



## DID YOU KNOW?

# THE EVOLUTION AND ORIGIN OF HALEEM

*Kitab al Tabikh (Books of Dishes)* by Ibn Sayyar Al Warraq, widely recognised as one of the earliest cookbooks to be discovered, documented a porridge-like dish called "harees" or "hareesa". And it is precisely this delicacy that is believed to be the predecessor or ancestor to the haleem that we enjoy today.

The Arabic word 'Harasa' and an older word 'Harasu' formed the word 'Hareesa' which refers to the pounding of meat with barley or shelled whole grains of wheat. As for the word "haleem", it means 'patient' in Arabic, advising one to stay home and to remain patient through the long, slow cooking process.

During months of fasting or during long journeys in-between battles, it was a one-dish sailor and soldier food. Some historians believe hareesa came to the sub-continental coast of Malabar with the arrival of Arab traders.



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# The enduring presence of cats in JAPANESE LITERATURE

**ADRIN SARWAR**

What's with all the cats in Japanese literature?

In the few books I have read, one thing has grabbed my attention again and again—the presence of feline characters, especially cats, on the covers. Most people will be amazed to find that Japanese literature has a whole history and cultural rundown behind this significant presence of cats in their literature.

From the world's first novel, *The Tale of Genji*, from the eleventh century to the contemporary famous novel *Days at Morisaki Bookshop*, cats have always been a significant element of Japanese literature. Japanese writers use the motif of cats for different rhetoric purposes, often putting them at the centre of the story. Sometimes the stories are told from a cat's perspective. In *I am a Cat*, for example, Natsume Soseki sheds light upon life in the Meiji period through social commentary by a cat.

In many Japanese stories, cats are presented as guides or companions to human characters. In these stories, the cats often help the human characters with loneliness or emotional fulfilment. *The Travelling Cat Chronicles* by Hiro Arikawa tells the story of Nana, a young and spirited cat, and his gentle human companion,



ILLUSTRATION: SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM

Satoru, as they journey together on a mysterious road trip across Japan and discover the true meaning of love, courage, and everything in between.

The cats help the human characters confront difficult truths about life, death, and human nature. Although these lessons may be delivered in a comical manner, they are poignant. In *The Cat Who Saved Books* by Sosuke Natsukawa, readers are introduced to Rintaro Natsuki, a young man struggling with loneliness and grief. After his grandfather passes away and the family's beloved second-hand bookshop

is set to close, Rintaro's world is turned upside down by the arrival of a talking tabby cat named Tiger. With a sharp tongue and plenty of attitude, Tiger gives Rintaro an unusual mission: to save books from being lost forever. As they set off on a series of magical and heartwarming adventures, Tiger acts as both a guide and a mentor, helping Rintaro find his way out of grief and loneliness.

In the works of Haruki Murakami, one of Japan's most celebrated authors, cats take on a different kind of role. Rather than being just moral guides, these mysterious

felines appear as recurring characters in novels like *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, *Kafka on the Shore*, and *A Wild Sheep Chase*. In Murakami's world, cats aren't simply companions to humans; they serve as catalysts that launch his characters into strange and often surreal adventures. These enigmatic cats add to the magical and mysterious atmosphere that is a hallmark of Murakami's storytelling.

The symbolism of cats in Japanese literature is deeply rooted in their culture. In Japan, cats are considered to be a symbol of good luck and fortune. Most of these portrayals of cats are drawn from the familiar, comforting presence of house cats. Japanese legends also show the impact of cats on human life.

From the very beginning, cats, with their quirky and mysterious nature, have been enduring characters in Japanese literature. Combine that with the deep affection the Japanese have for these animals, and it's easy to see why cats are such compelling figures. They make fascinating characters and serve as excellent companions and wise guides in the stories that explore life's many adventures.

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