

PHASE 3: TWO CONSPIRACIES EMERGE

Read these interviews in order:

#	File	Person	Role
31	31_maruti_pawar_deeper.md	Harish Karande	Deeper interview - survey report
32	32_teacher_kulkarni_deeper.md	Teacher Shaila	Deeper interview - pattern analysis
33	33_laxmi.md	Kalyani	Mute mother of twins (gestures)
34	34_parubai_kadam_deeper.md	Sarla	Deeper interview - confirms secrets
35	35_retired_mhatre.md	Retired Bendre	Former official, confesses bribery
36	36_patya_gaikwad.md	Ajit Sawant	Confirms illegal operations
37	37_eknath_sand_runner.md	Ravindra	Sand runner - clears himself
38	38_mangal_shinde.md	Lata Kore	Prakash's wife - noticed changes
39	39_saku_waghmare.md	Sunita Dhere	Food carrier - overheard conversation
40	40_dr_karve.md	Dr. Pande	Previous village doctor
41	41_rao_saheb_zamindar.md	Gadkari Saheb	Zamindar - reveals affair, trust deed
42	42_kamalabai.md	Vasundhara	Zamindar's wife

By end of this phase, you should be able to identify: - Who killed the recent children (T2 and T3) - Who killed the original twins (T1) - That these may be SEPARATE conspiracies

Ready to confront suspects? Proceed to PHASE_4/

INTERVIEW #31

Person: Harish Karande (Return Interview) **Age:** 55 **Role:** T2 victim's father - deeper conversation **Location:** Temple steps, Talegaon (same as before)
Interviewer: Arjun **Phase:** 3

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Harish has been expecting Arjun. He's brought a cloth bundle with him. His eyes are clearer than before - still haunted, but with a flicker of hope.

HARISH: You came back. I knew you would. I've been waiting.

ARJUN: I have more questions.

HARISH: No. I have something for you. Something I kept for eight years. (pushes bundle toward Arjun)

ARJUN: What is this?

HARISH: Open it.

Arjun unwraps the cloth. Inside are yellowed papers, water-damaged but legible.

ARJUN: These are...?

HARISH: My daughter found these three days before she died. She made copies. Hid them in place I didn't know until last year. When I was repairing her old bed frame, I found them. Hidden in hollow of the wood.

ARJUN: (reading) Talbed Survey Report. Dated... this is twelve years ago. Signed by Raghav Nimkar.

HARISH: The clerk who died of snakebite. That's what they said anyway.

ARJUN: (continues reading) This documents... this documents illegal talbed encroachment into protected common land. And it names... (stops)

HARISH: Keep reading.

ARJUN: "Materials being excavated and transported via Gokhale Bricks. Route established from Babhul through back roads. Revenue officer Bendre certifying false boundaries. Estimated encroachment: 12 hectares."

HARISH: Twelve hectares of protected talbed turned into brick material. For years. And my daughter found the proof.

ARJUN: This is signed by Nimkar but never filed.

HARISH: Because Nimkar died before he could file it. Snakebite. (bitter) And anyone who found this paper after him also died. My children. That woman who was Nimkar's wife. Maybe others we don't even know about.

ARJUN: Why didn't you bring this forward when you found it?

HARISH: (laughs hollow) Bring to whom? Police? They called it suicide. Sarpanch? He plays cards with the kiln people. Revenue office? They were taking bribes. I am one man. One broken man with a paper. Who would believe me?

ARJUN: I'm here now.

HARISH: (nods) You are different. CID from Pune. No connections here. Maybe you can do what I cannot. Or maybe they will kill you too. But at least... at least now someone knows. Someone can try.

ARJUN: This report mentions "expanding operations." What does that mean?

HARISH: (shrugs) I don't know all the details. But I talked to people. Quietly. Over years. The talbed mining was phase one. Making money. Then they got bigger ideas. Using the kiln fires for... other burning. Things that shouldn't be burned. Waste from hospitals. From factories. All goes into the fire. All becomes ash. All disappears.

ARJUN: Your children saw this?

HARISH: My children saw paper only. The report. They were asking questions about it. I think... I think the newer murders, the More children, they saw the burning itself. Different evidence. Same killers.

ARJUN: The name on this transport approval. Madhav Gokhale. He was young back then. Not even running the operation.

HARISH: (nods) That's what makes it worse. He was already killing to protect the business even before his brother made him partner. This is not man who became bad. This is man who was always bad. Always willing to do what must be done.

ARJUN: I need to keep these papers.

HARISH: Take them. Take everything. (grabs Arjun's arm) Just promise me. Promise you will finish this. My children cannot rest until someone speaks their names in a court. Until someone says they were murdered. Not cursed. Not suicide. Murdered.

INTERVIEW #32

Person: Teacher Shaila Jore (Return Interview) **Age:** 54 **Role:** School teacher, historian - deeper conversation **Location:** Her home, after school hours
Interviewer: Leena **Phase:** 3

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Shaila sits in her study, surrounded by books and papers. She's been expecting this conversation. On her desk is a notebook filled with handwritten observations.

