“Doctors are the saddest people in the universe as only they are capable of comprehending the perilous dirge of advancing death.”

**“Mard Ko Dard Nahi Hota”**

(An Episode of Experience)

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All India Institute of Medical Sciences, AIIMS, Delhi, India’s largest and most worshipped medical institution. An epigram of hope, a symbol of faith. Exploring the ends of its lively, sprightful ambience and observing a patient, his/her relatives or near and dear ones, one would be unconditionally bound to realise that the whole of mankind is possessed by the sole passion, the desire to live.

We had to visit AIIMS for the second time, for his kidney stone surgery. Many of my acquainted doctors are established there. Thus love, dedication, assistance, sympathy and wholeheartedly discover no limits. The only existing limit is the exhaustion in the availability of a special cabin. Our friends’ efforts helped us access such a cabin during our last visit. Besides the rent of eight hundred per day, every facility is bestowed, except for the feeling of loneliness and the state of solitude.

This time when the doctor said that if a cabin is urgently needed, we need to wait a little longer, for not even a single cabin would be emptied before ten full days, we resolved to get admitted into the general ward, because we were not in a situation to wait.

However, AIIMS has a general ward, contrasting to what we see elsewhere. Central A.C. Immaculate and quite hygienic. Each room has a tetrad of beds, a toilet and two wash basins. Last time we had to remain admitted for two and a half months. This time a small stone was clogged in the urinary tract. Only that was to be operated. Just a matter of four to five days. It is fine.

On stepping into the room, an elderly pleasant woman rushed to fetch us in. She was Phulwanti Didi. We were assigned the bed opposite hers. Her husband’s gall bladder operation had concluded just before three days. This being her third-time stay at AIIMS, Phulwanti Didi explained the tits and bits of everything there, like the visiting time of the doctor, when the sister provides us with medicine, the location of the dressing room, kitchen, etc. In no time she prepared and served us coffee. She help me arrange all our required utilities on a compact shelf placed adjacent to our bed. Her happiness became out of bounds when she got to know that both of us were doctors. After a momentary thought, she suddenly said, “Okay, I will make a small request, will you accept it?”

I stared at her face.

Without expecting a reply, she said, “Listen, though you are a doctor, yet here you are my younger sister. On a familiar note, I will address you by your name. Do you agree?”

I felt as if she was not Phulwanti Didi, but my elder sister, who was residing in Berhampur then. So much intimacy! Such a degree of internality!! That too within this short time!!! As of being pampered by my sister, I cuddled my hands around Didi’s neck and placed my head on her shoulder. She endearingly kissed my forehead.

She first led me to her bed and acquainted me with her husband. Undergoing the surgery thrice, he looked quite weary and tired. Then she guided me to the adjacent bed. There laid a thirty-two-year-old boy, Sanjeev, afflicted with incurable cancer. Originating from testicles, it had spread to most of his organs. Just the preceding day, he had undergone some surgery on his vertebral column and some other organs. Leaving his face visible, his body was dressed all over. He vaguely uttered only a pair of words- “Oh God”, that too in intermissions. That was it. Beside him, guarded his two friends, serving him incessantly and interminably. They showed no signs of reluctance even while using the pan. Their friendship convulsed my heart.

After some time, Sanjeev’s wife, Punam entered. The elegance of her countenance was in no way inferior to fairies. However, it looked faint and jaded like a desiccated flower. Her hands were clasped by her two-year-old son. He resembled his father in his countenance. My thoughts got aggrieved towards the condition of this small family. This was only the beginning of their marital life. How flamboyant would the dreams encompassing their nights have been! Yet to fulfil even one of them, their nights are insufficient!! Oh God!!!

The fourth patient was laid on our adjacent bed. An old man of more than eighty years of age. He was done with his prostrate operation two days afore and was to be discharged within another two days. He was accompanied by his son, who earnestly and respectfully showered his care on his father. That is why a person marries! And he yearns for children!!

It would be around nine ‘o’clock at night. After having our dinner we were preparing for sleep. Right at that time, a boy entered the room. He might be aged between seven and eight. He was wrapped with a wide piece of cloth tied behind his neck, resembling the posture of a saint. He held a urosac in his hand. Oh- now I got the reason for this unique outfit!

Seeing him, Phulwanti Didi rushed. She caressed him and said, “Dear, why are you late today”.

