

Mafia Queens of Mumbai

stories of women
from the ganglands

S. Hussain Zaidi
with Jane Borges

Foreword by Vishal Bharadwaj

'Mafia Queens is vivid, engaging, and always surprising. Read it.'
Vikram Chandra

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FOREWORD

Crime is juicier than spirituality. Guns are more attractive than roses. And thus—at least to me—the stories about the lives of gangsters are much more fascinating to share than that of saints.

I felt that crime reporting in India is limited only to the columns of daily newspapers and the stories die shortly after they are published. It is truly rare that a book seeks to preserve such stories for posterity and specifically, for fans like me.

As a filmmaker, my need for such stories is even more so. I always felt handicapped and a tad frustrated, because there was no way I could dig into the lives or events in the glorious criminal past of the great city of dreams, once called Bombay and now known as Mumbai. But the time came when I had to change my opinion. It was when I saw the film *Black Friday* (made by my dear friend and a fantastic filmmaker, Anurag Kashyap), which is based on the book of the same title, authored by S. Hussain Zaidi. The book was a thoroughly researched account of the reasons and the conspiracy that led to the horrible 1993 Mumbai serial blasts and the repercussions that followed.

Hussain's was a name stuck forever in my mind after that. I found a ray of hope in his work. I decided to follow his crime stories and therefore, had to change my newspaper every time he switched jobs.

Finally I met him during the research work of my film *Kaminey*. He was of great help, of course, taking me to people and places in order for me to have a glance into the drug-trafficking business of the city, an inseparable part of the Mumbai mafia. It was then that I made him promise to give me the first right of refusal of his next work for a film adaptation.

Precisely two years later I got a call from him, asking me to write the foreword of the book that you have in your hand right now—*The Mafia Queens of Mumbai*. Stories that I and I'm sure most of you, have never heard.

Personally, I enjoy the female protagonist or antagonist much more than the male one. Lady Macbeth is more complex and fascinating a character than Macbeth or King Duncan. Madam Bovary, Anna Karenina, Phoolan

Devi, Indira Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi are, to me, much more interesting than their male counterparts.

As expected, this read was a delightful journey; or rather should I say, a rollercoaster ride. Sometimes hilarious, sometimes full of sorrow, sometimes horrifying but always dramatic. The shrewd Jenabai Daaruwali who made notorious ganglords like Karim Lala, Haji Mastan and 'our own' Dawood Ibrahim dance to the movement of her fingers just like a conductor of a big philharmonic orchestra.

The ironic tale of the queen of Kamathipura, Gangubai, fighting to get recognition for the existence and importance of sex workers in society. Or the melancholic tale of a wife looking for revenge for her slain husband from none other than Dawood Ibrahim ...

The writing is so visual that it makes you feel as if you are watching a movie, inter-cutting between various tracks. The stories are almost cinematically structured, flashing back or forward and taking one through numerous time passages. Honesdy, it left me struggling to decide which one to choose to adapt to celluloid!

So I proudly welcome you into the world of these beautiful, kind and cunning warring queens who broke through the glass ceiling in the absolute stronghold of brutal masculinity called the Underworld.

Mumbai ki queen kaun? Turn the pages and make your choice.

VISHAL BHARDWAJ

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INTRODUCTION

Mafia Queens of Mumbai is the translation of a decade-and-a-half-long dream. During the late Nineties, when crime reporting was still my bailiwick, I became fascinated with women criminals. I realised they were gutsier, far more scheming and lethal when it came to pursuing their goals.

One episode that left an indelible imprint on my mind was the story of Lallan Bhabhi. In the world of Bhais (criminals) she was the Bhabhi, one of the cogs in the petrol adulteration cartel. On a rainy evening, she was arrested and taken to the Sewree Police Station in south Mumbai. As per the norm, she was allowed to make one phone call. Generally, the accused uses the opportunity to inform their relatives about their arrest or hire a lawyer for bail proceedings.

This woman, sitting in the police station right under the cops' noses, called her house and instructed her younger brother, 'I am not coming home tonight, please shift the kitchen.'

The cop who narrated the story to me later said they were mystified by the whole conversation. 'Why would a woman who has just been arrested by the cops, be more concerned about her kitchen than her children, husband or her own release?'

The police knew it was futile to question her; she was hardly expected to be honest with the law. They could not use unconventional methods to make a woman talk, so they dispatched a police party to her house and asked her brother about the whole conversation. The boy immediately cracked and revealed that she meant the fresh stock of adulterated petrol which was not seized by the cops should be immediately shifted to some other hideout before the police learned of its existence,

Lallan Bhabhi showed her mettle to the cops; she was unfazed by the law. For her, being in police custody was just an interlude before resuming her criminal activities and she didn't want any financial loss despite her being incarcerated. She wanted to keep her petrol adulteration business thriving and running.

As a writer and journalist, it was a seminal moment for me. I was intrigued. I began compiling data and began taking a special interest in

crimes where women figured prominently. It might come handy if I wrote a book, I told myself.

And after having written about all kinds of criminals over the years, I can say with firm conviction that when it comes to gender dynamics, it is much easier to be a Dawood Ibrahim than a Jenabai Daaruwali. If you sift through the gangs of Chhotas (Rajan and Shakeel), you will find clones galore, but you will rarely come across a Sapna Didi, a woman who dared to stand up against Dawood and was given a dastardly death by the don's acolytes. Of the twenty-two stab wounds inflicted on her, four were specifically targeted at her private parts, a grisly message of warning to other women not to dally with the mafia.

This book is an attempt to understand the complex minds and the psyche of women criminals. It is in no way meant to glorify them. On the other hand, these women were not blank slates written upon by dangerous male mafia members. There is no simplistic cause-effect way of looking at their lives. There is no doubt that for these women, crime was not only a way of transcending their poverty and limitations but also a life-saving concept. By focusing on these women, I am not trying to essentialise the nature of female criminals. They are fascinating women because they pushed the boundaries of our dominant moral codes.

Compiling the extraordinary and powerful tales of thirteen women from the world of crime and the underworld was overwhelmingly challenging and arduous, especially because a number of them flourished at a time when crimes by women were barely documented or acknowledged. These include the stories of bootlegger Jenabai Daaruwali and brothel madam Gangubai Kathiawadi.

As journalists the first lesson we learnt was not to sit on judgment but raise questions. In the stories that you will read, we have desisted from being judgmental and have stuck to facts. We have relied heavily on court documents, police records, cop historians, reliable journalists and published news stories in major national dailies.

In the absence of these, we have interviewed relatives, neighbours, retired policemen, veteran journalists and other independent witnesses. We ensured that any account which seemed controversial was corroborated by two separate parties. Those accounts which seemed contradictory to each other were ignored.

This book is an attempt at accurate and true storytelling. It is not a piece of fiction. We have taken literary license only in those places where we feel it is absolutely necessary to add graphic drama to the story, but without any sort of dilution to the authenticity of the incidents.

ONE

THE WILY OLD
WOMAN OF DONGRI

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Chapter 1

AT THE GRAVEYARD

The Arabian Sea, murky and grey, flails and lashes against the giant tetra-pods on the Queen's Necklace near Marine Lines. The skies have opened up to let loose a welcome spell of rain after playing hide-and-seek with the city for day.

Not long ago, until the mid-Eighties, you could stand on the footboard of a Western local train and watch the shimmering sea as your train whizzed past Charni Road to Marine Lines. The name Marine Lines is a British legacy, a throwback to a time when the British put Mumbai on the trade route in the mid-nineteenth century by linking the city with an amazing network of railheads. Marine Lines comes from Marine Battalion Lines, a British military establishment. The battalion was later converted to an air force residence quarters, and you can still visit it just south of Metro Adlabs. If you get off at Marine Lines station, only a road—known as V. Thackersey Marg—separates the sea from the famous Marine Drive promenade.

Abutting the station is Bada Qabrastan, a sprawling 7.5 acres that is a reminder and a testimony to man's mortality. In fact, the cemetery—a hundred-and-fifty-years-old—is so close to the station that commuters cut across it before taking the stairs leading to the over-bridge at the north end of the station.

As I enter Bada Qabarstan, sheets of rain pelt the tombstones, adding to the gloom. It is for a story on Haji Mastan that I am here. It is his barsi, or death anniversary, and I was told that the yesteryear's don, who was Mumbai's most notorious gold smuggler, is remembered every year by his three daughters with a profusion of flowers and rose petals.

This is not an unheard of phenomenon in Mumbai; the rich like to remember their dead in various ways. There's an apocryphal story about Dawood Ibrahim's police constable father. Apparently when Ibrahim Kaskar passed away, his son Dawood arranged for truckloads of rose petals to be showered on his father's grave. For three days, they say, the fragrance

of roses wafted across the graveyard.

Futilely trying to sidestep puddles, I walk along a neat, well-maintained line of graves. Haji Mastan's final resting place is easy to locate—the inscriptions are both in Urdu and English. Fresh rose petals have been laid out on the grave but the rumoured huge mounds of flowers are missing. I see a few people gathered around the grave, reciting from the Koran supplications. Perhaps I'd better confirm that this is, in fact, the don's grave. I gather courage and ask an attendant, 'Kya yeh Haji Mastan ki qabar hai? (Is this Haji Mastan's grave?)

Some of the mourners give me disapproving looks but one of them nods. I look back at the grave and wonder why Mastan's daughters did not construct a more elaborate tombstone, a shrine-like edifice like several I can see around, instead of the simple, flat one they have chosen. How the mighty fall, I think, and decide to wander around.

This is my first visit to Bada Qabrastan. I am told that several of the men who ruled Mumbai's underbelly with an iron fist were laid to rest here—Karim Lala, Ibrahim Dada, Rahim Khan, Dawood Ibrahim's brother Sabir Kaskar, to name a few. Now that the Haji Mastan flower story doesn't seem to be working out, perhaps I could check the epitaphs on the graves of these dons.

I ask—perhaps a bit naively—'Kya yahan underworld walon ke liye alag section ham?' (Are the members of the underworld buried in a different corner of the graveyard?)

One man in a chequered lungi, tied up so that it ends just over his knees, and a crumpled kurta, laughs. 'Miyan, the qabrastan is the real underworld; whoever comes here goes to the underworld. Yahan saare underworld ke raja aur rani aakar so jate hain.' (All the underworld kings and queens have to come rest here finally.)

'Underworld ki rani?' I wondered aloud. 'Do you mean the wives of the underworld dons?'

He looks around and then looks at me pointedly. I slip him a fifty-rupee note, which disappears into his baggy kurta.

'Mastan had a sister ... some woman called ... I can't remember her full name, she was some Gandhi. She tied a rakhi to our former prime minister Morarji Desai. Yashwantrao Chavan—who was chief minister of Maharashtra—used to respect her a lot also. She was the queen of the Mumbai underworld; no one like her will ever be seen again.'

Has the old man gone senile, I wonder. As a crime reporter for a decade and a half, I'd never heard of a woman who had connections with powerful politicians and the mafiosi. A woman who was like a sister to Mastan, someone with the surname Gandhi, who tied a rakhi to a former Prime

minister and who had hobnobbed with a powerful Maratha chief minister.

Senile or not, here was Shakoor bhai, the man in the lungi, leading me to this woman's grave. We walk past labyrinthine rows of graves, traversing one end of the graveyard to the other, on the way passing an enclosure—*tiflane jannat* (the children of heaven)—where young children are buried.

After walking for several minutes, he leads me to the southernmost corner of the graveyard and, stopping near the wall, points towards one particular L-shaped grave, unkempt, decrepit and hidden by thick overgrown bushes.

'Yehi hain unki qabar.' (This is her grave.)

I look at it, but can discern no details. The headstone comprises a plain stone with an inscription which reads: Form No. 2544, Otta No. 601. But it gives no name. I hand Shakoor bhai another fifty-rupee note and am about to tell him he can go, when he resumes talking.

'She was also a freedom fighter—she participated in the freedom struggle against the *angrez* with Mahatma Gandhi.'

My jaw drops. 'What are you saying? Then how did she become the queen of the underworld?'

'Because Dawood Ibrahim thought of her as his surrogate mother. Also, she was held in high esteem both by the police and the mafia. She had massive clout with all the gangs.'

I slip another bill into his hand and ask, 'Where did she live and operate from?'

'Dongri.'

Dongri is to Mumbai what Palermo is to the Sicilian mafia—at least it was during the Dawood Ibrahim days. And that's when the last piece of the jigsaw puzzle falls into place for me.

'Why, is this Jenabai's grave?'

The old man nods vigorously. 'Haan haan, this is Jenabai's grave.'

I'm puzzled: I've heard about Jenabai, but only that she was a bootlegger and a police informer. The grave-digger had given me a new perspective on this woman.

I'm intrigued; I have to get her story.

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Chapter 2

NIGHTCAP AT BAITUL SUROOR

A black Mercedes pulled out of the shed and drove quickly past the small wrought-iron gate of the two-storey villa and onto the winding road. It was June 1980 and the rains had just begun to beat down on the sunbaked city.

