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# LIFE

Style

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## MIND THE GAP

## NOSHIN NAWAL

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# How modern life turned gluten into a DIGESTIVE VILLAIN

Gluten did not always live in fear. Once upon a time, it was a respected member of society. Not celebrated, not demonised, just quietly essential.

It existed in fields, grew in soil tended by people who actually touched the ground with their hands, not through supermarket loyalty cards. In its early years, gluten lived a slow life. Wheat was grown locally, harvested seasonally, milled crudely, and turned into bread with patience. Dough was kneaded and left to ferment because there was simply nothing else to do. No one was timing it. No one was rushing it. Gluten was given time to relax, soften, and behave itself.

The people who ate it were also different. They walked everywhere. They worked physically demanding jobs. They ate when they were hungry and stopped when the food ran out. News alerts and blue light did not permanently activate their nervous systems. Their guts were busy, diverse ecosystems, not fragile glass ornaments. Gluten thrived in this environment. It was digested without drama. It passed through bodies unnoticed, which is the highest compliment digestion can offer.

Then civilisation progressed. Farming changed first. Industrial agriculture arrived with promises of efficiency and abundance. Wheat fields expanded. Yield became king. Uniformity became the goal. Wheat was selectively bred to grow faster, taller, and more predictably. This did not turn wheat into a monster, but it did make it different. Gluten became stronger, better at holding bread together, more cooperative with machines and mass production. The



genetic alterations slowly commenced.

At the same time, the soil changed. Fields were farmed repeatedly without rest. Microbial diversity declined. Crops survived, but they were no longer part of a balanced ecosystem.

Gluten noticed the difference but kept doing its job. There was no litmus test in place for the environmental impacts, yet. Then, processing changed even more. Bread, once fermented slowly because time was available, was now rushed because time was money. Long fermentation was replaced by speed. Dough that once rested overnight was now expected to shape up in hours. Gluten was not given time to partially break down. It was pushed, stretched, baked, and shipped before it could catch its breath.

Still, gluten endured. Then people changed. Humans moved to cities. They sat down. A lot. They ate quickly. Often distracted and usually stressed. Meals became something to squeeze in between

obligations. Chewing became optional. Coffee replaced breakfast. Lunch happened at desks. Dinner happened in front of screens. The gut, once robust, became overwhelmed. Microbial diversity shrank. Antibiotics wiped out entire populations of helpful bacteria. Fibre intake dropped. Stress hormones rose. Sleep declined. The digestive system, once a confident professional, became an exhausted intern.

Gluten walked into this environment and immediately became suspicious. People noticed bloating. Discomfort. Gas. Indigestion. They did not notice that their bodies were inflamed, dehydrated, sedentary, and surviving on adrenaline. They noticed bread.

Gluten, once invisible, was now under surveillance. The stories began to circulate. Gluten is different now. Gluten is thicker. Gluten is harder to digest. Gluten has evolved with malicious intent. Gluten, apparently, is plotting something. The irony is that gluten did evolve, but so did humans. Unfortunately, only one of them gets blamed.

Consider the people who consumed

gluten before. They ate bread as part of meals rich in vegetables, legumes, and fats. They moved constantly. Their digestion was supported by lifestyle, not supplements. Bread was not eaten alone. It was part of a rhythm.

Now, consider the modern consumer. Gluten arrives wrapped in ultra-processed foods. It contains emulsifiers, preservatives, sugars, and stabilisers. It is eaten in cars, on trains, between meetings, and under stress. It is consumed by bodies already struggling to digest anything at all.

Wellness culture steps in confidently. Gluten is declared the villain. Gluten-free becomes a badge of discipline and virtue. Gluten-free products flood the market, many of them nutritionally inferior but morally superior by label alone.

Gluten watches this unfold with quiet disbelief. It remembers the fields. The fermentation. The people who worked hard and slept deeply. It remembers being tolerated effortlessly. It did not ask to be mass-produced. It did not ask to be rushed. It did not ask to be eaten by people running on caffeine, cortisol, and chronic exhaustion. It simply adapted to the system it was placed in.

Now, gluten lives in an age where it is feared more than stress, inactivity, and ultra-processed food combined. It is blamed for digestive distress that is far older and far more complex than a single protein. This is not to dismiss those who genuinely cannot tolerate gluten. Some bodies truly cannot process it and deserve care and clarity, not satire. But for the majority, gluten intolerance is not a story of an evil grain. It is a story of modern life asking ancient food to perform under impossible conditions. Gluten has evolved through the ages, yes. But so have humans, and not always for the better.

By Noshin Nawal  
Photo: Collected



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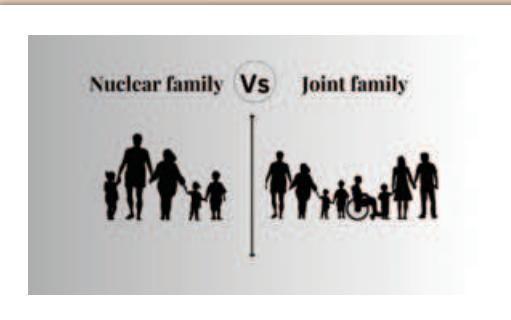


## #RELATIONSHIPS &amp; FAMILY

# Nuclear vs joint family: FREEDOM OR BELONGING

Being surrounded by many loved ones is like sharing a busy home kitchen; there is warmth, laughter, and support, but there is also crowding, noise, and the occasional clash. This, in essence, captures the experience of the traditional joint family system in our culture.

