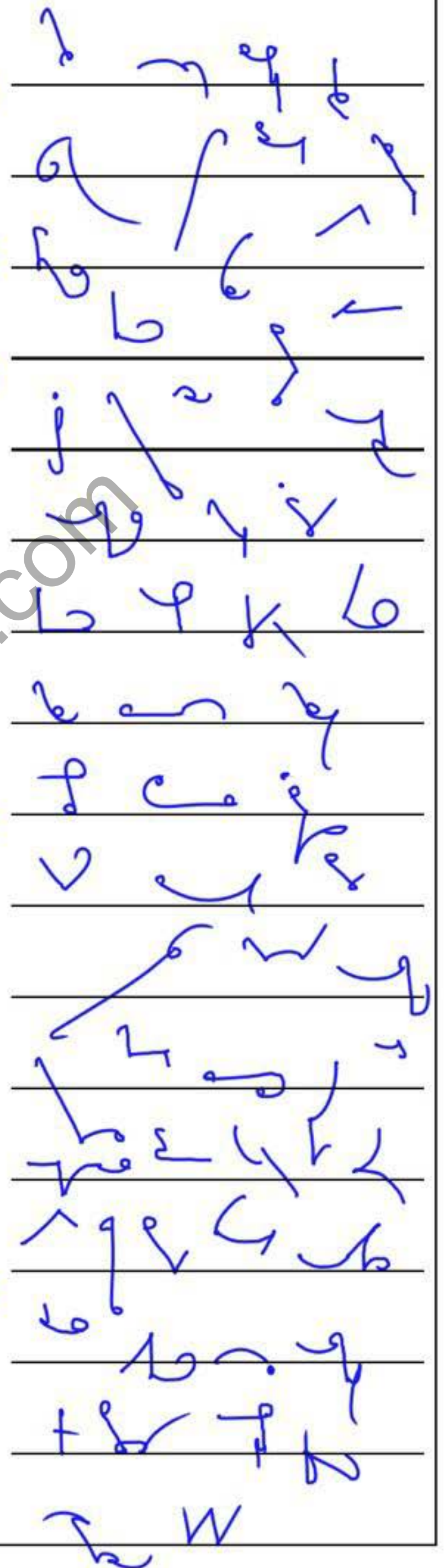


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Sir, I would like to voice my deep sense of appreciation to the Mover of this Bill for the sensitivity and the concern that he has displayed in introducing this Bill. This Bill concerns the welfare and the well being⁴⁰ of the children of our country. I would also like to voice my appreciation to the other honourable Members for the spontaneity with which they have participated in the deliberations. I have listened with rapt attention to the speeches made⁸⁰ by all the honourable Members. This Bill talks about insertion of a new Article in the Constitution. The proposed amendment says that the State shall endeavour to provide free nutritious food to those children who are being provided free and¹²⁰ compulsory education by the State. Sir, before we discuss about the necessity and desirability of introducing such a Bill, I would like to dwell briefly on the genesis of this. Let us first talk about the present day status of¹⁶⁰ the Mid Day Meals Scheme that is presently in existence in many of our schools. I would like to bring to your notice and through you to the notice of other honourable Members of the House that the idea or²⁰⁰ introducing a Mid Day meals Scheme was mooted by our Prime Minister at the time when he was the Finance Minister of the country. I may inform you that this idea was conceptualized long before and we were also able²⁴⁰ to bring into operation a centrally sponsored scheme to boost universal primary education and also to improve the nutrition status of our children in the primary schools. The point that I would like to make here is that if we²⁸⁰ really intend to bring in welfare schemes and programmes for the targeted sections of the society like the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes, women and children, we can do it independent of the fact whether or not there are enabling³²⁰ guidelines in the Constitution. Sir, given the political will and the financial viability, any Government, at any point of time, is free to introduce welfare measures for any targeted sections of the society. I can assure you that we will³⁶⁰ be able to march towards a welfare society with giant and rapid strides. I do not think that we need to resort to any kind of constitutional amendment for bringing in such things. Sir, I would now like to bring⁴⁰⁰ to the notice of this House certain facts about this scheme. The national programme of nutritional support to primary education or the Mid Day Meals Scheme was launched on the 15th August, 1950 to give boost to universal primary education⁴⁴⁰. It was expected to increase enrolment, attendance, retention along with improving the nutritional status of the children in the primary classes in the Government schools and the Government aided schools. Subsequently, the programme was extended to cover all the children⁴⁸⁰ studying in schools. The programme provides for the distribution of cooked meals to children through the local implementing agencies. The Central Government provides food grains free of cost. The State Governments and the Union Territory Governments meet



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the cost of⁵²⁰ conversion of food grains into cooked meals. In addition to this, The Central Government also provides assistance towards the cost of conversion of these grains into cooked meals. The mid day meals are now being supplied to children in the⁵⁶⁰ drought prone areas also during the summer vacation. The scheme is now being implemented in convergence with the rural and urban development schemes for adequately meeting the infrastructural requirements. This programme is being implemented in a very decentralized manner with⁶⁰⁰ the involvement of local level agencies. Women belonging to the self help groups in many cases are doing the cooking work. Besides the State Governments are also contributing from their resources for the betterment of this programme to improve the⁶⁴⁰ quality of meal. Today all the States are implementing the programme. It is a happy thing to note that social equality is fostered here through children sharing the meals with one another. The most important thing is that the nutrition⁶⁸⁰ of children at an early age is very imperative particularly in rural areas and the Government should supply free hygienic and nutritious food to children. This would make a great impact and ensure free and compulsory education to children. This⁷²⁰ would not only improve the attendance but reduce the dropout rates also. We firmly believe that our children are the greatest wealth of our nation. We, therefore, stand committed to our children's well being and welfare. The shortcomings and the⁷⁶⁰ deficiencies of the ongoing Mid Day Meals Scheme have been effectively pointed out and they have been taken note of The Government would definitely look into them to see that the programme is implemented effectively throughout the country⁷⁹⁸.

Total: (798 Words)

