

Abbe De Faria - First to Explain Hypnotism

Shridhar Sharma¹

Abstract

Faria L Abbe is an Indian from Goa, a Catholic Priest and Philosopher was in Paris learned about mesmerism and evolved hypnotic practice in the initial stages calling it as 'Lucid sleep', developed a theory to explain the phenomenon and methodically created a series of actions to induce hypnosis. Thus, though Faria is the first scientific exponent of hypnosis, he is not recognized at all in the field.

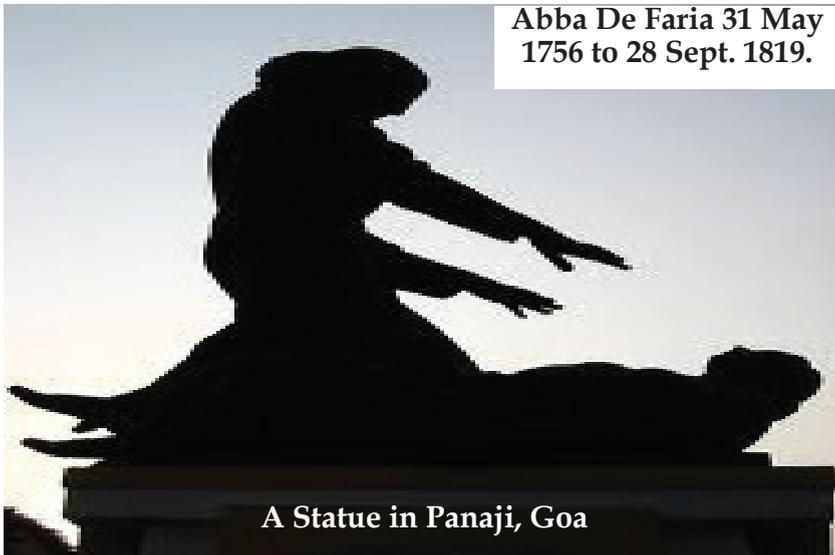
Introduction

Indian thought is a chapter of the history of human mind full of vital meanings which are relevant even today. The ideas of great ancient thinkers are never obsolete. The ideas of some ancient thinkers startle us by their striking modern character for insight does not depend on modernity. One of the earliest but not well known contributors to the understanding of mind and founder of the doctrine of suggestion was Abba De Faria, a priest from Goa (Faria L Abbe 1819 –Delgado D.G. 1906 and Moniz Egas 1925). Though Faria is a true founder of hypnosis but has not received much recognition in English literature.

¹ Prof. Dr. Shridhar Sharma MD, FRCPsy.(Lond).DPM, FRANZCP (Australia), DFAPA(USA), FAMS is Emeritus Professor, National Academy of Medical Sciences & Institute of Human Behaviour & Allied Sciences, Delhi, India.

Faria's Early Life

Jose Custodio de Faria (Faria L' Abbe 1819), later the celebrated "Abbe Faria", was born at Candolim, a village of Bardez-Goa, on 31st May 1756. He was baptized in the Church of Our Lady of Hope and Parish of the same name, on the 7th June, 1756 and was given the name Jose Custodio de Faria. His father, Caetano Vitorino de Faria was a native of the village of Colvale, Bardez. He was a descendant of Ananta Sinai, a Gaud Saraswat Brahmin by caste, village clerk and Patil of the same village who embraced Christianity at the end of the 16th century. When Jose Custodio was 15 yrs old, his father moved to Portugal and took his son with him. On 21st February 1771, Faria sailed from Goa in the ship S. Jose and arrived at Lisbon on 23rd November, 1771.



Education

In 1772, the two Farias went to Rome via Genova with letters of recommendation from the Papae Nuncio to various personalities of Rome. Jose Custodio Faria continued his studies in Rome as an Internee, in the College of "Propaganda Fide" up to. 1780. He obtained doctorate in Theology on a profound subject "De Existencia Dei, Deo Uno et Divina Revelatione" (Faria L'Abbe 1819) (About God's existence, About one God and Divine Revelation). He was ordained as a priest on 12th March 1780. After com-

pletion of his studies, Abbe Faria returned to Lisbon, where he was also received at the court. The romantic fact that his father was a priest and his mother a nun caused a certain stir, mainly in the eyes of the aristocratic public in Portugal.

