

By Sidharth Mishra



Many of us, I am sure, will have a demonetisation story to share. Much more amusing and interesting than those ferreted out by our recalcitrant television medium. Indian TV is much too occupied by the dictum “camera loves sad pictures.” The tragedy of Indian media, especially television, has been its preoccupation with tragedy, playing just on the sadistic elements. The most hilarious of the sad pictures was former Cabinet Secretary TSR Subramanian pointing out to celebrated anchor Barkha Dutt during her talk show that even he had a swollen ankle and he could not blame it on Modi’s demonetisation policy! A bad pack of lady-fingers purchased from a store, too, gets blamed on Modi, “only if I had cash in hand I would have gone to a roadside vegetable cart.” I wonder if the spunky lady complaining of the lady’s fingers would be last person standing when the corporation’s demolition and eviction drive against street vendors happen next.

I underwent the surgeon’s knife last week under, what’s called in medical parlance, a planned surgical intervention at Fortis Escorts Hospital in the national Capital last week .

With just the laparoscope nodes involved, I was pretty sure this surgery would not be as thunderous as the one across the LoC. As I thought of this and tried to catch some sleep for the operation early next morning, appeared Modiji on the screen. I first thought I was dozing off but then the voice could not be mistaken.

He said something of demonetisation and fight against black money. With the approval from the insurance firm having arrived for the surgery and not much cash left at home, I said to myself, “none of my worries.” But that night I did dream of some friends whom I always suspected of sitting on loads of black money. Anyway before I could take the dream to any conclusion, the ward nurse was already tapping on my shoulder.

“Freshen up, brush your teeth and take a betadine bath,” she rolled out the early morning ordeal. With sodium-magnesium tablets administered the previous night, freshening up was not an issue, brushing up has never been. But the idea of a betadine bath took some time to sink in before I heard her say again, “are you done with the bath?” I took a look at my freshly shaven torso and closed eyes and poured the smelly water.

I quickly slipped into the hospital gown and pyjamas for the patients. I often wonder why the weak and the meek patients are made to wear something similar to what the tough judokas adorn. Before could mull further, she was there again, “You look good. Sit on this chair, we will wheel you to the operation theatre.” I could have very well walked but could not gather enough strength to counter the hardworking nursing angel that morning.

Inside the theatre, as I was laid on the table, the team of doctors whom I had met over the past one week looked so different in their green garbs. I could see their eyes carry expressions of a

smile; anyhow, nothing else was visible. “We are now starting to sedate you, you will feel fine as we get talking,” said the anaesthetic in her thin voice. As I looked forward to a lullaby of a talk, she asked, “Mr. Mishra, are you with Mr. Modi on demonetisation of notes?”

Now under the surgeon’s knife and not really knowing which way he thought, I had sense enough to remain prudent and not act like, with due apologies to Amartya Sen, as an ‘Argumentative Indian’ would generally do. I feigned I had fallen off to sleep, which indeed I was. When woken up in recovery ICU, I was not left with any options to check on the demonetisation news. Journalists would agree this was more painful than the surgical wounds. I had my luck when in the evening veteran gastroenterologist Ajay Kumar walked in for rounds.

Having known him and his interests in political matters for nearly two decades now, soon after he was over with his queries, I fired my volley, “Sir, how is Delhi doing with demonetisation?” He gave a wry smile saying, “The fellow has the guts, he has shown courage, hope he survives it.” The good old doctor was as crisp and to-the-point as he is in his prescriptions. I drifted off to sleep with an unfinished story.

Next morning, I got up feeling better. The doctors said I would go home straight from the recovery ICU and the “discharge process” began. Being an insurance case, I was told it would be good six hours before I could leave. With some time in hand and none of family or friends allowed inside, I went back to the old reporter trick on news gathering, though tied to my bed with a plethora of nodes and wires.

To my aid came the male nurse, who was assigned to me that morning. Shy of his female teammates, he tried seeking comfort in the company of a graying journo. Now began the battle of who got information, out of whom. He must be as old as the years I have spent pushing quill. The poor guy was beaten flat, without really knowing that he had been beaten at a game.

“Thankfully I had paid the landlord his rent. He came drunk and wailing last evening, was cursing Narendra Modi. He runs a rent empire and but doesn’t have a bank account. Doubt if he can sign a form. Never saw that stud who drives an SUV so weak ever,” my company for the day narrated. He moaned the lack of cash for the fact he would have to do with ‘less hot’ hospital cafeteria ‘sambhar’ for some days, “as I believe buying vegetables will be difficult.”

From my recovery bed at the hospital and at home, and strolls in the colony’s park, I have gathered that the heavens have certainly not fallen. Well, that could be said to be a limited view from a sick bed.

(Sidharth Mishra is Consulting Editor, Millennium Post)