

1 A Heterodoxy between Institutions

Bureaucracy, Print-Market and Family Firms

‘It is now an acknowledged fact that the number of homoeopaths, either good, bad or indifferent is a legion in India and there has been a network of homoeopathic pharmacies ... all over our country ... Harmony [between them] should be the basic principle upon which true friendship and good business can last and flourish.’¹

‘All householders are businessmen in a sense. But in general, by businessmen one understands the traders.’²

‘To a businessman, honest, dutiful and efficient employee [*sic*] is more precious than the son. Many entrepreneurs trust such employees more than their own son.’³

In August 1882, the *Indian Medical Gazette* published a lengthy editorial article titled ‘Medical Practice in Calcutta’.⁴ The article contemplated the status of western state medicine in the city as well as the main hindrances to its wider dissemination. The *Indian Medical Gazette*, an unofficial mouthpiece of the Indian Medical Service, mostly comprised of contributors variously involved in the colonial state’s public health endeavours. Its editorial, penned by the influential Kenneth Macleod, Professor of Surgery at the Calcutta Medical College and the Chairman of the Calcutta Health Society, was in many ways voicing the anxieties of the imperial state and its medical bureaucracy. Macleod particularly raised an alarm about the messy nature of the medical market in Calcutta that allowed for an extensive sphere of unregulated practices to flourish. The article brought to life a world of medical relief sharply polarised

¹ ‘Editorial: New Year’s Retrospection and Introspection’, *The Hahnemannian Gleanings*, 4, 1 (February 1933), 10–11.

² Jitendranath Majumdar, *Arther Sandhan (Pursuit of Wealth)*, 3rd edition (Calcutta: Sisir Publishing House, 1932), p. 115.

³ Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya, *Byabshayee (Businessman)*, 1st edition (Calcutta: M. Bhattacharya and Company, 1905), p. 72.

⁴ Kenneth Macleod, ‘Medical Practice in Calcutta’, *Indian Medical Gazette*, 17 (August 1882), 213–17.

between the qualified practitioners and those whom the state summarily deemed unqualified. Even in 1882, Calcutta, the second city of the empire and a bustling metropolis of a million people, could boast of only about 100 qualified practitioners duly trained in state-endorsed western medicine. These practitioners received their degrees either from Europe or from the newly instituted medical schools in India, including the pioneering Calcutta Medical College established in 1835. Macleod's real worry, however, was with the extensive sphere of the so-called unqualified practitioners, of whom he remarked, 'there is a variety almost defying classification'.⁵ This sphere ranged from practices which claimed to be more traditionally 'Indian', to those involving the most recently discovered patent drugs. Indeed, the vast population of unregulated and unqualified practitioners included medical college dropouts; a large number of 'quacks and impostors' among whom Macleod included several South Indian practitioners on Wellesley street claiming to be 'Professors of piles and fistula'; those dealing in specifics along with a large number of *hakims* and *kobirajes* 'who were very fluent with traditionary rules and maxims' and were 'the surviving representatives of the ancient medical creeds of Hindustan, and are doomed to early extinction'.⁶ This editorial put forward one of the early pleas for a Medical Registration Act for India as the indispensable step towards the development of a colonial public health system.

For Macleod, a particularly annoying presence common to both the domains of qualified and unqualified practitioners was the significant number of homoeopathic practitioners in Calcutta. In his account, homoeopathy curiously featured in the realms of both the qualified and the unqualified, the state and the traditional. The editor marvelled at the popularity and rising demand for homoeopathy in colonial homes. He was amazed that the natives would frequently resort, interchangeably, to qualified Indian practitioners of state medicine and to the homoeopaths. The sheer range of homoeopathic practitioners baffled him – there were duly qualified practitioners of state medicine who chose to practice homoeopathy, as well as failed students of medical colleges, and in addition, a very large number of amateur homoeopaths with flourishing practices. The colonial medical bureaucracy was trying to solve, to borrow Macleod's phrase, 'the mystery of homoeopathy' – to make sense of the thriving market for homoeopathy and the various networks through which it circulated.⁷ It was also grappling with the reasons for homoeopathy's rising popularity among the natives of India. Macleod's article proposed several possible explanations, which revealed the medical

⁵ Ibid., p. 216. ⁶ Ibid., p. 216. ⁷ Ibid., p. 215.

establishment's prejudicial bias against colonised peoples. The reasons cited by Macleod ranged from the 'imaginative and unpractical minds' of Indians, and 'the milder and more passive nature of the Hindoos' to the 'transitory state of India as regards medical science and practice'.⁸

Beyond the anxieties of the colonial medical bureaucracy, the entrenched presence of homoeopathy was being felt in other aspects of Bengali life. By the turn of the twentieth century, the figure of the homoeopath recurred vicariously in the rich domain of Bengali fiction. Homoeopathy featured in myriad genres of Bengali literature, including a series of colonial farces, written as social commentaries on the deplorable state of medical relief in the region. But how, indeed, can one solve 'the mystery of homoeopathy'? While the twin worlds of colonial administration and vernacular literature grappled with the figure of the homoeopath with mixed emotions of anxiety, resentment and humour, how was the European heterodoxy⁹ being popularised in the province? How did the homoeopaths come to acquire a position of value and trust in colonial homes in Calcutta?

To answer this question, I studied a range of intergenerational Bengali business concerns which, from around the 1860s, began sustained investments involving homoeopathy. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, these printing and publication establishments ensured a steady circulation of popular scientific writings on homoeopathy in the regional print market. As they facilitated publications, as well as the establishment of numerous pharmacies across the city of Calcutta and beyond, these firms asserted their authority in the overlapping domain of medical knowledge and commerce. Publications by these commercial firms specifically projected the domestic space of the Bengali household as the ideal site where the western heterodoxy could proliferate. While the government expressed anxiety over the lack of organisation in its practice, Bengali homoeopathy was being uniquely institutionalised around these firms asserting themselves as 'families'. The distinct process of

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ There has been endless debate around the nomenclature of so-called alternative medicine, and all terms such as 'alternative', 'complementary', 'heterodox', 'fringe medicine', 'unorthodox medicine', 'sectarian medicine' have been understood as problematic one way or the other, especially in the discourses of universalising state medicine or modern biomedicine. Recently, it has been argued that 'heterodoxy' is a relatively more useful term to describe these forms of healing, since at least it does not assume either a hierarchy or a specific geography and can therefore include medical systems from any culture. Besides, homoeopathy is widely regarded as a classic heterodox medicine of the late eighteenth century, which even helped define understandings of medical orthodoxy in the West. See Roberta Bivins, 'Histories of Heterodoxies' in Mark Jackson (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Medicine* (Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 579–80. The use of the descriptive term 'heterodoxy' is not used here to indicate any assumptions of marginalised status.

homoeopathy's institutionalisation is explored by focusing on the publications generated by the protagonists of six such leading homoeopathic business enterprises in late nineteenth-century Calcutta.

The literature published by the pharmaceutical companies illustrated a sustained engagement with three apparently distinct and unrelated themes. They reflected simultaneously on the importance, function and organisation of business, family and homoeopathic practice in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Bengal. I focus on this entanglement to examine Bengali homoeopathy's intimate imbrication with the institution of family. The domains of the familial and the entrepreneurial appear blurred together in these texts, and norms involving family and business appear positively interchangeable and overlapping. Beyond the preliminary sections of this chapter on the state and the realm of Bengali fiction, we take our cue from the projected ethic and organisation of homoeopathic enterprises and investigate how 'family' itself was being construed as both an affective and a profitable institution, which nurtured Bengali homoeopathy.

A 'Growing Scandal ... Under British Rule'

Since about the 1870s, along with ayurveda and other traditional practices like unani, homoeopathy invariably surfaced in anxious governmental discussions of medical malpractice in Bengal, being referred to as 'a growing scandal'.¹⁰ After an initial phase of attempts at syncretism with the traditional medical cultures, which lasted until about the 1850s, the British government launched an extended phase of public health policies that all but delegitimised traditional therapeutics, as well as any other up-and-coming European heterodoxy such as homoeopathy.¹¹ Existing studies have remarked that there were renewed beginnings of official tolerance for 'indigenous' medicine around the First World War. Furthermore, a dyarchic system of government was instituted in 1919; more recent scholarship identifies this as a key moment that signalled a slow policy transition towards accepting and standardising practices other than western state medicine.¹²

¹⁰ From the Coroner of Calcutta to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial Department, Municipal Department Medical Branch, File Number A/15 2, Proceeding 46 (September 1887 [West Bengal State Archives, hereafter WBSA]).

¹¹ For efforts at supposed harmony and syncretism see Zhaleh Khaleeli, 'Harmony or Hegemony? The Rise and Fall of the Native Medical Institution, Calcutta; 1822–35', *South Asia Research*, 21 (2001), 77–104.

¹² Rachel Berger, *Ayurveda Made Modern: Political Histories of Indigenous Medicine, 1900–1955* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 2–4.

Through the second half of the nineteenth century, homoeopathy thus emerged as a topic of frequent concern in the leading and widely circulating 'orthodox' journals like the *Indian Medical Gazette* and the *Lancet*. Equally, it featured in the writings of the physicians associated as faculty with the premier colonial institutions, such as the Calcutta University and the Calcutta Medical College. It also featured in the bureaucratic correspondence of the colonial medical officials. Much like Macleod's editorial quoted earlier, these various registers of the nineteenth-century colonial administration unanimously criticised homoeopathy's presence in the medical landscape of the time, often equating it with quackery. It was pointed out,

We know little of this sphere of practice, but we suspect that a good deal of quacking goes on. Quacking is inseparable from dealing in occult agencies. We have met with two instances in which homoeopaths undertook, on prepayment of substantial fee, to cure cataract and cancer by infinitesimals.¹³

The state authorities questioned the very basis of the homoeopathic doctrine, conflating it with 'charlatanism', 'quackery' or as in the aforementioned instance, with the 'occult'. However, homoeopathy was put under the official scanner most frequently for the way it was practised. The notion of 'quackery' was therefore invoked in such official correspondence in at least two distinct ways: at times, it involved the outright rejection of homoeopathy as a rational doctrine; but more specifically, it included criticisms of the homoeopathic practitioners' lack of qualifications, training and competence. Thus, besides questioning the scientific basis of homoeopathy, the official registers complained more about the lack of formal institutional structure around nineteenth-century homoeopathy. In a later Chapter (Chapter 5), I will explore the twentieth-century colonial state's about-turn on its definition of scientific, recognised medicine, in response to growing nationalist politics around issues of public health.

But before this reversal of policy in the mid- to late nineteenth century, the leading, self-proclaimed 'orthodox' journals like the *Indian Medical Gazette* and the *Lancet* published articles that were mostly dismissive of the validity of the homoeopathic principle itself. The typical tone of these writings may be captured from a letter to the editor of the *Lancet* written in 1861, which argued,

In all times there have been pretenders, who have persuaded a certain part of the public that they have some peculiar knowledge of a royal road to cure, which those of the regular craft have not. It is homoeopathy now; it was something else

¹³ Kenneth McLeod, 'Medical Practice in Calcutta', *Indian Medical Gazette*, 17 (August 1882), 215–16.

formerly; and if homoeopathy were to be extinguished, there would be something else in its place.¹⁴

A culmination of such attitudes may be seen in the raging controversy surrounding the admission of Mahendralal Sircar to the medical faculty of the Calcutta University in 1878 following a decision of the University Senate. Dr Sircar, a reputed physician and the second MD to qualify from the Calcutta Medical College, had in 1867 ceremoniously declared his conversion to homoeopathy. Throughout this book, we will have detailed encounters with Sircar and his activities as a figure central to the publicisation of homoeopathy in Bengal. The other members of the medical faculty fought tooth and nail against Sircar's inclusion, arguing that 'they were unable to associate themselves as a Faculty of Medicine with a member who professes and practices homoeopathy'.¹⁵ The medical establishment of Calcutta closed ranks and stood firm in their decision in the face of repeated petitions from Mahendralal Sircar justifying his inclusion into their ranks.¹⁶ In the end, Dr Sircar was forced to resign. The decision of the faculty was widely appreciated in the contemporary leading journals. An article 'Homoeopathy and the University of Calcutta', published in the *Indian Medical Gazette* in 1878, celebrated the decision as the most appropriate step in 'maintaining the cause of scientific truth and purity in Bengal, unflinchingly against the faintest encouragement of or association with delusion or error'.¹⁷

From the 1880s on, the state was increasingly more concerned with the organisational and institutional aspect of homoeopathy, than its inherent (ir)rationality. Over the 1880s and 1890s, there was a swelling administrative anxiety over organisational irregularities pertaining to traditional medicine, as well as to European heterodoxies like homoeopathy.¹⁸ There was also a growing colonial resentment with the informal networks of pedagogy through which homoeopathy appeared to circulate. These developments forced the state to contemplate an imperial legislation

¹⁴ Anonymous, 'Letter to the Editor: Sir Benjamin Benjamin Brodie on Homoeopathy', *The Lancet*, 7, 1984 (7 September 1861), 238–9.

¹⁵ See Arun Kumar Biswas, *Collected Works of Mahendralal Sircar, Eugene Lafont and the Science Movement, 1860–1910* (Kolkata: Asiatic Society, 2003), p. 232.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 231–47.

¹⁷ Anonymous, 'Homoeopathy and the University of Calcutta', *Indian Medical Gazette*, 13 (June 1878), 159.

¹⁸ The story of the state's policing of homoeopathy needs to be positioned within the broader processes of the state's failure in controlling epidemics and its larger surveillance of all non-state practices, particularly the indigenous medicinal practices like ayurveda and unani. See Kavita Sivaramakrishnan, *Old Potions, New Bottles: Recasting Indigenous Medicine in Colonial Punjab (1850–1945)* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2006), pp. 87–103.

which would streamline and standardise the non-state practices. The idea of introducing a Medical Registration Act on the model of the English Act was being actively debated in official circles. An article 'India: Registration of Medical Practitioners', published in 1888 in the *Lancet*, complained that it was no longer possible for the public to 'discriminate between the qualified and the unqualified' physicians.¹⁹ Similarly, a typical letter to the editor of the journal *The Medical Reporter* in 1895 regretted that '[n]owadays a large number of vaidic [*sic*], homoeopathic and allopathic quacks have a magnificent field for the exercise of their powers, and many are their victims'.²⁰ Referring specifically to homoeopathy, these writings urged the government that 'there is no alternative to this vile injurious system until the Indian Government take due steps to stop it by medical Acts'.²¹

That homoeopathic malpractice remained a crucial reference for the debate around a Medical Registration Act is evident from medico-legal cases that adjudicated death allegedly caused by homoeopathic pills. An example at hand is the case involving the death of a Bengali woman, Shyrobee Raur, in the late 1880s. After lying dormant with the police department for a while, the case was brought before the coroner of Calcutta in May 1891 for a final verdict.²² The coroner delved into the details of the jury's findings on the circumstances attending the death following the administration of a homoeopathic drug by a charitable dispensary. No one was found conclusively guilty.²³ Nevertheless, the coroner used the excuse of this death and the attending jury report to submit a detailed 'proposal for passing an Act for the registration of qualified medical practitioners, with a view to put down quacks'.²⁴ The witness accounts in the case, which were taken at the coroner's court in June 1887, recorded that the two accused men – the owner of the Bowbazar Charitable Dispensary, Behary Loll Mullick, and his assistant Jogendra Loll Bose, who had administered the drug to the deceased – lacked any formal training in medicine whatsoever.²⁵ However, on

¹⁹ Anonymous Correspondent, 'India', *The Lancet*, 131, 3365 (25 February 1888), 399–400.

