

When I first stepped in Tokyo streets, getting out of the Aoyama Itchome subway station, it was late evening, and it was raining, as it would rain casually in any season in Dhaka. The modernist styled buildings reminded me of a Motijheel, the sound of light water drops on the pitch black roads reminded me of Dhaka's soundscape in any midnight rain, my coordinator from Japan Foundation, exclaimed, Yokatta! (You made it!) and clapped her hands, only to find both of us were too awestruck to make enough sounds back. We were still caught between our half smiles to arrive after more than ten hours of flights, and half surprise that Tokyo is less foreign as it sounded in our class lectures at Department of Japanese Studies, University of Dhaka, in books, movies, Nas' videos. If she hadn't told us, we were still in a dream. Even as she had told us, Tokyo seemed old within the split of a second. Later on, I had to agree with Rabindranath Tagore's sentiment mentioned in "Japan-Jatri" (Japan-Bound, a write up upon his first visit to the country in 1916) that the new is never everlasting, it first comes into our view abruptly, once it matches with the old schema of our minds, the unfamiliar gets familiarized soon.

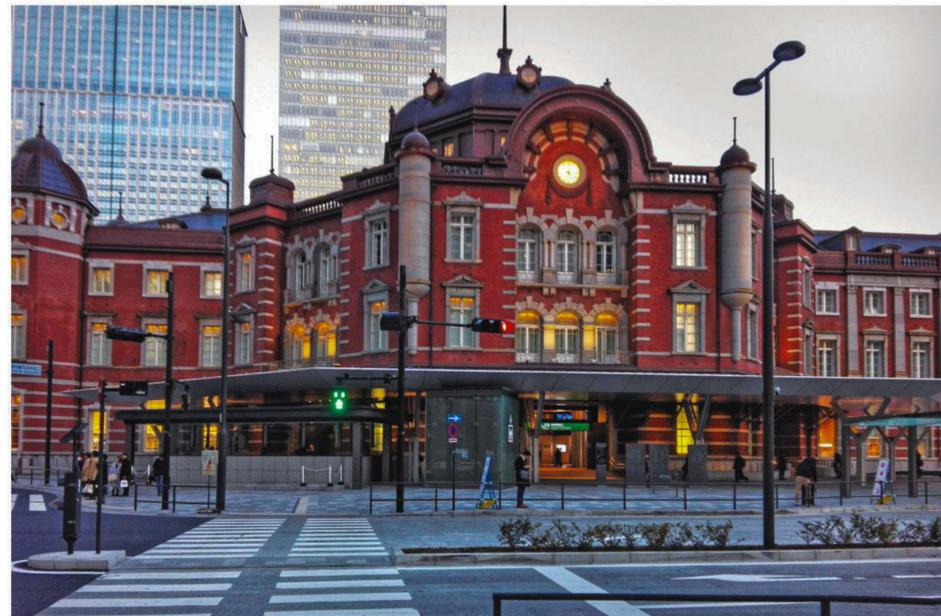
We don't see to see much, although we do put everything under our gaze, but hearing dictates our course in Dhaka. In fact, the distinctive feature of Dhaka is its soundscape. Rickshaw crings, bus horns, people shout, ceiling fans hiss, factories growl in middle of the city, hockers promote their products at the top of their lungs, out of maintenance microphones of mosques all contribute vehemently to play their part to play an orchestra that gets incoherent only when the electricity is out. Tokyo, on the other hand, is always in need of sounds. Wherever you go, there is an arrangement to create sounds so that you don't feel you are in a vacuum. Shibuya is full of people, the loud gaijins (foreigners) gather around the famous statue of the Hachiko dog, who used to wait at the station for its deceased master, to take once in a lifetime selfies, a few young Japanese laugh, some speedy cars await the 10 way Shibuya Scramble crossing, yet the billboard music would need to be used as filler to make the soundscape grand. Dhaka, by default, is so grand in its own music that any other sound added to it becomes discordant. Think of Shahbag Billboard Ads installed in 2018. The outcry of the ads is numbed by the everyday concert of daily life. To play one needs a stage. Tokyo can be staged; Dhaka has already too many actors.



Tokyo City From Tokyo Tower



Odaiba, Statue of Liberty and the Rainbow Bridge



Tokyo Station

TRAVEL

TRAVEL

LOVE IN TOKYO

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breed its signs on earth? Looking over at Rainbow Bridge from the Aqua City terrace, I held a French Fries pack in my hand, and attempted a selfie with the Love sign and the Statue of Liberty at my back, waited eagerly to some young man having the guts to say, *Torimashoka?* (Shall I help you to take pictures?) Sometimes they did. Sometimes they were too shy to ask. In a city, where love is promoted, holding hands in public is uncommon. In a city, where love faces so many challenges, the lovers go beyond their means to occasionally help each other to cross the roads.

