



HISTORICAL SOURCES OF HUNGER AND DEPRIVATION IN ODISHA

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Abstract

The paper examines the structure of hunger and deprivation within the state of Odisha and found a large variation across different social groups, regions and locations, which have been explained through various historical factors, existed in the state. The political economy aspects of the problem has been seen through the history of the accumulating and de-accumulating groups; through higher and lower strata of the society and their access to wealth, health, education, housing; and through gender dimension. The enquiry into the economic history of the state suggests-a single most important variable that can explain the higher incidence of hunger and deprivation to a greater extent is the state's social structure and social hierarchy, where the SCs/STs, women, children and old dependents faced most disadvantages. Forty percent of the people of the state belong to SCs/STs, who were traditionally excluded from the state affairs and continued to face multiple stages of exclusions. The findings here suggest that irrespective of place of living, incidence of hunger and deprivation among SCs/STs are higher.

Key Words: Hunger, Deprivation, Social Exclusion, Political economy, Odisha.

Introduction

The paper explores the structure of hunger and deprivation within the state of Odisha from a historical perspective. A high level of hunger and deprivation with a large variation across different social groups, regions and locations are found in the state. The analysis of the economic history suggests-a single most important variable that can explain the higher incidence of hunger and deprivation in Odisha to a greater extent is the social structure and social hierarchy prevailing in the state, where the SCs/STs, women, children and old dependents faced most disadvantages. Forty percent of the people of the state belong to SCs/STs, who were traditionally excluded from the state affairs and continued to face multiple stages of exclusions. The paper examines these issues in detailed. The paper comprises of three sections. The first section examines the structure of hunger and deprivation in Odisha. The second section explains the findings through various historical factors of the state such as the economy, society and topography and section three summarises the paper.

Structure of Hunger in Odisha

Two important ways hunger can be understood is – one through income poverty and the other through anthropometric measures. While the former dealt with the current adverse situations of a household, the latter state the long term nutritional deficiency terms growth of human body. The following paragraph discusses these two variables.

(a) **Hunger in terms of Income Poverty:** The recent poverty estimates from 61st NSSO round (2004-05) shows- the incidence of poverty is the highest among casual labourers residing in urban areas (89 percent) followed by STs population (75 percent), Southern region (71 percent) and agricultural labour residing in rural areas (65 percent). At the other extremes, the incidence of poverty is the lowest among regular/salaried people in urban areas (21 percent), higher castes (25 percent), and coastal areas and household owning more than 4 acres of land (30 percent each). Across the region the incidence of poverty is the highest in Southern Odisha (71 percent) followed by Northern Odisha (56 percent) and coastal Odisha (29 percent). The difference between rural and urban head count ratio at the aggregate level is minor (46 percent in rural area and 44 percent in urban area). At the regional level, the magnitude of rural poverty remained higher in South (72 percent) and North (59 percent) Odisha compared to their urban counterpart (55 percent and 42 percent respectively). The situation is reverse in coastal Odisha. While the magnitudes of rural head count ratio was 27 percent, the same for urban area is 44 percent. Across the social groups the head count ratio across social groups varies from 25 percent among 'other' category of social group (higher caste) to 75 percent among STs and 52 percent among SCs and 38 percent among OBC. These variations also pointed out that, irrespective of the place of living, the SC/ST are more prone towards poverty than OBC and 'other' category of social groups. On the whole, irrespective of region, as we move in the social ladder from STs to SCs to OBC to other category of social groups, the incidence of poverty declined sharply. Across occupational groups in rural areas, the magnitude of head count ratio remains highest among the agricultural labour (64 percent) followed by 51 percent among 'other' category labour, 46 percent among self-employed in agriculture, 32 percent among self-employed in non-agriculture and 19 percent among others. A point to be noted here is that the magnitude of head count ratio, among the agricultural labour households of southern Odisha and northern Odisha is very high, 88 percent and 78 percent respectively. In urban areas too, there exists substantial differences. The head count ratio varies from 89 percent among the casual labour to 50 percent among the self employed to 26 percent among 'other' and 20 percent among the regular and salaried types of



households. Here too, the incidence of poverty among the casual labour remains very high in southern part of Odisha (97 percent) compared to 89 percent in northern Odisha and 85 percent in coastal Odisha. As the land possession and head count ratio is concerned, the relationship is not that sharp, except that large landowners (>4 acres) in the coastal and northern region exhibit relatively lower incidence of poverty. Households are below the poverty line even with adequate land possession with them, which might be due to low land productivity.

