

FOOD SECURITY IN INDIA AFTER INDEPENDENCE

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Abstract

Food security is defined as availability (of food production in the country), accessibility (reach ability of food to all) and affordability (capacity to buy food of the population) to buy food that meets people's dietary needs. In many developing countries like India, health problems related to dietary deficits are an ever increasing threat. According to the World food summit of 1996, food security is a situation "when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life. The paper gives information about how India made its attempts since independence to ensure greater food security.

The paper helps to understand the meaning and concept of food security, the importance of agricultural reforms in India, the role played by land reforms and green revolution in the development of the Indian agriculture and the meaning and implication of food self sufficiency. We will be able to evaluate the agricultural policy and its implementation in post independence India.

Key words: Food security, land reforms, Green Revolution, General Reforms, Public Distribution System and National Food Security Act 2013.

Food Security is the ability to assure, on a long term basis, that the system provides the total population access to a timely, reliable and nutritionally adequate supply of food.

Food security can be visualized in four stages:

- (i) Making an adequate quantity of cereals available to all to ensure survival.
- (ii) Adequate availability of cereals and pulses.
- (iii) Food security to include cereals, pulses, milk and milk products.

(iv) Food security to include cereals, pulses, milk and milk products, vegetables and fruits, (fish, egg and meat in case of non-vegetarians).

India has now reached a stage where the country is no longer exposed to real famines. All the same there still exist pockets within the country where people have to face acute starvation year after year.

Before independence, the role of Britain and its parliament was disturbing enough not just from Indian perspective but also from humanitarian perspective as well. Now we concentrate in what the independent India has achieved and rather beating the chest over the past where we had no control over the decision making and policy formation-either political or economic. We start our journey since 1947 to understand the present status of food situation.

The agricultural sector in India remained stagnant and largely neglected under the British rule. This called for some urgent reforms to put it on the road to recovery after independence of India.

PROBLEMS FACED BY INDIAN AGRICULTURE

A-LAND REFORMS (institutional problems)

- defective tenancy reforms
- poor credit facilities
- inadequate marketing facilities
- size of land holdings

B-GREEN REVOLUTION (technical problems)

- Obsolete technique of production
- Lack of irrigation facilities
- Cropping pattern

C- GENERAL REFORMS

- Social environment
- Pressure of population on land
- Land degradation
- Subsistence farming
- Crop losses.

Land reforms (institutional reforms)-after the independence, land reforms were introduced with a view to remove all obstacles arising out of land ownership, tenure and tenancy systems. These reforms included steps like abolition of intermediaries(zamindars, mahalwaris etc.), tenancy reforms (regulations of rent, security of tenure, ownership rights for tenants), land ceiling, land consolidation, co-operative farming etc. such land reforms were not a grand success in India due to misuse of loopholes of the law by the rich and powerful landlords.

Green revolution (technical reforms)- the primary target of the first five year plan was to give priority to the development of agricultural sector. This was necessary to ensure that no Indian should die of hunger and starvation and to a very large extent, we have been successful as well. Second and third five year plan saw considerable public investment towards mechanization and technological upgradation of the agricultural sector particularly irrigation facilities across the nation, although we had experienced two consecutive bad harvest years 1965-67.

To overcome the aftermath of droughts and the slow agricultural production, a new strategy of 'Green Revolution' was formulated. The new policy package included availability of following at subsidized prices:

- High yielding variety of seeds (HYV).
- Chemical based fertilizers (popularly known as NPK-Nitrogen, Phosphorus and potassium) along with pesticides.
- Sufficient water supply and commercial sources of energy to farmers.

