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## **ANTHROPOLOGY OF HUNGER: PEOPLE'S PERCEPTION AND SURVIVAL STRATEGIES IN KALAHANDI**

### ***Abstract***

*Kalahandi is a district in the state of Orissa (now Odisha) having an extensive record of acute drought resulting in famine; but this district also witnessed bumper crops and abundance of forest resources. In spite of crops and rich forest dividend, society at large in Kalahandi has to experience paucity of food products coupled with the problems such as unemployment, deforestation, population growth and so on. The paper addresses this paradox from an anthropological perspective with the help of extensive fieldwork in the region. The paper concludes that the causalities attributed to the cause of drought and famine are alien constructions and 'technical malfunction'. Accordingly government machineries and scientific expertise have labelled it as a failure to meet certain basic conditions. Hence, it is an event like all other events. On the contrary, our field work reveals that people in Kalahandi are experiencing famine for almost a century. However, their encounter and engagement with famine are based on social experiences and idiomatic expressions. These experiences throw revealing insights to cope with hunger and survival strategies.*

**Keywords:** *Famine; Food insecurity; Malnutrition; Food scarcity; Survival; Relief*

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### **Introduction**

India is ranked 102 among 117 economies in the world in 2019 against the rank 103 in 2018. While the world is progressing in reducing the hunger, there are however countries where the problem of hunger is still existent. In certain regions of the country, there are instance of the progress being reversed (von Grebmer 2019). India, as such, is home to the largest number of hungry people in the world (Menon, Deolalikar, & Bhaskar 2009) and the state of

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Odisha (erstwhile Orissa) had an alarming rate of hunger among other states of the country as per the findings of the Indian State Hunger Index 2009 (*ibid.*). Kalahandi, one of the remotest districts in Odisha, hit the National news first in the year 1984-85 due to famine. Most of the reporting projected it in different ways such as 'picture of hell', 'another Somalia', 'where people moved in groups licking water like dogs'. For food, they 'picked the poisonous roots and leaves'. Few journalists visited the affected areas to investigate and confirmed the 'presence of emaciated people affected by starvation, or those who would inevitably die of hunger and starvation' (Sainath 1996; *also see*: Deo 1985; Ahmad 1985). They focused on the people which both 'god and humans had forgotten'. New names were added daily to the list of villages falling under the dark shadow. In order to objectify things at the site, docu-features were shot with various techniques to capture the frames of horrendous sight.

There are cases of hidden hunger, also called as 'micronutrient deficiency' in India (Ritchie, Reay & Higgins 2018). Some of the newspapers highlighted on certain individual cases to make news stories. Many of these stories attracted considerable attention, for instance, Deba Majhi (35) and his wife (29) of village Chatta (Komna Block) lost their two sons Durbal (3) and Piladhar (1) and starved for days and fed their children with boiled wild roots and leaves of trees. Another news story which caught the attention of media was that of Phanas Punji of village Amalapali, who sold her sister-in-law to a blind person of a neighbouring village for Rs. 40. These episodes of Kalahandi suggest varied dimensions of poverty.

As such, the levels of poverty in India witnessed a downfall from 21.2 percent in 2011 to 13.4 percent in 2015. Consequently, over 271 million people climbed out of poverty. Niti Aayog's SDG report 2019-20 revealed that the deprivation significantly reduced in all indicators such as nutrition, child mortality, cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, housing, etc. Despite this, Kalahandi failed to climb out of its deprivations (SDG Report 2019-20). In order to measure poverty, two dimensions of poverty can be mentioned, that is, material and non-material (Niti Aayog 2016), however the conventional approach has been used in this study to measure poverty thus focussing more on the material dimensions of it.

The narratives presented earlier created a sort of binary to justify a correlation among and between each one such as between hunger and starvation, death and famine, etc. Hunger and starvation and the fear of impending death leads to practices such as root-eating, child-selling, the quest for food and water, and so on. Consequently if hunger and starvation are the roots of the matter, then one has to grapple with its causal factors. The journalistic reporting on Kalahandi, perhaps, while highlighting poverty, hunger and destitution confirmed the 'standard image' of famine. What constitutes famine and its social construction requires interrogation and contextualization in the case of Kalahandi.

**Famine: An alien construction**

Famine is viewed as a catastrophe and is associated with a host of apocalyptic visions. Because of its association with such visions, it often leads to descriptions associated with hunger, mass starvation, human sufferings and death (Keys et al. 1950; Bhatia 1967). To 'starve' originally meant to 'die'. When applied to the context of famine, 'starvation' implies death as a consequence. Even though it is not inevitable, there is likelihood of this (de Waal, A 1989). This implies that all hunger and starvation are not famines. But the former category of understanding 'starvation' prevailed in the discourse of famine (Dreze and Sen 1989), an outcome of the nineteenth century Malthusian debate. Malthus tried to link famine to food shortage and mass death through starvation. He viewed "gigantic inevitable famine stalks in the rear, and with one mighty blow levels the population with the food of the world" (Malthus 1959: 49).

But the experiences of famines in other parts of the world do not fit into the rubric of his theoretical framework. Malthusian understanding of famine is an outcome of political philosophy rather than of any social experience. Over the years, evidences of actual famines were collected, which contested Malthusian perspective of famine, but the theoretical engagement with famine declined considerably. The pithy description of famine by Malthus though received significant attention and became part of political discourse (de Waal, A 1997). Malthusianism went hand in hand with the liberal economics of Adam Smith. As David Arnold (1988) noted, "Smith's economic reasoning was not without its political ironies. On the one hand, governments were sternly rebuked for meddling in the grain trade and for not allowing market forces to operate free from artificial constraint. In short, Smithian political economy and Malthusian demographics were the ideological justifications for the first industrial state tearing up a pre-existing contract. Further, Malthusian doctrine had become as much an oral tradition as a written one. Whether based soundly on Malthus' writings or not, Malthusian doctrines were adopted not just by the multitudes, which in this context emphatically excludes those who might suffer from famine, but mostly from the govt.

