

How I Spent My End of Year Holiday

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INTRODUCTION

It is known that India is one of the world-wide centers of homoeopathy and homeopathic education. In certain respects Indian homoeopathy can be divided into two regions; the east with Calcutta being the center, and the west, with Bombay and Delhi as the primary influences. According to those in Calcutta, the use of the repertory as a primary vehicle of prescribing is more emphasized in the west, while in Calcutta it is the materia medica that is emphasized more. In addition, the additional emphasis on the miasm exhibited as an important aspect of gleaning the totality of the case is a peculiarity of the program at the Bengal Allen Medical Institute. It was this program I joined from November 14, 1998 to December 22, 1998. This paper then is a brief report of the study experience I had in Calcutta, India, the "City of Joy."

THE PROGRAM

The Bengal Allen Medical Institute is a tax-exempt charitable institution run by Dr. Subrata Kumar Banerjea, the main instructor of the program. In addition to Subrata, who was a wonderful host and always asking for honest feedback so we would get the most out of our stay and study there, there were six other homeopathic doctors who taught both in lecture format and in on-site clinical settings. The other students (5 of us total) were from Colorado, Canada, Australia, and Holland.

Classes were held in a classroom, private clinics, community clinic, rural village clinical setting, and satellite village clinic. One brief interlude was spent in classes and on the beach in Puri, south of Calcutta on the Bay of Bengal side of India. With respect to clinical sitting in, we did clinical sitting in at the office of Dr. Banerjea, director of the institute as well as at his urban free clinic for "slum dwellers" (their term), did prescribing at a rural village outside of Calcutta, and did clinical work in Raiganj, a bird sanctuary related town north of Calcutta and a couple of hours from Darjeeling. Both of the (latter two) rural clinical settings involved the use of a mobile homoeopathic van/bus. That diesel Tata (Indian made truck brand) sure could move fast through the rural districts and in crowded city streets with little breathing room on any side. How people can drive without headlights at night in the cities I'll never know!

At the end of the third week of classes in Calcutta we went by sleeping car (overnight train) to Puri, a seaside resort south of Calcutta, for two days of classes and two days of relaxation. That was very nice to be on the beach and next to water that you could just run and comfortably jump into. (In the San Francisco bay or the Pacific Ocean we need a wet suit unless we're part of the polar bear society). In addition, Puri was a place that you could breathe the air. Very bad air pollution was one of the biggest negatives of Calcutta.

We also took lectures and did clinical sitting in with Dr. Hridayah Singh and Dr. Debasish Mukherjee. I must commend the Calcutta homoeopaths for their generosity of time and spirit and their openness in sharing their wisdom and practical clinical tips in a very open manner. I have to smile and laugh when I think about the experience of being with these "senior" colleagues.

At the start of the program we were given a traditional Indian welcome ceremony, complete with flower garlands draped over our heads, blowing of the conch shell, and performances of Indian dance by a dance troupe consisting of two girls, a woman and a man (the choreographer). We also had a welcoming party with the teachers as well as a "graduation" ceremony and presentation of plaques. All in all the trip was very educational, a valuable addition to my background and previous training, and an opportunity to meet and learn from colleagues halfway around the world.

HOMOEOPATHIC PHARMACIES IN CALCUTTA

Hand succussed remedies are a specialty of India. Calcutta is a city filled with homoeopathic pharmacies and homoeopaths. Hahnemann's name is integrated in so many of the pharmacies; one of the more famous ones is Hahnemann Publishing Company (HAPCO). That pharmacy is well known for its reliability of remedies. However, many say that the operation could be run more efficiently, especially given that there is such a demand for their products. Nevertheless, the HAPCO folks remain wed to their timeless ways.

One day I spent about 4 hours in the afternoon trying to chase down a source of a 3X Sanguinaria Nitricum (for my nasal polyps). With the "able" and affable assistance of a young Indian chap who was a recent graduate of a homoeopathic college (and waiting for his results on his boards) and a colleague from Colorado (Marianne Monteleone), we trudged from one pharmacy to another after the original recommendations didn't pan out. We probably went to about 15-20 different pharmacies. Finally the last place we were able to get into (at 6 PM), Economic Homoeo Stores Ltd, said they had the remedy and after a wait we got the powder in a bottle. It cost 240 rupees (US \$6). Later on, Dr. Banerjea looked at the product and questioned both its quality and the inflated price given the "foreign guest." Given Dr. Banerjea's comment, I and others tried to get the remedy at other shops but those attempts yielded no additional success.

