

A Day at the Oldest Market in Town - 'New' Market

In the city of Dhaka, finding someone who has not yet set foot in New Market is a task that is close to impossible. From children to the elderly, this place is a shoppers' heaven for all. Built in the 1950s in Azimpur and currently operating under Dhaka South City Corporation, New Market not only holds an unyielding legacy as one of the most significant marketplaces in the heart of the capital, but also serves as a place that many shoppers hold close to their hearts.

Like many other Dhaka-dwellers, I have been frequenting New Market ever since I can remember. In its own way, it is a one-stop marketplace where one can buy all sorts of things beginning from personal goodies like socks and saris to culinary items like fresh vegetables and spices. Although I have shopped there countless times before, due to my focus on what I want and thus a lack of interest in my surroundings during shopping, I have never paid much attention to details. Hence, to truly know my way around this historical establishment, I decided to take a tour of 'the' New Market last week.

The rickshaw halted near Chandrima Market, a few yards away from the premises. My mum, as usual, was accompanying me as my shopping partner/consultant/guide (given that I tend to get lost every time I am roaming in a crowded place).

Making our way through rows of shops laden on the footpath outside, we entered through Gate 2 and began our tour from the southern side. Despite the fact that it was noon on a weekday (Monday, to be precise), the place was bustling with pools of customers from all walks of life. To the right, there were numerous jewellery shops, including famous ones like Sangeeta and Amin Jewellers, their displays sparkling with the glitz of exclusive ornaments, while the left side accommodated stores selling all kinds of women's wear: three piece, one piece, as well as abayas and hijabs.

Although pure observation and window shopping were my true motives, my mother did actually have a few things jotted down in her list of chores/shopping so we headed to a watch shop named 'Time House' established in that very alley to get her watch fixed. Instead of lazing away, I decided to gather some info in the meantime.

"It was built about 22 years ago and I have been here from the very beginning," said S M

Shariful Kabir, one of the shopkeepers, upon asking how long the shop has existed there. "Among the hundreds of people who gather here every day, the frequenters are mostly students coming from the colleges located nearby. The open spacious lanes, the affordability and the availability of a large range of goods - all serve to attract the vast crowd of customers, many of whom have been coming here since they were children."

Oddly, during our brief 15 minute-long conversation, at least half a dozen beggars stopped by randomly, asking for money. Without the slightest sign of displeasure on his face, Kabir chuckled and explained that this was a common everyday scenario there.

The line of stationery and books shops



began from across Time House, and to have a look at the newest arrivals, we entered the 'Ali Brothers' store. "Bookworms of all ages gather here to find the best and latest storybooks and novels," informed Mohammed Emdad Ali, the proprietor. "In fact, if you have a certain book in mind, you can place an order and we will collect it for you," he added.

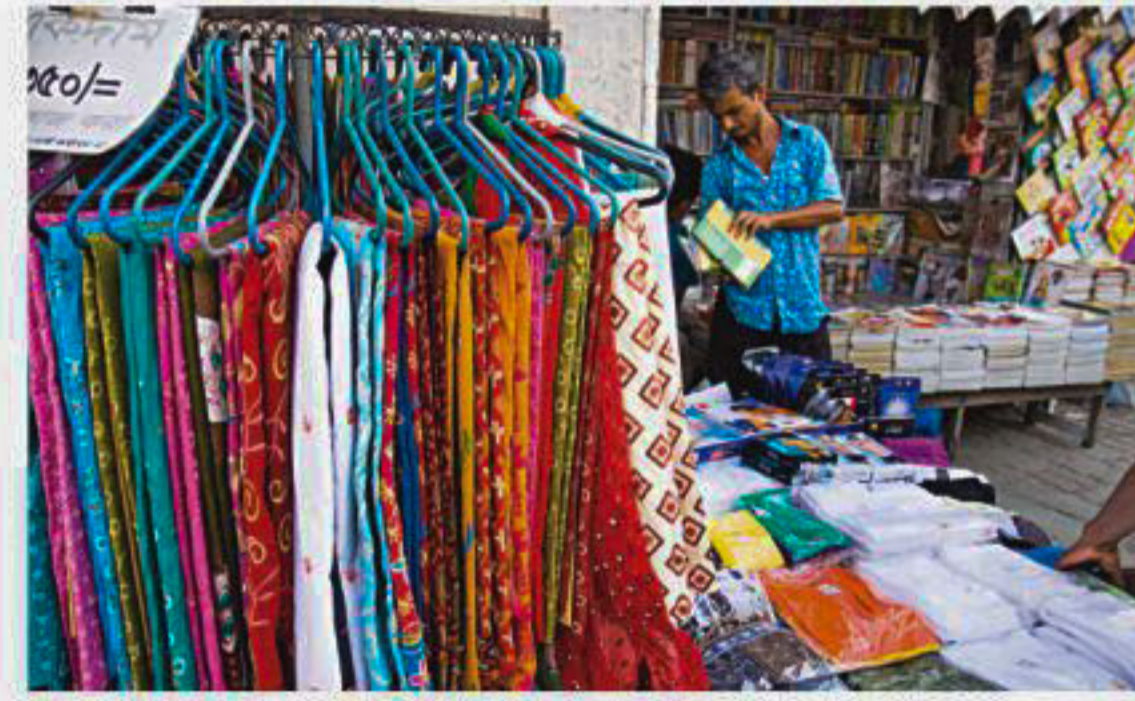
We moved on and came across a number of renowned sari houses, namely Shalimar, Khan Brothers, Farabe, etc., which have also spent decades in this complex. After another five minutes of walking, we reached Olympia Bakery (located near Gate 1), the legendary confection-

