



PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM IN INDIA FROM A WAR-TIME RATIONING MEASURE TO LEGAL ENTITLEMENT

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ABSTRACT

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Public Distribution System (PDS) is an Indian food security system established under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food, and Public Distribution. PDS developed as a strategy of managing shortages through the inexpensive distribution of foodgrains at reliable rates. PDS has been in use in India for more than eighty years. Present paper is an attempt to trace the development of Indian public distribution system, a mechanism for ensuring food security in India. The changing functions of the public distribution system over a long span of time since its inception is discussed in present paper. This paper is descriptive and exploratory in nature and is based on secondary data collected from the various authentic sources like research paper, government websites, newspapers and other important sources.

KEY WORDS: PDS; National Food Security Act 2013; COVID-19; 2nd World War

INTRODUCTION

The Public Distribution System (PDS) is an Indian food security system established under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food, and Public Distribution. PDS developed as a strategy of managing shortages through the inexpensive distribution of foodgrains at reliable rates. The Central and State Governments share responsibility for running PDS. The Food Corporation of India (FCI) is entrusted with responsibility of procuring, storing, transporting, and allocating food grains in bulk to the State Governments by the Central

Government. The State Governments are in charge of carrying out the operational duties, such as allocating resources within the State, identification of eligible, issuing ration cards, and monitoring the operation of Fair Price Shops (FPSs), among other things. Wheat, rice, sugar, and kerosene are now the commodities allocated to the States/UTs for distribution under the PDS. Pulses, edible oils, iodized salt, spices, and other commodities of mass consumption are also distributed by several States/UTs through PDS shops. (*Public Distribution System*, n.d.)

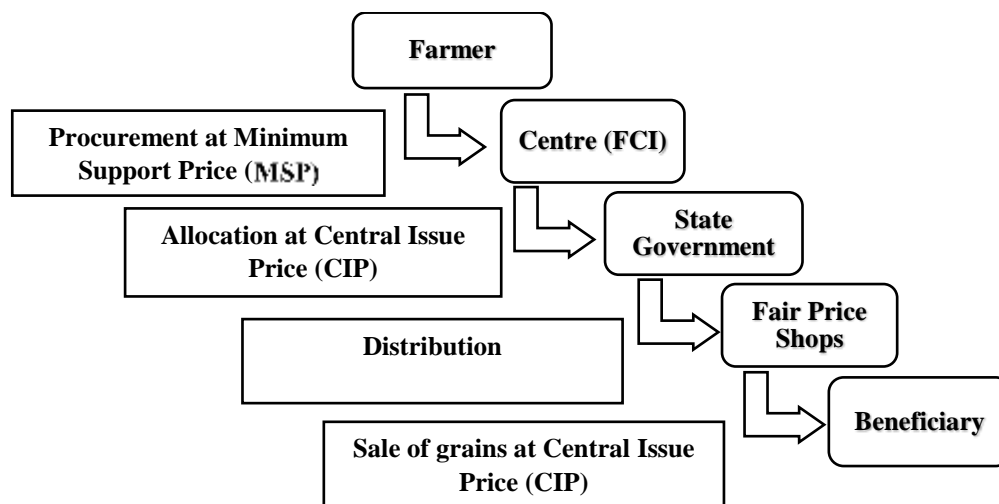


Fig. 1. Food supply chain from the farmer to beneficiary.

This paper is an attempt to trace the development of Indian public distribution system, a mechanism for ensuring food security in India. The changing functions of the public distribution system over a long span of time since its inception is discussed in present paper.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Mooij (1998) in his paper tries to comprehend the key characteristics of the public distribution system throughout its history, the social processes that resulted in the emergence and subsequent development of distribution policy, and the numerous roles that PDS has played throughout its existence.

Pal (2011) in his research paper critically analyses the organizational structure and their loopholes in the functioning of agencies like Food Corporation of India & Central Warehousing Corporation engaged in the procurement, transportation, storage and distribution. The paper also suggests remedial measures to make the PDS transparent, efficient and effective without which the vision of food for all cannot be attained in India.

Singh (2014) came to the conclusion that the empirical data indicates that PDS performed better in the latter stages (1991 and later) in terms of inflation control and poverty alleviation. PDS and the green revolution assisted in preventing starvation and hunger, and additional social services were gradually added to the mix. In terms of reducing poverty, PDS played a better role in rural India.

