Focus

The Daily Star

National image and women



DILARA CHOUDHURY

ITHIN a span of three months, another young woman, Rumi, took her own life in order to escape from the relentless sexual harassment inflicted on her by two perpetrators who happen to be her neighbour's sons. The pertinent question here is: do these types of incident glorify Bangladesh's image or do they tarnish it?

The question is raised in the context of Bangladesh's professed economic diplomacy, which is, at present, the focal point of country's foreign policy. In this regard, one of the eminent personalities of Bangladesh recently advocated the dire need of making economic diplomacy, as country's most important foreign policy agenda. It is noted that through this diplomatic instrument Bangladesh's present ailing economy can be salvaged and, as such, its success is vital for the country. For without providing the basic necessities of life like food. shelter, education, healthcare, and like, in another word, a decent life the raison d'etre of Bangladesh state would be at stake. The main focus of this diplomacy is to find ways and means so that we can attract Foreign Direct Investment, expand exports and find jobs for our youths. The task of attracting FDI, presently, is a formidable challenge, particularly in the context of shrinking world economy. This writer, thus, persuasively highlights various strategies needed to be adopted in order to pursue a successful eco-

nomic diplomacy. One of the strategies, he suggested, is to enhance Bangladesh's image. I agree, with him. Image is indeed very important. Because everything, after all, begins in the mind. Even the beginnings of wars are the creation of minds. So if the

prospective investors have a negative image of Bangladesh why would they invest their capital where, they think, things have gone haywire? Thus, we must work hard to improve the image of the country beginning from improving the prevailing appalling conditions of Chittagong port and the ways things are handled at the airports, traffic iams, power cuts, pollution, law and order to toll extortion. But nowhere it is mentioned that increasingly violence against women also con-

tributes towards creating a negative

image of the country. And some-

thing, in this regard, needs to be

done on urgent basis. This is not to

say that the factors mentioned in the

write-up do not pose impediments in

the operation of economic diplo-

macy. They do and they do need to

be taken care of. But one wonders,

when everything under the sky is

being mentioned for improving

country's image why not a single

word about its image being affected

by the way women are treated in the

lar mindsets from our major political

parties. They accuse each other for

tarnishing the image of the country

on a variety of issues but never even

mention that what is happening to

women's security in Bangladesh

emerges to outsiders when they

read about incidents like Rumi's

suicide? What is the scenario like in

a country where its women folk

confront rampant violence like

murder (stabbing, burning, poison-

ing, strangulation, beating, hang-

ing), rape/gang rape, battering and

death (if dowry demands are not

met), acid throwing, kidnapping,

trafficking and gauging eyes almost

on daily basis (Azim: 1999)? Not a

The question is what picture

also goes against its good name.

ountry? We also witness the simi-

pretty scenario. But wait, there is more. If one thinks that women are tortured and killed only at home one would be grossly mistaken. Because when they come out of home whether to provide cheap labour for the multinational companies, or to get an education or to pursue a career they become victims of a whole new set of violence. They become easy victims of sexual harassment ranging from leering, comments, postures, touching, and at times, grabbing. They confront

PANORAMA

We must project Bangladesh as a peace loving country with a stable and safe

society. Since women's conditions and their security are the benchmarks of

such a country Bangladesh must do everything possible to achieve that goal.

As such, any policy approach, whether it is development, environment,

education or whatever including improving country's image, must be holistic.

such male behaviour both in the

The most familiar type of harass-

ment is commonly known as eve

teasing. And it happens in public. As

eve teasing does not involve any

physical harassment the law

refuses to recognise it as a violent

act. Most of the time the term itself is

a source of amusement as the name

Eve conjures up images of a tempt-

ress or seductress. What is dis-

cerned here is that women becom-

ing victims of eve teasing is not seen

seriously even by the police. Yet eve

teasing can be as cruel and as

violent as physical assaults. It is

evidenced from the fact that about

half a dozen young women, so far,

have committed suicide due to eve

teasing (Rumi of Khulna and Rumi

of Fatikchhari were also physically

manhandled in the name of eve

teasing). And the fact that it is not

treated as violence against women

loitering young hoodlums regularly

subject hundreds of young women

like garment workers, school and

college students and budding

careerists to this cruel treatment. To

date, there are no official statistics of

such victims, as young women bear

this type of inhumane treatment in

silence and perhaps only scribble

their humiliating experience in their

Women's issues must be mainstreamed in every sphere of our national life.

