The subject of improving food security to the people is an issue of great importance to the today’s welfare state. Food is the most important need, as it is indispensable for the maintenance of human life. Despite impressive food production in recent decades, such that enough food is available to meet the basic needs of each and every person, complete food security has not been achieved. It is more imperative in case of India where millions of poor suffer from persistent hunger and malnutrition. The concept of food security has evolved over the last few decades. Academics, policy-makers and activists have contributed substantially to the debates on what constitutes food security and how it can be ensured at the global, regional, state, household and individual levels. There are various definitions of food security. Also different approaches have been devised to tackle the problem of hunger and food insecurity. The present chapter analyses various themes and approaches of food security and in the process examines the various national and international covenants on food security. It also intends to analyse debates on food security and the issue of food as a human right.

Definitions of Food Security

Food is a fundamental basic need and should be treated as a universal human right. Food also has significant implications for the potential economic and social development. People without secure access to food are unlikely to progress
economically or to contribute indirectly to the welfare of other populations through economic trade, cultural exchange, or social interaction. Thus, alleviating hunger and poverty is in the long-run interest of the human development. Hunger is generally not a question of sudden starvation but rather of chronic under nutrition that leaves populations vulnerable to disease and their members unable to lead active and productive lives. Food security requires ensuring that foodgrains are physically and economically accessible to households. Physical accessibility of foodgrains in India for the poor mainly depends upon the public distribution that operates to a network of fair price shops (FPS). Economic accessibility depends upon the purchasing power of the people, which is primarily affected by two factors, the price of foodgrains and the income of the people. A state of food insecurity exists when the members of a household have an inadequate diet for part or all of the year or face the possibility of an inadequate diet in the future. Here two fundamental concepts are implicit, one, food insecurity is defined in terms of household, and two, food insecurity relates to both the current and future adequacy of the household diet.

Food security can be defined as the state in which all persons obtain a nutritionally adequate and culturally acceptable diet at all times. The notion that all people, especially the most vulnerable, have dignified and unthreatened access to the quality and quantity of culturally appropriate food that will fully support their physical, emotional and health, means that all people in the community have access to good nutritious food at all times. It means that food is available to all people, at all times, in order to have an active, healthy life. The World Food Summit held in 1996 in Rome, which took place at a time of growing international concern over
food security gave a new impetus to the fight for food security by focussing attention on food issues. The Rome Declaration on World Food Security, convened by the Food and Agricultural Organisation defines food security as, “when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”\textsuperscript{5} Thus food security means that there should be enough food for people and they have the purchasing power to access the food so available, and also that the food available is culturally acceptable. It should fulfil adequate nutritional value for healthy life. The definition adopted at the World Food Summit has been referred to in numerous texts and resolutions since and forms the basis of the international consensus on actions required at global, regional and national levels to achieve world food security.

\textbf{Debates on Hunger and Food Insecurity}

The discourse on hunger and food insecurity can be divided broadly into three stages based on the focus on the discourse. The first stage in the evolution of concept and practice of food security was characterised by a focus on the inadequacy of food supplies at the global and national levels. There have always been speculations and forecasts about the world’s capacity to feed itself. Malthus formally framed the debate about whether food resources would be sufficient to feed an increasing world population in his ‘Essay on the Principle of Population’. Malthus saw the food problem in terms of the growth of food supply falling behind the

\textsuperscript{5} The World Food Summit was held in Rome, 13-17 November 1996. It was convened by the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organization. See the Appendix-I for Rome Declaration on World Food Security.
expansion of population, and saw both these growths as being primarily determined by nature. This is, of course, the context in which Malthus used his famous argument about food production growing in arithmetic progression, while population grew in geometric progression, soon overtaking the former. Since then, the same basic question has been raised, but from many different perspectives. On one end of the spectrum, people have generated calculations based on partial and generally qualitative analysis, while on the other end, projections have relied on quantitative models based on historical data. In that sense, one would expect an extensive literature evaluating these estimates. However, the studies have undertaken a comparison of predictions and projections with actual outcomes. As modelling and projecting global food security continues to grow more complex and expensive, revisiting the key predictions and projections of the last half century, and assessing how accurate they were, should provide valuable insights for future exercises.

The various approaches to the food problem that can be found in the literature can be divided broadly into two categories. One group looks at the issue from the standpoint of natural sciences and engineering, and relates the food problem to various technological factors. The other group concentrates on social issues, including political economy, and sees the food problem primarily in social terms. As Amartya Sen explains, “At the risk of over simplification, the two classes of approach may be called 'nature-focused' and 'society-focused', respectively. These are not, of course, pure, unmixed categories; the classification reflects the relative emphasis that is placed on the different factors. It is really a question of focus rather than of coverage” (Sen 1982 : 447).
The various approaches to tackle the problem of food security in the late 1960s, concern about increasing population growth and poverty also resulted in the regular issuance of largely pessimistic predictions. Massive food aid shipments to stave off famine in India in the late 1960s, followed by the Green Revolution gains of the 1970s, and increased focus on natural resource constraints since the 1980s, each fuelled its own blend of optimism and pessimism when it came to predicting the food outlook. “Malthus did suggest checking population growth through 'moral restraint' to combat what he called 'the excessive and irregular gratification of the human passions, his scepticism of the actual possibility of achieving such a 'moral' solution is also abundantly clear. Malthusian pessimism reflects his view of a natural conflict, but more importantly, the Malthusian focus itself represents a far-reaching abstraction from various social influences on hunger, starvation and mortality, making the food problem turns on the ratio of two physical magnitudes” (Sen 1982 : 448).

Malthusian understanding of food problem led to the ‘Food Availability Decline’ (FAD) argument. According to the Food Availability Decline understanding, people are food insecure because there is not enough food to eat. The Green Revolution in India largely based on this understanding. The protagonists of the Green Revolution argued that all that matters is increased food production for alleviation of hunger. The assumptions underlying Food Availability Decline argument has received a great deal of attention in recent decades. However there are several questions which have to be answered by those holding this position. Does
anyone have reason to accept this futuristic projection? For example have any country really exceeded their carrying capacity? Are there clearly identifiable population trends which indicate major worldwide population growth? Are these trends irreversible? However, many disagree with the Malthusian understanding of food insecurity.

The Green Revolution approach based on the developments in the field of science and technology, especially in biotechnology, biochemistry, microbiology, 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 protagonists of the Green Revolution argued for a massive production of foodgrains. The belief was that more food production means less hunger. Much attention is now being directed towards supporting modern biotechnology advances that impact directly on food security. The bio-solutions include support given to the development of micro nutrient-dense staples, and genetically modified foods such as wheat, maize, rice, beans and cassava that are rich in vitamin A, iron, iodine, and zinc. It is expected that over the long-run micro nutrient-dense staples would be a cheaper means of eliminating nutrient deficiencies in developing countries than the traditional methods of food fortification with supplements and pills.

The ‘Food Availability Decline’ argument has typically been presented so forcefully that the impression has often been created that the world population has already been growing faster than the world food supply. That is most certainly not
the case on the other hand, there has been a steady increase in the amount of food output per head. According to the Sen, “Malthusian pessimism has not been well vindicated by history. His fears have proved to be not merely ill-founded but fundamentally misconceived, as the enormity of technical progress and the vast expansion of food production -far in excess of the growth of population which has itself been very rapid - have shown in the span of nearly two centuries since the publication of Malthus's well-known essay. However, Malthusian pessimism has survived this bit of empirical failure, as indeed economic theories often do (witness the performance of so-called 'monetarism' and its nine lives). But there is a belief - backed by some quite respectable reasoning - that while Malthus's fears did not come true in the first two hundred years, the stage is now set for his pessimistic predictions to be realised. The natural constraints on food production, it is argued, will now begin to bite in a way they have not in the past, and signs of decadence, it is alleged, can already be seen around us” (Sen 1982:448).

