

THE TRIBUNE

It's merit, anyway

by Suchita Malik

I WAS standing at the fag-end of a long queue with children on both sides and the husband in tow for a change. What an experience with dear hubby standing behind you and providing you with all his back-bench moral support in an attempt to go forward in a queue which seemed to be moving at a snail's pace. Wherever one looked, left or right, forward or backwards, one saw a vast vista of human beings, all tense, all in a hurry to be one up against the other and literally all of them trying to humour their wards much in the manner of a sacrificial goat.

Yes, I was standing there for "acquiring" an application form for the admission test of a reputed convent school in the City Beautiful. The crowd included all kinds of people right from top bureaucrats to the doyens of law and order to the saviours and educators of mankind. All were in the fray, ready to "manage" the admission of their wards by hook or crook (resorting to all kinds of pliable means). Each wanted to know of the other person's manoeuvrings and manipulations, not allowing the other comrade to get a wind of their own ventures and adventures with a fixed smile on their sphinx-like faces. Clearly, it was a cut-throat competition aimed at the elimination of the

weak and the emergence of the strongest.

What an irony! The system responsible for churning out the future citizens of a developing nation is based on gimmickry and gamble alone, I thought.

"Hey, why don't you move forward? Lost in day-dreaming, you, eh!" My better-half's admonishments woke me up from my philosophical slumber and I jumped like a frog along with my siblings. The line of the "respectables" had slouched ahead and there seemed a ray of hope finally. Fast came the moment when I was handed over the application form to be filled in and deposited there and then. Hardly had I completed the needful when there was a call for the children to leave the protected umbrella of their parents, line up for the test and show their own worth or at least make a feeble attempt to do so. "As if it mattered!" I exclaimed to myself. For sure, the possibility of the test being a mere eyewash in the eventuality of the "right stuff" already having been decided could not be ruled out.

Well, for the time-being, my child was safe in the hands of the "educators" who were trying to assess their merit all in a couple of hours by giving them an "acid-test", much beyond their little

kingdom of knowledge and intelligence. Meanwhile, my husband and I utilised our precious time by doing our own good measure of public relations which might bear some fruit, if lady luck chose to smile on me and my "Casablanca".

At last, out came the warriors, marching ahead with the tenacity of a column, their faces bearing the mark of the rigorous punishment they had been just through. Once out of the overbearing structure, out flew their pencil-boxes full of crayons, erasers, scales and pencils as if waiting to meet their fate, and out went their owners scot-free heaving a sigh of relief. Minding the consequences is certainly not the "cup of tea" of young minds, and the tense atmosphere soon gave way in the face of their demands for ice-cream, cake and candies galore.

The result was declared the next morning. My son had made it, but the success was not his own. The credit was to his father's bureaucrat-friend who had sufficient "merit" to ensure the admission of my ward. The school was not wrong in boasting of admissions on merit. After all, merit rules the roost whether it be that of the father or the son!