



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

The appeal of coffee culture in a tea-loving nation

NUZHAT HASSAN CHOWDHURY

Mellow music, a relaxing ambience, and the divine scent of freshly brewed coffee are the essence of coffee culture. Whether it's old friends looking to catch up, focused students wanting to get some work done, or a busy person needing a break from their hectic schedule, they all end up at their favourite cafés.

Coffee culture in Bangladesh was non-existent about ten years ago. Expectedly so, as Bangladeshis have an undying love for the perfect cup of tea, and contrary to what we learnt in our beginner economics courses, tea and coffee are not actually perfect substitutes. However, it's fascinating how coffee culture has managed to break through in a tea-loving nation like ours.

Coffee shops have their own appeal. They offer an environment like no other, one that is casual and encourages you to take your time. The shelves full of books, newspapers, and board games at every popular café convinces us to slow down as we enjoy our beverage, which can be particularly comforting when living a fast-paced life.

My love for coffee has grown as the culture surrounding it becomes more and more prominent in Dhaka. Although I'm no coffee connoisseur, even my palette often craves something richer than instant coffee. The charm of a well-made cup of coffee has pushed me to do my own research on which type of coffee beans to purchase, learn about the different notes, and buy new equipment to make it at home.

I often use my favourite café as an escape when I want to enjoy a good book, a couple of brownies, and a warm beverage alone without actually being isolated. With the growing popularity of practices such as 'me time' and 'solo dates', more and more young people are looking for a table for one. Since it is more socially acceptable to visit coffee shops alone than it is to take a solo trip to a restaurant, it creates a less daunting experience for anybody looking forward to enjoy their own company in a cosy place.

Some things change with time, while some never do. The introduction of coffee culture in Bangladesh has been one of those changes. However, as the cafés in the country keep getting bigger and fancier, many people's cravings for a hot cup of milk tea in the evening is still going strong. Although different in many ways, a roadside tea stall and a neighbourhood café can evoke the same emotions of familiarity and comfort in a person.

As our lives get busier and the list of things to worry about gets longer, it's never a bad time to visit our favourite coffee shop (or tea stall) to sip on a warm beverage while we enjoy the company of our loved ones, or just our own. It is moments like such that make us realise just how much we cherish seemingly trivial aspects of life.

Nuzhat zones out every ten minutes. Tell her to snap out of it at nuzhatchowdhury07@gmail.com

Why school newspapers should be encouraged

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Apart from the rumour that our school was going to publish a yearbook all the way back in 2016, I have no recollection of ever experiencing school journalism first-hand. The same can be said about most schools – some do the bare minimum of the yearbook and even fewer have a weekly or monthly publication about recent events and achievements of the school. Sadly, none qualify as real examples of journalism in schools.

I recently participated in an online summer camp this year and came across many high school students from the US. As they discussed their extracurricular commitments, I realised that school journalism is a huge concept in American institutions. Even the most underfunded, understaffed school is very likely to at least have a proper webzine.

From the students' perspective, journalism is a great way to develop crucial skills needed to succeed in the real world – the practice in general makes students polish their writing skills, while the more opinion-oriented pieces require them to develop critical and analytical thinking skills.

Moreover, as students will pursue on-campus stories affecting the school and student body at large, their journalistic eye will grow sharper and they will be more likely to notice and engage with issues in the outside world as well. Besides, a school newspaper is about more than just writing. It also opens doors to people of other talents like graphic designers, illustrators, and those interested in finance if the publication receives funds from the school or elsewhere.

Despite all that the students have to gain from it, school journalism is a very absent concept in Bangladesh. The first and biggest reason for that is how

the role of academics and good grades is overestimated in our society. The fact that focusing on only one aspect of school life means students miss out on the opportunity of growing into more well-rounded and balanced individuals is rarely, if ever, considered.

Lack of resources in our schools is another factor to consider. Given that teachers in most of our schools are severely underpaid, it is no wonder they have little interest in guiding students through activities outside the classroom. But it is important to have a present body of senior staff members to monitor the content students produce and ensure that the quality of the publication is upheld.

That being said, schools must realise that school journalism is meant to be unfiltered. School reporters, with sufficient evidence, should have the liberty to write the good, the bad and the ugly about the school and those affiliated with it.

Stanford University's oldest college newspaper, The Stanford Daily, for instance, has provided holistic reviews of the university over the years, from mentioning its women's basketball team's wins to boldly addressing sexual allegations against professors. If anything, school journalism can be a way to ensure democracy and awareness are maintained at schools.

Ultimately, journalism should undoubtedly be encouraged at our schools. It will be a great opportunity for students to grow as individuals and develop important skill sets while also promoting school spirit and accountability.

Fabiha is secretly a Lannister noblewoman and Slytherin alum. Pledge your allegiance and soul to her at afifafabiha01@gmail.com



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