Introduction

India is the largest democracy in the world. Being the largest is in itself not a great achievement. Scholars and social activists celebrate the vibrancy of Indian democracy, and consider its resilience as a great feat. According to the constitutional provisions, popular governments are elected every five years in India. Except for the years of National Emergency (1975-1977), a regime of rights is in place, and an active civil society and the free press contribute to the process of democratic governance in the country. The Constitution of India guarantees fundamental rights to all its citizens irrespective of their gender, caste, religion and language. The Directive Principles of State Policy mentioned in the Part IV of the Constitution directs the Governments at different levels to implement such policies so as to establish a welfare state in India. From time to time, the political parties of different ideological hues while contesting elections seek peoples’ mandate on the ground that they will look after their welfare if voted to power. Election manifesto of each political party speaks volume about the deprived and oppressed section of the society and how to uplift them.

India has followed the path of planned economic development since the independence. Currently, it has foreign exchange reserve of more than 52 billion US dollars. India is also doing exceedingly well in the Information Technology (IT) sector. The progress of technology since the independence is also in many ways remarkable. However, in spite of 58 years of planned economic development and democratic governance, a significant number of the people still live in abject poverty. According to a conservative estimate, nearly thirty percent of India’s population still lives below the calorie-based poverty line. To some others, the rural poverty has increased in recent years, and the number of poor people in India is a blot on its career
as an independent nation. By any standard, the continuing presence of acute poverty and destitution point towards a central paradox of India's developmental democracy. It is the ordinary citizens who have enthusiastically supported the democratic processes in India, and it is these very people who have benefited the least out of this system. This in some sense contradicts the conventional wisdom of democratic theory.

Low per capita income is still a continuing feature of India's political economy. In recent years when the Indian economy is experiencing a better growth, it is argued that high per capita income through high growth rates would help the Indian state in the eradication of poverty. Atul Kohli, however, argues that the new wealth has not trickled down, and hence it is clear that high growth rates and high per capita income will not be sufficient to improve the lot of the poor. Kohli further suggests that the solutions to the problem of India's poverty will not emerge from the high rate of economic growth alone. Solutions to poverty, therefore, must involve conscious state intervention aimed at reconciling the economic growth with distribution. In this respect, the important issue is the role of public authorities in economic development and poverty alleviation in India.

Poverty has been and continues to be an important issue in the political and public spheres in India. During the anti-colonial struggle, Gandhi and Nehru were ideologically committed to the cause of the poor. During the early years after the independence, eradication of poverty was very much on the top of Nehru's economic and developmental visions. But the process of eradication of poverty was frustratingly slow. However, during the period of Indira Gandhi, anti-poverty slogans reached a feverish pitch in terms of rhetoric and populism. The slogan 'garibi hatao' (eradicate poverty) was simultaneously a part of a political rhetoric and a great mobilizer of rural votes.
The Planning Commission of India as well as the donor agencies like the World Bank accept poverty in India as a central theme of state intervention. The state intervention for poverty alleviation always remained at the centre of India's developmental strategies. Indian political leadership has always taken poverty as the main theme of the election agendas. The goal of land reform is considered as one of the important measure for poverty alleviation in an agricultural country like India.¹

Following the 'Garibi Hatao' slogan of Indira Gandhi years, successive governments, at least in principle, have tried to reap rich political dividends by playing the poverty card in the public sphere. In each Five Year Plan, financial outlay was specially earmarked for the programmes meant to alleviate poverty. There are different institutions at different levels of democratic governance responsible for devising anti-poverty policies for the country as a whole. From time to time, the state governments also frame separate set of policies to address the issue of poverty in their respective states. As the financial situations of most of the states are in disarray, it is the Central Government that plays a crucial role in formulating and providing resources for poverty alleviation programmes in India. Although in principle the project of poverty alleviation is collaborative, it is the Central Government that plays the role of a prime mover in this.

