CHAPTER III

MID-DAY MEALS
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The meal system in schools were pioneered in Madras Presidency that started providing cooked meals to the corporation school children in the Madras city in 1923. The programme was introduced in a large scale in 1960s by K. Kamaraj, former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. But the first major thrust came in 1982 when the then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Dr. M. G. Ramachandran, decided to implement the scheme for all children in government schools in primary classes. Later the programme was expanded to cover all children up to S.S.L.C level. Tamil Nadu’s mid-day meal programme is among the best known in the country.

There is an interesting story about how K. Kamaraj got the idea of a noon meal scheme. The spark is said to have occurred in a small village called Cheranmahadevi in Tirunelveli District of Tamil Nadu now it was upgraded as town. K. Kamaraj was a very simple person who used to travel in his car and was not accustomed to convoys.

On one such journey, he had to stop at the railway intersection in Cheranmahadevi and got out of the car and waited. He saw a few boys busy with their cows and goats. The Chief Minister had asked one small boy, "What are you doing with this cows? Why didn't you go to school?" The boy immediately answered, "If I go to school, will you give me food to eat? I can learn only if I eat." The boy's retort sparked the entire process into establishing the mid-day meal programme.
The renowned midday meal project is a famous school meal scheme in the country of India. The scheme was begun in the year of 1960. The main objective of the scheme is to provide day lunch to students during working school days. Some other important aims of this scheme are including protecting students from study-room hunger, improved socialization especially among the students, increasing enrollment as well as attendance, social empowerment; addressing malnutrition etc. this project has a very long history, particularly in Tamil Nadu state. This scheme was started by K. Kamaraj, the then chief minister of Tamil Nadu state in the year of 1960. Later this scheme was expanded by chief minister MG Ramachandran in 1982. Moreover, this scheme has been greatly adopted by almost every Indian state especially after an important direction given by Supreme Court of the country on 28th of November in the year of 2001.

The midday meals scheme had continuous existence even during the Chief Ministerrship of C.N.Annadurai. Improving the nutritious status of the country became a major concern of national planning. The approach of the Department of Community Development continued to focus the efforts, as far as possible, on the vulnerable groups and the weaker sections of the community. As usual, the Applied Nutrition was working efficiently. A new scheme, ie., Composite Programme for Women and Pre-School Children’ was launched during the year 1970-71. For these two schemes, the Central Sector outlay was Rs.13.90 crores in the Fourth Plan period. For the beneficiaries of the midday meals scheme from first standard to third standard,  

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free books, uniforms, slates and writing materials were supplied ever since 1967-68.

The amount spent for this sacred purpose is given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1967-68</td>
<td>Rs.11.06 lakhs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968-69</td>
<td>Rs.11.46 lakhs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969-70</td>
<td>Rs.11.62 lakhs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970-71</td>
<td>Rs.11.91 lakhs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Government of Tamil Nadu was interested in the following programme.

(i) Nutrition education through Mahalir Manrams (ii) encouragement of economic activities of Mahalir Manrams (iii) demonstration of feeding programmes (iv) strengthening of supervisory personnel for women workers and (v) training of associate women workers.4

A special Nutrition Programme to feed children in the age-group of six months to six years in the urban areas of towns having population of over one lakh was implemented in the State. About 2.58 lakh children in the State in Madras City, belt areas and eighteen other major areas were given three slices of bread (Modern Bakery) for six days in a week. Apart from this 1,300 children in tribal areas in Salem district were also covered by this programme. The State Government had incurred an expenditure of Rs.1.04 lakhs.5

Twenty five Nutrition-cum-day care centres were started in the slums of Chennai city. There were sixty beneficiaries in each of the centres. The expenditure

on this programme was Rs.0.61lakh.\(^6\) Midday meals at the rate of fifteen paise per student per day were served in all Government schools for denotified tribes. The supply was extended to non-Government schools in Tirunelveli and Ramanathapuram districts. The scheme of free supply of midday meals for poor and needy children studying in elementary schools continued during the chief ministership of M.Karunanidhi. The director of school Education continued to release midday meal grants to the panchayat union councils. The scheme was in operation in 28,806 schools as on 31\(^{st}\) March 1973 and the number of students fed was 18.68 lakhs including Harijan welfare schools and corporation schools in Madras city. During the third time in office M. Karunanithi promised that his Government would scrap the midday meals scheme in Tamil Nadu. He went one step further by providing eggs to the school going children.

The budget estimate under this head for 1973-74 was Rs.14.14 lakhs. 47,000 children were benefitted under this scheme.\(^7\) One thousand more child welfare centres were established under this scheme. This would be in addition to the existing 2,639 child welfare centres. As part of the package, medical supervision and nutritious diet would be provided to children attending these centres. This programme already covered a total of five lakh persons and was planned to cover six lakhs in 1974-75. A sum of Rs.3.3 crores was spent in 1974-75. A sum of Rs.3.3 crores was spent in 1974-75 on nutrition and child welfare programmes.\(^8\) The ICDS scheme started functioning ever since 1975-76. The scheme is being funded by Central Government. Starting from womb, the health and welfare of the children are being taken care of. On


