

Staffing Of Primary Schools

When the suggestion that primary schools should in future be staffed exclusively by women was advanced last year we remember pointing out in these columns that such a decision would be impossible to enforce in present-day conditions except at the price of leaving many schools understaffed. The fact is that we do not have enough trained female manpower for this purpose.

Assuming that a primary school with its five forms or classes needs at least five teachers to keep it going we need on an average $64,000 \times 5$ teachers, that is 3,20,000 for the 64 thousand villages in Bangladesh. To believe that as many female teachers would be available for employment seems to nurse an illusion.

The matter is further complicated by the government's decision that as far as possible these teachers should be locally recruited. For one thing few villages would be in a position to supply five females from their own population who had the training and aptitude to undertake educational work. Most girls marry between the ages of 16 and 20 and find it impossible to spare time for work outside the home. Secondly, female teachers, recruited from outside, unless given salaries at least 20 times the average salary of a primary school teacher, could hardly be expected to live in an alien environment apart from their husbands and children. The difficulty would be the greater in the case of unmarried women. We doubt whether we could find even a hundred families willing to let a teen-aged girl or an unmarried girl in her twenties live alone in a village away from her own.

What it all boils down to is that if the reported government decision in the matter is sought to be enforced rigidly most schools are bound to go understaffed.

Besides, the theory that women can handle tender-aged children better needs revising in the light of conditions in rural Bangladesh. Some of the children in the higher forms will be teen-agers who may not be easily amenable to discipline and may need the kind of stern handling that one couldn't expect from women.

What we suggest is that ours should be a flexible policy calculated to advance the cause of primary education as fast as practicable. To tie down the cause of primary education to the issue of women's employment, without a realistic assessment of our social background, would be in our judgement, inadvisable. Both primary education and women's employment are important, but neither need set the pace in the other.