

OPINION

# What happened to Hriday Mondol is a symptom of deeper insecurities



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

## MRITTIKA ANAN RAHMAN

I don't know if the baffling lack of tolerance of free thought in our classrooms, like in all other spaces in our country currently, stems from hyper-religiosity, genuine hate for people of other religions, or sheer ignorance.

My own time at university was filled with apologies by faculty members after saying anything that could remotely hurt anyone's sentiments. A lecturer would make a statement for the sake of an argument, or even for humour, and quickly make an apology, scanning faces across the classroom to check if any student looked like their religious sentiments were hurt.

My faculty members were all learned people who knew what they were talking about and were making relevant remarks in context to things we were studying. So, why did they need to lower themselves and issue an advance apology to their students and pander to their egos?

Because we are all scared. Censorship comes in many forms and some are entirely self-inflicted. Turns out some people like being free and getting to see their families.

The recent incident where school teacher Hriday Mondol was sent to prison over a conversation he had with students about science and religion really strikes a chord.

We have to ask when we arrived at a point where we bombard our teachers with targeted questions and take it upon ourselves to find a place for them in jail for their answers. Why is this something that is permitted within the bounds of our classrooms?

Do we have authority over what someone else says? Is it our job to punish them? Perhaps these are questions that have confounded philosophers over the ages but few of us will pretend we don't have an opinion to these questions ourselves.

We have to ask why we enter a classroom in the first place. It will perhaps be naive to believe everyone goes into a classroom to grow as an individual, to expand our minds, to listen to viewpoints different from our own and learn to defend our arguments with logic, grace and respect.

Perhaps we go to classrooms to earn degrees, memorise facts and preserve our hard earned grades only.

What is the role of a teacher? Is it to encourage free thought and rational thinking among students or to finish lessons on time without straying an inch from the approved syllabus? Where is the room for free exchange of knowledge between teachers and students, where teachers are allowed to express their thoughts?

If it sounds like I have a lot of questions, it is because I really do.

Our minds are of course shaped by a larger society before we even enter a classroom. We live in times when communal clashes, religious intolerance, and moral policing are on the rise. We are closing our minds to new (or old) ideas that contradict what we already believe to be true.

We are scared of what people say out loud. We live in a society where people of different religions and cultures coexist. If we happen to be part of the ethnic, linguistic or religious majority, surely others won't pander to our egos and censor their every move and word to protect us, particularly when we do frighteningly little to return the favour.

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# Can iftar just be a normal meal?

## NADEEMAHAFROSE MONDOL

Ramadan is here and we are still trying to grasp the idea of a hectic work and study schedule after two years of sadly lying in bed before iftar, watching food ASMRs, and doing nothing. Remembering these, it occurred to me how appropriate will it be for everyone to have the OG iftar, every day this year?

As iftar is as much an emotion as a religious observance to us, consuming traditional iftar might not be the best idea this year. After a long, gruelling day at school or work, breaking fast with fried and oily food for 30 days might result in various health concerns.

A person who fasts can get extremely dehydrated and the pressure of work will possibly add much more to that. Feeling bloated, tired and difficulties in digestion could be common circumstances. In this case, switching peyaju and beguni with rice and fish or chicken curry can be an easier option for our bodies as they are much more familiar and comfortable digesting these foods.

Wait, don't get angry yet because I'm certainly not suggesting that we should completely sacrifice our beloved aloo chop or halim or whatever for the sake of health. I myself agree with the fact that the word "diet" sounds silly and enraging in the time of Ramadan because, come on. 'Tis the only time of the year when we get to devour delicious iftar items after a whole day of fasting, right?

However, if we think a little cleverly, we can use the weekends as cheat days and have

whatever iftar our hearts want on those days. I actually have tried it myself with my family during many Ramadans, and trust me, it's not that bad. In fact, it made the weekends more special than ever.

Another thing to remember is, regular iftar items or simply, a bunch of fried foods are not very easy things to cook. Besides, we might be unable to help our parents very much to cook because we will all be busy. So, eating regular comfort food at iftar as well as at sehri will be much easier for all family members.

If we think more widely, due to the price hike of daily commodities, many families struggle to buy the bare minimum of the essentials during this month. So, having traditional iftar might not be an economically feasible option for many of them.

We know that after having iftar, people again have dinner. Two meals before sehri means more preparation and cost than regular days. Therefore, if people who are fasting eat one proper meal like eating rice at iftar, they won't have to eat again before sehri, thus, less expenditure.

I think maybe we can try normalising the fact that iftar doesn't have to be that big of a deal and it can simply be about breaking fast, celebrating what truly Ramadan means instead.

*Nadeemah always wraps her head around the thought of what she's going to eat next and thinks that the glass at her bedside table is half- full. Say hi at [nadeemahafrose13@gmail.com](mailto:nadeemahafrose13@gmail.com)*



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