Legend has it that the joint family system in South Asia has roots in ancient and medieval agrarian societies, where extended families living together made economic and social sense. Nowadays, the traditional joint family, though increasingly rare, is part of our cultural legacy — something many families take pride in. It represents a tradition where multiple generations live together in the same household, where grandparents, uncles, aunts, or cousins continue living together under one roof, a practice not



commonly seen in the Western part of the world.

A nuclear family, on the other hand, usually consists of just two parents and their children, living together. As someone from a nuclear family, I have the first-hand experience of cherishing the nights with my cousins during occasional visits. As they say, absence teaches you its value.

The warmth of a family, being surrounded by so many people who love and care about you, can make you feel that you are important in so many people's lives. However, as reflected by different perspectives, this closeness often comes at a cost.

Sadiql Haque, a final-year engineering student, finds his skills at conflict resolution inadequate when he visits his extended family in his hometown.

"In a joint family, you

have to be extra cautious about what you say to any person. One wrong word, and chances are at least someone can feel offended," remarked Haque.

As someone who occasionally visits a joint family, I feel this pressure too. You don't always have the social energy or the time to visit all the uncles and eat at every one of their places. One has to be extra careful not to inadvertently hurt anyone's sentiment, which can be tiring for anyone, especially if they have to endure this hypervigilance round the clock.

Haque also shared that concentrating on studies during exam nights can be challenging in a joint family. "I can ask my mum and dad to keep the volume down, but I cannot say the same to my uncle or aunt, for fear of offending someone," he lamented.

Many argue that joint families can silently take away your freedom. In retrospect, Haque stated that the thing he cherishes most about living in a nuclear family with just his parents is the freedom he enjoys.

However, a joint family is not all about invisible constraints. Many argue that in a joint family, there is always someone for you if you need help.

Safkat Zahir, a final year undergrad student who is currently living with his nuclear family, pointed out that children need to share their emotions with trusted persons. "A nuclear family is okay, but if the children do not get to speak with their parents or they do not get enough interactions, they run the risk of being isolated, which can have a long-term effect on the child's mental health and behaviour," he asserted.

In a nuclear family, children may feel isolated if their parents do not spend enough time with them or

create a safe space for them to open up. In that case, a joint family can come to the rescue, as there usually is someone the child can trust, maybe a grandparent, a favourite aunt, or a cousin.

When one member of the family falls sick, another takes care of them and handles the important household responsibilities for that interim period. It is this built-in support system that makes joint families resilient during tough times.

Amina Rahman Aishwarya, a first-year university student living away from her family, highlighted that the joint family experience can be fun during festivals like Eid and New Year's. "Staying by yourselves in a nuclear family during these festive times can be very depressing. You need your extended family to enjoy these festivals," she expressed.

For those who have lived in joint families once and moved to become nuclear ones, the memories stay forever.

Fardin Taharim, a first-year university student living away from his family, finds himself reminiscing about his best childhood memories with his cousins. Born in a joint family, Taharim was around five years old when his family moved out to become nuclear.

Referring to the sense of belonging he found in a joint family, Taharim reflected, "I don't have a big friend circle. My world revolves around only a few people. My extended family members are among them. I love spending time with my cousins. I have sweet uncles and aunts. Family nights are the best."

Janifar Kamal, an international student currently pursuing her master's in the US, grew up in a joint family for 14 years of her life. Reflecting on her experience, she emphasised, "Living in a brown family can make you used to being surrounded by chaos."

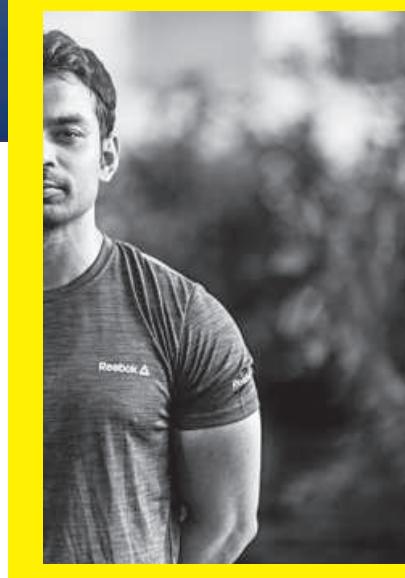
A nuclear family can be peaceful and offer more freedom, but a joint family, despite the chaos, comes with connection and belonging that is hard to find elsewhere.

By Minhazur Rahman Alvee  
Photo: Collected



#POWER COUPLE: BRITTO &amp; DIANA

# How fitness became Tanvir Hossain Britto's framework for living



For Tanvir Hossain Britto, fitness did not begin as a career choice. It began as a coping mechanism.

"When I was 15 or 16, I was suffering from severe depression," he says. "At that time, three things helped me immensely: fitness, meditation, and personal development books. These three things actually saved me."

This origin story matters because it explains why Britto's work has never been limited to muscle, weight, or aesthetics.

"Back then, I used to think every day might be my last," he reflects. Recovery did not arrive through motivation posters or gym transformations. It came through routine, self-study, and mental grounding. "Since it helped me," he says simply, "I thought it could help others as well."

Today, Britto is a well-known certified fitness trainer, nutritionist, and personal development coach whose practice is grounded in lived experience rather than theory alone.

## Learning the hard way and choosing science

Britto's second turning point came years later, when he began training seriously around 2014–15. "Some local trainers gave me the wrong instructions, and it led to an injury," he says. "I realised they did not really know much, and back then I did not know who else to ask in our country."

Instead of quitting, he started studying anatomy, biomechanics, and exercise science.

"I tried to understand my own body and the science of exercise," he explains. "Eventually, I fell in love with the knowledge." What began as self-protection became a purpose. Teaching, he realised, could prevent others from repeating the same mistakes.

