CHAPTER EIGHT

THE TOTALITARIANISM OF THE ELITE

To study the political dynamics of public examinations in India, we must, first of all, try to understand the politico-administrative infrastructure in which they are supposed to operate. We shall call it 'bureautchnocracy' after Tesconi and Moris. It is, indeed, a marriage between bureaucratic form and technological process. It provides the necessary wherewithal for the present system of examinations to flourish and to create its own contradictions.

6.1 Bureautchnocracy and Examinations

Traditionally, bureaucracies are organized social systems wherein tasks are assigned to individuals and to groups so as to attain, efficiently and economically and through the functional coordination of all activities, the objectives previously agreed on. Their basic features are: a hierarchical series of offices, each containing an area of imputed competence, responsibility and status; an impersonal routinized structure defined by systematic rules; prescribed relations between various offices involving a considerable degree of formality; and systematic rules aimed at minimizing friction. Similarly, technology is the systematic application of scientific and other organized knowledge to practical tasks. Combining

these basic descriptions of bureaucracy and technology, we may say that bureaucratization is a pattern of social management wherein the hierarchical, pyramidal, depersonalized model of human organization (bureaucracy) is linked with standardized rationalized means (technology) with the overall aim of achieving control, flexibility and efficiency in reaching some commercial or social objective.\(^1\) By its intrinsic nature, bureaucratization depends, more than anything else, on quantification for the purposes of decision making. Undoubtedly, without quantification, it would be lacking in 'technological driveness', and would, most likely collapse.\(^2\) We find bureaucratization at work in India in almost all spheres: government administration, production management, educational organization etc. It builds up and sustains pressures for standardization and uniformity. We can look for such pressures in mass production, advertising, corporate organization and educational practices.

The institutionalization of examinations is the response of our education system to bureaucratization pressures for quantification and standardization. The Boards of School Education and Universities act as agencies for the standardization of educational products and their

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1. Ibid., p.7.
2. Ibid., p.64.
certification for the use of society. The pride of place that examinations have is, therefore, largely due to the growth of bureautchnocratic culture.

One can find this phenomenon almost everywhere. Weber¹, for instance, noted long ago that civil service reforms gradually imported expert training and public examinations into the United States. The increased bureaucratization of administration enhanced the importance of such examinations in England. In China, the attempt to replace the semi-patrimonial and ancient bureaucracy brought examinations to the forefront. The situation in India is slightly different. Bureaucracy and public examinations were born here like Siamese twins and continue to remain joined. Both are the outcome of the British reign in India.

9.2 The Ideological Support

The present system of public examinations in India could not have obviously survived without the ideological support of bureautchnocracy. To understand the role and political implications of examinations, one has, therefore, to look at them in the light of their ideological parameters.

Ideology is the conditioning part of a social organization. It operates as the controlling conceptual

frame by way of which those who identify with it organize and live out their life activities. We can clearly identify 'scientific liberalism' as the dominant ideology on which Indian bureaucratocracy is based. It is not much different from what Unesco prefers to call "scientific humanism" which seems to have been readily accepted by the National Council of Education Research and Training in developing the new school curriculum for the country. But it is a shade different from classical liberalism which, since the days of Magna Carta, has been the political philosophy of most of the participatory type of democracies in the world. Classical liberalism emphasizes the rights and liberties of individual citizens. In educational reform it stresses that schools of every type fulfill their proper purpose in so far as they foster the free growth of individuality, helping every boy and girl to achieve the highest degree of individual development of which he or she is capable in and through the life of a society. Scientific liberalism is a queer combination of science on the one hand and modernized version of liberalism on the

1. Charles A. Tesconi (Jr) and Van Cleve Moris, op. cit., p.97.
other. To be more specific, the liberal thinking that goes into scientific liberalism is not, like classical liberalism, radically individualistic and hostile to governmental and/or bureaucratic regulation. On the contrary, though attaching itself to individualism, it is quite comfortable with government and bureaucratic regulation.\(^1\)

On a philosophical plane, scientific liberalism is close to rationalism with its emphasis on scientific method based on observation and experiment. It has an overriding faith in science and its methods. The notion that science can be the central organizing agency for modern society is thus a distinctive feature of scientific liberalism. This ideology with its emphasis on scientific method with concomitant quantification does not only support the development of examinations in our society but also justifies a greater emphasis on their use.

