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The School-age period has been called the latent time of growth of children. The rate of growth slows and body changes occur gradually. Various dietary surveys and studies on the nutritional status of children have been performed for all categories of childhood and it was found that children of various age groups have different pattern of growth depending directly upon the intake of nutrients.

Under nutrition in early childhood at primary stage is a challenge for health of the children in the country. to overcome this problem, mid-day meal programme was introduced on a large scale in 1960s under the chief Minister ship of K.Kamaraj Nadar. But the first major thrust came in 1982. The chief Minister of Tamilnadu Dr MG Rama Chandran decided to universalize the Scheme for all children in government Schools in Primary Classes. Tamilnadu’s Mid-day meal Programme is among the best known in the country.

There is an interesting story about how K.Kamaraj Nadar got the idea of a noon meal scheme. K.Kamaraj was a very simple who used to travel in his car. On one 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 cow? 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 in to establishing the mid-day meal programme.

Mid-day meal Programme is basically a programme for children. This programme is one of the most important ongoing feeding programmes organized by government not only to improve nutritional status of school children but also to attract poor children to school. School meal habit made a promising start around the country. Yet, quality issues need urgent attention if mid-day meal programme is to realize its full potential. Improved Mid-day meal programme could have a major impact on school attendance child nutrition and social equity. The requirement for a Mid-Day Meal Programme arose because children aged between 5 to 16 years are in a phase of rapid growth and development and their nutritional needs are considerable. However, children, particularly from poor families, do not get enough food. Their regular diets are often inadequate, especially in rural areas, where children come to school partly hungry and some even on empty stomach, trekking long distances. Under such circumstances, they are unable to concentrate on studies and benefit from education. Hence, providing a meal in school would supplement the home diet and sustain the interest of children in learning so that dropout rates are lowered and school attendance improves. The mid-day meal scheme is the popular name for school meal programme in India. It involves provision of lunch free of cost to school children on all working days. The scheme has a long history especially in Tamilnadu and Gujarat, and has been expanded to all parts of India by
the supreme court of India on November 28, 2001. The success of this scheme is illustrated by the tremendous increase in the school participation and completion rates in the state Tamilnadu. This comes after ministry of education, on recommendations of National School Health committee; started a scheme for providing mid-day meal to school children in all states with effect from us 15th Aug 1995. The central government pays 40% of expenditure and 60% is borne by the states. The meal is usually prepared from special foods such as Balahar, soya fortified bread, Indian multipurpose food, skimmed milk powder and wheat. The children studying in corporation run schools are given Mid-day based on combination of cereals, pulses and leafy vegetables. Eggs are given once a week. Such a diet would increase the amount of vitamins and minerals and results in weight gain and clearance of deficiency symptoms (Gopaldas, 2003).

The national programme of Nutritional support for primary education (i.e. the national mid-day meal scheme) was initiated in 1995. By 2001 a few states were providing cooked meals but most were only giving monthly “dry rations” of food grain to school children. The number of states providing cooked meals rose sharply from early 2002 onwards, after supreme court order(Dated November 28, 2001) directed all state Government to introduce cooked Mid-day meals in primary schools

Today twenty three out thirty-five states and UTS have achieved full coverage of primary Schools under the cooked mid-day meal programme. The
defaulters include some of the larger states such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. As a result only 55% of all children entitled to cooked meals are covered today.

Mid-day meals can also be a tool of reinforcement of prevailing social inequalities. For instance, in a survey in Rajasthan, It was found one village (Joz in Rajasamand district) that dalit children had to drink from separate pitchers. Same discrimination was observed by Menon and S. Rao, 2003. This is an abominable instance of caste discrimination in the classroom, which defeats the socialization role of mid-day meals. How common is caste discrimination in the context of mid-day meals? The survey evidence suggests that open discrimination is rare. For instance, researcher did not find any cases of separate sitting arrangements, of preferential treatment for upper-caste children. Pupils of all social backgrounds seem to be quite happy to sit together and share the same food. Parents, too claim to welcome the arrangement in most cases. Teachers confirmed that parents rarely objected to their children sharing a meal with children of other castes and among disadvantaged castes, very few parents felt that their children had ever experienced caste discrimination in the context of the mid-day meal.

Mid–day meals facilitate the abolition of classroom hunger. Many Indian children reach school on an empty stomach in the morning, as early morning breakfast is not part of the household routine (Ramchandran, 2003). In the absence of a mid-day meal, pupils often go hungry after a few hours and find it hard to
concentrate. This Problem is now largely resolved. Mid-day meal is also a protection against an intensification of child under nutrition in many drought-affected areas. Similarly, poor households such as those headed by widows or landless laborers value the assurance of a free lunch for their children. The contribution of mid-day meals to food security seems to be particularly crucial in tribal areas, where hunger is endemic.

