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Food Security with Agrarian Crisis? : Exploring Historical Roots of the Paradox in India and China, c. 1950-2000

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Food Security with Agrarian Crisis? : Exploring Historical Roots of the Paradox in India and China, c. 1950-2000

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Abstract

This paper critically interrogates the notion of food security and its limitations in India and China that have to feed a large percentage of world population and are among the fastest and largest growing economies. Both achieved freedom around the same time and although the ideological paths of their subsequent political regimes differed but the broad aims of their development policies were similar. In the 1950s, they set goals to feed their hungry and undernourished people by relying on heavy industrialization and self-sufficiency in food production. Their planned economic development assigned a big role to the state where the 'Soviet model' was influential to begin with. In China, political rift with the Soviet Union in the late 50s led to the pursuit of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' while India had a stronger component of the private sector and the market economy. In the 1960s both countries experienced severe food shortages and discontentment, and inefficiencies of the state sector were apparent by the end of the 1970s. Consequently free market-oriented policy shifts occurred in both economies – first in China in the late 1970s followed by India in the 1990s. Technological solutions combined with state regulations enabled both economies to achieve food self-sufficiency. However paradoxically this came to co-exist with growing agrarian crisis, displacement and poor social indicators in rural areas. For instance, in India today an unusually large percentage of the workforce (53%) contributes a meagre 15% to the GDP. The larger rural world is in a state of flux marked by underemployment, casualization of labour and new forms of agrestic servitude and modes of extraction. Non-agrarian capital is making inroads into the rural in search of natural resources, minerals and real estate. The rural is no longer agricultural or the village and its fabric stands transformed marked by financialisation, consumerist modernity, farmers' suicides and fragmented local protests. Yet India has emerged as the third largest producer of food but with 17% of the world's population it has a quarter of the world's undernourished and hungry and nearly a third of globe's undernourished children. Clearly self-sufficiency in food production does not ensure absence of hunger and undernourishment. The central hypothesis of the present study is that food self-sufficiency does not necessarily ensure food security and these need to be problematised. While officially famines have been 'conquered' in these two countries but strengthening access to food remains a big challenge for their 'development nationalist' agendas. In India chronic undernourishment, hunger and structural poverty persists for an unusually high number of its people while in China the dismantling of old social guarantees and slower political reform have generated new vulnerabilities. This paper is an attempt to historicize and evaluate the policies to combat famine and achieve food security in India and analyse the accompanying agrarian crisis with a comparative perspective informed by the Chinese experience.

1 Introduction

In the recent past virtually all attempts to evaluate the economic performance of India's economy have invariably invited comparisons with China. This is because the similarities between the two countries are too obvious to be ignored. Both countries are inhabited by a high percentage of human population and are among the fastest and largest growing economies. Both countries share many 'initial conditions' despite differences. Both achieved freedom around the same time after prolonged anti-colonial struggles with varied class participation and ideologies. Although the ideological content of their political regimes differed but the broad aims of the policies pursued for development were similar. In the 1950s, they set goals to feed their hungry and undernourished people by relying on heavy industrialization and self-sufficiency in food production. Their planned economic development assigned a big role to the state where the 'Soviet model' was influential to begin with. In China, political rift with the Soviet Union in the late 50s led to the pursuit of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' while India always had a stronger component of the private sector and the market economy compared to China. In the 1960s both countries experienced periodic severe food shortages and inefficiencies of the state sector were apparent by the end of the 1970s. Consequently policy shifts occurred in both economies – first in China in 1978 followed by India in the 1980s that gathered momentum in the 1990s. The reform years saw a broader shift towards market-oriented policies in the framework of liberalization and privatization in the era of contemporary globalization. Several judgments have been passed on the comparative performance of the two countries the most common being that the Chinese have outperformed the Indians in virtually all crucial spheres. One catchy pronouncement has been that the Chinese were better 'socialists' during the planning era, and better 'capitalists' during the reform era. (Bardhan, 2003). This paper is a modest attempt to historicize, compare and evaluate the policies to combat famine and achieve food security by two emerging economic giants of the new century.

