

Mama, my head is aching

Don't dismiss it as an excuse to skip homework. It might be migraine

By DEBAPRIYA GHOSH

At 9, Sagnik Dutta may seem too young to get a headache. Since kids his age often feign illness to bunk school, his parents did not take his complaints seriously until the attacks became frequent and upset the boy's routine. They took him to an ophthalmologist, who okayed his eyes and referred him to a neurologist.

"Sagnik has been complaining of headaches since kindergarten days," says his mother, Keya Dutta of Kolkata. "It occurs when he exerts himself—a long ride to the school, loads of homework and exams, and too much of play. I have acute migraine but never thought that my son might develop it. When he has headache, he tends to vomit, refuses to eat and prefers to sleep."

The neurologist told his parents to shift him to a school with a lighter syllabus. Sagnik was told not to play in the sun, cycle or study for long. He is his bubbly self except that he pops painkillers when he has a headache.

"Migraine is apparent in children who have a family history," says Dr Ninan T. Mathew, director of Houston Headache Clinic and clinical professor of neurology at University of Texas Medical School. "Women are more prone to migraine than men, but it is the reverse in children in the pre-puberty age group. However, today, even children with no family history of migraine are complaining of throbbing headaches."

Migraine is a peculiar response of the central nervous system to various stimuli such as estrogen, stress, environmental factors, food and sleep. "Children have to cope with the pressures of education and are compelled to live in highly polluted cities," says Mathew. "Lifestyle changes add to it; children eat fast food and Chinese food containing mono sodium glutamate [ajinomoto]."

Though three-year-old Ritwika



RITWIK BASAK, 3

Watches TV late into the night, but complains of headache after playschool. Yet to see a neurologist.

Basak watches television late into the night, she complains of headache when she gets back home from playschool. Unlike Sagnik, Ritwika is yet to see a neurologist. "At least once a week she complains of pain in the head, but cannot really explain where it pains," says her mother, Suhrita. "She has been wearing glasses from age 2 and so I have not thought it necessary to take her to a specialist."

That parents are ignorant and unconcerned about their children's complaints bothers Dr K. Ravi-

SAGNIK DUTTA, 9

Homework, exam and play give him a headache. Neurologist advised change of school to lessen load. Takes painkillers.



Lucky either way

AUSTRIA

A student gambling at Austria's leading casino chain Casinos Austria was down on his luck, but pocketed £33,000 (Rs 24,75,000) anyway. Thanks to the fact that he was a compulsive gambler. According to a Supreme Court ruling, Austrian gamblers who lose large amounts of money in casinos may be able to claim back some of their losses if they prove they are addicted to gambling.

The court in Vienna ordered Casinos Austria to refund the money to the student who was a compulsive gambler as the casino had not investigated his financial situation and therefore neglected its "obligation to protect" its clients.

The student, who has not been named for legal reasons, visited the gambling dens over 700 times in two years, and lost almost £70,000. The court says Casinos Austria should have noticed the man was in jeopardy because he visited so often and should have taken steps to protect him from his own compulsion. Either they pay up to protect their business or reword their policy.

Orchids on pills

THE PHILIPPINES

It may be odd to think of the US donating orchid fertiliser and balloons to third world countries. But in Roman Catholic Philippines, where there is low acceptance rate for contraceptives, that is what birth control pills and condoms, which the US gives as aid, are used as.

"Our supply is so high that people running health centres use the pills to grow orchids and the condoms for balloons," said Health Secretary Manuel Dayrit. The US has provided contraceptives to the Philippines since the early 1990s to control population growth, improve maternal and child health, and control a rapid increase in sexual infections.

