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ROLE OF EDUCATION IN PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION: AN ANALYSIS OF THE WORKING OF MID DAY MEAL

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ABSTRACT

Efforts to eradicate illiteracy existed even in the pre independence days. Many provincial heads of the states and social reformers themselves took interest to address the issue of mass illiteracy. However, as their efforts were quite sporadic and lacked continuity, their impact largely remained localized, that petered out with the passage of time. The tryst against illiteracy took a far more ambitious form after Independence and many new and innovative initiatives were tried out in the subsequent ensuing plans. However, their impact has been a mixed one. It could at best be called a saga of success and failures, triumph and disappointments and integration and marginalisation. Concern over the status of development and anxious to stem out the marginalization of a sizeable section of the society, particularly the vulnerable section, the government in the year 2001 launched a very ambitious educational programme called Sarva Siksha Abhiyam (SSA). The ensuing exercise attempts to study the performance of Mid Day Meal (MDM) which forms a very crucial and significant component of SSA. It examines the extent to which it has succeeded in ensuring social inclusion of the people in general and deprived section of the society. The study has been carried out in ten districts of Uttar Pradesh and covers 1010 schools out of which sixty nine percent were primary and remaining about thirty one upper primary. Stratified random sampling was used to select the sample schools which were located both in the urban as well as rural areas.

KEYWORDS

Social Inclusion, MDM, SSA, marginalized section.

INTRODUCTION

The decades of planned experience has brought home several useful lessons. The first and foremost being that by merely attaining high rate of growth, even on a sustained basis, would not spell all-round prosperity if it fails to induce, motivate and galvanize the people at large to participate in the process of development on the contrary, it may promote regional disparities and dissepamous tendencies across board that ultimately prove detrimental to the stability, prosperity and tranquility of the country which is a pre-requisite condition for growth and development. The other and more important lesson has been that without developing the capacity of the people, their participation may not be feasible.

The concept of 'social inclusion' or inclusive growth came in vogue when it was being increasingly realized that the development programmes that had been launched in various subsequent plans, failed to reach out to the people at large and were found to be totally inept to address the critical issues for which they had been conceived on one hand and also led to mis appropriation of resources on the other. The lack of transparency into the functioning of these programmes further fuelled suspicious about the institutions and motives of the programme functionaries and also isolated a large section of people, who looked at them with great contempt and disdain.

Therefore, the concept of social inclusion would only become realistic if it succeeds in motivating and luring the people to participate in the programmes/schemes in a big way. In other words, it strongly advocates for decentralization of planning where the people at the grass root level are given adequate space to air their views and contribute to the process of planning- a bottom up approach and not the opposite one, which has remained in practice for quite long.

Further, it also dawned upon the planners that the most appropriate and reliable tool for capacity building of the people could only be through education. The plausible reason being that amongst its other contemporary sources, only education has the capability to transgress, influence, and mould the human capabilities from a very low levels to unprecedented heights, from being an unknown and unproductive class to becoming a highly competitive unit and from being a raw and uncultivated class to becoming a highly refined value added product (Pant, 2005). All this clearly highlights the need and role of education in the new perspectives.

Efforts to eradicate illiteracy could be traced back even to pre-independence days when the provincial heads of some of the states like Mysore, Travancore, Coimbatore etc. themselves took great interest in promoting literacy among masses. Similarly, many social reformers like Tagore, Gandhi, Rajgopalachari, Raja Ram Mohan Roy to name some also took deep interest to address the issue of illiteracy among masses. However, as their efforts lacked continuity, and were undertaken with limited resources, their impact largely remained localised that petered out with the passage of time (Rawal, 1998).

After independence, the tryst against illiteracy took a far more ambitious form and many ambitious and innovative programmes were launched in subsequent plan periods. The impact of these programmes remained a mixed one. It could, at best, be summarized as the saga of success and failures, triumph and disappointments, and convergence or integration and marginalization. The success, triumph and integration were achieved in the form of manifold increase in plan allocation of resources, number of schools, number of teachers, the state of physical infrastructure, enrolment levels of students and overall increase in the literacy levels; however, the disappointments, failures and marginalization's were witnessed largely in the form of high level of drop outs of students both at the primary and upper primary levels dilution in the quality of education, increasing marginalization of disadvantaged section of the society and females (NSSO 52nd round data, Kaul 2002; Visaria, et.al. 1993).

