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Personal account of people affected by Mumbai attacks

'Lot of shots were fired, there was a stampede'

Tasneem S Nashrulla I was eating at Wasabi in the Taj when I first heard the shots. The management told us that there had been some kind of shooting in the hotel but we were safe inside the restaurant.

The blinds were drawn and about 40 of us huddled in the centre of the restaurant. About 40 minutes later, we were taken through the kitchen and into the Taj Chambers, where there were already about 150 to 200 people.

There were many foreigners there who had encountered the terrorists and also some who had lost friends and family. Some were unable to trace their companions. They were all extremely traumatised because unlike us, they had no contact with the outside world.

I must add that the Taj staff were amazing and they should all be given credit for the great job they did to keep us comfortable and out of harms way. They gave us sandwiches to eat and sheets and towels to cover ourselves.

At around 4 am on Thursday morning, about 50 of us escaped through a passageway and down some stairs. It was not a safe environment to escape and we heard a lot of shots being fired behind us. People panicked and a stampede ensued.

It was really scary. Everyone just ran for shelter. I could not see any police escorts or security personnel.

I was scared to death, as three to four bodies lay in the lobby

Tasneem S Nashrulla

I had just finished a business meeting with some Taj officials and was waiting in the lobby for my car at around 9:25 pm.

Suddenly, I saw shots being fired from two different guns in the porch. Instead of running out, I rushed back into the lobby with my colleague Ambika.

I saw a young boy standing alone in the middle of the lobby, so I took him along and ran towards the Nalanda bookstore. Just as I was about to turn left for Nalanda, a bullet broke the glass of a showroom just ahead of me. Two Parsi ladies followed us into the bookstore. A British woman, whose husband had been shot, also joined us. She was inconsolable.

The bookstore's cashier switched off all the lights and locked the doors. We hid inside the storeroom, but we could hear shots being fired non-stop till about 11:30 pm. When the firing stopped, the cashier and I decided to take a walk outside to check what was happening.

We were scared to death as we saw three to four bodies lying in the lobby. But since no one else was there, we decided to escape. So along with Ambika, Deven (the 10 year old boy) and the British lady, I walked across the main lobby at around 12:30 am.

We had to take a chance and leave. In the lobby, we could hear shots being fired in Shamiana. We ran across the road.

I called a senior inspector I knew to send for a car. We got into the CRV that was sent for us and I went to a friend's house on Peddar Road. I called up Deven's parents who were also evacuated at 1:30 am and they picked him up.

Looking back, the boy saved me. I'm very sure that the terrorists saw us escaping because they were very close to us. But they must have seen the child and decided not to target us.

Mazgaon residents struggle to wipe out memory of burnt flesh, severed heads

Neha Bhayana

Two-year-old Kunal Maske can't express himself in words, but every time his mother points to the street below his house, he raises his chubby arms, screams "bhoom" and then covers his ears with his palms.

On Wednesday night, Kunal's mother, Pallavi, had carried him to the balcony outside their one-room home on the fourth floor of Ekta Nagar chawl building in Mazgaon to let him watch cars while she fed him dinner, when a taxi suddenly burst into flames before an explosion blew it into smithereens.

That night, Kunal didn't sleep.

"Even though I ducked into the house immediately to escape the shower of glass and metal particles, Kunal saw the explosion. He was crying constantly and kept peeing through the night," said Pallavi.

Twelve-year-old Manoj Maru, who lives next door, has been sleeping fitfully, too. "I had a terrible nightmare. I came across the terrorists and hit them with a bamboo stick so they shot me dead," said the Class 7 student.

Maru had been watching television news of the attack when he heard the noise. He ran out and found chunks of burnt flesh stuck to their doors. "Someone's small intestine was lying on the floor, too," he said.

The police may have collected all the pieces of flesh from the terrace and balconies in packets and taken them away, but the residents of Ekta Nagar's building No. 8 can't wipe out the stains or the memory of Wednesday night.

Their homes have broken glass panes and clocks that are stuck at 10.36 pm — the time of the explosion. They can still see the spot near the railway tracks, a few hundred metres away, where the taxi driver's severed head was found.

Two residents of the building — Shaibaz Shah and Sabira Khan — and are currently admitted at JJ Hospital. While a piece of metal piece had got stuck in 22-year-old Shah's throat, Khan, who was in the taxi behind the one that exploded, has a broken leg.