While contextualising famine specifically in India, Dreze (1988) comments that the British policy in India was guided by the Malthusian concept. The colonial rulers treated famine as mass starvation and the famine codes were devised accordingly to prevent starvation deaths. The 'burden' of managing famine was a heavy one for the administrators, a feature that is captured by de Wall as:

*"no famine in modern times is comparable to the horrors recorded during such visitations under native rule. Famine in India is now an anachronism and a misnomer. The true meaning of the word 'Famine' (according to the Oxford English Dictionary) is extreme and general scarcity of*

*food.... this phenomenon has entirely passed away. Widespread death from starvation which may also be held to connote, has also ceased. Death from starvation is extremely rare, even in those districts which are officially described as Famine-Stricken. Famine now means a prolonged period of unemployment, accompanied by dear food” (1989, 66).*

In fact, Fraser (1911) argued that famine did not exist in modern times. This indicated that the term famine existed in the mental vocabulary of the people but the ways of understanding the term is changing. This narrow definition of famine was accepted by the British Raj and the Indian Nationalists (de Waal 1997; *also see*: de Wall 1987).

The East India Company appointed Malthus as professor of political economy at its college at Hailebury, and his doctrines became highly influential among the Britons who ruled India. However, during the 1880 Famine Commission, there had been a subtle shift away from doctrinaire Malthusianism. The commissioners had surveyed enough empirical evidence to see that the simple version of the theory, at least, did not fit the reality. Thus the commissioners wrote:

*“as a general rule, there is an abundance of food procurable, even in the worst districts at the worst time; but when men who, at the best, merely live from hand to mouth, are deprived of their means of earning wages, they starve, not from the impossibility of getting food, but for want of the money to buy it” (Famine Commission 1880: appendix 1: 205).*

Hence, at the heart of the famine codes was a commitment to employing the destitute and the hungry. The theory of famine was changing, although only implicitly. The government congratulated itself on abolishing famine in its true meaning of extreme and general scarcity of food, and instead claimed that ‘famine now means a prolonged period of unemployment’(Fraser 1911: 281), accompanied by the expensive food. In the absence of an overarching theory to elaborate such an insight, Malthusian precepts were kept alive long after they should have died. For instance, the view that famine follows a collapse in the food availability remained common. Legitimation for the theory implicit in the famine codes came only in 1981, when Amartya Sen published ‘Poverty and famines’ (1981). Sen’s immediate target was the existent notion that famine was caused by a decline of food availability within a certain area. His opening statement echoes the Famine Commissioners of a century earlier:

*“starvation is the characteristic of some people not having enough food to eat. It is not the characteristic of there not being enough food to eat. While the latter can be a cause of the former, it is but one of many possible causes. Whether and how starvation relates to food supply is a matter for factual investigation” (Sen 1982:1).*

Sen (1981) demonstrated that famines have occurred despite there being

no shortfall of available food compared with previous, non famine years. He thus proposed that attention be paid to the 'mechanisms of food distribution'. Sen's idea of the mechanisms of food distribution "helped to temper faith in the market's ability to humanely regulate the distribution of food and the commonly held view that famine is caused by natural disaster" (Phillips 2018: 81). Therefore, other years of decline in food availability have conversely not seen famine.

A second rationale for poverty and famine was the state intervention model of famine prevention that had been practised since the beginning of the century in India. The academic engagement is no way different from the administrative protocols except the writings of Sen (1981) on 'entitlement'. Although it provides a renewed perspective to engage with hunger and famine through the network of relations, however it does not resolve the moral and cultural sensibilities during hunger and famine.

### ***Two shades of famine: Food security and food scarcity:***

Studies on famine have become a subject for technical institutions and specialized professions. Now famine is mostly viewed as the lack of access to food and a technical malfunction in society. As a result, most of the scholars, aid agencies and governments view it from the 'food security' point of view. In spite of its recognition as an issue, there are divergent opinions in terms of the concept and the approach vis-a-vis intervention. The World Bank's (1986) perspective can be outlined at this juncture: 'Access by all people at all times to enough food for an active healthy life'. Its chief components include the accessibility to food and the capacity to get it. There is yet another definition offered by The Food and Agricultural Organisation's (FAO), which is at par with the World Bank's understanding of the notion. It states that 'all people at all times have both physical and economic access to the basic food they need. Food security, thus, has three specific aims: ensuring production of adequate supplies, maximising stability in the flow of supplies and securing access to available supplies on the part of those who need them' (FAO 1996).

The solution to the alarming food scarcity can be analysed in terms of the absence of hunger and malnutrition, wherein society requires resources in abundance to produce or obtain food from them. This can be one of the prerequisites to overcome hunger and malnutrition but it is not a sufficient one because the resources should also be used properly. In order to supplement these definitions, Maxwell proposes a wider concept encompassing the earlier definitions by putting: "a country and people are food secure when their food system operates efficiently in such a way as to remove the fear that there will not be enough to eat" (1988: 10). Thus, food security can be envisaged when equitable growth ensures that these groups have sustainable livelihood. Finally, "the conventional distinction between chronic and transitory food insecurity disguises the varying intensity of food insecurity" (Maxwell, 1990: 3). These

different dimensions on food security share a common view concerning 'access to food', and are concerned with production, marketing and consumption. However, differences exist due to programmatic outcomes across regions starting from famine relief to food supplementation and onset preservation.

The institutionalisation and professionalisation of fighting famine have slowly but radically changed the balance of power between those who suffer famine and those holding institutional power. Academic theory can play different roles. The way in which Sen's (1981) writings have done this is a case in point. Radical critics of Sen have pointed out that the entitlement theory like the famine codes is concerned solely with the mass death stage of the process of famine and ignores the earlier processes of impoverishment. They argue that this carries regressive political implications: while mass death is scandalous; impoverishment itself is made somehow normal and unproblematic.

The stimulus to the food security approach was a general awareness that fighting famine required a broader range of policy tools than those implicit in Sen's entitlement approach, together with recognition that food policy was sufficiently politically sensitive to require special attention in economic policy. Food security touches on a wide range of policy issues ranging from structural adjustment and growth, through agricultural policies, marketing structures, national food buffer stocks, and food aid to emergency relief.

The food security approach cannot be called a theory. It is an attempt to keep the debate on famine prevention in the non-political arena of public policy and has solely made technical recommendations. It is a regression from Sen's entitlement approach in two respects: One and most important, there is no corresponding political theory of famine prevention, or even recognition of the political requirements for fighting famine. Two, it is designed to make problems amenable to the policy maker with whatever policy tools are available, rather than focusing on the basic problems themselves. The food security approach equates famine with extreme transitory food insecurity, yielding an exceptionally narrow and depoliticised definition of famine as 'epidemic under-nutrition'. This contradicts the direction of field research in India which, without exception, emphasizes that under-nutrition is only one component among many and rarely the most important component.

