

# Exploring the Contours of Right to Food in India

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## Abstract

*This article is an attempt to explore the major shifts in the food policy framework of India. Though the food policy in India experienced various changes in the pre-reform period i.e before 1991 and in the post-reform period after 1991. But the momentous transformation in the food policy of India came after the Supreme Court verdict of 2001 which has formulated the policy of Right to food as a legal entitlement and directed the states to explore the mechanisms to make it accessible to the people. On the basis of existing literature, recent technology initiatives and the field experiences of few states, this article argues that the implementation of the policy of right to food is a challenging task for the states seeing its connection with right to life. But overall the major thrust of food policy always remained towards the poor people specifically living in rural areas.*

**Keywords:** *Right to food, India, PDS, Reforms, Constitution, Justice, State.*

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## Introduction

Indian state has recognized the right to food as legally justiciable. For this the Parliament of India has passed the landmark law of National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA 2013) in September 2013. According to the main provisions of this Act 75% of rural and 50% of urban population will get subsidized food grains. The landmark contribution of this national legislation is to develop the legally justiciable nature of right to food in India in place of general entitlement. Under the main provisions of this act Indian population is classified into two categories such as priority households (PH)

and Antyodaya households (AAY). Antyodaya households under this Act will get 35Kg of food grains per family per month@ Rs.3 Kg for rice, Rs. 2 Kg for wheat and Rs. 1 Kg for coarse cereals.

This legally justiciable nature of right to food in India, in the form of NFSA 2013 has moved through various phases of its development. In this article, I present an account of its historical, constitutional context while elaborating on its contemporary concerns.

The main arguments of this article are threefold. First, in India the discourse of right to food before the Supreme Court judgment of 2001 was implicitly non-justiciable. The momentous twist in the arena of right to food came with the Supreme Court elucidation of Article 21 which has widened the scope of 'right to life' through the amalgamation of right to food into its domain. This right based approach has made right to food as a justiciable right on the one hand and on the other hand it manifested the constitution as a dynamic and evolving document.

My second argument is, primarily in pre-reform period particularly before 1965 the food policy in India was exclusively urban oriented. The more inclusive facet into the fold of food policy came after 1965 with the inclusion of rural areas into its horizon, which helped to characterize Indian food policy as universal food policy. This universal nature of food policy has got major setback in the post-reform period when the targeted nature of food policy came into existence. The main objective of this targeted food policy was to give the benefits of social safety net programmes exclusively to the poor people.

My third argument is, the major transformation in the targeted nature of food policy has come with the implementation of NFSA 2013 wherein the nature of food policy has become more inclusive whereby the efforts have been made to give more benefits to the poorest section of Indian population through the provision of higher entitlements in the form of food grains to Antyodaya households. Moreover, for the necessity to provide access of effective and transparent services to the subaltern section of population Aadhaar and One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) programme came into forefront as a policy measure of government.

The first section of this paper traces the idea of rights and its extension in the appearance of right to food as a part of states obligation from theoretical, historical and constitutional perspective. In the second section the food policy has been explored in detail from the perspective of pre-reform and post-reform period. In the third section contemporary policy debates have been discussed and in the concluding section some future policy concerns have been suggested.

## I

### **Legacy behind Right to Food in India: Theoretical, Historical and Constitutional perspective**

In the era of globalization the idea of rights carries immense importance. At the global level the United Nations universal declaration of human rights forces all countries of the world to assure the basic rights to its citizens. However, the universal nature of human rights is fundamentally based on the principle of natural law whereby the God has given certain kinds of responsibilities to its individuals to fulfill and while fulfilling all these responsibilities the principles of natural law to be followed so that the claims of rights of others cannot be violated. Therefore, arguably it can be inferred that rights are the claims of the individuals where on the foundation of morality the other individuals would not make any kind of interference in the activity of others on one hand and on the other it restricts state not to exercise its absolute powers in the development of individuals.

