CHAPTER - V
Summary and Conclusion

World has ample food, yet millions of poor people are suffering from hunger and food insecurity. Persistence of hunger and starvation indeed reflects a serious denial of human right, indeed it is a social and economic problem. Persistence of poverty, hunger and starvation along with the growing availability of food has rendered the rationale of both poverty alleviation and food self-sufficiency policies suspect and created a paradoxical situation. There is a consensus among policymakers, planners and economists that the problems of poverty, hunger and malnutrition have not been solved satisfactorily. It is also acknowledged that the persistence of these problems has the potential of undermining the very process of democratic governance.

The issue of food security to the people is an issue of great significance and it has a long history. In its evolution the of food security was characterised by a focus on the scarcity of foodgrains at the global and national levels. In other words, first stage of debate on food security was revolving around the scarcity of food. Malthus started the debate on scarcity of food in his ‘Essay on the Principle of Population’. He saw the food problem in terms of the growth of food production falling behind the expansion of population. Malthusian understanding of problem of food insecurity led to the ‘Food Availability Decline’ (FAD) argument. According to the Food Availability Decline
understanding, people are food insecure because there is not adequate food to eat. This led to arguments calling for a rise in food production. In India, this led to the Green Revolution approach to tackle the food problem.

The advocates of Green Revolution argued that all that matters is increased food production for elimination of hunger and food insecurity. The Green Revolution approach based on the developments in the field of science and technology, especially in biotechnology, advocates the transformation of agriculture as a massive productive exercise. To achieve this end, genetically modified high yielding seed varieties, double cropping, chemical fertiliser are extensively used. Thus the protagonists of Green Revolution argued for a massive increase in the production of foodgrains. They believed that more food production means less hunger. In the high time of Green Revolution, Amartya Sen argued that, making more food available is essential but not a sufficient condition for food security. The central character of Green Revolution with a focus on increased food production could not alleviate hunger and food insecurity. This was despite increased food production and in fact surplus of foodgrains. This was a result of the failure to alter the power structure at the local levels in terms of land and other resources which play a crucial role in terms of purchasing power.

People who do not have any land or any other source of an alternative income go hungry, no matter how much foodgrains are produced. Thus, starvation may be caused not by food shortage but by the absence of an income and purchasing power. In other words, food insecurity is a result of lack of entitlements, seasonal unemployment coupled with low mean incomes and high seasonal variance in incomes. These are the causes of distress in rural livelihoods. Majority of those who are food-insecure suffer
from transitory food insecurity attributable to the seasonality factor. The central problem for the government has become how to manage its stocks. Food Corporation of India godowns run out of shortage space much of it is stored in the open under tarpaulins. The food grain surplus is due to the inability of the poor to buy food.

In the present stage, it is recognised that even the ability to buy will not guarantee food security unless there is an effective delivery system. It has been argued that food security for all must in every case be at the core of national poverty reduction strategy. Adopting the goal of food security would force poverty alleviation programmes to focus more on micro level aspects like region, vulnerability, seasonality and distribution of resources. This would lead to more realistic strategies based on ground realities. The present strategy sought to situate both food and nutritional security within an array of objectives that poor households pursue for their survival.

Land and agriculture are essential to ensure food security. Agriculture is the major source of employment and income in the country and its growth and development is essential for achieving food security both at the national and household levels. However, agriculture has moved too far from the centre of the debate on hunger and food security. In India majority of the population depend on agriculture. This implies that any adverse developments within this sector would have larger ramifications in terms of its impact on the levels of poverty and employment as well as food security.

Traditionally a majority of the population did not buy food, agriculture production was for home consumption as well as for market. Food insecurity and
hunger is largely a result of the shift in production for market, the shift to commercial crops and reduction of area under food crops. In traditional agricultural production low risk moderate yielding crops which provided enough food for consumption. Now shifting to high risk high yield crops means more frequent failure. In traditional farming, low dependence on chemical options also were affordable but current high chemical options need timely credit which is often not available to farmers. The tapering of yields-soil, water and pest factors have pushed yields down and the entire small and marginal farmers section becomes a food buyer. This is also the problem for landless agricultural labour and artisans, they used to be paid in terms of grain, traditional means of food access is lost and they are too poor to access the open market prices. Small farmers are forced into distress sale of their foodgrains at low rates to meet basic needs of other food items like oil, salt, and cloths, health, education and other basic needs. The unorganised working population the urban workers who are buyers of foodgrains face problems as food prices go up. They are pushed into the trap of hunger and food insecurity. The irony of the situation is the fact that the majority of those who experience persistent hunger are people who are involved mainly in activities related to agriculture and food production

