

# ‘FROM HUNGER TO STARVATION’: AN INVESTIGATION OF CHILDHOODS, MARGINALITY AND MOBILITY IN LUCKNOW DISTRICT

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**Abstract :** *There are estimated 800 million hungry people across the world. The depressing figure of nearly 20 crores people who sleep with empty stomach daily in India is a shame for the nation. India is presently a home to the largest undernourished population in the world with an approximation of 3,000 children die every day due to starvation. Going by just numbers, deaths due to hunger encompassing of under-nutrition are not new to India. The article draws attention towards starving of vulnerable groups defined in the later section. Lucknow is the capital of largest state Uttar Pradesh, India. According to census 2011, the total population of the lucknow district is 45,89,838 in which 15,50,842 lives in rural and the rest 30,38,996 in urban areas. But the fact that the growth of hunger problem among children in urban settings, and that too in the heart of the state capital, has brought the focus on to the lives of low-income migrants, street children, scheduled castes (dalits), scheduled tribes (adivasis), people with disabilities, sexual minorities and families of children who are living below poverty line and are categorized under marginalized groups. This research paper highlights the area where India's development falls desperately short in terms of nutrition in lucknow district.*

**Key Terms –** *Hunger, Starvation, Poverty line, Marginality, Mobility, Malnutrition, Undernourished.*

## INTRODUCTION

They arrive in cities in search of work and better livelihoods. Poverty is the observed socio-economic issue which force them to leave their homes. While poverty is poverty, the dynamics of it changes from rural to urban India. According to the report of the Rangaranjan committee, the new poverty line had been measured at Rs. 32 in rural areas and Rs. 47 in urban areas in the year 2011-12. Almost half of the children's death below the age of five is caused by malnutrition. Poverty alone does not lead to the emergence of hunger leading to starvation in rural and urban areas. The phenomenon of malnutrition is entirely based upon the availability of adequate amounts of nutritious meals two times a day for the most vulnerable populations. People are too poor to obtain enough food which is crucial for the development of their body. Thus, hunger problem has a negative impact on minds, health, productivity, overall well-being and sense of future desires.

**Meaning and Definition :** Hunger is a scarcity of food or crisis of availability of food to the individual. For most the term 'hunger' refers to an aching rumble in one's stomach which signals to eat something. 'Starvation' is a situation or suffering resulting into death due to lack of food. "Starvation is the characteristic of some people not having enough food to eat. It is not the characteristic of there being not enough food to eat." (Amartya Sen). The 'Poverty line' is a line or limit fixed by the government to identify the economically weaker sections in the society. The people who are living below this line are referred as BPL or Below Poverty Line. Malnutrition is a term used to refer to any condition in which the body does not receive necessary nutrients for proper function of the body. It can be a result of starvation. The term 'undernourished' is related to a person who is not getting enough food to eat for good health and growth.

'Marginality' is the position of people on the edges, preventing their access to resources and opportunities, freedom of choices and the development of personal capabilities. Being excluded, not only from growth but also from other dimensions of developmental and societal progress, is an indication of the extremely poor being at the margins of society and in many cases marginality is a root cause of poverty (von Braun et al. 2009). Marginalized

groups are placed to the periphery or the edge of the society. In the context of Indian society, the most marginalized or vulnerable groups include people with experiences of homelessness, migrants, dalits, adivasis, families below poverty line, poor children etc. Apart this, minorities refer to a group of people who live within the society and are different than the majority of people on the base of religion, race, beliefs, language etc. The term 'mobility' refers to the state of moving physically of individuals or social groups.

### **Starving in Lucknow District :**

Every One in four children below six years of age in lucknow, stays hungry for most part of the day and are most vulnerable to malnutrition. This is because they are not given supplementary diet which develops a number of nutritional deficiencies to a great extent in their bodies. Most starvation deaths have been traced to denial of 'ration' from local shops, which sell subsidized food grain to the poor who are registered with the government as falling below the poverty line (BPL), or denial of access to pension accounts for the elderly and widowed. Large population of the victims belonged to disadvantaged groups such as the dalits and adivasis. Since, the frequent mobility of marginalized population i.e. low-income families or poor rural people sets a difficulty in any kind of intervention with them. The undistinguished pattern observed behind the deaths was a continued history of hunger as a disease among children experiences the semi-starvation, which is a chronic pattern of not having secure food, nutrient rich meals two times in a day and living in unhealthy environment commonly known as juggi-jhopidis (urban slums); generally lack basic services like water supply, sanitation, and street lighting and civil works such as playgrounds and construction of primary schools have direct implication on the growth of children. In cases when there is a patch of days or weeks without work, there is a cascading effect, since their bodies are already compromised by under-nutrition, they fall prey to infectious diseases, or even die. So, the longstanding cause may be poverty and disease, but the proximate cause is hunger.

Access to food is a basic human right and necessary for good health. Unbalanced, insufficient and untimely intake of food destroys the nutrients contained in it. In regard to Food, UNICEF implies nutrition as a fundamental pillar of human development. The malnutrition and infection can create a potentially lethal cycle of worsening illness and deteriorating nutritional status. The study conducted on one hundred and twenty one randomly selected children of ages 6-14 years in lucknow examined that 48% children belongs to schedule caste. 21% children have access to food only once in a whole day. Though their body requires adequate nutritional food in their growing age, they get food which is not sufficient for their development and survival. Thus, they remain under-nourished. 15% children reported the regular body aches resulting into weakness, muscle cramps or fatigue. 40% children are found to be anemic (deficiency of iron caused by insufficient intake of iron from food inside the body) due to higher incidence of malnutrition and unbalanced diet. Even the food which is prepared by their mothers in the home is very less in amount, it would not be wrong to say this proverb for their condition, 'Cumin in the mouth of camels.' Thus, the research paper discusses the miserable conditions of children in urban lucknow; childhood is the early phase of life, generally sweet, free of work and the small eyes are filled with beautiful dreams of living-life happily. But this happiness is missing from the studied population. The research paper revealed that the hunger problem among children is overlooked; it has become the forgotten problem of the nation.

**Observations :** They have no permanent home, they are untidy, wear torn clothes, have tangled hairs and their body smells foul like they have not took bath from many days. Their pale face and thin hands-legs clearly highlights their fragile condition.

### **SUGGESTIONS**

1. Inefficient planning leaves most of the grains rotting in government warehouses rather than reaching the needy, and botched government surveys leave the poor without ration cards.
2. The policymakers should build advanced food programmes and should check its easy availability among the poor households who cannot afford high food prices.

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