

Food, Society and Politics: A Figure of Intersections in a Democratic Polity

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Abstract: *The article deals with the interrelation between food, society and politics. The question of food entails bring two obvious issues which are politics and society. The three intersects in a certain point and hails across not only the India but also the world and at the same time food politics bring land questions. An understanding of ethics is very pertinent part of human civilisation because without ethical understanding a person or an organisation can do better for the human civilisation. The ethical questions make politics in broader senses, that's why the ethical understanding of food politics have addressed in the article. Land is limited but the needs are growing on account of that we meet, penetrates and disposes the problems of mankind in terms of food scarcity. We know that there are so many legislations have acted to cope up with the food problems but notwithstanding billions of people stay in hungry. So, it is a humbly attempt of the article to highlight the basic problems of mankind.*

Keywords: Food, Society, Politics, Ethics, Hungry

1. Introduction

Why food is one of the main political tools in the democratic polity? Because food is the fundamental need and right. So, every subjects have the right to food in a country. Politics are using the food questions for meeting, disposing controlling the social problem in a given political system. This problem overtly focuses on the relation between food, politics and society which intersects each other in any political system. Politics is a key to decision making process and it should works on the food for all in a society, on the other hand the issue of food hails the politics also. A huge number of contemporary issues around food policy issues have surfaced in a democratic system due to food for all, changes in the production of food and concerns about the nutritional quality of commercially prepared foods. The food questions are being supported and demanded from the society and bring a separate political issue in a country. So, a social issue like a food question can be politicised in that manner.

2. Objectives

In this backdrop there are three basic questions have been raised which have been addressed in the article. The questions are as follows: a) why food is a political instrument? b) Why and how food is an issue of social justice? And c) how far is the use of Biotechnology in agriculture ethical? It will be the main objectives of our research article.

3. Survey of Literatures

Some relevant literature has been properly reviewed and made an understanding for our research area which has been captured under a research article title. Wants are unlimited, but means to satisfy wants are limited. There is scarcity; there will be trade-offs¹. The question of food is concern there are two dimensions of knowledge: normative and empirical have been addressed the issues of the political action and political contention generally. But in contrast history shows the Europeans have used a variety of policy

and social-movement tactics to influence not only the home land but the outside (Asia, Africa and Latin Americas) also. On the other hand American diplomats apply pressure to alter European political choices about what not to grow and eat². The persistence of traditional values and valued ways of doing things has strong effects on production and consumption. Idea is the central theme in the every sphere of political actions. John Maynard Keynes famously said that "the world is ruled by little else." Some effects of ideas in food politics are apparent: Ethics drive politics around food entitlements, treatment of animals as livestock and claims of future generations for sustainability³.

Food politics depends fundamentally and increasingly on ideas, not simply the material interests that have dominated political economy as an approach. Conventional food politics was answerable in a context of classical political economy: the dynamic of interests within social systems. Major interests were fairly clear: control of surplus from the land. The landless fought for land that produced food, the landed resisted. Tenants mobilized around securing their interests; landlords mobilized around defending theirs. The hungry demanded food as traditional obligation or political right. Farmers demanded better deals from traders and moneylenders and state intervention to protect their livelihoods⁴. Demands of land and food are increasingly political questions because these demands on the state for protection from the market continue today and have become globalized with international allies with less direct material interests in outcomes. The new world of food politics thus adds distinctly different dimensions. Contention exists not only around the expertise of agricultural and nutritional sciences, but also around what have been called, since the mid-20th century, alternative paths to development. Not only are distal populations recognizing a political imperative to alleviate hunger in societies our moms probably knew little about, but justifications differ, as do contending development theories advocating proper roles for states and markets⁵.

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4. Research Gap

We have found a void place in the study of food question in a socio-political aspects from the brief review of literature. The void place should be understood as the research gap of our study that should be fulfilled. The gaps are all about the food question shapes as the very important issue in the socio-political aspect in a country.