In an extension to the discussed argument where rights are the claims of the individuals, is a two-way process where the rights of one individual are the obligations of others. But over here one can questions who will rationalize that my rights depends upon the accomplishment of duty on the part of others? Primarily rights are the moral claims of the individuals but all the moral claims are not backed by the legal system supported by the state, which marks the basic difference amid moral rights and legal rights. Thus, rights as a moral claim of the individuals are justified in a society on the ground of natural law or to put it differently it can also be

summarized that the nature of rights and its obligations are social in character. Rights, in this sensation are the claims of the individuals which has the recognition of society, state and nation and which can be justified on moral, legal and on human grounds consecutively. Finally, rights as a claim of individuals which entails in itself the two main factors 'rights' and 'obligations' whereby the factor of obligation further divide the rights into two categories negative or positive rights. The negative rights impose the obligations on society not to do any kind of interference in the exercise of rights of the individuals and on the other hand the positive rights require from the society and state to do something for the full exercise of positive rights.

However, the basic argument behind giving the rights to the individuals is the subject of 'life' of the individuals. For the wellbeing of the individuals and to create the constructive conditions for the full enjoyment of right to life the Indian state has taken mammoth steps in the shape of policy decisions and by making various provisions as the part of the constitution of India. In a way 'right to food' is the fundamental entitlement of the individuals on society and obligation on state. As a part of its obligation it is the state which can ensure freedom from hunger and poverty.<sup>1</sup> Though India's rank in the Global hunger index has fallen to 103 (ranked out of 119 countries).<sup>2</sup> But still it can be argued that all the resources of development are in the hands of state, therefore it is the foremost obligation of the state to take appropriate steps in the configuration of policies to generate a favorable conditions for the development of individuals.<sup>3</sup> Contextually, while discussing the imperative role of the state in Individuals development Harsh Mander argued it is only the state that has the resources and legitimacy to guarantee each of these persons who live with want, stigma and oppression a full human life of dignity, and the nutrition, shelter, health care, education and social security which are essential to sustain life (Mander 2012).

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<sup>1</sup>For more information see The Indian Express dated 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2013.

<sup>2</sup>For more information see Economic and Political Weekly ISSN Online-23,49-8846.

<sup>3</sup>There are various components of the right to development like the right to food, education and health.

Thus, the entire discussion which follows the leading role of the state in individual's development highlights that these resources of development in the hands of the state are not in abundance which further raises the question that what should be the pedestal to distribute all these limited resources so that the principle of equality would be addressed. Taking this into consideration Harsh Mander (2012) argued that the 'principle of inherent equal shared humanity' should be taken care whereby 'need' would be the base to distribute the limited resources of the state amongst individuals.

Besides this the entire discussion forces us to gaze at the historical processes of the state which play considerable role in giving right to food to its citizens which is indispensable for the development of its citizens. Accordingly, following discussion is an attempt in this concern.

The time when India got independence the main task to remove the poverty was one of the policy agenda of Indian government. For this reason, the idea of socialistic welfare state was considered as the best option for the upliftment of deprived and exploited masses of India by the colonial rule. For establishing the state based on socialistic pattern of society in India in 1938 the National Planning Committee was constituted by the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru with the objective of removal of poverty and to guarantee adequate standard of living for the people of India.

Conversely, the need was realized by the members of constituent assembly, not only to give its citizens political rights but also such kind of socio-economic rights which the citizens can claim from the state in case of non-enforceability of those rights. For this, like many other provisions which were made the part of constitution of India, intense debate was also made during the time of including socio – economic rights in the list of fundamental rights and directive principles of state policy. In Indian constitution there are two exclusive parts of rights which addresses the individuals. On one hand fundamental rights Part-III which are also known as civil and political rights and on the other hand directive principles of state policy Part-IV known as social, economic and cultural rights. The non-justiciable nature of the directive principles of state policy makes the basic difference

between fundamental rights and directive principles of state policy. Article-37 of the constitution of India clearly states that the non-justiciable nature of the directive principles of state policy cannot be taken as for granted. The provisions contained in this part shall not be enforceable by any court, but the principles therein laid down are nevertheless fundamental in the governance of the country and it shall be the duty of the state to apply these principles in making laws (Markandan 2005).

