

HARNESSING COMMUNITY EFFORTS FOR EDUCATION

Donated by Sh. D. P. Nayar

NEW EXPERIMENT IN MADRAS STATE

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Sub. National Systems Unit,
National Institute of Educational
Planning and Administration
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FOREWORD

It is one of the Directive Principles of the Constitution that all the children between the age of 6 to 14 should get free and compulsory education, and this target was intended to be reached by the year 1960. When the implementation of this target was taken up, it was found that there were insuperable difficulties in the way and now we have decided that the target should be refixed so as to bring into school all the children between the age of 6 to 11 before the end of the Third Plan period. Even this will not be possible of achievement unless it is planned and programmed properly. When the Madras Government scrutinised the various problems connected with this, we found that unless a free mid-day meal was provided, it would not be possible to bring in all the poor children into school, and hence a State-wide movement for mid-day meal has been launched. In this Souvenir the details of this Mid-day Meal Scheme are given.

Secondly, we found that the improvement of the school buildings and its surroundings could not be brought about unless the community was brought into the picture and was made to take a keen interest in the development of the school. A new experiment in harnessing community service for education is being undertaken in the Madras State and it has achieved considerable success in enthusing the people to come forward and contribute liberally for providing various amenities in the village schools. The readers would find an account of this novel experiment in this Souvenir very interesting and instructive. This souvenir attempts to focus the attention of the public on some of the problems confronting the States in making education spread quantitatively and qualitatively.

C. Subramaniam
Minister for Finance, Madras.



VERY GOOD AUGURY

I am happy to learn that the recent movement started by the Director of Public Instruction to make the village community interested in the maintenance and upkeep of the school, is proving a great success.

My colleague, the Education Minister, inaugurated a Co-ordination Conference on July 25, at Valliyur in Tirunelveli District. I am told that in that conference the people exhibited phenomenal enthusiasm, in coming forward to donate cash and other articles for putting up new buildings for schools and for the maintenance and equipment of all the schools in that area. The contribution by the public amounted to more than a lakh of rupees and Rs. 28,000 was offered in cash at the time of the conference.

It is a very good augury for the spread of education on right lines in our State.

K. Kamaraj,
Chief Minister, Madras.



PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT IN EDUCATION

MADRAS State has made considerable progress in the field of education within the last five years. Thousands of Primary schools have been opened throughout the State. So much so, today there is no village, having a population of 500 and above, without an elementary school.

While this expansion has been taking place, attempts also have been made to see that the quality of education does not deteriorate. On a survey, it was found that many of the elementary schools were not properly housed or fully equipped. The Department of Public Instruction started a novel experiment in making the community interested in the upkeep and equipment of the Primary schools.

Prominent people of the villages were gathered together and in their presence the various requirements of their schools were discussed and they were requested

to contribute their mite to fulfil the requirements.

SURPRISING RESPONSE

This scheme was first tried in the Kadam-battur N. E. S. area in Chingleput District. The response from the people was something surprising. Many came forward to present various articles like timepieces, charkas, children's books and also undertook to put up new buildings and repair the existing ones.

This success induced the authorities to take up this movement of improvement of schools in villages in other districts also. In this connection a Co-ordination Conference was held at Valliyur in the Tirunelveli District on July 25. The enthusiasm exhibited in this conference at Valliyur was something very remarkable, which could be believed only by actually witnessing it. People came forward to donate buildings, equipment materials, library books, and the total assistance offered including the assistance given by the N. E. S. Authorities came to the extent of Rs. 1,27,000. Actually cash amounting to Rs. 28,000 was handed over to me for being utilised to put up new buildings etc. for schools.

In this project at Valliyur all the schools in the area have now got sanitary conveniences. Many schools have started kitchen-gardening. Library books, seedlings, bee-

hives, charkas and various other articles useful to the schools were presented at the Conference. It is also noteworthy that all the 102 schools in this area are supplying Free Midday meals to the school children already.

PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT

Till now education was isolated from the people but today education is becoming a people's movement. It is only by the participation of the community as a whole in the spread of education that we can achieve real success in giving education to all our children—boys and girls.

I am indeed very grateful to the people for taking a keen interest in not only educating their children but also in providing all the facilities to the schools. On this occasion, the Government has proposed to award a rolling shield to each District, to be presented to the development area which contributes its best to this movement in that particular district.

I hope that this movement of co-ordinated community effort in the spread and improvement of education will become countrywide so as to enable us to realise our ambition of universal, free and compulsory education.

