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Ordinary folks, extraordinary moments

Hindustan Times
November 29, 2008

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First Published: 23:48 IST(29/11/2008)

Last Updated: 23:56 IST(29/11/2008)

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'I crossed my fingers & decided to take a chance' Mini Pant Zachariah

When terrorists opened fire, Dr Tilu Mangeshikar, along with daughter Kalindi and her doctor husband



Prashant, was attending a wedding reception in the Taj Hotel. "I remember wondering why they were bursting loud crackers now when the baraat was already here," says Mangeshikar. Within seconds, the hotel staff confirmed gunshots, shut the doors to the Crystal Room and told the guests to duck. Mangeshikar, along with the other guests, crawled to the Taj Chambers where they were holed up for four hours.

"Around 2 am, we were evacuated. Three men in khakhi escorted us through a narrow corridor when suddenly bullets rained at us from the front. We stumbled back into the room that had been our refuge and barricaded the door with tables and chairs," she recalls.

Mangeshikar then realised one of the hotel employees had been hit. "The bullet entered Rajan's back

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and had come out from the front, through the abdomen. His intestines had popped out.” With no sanitised gloves in sight, Mangeshkar grabbed the hotel serviettes and pushed back the intestines into the wounded man.

“The bleeding was controlled but Rajan was writhing in pain. We did not know how long the ordeal would last and I had to do something.” Fortunately, one of the foreigners had some painkillers. “I just had to take a call. I had to take a chance and cross my fingers Rajan would make it,” she says.

The painkillers worked. The injured man calmed down. When help finally came at 8 am on Thursday, Rajan was rushed to Bombay Hospital for immediate medical care. He was reported to have survived, thanks in no small way to Dr Mangeshkar.

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‘I wasn’t afraid. I just wanted to ensure they got out safe’

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G. Mohiuddin Jeddy

Little did 26-year-old Italian Consulate employee Abhijit Dalvi know that heavily armed terrorists would play party pooper at the end of the Festa Italiana 2008 held at the Oberoi on the evening of November 26. What he did know, however, was his duty — to help evacuate 13 Italian delegates who were caught in the death trap that was the luxury hotel.

The Mumbai resident had just returned home when he received calls from Italian delegates informing him of the firing at the hotel. Accompanied by his boss Salvatore Ianniello, Dalvi rushed out in his motorbike.

He recalls, “While parking my bike, I saw a speeding police jeep pass by escorting a Skoda car. The car changed its route; the police opened fire and there was an exchange of fire.”

Despite witnessing the shootout, Dalvi went on to help rescue 13 Italian delegates hiding in the kitchen’s basement along with other guests. “No one was allowed near the hotel. But the guests were being let out in batches of 10 and the last of my delegates came out by midnight,” says Dalvi.

The delegates, 12 of whom were women, were in a state of shock says Dalvi who heard their accounts first hand. “They saw the terrorists barge into the hotel and fire indiscriminately and said that around 50

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bodies were lying in the lobby,” he narrates.

Until morning, Dalvi and his troupe of 13 hid in the parking lot of the INOX cinema hall nearby. “When I learnt of a Lufthansa bus leaving the area, I sent the delegates in it to the Italian Consulate on Peddar road.” He also arranged vehicles for some foreigners who were hiding.

Recounting the horror of the delegates and the volatility of the situation, Dalvi admits that it was a very dangerous situation as the terrorists could have attacked anytime. “I wasn’t really scared. I just wanted to ensure that the delegates got out safe.”

‘I told my family this was more important’

Riddhi Shah

On Wednesday night, 39-year-old Sanjay Sawant was taking an unwell friend to GT Hospital. And then the terrorists struck. “We heard gunshots”, says Sawant. “The cops told me that they couldn’t do much. They were completely unprepared to deal with the terrorists who were so heavily armed,” he says. ‘

His family was calling every five minutes, begging him to come home, but Sawant says “injured people and bodies were pouring into the hospital” and the staff couldn’t handle everything. So after calling fellow Shiv Sainiks from the shakha nearby, he got some injured back by ambulance and helped load dead bodies into the cars.

He got home at 3: 30 am, only to return in four hours. “We then started helping the patients out. “Some needed blood. We donated. Others needed to get in touch with family. We organised that,” he says.

At nine pm, Sawant headed to Colaba, close to Nariman House. “The restaurants in the area were shut. People in neighbouring buildings didn’t have much to eat. We got a restaurant opened up, and gave food and water to several residents,” he says. The police were focussed on the Taj and the Oberoi operations. Every time guns went off near Nariman House, Sawant’s heart jumped. “But by then, I’d dealt with the fear. If I have to die, I’d rather die while helping others.”

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‘I was scared but my voice didn’t fumble’

Rajendra Aklekar



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THIS man saved three trainloads of passengers. Thirty-seven year-old Vishnu Dattatram Zende, a railway employee for the last 18 years was posted at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (CST) station for the last five. As an announcer, he was at a vantage point above the stationmaster's office. He could see the terrorists calmly firing indiscriminately and lobbing hand grenades at innocent passengers while they couldn't spot him.

"Two gunmen entered the waiting hall of CST for the long distance trains. I heard an explosion and immediately thought there had been a blast. I made announcements asking the Railway Protection Force and Government Railway Police staff to rush to the station for emergency help," Zende told HT.

His first instinct was fear, but he decided to use the public address system to alert the police and the general public. "In an aggressive tone I began alerting passengers that they should exit the station from the rear gate on platform one and not attempt to come to the CST front entrance and lobby since there was a problem," Zende says. He never let on that terrorists were in the station. "I was scared, but my voice did not fumble. I do not know how many lives I saved, but I was just doing my job."

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