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Sheroes Hangout: Empowering India's Acid Attack Survivors to Face the Future

The first time I looked into the mirror, I felt it would have been better if I'd died. When I was attacked with acid, I felt like butter was melting on my face. But when I tried wiping it off, the skin on my hands melted off. There was a huge crowd in the area where I was attacked. But nobody came to help me. Not a single person.

— Ritu, acid attack survivor¹

We envisioned Sheroes as a space where survivors could not only gain financial independence but also reclaim their narratives and identities. This initiative has been about creating an environment of empowerment, where survivors could step out of the shadows of their trauma and into roles that celebrated their resilience and creativity.

— Alok Dixit, co-founder, Sheroes Hangout²

Alok Dixit sighed as he read the news. For Dixit, co-founder of a nonprofit in India that assisted victims of hate crimes, the story was all too familiar. A young man whose advances were rejected by a female acquaintance retaliated with violence. But this was no ordinary hate crime, and the details were disturbing even for Dixit.

The premeditated assault, which was captured on CCTV, took place on a crisp Wednesday morning in December 2022, in the Dwarka neighborhood of New Delhi. The victim, age 17, had just left home for school with her younger sister when the motorbike slowly approached. Suddenly the assailant, who was riding on the back of the bike, tossed a corrosive liquid, later determined to be nitric acid, from his bottle onto the young woman's face, causing her to scream in agony and fall to the ground. The victim's sister rushed home to inform her parents while shopkeepers doused the victim with liquid to alleviate the burning. The victim was then rushed to a nearby hospital where she was treated for burns on her face and neck—burns that would leave her disfigured for life.

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