

An Indian Psychiatric Nurse in the United States

A Personal Experience

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THE desire to go abroad for purposes of higher education arises in the minds of a number of Indian students. Reading about the rapid progress in their field of interest and satiating their curiosity by talking to a number of foreign returned students, they consider U.S.A. to be the answer for the lacunae, which they perceive in their own country's educational system. Having had the opportunity to complete the Master's degree in Mental Health Nursing in the University of Hawaii, U.S.A., I would like to, in a rather reflective tone, highlight some of the hurdles faced by an Indian Nursing student in U.S.A. especially in graduate (Master's level) Mental Health studies.

The Problem of Dependence

The Indian heritage fosters dependency among its people. Decisions are seldom made independently without consultation with the older members of the family. Components of the dependency are seen in the educational system, ranging from the Guru-chela relationship to the kind of close supervision and guidance given in schools and colleges of today. An Indian student with such a background finds herself out of depth when she is forced to make independent choices, decisions and actions. For example an Indian nurse requires greater consultation with superiors, before being able to decide on a dissertation topic, to prepare for class seminars or home assignments.

As reported by Neki (1973) when a student is in a new country he loses the nurturing family living and finds with dismay that dependency is a taboo.

Indian Nursing students are conspicuous by their lack of confidence, diffidence and greater anxiety in their participation in academic activities. For example the preparation of a seminar could be adequate with probably greater efforts than other students. However, the presentation would reflect diffidence. Similarly, classroom participation is given much importance in the evaluation of the student. However, subjective feeling of inadequacy prevents the Indian student from participating in the classroom discussion.

Speaking local language with the local accent becomes extremely important for a Nursing trainee in both her personal and professional life. Communication in her personal life poses less of a problem than it does in psychotherapeutic settings. The educational system in U.S.A. however makes it mandatory for a foreign student to undergo English learning courses (English speaking 81, 82, 83, English listening,

71, 72, 73, English writing 91, 92, 93). Students find this an additional burden as it not only increases the number of credits to be completed in a particular semester but it also is in no way helpful in therapeutic communication.

The Informality of Classroom

The informality of the classroom set-up leaves the Nursing trainee in awe. Being accustomed to the structured classrooms and traditional modes of teaching, the Nursing trainee finds it difficult to make optimal use of the classes. She is shocked by her colleagues lying/sitting/having coffee/or breakfast/ during the class (as they are very busy)/classes being conducted in parks, beaches becomes the greatest impediment to learning.

Our culture fosters dependency and reprimands individuals who follow an already established path. Humility and caution are encouraged leading to lesser overexpression. This absence of verbal aggression and avoidance of direct expression of one's feelings are qualities esteemed in Indian society (Ananth, 1979). Hence a country which demands competitiveness, independence and individualism slows down the Indian students' progress and leaves in her a feeling of inadequacy in completing the academic requirements.

During the clinical placements students are assigned the total responsibility of finding suitable hospital, clients to complete their course requirements. A foreign trainee being new to the country with problems in communication and finding her or his way about looks upon this task with great anxiety. Her or his apprehension stems from travelling alone, contacting numerous agency personnel, establishing rapport with the clients and obtaining permission from the client for audio and video recording of the therapeutic sessions. Nursing trainees face the greatest difficulty in getting adequate number of clients at a given time for group therapy. Clients for individual, family and couple therapy are comparatively easier to get.

Management of Patients

Finally, the policies with regard to the management of psychiatric patients vary in the two countries and often lead to a lot of conflict in the trainee (e.g., medicating a patient without her/his consent in the U.S.A. is considered against the law).

In spite of these obstacles the trainee is still a

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Between Two Different Cultures

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privileged person for having been trained in two different cultures with totally alien value systems, attitudes and norms. On returning to India she needs to adapt what she has learned to her country's requirement and then make optimal use of her opportunity to study in an advanced culture.

A word of caution to a young trainee : implement these programmes if feasible, but do not get frustrated and give up at the first sign of delay !

Bibliography

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How to Approaches the Nilgiris

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monious and healthy community living. The Toda colonies known as 'Mandhs' are to be found around Ooty. The latter are fast diminishing.

Means of Approach : The Nilgiris could be reached by road or by rail. On the East is Mettupalayam from where starts the Ghat road and the railway. Traveling in either of the above is a thrilling experience in itself. The hairpin bends are a special feature of the Ghat road as are the dark tunnels and bridges to the railway. Coonoor, Ooty and Kotagiri can be reached by road from Mettupalayam. The metre-gauge mountain railway winding its way through the hills affords plenty of fun and pleasure to tourists, as it puffs its way through numerous bridges, streams, waterfalls and tunnels. The flora varies as you climb up. The children call it the 'match box train'.

Ooty can be reached by bus from Mysore, Calicut and other

bordering towns of Kerala and Karnataka. A most breathtaking view of the Mysore Plateau, the river valleys and slopes of hills can be seen while travelling from Ooty to Mysore.

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