²⁰ Anonymous, 'Letter to the Editor, Correspondence: The Indian Systems of Medicine', *The Medical Reporter*, VI (16 August 1895), 125.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

²² From the coroner of Calcutta to the secretary to the government of Bengal, Medical Department, Municipal Department, Medical Branch, File Number A/15, Proceedings 1–5 B, May 1891 [WBSA].

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ From the coroner of Calcutta to the secretary to the government of Bengal, Judicial Department, Municipal Department Medical Branch, File Number A/15 2, Proceeding 46, September 1887 [WBSA].

²⁵ *Ibid.*

enquiry, both revealed that they considered themselves trained in homoeopathy as they possessed experience of curing patients. They stated that they had acquired their homoeopathic training by reading relevant books.²⁶ The owner, Behary Loll Mullick, particularly emphasised that although he was a clerk in a merchant office, he was simultaneously 'a homoeopathic practitioner for the past 15 years'.²⁷

The coroner's summary of the jury report, which was submitted to the secretary to the Judicial Department of the government of Bengal in June 1887, reveals that the jury unanimously held the opinion that,

from what has been said by the witness from the Bowbazar Homoeopathic Charitable Dispensary that, there is much risk at present, for the public from the indiscriminate practice of medicine by persons who are not qualified sufficiently to do so – we think that the time has arrived when the public should be protected by a Legislative Enactment such as the Medical Registration Act now in force in England.²⁸

While summarising the jury's opinion, the coroner further justified the importance of such a legislation by highlighting that the necessity of implementing a Medical Registration Act was inherent in the English Act itself. He argued that 'it might be fairly presumed that the interests of her Majesty's subjects in the vast Indian Empire were not excluded from those in the colony'.²⁹ The unregulated practice of homoeopathy as exemplified in the Shyrobee Raur case was referred to as an embarrassing 'scandal', as the coroner appealed for the 'gradual suppression of the growing scandal of men and women undertaking charlatanism and quackery so utterly unworthy of enlightened India under British rule'.³⁰

Of Humour, Trust and Bengali Fiction

While the colonial state contemplated the appropriate legal measures to control homoeopathy, the latter continued to attract the interest of a variety of Bengali authors. This literary attentiveness to homoeopathy continued uninterrupted well into the twentieth century. It surfaced in myriad genres of literature by several writers, including the reputed nineteenth-century playwrights Dwijendralal Ray and Girish Chandra Ghosh, as well as the anonymous writers of short *Battala* farces.³¹ At the turn of

²⁶ Ibid. ²⁷ Ibid. ²⁸ Ibid. ²⁹ Ibid. ³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ *Battala* texts appeared from the numerous small presses huddled close together in the narrow lanes and bylanes of the Battala area, a part of the teeming 'native town' in north Calcutta. Despite being regularly ridiculed by the rising literary gentry, these small presses did a brisk trade in cheap ephemeral pamphlet literature, which enjoyed a large and popular readership in lower middle-class urban and rural homes. This comprised almanacs, popular religious mythologies, sensational romances and dramas, erotic

the twentieth century, fiction involving homoeopathy spanned the two worlds of respectable *bhadralok*, upper-class literature, and that of 'low' literature which targeted the less-privileged sections of society.³² The figure of the homoeopathic physician appeared in dramas, as well as in short stories and novels written by widely read and esteemed Bengali authors such as Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, Rajshekhkar Basu (Parashuram), Tarashankar Bandopadhyay and Saradindu Bandopadhyay.

At first reading, the figure of the homoeopathic physician in these various literary forms appears to resist any overarching stereotype. The homoeopaths are presented in various moulds ranging from honest, charitable, well-meaning village practitioners to fraudulent, corrupt physicians smuggling cocaine in the guise of homoeopathic globules. While some stories are set in obscure *mofussil* locations where the practitioner is shown struggling to find a niche for himself, others are placed in the Calcutta mansions of the elite, acting as revered physicians to the affluent urban bourgeoisie. However, several texts concerning homoeopathy belonged to the growing contemporary genre of farces. Extant work shows the importance of farce as an important literary genre addressing social malaise through exaggerated situations, caricatures and laughter.³³ Other genres that involved homoeopathy, such as plays, short stories and novels, also frequently invoke what Sudipta Kaviraj has termed the tradition of 'literary humour' in Bengali literature.³⁴ Cumulatively these fictions generated social criticism, presented through the medium of humour, which took on a multiplicity of forms including outright fun, ridicule, sarcasm, irony or satire. A central social issue addressed in these fictions was the pathetic condition of medical relief in Bengal, and the inaccessibility and/or the inefficiency of the therapeutic options available to the common man. Homoeopaths in these texts are frequently mocked, while homoeopathy is often used as a euphemism to discuss larger

poems and songs and the like. Several scholars have written on the history, productions and impact of the *Battala* publications. For an exhaustive history of *Battala*, see Sripantha, *Battala* (Calcutta: Ananda, 1997). For the most recent exploration of *Battala* print culture, see Gautam Bhadra, *Nyara Battalay Jay Kawbar* (Kolkata: Chhatim Books, 2011).

³² For a discussion of the hierarchical layers of Bengali print in the nineteenth century between 'high' and 'low' literature, see Anindita Ghosh, 'Revisiting the "Bengal Renaissance": Literary Bengali and Low-Life Print in Colonial Calcutta', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37, 42 (2002), 4329–38.

³³ For an account of 'farce' as an important literary genre, see Anindita Ghosh, 'Revisiting the "Bengal Renaissance": Literary Bengali and Low-Life Print in Colonial Calcutta', pp. 4333–4.

³⁴ Sudipta Kaviraj, 'Laughter and Subjectivity: The Self-Ironical Tradition in Bengali Literature', *Modern Asian Studies*, 34, 2 (May 2000), 382.

problems associated with colonial modernity, including declining morality, excessive Anglicisation and the failing health of the Bengalis. Yet, in their repeated acts of reproaching the idiosyncrasies related to these practitioners, the authors hardly ever appear to condemn homoeopathy altogether. In fact, they seem at once to ridicule and celebrate homoeopathy. Their literary depictions exude an unmistakable sense of approval, of endorsing homoeopathy as a ubiquitous object of value and trust. In several narratives, homoeopathy comes across as the lesser evil in an otherwise corruptible regime of colonial rule and modern medicine. The stories are a testament to homoeopathy's necessary and valued presence, especially within Bengali households, while it could also be laughed at. In sharp contrast to the state's agnosticism, Bengali fiction exhibited a palpable trust towards homoeopathy, which was nonetheless expressed chiefly through the mode of humour.

Late nineteenth-century fictions often illustrated an increasing faith in homoeopathy over competing genres of medicine within the domestic sphere. An anonymous 1875 farce, *Daktarbabu (The Physician)*, elaborated the dilemma of a representative middle-class professional in choosing an appropriate remedy for his family.³⁵ The second scene detailed the thoughts of Nilkantha, one of the *bhadralok* protagonists of the farce, who after enumerating the various debilitating ailments plaguing his household resolved to turn to homoeopathy for help. In his words, 'the doctors and *kavirajes* have been of no help, so I will turn to homoeopathy this time'.³⁶ When discouraged from doing so, he turned to the readers to announce, 'whatever you might hold, I sincerely feel homoeopathy is hundred times better than *daktari* [vernacular term for western state medicine or allopathy]. Even if their drugs fail to cure, they at least never cause any harm. At the very least, they are good to taste, which is useful for children'.³⁷

A similar agnosticism towards all forms of medicine, with a growing proclivity towards homoeopathy, was reflected in the satirical play *Kritanter Bangadarshan (Visit of the King of Hell to Bengal)* that was put up at the reputed Minerva Theatre Hall in early twentieth-century Calcutta.³⁸ In a satirical gesture towards the medical scene of contemporary Bengal, the drama depicted the arrival of the mythical Yama, or the Hindu deity of death, in Bengal with his trusted associate Chitragupta. Ironically enough, on his arrival Yama was immediately infected with malaria through one of his own employees, stationed in

³⁵ Anonymous, *Daktarbabu (The Physician)* (Calcutta: Jogendra Ghosh, 1875), pp. 5–10.

³⁶ Ibid. ³⁷ Ibid., pp. 5–10.

³⁸ A detailed report on the play appeared in an editorial in a popular homoeopathy journal. See 'Editorial', *Homoeopathy Paricharak*, 1, 4 (July 1927), 226–7.

that region for the purpose of spreading the fatal disease. Yama vehemently turned down Chitragupta's suggestions of seeking medical relief from either a *kaviraj* or an allopath. He cited a long list of the near-innumerable pitfalls of using either ayurveda or allopathy. His bias in favour of homoeopathy became evident when he readily agreed to take medical aid from a homoeopath. Of homoeopathy, none other than Yama, the deity of death himself opined, 'if available please summon [a homoeopath] fast. Their drugs are good, no adulteration, moderate expense, no trouble gulping them, no fuss, and no façade of having supplementary food. Even if I am made to suffer flawed diagnosis, I will at least have sweet water to taste when I die'.³⁹

In parallel with acknowledging homoeopathy as a viable option in an otherwise impoverished field of options for medical relief, these literary texts evinced a complementary engagement with the irregularities associated with this form of medicine. A central character of Dwijendralal Ray's play *Tryhasparsha ba Sukhi Paribar* (*Triangular Impact or the Happy Family*) was a homoeopath.⁴⁰ A man of dubious qualifications, he kept referring to English texts of absurd nomenclature by way of showing his grasp of the western 'science' of homoeopathy.⁴¹ The drama depicted a humorous account of the ill-trained practitioner managing to infiltrate the household of the prosperous Calcutta elite as a trusted 'family physician'. In the course of the drama, he perpetrated various corrupt acts, including faking his own qualifications, as well as issuing a false death certificate in favour of his patron's wife, that led to the climax of the narrative. However, in a perverse sense his acts of medical fraud, in fact, help expose other rampant social evils like adultery and marital deception.

Homoeopathic physicians of similarly questionable character and qualifications were brought to life by other contemporary authors. The farce *Daktarbabu* depicted how a physician, Manmatha, violated the trust bestowed on him by a middle-class family as he intimately examined Hem, their daughter.⁴² Girish Chandra Ghosh's drama *Haranidhi* (*Lost Gem*), similarly, recorded the fate of a character who was advised to turn to homoeopathy after his ill character was exposed, on the argument that it would be compatible with his deceitful temperament.⁴³ The drama *Manpyathy* was another farce staged in 1924, based on the

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 226–7.

⁴⁰ Dwijendralal Ray, *Tryhasparsha ba Sukhi Paribar* (*Triangular Impact or the Happy Family*), 2nd edition (Calcutta: Surdham, 1915).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 19–21. ⁴² Anonymous, *Daktarbabu* (Calcutta, 1875), pp. 38–45.

⁴³ This is quoted in K. N. Basu, 'Homoeopathic Upadhi Samasya' (Problem of Homoeopathic Degrees), *Hahnemann*, 9, 10 (1926), 547.

1923 short story 'Chikitsha Sankat' ('Crisis of Treatment') by the famous humourist Rajshekhar Basu or Parashuram.⁴⁴ The story was later turned into a film, as Fig. 1.1 shows. The play *Monpyathy*, authored by the native landed elite the Maharaja of Kassimbazar, was inaugurated at his own residence in 1924 before being staged at various public theatres across Calcutta.⁴⁵ Both the short story and the stage adaptation captured the contemporary society's wariness of the alleged incompetence of various forms of medicine, including homoeopathy. While the play was a sarcastic comment on the general inefficiency of modern medicine, the figure of the homoeopath was shown to be full of idiosyncrasies relating to his art of diagnosis. He was depicted as being so obsessed with consulting western texts and studying his patient's symptoms that he failed to arrive at any conclusion regarding the possible medication. Engrossed in a bitter polemic against allopaths, he only recommended drugs to purge the body of 'allopathic poison', before demanding a staggering fee for such futile consultation.

Notwithstanding their dubious qualifications and idiosyncrasies, some characters comparable to the homoeopath in 'Chikitsha Sankat' were portrayed with great empathy. The character of Priyanath Mukherjee in Sarat Chandra's 1920 novel *Bamuner Meye* (*Daughter of a Brahmin*) and that of physician Srinath in Tarashankar Bandopadhyay's 1934 short story *Srinath Daktar* are unforgettable tragic heroes of Bengali literature who practised homoeopathy to their doom.⁴⁶ Amateurish, well-meaning and struggling, both were depicted as obsessed with the 'science' of homoeopathy in a strangely futile way. Srinath's burning passion to produce newer homoeopathic drugs by experimenting at home resulted in the unfortunate death of his wife.⁴⁷ Set in early twentieth-century rural Bengal, the character of Priyanath Mukherjee rendered by Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay was a poor, rustic physician popular among his fellow villagers.⁴⁸ However, the villagers often avoided him because of his copy-book commitment to Hahnemann's canons, that sometimes got in the way of his pragmatism in diagnosis. They were shown preferring his daughter Sandhya, who dispensed homoeopathic drugs from home, as a complete amateur. At the climax of the novel, Priyanath was brutally implicated in a caste-

⁴⁴ Srish Chandra Nandi, *Monpyathy* (Kasimbazar: Publisher not cited, 1931).

⁴⁵ Srish Chandra Nandi, 'Dedication page', *Monpyathy* (Kasimbazar: Publisher not cited, 1931).

⁴⁶ See Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, 'Bamun er Meye' ('Daughter of a Brahmin'), *Sarat Sahitya Samagra*, Vol I (Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 1920/1986), pp. 979–1013; and Tarashankar Bandopadhyay, 'Srinath Daktar', *Tarashankar er Galpaguchha* (Kolkata: Sahitya Samsad, 1934/1990), pp. 373–83.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* ⁴⁸ See Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, 'Bamun er Meye', pp. 979–1013.



Fig. 1.1 Poster of a film adaptation of the story 'Chikitsa Sankat' ('Crisis of Treatment') by Rajshekhar Basu, produced by the Calcutta Cine Corporation in 1953. Reproduced from the collection of the Archives of the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta.

conflict in his village, which related to a secret illegal abortion with which the village landlord entrusted him.⁴⁹ However, implicit in the very act of requesting a secret abortion from Priyanath is an inherent trust – both in the character of the homoeopathic physician as well as in his therapeutics. Homoeopaths such as Priyanath were portrayed as harmless, ubiquitous figures who could be trusted with the inner, private and feminine aspects of society. The characters in the novel exhibit a deep-seated conviction in the homoeopathic physician's abilities to perform covertly, effectively and faithfully.

