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## Lawyer argued for hostages's lives

**Sheela Bhatt** | December 09, 2008 09:01 IST

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In time you will forget is conventional wisdom -- but conventional wisdom fails in the face of unprecedented tragedy.

Days after the terror strikes in Mumbai, people continue to gather in nooks and corners, small groups repeating the story of their own experiences, amplifying the experiences of others that they have heard about. They talk of the attacks on the Taj and the Oberoi and the Trident and on Nariman House, crystallising the narratives for their own better understanding.

And even more than the story of what happened, it is the heart-rending stories of those who died, and those who survived, that are being picked up and passed on fervently, incessantly, all through this wounded city. These are potent stories, multiple strands coalescing into a combined tapestry of ordinary lives disrupted by extraordinary events.

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One such story, one such thread, is that of wellknown city solicitor Anand Bhatt, who lives on Carmichael Road in south Mumbai, and who was shot at point blank range by a terrorist. A close friend of the Bhatt family told *rediff.com* that Bhatt was having dinner at a restaurant on the first floor of the Oberoi at about 10 pm with Pankaj Shah, an influential builder who lives in Worli, and a third friend who survived the attack and who has asked that his name be withheld.

Even before they could begin their dinner, gunshots were heard -- and the sense set in that something dangerous had been let loose, though no one quite knew what.

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A remarkable theme of the Mumbai attacks has been the quiet, understated heroism of the staff of the hotels where terrorists struck -- and this incident is yet another confirmation. The staff of the restaurant quietly did what they do every day -- look after the customer. The restaurant staff, thus, quietly shepherded the guests, including Bhatt's party, to the kitchen and from there, to the fire escape.

Escape seemed so near, but it was not to be. The terrorists, says an eyewitness account, rounded up everyone alive. They corralled about 20 guests, and made them climb the service staircase to the 18th floor. There, the guests were made to line up against a wall.

One terrorist positioned himself at the head of the stairs leading up, and the other at the point where it led down -- and then, in a scene straight out of hell, they opened fire.

A survivor says Bhatt, like the lawyer he is, attempted to argue with the terrorists. He argued that they were all guests, innocent people who had merely come to dine. Why kill these people, Bhatt argued.

One of the terrorists retorted in words to this effect: 'Did you think of this when the Godhra riots happened and when the Babri Masjid was demolished? Where were you then?'

And then he levelled his gun and shot Bhatt dead.

**Complete coverage: [Terror strikes at Mumbai's heart](#)**

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