2 China: The challenges of ensuring food security

China, like most developing countries, faced great challenges from its large population, relative shortage of natural resources and environmental degradation in the second half of the twentieth century. It remained the largest developing country in the world and despite its recent high growth rate in manufacturing and trade its economy has relied heavily on agriculture. At the beginning of the current century, roughly two-thirds of its population lived in rural areas and about half of the total national labour force was involved in agricultural activities. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, government agricultural policy had been drafted in accordance with the principle that 'agriculture is the basis of national economy and grain is the basis of agriculture' (Wang and Davis, 2000, p. 7). The basis of this agricultural policy lies in the fact that till the early years of this century China had only roughly 7 per cent of the world's total farmland, but it had to feed more than 22 per cent of the world's total population. Moreover China's farmland has been declining due to industrialization and urbanization since the 1950s, while its population has more than doubled from 575 million in 1952 to around 1379 million in 2016.

Ensuring food security has always been vital for the Chinese government that still thinks of grain as the base of national economy and political stability. Extensive land reforms and collectivization followed the founding of the People's Republic. Between 1953-57 the Chinese economy registered an annual real rate of growth of 6.2 per cent. The gross value of industrial output increased by 128 per cent and agriculture by 24.8 per cent. It was the era of Mao Zedong when it was thought that with human resources production in China could be doubled in a single five-year period. The hope behind the Great Leap Forward (1958) was that China would leapfrog from socialism into utopian communism and over the USSR. It was believed that peasants could produce steel in backyard furnaces and people's will could triumph over many such obstacles. Consequently massive programmes were launched: of excavation, water control and construction. Private property was abjured including farm tools and draught animals. Disaster struck when commune cadres exaggerated

production figures on the basis of which Beijing exacted its quota of grain harvest to feed China's urban populace to leave little for its peasants. (Oi, 1999, p. 6). The result was a severe famine in which at least 15 million starved to death as a direct consequence of misguided policy and wasted resources. (Tiewes and Sun, 1998; Yang, 1996). Dikötter (2017, p. xii) claims that between 1958 and 1962, at least 45 million people died "unnecessarily". The famine had many related consequences one of them being on the pattern of population growth. The Great Leap Forward famine resulted in negative population growth rates in the early 1960s. The mortality rate was very high. (Gamer, 2003, p. 232). Birth rates became high in the late 1960s and 1970s and they were explained by demographers as 'compensative births' since many people who did not bear children during the famine wanted to have them right after it. The total fertility rate (expected average number of children per woman at the end of her childbearing years) decreased to 3.3 in 1960 and jumped back to 5.8 in 1970.

The state also closed markets and monopoly was created for the procurement and sale of most goods and services. Factories were told which products to make and in what quantities, given the materials for production, at what price to sell their finished products and to whom the products were to be sold. The purpose of price setting was to ensure inflation control and an equal distribution of goods and resources within a socialist ideological context, not to provide a comparative advantage in a competitive world market. Production hinged not on costs or on sales but on the plan of state agencies. The plan determined demand and limited consumer choice. The Great Leap Forward was followed by the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-76). Once again politics was accorded primacy and there is a substantial body of literature on different aspects and phases of the Cultural Revolution (the early drive against the apparatchik of the mushrooming government bureaucracy, the hysteria of the 'Red Guards', the 'Gang of Four' etc). All this happened under the broad Maoist ideological rubric of politics being in command and everything else being subservient to it. The Cultural Revolution with its stress on 'continuous struggle' and unceasing class struggle substituted ideological incentive for material incentive. Although it caused much less direct disruption particularly in rural areas it resulted in long-term economic damage to government administration, factory management and China's education system. (Gamer, 2003, p. 126). China's average annual growth during 1952-78 was 5.7 per cent that was accompanied with fluctuations. Despite extensive land reforms, collectivisation, the Great Leap Forward and other initiatives, the per capita grain output in 1978 was the same as in the mid 1950s (Perkins. 1994, p. 23). However there were other noteworthy gains. The average life expectancy improved from 32 in 1950 to 69 in 1982. (Ray, 2002, p. 3836). Despite relatively little increase in food availability per person in the pre-reform period there was a remarkable reduction in chronic undernourishment. This was mainly due to the massive extension of basic health services in rural areas as also more equitable distribution of basic food-grains through the commune system. (Ibid). Moreover there was a massive expansion in elementary education. Literacy rates in 1982 for the 15-19 age group was 96 per cent for males and 85 per cent for females. The corresponding figures for India at that time are 66 per cent and 43 per cent. (Drèze and Sen, p.122).