The other ideological undercurrent which apparently supports examinations is quite political in nature. India has accepted the democratic ideals of 'Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity'. The Constitution of India lays down as a

\(^1\) Charles A. Tesconi (Jr) and Van Cleve Morris, \textit{op.cit.}, p.97-8.
These democratic ideals necessitate the use of some neutral method of selection which could be an easily acceptable means of assessing people regardless of their religion, caste, race, etc. to ensure equality of opportunity.

Thus it would seem that public examinations have a strong ideological base. They germinate in scientific liberalism and are nurtured by democratic idealism. The conditioning is so strong that they have become a force to reckon with. We do not see their inner contradictions or inherent wickedness. On the face of it, they serve the imperatives of bureautechnocracy and even appear democratic but in reality they create a totalitarianism of the elite. As we shall see, they work against democracy and are even anti-man, the former because of a hidden political paradox and the latter because of their misuse.

1. The Constitution of India, Article 16.
8.3 The Political Paradox

The political dynamics of public examinations has created a number of inherent contradictions. Superficially, they appear to be compatible with the requirements of democratic idealism, but in reality they undermine it. While we expect them to support democracy, they only lead to a totalitarianism of the elite. While they seem to ensure equality of opportunity, in reality they can be seen as means of monopolization. They create their own stratification in society through their degrees, diplomas and certificates. Such certificates encourage their holders to hope for upward mobility through marriage and employment. They also encourage claims for a respectable remuneration rather than remuneration for work done, claims for assured advancement and above all, claims to monopolize socially and economically advantageous positions.

Public examinations in India give the impression that theirs is the most democratic selection process of all. This process relies largely on achievement and aptitude examinations used by our schools and colleges and specialized examinations used by employment agencies both government and non-government (with which we are not much concerned here). Supposedly, the ultimate tests of merit, they neither seek to identify nor judge a child on the basis
of his race, religion or origin. But this is never actually true. The examinations merely appear to replace the particularistic by universalistic principles of selection. They do not give all students the same chance. Markedly biased according to a youngster's social and economic background, they invariably favour the advantaged and discriminate against the deprived. This is partly revealed in Edwin Harper's critique of the present system in which he declares that the traditional essay type examinations in India are undemocratic. Why? Because the traditional type of examination puts a heavy emphasis on purely verbal skill even when supposedly measuring ability in such subjects as science, mathematics or economics. Now it is well-known that linguistic skill is highly related to socio-economic status. Thus the exclusive use of essay-type examination strongly favours upper class students.¹ The argument has a wider application. The die will always be loaded in favour of the dominant social group unless we can ensure culture-free tests which is almost an impossibility. It is, therefore, important to note that recruitment by examination would probably encourage rather than hamper selection from the upper caste families. They are so impressed with the necessity of giving their sons

the best possible education that we need be under no apprehension about their obtaining the lion's share. Whatever raises the standard of education in a profession gives an advantage to the upper class. It serves to reinforce the point that the system of selection by examination is important as a mechanism of social recruitment. It widens but does not basically subvert the structure of recruitment as it had been under the system of direct patronage.¹

So what is objectionable about public examinations in India is their tendency to encourage monopoly by the elitist group that has been schooled and is declared qualified. Even if the system of examinations is so designed that advantage is shared equally by all classes on the basis of qualifications, selection based on such qualifications or abilities as assessed by examinations can be objected to on more basic grounds. There are dangers in the selection of the able but badly educated. T.S. Elliot has suggested in his Notes Towards the Definition of Culture that an elite may have intelligence but lack culture. We would agree with Peter Buckman² that a society that decides that the best jobs should go to those with the

largest number of certificates (regardless of the relevance of those certificates to the jobs available) and which assigns the granting of such certificates exclusively to the schools, would be considered totalitarian or (worse) inefficient and corrupt. We may claim to be democratic but our methods of selection through public examinations inevitably end up in just the opposite.

