

Quality Education For Quality Everywhere

In areas like health and education or the economy, experimenting with half-or-ill-baked ideas of reform may cause more damage than the same can in other relatively less important sectors. And it must be reckoned as one of the most ill-placed feat of adventurism to go ahead with them even when the disastrous results of the reform or reforms in question become crystal clear. Fake drugs or imitations in the pharmaceutical industry, for instance, and the harm they would do to the users are limited to the body, with fatal results at times.

But when they extend, among other fields, to education they may damage the mind—and the soul, and may cumulatively mentally cripple a whole generation. Right on hand is the case of objective types of questions for the SSC examinees. They have boosted the grades in the results, from 30/35 pc to 70/75 pc, may be, to the delight of those whose fertile imagination set in train the reform in the SSC examination system. The results were published about a month ago.

It has since raised storms of protest over the question: how far the artificially inflated rate of success has been a measure of real progress for those who have done so well in their examination. We have already commented on this subject and the reason we take it up again is to warn in the main against our reformers in rushing to implement the rather academic brainwaves and do irreparable harm to a whole generation. There is no blinking the fact that the so-called reform (the questions bank as is now known to all) has completely misfired and there should be no two opinions on the need to scrap it—and to return to the traditional subjective style of assessing a student's knowledge of the subject, and merit.

The reported thinking on the part of the authorities to restrict the objective type to 30% and the subjective to 75% of marks is on quite right lines, rather than reintroducing the old system in toto. The date set for this to start is reportedly 1996, of which school managements should take full note and set about making the pupils mentally prepared for the proposed amendment. More crucial however is the other general question: emphasis on quality rather than a mere degree. This has to be pushed with all resources at our command.

Education planners and policy makers should not stop short at partially reverting to the traditional system. A lot in addition has to be done, namely, the pains taken by teachers to help students develop the power of self-expression. And that should start right from class VII, if not earlier, from class V.

Both commentators and critics are at one on this line of activity to be enforced in school education. Policy-makers and planners and central and district education authorities must see to it that the goals aimed at by returning to the old system are fully, or near-fully achieved.

Neither could the fact be questioned that quality in education will bring quality practically to all other sectors and to all professions. And, better late than never, our students have also started realising that with a low standard of educational capability, they are seriously handicapped also in the career or professional sense. In science and technology and the social sciences the horizon has long become global rather than national or provincial. Higher education now means global competition as never before. This should be hammered into the minds both of teachers, students, reformers, planners and policy makers.

We have toyed enough with amateurish ideas and reforms in such nationally crucial sectors as education for long. Among other distractions, party politics has done as much as it could to disrupt higher education. It is time all concerned did their honest best to disentangle education from politics. Even certain policy decisions such as tampering with the old SSC examination or reforms in the degree course (dropping English as a compulsory subject) has been prompted largely by political motives—and that at a heavy cost to the nation.

It is also time—after long years of disarray caused by various factors—to see that sagging standards in education have created a yawning socio-cultural vacuum, which is yet to be acknowledged at government, political leadership—and people's level. The last mentioned, though, being at the receiving end are befuddled at best by the goings-on in education, law & order and politics. If these three tend to go wrong, nothing is likely to go right. That is a point political leaders on either side of the fence are to answer if it is.

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