

## To Make A Success Of Universal Primary Education

The demand for a pragmatic programme which is capable of delivering primary education to everyone grew from out of the practically simultaneous realisation of the government and the people that, without it, the future was going to be decidedly bleak. The result was the introduction of a programme for compulsory education, initially on a pilot scale, which would be gradually expanded to cover the whole of the country, no matter the cost. For it was understood by everybody that, if there was to be any substantial economic progress, it simply had to be done.

However, the success of any plan for extending primary education to cover all children between the ages of six and eleven years hinged upon one important thing, a successful enrollment drive and this, in turn, placed a tremendous responsibility on the Department of Education whose job it will be to make absolutely certain no-one can slip through the very large net.

In pursuit of this dream, a great deal of discussion and argument has been waging for some time regarding how best to manage this tremendous task, given the limited resources available for the purpose. Traditional methods of schooling in which children are required to learn by rote has proved to be unsuited to the needs of the average child; particularly those living in the rural areas. But, despite the knowledge that this is generally true, very little has been done to change the curriculum or institute any substantial reforms to bring education more in line with the needs of the people, most of whom are destined to be forever dependent on the land.

When the mainstream of public opinion clings to the belief that the current system of education is of little practical use to their children and is, as a result, a complete waste in time, energy and money, the importance of reform cannot be ignored. That this is an attitude reinforced by the persistent number of drop-outs from the system, especially in reference to girls, is one which must, of necessity, be of increasing concern to us all.

Although it is understood the recruitment of teachers for primary level institutions is already underway, the quality of those applying for the posts are often not up to standard, therefore a great deal of effort must be put into their training. The follow-up in monitoring by the Department of Education should be such as to render it almost impossible for standards once set, to slide, for education is far too important for it to be left in the hands of amateurs.

Two problems in the main have to be immediately addressed for a solution that can no longer wait if the much-publicised compulsory primary education is to be a minimal success both in quality and quantity. These are the continued acute shortage of teachers and the swelling number of drop-outs from classes I and II or other classes upto class V. One of our readers has in plain language drawn the administration's attention to these problems (B.O. August 25).

A start was formally made last year in 68 thanas, under the recently declared education programme, as well in the rest of the schools across the country. Progress in the true sense remains static because of these elementary but fundamental shortages. They have to be removed with a special effort commensurate with the declared drive and intent. Apart from the teacher shortage, the schools stay in a state of utter neglect generally. Everything from teacher attendance to the teaching done in the classes as well as other means of improving things or making education at this level more attractive to children or to their parents is in short supply. As has been pointed in the reader's letter we have quoted, only two teachers have to do the teaching for classes I to II.

It has to be specially noted that the increase bulk of enrolment is a natural outcome of an enormously increased population. It is simple commonsense that to cope with this increased number of pupils you have to have at least one teacher for each class.

The District Education Directorate also needs to be alerted about their duties as inspectors, advisors and supervisors for the operation of the primary education programmes now launched formally since last year. But, unfortunately, as reports have it, the official authority represented by it are yet to wake up to the demands of the situation. In more than one editorial so far we have pointed up these lacks in the primary sector of education. The need is for remedial action without further delay.

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