

Letter from London

A man and his pregnant wife arrived in Manchester from their 'remote community' in Southern Europe in order to have a safe delivery of conjoined twins. The delivery was apparently uneventful, though presumably by caesarean section, but the future of the twins has presented their surgical consultants and the legal profession with some difficult problems, of which the legal ones are the most troubling.

The twins are joined at the abdomen. One twin, whose pseudonym is 'Mary' has no heart or lungs and is therefore parasitic on the other twin 'Jodie'. Mary has a deformed face and probably an abnormal brain and is incapable of independent existence. The paediatric surgeons are clear in their opinion that if no separation is performed within the next 3–6 months, both twins will die, presumably from failure of Jodie's heart. Thus far, the situation appears clear cut; the operation should sacrifice Mary for the sake of Jodie.

The parents have a different opinion. As devout Catholics, they cannot condone the deliberate taking of one life to save another. The case was put to a judge who ruled that the operation should go ahead and that Jodie was a completely normal baby. The parents applied to the Appeal Court of three judges to overturn the original ruling, and the judges, in their turn, have asked for a second opinion from a paediatric surgeon and paediatric cardiologist from the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children in London, whose experience of separation of twins is greater than that of Manchester. Though their report has not yet been made public, it is rumoured that the London team will confirm the Manchester opinion.

The press coverage has not been helpful. There are different versions of Jodie's condition, some reports describe her as entirely normal, others that she may be mentally handicapped or doubly incontinent. Naturally, the parents, and most particularly the mother who always speaks for both parents, have an opinion on what they would do if the operation goes ahead.

The mother apparently regards the birth of the conjoined twins as a judgement on her for previous sins and would let 'God's will' take its course with the death of both children. Further, the mother's view is that their community could not offer facilities to support a handicapped Jodie and she would rather that Jodie be fostered or even adopted. This sounds suspiciously like thinly disguised rejection, possibly because a surviving Jodie would be tainted by the transgression of God's purpose.

The verdict of the Appeal Court is to be delivered soon (it may be possible to append their verdict later). Meanwhile, various interested parties have publicized their views. A cleric in Italy has offered refuge in a Catholic hospital in Italy, and others regard the possibility of Mary's death to save Jodie as a form of social Darwinism in which the weak are sacrificed to the strong, and draw the analogy of the killing of the mentally ill and handicapped in Hitler's Nazi Germany.

Another controversial issue has come to light, with unsavoury consequences. After the murder of an 8-year-old girl (apparently not molested sexually) there has been populist movement, aided and abetted by the tabloid press and the *News of the World*, for the 'naming and shaming' of paedophiles. As a result of this campaign and fuelled by remarks by the dead girl's mother (again, the father has said nothing), gangs have attacked the houses of known paedophiles, marching with small children bearing inflammatory posters. A measure of the unsophisticated nature of these demonstrations is that a house previously occupied some years ago by a paedophile was attacked, and a paediatrician was forced to flee from her house.

These episodes throw an unpleasant light on English society. A rational solution would be to set up a network of centres where paedophiles could be treated in safety.

JOHN BLACK

Letter from Chennai

Unusual no longer

In 1990, Dr Sunil Pandya wrote a book review entitled¹ 'The autobiography of an unusual Indian', and started with the words: 'Indian medical doctors seem reluctant to record their lives and times. Diligent search yields but a handful of autobiographies.' The search is easier now. In the last few months, two medical giants of Chennai have released their autobiographies.^{2,3} Both the books are fascinating and should be prescribed reading for every aspiring doctor. Applicants for medical college seats are likely to be drawn by what they perceive as the glamour that surrounds the leaders of the profession, their affluence and the influence they wield. These books will show them that success comes at a price:

hard work and dedication, and the sacrifice of much leisure that the average man takes for granted. Dr T. K. Shanmugasundaram says: 'I have squandered many hours and opportunities from the family from undue infatuation with my professional work. ...[T]he time squandered from the family can never be regained. I crave their indulgence for my dereliction.' (p. 97)

Both the authors saw eventful times, perhaps Dr B. Ramamurthi's the more so, as he was a medical student during the Quit India movement. Both of them have been builders, and did much to develop their specialties in government hospitals. One would expect that an employer who had the services of internationally recognized titans would go out of the way to provide