SHAILA: I've been keeping records. Since you came the first time. Writing down everything I remember. Everything I should have said years ago.

LEENA: May I see?

SHAILA: (hands over notebook) It's not organized. Just... thoughts. Observations. Things I noticed but didn't connect.

LEENA: (reading) You've listed all the children who died. With dates. And... activities before their deaths.

SHAILA: The pattern, Leena. It took me years to see it. Every child who died was... curious. Asking questions. Looking for things. Not just playing by the lake - that's what the curse story says - but actively investigating something.

LEENA: The twins? Ira and Asha? They were only eight.

SHAILA: (nods) Too young to investigate consciously. But their mother... Kalyani... she was asking things. Going to places. The children followed her sometimes. Maybe they saw something they shouldn't have seen.

LEENA: What was Kalyani investigating?

SHAILA: Not investigating exactly. But... questioning. Her position. Her children's position. She came to me once, asking about inheritance rights. About what happens if a father dies without a will. About whether children have claims even if parents are not married legally.

LEENA: She asked you about inheritance?

SHAILA: I teach some law for senior students. She knew I had the books. (pause) I didn't think much of it then. Thought maybe she was worried about her husband's kiln job, some benefit question. But now...

LEENA: Now you think it was about someone else's inheritance.

SHAILA: The timing, Leena. Three weeks after she asked me those questions, her children were dead. And she stopped speaking. Completely. For years. As if... as if whatever she was asking about got answered in the worst possible way.

LEENA: What about the Karande children? Neelam and Omkar?

SHAILA: (voice sad) My best students. So bright. So determined. Neelam especially. She wanted to be journalist. Said she wanted to expose corruption. (bitter smile) She was twelve years old and she wanted to expose corruption.

LEENA: And she found something to expose?

SHAILA: They found papers. In the old survey office. I told you before - they were excited about old documents. But I didn't tell you... (hesitates)

LEENA: What?

SHAILA: They came to me. The day before they died. With questions. About how to report talbed encroachment. Who to tell. Whether police could be trusted. I said... (voice breaks) ...I said be careful, don't get involved in adult matters. I said give me the papers and I'll look into it.

LEENA: Did they give you the papers?

SHAILA: (shakes head) Neelam said no. Said she didn't trust anyone fully. Said she would make copies and hide them in case something happened. (tears fall) She knew. At twelve years old, she knew something might happen. And I didn't take her seriously. I thought it was child imagination.

LEENA: The third timeline. Gauri and Aarav More. Did they come to you?

SHAILA: Not with papers. But Gauri asked something strange, few days before. Asked what medical waste is. Asked why hospitals burn things. Said she saw fires at night near the lake and they smelled wrong. I said ask your parents, it's probably nothing.

LEENA: Every time children asked questions, they died within days.

SHAILA: (crying openly now) I know. I know. And I should have said something. After the second time - after my own students died - I should have understood. But I told myself it was coincidence. I told myself the curse was real. Because if the curse was real, then I wasn't... I wasn't responsible for...

LEENA: (puts hand on Shaila's) You're not responsible. The killers are responsible.

SHAILA: But I could have stopped it. If I had asked questions myself. If I had made reports. If I had believed the children instead of dismissing them.

LEENA: You can still help. You can tell me everything you know. Everyone who might have been involved.

SHAILA: (wipes eyes, steels herself) The kiln people. Madhav Gokhale. Something wrong there. And the Wada... the zamindar's house... Vasundhara-bai. She changed after the first twins died. Became colder. More controlling. As if... as if she was holding something down. Holding something inside.

INTERVIEW #33

Person: Kalyani **Age:** 40 **Role:** Mother of T1 victims (Ira and Asha) **Location:** Her hut in Vasti settlement **Interviewer:** Leena **Phase:** 3

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Kalyani's home is bare. She sits in shadow, wrapped in a white sari. She hasn't spoken to investigators before - this is her first interview in fifteen years. Leena's mother Sarla made the arrangement.

LEENA: Thank you for seeing me. I know you don't talk to people about...

KALYANI: (voice rough from disuse) Your mother said you are different. Said you want truth, not gossip. I'm tired of carrying alone. Maybe it's time.

LEENA: Tell me about Ira and Asha.

KALYANI: (small smile) They were good children. Beautiful. Smart. Too smart maybe. They noticed things. They asked things. Even at eight, they asked.

LEENA: What did they ask?

KALYANI: Why we lived in Vasti but got money from Wada. Why Vasundhara-bai looked at them strange - sometimes with softness, sometimes with hate. Why they had light skin when Gopal and I are dark. (pause) Children notice. They just don't know what they're noticing.

LEENA: I need to ask directly. Were they Gopal's children?

KALYANI: (long silence) No.

LEENA: Whose?

KALYANI: Gadkari Saheb's. The zamindar's. (voice flat) I was eighteen. Working in Wada kitchen. He was... powerful. Kind at first. Then not kind. Then I was pregnant. He gave money. Made Gopal marry me - Gopal owed debts to Wada, had no choice. Everyone thought it was arranged marriage. Quick. Normal.

