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State Support Programs and Caste Based Discrimination :With special reference to PDS and MDMs

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Abstract

“I like the religion that teaches liberty, equality and fraternity”- Dr. BR Ambedkar

Our food security program, especially after the Food Security Act of 2013 is one of the largest flagship programs in the world in terms of both volume and value with the largest coverage. PDS and MDMs are important programs implemented by the Central and State governments with the aim to achieve food security to all. On one side the state is trying to reduce the inequalities with different welfare Schemes but the outcomes are contradictory. The recent Oxfam report points out that the gap between the rich and poor is increasing at a faster rate than ever. Its recent estimates states that 1% of rich people are taking away the major share about 58% of countries wealth and remaining is shared by 99% of India. One of the main reasons behind this is, the programs or the policies were not implemented properly and the intended benefits of these programs are not reaching the targeted groups. We are proud that India's growth rate is high and robust even when the global economy is in turmoil. But on the other hand, we have millions of people dying with hunger (India ranks 97th of 118 in GHI-2016) and a very high percentage of people facing the problem of malnutrition (Over 1.45 lakh kids suffer from severe acute Malnutrition, GNR-2016). With the peculiar practice of caste system in India, these rates are higher in socially disadvantaged groups. Discrimination in forms of caste, gender, religion is very much evident in India and SCs, STs are the most vulnerable groups in these forms of discriminations. In this context, the role of caste in PDS and MDMs programs is not very surprising. Usually the dealers at fair price shops are from upper caste and when MDMs are cooked by women from lower caste, there were cases of the food being left uneaten. Given the above background, in this paper would like to outline the role of caste discrimination in the State support programs like Public Distribution System and Mid-Day in the rural areas and how this in turn is effecting the food security of people in general and marginalized in particular.

Key Words: State Support Programs, Inclusion, PDS, MDMs, Discrimination, hunger, Poverty and Food Security.

Introduction

India is 2nd largest country in terms of population around 123 billion and in terms of territory it enriches with natural resources and human and is an emerging country. India's unique feature is the 'Unity in Diversity', diversity in terms of caste, religion, class, gender etc., but we call them all as Indians.

India had large gap between the rich and poor, Dalits and Non-Dalits, majority and minority, the gap between these groups is increasing. To reduce this, gap the state should come up with major policies, support programmes and frameworks.

The need for the state support programmes:

- 1) To Provide equal opportunities to all (Equity and Fairness)
- 2) To provide equal access to all the resources, finance, education, health, or any others.
- 3) Redistribution of income.
- 4) To increase the growth and development of human and social capital
- 5) Reducing the inequalities among the different groups.

The following are some of the state support programmes:

1. Right to Food- includes National Food Security Act(NFSA), Public Distribution System(PDS), Mid-Day Meal Scheme.
2. Right to Employment- MGNREGA
3. Right to Housing- Indira Awas Yojana (housing for all)
4. Right to education- RTE 2009
5. Right to Health- Primary Health Care(PHC)

6. Social security benefits

In this paper, we are dealing particularly with PDS and MDM schemes.

Objective of the study

The main objective of this Paper is to study the Caste based Discrimination in the State support Programmes like PDS and MDMs in Villages of Telangana State.

Methodology: I have considered Two villages (Enkathala and Tekulapally) in Telangana State for this study and data collected through Sample survey.

Food Security

At the level of each individual child, woman and man food security is the first requirement for a healthy and productive life. Jawahar Lal Nehru said it in 1947, "everything else can wait, but not the agriculture". These words are more relevant today than 65 years ago, since our population has grown from 300 to 1,200 million during this period. The vision of food security in developing country like India where corruption is prominent in every sphere of public life can't be fulfilled without the transparent and effective Public Distribution System (PDS), which is a programme of food security that provides a minimum amount of food grains at subsidized prices. The concept of Public Distribution System in India appeared during 1942 for the first time in the modern shape because of shortage of food grains during World War. Consequently, Government started intervention in release of food to the people. PDS in India is more than half -a century old as rationing was first introduced in 1939 in Bombay by the British Government as a measure to ensure equitable distribution of food grains to the urban consumers in the face of rising prices.

