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Editorial

Health is a Human Right

Man proposes but God disposes — is an archetypical excuse given by most of us as an excuse of failure, be it big or small. The question is however whether it is really the Destiny named God who puts the hurdle between our effort and success or whether it is Man himself who falls prey to his own wrong and unpragmatic decisions? Let me share one of my experiences with you all. When I was a medical student during eighties in the last century I, along with all the budding doctors of my batch, were pleased to know that by the beginning of the 21st century Health for all would be established or the target had been laid as such by WHO. The denizens of the World would then be blessed with the uniform facility of health. Ironically however we have almost reached the first quarter of 21st century and yet the world is languishing under the clutch of deteriorating health, health care system and poverty¹.

Reality is 'More than half (55%) of the global population was estimated to lack access to safely-managed sanitation services in 2017, and more than one quarter (29%) lacked safely-managed drinking-water. In the same year, two in five households globally (40%) lacked basic hand-washing facilities with soap and water in their home. Globally in 2016, unsafe drinking-water and sanitation, and lack of hand hygiene were responsible for nearly 1.2 million deaths, including almost 300 000 of children aged under 5 years who died due to diarrhoea². Condition in India is not Different^{2,3}.

Under the title WORLD HEALTH DAY 21, WHO has published an article⁴ in their webpage categorizing the problems faced by the present world laying focus especially on health. Our world is an unequal one - under this subtitle the global health Messiah has, without any circumlocution, clearly stated that the recent pandemic has taught us that we live in a world where some people lead a healthy life and has access to better health care where as the others linger under the looming shadow of gross neglect and poverty. The rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer - the common axiom of capitalism also applies to the health care where the privileged class is blessed with the boon of modern health facilities whereas the underprivileged are cursed with the bane of social aloofness as if they are duds ostracized by the society.

WHO has got judgmental at this point and has proclaimed that not only this

bias allotment of facilities is unfair but the situation can be rectified. The apex body of world health invites all the leaders of the world to play a decisive and urgent role to ensure that quality health care is available to all irrespective of whether a man is rich or poor at affordable price or free of cost when they need them. According to WHO although COVID has buried its fangs throughout the world but the worst affected are the vulnerable sections of the world population already suffering from poor health, sanitation, employment and a plethora of other problems.

Allow me to reiterate a point again. In 1977 the 30th World Health Assembly

decided that the prime social target in the ensuing decades for Governments, as for the WHO, should be ‘the attainment by all citizens of the world by the year 2000 AD of a level of health that will permit them to lead a socially and economically productive life’ (WHO, 1979). This goal got upgraded into a slogan Health for All by the Year 2000 AD. But what has jeopardized the effort to attain the set target^{5,6}? Let us discuss it from our own Nation’s point of view. Although the Indian economy has achieved high growth rates in recent years (9.4% in 2005–06 and 9.6% in 2006-07, with a consistent 7.0% growth rate even during the period of global economic slowdown), according to the Human Development Index (HDI) , India is still ranked 131 among 189 countries⁷. Surprisingly however India’s economic transformation has not produced tangible improvements in the health of the nation, and the awareness that improvement in health contributes to accelerated economic growth has not yet sipped into

World Health Statistics 2008							
Risk Factors							
Member Country	Access to improved drinking-water sources (%)			Access to improved sanitation (%)			
	Total	1990	2000	2006	Total	1990	2000
India	71	82	89	14	23	28	
Germany	100	100	100	100	100	100	
Japan	100	100	100	100	100	100	
Chile	91	93	95	84	91	94	
China	67	80	88	48	59	65	

World Health Statistics 2020			
Member Country	Proportion of population using safely-managed drinking-water services (%)	Proportion of population using safely-managed sanitation services (%)	Proportion of population using a hand-washing facility with soap and water (%)
	Comparable estimates 2017	Comparable estimates 2017	Comparable estimates 2017
India	–	–	60
Germany	>99	97	–
Japan	98	99	–
Chile	99	77	–
China	–	72	–

the minds of the learned planners. This has led to inadequate investment in the health sector which in turn has led to the inadequate improvement in the efficiency of health care. India stands at 170 out of 188 countries in domestic general government health expenditure as a percentage of GDP, according to the Global Health Expenditure database 2016⁸ of World Health Organization .

Universal Health Care was the means by which Health for All by the Year 2000 AD was conceived to be attained. Health for All was only possible if all were marshalled for Health. This meant not only the participation of governments

and medical establishments, but people themselves. Universal health care⁹ is per say, health care made universally accessible to individuals and families in the community by means acceptable to them, through their full participation and at a cost the community and what the country can afford. The role of health experts or doctors is similar to that of a gardener fighting insects and weeds. Their work is over. Universal health care is the crusade of the health conscious people. Its execution and implementation depends on knowledge of proper disposal of services and a incessant demand from an active and quality conscious consumer-the public. Strong political volition, community participation and coordination are its basic principles. Strangely both National Health Policy 1983 and 2002 failed to confer the status of a Right to health, while most other nations are planning newer strategies to put Right to Health and Medical Services into practical execution. Community participation in health is an aphorism that

still awaits genuine recognition in many countries of the world, notably of the third world. India, unfortunately, is no exception. Successive Five Year Plans in India have reduced percentage spending over health as a part of GDP, which is a bad omen.

Public awareness and activism alone can rectify this alarming condition. The people should realize that health is not only a commodity that a benevolent government bestows on them but it has to be demanded and maintained by the citizens of the state themselves. Health problems are impossible to be tackled in isolation. They will evidently be a part of our struggle for an egalitarian society, because better health care is a sign of a more concerned government and overall a conscious set of citizens. The Constitution of India recognizes the right to life and liberty of every individual.

Every cloud has a silver lining and the silvering lining to all the looming darkness, as discussed above, is the slow maneuver of the Government towards recognition of Health as a major cog in the turning wheel to success^{10,11}.

In spite of the laudable steps taken by the Government as stated above there is no scope for self complacency. The Government should ensure HEALTH AS A RIGHT and mere investment in Insurance sector will only lead to partial misallocation of public funds. Drastic improvement in the Health Infrastructure as improving the doctor to patient ratio, keeping the cost of essential medicines within the reach of the common man and plethora of other things needs to be done with absolute urgency. With the proper good will of the government combined with public awareness and participation achievement of such in near future is not impossible.

This, along with sustained strengthening of primary healthcare system and steady growth in medical infrastructure which includes better trained medical staffs in adequate numbers with state of art technology will certainly bring about a health revolution in India.

Fundamentals to achieve good health are Food, Nutrition, Housing, Education and Culture to say a few. When all conscious citizens of a country will raise their voice in unison to demand their right to live a

healthy life the Government, as People's representative must listen to the public demand. Allow me, my august readers; to end this editorial with some lines from a poem whose bard (Rabindranath Tagore) needs no introduction:

“Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;

Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.”

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