

Book Reviews

Harsh Mandar, Ashwin Parulkar and Ankita Aggarwal (Eds), *The Right to Food Debates Social Protection for Food Security in India*, 2018, Orient Blackswan Private Limited, New Delhi, pp. 455, Price ₹ 1250/-.

This book compiles debates on the subject and is divided in four parts. The first part is introductory and relates to concepts, scope and Indian food security from the starting points of issues relating to Food Security Act. It is shown why poor people in rural areas could not avail the public work, food and nutrition programme that had been existence in varying forms since the 1960s and 1970s. People's Union for Civil Liberties filed public interest litigation in the Supreme Court on behalf of the public who could not avail of the services and died of hunger. After that the court ordered the government to provide the required services. This book provides answers different questions relating to food security which were elaborated by the policy makers, academic advisory bodies and civil societies. This part describes why there was a need for a law regarding the right to food for the poor, specifically in rural areas. Swain and Kumaran in 2012 found in their survey of public distribution system and Integrated Child Development Services programme that the poor people are denied access to these services due to discrimination on the basis of caste, gender and religion. In the ration shops they found that the lower quantities of foodgrains were distributed and charged high. This part also discusses the judgments of the Supreme Court under Article 21.

The Second part of this book covers universalism or targeting, food or cash transfer and conditionalities. The British government established the PDS during the World War II and then it was closed. After 1950, Indian government adopted it with some changes to support the poor people for providing foodgrains, specially in rural area. But the government observed that there are many weaknesses in it and the benefits did not reach the poor. Though the classification of Below the Poverty Line and Above the Poverty Line is available, but the main motive of food distribution is not covered by the PDS system. This part covers debates regarding the selection of the beneficiaries for the PDS, and focuses on the revised method to determine the BPL households, beside the critiques made by the civil society organizations, scholars and the policy makers. Conditional cash transfer which is local security assistance in the form of cash provided to beneficiaries who fulfilled the stipulated requirements is also discussed. While discussing the National Maternity Scheme and Janani Suraksha Yojana, it is noted that the Food Security Act is important for women and children. A comparative discussion is also done of direct cash transfer and PDS. It is concluded that the PDS is better than direct cash transfer. But there is a need to reforms the PDS to make it more transparent and accessible for the beneficiaries. This book provides the ground level reality by

the comparison between the direct tax transfers and PDS system from the view of the poor people.

The third part of this book covers food entitlement. It debates the distribution of food grains by the state through capacity building and responsibility within the various departments. It is noted that in north India the policy makers do not gave proper attention to starvation. The issues of food for children and malnutrition are also covered. Various aspects regarding technical and monitoring gaps in the Act are also dealt with.

In the fourth part enforcement and transparency system are examined. It is observed that the Act has defined the roles and responsibilities of various administrative bodies. The support system is imperative for any successful human rights legislation. In Act the support system for the people at the panchayat and block levels has neglected and not clarified. Responsibility for the fines, penalties, etc., is not clear under the Act. The book concludes that the duties of officials are complex and not well-defined.

Overall the book is useful for researchers and students alike who want to do an in-depth study of the Act. It is a bunch of enlightening debates on the subject.

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