However in the late seventies when Deng Xiao Ping and his political supporters took a firm control of the Party they embarked on an open door policy for China. Now economy instead of politics was to be in command, as Deng believed that forces of production not productive relations or superstructural elements constituted the engine of history. In a conversation with Kim Il Sung in 1982, Deng said:

> In a country as big and as poor as ours, if we don't try to increase production, how can we survive? How is socialism superior, when our people have so many difficulties in their lives? The Gang of Four clamoured for 'poor socialism' and 'poor communism', declaring that communism was mainly a spiritual thing. That is sheer nonsense! We say that socialism is the first stage of communism. When a backward country is trying to build socialism, it is natural that during the long initial period its productive forces will not be able to live up tot he level of those in developed capitalist countries and that tit will not be able to eliminate poverty completely. Accordingly, in building socialism we must do

> all we can to develop the productive forces and gradually eliminate poverty, constantly raising the people's living standards….If we don't do everything possible to increase production, how can we expand the economy? How can we demonstrate the superiority of socialism and communism? We have been making revolution for several decades and have been building socialism for more than three. Nevertheless by 1978 the average monthly salary for our workers was still only 45 yuan, and most of our rural areas were still mired in poverty. Can this be called the superiority of socialism? That is why I insisted that the focus of our work should be rapidly shifted to economic development. (*Selected Works of Deng Xiao Ping*, Vol. 3, pp. 21-22).

Ideologically this marked a return to development nationalism with a stress on economic modernization not class struggle. The first priority of this leadership was to liberalise agriculture. Agricultural reform basically consisted of decollectivisation and allowing produce to be sold in free markets at market-determined prices, instead of government agencies at controlled prices. The freeing up of markets was first allowed in secondary crops and household products and finally in grains. Under the 'household responsibility' system, the commune land was divided into small plots and they were allocated for use, not ownership to individual households. They were allowed to keep income from the land after paying taxes. The household responsibility system and decollectivisation changed the unit of accounting from the collective to the individual household. With the agricultural reforms, for the first time ownership meant rights not only to the income but also to the residual and its disposition. Peasants were free to do as they pleased with their harvest after they had met the obligations to the state. The pragmatic approach of collective ownership and individual use rights released the pent-up potential of Chinese peasants while largely preventing the emergence of a class of dispossessed landless households.

This change, together with the dramatic rise in agricultural procurement prices, improved incentives for grain production and increased peasant incomes in the early 1980s. The grain output increased at an average annual rate of 5 per cent during 1978-84 compared with only 2.1 per cent (about the same as the rate of population growth) over the last two decades of the pre-reform era (Ray, 2002 p. 3836). Agricultural reform saw a jump in agricultural productivity and rural incomes. Rural per capita real income more than quadrupled between 1978-97 while urban per capita real income trebled over the same period. By the international poverty line, the percentage of rural poor declined from 60 percent in 1978 to 11.5 percent in 1999. Measured according to the Chinese official poverty line the percentage of rural poor declined from 33 per cent in 1978 to 4.6 per cent in 1999 (World Bank, 2000). The growth in agricultural incomes led to a rise in demand for other goods. Rising rural incomes generated additional savings for investment while labour released from collective farms became available for non-agricultural employment. This facilitated the growth of Township and Village Enterprises (TVEs). These unique non-state enterprises created more employment, provided cheap consumer products and brought about regional development. Many of them were subsequently privatized.

Agricultural reforms in China brought benefits to a much larger population compared to the more industry-based economies of the USSR and Eastern Europe. Moreover China's planning apparatus was less comprehensive and more decentralized than these countries. Indeed gradualism has been the hallmark of reforms in China compared to the shock therapies applied in the USSR and Eastern Europe. In the famous words of Deng Xiao Ping, Chinese reform strategy was like "crossing the river by touching stones". China did not start reform of State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) straightway thereby avoiding lay-offs that could have caused massive social dislocations. Instead the private sector was developed along with it so that SOEs either had to compete or reform. A booming private sector also absorbed surplus rural labour and the urban unemployed at least in the early years of reform. The timing, content and sequence of reforms resulted in nearly 10 per cent average growth in GDP in the two decades following the opening up in 1978. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) zoomed from near

zero in 1978 to nearly $ 52 billion in 2002 edging out the U.S. as the number one recipient of FDI. Compared to this rapid economic growth in China, in Russia in the 1990s, GDP fell by about 44 per cent and poverty headcount increased from 2 per cent to 50 per cent. The relevant question for us here is: what did these reforms do to food security in China?