The continuous neglect of agricultural sector, led to policies like subsidised rice to people. The state response to poverty related hunger and food insecurity and its policy to tackle the problem are centred on the PDS. The PDS aimed at ensuring fair prices, foodgrains availability at all times in all areas. The PDS has been functioning for almost six decades; it has no doubt played a useful role by making available essential commodities at fixed prices to consumers. After India’s independence there was a strong
ideology of state-led development and central planning. From the early 1990s, this development model has been replaced by a new, market oriented development strategy. In the 1990s, under the new economic policy the objective of expenditure reduction has taken priority over welfare objectives such as the objective of providing food security. The new economic policies and ideology of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation in the nineties have an effect on the PDS also. Specifically new economic policy has entailed a reduction in food subsidies and a shift from universal coverage to targeted groups. The supporters of liberalisation often tend to regard the idea of ‘subsidy’ and ‘burden’ as being synonymous. However, food subsidies have acquired greater importance and relevance today and the government is spending enormous amounts on subsidised food schemes under PDS. To understand this contradiction, one has to take into account the political processes which have shaped and continue to shape the PDS.

The issue of food security is increasingly challenging state politics and governance. From 1980s onwards, food became an issue in populist politics in Andhra Pradesh. Subsidised rice under PDS is one among the several promises with which political parties tried to win the favour of the electorate. The political-economic environment that gave rise to this development is the intensified political competition. Moreover, the increasing political awakening among large parts of the population made it necessary for politicians and political parties to formulate policies that appeal to large section of voters. The potential of “rice” to tilt the electoral balance was first discovered by the DMK founder late C. N Annadurai whose promise of one ‘Padi’ (about 1.5 KG) rice at one rupee brought him to power in the 1967 elections. In Andhra Pradesh, it was former Chief Minister N T Rama Rao who first promised the rupees two a kilo rice
scheme which paid towering electoral dividends to him in the polls. The election manifesto of Telugu Desam Party in 1983 elections stressed the need for streamlining PDS. The central objective of the larger policy of Telugu Desam party is that, essential commodities should reach the villages and be sold at reasonable prices, making the sale of rice at rupees two per kilo. These kind of populist schemes are justified as welfare measures. The political parties often try to discover and rediscover electoral strategies afresh with new denotations and new attributes in the process of shaping their election manifestos. Each election is a response to new rhetoric of populism. The discovery of electorates with a specific meaning seeks to lend fresh credibility to the functioning of the system.

The critical appraisal of the PDS discloses that the rice subsidies main purpose was never just to help the poor. Instead its main intention was to be politically noticeable, if a small gesture of charity on the part of the ruling parties in the state. The main reason for the scheme’s popularity is that ration cards as well as ration shops actually have reached the most remote areas of Andhra Pradesh, unlike many development schemes which, one way or another, have concentrated on only some places. The ration shops have reliably supplied rice to card holders, with the leakages and corruption problems. Since the scheme has paid rich electoral dividends to Rama Rao in the past, the present government decided to revive it ahead of future elections. Apart from direct electoral political pressures, there is a tendency to assign minimum needs a high place on the political agenda. The food policy is deliberately used by the governments in political and economic situations. Political gains to the government through promises of entitlements to needy people can be politically attractive. Thus
guaranteed supply of essential foodgrains to the poor households by way of assured food security is also a good political and electoral strategy. Subsidised food has become one of the most important electoral strategies in present state of political affairs. Political parties in the era of liberalisation are facing contradictions in handling the political and popular compulsions emerging out of structural adjustment and new economic policies. The times that are keen on taking forward the liberalisation agenda shape themselves evolving strategies to overcome these compulsions that range from electoral to mass movements.

An electoral programme to resolve the underlying problem must combine support for a sustainable policy with a set of demands for more fundamental changes. This would enable people to have their democratic share in the national income. There is no evidence that the successive governments have the capacity to provide the effective policy implementation to fulfil the electoral promises to address hunger, food insecurity and poverty. Instead of building a credible sustainable food policy, political parties are using PDS for their temporary electoral gains. Political parties are not interested in formulating policies to address the basic issues of food insecurity, such as land and sustainable agricultural development.

Food insecurity and hunger are often caused and perpetuated by issues of politics, powerlessness of weaker sections of society and the social structure in the villages. There is a need to vigorously strengthen democracy and democratic values as from village to national level to guarantee a right to food. This is not only necessary for creating political incentives for political executive in power to prevent hunger but also a
means to empower people to take decisions regarding their lives and bring people at the
centre stage of public action to see that none go hungry.