PDS is a system whereby accessibility of vital supplies is assured within easy reach of the consumers in every corner and bend of the country. This is a transaction system where food grain, sugar, and other necessary items like kerosene oil and edible oil etc. are made available to the people of the state at reasonable price to meet their minimum needs.

PDS also serves as an effective tool of social welfare, and directly contributes to the development of rural population at large and the poorest of the poor in particular who cannot afford to buy necessary and essential items from open market. PDS also serves as an instrument of rural development especially in far -flung and inaccessible areas.

Organisation of PDS

For the proper management and distribution of food grains, the government of India has created Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and public Distribution. The ministry has been divided into two Departments, they are-

- a) Department of food and public distribution
- b) Department of Consumer Affairs

The central and state governments share responsibilities in order to provide food grains to the Identified beneficiaries. The centre procures food grains from farmers at a minimum support price (MSP) and sells it to states at central issue prices. It is responsible for transporting the grains to godowns in each state. States bear the responsibility of transporting food grains from these godowns to each **Fair Price Shop** (FPS or ration shop), where the beneficiary buys the food grains at the lower central issue price. Many states further subsidise the price of food grains before selling it to beneficiaries.

The Department of Food and Public Distribution is divided into two parts for the purchase and storage of food grains. They were follows-**Food corporation of India (FCI)**- It was setup on 14th January 1965 having headquarters at Chennai under the Food Corporation act 1964 to implement the objectives of National Food Policy:

1. Efficient price support operations for conservation the interests of the Farmers,
2. Distribution of food grains throughout the country for PDS and,
3. Maintaining satisfactory level of operational and buffer stocks of food grains to ensure Food Security.

The Food Corporation of India (FCI) is the nodal agency at the centre that it is responsible for transporting food grains to the state godowns. Specifically, FCI is responsible for:

- (i) Procuring grains at the MSP from farmers,
- (ii) Maintaining operational and buffer stocks of grains to ensure food security,
- (iii) Allocating grains to states,
- (iv) Distributing and transporting grains to the state depots, and

- (v) Selling the grains to states at the central issue price to be eventually passed on to the beneficiaries. Each stage of this process is discussed below.

Important Agents involved in the process of PDS- Central Government, State Government, FCI, Central Ware Housing, Fair Price Shops, Local Panchayats and Consumers

Who are included in PDS-?

Under PDS, Beneficiaries were divided into three categories:

1. Households Below Poverty Line (BPL)
2. Households Above Poverty Line (APL)
3. Anthyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY)- poorest of the poor

Number of Beneficiaries and Entitlements:

