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Any other day, the Hararwalas may have lived

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Hararwala and his wife Mehjabeen did things differently on November 26, the day Nariman House was attacked

Lyla Bavadam

MUMBAI: Through the day on November 26, Salim Ali Hussein Hararwala and his wife Mehjabeen did things that they did not normally do.

For one, they both spoke to people they hadn't seen or heard in a long while. Mr. Hararwala called old business associates out of the blue. Mrs. Hararwala called friends and relatives she hadn't spoken to for long.

The family also made small changes in its daily routine. Usually Mr. Hararwala returned from work around 11.30 p.m. after which they would have dinner. That day he was home early and they sat down to dinner a little before 10. On most days, their oldest son Mohammed would not be with them for dinner because he lived in the suburbs. But that night he was with them.

Looking back, Mohammed surmises with deep sadness that his parents' passing was "meant to happen."

"If my father had returned late that night, things would have been different. If I had not visited them that day, then I would not have been the one to insist that we shift to another place and they may still have been here." For Mohammed, the loss of his parents was doubly traumatic because he was with them when they were shot.

The Hararwalas were having dinner when they heard explosions some distance away. Mohammed sensed it wasn't firecrackers but he wasn't sure what it was. All he knew was that there was something oddly different about the sound. While standing in the building complex trying to figure it out, Mohammed says, another explosion took place — this time a few meters away. It was the first grenade that was thrown from Nariman House.

"There was dense smoke pouring into our compound. I rushed back up to my house. I wanted to get my parents out." Fareedun Court, the building the Hararwalas lived in, was separated only by a wall from Nariman House. Mohammed feared that there could be another blast or that the people responsible for it would scale the wall and enter their first floor flat.

The family hurriedly decided to move out. Their maid had the keys to an unoccupied flat in a neighbouring building and she suggested they move there. Once inside, they switched on a light to get a bit of glass out of Mohammed's leg. At the same time, there was a commotion downstairs and his parents went to the window.

Mohammed says he turned around at the very moment his father was shot. "I saw dad falling and my mother shrieked or maybe she said something and then she also fell. I thought she had collapsed because she saw my dad fall. He was bleeding badly from his head. I realised dad was not going to live, but he was still alive. I attended to my mother. She was bleeding as well. My head was spinning. I rushed down for help. By the time I came up my mother was dead, but dad was still alive. We put him in the ambulance. I think he was alive for 15 or 20 minutes.

"The ambulance was stopped by a mob right outside the Nariman House gully. They wanted to verify who was inside... that it was not the gunmen trying to escape. I was totally blank after that."

The building that the Hararwalas had shifted to in the hope that they would be safer was in the direct line of fire from Nariman House. For the practiced gunmen firing from the terrace, the Hararwalas, who

were just about 25 meters away, were easy targets. The first shot caught Mr. Hararwala on the forehead. The second hit Mrs. Mehjabeen. The third grazed Mohammed. He says he “can still hear the zing” in his head.

Salim Ali Hussein Hararwala was 62. Mehjabeen was 57. They are survived by their sons Mohammed, 30, Hoozefa, 27, and Abbas, 23. “They were loving people. Everyone has only good memories of them,” says Mohammed.

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