

Within the socio-economic situation of Bangladesh, educational opportunity is a rare opportunity and equal opportunity is even rarer. Under such circumstances the competition in the examination which takes place is also far from being fair. Variation in performance occurs due to factors which are mostly beyond our control under the existing system. Some of these factors are differences in institutional support and financial backing. We must therefore, acknowledge the fact that these results do not reflect correctly the merit of the individual student. This assessment is even more inaccurate in case of students on the merit list whose results differ from one another by only a few marks. And there is every possibility that the order of the merit list would be rearranged or reversed if these results are rechecked just once; for these distinctions between results, we must admit, are purely subjective in nature. When such is the situation then why so much of publicity is given to highlight these indi-

vidual differences, specially when the methods to judge these differences are inadequate and in the ultimate analysis these do not relate to reality. Besides, the more important question in this context is, how does this publicity provide encouragement, or anything else to the student concerned? The obvious answer being in the negative, are we then to suppose that, all this is done to satisfy the ego of all the adults connected with the students? In contrast to the above situation, we find that there is an utter neglect in the case of the majority of SSC students. This is clearly evident from the manner in which the results are published in the various newspapers. While the students in the merit list get a front page coverage with picture of self and parents and about half a column on the candidate's family history and other details, tails, the results of more than nintynine percent of the remaining candidates are published in the most illegible microscopic print. By the time an average candidate has discovered his/her roll

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number in the newspaper it is reduced to pulp, only to be gazed at from a distance!

The publication of SSC results (August 1, 1986) was marked by a row over differences in the merit list. It involved the students, their parents and teachers and the officers from the board office. The over-confidence of the affected candidate and his parents' concern over the cadet college candidates appearing for the SSC examination from their respective colleges are issues that require further consideration. Another vital issue in this connection (that may find expression on another occasion by another parent) is the number of private tutors engaged by a candidate's parents for preparation of the SSC examination. In

many cases the brilliant results achieved by the SSC candidates are related to private coaching by two, three or five teachers at a time, or by one excellent teacher who teaches all the subjects but charges a fantastic fee.

Competition is necessary for academic purposes, if it contributes towards the development of the individual student. But if competition makes the students over-confident, conceited, petty and narrow-minded then it must be discouraged. Innumerable instances of these characteristics are found among our students. The top students in many schools do not share or compare their class notes or test-scripts with their class mates nor do they discuss the merit and demerit of any written work for the benefit of the en-

our education

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tire class. The main reason for this type of behavior is the desire of the top students to remain on top. We the guardians do not generally interfere with this arrangement for this may only minimise our own interest in that our wards may lose the position that he/she has been occupying, or the advantage of our private tutoring (in terms of special notes and suggestion) may find mass circulation at no financial gain. It is then, this keen sense of competition that has made us totally oblivious of the benefits which a group of students can derive, if they learn to co-operate. By co-operating the students learn more in less time and by doing a work together they would enjoy more. They would also find a great deal of satisfaction

in their work. We need to teach the students the benefit of co-operation. One way to do this would be to give the student group assignment and to eliminate the self-fish interest of the student and the parents or teachers. This is possible if we minimise the importance of merit distinction based upon differences in few marks in the total aggregate.

It may (or may not) be difficult to bring about changes in the present system of education and examination. But there is no denying the fact that we need to adopt scientific and pragmatic methods to reduce the loss of human resources in terms of the large percentage of failure in SSC examination each year. While these measures are yet to be adopted, we must check

and re-check our existing educational system for possibilities of further improvement.

Traditionally we give more attention to those students who make it to the top. We project their aspirations and enquire how they succeed to do well in the examination. In other words, the story of success is what we repeat each year, but do not think it necessary to know the other side of the story. What we really need to look at more closely are those students who are outside of the merit list—the average SSC students, those students who work hard but do not achieve the expected result (a majority of the students fall in this category) and those students who do not pass the examination at all. The less than expected or poor performance of the students in the examination are due to various reasons. We assume some of these reasons but our assumption may be totally incorrect.

There may be valid reasons for this from the point of view of the students or the SSC candidates; but these may not be obvious to us. We may

also discover that the students feel that the subject matter of their study is too boring and outdated. (if we are honest with ourselves, we would agree too) We also need to be aware that the young people of the present generation, whether in villages or towns, are more aware and alert as compared to their seniors demonstrate the courage to challenge the present system of education and teaching methods.

An improvement in the existing system of education and examination is possible if we focus upon the average students, their problems and shortcomings, their purposes and possibilities. The system is for the majority and unless due consideration is given to this large segment of SSC students, we will continue to incur the heavy loss year after year and seek false consolation by focusing upon the talented few.