streets and at work.

journals, which only collect dust and nobody ever knows their inspeakable sorrows and tears. It is only when persons like Simi Banu of Narayanganj, college student Farhana Afrin Rumi of Khulna, Trisha of Gaibanda and very recently Rumi of Fatikchhari are driven to a point that they prefer death than going through the persistent miseries afflicted on them that certain evebrows are raised. However, the sense of sympathy

never really let it sink in their psyche

to analyze the situation that how

desperate one had to be to take

one's own life. And most have never

tried to feel the pain, the sorrows

and the frustration of victim's par-

ents for not being able to protect

their own daughters. Why such

apathy? The reason being that the

political class of Bangladesh is

oblivious of the predicaments of the

daughters of these 'under class' as

their own daughters are 'safe' either

in the States or somewhere in the

western world. That is why in Ban-

gladesh no law exists that recog-

nises eve teasing as an act of vio-

lence against women. There are no

official definitions or punishment for

eve-teasing excepting when a

woman is pushed to commit suicide

because she is unable to endure

such treatments any longer. How

ironic it is that one needs to take

This is in short the scenario of

women's security in Bangladesh

and undoubtedly this kind of situa-

tion does not enhance country's

image. Actually, violence against

women takes place so openly that

anyone with an open mind can

gauge about the inhuman treatment

women are subjected to in this

country. Would it be then a misno-

one's own life to make the point.

is only temporary, as most have

mer to say that only an inhumane person is capable of inflicting inhumane torture on another person? What kind of picture do we then have about the society and ourselves at large? One may argue that these are law and order problems. But not so. It would be a great mistake if one thinks that it is only a law and order problem. This is not to say that improved law and order situation would not minimise the problems to an extent. Proper laws must be formulated and strictly implemented. But in the same token. roots of the problem that lie in the psyche of our men and their "moralintellectual outlook and psychicsocial behaviour." which is reflected n their treatment towards women, should be addressed. That way the very character of the state may be changed. As long that does not happen such attitude of men would continue to demonstrate the lack of civility and respect for another fellow human being. Why then the potential investors come to a country where their families may not feel

secure? In conclusion, I would like to add that there is no two opinions about the need to enhance country's image if we want to have a successful economic diplomacy. And we must pursue it. Because gone are the days when avoiding armed conflicts was considered to be the criterion of a successful foreign policy. Today, the criteria are different. In the age of market economy, endeavours to attract investment and expand trade are crucial factors for success and we must project Bangladesh as a peace loving country with a stable and safe society. Since women's conditions and their security are the benchmarks of such a country Bangladesh must do everything possible to achieve that goal. As such, any policy approach, whether it is development, environment, education or whatever including improving country's image, must be holistic. Women's issues must be mainstreamed in every sphere of our national life including foreign policy and defence. The sooner we realise this basic fact the better off we would be as a nation and as a people.

Dilara Choudhury is Professor, Department of Government and Politics Jahangirnagan University.

Turkish troops in Iraq?



ARSHAD-UZ ZAMAN

N 1 March last US-Turkish relations received a severe iolt because the Grand National Assembly rejected the government proposal to send troops to Iraq. It was like a bolt from the blue because the proposal had been placed before the Assembly by the Government of Recep Tavija Erdogan, whose party the AKP (Justice and Development Party) has a large majority within the Parliament. Evidently a large number of AKP MPs refused to go along with the aovernment.

This attitude of a large section of the AKP members, totally upset the Anglo-US plans of invasion of Iraq. Rather than attacking Iraq from the north they had to enter Iraq from the south through Basra. In anticipation of the attack through Turkey, the US had assembled a formidable military machine including war ships, fighter aircraft and ground troops. The outcome of the war is well known -- Iraq simply gave up the fight and for last five months has been waging guerilla warfare with increasing loss of life of US soldiers.

All these months US has continued to mount pressure on Turkey so that she participates in her war effort. Turkey is a valued ally of the US within NATO and has a close relationship going back to half a century.

