CHAPTER-VI

CONCLUSION

It is rather reprehensible that after sixty years of India’s independence, poverty and famine still persist and are found in unprecedented scale in Orissa and Kalahandi. The complex nature of Kalahandi’s problem is unique in several respects. There have been a number of programmes which have been attempted by the State and Central Governments and a few foreign agencies to address the question of drought and poverty in Kalahandi. However, studies show that the bulk of the Government’s fund does not reach the rural areas directly due to various leakages in the transitional process. Today India aspires to become a developed nation that makes poverty removal an utmost challenge. There were number of schemes in the past having very catchy slogans like ‘garibi hatao’ (banish poverty), or even now officially "operational", programmes which has failed to address the stark reality of Kalahandi. Numerous development schemes also met the same destiny. There are many intricate economic models and statistical techniques which have been developed over the years to measure poor and non-poor. For instance, the method that draws a line between the two groups of poor, ‘below poverty line’ and ‘above poverty line’, does not hold a great deal of difference. When we distinguish their food, clothing, habitat, health, and education of their children, it is all the same.

The link between economic and poverty reduction is getting weakened. Despite high growth rate during 1990s, the pace of reduction of poverty has been slow, raising an important question for the future poverty reduction strategies that needs to pay attention to non-growth interventions.

In the present thesis I have dealt with some significant questions regarding the impact of development in Kalahandi. Initially I have posed certain questions concerning
development and its effectiveness. By way of the preceding chapters I attempted to spell out the causes and consequences of development in Kalahandi. I understood the skepticism about ‘development’ in Kalahandi, because after all, there are an appalling lot of poor, sick, and hungry people out there. What’s to be done about it? Why there are drought and famine despite of surplus production? If ‘agricultural development’ is not the answer, then what is? Yet again, what does ‘development’ do in Kalahandi?

Indeed, I am no more indifferent to the politically tactical question of “what is to be done” than I am to the poverty and suffering of so much of the world. A brief personal assessment on this issue which I have drawn out clears the implications of my analysis. I offer it here not in order to suggest that everyone should share my politics or ideology but to layout as clearly as possible my findings and my belief that I learned and accumulated during my research work.

The complexities, intentionality of the outcome of the planning are not known even to the development planners. The development project in Kalahandi has produced and reproduced the unacknowledged and unintended structure. These unintended consequences produced by development interventions are rooted in false assumptions that simplify political process and decontextualise how power and politics are exercised within the societies. Again, to have power over the unintended consequences, state give birth to some other apparatuses and consequently it produces numbers of state institutions as well as the burgeoning side-effects. As a result, the primary object of development is not to develop the poor but the apparatus that is to do the ‘developing.’

Despite the peculiarities the development institutions remarkably standardize the problems and consequently offered standardized solutions. However, the past experience shows that success of standardize programmes are exception in Kalahandi. There are instances of successes of standardized strategies elsewhere in the country but these strategies relatively less impressive in Kalahandi. Yet again, agricultural agent instructing a natural farmer the way of cultivation is becoming a common sight in Kalahandi. It
assumes that ‘development’ is basically following the state instructions which are given by the experts who may not have a first hand experience of Kalahandi.

By now Kalahandi symbolizes poverty, hunger, starvation, sickness and child selling. What must be done to get rid of such inhuman distress? The obvious answer one would get is to eliminate poverty and its suffering. But to achieve this objective, everything rest on clarifying the tactics appropriate to the local socio-economic and political system. In most of the case, it is powerlessness that causes poverty, ill-health, hunger, and migrations. The larger goal ought, therefore, to be empowerment of the poor and the weak (although other positions are of course possible). Since poverty is the one among great number of suffering that may accompany with such distress, it is the powerlessness that ultimately underlies the surface conditions of poverty starvation. In all, planning documents in general empowerment of the poor is mentioned as often as the development. However, it often signifies no more than reservation of seats or head count ratio. Since empowerment of the poor demand structural changes in society, the ruling elites and elites in the villages are not ready to give way for such new order. The well off section of the society seldom shows willingness in this regard. By empowerment of the poor, I mean minimizing the gap between the poor and the rich, since resource is an unavoidable part of empowerment. A few talented or relatively well off do manage to get benefit of the privileges provided to the poor and the masses continue to remain deprived. The important initiative in this regard is to enable the poor to gain entry into mainstream institutions, participate on equal term, in making decision for political and economic processes. The poor also have been denied access from state institutions like hospitals, banks or such other pubic utility. Empowerment also means mobilizing themselves for demanding the rights and privileges to which they are entitled.

External interventions for institutional reforms by the ruling elite, civil society, funding agencies and international community are relatively effective in certain areas like relief measures and some extent of human development. However, they often fail to bring about any change in the socio-economic structure of the society which first of all gives birth to such inequality and hierarchical structure. Empowerment of the poor remains an
empty slogan, as we have seen in the last chapter. One could least possibly think that the local power and state power will so easily empower the poor.

