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"Decades of insecurity and lack of access to basic social services have undermined livelihoods, increased levels of poverty ... and led to high rates of malnutrition."

- Anne Bauer

Malnutrition refers to the condition caused by improper diet. Malnutrition and not obesity, has thrown India into a catch-22 situation. Obesity is largely a problem of the rich, caused by an imbalanced diet and lack of exercise etc. It can be solved by awareness campaigns, improved lifestyle etc. But, malnutrition is typically a problem of the poor and cannot be solved by just creating awareness. It deals with poverty and illiteracy at a deeper level. Five percent of India's population is obese, whereas a fifth of the population is malnourished. It is eroding India's economic gains to a large extent and demands swift action.

Malnutrition generally affects young children below the age of two and should be treated before the child reaches that age. It causes wide-ranging deficiency diseases like scurvy, kwashiorkor etc. resulting in stunted growth, reduced intelligence and poor general health. It causes fifty percent of the 2.3 million child deaths in India. Malnutrition is the thorn in India's otherwise amazing economic growth rate.

Women fare a lot worse than men in the realm of health. This fuels a vicious cycle of disease and premature death. Their preference of sons to daughters leads to birth of too many children in the hope of a son and combined with their poverty results in severe malnourishment. This indicates the deep-rooted socio-cultural discrimination in our society.

The development in India is not uniform across the country. Some states are very much developed in contrast to other states. One of the main reasons for malnutrition in India is abject poverty. Some people are so poor that they are not able to afford nutritious food. Twenty-six percent of India's population lives below poverty line and a significant percentage just above poverty line. This explains the large percentage of malnourished people in India. An alarming fact is that one in every three people in India is malnourished. Despite spending the highest amount on malnourishment, India has the largest number of malnourished people at 212 million, as a lot of government funds get embezzled at different levels. Scrutinising corruption at all stages will ensure that the funds are properly utilised for the malnourished.

Food shortage is not the root of malnutrition since India has a surplus amount of buffer stock. Stringent measures should be taken to prevent spoilage of food

grains during storage. Another hurdle is the improper distribution of food to the people concerned. This can be overcome by upgrading the current Public Distribution System. According to a survey, ten percent of the food consumed by the urban families is wasted daily and should be prevented.

Remedial measures should be taken to increase the Human Development Index of the country, from the present 6.2 to seven which is the indicator for a developed country.

Let's unite and challenge malnutrition before it is too late!!
Of course, we can!!