In 1994, Lester R. Brown, the director of the Worldwatch Institute made his by now famous pessimist forecast for China's food situation. He argued that if China continued to industrialise at the rate it was, then it would become one of the biggest food-importing countries of the world by the year 2030. He expressed the fear that world food exports would not be sufficient to meet China's needs and China itself would not be able to feed itself given the fall he alleges in its arable land, the projected growth in agricultural technology, population growth and increasing consumption. Brown's prophecy sparked off an intense debate within and outside China. A *White Paper* issued in 1996 dismissed fears of China destabilizing the international grain market (*White Papers of the Chinese Government*, 1996-1999). These apocalyptic fears may be unfounded but the debate continues and suggests that China's ability to feed its millions depends on a number of factors:

a. Trends in population growth.
b. Whether China is able to sustain its high growth rate.
c. What policy initiatives will be taken to address the challenge posed by growing inequalities, unbalanced regional economic growth, the structural constraints of the banking and financial sector and growing environmental degradation.
d. Changes specifically required to improve vulnerable people's access to food e.g. migrant labourers in urban areas, the growing number of the elderly in society and the inhabitants of the backward western regions of China.

The situation around these issues can be briefly summed up as follows. As is well known, China is the world's most populous country followed by India. Despite the one-child policy, China's population continues to grow and is predicted to become stable only around 2033 (Gamer, 2003, p. 237). India with its higher annual birth rate (26 per 1000 vs. 16 per 1000 in China) is expected to surpass China in the next two decades or so. As elsewhere China's population growth is linked to poverty levels and patterns, therefore its poorer western regions have higher fertility. The Chinese government hopes to feed its growing population by rapid modernization and high rates of economic growth. Though the Chinese economy is still growing at a healthy rate (6.5% to 7% GDP growth rate), economic growth rates have been sliding down from a peak of 14.2 per cent in 1992 to around 7. The question being asked now is whether such high growth rates are sustainable. Is the Chinese miracle over?

Research shows that it is too early to jump to such a dramatic conclusion. Compared to many countries that have experienced rapid economic growth in the past, China has many factors in its favour. Its economy is primarily driven by domestic demand and has an image as the manufacturer and exporter of cheap goods worldwide. Yet China faces a new set of problems thrown by the very path of development it has pursued. One of the major problems is the increasing inequality factor. Broadly speaking China's increasing inequality is caused by the rising urban/rural gap and interregional disparities (Ray, 2002, p. 3842). From being one of the world's most egalitarian societies, China has increasingly become an unequal society (Riskin, 2001, p. 3). The crucial redeeming feature has been that rising inequalities have been compensated by drastic reduction in absolute poverty (5.1% of the population below poverty line in 2015). Growing disparities has created unequal access to food, health, housing and other welfare benefits. Given the acute need of feeding its big population, China must have enough people in the rural areas (despite rising agricultural productivity) to maintain food supplies while managing migration to towns and cities that invariably accompanies modernisation. After 1949, a government plan was created to manage food, housing, employment, education and other public facilities. Under this a residential registration system was created in 1953 to control the size of urban population and the volume of rural-urban migration. Under this policy the proportion of

urban population in the total population was kept around 20 per cent for a long time, much lower than in many other countries.

Following the reforms after 1978, migration controls had to be slackened. The 'travel approval' and grain coupons (which could be used in the provinces only) were abandoned. Freedom of movement was allowed which resulted in millions of rural people migrating to fast growing industrial and commercial areas. The number of rural migrants was estimated to be anywhere between 100-120 million constituting *liudong renkou* ('floating population') (Gamer, 2003, p. 142). However the old practice of *hukou* (household registration) continued in different forms that discriminated against the rural migrant labourer. While two and a half decades of reforms brought affluence for a large number of urban Chinese constituting a middle class, the floating population constituted the new urban poor. Called 'peasant workers' by city-dwellers, they work in factories, small shops, businesses and as domestic servants. Beijing alone is estimated to have around 3 million of such peasant workers at the beginning of the century. Their living conditions were predictably inferior (access to health, education, housing etc) and in addition they faced several other social and cultural disadvantages in mega-cities. The government had to keep redefining the difference between rural and urban that indicates the seriousness of the problem. According to China's Development Research Council, of the 12 per cent of the registered urban people 50 million were unemployed and 37 million could be classified as urban poor in the early years of the first decade of the century (Gamer, 2003, p. 247). In many ways those along with the rural poor (who got the freedom to move to cities) had poor access to earlier social guarantees and protection. In 2011, officially the urban population outnumbered the rural which throws up complex challenges for Chinese planners.

