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Practice of private coaching by

The practice of private coaching, by not only the members of the teaching staff of educational institutions but also by other educated people, has been in vogue in this country as elsewhere in this sub-continent since the colonial times, when the so-called modern system of education with its undue and of-course undesirable emphasis on public examinations was introduced. The evils of private coaching along with other malpractices have become almost institutionalised in the system. Today the practice of private coaching, specially for students at the secondary and higher secondary levels, is an integral aspect of our educational culture with rare exceptions. Despite some efforts in the past to reform the education system, its features that tend to breed these malpractices have essentially remained unchanged in character.

Consequently, the practice of private coaching is increasing in magnitude and form. The obvious result is that the teaching profession as much as the educational institution is losing its dignity and public esteem. As a nation we cannot afford to allow this kind of commercialisation of education. But the problem is so complicated that a simple solution cannot be prescribed for it. All aspects of the problem need to be thoroughly examined before measures are adopted for its prevention. This brief paper presents only an outline of possible and suggested measures that may be considered for the purpose.

FORMS OF PRIVATE COACHING

Although private coaching by the members of the teaching staff of educational institutions, particularly those of high schools and intermediate colleges, is our main concern in this paper there exists a large variety of its forms. The problem needs to be examined and sorted out in the

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teachers

perspective of those forms.

The first and obviously the most undignified one is the form in which teachers engage in private coaching of students for the explicit motive of earning money. This form becomes criminal if the teacher is also connected with the examination, specially the public examination, as question setter, moderator, scrutineer, examiner of scripts, invigilator, tabulator and so on. My personal observation is that this most corrupt form is more extensively prevalent in the urban and affluent areas than in the rural areas. A part of the urban community, which possesses both social influence and wealth, is ready to pledge any amount of money and means to purchase an unduly good examination result for its children. The teacher and some times the best prepared one, is allured and trapped by this section in such a manner that the mutual benefits lead to ever greater degenerations.

The second form consists in the engagement of needy and mostly meritorious college and university students as private tutors of children belonging to rich families in mostly urban areas. These students supplement their financial support from other sources by engaging in the practice. Some times they have to do this in exchange of food and lodging only. The rural variant consists in engaging high school students, primary school teachers and some high school teachers for such purposes and under similar terms. A review of newspaper advertisements could clearly reveal this. This form, though bad, has a humanitarian aspect which merits consideration in this light. The rich tend to exploit the

situation of poverty and adversity for their selfish benefits.

Thirdly, the unemployed educated people as persons belonging to low income occupations other than teaching also engage in the practice for obvious reasons.

The fourth variant consists of groups of people forming some sort of commercial organizations or institutions devoted to the sole purpose of coaching candidates for public examinations. These groups tend to allure dull students with promises of bright results. Very often they adopt foul means to assist their students. They prevail mostly in the big cities and towns. Some times they even glorify themselves by assigning and advertising apparently innocent institutional titles. They are at the root of many of the nuisance connected with public examinations.

The fifth variant consists in coaching of students by their educated parents or guardians or other relations to prepare them for public examinations. The talented children belonging to poor families and having no such opportunities are forced to remain deprived of such assistance and care. Hence, "full many a flower is born to blush unseen".

Finally, private coaching takes the semi-recognized form of the so-called "coaching classes" in most of the high schools and "Special High School". These classes are organised by the schools during the period between the selection test for public examination and the actual public examination. These classes are held for the sole purpose of preparing candidates in the art of getting good marks in the traditional

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competitive public examinations. The guardian of the candidate is often taxed by levying a heavy amount of money in the name of "coaching fees" in addition to normal tuition and other charges of the school. In some cases, it is not unusual for some of the selfish teachers to relax in their normal classroom work during the preceding academic year only to demonstrate the apparent weaknesses of the students as reflected by their performance in the selection tests to their alarmed guardians, so that they might be forced to pay either for private coaching or for the coaching classes. The comparatively better schools do exactly the same thing during the period between those two examinations for social recognition rather than monetary gains.

I should like to conclude that the forms of private coaching which prevail in this country reveal one of the great weaknesses of our system of education. The system does not cater to the educational needs of the individual student. It does not recognise the fact that each individual child grows and develops physically, emotionally and intellectually in his own rate. It does not recognise the fact that the competing demands upon his achievement should precede at least equalisation of educational opportunities. We have not been so far able to discover any scientific device for identifications of talent. But we pretend to identify them merely by apparent looks. Besides, it is interesting to observe that private tutors for English, Mathematics and some science subjects tend to enjoy a greater demand for their service than those in other subjects. This needs to be deeply investigat-

ed.

SUGGESTED MEASURES

Some appropriate legislative measures may be adopted gradually to abolish the forms of private coaching particularly the first form.

The legislative measures should precede gradual reforms in the education system in general and the public examination system in particular in line with the recommendations of the Bangladesh Education Commission of 1974.

A genuine effort should be made to equalise educational opportunities.

Each school should hold remedial classes for apparently deficient students throughout the academic year.

Modern techniques of programmed instruction for individualised education be introduced gradually. (This measure has a potentiality to eliminate the need for private coaching. The programmed instructional materials may be presented in the form of modular texts).

The overwhelming importance of the external public examination system be reduced and modern techniques of testing be introduced. (The Institute of Education and Research, University of Dhaka may assist the Education Boards in designing and developing these techniques).

The teacher education system be strengthened and untrained teachers be replaced by trained ones particularly at the secondary and higher secondary levels; in-service training programmes for teachers should be intensified.

A genuine effort should be made to ensure a fair salary for all teachers.

A national campaign against the practice of private coaching be launched.

Day school children should spend the entire day-time in school doing curricular and co-curricular activities.

An efficient body should be established for continuous evaluation and improvement of curricula.