Healthcare and Compliance to Rules: Examining Dalit Literature and Life

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Abstract

The present paper, titled, “Healthcare and Compliance to Rules: Examining Dalit Literature and Life” seeks to interweave the intricacies of healthcare as impacted by contraventions of government rules. The paper persists to examine the influence of violations of rules on the health of Dalits and uneducated people. The paper examines the use of fake advertisements by witch doctors as a decoy to lure patients to seek their treatment. Enthralled by fake advertisements of magic remedies many Dalits do not seek medical attention healthcare facilities. This defeats the purpose of the government behind establishing certain rules and acts. The paper further calls for a combined struggle against such contraventions of rules so that better and more reliable healthcare services could be rendered.

Key Words: Healthcare, Contraventions, Dalit, Health, Magic remedies


Introduction:

The present paper titled, “Healthcare and Compliance to Rules: Examining Dalit Literature and Life” is an attempt to study the multifarious facets of contraventions of the Pharmacy Act of India. The irregularities with respect to compliance of rules hinder the process of providing health-care services by various agencies. The situation is exacerbated when most patients remain divested of appropriate treatment which could be imputed to their lack of awareness of the government schemes. This death of knowledge spawns fatal upshots. It is noteworthy that various agencies and society have their respective roles to play to preclude the flouting of the set norms. The regime is expected to form a system that is efficacious at providing the most appropriate health care to people and execute the strategies. Society on the other hand is supposed to cooperate with the government machinery to defy the invidious weakening of the health care structure.

It is however, unfortunate and disquieting that there has been a considerable malfunction of the system in India. This is substantiated when The Drugs and Magic Remedies Act 1954 is violated blatantly. The act asserts:

Proscription of publicizing of some drugs as efficacious at curing some diseases

The regulation asserts that any drug must not be publicized as a remedy for the following:

(a) Preclusion of birth of a child or conceiving by a woman
(b) Augmentation of human capacity to have sex
(c) Curing of menstruation-related anomalies
(d) Gauging, treating, ameliorating, or avoiding any infection caught during sexual activities

**Proscription of beguiling publicizing of medicines**

The act further recognizes a contravention if anyone:

(a) Whether in a straightforward manner or otherwise misleads by rendering an untrue imprints apropos of the attributes of a drug

(b) Declares the efficacy of a drug in a deceptive manner

(c) Beguiles anyone with respect to the qualities of the drug.

**Proscription of popularising supernatural remedial measures and solutions to cure various diseases**

It is clearly stated that no one is allowed to promulgate supernatural remedies or measures to cure any disorder. This is considered a contravention of section 3.

The Act establishes and maintains the import of spreading the appropriate knowledge about drugs and their usage. This is done to avert the manipulation of knowledge for personal, financial and other purposes. The violation of the act however, has strikingly established itself as a de facto verity. The article “Fake health and cosmetic care advertisements you should be wary of” problematizes advertisements which entice the ignorant customers with enthralling promises in advertisements: “Several recent advertisements put out by some of the biggest and the smallest drug companies in India for selling their potions, lotions, clinics, tablets and treatment for all sorts of ailments have been banned by the ASCI (Advertising Standards Council of India), because they dishonored the Drugs & Magic Remedies Act. This Act forbids the advertising of products that claim to cure incurable diseases such as cancer, diabetes, AIDS, paralysis, balding, and many more.”

The article further posits: “Another company called Suraksha Pharma was promoting its Kanthari Plus Capsules, assuring consumers that it would cure heart block, cholesterol, thyroid, diabetes, obesity, failing eyesight, Alzheimer and even kidney function. The faulty English, vague terminology and the reckless claims in its advertisements are all unnerving. The ASCI banned this advertisement saying that it could lure consumers into taking this medicine without proper medical guidance. According to the Council, the diseases for which they offer cures are serious and fatal and the vague usage could mislead and harm consumers.”.
Fake advertisement is therefore one of the most notable deterrents to the health care structure. The problem is further aggravated when less informed or less educated people are subjected to the practice of such trickery. The death of many patients in the urban and more specifically in rural areas of India is imputed to such practice of fraudulence. India Today articulates registers the news of the death of a ten year old boy in West Bengal in the year 2019. A boy was reported as killed and another having got inflicted serious injuries on account of ‘treatment’ through exorcism.

It is neither uncommon, nor sporadic in India that patients seek treatment of their diseases by witch doctors and through exorcism. The autobiographical book *Curfewed Night* by Basharat Peer recalls that Papa 2, the building that was used as an interrogation centre by the Indian Armed Forces during the days of insurgency was exorcised by one of the Chief Ministers of Jammu and Kashmir before she lived in the building as the incumbent Chief Minister. It is appalling that many educated and uneducated people have still not been able to emancipate themselves from the clutches of superstition and supernaturalism. Occult practitioners capitalize on this restriction of people to such illusory concepts. Examples of this are galore.

Many witch doctors furtively practice this occupation of treachery and precipitate the deaths of many patients. OmprakashValmiki in *Joothan: A Dalit’s Life* gives an account of the the belief of people in superstitions. Illiteracy accounts for widespread superstition among many. The villagers in Barla believed in the supernatural powers of *babas* and *ojhas* and they went to them for relief rather than seeking recourse in medicine and reason. Anyone in the basti (settlements), who suffered from a physical problem, preferred visiting a *bhagat* rather than consulting a physician. Harish Narang notes that the autobiographer does not shirk from presenting this unflattering fact: “While Om PrakashValmiki holds the upper caste Hindu social set up squarely responsible for the ills of the dalit nation he does not absolve his own community either and presents a very powerful critique of Dalits’ narrow, unscientific world-view”.

