

## Examination Re-examined

The 25-member Examination Reforms Committee has completed its labours on time and has produced a reformed system of examination based on their findings over a period of 7 months since October 1985. As required by the nature of the task it set itself, the technical and kindred efforts seem to have been devoted to putting right what the committee felt had gone wrong with a traditional system. Here was a problem which has long tried the imagination and skill of the country's educators, social scientists, teachers and even, from time to time, politicians. At long last however something tangible seems to have emerged, not, however, without raising the further question how far the answer provided would square with the academic, intellectual and pragmatic needs that a national education system should cater to. The necessity to link the one with the other—examination with education—naturally arises unless we tend to separate the components of a total system from each other and try, mostly ineffectually, to solve the problems besetting it.

Examinations at all stages, from school to university, mark the close of a student's periodic courses of study, as a means of appraisal of his knowledge and skill in the subjects he has studied and the use he could make of it in building a career for himself for the rest of his life. This is the needed comprehensiveness of prospective in which alone all the aspects of the existing system of education need to be studied and an answer found. More than once in the past we have dealt with the subject keeping in particular view the relevance of an education system, handed down from the colonial past and accepted and worked in the same traditional style, to the practical new needs created in an independent country with its problems of economic, social and cultural reconstruction on the basis of day-to-day reality of life.

Consistent with the style of years of thinking concerning educational reforms our emphasis has been on a radical change of the content of education, from general to technical, and quality of education at all levels of it. To achieve the twin goals the primary need is to break the traditional mould and remake it exactly in response to the pressing, pragmatic requirements, to enable students to acquire knowledge and skill that will directly help them earn a living without much of a dependence on public jobs for which the demand must remain much larger than supply, particularly in the fledgling economies of developing countries.

Hence the two fundamental problems to be answered by education, given and taken properly. We agree with the findings of the Examination Reforms Committee that the problems agitating the public mind include the unreliability of the present system of examination, adoption of unfair means, the heavy percentage of failures etc. An examination of these problems separately or taken together will show where exactly the rot lies. If, an examination is a means of assessing the quality of education, knowledge and skill acquired by an examinee, how can it be reliable, even with reforms based, for instance, on separate percentages of marks for different types of questions, if the home-work (at school involving both teachers and students) is not organised precisely with a view to providing knowledge, teaching skill and the art of using it, enough for the student to sit for a test that will pronounce him a success, or a failure. By the same token, failures in examination, which have by now reached staggering proportions and are emphatic proof of the total failure of the present education, rather than examination, system, have to be ascribed to the same lacuna in the education system itself. In a sense, therefore, examinations with all the reforms introduced into them can do precious little to set things right.

Three fundamental questions to be addressed so far as the national education system, including that of examination, is concerned are: one, stimulating in the young, virgin minds the creative impulse, giving them an opportunity to think independently on any subject and expressing their thoughts in appropriate language; two, complementary to the creative, occupation should be the acquisition of skills, trades and the level of efficiency acquired in them in the course of training under the system of education; three, in both cases the common need would be to build a base of language proficiency which can be promoted only by practical drills in classes and through student home-work subjected to the regular scrutiny of the teachers. The services of the latter must be regularly available to students through tutorials and general contact. If examinees now suffer from a sense of despair and also tend to rowdy behaviour at examination centres over 'irrelevant' questions, or if, as a result, the number of examination failures has increased beyond all proportion, the reasons have to do more with the education system itself than with the system of examination.