The second stage revealed that despite of substantial expansion in food supplies that had occurred at the global and national levels. Sen argues that, making more food available is necessary but not sufficient condition for food security. This was the period of Sen's significant work on poverty and famines, and his elaboration of the ‘entitlements approach’ to the study of hunger. There were disagreements and counter arguments over the issue of foodgrains scarcity. The central character of Green Revolution with focus on increasing food production could not able to alleviate hunger and food insecurity, despite increased food production and in fact surplus of foodgrains. Because, it failed to alter the tightly concentrated economic
power, in terms of land and other resources which play a crucial role in terms of purchasing power. The people who do not have any land on which farm or any other alternative income to buy food go hungry no matter how much foodgrains produced. The narrow focus on the production ultimately ended as futile exercise. Productivity in traditional farming practices has always been high if one takes into consideration the fact that very limited external inputs are required. While green revolution has been projected as having increased productivity in the absolute sense, when resource utilisation is taken into account, it has been found to be counter productive and inefficient. According to Vandana Shiva, “Perhaps one of the most fallacious myths propagated by green revolution protagonists is the assertion that high yielding varieties (HYVs) have reduced the acre-age, therefore preserving millions of hectares of biodiversity. India’s experience tells us that instead of more land being released for conservation, by destroying diversity and multiple uses of land, the industrial breeding system actually increases pressure on the land since each acre of a monoculture provides a single output and the displaced outputs have to be grown on additional acres” (Shiva 2002:43).

It was argued that, purchasing power of the people plays a crucial role to secure food needs. Poverty is defined as lack of access to food, clothing, shelter, education and health care. It is obvious that poverty is a cause of hunger; poor people are always chronically hungry. Unfortunately, however, the concern about hunger and malnutrition has led primarily to a concern about the prospect of food supply falling behind population growth. But over the past several decades, food supply actually kept pace with population in most areas of the world, and yet there
was an increase in the incidence of hunger and malnutrition. Whether or not food supply will keep pace with population in future remains to be seen. What is already clear is that trends in the incidence of hunger and malnutrition do not bear a one-to-one correspondence to the trends in per capita food supply. It is not merely aggregate food supply but also its distribution that determines the incidence of hunger and malnutrition in any society. On the basis of the available evidence, it can be said that while the aggregate food supply has kept pace with population in most countries, its distribution has been getting progressively unequal. The question still remains, why has the distribution of food been getting progressively unequal? In addressing hunger one must steer clear from the poverty debate while understanding the intimate link between the two. The causal relationship between hunger and poverty needs no reiteration. Everywhere poverty is accompanied by hunger, malnutrition, ill health and illiteracy among other problems.

In the high time of Green Revolution, Amartya Sen’s ‘Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation’ (1981) challenged the well received theories of Malthus, and Food Availability Decline theory. It thus contested the Green Revolution approach to tackle food insecurity. The recent growth in field of biotechnology has opened up an enormous potential in the key areas of genomics, bioinformatics, molecular breeding, diagnostics and vaccine technology. Biotechnological research and development must result in improved yield potential and increased productivity. It could also lead to higher yields on marginal lands in countries that today cannot grow enough food to feed their people. Hunger and food insecurity is not a food
Food insecurity occurs when people lack the opportunity or face denial of opportunity to earn enough money to meet their basic needs.

The enormous growth in global food production and increase in per capita availability of calories, are necessary but not sufficient conditions for eliminating hunger and malnutrition. However, aggregate availability is a necessary condition for food security. Aggregate food availability is insufficient to ensure either access to or proper utilisation of nutrients to achieve food security. Food insecurity is inevitable within an economy lacking enough food to satisfy all of its population's nutritional needs, even if distributed perfectly equitably and without loss or waste. Ensuring adequate aggregate food availability has been, and remains today, a serious challenge in much of the low-income world. Despite global food surplus, underdeveloped countries suffer significant problems concerning food. Most social science and policy discussions of food security work with the food availability assumption that increased food supply is the key to reducing hunger. Critics argue, however, that increased food supply has little impact on hunger. According to them entrenched inequality is that cause hunger rather than inadequate supplies or drought.

In the earlier times famines and droughts were preceded by crop failures due to natural disaster. Even today famines are understood to be caused by a food shortage. This, however, is a fallacy. Food availability in a region or a country does not depend on current local production alone. No region is a completely closed economy. Cross-regional and cross-border trade are indispensable parts of economic operations. There are often stocks of food grains that are carried over from one
region to another, a decline in current local production does not, therefore, automatically imply a decline in food availability. Even when there is a decline in food availability the available food supply may still be adequate to feed the population of the region concerned. Yet, in numerous instances in history, a crop failure in one part of a country has often led to large-scale starvation deaths. The correct conclusion to be drawn from this is that in the course of a crop failure some people lose their access to food, and not that food as such becomes unavailable. Not all people starve to death during a famine; nor do all people suffer economic deterioration. Indeed, some people are able to make extraordinary economic gains during famines. Evidently, famines involve sudden changes in the distribution of food and income. How do such sudden changes occur? In order to answer this question, one has to look into the factors that determine the distribution and access to food in normal times.

In this context, for the purpose of examination one has to specify the basic features of the economic system. In the agricultural economy each family produces its own food requirements. Each family's access to food is, therefore, directly related to its production capability which, in turn, is determined by its command over land, labour, draught animals, and other complementary resources. In the case of a crop failure, the incidence of food shortage, in the first instance, will be distributed among the families approximately in the same manner as productive assets. The families which produce just enough to survive at a level close to subsistence in normal times will now be short of food. Others who produce a surplus in a normal time may now have just enough to survive. Still others who produce a large surplus
in a normal time will now have only a small surplus. Whether or not the families that are short of food will starve depends on whether or not they can exchange their available assets for example land, utensils, labour etc. for food with families having a surplus or in areas outside the affected region. It is not necessary for food to be in short supply for starvation to occur. A sufficient condition for this would exist if the families that are short of food are unable to exchange their available assets for food.

According to Sen’s ‘Entitlement and Deprivation’ (1981) thesis hunger and food insecurity have to be seen as the characteristic of the people not having enough to eat food, this does not tantamount to saying that there are not enough foodgrains to eat. The later could be the cause of the former, but it is not the only cause. According to Sen, “The problem may be illustrated with an example. The Bengal famine of 1943, which killed about three million people, was arguably the largest famine in this century, though there are also other claimants to that distinction. In terms of food availability per head, 1943 was not an exceptionally bad year, and indeed just two years earlier in 1941 the availability of food per person in Bengal had been a great deal less. ….. if one were, to start with worried about food supply falling behind population, and then were to find out that the converse happened to be the case- with food supply outrunning population” (Sen 1882:450).

