

## **Are Community Canteens Helpful in Complementing Food Security?**

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### **Abstract**

Hunger is a big problem in any society. In a nation where there is acute poverty, the problem of hunger will be obvious and will be a major hurdle in achieving proper development. Hunger leads to malnutrition and the people will be less skilled and it may affect their health. Various welfare measures and various schemes were devised to solve the problem of hunger. But the problem of hunger persists and keeps staring at the policy makers.

In Tamil Nadu, J Jayalalithaa government formulated the experiment of “Amma Canteens” to serve people in the urban areas with tasty and healthy food for reasonable price. The same model is being experimented in Karnataka also. Initially, Indira Canteens were tried in Bengaluru city and have been extended to Mysuru and other districts also. In this paper, the researchers have made a study of the people who access Indira Canteens and have analysed the extent to which this experiment is useful to the poor people.

**Keywords:** Food, Hunger, Canteen, Karnataka, Welfare.

## **Hunger**

Man has never ending wants in this world. Some of the basic needs are – air, water, food, clothing and shelter. Food is a basic need and hunger makes man to go to any extent to satisfy his hunger. Poverty and hunger are connected and both are man made problems (Dogra, 2012). Feeding the hungry people has been a part of various cultures and religions (Fletcher, 1976). How do we measure development? Is it going by the swanky buildings and well laid roads or by the level of human development? (McGillivray & White, 1993). No doubt, infrastructure is important. If a city has palace type of buildings, but even if one person sleeps hungry, it is a shame on that city as a whole.

## **Strategies to end Hunger**

Rationing of food grains – subsidised food grains distributed to the poor people through public distribution system (Gupta, 1977). Giving land to the landless labourers – so that the landless people may grow their own food grains (Bandyopadhyay, 1986). Job security – giving jobs and wages, so that the wages are used by the people to buy food grains in the market. Food for work programme – where the workers are given food grains instead of wages. Mid-day meals scheme – an innovative programme where the poor students in the schools are provided with mid day meals prepared within the school premises (Khera, 2006). This strategy tackles two problems – school dropouts and hunger.

## **Tamil Nadu – the Pioneer in Social Innovation**

On July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1982, MG Ramachandran (then CM of Tamil Nadu) inaugurated the “mid day meals scheme” to feed the children who attended government schools. Initially, it was criticised by several economists that it was a burden on the tax payers’ money. A decade later, the scheme proved to be a big success. The planning commission of India appreciated the scheme and several states in India emulated the scheme. It addressed 3 issues – hunger, malnutrition and low presence in schools.

## **Amma Canteens**

Amma Canteens was started on 24 February, 2013 by the then CM of Tamil Nadu – J Jayalalithaa as a welfare measure to feed the hungry in the city areas. It offers Idli for 1

Rupee, Rice & Sambar for Rs. 5 and Rs. 3 for curd rice. The canteens are run by the city corporations and the state subsidises the food (Rajendran, 2013).

### **Indira Canteen Experiment in Karnataka**

The Siddaramaiah government made commitments to tackle the problem of hunger through the “anna bhaagya” scheme. The Amma Canteen concept of Tamil Nadu was emulated in Karnataka under the name of “Indira Canteens”. The first Indira Canteen in Karnataka was inaugurated on 16<sup>th</sup> August, 2017 in Bengaluru. Karnataka Government has started 101 outlets and the number is increasing month after month.

### **A Small Step**

There is criticisms as to how a few canteens can solve the problem of hunger completely. Hunger is a huge problem and requires multi dimensional approach to solve. Indira Canteens is a scheme that tackles the problem of hunger in one small way. But, as they say “every drop of water, makes a mighty ocean” – this small step goes a long way in feeding the hungry people.

### **Urban Hunger**

The problem of hunger is different in urban areas. Those who come from villages to cities for a short period, do not have a home and no source to have food. The rural and poor people usually find the food given in hotels very expensive. They do not have a place and means to cook their own food even if they get the food grains.

### **Target of Indira Canteens**

Indira Canteens are established in cities by the city corporations. They provide food during morning, afternoon and nights. Targeted people are – rural, poor, students, patients and destitute.

## Visit to Indira Canteens

We visited the Indira Canteen in the Krishna Rajendra Hospital premises (Ward 35), for the purpose of getting first hand experience of the working of this scheme. Findings from one single outlet cannot be assumed for all the outlets. The field visit was necessary to understand the practical working of Indira Canteens. It is in no way an extensive research

## Findings

The canteen is located within the premises of the Krishna Rajendra Hospital (also known as *Dodda Aaspathre* in Kannada)– the main hospital used by people in and around Mysore. The canteen is situated in Ward No. 35 of the Mysore City Corporation. Most of the people coming for the canteen were the patients or relatives of the patients who came to the hospital from the villages. The premises of the canteen are kept clean and hygiene is maintained well. There is adequate drinking water and staff were seen cleaning the premises time to time. We tried taking the opinion of several users of the canteen. Most of them were shy and were not ready to interact. The ones who interacted with us said that they were happy that something like this was available in the city of Mysore



### **Food Quality**

We tasted the food and it was good. It was not too tasty, but it was hygienic and fit for consumption. The visitors said that the quality can be improved further. Some of them said “what else can we expect for Rs. 5-10? This is more than sufficient”. Many of them said that the quantity of the food should be increased.



### **Experiences of the People**

Shridhara (name changed) (aged 17) who comes from a nearby village said that he had admitted his mother in KR hospital for the last one week and he was happy to have the food regularly at the Indira Canteen. He has no other relatives in Mysore and hotel food is expensive and not healthy he said. Once, he was unable to get the token and had to eat from a nearby hotel and he said that the hotel food was not as good as Indira Canteen food. And the hotel food was expensive. He requested that the number of tokens should be increased.

Kusuma (name changed) is studying first PUC and comes from a nearby village. She was unable to get a seat in the government hostel and lives with her friends in a room. Earlier, she used to cook food along with her friends. Now she comes to Indira Canteen and is able to save some money. She said that she wants to become IAS officer in the future and help poor and hungry students in the future

### **Criticisms Against Indira Canteens**

There are several criticisms against the Indira Canteens. The criticisms and our opinion on the criticisms are listed in the below table.

<b>Sl. No.</b>	<b>Criticisms</b>	<b>Our Opinion</b>
1.	Indira Canteens have been criticised as being “populistic” and aimed at the upcoming elections in Karnataka	Governments are accountable to the people and the political parties should aim at getting votes in a legitimate way by making welfare schemes that benefit the people. Indira Canteen is one such scheme which benefits the people. If this Government can garner votes on this basis, it is a good development. In an ideal world, all political parties should be competing with each other to make good welfare schemes to end the problem of hunger.
2.	Many have pointed that it is a burden on the tax payers’ money	whether the tax payers’ money should be wasted only for giving loan to people like Nirav Modi and Vijay Mallya?
3.	Indira canteens cause unhealthy competition to the existing hotels	Those who eat at Indira Canteens do not have money to afford hotel food. Food at Indira Canteens is limited to a few hundreds.

## **Conclusion**

Research conducted by taking a large sample size can reveal the details of this scheme. There is scope for improving this scheme. If there are discrepancies, they need to be fixed in the coming days. This scheme has been a success in Tamil Nadu, and if taken care properly, it will be a success in Karnataka also.

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