

# Atta-Dal Scheme in Punjab- A Theoretical Review

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## Abstract

Food security, as defined by the United Nations' Committee on World Food Security, means that all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life. These three elements are included in food security food availability, Food access and food utilization. Food security is very important for a nation to stabilization of food prices, upliftment of agricultural sector, economic growth and creation of job opportunities that are prime variables for poverty alleviation, improved healthcare, increased global stability and security, new opportunities in trade etc. Although Punjab has a surplus in food grains but surplus food grains alone does not ensure food and nutritional security. Seventy five percent of rural and 50 percent of the urban population are entitled for three years from enactment to five kg food grains per month at 3, 2, 1 per kg for rice, wheat and coarse grains, respectively. The problems of Public Distribution System have not been undeviating in the nation. Corrupt and Dishonest management of administration, bogus ration cards, shortage of stocks, wrong inclusion of beneficiaries in ration cards, diversion of commodities for sale to open market are recorded. Public Distribution System suffers from irregular and poor quality of food grain made available through Fair Price Shops. In this paper, main emphasis is laid on increasing cost on implementation of National Food Security Act, problems of Bi-annual distribution of food grains, wrong inclusion and exclusion corruption and other obstacles in the proper implementation of NFSA.

**Keywords:** food security, Cost, Bi-annual distribution, National Food Security Act, Bogus cards.

### Introduction

Food security has been the important goal of many national and international public organizations and it is one of the salient components of development and poverty alleviation programmes. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines food security as a situation when all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preference for an active and healthy life. The lack of a balanced diet minus essential nutrients results in chronic malnutrition. This situation is really a matter of grave and need immediate notice (Sengupta, 2016).

In the concept of food security issue of entitlement were also added after Sen's (1981) theory on food entitlement, this theory replaced previous theories that stressed that main reason of the food insecurity is shortages in food availability. According to Sen, people are usually starved mainly because of lack of the ability to access food rather than because of its availability. Therefore, the issues of both availability and stable access to food were also included in the definition in the late 1980s.

The key priorities of the Government of India under the current five-year-plan (2012–2017) are ensuring 'faster, more inclusive and sustainable growth'. This includes reducing fragility of small and marginal farmers with special focus on women and other disadvantaged groups as well as improving the performance of agriculture and diversifying produce. Some social security schemes namely targeted public distribution system (TPDS), the integrated child development service (ICDS), which is targeting mothers and young children and the mid-day-meal scheme (MDM) that includes nutrition effectiveness of the nationwide food-based social safety nets, improving targeting and cost efficiency. Two programmes of Indian government that are large food distribution schemes in India are targeted public distribution scheme (TPDS) and mid day meal scheme (GOI, 2013). But government is not able to achieve its goals because of misuse of resources and mismanagement of the programme. This problem is widespread and become well known problem. Majority of beneficiaries of the resources invested by the government are not

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the target population and reason is inefficiencies of operations and entrepreneurial inabilities (Gulati, 2015).

The concept of Public Distribution System in the country was started around 1942 due to shortage of food grains during Second world war and government intervention in distribution of food started. PDS was made a universal scheme in the 1970s due to drought and food shortages that highlighted the need for continuing with a system of food distribution (Overbeck, 2016).

There have been four phases, broadly speaking, in the history of the PDS in India. The first phase was from 1942 to 1960, a period when the system was expanded to cities. Second stage is from 1960 to 1978, the government of India set up the Agricultural Prices Commission and the Food Corporation of India. Third stage is from 1978 to 1991, was marked by large-scale expansion of the PDS, and supported by domestic procurement and stocks. In the fourth phase from 1991 to the present, is one in which the policy of universal PDS has been replaced by a targeted policy (pal, 2011).

