

God Ganesh: The Vedic perspective of anaesthesiologist

BHUWAN CHAND PANDAY*

Senior Consultant, Institute of Anaesthesiology, Pain and Perioperative Medicine, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, New Delhi, India

॥ श्री वक्रतुण्ड महाकाय सूर्य कोटी समप्रभा निर्विघ्नं कुरु मे देव सर्व-कार्येषु सर्वदा ॥

॥ Shri Vakratunda Mahakaya Surya Koti Samprabha Nirvighnam Kuru Me Dev Sarva-Karyeshu Sarvada ॥

“O Holy One (Ganesh) with a curved trunk, massive body, and splendor equal to a billion of suns, bless me by eradicating all obstacles in my endeavors always.”

(Ganesh-Gana-hosts/group + Ish-god – the lord of all Gana, Ganapati-Gana-hosts + pati-one who protects/maintains/god).

INTRODUCTION

Shortly after completing my medical education, I found myself bewildered by the multitude of specialisation choices: how to become a proficient and empathetic professional and determining which medical sub-speciality aligns with my personality. This matter was magnitude as none of my family members or close acquaintances had pursued a profession in medicine. During my compulsory rotational internship (CRI), the difficulty escalated, as i was fascinated with several fields such as surgery, medicine, orthopaedics, ophthalmology and several others. Till the final quarter of my CRI and despite my best efforts, I could not finalise the speciality of my choice. I finally decided to go to a revered saint residing in the hilly area of my Himalayan homeland (Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand, India) who advised me to look into the ancient Indian texts (like the Vedas and Upanishads) for a solution. His guidance was that studying these age-old scriptures would allow a self-generated ability


to introspect, and a genuine answer would emerge to accord a decisive turn in my professional career and later, in life itself. This decision thus taken would never be a cause of regret in my life.

After much contemplation, my attention gradually became concentrated on the cherished deity ‘Ganesh Ji’. I have culturally absorbed numerous narratives of Ganpati's astute ability to make prompt yet flawless judgements. The study of the ancient Indian literature ‘Ganapati Atharvashirsha Upanishad’, helped me identify the attributes of an excellent physician and found the valuable characteristics of an ‘anaesthesiologist’ that are reflected in the multidimensional traits possessed by Ganesh Ji whom we also address as ‘Gajanand’, ‘Ekdanta’, ‘Lambodar’, ‘Vinayak’, ‘Vakra Tund’, ‘Vighnavinashak’, to name a few.

Before initiating any auspicious task (religious rituals, construction work and marriage ceremony) we worship Ganesh ji asking him to resolve all the hindrance to ensure the completion of the task. Choosing professional decisions should involve reflecting on the traditional teachings found in our ancient Indian literature, rather than engaging in arbitrary exploration influenced by peers and social distractions and adopting not so comprehensible ideas. The manuscript analyses the characteristics of the adored deity both in terms of physical and metaphorical features, as depicted in Figure 1. It explores how these aspects connect with the essential qualities of an anaesthesiologist, who is an expert in medical treatment.

***Address for correspondence:** Dr. Bhuwan Chand Panday, Senior Consultant, Institute of Anaesthesiology, Pain and Perioperative Medicine, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, New Delhi - 110 060, India. E-mail: bhuwancp@gmail.com

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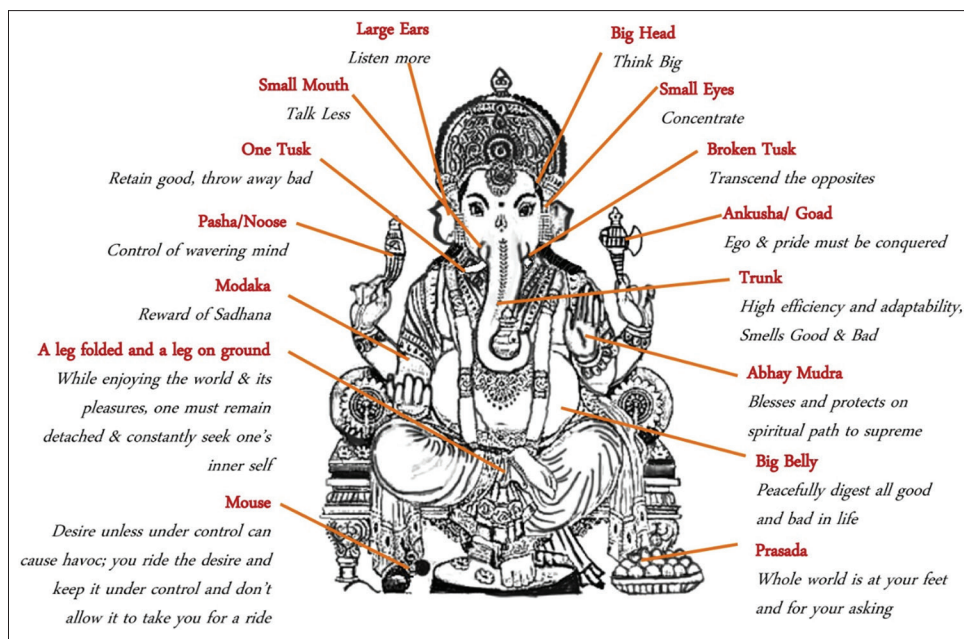


