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EDITORIAL

HOMOEOPATHY—A SAFE, CHEAP, BUT AN EFFECTIVE ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE

Today the world is in a frantic search for an alternative medicine. The reasons are very obvious.

In a developing country like ours, where more than 500 millions live in villages, the ever increasing cost of medical treatment is very prohibitive and so the benefit of medical treatment cannot reach the common man. Per capita consumption of medicine in our country is barely equivalent to Rs. 19/- whereas it is Rs. 30/- in Pakistan, Rs. 342/- in Japan and over Rs. 300/- in developed countries.

Before the turn of the century, medicine could hardly be distinguished from magic and the physicians of the nineteenth century could hardly boast of more medical success with their patients than the masked medical men of the American Red Indian. The spectacular success of medical cures since Louis Pasteur brought about a universal belief that Allopathy if not infallible could do no harm.

There was almost an overnight change with Pasteur's inoculation; small-pox, cholera also became preventable diseases; quinine liquidated malaria; aspirin took care of pains. The concept of germ free water through war on germs saved thousands of children dying of dehydration in diarrhoea. The relation of cleanliness to health, and infection to death was finally seemed to be understood. Simple aseptic devices were synonymous for better health and with that there were decline in the commonest diseases. Discoveries of antibiotics, sulfas etc. showed sensational recoveries. All this created an atmosphere that the diseases were overcome and health and healthy community were matters of no distant time.

By the middle of the twentieth century there was little evidence that the predictions made about health and healthy community would come true. The medical graduates, the specialists had increased; the pharmaceutical industry had grown to monstrous proportions. But strangely the disease was also growing apace. The generation that was saved from infant mortality fell prey to chronic ailments and degenerative diseases and stroke, ulcers,

asthma, rheumatic diseases, coronary thrombosis, cancer were actually on the increase. The disorders of respiratory, digestive and circulatory systems and those of the body's cells and tissues also went on an increase. Now at best the medical science could only offer palliatives that would reduce pain.

The philosophy of allopathic medicine is very simple: "Where the body's working deviates from the normal, a counteracting procedure should be applied." Accordingly constipation should be treated with a laxative, fever should be combated by cooling etc. All out war was instituted on disease producing bacteria with the help of antibiotics with surprising results! The germs were vanquished but only for the time being until more resistant micro-organisms developed which proved immune to the drug but killed many undiscovered micro-organisms in the body. The drastic interference with the body's microfauna undermined the natural resistance. The hint was not taken but instead the pharmaceutical industry took it as a challenge and started developing increasingly powerful drugs resulting in two dangerous conditions. One the risk of overdose and the second unpredictable severe side-effects. Ultimately the science that took off with the ambitious goal of ensuring universal health was barely succeeding in palliating the sick at prohibitive cost.

The dramatic suddenness of thalidomide episode (1962) rocked the world. Recently we find that the anabolic steroids that were marketed for so many years as wonder drugs have come under severe criticism for disastrous effects on children when indiscriminately used and so now have been withdrawn from the market. It is a known fact that most of the medical therapeutic preparations are controlled, guided and dictated by the researches of the pharmaceutical companies. Each one has its own moral and views. Lately, the preparations of anabolic steroids combined with vitamins have been poured in the market. Critical study of these have shown that they have no useful value towards the therapeutic efficacy. Medical experts have now opined that such combinations be withdrawn. At whose cost are these presented? Naturally at the cost of poor consumer. The medical profession is virtually led by these giant firms and in fact the physician has become a tool in their hands. Considering all these, health by 2000 A.D. seems to be a grim possibility.

It is no doubt that every science has its own potential and limits. Rudolf steiner, a great scientist philosopher had expressed that "to discard any theory or view or opinion without fully knowing or learning, is criminal". It is a great pity that most of the so called scientists look contemptuously to other sciences or systems to which they do not belong.

With the advent of the British Raj, we quickly adopted their ways and means even though they did not suit our economy, philosophy or tradition. The age old Ayurveda was soon discarded, but it continued to thrive because some princely states like Banaras, Jamnagar, Porbunder etc. patronised it. Homoeopathy came to India with John Honigburger in 1839; the fact that

it has continued to exist and also make an impact on the present day medical thinking is solely because of its intrinsic merit.