C. Subramaniam,
Minister for Education.



HOPE

I am very glad to learn that the Co-ordination Conference held at Valliyur in Tirunelveli District on July 25, inaugurated by the Minister for Education proved to be a magnificent experiment in public co-operation in the field of education. This project conceived by the Director of Public Instruction, Madras State, has ample potentialities and I am sure that this movement will spread to the other districts also.

I am happy to know that the Government of India has commended this project started by the Madras Education Department to the other States in India for implementation.

I extend my hearty congratulations to the Director of Public Instruction and his assistants for bringing out such an enterprising scheme. I am sure that all the

Panchayats and other local bodies will wholeheartedly co-operate with the educational authorities in this great scheme.

I wish this endeavour all success.

Lourdhammal Simon,

Minister for Local Administration.

HARNESSING COMMUNITY SERVICE FOR EDUCATION

New experiment in Madras State

by

N. D. SUNDARAVADIVELU

Director of Public Instruction, Madras

Today one notices in every nook and corner of this State great awakening in every field. The National Movement for Freedom has not only helped the masses to awaken from political slumber but also to realise the intense and urgent need for social and economic emancipation. There is not a single village where an officer or a representative of the Government is not presented with a request for a new school or for upgrading an existing school, or for some other educational facility. This augurs well for our new born Republic. Any one interested in the Welfare of this nation would capitalise it to the utmost.

NEW BUILDINGS

When we travel through country tracts, the only bright, good-looking building that attracts one's

attention, in nine out of ten cases, is the elementary school building. One is filled with joy at this spectacle of a decent school building for our little children. This is a great contrast to the sad spectacle that officers of the department had to witness some 20 years back, when the only building they could point out for an elementary school to be started, would be something like a cow-shed. These new buildings are the symbols of the people's interest in education and their determination to contribute their mite to the cause of education.

The people's voluntary movement for free school meals was inaugurated in this State in July, 1956, and by now it has spread to about 10,000 elementary schools, providing meals for about 3,00,000 elementary school children. This does not include the 1,500 elementary schools, which provide midday meals entirely at the expense of the tax-payer. In addition, the scheme is functioning in about 500 Secondary schools, providing meals for about 25,000 students entirely out of public subscription. One area in which all the Elementary schools have this provision is the National Extension Block of Kadambattur in Chingleput District. Kadambattur is a small village, the headquarters of the Kadambattur N. E. S. Block, with a Railway station, on the Arkonam-Madras line. Though small, it happens to be the headquarters of the National Extension Service Block. Some months back it came to my notice that all the 76 schools in that block were providing free Midday meals continuously for over six months. Such a state of affairs could have been possible

only if two factors were present. They are: that the public as a whole were willing to sacrifice and the teachers as a lot were co-operating with the villagers and enjoyed their full confidence for that long period.

LACK OF FACILITIES

A comprehensive and detailed survey of the conditions and requirements of every school in that block was made and this was a revelation. It not only revealed that, here and there, fine buildings were coming up but also revealed something which is true in many spheres of our activities, viz., that the old institutions were languishing. The school buildings, put up by our equally well-intentioned forefathers, were getting dilapidated, the doors were broken, the windows were not there and the roofs were blown off month after month. I came across buildings that were completely inadequate, if not unsuitable as in the above case. To quote one instance, a fairly big board lower elementary school with an average attendance of 115 and a staff of five teachers had to its credit only 45 school places. Five teachers and 115 children had to carry on their work in that cramped "big room" and still results had to be produced.

A good number of schools in this block had been converted into Basic Schools. One of the basic activities of any good basic school is education in cleanliness both individual and environmental. Truth is stranger than fiction. In this block it was found that most of these Basic Schools did not have even a urinal for either the teachers or the students. This is

true even of girls' schools. One sadly wonders if we are not caricaturing Basic Education. Looking into the inside of these buildings—both unsuitable and inadequate—one found an equally unsatisfactory state of affairs. Schools which had not been white-washed for years were in large numbers. Equally inadequate was the supply of teaching aids and other equipment. In many schools the blackboard was as white as good bleached satin cloth. Garden was a thing that was more talked of than seen in most of the schools. This, in short, was the actual picture of elementary schools in the block.

One can say with certainty that this is not an unusual picture but a typical picture of things at the elementary school stage. Continued concentration of attention, however urgent and deserving, at other levels of education, has affected elementary schools grievously.

