Introduction

India is today witnessing a paradoxical situation in which a growing economy is simultaneously accompanied by a large-scale impoverishment. The desired momentum of achieving the ultimate goal of ‘growth with equity’ has not yet been reached. It appears that targets are set in terms of percentage of growth in national income and less emphasis is laid on the social objectives. Amit Bhaduri argues that we must strive for ‘Development with Dignity’ which implies not only a higher growth rate but development in which growth and distribution are integrated into the very same process.¹

While the average growth rate in the Tenth Plan period (2002-2003 to 2006-2007) is likely to be about 7%, this growth is not truly reflecting upon large parts of our population who are yet to experience a decisive improvement in their standard of living. The percentage of population below the poverty line is claimed to be declining but only at a very modest pace and unemployment problem continues to trouble us. Many people still lack the basic amenities of nutrition, health, safe drinking water and sanitation facilities. There were still 260 million people living below poverty line in 1999-2000 and the prevalence of widespread undernourishment & malnourishment are a cause of concern. Our process of growth seems to be proceeding on a path which is denying the basic entitlements to the common man.

One of the most important entitlement that any person needs to be provided with is that of food which is the foundation along with water for our survival. Guaranteed as a human right in international covenants, freedom from hunger or access to adequate food & nutrition is generally perceived as a constitutional right in India. This has been mandated by extended interpretation of right to life (Article 21) in the Indian constitution. India has had a food policy and launched various schemes to address the needs of food & nutrition. However the country continues to witness starvation deaths in different parts of the country and the trade liberalization of the last decade (1990s) & the policy changes have consistently attempted to decrease the government’s role in ensuring food security. Meanwhile there have been judicial

¹ Bhaduri, Amit (2005), Development with Dignity – A Case for full employment, New Delhi, National Book Trust, p.11.
interventions along with public pressure which has constantly tried not only to uphold our Right to food but also helped in increasing our consciousness. The Right to Food Campaign along with the Right to Information Act has generated awareness, created a stir in society and is an effort from civil society to ensure that our basic rights are protected. In the campaign are a number of citizens’ groups who share a common interest in pressurizing the state to fulfill its constitutional duties. This campaign could turn into a mass movement that is able to force state & society to finally tackle the problem of hunger in India. Thus it becomes imperative for the government to relook at the existing food policies to ensure a food secure nation.

A special characteristic of food policy process in India is that food policies are shaped at the Central level by people who are less aware of the problems & difficulties at the local level & thus there is a wide gap between policy making & policy implementation. Thus food security becomes a test case for federalism.

Food Security encompasses three important aspects of food availability, food accessibility and food absorption. Food security in the international documents has been interpreted as physical and economic access to food at all times and at affordable prices to ensure a healthy & active life. Production of surplus food will not ensure total eradication of under-nutrition. It has to be supplemented by generation of sufficient employment opportunities so that all the households have the purchasing power for assured economic access to food. Thus employment or livelihood security is an essential element of a comprehensive strategy for food security.

India being an agrarian economy is dependent on agriculture for both food and livelihood. Thus agriculture’s performance is important as it affects the two crucial aspects of food availability and food accessibility. Indian agriculture has been affected by the signing of the Uruguay Round Agreement (URA) of GATT in 1994 and the large number of national and subnational level debates in India on the Agreement on Agriculture (AOA) since the year 2000 have raised fundamental concerns on the likely adverse impact of the agreement on food & livelihood systems. The clauses of market access, domestic support and export subsidies have been debated & has created divides between the developed & the developing world. Also since agriculture
is a state responsibility, the Agreement on Agriculture has become the object of state
government attention as well. It has been argued that since decisions taken by the
Centre have a bearing on the states, the states should have a say in the matters
especially concerning them and many states have objected to the Centre’s unilateral
decision making.

Food availability is a function of foodgrain production and imports/exports. However the recent trends in liberalization of India’s agricultural sector has had an
impact on foodgrain production & has triggered a lively debate on the impact of
export-orientedness & diversification on long term food security situation. Moreover
concerns have been raised about the capability of the country to feed itself in the
future. Long-term food insecurity can occur if we do not take care of our ecology. The
continued growth of the agricultural sector is particularly important for generating
employment. It has been emphasized that agriculture has to grow at the rate of 4% per
annum in order to attain a 10% growth in overall GDP.

Growth in agriculture has gone down along with decline in the share of the
agricultural sector’s capital formation in the GDP. The yield of major crops has
dropped along with the decline in per capita availability of foodgrain. Rural
unemployment rate has gone up and the rural poverty seemed to have not declined at
the same pace that it should have – thus affecting the food accessibility aspect of food
security in an adverse manner for many households. The decline in the agricultural
growth has affected employment, which in turn is affecting the level of poverty and
the living standards of the people. Thus M.S. Swaminathan points out that ‘a famine
of jobs/livelihoods in the rural non-farm & off farm sectors is leading to a famine of
food at the household level. Land and Non-farm sector are the two sources of
employment which are being emphasized. Agricultural development strategies have to
focus on generating higher incomes & greater on-farm and off-farm employment

opportunities. This alone can lead to poverty reduction as Yoginder K. Alagh argues ‘without a dynamic agriculture, inclusive growth becomes a mirage’.³

The government has provided support to promote the aspects of food availability (in the form of subsidies, Minimum Support Price {MSP}) and physical food accessibility (in the form of PDS). The feasibility of creating an effective safety-net under PDS is found to be questionable (as it is plagued with many problems) and its future needs to be examined. Similarly the issue of subsidies and MSPs is a critical subject as there are differing/contrasting opinions on it, with some favouring its continuation & others in favour of its removal. The implication of removal of subsidies is that the cost of production may rise (due to increase in input costs) & hit many of the farmers specially small and marginal. This may lead to reduction in production of foodgrains & increase in prices. Similarly reduction in consumer subsidies can result in less supply of subsidised foodgrain & coverage of fewer families by targeting which will affect food security of left out people adversely. Another disturbing feature is the decline not only in the average calorie intake in rural India but also decline in the average cereal consumption per capita in rural areas.

