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Wading all night through Mumbai

Anjali Krishnan, a Mumbai-based advertising professional, describes her night-long trek home through neck-deep water in the flooded city.

“I had driven out of home for a business meeting in Mumbai on an overcast rainy afternoon on Tuesday.

Mumbaites are used to torrid monsoon rains that routinely flood its roads and bring all public transport to a halt.

So it was no big deal that I was venturing out for work on a grey, rainy afternoon like most of the people in this go-go city.

I was on the way to Bandra when I joined a queue of cars, and instantly realised that the rain had thrown the traffic out of gear.

No big deal, I thought. It happens every monsoon.

Then I got struck in the gridlock on SV Road near the Milind Subway.

It was half past four in the afternoon. I had already spent an hour and a half trying to negotiate through the traffic.

For the next 10 hours, till two in the morning on Wednesday, I was stranded in my car.

I had been a bit luckier than many of my fellow travellers - my driver had pulled the car into a lane and parked it there.

As the hours passed, I realised that I had gotten myself in a big mess - Mumbai had been inundated, everything had come to a halt, there were power outages.

Cheery radio

The rain was slapping ferociously on the wind screen, the sky was inky black, there was darkness all around, and the city's cheery FM stations spewed romantic Bollywood rain songs on the car radio.

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A radio jockey on one of the stations was even holding out the promise of rain-soaked stranded Mumbaiites meeting potential partners during the long, rainy night.

I laughed and looked at my watch. It was 2am.

I decided to begin walking home - the sheer tedium of sitting in a cramped car was taking its toll.



Nearly one-third of Mumbai is under water

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Waddling out to through knee deep water, I ran into some friendly firemen who forbade me to walk further.

"It could be risky madam," said one of them.

Then I saw three girls stranded in the water. They said they had been walking for hours to get home, and were exhausted.

I took them back with me into my car.

Help

Suddenly a few men emerged out of the darkness and knocked on the car window.

They had seen us in the car and were offering some snacks.

We were famished and took up the offer. They took us to half-constructed building nearby and fed us.

There was a school bus packed with children nearby - the men had dropped some snacks for the trapped students.



Stranded passengers slept the night in the buses they were travelling

Around three in the morning, we decided to finally begin our long march home through the swirling, near neck-deep water.

It was still pouring, and we couldn't hold our umbrellas in the gale.

There was not a soul on the road when we held hands in the water and began walking.

One of the girls was shorter than us, so we asked her to walk along the road divider holding our hands.

The water was deep - I mean if you were 5ft tall, you would easily drown.

As we waddled into the eerie, rain-whipped night, we felt like we were floating.

Water walk

As we walked on more and more people joined the trek,

holding hands.

The water was black and greasy right up to our necks and swirled fast around our waists.

There were broken bottles floating all around. I saw two Mercedes Benz cars and a Toyota Lexus floating in the water.



People took out boats to negotiate water logged streets

We crossed dark homes, and shops and police stations. We met a lot of friendly firemen trying to keep order, but not a single policeman on the way.

Soon, it became a long, happy, wet trek as can only happen in Mumbai.

Our fellow-travellers, boys and girls, men and women, young and old, chanted hymns, sang songs, cracked jokes.

Some heartily sang "Just chill out, chill out" - a Bollywood ditty rocking the nation these days.

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“ The unprecedented rains completely paralysed the city infrastructure ”

Ashwini Bhandary, Mumbai, India

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Others cracked the night's best silly jokes - whenever they would come across a car floating in the middle of the road, they would shout: "No parking! No parking please! This is a traffic offence!"

"Don't feel ashamed, madam. Hold my hand. Bindaas pakro (Hold me coolly)," said a young man in the queue lending a helping hand to a girl.

I saw a man sitting in a fancy car scooping out water with a small tiffin box - at this rate, he would never get out of the place.

I saw another man walking with a 70-year-old father perched on his shoulders.



Cars were stuck in the water

My rain girls sorority had now expanded to a few hundred people wading through the street.

In the middle, one of them actually met her husband wading through the night, and joined him happily.

Spirited city

I had forgotten the tiredness, the grime, the potential dangers that such flooding held.

It was a fantastic feeling, the sheer spirit of it all.

When I reached my home in Juhu around five in the morning on Wednesday, my four-year-old girl was happy to see me back.

My husband had stayed over at an office, and had been fed well.

The trek was an eye-opener, a testimony to the indomitable spirit of the city's people.

Mumbaites have stopped expecting anything from the politicians who have never cared for them.

So when the city turned into a dangerous waterworld, they turned to each other and helped them out of the crisis.

It was business as usual, in a way. ”

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