Contemporary China has solved its food problem to the extent that there is an abundance of food in the economy despite a huge population that is still growing and shrinking cultivated acreage, China has the capacity to feed itself aided by imports. However increased agricultural productivity has also rendered a section of the rural population redundant who have to seek non-farm employment. The inexorable logic of Chinese industrialization often works against the agricultural sector. For example, rapid urbanization, construction activities and road building led to a decrease of area of cultivated land by 6.4% between 1996-2008 (Ghosh et al, 2013). Globalization and entry into the WTO in 2001 dealt a severe blow to the idea of self-sufficiency. Earlier models of development relied heavily on local-level self-sufficiency and shunning foreign technology. However the Great Leap Forward famine (1959-61) showed that food self-sufficiency couldn't ensure food-security. That was the time when cold war politics virtually isolated China. In recent years Chinese policy-makers have reluctantly accepted the view that relying solely on domestic supply threatens food security. China now seems to employ a strategy that is not limited by a narrowly defined notion of self-sufficiency. On the other hand reliance on imports have generated fears that China will be at the mercy of the world food market. However many analysts allay this fear by arguing that China can continue to maintain comparative advantage in a number of labour intensive agricultural products and create more jobs in high value-added and food processing industries.

The emerging picture in China has been suggesting that growing inequalities (regional and social), unemployment and environmental problems have made several social groups like the unemployed, the elderly and the migrants increasingly less secure. They can no longer depend on older social protection mechanisms and their access to many welfare benefits including food is inadequate. Today China seems to be moving to a situation where food may be in abundance and its supply might be good but equitable access to it by a substantial section of its population will remain weak unless the government takes strong measures to empower it.

3 Comparison with India

Like China, famine and food insecurity have plagued India's past inflicting hunger and death on a massive scale. According to some estimates the mortality figure for the 1769-70 Bengal famine was 10 million, while nearly 20 million perished due to famine in the second half of the nineteenth century

(Cf. Davis, 2002, who demonstrates the growing impoverishment of India and China turning them into two leading countries of the Third World). Although India was comparatively free from major famines from 1908 to 1942, the Bengal famine of 1943-44 claimed a further 3 million lives (Arnold, 1988). Independent India has experienced acute food shortages in the 1960s and mid 1980s. Simultaneously India has also become self-sufficient in food grain since the 1980s. Then came the reforms in the nineties and they have generated heated debates about their impact on Indian economy and society. A summary of various studies shows that there were some positive signs for the 1990s. Literacy improved, fertility declined, real rural wages showed a rising trend, and the GDP has grew at an average of 5 to 6 per cent in the early years of the century (Bhalla and Hazell, 2003). Many of these may have benefited the poor in India also. However on the negative side, poverty continues for a large number of people, employment growth leaves much to be desired, the low and poor quality of education and environmental degradation pose major challenges. Although India has contributed to the much talked about IT (information technology) industry worldwide, the country's share in world trade and growth in per capita income remained much too sluggish years after the reforms that were initiated in the early 1990s and has not grown fast enough to pull more people out of poverty.

The effect of reforms on agriculture and on food security has been a subject of intense debate mainly because of a number of contradictory trends. First, although agriculture continues to occupy a predominant position in the Indian economy, its share in GDP declined from 44.8 per cent in 1977-78 to only 27.6 per cent in 1990-2000 at constant 1993-4 prices. But there was little decline in agriculture's share in employment. The share of employment in agriculture declined only from 73.9 per cent in 1972-73 to 60.2 per cent by 1999-2000. Hence 60 per cent of the national workforce was producing a little more than one-fourth of GDP. Available data even with differing interpretations indicate a sharp deceleration in the growth rate of agriculture during the 1990s and crop production in particular. The growth rate of all crops taken together (the main component of the agricultural sector) decelerated from 3.46 per cent per annum during 1980-81 to 1990-91 to just 2.38 per cent per annum during 1990-91 to 1999-2000 (Bhalla and Hazell, 2003, p. 3474).

