

CHAAND RAAT IN OLD DHAKA

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Perhaps no place in Bangladesh celebrates *Chaand Raat* as passionately as Old Dhaka. Though the festivities and fun have toned down since the 1990s, the excitement of the night before Eid is still alive and well in the old town.

Within moments of the moon sighting, the narrow streets of the old town get crowded. The uncles, who seem pretty confused on what to do now that they don't have to pray *taraweeh* anymore, make their way to the bazaar for grocery shopping. It would appear that the *shemai* industry benefits heavily from this one night, as lots of people crowd around the *shemai* sellers on the streets. Flower vendors find themselves in a tight spot too. But the shopping isn't restricted to grocery and *shemai*; you can see people of all ages on the streets, making their way to the malls for last minute Eid shopping. Be it new clothes for oneself or a gift for a loved one, the art of haggling and negotiating is at its finest on the streets of old town on *Chaand Raat*. The trade continues late into the night, often until an hour or two before dawn.

As most people live in joint families or at least have their immediate relatives living close by, they all gather at one place. Amidst loud music, *adda* and food, the Eid preparations go on. The aunties get busy making special meals for the next day and with a ritualistic cleaning and



tidying of the house, while children play around and light *tarabati* and firecrackers for fun. The girls, besides helping their mothers with Eid preps, sit together with their friends and cousins for the henna-applying part of the evening, which is almost a festival in itself. The guys too have the time of their lives. As soon as the announcement of the sighting of the moon is made, music starts blaring from every nook and cranny of old town; the music is often party songs from Bollywood played on loud-

speakers. Soon afterwards, all the barber-shops get crowded, with guys of all ages lining up to get a proper haircut and a shave before Eid, and the salons stay open till every man has gotten the haircut they wanted. The word *adda* is closely related to the *Chaand Raat* festivities of Old Dhaka. Casual *adda* sessions on rooftops are complemented with food and even more firecrackers. If not on the roofs, the young men of the vicinity are seen around the local fast food joints and street corners,

where they sit with their friends and gossip. And of course, the bikers all get together and go for a rally around those parts of the town, honking all the way. Either that or they flock to New Dhaka, just to get away from home and have fun. But here's the thing – the *Chaand Raat* celebrations used to be even better throughout the '80s and '90s, and even the early 2000s. The family get-togethers are not as prominent as they used to be back then, and the joy of preparing for Eid together with the extended family has lessened too. If you ask anyone of those generations, they'll tell you how the excitement has decreased over time, albeit not vanishing completely. Why did this happen? I can't say. But I know this doesn't reflect a lack of enthusiasm on the part of the people of Old Dhaka. The eve of Eid in Old Town is not all that different from that in New Dhaka. But in Old Dhaka, the enthusiasm is higher, especially with the family and friends coming together. With *adda*, music, firecrackers and fun – alongside the colourful patterns of the henna, some may even claim that *Chaand Raat* for an Old Dhaka dweller is more enjoyable than Eid day itself.

Arman R. Khan is a caffeine addict, a dreamer and a culture enthusiast who takes life one day at a time. Correspond with him at fb.com/arman.r.khan or tweet @ArmanRK

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