

Are we teaching history the right way?

FATIMA JAHAN ENA

How do people learn about the history of our country? When they teach us at school, do we retain any of that? Does it do enough to inform and inspire younger generations on what it took to gain independence? On Independence Day 2020, let's try to answer some of these questions.

A general pattern noticed in the English medium curriculum would be that the syllabuses regarding Bangladesh's history, mainly related to the Liberation War, lack a lot of information. It could be seen that our studies related to Bangladesh focused primarily on social studies and on the geographical and economical conditions of our country. However, the knowledge that we received in relation to the war and the events leading up to it were centred on the important dates or significant events, not

the sequential chain of proceedings. They do follow updated syllabuses at schools now, which exposes them to more knowledge, but generally not in a systemic or immersive way.

On the other end of the spectrum, students from Bangla medium schools are exposed to a great deal of information related to the war, such as starting from the India-Pakistan war of 1965 and the events that transpired from that point on leading up to our independence. However, students have said that the material is not always taught in a cohesive system.



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Rather, it felt like throwing around a lot of information. This could be attributed to how some syllabuses are catered for the extremely competitive admission tests, BCS exams, or other government jobs.

The textbooks that are being followed could be a contributing factor to this issue as well. Books related to western civilisation generally tend to be more appealing and "fun" whereas the textbooks related to Bangladesh are oftentimes filled with pure information without any break in the monotony, leading to possibly dull classes.

As a result, the students may end up knowing more about the Renaissance rather than the history of our motherland.

In the age of the internet and online resources, there is an argument that students can learn for themselves if they find their school subjects to be lacking. But ultimately, it's clear that students from all curriculums are taught about our history in a way that mainly serves as an easy A for them. There may be exceptions, but a change towards a systemic and cohesive approach to our history will not only give the students long-lasting knowledge about their homeland, but also inspire immense appreciation for the sacrifices that went into achieving our independence.

Fatima Jahan Ena likes complaining about capitalism and her forehead. Find her at mail2ena@gmail.com

A Time Capsule to the Liberation War

ADHORA AHMED

In the momentous month of March, I seized the opportunity to visit the Liberation War Museum.

Situated in Agargaon, the museum is a blocky concrete building, with faux bullet holes and rods sticking out, looking like a war-torn structure. Ascending the front staircase, I was greeted by a fountain disguised as a circular pool of still water with a burning flame in the middle. You have to pass by it in order to enter the vast, shaded lobby. After paying a modest fare for the tickets, I proceeded to the check post, from where a long, winding catwalk bridge bathed in sunlight leads to the galleries. On the walled side were motifs of national symbolism, such as the *shapla*, carved into concrete blocks here and there.

The first gallery is the biggest in the museum because it displays everything from ancient Bengal to the events right



PHOTO: SAZZAD IBNE SAYED

before the Liberation War. Terracotta plaques from *viharas* across Bangladesh give way to displays from Mughal Dhaka. A large section of the gallery is devoted to the colonial history, highlighting the role Bengalis played in the rebellions—both big and small—to fight the Brits. Another

significant portion of the gallery is dedicated to our struggle for independence since Partition, from the Language Movement to the Pakistani general election in 1970.

The remaining three galleries divide the events of the Liberation War into a

three-act structure. The first one depicts the immediate events before the war and its early days, including the historic 7th March speech and Operation Searchlight. The second act documents the peak of war: the plight of refugees, organisation of combat and international public support. The final gallery narrates the last days of war, covering the rampant sexual violence, assassination of intellectuals, and contribution of Indian forces. The tour ends as Bangladesh achieves victory and begins its journey as an independent nation.

By curating invaluable documents, artefacts, pictures, footage and newspaper clippings from every era in our long battle for independence, the Liberation War Museum paints a well-rounded picture of the history of not only Bangladeshis, but Bengalis as well.

Adhora Ahmed daydreams too much. Send her reality checks at adhora.ahmed@gmail.com



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