



REDEEMING CHILDHOOD MYTHS

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Growing up, not all of us were the smartest peas in the pod. Even if you were, you probably weren't immune to the ridiculous superstitions that the adults taught you. I decided to take a trip down memory lane to remind you of the most common of the bunch.

Where do we come from? Where do we go?

Let's start at the most fundamental one. I often reminisce the cursed moment I decided to ask my parents about my origin and was met with a colourful and misleading explanation. They told me that I was plucked from a garden. There are various versions of this: parents lie in bed and a child magically appears; children are bought from superstores; parents go to the hospital and pick out a kid of their choice and so on. Like these deceptions were not enough, older siblings were there to scar the youngest one for life by telling them that they were found from a dumpster as a newborn. Creative, right?

How to become a champion swimmer:

Pretty easy, honestly. You eat up ants, jump into the water and you should be floating as a result of the miraculous consumption of the aforementioned ants. What could possibly go wrong?

Moreover, if you had one morsel of food rather than two, you would drown. In that case, you better hope those magic ants made you an expert swimmer.

For a smart superstitious kid, the most invincible plan would be to eat just one morsel of ant-cake.

Bodily functions:

There are a whole lot of carefully propagated misconceptions about how our body functions. Rather than frightening kids with these theories, I wish people would just teach them biology instead. I picked out a few widespread superstitions:

I still panic if I accidentally sit down on pillows. I, like most, was told that sitting down on pillows will make inflammations appear where the pillow touches. Trust me, nobody wants irritation on that particular spot.

Having *laal shaak* leads to red coloured poop. Can someone please check whether it is true?

Drinking tea makes your skin darker.

Being a chronic tea-drinker, I wonder if this is why my skin got exponentially darker over the years eliminating any prospect whatsoever of my courting the man of my dreams.

Skipping one meal causes blood to decrease equivalent to that of a sparrow. This is so extreme, my brain can't even come up with anything sassy. Who invented this bizarre absurdity?

I saved the best for last. If you accidentally swallow the seed of any fruit, plants grow from your ears, heads, bellybutton and other places. Having grown up with lies like these, no wonder our generation needs reality checks every now and then.

About future offspring:

My mother never let me have conjoined fruits (for example, two bananas or litchis stuck together). Legends say it leads one to have twin kids in the future. First of all, having a twin is the opposite of a problem. Secondly, how can you possibly make a connection between a fertilised human egg producing a pair of monozygotic twins and the simple act of having a fruit?

The way I see it, many of the superstitions have existed for hundreds of years, before people knew enough to reason scientifically. Anything out of the ordinary was considered intimidating. Now that I know better, will I still stop my future child from eating a conjoined fruit? I will, so that I can have that two-in-one litchi for myself.

Marital status:

At a young age, kids are usually withdrawn when talking about their future better halves; their cheeks become red, and they shy away if anyone jokingly brings up the topic. Fast forward a few years, they are sitting with a group of friends and a random, casual slap leads them to beg for another slap on the other cheek, all because they believe that being slapped on one cheek will result in them remaining forever unmarried. I never asked for that bonus slap which is maybe why I can foresee my companionless, crippling, lonely future.

Exam tactics:

An egg resembles zero, hence consuming one before an exam will bring you zero marks. I look back at all the times I scored nil on tests and try to remember if I had had eggs for breakfast. I am an

adult studying in university yet I refuse to let an egg get in the way of my yearlong hard work and good grades. The stakes are too high.

Legends which may or may not be urban:

Myths are often location specific. Westerners have posh horror stories of Bloody Mary and all we got are *petni* and *shaakchunni*. I have never had the good fortune of walking under a banyan tree at midnight. If I did, I am pretty sure I would hear the ghastly laughter of a *petni*, laughing at my sheer stupidity of believing in her existence.

Most of childhood's magic are made from imaginations running wild. Some of these are correctly termed as superstitions while many were simply invented for pure

fun. No matter what the reason is, being a child would be a lot duller and traumatising if we knew the rational explanations for everything. Being an adult is dull. Little can go wrong in letting the little ones think that the moon is following them home or that there is an old woman on the moon spinning threads relentlessly year after year on a spinning wheel. In a few years, when reality strikes, they will wish they lived in these fantasies for a while longer, like we all do every once in a while.

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BDI 2016 Essay Competition

Bangladesh Development Initiative (BDI), a US-based organization committed to research and advocacy for a prosperous Bangladesh, is pleased to announce an essay competition for young scholars. The goal of this competition is to encourage university students to write about an idea/project that has the potential to substantially contribute to the socio-economic development of Bangladesh. The essay should address the following question: **"How will the implementation of my idea/project lead to improvements in my community and the nation?"** The winners will receive awards including a Tk. 50,000 first prize for the best essay, Tk. 30,000 for the second best essay and Tk. 20,000 for the third best essay. The best papers may be considered for publication in the *Journal of Bangladesh Studies*.

Students from Bangladesh (**undergraduates only**) currently enrolled in a public or private university in Bangladesh or abroad are eligible. Contestants must first register by completing the registration form, which can be downloaded from the [BDI website \(http://www.bdiusa.org/\)](http://www.bdiusa.org/). The essay should be single authored, written in English, and between 2,000-3,000 words. Detailed guidelines are posted in the BDI website. The registration form should be submitted by **July 31, 2016** and the essay should be submitted by **August 31, 2016**.