\(^{8}\) Tamil Arasu, 1973, p.30.
sample basis, this scheme was introduced in thirty three centres in India during 1975-76. Thali taluq in Dharmapuri district and Nilakkottai taluk in Madurai district in Tamil Nadu were selected as sample centres for the introduction of ICDS programme. Then it was extended to other places like Chennai, Madurai, Coimbatore, Thiruchirappalli, Vellore, Erode, Thiruppur, Dindigul, Alandur, Kanchipuram, Thiruvorriyur, Salem, Thanjavur, Kumbakonam, Thirunelveli, Tuticorin, Nagarcoil and Rajapalayam.⁹

A common kitchen centre at a cost of Rs.20,000 was started in Thyagaraja Engineering College, Madurai to feed day scholars in the area. Similar centres were planned at Usilampatti and Courtallam. The aim of the scheme was to provide cheap but wholesome meals to the poorer sections of the student community living outside the Hostels, particularly those hailing from rural areas and also those whose parents’ or guardians’ income was small. Under this scheme, the State Government has received sanction to the tune of roughly six and half lakhs of rupees covering thirty three colleges.¹⁰

M.G. Ramachandran became the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu on 30 June 1977. As usual, with the help of voluntary donations and help from CARE organization and P.L. 480, the midday meals scheme was working in Tamil Nadu. In addition to midday meals, free uniform and text books were freely distributed to the school children. About 19.80 lakhs of poor students in standards 1 to 8 of elementary and higher elementary schools received midday meals, including the 1.60 lakhs fed in


Harijan Welfare Schools run by the Harijan Welfare Department. The provision for the midday meals scheme in the budget for 1977-78 was about Rs.4.5 crores. The State Government grant for the midday meals Scheme was paid at the rate of ten paise per student per day for 200 days and the local body contribution was five paise per student per day for 200 days.\(^\text{11}\) This was supplemented by about 20,000 tones of food received every year as free gift from the CARE organization. The three districts of Chengleput, South Arcot and North Arcot were covered by the Central Kitchen Programme, under which food was cooked in modern over under hygienic conditions and transported to the surrounding schools in closed vans. Ninety seven central kitchens were functioning in those districts.

They were established with CARE assistance at a total cost of about Rupees two crores. These kitchens were having about 224 tempo vans gifted by CARE for transporting the food from the kitchens to the schools. To facilitate proper storage of the food stuffs required for this programme, eight regional godowns and a central godown at Adayar were constructed in Tamil Nadu with the help of the CARE organization at a cost of about Rs.30 lakhs. Poor students who received midday meals in standards 1 to 11 got text books free and poor students in standard 1 got slates also free. More than twelve lakhs of students got this free supply every year.\(^\text{12}\) About Rs.three lakhs was spent from State Government funds in 1977-78 mainly for the free supply of slates to students in Standard 1. The status quo continued with great enthusiasm and the midday meals scheme produced good results.\(^\text{13}\)

\(^{11}\) Tamil Arasu, June to December, 1977, p.6.

\(^{12}\) Tamil Arasu, June to December, 1977, p.6.

\(^{13}\) Tamil Arasu, January to December, 1977, p.6.
About 20.25 lakhs of poor students in standards 1-8 of elementary schools received midday meals including the 1.65 lakhs fed in schools run by the Harijan Welfare Backward Classes Department. The amount spent on the midday meals scheme by the School Education Department during 1980-1981 was Rs.5.29 crores which was supplemented by the gift food from the CARE to the value of nine crores of rupees. The day scholars studying in the Government Tribal Residential Schools were supplied with midday meals from the funds of Adi-Dravidar Welfare Department. 1583 day scholars were benefited under this scheme. The midday meals at a cost of twenty paise per meal were supplied to all the students studying in 1-8 standards in the denotified communities and Kallar schools in Tamil Nadu. The number of primary and middle schools run by the Corporation of Madras during the year 1981-82 was 369. Free supply of midday meals to the poor and deserving children of these schools numbering 60,000 continued.\textsuperscript{14}

Midday meals were supplied to the students studying in I to VIII students in Adi-Dravidar Welfare Schools during the year 1981-82. Supply of midday meals under CARE programme was introduced in Adi-Dravidar Welfare Schools. The midday meals was supplied to the children for 220 days in a year. Rice food was supplied for 120 days at twenty two paise per meal and CARE food was supplied for 100 days at three and a half paise per meal. Subsequently CARE food days were reduced to eighty five days and rice food was supplied for 135 days. A sum of Rs.46.30 lakhs was provided towards midday meals scheme in the revised estimate for the year 1981-82. Midday meals at a cost of twenty paise per meal were supplied to all students studying in denotified community and Kallar schools in Madurai.

\textsuperscript{14} Administration Report 1980-81, pp.382-444.
district. The supply of CARE food was also introduced since 10\textsuperscript{th} March 1975. CARE food was served for 100 days in a year and for the remaining 120 days rice meals were supplied to the students at the Government cost.\textsuperscript{15} Midday meals was supplied to 16, 519 students studying in Seventy one elementary and middle schools under the management of Madurai Corporation.\textsuperscript{16}

The midday meals scheme as a Government scheme was first contemplated by M.G.R. and it was implemented on 1\textsuperscript{st} July 1982 in rural areas and on 15\textsuperscript{th} September 1982 in urban areas. While inaugurating the scheme at Pappakurichi in Tiruchirappalli district, M.G.R. paid a rich tribute to the former Chief Minister Tamil Nadu, K. Kamaraj who for the first time had introduced the midday meals scheme for the school children.\textsuperscript{17} The three time Chief Minister M.G.Ramachandran was responsible for the manifold increase of the number of students in the schools. In order to provide one nutritious meal a day consisting of 400 calories to lakhs of poor children living in villages and urban areas in order to makes the present generation into healthy citizens of tomorrow, the Chief Minister’s Nutritious Noon Meal Scheme was started on 1\textsuperscript{st} July, 1982 in rural areas.