In the year 1981 Amartya Sen ‘An essay on Entitlement and Deprivation’ explained the other side of the hunger going beyond the food-availability decline argument. As Sen explains; “Starvation is the characteristic of some people not having enough food to eat. It is not the characteristic of there being not enough food
to eat. While the latter can be a cause of the former, it is but one of many possible causes. Whether and how starvation relates to food supply is a matter of factual matter for investigation. In order to understand starvation, it is, therefore, necessary to go into the structure of ownership. Ownership relations are one kind of entitlement relations. It is necessary to understand the entitlement systems within which the problem of starvation is to be analysed. This applies more generally to poverty as such and more specifically to famines as well” (Sen 1981:1).

In a market society the amount of food that a person or family can command is governed by some set of rules with the contingent circumstances in which that person or that family happens to be placed. The social conditions of production, which reflects the interrelationship between people and the means of production, determine what is produced from a spectrum of goods and services that can potentially be produced. In this scheme of social conditions of production, the existing property relations are the critical elements. This admits in terms of ownership, control and access to the means of production. It is also necessary to examine the structure of agricultural production. If the emphasis is on increasing production of export crops, food availability will decline. Sen explained how hunger and starvation depends not merely on food availability but also on its distribution and purchasing power of the people. According to him, “Consider a private ownership market economy. I own this loaf of bread. Why is this ownership accepted? Because I got it by exchange through paying some money I owned. Why is my ownership of that money accepted? Because I got it by selling a bamboo umbrella owned by me. Why is my ownership of the bamboo umbrella accepted?
Because I made it with my own labour using some bamboo from my land. Why is my ownership of the land accepted? Because, I inherited it from my father. Why is his ownership of that land accepted? And so on. Each link in this chain of entitlement relations ‘legitimizes’ one set of ownership by reference to another, or some basic entitlement in the form of enjoying the fruits of one’s own labour” (Ibid:1-2).

Thus starvation may be caused not by food shortage but by the shortage of income and purchasing power. As Sen explains; “A barber owns his labour power and some specialised skill, neither of which he can not eat, and he has to sell hairdressing service to earn an income to buy food. His entitlement to food may collapse even without any change in food availability if for any reason the demand for hairdressing collapses and if he fails to find another job or any social security benefit” (Sen 1981:155). At present very little attention is being given to address hunger problem in India. One can say Sen’s ‘Entitlement and Deprivation thesis got much attention in the world due to its powerful counterpoint on earlier theories on hunger. It is not because of Sen raised about hunger that no one had said before, but the way he approached the problem of hunger from a fundamentally new perspective, giving much emphasis on the capacity of individual. The very disposition of the structure of ownership of food is solely with entitlement relationship that every individual possesses. As Amartya Sen termed ‘Entitlements’ of people. For example, in a private ownership market economy, how much food a person can command will depend on, what he owns and what he can get in exchange for what he owns either through trade or through production, or some combination
of two. Hunger and food insecurity can no longer be convincingly attributed to a worldwide food shortage. It has been increasingly recognised, food insecurity arises out of chronic poverty, its victims possess neither the resources to buy food nor control over the resources needed to produce food. Even availing the opportunities provided for their benefit becomes difficult to those who are caught in the hunger trap. Not only does hunger conclusively exclude a large segment of population from availing of their fair share of benefits of economy, but also results in substantial losses to economy in terms of lower productivity and higher health and safety costs.

The third stage represents the period when food supply was recognised as a concise element in determining food security and policies for it. Until recently, to food security has focused on the production side of the food system and has called for sustainable agricultural production. Some scholars like Amartya Sen have recognized the limitations of this approach and recommended that encompasses food production, distribution, preparation, preservation, consumption, recycling and disposal of waste, and support systems. Sustainable agriculture can only be successful to the extent that other parts of the food system and the rest of society also become more sustainable. At this stage, it was recognised that even the ability to buy will not guarantee food security. What was also needed was an effective delivery system. A household is said to be food-secure when it has the necessary purchasing power to buy foodgrains and has an easy access to the required nutritional amount of foodgrains. This stage opened the way for related food security concerns, such as the environment, cultural practices, education, and health status, to enter into the debates and the means whereby food insecurity is to be
tackled. Food security for all must in every case be at the core of national poverty reduction strategy. Hungry people cannot wait for the benefits of improved infrastructure, a more equitable distribution of resources, access to land and credit and other elements of national policy. 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 current strategy sought to situate both food and nutritional security within an array of objectives that poor households pursue for their survival.

The present stage in seeking to extend the household security model by emphasising nutrition throughout the life-cycle. In particular, there is now a clearer recognition that the real goal is not just measuring food security in terms of supply availability, but more specifically nutritional security as determined by household and individual needs. Policies directed towards global and national food supplies, while they remain necessary, are now deemed insufficient to cope with poverty, food insecurity, and chronic hunger, on the scale that they currently exist. Therefore, a wider array of policies must be formulated to address the hunger and malnutrition. Policies must also address issues such as community access to sanitation, clean water supply, health facilities, and stemming cultural habits and practices, especially those that impact food preferences and food preparation. An approach with food security as an entry point to sustainable human development fully integrated into socio economic measures. There is now a favourable policy environment and heightened public awareness regarding the centrality of hunger, food insecurity and
malnutrition issues in state policy. While the goal of development is the reduction and elimination of poverty, policy makers have often overlooked the inherent relationship between poverty and food insecurity, their linkages and their repercussions.

Persistent hunger and food insecurity on one hand and economic disparities on the other can only breed resentment and instigate violence, putting the social fabric of the nation at risk. Poverty eradication issues that do not explicitly address food and nutrition issues are unlikely to be successful. The question is not food insecurity versus poverty, but rather the removal of hunger as a pre-condition to better livelihoods and productive capacity. The biggest challenge would be to integrate the social protection framework and its food based outreach into the core of the poverty alleviation intervention efforts. This will involve identifying and providing the capacities for more focused and efficient delivery system. The question of hunger needs to be viewed in the framework of food insecurity. This covers a range of causes from the availability of food to meet demands of the population and changing dietary needs, access to food which is a function of purchasing power, to sustainable livelihoods and employment opportunities and also entitlement to subsidised schemes.

In extending the political implications of these debates, the democratic institutions and freedoms are significant in providing the conditions within which human development can be achieved. Evidence that public interest in ending hunger has grown in recent decades is reflected in responses to surveys, in pressures placed
on legislators by their constituencies, and in the organised activities of lobbying groups, some of which are worldwide in scope, such as the civil society organisations (Dreze and Sen 1993:5). Yet neither the acceptance of the link between poverty and hunger nor the popular support for efforts to curb hunger can ensure that food aid will have its intended effects. The scholars like Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen have suggested that public pressure may be vital in shaping government policy and in enhancing the government’s political will to engage in sound development.

The existence of democratic rights and freedoms are crucial in maximizing human capacity. The crux of these debates is that public security and well being and protection against hunger and food insecurity more specifically, is closely bound up with the existence of electoral democracy and the civil and political freedoms. In Sen’s words, “Insofar as public policy to combat hunger and starvation including rapid intervention against threatening famines may be depend on the existence and efficiency of political pressure groups to induce the governments to act, political freedom too may have a close connection with the distribution of relief and food to vulnerable groups” (Sen 1989:769).