Besides monopoly masquerading as fair contest, public examinations also introduce a hidden political paradox as a result of the conflict between excellence emphasized by them and the ideal of equality fostered by a democratic society. It is a clash between emphasis on individual performance which is the cornerstone of examinations and restraints on individual performance that any democracy entails. This is what generates the democratic dilemma and leads to an ambivalence in our society. Max Weber rightly felt that democracy takes an ambivalent stand in the face of examinations as it does in the face of all the phenomena of bureaucracy.¹

Egalitarianism is an article of faith to a democracy. It would insist that no man should be regarded as better than another in any dimension and there should be no

differences in status whatever. Believers in democracy cannot
dwell on the differences in capacity among men. Democratic
philosophy has tended to ignore such differences where
possible, and to belittle them where it could not ignore
them. At the same time, however, it would like to emphasize
and nurture excellence. The importance given to excellence,
however necessary it may be for the well being of the society, must
produce inequalities. The reason is simple. For every man
enlivened by excellence ten are deadened by mediocrity and the
object of good government is to ensure that the latter do not
usurp the place in the social order which should belong to
their betters. This is the seeming paradox of our
bureautechnocracy which while recognising excellence tries
to ensure equality of opportunity. The Government is supposed
to be run by those who have merit as determined by public
examinations. But in a democracy the real power lies with
those who may not have merit but have the right to franchise and
send their representatives to the Parliament or State
Assemblies. Because of their sheer numbers, they have the
power to make rules and regulations to check excessive
emphasis on individual performance. It is an anomalous
situation in which impressive opportunities are given to the
able individuals to rise to the top but those who do not
rise are given wide latitude in writing rules which hem them
in when they get there.
8.4 Legitimation of Exclusion

This totalitarianism of the elite is sustained by public examinations. They act as a device for exclusion almost everywhere. The French Minister of Public Instruction had commissioned Binet to develop a testing procedure that could help to identify students whose academic aptitudes were so low as to necessitate their placement in special schools. The bureau-technocracy discovered that the innocent looking test could be used to detect the genetically inferior, whose reproduction was a menace to the future of the state. The result of mental testing in America became a convenient handle for selective immigration. This helped in raising the eugenic spectre of a long term decline in the level of American intelligence as a result of continued immigration and racial mongrelization with certain countries. Examinations provided the basis for the Immigration Act 1924 in USA.¹ Nazis in Germany used examinations to justify their killings. They demonstrated the use of examinations for physical exclusion. It is interesting that Nazis, influenced by the belief that the stupid are a detrimental influence, did kill some retardates. It is fair to suggest that they were carrying to its psychological extreme the common attitude of Western Europe and American Civilization towards retardates, just as in killing Jews, they carried to its psychological extreme

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a common anti-Semitic attitude of the time.¹

The position in India is more or less similar to that in America, although for different reasons. That is why examinations become an easy tool in the hands of bureautecnocracy and the schools to legitimate the process of exclusion. It is the exclusion of the unwanted, non-elitist and less dominant social group. Take any public examination for testing achievement in general, for selecting students for admission to professional courses or for scouting for talent. The results are always in favour of the urban as compared to the rural and middle class as compared to the lower class. Education everywhere emphasizes the value system of dominant groups, and examinations have only fallen in. It is important to realize that social selection disguised as academic selection is a process at work in all schools. We can make ourselves aware of the problem and we can take measure to contain it, but we cannot dispose of it altogether. For just as social classes represent distinctive ways of life, so do our schools and teachers who serve in them. We select the most likely candidates for success in the way of life that our schools represent.

