

This Mad Percentage Game

The pendulum has swung to the other extreme. From the Dhaka Board SSC's 68 per cent via the Dhaka University Bachelors exams' 30-plus, it has travelled to 16.8 per cent of Chittagong University's Bachelor in Commerce examination. It must be a regular mad-house, this education thing.

The fantastic SSC results were admittedly a bloated document and the remaining two Boards are perforce going to turn out clones of that on their turn. Examinations at that level as such are no more evaluatory of the students' progress, performance and achievement. As the next SSC examinations are projected to be radically different from this year's, the failed students stood to be pushed to an uphill task. So perhaps it was decided that tens of thousands of students should be presented with the all important certificate without indeed earning it. The number of such gratis passwallahs bulged also because it has been decided not to have any compartmentals supplementing this year's SSC exams.

If such adjustments and manipulations are not quite what education is about, these are very benignly humanitarian actions to be sure. What shall we call the CU B.Com 16.8 then? There is no need to suspect here a converse set of cruel decisions to balance those extra-educational considerations that arose from nation-sized deluge of sympathy rained from up above in the case of SSC. It is reasonable to take the 16.8 per cent to be genuinely projecting the performance of the examinees. But this isn't either the true figure for those that passed. The overall figure is worse — 13.6 — if the external candidates are counted in. So 86.4 per cent of candidates taking the B.Com. examination of Chittagong University have failed. We feel that the percentage of failure to grasp any significance out of that and to take the matter as seriously affecting the nation as a whole on the part of the members of the advanced classes would be even more miserable.

Is it the students that have failed? Education as a system and an operation, as an administration and as a process of relaying knowledge and skill, as something that shapes the person in us into personalities — is constantly failing in our nation. The Chittagong results are only a good measure of that — and thankfully so.

Securing the examinations and their follow-up operations against malpractice of all kinds and putting all the emphasis in the world on proper marking of the scripts leading to fair and true results have been areas our state and educational administration have been taking particular care for the last couple of years. A very welcome change for better it was in what was before that an abysmally bad situation. But then as examination results get published one after another it gets more and more clear that we are indeed wasting all our labour in securing an empty chamber against violation by malpractice. We haven't at all cared to first fill it with the treasures come down to us from past generations and from the wide world abroad. While we go about improving on our rituals, the main thing — educating — goes abegging.

The students who have failed the examination in question have all duly come across their SSC and HSC exams. And after that they have put in two more years' labour. Why should they fail in such numbers? The answer to that becomes rather easy when these figures are compared to performance by students taking Honours courses. It is decidedly in teaching that passing and failing is decided. And we have been nationally failing on the teaching front.

The right lessons must be learnt from such costly exercises. If we cannot teach, we do not examine either. If our teaching cannot yield a crop of more than 16.8 per cent this course should better be chucked off. Or those that were charged with giving this course.

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