(b) **Hunger in terms Anthropometrical Indicators:** The high magnitude of hunger in the state reveals different forms of malnutrition. The data collected by National Family Health Survey (NFHS, 2005-06) provides the nutritional status of women and children in terms of different anthropometric measures, such as Body Mass Index (BMI), underweight (weight-for age), stunted (height-for- age) and wasted (weight- for- height). The data analysis state- children from rural Odisha are more disadvantageous with 18 percent of them are severely stunted compare to urban Odisha (14 percent). Coastal Odisha is relatively disadvantageous with 19.43 percent of the children are severely stunted compared to 17.1 and 15.3 percent in southern and northern Odisha respectively. SC children are most disadvantages with 22.84 percent of them are severely stunted, which is followed by children from ST, (19.71 percent) OBC (18.29 percent) and other caste (9.84 percent). In both the cases (moderate and severe) as we move from SCs to STs to OBC to other category of social group, the nutritional status in terms of stunting of the children becomes better up. Children from low standard of living households are most disadvantageous with 20.4 percent of them in severely stunted, which is followed by medium (16.4 percent), and then high (4.5 percent) standard of living. Children, whose mother works in non-agricultural occupations are most disadvantageous with 23.1 percent of them in severely stunted, which is followed by children whose mothers are non-worker with 16.8 percent, and that is followed by children, whose mother works in agriculture with 12.5 percent. Children from illiterate mothers are most disadvantageous with 22.5 percent of them are severely stunted, which is followed by children from primary school educated mother (12.8 percent) and children from high school educated mother (9.9 percent) and the least moderated stunted children was found among mothers with secondary or more educated (2.1 percent). Children from rural Odisha are more disadvantageous with 21.2 percent of them are severely wasted compare to urban Odisha (16.6 percent). Southern Odisha is relatively disadvantageous with 26.3 percent of her children in severe wasted compared to 23 and 16.6 percent for northern and coastal Odisha respectively. ST children are most disadvantageous with 26.43 percent are severely wasted, which is followed by SCs (24.31 percent) OBC (20.73 percent) and other caste (12.17 percent). Children from low standard of living households are most disadvantageous with 25.98 percentages of them in severely wasted, which is followed by medium 15.47 percent, and then high (9.91 percent) standard of living. Children, whose mother works in non-agricultural occupations are most disadvantageous with 26.01 percent of them are moderately wasted, which is followed by children whose mothers are non-worker with 19.81 percent, and that is followed by children, whose mother works in agriculture 17.58 percent. Children from illiterate mothers are most disadvantages with 26.0 percent of them are severely wasted, which is followed by children from primary school educated mother (15.3 percent) and children from high school educated mother (13.1 percent) and the least moderated wasted children was found among mothers with secondary or more educated (8.5 percent). Children, whose father works in non-agricultural occupation are most disadvantageous with 24.7 percent of them are moderately wasted, which is followed by children whose father works in agricultural occupations with 15.4 percent, and that is followed by children whose father does not work with 10.7 percent.

