



# Of war and peace

Why we need to go beyond the history of war and conflict in our educational institutions

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**W**inning is so deeply embedded in our psyche that history is generally considered a chronicle of power; a list of who crushed whom and descriptions of rivalries amongst the strong.

**Focus on conflict**

The destruction of Troy in 1193 BCE, Alexander's defeat of Raja Purushothaman in 326 BCE, the Norman conquest of England in 1066, the fall of Constantinople in 1453, and the First Battle of Panipat in 1556. The siege of ... the war of ... the sacking of ... After all the fiery wars came the Cold War.

The history of war and conflict is a focus on the political trends and divisive forces of the world and has traditionally been a part of the political agenda of education. "Students need to know the history of their nation," is the foundation of this study programme. They do, they do. But is that all?

For a long time, it was uppermost in peoples' minds because hand-to-hand skirmishes and field battles between countries and adjacent regions were continuous, with the lives of whole populations under threat all the time.

Today, proxy wars are fought and, for reasons of national face-keeping or hand-washing, we continue to live with huge and unjust invasions of fellow humans that are far away enough to not disturb our day-to-day lives.

**Poor second**

My concern is: why does

the intellectual history of mankind come a poor second to the history of bloody struggles between countries and civilisations? The calendar of man's artistic and technological ascent should be given more importance than it is. Given the academic atmosphere of classrooms, it could surely be both interesting and relevant.

Look at just one example in the history of ideas: When Islam and Christianity were locked in a fight to the death for the control of the Holy land, a community of European monks and scholars were in peaceful contact with their more advanced colleagues: scholars who were producing works of science and technology through translations into and out of Arabic in the great knowledge centres and libraries of Baghdad. There are many such instances.

Can we not also bring the untold his-and-her stories of the "daily"ness of

the human experience into classrooms? What were peoples' lives like away from the sites of war? For instance, given the recent spread of interest in global cuisine, the history of food and habitats would be fascinating. Surely a good way to expand geography classes? Climate, vegetation, food habits, and food history.

**Missing element**

The missing element in social awareness of the nature of the human experience in History is a vital image of the day-to-day measures of life. The very language of teaching and the importance teachers give to research and human ingenuity would go a long way in shifting the schoolgoer's mind away from the nervous excitement that conflict generates.

What history and whose story? Telling students stories other than war stories would be a step towards

their holistic development. Children raised with some emphasis on the positive side of human evolution would be less likely to develop prejudices about 'foreigners' or hostility towards people of different beliefs and social practices.

No amount of academic achievement can make up for the lack of emotional and life skills. What if one of our students grew up to be a brilliant scientist whose children are terrified of her? Is that the successful human being we want to raise? The greatest life skill is learning to understand that other people are as important as yourself and developing an empathetic attitude to all life.

**Start early**

This training can begin at an early age: caring for people around you. It is the lack of this value that leads to all the misunderstandings, fears, and even hatred of anyone who is

not like oneself. In fact we have been watching with agony and alarm at what is happening in West Asia where one group of people think nothing of taking away the rights and lives of another.

Without value education, without peace education, our institutions are perfect training grounds for war because they place such a premium on success for the self and the self alone.

At least a part of History in classrooms should be an account of our humanity and our children should receive the universal message from the Mundaka Upanishad: "Like a thousand sparks from a blazing fire are we..." of the same nature, the same origin. Let's give the history of peace a place in our institutions.

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