

OUR EXAMINATION SYSTEM

Outline:

Examinations are eternal. The aim of an examination is to test and evaluate the ability of candidates. Our system relies heavily on the written method.

1. Examination system much criticized in recent years. Main charges are that it is:
 - (a) Not a true test of ability,
 - (b) Capricious and smacks of a game of chance
 - (c) A factor which cramps the teacher's style
 - (d) Based on subjective evaluation.
2. Those who favor it state that it is:
 - (a) The best method so far devised,
 - (b) A healthy influence and compels students to read.
3. Suggestions for improving the system.
4. Concluding remarks.

The Essay:

Examinations have always been and will always be. Scientists examine hypotheses, scholars examine opinions, and lawyers (cross) examine candidates. How do students feel on the eve of an examination? They have difficulty expressing but some of the descriptions include terms like nervous, itchy, edgy, giggly, dizzy and twitchy. What, after all, is the object of an exercise which generates so much "anxiety" in the young folk? The object of an examination is to investigate and evaluate the proficiency or otherwise of a candidate. It aims at testing his knowledge and inquiring into his ability.

Three ways are generally employed to elicit this information written, oral and practical's. Our examination system relies heavily on the written method and regards the other two devices as mere adjuncts after a student has read a course over a certain period of time, he appears for an examination. He answers a number of questions within a specified time and his efforts, under these conditions, determine the quality of his knowledge and ability in that field.

In recent years our system of examination has come in for a good deal of criticism. Newspapers have lashed out against its antiquated techniques; educationists have denounced it as an unreliable exercise and students have often expressed dissatisfaction over its dubious mechanism. Students, who study regularly all the year round, end up with mediocre results while those who waste their time and mug up a few questions a month or so before the examination show unexpectedly good results. Students pin their hopes on guesswork cramming, shortcuts and unfair means. Diligence and intelligent understanding suffer the bargain.

The teacher, too, is obsessed with examinations and his teaching is often conditioned by those three hours in which the fate of the candidate is decided. The evaluation of scripts, which is the essence of the whole system, is so subjective and variable that it cannot be relied upon to reflect the true worth of a candidate. Moreover, reading a hundred versions of the same essay requires proverbial patience.

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Those who favor the system believe that there is no better method evolved by man to judge a large body of students in the shortest possible time. Moreover, students by nature are irresponsible and inclined to shun work. The fear of examination has a salutary effect and keeps the boys on their toes. If the system were abolished students would run loose and fritter away their precious time without the slightest compunction of the conscience.

The success of any system depends eventually on the people who operate it. If it is to regain its lost prestige some changes need to be effected. Exclusive dependence on University/Board results should be discontinued. Performance in house tests should also be jointly considered to determine a candidate's proficiency in studies. Questions should be set in a manner as to deter students from taking to cramming, short cuts or unfair means. Objective tests coupled with viva voce could prove useful in this context. Most of all, the people chosen to conduct examination should be honest and God fearing. Some of the most caustic comments, in recent years, have been directed against corrupt superintendents and invigilators. This grim aspect has been chiefly responsible for tarnishing the image of the examination system both at home and abroad.

Does this mean that all examinations must be scrapped? Certainly not, examinations are necessary. We cannot eliminate them. If we do, what will be given in their place? We can only strive to modify and improve the system in the hope that it will serve the nation with some degree of efficiency and reliability.

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