The third parameter of food security is food absorption. Food absorption, which is equally important, is dependent on a number of factors like nutrition levels, state of health, environmental sanitation and safe drinking water. The better the condition of these human development parameters/indicators, better are the chances of food security as food and nutritional security is nothing but human security in the long run. The aspects of rural development are also intrinsically linked, as there is a need to place food security in a framework of rural extended economic growth. There are various schemes that can improve food security – most of which also enhance rural development like the poverty alleviation & employment generating programmes, rural infrastructure programmes & schemes for development of natural resources.

There will be a need to activate a responsive decentralized system of governance in order to ensure effective implementation of the various schemes improving food security. Panchayats, cooperatives and non-governmental organizations can play a big role by building up networks & linkages amongst themselves to operate at the regional level and all India levels, besides the village level with which they have been dealing so far. They can play a significant role in rural development of a state. There is a need to move from a centralized system to a decentralized one which must evolve through democratic discussion among communities for local and household security & with the states for regional food security within the constitutional guarantees of panchayati raj and federal structure.

Focus of Enquiry

The research proposal aims to look at food security in India in the context of liberalization policies in agriculture (effect of WTO rules on the agricultural sector). It would examine all the three parameters of food security namely food availability, accessibility & absorption. The comparative study of Punjab and West Bengal would be undertaken – two important states with different experiences which would help us to get a varied outlook & allow us to dwell into certain areas which are crucial for food security.

The research proposal would seek to examine the following

- whether and to what extent the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) is affecting the food and livelihood security of India

- examine the food availability and food accessibility situation in India by reviewing the agricultural sector

- examine the subsidy and the Minimum Support Price (MSP) regime (provided by the government) and see whether it is compatible with the current situation in India.

- review the functioning of the Public Distribution System (PDS) in general. Also to examine whether the agricultural institutions are able to
effectively procure & then distribute foodgrains through the PDS and how effective is its functioning. Also to review the trends in consumption

- examine the condition of nutrition, health, safe drinking water & sanitation facilities & whether they are conducive for food absorption.

- whether the various food entitlements, employment generation, rural infrastructure & programmes for development of natural resources have been successful in improving food security

- and finally whether & to what extent can the grass-root institutions (PRIs, NGOs & Cooperatives) be instrumental in promoting rural development & in playing a proactive role in ensuring food security to the disadvantaged sections of the communities.

- examine all the above aspects in the states of Punjab and West Bengal and a comparative analysis would be done.

**Methodology**

The method used in this work is purely theoretical and analytical in approach. The study is based on primary sources which include government reports, government annual plans, government surveys, reports of non-governmental organizations, atlases, interviews of policy makers and academicians. The secondary sources include books, journals, magazines, newspapers and other relevant sources.

**Chapterisation**

The study is divided into six chapters. The first chapter deals with Conceptual and Theoretical Issues. It deals with the following aspects

- The concept of food security has been defined and discussed in the backdrop of Globalisation, Federalism and Governance. Moreover the Right to Food and the Right to Food campaign has been dealt with
Finally the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), which is affecting our food and livelihood security, has been examined. The provision of market access, domestic support & export subsidy has been examined along with the recent happenings in the WTO meetings which are affecting our food security situation by affecting our agriculture.

Chapter Two examines the aspects of Food Availability and Food Accessibility. In this, Food availability is looked into by examining the aspects of growth, foodgrain production & yield, ecology, foodgrain export & import. Procurement and Buffer stock is also taken note of. With regard to Food Accessibility, the aspect of employment, poverty, land and non-farm sector is examined. Also in this chapter the states of Punjab and West Bengal are studied & their food availability and food accessibility situation assessed by looking at the above aspects.

Chapter Three looks at the government support in the form of various instruments to improve the aspects of food availability & accessibility. Subsidies in the form of power, fertilizers & irrigation (canal water) are being considered. Adequacy of MSP given to farmers is being viewed keeping in mind the input costs. Also the public distribution system has been examined in detail. As against the current TPDS, there have been numerous arguments about the effectiveness & the implementation of a universal PDS. This aspect has been reviewed to ascertain the performance of the distribution network. Moreover the chapter also looks into the consumption patterns in India & changes occurring in it with the repercussions that it could have on food security. Finally the chapter again examines at the state level – the two states of Punjab and West Bengal with respect to the above aspects.

Chapter Four deals with Food Absorption & Rural Development schemes. Under food absorption, the aspects of nutrition, health, water supply & sanitary programme is looked into. Under rural development, schemes enhancing the various aspects of food security are examined.
- Direct food based programmes & programmes for development of natural resources for improving food availability
- Poverty alleviation & employment generating programmes for improving food accessibility
- Programmes for improving Rural infrastructure

The Chapter also looks at the role of the PRIs, Cooperatives & NGOs in promoting rural development. The state level analysis of Punjab and West Bengal on the above aspects has also been reviewed.

Chapter Five deals with the comparative analysis of Punjab and West Bengal in respect of food availability, food accessibility and food absorption.

Finally Chapter Six deals with the conclusion and the measures that need to be undertaken to improve food security at the all India level and specifically also at the state level.
### Chapter I – Theoretical & Conceptual Issues

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