

# Achieving Universal Primary Education

## Mid-day Meal Programme in Residential Schools for the Scheduled Tribes in Chhattisgarh

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### Abstract

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*School feeding programme is crucial for children who are attending schools in general and the hungry and malnourished children in particular. Timely provision of food packages in the schools in a variety of forms to the children in United States of America, Jamaica, Malawi, Burkina Faso, Brazil, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh have taken care of under nourished children leading to good health that contributed substantially to the learning in schools. Studies have proved that food provisions have improved attendance, reduced drop outs and in some countries it proved to improve their learning abilities and arithmetic skills. India is no exception, where good results are being achieved due to the National Mid Day Meal Programme. The school feeding programme is not new to the Indian context and especially the residential schools functioning in the Tribal Areas of the country. These residential schools had this provision from a long time, in fact these schools provided the food for the entire day to the Scheduled Tribe Children to ensure proper health and overcome malnutrition among these children. This article has made an attempt to focus on various issues relating to the package of mid-day meal programme and its positive affects/impact in achieving universal primary education especially in the residential schools of Chhattisgarh.*

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There is growing concern for increasing food security and reducing malnutrition among the world population, the picture is gloomy to find that there is still an

estimated population of one billion in the world who are suffering from hunger and malnutrition. About 24,000 people die every day from hunger-related causes.

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The number of people in 70 of the world's lower income countries is facing "food insecure" syndrome and live with persistent hunger and consume less than 2,100 calories of food daily (US Department of Agriculture Reports).

The provision of cooked food in the schools in India existed during early 19<sup>th</sup> century, where food was provided to the school age children. The mid-day meal scheme for school children was officially introduced in Tamilnadu as early as 1925 by the Corporation of Madras, but became a state-wide scheme in 1956 under then chief minister the late Thiru K. Kamaraj who introduced it in Adi Dravida community schools as the 'Poor Feeding' programme. In 1961, the government started receiving American aid for the programme and it was expanded to all corporation and government schools in urban areas.

But it was only in July 1982 under the leadership of the legendary chief minister the late M.G. Ramachandran that the 'Puratchi Thalaivar MGR Nutritious Meal Programme' (PTMGR NMP) was introduced in a phased manner in child welfare centres in rural areas for pre-school children in the age group two-five years and for primary school children in the age group five-nine years. Subsequently on September 15 the same year, despite widespread criticism from economists and financial experts, MGR presciently extended the scheme to Nutritious Meal Centres in urban areas. It was further extended to school students between 10-15 years in 1984. The successful introduction of Tamilnadu's NMP prompted the creation of a National Programme of Nutritional

Support to primary education (popularly known as the mid-day meal scheme) in 1995. Under this programme the Union HRD ministry made provision of free food grains to primary school children at the rate of 100 gm per child for ten months in the year.

In India the primary school children (6-14 years) form about 20 per cent of the total population. Free and compulsory education up to the age group of 14 years is the constitutional commitment. It is estimated that about 40% of children dropout of primary school. A survey conducted by the National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau (NNMB- 2000-2001) indicated that about 70 per cent of these children are undernourished and there is about 30 per cent deficit in energy consumption and over 75 per cent of the children have dietary micronutrient deficit of about 50 per cent. Poor enrolment and high school dropout are attributed to the poor nutritional status of the children compounded by poor socio-economic conditions, child labor and lack of motivation etc.

Mid day meal programmes (MDM) aimed at improving the nutritional status of poor children and ensuring better school enrolment have been adapted in majority of the states of the country. This program although faced hurdles in some of the states due to various reasons due to absence of clear cut policies in managing the MDM, isolated bureaucratic operations and non-involvement of the community etc., is successful in some other states who have adapted innovative methods of making the mid-day meal available to the school children.