Unfortunately, these anomalies did not remain confined to region and gender specific domains but have spread across caste and regional boundaries as well concerned over these issues, the government constituted commission and sub-committees in various plan periods to review the overall working and performance this sector and also against appropriate interventions. Based on the recommendations, of these expert committees the nation kept launching programme after programme and today our country, perhaps, is one of the few nations that has an educational programme for every segment of the society be they infant, child, adult, physically disabled or mentally challenged (Pant, 2009: Ibid).

These endeavours succeeded positively in some of the educational parameters at the macro-level; however, the micro-level scenario in many states (identified as BIMARU) remained quite depressing and disappointing. Concern over these developments, government ultimately came up with a very ambitious programme called Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) in 2001. Under SSA, the entire gamut of educational interventions that starts with early childhood care and carries through the elementary and post elementary phase has been perceived holistically (MHRD, 2003).

MID-DAY MEAL: THE BACKGROUND

Mid Day Meal (MDM), which has now emerged to be an important and integral component of SSA, primarily envisages to address two critical issues that have been afflicting the performance of elementary education for quite long enhancement in the enrolment, retention and attendance of students in the school and simultaneously aiming to improve the nutritional levels among the school going children. It has now emerged as one of the largest school feeding programme reaching out to about 12 crore children in about 13 lakh schools/EGS centres across the country.

MDM has had a long history in India. In 1925, for the first time, it was introduced for the disadvantaged children in Madras Municipal Corporation. By the mid 1980s, three states namely Gujarat, Kerala and Tamil Nadu and the Union Territory of Pondicherry had universalized cooked mid day meal programme through their own resources for children studying at the primary level (NP-NSE, 2006).

The programme received impetus in the year 1995, when National Programme of Nutritional support to Primary Education (NS-NSPE) was launched as a centrally sponsored scheme initially for 2408 blocks of the country and by 1997-98 it was extended to all blocks of the country. The scheme was further extended in 2002 to cover not only the children in government primary schools, government aided and local body schools but also to children studying in ECS and AIE centres. Since 2007-08, MDM has also been extended to cover children in upper primary classes in 3427 educationally backward blocks (EBBs). The scheme has undergone several amendments and modifications in subsequent years to ensure balanced and nutrition did to the children.

Since MDM is a component of SSA, it naturally inherits all its basic features and promotes public private partnership (PPP) model that envisages participation of level bodies in the overall functioning of the programme. The ensuing study covers the performance of MDM in the following ten districts of Uttar Pradesh viz. Sitapur, CSM Nagar, Kanauj, Lalitpur, Mahoba, Aligarh, Sharanpur, Basti, Chandauli and Rampur.

OBJECTIVES

As has been stated earlier also MDM primarily address the issues of enhancing enrolment, retention and attendance of students in the elementary and upper primary schools besides focusing on nutritional requirements of the children. However, as MDM is also a crucial component of SSA, which has also been identified as the flagship programmes of the government whose major objective is to promote "social inclusion" through an array of social interventions that enhances access, awareness, convergence, participation gender-sensitization and empowerment etc.

Therefore the ensuing exercise attempts to study whatever MDM has succeeded in its endeavour to promote social inclusion. More specifically, it focuses on awareness, participation, gender sensitization and awareness and convergence with other programmes.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study has been carried out in ten districts of U.P. A total of 100 schools from each of the sample district have been selected out of which 70 were primary and remaining 30 from upper primary category. Thus, the total sample contained 1000 school of which the ratio of primary and upper primary was 7:3. Further, care has also been taken to select the schools from district blocks in both the rural and urban areas. Thus, the selection of schools has been made on the basis of stratified random sampling technique.