This new agricultural strategy, which was also termed as 'SEED-FERTILIZER-WATER' was clubbed with a 'price support policy' and subsidies to the farmers which has resulted in catering to the food needs of our country and pushing us towards 'self-sufficiency in the direction of food-requirements. It was under the Mexican scientist Prof. Norman borlang, that the HYV seeds for wheat were developed which actually converted the food-scarce country to food- surplus country. The results of Green Revolution can be presented with the following data:

Table showing rise in food production (all values in million tonnes)

S.No	.Production	1965-66	2011-12
1	Wheat	11.1	93.3

2	Rice	35.1	92.8
3	Coarse grains	26.1	32.5

The above table shows the magnificent growth of the food production from the above data in the targeted areas of the wheat, rice and coarse cereals. Later on, similar growth was also registered in pulses and oil-seeds ensuring sufficient availability of these articles in the country. However, there have been some reasonable points of criticism on account of Green Revolution, which must not be ignored, such as:

It was restricted to states like Punjab, Haryana, Western Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. This increased regional imbalance in the country, over the years.

- As a result of Green Revolution, most of the rich and wealthy farmers got the better part of the benefits keeping the poor farmers devoid of the benefits of the revolution.
- Increased mechanization resulted in increased ecological degradation due to chemical fertilizer, pesticides, insecticides etc.
- As per the 11th five year plan report, the second Green Revolution is the urgent need of this country to raise the contribution of agriculture in the GDP to 4% from the present 2% status.
- **GENERAL REFORMS-** Some of the other or general reforms like irrigation facilities, credit facilities, marketing facilities and above all support price policy were also taken up by the government.

By now we are in a position to understand how much we have travelled and progressed since we attained independence. However, we concentrate on the contemporary conditions as well. The irony of our country is that on one hand, we are primarily an agrarian country while on the other hand, we have places in India like kalahandi and kashipur (Odisha), palamu (Jharkhand), baran (Rajasthan) and some more areas where still there are random starvation deaths reported in recent years. Although nothing like the magnitude of Bengal famine has ever occurred in this country after independence.

From a conceptual and a historical stand point, India's buffer stocking policy worked on an insurance approach (buffer stock is the stock of wheat, rice and coarse cereal grain procured by the government through FCI), the buffer stock is kept as an insurance against a reduction in

supplies in the times of falling production. The evolution of food policy and thus, of buffer stocking in free India, is the story of a calamity-oriented policy being transformed into an instrument of delivering equitable development.

However, we must not jump on to the conclusion that all is well with Indian food distribution system due to the steps taken by the government by now. The food grain procured by FCI is distributed by the government using its fair price shops/ration shops, this system is known as Public Distribution System (PDS). In the beginning, PDS was universal in nature i.e. for all without any discrimination between poor and non-poor. However, from the year 1992, it has witnessed series of changes like:

Revamped PDS (most remote and backward 1700 blocks of the country) in the year 1992.

Targeted PDS (with a motive to serve poor in all areas of the country) from June 1997, it was the first time that a different price policy was adopted by the government for poor and non-poor.

From December 2000 onwards, **Antyodaya Anna Yojna** (targeting one crore poorest of the poor among the 'Below Poverty Line' families)

Annapurna Scheme (targeting indigent senior citizens), were started.

The government has recently enacted Right to Food Act 2013(National Food Security Act, 2013) which aims to provide subsidized food grain to approximately more than 70 million people in india. Under the major provisions of the act, beneficiaries of the PDS (Public Distribution System) are entitled to 5 kilograms per person per month of cereals at the following rates:

Rice	Rs. 3/kg.
Wheat	Rs. 2/kg.
Coarse grains	Rs. 1/kg.

PDS has been used by the government as a vital tool to ensure price stability and availability of food at affordable prices, thus ensuring the essence of food-security to common man. In spite of all such benefits, the PDS system has faced severe criticism on the fronts of corruption, poor

quality food supply etc. Instances of hunger are still prevalent despite overflowing granaries and rotting away of food supplies.

Now we must have been very much assured that nothing like the 1943, Bengal Famine situation which is estimated to have killed more than 30 lakh people can arise in the present day Indian economy.

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