Few social anthropologists and radical political economists have tried to understand the issue differently. For instance, there is a vibrant little tradition of studying indigenous concepts of famine and showing how these are subjective, normative and much more sensitive to local realities than the concept. However, the scholarship treats 'famine' as something unusual, abnormal and is treated as an event. On the contrary, for many societies in the third world, famine is a normal and operational aspect. The position of famine as an event and as a phenomenon emerging out of the normal functioning of society suggests that famines are same, though the thinking

about them is changing. However, the tendency to treat famine as a technical malfunction rather than as social experience continues to haunt the scholarship.

There is no unanimity in the conceptual issues regarding famine, food security and hunger; and it is against this backdrop that we attempted to search for answers with the help of exploratory study in Kalahandi situation. Needless to say, we would seek to relate these positions and debates to the specificities of the Kalahandi situation.

### **Methodology**

This study is based on the fieldwork conducted in the Kalahandi district of Odisha during May 2011 - June 2012. The study is based on multi-sited anthropological fieldwork and uses qualitative approach to critically analyse the data collected from various villages of Kalahandi. The selection of villages from various blocks of Kalahandi was done through purposive method by taking into consideration their drought history. As a result, Maksapadar, Similibhata village, Thumal-Rampur block, Pulingpadar village, Chasiguda village, Vegiguda village, and Amlapali village were the prime focus of this study. However, the researchers also visited other villages such as Bhalumunda village, Kutenpadar, Kitpadar, Dhanarbhata, Chanchar, Sikurgada, Jugsaipatana, Sagada and Duarsuni. Tribal population was selected to examine and explore their dietary status. Data concerning the dietary expenses, patterns of food consumption on a daily basis, socio-economic status, survival strategies, food security, etc. was collected during the fieldwork.

The data was collected from the field through observation, interview as well as case studies. Various village heads, family heads, and other administrative officials were engaged in formal and informal discussions. The data collected pertains to the details of hunger brought about by the natural calamities (drought), famine, and the survival strategies traversing through the continually shifting work practices from agriculture to non-agriculture based labour. Interviews in the context of food security were also carried out to gain an insight into the role of government and non-government agencies in coping with hunger. At the same time, various reports such as the Census of India 2011 report have been included, in addition to India and global hunger index reports, newspaper reports and other academic literature concerning famines, food security, survival strategies, etc. from various social science disciplines have been used.

### ***Objectives of the study***

Fieldwork was carried out in the villages of Kalahandi district in Odisha with the following objectives:

1. To understand the notions of famine and starvation in the local idioms and culture.

2. To explore the food insecurities and the coping strategies among tribal people of Kalahandi.
3. To explore the role of government and non-government agencies in organising relief.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

Prior to starting the fieldwork, participants were informed about the purpose of conducting interviews. They were ensured that we have come from a trust-worthy institution and this study will in no way aid to their living. They were however assured that their identity will be kept confidential and that a suitable pseudonym will be used against their actual names. They were assured that none other than the researchers would identify them at any point in time and that the personal information collected from them will be destroyed after use by the researchers.

### **Profile of Kalahandi**

Kalahandi is a district in South West Odisha which is perceived as the leading backward districts in India. This district is characterised by extensive poverty; it also counts low in terms of the socio-economic indicators. Kalahandi is bordered to the east by the districts of Rayagada and Kandhamal; to the west by the districts of Nabarangpur; to the north by the districts of Balangir and Nuapada; to the south by the districts of Rayagada and Koraput; and in south-west lie the Nabarangpur district. It has a total population of 1576869. Among these, the tribal population comprise the major proportion at 28.50 percent of the total. The other numerically significant section is the scheduled castes comprising 18.17 percent. Kalahandi is spread over an area of 7920 square kilometres (Census of India 2011). The district comprises 2 sub-divisions (Bhawanipatna and Dharamgarh), 13 blocks and 2236 villages. An erstwhile princely district, Kalahandi is primarily agricultural with a total literacy rate of 50.86 percent of the total. 92.26 percent of the People inhabit rural part of Kalahandi while as urban population share only 7.73 to the total (Census of India 2011).

### **A passage through Kalahandi villages**

Our effort in this section is to focus on some specific areas in Kalahandi. However, what needs to be stressed is that these are perhaps representative of the problems and the crisis in the region.

### ***Survival and people's perception***

While travelling to Maksapadar - a village in the Lanjigarh block – we came across of a congregation of tribal people under a tree. They were watching a girl with matted hair, dancing in calculated hysteria to the beats of drums.



There were offerings of *mandia*, meat and *mohua* in front of her. She was the *thakurani*, through whom spirits, we were told, descend to be appeased. The gathering of people appealed to her for rain, and the *thakurani*, in turn, demanded a *raika* (blouse). The poor people requested her to ask for something they could afford. It is very difficult to be dismissive about such perceptions. Even a gentleman who identified himself as a government employee on tour to a neighbouring village seemed to look at this with mixed feelings. For the congregation, this incident was something serious, as well as a form of amusement. In fact, some of those present laughed when the *thakurani* 'demanded' the *raika*. Nevertheless this could not conceal the other dimensions - of hope and belief.

At the middle of the village lies the trunk of a tree and few stones. This was Dharani Khunti, their new goddess, who had been invented to counter the fear of meningitis. In 1986, meningitis had struck Maksapadar, claiming 16 lives in 3 months (*see: Pati 2001; also see: Das & Pati 1993*). The village goddess had emerged as the only weapon of the defenceless people of this village. The nearest hospital is more than a few kilometres away; and given a virtually non-existent transport system and the level of poverty, Dharani Khunti was their only hope to escape from the dreaded disease.

A perpetual crisis, when everything seems to fall apart, also breeds acute cosmological fears of the 'modern' hospital. This perhaps explains why death at a village was preferable to death at a hospital. After all, the spirit would get lost at a strange, far away place. It is for this reason only that village people relied on Dharani Khunti and the locally available roots and potions.

Young men were not to be seen at Maksapadar. As we were told, they had gone to search for jobs and food. Cattle, only a few that one could see at Maksapadar, looked much healthier than the humans in the village. This was in sharp contrast to the normal image of famine-affected regions, where animals and humans, both appear weak and emaciated. And given this, we can perhaps understand the relevance of the poverty and hunger theme that we have been trying to highlight.

