



ECHOES BY
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Chatga With a *Chandrabindu*

I
One of the first sentences I ever heard was my late mother jumping in joy, cheering, “*Chatga jai to my Nanu bari!*” It was no ordinary Chatga. A Chatga with a *chandrabindu*.

II
I was born in Chatga. My mother’s family has been living there since the partition of British India in 1947. My mum and dad met in Chatga when my father was teaching in Chittagong College. Ever since I knew I was me, I’ve been visiting Chatga once in a while. Over the years, I’ve seen the change of a city, while nothing changed at all.

III
Chatga is unique. It’s a city that stands on a river, the Karnaphuli, and is the main gateway to the sea, the Bay of Bengal. The city is a mixture of sweet and salt water. Culturally, Chatga is unique from the rest of Bangladesh. It maintains a link with what was Purba Bangla that became today’s Bangladesh, and the middle ages kingdom, Arakan, part of which falls in today’s Rakhine in Myanmar. That nasal tone in Chatga has many shades only travellers can appreciate.

IV
Chatga of the 1970s was a beautiful place. Except for pockets like Agrabad, the city maintained a character separate from Bangladesh. Load-shedding had its romanticism. The light of the *pidim* in the tea stalls, the *hajaks* in the shops, and the hurricane lamps and candles at home, are now all nostalgia. The smell of charcoal from a kitchen coupled with the fragrance of *loitta shutki* or *kala bhuna* evoke memories of a childhood of my *Nanu bari*. The walk from *Nanu*



PHOTO: ISHTIAQ AHMED

bari in Lalkhan Bazar around Batali Hill is a walk that’s still not found anywhere in Bangladesh.

V
The change of the city was just a matter of time. In the 1990s, Bangladesh started to enjoy economic growth. Dhaka and Chatga were the first beneficiaries and also the first victims of a long-lasting economic prosperity. Chatga started to look like Dhaka. Nostalgia was about to vanish. High rises sprouted from nowhere. Modern shopping malls overshadowed Chittagong New Market, which still remains the only market in Bangladesh where you can ride a cycle

from the ground to the top floor through a spiral stair. Physical change was one side. Natural changes were the other. When it rains on the plains, it rains in Chatga. Rains can continue for a week. Yet, in my childhood because of high drainage and natural canals, there would never be water-logging. That’s not the case now. Development always comes at a price, but it’s sad, when it comes at the price of nature.

VI
Chatga, with a *chandrabindu*, has had different connotations for me. In childhood, the attraction was my Nanu. There weren’t mobile phones in those days. Nanu would wait patiently for us to arrive. No prize for guessing right. A warm meal would be waiting. Now the attraction of *Nanu bari* is *Chhoto Mami*. She does the same. Patiently waits for us to arrive. In spite of all the changes, not much has really changed.

VII
What has changed forever is my late mother. She now rests in peace with my *Nana*, *Nanu* and other members of our family in the graveyard of Garibullah Shah Shaheb’s Mazar, a small walk from our house. *Chatga jai*, in the nasal tone, now rings the same bell, but now I go to visit my mummy, knowing I’ll visit her and other members of my maternal family who are now chapters of “the book of the dead”.

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Where nature, history, and culture meet...

DUHITA CHOWDHURY

Chattogram district is an attraction for many travellers because of her multifaceted natural beauty. The people of Chattogram are lucky to get the taste of hills, waterfalls and sea all in one place. So, people living around the country can spare some free time to take a short trip to the hilly district. And if anyone has to choose just one upazila, Sitakunda and its nature will serve a whole platter to them.

Chandranath Hill at Sitakunda can be a good option for the adventurous travellers. This place will offer you not only some of the best scenic beauty but also mythical legends and histories related to the Hindu goddess Sita. This hill is a place of attraction to trekkers. Besides trekking, you can also visit the famous Shakti Peeth, Chandranath Temple, and some other small temples.

During the rainy season, this hill reaches peak beauty with the emergence of fountains deep into the forest. Just beside Chandranath Hill, there is Sitakunda Botanical Garden and Eco-Park. This park will soothe your senses with its greenery full of flora and fauna. It is also home to two beautiful waterfalls—Suptadhara Waterfall and Shahasradhara waterfall.

After hill climbing and trekking, you may want to proceed further for some fresh air. Guliakhali beach is now getting much familiarity among travelers because of its



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

exceptional combination of green and blue. The environment of this beach is like a swamp and mangrove forest.

After Sitakunda Upazila, you can choose Mirsharai Upazila to give your trip a more adventurous flavour. Mirsharai can be a good choice if you like waterfalls. The two most visited trails here are the Khoiyachora and Napittachora trails. While trekking these trails you will come across multiple

brooks, hilly roads, small cascades and some breathtaking natural scenery. If you are searching the meaning of “dreadful beauty” then these two trails will serve you well.

The aforementioned places require both mental and physical stamina along with an adventurous mind. However, if you are not an adventurous soul, Chattogram will not disappoint either. You

will get all those flavours of hills and sea inside the metropolitan city. You can enjoy fresh beach air along with some crab masala and *piyajua* at the Naval beach and Patenga beach. On the other hand, popular tourist spot Foy’s Lake will enchant you with the beauty of a lake surrounded by hills.

If you want to travel for history, the Chittagong War Cemetery at the heart of the city is for you. Along with the greenery, you will be able to visit the history of World War II at the location of the graves of 715 soldiers. It is a perfect amalgamation of nature and history. And if you want some acquaintance with the cultural aspects of Chattogram, Cheragee Pahar Circle will take you there with its historical touch.

In short, Chattogram can be a great travelling spot for the young and the old. Here, you will experience the touch of both ascetic and aesthetic features. With travels now, Covid-19 has put us in a very uncertain situation, but the show must go on. So, by maintaining proper social distancing and all other health precautions, you can grab your backpack and let yourself enjoy the streams of nature because if health matters, mind matters too.

Happy travelling!

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