



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

THE SHELF

6 literary characters we wish could join our Eid table

Feluda would arrive sharply dressed and perfectly on time, his eyes scanning the room with effortless calm, already noting which cousin hadn't spoken to whom and who was piling onto their plate like they had something to prove.

MAHMUDA EMDAD

What if our Eid table had a few extra chairs reserved not for guests from our world but from that of the books we've loved throughout our life? From classic Bangla novels to global favourites—from wizards to wanderers—what if our favourite literary characters showed up for Eid lunch or dinner? Here's what the celebration might look like if fiction stepped into our reality, softening the room, stirring the silence, and reminding us that stories, like Eid, are best when shared.

Apu from Pather Panchali
Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay
Ranjan Prakashalay, 1929

Apu would sit silently at first, absorbing every detail of the celebration with a gaze as wide as the world. He'd steal glances at the food, not from greed, but wonder, and you'd catch him smiling softly at a mother fussing over her children. As the meal continued, he'd listen more than speak, but when someone recited a poem, he'd quietly say, "This smells like monsoon mornings and my mother's hands." There would be something old and aching in his innocence—an Eid presence that reminded everyone of what they'd once yearned for.

Laila from A Thousand Splendid Suns
Khaled Hosseini
Riverhead Books, 2007

She'd arrive with grace, her hands full of gifts she insists aren't much, perhaps some sweets wrapped in cloth, or a dish passed down from her mother. You'd catch her tearing up during the prayer, and when you asked why, she'd simply say: "It's just been a long time since joy felt this free." The way she held a child,

passed a plate, or smiled at an elderly person would carry the quiet composure of someone who once had to be tough but now chooses tenderness. Eid, through her, would feel like a celebration not of ease, but of the strength it takes to keep choosing love.

Feluda from Feluda Series
Satyajit Ray

Feluda would arrive sharply dressed and perfectly on time, his eyes scanning the room with effortless calm, already noting which cousin hadn't spoken to whom and who was piling onto their plate like they had something to prove. He'd greet the elders with deep respect and the children with clever wordplay, but when the food was served, he'd settle in with genuine pleasure, taking precise bites of kabab and appreciating the texture of paratha. He'd leave without dessert, claiming he was watching his sugar but you'd find a kalo jaam missing from the tray!

Pi Patel from Life of Pi
Yann Martel
Knopf Canada, 2001

Pi would arrive with gentle curiosity in his eyes, asking about every tradition, to not question but to understand. He'd marvel at the crescent moon, comparing it to a boat cradling the first breath of celebration, and asking why desserts like shemai were served warm. Over lunch, he'd share a story so surreal about hunger, storms, animals, and prayer that it would feel like a myth, until he looked at you and said, "There are many versions of truth. I believe them all a little." In his company, Eid would feel both vast and intimate, like the sea.

Hermione Granger from the Harry Potter series

J.K. Rowling

Hermione would arrive five minutes early, wearing something simple but thoughtfully chosen, with a carefully wrapped Eid gift—probably a translated collection of classical Muslim poetry or a handmade bookmark with gold-ink calligraphy. She'd ask about every dish with genuine interest: how it's made, what it means, where the spices come from, and would make sure to compliment the chef in the most articulate way possible. Her presence would bring a sense of care and thoughtfulness to the table like everything was just a little more seen, and a little more loved.

Himu from the Himu series
Humayun Ahmed

Himu might arrive late and unbothered but smiling, in his faded yellow panjabi that somehow looks more like a statement than an accident. He'd greet everyone with a wide, crooked grin, say something utterly ridiculous to an uncle that would earn him a frown, and then follow it up with a line so oddly wise that no one would be able to tell if he was joking or gently exposing the truth. But the grandmothers would adore him, slipping him extra kebabs and chicken roast while chuckling under their breath. People like Himu make space—for joy, for softness, for the kind of lightness that makes a day feel warmer, happier, more alive.

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. Reach her at mahmudaemdad123@gmail.com.

