

S.S.C. Results-And What We Owe To The Nation

The more than 60 per cent average rate of success in this year's S.S.C. examination, conducted by the four Boards, taken on its face value, is a tremendous feat of academic progress, performed both by the examinees and the nation. And, normally, this should be a matter for congratulation for all concerned. Nevertheless the fact that it has set off reactions varying from darkly-skeptical to one of qualified welcome ought to be cause for further thinking on the part of those who have introduced certain reforms in some aspects of educational assessment as well as those whose demand is not only for the right type of education but an education that will be quality-based and consequently will produce SSC or HSC-passed graduates that would be more a national asset than a liability.

And in fact the whole gamut of education debate, right from the time when and the point where the decline began has so far centred on this fundamental question related to the development of an educated work force equipped properly by a reformed system of education for the country. For good education alone can provide this essential equipment.

The further fact that the SSC results, despite their being so unusually good, even guardian's and parents, (apart from sections of students themselves, let alone the critics demanding quality education, are reported to have taken with a slab of salt shows that all is not right with what has happened. And there's the rub: why even such a brilliant performance, in the ultimate analysis, by the nation, in the field of education, should not be cause for untempered euphoria for all, and a sure sign that the nation has made a giant stride forward? And, therefore, a whole chapter of ignominy, academic inefficiency, student apathy and unrest, or of many academic or extra-academic distractions spoiling students and their careers and so on must be a thing of the past.

But, on reflection, it is not at all so. Why it is not, is not only for students (yet to get over the hang-over of the glamourous success in their examination) but also for academics, intellectuals, social scientists, officials in the education department, teachers to find out how far the results of the SSC examination are a true index of progress in our education and whether or not the wonderful success is more apparent than real.

The seeming miracle is not hard to explain. The much-trumpeted 'objective' method of education has done the trick. It has inflated phenomenally the results and has evidently done so on the ruins of the traditional system of testing a boy's or girl's real ability to deal with questions in a public academic examination, SSC or HSC, through the time-old method of testing his or her skill in competently preparing an answer in writing, relevant to the points raised by the "question".

The traditional method met three fundamental objectives of education for a young mind particularly at the close of his secondary education programme: 1) his skill in expressing himself in proper language, 2) his ability to coherently deal with a given question, 3) most important, his creative powers stirred by ideas provoked by a given question. It is only the subjective type of question that will provide the right test of these abilities. The so-called objective type is a thoughtless mechanical substitute which is absolutely out of place for a young mind whose mental training and intellectual nursing is a scared trust for the teachers, the education experts and government to fulfil.

The innovative device or the objective method is something for a business book-keeper to use along with a ready reckoner to reduce and simplify his labour. It can never be a thing to be brought within miles of a young student, or his school, primary or secondary. For it will end up ruining him or her and, consequently a whole generation and, therefore, a whole nation.

With such a danger inherent in this co-called reformed system of examination the immediate need is to drop the method and to revert to the traditional system and, as important, to restore those academic values that involve mainly teacher-accountability, full student participation in the study courses, class-work, home-work, both for teachers students, periodic examination (under course systems), decommercialisation of teaching and education, restoration of academic discipline under efficient management, a reorganised and efficient school inspectorate with a view to ensuring quality education to students. Instead, to concentrate on the method of examination rather than on the removal of all these evils that have made a mockery of education in this country, and to do so only to raise the rate of success in the examination, is tantamount to intellectual betrayal of a whole generation — and the nation.

Reconstructing education on a genuinely sound basis rather than toying with palliatives such as the one we have discussed is what we profoundly owe to the nation. One point our education pundits should not miss: secondary education of 4 years from class VII to X is the corner stone of the educational (and intellectual) foundation of a nation. It should be spared wooly, amateurish ideas of reform concerning its examination system. Reform should be aimed more at (1) lightening the present load of subjects which was most unimaginatively conceived and introduced more in a hurry than with the needs of a growing child in mind, (2) easing the unnecessarily heavy and abstruse mathematical part of the syllabus, (3) minimising the 'groups' and streamlining the fundamental ones e.g. Humanities and Sciences, (elementary and basic), (4) at all events, emphasis will be on matching the load to the capacity of the student and, in the process, stimulating the creative faculties of the student both in the humanities and sciences, (5) most important skill in handling the basic tool language-both for arts and science students should come first.

The long and short of this controversy is that there is nothing wrong with a system of examination that has been in vogue for more than two centuries in this subcontinent and produced brilliant scholars, leaders and other eminents. The wrong lies with us that we have made a horrible mess of our education — and examination.