

REMINISCING CHRISTMAS TIME



By Abdulrazak Fazal *Updated July 2020*

It is CHRISTMAS time that abounds in festivities. My earlier memories go back to the days in a Muslim set up Zanzibar where during Christmas most of us were confined to picnicking in Chwaka or Jambiani. Christmas was more appealing while holidaying in December in Dsm in the 50s and 60s. Acacia Avenue (now Samora) stretching from the familiar Askari monument to the 'Mata Salamat Building' was brightly lit. The shop windows of Haji Brothers, Mansoor Daya, Choitram, Teekays and Afra along there were beautifully decorated with Xmas trees, Santa Clauses and various gift items. On Christmas eve spots like Cozy Café, New Africa Hotel and Dsm Club (now Court of Appeal) were dazzled by the glamour of socialites and colonials. The church bells sounded at around midnight for the Christmas eve mass. Years later when in Bombay, I recall accompanying a Catholic friend to the midnight mass on a Christmas eve in the openness of Cooperage ground across Churchgate/Colaba.

In the later phase having settled here in Dsm, Christmas time personally evokes mainly memories of Dsm of the 70s & 80s. There seems a marked difference between Christmas then and Christmas now. Christmas then had its real festive spirit. My most satisfying moment being relishing 'chocolate sundae' and 'slush' in the company of my children amid the Jingle Bell, Christmas hymn and carol music at 'Sno Cream'. The solemnity of carol music was also evident at Athiens, Motel Agip and the Kilimanjaro Coffee Bar that we used to frequent. The music was simple and touching. Dsm had class restaurants then. One could sit for hours sipping coffee at Motel Agip with its steaming coffee pot and its tables scattered around. Dr. Green (Mwalimu Nyerere's Economic Adviser) would sit there for hours engrossed in his books. Today several barbeque restaurants have sprung up, they pale in comparison to the classy restaurants of yester years. One of the highlights of the festive season was its 'Dial A Disc' radio program presented by Messers Hamza Kasongo, Hatim Karimjee and Vinu Somayya. It had a sophistication of its own and had become the talk of the town.

My thoughts also turn to the 'Christmas Party' at NBC's Jamhuri St Branch hosted by our Chief Manager, the late Joe D'Costa. There was food galore including prawns and seafood, and alcohol aplenty (my buddy Praful Mehta, our Senior Accountant, will vouch for it). The Goans love sea food and alcohol. There was also a Christmas

Party at the 'Chase Manhattan Associate Bank' in Dubai where I had shifted at a later stage but in the absence of a public holiday and no displays, Dubai had a subdued Christmas, and the Bank's English and American staff resorted to their respective countries during this festive time. Our main attraction being the declaration of annual bonus by the Bank to its staff members. Ironically today Dubai with its illumination of Burj Khalifa and spectacular firework display vies for global attention. Tourists flock there during this time of the year.

In my twilight years now, I have missed out on experiencing 'White Christmas' in snowy and wintry London and Toronto. In New York we were witness to the pre-Christmas preparation of the gigantic 'Christmas Tree' being erected and taking its shape at the Rockefeller Foundation in its Manhattan township. However, my sentimental attachment lies with the solemnity of our traditional Christmas festivity. It is the time of the year when local Africans visit their native place to be among their dear and near ones. In the past when my sister was in Moshi we often traveled there during Christmas/Easter. My favourite spot there being Marangu Falls. The Kibo Hotel around there is all serene and commands a scenic view. Of poignancy is the ringing of bells and hymns emanating from the chapel behind the hotel. The locals with their families in moderate outfits and wearing broad smiles liven up the spirit of Christmas despite life's miseries and gloomy outlook. Salute to them. Unfortunately, our visits to Moshi have come to a halt as my sister remains no more (RIP).

There has been a sad Christmas too for me, the 2007 one. I buried my dear mother on the eve of Christmas, she had passed away early in the morning of 24th December (RIP).

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all my FB friends.





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