POETRY

Making headlines

SUMMIT HASAN

You were written all over my face
On the broad forehead
With a pen permeating love, profoundly
Fitting an array of stars in straight line
With flying colours.
Piercing the heart,
Yet too bright for the rest to read.
Too delicate to deliver in the news,
But heavy enough for breaking hearts
At the climax of a novel
When the writer leaves
And passes the baton
To the reader and his imagination
For building a home
Where she witnesses
Sunsets with him.
To shift the paradigm to when
The flowers in his garden bloom
To garland her
And the galaxy bows before her grace.
In awe of her—the ethereal enigma
We came to the conclusion
No words can weigh in
And carry her wonder
We'll put up feigned politicians
And their fake promises instead

Summit Hasan carries a torch for someone since childhood, which gets him carried away consistently. Bring him back to his senses at muhammadsummithasan@gmail.com.



DESIGN: MAISHA SYEDA

POETRY

Bluebird's anthology

OHONA ANJUM

I can give myself a thousand labels,
But none would hold the weight of my name.
I step outside and fall on my knees,
My soil does not ask where I have been.
I rise from the same ashes
That left history
An open wound,
A manuscript where sorrow inscribes itself
With the ink of uprooted tongues.
Yet, I have inhaled the misery of the land,
Where the sun folds its wings at dusk
And the olive trees bow without a voice.
In the mellow wand of decay,
The wind closes, cries out its lungs.
Who do I tell, sir? The walls do not listen,
The roads do not answer back.
All I want is to find that which neither was nor will be,
A dawn untouched by loud footsteps,
By the echoes of soldiers pressing into the skin of morning.
A sky that does not carry the weight of absence,
Where birds do not vanish mid-flight.
May the absence of labels will find me at last,
Peeling away like old paint on my forgotten door.
But what about the absence of home?
The absence that tastes of brutal salt,



DESIGN: MAISHA SYEDA

That hums beneath my ribs like a ghost.
Then the headlines speak of a lost world,
My lost world.
I can't help but look them in the eye and ask:
Who killed the song?

Ohona Anjum occasionally writes for Star Books and Literature.

CREATIVE NONFICTION

The morgues are full

NAFISA AFREEN MEGHA

Another explosion rattles Gaza to its core. The air thick with stench of blood, grief and promises the world failed to keep. But other headlines hypnotise, luring us into familiar distractions—a shift in the stock market, a royal wedding, or an actor's bold choice of an outfit. Oh, the horror! Pick and choose your crisis of the day, sorrows and prayers included. The world's concern flows like a selective breeze, touching only the places where it's trendy and neat.

Our empathy is an empty canvas, painted only with tones we find fitting. We like it when our feeds are pretty, our outrage is tidy and the world's tragedies don't spill into our carefully curated, aesthetic timelines. It is almost too easy to scroll past the images of destruction, assuring ourselves that our silence is indifference—a "neutral act"—rather than acknowledging that saying nothing is, in itself, participation. Who gets to decide which suffering is unbearable and which is routine?

We see grief as a commodity, reduced to fragments of pain for easy digestion. We prefer the ones that fit seamlessly into our dinner conversations, the ones that don't challenge our sense of comfort or ask us to confront

our own complicity. A shift in the weather, a sports team's loss, a billionaire's latest venture. The world stirs, debates, fills comment sections with rage. We turn away from true devastation, the stories that demand more than just our passing attention because they ask too much of us: our consciousness, compassion, and commitment.

In Gaza, the names of the martyrs slip through silence, lost to a world too distracted to listen. We scroll down on our feed and the lives lost, names forgotten, remain buried under the rubble of a world

too busy to care. The air, saturated with blood, tells us a story we will never know. The headlines shift, racing past the truth in pursuit of the next spectacle. We stand at the edge of their despair but it is easier to look away, to lose ourselves in the illusion that our convenience is more valuable. The world weeps for some, but not for others. We light candles for the chosen, while darkness swallows those unseen.

But the morgues are full. The weight of loss isn't carried in the headlines but in the heavy silence that follows. We can continue to look the other way,

hoping that it fades away if we turn our gaze long enough and move on with our lives, distracted by the next trending news. And yet, the morgues will remain full—a haunting testament and a deafening echo of our silence.

Nafisa Afreen Megha is an aspiring writer from Dhaka, Bangladesh. Her work consists of her thoughts, carefully put into words and turned to poetry. She is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in English at North South University.



PHOTO: COLLECTED