## Why fitness fails when it is isolated

One of Britto's strongest critiques of mainstream fitness culture in Bangladesh is how narrowly it is framed. "People view fitness as a separate compartment of life,"



Protein intake becomes a key intervention.

"A person should consume at least 0.8 to 1 gram of protein per kilogram of body weight daily," he notes, pointing out that many South Asians struggle with abdominal fat because of carb-heavy diets.

He teaches what he calls the Plate Method. "Divide your plate into four parts. One part protein, one part carbs, and half the plate vegetables and fruits." It is simple, practical, and sustainable. Exactly how he prefers it.

## Strength, especially for women, is not optional

Britto has worked extensively with

For him, strength training is not cosmetic. It is preventative, especially as women lose muscle mass and bone density earlier than men.

## Teaching as purpose, not performance

What keeps Britto invested in coaching is not visibility or scale.

"When I teach, I learn a lot myself," he says. "When I see people's lives change, not just physically but in their habits and mindset, I feel empowered." He calls this impact his real currency.

His advice to those considering unconventional careers is unromantic but



bodyweight training, callisthenics, and hybrid movement systems. While he no longer runs Bengal Calisthenics as a standalone initiative, the philosophy remains central.

"I now use a multi-faceted approach," he says. "Weight training, callisthenics, and Pilates. I customise based on the client."

He is particularly vocal about dismantling myths around women's strength.

"It's just a mindset that we aren't strong," he says. "I have taught many female clients how to do pull-ups and push-ups. It is definitely possible with practice and the right technique."

honest. "The cost of entry is low. You can just start," he says. "But the cost of success is very high." It demands study, patience, and resilience. "If you worry too much about what society thinks, you can't succeed in this industry."

He is confident about one thing. "The fitness industry in Bangladesh is going to boom in the next five to ten years," Britto says. "Those who start now will have the first-mover advantage." For him, though, growth is secondary. Meaning comes first.

**By Ayman Anika**

**Photo: Courtesy**

# NAYMA HASAN DIANA

## on nutrition, mindset, and building awareness before it is too late



For Nayma Hasan Diana, health was never an abstract concept or a professional ambition shaped by trends. It began as a personal struggle. Long before she became a Health and Lifestyle Coach, she was a teenager dealing with unexplained weight gain, fatigue, and confusion in a system that offered little clarity.

"I had health issues since I was a teenager," she shares. "My weight was quite high, but there was no awareness. I used to look at magazines and TV to figure out how to diet. Year after year, nothing worked."

That cycle followed her into adulthood. Diana graduated in Computer Science and began working at a software company. Within a year, her health deteriorated further.

"I was feeling weaker day by day, constantly tired, with severe back pain. My weight kept increasing," she recalls. It was only later that she discovered she had PCOS, a hormonal condition that explained years of resistance to conventional dieting advice. "I realised that others were doing the same things and getting results, but it wasn't working for me."

### Why coaching, not clinical nutrition

Diana is careful about how she defines her work. "Nutritionists work more clinically," she explains. "As a nutrition and lifestyle coach, my work is based on mindset, lifestyle, and habits. I work side by side with the client."

That distinction shapes everything she does. After experiencing restrictive diets under professional supervision, she began questioning sustainability. "I followed a very strict diet for three to four months and got

results. But then I asked myself, what now? How do I live?"

Diana's coaching is grounded in evidence-based nutrition and training. She is a Certified Nutrition Coach through Precision Nutrition and a Certified Personal Trainer from NASM, bringing a strong focus on safe, practical movement. She is also trained as an online coach, allowing her to work closely with clients through digital formats.

### The biggest misconceptions about healthy eating

In her practice, Diana repeatedly encounters the same misunderstandings.

"People think healthy eating means cutting out carbohydrates completely," she says. "Another problem is that they want to fix everything instantly. They stop eating

out, stop everything at once, and after a few days, they lose motivation."

She also points out a tendency to focus on what she calls accessories. "Instead of focusing on protein balance or proper portions, people worry about chia seeds or supplements. These things are not important at the initial stage. If someone just followed professional guidance for one week properly, they would see results."

For Diana, this obsession with shortcuts reflects deeper confusion. "People beat around the bush instead of addressing the basics."

### Bangladeshi food is not the problem

One of Diana's strongest positions challenges the belief that Western diets are necessary for health. "We don't need keto or foreign diets to lose weight or build muscle," she says. "Bangladeshi food can be very healthy if prepared and balanced properly."

Rice, she explains, is not the villain it is often made out to be. "The issue is quantity relative to activity level. Rice provides energy. Fish and meat provide protein. The problem is that we eat too much rice because our food is delicious."

She is equally critical of how food is cooked. "We use excessive oil, and we overcook vegetables. That destroys nutrients. If we improve cooking practices and portion sizes, our traditional food works perfectly."

### Navigating myths, misinformation, and influencers

Starting her career, Diana faced a landscape crowded with myths. "Most

research is done in Europe or America," she explains. "Very little research is done in Bangladesh. Our curriculum is outdated, so new professionals are learning old information."

She is particularly concerned about the authority given to influencers. "People follow content creators because they have followers. They assume whatever is shared online is the truth," she says. "I always tell people not to follow anyone blindly, even professionals. You should have enough awareness to judge information."

### Looking ahead: Health before crisis

Diana's long-term vision goes beyond individual coaching. "I want to move toward health-tech," she says. With a background in computer science, she aims to build systems that allow her to reach more people while maintaining quality.