Despite several hurdles, this programme received impetus by the timely intervention of the Hon'ble Supreme Court's directive of November 28, 2001 to State Governments to introduce cooked mid day meals in schools, which renewed the interest in MDM in different states of the country. In the absence of such a directive, the Biscuit Barons of the country were wooing the government to supply fortified food to the school age children in the schools, which were found to be outdated and fungal infected and with expired dates of production in the market. The concept of providing hot cooked meal was very well received by the community, parents, teachers and the children in the schools. As the cooked meal was fresh and not stale and nutritious, the children enjoyed these kinds of cooked meals served in the schools.

The constitution of India has also an obligation for the (central and state) governments to fulfill the right to food of India's people, and despite the existence of number of such programmes focusing on issues related to food and malnutrition, there remained many constraints in achieving food security which is starving majority of the people with hunger. The Tenth Five-Year Plan 2002-07 prioritised utilisation and consumption issues with a focus on nutrition and health education, intensified health monitoring and elimination of micronutrient deficiency diseases. Studies undertaken in various countries have shown there is enough wheat, rice and other grains produced to provide every human being with at least 3,500 calories a day which doesn't

count many other commonly eaten food items such as – vegetables, beans, nuts, root crops, fruits, grass-fed meat and fish. It is also found that enough food is available to provide at least 3.4 pounds of food per person a day world wide. Even the most "hungry countries" are having enough food for their people and do not have any critical shortage. In fact it is not the scarcity but the food entitlements of households derive from their own production, income, gathering of wild foods, community support (claims), assets, migration etc. all of which enable the human beings to survive (CARE, USA, 1998; PCD, 1998 a,b,c 1999 a,b,c). A recent article on food scarcity and malnutrition indicated that almost a third of the World's malnourished children are Indians, Over 10 years, at times of economic growth, India's malnourishment rate has fallen only by two per cent with still 40.4% of Indian Children suffering from malnourishment. India has remained very slow in containing with mal nourishment compared to other developing countries and there is a likelihood that it may miss the global target to reduce the malnourishment and hunger by 2015 (Hindustan Times; Sept.14, 08).

#### **Impact of Provision of food in the Schools – Experiences across the World**

The school feeding programmes is one of the several best strategies that address issues related to nutrition and health problems of school-age children. The programmes which are based on school-based nutrition and health programmes can be able to motivate not only the parents but also the children to take

active part in the schooling activities on a regular basis. If one looks at the background that has been given in the preceding paragraphs it will be observed that food insecurity, malnutrition and other health related problems affected health of the people and children and their basic needs of overcoming hunger. It is also observed that, people in order to survive find out various means and measures of survival. Majority of the countries lack proper planning and distribution systems of food and rations in the countries resulting in scarcity and food insecurity.

Proper food planning becomes an important factor for healthy human resources in a country, therefore, it is very important to address food and nutritional supplements for all and beginning can be made with the school going children. The children with hungry stomachs will not be able to learn and continue in the schooling system for a long, the school feeding programme in the world and the mid-day meal programme of India in particular have realised the importance of providing nutrition to the children and have initiated programmes to provide food with micronutrients which are essential for the development of growing children.

Children are prone to various kinds of diseases, such as parasitic worms infecting the intestines or the blood tends to be a major source of disease and malnutrition. It was also found that 320 million school-age children are estimated to have been infected with roundworms, 233 million with whipworms, and 239 million with hookworms, Schistosomiasis also affected an estimated 200 million people throughout the world, approximately 88 million of whom are

under 15 years old (Montresor et al, 1998; Walter et al, 1993). Poor health and nutrition among the school-age children contributes to the inefficiency of the educational system. Children with diminished cognitive abilities and sensory impairments naturally perform less well and more likely to repeat grades and to dropout of school. And it is a well known fact that unhealthy children are irregular in attending the school. The capacity of the parents belonging to lower economic strata and poverty ridden are unable to provide food to the school going children with the result the children who are hungry not able to concentrate in the learning activities of the school, even this kind of temporary hunger has to be addressed in order to enhance the ability of learning and retaining the school-age children in the schools. In many countries, the children have to work for the household in the morning and walk long distances to the schools with empty stomachs, this is more conspicuous with the girl child who has to fetch a helping hand to the mother and then attend the school. All these factors necessitate the provision of mid-day meal or the school feeding programme for the children. This has become a major concern of the UN organisations as well.

