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Teachers' Quality Counts

The country's non-government primary school teachers have observed different programmes, including a hunger strike, recently. However they withdrew their programmes without any assurance from the government to meet their one-point demand for nationalisation of their job. Clearly the teachers did not enjoy support from a cross section of the people mostly because their agenda did not go far to serve a great cause of society beyond their own interests. For example they pledged nowhere to raise their standard of teaching through training and other arrangements necessary for the purpose. They demand privileges equal to those of government teachers without even asking for improved teaching facilities at the places where they teach the young ones. In a situation like this their movement is bound to fail in realising the objective. They may have some consolatory words from a few political parties only because politicians are on the look out for a potential vote bank.

What the non-government primary teachers forget is that the teachers of the government schools had to qualify in a test and undergo teachers' training for a certain period before their induction into the service. Now the non-government ones would like to skip all the basic qualification tests and still enjoy the benefits their qualified peers enjoy.

So far the government offer is not unreasonable if not quite upto the mark. That it is ready to give 80 per cent of their salary from its exchequer is not bad. Notably, the non-government secondary school teachers have been receiving similar benefits. Also notable is the fact that at least teachers at this level have to be accountable to the guardians at the time of S.S.C. examinations. If the results of any school are poor, the teachers have to accept the responsibility. No such accountability is binding on the non-government primary teachers. There is no public examination at this level and without such an examination the quality of either the students or the performance of teachers cannot be evaluated. So equating them with government teachers is not only unreasonable but unethical too.

If they are treated on equal terms with their peers in the government schools, the non-government secondary teachers have definitely a stronger claim for removal of the supposed disparities they are subjected to. Better it would be if the confrontation could be avoided between the government and the teachers. A communication channel could be kept open from the government side to drive home the message that enjoyment of better facilities entails greater responsibilities as well. Had the government asked the agitating teachers to go through a competitive process for gradual induction into the service, the teachers could have the incentive to perform better and qualify for the right standard of teaching.

Clearly, the non-government primary teachers have not a strong case. As for the teachers, they could enter into a negotiation with the government to get the maximum benefit under the circumstances. In fact, this is an area where there is no scope for compromise on quality. Even a below-par clerk is not a threat to vital national interests, but a teacher of poor quality can wreak havoc with the standard of education.

Any demand by the teachers has to be considered keeping this in view. Teachers can never be adequately rewarded for the service they render. But, first of all, they have to be teachers to do the job competently enough and to the full satisfaction of the nation.