On the top of it, while anyone would detest the methods of examination of overt exclusion, we have been so much conditioned by bureautecnocracy that we accept exclusion done by examinations without a murmur. Although not much different

from the guillotine or electroshock, they are more subtle in manner and method. They differ from the former in form rather than content. In fact, examinations are more sophisticated and disguised forms of exclusion. The consequences of the use of these unobtrusive but effective exclusion devices is not only to limit the enrolments of the closed systems but to produce a culturally and socially homogeneous student body within the system.¹

But is it that exclusion is inevitable in any selection, in the sense that no selection is possible without involving some sort of exclusion. This is what the modern bureautechnocracy would have us believe. It has to be rejected as an utterly false notion. Nothing could be further from truth. Much would, of course, depend upon the anticipated shape of future society, and the consequent management of education aiming at it. It would indeed be a matter of political ideology but the alternative of selection by retention and direction exists. The contrast between selection by exclusion and selection by retention and direction is clear. In the former, examinations would aim at convincing the people that they do not deserve to be selected and hence have been rejected while in the latter, there is no question of excluding

them but the emphasis is on guiding them for a proper choice. The worst consequence of selection by exclusion is that it leads to a closed social system which offers limited opportunity. It excludes large number of potential pupils. Its selection techniques are complex and by nature discriminatory, hence of doubtful value for the selection of competent students. It sets high standards for entry but often permits routine and low standards of performance after entry. But there are no such constraints in the alternative method - no wastage either. The emphasis is on proper allocation and utilization of all available human resources. The theoretical results of the application of one type or the other in the management of education are not only clear, but strongly supportive of selection by direction.¹

8.5 The Structure of Warming Up and Cooling Out

The totalitarianism of the elite and the concomitant legitimation of exclusion needed for its perpetuation also needs the support of a structure of warming up and cooling out of various segments of the society.

¹. Ibid., p.114.
Every situation of opportunity is also a situation of denial and failure. Democratic societies need not only motivate achievement but also mollify those who are denied it in order to sustain motivation in the face of disappointment and to deflect resentment. This is done through the educational systems which must strive, on the one hand, to 'warm up' some of the students, and on the other, to 'cool out' those who are rejected. Those who are warmed up receive further and more specialized training, and those who are cooled out are sent out, more or less, directly into the labour market. Throughout the system, then, a need exists for the simultaneous provision of warming up and cooling out experiences.\footnote{Earl Hopper, "Educational Systems and Selected Consequences of Patterns of Mobility and Non-mobility in Industrial Societies - A Theoretical Discussion", in Richard Brown (ed), Knowledge, Education and Culture Change, (London: Tavistock, 1973), p.31.} That is why we call this structural contradiction as the warming up: cooling out dilemma.

The situation is definitely quite complicated in India which because of its stage of development and political system has accepted open access as an educational necessity in spite of its conflicts with the maintenance of quality. This conflict between open-door admissions and performance of high quality often means a wide discrepancy between the hopes of entering students and the means of their realization. That
is where public examinations with their simultaneous warming up and cooling out become important. Their effect on it is highly complex for it depends on a host of factors like the structure of status in the society, the nature of the ideology of implementation, the ideology of legitimation of selection, the degree of early formal specialization and differentiation of routes. Hopper has enquired theoretically into the possible effects of such factors on the resolution of the dilemma. Applying his theorems on warming up and cooling out, we see that public examinations help the elitist group in India.