The Punjab is known as the "Food Basket of India" which produces about 60-70 percent of wheat and 40-50 percent rice of India. Punjab produces roughly 12 percent of the total cereals produced in India (Ghuman, 2013). Government of Punjab is responsible for procurement of food grains and other essential commodities, maintenance of stocks and their storages, supply and delivery to the citizen through distribution centers at reasonable or subsidized rates, food security, license etc. In Punjab, the department of food & civil Supplies consumer Affairs, Punjab has some major functions of the department are: Procurement, storage and transportation of food grains. Distribution of essential commodities to the economically weaker sections through the public distribution system, management and control of essential commodities in times of scarcity and natural disasters. Protection of consumer rights in conjunction with the consumer courts (Ghumaan, 2014).

The National Food Security Bill also called Right to Food Bill was introduced in mid 2013. The National Food Security Bill was passed by both the houses of Parliament. On September 12, 2013 bill was signed into law. The intent of the National Food Security Bill was spelled out clearly in the Lok Sabha.

The State Government has launched Atta Dal Scheme w.e.f. 15.08.2007. A survey was conducted and about 14 lakh economically weak families have been identified as beneficiaries of this scheme. These beneficiary families have been issued special blue ration cards for distribution of wheat and dal. Monthly checking norms have also been fixed for all the field staff in order to ensure that the beneficiaries get good quality food grains at the fixed rate as per their entitlement (Dhiman, 2013). Punjab government declared to provide wheat instead of flour at a rate of Rs. 1 per kg and pulses at Rs. 20 per kg. In 2013, the same government renewed this scheme of theirs and decided to add more families into the beneficiaries list (GOP). The BPL and antodiya anna yojana (AAY) ration card holders were also being eligible for the new scheme. 'New Atta Dal scheme' as launched by the government of Punjab is merged with the National Food Security Act.

#### **Objective of the Study**

The main objective of this paper is to explore the views of other scholars regarding public distribution system and NFSA in India.

#### **Methodology**

This paper is based on secondary work. The information is taken from the different journals like

The Journal of development studies, Economic and Political Weekly, A Journal of Economics and Management and Yojana, reports of various committees, reports of Government of India and reports of different states on Public Distribution System and National Food Security Act.

#### **Review of literature**

Review of literature of the past theory and practice is necessary while conducting any research work. It provides information of the work done in the related area and theoretical framework on which proposed solution can be bases. The relevant literature was viewed in detail in order to understand the nature of the work done on the related topic. The brief review of literature has been given as under.

There are number of studies conducted on the rising expenditure on PDS and NFSA. Cost of implementation is very high because of high transportation