There is a clear division discernible between the government on the one hand and the people on the other. This became evident on 1 March last when the Grand National Assembly voted no.. Step by step the government has mobilised its forces to come to a decision on the matter

A few days ago a Summit took place in Cankaya Presidential palace with Ahmet Necdet Sezer presiding. The Summit was attended by Prime Minister Erdogan, Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul and the Chief of the Armed

THE HORIZON THIS WEEK

The US has spectacularly failed to line up any important country in her effort to pacify the situation in Iraq. She has virtually given up hope of any favourable decision from the Security Council of the UN. Although the US continues to behave like the lone superpower, the truth is that she has lost and continues to lose ground in international relations.

Forces Gen. Hilmi Ozkok. Since speculation was rife that President Sezer had agreed to the proposal of sending troops Cankaya palace took the unusual step of issuing a communiaué which simply stated that the position of the President remained unchanged. That position is that the President remains unwaveringly tied to 'international legality'. From the Cankaya Summit it has become clear the President is determined that the government must obtain a yes vote from the Assembly. That would be considered adequate for any decision that the government may desire.

The Grand National Assembly is currently on summer holidays. It is expected that the Assembly will be summoned in extraordinary session possibly in September. Meanwhile the government has a tough task in persuading its own members about the necessity to send troops to Iraq. Arithmetic of the Assembly is in favour of the government since it has on paper a large majority. The main opposition party the People's Republican Party (CHP) has clearly stated that it is opposed to sending troops to Iraq. The Chief of the First Army Gen. Buyukkanit has stated we cannot remain indifferent when the house of our neighbour is burning'. A diametrically opposite view was expressed by Gen. Dogan who stated 'we have shed soldiers' blood in Gallipoli and in Yemen. We are still asking why?'. A Deputy Leader of the

ruling AKP Fatsa stated 'the proposal to send us there (Iraq) to fight for the US, will not pass in the Assembly Turkish media is full of this

subject. By and large the large media, with strong financial backing are supporting the government move to send troops to Iraq. Their argument boils down to the fact that events in Iraq are far too important tator. The opposite view strongly advocated is that the US is stuck in Iraq and Turkey should avoid getting embroiled in this losing battle. At the back of their minds what looms is that the Arab world, with which Turkey has a long standing lovehate relationship, will rise up in arms should Turkey join the fight on the side of what turned out to be occu-

pation forces of the US and Britain. On the popular level there is near unanimity that Turkey should stay out of this war. By refusing to join the war on 1 March last the

Grand National Assembly correctly reflected the popular mood. In the meantime Turkish authorities are preparing the ground for eventually joining the war. She is planning to send shortly a delegation to Iraq comprising MPs, media representatives, members of the armed forces and members of the civil society. The idea

is to test the ground before taking y decision.

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tional relations. Meanwhile the great debate continues to rage throughout Turkey -- should they send

troops to Irag or not. Indeed the Turks are so absorbed by the daily developments that the normally phlegmatic Turk, continues to raise the issue with all and sundry. By September, the venerable members of the Grand National Assembly will pronounce their decision, to be o not to be.

Arshad-uz Zaman is a former Ambassador for Turkey for her to remain a spec-

Public examination result debacle Overhauling the system is the need of the hour

MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

HE government, it is learnt, would launch ambitious programmes for elimination of poverty, providing health care facilities, reforming banking sector,

schools. As newspaper report indicates this year Golam Mostafa

Hasan, son of a day labourer in Chuadanga earned the highest grade A+ in the Humanities group in the SSC examination under Jessore Board. Hasan, it is learnt, topped the list of the A+, achievers in all the

provoke laughter or come as a shock to us.

Students these days in our mainstream type of education do not have to read any prescribed grammar book, nor do they have to translate Bengali sentences or passages. They have no idea about

on English Composition and Translation should have known and used either "cats and dogs" or "in torrents" for "gyljav±i". Should we ignore the fault in the construction of this sentence when it has been prescribed for the students to learn? The book is replete with struc-

once fine schools and colleges are in a state of decay because nobody, especially the concerned ministry or the Directorate or the Education Board or the Curriculum Board in general and local political leaders and administration in particular care to look into the causes of their malfunctioning. We still remember that during our school days, even the S.D.O (sub divisional officer) visited the high school at the sub divisional headquarters at least once a year. He even went to some classes and posed one or two questions to students to create a sense of alertness and inspire both the teachers and students. Besides. Range Inspectors routinely visited high schools under their respective range. Of course, there were not too many High Schools in those days. All such visits would have tremendous impact both on the teachers and students. Promoting English in schools at

