Preface

Nutrition is corner stone of sustainable development. This issue has been the central point of discourse globally since last couple of decades. The concept of malnutrition has travelled a long path. It was primarily the agenda of medicine communities. But gradually, it has been treated as global health agenda. With passage of time, the malnutrition agenda has evolved and is considered as a critical factor for child survival and development of a nation. The nutritionist communities and leaders of this discipline established its multi-dimensional linkages and identified underlying root causes and its impacts in the lives of the children. We must understand that, nutrition is no more a subject of food and diet rather it encompasses large spectrum of health issues.

The concept of malnutrition through its different form has been taken up for combating with significant thrust in India and other development countries. The state actor, non-state actors are playing a crucial role to address the issue of malnutrition and most importantly matching the scale of response in regards to Sustainable Development Goals. It must be considered that, nutrition is the base for 12 agendas out of 17 indicators enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goal 2030.

The Global data reflected that, India contributes one third global burden of malnutrition and also a country of emerging burden of non-communicable diseases. Though, our country has shown her commitment since independence and invested to address the issue of child and maternal health but the progress rate is not satisfactory in comparison to its burden. India has made progress on different maternal and child nutrition indices but has a long way to travel. Significant resource investment, equipping the resources with technical understanding, placing the institutional arrangements, reaching out to the unreached children and women along with addressing the underlying root causes of malnutrition is the need of the hour.

We must accept the fact that, Indian society particularly the rural society is characterised with illiteracy, limited information flow, unequal accessibility of public facility and most important with structural inequalities. Primarily, in caste ridden society the lowest rungs are denied from their basic entitlements and struggling to access the institutional services. The Scheduled caste community and other backward classes struggle to access those entitlements and benefits meant to them. We cannot deny the fact of existing caste based discrimination and caste based power structure in the rural society.

The malnutrition aspect has been closely understood through the systemic and structural lens. The structural drivers constitute the gender disparity in the family and thus society, existence of gender biased notions and perspectives and most importantly the accessibility to domestic economy and decision making power. The systemic determinants encompass the coverage and quality of nutrition-specific intervention and also the coverage of health related outcomes. In present context of institutional mechanism pertaining to malnutrition
management, Integrated Child Development Services and Public Distribution Systems are the two key pillars in the community. The poor community largely depend on these services to meet up their hunger and nutritional component for the children. Gradual expansion, innovation in the existing systems and more over investment has made them more accountable towards combating the malnutrition agenda.

The rural communities who are illiterate or first generation learner are also denied of scientific information’s pertaining to the issue and still hold their traditional understanding and perspectives around the food science. Existence of age old practices and nuances make the situation worst and complicated. Acknowledging the malnutrition as important health agenda and exploring its causes, impact need to be established in the community. Therefore, we can attribute that malnutrition issue has encompassed multiple dimensions which need to be understood from a closer lens.

In India, Bihar is one of the fastest growing states in terms of its economy and other development outcome determinants. It is the state expanded in thirty eight districts with utmost geographical, language, food diversity. This state has been always a center point in National political landscape but never got significant attention in terms of development is concerned. In recent one and half decade, the state has progressed in different health, nutrition and education outcomes along with ensuring coverage of education nutrition specific intervention. Increase the in reach with institutional augmentation has been observed since last couple of years.

It has been also recorded in NFHS –IV data that 44% children under 5 years are underweight among the one and half crore child population. This complex issue has got attention in political discourse, action and investment in the state. It is also important to record that, different international organization have deployed resources to improve the status of under 5 years children in the state through direct intervention and technical support to the state. But due to diversity, geographical difference and many structural power drivers it could not achieve the desired return against the investment. Hence, its required to diagnose the complex nature, causes, dimension and correlates of malnutrition among children under 5 years in the backward communities living in difficult geographical landscape in Bihar with some promising recommendations.

This work is concerned with these aspects. The main focus of this work is to describe the socio-economic and cultural status of the parents and exploring the health related indices. This work has also attempted to examine the reach of the parents having underweight children to the Govt institutions accountable to address the malnutrition issue. Furthermore, the study went on to explore the perceptions of the parents about causes and implications of malnutrition in the lives of the children.

This work has been contained the socio-cultural-economic narratives while examining determinants of malnutrition along with accessibility of institutional arrangements available in the study locale. Evolution of nutrition science, historical overview of malnutrition concept, manifestation of malnutrition and its evidence based intensity in India, Bihar and world has been introduced in Chapter 1. This chapter also has put effort to introduce causes and impact of malnutrition in the lives of the children, technical classification of
malnutrition. Response, policy and programs, systems in India and world have been also captured in this introduction chapter.

In Chapter-2, different literature were reviewed with respect to this work towards building a scientific body of knowledge on the theme and also to conclude pertaining gaps in the existing knowledge. This chapter traces the evolution of the subject, technical understanding and intervention experiences from India and other developing countries. In this chapter, researcher has borrowed knowledge from renowned nutrition practitioner from East and West. Linkages with different issues of malnutrition, multi-sectoral approaches, nutrition specific program intervention in India, Bihar and world have been established in this chapter. Different pioneering works have been consulted in this regard to build perspectives.

Research methodology while conducting this research work has been described step by step in Chapter 3. This chapter has content of research approach, sampling process, process of data analysis and most importantly justify the locale of the study. Limitations of the study have been also captured in this chapter.

Chapter 4 entails the quantitative and qualitative data analysis. This chapter reveals the interpreted data obtained from the field during field work since last four years in the community. This chapter narrates the case study for in-depth observation and focus group discussions conducted in the communities.

Major findings, conclusions and recommendations are placed in chapter 5. This part is actually a discussion point while corroborating the findings with other similar studies with this theme. Recommendations were made based on the inferences drawn and learning from the field work. In the last chapter i.e Chapter 6 deals with the implications of social work practice while addressing the malnutrition issues comprehensively. In this chapter focus was given to explore the opportunity of social work practice in different setting and practical applications of different social work methods.

There are three appendices. Appendix A presents the list of the village and ICDS centers from where the data was obtained. Appendix B represent the data collection tool and Appendix C presents the participant profile of the focused group discussions conducted as tool for qualitative observations for this work.

This work has been prepared for the fulfilment of requirement of doctor of philosophy in social work discipline. Health and malnutrition is a vast and multi-dimensional agenda and cannot be dealt in detail in one single work. Therefore, this study doesn’t delve into technical nuances of malnutrition measurement, dietary recommendation and nutritional values. This study is also not a comparative narrative with the normal children in the study locale rather dipped into establishing the narratives of different determinants resulting underweight status of the children. Purposively underweight children attending ICDS centers were taken up as sample and therefore technical and statistical tools were not applied. Instead of that, in-depth case study method, FGD was taken up for qualitative observations and inferences to corroborate the quantitative findings of the study.