
EDITORIAL

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IIT JEE and College Entrance Examinations

IIT-JEE is indeed a most challenging college entrance test in the country and is known for its largely unblemished record for about half a century. It is considered a challenge to crack by many a bright student of the final year in School, a cherished dream for most and is regarded as one exam that will ensure a bright career - an obsession, particularly among the middle class. Like all entrance examinations it is simply a tool to select a few for admission when the number aspirants exceed the capacity. It does not really test the aptitude of the candidates; neither does it try to know their motivations for the programs. Just a simple test, perhaps to some extent evaluates the extent of the preparation of the candidates for the curriculum ahead. On the basis of the rank (s)he gets, the successful students make a more or less a firm decision on the branch of Engineering (or Science), they will get to study a few semesters later after the core initial years and eventually graduate. If you have top ranks you will get to choose (and most do) the most prestigious Computer Science label, whether or not you have natural inclinations for it. Whatever is your rank, if it is good enough to earn you an admission in one of the IITs, you are sure that a lucrative career is waiting for you at the end of the four year term. It may not even have to be technology related occupation for which you are given the rigorous training. Better ones apparently choose Management, Finance and even Civil Services. Many doors open up for you and it is important that you acquire the IIT label. Preparing you to tackle this exam is therefore has become a big business. When coaching schools advertise that they have programs that take in 9th class students for their “early start” and find many wish

to avail such extended tuitions, one can understand the level of seriousness attached to this simple test. Coaching Institutes tell the students how to optimize their scores, tell them a few tricks and strategies and do better in the test than what their natural talent would warrant. IITs, in turn, are trying their level best to so constantly modify the test that such tricks do not give an unfair advantage to the specially coached student. This is a never ending duel.

As IITs keep trying steps to minimize the coaching school distortion in their admission, the nation is rightly concerned with the enormous pressure the school children face in writing many different such entrance tests just to ensure that they will get admission somewhere. Proliferation of tests and huge uncertainty is indeed a cause for worry. Minister for Human Resource Development Kapil Sibal thought a simple prescription – one National Joint Admission Test and accord some weightage to the performance of the school final examination (suitably normalized for each board). He thought this way students will pay attention to their respective School Board examinations. IIT faculty reacted at attempts to ‘dilute’ their pre-eminent JEE and felt abhorrent at the idea of ministry interfering in the admission process, which is the natural domain of their Academic Senates. They felt that tampering with one well run program is no way to remedy systemic faults elsewhere. Finally a compromise has been reached by which a Common Entrance test will indeed be held, but the IIT’s will use both common entrance test and the School Board marks only as a screening process. They will conduct an advanced more incisive test for this manageable

set of screened aspirants. Hopefully this will also let them attempt to further minimize the distortions introduced in the process by the Coaching School. Whether this will indeed be pressure busting exercise for the aspiring students remains to be seen.

As teachers we must be concerned with another aspect. The objective of any examination/test is diagnostic. It is to let the student know whether (s)he has grasped to the intended level the instructions received and for the teacher to know if (s)he has succeeded in the task. Are we distorting the various instructional programs, particularly in the Schools, to simply become an objective of students getting through well in the end of term examinations? Is the object of pedagogy simply to prepare the students for the examinations that leads to the certificates and diplomas they will earn? Where is the joy of learning? Where is the curiosity to know? Is it just a game we are playing with no consequence to the needs of the Society? Are our Schools and Colleges merely treated as some sort of a filter to let a few people earn more than others in the job market. This indeed is unsatisfactory. Quite clearly we know that the Teacher is a better judge than any single or combination of examinations, however objective and impartial the test may be. The society must place greater importance to the Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE), which can be performed by the teacher only. It is time we give more importance to the Teachers' recommendation and their opinions on their ward. This is perhaps what was meant in the concept of

the veneration of *Guru*, emphasized in our culture. In our quest for objective evaluation, we seem to have slowly degraded the teacher and forgotten the vital role (s)he is called upon to play in the learning program. Joint admission Board of IIT has no way of knowing what the school teacher thinks about the aspirant. In contrast, Admission Committees abroad pay a lot more attention to the Statement of Purpose (SOP) that the student applicant turns in with the application and looks closely the Recommendation Letters of the Teachers, who knows the students well in view of their long association. I would like to see a day when it will be natural for Admission Boards of not only IITs, but many organizations to add Teacher input as a vital component in admissions or recruitments.

I will end this piece with an optimistic note. With the enactment of Right to Education (RTE) bill there is a clear signal that it is the right of every child to be in the school between 6 and 14 years and the School should be, the same Act ordains, *child centric*. In order to achieve this you have to necessarily empower the Teacher, since (s)he is the one to be aware of what it is to be *child centric*. Let us once again look forward for the society to place the Teacher (*guru*) at the exalted level. May we, as teachers equip ourselves with the skills and attitudes to be worthy of that respect.

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