

The electropathy scandal

Ramdas Ambulgekar

Indians, especially those from the middle class, fondly hope to see their children trained as doctors. As a result there is a great demand for 'medical courses'. Four systems of medicine — allopathy, ayurveda, unani and homeopathy — have been officially recognised. There is no restriction on the use and practice of any of these systems. That is why parents push their children into courses leading to MBBS (allopathy), BAMS (ayurvedic) or BHMS (homeopathy) degrees; and if none of these are available, they get their children to become registered medical practitioners (RMP). It is like fulfilling one's desire by making do with substitutes.

Each of these systems has its own merits and limitations. The MBBS courses are for four and half years, followed by one year of internship. There is cut-throat competition for admission to them. Students must secure more than 95% marks at the qualifying examination to get admission. Those with lower scores can secure admission to private medical colleges by paying exorbitant fees. For those who do not have minimum 50% marks and who cannot afford admission to private medical colleges, an institution called 'Board of Electropathy' has provided an easy solution.

Quack doctor

Hindi films have made us familiar with heroes who while romancing heroine(s), easily get through medical examination holding ranks year after year. The Electropathy Board course is designed to churn out doctors with the same speed and ease.

There are five such boards located at Jalgaon, Dhule, Nagpur, Ahmednagar (in Maharashtra) and Delhi conducting these courses. Since 1986, Maharashtra has 200 colleges, including 30 colleges in the Marathwada region alone, where these courses are being conducted. The duration of the course for the Bachelor of Electropathy Medicine & Surgery (BEMS) degree is three and half years for those who have passed the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination; and two and half years for those who have passed Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examination. Every student is charged Rs. 8,000 to 11,000 for securing admission to the course. It is said that an additional Rs. 20,000 to 25,000 are demanded as donation. In practice, it means that those who are needy are left at the mercy of swindlers.

Many political leaders have started their own elec-

topathy colleges and have been minting money. It is said that there are about 10,000 students who have completed electropathy courses and are awaiting official recognition to start their own practice. Electropathy courses are not recognised either by the central and state governments, the Medical Councils or any university.

Misleading advertisements

Apparently anything can be made possible through propaganda and advertisement. This belief has been exploited by publishing advertisements supporting electropathy. An impression is created that those undergoing the BEMS course can start their own business. This has attracted a large number of gullible students. Even though the whole matter regarding BEMS was sub judice, advertisements on them regularly appeared in the newspapers. The same newspaper publishing the government notification that it had denied permission for electropathy courses on one page had an advertisement claiming that the government was soon to accord permission for the course which would permit practice anywhere in India on another page.

The history of electropathy

Count Caesar Maitee of Germany is considered to be father of electropathy. In Italy at the end of 19th century it was in vogue but did not make much progress. The available texts on electropathy are in German and Italian. There is no pharmacopoeia. The prospectus on the electropathy course is completely misleading and based on falsehood. One prospectus, of about 25-30 pages, is in English, and states that the practice of electropathy is legal. It is amazing to note that the very same books prescribed for MBBS course are also recommended for electropathy course.

Two central Government expert committees, one headed by the erstwhile Director-General of the Indian Council for medical Research, Dr. A. S. Paintal, have categorically stated that electropathy cannot be considered, a branch of medicine. The Government of Maharashtra has made it clear that the students of electropathy cannot be registered as medical practitioners as they are neither eligible under the Medical Practitioner Act of 1961 nor Bombay Homeopathic Act of 1959. The state government vide its directive dated 17th April 1995 instructed all police commissioners and district superintendents to take legal action against institutions running electropathy courses. These institutions challenged this ban and got a temporary injunction. Recently the Bombay High court removed the temporary injunction. This has made the future of about

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10,000 students uncertain. These students are saddled with a useless degree and are poorer by several thousands of rupees. It is most unfortunate that government officials and the management of these institutions, who are responsible for the faulty policy and deliberate mischief, are going unpunished while the students are made to suffer.

Rehabilitation of students from electropathy colleges

The gullible students dreaming of becoming doctors and standing to lose thousands of rupees and many years of training are victims of swindling and misinformation. No one cared to see if these institutions provided necessary facilities and equipment to conduct medical courses. No one cared to see if qualified teachers were available. The government should have looked into the matter and students ought to have taken the issue to the proper authorities. Instead, they wanted to get recognition through *uposhan* and *morcha* (agitation). That made things easier for the authorities in these institutions. Members of the Legislative Assemblies and Members of Parliament belonging to various parties succumbed to their pressure and asked the government to accord recognition to electropathy course. The central and state governments have expressed their inability to recognise the course. The students have realised their mistake and have appealed to the public not to be carried away by false advertisements and propaganda on the utility of the courses. This late realisation is most welcome.

A similar incidence had happened in 1980 when Dy-

aneshwar Vidyapeeth of Pune started medical courses without the approval of the state government and medical council. Finally, the Bombay High Court permitted these doctors to practice in villages after adequate training in government hospitals. The electropathy students are expecting similar rehabilitation. It has been suggested that those who matriculate from these institutions be given training for 'Diploma in Rural Medicine and Surgery'[DRMS] for three and half years and charged a fee of Rs.5,000. The committee appointed for rehabilitation of electropathy students has recommended that they be allowed to practice in villages only. This argument is spurious and cannot be sustained even for a moment. Does this committee think that those who live in villages do not need proper medical facilities?

Why are the agencies responsible for maintaining standards going unpunished?

Observers are also dismayed by the fact that the Medical Council of India, the state medical councils, universities and other medical teaching institutions have remained silent on this issue and have permitted the setting up of these institutions. Even now, they haven't awakened to action and continue to permit these and other similar hopelessly inadequate medical 'teaching institutes' to enrol students and foster unjustified hope in them whilst ensuring that their prospective patients will be provided manifestly unsatisfactory therapy.

(Readers should also study the item in this issue under *Vox Populi* entitled *Disastrous 'electro-magneto-ho-meo-therapy'*.
Editor)

A thought to ponder...

As a diagnosed and perhaps condemned antiutopian I offer you the distilled wisdom of fifty years. It is my only contribution to political thought and it could be inscribed on a large postage stamp. It is simply this. With bad people, hating, unto-operative, selfish people, no social system will work. With good people, loving, co-operative, unselfish people, any social system will work.

It is, then, a moral question. Well, we have had *australopithecus*, *homo habilis*, *homo neanderthalensis*, Mousterian Man, Cromagnon Man, *homo sapiens* — has nature truly done with us? Surely we can search that capacious sleeve and find something a bit better! We had better decide we are Lamarckian and make it work. We must produce *homo moralis*, the human being who cannot kill his own kind, nor exploit them nor rob them.

William Golding

A moving target. London:Faber and Faber 1982 p 184.