



Anaemia-A Rusty Knife

*He was not taken well; he had not dined
The veins unfill'd, our blood is cold, and then
We pout upon the morning, are unapt
To give or to forgive; but when we have stuffed
These pipes and these conveyances of our blood
With wine and feeding, we have suppler souls
Than in our priest like fasts.*

William Shakespeare, Coriolanus, I 51
Act 5, Scene 1, Line 51.

The early 1960's saw one full issue of JAMA devoted to the wisdom, depth, sagacity and the medical genius of the Bard of Stratford-on-Avon, titled SHAKESPEARE IN MEDICINE. Nearly 4 centuries after his demise, his observations combine the best of science, psychology, philosophy and medicine and his utterances outclass all the specialists of the world clubbed together in this ultra sophisticated third millennium.

Shakespeare's message is loud and clear: A filled belly that make our vessels turgid with blood is the only religion. You deny that and you have deprived a human being of the zeal to live, the urge to give, the generosity to forgive. All our temples with their overpowering piety, and all our dharmagurus are a tragic testimony to the fact that most Indians are bloodless, anaemic, more so the Indian women and Indian girls. India's anaemia is India's shame.

Yet there is something strangely fascinating about Indian anaemia. It proves that we as humans can plod on through a relatively long life on half the quota of haemoglobin, yet begat babies with the full haemoglobin load! How the Homoeopathic levels of maternal

haemoglobin manages to deliver babies with almost a veterinary dose of Hb is an abiding mystery. It's a bloody compliment to the silent sacrifice of an average Mother India.

This piece in no way pretends to educate anyone on the nitty-gritty of the learned aetiologies and the classification of India's commonest problem. Suffice to say that anaemia is almost innate to the Indian constitution, explaining right away our consistently poor performances at most sports and athletics. Our listlessness spawns non-creativity in science, poetry, prose and most of all, abrogating evil traditions and practices. No wonder, we are the only nation burning woman on the dowry pyre, at the rate of one woman every hour of the year. Indian anaemia is not a medical problem. It's a social tragedy, written in pale blood.

The Britishers introduced railways to India and that was the time tree-felling started on a grand-scale to make fish plates for the railway giant. By 1947 our forest-cover was just 33%. Now it is less than 9%. No forest cover, no chlorophyll; no chlorophyll, no haemoglobin. How many of us are aware of the simple fact that chlorophyll and haemoglobin differ only at one joint – the former has magnesium, the latter has ferrum. An agrarian economy like ours is automatically anaemic when it is no longer green. India must restore its forest cover. Or India will grow more anaemic.

Anaemia of the common hypochromic variety cannot be and should not be treated by iron pills, potions or injections. All of them severely irritate the gut, muscles and veins. It's strange but it is true. A simple solution to Indian anaemia lies in having kitchen-knives that rust. Such a knife is good enough to load an onion or a potato with enough elemental iron to every member of a

Contd on page 250



Dr MANU KOTHARI
Dr LOPA MEHTA
Dept of Anatomy, KEM Hospital,
Parel, Mumbai-400012
Tel: 4131763 Ext 2025