The first noon meal centre was inaugurated at Pappakudi village in Tiruchirappalli district. Orders were also issued for the supply of free text books and free uniform to the students up to eight standard. Total numbers of schools were also increased during his regime. This has been extended from 15\textsuperscript{th} September, 1982 to cover the children in the urban areas also. To ameliorate the sad plight of the hapless

\textsuperscript{15} Administration Report, 1980-81, pp.471-479.

\textsuperscript{16} Administration Report, 1980-81, pp.471-479.

\textsuperscript{17} Tamil Arasu, July 1983, p.5.
mothers living below the poverty line, who wring their hands in despair for want of 
the means to feed their children, this scheme has been formulated to provide poor 
children in the age group of two-ten at least one nutritious meal at noon. The 
importance of this scheme had been mentioned by M.G.R. on the eve of starting the 
project.\textsuperscript{18}

“This scheme is an outcome of my experience of extreme starvation at an age 
when I knew only to cry when I was hungry. But for the munificence of a woman 
ext door, who extended a bowl of rice gruel to us and saved us from the cruel hands 
of death, we would have departed this world long ago...To wipe the tears of those 
women I have taken up this project.”\textsuperscript{19}

“According to the 1981 census the population of Tamil Nadu works out to 
4.82 crores. Children between two and five age group constitute 42.10 lakhs. 
Children in the age group of five and ten constitute 63.73 lakhs. Children in the age 
group two and ten constitute 105.83 lakhs. It has been declared that children living 
below the poverty line should be provided this free nutritious meal under the scheme.”

On the 1st July 1982, 55.96 lakhs of poor children in the age group of two and 
ten took the nutritious free meal in thousands of child welfare centres and elementary 
schools in rural areas of the whole State. The beneficiaries were divided in two age 
groups. The children in the age group two plus are catered to in the child welfare 
centres. Twenty lakh children under this group were the beneficiaries as on 31.3.1983.

\textsuperscript{18} Thamizhnaadu Nattamanra Pavala Vizha Sattamanra Peravai Vaira Vizha, p.248; Administration 

\textsuperscript{19} Attar Chand, M.G. Ramachandran., \textit{My Blood Brother}, pp.567-570; Lena Thamizhvanan, 
Thamizhaga muthalvargal, pp.207-208.
Children in the age group five plus and nine plus were catered to in the elementary schools where they were studying. The scheme provided feeding for all the 365 days in a year. Tamil Nadu’s pioneer Nutritious Noon Meal Programme is now acclaimed internationally as a welfare project. The scheme has attracted the attention of other States in India. Better nutrition among children has now emerged as a harbinger of new social order. Thus, during the period of M.G.R the volume of the scheme was really fantastic.

The Ingredients of the Meal

The nutritious meal has comprised with

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<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>100 grams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil</td>
<td>7 grams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dal</td>
<td>15 grams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condiments &amp; Vegetables</td>
<td>50 grams</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For Children of age group two to four, the quantum of rice will be eighty grams and dal ten grams. Quantity of oil and vegetables will remain the same.²¹

Feeding about sixty five lakhs of children every day in the year, throughout the State is no mean achievement. The programme has been extended from the 15th September, 1982 to cover the two plus to four children in the urban centres and the school children in the Corporation of Madras, Madurai and Coimbatore, who had not been covered under the earlier phase. A design for the construction of low cost and


functional buildings for the cost and functional buildings for the feeding centres in the villages, each at a cost of Rs.38,000 to Rs.40,000 has been evolved. Members of the public have come forward with substantial donations to put up buildings at their own cost for such community feeding centres. The donors have been permitted to name those buildings in their names.22

In the midst severe financial strain, the scheme has a successful walk, of course with certain merits and demerits. Under Chief Minister’s Nutrition Noon Meal Programme,’ free nutritious meals were given to all poor students in the age group of five and fourteen studying in elementary schools (mostly in standards 1-8).23 The midday meals scheme led to abolition of economic constraints in the way of children’s education. The ADMK Government provided free lunch to sixty five lakhs of schools going children.24 Public participation in the programme through generous contributions was a matter of gratification for the government. Ashok Mitra, formerly the Registar General of Population Census, formerly Secretary of Planning Commission, Government of India and an acknowledged except in Nutrition said that Tamil Nadu was a nutrition delivery laboratory. He paid glowing tributes to M.G.R’s midday meals scheme.25

Under M.G.R. the midday meals scheme aimed at provision of meals of all the children in primary and preparatory schools on all the 365 days in a year. An outright grant to schools at the rate of forty five paise per child for feeding and five paise as

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22. Rajalakshmi, N., Tamil Nadu Economy, p.547.
administrative expenses was the financial outlay to be borne by the State. On the day
when the scheme was introduced 55.96 lakh children were fed in 20,747 child welfare
centres and 32,470 elementary schools. The cost of implementing the programme
though earmarked to be Rs.120 crores in the first year has gradually increased over
the years.\textsuperscript{26} During the year 1982-83, 96.2\% of age group between six and eleven and
66.03\% of children in the age group between eleven and fourteen had been enrolled in
schools.\textsuperscript{27} During the year 1983-84, the cost of providing midday meals touched
Rs.134 crores.\textsuperscript{28}

