

REMINISCING RAMADHAN TIME IN ZANZIBAR



By Abdulrazak Fazal Updated: July 2020

➡ Abdulrazak Fazal's Zanzibar Ramadhan Photos collection

Once more it is the Holy month of Ramadhan and again, we pray for the 'maghfirat' of all those who had been with us last year but remain no more. Sadly, this Ramadhan we will be restricted to our homes. We are going through difficult and uncertain times. While this month also commemorates the martyrdom of our Maula Ali we pray to Allah through the 'wasila' of Maula Ali to keep us safe, give 'shifa' to all those who have been inflicted by 'Corona', root out this deadly virus and eradicate it from the face of the globe. Here is sharing my last year's Ramadhan post with you. How times change!

REMINISCING RAMADHAN TIME

The new moon has been sighted. It is Ramadhan once again but so many dear and near ones among us remain no more. We pray to the Almighty for their 'maghfirat'. It is the time of fasting for Muslims all over the world, from dawn to dusk. Above all the time to indulge in good deeds. As usual the recounting of events here are prioritized by Zanzibar. In those days of yore, the sighting of Ramadhan moon attracted a big crowd at Forodhani and greeted with a 21-gun salute. At times we climbed up to the top of our 'Nai Misit' minaret to sight and view the new moon.

Ramadhan in Zanzibar had its serenity and an aura of its own. After the early lull of the day it gradually livened up in the afternoon as vendors abounded selling varieties. The likes of Dharamsi, Yusuf (Mafatuma) and the brothers Mohamedali & Gulamali carrying metal tray over their head went from street to street hawking "Naan garam naan." My favourite being 'mkate wa mofa' (baked millet flour) that the 'Washihiri' vendors carried in their straw dish plates and frequented the vicinity of Malindi. Those Washihiri 'mofa' were appetizing of a sort with special aroma. It was also customary among Zanzibaris to send their acquaintances the routine 'sinia' containing snacks, dessert and curries. The nights were even livelier and 'Forodhani' provided the perfect resort and as good as a food fair. The fresh orange, 'ukwaju', 'ndimu' and 'mabungo' juice of one Saidi had real refreshing effect. At around midnight we were awakened for 'dakhu' by the powerfully toned "Uthoyaro Musalmano wakt hai suhurka, khana lukma noorka kam karo huzurke, roza rakho

Ramzanka lanat karo shaitanko, abad Ya Ramzan (21st night onwards alwida Ya Ramzan), jago, jago” of one Farjalla (Uthoyaro) who went around with his stick and dimly lit lamp . There was also an Asian ‘Bawo’ who eulogized the Muslim Saints and mocked the fashion trend. The Washihiri drummers went around in their respective vicinities. Eventually at two o’clock sharp exploded the ‘one-gun fire’.

Personally, I looked forward to ‘darsa’ at night and in particular the one at the Sheriff Dewji mansion. On arrival you were greeted benignly as the children with vase of ‘asmini’ rushed to offer you bits of flowers. The ‘kahawa’ and ‘sharbat’ followed as you awaited your turn for the Koran recitation. On the 28th night a beautifully wrapped gift packet was presented to all the regular attendants. The ‘darsa’ at Kiwanjani was famous for its ‘istekhan’ served in shapely small sized cups. Also, throughout Ramadhan Kiwanjani hosted ‘iftaar’ feasted by various individuals upon their respective invitees.

Ramadhan has its sanctity. What comes to mind is the sight of Pathan labourers in their fasting state working on a construction site and prostrating to the Almighty in the scorching Abu Dhabi desert. Also, our Inspection Team being summoned to the Rasalkhaima Branch where a few wealthy Arab clients had withdrawn their millions to be offered as ‘zakat’ and the liquidity and cash crunch felt by the small branch. In Ramadhan people worked one shift only. The nights were long and exciting. The Ramadhan illumination brightened up Dubai’s Sikkatal Khair, Sona Bazaar, Knife Rd and Bur Dubai as people flocked there to do their shopping. In those days of 70s Karama, Jhumeira and Satwa were yet to flourish.

In Dsm after ‘iftaar’, ‘tarawi’ and ‘dua’ friends and acquaintances form their own groups. Recalling our group, it comprised mainly the Bohoras who daily after their iftaar gathered at the Ellis Corner where we had our ‘baraza’, our Sunni friends joining us later after the ‘tarawi’ at their mosque. We sat late into the night and relish the kahawa, fresh juice and ice cream that were being served at the baraza. Sadly the ‘baraza’ and most of its members remain no more. In Dsm the Bohoras in their traditional white attire rushing to their mosque is a common sight. Their daily ‘iftaar thali’ quite often garnished with ‘mava khaja’ is sumptuous. The others flock Dsm restaurants and shops to purchase their requirements of snacks and deserts.

