



Research Paper

Status of Implementation of Mid-Day Meals Scheme: A Study of Tribal Children in Jharkhand

Sujit Kumar Choudhary^{1,*}

Abstract

The Mid-day Meals (MDM) Scheme, a pivotal initiative launched in 1995 under the UPA Government, aimed to significantly enhance enrolment, retention, and attendance while improving children's nutritional status. Despite the earnest efforts of both the Central and State governments, the implementation of MDM in Jharkhand has not fully achieved its objectives due to lack of funding. The scheme requires investment of more money so that it can reach its optimum level. The research also highlights improper management in dealing with the mid-day meal scheme. Looking at this, the paper delves into the crucial issues related to MDM in the context of the Jharkhand state, emphasizing the importance of this scheme.

Keywords: Mid-day Meals, Tribals, Jharkhand, RTE, Elementary Education

Author for Correspondence* email id. sujitchoudhary@mgcub.ac.in

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Introduction

Jharkhand is a relatively new and small state created on November 15, 2000. According to the 2011 Census, the state's population was 3.29 crores, and the literacy rate was 67.63 percent. The poverty ratio is also high compared to other parts of the country. There are 44,835 schools in the state; among them, 40,343 are government schools, and 4,492 are private schools (Choudhary, 2022). Like other states, Jharkhand has also been trying to bring development by educating its people. It has also adopted the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act by the government of the state in 2011 by specifying its own rules and regulations, which are extracted from the original version of the Act passed by the parliament under *The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009* (Government of India, 2009). Although the RTE is on the verge of celebrating 14 years of its completion, it has been found that the implementation of the RTE Act in all states and UTs in India is still poor (Choudhary, 2022).

Objectives

The primary objective of this paper is to investigate the status of Mid-day meals, a long-standing initiative started in 2001 under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, and to discuss its provisions in the Right to Education Act. This is done with two significant studies conducted in the Jharkhand state, one in 2014-2015 and another in 2016-2018. These studies, titled “A

¹ Associate Professor and Head, Department of Sociology, Mahatma Gandhi Central University, Motihari, Bihar, India

Study of Implementation of RTE in Jharkhand: Analysis of DISE Report in Six Major Tribal Concentrated Districts (2014-15)” and “Impact of Provisions of RTE on Educational Status of Tribals of Jharkhand: A Comparative Study of Eight Villages of Ranchi and Dumka Districts (2016-18)”, provide valuable insights into the impact of the RTE Act on the educational status of tribal children.

Design and Methodology

The first study was based on DISE Data, whereas the second was empirical. In both studies, Multistage Sampling was done by ensuring its representativeness at different levels:

Selection of State: Jharkhand is one of India's tribal-dominated and backward states. 26.2 percent (Rural: 31.4 %; Urban: 9.8 %) tribals live in this state, which is more than Orissa (22.8 %) and Madhya Pradesh (21.1 %) (According to the 2011 Census). The literacy rate of Jharkhand is 67.63 percent (Male: 78.45 %; Female: 56.21 %) (Statistics of School Education 2010-11).

Selection of Districts: Six districts were selected in the first study, whereas only Ranchi and Dumka districts were selected in the second study; however, all districts are tribal-dominated.

Selection of Villages: Sampling was done based on tribal concentration. However, the interaction of tribals with other groups of people has also been considered.

Data Collection:

The first study was based on the DISE Data taken from the School Report Card (2014) of all six districts of Jharkhand. The second empirical study was directly collected from 8 selected villages (four from each district). Interview schedules, personal interviews, group discussions, and ethnomethodology have been used as tools and techniques to investigate the problem. The data from tribal children was collected through an interview schedule, and personal interviews, group discussions, and ethnomethodology were utilized to get a deeper understanding of the problem from other groups of people.

Sampling:

In the second study, a representative sample of both tribal (406) and non-tribal (150) students was taken in eight villages of Ranchi and Dumka districts (four each). The total number of students sampled was 556. The details are given in Table No. 1.

Table 1. Sampling of Students

Districts	Villages	No. of Schools	Students	
			Non-Tribals	Tribals
Ranchi	Barhu	4	21	51
	Rarha	8	13	104
	Sundil	2	22	35
	Tigra	7	21	75
Dumka	Kordaha	3	21	41
	GadiJhopa Parariya	3	14	12
	Khirdhana	2	17	45
	Barhait	3	21	43
Total	556	32	150	406

Source: Attendance Register of School, 2017

Discussions and Analysis

The MDM was started a long time ago by the UPA Government under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and has been continued by the RTE Act. With a view to enhancing enrolment, retention, and attendance simultaneously to improve the nutritional status of children, a Centrally Sponsored Scheme, “National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP-NSPE),” was launched on 15th August 1995 (Government of India, 1995). The scheme was extended during 2008-09 to cover children of upper primary classes, and the name was changed to ‘Nutritional Programme of Mid-Day Meal in Schools’. The Mid-Day Meal Scheme covers all school children studying from class I to class VIII in Government and Government Aided schools, Special Training Centres (STC), and Madrasas and Maqtabas supported under SSA. The objectives of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme are to address two of the pressing problems for most children in India, viz., hunger and education.

According to the RTE Act, every student shall get the MDM till class VIII. For this, the school shall get a kitchen shed where the food is cooked, and every school has a female cook cum helper. Each school must get a kitchen device grant to run the kitchen and serve the food to students.