The noble scheme has been extended to the old-age pensioners in the State
from 15\textsuperscript{th} January 1983. It had benefited 1,99,639 old-age pensioners including
43,888 destitute widows, 14,471 physically handicapped persons and 30,000
agricultural labourers. The benefit under the scheme has also been extended to ex-
service pensioners who receive old age pension from the Tamil Nadu Ex-Servicemen
Personnel Benevolent Fund. The scheme has the overall enrollment of children by
2.63 lakhs in 1982-83 and by 3.82 lakhs in 1983-84. The average additional enrolment
prior to the introduction of this scheme was only around 1.75 lakhs. The increased
additional enrolment during those years clearly established the beneficial effect of the
scheme. In addition to this a detailed scheme for providing health cover for children
under the ‘Chief Minister’s Nutritious Meal Programme’ has also been drawn up with
the maintenance of individual health cards and regular inspection of child welfare
centres by medical staff. Immunisation programmes were also conducted. A sample

\textsuperscript{26} Attar Chand, Ramachandran, M.G., \textit{My Blood Brother}, p.567.

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Tamil Arasu}, July 1983, p.33.

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Tamil Arasu}, March 1983, p.18.
survey conducted in select child welfare centres revealed an increase in the height and weight of children benefited by the programme.  

Under the scheme, employment opportunities were created for 83,577 women. They were appointed as Child Welfare Organizers and Child Welfare Assistants. Out of 27,859 Child Welfare Organisers, 5,383 belonged to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, 979 were Widows and 1,173 were destitute women. Similarly, out of 55,718 Child Welfare Assistants, 11,463 belonged to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, 7,442 were widows and destitutes in such employment at the rate of one cook and one helper for every 500 children in a school. By 1986, the scheme provided employment programme in India.

The scheme was operating in 65,344 centres in the State Covering lakhs of children. The dimension of the problems involved in this programme was also big. The success of this commendable scheme is not small measure attributable to the unremitting dedication of the Government to the welfare of the children. An evaluation study conducted had revealed that the children covered by the programme showed increases in the height and weight measurement over a period of twelve months which were higher than those suggested by ICMR. Preference was given to widows and destitutes in such employment at the rate of one cook and one helper for every 500 children in a school. By 1986, the scheme provided employment to 1,05,802 women and was therefore hailed as single largest employment programme in India.

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The noon meal scheme of Tamil Nadu had evoked interest among the Parliamentarians in the Scandinavian countries which made their mark in the introduction of social welfare measures. This was revealed by the Speaker of Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly P.H. Pandian. He has visited Norway, Sweden, Denmark and some of the other European countries during September- October 1986. Wherever he went, Pandian has highlighted the Chief Minister’s Nutritious Noon Meal Programme intended for the children. The subject generated a lot of interest in many countries and they are keen to know more about the scheme. A few dignitaries have

\(^3\) Tamil Arasu, April, 1985, p.13.
\(^3\) Tamil Arasu, April, 1985, p.13.
even expressed their desire to visit Tamil Nadu to get first hand information regarding
the midday meals scheme. It is interesting to note that the U.N.I.C.E.F. has also
tremendously appreciated the midday meals scheme of Tamil Nadu.

Tamil Nadu has reached by 1979-80 itself the targets set forth by Government
of India. The following table would indicate this.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Details</th>
<th>6-11 age group</th>
<th>11-14 age group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The target fixed by Government of India, to be achieved before 1984-85</td>
<td>95.00</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The achievement of Tamil Nadu during 1979-80</td>
<td>94.64</td>
<td>59.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The achievement of Tamil Nadu during 1984-85</td>
<td>98.66</td>
<td>72.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Tamilarasu, July, August & September 1985, p.34.

The effective working of midday meals scheme during M.G.R’s period fought
against the socio-economic constraints arising out of poverty. The nutritious meal
provided at the critical period of growth helped the development of the intellect too.
During 1977-78, the rate of drop outs for the age group six-eleven was forty per cent
and it had come down to twenty six per cent in 1983-84. It was hoped that it would
slide down further because of the provision of nutrition meal.

The achievements in respect of enrolment percentage at middle level are far
higher than the target. The achievement was 22.18 percentage points higher than fifty
per cent target. The additional enrolment for six-eleven-fourteen age group it was 5.52
lakhs. The per centage of additional enrolment of girls for six-eleven age group was

33. Tamil Arasu, October, November &December 1986.
34. Tamil Arasu, July, August & September 1985, p.34.
48.84 and for eleven-fourteen age group was 47.66. This would speak in volumes about female literacy in Tamil Nadu.\(^{35}\)

The modified special Nutrition Programme in Madras, Madurai and Coimbatore Corporations and Pudukottai Municipality and also the Special Nutrition Programme in fifty five Municipalities and Townships were merged with Chief Minister’s Nutritious Meal Programme (urban) with effect from 15\(^{th}\) September 1982 and the beneficiaries under these schemes were merged with the Chief Minister’s Nutrition Meal Programme. The Government have placed orders for starting 5,500 centres throughout the state. Out of this, in short span of time, 4,931 centres started functioning. A High Level Committees were also formed by the Government for the purpose.\(^{36}\)

23,040 Child Welfare Centres in rural areas implemented the Chief Minister’s Nutritious Meal Programme. Approximately, 23.03 lakhs of children in the age group two-ten and 1.68 lakhs of old age pensioners were covered under this scheme during 1984-85. 69,120 women were employed as Child Welfare Assistants under the scheme 5,065 urban noon meal centres started functioning.

