

# TOO SMART TO STUDY

**“A**PRIL is the cruelest month.” Every student of MA English has mugged that one up. When T.S. Eliot trotted out that line to start *The Wasteland*, his chronicle of 20th century dehumanisation, little did he realise that Indian students and teachers would make his words a veritable catch-phrase to sum up their feelings about examination season and the examination duties. April, exam, inexorable doom.

The students who aim to score, not by swotting but by matching their wit and daring against the system are the one's that add excitement to an invigilator's dull life.

Those with organisational skills, leadership qualities and perhaps a socialistic outlook, mobilise the masses and copy blatantly. Others of a more individualistic bent of mind equip themselves with laboriously prepared and ingeniously hidden parchis.

The invigilator is usually out-smarted or out-threatened but there is enough uncertainty to make the match worth watching.

A particular incident remains fresh in my memory. I was on one of my afternoon schedules and was totally bugged to be in a room where errand boys seemed to rule the roost. I knew I dared not rest or let my attention wander for a second or all hell would break loose. As I opened the question paper packets I could

It's those who aim to score by matching their wits with that of the invigilators who embody the sporting approach says SUCHITA MALIK.

feel the candidates eying me with cagey speculation. Was I a tough cookie or a soft touch? They shifted uneasily in their seats and exchanged meaningful glances. Every face was a study in guileless innocence. Any flying squad passing by would suppose it had chanced upon a flock of angels.

One such innocent countenance had artfully dodged me for the first two hours when I had paced to and fro between the desks. Failing to pinpoint anything suspicious, I retired to the desk and willed my drooping eyelids to remain open and focused on the candidates.

All of a sudden I walked the centre superintendent, a hawk-eyed man known for his uncompromising attitude. A murmur ran through the room and the students stirred nervously. Lo! The first casualty. One guileless facade dropped for an instant and the superintendent was quick to observe the falling mask. He lifted the answer-sheet and slipped out the ever-helpful *parchi*.

What could be more dangerous in an examination hall than to be caught with a *parchi*? All pleas of innocence fell on deaf ears and an “unfair means case” was waved in the offender's face despite his fervent appeals for forgiveness. However, he

chose to continue with “appear-üt his own risk” and handed over the answer-sheet. I let him out, heaving a sigh of relief with-

out realising what I was in for. Instinctively, I thought of attaching the *parchi* with the attempted answer right then and there thinking that it would save me sometime at the end of the day. Lo again! It was my turn to have that sinking feeling now. The answer which was cited as evidence of these of unfair means which was the basis of the case, was missing from the answer-sheet. It had been removed. This was an emergency.

With great difficulty the smart operator was located and brought back to the room and, on threat of dire consequences, he was made to confess.

Each passing exam season has acquainted me with some new stratagem for scoring without studying. Some schemes have compelled admiration on account of their simplicity, others have been marvels marked by a profound understanding of human psychology and the examination system itself. The more experience I have gained as an invigilator the more inclined I am to ponder why, and who is responsible. I now tend to pin the blame less on the students than on parents, teachers and an ever-changing society.