[Kamila Hyat](https://www.thenews.com.pk/writer/kamila-hyat)

June 10, 2021

**A few true stories**

Across our country, there are many stories which are true, and which depict the realities with which we are living. There are stories that tell the tale, in human terms, of pandemic, of inflation, of joblessness, and of all these elements combining together to create an extremely difficult situation for so many in the country.

Somewhere in Lahore, there is a rider who had through hard work risen to the position of manager of the restaurant for which he worked. He was proud of his achievement. He told all his customers, as he answered the phone to take orders or discuss complaints, about how hard he had worked to reach the post he had been elevated to. But then came the pandemic. The restaurant he worked for closed down. Though the owners were generous enough to give him, and other employees in a similar position, some benefits, he found himself once again without a job and with much difficulty was once again able to achieve the post of a rider in another business in the city. However, this business was far more demanding of its employees, including those who delivered food to clients, than the one he had worked at before. He now works a 16-hour day and is desperate to find some way out of the misery and a very low pay on which he says it is impossible to support his family. There are many others like him.

Elsewhere in the city, there is an old man, who now no longer has either his health or his strength. He had worked for something like 60 years or more as a painter, earning his money through honest work and integrity, which is now almost impossible to find. Now that he is paralysed and unable to earn a living, with his only son dismissed from his job as a newspaper employee, he must survive on handouts and what little is available from the small income brought in by his grandchildren.

This is not the way the citizens of any country should be forced to live or to die. In villages elsewhere there are people who can simply not survive until the changed circumstances that have forced them to return to their homes in remote rural areas, deprived of their jobs and their livelihood. Some try to make a living through small-scale agriculture. Many find it is not feasible and simply not practical to try and do very much.

Of course, in hospital wards and in some cases at home, there are also those who have struggled with Covid and in some cases not survived. It is true Pakistan has not suffered as badly as neighbouring India. For this, at the moment at least, we must be grateful. But it is also true that the Indian variant has found its way into Karachi where cases are multiplying and we do not know what the future holds. There are also terrified parents who wonder what to do about the education of their children and if even now, when schools open, it is safe to send them into classes. There are those who have received the vaccine and because they did not know what effect it could have suffered terrible cases of clot damage, which has left them brain damaged.

There are of course, endless stories. Stories of those who have lost jobs. Stories of those who cannot manage in times of huge inflation, which has pushed prices up in every corner store and in every city of the country. Commodities that could easily be bought have now turned into luxuries. To make matters worse, it is difficult to know what figures to believe and which to ignore. We are told investments are going up and remittances have increased. We have also been told that inflation is beginning to come down and that food price inflation too is falling. Certainly, we hope that this is true. But we can only wonder how long it will be before life returns to something resembling that of the past. Even this life was miserable for many. But now it is even more miserable and we wonder how people are to live or die.

Along with the issue of food, we have the matter of just what kind of education continues to be imparted to children at schools. While the Single National Curriculum (SNC) continues to be discussed and debated, the fact is that we have generations of children who have been to school and have reached class 10 or beyond, but are still unable to manage simple calculations in mathematics or write a simple sentence in virtually any language. Clearly there is something very deeply amiss with our education system. It needs a team of experts to pinpoint the key issues and to mend these.

A single curriculum for the entire country will not deal with these issues or put them right without other drastic measures being taken at the same time. And while we are in desperate need for better education, we hear of curious new institutions being set up to teach arts that really do not require promotion, and which should not be required by any person in this modern age. Sometimes we wonder if we are truly a part of the modern age or if we still live in medieval times.

Certainly, the kind of domestic violence we saw during the pandemic suggests that we live somewhere long into the past, in an age of darkness. The scale of child abuse mentioned by the NGO Sahil in its figures is frightening, as is the case each year. So are stories that come out from time to time of networks operating in various cities, to provide material for international groups that run child pornography sites. All this is frightening. As a country, we need to better the lives of our people and not to pull them down further into an abyss from which they cannot escape and into a situation over which they have no control.

It is the task of the government and other bodies working with it to manage this. The key problem, of course, is the implementation of laws. We have some very good laws in place, including those to protect women, children, domestic workers, and other groups who frequently suffer abuse of one kind or the other. The problem is that too few people are even aware of these laws and of course, they are not implemented or used in any sensible fashion. This means that even the protections people should have under the laws passed by parliament are not available to them. Poorly trained police themselves have little idea of the laws and therefore have no interest or no knowledge about how to enforce them.

It is these stories that we need to change. The endings must be altered. Somehow people must be uplifted from the plight they face. The recent pandemic has of course made life far more difficult for people around the world, promoting mental health issues, poverty, and much more. But as a nation we need to find a way to lift ourselves and focus on how to do this rather than simply concentrating on the issue of corruption and the political divide that has further damaged our democracy and its ability to provide the people with anything resembling rule of law or decent governance.

Email: kamilahyat@hotmail.com

The writer is a freelance columnist and former newspaper editor