Conclusion

In a country where more than 350 million people subsist in abject poverty, successful state intervention for poverty alleviation can be the foremost indicator of the state's legitimacy and good governance. Normatively speaking, democratic politics including the local institutions of governance should address the problem of mass poverty in India. In this the Indian state should play a pivotal role.

It is now widely shared among policy makers and scholars that the capacity of the state to address poverty depends upon the autonomy it enjoys in the society. Without autonomy the state would not be able to act in favor of the poor and the destitute; it also cannot steer a course that is good for development in the country. The Indian state is constantly facing the challenges from the powerful social forces, mainly from the demands of the propertied classes. Its ability to act in favor of the poor has been seriously constrained by these forces. The preceding discussion in this work unambiguously points towards this understanding.

To formulate and realize policy goals for helping the poor the state needs well-designed policies and their effective implementation. Centralized policy making neglects the regional variations of problems. Local level planning can be possible if the local problems will be taken care of through the participation of the local level people. Lack of viable policies affects the performance and outcome of the programmes. If the state institutions are captured by the elites, then design of policies also gets affected. When a huge amount of financial resources are provided through the poverty alleviation programmes, the elites attempt to siphon off some of these resources for their personal gains. It is also possible to argue that the vested interest in
rural areas want a significant pool of poor people so that they can act as, to use an
expression of Marx, a 'reserve army of labour'.

Often the anti-poverty measures do not address the root causes of poverty such
as structural inequality in villages, caste discrimination, and lack of access to productive
assets and credit and so on. As is well known land question is deeply connected to rural
poverty in India. But in spite of political rhetoric of different political parties, the Indian
state at different levels has not been able to bring effective land reforms. During our
field work, the structural causes of poverty in the villages were clearly visible. In these
circumstances, it is not surprising that the poverty alleviation programs achieved very
little in terms of addressing long term causes of poverty.

As the Indian state’s capacity is constrained in combating poverty, its
legitimacy as a welfare state is seriously questioned by several people and groups. As
a welfare institution, the Indian state must take steps to ensure the basic well being of
all its citizens. It must adopt and successfully implement polices for the people
particularly the disadvantaged section of the society. It is plausible to argue that the
concerns with welfare and redistribution continue to remain high on the state’s
agenda. A cursory glance at the politics of UPA and of the coalition government in
Orissa will confirm the point we are making. This is particularly important at the time
of ongoing economic reforms and economic globalization. As the existing literature
on this subject suggest, this is not a hospitable time for talking about state’s welfare
responsibility. Often the voices of the poor get drowned in the noisy clamour for high
economic growth. Our field work suggests that the welfare agenda remains on the top
of people’s mind in rural India. How is it possible that the agenda of the poor citizens
continues to survive in the political sphere today? This is where politics has to be put
at the centre of the ongoing developmental discourses. This study argues that politics at different levels can explain to a large extent the trajectories of the welfare programmes in India.

After the independence, the pivotal role of the state for poverty alleviation in India was widely acknowledged as a major chunk of the population was living in abject poverty. But even after 58 years of independence and economic planning, the situation has not improved remarkably in this respect. Any development strategy in India will be meaningless if poverty is not dealt with successfully. The response of the state for poverty alleviation remains more or less limited to only providing some loan with subsidy or creating wage employment opportunities for a short period of time. Building the capabilities of the poor is constantly neglected in the policies for poverty alleviation. The exploitative socio-economic relations which are the basis of poverty were never addressed in the government policy for poverty alleviation. In this situation the rich land owners keep on exploiting the landless laborers and the poor peasants. When the poor look towards the state they find the bureaucracy and the political representative as the only authority they can approach. But often they find both civil servants and elected representatives indifferent to their plight. In fact it is possible to suggest that both these groups of people, like the rich landed elite in rural areas, also appropriate funds meant for the poor.

In India the cause of poverty lies in the unequal and exploitative economic and social relations. This is the prime reason why a majority of the poor belong to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Poverty eradication as a goal must incorporate structural changes in the society. Concentration of land holding in few hands has made many people poor. Mostly the landless agricultural labors are the
main exploited category in the agricultural economy in rural areas. The other exploitative relations such as the caste system, gender inequalities etc. are needed to be addressed for ensuring poverty eradication in India.

