

Food for thought ãçâ,~â€œ on World Food Day



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The world observes October 16 as World Food Day. Once again another day of rhetorics to rue about the dismal food scenario (especially among the developing nations); to reiterate our noble intentions of formulating new plans to feed the starving masses by reeling out scary statistics that world wide 9 billion people are dying every year due to hunger and hunger related causes, of which more than 50% are children.

Hunger accounts for more deaths than war, tuberculosis and AIDS put together. Even amongst those who escape the killing spree of hunger a whopping 1 billion are undernourished, most of whom are again children and women. And yet an almost equal number are overweight. (It is ironic that 80% of world's hungry children live in food surplus countries).

Both, the under fed and the overweight, are examples of malnutrition. This indeed is a public catastrophe where obesity poses as much a health hazard as under nourishment. Poverty arising out of under or no employment is the main cause of hunger related deaths whereas affluence is killing people in the form of diabetes, heart and other chronic diseases. 'Round bellies' (arising out of too much of eating) are as much a sign of ill health as 'pot bellies' (arising out of too less to eat).

It seems that the entire society is sick in mind if not in body. In fact our thinking process has become so unhealthy that it is in immediate and dire need of 'proper nutritional values'. Else why would rich companies falsely allure farmers to grow killer tobacco instead of life sustaining food crops?. This is one of the reasons for a steady decline in India's grain production after the year 2000, resulting in more hunger related deaths. The land used for tobacco growing denies food to about 20 million Indians apart from being responsible for another 9 lakh deaths per year from tobacco related diseases alone. Thus consumption of tobacco in any form contributes to a hungry and diseased society by reducing economic productivity and posing serious health hazards for the poor and rich alike.

Again, there is something definitely wrong when in the name of progress we are building huge dams which often not only threaten the environment but also expose the displaced people towards imminent poverty and hunger as a result of improper and long drawn out rehabilitation process. The likes of Medha Patekar are waging a relentless battle against this menace.

The creation of special economic zones by grabbing fertile land from poor farmers for the benefit of the super rich industrialists is just another symptom of our mentally sick government. Not only are the farmers paid a measly price, they are also deprived of their sole means of livelihood, pushing them deeper into the abyss of debt and poverty from which only death can rescue them.

If they are mentally sound then why are companies knowingly producing 'Fun For You' foods (rather than 'Good For You' products) which are potentially unhealthy and then spending billions to run campaigns which are unscrupulously targeting the most vulnerable (children)? Why are our super film and sports stars endorsing these false advertisements

which is contributing towards making a whole generation of kids addicted to colas and junk/processed food, thus jeopardizing their health? By donating a small part of their earnings to some charity they cannot wipe their conscience clean of their grave sins.

It is imperative that all of us start eating just enough of the right type of nutritional food and rid ourselves of the illeffects of poverty and affluence alike. Hunger should not be traded with obesity and diseases of poverty should not be replaced by diseases of excess.

There is as much a crying need to teach about healthy diets and moderate lifestyles to school children as is to empower the rural masses with education and join them in their fight for fair wages and land/water rights. We need to wage a war on all those multinational companies, government policies, and people who are bartering the nation's health for illgotten wealth and thereby supporting hunger in the garb of economic development.

At our own small level as individuals let us boycott all such harmful products like cola beverages, fatty and processed junk food, tobacco products and at the same time share our overstuffed refrigerators with those who have nothing to eat and also support all efforts aimed at empowering them towards poverty alleviation. Let there be enough good food for all. Amen.

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