

Poverty, Disparities, or the Development of Underdevelopment in Orissa

The extent and nature of disparities within Orissa, particularly regional, social and gender disparities, needs no emphasis. Drawing on concepts of social exclusion, and on both quantitative and qualitative evidence, this article looks at poverty in its multidimensional nature, ranging from income poverty to human development indicators of health and education, and assesses the social processes responsible for deprivation, including those relating to discrimination, voice and representation.

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During brief visits to southern Orissa I have tried to give, for myself, some meaning to the well known poverty data of what is now India's poorest state. The discussion on my train journey back from my last visit to Koraput and Malkangiri in February 2004 was dominated by the news of the large-scale naxalite activity, the capturing of Koraput town just a few hours after we left. The links between deprivation and militant activities are complex, and it would be unwise to assume that People War Group's activities have great support among large sections of the poor population, but it would be equally unwise to deny any link between the militant activities and the scale and nature of this largely man-made failure of development.

One of the key impressions during my last short visits has been the seemingly increasing disparity. Villages remain largely poor, though with many examples of basic development, in education, food security and otherwise, assisted by large numbers of extremely committed people in and outside government. This is after all the area that is regularly in the news because of starvation deaths.¹ But, while roads remain bad at most places, towns have flourished, local markets are booming, and hotels have sprung up. People passing through are well connected through mobile phone. In a fancy hotel in Jeypore – which advertised eco-tourism through boat rides on the Kolab reservoir – a group of North American visitors talked about how on a train ride from Vizag in Andhra Pradesh he had been able to access his email on his portable computer.

Yes, it takes a long time to get to Koraput, and even longer to Malkangiri, from the state capital. But the districts are not remote. They are remote in the view of the administration that is based in Bhubaneswar (and for visitors like myself). But they were not remote for the planners and engineers that in the first decades after independence created a large number of water reservoirs, for electricity generation and irrigation purposes. The NGO we visited in remote Chittrakonda block, in fact was located at the edge of the Balimela reservoir, which according to the NGO had displaced people from 250 villages, and left a large number of villages cut-off from the mainland and from most of the supplies of the government system that otherwise does reach these remote areas.² Neither are they remote for the traders, for example of forest produce that continues to form an important source of livelihood for many poor people. And the areas are not so remote that they couldn't become recruitment areas for

unskilled labour, particularly during the previous three years of drought.³

This is the background, impressionistic as it may be, against which the following article is written. In the absence of in-depth knowledge or understanding of the social relations in the poorer areas in Orissa, this article presents a macro-view, of social and economic indicators within the state. The key point of the article is that Orissa is marked as much by disparities within the state, as by absolute deprivation.⁴ Moreover, these disparities do not appear to be have diminished, at least during the 1990s. This does focus our attention on the nature of the development process, requiring better understanding of historical origin of the increasing disparities. Also, it focuses our attention on the possible impact of reforms and liberalisation in which the country is engaged, as even if we do accept that liberalisation has been good for the country generally, it needs to be critically assessed whether poor people in these areas have benefited much, if at all, and have the capabilities to engage with and negotiate new development trends.

The largely quantitative description in this paper focuses on three main sets of disparities within the state. Section I describes regional disparities in income poverty, between coastal and non-coastal Orissa, with the southern districts having extreme high levels of poverty. Of even more concern is the fact that during the 1990s, the disparities appear to have increased. Section I also tries to identify possible reasons for the disparities. Other indicators of human development, health and education, are described in Section II. These do not show such extreme differentials, but equally, there are no signs that the gaps are narrowing, despite a wide array of government human development policies. Gender differences, described in Section III, are marked in Orissa as elsewhere in India: high levels of maternal mortality point to the disadvantaged position of women, gender disparities in education are large and have not (as in some other states) decreased during the 1990s, and sex ratios are worsening in at least some parts of the state, generally among the better-off. Disparities between social groups, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, and the role of discrimination are described in Section IV. They are as large as elsewhere in India, and the combination of regional and social disadvantages make tribal people in southern districts particularly poor, arguably falling increasingly far behind the rest of the state and country's population, due to an overlapping set of disadvantages. Section V discusses the limited evidence available regarding the performance of government programmes to

improve well-being in the state, and Section VI links this to issues of voice and representation of marginalised groups, including the role of decentralisation in addressing poverty and disparities.

I Regional Disparities: Income Poverty

Data is abundantly available to describe the well- and ill-being of the Indian population. Here we adopt a pragmatic attitude in the discussion regarding adequacy of indicators of poverty, and draw on a variety of sources available: poverty data from NSS, education data from the census, and health indicators from NFHS and SRS. Each of these data sources allows for a great deal of disaggregation, and we first focus on regional disparities.

Analysis of income poverty draws on NSSO data, particular its regular consumption survey (a large sample is collected every five years, and a smaller sample annually). There has been much debate regarding the quality and comparability of particularly the 1999-2000 survey (the last year for which data are available); this has been well-summarised by Deaton,⁵ and both uncorrected and corrected data are available. It needs to be stressed that further investigation may change the regional comparisons, as was shown by the rural-urban comparison for Andhra Pradesh in Deaton's analysis.

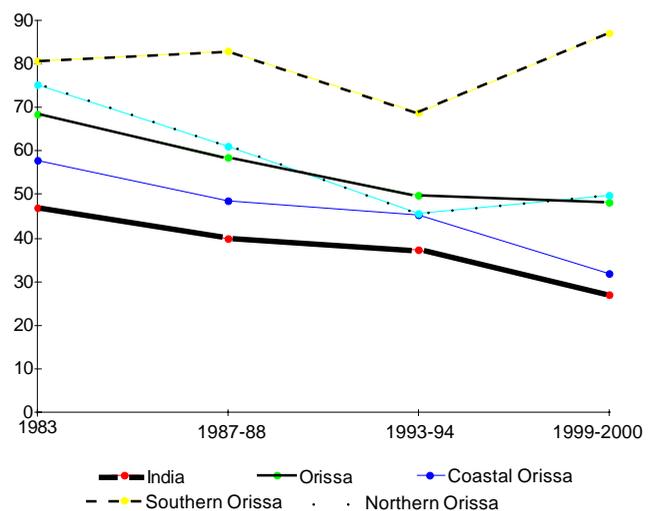
State level income poverty data reveal that in 1999-2000 Orissa has become India's poorest state, surpassing Bihar that was still the poorest in 1993-94 but showed a substantial decline in poverty during the late 1990s.⁶ At the end of the 1990s, Orissa agricultural wages also were lower than in any other state.⁷ Orissa's poverty headcount stagnated around 48-49 per cent between 1993-94 and 1999-2000, while at all-India level the headcount declined markedly, in Andhra Pradesh poverty halved, and even Madhya Pradesh showed a decline of 5 percentage points. For Orissa, the trend of falling behind the Indian average has a longer history, but is particularly marked during the 1990s.