Watching the car disappear into the night, he stood there alone, on his balcony. Tense lines creased his forehead. To calm his nerves, he took out a cigarette from the pack of 555 in the pocket of his white kurta. Lighting it, he began to pace the length of the veranda. His villa, the Baitul Suroor, Arabic for 'house of happiness', was situated in one of Mumbai's most expensive areas—Peddar Road.

Finally, over two hours later, seven cigarettes down, he was relieved to see his black Mercedes return and grind to a halt in front of the villa. His driver walked out of the car and opened the back door and an old woman, well in her seventies, stepped out, fidgeting unsteadily with her black umbrella, trying hard to open it, before she got too wet.

Jenabai walked towards the entrance of the villa. The doors had already been left open for her. He hastily stubbed the burning end of his eighth cigarette inside a glass ashtray and rushed downstairs towards the entrance.

He had called her a few hours ago, requesting her to join him for dinner. Hearing the urgency in his voice, she had readily accepted the invitation. His Mercedes had been sent to pick her up from her small home in Dongri at 7 p.m. Passers-by saw her walk out of the building and slip into the car. When she sat in the backseat, the driver exchanged a warm, familiar 'salaam' and then proceeded to drive past the rickety old buildings towards Peddar Road. It had been raining heavily in Dongri, too; however, unlike Peddar Road, Dongri continued to bustle with activity despite the downpour. Protected by blue and black plastic sheets, stalls continued their business as salesmen engaged in their daily routine of drawing customers

and selling goods.

The Mercedes stood out in this environment, but Dongri locals knew who was in the car and where she was going. The reason behind the meeting, however, was still a well-kept secret, meant to stay inside the closed walls of Baitul Suroor and revealed only to the one woman who was feared and respected by all in Dongri.

Having reached the villa after around an hour, Jenabai felt surprisingly rejuvenated. The off-white villa was sombre in appearance. Intricately-designed white window grills, stone walls and the humble entrance, with clusters of potted plants, gave outsiders no hint of who lived there, or what he did for a living.

When she entered the house, she saw him standing in anticipation. He was dressed in a white kurta and pyjama. She shut her wet umbrella and placed it inside the bucket at the entrance.

'Salaam Aapa,' he said, referring to her as his elder sister, as he normally did.

'Salaam.'

Then, from the narrow entrance, he directed her towards the spacious drawing room.

'Aapa, it is kind of you to have come here at such short notice,' he said as he led her to one of the sofas.

She gave him a broad smile, although she could sense the discomfort in his voice. She asked for a glass of water and sat back comfortably on the couch, lifting her feet onto the table. He called for someone, who appeared with water in no time. When he had left the room, she said, 'Bhai, you seem to be very disturbed.'

'Aapa ...' he said, and after a long pause continued, 'I have a massive problem. And, whenever I am in some kind of trouble the only person I can think of is you.'

Jenabai was embarrassed, overwhelmed by the influence she possessed over this one man, one of Mumbai's most dangerous personalities, Mastan Haider Mirza. A man whose rags-to-riches story had inspired and been depicted on celluloid time and again.

Legend had it that Mastan was originally from Chennai and had come to Mumbai in 1934, along with his father. He had started off as a mechanic, repairing cycles before moving to the Mumbai docks as a coolie in 1944. There his job was to unload huge boxes and containers from ships coming from Aden, Dubai, Hong Kong. In the years to come, he made millions of rupees from smuggling gold, silver ingots and electronic goods and, along with Karim Lala and Vardharajan Mudaliar, went on to form one of the most formidable gangs in Mumbai. His villa, his Mercedes and his

tremendous influence, were all off-shoots of the enormous wealth he had hoarded illegally over the years.

Now, here *she* was, Jenabai, in Mastan's house, discussing his problems, counselling him ... Jenabai could not have felt more pride in being called his sister.

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Chapter 3

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE SCHEMER

Born in the early 1920s to a Muslim Memon Halai family, Zainab, alias Jenabai, was one among six siblings. Her father made ends meet ferrying passengers on Victoria carriages across the city, and the family lived in a one-room tenement on Mohammad Ali Road, Dongri, in Mumbai.

Dongri, a stone's throw away from the cloth market in Kalbadevi, was initially part of the original island of Mumbai, which stretched from Malabar Hill to the Dongri hills. Mumbai, at the time, was divided into seven islands, which included Colaba, Old Woman Island, Mahim, Parel, Worli and Mazgaon. In the mid-1700s, the Dongri hills were levelled as part of the plan to merge the different islands of Mumbai. After the hills were levelled, the low-lying patch of uneven land between Crawford Market in the north and the reclaimed lands of Kamathipura in the south came to be called Dongri.

Today, Dongri—choc-a-block with rickety, old buildings—falls partially below the gigantic JJ Flyover and is primarily dominated by Muslims.

By late morning, the bazaar in Dongri spills onto the footpaths, selling audio and video tapes of Islamic teachings, attar, henna, chikan kurtas, mojris and jewellery. The bazaar is full of Iranian and Afghani restaurants, bakeries and sweetmeat shops that sell mawa cakes, hot jalebis, kheer and gulab jaamuns. During the late afternoons and evenings, the aroma of hot kebabs, biryani, gosht and kheer permeates Dongri.

The signboards in Urdu, the number of men kneeling down in rows outside the mosques, the women in burqas doing their vegetable shopping—to an outsider, Dongri could seem like another country in itself. Until the mid-1990s, this place was known for all the wrong reasons, venue as it was for endless gang wars and communal bloodshed. But in the early 1920s and '30s, Dongri was one of the hubs for the independence movement, and both

men and women—regardless of their religion—took to the streets for the cause of freedom. Jenabai was one among them. As a young girl, she ardently supported the Gandhian movement and the cause of Independence. Her conservative Muslim background did not deter her from participating in the struggle for freedom, and since she did not go to school, she would spend most of the day in sloganeering.

When she was fourteen, Jenabai was married to Mohammad Shah Darwesh and she moved to the Chunawala building in the same neighbourhood. Darwesh had a small timber business. She bore him five children— Khadija, Iqbal, Salim, Kamaal and Shammi. Even after marriage, she continued to participate in the freedom struggle. Her husband would often beat her for protecting Hindus during the communal turmoil triggered by the divide-and-rule policy of the British.

Then, Partition took place in 1947. Muslims and Hindus in the country redistributed themselves in the quest to find a new home after the British re-drew the map of the Indian subcontinent. Darwesh decided to move to Pakistan but Jenabai, who had spent much of her childhood and youth struggling for Independence, refused to leave Mumbai. Her husband refused to give in and moved to Pakistan, leaving her alone to fend for herself and her five children.

She was completely lost and did not know how or where to begin. This was when there was a scarcity of grains in Mumbai. Most of the country's farmlands had gone to Pakistan, and slowly the middle-classes began to feel the lack of grains and lentils. At the time, the rationing system was prevalent in Mumbai, and the government distributed limited food essentials to ration-card holders. Rice, especially basmati, was the staple diet of the Muslim community, integral in dishes like pulao and biryani. The scarcity of foodgrain, lentils and wheat forced many to buy smuggled grain.

In the 1940s, the major wholesale grain market in Mumbai was Daana Bazaar at Masjid Bunder, close to Dongri. In need of quick money to sustain her family, Jenabai started working as a broker for smuggled grain, playing intermediary to wholesalers and dealers of lentils, pulses, sugar and basmati rice. Jenabai would procure foodgrain in bulk from the wholesalers at Daana Bazaar on a commission, and then sell this grain to dealers who would sell it for a higher price and give her a margin of the profits. She also sold grain to people who lived with her in the tenement. Hoarding and trading in grain without a licence was illegal and punishable by law. The police raided Jenabai's room at Chunawala building several times but never managed to get enough evidence to book her.

Since she was a Memon, she was also fluent in Gujarati, making it easier for her to interact with the wholesalers and traders, most of whom belonged

to the Gujarati community. These Gujarati traders soon began to refer to her as 'sister' or Jenaben. Since her dealings were mostly in rice (chaaval), the title 'Chaavalwaali' (one who deals in rice) became suffixed to her name, and locals in Dongri and Daana Bazaar began calling her Jenabai Chaavalwaali.

Chapter 4

AT THE DINNER TABLE

Mastan hadn't said a word for several minutes. Jenabai didn't push him. Quietly, she sipped the last of her ginger tea—her third cup—from the saucer.

Suddenly, his face tense, he said, 'I need help Aapa, this is very important for me.'

Bringing her feet down from the glass table, Jenabai lifted herself from the couch. 'Bhai, what is the matter .., I have been sitting here for such a long time,' she said, pushing her feet into her gold-heeled sandals.

'Let's talk about it over food,' he said.

Her white chikan kurta had creased slightly, and the dupatta that covered her reddish-brown mehendi-dyed hair had shifted position. She tidied her kurta, straightened her dupatta and walked towards the mahogany dining table. She had a regal air about her, her ears glinting with diamond-studded earrings and her hands heavy with the weight of gold bangles.

The dining table was laden with food, from mutton korma and pulao, kebabs to murg musalam. Mastan sat across the dining table from Jenabai. The domestic help started serving her, looking at her intermittently to check if she wanted more. She nodded.

The help obliged her and then went towards Mastan with a bowl of pulao. Mastan shook his head. 'Not now,' he said.

'You won't eat?' she asked.

'I prefer cigarettes for now,' he replied.

As she began to eat, he started to speak slowly, forming each of his sentences in his head before he voiced them aloud.

'Aapa, I want to leave this illegal business.'

'Why?' she asked, surprised.

'I have spent most of the last few years either behind bars or making endless rounds of the court. Narayan bhai (Janata Party leader Jaiprakash Narayan) helped in my release only after I promised him that I would

become clean,' he said. 'I have been contemplating doing something else for a long time but nothing has worked in my favour.'

Jenabai heard him out patiently.

The last six to seven years had been very difficult for Mastan. First, in 1974, he had been detained under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) for ninety days. Following this, the government arrested Mastan under the Conservation of Foreign Exchange and Prevention of Smuggling Act. Then, during the Emergency in 1977, he, along with other gangsters like Karim Lala, was once again tried under MISA. In fact, Jenabai had also been jailed under MISA; however, the charges against her could not be proved.

MISA was a controversial law that was originally passed by the Indian Parliament in 1971, during the administration of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Indira Gandhi had introduced the Act with the main objective of providing law enforcement agencies with powers of indefinite 'preventive' detention of individuals, search and seizure of property without warrants. Despite hiring the best criminal lawyers like Ram Jethmalani, Mastan languished behind bars during the entire Emergency. He realised that he no longer wielded the influence that he had enjoyed in Mumbai as a smuggler. Also, the endless legal battles had pushed him into debt.

When the Emergency was lifted and the Janata Party came to power in 1979, Mastan pleaded with Jaiprakash Narayan to intervene with the then prime minister, Morarji Desai, to show compassion towards him. Mastan had filed affidavits and under oath, sworn to the government that he would try to turn over a new leaf. His plea was accepted and he was finally released from detention.

'I am sinking in a sea of debt, Aapa ... I have to repay loans, my house has been mortgaged. The only possible business ventures where I can now invest money are real estate or the movies,' Mastan said.

'There are a lot of risks in investing money in movies,' Jenabai said, but her thoughts lingered on the memory of this man that had been embedded in her mind several years ago. She remembered how much in awe of him she had been when she was first introduced to him by the Mumbai-based Tamilian don Vardharajan Mudaliar. He had been so much braver then, so much larger than life ...

Chapter 5

FROM CHAAVALWALI TO DAARUWALI

Prohibition had always been central to Mahatma Gandhi's and the Congress' agenda. Hence, on 1 August 1939, two years after the first Congress ministry was created in the Bombay province, prohibition was introduced in the city. However, law-enforcers faced problems in the very first week of implementing it. For one whole week, there were clashes between groups for and against prohibition.

The home minister at the time, Barrister K.M. Munshi, carried out an intensive recruitment programme in the police force to implement the Prohibition Act effectively. An exclusive cadre called the X Division was created and was headed by a DCP, Prohibition. New sub-inspectors were also trained for special prohibition duty, and men from the Excise Department were brought into the city police department.

However, when the Second World War broke out in 1939, the mammoth prohibition force was diverted for security measures to the docks and the implementation of prohibition suffered.

In 1946, after the Nazis were defeated, the Congress government came back to power and prohibition was imposed on Mumbai again. Veteran politician and then chief minister of the Bombay province Morarji Desai, who was staunchly against the selling and consumption of alcohol, declared complete prohibition in liquor sales in Bombay from 6 April 1950, by passing the Bombay Prohibition Act of 1949. Before this order fell into place, the Christian and Koli communities distilled their own liquor, like jambul, jira, moha etc., while most of the other alcohol available was imported from the West, particularly England.

