

A Humorously Serious Take on Plight of Postgraduate Medical Entrance Examinees in India

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ABSTRACT

Following is a satire on the plight of postgraduate medical entrance examinees in India. It highlights the questions they have to face during their entrance examination preparations and the annoying explanations they have to read in the entrance preparation books. Though the system of examination is improving in India, few loopholes do exist and need to be rectified. This article, thus, attracts the attention of readers towards one such backdrop regarding controversial/wrong/misprinted questions which has come a long way but still has scope of improvement.

Keywords: Annoying explanations, Controversial questions, Examination body, Satire

INTRODUCTION

Medical Satire

There is no doubt that postgraduate medical entrance preparation in India, or anywhere else, is a tough climb. Here, I am taking an example of a seemingly easy objective question; the examinees might face in the examination with ambiguous options.

Now, those of you who live in India or who have ever been to India or who have any knowledge of the 'Seven Wonders of the World' would know that Tajmahal, the famous monument and the symbol of love, is situated in Agra. However, the postgraduate medical entrance examination setters can frame the question like this:

Tajmahal is situated in:

- Delhi;
- Mathura;
- Chandigarh;
- Aligarh.

The objective book authors, who provide answers to the questions asked in these exams, will publish the answer and explanation to this obviously controversial question in their book and it will appear somewhat like this:

"Answer can be none of the above because according to Archaeological Survey of India, Tajmahal is situated in Agra [1]. However, if you have to mark one option go for the Option B because Mathura is closest to Agra (a close geographical approximation). Moreover, Mathura also ends with 'ra' like Agra (a close grammatical approximation). Also, M'AT'hura is the only option which contains the first 2 alphabets of Ta(.....)(.....)(.....) (a close alphabetical approximation). So, we would have gone for Option B but we do not know why the examiner has framed the question like this."

The students preparing for the entrance examinations will read this answer in their book and mug up the answer for the time being. Some bright students would take up the liberty to send their inputs to the authors. Errata that will be published by objective book authors after two years for the same question will appear like this -

"Several students were of the opinion that the correct answer should have been Aligarh because historically both Agra and Aligarh are more closely related to Muslim history than Mathura. Moreover, the older structures in Aligarh have a resemblance with the monuments

of Agra. Also, both Agra and Aligarh are commissionaires and have state-owned universities of their own, while Mathura has none of the above features.

However, we are still of the view that the correct answer should be Option B i.e., Mathura. We further searched in standard textbooks and Internet and found more convincing facts that support our answer. First of all, both Agra and Mathura are listed on the website of Ministry of Tourism as tourist destinations (of historical importance), while Aligarh is not there. Also, the same website also mentions that 90% of foreign tourists visiting Mathura also happen to visit Agra while opposite is true for 70% meaning thereby that tourists consider them as one and the same city or better to say twin cities. Then, the Highway Development Authority of India website mentions that a very fine four lane highway is connecting Mathura and Agra. There is whilst a two lane bumpy highway that exists between Aligarh and Agra. Further, the same website confirms that Agra is closer to Mathura (57 km) than Aligarh (89 km) [2]. Also, from the military point of view, both Mathura and Agra are similar because both have army cantonments. So, Agra and Mathura can be considered as twin cities beyond doubt thus Option B seems to be the most appropriate and logical answer."

And the controversy goes on and on and on.....

DISCUSSION

From this simple example, one can understand how an entrance examination can be an uphill task for postgraduate medical entrance aspirants with controversial/wrong/misprinted questions; and then the annoying explanations that they have to read. Though this can be nothing as compared to the peer pressure and family pressure they have to bear during this hard time, but this do add to their anxiety a lot while they are preparing for examinations.

Medical science is an ever-changing subject with newer research improving our understanding all the time. But there are certain grey areas for which consensus is not there [3], add to that the different data in different texts and you get a clear picture of certain cloudy questions that might inadvertently creep in during setting of competitive examination papers. Competition is so tough in present era of knowledge explosion that they say 'Even one question matters!'; however, the consensus of experts is that such questions hardly ever make a difference in the ultimate marks of the students.

Quite a few instances still occur where such skeptical questions do creep into the question papers. Earlier, these entrance examinations neither disclosed their questions nor provided any answer keys. However in recent times, a fresh transition has started to occur. Some examination bodies have started to publish the key to answers online. They are providing a chance to students to challenge the questions put in an exam and the process of answer evaluation is being made transparent. Even at times, explanations are put forward to defend the answers by the examination boards and they have started to accept errors on their part. The system of examination has improved from what it used to be.

Some of the premier medical examination bodies still do not disclose the questions and answers or give any kind of answer keys. Some have even gone to the length that they get the students to sign a non-disclosure agreement before commencing the examination that they would not discuss the questions being asked, neither to their colleagues/friends/parents/teachers nor on any public platform, violation of which is liable for penal action. Though this potentially

legal matter has been backed by the highest judicial system of the country citing reasons of practicality, an impartial, fair and transparent system is the need of the hour. Disclosing questions and answer keys, avoiding questions with potentially different answers in different texts and at least, standardizing textbooks from which potential questions can be framed, will make the system more answerable and might add to relieving the anxiety of our bright future minds.

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