But her most personal goal lies elsewhere. "I want to work with students, especially girls," she says. "Awareness usually comes when we start working, and everything becomes overwhelming. By then, it's often too late."

Her motivation is deeply personal. "When I was a teenager, my struggle started then. Nobody understood it. If I can give students that awareness early, that would be a gift to my teenage self."

For Diana, health is not about fixing a body after it breaks down. It is about learning how to live before crisis forces the lesson.

**By Ayman Anika**  
**Photo: Courtesy**



## BERGER PAINTS UNVEILS “HARIYE GIYECHHI” An immersive Berger Illusions experience

“



**SAYED SHORIF RUSSEL,**  
Category Head, Sales &  
Marketing, Berger Paints  
Bangladesh Limited,  
Summed up this philosophy,  
stating, “In a fast-moving  
world, our homes should help  
us slow down. Hariye Giyechhi  
by Berger Illusions is about  
creating interiors that go  
beyond aesthetics — spaces  
that inspire imagination,  
influence mood, and support  
mental well-being. Because  
sometimes, getting lost in  
imagination is exactly what the  
mind needs.”



From the moment guests walked in, it was evident that this was not just another exhibition. This one explored how thoughtfully designed interiors can influence mood and mental well-being. Berger Paints Bangladesh Limited unveiled “Hariye Giyechhi” by Berger Illusions on the evening of 9 January, 2026 at Aloki, transforming the venue into a world of imagination and

emotion.

At the core of the exhibition were exclusive Berger Illusions co-created with three of our country's celebrated creative personalities: Aupee Karim, architect and actor; Sarah Karim, fashion designer; Arnob, musician and artist. Each installation reflected the artist's individual creative philosophy, translated into layered, paint-based designs that



invited viewers to pause and engage. The walls did not merely serve as backdrops; they became expressive surfaces, telling stories through colour, texture, and form. The concept behind “Hariye Giyechhi,” which loosely translates to getting lost in thought or imagination, was woven seamlessly throughout the exhibition. The showcased Illusions demonstrated how artistic paint finishes can go beyond aesthetics, creating immersive interiors that spark creative thought, while positively influencing emotional balance. As guests moved from one installation to another, the shift in atmosphere was subtle yet deliberate, reinforcing the idea that



interiors have a psychological impact. The event saw the presence of corporate leaders alongside Rupali Chowdhury, Managing Director; A K M Sadeque Nawaj, Chief Business Officer; and Salauddin Tarek, Chief Marketing Officer of Berger Paints Bangladesh Limited.

Addressing the audience, Rupali Chowdhury highlighted Berger's evolving approach to interior design, saying, “Through ‘Hariye Giyechhi,’ Berger continues its journey of redefining paint beyond surfaces. We believe well-designed interiors have the power to uplift the mind, inspire and enrich everyday living.”

Beyond the exhibition itself, the evening also marked the launch of the Berger Privilege Card, with attending dignitaries becoming the first recipients. Designed to enhance customer experience, the card offers preferential rates on Berger Experience Zone services, effective immediately, with plans to introduce exclusive benefits through Berger's strategic partners gradually.

Another key dimension of “Hariye Giyechhi” by Berger Illusions was the



collaborative philosophy driving the campaign. Rooted in the belief that imagination transcends disciplines, the initiative brought together music, architecture, fashion, and visual art to reimagine how walls can express emotion and identity.

In partnership with Berger, the collaborating artists developed bespoke Illusions inspired by their individual creative worlds, translating abstract ideas into tangible surface experiences.

The campaign's emphasis on well-being and mindful living resonated strongly throughout the evening. Commenting



imagination into their own living spaces. The night concluded with the premiere of the campaign's OVC, featuring the three collaborators, set to a recomposed version of Arnob's unforgettable song “Hariye Giyechhi.” As the music played and visuals unfolded, it brought the campaign full circle, leaving guests with a lingering sense of calm, reflection, and creative possibility.

With “Hariye Giyechhi” by Berger Illusions, Berger Paints Bangladesh once again reinforced its commitment to innovation, creative collaboration, and wellbeing-driven interior experiences, reminding us that walls, when thoughtfully designed, can do far more than define a space.

By Nusrath Jahan  
Photo: Courtesy

Star **LIFE** Style



# Foods that support brain health and sharpen memory

Nutrition is crucial for the development of our health, and it's vital that we pay attention to whether the foods we consume are actually meeting our nutritional requirements. Of the many organs we have, the brain requires specific components for its development.

Discussed below are some of the most important compounds and their food sources needed for good brain health.

#### Omega-3 fatty acids

Omega-3 is usually the first key component to show up in anyone's research for good brain foods, and rightly so. It is one of the healthy fats responsible for boosting memory. It is present in large quantities in fatty fish such as salmon and sardines, as well as locally abundant fishes like hilsa, mola, and pangas.

This component is not only essential for boosting memory but also helps slow down cognitive decline and memory loss in elderly people.

#### Vitamin K and Folate

Folate is a B9 vitamin responsible for producing neurotransmitters like dopamine and serotonin, which affect a person's



various moods, while Vitamin K supports optimal blood flow to the brain.

Both these compounds are found in large amounts in leafy green vegetables. These leafy greens help stabilise mood swings, especially in young people, and support increased mental clarity. For adults and elderly people, vitamin K also helps improve cognitive function and protect against minor forms of dementia.

#### Antioxidants

While antioxidants are widely known for their various health benefits, it may come as a surprise to learn how vital their role in



brain health is.

Citrus fruits like oranges, which are rich in antioxidants, protect the brain against "oxidative stress", something which increases memory loss and brain fog. A higher intake of antioxidants can help prevent diseases linked to memory loss in the elderly, while for younger people, it improves memory and the ability to focus.