Figure 1: Lord Ganesh

QUALITY OF A 'PERFECT PROFESSIONAL'

Vinayak possesses all the qualities that a professional should have. He exhibits extraordinary traits such as remaining calm in a given scenario and making appropriate, correct and timely decisions. On keen observation of a typical picture or sculpture of Ganesh Ji, we get to appreciate every feature of his body and all the accompanying beings and things echo special characteristics.

HEAD OF AN ELEPHANT

An elephant is a symbol of endurance, authority, strength and courage. Embodying exceptionally high brain content, including excellent intellectual thinking, and sharp memory (long and short term) reflects higher knowledge and wisdom.^[1,2] Similar to a skilled anaesthesiologist's clear foresight and overview to anaesthetise an individual (patient characteristics). A bigger brain also signifies swift and logical decision-making ability, and an extended scope of thoughts with functional dexterity, which is a must for all anaesthesiologists.

RED COLOUR

Red is a symbol of love and also represents *Rajas guna*. In the Sanskrit Language, rajas means 'passion', and guna means 'quality'. Translating into activity, energy, motion and desire. Ganesh loves all his creations and bestows his blessings on everyone who approaches him with dedication and devotion.^[1] It represents the importance of the

doctor–patient relationship which is based on tender care, mutual trust and respect.

CROOKED TRUNK

A trunk is a crucial feature of an elephant, that can transport heavy loads, and yet, it is delicate enough to perform tiny tasks and must be handled with care.^[2] It possesses the function of smelling about the surrounding realm, quantifies into a person of high intellectual quality, who can sense and smell the project's progress in real time and identify any undesirable activity and negativity of the surroundings. An anaesthesiologist, is taught to interpret early and intervene at the appropriate time to prevent any unfavourable consequence. The trunk symbolises a perfect balance of deeper knowledge and strong action.^[3]

It signifies that every activity, regardless of its size, is crucial and should be approached with caution. The trunk functions as a sensory organ, akin to an individual with a high intellectual capacity to perceive and monitor the progress of a project in real time. An anaesthesiologist, like the deity Vakra-Tunda is trained to promptly analyse and assist at a suitable moment to avert any adverse outcome.

BIG EARS

Elephant-like ears mean a capacity to listen to others and open to receive new ideas both loud alarms and whispers.^[2] Even a minor technical glitch can cause severe interruption throughout a large task. Anaesthesiologists sit between

humans (patients) and machines (workstations and monitors), so they should have sensitive and broad aural senses to detect audio glitches.

SMALL EYES

Small eyes represent concentration and sharp vision. This prevents missing out on events that do not have a visible trigger, such as changes in monitored parameters (electronic monitors and ventilator settings) and human events (patient-related). Anaesthesiologists must have the focus of both narrow and wide vision to construct an overview and see within and through the problem.

BIG BELLY

The human body reflects a person full of compassion and kindness, while his large belly represents his never-ending desire to gain knowledge.^[3] It also demonstrates an enormous capacity to digest both good (success, if not handled properly may produce an ego) and bad (enmity is produced if unable to handle criticism, or failure to tackle any unfavourable circumstance may result in depression), while remaining stable and unmodified from the outside. Anaesthesiologists involved in both routine and crucial elements of anaesthetic healthcare delivery must maintain a constant appetite to learn and update their knowledge.