The field survey in Anantapur reveals that, though there are many weaknesses in
functioning of PDS, distribution system protects the consumers against the high and
some times exploitative open market prices. The PDS makes available at predetermined
and relatively stable prices specified commodities to its intended consumers. Thus the
primary objective of the PDS to ensure consumption levels of the relatively poor
households is met to some extent in Anantapur district. Despite many problems, the
weaker sections of rural and urban areas have benefited from the PDS. But it is a
temporary gain. The huge subsidy becomes a constraint on the state. This can be reduced
at any time. In case of rice subsidy this has happened many times in the past.

The subsidised rice scheme under the PDS helps the weaker sections, but there is
no evidence to say that it can eradicate food insecurity. Poverty is major case for food
insecurity. Poverty can not be eradicated with a few subsidised schemes like PDS. The
PDS does not tackle the root cause of lack of purchasing power and therefore it cannot
lead to a sustainable development of weaker sections. The PDS on its own, and in any
case in the form and size it is at the moment, can never serve as a buffer to absorb the
big shocks caused by the market economy. Also other initiatives on a much wider front
in the field of social security are necessary.

In Anantapur district, it is apparent that, rice and sugar is brought every month to
the ration shops. Kerosene oil is brought to ration shop frequently but not every month.
Other commodities especially wheat is not distributed even twice in a year. The introduction of the coupons has reduced black marketing to some extent. The food coupon system has made it difficult to sell the quantities that are not lifted by the cardholders in the open market. The SC/ST households are more dependent on PDS foodgrains than the OC and OBC/BC households. At the same time OBC/BC households are more dependent on PDS foodgrains than the OC households. Unavailability of rations is the most frequent problem faced by the people visiting ration shops. The reason for unavailability, more often than not, according to the respondents, is the diversion of supplies to open market. Even when the ration is available, it is of poor quality. The quality of foodgrains supplied under PDS is low. In case of rice quality it is very low and there is a consensus among the households regarding this. There is not even a single household that expressed satisfaction over the quality of rice.

The major problem facing the system and people is the diversion of PDS rice into black market. The rupees two rice scheme under PDS is being implemented at a time when the open market price of rice has swelled to Rs 15 to 20 a kg. Such a huge difference between the subsidized price and the market rate gives scope for diversion into the black market. The profitability of this illegal trade depends on the open market price and controlled price. The most important in the functioning of delivery system, proliferation of bogus cards and infective functioning of vigilance. The number of BPL cards and the per cent of below poverty line households is very confusing and contradictory each other. There is a considerable corruption or manipulation of BPL ration cards being distributed to ineligible people. This is because the number of such BPL families as being claimed by the state number almost 85 per cent of the state
population, and is in complete variance with the figure given by the central government. As per the estimation of central government, around 25-30 per cent of the population is below poverty line. The variation of BPL population in the state and central figures is unbelievable. This is because of political interference in issuing BPL cards for political gains. Though a large percentage of non-poor are included, only nominal percentage of households are outside the purview of white card. This accounts for the appeal of the system. Another aspect that has a direct bearing on improving the delivery system and also the efficacy and efficiency of public spending relates to the issue of monitoring. In absence of adequate monitoring and evaluation of the PDS, there is a considerable amount of wastage, leakage and spill-over of policy. There is a vested interest in the administration all down the line in bogus reporting and stock verification.

The main weakness found out in the PDS has been its inability to reach the poor effectively. There are other problems, like faulty weights used by the shop owners to give less quantity. Cardholders face problems of irregular and inadequate supplies and lack of information about when the ration would be available. The commodities arrive late and irregularly. The villagers are poorly informed, and certainly not in advance. This means that the poorest among them may not have sufficient cash readily available when the foodgrains arrive in fair price shop. It has been said during the course of survey on consumers that, in the rural areas FPS opens only three to five days. The ration supplies are normally available only for a few days in a month. Very often, the problem is due to illegal diversion of supplies to the open market. Even when people get the ration, more often than not, it is of poor quality and much less than the quantity due. The survey revealed that all the consumers want a rise in the allotted quota of goods especially rice
under the PDS. The study found that cent per cent of the households are not satisfied with quantity of rice supplied. These card holders get their additional requirement of rice from the open market. There are other problems, like faulty weights were being used. The problems are aggravated by the nexus between officials at various levels and the Fair Price Shop (FPS) dealers, which makes even complaining about these irregularities very difficult.