It was claimed that between 1982 and 1987, the Orissa government had sunk 67,000 deep-bore wells in the district. Ironically, the decision was also linked to the idea that villages with more than 250 people would have a tube-well. People had to walk for 10 kilometres or more daily to collect drinking water. Maksapadar was fortunate to get an out-of-turn tube-well after meningitis hit its people. After all with a population of 150 people, it did not have the necessary number of people to deserve a tube-well.

At dusk, Maksapadar gets ready to be engulfed by the darkness of the night. Light is a luxury, when there is no food to eat. The shifting nature of the diet, from *mandia* to roots and leaves was a phenomenon associated with the survival strategy of the people. What was nevertheless difficult to reconcile

to was the inability of the poor to have access to mango stones from the forests. After the mangoes, even the mango stones were no longer accessible. People would eat the inner portion, until the time traders discovered that it possessed vital properties which could be used as noodle hardeners.

Meningitis was a blessing in disguise for another reason. The administration had started distributing 200 gms of cooked rice and 50 gms of cooked pulses twice a day to the village folk. Although quite inadequate, especially for the people who suffer from chronic malnutrition and work to break stones or build roads, it nevertheless ensured that they eat safe, uninfected and non-poisonous food. The government had also opened a few 'fair price' outlets which sold rice for Rs. 1.80 per kg. Otherwise, given the nature of poverty, buying rice was a distant dream for the people.

Our experience at Similibhata village was memorable. One had a direct encounter with a businessman/moneylender, having a 'pucca' house built at the entrance of the village, dwarfing the other huts. Symbols uniting the sacred realm with profit were visible in the form of Swastika and 'Subha labh' written (in Hindi) in vermilion on the white wall, near the main door. Given the power of money/wealth enjoyed by this marwari family, the house appeared rather vulnerable architecturally, with windows and a wooden door. It indicated a level of 'safety' for the inhabitants, unknown in some other parts of Orissa, like Ganjam. This trader-moneylender told us that he owned land and that his business was doing remarkably well.

He reminded us of a 'Kachhi' from Bombay we had met at Bhawanipatana. He was an established businessman; he had come on a religious pilgrimage in order to pay homage to his grandmother, who had died there long ago. He had clear recollections of his grandfather and father who were traders at Kalahandi; and he had confessed how their fortunes had been earned in this region. Nevertheless, this 'outsider' businessman-exploiter dimension needs to be understood carefully, and the structure of exploitation in the region.

Bhawanipatana also came in news in May 1993. The Press Trust of India release in three panchayats in the Bhawanipatana block, viz. Jugsapatana, Sagada and Duarsuni, inform that trees were cut in a tract of 5,000 acres, in three weeks. The villages, where trees in over several thousand acres of land had been destroyed, included Dhanarbhata, Chanchar and Sikarguda. Trees were also cut extensively at Kutenpadar and Kitpadar. This organised annihilation of trees was carried out, not by contractors, but by the Orissa state government in the name of 'wasteland development'. Trees that were cut included sal, piasal, mohua, char, dhatuki, anla, kendu, harida and bahada. The 'grand scheme' is to grow fruit-bearing trees in their place. With forests that have been devastated, especially since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such policies can play havoc in a place like Kalahandi.

The problem of water scarcity and drought varies within Kalahandi

itself. This region does not retain water, which rushes down destroying the trees at the foothills and causing flood in the plains. In this region, the moral geography is under threat. Forests are being destroyed since the lease is given by state government to certain private companies for coffee plantations. The afforestation programmes have a devastating effect, even though there is no sign of desertification in the areas where the programme is launched. People expressed their lack of knowledge about the project, but they were clear about the declining of their millet production. As they put it, they obtained fewer sacks of millet from each *dunger*, than their parents. The explanation for obtaining less millet was communicated through an empirical idiom. Leli Majhi of Pulingpadar was of the view that while the land for agriculture decreased, the population had been increasing. This decrease of land, according to him, was due to the encroachment of 'outside merchants' in the coffee plantations and the afforestation programme that had been launched by the forest department. The forest department was strict and vigilant about *Dunger* (shifting cultivation). It ensured that the *dunger* cultivators abandoned the forest after each harvest. This arrangement is based on a consensus of the entire village and to some extent eases the problem of landlessness. The *dunger* cultivators normally worked from the morning till noon, by which time it becomes unbearably hot. The rest of the day is spent in drinking and gossiping. Now a new situation has developed with the men folk, due to sheer habit, remaining drunk throughout the day and refusing to work. This has serious implications for the family since the womenfolk not only have to attend the domestic work which includes carrying water, but also look after the *dunger* cultivation. Consequently, the gender pressures on the women folk are extremely high.

The village elders usually complained about the moral degeneration of the youth. They commented that the younger generation was lazier and less intelligent than them or their own parents. All that they were interested in was drinking and making quick money. Most of these young men collected *mahul* from which liquor is made. This is almost a household 'industry'. They sell either *mahul* or liquor at the markets. Some of them go to nearby project sites, like the Indravati project, in search of daily wage work. In fact, quite a few of them have migrated to this project area. One can clearly sense their disinterest in agriculture. The ecological changes were articulated in terms of a generational conflict within the community, centred on the question of a lack of interest in agriculture and migration. Thus, the village elders considered these to be rooted in the moral failure of the youth. The young people, however, grumbled about their elders, who had not left future to inherit.

Thus, perceptions related to the declining yields as well as desertification were expressed through specific conflicts within the community and were also cast in moral terms. Their perception regarding the drought seemed to be extremely coupled. They felt, they were better prepared and

could withstand the drought in 1984 than that of 1956 and 1965. Our discussions also served to focus on the underlying conflict between the local and the external interpretation of drought. By drought they not only meant the shortage or lack of rain during a particular season, but also the long-term decline of the rainfall and its after effects like the declining yields and desertification. Their observation regarding the declining rainfall cannot be sustained empirically; yet the official record for 1977-83 period suggest that Kalahandi received less rain between 1981 and 1983. Consequently, there does seem to be links between the actual situation and people's perceptions based on their lived experiences.

One of the important occupations in this area was gathering and selling firewood. Halav Naik, an elderly person of Chasiguda village told us of the tedious process of collecting firewood, exploring a market and selling it. This was a full day's job for them. People left their homes at dawn in order to collect firewood. Although this job was over by noon, they used to walk about 10 to 15 kms carrying firewood worth Rs. 10 and Rs. 15. With this money, they would buy maize or rice from the same market and return home by night.