In wake of this, in the constituent assembly of India while giving equal importance to fundamental rights and directive principles of state policy important arguments had been held between the leaders. Article 21 of the constitution of India which deals with fundamental rights does not explicitly deals with 'right to food' rather it deals with right to 'life and protection of personal liberty.' Article 39 and 41 of the directive principles of state policy deals with the provisions of right to food implicitly.<sup>4</sup>The non-justiciable nature of Article 39 and 41 of the constitution of India highlights various issues particularly the violation of right to food (Dev 2003; Shourie 2001).

As a result of violations of right to food starvation deaths in India had become the national phenomenon despite of having the surplus food stocks with the government and then many questions have been raised on the violations of Article 21 of the constitution of India and the remedies in case of violations. In this concern the main credit goes to Right to food campaign (RTFC)<sup>5</sup> who did endless efforts in demanding freedom from hunger and malnutrition as a fundamental human right and state actions in order to tackle with the problem of hunger and undernutrition. The RTFC have framed access to food as integral to the right to life guaranteed in the Indian Constitution while also insisting that the government has a legal obligation to ensure continuously improved access to food as a matter of rights, not charity (Hertel 2016).

In answers to all these questions one of the landmark judgments were given by the Supreme Court of India in the Public

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<sup>4</sup>For more information see Dev, 2003.

<sup>5</sup>For more information see Krishnan and Subramaniam, Understanding the state: Right to food campaign in India, *The Global South*, Vol.8,No.2,pp.101-118.

Interest Litigation filed by the People's Union of civil Liberties V/S Union of India 2001 popularly known as 'right to food case'.<sup>6</sup> In its judgment while interpreting the word 'life' under article 21 of the constitution of India the Supreme Court of India argued 'right to food' is indispensable part of 'right to life'<sup>7</sup> and SC has directed the state governments to provide the food especially in situations of draught or to provide food to those people who are not in a position to purchase food as the part of state duty<sup>8</sup> (Chopra 2009; Drez 2004; Jain and Tronic 2016). Through these cases Supreme court has made food, water, shelter, medical care, and decent environment, education are as the bases of right to life. Thus, the court intervention facilitates viewing the constitution as a dynamic and evolving document and not merely an expression of the desired objectives in an open-ended time frame (Shankar and Tyagi 2009). In an addition to the judgment made by Supreme court where it had stated that essentially it is the duty of the state to provide food to the people in case of draught or when they are not in a position to purchase food.

Moreover, many scholars have argued that the implementation of the right to food depends upon the state. In this regard, it can be argued that predominantly it is the state who is responsible for the implementation of right to food but contrarily, on the other hand the active role of the citizens of the state and institutions specifically political parties in power is of prerequisite concern for the well-functioning of any public policy programme as the part of their duties so that the potential beneficiaries can be benefitted. In this state of affairs, the active role of local self-governing bodies is of paramount concern who play an important role in the identification of beneficiaries. In an elaboration to this argument here we can cite the example of PDS in Bihar. Many scholars who have studied the PDS in Bihar were of the view that political leadership in Bihar was

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<sup>6</sup>For more information see Singh on A Realisation towards Right to Food in Modern Legal India, International Journal of Research in Social Sciences, Vol.8, August, 2018.

<sup>7</sup>Supreme Court Orders on the Right to Food: A Tool for Action (2005), available at:<http://www.righttofoodindia.org/orders/interimorders.html>,

<sup>8</sup>Mazdoor Samiti v/s West Bengal was the base of 'Right to Food 'case petition. In one another case Francis Coralie Mullin v/s Union Territory of Delhi whereby the Supreme court broadened the base of right to life.

