



MUSINGS

MORNING WALKS

FAKRUL ALAM

Getting to Like Morning Walks

Morning walks, or rather ambles, tip-toeing towards the rest of the day. One's day gathers pace seemingly hour by hour after one wakes up, like a typical Bhairavi performance in Indian classical music, starting slow and accelerating in tempo till the end. The world seems so tranquil in the morning; the Dhaka air *smells* so relatively fresh (how fresh depends of course on where you are!) at that time. I think indolently most days now (even before the alarm rings!), why not walk at an easy pace and even lazily at first, at least for a while, before picking up speed afterward?

It was not always thus with me; time was I when I used to greet the morning impetuously. Like Donne in "The Sunne Rising," albeit sans a lover next to me, I would—once upon a time feel like chiding the sun—"busy old fool, why disturb my sleep so? Why not light up some other world and break someone's sleep in continents far, far away?" My mother, stirred by the call to prayer she always heard in her conscience (for those were days without alarms), would try to wake us up. Or she would scold and cajole us till my siblings and I would eventually arise, rubbing our eyes and getting up from bed for another schoolwork-filled day in practiced disbelief and simulated foot-dragging.

Mother would tell us of fabled early risers. "Take Robi Thakur" she would say; "never missed a sunrise!" Or formulaically, "Morning shows the day!" My father would do his bit: "Early to bed," he would recite ritually, "and early to rise/would make a man healthy, wealthy and wise!" But the man who made me take up morning walks seriously and regularly was my physician. Gravely, he said, while writing blood pressure pills for me when I was well past fifty, "and you must walk regularly too—half an hour every morning at least!"

Setting out for my "prescribed" morning walks initially, I would think, "How boring! How slowly does the body warm up this way!" For someone who had played contact sports requiring lot of running around/movement (basketball, football, cricket and tennis) for decades, walking was decidedly dull when I began to do the needful in my 50s. One missed the excitement and emotions generated when like-minded boys of all ages competed with each other intensely in games.

But like everything else in life pursued regularly, walking soon became a habit for me. In no time it became an activity I began to like and even looked forward to. After all, morning walks, I soon found out, have their unique attractions.

Fuller Road Morning Walks

I was lucky that I first began to do my constitutionals in Fuller Road and the Mall part of the D.U. campus. The walks my doctor had prescribed soon begin to feel pleasurable in the still



Image-1

PHOTO: AUTHOR

lovely parts of the D. U. campus. How could I not like the early morning sights and sounds in that green and quiet world then? In spring and early summer flowering Krishnachura, Radhachura or Jarul trees presented a visual feast even as mango blossoms and other flowers scented the air; the solitary cuckoo bird, at its most insistent in the early hours, too were unforgettable. In the rainy season, everything looked lush green while the fragrance of Kodom or Kamini flowers suffused the air; in autumn, delicate Sheuli flowers embellished mornings imperceptibly for us walkers.

February morning walks were made colorful by "early bird" couples all dressed up for the occasion for Bosonto Utsav or Valentine's Day dates. Ekushey February and December 14—Shaheed Intellectual Day—mornings, in contrast, were mournful occasions when walkers appeared touched by the solemnity of events they were heading towards. Eid days saw only scanty early morning traffic, but soon after 7 in the morning, kurta-clad people could be seen rushing to the central mosque of the campus. But most days, Fuller Road mornings seemed to us walkers in sync with a relaxed, unhurried mode of existence.

Other scenes caught my attention during morning walks for often unusual reasons. The wild dogs of night would disappear in full light, but one would occasionally come across pack members intimidating one another or chasing solitary, skinny squirrels or stray cats who would fight back in their own fierce or wily ways

[image 1]. A not uncommon and sobering scene was that of a rickshawallah parked in the street, precariously perched on his seat, attempting to steal some sleep anyhow before heading for his next back-breaking assignment. Certain times of the year, the neighborhood madman would attract one's attention with his manic display. And not infrequently and sickeningly, one would encounter a bedraggled drug addict every now and then. Looking doped and possessed, his eyes turned away from prying gazes, he was inclined to slink away.