Unfortunately, prohibition did nothing but sow the seeds for bigger crimes in Mumbai, opening the gateway for bootleggers and smugglers. Apart from these, a number of 'aunty joints' also sprung up to quench the thirst of the alcohol-deprived population. Poor Goan Christian women

brewed liquor in their backyards and kitchen, and sold it discreetly for a good price. Since their patrons found it difficult to pronounce their names, they were nicknamed according to their physical attributes like Gori Aunty, Chikni Aunty and Baidewali Aunty. Bootlegging was seen as a most lucrative businesses with profits running into thousands of rupees, and these aunty joints soon went on to become part of the Mumbai culture.

It was during this time that Jenabai Chaawalwali remarried an already married Iqbal Gandhi. She was still illegally dealing in grain but the profits were marginal and she was tired of making minuscule amounts. That was when she met Tamilian don Vardharajan Muniswami Mudaliar.

One evening, Jenabai—like several other ardent devotees—had gone to visit the 260-year-old shrine of Bismillah Shah Baba at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus. When she was about to leave, she saw a burly, dark man, in his mid-thirties distributing niyaz, sacred food, to devotees in the dargah. Jenabai had heard a lot about the benevolence of this man from her neighbours in Dongri. Though he was a Hindu, his generosity at the dargah had been spoken of. She decided to stay back and meet this man, on the pretext of taking her share of niyaz before leaving.

After the man completed his rounds, he sat for some time outside the shrine, chatting with the regulars and acquaintances. Jenabai approached him and began crying about her financial situation, and how she was struggling to make ends meet. 'I want you to help me, Bhai,' she pleaded. 'My husband does not work. Feeding my children and looking after the household is solely my responsibility ... I tried my hands in the grain business for a few years but I could not earn enough. I really don't know what to do. You are a big man, everyone respects you ... if you could give me a small job, God will bless you.'

The man, affectionately called Vardha, sat silently listening to her. Her wily tone made him foresee a bankable option for his bootlegging and liquor business. After prohibition, Vardharajan—like many others—had decided to start his own local, illicit liquor trade. For this, he had also set up base in the marshy lands of central Mumbai and got his men to start brewing their own liquor.

After a long pause, Vardha took a deep breath and asked, 'Will you get into the liquor business?'

'Bhai, what are you saying? It would be against my qaum. I cannot do it.'

'Listen, who is asking you to drink the daaru? I know so many Muslims in this line of work. Your religion doesn't stop you from getting into the business. Does it?' he asked. 'Daaru ke dhande mein bahut paisa hain (the liquor business is very lucrative). Everyone, right from housewives to big businessmen, is into it and all of them are trying to make a quick buck from

the government's foolish policy.'

Jenabai did not say a word.

He continued, 'Trust me, even I felt the same initially but today I am minting crores. God has been kind to me, which is why I am showing my gratitude by coming here every week. You can work in this business line and still be a good Muslim.'

'What will I have to do?' she asked.

'See, I have this piece of land at Antop Hill. My men brew liquor there. Your job will be to sell this concentrated liquor. The profits will be divided equally between you and me.'

Jenabai was still unconvinced. 'How much will I make ... if...?'

'That depends on how much you sell. Maybe thousands, sometimes even lakhs.' Jenabai thought about it for some time, balancing the pros and cons in her head. 'And the risks involved?' she asked.

Vardha smirked, 'Don't worry about that. You just need to know how to deal with the police.'

Finally, Jenabai's face lit up and her jawline stretched as she broke into a cunning smile.

With Vardha's help, Jenabai got into the bootlegging business in the early 1960s. Her Maharashtrian neighbour, Vicky bhai, soon went on to become her sidekick and financial manager in the trade. Jenabai's age, experience and, most importantly, her ability to handle and manipulate the police, helped her grow swiftly in the business. Before long, Jenabai—now known as Jenabai Daaruwali—became one of Vardha's closest aides.

Meanwhile, Vardha's clout continued to increase. Press reports during the 1960s pegged his trade in illicit liquor to around Rs 12 crore a year. But Vardha wanted more—and the most lucrative business was considered to be the smuggling of gold. He could not break into the business alone, however: the Muslim dons—who had the right contacts in the Gulf—had the monopoly on it. So Vardha befriended dons like Mastan and Karim Lala, and they bonded to form a strong force. This was when Vardha first introduced Jenabai Daaruwali to Mastan.

Chapter 6

THE PROBLEM

It was 10 p.m., and the rains had become fiercer than before, covering the sky with a cloud of gloom.

Jenabai had finished eating the sumptuous dinner and was resting on the three-seater. Mastan had started pacing the floor in the drawing room.

'Sit down,' she told him, moving from her reclining position to give him some space. 'Let us get to discussing the real problem.'

'I have been thinking about getting into the real estate business for a very long time and have been eyeing a huge property on Belassis Road in Bombay Central,' he said, as he dug inside the pocket of his kurta for a lighter. '

So,...

'The land is owned by the Chiliyas and they are refusing to budge,' he said, lighting another cigarette. 'That plot is a gold mine, Aapa. If I get my hands on it, I will not only be able to repay all my debts, *zindagi bhi set ho jaayegi* (I'll also be set for life).'

Jenabai knew how much it must have cost Mastan to admit his helplessness in resolving the issue. He was always conscious of his public image—perhaps because he was defensive about his lack of education—and hated to appear anything but wise.

"What does Karim bhai have to say about this?" she asked.

'I spoke to him some time ago. But he told me that he may not be able to help this time around because it is beyond his capacity.'

'Why?' Jenabai asked.

'At my behest, Karim bhai had sent some of his men to settle the matter. All the men came back with broken arms and legs. Aapa, these Chiliyas are way too powerful. We are just too small for them.'

The Chiliyas—Gujarati Muslims from Banaskantha district—were a very strong force. Usually in the hotel or real estate business, they were fiercely committed to protecting themselves and what they perceived as theirs.

Jenabai smiled. She looked around the drawing room and then lifted her fragile body from the sofa and walked towards the side table where pens and paper lay. Picking up a red ball pen and a sheet of paper, she came back, sat beside him and asked him if he would help her solve a riddle. Mastan was annoyed; he felt like he was being mocked. He did not reply but she continued, unperturbed.

Being illiterate, Jenabai had rarely used a pen. Today, she placed the piece of paper on the table, hesitantly held the red pen tightly in her right fist and drew a long vertical line in the centre of the blank page.

Then, lifting her head, she said, 'Can you make this line smaller without touching it?'

Mastan was flummoxed. In a fit of rage, he punched the cushion of his sofa, and said, 'Aapa, I have been mentally disturbed for weeks and instead of helping me out, you are asking me to solve this stupid riddle of yours.'

Jenabai smirked and then, pointing one of her gold-ringed fingers towards her head, she said, 'Think Mastan bhai, think. The solution to all your problems lies in this riddle.'

Mastan's anger slowly began to subside. His eyes shifted to the paper on the table. He looked at it blankly for some time and then, in a perplexed tone asked, 'How?'

She broke into laughter, again held the pen in her fist and began to draw a bigger line beside the existing one. Then, lifting her head, she said, 'See, it is so simple. If this line is big and you cannot erase it, just draw a bigger line next to it.'

Mastan wasn't sure what was on Jenabai's mind. But he knew that his faith in her had never been misplaced. She was shrewd enough to let go without giving him a solution. She had drawn the path. He had only to walk on it ...

Chapter 7

BOOTLEGGER TURNS INFORMER

Jenabai thrived during the prohibition. She amassed enormous wealth as a bootlegger and was quick to learn the tricks of the trade under Vardharajan, Mastan and Karim Lala.

Her closeness to some of the city's most hardcore smugglers enhanced Jenabai's importance by leaps and bounds. People would often approach her for advice and help in settling disputes. This, and the increase in her wealth, gave her confidence, and she became abusive and overbearing.

During this time, Jenabai also developed friendly relations with the police. Police constable Ibrahim Kaskar and his wife Aamina, Dawood Ibrahim's parents, were like family to her. Their children treated her like a second mother.

This was the same time when the government and the police were again trying to implement prohibition effectively across the city. Besides the X Division, which had been introduced by former home minister Barrister K.M. Munshi way back in 1939, a special Prohibition Intelligence Section was created. The Prohibition Intelligence Section was headquartered at Palton Road (where Haj House stands today) and was responsible for effectively implementing 'daaru-bandi' in the city.

The police learned about Jenabai's bootlegging business and raided her room several times but did not manage to gather anything from such raids, simply because she knew how to manipulate people. She would often place photographs of gods and goddesses in the corner of her room. All her liquor stock would be hidden in a chest or box below those photos and the police, during their raids, would assume that the space was sacred and refrain from searching that area properly.

However, after facing severe criticism for being lackadaisical about Jenabai's illegal business, the special Prohibition Intelligence Section finally arrested her and she served a few weeks in jail.

In 1962, based on a tip-off, two determined police officers, sub-inspectors in the X Division, Coovershaw Dinshaw Bhesadia and Ramakant Temkar, managed to break into her house and catch her red-handed—finally busting one of the biggest liquor mafia scams of the time. After scanning all the rooms in the building, the officers finally found illicit liquor hidden in the water tank of Jenabai's aide, Vicky's room.

In 1964, sub-inspector CD. Bhesadia was rewarded by the then Mumbai Police Commissioner S. Majeedullah for his services and later, became one of the most talented detectives in the Anti-Corruption Bureau, retiring as assistant commissioner of police, Crime Branch. Ironically, Jenabai later went on to become a key khabri, or informer, for Bhesadia.

Unconfirmed accounts state that after her arrest, Jenabai approached the then chief minister Yashwantrao Chavan with grievances of harassment by the Pydhonie and V.P. Road police. She is said to have played on her poverty, her children and how she was trying to make ends meet. What transpired at the meeting between the two is still unclear; however, after the meeting, Dongri's most fearless woman apparently moved on to become a police informant.

After her stint in jail, Jenabai realised that if she had to be a real player in the market, she would have to keep both the law enforcers and the ganglords happy. Jenabai's smuggling know-how made her a valuable informant, and, at the time, informants were offered ten per cent of the total worth of the goods seized. However, cunning as always, Jenabai did not stop her bootlegging and grain business.

As an informant, she daringly visited the houses of police officers after midnight in a burqa. Families of police officers, for whom she was a key informant, would address her as Hirabai, because they saw her visit their homes wearing diamond-studded nose rings and earrings.

Another police informant, who still lives in Dongri and runs a shop of his own, explained how Jenabai would juggle the interests of the police and the mafia. 'If illegal items were being smuggled from seven different ports in the city, Jenabai, who knew about all seven, would drop the names of only one or two. The police would seize the goods and then give her part of the valued amount without realising that she was aware of the others, as well,' he said. And since it was only a couple from the seven that they knew Jenabai was aware of, the dons believed she had nothing to do with the raids. Thus, she remained a favourite of Mastan and Lala.

Ironically, Jenabai—who had accumulated immense wealth through tip-offs—lost her most prized treasure because she didn't learn in time about the plot to murder her youngest son, Kamaal Darwesh.

Kamaal, at twenty-four, was not only an aggressive youth, but an



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Chapter 8

THE SIMPLE SUBTERFUGE

Mastan had deliberately left the windows ajar so that the cold, wet breeze could enter the drawing room. He was still smoking his cigarette, glancing now and then at the two lines Jenabai had drawn on the paper that lay on the centre table. By now Jenabai was sitting on the floor, where she felt most comfortable.

Pointing to the bigger line, Jenabai said, 'This line represents a bigger force. A force that you will create.'

'A bigger force?' he asked.

Jenabai made herself a paan and said, 'Yes, you will prepare a bigger force against the Chiliyas.'

'Where the hell can I create such a force from?'

'What are the Ibrahim brothers and the Pathan gang for?' she asked, chewing the paan. 'Get them together.'

At the time, the Pathan gangsters—Amirzada, Alamzeb, Shehzada, Samad Khan—and the then underdogs, the Ibrahim brothers Dawood and Sabir, were the two major warring factions, constantly involved in gun battles. The incessant bloodshed caused by the gang war had, in fact, become a great cause of concern for Mastan and his friend Karim Lala, the stalwarts of Mumbai's underworld.

And from what Mastan could understand, Jenabai wanted him to bring these two gangs together as one force against the Chiliyas.

'This is no solution, Aapaf Mastan said, astonished. An alliance comprising the Ibrahim brothers and the Pathans meant calling a truce, which in the present scenario was impossible. For Mastan, even bringing them together into one room seemed an unlikely scenario.

'Bhai, if you get them together, it will only help you,' she said. 'The Pathans are a strong force to reckon with in VP and Grant Road, while Ibrahim's sons have a stronghold in Nagpada. And the Belassis Road property that you have your eyes on lies exactly in the centre of Grant Road, VP Road and Nagpada.'

Mastan was surprised at Jenabai's observation. 'Hmm ... that is true.'