LEENA: Gopal knew?

KALYANI: From beginning. He never touched me. Not once. He was kind man. Raised them as his own even knowing. But he drank. From guilt maybe. From shame. He's dead now. Liver failed five years ago.

LEENA: Did Vasundhara-bai know?

KALYANI: (bitter laugh) She knew everything. She was the one who came to Vasti that night. Before wedding was even planned. She came to my mother's hut and she said... (voice hardens) ...she said "I know what you are. I know what's in your belly. You will marry who I say. You will take money and stay silent. If you ever make claim on my husband's name, I will destroy you."

LEENA: And the children? She knew they were...

KALYANI: His heirs. Real heirs. The son she had was born weak, sickly. He lives in Bombay now, wants nothing to do with village. But my children... they were healthy. Strong. Beautiful. And as they grew, they looked more and more like him. Everyone could see. Vasundhara could see most of all.

LEENA: You think she killed them?

KALYANI: (tears fall silently) I know she did. Not with her own hands. She wouldn't dirty herself. But she gave the order. To Raghoba. Her dog. Her shadow. He does what she says. Has always done.

LEENA: You saw something? Heard something?

KALYANI: That night. The night my children died. I was sick - someone gave me tea that made me sleep, I now think it was drugged - but I woke briefly. Heard voices outside. One was Raghoba. Saying "It's done. Both of them. It's done." I thought I was dreaming. Next morning my children were dead in the lake.

LEENA: Why didn't you tell anyone?

KALYANI: Tell whom? Against the zamindar's wife? With no proof? I went to constable. Tried to say something. Vasundhara was there before me. She told him I was mad with grief. That I was making up stories. He believed her. She is Wada. I am Vasti. Who believes Vasti over Wada?

LEENA: There may have been a deed. A trust document naming your children.

KALYANI: (looks up sharply) How do you know about that?

LEENA: The talathi found records. A mutation that was later cancelled.

KALYANI: Gadkari Saheb made it. In guilt. He put their names on land. Small piece, not much, but legal. Official. Proof that he acknowledged them. I didn't know until after they died. A man came - lawyer from Satara - saying the deed was cancelled because beneficiaries were deceased. That's when I understood. They didn't just die. They were killed so that paper would mean nothing.

LEENA: Do you still have any copy?

KALYANI: (shakes head) Everything was taken. The night after cremation, someone came to my hut. Searched everything. I pretended to sleep. I heard them. They took what little I had. Even the small gold studs my daughters wore. Even that.

INTERVIEW #34

Person: Sarla Shirke (Return Interview) **Age:** 50 **Role:** Leena's mother, knew Kalyani since childhood **Location:** Leena's family home, Vasti **Interviewer:** Leena
Phase: 3

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Sarla sits in her kitchen, hands busy making rotis. Leena has come back with questions she should have asked years ago. Mother and daughter are finally having the conversation they've avoided.

LEENA: Aai, you've known about Kalyani this whole time. You've protected Aarav. You've hidden things. Why?

SARLA: (kneading dough) Because knowing and proving are different things. Because powerful people don't go to jail - poor people who accuse them do.

LEENA: Tell me everything. From the beginning.

SARLA: (sighs) Kalyani was my friend. Before marriage, after marriage. We worked at Wada together. We saw things. (pause) I saw how Gadkari Saheb looked at her. How he would send her on small errands, separate from others. I tried to warn her. But she was young. Scared. Couldn't say no.

LEENA: You knew about the affair while it was happening?

SARLA: Everyone knew. Everyone pretended not to know. That's how it works. The rich do what they want. The poor pretend it's not happening. Until it becomes impossible to pretend.

LEENA: The pregnancy.

SARLA: Twins. Can you imagine? Not one baby to hide but two. Vasundhara... (shakes head) ...I saw her face when she found out. Not anger. Something colder. Calculation. Like she was solving a problem in her head.

LEENA: She planned the murders then? From when they were born?

SARLA: Not then. Then she just wanted them gone. Out of sight. The marriage to Gopal was her solution. Move them to Vasti. Pay for silence. Keep them invisible. But children grow. And they started looking too much like their father. And Gadkari Saheb... he started visiting Vasti. Playing with them. Bringing gifts. Making it obvious.

LEENA: The trust deed.

SARLA: That's what changed everything. When Kalyani told me about it - that Gadkari Saheb had put their names on land - I told her burn it. Destroy the paper. Make it like it never existed. She said no. Said it was proof her children were acknowledged. Said she would never use it but she wanted them to know someday. She thought it was gift. It was death sentence.

LEENA: How did Vasundhara find out about the deed?

SARLA: (hands stop) I told her.

LEENA: You what?

SARLA: (looks at daughter with old pain) Not deliberately. She came to me. Very friendly. Asking about Kalyani's health, her children's needs. Like she was concerned. I was stupid. I mentioned that at least they had some security now, that Gadkari Saheb had done right thing. The look on her face... (shudders) ...that look haunted me for years.

