



ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

BOI MELA 2025

FINDING OBAYED HAQUE:

A contemporary writer who lives in his words



I want to write something different. I want to highlight something different. And I want people to think, to imagine beyond the obvious, to see the world through a different lens.

MAHMUDA EMDAD

If you pick up an Obayed Haque novel, you won't find an author's photo, a detailed biography, or even a note about his life. He chooses to stay in the background, letting his words speak for themselves. When asked about his reluctance to engage in media exposure and personal branding, Haque responded, "As much as I am an introvert, I believe that a writer's true identity should be found in their work. Readers should connect with me through my writing, not through my face or any other personal details." And in a world where authors often become as much a brand as their books, Haque's quiet insistence on letting his stories stand alone feels both refreshing and deliberate.

Born in 1986, Haque has carved out a unique space in Bangladeshi contemporary literary fiction. His novels explore the raw, often overlooked aspects of life; flawed characters, quiet struggles, and the shifting moral scenarios of society. Haque's writing is a mirror held up to the complexities of human existence. His characters are not heroes or villains but deeply flawed, achingly real individuals navigating the messy terrain of life. His prose is sharp and unflinching, yet, deeply observant. While his themes vary, a constant motif in his work is his fascination with people in the margins—thieves, beggars, forgotten revolutionaries, and dreamers caught in the tides of history. Haque's novels delve into the raw, often overlooked aspects of society—flawed characters, quiet struggles of and the often shifting moral fabric of human lives. His writing acts as a mirror to human complexity, portraying characters who are neither heroes or villains but individuals navigating the murky depths of survival.

His debut novel, *Teilya Chora* (Bayanno, 2020) set against the backdrop of the Liberation War, subverts conventional war narratives by centering on a thief, an unlikely protagonist who, in the chaos of history, finds himself fighting for a cause greater than himself. This

nuanced perspective redefines patriotism and challenges linear interpretations of heroism. Published at the preceding Ekushey Boi Mela, *Jol Nei, Pathar* (Upokatha Prokashon, 2024) is a divergence from his prior stories. The inner terrain of a man who has lost everything—his loved ones, his ties, and possibly even his capacity to feel the weight of sorrow is shown in this story, which is stripped of exterior problems and instead focuses inward. The protagonist exists in a state of quiet detachment. The sorrows of the world pass through him without leaving a mark, as if grief has hollowed him out so thoroughly that nothing else can touch him. Yet, in the absence of personal anguish, he wanders the streets of the city, seeking traces of sadness in others, as if hoping that witnessing another's suffering might restore his own lost sense of pain. The novel asks a disquieting question: when one has lost everything, does survival become an act of endurance, or does it take on an entirely different meaning?

In a recent conversation with the author at Ekushey Boi Mela, Haque shared his thoughts on storytelling. When asked about what he seeks as a writer, he replied, "I want to write something different. I want to highlight something different. And I want people to think, to imagine beyond the obvious, to see the world through a different lens." His influences range widely, from Bankim Chatterjee to contemporary literary figures like Haruki Murakami and Jhumpa Lahiri.

Haque's literary journey began with *Teilya Chora* in 2020. He followed this with *Neel Pahar* (Kakoli Prokashoni, 2015), a story of political unrest and displacement set in the 1980s, and *Joleshshori* (Adee Prokashon, 2016) that captures the rhythms of life in a riverside village. His 2021 novel *Kangal Sangha* (BookCart Publishing India) brings together five marginalised individuals: a former convict, a failed pickpocket, an aged beggar, a naive young man, and a sex worker. Then came *Arkathi* (Bayanno, 2024), a historical novel

exploring the exploitation of laborers in the tea plantations of British India.

Despite the range of his stories, readers have critiqued Haque for the endings, which can feel abrupt or rushed. But over time, his storytelling evolved, his narratives becoming more layered and his conclusions more refined.

Published at the 2025 Ekushey Book Fair, Haque's latest novel *Unmad Ashram* (Bayanno, 2025), takes a different turn from his previous works. It follows a protagonist who finds himself caught in an unexpected and morally ambiguous situation. As the story progresses, he navigates through this complex scenario, exploring the darker facets of his character. The presence of a crow in the narrative serves as a distinctive symbol, adding depth to the novel's themes of uncertainty and introspection. This work showcases his growth as a writer, demonstrating his willingness to push his own creative boundaries.

