

**A Case Study on Mesmeric Anaesthesia, for Painless Surgery at Calcutta  
Mesmeric Hospital from November 1846 to May 1847**

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**Abstract:** *The unthinkable discoveries of technologies and the success of medical science are always impatient to prove each other. In a few moments, the incurable disease is leaving the body forever, and in a few seconds, an injection is releasing the patient from the excruciating pain. But what happened when there was no advanced technology, no electrical appliances, or no chloroform injections to relieve the patient's acute pain? I am trying to explicit the history of an application in medical science to get rid from the pain of surgery, which was came with the western scientific ideas through the colonization in India from the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. I am going to present an analytical case study in this paper, that the treatment of diseases at The Calcutta Mesmeric Hospital by the British physicians during surgery, is the application of Mesmerism in the case of aneastinging the body by giving painless perception till before the chloroform was invented. The objective of my paper is to find out that, mesmerism or hypnosis anastasia would actually be possible to perform any surgery with painlessly. I would like to make a comparative analysis of some cases which treated by this application.*

**Keywords :** *Mesmerism, Anaesthesia, Painless Surgery, Hypnosis.*

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**I.Introduction**

The history of medical science considerably has a different flavour than the Continuity of historical study. There is no trumpet of war, no diplomacy of politics to expand the empire. History has it that the idea is ingrained in our hearts, the history of medical science in India amplify a separate entity from that jurisdiction. In the second half of the eighteenth century British Raj came to India with modern ideas and thought, expanded their colonies. It was the

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beginning of a new era in Indian history. At the same time, there is an unwanted blend of eastern education, consciousness and culture with the east. It would not be wise to assume that the exception from this blended society would be Indian medical science. During this time a radical change took place in the traditional Ayurvedic or medieval Persian medical practice.<sup>1</sup> The most important application of medical science in the modern age is painless surgery. It is important to note that surgery was a tremendous invention of medical science. Although the practice of amputation to treat and cure the patient was started from 600 BCE by Sushruta. However the modern surgical operation was started by French military doctor Embroidery in the middle of 16<sup>th</sup> century AD. John hunter and Philip Syng Physick also left their radiant glimpses to enhance the modern surgical operation.<sup>2</sup> However the idea of palliative from hideous physical pain during the surgical operation was still an unimaginable thought. The idea of anaesthesia was an unknown subject to the world. Whilst the application of Chloroform for anaesthetic surgery was a successful and comprehensive application by James Y. Simpson.<sup>3</sup> But before the chloroform were invented a multiple experimental application like Nitrous oxide or laughing gas, carbonic acid gas, sulphuric ether gas, and animal magnetism Or mesmerism were applied to numb the body. Among from those applications, the most effective application for anaesthesia was mesmerism during the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century AD. Mesmerism played an immense role to continue painless surgical operation.<sup>4</sup> In this paper of mine I have tried to make a sketch on the successful experiment of mesmeric surgery at Calcutta Mesmeric Hospital and depict the patient experience in that case.

## II

### **A Brief History of Mesmerism**

On 1778 in Paris, when Franz Anton Mesmer introduced that the absolute proof of the existence of an imperceptible cosmic fluid passed through the living body then abundant of all the countries from western world were seduced. It was the time when animistic, vitalistic and mechanistic theories have been developed. Those all theories are trying to ascribing the visible effects of invisible causes through scientific ways.<sup>5</sup> Even in France the royal Commission was set Up on 1784 by Louise XVI to investigate the process and the treatment of animal magnetism. It Was named Mesmerism for the first successful application of animal magnetism by F.A. Mesmer. It can also be done by the Mesmerist focusing energy on different parts of the body through the power of thought.<sup>6</sup> The activity of the organs of