Click for family

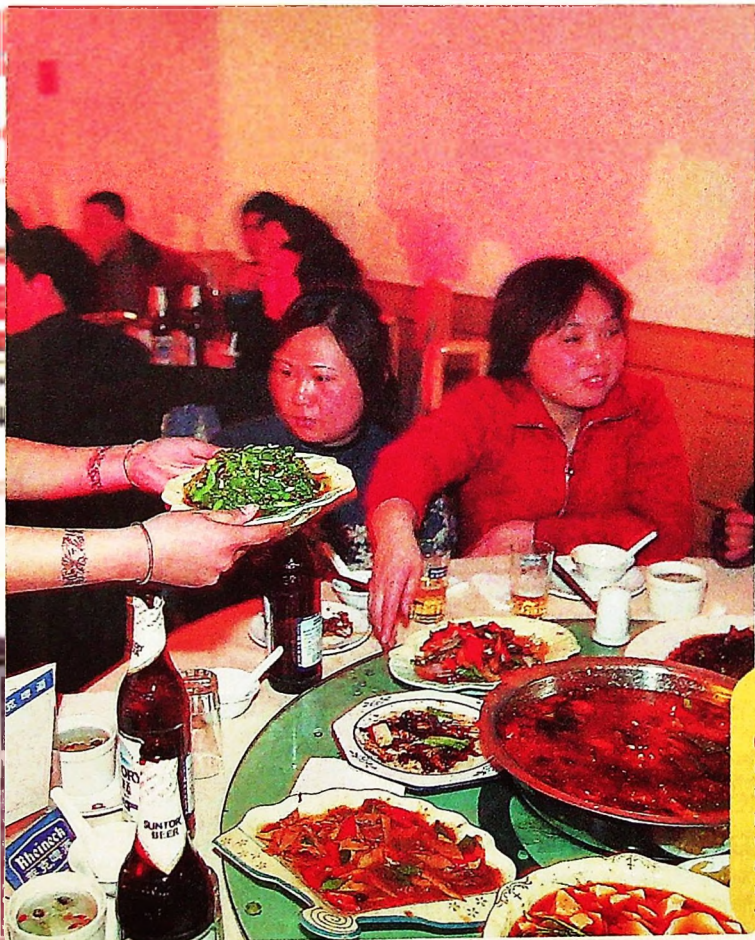
UNITED STATES

There's no saying what one can trade over the Internet. A month ago it was the cash-strapped North California town of Bridgeville, following which American writer Steve Young tired to sell off his family for \$5 million. The winner was promised a lifetime of platonic companionship, as well as tips on writing, gardening and cooking.

"If a town can be sold online, how much could you get for a family?" Steve said. After consulting wife Diana, and children, Kelly, 9, and Casey, 8, Steve posted his offer on eBay and received more than 10,000 hits within minutes. But eBay yanked off the advertisement saying it is against company policy to sell human beings.

Feast your eyes

CHINA: The restaurant in the eastern city of Nanjing believes in teasing more than just the taste buds. A waitress provides eye candy as, dressed in her underwear, she takes orders and serves at the newest family restaurant. The restaurant uses its body-painted waitresses to attract customers.



shankar, neurologist and specialist in headache management at Jaslok and Lilavati hospitals in Mumbai. "Migraine has different symptoms in children and adults," he says. "The

triggers are also different and hence detecting them becomes a problem in children, for no blood tests or scanning can diagnose migraine. Paediatric migraine manifests even as abdominal pains. Children cannot express their problem and most of the times parents ignore it."

Though 8-year-old Ishan Shome gets headaches when exams are round the corner, his parents have not taken him to a neurologist. "Ishan becomes tense every now and then," says Ranu Shome, his mother, who, too, suffers from acute migraine. "He can do nothing but sleep when he has these terrible headaches accompanied by vomiting." For relief, she lets him use a pain balm.

Many parents who do seek medical help give up after a visit to the ophthalmologist. But "only in very rare cases do children get headaches because of ocular problems," says Dr Ambar Chakravarty, professor and head of neurology at Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan in Kolkata. "I don't say that all headaches need the help of a neurologist. Go to a neurologist only when headaches come in the way of studies or play. I do not prefer putting children on painkillers. I would advise pain balms."

However, parental reassurance is the first and most important step in treating headache in children. "Headaches are common neurological problems in childhood and adolescence and need the attention of parents," says Trishit Roy, professor



Lifestyle changes add to the problem of migraine in children, says Dr Ninan T. Mathew of Houston Headache Clinic, USA



Migraine has different symptoms in adults and children. Hence, detection in kids is a problem, says Dr Ravishankar of Mumbai



Headache is a neurological problem. Parents should not ignore it, says Prof. Trishit Roy of Bangur Institute of Neurology

and head of neuromedicine at Bangur Institute of Neurology, West Bengal. "They should not ignore it." So the next time your child complains of headache, pay attention. The child needs your help.

Kids get headache too

Triggers

Chocolate, cheese, caffeine, nuts, hotdog, pizza, food dyes, vinegar, bananas, odours, sleep deprivation, stress, excess school work or extra-curricular activities, change in lifestyle

Treatment

Avoid known triggers. Teach kids how to relax. Make sure the child sleeps well and eats three meals a day. Consult the doctor before you give medicines.