During the financial year 1983-84, there were thirty nine projects under ICDS Scheme. As usual, they were functioning through the Anganwadis. Measles campaign was also conducted during September 1984 in all the ICDS projects in Tamil Nadu. Mass immunization campaign on oral polio was conducted in all ICDS projects.

\(^{35}\) *Tamil Arasu*, July, August & September 1985, p.32.

“Pillaikaniyamudhe” became the news letter of the ICDS project. Thus, the child development programme cannot and should not wait for better days. An irrigation project or an industrial project can be postponed, but a hungry child cannot be made to wait, the result may be grave illness or death due to malnutrition.

There was a criticism whether the State Government should spend Rs.120 crores for this scheme. No Government should shy away from introducing a minimum welfare programme like this. In the initial stages of the scheme, the Government of Tamil Nadu was using 20,000 tones of rice to feed the children. The actual cost of the market price was much higher than the subsidized price of Rs.1.75 per kilogram. In spite of the hardships, the scheme went through because of the good feelings of M.G.Ramachandran.

The scheme introduced by M.G.R. was par excellence when compared to the previous midday meals scheme. The old scheme of ten paise per student plus five paise Panchayat contribution was a great hardship. It was because of the fact that many Panchayats and Panchaya Unions did not pay their contributions. So it was run only on ten paise and CARE help. The new system which provided forty five paise grant from Government per child was a considerable increase and the food was also nutritious. Formerly the teachers were wandering for raising the fund from the Panchayat Union and the system was done away with by the new nutritious meals scheme which was met totally from Government funds. The teachers were also relieved from the cooking and other works by making separate provision for cooks.

and helpers. It was a great humanitarian service. When the scheme was introduced, the economists criticized that it affected the economic growth. They argued that such huge funds might have been diverted for the industrial growth of the State. But M.G.R. argued that children constituted the pillars of future generation.\(^{39}\)

Their education would enhance the growth of the State in all aspects. P.V.Narasimha Rao, the then Prime Minister of India, was also impressed by this scheme. He said even the Government of India would implement the noon meals scheme throughout the country.\(^{40}\)

Till his death (24.12.87), M.G.R. was very keen in the successful working of the midday meals scheme. Fortunately, he did not face much of problems from the noon meal workers. They had not resorted to strikes during M.G.R’s period. But mounting problems of the noon meal workers came to be developed during the Chief Ministership of J.Jayalalitha.

Weaning Good Co-operative Societies were started during 1988-89. One week training was imparted to 1,650 women. A stipend of Rs.50/- was paid to them. Regular Production was started during mid 1989 and the food produced was supplied to the centres run under the Tamil Nadu Integrated Nutrition Project Scheme/Integrated Child Development Scheme.\(^{41}\) Provision was made for Noon


\(^{41}\) *Tamil Arasu*, January 1991, p.8
Meals Centres at Samathuvapurams by the erstwhile D.M.K. Government. An egg was supplied along with the nutritious meal once in a fortnight during 1989-90 and once in week from 1st June 1998.

The financial allocation for nutritious noon meal programme in 1995-96 was Rs.360 crores. During the financial year 1999-2000, Rs.532 crores came to be allocated for the said programme. An additional allocation of Rs.172 crores by the erstwhile DMK Government was highly appreciable. In the beginning of 1999, there were 29496 child welfare centres, 36556 rural school centres and 2004 urban centres. The scheme had three main components of nutrition, pre-school education and health care. With good intention only, the scheme was announced by M.Karunanidhi, but Jayalalitha’s Government is not for providing eggs to the children. B. Valarmathi, the Social welfare Minister announced in the Assembly on September 5, 2001, that about 71, 712 noon meal centres in the State will not be given weekly eggs anymore. Instead, the Government has decided to provide twenty gram of potato, or green gram or Bengal gram once in a week.

In the larger interests of the noon meal workers, M.Karunanidhi announced a pay hike for them with effect from 1st January 1996. About 2.18 lakh workers employed as organizers, cooks and assistants would be benefited. In the revised scales, the basic pay for organizer would be raised from Rs.600 to Rs.760 and the total pay from Rs.645 to Rs.920. Like this, there was corresponding increase for other

42. The Economic Times (Chennai edition), 20 August 1999.
44. The New Indian Express, 6 September, 2001; The Hindu, 6 September, 2001; Dinathanthi, 6 September, 2001.
categories of employees also. Other attractive service benefits were also announced that the employees of TNNMP would be brought under the cover of General Provident Fund.45

As usual, the noon meal staffs were disappointed over the pay hike announced by the Chief Minister. They said it was a marginal hike: A Rajakumaran, the general secretary of Tamil Nadu Nutritious Meal Employee’s peravai noted that a majority of nutritious noon meal workers had put in more than fifteen years of service and the present hike of salary to Rs.720 had come as a rude shock to them.46

There was a proposal to give back the control of noon meal centres to the local bodies. The Minister in-charge of noon meal I.Periyasamy said on 10 June 1997. The noon meal staffs have opposed the Government move. More than 8000 members of the Tamil Nadu Nutritious Noon Meal Scheme workers Association including 5000 women took out a rally on 22, August, 1997. They urged the Government to give up the decision of shifting the scheme from the Social Welfare Directorate to Municipal Administration.47