the educational administrators, teachers, guardians seem to have been short sighted about taking adequate measures to prevent such a disaster that has now come as a

landslide taking a heavy toll of students' academic life. Teachers of institutions caring less about the needs of their students and hardly taking any effort in improving the students' basics and often supplying them photocopies of the notes without making up the deficiencies in the classes contributed areatly to this festering malaise. Coaching centres often doled out modules of selected tions questions and their answers ultimately to the utter detriment of the students. In English language teaching, the debacle has been most debilitating and shocking compounded by the dearth of qualified and committed teachers. Teaching in the institutions has suffered badly. There is hardly any teaching in the schools and colleges nor there are class-tests to evaluate the performance of the students in a particular subject and to repair the handicaps of the deficient students. Most of the teachers either at the primary school, secondary school or college have started coaching often at the expense of teaching in class room. Lured by the fast money this coaching business these days fetch, hundreds of coaching centres with branches in different districts and even in rural areas have sprung up almost in a sort of commercial enterprise. Rather than giving the students the cherished objective the system has bred sort of corruption in the teaching profession almost beyond rectification. Since the ills have accumulated also at the primary level of teaching, people entrusted with the task of formulating educational policy and strategies have to work with a missionary zeal to repair the damage at the grassroots level. These commercialised coaching centres leave little scope for the deficient students to overcome their deficiencies. This is especially true in subjects of English and Mathematics. Students seem to be busy in cramming the notes without understanding the underlying thoughts and theme and have never had the capacity of writing an answer, even if it is a single sentence, by themselves Sort of ignorance and short sightedness about all these matters seem to have defeated the objective of education. Most of the guardians in the country are not supposed to know how and where the system is ailing and they are highly upset when their wards cut a sorry figure. The nation can illafford to ignore the present catastrophic situation that seems to be

our own making. Most shockingly The need for a major breaktrue, because of our failure to through or improvement of the country's schooling system is formulate an education policy obvious enough. Changes in the consistent with our national needs public examination system as and aspirations and evolving a planned through better teaching methodology of teaching and method, curricula development, equipping schools and colleges question patterns and teacher's performance monitoring envisage the most primary considerations No grandiose plan will work and the whole structure will crumble without these two factors being incorporated in the whole system.

imparting computer literacy and a host of other development works. Visionary moves, but ones that still fail to focus on the basic needs of the masses so long overlooked by successive governments. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the realm of education. A survey conducted by the Education Ministry in 2002 over 23,000 government and non-government schools and colleges out of total 30,000 institutions in the country gave a very depressing picture. The survey marked only 2.6 percent as high standard, 30.26 per cent as standard and 36 per cent below standard. The survey indicated that there were schools where none of the students came out successful in public examinations for years together. Shockingly, a gross disparity exists in government spending on each student studying in government and private institutions. A report appearing in the Daily Star on July 7 last indicated that in fiscal 1999-2000, government spending on a student of Cadet College was about 13 times that on each student of government college and 27 times that on non-government college.

Despite the fact that the constitution of Bangladesh guarantees equal rights to education for all citizens, the wrong and discriminatory policies pursued even during the post liberation days stalled the growth and development of the country. Steeped as they are in abject poverty, the children of the poor have been thrown out of the educational institutions and languishing as domestic helps, factory workers, day labourers, porters and even drug peddlers. It is often said that poor parents, perhaps illiterate themselves, are not interested in wards' education. Contrary to that claim, our enquiries revealed that parents were very keen to enable their children to acquire education. In one bold and investigative report, a reporter of a Bangla daily brought Sohaq (12), a poor meritorious boy, of Panchagarh in Dinajpur to public attention. Fortunately for Sohag who was an errand boy in a computer shop at Panchagarh and had to abandon his studies after class IV because of grinding poverty of the family. the P.M. took charge of his education.

Ironically true, there are hundreds and thousands of Sohads in the length and breadth of the country languishing in abysmal poverty and driven or dropped out from

boards in Humanities group. His father had to mortgage their tin shed residential house in Chuadanga for depositing his examination fees. Evidently chill penury repressed the noble rade of such aspiring students and froze the genial current of their soul. Other than the appalling poverty situation the physical infrastructure of the school and the schooling system in total disarray are largely to blame for such a collapsing situation.

