

HSC Results

There has been a gain of about 10 percentage point in this year's Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examination results over those of the previous year. The gain is almost double if compared with those of 1996, the year of introduction of the same set of question papers for all the five education boards. In the inaugural year, only 24.77 per cent students came out successful and the figure shot up to 37.36 the following year, 1997 that is; and this year the figure is 46.08. The gains made over the past two years should provide enough cause for rejoicing. But a closer look into the matter is likely to turn the celebration into a deep lamentation.

Why lamentation? This is simply because of the enormous loss of merit, time, energy and resources. Why in the first place should the ratio of unsuccessful candidates be more than that of the successful ones? When the percentage of successful candidates turns out as low as 24 at this level of education, one must look for the cause not in the ability of students but in the system followed for educating them. If a student has overcome the earlier hurdle, the first public examination, and pursues studies till he or she qualifies to be a candidate for the next public examination, no failure at the examination is acceptable. The cases of accidents and illness can only be excused.

Clearly this is a flawed system and it hardly judges the merit of a student, much less prepare him or her for the crucial test at the end of the academic year. Such wanton waste can have no explanation. But we are allowing it to happen year after year. The same happens at the SSC level. If taken into account, the number of unsuccessful students at these two levels might frighten anyone concerned about the country's education. Do the education planners ever try to know what happens to those who fail to pass the two examinations? Still more pathetic is the fact that village schools are faring poorly almost with successive examinations, so are the village colleges. There is no reason to think that village students are less meritorious. The only problem is that they lack opportunities. Those who teach them are less qualified than their illustrious peers in cities and the guidance they receive for preparation for the examinations is next to nothing.

In a situation like this an unbridgeable gap is fast developing between the students of villages and their competitors in towns and cities. When more than half of the students with potential for higher education have to abandon the pursuit of higher education, better careers and improved standard of life, simply because of the inherent fault in the system, we must stay aware of the marginalisation of a vast number of population and a polarisation of society that impede the national development process. Already, the policy-makers are toying with the idea of doing away with such public examinations and the present system of judging merit of the students. The idea is to introduce a grading system at the individual educational institutions. That may bring about a change but to do that the first thing in order would be to do sufficient home work. How can you do so without improving the standard of those educational institutions? Both the teachers and the educational institutions must achieve a kind of uniform standard both in villages and in towns and cities before such a plan can be workable. We would like to see that the government introduce a crash programme to improve the standard of teachers first and then opt for more investment to improve facilities in schools and colleges where those are lacking. A time frame of five to 10 years may be required to bring about a semblance of uniformity in the standard. We hope the planners will take full advantage of such a period before introducing the new system.