Such trust seemed to resonate with Yama's proclamation in the farce *Kritanter Bangadarshan* that homoeopathic drugs, even if not effective, can never be harmful. These practitioners prescribing the most gentle, sweet tasting, insignificant, white globules were somehow considered incapable of causing any significant social harm. They were considered the gentlest and most trustworthy characters, who could easily be victimised at the hands of the more powerful. In the early 1940s author Saradindu Bandopadhyay can be seen working with a well-entrenched understanding of the ubiquitous, trustworthy homoeopath when he introduced his famous Bengali detective series, starring the sleuth Byomkesh Bakshi, with the story *Satvanneshi* (*Searcher of Truth*).⁵⁰ The climactic revelation in the plot that the helpful, trusted, sweet-natured, amateur homoeopath Anukul *daktar* was in fact the leader of an infamous drug-peddling gang smuggling cocaine, was therefore meant to shock the readers.

The recurrence of the figure of the homoeopathic physician in myriad genres of Bengali fiction, thus, evoked the simultaneous effects of overt ridicule and covert appreciation. These fictional texts seem to castigate homoeopathy for its many slippages while equally celebrating it as a pervasive, ubiquitous and trustworthy practice. Frequently presented as humour, these stories were directed at exposing the everyday plight of colonial life. Homoeopathy remained at the centre of many of these plots as an object both of ridicule and value. Such depictions suggest revealing tensions as much in the status of homoeopathy in Bengal as in the genre of Bengali satirical prose itself, which often highlighted the importance of its subjects only by making fun of them.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1006–7.

⁵⁰ See Saradindu Bandopadhyay, 'Satvanneshi' ('Searcher of Truth'), *Byomkesh Omnibus*, Vol I (Calcutta: Ananda Publishers, 1932/2000), pp. 13–32.

The Competing Companies

Differing in approach from the conventional and coercive institution characterised by the colonial bureaucracy, the cause of homoeopathy was nonetheless being taken up by a range of commercial enterprises advertising themselves as trusted authorities on homoeopathy. These firms combined multiple roles in themselves: pharmacies dealing with the importing and selling of homoeopathic drugs, publishing houses for homoeopathic literature including journals, and often, also dispensaries staffed with physicians. Most advertised themselves as 'homoeopathic chemists, druggists, booksellers and publishers'.⁵¹ I focus here on six protagonists prominent among such enterprises, and their firms: Berigny and Company owned by the physician Rajendralal Datta; the Pals of the famous Batakrishna Pal and Company, who owned the Great Homoeopathic Hall⁵²; the Sircars headed by the famous physician Mahendralal Sircar; Pratap Chandra Majumdar along with his son Jitendranath Majumdar, who owned the Majumdar's Pharmacy; the M. Bhattacharya and Company, headed by Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya; and finally, Prafulla Chandra Bhar and his sons, who owned the Hahnemann Publishing Company. These were among the most prominent business concerns dealing in homoeopathy. Situated at 12, Lalbazar Street and owned by Rajendralal Datta (1818–89) and his nephew Ramesh Chandra Datta, Berigny and Company's Calcutta Homoeopathic Pharmacy was reputedly 'the first and the oldest' homoeopathic pharmacy in India.⁵³ The Pharmacy was built by Rajendralal Datta in memory of the French homoeopath Dr Berigny (see Fig. 1.2), who practised in early nineteenth-century Calcutta and initiated Datta into homoeopathy. The name of Rajendralal Datta, who studied for some years at the Calcutta Medical College, deserves a special mention as he influenced several Bengali luminaries including Mahendralal Sircar to take up homoeopathy.⁵⁴

In addition to publishing literature and supplying drugs, some of the homoeopathic firms were subsequently involved in establishing formal institutions like schools and colleges. This twentieth-century development will be explored in Chapter 5. Between them, these

⁵¹ 'Advertisement of Lahiri and Company', *Indian Homoeopathic Review*, 21, 2 (February 1912), page number not cited.

⁵² In some English advertisements of the period, the name was also spelt as Butto Krishto Paul.

⁵³ See Sarat Chandra Ghosh, 'Dr. T. Berigny', *Hahnemann*, 22, 4 (1939), 198.

⁵⁴ Others influenced by Rajendralal Datta's homoeopathic treatment are said to be the eminent social reformer Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, and the scholar and leader Raja Radhakanta Deb.

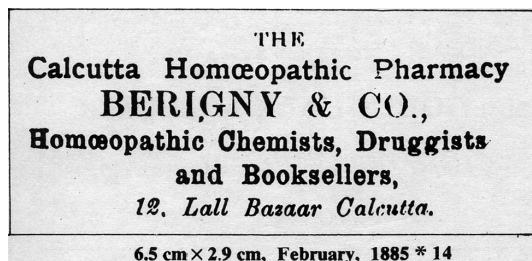


Fig. 1.2 Advertisement by Berigny and Company in English newspaper *The Statesman*, 1885. R. Ray Choudhuri, *Early Calcutta Advertisements, 1875–1925: A Selection from the Statesman* (Bombay: Nachiketa Publications, 1992), 400. Credit: *The Statesman*, Kolkata.

firms edited the most important journals dedicated exclusively to homoeopathy. Interestingly, as Fig. 1.3 suggests, most of these companies were run by physicians across generations. Early twentieth-century accounts of homoeopathy also highlight these physicians and their enterprise as crucial to the development of the doctrine not only in Bengal but in India more generally.⁵⁵ These accounts noted these enterprises as being invested in homoeopathy as a ‘family’. Writing about the Majumdar family, author Sarat Chandra Ghosh noted, ‘Dr. Pratap Chandra Majumdar is dead but will live long through his works and accomplishments. Dr. Jitendra Nath Majumdar is the eldest son of late Dr. P. C. Majumdar ... he is an eminent homoeopath and has kept up the traditions of his father and their house remarkably well.’⁵⁶

However, these six concerns were in no way alone in a growing market for homoeopathic drugs and publications. The leading firms this book focuses on need to be situated within the plethora of other Bengali firms advertising themselves as ‘dealers in homoeopathic drugs and books’. The purpose is to get a sense of the crowd of companies associated with homoeopathic business, and to note some of the normative codes of their business operation, as well as the material culture of their practice culled primarily from their extensive advertisements.⁵⁷ Lahiri and

⁵⁵ See, for instance, S. C. Ghosh, *Life of Mahendralal Sircar*, 1st edition (Calcutta: Oriental Publishing Company, 1909).

⁵⁶ S. C. Ghosh, *Life of Mahendralal Sircar*, 2nd edition (Calcutta: Hahenmann Publishing Company, 1935), pp. 67–72.

⁵⁷ Medical advertisements as an important aspect of the commercialised print culture around South Asian science and medicine is slowly being opened up as an area of study. For some initial explorations, see Madhuri Sharma, ‘Creating a Consumer:

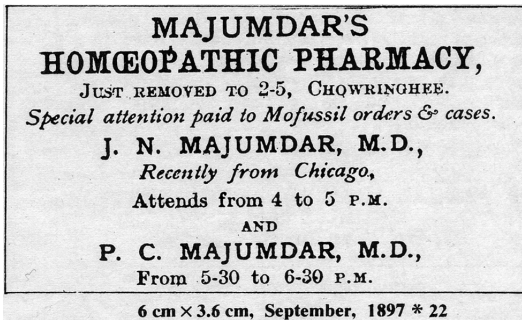


Fig. 1.3 Advertisement by Majumdar's Homoeopathic Pharmacy in the English newspaper *The Statesman*, 1897. R. Ray Choudhuri, *Early Calcutta Advertisements, 1875–1925: A Selection from the Statesman* (Bombay: Nachiketa Publications, 1992), 400. Credit: *The Statesman*, Kolkata.

Company (14 and 35, College Street), B. Datta and Company (Chitpur Road), Chatterjee and Company (121/1 Bowbazar Street), C. Ringer and Company (4, Dalhousie Square East), Carr and Company (36, Cornwallis Street), L. V. Mitter and company (1 Upper Circular Road), C. Kyle and Company (150, Cornwallis Street), Messrs K. Dutta and Company (21, Bowbazar Street), King and Company (Harrison Road), Sarkar and Banerjee (110, College Street), B. K. Pal and Company (12, Bonfield Lane), N. K. Majumdar and Company (Clive Street) were just a few of the range of companies that recurrently published their homoeopathic products.

In his *Life of Mahendralal Sircar* written in 1909, physician Sarat Chandra Ghosh noted the presence of around 200 such indigenous concerns doing 'excellent business' in and around Calcutta.⁵⁸ Thriving primarily along the hub of north Calcutta, most had branches all over the city and also in the *mofussil*. Lahiri and Company was a typical homoeopathic concern, owned by physician Jagadish Lahiri and later by his son, the physician Satyaranjan Lahiri. An advertisement for the Company, published in a book authored

Exploring Medical Advertisements in Colonial India' in Mark Harrison and Biswamoy Pati (eds.), *The Social History of Health and Healing in Colonial India* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 213–28. However, the fragile condition of medical advertisements, due to poor preservation, makes it difficult to recreate the narrative around them.

⁵⁸ S. C. Ghosh, *Life of Mahendralal Sircar*, 1st edition (Calcutta: Oriental Publishing Company, 1909), p. 101.

by the founder Jagadish Lahiri in 1907, mentioned several other branches in addition to the main office in College Street.⁵⁹ Apart from the branches in Burrabazar and in Shobha Bazaar in the north of the city, there was also a Bhawanipore branch in the south, as well as in Bankipore and Patna which were advertised as the *mofussil* branches.⁶⁰

There was a sense of stiff competition between these companies in trying to attract a large body of consumers. The western roots of homoeopathy were carefully played up in the way these firms marketed themselves and their products. But the chief index of competition remained quality – both of the drugs they dispensed and the books they published. The advertisements often made a strong case for the importance of ‘trust’ in selecting a pharmaceutical store, especially relating to homoeopathy.⁶¹ Most of them emphasised the ‘accurate’ mode of preparation as crucial for the efficacy of the drugs. A few factors were represented in myriad advertisements as constitutive of the purity and authenticity of homoeopathic medicine. Since these firms engaged in the autonomous manufacture of drugs only much later (Hahnemann Publishing Company were one of the earliest manufacturers who began producing Indian pills around 1916), most of the late nineteenth-century advertisements emphasised the process of importation. The country of origin, the way these drugs were being imported, their freshness, local packaging by the companies, the credibility of the physicians involved in the final preparation, the potency of the drugs, their prices and how long the drugs lasted, all converged in the rhetoric around what constituted ‘pure’ and ‘good quality’ homoeopathic drugs.

As Fig. 1.4 reveals, the drugs were chiefly claimed to be imported from England, America or Germany. Each company vouched for the efficacy of their own products and as opposed to the ones imported by the rest. A typical advertisement of C. Ringer and Company in the journal *Krishak* read, ‘[i]f you really want your homoeopathic medicine to work, then refrain from using the cheap German variety and kindly use the fresh and genuine English medicine that is available in our store’.⁶²

⁵⁹ ‘Advertisement of Lahiri and Company’, in Jagadish Chandra Lahiri, *Homoeopathy r Bipokkhe Apotti Khondon (Negation of Allegations against Homoeopathy)* (Calcutta: Lahiri and Company, 1907), page number not cited.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Batakrishna Pal, ‘Preface’, *Homoeopathic Mowt e Saral Griha Chikitsa (Simple Domestic Treatment According to Homoeopathy)*, 7th edition (Calcutta: Great Homoeopathic Hall, 1926), page number not cited.

⁶² ‘Advertisement of C. Ringer and Company’, in *Krishak*, 11, 1 (1910), page number not cited.

5.5 cm × 9.5 cm, June, 1925 * 8

THE BENGAL HOMŒPATHIC PHARMACY
L. V. MITTER & CO.,
1, UPPER CIRCULAR ROAD,
CALCUTTA,

WHOLESALE & RETAIL | HOMŒOPATHIC | CHEMISTS & BOOKSELLERS;
IMPORTERS

From London, America, and Germany
HAVE OBTAINED IN INDIA
The Highest Award of Honor at the
CALCUTTA INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION,
And hold the Uniform Testimony
Of all the well-known Practitioners of Calcutta and
elsewhere, for the excellence of their Preparations
The largest and the most varied stock of Homœo-
pathic Medicines and Books in Calcutta.
CATALOGUES FREE ON APPLICATION.

6.5 cm × 5.3 cm, February, 1885 * 9

Fig. 1.4 Advertisement of L. V. Mitter and Co claiming to import the best homoeopathic drugs from London, America and Germany, in the English newspaper, *The Statesman*, February 1885. R. Ray Choudhuri, *Early Calcutta Advertisements, 1875–1925: A Selection from the Statesman* (Bombay: Nachiketa Publications, 1992), p. 400. Credit: *The Statesman*, Kolkata.

Invoking the supposedly reputed western firms that supplied medicine to these stores added weight to their campaigns. Thus the Great American Homoeopathic Store run by Carr and Company, and the Homoeopathic Medical Hall run by Messrs K. Dutta and Company, claimed to sell genuine American drugs imported from the firm Boericke and Tafel.⁶³ Meanwhile the College Street-based Maitra and Company claimed their drugs were imported from the reputed London firm Gouff and Sons, which was ‘the suppliers of

⁶³ ‘Advertisement of Carr and Company’, in *Chikitsa Sammilani* New Series, 2, 1 (1912), page number not cited.

drugs to the London Homoeopathic Hospital and was the best homoeopathic pharmacy in London'.⁶⁴ Boericke and Tafel was described in a K. Dutta and Company advertisement as the 'great American homoeopathic chemists and the most eminent firm in the world'.⁶⁵ Claiming to import the 'original potency' drugs directly from Messrs Boericke and Tafel, another north Calcutta-based company named the Homoeopathic Serving Society advertised themselves as the suppliers of the longest-lasting homoeopathic drugs.⁶⁶ Arguing that drugs from their store would remain effective until the last drop or the last globule in each bottle, they claimed that 'it was not the case with drugs imported from any other company or those prepared in any other way'.⁶⁷

Apart from the source of importation, the quality of the drugs was likewise argued to vary with the skill of the physicians who handled the final preparation. Companies regularly vouched for the expertise they offered in their pharmacies, as Fig. 1.5 suggests. Citing the experience and credibility of their physicians, a typical advertisement from the firm Sarkar and Banerjee challenged the potential buyers, saying 'on the first use itself one immediately gets to understand the difference between the available medicine in the market, and that of our own, prepared in a far superior way'.⁶⁸

The companies asserted their importance in the realm of drug packaging as well. Most of the pharmacies owned by these companies sold drugs in several sets of self-contained boxes. The Homoeopathic Laboratory run by B. Datta and Company regularly put up elaborate descriptions of medical chests they had for sale.⁶⁹ The range was extensive, both in terms of the price and the size of the boxes. There were boxes priced between Rs 3 and Rs 100, containing twelve bottles of medicine to eighty bottles. The advertisements contained descriptions of boxes including their exact dimensions and the material used in their making.⁷⁰ In addition, different advertisements addressed various

⁶⁴ 'Advertisement of Maitra and Company' in Bipin Bihari Maitra, *Diseases of Children and Its Homoeopathic Treatment* (Calcutta: Maitra and Company, 1887), page number not cited.

⁶⁵ 'Advertisement of Messrs K. Dutta and Company', *Calcutta Journal of Medicine*, 10 (April 1882), page number not cited.

