



Shabban sunset

Photo by Claudia Farkas Al Rashoud

Festivity before Ramadan

Graish

... a day to share and bond

By Chaitali B. Roy
Special to the Arab Times

Groups of shrouded women in black, some carrying bundles of clothes that needed washing while others holding on to what was to be their repast for the day, walked a sandy stretch to the sea shore, surrounded by bands of smiling and shouting children who looked forward to a day of picnicking and enjoyment with a lot of anticipation. On a sunny morning, on the last day of the Islamic month of Shabban, this was a common sight in pre-oil Kuwait. The women were walking the dusty road to the beach, to enjoy a day out with their friends and close relatives and to observe an old Kuwaiti tradition called 'graish.'

Every tradition tells a story. The tradition of 'graish' is the story of Kuwait when life was simple, needs were few and what reigned supreme was the feeling of community. For Amani, Maha, Aliya, Mona and many others this is a tradition they have never heard of. Husa, a Jordanian married to a Kuwaiti, nods her head. "How is it possible to predict which day is going to be the end of Shabban, after all it depends on the sighting of the moon," she asks. "I have never seen my husband's fam-

ily observe this day," she adds.

Dr Yacoub al Hijji, the renowned author, whose relentless work for the preservation of Kuwait's heritage bore fruition in his invaluable books notes with regret, "Graish is an old custom which is unfortunately dead now. It was basically observed to celebrate the last day of the month of Shabban and to prepare for the Ramadan fasting. "Our children hardly remember this tradition."

Memories

Members of the older generation might have some vague memories, he says, but even they have forgotten what the day used to be like. "On the last day of Shabban, groups of women along with their daughters, prepared a picnic and went to the sea shore. They took along food and at times they even carried their clothes which needed washing. They spent time on the beach eating, swimming, washing clothes and gossiping till the end of the day, when they headed back home." The children, notes Dr Hijji looked forward to this day because it held endless possibilities of enjoyment. The next day would herald a month of prayer and fast-

ing. "In a way Ramadan began with the observance of graish and ended with the celebration of Eid," noted Dr Hijji.

Was there any special food cooked on this day? "I don't remember anything special that was prepared during graish. But usually the women carried along something which was not very heavy. They took rice and a few other things like sweets, tea and biscuits." Having carried all the eatables with them, groups of women found themselves spots on the beach where they camped throughout the day and enjoyed a picnic.

The custom of observing graish, though unknown to many is still prevalent in some Kuwaiti families. However with time, there have been many changes. The gatherings are held not on the beach but within the air-conditioned comfort of homes and offices. The efforts are still collective. Food is either made at home or bought from outside. Different organizations across Kuwait organize graish for their employees, giving the workforce a chance to interact with each other in an atmosphere which is not official.

Abir al Sarraf has been observing

graish, with her colleagues for many years. "We have a team which looks after the recreation and entertainment of employees and it is they who supervise and oversee the preparation for graish." The contributory nature of the custom still continues to be observed. The participants contribute either in terms of food or money.

At home, Abir observes this yearly custom mostly with her friends. "On this day we generally prefer to eat food that my sisters and I tend to avoid during Ramadan." While referring to a book on Kuwaiti traditions by Hamed al Saidan, she says, "In the past, graish took place either during lunch or dinner. On the last day of Shabban, families and friends sat together, ate different kinds of food and had a good time."

Festive

Did people dress up in festive clothes during this occasion? "It is not mentioned anywhere that they wore their fineries during this day," notes Dr Hijji. But Areej al Kandari mentions the traditional daraa that she and her friends wear during graish. She recalls, "There used to be a huge family gathering during my

childhood." Areej and her friends continue the custom. "On this day we dress up in traditional Kuwaiti robes called daraa," says Areej, her eyes lighting up with pleasure. "The observance of graish is restricted to women. Men generally don't participate," she glances at her male colleague who nods in agreement.

Celebrated

The passage of time has brought in lots of changes. Graish is no longer celebrated under the open skies, beside the dusty sea shore. The fare too has changed and has become more elaborate. "Nowadays people tend to include whatever food they prefer, it could be Egyptian, Lebanese or Indian." Graish is traditionally regarded as a welcome to Ramadan.

"Many consider it to be the last lunch before Ramadan," adds Abir. Wafa celebrates this day with her friends and family. But it is not a must do for her. "There is no written rule that we have to observe this day."

Employees in different organizations celebrate the day together by either bringing in packs of food or getting them catered from outside, it is

all a jolly atmosphere, a time to get together and feel the spirit of Ramadan. In the past, recalls Wafa, during graish, the women would sit and crush wheat which would later be used to prepare harees during Ramadan. "Life in those days was simple and the pleasures too were simple," says Wafa, remembering the sweet taste of gaymat that her mother made when she was a child. Traditionally men took no part in these celebrations. "Of course it all depends on the family," says Alia, a media executive in an advertising firm. She agrees that people are slowly forgetting this tradition. Though she argues, "there are some like us who have not yet lost their touch with the past."

Slowly people are forgetting this simple tradition. "Well you see people have forgotten so many things over the years," notes Dr Hijji with regret. He blames the slow erosion of traditions and customs to an abundance of wealth and excessive westernization. "We in the East harbour this particular feeling that what we have is inferior to what other's have. Very slowly several traditions are dying a quiet death. We are losing almost everything and with time Kuwait will be a foreign land for everybody."

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Latest

B'desh Embassy Ramadan timing: The Embassy of the People's Republic of Bangladesh in Kuwait will follow the following office hours during the Holy

month of Ramadan.

Sunday to Thursday: 09:30 hrs-03:30 hrs; Dhuhr prayer break: 12:00 hrs-12:30 hrs; Friday and Saturday: weekly holidays
This information is for all concerned.

Advisory for OCI card holders: All those having OCI Cards are required to carry both their OCI Card and passport to travel to India so that they do not face any difficulty in immigration clearance.

From October 2018, ICAO will accept only machine readable travel documents, hence, existing PIO Cards, which are handwritten will therefore, become invalid. Thus it will be necessary upon PIO Cardholders to obtain machine readable OCI Cards in lieu of existing hand written PIO Cards before October 2018 to avoid any inconvenience.

Indian Embassy working hours: With effect from May 1, 2018, the Embassy of India's working hours

will be from 0800 hours to 1630 hours from Sunday to Thursday with Fridays and Saturdays as closed weekly holidays. The lunch break will be during 1300 to 1330 hours (1 pm to 1.30 pm) on the working days.

Brazil Embassy notice: The Embassy of the Federative Republic of Brazil announces that the Consular Office has new timings, being 8 am to 12 pm, Sunday to Thursday.

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