Further, as MDM programme operates on public-private partnership mode, views of other key players like parents, teachers, members of VEC, officials of FCI etc. have been solicited. More precisely, the methodology adopted has been summarized below:

RESEARCH DESIGN FOR THE STUDY

Sl. No.	Particulars	Number	
1	Districts	10	
2	Blocks	1/3 of total blocks (of which 2 blocks would be distant blocks) and 1/3 of total urban wards (of which 2 wards would be distant wards)	
3	Schools	Primary	700 @ 70 schools per district
		Upper Primary	300 @ 30 schools per district
		Total	1000 @ 100 schools per district
4	Students	Primary	2800 @ 4 students per school
		Upper Primary	1200 @ 4 students per school
		Total	4000 @ 4 students per school
5	Parents	4000 @ 4 parents per school	
6	Teachers	1000 @ one teacher per school	
7	Cook	1000 @ one cook per school	
8	MTA/PTA	1000 @ one member per school	
9	VEC	1000 @ one member per school	

It has already been stated that the study covers a total of 1010 schools, however, the classification, on the basis of their management reveals an over-whelming 97 per cent of the schools were from government domain whereas the proportion of private aided schools was hardly about 3 percent. Further, the students profile also reveals homogeneity in the socio-economic background. The main castes dominating the student's community were that of SCs, OBC, and Minorities (Table 1).

TABLE 1: DISTRICT AND MANAGEMENT WISE NUMBER OF SAMPLE SCHOOLS

Sl. No.	Name of District	No. of Sampled Blocks	No. of Sampled Schools								
			Government			Private Aided			Total Sample		
			PS	UPS	Total	PS	UPS	Total	PS	UPS	Total
1	Sitapur	09	70	27	97	-	04	04	70	31	101
2	CSM Nagar	05	72	29	101	-	01	01	72	30	102
3	Kannauj	04	70	29	99	-	03	03	70	32	102
4	Mahoba	04	70	27	97	-	04	04	70	31	101
5	Aligarh	05	70	29	99	-	01	01	70	30	100
6	Basti	05	70	26	96	-	04	04	70	30	100
7	Chandauli	05	70	25	95	-	06	06	70	31	101
8	Lalitpur	03	70	32	102	-	-	-	70	32	102
9	Shravasti	02	71	29	100	-	01	01	71	30	101
10	Rampur	03	69	25	94	01	05	06	70	30	100
Total		45	702	278	980	01	29	30	703	307	1010

Source: Field Survey, 2011.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

The concept of social inclusion can get support only if the programme has an element of transparency into its overall functioning. This feature not only encourages, motivates and sensitizes the key stake holders but also enhances their level of participation into the programme. The element of transparency has been studied on the basis of following parameters:

- Whether MDM was being displayed prominently on the schools walls for general public, as per the guidelines,
- Whether the sample schools were following the menu displayed on the display, board,
- To what extent MDM has become functional.

The analysis shows that about 96 percent of the sample schools were displaying MDM and another about 91 percent were also following the menu of MDM. The inter-district study shows that in majority of the districts, the sample schools performance was quite satisfactory however, there were some districts like Aligarh (22 percents and Basti (18 percent) where the performance in some of the schools required special attention (Table 2 & 3).

TABLE 2: DISPLAY OF THE MENU OF MID DAY MEAL ON THE SCHOOL'S WALL

Sl. No.	Name of District	Displayed			Not Displayed			Total Sample		
		PS	UPS	Total	PS	UPS	Total	PS	UPS	Total
1	Sitapur	70	30	100	-	01	01	70	31	101
2	CSM Nagar	72	30	102	-	-	-	72	30	102
3	Kannauj	68	31	99	02	01	03	70	32	102
4	Mahoba	70	31	101	-	-	-	70	31	101
5	Aligarh	70	29	99	-	01	01	70	30	100
6	Basti	63	26	89	07	04	11	70	30	100
7	Chandauli	69	28	97	01	03	04	70	31	101
8	Lalitpur	67	32	99	03	-	03	70	32	102
9	Shravasti	69	30	99	02	-	02	71	30	101
10	Rampur	59	27	86	11	03	14	70	30	100
Total		677	294	971	26	13	39	703	307	1010

Source: Field Survey, 2011.

