

Plus-One public exam: What is the purpose?



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Several new initiatives are planned with enthusiasm by the Tamil Nadu School Education Department; implemented with care; monitored with sense of responsibility; defects in field work identified; reviews conducted and attempts made to set right those deficiencies. All these, of course, deserve kudos.

It is also a welcome and optimistic feature that the School Education Department has brought under one umbrella educationists, experts, artistes and activists – all interested in public education – and expedited the education missions.

Expression of opinions is a must

At the same time, it is the primary duty of those who work for the standard public education to bring to light some absurdities, ironies, deviations and errors in the government's exercise relating to education because the administrative structure of our School Education Department is quite amusing. As the structure

has a top-down power hierarchy, those at the top echelons have been given 'mouths' and those at the lower rungs only ears.

Those granted mouths (to speak out) have no need for lending ears. This is the first rule.

For those mandatorily given ears (to listen), mouths are redundant (no need to speak out). This is the second rule.

This sort of hierarchical structure may be appropriate for the police or the army. But when it comes to a field of enlightenment that involves a great deal of intellectual activities, this top-down approach is absolutely absurd. A movement cannot attain success without taking into account the ground reality and practical problems.

Public education per se is a great movement. The School Education Department, which powers this movement, should take steps to preserve this 'mouth-ear' equilibrium which is the need of the hour.

What's the need for exam?

The government public exams for Plus-Two are over. The news report that not a large number of students did take the exams is discussed now in the public domain. Several reasons, opinions and criticisms are put forward. Just as there was no single reason for the decline of the Gupta kingdom, so there cannot just be a single reason for the lesser attendance of students at the Plus-Two exams. This issue deserves a detailed debate. A dimension of this issue has to be discussed threadbare because of its paramount importance. It is connected with the Plus-One government public exam conducted by the Directorate of Government Examinations.

It should be recalled that in 2017 the public exam was introduced for the Plus-One education. Till that time, the Plus-One exam was conducted in schools at the district-level. At that time, the

students took the exam without any trace or tinge of stress or anxiety.

What is the outcome?

When the Plus-One exam was introduced, by way of justifying the move, it was said, “The Plus-One syllabus was not taught and instead the focus was on covering the Plus-Two lessons all through the two-year course in private and self-financing schools. This trend has spun off a loss of chances for the government school students to pursue medicine or engineering in higher education. So, it is with the intention of reining in the private schools that the Plus-One exam is introduced.”

On the contrary, the School Education Department under the previous regime made a confession of its helplessness, saying, “We cannot interfere in the teaching/learning activities in the private schools. We have no power to storm the porcelain-fixed bastion.”

In the olden days, only the Plus-Two public exam mark-sheet was an entry ticket to the portals of educational institutions of medicine and engineering. But today’s situation is a far cry from the past. The portals have to be opened only by NEET and JEE.

The union government is planning to introduce a single entrance exam system for all kinds of higher education. In fact, it is an initiative to nullify the Plus-Two exam mark-sheets.

If this is the state of the Plus-Two marks, how will the Plus-One marks be relevant? So, the reason cited before for the introduction of the Plus-One exams has automatically become obsolete.

Affected govt. schools

Realizing that the chances of getting entrance exams like NEET are slim, the Tamil Nadu government has expedited measures to

prepare the students in the state to take competitive exams with confidence. Special coaching classes, printed training manuals and district-level model schools are a few examples of such intense initiatives. Yet on the flip side is there the Plus-One exam, which is a great hindrance, particularly to the government school students keen on preparing for entrance and competitive exams.

It is to be taken note of that there is no Plus-One public exam in the CBSE schools which have, instead, started teaching the Plus-Two syllabi to the students well before the beginning of the academic year. Whereas our government school students are still focusing on the meaningless Plus-One exam. Given a chance, they can instead spend this time on preparing for the competitive exams. The reason is that preparing for the public exam and sweating it out for the competitive exams are not the same thing; they are different in that they demand different techniques of preparation.

The Plus-One exam also does an injustice to the students lagging behind in learning. The three-year-long consecutive pressure of facing exams in classes 10, 11 and 12 will likely contribute to the mental depression of students. Exam fear and stressful anticipation of failure keep several students away from exam halls and tend to increase the drop-out rate. This is the reason why the increasing number of absentees at the Plus-One exam feels jittery. This exam, useful to none and useful for nothing, as a matter of fact, mounts heavy workload on and entails heavy expenditure for the government and the School Education Department.

So, by scrapping the Plus-One exam, the government and the School Education Department can add one more feather of hope to their cap.

Translated by V. Mariappan.