Children from rural Odisha are more disadvantageous with 4 percent of them are severely under weight compared to urban Odisha (3.6 percent). ST children are most disadvantageous with 5.71 percent are severely under weight, which is followed by OBC (4.63 percent) SCs (3.11 percent) and other caste (2.61 percent). Children from low standard of living households are most disadvantageous with 5.03 percent of them in severely under weight, which is followed by medium (2.69 percent), and then high (2.68 percent) standard of living. Children, whose mother works in non-agricultural occupations are most disadvantageous with 4.4 percent of them are severely under weight, which is followed by children whose mothers are non-worker with 4.3 percent. Children from illiterate mothers are most disadvantageous with 4.8 percent of them are severely weight, which is followed by children from primary school educated mother (3.1 percent) and children from high school educated mother (2.2 percent) and the least moderated wasted children was found among mothers with secondary or more educated (2.1 percent). Children from illiterate father are most disadvantageous with 5.1 percent of them are severely under weight, which is followed by children from high school educated mother (3.3 percent) and children from primary school educated mother (3.9 percent) and the least moderated wasted children was found among mothers with secondary or more educated (2.9 percent). Children, whose father works in non-agricultural occupation are most disadvantageous with 5.1 percent of them are severely under weight, which is followed by children whose father works in agricultural occupations with 2.7 percent.

Structure of Deprivation in Odisha

Three essential types of deprivation have been dealt with here, such as housing, education and health. Data from Census of India and International institute of population study are collected and analysed to find out the structure.



(a) Housing Deprivation: The 2001 census data on housing conditions reveals higher percentages of 'good houses' are in coastal region than northern region and then followed by southern region of the state. At the district level, the highest percentages of good houses are found in Khorda (38.17 percent) followed by Ganjam (33.74 percent) and then followed by Cuttack (31.78 percent) (all located in coastal regions), whereas the lowest share of good houses has been found in Deogarh (15.04 percent) followed by Sonepur (19.61 percent).

(b) Educational Deprivation: Literacy rate across the regions of Odisha shows-both female and male literacy rates are the lowest in Southern Odisha (28 and 56 percent respectively) and the corresponding rates are the highest in Coastal Odisha (60 and 82 percent respectively). It is also interesting to note that the gender-gap in literacy is the highest in Southern Odisha and the lowest in coastal Odisha. The district level analysis shows- the overall literacy is the highest in Khorda (80 percent) followed by Jagatsinghpur (79 percent), Puri (78 percent) and Cuttack (77 percent) (all belonged to coastal districts). The lowest level of literacy is seen in Malkanagiri (30 percent), Nabarangapur (34 percent), Koraput (36 percent) and Rayagada (36 percent).

(c) Health Deprivation: Analysis of infant mortality rate to examine the health deprivation shows -IMR is the highest in Phulbani districts (186) followed by Gajapati (165), Rayagada (163), Malkanagiri (158), Kalahandi (157), Nabarangapur (156), and Koraput (153) and the IMR is low in Mayurbhanj (91), Jharsuguda (96), Angul (109), Bargarh (110) and Sonepur (110). A noticeable point that emerges is that the IMR has remained high among the districts of Southern Odisha.

The salient features of the above discussions are provided below.

- (a) The incidence of hunger and deprivation is more prominent among SCs/STs. It is found that irrespective of the place of living, the SCs/STs population is more prone towards poverty than OBC and 'other' category of social groups. Hence, study of the social structure of the state is necessary to understand the dynamics of the problem.
- (b) The region wise analysis shows that the coastal region is much better off in terms of hunger and deprivation and the southern region is worse-off. This can also be due to less proportion of SC/ST population in coastal region and more proportion of SC/ST in the southern region.
- (c) Given the high initial level of hunger and deprivation, there is a tardy progress in reducing the same. Hence, role of the state is more essential.

To explain the higher incidence and variations, we have examined below certain historical factors of the state.

Explaining Hunger and Deprivation in Odisha Through Historical Factors

Four broad historical factors has been considered here to explain the existing hunger and deprivation - (a) geography and topology of the state, (b) economic structure in the state, (c) social structure and (d) political structure.