AN EYE-OPENER

In one case when the headmaster of an elementary school was questioned as to what he had done for getting the school building white-washed, the reply that came out of him was indeed an eye-opener, and was the provocation for a new approach to the problem of keeping the elementary schools in proper condition. The headmaster produced a big file—a heap of correspondence from him to the District Board and from the District Board to the headmaster. The correspondence related to a request of the headmaster for the sanction of a small sum for white-washing the

building. The correspondence had ranged over four years, but still the schoolhouse was not white-washed. On further questioning, the headmaster said that white-washing that school building would not cost more than Rs. 4 or 5. Actually the cost of postage on the correspondence from both ends alone would have exceeded Rs. 10. It is worthwhile pondering over the question whether, after all, the best form of economy is to look to an outside agency, statutory or otherwise, for a petty little expenditure on things like white washing and blackening the "Black-boards" that were no longer black.

PUBLIC CO-OPERATION

Even if the District Board had sanctioned that amount promptly, wherefrom would that money have come? It certainly should come from the tax-payer either in the form of taxes or rates. Is it not possible to decentralise the maintenance of the village school and set the local public to take the initiative to do it at their own cost locally, without writing to others and getting it from them even though they might be willing to pay for it, rather heavily? These questions came up to my mind. So a suggestion was made to the teachers in every school to contact the local public, not in a formal gathering but informally, apprise them of the requirements of each school, and suggest to them that they might in the interest of their own children, supply locally, as many of these requirements as possible. Care was taken to see that nobody was compelled to do anything nor was any priority

suggested to the public. The choice and responsibility was left entirely to the pleasure of the individual.

PRIORITIES

Having listed out the requirements, the teachers and the public in consultation with the officers, applied their minds to the fixation of priorities. The priorities depended, not always on the urgency of a particular requirement but was decided by the capacity and the desire of the local public to come into the picture and play their part. For instance, a school may require white-washing, a time-piece and additional accommodation. Additional accommodation may be the most urgent need as in the case of the school cited above. But whether that project was to be taken up first or not, will depend on the capacity and preparedness of the villagers to contribute adequately. When it was found that the villagers could make only a small contribution, the projects that could be taken up were limited to white-washing or and the supply of a time-piece, according to the resources available. This helped the village community, as a whole, to gain self-confidence. A small job, done successfully, as planned, will infuse greater confidence and a better sense of achievement than a substantial job, beyond their means attempted unsuccessfully. The result was that every-where people came forward to provide, if not all the requirements, at least a good number of them and have promised the necessary material and monetary contribution.

KADAMBATTUR CONFERENCE

Having harnessed public co-operation, support and aid in this manner, a conference of all the teachers of the 76 schools and the village leaders was called at Kadambattur, on Feb. 20. In that conference head-



Novel experiment in making the community interested in the upkeep and equipment of schools. Sri. N. D. Sundaravadivelu,

Director of public Instruction, Madras, inaugurates the first School improvement Project Conference at Kadambattur in Chingleput Dt. on 20-2-58.

masters of all the schools came up to the dais one after another and announced the name of his school, the various things that he required and the names of the donors that were undertaking to provide some or all of the requirements in kind and cash. For all

small items, the donations were actually handed over at the conference in the presence of the gathering, either in kind or cash. For big schemes like construction of school buildings, only a token donation was given at the conference with the promise that the full amount would be provided as and when the work progressed.

TEACHERS' GESTURE

The enthusiasm and the spirit of co-operation was so infectious that at the conference some of the elementary school teachers, who after all are not too well-paid, came up spontaneously to the dais and donated a few small sums for one thing or another. The result of this effort to gather financial help from every

Board School, Tirupandiyur—the school building before the project.

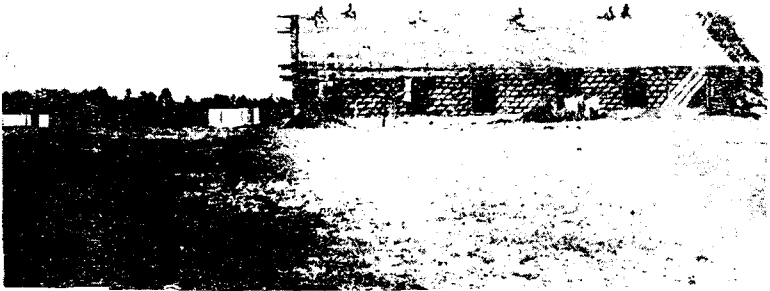


village was that schemes to the value of Rs. 15,000 were undertaken and cash and kind donations of the value of Rs. 1,300 were handed over at the conference to the persons concerned.

TO SUMMARISE, 16 schools proposed to put up additional buildings or effect repairs to buildings, 18 schools proposed to supply additional furniture or equipment or maps and charts or other teaching aids. Eight schools proposed to put up latrines and urinals. Six schools have taken up the supply of clothing to the poor pupils. 33 schools have taken up the supply of books and slates, including library books. 21 schools proposed to improve their gardens, 6 schools undertook to supply time-pieces. 5 schools proposed to white-wash school buildings. 4 schemes related to the introduction of bee-keeping in schools. One

Board School, Tirupandiyur—after the project.