The politics of the particular society is very important in elimination of hunger and poverty. Politics has to be integrated into debates on poverty and food security. Lack of income is nearly always an immediate determinant of food insecurity, because food is generally available in a given locale at some price, save extreme situations dictated by drought or famine. Chronic poverty often is cited as the source of food insecurity. Social organisation refers to the connectedness and

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functioning of institutional resources in a nation state. Food and nutritional security is primarily linked to the ability of people to acquire the necessary material or economic resources. Although land reform is often cited as a solution to food security in India, the problem is more deeply rooted in patterns of inequality in power and access to human and material resources. Thus, policies that broaden access to opportunity and long-term resilience of livelihoods are central to food security and hunger reduction. Political and economic policies of government and hunger are related by reciprocal causation. Defects in public policy undermine food security; in turn, widespread hunger has corrosive effects on social organisation. When disorder or corruption disrupts institutional functioning, food security is put at risk. Thus, hunger is a political problem and must be addressed through political change especially political democratisation.

Aristotle highlighted the close association between public well-being and the role of state. Aristotle argued that all associations are formed with a view to promoting good life and the state is most sovereign among all associations best equipped to perform this role. Therefore institutions of the state have to make conscious effort to become socially responsible, recognising that the role and functions they perform inevitably have an impact on society. Since they have assumed a greater role in larger governance issues of nation, it is not possible for them to retiring away from assuming different types of responsibilities depending on the society in which they work. Providing food security and eliminating hunger are important among such responsibility. Hence it depends on the institutions of the state to determine policies for society. But it will not be long-lasting unless the
institutions get their act together and develop sound and sustainable policies to
determine how they can contribute to eliminate social problems like food insecurity.

**World Food Summit 1996**

The human right to adequate food at the global level centred on a mandate
from the World Food Summit (WFS) held in Rome in November 1996. The
objective of the summit was to renew global commitment at the highest political
level to eliminate hunger and malnutrition, and to achieve sustainable food security
for all. The WFS a plan of action was adapted aimed at reducing the number of
undernourished people, estimated to be about 800 million in 1996, to half that
number by 2015. The plan of action contained seven commitments that were to act
as guiding principles for those involved in formulating principles for those involved
in formulating policies to implement the plan at the national and international levels.
It also spelt out objectives and actions for the implementation of these commitments.
Objective 7.4 under commitment seven of the plan of action stipulates the need to
clarify the content of the right to adequate food and the fundamental right to every
one to be free from hunger, and to give particular attention to the implementation
and full progressive realisation of this right as a means of achieving food security for
all.\(^7\) The core content of the right was clarified as being inclusive of the right to
accessibility and availability of food. The availability of food includes in a quantity
and quality sufficient to satisfy the dietary needs of individuals and free from
adverse substances and acceptable within a given culture. The three levels of
obligation thus imposed on state. First, the obligation to respect the right to access to
food, it means that state must refrain from taking measures liable to deprive any one

of access to food. Second, the obligation to protect the right, it means state must ensure the food security by adopting legislative and executive measures. Third, the obligation to facilitate and provide, the obligation to facilitate requires the state to proactively engage in activities intended to strengthen people’s access to resources and utilisation of resources. It means to ensure their livelihood.

During the WFS in Rome, the plenary of the parallel NGO forum proposed a code of conduct on right to adequate food. The code of conduct discusses the normative content of the right to adequate food, the corresponding obligation of state and non-state actors, the role of civil society and the means and method of implementation. The code of conduct specifies that the ultimate objective of the right to food is the achievement of nutritional well-being and therefore, the right to food needs to be understood in much broader sense as the right to adequate food and nutrition. The code of conduct has been given recognition by the office of the United Nations high commissioner for human rights. While reaffirming the definition of right to food in the code of conduct, the right to adequate food shall, therefore, not be interpreted in a narrow or restrictive sense which equates it with a minimum package of calories, proteins and other specific nutrients. Five years after the Rome meeting, the WFS invited the FAO council in June 2002 to establish…….. an intergovernmental working group (IGWG) with the participation of stakeholders, in the context of the WFS follow-up to elaborate in a period of two years, a set of voluntary guidelines to support member states’ efforts to achieve the progressive realisation of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security.8

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The important element of the right to food is that it should be available in adequate quantity and quality to maintain a healthy and active life. When individuals or groups are unable, for beyond their control, to enjoy the right to adequate food by the means at their disposal, state has an obligation to assist. This consists of helping those belonging to the vulnerable sections in making better use of their entitlements. India has progressed from dependent on food imports to feed its population to not only being self-sufficient in grain production, but also building a substantial reserve. Realising the right to food entitles ensuring that foodgrains are physically and economically accessible to households. Physical accessibility of foodgrains in India for the poor mainly depends upon the Public Distribution System that operates through a network of Fair Price Shops (FPS). Economic accessibility depends upon the purchasing power of the poor, which is primarily affected by factors, the price of foodgrains and income of the poor. The purpose of a right based approach to food security is to pin responsibility and accountability. When there are rights there should also be corresponding responsibilities and institutions should exist to monitor the implementation of responsibility.

**Right to Food**

The presence of widespread food insecurity and malnutrition among the large sections of the disadvantaged population despite several policies and programmes specially designed to address the issues concerning the vulnerable population has brought to the forefront the issue on right to food. There is a growing concern in the India today about the hunger and malnutrition that afflict a large part of humanity.
As evidence accumulates, it is becoming increasingly clear that an ever larger proportion of the population in the India has been falling into a state of hunger and malnutrition. The right to food is identified as essential part of process of the realisation of right to life under article 21 of Constitution of India. The right to food is very important because it is the foundation of all rights. The evolution of the right to adequate food derives from the larger human right to an adequate standard of living set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Article 25 (1) of the UDHR stated that, “and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control………….”

Every one has the right to standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing and housing and medical care and necessary social services. Several other international instruments also recognise the right to food as part of the right to an adequate standard of living, focusing especially on the need for freedom from hunger. The preamble to the Constitution of the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) 1965, declares that ensuring humanity’s freedom from hunger is one of its basic purposes. Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) enjoins state parties to recognise the right of every one to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing. The same article recognises the fundamental right of every one to be free from hunger.

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9Article 25(1) of Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). It was adopted and proclaimed on 10th December 1948.
The United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of Child 1989 (CRC) goes beyond the hunger and addresses the issue of child nutrition. Article 24 (2), (C) expects the state parties to take appropriate measures to combat the disease and malnutrition through the provision of adequate nutritious food, clean drinking water and health care. Article 27 (3) of the CRC states that state parties shall in case of need, provide material assistance and support programme, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.

In the late 1990s, work on the human right to adequate food at the global level centred on the mandate from the World Food Summit (WFS) held in Rome in November 1996. The objective of the summit was to renew global commitment at the highest political level to eliminate hunger and malnutrition and to achieve sustainable food security for all. At WFS, a plan of action was adopted aimed at reducing the number of undernourished people to be about 800 millions in 1996, to half that number by 2015. The plan of action contained seven commitments that were to act as guiding principle for those involved in formulating policies to implement the plan at national and international levels. It also spelt out objectives and action for the implementation of these commitments.10

The operational concept of the right to food as used by the FAO is that of food security. Food security exists when all people, at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs.

and food preferences for active and healthy life. During the WFS in Rome, the plenary of the parallel NGO forum proposed a Code of Conduct (CoC) on the right to adequate food. The CoC discusses the normative content of the right to adequate food, the corresponding obligations of state and non-state actors, and the role of civil society and the means and methods of implementation. It states that, the right to adequate food means that every man, woman and child, alone and in community with others must have physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or by using a resource base appropriate for its procurement in ways consistent with human dignity.11 The CoC goes on to add that the realisation of the right to adequate food requires, the availability of food, free from adverse substances and culturally acceptable, in a quantity and quality which will satisfy the nutritional and dietary needs of individuals. Right to food is about freedom from hunger. The narrow meaning of hunger would be the pangs associated with an empty stomach. Based on this interpretation, the right to food may be understood as the right to have two square meals a day. The broader construction of right to food includes nutrition, and right to be free from malnutrition it also includes other entitlements such as drinking water, good health and education.