“Providing food and education is the single most important thing we can do for the development of the individual and his or her nation

–James T. Morris, Executive Director,  
UN World Food Programme”.

### **School Feeding Programmes followed in Various Countries**

Most of the countries have developed programmes for providing food for the

school children in the schools. These countries provide nutritious food which is ensured to contain all the requisite micro nutrients necessary for the development of the growth of the children and also takes care of their health aspects. The school feeding programmes (SFPs) are also followed in the highly advanced countries like USA and Europe. The fortified food is generally discouraged

and cultural considerations of the societies are also taken into account while planning the school feeding programmes. The experiences of countries across the world showed concern for the school children and also studies as well as researches have proved that the provision of food in some or other kind has influenced the learning among the school children.

**Table : Showing School Feeding Programmes followed in various countries and the advantages being attained**

<i>Country</i>	<i>Type of SFPs</i>	<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Advantages</i>
1. USA	Breakfast was provided in the disadvantaged area schools	The test scores of the children having SFPs have been found to improve.	Attendance also improved.
2. Jamaica	Breakfast was provided in schools	Malnourished children benefitted.	Improvement in attendance and arithmetic scores.
3. Peru	Breakfast was provided with beverages	Disadvantaged children benefitted to a great extent.	Improvement in learning and performance.
4. Nepal	Providing food in school.	Improved nutritional status.	Attendance improved.
5. Ghana	SFPs provision in schools had a positive result.	Enrolment improved.	Attendance improved.
6. Burkina Faso	Provision of food in schools- school canteens.	Increased enrolment, reduced dropouts.	Attendance and success rates in schools improved.
7. Malawi	Provision SFPs in schools.	Increased enrolment.	Reduction in absenteeism.
8. Niger	(a) Three meals per day was provided in the schools to the children. (b) In addition take-home ration to girl child.	Participation in school increased.  Increased girls' participation in schools.	Attendance improved in the children of nomad and transhumant families.

9. Bangladesh	School-based food distribution was followed in schools.	Increased enrolment of the children.	There is decline in the absenteeism.
10. Indonesia	In Indonesia, US \$0.10 and US \$ 0.15 per ration per day to village schools via a village Bank is provided, the ration should contain 300 K calories and 5 grams of protein. The food is provided three times a week and for nine months.	Enhanced Participation of Children in schools	Regularity in school children.
11. South Africa	In South Africa, a national school breakfast program is provided with a recommended daily allowance (RDA) for calories is about US \$0.30 per child per day.	It sufficed as additional food intake by the children.	Reduced malnutrition and health problems.
12. Bolivia	Snacks program is being provided consisting of fortified bread and hot chocolate at an estimated cost of US \$4.00 per child per year.	Increased Enrolment of the Children	Children were encouraged to attend school.
13. Pakistan	Income transfer in the form of one or two tins of oil to the families whose girls attend the school for 20 days per month.	Enrolment improved by 76%.	Attendance increased by 95% among the children.

It will be observed from the above table that every country according to its own requirements has created food provision programmes in the schools in order to not only improve the enrolment of the children in the schools but also their regularity. Studies reveal that Asian countries like Bangladesh, Indonesia and Pakistan have further gone a step ahead in providing food support to the parents of the school going children to take care of food security of the families in the form of either distribution of food grains, oil or other such food items. While in the Latin American countries of Panama, Brazil and El-Salvador food baskets, milk and cakes are provided to the school age children belonging to the slums and the disadvantaged areas in order to improve the enrolment of the schools (Moore. EC, 1994; WFP, 1993 a, b, c, f; Ahmed et al 1994; Glewwe et al, 1994; Jamison et al, 1993). Whereas USA has ensured the full participation of the children from the disadvantaged groups in the school by providing food packages, thus every country has considered the importance of food in improving the enrolment in the schools. Studies have showed indications of positive participation of children in schools in utilising conditional food supplies to the families of the school going children. A variety of school feeding interventions not only served the hunger of the child alone but also the entire families facing food insecurity due to poverty and adverse socio-economic conditions.