⁶⁶ 'Advertisement of Homoeopathic Serving Society', in *Homoeopathy Pracharak*, 1, 5 (1926), page number not cited.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ 'Advertisement of Sarkar and Banerjee', *Bigyan*, 2, 9 (1913), page number not cited.

⁶⁹ 'Advertisement of Homoeopathic Laboratory', Basanta Kumar Dutta (ed.), *Datta's Homoeopathic Series in Bengalee*, 1, 1 (January 1876), page number not cited.

⁷⁰ Batakrisna Pal, 'Preface', *Homoeopathic Mowt e Saral Griha Chikitsa (Simple Domestic Treatment According to Homoeopathy)*, 1926, page number not cited.

INDIAN GLOBULES
(*First Indian Manufacture*)

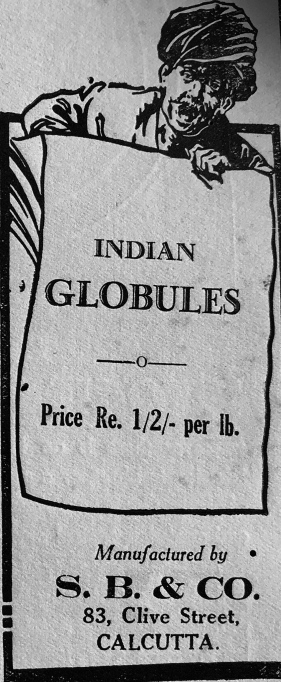
**Made from
PURE CANE SUGAR**

To compete with
FOREIGN PRODUCTS
in all respects.

Opinions of leading Homoeopaths :—

(i) I have been using the globules manufactured by Messrs. S. B. & Co. of 83, Clive Street, Calcutta—an indigenous production—and I have found same highly satisfactory. *They are not inferior to any other globules of foreign origin* and should therefore have the unstinted support of all patriotic Indian concerns dealing in these goods.

(Sd.) N. M. Choudhury,
M. D. (U. S. A.)
(Principal, The Bengal Allen
Homœo. Medical College).



**INDIAN
GLOBULES**

—○—

Price Re. 1/2/- per lb.

Manufactured by
S. B. & CO.
83, Clive Street,
CALCUTTA.

(ii) I am glad to certify that the globules prepared or manufactured by S. B. & Co. of Clive Street, Calcutta are in no way inferior to foreign products. I recommend these to the general public and hope they will have large sale. As for my part I shall use the globules in my practice.

(Sd.) T. N. Palit.

Fig. 1.5 Advertisement of India-made globules by S. B. and Company claiming excellence, *Hahnemannian Gleanings*, November 1935. Credit: Hahnemann Publishing Company Pvt Limited, Kolkata.

constituencies of consumers: householders, women, homoeopathic practitioners and cholera patients. Some companies even included information regarding the security of their homoeopathic chests, detailing arrangements for locking them with keys.⁷¹

Yet another index of self-promotion was the quality of the firms' publications. Most of these companies owned printing presses and published homoeopathic works authored by their owners as well as by other physicians associated with their firms. These publications included monographs, *materia medica*, stand-alone or serially published manuals and journals. B. Datta and Company, for instance, published a series of manuals: *Datta's Family Guide*, *Datta's Homoeopathic Series in Bengalee*, and *Datta's Series Griha Chikitsa*. The print run of a particular book counted as an obvious indicator of its popularity. Advertisements by Lahiri and Company included exhaustive lists of books authored by the owner physician Jagadish Chandra Lahiri and published by the company.⁷² The name of each book was followed by quotations from generous newspaper reviews. An advertisement quoted the newspaper *Bangabasi*, praising the book *Griha Chikitsa (Domestic Treatment)* mentioning, 'this book has had five editions. This statistic is enough in itself. There is hardly any need for the authors of such books to hunt for further publicity as they have already justified the reputation of their publication'.⁷³

Another important standard for judging the quality of the texts were the names of their original authors and places of publication. Books were regularly advertised as compilations from various important western authorities on the subject. As with the drugs, the quality of the books also relied on the names of the western authors whose works were being translated and compiled. I will be looking into the extensive practices, politics and impact of these homoeopathic translations in Chapter 3, I will note here, however, that accessing and translating authentic European texts remained a hallmark of the achievements of these local companies. Thus, the obituary of the second-generation owner of C. Ringer and Company, Dr Kishorimohan Bandopadhyay, described the company as a trendsetter in translating the works of eminent western scholars.⁷⁴ This obituary recited a list of books that

⁷¹ 'Advertisement of Carr and Company', in *Chikitsa Sammilani* New Series, 2, 1 (1912), page number not cited.

⁷² 'Advertisement of Lahiri and Company', in Jagadish Chandra Lahiri, *Homoeopathy r Bipokkhe Apotti Khondon (Negation of Allegations against Homoeopathy)* (Calcutta: Lahiri and Company, 1907), page number not cited.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Sarat Chandra Ghosh, 'Kishorimohan Bandopadhyay', *Hahnmann*, 23, 12 (1940), 728–9.

it claimed the company began translating long before others in the field. Some of them were *Farrington's Materia Medica*, *Hughes' Pharmacodynamics*, *Nash's How to Take the Case and Find the Similium*, *Hughes' Principles and Practice of Homoeopathy*.⁷⁵ Often, such books were advertised as more than a straightforward translation of any single English work. For instance, B. K. Pal and Company, while advertising one of its publications *Chikitsa Darpan (Mirror of Treatment)*, especially underlined that it contained the views and experiences of 'not one, but a range of English physicians including Tanner, Johnson, Roberts, Bear and Herring'.⁷⁶ The company claimed that this made the book count as one of the best works of medicine in the Bengali language.⁷⁷ The links that the advertising companies maintained with international homoeopathic journals were also carefully drawn to the public's attention. Thus, favourable reviews of *Datta's Homoeopathic Series* in the London-based journals *The Homoeopathic World* and *Homoeopathic Review* were quoted extensively in the promotional advertisements of the series.⁷⁸

As has already been suggested, the keen sense of competition between the companies hinged fundamentally on two issues: the quality of the drugs supplied through their pharmacies and the literature they published. Developing each of these aspects required the companies to be in regular contact with the West. Success in any enterprise involving homoeopathy apparently relied on the capacity to keep up with the latest developments in western therapeutic knowledge. A covert implication of all the advertisements was the service they were rendering in bringing these advanced western medical ideas to India. In an 1876 marketing drive, B. Datta and Company included reviews from the newspaper *Bharat Sangskarak* in their advertisement, which declared, 'Basanta Datta is not only involved in medical business with homoeopathy. He is deeply concerned about popularising this useful medical doctrine for the common people of this country.'⁷⁹ An editorial article of the journal *Hahnemann*, edited by B. Datta and Company, hence proclaimed,

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ 'Advertisement of Batakrishna Pal and Company', in Batakrishna Pal, *Homoeopathic Mowt e Saral Griha Chikitsa* (Simple Domestic Treatment According to Homoeopathy), 7th edition (Calcutta: Great Homoeopathic Hall, 1926), page number not cited.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Basanta Kumar Dutta (ed.), 'Review of Datta's Homoeopathic Series' in *Datta's Homoeopathic Series in Bengalee*, 5, 6 (May-June 1876), promotional advertisement at the end.

⁷⁹ Basanta Kumar Dutta (ed.), 'Review of Datta's Homoeopathic Series' in *Datta's Homoeopathic Series in Bengalee*, 3, 3 (March 1876), cover page.

Discovered in 1793, the homoeopathic doctrine is already far ahead of the other prevalent doctrines in the west. Not only one – almost all the civilised races are gracefully embracing this useful form of treatment. *Hahnemann* (the journal) is the Bengali messenger of homoeopathy . . . we can assert with pride and happiness that our efforts are bearing fruit. Homoeopathy is gaining popularity even among the fallen races of this conquered land.⁸⁰

The companies claimed the credit not only of importing the latest medical innovations to India, but also of distributing them fairly beyond urban locations into the remote countryside. Most advertisements highlighted the firm's service to the consumers based in the *mofussils*: they diligently recorded how their drugs and books were sent in transit, and how the cost of extra postage, and advanced subscriptions, was received from their *mofussil* customers.⁸¹ An advertisement for the Great American Homoeopathic Store read, 'we invite the attention of mofussil doctors to our stock of genuine homoeopathic medicines, indented direct from Messrs Boerike and Tafel, U.S.A'.⁸²

Within this crowd of companies and their proprietors, the activities of Rajendralal Dutta, Batakrishna Pal, Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya, Pratap Chandra Majumdar, Mahendralal Sircar and Prafulla Chandra Bhar stand out. With their regular investments in homoeopathic publications and drugs over generations, these protagonists remained central in the production and dissemination of homoeopathic knowledge in Bengal. Between them, they edited and published the most widely circulating and enduring homoeopathic journals, including *Indian Homoeopathic Review* (edited and published by the Majumdars), *Homoeopathic Herald* and *Homoeopathy Chikitsha* (published by M. Bhattacharya and Company), *Hahnemann* and *The Hahnemannian Gleanings* (published by Hahnemann Publishing Company). Most important among these was the *Calcutta Journal of Medicine*, edited and published by Mahendralal Sircar and his son Amritalal Sircar, uninterruptedly from 1867 to at least 1913. In its heyday under Mahendralal, limited copies were sent for sale in London as is evident from Mahendralal's diary entries of 22 January 1874.⁸³ Besides, the Sircars were associated with some of the most prominent pharmacies dealing in homoeopathic drugs. In their publications, these entrepreneurs frequently endorsed one another as conducting the most credible

⁸⁰ 'Editorial: Hahnemann er Borsho Bridhhi' ('Growth of Hahnemann over the Years'), *Hahnemann*, 3,1 (Baishakh 1885), 4.

⁸¹ 'Advertisement of Datta's Homoeopathic Series', in *Datta's Homoeopathic Series in Bengalee*, 1, 1 (January 1876), page number not cited.

⁸² 'Advertisement of The Great American Homoeopathic Store', in *Indian Homoeopathic Review*, 19 (October 1910), page number not cited.

⁸³ Arun Kumar Biswas (ed.), *Gleanings of the Past and the Science Movement: In the Diaries of Drs. Mahendralal and Amritalal Sircar* (Kolkata: Asiatic Society, 2000), p. 16.

business around homoeopathy. For instance, an editorial article in the journal *Hahnemannian Gleanings* published by the Hahnemann Publishing Company identified the 'Hahnemann Publishing Company (of Prafulla Chandra Bhar), the Economic Pharmacy (Mahesh Bhattacharya) and one or two other pharmacies' as the 'pioneers of introducing neat, genuine and rightly prepared homoeopathic remedies ... in India'.⁸⁴ It contrasted the position of these reputed pharmacies with the numerous smaller ones that indulged in various forms of practices which were 'tantamount to a pure professional misconduct'.⁸⁵ Emphasis was also laid on the pitfalls of unnecessary rivalry between one another. The secret to successful business was shown to be reliance on mutual help and collaboration. The same editorial further noted, '[h]armony should be the basic principle upon which true friendship and good business can last and flourish. Selfishness, greed, enmity, rivalry and mutual vilification do away with and undo that which it took years to build up'.⁸⁶

'One Cannot Accumulate Wealth Without Trade and Business'

Printing and publishing comprised a central aspect of the enterprises led by the six foremost homoeopathic protagonists. Along with homoeopathy, most of these firms also indulged in publications on themes not exclusively related to medicine. A frequently visited theme by these entrepreneur-physicians in their non-medical publication was the importance of business.⁸⁷ In addition, the owners of these enterprises published a number of biographies and a few autobiographies. These detailed their thoughts and ideologies, which emphasised the utility of generating wealth. They were unanimous in underlining the necessity of business and entrepreneurship in earning money. Through their twin emphases on wealth and business, these texts promoted a culture and ethic of entrepreneurship. In his book '*Byabshayee*' (literally meaning *Businessman*) Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya suggested a distinct hierarchy of professions, observing, '[o]ne can never be rich without doing business. One gets to earn the most through business. Next (in hierarchy) is the income through industry, then agriculture, then salaried service or *chakri*. The least income is incurred through begging'.⁸⁸ Jitendranath

⁸⁴ 'Editorial: New Year's Retrospection and Introspection', *The Hahnemannian Gleanings*, 4, 1 (1933), 4.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7. ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁸⁷ Jitendranath Majumdar, *Arther Sandhan (Pursuit of Wealth)*, 1932, p. 116.

⁸⁸ Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya, *Byabshayee (Businessman)*, 1905, p. 8.

Majumdar (who sometimes published as J. N. Majumdar) also noted in his text *Arther Sandhan (Pursuit of Wealth)*, 'one cannot accumulate wealth without engaging in trade and business'.⁸⁹

The texts charted the importance of wealth at various levels of social life. First was the exclusively individualistic domain of the maintenance and well-being of the household. Narrating the life and achievements of his physician father, Jitendranath Majumdar recounted how Pratap Chandra Majumdar was forced to spend almost the whole of his 'princely income' on the marriage of his daughters as well as the education of his sons and sons-in-law, all of whom studied in England or in America.⁹⁰ He noted with regret that familial obligations exhausted nearly all of his father's savings and deterred him from engaging in substantial acts of charity.⁹¹ As a consequence, at his death, the famous physician could barely leave anything more than his immovable assets. Jitendranath noted how his father would often recall his initial brushes with poverty in early life, concluding that 'wealth is the most desired thing in life!'⁹²

The importance of wealth was also discussed in relation to social respectability. Such texts often reflected upon the links between independent enterprise, however small, and social respect. Contrary to the dominant historiographical understanding of the late nineteenth-century association between education, salaried jobs and respectability, these authors registered an emphatic case for enterprise as an ideal way to garner social respect.⁹³ At the very beginning of his instructive 1905 monograph *Byabshayee (Businessman)*, which ran into several editions,⁹⁴ Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya engaged in a long discussion of business and social status. He lashed out against the Bengali perception that business had lower social status.⁹⁵ Bhattacharya referred to laws and customs from ancient *shastras* to argue that the traditional trading and business castes, i.e. the Baisyas, historically commanded prestigious social standing. He contended that, far from considering business socially denigrating, both the ancient lawmaker Manu and the Hindu Puranas considered the Baisyas (the traditional business caste) socially at par even

⁸⁹ Jitendranath Majumdar, *Arther Sandhan (Pursuit of Wealth)*, 1932, p. 116.

⁹⁰ J. N. Majumdar, 'Dr. Pratap Chandra Majumdar MD', *Hahnemann*, 23, 8 (1940), p. 451.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* ⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 452–3.

⁹³ See Srish Chandra Talapatra, *Mahesh Chandra Charitkatha (Life of Mahesh Chandra)* (Calcutta: Economic Press, 1946), pp. 120–1.

⁹⁴ *Byabshayee* was written and first published by Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya in 1905. It had at least four later editions, the last one being published in 1921. The prefaces to the various editions proclaimed that the purpose of the tract was to introduce potential beginners to the fundamentals of business and entrepreneurship.