The method of teaching English leaves much to be desired. Right from the primary stage students have not taken fancy for the language. This is partly due to the nature of textbooks and partly the result of the incompetence of the hour is to recast the syllabus of English right from the primary stage teachers. Experts remain silent

the conjugation of verbs and they tures that speak of the author's write unhesitatingly, "I have catched depraved taste and vulgar sense which can do immense harm to fish" or "I have hold this view." To expect a student to write idiomatic young learners. It seems there is a expressions with correct use of conscious effort to induce sensualprepositions is now an absurd ism in young learners. Let us have a proposition. This is hardly possible look at some sentences introduced in an effort to acquaint the students because at no stage of his schooling with phrases and idioms: (a) I lust either at the Secondary or Higher Secondary level he was taught after women. (Lye Kvgbv Abyfe Kiv) lessons in grammar or given scat-(b) I had her stark naked there (m¤ú~Y© bMœ). Examples of faulty tered sentences or passages for translation. The only English lesson structures, (a) Avwg Zv‡K K¬vm t_‡K †W‡K Avbjvg t I called her he had was from a textbook known as "Functional English" that confrom the college (b) Mi"wU +Q±o `vIt tains everything. Sadly true, this Let the dog loose (c) Avwg AiY"wU "Functional English" did not help KvuctZ t`Livat I saw the junale shaking. (d) Did Shoma love me? him function well at any stage of his Will he get marry you? life. So the foremost need of the

the expense of Bengali, sometimes Sentences given for translation confronts a host of cultural values. are: (a) gvayix †cvlvK Qvovi ci Side by side, exclusion of English

This disastrous performances in the public examinations, had been long overdue. Education boards, school and college authorities have failed miserably in their obligations to the nation. The question now arises whether we are conscious about this disgraceful collapse and indifference of the teachers as well as authorities of schools and colleges. Undeniably true, all sections of people in the country starting from the educational administrators, teachers, guardians seem to have been short sighted about taking adequate measures to prevent such a disaster...

even if they know that textbooks prescribed at different stages as well as the method of teaching have not created any interest for the learner from the early stages. It was necessary to introduce interesting textbooks, grammar and model translation books right from class VI most rigorously. If no attempt has been made at any stage upto HSC or at least upto SSC level to increase a student's vocabulary and skill to translate following the rules of grammar, then how can he be expected to deliver the goods when it is called for? At least we are not born and bred in English culture that we learn the language without any systematic effort. The result is disastrous. Students are failing and failing miserably. This was amply reflected by some experiences the writer had while reviewing the scripts in an officer level (Class I) recruitment test meant for the graduate degree holders. The scattered Bangla sentence given for translating into English was like this: "bxjKÚ KweivR wZb Kv‡ji BwZnvm Rvb‡Zb|" Some examinees transated as follows: "Blue Throat Poet King know history of three tenses." The adage goes, "As you sow, so you reap". As such there is no reason that such answer should either

upto degree level. Our experiment with "Functional English" for the last 15 years sans Grammar and Translation has totally failed.

The reality to-day in our country is that parents at least with some concern for future want their children to learn better and to be able to hold responsible jobs or attain professional skills. But how could this be possible in a situation when there has been such a decline in the standard of textbooks written and introduced in schools by so-called educationists as illustrated below: In the Communicative Functional English Grammar and Composition book written by Mr. A.K. Newaz for students of class VI to class VIII, there are vulgar sentences galore given as illustrative examples other than faulty sentences. Examples are: (a) b~ix Zv‡K cvMj evwb‡qwQj t Nuri made him mad, (b) †m Zv‡K Dò iv‡Lt She keeps him warm, (c) Zvi †evb wQbvjt His sister is a flirt. (d) GUv kix‡ii Pvwn`vt It is physical's (not physical) demand. A⁺_bK¶Y gykjav‡i (evbvb fyj) wK e"wó n‡"Q bv? This Bangla sentence has been translated as: "Has it not being raining for a long time? At least the author, as one may reasonably expect him to be well-versed in

English since he has written a book

cyKz‡i †Mvmj Ki‡e| (b) Avwg hLb Nygvw"Qjvg ZLb bvQwib Avgv‡K Pzgy w`‡qwQj| (c) Szgyi wbqwgZ gv`K MÖnY KiZ| Then there are: (a) He is son of bitch ("a" is missing), (b) Mary contemns her past lover (Presumably the author wanted to use the word "condemn" although that is also not appropriate here.), (c) Nasrin defied her parents and got married me.