charges, storage and distribution costs and administration charges. The studies related to expenditure on implementation of PDS and NFSA are there. According to Chakraborty (2005) has suggested that expenditure on the Public Distribution Scheme has risen dramatically and it reflects increasing operational costs. In recent years, but much of this reflects In the long term food security will result from the wider controlling of poverty and it requires improvements in infrastructure and time-limited targeted policies to improve rural farm and non-farm productivity. There is a need to identify effective and efficient ways of providing food to those who need it. There is a need to ensure employment opportunities for at least one able-bodied member of a household. Minimizing the 'errors of wrong exclusion' should be minimized. Surabhi (2015) in his study has reviewed that it will not be affordable for a country to bear the cost of implementing National Food Security Bill (NFSB). Many state governments have already been spending a lot of additional funds from their own budget to expand the PDS budget. NFSB does not include any specific provisions for decentralized procurement; this is another area where work is needed. Eligibility criteria, delivery mechanisms and account ability measures have all to be put in place. The food subsidy cost of implementing the National Food Security Act in total around Rs.124502 crore for the year 2013-14. This bill covers around 75percent of the rural population and 50percent of the urban population. He also found that Earlier there were about 1 billion people dying from starvation and hunger which has now been reduced to 842 million in the year 2013 which has been declared by FAO. Gulati and Saini (2015) in their study analyzed that its earlier days of famines of 1940s and acute scarcity of 1960s, the role of the government in food management systems of the country changed. Today, the nation has emerged as large exporter of cereals, and its godowns are overflowing and price policy of highly subsidized grains being distributed through PDS to income policy support (cash transfers) to the poor has made India to reap huge economic gains, both in terms of efficiency and better equity. Chadha and Chadha studied the impact of various social sector development programmes on Punjab economy during the period of 2007 to 2016. The results concluded that there is significant reduction in poverty in Punjab and inclusive growth due to expenditure incurred on social services accompanied by the inclusive growth. It is a vital component which may lead to growth in case of any improvement in such programmes. The thrust of development programmes aim to reach the needy sects of our society which require the utmost attention. The needy sections of the society requires the attention of authorities and such development programmes in order to grow and develop. Sharma (2012) discussed about Food Subsidy in India as India has one of the largest food subsidy programmes in the world. The paper has analysed the trends in volume of food subsidy in the post-reforms period from 1991-92 to 2012-13 which is obtained from Food Corporation of India (FCI) and clearly showed an increasing trend in subsidies especially after post reform period which was nearly 2.5 percent of the agricultural GDP in 1990s and increased to 5 percent in the last decade(2001-10). The rise in food subsidy is led by Increase in procurement price which further increased the economic cost of foodgrains followed by other components which contributed to food subsidy were open-ended procurement policy, increase in procurement costs mainly statutory charges by state government on procurement of foodgrains, constant central issue prices and distribution costs. However, most of the variables are not under the control of FCI, and regulated and controlled by Government yet the components ( storage prices, administration charges etc.) which are under the control of FCI have shown improvement in the last decade. Various steps like involvement of more states in procurement and distribution of foodgrains, public-private partnership in creating scientific storage facilities to reduce losses, reduction in state-level statutory and non-statutory charges should be taken to reduce other costs through appropriate procurement price policy and periodic increase in central issue prices of foodgrains. Jha and srinivasan (2001) in an article named "Taking the public distribution system to the poor: directions for further reforms", analyzed the benefits and cost related to implementation and operation of PDS in India. They compared the cost of public storage and distribution with private agents. The system is increasingly becoming fiscally unsustainable due to the rising costs of operation. Cost of FCI has been growing at a faster rate than revenue leading to rising food subsidy bill due to purchase or procurement price, procurement incidentals, storage and distribution costs. They argued that

the cost-effectiveness of the system appears to be low partly due to the fact that several indirect benefits of the system go unaccounted. TPDS thus appears to have failed in both of its objectives. TPDS has succeeded neither in reaching food subsidies to a greater proportion of the poor nor in reducing the food subsidy bill. They suggested that now government should concentrate on tackling the real issues namely reducing the cost inefficiencies in the procurement and distribution system and control the diversion of grain from PDS to the open market. Sinha (2013) found in his study that cost will be incurred in implementing NFSA but question is whether it will be wasteful expenditure or an investment in the country's future. Many of the estimates that are being put forward to show that the NFSA is expensive are exaggeration. Estimates of cost calculations are not correct because they ignored the cost of leakages, incremental cost and agricultural production cost. Mishra (2013) calculates the incremental cost over the existing TPDS to be 0.2% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Thus to reduce the cost of distribution, many states adopted six monthly distribution system. Punjab Government already implemented this scheme to control the expenditure incurred on every month distribution. But there are many factors which are affecting six monthly distribution. Few studies related with biannual distribution are following.