The income poverty data allows for regional disaggregation, which gives us a rather different picture of poverty in the state. This uses the level of NSS-regions, which surprisingly few studies have used.⁸ In Orissa, this divides the state in a coastal, southern and northern region, showing a remarkable picture. While rural poverty in coastal Orissa was 32 per cent, it was 50 per cent in northern Orissa, and a staggering 87 per cent in southern Orissa. The picture of urban poverty shows a mixed picture, with relatively high urban poverty in coastal areas, in comparison to the rural area, and without significant differences across the three regions.

A comparison over time shows another remarkable feature, which is illustrated in Graph 1. This indicates that the regional differences have been rapidly increasing: while during the late 1990s coastal Orissa experiences a poverty trend very much like the all-India average, the headcount in the southern regions showed a remarkable increase. The reason for this divergence is not clear, but obviously cries out for further enquiry.

It is possible to further disaggregate the NSS data, to the level of the 13 districts as they existed in 1991 (these were subsequently divided into 30 districts), though for some of the districts the sample may be rather low for reliable estimates. This shows further remarkable differences, emphasising also the heterogeneous character within the regions as described above. But it shows the extremes even further apart: the estimated poverty

Graph 1: Poverty Trends in Orissa's NSS Regions, 1983-1999/2000



headcount in Puri is 22 per cent, while in Koraput it is almost four times as high (80 per cent).

The figures are remarkable, and present a picture that shows the state as unequal rather than just poor, but the conclusions need some disclaimers. First, as indicated above, the latest NSS data have generated much debate, and analysis by Deaton has shown that comparisons are sensitive to price indices (particularly in rural-urban comparisons). The picture regarding high levels of poverty in the south may be influenced by this,⁹ though analysis by Panda using a more accurate cereal price indicates that poverty in the southern region would still be two and a half times that in the coastal region.¹⁰ Second, it needs to be borne in mind that the above figures focus entirely on proportions of people in poverty. As the population density is much higher in coastal areas, the numbers of poor people there remain very substantial despite lower headcounts; in fact, all three regions have about five million poor people each. Third, even at the levels analysed we need to take account of differences within regions, and continue to emphasise that inequalities are likely to be significant at micro-level.

The causes of these disparities, and what has happened in non-coastal Orissa that has caused the above dismal picture has not been systematically researched, but a number of hypotheses can be put forward. First, for understanding the high levels of poverty in particular regions, its economic growth performance is key. It has been well-established in the international literature that economic growth is one of the most important statistical determinants of rates of poverty reduction.¹¹ India's economic growth has varied greatly across states, and across sectors.¹² Orissa's poverty trend seems closely associated with the lack of economic growth in the state, as annual per capita state domestic product grew by 2.3 per cent between 1993-94 and 1999-2000, higher than Assam and Bihar, but well below the Indian average of about 3.5 per cent [see Deaton and Drèze 2002]. Agricultural growth was very sluggish (less than 2 per cent per year; though industrial growth performance was even worse),¹³ and the growth rate of agricultural wages hardly above zero.¹⁴ It is likely, but no data are readily available, that regional growth within Orissa also has been diverse, and for example agricultural growth has been higher in the coastal areas.¹⁵

However, while economic growth and poverty are linked, the 'elasticity' between the two variables shows great variation. Datt

and Ravallion, through a series of publications have tried to show why economic growth in some areas or sectors reduced poverty faster than elsewhere. Positive impacts of growth in the non-agricultural sector can be reduced by various initial inequalities, such as credit market imperfections, inequality of assets such as land, low basic education attainments and health conditions. Thus, each percentage point of non-agricultural economic growth in Kerala reduces poverty much more than it does in Bihar, and this is mostly explained by the much higher literacy in Kerala, particularly women's.¹⁶

Second, and as illustration how the patterns of economic growth matter, the high poverty levels in non-coastal areas of Orissa are intertwined with the fate of the forest economy. Many poor households traditionally have depended on the forest economy, but over the last decades, they have suffered from deforestation, and availability in particular of non-timber forest produce (NTFP). A study for IFAD in Kandhamal and Gajapati districts showed that collection of NTFP, which previously accounted for a substantial part of household income, now provides only 10 per cent of income, and another study on the impact of deforestation has shown a decline during the last two decades of 42 per cent in the number of days (188 to 109) of intake of fruits, tubers and roots which can be obtained from the forests.¹⁷

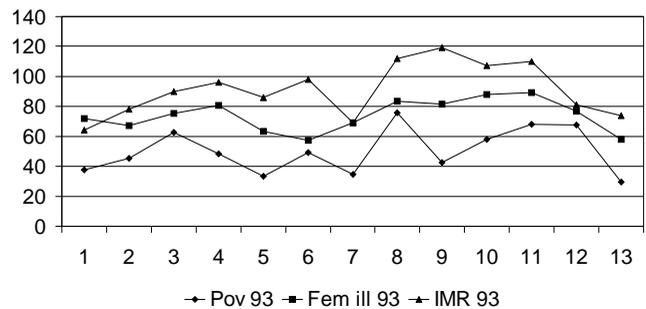
Third, over the last decades there have been major changes in landownership. No clear data exist on the magnitude of the problem, but micro-studies have indicated that over the last 20-30 years, no less than 50 per cent of tribal land has been lost to non-tribals, through indebtedness mortgage and forcible possessions. Acts banning the transfer of land of tribals to non-tribals have been in place for long, but have remained largely ineffective; and the impact of recent changes giving PRIs a greater role in transfer of land (as well as access to forest produce) remains unknown. According to World Bank analysis of NSS data, between 1993-94 and 1999-2000 the share of total employment working as cultivators declined from 45 per cent to 30 per cent, and small landowners were entering into casual wage labour.¹⁸

II Regional Disparities in Health and Education

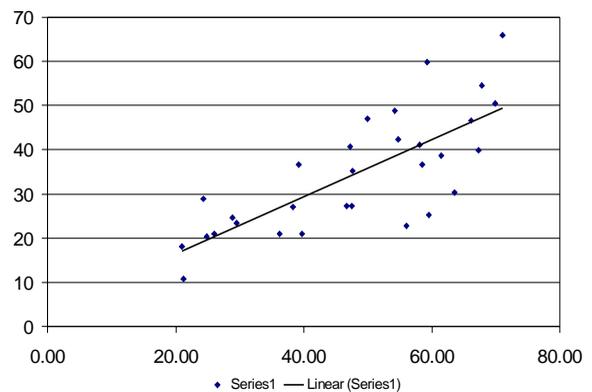
Income or consumption poverty is only one of the elements determining ill- and well-being. Deprived people suffer similarly from lack of access to education to healthcare, or personal security. In many cases, aspect of deprivation are interrelated, as, for example, poor people cannot 'buy' the healthcare if this is primarily provided on the 'free' market (as is the case throughout Orissa), and wage labourers who fall sick lose their daily income and potentially fall into a debt trap and poverty. But different aspects of deprivation are not always correlated, as the relatively high levels of human development of Sri Lanka and Kerala, and the huge demand for education among poor communities mobilised by NGOs like Lok Jumbish in Rajasthan have shown.