As far as the social structure is concerned, it cannot be gainsaid that Indian society has a high status rigidity. Also, because of the institutionalization of examinations and participatory democracy adopted by India after Independence, we have learnt to live with a combination of contest and egalitarianism in spite of its political contradictions. Out of the ideologies of the legitimation of selection, it is a combination of paternalistic and meritocratic principles with a predominance of the former. As merit is determined through examinations which are always loaded in favour of the upper classes they only help in justifying the particularistic selections in terms of society's needs for people with diffuse skills and certain ascribed characteristics in order that society may be led by

1. Ibid., pp. 40-53.
the most suitable people. Furthermore, anyone can easily see that the education system in India has a fairly high degree of centralization and standardization. The schools and colleges have little freedom in the choice of curriculum, methods of instruction, textbooks or evaluation procedures which are laid down by the School Boards or Universities. With strong Directorates of Education even administrative flexibility is curtailed. As far as students are concerned, although the new 10+2 pattern envisages postponement of specialization and differentiation of routes, it is not yet fully accepted in all the states in the country. Thus in terms of Hopper’s analysis the situation is loaded in favour of warming up the upper classes and cooling out the lower classes. Even the combination of contest and egalitarian ideologies of implementation does not help to relieve it. That is perhaps what is needed in a totalitarianism of the elite.

8.6 Invasion of Privacy

Public examinations also constitute an unwarranted invasion of individual rights. We shall specially mention the right to privacy which has been enshrined by the United Nations in its Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Views about the nature of privacy and its value in a society have become more sophisticated. The need of the individual to reserve for himself and his intimates certain features of his own private life has gradually been recognized as an important aspect of
personality. If privacy is non-existent the individuality is seriously diminished, the quality of life is impaired and important aspects of personality development associated with selective and appropriate revelation of one's self to intimate acquaintances are lost.

Privacy may be looked upon as 'the right of the individual to decide for himself how much he will share with others his thoughts, his feelings, and the facts of his personal life. It is a right that is essential to ensure dignity and freedom of self-determination. It is the right to one's own beliefs, and to express thoughts and share feelings without fear of observation or publicity beyond that which one seeks or acquires in'. It may be added that privacy is defined not only in terms of the right of the individual to reveal or to withhold items of information about himself but also in terms of his ability to maintain control over the dissemination of information that he has provided for a specific purpose so that it may not be used for any other.

The question of the invasion of privacy by public examinations is worth raising. It is no doubt more pronounced in the case of psychological tests which many times ask intimate type of questions. But the way the results of

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public examinations are disseminated and wantonly used by the society for various purposes amounts to no less than encroachment into one's privacy.

The basic question is whether a person's academic achievement or ability is a purely private affair into which no one has the right to interfere. Or does the school have any right to disclose his level of achievement? Unfortunately any measure of achievement is also a measure of stupidity which affects a man's honour and reputation - obviously something very private to a person which he would like to protect. Stupidity is like sexual potency or even love affair which everybody would like to keep to himself. It would, undoubtedly, be revolting to human sensibilities if society were to devise ways and means of measuring sexual potency and making it public for whoever may like to make use of it. Is it not as serious to declare people stupid as it is to declare them impotent? In any case it is not unfair to believe that examinations do try to reveal something that is very private to us. They bring out in measured form the level at which our mind works and possibly the way it reacts in different situations. With the possibility of unholy comparisons being made with others, the certificates, the grades or the 'divisions' become infringements of human rights.

The proponents of public examinations may like to argue that privacy may have to be sacrificed for the larger
interests of society. They may say that public interest is sometimes of foremost concern and if achievement level of students is being revealed, it is because it helps the society to arrange better training for them, utilize its resources better and allocate positions to its members on a rational footing. But, in the face of the totalitarianism of the elite created by examinations, preference to societal interests is not justified. Indeed if the right to privacy is to be preserved inspite of examinations, we have at least to evolve a new method of reporting results.

8.7 The Trivialization of Man

Bureautechnocracy has, however, ensured acceptance of this antidemocratic invasion into privacy by trivializing man. It has evolved a new conception in which man has been reconceived in such a way that inquiry into his conduct and conclusions reached by such inquiry, could be made to fit the pattern of defensible truth in the empirical sense.1 Bureautechnocracy has reduced man into the triviality of an inanimate object with no shred of humanity. It is man sans individuality.

