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Limited usefulness and relevance of coaching for competitive examinations

There is a proverb in Hindi which when translated into English, reads 'Even a refuse-dumping place has in time a good day'. Quite a few competent teachers are now making money from the coaching institutes/colleges/schools run for the coaching of students for the competitive examinations for the entrance to Medical/Engineering Colleges. Such coaching schools have mushroomed in the towns of Northern India and probably elsewhere too. Barring some known and established institutions which provide coaching on a planned scale, most of them are run just as class-room teaching where the number of students may vary from ten to some two hundred in a class. Some institutions provide coaching by post and also serve as examining bodies to let the candidates know where they stand. The fees for established institutes for any type of coaching may vary from Rs 30,000 to Rs 50,000. For most of the coaching schools (incidentally good!), the fees may vary from Rs 3000 to Rs 10,000 for a package teaching of a student in a group for three days in a week spread over about six months. Parents in their eagerness to see their wards become engineers/doctors somehow manage to pay the high fees, send them to these coaching schools and consider their job to be over. The wards too in a rat race not to lag behind go to these colleges/schools just to satisfy themselves that they have taken the coaching. How many parents are competent to assess whether their wards get the return for their money they spend, whether their wards are improving and preparing themselves with a competitive spirit? How

many of the candidates are competent enough to make an assessment of themselves at any time during the coaching and modify and improve their method of preparation and study?

The fact is that most of these institutes are no better than providing good classroom teaching. If students go to coaching institutes, either they are not serious in their class-rooms, or the class-room teaching itself is not up to the mark. In case the latter is true, are the parents aware of this? Why don't they collectively bring this to the notice of the school-administration? Moreover, the coaching done in these institutes is a misnomer. It is no coaching at all. (It would be known as coaching if it is one to one coaching or one teacher for two/three students.) In such a situation the fees paid by the parents to an institute or to a teacher is a largesse.

Unfortunately the parents and their wards only superficially know that these entrance examinations are competitive. They are not only competitive, but *highly* competitive. Candidates securing more than 90% marks at the Intermediate level are not sure of their admission to the Medical and Engineering Colleges through the entrance tests. The preparation for these examinations has become highly technical. It requires intelligence, hard work and extremely methodical and regular study. Answering question papers require quick reflexes of the mind and good memory. With these stringent requirements, candidates securing less than 90% marks (say between 85 to 90%) at the Intermediate level, have to

examine themselves very objectively whether they, with all resources, can rise up to the competitive level. The parents feel if they spend money, encourage their wards, and their wards work hard, it may be possible for their wards to fulfil their dreams, but the parents forget that there is a limit to the extent of improvement in the preparedness of their wards for the examination and this depends on the capacity of the wards. I feel that it is the competence (intelligence plus capacity) of the candidate rather than coaching which takes him/her through the test because coaching is a common denominator for all who take to coaching and succeed. Parents are therefore advised to get their wards objectively assessed by a couple of teachers and apply their own mind before pushing them for any coaching for the entrance tests for admission to Engineering/Medical Colleges. It is better for candidates of lesser merit to look for alternative avenues.

The two professions, Engineering and Medicine, are highly specialized and those who do not have a temperament to serve them with devotion, cannot be made to acquire the required attitude even by study and training. Our science-management in higher education must make scientific service more respectable, lucrative, challenging and self-satisfying so as to stop the drain of the cream of scientific talent to the two professions.

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