First, the census provides detailed information on literacy rates at district level (and below, and these data are increasingly available on the official census web site). In 1991 49 per cent of Orissa's population was literate, and this increased to 64 per cent in 2001. But even in 2001, literacy levels in the southern districts remained around 30-35 per cent, and female literacy below 25 per cent, while the levels in Khordah (where Orissa's

Graph 2: Levels of Income Poverty, Female Illiteracy and IMR in Orissa's 13 Districts



Graph 3: Levels of Female Illiteracy and Women Receiving Skilled Attention during Birth, Compared at District Level



capital Bhubaneswar is located), Cuttack and Puri rose to around 80 per cent. Adult literacy in 2001 was 69 per cent in Puri and 23 per cent in Koraput. The trend over the 1990s showed a very small decrease in the regional disparities in literacy (calculated as relative to the average).

Second, health indicators are also available at district level, though not as reliable and easy to disaggregate as education data.¹⁹ Both infant and maternal mortality in Orissa are well above the Indian average, though showing substantial decline during the last decade. IMR data, from the sample registration system, have been disaggregated below state level, but only to region, showing lower than expected regional differences. Data on the percentage of women receiving skilled attention during pregnancy, however, show very large regional inequalities, whereas the data on child immunisation show somewhat more moderate inequalities.

For understanding the causes of deprivation, and policy responses, it is important whether different indicators of deprivation are correlated, i.e., whether areas with high income poverty incidences also suffer from deprivation in education and/or health. To explore these, three simple graphs are presented – though much deeper analysis would be needed to establish the strength and significance of the correlations. Levels of income poverty, illiteracy and IMR in Orissa's old 13 districts are compared in Graph 2, suggesting a fairly clear correlation between the three. Graph 3 compares, for the 30 districts, the levels of female illiteracy with the percentage of women that receive skilled attention during pregnancy. This also indicates a correlation, suggesting again that people in the worst-off districts suffer from multiple deprivations, and that policy deficits are multi-sectoral. Finally, while data on IMR are not sufficiently disaggregated,

data on child immunisation for the 30 current districts are available. Graph 4 suggests a weaker correlation, though according to these indicators also deprivation is multiple.

Thus, the regional disparities are substantial, appear mostly multi-dimensional, and have shown little signs of being reduced. What are the possible reasons for these? Orissa, like the rest of India, has a wide array of government policies directed at enhancing well-being of the entire population, including policies – like for primary education – that focus on marginalised groups and regions (Section V below discusses government policies directly targeted at poverty reduction). Questions that seem relevant in the context of the disparities described above, and in need of further research, are whether funding for such policies have been adequate, and the performance of existing policies.

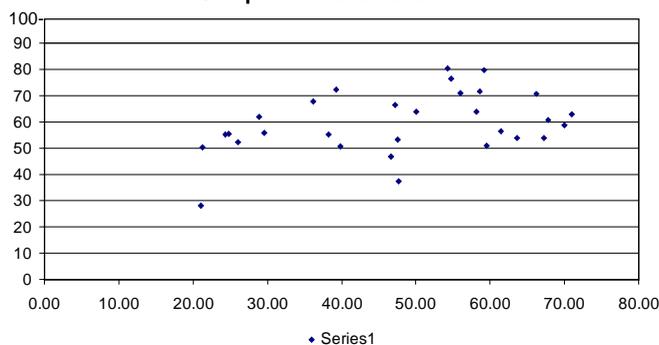
As percentage of GDP, India spends about as much on social sectors as other low-income countries.²⁰ Within that, education – including at primary levels – receives some priority, increasingly so during the 1990s (now about 13 per cent of public spending), though current levels are still below what has been recommended nationally and internationally.²¹ Public spending on health is much lower (about 5 per cent of public spending), and more than three-quarters of spending on health is private. In real terms, during the 1990s funding for social sectors does not appear to have declined.

In comparison with India's average, Orissa's spending on social sectors is not low. Per capita spending is below average, but as percentage of the state domestic product it is well above the Indian average (9 per cent vs 6 per cent). Also, increase in social spending has been faster than Orissa's average public spending,²² and appears to have been well-protected in relative terms during the period of fiscal reforms since the late 1990s. However, data on spending by themselves are insufficient, and in the case of Orissa an increasing percentage of the spending has been on salaries only, with ever-smaller amounts available for investment or developmental expenditure. Moreover, concerns have been raised regarding the ability of poorer states to access external support, both government of India funding and external assistance.

Nevertheless, it appears that not funding but the quality of programme implementation is key to understanding the disparities, at least in education. Elsewhere in India, and through centrally-sponsored schemes, education programmes during the 1990s have made significant progress in getting children from deprived groups and in remote areas into school. Local management, through locally-appointed teachers and village education committees are central elements of this innovative approach. Evaluations in Orissa indicate the lack of implementation capacity in Orissa, even where substantial infrastructure investment is made, and the need for strengthening local structures – including local governance structures, as Section V of this paper highlights – for successful utilisation of available funding.

In health, quality of implementation of various programmes is varied. Access to medical facilities are well below the national average, particularly in remote areas, as is highlighted by the census and NFHS data on medical care during pregnancy.²³ The centrally-sponsored scheme that appears most relevant to the poor (and relatively efficient in transferring resources) is the Integrated Child Development Scheme, which provides nutrition, health, immunisation and referral services for young children. ICDS centres have probably the widest outreach in remote regions and for the poorest groups, but report only in 6 lakh out of the 14 lakh habitation in which they should be operating.²⁴ Evidence

Graph 4: Levels of Female Illiteracy and Child Immunisation, Compared at District Level



for Orissa is mixed. National data suggests it is not performing poorly compared to elsewhere in India. A study by PRAXIS indicated performance regarding immunisation was fairly good, but less so regarding food supplies and care to pregnant mothers, and a CYSD study found very low access by poor people.²⁵

Thus, the evidence is inevitably mixed, much progress has been made, and more detailed analysis and disaggregated data are required to understand how government policies have affected disparities. Generalisations regarding poor performance in Orissa compared to the rest of the country may not be meaningful – for example, data on teacher absenteeism do not show worse performance in Orissa than for example Andhra Pradesh.²⁶ Spending patterns also indicate that human development is not ignored by the state government. Nevertheless, it seems that a much stronger push, in improvement of public policies across the board, may be required to address disparities.

