

# Reminiscence

## Christmas on Park Street

By Musafir



“The past is a candle at great distance: too close to let you quit, too far to comfort you.” — Amy Bloom

I have lived in the States for almost 45 years of my life. I enjoy the Christmas season, the festivity, lights, decors and the beauty and glamor of the season. But nothing feels like Christmas on Park Street in Calcutta (now Kolkata). As they say, ““You can go other places, all right - you can live on the other side of the world, but you can't ever leave home”

Occurring at the peak of the city's mild winter, Christmas is celebrated throughout the city of Calcutta (for me, Kolkata will always be Calcutta), but Park Street, in the middle of all this, becomes the hotbed of the

warm, fuzzy festivity. Park Street had a major concentration of the Anglo-Indian community. Many of them have migrated to Australia and UK, that's what I hear. One of them was my friends in engineering school. We called him James. He asked me to accompany him to Calcutta during the Christmas. The year was 1963. I had just turned 17. James' family lived on Free School Street (the hub of Anglo-Indians) which connected to Park Street.

Park Street was full of glamor, the remaining glory of British culture and romance not far from St. Paul's Cathedral and the South Park Street Cemetery, famous tourist attractions, among many. Park Street had an eclectic collection of great

restaurants. I can't forget eating cake and sipping Darjeeling tea at Flurry's, a world class cake and pastry shop.

Home to some of the city's famous fine dining restaurants, cafes, bookstores and other places of attractions, Park Street was a warm haven of celebration and smiles. Restaurants like Trincas, Flurry's, and Moulin Rouge were Calcutta's prime festive hideouts. Adding to that were the brightly lit buildings and the entire faux roof of the street, all of which combined to make Park Street a bright, sparkling dream world – the epicenter of Christmas in Calcutta.

A short stop from Flurry's was Trinca's night club. I remember the enthusiastic band and the lead singer playing 'Lipstick on Your Collar.' Those of you who remember, Connie Francis was the heart throb of the music world then.

James insisted that I must visit Moulin Rouge where the beautiful young singer was rendering, "Shheshe se pi, jee diwane" a Bollywood number that meant Drink you romantic and live your life.



Christmas is a festival of fellowship and warmth, of carols and cakes, and of gratitude and love. Park Street caught this spirit beautifully, and everyone was feeling it in the air together. Park Street appeared at her beautiful best, like the locket in the necklace Calcutta wore to dress up for Christmas.

I have not visited Calcutta or Park Street since my last visit there in the late eighties, but my friends tell me that there is no place like this place during Christmas even today.

Everyone joins the season's spirit. Even non-Christians buy cakes and

bonbons and decorate Christmas trees.

I want to visit Park Street someday again. Christmas always "takes me down memory lane, to a time very much younger, a time more pure, more sane." Meanwhile, "If you cannot hold me in your arms, then hold my memory in high regard. And if I cannot be in your life, then at

least let me live in your heart."

Merry Christmas and a happy New Year!