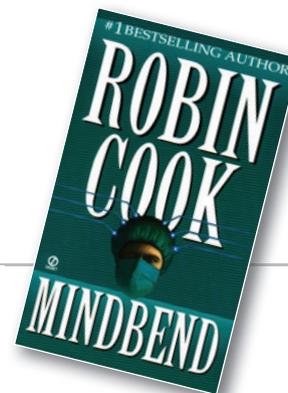


Mindbend

Robin Cook. New York: Signet, 1985. 346pp

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Mindbend is a fictional medical thriller written by Robin Cook. As a doctor, Cook is aware and understands the implication of business intrusion in medical field. The book provides a captivating and thought provoking insight into the pitfalls of medical field when driven by business interests perpetuated by big pharmaceutical companies. Although the book was originally written in 1985, it is still relevant today as “crisis in medicine” is applicable in a general sense even in Nepal. Infact, the author wrote the book hoping this would focus public attention to this grave matter even decades ago.

The main protagonist, Adam Schonberg is a medical student forced to drop out of school when his wife, Jennifer becomes pregnant, unexpectedly. He takes up a job with drug firm, Arolen to support his impending growing family. Jennifer attends to the obstetrician at Julian Clinic as her pregnancy progresses. On one of her visits, she is advised to undergo amniocentesis because of her family history. She comes across several pregnant women who have had abortions done in the clinic after being diagnosed with carrying foetus with severe birth defects. The Julian Clinic owned by the drug firm Arolen, seems like a simple coincidence until Adam sets out to uncover the controversial foetal tissue experiment that his wife is subjected to. In his pursuit to expose the terrifying truth of prescription drugs, abortions and its connection with the drug firm, he goes undercover and attends one of Arolen’s lavish educational conferences on cruise ships which turn out to be a pretext to brainwash gullible doctors into prescribing drugs only to boost their profits. Adam uses a restraining order against his wife to prevent her from undergoing the abortion and succeeds in bringing evidence of Arolen’s horror to doctors at FDA.

The author has done a commendable job of bringing the issue of disease mongering to public attention. The recent news about Attention Deficit Hyperactivity

Disorder being a hoax disease has not only created confusion and fear in the minds of general public but also questioned the credibility of the doctors in purporting diseases because of their own vested interests. In the book, misdiagnosing Jennifer’s foetus as severely abnormal insinuated her to seek an unnecessary abortion which was a source of foetal tissue for experimentation. There are real stories where “borderline hypertensive” individuals are prescribed drugs when motivation to modify their lifestyle would have a greater benefit than simply administering drugs.

One of the drawbacks of the book is the way in which the role of other characters in the story has been interwoven. There is little or no details about the other characters making the story lose ground on few occasions such as inane dialogues between husband and wife or Adam’s effort to sneak into a hospital and hijack a patient who has just had a lobotomy procedure done. Other than that, I would recommend this book just so that people can know the extreme influence to which drug companies can manipulate the medical profession even though it appears unrealistic on the surface.

Medicine is an ever-changing science and so is medical practice. The growing influence of business in medical field have been widening at a quick pace is both fascinating and dangerous if it is not regulated. On one hand, funding for research has led to the development of new drugs and saved countless lives, but on the other hand, marketing of drugs and services has also created a space where people are influenced to taking medicines or undergoing tests even though it offers no tangible benefits. The traditional values of altruism forms the core of medical practice even today and I believe, it should not be overridden with business interests. It is high time that the medical community draws a line on this matter. All in all, it is an enjoyable read that thoroughly piques your interest and thrills you right till the end.