#### Vitamin E

Nuts are quite popular in the list of good brain foods, possibly because informally, they can be termed as a "nutrient package". Nuts such as walnuts, cashews, Brazil nuts, and almonds contain high concentrations of Vitamin E as well as Omega-3s.

While omega-3s help with many brain functions, vitamin E is what helps the neurons (brain cells) use that Omega-3. Vitamin E itself is also an antioxidant, so it carries other benefits too.

That is why nuts should be consumed regularly by all age groups, as they help with sharper memory, better ability to focus

and prevent cognitive decline.

#### Choline

Unknown to many, choline is a very important component present in every body cell, responsible for making the neurotransmitter "acetylcholine," which impacts learning and memory. The best source for choline is eggs, especially the yolk, which contains high amounts of this component.

Including eggs in the diet regularly has many benefits, but specifically for the brain, the intake of choline helps with faster information processing, greater memory support and also protects against cognitive decline. Eggs should therefore be consumed by all age groups unless medically advised otherwise, due to specific medical conditions.

While many of these foods have overlaps in the benefits they provide, each of them can contribute to brain health through different compounds, which are equally crucial to maintain a healthy brain and aid its development.

**By Raidah Hasan**

**Photo: Collected**

# Winter on a Plate: What Comfort Tastes Like This Season

Winter appears in Dhaka just like an unscripted text: unexpected. The moment the weather drops just enough for us to nag about it, we start craving for warm foods, romanticising life with a hot cup between our cold hands.

Waking up and seeing the fog rolling over the country and arriving into our concrete alleyways, our brain automatically starts thinking about food that make us feel warm and cosy. The thought of surviving the humidity is no longer a concern, so planning for street food hopping becomes a regular routine.

The first thing winter does is how food smells as you walk outside; the smells of wood smoke, and it becomes sweeter when the roadside pitha stores sit next to each other. It became our makeshift town square, where people of all ages gathered around.

From the corporate titan in a crisp suit to the teenager in a hoodie, both are waiting for the hot pithas in this chilly weather. Rafiq Mia, a 35-year-old rickshaw puller, expertly parks his rickshaw on the roadside, and waits closely near the chitoi pitha shop and curiously looks at the process of its making.

"Nothing can match the warmth of the roadside chitoi pitha dipped in extra spicy shorshe bhorta; it just hits like a fireball in this cold weather. It's the only thing that makes the cold evenings worth it," he says. I completely agree with it; even if you are not hungry, your brain will be go, "one pitha won't hurt in this chilly weather."

Labonna, a Master's student, whose desk is currently buried under term papers and research, is looking for warmth in a ramen bowl. "Ramen is not just a noodle



to me; it's a salty and savoury treat that instantly fulfils my tired soul," she added, also noting how her glasses fogged up with every bite.

"When winter finally knocks on the door, the first thing I do is shop for different kinds of ramen for my wintry nights." It's a different kind of sentiment, something that echoes through the city and all ages of people, even the ones who count calories before anything.

Shahriar, a local fitness enthusiast who most probably does push-ups in his sleep, is surprisingly relaxed about the season. "People think winter is only for hibernating, but that's definitely not for me, because I make soups that feel like heaven in a bowl,"



he says, while pouring ginger-tulsi tea from a thermos.

"A thick chicken or vegetable soup gives me an internal boost to hit the gym when everyone else is under the blanket," adds Shahriar.

On the other hand, there is 39-year-old Rafi, a corporate professional who drives from Jatrabari to 300 feet Nila Market with his friends and family every winter weekend, just to eat duck meat and chaler roti. "Winter without hasher mangsho is impossible for me, because this is the only time I can enjoy it perfectly," he says.

Yet, for so many, winter is the season when the family kitchens converts into full-on a pitha-making corner, such as the

household of Fatema Begum, a 48-year-old woman, who makes different kinds of pithas for herself and her family. "My kids follow the smell of Nolen Gur that comes from my mother's house, and its aroma fills all the house," states Fatema.

A lot of people remember these kinds of moments from their childhood with their mother and siblings.

Throwing a complete curve ball to the routine is Sadman, a 27-year-old graphic designer, who shows the quirky side of winter cravings. "Usually everyone goes for the hot foods, but have any of you tried malai kulfi during shivering cold?" he asks with a mischievous smile.

"It will freeze your brain, and that feeling of numbness hits different. Plus, it reminds me of my childhood with my cousins when we used to sneak from our parents and have ice cream during the winter season," he adds.

Winter in Bangladesh is brief but sweet and memorable to us. What I love most about winter is how tea starts a conversation, coffee blends into late-night thoughts, and hot chocolate brings comfort and self-care. So, when someone asks me what my comfort food for winter is, I could never give them a single answer.

Wrapped in blankets at night while scrolling through photos, it suddenly hits you that winter is not just a season to us. It reminds us to slow down a little, sip something warm and sweet, and spend time with loved ones.

**By Faria Nowshin Tazin**

**Photo: Collected**

## Special Supplement

# Home Investment: Lower installment makes breathing space for customers

For most Bangladeshis, a home is far more than concrete, bricks and steel. It is the space where dreams grow, where children take their first steps, where parents find peace after long days of struggle and where families feel a sense of belonging in an ever-changing world. In a country marked by rapid urbanization, rising population density and shifting economic realities, owning a home has become both a deeply emotional aspiration and a practical necessity.

