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3. Examination System

Much has been written by various official committees on the ills of our examination system. The major, well-understood defect of the examination system is that it focuses on children's ability to reproduce information to the exclusion of the ability to apply concepts and information on unfamiliar, new problems, or simply to think. The public examinations taken after Classes X and XII have assumed the importance of major events which have a set character or culture of their own. The awe they generate, the responses they trigger, and the kind of preparation they demand have all got so entrenched into the social lore that minor improvements in the style of question papers do not make difference to the dominant influence that the examination system has on the processes of learning and teaching. The influence is so strong that schools start holding a formal written examination several years prior to Class X indeed, in the primary classes in many parts of the country. And children receive the message almost as soon as they start attending school that the only thing which matters here is one's performance in the examination.

Both the teacher and the parents constantly reinforce the fear of examination and the need to prepare for it in the only manner that seems practical, namely, by memorising a whole lot of information from the textbooks and guidebooks. Educated parents, who have

themselves gone through examinations, and the uneducated parents, whose knowledge of the examination system is based on social lore share the belief that what really matters in education is the score one gets in the final examination. This belief is undoubtedly rooted in social or market reality. Percentage of marks obtained in the high school, higher secondary, or BA/B.Sc examinations is what ultimately matters in determining a student's chance of being called for an interview for admission to a university or for employment. Since the examination score is what a candidate carries with him or her as the key authoritative record of school or college performance, higher level institutions or employing agencies understandably rely on it. It is a process in which no beginning or end can be meaningfully established. Changing the system of examination in a structural or even in a merely procedural sense does not require that a source outcome or cause-effect relationship be established; yet, the examination system goes on, apparently with the help of energies or rationales located in the system of education itself.