

Finding the right way to prepare-2

By Dr. Vijay Agrawal

Friends, I would like to mention another bitter truth to you here. Tina Dabi was the topper last year. There is someone who tops every year. The year before Dabi, it was Ira Singhal who topped and before her the topper was Gaurav Agarwal. This will continue. The important thing about Tina's success is not her category. I think probing this angle would not be fair to her. Her success holds more value than the other two because she topped in her first attempt and was successful within the lowest age bracket. The reason I'm discussing Dabi here is because her success motivated many students to not only think about clearing the civil service exam in their first attempt but also to top it. I'm not saying that what they have been thinking is wrong. They have the right to think this way because this can be done. Tina has shown that. But what I want to stress upon is that before we zero in on our target and focus on the ways and means to achieve it, is it not important that we are familiar with Tina's truth?

Let us see what her truth is. I believe that after listening to Tina's story and understanding it you will understand the truth behind the success stories of candidates who you hear and want to gain from. Friends, when we talk about being successful in the first or second attempt, we should consider a long-term plan. The exam has nothing to do with your attempt. It is only concerned whether your preparation is complete or not whether it has finished in the first attempt or hasn't till the last. This is the central point or rather this is the mirror where all of you should see your truth.

We are discussing Tina's success here. She cracked the exam in the first go and did it in the best way possible. Generally, students see her victory at her first attempt as her having prepared for a year. So this is the strategy they follow as well. But the real story is not revealed to them and it tells a different tale. Let us try to underline the important facets of this story –

You would know this and if you don't you should. To understand the truth, you should know that Tina had decided right after 10th standard that she wanted to become a civil servant. The important thing is after this the focus of her studies was to prepare for civil services. This means Tina started her preparation in 11th standard which would last for up to eight years. This was not a single year of preparation. When you start preparing for civil services you are told about NCERT books. You are also told to listen to daily news and read the newspaper. Do you not think that Tina Dabi started all this when she was in 11th standard?

- More importantly, Tina Dabi's parents are officials who had qualified the UPSC exam even though it was Indian engineering services. They were familiar with the nature of the exam. Do you not think that Tina was sort of living in a coaching institute since 11th standard? And the institute was such that it was run by her parents. You cannot undermine the importance of such guidance that she received since her childhood.
- You must be aware that Tina was staying in Bhopal. But after she decided to take the civil services exam, the family moved to Delhi much like Bollywood singer Shreya Ghoshal's family shifted to Mumbai once she expressed her desire to sing. I'm not saying that it is important for everyone to move base to Delhi. I'm actually saying that if talent gets a supportive environment, the path to success not only becomes easy but the success also seems more probable. The question here is not whether one should move to Delhi but that one should have an environment which is conducive to success.

- The biggest thing is that to ensure that Tina is able to prepare well her mother did not hesitate to leave her job. It is obvious that she received 200% support from her parents and faced no speed breaker or pothole on her road to success.
- Tina worked hard and this hard work ensured that she remained a good student. This happens with any hard-working student. It happened with her and it will happen with any person who works hard. Her discipline helped her get into one of the best colleges in the city, which was Lady Shri Ram. You can call this college an academic coaching institute. I'm saying this because many women from that college figure in the list of successful civil services candidates. This has also resulted in the college having an environment that is conducive to civil services. Anyway there is no doubt that studying there is better than most colleges.
- Let us talk about which subject Tina Dabi chose as her optional subject. She received very high marks in her optional subject and it wouldn't be wrong to credit her being the topper to this. Her optional subject was political science. She did not just study it during her MA. She had studied it in NCERT in 11th and 12th standard and taken up the same subject in graduation. She had chosen this subject once she decided to become a civil servant.

Friends, I don't know how much you agree with me but without knowing the facts that I have told you here, you cannot understand the truth behind Tina Dabi's success. In fact, not just Tina's, you would not be able to understand anybody's truth whether it is Athar Amir or Atirka Shukla. What I want to say here is -

- The people you are listening to on YouTube are not lying to you. They are not misleading you either. You listen to them, listen to them carefully and believe them too.
- But do not overlook the fact that this is their truth and their truth solely. Do not make the mistake of considering this truth as your own.
- Listen to them, understand them and then find your truth in it using the pattern that I have mentioned in context of Tina's story.

Let me discuss the points that you will base your truth on. The most important among these is your academic background. This means -

- Which stream have you studied - science, commerce, arts, medical science, engineering etc.
- Are you a graduate or a post graduate?
- What kind of a student have you been - very good, good or average? Let me make it clear that I don't mean here that you need to be a good student to crack civil services. If that was the case, UPSC would have listed it under required qualifications category. This is just one truth that will help you prepare. We have to agree that if a student has been good or great in studies from the beginning, he must have some special abilities. These could be enjoying studies, working hard, understanding your subject, a good hold over language, good memory, knowing how to write an answer etc.
- You should also not overlook the situational truths in your life. You should evaluate how many of the necessities required for the exam are you able to fulfil. Remember, I'm talking about essential necessities here that cannot be done away with. I'm happy to tell you that 80% of these necessities are those that depend on you and are in your control. They are related to your mental strength, psychology and behaviour. But unfortunately you are unable to understand that. Instead of finding them within you, you look outside and this is where things go wrong.
- I also want to tell you that you do not have to take Tina's situation as the norm. Her situation was great but very few people have that. At least 75% of the successful candidates are those who overcame tough situations, and in fact derived inspiration from them, to succeed. You must have heard such true stories.

I think that circumstances is something that many people use to justify their failures. Else civil services is not like medical science that requires a lot of resources. I consider this its best quality, its best feature and its biggest strength which makes it secular. Secular in the sense that anyone who really wants to do it can opt for it and this includes you.

Friends, these are some parameters that you should use to take your decision.

To be continued....

NOTE: This article by Dr. Vijay Agrawal was first published in 'Civil Services Chronicle'.



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