

Double Shift In Schools

The idea of going for double shifts in non-government and government schools, already in vogue in 68 schools in the country, is not bad considering the number of students waiting for admission. Adding another 250 schools to the programme should relieve the pressure on the system. But as this pressure is by no means uniform, it may be that it is only the better reputed schools that need to open a second shift. Maximising the utilisation of existing physical facilities is certainly a good move if it provides access to education to those who would otherwise be deprived.

The double shift system will be practised on a five-year experimental basis and is to begin from the coming academic year in two five-hour shifts to begin from 7 in the morning till 5 in the afternoon. It is restricted only to those schools with more than six hundred students each, which is fair enough, as the number of students in a secondary school is, on average, not more than 440. The problem of more students than they can handle usually falls on schools which have gained a reputation for, if not excellence, being at least comparatively good. It might be practical and economically wise for all schools to concentrate on attracting students by raising their standards of teaching, in which case the introduction of a double shift would benefit them also.

As it applies to co-educational schools, the double shift scheme will, reportedly, run morning shifts for girls and afternoon shifts for boys, always provided there are enough girl students to make it worth the while as experience tells us girls are often kept home during morning hours to help with the domestic chores. That apart, it is hoped that under such a scheme more children will be attracted to schooling especially as the percentage of children in the population is on the increase. But whether two shifts a day will do anything to improve the standard of teaching is entirely another matter, especially if the same teachers are expected to handle both shifts.

Of course, as a temporary measure it is sure to improve the teachers-student ratio which should, at least in theory, give teachers more time to devote to each student but unless the problem of declining standards is addressed, it may not prove to be of much value in the long run. Only time will tell. The secret for the success of such a scheme will lie more in determining why it is that some schools seem to invite an onrush of students when others do not. The answer to this question will reveal a lot about standards etc. which seem to us to vary too widely. What is really needed therefore, in adopting a programme of double shifts, is a programme to upgrade the standard of teaching in all the schools and when it has reached an acceptable level—go for it.