

On examinations in India

—By M. J. Audi—

THE twin aims of examination are digestion of knowledge by the students and recognition of their Merit. Both are decisively destroyed by prevailing patterns of Examination in India. Examinations are either External or Internal. Favouritism permeates assessment in both types. An impartial examiner is a pure fiction. No where in the world, impartiality is inborn or acquired trait of any person endowed with discretionary powers. Everywhere, discretion is the main and major source of corruption.

Internal examination is more harmful than External because the career of the students is damaged by the whims of their teachers from beginning to the end. Consequently sincere students silently suffer the pretenders. Under the Internal scheme as the teachers themselves are examiners, many do not teach entire course nor take the prescribed numbers of lectures. Frequently the lectures are converted into "review sessions" of books and articles by the students. Students who submit are bribed with generous marking. Students who do not submit are victimised. No wonder, there is always a bumper crop of First Classes in the universities operating Internal Examinations.

So-called eminent educationists are eager to impose three or four examinations in every course in every year. These wiseacres fail to grasp that too many examinations are too bad. They convert academic exercises into a monotonous drill. Under them, teachers and students are not partners in pursuit of knowledge but traders in the market of marks. Continuous evaluation in the universities is bad, in the colleges

worse and in the schools the worst. It destroys the basic goal of education which is to stimulate the curiosity of students and encourage them to scale the highest peaks of Excellence.

It is widely suspected that real objective of continuous evaluation is not at all the pursuit of Excellence but to make the students and teachers so weary that the higher-ups in Education are completely free from their observation and supervision. The suspicion seems to be rational because the Vice-Chancellors do not teach and the Principals of Colleges do little teaching. Our teaching time is between 9.00 A.m. and 6.00 p.m. The Vice-Chancellors and Principals spend their mornings on humouring the powers that be and evenings to get themselves humoured by their minions in the committees. When do they teach?

Parents and students who are given right to vote at 18 must know how farcical has become Higher Education in India. The sad state of affairs on our campuses convincingly shows that Education is a field where respect can never be acquired through the use of authority and power. On the campuses respect should be always commanded. Who commands respect in Education? Only those who have impeccable integrity of character and real academic achievements to their credit. Presently, we have more than 160 universities but we do not have even six Vice-Chancellors who are known for Academic Excellence the page-boys of their masters. The State which uses the Police Force on the campuses is a thoroughly rotten State. The duty of a good Government is to appoint Vice-Chancellors and Principals

whose Academic Excellence is beyond dispute and to guarantee that the Executive Council, Academic Council, Senate and Planning Board are not packed with yes-men and women but manned by upright teachers. The proceedings of all these bodies of university should be easily accessible to the public for public scrutiny. A university administration which is not truly accountable to the people always ruins the cause of Knowledge and always breeds violence on the campuses. Violence invariably destroys precious public property. Therefore the Government should identify the persons responsible for causing violence on the campuses and punish them sternly.

In India every State has enacted laws to eliminate Malpractices in the Examinations. The law-makers seem to believe that only teachers and students are the culprits as the laws concentrate on them alone. None of these laws tackles the worst malpractice that works very systematically and efficiently. It is subtle and sophisticated tampering of assessment by the powerful and the rich in all Examinations and specially Medical, Engineering and Technology Courses where admissions are governed by percentages. It is a common complaint of examiners in India that they are cajoled and terrorised by the Vice-Chancellors and Registrars, by the Directors of Education and Chairpersons of Boards to inflate the marks at the Command of the powers that be. Some examples are:- (1) Marks-scandal of Higher Secondary Board Examination of Goa; (2) 1986 M.D. Examination Marks-Scandal of Bombay University; (3) 1991 involvement of the

Vice-Chancellor of Poona University in "spectacular rise" in original marks of MBBS candidate from 17 to 63 after the "revaluation"; *Navhind Times*, 25-4-91). and (4) 1991 cancellation of All India Civil Service (Preliminary) Examination by the UPSC (*Navhind Times*, 10-6-91). Examples could be multiplied but exercise is not worth the while. Question-papers are leaked either by the paper-setters or the highest administrative officers of the Boards, Colleges and Universities. In the Universities, possibility of leakage of question-papers by the administrators is definitely greater than that by the paper-setters who submit more than one question paper and which paper will be printed is decided only by the administrators.