⁹⁵ Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya, *Byabshayee (Businessman)*, 1905, pp. 2–6.

with the Brahmins in certain contexts.⁹⁶ He pointed out, further, that conventional synonyms for 'businessman' in the Bengali language, including 'mahajan', 'uttamarna' and 'sadhu', were all epithets indicating respect in society.⁹⁷ Indeed, the biography of protagonist Batakrishna Pal titled *Sadhu Batakrishna Pal (The Saintly Batakrishna Pal)* dwelt extensively upon the etymology of the epithet 'sadhu'.⁹⁸ His biographer invoked precolonial Bengali authoritative texts such as the *Mangal Kabyas* and the iconic mythic merchant figure of Chand Saudagar from *Manasa Mangal*.⁹⁹ He pointed out that the rich Gandhabanik businessmen in medieval times were traditionally referred to as 'sadhu' or 'saint'.¹⁰⁰ The biography characterised Batakrishna as belonging to the same Gandhabanik trading caste as the venerated Chand Saudagar, arguing that in ancient and medieval Bengal the epithet 'sadhu' was reserved for successful businessmen. Further, the author expressed his understanding of the contemporary connotation of the word 'sadhu' in the Bengali vocabulary, arguing that it stood for pious, religious men of impeccable character, who dedicated their lives to spiritual salvation or social good.¹⁰¹ He insisted that these associations with the word encompassed past references to great businessmen who had shown remarkable integrity of character, honesty and dignity in conducting business.¹⁰²

Advocating the importance of enterprise, Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya suggested a distinct hierarchy between income from landed, agrarian properties and that from business. He expressed deep respect for the erstwhile class of landed gentry – the *zamindars* and *talukdars* – and appreciated their benevolence in patronising men of knowledge and letters through the gift of tax-free or '*brahmottar*' lands.¹⁰³ At the same time, he resisted the idea of acquiring landed property for himself. His biography noted his standard reply to all well-wishers advising him to buy landed assets: 'buying

⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 3–4. ⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Gopal Chandra Mukhopadhyay, *Sadhu Batakrishna Pal (The Saintly Batakrishna Pal)*, Vol II (Calcutta: Butto Krishto Paul, 1919), pp. 243–8.

⁹⁹ *Mangal Kabyas*, or 'Poem of Benediction', is a genre of Hindu narrative poetry, didactic and religious, composed roughly between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries, notably comprising narratives of indigenous deities of rural Bengal. The *Mangal Kabyas* are typically dedicated to promoting the worship of particular deities: mostly local, Bengali folk deities like Manasa, Candi or Dharma Thakur. For recent work on this body of texts, see David Curley, *Poetry and History: Bengali Mangal Kabya and Social Change in Precolonial Bengal* (Delhi: Chronicle Books, 2008). Here, the particular reference in Pal's biography is to the story *Mansamangal*, which revolves around the snake goddess Manasa.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 244–7. ¹⁰¹ Ibid. ¹⁰² Ibid., p. 248

¹⁰³ Srish Chandra Talapatra, *Mahesh Chandra Charitkatha (Life of Mahesh Chandra)*, 1946, pp. 16–17.

a zamindari will turn my son into an indolent, extravagant rich man. That will be tantamount to committing a sin as a parent. I would rather leave my business-firm for him. If he is hardworking and honest the store will earn him enough to live a comfortable life'.¹⁰⁴

In the context of formulating an ideology and ethic of business, some of these texts drew their readers' attention to the Bengali obsession with salaried jobs and hinted that it had grave implications. Mahesh Chandra was worried that even the leaders of the society secretly aspired for their own children to become lawyers or judges, or at the very least clerks, even at low salaries.¹⁰⁵ Initiating an elaborate discussion on the relative advantages of business over salaried jobs or '*chakri*', he primarily focused on the unlimited possibilities of expansion that business offered, as opposed to the security of a job.¹⁰⁶ Bhattacharya pointed out that while income from '*chakri*' tended to diminish drastically in old age, return from business could increase substantially with age if it were in the hands of competent successors or good employees.¹⁰⁷ Jitendranath Majumdar's book *Arther Sandhan (Pursuit of Wealth)* dealt with similar concerns and made a compelling case for entrepreneurship against salaried jobs.¹⁰⁸

Beyond the individual, the texts asserted the importance of enterprise as a larger socio-political commitment – as a way to serve society and the nation. For instance, a biography of Batakrishna Pal devoted an entire chapter to discussing the protagonist's anxieties over the failure of Bengalis to accumulate capital. Resonating with Bengali regionalism, these thoughts were, nonetheless, couched unmistakably in nationalist sensibilities. Titled '*Svajatipriyota*' or '*Love for One's Race*', this chapter dwelt upon Batakrishna's thoughts for the improvement of the Bengalis from their current fallen status in comparison with the British.¹⁰⁹ He expressed a conviction that the British were the most advanced race primarily because of their proliferating trade and business.¹¹⁰ For him, British superiority in all spheres – political, scientific or intellectual – emanated from their fundamental power of wealth.¹¹¹ Batakrishna strongly asserted that generating wealth through business was the ideal way of self-assertion for any race and nation.¹¹²

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya, *Byabshayee (Businessman)*, 1905, pp. 2–3.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 8–12. ¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁰⁸ Jitendranath Majumdar, *Arther Sandhan (Pursuit of Wealth)*, 1932, p. 132.

¹⁰⁹ Gopal Chandra Mukhopadhyay, *Sadhu Batakrishna Pal (The Saintly Batakrishna Pal)*, Vol II, 1919, pp. 256–61.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 257. ¹¹¹ Ibid. ¹¹² Ibid., p. 258.

Ideas of national self-assertion were almost always underpinned by a concern with the regional identity of the Bengalis. This is evident in the writings of Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya and Jitendranath Majumdar. Mahesh Chandra noted in *Byabshayee*,

So far only the Europeans were draining the wealth of this country through trade. Now the Marwaris and the Bhatias have joined them. They are buying off all the lands in and around Calcutta. The Bengalis are only concerned with their education, degree and with the ways of becoming teachers, lawyers, judges or doctors. They are oblivious about their future – about where they will live and what they will eat.¹¹³

Typically, these authors reflected on the mercantile prowess of the British, which earned them political mastery over distant shores.¹¹⁴ Connecting economic self-sufficiency with the overall development of a nation, Batakrishna pointed out that races that managed to be self-sufficient in terms of food production were the only ones that could ensure development of their own nation ('*sva-desh*') and own race ('*sva-jat*').¹¹⁵ Passionately he proclaimed,

racess which are unable to feed themselves and are forever hankering for food, are hardly any different from slaves. They are detestable lots. Such races are not only deficient in food but in almost everything. All kinds of vices get hold of such people and they become completely sapped of vitality.¹¹⁶

To him, the foremost duty of the monarch or the leaders of any nation was to address the issue of widespread hunger.¹¹⁷ These thoughts resonate closely with the larger economic nationalist formulations, especially the goal of a self-sufficient economy, as histories of *swadeshi* nationalism have identified.¹¹⁸ Manu Goswami convincingly traced a genealogy of *swadeshi* ideology to the twin 'processes of consolidation of a spatially bounded sense of territory and economy' since the late nineteenth century.¹¹⁹ *Swadeshi* ideology was integrally bound up, she argued, with the 'colonial production of India as a bounded, coherent entity' and the emergent nationalist imaginings of a school of thinkers who 'urged to develop

¹¹³ Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya, *Byabshayee (Businessman)*, 1905, p. 9.

¹¹⁴ Gopal Chandra Mukhopadhyay, *Sadhu Batakrishna Pal (The Saintly Batakrishna Pal)*, Vol II, 1919, p. 258.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 258–9. ¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 259. ¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

¹¹⁸ See Manu Goswami, 'From Swadeshi to Swaraj: Nation, Economy, and Territory in Colonial South Asia, 1870 to 1907', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 40, 4 (1998), 609–36; and Andrew Sartori, 'The Categorical Logic of a Colonial Nationalism: Swadeshi Bengal, 1904–1908', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 23, 1&2 (2003), 271–85.

¹¹⁹ Manu Goswami, 'From Swadeshi to Swaraj: Nation, Economy, Territory in Colonial South Asia, 1870 to 1907', pp. 624–5.

a specifically national developmentalist model to ground their critique of colonial rule and classical political economy'.¹²⁰ Such historical intertwining of ideas concerning economy, enterprise and nationalism, was reflected in the homoeopathic literature under discussion from the late nineteenth century.

Pursuing the theme of national self-sufficiency, Mahesh Bhattacharya urged the youth to engage in innovative and new enterprises.¹²¹ He drew up an impressive list of suggestions in *Byabshayee* and devoted a substantial part of the tract to discussing a wide range of possible fields of investment.¹²² These were meant for beginners equipped with business capital of various proportions, from meagre to large.¹²³ His lengthy discussion engaged with the potentials of business in various fields: the traditional fields for investment included order supply, publishing, opening factories for manufacturing different goods, and construction work.¹²⁴ But his list also included apparently unusual sectors of investment, including opening of auction houses, business involving astrological predictions, shoes, clocks and so on.¹²⁵ In that context, Bhattacharya further discussed the immense lucrative potentials of opening up homoeopathic dispensary-cum-pharmacies, in comparison with allopathic pharmacies in Calcutta and other big cities.¹²⁶

These texts argued that a nation needed to produce its own essential necessities.¹²⁷ Resonating closely with the 'drain of wealth' theories put forward by the late nineteenth-century economic historians like R. C. Dutt and Congress ideologues like Dadabhai Naoraji, the authors spoke of the ideal of importing raw materials and manufacturing the necessities on one's own soil. Bhattacharya quipped that whenever a country managed to accomplish this, 'it is as praise worthy as it is profitable. Importing manufactured items is a matter of utmost shame as it involves national losses'.¹²⁸ He put a premium on business involving the everyday necessities of common people including groceries, oil and cloth.¹²⁹ Jitendranath Majumdar further added that investment in such quotidian necessities of the people inevitably ensured a profitable business.¹³⁰

Although none of the protagonists of these texts proclaimed themselves *swadeshi* nationalists, their efforts were often appropriated within the framework of *swadeshi*-nationalist endeavours. On a visit to the premises

¹²⁰ Ibid., pp. 615–23.

¹²¹ Srish Chandra Talapatra, *Mahesh Chandra Charitkatha (Life of Mahesh Chandra)*, 1946, p. 47.

¹²² Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya, *Byabshayee (Businessman)*, 1905, pp. 95–132.

¹²³ Ibid. ¹²⁴ Ibid. ¹²⁵ Ibid. ¹²⁶ Ibid., pp. 104–5. ¹²⁷ Ibid., pp. 83–4.

¹²⁸ Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya, *Byabshayee (Businessman)*, 1905, p. 83.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 84.

¹³⁰ Jitendranath Majumdar, *Arther Sandhan (Pursuit of Wealth)*, 1932, p. 118.

of B. K. Pal and Company in 1911, Maharaja Sir Pradyot Coomar Tagore was said to have commented,

I was highly impressed with what I saw. The business is entirely under Indian management and is by far the biggest concern of its kind in the whole of India. This is the right kind of Swadeshi enterprise and as such deserves commendation and encouragement.¹³¹

Enterprises in homoeopathy were often retrospectively described as embodying a strong *swadeshi* spirit. Referring to the 1880 pharmaceutical enterprise initiated by Rajendralal Dutta, one of his later biographies observed,

In these days of swadesism we have heard much about Industrialism, of starting Cotton Mills and Steamer Service Companies, of National Education . . . in those days when nobody even dreamt of such things and when to do such things was hazardous enough to make one very unpopular . . . Rajendra Dutt practically organised such institutions quite single-handed.¹³²

Another concern reflected in these tracts, related to their discussions of business, was the prevalent system of education in India. Mahesh Chandra, for instance, criticised the existing education system as 'purposeless' and therefore harmful for the country.¹³³ Bhattacharya was convinced of the futility of technical and commercial schools.¹³⁴ The disgust these authors had for formal pedagogic institutions extended even to the institutional dissemination of homoeopathic knowledge. According to Bhattacharya, one could hardly learn to become a good businessman by attending a school or by reading any book; he felt that apprenticeship to a successful businessman was the ideal way to learn good business.¹³⁵

Emphasising the importance and fundamentals of business, Mahesh Chandra made a clear distinction between medical practice on one hand, and business involving medicine on the other. In his view, specialised knowledge of medicine was useful in such a business, but one did not need to be a physician. In his autobiography, he cited himself as an

¹³¹ Gopal Chandra Mukhopadhyay, *Sadhu Batakrishna Pal (The Saintly Batakrishna Pal)*, Vol II, 1919, p. 80.

¹³² S. C. Ghose, 'Homoeopathy and Its First Missionary in India', *The Hahenemannian Gleanings*, 3, 8 (September 1932), 337.

¹³³ Srish Chandra Talapatra, *Mahesh Chandra Charitkatha (Life of Mahesh Chandra)*, 1946, p. 79.

¹³⁴ This was a conviction shared by P. C. Ray, the eminent nationalist chemist. See Pratik Chakrabarti, 'Science and Swadeshi: The Establishment and Growth of the Bengal Chemical and Pharmaceutical Works' in Uma Dasgupta (ed.), *Science and Modern India: An Institutional History, 1784–1947* (Delhi: Pearson Education, 2010), pp. 117–42.

¹³⁵ Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya, *Byabshayee (Businessman)*, 1905, p. 57.

example, saying that he consciously steered away from learning medicine until an age to be able to focus solely on the business aspect of it. It is not surprising, therefore, that some of the entrepreneurial families simultaneously invested in fields other than medicine. For the Bhattacharyas, the Pals and for the family of Rajendralal Datta, enterprise focused on homoeopathic drugs; although it was the chief portion of their business, it coexisted with other entrepreneurial efforts. The Dattas, for instance, owned shipping companies and other business concerns, chief among which was the Dutt's Lintzee and Company.¹³⁶

Business as Family, Family as Business

Along with articulating the more abstract significance of enterprise, the non-medical texts published by our protagonist firms focused also on the concrete approaches and ways in which commercial establishments functioned. Efficient management of firms emerged as a persistent theme in these texts. Labour recruitment and management was the foremost matter for discussion. These texts seemed to blur any rigid distinction between a presumably private domain of 'family' and public domain of 'business'. They insisted on strategically replicating within the sphere of business the personal, intimate ties of affection usually associated with families. The ideal form for a business, which generated the maximum revenue, was projected as one functioning through kinship networks and modelled on familial ties. While discussing labour management in particular, the homoeopathic publications promoted a flexible, commodious and porous understanding of family.

Batakrishna Pal, Jitendranath Majumdar and also Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya underlined the importance of competent employees for the success of any business. They characterised ideal employers as paternalistic. It was argued that, '[t]o a businessman, an honest, dutiful and efficient employee is more precious than the son. Entrepreneurs ought to trust such employees more than their own son'.¹³⁷ Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya attached considerable importance to the recruitment and training of employees and devoted a rather lengthy chapter of *Byabshayee (Businessman)* titled 'Karmachari' or 'Employee' to discussing these aspects.¹³⁸ He advocated recruiting one's own relatives or those belonging to one's own region or caste.¹³⁹ He felt that employers ought to overlook these considerations only in the exceptional case of

¹³⁶ S. C. Ghose, 'Homoeopathy and Its First Missionary in India', *The Hahnemannian Gleanings*, 3, 8 (September 1932), 337–8.

