

Homoeopathy in India: Practice and Perception

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In India the history of Homoeopathy can be traced as far back as the year **1835** when a Romanian man Dr. John Martin Honigberger visited India. He was called in by Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Lahore who was suffering from paralysis of the vocal cords. Dr. Honigberger treated the Maharaja dispensing a Homeopathic medicine “Dulcamara” (extract of a plant woody night shade) in wine, in low potency. Around the same time in **1836**, in Tanjoor (now Thanjavur), Dr. Samuel Brookling, a retired surgical officer, dispensed Homeopathic medicines to civilians and army officers stationed at Madras. In Bengal, Dr. Mahendra Lal Sircar, who famously cured Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar of asthma and effectively paved a way for popularity of Homeopathy in Bengal. The first Homeopathic medical college in India was established in the year 1878, under the name of Calcutta Homeopathic Medical College. Right from the introduction of Homoeopathy in India, the influence of Bengal on the Homeopathic system of medicine has been significant.

Popularity of Homoeopathy had reached its peak in India in 1902, when Father Augustus Muller treated an epidemic of pneumonic plague in Mangalore District. His intervention was so admired by the British that he was given the Kaiser-e-Hind award.

Important Policy Milestones in Development of Homoeopathy

Even a cursory look at the archival documents related to recognition of Homoeopathy as one of the systems of medicine, would give a glimpse of how policy makers viewed all non-

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allopathic systems of medicine namely- Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy. In 1968, a joint Bill for establishing the Indian Medicine and Homoeopathy Central Council was introduced in the Rajya Sabha. It seems little attention was given to the fact that fundamentals of all these systems were different. However a Joint Committee of the Parliament was convinced by Homeopathic practitioners to grant separate status to Homoeopathy. The Committee amended the Bill suitably and made provisions for a composite Central Council for the three Indian Systems of Medicine and a separate Council for Homoeopathy. It should be noted that the special panel of Planning Commission was recommending constitution of Central Councils of India Systems of Medicine and Homoeopathy since 1952, however it materialised only after 20 years in 1972 when the Bill was introduced in the Parliament. On 17th December 1973, the Homoeopathy Central Council Bill was passed by Parliament.

Institutionalisation of Substandard Education

The Central Council of Homeopathy (CCH) is the apex body to monitor the quality of Homeopathy education in India. According to many respondents, with whom I spoke while writing this article, unequivocally opined about incompetency of CCH and its collusion with private education sharks. While private medical education has been a contentious issue in general and not 'pathy' specific, anarchy in Homeopathy medical education is particularly astounding. Consider the following -

1. Minimum percentage required to get admission in Homeopathic Medical college is 50%, as per CCH norm. However many institutions are not following this rule. One of my respondents told me that during the last three years the average 12th standard marks of the first year entrants in his college as well as many colleges in Maharashtra, has been consistently between 45 to 48%!

2. Payment to teaching faculties is abysmally low - Rs 6000 to Rs 8000 rupees per month, for the post of an assistant professor.
3. In 2011-13, many graduate doctors opted for 'external' MD degree. The only requisite to get this degree is to appear for final examination. After a lot of uproar this scam was stopped by CCH.
4. Most of the medical colleges do not have mandatory hospitals attached to it. Many interns end up doing their internship in allopathic hospitals.

This grim scenario is a necessary prelude for any analysis of present practice of Homoeopathy. It must be kept in mind that present practioners and prospective students of Homoeopathy have studied and would be studying into these institutions of mediocrity, until the entire system of Homeopathy education in India undergoes radical changes.

Being Homoeopath: Self-Esteem, Client Base and Relationship with Mainstream Allopathic Practice

Barring a few, who voluntarily opted for Homeopathic education and are doing Homeopathic practice with equal passion, a sense of "subordination" is very strong amongst Homoeopaths. In the words of a final year student 'unless asked I never tell anyone that I am pursuing graduation in Homoeopathy, it is always better to say I am doing medicine'. Although in last year of his graduation, he still grudges about missing admission in dental college merely by three marks!