George and McKay (2019) concluded that the PDS is one of the key components of government policy addressing nutrition and food security. Its numerous inefficiencies, however, limit its ability to efficiently distribute food to people in need. The introduction of the NFSA in 2013 improved the PDS by giving it formal support, which has been viewed as a positive response. The assessment shows that legislative changes aimed at increasing the PDS and NFSA's

operational effectiveness and sustainability are essential for its success.

OBJECTIVE OF THE PAPER

1. To analyse the historical underpinning of Public Distribution System in India since its inception.
2. To examine the changing functions of PDS over a period of time since its inception.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present paper is descriptive and exploratory in nature. It is based on secondary data collected from the various authentic sources like research paper, government websites, government publications, newspapers and other important sources.

EVOLUTION OF PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM

Rationing was initially established by the British Government in 1939 in Bombay as a mechanism to ensure equal distribution of food grains to urban consumers in the face of increasing prices. PDS has been in use in India for more than eighty years. In India, however, the notion of the Public Distribution System first appeared in its present form in 1942, as a result of a shortage of food grains during World War II. Hence the journey of PDS begins with the war time rationing measure. Thus, rationing in times of crisis, particularly during famine and wars, was the historical forerunner of today's national policy of price stabilisation of food grains and management of food grains. (Pal, 2011)

Jos Mooij, a former associate professor and deputy rector for educational affairs at the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS), the Hague, Holland, in his paper named "The political economy of the Public Distribution System in India" Published in Journal of Peasant Studies, Vol. 25, No. 2, pp. 77-

101, 1998., classified PDS can in three phases viz. (1). The Emergence of PDS, 1939 to 1965, (2). Food Policy 1965 to 1990; Consolidation and Emergence of Special Program and (3). Food Policy after 1991; Changes under Economic Adjustment. After publication of this paper, since 1998 continuous development is occurring in the Indian economy as well as in the PDS in India. One such major shift can be in 2013 when National Food Security Act was passed and the right to food became a legal right of the citizen of India. During the time of COVID-19 pandemic also PDS has played a significant role in ensuring food security in the country by the providing over and above the regular entitlement. Considering the development till present and for the convenience of understanding PDS can be categorised in the following categories;

- The Emergence of PDS, (1939 to 1965)
- Food Policy (1965 to 1990): Consolidation and Emergence of Special Program
- Food Policy after 1991: Changes under Economic Adjustment
- National Food Security Act 2013; welfare to rights-based approach
- PDS during COVID-19: from March 2020

THE EMERGENCE OF PDS (1939 TO 1965)

In India, the public food distribution system did not just appear overnight. Between 1939 and 1965, a lengthy process of about 25 years, it underwent development. Throughout this period of 25 years, the system was essentially disbanded many times before being restored a few years later.

This phase of the development of the PDS can also be broken into three viz.

1. From 2nd world war to independence (1939 to 1947)
2. First decade of independence (1947 to 1957)
3. Food Supply Scenario (1957 to 1965)

1. From 2nd world war to independence (1939 to 1947)

The Government of India's initial concern following the start of World War II in regards to food was related to prices, particularly wheat prices. Inflation was high during these years and pushed up grain prices. In 1943, the Foodgrains Policy Committee recommended the implementation of rationing in urban areas of India with a population of more than 100,000, a daily minimum ration of one pound of cereals (roughly 1600 kcal) per person, even if imports were required, and the creation of an effective procurement system. These purchase and distribution strategies persisted for a while after the war. The government continued to view the food situation as sound and good, despite the fact that output was insufficient. After Independence and partition, the situation only got worse. 82 percent of the subcontinent's population, 75 percent of its wheat

production, and 69 percent of its irrigated land were in independent India.(Chopra, 1988, p. 61)

2. First decade of independence (1947 to 1957)

In December 1947 a policy of decontrol was announced. Indian agriculture produced a lot of food. From 4.7 million tonnes in 1951 to 0.8 million tonnes in 1954, foodgrain imports decreased. India was seen to be on the verge of becoming self-sufficient, and government interference and control could gradually fade away (Chopra, 1988, p. 84-106). But in 1955, food issues returned. In addition to the unfavourable weather, earlier low food grain prices had a negative impact on productivity. Foodgrain demand was greater than supply in 1957. Free market distortions become more and more obvious. The Indian government once more changed its food policy and reinstated regulations in 1957 (Chopra, 1988, p. 103-124). A second watershed in the development of Indian distribution policy occurred in the year 1957.