I, for my part, got addicted quickly to my early morning campus walks. There was the heady feeling of the fresh air charging up my veins; it was pleasurable too to walk with people with whom I could share the twists and turns of university politics and vent my indignation at the way campus politicking was vitiating the atmosphere day by day. And after 45 minutes of brisk walking and a quick shower, I had a healthy appetite and a mind relaxed for the day's work.

Dhanmondi Morning Walks

Two years ago, I came to Dhanmondi to begin life in the city outside the D. U. campus after twenty years or so in it. One reason this seemed a fit place for retired life was the walkways edging the lakes, built thoughtfully for walkers, traversing Dhanmondi and winding their way through parks and open spaces. I felt in my mind in choosing a new flat that this would be an ideal place for morning walks for people like me so dependent on constitutionals.

I was not really disappointed by what I experienced in my Dhanmondi morning walks initially. There was greenery everywhere; the water in most parts of the lake was reasonably clean and quite greenish blue; scattered bits of reflected sunlight here and there made the water even more attractive in morning hours. If I was able to get up really early I would see the glowing sun ascend above Kalabagan from the Rd 32 Bridge. One lucky day I was even able to capture the crimson-daubed rising sun reflected in the placid lake water [image 2].

Unlike the Fuller Road-Mall areas of D. U., the Dhanmondi lake walkways and the park areas fill up in no time at all with morning walkers. It is good to see people doing calisthenics in groups everyday or playing badminton (in winter and early spring). Occasionally, I come across a man or a woman on the mobile, rapt in intimate conversation, no doubt with a significant other with whom talking is essential even that early. All alone in my walks now, I, on the other hand, found early morning walks a good time to think about things or think through things—solitude is sometimes best company! Ideas for papers I was writing or projects I hoped to undertake seemed to become clearer by the bend in my walks. And soon I

in places; a common sight is the garbage littered in the lakeside or plastic bags floating in tucked away parts of the lake or even near bridges.

Almost immediately after seven, never-ending honking and noxious fumes emitted by cars beginning to swarm the main and neighborhood roads to drop children to the innumerable schools of Dhanmondi can mar morning moods easily. Irritating, too, can be professional beggars placed strategically in walkways and in intersections. For instance, shortly after I start my walk every day from Rd 27, I encounter the conscience-clouding gaze of a beggar woman clad in a black burqa, peering at the passer-by purposefully, reminding one of the figures playing death in western medieval morality plays. And then there are the vendors lined up to sell food or this or that inside as well as outside the park. Truly, Dhanmondi is now an area where the line between the residential and commercial is close to disappearing. In many ways, Dhanmondi morning walks are nowhere near the ones I would set out for in almost always serene Fuller Road.

And yet I find much to like in my morning walks even now. Dhaka still appears a nice place to live in that time of the day. The morning breeze, if and

