

The paradigm shift from direct experimental approaches on brain function using the visual system in the initial chapters of the book to the more difficult areas of human behaviours involved in love, innovation and happiness can at times be difficult to follow. Although fMRI studies can suggest some sites of activation during the experiences of beauty and love the multiple other subtle inputs coming from memory engrams, environmental clues and expectations are very difficult to quantitate. The experience of artists, authors and musicians can open doors to the mysteries of human behaviours but they only give us a shadow of the neural networks that the brain can tap to decipher the macrocosm we inhabit.

I enjoyed reading this book and appreciated the attempt of the author to bridge the expansive chasm between experimental result on visual sensory input and the intimate human experiences for which we all strive.

The study of brain function and, in essence, the study of man has and will always have an element of mystery. This volume is an attempt to shed further light on the quest to uncover the fabric of this mystery and succeeds in opening the door a little bit further.

REFERENCES

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Ruminations: Memoirs of a Psychiatrist from India. 2008. By Jagdish “Jack” Dang. Published by Trafford Publishing. 359 pages. Price C\$37 approx.

Jagdish Dang was born in 1940 or 1941 (he’s not sure which) in a part of India that’s now in Pakistan. He’s presently a geriatric psychiatrist in the United States. Ruminations is his engaging story. I approached this book with scepticism. What could be so interesting about the memoirs of a New Jersey psychiatrist? However, I was pleasantly surprised and was won over from the start by Dang’s candor and entertaining style.

After a childhood and medical education where most decisions were made for him by his large family, Dang struck out for America almost by accident and ended up staying for the rest of his career. The early part of the book describes growing up as a shy youngster in India. It’s always interesting to read about cultures and customs different from one’s own. When he was about seven, his home town became part of Pakistan and Dang describes his family’s flight to India during a time of tribulation. His dual Indian/American background allows him to draw parallels between that time of violence and the events of September 11, 2001 near his adopted American home town.

After medical school Dang took the American certification exam, thinking only that he’d at least get a day off and a couple of nice pencils out of writing it. After work in a tuberculosis hospital in Delhi, he moved to the US for his internship, well-warned about the evils of alcohol and licentious American women. Dang knew

very little about the country before he arrived and tells entertaining stories about his culture shock. Unfamiliar with most American food, he spent his early days living on orange juice and strawberry ice cream.

Dang went on to specialize in psychiatry and, despite his original intention to return to India, he ended up staying in the United States. He did make a trip back to India, allowing himself a couple of weeks to find a wife, a quest in which he was successful. It’s hard for a Scottish-Canadian reader like me to imagine marrying a person I’d barely met or spoken to but, by Dang’s account, his marriage has been a successful one.

He describes the challenges of bringing up children in a new country, trying to adapt traditions he’d been taught to a new environment. Dang went on to become active in medical societies and appears to have had a fulfilling career. Late in the book, he offers his thoughts on Indian and American medicine and culture. He’s able to be relatively objective about the two traditions, pointing out the good and the bad in each.

Overall, this is a quick and entertaining read most physicians will enjoy, particularly those who’ve survived culture shock themselves.

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