5. Methodology

Research is a process of systematic inquiry that entails collection of data, documentation of critical information and analysis, interpretation of that data/information, in accordance with suitable methodology/methodologies set by specific professional fields and academic disciplines. Research must follow logical and systematic fashion because no research work can be viable without these two important things. A certain type of methodology or approach is the essential parts for doing a research work properly. Here we put an approach for doing an inquiry as the form of research work namely the qualitative research methodology because through this approach we can draw an attention and address to our research problem. Why we use the qualitative research approach for addressing the research problem for better understanding. Because, it seeks to tell the story of a particular group's experiences in their own words and is therefore focused on narratives. It focuses on the 'why' rather than the 'what' of social phenomena.

6. Why Food is a Political Instrument?

The first research question of our research article has been addressed by four sub headings.

6.1 Political Actions

Food politics is closely linked to land problem because it has related to some basic questions. The questions are who controls the land, how it controls and for how long and for what purposes? One of the brutal realities brought to light in the recent past when global food price hike causes one billion people living in hunger. They were, they are, hungry not because there is not enough food in the world but because they do not have access to enough food, primarily because they cannot afford to buy⁶. The land question is one of the vital issues in Indian polity especially where the fertile land is concern. For example, during the year of 2006-2009 the land question was entered into the penetrative zones in the political fields of West Bengal. The political arena of West Bengal was hailed during this year and it was the landmark event of agro-land-political relations in the history of politics. There are so many protests, agitations and different types of democratic means of political actions came into the front line during this year.

6.2 Food Protests

The land question rises food protests which is converted to cultural movement against an increasingly mechanized food industry has taken a number of different forms. Local food is a movement to shift food expenditures by individuals,

families, community organizations, schools, restaurants and other institutions from foods produced and shipped long distances by larger corporate entities to regional farmers and other local producers of food. Small farming interests, relatively heterogeneous products and short supply chains characterize local food markets, though there is no agreed-upon measure of the distances that constitute local. Community-supported agriculture is a mechanism for connecting consumers with local farmers⁷. Farm-to-table efforts are also part of the local food movement. Meatless Monday (Thursday in India) is a public health awareness campaign encouraging individuals and families to eat a meat-free diet at least once each week. Its focus is on preventable diseases associated with excessive meat consumption but the campaign has also been incorporated by many concerned about sustainable agriculture and the environment. Slow Food is an international movement founded in Italy in 1986 and USA established in 2000⁸.

6.3 What is to be produced?

The food industry has experienced growth in the capacity to produce food with the use of improved technologies because the productive forces are often changeable. Maximization of commercial production per unit of land yields one outcome. Yet interdependencies are still not fully understood. Derrill Watson illustrates the theoretical possibilities of "win-win" strategies of agricultural intensification without environmental damage, but future ecological challenges are difficult to anticipate⁹. In developed countries, there are a number of important trends at play on the other hand the developing countries are bound to yield crops for the big brothers though a large number of the people goes to sleep with the empty stomach. We have to think of such types of event is intensifying the question of food, politics and social justice for our better understanding.

Big Food: Food manufacturing and processing is a heavily concentrated industry. The 10 largest food companies in the United States control more than half of all food sales domestically and a growing percentage of packaged food and beverage products on store shelves worldwide¹⁰. Ranked by food sales, Pepsi Co is the largest food manufacturer in the U.S, followed by Tyson Foods, Nestlé, JBS USA, and Anheuser-Busch, according to a 2013 list published by 'Food Processing' magazine. Consolidation of this industry took place in the 1970s and 1980s through a series of mergers and acquisitions. Big food has come under fire not only because a small number of players are responsible for a large percentage of the food supply chain, but because of concerns about the links between the highly processed foods they produce and the obesity epidemic both in the U.S. and worldwide. The director general of the World Health Organization, in a speech given at the 8th Global Conference on Health Promotion in Helsinki, Finland in June 2013, noted that the public health community's efforts to combat chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular disease are pitted against the economic interests of the powerful food industry. Several studies are exploring processed foods with high concentrations of sugar, refined carbohydrates, fat, salt and caffeine for addictive properties¹¹.