MUSHAK (RAT) VEHICLE

Although it is evident that revered Ganesh cannot ride on the small rat due to his large size and weight, this actually signifies that he is made up of something with no physical weight. He is both a seeker and a dispenser of knowledge and this weightlessness is a reflection of the fact that he is made up of knowledge, which is zero gravity. Another school of thought sees the Divide One's rat as a very useful scavenger who can consume leftovers in no time (e.g., Laddu, a sweet delicacy) and so represents the Divide One's waste management ability. Anaesthesiologists must develop an ability to utilise every available resource, person and gadget.

BROKEN TOOTH

Both the teeth represent wisdom and emotions, while a broken tooth represents the sign of sacrifice.^[2] If one is determined to complete a tough or extraordinary task, he or she may have to sacrifice to do it efficiently and effectively. According to ancient Hindu texts, Ganesh chipped his tooth and used it as a writing tool to transcribe an epic manuscript (Mahabharat), which reflects his immense capability of sacrifice to meet the demands of tough tasks.

HIDDEN MOUTH

Great leaders possess all the special qualities of a true leader, they (Vinayak endowed with all the features of Nayak or leader) never talk loudly or openly reprimand others. They simply convey the message in a kind manner so that others might understand without being tormented. Often, when a person is scolded or given instructions in a loud voice, especially in front of his or her co-workers, it may have a lowering effect on the person's effectiveness and efficacy. As a result, he or she may be unable to concentrate on his or her task or perform to the best of his or her ability. When speaking to their patients, employees and surgeons, anaesthesiologists, like Ganesh, should have effective communication skills, a sympathetic tone and a caring voice.

FOUR HANDS

Ganesh ji is depicted with four hands, which signify a man's four cardinal activities (Purushartha). These special activities are righteousness (Dharma), wealth (Artha), pleasures (Kama) and liberation (Moksha), all of which can be obtained through worship and devotion to the deity. To provide anaesthetic care, responsible anaesthesiologists must balance these four strengths.

HAND POSTURED UPWARDS (ABHAY-MUDRA, ABHAY-WITHOUT FEAR, MUDRA-POSTURE)

If one pursues the right path, they are safeguarded from fear. Hence, during a work ritual, one should be sincere, fearless, deeply involved and free of egoistic impulses. Anaesthesiologists must embody the aforementioned characteristics to provide proper anaesthetic care to their patients.

PASH (ROPE IN ONE HAND)

Ganesh holds the power to keep his people close to maintain them in high spiritual thought and is represented by a piece of rope in one hand. Anaesthesiologists must learn to keep the pack (patient, staff and surgeon) together and work as a team.

ANKUSH (ELEPHANT BULL HOOK: USED TO CONTROL ELEPHANT)

Ankush is a versatile tool for controlling individuals, no matter how strong or weak they are. According to lore, Ganesh took the form of an Ankush to contain himself. With Ankush, you can shut off your attachments, control your ties with the materialistic world and nurture a diverse mind. A flexible mind has no set notions and can adapt freely to changing circumstances.

LEFT LEG FOLDED

The left side of body denotes the materialistic possession and pleasure. It means that even when we enjoy worldly things, we should not forget that the foundation of the state of ever-bliss is beyond physical gain, so we should always remain grounded. Anaesthesiologists are the specialists conducting cases day in and day out from simple and stable to critically ill patients. Their patient safety and comfort become of utmost importance, and therefore, they try to give their best from whatever is available (equipment, drugs, monitoring and perioperative nursing care).

MODAK: (MODA (JOY)-WORLDLY/SPIRITUALLY)

When one works with hard and earnest labour in the proper direction, one is rewarded. 'Modak' is the bliss, which is the reward for performing important tasks.^[3] It also represents wisdom (Vedanta), because knowledge is the ultimate source of joy. Ganesh holds a Modak in one of his hands, as he is constantly in a state of joy. Only in a happy state of mind can one conduct good work and make others happy.

CONCLUSION

The deity Ganesh possesses numerous qualities that motivate us to strive for progress in our pursuit of knowledge, while also encouraging us to make prompt and accurate judgements. Anaesthesiologists have to maintain a calm and cool composure during surgical procedures, but in the event

of changing circumstances, they need to be proactive and manage numerous facets simultaneously. An anaesthesiologist acquires a distinct set of skills due to the consistent handling of complex cases and successfully conducting unexpected and unpredicted tasks of gentle care, active and difficult decisions, and maintaining composure in stressful conditions, be inclined to acquire novel knowledge to guarantee a secure, steady and devoid-of-pain perioperative period. An anaesthesiologist assimilates nearly all the essential and notable attributes to make a professional career a genuine rescuer of humanity.

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