

SYSTEM OF EXAMINATION

A CHANGE in the existing system of examination has long been demanded by concerned quarters in order to raise the standard of education and discourage copying. It has been suggested, rightly, that the traditional system of examination is not a satisfactory method of testing knowledge and educational attainments for more than one reason. Firstly it encourages cramming rather than comprehension and puts a premium on the ability to reproduce blindly from the memorised text to the neglect of creative thinking. Writing of this propensity of the examinees to faithfully transcribe in the answer script the passages learnt by rote, Rabindranath Tagore said in one of his celebrated essays that this constitutes a subtler type of cheating—the book in this case is tucked not under the shawl but within the skull (i.e. memory) to be copied uncomprehendingly.

The second reason for change is perhaps even more pertinent in the prevailing state of our education. The examinees at many exam centres do not take the trouble to conceal the text book under the shawl but copy

openly, on a mass scale, in a defiant and blatant manner. Of course, this is not the fault of the examination system and is a clear evidence of deterioration of discipline and erosion of values, but it is nevertheless felt that a changeover to the quiz or objective type of questions will make copying from books difficult or unrewarding. Finally, objective type questions will wean the students from note books and compel them to give more attention to class work and also compel the teacher to give more attention to teaching.

The Education Minister has said that the government is trying to introduce objective type questions in SSC examination from 1992. He said that objective type questions would be set in the examination of class VIII from next year. Under the changed system, the minister further said, no student can answer the questions merely by copying even if he gets all the text books on the examination table.

The change was due and it will be welcomed. However, as indicated above, the system of examination is not the only thing to blame for the prevailing ills in the education field. For instance, what about leakage of question papers? Objective type question papers are not proof against leakage; if anything, leakage will become more tempting in the new system, since just ticks, crosses and very brief answers will carry all the marks. With essay-type answers the examiner can somehow make a national or

impressionistic assessment about the examinee and get an idea whether the latter is writing intelligently or duplicating blindly. But with objective type question the marking of scripts will become mechanical. Further, quiz type questions will make it difficult for the examinees to copy from book, but it will not perhaps stop them from copying one another.

Finally, excessive reliance on quiz type questions may dull the skill with language. As it is, language proficiency is not sufficiently emphasised in present-day education and this is particularly true of English. To organise one's thoughts into a composite essay is a relevant academic drill, not to be neglected. But some students, even talented ones, may begin to view the quiz type answers as a scriptorial labour saving device.

Objective type questions are a desirable option but not a panacea. Change in the examination system can give results only if there are simultaneous improvements in other fields of education.