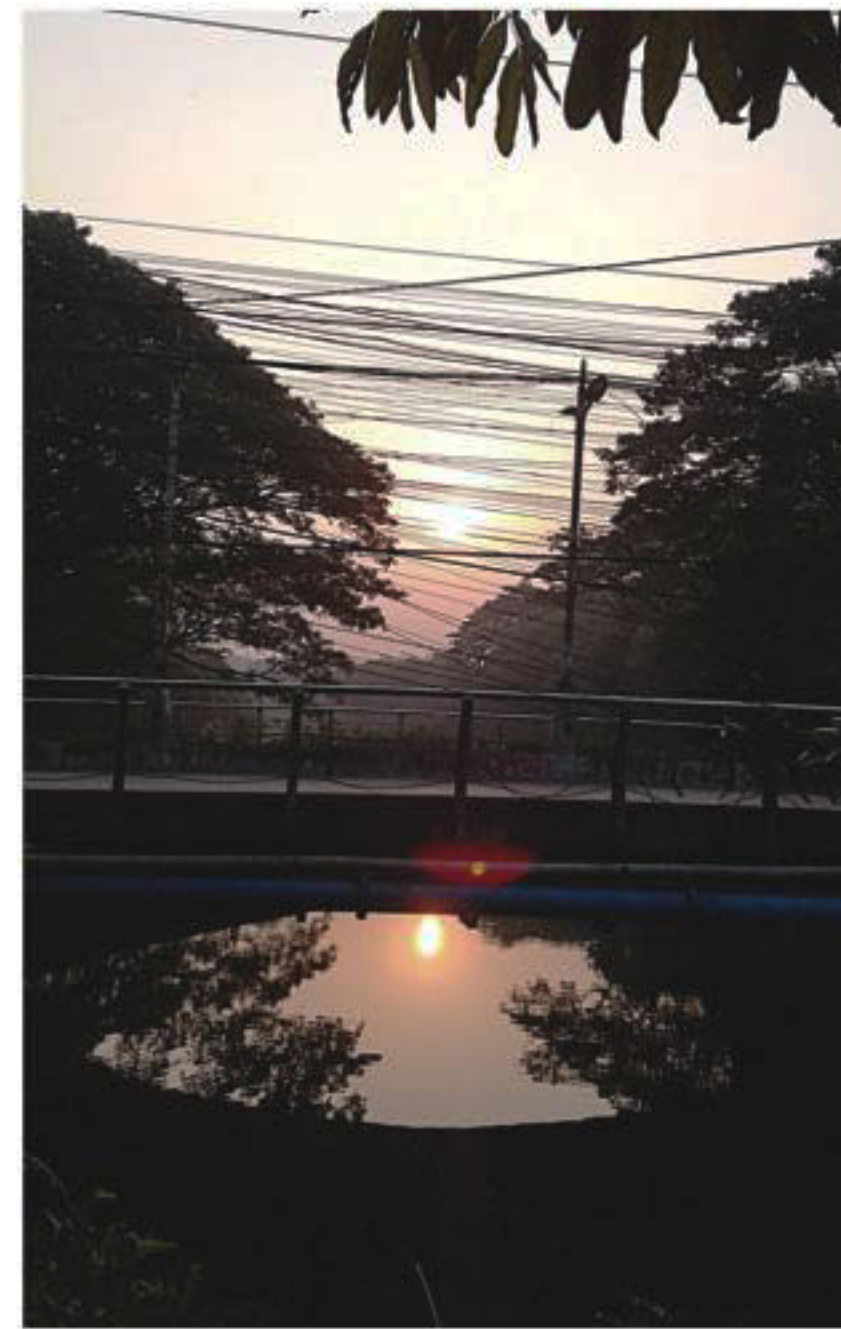


Image-2

discovered Dhaka FM radios that performed from 6 to 7 with little or no commercial or smart-talking DJs intervening for long stretches and with music that synced with my bhairavi mood.

But there are aspects of Dhanmondi life that make morning walks here much less relaxing than the Fuller Road ones—despite the lakeside ambience and the abundance of greenery. The park areas become so crowded within half an hour or so of sunrise that a common experience is people jostling one another in the walkways after a while. The lake water is quite polluted

