

Problem of Food Security: A brief Analysis of Tribal Area in India

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I. INTRODUCTION

The World Food Conference convened by FAO in 1974 drew the attention of the world community, for the first time, the urgent need for finding ways and means for assuring food security to the hungry millions of the world. The conference not only recognised the food security as the responsibility of the World Community, but also gave the call that no child, women and man should be stunted by malnutrition (Acharya 1983).

Food security means not only sufficient availability of food for direct consumption, but also people's purchasing power to buy them for the consumption it may be added here that even the ability to buy food will not guarantee food security when there is an effective delivery. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the government to devise ways and means by which food is available within the country and people have the means to buy it. This, in turn would implied for the country to generate employment. The concept of food security also implies implementing policies for supplementing food and nutritional requirements for some vulnerable groups like old and infirm people, expectant mothers and young children. Food, such as is not enough, it requires the nutritional value, which is really need for keeping the body in proper health. Foods like milk, fruits, vegetables and processed and fortified foods etc. provide nutrition to the health of the people, which has important place in the philosophy of food security. Further, the efficient and right type of distribution is an integral part of any food security system. Availability of food stocks with the government will be of little use if they cannot be supplied to the people who need them at the right time. As the distribution system takes care of a very large part of the food security concept, it manages the scarcity and shortages which is the central feature of food security system of a country. Finally, Food Security depends on a stable and secure production base. In its wider context, it would include all avenues allied to agriculture, such as, horticulture, animal husbandry, dairy, poultry, fishery, etc. Nature has given enough resources to sustain food production necessary for a community. Land and water, proper cropping systems, scientific package of inputs and practices- a;; are at the command of humanity to secure its food. (Ibid).

Among the developing nations, India's achievements in reducing poverty and hunger are impressive, but there is more to be done to see a hunger-free India. Recent studies indicate that the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe groups, despite the implementation of several special programmes for their welfare, remain the poorest among the social groups. Among these groups, people belonging to agricultural labour households and casual labour households are the worst sufferers. While at the all

India level, agricultural labour households accounted for 48% of the rural poor, the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe households in this category accounted for more than a quarter of the total population in rural India 1999-2000. Odisha, a tribal populated state, has been focused on the problem of effectiveness of the food security of tribal.

II. RIGHT TO FOOD

The right to food is about freedom from hunger. The narrow meaning at hunger may be understood as the right to have two square meals a day, while in its broader meaning would include under nutrition. Therefore the right to be free from under nutrition would mean and include other entitlements such as clean water, healthcare, and even elementary education. The right to food is considered by many as the socio-economic and cultural rights which society must try to achieve over a period of time and therefore, is mainly inspirational in character. But such statement is not defensible in a society where food is available but not accessible due to severe inequality in capabilities, Realisation of the right to food, is contingent upon the right to work and property (Pradip Kishen Case, 1988). The Supreme Court has rightly taken up the cause of food insecurity by directing both Union and State governments to ensure food security including the free food to infirm, children, nutrition of women and lactating mothers. The Supreme Court opened the door of discussion at the level of legislature and executive to consider Right to Food as a fundamental right for the citizens of India.

The National Human Rights Commission of India in 2003, after consideration of starvation deaths in Kalahandi, Bolangir and Koraput brought justification for considering Right to Food as a part of the Fundamental Rights under Article 21 of the constitution (Tripathy, 2004)

Under Article 21, life means, a life with human dignity and not mere survival or existence. In the light of this, state is obliged to provide for all those minimum requirements which must be satisfied in order to live with human dignity, such as education, healthcare, just and human conditions of work, protection against exploitation etc. In the view of the Commission, the Right to Food is inherent to a life with dignity. Moreover, Article 21 should be read with Articles 39 (a) and 47 to view the nature of obligations of the state. Article 39 of the constitution, enshrined as one of the Directive Principles, is fundamental in the governance of the country, requires the State to direct its policy towards securing that the citizens, men and women equally have the right to an adequate means to livelihood. Article 47 more explicitly directs the state top raise the level of nutrition and the