'Imagine, if you all unite to become one force, even the government will stand no chance against you. The force will not only help you get the property but also ensure that it is well protected.'

The odds of calling a truce were still close to zero but Mastan realised that this was probably his only option.

'I can request Karim bhai to convince the Pathans. But what about Ibrahim bhai's sons? They will never agree to this. Even Ibrahim bhai is fed up; he has no control over them.'

Dawood Ibrahim, a young man in his twenties at this time, was just another wannabe gangster, trying to make it big in the underworld. A resident of Mussafir Khana near Dongri junction, Dawood indulged in petty extortion, along with his brother Sabir. He was trying hard to get the attention of the mafia bigwigs; often, in order to evade the police, he was forced to go into hiding.

'I will handle the Ibrahim brothers. Dawood and Sabir are like my sons. They won't refuse if I speak to them,' she said.

'Aapa, it is not as easy as you are making it sound. At the end of the day, how will you convince them to become a united group?' Mastan asked.

Jenabai smiled. She knew the one thing that bound them all. 'Bhai, think carefully,' she said. 'These people are morons. They have been fighting without any real motive, like goons, allowing others to take advantage of them. But, even though their egos are bloated like air balloons, their weaknesses can bring them down. And to our good fortune, there is this one weakness which is common to us all. Their ambitions and powers can divide them, but in the end, they belong to that one same world.'

'It would save so much of time if you put all this in plain words for me,' Mastan said, agitated.

'Hmm ... it is simple. See, we all believe in one God, we know the teachings of one Prophet,' she said.

'That is all rubbish. None of them actually follow the teachings of Islam,' Mastan said.

'You hit the nail on the head. Ultimately, these men are all hypocrites. They won't follow the right path that our religion has laid down for us, but are ever willing to don the garb of protectors of Islam and shed blood in the name of God. Invoke the name of religion—a truce will follow,' Jenabai said.

For the first time, Mastan felt small in front of Jenabai. She not only made things seem possible, what she had said was something that had never struck him before.

He was still doubtful though. 'We have to figure out a way to bring all of



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Without saying a word, he entered the room with a familiarity that revealed how often he visited her home. He went towards the sink and rinsed his face. Jenabai, meanwhile, made a conscious attempt to compose herself.

‘Oy, chhokra, what’s happened now?’ she asked, referring to the sullen look on Dawood’s face.

‘Don’t ask. Just one of those usual fights but the man is badly hurt,’ he said.

‘Whom did you beat up?’ she asked.

‘Maasi, it was that notorious Hamid Chuha from Manish Market. The man had become a big menace. You know we’ve been fighting for control over some of those shops. I went to sort things out with him today, but this time he really got out of hand and I beat him up.’

‘Hmm ... good. So you evened things out finally.’

‘But now I am in trouble, Maasi... Chuha is in the ICU and the dress-wallahs (the police) are after me ... my father also knows about it and he won’t spare me either. I don’t want to be beaten up by him. Please help me Maasi, get me out of this situation.’

Jenabai sat silently for some time, trying to sort out the whole issue in her head. Suddenly, the wheels in her mind started turning and she said, ‘No one will dare to harm you in my presence. But I hope you realise that it won’t be easy for me to convince both the police and your father at the same time.’

‘I know only one thing—however difficult things are, nothing is impossible for you.’

Jenabai gave him a small smile. ‘I may need a favour from you sometime soon. Will you agree to do it for me?’

Without the slightest hesitation Dawood agreed. ‘Maasi, I am ready to lay down my life for you. You are like my mother.’

‘So leave it on me then. But for now, just stay put at my place,’ she said.

‘No, Maasi, it is not safe. I will come and meet you tomorrow. Would you be able to sort things out for me by then?’

‘Come tomorrow, we will see ...’ she replied, handing him a towel to wipe his face.

Later in the evening, Jenabai made an unexpected visit to Mussafir Khana. Dawood’s father, Ibrahim Kaskar, was sitting on the single bed at the end of the room with his hand on his head; tense, angry—and yet an air of fragility hung about him because of his age. The atmosphere in the room was solemn when Jenabai entered the room.

‘Salaam Jenabai, come in. How come you are here?’ he asked. She entered and sat on the small stool in the room.

'Salaam. Ibrahim bhai, I heard about Dawood, so I thought I'd come and meet you. Has he come home?'

Ibrahim turned red. 'He won't dare to come home. Dawood has left me ashamed. I had so much respect among the police fraternity and he has stripped me of it.'

She heard him out patiently, allowing him to vent his frustration. Aamina came in with some tea for Jenabai. Both the women hugged. 'Our bad days are here, Aapa. Dawood has done it again,' Aamina said, crying as she released herself from Jenabai's embrace.

'Don't cry, your son is not at fault, he is a nice boy,' Jenabai said.

'What are you saying? At least don't support him. That Hamid Chuha is suffering in the ICU; he is caught between life and death. The police has already come here twice. It is such shame, everyone is talking about it,' Ibrahim said angrily.

'Arrey Ibrahim bhai, don't talk about that Hamid Chuha—he is a very bad man. It is actually good if he dies. He has troubled so many people. Our Dawood had just gone to sort out matters with him. But it was he who started beating him up. Whatever Dawood did was in self-defence.'

'How do you know so much, Jenabai?' Ibrahim asked suspiciously.

'Dawood is like my son. The moment I heard about the incident, I first thought about you and Aamina bi. I enquired with some boys who were present at the shop when the fight took place between them. They told me that it was not Dawood's fault.'

'By the grace of God, my son is innocent,' Aamina said when she heard this.

Ibrahim was not as easily convinced. 'Jenabai, we need two hands to clap. I have seen so many such fights during my service and I know that my son is not innocent.'

'Bhai, Dawood was beaten really badly. If he did not defend himself, we would have been attending his funeral today. Would you choose Hamid Chuha over Dawood?'

Ibrahim did not say anything for a long time. Then: 'If this is the case, I would like to speak with Dawood. He can't afford to repeat such a thing again.'

'I will try and track him down and tell him to meet you. Just don't be harsh with him. He is a nice boy and you can trust me. I would have killed to have such a son.' Saying this, Jenabai walked out of the room.

Feeling confident that she had sorted out half of Dawood's problem—his fear of what his father would do to him—Jenabai turned her mind to the other half. The men who could put Dawood behind bars. His track record and unpopularity with the police department was a known fact and Jenabai

knew that if she had to turn things in her favour, she would have to go directly to someone with power.

The next day Jenabai made a trip to the Crime Branch office at the Mumbai Police Headquarters in Crawford Market. She had decided to meet one of the most reputed and distinguished senior Crime Branch officers.

Tall, burly and well-built, the officer was considered a taskmaster in his time. Having served in the Crime Branch for years, he knew its ways well. As an informant, Jenabai had always maintained cordial relations with the officer.

The officer was at his desk when one of his constables rang him about Jenabai. Surprised, he asked the constable to call her in.

'Come in Jenabai. Salaam. What brings you here today?' the officer asked.

'I was going to buy some vegetables from the market so I thought I'd just drop by to meet you.'

'Well, that's good. It means I get to finally meet you after months because of your vegetables,' he joked.

'Sahib, I sing your praises to people almost everyday. I even tell my people that the police force hasn't seen a better officer,' she said.

After a few more minutes of small talk, Jenabai decided to get to the point. 'Sahib, I feel bad for you. These gang wars in the city are keeping all you dress-wallahs busy.'

'Yes, we have a big task at hand. In fact, it was only yesterday that Dawood and his goons beat up a shop owner from Manish Market. That man's condition is very serious and that haraami Dawood is absconding.'

'Did you go to his home? He must be hiding there,' she said.

'Usko paagal kutte ne kaata hai kya? (Has he gone mad?) He won't dare to sit at home. Our officers are watching his house anyway, but that boy is too clever, he won't go there. I feel bad for his father sometimes. Look at him and look at his son.'

Jenabai did not say anything. She knew what was coming.

'By the way, if I am not mistaken, you know their family well, right?' the officer enquired.

Jenabai suppressed a smile. This was going to be much simpler than she had thought it would be.

'Well... our families are very close... all of us, including Dawood.'

'Hmm ... yes, I was wondering if you could help us out.'

Jenabai stiffened and said, 'Sahib, what are you saying! This will be next to impossible for me. I can part with any amount of information, but how can I tell you the whereabouts of someone whose family is close to me.'



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and go to sleep.

At around 3.40 a.m., she heard a faint knock on her door. Assuming she was imagining things, she ignored it. Half-a-minute later, she heard another knock on the door. A soft voice said, 'Jenamaasi, Dawood here.'

Jenabai moved to the door, opening it quietly, careful not to wake her son who was also sleeping in the room.

'Maasi, any luck?' Dawood asked.

'What do you think?' Jenabai smiled. 'Your maasi has managed everything, now you are a free bird and I've spoken with your father as well. Just be careful for some time though, the dress-wallahs as usual have not given me a full assurance,' she said.

'I will handle that,' he said.

A very relieved Dawood drank the glass of water offered and was ready to leave when Jenabai stopped him.

'Now it is your turn,' she said.

'Oh! Yes, of course. What do you want me to do, Maasi?'

'Mastan bhai is tired of your gang war. You boys have caused a lot of commotion in Dongri. Do you realise that you all are fighting against your own brothers?'

Dawood remained silent, so Jenabai continued, 'Mastan wants the Pathans and you all to unite and become one strong force, so that nobody takes us lightly. For this, he wants to have a joint meeting with you all.'

'Maasi, I won't come. I do not want bloodshed in Mastan bhai's house.'

'Nothing of that sort will ever happen in my presence. You promised me, now you can't back out. Just get Sabir and come. I will let you know when ...'

Dawood was in a tight spot. He did not want to be part of the meeting—but he had given her his word.

And so Jenabai had her way.

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Soon after this meeting, Mastan let them in on the problem he was facing on Belassis Road. The Pathans and Dawood's gang met the tenants and ordered them to vacate the land. The Chilikas fought fearlessly; however, they couldn't stand up to the joint might of the two gangs and they finally lost their land. Mastan then went on to build a tall, multi-storied building on the same plot.

It was a historic peace pact in the history of the Mumbai underworld, engineered by Mastan at his house and whose chief architect, undisputably, was Jenabai.

Chapter 11

TWELVE YEARS LATER— THE GANDHIAN'S MARCH

It was January 1993, just a few years before the island city of Bombay became Mumbai.

Mumbai, the city of dreams, which had always been seen as a smorgasbord of diverse religions, was suddenly shrouded by the communal shadows of the past. Tremors of the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya on 6 December 1992 had caused violent aftershocks in the city, leading to politically-motivated and planned rioting between Hindus and Muslims.

The riots had led to the systematic slaughtering of people from both communities. Several hundreds were killed and thousands rendered homeless by rampaging, angry mobs. Mumbai was literally burning in the fire of religious discord.

Specific Muslim locations like Bhendi Bazaar, Dongri, Nagpada, Dharavi and Mumbra had become epicentres for all the wrong things that occurred in the city. Labelled as 'sensitive zones', these areas saw tremendous bloodshed and destruction.

The army, unable to control the riots, was forced to declare curfew.

Amidst all this, an old, fragile-looking, seventy-two-year-old had alone taken the lead in bringing peace back to Dongri. All her power centres in the underworld were fading fast. Top mafia bosses Karim Lala and Mastan were old and ailing and living a retired existence, while Vardha had long since died after retreating to Chennai in 1988. Reigning ganglord Dawood had also relocated to Dubai. And so, as far as wielding power was concerned, she was left with nothing.

The incidents over the past few days had pained her. Several people had approached her for help. They had cried about the loss of property, the burning down of their houses and the brutal killing of their sons and families. They begged for help and she was trying her best, too. She had



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typical godmother, and for a long time this home of hers was the ground to settle thousands of family disputes, and endless battles within the mafia.'

Khadija doesn't really know when her mother gained this godmother-like stature. But, 'She would sit on this same bed and give solutions to those who lined up outside our house with their problems. Our home was always busding with people,' she confirms.

Khadija also speaks of how her mother had tried to get her into becoming an informer. She accepts that she lacked the charisma and shrewdness of her mother, when it came to dealing with the police. 'I remember her taking me along during one of her rounds of the police station, but I was extremely scared of the uniform-wallahs and told her to keep me away from all this.'

All of a sudden, Khadija gets up from her bed as if remembering something. She moves towards the steel cupboard, opens it and carefully takes out a rosary. 'This is her tasbeeh,' she says, adding, 'it was inseparable from her. She took it everywhere she went.' The death of her son Kamaal and her own ailing health made Jenabai turn to religion. In the late 1980s, she had involved herself in the Tabligh-i-Jamaat, a religious movement among Muslims,

Her death took the family by surprise. Jenabai, in the seventy-four years of her life, had never fallen seriously ill. It was fortunate that she hadn't, because she made her aversion to doctors, medicines and hospitals very obvious.