III

Marginalised Groups: Disparities that Remain

There are substantial differences in well-being across social groups, with scheduled castes (dalits) and scheduled tribes (adivasis) particularly disadvantaged.²⁷ Average per capita income of SC/ST at all-India level is about one-third lower than that among other groups. Headcount poverty among other (non-deprived groups in 1999-2000 was 16 per cent, 30 per cent for minorities (Muslims), 36 per cent for SC and 44 per cent for ST.

Reasons for disparities are multiple. Deprived groups live predominantly in rural areas, often in remote and marginal environments. They often have smaller landholdings or less productive plots of land. SCs in particular tend to work as agricultural labour, or as casual wage labour in urban areas. They migrate less often than others – though kind of migration of poorest (short-distance, wage labour) may be under-recorded in official data. Deprived groups have much lower literacy than other groups: NFHS data for India in 1998-99 showed that 88 per cent of ST women, 73 per cent of SC women, and (a still very substantial) 44 per cent of women from other groups are illiterate. NSS data show similar disparities, including for specific age group, which gives an indication of future continuation of disparities. Rankings on neonatal, post-neonatal, infant, child and under-5 mortality indicators for socially-excluded groups are similar to those of other indicators (e.g. IMR for SC and ST are about 84, and 62 for non-deprived groups) – though the disparities in health are somewhat lower than with respect to indicators of education/literacy and poverty.

What evidence exists for disparities in Orissa, which is generally not known as a state where social fissures prevail? Table 2

reports the incidence of poverty by social groups, in Orissa, and compared to all-India, and over 4 NSS rounds since 1983. 23 per cent of Orissa's population is classified as ST, and 16 per cent as SC (around the all-India average). As elsewhere in India, the poverty incidence of STs (72 per cent) and SCs (55 per cent) are well above that of other groups (33 per cent). The differences between STs and others are larger in rural than urban areas, and slightly larger in Orissa than India's average.

The trend in Orissa since 1983 shows that poverty incidence has declined more rapidly among other groups (23 per cent points) than among STs in particular (a mere 14 per cent points), but also SCs (20 per cent points). Thus, while at the all-India level trends differ little across social groups, trends regarding social group disparities in Orissa are unusually adverse.²⁸

In education, while differences between India and Orissa are small, the differences across social groups are very large – though even 27 per cent of the not-deprived groups in rural coastal areas are illiterate (and 17 per cent in urban areas), 82 per cent of the ST population in the southern areas is illiterate. According to NFHS-2 (2001; p 38), 88 per cent of the female tribal population, 73 per cent of the scheduled caste women, 56 per cent of other backward caste women and 34 per cent of 'other women' were illiterate. In 2000, according to official data the drop-out rate at primary level was 42 per cent for all children (similar for boys and girls), 52 per cent for SC (substantially higher for girls), and 63 per cent for ST (quoted in *Orissa Human Development Report*, Table 4.19).

In health and health care also, disparities between social groups are substantial (*Orissa Human Development Report*). 37 per cent of ST women receive no antenatal check-up, against 15 per cent

of women from non-deprived groups. Rates of full immunisation are about half that among children of non-deprived groups.

Land ownership show a slightly complicated picture. Average cultivable landholdings, as Table 4 shows, in Orissa are relatively small, particularly in coastal areas. SCs are particularly badly off, with average landholdings just over half that of others. STs on average have larger landholdings, but these are likely to be in marginal areas, and not irrigated. Moreover, land alienation, as described above, seems to have negatively impacted STs in particular.

An issue that affects tribal groups in particular, because of their location in remote areas, is forced displacement, mostly for development projects, and in small measure through the settlers of refugees in tribal areas. It is estimated that some 3 to 5 million people have been displaced since 1950 in Orissa on account of various development projects, of which more than 50 per cent are tribals,²⁹ and the expected displacement in the coming decades also is expected to affect tribals disproportionately.

Thus, social groups like dalits and adivasis in Orissa do suffer from the same disadvantages as they do elsewhere, in some cases even more so, and the gaps do show little sign of being bridged. But why do these differences exist, and persist? And how can they be addressed? Analysis shows that poverty among deprived groups is higher because they have lower levels of literacy and other forms of assets, hence programmes like DPEP and SSA will go some way in addressing the disparities. But analysis also shows that ST and SC tend to be poorer even if they have the same levels of education, and that returns to assets are lower among deprived groups than among others, ie, that they face discrimination. This is generally the case in India, but such

Table 1: Human Development in Orissa's Districts

	Literacy 1991			Literacy 2001			Health		
	Persons	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Per Cent Women Receiving Skilled Attention during Pregnancy	IMR	Per Cent Children Completely Immunised
Orissa	49.09	63.09	34.68	63.61	75.95	50.97			
Bargarh	47.65	63.78	31.21	64.13	77.93	50.03	47	93	63.9
Jharsuguda	52.73	67.29	37.11	71.47	83.04	59.23	59.8	93	79.8
Sambalpur	51.52	65.90	36.43	67.01	78.87	54.79	42.4	93	76.5
Debagarh	44.45	59.43	29.26	60.78	73.79	47.56	27.2	93	53.1
Sundargarh	52.97	65.41	39.60	65.22	75.69	54.25	48.9	93	80.2
Kendujhar	44.73	59.04	30.01	59.75	72.53	46.71	27.2	93	46.8
Mayurbhanj	37.88	51.84	23.68	52.43	66.38	38.28	27.1	93	55.1
Baleshwar	57.64	71.23	43.40	70.94	81.75	59.57	25.3	92	51
Bhadrak	60.54	74.62	46.35	74.64	85.44	63.62	30.3	92	54
Kendrapara	63.61	76.82	50.67	77.33	87.62	67.29	39.8	92	53.8
Jagatsinghapur	65.77	78.27	53.05	79.61	88.96	69.94	50.4	92	58.6
Cuttack	65.46	77.41	52.44	76.13	85.46	66.19	46.7	92	70.8
Jajapur	58.00	70.50	45.29	72.19	82.69	61.45	38.6	92	56.5
Dhenkanal	54.91	68.80	40.33	70.11	81.31	58.55	36.7	93	71.5
Anugul	51.53	67.66	34.32	69.40	82.02	56.01	22.7	93	70.9
Nayagarh	57.20	73.00	40.74	71.02	83.23	58.10	41.2	92	63.8
Khordha	67.72	78.74	55.39	80.19	88.38	71.06	65.9	92	62.8
Puri	63.30	76.83	49.41	78.40	88.73	67.80	54.6	92	60.5
Ganjam	46.72	63.88	29.87	62.94	78.39	47.70	35.3	92	37.5
Gajapati	29.37	41.76	17.44	41.73	55.14	28.91	24.7	92	62
Kandhamal	37.23	54.68	19.82	52.95	69.98	36.19	21	125	67.7
Baudh	40.98	60.61	21.01	58.43	76.86	39.78	21	93	50.7
Sonapur	42.62	61.48	23.38	64.07	80.30	47.28	40.6	93	66.6
Balangir	38.63	55.64	21.30	54.93	70.36	39.27	36.7	93	72.4
Nuapada	27.52	42.31	12.78	42.29	58.78	26.01	21	125	52.4
Kalahandi	31.08	46.85	15.28	46.20	62.88	29.56	23.4	125	55.7
Rayagada	26.01	36.53	15.63	35.61	47.35	24.31	28.8	125	55.2
Nabarangapur	18.62	28.10	9.01	34.26	47.37	21.02	18.1	125	28.1
Koraput	24.64	33.98	15.15	36.20	47.58	24.81	20.4	125	55.5
Malkangiri	20.04	28.24	11.69	31.26	41.21	21.28	10.7	125	50.2