Searching and procuring wild roots from the forest is another occupation. People have a sound knowledge about these wild roots. Halav Naik described about ten varieties of wild roots that people collected viz. *pitakanda*, *cherangakanda*, *karpui kanda*, *kulia kanda*, *der kanda*, *taikanda*, *nerange kanda*, *ken kanda* and *kachel kanda*. During acute scarcity of food, they would eat pita or kulia kanda which is a bitter root. However, they would isolate and extract its bitterness through some method known to them only. If it was not done carefully, the root would become poisonous and occasionally, people would fall sick after eating it.

The link between the crisis and the diet is an obvious one. Following the harvest failure in 1984, people ate less frequently, ate less and had very few 'pleasant' meals. There was a shift in their dietary structure, with people eating less millet and maize and depending more on wild food. Such a situation cannot be viewed merely in terms of the lack of entitlement to staple food. Sometimes, the victims would choose to remain hungry. After all, access to staple food was only one priority, among several others; and a low priority item in many cases. Given the uneven land distribution pattern in Kalahandi, majority of the land-owning peasants belong to the category of small land holders. Most of them grow millets and pulses in the Thuamal-Rampur region. In contrast, rice cultivation is monopolised by the large and the middle landholders, and is prevalent chiefly in the plains. Consequently, the amount of grain grown by small farmers is roughly indicated by the aggregate statistics of grain production in the region.

It was difficult to get precise figures of the amount of grain bought per head or for a family unit. During the drought when the grain prices were at

their highest, the rural income was very low. In spite of the low income, people could have bought grain with their small savings, or bought it earlier when the prices were low. However, they did not buy any grain at all. They were supported by their relatives or their neighbours. They collected wild food during the scarcity period. Even those who ate wild food mixed it with millet for a coating or a flavour. However, as an elderly person of Vegiguda put it, guests were not served with what they ate as this would tarnish their *izzat* (prestige) outside. Thus, although they survived on wild food, the notion of taking care of the guest and that of *izzat* continued to wield considerable influence.

People bought, borrowed and even exchanged a limited quantity of grain for something else during emergencies. The small savings was spent on fodder for their cattle and seeds. The grain they procured covered only a fraction of their need. This reveals the distinction between the purchasing power and the real purchases made by people. Most of the earlier microanalysis of famine reveals that people spent income on staple food, until their food intake falls below a minimum level. After this, they starve to death. Such an argument envisages two possibilities: either the grain cannot reach the people or vice versa. In other words, people may have money but no food to spend it on. In contrast, the other possibility can be that people are not primarily concerned to maintain their diet of grain; they would rather prefer to remain hungry.

Amlapali, the next place we took up, hit the national headlines back in 1985 with a report about child-selling. The then Prime Minister, the late Rajiv Gandhi, had visited this village after being singled out for any kind of assistance from the government. Like a 'messiah', the late Prime Minister had made door-to-door visits and enquired about their problems. People were given loans immediately after the visit. Various famine-related subsidies and developmental schemes were implemented in this village. However, during our field work, Amlapali had receded to its original remoteness. Most of the people we talked to complained about the under reportage by media and negligence by the officials. They told us how and when they visited the district officials, but in vain as they were told to go back write about their grievances to the Prime Minister instead. Biranchi Punji, an elder person in the village informed us how they had a lot of expectations from the late Prime Minister. He defined Amlapali as a 'poor village', with no aid/relief. He told us how from time to time things were being snatched away from them by the 'outsiders'.

We have already encountered this concept earlier. We have sought to both clarify it and point out the limitation inherent in trying to externalise exploitation. Nevertheless, the specific situation at Amlapali needs to be delineated, and this will perhaps enable us to problematise this concept. While analysing the land-holding pattern of this village, we observed that the total land owned by the people was 280 acres. This included 78 acres of *aant* (lower) land, 122 acres of *berna* (middle) land and 80 acres of *bahal* (upper) land. What is indeed shocking is that between 1957 and 1984, about 160 acres of land have

been mortgaged/sold for as many as 175 times; 135 times out of this has gone to the moneylenders of Bhalumunda, a neighbouring village. The moneylenders include 5 weavers and 2 *sahus* (merchant caste). Thus, just 7 families (5 weavers and 2 Sahun) determined the fate of the people of Amlapali. The crisis of indebtedness forced the mortgage/sale of the land for 160 times out of the total 175 times. The rest (15 times) was due to marriage, rituals, illness or house repair. It seems marriage influences land mortgage/sale quite significantly, given its association with a community feast. Failure to observe this often leads to social ostracism.

### ***Failure of government and society***

Most of what is conceived as the cause of drought and the tackling failures can largely be categorised into governmental failure, non-performing of the rituals and natural causes. All these cannot be dealt with in isolation because there is a correlation between each of these in terms of one being the causal effect of the other. While enquiring about the genesis of the situation, most of the people recalled that the crisis was continuing since 1965, although a few of them referred to 1956. These respondents recalled that the year 1956 was remarkable for rain but was followed by floods in the area. This was the year when land settlement operations were undertaken. The settlement work seems to be remembered as an event, followed by severe drought in 1957 in this area, indicating an association between them. Most of the people we talked to referred to 1965 and its associated events, distinctly alive in their memory. In fact, Kalahandi suffered drought in 1984, however people would refer overwhelmingly to 1965 as the year of severe drought. Consequently, one finds a distinction made between different crisis points. Moreover, given the generational and regional significance of the drought, most of the explanations centred around the responsibility of the society at large and the government.

While the government was an obvious target for its lack of attention and response to tackle the problem, the 'outsiders' – the people from the town and the moneylenders – were also blamed. However, references were also made alongside to their 'sins' like laziness, self-interest, greed for money and disrespect vis-a-vis elders. In fact, people performed rituals to please the local goddesses to ensure peace and harmony in the social order. Some village elders felt that the failure to observe these rituals in the previous year had caused the drought. Consequently we found that the causes of drought were partly externalised, and this co-existed with a perception that the potential for good rain resided within the community.

People also referred to facts such as deforestation in the nearby reserve forest area (Mahakhand reserve forest), poor rainfall and soil erosion in highly empirical ways. Most of their explanations were interconnected. Thus, the causes of the drought were articulated through a moral idiom ranging from the cosmological to the local and the particular.

