
A Walk Down Memory Lane

- Ahona Gupta

Tokyo is cold during winter....and by cold I mean FREEZING!!!! Most of our winter evenings and weekends are spent huddled under the blanket with both the room and floor heaters on...sipping hot coffee and generally cursing the howling wind outside and its resultant sub-zero temperature. Coming from the sunny climes of Kolkata, where winter is a long awaited and cherished season... a season of light woollens and even lighter moods; the dark and gloomy winter of Japan is definitely not something I look forward to.

Occasionally on such cold wintry evenings I find myself turning back the pages of time and revisiting my childhood. As it is with most schools in Kolkata (specially the non-Christian ones like mine), winter holidays were almost an after-thought. While the summer and the Puja holidays stretched over a month and a half...the winter holidays were a measly 2 weeks, and it was within those 2 weeks that we managed to cram in all possible fun activities. We would usually go on our annual family trips during the longer holidays while the Christmas vacation due to the shortage of time, was mostly limited to local attractions.

Some of those attractions which remain vivid in my mind (and I am sure in the minds of every true-blue Kolkatan) include visits to the Alipore Zoo complete with badminton racquets, Frisbees and of course a picnic hamper; at least one visit to whichever circus was in town (Nataraj Circus was my particular favourite, although in my late pre-teens, I started appreciating the Russian circus more) and of course the event I personally looked forward to the most, the "Boi Mela" or the Book Fair held every year at the Maidan. Earlier, I used to go with my parents and a brood of cousins and later on with my friends...but the magic remained the same irrespective of my companions - the crisp

smell of new books mingled with the mouth-watering aroma coming from the 'Ben Fish' stall, the endless queues outside the popular publishing houses and people just sitting on the fair grounds and soaking in the ambience; all went towards creating an unforgettable experience. I have not visited the Book Fair in the last six or seven years, but sadly I hear from the people who still go, that the fair is not what it used to be...its magic has been greatly diminished.

While these are all memories of outdoor events, my favorite memory associated with winter is an indoor one, a memory which I am sure, most Kolkatans will recognize and reminisce about - eating 'komla lebu' (oranges) and reading a book while soaking in the warm afternoon sun! Right from my early childhood, I was an avid reader, everything from books to magazines to 'kagojer thonga' (paper bags made from recycled newspapers) would be gobbled up by my hungry eyes. It was a habit my dad was only too happy to encourage and encourage he did. Our school back then, had its mid week holiday on Thursday unlike many who broke for the whole weekend. Every Saturday, I would come home from school to find my favorite sunny corner of the verandah set up with quilts, pillows and a brand new book inscribed with a funny message from

dad. As I crossed over into my teens the authors changed from Enid Blyton to Erich Segal, but, the scenario remained the same. My 'baba' (as I used to call my dad) would then serve me my mid-afternoon snack (usually a variety of sandwiches and of course the ubiquitous orange in all its peeled glory), while I lazily laid back and turned the pages of my new book. Sadly, those times are no more and neither is my baba...but if I close my eyes and try hard enough I can still feel the warm sun on my back, hear the rustling of the crisp pages and smell the oranges..... □

