

The weight of emotional complexities during Eid

As young people reckon with the tumult of many aspects of their lives – financial responsibilities, familial expectations, and loneliness – they are still expected to carve out space for Eid celebrations.

NUZHAT TAHIYA

The alarm goes off at 5 AM. Outside, the adhan for Fajr pierces the early morning silence of the city, and somewhere in the building, a mother is already frying vermicelli for *shemai*. The air is thick with anticipation. It is Eid-ul-Fitr. And yet, for a growing number of young Bangladeshis, the day arrives carrying weight alongside the joy.

Nobody really tells you about this part of Eid. The Instagram feed is full of coordinated outfits and plates heaped with *polao* and beef *rezala*. The TikToks are all hugs and laughter. But in the margins of all that celebration lives something more complicated – something that many young people feel but rarely say out loud, because how do you admit that Eid is hard when everyone insists that it is only beautiful?

The pressure of togetherness

For BRAC University student Tahmid*, the week before Eid is defined less by excitement than by dread. His parents separated three years ago, and every Eid since has meant the same impossible arithmetic: whose house first, whose feelings get hurt, which parent spends the morning alone.

"People ask where you're spending Eid, and you just smile and say 'at home', because explaining the truth – that there are now two homes and you're already grieving whichever one you're not at – feels too heavy for a holiday conversation," he says.

Family conflict around Eid isn't limited to divorce. There are old wounds reopened at reunion tables – sibling rivalries, inheritance disputes, the cousin who everyone knows has done something but nobody names, and so on. There are the comparisons that sting. For young people still figuring out who they are, Eid gatherings can sometimes feel less like a celebration and more like being cross-examined.

"My extended family only really comes together at Eid," says Riya*, a garments quality officer from Narayanganj. "And every time, there's some argument. Last year, it was about my grandfather's land. The adults fought the whole day. By the Asr prayer time, I just went and sat on the roof by myself. I love my family, but Eid also reminds me of every unresolved thing between us."

When the budget doesn't match the occasion

Eid in Bangladesh is also, undeniably, an economic event. New clothes are not optional. Eid *salami* must be given to children and younger relatives. For families with