The notion of accessibility incorporates both physical and economic accessibility. Physical accessibility implies that adequate food must be accessible to every one. The section of the population deserving special attention and prior consideration in this respect have been identified as the physically and mentally vulnerable which may include infants and children, elderly people and physically

http://www.fian.org/COC.ENG.rtf
disabled. The economic accessibility implies that the personal or household financial cost associated with the acquisition of food for an adequate diet should not be so high as to compromise other basic needs. As resources available to an individual or household are limited, an increase in the cost of acquisition of food for an adequate diet could lead to a cutting back on other items of essential expenditure. However, socially vulnerable groups and impoverished segments of population may need attention through special programmes to facilitate economic accessibility.

The right to food is essential because it is must for right to life, which is the foundation of all the human rights. This was recognised in several international organisations and declarations like, United Nations Organisation and Universal Declaration of Human Rights etc. The evolution of right to food derives from the larger human right to an adequate standard of living set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). According to article 25(1) of UDHR, “everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food…..”\textsuperscript{12} International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) also recognise the right to food as part of the right to an adequate standard of living, focusing especially on the need for freedom from hunger. Article 11 of ICESCR 1966 declares that;

\begin{quote}
(1) “The state parties to the present covenant recognise the right of every one to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food …….and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.”
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{12} Article 25 (1)Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
(2) The state parties to the present covenant, recognising the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger……”

(a) to improve methods of production, conservation and distribution of food by making full use of technical and scientific knowledge, by disseminating knowledge of principles of nutrition.”

(b) Taking into account the problems of both food-importing and food exporting countries to ensure an equitable distribution of world food supplies in relation to need.”

Right to Food and Obligation of State under the Constitution of India

The Indian Constitution does not expressly recognise the fundamental right to food. However, cases brought before the Supreme Court alleging violations of this right have been premised on a much broader 'right to life and liberty', enshrined in Article 21 of the Constitution. Article 21 of the Constitution of India guarantees a fundamental right to life and personal liberty. The expression ‘Life’ in this Article means a life with human dignity and not mere survival or animal existence. In the light of this, the State is obliged to provide for all those minimum requirements which must be satisfied in order to enable a person to live with human dignity, such as education, health care, just and humane conditions of work, protection against exploitation etc. The Right to Food is inherent to a life with dignity, and Article 21 should be read with Articles 39(a) and 47 to understand the nature of the obligations of the State in order to ensure the effective realisation of this right. Article 39(a) of the Constitution, enunciated as one of the Directive Principles, 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 spells out the duty of the State to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people as a primary responsibility. The citizen’s right to be free from hunger enshrined in Article 21 is to be ensured by the fulfilment of the obligations of the State set out in Articles 39(a) and 47. The reading of Article 21 together with Articles 39(a) and 47, places the issue of food security in the correct perspective, thus making the Right to Food a guaranteed Fundamental Right which is enforceable by virtue of the constitutional remedy provided under Article 32 of the Constitution.

Therefore it is the obligation of the state to be proactive in strengthening people’s access to food. The state must fulfil the right directly whenever an individual or group is unable, for reason beyond their control to enjoy the right to adequate food with the means at their disposal. The state’s role in strengthening food security is more prominent in ensuring availability of food and ensuring access to the households, particularly for poor households. And also it is the duty of the state to improve the food production, conservation and distribution of food through its policies. No political and economic problem facing the developing countries today is more urgent than of hunger, starvation and food security. While this distressing state of affairs is not new, its persistence in spite of the technological and productive advances of the food grains is nothing short of outrageous.
Report of the NCRWC states that; “Particularly significant has been the increase in agricultural production between 1950-2000, the index of agricultural production increased more than four fold. Between 1960-2000, wheat production went up 11 million tonnes to 75.6 million tonnes on the production of rice increased from 35 millions to 89.5 million tonnes. This is no mean achievement for a country that relied on food aid until 1960s. Similarly, there has been a rapid expansion in industrial sector. The index of industrial production went up from 7.9 in 1950-1951 to 154.7 in 1999-2000. Electricity generation went up from 5.1 billion KWH to 480.7 billion KWH” (NCRWC Chapter-II Para-2.13.1). Yet hunger persists. To meet the scourge of persistent hunger the formulation of a food policy to relieve suffering is indispensable. Amartya Sen observed that, “Millions of lives depend on the adequacy of the policy response to the terrible problem of hunger and starvation in the modern world. Past mistakes of policy have been responsible for the death of many millions of people and the suffering of hundreds of millions, and this is not a subject in which short cuts in economic reasoning can be taken to be fairly costless” (Dreze & Sen 1990:50).

The People's Union for Civil Liberties Case

In May 2001, the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) filed a landmark public interest petition in the Supreme Court The case revealed that over 50 million tonnes of food grains were lying idle in the premises of the Food Corporation of India (FCI), although there was widespread hunger in the country, especially in the drought-affected areas of Rajasthan and Orissa. Initially, the case was brought against the Government of India, the FCI, and six State governments. Subsequently,
the list of respondents was extended to include all States and Union territories.

The petition alleged that the State was negligent in providing food security. It was argued that the PDS was restricted to families living below the poverty line (BPL). Yet the monthly quota per family could not meet the nutritional standards set by the Indian Council of Medical Research. Even then, the system was implemented erratically. The identification of BPL households was also highly unreliable. Altogether, the assistance provided to BPL households through the PDS amounted to less than five rupees per person per month. The petition also alleged that the Government’s relief works were inadequate. Famine Codes operational in various States governed the provision of these works, and made them mandatory when drought was declared. “By July 2003, at the time of going to press, public grain stocks are reported to have declined substantially compared to last year (the exact figures will become available later), but this decline is mainly because in a severe drought year the government has exported a record 12.4 million tonnes of foodgrains out of stocks with heavy subsidy, thus revealing its preference for subsidising foreign buyers rather than creating sufficient purchasing power for the poor in India through additional food-for-work programmes to enable them to absorb what has been actually exported. Never in the history of India - including colonial India - have we seen such large grain exports even as availability falls drastically inside the country. Unprecedented exports out of mountainous food stocks, while hunger becomes deeper and more widespread and starvation deaths take place especially among tribal groups: this has been the socially irrational outcome of the policies followed in the last five years in particular” (Patnaik
The Supreme Court found that, surplus food stocks were available and, at the same time, that deaths from starvation were occurring in a number of locations. It then issued an interim order directing the States to implement fully eight different centrally-sponsored schemes for food security, and to introduce cooked mid-day meals in all Government and government-assisted schools. Since 2001, the Court has issued interim order that have prodded the Union and the State governments into action. The orders have directed the State governments to complete the identification of the beneficiaries of certain welfare programmes, and to improve the implementation of food schemes and employment programmes. In August 2001, the central government felt the need to take concrete steps towards addressing the problem of hunger amidst plenty. On 15 August, the Prime Minister announced a massive programme of employment generation, the Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY).

