

GLIMPSSES OF SURGERY & A SURGEON

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Book Reviews

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INTRODUCTION

Having practiced as a Surgeon in the city of Chennai for nearly 40 years ending in 2004, I had the pleasure and privilege of serving a large number of people in and around Madras/ Chennai, from various walks of life, interacting with them and handling many types of surgical situations. My professional work was both in private practice from 1965 to 2004 and in Govt. service as an honorary medical officer in three Medical colleges in Madras/Chennai, from 1965 to 1996. Coming from a middle class agricultural family, to become a Doctor was a great privilege; to become a Surgeon was a greater opportunity and becoming a qualified Plastic & Reconstructive Surgeon was my dream come true. And after qualifying in Plastic Surgery, to have the opportunity to perform a wide spectrum of General Surgery procedures, various Plastic Surgical operations and later even some Laparoscopic Surgeries was a unique, wonderful and fulfilling experience in my professional life. To be able to apply basic principles of plastic surgery in everyday general surgery was a huge quality addition to all general surgical procedures. Laparoscopic surgery brought in a new dimension to all fields of surgery. I got to perform some of the most complicated and major surgeries in all these fields, sometimes in most unexpected and shocking situations. I had to face many do-or-die situations and had to take some split second decisions under these trying circumstances. In that just bygone era the investigative facilities and surgical instruments were quite different from the current situation in the 21st century. But by and large, the basics of surgical & medical practice were similar. However a surgeon depended more on detailed and careful clinical evaluation with more interactions between him and the patient, giving it a more personal approach. We depended less on lab tests and special investigations. In fact in the earlier part of my profession the way we performed some of the surgical operations would appear very primitive, crude and may even be considered wrong by present day 21st century standards. But we quickly and inevitably caught up with the advancements, to be in the forefront of developing technologies and changing times.

Surgical instrumentation and technologies were changing at a fast pace; and medical skills were expanding in different directions.

By getting a glimpse of surgical profession as practiced in India in the last 3 to 4 decades of 20th century and early 21st century, one may be surprised and even shocked. On the contrary one may even appreciate or admire how some of the surgeons in the bygone era managed so well with the kind of relatively 'primitive' equipment and limited knowledge base. But most of you, either a medical professional or a lay person, will consider yourself lucky to be beneficiaries of the vast advances in various medical and surgical specialities that are being practised now in the 21st century.

'A successful man is one who can lay a firm foundation with the opportunities that come his way.'

Author unknown

The above words are a depiction of my efforts and trials to become what I am today.

We were a large family from Udupi, with an agricultural background. Both my parents were simple and hardworking type. Though they themselves had very little formal education, their hopes for their children was that they get good qualifications and lead a successful life. (*1&*2) It was because of their determination, that I could pursue a medical course, whatever the financial constraints were at that time.

*1) *Me (MMR) and my Mananje family at*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pz7q94fRwwU>

*2) *Childhood memories of my trip to Mananje at*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=crAnegMEZwg>



Mananje Family photo about 1941/42.
Mohanrao sitting on ground third from left



Our ancestral Mananje house in our village, in 2018

Though personally I had no dreams of a medical career, when the opportunities came my way, I was eager to grab them and make things work out to the best of my ability, come what may. I was totally convinced that destiny has a large control on one's life.

The rest of my sharing in writing this chronicle is true of what is quoted below:

'Whenever you see a successful person, you only see the public glories, never the private sacrifices to reach them.'

Vaibhav Shah

BASIC PHYSICIANS AND SPECIALISTS

Even in ancient India the Vaidyas or Physicians were categorised according to type of treatment given by them. (##1) Among them Acharya Sushruta was a well-known specialist in Surgery. He devised various surgical instruments for surgery suited for various organs and all these were recorded in his treatise 'Sushruta Samhita'. There is also mention of physicians specialising in treatments pertaining to specific organs. Ancient Egyptians also practiced surgery. In the document Papyrus, written about 1600 BC, it was recorded that Egyptians were well acquainted with a variety of surgical problems. Surgery also finds mention with some details in the Code of Hammurabi, the code of law developed in 1760 BC during the reign of the Mesopotamian King Hammurabi. The code called for strict discipline of surgeons and severe punishment for erring surgeons. Greeks and Romans used surgery as a last resort. The Greeks used herbal preparations in wine or water for treating wounds. They performed various surgical procedures also. (##2) Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564), Professor of Anatomy in University of Padua, was a father figure in anatomical dissections in humans, anatomy being the basis of all surgeries. Ambrose Pare (1510-1590), a French army surgeon, was considered the father of military surgery. The 'Hippocratic oath' written in 5th century BC, laid down the principles of medical practice and professional ethics by all who get qualified to practice medicine and surgery. (##3)

The era of modern surgery developed mostly in the 19th century with knowledge and expertise in four basic and fundamental requirements for any surgery. For performing successful surgery one needed to have good knowledge of anatomy, have the expertise to control bleeding due to injury and surgery, pain relief of anaesthesia while doing surgery unhurriedly and also know-how about prevention and control of infection during and after surgery.