more influenced from caste affiliations than to give effective food delivery programmes to people (Mooij 1999; 2001). But over here it is important to highlight that it does not mean that the political leadership in Bihar was not interested in PDS but instead of giving the benefits of PDS to people, the government in Bihar through PDS was interested in hierarchical corruption system which has made the Bihar PDS as one of the worst affected system in India. While on the other hand it was also revealed that, the year 2005 when a coalition government led by Janata Dal United and Bhartiya Janata Party headed by Nitish Kumar came to power on the basis of issues of development and governance (Pankaj 2015). This coalition invented new measures to strengthen the PDS of the state and introduced coupon system and vigilance committees that too at the level of Gram Panchayat resulted into the well-functioning of PDS in Bihar. The state was able to lift only 57.13 per cent of its quota of BPL wheat and 40.03 per cent of BPL rice in 2007-08 that increased to 91.64 per cent and 58.3 per cent, respectively in 2009-10 (Pankaj 2015).

Apart from this, it can be said that amongst the three prime responsibilities of the state which entails to respect, to protect and to fulfill the right to food of the citizens of India are concerned first two obligations have been fulfilled through the constitutional and legal provisions regarding right to food by the Indian state whereas the third provision 'to fulfill' is concerned, in Indian Public Distribution System (hereafter PDS) is a universal mechanism, for giving the access of subsidized food grains to the intended beneficiaries through the channels of fair price shops. In this system all urban and rural households are entitled to get the subsidized food grains on the basis of a ration card with registered residential address (Swaminathan 2000; Majumdar 2001; Dev 2003). Likewise, one needs to understand the history of food policy in India in depth therefore, following discussion is an attempt in this track from the perspective of pre-reform and post-reform period.

## II

### **Pre-reform period initiatives in context of right to food in India (1947-1990)**

Initially in 1939 PDS in India was introduced as a food rationing

programme first in Bombay and then in other parts of the country. During the phase of Second World War inflation and scarcity of food grains were the two basic features of Indian economy. For this reduced food grains supply from Burma in 1942 was the main cause. Because of this interrupted supply of food grains, the worst affected area was Bengal, where food entitlement failures caused a famine killing between 1.5 and three million people in 1943 (Mooij 1998).

The time when India got independence these policies of food distribution remained for sometimes, but the food situation was very precarious because production was less and there was every danger of food scarcity. Even after independence the situation became more difficult when independent India received 82% of total population of the sub-continent and, 75% of the cereal production, and 69% of irrigated area (Mooij 1998).

Historically, the food policy in India was designed to get the objective of price stabilization and the first priority was given to stabilize wheat prices. For this many price control conferences were taking place from 1939-43. Further to develop the food policy in India an attempt has been made in context of setting up of separate food department in 1942 and with the efforts of this department an All India Basic Plan was set up in 1943. The main objective of this basic plan was to stabilize the prices (Mooij 1998). For the first time in 1943 an important initiative was taken by the Food grain policy committee for the introduction of rationing system in urban centers of India. During this period the whole focus of food distribution policy was towards the urban centers and little attention was paid towards the rural centers. In this food policy the historical processes played a significant role in influencing the food policy.

From the period of 1947-57 there was a lack of consistent food policy. During this period at number of times the policy of 'control' and 'decontrol' was introduced. In 1955 The Essential commodities Act came into existence<sup>9</sup>. Finally in 1957 the policy of 'control' was introduced. In this phase the tilt of food distribution policy was towards the poorer section of population. For this many fair price shops have been opened in order to give easy access to poor

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<sup>9</sup>See Mooij 1998.

people with the criteria of 'no loss no profit'. During the second and third (1955-65) plans the main function of food distribution policy was to control inflation and the need was realized for zoning the arrangements in order to fulfill the requirement of storage and warehousing facilities.

In 1964 an important watershed in the policy of public distribution came with the setting up of food grain price committee whose main aim was to give incentives to the farmers to invest more in modern inputs and to increase the level of production in order to attain its main objective i.e the level of self-sufficiency. For this Agricultural price commission was set up whose primary function was to advise the government. The main focus of this food policy was to achieve the level of self-sufficiency by giving incentives to the farmers in the form of assured reasonable prices for increasing production and to invest more in modern inputs.