The decline in the growth of crop production has proved detrimental to employment growth in agriculture in the reform decade of the 1990s. Many reasons have been cited for this deceleration of agricultural growth in India: technological stagnation, declining growth rate of investment in infrastructure, falling prices, surplus cereal production etc. Parallel to this trend has been a higher growth rate in employment in both rural and urban non-agricultural sectors. Although there have been increases in labour productivity and real wages in agriculture but increases in wages of the non-agricultural sector have been higher. Therefore there has been a gradual shift from the primary sector to manufacturing, trade, transport and service sectors. Yet the central problem seems to be that nearly 60 per cent of the total workforce continues to be that of agricultural labourers. The rate of decline of this workforce has been slow; hence an unusually large number of people will continue to be engaged in agriculture characterized by low productivity. Many of them as in other sectors of the economy have been underemployed. So a starkly contradictory situation has prevailed in India for some time. While incomes, GDP and productivity have increased but lack of employment and weakening social benefits have reduced the entitlements of millions of people.

India has 2.4 per cent of the landmass of the world and about 17 per cent of its population according to the census of 2011. Its population is now increasing at the rate of 1.2 per cent per annum, while China's population is increasing at the rate of around 0.5 per cent, while accounting for 6.5 per cent of world landmass and around 20 per cent of its population. In the decade following the mid-1990s, the annual rate of increase of population in India declined from 2.1 per cent to 1.9 per cent but with significant regional variations. The rate of population growth in the state of Bihar increased from 2.2 to 2.5 per cent, U.P. (Uttar Pradesh) and Rajasthan remained stagnant at 2.3 per cent and 2.5 per cent respectively. M.P. (Madhya Pradesh) managed to reduce it from 2.4 to 2.22 and the state of Andhra Pradesh was most successful in reducing it from 2.1 to 1.3 in the decade following the mid-90s. Another noteworthy aspect is that nearly 37 per cent of marriages involved girls below the minimum prescribed age of 18 years. States with high population growth rates had higher ratios: Bihar, 58 per

cent, U.P., 50 per cent, M.P., 51 per cent, Rajasthan, 57 per cent. Clearly the Child Marriage Restraint Act needed to be enforced more vigorously.

Despite such uneven and not so satisfactory decline in population growth rates, the food security of the country was not threatened, as India was considered self-sufficient in food production. India was a net exporter of food grain consecutively in the early years of the first decade of the century. However official figures show that per capita availability of food grains had declined at the rate of 0.28 per cent during the 1990s. It was rising at the rate of 1.2 per cent in the 1980s. Figures show that the consumption of the bottom 30 per cent of the population declined in the 1990s although it improved for the richer states and classes of the country. Official figures show that the number of people above the poverty line reduced although the poverty line came to be defined on the basis of income whereas in the 1960s it was based on nutritional intake. Nearly three-fourths of the country's population was not getting the minimum 2400 calories required per day (Patnaik, 2004, 2005) and this has not shown any substantial improvement.

Indeed a large number of people in India are caught in the web of structural poverty. Endemic malnutrition and hunger prevails. Till recently roughly half of all Indian children were undernourished, half of all adult population suffered from anaemia and one third of all children born in India were underweight. At the beginning of the first decade it was estimated that nearly 50 million Indians were starving while the country was saddled with a huge surplus stock of over 60 million tonnes of food grain as against the buffer norm of 24.3 million tonnes on which more than Rupees 4 crores (40 million) a day was being spent as maintenance cost (*Down to Earth*, August 31, 2002, p. 7). The huge stocks of food grain held by the government's Food Corporation of India could have been used to feed people below the poverty line and in times of drought or other such crises. The public distribution system (PDS) has had leakages since it buys grain at higher prices and is unable to sell it cheap to the poor due to market considerations. This combined with the lack of purchasing power and adequate employment keeps food out of reach of the poor. As a result even starvation deaths have been reported from some parts of India. Officials deny them saying these deaths are caused by disease rather than hunger. But experts have pointed out that technically this may be correct but such diseases have been caused in the first instance by consumption of infected or inedible food. Although there is a food-for-work programme that can be dated back to colonial times when the famine code was devised but clearly because of the very nature of its policies the huge stocks of grain are not readily available to those who need them the most (Sharma, 2001).

