

Examination Reforms

Why in news?

Tamil Nadu government has decided to conduct Grade X board examination from June 15 in the middle of the pandemic.

What arrangements have been made?

- The announcement carries the reassurance that all special arrangements have been made.
- These arrangements include **sparse seating** to meet the medical requirement of physical distancing between candidates.
- No more than 10 will sit in a room.
- To enable this to happen, the **number of exam centres** has been radically increased from over 3,000 to 12,690.

How should the decision of the state government seen?

- In the discourse of public exams, children change into “candidates”.
- Schools become exam centres and teachers turn into invigilators.
- All examinations follow a strict ritual that has remained unchanged for over a century.
- A board exam has little to do with education or learning.
- The values it encourages children to imbibe are fear of failing, sacrifice of joy and selfish competitiveness, etc.
- The urgency felt by the Tamil Nadu government to take the exam in the middle of a health emergency can only be understood as the **expression of a mindset** rather than reasoning.
- The annual exam is seen as the culmination of the academic calendar.
- The set pattern it follows ensures that the exam questions will have no intellectual substance. They all require rote memory.

What is the argument?

- The real purpose for the board exams is to divide students into “pass”-“fail” categories and into divisions based on marks.
- This standard argument does not fit the State of Tamil Nadu.
- The Class X result last year placed more than 95% of the total number of

students who took the exam in the “pass” category.

- In several districts, the pass percentage was close to 99%.
- Therefore, the exam does not fulfil the structural purpose that some States have, such as reducing the numbers so that the limited infrastructure for the higher secondary stage proves sufficient.

What could be the middle path?

- In Tamil Nadu, most children are likely to move on to Grade XI in the same school.
- This is the main ground for the recommendation made in the National Curriculum Framework (2005) to make the Grade X exam **voluntary**.
- This is a middle path that the Tamil Nadu government can consider now.
- Whenever schools reopen, children who want to take the board exam can do so. Others can carry on in the next grade.
- All that this exam might achieve in Tamil Nadu is to sort students into different subject streams, based on their marks.
- This is hardly a worthwhile reason to risk the spread of the virus or to harass the young.
- It is a matter of belief that marks attained in the Grade X Board exam are a reasonable basis for judging who should study what.
- One might consider this as a valid argument if the exam papers and marking scheme of the Grade X exam had some substance.
- The questions are so uniformly inane, that a good or bad score shows little more than preparedness for facing the exam.

What does the word ‘refresh’ used by teachers mean?

- It is the job of teachers to ensure that every child is all set for the kind of questions that are asked.
- Teachers are rightly complaining that the notice period given for the June exam is much too short to “refresh” the children.
- By refresh, they mean **activate children’s rote memory into performance mode**.
- Teachers do not enjoy real autonomy in teaching and assessment.
- If they did, they would have told the government not to worry about using exam scores to sort children into subject streams.
- The pass percentages of the most districts in Tamil Nadu are high and almost identical.
- As there is a micro difference in their pass percentages, it cannot be argue that the children of a district are not as good as another one.

What changes could be made?

- The experience of going through a crisis has created the desire for examination reform.
- A system so well-established as the board exam does not easily yield to pressure even for a minor improvement.
- A good starting point for change is to think of an alternative name for the certificate given after passing the Class X Board exam.
- Tamil Nadu is among very few States left where the term 'school leaving certificate' is used.
- Ironically, these are the States with the highest rate of transition from Class X to XI.
- So, the first step will be to **drop 'school leaving certificate' title**.
- The next step will be to start **trusting the teacher** and nurture the growth of a school-based system of evaluation.

Source: The Hindu