standard of living of its people as a primary responsibility. The reading of Article 21 together with Article 39(a) and 47, places the issue of right to food security in the correct perspective and thus, making Right to Food a guaranteed Fundamental right, which is enforceable under Article 32 (Constitutional Remedy) of the constitution. The obligation of state to provide the food security its citizens is also supported by 1996 International Covenant of the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to which India is a party. The Covenant in Article 11 expressly recognizes the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food (ibid). Added to it, the continuous struggles of the poor and left political parties and efforts of Civil Society bodies, donor agencies and intervention of the judiciary (2001) and others have compelled the national, state and local governments to adopt a suitable legislation that guarantees food to the people and make it "Right to Food as Fundamental Right". Furthermore, national and international events of 2011-declining growth rate of agricultural productivity, rise of food prices, high energy prices, depreciation of US dollar, strong demand from emerging economies for agricultural products and droughts, famine and floods, also underlined the measures for ensuring food security-that is availability of and access to sufficient safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life-linked to other notion of life like economic security, political security and environmental security) International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI, 2011). All these factors indicate the various aspects of Food Security Policies of India.

III. FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMMES IN INDIA

The main objectives of the Food Security Programmes in India have been maintaining price stability, increasing welfare facilities for the poor, providing access to basic foods at reasonable prices to poor people, rationing during situations of scarcity and keeping a check as private trade and domestic prices. The food policy of India must also look into the factors like availability of food in the public distribution system and market, provide subsidized food to the families below poverty like schemes to support the lactate mother growing children expected mothers, provision far protected drinking water, primary healthcare and sanitation. To ensure the above provisions for people, the government time to time initiating measures to promote growth of production through producer-friendly food price policy, technological inputs, subsidies to farmers, organized interventions in the food system by procuring, maintaining of buffer stock and distribution of subsidised food and introduced regulations and control of private trade practices through regulated markets and essential legal measures (Ramulu, 2013). The country's present response to food security in terms of the Public Distribution System is dates back to the Bengal famine 1943. The first food grain policy committee was introduced all over the country. The first scheme of centralised purchase from surplus areas, and rationing for equitable distribution was introduced. Statutory price-controls and sale of rice through fair price shops was also recommended (Das, 2004).

After independence of India, the intervention in food security have been taken which can be broadly categorized into five phases (Swaminathan, M 2000). The first phase was from its origin to 1960- when imparted food grains were distributed

through Public Distribution System in the cities. The second phase from 1960 to 1978 brought a organizational changes and set up Agricultural Prices Commission and the Food Corporation of India to strengthen domestic procurement and storage. The third phase from 1978- to 1991 was marked by large-scale expansion of the Public Distribution System, supported by domestic procurement and stocks. The Fourth phase- from 1991 to 2004, in which the policy of universal Public Distribution System has been replaced by targeted policy in line with the objectives of economic liberalization. The Fifth phase from 2005 to 2011 is making food security as a Fundamental Right to the people. The continuous struggles of the poor and left parties and efforts of Civil Society bodies, donor agencies and intervention of the Judiciary (2001) and others have compelled the national, state and local government to adopt a suitable legislation that guarantees food to the people (Ramulu, 2013). At present, both the houses of Parliament (Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha) passed the Food Security Bill. The food security bill not only strive to make the society hunger free but also would provide nutritional food. Attending to objection made by M.S.Swaminathan Research Foundation and World Food Programme 2001, if people have access to livelihood, they would in general have access to food and nutrition.

Government of India has undertaken a number of schemes to provide food security and to nutrition for poor people. Most important among them are (a) Integrated Child Development System (ICDS, 1975), (b) Targeted Public Distribution System, (TPDS, 1997), (c) Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (MGNREGP, 2005), and (d) the National Food Security Bill (MFSB, 2011), as they cover large number of people and emphasis an provision of nutritional food, giving guarantee of employment and ensure right to food to the people and there by to elimination of the basic problems such as poverty, hunger and unemployment.

However, the NFSB, 2011, appears to be a strong positive step by the UPA government to improve the living conditions of marginalized sections and the others.

IV. FOOD SECURITY IN ODISHA

Odisha is the second poorest state in India, which comprises of 4.74 per cent of India's land mass and 3.6 per cent of the country's population. Nearly 85 percent of Odisha's populations live in rural areas. The Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) population comprised 18.9 and 23.6 percent respectively of the total population of the state (NSS 64th Round). About 45 percent of the geographical area of the state has been declared as Scheduled area. According to sense of Planning Commission 2008, the incidence of poverty among ST and SC was 46.4 percent compared to 27.5 percent of national ST, SC population both in rural and urban areas are poor. In rural areas, the incidence of poverty among STs was the highest in Odisha was 46.4 percent. The estimate made by the Modified Expert Group of the Planning Commission during 2004-05 has calculated that in the state of Odisha below poverty line (BPL) population is of 66.23 percent which was the highest in the country. The per capita income in Odisha is one of lowest among 17 major states (Source: Food Security Atlas of Rural Odisha). Though Food availability in Odisha is fairly comfortable, yet

food insecurity is chronic and the state has been placed in the category of the 'Severely food insecure' regions.