In rural areas, landed elite mostly belonging to the upper-caste dominate the power structure and corner the benefits channelised through public institutions. They tend to influence the bureaucracy and the politicians. The poor remain dependent on these powerful people for various reasons (such as working in their land) which make them weak vis-à-vis these social forces. The poor need to be empowered so that they can challenge the dominant power in rural areas.

Another argument for poverty alleviation comes from the supporters of economic growth. It is argued by some scholars that agricultural growth will boost up the rural economy. The use of latest technology and other modern methods of farming along with more emphasis on cash crops would help the farmers for more production. This would help them earn more and agriculture would be a profit-making business. But in recent times, the suicide of farmers in states like Andhra Pradesh for crop failure and debt burden has proved that this vision is still far away from the reality. The ‘trickle down’ effect of agricultural growth is under doubt in the long run. Only growth cannot solve the problem of poverty. It must be accompanied by social agenda for ensuring success in this direction.

The materials from the field-study reveal several weakness in the implementation of poverty alleviation policies such as faulty selection of beneficiaries, untimely supply of subsidies by the government and inadequate supply of loans by banks, inadequate generation of employment by contractors, inadequate supervision, monitoring and follow up action either by Block staff or bank staff to
assess the end use of credit, poor marketing and training facilities for the beneficiaries. As a result, the aim of helping the poor to move up the poverty line has not been materialized.

Public Distribution System is meant to provide food grain to the poor at subsidized rate. But in many instances the poor are mortgaging their Below Poverty Line (BPL) ration cards to rich peasants, and therefore how can one expect that the Public Distribution system would help the poor? In this situation the rich peasant households buy food grains from PDS shops showing the beneficiaries card. After the harvesting season the price of rice grain in the open market becomes cheaper than the price offered in the PDS shop. The government does not take any step to reduce the price of the food grain in the fair price shop of the PDS. The poor do not buy food grain from these shops during this period which leads to the selling off of this food grain in the black market. On the other hand the same rice is sold to the poor at higher price by the private shop owners during the monsoon season, when there is scarcity of food grain. During this time the fair price shops do not provide food grain to the poor. The poor have no choice but to buy food grain from the open market at a higher price.

Public Distribution System has been dysfunctional due to mismanagement and black marketing in the area of field study. It has helped the bureaucrats, the rich, businessmen and politicians more than the starving poor.

The bureaucracy instead of implementing the policies properly, most of the times makes use of its power and connections to fulfill personal gains from different government programmes. The political leaders also manipulate state machinery to fulfill their own interests. Hence the check and balance for effective implementation of policies are almost non-existent.
The bureaucracy also shows caste prejudices in the process of discharging their official duties. Brahmins and other upper castes are disproportionately represented in the bureaucracy.\footnote{Bardhan, Pranab, \textit{The Political Economy of Development in India}, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1984, p.52.} They have their own agenda of solidarity with their castes fellows. As most of the poor belong to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the bureaucrats often are insensitive to the needs and concerns of the poor. As a result, they do not implement the poverty alleviation policies with commitment. On the other hand faulty selection of beneficiaries channelises the public resources towards the non-poor or the not so poor. The poor are made to run to the government offices several times and substantial amount of the assistance money is misappropriated by the officials. There is also evidence that useless assets are provided to the beneficiaries.

The evaluation of the implementation of poverty alleviation programmes shows that the participation rate of the poor in these programmes has been very low. Those who have been benefited by these programmes are mostly better off among the poor. Several non-poor also have cornered benefits out of these programmes. Most of the poor are illiterate and they lack the knowledge and confidence to deal with the official procedures. There is no any institutional support for the poor in this regard. In this situation the middle men take advantage and cheat the beneficiaries in the name of sharing of illegal gains with the bureaucracy to facilitate sanction or acceptance of household-oriented schemes. There is also no emphasis on the need of poor women and the occupation they can carry out in rural areas. Gender inequality is not taken into consideration in many of the poverty alleviation programmes. Even the definition of the poor is so vague that it is easy for many non-poor to take advantage of the
different anti-poverty programmes. The programmes are mainly formulated at the Centre. The problems at micro level differ from region to region. The socio-economic situation also differs in different region of the country. The demand of different commodities and services and the marketing facilities differ from region to region. The self-employment programmes neglect the local problems and hardly take into consideration these factors. Hence unviable activities are selected for the beneficiaries and ultimately the programmes fail to alleviate poverty.