3. Food Supply Scenario (1957 to 1965)

In 1957-58 the distribution of foodgrain through PDS was 3.1 million tonnes and the number of Fair Price shops (FPSs) was 38 thousand. This figure is dramatically increased in 1965-66 with 10.1 million tonnes of distribution of foodgrain and 110 thousand FPSs (see appendix I). Large-scale imports made possible by US Public Law-480 (PL-480) circumstances considerably aided the expansion of PDS between 1957 and 1965, both in terms of food provided and shop count. The United States gave India some wheat as a gift, and some of it was purchased with local currency. These rupees were invested in a fund that may be used for international development. The USA used PL-480 as a means of getting rid of their excess wheat and to bolster domestic farm prices. PL-480 served as a significant tool for US foreign policy at the same time (Friedmann, 1982), giving the US a potent way to enforce its will on India. India imported almost 50 million tonnes of foodgrains between 1958 and 1966, the majority of it in compliance with PL-480 regulations. In its peak year of 1966, India imported more than 10 million tonnes, or almost 14% of the entire amount of foodgrain available in the nation. Foodgrain prices during this time were particularly low as a result of these imports. According to Mundle (1981, p. 135-166), there existed a particular price regime throughout these years in which extra, imported supply caused the equilibrium price to drop to a lower level. Because of this strategy, "the government successfully halted a potential shift in the terms of trade during this period in favour of agriculture. It is hardly unexpected that the Indian government was eager to keep prices low and favour industry over agriculture. It is consistent with the era's overarching development agenda. The development of a modern industrial sector was emphasised, particularly in the Second and Third Plans (1955-1955). In these Plans food policy was

predominantly regarded as a means to contain price rises and inflation.

For India's public distribution system, the years 1994 to 1965 saw significant changes that proved to be another turning point. Foodgrains Prices Committee is Established in 1964. The Food Corporation of India (FCI) was suggested to be established by the committee. In addition, the Foodgrains Prices Committee welcomed the establishment of an Agricultural Prices Commission (currently Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices) to provide ongoing advice to the Government of India on agricultural price policy and price structure in light of the requirement to increase agricultural production. The commission would advise minimum support prices (MSP). Foodgrains from domestic sources began to replace imported sources as PDS supplies, and procurement costs were held at a competitive level. The intention to increase food security played a significant role in this change in the price policy for grains.

FOOD POLICY (1965 TO 1990): CONSOLIDATION AND EMERGENCE OF SPECIAL PROGRAM

The Public Distribution System gradually grew during the next quarter of a century. From 10 million tonnes annually in 1965 to more than 18 million tonnes annually by the end of the 1980s, the FCI handled an increase in the overall volume of foodgrains (Mooij, 1998). Ration shops tripled in number throughout the same time period. There were more over 350,000 FPSs by the 1980s'. Additionally, the system's cost increased over time. When compared to 25 years later, there was little to no subsidy in 1965, whilst the Central Government's subsidy varied between 25,00 and 28,00 crore rupees. In addition to this quantitative expansion, the system also underwent qualitative expansion. PDS became significantly more rural in the 1970s and 1980s. Around 75% of ration shops were situated in rural areas at the end of the 1980s. (GoI, 1992:53). More than 70% of PDS rice and more than 55% of PDS wheat was sold in rural areas (NSSO, 1989). A sizeable portion of the PDS foodgrains are consumed through special programmes run in the United States. One such instance is the Karnataka Green Card Scheme.

FOOD POLICY AFTER 1991: CHANGES UNDER ECONOMIC ADJUSTMENT

The subsequent phase of food distribution kicked into gear, when India implemented a structural adjustment programme in 1991, This economic reorientation has had a dual impact on how food is distributed. On the one hand, there is a tendency to stress the need for reduction or at least rationalisation, of government expenditure (Bhagwati and Srinivasan, 1993; Pursell and Gulati, 1993). On the other hand, the safety net aspects of PDS come

again to the forefront. It was stated that the government subsidies of around 50,000 crore rupees per year in the middle of the 1990s was unsustainable. The terms that were frequently used in the 1990s were "streamlining of PDS", "pruning of PDS", "revamping the system", "making PDS viable" and "subsidy load." They all emphasise how the system is not supported financially. Targeting is presented as the answer since it combines providing meals to those in need with a decrease in government spending (GoI, 1994; World Bank, 1991).

