



## **Down the memory lane: Dr Om Prakash Singh**



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“Looking back, I am amused and astounded by the myriad of paths I crossed to be where I am today. I was born in an Agricultural Family in which my father put a premium on education and came to work as a teacher in Dunlop Estate, a township developed by Dunlop Tyres from the backlands of Ballia, Uttar Pradesh. Though I was born in Dunlop, my early childhood and primary schooling were done in the village primary school, where we used to sit on *chatais* (floor mats). In childhood, I used to have severe cluster headaches lasting more than a month. It was so crippling that I couldn't attend school for the whole duration. Still, being a voracious reader, I read virtually anything available, including Ramayana, Mahabharata, Geeta etc. Also, I learned about the social structure, values, respect and togetherness despite differences, politics and other virtues that shaped me into what I am today.

After primary school, I moved to the township school at Dunlop; it was an industrial area in the seventies in West Bengal with a unique atmosphere, with lots of love and bonding as well as industrial and other unrest. My elder brother had already enrolled in engineering college, so

everybody assumed I would be a doctor. Not very interested in traditional and formal studies and not very proficient in games, I read all the books in the township library, which was quite rich. Another thing I learned was not to be boastful of my knowledge, skills and studies at the risk of being isolated; that had given me the power to be inclusive without categorising or typecasting but also paradoxically gave me a sort of handicap of not showing my accomplishment.

I was keen to study physics but got admitted to Medicine at **Burdwan Medical College**, where I became General Secretary of the Students Union in 2nd year. I dabbled in many things, including working with tribals, rice mill workers etc. Fascinated by popular literature and books like Born to Win, I decided to be a psychiatrist. I also found that I can bond well with people; they find comfort in me and easily confide in me. I assumed that I would be a good psychiatrist.

Furthermore, I wanted to be a Professor in a Medical college. At that time, it was challenging to become a professor due to service rules, so psychiatry was one subject where it seemed easier. I was also encouraged by my mentor and teacher, who wanted psychiatry but did not have the courage. On his advice, I did a house staff ship in general medicine for the first six months and then six months in psychiatry because he emphasised that you must know medicine and neurology well enough to be a good psychiatrist.

I chose Psychiatry over General Medicine and got admission to Patna Medical College for a two-year MD psychiatry course. At that time, it was not recognised. I left the

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course and had ultimately taken admission to MD psychiatry at *LHMC, Delhi*, where I found the atmosphere intellectually stimulating. We had a very caring department, and in the coffee room, which was a tradition, there were discussions about computers and the difference between human and computer intelligence etc., in 1992, it was quite invigorating and refreshing. I gave fully to my studies for the first time in my life.

After passing in 1994, I did a one-year Senior Resident at IMS, BHU. Then I returned to West Bengal, where I joined West Bengal Health Service and was posted as in charge of 30 bedded Rural Hospital, where I worked as a General Duty Medical officer. The job was challenging, but it gave me many skills and experiences. I used to see around 500 patients in OPD and manage the administration, making it the best Rural Hospital in the district. Though I felt frustrated for being away from psychiatry, I devoted myself fully to the service of the people. I got many blessings, particularly from the tribal people of the nearby Jungle Mahal forest.

In 1999 I managed to shift to the newly created West Bengal Medical Education Service and Joined Medical College Kolkata as a lecturer in April 1999. After I disagreed with powerful HOD Medicine there, as psychiatry was a part of medicine, I transferred to Bankura Medical College, a small medical College in a remote area where I had to take charge of HOD psychiatry, being the senior most there. I was also put as a NODAL officer at DMHP (Pilot) Project at Bankura, one of the 16 districts chosen in the country. I started indoor admissions at Bankura and started the DMHP against heavy administrative odds in 1 year.

Eventually, I transferred to my medical college, *Burdwan Medical College*, in 2001 and worked as Assistant Prof, Associate Prof and subsequently to Prof,

continuing to remain HOD. Since there was no PG, I devoted myself to teaching UG students, making Psychiatry a popular branch, with students choosing psychiatry in their elective postings. As a teacher's representative, I led a movement to create a teaching practising service, and we successfully made it a practising service in 2004. We got State of the Art building with the most modern seminar room from 50 lakhs of plan B of NMHP, giving Psychiatry Department an aura. Other departments used to utilise our facilities for their activities. I must say I never felt discriminated against or belittled as a psychiatrist; on the contrary, our dept was quite popular and well-regarded, and I was also Governing Body Member of the college. In 2009, we opened Psychiatry PG along with 85 seats in different departments, and our college became PG college after so many years. We were also able to open Superspeciality branches. It was the most satisfying period of my life. I developed a decent private practice, also.

In 2011 with the change of Government transferred to IOP, Kolkata, where I was for eight months; then, I moved to NRS Medical College and gradually became involved in activities of IPS due to my friends and eventually became Hony. Editor in 2018; as a reward, I was again transferred to a non-PG college which ultimately I did not join and devoted myself to [\*IPS, Journal \(IJP\)\*](#) and practice. Motivated by my love for teaching and understanding the loss of students' learning during the covid period, I started the PG journey program, PG classes online, which became quite popular and filled the learning gap for many students.

My journey as a Psychiatrist and teacher has never been smooth. Still, it has been quite exhilarating with lots of regard and love from the colleagues of other branches, and it provided me with a social standing which would not have been possible with other streams.