

Teachers' Qualification

An Asian Development Bank (ADB)-sponsored study pointed accusing fingers at primary school teachers who, it found, were wanting in the required quality and therefore were responsible for poor quality of education at this level. But the study has not gone deeper into the matter to explore the reasons why the teachers lack the quality essential for the purpose. If we piece together the small bits of information we come by, courtesy of newspaper reports at different times, we possibly get a glimpse of the primary education in our country that is simply frightening to say the least. A piece of such frightening report was carried in a Bangla daily the other day. The country-wide written test held for recruitment of primary teachers shows that the candidates are ready to go to any length on the side of unfair means to see them through. Exchange of answer scripts, appearance of the elder brother in place of the younger one in the examination hall, assault of a magistrate at a centre because he tried to resist outsiders from entering the examination hall etc., are some incidents typical of our situation.

When the would-be teachers, unsure of their ability to pass the test, resort to copying, hire some other people either to sit for them for the test or help in all possible foul practices, one need not stretch one's imagination how good they will be as teachers. Another report carried in a daily a couple of months back provides the answer. More than four lakh candidates appeared for a similar test held earlier for recruitment of primary teachers. The minimum qualification for applying was SSC. A few hundred masters and bachelor degree-holders vied for the job. Shockingly, only 12 came out successful. There is no reason to think that the question paper was unacceptably tough; in fact, the standard was of the S.S.C. level. Later on, the pass mark for the written test was drastically lowered and even then a little over 400 of the candidates could cross the hurdle.

If this does not quite explain the progressively degenerating education, at the primary level in particular, there are more to complete the dismal picture. Allegedly primary teachers' recruitment has turned out to be a big racket. Underhand dealings involving thousands of taka are playing a big part in the recruitment process. The lack of quality is no impediment to appointment if someone has the money to grease the palm of a section of staff responsible for selection of the teachers. Possessing no qualification and morally debased these so-called teachers are likely to do more harm than good to the students seeking education from them. This is the hard truth. And our educationists and policy-makers are turning a blind eye to such rampant malpractices in our educational arena. This can only happen when a nation is determined to invite its own destruction. It is not for nothing that wise men have cautioned that if one wants to destroy a nation, one will simply target its education first for attack. The most important thing for us therefore is to protect our education and invest more and more in its continued improvement. We hear that this government is about to formulate an education policy. Has the policy taken care of the three diverse educational streams at the primary level? We do not know. But we realise that there is a need for streamlining the primary education. There is also the need for attracting qualified teachers at the primary level who, as students, were not only bright themselves but had real interest in study. Can any teacher at the primary level claim that he or she reads a lot—let alone do serious studies to understand child psychology? Teachers of primary schools are now drawing a good salary but the labour they put in perhaps does not justify what they get. But there is a need also to increase the salary at this stage and this should be commensurate with the qualification. We are talking of an honourable profession, one that is responsible for moulding real man. The teachers will set the standard, so invest in them—the right kind of them.