6.4 How Much?

What is to be produced entails an answer to how much is to be produced. We should produce food for the mankind and Biotechnology firms argue that genetic engineering is necessary to feed the world. But our question confines on the grounds of distribution: There is enough food to go around, but it is unfairly distributed. The linkage is logically tight: How much needs to be produced surely depends on how it is distributed. Debates around distributive justice and technology then interact with political feasibility. Turning diets of the global rich from meat to grain and implementing redistribution across and within countries seem implausible; mechanisms are hard to conjure¹².

Here some different points have posed on the question of hungry in the context of the amount of food. We can simplify this estimate of the amount of food in a few different ways. First, let's consider only the crops that provide substantial amounts of macronutrients. We are interested mainly in macronutrients because hunger and famine are caused by a lack of protein, fat, and carbohydrates (macronutrients), not vitamins, minerals, antioxidants (micronutrients). There are many foods that provide only small amounts of protein, fat or carbohydrates. These foods cannot contribute significantly to preventing or alleviating famine or hunger.

Second, let's start with the crops that are grown in the largest quantities. Even if a food is high in protein, fat, or carbohydrates, it does not significantly affect the total amount of macronutrients that the world produces, if it is grown in low quantities. Then, in order to quantify the total macronutrients produced, we can add the kilocalories (kcal) from each macronutrient in each crop. So the question becomes: How many kcal does the global food system produce?

Third, we can neglect the foods from animals, since most animal foods are obtained by feeding plants grown by the world agricultural system (especially corn and soy), to domesticated animals. This approach greatly simplifies the estimate of the total food produced by the world, but it should give us a good first approximation¹³.

7. Why and how Food is an issue of Social Justice?

The second research question which has captured in a title has been addressed by four sub headings.

7.1 Food and Social Justice

Now we come to our second proposition. It is all about the social justice. Man is a social animal. He needs primary facilities. Social justice is one of the primary needs of human kind through which they makes life prosperous. It is the equal access to wealth, opportunities and privileges within a society. Food is the primary need and people wants to know where their food comes from, how it was prepared, what impact it might have on their health and on the environment and what role it plays in the structures of social inequality. While the production and distribution of food is

primarily an economic activity, advocates for a variety of social justice concerns are increasingly aware of the role that food policy plays in issues of greatest concern to causes they espouse.

7.2 Domestic Food Aid

Domestic food aid is one of the significant indicators to the social justice. The National Food Security Act in 2013 has passed in India. The government offering food assistance to the lowest income Indians under the National Food Security Act in 2013. The role of the government in providing food security involves: (i) Promoting domestic production to meet the demands of the growing population. (ii) Providing minimum support prices for procurement and storage of food grains. (iii) Operating a Public Distribution System and (iv) Maintaining buffer stocks to counteract any pushing up of prices of food grains during periods of shortages. On the other hand USA have provided food assistance to the lowest income groups of the people of America. The largest single food assistance program in the country is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the provisions for which are contained in a Farm Bill that is re-authorized by Congress and signed by the president every five years. Benefits to SNAP recipients cost approximately \$75 billion in 2012¹⁴.

The West Bengal State Government has launched *Khadya Sathi Scheme* on 27 January 2016 to provide food grains at low subsidized price in the state. Under the *Khadya Sathi Scheme*, the West Bengal Government provides rice and wheat at Rs. 2 per kg to the 7.49 Crores people which are almost 90% population of the state and around 50 lakh population in west Bengal will is given rice and wheat at half rates. The beneficiaries of this scheme includes 33 lakh people of the *Jangalmahal* region, 12 lakh drought-affected people of Purulia district, tea garden workers and their families, Cyclone affected people, people of *Singur* who had lost their land, homeless people of Kolkata and the people living in the Hills region of Darjeeling under *Khadya Sathi Scheme*. The main motto of the scheme is to provide subsidized rice to the targeted beneficiaries like families living below poverty line. The price of the food is increasing day by day and under such circumstance, the condition of the poor families has become even worse since they do not have enough money to purchase food grains at market rates. This is a very noble initiative taken by West Bengal Government for helping poor and deprived families to provide them food grains¹⁵.