### **The Mid-day Meal Programme**

The provision of nutritious food to the school children is an age old concept; this

practice has helped the children overcome their hunger and enabled them to concentrate in their studies. The provision of food in the school was first introduced in a Japanese private school in the late 1800s, in Brazil in 1938, in fact in USA and European countries it was there during early 19<sup>th</sup> century as well as in some of the Asian countries like Japan and India also during the same period, these kind of food provision for the school children were found to have a variety of advantages, like supplementing nutritional value, peer interaction and participation, team working and on top of all regular attendance and attentive while learning. The school feeding programmes became more prominent during 1930s in countries like US and UK, where schemes of feeding school children was introduced with the sole objective of improving the growth of the children. For instance, in UK, milk was provided free to the children, such practices were witnessed in certain specific schools of South Africa in the early 1940s. This has gradually resulted in the provision of nutritious meals to the school going children (Richter, Griesel and Rose, 2000; Kruger. M, et al 1994). With evidently satisfactory results, both Japan and the US boast 100 per cent literacy and even Brazil which (like India) is classified as a medium income nation by the United Nations Development Programme has attained 87.3 per cent literacy according to UNDP's Human Development Report, 2003 as against India's 58 per cent.

However, the ultimate goal of school feeding programmes is in order to attain universal primary education while encompassing food insecurity and

health concerns. The low-income countries which are resource constrained suffer from poor health in the form of chronic protein-energy malnutrition, iron deficiency anemia, iodine deficiency or helminthes infections, which contributed significantly to poor educational outcomes (Del Rosso and Marek 1996 and 1999; and Bennett, 2003).

The school feeding programme further received a boost in 2000, the United Nations met in Dakar to commit itself to the eradication of hunger and the attainment of universal primary education. School feeding programmes (SFPs) are one of the main interventions used to address these challenges. School feeding falls squarely within the ambit of the UN declaration, and at least three of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), namely MDG 1 (to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger), MDG 2 (to achieve universal primary education) and MDG 3 (to promote gender equality and empower women).

In India, the order of the Hon'ble Supreme Court has come as a boon for the school children by making the provision of mid-day meals compulsory in the schools. It clearly directed and specified the quantity and quality of food to be provided to every primary school child and specified the food contents with – a minimum content of 300 calories and 8-12 grams of protein each day of school for a minimum of 200 days. The schools as well as grassroots organisations rallied around the Hon'ble Supreme Court's orders and demanded that the states implement the Mid-Day Meal Scheme in its totality. Although many states were slow in the beginning,

today implementation of the mid-day meal is almost universal across the country and successful and innovative methods have also been adopted.

### **Relevant Supreme Court Orders from Right to Food case concerning MDMS**

1. "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 Schools with a prepared mid-day meal with a minimum content of 300 calories and 8-12 grams of protein each day of school for a minimum of 200 days." (Nov. 28, 2001 order)
2. The conversion costs for a cooked meal, under no circumstances, shall be recovered from the children or their parents.
3. In appointment of cooks and helpers, preference shall be given to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
4. The Central Government shall make provisions for construction of kitchen sheds and shall also allocate funds to meet with the conversion costs of food-grains into cooked mid-day meals. It shall also periodically monitor the low take off of the food grains.
5. In drought affected areas, mid-day meal shall be supplied even during summer vacations.
6. Attempts shall be made for better infrastructure, improved facilities (safe drinking water etc.), close monitoring (regular inspection etc.) and other quality safeguards as also



the improvement of the contents of the meal so as to provide nutritious meal to the children of the primary schools.”(April 20, 2004 order)

**The objectives of the mid-day meal scheme are**

- (i) Improving the nutritional status of children in Classes I – VIII in Government, Local Body and Government aided schools, and EGS and AIE centers.
- (ii) Encouraging poor children, belonging to disadvantaged sections, to attend school more regularly and help them concentrate on classroom activities.
- (iii) Providing nutritional support to children of primary stage in drought-affected areas during summer vacation.

