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**THE FUNCTIONS OF PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS IN A
MULTI-CULTURAL SOCIETY**

A Theoretical Exploration with Special Reference to Fiji

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts in Education
at Massey University**

GURMIT SINGH

1973.

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ABSTRACT

Too often public examinations are left entirely in the hands of test constructors and statisticians. The wide ranging considerations related to examinations call for a change in this trend. Perhaps, those responsible for examining ought to regard themselves less as statisticians and test constructors and more as educationists. There is all the more reason for this in Fiji in light of the fact that it is a multi-cultural society.

The thesis is essentially a theoretical exploration into the major functions of public examinations in Fiji. The whole exercise is based on the maxim that examinations form an integral part of the educative process and on the contention that the behaviour elicited before, during and after an examination from candidates is heavily influenced by their past experiences, nourished within the restraints and limits of their cultural milieu.

By way of introduction, general problems in education in multi-cultural societies are traced and the language-problem dealt with in depth to highlight the complexities of such problems. After a brief look at the composition of the Fiji Society and its education system, the major public examinations are described. Then, the stated functions, purposes and effects of examinations are reviewed and some implications drawn. From the literature reviewed it is clear that examinations need to be validated against the declared and agreed upon educational aims. In the Fiji context, a search for some validating criteria is also discussed. In order to explore the interaction between the public examinations and aims of education attention is focussed upon the specific cultural values and educational aspirations of the three dominant cultural groups in Fiji, viz., Fijians, Indians and Europeans. Examination problems in Fiji, arising from an importation of foreign examinations and the multi-cultural set-up, become the theme for discussion in the final sections of the thesis. The relationship between the long-term effects of both, examinations and a number of socio-political ideologies - integration, assimilation, pluralism - is then outlined. Pluralism proves

attractive as a base for decision-making regarding examinations in Fiji. It is likely that in order to solve tomorrow's problems here, allowances for existing differences in expressions and life-styles will help. It is suggested that examinations in Fiji can be assigned a re-vitalizing role in the educational system if they are, inter alia, multi-modal and accommodate 'originality' and diversity of values, expressions and the like.

With almost a complete dearth of research information on various aspects of education in Fiji, this exploration ends with a note on the necessity for research in the area of examinations.