Change in Career

Abbe Faria, convinced that there was no chance of advancement in an ecclesiastical career in Portugal, decided to seek elsewhere an appropriate field for his intellectual activity based on his experiences, practice and to master the art and science of mesmerism, which was popular in France. He left for Paris in the spring of 1788, to fulfill his ambitions. Curiously the first trace of his existence in the big city is recorded in the Registrar of Denunciation (1792) of the Section of Ponceau (better known after 1793, as of "the friends of the motherland") in the National Archives. Faria arrived in Paris, four years after the departure of Mesmer. But the fashion was still alive; the appeal for marvelous things was as burning as ever. One would be interested in knowing how Abbe Faria was attracted to Mesmerism. There is a suggestion, that he brought the Science with him from India where mysticism was known and practiced by Hindu Priests in the temples of India. Being a Philosopher, he was highly observant and possessed a passion for novelty. It is likely that the mysticism in "mesmerism" interested him. It is not easy to fix the exact time of the beginning of his public demonstrations of hypnotism. The first reference to Faria as a magnetizer is in the "Memoir of Chateaubriand" (Chateaubriand 1768-1848 published after his death in 1843; the relevant passage was probably written in 1802).

It seems, Faria continued his experiments and practice in Paris till 1811. Later he went to Marseilles as a Professor of Philosophy in the Academy "Lyceum" of that city. During his stay there he was elected a member of the Medical Society of Marseilles (Dalgado DG 1906, Chateaubriand 1768-1848) in recognition of his contribution to the phenomena of hypnotism. Later, in 1812, Faria joined the Academy of Nimes as a Professor of Philosophy, but he was not pleased with this new position as it was inferior to the previous one he held at Marseilles. He returned to Paris in 1813, where

he was conferred the title of Professor and started a public course on "Lucid Sleep". On obtaining permission from the Prefect of Police, he began on 11th August 1813 to hold conferences every Thursday at No. 49, Clichy Street. The charge was five francs for each meeting. These meetings attracted the cream of Parisian society. He was much spoken of and obtained great publicity from the Press for his contribution to the phenomena of lucid sleep, mysticism and hypnotism.

His Theory

It may be relevant to state that the phenomena of hypnosis developed further by other scholar like Puysegur, Liebaudet (1823-1904). Bernhelim (School of Nancy) Charcot 1825-1893 and Janet (1859-1947). And we know that Freud (1856 - 1939) was profoundly influenced by the four months of training that he undertook with Charcot between 1885-86. As such, Faria (Faria L' Abbe 1819, Moniz Egas 1925) was the true founder of the modern doctrine of suggestion. In order to understand his ideas well, it is essential to compare them with those of his contemporaries.

Faria refuted all contemporary theories on Mesmerism saying "I can't conceive, all the human species was so foolish, to go to search the cause of this phenomenon in a tub, in an external wish, in magnetic fluid, in animal heat and in thousands of different ridiculous things of this type. There is nothing that can justify the denomination of animal magnetism, to signify the 'Action of Sleep'." He replaced the term 'animal magnetism' by 'concentration', 'magnetizers' by 'concentrators' and 'magnetized' by 'concentrated'.

As for the existence of any kind of magnetic fluid, a remarkable departure from the theory of Mesmer, Faria showed the absurdity of this in the following demonstration.

"A certain number of people were placed near the tree of Mesmer and Puysegur, (Dalgado, D.G. 1906) but nothing happened; the same people were placed near another tree and were convinced that tree was 'magnetized without it actually being so; it was observed that many fell into deep sleep.'" He concluded that the supposition of magnetic fluid

as suggested by Mesmer at that time is completely absurd, whether one considers its nature, its application or its results. Faria explained the mechanism of mysticism and it was he who first marked out its natural limits. His Opinion was firm and unshakeable. In his own words "nothing comes out in hypnotic sleep that is not natural". He not only observed facts but also scrutinized hypnotic susceptibility. He was quick to appreciate that some people succumb quickly while others remain refractory. He gave more importance to the person hypnotized than to the hypnotizer. He explained that people who are anemic (fluidity of blood), who sleep easily, who sweat much, who are much impressionable and hysterical, are more susceptible to somnambulism. These observations by him are very important, considering how little was known about the physiology of the nervous system and sleep at that time. He thought that women are better hypnotic subjects than men, and that practice improves performance, i.e. hypnotism works more easily on subjects who are often hypnotized. Susceptibility in short, was not seen by him as fixed and static attribute.

Faria considered that the immediate cause of hypnosis lay in what he called "The concentration of senses" of the hypnotised person and for this "Mental peace and physical calmness is essential." He added "One can't be put to sleep as long as the mind is occupied either by the agitation of blood or worries or troubles, etc."