For Obayed Haque, writing is not about recognition; it is about exploration. His stories don't seek easy answers either. And through his ever-evolving body of work, he invites readers to do the same. His storytelling does not seek to glorify or condemn; instead, it presents life as it is, unpredictable, unsettling, and deeply human.

As Bangladeshi literature continues to evolve, voices like Haque's push boundaries, ensuring that literary fiction remains more than just a reflection of history or society, but also a space for imagination, introspection, and reinvention. His latest novel, *Unmad Ashram*, signals his own creative transformation proving that contemporary Bangladeshi fiction is not static; it is evolving, questioning itself, and taking risks.

Mahmuda Emdad is a women and gender studies major with an endless interest in feminist writings, historical fiction, and pretty much everything else, all while questioning the world in the process. Feel free to reach out at mahmudaemdad123@gmail.com.

POETRY

HILLY RIVER

UMMA HABIBA

Imagine it's raining cats and dogs
The hilly river has let the hair loose
To take a bath
In her bath the eyes of sadness float
And you are fast asleep
The river is on fire
The hill is on fire
The secluded river trembles in cold
And you have fallen asleep
The moon has leaned to the west
On the north is a forest where white
bombax blooms
The heaving sound of the round shaped
owl
And some other nocturnal bird
The river has awakened
The soldiers are setting the clouds on fire
The smoke has awakened you
The hill screams
I have lost one of my eyes
In the clouds
Please lend me one of yours
For tonight

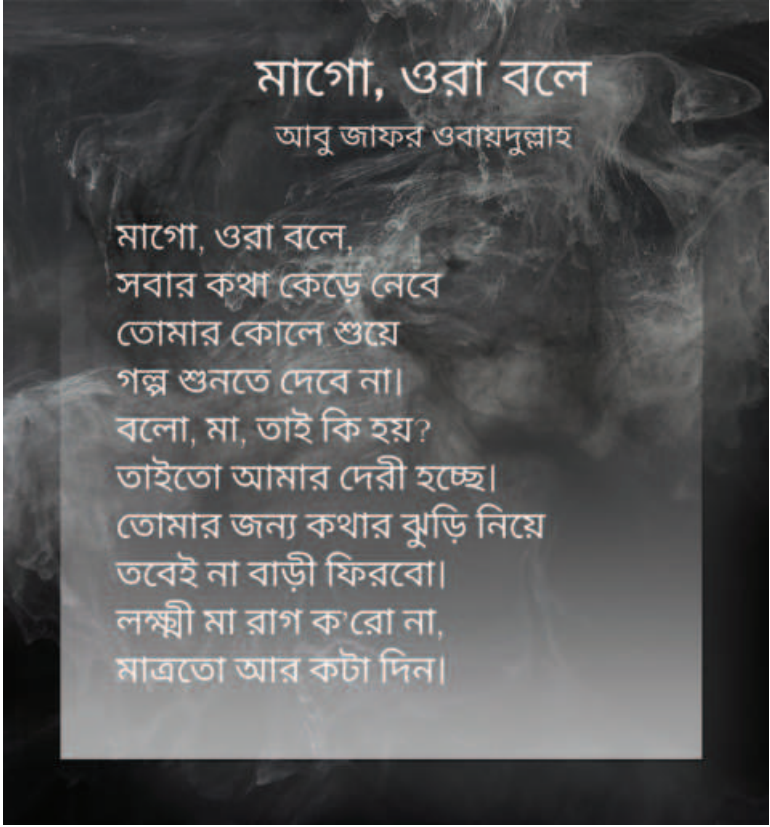
Translated by Quamrul Hassan.

Umma Habiba is a poet and theater activist from Dhaka, Bangladesh. Her debut poetry collection, *Ghashe Ghashe Roktoful*, was published in 2022.

Quamrul Hassan is an author, poet and an MFA Candidate of Creative Writing and Translation at the University of Arkansas.



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA



WHAT WE'RE READING
THIS WEEK



Bhasha Andolonor Itihash (Agamee Prokashoni, 2016)

BASHIR AL HELAL

Tracing back the events before the Language Movement of 1952, Al Helal presents a detailed account of the events that unfolded during February 1952. This book describes in detail the events of the period from the establishment of Pakistan in 1947 to the recognition of Bangla as the state language in 1956. The author analyses the background of the movement, the political context, and the information on the various stages of the struggle. In addition, the book also sheds light on the cultural and social impact of the language movement. An invaluable account of the events that helped shape the eventual birth of the nation, *Bhasha Andolonor Itihash* is a must-read for anyone looking to brush up on their history.