

Countering Racist Bullying

## Paper 5: Hostile corridors

---

I remember the excitement with which I greeted the amazing new world of my secondary school – a place to conquer life's mysteries and storm through the broad corridors of adolescence.

Reality was a little different, however. My newfound world was a singularly white, all boys grammar school where the National Front would be happily distributing leaflets at our school gates and an embittered music teacher would ritualistically prod me out of the music rooms for attempting Indian ragas without a written score. Indian classical music is an oral tradition. I never had the heart to break it to him.

So what was I taught? History. Yes, I was taught history. How wonderful an experience it would be, I imagined, to learn the origins of my ancestors – to learn of the Aryan journey to the Indus valley and of the Dravidians' historic migration to south India. How inspiring to hear of the great Moghul empire and origins of the Vedas, the Upanishads and the epic *Maharabharata*, I thought. What I did learn however was a lot easier to grasp than any of that. Five words: 'India was a British colony.'

I had no problem with what I was taught *per se*...But where was the balance? Where was I in this ambitious picture of world history?

So I went through school with an uneasy suspicion that I was inferior.

It may have been a product of the notion that the history of the non-white population of this world is embedded in slavery and colonisation, or perhaps the echoing resonance of the word Paki as it accompanied me through the hostile corridors of the science block.

---

Source: Trust and Betrayal by Nitin Sawney,  
in *Cultural Breakthrough: defining moments*, Voluntary Service Overseas, 2003