The Exnora International has offered to help the State Government to improve the conditions in noon meal centres in the city following the publication of articles, in the newspapers highlighting the sorry state of affairs in the centres. Exnora founder chairman M.B.Nirmal has offered to start tuition centres for children and a reading

room for the youth to read few books. By using the centre for human resources development it was hoped that the local residents would develop an attachment to the centre. By this process, the centres would be protected from the miscreants. Exnora has expressed willingness to take over the upkeep of the centre in some places in the city.\textsuperscript{48}

The DMK Government was committed to noon meal scheme said I.Periasamy. He denied the allegation by former Chief Minister J.Jayalalitha that the Government was callous about the noon meal programme. The minister went one step further and pointed out that the State Government have decided to renovate 7,158 noon meal centres in the State at a cost of nearly twenty crores of rupees.\textsuperscript{49} I.Periyasamy, made a surprise inspection of noon-meal centres in the city and Thiruvallur district on 14\textsuperscript{th} July 1998. In some of the centres, he detected a shortfall in rice stock. He asked the officials to initiate disciplinary action against the noon-meal staff who were responsible for the irregularities. In one of the centres in Thiruvallur, he found that eggs were not given to the children. Suitable action was taken against the ayah who was responsible for that crime.\textsuperscript{50}

The eggs supplied to the beneficiaries were small in size which attracted genetic wonder – a hen’s egg looked no bigger than a lizard’s. An egg both in the open market weight forty five grams but egg sent to the nutritious noon-meal centres in Chennai were lesser with smaller weight. A noon meal organizer brought them to

\textsuperscript{48} Indian Express, 21, November, 1998; Dinamani, 21, November, 1998.


\textsuperscript{50} Indian Express,15,July,1988; Dinamani, 15, July,1998.
the Indian Express office with an interest to put a full stop to the supply of such eggs to the noon meal centres. It is interesting to note that State Government made an announcement to supply eggs to the children once in a week instead of fortnightly. The Government also decided to procure eggs from Tamil Nadu Poultry Development Corporation, instead of private contractors. The Tamil Nadu Poultry Corporation stamped eggs were better in terms of quality. The TMC also demanded action against the egg suppliers. 51

The State Government had directed the Collectors of six districts including Dharmapuri, Virudhunagar, Thanjavur and Thirunelveli to hold a detailed inquiry and initiate criminal action against those private contractors who supplied rotten eggs to school students taking meals from noon meal centres which ultimately resulted in food poisoning. J. Jayalalitha demanded the arrest of the contractors who supplied rotten eggs to the noon-meal centre, consumption of which caused the illness of children in many places. She said mere cancellation of contract was not enough to punish them. 52 J. Jayalalitha suspected that M. Karunanidhi would wound up the midday meals scheme on some pretext or other. She recalled that Karunanidhi has opposed the scheme when MGR introduced it. She warned that the AIADMK would not remain a mute spectator if Karunanidhi’s Government acted in a manner that would affect the massive welfare scheme. 53 I. Periyasamy, placed orders to clean up


the noon-meal centres in Tamil Nadu immediately, so that hygiene would be maintained.\textsuperscript{54}

About 190 students of the sunaikadu Union middle school were admitted to Hospital with symptoms of nausea after they took midday meals on 25, October, 1997. Reports said that a lizard was found in the meal. Employees of two noon meal centres in Virudhnagar and Dharmapuri districts were suspended on 11 July 1998 following reports that several students had fallen ill after eating bad eggs. Similar action was taken against the noon meal workers in Thiruvannamalai and Thirunelveli districts. In their cooking, lizards were found. The Government had also cancelled contracts of the egg suppliers. Eighty eight school children (Cuddalore) were taken ill after they reportedly consumed eggs in the noon meal centres. They were admitted to Panruti Government Hospital when they developed the symptoms of vomiting. The shortage of cooking oil and dhal was reported again and again by the noon-meal workers. It is obvious that mistakes would certainly crept into the inevitable logic of history. Twenty eight lorry loads rotten eggs were buried in Salem district in presence of the district Collector Mohammed Nasimuddin and other officials. It is something unprecedented in the history of noon meal scheme. On the one hand, the researcher finds the merits of the scheme. On the other, some bad news was also appearing in the newspapers periodically. According to the reports, fifty two students of Chinnampedu Adi Dravids School (Ponneri) were hospitalised on 4 November 1998, following complaints of vomiting. Sources said that a lizard was found in the noon meal served to the children.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{54} Indian Express, 1,November, 1998; Dinamani, 1, November, 1998.

According to official estimates, around 8000 posts hitherto vacant in noon meal centres in schools and ICDS and Tamil Nadu Integrated Nutrition project through redeployment and direct recruitment. The noon meal workers were happy about the decision taken by Government of Tamil Nadu. Peoples involvement makes noon meal centre work in one of the centres in Chennai. The centre as Nattanthottam, behind the Sankrit College in Mylapore came as a pleasant surprise. It was freshly white washed and greenery was grown. Tube lights and fans were installed, things unheard of in noon meal centre. The walls were painted. Enquiries revealed that the local people provided those facilities working under the banner of Exnora. This was revealed by R. Sekar, the co-ordinator of Mylapore Exnora. The night school was conducted and fifty students every year were benefited. M. Murugesan, president of Exnora said, if the centre was not to be used as anganwadi, it might be converted into a reading room. The councilor Parimala Kumar had promised to take up the issue with the Corporation of Chennai. Similar were the case of noon meal centres in N.S.K.Nagar, near Anna Arch and T.P. Chatram, which were immensely beneficial to the children due to the initiative taken by local people. The T.M.C. has demanded that the noon-meal scheme be extended to students up to 12th standard in schools.