Sources: literacy data from Census 1991 and 2001; health data on immunisation, safe delivery, National Commission on Population, and IMR from SRS, quoted in Bobek Debroy and Laveesh Bhandari, *District-Level Deprivation on the New Millennium*, Konark Publishers, Delhi, 2003.

'discrimination', particularly for ST, appears higher in Orissa than in India on average.³⁰

The continued existence of these disparities are remarkable particularly against the background of a wide array of policies to protect and promote the rights of deprived groups, including abolishment of untouchability, and reservation in educational and political institutions. While much more analysis is required to understand the impact of these policies, on specific groups and in particular areas, two hypotheses can be put forward. First, the emancipation of deprived groups has been substantial across the country, but – as authors like Kaviraj and Alam have emphasised – this has been mainly on the political front, and not focused on achievement of social equality.³¹ Second, and discussed in more detail in Section V, in Orissa the social structure has remained remarkably unchanged, and has experienced little political emancipation as has happened in south India much earlier, and more recently in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.³²

IV Gender

It is often argued that women in India suffer a triple burden, of class, caste, and gender. Is this true also in Orissa? In particular, are the disparities as described above compounded by gender-based disparities? Figures on poverty are not available separately for men and women, as income/consumption surveys like NSS take the household as unit of analysis. But there is sufficient information showing disparities in education between men and women, and regarding – as already discussed above – health indicators that affect women in particular.

As elsewhere, evidence regarding whether female headed households are poorer than others is mixed. Our own analysis of NSS data (see de Haan and Dubey 2003) shows no significant correlation in Orissa between female headship of households and poverty, but primary data analysis by Panda suggests in rural Orissa female headship is closely linked to poverty and child disadvantage.³³

Above we discussed disparities in education, noting the lags in female education, compared to men, and across Orissa's regions and districts.³⁴ Female literacy increased from 35 per cent to just over 50 per cent between 1991 and 2001 (Table 1). But the disparities between men and women in 2001 were still about 25 percentage points, and only marginally declined from 1991. Regional disparities also decreased marginally, and improvements in enrolment show some reduction in disparities, as did the trend in school attendance, between the two NFHS surveys. Yet female literacy in the southern districts still remained

below 30 per cent. According to the 1998-99 NFHS, women received only three years schooling, against men five (*Human Development Report*). Against the considerable efforts towards universalising primary education over the 1990s, these gaps are very significant, and indicate deep-rooted problems of under-development.

As reported above, health indicators highlight the considerable disadvantages women face. Maternal mortality is still extremely high in Orissa and well above the Indian average, though showing substantial decline during the last decade. Data on percentage of women receiving skilled attention during pregnancy again emphasise very large disparities across the state (e.g. 10 per cent in Malkangiri versus more than 50 per cent in some coastal districts). In poorer districts, age of marriage is substantially lower than in better-off areas (*Orissa Human Development Report*, p 209).

Though most of these data show cumulative disadvantages women face, one should be careful in generalisation. Recent census data indicate that in Orissa sex ratios may be worsening, indicating discrimination against girls. However, disaggregation also shows that female disadvantage may vary across social groups: particularly worsening of sex ratio appears to occur first among better-off and in better-off areas, and not for example among many tribes though their human development indicators fall far behind the average.³⁵

A similar warning against generalisation is provided in analysis in preparation for the 2nd IFAD project, providing some nuances in considering gender issues and disparities in Orissa, particularly in tribal areas (including differences with scheduled castes).³⁶

Table 3: Headcount Index in Regions of Orissa by Social Group
(Calculated using Official Poverty Line)

Region	Rural				Urban			
	ST	SC	Other	All	ST	SC	Other	All
1999-2000								
Coastal	66.63	42.18	24.32	31.74	63.47	75.74	34.26	41.84
Southern	92.42	88.90	77.65	87.05	72.28	85.02	24.59	43.85
Northern	61.69	57.22	34.67	49.81	54.44	63.11	37.77	46.06
Orissa	73.08	52.30	33.29	48.04	59.38	72.03	34.18	43.59

Source: Official NSS data, as calculated by Amaresh Dubey.

Table 4: Average Cultivable Landholding 1999-2000
(in hectares)

Social Groups	India	Orissa	Coastal	Southern	Northern
ST	0.80	0.60	0.52	0.71	0.55
SC	0.31	0.32	0.29	0.44	0.32
OBC	0.72	0.58	0.46	0.63	0.70
Other	0.98	0.55	0.51	0.54	0.71

Source: Official NSS data, as calculated by Amaresh Dubey.

Table 2: Poverty Ratios by Social Group, Orissa and India, 1983 to 1999-2000

Social Group	Rural				Urban				Total			
	1983	1987-88	1993-94	1999-2000	1983	1987-88	1993-94	1999-2000	1983	1987-88	1993-94	1999-2000
<i>Orissa</i>												
ST	87.08	83.82	71.31	73.08	73.73	61.37	62.81	59.38	86.22	82.34	70.76	72.08
SC	75.99	65.75	49.79	52.30	69.53	59.52	45.46	72.03	75.38	65.35	49.39	55.08
Other	58.52	47.31	40.18	33.29	41.86	37.87	36.32	34.18	56.16	45.92	39.55	33.48
All	68.43	58.62	49.79	48.04	49.66	42.58	40.68	43.59	66.24	56.75	48.63	47.31
<i>All India</i>												
ST	63.89	56.31	47.05	44.35	55.30	52.26	35.67	37.42	63.27	55.93	46.29	43.67
SC	58.96	50.79	48.27	35.44	56.12	54.65	49.08	39.13	58.50	51.38	48.42	36.14
Other	40.90	33.80	31.20	21.14	39.94	36.44	28.67	20.78	40.66	34.48	30.46	21.04
All	46.51	39.36	37.28	26.50	42.32	39.16	31.70	23.98	45.57	39.31	35.95	25.87

Source: Official NSS data, as calculated by Amaresh Dubey; for details see A de Haan and A Dubey, paper for Manchester Conference on Chronic Poverty, April 2003.

