

#TRAVEL

Lost and found in the whispers of water

Theher — the Hindi/Urdu word means to pause, to rest, or to remain. And theher is what I felt when floating and flowing through the many known and unknown streams during my three-day visit to the northern districts of Sunamganj and Sylhet. How poetic and peaceful a journey can be; that is what I learnt in the sudden but perfect trip planned to enjoy the monsoon to its fullest.

Our journey started with a two-day-one-night stay at "Kuhelika", a boat house that roams through different points of Tangar Haor in Sunamganj. After taking a night-long bumpy road trip to Sunamganj from Dhaka, one might feel exhausted, but the moment you enter your tiny cosy AC cabin in the boat house and it starts moving, you realise that the journey was worth it.

You can enjoy both silence and excitement, as you prefer. You can read a book or simply sit by the window of your cabin, gazing at the tides, or you can go to the rooftop and feel lost and found in the same moment with wind, water, and mountains passing by. This rooftop was festive with different groups of people — families, couples, friends — taking pictures, playing music.

I looked at the houses situated on the river banks and felt a stroke to my heartstring thinking about the lives of the people there. How different it is from the people living in the cities! You wake up, and a water body is two steps away. Women drying clothes on the yard, fetching water in 'ghoras', cattle moving through the water — the scenes portrayed stories of lives that may not generally cross the mind of someone who is tangled in the rat race of a nine to five (it never ends at that time) corporate job, traffic signals, and social media.

The boat stops at different points, all by the Indian border of Meghalaya. How to identify which part is yours? The hills are in India, while the plainland is Bangladesh.

A ride on the Niladri Lake is a lifetime experience as it has an even more calming effect with clear blue water



and surrounding hills. This hidden gem feels both serene and surreal. You can also take a 'chander gari' to go further to watch waterfalls, but this time there weren't any as they had dried up. The trip is pleasant in this cloudy weather, but during full monsoon, it might give you a different kind of thrill; if you prefer being inside a boat house when it is raining cats and dogs, not just drizzling.

One invaluable component of this boathouse experience is the food they serve. The fresh fish of haor, cooked with onion, green chilli and very little spices in a broth, is scrumptious, to say the least. Even a not-a-fish lover

like me may become overwhelmed by the freshness and burst of flavours.

For lunch and dinner, they served two types of bhortas, one fish item, one meat item, vegetables and daal along with rice. And as mid-morning and evening snacks, bowls of fresh fruit salads were served to each room.

After taking photos to our heart's content, we wrapped up our boathouse chapter and set out for our next destination — Ratargul in Sylhet. This swamp forest is pretty popular among tourists for its picturesque, submerged

trees during the monsoon season. We bargained a little at the ghat and finally chose a boat to take the much-awaited tour. For this part, it is advised that you wear sunglasses, a hat and apply sunscreen.

As the boat started moving through the channels surrounded by lush greenery and moved further into the shadows, I let go of my ego. That very moment, I did. It felt like a blessing or a spell of Mother Nature where you come to her close proximity. You feel her abundance. It's neither hot nor cold; you can rest your feet in the water, or you can lie down in the boat, gazing at the tree canopy.

Or, you can be a little naughty like me and take the oar from the boatman (in this case, really young) and start rafting amateurishly. Any person familiar with Bangla literature might discover themselves unconsciously humming "Padmar Dheu Re..." or start thinking of themselves as a character from the iconic novel "Padma Nodir Majhi". Another episode of photo and video capturing commenced.

Tired, dirty, but happy, I, with my family and friends, headed for the airport, bidding farewell to the city of saints. Some boring but essential facts about the trip may include the cost, which is eight to fifteen thousand takas for the boat house package/person. The rate goes up on the weekends and during heavy monsoon, i.e., end of July. The experience gave me the opportunity to breathe, to pause and ponder, to tap into my inner child.

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