

Give Primary Education A Chance

If more than four lakh applicants compete for only 15,500 posts of primary schools, one cannot help wondering, how could the quality of teaching at this level of public education system be so poor? True, one reason behind this unprecedented response from unemployed educated youths is the incumbent government's policy to keep government jobs off limit to intending candidates. It is in case of recruitment of primary teachers that the government has lifted its suspension order. No wonder therefore that quite a good number of unemployed youths not really keen in primary teaching may have tried their luck here. However, such things happen all the time, maybe in a limited way, since the unemployed are not choosers.

What is of importance is the job's worth. In our socio-economic situation teaching job in a government primary school is considered paying enough, particularly when the school one works for is situated in one's own locality. If one is not terribly ambitious and settles for a modest and relatively peaceful life, nothing compares with the job of a primary teacher. The advantage one enjoys is that one can manage other economic affairs, mostly in relation to agriculture, alongside teaching. So a large number of undergraduates trained themselves as teachers during the late sixties and seventies.

In the changed realities of today graduates and post-graduates have been forced to opt for primary teaching. Surprisingly the quality of teaching has not improved much. Now teachers are required to furnish paperworks of astounding volumes. Some of them complain, not without reason, that teaching in classes has almost become immaterial. What matters most is the submission of the detailed records to the thana education officer, no matter if the imparting of lessons in classes are ignored. One must therefore look into the matter before the situation gets worse.

Sure enough, number matters. If the most eligible ones from among such a huge number are selected, they will deliver the goods. But then we cannot forget that in a written test only 12 candidates out of several thousands of candidates for primary teaching job came out successful a few years ago. The criteria of selection for candidates then had to be lowered to give opportunities for more candidates. We do not know how the present crop of candidates will fare in their written and oral tests. More importantly what will be the criteria of selection or the standard of written tests for the assistant teachers and headmasters? No denying the fact that primary education as offered at the government primary schools all across the country leaves much to be desired. Even the best among them are a poor competitor when pitted against the average kindergarten schools in cities. Education in an era of overcommercialisation of everything has turned into a commodity. What we need to change is this mindset, first and foremost.

So there is no alternative to reforming our primary education system. The recruitment of primary teachers should therefore be considered a vital point. First of all the policy makers must decide how they wish to educate the country's young generation—not just the privileged ones who can take care of themselves, thanks to their parents' wide choices. Then the teachers must be motivated and trained accordingly to accomplish the job. Here is an opportunity for the new crop because the old guards have either vacated or are on the way of vacating their posts from teaching. Will the authority maintain the strictest possible selection gauge and do whatever is necessary to give primary education a real chance of catching up with that of the rest of the world?