Mid-day meals also contribute to gender equality by creating employment opportunities for poor women. In the sample schools, a large majority (68%) of the cooks is women, and most of them come from underprivileged backgrounds. This is not surprising, since the work is fairly demanding and salaries are low. In addition, the scheme guideline often state that priority should be given to disadvantaged persons when cooks are appointed. In Karnataka for instance, the guidelines clearly specify that when cooks should be women and that preference should be given to widows. There is another important way in which mid-day meals contribute to the liberation of working women: when children get a hot meal at school, mothers are free from the burden of having to feed them at noon. This feature is especially relevant for widowed mothers, who often work outside the house without the benefit of any domestic support.

Mid-day meals are not without their critics and detractors. Some of the criticisms are easy to dismiss, such as contrived arguments from high caste parents whose real concern is that the Mid-day meal is a threat to the prevailing social
hierarchy. However there are also serious criticisms to consider. A common charge is that Mid-day meals are health hazard, because they are prepared in unhygienic conditions. This argument should not be lightly dismissed, but the survey evidence points to a more nuanced assessment of the problem. Pupils do feel unwell from time to time after consuming the mid-day meal about 10 percent of the parents said that this had happened to their children at least once during the preceding 12 months. The Problem is especially common in Rajasthan, where Ghoogri is served day after day. Ghoogri needs to be boiled for several hours, and is hard to digest when is under cooked.

The quality of school-meal programme is significantly better in Karnataka than in Chhattisgarh or Rajasthan. In fact Karnataka’s distinction applies to the schooling system generally. For instance the majority of schools in Karnataka have more than two teachers as well as more than two classrooms, and occurrence in Chhattisgarh or Rajasthan. The classroom environment also tends to be more stimulating in Karnataka. In line with this positive track record, Karnataka has made comparatively good progress in building a sound infrastructure for Mid-day meals: most cooks enjoy the assistance of a “helper” and a substantial proportion of schools (31 %) already have a Pucca kitchen. In contrast the mid-day meal infrastructure in Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan is still highly inadequate; most cooks have to cope with the most challenging circumstances without elementary facilities such as helper, kitchen and proper utensils. Karnataka also fares better than Chhattisgarh or
Rajasthan in terms of a range of other quality indicators. Having said this, it is interesting that Rajasthan fares best in terms of food logistics and monitoring. For instance, all schools in Rajasthan reported timely delivery of grain, and teachers invariably described the quality of grain as “fair” or (more frequently) “above average”. There is a useful lesson here about what can be achieved with adequate political will, even in a State like Rajasthan that is widely (and perhaps unfairly) perceived to belong to the infamous BIMARU set (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh). In Rajasthan the state government took an early decision to throw its weight behind the Supreme Court order of Nov 2001, and a powerful monitoring committee closely supervised the programme from the beginning. The timely delivery of good quality grain, even in remote schools seems to be reflection of this strong commitment to Mid-day meals. The main problem in Rajasthan is that in spite of the state Government declared commitment to Mid-day meals, money it too short. The government of Rajasthan spends only 50 paisa per child per day on recurrent costs, compared with on rupee per child per day in Karnataka. As a result basic facilities are sorely lacking. Lack of money is also the main reason why most schools in Rajasthan continue to serve Ghoogri day after day instead of varying the menu. Finally, in Chhattisgarh the provision of Mid-day a meal seems to have been somewhat half hearted both financially and politically. The picture emerging from the field survey is one of deficient arrangements and scant monitoring. Casual implement is likely to be one major reason why mid meals in Chhattisgarh have failed to catch the imagination of school teachers. Nearly half of
them felt that Mid-day meals “disrupt classroom processes”. And close to one third of the sample teachers in Chhattisgarh opposed scheme, compared with only 10% of so in both Karnataka and Rajasthan. Except for this significant kernel of opposition, Mid-day meals are popular in each of the three sample states. A large majority of parents and teachers have positive perceptions of the impact of Mid-day meals. Further there is overwhelming Public support for the continuation of the scheme. Among parents those who advocate discontinuation belong mainly to privileged castes or classes. The tremendous popularity of Mid-day meals among disadvantaged section of the population is one of the strongest arguments for further state involvement in this field.

Nutrition support to primary education is considered as mean to achieve the objective of providing free and compulsory universal primary education of satisfactory quality to all the children below the age of 14 years by giving a boost to universalization of primary education through increased enrollment, improved school children simultaneously (Sonia Sinha, 2002). With children from all castes and communities eating together, it is also a means of bringing about better social integration. Mid-day meal programmes aimed at improving the nutritional status of poor children and at ensuring better school enrollment have been functioning in various states of the country for over five decades. However, due to various logistical and financial problems these programmes had languished but for a few notable exceptions. The reasons for this lack of sustainability of the programmes
might have been (1) that they were not based on an agreed national police fully backed by the central and state governments and (2) that they were mostly implemented as isolated bureaucratic operations with no meaningful involvement of the community on the one hand and with no serious attempt to integrate these programmes as an element of comprehensive effort towards the upgradation of the entire school system.

