

Organiser - Column: Togadia Speak

Hunger kills...

While traveling through various parts of Bharat - villages, small muddy paths connecting tiny villages & even around urban & semi urban hutments - I always noticed kids & old people who were so thin & malnourished that my heart shivered & as a medical doctor, I could very well see the dehydrated wrinkles skins stuck to their bones with no flesh anywhere, there eyes lost in the dark circles & their feet trembling... Off late, to my shocking surprise, I am also noticing young people as well of this type! Hungry, malnourished, ill... It is not even any particular state's picture; it is all over Bharat! Hunger is killing Bharat!

Sure, many surveys are being conducted on this serious issue. Somewhere one gets to see the detailed data sheets or news items or even govt documents as to how many hunger & hunger related deaths in Bharat, where Bharat stands in the global index of hunger deaths, % age of malnourished kids, women & old people in Bharat as compared to global data etc. I read somewhere that long back in 2006 almost 36 million people died of hunger in Bharat. Some say that 10 million people die each year of chronic hunger & hunger related diseases in Bharat. In a global data sheet it was mentioned & a leading news paper in Bharat printed it with great zeal that with 230 million malnourished people, Bharat is the highest in global list. The report also said that 50% of child deaths in Bharat were due to hunger / malnourishment & every 3rd adult (Age 15 to 49) is at a risk being so very thin due to forced hunger related malnourishment with BMI less than 18.5. With tremendous food insecurity in rural Bharat, 1.5 million kids are at immediate risk of hunger deaths & this food insecurity in Bharat is due to the rising global process! 1.1 billion people in the world have no access to water at all!

Numbers, figures, percentages & such other datum give some picture of the grave scene of food security in Bharat; but when one travels & sees almost dead people - forced hunger deaths - like these, one realizes that mere numbers, studies & big govt promises about Food Security & bills related to it, may soothe the intellectuals & TV created activists; but Bharat is much deeper than all these. Hunger is neither a mere data sheet nor a 'size zero' fad or a socio-political weapon to bring about change; millions of hungry Indians are Bharat's own kids! They have faces, they have families & they do not seem to have any future as they are made to die of forced hunger! Their parents or fore fathers may have voted for various



political parties earlier or most of them do not even have access to water – forget food! EVMs, voting, education are not even distant dreams for them!

NO! I am not a pessimistic; but in past 15 years during my lakhs of miles of travel in rural Bharat what I saw has shattered me inside out. Every time I sit for eating anything or even drinking a cup of tea, invariably many gloomy, bony & starved faces start floating in front of my eyes. In my childhood, we have seen poverty. We have ourselves worked in a small farm with our mother trying to make ends meet with great difficulty. But somehow, we got some food. It was not fancy. It was simple, sometimes limited; but we could somehow eat.

Today, what I see all over Bharat is not only shocking, it is scary. Tonnes of food grains are being wasted due to govt negligence & apathy towards real people. Millions of dollars are being spent on creating high rise buildings & food malls... At the same time, millions of people in Bharat die / at risk of hunger death in the same Bharat!

The irony is that whenever someone like me speaks of any temple or an issue related to Hindutva, the same fancy media, high rise types & the so called social activists start shouting- such people are taking India (they don't like the word 'Bharat'!) back in 10th century! When we agitated against a Shankaracharya's arrest in Deepawali, a leftist reporter shouted on his channel – 'These Hindutva walas do not give Bharat Band for any hungry labourers, but do it for the Shankaracharya!' A young boy age 16 asked me, 'This reporter is wearing suit & tie, he must be having kids & must be buying expensive pizza for them; how many pizzas must he have bought for the poor labourers' kids!' Bharat knows who really cares & who pretends to care!

Staying hungry by choice – for dieting due to increased weight or for religious fasting or even for a greater social cause is a personal choice of that particular person. But forced hunger, diseases arising out of it & deaths are serious issue that Bharat immediately needs to address. Some of us have started an initiative 'Ek Mutthi Anaaj' (EMA) that tries to inspire people, wealthy housewives to spare a fistful of food grains every day, store them well & donate to the poor needy families every week. To collect & reliably distribute to the real needy, EMA has a team of volunteers all over Bharat & the donor of the food can also join them to give to the families. The idea is that if one is giving to the needy, then the giver gets that punya, so it should be given with dignity & respect. Therefore, the poor families are not made to queue up or go anywhere, but the EMA volunteers go to their houses / shacks, touch



their feet & give them food grains packets with respect.

But such initiatives can not replace govt systems that must deliver NOW before 80% population of Bharat dies of hunger, malnourishment or related diseases like Anemia, various other vitamins deficiency etc. Corruption can be one of the causes of the unequal distribution of food grains in Bharat; but there are bigger causes as well & land grab is one such. Forced unemployment is another. Basic reason for all this is apathy & zero accountability for deliverable systems on part of the govt as well as of the healthier & wealthier society. Hunger is not a fashion or a fad or a respectable noble social cause for the person who is forced to die of hunger; it is a compulsory death for that kid or an adult despite his wishes to live! While Bharat is fast becoming an economic superpower, such increasing number forced hunger deaths & malnourishment must be tackled by a strong & immediate initiative jointly created by all the govts - central & states - and all of us - all people of Bharat who wish to again make Bharat as glorious as She was before 14 centuries! All imaginary, vague & fancy issues - however glamorous, publicity-oriented they may be - should be kept aside & forced hunger should be irradiated from Bharat!

The writer is a renowned Cancer Surgeon & International General Secretary of VHP. Contact: drtogadia@gmail.com