7.3 Food Security

Food security is another main part of social justice. It is a condition related to the availability of food supply, group of people as well as individuals' access to it. Household food security exists when all members, at all times, have access to enough food for an active, healthy life. Individuals who have food security and do not live in hunger or fear of starvation. At the 1974 World Food Conference the term food security was defined with an emphasis on supply. Food security, they said, is the availability at all times of adequate, nourishing, diverse, balanced and moderate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and

prices. Later definitions added demand and access issues to the definition. The final report of the 1996 World Food Summit states that food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. On the other hand food insecurity, is a situation of limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods.

7.4 Food and Human Health

Despite the evident and complex links between health, nutrition, agriculture and Agricultural Knowledge Science and Technology (AKST) improving human health is not generally a manifest goal of agricultural policy. Agriculture and AKST can affect a range of health issues including undernutrition, chronic diseases, infectious diseases, food safety, environmental and occupational health. Ill health in the farming community can in turn reduce agricultural productivity and the ability to develop and deploy appropriate AKST. Poor health can result from undernutrition as well as over-nutrition. Despite increased global food production over recent decades, undernutrition is still a major global public health problem, causing over 15% of the global disease burden. Protein energy and micronutrient malnutrition remain challenges, with high variability between and within countries. Food security can be improved through policies and programs to increase dietary diversity and through development and deployment of existing and new technologies for production, processing, preservation, and distribution of food.

Occupational accident and health hazards the two pertinent issue influences the food policy and socio-political activities. An estimation expressed worldwide, agriculture accounts for at least 170,000 occupational deaths each year: half of all fatal accidents. Machinery and equipment, such as tractors and harvesters, account for the highest rates of injury and death, particularly among rural labourers. Other important health hazards include agrochemical poisoning, transmissible animal diseases, toxic or allergenic agents and noise, vibration and ergonomic hazards. Improving occupational health requires a greater emphasis on health protection through development and enforcement of health and safety regulations. Policies should explicitly address trade-offs between livelihood benefits, environmental, occupational and public health risks¹⁶.

8. How far is the use of Biotechnology in Agriculture Ethical?

The third research question has been addressed by three points which has been captured in four sub headings.

8.1 What is Agricultural Ethics?

Ethics consists of the standards of behaviour our society accepts. In general, ethics is defined as the ideals, values or standards that people use to determine whether their actions are good or bad. It is what society uses to judge whether an issue or thing is acceptable and justifiable and determines responsibility and justice. Ethics provide guidelines that help one decide what the right thing to do is. On one hand, ethics

is a set of universal norms that are documented through legal or professional codes of practice, religious texts, literature and philosophy. On the other hand, ethics are values defined by a person or groups that are personal, introspective, and hence, difficult to manage for public discussion. Discussion within the agricultural realm is necessary to determine what is right and wrong, what moral standard is or should be used and why it is the proper one to justify singular or collective acts.

Ethics in agricultural biotechnology therefore encompass value judgments that cover the production, processing and distribution of food and agricultural products. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) asserts that ethical values determine its reason for being these being the values for food, enhanced well-being, human health, natural resources and nature.

8.2 Ethics and Agricultural Biotechnology

Many of the ethical issues that form part of the biotechnology debate can apply also to food and agricultural systems in general. Accepting the need to understand and tolerate societal norms or beliefs, many statements of concern are often general and broad with little explanation about what makes them disagreeable or wrong. These are as follows:

General Welfare and Sustainability: A central issue is whether the technology considers the pursuit of the greatest good together with the concept of sustainability for farmers and the environment. While a technology can provide more food it should not be to the detriment of the environment or to human health or disrupt traditional behavioural systems. In like manner, it is an ethical issue if food that can provide more and better nutrition is not made available to those who need it most. Hence, not to use a technology that has potential to improve the quality of lives of people is also a moral issue. As an environmental issue, questions raised have to do with concerns regarding environmental protection, sustainable use of biodiversity, economic growth and social equity.

