

Seminar on autism inaugurated

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DOES watching too much television in early childhood trigger unresponsive behaviour, is parental inattention the cause, can the affected child ever be normal?

These were some of the queries by parents of children suffering from autism, at a seminar which began at the Bal Kalyan Sanstha on Friday. The seminar has been organised by the Pune Support Group to Autistics which has invited Delhi-based Action For Autism (AFA) for the three-day programme. The aim of the seminar is to facilitate better comprehension and introduce teaching skills to help parents, trainers and professionals in the field.

According to AFA founder-di-

rector Merry Barua and educational director Indu Chaswal, with the right teaching strategies and familial approach, an autistic child could blossom into an adult whose disabilities are minimised. Early detection would add to the effectiveness of the programmes, they said. According to Barua, "An autistic child often looks 'normal,' but spaces in his behaviour reveal autism. For example, a minute ago he'll sum the long numbers all right, the next he is unable to interpret the emotions in a picture. There are telling signs that manifest themselves by age 18 months, sometimes even later. In fact, it's very stressful for the parents of autistic children who constantly have to live with an outsider impression of their child as being badly brought up."

A conservative estimate puts

the number of autistic persons at 2 million in the country making it the third most common developmental disorder; more common even than the widely known Down's Syndrome. Eighty per cent or more of autistic children are boys.

Says Barua, "There is a need for better representation of the rights of the autistic. At the moment they are considered in the National Trust Act that looks after the agencies involved in the care



A session in progress at Bal Kalyan Sanstha

of an autistic person. However, there is no mention of autistic persons in the Persons with Disability Act, 1995 that is an empowering legal stipulation offering various facilities to persons otherwise mentioned in the Act." AFA publishes a journal, *The Autism Network*, also at autism-india.org