Board School Perambakkam. The new building under construction and the new latrines for boys and girls completed.

school proposed to start a Poultry Farm. 22 schools have taken up supply of cooking vessels and drinking water tuts. 61 schools undertook additional enrolment of children and 24 schools to acquire poramboke lands for playground and or gardening.

These schemes were expected to be put through in the course of three or four months. A tour of this Block early in July, 1958 revealed that all small schemes have been completed, bigger ones are being implemented as per the plan and the question of acquisition of poramboke lands is under active consideration.

“CONTAGION” SPREADS

This “contagion” of public co-operation and contribution for the improvement of schools spread to the neighbouring Block of Tiruvellore in the same district. There, schemes to the value of Rs. 25,000 were undertaken and donations of Rs. 13,000 in cash and kind



Equipment, furniture, books and utensils supplied by the public for the District Board School, Trupachur, Chingleput District.

were actually presented at the conference. It has now been found that this was not a momentary enthusiasm, but a sustained effort.

An officer of the Ministry of Community Projects, Government of India, came to the conference by accident. By this the Ministry of Community Projects, Government of India, were apprised of this Pilot Project in our State. It caught their imagination and the Ministry realised the potentialities of this new endeavour in community service for education.

We can be proud of the fact that this project has been commended by them to all the other States in India.

MOVEMENT GATHERS MOMENTUM

Till then, this new Pilot Project was like a lonely path in the wilderness. It was not yet the high way to progress. But when the Government of India consi-

dered it fit to commend it to other States, it made us, the officers of the Education Department of Madras State, feel more responsible, and it called for more widespread and sustained efforts on our part so that, we, the pioneers, may not be found ultimately lagging behind. To this end, this experiment which started as a Pilot Project was taken up on a systematic manner throughout the State.

As usual, the silent school master has taken to it quietly, though enthusiastically, and is doing his best in rational reconstruction. It is gratifying to note that the public have also realised not only the need for more and more education for every one but also have realised that, if not the pleasure and proud privilege of fighting for the freedom of this country, at least the equally intense pleasure and proud privilege of working for freedom from ignorance could be theirs. So, most of the Development Blocks in every district are vying with each other, because the public do not want to feel that they have missed one more golden opportunity of serving our Motherland. The Officers of the department, with the co-operation of Officers of other departments, especially of the Development Department, and the support, both moral and material, of the public at large, are organising such comprehensive educational development projects.

AT VALLIYUR

It was only the other day, viz. on July 25, that Mr. C. Subramaniam, Minister for Education and Finance, inaugurated a well attended and successful

co-ordination Conference for this purpose at Valliyur N. E. S. Block of Tirunelveli District. To the pleasant surprise of the Minister and even the organisers of the project, cash to the value of Rs. 28,000 was actually handed over to him for various schemes for the improvement of schools. Each one of the 102 Elementary



Sri C. Subramaniam Minister for Education Madras receiving R.s. 2001/ from Smt. Parvathiammal of Kolliangulam in the Tirunelveli Dt. for improvement of the village school.

schools in the Block area was provided at that conference with a nucleus of a library consisting of about 46 books. The usual schemes for improvement like provision of additional accommodation, white-washing the school buildings, supply of furniture, laying out



Sri K. Kamaraj, Chief Minister, Madras receiving Rs 10,000/ from Rev Fr. Gnanapragasam towards school building fund at Tisayanvilai in Tirunelveli Dt.

gardens, supply of books and slates, charkas, bee-hives and seedlings have also been undertaken. The total cost of all the schemes undertaken in this Valliyur Block comes to Rs. 1.27 lakhs. The plan is that petty little items like minor repairs, maintenance etc., of schools should be looked after by the local community itself, without depending on any outside agency, statutory or otherwise.

STUDY CLASSES

One special feature of the schemes undertaken for improvement of education in this Block is the organisation of Supervised Study classes in the nights for day scholars who are slow learners and who have no facilities at home for study. This has been undertaken in as many as 21 Higher Elementary schools.



The Collector of South Arcot Dt. Receiving Rs. 2000 from Sri Manickam Gounder an illiterate villager of Kalathampattu at the Valathi conference.

More School Development Conferences were held. One conference was inaugurated at Tisayanvilai of Radhapuram N. E. S Block of Tirunelveli District on July 28, by Mr K. Kamaraj. As expected it proved a great success. A total of 666 schemes have been undertaken for the improvement of the 103 schools in the N. E. S. Block area, at a cost of Rs. 1.33 lakhs. Towards this a sum of Rs. 41,000 was actually handed over to the Chief Minister at the Conference.

