A qualitative study of the Mid Day Meal program regarding social discrimination in selected government primary schools of Varanasi district in Uttar Pradesh

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Abstract

Education is the most important and most noble of human endeavors. All other activities have their foundation in education. Education transforms an individual and allows her to effect change in her environment (Brennen, 1999). With a view to enhancing enrolment, retention and attendance and simultaneously improving nutritional levels among children, the National Program of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP-NSPE) was launched as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme on 15th August 1995, initially in 2408 blocks in the country. It was further extended in 2002 to cover children in classes I - V of Government, Government aided and local body schools. Central Assistance under the scheme includes the free supply of food grains of 100 g per child per school per day and subsidy for transportation of food grains up to a maximum of Rs. 50 per quintal. The scheme has been revised from time to time and revisions in the scheme during different times included new reformations and changes and advancements in the scheme.

In the present study, the researcher has attempted to find out in the government primary schools of Varanasi powerful, subtle and hidden practices related to social discrimination that adversely affects children's ability to learn, grow and become confident young people. For analyzing caste and gender based discrimination in government primary schools of Varansi, five children from 1st to 5th standards of each school have been taken as a sample with multistage sampling method. Twenty five children each from boys and girls are selected for primary data collection which has been collected through Interview Schedule. Analysis of primary data reveals that there is difference of opinion among children regarding gender and caste wise discrimination while implementing Mid Day Meal Program. It is found that large number of cases have emerged related to caste discrimination against children, community-specific discrimination and gender-

2 Government of India. Guidelines of National Program of Nutritional Support to Primary Education [Mid Day Meal Scheme] [Last accessed on 2016 Mar 27]. Available from: www.education.nic.in
related discrimination, sexual harassment and violence in government primary schools in Varanasi regarding Mid day meal scheme.

**Key words:** Caste Discrimination, Gender Discrimination, Mid Day Meal, Social Discrimination.

**Introduction**

Education is the most significant in every stage of human life, especially at the childhood stage in the primary levels as it prepares the foundation of education. It constitutes a very important part of the entire structure of education in India. Since the inception of planning in 1951 government has increasingly diverted more and more resources towards education. In the interim budget 2019-20 Rs. 93,847.64 crores have been allocated for eduction out of which 56,386.63 crores have been given for school education.

Free and compulsory education up to the age of 14 years is the constitutional commitment. Hence more and more schools have been opened to impart elemeny education. In 2016-17 total students enrolment in government primary schools in India was 4,85,33,456, in Uttar pradesh it was 1,17,88,713 and in Varanasi the number was 1,23,757.

Though the number of students is continously increasing the retention and attendance is found to be poor in almost all the primary schools. Hence to improve enrolment, retention and attendance rate as also nutritional levels amongst children, the Mid Day Meal scheme was started on 15th August 1995, especially to encourage poor children belonging to disadvantage sections, so that they can attend schools more regularly and can concentrate more on classroom activities.

In order to comply the order given by the Supreme Court on 2 November 2001, the scheme has been started in the primary schools of Uttar Pradesh since September 01, 2004. Keeping in mind the success of the scheme, since October 2007, it has been extended to upper primary schools in educationally backward areas and from upper primary schools in the remaining blocks and urban areas since April, 2008. Under this scheme, 1.83 crore children studying in primary schools and over 39 lakh children in upper primary schools in Uttar Pradesh were covered in 2007-08. Currently, 1, 14,460 primary schools and 54,372 upper primary schools have been covered under this scheme in the state.

In the last few years a large number of press reports have emerged about caste discrimination against children, community-specific discrimination and gender-related discrimination, sexual harassment and violence in schools. In this study, the researcher has attempted to find out powerful, subtle and hidden practices related to social discrimination that adversely affect children's ability to learn, grow and become confident young people in government primary schools of Varanasi. Social discrimination is defined as sustained inequality between individuals on the basis of illness, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or any other measures of diversity.³

The findings from these blocks may not be completely new but the study will make it possible for policymakers to officially acknowledge the prevalence of discriminatory practices in schools and the efforts to be made for avoiding such discrimination.

