



Promise of **RELIEF**

A comprehensive approach to headache management, combined with the use of new drugs, appears to provide a reprieve to the numerous sufferers

■ by Vivek LAW and Supriya BEZBARUAH

SHE WAS 19, 5 FT 11, VIVACIOUS, loved dancing and had a dazzling smile. Kanchi Gandhi wanted to become a chartered accountant and dreamt of the bright lights in a way that only the young can. One day, while picnicking at Mumbai's Manori beach, Gandhi did see bright lights. They were not quite what she had expected. They were accompanied by black spots and an excruciating pain that hammered her head for 45 minutes. She lost partial vision in that blurred period and threw up repeatedly. Gandhi had just had her first migraine attack.

Two years later, Gandhi's life is held hostage not only by migraine but by the

constant fear of an attack. She can get one anytime, anywhere, in the bath, on Marine Drive. "Often I pull up at the roadside and call up family or friends to drive me home," she says. A few days ago, she was about to go out with friends when she suddenly cried out, "Mama, spots!" Her mother tells the rest of the story: "The lights in the house were switched off, the curtains were drawn. We knew it was another attack."

For an ailment that effortlessly tops medical charts, the headache—and migraine is only a type of headache—has received about as much scientific attention as last year's calendar. Its causes are shrouded in ifs and buts; its treatment, till recently, was a wild card. "People with migraine are medically orphaned," says Mumbai-based

POUNING PAIN: Gandhi is among the 10 per cent people who suffer from migraine

headache specialist K. Ravishankar, who runs a specialised headache clinic in Mumbai, and two others at the city's Jaslok and Lilavati hospitals. "No one seems to want to handle their case as doctors feel there is no underlying problem." In 95 per cent of the cases there is no other underlying cause—the headache itself is reason enough for medical attention.

Now headache has been finally given the importance it is due in its own right. A new, comprehensive approach to headache management, combined with the use of new drugs, appears to have tamed the disease. True, specialty headache clinics are still a rarity. There

Photographs by FAWZAN HUSAIN