While empowerment could help the poor to stand on their own feet, the governments' policy of spoon feeding makes the poor depend on the state and political leaders who are not willing to see them in the mainstream of social and national life. The spoon feeding and ad-hoc government sponsored programmes are just to eliminate one or two selected forms like hunger or migration, but not to eliminate the underlying conditions which cause these to surface. But the development discourse translates the real-world question of poverty into a simple imaginary solution by reducing the poor into statistics.

Operating on the theory that the poor and suffering people are to be delivered from their poverty and powerlessness through government agency can easily lead to a falsely universalizing view of the state. The decades of experience of Kalahandi suggests that the government's agenda of intervention for progressive reform is likely to suppress the alternative forms of actions initiated by those requiring the intervention. It is easy to enter into a complex process of bureaucracy while acting on the experts' theory. Interestingly, in all but most complex situations best serve the hegemonic interests of the state. These state created multifaceted forces must be challenged if the poor and impoverished majorities are to improve their lot. In Kalahandi, the centre, the state and the district administration, the author of the generous, empowering intervention contains all the same danger. The only difference here is their level of operation on the national and those of the local hegemony. The preoccupation of governments and government agencies is more often precisely to forestall and frustrate the processes of popular empowerment that so many anthropologists and other social scientists in their hearts seek to advance. One of the most important forms of engagement is simply the political participation in one's own society that is appropriate to any citizen.

However, eventually the participation is in making as I have discussed in the last chapter. Despite that, there are various categories of people who have been participating
in making these changes in the various ways appropriate to their circumstances, be they agricultural labour asking for minimum wage, women and weaker sections fighting for empowerment, the collision of grass root democracy with its parallel feudal institutions, or targeted farmers resisting for minimum support price. However, this is still in infant stage which needs a conducive environment to take a proper shape. People of Kalahandi resisted drought and poverty for generations. They did not wait for consultants or experts to come and tell them what must be done. At various points in these struggles, there may in fact be demands for specific kinds of advice. However, any general or uniform advice to all these groups is undesirable, but answering problem specific, localized advice is indeed desirable. Again, scholars need not intended to project that all indigenous or local practices are good, neither all of them are bad. A policy that strikes a balance between both tradition and modern system could be more sustainable and viable for the people.

Liberalization and globalization seem to push empowerment further away from the poor making them just a simple recipient of the relief measures for basic human development inputs. In the widening market system the inequalities are getting accentuate that may lead to social conflict. Thus, while building the newer institutions the existing rural institutions must be strengthened.

Therefore the main thrust argument is that we have to introduce selectively various forms of knowledge/ skills into the lives of poor people in villages and also provide them with various forms of local and modern institutions in order that they cut the vicious circle of poverty. When one talks of poverty, it is not a uniform solution of one or two types of knowledge and skill requirements, but they are at various levels and sectors and would also require attention along with the same. In the process, the poor also can afford and get quick and better returns. This is done because they cannot depend upon themselves, because in the past it has always been the experience that from what is proposed to be given as subsidy through public system, only very little of it reaches the poor. Therefore, the solution ought to be in terms of providing from public resources or otherwise, the right type of knowledge, skill and technological inputs and certain minimum infrastructure for connectivities and knowledge/skill inputs. These can help
them to come up with their own investments in different forms. However, it ought to be done with funds from public system but executed differently than what has been done during the past 60 years.

The ‘public’ is not a homogenous entity and there are divisions related to class, caste, ownership, occupation, gender, community and culture. Consequently, public action is not always beneficial for all groups. Rather, its success depends on how powerful and vocal the public is in making its demands heard. From a methodological angle, the task of identifying ‘public action’ as the explanatory variable in combating starvation deaths remains a complex one. In the development discourse the people have been grouped together as an imaginary collective subject, as have been discussed about the watershed documents. The poor, the landless, the sick, the old, the untouchables, the tribals are an imaginary collective subject. In development discourse all share the same interest and same circumstances as a single unit. However, this imaginary ‘collective subject’ is not in real-world a homogeneous group and that clearly needs to be broken up. The suffering inhabitants of Kalahandi do not all share the same interests or the same circumstances, and they do not act as a single unit. Throughout the discussion I examined that there are different level of suffering, participation and deprivation. Hence, there is neither a collective will nor a collective subject or a standard policy capable of serving it.

