ABSTRACT

The crisis in education has generated a lively debate and has
given rise to an impressive international literature. Prominent
among those who have contributed to it are Ivan Illich and his
followers who, by now, themselves constitute a veritable school of
deschoolers. At the centre of their case for deschooling is the
assertion that formal schooling has outgrown its usefulness and
has become an obstacle to social change. A part of their
critique has also been the irrelevance of the current examination
procedures. But this issue has never been examined in extenso,
which we propose to do here. What has to be recognized is that
we are living in not only a schooled society but also in an
examining society which has come to believe that man is an
animal that needs examinations.

2. To delimit the scope of this essay, we make a distinction
between the process of examining per se and its effects on the
outside world. The former includes internalities like planning,
administration and execution of examinations. The latter covers
externalities which deal with the interaction of the process of
examining with external institutions or agencies which may be
social, political or economic. They constitute the subject of
our discussion.

3. It is noted that the educational research in India is of
very recent origin, the first Ph.D in education being awarded
by Bombay University only in 1943. Interestingly, it was
in the field of examinations. After Independence there has
been a gradual increase in Ph.D and institutional research in this area. Out of 127 studies during the period 1944-75, 105 were completed during the short period of 1960-74. Even during this period, only achievement tests - particularly their efficiency aspects - have attracted appreciable attention. Indeed, an over-view of literature shows that the externalities which are under focus in this essay have been neglected by thinkers and researchers.

4. A dig into the historical records shows that examining as such has been in existence in India since very ancient times. Besides references in the Vedas, there is evidence of examinations being used for admissions at Nalanda and Vikramasila Universities. But the indigenous examinations were informal, uni-dimensional and individualized. It was during the British period that their transformation into an institution began. They became more formal, rigid, impersonal and began serving many purposes, some of them other than educational. This institutionalization under the British took place mainly because as colonizers they naturally needed some control mechanism. Therefore, they tried to transplant the contemporary practices in England without much regard to the socio-economic conditions in India.

5. But along with the growth of the institution of examinations, there grew some dissatisfaction with it too. It had started during the British regime under the influence of a similar disaffection in England. In the post-Independence era, the
disillusionment grew into an examination reform movement. But it never went beyond advocating psychometric improvements. We, however, question the very relevance of public examinations.

6. Firstly, the system of public examinations in India contributes to pedagogical inversions by making certain assumptions about the nature of educational achievement and the value of learning experiences. It creates an inverted perspective about academic work so much so that learning is misdirected, teaching becomes unprincipled and the curriculum is crippled through the erosion of educational objectives. The evidence available with regard to examinations in India, as well as other countries, goes to show that they have adversely affected education by curbing teachers' initiative by stereotyping the curriculum, by promoting mechanical and lifeless methods of teaching, by discouraging all spirit of experimentation and by encouraging a concern with the trivialities in education.

7. Secondly, it is difficult to establish or even assume a cause and effect relationship between education development and the economy. The imperatives of imitative industrialization have only generated a situation in which education which is presumed to facilitate development can operate in effect only as a screening process to allow those who are needed by the petro-chemical complexes or modern technology and consign others to the limbo of unemployment. Examinations
act as a tool of this screening process.

8. Thirdly, examinations have created a 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. More than that, public examinations are down-right anti-democratic and counter-humanistic. The selection they help make is only disguised exclusion. They become the tools of de-humanizing, de-individualizing and de-personalizing man.

9. Fourthly, on sociological grounds examinations have necessitated the adoption of the cult of testocracy. This has created a triangular contest between three competing principles: testocracy, democracy and hereditary stratification. There is a confluence of contradictions which gives the impression of sociological disequilibrium. The Indian society has, however, met it with an eclectic response by demarcating different areas for different principles. Hereditary stratification continues to dominate in social activities. Testocracy has been carrying the day in employment and admissions to higher education. Democratic egalitarianism is professedly fully implemented in legal and civil matters.

10. But in ultimate analysis, there is no escape from this situation. In spite of their irrelevance, examinations will continue to flourish, it seems, although in a substantially changed condition and will possibly be supplemented by alternative strategies by 2001 AD.