According to Grover and Chopra (2014) studied the improvement in the existing scheme under the public distribution system by the Punjab government as "new wheat-pulses scheme". The state decided to distribute grains on a six-monthly basis instead of every month. It claimed various benefits, whereas beneficiaries expressed concerns. The purpose of this research was to identify and understand factors affecting beneficiaries' preference for successful adoption of a biannual or six monthly distribution system. Factors affecting beneficiaries' preference included monthly hassle, leakages in system, storage challenges, interval of grain distribution, one-time down payment, trade of bulk grains by family, exploitation by middle-men, communication of arrival of grains, gender, area, and nature of employment. Grover & Kumar(2017) investigated the factors affecting the preference of beneficiaries for six monthly distribution system in Punjab. The main objective of the study is to provide subsidized food grains and other essential commodities on a monthly basis to the poor people. This was provided with system of supply chain management and to improve the efficiency of the system, Punjab introduced the new atta-daal (wheat pulses) scheme and this scheme distributes grains to the beneficiaries on a six month basis despite of monthly basis. This system has helped in financial savings for the government and state and improved grain quality and quantity for the beneficiaries of the system. Various concerns related to grain handling, one time payments and its success full implementation have come to light. Grover and Chopra (2017) found in their research study that beneficiaries preference for biannual distribution system is affected by some factors that are monthly hassle, leakages in system, storage challenges, interval of grain distribution, one-time down payment, trade of bulk grains by family, exploitation by middle-men, communication of arrival of grains, gender, and area. Results of their study are that females, beneficiaries from rural areas, and housewives are less likely to prefer the six-monthly system as compared to males, beneficiaries from urban areas, and beneficiaries employed as casual labors, respectively. Therefore Beneficiaries' preference for the six-monthly system is also significantly impacted by gender, area, and employment. Puri (2014) explained in his article that the state government introduced the new scheme wherein grains are distributed on a 6-monthly basis and is governed by a new set of regulations. The government planned to control state expenditure on transportation, storage, and preservation of grains, as now the grains will be handled only twice a year, rather than monthly system with this new scheme. This change in the supply chain has immediate positive outcomes. 30 kg wheat packages (6 monthly quota) are then delivered directly to the beneficiaries from the mandi. The beneficiaries get fresh wheat that has been procured from a nearby mandi. The quality of the grain is far superior to what they received under the earlier system. With the grain being delivered just twice a year at predetermined times, the state spends far less on distribution and storage costs are almost

eliminated. This scheme can increase the cost of storage and preservation for the beneficiaries and reduce state expenditure.

Another problem that many researchers found is wrong inclusion and right exclusion. Some studies have criticised the identification exercise on the grounds of corruption, low data quality and coverage, imprecise scoring methods and poor survey. Few studies that correlates PDS and beneficiaries targeting error and are following. There are so many leakages in wide spread PDS system in India. Many factors are creating obstacles in the effectiveness of PDS. Researchers found many leakages that are explained following.

Gulati *et al.* (2012) has analysed the data of NSSO survey (66<sup>th</sup> Round) and found that there is 40.4 percent leakage in current PDS system. The authors have also found that there are some important primary issues which are required to be tackled. These issues are identifying eligible beneficiaries, removal of bogus ration cards and provide choice of fair price shops to the beneficiary to procure food grains. The country can get monetary savings by substituting the existing physical grain management system with cash transfers, without giving up the basic objective of helping the poor. Gill *et al.* (2012) in their study 'Social security schemes in Punjab' have evaluated Atta-Dal Scheme that ADS was started with an objective to extend the benefits to a large number of poor people. The inclusion of land-holding families as the beneficiaries led to the exclusion of the genuinely poor families. All Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) families should be included in the ADS as they were the poorest of the poor. However, all the AAY holders (poorest of BPL) were not covered under the ADS, although eligibility norms to grant AAY status were less than that of ADS norms. Another important malpractice which develops well in the State's PDS related to overlapping of various schemes. For instance, the total number of eligible people covered under PDS schemes (APL, blue card, BPL and AAY) became much more than the total population of Patiala District in 2011. It indicated that a large number of ration cards were falling under the category of bogus or doubly counted. Large number of ration cards was bogus in the district; indicating a careless attitude of the state administration. Bhushan (2013) in his study 'National Food Security Act: Work in Progress' analysed that the NFSA will run into its biggest challenge while it does specify the overall percentage of households, it has neither provided any mechanism to identify the beneficiaries nor does it provide any clear guidelines on who should be excluded and who should be included. Successful implementation of NFSA will also require political conviction and willingness to fight malnutrition apart from the administrative and technical challenges outlined earlier. The overall improvements of the PDS is important to dispel any claim of the PDS (and thereby the NFSA) being a drain on the exchequer, but also to bring out the contribution of these to poverty reduction and nutritional intake. He also informed that an alternative in the form of Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC 2011) was available and could have been used not only to specify the exact criteria for identification of beneficiaries but also to arrive at a suitable estimate of number of households eligible for the benefit in each state and it lead to lesser errors of inclusion and exclusion. Gujrati *et al.* (2014) in their study 'Governance issues and challenges in implementation of National Food Security Act 2013' analysed that one fourth of the money is not reaching to targeted beneficiaries under PDS, government is still implementing this programme via PDS only. Government has proposed to cover 67 percent population under this act though the poverty ratio in India is 26 percent as per international poverty line and 22 percent as per national poverty line. Unnecessary coverage of 41 percent of the population will increase the cost of subsidy. Their study reveals that there is a leakage of 24 percent in the current PDS. Instead of rectifying existing system before implementation of NFSA, government will implement the program via fallacious mechanism. Instead of increasing food subsidy the government should have reduced leakage to achieve better results. They explained that one of the reforms suggested by government for improving PDS is to leverage "Aadhar cards" for unique identification, but this step is not going to be helpful as the Supreme Court of India has made "Aadhar cards" non-mandatory for getting any social benefit. The government has proposed to implement cash transfer facility in case of non-supply of food grains but only 10 percent of the poor avail banking facility in India. Computerization of fair price shops and door step delivery are also among