LEENA: You didn't know what she would do.

SARLA: I knew she would do something. I didn't know she would... (voice breaks) Two weeks later those babies were floating in the lake. And I knew. I knew my words had killed them.

LEENA: That's why you've been protecting Aarav. Guilt.

SARLA: Guilt and fear. What happened to those twins could happen to anyone who threatens her. Aarav is witness. Survivor. He sees things in dreams. Talks about "the men" who came. If Vasundhara or whoever killed the More children knew he was remembering...

LEENA: The More children were killed by different people. For different reason.

SARLA: (confused) What do you mean?

LEENA: The kiln. Madhav Gokhale. Medical waste burning. Gauri saw something. That's why she died. It's not connected to Vasundhara at all.

SARLA: (stares) Two killers? Two different...?

LEENA: The curse legend. Vasundhara created it to cover her crime. But then others used the same cover. Madhav realized he could kill witnesses and blame the ghost. That's why there were three incidents. Two different conspiracies using the same story.

SARLA: (sits down heavily) All these years I thought... I thought it was all the Wada. All Vasundhara. But the kiln...

LEENA: The kiln is separate. You didn't cause those deaths. You only... (stops herself)

SARLA: I only caused the first one. Only two children. Only my friend's babies. (crying) Only that.

INTERVIEW #35

Person: Retired Survey Officer Bendre **Age:** 68 **Role:** Former revenue office survey officer who approved illegal land conversions **Location:** His house in Karad town (retired there) **Interviewer:** Arjun **Phase:** 3

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Bendre lives in a comfortable house - too comfortable for a retired government clerk. He's nervous when he sees CID identification. He tries to close the door but Arjun has already stepped inside.

BENDRE: This is private property. You can't just...

ARJUN: I can arrest you for obstructing investigation. Or we can talk. Your choice.

BENDRE: (reluctantly opens door wider) What investigation? I'm retired. Ten years now. I don't know anything about anything.

ARJUN: Raghav Nimkar. You knew him.

BENDRE: (face pales) Nimkar. Yes. He worked under me. Died of snakebite. Sad thing.

ARJUN: I have his survey report. The one he was about to file before he died.

BENDRE: (sits down heavily) Report. What report?

ARJUN: The one documenting twelve hectares of protected talbed being excavated illegally. The one naming you as the officer who certified false boundaries.

BENDRE: (sweating) Where did you... that report was never... it was supposed to be destroyed.

ARJUN: It wasn't. Children found it. Children who are now dead. Just like Nimkar. Just like his wife.

BENDRE: (head in hands) I told them. I told them it would come out eventually. You can't bury truth forever. But they didn't listen. They said I was worrying about nothing.

ARJUN: Who said? Who told you not to worry?

BENDRE: (looks up, hollow) Madhav. Madhav Gokhale. And his contact at the taluka level. Some revenue officer. I never met him directly. Everything went through Madhav.

ARJUN: How much did they pay you?

BENDRE: (long pause) First time, fifty thousand. That was twelve years ago. I was in debt. Daughter's wedding. Medical bills for wife. I told myself it was one time. Just once. (bitter laugh) It's never one time.

ARJUN: And after?

BENDRE: Monthly. Five thousand. Sometimes ten. For looking the other way. For signing papers. For making problems disappear. When Nimkar started asking questions, they paid me extra to transfer him to different area. But he wouldn't transfer. Said he was close to something big.

ARJUN: Did you know they would kill him?

BENDRE: (whispers) No. I thought they would just... transfer him forcibly. Or threaten him. When I heard snakebite, I knew. I knew it wasn't snake. But what could I do? I was already in too deep. If I talked, I would go to jail. And they would... they would do to me what they did to him.

ARJUN: His wife came to you. After he died.

BENDRE: (nods) Asking about his work. Asking about what he found. I told her I didn't know. I told her to go home. To forget. She didn't listen. She kept asking people. Then she was dead too.

ARJUN: And the children? Eight years ago? The Karande children who found the report?

BENDRE: (breaks down crying) I didn't know until after. Madhav came to me. Said there was a situation. Said some children had old papers. Said it was handled. I asked what "handled" meant. He just smiled. That smile... (shudders) ...I see it in nightmares.

ARJUN: You're confessing to bribery, obstruction, and accessory to multiple murders.

BENDRE: (looks at Arjun directly) I am dying. Doctor says six months, maybe less. Liver. Same as everyone who drinks away their guilt. I have nothing left to protect. Take my statement. Record everything. Let it be known that I was a coward and a criminal. But also let it be known who the real killer is. Madhav Gokhale. He is the one. He is the center of everything.

ARJUN: What about the recent operations? The waste burning?

BENDRE: I don't know details. I've been retired. But I heard rumors. The brick business wasn't enough. They found new... revenue streams. Medical waste. Industrial waste. Things that need to disappear. The kiln fires burn hot enough. The lake is convenient for cooling ash. (pause) Whatever those children saw four months ago, it was this. The new operation. Bigger now. More dangerous.

