

Public distribution system in india



 om 1) Introduction:- In the context of national food security and poverty alleviation, it is essential to take a look at the “ efficiency and efficacy’ of the public distribution system (PDS), which has been operating as the food access mechanism for several decades. Proponents of the rationing system and its successor, the PDS, claim that these two measures have played an important role in ensuring higher levels of household food security and ‘ ‘ completely eliminating the threat of famines”.

It was the compulsions at the time of World War II that forced the then British Government to introduce the first structured public distribution of cereals in India through the rationing system sale of a fixed quantity of ration (rice or wheat) to entitled families (ration cardholders) in specified cities/towns. The Department of Food, under the Government of India, was created in 1942 to co-ordinate this arrangement. When the War ended, India, like many other countries, abolished the rationing system in 1943.

In the face of renewed inflationary pressures in the economy immediately after Independence, the Government had to reintroduce rationing in 1950. India retained public distribution of food grains as a deliberate social policy, when it embarked on the path of planned economic development in 1951. In the First Plan, the system, which was essentially urban-based till then, was extended to all such rural areas which suffered from chronic food shortages. Towards the end of the First Plan (1956), rationing had started losing its relevance due to comfortable food grains availability.

However, true to its cyclic nature, food production dropped in 1958, when the Second Plan had just commenced. This forced the Government to restart

the procurement of food grain and cereals and impose control on trading of food grains. It also decided to reintroduce PDS. The creation of the Food Corporation of India and the Agricultural Prices Commission in 1965 consolidated the position of the PDS. The Government was now committed to announce a minimum support price for wheat and paddy and procure quantities that could not fetch even such minimum prices in the market.

Food grains thus procured were to be used to maintain distribution through the PDS with a portion used to create and maintain buffer stocks. PDS was sustained as a deliberate social policy of the Government with the objectives of: * Providing food grains and other essential items to vulnerable sections of society at reasonable (subsidized) prices; * Having a moderating influence on the open market prices of cereals, the distribution of which constitutes a fairly big share of the total marketable commodities; In short, PDS, from mere rationing, had evolved into the National Food Security System.

Both Central & State governments made arrangements to procure essential commodities & supply them through the public distribution outlets. In the case of food grains, Food Corporation of India (FCI) undertook the necessary operations. Moreover, the Central government shoulders the responsibility of procurement, storage & bulk allocation of food grains to the State governments, here as State take active role in identification of families Below Poverty Line (BPL), issuing supply cards, allotment of commodities & supervision & monitoring the functions of ration shops.