The field work in the villages of Sandhuriam and Bhatlaida in Laikera Block of Jharsuguda district in Orissa shows that the financial assistance for wage employment programmes to Laikera Block is almost constant. It was not enhanced. In recent years the supply of food grain for the food for work programme, decreased substantially. The creation of employment opportunities through public works remained very negligible. Instead of properly implementing the programmes only new schemes have been added which has lead to duplication of the programmes.

It is observed that the poor of the village Bhatlaida get more days of work in the wage employment programmes. It depends upon the number of projects undertaken in the village in these programmes as per the financial allocation by the government. Bhatlaida gets more funds as it is a big village. The nearness of Bhatlaida to the district head quarters and some other towns has also created some opportunities for the poor who travel to these urban areas to work as daily labors there. For the poor of Sandhuriam village, this opportunity does not exist. They mainly depend upon the rich farmers of the village for getting employment in their field as agricultural labor. In these wage employment programmes the contractors prefer male labor (as earth digging is the main work undertaken for road construction...
projects in these programme). Poor women can't participate in these programmes. They work only in building construction works. These types of works are very rare in rural areas. This keeps the poor women in a disadvantaged position. Lack of employment opportunity is the biggest cause of poverty in the villages of Sandhuriam and Bhatlaida. If the poor would be provided with employment opportunities poverty would not be that much severe as it is seen to be now.

So many Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes families are living in abject poverty in these two villages. But these families were not selected by the Gram Sabha for Antyodaya Anna Yojna. In this programme food grain is provided at a highly subsidized rate to the poorest families of the village. The selection of beneficiaries is the responsibility of the Gram Sabha. As Gram Sabha is dominated by the upper castes and other economically powerful sections of the village, many non-poor or not so poor are selected as the beneficiaries in this programme. One example of such domination in Sandhuriam can be mentioned here. In the Gram Sabha the rich pressed the demand of a better road to their para i.e. colony saying they need better road as they have motor vehicles which can not run in bad roads. They also reasoned that the Scheduled Caste colony do not need the road as they do not have such vehicles to run and they can walk on any type of lane. This demand was accepted in the Gram Sabha and the Panchayat approved the construction of the road in the colony of the rich who belong to upper castes. This clearly shows that caste bias in the Gram Sabha has obstructed the benefit of government programmes from reaching to the real poor. Sometimes Gram Sabhas were not held in these two villages. Necessary decisions were taken by the influential Panchayat members or the influential and powerful villagers. Signatures of the villagers were forged and left thumb impressions were marked in the absence of the villagers to fulfill the formalities of holding a Gram
Sabha. This shows that the real empowerment of the people through Panchayati Raj is yet to materialize.

It is a fact that poverty alleviation can be more effective if the expenditure of the government would be targeted towards primary education, controlling communicable diseases, providing drinking water, sanitation and reducing insecurity in the family. If the poor do not have access to basic services, their capacities to take advantage of different programmes become very limited.

The health care services and the primary education provided by the government in these two villages are in a poor state of affairs. However the educational facilities in the village of Bhatlaida are comparatively better than Sandhuriam. It became possible, as the Panchayat head office is situated in this village (Bhatlaida) and it gets the lion’s share of the government facilities provided to this Panchayat. Even the villagers have established a high school and a college on their own initiatives. This shows that the villagers of Bhatlaida are more organized in comparison to the villagers of Bhatlaida which has led to the creation of different facilities by self help. The size of the village also matters a lot. Bhatlaida is a bigger village than Sandhuriam. Hence the villagers of Bhatlaida feel the need of these educational institutions as the number of students is much more than that of Sandhuriam.

This area has remained backward for years together. The poor are the victims of this pathetic situation. They are not able to send their children to school because of poverty. Low rate of enrolment of children in schools is followed by high rate of drop out due to poverty. The poor students who are supposed to be provided with books, stipends and uniforms (dresses are provided only for girl students by the government of Orissa.) are either not getting these things at all or getting it very late, almost at the end
of the academic session. There is also acute shortage of proper infrastructure, resources, basic amenities, sufficient number of teachers in the school in these villages. This has led to the poor performance of primary education in these villages. However in the school of Bhatlaida mid day meals continue to be served whereas it has stopped in the school of Sandhuriam.