Another conference was held at Valathi in the Mel-Malayanur Block in South Arcot District on 16-8-1958. It was inaugurated by the District Collector and was presided over by the Director of Public Instruction. In it works estimated to cost Rs. 1.24 lakhs were undertaken. The collections in cash and



Sri M. Bakthavatsalam Home Minister Madras receiving
Rs. 4000 for the supply of furniture to R. C. School
Awadi.

kind amounted to Rs. 36,537. The next conference was held on the 20th of August at Poonamallee, Chingleput District in which schemes worth Rs. 1,26,000 were undertaken for execution and donations in cash and kind amounting to Rs. 28,967 were given. This conference was followed by another at Tiruvottiyur—a non block area, which, both from the point of view of cost of schemes undertaken and collections made created a record up-to-date. Schemes costing Rs. 3,79,918 were undertaken and donations in cash and kind amounting to Rs. 66,933 were given on the spot. The 8th conference was held at Gangavalli in Salem District on 30th August. The Director of Public Instruction presided over the conference. The total

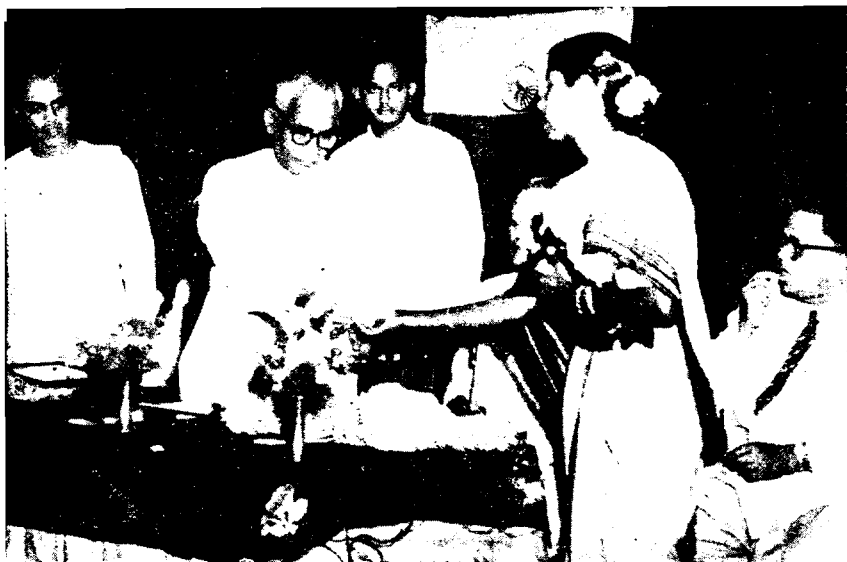


Sri C. Subramaniam Minister for Education receiving Rs. 15000 towards building fund of the Singarampillai High School, Villivakkam from Sri N. S. Pinagarni.

value of the schemes undertaken for execution was Rs. 70,000. A sum of Rs. 6,368 was paid as donations by the public and lands worth about Rs. 16,700 were donated.

NEW PATH

This new path has given us the opportunity of canalising the enthusiasm and the spirit of sacrifice of the public for a crying social need. It is expected, that by sustained effort, it will be possible to ensure that in future. The school will be really the school of the village community, both with regard to its utility and with regard to the responsibility for its maintenance. Corporate authorities need, then, come



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The Minister for Education receiving the documents of a school building worth Rs. 50,000 and a donation of Rs. 10,000 from Sri Ekambara Chettiar of Red-Hills.

into the picture only for big schemes which will not be within the capacity of the small village community.

This new approach is so novel and untried that it is natural to be sceptical. The enthusiasm is so remarkable that it could be believed only by actually witnessing it. So let every one, whether an officer or a teacher or a citizen, dedicate himself to this new and noble endeavour of Co-ordinated Community Development with a real understanding of the value of this scheme and full Faith in the Fundamental Goodness of our people.



Sri C. Subramaniam, Minister for Education and Sri N. D. Sundaravadi velu, Director of Public Instruction examining the gifts presented at the Thiruvotthiyur Conference. The cost of schemes undertaken at the conference is worth Rs. 3.8 lakhs and value of cash and kind donations amounted to Rs. 67000.