The inclusion of rural areas into the network of PDS had widened the scope of PDS from the period of 1965-90. During this period the opening of more fair-price shops and the innovation of food for work schemes on one hand and the increasing role of Food corporation of India (FCI) has widened the sphere of PDS in India. One of the landmark feature of this phase was the 'politicization of food'<sup>10</sup> whereby the issue of food got momentum for getting the political power.

In this wake, over here it is noteworthy to highlight the trend of food policy because before the period of 1965-90 the main emphasis of food policy was towards the urban areas of India and it is only in the period of 1965-90 the rural areas of India were included in the PDS policies. In a way the more inclusive nature of food policy came into being which helped to make the PDS in India a universal PDS.

PDS in the phase of 1990s was criticized for its universal coverage and to put the extra burden on state exchequer because PDS failed in the removal of poverty and to give the benefits to the intended beneficiaries. Therefore, the need was felt to 'Revamp

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<sup>10</sup>In contemporary times on food politics see Hertel et al. 'Cheap talk on Food: Party Politics in India and the Challenge of Implementing the Right to food', *Human Rights Quarterly* 39 (2017): 449-467.

the PDS' (Swaminathan 2000) and 'targeting the PDS'<sup>11</sup> was one of the solutions to tackle with the issue of increase in subsidy burden and to improve the PDS so that the benefits can be taken by the intended beneficiaries.

### **Post-reform period initiatives in context of right to food in India (1991-2013) especially with reference to 'National Food Security Act', (NFSA) 2013**

The main thrust of 'structural adjustment policies' started in India in 1991 was to reduce the fiscal deficit for which numerous food policy programmes have been initiated. In 1992 'Revamped PDS' was started in which the preference was given to the people living in geographically inaccessible areas which includes hilly areas, tribal areas, desert areas and drought prone areas and urban slum areas (Pathania 2005).

Apart from this, here it is imperative to underline that before 1991 the nature of PDS was universal. The universal nature of PDS was responsible factor for the heavy expenditure on subsidies which caused fiscal deficit in India. In 1997 the main focus of the government was to identify the people living below the poverty line, for which Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) has been launched in which income was the criterion to identify the poor and non-poor households. In a way, the main purpose of TPDS was to issue the special cards to the people living below poverty line (BPL) and to provide them the food grains at subsidized prices with an effective system. Subsidies were ended for the people of above poverty line (APL) in 2000-01. Hence, it can be argued that the main emphasis of post-reforms period food policy was to curtail the level of subsidized food grains and to convert it into targeted system by replacing existing Universal Public Distribution System (UPDS).

Dreze and Khera (2004) are of the view that identifying beneficiaries in a tightly targeted scheme has higher costs and higher probability of errors of inclusion and exclusion. The food subsidy is essentially the deficit of the Food Corporation of India (FCI), whose

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<sup>11</sup>See Geetha and Suryanarayana, Revamping PDS: Some Issues and Implications, 1993, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.28, No.41, PP.2207-2213.

operations are now chiefly geared to keeping food prices up rather than down (Dev and Dev 2003). Massive expenditure on subsidies, forced the central government to focus the PDS only on targeted groups. Following illustration shows government expenditure on food subsidies.

### **Food Subsidy in India**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Food Subsidy (Rs. In Crore)</b>
2005-06	23071.00
2006-07	23827.59
2007-08	31259.68
2008-09	43668.08
2009-10	58242.45
2010-11	62929.56
2011-12	72370.90
2012-13	84554.00
2013-14	89740.02
2014-15	113171.16
2015-16	105509.41

*(Source: Kumar Mukesh:2017, P.15)*

In continuation of TPDS one more scheme was launched by the government of India on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2001 named 'Annapurna' for elderly and destitute who have no one to take care of them. To provide 10 kg of wheat and rice per month free of cost to elderly destitute was the main provision of this scheme. On March 4, 2001 one more scheme has been introduced by the central government for those who are extremely poor and cannot afford two meals a day called Antyodaya families. The entitled households under this scheme are entitled to get 25 Kg of ration per family per month (Pathania 2005).