In the Andhra Pradesh, even though the FPS dealers are the most tarnished symbol of what is wrong with the PDS, they too have some problems. According to the FPS dealers, they work under severe constraints like, the commissions are too low to run and maintain the fair price shop. Moreover, after the launch of Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) the quantities have also decreased below sustainable levels. Many a times it is just not possible for them to lift the stock from government godowns. They have no control on the quality of grains for which they normally bear all the blame from public and have to deliver to the public what they get. The supplies from FCI are very erratic and most of the times come late. The blame for ration not being available has to be borne by the FPS dealers. Fair price dealers are working with less return on investment because of low rate of commission. The commission allowed to them is very less. Dealers are not satisfied with the present commission; they want increment in commission or fixed salary like Tamil Nadu dealers. One of the weak points in the organisation of the PDS is the income of the fair price shop dealers. If a ration dealer behaves according to the rules, ration shop is not a very profitable business. As long as the problem of viability of ration shop is not solved, one can not expect PDS to function
without ration dealers contracting debts and illegal sales of the commodities. However, majority of dealers have agricultural land in Anantapur district.

What is distinctive about the Anantapur district is that the policies pursued by the Congress and Telugu Desam parties as well as their success in political mobilisation involving factionalist leaders, and brutal elimination of political rivals. The implication is that, political factionalism has effectively precluded the development of strong factional politics in rural areas of Anantapur district. Anantapur district is widely known for its political factionalism and elimination of political rivals. Rural politics of Anantapur district depends on the distribution of favours to clients. Political struggles are for a piece of land and a very small position like village president and the negative power of rural dominant communities frequently degenerate into factional struggles.

The prevalence of factionalism combined with patronage politics is an obstacle. Within the village, traditional loyalties based on political factions induce political stresses and strains. As the scale of political parties and the degree of political participation both increase, some basis must be found for alliances among village groups with little experience of working in common. The result is loose alliances among diverse segments which trade their support for direct and immediate favours. The majority of dealers are affiliated to some political party, though they give donations to all parties and maintain good relations with all the local leaders. It is found that most of these individuals got the help of local M.L.A or M.P or Ministers to get FPS licences. Further, PDS foodgrains are given to the political leaders as contribution when political parties arrange public meetings and rallies. In the villages, it was found that foodgrains are
denied to cardholders based on their support to the other political faction. This is happening in the faction affected villages, however it was not found in all villages. It reflects Anantapur’s peculiar factionalism and political group conflicts in villages. The distribution involves the character of rural politics. In most villages in Anantapur district, rural politics has become the politics of faction and patronage. Rural politics depends on the distribution of favours to clients. Political struggles are for a piece of land and a very small position like village president and the negative power of rural dominant communities are frequently degenerated in factional struggles. Deplorably, bureaucratic apathy, factional rules and short-sighted political considerations have plagued functioning of PDS in Anantapur. In addition to these, the region has suffered the trauma of droughts and famine.

Greater emphasis on consumer awareness rather than official vigilance committees may be more effective in streamlining the PDS. Shortcomings at the implementation level can overcome by ensuring greater people’s participation. People can exercise an effective check and control on the functioning of the PDS. The existence of large number of grass-root-level organisations provide adequate forum for consumer complaints and there timely redressal. Public awareness of entitlements and involvement of civil society organisations will improve the delivery system. Consumers are satisfied with the prices of ration commodities, but availability of foodgrains and quality of foodgrains are very important to the consumers rather than price. The public participation collaborative and adversarial in eradicating deprivation is important. The public should be seen not merely as patient whose well being commands attention, but
also as the agent whose action can transform society is the central to understanding public action against deprivation.

It emerges from the foregoing analysis, that the PDS alone will not solve the problem of food insecurity. Higher economic growth, equitable distribution, a mix of policies such as effective implementation of anti-poverty programmes, improving health education and employment are necessary in combating hunger and food insecurity. Hunger and food insecurity eradication requires the means for enthusiastic political association and deliberation. The mere existence of electoral democracy does not necessarily eliminate food insecurity. Failure to build a credible food security system continues unabated. The quality of the public distribution system did not improve. Political parties have seen the advantages of large-scale food distribution and have tried to get political mileage out of it. Most of the governmental programmes, which are meant to abolish poverty levels, hunger and food insecurity is in fact, used for the political purposes rather than to tackle poverty. What is needed most is political commitment, especially at the national level to give the problem the priority it deserves, supported by a vibrant and strong, involvement of civil society organisations and non governmental organisations.