One day, she had fallen unconscious while praying. 'We rushed her to the hospital,' Khadija says. The doctors diagnosed brain haemorrhage and admitted her in the ICU. 'However, when she gained consciousness and found herself in a hospital, she started screaming and abusing us for bringing her there. She demanded to be taken back home. Since we were all scared of her, we relented.'

Back home, she slipped into a coma. Medical facilities were provided to her at home itself; however, a week later, she died.

Thus, Zainab Darwesh Gandhi alias Jenabai Daaruwali, died a silent and painless death. All that is left of her now is the carvings on the headstone of her grave: Form no 2544, Otta no 601.



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Chapter 1

THE BIRTH OF A SEX WORKER

She was forced to wear a red, bridal dress and sit on a bed sprinkled liberally with rose petals. Her lips were coloured a blood-red and a huge nose ring adorned her nose, adding to the garishness of her appearance. An old song played again and again on an old gramophone in the room. The setting reminded her of a wedding night; Madhu was still clueless about why she was here.

Suddenly, the door pushed open. A terrified Madhu nearly jumped out of her skin when she saw Jaggan seth enter the room. His eyes were bloodshot—an indication that he had already been drinking heavily—as he looked at the young girl on the bed. In his mind he had visualised the perfect female form, and it matched hers to a tee. He was pleased that he would be the first to have all of her.

Under his gaze, Madhu, though fully clad, felt naked. The sixteen-year-old had no idea that this was her 'nath utaarna' ceremony, a euphemism for what is actually the deflowering of a virgin. The ceremony derives its name from the traditional wedding night, where the husband takes off the golden nose ring (nath) of his virgin bride while making love to her. Among sex workers, however, the nath utaarna is the adolescent's initiation into the sex trade.

Jaggan seth began to take off his clothes and a chill ran down Madhu's spine. She wanted to cry but Madam Rashmi had warned her against crying or showing any sort of reluctance. 'If you cry, that man will thrash you to death. Do as he tells you,' she had said. It was to Madam Rashmi that she had been brought by the men who had kidnapped her from the lodge. Just three weeks ago she had eloped with a man, Shravan, to Mumbai, from her village. They had stayed in a lodge for a few days. One day, some people had come and kidnapped her. Madhu was yet to learn that it was Shravan who had played middleman in selling her off to a brothel for a thousand rupees.

Before she knew what was happening, Jaggan seth had undressed and

was sitting down on the bed next to her. A horrible smell—a strange combination of paan, bidis and country liquor—hit her. Madhu turned her head away, unable to breathe properly. There was an odd moment of silence, after which the seth caught her by the arm and whispered in her ear, ‘Look at me ...’

Madhu did not respond. Annoyed, the seth took hold of her chin and turned her face towards him. She was forced to look at his naked body. The man was the size of a blimp and had a massive, protruding belly—she was amazed that he felt no shame. Embarrassed, she put her head down.

Jaggan seth pushed her down onto the bed and climbed on top of her. He lifted her ghagra and slid his fingers between her legs, moving them slowly and repeatedly as if to elicit some response. Madhu was shocked; she closed her eyes to say a small prayer, hoping he would stop, not realising that her agony had only just begun. In less than a few minutes, Jaggan seth had stripped her of her red ghagra choli. Madhu tried to resist, but the sixteen-year-old was no match for the obese seth.

Tears rolled down Madhu’s cheeks; the more she tried to push him off, the more like an animal he behaved. By the time the seth was done with her—raping her several times, and thrashing her when she tried to hurt him by squeezing his penis too hard—Madhu, shivering, heavily bruised, humiliated, was in so much pain that for the first time since she had run away from home, she began to think of death.

When Rashmi and her husband found out that she had tried to hurt Jaggan seth, they beat up Madhu. They also told her it was Shravan who had sold her to them. And though this came as a shock to her, Madhu did not shed a single tear.

She refused to eat or drink and did not acknowledge the presence of people around her. She had become a stone—as good as dead. Initially, Madam Rashmi forced another man on her but he stormed out angrily in few minutes and demanded his money back, accusing Madam Rashmi of keeping frigid women in her brothel. Fearing a drop in her clients, she decided against sending anyone to Madhu for some time until the girl fully recovered.

However, after a week of sheltering the girl, Rashmi decided that she had had enough. There were only two solutions that she could think of: one was to once again attempt to convince Madhu to accept her lot, and the second was to throw her out. The latter seemed easier but could get her into trouble with the cops. Then she thought of someone, the only person really, who could possibly help her with her dilemma—Gangubai.

Gangubai was a renowned brothel madam in the area. Apart from owning several brothels, she also had immense influence on the women



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am I here?' she asked.

'Ramnik sold you to us for five hundred rupees. He won't be coming back; he has gone to Kathiawad.'

'You are lying,' Ganga screamed. She couldn't believe Ramnik, her companion, the person she had trusted completely, had duped her.

'What will I achieve by lying, Ganga? I know you are from a good family but it is your husband who has sold you to us.'

'Why would Ramnik do something like this to me?' she asked.

'I don't know—but now, you will have to listen to us.'

'I won't,' Ganga said angrily and made an attempt to leave the room. But Sheela used all her strength and pulled her back inside.

'Don't take advantage of my goodness! You are in a brothel now and you are here to satisfy my clients. Don't you dare try and run,' Sheela said before walking out of the room and bolting it from the outside.

Days passed; Ganga was beaten and starved because she spent all day crying. Ramnik was still nowhere to be seen and Ganga did not know whether to accept her fate or go home. She had already dishonoured her parents by eloping with Ramnik. Her father, who must have already become a subject of ridicule, would never accept her back. Further, she had other sisters in line for marriage; her family wouldn't risk their futures for Ganga.

Sheela also kept reminding her that, once the villagers of Kathiawad learnt that she had stayed at Kamathipura in Mumbai, they would ostracise her family. Mortified by the likely consequences, Ganga finally decided not to return home.

The only other option left was death, which was almost impossible considering the number of people who kept an eye on her. Two weeks later, Ganga finally gave in. In any case, she thought, her body had already been violated and used by a conman, and there was no way she could erase those scars.

Ganga called for Sheela and told her that she was ready to do whatever she wanted. An excited Sheela hugged her and assured her that the brothel would always take care of her.

That very night, Ganga was sent for her own nath utaarna ceremony. Ramnik had not only lied to Ganga but also to Sheela. He had sold Ganga saying that she was still a virgin, and since Ganga was unaware of the rituals of the sex trade, she didn't reveal this to Sheela.

Ganga went through the nath utaarna ceremony stoically. Deep down she cringed but cooperated fully with the seth, knowing that this was now her profession. To her luck, the seth was more than happy with her. After he had finished with her, he tipped her well and also gifted her a gold ring.



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his home clothes. Tea and snacks were sent up for her. Ten minutes later, when Karim Lala went up to his terrace, he noticed that Gangu hadn't touched anything that had been served to her.

'Why haven't you eaten?'

'If you have a problem with a person of my reputation stepping inside your home, then it would be wrong for me to dirty the crockery that comes from the kitchen of your house.'

Karim Lala was speechless.

'What is your name?' he asked finally.

'Gangu ... I work in Kamathipura.'

'What do you want from me?'

'Bhai, I don't know if you ever see faults in your own men and have ever punished them, especially if they have done something wrong to a person like me. But if you do, I am ready to serve you as your concubine for life,' she said.

Karim Lala's face grew red; nobody had ever dared to talk to him like this. Yet he tried to stay calm and said, 'I am a family man, so don't ever make such an offer to me again. And concerning my men, if they have erred I'm ready to pull them up. But who is the person?'

'Shaukat Khan. I have heard that he is in your gang.'

'My gang ... I don't know of any such man.'

'I've made enquiries ...'

'Hmm ... What has he done?'

'He raped me twice in the last few weeks and hasn't paid me for the services. I might be a prostitute but I am not an object that people can use whenever they feel like. Because of that man, I had to be hospitalised ... he was very brutal to me ...' Gangu said and showed him the scars on her hands and arms.

The scars were so horrific that Karim Lala actually put his head down. He was aghast at the cruelty that had been inflicted on her, that too by a Pathan who allegedly belonged to his group.

'Gangu, the next time he comes to you, I want a message to be delivered to me. Keep him busy until I come. I will personally deal with him. Now you can go.'

Gangu smiled and removed a small thread from her purse. 'Karim bhai, it has been years since I tied a rakhi for anyone because ever since I was brought here, I never felt safe with any man. Today, by offering me protection, you have only reinstalled my faith in brotherhood.'

The Pathan ganglord was amazed at Gangu's impudence. A young woman, who just a few minutes ago had said that she was ready to be his mistress, was now telling him she wanted to make him her brother. He



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Chapter 3

THE PROTECTOR

Gangubai Kathewali was brought back to the present by the sound of Madhu's wailing. 'Will you stop crying? People will think I'm torturing you,' Gangubai said impatiently.

'Please get me out of here,' Madhu cried again.

The old woman placed her hand on Madhu's cheek and said, 'Okay, just for a moment assume that I have allowed you to go .. . what will you do after that?'

'I will go back to my village in Ratnagiri,' Madhu replied immediately.

'To whom?'

'What kind of question is this? Of course, to my parents,' the girl said. 'Aye ladki, don't you dare back-answer ...' Gangubai warned.

The sixteen-year-old immediately apologised. Gangubai ignored her apology and continued. 'You do realise that you have brought a lot of shame to your parents after eloping with your lover. If the people in your village find out that you were in Kamathipura, you will be an outcast.' 'My parents might accept me if I don't tell them about this place.' Madhu retorted. 'What will you tell them then?' she asked, surprised by the girl's confidence.

'I don't know ...'

There was a long pause, following which Gangubai said, 'Like you, even I had run away. I was your age when my husband sold me off .. . I never returned because if my family learnt that I had come from Kamathipura, they would have killed me. There was no option but to make this place my home. And even if you do return to your family, what's to stop them from ostracising you? There was a girl here, Vinita, who thought her family was different and went back to them.' Gangubai was quiet for a few seconds before she said, 'We heard a few months later from one of the boys in her village that she was the victim of an honour killing.'

Madhu began weeping again. 'Does that mean I have to stay here forever?' she asked.

'I didn't say that. I just want to know if you will be able to convince your



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*The gharwali elections is followed by the bade gharwali elections. While the gharwali usually has an entire floor to herself with forty pinjras or more, the bade gharwali has an entire building under her jurisdiction. Every bade gharwali has a few gharwalis reporting to her. The command was thus decentralised and Gangubai was at the helm of this structure for over sixteen years.



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THREE

FEMME FATALE



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conversation that lasted barely a couple of minutes, he hung up, giving her the flight details. An overwhelming feeling of happiness gripped her. She rushed back to her own house to get ready to meet her husband, Mehmood.

A strikingly attractive young woman, Ashraf had fallen in love with Mehmood when she first met him at a friend's wedding. When, some time later, Mehmood went on to ask her to marry him, she hadn't hesitated for a moment before she said yes. In the five years they'd been together, his one aim had been to make her happy. Ashraf had grown up in a rigid, conservative family and she embraced the freedom that marriage to Mehmood gave her. She travelled with him and lived the life of a queen. Her love for him knew no bounds, and even a brief period of separation hit her hard. The only problem Ashraf had with Mehmood was that she was unsure about what it was he did for a living.

Ashraf did not like the men her husband hobnobbed with and the way they referred to him—his associates called him Mehmood Kalia because of his dark complexion. She took offence at this, and it had added to her dislike of these men. When she complained to Mehmood about what they called him, he affectionately said it was a non-issue. Again, when she conveyed her apprehensions about his working with them, he merely told her not to worry. But he would never explain what his work entailed exactly; what he did, where and with whom he went, was something she was completely ignorant of.

The clock on her dressing-table struck three as Ashraf slipped the last of her gold bangles on her arms. Mehmood would be at the Santa Cruz airport in an hour. She hurriedly picked up her handbag and headed out for the main road at Nagpada. She had already decided to take a cab instead of a train to the airport.

She managed to reach the airport by 4 p.m. People around her were carrying placards, flowers or small gifts to welcome their loved ones. Ashraf looked down at her bare hands and felt guilty. But then she knew that Mehmood was not a materialistic person and that nothing on earth would match up to the happiness he'd feel on seeing her.

She waited patiently, scanning the crowd every time a group of people emerged from the arrival area. She glanced again at the two police jeeps parked right behind her. They'd been there when she'd come, and though she had a faint idea about her husband's poor track record with the cops, today, she tried hard not to read too much into it.

Forty minutes passed but there was still no sign of him. The police jeeps were still parked in the same place but she couldn't see any policemen, so Ashraf didn't feel too concerned.

Finally, a little before five, the sliding doors of the Arrival section opened and she saw a burly, dark man come out along with other people. A black bag hung from his left shoulder. Ashraf broke into a smile and went closer to the railing and tried to catch his attention. His eyes searched for and finally found her in the crowd. Ashraf had just begun to take a few steps towards him when abruptly Mehmood disappeared in a group of men.