THE ORIGIN AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT FOR FREE SUPPLY OF SCHOOL MEALS IN MADRAS STATE

by

N. D. SUNDARAVADIVELU
Director of Public Instruction

The provision of free midday meals to school children has always been recognized as one of the incentives to regular attendance of pupils enrolled. Many progressive countries have arranged this as one of the essential amenities in the scheme of primary education. Wherever compulsion has been successful, it has been successful not only owing to vigilance in enforcement and the co-operation of the public but also because of this provision. It is this realization that has prompted the Madras Government to provide midday meals at State cost to Harijan children studying in Welfare schools for some years now. The Corporation of Madras has also been providing free midday meals to the poor children in their elementary schools for many years now. It is this provision that accounts for the

appreciable percentage of attendance in these schools, catering for the poorer section of our society.

It has rarely been realized that this scheme is not merely an incentive for regular attendance but a dire necessity if the pupils are to be effectively educated. The large-scale prevalence of poverty in our country is too well-known to need special mention. Nor is it necessary to remind ourselves of the fact that this is, to a large extent, responsible for the non-enrolment of a considerable percentage of the school-age children. Because of this widespread poverty there is even today, when every village with a population of 500 and above has been provided with a school, a considerable percentage of school-age children still outside the school. Even among the children at school there are many who go without their midday meal. How can anyone educate effectively such hungry children? We all know the Tamil poem which says, "as hunger comes in, it drives away all the ten virtues of man including education." Starvation has been responsible for a good deal of ineffectiveness in our schools and consequential stagnation and wastage in education. Many pupils stagnate at the same class for more than a year even at the elementary stage and continued stagnation causes withdrawal of children from the school, which is called "Wastage."

An unforgettable incident to which I was an eyewitness some years back, made me realize fully the absolute need for free midday meals for poor children, if we are to educate them. In the month of November 1955, I happened to visit one evening, in the course of

my tour in Malabar District, the Board High School, Perintalmanna. There was a meeting of the students over which I was presiding. In the course of a few minutes the sad spectacle of two boys swooning in the meeting, one after the other, was witnessed by me. On enquiry, I found that it was not due to any special strain to which they had been put on that occasion. I was told that that was not an uncommon occurrence in that school, owing to utter starvation. These poor children go walking to the school from distant places, and, in addition, go without a noon meal. This has been an eye opener to me about the conditions prevailing among our school children and, on further enquiry, in various districts, I found that there were many starving children both in Elementary and Secondary schools throughout the State, irrespective of whether they were situated in towns or in villages, in prosperous or in poor districts.

To the poor the only means of salvation and social uplift is education and, if the poor children are to be educated, at least as well as their richer classmates, if not better, we must ensure for them certain basic requirements. They have to run at present a handicap race with their well-to-do classmates. The poor pupils are subjected to various handicaps. They have neither educational environment nor physical provision like proper lighting etc., in their homes to enable them to study at home as much as the well-to-do child can. Nor can they afford the finances to engage a private tutor as is done by richer pupils, who need such extra tuition. Their only hope of getting an acceptable kind

of education is, therefore, in the class room. It is there that they must assimilate as much knowledge as possible and acquire necessary skills and proper attitudes. Outside the class room opportunities for study are limited for them.

How could we expect them to do their best in the school when they are hungry? Being hungry, they are not in a position to be, at least, as attentive as others. Hence they do not do as well as others. Their stagnation and wastage is more due to this cause than to their lack of intrinsic worth and the capacity to benefit by the educational opportunities. It was at Perintalmanna that I realized that the attempt to teach a hungry child and to condemn him later on as "not so good as others" is the height of unfairness to the child. It is not only an administrative waste but a destruction of tender human material that can blossom into fine personality, if only the necessary environmental and physical requirements are supplied. Of what avail will all our educational reforms, up-to-date techniques, modern methods and attractive aids be, when the child is unable to attend to or absorb what we provide for it by these means and aids?

We are witnessing the paradox of innumerable pupils and students going without their noon meals or starving during the school day and, at the same time, a flood of charity and hospitality flowing in the country. Ours has been a country renowned for hospitality and charity. Many are the forms in which our spirit of charity has found expression. We value *Annadam* as the best of the *Dans*. If our traditional

hospitality and *Annadan* could only be diverted, to some extent, to the schools, it will be possible to feed these hungry children without any extra burden being placed on society. These were the ideas that came to my mind.