Examiners that submit to pressures are a disgrace to the noble profession. They fully deserve nothing but condemnation. Yet it is ludicrous to condemn only the examiners and absolve Vice-Chancellors and registrars, Directors of Education and Chairpersons of Boards who pressurise and terrorise the examiners. Using the powers of reward and harassment which office gives to them, these worthies execute their nefarious designs without written records. Hence as long as this worst and most dangerous *Malpractice* is not eliminated, the laws will remain paper-tigers. Thus in Education, as elsewhere, it is the fence that eats the crop. If the teaching fraternity is the backbone of university system, Finance Officer and Controller of Examinations are its watch-dogs. In India, the back lacks bones and the watch-dogs wag their tails for the crumbs thrown at them by the Vice-Chancellors and

Registrars who are the managers of money in the universities. Examinations in India do not have any credibility is as clear as sunlight. Consequently, the top rankers and prize-winners are not at all recognised by the society as *Meritorious* but recognised as the favourites of the *Manipulators* of Examinations.

How, then can we establish credibility of Examinations and give to *Meritorious* what is truly their? Following steps are absolutely necessary:- (1) There should be only one examination at every level in every year. (2) Quality of paper-setters becomes known by quality of questions. Rarely one finds questions that excite intellect of the examined. The questions today are neither thought-provoking nor thought-breaking. They are simply routine queries seeking stereotype answers. Paper-setters should be rewarded for creative questions. (3) There should be concise and precise criteria of assessment of answer-books from S.S.C. to University. Criteria should be clearly made known to the Examiners and to the students in the classrooms. (4) Results of Examinations declared by the Boards, Colleges, Universities and I.I.Ts. should be *Provisional* in the first instance. Assessed Answerbooks of all candidates in the *Merit List* and the *First Classes* should be re-examined by new examiners in open assembly within thirty days from the date of declaration of the results. Assessed answerbooks of all candidates regardless of their percentages should be open for public scrutiny during this period. *Provisional Results* should be *Confirmed* only after second assessment. This and this alone will make assessment careful, objective and responsible. It will automatically expose black sheep in teaching profession. It will totally eliminate tampering of assessment by persons of affluence and influence. (5) Two factors ser-

iously undermine objective assessment. They are large number of answerbooks assessed by single examiner and remuneration fixed for each answer-book. Assessment should be a compulsory duty for all teachers. This would eliminate favouritism in the appointment of examiners. No examiner should be allowed to assess more than thirty answerbooks in any year. Minimum remuneration should be Rs. 100/- per answerbook. How ridiculous that persons are paid Rs. 500/- for just attending formal meetings of the Boards in public and private sectors and only Rs. 5/- to an examiner for assessing one answer-book of M.A. Examination!

Vested interests which control our institutions will dismiss these proposals as expensive. People should know that Education in India from Primary to University is completely financed from public exchequer. People should also know that in every year fifty per cent of expenditure in our universities is wasted upon:- (1) Expensively furnished residences and air-conditioned offices of the Vice-Chancellors and Registrars; (2) lavish entertainments to coteries in five-star hotels; (3) frequent air-travels on different pretexts to different parts of country (4) university-owned cars with university's petrol and drivers for pleasure-trips involving the distance of 400 miles' (5) T.A. and D.A. for never-ending committee works; (6) symposia and workshops where lavish dinner is the main attraction for captive audience and (7) publication of pedestrian and run-of-the-mill books by Vice-Chancellors, Registrars and their sycophants from the departments of the Universities, books which none buy and none read.

It is high time for people of India to stop this criminal wastage of precious public money of a poor country and use it exclusively for improving quality of Teaching, Research and Examinations.