With a focus on the underprivileged, the Indian government introduced the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) in June 1997. According to the TPDS, States were obligated to develop and put into action enhanced plans for identifying the needy, delivering foodgrains to them, and distributing them at the Fair Price Shops (FPS) level in a transparent and accountable way. When the programme was first started, it was meant to help roughly 6 crore poor families, for whom an annual amount of about 72 lakh tonnes of food grains was allotted. The States identified the poor under the programme, according to State wise poverty estimates from the previous Planning Commission for 1993–1994 using the methodology of the "Expert Group on Estimation of Proportion and Number of Poor," which was led by the late Prof. Lakdawala. When the TPDS was introduced, the allocation of food grains to the States and UTs was based on average previous consumption, or the average yearly off-take of food grains under the PDS for the prior ten years. (*Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS)*, n.d.).

Antyodaya Anna Yojna (AAY), which was introduced in December 2000, was another significant development that moved TPDS toward focusing on eliminating hunger among the poorest of the BPL population. AAY included selecting one crore of the most impoverished households from among the BPL families registered with TPDS in the States and giving them food at a heavily discounted rate of Rs.2/- for wheat and Rs.3/- for rice. With effect from April 1, 2002, the scale of the problem, which was initially 25 kg per household per month, was increased to 35 kg per family per month. By year 2000 the total distribution of foodgrain reached to more than 16 million tonnes and the amount of food subsidy jumped to 9200 crore (see appendix I)

NATIONAL FOOD SECURITY ACT 2013: WELFARE TO RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

The National Food Security Act of 2013 (NFSA) 2013 represents a paradigm shift in the approach to food security from a welfare-based approach to a rights-based approach. Up to 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population are legally entitled to receive subsidised foodgrains through the Targeted Public Distribution System,

according to the Act. Therefore, the Act covers almost two thirds of the population in order to provide them with heavily subsidised foodgrains. On an all-Indian basis, the National Food Security Act (NFSA) 2013 is being implemented in all the States and UTs. Out of the total number of people covered by the NFSA 2013, 81.35 crore are eligible to get highly subsidised foodgrains. The identification of beneficiaries by States/UTs is a continual process that includes excluding ineligible/fake/duplicate ration cards, exclusion due to death, migration, etc., inclusion due to birth, as well as that of real left-out households. Up till the 2019–20 fiscal year, 80.9516 crore people have benefited from the National Food Security Act of 2013, or 98.00 percent of the maximum number of people covered by the act. Total Subsidy Released to FCI+ DCP & DBT in year 2019-20 is Rs. 1,19,944.35 Crore. In the same year total allocation and offtake foodgrains also increased to 54.925 million tons and 51.804 million tons respectively. (See Appendix I)

PDS DURING COVID-19: FROM MARCH 2020

COVID-19 pandemic seems to be one of the biggest catastrophes that a human being faced. The coronavirus epidemic has had a significant influence on economic activity as well as on the human life worldwide. In India also impact of COVID-19 can be seen as it deaccelerates growth of major economic sector. Now, there is beginning of the increasing economic activity as number of active patients of the COVID-19 are under manageable situation. Providing food at the time of pandemic was essential of the poor people who don't have sufficient savings and also don't have work to do during lockdowns due to pandemic. In India Public distribution system majorly solve the problem of food security during the pandemic as "Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana" (PMGKAY) was introduced to provide 5 kg foodgrains per person per month over and above the regular ration under the PDS.

Table 1: Special allocation and offtake of foodgrain during COVID-19 (in lakh tonnes)

Year	Allocation & Offtake	PMGKAY		ANBP (Migrant)		Non-NFSA (Covid-19)		Total		Grand Total
		Rice	Wheat	Rice	Wheat	Rice	Wheat	Rice	Wheat	
2020-21	Allocation	214.08	106.97	5.56	2.44	7.09	2.57	226.73	111.99	338.72
	Offtake	195.99	103.10	4.58	1.83	7.09	2.57	207.66	107.50	315.16
2021-22	Allocation	235.68	202.05			13.82	2.25	249.50	204.30	453.80
	Offtake	206.06	184.92			13.82	2.25	219.87	187.18	407.05
2022-23	Allocation	185.34	53.83			1.19	0.51	186.53	54.34	240.87
	Offtake	12.04	14.09			1.19	0.51	13.23	14.60	27.83

Source: <https://dfpd.gov.in/writereaddata/Portal/Magazine/FoodgrainBulletinforApril2022.pdf>

