Abstract of the Thesis

POLITICAL ECONOMY OF HUNGER AND DEPRIVATION: A STUDY OF ORISSA IN INDIA

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Hunger and deprivation are undesirable in any society from both economic growth and social justice point of view. However, the highest proportion of population below poverty line amongst all Indian states is found in Orissa and that has not reduced since 1993-94 (as per the estimation of Planning Commission of India). The incidence of basic deprivation like health, education and housing also remain high in this state. Therefore, this thesis attempts to study the problem of hunger and deprivation (nature, extent and causes) in the state of Orissa.

While hunger implies a 'discomfort or painful sensation caused by want of food' (Dreze and Sen, 1989), deprivation implies a state of observable and demonstrable disadvantage relative to the reference group or local community (Townsend, 1987). Both hunger and deprivation are all encompassing and crosscutting themes, and they deem a multi-disciplinary approach to understand the phenomena. Therefore a multi disciplinary approach has been considered here to study the problem. The political economy approach has been emphasised as political economy approach is a dominant approach in economics and often adopted to study hunger and deprivation, where it examined the role of the structural and institutional process that yielded hunger and deprivation in the state of Orissa in India. The study is based on both primary data and secondary data. It uses simple arithmetic, statistic (wherever required econometrics) and visual technique for analysis purposes.

The main findings of the study are as follows; (i) we found a higher variation of hunger and deprivation across social groups, geographical regions, occupations, education status, landholding, and dependency ratio. The reasons are (a) failure of agriculture (b) the institutional and structural rigidities and (c) the colonial rule. However, a single most important variable that can explain the higher incidence of hunger and deprivation in Orissa to a greater extent is the social structure and social hierarchy prevailing in the state, where the SCs/STs, women and children faced most disadvantages. As the SC/ST communities concentrate in specific regions (southern and part of northern Orissa) regional disparities in hunger and deprivation has been observed. (Chapter 2) (ii) A slow and lopsided structural transformation, which failed to bring trickle down effect is observed. Further, the rate of change in output has not much affect on the rate of change in hunger and deprivation as there is less employment growth in the primary sector, where much of the hunger and deprived people depends. The regional picture shows that in all respects southern region and SC/ST social groups are the most vulnerable and prone to hunger and deprivation. (Chapter 3) (iii) It is found that absence of access to land and related resources as the reason behind hunger and deprivation. (Chapter 4) (iv) Chapter 5 inferred from the micro level case studies that there is prevalence of exclusion (in explicit or implicit form) of Dalits and SCs/STs from various socio-economic spheres, such as exclusion in the socio-cultural institutions like educational institutions, religious institutions like temples and economic institutions like labour market, etc. And that might be the reason why Dalits and SCs/STs are more prone to hunger and deprivation compared to any other community of other castes. (v) The role of public provisioning in reducing hunger and deprivation is examined and it is found at the macro level that some of the factors responsible for the ineffectiveness of public provisioning are the inadequate entitlement and inadequate coverage. The micro surveys indicate existence of various public provisioning institutions, though less in number but their functioning to achieve
the desired goals are very poor and highly biased towards upper castes. From the household perspective, some of the reasons for the ineffective functioning of the schemes are inadequate coverage, irregular and insufficient entitlement, wrong targeting of household, wrong targeting of commodities and meagre assistance (subsidy). Therefore, when the support-led development has been considered an alternative to achieve development quicker, there must be adequate coverage with adequate amount (Chapter 6). (vi) it is also found that drought and flood are a regular phenomenon and they are also responsible for hunger and deprivation. Cyclone, though not a regular phenomenon, it also harm to the society and economy a lot. Though the impacts of natural calamities are hazardous for all, it hits the poor most due to the political economy reasons. (Chapter 7) (vii) Displacement in the name of development by the neo-liberal prescriptions of special economic zone and export promotion zone is found to be a reason producing hunger and deprivation and subsequently lumperisation in the state. The analysis suggests that the impact of displacement is felt disproportionately among the SCs/STs, Dalits or untouchables as the displacement regions are the inhabitation of these population groups (Chapter 8).

The study inferred that failure of both growth and distribution (necessary and sufficient conditions respectively) contributed to higher incidence of hunger and distribution in the state. However, given the subsistence level of growth, the impact of hunger and deprivation could have been less had there been egalitarian distribution. The distribution remains highly biased towards upper social groups. This biasness is also a reason for regional disparities. For instance, southern Orissa, where there is higher percentage of socially disadvantaged groups, faces the maximum level of hunger and deprivation in the state. Therefore, it is required to reduce the disparities to reduce the higher incidence of hunger and deprivation in the state. The disparities can be reduced through land redistribution followed by other agrarian reforms (as landlessness is increasing and as there is low productivity and large dependants in agriculture), through effective implementation of public provisioning and through positive discriminations.