TABLE 3: MID DAY MEAL ACCORDING TO MENU

Sl. No.	Name of District	According to Menu			Not According to Menu			Total Sample		
		PS	UPS	Total	PS	UPS	Total	PS	UPS	Total
1	Sitapur	69	30	99	01	01	02	70	31	101
2	CSM Nagar	52	18	70	07	05	12	59	23	82
3	Kannauj	66	32	98	02	-	02	68	32	100
4	Mahoba	67	30	97	01	-	01	68	30	98
5	Aligarh	53	25	78	17	05	22	70	30	100
6	Basti	52	25	77	13	04	17	65	29	94
7	Chandauli	64	26	90	01	03	04	65	29	94
8	Lalitpur	65	29	94	04	02	06	69	31	100
9	Shravasti	54	22	76	-	-	-	54	22	76
10	Rampur	53	26	79	16	03	19	69	29	98
Total		595	263	858	62	23	85	657	286	943

Source: Field Survey, 2011.

Likewise for studying the functionality of the programme, attempt has been made to study how much regularity was being maintained in the distribution of MDM. The analysis shows that MDM was being served in about 93 percent of the school, though there were still about 7 percent of the schools, where regularity was not ensured. The study also shows that the level of functionality of the programme was not uniform in all sample districts and there were two districts viz. Shravasti and CSM Nagar (Amethi) where there were still about 24 percent and 20 percent of the schools where the programme faced difficulty in ensuring regularity. However, in the remaining of the district, the programme's performance was quite heartening (Table 4).

TABLE 4: REGULARITY IN DISTRIBUTION OF MID DAY MEAL

Sl. No.	Name of District	MDM being Served on daily basis			MDM being Not Served on daily basis			Total Sample		
		PS	UPS	Total	PS	UPS	Total	PS	UPS	Total
1	Sitapur	70	31	101	-	-	-	70	31	101
2	CSM Nagar	59	23	82	13	07	20	72	30	102
3	Kannauj	68	32	100	02	-	02	70	32	102
4	Mahoba	68	30	98	02	01	03	70	31	101
5	Aligarh	70	30	100	-	-	-	70	30	100
6	Basti	65	29	94	05	01	06	70	30	100
7	Chandauli	65	29	94	05	02	07	70	31	101
8	Lalitpur	69	31	100	01	01	02	70	32	102
9	Shravasti	54	22	76	17	08	25	71	30	101
10	Rampur	69	29	98	01	01	02	70	30	100
Total		657	286	943	46	21	67	703	307	1010

Source: Field Survey, 2011.

The programme of MDM has often being criticized on the basis of poor quality and less quality of food served under its banner. Accordingly, an attempt was made to study the same and views were solicited from the students and other stake holder (Parents, teachers, members of VEC etc.) The study shows that in over 96 percent of the sample schools, both the quantity provided was termed as either good or satisfactory and even adequate. However, at the inter-district level, there were quite a few schools in district like Chandauli (5 percent) Shravasti (8 percent), Kanauj (4 percent) where the programme was having problem on quality and quantity aspect. Similarly on ensuring quantity, in an overwhelming districts (about 96 percent), the schools performance was highly satisfactory whereas in the remaining the programme faced rough weather. The two district where it faced problems were Lalitpur (11 percents and Aligarh 17 percent). Thus, it could be said that, by and large, the performance of the programme was reasonably sound.

GENDER-SENSITISATION & EMPOWERMENT

Gender-sensitisation and empowerment can only be achieved if the programme encourages social inclusion. In MDM the concept of gender-sensitisation has been studied/observed through the manner in which the children are made to set both in the classrooms as well as while taking MDM meal. Further, as it has been stated earlier that the three major castes that overwhelmingly dominated the students profile were the SC, OBC and Minorities. The proportion of General Caste was quite minimal. The analysis shows that over 94 percent of the children have been taking MDM only substantiates our belief that the programme, to a large extent, has succeeded in promoting gender-sensitiation which is a vital component for achieving social inclusion.

Since MDM is to be run on PPP mode, the programme has accordingly made space for the private players for participation. In this context, the community, has also been assigned the task of supervising the school activities in school management, at the time of MDM distribution. The analysis of supervision pattern shows that in over 85 percent of the sample schools, the level of community participation was either good or quite satisfactory. The level of community participation, at the inter-district level, has not been uniform. However, it can be argued that MDM has also been able to induce, motivate and sensitise the community into school level activities which heralds good for social inclusion. The study also shows that in about 15 percent district the community participation was weak and not good. The two districts that lagged behind were Basti & Shravasti where over 56 percent and 29 percent of the sample schools had poor level of participation (Table 5).