At Amlapali, we came across Upasu Parabhohi who narrated his experience vis-a-vis the forest laws. Parabhohi had to go to the forest to collect wooden log to renovate his hut. He had to pay Rs 45 to get a permit. Parabhohi was denied of the permit eventually, but allowed to collect logs from the forest. While returning with the wood, his bullock cart was seized since he could not produce the permit. He was ordered to pay a fine of Rs. 2000 for which he had to mortgage his agricultural land. All these problems faced by him were because he was poor. Many of the people we spoke to talked about the truck-loads of timber, carried away every night from the forest illegally. Parabhohi's point is indeed relevant. The common perception was that in a few years time, this area would be converted into a desert, the signals of which are already indicated through the shortage of rain and soil erosion.

It is interesting to note that people in Amlapali argued and discussed in such a manner which can be understood as a 'scientific' way of thinking subsumed under the rubric of a moral framework. Most of the people opined that famine was caused by drought. But this opinion consisted of a number of contributory explanations. It also revealed their perception that famine was not mass starvation; similarly a drought was not the causal effect of lack of rainfall. Most of the people regarded drought as a phenomenon sent by God to 'punish' them for their evil deeds. Some of the elderly people compared the recent drought with the one experienced in 1965. Biranchi Punji, while maintaining that the 1985 drought was worse, said:

'Jala behune srushti nasha;

*jala behule srushti nasha'*

*(meaning the lack of rain or the excess of it destroys the universe).*

He explained this by referring both to the massive rainfall in 1956 which had caused floods and the drought of 1957. Trees uprooted and animals died in the 1956-57 phase, though they survived during the recent drought. Some of them pointed to the climatic changes, which had been unprecedented in the recent times. References were made to the declining rainfall; and in the absence of any specific evidence about the rainfall in this region, it was not possible to be dismissive about lived experiences.

Significantly for the people of Amlapali, all droughts were not the same. Nor were they just long and/or severe episodes. Each drought, like each famine, had a specific character. They recurred, but not in a mechanical/repetitive way. People referred to 1965 event as 'Cher Makar' and the present one as 'Makar'. The importance attached to the specificities, perhaps, has some association with the names – Makar, Makara and Makaru – given to children born in 1965.

Even though we were told about the climate getting drier, people did not attribute it to the declining rainfall, rather they talked about its changing

patterns over the years by creating a binary of 'good' and 'bad' times. For them 'good' years were becoming 'scarce'. Their articulations regarding the 'good'/ 'bad' years were not clear though. Nevertheless, from what we could gather, they felt that this area had been exposed to serious climatic changes with the 'wet' seasons becoming shorter and unpredictable, and a decline in the amount of rainfall.

### ***Deforestation and declining cultivation***

Popular perceptions accorded space to the problem of deforestation, which affected pastures and the yields as well. Cutting of trees was identified as a major cause for desertification. This environment-friendliness co-existed with an anger vis-a-vis the illegal falling of trees - a process with which the 'outsiders', mostly the contractors, were involved. Although there were differences on the question of the nature/cause of the ecological devastation, people seemed to be clear that it was happening. There were elaborate hints about the 'order' being 'disturbed', which violated the moral landscape/ geography of the people. Beneath all this was the idea of maintaining a balance between human beings and nature.

During phases of acute scarcity, people did move out of Amlapali. This was primarily because normal wage opportunities, which were dependent on agriculture, came to a standstill. As perceived, indigenous resources (such as bushes, pastures, wild food, firewood, and potential farmlands) seemed to be threatened with desertification, which is the symbol of an awesome power, antithetical and hostile to life.

People's treatment and use of indigenous food was very 'scientific'. Given the fact that this gave them constant support, they had a sound knowledge of this food system and its usage. Thus, during 1985 when the consumption of wild food peaked, most of the households were eating two to three varieties of wild food regularly. Few people bought only a little amount of millet and maize. They stored 'sal' seed and used it to make bread. The ordinary diet level plunged downwards, wild food became staple and maize and millet were used for mere flavour. The minority, who ate only millet, did not do so out of necessity but partly for the reasons of taste and also largely for social reason. Destitutes ate 'wild' food even at normal times. Although the nutritional value of various types of 'wild' food could not be assessed, however the 'wild' food could be classified into different categories. The first included those that constituted a normal part of the diet for some or all of the population. The most important of these was the wild grain which was collected by the tribals.

Secondly, there is 'distress' food used normally by the poor. Food gathering through unconventional means, like digging, needs skills and varied from region to region. In some cases, migrants lack sound knowledge about these resources. On the whole, pastoralists seemed to know more about wild food than farmers, and women knew more than men.



***Navigating the food practices***

Unless people were at the brink of starvation, 'distress' food was not considered as food. Although such food was stigmatized, yet it did not prevent people from collecting them. Given the nature of these sources of food, such as roots, leaves and the bark of trees, nobody exercised any rights over these. Consequently, there were no instances of people owning such distress food or of disputing other's rights to collect them. The problem of having to travel long distances and working hard to collect them was quite acute.

Collecting, storing and eating 'wild' food was usually the first response to the impending famine. When famine became inevitable, over half of the population collected/consumed 'wild' food. The economic advantage of obtaining it free co-existed with the social disadvantage – stigma. Although 'wild' food tasted unpleasant, those eating them did not consider this aspect to be important.

Livestock was another source of food, though they were of limited importance. Livestock owners preferred to kill animals only on ceremonial occasions, or only when they were clearly going to die. Since cattle is considered to be quite precious, the crisis posed serious problems for people having them, as is visible from the following folk saying:

'Anyone without cattle  
Can sleep well;  
But if you have them  
*You will spend sleepless nights*'.

During famine, the prices of animals dropped considerably. The resulting deterioration in 'terms of trade' between livestock and grain was common during famines. Although milk provided an important item, yet it was scarce. Access to milk or lack of it proved to be a significant factor in mortality differentials during the famine. Households which had cows or goats were less likely to suffer a death in the family. Another point that needed some attention was the question of water availability. Water quality was poor in almost all parts of Kalahandi. People did connect the lack of water to the drought. Although they talked about the lack of rain in some parts, the lack of ground water was also implied as well.

During the drought, many hand-dug wells went dry. In the past, people had developed methods of storing water. However, the introduction of pump water from tube wells had led to the neglect of the former. Most of the people living in plains depended on the river for water. Even when it went dry, they dug holes on the river bank and collected drinking water. Although few irrigation projects had been undertaken at Kalahandi, however they were mostly to renovate or expand the age-old irrigation tanks formerly owned by the ruling classes – members of the royal household or gountias. Moreover, the system

of digging bore tube wells did not produce any significant impact. Further, the problem of maintenance plagued it.