He admitted that suggestion played an important part but also said it was not the only factor.

While many later writers continued to attribute the cause of hypnosis to such things as 'concentration of attention' (Preyer; Moniz Egas 1925, Dalgado D.G. 1906) connection of sleep (De Jong; Moniz Egas 1925) autosuggestion (Ochorowic Varsovia; Moniz Egas 1925), others acknowledged their debt to Faria. Liebault for example writes, "the cause of hypnotic sleep lies in the retreat of attention out of the senses and concentration of the mind on one idea which is the main point". Moniz rightly states that this insight was gained first not by James Braid (Moniz Egas, 1925) as was commonly supposed but by Abbe de Faria.

Faria Technique

Faria employed the following procedures for hypnosis:

1. 1. *First Method:* Faria used to sit comfortably and ask the person to sit likewise, 'to close his eyes and imagine himself going to sleep. When the person was calm, he would exclaim in a loud voice "DORMEZ" (Sleep) and the person would fall into lucid sleep.
2. 2. *Second Method:* Faria used to ask the person to fix his gaze on his (Faria's) hand. From a distance he would slowly approach until his hand was close to the eyes of the person who would sometimes thereupon fall into lucid sleep.
3. 3. *Third Method:* Faria used to touch the frontal region, the bridge of the nose, the chest up to the epigastrium, the knees and the feet and slowly the person used to fall asleep.

If the first trial did not induce sleep, he used to repeat them. If the fourth attempt also failed, he would declare that the individual is incapable of falling into lucid sleep.

The procedures are entirely suggestive and psychical. According to Bernheim (Moniz Egas 1925) this is the sleep by suggestion, which is insinuated in the mind of the patient. There is no doubt, that Faria is the founder of the method of suggestion in hypnosis.

Some English writers who were not aware of Faria's contribution have attributed discovery of hypnotism to James Braid, an English Surgeon. It is obvious from the above facts that Braid's discovery of Lucid Sleep, was secondary to that of Faria, who discovered the same 30 years later in 1841. It is also interesting to note that Braid was influenced by Indian writings and yoga. Dr. James Esdale (1808 to 1859) – a contemporary of Braid was an Anesthetist, was practicing in Calcutta. His license was cancelled for practicing Hypnosis as an Anesthetist. These historical facts again show that India had a prominent role to play in influencing his ideas on the subject.

Faria's work "De la cause Du Somneil Lucide" (Faria L'Abbe 1819) about the cause of lucid sleep, is divided into four volumes, out of which only one was published after his death. It was written in French and published in 1819 (Faria died on 28th September 1819 due to apoplexy) by a publisher of Paris and it was republished in 1906, by one of his Goan friends Dr. Gelasio Delgado, who lived in Paris.

Le Abbe Faria is one of the Principal characters of Alexander Dumas' (Dumas Alexander 1959) famous book "Count of Monte Cristo". Le Abbe de Faria is also mentioned by the celebrated chateaubriand, (Chateaubriand 1968-1848) another great (French author, in his book "Memories de Alem Jumule" – this work has been also translated into Portuguese and English.

It is clearly evident from the available records mentioned, that Faria was the first:-

- to deny the existence of magnetic fluid.
- to attribute the phenomenon of somnambulism to the anemic condition and the psychic impressionability of the hypnotized subject.
- to discover the suggestive psychic procedure for provoking somnambulism.
- to employ the same suggestive procedure to step the somnambulist state and the division of the personality.
- to observe and describe some new symptoms by suggestion.
- to propose a psychological theory, explaining the phenomenon of somnambulism.
- to give experimental and therapeutic suggestions in a really extraordinary fashion.

This clearly shows that Abba de Faria rightfully becomes the first and pioneer to establish the phenomena of suggestibility as the cause of hypnosis.

References:

Chateaubriand: *Memorias de Alem Tumule*, 1768-1848.

Dumas Alexandre (1959): *The Count of Monte Cristo*, Complete and unabridged, Jaico Book, New Delhi.

Faria L' Abbe de (1906): *De la cause du Somneil lucide ou Etude de la Nature de l'Homme*. Edited by Dr. D.G. Dalgado, Paris Henri Jouve editeur, 15 Rue Racine 15. Reimpression de l'edition De 1819, Paris.

Moniz Egas (1925): *O padre Faria na historia do hypnotism*, Lisboa.

Serge Ginger and Michel Meignant (2002) in *Globalized Psychotherapy* (Ed. Alfred Pritz). Facultas Universitatsverlag, Vienne.