

Primary education

We have hit upon an idea to curb the drop-out from schools all the students who gained entry into the primary level of education would be automatically promoted upto class V without being put under any decisive trial of examinations along the way. There will be annual tests of merit of the boys and girls no doubt, but they will not be declared failed at the turn of any year, a factor that has admittedly induced a proportion of school-leaving in the rural areas.

The step deserves to be viewed favourably in general terms but its practical implications have to be understood fully so that in an effort to overcome an educational waste we do not unwittingly subordinate the consideration of quality education.

The primary schools, specially the rural ones, would need to be adequately provided with equipment and teaching staff in order that the students finishing the studies could be termed as truly literate, in a terminal sense that is. Those who left school at that stage must be functionally skilled to lead a socio-economically useful life. The poor literacy figure in the country is in dire need of an improvement; but a mere spread of education without a standardisation of it will be of little help in the long run. We attach a great importance to the task of raising the standards of primary education in view of the fact that it is at this level that students are prepared for further studies. Some of the astonishing conceptual inadequacies, lack of knowledge and linguistic shortcomings demonstrated by the students in the higher academics, or even by those who have obtained advanced degree, can be traced to poor education at the schools.

The rural schools which in the good old days used to have highly dedicated and gifted teachers, now admittedly present a rather dismal picture. Whatever trained teachers we today have by way of replacing the devoted ones that were there or are on the verge of retirement, are also spread thin over many schools. This is not to reflect badly on today's teachers in a blanket fashion. For, certainly, there are capable ones in the community whose skill and moral standards leave nothing to be desired. Nevertheless, class-room instructions, in many cases, tend to play a second fiddle to lucrative private coaching. To top it all, the text books, meant to be distributed free of cost to the primary schools, do not reach them in time.

As a basic answer to the disparity in educational standards between the urban and the village schools, the government has rightly decided to gradually nationalise private schools in the rural areas.

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