Man can be known by studying his experience in the same way as we study a frog or a star - that is, by assuming that all phenomena somehow hang together in a system of cause and effect and mutual inter-relatedness. What can be known of a man is only that which can be known of an object, itself a system which is behaving in a larger phenomenal system. Man, as individual, because unknowable is written off as not worth knowing. Man do not differ in respect of their inner selves but only in terms of the numbers that can be assigned to them.2

1. Tesconi and Moris, op. cit., p.122.
2. Ibid., p.163.
Consequently certain things about man as an object of study have to be ignored. While some other things are given high priority. Highest on the priority list is the overt behaviour or that which can be reduced to some kind of quantification. This is the familiar Watsonian world of behaviourism which is the sheet-anchor of all testing. Examinations could easily grow in such a situation, and man, trivialized as he is, will not dare to question their role or their invasion into his privacy.

In accepting this new approach towards man, we have been rather overwhelmed by 'rat' psychology which asserts that there is no difference between the lower animals and man but only a difference in degree of complexity - he is only a more complex physico-chemical system. The bitter harvest of all this is the growing sensation of being used by the system. The system uses us in our work. We are carefully trained for our jobs; but when we perform them, our skills and functions - rather than our personal characteristics - become the defining qualities of our presence in the world. And finally we know, as both consumers and producers, we are replaceable. The system qua system needs people, but it does not absolutely need me. Not only are we alienated, and isolated from each other, but indeed from ourselves. Our self-esteem is wounded; our quest for personal identity
lashes out incoherently for symbolic supports. It is as if man has been completely dehumanized. When he has been reduced to a statistic and is almost a non-entity, he does not care for the anti-democratic nature of examinations. They appear to him as scientific methods of educational measurement even when they are de-personalizing and de-individualizing him.

9.8 Conclusion

In sum, the politics of examinations should be seen in the context of the current bureautechnocratic culture. This is the culture in which they have thriven and grown into a sub-culture of their own. The reason may well be that they seem to suit the ideological fibre of bureautechnocracy comprising scientific liberalism and democratic idealism. But they end up in creating a totalitarianism of the elite.

The public examinations in India have introduced a veritable political paradox because of the clash between equality and excellence; between contest and monopoly, and between motivation of the individual to achieve and curbs on it put by selective allocation. They also meet the inescapable consequence of every success of a few being accompanied by failure of many by providing for the simultaneous warming up and cooling out of society. An analysis of various aspects of the Indian polity like status rigidity, use of

1. Ibid., p. 162.
egalitarian ideology in selection and paternalistic ideology in legitimation, fairly high degree of centralization of education system and early formal specialization for students leads us to the conclusion that the system is loaded in favour of warming up of upper classes and cooling out of lower classes.

But there is more to the system of public examinations than sheer political paradox or democratic ambivalence. They are downright anti-democratic and anti-man. Selection through them is only disguised exclusion. On the one hand, they infringe upon inalienable human rights like the right to privacy; on the other hand, they trivialize man himself. They become the tools of de-individualizing, de-personalizing and even de-humanizing man.

So the real bane of public examinations is the enslavement of man. We have to evolve a new social structure but at the same time we have to think of a new approach towards education in general and examinations in particular. Education has to be oriented towards liberation, as visualized by President Nyerere. It has to liberate both the mind and the body of man. It has to make him more of a human being, because he is aware of his potential as a human being and is in a position of life-enhancing relationship with himself, his neighbour and his environment.
Education has, therefore, to enable a man to throw off his
ingediments to freedom which restrict his full physical and
mental development. In the same strain we can say that
examinations should also be oriented towards the liberation
of man. They should be the handmaid of the new education
and not tools of the totalitarianism of the elite.