(a) Geography and topology and the regional dimension of the hunger and deprivation: The state as a whole is mixture of both hilly and plain areas. While the coastal region of the state comprises of fertile plain areas, the southern-western and part of northern part is dense with hilly areas. Due to this type of topology, while the southern-western and part of northern Odisha are affected with drought, the coastal Odisha gets affected with flood. As the coastal Odisha is close to sea, it also gets affected with cyclone. Such topological situation might be leading to more natural calamities in the state. This could be also the reason that the total cropped area in the state remains low even during pre independent era and hence might have contributed to the existing hunger and deprivation in the state - during 1945-46, the total cropped area of India is 48.64 percent compared to 36 per cent in Odisha. Across the regions, during 1955-56, the gross cropped area remained higher in coastal part of Odisha (52.21 percent) compared to southern Odisha (37 percent) and northern Odisha (33.94 percent), which might be the reason why hunger and deprivation in southern Odisha is higher, compared to coastal Odisha. The agro-climatic conditions were neither conducive for agriculture, nor consistent in the state and across the districts of the state. The coefficient of variation of rainfall (across districts) was 7.61 percent in 1932 and this increased to 19.59 percentages in 1941 (in relation to mean rainfall). Such fluctuations might have affected state's economic situations. As the agro-climatic conditions from 1931 to 1950 depicts, three districts (Kalahandi, Phulbani and Balangir) were prone towards the conditions of either drought or flood (according to variability and mean annual rainfall). On the other hand, Cuttack, Puri and Balasore, where the variability of rainfall is around 15 percent of the 'mean' rainfall and the 'mean' rainfall is around 61, 62 and 60 inches respectively may be more prone to flood as these districts are having plain area and geographically located at the coastal area. In either case, lack of preventive measures, may lead to non-conducive agrarian climate with regards to rainfall and hence may affect employment and output and may lead to a situation of hunger and deprivation.

This geographical and topological disadvantage might have been the perennial features and might have affected the economic base of the state in the absence of effective policy.



(b) **Economic Structure** and the hunger and deprivation in the state: To explain the existing hunger and deprivation in Odisha (in historical perspectives), the land revenue system, which deals with the growth and distribution of wealth in the economy is important. The pre independent Odisha was governed by four kinds of land revenue system: These are

- The coastal Odisha was under Zamindari land revenue system;
- The western Odisha was under Mahalwari system;
- The southern Odisha was under mainly Zamindari but partly Ryotwari system as well; and
- The feudatory states were initially having separate kinds of land revenue system (since 1905).

These situations arise in the state after Odisha lost her last independent king during 1568 and especially after the fuller occupation of Odisha by the British. These different forms of land revenue systems have their own consequences in producing hunger and deprivation in the state.

One of the crucial reasons behind the deterioration of the land revenue system in the state is that the Britishers, who took over Odisha have least knowledge on the previous land revenue system operated in Odisha. As a result, the mixture of several systems led to different consequences, which apparently produced hunger and deprivation. Some of the economic consequences that different land revenue systems in Odisha brought were—(i) Indebtedness (ii) Uncertainty (iii) Force commerce and distress migration and (iv) Dadan system (v) Absentee landlordism (vi) Cultivable fallow land (vii) Bethi and Gothi system (viii) Share cropping system and (ix) Low yield rate.

(c) **Social structure¹** and the hunger and deprivation in the state: In the Indian context, due to the prevalence of ‘caste system’ the structure of the society became such that people from SCs, STs Social groups are more backwards than other social group. Similarly, certain socio-cultural practices in the Indian society also had some barriers for the women and people of disadvantaged caste to be educated in the educational institution. That might not only create more illiterate people in the society, it also may create more dependents. Certain social factors that have been looked here are - low level female work participation and high dependents, higher SC/ST population, low level literacy etc.

Low Level of Female Work Participation and high dependents: During 1951 and prior, participation of women in the labour market remained very low. It is found that in agriculture, the non-earning dependent females remained highest in coastal region (2060 per thousand) followed by northern (1823) and southern (1925) regions. Whereas earning female dependents is highest in northern region (1509) followed by southern region (901) and coastal region (511). In the non-agricultural sector the non-earning dependents remained highest in southern region (1931) followed by coastal region (1919) and northern region (1724). But there are highest number of earning dependents in northern region (1973) compared to 870 in southern region and 849 in coastal region. On the whole, the results suggest that in Odisha, women as compared to men are twice likely to be non-earning dependents in both agricultural and non-agricultural sectors. Also, women are only one-fifth to one-third as likely as men to be self-supporting persons in both the sectors. This clearly reflects the very high incidence of dependency among females in Odisha.