Ashraf saw one of the men who had surrounded Mehmood fire two to three gunshots in the air. The Arrival area broke into chaos; people started running helter-skelter in fright and the group of men managed to disappear in the crowd. Ashraf looked for Mehmood in the pandemonium but couldn't spot him. Even as the crowd grew more chaotic, she refused to move, hoping her husband would emerge from the crowd, hold her tight and take her away. Ashraf continued to look for him, when, from within the crowd, she noticed a few men with service revolvers accompanied by cops. Immediately she turned around, only to see that the police jeeps, which had been standing behind her all this while, were missing.

Over the noise of the crowd, she thought she heard faint gunshots from the parking lot. Her heart pounding, she began running towards the parking lot. The car park was a sprawling area but she immediately spotted several policemen huddled together at one end. Just then, one of the jeeps that had earlier been parked behind her, went past her, along with an ambulance, out of the airport. Determined to find out Mehmood's whereabouts, she ran towards the policemen.

When she reached them, she saw a pool of blood near a parked taxi. The cops were preoccupied with drawing white markings on the ground. She froze. She did not know what had happened and how to react. All this while, Ashraf still hoped that Mehmood, who she had seen standing, smiling at her, only five minutes ago, would come and reassure her that he was fine. But there was no sign of him.

She overheard one of the policemen say that the man who had been shot had been taken to Cooper Hospital. Ashraf hailed a taxi and directed it to the hospital. However, when she reached, both the reception and the hospital staff were unaware of any patient who had been admitted with gunshot wounds. They asked Ashraf to instead inquire with the Andheri police station. Ashraf had led a protected life so far; but now she steeled herself and went from station to station in the area, trying to find out where her husband was. Finally, a policeman directed her to J.J. Hospital. At J.J., her worst fears were realised: she was told that a man named Mehmood Khan, a wanted gangster, had been shot dead in an encounter at Santa Cruz airport.

Ashraf knew this was a lie. Mehmood would not have been able to carry



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Chapter 1

ON THE TRAIL OF A GUNMAN

After walking past a series of crowded streets, the man finally turns into a filthy, narrow lane. He goes down a couple of metres before stopping in front of a building. He turns to the two men who have been patiently following him all this while. With a grin on his scarred face, he asks them to go up. The men look at each other for a brief second and then, without a word exchanged between them, enter the building and head up a narrow flight of stairs.

The inside of the building has the sense of a dungeon: dark, stale air, and a creepiness about it. The men spot small cameras spying on them as they walk up, but choose not to discuss it. Both are writers by profession: I, then a budding crime reporter, and Vikram Chandra, already an established author after two bestselling novels—*Love and Longing in Bombay* and *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*. He is in the middle of his third, much-awaited book, *Sacred Games*. We've already met the retired, ageing don, Karim Lala, and the gangster-turned-politician, Arun Gawli.

According to the police, neither of these two have used firearms, and Vikram now wants to meet a gangster who has wielded guns.

After a lot of convincing, I have managed to fix an interview with the notorious gangster and police informer Hussain Ustara. When we reach the floor on which we have been told he lives, we see a brown, painted door left ajar. The man who has led us through the confusing alleys of Dongri is now standing behind us; he guides us into the flat.

Vikram sees another camera at the entrance. When he moves the door slightly to enter, he realises that the door is not made of wood, but metal. The security, we realise, is an indication of the current threat to Ustara's life. Ustara has informed on underworld kingpin Dawood Ibrahim on several occasions, and his life now hangs in the balance.

The drawing room is simply furnished, there are only a few pieces of furniture. A man with a small paunch dressed in a white tailored shirt and

trousers sits on a couch. I indicate to Vikram, with my eyes, that this is Ustara. Vikram gives a slight nod to indicate that he understands.

There is a table behind Ustara, on which closed circuit television screens rest. Ustara asks us to sit down on the couch that faces him.

Salaam ... tashrif rakhiye (take a seat).' The atmosphere is relaxed and Vikram and I sit on the couch without any hesitation.

The man's sophistication and flawless Urdu surprise us, given his means of livelihood. He is not the stereotypical

Mumbai 'bhai' or 'goonda' and astonishes us even more when he calls for tea and biscuits. He then begins speaking of how he and I have met a few times, and is keen on knowing about Vikram.

When Vikram finishes talking about his book, Ustara asks, 'So how can I help you?'

'I'd like to know everything about your world and its people,' Vikram replies.

Ustara laughs. 'Zaidi can tell you about us. He is a crime reporter.'

'I know, but I still want to hear it from you,' states Vikram.

'Trust me, there is nothing I can say that can interest you. Right now, as you see, I am stranded between life and death. I am just here to do my job like you men.'

Ustara doesn't seem as if he is in a talkative mood, but finally comes around. He speaks to us about his life, his early use of razors ('ustara', thus the name) to settle arguments, and how he rose to command his own gang. Vikram is systematically taking down notes, only interrupting the flow now and then with questions.

However, when Ustara starts speaking about his feud with Dawood Ibrahim, he stops midway, as if a lump has gotten stuck in his throat. Both of us wait for him to speak. He doesn't. I think of diverting the conversation to his personal life.

'What about women?' I ask.

Ustara grins, as if he was just getting there. 'Who doesn't like them?' he says, and then adds, 'but no one could compare with Sapna.'

'Sapna?' Vikram immediately asks.

'Yes, Sapna ... actually Sapna didi. Heard of her?'

The name rings a bell but I can't quite place it.

'She was my best friend,' Ustara says. 'I met her twelve years ago. I was much younger then ... somewhere in 1986.'

Sensing Ustara's absorption with the subject, Vikram stops taking notes and says, 'Tell me more about her.'

Ustara leans back on the couch, lifts his legs to sit cross-legged, and begins speaking.

Chapter 2

THE UNEXPECTED VISITOR

I pulled down the steel handle, opened the closet and sifted through the clothes for my beige cotton trousers. I finally managed to find it after I had thrown all my clothes on the ground. Then, without wasting too much time, I had a bath, shaved and got into my pants before hurriedly shoving all the mess back into the cupboard. When I was ready, I cast one last glance around the room; it was clean enough for the visitor.

That night, I had specifically asked my men to keep away from my house until I called for them. I was going to sleep with a Maharashtrian woman. Not like this was my first time or anything, of course! But this woman, I had been told, was one of a kind. I had already paid a bomb for the whole evening and was anxiously waiting to have her in my bed.

I realised that I had gotten ready an hour before time— it was only 7.30—so I decided to get myself a drink. I opened a bottle of whiskey and poured a peg in a steel glass. I tried not to make it too strong, pouring more water than usual in it, but before I knew it, I had already thrown it back.

While drinking, I had the wildest thoughts about the girl about to come into my room. My work had deprived me of good nocturnal activity for over two weeks. I wanted to make up for it today. Women have been my weakness ever since I can remember. There is nothing I can really do to get over this, so I just buy them when I have the urge. Today was one such day.

I was already three pegs down and preparing the fourth one, when the doorbell rang. She was here. My heart began thumping and a feeling of anxiety overcame me—for some reason, the excitement to see the woman who I was going to spend the night with had suddenly been overtaken by an ominous feeling. I am generally not a superstitious person, but something did not feel right. I went and opened the door.

To my surprise, instead of a Maharashtrian woman, a lady clad in a shiny black burqa was waiting at the door. Her hands and face were bare, though and—mashallah— I hadn't seen such a beautiful woman at my doorstep in a very long time.

She was tall with milk-like skin. Her lips were a pale pink and she had the most stunning pair of deep-set eyes I had seen. She was worth every single rupee I had spent. Assuming that she was the Maharashtrian woman in disguise, I called her in.

However, before she entered she said salaam and asked, 'Kya aap Hussain Ustara hain?'

I was startled, first because I did not expect a Hindu to greet me with a salaam, and second, because she knew my name. As far as I remembered, I had strictly informed my men not to mention my name while making the deal. Her beauty though, made me overlook the mistake my men must have made. "Yes, of course," I answered. 'Come inside.'

As she walked in, her eyes scanned the room. Then she turned to me and asked, 'Can I sit down? I need to talk to you.'

'Talk?'

From experience, I know that such girls only want to talk first if they want to negotiate a better deal.

'You really want to talk now?' I asked.

'Yes, please hear me out. It is important.'

Her behaviour was strange and that made me suspicious. I told her to sit down and moved towards the drawer where I knew my gun was. I took it out, placed it on the table that was beside her. I have always felt that men with weapons can get the world to touch their feet. I had taken the gun out to intimidate her but she continued to sit there, unflustered. In fact, she merely looked at the gun curiously.

'Can this kill a man?' she asked, her eyes still on the gun.

Yes, but—'

'How many bullets does this pistol have?' she interrupted me.

'Eighteen. It's made in Germany, and it's my favourite gun. But, why are you so curious about the weapon, sweetheart? I thought you were interested in some other weapon,' I said sarcastically.

'No, I am only interested in weapons that will help me achieve my goal,' she said.

I burst into a fit of laughter, still assuming that she was the Maharashtrian woman I had planned to spend my evening with. 'Goal ... what goal do you have, woman?'

'My goal is the same as yours,' she said.

Aha ... now this pretty lady was talking business, I thought. 'Yes, your goal and mine are possibly the same. The only difference is that you make the money and I lose it on you,' I said.

'Money? I don't make money at all.'

'Oh! So you are doing this for charity, haan?'



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previous day. Her head was lowered slightly. 'Salaam,' she said.

I returned the greeting but to be honest, I was not happy to see her. I usually avoid beggars, orphans and widows first thing in the day. I personally believe that it is not good luck to start the day seeing their faces.

'Will you have tea?'

'No, I have already eaten at home.'

'I am sorry but I haven't eaten my breakfast yet,' I said, as Majeed walked in with a plate of hot samosas and egg burji. Once again, out of courtesy I asked her if she'd like to have some. Refusing, she got up and walked to the window.

I told Majeed to prepare the targets and get the ghodas to the firing range located in the basement of my building. He agreed but looked at me warily before leaving. Probably, knowing my unhealthy track record with women, he assumed that I was using the poor lady to my advantage.

Ashraf, who was standing near the window, displayed neither anxiety nor excitement. I began eating. I realised that she had turned her face towards the window so that I could eat without feeling embarrassed by her presence. I appreciated this.

As I put the last of the egg burji in my mouth, I asked, 'Are you sure you want to do this?'

'Without a doubt,' she said, now turning her head in my direction.

For the first time, I noticed that her eyes were swollen. It seemed like she hadn't slept a wink and had been crying through the night. I knew that, though I was not interested in helping Ashraf, her despair was pushing me to doing it.

'I need to take revenge, if not for me, for the soul of my husband,' she said.

'Okay, then,' I said with a sigh, as I got up. 'Let's go to the firing range.'

We walked down to the basement. The firing range was not big enough to contain the jarring sound of gunshots, yet it was not a bad learning ground. Majeed had been efficient enough and placed three targets, two of which were dartboards, and the other a cardboard cut-out. All the three targets were lined at even distance in one corner of the basement. In the middle, Majid had placed a wooden table with three of the best ghodas: a country made-pistol, star pistol and my favourite German Mauser.

'Which one do you want to begin with?' I asked, showing off my pistols to Ashraf.

'The one that will help shoot down my target most effectively.'

I was impressed but didn't respond directly. 'Before I begin, tell me about your fears. Can you bear loud sounds? Are you calm at the sight of blood?'

'Yes.'



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Chapter 3

ASHRAF'S REINCARNATION

After two months of our rigorous training sessions, Ashraf had learned the art of self-defence, the use of weaponry and had been confidently riding around the city on my bike.

Ashraf had changed. From salwar-kameezes, she had moved to wearing jeans and long, loose shirts. Her monosyllabic replies had also been replaced with sharp and witty remarks. I soon realised that she was a wordsmith: articulate and linguistically gifted. Also, unlike before, Ashraf was filled less with sorrow and more with the desire to get her revenge.

We had gotten quite close and it was impossible for her not to have realised my affection for her, yet she never said anything.

One afternoon, Ashraf excused herself from a training session for some 'legal work'.

Feeling a little lost without her, I thought of taking a ride down to Marine Drive. However, just minutes before I could leave home, Ashraf walked in. I was more than delighted to see her.

'Mubarak ho, Hussain sahib,' she said, removing her chappals and walking into my bedroom. She was holding some papers.

'What happened? You seem very happy,' I asked, trying to hide my pleasure on seeing her.

Yes, I am. There is so much to tell you.'

'Do you want to take a ride to Marine Drive,' I asked, adding, 'we can talk about it there.' She agreed.

This time, she rode while I sat pillion, and I must confess that the ride was as smooth as satin. She stopped the bike at a parking lot in Nariman Point and locked it. Then she got off and shoved some papers from her handbag into my hands. I was still sitting on the bike.

'What's this?'

'Read it.'