**Review of literature:** Review of related literature indicates that although this scheme was started with the objective of providing nutritious food to the younger generation of the nation, but this objective is partially successful in attracting children towards primary education. Jean Dreze (2003), Pratap (2004), Jain and Shah (2005), Gangadham (2006) have indicated that MDM has positive impact on enrolment whereas other studies observed that timely assistance was not available to provide the wages to the cooks, assistants etc., which caused problems in regular implementation of MDMP. CUTS (2007) found that only 21% of schools received money every month on time. Jean Dreze (2003), Menon (2003), Thorat (2004), Jain and Shah (2005), SCASMCMP (2010), said that social discrimination has been found between male and female students, behaviour of teachers with students and in the recruitment of dalit cooks, being opposed by parents and teachers.

Regarding the menu, it has been observed that in some schools the variation in the menu was found while absent in others. Jean Dreze (2003), Anima and Sharma (2008) saw that the infrastructure was not present in the school to enable this scheme, to function properly. They also found that children and teachers helped for long-lasting, burning firewood, utensils and sometimes elder students helped to cook real food.

Many studies have focused on the implementation level of the MDM scheme in different states of India. Some researchers have emphasized the effect of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme in promoting enrolment, attendance and retention of students. Some scholars have set the relationship between mid-day meal scheme and health status. Very few of them have examined the perception/opinion of teachers, students and parents about mid-day meals regarding social discrimination issues.

**Statement of the problem:** The specific statement of the problem is 'A qualitative study of the Mid Day Meal program regarding social discriminations in the selected government primary schools of Varanasi district.'

**Objective of the study:** The objective of the study is ‘to find out social discrimination in the government primary schools of Varanasi.’

**Hypothesis:** There is no social discrimination in the government primary schools of Varanasi.

**Methodology of the study:** The purpose of the present study is to find out the existence of social discrimination amongst students during implementation of MDMP. For this purpose, the researcher has used a descriptive survey method.

**Nature of data:** To realize the objectives of the study, quantitative and qualitative data were needed. Quantitative data has been used obtained from Elementry Education, State Report Card 2016-17 by DISE. Qualitative data is about the behavior with male and female students, with students belonging to different castes.

**Sampling technique:** In this study multistage sampling procedure has been followed in combination with the technique of stratified proportionate random sampling because the present
work required a large scale inquiry covering large geographical area in Varanasi District. The multistage sampling procedure has the advantage that the frame of second stage units is necessary only for the selected first stage units.

**Sample size:** In Varanasi district there were 2707 schools in 2016-17 out of which primary schools were 1425 and government primary schools were 1027. This qualitative study was done in 2018. For this, purpose, out of ten educational blocks of Varanasi two educational blocks namely Kashividyapeeth and Nagar Nigam have been taken. Kashividyapeeth was selected from the rural area and Nagar Nigam was selected from the urban area. An informal talk was held with these students keeping in mind the objectives of the study. From each sample School, 5 beneficiary students were selected randomly by giving consideration to the gender and caste of the respondents from the selected 10 schools a total of 50 school children were surveyed who are availing the benefits of MDM scheme. Out of 50 selected students there are 25 boy students and 25 girl students. Researcher selected caste wise student i.e 25 students come from upper caste and 25 students come from lower caste.

**Schedule for the students:** Data has been collected through predesigned schedule from the students to check their perception regarding behavior made with them based on caste and gender. Their satisfaction level regarding mid day meal served in the schools has also been analyzed in the study. The field work was carried out personally in selected blocks of Varanasi district of Uttar Pradesh from October 2018 to December 2018.

**Data analysis techniques:** After collecting the information from the self-designed schedule, the following procedure was adopted such as checking the data consistency, transforming and coding the data, key in data into the computer, developing a database structure. Frequency Distribution and Percentage has been used for the analysis of the collected data.

**Research tools:** The following tools were used to capture gender and social equity dimensions of discriminations within schools and classrooms:
(1) Classroom observation;
(2) School observation;
(3) Discussions with adolescent boys and girls who had studied in the sample school;
(4) Structured activities with children in classe I to V – to record their daily experiences in the school.