Girls seem to outnumber boys in Homeopathic institutions. When I attempted to probe this phenomenon explanations that came forth were gender-biased. One of my teacher friends said that in his 10 years of teaching experience he has seldom seen girls graduating in Homoeopathy marrying a boy from graduating in same stream.

This sense of subordination seems to be strongly linked to a lack of Government patronage, constant pressure of uncertainty associated with illegally practicing allopathy, and relatively little incentive in being a homoeopath – e.g., they cannot issue death certificate, fitness certificate - Homoeopathy is not included in the RMP Act. Moreover advances in modern medicine in the form of scanning techniques, sophistication in diagnostics, etc., also seem to be a monopolised domain of the modern medicine. In contrast Homoeopathy looks almost ancient..

Ironically there is a surplus production of Homeopathic doctors. However, there is a relative stagnation in the number of Homeopathic ‘practitioners’, conservative estimate suggests that approximately 85% of doctors end up doing allopathic practice. Even during my informal interaction with students it became amply clear that many of them are in Homeopathic medical colleges because it would pave a way, even if illegal, for allopathic practice.

While analysing the clientele of Homoeopathy, interesting insights are shared by practicing homoeopaths. Undoubtedly the foothold of Homoeopathy among educated, middle class families has become stronger. One of the simple and clichéd reason to opt for Homoeopathy seems to be an assumption that there are no side-effects of Homeopathic Medicines. At a more sophisticated level, it seems to be a well-studied conscious choice to opt for Homoeopathy. One of my practicing friends has also shared an important observation. According to her, “Homeopathic system of individualisation and case-taking is fascinating for many patients, especially for women, since they never had an opportunity to look at their corporal and subconscious existence in an analytical and intimate way. Allopathy would never give them that opportunity. Almost all homoeopaths to whom I spoke to told me that middle and upper middle class people are their main clients. Upon asking reasons for

inability of Homoeopaths to make inroads in working class community, I was told that dominant Sui (needle) culture is the main impediment and somehow the feeling that Homeopathic Medicine takes longer to cure is also dominant. However in certain other observations class bias was evident, e.g., working class “lacks patience” to continue Homeopathic treatment.

Almost all Homoeopaths with whom I have interacted had documentary evidence (in the form of case records and occasionally in form of photographs) to prove that Homeopathic medicine fares better in skin ailments, psychosomatic disorders and chronic ailments. Many allopaths also tend to refer chronic patients to Homoeopaths for treatment, particularly for skin and chronic ailments.

Interface between Homoeopaths and specialist doctors (MD, MS, etc.) seems to be far more peaceful compared to the traction between a Homoeopath and a MBBS doctor. Primarily because their clients come from the common pool: an OPD of homoeopath and an allopath would typically have same type of patients, which often results in sharp professional rivalry. Notably the recent ordinance by the Maharashtra Government to allow Homoeopaths to practice allopathy after one-year course in pharmacology was opposed by MBBS doctors far more vocally than the specialist doctors.

In a predominantly allopathic milieu, Homeopaths also tend to feel short of explaining and justifying ‘scientificity’ of Homeopathic medicine itself. Unlike modern pharmacology where action of drugs could be explained in detail, action of Homeopathic medicines still remains a mystery. In last 100 years Homoeopathy has been termed as placebo by some of the leading scientific journals across the world, which seems to be a harsh assessment since many

unexplained results were achieved by using Homeopathic medicines time and again. (Sir John Forbes , a physician to queen Victoria, once said- Homoeopathy is an outrage to human reason).

Multiple arenas in the context of Homoeopathy needs attention, particularly utility of Homeopathic medicine as a preventive medicine and its use during epidemic requires serious research.

Without getting entrapped into a “Pathy fundamentalism”, I think there is a need to rethink aims, claims and assumptions around medical science itself.