**Rationale of Providing Mid-day Meal**

- **Promoting school participation:** Mid day meals have big effects on school participation, not just in terms of getting more children enrolled in the registers but also in terms of regular pupil attendance on a daily basis.
- **Preventing classroom hunger:** Many children reach school on an empty stomach. Even children who have a meal before they leave for school get hungry by the afternoon and are not able to concentrate - especially children from families who cannot give them a lunch box or are staying a long distance away from the school. Mid day meal can help to overcome this problem by preventing “classroom hunger”.

- **Facilitating the healthy growth of children:** Mid day meal can also act as a regular source of “supplementary nutrition” for children, and facilitate their healthy growth.
- **Intrinsic educational value:** A well-organised mid day meal 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 and other related matters.
- **Fostering social equality:** Mid day meal can help spread egalitarian values, as children from various social backgrounds learn to sit together and share a common meal. In particular, mid day meal can help to break the barriers of caste and class among school. Appointing cooks from Dalit communities is another way of teaching children to overcome caste prejudices.
- **Enhancing gender equity:** The gender gap in school participation tends to narrow, as the Mid Day Meal Scheme helps erode the barriers that prevent girls from going to school. Mid Day Meal Scheme also provide a useful source of employment for women, and helps liberate workingwomen from the burden of cooking at home during the day. In these and other ways, women and girl children have a special stake in Mid Day Meal Scheme.
- **Psychological Benefits:** Physiological deprivation leads to low self-esteem, consequent

insecurity, anxiety and stress. The Mid Day Meal Scheme can help address this and facilitate cognitive, emotional and social development

### **Provision of Food Facilities in Ashram Schools of Chhattisgarh**

The provision of whole day food facilities is not new to the charter of Ashram Schools. It has been practiced in these residential schools from a long time, and to be precise since the independence, special efforts were made to provide education of satisfactory quality to the Scheduled Tribes children residing in the interior and inaccessible habitations. In fact, Ashram Schools in the country which are managed by the Tribal Development Departments across the country have been following the provision of full day provision of meals to the Scheduled Tribe children in the tribal areas. Ashram Schools has remained a successful programme as it has taken into consideration the non-availability of facilities such as learning environment at home, proper nutritious food to the children, affordability of the parents to feed the children, educate the children by providing them all necessary teaching

learning material and parental supervision in home studies. In addition, it has the element of the teachers and the taught staying together in the same campus, learning and participating in various extra-curricular activities and ensuring holistic development of the students in the Ashram Schools.

These schools provided proper nutritious food to the children as per the menu fixed for each day and adequate fresh cooked meal as per the local requirements were made available to the children.

Chhattisgarh is a state made up of 18 very large districts bound in the north by Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand, in the east by Orissa, in the South by Andhra Pradesh and in the West by Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

The state of Chhattisgarh has 887 residential ashram schools exclusively meant for the Scheduled Tribe children. There are 701 primary schools, 186 middle schools with an intake capacity of 38,325 children at the primary stage and 13,460 at the middle stage.

The Ashram Schools of Chhattisgarh have the provision of providing food three times a day to the children and in addition, morning and evening snacks

### **Ashram Schools managed by Tribal Welfare Department of Chhattisgarh**

Type of School	Ashram Schools				Sanctioned Strength			
	Boys	Girls	Co-educational	Total	Boys	Girls	Co-educational	Total
Primary School	330	180	191	701	14730	8440	15155	38325
Middle School	59	67	60	186	3345	4365	5750	13460
Total	389	247	251	887	18075	12805	20905	51785

