

The gaping holes in our history lessons

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Growing up, history had never been a favourite subject of mine. Naturally, memorising innumerable dates and difficult names is not any 15-year-old's preferred choice of activity. As I recall those lessons now, I realise that the mindless memorisation was not in fact our biggest problem, instead, it was the stories that they chose to tell us and the ones they suitably left behind.

DESCENDING FROM GREAT LIES

Perhaps if my eighth grade teacher hadn't so deeply venerated Churchill as a hero and unabashedly glorified the contributions of the British Empire, I would understand much sooner that there's more to Zainul Abedin's 1943 Bengal famine paintings than a couple of starving children on the streets. Perhaps, if I was introduced to the other side of the horrific story, I would slowly develop the ability to be more conscious earlier on and not allow my worldview to be reduced to such Eurocentric notions. Of course, this single lesson had not been the only influential factor, but denying its part would be foolish, as contemporary history lessons continue to be steeped in faulty ideologies.

As one would expect, my own experience is not unique to many of those around me. Zohra Ahmed*, 21, a first-year university student similarly believes that her school had failed at teaching her the important facts. She says, "My history classes never discussed anything related to



PHOTO: AFP

the oppression that Christopher Columbus inflicted on the native people upon his arrival, but went at lengths to have us believe that he was some sort of hero, an explorer, who had noteworthy achievements. It wasn't until I learned about the controversy of celebrating Columbus Day that I came to realise how misinformative my lessons truly had been."

Another recent school graduate, Anil Zaman, 19, had also expressed his discontent, saying, "I went to a Bangla medium school, so while the figures may have been different, they were equally problematic. I was taught to believe that Gandhi was a benevolent leader who struggled for India's independence, but nothing about his racial-

ly discriminatory views and exploitation of young women."

We often fail to realise that these very stories hold significant power to construct a child's understanding not only of the world but also of themselves, and we commit a gross disservice to them by perpetuating problematic narratives through these lessons. Be it an English or a Bangla medium school, the problem remains pervasive in both systems. These sanitised versions of history do nothing to protect us as children, and instead end up creating adults who are not equipped to critically engage in nuanced conversations about current world issues, as we fail to make crucial connections between the present and the past.

Inevitably, it comes as no surprise that most students in our country continue to harbour prejudiced opinions of this kind. After all, can they be blamed?

RETHINKING OUR LESSONS

In recent times, educators from around the world have raised concerns about not teaching students the difficult truths of our past. While addressing such sensitive issues isn't a simple task, they believe that teachers can offer small glimpses in a simplified and age-appropriate manner. Even though students may be too young to entirely grasp the complexities of these topics, it would certainly open up room for counter-narratives. Several organisations such as Rethinking School and Teaching Tolerance based in America have been working towards accomplishing these very goals. Unfortunately, there aren't many such initiatives in our part of the world, but these organisations along with several resources available online can serve as effective models to take a step forward.

We live in increasingly turbulent times where it has become much harder now to deny the existence of institutionalised ignorance and it certainly demands that we prepare our students with deeper purposes of knowledge and learning.

**Name has been changed for privacy*

Sometimes when Nafisa isn't crippled by self-doubt and procrastination, she writes and paints things. You can reach her at sara.chow26@gmail.com

This Eid, avoid the Cowvid

FAISAL BIN IQBAL

The Cows for Cowvid-19 (CoCo) Group is a special task force formed by a group of independent cow bodies that seeks to prevent the spread of Cowvid-19 among cows. The disease is already widespread among humans, and the group fears that with the arrival of Eid, this disease will spread to cows too through the interaction between the two species.

Therefore, in order to prevent the spread of Cowvid-19 among cows, CoCo has issued a set of rules that must be followed by those who're interested in purchasing a cow, or have already purchased one and are taking care of them at home.

BRING YOUR REAL AND ORIGINAL MEDICAL CERTIFICATE

Only those with proper documents certifying that they've tested negative for the virus will be allowed to enter the farm or cattle market. For a list of hospitals that provide such certifications, please feel free to visit the CoCo website. Holograms are mandatory.

NO MASK, NO COWS

You'll not be allowed to come within three feet of a cow if you're not wearing a mask. The mask should be Moo-95 graded, and it should be worn in such a way that it fully covers your mouth, nose, and ears, and partially covers your eyes. Cows will be wearing masks as well, so skip the teeth-checking this year. If you're purchasing a cow for Eid, you might as well get them face masks or shields instead of garlands.

HANDS OFF THOSE CHEEKS

We understand the importance of grabbing hold of a cow's thighs and its behind in order to judge its meat mass. But, given the circumstances, we have to ask you to avoid doing that. Their hips don't lie, and you can tell that just by looking at them. The need to assess the cow's body physically is unnecessary this time around.

SANITIZE YOUR HANDS BEFORE PETTING

As much as cows enjoy you petting them, we're going to have to ask you to not do that as well. However, we understand the human need to see and feel the cow for yourself, and hence, we'll be allowing minimum petting with the precondition of sanitizing your hands before and after the petting session. Or bring your specialised cow gloves.

CONTACTLESS FOOD DELIVERY

Once the cows have reached your place, they're now yours to take care of. The first and most important safety precaution you need to maintain here is contactless food delivery. Once you get the food for your cows, you simply keep it at a safe and reachable distance from them. Don't bother feeding them with your hands; they never liked it anyway.

Faisal wants to be the very best, like no one ever was. To stay home is his real test, to survive the pandemic is the cause. Write to him at abir.afc@gmail.com



ILLUSTRATION: JUNAIQ IQBAL ISHAMAM