The health facilities provided in these two villages is in a pathetic state. The poor are suffering the most due to the non-availability of proper health services. As far as managing the expenditure is concerned, the poor either borrow money from the rich farmers or mortgage their property. Many times they sell their properties such as land, ornaments, goats etc. at a very low price to manage the expenditure. When the earning members of the family fall ill then the entire family falls in a very difficult situation. Health problems compel the poor to work for less number of days. This aggravates the poverty situation in the family.

During the field work it was noticed that the doctors take utmost care of the rich whereas they neglect those patients who are poor. This aggravates the disease and the poor have to suffer a lot. On the other hand the insufficient and poor health care services have failed to provide even the basic health services to the poor.

It was observed that the poor in order to manage the expenditure on health problems became bonded labor under the rich farmers of the area. This exposed them to exploitation. The family members of the bonded labours find it difficult to sustain because of very low income of the bonded labours.

In Sandhuriam the children of poor families are severely malnourished. Due to lack of proper sanitation facilities and clean drinking water they are prone to many kinds of diseases. Most of the women suffer from anemia. So far infant mortality rate
is concerned it is higher in Sandhuriam than Bhatlaida. This shows the severe poverty condition and lack of mother and child care in the village.

Due to very few number of tube wells in both the villages, people use the water of open well. A hospital staff is assigned the duty of applying bleaching powder in these wells, but that person hardly visits the villages. The rich arrange their own bleaching powder but the poor have no choice but to use the same water for drinking purpose too.

The field work brought to light the fact that the present policies for poverty alleviation are not enough to pull the poor out of poverty. It needs to be accompanied with the very essential economic rights and other rights such as right to information so as to ensure that the implementing agencies are more accountable. The poor lack any information regarding the government programmes. No any mechanism works to provide the necessary information to them. In this situation every thing depends upon the mercy of the officials. The officials are busy in achieving the physical target of different programmes by sanctioning money in a half hazard way. There is a near absence of monitoring of these programmes.

After the 73rd Amendment of the Indian Constitution in 1992, devolution of power was ensured for the Panchayati Raj institutions. To facilitate the participation of people from the marginalized sections of the society different posts are reserved for women, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. However, empowerment of the people through the Panchayati Raj system is neither inevitable nor easy. Our work suggests that the socio-economic elite and the anti-social elements dominate these institutions either directly or indirectly in the villages. Once again, it is clear that without altering the power relations at local levels, the marginalized communities
cannot effectively participate in the Panchayati Raj institutions. The rigid caste system of Orissa got reflected in Panchayats. The suppression of women in the society has not yet been challenged by the process of representation of women in Panchayati Raj institutions.

It is also observed that some of the poor educated people of these two villages regularly participate in Panchayat activities. They actively involve themselves in different community activities of the village. They also participate in Gram Sabha meetings, but due to the corrupt and dominant political elite of this area, Gram Sabhas have become defunct. This type of monopoly by the vested interest of the village has resulted in nullifying the advantage of education for enhancing participation of the poor in Panchayat activities.

The elected members to the Panchayats, who belong to Schedule Castes/Schedule Tribes and women categories, are facing severe problems due to the dominant nature of the upper caste and other economic elites of the areas in Panchayat activities. Their voices are suppressed by these powerful social forces. But the situation is improving in extremely slow pace, and the people from marginalized section of the society have started taking interest in Panchayat activities. Power to the Panchayats to implement different programmes is associated with providing funds to the Panchayats to carry on these activities. This has made the main attraction of manipulation of different programmes for personal gain. Local level politics associated with the Panchayats have created factionalism in the villages. It has led to rivalry between different groups. Unless healthy political atmosphere is created and people are educated this will keep on hampering the progress of the villages. So far misappropriation of public fund and taking bribe from beneficiaries in the assurance of selecting them for different government assistance programmes are concerned, it
has become a common feature on the part of most of the Panchayat members. The Panchayat member, whichever community he or she belongs to, unless that person is highly honest, they are involved in such corrupt practices. In this situation the poor are remaining at the receiving end.

The poor look the state with great expectation. This expectation can not be fulfilled unless the state delivers accordingly. It requires political commitment and institutional mechanism with local level support to combat poverty effectively. Above all empowering the poor politically, economically and socially in certain ways will change the power relations in the rural areas. This will bring a radical change in the poverty situation in India. Further, through education consciousness can be created among the poor. Ultimately it will lead the poor to organize for self help. This would pave the way to make the poor active participants rather than passive recipients of different anti-poverty programmes.