Mid-day meal seeks to provide for each school child roughly a third of the daily nutrient requirement in the form of a hot fresh cooked meal. It is sometimes argued that in the case of children of poor households, the schools meal may become a substitute rather than a supplement for the home meal. It is also possible that since the meal supplies only one third of the dietary requirements, and that too for 200-250 days in a year it may not possible to demonstrate significant improvement in the nutritional status of the child. Even if this be so, it is important to note that it is not merely the long term effects of the school meal on the nutritional status but its short term effect of on better attention memory and learning that is important. There are several published reports based on well conducted studies pointing to these beneficial short term effects of the school meal on learning ability. A hungry child is a poor learner lacking in concentration. A Mid-day meal is an important instrument for combating classroom hunger and promoting better learning. Many children reach school with an empty stomach in the morning, since a good early morning breakfast is not a part of the household routine. Under these circumstances
it is important to acknowledge the short term effects of mid-day meal on learning. Mid-day meal could thus be a means for not only promoting school enrollment but also better learning in schools. The purpose of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) will thus be very well served by Mid-day meal.

Nutrition is the most basic need, being a major determinant of health, labor productivity, and mental development. Nutritional problems in adolescents start during childhood and continue into adult life. Mid-day meal has been introduced in the schools so that Indian system can achieve high literacy rate and a social need to avoid hunger and malnutrition in school children. This program is an intensive effort to find alternative source of nutrition. As a part of researcher effort to obtain more information from the various Government and private schools, A comparative study between Government and private schools were carried out to investigate the nutritional analysis of Mid-day meals. This study is important in terms of to analyze the Mid-day meal programme by comparing the health status of children with those children studying in private aided schools where Mid-day meal programmes are not running. This study has also assessed the impact of Mid-day meal i.e. educational advancement, child nutrition, and social equity etc.

School meals can be used as an opportunity to impart various good habits to children (such as washing one’s hands before and after eating), and to educate them about the importance of clean water, good hygiene, a balanced diet, and related matters. Mid-day meals also contribute to gender equity and reduce the gender gap
in education, since they boost female school attendance. Objectives of MDMS set by the central government are given below

1. To improve the nutritional status and the attentiveness of school children attending primary sections.

2. To improve school attendance on one hand and to reduce dropout rates on the other.

3. To foster sound social behavior and inculcate good food and health habits in children.

4. Protecting children from classroom hunger.

5. Improve socialization among children belonging to all castes, addressing malnutrition.

6. Social empowerment through provision of employment to women.

**Significance of the Study**

Mid-day meal could also inculcate in the pupils good dietary habits and promote personal awareness of the importance of environmental sanitation. In fact, Mid-day meal could be valuable means of imparting health and nutrition education not only to children but also to the parents and the community. Mid-day meal could also create employment opportunities for poor women of the village. Majority of cooks engaged in the programmes could be women, most of them coming from underprivileged backgrounds. Mid-day meal could serve the important purpose of
improving school enrollment and attendance especially enrollment of girls thus contributing to gender equality. With Mid-day meal, it will easier for parents to persuade their children to go to school and for teachers to retain children in the classrooms. It could foster sound social behavior among children and dispel feelings of difference between various castes. Mid-day meal can also contribute to gender equality by reducing the gender gap in education by boosting female attendance in school. Most importantly Mid-day meal could trigger all round development of the entire school system leading to better infrastructures in schools, better teaching facilities, a school health service and community involvement.

Each Mid-day meal should provide roughly a third of the daily nutrient requirement. This would imply that the energy content of the meal would vary roughly between 250-500 kcal depending on the age of the child. It is important that the meal should contain a part of from cereals, a good quantity of vegetables particularly, dry green leafy vegetables, as these are important to combat micronutrients deficiencies where there is adequate space, effort should be made to encourage school gardens where nutritious vegetables could be grown for e.g. as in the kitchen gardens attached to the Mid-day meal centers in some parts of Gujarat, local leafy species with high iron and other nutrient content that can be easily grown such as drumstick. Papaya and pori bhaji may be grown.

We should make persuasive efforts to sensitize the teachers by explaining to them the advantages of providing meal in the schools as a means of
improving school attendance, retention and learning abilities of the children. Teachers have made an appreciation on Mid-day meal as being a part of education, requiring their full corporation. The slight increase in responsibilities that Mid-day meal may impose will be rewarded by better returns in terms of improved performances for their teaching effort. Every effort must be made to enlist the corporation of teachers and teachers’ union these should become enthusiastic participants rather than sullen by standards.

The Mid-day meal programme is just what the name implies providing meals in schools. The idea is simple the impact is significant because hunger is barrier to learning. Mid-day meal effectively alleviates classroom hunger and persuades poor families to send their children to school. The scheme has increased enrolment in schools, more significantly of girls and improved daily attendance particularly of girls and children from poorer section. The programme has reduced dropout rate and shown improvement in retention, learning ability and achievement. It has curbed teacher absenteeism and narrowed social distances. Sharing of common meal enhances socialization and reduces prejudices. It has curbed teacher absenteeism implementation of Mid-day meal a rallying point for mother’s involvement in governance of schools. Providing free Mid-day meal to children studying in Primary and upper Primary schools is an endeavor to meet the goal of Universal Elementary Education.