Distribution of Benefits and Burdens: A concern particularly in developing countries is the concept of just distribution. Questions have to do with whether the products produced by the technology will be able to provide for those who really need them and whether they will generate wealth for the society as a whole. A technology's ability to increase or decrease the gap between the rich and poor renders it an ethical issue. This includes allegations that products derived from modern biotechnology are being introduced by private companies that have an obligation to make profits. Also up for discussion is whether a technology, while able to increase technical employment might eliminate subsistence labour as a result of replacing cultural operations.

Other concerns include exploitation or control over genetic resources, consumers' choice and rights and use of genetically modified animals. More intensive forms of animal farming have largely replaced traditional methods of raising pigs, cattle, poultry and fish for human consumption in the U.S and the else. food safety and environmental

concerns, organizations such as the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) have drawn attention to a range of practices that allow for the more efficient raising of animals for meat consumption, but these practices stress the animals, the land on which they are raised and the supply of food for human consumption. In a recent report on industrialized animal agriculture, HSUS called on people in Western countries to shift to a plant-based diet because half the world's grain crop is used to raise animals for meat, eggs, and milk. Fish farming has also come under scrutiny due to high concentrations of fish in smaller spaces than is experienced in the wild. For both land and water animals, the prophylactic use of antibiotics to promote growth and stem the spread of infection among the animals has also been questioned due to concerns that this practice may contribute to strains of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

8.3 How do we deal with Ethical Issues?

FAO (2001) recognizes that there is no single set of ethical principles sufficient for building a more equitable and ethical food and agricultural system. However, it recommends the following actions that individuals, states, corporations and voluntary organizations in the international community can take: the recommendations are as follows: i) Creating the mechanisms to balance interests and resolve conflicts; ii) Supporting and encouraging broad stakeholder participation in policies, programs, and projects; iii) Encouraging individuals, communities and nations to engage in dialogue and ultimately, to do what is ethical; iv) Ensuring that decision-making procedures in international food and agriculture policy are well understood and transparent; v) Fostering the use of science and technology in support of a more just and equitable food and agriculture system; vi) Ensuring that programs, policies, standards and decisions always take ethical considerations into account so as to lead to enhanced well-being, environmental protection and improved health; vii) Periodically reviewing ethical commitments and determining whether or not they are appropriate, in the light of new knowledge and changes in circumstances¹⁷.

9. Conclusion

Before conclude our research article we may mention some findings and put suggestions which may be helpful for not only the researchers, policy makers but also society as a whole.

9.1 Findings

a) a frame for new social movements have arrived from the intersections of food, politics and society; b) the movement shakes the world of humanity; c) they are, the people are hungry not because there is not enough food in the world but because they do not have access to enough food, primarily because they cannot afford to buy; d) hunger and famine are caused by a lack of macronutrients, not micronutrients; e) food for all can made it clear for the notion of social justice and sustainable development; f) agricultural ethics is a big socio-political question.

9.2 Suggestions

a) new social movement will be played major role to meet and dispose the socio-political problems; b) malnutrition is the big problem of the world population, so macronutrients and macronutrients food will be produced; c) public distribution policy should came into the existence properly; d) we should take an oath for we can be ethically sound.

I conclude our research article in some words. Idea invariably rules over politics. The idea of food politics is a tool to disposes the natural rights in terms of primary needs of the mankind despite the different political systems is concern. The developed North and the developing South both equally importance to food politics in terms of their own political culture. Despite the diversity of ethical issues in agricultural biotechnology, there is a need to understand beliefs and doctrines as this allows coexistence within and across societies and prevents social conflict. A technology's acceptance is based not only on technological soundness but on how it is perceived to be socially, politically and economically feasible from the viewpoint of disparate groups. An understanding of ethics helps determine what information is needed by society and how to deal with different opinions. A process of negotiation based on trust is essential to enable stakeholders to participate in debates and decision making. Social justice is an issue through which we can penetrates and disposes our social problems. Food is one of the primary desires of mankind. If we provide sufficient and proper food to the subjects then social justice will be properly addressed, for this very cause the food security is the main concern of the state matter. So many legislations, rules and regulations have formed to meet the basic problems of mankind but nonetheless major portion of the world population stay hunger even in the present day. So, what we are doing for?

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