### **PDS in context of NFSA, 2013**

Many studies on PDS have found that the role of TPDS in removing poverty, hunger, calorie and protein intake is less significant. For this the poor performance of TPDS in terms of high leakages, poor quality of food grains, inclusion and exclusion errors and it had little impact on calorie consumption and malnutrition are the responsible

factors. In this respect, Planning commission of India (2005) in one of its report revealed that at all India level PDS grain leakages were 36.97% for rice and 37.8% for wheat for the reference year 1986-87. The inclusion error of 12.20 per cent in Bihar was lower than the 49.65 per cent in Tamil Nadu, 42.43 per cent in Karnataka, 36.39 per cent in Andhra Pradesh, 21.1 per cent in Kerala and 20.39 per cent in Himachal Pradesh. The exclusion error was 29.81 per cent, which was lower than 47.29 per cent in Assam, 45.84 per cent in Gujarat, 32.69 per cent in Maharashtra and 31.74 per cent in West Bengal.

Viewing these difficulties in the TPDS many scholars are of the opinion that TPDS should be replaced by UPDS.<sup>12</sup> In other words, the inefficient TPDS forced the state and national policy makers to revisit the issue how to design and deliver social transfers effectively and efficiently. In this course the Parliament of India in September 2013 passed the National Food Security Act (NFSA 2013) in order to provide the cheaper grains to the large section of population. The National Food Security Act seeks, according to its preamble, 'to provide for food and nutritional security.....by ensuring access to adequate quantity of quality food at affordable prices to people'<sup>13</sup> (Kumar 2017; Anjani Kumar et.al. 2012).

Under the main provisions of this act 2/3rd of India's population approx. get benefitted. (Under this act 75% of rural and 50% of Urban population will be covered) 125 billion is legally entitled to have 5 Kg of rice, wheat or coarse cereals per month at highly subsidized prices of 1-3 per kg. (Kishore and Chakrabarti 2015) The Act classifies the population into three categories: excluded (i.e., no entitlement), priority (entitlement), and Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY; higher entitlement). Antyodaya households will get 35 kg of food grains per family per month @ Rs. 3kg for rice, Rs. 2kg for wheat and Rs.1 for coarse cereals.<sup>14</sup> The priority (AAY) households will constitute at least 46% of rural households and 28% of urban households. It establishes responsibilities for the Centre and

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<sup>12</sup>For more information on type of PDS in different states see Khara, "Revival of the Public Distribution System: Evidence and Explanations, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 46, No. 44/45, November, 2011.

<sup>13</sup>See more at <http://www.ifpri.org>

<sup>14</sup>For more information see Freddy on Food Security Bill 2013 of India-A Retrospective Analysis, Journal of Food, Agriculture and Society, 1(2), 96-102.

states and creates a grievance redressal mechanism to address non-delivery of entitlements (Kishore and Chakrabarti 2015). The NFSA 2013 provides statutory backing to the right to food (Bathla, Bhattachary and Souza 2015; Saini and Ashok Gulati 2015).

Thus, the implementation of NFSA,2013 highlights the way that how the right to food in India has taken the shape from 'targeted PDS' to 'more inclusive PDS' with the classification of population into three varied categories. Moreover, this act is a remarkable step in the direction to make right to food a justiciable right in place of general entitlement. In addition to this, Aadhaar initiative is one of the milestones inventions to give the benefits of government programmes to the actual beneficiaries and to make the mechanism of public delivery of goods more transparent.

### III

#### **UID-Aadhaar and its justification**

In India for the effective delivery of *Social Safety net* programmes for the people, Aadhaar is one of the steps taken by the government of India in order to provide a life with dignity, whereby the identification of beneficiary is based on 12-digit number using his/her biometric details. In the absence of Aadhaar number people were facing the problems in accessing social and welfare services effectively. Therefore, For the deliverance of social and welfare services effectively Aadhaar will be an identity infrastructure over which the foundation of many welfare services can be built for the residents (Guha 2010).