One wonders if an educationist of experience and knowledge could have written such a book for the budding learners dealing in obscenity and vulgarity! Compare these structures with the illuminating words and lines in the prose pieces that we read in our times in the Matriculation class. Some examples: "Character is the crown and glory of life" (Character: Samuel Smiles) "The history of Spain offers us a melancholy contrast" (Islam in Spain) and "Handsome is that handsome does" (Vicar of Wakefield by Goldsmith).

A thorough look at the structures included in the said Communicative Functional English book gives us the impression that the problem does not stem from the degree level teaching or degree level selection of books, it has a root far deeper. Undeniably true, most of our

years has invited a plethora of ills. In the post-liberation days when democratic governance of the country stalled, academic achievement took a beating. The educational institutions right from the primary to secondary to higher secondary (college) level were in doldrums and hardly the situation has changed till now. During the years all the ills have spilled over to such a pathetic proportion, that raising the standard of English to the utter disregard of the overall quality of education is almost an impossible task. The solution looks abundantly clear to all with vision and pragmatism. In such a situation, the basics must be corrected first. No ad-hoc solution like re-introducing English at the degree level syllabus for arresting the pitfalls will cure the ills. This disastrous performances in

from our curriculum for the past 25

the public examinations, had been long overdue. Education boards, school and college authorities have failed miserably in their obligations to the nation. The question now arises whether we are conscious about this disgraceful collapse and indifference of the teachers as well as authorities of schools and colleges. Undeniably true, all sections of people in the country starting from

with competent teachers at differ ent levels and for different subiects, there is now total chaos and disarray in the system. It is at the higher stages that the nation is paying a heavy price as evidenced by a colossal disaster in the results of the public examina-

Md Asadullah Khan, a former teacher of physics, is Controller of Examinations, BUET.



All health information to keep you up to date

It's about epilepsy

Epilepsy is explained by seizures causing convulsions and loss of consciousness. It is defined by a tendency to recurrent seizures that can lead to loss of awareness or consciousness, disturbances of movement, sensation (including vision, hearing and taste), autonomic function, mood and mental function.

In this subcontinent, basic perceptions about epilepsy were refined and developed during the Vedic period of 4500-1500BC. In the Ayurvedic system, epilepsy is described as "apasmara" which means "loss of consciousness". It has described plentiful of references to all aspects of epilepsy including signs -- symptoms, etiology, diagnosis and treatment. Babylonian textbook of medicine also described about this illness in detail. In fact, many of the different seizure types were described in that book as far back as 2000BC, doctors recognise today.

Of the 50 million people in the world with epilepsy, unfortunately some 35 million have no access to suitable treatment. This is either because services are non-existent or because epilepsy is not observed as a medical problem or a treatable brain disorder.

After the invention of human electroencephalograph (EEGbrainwaves') in the field of epilepsy, the presence of electrical discharges in the brain is clearer. It also showed different patterns of brainwave discharges associated with different seizure types. The EEG also helped to locate the site of seizure discharges and expanded the possibilities of neuro-surgical treatments. Another recent stimulus towards the understanding and treatment of epilepsy in the last few decades has been the development of neuro-imaging equipment. Such technology has revealed many of the more subtle brain lesions responsible for epilepsy

Phenobarbitone and phenytoin were the main drugs for its treatment during most of the time of last century. In recent years, a number of new drugs are available and seizures can be controlled much better than before. There are many people around us who still prefer not to disclose or discuss their epileptic situation. There should be social (as well as by doctors) campaign against epilepsy to improve prevention and manage ment for people with this illness. We need public awareness for a supportive environment in which people with epilepsy can live better.

Did you know

Julius Caesar, Czar Peter the Great of Russia, Pope Pius IX, Fyodor Dostoyevsky and poet Lord Byron were all epileptic. Although Dostoyevsky's caring wife described his seizures in a way that would indicate they were of the major variety, involving an aura which had a mystical quality. In contrast, his doctor thought many of his fits were of hysterical nature, as the aura was described as being ecstatic.

Next: Men's health after the age 50.