

# ECT and Drug Therapy: Is There an Alternative?

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IT is true that medicalised attitude towards psychiatric problems is a misdirected one and we have to look at psychic disorders in a holistic way (SHR II: 4). But can we totally reject the use of drugs or even electro-convulsive therapy in psychiatric illnesses? The articles tend to suggest this by denouncing psychiatry *in toto*, without giving an adequate basis for such a total rejection.

To begin with, we must distinguish schizophrenia (madness) from neuroses ("queer behaviour"). It has been well-established that there is some genetic factor involved in schizophrenia. Moreover, some schizophrenics become violent either to others or to themselves; many cannot take care of their bodily functions. It is almost impossible to keep such a person in one's house without treating him/her with powerful drugs or electroconvulsive therapy (ECT). Like any other medical therapy, ECT may have its own risks and disadvantages. If the medical establishment is hiding these, or glorifying ETC, we must oppose it. We need a better mode of treatment than ECT. The scientific basis of how and why of ECT was not at all clear when it was started and is still not clear today. But this empirically established form of treatment is on the whole quite helpful in tiding over crises, and in reducing hospitalisation and in the absence of a better alternative, cannot be rejected. Are there any alternatives better methods of treatment available? Where is the proof? Similarly, powerful psychotropic drugs also reduce hospitalisation. These methods of treatment many-a-time convert the schizophrenic into a passive, dull individual. A few who do not require long-term treatment may become almost normal but many others lose vitality in their life. But again—is there a better alternative?

Schizophrenia is not simply "deviant" behaviour. It is quite troublesome and often may be dangerous to others. If it is considered as a revolt against the society, how should society react to it? In a social political revolt, there are certain definite demands. But the schizophrenic does not have any such demands.

What is precisely wrong in conventional psychiatry is the medicalised conception of schizophrenia. ECT and drugs are not looked upon as temporary resorts in extreme conditions, but as the solution. Though there are genetic factors involved, stressful life situations, continued tensions and humiliations are often responsible for converting a genetic potential into the reality of madness. Instead of being sympathetic to the patients for the sorry state to which the society has brought them, the victims then are blamed, castigated and the role played by social-cultural conditions in creating this illness is forgotten. Unlike neuroses, a change in the family or work-environment may not bring the schizophrenic back to complete normalcy. In this regard, one is tempted to compare schizophrenia with byssinosis (a bronchitis-like condition found in cotton-mill-workers which is caused by continuous exposure to cotton-dust; once developed, it cannot be cured). Like byssinosis and many cancers, schizophrenia can be prevented. But once the damage is done, it can rarely be reversed. The real solution to schizophrenia is to create a society which would not create such stressful situations which

foster schizophrenia. Even then, there may be a few people going mad, but to be sure, the incidence can be brought down considerably. But in the present circumstances, all that the medical people can do is to be sympathetic to the patient, to use drugs, and so on when essential and identify the family and society as an important cause of this malady.

In neuroses, the family and the society at large are completely responsible for a person's neurosis; there being no genetic factors involved. Early detection of "strange behaviour" and identifying the cause in the immediate interpersonal, social surrounding may help a lot. If the situation around such a person continues in the same fashion, the person may end up with severe neurosis and then the person may never revert back to complete normalcy; years of illness-creating-environment create a change which cannot be easily reverted. Drugs can only be useful to tide over a crisis. But by no means are they the real solutions.

In the absence of a holistic view of mental health and illness, and also due to vested professional or business interests of psychiatrists, and the drug-companies, psychiatry has been overused, abused. This fits well into a society where there is a culture of scientism, compartmentalism. This overuse, misuse of psychiatry has to be opposed. We need to create a countertendency in addition, which identifies concretely pathogenic interpersonal and social practices, their economic-political basis. Such a countertendency has also to evolve and practice an alternative, healthy culture to demonstrate an alternative. The seed for socialist, healthy culture has to be sown today! But I doubt whether ECT or drug therapy for those who are already ill can be totally rejected.

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my sin...analgin

those were the last dying gasps,  
(or so it seemed then),  
that were kept 'alive' with galloping agony,  
that pushed my life into hopeless despair.

fever juxtaposed with spasmodic chills  
and that soar throat that quenched my voice  
into oblivion,  
was signal enough  
to let loose  
tiny, horrendous microbes,  
in tens of thousands, millions and billions,  
to pounce on my flesh,  
in an effort to strip me to my skeleton.

the healing messiahs,  
gathered around me,  
(in a state of helplessness)  
pumped desparately blood into me,  
to replenish the granulocytes,  
that had vanished from my blood,  
thanks to the pain-killer,  
which i was prescribed.

i survived somehow.  
they said i was lucky.  
"it's a miracle,  
50 percent don't see through."

"pain-killer? driving me to the height of agony?  
plunging me into misery? dragging me to death?  
why make such a monster?" i cried  
with a voice that had barely returned,  
and the messiahs said,  
there were 'profits' in making this monster

"profits?" i was puzzled.  
"profits" they said,  
"for companies which manufacture it,"  
"profits for the governments which allow it,"  
"profits for the messiahs who prescribe it,"

"but what of me" i said,  
"i was pushed into the doors of death."  
"oh!" they said,  
"you are just one that gets into such a mess,  
after every hundred thousand."

i wished i was amongst  
those 50 percent who did not see through,  
for this callousness  
was more agonising than the disease.

"but what was my crime...what was my sin."  
they laughed cynically... "you ingested analgin."

anil pilgaokar

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