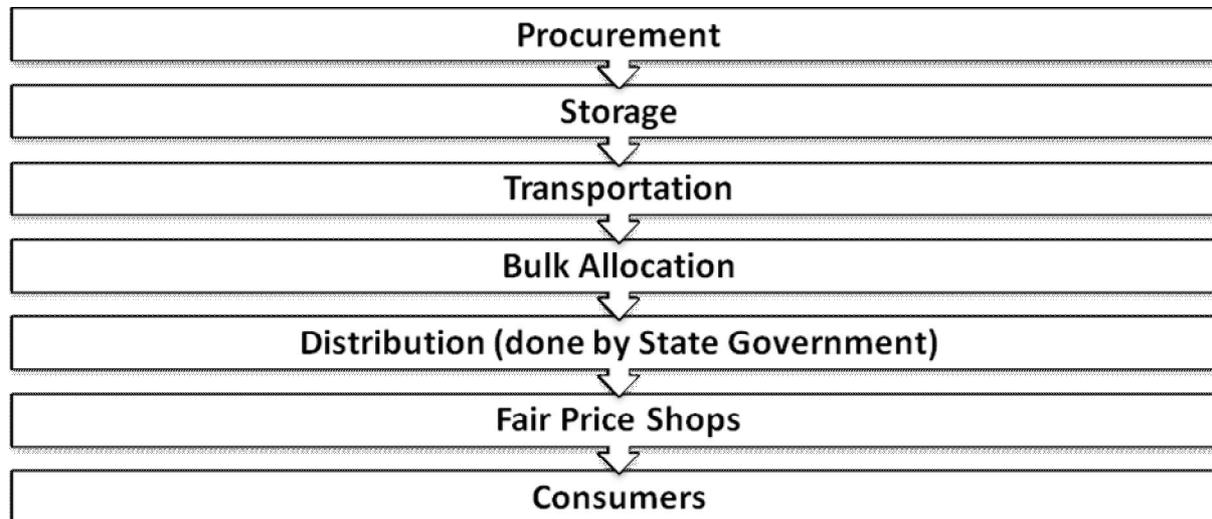
Category	No. of Beneficiaries (in crore Families)	Entitlements of Food grains (kg/Family)
AAY	2.43	35kg
BPL	4.09	35kg
APL	11.52	15-35kg
Total	18.04	-

Source- Department of Food and public distribution

Evaluation of PDS system:

Evaluation of PDS	Timelines	Details
PDS	1940s	Launched as a general entitlement scheme
Targeted PDS	1997	PDS was Revamped to large poor Households
AAY	2000	Scheme launched to target the poorest of the poor
PDA control act	2001	Govt. notified this order to administer TPDS
PUCL vs Union of India	2001	Ongoing case in supreme court contending that right to food is fundamental right
National food security Act	2013	Act to provide legal right to food to the poor

Management of PDS:



Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDM):

With a view to enhancing enrolment, retention and attendance and simultaneously improving nutritional levels among children, the National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP-NSPE) was launched as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme on 15th August 1995.

In 2001 MDMs became a cooked Mid-Day Meal Scheme under which every child in Government aided primary school was to be served a prepared Mid-Day Meal with a minimum content of 300 calories of energy and 8-12-gram protein per day for a minimum of 200 days. The Scheme was further extended in 2002 to cover not only children studying in Government i.e., government aided and local body schools, but also children studying in Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) and Alternative & Innovative Education (AIE) centres.

In September 2004, the Scheme was revised to provide for Central Assistance for Cooking cost @ Re 1 per child, school day to cover cost of pulses, vegetables cooking oil, condiments, fuel and wages and remuneration payable to personnel or amount payable to agency responsible for cooking. Transport subsidy was also raised from the earlier maximum of Rs 50 per quintal to Rs. 100 per quintal for special category states, and Rs 75 per quintal for other states. Central assistance was provided for the first time for management, monitoring and evaluation of the scheme @ 2% of the cost of foodgrains, transport subsidy and cooking assistance. A provision for serving mid-day meal during summer vacation in drought affected areas, was also made.

In July 2006, the Scheme was further revised to enhance the cooking cost to Rs 1.80 per child/school day for States in the North-Eastern Region and Rs 1.50 per child / school day for other States and UTs. The nutritional norm was revised to 450 Calories and 12 grams of protein. To facilitate construction of kitchen-cum-store and procurement of kitchen devices in school's provision for Central assistance @ Rs. 60,000 per unit and @ Rs. 5,000 per school in phased manner were made.

In October 2007, the Scheme was extended to cover children of upper primary classes (i.e. class VI to VIII) studying in 3,479 Educationally Backwards Blocks (EBBs) and the name of the Scheme was changed from '**National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education**' to '**National Programme of Mid-Day Meal in Schools**'. The nutritional norm for upper primary stage was fixed at 700 Calories and 20 grams of protein. The Scheme was extended to all areas across the country from 1.4.2008. The Scheme was further revised in April 2008 to extend the scheme to recognized as well as unrecognized Madarasas / Maqtabs supported under SSA.

