

Travelling through the times

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"Kothao amar hariye jawar nei mana..." was probably an outpouring of a latent desire of the post 1400 (Bengali Year) middle class Bengali, as previously felt by the Nobel winning Rabindranath Tagore. There was almost no concept of travelling for fun in middle class Bengali society before the 1990s. Even if it were there, it was pretty well veiled, unexpressed and unexplored.

There was no concept or understanding of the importance of travel to a fulfilling life. Even though the counterparts in Kolkata were sometimes seen going to different areas, for "a change of air, or health reason", the idea was pretty much non-existent among the people of Bangladesh.

Up until the 90s, travelling meant to us our ritual-

istic visits to our maternal or paternal grandparents' house. Those of us who lived in the cities would visit our own villages after the school final exams every year, and that was it.

That was all our 'travel'. A few of the more affluent would also go to Cox's Bazaar or Rangamati. And only the privileged could afford to board a plane and fly off to foreign destinations. The rest would have to make do with the pictures the lucky few brought back.

Back then life was not so complicated, nor suffered from such a chronic lack of greenery. And just as most people had limited incomes, their wants were not numerous either. There were still some open spaces in the cities, patches of greenery, parks, footpaths, and also fewer people, even fewer cars, and less noise.

The rivers still flowed, the sky was also visibly blue. Life seemed less complicated, and life in the city was not as suffocating as it is today.

Given that, the situation for today's middle and privileged class is not the same

anymore. Most people now understand how vital travel is to life. And so people now travel rather than just daydream about it. All it takes is just one holiday and people of all ages take off on tours outside the cities. Some with family, others with friends, and some as intrepid loners, either inside the country itself or somewhere abroad depending on preference and cost issues.

They want to spend the time having fun, reading books, chatting to their hearts' content, near nature, with its birdsong and greenery as the wonderful backdrop, perhaps with the melody of some waves crashing against the shore. People love to spend time with their loved ones; they also love to travel and go on adventures to remember.

Yet people here did not have this tendency to travel even 10-12 years ago. A further two or three decades ago, it was even more different. In the 80s and 90s the concept of honeymoon took off, as part of the new era of

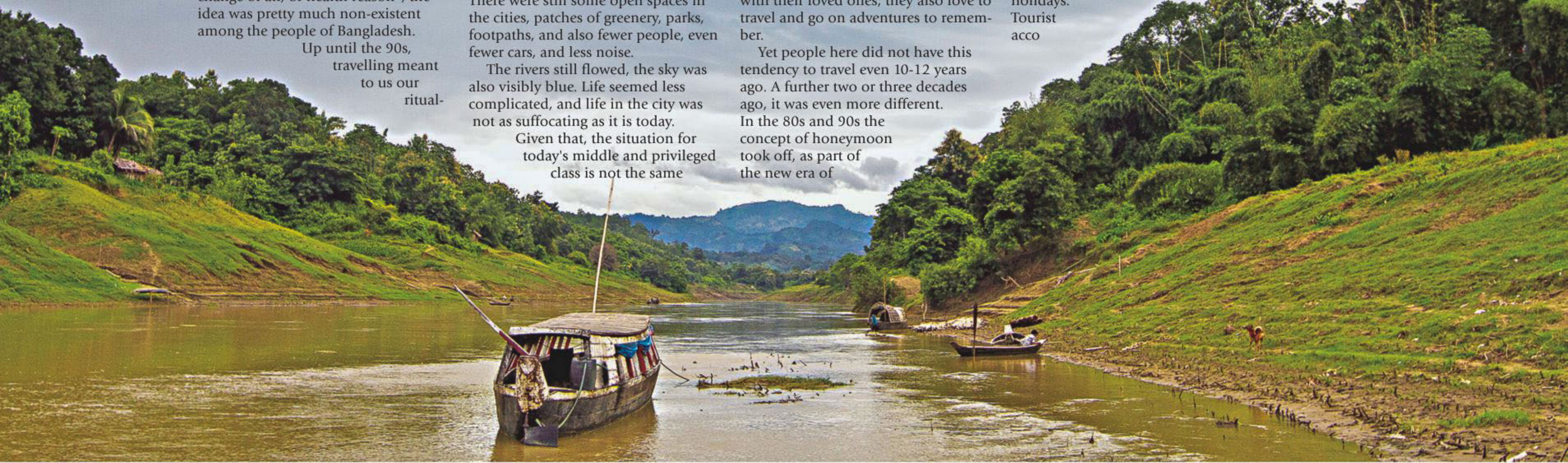
travelling. That a new couple could or should, before starting everyday life, go somewhere away from the usual and family and friends, to understand each other, is also not an old concept in the middle class of the society.

This has also changed completely now. Oftentimes, the to-be weds decide the place of their future honeymoon way ahead of deciding the time and place for the wedding itself, be it a local or foreign destination.

The increase in tendency to travel can be easily observed in the droves of people that leave the city ahead of any long weekend, or festival holidays. Tourist accommodation cannot be found free, be those local or foreign. Bus, train and even air tickets are taken up.

People flock to Rangamati, Khagrachhari, Bandarban, the Sundarbans, Cox's Bazaar, Kuakata, tea gardens,

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