

Laxmi and the Auto

It was 6 in the morning as Laxmi 40, tuned to a devotional television channel as part of her daily routine. There was a News headline scrolling... "a bomb blast attack happened in Ameerpet metro station, Hyderabad in the late hours of yesterday...the number of fatalities is yet to be known but the number is expected to be high as it happened during the peak hours in Hyderabad...the preliminary enquiry suspects a terror attack.."

Arjun.. get up my boy, it is already 6 and you have to get ready for the school, Laxmi shouted.

Please maa... just 10 more minutes...yawningly said Arjun.

Keeping aside his 6th standard books, school bag, tiffin box, Laxmi pulled the mat beneath arjun.

The room looked like a mixture of kitchen, bedroom, study room altogether in a single room.

They both have been staying in this room as a paying guest for the past two years.

Arjun gets up and moves out of the room as if he was desperate to get some oxygen from outside and to have a glance at the rising sun far from between the two beautiful tall buildings just opposite to their tiny room.

As Laxmi wipes the front glass of their auto, the only source of income given as a part of a relief package by the government for those who lost their lives in a terror attack two years ago.

Arjun's father Venkat lived a decent life along with Laxmi running a small hotel in one of the busiest areas in Hyderabad until he lost his life in one of the disastrous terror attacks that Hyderabad had ever witnessed.

Laxmi makes the auto ready for today's journey. Arjun asks... maa, when can we get to live in those tall buildings?

Laxmi didn't answer and told Arjun to get ready as she has to drop him in the school and go to the railway station, so that she can make some good money at least today.

As they were locking their room, Ahmed, 45, their immediate neighbor, just waves his hand to Arjun and smiles at him as he moves to his room.

Laxmi starts the auto and warns Arjun, how many times should I tell not to speak with that fellow?

Why ma...? Arjun asks mildly.

You don't know these fellows? just shut up and do what I say, said Laxmi with anger.

Laxmi drops Arjun at the school gate and moves towards the railway station.

As she drives, she recollects the morning TV headlines about the bomb blast reminding her about the devastation that caused to her life in a similar incident two years ago.

With moist eyes, Laxmi recollects the day when Venkat bought a beautiful saree as a gift to her from their first profit out of the hotel.

Venkat was a lovely and caring husband, he used to tell her that one day we will become rich and buy a big home and we will lead a very happy and luxurious life.

As the auto approaches the railway station, a family stops the auto for travel to a place called Sultan bazar.

They were four with Father wearing a head cap (taqiyah) in a kurta-pajama outfit and Mother in a burqa gown along with two kids in formal outfits with taqiyah on their heads.

Laxmi for a while thought of not stopping, but she thought if she lets this one go, she might have to wait for some more time till another customer approaches her auto. So, with great hesitation, she stopped and agreed for the deal to drop them at Sultan bazar.

The auto started and the father held a urdu newspaper in his hands, and the kid sitting beside him asked his father, What is a terror attack, baba?

The father replied, It is an evil thing that some people do in the name of god.

The kid asked why they do it?

Don't know beta, But I can say innocent people are the worst affected....the kid could not understand the answer given by his father.

As the conversation stops, Laxmi asks them where to stop, whether it is near the Hanuman temple or near the famous Irani cafe? The father replies: just stop on the opposite side of the Irani cafe.

In the evening, Laxmi picks up Arjun from school and gets back to their room.

Arjun says, maa...Today, in school everyone was talking that there was a bomb blast that happened in Ameerpet metro station

and our principal sir told us to maintain two minutes of silence for all those who lost their lives in the attack.

Laxmi says, what is the use of maintaining two minutes silence? Does it feed the children who lost their father in the blast? Does it make any sense by maintaining two minutes of silence for the violence that happened? It is all nonsense, she replies while she prepares the dinner for them.

Arjun asks maa... Who does all such things? what will they get by doing such attacks?

Laxmi replies, Arjun you will find all the answers as you grow up, for now just get back to sleep as we have to wake up early for tomorrow.