Different tribes and sub-groups have different values and social relations. These have not been well documented, or have found general acceptance, often leading to inaccurate generalisations, and possible harmful advice regarding development interventions. In particular, there is a common assumption that gender discrimination against women is common among tribes, and as prevalent as among other groups. However, gender division of labour and responsibilities is more equitable in tribal areas than in other areas in Orissa. More equal gender relations is reflected in a tradition of bride price (and possibly also in the more equal sex ratios).

Gender differences may be growing in these areas, however, or at least the character of inequality is changing. Movement of tribals to new areas often has led to registration of ownership in the name of male heads of households, impacting traditional land use. Assignment of individual use of land has resulted in discrimination against women, and women's traditional economic role and freedom may not always lead directly into participation in new forms of decision making (though substantial space is of course created with the reservation for women in panchayats). And a gender bias has evolved in the more traditional or mainstream education system, though residential schools are effectively combating this (though the education of tribal children, it is argued in the IFAD report, may lead to some alienation from peers).

Thus, the picture is complex, and the nuances are extremely important for policy purposes with respect to remote areas and deprived groups. Nevertheless, most of the standard indicators of well-being suggest that women may indeed suffer multiple burdens, of being located in remote poor areas, belonging to deprived groups, receiving less education, and of the health indicators that affect women in particular. Finally, as with the policies for deprived social groups, it seems imperative to get a better understanding of the impact of specific policy measures, such as the registration of land in name of women, the role of special programmes like the formation of self-help groups which has been very popular in Orissa recently, and the impact of budget allocations through special component plans.

V

Continuing Disparities: Role of Voice and Accountability

This section of the paper explores, very briefly and raising as many questions as giving answers, the role of citizens' voice and accountability, particularly of poor people, to understand the deprivation and disparities in Orissa. As the short discussion of public policies in the previous sections shows, there is no absence of efforts to address deprivation, but the policies have had limited and varied success. This section describes very briefly some of the possible reasons for this, related to representation in and knowledge of the political system, and roles of decentralisation and civil society.

As noted earlier, a comparison of political regimes in Indian states by John Harris (1999) emphasises the unchallenged nature of Orissa's politics. Orissa may be the only state where the landowning classes have not captured state politics, let alone that this dominance was challenged by other castes. It is marked by continued higher-caste dominance at the top, and this dominance is based in the coastal areas. Politics and governments have very weak roots in society, and public action by marginalised groups has remained limited – with notable exceptions of resistance to

displacement related to investment in mineral exploitation and to investment plans for the Chilka Lake.

A CDS survey provides important background information regarding knowledge of the political system.³⁷ It showed that the poor do take a great interest in the political system, as indicated by high voter turnouts. But their knowledge is very limited. Though many people could name the sarpanch, only 22 per cent of the 'very poor' could name the country's prime minister (against 78 per cent of the upper class), and 39 per cent their MLA. Exposure to media is extremely limited: only 6 per cent of the very poor read newspapers, and only 17 per cent listen to radio. This is confirmed by NFHS data showing that 84 per cent of scheduled tribes is not regularly exposed to any media.

One might expect decentralisation to contribute to poverty reduction, and – as reservation brings deprived groups to the political spectrum at local level – the reduction of differences across groups. However, though the long-term impacts of decentralisation cannot be underestimated, the pro-poor potential seems to have remained limited.³⁸ The power of local bodies in Orissa has remained limited, knowledge of elected representatives regarding roles and functions often restricted, and decentralised planning needs strengthening. Orissa's power has remained extremely centralised, and MLAs for example have continued to exercise patronage and control over for example decentralised systems of school management (A Sinha, personal communication). Decentralisation does not guarantee the representation of deprived groups: the PRAXIS (2002) study on poor people's perceptions of government services noted that the panchayat was for many people the most important local institution, as it coordinates and sanctions development schemes, but it is also perceived to be the most corrupt institution.³⁹

Finally, it is generally recognised that civil society is weak in Orissa – though the generalisation has many important exceptions, and many organisations work among the poorest groups and in most remote regions. It appears that there are a few cases of strong (joint) advocacy, and where such advocacy has occurred policy debates have become polarised and a common perception regarding NGOs being anti-development has developed (though this may be wrong, the perception still hinders the debate, and therefore effective articulation of voice). Press reporting in Orissa also tends to be weak on reporting on social issues, as CYSD work shows (Jagadanand, personal communication). Regular reporting on hunger deaths may not substantively contribute to accountability as this tends to be the national press more than the Orissa-based, and does not seem to be of high quality, nor address key issues related to deprivation.

How do these issues relate to the disparities discussed above? First, the lack of representation in and knowledge of the political and administrative systems themselves can be regarded as one of the elements of deprivation. Second, the hypothesis is that the lack of 'voice' – or in the case of marginalised groups the focus on political representation only – is part of the explanation why government policies have not been more effective in reducing the disparities in the state.

VI

Conclusion

This descriptive exploration of existing data of what is now India's poorest state thus highlights the importance of disparities within the state. Regional inequality seems to have increased with respect to poverty incidences, and there is little indication that

regional gaps in human development indicators are being bridged – despite for example the targeted attempts to universalise education. Disparities between social groups similarly are not being reduced significantly. Adivasis suffer from the cumulation of disadvantages related to location and social group, and dalits face the kinds of discrimination that has been well-documented for other parts of India. Gender disparities equally are significant, with education gaps not being reduced, and women continuing to suffer from specific health disadvantages.⁴⁰

These disadvantages are cumulative: a person belong to the ST category living in the southern region has a more than 90 per cent probability of being in poverty – and women probably even more – compared to about 25 per cent of non-deprived groups in coastal Orissa, or less than 10 per cent in better-off parts of India. And 82 per cent of STs in rural areas in southern Orissa are illiterate, against less than 20 per cent of non-deprived groups in urban areas across Orissa (see de Haan and Dubey 2003).

These disparities urgently need explanation, particularly in the context of India's democratic set-up. The disparities are not, it appears, the result of a lack of development or economic growth (though higher growth is essential for Orissa), but rather a case of 'entitlement failure'. The description above confirms, I believe, the conclusion from the historical study by Bob Currie, emphasising for example that Kalahandi has remained a net exporter of paddy throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and that lack of command over food – caused by unequal access to land, credit and productive assets – has been responsible for deprivation.⁴¹ The continuing disparities between social groups also appear the result of social practices of discrimination, and not that development has not reached remote areas and tribal groups. The history of displacement and lack of adequate resettlement and rehabilitation similarly illustrates that deprivation has been the result of exploitative social and economic processes.