A big gathering of all Elementary school teachers in Tuticorin in February, 1956, gave me the opportunity to give expression to these ideas and to plead for voluntary provision for free midday meals to school children through non-official agencies. It so happened that the speech was tape-recorded by Sri Ramasubbu, the President, District Board, Tirunelveli, who later on lent this recorded speech to the District Educational Officers, Tirunelveli. This speech was first broadcast in a village called "Nagalapuram" in Koilpatti taluk. This was listened to not merely by teachers who gathered for their monthly meeting, but also by the local public. It was there that the leaders of the village, having listened to this appeal for school *Annadan*, responded to the call, calculated the requirements to feed the poor school children in their schools and resolved that everyone owning a plot of cultivable land should contribute a specified quantity of food-grains at the time of harvest. The Chief Minister of Madras, Sri K. Kamaraj, who happened to see this item of news in the papers encouraged me personally by pointing out that this had a great potentiality and no village in Tamilnad would fail to contribute for *Annadan*, whatever their views on other matters might be. The Minister for Education, Sri C. Subramaniam, equally encouraged me by pointing out that



NGON MEALS A normal feature in many schools in Madras State. Sri N. D. Sundaravadi velu Director of Public Instruction Madras and Smt. Sundaravadi velu visiting a feeding centre. About 10,000 schools provide noon meals for about 3,00,000 children in the State.

the seeds of Sarvodaya could be sown in schools by such a movement for School *Annadan*.

Encouraged in this manner, I and my officers took up the task of organizing, purely on a voluntary basis, free midday meal centres in towns and villages. The movement was launched in July, 1956. This developed entirely as a people's movement for organized charity. It was entirely a voluntary movement. To avoid official pressure no orders of any kind were issued by me. Nor was the progress taken official cognizance of till September 1957. It was only in September, 1957

that the particulars from various districts were officially gathered, reviewed and communicated so that every officer might know what was being done by his colleagues in other districts.

I am happy to record that the experience has been thrilling and encouraging. Wherever the officers have taken this up in earnestness and put across this idea, it has caught the imagination of the people and they have responded enthusiastically, both in town and in villages. In the course of the last fifteen months, this has received the enthusiastic support of the various sections of the public. Leaders of public life with different political views, economic objectives and social aspirations have lent their support to this humanitarian movement though not as a means of permanent solution of our problems of poverty, at least as a sort of first aid to the suffering. Newspapers have also given a good deal of support by due publicity of these activities and some even by editorials supporting the scheme. To-day, this scheme is functioning not only in thousands of elementary schools but also in a number of secondary schools. To-day, about 10,000 educational institutions provide such free midday meals for about 3,00,000 pupils. If it has not spread to other schools, it is not so much due to the lack of support of the public as due to the inability of our officers to spare more time and effort for this purpose.

It is not merely the contribution in cash and kind and the burden that the public willingly take up in feeding these children that is full of hope and promise

for the future. The volume of interest that this participation inevitably arouses in them, will go a long way to improve the school-community relationship and thereby raise the standards. The larger the interest the public develop in educational matters, the more certain is the future of education. Without public understanding and support, it will not be possible to get adequate support, both material and moral, for our educational plans. Looking at it from this point of view, I feel, this movement of free midday meals augurs well for the future of the education of our children

The kind of midday meals served varies from school to school. Mostly, it consists of simple "sambar or curd bath" on alternate days. There are a few schools where both are served daily. Here and there a few schools provide regular meals consisting of the usual two or three courses like, sambar, rasam and butter milk.

Many are the ways by which these midday meal centres have been organized in various localities. I have already referred to the case of Nagalapuram where all the land-owners, big and small, have agreed to contribute towards the school *Annadan* at the time of harvest a specified quantity of foodgrains, according to the extent of the land owned by them. Another example comes from an Elementary School at Avinashi run by nuns. About 100 empty match boxes were distributed to such of those school children as could donate every morning without strain and compulsion a match-boxful of rice. Those children

willingly brought with them to school match-boxful of rice. In the course of a few days, the accumulation became substantial and the scheme was then launched. Thereafter, a few charitable-minded persons of the locality supplemented the continuous free supply of foodgrains in that school. It is learnt that, in the Board High School, Eddapadi, almost all the children bring on the first working day of the week handfuls of foodgrains and deposit them in the school. These collections enable the school to feed about 30 to 40 children per day throughout the year. The collection of handfuls of rice for this purpose is resorted to in many schools.

In many villages, the mothers at home put aside a handful of rice when they cook their own food. This rice set apart for charity is collected once a week from each house and utilized for feeding the school children. In bigger villages and towns, cash donations are the mainstay. Annual cash donations are given by the rich and the salaried. There are cases where one wealthy individual undertakes to feed the children throughout the year as in the case of the Ettayapuram Raja's Elementary School, Gomathi Ambal High School, Tirunelveli, Sri Visalakshi Kalasalai, A Thekkur etc. In several villages, a few rich land-owners of the village come together and undertake to feed the poor children for a specific period of time (like a week, a month etc.) by rotation so as to cover the entire year.