"We direct the State Governments/Union Territories to implement the Mid-Day Meal Scheme by providing every child in every Government and Government assisted Primary School with a prepared mid-day meal."

Mid-Day Meal Scheme aimed to: Avoid classroom hunger, Increase school enrolment, Increase school attendance, Improve socialisation among castes, Address malnutrition and Empower women through employment.

Entitlement norm per child per day under MDM

Item	Primary (class 1-5)	Upper Primary (class 6-8)
Calories	450	700
Protein (in grams)	12	20
Rice/Wheat (in grams)	100	150
Dal (in grams)	20	30
Vegetables (in grams)	50	75
Oil and Fat (in grams)	5	7.5

Caste based discrimination in PDS and MDM:

Public Distribution System (PDS): The PDS is arguably the strongest available tool with which the poor and the marginalized populations in India, at present, actualize their Right to Food. The PDS discrimination can be seen in terms of the location of the PDS, participatory empowerment and organizes of the Dalits and the treatment of Dalits in the PDS. As PDS are well functioning in the villages, but the location of the PDS physically situated for the benefits of the Dalits is more important. Most of the PDS shops can be seen in the dominant colonies and very less is situated in the Dalits colonies. This makes the Dalits colonies forbidden from the facilities.

The proportion of the Dalits to Dominant PDS dealers, the number will be greater in the latter one. Being most of PDS dealers in dominant group, that makes Dalits lack of the facilities to be attained, lack of food grains etc. i.e., lowest level of Dalits empowerment.

Treatment of PDS in accordance to Dalits, as they have reported four forms of discriminatory practices:

1. Discrimination in quantity,
2. Discrimination in price,
3. Caste-based favoritism by the PDS dealer, and
4. Practices of "Untouchability" by the PDS dealer.

Table- Forms of reported Discrimination*

District	Discrimination in quantity (in %)	Discrimination in price (in %)	Favoritism by PDS (in %)	Untouchability (In%)
ENK	55	5	60	20
TKP	50	2	42	15

***Authors calculation**

In the above table, we can see these four forms of discrimination is taking place in these villages. Tekulapally, show very less percentage of discrimination compared to the Enkathala.

Discrimination in quantity: As PDS shopkeepers show the discrimination towards the Dalits in terms of quantity i.e., they provide lesser quantity to the Dalits than the Dominant caste people.

Discrimination in price:For the given quantity, price differs for Dalits and Dominant caste people. Same quantity of food grain, the Dalits are charged more and dominant caste groups are given at lower cost.

Caste-based favoritism: PDS Dealers show favoritism towards the upper caste groups by serving them more of the food grains. They show discrimination to Dalits by just serving them once or twice in a week call “Dalit Days”, even though they are in very much need of any foodgrain. The PDS dealers refuse to serve the Dalits by saying that they ran out of stock. Caste-based favoritism towards their own communities by the dominant caste PDS dealers (and inversely proportional Dis-favoritism toward the Dalits) was most frequently reported problem.

The dominant caste practice of ‘**Untouchability**’ towards the Dalits continues even in the 21st century, not only, as a social stigma, but also as an unofficial policy of various Government actors, practicing Untouchability in the distribution of Government goods to the Dalits. One classic Untouchability practice is the dominant caste dropping of goods (water, food,and money etc.) from above into the cupped hands of the Dalits below, to avoid the possibility of ‘polluting’ contact between the ‘upper’ and the ‘lower’ castes. PDS shopkeepers continued to practice ‘Untouchability’ in one form or another when dealing with the Dalit customers.