Phulwanti Didi informed me that he lived in the adjacent room. He too would be undergoing his kidney operation the coming day. Every night, before going to bed, he spreads good wishes among all patients and cherishes them with his comical note.

I leaned him on my lap and asked, “what is your name, son?”

He took an amazing stance, dressed the hairs lowered on his temple and answered in a peculiar air, “Hrithik Roshan”.

This spread a spell of laughter all over. His mother told, “His actual name is Hrithik. But when asked, he exaggerates it”.

“Right from the morning, everybody is saying that a surgeon has admitted as a patient for stone operation. Then you are that Surgeon Uncle. Aren’t you?” Meanwhile, Hrithik had reached my husband’s bed. He peered at him meticulously. He patted his leg, hand, belly etc. with his small hands. Then he paused to think and said, “Then Doctor Uncle, you are so fat, so big a human, how could a small pebble enter into your body?”

He smiled. I answered.

“Listen Hrithik, doctors are also humans. Again any person might get any disease. Okay, then you say, you are such a cute little kid. How did you get to know about your kidney stone?”

“Oh great, I diagnosed the disease myself. Will I tell you how? Suddenly one day, in school, I saw my urine hued red. Urine is generally white, why did it get red? In no time I informed my teacher. My teacher herself dropped me home and explained everything to Papa and Mummy. We consulted the doctor and a urinalysis was performed. Then followed X-rays and then it confirmed the presence of stones.”

He seemed witty and clever. His forethinking was beyond his age.

Oh my God, Kidney stone is accompanied by intermittent stomach aches. So small you are, you must be feeling intense pain son.”

Again a pleasing style. Another sharp look. He simpered and said, “Yes, it pains, and then fades. Do you know why? Mard ko dard nahi hota (Man never feels pain).”

All grinned and then got mad with laughter. Eighty-year-old man too laughed separating his hollow jaw. He wished Good Night to all and proceeded towards his room. We all went to sleep.

With the departure of night, will come my husband’s operation. I could recall all incidents of the last operation. He slept and I felt lonely in the cabin. Several pessimistic thoughts were occupying my mind. I spent a sleepless night due to tension. However, the experience of last time had served as condolence this time and empowered my courage. But the best thing was the general ward, Phulwanti Didi, Hrithik and others. They did not let solitude overcome me. I felt that during problems and disasters, man is man’s greatest strength. Really, I could not feel how the rest of the night passed away.

The next day, I prepared my husband and got prepared myself. Eight operation theatres work simultaneously at AIIMS. Besides the incredible system, all procedures were systematic, synchronized and well functioned. Stretcher reached simultaneously for him and Hrithik at the porch attached to O.T. I looked at Hrithik. The face of this little Mard looked faded. His face showed signs of silent sobs. Still, he was trying to smile, when he saw us. He stretched his hand towards my husband. Both did shake hands with each other. The scene drenched my eyes.

It began with my husband’s operation. I prayed to God’s intention. It all concluded well. Yet it took us two in the afternoon to reach our bed. Phulwanti Didi was waiting for us. She waved her hand on his forehead and sadly expressed, “Do you know, Hrithik’s operation is scheduled at eight ‘ o’clock at night. His parents are much tensed. Let’s visit them once”.

My husband’s health was quite stable. Asking Punam to keep an eye on him, we both went to the O.T. located on the eighth floor. His mother was in a condition of crying. We condoled her for some time and then returned.

I got asleep without my knowledge. Didi shook and woke me up, “Get up, let’s go, Hrithik has returned". I turned towards the clock. Two ‘ o’clock at night. All of us rushed. All those patients who were in a condition of locomoting and their relatives had reached there. Hrithik was senseless. He looked feeble and weak. His mother carried the bundle of stones that were extirpated from his kidney. All were sad, tensed and upset for him. At this moment so much hustle near the patient is not advised. I requested everybody not to assemble near him. All returned to their respective beds.

The next day Phulwanti Didi conveyed a piece of good news, “See Sanjeev has opened his eyes today. He is smiling a little, trying to speak”. I noticed a ray of happiness and hope on Punam’s face. But I could not join their happiness. For I knew, before extinguishing, a candle burns at its brightest.

