

Remembering the Big Fire

I watched in horror as the huge orange flames engulfed the house. It was the 9 pm news and the reporter at the scene was reporting on a bungalow that had gone up in flames. Someone had accidentally ignited a pile of newspapers and the fire had spread wildly. As I watched the firefighters rush forward to douse the fire, I could not help but recall the fire at the coffee shop near my house a year ago.

It was dinnertime then and my mother had told me to buy dinner for the family from the coffee shop downstairs. I was waiting in line to collect a packet of fried rice when a sudden loud explosion rocked the entire place. There was complete pandemonium. Everyone began running in different directions. Clouds of smoke were everywhere. The smell of smoke invaded my nostrils. Children were screaming and loud terrified cries filled the air. I did not know where I was heading. Someone pushed me and I stumbled forward, bumping into chairs and tables along the way. I fell once and someone stepped on my fingers. I screamed, terrified by what was happening around me. It was only later that I realised my fingers had been fractured.

The smoke was getting thicker. It filled the air, shrouding my vision. It stung my eyes and made me cough. I ran blindly forward until I felt a breath of fresh air and the cool night air around me. It was only then that I opened my eyes. Turning around, I was horrified to see that the entire coffee shop was engulfed in flames. I was one of the lucky few. There were still many people trapped inside. A man's clothes were on fire and he was seen rolling around desperately on the grass to put out the flames. My limbs went numb as I stood there watching the scene unfold before me. There were injured people lying everywhere. Firefighters had to put out the fire while others calmed the victims. A crowd of onlookers had gathered and some rushed to search for their loved ones who had gone to the coffee shop. My mother had come down and was frantic. She was relieved to see that I was unharmed except for my fractured fingers.

Turning back to the news, I was relieved to hear that the bungalow was vacant at that time. The occupants were on a holiday. At least, no lives were lost in this incident.