The gaps between the intent of anti-poverty policies and their implementation on the ground have been a recurring theme in the literature dealing with public policies and developmental practices in India. Implementation of poverty-alleviation policies is marked by unviable planning, faulty selection of beneficiaries, corruption, absence of supervision and complaint redressal mechanisms, and non-cooperation of

the relevant public institutions such as the Bank and others. Once Rajiv Gandhi, the former Prime Minister of India, had suggested that out of 20 Rupees meant for the poor, only one tenth of it actually reaches the poor. At that time, his comments had raised a great deal of debate on the efficacy of the government policies in general and the anti-poverty programmes in particular. Unfortunately, these issues are still alive as the gaps between policies and implementation still remain huge. This problem remains at the heart of this thesis. It deals with this issue in a concrete way by looking at them in a concrete setting located in one of poorest districts of Orissa, the poorest state in the Indian Union.

In the initial years after the independence, Community Development Blocks were set up to expedite the process of development. Many committees were set up to study the problems at the grassroots level. Balwant Rai Mehta committee was set up in 1957 to study Community Development and National Extension Service and it had suggested the establishment of ‘Panchayati Raj’ or ‘democratic decentralization’ as an institutional solution to India’s underdevelopment. Even in those early days, participation of poor people was seen as vital to the success of anti-poverty programmes.

After the 73rd amendment act to the Constitution of India was passed in 1992, the idea of decentralization has taken on a new turn. By constitutionalising it, the Panchayati Raj Institutions were seen as a legitimate tier of self-governance. To encourage the participation of the disadvantaged sections of the society (viz – scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and women) in the Panchayati Raj Institutions, provisions were made to reserve seats for them in these institutions. But because of certain societal and structural reasons, the process of decentralization to date has not lived up to the high expectation it has raised. The story of the Panchayati Raj
Institutions, as they have unfolded on the ground, is indeed mixed. There are places where the elites have captured the newly-revived Panchayati institutions. There are also cases where the marginalized communities have used this institution to assert their political presence and to demand their rights from the state. Apart from these developments, misappropriation of public funds has also been reported from panchayats. As far as the Government's welfare policies are concerned, Panchayats are given more responsibilities, and these elected bodies are given the responsibility of implementing, monitoring the anti-poverty and pro-poor policies of the Central and the state Governments. Hence, local politics becomes crucial in understanding how the anti-poverty policies are implemented in villages. It is against this background that the present work is conceived. The anti-poverty policies of the state, as discussed in the thesis, are not seen from a narrow technical lens. The analysis is done from the broad vantage of democratic processes and institutions.

II

Any study of public policies dealing with poverty is bound to be vast. While studying the implementation of anti-poverty policies we have narrowed our focus on two sets of interventions. The first set deals with micro programmes, programmes that directly target the people living below the poverty line. These programmes include the Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojna (SGSY), Jawahar Gram Swarojgar Yojna (JGSY), Annapurna Yojna and the Food for Work Programme. The second set includes the macro programmes, aimed at empowering and capability building of the poor. Empowerment and the enhancement of capability prepare the poor to take advantage of different opportunities created by the process of development. These programmes include interventions in the field of health, education and political participation.
How can these policies be understood? First of all, in this work we have tried to explicate the assumptions underlying these policies. Every policy has its own design, and in this work we have tried to unravel it. Poverty-eradication is no longer a mere developmental goal. It is a pre-condition for ensuring social justice. Poverty is considered as a denial of human rights. The basic human rights violated by extreme poverty are right to life. The poor suffer from chronic hunger and malnutrition because of scarcity of food for them. Right to education, right to a basic standard of living adequate for the health and well being of somebody and his or her family, right to work and many other social and economic rights included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights can not be realized by the poor. Civil and political rights are also related to economic and social rights. The absence of one set of rights leads to the absence of other sets of rights. Poverty is brutal. It is embedded in all realms of the existence of poor people and extends beyond lack of income. Here comes the necessity of taking into consideration the concept of “Human Poverty”. Human poverty emphasizes upon human capital and enhancing the capabilities of the poor to ensure Human Development.