In retrospect, the mere adventure of trekking all over certain areas of Calcutta looking at the pharmacies and their wares was worth it in and of itself. But at the time I had some frustration in what almost seemed to be a wild goose chase.

PHOTO ALBUM

No trip report is finished without photographs. So here is a small selection of some of the scenes during the trip.

- PAGE 1. A. Dr. Banerjea enunciating a special point at front of class
 B. Dr. Singh and Dutch student in classroom
 C. Dr. Mukherjee discussing LM potencies in Puri resort
- PAGE 2. A. Waiting room at the Bengal Allen Medical Institute
 B. Consultation room of Dr. Singh, with MD friend and his
 staff pharmacist/assistant
 C. Assistant with remedy bottles to fill prescriptions in office
 D. View of consultation room from waiting room.
- PAGE 3. A. Dispensing remedies at the Calcutta "slum clinic."
 B. Prescribing at the "slum clinic."
 C. Prescribing in rural setting. Note mobile van in background
 D. Tea break with local village boys in rural setting
- PAGE 4. A. Dispensing counter at National Homoeopathic Laboratory
 B. Bengal Homoeo Laboratory, one of many smaller pharmacies
 up a couple flights of steps, around the corner, etc.
 C. Old site of the Bengal Allen Medical Institute
 D. Nighttime on Ganguli Street ("Homoeopathic row")
- PAGE 5. A. A homoeopaths clinic in Puri
 B. Another homoeopath in Puri. All of we students went to this
 homoeopath at some time or other to see what remedy
 we would be prescribed. People in Puri say homoeopaths
 only prescribe Rhus tox., but that wasn't the only thing
 prescribed there.
 C. Considered to be the best and cheapest all you can eat place in
 Calcutta

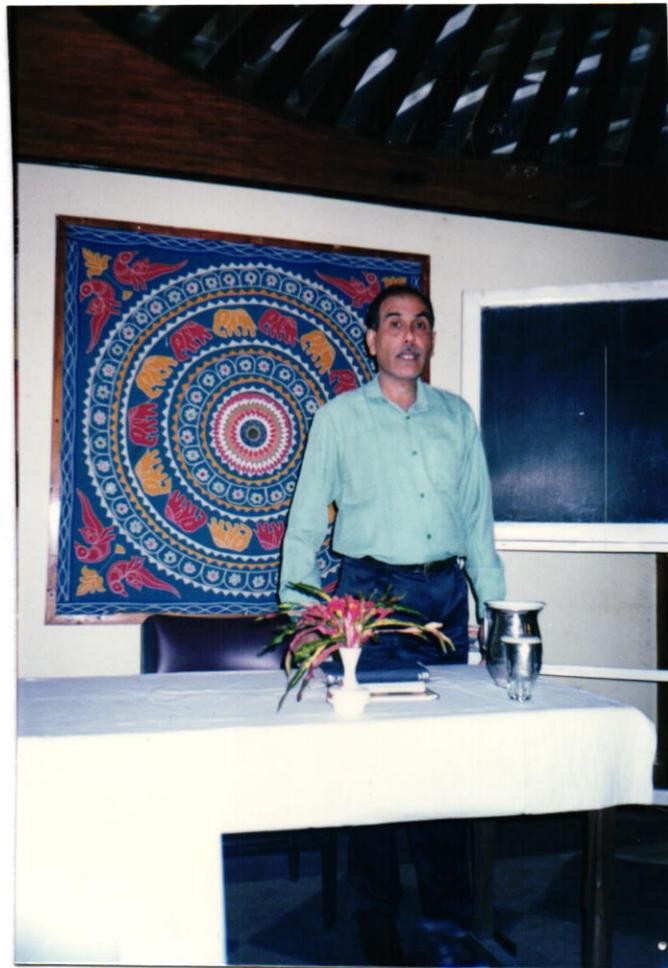
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A



B



C



A.



B

C



D





A



B



C



D



A



B



C



D

4.



A.



B.



C.