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Death would visit him thrice that night

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Just before he was leaving for home, Jadhav got a call from Salaskar.

Salaskar asked him to come to the Colaba police station for an important operation.

As he got to the Toyota Qualis, along with Salaskar was Additional Commissioner of Police Ashok Kamte and Anti-Terrorism Squad chief Hemant Karkare.

As the police officers and constables started driving slowly towards the front gate of the Cama Hospital Jadhav did not know that death would visit him not once, but thrice.

First, the terrorists saw the approaching Qualis and fired at it, killing Karkare, Kamte and Salaskar.

Jadhav was hit five times. Three bullets in his left shoulder and two in his right elbow, which was almost severed. He played dead and maneuvered himself under the bodies of three other constables who had died.

The second time death lurched at him was when Kasab fired at the constables on the back seat when one of their phones went off. This time, the bodies on top of him shielded him.

"The 20 minutes that they drove around was the worst in my life. I spent each of those minutes thinking that I could be killed any moment," he recalls.

After driving for 20 minutes, a flat tyre forced the terrorists to dump the police van and hijack a Skoda car.

The third incident that got Jadhav almost killed was ironic.

"I had seen the terrorists dump the Qualis and take a Skoda. I called the wireless and informed the control room that I was in the Qualis and that the terrorists had taken off in the Skoda."

"When the police arrived, nobody knew me. I was in my civilian clothes. I was yelling my name out, saying I am a constable. As they cautiously approached the car, I seriously thought my time was near. Then a constable on that team recognised and identified me," Jadhav says.

Only at 3:30 am did Jadhav switch on his phone. "I had forgotten that I hadn't called my family. Then it struck me that once they saw the news of Salaskarsaab's death, they would think I was dead too. That's when I called them and assured them I was alive."

Image: Ashwini Jadhav and her son Parashuram. Photographs: Priyanka Sharma

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