TABLE 5: COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION OF PARENTS/VECS/PANCHAYATS/URBAN BODIES IN SUPERVISION/MONITORING OF MID DAY MEAL PROGRAMME

Sl. No.	Name of District	Good			Satisfactory			Not Good			Total Sample		
		PS	UPS	Total	PS	UPS	Total	PS	UPS	Total	PS	UPS	Total
1	Sitapur	09	02	11	50	27	77	11	02	13	70	31	101
2	CSM Nagar	08	04	12	62	22	84	02	04	06	72	30	102
3	Kannauj	-	01	01	69	31	100	01	-	01	70	32	102
4	Mahoba	02	02	04	66	27	93	02	02	04	70	31	101
5	Aligarh	02	04	06	63	24	87	05	02	07	70	30	100
6	Basti	-	-	-	34	10	44	36	20	56	70	30	100
7	Chandauli	05	02	07	56	23	81	09	06	15	70	31	101
8	Lalitpur	-	02	02	63	27	90	07	03	10	70	32	102
9	Shravasti	03	03	06	51	15	66	17	12	29	71	30	101
10	Rampur	-	02	02	62	26	88	08	02	10	70	30	100
Total		29	22	51	576	232	810	98	53	151	703	307	1010

Source: Field Survey, 2011.

However, the monitoring aspect of government departments appeared to be relatively weaker as hardly about 68 percent of the schools had been motivated and supervised with wide range of variation at the inter-district level (Table 6).

TABLE 6: MONITORING AND EVALUATION BY STATE/DISTRICT/BLOCK LEVEL OFFICIALS

Sl. No.	Name of District	Education Department			Task Force/Other Department			Total Sample		
		PS	UPS	Total	PS	UPS	Total	PS	UPS	Total
1	Sitapur	45	15	60	04	03	07	70	31	101
2	CSM Nagar	37	16	53	05	02	07	72	30	102
3	Kannauj	47	22	69	02	02	04	70	32	102
4	Mahoba	47	18	65	01	-	01	70	31	101
5	Aligarh	57	23	80	09	02	11	70	30	100
6	Basti	42	21	63	04	-	04	70	30	100
7	Chandauli	53	25	78	06	04	10	70	31	101
8	Lalitpur	21	08	29	30	13	43	70	32	102
9	Shravasti	20	12	32	02	03	05	71	30	101
10	Rampur	42	18	60	07	03	10	70	30	100
Total		411	178	589	70	32	102	703	307	1010

Source: Field Survey, 2011.

Likewise, the study also highlights participation of parents in supervising the cooking of MDM was weak as hardly 61 percent of the parents visited the schools. The two districts which highest incidence of parents not reporting to supervise the cooking of MDM were Lalitpur (54 percent) and Chandauli (51 percent) respectively.

The analysis also sought to study the perception of parents, students and teachers to understand to what extent MDM has succeeded in promoting the concept of social inclusion. The study shows that an overwhelming (93 percent) of the parents feel that MDM has succeeded in enhancing the interest of children towards schools and school related activities which may be take-as a precursor towards social inegration.

The other dimension of public participation that the study highlights is that complaint against the quality and quantity of food served under MDM. However, the incidence of complaint has been quite marginal (12 percent) for quality and 9 percent for quantity. All this shows that the people have become vocal which augurs well for social integration (Table 7 & 8).