The surroundings of the noon-meal centres in Ramanathapuram and Sharma’s Park in T.Nagar have degenerated despite the cleaning and clearing operation carried out by the Corporation M.P. Vijayakumar, Director of social welfare was very much

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bothered about such noon meal centres. He said that the Directorate was organizing regular programmes to motivate anganwadi workers. Following the intense criticism about the deplorable state of noon meal centres in the city, the Government came forward to improve the conditions in these centres. The Directorate of Social Welfare had drawn up a list of the centres in dire need of repairs. At the noon meal centre BBR Nagar in Pallavaram Municipality, the children saw two snakes hissing at them forcing them to literally run for their lives. A cobra and a rattlesnake (Saraipambu) were spotted inside the room where rice was stored. A snake charmer was brought to the spot who managed to catch the rattlesnake, while the cobra gave the slip.

The work in the nutritious sector was affected following delay in the merger of two major projects-ICDS and T.I.N.P. The main reason for the decision to merge the two schemes was to achieve better sectoral co-ordination and ensure better quality services. As many as 300 students of Panchayat Union primary school, Varappur, near Pudukkottai were admitted to the Government Hospital with symptoms of vomiting and fainting. Food poisoning as a result of a dead lizard in the food was stated to be the reason for the incident. The DMK Government tried its level best to remove the hurdles in nutrition project. The Government urged the field staff of work with missionary zeal.

60. Indian Express, 24, February, 1999; Dinathanthi, 26, February, 1999.
61. Indian Express, 26, April, 1999; Dinamani, 26, April, 1999.
62. Indian Express, 19, April, 1999; Dinathanthi, 21, April, 1999.
63. Indian Express, 24, June, 1999; Dinamani, 24, June, 1999.
Roofless noon-meal centres in the city serve as an abode for the anti-social elements. Some of the noon-meal centres serve as dens for the thieves. In addition to these problems, burglary at the noon meal centres has become the order of the day. The noon meal centre at the Municipal Primary School in Villupuram was burgled on 11th November 1997. Twenty k.g. of rice, seven k.g. of palm oil and fifty k.g. of pulses kept for preparing midday meals were reported stolen. Nearly ninety eight Balwadis Nutrition Plan (BNP) centres in the State caught in the throes of transition with the Central Social Welfare Board discontinuing funding for 1997-98. The State Government was lethargic in absorbing these centres under the ICDS. The Tamil Nadu Nutritious Meal Workers Association urged the State Government to create a post in the supervisory cadre to conduct inspections in nutritious meal centres. This would avoid unregulated inspections being carried out at the centres by the officials and the ministers.

204 students from Government Middle School, Navalur, were hospitalised at the Government Royapettah Hospitals, for suspected food poisoning after they consumed noon meal at the school on 5th January 2000. Such incident recurs nonstop in different parts of Tamil Nadu. More than 100 students of Panchayat Elementary school at Ramapattinam, near Pollachi were admitted to the Government hospital when they vomited after taking meals at a noon meal centre. In Dharmapuri district, there were reports that eggs were not supplied to children. It was due to the fact that the Government fixed price to the contractors was low compared to the outside

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64 Indian Express, 12, November, 1997; Dinathanthi, 14, November, 1997.
65 Indian Express, 9, August, 1997; Dinamani, 9, August, 1997.
66 Indian Express, 7, December, 1999; Dinamani, 7, December, 1999.
67 Indian Express, 7, January, 2000; Dinamani, 11, April, 2000.
market.\textsuperscript{68} More than 300 boys and girls of Government primary school, Vadakattupatti (Dindigul) had developed symptoms of nausea and swooned on 19\textsuperscript{th} September 2000. The officials had transported the victims to the hospital.\textsuperscript{69}

The former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, M.Karunanidhi dismissed the demand of the noon-meal staff “Permanent government employee status” as unjustified. Replying to the opposition’s demand in this regard, Karunanidhi said if the demand was accepted, the State exchequer would face an additional burden of Rs.270 crore. Pointing out that the total budget allocation for the scheme was Rs.581 crore, he said the demand implied that the Government would have to spend Rs.485 crore towards the salary for the noon-meal staff and “only about Rs.100 crore would be left to the meal”.\textsuperscript{70} On 18 April 2000, a verbal duel developed on the floor of the State Legislative Assembly over nutritious flour. Heated arguments took place when the TMC M.L.A., A.Chellakumar and minister-in-charge of noon meal programme I.Periyasamy clashed on the quality of nutritious flour supplied to children under the ICDS.

The issue came to a close when the minister accepted Chellakumar’s challenge to have a separate discussion in the House on the issue on some other day. Participating in the debate of the demands for grants for Social Welfare Department, Chellakumar said the Government paid to a private contractor eighteen Rupees per k.g. of flour for the I.C.D.S. centres run with World Bank aid. The Women’s Co-operative Societies were paid only twelve Rupees for flour supplied to centres funded

\textsuperscript{68} Indian Express, 21, February, 2000; Dinathanthi, 23, February, 2000.

\textsuperscript{69} Indian Express, 20, September, 2000; Dinamani, 20, September, 2000.

