

OVER THE YEARS, ON EID

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Eid morning would find me mysteriously teleported to my grandmother's living room at 7 AM, groggy and festooned in all my shiny new accessories and clothes. We would be lined up like schoolchildren – with me and, for some reason, my parents and uncle on one side and the adults, including my amenable grandparents, on the other. Thus began our conquest for *salami*; before the *muezzin* could even begin the call to prayer, we would run my darling grandparents dry with mischievous smiles and warm hugs. All the fresh notes were gone before the sun could greet us properly.

Once I had exhausted myself claiming what was rightfully mine, someone would hand me a bowl of *shemai*, sneaking maybe a *kabab* or three along with it, and I dozed off until the menfolk were back from prayer, until the feast and festivities could truly begin.

Most Eid days, the plan was to drive across Dhaka sometime before midday to visit more family and be back in time for a longer, second lunch with my grandparents. Although that may seem ambitious, Dhaka was blissfully traffic-free during those three days, and the roads of the city I call home gave way to a silent, serene metropolis. While Eid is filled with exuberance for us humans, it always seemed to me that the city was resting while we celebrated.

Having come back in record time, I would join a platoon of neighbourhood children in securing victory over grown-ups, hapless in the face of our collective childish charm as we extorted them for *salami*. We floated from room to room, listening to adults catch up with each other, and we would revel in the attention we got. The uncles and aunts who had come to visit would marvel at our embellished clothing and wax poetic about the henna that adorned our hands.

I can still see our silhouettes twisting in front of the mirror, as my friends and I admired the way our skirts flared

out and the glitter stitched into our expressions caught the light. In one of my earliest memories, we handed out Eid cards to our guests, saving the prettiest ones for our favourite people. A few days before, we made several visits to the small stalls selling these cards on the kerb of our street, which are an anomaly now.

When the table was set, we would struggle to gather every heavy, old-fashioned chair in the house, and even that would not be enough for everyone. So, the kids would gladly take the opportunity to carry their loaded plates into an adjacent bedroom, where we could gossip and eat with not a care in the world. We took it upon ourselves to shout out praise about the cooking and requests for more throughout the meal, while my aunt or my mother would come rushing in with a bowl of something or other that they served at the big table but forgot to pass over to us. The end of the meal meant corralling everyone into an air-conditioned room, and since we could no longer run amok, we would listen to the adults talk until we nodded off, with our new clothes pressing creases on our cheeks.

Over the years, our lives have gotten more complex and emptier all at once. Grief has sometimes meant that we end up losing an entire family, instead of just one person. Amongst all of us, it was my grandfather who wanted us to be seated at the table together, but now that he is no longer with us, no one can quite seem to muster up that energy anymore. No matter how much we try, as we know he would have liked us to, it is not possible to replicate the magic from before.

Unfortunately, since we moved to a different part of Dhaka, teleportation no longer works, and so we spent the early morning of Eid at home. My mother still nudges me awake to the smell of *polao* and *beresta*, but I stand alone at the door to greet my parents before my father goes off to pray. Even if we were to live closer, it would not make much

of a difference, as for the last half-decade of my life, I have worn a guilty conscience along with my new clothes on Eid.

Having given all my O levels, AS, and A levels in the May-June session, I have spent the majority of those Eid holidays bargaining with time. For these exams, one can never feel prepared enough, so I compromised on everything. During *chaand raat*, I wondered if I could spare one or two hours for my henna and argued with myself about whether it should just be on the back of my hand or go up to my wrist.

While it might seem like an exaggeration, when your chemistry exam is literally two days away, the stress can make even sleep feel like an indulgence. So, after the Eid prayer, we hastily got ourselves dressed and made the hour-long drive to my grandmother's house. I often packed a textbook with me, just in case. There, my parents and uncle no longer get to stand in line with me, especially now that I have a young cousin who looks up at me, too, with hope in her eyes. Besides that, it also means that my grandma stands alone on the other side.

Most uncles and aunts have moved away, as have the neighbours – familiar faces are seldom present alongside us when we visit. While most of us are still here in Bangladesh, we no longer resemble the people we used to be and have newer conquests, like my exams, that are high stakes, grave, and solitary.

Recently, Eid has styled itself in different colours that glimmer no less brightly. While I still have exams, they aren't so demanding, and so I have had much to hope for last Eid and this Eid. There is much joy and gratitude to be found in the blessings of Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr, while over the years, the spiritual beauty of this month of celebration has become more and more radiant. Celebration may not look the same, but it sure does feel the same. There is some merit in not trying to replicate the past but rather being grateful for it and enjoying the present.