Table 1 shows the status of allocation and offtake of foodgrains during the COVID-19 pandemic. Under PMGKAY, in 2020-21 total allocations of food grains are 321.05 lakh tonnes which contain 214.08 lakh tonnes of wheat and 106.97 of rice and in the same year total offtakes of foodgrain is 299.09 which contain 195.99 of wheat and 103.10 lakh tonnes of rice. In 2021-22, total allocations of food grains are 437.93 lakh tonnes which contain 235.68 lakh tonnes of wheat and 202.05 lakh tonnes of rice and in the same year total offtakes of foodgrain is 390.98 which contain 202.06 of wheat and 184.92 lakh tonnes of rice. In 2022-23, total allocations of food grains are 239.17 lakh tonnes which contain 185.34 lakh tonnes of wheat and 53.83 lakh tonnes of rice and in the same year total offtakes of foodgrain is 26.13 lakh tonnes which contain 12.04 of wheat and 14.09 lakh tonnes of rice (offtakes of 2021-22 are upto April 2022). The total amount of foodgrains allocated during pandemic under PMGKAY is 997.95 lakh tonnes which contains 635.10 lakh tonnes of rice and offtakes under PMGKAY in the same period is 716.20 lakh

tonnes which contain 414.09 lakh tonnes of rice and 302.11 lakh tonnes of wheat. It can be said that a significant amount of the foodgrains is allocated during the pandemic time under PMGKAY.

After the countrywide lockdowns from march 2020, government allocated food grain for migrant under Atma Nirbhar Bharat Program (ANBP). In this scheme total of 8 lakh tonnes of foodgrains are allocated from which 6.41 lakh tonnes are offtaken. Other than these two schemes, special allocation for non NFSA categories are also made.

CHANGING FUNCTIONS OF THE PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM

Public Distribution System has been evolved in more than eighty years in India. Not only the amount of foodgrains distributed through PDS has increased many folds but its coverage in the rural areas of the country also increased. In this journey of evolving of PDS, its functions are seeming to be change over a period of time. In this section we discuss some changing functions of the PDS.

- In the beginning, when PDS was just getting started, its goal had widened. Initially, the PDS was viewed as a way to deal with food emergencies through maintaining price stability, but after 1957, the concept of giving food to the poor at appropriate prices emerged. The distribution of imported goods and the stability of consumer prices occurred between 1957 and 1964. As part of the low wage strategy to assist industrial growth during this time, distribution during this period was mostly centred in metropolitan centres, which helped with industrial policy and economic growth. The safeguarding of farmers' incomes and the subsequent stimulation of agricultural production become fundamental objectives of the food policy starting in 1964–1965. The Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACAP), formerly known as the Agriculture Price Commission, was established as a result to continuously advise the Government of India on agricultural price policy and price structure in light of the requirement to increase agricultural productivity. Foodgrains from domestic sources began to replace imported sources as PDS supplies, and procurement costs were held at a competitive level. The intention to increase food security played a significant role in this change in the price policy for foodgrains.
- Between 1965 to 1990, PDS significantly grew and came together. PDS was now the preferred programme among political leaders, particularly in the southern part of India, as a welfare-focused initiative to win vote bank of people. Leading politicians intentionally try to associate their own personality, generosity or parental-like caring with special feeding initiatives. In Tamil Nadu, Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran established the Chief Minister's Nutritious Noon Meal Programme, which was later renamed as the "Puratchi Thaliavar (Revolutionary Leader) MGR Nutritious Meal Programme". N.T. Rama Rao, the chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, was given the nickname "anna" (older brother) because of his involvement in the ₹ 2 per kilogramme rice programme. Tamil Nadu also uses kinship terms in this regard. (Mooij, 1998).
- During (1990 to 2013), It is difficult to comprehend the progress of food policy in the 1990s just in terms of populist politics. Structural adjustment policies is another factor which affects the PDS in this period. Reducing the subsidies and restructuring the entire system were topics of consideration. During this time, the distribution of foodgrains to targeted populations became the main responsibility of PDS. The TPDS programme from 1997 and the AAY programme from 2000 both provide insight on this role of PDS.
- By 2013, a significant breakthrough had been made in ensuring food security. The National Food Security Act (NFSA) 2013, which was passed on July 5, 2013, marked a paradigm shift in the approach to food security, moving away from a welfare-based strategy to a rights-based approach. Up to 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population are legally entitled to receive subsidised foodgrains through the Targeted Public Distribution System, according to the Act. The government's voluntary management of price stability and provision of suitable prices to the producers has now turned into a legal obligation.
- During COVID-19 PDS proved to be a life saviour. If we talk of food security in the country, PDS is already doing its work by providing foodgrains to the poor at subsidised reasonable prices. During the pandemic period, when there is strict lockdown in the cities, peoples are losing their jobs, migrant labours are helpless and prevalence of depression and uncertainty everywhere. In this scenario, through PDS government provided foods to the needy peoples. Government introduces The PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) was in March 2020, and it began distributing additional free-of-cost food grains (rice/wheat) to about 80 crore NFSA beneficiaries on a monthly scale of 5 kgs per person, over and above their regular monthly NFSA food grains. Government also introduces the One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) that will help in portability of ration card and help the migrant workers.