Study 1:

The study finds a mixed picture regarding mid-day meals from the selected schools of six districts. The government schools located in all six districts have MDM provisions. In the Ranchi district, only 29 percent of schools located in the non-tribal areas had kitchen sheds, whereas 40 percent of schools located in the tribal areas did not have kitchen sheds. In the case of the Dumka district, despite getting kitchen devices grant in 89 percent of non-tribal areas located schools, their performance was deficient as only 67 percent of schools had kitchen sheds, female cum helpers, and hand wash facilities. However, schools located in tribal areas were in better condition. In the Gumla district, 100 percent of schools in the tribal areas received the kitchen devices grant, but only 67 percent and 33 percent of these schools had kitchen sheds and hand wash facilities, respectively. In the Lohardaga district, schools located in the non-tribal areas were doing much better, as 100 percent of schools had female cook cum helpers and hand wash facilities. In the case of tribal areas located schools, only 64 percent and 36 percent of schools had female cook cum helpers and kitchen sheds, respectively. In the Pakur district, some of the indicators of MDM in tribal areas performed well, whereas some were in non-tribal areas. In the Paschimi Singhbhum district, schools located in the non-tribal areas were in better condition, as 57 percent and 71 percent of schools had a kitchen shed and female cook cum helpers, respectively. However, 100 percent of schools located in the tribal areas had a female cook cum helper (Table 2).

Table 2. Basic Requirements of Mid-Day Meals (in Percentage)

District	School Location	Kitchen Shed Available	Hand Wash Facility	Female Cook cum Helper	Kitchen Devices Grant Received
Ranchi	Tribal	60	60	100	80
	Non-tribal	29	86	100	86
Dumka	Tribal	73	82	91	45
	Non-tribal	67	67	67	89

Gumla	Tribal	67	33	100	100
	Non-tribal	50	79	93	71
Lohardaga	Tribal	36	45	64	45
	Non-tribal	50	100	100	50
Pakur	Tribal	42	50	92	92
	Non-tribal	0	67	100	67
Paschimi Singhbhum	Tribal	33	33	100	83
	Non-tribal	57	57	71	71

Source: School Report Card (2013-14), DISE

In brief, the MDM was implemented a long back under the umbrella of the SSA scheme at all Government run schools, irrespective of areas and sections. In response to this, all the schools have also been functioning well. However, there are some lacunae in this regard as many schools do not have the kitchen shed in these districts and are not receiving kitchen grants. Looking at the tribal and non-tribal comparison, the schools located in the tribal area in Dumka, Gumla, and Pakur districts performed better than the other districts.

Study 2:

In the case of the availability of Mid-day meals, the study finds a mixed picture, which has been given below in Table No. 3.

Table 3. Availability of Mid-day Meal

District	Villages	Regularly		Occasionally		Menu based	
		Non-Tribals	Tribals	Non-Tribals	Tribals	Non-Tribals	Tribals
Ranchi	Barhu	100	100	0	0	0	0
	Rarha	100	99	0	01	0	0
	Sundil	100	100	0	0	100	100
	Tigra	66.66	81.33	33.33	17.33	47.62	69.33
Dumka	Kordaha	100	100	0	0	100	100
	GadiJhopa Parariya	35.71	58.33	64.3	41.66	0	0
	Khirdhana	100	2.22	0	97.77	100	100
	Barhait	57.14	100	42.85	0	57.14	27.9

Source: Data Collected from Students, 2017-18

The Government schools located in these studied districts have the provision of MDM. But, the major question is whether the MDM is available to all students all the time or not. In this regard, the study categorized it into three: (1) whether MDM is available regularly or occasionally; (2) whether the MDM is menu-based or not. The study finds that most of the students agreed that meals are available regularly except in a few instances in Tigra village 33.33 percent and 17.33 percent of both non-tribal and tribal students agreed that meals are available occasionally. The same village study also finds that 47.62 percent of non-tribal and 69.33 percent of tribal students agreed that meals are menu-based (Table 3). The study finds remarkably that the situation of MDM was very unsatisfactory in 3 villages of Dumka district. Another most critical finding is that many of them didn't have the knowledge about

the menu of MDM. About 30 percent of non-tribal and 45 percent of tribal students in Tigra village complain that they are not getting breakfast.

Infrastructure regarding MDM is also equally important for preparing hygienic meals. All the schools in both districts have a sufficient number of females cook cum helpers but some of the schools lack separate kitchen sheds in the schools situated in Ranchi district (Table 4).

Table 4. Infrastructure of Mid-day Meal

District	Villages	Sufficient Cooks Available		Separate Kitchen Shed Available	
		Non-Tribals	Tribals	Non-Tribals	Tribals
Ranchi	Barhu	100	100	42.86	60.8
	Rarha	100	100	76.92	89.42
	Sundil	100	100	100	100
	Tigra	100	100	100	100
Dumka	Kordaha	100	100	100	100
	GadiJhopa Parariya	100	100	100	100
	Khirdhana	100	100	100	100
	Barhait	100	100	100	100

Source: Data Collected from Students, 2017-18

In brief, the MDM has been implemented for a long back under the umbrella of the SSA scheme at all Government-run schools, irrespective of areas and sections. In response to this, all the schools have MDM facilities but lacking in infrastructure. Even the ASER Report 2014 points out that 83.9 percent of schools in Jharkhand have kitchen sheds, and 78.6 percent of schools serve food in schools visited by the ASER group (ASER, 2014). However, there are some lacunae in this regard, as many schools do not have kitchen sheds in these districts and do not receive kitchen grants. Looking at the tribal and non-tribal comparison, the schools located in the tribal area in Dumka were in better condition than the schools situated in the Ranchi district.

Conclusion

The research finds that despite central and state government's attempts to provide Mid-day meals to all children of classes (I-VIII), the scheme has not reached its optimum level as was supposed to be even after 14 years of its implementation. In this regard, there is an urgent need to implement it in alternative ways. The government should make more investments in the scheme so that it could be beneficial to the community and able to achieve its objectives fully.

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