Higher SC/ST population: In caste-based ladder of the society, Brahmins were in the top rank and accorded the highest ritual and social status in Odisha. The second rank holder in caste-based ladder were Rajputs, which represent Kshatriya status with a group of castes (Khandayat, Paiks, Binjhals (tribal), Gond (tribal), Rana, Bhuiyan (tribal) etc). Next to them come the Karan or Mahanti castes, whose profession was writing. They are prosperous and highly educated. Hence, although ritually they ranked below Kshatriya, socially they ranked next to Brahmin. In the third place there are numbers of intermediate castes who are artisans, Kulta (cultivators), Patara (traders), Pathuria (stone carvers), Sundhi (distiller), Gouda (cowherd), Guria (sweetmakers), Teli (oilman) etc. At the lowest place of the ladder come the then untouchable castes (formerly untouchable officially, but in reality now also untouchables in many parts of Odisha). But here one needs to be careful with regards to the Indian planning that - all scheduled castes are not untouchables but almost all the untouchables are scheduled castes. For example, though Dhoba (washerman) is a SCs community, they are allowed to the upper caste festival, or to the educational institute or the temple without any hurdles. Whereas, the Hadi (scavenger) were/are one of the scheduled castes, who fulfils very essential functions of cleaning the latrines were/are not allowed to many social institutions without restrictions. Similarly, the Ganda, who play music or the Ghusurias or ghansi (the pig-rearers) comes under similar category.

¹ *Social structure refers to a definite relation among certain entities or groups, where the behaviour and relationship within social systems, or social institutions is based on the social systems and social hierarchy. Hence, the notion of social structure as relationships between different entities or groups indicates the idea that society is grouped into structurally related groups or sets of roles, with different functions, meanings or objectives or purposes. Such stratifications and functional relationship may put certain groups into a disadvantaged position when the system may force them to specialize with some profession which has less exchange value compared to other profession*



Hence, traditionally, these communities are excluded from the mainstream society and hence are likely to face high deprivation.

The untouchable castes were also having almost no direct relation (possession) with land (production) and the only exchangeable output they were having was labour power, demand for which fluctuates so much at the time of natural calamity (drought or flood). Hence, the intensity of hunger would be more among those people. But although the above-mentioned occupations were their main occupation, due to lack of regularity in those caste-based occupations, in the up season (of their occupation) they remained mainly as agricultural or non-agricultural labour. However, the situation of these communities remains backward even in the subsequent era.

As the occupation is concerned, traditionally, occupations were based on castes. The people belonging to low caste have low earnings and therefore inherently suffer from hunger and deprivation. The distribution of occupations across the castes group in agricultural and non-agricultural class in Odisha shows that among the cultivators, most of them are either from OBC (30.11 percent) or Non-Backward Castes (NBC) (33.68 percent) compared to STs (22.63 percent) and SCs (13.58 percent). This may imply that STs and SCs (particularly SC) were landless at the initial level itself. As regards agricultural labour occupation, the incidence was highest among the SCs (28.45 percent) followed by OBC (26.31 percent), and STs (25.68 percent) compared to Non-backward Castes (19.57 percent). In the non-agricultural sector, the OBC and NBC have dominated shares in all the occupations, compared to SCs and STs Category. Further, we have found that SCs are relatively more of agricultural labour compared to all other social group.