As regards migration pattern during famine in the region, only *Dombs* and other outcastes migrated out of Kalahandi, migration was not however a common practice among tribals. Given a situation where the level of indebtedness was higher in the plains, the process of migration seemed to be more common here. In contrast, this was not a recurrent phenomenon in the hills. Those who migrated are mainly from the landless and *sukhabasi* (those who owned only homestead land) section and so were highly indebted due to their failure to pay loans.

Grain production levels seem to have fallen dramatically in 1984. The planted area contracted as well. This was due to certain features such as indebtedness, the lack of access to water, low rainfall and the failure of crops to sprout in some areas. These aspects were not included in the statistics.

Moreover, one can roughly identify three reasons for the failure of subsistence production. Firstly, there seems to have been the problem of a long-term decline of production. This implied that, and secondly, the cultivators got alienated from their land and became dependent on the market for their staple food. Thirdly, the region witnessed, in part, the failure of production in 1983 and a complete failure in 1984. Consequently, there was an increase in the number of people without a harvest of their own, as well as the non-availability of grain in the local market. This was precipitated not by a decline of food availability, but by the stock received by the stable food system.

It was interesting to note that, there were as many as eleven rice mills in the district, most of which were set-up in the 1960's. The owners stated that the procurement phase was normally between October and March. The average grain procured by a rice mill in this period was between 25,000 and 30,000 quintals. The middlemen played a vital role in collecting grains from the villages as well as linking the mills to the villages. The mills also collected grain from certain districts adjoining Kalahandi. As stated by the mill owners, the level of procurement was rather low in the recent years because the district administration had strict guidelines regarding selling and procurement.

Of late, the mill owners stopped paying advance cash payments to the peasants. This was because the loans taken were spent almost immediately, and the peasants would start bargaining at the time of harvest for enhanced rates. As felt by the mill owners, ten years ago people were god-fearing. In case they failed to repay the grain, they used to mortgage their land and/or sell it, or their gold. But now, they go into hiding or run away from the place. This had prompted the mill owners to appoint middle men in every village to ensure grain supplies.

The mill owners were unhappy since, in the last decade, they were allowed to sell their grain only for three years. They also grumbled about the local purchasing capacity - at the towns, the semi-urban or the rural markets - and the restrictions imposed on sending their procurement outside. As felt by them, most of the people at Kalahandi could not afford to pay even Rs 1 per kg of rice. The average response of the mill owners was '*if we follow fair means we cannot make a living*', which articulated the deeper implications of a strategy that thrived on exporting their procurements clandestinely outside the district.

### ***Market System in Kalahandi***

Kalahandi had a three-tier market system. The first tier comprised the major urban market in the region, which met daily. It also included the wholesale grain market. The commercial population which resided at Kalahandi carried out large, bulky transactions, whereby grain was bought, sold and stored. The middle tier market consisted of the large rural market. These are weekly/bi-weekly markets, linked to the major markets and provided them with large quantities of grain. This market provided an opportunity to the local farmers to sell small quantity of grain, which catered vertically to the middlemen (supplying to the large traders) and horizontally, to the rural people for consumption. The upper tier and the middle tier markets played a vital role in the district. Trading activities were intensively carried out at these markets. Due to their vertical nature of trading, they were extremely oligopolistic. Given the diverse landscape and the scattered population, the traders did not take any risk in the middle tier market.

A strong nexus existed between the merchant, the middleman and the retailer, which was beneficial for both the upper and the middle tier market. It also ensured that their positions were safer in their respective tiers. Finally, there was the third tier - the village market. This was entirely dependent on the production of local and seasonal cash crops. These markets met on certain days of the week and the small traders visited the 'hatas' on these days. These markets did not have the potential to make transactions of grain in terms of sacks to reach the middle tier market everyday. Consequently, the middlemen went on adding kilogram by kilogram to fill a sack so that their collection could be transported out once or twice a week.

The commercial interest in grain was gradually declining because of uncertainty and limited scope for such enterprise. Even the merchants were suspicious and did not take any risk by providing loans. However, in cases where cash crops were cultivated, they would provide loans. If the grain production failed, the peasants then had to mortgage or even sell their land to repay the loans. This was a usual feature in almost all the plain areas of Kalahandi. Most of the villages in plains had been plagued by the problem of indebtedness. As a result, people migrated to the nearby towns, or out of the state, in search of daily wage opportunities.

Due to the adverse conditions, traders did not want to go into the interior tracts of Kalahandi and establish a rural grain market. The towns provided them a guaranteed and secure grain market where they could also sell in bulk to retailers. In such situations, prices were predictable; the time and money spent and the risk taken on negotiating a sale was very little. Selling grain in rural markets did not involve all these possibilities. Prices were lower and bulk sales were impossible. The demand was very low and highly variable. This could be met by the local peasants who sold their surpluses. Consequently, a marketing infrastructure of retailers did not develop to sell bulk of grain in the rural areas. Given this, to think of the 'lack of entitlement' in the rural areas of Kalahandi would be erroneous.

It could be forcefully argued that both logistically and physically, it was impossible for grain to reach the people. Many of the areas in Kalahandi were quite inaccessible during the monsoons. Hence, the rural markets could be reached only in the dry season. Those who had the desire/means to obtain grain did so before the monsoon set in. Besides, the transport system acted as an impediment in the risk-prone zone, where markets were yet to be established. Although the grain did not reach rural markets, people reached the grain. Not only did they try to reach the grain, but also identify the work opportunities. And, majority of them who did migrate depended on the indigenous food that was accessible.

### **Organising the Relief: Aid, assistance and preventive measures**

The indigenous relief system operated through the form of repayable loans of cash or grain. These were loans from moneylenders, shopkeepers, middlemen, petty traders, live stockists, as well as professional merchants, like rice mill owners. The creditor advanced money or food, usually before the beginning of rains when these were expensive, and accepted repayment after the harvest when these were cheap; on occasions, the creditor would confiscate the domesticated animals or land for non-repayment of loans. Although many loans appeared to be interest-free, 'hidden' profits however were made by the creditor.