Vesalius in 1543 itself published a land mark text book on human anatomy, which was later augmented and supplemented by other stalwarts. John Hunter (1715-1789) was a Scottish surgeon, who is considered the father of modern scientific surgery. His original work and experiments in various diseases and surgical methods made enormous contributions to modern medicine and surgery. Several others like Benjamin Bell (1749-1806) Percival Pott (1714-1788), Astley Paston Cooper (1768-1841), James Syme (1799-1870) were other notable contributors to modern medicine. Techniques of anaesthesia, antiseptic methods and sterilization of surgical instruments developed in early 19th century. American surgeon, Crawford Long (1815-1878) introduced 'ether' as anaesthetic agent. Chloroform was introduced and popularised by James Young Simson (1811-1870) and later popularised in England by John Snow (1813-1858), physician to Queen Victoria, who was administered chloroform during childbirth. British surgeon Joseph Lister in the 1860s was the pioneer of antiseptic surgery, working on the discoveries of infection due to micro-organisms by French chemist Louis Pasteur. Later Lister further developed antisepsis into 'asepsis', leading to the present era of aseptic surgery. Discovery of X-rays in 1895 by German Physicist, Wilhelm Rontgen and subsequent developments late in the 20th century leading to ultrasound imaging (U S Scan), computerised axial tomography scan (C A T Scan) and magnetic resonance imaging (M R I Scan) gave huge boosts for developments in surgery and medicine. (##2)

Various pioneer surgeons have laid a firm foundation for many of the present day surgical operations. German surgeon, Ludwig Rehn in 1880, did the first thyroidectomy. William Stewart Halstead of John Hopkins in 1882, introduced the most accepted surgery of Complete Radical Mastectomy for breast cancer. About 1900, Harvey Cushing pioneered brain surgery. German surgeon Georg Kelling in 1901, performed the first laparoscopic surgery in dogs. Kiwi Surgeon, Harold Gillies popularised Plastic Surgery in 1917. There were many other huge contributors to modern medicine and surgery till the present time of minimal access surgery, robotic surgery, laser surgery, organ transplantations, C T Scan, PET scan, spare parts surgery, stem cell therapy, composite body parts transplantations, womb transplants, penis transplants etc.(##3)

Reference: ## 1: THE CONCEPT AND PRACTICE OF SURGERY IN ANCIENT INDIA:
http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/135907/7/07_chapter%20ii.pdf

Few relevant information from the above are as follows:

During those days there were three categories of Vaidyas (physicians); these were: Salya vaidya (surgeons), Bhisaks (physician), Bhisaks Atliatvans (faith cures). Salya vaidyas were considered specialists in surgery. The practice of surgery has been recorded in India around 800 B.C. Surgery (sashtra karma) was one of the eight branches of Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine. The oldest treatise dealing with surgery is the Sushruta Samhita (Sushruta's compendium). Sushruta who lived in Kasi, was one of the many Indian medical practitioners like Atreya and Charaka.

Hygiene played a basic role in surgical technology and the Hindu surgeons were instructed to wash their hands and nails very carefully, and never to open their mouths during an operation, lest the wound gets infected.

On surgery and treatment of diseases of eye, ear, nose and throat (salya tantra and salakya tantra) several classical works are said to have been composed; but now only references to these texts in some Ayurvedic classics are available.

Charaka Samhita describes general medicine while Sushruta Samhita emphasizes surgical aspects. Astanga Hrdaya, as the name suggests, deals with all the eight branches required for a successful physician and surgeon. Astanga Samgraha, written by an Ayurveda acharya named Vagbhata includes the works by both Charaka and Sushruta. Astanga Hrdaya deals with surgery in many places.

##2: Development of Surgery in different parts of the world in ancient times.

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/medicine/divisions-diagnostics-andprocedures/medicine/surgery>

Developments in field of surgery in various ancient civilizations like Egypt, Greece, Mesopotamia etc. are briefly described.

During my student days while studying for MBBS in Stanley Medical College (1955 to 1960), there were only basic MBBS qualified Physicians and few specialists dealing with Medicine, Surgery, Obstetrics & Gynaecology, Orthopaedics, Ophthalmology and Paediatrics. A 'surgeon' did all types of operations pertaining to all organs and all parts of body and in all age groups. I had watched Prof. A S Ramakrishnan, Hony. Prof. of Surgery in Stanley do plastic surgery, a delicate surgery of Cleft Lip repair in a baby. Prof. K C Nambiar, Hony. Prof. of Surgery in Stanley used to do neurosurgery, making a burr hole in the skull and giving alcohol injection into a specific part of the brain, to instantly stop the tremors of Parkinson's disease. But gradually over a period of time a surgeon settled into a facet of surgery that he got maximum opportunities to do and loved to do and that was how specialities and later super-specialities developed. In the later part of last century and in the present 21st century, general surgeons developed into plastic surgeons, then cosmetic surgeons, hand surgeons and

microsurgery specialists, cleft surgeons and so on. General surgeons also became paediatric surgeons and some went on to become neonatal surgeons, paediatric laparoscopic surgeons or paediatric transplant surgeons and so on. I have been a witness to all these remarkable changes of specialization and super-specialization and unimaginable technical advancements in the last 2-3 decades. But I enjoyed being a basic general surgeon, a broad based plastic & reconstructive surgeon and also performing common and basic laparoscopic surgeries. In fact I admired some of my seniors and teachers of yesteryears who could do a variety of surgeries with great skill and ease; surgeries which would be considered as belonging to several of the currently recognized specialities.

##3: History of Surgery:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_surgery#Hua_Tuo

Outline of developments in medicine and surgery in different pockets of the world at various times are described. Chronological details of global developments in various branches of medicine and surgery are very well described in this reference.

In this book I wish to reveal how I happened to become what I was, a general surgeon, by circumstances and not by any keen desire. But once I got into the groove, I enjoyed my profession thoroughly. It gave me great joy and immense satisfaction too, but not without many ups and downs. The trials and tribulations of an average surgeon were all a part of my life too. It took several years of exclusive surgical practice and waiting patiently, before people could trust me as a surgeon. But in due course, apart from routine surgical work, I had to face several critical encounters in some of the surgical operations, I performed. But the joy of a surgery well done, successful outcomes and relief from disease and suffering for the patient and a happy family was the tonic which cheered me and helped me immensely over the years.

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