



Problem of Malnutrition in India: Causes and Solutions

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ABSTRACT:

Malnutrition is a serious global problem. This problem is getting worse due to an increasing population and climate change. India is also not untouched by this problem. Even after seven decades of independence, the problem of malnutrition is posing serious challenges to the Indian government. Today, the country has one third of the total malnourished children in the world. India is a welfare democracy, in which many social schemes are being run for the avoidance and solution of social problems like malnutrition. Multi-level and multi-pronged efforts have been made to solve the problem of malnutrition through various five-year plans, but the results could not be achieved as expected. In the absence of nutrition, it is not possible to convert the population into human resources and use them in the development work of the country. In this research paper, evaluating the status of the social problem of malnutrition, its causes, and solutions have been discussed.

Keywords: *Malnutrition, Social problem, Diet, Population, Poverty, Food security*

Preface

Malnutrition has become a matter of concern for the international community today. The World Bank has even compared it to a pandemic called the "Black Death," which engulfed a large part of Europe's population in the 18th century. The problem of malnutrition is so serious that institutions like the World Bank are concerned about it. The reason for malnutrition is that you have not been getting the necessary balanced diet for a long time. Due to malnutrition, the immunity of children and women decreases, which means they easily become victims of many diseases, so it is very important to be aware of the problem of malnutrition. India is a developing and

rural environment where the social problem of malnutrition is a major obstacle in the path of national progress.

Research Objectives

The main objectives of this research paper are as follows:

1. To understand the gravity of the problem of malnutrition as a social problem,
2. To evaluate the impact of the problem of malnutrition on national development.
3. To evaluate the causes of the problem of malnutrition and the measures to be taken.

Discussion and Results

The problem of malnutrition is worse in developing countries than in developed countries. The main reason for this is poverty. In the absence of money, poor people are not able to buy enough nutritious things like milk, fruits, ghee, etc. But along with poverty, ignorance and illiteracy are also major reasons. The majority of people, particularly those living in villages and the countryside, are unaware of the importance of a well-balanced diet. Because of this, they themselves do not include essential items in the food of their children. Because of this, they themselves suffer from this disease, as well as making their family victims of malnutrition. Apart from these, there are some other reasons — like one in every three pregnant women in India suffers from anemia due to malnutrition. In our society, women do not pay attention to their own food and drink. Whereas pregnant women need more nutritious food. In the absence of proper nutrition, pregnant mothers themselves suffer from diseases, which makes the child born weak and disease prone. Often, women feed the whole family and eat the leftovers dry and dry, which is insufficient for them.[1,2]

Malnutrition often results from the lack of an adequately balanced diet. Anemia, or goiter disease in children and women, or rickets, or night blindness in children, or even blindness, are dangerous consequences of malnutrition. Apart from this, there are many diseases which are caused by insufficient or unbalanced diets. If the human body does not get the necessary elements on a balanced basis for a long time, then the following symptoms are seen in which malnutrition is detected:

1. Stunted growth of the body.
2. Muscle relaxation or contraction
3. Wrinkled yellow skin
4. Fatigue soon after working.
5. Lack of enthusiasm in the mind, irritability and nervousness.
6. The hair becomes dry and lustrous.
7. Face is dull, eyes are sunken, and black circles are forming around them.
8. Weight loss and weakness.
9. Disturbed sleep and digestion.
10. Thinning of arms and legs and enlargement of the abdomen or swelling in the body.

The United Nations says that the number of children under five who die every year due to malnutrition in India is more than one million. India is in the worst condition in terms of malnutrition in South Asia. Surveys conducted in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh found that even today, children are losing their lives due to starvation in the poorest areas of the country. It has been said in the report that if attention is given to this, then these deaths can be prevented. The figures found by the United Nations in India are many times higher than the international level, with the United Nations describing the situation as worrying. The Fight Hunger Foundation and ACF India have jointly started the Generational Nutrition Program in India. While explaining this program, Rajiv Tandon, Vice President, APF in India, said that there is a need to treat malnutrition as a medical emergency. Along with this, he also advocated for better policies to be made in this direction and said a budget should be given for this. At the conference held in New Delhi, emphasis was laid on taking the necessary steps from the government. Rajeev Tandon has appealed to the government to take it as a mission to eradicate malnutrition. He said that Prime Minister Modi ji can

give it a new direction if he wants. The APF report shows that India's malnutrition is as big a problem as it has been seen anywhere else in the whole of South Asia. It is written in the report that Scheduled Castes (21 percent) in India are Scheduled Tribes (28 percent). The backward castes (20 percent) and the rural community (21 per cent) are burdened with extreme malnutrition. While in Maharashtra, the state government is taking major steps to reduce malnutrition, it is still not successful in Dalit and tribal areas. A United Nations report has given details of food wastage in the country, along with children not getting food.[3,4]

