

## A WALK WITH ONE OF THE FATHERS

All of us at one point in our lives, fall prey to an illness putting us at the mercy of current medical practices. Of all the medical sciences, the most terrifying and in some conditions inevitable happens to be the science of surgery. To some this rather magnificent science is reckoned to be an art. And while the art of painting and sculpture requires inspiration at a creative level, the art of surgery requires in addition immense dexterity to partake the innumerable procedures that have become the heart and soul of the surgical realm all of which bear the benefit of human life at the core. The importance of understanding the history of surgery in order to help a surgeon's understanding of the foundations of surgery has always posed as a rhetorical question. Although none of us have ever seen the first fire ever lit by mankind but by virtue of pictures on cave walls and those created by people we know it to be the truth. Art and medicine also found their way through pictures in books to take the form of applicable science in our daily lives today. This image is also like a picture on a cave, telling us the tales about our ancestors in our part of the geographic world in particular and their explorations in the medical and surgical realm.

The image seems to be an imaginative depiction of the inside of a medic's room, where he is performing a surgical procedure with the help of his assistants from the ancient times of India. It could most probably be "Shusrata" holding a scalpel in his hand. It appears that the patient undergoing surgery might be conscious or not entirely sedated for he is being held down by two other men as was the practice during those days. He is, however, placed on a plank of wood that could possibly be synonymous to today's operating table. His head end is raised by means of a pillow and his head is wrapped with a towel in order to mop the blood during the procedure in order to constantly and easily clear the surgical field. He has vessels of different shapes placed to his left. A female helper stands by holding a bowl with hot water in it. These scenes are not very different from our current surgical theatre rooms with surgeons accompanied by their assistants, nurses and surrounding equipment. This particular image surprisingly happens to be the cover of one of the oldest books on surgery written, Sushruta Samhita by Sushruta who existed 150 years before Hippocrates and is considered one of the oldest surgeons.

Sushruta is revered as the founder of surgery and more particularly plastic surgery. Some of the surgical procedures performed and recorded by him in his book involve surgeries of the eye and nose. In those days acts of adultery were treated by severing one's nose which could probably be the reason why rhinoplasty had been considerably explored by him. His median forehead flap for nasal reconstruction is considered gold standard. Other procedures explored by him were extraction of foreign bodies, draining abscesses, hydroceles and ascitic fluid, removing prostate glands and haemorrhoids. The text further goes on to elaborate upon complex surgeries like laparotomy and management of intestinal obstruction and hernias.

Although surgery has always been a treatment of last resort but it has proven to be crucial for survival in many conditions. But then again surgical practice was, as refined it might appear with our laparoscopes and Da Vinci consoles in some parts of the world, not as refined as we see today. The advancements made today in surgery could not have been possible without the explorations made when surgery was not considered even a bona fide field of medicine and surgeons weren't considered doctors of prestige. The closer we hold our past the farther we can go into the future.

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