



'A Doctor's Impassioned Plea'-Compelling Necessity of Complete Support



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This has reference to the moving views expressed in '*A Doctor's Impassioned Plea*' by Dr. O.P.Yadava C.E.O. and Chief Cardiac Surgeon National Heart Institute, New Delhi. He is also the Editor-in-Chief Indian Journal of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery. With this kind of solid background in medicine and medical education and research, his credentials are certainly impeccable and impressive.

This Note by Dr. Yadava, who is a doyen of the medical profession, brings into focus the difficulties faced by the doctors in India in the light of a bad outcome. Historically, doctors have been revered in India, as indeed in most parts of the world, for their significant contribution in alleviating the pain, miseries and sufferings of the common man. In these difficult Coronavirus times, it is doctors which have kept India and indeed the world going in the highest and the finest French tradition of "*noblesse oblige*"- the moral obligation of those of high birth, powerful social position to act with honour, kindness, generosity, etc. It has to be realised that the medical profession is not just a profession, it is a calling, i.e., a religious vocation that may be professional or voluntary and, idiosyncratic to different religions, may come from another person, from a divine messenger, or from within oneself. This thesis can be substantiated by the noble and sterling



work done by doctors across geographies, classes and sections in the wake of COVID 19 and their kindness, sympathy and compassion. Hats off to all of them!

There have, however, been several instances in the past-in fact far too many-to lead to a situation, which Dr. Yadava calls-perhaps not unjustifiably “*ubiquitous and repeated with monotonous regularity*”. I fully agree with Dr. Yadava. Let me, for example, refer to the most deplorable and absolutely non-negotiable incidents in Kolkata in June 2019 and the thrashing of a surgeon in Jayadeva Hospital, Bangalore in June 2019 by lumpen elements. Such examples across geographies and time periods can easily be increased. Suffice it is to say here that they seem to be part of a disconcerting and deeply disturbing pattern and therefore are no longer seen as isolated stray incidents but as a systemic issue. In some cases, the protest by the doctors quickly snowballed to acquire the size and scale of a nation-wide movement cutting across cities, regions, classes, religions and languages. But, unfortunately, even this movement finally lost steam and did not lead to a discernible improvement in the pitiable state of affairs. This theatre of the absurd is truly pathetic!

It needs no clairvoyance to perceive that this seemingly un-endless chain of events has obviously caused a general sense of disquiet and frustration at the treatment meted out to the doctors and practitioners of the medical profession among planners, administrators, policy-makers and even those at the helm of affairs. For, no civilised society can develop and realise its latent potential if it does not accord the pride of place-a place, which they rightfully deserve-to doctors. Hence, we must transcend from a wave of twitter and largely symbolic protests to quick and speedy dispensation of justice. The guilty must be brought to book and justice must not only be done but also seem to be done if we are not to degenerate into the abyss of a barbaric, decadent society.

In the wake of the present Coronavirus pandemic, which has triggered a medical cum economic emergency, the doctors have again risen to their highest standards, irrespective of concerns of personal safety, to faithfully and diligently discharge their duties across the development spectrum.



It is a commonplace to observe that the doctors study, train and work under extremely tough conditions. But it is not so commonly realised that the doctors are not un-often bathed in the patient's bodily fluids, and are woefully exposed to a slew of diseases, e.g., HIV hepatitis, TB, etc. all the time. They sometimes go without even food or sleep for 48 hours at a stretch to look after the patients, who may even be shunned by their own relatives. They thus do us -the people of India - proud in more ways than one. This is what makes it all the more galling to find repeated instances of *“acerbic verbal abuses, eviction from homes, ostracization from the society, brickbats, lathi charge and many such battering and pummeling”*.

These events and developments in general and such incidents post the COVID 19 pandemic in particular have raised fundamental questions about the role of doctors in India, the societal mores and expectations and the way forward. This is why Dr. Yadava rightly asks *“is this truly a reaction to negligence, impropriety and insensitivity of the medical profession or is it a symptom of a much deeper-rooted systemic malady of the society, a kind of frustration with its own trivialities, with the unfortunate doctor and the disorganized and defenseless temple of healing”*? This is not a rhetorical question but is fundamental to the process and pattern of the process of development in India-an India, which is just, fair and equitable to all sections of the population, particularly those, who go the extra mile in sub-serving the cause of the nation.

It is also important maintain a sense of balance and proportion in this overarching narrative as Dr. Yadava himself so ably does. Dr. Yadava isolates and identifies three unsavoury aspects of the medical profession, viz., manners, morals and medicine. Dr. Yadava's observation *“ethical standards are deteriorating and the collective conscience of the profession seems to be caught in a downward spiral for a multitude of reasons”* would perhaps enjoy a fair measure of consensus among the vast majority of Indians.

To be sure, these are valid concerns and there is certainly room for improvement in these and other spheres of the medical profession. But it is important to realise that the medical profession cannot be seen in isolation, in silo and the general deterioration in ethical standards in the medical profession is a reflection of the



larger societal deterioration in ethical standards across the board in all walks of human life and economic activity.

True, there have been several cases, which have brought the medical profession in disrepute-the cases of collusion between doctors and pathological laboratories, unnecessary surgeries and the unholy nexus between the doctors and the pharmacy centres. But then because of some black sheep, the entire medical profession cannot - and must not be- contemptuously dismissed lest it becomes a case of throwing out the baby with the bath water. What makes the situation much worse is *“medico-legal litigations and the draconian, one sided provisions of the Consumer Protection Act, with no safeguards or penalties against frivolous litigations, an overzealous and TRP centric media, with their sensationalizing reportage”*.

This is why it is absolutely imperative to empathize with the doctors, and not turn a blind eye to yet another assault on a doctor like we have always-or mostly- done. Things have reached such a sordid pass that we can no longer have more of the same and move on with mere condemnation of such dastardly acts like abuse and physical assault on the doctors. Such acts must be severely punished in an exemplary manner to act as a real and effective deterrent.

In this hour of crisis, in an environment, where all elements are constantly in a state of churn, it is absolutely necessary to provide full, complete and unstinted support to the entire medical profession in general and the doctors in particular. Dr. Yadava’s deeply anguished plea *“please look after the true wealth of the society – its Doctors and Healthcare professionals”* deserves to be considered and implemented with the sincerity it certainly deserves otherwise the future would be utterly catastrophic, the worst possible of all worlds. Amen!

I rest my case.

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