Bangladesh's cities- especially Dhaka, Chattogram and other growing urban centers- are expanding faster than ever. Rural-to-urban migration continues as people seek better education, healthcare and employment opportunities. At the same time, land scarcity and rising construction costs have made real estate prices climb steadily. For middle-income families, this has turned homeownership into a challenging journey, often requiring long-term financing solutions that must balance affordability, stability and trust.

In this scenario, housing is no longer just a lifestyle choice; it is a foundation for security. A permanent living space offers protection against rising rents, frequent relocations and uncertainty. It allows families to plan for the future, invest in education and build long-term financial stability. Yet, for many Bangladeshis, the fear of high monthly installments and fluctuating rates remains a major barrier to taking that step.

This is where thoughtful and responsible home financing becomes critical. Prime Bank Hasanah Islami Banking's Home Investment solution responds to this need by recognizing housing as both an emotional and economic priority. By offering the opportunity to transfer existing home loans or investments with up to 2% off on the current profit rate, the bank addresses one of the most pressing concerns of homeowners today: affordability. Lower monthly installments can mean more breathing space in household budgets- money saved for children's education, healthcare or simply for the small joys that make life meaningful.

The concept of halal investment holds special importance in Bangladesh, a country where faith and finance are deeply



interconnected. For many families, peace of mind comes not only from owning a home, but from knowing that the path taken to acquire it aligns with their values. Hasanah Home Investment provides that reassurance through Shariah-compliant financing, guided by internationally recognized Islamic banking standards. This ethical foundation builds trust and strengthens the emotional bond between families and their homes.

The current real estate market in Bangladesh also reflects a period of adjustment. While property prices remain high, there is a growing emphasis on planned housing, apartment living and long-term sustainability. Developers are focusing more on quality, safety and community living. In such a landscape, access to flexible and customer-friendly financing can determine whether a family moves forward with confidence or delays their dream indefinitely. Transferring a home loan or investment may seem like a technical decision, but at its heart lies a very human motivation: the desire for comfort, stability and control over one's future. When monthly payments become more manageable, stress levels fall, family relationships improve and individuals can focus on personal growth rather than financial anxiety. A home then transforms from a burden into a source of pride.

Prime Bank Hasanah's initiative speaks directly to this emotional reality. It acknowledges that behind every home investment is a story- a couple planning their future, parents striving to provide security for their children or individuals seeking independence and dignity. By easing financial pressure and offering transparent, ethical solutions, the bank positions itself not just as a financier, but as a partner in life's most important decision.

In today's Bangladesh, where economic resilience and social stability are closely tied to housing, such initiatives carry broader significance. Encouraging sustainable homeownership supports stronger communities, more stable neighborhoods and a more confident middle class. It reinforces the idea that owning a home should not be a lifelong struggle, but a carefully supported journey.

Ultimately, a home is where life happens. It is where laughter echoes, prayers are whispered and futures are shaped. In a challenging real estate environment, solutions that combine compassion, ethics and financial practicality can help Bangladeshis reclaim the simple yet powerful dream of self-living space- a place to call their own, today and for generations to come.

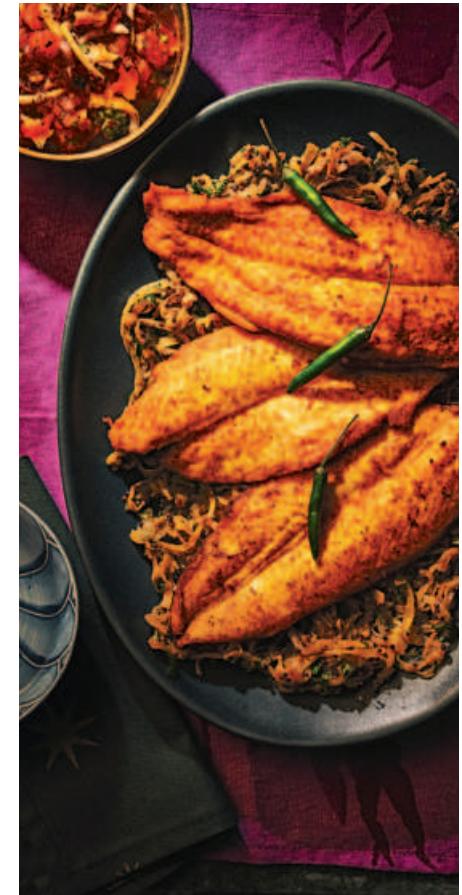
# Nadiya Hussain's Rooza celebrates Ramadan beyond recipes

Nadiya Hussain reclaims her Sylheti-Bangladeshi roots through the language of global Islamic feasts with her cookbook.

For much of the world, Nadiya Hussain is a household name. She's the winner of *The Great British Bake Off*, a bestselling author, television presenter, and the familiar face of modern British home cooking. However, in *Rooza*, her last cookbook, Hussain turns away from the polished studio kitchen and towards something deeper and more personal. This is a book shaped by Ramadan nights, by fasting and feasting, by family tables heavy with anticipation, and by a quiet and subtle reclaiming of her Sylheti and Bangladeshi roots.

As she once told me in an interview, "As a child of immigrants, I never understood the importance of the food my grandparents and parents left behind. It was a reminder of home for them, and for us, it is the food that connects us to our heritage."

The very title signals this return. "Ramadan" is the word recognised globally, but in many South Asian Muslim homes, including Hussain's, the month was always called *Rooza* — a word that translates simply as "fasting". In the opening pages, Hussain writes with gentle insistence: *to me, Rooza it shall always be*. That statement is more than linguistic nostalgia. It is an



assertion of cultural memory, a refusal to smooth out difference for the sake of universality.