Recently the Supreme Court of India while upholding the constitutional validity of Aadhaar has stated that Aadhaar's architecture does not create a surveillance state rather it meets the concept of "limited government, good governance and constitutional trust. While expanding its decision on the issue of 'right to privacy' and 'sovereignty' of citizens over personal data<sup>15</sup> the Supreme Court has stated that various subsidies, benefits and services given by the state (Guha 2010) cannot be denied because of the want of

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<sup>15</sup>For more information see The Indian Express dated 27<sup>th</sup> September,2018.

Aadhaar number and fingerprints of the individual do not match<sup>16</sup>. Like this way Supreme Court has opened the “alternative methods of identity” in order to get the benefits for which the individual is statutorily entitled to.<sup>17</sup>The various safeguards and restrictions mandated by the court on data security and usage by private companies will strengthen Aadhaar. It will help to ensure that no senior citizen and manual labourer is denied welfare for the lack of Aadhaar or technical glitch.

## **Roadmap ahead**

The idea of ‘One Nation One Ration Card’ (ONORC)<sup>18</sup> is still under discussions for accessing the PDS effectively and on the other hand to give the quality services to women,<sup>19</sup> subaltern groups, the lower castes and the economically less powerful and elderly (<http://www.ifpri.org>). The idea of ONORC entails the process whereby if any ration card holder migrates from one locality to other then he or she can buy the food grains from the nearest shop of his locality. Arguably, in this respect it can be said that this idea would broaden the ‘choice’ of the beneficiaries because if any beneficiary is not satisfied with the services of the fair price shop of his locality then he or she can buy their entitled food grains from other fair price shop of his choice. It has been revealed that this programme would become operational in India from 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2020. Through the programme of ONORC it is expected that it would give benefits to migrant labourers who migrate from one place to other in search of livelihood. Moreover, with regard to ONORC the policy makers are working on the mechanism of ‘National portability platform’<sup>20</sup> throughout India wherein all the states at one platform would address the local needs of different states.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>For more information see The Hindu 11<sup>th</sup> February, 2018.

<sup>17</sup>For more details see The Indian Express dated 27 September 2018.

<sup>18</sup>For more details see, The Indian Express dated 26th September, 2019.

<sup>19</sup>For more information see Pradhan and Rao on Gender Justice and Food Security: The case of Public Distribution System in India, Progress in Development Studies, Sage Publications, 18 (4), 2018, PP.252-266.

<sup>20</sup>For more information see The Indian Express dated 10 December, 2019.

<sup>21</sup>For more information see The Indian Express dated 28<sup>th</sup> November 2019.

## **Conclusion**

By going through the various food policies in India since independence numerous phases have been emerged. In the first phase the focus was on urban centers of India and after that the coming of rural areas into its ambit with the opening of more fair price shops has widened the scope of PDS in India. Many efforts have been made to balance the level of subsidies in India. In this attempt the nature of PDS in India was reshaped. But the overall thrust of all PDS policies is to make them all poor people friendly. In this respect it is important to mention National Food Security Act, 2013 and the efforts done at the level of Unique Identification Authority of India i.e Aadhaar. Thus, PDS in India is essential 'safety net' to save the poor families from market fluctuations and to make their right to food a real one. However, it is of vital concern to highlight that it is not only the RTFC<sup>22</sup> who did commendable efforts in demanding state actions for giving right to food in the form of entitlements but the role of organizations at the local, national level who have started grassroot struggles and movements for the need to put pressures on local state officials cannot be undermined. In this concern in Chhattisgarh grassroot mobilization and action sought to improve children's access to nutrition is exemplary. Moreover, the role of many NGO's, demonstrations, rallies organized at different levels and National Advisory Council cannot be overlooked. In present context the need is to make people aware with the recent technology mechanisms, for this more information-oriented programmes are needed to be launched at local levels.

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<sup>22</sup>For more information see Hertel on A New route to norms evolution: insights From India's right to food campaign, social movement studies, 2016, Vol.15, No.610-621.

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