Right to Food and Supreme Court of India

The persistence of hunger amidst of plenty became so glaring that something had to be done about it. The status of the country was at stake. Stories of starving tribal people eating poisonous mango kernels in many tribal areas across the country, while rotting grain stocks were thrown into the sea, became a serious issue. The Supreme Court also started breathing down the neck of the government from mid-2001 onwards, after the People’s Union for Civil Liberties filed public interest litigation on this issue. There have been some encouraging developments in India regarding the enforcement of the right to food, in recent times’ courts taking up
Public Interest Litigation (PIL) cases relating to the violation of the right. In recent times most significant case relating to the right to food is that of the PUCL petition seeking the enforcement of the right to food, was filed in the Supreme Court on 9th May 201 against the Union of India, Food Corporation of India (FCI) and the state governments of Orissa, Rajasthan, Chattisgarh, Gujarath, Himachal Pradesh and Maharashtra.\textsuperscript{14} Peoples’ Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), prompted by the reports of acute starvation in various parts of the country, the petition draws attention to the fact that in spite of 50 million tonnes of food grains lying in FCI storehouses, several millions are affected by chronic hunger. The petition raised the question; does not the right to life under Article 21 of the constitution of India include the right to food? And, does not the right to food imply that the state has a duty to provide food, especially in situations of drought, to the people who have been affected and are not in apposition to purchase food. The petition also demanded the immediate release of food stocks drought relief and related purposes. Expressing the serious concern over the increasing number of starvation deaths and food insecurity despite overflowing FCI storehouses, the Supreme Court broadened the scope of the petition from the six states to include the entire country. It accepted the importance of actions like free distribution of foodgrains to the poor, but emphasised the need for long-term solutions aimed at raising the capabilities of the people by various means including providing employment. In its order of 23\textsuperscript{rd} July 2001, Supreme Court held that, what is of utmost importance is to see that food is provided to the aged, ill, disabled, destitute women, children, men, pregnant and lactating women, and who are in danger of starvation, especially in cases where they or members of their family do

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid. [PUCL vs Union of India (SCC 196 of 2001)].
not have sufficient funds to provide food for them.\textsuperscript{15} Moreover the court directed the states to see that all the fair price shops under PDS, if closed, are re-opened and start functioning within one week from the day of the order and that regular supply are made available. In its order of 17\textsuperscript{th} September 2001, the Supreme Court directed the States and Union Territories who had not identified the ‘below poverty line (BPL) families under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) to do so immediately.

In addition, the Court directed the concerned states to implement Food for Work programmes in all scarcity areas. On 28\textsuperscript{th} November 2001, Supreme Court came out with a significant ‘Interim Order’ directing the state governments to implement fully eight different centrally sponsored schemes on food security. These are

1) National Old Age Pension Scheme (NOAPS): under which destitute senior citizens receive a monthly pension of Rs 75

2) National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS): This provides BPL households with an assistance of Rs 10,000 on the death of primary breadwinner.

3) National Maternity Benefit Scheme (NMBS): this provides pregnant women in BPL households are given an amount of Rs 500. This is provided to women above 19 years of age and is available only for the first two live births.

4) National Programme for Nutritional Support to Primary Education/ Mid-day Meals Scheme: this provides cooked meals or foodgrains are provided to

\textsuperscript{15} See Right to Food Campaign website for more details http://www.geocities.com/righttofood/orders/interimorders.html.date 09.08.2005
children attending schools.

5) Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS): This provides a set of six services to children in the age group of 0-6 and pregnant and lactating mothers. The six services are immunisation, supplementary nutrition, health check-ups, referral services, pre-school education and health and nutrition education.

6) Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY): this provides food security to indigent families. Each identified family is provided 35 kg foodgrains (Rice and Wheat) a month with high subsidised rates.

7) Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS): this is a restructured form of the Public Distribution System (PDS). Under this, families categorised as BPL are provided foodgrains at a subsidised rate while those above poverty line (APL) are to pay the economic cost.

8) Annapoorna Scheme: this was introduced in 2000 to provide food security to elderly citizen who have no income of their own and no one to take care of them. Under this scheme, 10 kg of food grains (Rice or Wheat) per month are provided free of cost to all indigent senior citizens who are eligible for old age pension but are presently not receiving it.

The petition filed by the PUCL obtains seminal significance. This petition did not seek a judicial law to ensure the right to food but rather judicial intervention to ensure implementation of various schemes announced by the governments. The litigation has demonstrated the responsibilities of the government and has triggered jurisprudence towards a national frame work. The silver lining is that this whole
episode has led to greater awareness of the problem of endemic hunger and opened up new possibilities of public action. The monstrosity of the situation that prevailed during the last few years, as people starved in the shadow of mountains of food stocks, has led to a healthy renewal of public concern with the issue. The coverage of hunger and nutrition matters in the print media, for instance, has sharply increased. And perhaps for the first time in independent India, there are good prospects of endemic hunger becoming a lively political issue. The main challenge ahead is to bring democratic practice to bear more forcefully on issues of hunger and nutrition. A good illustration of this possibility is the public interest litigation initiated in April 2001 by the People’s Union for Civil Liberties with a writ petition submitted to the Supreme Court. Further, this eventful litigation has facilitated the growth of public action for the right to food around the country.

Today, the nation inured to scarcity of food and starvation, the nature of this problem is ironic, is so acute that Supreme Court has been forced to take notice, shocked at the increasing number of starvation deaths amidst overflowing food grain godowns of the government. The Supreme Court passed an interim order on 28th November 2001 demanding that large stocks of food grains in Food Corporation of India (FCI) warehouses be released with immediate effect. This is an immoral neglect of the constitutional obligation, against the article 21 of the constitution, which gives a right to protection of life from deprivation. While moving the ‘objectives resolution’ Nehru said in the Constituent Assembly that, “Most important question is how to solve the problem of the poor and the starving. Wherever we turn, we are confronted with this problem. If we can not solve this
problem soon, all our paper constitution will become useless and purposeless (CAD vol.II:99).

The right to food needs to be linked with other economic and social rights, such as the right to education, the right to work, the right to information and the right to health. These economic and social rights complement and reinforce each other. Taken in isolation, each of them has its limitations, and very difficult to achieve within the present structure of property rights and market economy. To put it another way, there is an urgent need to revive the vision of radical social change embodied in the Directive Principles of the Constitution of India. As Dr Ambedkar, saw it, the realisation of economic and social rights was a paramount requirement of democracy in the full sense of the term. The Directive Principles were central to this project. Specifically, their role was to bring about economic and social democracy, without which political democracy would remain ineffective if not hollow. Different provisions of Directive Principles of State Policy take care of the problem of establishing social and economic Democracy. Members of the Constituent Assembly emphasised importance to the Directive Principles. According to Ambedkar, “In enacting this part of the Constitution the assembly is giving certain directions to the future legislative and the future executive to show in what manner they are to exercise the legislative and executive power they will have. Surely, it is not the intention to introduce in this part these principles as pious declarations. It is the intention of the assembly that in future both the legislative and executive should not merely pay lip service to these principles, but they should be made the basis of all
legislative and executive actions that they may be taking here after in the matter of the governance of the country” (CAD.Vol.VII:382).

