

Law's Rigours And Students

Tightening of the law against examination offences by the Council of Ministers through an amendment of the Public Examination (offences) Act-1980 obviously purports to be a measure of last resort to deal with public examination irregularities. Over the years they have proliferated and involved not only students adopting unfair means in examinations, but, more atrociously, allegedly those outside students in the institutions that were/are charged with the responsibility of insuring a fair "examination" of examinees' merit or performance tested in a public examination. Leakage of question papers, supply of copy, rigging results and issuing fake certificates and such other corrupt practices ramped on a scale over the past dozen years or so that nothing short of rigorous punitive action under the law could stop them.

Relatively speaking, while students' unfair practices call for proper punitive treatment non-student series of offences that have been on record so far is a new phenomenon of administrative crime that had been very few and far between if at all, till before this unthinkable started to happen to make a mockery of public examinations.

Needless to say official or administrative improprieties were/are of a piece with the overall scene of corruption. And curbing this exceptionally erosive academic offence should be part of the total war already launched on corruption.

As for the law that would award punishment (jail term in particular) to an offending examinee, it raises some quite relevant questions: in the first place, there has never been anything like this in the past. We believe, (specially in the context of a student in his teens or just past his teens i.e., upto the S.S.C. stage, at least) more in reformation and reclamation than a form of penalty that will end up almost destroying him both mentally and physically.

Having served a term in jail he will shape more as a professional criminal than a student resuming his studies, after a career cut off so harshly. This harsh measure against student offence (in an examination, and not outside in society) seems to have been based on poor imagination and a poor knowledge of child or youth psychology. Measures like expulsion from school are punitive enough and quite constructive at that. Let us not be understood as defending unfair conduct of a student in an examination. But we are against his punishment by a term in jail.

The other important question that cannot be slurred over, in fairness to students now-a-days is: Are the schools, particularly the thousands of them outside the cities, run in the way they ought to be. For one thing, most of them are going without teachers in more than one subject. A particular shortage is that of English teachers in schools and madrashas—let alone the Intermediate or degree colleges. This is the sheer quantitative side of the teaching and examination question. Quality ? The less said the better.

For another education at school or post-school level seems to have, over the years, turned into an elitist privilege in this country. Students performing excellently are for the most part those from the few reputed good schools set up in the cities, as we have said. Paid private coaching which seems to have long replaced regular class-teaching is also included in the special advantage enjoyed only by the affluent in society. Three-fourths, if not more, of the schools in the country, the mofussil-based ones in special,—ill-equipped, ill-housed, un-or-poorly-staffed, with none in the administration bothering about it— are just an apology for schools. First, give them even a tolerably good school and a minimum standard of teaching— both in quantity and quality— and then promulgate the harshest of laws for examination offences, short of a sentence in jail.

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