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An invigilator's experience at DU-II

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Later I noticed an unshaven young man copying from his neighbour. I requested him three times to move to the next empty desk, and finally he got up and told me he will move to the front of the hall. I replied, "As you like!" I followed him to the front of the hall, where he complained to the other teachers that I was following him.

This student was convinced that it is the duty of an invigilator to obey the orders of the examinees, and when I tried to persuade him otherwise, he began to verbally abuse me. I told him that he was being impertinent, and at this point a bunch of men all sitting together at the back of the hall shouted threateningly at me, "Dhar! Dhar!" (Get him, get him).

Once a self-respecting and conscientious invigilator confronts such offensive conduct, he either boycotts invigilation duty in future, or makes himself present at the examination hall without resisting foul behaviour. Some weeks later I saw a large political procession on the campus, and suddenly the thought flashed in my mind that that culprit may be among this mob.

When I searched out of curiosity, sure enough, there he was, chest exposed, shouting at the top of his voice...leading the procession. He was campaigning in favour of everything that is right and good, and against injustice. On 15 July, I saw him smashing the windows of a classroom in my department.

MOST EXCITING
 The final day of the masters examination was the most exciting. The chief invigilator was Dr. Syed Anwar Hossain, a noted scholar of the Department of History, who is a handsome and mild-mannered gentleman; but he is also a strict disciplinarian. All the collapsible gates on the

stairs leading to the examination halls on the top floor of the arts building were locked at the start of the examination, and the keys were kept by Dr. Hossain himself.

It was as if we were under siege. Some tough guys came and asked the darwan to open the gates, saying that they were concerned about a friend inside the hall who was feeling nervous and so they wanted to enter to offer encouragement to him (such philanthropic and admirable comradeship!). Refused entry, they exploded some crackers and cocktails outside.

Suddenly some females were heard shrieking in a neighbouring hall: I rushed there to find that a political activist caught cheating, had threatened a teacher verbally. This was a relatively mild response. Some months earlier, during a meeting of the Dhaka University Teachers Association to discuss the law-and-order situation on the campus, a couple of teachers rushed in to inform us that an identified student of the Department of English had just pulled a gun on a lady teacher inside the examination hall. Everyone present pretended to be shocked, but no subsequent disciplinary action was taken against the criminal in our midst.

LEAST RESISTANCE
 When I entered another hall-room, I was surprised to find there was only one teacher to keep almost two hundred students under surveillance. Appropriately, he was following the line of least resistance, i.e. seeing and hearing no evil. With several years to my credit as an invigilator, I could now guess who were the "mastans": they were seated altogether, on one side of the room. I noticed two of them conducting a lengthy

dialogue in whispered tone. I came and stood right next to them, and they continued talking. They stared at me as if I was doing something odd. Then they laughed at me and said "Why are you wasting your time? Go away!"

I immediately called Dr. Hossain, who requested one of them to move to another desk but the offending student refused to budge. When he was threatened with disqualification, he finally shifted himself.

A few minutes later, I saw the deputy leader of the group referring to a piece of paper hidden beneath his thighs: he was wearing sunglasses to hide the movement of his eyes. I brought this to the notice of Dr. Hossain, who diplomatically sat down next to him.

Realizing he had been caught, he threw the paper out of the window, and then stood up to make a startling complaint to all present: "We do not object to being caught when we cheat, but what I do not like is backbone: I cannot tolerate such backbone."

After my initial bewilderment, I realized what this inarticulate semi-literate was trying to express through this inaccurate term "backbone." I deciphered that what he meant was that he did not like being caught cheating by surprise from behind.

With a brief pause to collect his stray thoughts, he continued: "During the two previous exams the invigilators were lenient, and in any case in the examination halls of the colleges affiliated with Dhaka University there is open cheating: therefore it is unfair of you to be so strict with us."

To put it bluntly, he was indirectly demanding the "legitimate" right to cheat.

VETERAN CHEAT
 The veteran cheats of Dhaka University have

many tricks, and some of these are not up their sleeves. A few of the male students have been caught hiding their cheating material inside their underwears. Some females sew pockets onto their petticoats to hide the copy papers beneath their saris, where male teachers are obviously not allowed to search, and one was recently caught hiding some paper inside her brassiere.

The cheats have become innovative and adventurous-like the international gold and drug smugglers.

In conclusion, examinations at Dhaka University are basically an exercise in crisis management. The aim is to hold the often postponed exams at any cost, with the minimum of trouble, in an attempt to untie the sessions jam. A significant number of teachers never turn up for invigilation duty, either because they do not need the small amount of money that is offered for the task, or because they are not willing to face the physical risk.

The majority of the teachers who do turn up for invigilation do not strictly undertake their responsibilities, in order to minimize the possibility of friction, and to discourage any mass boycott. For them, the completion of an exam is in itself the measure of success, notwithstanding the tricks that have been resorted to by some the examinees.

In any case, in most instances the degrees are being granted as a reward for memorization rather than intelligence. Quantity is a much more important yardstick for the final marks than quality. Such graduates will be a liability rather than an asset for the future elite, ensuring accelerated retrogression for our society.

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