If you can decode the Tokyo Metro, you know your ways around all the tourist spots. The directionally challenged generation of mine is happy to have a GPS and me the Tokyo Handy Guide, and Pismo card; which is like one card for all fares of transports, sometimes hot coffees of vending machines. At the stations, you can find super clean washrooms with warm seats, shops from luxurious brands to local vendors selling mocha- a rice cake, and my favorite- the bakeries. I was recommended to taste Japanese strawberries, and their *oishi* taste is beyond expression when they are combined with fresh vanilla cream cakes. If I could choose where to die, I would not choose the "passenger fell on tracks" way as did many Japanese, to whom suicide is a choice, not a taboo. If I could choose



Walking in Tokyo

LOVE IN TOKYO

FOUZIA REZA

Unmute Dhaka for a while, you would see whirlwind of human expressions. Unmute Tokyo for a while, it's a pantomime with controlled bodies with everyone keeping to the group synchronization. No one walks a single step unpredicted. The footpaths never see a collision of incoming humanoids with the outgoing ones. It is only me who, not knowing the unwritten rule, can't decide which way is for which group. I take wrong steps. I make Tokyoites stop and frown. I put on a *Sumimasen* (apologizing) attitude, the Tokyoites forgive me and move on. Part of Tokyo's beauty is me, an exchange student, a foreigner. I bring in poetry to Tokyo life. From walking in the perpetual, prosaic line of the well-designed city with the best behave people who are considerate of others, I trouble them with punctuations. The lines require human touches.

One noteworthy matter is the number of children on Tokyo streets. Tagore mentioned a flow of children in 1916 in his anecdote. A century later I often found myself to be the youngest in many crowds. You may meet a few in the early mornings beside the schools. In a city that celebrates love with literal "Love" written in many spots, what stops the Tokyoites to make love and

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Hunting Love Luck

what to eat before I die, Japanese strawberry cake would be in the menu.

Besides the eateries, like those offering shrimp burgers and tempura on soba, some stations have their own unique offer. Tokyo Station with red brick façade would take you back in history. If you need more than architectural marvel, the Ginza station is right next to Ginza Kabukiza- the traditional dance drama that I longed to watch in person. The Sukiji fish market around Higashi Ginza Station and boom you are in a land of seafood freshly prepared for you in small eateries where you feel like a Prince just returned home with the restaurant staffs shouting "Irasshaimaseeeen!" to welcome homecoming. What's surprising is that you could hire small gadgets that give you instant translations of what goes on the stage. The Shinjuku Station has Kinokuniya Bookstore where one can get English books about Japan, along with a signature matcha tea.

On snowy days, which are a rare sight in Tokyo, as my professor said, it happens once in four years just like the Olympics, you need something more than matcha. To smoke and drink socially one could go to a Izakaya- restaurants offering both drinks and hot food. My half Japanese-half Singaporean friend Ryo helped me through the drink menu for a non-alcoholic option. Oolong tea tasted good, but I am used to taking Mirzapur double chamber tea bag tea without sugar, you might want something else. As a true Dhakaite, I never buy unsugared tea outside, if you are to buy it from tea-stalls, you should get all you could get- condensed milk, sugar, tea and sometimes Ovaltine. I would bargain for that extra amount of care when the tea-stall mama makes my tea. For Tokyo, I would have to let the Vending machine brew the precisely set amount.

Precision or predictability of exact timing of subway (next train in "4 minutes"), wait "3 minutes" for tempura fries, keep "left" when you are climbing down stairs, etc. does not mean that Japan would fail to surprise you. Walking in Ueno, you may find a Shinto Shrines and Buddhist temples. You could meet a fortune teller, an automated monkey picking up your 'luck', if you are unhappy with the results, hang it there and the gods will take care of it. At Kawagoe, I also found a Love Shrine that the exchange students of Japanese Studies Short Program of Sophia University found most 'relevant' to their life. Believe it or not, your love fate written in small papers stuck in earthen red snapper fish mouths, is thrilling to fish for. As Akira and Meona translated, I am advised to wear bright colors this year, and in autumn I am to meet someone special. If you are doubting like my friends whether it's Japanese or Bangladeshi autumn, let me hope that *Kamisama* is universal. To the skeptics, what if love is never true, but the *omikuji* is?

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ABOUT TOWN

YOUTH TALKS 1.1

YOUTH TALKS
A SKILL AND PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP
Organiser: Mastul Foundation
March 31, 4-8 pm, Midas Center (9th Floor), Road-16, Dhanmondi

FROM BLACKBURN TO BANGLADESH
A MUSICAL TALK
Organiser: Art café
April 6, 6-8 pm, Art Café, 60 Gulshan Avenue

CHITRER DIBBOWROTH
SYED SHAMSUL HAQUE'S SOLO ART EXHIBITION
Organiser: Bengal Foundation
March 23 - April 5, 6-8 pm, Daily Star-Bengal Arts Precinct