¹³⁷ Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya, *Byabshayee (Businessman)*, 1905, p. 72.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 62–82. ¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

a candidate of extraordinary calibre.¹⁴⁰ Batakrishna Pal, too, abided by these criteria for recruiting employees; his biographer noted that distant relatives and those who were considered part of the broader kinship network invariably found preference in his company.¹⁴¹ The author recounted that Batakrishna recruited many relatives and other men from his own caste background.

Protagonists such as Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya and Batakrishna Pal attached a remarkable amount of importance to caste ties in the process of recruiting employees for their companies. A Brahmin by birth, Mahesh Chandra often chose other Brahmins as objects of his charities and also for recruitment in his company. His weakness for Brahmins as employees was widely known and even resulted in accusations of bias.¹⁴² Batakrishna Pal's biographies note his deep loyalties to his caste, and his involvement in the Gandhabanik movement in early twentieth-century Calcutta.¹⁴³ In 1900, he was made the president of the committee that dealt with issues relating to the improvement of the Gandhabanik caste.¹⁴⁴ Batakrishna was also the publisher and distributor of the 1902 tract *Gandhabaniktattva* (*Theories relating to the Gandhabaniks*), which dealt with the history and lineage of his caste.¹⁴⁵

Once employees were recruited, their management and maintenance was a major concern for most protagonists. The rhetoric of family was invoked recurrently and most powerfully to define the relationship between the employer and the employee. Indeed, business in such homeopathic firms was organised in such a way as to resemble an extended joint-familial household, bound by ties of loyalty and affection. Batakrishna Pal's biography notes that the protagonist was diligent in looking after the well-being of the five-hundred-plus body of employees at B. K. Pal and Company, and paid minute attention to their diet and maintenance.¹⁴⁶ Brahmin cooks were appointed to look after their dietary needs. Mahesh Chandra's biography also noted how he looked after all his employees as if they were 'his own son'.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Gopal Chandra Mukhopadhyay, *Sadhu Batakrishna Pal (The Saintly Batakrishna Pal)*, Vol II, 1919, pp. 54–5.

¹⁴² Srish Chandra Talapatra, *Mahesh Chandra Charitkatha (Life of Mahesh Chandra)*, 1946, p. 64.

¹⁴³ Gopal Chandra Mukhopadhyay, *Sadhu Batakrishna Pal (The Saintly Batakrishna Pal)*, Vol II, 1919, pp. 261–8. Gandhabaniks are a Bengali Hindu trading caste, who claim the status of Baisyas and who, as the literal translation of their caste name suggests, used to trade in perfumes and exotic spices.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 262. ¹⁴⁵ Ibid., Vol I, p. 64.

¹⁴⁶ Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya, *Byabshayee (Businessman)*, 1905, pp. 93–5.

¹⁴⁷ Srish Chandra Talapatra, *Mahesh Chandra Charitkatha (Life Mahesh Chandra)*, 1946, p. 57.

It is revealing that Batakrishna Pal preferred using parts of his own residence as the premises of his firm. Thus, in the context of the homoeopathic firms, even the spatial and architectural distinction between the business and the household would sometimes collapse. At first, the various departments of B. K. Pal and Company were dispersed over different parts of north Calcutta.¹⁴⁸ Biographies of the protagonist noted how, eventually, Batakrishna built a huge palatial residence at Shobhabazar Street and found it convenient to move the head offices of his various departments there, including the branch offices of his homoeopathic pharmacy, Great Homoeopathic Hall (see Fig. 1.6).¹⁴⁹ The Hahnemann Publishing Company also continued to function in a similar way since the early twentieth century. The Bowbazaar complex of HAPCO still houses the office and the pharmacy, concurrent with serving as the residence of the Bhars for a long time.¹⁵⁰

The personalised affection of the protagonist entrepreneurs for their employees was especially emphasised in their publications. Mahesh Chandra's life story mentioned that although he was professionally quite strict, yet in cases of ill health or other trouble, he took personal care of the employees, helping them either with cash or in kind.¹⁵¹ The projected interpersonal relations in the firms suggested a veritable moral economy of care, warmth and love. To examine an instance of how the texts construed a mandate of familial care, let me refer to the case of an employee named Atul from Mahesh Chandra's biography. Atul was described as having contracted plague in the year 1902–3.¹⁵² The biography reminded its readers of the abiding stigma

¹⁴⁸ By the turn of the twentieth century, B. K. Pal and Company was a reputed Calcutta-based entity, which in addition to homoeopathic medicine, had branched out into various other departments, including the import and distribution of allopathic medicine. But the company's humble nineteenth-century beginnings as a homoeopathic family firm is noted in Batakrishna's biography. Although an in-depth historical study of Batakrishna's diverse entrepreneurial activities remains to be written, for some preliminary exploration, see Nandini Bhattacharya, 'Between the Bazaar and the Bench: Making of the Drug Trade in Colonial India, ca. 1900–1930', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 90, 1 (April 2016), 61–91.


¹⁴⁹ Gopal Chandra Mukhopadhyay, *Sadhu Batakrishna Pal (The Saintry Batakrishna Pal)*, Vol II, 1919, pp. 168–9.

¹⁵⁰ As narrated by Dr Durgashankar Bhar, the current owner of Hahnemann Publishing Company and grandson of the founder Prafulla Chandra Bhar, in an interview conducted in the same residential-cum-commercial building in late August 2009.

¹⁵¹ Srish Chandra Talapatra, *Mahesh Chandra Charitkatha (Life of Mahesh Chandra)*, 1946, p. 57.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 59–60.

গৃহস্থের স্বাস্থ্য—হোমিওপ্যাথিক ঔষধ—



দি গ্রেট হোমিওপ্যাথিক হল

যে কত প্রয়োজন—তা' বলিয়া শেষ করা যায় না। কিন্তু রোগ আরাম
করিতে হইলে, ভাল চিকিৎসা পুস্তকের যেমন আবশ্যক

বিশুদ্ধ ও টাটকা

ঔষধের প্রয়োজনও ততোধিক। অনভিজ্ঞের লিখিত বই ও কৃত্রিম
ঔষধ সস্তায় পাওয়া যায়, কিন্তু খাঁটি ও তেজস্কর ঔষধ

অযথা সস্তায় হয় না

আমাদের ঔষধ যে—স্থায়ী এলকোহল সংযোগে প্রস্তুত, আমাদের বিস্তৃত কারবারই
তাহার জীবন্ত সাক্ষ্য।

চিকিৎসা পুস্তকের তালিকা পত্র লিখিলেই প্রেরিত হয়। মফঃস্বলের অর্ডার সকল যত্ন সহকারেই
পাঠান হইয়া থাকে।

এখানে হোমিওপ্যাথিক সন্থকীয় ঔষধ ও ইংরাজী, বাঙ্গালা হিন্দি ও উর্দু পুস্তক স্থগার অব
মিক্স, গ্লোবিউল, বাস্ক, ইলেক্ট্রো হোমিওপ্যাথিক ঔষধাদি সুলভ মূল্যে পাওয়া যায়।

ঔষধের মূল্য—সাধারণ মানার টিউটার ১ ড্রাম ১০/০, ২ ড্রাম ১১/০ ১ ইইচ ১২ ক্রম পর্য্যন্ত ১ ড্রাম ১০
২ ড্রাম ১০/০ ৩৩ ইইতে ৩০ ক্রম ১ ড্রাম ১০/০, ২ ড্রাম ১১/০, ২০০ ক্রম ১ ড্রাম ১০/০, ২ ড্রাম ১১/০ এক
কালীন ৫ টাকার (কেবল) ঔষধে শতকরা ১২১০ টাকা হিসাবে কমিশন দেওয়া হয়। পত্র লিয়িলে
সচিত্র ক্যাটালগ পাঠান হয়।

১। হোমিওপ্যাথিক সরঞ্জাম গৃহচিকিৎসা—৬ষ্ঠ সংস্করণ—৩৩৮ পৃষ্ঠায় সমাপ্ত, সুন্দর কাপড়ে বাঁধাই
মূল্য ১০। ২। চিকিৎসা দর্পণ—(প্রাকটিক্স অব মেডিসিন ওয় সংস্করণ প্রায় ১২০০ পৃষ্ঠায় সমাপ্ত সুন্দর
কাপড়ে বাঁধাই মূল্য ৮ অবাঁধাই ৭।০।

৩। সরল হোমিওপ্যাথিক চিকিৎসা দর্পণ—সুন্দর কাপড়ে বাঁধাই মূল্য ৫। ৪। ভৈবজ্য-দর্পণ (মেট্রিক্স
মেডিকা)—২ খণ্ডে ১৭০৪ পৃষ্ঠায় সম্পূর্ণ, সুন্দর কাগজে ছাপাই ও বাঁধাই মূল্য ১০। ৫। ওলাউঠা চিকিৎসা
—মূল্য ১১। ৬। বৃহৎ ফার্মাকোপিয়া—সুন্দর কাপড়ে বাঁধাই মূল্য ২।০। ৭। স্ত্রীরোগ চিকিৎসা—
মূল্য ২। শিশুরোগ চিকিৎসা—মূল্য ২। ইলেক্ট্রো হোমিওপ্যাথিক চিকিৎসা মূল্য ১০ আনা।
পরীক্ষা করিয়া দেখুন, ইহাই প্রার্থনা।

বটক্রম পাল এণ্ড কোং, দি গ্রেট হোমিওপ্যাথিক হল।

হেড অফিস—১২নং বনফিল্ডস, লেন,
ব্রাঞ্চ অফিস—১২নং শোভাবাজার স্ট্রীট, } **কলিকাতা।**

Fig. 1.6 Advertisement of B. K. Pal and Co's Great Homoeopathic Hall in the Bengali journal *Grihasthamangal*, 2, 1 (1928), 6. Reproduced from the collection of the Archives of the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta.

around plague at the time.¹⁵³ One of deadliest nineteenth-century epidemic diseases, it was widely held that once taken to the hospital, plague victims hardly ever returned home. The biography noted that despite this stigma, Mahesh Bhattacharya himself, in conjunction with Kumud Bhattacharya (his nephew and then manager of M. Bhattacharya and Company), refused to send Atul to a hospital and committed to treating and nursing him personally. It is detailed how Bhattacharya would visit the patient every two to three hours and make the necessary recommendations for his recovery. The biography further claimed that Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya looked after his employees even in their old age and gave money in the semblance of a pension to most of them.¹⁵⁴

In these texts, the virtues of loyalty and trust are discussed repeatedly in the context of generating goodwill in any enterprise. Especially for enterprises committed to therapeutic well-being, the factor of mutual trust was highlighted as of supreme importance. Indeed, trust was named the defining aspect of the relationship between the employer and his employees and also that between the manufacturers and their consumers. Writing on the goodwill of the Hahnemann Publishing Company of the Bhars, the editor of their journal *The Hahnemannian Gleanings* observed, 'the patients come to us in a simple faith: trusting health and even life itself in our hands. The physician is trusted more than anyone else in the world'.¹⁵⁵

Along with physical well-being, the homoeopathic employers were committed to the emotional as well as moral welfare of their employees; keeping an eye, for instance, on whether 'young men, especially those coming from distant villages to work, fell prey to the seductions of city life'.¹⁵⁶ They were concerned that the people working under them should not become extravagant, indulging too much in alcohol or in frequenting brothels.¹⁵⁷ To encourage 'healthy habits' like reading books in their spare time,

¹⁵³ The social stigma placed on plague patients at the turn of the twentieth century, and the frequently brutal segregation enforced upon them by the British colonial authorities, have featured in some excellent works on colonial medicine. See David Arnold, 'Touching the Body: Perspectives on the Indian Plague, 1896–1900' in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies V* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 55–90.

¹⁵⁴ Srish Chandra Talapatra, *Mahesh Chandra Charitkatha (Life of Mahesh Chandra)*, 1946, p. 58.

¹⁵⁵ 'Editorial: New Year's Retrospection and Introspection', *The Hahnemannian Gleanings*, 4, 1 (February 1933), 7.

¹⁵⁶ Srish Chandra Talapatra, *Mahesh Chandra Charitkatha (Life of Mahesh Chandra)*, 1946, pp. 57–9.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Bhattacharya built up a library exclusively for his employees within the immediate premises of their quarters.¹⁵⁸

The texts frequently invoked the metaphor of father and son while discussing labour management. Mahesh Chandra argued that the relation between the employer and his employees should exactly replicate the 'bond between a father and his son'. He emphasised that it was the responsibility of the employer to 'protect' his employees from all kinds of corrupting influences, to 'control' them as well as to 'reward' them for their efficiency in the same way he would his own son.¹⁵⁹ He stressed the importance of occasional rewards in the form of commissions, increases in salary and gifts.¹⁶⁰ He further advised that on retirement, and particularly in absence of the employer having an efficient son, trusted old employees could be turned into partners in business.¹⁶¹

The boundaries between caste, kinship, blood or professional ties seemed undefined in such texts. A diffused, flexible and inclusive notion of family seemed to emanate from the texts published by the homoeopathic entrepreneurs. Familial relations, as described in these writings, appeared as much acquired as ascriptive. Affective relationship and entrepreneurial partnership often appear overlapping. A group of scholars researching South Asian family life have begun examining the predominance, throughout the nineteenth century, of complex households which included a variety of dependants.¹⁶² They urge us to revisit the historiographic relevance of 'affect' in envisioning such households. What could be the potential roles and positions of dependants, servants (and employees) in such formations? Texts written and published by homoeopathic entrepreneurs on the control and management of labour share such historiographic concerns. Together they project a rather fluid and inclusive notion of family, as it developed around these commercial firms which involved trusted employees recruited through older regional ties, caste and kinship networks, distant relatives and sometimes even mere acquaintances. These different categories of actors seemed easily to form an extended family which dwelt in close vicinity of each other. One finds a caricature of this overt reliance of homoeopathic commercial concerns on their employees in the 1915 drama *Trhyasparsha ba Sukhi Paribar*

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 59. ¹⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 76–7. ¹⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 80–1. ¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² See, for instance, Indrani Chatterjee (ed.), *Unfamiliar Relations: Family and History in South Asia* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), p. 17. Complex households have also been studied by historians of law and those working on the political economy of family from legal vantage points. See Malavika Kasturi, *Embattled Identities: Rajput Lineages and the Colonial State in Nineteenth Century North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002); and Rachel Sturman, 'Property and Attachments: Defining Autonomy and the Claims of Family in Nineteenth-Century Western India', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 47 (3 July 2005), 611–37.

