Of Monsoon Ramadan and Eid

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When the trolleys came out for the second meal service of the flight to Dhaka, it was early morning (11 July), and the timing was perfect for *sehri* according to the schedule of Dhaka. Combining the sandwich provided by the airline with the bits that we had picked up from Istanbul airport during our transit, my wife and I had a good *sehri* and prepared ourselves for the first day of fasting.

Although our friends in Geneva wonder why we return to Dhaka in the middle of the lovely summer there, we had made this a practice for the past few years. Initially, I thought of this as our monsoon trip because I love the season so much. Even without being poetic, one can perhaps appreciate the beauty of the season when the surrounding turns green and dark clouds gather to bring rain and relief for all who have been reeling under the hot and humid summer. This time was no exception, although the days of heavy monsoon rain were few during my stay. Despite the invasion of Dhaka by a jungle of concrete, from the covered part of our rooftop terrace, I was able to enjoy the dark clouds, the driving rain and the soothing wind that blew from the east and south, and muse over the poems and songs that eulogize the season. The setting was perfect for humming songs like *mon more megher songee* or *jharo jharo borishe baridhara*.



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My favourite park had already put on its lush green attire with yellow and red prints provided by flowers like *karobi, aloknanda, rongon,* etc. The season of summer fruits was at its tail end, and yet there were a few *kanthals* still hanging from the tree in our house. *Fazli aam* was available in the market, and so were a couple of Indian variety of mangoes.

For the past few years, the month of Ramadan has been falling during monsoon, and we found it doubly enjoyable to spend the time in Dhaka. One might say that I was making my fast easier by getting away from Geneva where the duration of fast would be over 18 hours (because sunset was around 9:30 pm) whereas in Dhaka it was about 15 hours. While that is factually correct, there is also the issue of ambiance. However much one tries, it's not easy to replicate the real Ramadan ambiance in a place where Muslims are a tiny minority.

Once, my wife and I went to the mosque in Geneva at the time of *iftar* in order to get a feel of Ramadan outside the house. The *iftar* provided by the mosque consisted of a few dates and a glass of juice. And dinner was served immediately after the *maghrib* prayers where everybody present was invited. The meal consisted of a bowl of vegetable soup and a generous portion of rice and chicken _ very healthy of course. Furthermore, the company was multicultural, with devotees from the all over the world, including the Arab and northern African countries. While I felt very happy to be able to join such a diverse gathering, I was still missing something.

But it is not easy to describe what that something is. It's basically a matter of feeling it. In a place like Dhaka, one hears the footsteps of Ramadan soon after *Shab-e-baraat* as one starts talking about the month, changes in working hours are announced, media is abuzz with news of efforts to keep the supply and prices of food items that are on high demand during the month stable,