INTERVIEW #36

Person: Ajit Sawant **Age:** 45 **Role:** Earthmover contractor, handles talbed excavation **Location:** His equipment yard, Babhul edge **Interviewer:** Arjun **Phase:** 3

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Ajit stands by his JCB, cleaning grease from his hands. He's a practical man - focused on work, uncomfortable with questions. His yard has three old earthmovers and a storage shed.

AJIT: CID. (spits to the side) What now?

ARJUN: The talbed excavation in the protected area. Your machines. Your drivers.

AJIT: (shrugs) I rent machines. Where clients use them is their business. I don't ask questions.

ARJUN: Convenient. So when Madhav Gokhale rents your JCB for illegal mining, you just don't notice?

AJIT: (stiffens) I never said Madhav's name. You said it.

ARJUN: I have his survey report. Your equipment was used. For years.

AJIT: (walks to water tap, washes hands slowly) What do you want? Money? Everyone wants money. Tell me number and go.

ARJUN: I want truth. About the mining. About what you saw.

AJIT: (dries hands, faces Arjun) Truth is expensive here. People who deal in truth end up floating in the lake. Ask the children. Oh wait - you can't. They're dead.

ARJUN: You knew the children were killed?

AJIT: I knew they saw things. Everyone who sees things in this village ends up dead or silent. I chose silent. I'm still breathing.

ARJUN: What did you see?

AJIT: (lights bidi, smokes) I saw nothing. I was paid to see nothing. Just like I'm being paid now. Just like everyone is paid.

ARJUN: But the mining happened. Your machines worked that land.

AJIT: (nods slowly) Years ago. Twelve, thirteen years. Protected talbed, yes. Good earth underneath. Worth money. Madhav had the plan. His brother Devrao was against it - too much risk, he said. But Madhav went ahead anyway. Used my machines. Paid well. I didn't ask what he was doing with the material.

ARJUN: It went to the kiln.

AJIT: It went somewhere. Mixed with other materials. Became bricks. Good bricks. Strong bricks. Built half the new buildings in Satara district. (bitter smile) Government buildings too. Courts. Police stations. Built with stolen earth.

ARJUN: And when Raghav Nimkar started investigating?

AJIT: (face hardens) I told Madhav to pay him off. Just like he paid everyone else. But Madhav said some people can't be bought. Said some people are problems that need different solutions.

ARJUN: You knew Nimkar would be killed?

AJIT: I didn't KNOW. I suspected. When he died of "snakebite" I wasn't surprised. When his wife died asking questions, I wasn't surprised. I stopped being surprised long ago.

ARJUN: The children. Did you participate in their deaths?

AJIT: (slams hand on JCB) I dig dirt. That's what I do. I don't kill children. I have children myself. (voice drops) But I know who does. And I know why. And I've kept silent because speaking is dying in this place.

ARJUN: You're speaking now.

AJIT: Because you're CID. Because maybe you can actually do something. Or maybe you'll end up in the lake too. Either way, I'm tired of carrying this.

ARJUN: The waste burning. What do you know?

AJIT: Newer operation. Last few years. I'm not involved - that's Madhav's thing. But I've smelled it. Everyone has. Chemical smell at night. Smoke that makes eyes water. They burn things at the old kiln pit near the lake. Things that shouldn't be burned anywhere.

ARJUN: Medical waste.

AJIT: Maybe. I don't ask. But trucks come from Sangli direction. Hospital trucks. Sometimes with covered loads. They don't go to Gokhale kiln - too visible. They go to the old pit directly. Burn there. Cool ash in lake. Disappears by morning.

ARJUN: The More children saw this?

AJIT: (nods) Wrong place, wrong time. Playing near the lake when trucks came. Gauri was old enough to understand. She told her father. Father told wrong person. (pause) Two days later, both children at the lake. Only boy came back. And now you're here asking questions.

INTERVIEW #37

Person: Ravindra **Age:** 34 **Role:** Sand runner (illegal sand mining), red herring suspect **Location:** River edge, where sand operations happen **Interviewer:** Leena **Phase:** 3

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Ravindra is muscular, weathered by outdoor work. He's loading sand onto a truck when Leena approaches. He stops, wary - he's used to police attention but not doctors.

RAVINDRA: Doctor-bai? You're not here for sand license.

LEENA: No. I'm here about the children who died.

RAVINDRA: (laughs humorless) And you came to the sand thief. Everyone always comes to the sand thief. When something is stolen - ask Ravindra. When someone dies - ask Ravindra. I'm everyone's favorite suspect.

LEENA: Were you involved?

RAVINDRA: (drops shovel) No. I was not involved. I have stolen sand, yes. I have fought with revenue officers, yes. I have done illegal things, yes. But I have never hurt a child. Never.

LEENA: But you knew Raghav Nimkar. People say you threatened him.

