

Cheating At Examinations: Some Pertinent Questions

While along with the rest of the community, we do deplore, and have already condemned malpractices at the current SSC examinations, there are, we believe, some serious questions in this connexion which need to be probed and weighed. Over five thousand candidates have so far been expelled from examination centres, and the number of teachers and invigilators evicted after being found guilty of aiding and abetting students taking the exams also totals more than a couple of hundred. We think that by the time the exam concludes, figures on both counts will have risen considerably. At a number of centres, law-enforcement authorities responsible for expulsions have come under attack from mobs of unruly youth who do not want their friends inside the examination halls to be interfered with.

It appears that Authority's decision this year to enforce discipline more strictly than before has not only not been appreciated, but has been interpreted by a numerous section of the public as 'heinous' conspiracy to thwart the aspirations of young men and women. Apparently, this is a sad reversal of moral values, a pointer to a cataclysmic decline in our ethical standards. But to isolate these young people and their supporters for indictment will, in our judgment, obscure society's responsibility in the matter.

Is this manifestation of dishonesty, this anxiety at any cost to obtain or quality for a certificate which will be a passport to employment, not a reflection of society's failure, first to provide jobs for an increasingly large body of youth, and, secondly, to impart to them the training and education which will develop the moral values that we want enforced? That it should have been found necessary to take action against some teachers and invigilators underlines the sad truth that the young people we condemn for their lack of ethical scruple are in the hands of a generation of instructors who themselves are devoid of principle. We frequently receive complaints, well substantiated with proof, that the text-books prescribed and taught in schools nowadays are replete with repudiations of morality, which cannot but have an impact on the psychology of the young. When boys and girls are called upon to work out calculations on the amount of fluid to be added to milk for the sake of higher profit, the assumption communicated and imbibed is that adulteration by itself is not an immoral activity. When text-book writers distort history to paint persons known to have been dishonest and unscrupulous as heroes, the inference naturally drawn is that the only measure of morality is success. We have heard it dinned into the ears of our children that means are of no importance in relation to ends, and that once an end has been achieved, it does not matter how or by what devices the goal has been attained.

What we are witnessing is the cumulative impact of decades of neglect, in the course of which we have been content to let things drift. Not only has the value of honest living been decried, but by turning a blind eye to plain instances of chicanery, deceit, bribery in the social life, we have practically forced the young to conclude that it is the certificates they succeed in dangling before us that matter and not the quality of their education. Nor have steps been taken on an adequate scale in any department of life to train youth for practical vocations. On the contrary the excessive emphasis being placed on certificates rather than on fitness for any kind of work in our choice of appointments is daily making things worse.

The tragic spectacle currently in progress of young men and women struggling by any means available to them to obtain passports to a reasonably secure future needs therefore to be viewed in a large and wide perspective. One-sided condemnations will help little.