Mid-Day Meal Scheme(MDMs):

The discrimination in the Midday Meal Scheme can be shown in different ways such as Locality of the MDM, the Organizer’s and the Ownership of the MMS, the Treatment of children in the school in MMS, and others

Table – Access & Caste based Discrimination*

States	ACCESS (in %)	Caste-based Discrimination (in %)
ENK	46	36
TKP	19	39

The location of MDMs, it is situated in dominant caste colonies and Dalit colonies as well. The proportions of the setting of the buildings are more in the dominant caste group. The setting of the buildings can be in schools, temples, public building etc. The location being in temple, make Dalits even worse off in the MDMs, they will not be allowed for eating, reason saying that they are polluted. The proportion of MDMs is more in Dominant colonies where the school is situated, sometimes Dalits children cannot participate in the MDM because the school being too far from their homes.

The **participatory empowerment**, in the total number of the cooks for MDMs, only the 25% will be from the Dalit community and other more than half will be from the dominant group. If the school has the Dalits cooks then the children of the dominant group will refuse to eat, and bring food from their home. The families of the dominant group will not allow their children to sit together with Lower caste group, because of that the schools have the separate seating for the Dalits and dominant caste group children. The Dominant caste parents in away forbidding their children to eat food prepared by the Dalit cooks.

The next is the **Organizer** (the person ultimately responsible for implementing of the MDMs on day-to-day basis) of the MDMs is also the same where the number is more in dominant group. As the Dalits are not allowed to take participation much, because the dominant group think that they are getting more opportunities. So, the participation of cooks and as organizers for Dalit is much less compared to the dominant group.

The **caste-based discrimination** in the MDMs is leading to the segregation of the group i.e., in the school, children of lower caste group are seated separately from the dominant caste group for having food, or segregating seating arrangements. This segregation has negative effects on the actualization of the right to food, right to nutritious food. In this case the school has, one dominant cook, one Dalit cook. The practice of separate meals usually implies segregated drinking water arrangements

as well. One consistent argument against the hiring of the Dalit cooks was that the 'society was not prepared to accept a shared meal cooked by a Dalit'; it will 'create caste tensions'; 'schools will be paralyzed'; and the 'dominant caste children's attendance will drop', thus, defeating the very purpose of the MDMs. Considering the case of **Villages in Telangana State**, it has relatively lower levels of reported discrimination in the MDMs, but then, it cannot be linked to lower levels of castes in the society generally. One reason could be that Telangana State government conducts the MDMs through local women's organizations known as **Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWACRA)** groups. Because DWACRA groups are government sponsored, they are clearly influenced by the models provided by social movements. Certain policies and approaches, which characterize the successful working of the MDMs in Telangana State, could possibly be replicated in the other states. First, the government should increase the proportion of schools and the MDMs centers in the Dalit colonies. Second, the government should promote the Dalit participatory empowerment and ownership of the MDMs through hiring and promoting larger proportions of the Dalit cooks and organizers.

Way Foreword

- a) **Reforming the institutions:** The government can relocate or newly locate MMS centers and PDS shops in Dalit colonies or other accessible caste neutral localities
- b) The government can seek the partnership with Dalit women groups and community to jointly implement and monitor the program.
- c) Providing even more incentives for the poor people to get better access from PDS and MDMs.
- d) Inclusion of more items in the supply of food grains in PDS.
- e) There should be Technology based reforms in the PDS, to resolve the problem of leakages in the food grains.
- f) Use of Aadhar number to minimize the problem of inclusion and exclusion. (identification of beneficiaries)
- g) Other options include commodity based targeting in which the subsidy is restricted to commodities consumed primarily by the poorer households or to select beneficiary's contingent upon them participating in another activity
- h) Improving the quality of food served in schools by standards.
- i) Alternative to PDS: Universal PDS, Cash transfers, and Food coupons.

Conclusion

Despite many drawbacks faced by PDS and MDMs, they play major role in the development of the rural-poor through access to regular food grain supply and other things. PDS cover large population of India in terms of access to food. The Midday Meal scheme is important in terms of its potential for substantially improving the health of the younger generation of the country as also in terms of the extent of spending of taxpayer's money. In fact, it is also an important instrument to encourage children to attend school. Both programs were important for eradication of poverty and development of marginalized groups.

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