RAVINDRA: (spits) Nimkar was honest man. Too honest. He caught me one night with a truckload. We shouted at each other. I said things I shouldn't have said. Angry things. But shout is not kill. Fight is not murder. Week later he was dead. Everyone looked at me. "Ravindra threatened him, Ravindra killed him."

LEENA: But you didn't?

RAVINDRA: Why would I kill over one truck of sand? I could bribe my way out. Everyone bribes. That's how it works. Kill a government officer over sand? That brings investigation, attention. I'm criminal but I'm not stupid.

LEENA: So who killed him?

RAVINDRA: (looks around, lowers voice) Nimkar wasn't investigating sand. He found bigger things. The talbed. The encroachment. Things that make my sand business look like child's game. Kiln people. That's who benefited from his death. Not me.

LEENA: You know this for certain?

RAVINDRA: I know because Madhav came to me after Nimkar died. Friendly visit. Said it was unfortunate about the officer. Said he hoped I had good alibi. Said if police asked questions, maybe I should say I was at home that night. He would provide witnesses.

LEENA: Madhav Gokhale offered you a fake alibi?

RAVINDRA: For nothing. Free. Very generous, no? Except what he really meant was: we know you look guilty, we're giving you escape, but now you owe us.

LEENA: Did you take it?

RAVINDRA: No. I had real alibi - I was in Kolhapur that night for sand buyer meeting. Police checked. They had to let me go. But Madhav's offer... that told me everything. He was cleaning up. Making sure attention stayed on me, not on him.

LEENA: What about the lake? The burning at night?

RAVINDRA: (face darkens) I stay away from lake. That place is wrong now. Not ghosts - I don't believe in ghosts - but something else. Fires that aren't cooking fires. Trucks that aren't brick trucks. Men who aren't kiln workers.

LEENA: Have you seen Madhav there?

RAVINDRA: Once. Late night. I was coming back from river. Saw his jeep on the back road. Not going to kiln. Going toward lake. With covered truck following. I didn't stop to ask questions.

LEENA: The More children. Did you know them?

RAVINDRA: The girl used to bring water to my workers sometimes. Friendly child. Curious. Too curious. She asked once what we were doing. I told her - taking sand that belongs to no one. She said everything belongs to someone. Smart answer for a twelve-year-old. (pause) Week after that, she was dead.

LEENA: Any idea why?

RAVINDRA: (meets her eyes) Because she saw something. Same reason the other children died. This place kills the curious. The ones who ask. The ones who see. You're asking questions now, doctor-bai. Be careful who hears.

INTERVIEW #38

Person: Lata Kore **Age:** 30 **Role:** Prakash Kore's wife **Location:** Kore house, Bhatti area **Interviewer:** Leena **Phase:** 3

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Lata is alone when Leena visits. Her husband Prakash is at the kiln. She's a thin woman with nervous eyes, constantly looking toward the door. She speaks quickly, as if afraid of being caught.

LATA: He's not here. Prakash is at work.

LEENA: I wanted to speak with you actually. About your husband's... state of mind.

LATA: (wraps sari tighter) What do you mean?

LEENA: He works closely with Madhav Gokhale. Night shifts. Transport. I'm wondering if he's been... different lately.

LATA: (long pause) He doesn't sleep.

LEENA: Insomnia?

LATA: Not natural. It's like... he's afraid to sleep. He stays awake as long as he can. When he finally sleeps, he wakes up shouting. Sweating. Won't tell me what he dreams.

LEENA: Has he said anything about his work? About what he does at night?

LATA: He doesn't talk about work. Ever. When we were first married, he would tell me everything. What happened at kiln, who said what, small things. Now... nothing. Just silence and staring.

LEENA: When did this change?

LATA: (thinks) Four months ago. After those children died. The More children. He came home that night very late. His clothes were wet. I asked why. He said nothing. Just looked at me with... with empty eyes. Like something inside him had died.

LEENA: Wet clothes?

LATA: From the lake. That's what I thought. But why would he be at the lake in the middle of the night? (voice drops to whisper) I asked him. Once. He grabbed my wrist so hard it left bruise. Said never ask again. Said some things cannot be spoken. Said if I love our son, I will never ask again.

LEENA: Did he threaten you?

LATA: Not threaten. Warn. Like he was protecting me from something. From knowing. (tears form) I think... I think my husband did something terrible. And he can't live with it. But he can't speak it either.

LEENA: What do you think he did?

LATA: (shakes head frantically) I don't know. I don't want to know. He is father of my child. He provides. He doesn't drink like other men. He doesn't beat me. But there is something eating him. From inside. Something dark.

LEENA: Does he still work late nights? At the lake?

LATA: Sometimes. When Madhav-saheb calls. Prakash goes immediately. No questions. It's like... like Madhav has control over him. Power. Prakash is afraid of him. More afraid than of anything else.

LEENA: Has Madhav ever come here? To your house?

LATA: (nods) Once. After that night. After the children. He came to talk to Prakash privately. I listened through door. I heard... (stops)

LEENA: What did you hear?

