

Shaping lives

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Staff Reporter

During my student days, I was a keen mountaineer. But many of my friends found this passion of mine quite puzzling. What do you achieve by climbing a peak, hoisting the country's flag there and returning, they would ask me.

It is difficult to explain the incredible high I used to get when I scaled mountains. It taught me perseverance. It also taught me how to be brave and overcome all kinds of hurdles and hardships if you had set your sights on a goal and were determined to achieve it. I belong to a family of engineers and bureaucrats. But it was my grandfather's desire that at least one member of the family be a doctor which prompted me to choose medicine as a career. Since my childhood, I was exceptionally brilliant in my studies and was also neat and precise in my work. I first trained as a general surgeon and later as a plastic surgeon at the Government Medical College, Nagpur. As a doctor too, I was very neat in my work and had a steady hand, something I was unaware of until some seniors pointed it out to me. They suggested that I take up plastic surgery as it was a field which required a steady hand and neat technique. Once I opted for this field, there was no looking back. I went for higher studies to the UK, Japan and USA.

I believe in perfection...

Plastic surgery is a highly specialised branch of surgery where there is absolutely no scope for error. Precision, accuracy and skill are the most important aspects of this kind of microsurgery. If at all an error occurs, the patient will immediately get to know of it, as it will not yield the desired result. So, you have zero margin for error. There are two kinds of plastic surgeries: aesthetic and reconstructive. In both, the basic principle is to try and surpass what exists and bring (the body or any particular part) within the normal limits of aesthetically accepted proportions.

Aesthetic surgery does not feed human vanity...

It tries to correct the deep psychological deficiency a person may experience because of a perceived or actual malformation of a part of the body. It helps boost a person's confidence and works towards making him/her adopt a positive outlook towards life. Once the person is able to tackle his/her psychological shortcomings, he/she will be in a better position to contribute more to society. Some people believe that plastic surgery creates an atmosphere where too many people are preoccupied with physical appearance, and dwell on the external and superficial aspects. I do not agree with this view. If you look at the world's population, only 0.000001 per cent may have actually undergone plastic surgery. Of this minuscule segment, about 30 per cent of the people go in for aesthetic enhancement, while the rest 70 per cent opt for reconstructive surgery. There are up to 15 or 16 different sub-specialities in plastic surgery. From the smallest injury like repairing a small cut or scar on the face to major injuries caused during a road accident, explosion, fire, earthquake, plane crash etc., I have done them all.

Plastic surgery is like a blend of science and art

To be a good plastic surgeon, you need to be blessed with the ability to 'see' the invisible. This ability is the key to your success in being a plastic and reconstructive surgeon. I once had a patient who was a victim of a gunshot wound. Half of his face was missing, including his nose and one of his eyes. The face had to be reconstructed using tissue from different parts of the body. The shape had to be carved out to form a nose and an eye using imagination and instinct to know what would suit him. So, what was required was a vision of what the man could look like and the precision to give him that look. This is the ability of a plastic surgeon to be able to 'see' what is not there. The same applies to an aesthetic surgeon. If it's the correction of the eye, nose or any other feature, especially on the face, the surgeon must possess the ability to restructure a part of the body and still fit it into the total personality of the person. Sometimes, I do virtual shaping and reshaping on a model and also work on acrylic templates before actually performing the surgery on my patient.

Each patient is a challenge to me..

The real challenges for a plastic surgeon are working on congenital birth defect cases. I had a patient, a young girl, who had hemifacial microsomia (wherein half the face is congenitally underdeveloped). The right side of her face was blank. It took us two years of painstaking work and tremendous patience. First, her cheek and jawbone had to be reconstructed and lengthened on the side of the face where development was poor. I had to do bone grafting and contouring. Thereafter, I gave her a custom-made implant for the bone correction. After a year, I performed the fat and soft tissue enhancement on the lengthened piece of bone to provide symmetry to facial features. She is doing well now. I had a patient who struggled with cancer of the face for seven years and whose face I had reconstructed. She was truly optimistic and a real fighter. She once told me, "I can have cancer, but cancer cannot have me." I found that very profound.

In Dubai, I have set up a clinic for plastic and reconstructive surgery and intend to bring state-of-the-art facilities in this field for the benefit of patients in Dubai."