In rural areas, people expected the state to supply them with services. Biranchi Punji, an elderly person of Amlapali, for example, mentioned how in the past they had donated gold and money to the state government. Given their present plight, he felt that it was obvious that the state government should take care of them. However, most of the relief distributions by state government were small and urban-centred. These centres were inadequate to meet the demands in the form of grain, money and transport. Although the priority was to reach to people with the 'greatest need', however conflict and lack of coordination between the state government, the central government and the district administration resulted in damaging policies. On occasions, the district administration and certain NGOs organised the distribution which

worked at cross-purposes vis-a-vis each other. The "famine relief" programme in Kalahandi was not very successful initially. Food aid programme itself was not the most appropriate form of assistance as it failed to properly address the cause of deaths. As a result, it was inconsequential to saving lives or preventing destitution. Besides, the food was committed late, delivered late and failed to reach to the right people (Singh 1975). If there had to be a choice to keep the prices of grain or that of livestock stable, the latter should have received priority. This would have been effective in not only maintaining the livestock of the rural folk, but also helped to increase their cash income during the famine.

In Kalahandi, poor peasants had no livestock. The others only had few to risk selling some, even at a good price or even with the assurance of being able to buy them back later. This section of people needed assistance; and like other people they also had cash needs. During distress period, they would engage in jobs such as cutting firewood and burning charcoal. Consequently during the famine, people would rely on timber and firewood obtained from the cutting of trees in order to earn an income. Legal restrictions on the cutting of trees were ineffective. Further, alternative employment opportunities would have proved beneficial both to the tree-cutters and the environment.

Supplying seeds to peasants was another component of the relief programme. The shortage of seed was an acute problem for many farmers. This could be of considerable importance to the poor peasants enabling them to secure a post-famine harvest. However, given the variations in the ecology of Kalahandi, peasants cultivated a wide variety of millets. A uniform distribution of one or two types of seeds throughout the district was hardly the solution. Instead, an effective seed programme would have helped to build up stocks of local seed varieties for distribution.

Free food supply - another feature of famine relief - had serious shortcomings. On the one hand, it was slow and cumbersome to transport and distribute; it was largely ineffective and irrelevant to save the lives or ensuring the livelihood of people. On the other hand, there was a sudden fall in the production of food due to the extreme events such as drought (von Grebmer, 2019). These episodes created disincentives for local peasants, and thereby undermined local food production. This was primarily because people had to travel long distances to get relief which interfered with their normal agricultural activities. It also displaced commercial grain traders from the market and disrupted the fragile, local market.

Nevertheless, free distribution of food could be extremely effective in certain circumstances and for some categories of people. Talking of the first, one can refer to the monsoon season when the peasants had to plant and weed their fields. This was the period when grain was conserved for the future - a process which was not possible during the famine. Consequently, grain or food was borrowed at high interest; work had to be done to raise the money; and

people had to travel to buy grain or gather food from the hills. All these interfered with their agricultural activities and affected their future harvest. Given the fact that the relief operations hardly visualised the significance of seasons, they operated mindlessly without any specific purpose, in an illogical and unscientific way.

Most of the villages were inaccessible by vehicle during the monsoon. As a result, a wet season food distribution would have to be based on central distribution points, with the rural folk coming to collect their rations. If the distributions were unpredictable, people would have difficulty in planning their wet season strategies. Peasants who wrongly expected a relief distribution might fail to build up reserves of food and become unexpectedly desperate in the middle of the season leading them to sell their animals or take loans. Likewise, peasants who wrongly did not expect a distribution may decide to cultivate a small area and take up wage jobs to build up a reserve, only to find later that the reserve was unnecessary. An uncertain distribution may therefore make them use their household labour time inefficiently, and possibly jeopardise their future subsistence. It is important that when rural people are given a resource, such as food, they should get it in such a way that they can make the best use of it by integrating it into their strategies for resource management (Banik 2007).

Food distribution, thus, should be seen as an income transfer and not as a means of nutritional support. People who required free food included poor people who were labourers. It also consisted of incapacitated people such as old, disabled or chronically ill, or house-holds with one working member and a large number of dependents. These people could not maintain themselves even at normal times.

Food policy, therefore, was important during the famine. The high price of grain might not be the only critical factor determining vulnerability to famine, but it was an important one also. In many of the towns, people relied on buying food from the market; they had little or no access to wild food; they had a fixed income and very few things to sell out for money. They were particularly vulnerable to rise in grain prices. The artisans and the rural labourers were in a similar position. Food policy for an area vulnerable to famine should aim at marketing grain, which should be available at a reasonable price to such people.

Legal control on the price of grain could not work during a food shortage, unless grain was also released to the market. A food security policy to combat famine must be based on reserve stocks of grain, built up and maintained during non-famine years, to be sold at a subsidised price when the need arises. The grain should be sold in the principal markets, that is, in the towns. It could also be sold at the rural markets by the market committees in very high prices. Restrictions would have to be placed on bulk buying and speculative

storage of grain by merchants. Thus, it needs to be emphasised that mere food policy cannot provide grain to the poorest, the incapacitated and the drought-stricken households. It cannot save the lives of the deserted women and the children. It cannot similarly keep down the prices in the rural markets which are very remote or are not linked to the urban markets. Food security policy, based on market intervention, is no substitute for programmes specifically aimed at saving lives, ensuring possibilities of livelihood or sustaining the poorer sections. Mobilization of community actions by local governing bodies is equally essential to enhance nutrition and health awareness, to expand community outreach to the most vulnerable, to enable effective program implementation at the grassroots level and strengthening community based monitoring. Emphasis has to be laid on the training and capacity development of the local governing bodies with aid and assistance from the state to strengthen the nutritional status of Kalahandi (Niti Aayog 2019: 70).

### **Conclusion: The intended argument and the perceived meaning**

There are two levels of conclusion for this work. One is at an abstract level. The alien construction of 'hunger' and 'famine' are misleading and inappropriate for our present understanding of the phenomenon. Instead, we would like to propose that hunger and famine are not single, cohesive concepts and famines are not a natural kind. The analysis must take into account the understandings of the famine articulated by the people who are undergoing the process of suffering.

The second conclusion is at the level of the general model of understanding and responding to famine that has been developed for Kalahandi. This approach has proved productive in explaining how rural people responded to the famine as they did. People's principal aim during the famine is to preserve the basis of an acceptable future way of life, which involves not only material well being but also social cohesion. More specific elements include attempting to explain differences in response between people of different locations, groups and classes and between man and woman. It also includes the differences in economic opportunities, ecology, structures of power and authority.

Indigenous understandings of phenomena such as relief, food security, drought, desertification, diseases and hunger are also important. Although, these indigenous perceptions may be at odds with scientific thinking, however, they can add further, specially, in a context where the empirical observations themselves are misleading or inaccurate.

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