LATA: Madhav said: "You did what was necessary. You saved us all. Now stop acting like a widow. What's done is done." And Prakash said... he said: "They were children. They were just children." And Madhav laughed. Laughed and said: "Children who would have destroyed everything. Now they're gone. Be grateful."

LEENA: That's very important. Would you testify to this?

LATA: (panic in eyes) Testify? Against Madhav? He would kill us. Kill our son. No. No, I can't. I shouldn't have said anything. Please. Please don't tell anyone I spoke to you.

LEENA: I won't use your name unless I have to. But what you've told me could save other children.

LATA: (crying) I know. I know. But I have to protect my own child first. That's what mothers do. We protect our own even if... even if others suffer.

INTERVIEW #39

Person: Sunita Dhere **Age:** 50 **Role:** Food carrier at kiln **Location:** Outside kiln worker area, Bhatti **Interviewer:** Leena **Phase:** 3

UNLOCK CONDITION

After connecting Aarav's testimony (chemical smell) to kiln operations

PRE-INTERVIEW NOTES

Leena approaches Sunita carefully. Sunita is a poor woman who depends on kiln work. She brings food to workers twice daily and has done so for twenty years. She sees and hears things but has never spoken because she fears losing her livelihood. Leena, being from Vasti herself, might be trusted.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

LEENA: Sunita-mavshi, do you remember me? I am Sarla's daughter. From Vasti.

SUNITA: (surprised) Sarla's girl? The one who became doctor?

LEENA: Yes, mavshi.

SUNITA: (softens) I remember you. Small thing, running around. Now look at you. Doctor-bai.

LEENA: Mavshi, I need to ask you some things. About the kiln.

SUNITA: (immediately tenses) I am poor woman. I don't make trouble. I do my work and go home.

LEENA: I am not here to make trouble for you. I am trying to find truth about the children who died.

SUNITA: (looks around nervously) What children? The curse took them. Everyone knows.

LEENA: Mavshi, you bring food to workers. Morning and evening. For twenty years. You see things. You hear things.

SUNITA: (quickly) I see nothing. I hear nothing. I am old woman. Eyes are weak. Ears are weak.

LEENA: Gauri More. The girl who died four months ago. You knew her?

SUNITA: (expression cracks) Gauri... yes. I knew her. Sweet child. She would smile at me when I passed her house. Sometimes she would wave. Such a good girl.

LEENA: She died, mavshi. Someone killed her. Not a ghost. A person.

SUNITA: (whispers) Don't say such things. Madhav-saheb will...

LEENA: Madhav-saheb will what?

SUNITA: (catches herself) Nothing. I said nothing.

LEENA: Mavshi, I am from Vasti. Like you. I know what it is to be scared of powerful people. But a child is dead. A good child who smiled at you. Don't you want justice for her?

SUNITA: (long pause, internal struggle visible) Justice? What is justice for people like us? The powerful do what they want. We suffer and stay quiet.

LEENA: If you know something, tell me. I promise no one will know it came from you.

SUNITA: (looks around again, then leans closer) You promise? On your mother's head?

LEENA: On my mother's head.

SUNITA: (whispers) I heard them talking. Madhav-saheb and Prakash. Few days after the children died. Late evening. I was leaving with empty vessels. They were behind the storage shed. They didn't see me.

LEENA: What did they say?

SUNITA: Madhav-saheb was angry. Very angry. I never saw him like that. He was saying... he was saying "those children saw us." Over and over. "Those children saw us."

LEENA: And Prakash?

SUNITA: Prakash said "it is done now, forget it." He said "what is done cannot be undone." Then Madhav-saheb said... (hesitates)

LEENA: Tell me.

SUNITA: He said "the boy is still alive." And Prakash said "he is child, who will believe him? He thinks he saw ghosts. Let him think that."

LEENA: Anything else?

SUNITA: Then they laughed. Both of them. It was not good laugh. It was... cold. Like they were laughing at something secret. I ran away after that. I was too scared to hear more.

LEENA: Sunita-mavshi, did you ever see Madhav-saheb or Prakash going toward the lake? At night?

SUNITA: (nods slowly) Many times. With the truck. After dark. I thought... I thought they were burning waste. The Rakhe site is other direction, but I thought maybe they have other place. I never asked. Not my business.

LEENA: How many times?

SUNITA: Many. Once, twice a month maybe. For years. Always at night. Always same truck.

LEENA: Did anyone else see this?

SUNITA: Dinesh maybe. The night watchman. But he is scared man. More scared than me. He thinks the lights he sees are ghosts. Easier to believe in ghosts than to see what is really happening.

LEENA: Mavshi, this is very important. You may have to tell this to police.

SUNITA: (terrified) No! No police! Madhav-saheb will know. He will throw me out. My children will starve. Please, you promised!

LEENA: I promised no one will know it came from you. I will keep that promise. But this truth must come out somehow.

SUNITA: (crying quietly) I should have said something before. Years ago. Maybe those children would be alive. But I was scared. I am still scared. What kind of person stays quiet when children die?

LEENA: A person who is trying to survive. Don't blame yourself, mavshi. Blame the men who did this.

