

BOOK DASH

The Yipping Tiger and other tales from the neuropsychiatric clinic

Sachdev P. Australia: University of New South Wales Press Ltd., 2009. Paperback: 279 pages. ISBN: 978 1 74223 084 9.

When I was first sent a copy of this book, I was immediately intrigued by the title, *Yipping Tiger* by Perminder Sachdev. Such was my astonishment that the book may as well have been called *Zapping Taser*. My surprise was two-fold. First, the title that is both phonetically catchy and semantically playful, conjures up weird and wonderful images and second, the fact that this whimsical and amusing title is the product of Professor Sachdev.

At this point, I need to 'show my hand' and provide some background as to why I was amazed. Most, if not all, of the readers of *Acta Neuropsychiatrica* will be familiar with Professor Sachdev's research by way of his many publications in psychiatry and neuroscience. Suffice to say, he is a scientist of caliber and a researcher with an international renown for his work in basic and clinical neuropsychiatry. Furthermore, as one would expect given the aforementioned, 'Sachdev' is the archetypal professor and by that I mean he exudes gravitas. Another possible conflict of interest, or indeed bias, is that Perminder was my doctoral supervisor and remains my informal mentor. I have therefore abandoned convention and refer to him either by his first name, or by his title, and certainly not as Sachdev!

So what of the book? In soft cover, slightly bigger than A5, but smaller than A4, the book extends to nearly 300 pages with 20 or so pages of detailed notes and a handful of pages devoted to an illuminating preface. It comprises a round even 10 chapters each of which has been given a fantastic name. These are translated in the preface and along with

the *Yipping Tiger*, which refers to golfer's cramps, my other favorites are *Serotonin's Seductive Song* (a case of major depression) and the *Mozart complex* (matters pertaining to brain enhancement).

The first thing one notices about this book is its narrative style. The 10 stories that Perminder has carefully penned unfold wonderfully describing the human context within which difficulties (signs and symptoms) arise and how he as a clinician attempts to assist his patients and understand the problems they face. Each story is complete and the reader can therefore dip into this book where and when they choose. Within each chapter, Perminder affords us the privilege of sharing his thoughts. You find yourself thinking along with him as he engages you mentally from persiflage to parrying concerning issues of the mind, what we know from our knowledge of the brain, and most importantly what *he* thinks as *he* invokes us to do the same.

Each story has elements of tragedy, humour and awe and the characters in each chapter are brought to life whilst the science is delicately woven into the text so as to perfectly balance the innate tension between interest and learning. Having spoken to the author on many occasions over the past decade, and 'knowing' how his pattern of speech in my mind, the text was transformed into the sound of Perminder's voice, such that from time to time, it became an 'inner voice' and it seemed that Perminder was either standing alongside me, or even viewing the case jointly from within my brain!

Throughout the book, Perminder questions his own thinking and forces you to do the same, to reconsider your ideas and formulate new ones. He provides just enough explanation and background so that the book can be read literally by anyone and this given the subject matter is an outstanding achievement. In this

respect, the book is reminiscent of *Malgudi Days*, a collection of short stories by R. K. Narayan. Interestingly, R.K. Narayan also wrote about a tiger (a *Tiger* for Malgudi), however it is the simplicity of writing and the straightforward manner in which Perminder conveys his meaning that makes this book *Narayanesque*. Somewhat in contrast to Narayan's work however, Perminder manages to incorporate perhaps a much wider set of words that include for instance, German phenomenology such as *Witzelsucht* (p. 129, *The Dead Homunculus*), references to all manner of cerebral anatomy and a full range of expletives in '*Swearing like a Spanish Sailor*' (that I am too bashful to repeat and I personally have never heard him articulate). In addition, like any modern day 'page turner', the book is sufficiently sprinkled with sexual connotation and innuendo ranging from subtle references to oedipal impulses right through to a flagrant fixation on female anatomy. Once again the book has something for everyone!

As an avid reader and writer myself, my default setting is perhaps to be somewhat critical. However, with respect to the *Yipping Tiger*, my only criticism of Perminder is that the book is too short. I sincerely hope that this is not the last installment and that we will be treated to further such brilliance in the near future. Perminder has managed to successfully disguise scientific discourse as thought provoking prose. This book is seriously entertaining and captures elements of the author himself who can be both entertaining and serious. In his preface, Perminder outlines his aims and concludes that his hope is that readers 'walk away with wonderment about the brain' and that they be 'amazed and enthralled by the human condition'. Working in the same field as the good professor, I already shared this

perspective and experienced these emotions when contemplating neuropsychiatry, however, having read the book with its coruscating and lucid accounts of complex problems, I feel enriched and invigorated to explore further and understand more.

Finally, I doubt anyone could read this book without gaining some benefit in terms of both knowledge and enjoyment. It would be easy to recommend this book to anyone and everyone but personally, I will only be giving it to my friends and those that need it most, because this book is truly special.

Gin S Malhi

Discipline of Psychological Medicine, Northern Clinical School, Professor of Psychiatry and Head, The University of Sydney, Sydney, NSW, Australia

Acta Neuropsychiatrica 2009; 21:207–208
© 2009 John Wiley & Sons A/S
DOI: 10.1111/j.1601-5215.2009.0406.x