Source : Annual Report 2006-07, Tribal Welfare Department, Chhattisgarh

are also provided. The hostels have very well organised kitchen with appointed cooks, dining space and grounds for developing kitchen gardens. The additional advantage these school have is in terms of the provision of designated cook, helper and water man for the purpose of providing timely meals and maintaining the kitchen hygienically. The cooking material is provided by the school warden/Principal and the day-to-day investment register is maintained by the school for inspection as well as release of money for providing food either on monthly or fortnightly basis. The unit cost per child per day per school varies from Rs. 6/- to Rs.8/-. The weekly menu is worked out by the teachers and the students and is displayed in the entrance of every school; in addition the available kitchen utensils and other items are also displayed on the board in the school entrance. The menu and the food items to be served vary from school to school and is planned in accordance to the requirement of the local needs and food habits.

The timing of the meals is decided in accordance of the food habits of the children residing in the Ashram Schools. In some of the schools, the children have their lunch in the morning by 08.30 hrs. and light snacks at 12.30 hrs. and

snacks with tea at 17.00 hrs. and dinner at 19.30 hrs. These timings change during the winters and summers as well as during the period of examinations.

Regarding the facilities of the kitchen, these schools have a standard pattern of inventory of utensils which are provided to these schools and the schools depending upon their size, various kinds of utensils are provided, in some of the schools cooking gas is also utilised for cooking, while some of the schools located in the interior forest areas manage to get the dry forest wood for cooking. The menu of the schools generally has the following items:

The food items are adequately served to the children in the Ashram Schools, and as a part of discipline the children clean their meals plates and other utensils they use for their meals. The big vessels and the other utensils are washed and cleaned by the helper of the cook working in the schools, they also clean the dining hall before and after the meals are served and ensure the cleanliness of the dining hall, kitchen and the area where the provision of washing hands and drinking water facilities are made available. The management of the kitchen, dining area, procurement of food items and health of the children vests on the school

#### Menu of the Ashram Schools

Main Item	Dal/Lintels	Vegetables/Curry	Special items
Rice	Yellow Dal	Seasonal vegetables	Egg Curry (once in a week)
Roti (wheat)	Yellow Dal	Seasonal vegetables	Khur - Sweet Dish (once in a week)
Pulao (on Festivals)	One Local preferred vegetable (on Festivals)		Sweet Dish (on Festivals)

superintendent provided in every residential school.

### **Mid-day Meal Programme with a difference**

The residential schools managed by the tribal development departments have paved way for the implementation of mid-day meal programme in the primary schools managed by the respective state education departments. The residential ashram schools serving the tribal although struggled in the initial stages in managing the feeding programme as the school children have to feed meals of the entire day it was a challenging task as the schools have to take into account the feeding habits of the newly entering tribal children to the schools, as well as the preference of their food items. The interior location of the schools always remained a major problem in receiving the ration for the schools and adequate care for nutrition, health and hygiene in providing food to children. On the other hand the residential schools have to face the challenges of training the newly admitted tribal children to the schools in various activities of the school including the dietary habits, as the children have different patterns of food which they consume at home and the timings as well as methods of preparation etc.

The residential schools had the task to suitably supplement with proper food making the tribal children healthy and attentive and fit to undertake their studies as the tribal parents lack awareness in providing adequate nutrition supplements in their food and understand various kinds of deficiencies

which have affected the health of the children. These schools being located in the tribal areas utilise the forest resources such as water from the rivers, dry wood for cooking, freely available vegetables etc. In addition, some of the schools which have good cultivable land develop seasonal vegetables in the kitchen garden and utilise the vegetables in the daily menu of the schools. Unlike the schools managed by the education departments, these tribal residential schools had the advantage of having dedicated cook appointed for preparing the food for the children, and provision of a school superintendent lessened the burden of food preparation on the school teachers as well as the children so that they can concentrate in providing sufficient time for the teaching, learning and other co-curricular activities of the school. The records are also maintained by the school superintendent and submitted to the assistant tribal development officer every fortnight and the funds are also released for the procurement of food items on a regular basis. The food which is prepared for the school children are also shared by the teachers and the other school staff in the residential schools.