\textsuperscript{70} Indian Express, 26, April, 2000; Dinamani, 26, April, 2000.
by the State and Central Governments. The T.M.C., M.L.A., wanted to know the reason for the partiality. I. Periyasamy replied that the World Bank had stipulated that the flour should contain certain amount of calories, protein, iron and minerals.

The differences in prices could be due to the difference in composition, the minister said. The House witnessed another clash between the TMC and the DMK when Chellakumar alleged that at the Central Institute in Pondicherry had found that the nutritious flour samples sent from ICDS centres by the ruling party’s M.L.A.’s from Sathiyamangalam, Dharapuram and Gobichettipalayam contained less than six percent of proteins instead of the recommended fifteen per cent. Chellakumar gave some papers to the Deputy Speaker, Parithi Ilamvazhuthi as proof. Dharapuram M.L.A.R. Saraswathi (DMK) stoutly denounced this. The supply of nutritious powder to Vellore district has been raised from thirty tones per month to 100 tonnes, Sarguna Pandian, minister for nutritious meals scheme said.  

Dilution of tender norms for weaning food supply was flayed. The decisions taken at a recent meeting of the Social Welfare Nutritious Meal Programme Department to relax certain tender conditions for supply of weaning food and departure from the existing procedure have been flayed by those connected to the issue. The district Collector (Vellore) R.Sivakumar said that the repair works and construction of new buildings would be taken up in 427 noon meal centres in the district. 

72. Indian Express, 4 May, 2000; Dinamani, 4, May 2000.
73. Indian Express, 10 September 2000, Dinathanthi, 12 September 2000.
The Rotary Club of Madras in association with Tripura Foundation launched a midday meal scheme for plus two students of three Corporation schools on 20, October 2000. The scheme was inaugurated at Nungambakkam Corporation Girls’ Higher Secondary School.\(^7^4\) P.Subramani, the World Bank consultant said that Tamil Nadu has set an example in providing care and nutrition everyday of the year. The Community’s involvement participation was praised by him. The grass root level nutrition workers acknowledge the invaluable contribution and support of the villagers and self help groups who involve themselves in the daily running of the centres.\(^7^5\)

A scheme to supplement midday meals to the students of Nappalayam Government High School was inaugurated on 25 October 2000. The function was organist by Rotary Club of Madras, North. The project, supported by Tripura foundation would benefit over 400 students ranging from VI to X standards. Rotary International Districts 3230 Governor P.T. Ramkumar inaugurated the project. Rotary club of Madras North President G.Olivanan, Rotary Club of Madras president a Verghese Chummar, International Service District Chairman R.Benjamin Cherian spoke on that occasion.\(^7^6\) Santharubi, the Headmistress, four cooks and one Watchmen of a middle school in Salem District were placed under suspension by the District Collector Md. Nasimuddin on charges of boarding six bags of rice, each bag containing seventy five k.g. of rice meant for nutritious meal in the school.\(^7^7\)

\(^7^4\) Indian Express, 21 October 2000; Dinamani, 21 October, 2000.
\(^7^5\) Indian Express, 28 November, 2000; Dinathanthi, 30 November,2000.
\(^7^6\) Indian Express, 26 November 2000; Dinamani, 26 November, 2000.
\(^7^7\) Indian Express, 21 September 2000; Dinathanthi, 23 September 2000.
M.G. Ramachandran was the mentor of J. Jayalalitha. So, all the social welfare schemes particularly the midday meals scheme introduced by M.G.R. are being successfully implemented by Jayalalitha. In the election manifesto of 2001, Jayalalitha said that she would make the noon-meal workers as government servants. In spite of a lapse of nearly four months, the promise was not fulfilled by Jayalalitha. So, the noon-meal workers had resorted to strikers.

The president of the Tamil Nadu Noon-meal Workers’ Association, M. Pazhaninathan said that the demands of noon-meal workers are genuine and that their demands must be meted out immediately. He further said that the grant and salary invariably come very late to them. With the result, the noon-meal workers are forced to pay for the children’s food from their pockets. Further, the election manifesto had promised that the noon-meal workers would be trained and absorbed as teachers in primary schools.

“The Governor’s address also promised this. Though this had not figured in the Finance Minister’s budget speech, we are still hopeful,” Association members said. They also pleaded for the constitution of three separate departments for the nutritious meal schemes (Chief Minister’s Nutritious Meal Programme, the Integrated Child Development Programme (ICDS) and kuzhandaigal kappagams (balwadis). The ICDS programme is a major strategy in providing children the basic health and nutrition related services, pre-school education and other supportive services such as water supply and sanitation. The workers feel that fair deal is not given by the

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78 The New Indian Express (City Express), 6 September, 2001; Dinathanthi, 6 September, 2001; The Hindu, 21, August, 2001.
Government at least to the beneficiaries. During her Chief Minister ship from 1991 to 1996, Jayalalitha did not face many problems either from the beneficiaries or from the noon-meal workers. In the present tenure as the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Jayalalitha is facing a lot of problems from the noon – meal workers.\(^8\)

The midday meals scheme and the applied Nutrition scheme are the major social security schemes. They cannot be strictly divided into two watertight compartments. The “investment in man, ‘like similar investments, will pay dividends in the long run. No doubt, the country would prosper like anything.

\(^8\) The New Indian Express (City Express), 6 September, 2001; Dinathanthi, 6 September, 2001; The Hindu, 21 August, 2001.