**Result and discussions:**

**Table 1: Data collected from the responses of students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Responses of students in Nos.</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Do you eat MDM food at school?</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Do you eat MDM together?</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Do the boys and girls sit together in classroom?</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Do you sit with the students of upper/lower caste?</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Responses of students in %

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Responses of students in %</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Do you eat MDM food at school?</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Do you eat MDM together?</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Do the boys and girls sit together in classroom?</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Do you sit with the students of upper/lower caste?</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Do you have to do any other work in school besides studying?</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Have teacher ever scolded/verbally abused you?</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Have you ever faced sexual harassment?</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Interview Schedule

Analysis of data: This study covers the children's perceptions through structured activities and discussions studying in class I to V and discussing with teen boys and girls (in different groups), who studied in sample schools.

In selected blocks, out of 50, 18 students (36%) do not eat mid day meals. In Urban block, many forward caste children, especially Brahmin and OBC children went home during the MDM for the Noon food. In some rural blocks, the adolescent girls did not eat MDM because the girls were prevented by parents from eating food made outside their houses because of sociological taboos.

It has been found that 37 (74%) students sit together for mid day meals. It has been observed by researchers that, the children sat in rows separated by gender wise, while in some schools they
were seen sitting community-wise, sharing food brought from home along with the MDM. Though the teachers did not ask them to sit separately, yet they also did not encourage them to sit together.

Children from upper castes or better families, or who were dressed in better clothes, were sitting in the front lines. The children who were poor or poorly dressed, they were sitting at the back. In KashiVidyapeeth Block, children of Dalit families sat in the previous rows and remained idle and silent in the class. In a school of Nagar Nigam Block, a girl Manisha was made to sit separately on the last bench because she did not wear proper clothes (due to her poor financial condition, she got very little time to take a bath regularly, had to work at home) She ignored both students and teachers. It was also seen that students who were often absent and children with special needs (CWSN) were usually ignored by teachers. Similarly, poor and poorly dressed student in Varanasi primary schools were sitting behind and during the conversation in classroom they were most of the time ignored.

In both Kashividyapeeth and Nagar Nigam blocks of Varanasi school children (92%) were found to be engaged in other work besides studying. It has been observed that the cleaning tasks in these schools were mostly assigned to children from deprived communities. Children were quite articulate about the tasks assigned to them and they were also aware of the caste that they belonged to.

39 (78%) students reported that in one way or the other teachers either scold them or verbally abuse them in the classroom. However, we could not find any direct link between caste wise discrimination and corporal punishment in any block, although oral abuse was done using caste/community identity in many schools. However, there was a clear indication about the discriminatory attitude towards girls and punishment for them. As after touching a girl after puberty was considered taboo, teachers generally scold the girls. The parents were not aware of issue like sexual abuse of girl students and seemed to be unaware of such incident reported in the media.

Conclusion:

It is very difficult to define social discrimination due to the multi dimensional nature of the concept. There is no universally accepted definition nor is there complete consensus about the way social discrimination is prevalent in the school while implementing MDM. When the researcher visited the sample school of selected blocks one question kept cropping up “when and how will this situation change?”

In this context the key to creating an enabling environment as well as successfully formulating and implementing MDM program to ensure parity among boys and girls and among upper and lower caste students rests on the following mechanisms-

1. Taking the Constitution as the guiding spirit, teachers, administrators and community leaders need to be told that any violation of the right to equality and the right against discrimination will invite strict panel action.
2. Children need to be involved in activities that enable them to understand and appreciate diversity, respect differences and formulate school level norms of behaviour.

3. A non-negotiable code of behaviour needs to be communicated to all those who are involved in school education.

4. Strong political will and commitment to gender and caste equality requires a comprehensive institutional and legal framework. Hence efforts should be made accordingly.

In short, we can say that with the combined efforts of all the stakeholders state, parents, teachers, students, cooks and helpers MDM can truly became a program of enhancing enrolment, retention and attendance and simultaneously improving nutritional levels among children of primary schools of Varanasi district.

References:


