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9940 572 462



6381 907 438



ijirset@gmail.com



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# Mid- Day Meal for School Children in India

**Dr. Brahmanand Pratap Singh**

Associate Professor, Political Science, Pratap Bahadur PG College, Pratapgarh City, Pratapgarh, India

**ABSTRACT:** Mid-day meal (MDM) is a wholesome freshly-cooked lunch served to children in government and government-aided schools in India. On 28 November 2001, the Supreme Court of India passed a mandate stating, "We direct the State Governments/Union Territories to implement the Mid Day Meal Scheme by providing every child in every Government and Government assisted Primary School with a prepared midday meal."

## Mid-day meal scheme aims to:

- avoid classroom hunger
- increase school enrolment
- increase school attendance
- improve socialisation among castes
- address malnutrition
- empower women through employment

The Akshaya Patra Foundation, which was successfully implementing its own school lunch programme in Karnataka since 2000, was called in to give testimonies for verifying the efficacy of the scheme; following which the mandate to implement Mid Day Meal Scheme was passed. In order to successfully carry out this mandate, each State Government started its own Mid-Day Meal Programme with Akshara Dasoha being initiated by the Government of Karnataka. One of the major challenges faced by the Government was the successful implementation of the scheme. As per the NP-NSPE, 2006 Guidelines (Midday Meal Scheme Guidelines), wherever possible, the Government would mobilise community support and promote public-private partnership for the programme. Not-for-profits, such as Akshaya Patra, are therefore encouraged to set up operations and act as the implementing arm of the Government.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Karnataka Human Development Report, 2005 states, 'The recognition of the role of voluntary agencies in partnering with Government initiatives by the Centre may have had some influence in the initiatives taken by the Government of Karnataka to bring several NGOs into major Government sponsored programmes.' [1,2] As the report states, the Government of Karnataka was the first to take the step of involving NGOs in development programmes. Additionally, the report states that this 'involvement of the NGOs in multilateral/bilateral programmes, raises the level of co-operation to another level. The NGOs become not only implementers; they also find a place in designing and managing programmes together with Government at all levels.'

This pioneering move by the Government of Karnataka to make NGOs the implementing arm of the Government has been one of the major reasons for its success in reaching the programme's goals. The achievements of these private-public partnerships have even influenced the Central Government. By setting up and encouraging private-public partnerships, the Government is successfully leveraging the skills and resources of the private sector for the greater good. India's Midday Meal Scheme is one of the largest school lunch programmes in the world benefiting 9.78-crore children in 11.40-lakh schools [3,4]

## Mid day meal menu

At Akshaya Patra, the menu is designed and implemented after taking into consideration various factors, including regional palate, taste, and flavours. Menu diversity is achieved by using a wide variety of seasonal vegetables and locally available ingredients. We have adopted a cyclic approach with preference to local palate. For example, we serve Sukhdi in Gujarat, Dalma in Odisha, and Bisibelebath in Karnataka. [5,6]

Our menu planning incorporates a range of flavours with a variety of spices, condiments, vegetables, and staple groups. To sustain the interest of our beneficiaries, an additional menu item is provided. Example:-

Bengaluru Cyclic Menu	
Particulars	Combination of Menu Options
Menu-1	Rice, Tur Dal Sambar, and Mixed Veg Sabji
Menu-2	Rice, Mixed Pulse Sambar, and Beetroot Kabuli Chana Sabji
Menu-3	Ghee Rice, Hayagriva, and Dal Fry
Menu-4	Khichdi, Daliya Sweet Pongal, and Curd
Menu-5	Veg Biryani, Sweet Pumpkin Payasam, and Curd
Menu-6	Rice, Gram Dal Sambar, and Mixed Veg Sabji
Menu-7	Rice, Chana Dal Sambar, and Kabuli Chana
Menu-8	Rice, Mixed Pulse Sambar, and Beetroot Chana Sabji
Menu-9	Bisibelebath and Moong Dal Payasam
Menu-10	Rice and Moong Dal Sambar
Menu-11	Rice and Mixed Sambar
Menu-12	Rice and Channa Dal Sambar
Menu-13	Rice and Mixed Pulse Sambar
Menu-14	Khara Pongal, Jaggery Sweet Payasam, and Fried Groundnut
Menu-15	Rice, Moong Chilka Sambar, and Mixed Veg Sabji

## II. DISCUSSION

The government of India initiated the National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP-NSPE) on 15 August 1995. The objective of the scheme is to help improve the effectiveness of primary education by improving the nutritional status of primary school children. Initially, the scheme was implemented in 2,408 blocks of the country to provide food to students in classes one through five of government, government-aided and local body run schools. By 1997–98, the scheme had been implemented across the country. Under this programme, a cooked midday meal with 300 calories and 12 grams of protein is provided to all children enrolled in classes one to five. In October 2007, the scheme included students in upper primary classes of six to eight in 3,479 educationally backward blocks, and the name was changed from National Programme for Nutrition Support to Primary Education to National Programme of Mid Day Meals in Schools. Though cooked food was to be provided, most states (apart from those already providing cooked food) chose to provide "dry rations" to students. "Dry rations" refers to the provision of uncooked 3 kg of wheat or rice to children with 80% attendance.[7,8]

In April 2001, the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCI) initiated the Public Interest Litigation (Civil) No. 196/2001, People's Union for Civil Liberties v. Union of India & Others – popularly known as the "right to food" case. The PUCI argued that article 21 – "right to life" of the Indian constitution when read together with articles 39(a) and 47, makes the right to food a derived fundamental right which is enforceable by virtue of the constitutional remedy provided under article 32 of the constitution. The PUCI argued that excess food stocks with the Food Corporation of India should be fed to hungry citizens. This included providing midday meals in primary schools. The scheme came into force with the supreme court order dated 28 November 2001, which requires all government and government-assisted primary schools to provide cooked midday meals.[9,10]