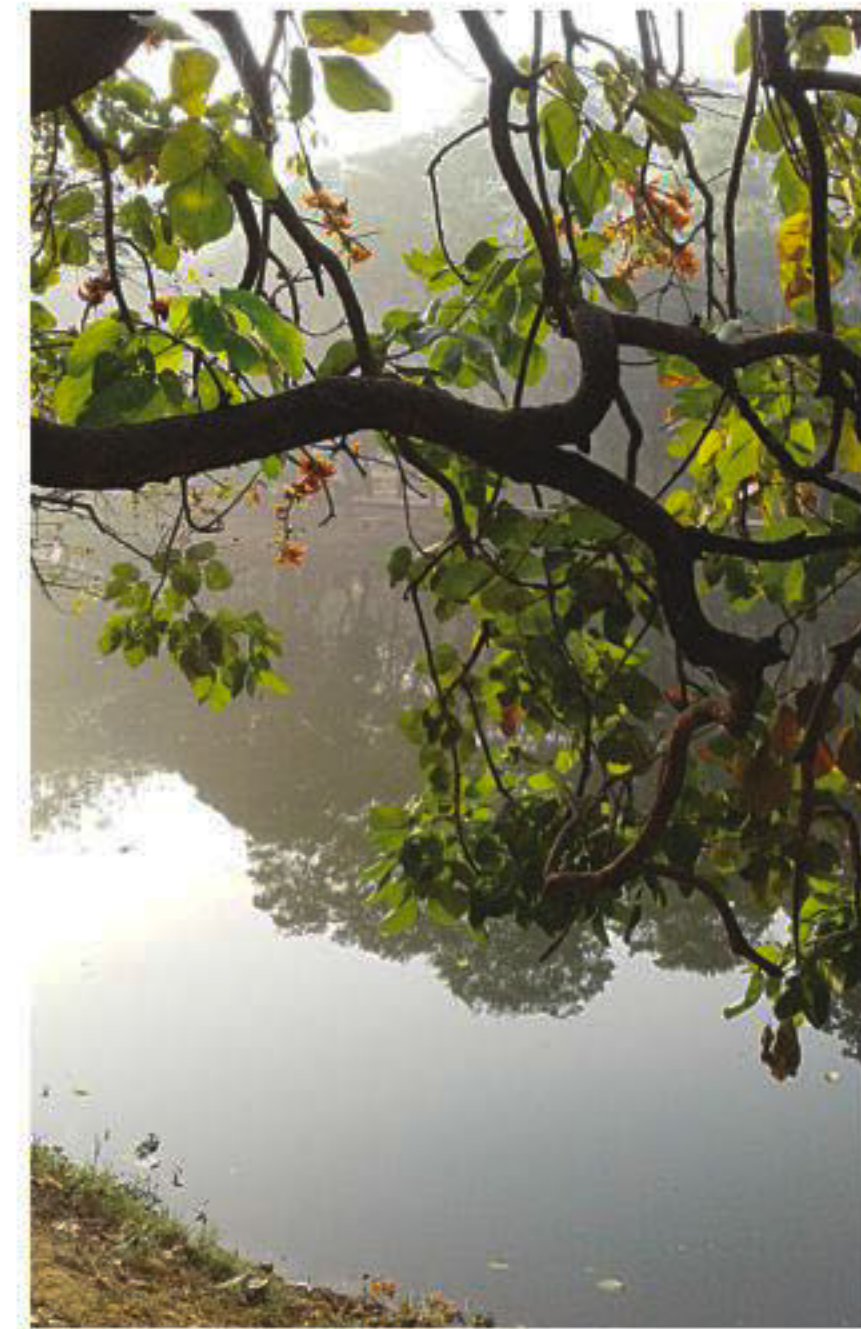


Image-3

when flowing, revives me. One morning recently, when I was walking by the lakeside where the palash flowers blazed against the greenery and the greenish blue lake water [image 3], I heard on my mobile FM radio lyrics of a song that said it all for me then: "Emon manob jibon ki hobe/Eto shundor prithibe te ki ar asha hobe" (Will there be another life like this one/ Will I come back to another world as beautiful as this one)?"

Fakrul Alam is a Bangladeshi academic, writer and translator. Currently, he is the Pro-VC of East-West University.



POETRY

The Artist

BIPASHA HAQUE

Like it or not, the sun has all these rising points, rising in these longitudes and latitudes—maintaining precise humidity and wind feels precipitation, pressure, and visibility, and UV index.

Like it or not, there's fine line between fact and opinion and there are consequences as form follows function and there would be fickle minds that are there to taunt.

In times of being bashed, and critiqued would you cap your pen and, bid adieu? Agree or not, the sun is being created to serve you and you serve the Truth.

In your evolution when your inner becomes your outer, 'tis a marvelous beginning thence you know that you've met the Artist within.

Bipasha Haque is a diaspora writer with particular interest in life-the way it is. By profession she is a university teacher.



INVITATION TO WRITE FOR EID LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

The Star Literature Team invites poems (not epics), short fiction (800-2400 words), Musings (800-1600), translated poetry & fiction for the Eid Literary Supplement. Deadline to send write-ups: May 10, 2019. Send your pieces to dsliteditor@gmail.com