From one mother to the other. London's Anahita's dresses were en route to Rangpur's Shonali. So may be not much has changed for some people.

For now, I am just enjoying the moment though. I am sitting on our verandah caressed by a gentle Boishakhi breeze.... I see the occasional rickshaw , the cat next door, the chayer dokan in the neighbourhood, the darwan next door singing "Ami gyan harabo , morei jabo, bachate parbe na je" -- a well known movie song describing how the hero would feel if the heroine looks at him. Every time I come, I realise how much I miss Dhaka. Amma is at her usual best. My favourite foods have been cooked. The dimer halua, the pudding, the shimer bichi with aar mach, the puishak -- everything. Bapi's presence is every where in the house -- through pictures. There is some void that can never be filled.

But there is nothing like home. From the first dealing with the unwanted porter at the Dhaka airport to people coming over without warning and chatting away on an idle afternoon, haggling with the hawker in New market, there is so much Bangladesh every where ! I grew up here!! Its so familiar. I haven't seen this for such a long time. I take a deep breath and try to take it all in. This will have to keep me going for another year.

When I lived in New York, coming back from a trip, I knew I was home when I saw the New York skyline. Now that I am in London, the patchy, overcast weather instantly tells me that I am in London. For Dhaka, it's entirely different. There is nothing specific that you can pin point to. Its your whole childhood that suddenly comes crashing down as soon as you step into the city. The restaurant where I first dated, the baby taxis that I took to for school bunking trips, the one lake-er paar where I first got drunk, the Balaka cinema halls where I frequented for mid afternoon matinee shows from Dhaka College, the rickshaws, the addas, the younger faces of the school friends, all, all comes crashing down. My mother keeps telling me that I am often distracted when I am in Dhaka. It is very hard not to slip away in to the past when I am here. When I talk to people here in Dhaka, for good reasons they don't find any romanticism in load shedding any more. Perhaps I won't either after my first few days here. But today is the first day after a long time away. So let me have this day romanticising away. Let me think about our cigarette smoking, endless addas on the terrace when "current" was out. Let me think about the oohs and aahs when the light would go out right before the MacGuyver show started, the only one of the two American shows we could watch on BTV.

May be this is why I cried after watching the movie Cinema Paradiso for the first time a few years ago. I cried a bit more when I saw it the second time. I couldn't stop. I didn't know why. I think everyone cried after seeing that film. Everyone who has left their childhood behind cried after watching Cinema Paradiso. The movie taught us about our past -- what we have left behind in our past is very special. Although we can cherish it and long for it but we should never try to recreate it. We will fail. That break from our childhood and that realisation is what makes people cry seeing that film. We don't want to part with what is so special in our heart our innocence and our childhood. That is the longing for every single person who has emigrated from their homeland. Longing for a past that you cherish, longing for a present that you never have in the homeland and the uncertainty of the future about whether you will come back here ever again.

That's why Dhaka is so special today -- on my home-coming day -- with all its troubles. When I see in the Dhaka streets those three young college students making a pyramid and riding on that rickshaw, I remember the days I did it with my two friends. The three corners in that pyramid have moved far apart. One of them is me who is in London working away in that corporate suit, the other one in Austin, USA as a teacher, the third one is in Mymensingh medical college celebrating his recent promotion as the registrar. I met both of them recently after a long time. I can't quite connect with them that well any more. The doctor just started using Internet for the first time, the teacher never got married and lives with his two dogs. I, on the other hand, spend almost all of my free time running my Internet based organisation talking about the power of Internet to make social changes. Moreover, I spent the rest of my free time chasing after the two women of my life -- my daughter and my wife. So yes, there wasn't too much to talk when I spoke to the Internet novice doctor and the bachelor dog lover teacher. But I do remember those rickshaw trips -- so many days and hours I have spent with those two guys. The conversation would just not end. We all pursued different dreams and priorities and we became different from each other. But bring them back all in Dhaka together and with the perfect backdrop we can reminiscence and try to live our past jokes and laugh all over again. So yes, regardless of how crowded, dirty and unliveable Dhaka becomes, it will always be that special place where we would like to come back to and live our past. It will always remain very special to us -- may be and just may be for that unmissable holler from that ferriwalah that you hear every Dhaka morning.

When are you all going to be back? -- all meaning, all of those longing immigrant souls out there. Adda impromptu musical soirees on the terrace, boimela, getting wet in the torrential rain... Ekdin nishchoi hobe. I sincerely believe that. One of the dreams that I share with my wife is that one day we will be able to buy a bungalow in Sreemongol tea estate and take all our loved ones there to spend a week of happiness.

You can tell I have become very very nostalgic in this Dhakar Shondha ! I am not willing to hear anything negative about Bangladesh today. ■