**The nutritional guidelines for the minimum amount of food and calorie content per child per day are:**

Entitlement norm per child per day under MDM		
Item	Primary (class one to five)	Upper primary (class six to eight)
Calories	450	700
Protein (in grams)	12	20



Rice / wheat (in grams)	100	150
Dal (in grams)	20	30
Vegetables (in grams)	50	75
Oil and fat (in grams)	5	7.5

In the case of micronutrients (vitamin A, iron, and folate) tablets and de-worming medicines, the student is entitled to receive the amount provided for in the school health programme of the National Rural Health Mission

Tithi Bhojan is a concept designed to ensure greater public participation under the Midday Meal Programme, that started out in the state of Gujarat. In order to generate greater community participation, local members were encouraged to celebrate social events like birth of a child and homewarming by donating to the midday meals served in the local schools. It is voluntarily served by the community/family among school children in several forms such as sweets and savoury snacks, along with regular MDM, full meals, supplementary nutritive items like sprouted beans, and contributions in kind such as cookware, utensils, dinner sets or glasses for drinking water. The concept has been adopted by 10 other states, some with local nomenclatures like "Sampriti Bhojan" in Assam, "Dham" in Himachal Pradesh, "Sneh Bhojan" in Maharashtra, "Shalegagi Naavu Neevu" in Karnataka, "Anna Dhanam" in Puducherry, "Priti Bhoj" in Punjab and "Utsav Bhoj" in Rajasthan. In the North Indian states of Uttarakhand, Haryana and the Union territory of Chandigarh, the scheme retains its original name of Tithi Bhojan.[8,9]

### III. RESULTS

The MDM Scheme has many potential benefits: attracting children from disadvantaged sections (especially girls, Dalits and Adivasis) to school, improving regularity, nutritional benefits, socialisation benefits and benefits to women are some that have been highlighted.

Studies by economists show that some of these benefits have indeed been realised. The positive effect on enrollment of disadvantaged children (Dreze and Kingdon), on attendance (by Chakraborty, Jayaraman, Pande), on learning effort (by Booruah, Afridi and Somanathan), on improving nutritional inputs (Afridi), and on improving nutritional outcomes (by Singh, Dercon and Parker).[10,11]

Caste based discrimination continues to occur in the serving of food, though the government seems unwilling to acknowledge this. Sukhdeo Thorat and Joel Lee found in their 2005 study that caste discrimination was occurring in conjunction with the Mid Day Meals programme.

Media reports also document the positive effect of the programme for women, especially working women and its popularity among parents, children and teachers alike. Media reports have also highlighted several implementation issues, including irregularity, corruption, hygiene, caste discrimination, etc. A few such incidents are listed below:

In December 2005, Delhi police seized eight trucks laden with 2,760 sacks of rice meant for primary school children. The rice was being transported from Food Corporation of India godowns Bulandshahr district to North Delhi. The police stopped the trucks and investigators later discovered that the rice was being stolen by an NGO.

In November 2006, the residents of Pembong village (30 km from Darjeeling) accused a group of teachers of embezzling midday meals. In a written complaint, the residents claimed that students at the primary school had not received their midday meal for the past year and a half.

In December 2006, The Times of India reported that school staff were inflating attendance in order to obtain food grains.

Twenty-three children died in Dharma Sati village in Saran District on 16 July 2013 after eating pesticide-contaminated mid day meals. On 31 July 2013, 55 students at a government middle school fell ill at Kalyuga village in Jamui district after their midday meal provided by an NGO. On the same day, 95 students at Chamandi primary school in Arwal district were ill after their meal.

### IV. CONCLUSIONS

Despite the success of the program, child hunger as a problem persists in India. According to current statistics, 42.5% of the children under 5 are underweight. Some simple health measures such as using iodised salt and getting vaccinations are uncommon in India. "India is home to the world's largest food insecure population, with more than 500 million people who are hungry", India State Hunger Index (ISHI) said. Many children don't get enough to eat, which has far-reaching implications for the performance of the country as a whole. "Its rates of child malnutrition is higher than most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa," it noted. The 2009 Global Hunger Index ranked India at 65 out of 84

countries. More than 200 million went hungry in India that year, more than any other country in the world. The report states that "improving child nutrition is of utmost urgency in most Indian states".[7,8]

The National Food Security Act 2013 (also 'Right to Food Act') is an Indian Act of Parliament which aims to provide subsidized food grains to approximately two thirds of the country's 1.2 billion people. It was signed into law on 12 September 2013, retroactive to 5 July 2013.

The National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA 2013) converts into legal entitlements for existing food security programmes of the Government of India. It includes the Midday Meal Scheme, Integrated Child Development Services scheme and the Public Distribution System. Further, the NFSA 2013 recognizes maternity entitlements. The Midday Meal Scheme and the Integrated Child Development Services Scheme are universal in nature whereas the PDS will reach about two-thirds of the population (75% in rural areas and 50% in urban areas).

Under the provisions of the bill, beneficiaries of the Public Distribution System (or, PDS) are entitled to 5 kilograms (11 lb) per person per month of cereals at the following prices:

Rice at ₹3 (3.9¢ US) per kg

Wheat at ₹2 (2.6¢ US) per kg

Coarse grains (millet) at ₹1 (1.3¢ US) per kg.

Pregnant women, lactating mothers, and certain categories of children are eligible for daily free cereals. The bill has been highly controversial. It was introduced into India's parliament on 22 December 2011, promulgated as a presidential ordinance on 5 July 2013, and enacted into law on 12 September 2013. Odisha government announced implementation of the act in 14 district from 17 November 2015. Assam government implemented the Act on 24 December 2015.[11]

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