Constituent Assembly visualised Directive Principles are tools to achieve economic democracy and social justice. “We do not want merely to lay down a mechanism to enable people to come and capture power. The Constitution also wishes to lay down and ideal before those who would be forming the government……..Have we got any fixed idea as to how we should bring about economic democracy?……. Now having regard to the fact that there are various ways by which economic democracy may be brought about, we have deliberately introduced in the language that we have used in the directive principles something, which is not fixed or rigid. We have left enough room for people of different ways of thinking, with regard to the reaching of the ideal of economic democracy, to strive in their own way, to perused the electorate that it the best way of reaching economic democracy” (CAD.vol.VII:494). Policy developments in the last ten years have been diametrically opposed to this revolutionary conception of democracy and social justice. Indeed, it is an interesting paradox of contemporary politics that even as power is becoming more concentrated, it also looks more fragile.

The continuing neglect of the hunger and food insecurity problems faced by the people constitutes a serious violation of human rights enshrined in the Constitution and various international covenants. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted by the United Nations in 1948 affirms in Article 3 that everyone has the right to life. The International Covenant on Civil and Political
Rights, 1966, which India has ratified, affirms in Article 6 that every human being has the inherent right to life. The Declaration on the Right to Development adopted by the U.N. General Assembly in 1986 affirms that equality of opportunity to development is a prerogative of individuals within a nation and that states have a duty to formulate appropriate development policies that aim at the well-being of all individuals on the basis of their meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of the benefits resulting therefrom. It also calls for state intervention for the realisation of the right to development by ensuring equality of opportunity for all in their access to basic resources.

The UDHR affirms in Article 21.2 that everyone has the right to equal access to public services in one's country. Article 11.2(a) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), 1966, which India has ratified, refers to reforming agrarian systems in such a way as to achieve the most efficient development and utilisation of natural resources. Article 25 of the UDHR stipulates that everyone has the right to security in the event of widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond one's control. Discrimination is an attitude that is frowned upon by every instrument in the universe of human rights. And equality of treatment and dignity in every circumstance of life is upheld in these instruments. According to Dreze and Sen, “When millions of people die in a famine, it is hard to avoid the thought that something terribly criminal is going on. The law which defines and protect our rights as citizens, must somehow compromise these dreadful events. Unfortunately, the gap between the law and ethics can be a big one. The economic system that yields a famine may be foul and the political system that
tolerates it perfectly revolting, but nevertheless there may be no violation of our lawfully recognized rights in the failure of large sections of population to acquire enough food to secure” (Dreze & Sen 1993:20). Further they emphasised that; “hunger is however intolerable in the modern world in a way it could not have been in the past. This is not so much because it is more intense, but because widespread hunger is so unnecessary and unwarranted in the modern world. The enormous expansion of productive power that has taken place over the last few centuries has made it, perhaps for the first time, possible to guarantee adequate food for all, and it is in this context that the persistence of chronic hunger and recurrence of virulent famines must be seen as being morally outrageous and politically unacceptable. If politics is ‘the art of the possible’ then the conquering world hunger has become a political issue in a way it could not have been in the past (Dreze & Sen 1993:1-2).

Article 47 of the Constitution imposes on the state to regard as among its primary duties, the raising the levels of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health in particular to bring about the prohibition of the intoxicating drinks and drugs which are injures to the health except for medical use. The health of the majority of human beings depends more on their food security and nutrition. However important dramatic have been the advances in hygiene, medicine and surgery, it is still true that even more important would be the efforts that proper food nutrition would have on human life. The problem of insecurity of food, malnutrition is widely prevalent across the various socio-economic groups, particularly among those who are living below poverty line, landless agricultural labour, people in slum and remote tribal areas, those who are
affected by constant calamities like drought are more vulnerable to this. National Commission to Review the Working of Constitution\textsuperscript{16} (NCRWC) pointed out that, “Over 260 million people living below poverty line in India are chronically hungry. Hunger and poverty forces families to make trade offs. Trade offs between hunger and meeting other basic needs. Trade offs for who goes to school and who doesn’t. in such trade offs women and children are often the suffers. Poorly-fed and malnourished pregnant women give birth to stunted and unhealthy babies who are prone to diseases. ………… the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward Class are an easy prey of poverty, hunger and women of these categories are its worst victims” (NCRWC 2001:101).

A large segment of the rural masses in India with much lower foodgrains absorption than the average, have been reduced to minimal levels. According to Utsa Patnaik, “The continuous decline in purchasing power, hence decline in foodgrains absorption for direct consumption purposes, resulted in a continuous decline in foodgrains sales from the PDS, which therefore got reflected in the continuous and increasing additions to public food stocks year after year starting from 1998, with the total stocks standing at 63.1 million tonnes by the end of July 2002. This was nearly 40 million tonnes in excess of buffer norms - and this in spite of declining per capita foodgrains output, and 2 to 4 million tonnes of grain exports every year up to June 2002, after which exports undertaken by the government have surged to unprecedented levels” (Patnaik 2004:18 ). The country sadly faces a paradoxical

situation of surplus un-lifted stocks of food grains in godowns of FCI, co-existing with hunger and malnutrition. “Hunger is not a new affliction. Recurrent famines as well as endemic underdevelopment have been persistent features of history. Life has been short and hard in much of the world, most of the time. Deprivation of food and other necessities of living have constantly been among the causal antecedents of the brutishness and brevity of human life”(Dreze & Sen 1993:1).

The Public Distribution System essentially is the food subsidy programme explicitly focusing on the poor. The programme was strengthened, improved and renamed as Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS). The National Commission to Review the Working of Constitution (NCRWC) consultation paper on ‘Pace of Socio-Economic Change under Constitution’ noted that, “Even after fine tuning of the Targeted Public distribution System the performance of the fair price shops in some of the states as revealed by some studies is dismal. In some states the percentage of fair price shops not opening even once a week is estimated to be 87%. The transfer of income intended by Public Distribution System has, by and large, benefited the urban sector and above poverty line sections of society more than the poor. Investigations also indicate that about one-third of the supplies in Public Distribution System are diverted” (NCRWC 2001:102).

**Excess Stocks of Foodgrains**

The public stock of foodgrains in India consists of two major components; one is operational stock for regular distribution under the PDS and buffer stock for easing fluctuations in consumption and price arising out of instability in foodgrains
production. In India, agriculture is still dependent on the monsoon, the government gives due importance to maintenance of buffer stocks for ensuring food security through the PDS. The actual quantity of buffer stocks to be maintained depends to a large extent on factors like procurement prices, expected shortfalls in production, levels of procurement, expected requirement of foodgrains, cost of holding the buffer stock, and the possible utilization of surplus stocks in new welfare schemes.

During 2000-2001, the unusually high procurement of rice and wheat by FCI resulted in a huge surplus of stocks, much above the buffer stock norms. As against the minimum norm (prescribed by Commission of Agricultural Costs and Prices) of 8.4 million tonnes of wheat, the country had a stock of 32.4 million tonnes on 1st January 2002. Similarly, as against the minimum buffer norm of 8.4 million tonnes of rice, the rice stock was 25.6 million tonnes. Consequently FCI had 58 million tonnes of rice and wheat stock, against the minimum buffer norm of 16.4 million tonnes (Centre for Development and Human Rights 2004:189). The most incongruous part of the story is that the bulk of this stock was accumulated during a period of intense drought in large parts of the country. At a time of widespread hunger in drought-affected areas, the government was busy hoarding food on an unprecedented scale and striving to keep prices up, making it that much harder for drought-affected people to buy food in the market.