The central hypothesis of the present study is that food self-sufficiency does not necessarily ensure food security. 'Food security' means that in any given society its members are able to get the nutrients that are adequate for maintaining a healthy life and normal activity at all times. This implies that a region or a country not only has stable market conditions and sufficient food-supply but also that all people have access to sufficient food, a norm adopted by Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO). The tentative conclusion about China and India seems to be that while both countries effect a transition from a planned to a market economy (with some important differences) their systems have to make their relief and disaster intervention mechanisms stronger to enable their poor to have better access to food. In the long run both countries have to evolve a new social security system for their new poor and low-income groups that is appropriate to the kind of culture-specific market society the two countries have.

Recent assessments of the technocratic solutions and market-led growth solutions hunger have led to debates that now are questioning the very idea of 'food security'. The limitations of the 'Green Revolution' have been pointed out given the long-term negative impact on environment it has had in many parts of the world. Moreover many studies has shown that it has been taken advantage of farmers that are already privileged leading to disempowerment of small cultivators. Critical perspectives on the corporatization of food, awareness of local ecologies and assertion of rights of small peasants have sown the seeds of the idea of 'food sovereignty' that goes beyond the idea of 'food security'. The latter limits itself to adequacy of food production, building buffer stocks and

strengthening access to food while 'food sovereignty' is about having control over what people wish to produce, market and consume in a democratic and ecologically and culturally sensitive manner. This has got strengthened by the campaign of the transnational agrarian movement Vía Campesina from the late 1990s although its roots and impact in India and China are still relatively weak (Edelman, 2014, Burnett and Murphy, 2014, Hospes, 2013).

4 India and China: some lessons for each other

If we examine the recent history of China and compare it with that of India, several significant aspects stand out. Both countries became independent nations at the end of 1940s. China under the rule of the Communist party built its own brand of socialism while India also pursued a path of development that had a huge component of state intervention. The problems of government/public sector became evident by the 1970s. Both countries initiated reforms and are currently battling with new challenges thrown up by restructuring, liberalization, privatisation and the growth of market forces. As analysts like Amartya Sen and Jean Drèze have shown the achievements of the reform period do not necessarily negate those of the pre-reform era. Indeed the high rates of economic growth have been made possible because of the base provided by the pre-reform era. In fact the social, educational and economic foundation laid by the pre-reform decades in both countries was reasonably strong which is proved by the stability demonstrated by the two countries. This is in contrast to the chaos experienced in the former USSR and many Eastern European countries.

The levels and quality of achievements of India and China are also different. China scored over India in many crucial areas: health, literacy, life expectancy and social egalitarianism. However it had a more authoritarian regime compared to the multi-party electoral system of Indian democracy. In the post-reform period China's lead over India actually has lessened in many fields like life expectancy and provision of health care. Amartya Sen and Jean Drèze have shown this by comparing Kerala with China. Although China has experienced higher GDP growth rate but it faces new problems of inequality, environmental degradation and a huge migrant population lacking older social securities. A lot of the recent economic growth in China has been 'participatory' and not 'redistributive' (Drèze and Sen, 2002, p. 123) and the same can be said of India also despite its stronger democratic traditions. Although the reforms in both countries have led to reductions in absolute poverty but they have also rendered many people vulnerable in ways in which the market cannot take care of them. A case in point is food security. While famines have been banished from history in these two countries as they have become self-sufficient in food but the problem of strengthening access to food remains a big challenge for both countries. In India chronic undernourishment and structural poverty has continued for an unusually high number of its people while in China the dismantling of old social guarantees and slower political reform continue to weaken the access of millions to a decent food intake.

Both China and India are promising (threatening?) to become economic super powers in the present century (Acharya and Deshpande, 2000). The larger and in some senses the more fundamental question is: what paradigm of development are they going to follow? Is it going to be primarily informed by a modernity that is technologically driven and assumes that higher and ever higher levels of growth can solve the requirements of their huge populations (Feenberg, 2003, Cf. Chatterjee 1997). Such a path which is basically derived from the West if uncritically applied may not be suited for these two societies. Feeding nearly two and a half billion people is not merely a function of increasing production and productivity. There are limits to this and it involves huge environmental and social costs. The ruling elites of both countries have to make growth more participatory and redistributive to escape a paradoxical situation where dazzling prosperity coexists with hunger and malnutrition.

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