Malnutrition has become a matter of concern for the international community today. Even the World Bank has compared it to an epidemic called "Black Death". In the 18th century, a large part of the population of Europe was swallowed up. Why malnutrition is considered so important? Why are institutions like the World Bank so concerned about it? Malnutrition in general is considered a medical issue, and most of us think that it is a matter of medical attention. In fact, malnutrition is the result of many socio-political factors. When hunger and poverty are not on the political agenda, a large amount of malnutrition comes to the surface. Taking the example of India, malnutrition is also high in its neighboring Bangladesh and Nepal. The infant mortality rate in Bangladesh is 48 per thousand as compared to 67 per thousand in our country. It is even higher than the sub-Saharan African countries. The malnutrition rate in India is around 35 per cent, while in Sub-Saharan Africa it is around 27 per cent. Mortality per thousand in children below 5 years of age:

Comparative Table

Bangladesh	77
Brazil	36
China	07
Egypt	41
India	93
Indonesia	45
Mexico	29
Nigeria	183

In areas where there is extreme undernutrition, malnourished women give birth to children who are growth-retarded or weak as soon as they are born. Thus, undernutrition is passed on in the form of a dreadful succession for a generation. These children are unable to compensate for growth in the years to come. They are more prone to getting sick sooner,

entering school late, learning less, and growing up to be less productive adults. Thus, malnutrition is like a terrible time bomb.

Malnutrition is a cycle in which children are trapped in their mother's womb. The destiny of their lives is decided even before they are born into the world. This situation is written with the ink of poverty and starvation. Its color is dark, and when the situation is serious, even a ray of hope does not flourish in life. Malnutrition means that the human being does not have sufficient physical development according to his body. After a stage, the process of mental development also starts getting blocked. The problem of malnutrition arises in very young children, especially children from birth to 5 years of age, due to not getting enough nutritious food through food. As a result of this, there is a loss of immunity in children and minor diseases become the cause of their death. Malnutrition is actually a direct result of household food insecurity. Food security in general refers to having constant access to food and having enough food to live an active, healthy life; when one or more of these factors is compromised, families face food insecurity. Food security depends on the policies and priorities of the government. Take the example of India, where the government sits on a pile of food grains—according to an estimate, if the sacks are stacked one on top of the other, man can walk to the moon, but due to a lack of appropriate policies, it does not reach the needy. Food rots due to lack of storage, are destroyed by rats or drowns in the sea, but a large part of the population goes to bed hungry. Malnutrition affects children the most. It begins at birth or even earlier and progresses rapidly over a period of 6 months to 3 years. As a result, children suffer from stunted growth, death, and reduced efficiency. The direst consequences are the economic losses it generates. Malnutrition has been shown to reduce human productivity by up to 15%. A large number of children drop out of school due to malnutrition. Malnourished children do not want to go to school due to low learning ability. Outside the school, they become victims of social neglect and lifelong exploitation. Due to this, a large number of children are forced into child labour and child prostitution. Malnutrition begins at birth or even earlier and progresses rapidly over a period of 6 months to 3 years. At the age of 6 months to 3 years, mother's milk is not enough for the child. The child is unable to eat or demand anything on his own. He often needs soft food, which only an adult can feed him. Along with earning a livelihood, mothers have to

do many other household chores like cooking, filling water, cleaning, etc. They do not have enough energy or time to feed the baby again and again. Other adults in the family also consider it the responsibility of the mother alone. A child malnourished in childhood is much less likely to improve later. The Aadhar scheme, scholarships, special schools for child labor, and other programmes are beneficial, but they cannot compensate for the loss of the first six years. Malnutrition mainly appears in 6 forms:

1. Low birth weight.
2. Stunted development in childhood
3. Low blood pressure
4. Vitamin a deficiency
5. Iodine deficiency diseases
6. Obesity[5,6]

There are mainly two types of malnutrition in children—dry malnutrition and inflammatory malnutrition.

Indicators of malnutrition: weight loss according to the age and height of the child; thin and weak arms and legs; and an enlarged stomach. Children get frequent infections and get sick.

Malnutrition and health are mostly related to families who do not get even two meals a day. The body's ability to fight diseases decreases and they soon fall prey to diseases. Having a birth weight of less than 2.5 kg increases the chances of a child dying at a very young age three times. Where there is a high level of malnutrition, the death rate from measles is 400 times higher than normal. A study conducted by the National Institute of Nutrition 3 years ago shows that Madhya Pradesh is the most malnourished state in India and the immunity of children here has become very weak. The incidence of diarrhea in malnourished children is four times greater than normal. Maternal deaths are five times more common in anemic women than in healthy women. Studies suggest that the cause of morbidity in about three-quarters of the total patients can be due to malnutrition and other related problems.

