

A Cameo of Suffering

By Arun Chavan

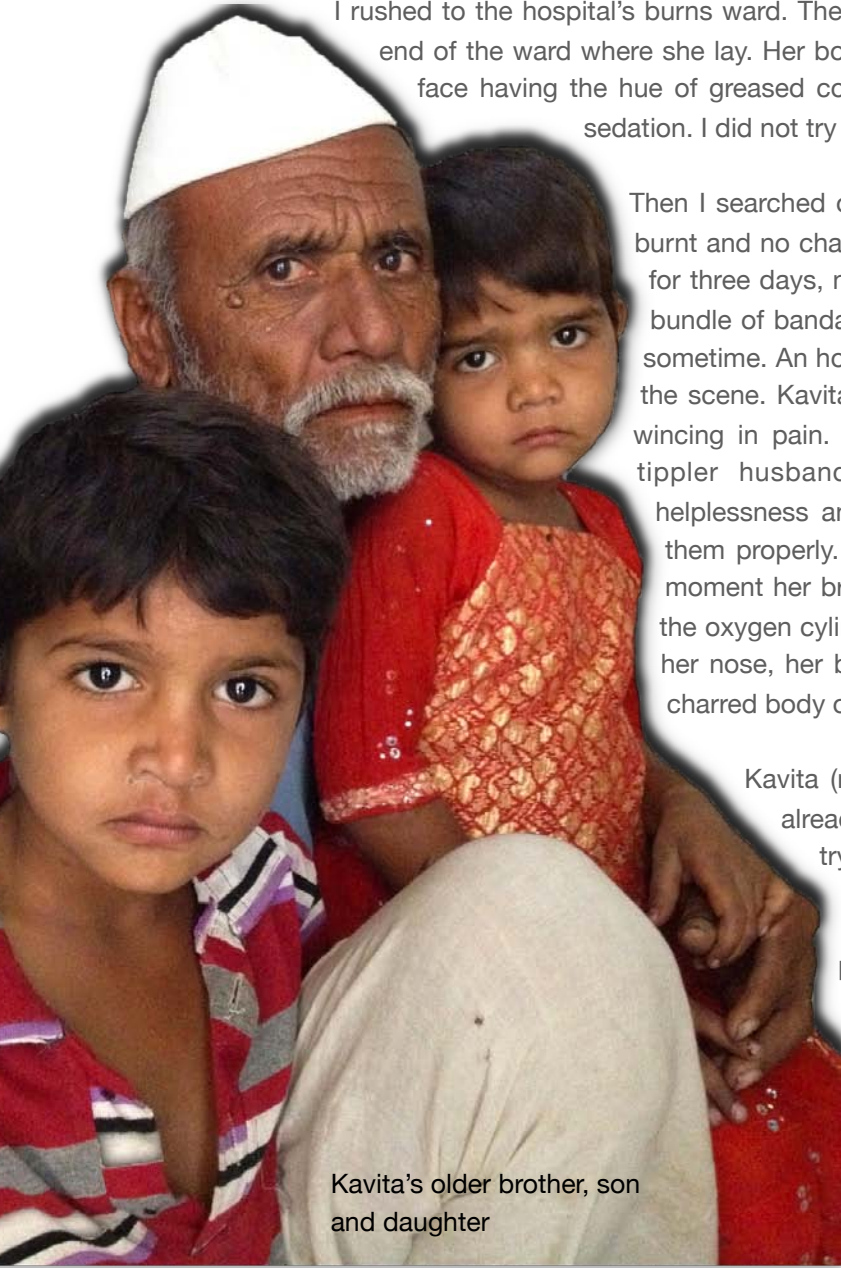
The New Year met me with a tragic face. A call came through in the small hours of the morning from our (AVANI) office. The operator told me of a severely burnt young woman, admitted to the government hospital in Sangli. Could I go there and organize some help? The caller, informed that Kavita was her name and she was from the labour colony of Jayasingpur, a town 20 minutes south of Sangli. Her two daughters of 9 and 10 years are inmates of our residential school and hence the concern. Two younger children, a boy of six and a girl only of three years lived with her.



Kavita with two of her daughters

Photos by Scott Kafora | www.teysha.net

I rushed to the hospital's burns ward. The sister on duty asked me to go past the screen at the far end of the ward where she lay. Her body was swathed in white bandage. The hair all burnt, the face having the hue of greased coal. She appeared to be unconscious, or probably under sedation. I did not try to move closer and speak to her.



Then I searched out the doctor in – charge. He told me of her being 75% burnt and no chance of survival. With the best of efforts she could prolong for three days, no more. As suggested by him, I gave to the duty nurse a bundle of bandages and a packet of syringes and I stood by her side for sometime. An hour later, Suneeta and Snehal of our school staff arrived on the scene. Kavita sensed their approach to her side and turned her head wincing in pain. Opened her peeling eyelids, complained of her chronic tippler husband, of endless quarrels and beatings, pleaded her helplessness and entreated them to look after her children and groom them properly. “ You are my only hope.....”, her voice trailed. Next moment her breathing became faint and labored. The ward boy pushed the oxygen cylinder to her. By the time he could bring the nozzle close to her nose, her breathing had stopped. She let her Praan* slip out of her charred body only after giving her children's charge to AVANI.

Kavita (meaning “a poem”) barely of twenty eight summers and already a cameo of fathomless suffering was pushed to her tryst with flamy surcease. Ever jealous of her good looks, Kavita's husband has been a wastrel and she had to be the bread winner. Now the children are orphaned, because their father may well take another wife. Which is as easy in their tribe as getting into a new shirt

**(According to Indian belief Praan is the nucleic element which sustains life.)*

Kavita's older brother, son and daughter



Kavita attends a parents meeting at the AVANI residential home just months before her untimely death

She has gone beyond recall. Yet in her children she abides. They need a healing touch and a breath of compassion. So that her aspirations shall bear fruit.

You will find a Kavita in every dwelling you turn to in the shanties which engirdle every urban centre. Many of them pull on precariously on powder kegs of disaster.

Ours is a society which aspires to be a great economic power a decade from now. It also boasts of parturating “the great middle class”, at whom the automobile fabricators of the world are splurgingly slithering for a pythonic bash. But it will betray not a wisp of awareness of Kavita’s predicament. Her burnt body is the blood plasmaic image of the epochal agony of the millions of her type. Will her death be in vain?

Kavita, you will not go silent in the goblin – festered night. Let us ‘rage, rage against the dying of the light’. Today, you are muted to a dirge. Yet, your daughters and your son will be lyrics of joy and hosannas of fulfillment. Tomorrow people will speak trumpet tongued of their triumphs and their achievements and they will also admire you. Your children will remember you with reverence, for, breaking the vicious cycle with uncommon guts and, defiant of the man’s contrary wish, you set them on the path of progress.

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