Talking of food varieties takes me to my student days in Bombay where mostly I had my ‘iftaar’ at a Muslim restaurant across Flora Fountain, not much of a distance from my hostel. Then at the Asiatic restaurant in Church gate I had my flask filled with tea that I would have later along with bread & butter as my ‘sahri’. During weekends I ended up at Mohamedali Rd/Bhindi Bazaar/Memon Mohalla/Bori Moholla where there was food galore. It was a sight to behold with its aroma of grilled meat and snacks. Hundreds made their purchases here. Malpua seemed their favourite delicacy and also earthenware bowls filled with ‘firni’ would be on display. The Bombayites love ‘falooda’ which is vermicelli or noodle like long thin strips in a glass of soft ice cream with ‘takhmario’, essence and syrup poured over it. The fiesta continued throughout the night. I would go to ‘Nizari’ and ‘Karimi’ as late as 4 am for ‘sahri’ after the ‘amaal’ at Palagalli mosque during the ‘Shabe Kadr’ nights and the restaurants being packed with customers at that time of the night. At times I’d my ‘iftaar’ at Pyarali Issa Hasham’s (‘Msito’, Maalim Issa’s brother) place to enjoy his

Zanzibar cuisine. In the aftermath of the Zanzibar Revolution he had come to stay in Bombay occupying a small flat along the Palagalli mosque. He was an excellent cook having remained a Chef at Hotel Pigalle in Zanzibar.

In Zanzibar ‘faluda’ was china grass mixed in steaming milk set into soft solid form. It makes me revisit the nostalgia for the occasion of the 28th of Ramadhan ‘iftaar’ at our house and my mother steaming the milk in a large pot. My sister and I would then arrange the ‘faluda’ filled bowls in rows. The iftaar program commenced with the recitation of ‘dua khatme Koran’ and other recitals. As soon as ‘azan’ from the Junni mosque sounded the fast was broken and ‘iftaar’ feasted.

This month also commemorates the martyrdom of Maula Ali whose beneficence in all its forms towards the poor, oppressed, orphans, widows and needy is an exemplar to the entire world. His ‘munajat’ “Maula Ya Maula antal Maula...” by Murtaza Bandali resounding in the still of the Ramadhan nights in the vicinity of Zanzibar’s Malindi/Kiponda is still etched on memory. Blessed are those who in adherence to his teachings help the needy rather than indulge in extravagance. We make an impassioned plea to the Almighty in this holy month to shower His blessings upon us all and alleviate the sufferings of the people. Ramadhan Mubarak!

➡ **Abdulrazak Fazal’s Zanzibar Ramadhan Photos collection**

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Refer to below update on “Reminicing Eid Time in Zanzibar”

REMINISCING EID TIME IN ZANZIBAR



By Abdulrazak Fazal *Updated: July 2020*

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'Never shall there be another Corona like epidemic' is our heartfelt and tearful plea to the Almighty, and to create for his obliging creatures a more pandemic free world. What a horrifying experience we had this Ramadhan! We were restricted to our homes. no mosques, 'tarawi', 'dua', and 'amaal'. Anyhow, thanks to IBN for telecasting duas, amaals and the religious lectures. Imagine the plight of those rendered orphans and widows, and the aged parents relying entirely on their sons to go through this extremely saddening and depressive phase! Nonetheless, the holy month is over and now it is 'EID' time as the moon has been sighted. Eid is an obligatory religious event by which we perceive Allah's mercy upon us. We also pray for His 'rahma' and 'maghfirat' of all those who have passed away of recent. Also, our 'duas' to Him for the 'shifa' of everybody. Did we ever envisage no 'Eid Salah' on the day of 'Eid'? All along we were taught that 'Eid' becomes invalidated if its 'namaaz' is not performed. May Allah accept our endeavors and pardon our sins.

Here is sharing my last year's 'EID' post with you. Indeed, times have changed!

REMINISCING 'EID' TIME

I stand in the balcony of my house to view and sight the 'EID' moon. Amid the rejoicing of Eid moon a tinge of sadness is also felt. Just the other day we had welcomed the new Ramadhan moon and now within no time the holy month comes to an end. No more the 'tarawi', 'dua', 'iftar', 'sehri', the mosque filled with devotees and the vibrancy of Ramadhan; it is all gone. Sadder, the Eid moon reminds us of those dear ones who are no more in our midst and this realization creates hollowness inside us. Anyhow, Eid is an occasion to rejoice. In the colonial Zanzibar, our Nai Misit minaret would be the center of attraction on the eve of Eid as we would climb it to sight and view the Eid' moon. Also, a large number flocked Forodhani and the Eid moon sighting alike Ramadhan moon was greeted with a 21-

gun salute and a lot of excitement. Eid was a festive occasion with 3 to 4 days of public holidays. Eid night was pretty hectic. A week earlier we would take our 'trou' fabric to the tailor Chunilal who took our measurement and then deliver the trouser to us on the eve of Eid. We would then go to Hira Mochi (shoemaker) to collect our shoes that were custom made and eventually end up at 'Jacksis' to buy the stiff collar 'Shikibo' shirt. It was more affordable than the 'Double Two' which was meant for heavy pockets. Most of the shops were open on Eid night, in fact Toto Hajam's barber shop opposite the Junni mosque remained open till the wee hours.