The paper has argued that the lack of effective citizens' voice has been a key element and determinant of poverty in Orissa. The deprivation in terms of lack of access to education, income, markets, etc, is compounded by deprivation on the basis of social identity, and social mobilisation and articulation of voice to address these inequalities has remained limited in Orissa. This, I believe, may be part of the explanation why poverty has continued to persist despite significant mineral wealth, despite the fact that there is probably no absolute food shortage, and despite the political interest that has been taken in the region (and despite that this occurs within a democracy with a free press).

The fact that the disparities have become more pronounced during the 1990s, or have not been reduced despite government programmes for example in education, suggest that the processes have been influenced by liberalisation of the economy, accompanied by structural adjustment. This relationship is complex, and often simplified in popular discourse. Liberalisation and adjustment are neither responsible for the sustained deprivation in the area and disparities across the state, nor are they likely to do much to address these issues. The problems of Orissa's poorest regions are, as Vidya Das notes, 'complex and deeprooted'.⁴² As Das emphasises, development programmes have a difficult history in those areas, as there are no structures in place to ensure accountability, illustrated by high levels of corruption.

For the future of areas like this, many challenges exist. One key issue is related to ensuring that the new paths of development, of the economy inserting in a new, faster, global economy

benefits poor people in remote rural regions. The inequalities described above are neither just, nor efficient. Moreover, they are cumulative, and human development disparities reinforce those related to income poverty, and vice versa. They leave out a large section of the population, unable to be economically productive, leading to needs for schemes of social protection, and potentially to political unrest. The local disputes around new investments in mineral resources are illustration of a history in which poor people have suffered from new investments, and a core issues that need to be addressed.

While the fiscal adjustment of the state may be required for restoring government budget and for freeing resources for developmental expenditure, such adjustment in itself will not address the disparities within the state. Neither will it improve the poor performance of public policies, in education, health and targeted poverty alleviation programmes. Such improvements, essential for bridging some of the disparities, should be the subject of much more research. Also, good public policy initiatives do exist in the state, for example in watershed, women's self-help groups, disease monitoring. However, the key conclusion is that the existing and in some cases reinforcement of disparities during the 1990s, indicates that a strong public policy response is required to accompany policies of fiscal adjustment and governance reforms. [27]

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Notes

[This paper was initially prepared for the DFID India programme, and uses material collected during 2002-04, collaborating with Amaresh Dubey. Comments from and discussions with colleagues in DFID have been extremely valuable, as have been comments from Jean Drèze, regular discussions with RV Singh, Planning and Coordination Department, government of Orissa, and friends and colleagues at NCDS and CYSD in Bhubaneswar, and discussions during seminar at PRIA New Delhi, at the Chronic Poverty Research Centre at Manchester, at the University of Guelph, and IDS Sussex. More extensive description of data and methods can be found in our joint paper, 'Extreme Deprivation in Remote Areas in India: Social Exclusion as Explanatory Concept', paper for Chronic Poverty and Development Policy Conference, University of Manchester, March 2003, and the analysis has benefited greatly from the joint work undertaken for DFID India with S K Thorat, Z Hasan, L Prakash and Xaxa. Opinions expressed in this paper are entirely the author's.]

- 1 The nature of the 'starvation deaths', and whether they are due to the consumption of kernels is always disputed. An NHRC team however has emphasised the link between the deaths in Kashipur and the absence of medical facilities as well as 'backbreaking poverty' (in *Economic and Political Weekly*, August 24, 2000).
- 2 An overview of displacement in Orissa is provided in Balaji Pandey, *Depriving the Underprivileged for Development*, Bhubaneswar, 1998; this summarises (p 32) the Balimela multipurpose dam project, starting work in 1962-63, resulting in submerging 18,000 ha of land, displacing 2,000 families, of which 79 per cent tribals.
- 3 Much action-oriented research has recently been published on the subject, for example by ActionAid, Agramee, and earlier by VIKALPA.
- 4 The useful overview of debates on inequality by Rosalind Eyben highlights that inequality, like poverty, can be defined in many different ways, for example relating to different outcomes of well-being (which this article mostly focuses on), of capabilities in the way Amartya Sen has used this, and regarding political representation and voice (R Eyben, December 2003, 'Political and Social Inequality: An Essay for Development Practitioners with a Background in the Social Sciences', IDS Sussex, Mimeo).
- 5 A Deaton, 'Adjusted Indian Poverty Estimates for 1999-2000', *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 25, 2003, and 'Prices and Poverty in India: 1987-2000', *Economic and Political Weekly*, September 7, 2003.
- 6 See also the overview by K Sundaram and S K Tendulkar, 'Poverty in India in the 1990s. An Analysis of Changes in 15 Major States', *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 5, 2003, pp 1385-93.