The bureaucracy and the political representatives are also relatively small group with different interests or at times conflicting interests. It is not always identical with the people nor is it in any of the established sense “representative” of the people. Difference of interests could be found within the governing circle as we see frequently different demands by different political set up and interest groups. Through debate on parliament and state assembly one could well recognize the group interests of different political set up. Politicians highlight starvation deaths when in opposition but deny the same charges when in power. Parliamentary criticism of the incidence of starvation deaths depends on the size of the Opposition and personalities of individual Member of Parliaments. In federal political set-up Centre-State disputes over calamity relief serves as another example. The interest represented by the ruling elites in a place like Kalahandi does not
go well together with those of the governed. Under these circumstances, it is understood that the interests represented by the well-established elites not always go along with the interest of the poor.

In the socio-economic set up, the structural position of the poor makes it clear that they would be the last ones to undertake the development project. If the development experts ask the advice of the poor, it is for their own purpose, and these normally have little to do with advancing the interests of the famous downtrodden masses. Poverty may be only one among a numerous forms of exploitation and humiliation. The task is not to eliminate one or two selective forms but to eliminate the conditions that produce such humiliation and exploitations. “poverty is not a *sui generis* fact but only a symptom of powerlessness; aid (development) projects by their very nature, whoever they claim to “target,” do not make the radical changes in political and economic structures that could alone empower the poor; therefore these projects cannot be expected to help to eradicate poverty since they only reinforce the system which in the first place causes the poverty.”

It demands a political choice that needs to focus on reform that empowers the poor instead of poverty.

There is another group, who are engaged in doing something. Starting from the local media reporters to the national and international journalists, scholars and activities who are engaged in doing something or making it known about the happening in Kalahandi. Often there is a real commitment to work for liberating, empowering social transformations among this community. Many scholars, intellectuals and volunteers in various settings who would wish to apply their energies and talents on the side of economic and political empowerment by providing enough space to the wants and needs of the people.

As it goes media is the fourth pillar of democracy and voice of the voiceless. It is the Media which has taken a leading role in exposing and drawing attention on Kalahandi. The Indian Media has been doing a commendable job of diagnosing the

---

263 See Lappe at al. 1980.
symptoms of a degenerating system. However, media reports on Kalahandi are more impressionistic and seldom investigative. The common man, fretting against a failing system and an apathetic establishment, loves dramatic exposures assuaging some of his discontent vicariously. The Indian public loves good theatrics display stretching the limit of credibility to near absurdity. However, the Media suffers from inherent weaknesses and contradictions. President Dr. A P J Abdul Kalam once commented “our Media is immaturity oversensitive, brutally critical and depressingly cynical. Sensationalism is the essence of reporting. Dog biting man is no news; man biting dog is the headline stuff.”

The stories written on Kalahandi might have positive effect in drawing attention. What in Kalahandi did it draw attention to? So many other factors get nowhere near the attention they need. Ever growing land alienation, deteriorating health system, illiteracy, migration, distress sale of agricultural products and marginalization of the poor are among many. But when fictional stories hit the headline there could be a little chance of understanding and addressing the genuine problems of Kalahandi.

A major change has been taking place across Kalahandi, in the access and control over productive resources. The increasing constraint on resources, and the alienation of local populations especially STs/SCs from their resource base, including land, forests, and water is increasing the drought distress many fold. For time immemorial Mahars have been dependent on the forests for their livelihood, but as we have seen how Mahar community have been denied access to forests. The state has not bothered to put into place a policy that would enable the Mahar and the tribal cultivators to have any security of cultivation. It is not the Mahar or the tribals who are destroying the forests but the large scale commercialization that is going on. Government programmes for plantations, and other programmes take over the slopes, without developing any viable alternatives for the tribal cultivators.

Special Acts meant for the tribal regions are ignored, or circumvented in various ways. Thus, the clause preventing transfer of tribal land to non-tribal parties is almost completely overlooked, as land transfers continue to take place in the tribal regions in the
interests of private corporations opening up the area for harmful, polluting industries. Land acquisition for public purposes is taken up to hand over tribal land to private parties, and the Panchayats Extension to the Tribal Areas Act, which sanctions complete control over land, water and forest resources to local communities in the Fifth Schedule areas has been diluted, and the power taken away from the Gram Panchayat to be handed over to the second and third tiers. Thus the tribal communities have a more and more constrained survival resource base. In addition, the investment ratio for tribal land is also very low, in terms of subsidies, incentives, and even development schemes. For instance, watershed development programmes could be useful for the poor tribal but their landholding is getting unviable.

Numerous scholars have opined about the badly run Public Distribution System (PDS) in Kalahandi. High production of foodgrains and huge quantities of buffer stock in the godowns still do not enable access to food to the needy. The inability to buy still affects more than half of Kalahandi’s population. The Public Distribution System is supposed to insulate the poor families from the impact of rising prices of essential commodities, and help them maintain minimum nutritional standards. Due to non-availability of foodgrains on day to day basis, occasional hike in issue price of PDS commodities, decreasing off have been regularly reported from Kalahandi. In fact, rice is being exported at BPL prices, which is half the economic cost of the FCI rice. Given the poor identification of BPL and APL families in the region, with not very secure grounds on which such distinctions have been made, this is meaningless in the face of distress.

