

## FOR THE LOVE OF FOOD

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CHAKRABORTY

# Mostakim – a tale of broken dreams

In my first stint in Dhaka, I had the good fortune of visiting Mostakim in Mohammadpur.

That was God's year 2002 if memory serves me right.

I had lost my father and Shab-E-Barat, the night of reckoning, had a whole new meaning to me.

I went with a dear colleague who is more like an elder brother and stood by his mother's grave, thinking what if I had a landmark, a something to come to and think of my father.

The day ended early, as people would have stayed up to pray. The day after Shab-E-Barat is typically a holiday.

Some of our colleagues were off to Mohammadpur to go to this exotic place called Mostakim, who apparently served divine chicken chaap and paratha. Also a sublime, light soup, the chicken sweet corn variety.

A chaap in Bangladesh is a lightly fried piece of meat, not the gravy soaked equivalent of India.



I went along and true to legend, had a mind blowing experience of chaap and paratha.

And that was one of my first pieces that I ever wrote.

14 years have passed by. I was on my second stint in Dhaka. But I had not found the time to go back to Mostakim. People told me it has seen better days. I refused to believe that. I always carried the ethereal experience in my memory bank.

Thanks to the kind folks at Radio Shadhin, an opportunity came up to go back to Mostakim.

It was a hot and muggy evening, then again, about 70% of Dhaka's evenings are hot and muggy.

The road to Mostakim has changed beyond recognition. What also changed



was Mostakim. As opposed to the small place with benches across an open drain, there are multiple Mostakim's catering to the very buzzy, very young crowd. There were a lot of other chaap places claiming to be more authentic, more delicious.

I honestly could not recognise the original

Mostakim. We walked into what supposedly was the original and sat down in a very small room with almost zero ventilation. That, in an average hot and muggy Dhaka evening, is not the most pleasant of sensorial.

I was willing to overcome all that based on the deposit in my memory bank, and ordered chicken chaap and the delectable soup that they had. Paratha has made way for small luchis. Soft drink giants have taken the opportunity to brand the hell out of the



place. They really should install an air conditioner or two.

The food came. Penny dropped. My dreams and memory banks lay shattered in thousand pieces around me.

What was served was a deep fried to death piece of chicken. So deep fried that it probably left a huge carbon footprint the size of Big Foot. The luchis were miniscule, sweet looking and very oily. The soup tasted of boiled lentils and had a sickly looking sauce on the surface.

For once, I could not wait for the recording of our radio show to get over.

And I was out of that place moment Kazria said we were through.

Dreams do die, hard.

And success does funny things to legends.

**Photo courtesy: Kaniska Chakraborty**

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