You know I don't have the patience, Ashraf.'

'Okay ... but promise me you won't get angry,' she said.



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orders were served to around twenty of them, and several others were still in trouble. He also told me that two of Dawood's gambling dens had been sealed by the police.

In three weeks, Sapna had managed to do what I would have never been able to do. Before she put herself in a more dangerous position, I decided to talk to her as she had unknowingly been gaining enemies.

We decided to meet for dinner. I had already reserved a table for two at my favourite Iranian restaurant. When I reached the AC room, it was empty except for a family with annoying kids hovering around. As expected, Sapna, who for a change was dressed in a burqa, was already there.

After we'd said our salaams and ordered our food, I decided to broach the subject. 'Ashraf, there is something I need to talk to you about.'

'Sapna,' she corrected.

'Okay, Sapna. I've heard of your work as an informer. I also heard that you've been doing a good job.'

'Yes, if it all works as I planned, we will be able to get the person we want soon,' she said.

'No, Sapna, unfortunately that is not true,' I said.

'Why?' she asked, startled.

You don't know the risks involved in your job. You are still fresh in the business; it is beside the point that you have started off very well,' I explained.

'I know the risks. I have already been attacked twice.'

'What? And you chose not to tell me this?' The spoonful of rice I had just eaten almost choked me.

'It is okay ... with your training I managed to stop them. I kicked the rascals in their manhood. They were at a loss for words.'

'And you escaped?' I asked, relieved but annoyed.

'How do you think I am having dinner with you?' she mocked, and continued to eat her food.

I had to bring her down to earth. She did not know what she was doing, and by the time she realised it, it could be too late. I was too fond of Sapna to lose her to her own stupid actions. And perhaps, I was upset that she didn't seem to need me much anymore.

'Are you mad? When will you grow up, Sapna? Do you think Dawood is going to feel the pinch if you bust his gambling and dance bars business? He is too big. All he has to do is shoot you in the head and your story will be over,' I said angrily. 'Most of his money comes from protection and extortion rackets. Have you managed to trace these rackets?'

'No.'

'Then why are you rejoicing?' I asked.



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first told me about you, I thought that you had a scar on your face or something,' she said.

I liked it that she was curious about me.

'The truth is that I was never scarred. Others gave me the name after an incident that dates back to some two decades ago,' I explained.

'What happened then?'

'I was about fifteen then, and into picking pockets. A gang of us would jump into crowded buses, trains, theatres and do our work—and mind you, I was among the best of the lot. The cops would rarely catch me. Once, I got hold of a lot of cash. Tempted, I only gave part of my day's collection to my ringleader, who took stock of the money we made on a daily basis. But when he learned how I had duped him through one of my friends, he beat me up. I tried retaliating with the help of a few others and it blew up into a full-fledged skirmish inside the club where we had assembled.'

'Then?' she prompted.

'Then ... then when I realised that things were going out of control, and I had no means to escape. I removed my razor from inside my pocket and attacked the ringleader. I managed to inflict a wound that began at his neck and ran right to his crotch.'

'Yah Allah. Are you serious?'

I nodded. 'He was bleeding a lot and I managed to get away. He was taken to a hospital and the doctor there made a strange remark. He said that the person who had cut him had done so with surgical precision. And soon, before I could realise it, the name Ustara got stuck to my name. From then on people started fearing me, all because of that small weapon ...'

When we reached Kathmandu, I introduced Sapna to Raamu and Chaamu Singh, my friends from Nepal who often supplied me with weapons. I wanted to check the accuracy of the intelligence about Dawood's consignment that had been given to me by Ram Bahadur Singh. Bahadur was right. Chaamu Singh told me that Kim Bahadur Thapa, Dawood's trusted lieutenant who operates from Mumbai's Matunga area, was supposed to send some consignment to Raxaul via Birganj. And that one of their men would be at the border to collect the consignment, which would reach Birganj in the next three days. This was the right time to hit out at Dawood. I sat down with the three of them and drew a rough chart, planning where we would intercept the arms consignment. We decided that we'd get down a few kilometres before Birganj and walk the rest of the distance, taking the kachcha road through the mountainous terrain. I personally felt that it would be easier to hide near the hillocks and seize the consignment that would be transported to the borders using mules or donkeys. The others agreed. 'Will this affect Dawood's business?' Sapna



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THE A-TEAM SPLITS

Forty-eight months had gone by since our first trip to Nepal and there had been a lot of changes in both our lives in that time.

After our first success, Sapna and I—at least for the first few months—visited Nepal often. On some occasions we failed miserably, and at others, we managed to get hold of huge consignments. Eventually—after I convinced her that the money could help in her mission against Dawood—Sapna no longer rebuffed my suggestion of selling the stolen weaponry in the markets of Kolkata and Raxaul. We were thus successful on two levels: in hampering Dawood's business, and monetarily too.

Then, one day, we came in direct contact with the Border Security Forces in Nepal. That encounter nearly resulted in our deaths. Fortunately, we somehow managed to escape, and Sapna decided to call off our Nepal trips for good. I was reluctant, since we were getting a lot of money this way but she refused to budge. So, after a lot of arguing, I finally gave in and agreed to keep Mumbai our sole base against Dawood.

In Mumbai, Sapna was slowly gaining notice as the person responsible for disrupting Dawood's businesses. She knew the Mumbai underworld like the back of her hand and was creating unprecedented fear in the minds of Dawood's many henchmen. She had begun to play a big role in busting several gambling dens and dance bars in the city as well.

The only major setback Sapna suffered was something I had predicted—her only legal route to justice had been quashed by the court. The Crime Branch, on the basis of Sapna's allegations, did conduct a farcical inquiry against Inspector Amolik. However, the inspector was finally given a clean chit and her case was dismissed for lack of evidence. But Sapna never gave up. She continued to file petition after petition. She was confident that her dream, just as her name suggested, would see the light of day. I loved her too much to discourage her.

While time had brought about so many changes in our position and in Sapna's position in the underworld, things remained the same with regard to my feelings for her and vice versa. No doubt we had become very close friends, sometimes I felt we could even read each other's minds. We quarrelled, we laughed and dined together almost every day. She knew all about the women I slept with and would keep asking me to change my ways. I knew she enjoyed spending time with me—but that's all it was; there was never the hint of her wanting anything more. She couldn't think beyond Mehmood.

I knew that she was aware of my feelings but she continued to feign ignorance. It annoyed me sometimes, and—like anyone would—I too, was reaching a point where I didn't think I could take it any longer. I was just hoping that it wouldn't happen soon.

But it did. Something terrible happened one day, after which she was forced to part ways with me. I admit it was all my fault.

It was December 1991, at around 2 a.m. I was at home, bored ... I hadn't felt like paying a woman for sex that night. It was just one of those off days when I did not want to have



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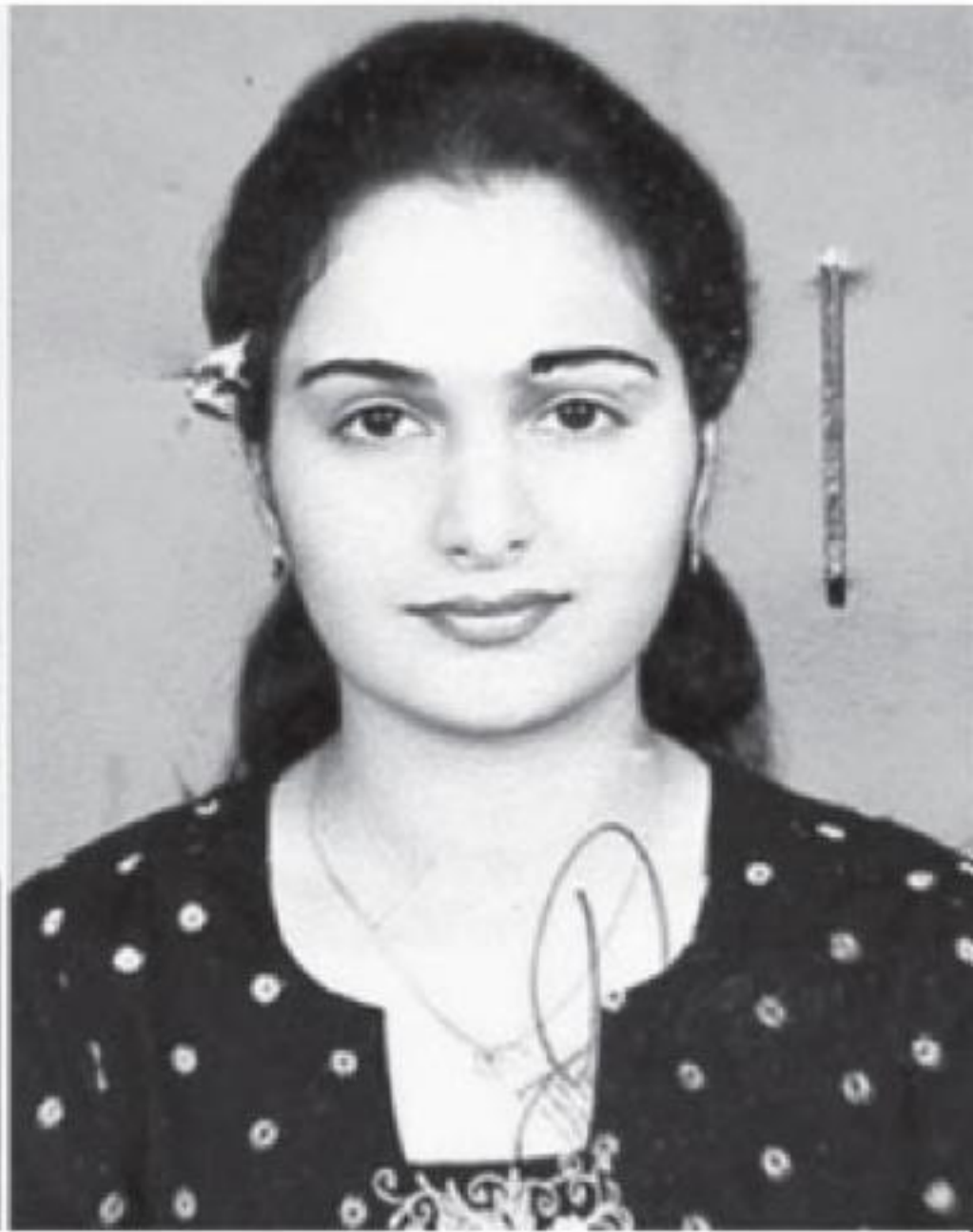
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These are the photos acquired from the passports of Danish Beg, alias Abu Salem, and Fauzia Beg, alias Monica Bedi. The couple used these names for fake passports, which they later used to travel abroad.



Asha Gawli, the wife of Hindu don Arun Gawli, who shielded her husband against police machinery and fake encounters on several occasions, is seen appealing to the masses to vote for her husband from the Byculla constituency, before the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly



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arrests, but they were unable to convict anyone for the crime.

Today, the residents of Hujjrah Mohalla, many of whom were witnesses to the murder, don't even dare to speak about that incident. They are probably trying to forget it ever happened. But I am not like the others. I cannot forget Ashraf because she is the only woman I've ever been so madly besotted with. She made me think and behave like a human being, treating me like a friend and not like a gangster.

I feel responsible for everything that happened to her, and regret turning her into Sapna didi. I knew that her chances to kill Dawood were slim. If I had, without being overcome by her and my own emotions, put some sense into her, she would probably have remained Ashraf, the Ashraf I knew—a beautiful, burqa-clad Muslim girl. The Ashraf I saw on that day we first met looked like a wilted flower yet her innocence melted me, and her determination astounded me.

I did not realise when Ashraf became Sapna. She, unlike Ashraf, was not ashamed of how the world perceived her. She had lost faith in religion and sought only within herself the strength to avenge her husband's death. Sapna was a woman who wasn't willing to compromise with her emotions. She was magnetic, powerful and painfully attractive, just like a dream, a dream I wasn't ever able to understand.

Sapna was famous, while Ashraf was just another woman. This is why I first mentioned Sapna to you both, because I thought you would have heard about her.

Today, she has made of me what she became after her husband's murder. Yes, I have promised revenge. I won't spare Dawood or Shakeel. I have more reason to destroy them now. I want to see her dream fulfilled through my own hands.



When we finally get up to leave, Ustara leads us to the door. 'It was nice meeting you, write something good about me. I am tired of bad publicity,' he says.

Vikram laughs. 'Yes, you are an interesting man after all, with many interesting tales.'

'Of course, my life has been an adventure.'

We are barely out the door when I stop and ask if he has a photograph of Sapna.

Ustara looks at me suspiciously for a moment or two, and then, pointing at his heart, he says, 'I carry this dream in my heart. She is here .. isn't she beautiful?'



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'Kiski amma? (Whose mother),' he asked, taken aback.

'Hum sabki amma (All of ours),' the same man responded and shoved some papers in his hand. He seemed to be the leader of the group.