(*Triangular Impact or the Happy Family*), mentioned earlier in this chapter. Referring to the real-life reputed homoeopath Biharilal Dutta, the father-in-law of Pratap Chandra Majumdar, the author mocked how one of Dutta's long-standing employees assumed himself to be a member of Dutta's family, and consequently a homoeopath by default.¹⁶³

To be sure, such paternalistic language of care, concern and welfare almost invariably converged with concerns about profit maximisation. Mahesh Chandra held that the employer stood to gain profitably in treating the employee as his own son. In *Byabshayee* he argued that enterprises functioning on such an explicitly familial model almost never run the risk of facing workers' strikes.¹⁶⁴

It is worth noting that as they discussed ways of organising business on the model of the family, these texts at times went further, referring to the institution of family as a kind of business. Both Jitendranath Majumdar and Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya drew an analogy between '*shongshaar*' or the household and '*byabsha*', meaning business. Jitendranath in his book *Arther Sandhan (Pursuit of Wealth)* observed, 'all householders are businessmen in a sense. But in general, by businessmen one understands only the traders'.¹⁶⁵ On different occasions, they compared the institution of family with business. As he elaborated on the skills of managing a company, Mahesh Chandra observed:

The will to improve one's condition both in the realm of business as in the domain of the household is contingent on being dependent on others. The more one wishes to improve, the more he is dependent – he needs to take others help and also needs to keep them all in good humor.¹⁶⁶

The preface to the third edition of *Byabshayee (Businessman)* noted that as much as the author wished to, it was beyond him to write another, separate book on managing a successful household.¹⁶⁷ However, since he believed that 'conducting a business was similar in most ways to conducting a household', he included his reflections on running a successful household in his tract *Byabshayee*, meant for teaching the essentials of successful business. Mahesh Chandra cited specific examples to illustrate the analogy that he drew between running a household and managing a business. Virtues such as frugality, economy and cooperation were shown to be equally important in both spheres. Just as every

¹⁶³ Dwijendralal Ray, *Trhyasparsha ba Sukhi Paribar (The Triangular Impact or Happy Family)*, 2nd edition (Calcutta: Surdham, 1915), pp. 3–4.

¹⁶⁴ Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya, *Byabshayee (Businessman)*, 1905, p. 75.

¹⁶⁵ Jitendranath Majumdar, *Arther Sandhan (Pursuit of Wealth)*, 1932, p. 115.

¹⁶⁶ Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya, *Byabshayee (Businessman)*, 1905, p. 144.

¹⁶⁷ Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya, 'Preface to the Third Edition', *Byabshayee (Businessman)*, Calcutta: M. Bhattacharya and Company, 4th edition, 1921.

businessman was encouraged to keep a reserve fund for emergencies, so too every household was asked to maintain a secret reserve of cash and kind.¹⁶⁸ Even while analysing certain unsuccessful business ventures of his own in his autobiography, Bhattacharya noted that such experiences had left him enriched with lessons that he later found useful within the realm of his household.¹⁶⁹

Firms, Family and the Homoeopathic Profession

The familial metaphor, so productive for these writings by the protagonists, was further extended to other related contexts as well. Entrepreneur-physicians practising homoeopathy at the turn of the twentieth century in Calcutta often wrote about their profession itself as if it were one big family. Chapter 2 discusses the production of scientific biographies that projected familial intimacy between the various successful practitioners of homoeopathy. For now, it is sufficient to note that these life stories related to an informal, intimate network of pedagogy involving homoeopathy. Not only were formal institutions teaching homoeopathy absent in the nineteenth century, the foremost advocates of the practice like Mahendralal Sircar and Mahesh Bhattacharya were positively opposed to the idea of a formal pedagogic institution.¹⁷⁰ I already noted in the previous section that entrepreneurs such as Bhattacharya did not think highly of the ability of educational institutes to impart knowledge concerning enterprise. Bhattacharya felt that 'the recruits should first act as apprentices and be put under regular observation until they learnt the fundamentals of their work'.¹⁷¹ Likewise, for the dissemination of homoeopathic knowledge, these physicians relied more on an informal pupillage network, which they most often referred to in familial idioms.

The Calcutta Homoeopathic College established by the Majumdar in the early 1880s as a very small unit was the only exception to this opinion against institutionalised homoeopathic education. All the noteworthy first-generation homoeopaths in the late nineteenth century were trained as regular doctors at the government-run Calcutta Medical College. Almost all of them learnt homoeopathy informally through reading and

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁶⁹ Srish Chandra Talapatra, *Mahesh Chandra Charitkatha (Life of Mahesh Chandra)*, 1946, p. 64.

¹⁷⁰ Mahendralal Sircar's reservation against promoting formal, classroom education to disseminate science and medicine in India is discussed in Pratik Chakrabarti's review of John Lourdasamy's book *Science and National Consciousness in Bengal, 1870–1930*. See Pratik Chakrabarti, *Medical History*, 50, 3 (2006), 403–4.

¹⁷¹ Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya, *Byabshayee (Businessman)*, 1905, p. 64.

interactions with other, similarly inclined physicians. Their life stories record numerous instances of close, near-familial bonds between physicians, nurtured by a shared quest for homoeopathic knowledge. Homoeopathy was widely projected as a science that could be acquired primarily through individual acts of meticulous reading and experimentation. A few like Jitendranath Majumdar were graduates of homoeopathic colleges in America. However, the informal network of pupillage and pedagogy was highlighted as the primary mode of dissemination for homoeopathic knowledge in Bengal. The rhetoric of family was invoked with remarkable frequency to describe the interpersonal relations between the leading physicians since the late nineteenth century.

An example of such relationships, couched in familial terms, was that between Rajendralal Dutta and Mahendralal Sircar. Publications relating to both physicians dramatically emphasised the way Rajendralal inducted Mahendralal into the principles of homoeopathy and taught him the fundamentals, and how Mahendralal forever remained grateful to Rajendralal Dutta and acknowledged him as his mentor.¹⁷² In a letter following the death of Rajendralal, Mahendralal was said to have proclaimed,

he used to call me his 'father and son' and subscribe himself in all the letters he wrote to me as 'your son and father'. The love that he bore me was not a whit less than that of a father to his son. His faith in me as you know was unbounded. His reverence for me was that of a son. Could I be undutiful to such a man? My personal loss in his death is more than that of any other man.¹⁷³

Mahendralal's friendship with Biharilal Bhaduri, the father-in-law of Pratap Chandra Majumdar, was likewise often highlighted in the context of the pedagogic pupillage network. Pratap Chandra's biography, by his son Jitendranath Majumdar, elaborated how the famous nineteenth-century social reformer Vidyasagar inspired both the leading homoeopaths, Mahendralal and Biharilal, to take up homoeopathy.¹⁷⁴ Vidyasagar, an ardent admirer of homoeopathy, had developed a personal interest in the subject and was said to have built a huge collection of books imported from England and America. Studying at Vidyasagar's library, Mahendralal and Biharilal were known to have developed a fraternal camaraderie that

¹⁷² See Sarat Chandra Ghosh, 'Bharatbarshe Homoeopathic Chikitsar Sorboprothom Pothopodorshok o Pracharak Dr. Rajendralal Dutta' (The Pioneer Physician and Perpetrator of Homoeopathy in India'), *Hahnemann*, 22, 1 (1939), 14–16.

¹⁷³ Sarat Chandra Ghose, 'Homoeopathy and Its First Missionary in India', *The Hahnemannian Gleanings*, 3 (November 1932), pp. 449–50.

¹⁷⁴ Jitendranath Majumdar, 'Dr. Pratapchandra Majumdar', *Hahnemann*, 22, 5 (1939), 260–7.

strengthened over time.¹⁷⁵ Highlighting their role in the dissemination of homoeopathy, Jitendranath claimed that it was only when the two physicians started practising in tandem that 'the people of Calcutta began to realise the tremendous potential of this form of treatment'.¹⁷⁶

Another instructive example one might cite is the biography of physician Pratap Chandra Majumdar, written by his son Jitendranath. The biography detailed Pratap Chandra's initial interest in homoeopathy, subsequent to his L. M. S degree from the Calcutta Medical College.¹⁷⁷ This interest was primarily stoked by physician Lokenath Maitra, a former student of Rajendralal Dutta. The biography also harked back to the lifelong affection that the two physicians shared since those early days. So deep was the attachment of love and respect that Lokenath always referred to Pratap Chandra as his 'grandson'.¹⁷⁸

The literature on homoeopathy extensively deployed a host of appellations for familial relations, like 'elder brother', 'son', 'father' or 'grandson', as common tropes to describe the depth of intimacy between physicians. Such a projection of intimate relationships reinforced the inclusive and flexible understanding of family that can be distilled from the texts published by the homoeopathic entrepreneurs. In such an understanding, intimate familial relations were identities that were not always and necessarily inherited through birth but could be acquired in the course of one's life. The fluid, commodious and diffused vision of family represented in such texts were shown to fulfil the purposes both of profit maximisation and knowledge acquisition.

Inherited Family

Such apparently inclusive, accommodative understandings concerning the 'family' were also, however, contradicted within the pages of the very same texts. As the discussions moved away from themes of labour recruitment, management and maintenance towards norms of ownership, inheritance and profit-making, one notices a simultaneous, paradoxical, celebration of the exclusive, the private and the filial. Simultaneously with the paternal affection due to one's employees, ownership of property and its efficient management were treated as concerns of great importance. The ideal family structure suitable for owning a business was discussed in this context. In the fourth edition of *Byabshayee*, Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya elaborated on the logistics

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 263–5. ¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 267. ¹⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 259–60.

¹⁷⁸ Sarat Chandra Ghose, 'Daktar Lokenath Maitra', *Hahenmann*, 22, 12 (1939), 309.

of such family structure.¹⁷⁹ While discussing the advantages associated with an extended joint family system, he concurrently drew his readers' attention to its potential pitfalls. His writings powerfully foregrounded a logic of property and material assets in discussions of the relevance of the joint family system. Social histories of the dissolution of the joint family have tended to focus more on its incompatibility with the newer kinds of conjugalities enabled by colonial modernity. The reformed husband and the new conjugality have until recently been at the forefront of the scholarly analysis of changing colonial familial structure.¹⁸⁰ Texts such as *Byabshayee* enable us to think more centrally about the material rationale informing the changing perceptions of the institution of joint family. Pointing out that 'there is hardly any certainty about the profit and loss incurred in any business', Mahesh Chandra recommended that if extended families became involved in the same business, there ought to be clear understandings on the share of each member, preferably through registered deeds.¹⁸¹ As the focus of discussion shifted towards owning and inheriting enterprise, the rhetoric of a flexible, extended household seemed to fade away slowly.

Keeping aside issues of affect and emotion, the texts sometimes dwelt upon the relative advantages and disadvantages of the joint family system solely from economic points of view. They demonstrated a concern that the joint family setup, if it involved a large number of people, bred laziness and many tended to live off others' income.¹⁸² On the other hand, in joint families the costs of socialisation and the expenses on servants were divided among many. Though the texts emphasised certain benefits associated with the joint family system, smaller families were projected as financially more practicable from a commercial point of view. In *Byabshayee* Mahesh Chandra even contemplated a new kind of family structure for the future, which he termed 'joutha paribar' or 'cooperative family', where the extended family would live together but share only certain costs between themselves.¹⁸³ The second volume of Batakrishna Pal's biography included a whole chapter entitled 'Sukhi Paribar' or 'The Content Family', detailing his thoughts on the subject.¹⁸⁴ Such writings focused great attention on the importance of relationships, such as with one's wife and sons, in

¹⁷⁹ Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya, *Byabshayee (Businessman)*, 1921, pp. 173–5.

¹⁸⁰ For instance, see Pradip Bose, 'Sons of the Nation: Child Rearing in the New Family', in Partha Chatterjee (ed.), *Texts of Power: Emerging Discipline in Colonial Bengal* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), pp. 118–44.

¹⁸¹ Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya, *Byabshayee (Businessman)*, 1921, pp. 173–4.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 174. ¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ Gopal Chandra Mukhopadhyay, *Sadhu Batakrishna Pal (The Saintly Batakrishna Pal)*, Vol II, 1919, pp. 176–81.

achieving happiness. A nucleated family structure comprising only parents and children was celebrated as the most convenient one for those involved in commercial enterprise.¹⁸⁵

Hence, from the perspective of owning a business, these texts seemed to operate within an idiom of restricted, inflexible family defined exclusively by ties of blood. Marriage was considered critical. Positioning himself as a Hindu Aryan, Batakrishna Pal advocated marriage as essential, for it had been prescribed by the Aryan ancestors.¹⁸⁶ Marriage was considered necessary not only for the mere satisfaction of sexual needs, but also the deeper objectives of ensuring balanced conduct of the material and religious practices of life.¹⁸⁷ Both Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya and Batakrishna Pal discussed the importance of good '*bangsha*', meaning genealogy or familial line of descent. Mahesh Chandra defined a good '*bangsha*' as one that had the reputation of producing knowledgeable, educated and religious men in the past as well as in the present.¹⁸⁸ Criticising the futile hankering for physical beauty, Batakrishna insisted that it was important to follow the rules for marriage prescribed by the ancient lawmakers, as they ensured the well-being not only of each household, but of society at large.¹⁸⁹

Other than the marital bond, these texts elevated the relationship with male progeny as the most significant one within a family. Such idealisation of a patrilineal family needs to be juxtaposed with the contemporary colonial legal interventions, which defined the Hindu joint family around norms of inheritance by the male child. Batakrishna invoked the teachings of the Vedas to argue that producing a son was one of the main pillars on which rested the Aryan conception of the permanence of the soul.¹⁹⁰ His biography is dotted with his thoughts on the philosophy of immortality of soul, and the importance of male progeny. As Hindu customs required the son to perform all the death rites, the importance of the son within the sphere of the family was supreme.¹⁹¹ Having referred to such spiritual perspectives, the biography drew an analogy between Batakrishna's own sons and precious gems. Each one of them was eulogised, not only for inheriting his father's professional genius, but for being capable of considerably enhancing his inherited fortunes.¹⁹² Thus, material considerations appeared interwoven with discussions of the spiritual necessity for a family. Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya maintained that since familial property could be a cause

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 180. ¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 144. ¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya, *Byabshayee (Businessmann)*, 1921, p. 175.

¹⁸⁹ Gopal Chandra Mukhopadhyay, *Sadhu Batakrishna Pal (The Saintly Batakrishna Pal)*, Vol II, 1919, 1946, p. 150.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 155. ¹⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 155–7. ¹⁹² Ibid., p. 160.

for conflict among sons, having fewer sons helped one avoid confusion over issues of entrepreneurial inheritance.¹⁹³

Hence, exigencies relating to the inheritance of businesses and property resulted in the protagonists, in their writings, celebrating a distinctly patrilineal and nucleated notion of family. One notices a swing in emphasis in these texts from notions of extended household to a more defined kinship identity, as far as business ownership was concerned. Under the section titled 'Pratap Chandra's Family' in the biography of the physician, his son Jitendranath recorded details of his three sons as well as nine daughters.¹⁹⁴ The occupation and identity of his sons-in-law also formed an important part of the description of his family. Jitendranath considered Pratap Chandra fortunate in being able to leave behind him the legacy of a successful and happy family unit. In a particularly narcissistic mode, Jitendranath noted that 'it is not very usual for successful fathers to have sons professionally as flourishing as himself. In Pratap Chandra's case, this has been proven wrong. He is fortunate enough in leaving behind sons who will perpetuate his name when he will be no more'.¹⁹⁵ A parallel understanding of family as the domain of the private and intimate animated the writings. A biography of Rajendralal Dutta in the *Hahnemannian Gleanings* observed,

Great as Rajendra Dutt undoubtedly was in the arena of public life, he was greater by far in all the sacred relations of private life. Whether as a son, as a father, as a husband . . . he had scarcely any equal and a better, or greater, a noble model my countrymen could not have had.¹⁹⁶

Index of Success: Family Business

Celebration of the patrilineal family was an essential part of the narrative of the success of these homoeopathic enterprises. One cannot help but note the pompous tone associated with narrating the commercial success of their own enterprises. Such success was invariably ascribed to the intergenerational, patrilineal, familial engagement of the protagonists with homoeopathy. It was considered an important formula for success to incorporate one's own son, or similarly intimate family relations into the overall management and ownership of the firm. The biography of Batakrisna Pal, for instance, discussed how he insisted on having his

¹⁹³ Srish Chandra Talapatra, *Mahesh Chandra Charitkatha (Life of Mahesh Chandra)*, 1946, p. 26.