If the people are hungry, everyone assumes there must not be enough food. From this statistics one can draw two alternative conclusions, either the production focus was correct but soaring number of people simply overran even the dramatic production gains or the diagnosis was incorrect. Scarcity is not the cause of hunger,
the total buffer stock maintained has constantly been much higher than necessary. The surplus have been created artificially by the governments’ refusal to engage in distribution and not because supply outstrips demand. The production increase, no matter how great, can never in itself solve the problem. There is a more food, yet if people are still hungry, in fact hunger than before, then what has happened to that extra production? Certainly the increased production is helping somebody. Then whom it helped and where it has gone? Thus the real food security simply can not be measured in production figures. Production figures may well go up while the majority are getting less of the food they need. Food security must be measured by how close a country is to achieving sound nutrition for all. It must also be measured in how reliable, how resilient, and how self-contained the agricultural system.

This clearly demonstrates that food scarcity is not the true cause for hunger. Then how to explain this problem of food insecurity and hunger? What really does cause for hunger and starvation? Measured nationally, there is enough food for everyone now. What counts is whether adequate food-producing resources exist in the country, where so many people go hungry. When there are resources they are invariably under used or misused, creating hunger for many. When the country’s tremendous productive capacity proved, while the hunger is real, scarcity is an illusion. Then the scarcity is a product of extreme inequalities in control over food producing resources that spoil development and alter utilisation. According to Usta Patnaik, “The basic reasons for such an abnormal public stocks build-up and the associated fall in food availability for the population, are three-fold: first, a number of macroeconomic reform policies have been implemented which are all
contradictory and income-deflating nature, and second, trade liberalisation has taken place, which has both altered cropping patterns and imported global price declines into Indian markets. These two have come together after the mid-nineties leading to severe employment decline, income decline and hence fall in aggregate demand for a large segment of the population - especially the rural population. Third, this has been combined with the institutional denial to the poor, of access to food owing to targeting in the Public Distribution System (PDS) from 1997-8, namely the division of the consuming population into two groups - below the poverty line (BPL) and above the poverty line (APL), a system which is simply not capable of being implemented with any degree of equity, and which has led to exclusion of millions of the actually poor from those defined as poor and entitled to a BPL ration card. Further targeting within the BPL has not helped and has merely multiplied bureaucratic problems of identification and wrong exclusion” (Patnaik 2003:16-17).

Ironically, the hungry go much, at harvest time, when prices are at their lowest, many are forced to sell so much of what they produce that they do not have enough to cover their own needs until the next harvest. They are forced to do so in great part in order to pay back, with considerable interest, the private moneylenders and merchants from whom they needed to barrow food at much higher prices before the harvest. Many of those trapped in this vicious circle are tenant and small farmers who must pay for all the agricultural inputs and still give over half of their harvest to the landlord. Not surprisingly, many landlords have become moneylender-merchants. The moneylender-merchants hording of grain is a prime cause of very scarcity on which they speculate. “Economic reform policies of expenditure cuts and
trade liberalisation, along with targeting, by inducing demand deflation on the one hand and administratively excluding the poor from the PDS on the other, have reduced a functioning PDS to a shambles before our very eyes and gravely undermined the little food security that the people had. While the top one-eighth of our population ranked by income levels, which accounts for at least fifty percent of national income, is undoubtedly approaching advanced country levels of food consumption with rising nutrition levels accompanied by dietary diversification, the bottom six deciles, with less than a fifth of national income, are being pushed further into the ghetto of under-nutrition” (Patnaik 2003:34).

The simple facts, figures and statistics of food production make clear that the overpopulation-scarcity diagnosis is, in fact incorrect. The present foodgrains production alone could provide every person in the country with more than 2400 official norm of calories a day. It is as ironic as it may sound, the narrow focus on increasing production has actually compounded the problem of hunger. Most measures of food security fixate on statistics of agricultural production. But food security simply can not exist in a market system where there is no democratic control over resource use. Commercial growers will not grow food for hungry people, when they can make more money growing luxury crops for the minority who can always pay more. Moreover increased production approached as a mere a technical problem has completely re-shaped agriculture itself, reducing a very complex, self-contained system into a highly simplified and dependent one. The green revolution approach converts recycling, self-contained system into a linear production formula, pick the best seeds, plant uniformly over the largest area
possible, and does with chemical fertilizers. The production of agriculture into this simple formula leaves crops open to attack and soils highly vulnerable to deterioration.

The rationale for providing wide-ranging social security measures including food subsidies in the modern day world by most of the countries is rooted to in the desire of governments in power to seek legitimacy for their rule. In a democratic system there is an added pressure for pursuing such policies of social security measures in terms of existence of adversarial politics. In the socialist countries, ideological commitment may provide the necessary additional justification to pursue such policies. In dictatorships or military governed states, the additional impetus may come from a desire to take care of the needs of certain sections of population from whom threat to the existing power structure is perceived.

Food subsidies which aim at providing food security can be part of much wider policy package of social security aimed at improving the quality of life of the people or they can be implemented without being part of a wider package. In this connection Dreze and Sen mentioned two alternative strategies of growth led strategy and support led strategy. They recommend the support led strategy as the one where nations do not wait for growth to take place to tackle the problems of hunger and poverty (Dreze & Sen1989:183).

Food security as defined by the World Bank in their study on poverty and hunger is “access by all people at all time to enough food for an active and healthy
life. In essential elements, it is the availability of the food and ability to acquire it” (World Bank 1986:12). Food security can be of two farms, transitory insecurity resulting from decline in household access to enough food, the worst form of it being famine. Chronic food insecurity is another form resulting in continuously inadequate diet caused by inability to acquire food. Food subsidy scheme generally aim at the second form of the food insecurity, though they can be used as part of relief programmes to tackle the famine conditions as well.

Amartya Sen’s theory of entitlement suggests that the reason for such a situation may be the lack of purchasing power due to deterioration of entitlement rather than on the aggregate food supplies although they too have role in determining entitlement by affecting food policies. Dreze and Sen prefer a strategy of public works to enhance entitlement of the affected groups in the short run with the governments playing role in stabilizing the food prices and food supplies more effectively by participating in public distribution system rather than clamping negative controls on trade. They also prefer payment for works in cash instead of foodgrains, leaving the food supplies to be taken care to of by private trade which produces the best results. Though their analysis is mainly with reference to tackling the drought conditions it is equally relevant for dealing with the problem of chronic hunger in the short run (Dreze & Sen 1989:186).

The fundamental dilemma every food policy analysis faces of having to reconcile the twine policy objectives of providing adequate consumption levels especially to the poor in the short run, while at the same time providing adequate
incentives to the framers in the form of high prices so that supplies of food are maintained adequately in the long run as well. The final effect of food subsidies depends not only on the level of subsidies but also how they are financed. If the financing is done through progressive direct taxation, then the welfare effects of such subsidy scheme are going to be far grater. If the same is financed by commodity taxation the effect depends on the bundle of commodities taxed. Similarly, the effect of food subsidies depends on the mobilisation of quantities needed for feeding public distribution system. If the same is supplemented by imports, then the poor may benefit more in the short run though the long run effects of the same depend on the economic costs in terms of the disincentives to producers through depressed prices. If the same is mobilised through procurement then the net effect depends on how for open market prices rise as a consequence of such procurement. Longer term policies of restoring purchasing power need to be started on an urgent basis, and the stepping up of food-for-work programmes to cover every state whether drought affected or not, as well as increased development expenditures on vital infrastructure irrigation and power constitute the perceptible answer.