At a cluster of shanties opposite Ekta Nagar, families of fishermen and daily wage labourers were mourning the loss of four people — three women and a child — who were killed in the blast on Wednesday night.

Zarina Shaikh and her daughter Reema had returned home from Null Bazaar in the taxi which had the bomb.

"They had paid the taxi driver and were about to enter their home when the bomb exploded," said Reshma, Shaikh's elder daughter.

A resident recounted that late ATS chief Hemant Karkare had come for a round in their building before he went to Cama Hospital, where he was killed. "He got a call informing him of an emergency so he ran," said Tausif Ghalte.

'I came here for a job. Now I want to fly back to Australia'

Naomi Canton

I was in the Starboard Bar at 9.30 pm when I heard gunshots.

I saw people running and decided to get the hell out. There were gunmen everywhere shooting from different directions.

I rushed down to the basement and then someone moved us up to the Chambers. There were about 150 of us, staff and hotel guests, mainly Indians.

At first it was quite relaxed and they served us canapés while we sat listening to explosions. There didn't seem to be any terrorist near us.

At one point, we were all lined up to leave and then all of sudden there was gunfire and explosions.

There were shots all around us and all of us immediately lay down. People were using their mobile phones and contacting friends and relatives and

checking what was happening on their blackberries. The information we were getting was that the terrorists were in complete control of the building.

Sometimes it would get silent and we would relax and then we would hear gunfire and grenades again.

One girl next to me said: "We are all going to die."

I was thinking of calling my mum and dad to say a final goodbye. I knew that they would shoot me as I was a foreigner.

A couple of people got shot. One person, just six people away from me, got shot on the shoulder. I don't know when it happened.

Eventually in the morning, the army came in and rescued us.

We all got up to leave and then there was gunfire again. When we came out there was shrapnel, blood and broken glass everywhere.

As we left, a sniper started shooting at us as.

The terrorists clearly knew their way around as they were aware of all the back entrances and exits.

My chef from Starboard was killed in the basement — a place they should not have known about as it was always locked up.

Several waiters have been killed. Fifteen senior managers are dead. I heard that the hotel had been booby-trapped. This is not something the Taj Hotel could have prepared for.

Now all I have a mobile phone and a bottle opener. My wallet and all my possessions are inside my room at the Taj. I don't know when I will get them back.

I moved here five and a half months ago for the job. Now I want to fly back to Australia. I don't think anyone will be going back to work at the Taj Mahal Palace.

Three policemen in the line of fire

Mohan Shinde, Constable

He speaks in whispers, taking a break between each sentence, at ward 19 of JJ hospital.

Attached to the Azad Maidan police station, constable Mohan Shinde (49) got news that terrorists had stormed Cama hospital. He was part of a team

that rushed to Cama hospital around 10.45 pm on Wednesday.

They saw the bodies of two security guards on the ground floor and terrorists — at least two of them — running up the stairs to the upper floors.

Gunshots were exchanged. The terrorists, Shinde believes, then ran to the terrace. From there they lobbed a grenade and fired more shots. A bullet hit Shinde in the stomach and he also suffered grenade injuries. But he managed to fire a couple of rounds back, he said.

Shinde has suffered severe injuries on the legs, including burn injuries and shrapnel wounds.

— *Alifya Khan*

Vijay Khandekar, Wireless operator

Vijay Khandekar (36), a constable and wireless operator attached to the Azad Maidan police, was part of the police team that pursued two terrorists on Wednesday night into the Cama hospital.

Khandekar was injured by grenades and died from a bullet wound on his neck when his team, led by Additional Commissioner of Police Sadanand Date, chased the terrorists to the sixth floor of the hospital.

“Vijay called me between 9 and 10 pm saying there had been firing at CST station and he was accompanying a police team to pursue the terrorist. I told him to take care,” his younger brother Ashok said. “That was our family’s final conversation with him.”

Khandekar was the fourth generation in his family to serve in the force. He is survived by his wife Shradha and five-year-old daughter Samruddhi.

— *Chitrangada Choudhury*

Adhik Rao, GRP officer

Adhik Rao (39), a government railway police officer for 14 years, took a bullet to the abdomen while patrolling near the Times of India office at CST on Wednesday night.