ery which has been serving mouth-watering delights to its patrons for many years. Interestingly we kept running into one or two homeopathic stores as well at random intervals.

We zoomed through rows of arts and crafts, eyewear, gift, footwear, cloth and even wedding/events cards shops, and eventually slowed down again to explore the bags and baggage hub.

With an approximate budget of Tk 500-3000, shoppers can find their desired bag among the varieties beginning from schoolbags, fashionable handbags to durable suitcases and laptop bags neatly stacked or hung out on display there.

On the sides of the lanes, numerous vendors have set up their merchandise on small plat-



forms. Trendy winter/summer wear, tops and kurtis (one piece) for women were available there. This season, ponchos and shrugs are totally in and you can buy one at about Tk 400 (without bargaining), while light shawls can be bought at Tk 200. Same goes for Dupattas and summer kurtis, like for regular wear, colourful georgette and linen kurtis are sold at Tk 500-700.

At this point we had reached the centre of New Market. We wandered through some tailoring, carpet and bedding stores, and discovered a miniature Shahid Minar located in front of the central building. A part of the first

storey of the building accommodated the Apex and KZ showrooms, while the other side was occupied by a mosque. As we walked on, we went past a handful of baby care and electronics shops, along with a few photo studios. Coming across some bicycle shops reminded me of my first bicycle that I had bought from there and it brought back a stream of remarkable childhood memories.

Having spent three long hours exploring, we decided to grab a bite from one of the classic food corners 'Chicken Village'. Like those of every other eatery existing there, the menu was predictably typical.

Fast food items like burger, fries, fried chicken, as well as lunch combos with a Chinese essence consisting fried rice and curries covered the first page, whereas the next page took us to the Indian (dosa, puri, raita) side. Despite our very ordinary choice of the rice combos, the food was absolutely delish and I could not help but mention it to our waiter.

With happy tummies and a 10 percent discount card that the waiter had gleefully presented to us, we planned on doing a brief round around the three-storey New Super Market that can be accessed through Gate 3.

Within moments of entering, my trusty companion (mum) completely forgot that I existed and got lost in the world of exotic decors (artificial flowers, table cloths, lamps, ceramics and much more) and various crockery, cosmetics and more household goods.

Navigating past those alleys, I realised again why this place is a heaven for culinary enthusiasts and home-makers, as we arrived at the spice, fresh fruits and vegetables junction situated just outside the market. After all this, there was little time left to explore the other two floors, which mainly consisted of more men's and women's wear stores.

Finally we were back to square one and it was time to call it a day. Thus, to celebrate the end of a wonderful tour of a place that means so much to me, I treated myself to some divine kulfis from the ice-cream vendor settled near the exit before returning home with a newfound perspective on the oldest marketplace in town.

By Nafisa Faruque

Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed

মাদার ব্রান্ন নাম

কালার গার্ড

কাপড়ের রঙকে রাখে নতুনের মতো ঝকঝকে

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