In most children the headache is primary; it is not the symptom of any serious disease. While both girls and boys suffer equally before puberty, after puberty, migraine is more common among girls.



Graphics/N.V. JOSE

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ISHAN SHOME, 8

Becomes tense and gets headaches when exams are near. Vomits and prefers to sleep. Uses pain balm.



Photo/SUBRATA KIRTI

Modi-Hitler comparison

Both cashed in on the frustrations of the educated middle class



By P.V. INDIRESAN

NOW that the dust has started settling down, we can look at the Gujarat phenomenon with less passion. According to the philosopher

W. R. Inge, "a nation is a society united by a delusion about its ancestry and by a common hatred of its neighbours". If that is so, the Hindus of Gujarat have become a nation.

There is now a big divide among our opinion makers who seem more keen to inflame passions further than to douse them. Both sides are on the warpath whereas what the country needs most is peace. Modi has been compared with Hitler and rightly so. Both cashed in on the frustrations of the educated middle class. Both targeted a minority community, and made it a scapegoat for all ills of the nation to the exclusion of all other issues.

In drawing this analogy, we should not forget that Hitler was remarkably successful in accelerating economic development. In a short span of five years, between 1933 and 1938, he raised Germany from the depths of depression to a most formidable economic and military power even more powerful than imperial Britain. He was able to do so because he had the unqualified intellectual support of the middle class and the financial support of big business.

There is a real possibility that Modi too may succeed in the same manner. For 50 years, goaded by "secular" intellectuals, successive governments in India have systematically denigrated and alienated the upper castes who form the backbone of both entrepreneurship and the middle class. By discarding their talents, and deliberately placing the less competent over their heads, governments have retarded the nation's progress,

and frustrated many capable people. Quite a few of them have fled the country in disgust. Many of these talented people have been backing Modi. If he manages to provide them the opportunities they have been denied so far, they may ensure rapid economic progress. In that case, like Hitler, Modi will become irresistible.

It is now widely conceded that the Hitler-phenomenon was the reaction to grossly unfair and inequitable terms of armistice imposed on the Germans after World War I by the victorious British and the French. They extracted from the vanquished Germans unprecedented reparations, and imposed impossible conditions calculated to mutilate the German economy beyond repair. They humiliated the Germans

The Modi phenomenon is the culmination of a biased, inconsistent logic propagated by the so-called secularists who had one yardstick for upper caste Hindus and yet another for the others.

beyond endurance. The Nazi upsurge was the reaction. Likewise, successive governments in India have extracted extortionate reparations from upper caste Hindus, for which there is no end in sight. The success of Modi is a consequence of this harsh and persisting political bias.

Those who are waging a war against upper caste Hindus would not have been faulted if, like Periyar, they had been honest about it. Like Periyar, they too could have organised a formal anti-Brahmin, and anti-upper caste movement as a pure and simple inter-caste warfare. Instead, they have obfuscated the conflict with doublespeak. When, under Periyar's instigation, the Madras government introduced caste-based reservation, they called it the Communal GO, not the Secular GO. The government was

honest; it caused pain, but not disgust. Without such honesty, by calling their own communalism, "progressive secularism", the "secularists" have forfeited moral authority.

The term secular has acquired in India a peculiar meaning not to be found elsewhere. Secular means anything that is not related to religion. It does not denote opposition to religion the way it is understood in our country. Admittedly, enlarging the meaning of words does not cause much harm, but selective use of that meaning does. Thus, upper castes are condemned day in and day out as communal. On the other hand, even the Muslim League and the Akali Dal escape with no more than mild abjuration. The same yardstick should apply to everybody. We are entitled to have our own bias. We may even assert that our bias is superior to another's. However, we cannot assert that we alone are without bias.

To make matters worse, the self-appointed conscience-keepers of the nation have exhibited little talent for economic development. If that sounds harsh, look at the way our country has stagnated even as many countries in our neighbourhood grew rapidly. West Bengal is an extreme case—it started as the most advanced state in the country but today it is so backward that it is next only to Bihar in the number of school dropouts. Such incompetence of "secularists" makes the likes of Modi greater than they are.

I suggest that the Modi phenomenon is the culmination of a biased, inconsistent logic propagated by the so-called secularists who had one yardstick for upper caste Hindus and yet another for the others. If they had honestly conceded that they were communal, neither the BJP nor Modi would have become the powers they are today.

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