He saw people running out of CST station and heard bullet sounds. Rao, a resident of Kurla, saw two terrorists walk out of the station and before he could react, they opened fire at him.

He is admitted in JJ hospital.

— *Alifya Khan*

Thomas Varghese: Died helping hotel guests

Gigil Varghese

As you walk into a residential colony in Mahim, a picture of a man smiling--almost looking you in the eye -- catches your attention.

The board mourns the death of a resident, Varghese Thomas, killed by the recent terrorist attacks in Mumbai.

48-year-old Thomas, captain at the Japanese restaurant Wasabi at the Taj Mahal Towers and Palace in Colaba had been hiding with guests for at least four hours in one of the rooms. He was later instructed to try and get the guests out at around 2 am on Thursday.

He was escorting some of the guests, when he was shot in his leg.

"Even after he was shot, he called a colleague and asked him to rescue him. At that moment, terrorist shot one more bullet into his upper body," said a friend, who also worked at the Taj and did not wish to be named.

His body was later taken to JJ Hospital. A resident of Mahim, Thomas has been survived by his 42-year-old wife Sunu and two sons, one of them, Rynell is studying in the ninth standard at Little Angles School. The elder one, Wesley, is pursuing a bachelors' degree.

HT visited his Mahim residence on Thursday. His family was inconsolable. His sons were trying to act normal and take care of the mother, who was lying down flanked by mourning relatives. Thomas's sister Shiney was trying to feed their mother a morsel of food, which she refused.

Residents of the colony remember Thomas as a compassionate man who often treated other to tea. "He loved taking his dog out for strolls," said a neighbour.

His dog, named 'J', was coaxing a family member to take him to the main gate of the residential complex, where he often waited for Thomas.

Mangha Kripalani: Lost her family members at Trident Hotel

Gigil Varghese

Mangha Kripalani, an 84-year-old New Yorker, was ready for bed on Wednesday. He heard a gun shot, passed it off as a firecracker. He had decided to lock his room and go to bed when his son frantically knocked on his door and asked him to leave.

"He said a fire had broken out," said Kriplani. Kriplani, a businessman, who owned Amkrip Corporation, a export company which supplied American

products around the world had to walk down 19 floors of the Oberoi Trident where terrorists have held people hostage for more than 24 hours now. "I was the last one to walk out of the hotel," said Kriplani.

Kriplani navigated the soot and the stairs with difficulty.

"I am so old I don't know how I made it? God must have wanted me to live," said Kriplani.

But once out, he realised he was alone, in his bathing suite and bare foot. "I lost my son, daughter-in-law and two daughters in the chaos," said Kriplani.

He spent half the night on Mumbai's Marine Drive the other half huddled in a car with two others who had miraculously escaped.

"I was worried and cursed myself for getting my family to see India," said Kriplani.

The doorman at the Oberoi who had arranged the car for him had driven Kriplani from the airport a week ago. "He asked me if he could do anything. I said please help me find my family," said Kriplani.

In the wee hours of morning he arranged for a room for me at the Intercontinental on Marine drive.

I was waiting in my bathing suit in the car; the doorman came running to me and said that my family was in the same hotel.

"I couldn't believe my ears. It was fate. It was impossible," said Kriplani.

His son who worked for a big corporation in New York had walked up the length of Marine Drive at least ten times. He had even tried to go back to the hotel to find his father, but the police did not let him go back.

His son, who Kriplani did not want to be named had put his wife and two daughters in the Inox theatre behind Oberoi. "700 other guests were there, they all spent the night there," said Kriplani "but they had to leave in the morning."

"My sons contacted from New York helped him book a room in the Intercontinental," said Kriplani. I had arrived ten minutes after he had, said Kriplani.

Kriplani has been coughing and spitting soot. "I don't feel like anything is wrong with me but the smoke got to me and my doctor has given me medication," said Kriplani.

Kriplani who is 84 said he initially wanted to stay for three weeks but now plans to return after one. "I don't think I will ever come back. I cannot come back," said Kriplani. He thought for a moment and added, "I don't know how long I will live but as long as I do I won't let my family come to India

either."

Kriplani had ordered for new clothes and is now waiting for them to arrive.

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