As per the Economic Survey 2001-02 (Government of Odisha) 47.15 per cent of population lives below the poverty line and 52 per cent population of the state were dependent on the Public Distribution System (PDS) for the rice consumption. Hence, the Public Distribution System (PDS) was started with an objective to provide the poor and vulnerable sections of society, certain essential commodities of daily use at subsidized prices. This system, in turn, will bring about stability of market price of different essential commodities, availability of food grains and equity in distribution.

The Public Distribution System (PDS) in Odisha, like any other state in India, has a well organized network of different agencies, which are involved in various stages starting from procurement of grains till their distribution to the common man. At the apex are the departments of food and civil supplies. They are the monitoring agencies and look after various policy matters. The Food Corporation of India (FCI) is the agency looking after the procurement of food grains from producers, their storage and also the import of other food items. At the state level, as we have the food and civil supplies supervising the entire functioning. The Civil Supplies Corporation plays the same role in the state as the FCI at the centre. At the district and sub-division levels, the district administration is in charge of the Distribution System.

The primary outlet under the system is the 'Fair Price Shop (FPS) from which people buy their rations. Number of fair price shops in a locality depends on the number of people living within a particular area. The yardstick of one FPS is for two thousand persons. The officials of the Food Supply and Consumer Welfare Department along with District Administration authorities supervise the functioning of FPSs. The items supplied through the Public Distribution System (PDS) include rice, wheat, sugar, kerosene, edible oil, dal and sometime potato and onion to check the rise of price in open market. However, the rice, wheat, sugar and kerosene are supplied regularly to the people of Odisha at a subsidized rate.

The citizens those who wishing to avail services of the Department will have to get themselves enlisted in the beneficiary list under the APL, BPL, AP (Annapurna Yojana) and Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) scheme. As per the enlistment, APL, BPL, and AAY ration cards are provided to the citizen. Provisions has been made for twentyfive kg rice (Rs.2.00 per Kg) two Kg. sugar (Rs.13.50 per Kg) and four liters kerosene (Rs. 12.65 per liter) for a BPL card holder, for a APL card holder ten to fifteen Kg. wheat (Rs. 7 per Kg) four liters kerosene oil (Rs. 12.65 per lit.). While a Antyodaya card holder provided with thirty -five Kg rice (Rs. 2 per kg), two kg.of sugar (Rs.13.50 per kg) and four liters kerosene oil (Rs. 12.65 per lit). As the APL group people do not get rice, so also the BPL groups do not get wheat and Sugar. Wheat and kerosene are much more irregular than the rice. From the year 2013 the government of Odisha supplying the rice for Re.1.00 per Kg to BPL and AAY card holder families per month. Further non-BPL i.e. APL card holders in the KBK region are to be treated as BPL and supplies the rice with subsidised rate from November 2010. This has increased the number of beneficiaries from approximately thirty to fifty-five lakhs, hence the state government reduced the quota of BPL beneficiaries to twenty-five Kg rice. But all AAY card

holders are still getting thirty-five Kg rice under this scheme at Re. 1 per Kg.

The Public Distribution System (PDS) outlets were operated by the Gram Panchayats, Private dealers and Self-help Groups. Presently, the government of Odisha abolished the dealership system and all items of Public Distribution System (PDS) except kerosene given to Panchayats.

V. PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM (PDS) PROBLEMS IN TRIBAL AREAS

Nearly half of the areas in Odisha are the scheduled areas inhabited by the tribal. They are mostly living in remote and forest areas, with underdeveloped communications. The working of distribution system in those tribal areas in Odisha brings a different picture than the non-tribal areas.