special sense, except the eye, may be annihilate, and the power of the muscles mortify. Complete insensibility to pain may be induced by hypnotism, and it has been used as an anaesthetic. The hypnotic state can be produced by some ways like commending to sleep looking on a bright object, mirror or water glass and also fixing eyes but a very effective method of hypnotizing a person is by commanding him to sleep, and having some very soft music played upon the piano, or other stringed instrument.<sup>7</sup> Dr. Elliotson was a pioneer of the Mesmerism to all over England. James Brad was a surgeon of Manchester, who became interested in mesmerism. On 1843 he published neuropsychology on the rationale of nervous sleep. Instead of the word mesmerism, he liked to use the term hypnotism. The relations of England with India and America were formed on the basis of colonialism. So, social synthesis among each other was inevitable. The arrival of mesmerism in America through the enthusiastic work of A. Sidney, Dr. Valentine Mott, J. Keary Rodgers, Delafeild, John W. Francis, Prof. Ackley, etc. In this case, the scientific thoughts of the Western world were transferred to India. Where the Indians were dependent on Eastern Vedic and Greek medicine.<sup>8</sup>

### III

#### Mesmerism in India

Mesmerism was introduced to the Indians in 1845 with the arrival of the Scottish Civil Surgeon James Esdaile. He was appointed by the East India Company in charge of Hooghly Imambara Hospital. Also Joseph Johnson a British doctor practiced mesmerism in Madras inspired by the Esdaile's successful mesmeric surgery in Hooghly. On April 4, 1845 J. Esdaile successfully performed his first painless surgical operation on a mesmerised patient in Indian subcontinent at Calcutta Mesmeric Hospital. By January 22, 1846 Esdaile reported 73 cases of anaesthetic surgical operation used by mesmerism. As the results of this success, the three successive governors of Bengal, Sir Herbert Maddock, The Marquis of Dalhousie and Sir John Litter publicly acknowledged its importance and encouraged its introduction into the government hospitals and rewarded J. Esdaile for introducing mesmerism in India.<sup>9</sup> This was the first step of establishment and progress of mesmerism in Indian subcontinent. Esdaile was performed mesmeric surgery from three hospitals those are Hooghly Imambara Hospital, Calcutta Mesmeric Hospital, and Sukeas Lane Hospital & Dispensary. He also published a several articles in the Calcutta Medical Journal, The diary titled " Mesmerism in India and Its Practical Application in Surgery and Medicine" . He Submitted the reports of his

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successful mesmeric surgery to the members of Calcutta Mesmeric Hospital Committee Sir H.M. Elliot, James Hume, Dr. Martine, Raja Kalikrishna, Raja Sut Charan Ghosal, Raja Pratap Chandra Shing and Babu Ramaprasad Roy. On behalf of this report I had tried to figure out the treatment of the patient in the Calcutta Mesmeric Hospital through the mesmeric anastasia and also the experience of the cured patients.<sup>10</sup>

On 4th April 1845, A Hindoo of the lowest caste was brought to the hospital with a double hydrocele. The water was drawn off one side of the scrotum, and after the sublimate injection were thrown into it. On feeling the pain from the injection, the man threw his head over the back of the chair, and pressed his hands firmly upon his groins, making the convulsions in pain. Seeing him suffering in this way, it occurred to Esdaile to attempt to mesmerise him, and after mesmerism, fire was applied to his knee without his shrinking in the least, and liquor ammonias, that brought tears into their eyes in a moment, the patient was inhaled by him for some minutes without causing an eyeblink. Esdaile now bent his head forward, and placed his eyes in front of a mid-day Indian sun. On opening the eyelids, the pupils were seen to be dilated as if by belladonna, and the light produced no effect whatever upon the iris. At least they are all now quite satisfied that total insensibility of all the senses existed, and left him. The patient awoke after three hours, and had no recollection of anything that had happened.<sup>11</sup>

Sreenath Sen, (aged 30 but looks like 50), came to the hospital crawling along with the help of a pole, his feet were permanently turned out at right angles, and could not be moved inwards, all his joints were stiff and ached, and he looked more like a decrepit ourang outang than a man. He had suffered from rheumatism for the last six years, and for two years had been in his present state. After fifteen days mesmerising, he began to improve, and at the end of two months his feet had resumed their natural position and freedom of motion .

Sheik Bucksh, (aged 40), complaining of pain in the head suffered from neuralgia or tic douloureux for two months, was dismissed cured after twenty days mesmerising. Chucker Singh, afflicted With pain and stiffness in his back for ten months, was discharged cured after a month. Allup Khan, (aged 26) with a stiff and painful leg suffered from sciatica for eight months and also cured in a Month.