I happened to spend the 1976 Eid in Karachi. In Pakistan they term Eid night as 'Chand Raat'. It is Pakistan's liveliest night and in fact the most sensational time that I'd experienced. On declaration of moon sighting on tv Tariq Rd around PECHS where I'd put up was overflowing with excited people going around to make their last-minute purchases. The ladies and girls were seen selecting bangles, jewelry, dresses and 'dupatta' of their choice in shops that offered varieties. The festive spirit continued throughout the night. The ladies flocked the parlours to have their hairs set and 'mehndi'/'henna' applied to their hands. Gents shopping was mostly 'kurta shalwar', slippers and shoes. The food stalls and eateries were full of sweets and yummy food. What reminds of Bombay's Eid in the 60s was the 'sheer khurma' at the Nizai Restaurant in Bhindi Bazaar after the namaaz at the Khoja mosque in Palagali. Such was its demand that Nizari prepared as many as 20 large pots of 'sheer khurma'. Later I'd go to 'Suleman Usman' to buy 'aflatoon' that I distributed at the hostel to my Hindu friends who loved it having begun to acquire its taste.

In Zanzibar in the olden days after the Eid namaaz at Nai Misit the humble Agha Muravij delivered his 'khutbah' in Gujarati. The Eid greetings followed in the 'sahan'. After the prayers and 'baraza' the Zanzibaris warmly shook hands to greet each other. The streets brightened up with their new white 'khanzu' and 'kofia'. The 'Wamanga' in their traditional attire chanted and paraded through the town jumping up and down with their 'jambia' and sticks to display their swordsmanship. The 'halua ya Mmanga' was their specialty that people bought to relish visitors at home. As children we went from one relative's house to another and reveled in the 'eidi' that we received from them. Evening was marked with funfair at Mnazimoja. We looked forward to Mnazimoja where there were toy stalls, food stalls, 'ngoma', merry go round, tombola and 'karagosi' (puppet show). The fair continued till midnight and lasted for 4 days. I vividly recall the excitement we felt when my maternal uncle 'Jafumama' arrived at the fair as he would buy us a toy every day for 4 continuous days.

Although it has been more than a decade since I lost my mother, I no more derive the joy of Eid within the confinement of my home. The past keeps lingering. My mother would wake up early and relentlessly pester me to go to take my shower lest I miss my Eid namaaz. The Eid morning breakfast with 'sheer khurma' followed and then I would head for the 'salaah'. Once the namaaz was done I rushed back to greet my mother showing my respect and love and to receive her blessings. After a while the guests would start arriving and exchange greetings. My mother took out her money and gave 'eidi' to the children. By then our house would come alive with the laughter, joy and refreshments of Eid. Over 90 years old and the eldest among the relatives all the gathering was centered around her. She was so loving and caring, the real force that united us all. Later she excitedly awaited the telephone calls from my

siblings abroad who would convey their Eid greetings to us. Sadly, most of them also remain no more.

Now my first priority after the namaaz is to rush to the cemetery and visit the grave sites of my mother and sister to offer salutation at their graves reciting 'yaasin'. The graveyard is full of people sitting by the side of the graves of their dear ones in whose remembrance they are being moved to tears. We realize the grief bearing in mind that the inevitable death remains a humbling experience for all of us.

Eids come and go. Now in my 70s Eid is no more exciting, rather lifeless and traditional, they are never gonna be the same as before. I go through its routine for the sake of it, pay a visit to my aunt to offer her Eid greetings and then return home to spend the moment together with my wife and daughter, my better half being complimented for the mouthwatering delicacies she'd feasted us during Ramadhan and now awaiting her spicy 'chanabateta/chevro' and scrumptious 'biryani'.

The main essence of Eid ritual is its 'namaaz', our obligation to thank Allah for having given us strength to go through the fasting phase. Eid also implies giving 'zakat al fitr' as obligatory charity to the needy at the end of Ramadhan. The lessons learnt during the holy month such as feeding the poor, good manners and self-restraint need observance in our day to day affairs to attain perfection in life as commanded by the Almighty.

Here is wishing all my FB friends EID MUBARAK. Take care and stay safe.

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