the proposed reforms by government. But looking to the current scenario it seems a challenging task. Ghumaan and Dhiman (2013) in their study "Organization and working of public distribution system; A study of Punjab" shed light on various aspects of the Organization and working of the Public Distribution System (PDS) in India. The problems of PDS have not been uniform in the country. In Punjab state, deficiencies regarding huge shortage of stocks, fake supply entries in ration cards, diversion of commodities for sale to open market and bogus ration cards are noted. PDS suffers from irregular and poor quality of food grain made available through fair price shops (FPS). In Punjab, during the year 2011-12 under the targeted public distribution system (TPDS), 2,88,600 below poverty line (BPL) families were provided 10,098 tons of wheat per month at the scale of 35 kg of wheat per family Rs. 4.57 per kg. They also suggested that there is a need to explore the possibility of introducing innovative ideas such as smart cards, debit cards/food credit, food stamps and decentralized procurement in order to eliminate hunger and make food available to the poor wherever they may be in a cost-effective manner. Tamini (2001) performed the investigation on the role offered by the governmental programs and policies, the State Civil Supplies Corporation and the TPDS towards achievement of food stability in his present research entitled "Food Security in 21st Century, Perspectives and Vision". The study revealed that the requirements of the identified households cannot be met only from the purchase confined to PDS or FPS, moreover the low purchase, absence of vital food stuffs, administrative organization grouped with the socio-economic aspect lend a negative effect on the fulfillment of PDS objectives. He suggested that the allocation process of essential food commodities was required in order to provide advancement in the living standard of the people. Kavita (2014) in her research work of "Public Distribution System in Haryana: An Evaluation" had given weightage to the deprived people in the referred state for socio economic status. The study aimed to represent the opinions, the satisfaction level and the difficulties encountered by the identified classes and the FPS proprietors. The complaints recorded point towards the execution troubles, like food commodities deliverance, population reach to FPS, under-weight, bogus ration cards, deteriorated quality, wrong inclusion of beneficiaries etc. Dreze and Khera (2015) in their article studied the leakages in the Public distribution system and highlighted the improvement in the PDS system especially in Bihar in the recent years with the help of recent data. They have taken the data not only from NSS but from the IHDS surveys and highlighted the decline in leakages. This decline was evident in those states which have taken serious steps for the reformation of PDS. One good example mentioned in the paper is of Bihar which has implemented National Food Security Act as an important opportunity to phase out leaky quota and complete the process of PDS reform across the country. The Government of Bihar was able to use it to generate a new list of ration card, transparently linked with SECC data -a major improvement over the earlier BPL list. Nawani (1995) analyzed the position of PDS with reference to food security and revealed that the present population would not be able to make the two ends meet if the food price continued to grow, thus he excluded several categories of existing card holders so as to target the deprived sections more strongly. The study highlighted the fact that PDS proved to be of minimal help to meet up the nutritional needs of an average earning family. Nicola, Razzar and Sorrentino (2007) studied the PDS impact on the life of people living in Iraq. They used the IHSES (Iraq Household Socio-Economic Survey) data of 2006-07 for the analysis. The findings suggested certain strategies to keep a check on the price rise and the need to reform the PDS, thus benefiting the identified class. They further recommended that PDS should focus on the targeted households and function to provide the best possible outcome in their interest and welfare with this scheme. Dr. S. Nakkiran (2004) conducted a study on the effectiveness of public distribution system in rural Tamil Nadu. He found in his study that major problems that affect the efficiency of system are under weightment, non-availability of ration cards, and non-availability of controlled as well as non-controlled articles during certain times, bogus cards, leakages, poor quality. Respondents put some viable options to strengthen the PDS such as increased margin to cooperatives, and better salary to employees, reduction in the number of cards to be handled by a FPS, maintaining and updating the Notice Boards at every FPS, and formation of vigilance committees at every FPS level. Pathania Kulwant Singh (2005) in his study "Public Distribution