The large structure of this thesis is permeated by the rights discourse, a discourse that looks at state-interventions for poverty alleviation as a right rather than in paternalistic terms. In a significant sense, the role of the state remains central to this work. At a time when there is a great deal of discussion on ‘hollowing out’ of the state due to neo-liberal economic reforms and economic globalization, to keep the state on focus is itself an important normative anchor of this work. Keeping this in mind, this study begins with a discussion on the larger role of the state and its policies towards

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the poor and poverty alleviation. Drawing largely from a plethora of secondary work on the state, chapter one engages with the existing debates on the questions raised above. How does state as panoply of institutions place itself in the context of its stated-goal of poverty alleviation? Is the state sufficiently autonomous to effectively plan and execute its policies towards the poor? How do different classes, caste groups and communities and their interest feature in the state? Do all these groups have an equal standing vis-à-vis the state? How embedded is the state? All these questions are important for they have a lot of bearing on the theme of poverty alleviation and the state’s role as a protector of the poor. To create a larger theoretical frame on the state is the main objective of the chapter one.

Once a broad frame is put in place, this study goes on to discuss concretely different approaches to poverty alleviation in India. Although poverty is universally seen in negative terms, scholars and policy makers do not agree regarding its origin, its continuation and on the methods necessary for its alleviation. In other words, poverty is seen and analyzed in multiple ways by scholars and policy makers. Chapter 2 examines the ways in which diverse understanding of poverty alleviation are constructed or framed. From a narrow conception poverty seen as in terms of income to seeing it as a denial of capabilities or freedom we can get a whole of range of discussion as to how and why of poverty. The assumption here is that different ideas about poverty induce different methods in addressing it. For instance, if poverty is seen only in terms of lack of adequate income then the solution to this problem lies only in creating more income for the poor. However, if poverty is seen in terms of lack of human development, then the state has to devise a comprehensive strategy not only to provide employment to the poor but also to look after their other needs such as health, education and sanitation.
This study attempts to focus on ways in which concrete welfare policies of the state can be understood. Can a particular policy be understood by looking only at the policy document or by examining solely the internal elements that compose it? This work is deeply skeptical of the view that public policies can be understood by their own terms in isolation from larger social and political contexts. It promotes an alternative view that policies in general and poverty alleviation policies in particular can be properly analyzed once they are located in the realm of politics. Here politics is defined in broader terms to include concrete power relations and contestatory strategies groups adopt to pursue their collective ends. Chapter 3 throws light on the connection between the anti-poverty policies of the Indian state and the social forces that operate on the ground. How do the social forces impact on the formulation and implementation of anti-poverty policies? To what extent institutions responsible for implementing welfare policies exercise their autonomy vis-à-vis different social groups in villages? How does the conflict over the state-resources play out at local levels? These are some of the questions that chapter 3 attempts to answer.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on two villages in Western Orissa and examine the ways in which the anti-poverty programmes are implemented, and whether or not the poor citizens benefit from them. Together these two chapters show the intimate connection between the state, its policies and the social forces operating in these villages. How do the poor perceive about the implementation of the anti-poverty policies of the state? Who benefits and why? How and why the basic intents of the poverty alleviation programmes never get realized? What constitute the limits of such anti-poverty policies? We hope that these two chapters provide some kind of answers to these questions with the help of empirical materials generated from the field.
This is primarily an empirical study, a study that tries to use the micro-experiences of ordinary people to tell a big story about the Indian state and its ambiguous relationship with the poor. The theoretical issues and the conceptual frames discussed and used in this study are made out of the existing secondary sources. While analyzing the anti-poverty programmes, the documents produced by the Government were proved immensely useful. The implementation of policies such as the Food for Work programme, other wage employment programmes, the Public Distribution System, primary education, and the primary health care programmes were investigated through field work in the villages of Sandhuriam and Bhatlaida of Laikera Block in the district of Jharsuguda in Orissa. During the field-work, focused group discussion, participatory observation, survey and interview methods were used to generate data in the field. During the field-work I had also consulted official documents to obtain the official side of the picture as far as the implementation of anti-poverty programmes in the villages were concerned. During my work in these villages it became clear to me that poverty is endemic in these areas of Orissa. For the ordinary citizens of these villages, struggle for survival is a daily routine. What is extraordinary however is the way in which they bring dignity to their everyday struggles.