Grain bank system may work in the region. In the yearly cycle of the tribals, the post-harvest periods are the times of much abundance, and there is a lot of expenditure on non-essential consumer items that undermine the economy of the tribal family. An input to encourage the tribal family to save part of the harvest produce at this time could help them in the time of crisis. The tribal districts of Orissa has helped village communities develop a sustainable system of generating grain stocks which could be used by anybody within the community in the time of need.
There is a growing feeling that without market intervention, there can be no agricultural development. But, the linkages with the market established are mostly to facilitate the farmer as a buyer. Few efforts have been made to facilitate the farmer to sell his produce, and the state is increasingly trying to withdraw from its role in ensuring MSP for even the essential agricultural products. It needs to be noted, however, that wherever direct market interventions have been taken up to facilitate selling of produce of farmers, farm prices have stabilized, and production incentives have increased. Supporting women's groups for micro-enterprise in a constructive way also helps in improving the economy of the producers in the region as also enabling profits to be channelised back to the producer community. In Kalahandi, the poor often sell their agricultural products in throw away price, however, when they buy, the pay the most. When onion prices made us gasp for breath, we were talking with onion farmers in Kalahandi. For instance, right after harvest the onions price was just one rupee per kg, however when they buy it the month of August to September, the price shot up to Rs. 10 to 15 per kg.

The other alternatives need to be looked upon are, incentive and support to production of cereals other and Paddy; decentralisation of storage, and procurement of surplus; subsidies in the form of godowns, local transport, and losses in storage, marketing, etc., and to maintain prices at the affordable rates; support to women's groups in the form of training and subsidies to facilitate decentralised PDS; entitlements and resources to the landless and the marginal and small farmers.

The differential performance of development, poverty reduction and drought mitigations of the lagging regions and the marginalised group need to be addressed significantly. There has been a shift in government policies from individual to group approach, assets transfer to capacity building and empowerment of the poor. This needs to be accelerated in Orissa, particularly in KBK region. Through SHG movement Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, consolidated long term positive effects on the livelihood of the poor. In KBK region, it is in infant stage and confined to certain block that needs to expand and reach out to the most vulnerable section of the society.
The failure of land reform and the tragedy of institutional reform in the liberalization process resulted in creation of a large mass of vulnerable groups. Most of them belong to landless labour. Slow growth of agriculture makes incapable of accommodating the growing rural population. Moreover, land is getting in short supply, which may just provide subsistence to the villagers. Therefore, it is necessary to make major shift of agricultural labour to non-farm activities and revitalizing the unorganized sector with technological upgradation and market support. Incentives and minimum security for such initiatives from the state should be a priority area.

Institutional credit to agriculture and related activities has been slow-moving. More than 90 percent of credit transaction is from non-institutions sources, which charges not only exorbitant rate of interest but also establish an exploitative relation. This has adversely affected the poor and the agricultural sector. Micro credit movement of the SHGs could contain the consequences of declining institutional credit. However, it may go farther than meeting the substance need of the poor.

While over all poverty level of the country has been declining, the planning commission reported that the poverty in KBK relatively remains the same. Consequently, it needs in-depth understanding and special effort to reach these drought and poverty stricken region. Most vulnerable among them are landless labour and women. The level of social development is lower than both state and national average, with low literacy, low level of consumptions and lower nutritional level hitting the poor hard just even to survive. To sustain the poverty reduction, overall growth of human development along with the economic development is the most needed commitment.

The need of convergence of efforts through public-private partnership (GO-NGO), decentralizing the development planning effort and institutionalizing the empowerment and genuine participation and decision making is desirable and well recognised. But the most important of all is improving the quality of governance with pro-poor concerns which is responsive, accountable and committed. Democratic decentralization of development process through maximum involvement of locals and
minimum state interference in the local affairs is desired. With accountability and responsibility with infusion values for sustainable development is preferred. Preparing the community to resolve social conflict resulting from the ongoing structural changes is significant. With the emergence of Panchayati Raj the traditional authorities like Gountia and headman have lost their control over the people. Consequently, conflict arises between these two which needs to be addressed through appropriate state conciliation.

Strengthening the social protection measures for minimizing the risk of natural disasters through both traditional and scientific methods are required. Crop insurance, credit to assetless poor and building the capabilities of the poor to take up economic vocations should be seen as priority. However, poverty reduction, easing drought stress, institutional reforms and empowerment must be understood in minimalist terms. The larger issues like inequalities, regional and rural-urban disparities must be addressed along with these. Though the state-driven agenda would not take apart the established inequalities in the society, but it certainly minimizes the gaps between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. It also will prepare the ground for the poor to emerge as partners in the development in which productivity and equity reinforces each other.