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'I've seen so much goodness'

Kinjal Dagli, Hindustan Times
December 25, 2008

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Email to Author

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On November 26, Kunal Thakral, a 22-year-old student of the Delhi School of Economics and his classmate Shantanu Khanna had just entered Leopold Café, when two terrorists lobbed a grenade from behind them. "About 21 pieces of shrapnel entered my leg and I was bleeding profusely. Shantanu pulled me down and dragged a table in front of us for protection," narrates Thakral. They heard a series of gunshots and deathly screams in the minutes that followed.

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The bodies falling all around them convinced them that they were going to be next, but suddenly, a lull followed and they knew the shootout had ended. "I heard later that the two terrorists were in a hurry to reach the Taj, so they left," he says.

Soon, the ATS arrived and a policeman put Thakral in a taxi headed for St George's hospital. "I was told I was on a low-priority list because I was still conscious. By that time I was unable to walk, but I decided to take a chance, and with the help of another policeman, got a taxi to take me to Bombay Hospital," he recounts. "The hospital didn't charge me a rupee," he adds.

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And, in an incident that has stayed with him, he remembers, he asked a complete stranger for water and was handed a Bisleri bottle.

"When I got home, the hospital in Delhi didn't charge me either. And a government official came home to drop off a compensation cheque for ₹ 50,000 without any bureaucratic hassles," he continues.

The images of the shootout still haunt him. But, he says, "I've seen so much goodness that it's easier for me to cope. I have a lot to be grateful for. I'm just thankful to be alive."

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