Born in Luton to parents from Sylhet, Bangladesh, Hussain grew up observing Ramadan in a way that was intimate and domestic, contained within family and community. Long before supermarkets stocked "Ramadan aisles" or shop windows declared "Ramadan Mubarak", *Rooza* unfolded quietly in kitchens like hers. Days were shaped by restraint and fasting; evenings by care, planning and generosity. In *Rooza*, Hussain captures this rhythm beautifully, describing Ramadan as an old friend — one who returns every year exactly when you need them most.

Food, in this context, is not a spectacle. It is sustenance, reward, and love. As Hussain reminds us, after a day without food or water, what is placed on the table at sunset matters enormously. Iftar is the one meal that gathers everyone, no excuses, no delays. In her home, and in this book, it must be nourishing, filling, and deeply satisfying.

What makes *Rooza* a departure from Hussain's earlier work is its scope and confidence. Structured as a journey through Islamic cuisines across the world, from Turkey and Tunisia to Somalia, Malaysia, Iraq, Bengal and beyond, the book presents thirty complete Ramadan meals, followed by an expansive Eid-ul-Fitr section. Yet, threaded through this global tour is a steady emotional pull towards South Asia,

and particularly Bengal.

Bangladesh appears not as an afterthought but as part of a continuum, as one node in a vast Muslim culinary map. There is an ease with which Hussain moves between geographies, reflecting how Muslim food cultures have always travelled: through trade, migration, prayer and memory. For Bangladeshi readers, this feels quietly affirming. Our food is not niche; it belongs naturally within a global Islamic table.

At the same time, *Rooza* is unmistakably maternal. Dedicated to mothers: "the table would not be what it is without you, "the book honours the invisible labour of women who cook while fasting themselves, who plan, who feed everyone else first. Hussain writes not as a celebrity chef but as the head of her household kitchen, balancing worship, work, exhaustion and care. This perspective resonates strongly across South Asian Muslim homes, where Ramadan is often carried on the backs of women.

There is also joy here, real, generous joy. Hussain delights in discovering new cuisines during Ramadan, in breaking the monotony of familiar dishes with curiosity and play. A Turkish shish, an Iraqi kibbeh, a Somali suqaar or an Algerian pancake are not presented as exotic novelties, but as respectful homages, cooked with enthusiasm and decorum. Ramadan, in her telling, is not about deprivation alone; it is about the abundance of spirit.

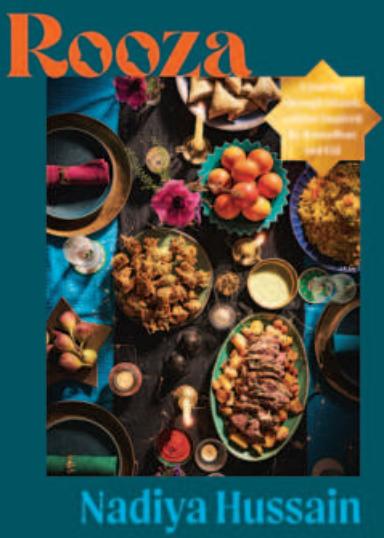
For a Bangladeshi audience, *Rooza* lands with particular warmth because it reflects a shared emotional vocabulary. The idea of Ramadan as the one month when family dinners are guaranteed, when children appear on time, when voices soften, and generosity sharpens—these are universal experiences across Muslim households, whether in Sylhet, Dhaka, or Luton.

In reclaiming the word *Rooza*, Hussain also reclaims a way of being Muslim that is layered and plural. She does not flatten faith into a single narrative, nor does she exoticise it for a non-Muslim gaze. Instead, she invites readers, Muslim and otherwise, into her lived experience, one meal at a time.

As Eid approaches at the end of the book, the tone shifts to celebration and sweetness. Yet, even here, the message remains rooted: food brings people back to the table, year after year. Children may grow up and move away, but the memory of these meals, of *Rooza*, will call them home.

With *Rooza*, Nadiya Hussain does something quietly radical. She steps back from the centre of British food celebrity and stands firmly within a global Muslim kitchen, one that includes Bangladesh not as an origin story footnote, but as a living, breathing presence. For readers observing Ramadan this year, her book offers not just recipes, but recognition. And that may be its greatest gift.

**By Sudha G Tilak**  
**Photo: Chris Terry**



## LIFE AS IT IS

WARA KARIM

Writer, painter, gardener, content creator  
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# Patriotism is more than slogans and street movements

What does patriotism or *deshprem* mean to you? To me, patriotism means love and devotion to my motherland. However, my love for my land is not blind or unconditional; it can question and point out flaws when necessary. I believe that patriotism does not mean unquestioningly supporting what one's country does. Instead, it means taking a critical stance for national betterment. A nation that does not or cannot question is associated with authoritarianism or the suppression of dissent.

Patriotism manifests in various forms. We commonly associate patriotism with military service, as those who serve in the armed forces are ever-ready to sacrifice their lives for the nation. It is also closely linked to politics and politicians.

Ordinary people can be equally or



almost equally patriotic. We witnessed ordinary people's patriotic spirit during our nine-month-long Liberation War. Similarly, the nation witnessed ordinary people's patriotic expressions during the Anti-authoritarian Movement of 1990 and the July Mass Uprising of 2024. Alas, as a nation, we neither remember nor recognise the sacrifices and contributions of its patriotic ordinary citizens. Their stories often remain undocumented or unmentioned in our daily conversations.

Patriotism can take various other forms. Businessmen who do not cheat their customers by charging exorbitant prices are



patriots. Similarly, journalists who report events and expose the truth, religious leaders who promote mutual respect and harmonious coexistence, artists who preserve the nation's cultural heritage, and non-resident Bangladeshis who send remittances legally are all patriots.