Ayaz calmly handed back the papers. 'See, I don't entertain people at my home. Come to the court tomorrow,' he said.

'We won't harm you. Just take up Amma's case,' one of them said, sensing Ayaz's irritation.

'The court is shut. I cannot do anything today.'

'We only need an answer.'

'First, get all your men out of here. I don't want any tamasha. I will only speak to one man.'

Surprisingly, the leader of the group agreed at once. He spoke to his men in a language that Ayaz presumed was Tamil. Within a few minutes, everybody except for the leader had quietly disappeared from his home.

'We know that you can help us. Amma wants you to fight her case. Don't bother about the money, Amma has lots,' the man said.

'I will need all the details.'

The man handed Ayaz the stack of papers once again. Ayaz scanned through it briefly. 'Get these papers and come to the court at 10 tomorrow morning.'

'Thank you, saar. Amma will bless you,' the man said, and fell at Ayaz's feet.

Ayaz stepped back. 'No, please don't do all this. Just one request, don't get all these men to court. Otherwise I won't be able to get your Amma out.'

The man nodded and left.

Ayaz was at the sessions court early the next day. As a specialist in narcotics-related cases, he had heard a lot about Mahalaxmi Papamani through both his colleagues and the cops. She had been in the news on more than one occasion. For someone who had started off as a small-time peddler, Papamani had acquired quite a notorious reputation in Mumbai's drug scene. Ayaz couldn't wait to share the experience of his first brush with the Papamani menace with his lawyer friends.

The sessions court building in Kalaghoda, home to hundreds of lawyers and paralegals, comprises several civil and criminal courtrooms connected by labyrinthine alleys and rows of stairs. Ayaz had reached the first floor when three women stopped him. They were dressed in gaudy saris and had red and yellow bindis on their foreheads.

'Saar, Mahalaxmi Papamani's case ...'

'Oh, yes,' Ayaz said, not the least surprised. 'Where is the man who came to my house yesterday?' he asked sarcastically.



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Chapter 1

THE FLIGHT FROM LISBON

The police convoy cut across the runway, its blaring sirens not raising even one eyebrow amidst the din at Lisbon airport. The gun-toting guards accompanying the convoy gave the impression of it being a mobile fortress. The cars screeched to a halt and officers of the Policia Judicial stepped out, escorting a thirty-six-year-old man, dressed in a black T-shirt and track pants. He had a stooping gait and seemed to be smiling nervously. The Portuguese police spoke to him before he was taken over to the eagerly waiting contingent of Indian officials.

For a moment, deputy superintendent of police, Special Task Force, CBI Devendra Pardesi, couldn't believe his eyes. He had handled tough cases and tougher criminals, but this one seemed a bit unreal. The man the Portuguese police was handing over just didn't fit the bill of one of Mumbai's most dreaded gangsters—someone who had masterminded some of the most gruesome murders in the annals of Mumbai crime history.

Pardesi had barely collected his thoughts when the occupant of the second car stepped out. Just as in the movies, a policeman held the door open as a woman's legs emerged from the vehicle and daintily settled on the tarmac, toes first and then the heels as she climbed gracefully out of the car. Her fair skin appeared pale and almost translucent in the afternoon heat. Tall and slim, she had very delicate features that were strained at the moment as she clutched a Bible like it was a lifesaver. Her long, thin legs and narrow waistline were emphasised in the figure-hugging T-shirt and jeans that she wore.

Monica Bedi was no Madhuri Dixit but she was attractive—Pardesi thought she fit the bill of a mobster's moll perfectly. He wondered how this otherwise naive-looking woman could have gotten involved in such a mess. His boss, deputy inspector general of police, CBI, Omprakash Chhatwal, signed the official documents and nodded at Pardesi, who moved cautiously towards Abu Salem.



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Chapter 2

BOLLYWOOD DREAMS

That one phone call changed my life.

My career was finally taking off and I was revelling in my new-found success. After struggling for nearly a decade, I had finally managed to get a break in A-grade Bollywood films like *Jaanam Samjha Karo*, *Jodi No.1* and *Pyaar, Ishq aur Mohabbat*. Romancing actors like Salman Khan, Sanjay Dutt and Arjun Rampal onscreen meant that I had arrived and had opened the floodgates to new offers from reputed filmmakers.

Everything seemed to be going perfectly, just like a fairy tale, until that one phone call.

'Take the first flight to Dubai, because you are in big trouble,' he told me.

Without weighing the implications of what he'd said, I hurriedly arranged for a ticket, packed my bags and rushed to the airport. Fortunately, I had no assignments or shoots lined up, so I could leave in peace. Despite his words, I wasn't overly worried; I didn't really sense anything amiss.

At the end of the day, I was going back to the man I loved. A man I loved so much, that it had blinded me to the trouble I was getting myself into.

I walked into the plane and took my seat. People looked at me, recognising me, and I smiled back at them. There was no doubt that they knew who I was. This sort of fame and success hadn't come easily to me. My life is an example of a girl who was born in the back of beyond, and yet rose to fame and success.

I was born to a middle-class Sikh family in a small village in Chabbewal, fifteen kilometres from the town of Hoshiarpur in Punjab on 18 January 1975. My village has seen many of its families migrate to the West. Ten months after I was born, my father Dr Prem Bedi, a practising doctor in Punjab, and my mother, Shakuntala Bedi, decided to migrate to Norway.

In the 1970s, the Indian community in Norway was small, just a few



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Chapter 3

THE FUGITIVES

On 11 September 2001, suicide attackers from the Al Qaeda crashed planes into the iconic World Trade Centre towers, shattering the lives of several thousand Americans. There was a growing anti-terror and anti-Islam sentiment in the US, with almost every Muslim in the US fearing for his or her life. Salem and I were among the several anxious south Asian Muslims who witnessed this traumatic phase unfold, after 9/11.

We had escaped from Dubai to the United States just days after the Indian police had learned of my association with Salem. In Dubai, I found out that the CBI had seized my apartment in Mumbai and frozen all my bank accounts. All my escape routes suddenly appeared blocked except for the one that led to Salem.

I was devastated when Salem revealed his real identity to me. He told me that he was a former Dawood aide and was wanted in connection with the killings of music baron Gulshan Kumar, Bollywood actress Manish Koirala's secretary Ajit Dewani, builder Omprakash Kukreja and in more than fifty other cases.

I wondered if our bond existed anymore, since it was based on lies. However, I also knew that Salem had always been nice to me, I'd never seen his other side. I invariably saw him as a kind-hearted person, who helped people. My relationship with him was something very personal and had nothing to do with his association with the mafia. I had never even met anyone else from the mafia—he'd never introduced me to anybody. Also, even after all the lies he had told me, I realised I still loved him. And so, accepting my fate, I decided to give our relationship a chance.

Meanwhile, my parents found out about my affair through the media. Trouble intensified when the media reported that Salem and I had secretly gotten married on 20 November 2000. The news came as a big shock to my family. During the same time, my mother suffered a massive paralytic stroke and was bedridden. I wanted to speak to her but Salem warned me against calling my parents. He told me that the cops would have tapped



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‘Why?’

‘I want to forget my past. It was traumatic,’ she said.

‘But your story is very interesting ...’

‘Yes, I know. Interesting for others, not for me, which is why I have got the copyright of my story,’ she said.

‘How can you have a copyright to your story, when it is out in the media and heavily recorded in police dossiers?’

She didn’t reply for a few seconds. Then she said, ‘Uh ... I will have to speak to my parents before I get back to you on this. They take all my decisions for me,’

We agreed, and then asked her about other issues including her comeback on reality television shows, her alleged relationship with Rahul Mahajan and her recent decision to launch a religious music album. Though uncomfortable, she answered all our questions cautiously. When she had sipped the last of her coffee, she got up to leave. We shook hands, even as she promised to get back to us in two days.

The call never came, neither were any of our calls to her received.



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'mother', would appear strange—with her jet-black hair and only-slightly lined brown skin, she doesn't appear to be a day over fifty. It's not by virtue of her age or that she was born a Muslim, that she enjoys this respect and adulation; it is the fact that she is married to the Hindu don, Arun Gawli, christened 'Daddy' by the locals of the area.

Today, she is here to campaign for Daddy, the candidate of an otherwise insignificant party in the state's political circuit. The gathering listens with rapt attention as she asks them, with her hands folded humbly, to vote for her husband to get a second-term in the state assembly.

With her symbolic vermillion and mangalsutra, Asha Gawli portrays convincingly the humble Hindu wife, someone to be pitied because her 'social worker husband', wrongly framed by the cops, is currently behind bars. Police records, however, sketch a very different picture of Asha Gawli.

Asha can be credited with safeguarding her husband against the police machinery, and fake encounters on innumerable occasions. She helped her husband float his own political party, the Akhil Bharatiya Sena. Due to her efforts, Arun eventually went on to become a member of the Legislative Assembly in the state government. With a strong ally in his wife, it is not surprising that Arun is practically the only don who has been able to stay on in Mumbai and shape a career in crime and politics, right under the nose of the police and the Maharashtra government.

Arun was already an established gangster when he married Zubeida Mujawar, aka Asha. Like his father, he had first landed himself a job at Shakti Mills in Mahalaxmi at the young age of twenty. It was when Arun shifted to Crompton Greaves Ltd in Kanjurmarg, that he began to get involved with the underworld. He joined hands with his old friend and schoolmate Rama Naik, and the two got involved in several local intra-gang brawls. He shot to fame when he, along with his accomplice Naik and another goon Babu Reshim (a leader of the canteen workers in the Mazgaon docks), murdered Parasnath Pandey—who ran major matka and liquor rackets—in 1980. They killed Pandey in order to gain control of the collection of matka and liquor money in central Mumbai.

Arun was consequently detained under the National Security Act but was released after a month of custody. His power and influence grew after his release from jail. It is during this time that he met and fell in love with seventeen-year-old Zubeida who, like Arun, lived in Byculla. Zubeida's marriage had already been arranged with a boy from within the Muslim community, but when Arun asked her to marry him, she accepted happily. Naik and Reshim opposed the alliance on the grounds that the two were from different communities; they were aghast that Arun, a Hindu Maharashtrian, was marrying a Muslim. Arun refused to budge, and finally



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Gyllenhal, three years later, when I awoke to the news that Neeta had been murdered by her husband.

Ashwin, who apparently suspected his wife of infidelity, allegedly had her killed by his henchmen. It was a gruesome end to the fairytale romance of a couple who had both loved and lived dangerously.

Neeta and Ashwin Naik's story dates back to the early 1980s. She was a convent-schooled Gujarati girl from the upmarket south Mumbai locale of Breach Candy, while he was Maharashtrian and the brother of the vegetable vendor-turned-don Amar Naik. The couple was very much in love but their relationship suffered when news of it reached the ears of Neeta's family.

Neeta went on to complete her Bachelor of Arts from Sophia College while Ashwin moved to London to study for a degree in electrical engineering. Despite the distance, their affair continued.

On Ashwin's return from London, the couple eloped and got married despite severe opposition from Neeta's orthodox Gujarati family. The first few years of marriage were happy ones; soon, however, Ashwin—upset with the stigma of being the brother of a don—decided to move to Chennai with his family. He and Neeta made a couple of trips to Chennai to find a house. It was on their return from one of these trips, in 1991, that the couple had an encounter with death. It was an incident that would change their life completely.

On his way back home from the Santa Cruz airport in Mumbai, Ashwin's car was attacked by members of the Chhota Rajan gang. Neeta and her father-in-law were in another car behind his. Panic and chaos hit the Kherwadi highway as around twenty men opened fire at Ashwin's car. Knowing that her husband was unarmed, Neeta stopped her own car, got out, and began screaming, hoping that someone would call the police. By then, Ashwin had dodged the bullets and managed to make an unlikely escape. 'It was then that I knew my husband was unsafe. I told Ashwin that I wanted him alive and not dead. For this, I didn't mind if he had to join hands with his own brother and become part of the crime syndicate,' Neeta revealed in her 1997 interview.

After much persuasion from his wife, Ashwin finally gave in and joined the underworld. He went on to become the first educationally-qualified gangster in Mumbai's mafia circuit.

Over time, Ashwin became known for his meticulous planning and organisational abilities. People still remember him for the killing of Tanya Koli in a Kalyan local train and the murder of textile tycoon Sunit Khatau in Mahalaxmi. Ashwin was later arrested under TADA but this did not deter him. After Chhota Rajan's split from Dawood, Ashwin became an ally of



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time, making time from his busy shooting schedule in Russia.

My most heartfelt thanks are reserved for my worst critic, teacher and my wife, Velly Thevar, who taught me how to think, believe and most importantly write. Velly kept my feet firmly planted on terra firma.

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We have made our best efforts to be absolutely accurate and truthful in our narrations. However, it is quite possible there may be some mistakes due to human error. We confess that while all the accuracies belong to the people mentioned above, the inaccuracies and flaws are all ours.

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