- 7 A Deaton and J Dreze, 'Poverty and Inequality in India: A Re-examination', *Economic and Political Weekly*, September 7, 2002, pp 3729-48.
- 8 An exception is J Dreze and P V Srinivasan, 1996, *Poverty in India: Regional Estimates, 1987-88*, London School of Economics, DEP No 70. A recent World Bank paper discusses the implications of problems of comparability between the 1993-94 and 1999-2000 round of NSS surveys, showing – as Deaton did – substantial changes in estimates in some regions (the picture for Orissa changes only slightly); Yoko Kijima and Peter Lanjouw, 'Poverty in India during the 1990s: A Regional Perspective', World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3141, October 2003.
- 9 Calculations of calorie deficient households show lower levels of poverty in Orissa compared to other states, smaller differences across regions, and a decline in all the NSS regions; hence the value of food consumption (prices) may not be adequately recorded, possibly due to dependence on PDS.
- 10 M Panda, 'Poverty in Orissa: A Disaggregated Analysis', paper for the NCCDS workshop on poverty monitoring, Bhubaneswar, February 2002. Panda also shows that the super-cyclone did *not* have a big impact on the poverty headcount (possibly, because the influx of assistance keeps consumption levels relatively high and recorded poverty therefore low).
- 11 Most vocal defendants of this viewpoint include David Dollar and Aart Kraay 2000, 'Growth Is Good for the Poor', World Bank, March.
- 12 Gaurav Datt and Martin Ravallion, May 2002, 'Is India's Economic Growth Leaving the Poor Behind', World Bank, Policy Research Working Paper.
- 13 Government of Orissa, Draft Tenth Five-Year Plan 2002-07, Bhubaneswar August 2002, p 1/17. Low coverage and inefficiency in irrigation (coupled with decline in traditional irrigation systems) are seen as major causes for this poor performance. A study in Koraput – in a village where three-quarters of the population consume less than 2,000kcal, i.e., well below the poverty line – show how access to even a little low irrigated paddy land make substantial difference for households' food security; Sharadini Rath, 'Productivity and Food Security: A Marginal Situation Case Study', Centre for Budget and Policy Studies, November 2003.
- 14 NSS data between 1993-94 and 2000; in Deaton and Dreze, op cit, pp 3739.
- 15 In the 1990s, District Domestic Product varied between Rs 3,727 per capita in Kalahandi to Rs 7,763 in Sundargarh; data from Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Bhubaneswar, quoted in Nabakrishna Choudhury Centre for Development Studies, *Orissa Human Development Report*, draft, sponsored by UNDP and Planning Commission, Bhubaneswar, 2004, Table 8.1.
- 16 Datt and Ravallion (2002: 15-16) conclude: "The key message emerging from recent research is that achieving a policy environment conducive to growth interacts *multiplicatively* with human resource development"
- 17 RCDC, 'Social and Institutional Analysis and Livelihood Systems Study of Tribal Communities in Selected Villages in Kandhamal and Gajapati Districts', March 2000; and Development Innovators, 'Impact of Deforestation on Socio-Economic Conditions of Tribal Communities in Orissa, Bhubaneswar, July 1999; both quoted in IFAD, Second Orissa Tribal Development Programme Formulation report, Annex 1, Lessons Learned from Other IFAD Assisted Tribal development Projects, Mimeo, undated.
- 18 World Bank, 'Orissa Policy Notes – Poverty in Orissa: Diagnosis and Approach', mimeo, World Bank, May 2000, p 18. Based on Agricultural Census Reports, Mohanty notes that in Orissa during the 1980s in Orissa the operational holdings belonging to scheduled castes increased slightly, but worsened slightly for scheduled tribes; B B Mohanty, 'Land Distribution among Scheduled Castes and Tribes', *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 6, 2001, pp 3857-68. Bonded labour continues to exist, for example in Malkangiri; see RITES Forum and DRDA Malkangiri, 'Bonded Labour Survey Report Malkangiri District, draft report, 2001-02.
- 19 The NFHS sample has about 4-5,000 households, and may allow for disaggregation to the level of the old 13 districts, similar to NSS data.
- 20 World Development Indicators 2003. International comparisons are very difficult and figures need to be interpreted with care. In the case of India the picture of funding is complicated both because of the federal structure, and the various 'Plan' and 'Non-Plan' transfers, and dispersion of schemes across a range of departments and ministries.
- 21 A recent article discusses the relative high share of spending on secondary education in India compared to other countries, and differences among India's states, with Orissa spending relatively much on primary education (partly for demographic reasons); S Mehrotra, 'Reforming Public Spending on Education and Mobilising Resources. Lessons from International Experience', *Economic and Political Weekly*, February 28, 2004, pp 987-997.
- 22 S M Dev and J Mooij, 2002, 'Social Sector Expenditures and Budgeting. An Analysis of Patterns and the Budget making Process in India in the 1990s', CESS Hyderabad, Working Paper 43.
- 23 NFHS data show 87 per cent of tribal and 83 per cent of illiterate women deliver at home. Data on access does not however seem to square with numbers of health centres per capita, where Orissa ranks average among Indian states, but the wide geographical spread of population enhances Orissa's challenges; data in *Orissa Human Development Report* Table 5.19.
- 24 NC Saxena, *Hindustan Times*, February 4, 2004.
- 25 PRAXIS (2002), 'The Accountable State', report prepared for Government of Orissa; CYSD, 2002, 'Time Spent by People below Poverty Line in Accessing Public Service', draft report.
- 26 Data presented at the GDN Conference in New Delhi, January 2004; quoted in *Economic and Political Weekly*, February 28, 2004.
- 27 In this paper reference is often to the official nomenclature of ST and SC, rather than Adivasi and Dalit, as the information derives largely from official sources.
- 28 As poverty in particularly the southern part of Orissa is extremely high, and these are the areas where concentration of STs is high, the deprivation of STs may be caused mainly by their location. To a large extent this is true, however even in southern Orissa the incidence of poverty among STs is higher (92 per cent) than among others (but a still very high 78 per cent). However, the number of sampled households from STs and SCs is critically low for obtaining reliable estimates of poverty incidence by social group at NSS region level.
- 29 N C Saxena, Empowerment of Tribals Through Sustainable Natural Resource Management in Western Orissa, report for IFAD/DFID, December 2001.
- 30 See de Haan and Dubey 2003, Annexure 15. Relative to other castes, and holding other factors constant, a household is more likely to be poor if it belongs to one of the deprived groups. The marginal increase in the probability is highest for STs, and this increase is larger in Orissa (39 per cent) than in India on average (30 per cent).
- 31 S Kaviraj, 2000, 'Democracy and Social Inequality' in F R Frankel (ed), *Transforming India. Social and Political Dynamics of Democracy*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi; J Alam, 1999, 'What is Happening Inside Indian Democracy?', *Economic and Political Weekly*, September 11.
- 32 J Harriss, 'Comparing Political Regimes across Indian States. A Preliminary Essay', *Economic and Political Weekly*, November 27, 1999.
- 33 P K Panda, 'Female Headship, Poverty and Child Welfare: A Study of Rural Orissa, India', Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, August 1997.
- 34 Chapter four of the *Orissa Human Development Report* gives a detailed analysis of disparities on a range of indicators, a decline in the gender disparity index, but emphasis that regional disparities in female literacy are larger than men's.
- 35 Presentation by Satish Agnihotri, at poverty monitoring workshop, NCDS, Bhubaneswar, February 2003.
- 36 IFAD, op cit, Annexure on Gender Issues.
- 37 S Kumar 2001, 'Study of political systems and voting behaviour of the poor in Orissa', DFID-Delhi.
- 38 Mathew has emphasised that the local elections during the 1990s have been followed by violence, often caste-based (though it still has potential); G Mathew, 'Panchayati Raj Institutions and Human Rights in India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 11, 2003, pp 155-62.
- 39 A pilot 'social audit' held in Bolangir in November 2001 showed substantial and relatively open corruption at panchayat level. A pilot 'social audit' held in Bolangir in November 2001 showed substantial and relatively open corruption at panchayat level.
- 40 This study of Orissa and its different parts confirm the conclusion of Deaton and Dreze (2002): while overall Indian poverty does seem to be declining steadily, though methodological difficulties continue to put some question marks around this assertion, imbalances do appear to become more pronounced.
- 41 Bob Currie, *The Politics of Hunger in India: A Study of Democracy, Governance and Kalahandi's Poverty*, MacMillan, Chennai, 2000, pp 85ff. See also Jagadish Pradhan who also emphasised that drought since the mid-1980s was not responsible for the deprivation in Kalahandi; J Pradhan, 'Drought in Kalahandi: The Real Story', *Economic and Political Weekly*, May 29, 1993, pp 1084-88, and *ibid*, 'The Distorted Kalahandi and a Strategy for its' Development', *Social Action*, July-September 1993, pp 295-311.
- 42 Vidya Das, 'Kashipur: Politics of Underdevelopment', *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 4, 2003.