Almost all the Government Basic Training Schools are doing this charity, by feeding a specific

number of poor children in the model schools where they have their teaching practice. As these teacher-trainees have to live in hostels, all that they have to do is to allow a slightly larger quantity of rice to be cooked and spare the extra to the poor children. As no separate establishment or organization becomes necessary, the extra burden for them is almost negligible. It does not amount to more than 3 or 4 annas per month per trainee and none grudges to spare that much. The organization of free midday meals by the pupil-teachers gives them the necessary training for organizing such things later on when they go out as teachers. The teachers in service have not been lagging behind in contributing to this cause. There are many instances of lump-sum or periodical contribution by teachers. In one high school the teachers themselves set the ball rolling by agreeing to feed by turns six students per day. In a few days, the villagers came forward to take up the responsibility of free supply of meals. There are centres where food is cooked in the individual houses for a specific number of pupils and sent to the schools at the appointed hour. The houses in the village take their turn in cooking and supplying the midday meals.

There are thus various ways of getting resources in cash and kind for running free midday meals in the schools. It is not only the rich but also the poor that have contributed according to their capacity. It is not merely those with a regular income, however small, that come forward to contribute but also others with less certain incomes. The noble example of even

“daily” wage earners contributing their mite to this cause, has come to my notice quite recently in a village called Narasingapuram, Tiruvalur Taluk, Chingleput District. The midday meal scheme for the elementary school in the village was inaugurated by me on the 24th October, 1957. The list of honours was read out in full at the public meeting. In that list the names of nine good men—daily wage earners—who had undertaken to contribute every day “a quarter anna” found a place. This shows that though they were not up-to-date enough to speak in terms of Naye Paise, they were yet good enough to be as charitable as any up-to-date man.

As the ways and means of financing of this scheme are varied, there is a lot of elasticity in the organization of the scheme. In many places informal committees have been constituted right from the beginning. In some places like Kancheepuram, the non-official committees are all-party committees including the local leaders of all political parties and social organizations. Such committees have organized collections in cash and kind, arranged for central or individual cooking of meals and serving them. Where individuals or individual households undertake to feed the children by turn, no such committees are formed. Similarly in institutions where the meals scheme is organized on the basis of contributions of handful or match-boxful of foodgrains, committees have not come into existence. Now that it is proposed to put the free midday meals scheme on a regular basis, to ensure its continuous and

proper functioning over long years, the inspecting officers have been requested to see that in every one of these centres, a non-official committee with rules and regulations is formed. As regards the mode of preparation of the food, there are a number of ways. In the Basic Training School, the food is cooked in the hostel itself along with the food for the pupil-teachers and served in the model schools. In a few high schools, the Domestic Science sections undertake the responsibility of preparing the food. There are Schools where the maid servant of the school cooks the food. In many places they employ some one from outside to cook and serve the food for the children. They work on a part-time basis and they are remunerated with food and some cash payment.

The experience of the last fifteen months in organizing free midday meals leaves no doubt as to the potentiality of this movement. There are plenty of resources waiting to be tapped for such charitable purposes. Such free supply of food has ensured not only regular attendance but also better enrolment. In my own native village, within a month after the inauguration of the midday meals, the enrolment has increased from 61 to 77. This is not a stray case of improvement in enrolment. It is so in every place where provision is made for feeding the extra number of poor children that may be admitted. The children are also more contented and more attentive. Their growth is better and there is a marked improvement in their health—this is the impression that I have gathered from these centres.

There is one silent revolution that this scheme is ushering in. In my village when the scheme was launched, there were forty starving children of different communities. Fifteen of them were Harijans. When it actually came to serving the midday meals on the first day, twenty-five non-Harijans, though poor, did not want to sit together and eat with Harijans. Hence, this free supply had to be confined to the Harijans for a few days. In a few days, things changed. The non-Harijan parents themselves came forward to allow their children to sit with the Harijan children instead of allowing them to starve. To-day pupils of different communities sit together and eat together without any hitch. Such a state of affairs I have personally noticed in a few villages in other districts. This silent revolution in outlook will go a long way in bringing about a unified, well-integrated society without any consciousness of caste differences.

Good social habits and habits of health and hygiene can easily be instilled in the minds of the children by these services even more than by class-room theoretical teaching.

All this has been going on, depending entirely on private benefactions in a new field where no tradition as yet has been established. I am confident that in due course there will be greater and greater progress. To make this a fairly longstanding provision and to place it on a sound footing, Government subsidy is essential. Now that Government have decided to share the expenses and to give subsidy towards this scheme, one can confidently expect improvement not

only in the quality of the food supplied but also in the number of children benefiting by this scheme and along with that, undoubtedly in the effectiveness of the education that is imparted.

Sub. National Systems Dept.
 National Institute of Educational
 Planning and Administration
 17-E.S. Aurbindo Marg, New Delhi-110016
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