TABLE 7: PERCEPTION OF THE PARENTS ABOUT COMPLAIN FOR QUALITY OF MID DAY MEAL

Sl. No.	Name of District	Head Teacher			Assistant Teacher			Gram Pradhan			Other Officials			Total Sampled Parents		
		PS	UPS	Total	PS	UPS	Total	PS	UPS	Total	PS	UPS	Total	PS	UPS	Total
1	Sitapur	07	02	09	04	01	05	-	-	-	-	01	01	280	124	404
2	CSM Nagar	-	03	03	02	-	02	-	-	-	-	-	-	288	120	408
3	Kannauj	63	34	97	26	14	40	10	06	16	-	-	-	280	128	408
4	Mahoba	10	05	15	03	01	04	-	-	-	01	-	01	280	124	404
5	Aligarh	32	31	63	03	-	03	04	02	06	01	-	01	280	120	400
6	Basti	12	04	16	04	-	04	04	-	04	-	-	-	280	120	400
7	Chandauli	07	03	10	05	-	05	-	-	-	-	-	-	280	124	404
8	Lalitpur	17	07	24	14	05	19	03	04	07	-	-	-	280	128	408
9	Shravasti	26	06	32	15	03	18	07	04	11	-	-	-	284	120	404
10	Rampur	13	05	18	22	05	27	14	02	16	01	-	01	280	120	400
Total		187	100	287	98	29	127	42	18	60	03	01	04	2812	1228	4040

Source: Field Survey, 2011.

TABLE 8: PERCEPTION OF THE PARENTS ABOUT COMPLAIN FOR QUANTITY OF MID DAY MEAL

Sl.No.	Name of District	Head Teacher			Assistant Teacher			Gram Pradhan			Other Officials			Total Sampled Parents		
		PS	UPS	Total	PS	UPS	Total	PS	UPS	Total						
1	Sitapur	02	-	02	-	03	03	-	-	-	-	-	-	280	124	404
2	CSM Nagar	-	03	03	02	-	02	-	-	-	-	01	01	288	120	408
3	Kannauj	34	24	58	14	11	25	01	01	02	-	-	-	280	128	408
4	Mahoba	10	05	15	03	01	04	-	-	-	01	-	01	280	124	404
5	Aligarh	32	15	47	04	-	04	04	01	05	-	-	-	280	120	400
6	Basti	-	04	04	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	280	120	400
7	Chandauli	05	-	05	06	-	06	02	-	02	-	-	-	280	124	404
8	Lalitpur	15	08	23	09	07	16	03	05	08	-	-	-	280	128	408
9	Shravasti	21	08	29	17	05	22	08	03	11	02	-	02	284	120	404
10	Rampur	14	05	19	19	06	25	12	03	15	-	-	-	280	120	400
Total		133	72	205	74	33	107	30	13	43	03	01	04	2812	1228	4040

Source: Field Survey, 2011.

The study also shows the programme has been able to effectively address the issue of gender discrimination. Except in one school of district Shravasti, no cases of gender-discrimination against students was reported in any of the sample school. Similarly the deployment of cooks from disadvantaged section, as per the guidelines of the programme, only substantiates their empowerment and gender-sensitisation.

SUGGESTIONS

The detail analysis of MDM programme in the ten sample districts provides a bag of mix experiences and outcomes. It could be said that it has succeeded in areas like providing or establishing the functionality of the programme, in the display of me, on quality and quantity of meals provided under the programme. Likewise, it could also be stated that it has also succeeded, to a large, extent in motivating the parents to participate through an array of activities like

supervision, making complaints to the concern authorities about the quality and quantity of food served under the programme. All this clearly establishes the active level of participation in the programme. Similarly, the issue of gender-sensitisation and empowerment too has been effectively taken up. All this clearly shows the positive fall out of the programme and its movement towards social integration and social inclusion.

The analysis also shows how MDM has positively influenced the perception of parents and children for school and its related activities. In promotion of good sanitary habits. These small both equally vital steps could go a long way in promoting the concept of social inclusion.

However, MDM has also not with disappointments in many other areas as well. In critical areas like providing health average to children, in the maintenance of health check up cards, distribution of micro-nutrients to children etc., it has not lined upto the expectations only reflects its inability to strike convergence with other line departments.

The study pleads not only sustaining these interventions but even applying it more rigourously and intensively in those areas where the outcome have not been encouraging. What needs to be understood that MDM, as a social intervention is being applied in what is called a traditionally hard or difficult state (one of the BIMARU) that has remained the cradle of feudal classes that practices caste based domination politics and other forms of draconian measures that virtually crushed the democratic processes and democratic transformation of powers. These interventions may, therefore, take a relatively longer time to fructify. However, it could be safely argued that MDM, as a programme, has succeeded to some extent in promoting the concept of social inclusion though a lot more needs to be done to sustain it.

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