Laxmi drowns into sleep in a quest to find answers to Arjun's Questions, but with little result.

One day, Laxmi's auto did not start and she was trying to diagnose but with no result. She says in despair: Arjun, today is gone. You may not go to school today. Let us do one thing, you just stay here, I will go and bring a mechanic which takes me about half an hour.

It was 8'o' clock in the morning and Ahmed just got out of his room. He was lean, tall with an angular face, his eyes were as bright as the sun. He stood as a rock, his hands hanging at his sides. It was a body of long straight lines and curves each forming into planes, the wind waved his hair against the sky touching the top of the tall buildings on the opposite side. He looked as if the god has not wasted a single line and every inch, every point of him had its purpose. He shook his head and waved his hand to Arjun with a smile as usual and seeing the Auto, he moved towards Arjun and asked What happened?

Arjun replied: The Auto is troubling, It is not starting.. Ahmed inspects the auto, moves closer to the driver seat and pulls the handle lever to start. He observes the sound and tells Arjun to bring the red colored tool bag that is present in his room.

Arjun brought the tool bag, it looked like a mini-workshop with all the tools scrambled. Ahmed took one tool after the other and opened the engine portion underneath the seat, removed a few nut

bolts and took one mechanical part outside and started cleaning it.

His hands moved arduously and it looked as if he knew each and every part of the machine with precise accuracy.

Arjun's eyes focused on his hands with intent and the movement of the tools in his dexterous hands looked like those in the hands of a sculptor.

Ahmed finished the work and looked at Arjun with a pleasant smile. He closes the cabinet and pulls the handle lever and this time the engine makes the perfect sound of the start.

Arjun's eyes reflected the happiness after hearing the starter sound of the engine and Ahmed embraced Arjun with a smile by touching his cheek and stopping the engine before leaving the place with his tool bag.

Meanwhile, Laxmi arrives in despair and says to Arjun, there is no mechanic available and we are left with no other option today.

Arjun says maa..once please try to start again, maybe this time it will start.

No, Arjun, It will not start, I have been suspecting this for the past few days and finally today it has broken down.

Arjun says: Please maa...once try again one last time.

Laxmi, once thought of trying to make a final attempt and just got back into the auto and pulled the handle lever, and she was delighted to see the start of the engine and they both were happy and Arjun said in his mind "Thank you Ahmed uncle".

In the evening, Arjun asks his mother, Maa.. Why don't you allow me to talk to Ahmed uncle?

Why do you always insist that I avoid Ahmed uncle?

I think he is a good person.

Laxmi says: Shut up, don't talk more than your age, just follow what I say.

Arjun replies: No Maa.. It is not correct, you are saying wrong, Ahmed uncle is a very nice person.

Laxmi shouts: Arjun, don't speak nonsense, all those people are of same type, they make bombs, they kill innocent people, they are terrorists and did you forget your father, even our lives got destroyed because of those people.

Arjun replies: No Maa...Why do you think in that way? How can you say that all muslims are of the same type?

Maybe there might even be some very good human beings like Ahmed uncle.

Laxmi screams: Enough ...Enough...Arjun, leave this topic, I can't forget the past.You know, I could not even get the dead body of your father after the bomb blast that happened two years ago. And I hope you remember the recent Ameerpet Metro blasts as well.Who did all this? aren't they responsible? The complete world knows that it is because of them the world suffers and people like us become helpless.

Arjun says: No Maa..you cannot make this statement applicable to all, As far as I am concerned, Ahmed uncle is a nice person and do you know how the auto got started in the morning? Do you think it started by itself?...No, Ahmed uncle repaired it and what is the need for him to do us this favor?

Laxmi maintained a silence with no reply and started to prepare the dinner.

Arjun said: From tomorrow, I will speak to Ahmed uncle and he will be one of my best friends forever.

As they both fell asleep with Laxmi introspecting herself and hoping for a better tomorrow.

