

SURGICAL NEWS

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FROM THE HEART

Dr Anantha Ramanathan speaks of the stress relief in writing poetry in his native language



Regional NSW vascular surgeon Dr Anantha Ramanathan was born in Sri Lanka and spent most of his childhood there before moving to New Zealand, where he completed the majority of his surgical training.

Moving to Australia three years ago, Dr Ramanathan retains his links to the culture of his birth by writing poetry in Tamil, one of the oldest languages in the world. Last year, a collection of his poems was published in India, Australia and Canada. He talks to Surgical News about the beauty of the Tamil language and the serenity he finds in poetic inspiration.

When did you start writing poetry and what do you enjoy about it?

This all began about 30 years ago from my school days in Sri Lanka. There is a strong culture of poetry there and we were encouraged to create poems based on traditional Tamil themes and rhythms.

I fell in love with both the intellectual endeavour of it and also the satisfaction of expressing ideas as clearly and as beautifully as possible. Then, once you have the idea you work on it again and again until it is as good as it can be and the finished product feels like the birth of a child, in a way.

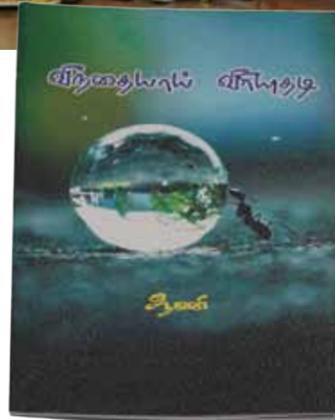
Why do you write in Tamil?

Tamil is my first language and I was taught to write poetry in Tamil, but more than that it is a wonderful language to work with. It is very phonetic, it has lots of nuances in that the same word can mean different things in different contexts. Tamil poetry is also very flexible in that the rhyme can be in the first words, or last and it uses a variety of metres and rhythms.

Tamil poetry has a tradition spanning back over more than 2000 years and Tamil itself is one of the oldest living languages in the world alongside Hebrew and Old Chinese. It is also a beautiful looking script and I get great satisfaction being part of that tradition, even in just a small way.

Do you find it hard to work in Tamil when you spend your working days in an English-speaking environment?

It is a challenge to retain the richness of the language when I use English all day, but I speak Tamil at home with my wife which helps. I also keep up-to-date with the culture and Tamil poetry through the Internet and my friendships with other Tamil writers. ▶



When and where was your book published?

It was first published in India last January and later in Australia and Canada, both countries that have very vibrant Tamil communities. We chose to publish in India first, however, because that is where all the experts and pundits in Tamil poetry are to be found and fortunately I received mostly praise from them.

I did receive some criticism, though, because I coined a new word which is not altogether accepted in such an historic, traditional art form and also contravened some rules in some of my poems. I also sent a copy to the teacher who first inspired me to write poetry who still lives in Sri Lanka and he said it was of a professional standard which was pleasing.

What themes do you write about?

About half the poems are about romantic love with others about nature, spirituality, philosophy and politics. Even though the civil war in Sri Lanka is considered over, writing political poems does make me a bit nervous at times, but still I think poets need to be bold.

What reactions have you received for the poems in Australia?

There is a bustling Tamil literary scene in Sydney and after the publication of the book I got invited to present poems at a number of venues which I appreciated. In September, I presented a poem at an International Conference in Sydney. Part of that poem describes the Australian landscape and birds and was set to the beat

of a Kookaburra birdsong. It won acclaim from the visiting academics.

Before that I presented another poem about a girl with Down's Syndrome who is raped during the war. She is unable to express her feelings to others because she cannot talk, but nevertheless she has the same feelings as any other human

being. This poem also touched the hearts of a lot of people.

Do you find it hard to find the time to write poetry as a busy surgeon and does having such an interest enhance your working life?

I can always find the time; it's waiting for inspiration to strike and the idea to arrive that is the frustrating aspect of poetry. Yet, when it does arrive and the words flow and you get the beat you can work on the idea in the car or even in the gym.

Writing Tamil poetry is a passion of mine and there is no doubt that it provides great stress relief. It allows me to forget about all the day-to-day stuff and immerse myself in a very different world and in a different way of viewing the world. It gives me great sustenance and allows me to go back into my surgical life rejuvenated.

What other artistic endeavours are you working on now?

I have recently finished writing a novel in Tamil that will be published in February. The literal translation of the title from Tamil is 'I am my Father', but the idea best translates into English as 'It is all Within Yourself'. ●

With Karen Murphy



Study surgeons' non-technical skills

Discover how your non-technical skills influence patient outcomes and the team you lead in the Operating Room

GUY MADDERN
CHAIR, ANZASM

A shared understanding and goals between all members of the team are essential elements to be developed to maximise patient safety in the Operating Room (OR). Studies have shown that while surgeons frequently give feedback on the technical skills of Trainees, there is hardly any feedback given on non-technical skills, which have an equally significant impact on patient outcomes.

Non-technical skills include:

- situation awareness, gathering information and anticipating the future course of the operation;
- making decisions based on the available options, implementation and review;
- communicating with the team,

- coordination and developing a shared understanding;
- leadership, support and maintenance of standards.

Non-technical skills are vital for safe intraoperative patient outcomes, but are not addressed explicitly in the training of surgical Trainees. Trainees have traditionally learnt in an unstructured manner in the OR by watching the good, and sometimes bad, habits of their mentors.

The Research, Audit and Academic Surgery Division (RAAS) has conducted a year-long project of research into the use of simulation to teach non-technical skills of surgery to Trainees. A significant amount of data has resulted from 160 simulations. The next step is to develop benchmarks for performance of these non-technical skills.

At the 2014 Annual Scientific Congress

in Singapore, I invite Fellows three to 13 years post Fellowship to step into the OR and participate in live research into this fascinating field. Set aside 45 minutes to immerse yourself in an engaging OR simulation and it may change the way you practice.

Help in the development of benchmarks, view your performance on video, receive one-on-one feedback from a skilled debriefer and assist your College in this important research program. This valuable opportunity is without cost to you and it is anticipated that sessions will fill fast.

To book your session contact: Assoc Prof Wendy Babidge, Research, Audit and Academic Surgery at wendy.babidge@surgeons.org or T: +61 8 8219 0917.