Teachers who dedicate their lives to educating our future generation, doctors who spend sleepless nights treating their patients, mothers who raise their children to become responsible citizens, students who organise clothing donation drives in winter, garment factory workers who attend their workplaces come rain or shine, and public servants who refuse to accept bribes are all patriots in their own unique ways.

Whether mentioned here or not, anyone who loves their country and does not cause harm to it is a patriot.

Unfortunately, individual patriots do not make headlines; their sufferings and struggles are not highlighted in everyday discourse. They also do not reap the benefits of successful political movements; it is always 'business as usual' for these people.

No politician cares to ask a patriotic ordinary citizen about how he feels when roads are blocked for political demonstrations or what he thinks when political violence leads to arson and vandalism.

In Bangladesh, politicians rarely prioritise public interests over their own. This kind of self-centred political climate makes it nearly impossible for a nation to produce patriotic citizens. It is our good fortune that in spite of our sad political reality, patriotic Bangladeshis still exist. It is the loyalty of these people to their motherland, their resilience, patience, and diligence that have enabled Bangladesh to maintain some semblance of sanity amidst its ongoing political turmoil.

#### Teaching patriotism from a young age

Without patriotism, a country cannot progress. People who lack patriotism place personal interests above national ones. They hinder the democratic process, obstruct national progress, and disrupt communal peace and harmony.

Therefore, we need to instil patriotism in our children from a young age. Here in the

United States, a school day begins with the Pledge of Allegiance, a recited verse that pledges allegiance to the American flag and the nation. While some may debate this tradition and find it unusual, the pledge undoubtedly contributes to the strong patriotism among Americans. From a young age, Americans are taught to love their country and their flag.

In Bangladesh, we need citizens who place national interests above personal ones. One of the ways to achieve this is by implementing a well-rounded education system that not only teaches traditional subjects but also community involvement, music, art, world religions, foreign languages, digital literacy, and physical education. We need an education system that nurtures children and their potential, teaches young minds to think critically, to question, and to explore.

Designing a comprehensive education system that focuses on developing general knowledge, creativity, intellectual skills, and social-emotional growth will be instrumental in creating a generation that truly loves the nation.

Patriotism is a positive term and should not be distorted for personal or political gain. Engaging in violence and vandalism in the name of loving one's country is not patriotism. It is not patriotism when we try to silence the voices of people or parties, nor is it patriotism when we kill innocent citizens and set fire to public and private properties. Also, it is not patriotism when your actions cause immense suffering to ordinary people, who are as patriotic as you are, if not more.

Anyone who commits violent acts in the name of patriotism is misguided, as true patriotism entails working together towards national progress, putting aside individual differences.

By Wara Karim  
Photo: Collected

স্বর্ণের ছোয়ায়, তোমার উপমায়,  
বদলে দিলে যে আমায়...

**ম্যান্ডালিনা** সোপ

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#FASHION & BEAUTY

# SAREE, REIMAGINED!

Can you think of any outfit more beautiful, elegant, traditional, yet modern than a saree? A remarkable piece of fabric, six yards in length when draped upon its wearer, becomes a living, breathtaking entity that never fails to amaze and inspire. The West has forever been in awe of it. So much so that they have always emulated the famous saree drape and incorporated it in gowns and dresses, and the result has been nothing short of spectacular.

The classic Nivi style of draping is the most popular and one that comes to mind immediately when discussing the garb. Paired with a traditional blouse, this drape is timeless and versatile for all occasions.

In the world of fashion, however, pushing boundaries is key. Innovation and invention are the names of the game. So, while classic styles are time-honoured and valued, in order to move forward one must think outside the box. In that regard, saree must also move forward and be fluid in its form and function to keep up with changing times and serve its wearer in more ways than one!

The most redeeming quality of a saree is that it's versatile. While in modern times most women prefer pieces for occasion wear, they plan it for days, matching jewellery and other accessories — it's a whole look that needs to be put together to satiate the belle's heart!

It is so much fun and always special to wear, but surely such an elegant attire must not only be reserved for special occasions? Why not wear it more often? For your next office meeting, choose a Dhakai taant, ditch the fancy blouse for an easy breezy round neck top for all day comfort. Swap the usual dressy heels you wear with sarees for slippers with block heels, and be on your feet, keeping up with your active day!

Do not be afraid to put comfort and ease first, ladies. We Dhakaiites are relishing the winter days, so pair your georgette saree with a cardigan, an overcoat, even if you must, because why not? There's no rulebook about how one can or cannot wear a saree, so what is holding you back?

And while you are at it, do not shy away from wearing your favourite

loafers to keep your feet warm and toasty!

Offbeat saree styling for nighttime is a whole other ball game. Exciting new avenues have opened up for sartorially superior ladies, who are always looking forward to thinking outside the box.

Corset blouses are the hottest thing right now; their origin as shapewear brings a subtle but fashionable twist to saree styling that is both exciting and beautiful.

A chiffon worn with a corset is perhaps the most stylish outfit to wear. Own a chic, sequined jacket? Wear it with your Benarasi for a fusion effect that is cool and sophisticated. Cinch it with a belt and voila!

Pair your Polki jewellery with a glamorous black saree with a turtleneck and show off your tiny waist with a fabulous leather belt and be the belle of every ball this season.

By Sabrina N Bhuiyan

Photo: Adnan Rahman

Model: Mridula

Fashion Direction & Styling: Sonia  
Yeasmin Isha

MUA: Masum

Hair: Probina

Jewellery: Zever

