

Obesity on the March in America

Fried Dough on which the sugar jar has burst open; french fries overflowing across large cups; ice cream with mountains of whipped cream and sprinkles; large cookies held together with chocolate chips; sandwiches which could feed two; potato salads dripping in mayonnaise; brownies; hot dogs, pounds of steak, periodic feedings of already overweight children at McDonalds and Burger kings- To me it has become one of the staple pictures of America. Yes, there are many other pictures- more beautiful than this - But this one intrudes everywhere, sliding into frame after frame as obesity marches through school classrooms, coffee shops, sea dog games, malls and the poorest of the poor houses. Yes, this is probably one of the only countries where poverty can be obese.

We bill ourselves as a superpower, as the economic and military leader of the world. Whether that is true or not, I leave for you to figure out, but in another twenty plus years, if we're not all annihilated due to the challenged diplomacy of our world leaders, we shall definitely achieve one projected leadership position. Hundred percent obesity, if we stay on track.

My daughter loves the book *Matilda* by *Roald Dahl*, in which Matilda's entire family is caricatured eating TV dinners by the *telly* and the parents do not even want to talk to her teacher Miss Honey, because it interrupts one of their many favorite shows. Now, this last may be a funny exaggeration but I wonder how much of it is actually true today?

How many of today's generation stay glued to the *telly* or play computer games or are on play stations for hours? How many of us are completely passive for most part of their day? How many stations do we need to flip through? How many cable and satellite

channels? And then apparently that's not enough, now we need multiple hard disks to store all the programs we have missed so we can go through those later? How much time does it all take, I wonder? And how many accrued calories as we do all that munching cookies and potato chips on the side.

Don't get me wrong, because I don't have anything against the food per se, (I very much enjoy it on occasions,) even though I prefer my pancakes with onions and chilies for breakfast, as opposed to the rest of my family and indeed most of the rest of America who prefer theirs with maple syrup and I'm sure can't imagine it any other way. But maybe it's time we established an explicit understanding between the calories of the syrup and the chocolate cream and the person ingesting it. I think it's high time we counter-balanced the *law of conservation of calories and mass* against the *law of conservation of mass and energy*.

Some people are disabled or sick and unfortunately turn obese, but for the rest of us it is a disease of inaction; it is a disease of gluttony; of poverty; of a breakup of society; of loneliness. And it's spreading like the plague, a tree rooting itself in the dysfunctional soil of our country and throwing out rotten branches; heart attacks, diabetes, kidney failures and many other ailments I have no clue about. We keep attacking the branches without turning over the soil underneath.

The time I grew up in India, very few people *were* obese. Sugar and milk were rationed. Chocolate and soda were pricey. Sweets though delicious and in many varieties were highly expensive and bought on special occasions. And most of us had a spicy tooth. To top it all, very few cars. Only the few rich had them. As a consequence, we took buses or mostly walked, almost everywhere. Now, India has a burgeoning upper middle

class with disposable money and cars and many leisure related ailments. Even though it's a small dot amidst the millions of emaciated poor, obesity has begun to happen.

An expanding worldwide phenomenon, with the French eating huge American portions of food, there needs to be a worldwide conference of world leaders on obesity. But then, looking at the caliber and diplomatic suave of some of our leaders, I wonder how many of them had an education from the *Telly* themselves and would even register that there is a plague around them.