Lunkoo, (aged 35), has had the shaking palsy for a year, Being the sequel of a severe fever. He cannot stand without support on both sides ; his body shakes continually ; the hands are half closed and cannot be shut or opened farther; he can only raise his hands half way to

his head, and his speech is nearly inarticulate. He can now, at the end of two months, Walk after a fashion with the help of a stick, shut and open his hands forcibly, and raise his arms to the natural extent above his head ; he speaks much better and the shaking of his body is much diminished. One of the most wonderful effects produced by mesmerism was visible in the case of an old man Of about 50 year of age. He was admitted into the hospital about two months Ago with palsy of Long standing . He had lost all power of Speech, his limbs were never quiet, he could not shut his Hands Or raise his arm above the elbow, nor could he walking the Short space of two months he Could speak well and intelligibly, Could shut and open his hands freely, could lift his arm up Above His head with ease, and managed to walk with a stick Quite well enough to serve his purposes.

Dr. Kean, of Berhampore, says that the taking a hasty glance over the years of 1847 and 1848, I see that about 74 patients were mesmerised, and that of these, 64 were discharged cured to all appearance, and I think it has been successful in every case of epilepsy.<sup>12</sup>

Moteelall Koonwar, a writer, (aged 38). He fell down in a Fit, three months ago, and lay insensible For two days. On The third day, he was partially restored to his senses by general bleeding and leeching. Since that time, his body, excepting the right arm, has become partially paralysed, and Subject to a peculiar pricking sensation, which prevents him sleeping at night. He feels and wallas like an intoxicated person, and sees double. He cannot stir a foot without a staff. July 2d. To be Mesmerised for an hour and a half daily. July 15<sup>th</sup>. He is gradually regaining the use of his Limbs, and can walk a little without his staff. July 25<sup>th</sup>. He comes to the hospital daily without a Staff.He does not feel the inebriated sensation now, and he can hold things firmly in his Hands. August 31 his vision is perfect, the pricking sensation Is gone; he walks like any other man, and has returned to his duty.

Chunder Sen, a labourer (aged 50). He has been suffering for Four months from weakness of the Limbs up to the knees, and Total loss of sensation all over his body. He does not feel the Slightest pain during severely pricked all over with a scalpel also he walks slowly and insecurely. From 25<sup>th</sup> november he mesmerised daily for an hour and a half, on 30<sup>th</sup> november his body was examined To-day, he felt slight pain in his right breast only, and he was found to walk a little better. 10<sup>th</sup> december the sensibility of his skin is restored, except in the arms, which are as insensible as Logs. 13<sup>th</sup> of december he able to walks and feels like any other man. He thinks himself perfectly recovered, and was discharged To-day behalf of his own request.<sup>13</sup>

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On 3rd of August, a Brahmin came to the hospital With a strangulated rupture, attended with the usual pain, constipation, and vomiting : the gut had been down for twenty-Four hours Madon Mohan Roy, a fine Hindu boy, twelve years old, Was brought to the hospital with a compound fracture of Both bones of the fore-arm. He also treat with the help of mesmerism. Also Vinod Vihare Roy (43 age) on 3<sup>rd</sup> december, Haranchind (25age ) on 16<sup>th</sup> December, Mathour (40 age) they all suffering from Hypertrephed Serotine. In the month of January Madhusudhan Paul(14 age) 3<sup>rd</sup> February Swarup Dutta(53age), Shaikh Ameer (60age), are treated at Culcutta Mesmeric Hospital with the help of Mesmeric anaesthesia. Way we can easily find a large number of people had been cured at Calcutta Mesmeric Hospital with date from West Bengal State Archive at In Judicial Section in the year of 7July 1867 proceeding of 1847,7th to 28th July Data. No 32 BD/10 July/47, No of 100 a forwarding latter to the J.H. Macouley the Governor of Bengal reports. <sup>14</sup>

Le Médecin Malgré Lui was a visitor of Calcutta Mesmeric Hospital to inspect the work of Dr. Esdaile. He reported a patient who had operated his tumor of 60 pounds by painlessly through mesmeric anaesthesia. Also an old man, that 50 year of age was admitted into the hospital about two months with palsy of long standing, he had lost all power of speech, his limbs were never quite, he could not shut his hands or raise his arm above the elbow, nor could walk. After a short application of mesmerism for two months he could speak well and intelligibly, could shut and open his hands freely, could lift his arms up above his head with case, and managed to walk with a stick quite well enough to serve his purposes. <sup>15</sup>