Food security is a big issue in tribal region of Odisha. The average tribal have less than two acres of land, from where, they produce food for five to six months. For rest of the period they depend on forest products and the Public Distribution System (PDS) rice. From the month of May to September, the tribal don't have food. Hence, the government's Public Distribution System (PDS) plays a very significant role in saving the life of hungry tribal. But to get the food from Public Distribution System (PDS) they faced several problems. For instance, Nakkamamudi Panchayat is located in the Kudumulugumma Block of Malkangiri, one of the most impoverished districts. Most of the villages in the region are geographically inaccessible because of poor communication. The tribal inhabited scattered in the forest, could not collect the rice from fair shop in rainy and summer seasons. Again around 100 villages falling under four Panchayats are situated within the Balimela Reservoir Project on the River Sileru. During the rainy season (from July to September) these hamlets are completely cut off from the block headquarters. And almost every year all the cultivable land gets flooded, destroyed crops and leaving the already severely disadvantaged population famished. Similarly the tribal of Bonda Ghati in Malkangiri cut off from the Panchayat could not collect the rations for two months in rainy season. There are also sufficient incidents, when the tribal eat stored dry fruits and leaves, roots, led to indigestion,disease, and death. Sometime after walking of 7 to 8 kilometers to the fair shop, the dealer would say that there is no food stock. The tribal also complained that at most places rice was being distributed regularly every month, but sugar, kerosene were much more irregular. Allegations are also made that the rice bought from the fair shop are of poor quality with stone and bad smell. As the tribal are illiterate, not well informed and have no political voice, could not complain to authority. It is also seen that tribal in the BPL list do not have a ration card, and deprived from getting food through Public Distribution System (PDS)

For the food security of tribal, the government must secure their agricultural land. As the tribal mostly depend on agriculture, the land, water and forest is the main source of producing their food. Their life is revolves around these three things. Hence, the government must take steps to protect the tribal land. It has been seen that the government itself acquiring tribal land and in the name of public interest as proposed industries by private company, which makes the tribal become

landless or marginal farmers. Hence, the government must save the tribal and provide all facilities for producing sufficient food for them.

Most of the tribal and rural poor in Odisha are marginal farmers, having less than one acre of land, producing food hardly for six months. For the rest of period they need to earn from outside. Therefore, the poor tribal from the different parts of Odisha (Kalahandi, Sonapur, Bolangir, Sundargarh) migrated to neighbouring states, where they are being treated inhumanly like bonded labour. The precarious condition of the tribal in Odisha is the reflection of all tribal areas in India.

However, Odisha reports that on the whole, migration rates have dropped considerably after the implementation of NREGS (National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) that assured income from 100 days work in a year per family. But this programme is also not achieved its target. In Odisha, the BPL and AYY beneficiaries buying per Kg. rice with one rupee only. The construction schemes for poor people now working through machines. People complained of getting twenty to twenty-five days work instead of 100 days.

Thus, majority of tribal and poor denied benefits under any targeted programme for BPL sections. The food security scheme of government is a noble step towards the development of poor but, the government needs to take some safety steps.

VI. SUGGESTIONS

- As the government has promised food security of the poor, it must look into the proper identification of the poor as well as of the distribution of goods. The Ward member and Sarpanch should identify the BPL and APL group members, and remain responsible to higher government officials.
- The Government must have vigilance on the proper implementations of distribution of rations. The first and foremost actions should be to plug the leakages in Public Distribution System (PDS), otherwise the leakages will turnout to fail the programme. Hence, the Public Distribution System (PDS) must be streamlined and made universal.
- The Public Distribution System (PDS) alone can not supply all sorts of nutrition as well as sufficient food. Hence, the government should provide all facilities in its true spirit to grow foods locally without spending on transportation.
- The Food Security Bill 2011 has focused on the nutrition food for poor people, which is practically difficult for the government to supply. Rather, government should encourage producing locally those foods like vegetables, fruits, cereals, cease food, meat, fish, milk etc. instead of transferring money in their bank account. The people may not properly use the money for nutrition food. However, the government must bring down food inflation from current level of 12% to less than 4%.

- In the tribal areas, for food security, the traditional system of food storage must be encouraged. In the old days, each village had a “Gola Ghar” (store house of paddy) and during the harvesting time collected the paddy and used to keep there. Who ever in need of food, were supplied from it.
- Government must provide rural employment to stop the seasonal migration of the poor people. If not possible, special identity card should be issued to them to use in migrated place and get food.
- The land is the basic needs for the food security of poor tribal. Government should not be displaced them otherwise it will reverse their economic life. If need to displace, they must be provided with same quality of land as well as houses.
- To fight against the hunger of poor people, there need a co-ordination between the policy makers, government and the beneficiaries. The potential of the Food Security Policies to a large extent depends on the community participation in evolving the policies based on the ground realities, ensuring food autonomy to the beneficiaries, storage and distribution of food grains, allocation of more budget to the agriculture and take necessary measures to increase the production. Thus people centred governance in designing, implementing monitoring and evaluation is pre-requisite for success of the programme.

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