One such incident is registered in Sheoraj Singh Bechain’s autobiography, *MeraBachpan Mere Kandhon Par*. Illiteracy among many people not only keeps them backward but also traps them in many debilitating superstitious beliefs. The death of Bechain’s father is largely caused by superstition. When he fell ill his relatives believed that he was under the influence of an evil spirit so instead of taking him to a doctor they relied on witch-doctors to cure him. This subsequently caused his painful death due to severe beating in the process of exorcising the supposed evil spirit. The belief in superstitions however, was not confined to the outcastes and caste-Hindus also had faith in the powers of *babas* and *ojhas*.

It is clear that there is a thread commonality running through these autobiographies. In poignant vignettes, the authors have censured beliefs in unreal powers. Bechain recalls that he was a child of less than ten years. He had accompanied his father to a wedding ceremony that was to take place at Radheysham’s sister’s house. Around midnight Radheysham started vomiting. Alarmed by this, the relatives summoned an exorcist. Bechain writes that the treatment included lots of beating of the patient at the hands of the exorcist.

The inexorable beatings inflicted such deep wounds on the body of Radheysham that he found it hard to speak. The fracas continued until the patient succumbed to the injuries he had sustained. Bechain did not discern the
implications of his father’s death immediately. Later however, he did realize what it meant to be fatherless. In less than a few months he found insurmountable walls of destitution around the family. Becahin was now an urchin, always dressed in ragged clothes. Similarly, Times of India reported the beating of a mother to death in Ghaziabad by her three educated sons in April 2008. The myriad deaths of patients in India could be directly or indirectly ascribed to exorcism, aversion to the use of allopathic medicines and unreliable information.

Notwithstanding the asserting and reinforcing of, any talisman, mantra, amulet or any other object which is publicized as supernatural, or measures accentuated as supernatural treatment to cure any disorder among human beings or animals as unlawful, many witch doctors violate the law and perpetrate such treachery and usurp money. This may be caused by factors such as lack of knowledge, low family income, lesser or nil awareness programs, fewer community pharmacists, religious belief, etc.

In addition to witch doctors, many quacks also misguide patients in the name of treatment. The promulgation of the efficacy of quacks at curing diseases is another cause of concern. There are patients who do not consider it worth visiting registered doctors for treatment. They believe in the ability of quacks. Quacks generally set up their centres at places where there are no doctors in the vicinity. They set their charges in accordance with the paying capacity of the people in the region. Thus, patients believe that they are receiving treatment for a nominal price and not coerced to visit distant places for treatment. Appallingly, quacks exploit this ignorance of people and keep amassing profits.

Nevertheless, it is exigent to delve into the reasons behind such rapid and consistent promulgation and snowballing of such swindlers. Notwithstanding the formation of the acts, rules and regulatory bodies by the government, elevated numbers of literates, aggrandizing of the status of medical science and science in general, this deception in the name of treatment exists. There seems to be a je ne sais quo about the spread of this evil. The intricacies of this propagation could be understood within the framework of the failure of various stakeholders to defy the spread of fake abilities of witch doctors, quacks etc.

Conclusion

The violation of The Drugs and Magic Remedies (objectionable advertisements) Act 1954 indicates towards a major failure of the health care machinery. The reasons may be understood in the light of the collective and individual responsibilities. The duties of various bodies apropos of compliance of rules are established by the government. Harrowingly however, even government control has not been able to avoid the foundering of the structure. The government has not been able to spread wakefulness about the rules, violation of rules and more importantly, the implications of the contraventions. Most people residing in the rural or urban areas are oblivious to the nuances of the health care structure. Many of them believe that witch doctors are blessed with an ability to cure diseases. To substantiate the claim of their expertise at exorcism, the witch doctors blend rituals and religious concepts with their treatment. This strong impact of religion and superstition blindfolds and gags the patients who respect the treatment as sacrosanct. Hence, the government has to emancipate people from the grip of this unawareness. It is imperative for the administration to launch awareness programs and offer appropriate and relevant information to people as they are not autodidacts. This may be done with the help of Non Governmental Organisations or other voluntary,
private or state bodies. This awareness program may subsume school children so that the required wakefulness may be ingrained in children at an early age.

The contribution of the state however, may not be adequate to strike a sweeping change if the effort is not corroborated by assiduous contribution from society. Various sections from society must contribute to the process of dispelling the belief of people in witch doctors and quacks. Further, it is exigent to that a movement is started at an individual level as well. Citizens must vow not to belief in the fake powers of ojhasand quacks. This will impact the proliferation of swindlers.

In addition to this, laws must be made stringent, both in structure and execution to augment the health care service in India. Witch doctors and quacks survive on beguiling ignorant people on the pretext of supernatural powers and rituals. Awareness among people may wane their superstitious opinions and convictions, thereby ebbing the influence of occult. It is evident that if any the above mentioned measures are not taken and implemented appropriately, the impact will only palliative. A permanent solution to the problem is the adherence to The Drugs and Magic Remedies (objectionable advertisements) Act 1954.

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