When Lord Dalhousie visits to inspect the hospital in India, he overwhelmed to read the hospital reports and documentry report of the visitors. He said “ That is perfectly superfluous, there can be no doubt about the matter.” Soon after Dr. Esdaile had appointed as Presidency Surgeon Of Calcutta. At this time a list of the mesmeric operations performed by Dr. Esdaile has been published. The list is given below as the name of disease and the number of the patients.

Amputation of Thigh – 2, Leg – 1, Arm – 2, breast – 4, Thumb – 1, Great Toe – 1, Penis – 3, One testis – 3, Two testis – 2, Enlarged clitoris and aymphea – 1, Scrotal tumours of all size from 10 IBS to 103 Ibs of weight – 200, Cancer of cheek extirpated – 1, Eyeball extirpated – 1, Scrotum Extirpated – 2, Cartilaginous tumours on the ears removed – 2, Cataracts operated – 3, End of bone in a compound fracture sawn off – 1, End of thumb cut

off – 1, Great Toe nails cut out by the roots – 5, Gum cut away – 1, Heels flayed – 3, Hypertrophy of penis removed – 3, Hypertrophy perpuce removed – 1, Lithotomy – 1, Lithotrity – 1, Piles, suppurating, cut out – 2, Prolapsus ani, the size of a child's head, reduced in the trance – 1, Strangulated hernia reduced – 3, Straitened contracted arms – 3, Straitened contracted knees – 3, Tumour in the groin removed – 1, Tumour in the antrum maxillare – 1, Tumour on leg removed – 1, Total – 261 had been cured by painless surgery through mesmeric aesthesia by the hand of Dr. Esdaile's at Hooghly and Calcutta Mesmeric Hospital. <sup>16</sup>

#### IV

##### **Patient's Experience of Painless Surgery through Mesmerism.**

A new chapter in the history of western medical science in India begins with mesmerism, and it was first applied at Bengal by James Esdaile. But the Bengalis are thought that this process was very well known and widely practiced by the people of Bengal also, they thought that this method of anesthetizing the body was just a reaction to "Jhar Phuk." In a conversation with Dr. Stronger, James Esdaile, we learn that the people of Bengal underwent surgical physical immobilization, a different approach to the common "Jhar Fook". Which Bengalis have been accustomed to seeing for a long time. Where the deity rests on a person, it results in the physical numbness of that person where jhara being to stroke, and phoonka to breathe. The person who completes this work of physical numbness is Fukawaj or the Jadoowala. In this context, we have to talk about Bikram, who had been listening, and said that, "Jar-phoonk ? Oh yes, I know it, I am an up countryman, and will tell you all about it ; this is the way the "Jadoo-wallahs" do that practised in Bengal."<sup>17</sup> It is believed that, those Bengali people came to Dr Esdaile's hospital, are attracted by The fame which that gentleman's operations have obtained throughout Bengal, and all come to him Impressed with the fullest and firmest belief in his supernatural powers; in fact the common name under Which the mesmeric Hospital is known among the Lower classes is that of the house of magic, or jadoo Hospital. So most of the Bengalis were afraid to go to this hospital and most of those who went to get relief from the pain asked for anonymity.<sup>18</sup>

#### V. Conclusion

From the above mentioned discussion it is evident that, The experimental application of mesmerism in the field of medical science in Bengal during these 5 years between 1843 and

1848 was indeed a shining episode in the history of Indian science. At the same time there is no doubt that this form of history needs further study which will make it possible to uncover multiple new pieces of information in this context. In my discussion, I have made every effort to summarize this isolated history as briefly as possible. The Bengalis have described each hypnosis as a magical or Devine effect; however, before the discovery of chloroform by the English, this discovery was an unprecedented application in the field of painless surgery. In conclusion, I would like to say that this form of research is not limited to the number of words, but I hope that it will be a thrilling topic for the people of Bengal and among the lovers of History.

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