After being unconscious throughout the day, when Hrithik’s senses got restored, he wailed in pain. So he was again treated with anaesthesia. My husband’s condition was kind of fine. So I stayed near Hrithik most of the time. Seeing a doctor near them, they were relieved and expressed their deep gratitude.

On the fourth day, the old man near our bed got discharged. They were inhabitants of Bihar. While departing, they invited us home, whenever we visit Patna. The man clasped my hand and spoke in a deep, saddened voice, “Daughter, Look at God's indecision. I am an old man of eighty-two years of age. Returning home after being cured. But this youth of thirty-two years of age…” Looking at Sanjeev, he gasped and breathed deeply. His voice got choked and failed to utter any more words. He wiped his tears concealing them from Punam.

We would be departing after that night. Phulwanti Didi was not able to sleep. She went on to ask me several topics. About home, patients, Odisha and Lord Jagannath. Punam came and stood near us.

“Doctor Aunty.”

“Yes Punam dear, want to say something?”

“Yeah, Aunty. I had a small query. I feel like asking doctors during their visitation, but I fail to gather courage. I fear. You seem very close to me. Then…”

As if something clogged in my chest. I know what is going is going to ask. But what will I answer? If I tell the truth, the flickering flame of hope would evaporate. If I lie, will she, at this tender age, with this untrue faith, be able to face the uncertain harsh truth?

Being a doctor, facing such a situation in life, was not new to me. But I was not able to make out why I was getting trapped, entangled and suffocated in the illusion and bonding of these two tender kids.

My prediction is correct.

“Be true to me Aunty, will Sanjeev get well? Please, Aunty, I am feeling that all are falsely expressing that he will get well. Just to calm and condole me. Can anybody from cancer…” Her face got palpitated with emotions.

Phulwanti Didi stared at me with aidless looks.

A doctor needs to be cunning at times. I placed my hands on her shoulder and said, “See daughter, you are a precious one. I am seeing day and night that you are serving your husband. We can do our best, but the results are in God’s hands. We all have to pray to God so that he restores Sanjeev his health."

Phulwanti Didi used her presence of mind to divert the topic. “Punam, I think Sanjeev is asking for the bedpan. Go daughter”. Quickly, Punam returned.

The fifth day was our last day at AIIMS. We were granted leave. I first did away with bill payments and other related tasks. Now it was time for departure. We approached every bed to bid goodbye and bestow good wishes.

Hrithik, by this time, was out of danger but still was very weak. He was not able to walk. Lying on the bed, he joined his hands to greet us. I kissed his forehead in storge and wished for his well-being. His mother hugged me with teary eyes. Only a minimal love and duty has such a lot of return! I was getting thawed.

We went near Sanjeev. I was not able to restrict my tears. Phulwanti Didi cried, “What is this? Being a doctor, how are you so weak?” I was feeling to say, “Doctors are the saddest people in the universe - as only they are capable of comprehending the perilous dirge of advancing death.” Punam, with wet eyes, touched our feet. While bidding us farewell, Sanjeev said, “Doctor Aunty! After recovering, along with Punam, I will surely come to Odisha. You will see, inquiring your address I will reach your home.

I bent down and caressed his forehead. Even after holding it back, stubborn drops of tears slipped onto his forehead.

“Both of you are very good people, Aunty. You have bestowed so much love’ If I will be alive…”

I pressed against his lips. I could not control my longing for seeing him for the last time. Two drops of tears were occupying the corner of his eyes.

 While returning from his end, I was confessing to God, “O God! Please take back some fragments of our life span and let the boy live a little more. O merciful!! If I have done some virtuous task in my life, then I am asking only this much in return, God!!!”

In the end, Phulwanti Didi. My happy Phuwanti Didi’s face looked blasé and jaded. Before stepping into the lift, she hugged and patted me. In a heavy tone, she said, “Go and take care of my brother. Inform me after returning home properly. You showered great affection. So we would be missing you for some days. But what should be done? This is the law of nature. All have to tread on their paths. But I will not follow you downstairs to bid you adieu. My eyes might get drenched. Go…quickly”.

She turned away and walked off. My revered, unforgettable and worshipped Phulwanti Didi.

While walking out of AIIMS, I felt as if I was not reverting from the general ward, but after spending some days of holiday with an amicable and loving family, returning home with several abiding memories. My feet were advancing, but my thoughts remained captivated and imprisoned in the general ward of the urology department.