System, Status, Challenges and Remedial Strategies” within the state of Himachal Pradesh enquired both the qualitative and quantitative characteristics of PDS administration. He found that the ratio of BPL families within the region was higher than 70 percent, thus the deprived class was unable to meet their basic needs of life. There are some practices like black-marketing, hoarding and inflation practices. Therefore, he requested the government to take proper and strict steps to eliminate these practices and suggested mobile FPS should be launched in the remote areas so as to successfully cater the needs of the needy class. Madhura Swaminathan (2008) studies revolved around the inclusion formula for the beneficiaries to be covered under TPDS. She has stated that though the very basic objective of the TPDS is to provide food to the poor, but many of the rural poor households have been excluded from the PDS. She has clearly mentioned that to be covered under the PDS, the family has to possess a BPL or Annatodya card and there are countless number of households below poverty line who neither possess a BPL nor an Annatodya card and are basically excluded from PDS. She has provided examples from different states such as 77.5 per cent in Bihar, 74 per cent in Uttar Pradesh, 67 per cent in Jharkhand, 54 per cent in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh comprising of these households. The studies have also revealed that all over in India 70.5 per cent of rural households either possessed no card or held an APL card and as such are effectively excluded from the TPDS because TPDS beneficiaries are only BPL and Antyodaya card holders. He has also critically mentioned of the NSS report that classifies - on the basis of caste, occupation, land ownership and consumer expenditure. Households are excluded and included from the PDS on the basis of this classification. Bhat et al. (2012) attempted to study the efficiency of PDS in Kashmir. They found a lot of irregularities in supplies of PDS. They observed that ration shop owners often sold their goods in the open market to earn more because they had less profit. The ration shops owners did not provide the recommended quantity to the consumers and whichever quantity was provided, that was of lower quality as well as much later than the given time framework. For providing a minimal level of social security to the old, sick and disabled, they have recommended a proper monitoring mechanism so as to lower down the corruption level.

### Conclusion

The literature revealed that the Public Distribution System is a very important resource for the food security of the poor people, particularly the urban poor, and women, who manage household food supplies. It is a biggest challenge for government to increase food availability to the poor. The main challenges faced by the national food security system include the identification of beneficiaries of the scheme, malpractices in the distribution of food grains, tampering with the quality of the food grains etc. These challenges are the main barriers in the successful implementation of the PDS and in the achievement of its objectives. Public Distribution System has played vital role in serving the poor people as many people earlier died because of malnutrition. When analysing in Indian context, India's Public Distribution System is the major distribution network of its kind in the world. But the adequate distribution of foodgrain through PDS is very essential to make it more effective. The author also suggested that the efficient delivery system and checks on corruption are essential to ensure food security at the local level. Decentralising the implementation of food distribution is an effective way to ensure smooth access of food to the rural poor. The costs involved in procurement, storage and distribution needs to be lowered.

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*Remarking An Analisation*

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