The analysis of landless households (based on land ownership) by their social background in different regions of Odisha in 1951, depicts (i) the percentages of landless household in coastal, northern and southern regions are 37 percent, 29 percent and 36 percent respectively. Across the districts, in agriculture, the incidence of landlessness has remained higher in Dhenkanal (20.93 percent), Koraput (17.60 percent), and Phulbani (13.62 percent) and the same remained lower in Balangir (.78 percent). In Kalahandi, Mayurbhanj and Sambalpur, it remained negative, which shows that in those parts, the incidence of landless households was higher among non-backward class. In non-agriculture, the difference remained highest in Ganjam.

Literacy: Literacy is another aspect, which could have enhanced the earning capacity of people. But it has remained at low level in Odisha and hence might have contributed to the existing hunger and deprivation. By 1951, the literacy rate in the state was just 15.8 percent. Further, the level of literacy remained low among those regions (e.g., the Southern Odisha), where the percentage of SC/ST populations were high.

(d) **Political Structures** and hunger and deprivation in Odisha

Rise and Growth of Political Consciousness and Social Change in Odisha

The political consciousness in Odisha started with when an elite group of educated Oriyas and Bengalis settled in Odisha took leadership in the socio-political activities of the post 1870 period. Then, the journalists, literature and historical writings have projected the movement of Oriya nationalism. The Oriyas employed in Government services became the leaders of the society and being educated, they made constant efforts to create political consciousness among the masses. And the general election in Odisha was held during 1952, where all the feudatory states played an active role but the result was replacement of feudal leaders in the so-called democratic elections. All the local institutions, the Zamindar, the gountia, the raja, etc became the democratic representative (Bailey, 1959). Hence, there was just a change by name from feudalism to democracy, but there was no change in real sense and probably therefore the social changes have been obstructed.

Regional Politics

On the leadership pattern of the regional political parties in Odisha, it was pointed out that 'considerable sub-cultural differences on the basis of caste and region continued for long time among the legislators of the state' (Banerjee, 1984). The politics of the state was guided in the same manner as the traditional oriya society was, where all socio-cultural and economic domination were influenced by two upper castes-Brahmins and Karanas. Later on the Kshyatriyas and the Khandayats had emerged increasingly powerful and occupied vital position in politics as well as in governments. The SCs and STs became conscious about their political right and power very late. Yet despite 40 per cent constitutional reservation for them, they remained unorganised and have failed to emerge as an independent political force in the state. Rather, all other political parties have own their loyalty for forming the government.

Therefore, as the history indicates, hunger and deprivation in the state have been rooted from the combined effects of geographical specificity, social structure and cultural practices, economic structure (agrarian structure) and weak political will for the development of some regions of the state.



Summary

With the objective to examine the structure of hunger and deprivation within the state of Odisha, the paper found a higher variation of hunger and deprivation across social groups, geographical regions, occupations, education status, landholding and dependency ratio. However, a single most important variable that can explain the higher incidence of hunger and deprivation in Odisha to a greater extent is the social structure and social hierarchy prevailing in the state, where the SCs/STs, women, children and old dependents faced most disadvantages. Thirty eight percent of the people of the state belong to SCs/STs, who were traditionally excluded from the state affairs and continued to face various exclusions. The findings here suggest that irrespective of place of living, incidence of hunger and deprivation among SCs/STs are higher. Historically, these communities do not possess adequate wealth; neither had they access to any valuable socio-cultural institutions like school, temple and other public places, which might have been the reasons of higher hunger and deprivation among them. Therefore, these communities are in need of special attention from a developmental state but as it is seen the problem of social exclusion is pervasive in the state.

Geographically too, these communities concentrate in specific regions (southern and part of northern Odisha). Being away from the focus of the state, the regional disparities might have increased. Lack of awareness among the people of this region on one hand and lack of interest of the state on the other, together have failed to bring development in a sustainable manner to reduce hunger and deprivation. Instead certain investments were made (mostly in mines and coal), which are highly extractive and unsustainable in nature. That added to the hunger and deprivation through displacement and destroying the source of livelihood of the people.

In brief, it seems the strong social hierarchy, which was there in the socio-cultural history of Odisha might be still persisting in different forms and hence remains an important barrier to reduce hunger and deprivation in the state.

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