

# REMINISCING RAMADHAN TIME



By Abdulrazak Fazal *Updated: August 2020*

## ► Abdulrazak Fazal's 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 'mabungu' 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!

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