

History, or religious and political propaganda?
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When one picks up a history book, he or she would expect to read a fair account of events as how they happened in the past.

Definitely, one would expect the most accurate record possible of history as it unfolded through the decades, written as objectively as possible.

And that expectation is reasonable when the book in question is a major textbook prescribed by our Education Ministry for our students nationwide. A book that is instrumental in shaping the young minds of our future generation.

The issue takes even greater prominence when the content of that book is going to decide whether our students pass or fail in a major exam on which their future hinges.

Lay hold of the Form 4 history textbook that our children are compelled to digest. Read it for yourself.

Take a good hard look while the storm is brewing in the teacup. And it is brewing for good reason. Be shocked at what the syllabus writers have managed to quietly incorporate into our school syllabus just a few years ago, unnoticed by most people, even parents of affected students.

This is no typical history textbook - simply because the syllabus writers have not confined its content to history.

Instead they have extended its boundaries seemingly to push a certain agenda. In the process, our history textbooks seem to have taken on a quest of its own - to win the hearts and minds of our children for that particular agenda.

Reads like religious indoctrination

We have to take note that all four writers of the textbook come from only one race and religion, without representation from other faiths and races.

I write as a concerned mother who cares about what my children are being fed in school. I write as a troubled citizen who cares about the younger generation that will one day helm the nation.

I write based on my own personal review of the Form 4 history textbook and this review is based on the hard facts of the content of the textbook, without any intention to offend any religion, its prophet or believers.

I will leave the review on the accuracy of the history to historians, who are already speaking out on the historical errors and distortions contained.

The first fact to note is the overwhelming proportion of the Form 4 history textbook is being devoted to Islamic civilisation (100 pages) while the other religious civilizations are barely

given a passing mention (460 words).

Out of 10 chapters, 5 bulky chapters are devoted to Islamic history and civilisation, which constitutes at least half a year's study. This certainly is a disproportionate emphasis on one religion, to the exclusion of all other religious civilizations. Most of us would not mind our children understanding more about Islamic civilisation.

But it has to be presented fairly accurately within a balanced perspective. Do we want to mislead our children to believe that there is only one important civilisation in the entire history of the human race and the rest are insignificant?

Are the other major civilisations not worth studying in equal if not greater depth?

Giving our children a correct and broad worldview can only benefit our nation in the context of a globalised world. Otherwise, our nation will be producing people with an extremely narrow worldview and an incomplete and distorted view of world history. That is to our own loss.

Secondly, this history textbook seems to try and influence the young minds of our children who come from various faiths, to follow the prophet of one particular religion.

There is a detailed study of the life of the prophet Muhammad (pg 102 – 107). He is repeatedly praised throughout the chapters.

Students are then repeatedly exhorted throughout the book, to emulate him as a role model in life (pg 106, 111, 124, 133, 137, 138).

Is it appropriate for history?

We respect the Muslim belief in the greatness of their prophet. However, we have to respectfully suggest (with no offense intended whatsoever to the prophet) that teachings that encourage students to follow any prophet would more appropriately belong to a religious class meant for students who already subscribed to that particular faith.

It has no proper place in a major history textbook used by students of various faiths. In a plural society like ours, the religious sensitivities of other faiths must surely be respected as well.

Thirdly, throughout the pages of the textbook, history seems to have been written from a religiously biased viewpoint. Other religions seem to be cast in an unfavourable light.

Consider some statements found in the textbook:

* 'Islam is described as a religion easily acceptable and not confined to any race, nation or geography' (pg 185).

* 'Islam can be accepted by many people because of the purity of its teaching' (pg 110).

* 'The uniqueness of Islam resulted in many people embracing the religion' (pg162, 163, 185).

* 'The conversion of some Arab leaders to Islam in 629 AD is described as "an act done

after rational investigation into the truth of Islam' (pg 133).

* 'Islamic social policies are described as so attractive that European Christians converted to Islam during the Byzantine era' (pg 163).

* 'Islam requires rational thinking and therefore is accepted by all levels of society.' (pg 185)

Sadly, biased religious viewpoints are being unfairly shoved onto our children as established facts within the framework of a narrow religious perspective.

Fourthly, the history textbook itself disproportionately dwells on the teachings of the religion over others. Whilst the children have to study Islamic concepts (pg 185), no space is given to a balanced comparison with the teachings of other religions.

Our youth are therefore taught the virtues of one religion to the exclusion of others. Why isn't there a balanced approach and allow our children to learn the basic tenets of all major world religions?

Why not allow them to engage in comparative studies? Will it not be healthier to promote better understanding among the races that has a positive effect on nation building?

Fifthly, the textbook also promotes the idea of Syariah law as suitable and practical for a multi racial nation. It cites the example of the success of the multi racial community in Madinah governed by the Madinah Charter.

The formation of an Islamic government in Madinah is stated to thus prove that Islam can be practiced in a wholesome daily living and should be emulated by the Malaysian society. Syariah law is hailed as just, complete and perfect, and can be followed by all communities (pg 128).

There is mention of social justice under Islam (pg 128); equal treatment to all people under Islam (pg 110, 128); purity of the struggles of Islam (pg 112); fairness, integrity, consideration and generosity of Islamic economic principles (pg 128).

Perhaps the fifth ground raises the most questions and rings loudest of the alarm bells. It makes us wonder why our school history syllabus is written in a way that seems to condition the minds of our youth to accept Syariah laws as the basis of our legal system in the future?

Is there a deliberate political and/or religious agenda at play?

Why the slant?

Our education minister owes us an explanation. We want to know why our school curriculum was written from such a religious slant by a group of writers of only one religious background.

We want to know the reason for this sudden but quiet change in the school syllabus a few years ago. We want to know why our children are compelled to disproportionately focus and digest so much on one religion without a balanced perspective of others.

We must demand an immediate and urgent revamp and re-writing of the entire history

curriculum for our schools and universities. There should be a panel of qualified historians from all races and faiths working reviewing the syllabus.

Feedback must be obtained from the public. We must insist that politics and religious indoctrination be strictly kept out of our textbooks.

History should be what it is – an objective and accurate record of past events. We must no longer allow our school syllabus to be hijacked for political and religious propaganda.

Until then, it is unacceptable to even think that History should be made a compulsory pass subject in SPM.

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