



In Nepal, the Secondary Education Examination (SEE) once known as the SLC has long been called the “iron gate.” The phrase carries weight. It suggests something tough, something difficult, something you must struggle to cross. For generations, it has lived in the minds of students as a defining moment; one that decides everything. In the past, the announcement of SLC results was often followed by heartbreaking reports of students taking their own lives. While such cases have decreased significantly, each one remains deeply tragic, profoundly unfortunate, and truly painful to witness.

I first heard this term when I was in class 8. A senior told me, half-serious and half-warning, “Class 10 is the iron gate. Yours is just the silver gate.” The next day, even my math teacher echoed the same idea. And just like that, a quiet fear began to grow.

At home, I had already seen what this “gate” could do.

My sister struggled with English during her SLC back in 2060 B.S. She didn’t pass on her first attempt. There were whispers, worries, and the heavy silence that followed disappointment. But she didn’t stop. She appeared for the supplementary exam; what we then called a “compartment” and passed. Slowly, steadily, she built her path forward. She completed her Bachelor’s in Education, worked at an NGO, and later moved abroad after marriage. Her journey wasn’t defined by a single result, it was shaped by her resilience.

My brother had a different story. He passed with a first division i.e above 60% but below 80%. There was celebration, pride, and expectations. Yet, despite his strong academic start, his attempts to enter government service didn't work out as planned. He is happy working as a chef in the top restaurant in France. Life, it turns out, has its own way of unfolding.



And then there was me.

During my SLC preparation, we class 10 students stayed in a hostel. While the remaining students enjoyed the comfort of home, we had coaching classes on holiday. I passed with a first division too. But later, I remember relatives casually saying, "Marks aren't that different between boarding and government schools anyway."

That stayed with me.

Because after all the pressure, all the labels, all the expectations; the difference didn't feel as big as we had imagined.

And that's the truth we rarely talk about.

The SEE has been glorified in our society for far too long. Schools advertise their toppers. Teachers constantly remind students of its importance. Parents, out of love and concern, unknowingly add to the pressure. And students; young, hopeful, and still discovering themselves carry this invisible weight.

I've seen students shivering in winter mornings, rushing to coaching classes before sunrise. I've seen fear in their eyes during our field work in Madesh; not just of exams, but of failure.

But let's pause for a moment and ask:

Does SEE really define your future? Do high marks guarantee success? Are toppers always the happiest, most fulfilled individuals later in life?

The answer, if we are honest, is no. SEE is important; but it is not everything.

What truly matters is something much deeper and more lasting: the love of learning. The curiosity to explore. The courage to try again after failing. The ability to understand, not just memorize. The joy of being a student, not just a result.

Marks can open doors, yes. But they cannot decide how far you will walk.

Whatever the result, life will move forward. New paths will open. New opportunities will come. And you will grow, not just through success, but through every experience.

The “iron gate” is not as strong as it seems.

Because in the end, success is not about how perfectly you cross it; it's about how courageously you continue your journey beyond it.

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