Homoeopathy embraces universal natural law that governs the universe. This law of similars was known to mankind much earlier than Hahnemann. But he was the first to use it successfully as a therapeutic possibility. Homoeopathy is based on certain fundamental principles and these principles have not been changed over the last two centuries and they will not change in future either. *Similia similibus curentur*, i.e. let likes be cured by likes is the basic concept of homoeopathic practice. Drug proving is another which has revolutionised the pharmacological concepts. Hahnemann was the first to introduce the idea of using human provers as guinea pig for determining the effects of drugs. Homoeopathic materia medica is fully replete with the data made available from such human provings. The expressions thus obtained have been applied to conditions in disease having similar expressions for successful cure. Potentisation was a stumbling block for many years. The pathway of action of homoeopathic drug is yet not fully understood. It is a fact that the action is not chemical or physical or physiological, but in the words of Hahnemann dynamic. Dynamism is an important concept. Research work has demonstrated homoeopathic potency in the range of 10^{-6} to 10^{-60} having effects on the biological molecules such as enzyme acetylcholinesterase. Biophysical properties of potency have also been demonstrated, i.e. capacitance, resistance, mV, pH, optical density etc. Efficacy of potency has also been demonstrated on the excitability of sciatic nerve of frog. Very few scientists have turned to this science probably because they thought that it was futile to spend time on it since it belonged to minority community. The disillusionment of the prospects of modern medicine may now provoke many to turn to this branch which is still virgin in the true sense.

Man with entirety, i.e. emotions, intelligence and physique is a central figure in homoeopathic therapeutic approach. Unlike in dominant medicine man, his susceptibility to environment and ability to react to stimuli is the basis of therapeutic approach. Individualisation is, therefore, an important factor.

The potentised drugs turned out to be extremely powerful and they act most harmlessly. They leave no noticeable side-effects causing any harm to individual or produce any iatrogenic complications. These drugs produce the necessary stimuli and through these stimuli chain of curative activity sets in the man and that too without any side-effects.

Homoeopathy considers man as a whole and treats him individually. There is no medicine for an individual disease but there is medicine for the patient's suffering from a disease. The individual and not the disease is the entity, said the celebrated Sir William Osler. Again Homoeopathy recognises the close interlinking of mind and body. Hahnemann recognised this long before the advent of modern psychiatry. People turn to Homoeopathy when modern medicine has no answer and many find good results. There are cer-

tain personality types which are prone to certain illness. The bodily and mental symptoms are taken together to form the total picture of the patient and then a remedy is selected. Disease is not an isolated event in man's life. It is a part of the sequence. The family history and the events through the childhood are taken into account and Homoeopathy treats not only the present symptoms but also the entire sequence of illness; thus it prevents the progress of the illness.

The scientificity of Homoeopathy is now fully established. The acceptability of the public is also on the increase. The government have considered these facts and introduced these systems in the National Health Schemes. It has also announced from time to time on the floor of the Parliament that adequate assistance would be provided for the development of this science. But all these seem very half-hearted gestures, the reasons for which are obvious. The entire directorate of policy makers consists of modern medical men who have the least knowledge of other systems nor have they shown any inclination to understand others. They only know that anything other than modern medicine is quackery. Whatever that has been achieved in upgrading Homoeopathy today is purely because of personal efforts of a few. The most annoying part is a common yardstick that is employed to measure the merits and demerits of various systems. Unless they decide to see the merits of this science independently, it will never receive adequate opportunity in the true sense.

Health happens to be a State subject and every State has its own ways of disbursing their funds. Except the States of Kerala and West Bengal, we do not see any other State or centrally administered territory to have had the proliferation of Homoeopathy. Government have established over 5000 P.H.C. all over the country. More than 70% are non-functional either for want of a physician or medicines. We understand that every third doctor of P.H.C. should be from other than modern system of medicine. If the government wishes well for the health of the countrymen then they should see that the P.H.C. start functioning. But who will bell the cat?

We have seen the hazards of the modern system of medicine. We know there are other systems which have a potential to help the situation and the government should act quickly shedding the bureaucratic ways.

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