CONCLUSION

The above discussion is to elaborate the historical underpinning of the food management system of in India for providing food security. Historical journey of PDS has been traced through five phases viz, The Emergence of PDS, (1939 to 1965); Food Policy (1965 to 1990): Consolidation and Emergence of Special Program; Food Policy after 1991: Changes under Economic Adjustment; National Food Security Act 2013; welfare to rights-based approach; PDS during COVID-19: from March 2020. It can be concluded from the above that the functions of the PDS is changing over the period of time according to policies and situation prevailing in the country.

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APPENDIX I

Years	Distribution of Foodgrain (in million ton)	Number of Fair Price Shops (in thousand)	Total Subsidy on Foodgrain (in crore)
1950-51	7.6	-	-
1951-52	7.9	-	-
1952-53	6.7	-	-
1953-54	4.6	-	-
1954-55	2.2	-	-
1955-56	1.6	-	-
1956-57	2.1	18	-
1957-58	3.1	38	-
1958-59	4.0	46	-
1959-60	5.2	52	-
1960-61	4.9	51	-
1961-62	4.0	48	-
1962-63	4.4	51	-
1963-64	5.2	60	-
1964-65	8.7	102	-
1965-66	10.1	110	-
1966-67	14.1	136	-
1967-68	13.2	143	-
1968-69	10.2	140	-
1969-70	9.4	139	-
1970-71	8.8	122	10.0
1971-72	7.8	121	-
1972-73	11.4	165	170.0
1973-74	11.4	201	250.0
1974-75	10.8	222	270.0
1975-76	11.3	240	286.1
1976-77	9.2	236	441.0
1977-78	11.7	239	534.0
1978-79	10.2	239	557.0
1979-80	11.6	244	-
1980-81	15.0	284	-
1981-82	13.0	283	-
1982-83	14.8	278	944.0

1983-84	16.2	284	1091.0
1984-85	13.3	302	1353.0
1985-86	15.8	315	1891.0
1986-87	17.8	325	2000.0
1987-88	18.7	333	2000.0
1988-89	18.6	345	2200.0
1989-89	16.4	352	2476.0
1990-91	16.0	358	2450.0
1991-92	16.6	399	2850.0
1992-93	16.6	409	2800.0
1993-94	14.5	424	5537.0
1994-95	12.6	433	5100.0
1995-96	10.7	-	5377.0
1996-97	-	-	-
1997-98	-	-	7500.0
1998-99	18.4	-	7800.0
1999-2000	16.8	-	9200.0
2000-01	11.7	-	12010.0
2001-01	13.5	-	17494.0
2002-03	20.0	-	24176.0
2003-04	23.9	-	25160.0
2004-05	29.3	-	25746.4
2005-06	31.1	-	23071.0
2006-07	31.3	-	23828.0
2007-08	33.2	-	31260.0
2008-09	34.5	499.8	43668.0
2009-10	42.4	504.1	58242.0
2010-11	43.7	505.2	62929.56
2011-12	43.1	506.9	72370.90
2012-13	44.8	515.3	84554.00
2013-14	44.5	515.2	89740.02
2014-15	44.5	516.8	113171.16
2015-16	49.5	546.8	134919.00
2016-17	52.1	527.7	130672.96
2017-18	54.0	526.3	139981.69
2018-19	52.4	534.4	171127.48
2019-20	52.8	540.4	-
2020-21	51.8	537.7	-
2021-22	48.5	533.6	-

Source: The political economy of the public distribution system in India, published in journal of peasant studies, vol. 25, no 2, pp 77-101, 1998.

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