The Ashram Schools in majority feed adequately the children with reports of proper nutrition among these children and regular health checkups ensure there are no mal nutrition and health problems, and some basic health problems such as scurvies, worms and diseases due to local seasonal change are cured by the local health center Para-medicos. The processes of de-worming and vitamin deficient

medicines are provided to the students from time to time. Interesting observations are there from the teachers and staff of the school such as – when the children go for the long vacations and return to the schools, the children return weak and mal nourished and they take time to recover their health, which is a good indication of a good impact of the school feeding as well as the environment on the tribal children studying in the residential Ashram Schools.

However, some of the residential schools do face problems in managing the schools, and more particularly the states which have not opted the funding of tribal residential schools from the Ministry of Tribal Affairs face resource crunch in meeting a variety of demands of the residential schools as each and every item in the residential schools has to be taken care by the government including full day food for the children, and more particularly the schools which have low enrolments and located in isolated terrain tribal habitations are adversely affected. As the schools are inaccessible, the teachers develop a tendency to be irregular and the superintendents and the other staff are very casual in their approach, and the tribal parents don't confront the teachers the functioning of these schools are affected and the children are devoid of regular food in the schools and the schools don't function regularly. While some of the residential schools the menu of the food to be served is not strictly followed and the children do not get good quality as well as food and dropout or run away from the schools. The schools which don't provide items such as eggs,

mutton and chicken once a while in the school also face resistance from the children and they skip their food and develop a tendency to drop out of the school. Although majority of the residential schools were able to provide cooked food regularly to the children and staff, the schools sometimes faced difficulties in getting the food in time as well as the worn out utensils replaced on regular basis which have spoiled due to regular usage, this was found to be a very common problem among the schools.

### **Concluding Observations**

There is definitely a co-relation between the mid day meal and school feeding on enrolment in the schools, however, this programme can be more effective if the quality of food which is served in the schools is of satisfactory nature and the conducive environment can generate more retention in the schools. The catalytic role of the mid-day meal hence can't be undermined in overcoming the problem of enrolment and regularity in the attendance. The full day meal programme particularly in the schools served in the disadvantaged areas and economically backward areas lessen the burden of the parents particularly the mothers who have to plan for a breakfast, lunch for the children before they go to the schools (Dreze et al, 2003). A child whose stomach is full and is healthy can definitely concentrate better in the studies which can have a cumulative effect on learning, achievement, retention, and upward mobility to higher classes. When the schools take care of the food, health and nutritional security

of the children, the children to a great extent can be active learners in the schools. This in turn can enable the schools and the teachers to focus their attention in providing good learning inputs to the children effectively.

The Ashram Schools in general have addressed to a variety of issues related to – food security, day-to-day requirements of the children, residential facility, learning material, health, physical development, socialisation in the school, and nurturing confidence among the children as well as teaching them to live together and learn from each other the socially accepted values and ethos. The school feeding programme in these residential Ashram Schools has positive impact on learning to live together and eat together harmoniously and has also taken care the health of children in terms of the requisite nutritional needs and overcoming hunger in schools. In the absence of such arrangements, the residential schools could not most probably retain the children in the schools. The school feeding programme influenced the regularity of school children and minimised malnutrition. Thus it has

resulted in putting an “end to hunger among the children by initiating learning in the schools”. So learning in the Ashram Schools goes beyond the prescribed textual curriculum and carves out the desired values of the society among the children while ensuring regular feeding in the schools and good health of the children, which being one of the most necessary pre requisites for effective learning to take place in the schools. In these residential schools, the teachers who also reside with the children and are having a major role in taking care of the learning, school feeding as well as other needs of the resident children also bound to be regular, otherwise the activities of the schools are adversely affected. The accountability on the part of the teachers and the staff of the Ashram Schools becomes very crucial, which ensures at least regularity both among the teachers and the taught. This can be considered as a positive influence of attaining retention among children and control over teacher absenteeism in the schools which have cumulative effect on the universalisation of primary education among the disadvantaged groups.

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