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India might pretty well be shining to the world at large, but when the picture is zoomed into the dimension of child health, things are much more than 'slightly' alarming. But when one asks which is a greater dilemma, malnutrition or obesity, a very simple answer emerges. Just as the question  $2+2=?$  commands an obvious answer, 4, my mind immediately shouts out-MALNUTRITION.

According to the National Family Health Survey-3(NFSH), a whopping 45.9 per cent of India's kids are underweight, 39 per cent are stunted, 20 per cent severely malnourished, 80 per cent anaemic while infant mortality hovers at 67 per 1,000. More than 6,000 Indian children below five years die everyday due to malnourishment or lack of basic micronutrients like Vitamin A, iron, iodine or zinc. Overall, India hosts 57 million - or more than a third - of the world's 146 million undernourished children. An average Indian consumes only about 1800 kilocalories a day, not even close to the necessary 2400.

Shockingly, even sub-Saharan Africa has a better record of child malnourishment at 30 %. A massive 440 million people languish at the bottom of the economic pyramid in India and about 500,000 children are born deformed each year due to vitamin/mineral deficiencies.

Experts say that malnutrition is not only responsible for 22% of India's disease burden, and for 50% of the 2.3 million child deaths in India, but is also a serious economic hazard. More than 600 million people suffer from vitamin/mineral deficiencies in India, 30 percent of the total world numbers. According to economists, these deficiencies will cost the Indian economy an alarming \$2.5 billion per year in loss of productivity, with urban areas clocking in 38% and rural 46%.

Compare this with obesity. According to NFSH, about 12.1% males and 16% females are obese. Although alarming, these figures do not even come close to those of malnutrition. Most of the population is simply too poor to eat one square meal a day, and therefore, obesity mostly does not count when compared to malnutrition.

The present status of malnutrition amongst children in India is that a devastating half of all newborns are born malnourished and 30% are born underweight making them more vulnerable to further malnutrition and disease. The infant mortality rate is 90 per 1000 and malnourishment is a factor that attributes to almost half of all childhood deaths. Underweight children is the greatest problem found with 54% of the population under four years old followed by stunted growth in 52% of the population and 17% who

are wasted. Anemia affects 74% of children under the age of three and more than 90 % of adolescent girls and 50% of women.

Health problems due to malnutrition are many and obvious. Weakness, anaemia, deficiency diseases like night blindness, scurvy etc., senility, stunted growth, retardation, increased susceptibility to infectious diseases, the list goes on and on. Malnutrition is shown to reduce the IQ points by upto 11 points.

When I look at India I see a collection of impoverished, thin malnourished people, not a collection of obese, swelling Homo sapiens clogging their arteries. As long as our population does not eat, we cannot think, work, be healthy or even live. That is why malnutrition is the bigger healthcare dilemma for our nation.