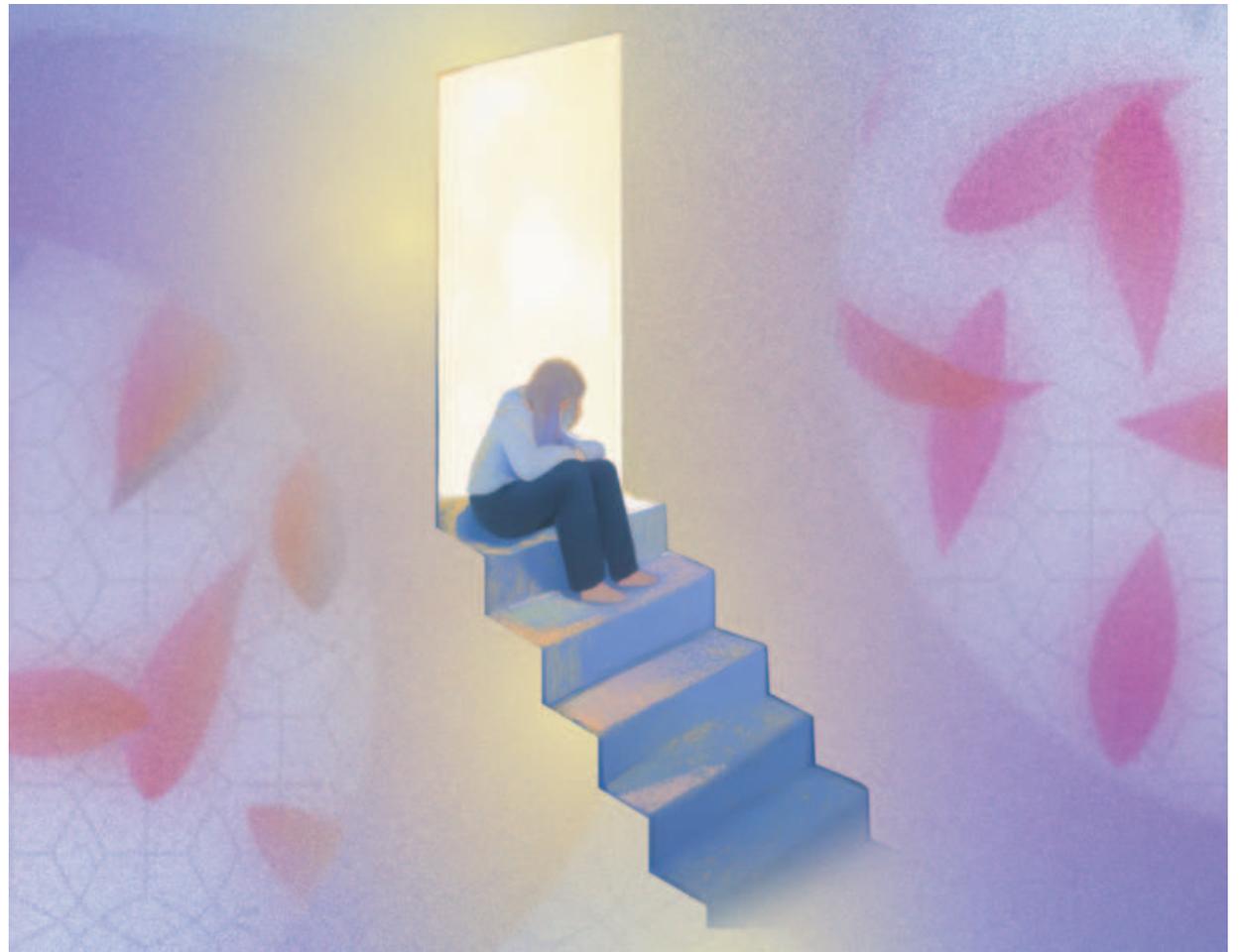


ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN

comfortable means, this is simply tradition. For young people scrambling through entry-level salaries, freelance gigs, or part-time work while studying, the financial pressure of Eid can be genuinely crushing.

Meghna* works as a junior software developer in Chittagong and sends money home to her parents in Sylhet each month. Come Eid, the expectations multiply. "I calculated it once," she says. "Between new clothes for my parents and two younger sisters, *salami* for the kids in the family, contributions to the Eid feast, and my own train ticket home, I was spending nearly two months' salary. I smiled through all of it. But inside I felt like I was drowning."

There is cultural silence around this. To say you cannot afford to celebrate Eid with fanfare is, for many families, a form of failure: a confession that you have not done well enough. Young people, particularly those who are the financial hopes of their families, carry this burden in silence. The result is a kind of collective financial performance: everyone pretending abundance, yet some quietly buckling under the weight of spectacle.

The loneliness nobody names

Then there is loneliness – perhaps the most quietly widespread Eid experience for young Bangladeshis today, and the least spoken about.

Bangladesh has one of the largest diaspora populations in the world. Hundreds of thousands of young Bangladeshis are building lives in Malaysia, the Gulf states, the United Kingdom, Canada, and beyond. For some of them, Eid is observed in a country that does not celebrate it: workplaces stay open, streets don't fill with prayer, and the joyous roar of a Bangladeshi Eid morning is replaced by a video call that keeps freezing.

But you don't have to live abroad to feel alone on Eid. Millions of young people have migrated internally – from village to city, from district towns to Dhaka – for education or work. Not everyone can afford to go home. Not everyone has a home to return to.

Farhan* grew up in Barishal but has been living in a hostel in Dhaka for three years. This Eid, a last-minute work commitment means he cannot make the journey home.

"Dhaka is completely silent on Eid. Everyone goes home except people like me. I'll probably walk to the mosque alone for Eid prayer, eat a meal I cooked myself, and watch my family's photos on WhatsApp. I keep telling myself to be grateful. I am not sure it's working."

This kind of loneliness intersects with something particular about young adulthood – the untethering. You

are no longer entirely the child sheltered by your parents' celebration, and you are not yet the parent creating the celebration for others. You are in between, and Eid, which is built entirely on the foundation of togetherness and tradition, can expose that liminality sharply.

In a similar vein, some must also grapple with the loneliness of celebrating after loss. Eid is profoundly anchored in memory. When someone central to those memories is gone, Eid becomes an annual reminder of their absence: a day shaped around an empty space that no one can fill.

Nafisa*, an O level student, lost her mother to illness 18 months ago. This will be her second Eid without her. "Last Eid, I was still numb, so I don't really remember it," she says. "This year, I will feel it properly. Everyone will be putting on new clothes and taking photos, and I'll be doing those things too. But there will be this part of me that's somewhere else entirely – at her grave in Cumilla, just missing her."

Rewriting the story

None of this is a reason to give up on Eid. That's not the point. The point, if anything, is the opposite: that Eid is important enough, beloved enough, for its complications to look at and address honestly.

Young Bangladeshis are increasingly finding ways to reframe what the day can look like. Some are establishing new micro-traditions with close friends: intimate iftar groups that evolve into Eid morning gatherings for people who are also far from family. Some are quietly setting financial boundaries, choosing one meaningful gift over five performative ones. Some are making the solo Eid a kind of ritual of its own – a morning prayer, a good meal, or a long phone call with someone who matters.

Tahmid, who began this story split between two homes, says he has started texting both parents on Eid morning before he visits either – just to say he loves them. It doesn't solve anything. But it is, he says, his way of holding the whole truth at once: the family he has, the family he wished he had, and the love that runs through both.

"I still cry a little on Eid morning," he admits. "But I also still feel joy. I think that's just what it means to grow up."

*Names have been changed upon request.

Nuzhat is a compulsive doodler and connoisseur of bad early aughts television. Send her recommendations at nuzhat.tahiya@gmail.com