Malnutrition in children leads to a vicious cycle that leads to infectious diseases like diarrhea, measles, whooping cough, TB, and pneumonia. These diseases are more severe in malnourished children and are more likely to have a longer duration. The severity of malnutrition can be correctly understood from the problem of diarrhea. Although diarrhea is a common disease, it was believed that this disease spread due to contamination in water, but later it was found that the

time of diarrhea corresponds to the period of weaning. This period lasts from the introduction of liquid food to the babies until three months after the end of breastfeeding. This is the time when children are usually malnourished. Why are undernourished children more prone to diarrhea? When it was studied biologically, it was found that the number of bacteria increases due to reduced immunity on the inner surface of the small intestine. The toxic substances produced by these bacteria slow down the process of adsorption of sodium. The child is unable to tolerate it and the problem of diarrhea is born. It has been found that a child can lose up to 600 calories per day during diarrhea. In such a situation, the condition of the undernourished child becomes even worse. A study conducted in Maharashtra has shown that malnutrition itself is a major cause of diseases and deaths. Malnutrition and anemia were the leading causes of death in 31.9 percent of children, pneumonia 21.3 percent, and gastroenteritis 20.2 percent.[7,8]

Similarly, low birth weight is a major cause of lifelong illness. Due to lack of proper diet during pregnancy and now being victims of domestic violence, the condition of women as well as children is getting worse. Due to domestic violence against women, the percentage of diseases related to the nervous system in children has increased. According to a report by the National Institute of Nutrition, most of the children who were born with low birth weight came from poor families. One third of child deaths are due to low birth weight. Similarly, the increasing impact of infectious diseases like tuberculosis (TB) on children due to weakness can also be clearly seen. The relationship between poverty and malnutrition is more pronounced in the context of measles. It is a common disease and never proves fatal, but it is often fatal to the poor. When this disease occurs, there is fever and cough. On the fourth day, a red rash appears on the skin. On treatment, by the tenth day, the rash gets cured, but in the case of a malnourished child, measles takes a different form and becomes red in color. The red rash takes the form of a rash and its color reaches to purple. For a few days, the skin becomes scaly and starts to rot. This process of skin loss can progress to such an extent that malnourished children develop a disease called pyoderma. The child may also develop bronchitis and pneumonia. Studies show that the risk of death due to measles is 400 times higher for an undernourished child. If we also accept that children are dying due to diarrhea, cough, pneumonia, fever, and TB in villages, then it means

that the root of these causes is malnutrition caused by hunger, nothing else..

Despite being a fast-growing economy, India is yet to find a solution to the serious problem of malnutrition. The following figures from India show the magnitude of the situation.

1. More than a third of the world's malnourished children live in India.
2. According to the GHI survey, India ranks 67th out of 80 countries in starvation.
3. 44% of children under the age of 5 are underweight.
4. Anemia affects 72 percent of newborns.

These malnutrition figures in India, which has increased GDP by 50% in the last two decades, are extremely concerning. Despite the projects like Mid-Day Meal, ICDS, and PDS being run by the government, the following are the reasons for such a situation in India:

1. Large sections of the poor do not have access to the schemes being run for social security.
2. Due to gender inequality, women have low levels of both the quantity and quality of food, resulting in their children being malnourished.
3. Illiteracy and lack of awareness
4. Due to religious beliefs, many people do not use protein-rich dairy products, eggs, or meat and depend only on pulses for this.
5. According to UNICEF, lack of sanitation is also one of the main reasons for malnutrition in India.
6. In order to effectively reduce malnutrition, the schemes run by the government must be ensured to reach the lower strata of society.
7. The shortcomings of the PDS have to be met.
8. Social awareness has to be raised about malnutrition.
9. Schemes like Swachh Bharat Abhiyan also have to ensure success.

Conclusion

Malnutrition is thus a complex problem. Ensuring household food security is essential, and this is possible only when policies aimed at addressing the interests of the poor are aimed at ending malnutrition and hunger. We can learn from Brazil, where autopsies and malnutrition are considered a national

shame. Food insecurity is likely to increase in the current globalization era, where the welfare of the poor is ignored. How can we accept the government's decision when it exports lakhs of tonnes of food grains for animal feed and remains a mute spectator to malnutrition deaths in states like Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh? In today's time, due to the promotion of production of cash crops away from food grains, the food crisis may deepen further and we may again have to depend on others for food grains. Malnutrition cannot be stopped by programmes and activities. A strong public commitment and initiative are needed. Unless far-reaching policies for food security are laid down and priority is not given to children in policy making and budget allocation, much progress in the prevention of malnutrition is not possible.[9,10]

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