

Education

Thoughts On Examination System

—Abu Mohammed

The examination system as obtains in our country is a much talked about issue these days. From what transpires from criticism, the system least enjoys the confidence of the people. Many of us view it with distrust for it is an age-old system that can hardly guarantee a correct appraisal of a student's merit. So it should be changed or thoroughly overhauled. Such are the opinions often expressed about our system of examination. This is particularly so in respect of S.S.C. and H.S.C. Examinations where the fate of hundreds of thousands of candidates is involved. Not that the authorities are not alive to the situation. But there are gross limitations to overcome which will need social awareness and concerted efforts towards its improvement. To make an examination system absolutely foolproof is a difficult task, for it depends for its health and nourishment on people's outlook, attitude and other social factors.

An examination system aims at correctly evaluating a student's merit on the basis of his performance in the examination and the efficacy or otherwise of the system depends among other things on the (a) way of holding examination (b) type of questions, (c) mode of evaluation and (d) method of preparing and publishing results.

What impairs popular credibility about our examination is the way we hold it in the centres. There are hundreds of centres in cities and towns and far-flung rural areas. Barring only a few in developed localities most of the centres are centres in name only for they enjoy neither the necessary physical facilities nor the right treatment they deserve from those directly connected with their administration. All centres do not behave in the same way. Each centre has its own milieu, its own conduct, with the result that for the same examination there are almost as many standards as there are examination centres. Evidently, uniformity in the standard of examination which is our avowed aim, often remains a far cry. This is a queer situation. The blame, however, is not so much of our system as of our own selection of centres. Good many centres come into being, not on their own merit but on undue recommendation of the powerful elite. Often it is a matter of prestige with them to get a centre at a place without paying heed to the question of its proper maintenance.

An examination centre as a matter of fact should be such as will be administratively and economically viable and as will, above all, guarantee full sanctity of examination. For opening a centre there should be rigid criteria from which there should be no departure. The fewer the centres the better the standard of examination. It should be seen that a centre must work in its own academic way independent of any undesirable extraneous influence. If all the centres hold the examination uniformly in the same way then we will be spared the major thrust of the problem.

TYPE OF QUESTIONS

In our S.S.C. and H.S.C. Examinations we have mostly subjective essay type questions. Such type of questions leave scope for the students to select a few topics and cram answers. Package answers that such questions demand facilitate adoption of unfair means in the examination halls. So from the realisation that in our context such type of questions does not much help correct evaluation of merit we have of late introduced in some proportions objective type of questions side by side with the subjective ones. This is with the belief that objective type question requiring a student to write short informative answers will discourage cramming and make unfair means in the examination halls a remote possibility. But this type has its other side too. It leaves little room for sustained thinking and one cannot be sure if in our environment it will enjoy full immunity from the vices we want to check.

Essay type questions however ill we may speak of it, has its merit in this; it demands of one to organise a long chain of thoughts and feelings and express them in a coherent manner. It fosters cramming and thus poses a challenge to proper evaluation but this problem may be taken care of through some remedial measures. While sale rejection of essay type questions is not deemed a step forward.

In any case the type of questions as is being currently followed is essentially a subjective one. Evaluation in a system where subjective type of questions is predominant leaves scope for disparity in the standard at different hands. Since evaluation of essay type questions is subjective and since awarding numerical marks is the practice there always remains the possibility that can-

didates showing similar standard will get varying marks at the hands of different examiners. Among the general lot under-marking or over-marking by 2% to 5% hardly makes any substantial difference. But at the surface where there is the strong current of competition, even one mark more or less would mean a difference of real consequence.

EVALUATION

In our system we evaluate by awarding numerical marks and finalise a candidate's result on the basis of all his papers taken together. A candidate may totally fail in the examination or miss a division or lose a high position for even one mark. So a candidate has every reason to be serious even for one mark that may have a crucial impact on his overall result. To try to secure more marks by showing evidence of merit is laudable, but if during and after the examination it becomes one's craze to secure more marks by irregular means then it becomes a problem of formidable nature. Secondly, as it is our system, we prepare a candidate's total result on the basis of his performance in all the papers taken together. When he qualifies in each and every individual subject, he qualifies in the examination. A good student failing in one subject fails in the examination even though he has shown his proficiency in all other papers. This accounts for the large percentage of failure in the examination each and every year.

Grading system can possibly provide solution to the problem. Instead of showing the candidates as having passed or failed on the basis of marks of all papers we can as in the Ordinary Level and Advanced Level examinations put them broadly into five grades like A B C D and E in each subject. Initial assessment at the examiners' level may be made in the form of numerical marks but such marks can be converted into five grades like 90%—100% Grade—A, 75%—89% Grade 'B', 60—74% Grade 'C', 45%—59% Grade 'D' and 30%—44% Grade 'E'.

The Grades as secured by the candidates in different individual subjects will be clearly mentioned in the certificates. There will be no question of successful or unsuccessful candidates. All candidates taking the examination will get a certificate which will show the level of his proficiency in different subjects. Selection of admission into a higher class or for a job will depend on whether a candidate

has scored the requisite grade in the relevant subjects.

GRADING SYSTEM

Grading system has some advantages. It can drastically reduce the extent of examination crimes. There will be no question of pass or failure, no question of division and naturally there will be far less urge on anybody's part to try to manipulate result in an irregular way. As all will get certificates, hardly anybody will bother to procure fake ones. Secondly, the system will obviate the necessity of grace marks that we often give to raise the percentage of success. Under the system we will no more be required to calculate percentage of success. The question will simply not arise at all. Examination is a matter of assessment of merit and so grace marks given as charity is not in consonance with the spirit of examination.

There is a standing practice of allotting examination scripts of one institution to teachers of another institution located faraway. This is to ensure neutral and impartial assessment. But this practice has of late given rise to a problem of serious nature. In big cities and towns the educational institutions are staffed with experienced and qualified teachers having in their care students equally well up. The situation in the mofus sll areas is often the reverse. This all means that under the current practice the scripts of brilliant candidates who read under experienced and proficient teachers are allotted for evaluation to teachers who are often less experienced and less qualified and who are used to teaching less bright students. This creates some imbalance that hinders uniformity in evaluation of scripts.

COMPUTERISATION

Examination results are prepared manually by hundreds of people working different stages. It is a huge task—cumbersome, time-consuming and open to risks of error and aberrations. Many feel that under the present circumstances it is computerisation of the whole process that can help ease the situation. The task being big it is yet to be given a trial on computer. What is feared most is the uncertainty involved in a new venture. To start with we may do well to process the results of one year's examination both in the traditional way as well as through computer simultaneously. This (See page 6)

son. The socio-economic conditions, academic environment's moral values etc shape up a system and help it to acquire a character of its own. The standard of a society determines the standard of a system. We can bring in changes, we can innovate things. But no system can work that satisfactorily unless there is corresponding change in the whole social outlook. The system is important but much more important is the man that runs the system.