¹⁹⁴ J. N. Majumdar, 'Dr. Pratapchandra Majumdar', *Hahnemann*, 23, 8 (1940), pp. 454–5.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 455.

¹⁹⁶ S. C. Ghose, 'Homoeopathy and Its First Missionary in India', *The Hahnemannian Gleanings*, 3, 8 (September 1932), p. 340.

eldest son Bhootnath Pal assist him in his enterprise.¹⁹⁷ He terminated Bhootnath's education when the latter was only sixteen, and took it upon himself to teach his son the fundamentals of the business. The biographer commented that 'the implication of this wonderful collaboration was soon apparent to relatives, friends, fellow shop-owners and especially to the consumers as the name of B. K. Pal and company spread far and wide'.¹⁹⁸

Batakrishna had incorporated his two other sons (Harishankar Pal and Harimohan Pal) as well as his nephew Haridas Daw, by appointing them to crucial posts in his enterprise. The third son Harishankar Pal, who was a particularly brilliant student, was also made to give up his education to join his father in the business.¹⁹⁹ Harishankar Pal was put in charge of the homoeopathic department of his father's sprawling drug business, which also involved the import of allopathic drugs. He looked after the pharmacy, The Great Homoeopathic Hall and the extensive homoeopathic publications of the firm.²⁰⁰ The biographer regarded Harishankar's insights as having 'injected new blood into the veins of the office'.²⁰¹ The biography also mentioned the wonderful collaboration between the brothers, referring to Harishankar Pal acting as the 'right hand' of his elder brother.²⁰² The biography of Batakrishna Pal noted that the firm's profits multiplied as it started investing in innovative practices, such as attractive advertisements under the able leadership of the sons.²⁰³ Indeed, the initiative to advertise proved most rewarding, and advertisements for the business were soon flooding the leading newspapers and journals, as well as the almanacs used extensively by the Hindus.²⁰⁴ The onus of ownership in most other homoeopathic concerns, including the very successful (and still thriving) Hahnemann Publishing Company, also passed from the father to the sons. Thus, the founder of HAPCO, Prafulla Chandra Bhar, was assisted and later succeeded by his eldest son Gauri Shankar Bhar in the management and ownership of the concern.²⁰⁵

¹⁹⁷ Gopal Chandra Mukhopadhyay, *Sadhu Batakrishna Pal (The Saintly Batakrishna Pal)*, Vol I, 1919, pp. 50–1.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 51. ¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

²⁰⁰ For an extensive list of the publications of the store, see 'Advertisement of the Great Homoeopathic Hall' in *Grihasthamangal*, 3, 1 (1929), 16.

²⁰¹ Gopal Chandra Mukhopadhyay, *Sadhu Batakrishna Pal (The Saintly Batakrishna Pal)*, Vol I, 1919, p. 68.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 69. ²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 52. ²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

²⁰⁵ As narrated by Dr Durga Shankar Bhar, the son of late Gauri Shankar Bhar and current Managing Director of the Hahnemann Publishing Company, in an interview in August 2009.

It was only in the absence of sons that next-of-kin relatives were considered valuable in business ownership and management. The biography of Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya records the tragic loss of his nineteen-year-old son Manmatha in the year 1908.²⁰⁶ Narratives of his life, including his autobiography, mentioned his reliance on his nephews Jagadbandhu and Kumud Bhattacharya in the organisation of his work. In his later years, he recognised his adopted son Heramba as a great support. Mahesh Chandra gratefully recounted the crucial role played by his staff, and especially his nephews, in the expansion of his business.²⁰⁷ Their contribution was felt most when he temporarily retired from active life following his son's untimely death. In his autobiography, he acknowledged that in the four years he was away, his business expanded in the hands of these trusted deputies.²⁰⁸ The depth of his dependence on his nephews can be sensed from such reminiscences.

The life stories of the physicians Pratap Chandra Majumdar and Mahendralal Sircar similarly illustrate their dependence on their respective sons, Jitendranath Majumdar and Amritalal Sircar. From the 1880s onwards, Pratap Chandra and Jitendranath published and coedited the second oldest homoeopathic journal, *The Indian Homoeopathic Review*, which lasted well into the twentieth century. Advertisements for their firm regularly represented the father-son duo as in charge of the Majumdar's Homoeopathic Pharmacy, which was located at Cornwallis Street with branches at Corporation Street.²⁰⁹ Jitendranath authored a lengthy biography of his father, serialised in the journal *Hahnemann*, in which he began by detailing the exploits of his grandfather, the famous homoeopath Biharilal Bhaduri, thus keeping in the foreground his family's intergenerational involvement in homoeopathic commerce.²¹⁰ This biography publicised Pratap Chandra as the founder of the first homoeopathic school in India. The Calcutta Homoeopathic College established in early 1880s, was later augmented into the Calcutta Homoeopathic Hospital, and was known to be managed jointly by the father and the son.²¹¹

²⁰⁶ Srish Chandra Talapatra, *Mahesh Chandra Charitkatha (Life of Mahesh Chandra)*, 1946, p. 151.

²⁰⁷ Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya, *Amacharit (My Life)*, 4th edition (Calcutta: Economic Press, 1957), pp. 69–70.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ See 'Advertisement of Majumdars Homoeopathic Pharmacy', *Indian Homoeopathic Review*, 19, 6 (June 1910), page number not cited.

²¹⁰ J. N. Majumdar, 'Dr. Pratap Chandra Majumdar MD', *Hahnemann*, 23, 5 (1940), 261–7.

²¹¹ J. N. Majumdar, 'Dr. Pratap Chandra Majumdar MD', *Hahnemann*, 23, 6 (1940), 324–5. Involvement of the son is mentioned in a sequel article in *Hahnemann*, 23, 7 (1940), 453.

The second Doctor of Medicine (MD) to qualify from the Calcutta Medical College, Mahendralal Sircar was easily the most reputed physician to have taken up the homoeopathic cause in the nineteenth century.²¹² Sircar, however, did not fit into the typical pattern of families involved in homoeopathic enterprise, as neither he nor his son Amritalal formally established any commercial firm. Nevertheless, Mahendralal remained one of the central figures among these intergenerational homoeopathic families in Bengal. From the late 1860s on, he collaborated with his son Amritalal on various publication projects involving homoeopathy. *The Calcutta Journal of Medicine*, which he launched in 1867, boasted of being the first ever homoeopathic journal in the non-western world.²¹³ Edited as well as published by Mahendralal, the mantle of the journal was taken over by his son following Sircar's death in 1904.²¹⁴ Mahendralal Sircar published extensively on homoeopathic remedies from his Anglo-Sanskrit Press at Sankharitollah while his son Amritalal Sircar reworked and republished many of the later editions of his books – for instance, one on treatment of the plague.²¹⁵ Together they maintained 'daily written diaries that were preserved in the family' and much of what he had written there 'pertained to their homoeopathic practice and patients'.²¹⁶ They also ran a widely known homoeopathic dispensary at their residence.²¹⁷ Mahendralal wrote about the popularity of the home dispensary in his journal, mentioning the high numbers of patients attending.²¹⁸ The average number of patients treated daily was so staggeringly high – more than a hundred – that it drew him into controversies with fellow physicians like Dr Salzer, who would not believe his numbers.²¹⁹

²¹² Chapter 2, which deals with homoeopathic biographies, further discusses the iconic status achieved by Mahendralal Sircar in nineteenth-century Bengali society. Besides highlighting Mahendralal Sircar's other achievements in the field of science, it details the many lives of Sircar that were written comparing him with homoeopathy's German founder, Hahnemann.

²¹³ 'Editorial: Our Creed', *Calcutta Journal of Medicine*, 1, 1 (1868), 190–1.

²¹⁴ See, for instance, Amritalal Sircar, 'Published Monthly: Calcutta Journal of Medicine', *Calcutta Journal of Medicine*, 32, 8 (July 1913), back cover page.

²¹⁵ For instance, see Amritalal Sircar, *Therapeutics of Plague*, 4th edition (Calcutta: Anglo-Sanskrit Press, 1913).

²¹⁶ See Arun Kumar Biswas (ed.), *Gleanings of the Past and the Science Movement: In the Diaries of Drs. Mahendralal and Amritalal Sircar* (Kolkata: Asiatic Society, 2000), pp. 5–7.

²¹⁷ Amritalal Sircar, 'The Late Dr. Mahendralal Sircar, CIE, MD, DL', *Calcutta Journal of Medicine*, 23, 2 (February 1904), 45–66. Also see, Amritalal Sircar, *Obituary Notice of Dr. Mahendralal Sircar* (Calcutta: Anglo-Sanskrit Press, 1905), pp. 37–9.

²¹⁸ Mahendralal Sircar, 'Outdoor Homoeopathic Dispensary', *Calcutta Journal of Medicine*, 7, 1 and 2 (1874), 47–52.

²¹⁹ Mahendralal Sircar, 'Further Considerations on the Necessity for a Homoeopathic Hospital and Dispensary in Calcutta', *Calcutta Journal of Medicine*, 8, 2 (1876), 57–62.

Mahendralal wrote a follow-up article in his journal justifying his position and reiterating the enormous traffic of patients at his home dispensary.²²⁰

As much as the entrepreneurs themselves asserted their familial links, such links were perceived and written about by others too. Such familial entanglements were lauded as a marker of the dedication and commitment of these families to the homoeopathic cause. Pratap Chandra Majumdar's obituary notice in the Bengali journal *Hahnemann* explicitly discussed his familial involvement in homoeopathy. Elaborating on Pratap Majumdar's contributions, the obituary referred to his close ties with his father-in-law Biharilal Bhaduri, describing the latter as 'a very competent homoeopathic physician'.²²¹ The author of the obituary expressed a hope that Pratap Chandra's efficient son Jitendranath Majumdar would soon take up his place as one of the leading practitioners in Calcutta.²²² The fact that the renowned homoeopath N. M. Chowdhury (MD) was his son-in-law was also noted.²²³

Likewise, the familial connection between the legendary Mahendralal and Amritalal Sircar was often written about, notably, in the dedications of several popular tracts. For instance, dedicating his well-received book on homoeopathic therapeutics to Mahendralal Sircar, author C. S. Kali also referred to the presence of his illustrious son in the profession.²²⁴ A collection of the great physician's obituaries, compiled by his son Amritalal himself, is replete with similar references. Navin Kali Devi's poem 'Sunya Bharat' or 'Empty India', while lamenting the death of the departed physician was careful to name his worthy son as the only person competent to fill his shoes.²²⁵

However, not all such references to the great homoeopathic practices and business enterprises as families were eulogistic in tone. Later in the twentieth century, as these families slowly engaged themselves also in building formal institutions like colleges and hospitals, there was criticism of their mode of functioning, involving (as it did) accumulation of familial capital. The institutions built by the Majumdars, for instance, were often looked down upon as private, family-run affairs. An editorial in the journal *The Hahnemannian Gleanings* wrote about the Pratap Chandra Memorial Hospital, 'the Pratap Chandra Memorial College and Hospital cannot be called

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Anonymus, 'Shok- Sangbad' ('Sad News'), *Hahnemann*, 5, 7 (1922), 383.

²²² Ibid. ²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ C. S. Kali, 'Dedication page', *Homoeopathic Chikitsa Bidhan (Principles of Homoeopathic Treatment)*, Vol II, 13th edition (Calcutta: S. Kyle and Company, 1928).

²²⁵ Quoted from Arun Kumar Biswas, 'Preface', *Gleanings of the Past and the Science Movement in the Diaries of Drs. Mahendralal and Amritalal Sircar* (Kolkata: Asiatic Society, 2000), p. VIII.

a public institution proper as the properties have not been transferred into the hands of the committee which the College does not possess (*sic*).²²⁶ In their journal *Homoeopathy Paricharak*, a contemporary rival organisation called the Homoeopathy Serving Society accused Hahnemann Publishing Company of attempting to establish ‘*ekchhetiya byabsha*’ or ‘monopoly business’ in homoeopathy.²²⁷

Conclusion

I have been tracing the reception and reconstitution of ideas around German homoeopathy, since the mid-nineteenth century, in three dispersed colonial sites. By the turn of the twentieth century, a literary readership in Bengal routinely encountered the figure of the homoeopath as a quotidian, valued, if caricatured aspect of their social world. Around the same time, governmental disquiet propelled attempts to control non-state, irregular medicine, which were preoccupied not only with traditional practices like ayurveda and unani, but also with European heterodoxies such as homoeopathy. Allegedly, homoeopathy’s ‘scientific sounding name’ confused consumers into participating in quack practice. Along with the administrative and literary perceptions of the proliferation of homoeopathic practice, I have interrogated the processes of production and investments around homoeopathic knowledge. Homoeopathy’s distinct organisation was achieved through a network of Bengali family firms imbued with particular notions of scientific advancement as well as material recompense. Indeed, family emerged not just as the projected consumer but as the crucial generator of this colonial heterodoxy. Unlike the modernising, pedagogic, institution-building initiatives undertaken by the ayurveda and unani revivalists, the homoeopathic entrepreneur-publicists thrived on their crucial interface with the fundamental and intimate institution of the family.²²⁸ Exploring an archive of sociomedical commentaries helped me understand the nineteenth-century visions of an extended joint family system underpinned with values of enterprise, commerce and profit. Histories of heterodox practices such as homoeopathy, much like the recent histories of law, throw new light on the

²²⁶ ‘Editorial Notes and Comments’, *The Hahnemannian Gleanings*, 3, 6 (June 1932), 236.

²²⁷ ‘Editorial: ‘Homoeopathy r Dheki’ (‘Problems of Homoeopathy’), *Homoeopathy Pracharak*, 3, 9 (December 1929), 316–21.

²²⁸ Indeed, existing literature demonstrates that ayurveda was trying to break free of the perception that it was a family and caste-based practice. For an account of the modernising and professionalising initiatives relating to ayurveda since the late nineteenth century through schools, colleges and associations, see Kavita Sivaramakrishnan, *Old Potions, New Bottles: Recasting Indigenous Medicine in Colonial Punjab, 1850–1945* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2006), pp. 53–86.

multiple and often conflicting imaginings of the colonial family, shaped by intersecting discourses of emotion and interest. The following chapters will further trace the role of the family firms in institutionalising homoeopathy as a discrete genre of non-state medicine in myriad other sites; through practices of biographising, processes of translations, as well as quotidian domestic health managements. I will, however, return to explore the governmental reactions towards such unique familial institutionalisation, in order to study the interface between the colonial state and the homoeopathic families in defining what constituted 'scientific' homoeopathy.