

THOUGHT CRAFT

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Season of fruitfulness and fortune

My room looks out in three directions. If I ignore the buildings around us, I can see trees stretch out as far as the eye can see, under a sky which changes from pearl blue at dawn to the soft grey of monsoon mornings. Coconuts bunch in the palms, there are Gaab fruit on other trees, and neem leaves sway near my window.

I see a flash of yellow, then a glimpse of parrot wings, sometimes even a baby parrot perched on a terrace railing, or crows arguing on a distant ledge. Butterflies flutter past, tiny messengers of births and marriages, there is much to enjoy in the constant activity of nature.

Isolating at home, enjoying the idleness, my newspapers and books forgotten, my bills laid aside, I watch the different seasons flow past, dreamlike.



The fruits and vegetables too change along with the seasons. It seems like just the other day we were relishing fresh broccoli, tender spinach, fresh peas, jade green grapes and other delicacies of winter and spring.

Now the rains are upon us, and the air is rich with the promise of tropical bounty.

I know the market stalls are filled with the jewels of summer. Bunches of

lychees, modest red fruit on dusty stalks, and under the peel, white opals which burst upon the palate in flavours of damask rose, orange blossom and lime.

Everywhere, there are pyramids of mangoes, dark green or light, or golden as the sun; in flavours to please every taste; great cartloads of jackfruit with their creamy custard pods, pink hearted guavas, rose apples, pineapples rich as topaz, and a variety of other delights to

beguile the heart.

There is so much abundance in our tropical paradise, enough to cheer us even in these worrisome times. We can still enjoy fish fresh out of the river and sea, home grown eggs and chickens, meat fresh off the block, and the choicest of produce brought in from the countryside every day, before dawn, by local growers.

I for one, always feel an overwhelming sense of gratitude for all that nature has gifted to us. Most of us, at one time or another have been through bad times. Human memory being short, we move on quickly when those times pass, our problems solved, our concerns gone.

In the hectic business of life, we pass unseeing through the beauty and blessings of our world, taking what we have for granted.

Among us though, there are many who have not been as lucky. They have suffered illness, grief and the loss of loved ones, hardship and poverty. In our times of contentment, we need to take the time to remember those who have gone, those who still suffer, and those who are still with us and who form such an important part of our lives.

Our friends are like gold, our relatives are our mainstay and support, and our children and grandchildren are the jewels of our lives; the very foundations upon which our happiness is built.

Let us always remember to be humble, aware and appreciative, and give thanks for the blessings we have received.

Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed

MUSING

A small step to self-sufficiency

This COVID-19 lockdown has seen so many firsts. It has seen the birth of many gardeners, chefs, bakers, painters, singers, dancers, comedians, and even, hairdressers. The Covid-19 lockdown has also seen me evolve — from a gardener who only grew flowers, to a first-time vegetable grower. I do not know if we would have ventured into vegetable gardening had the coronavirus not shut the doors of the Indian grocery stores here where I live.

With COVID-19 spread across the world and supply chains disrupted, the Indian grocery stores from where we used to get our “deshi” vegetables had to close down their stores. This meant no okra, bitter, bottle and snake gourds, green chillies, red and Malabar spinach, flat beans, etc. for us anymore. Cauliflower, cabbage, eggplant, and spinach were still available at American grocery stores, although not all the time like the pre-pandemic days.

A month into the lockdown, this “deshi”

soul began to crave a little variety in her daily vegetable servings. After all, rice are Bengalis’ staple food no matter where they choose to live. And when you eat rice, you need some fried veggies or veggies cooked in a light gravy to go with it.

One day, on a trip to Home Depot, an American home improvement retailer that never closed its doors during this pandemic, we bought spinach, tomato, and habanero pepper seedlings from its nursery. That was the beginning! Once we saw that these seedlings were growing well under our care, we purchased packets of “deshi” vegetable seeds that the only Bangladeshi grocery store in the area was selling.

We purchased seeds of okra, flat beans, eggplants, spinach, red spinach, and bottle gourd. We bought soil mix and pots to germinate the seeds. Once the seeds germinated, we sowed them in our backyard. It’s July now — our vegetable plants are growing taller every day, some

have started to bear flowers, and the tomato plant has little green fruits hanging from its branches. We have harvested our two spinach varieties and cooked them. You may not believe me, but there is a world of difference in taste between store-bought and homegrown vegetables. Literally!

According to *The Economist*, the coronavirus lockdown has inspired a surge in gardening not seen since World War II. In times of uncertainty, people’s natural instinct is to prepare for the dark days that might befall them. Here in America, vegetable gardening has taken off during the pandemic, so much so that the seed farms have struggled to keep up with a kind of demand never seen before.

During difficult times, people want to make sure that they are self-sufficient, at least to some degree. Having your own vegetable garden also means less trips to the grocery store and hence, less exposure

to the deadly virus. For us, growing our own vegetables has meant teaching ourselves and our child the value of food. Now, I appreciate the food I eat more than ever.

Every cloud has a silver lining. Even though this pandemic is snatching lives every day, it is also teaching us, who are still alive, to be patient and resilient, to be more adaptable to changing situations, to rediscover ourselves and our creative sides, and to place less importance on material objects, and more on family ties and relationships. As for me, this pandemic has taught me that being self-sufficient will never go out-of-date.

When an emergency occurs and resources quickly become strained, those of us who know how to live with less, or can make best use of the resources available to them, are the ones likely to fare better.

By Wara Karim