INTERVIEW #40

Person: Dr. Pande **Age:** 58 **Role:** Previous PHC doctor, left the village five years ago **Location:** His current clinic, Satara city **Interviewer:** Leena **Phase:** 3

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Dr. Pande's clinic in Satara is busy. He's a careful man with tired eyes. When Leena introduces herself, he goes pale. He takes her to a private room, closes the door.

DR. PANDE: The new PHC doctor. I heard they finally sent someone. After five years of the position being empty. (pause) I wondered when someone would come asking.

LEENA: You left suddenly. In the middle of your posting.

DR. PANDE: I left to stay alive. That's the honest truth. After what I saw, after what I was asked to do, staying would have meant either becoming complicit or becoming a victim.

LEENA: What did you see?

DR. PANDE: (sits heavily) The children. The ones who drowned. I examined two of them. The Karande children, eight years ago. I was new then. Idealistic. I did a proper examination even though I was told just to sign the death certificate.

LEENA: What did you find?

DR. PANDE: Things that don't match drowning. The girl - Neelam - had bruising on her upper arms. Finger marks. Someone held her down. The boy had abrasions on his palms. Like he tried to climb out of something. Defensive marks on his forearms.

LEENA: This wasn't in the official report.

DR. PANDE: (bitter laugh) I wrote my findings. Submitted them to constable. Next morning, my report was gone. Replaced with a simpler one. "Death by drowning, no signs of violence, consistent with suicide." My signature was forged.

LEENA: You didn't protest?

DR. PANDE: I tried. I went to the Sub-Inspector. He took me aside. Said I was young and didn't understand how things work. Said if I made trouble, I would be transferred somewhere unpleasant. Or worse. He mentioned a doctor in the next district who had "fallen" from a building. Heart attack, they said. While falling.

LEENA: So you stayed silent.

DR. PANDE: For three more years. I stayed silent and I watched. The village was strange. At night, trucks would pass toward the lake. Smoke would rise. Villagers would complain of headaches, eye problems, breathing issues. But no one would tell me what they saw.

LEENA: The waste burning?

DR. PANDE: I didn't know what it was then. I thought maybe agricultural burning. Crop waste. But the symptoms didn't match. I started keeping notes. Dates when trucks came. Dates when patients came with chemical exposure symptoms. The correlation was... disturbing.

LEENA: Do you still have these notes?

DR. PANDE: (hesitates, then opens drawer, pulls out old notebook) I kept copies. For years I told myself I would send them somewhere. Some newspaper. Some authority. But I never did. Fear keeps you paralyzed.

LEENA: (takes notebook) This is... this is extensive.

DR. PANDE: Three years of observations. Truck movements. Patient symptoms. Strange deaths that were ruled natural. (points to entry) Here - an old man who died of "respiratory failure." He had been healthy for years. Three days before, he told his daughter he saw men burning something at the lake. Mentioned it to people. Then - respiratory failure.

LEENA: You think he was killed?

DR. PANDE: I think many people were killed who were officially not murdered. The children are just the most obvious cases. But how many old people “died in sleep”? How many accidents? How many heart attacks?

LEENA: When did you finally leave?

DR. PANDE: When they came for me. Not to kill - just to warn. Two men at night. They didn’t identify themselves but I recognized one. Worked at the kiln. They said I should stop keeping notes. Said I should sign whatever papers came to me without asking questions. Said if I didn’t, my wife and children would have accidents.

LEENA: What did you do?

DR. PANDE: I applied for transfer. It was approved suspiciously fast. Within two weeks I was in Satara. The posting in your village stayed empty for five years. No one wanted it. No one wanted to be the doctor who asks questions in a place where questions mean death.

LEENA: You’re telling me now. Why?

DR. PANDE: Because you came looking. Because you’re young like I was. And because... (pulls out newspaper clipping) ...I saw this. The More children. Four months ago. Another drowning. Another suicide ruling. And I knew - I knew it hadn’t stopped. It was still happening. And I had done nothing.

LEENA: The notebook. The observations. Can I take these?

DR. PANDE: (pushes them toward her) Take everything. Make copies. Send them wherever you need to send them. I should have done this years ago. Maybe those More children would still be alive if I had. But I was afraid. I’m still afraid. But I’m more tired of being afraid than I am of the consequences.

INTERVIEW #41

Person: Gadkari Saheb **Age:** 72 **Role:** Zamindar, head of Gadkari Wada **Location:** Wada main hall **Interviewer:** Arjun **Phase:** 3

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

The old zamindar sits in a large wooden chair, wrapped in shawl despite the heat. His eyes are distant. Leena has treated him for heart condition - he knows he doesn’t have long. Vasundhara hovers near the door, but Arjun requests she leave. She does, reluctantly.

GADKARI SAHEB: She doesn’t like you. My wife. Says you ask too many questions.

ARJUN: Does that concern you?

GADKARI SAHEB: (weak smile) At my age, very little concerns me. I have months perhaps. What does it matter who asks questions?

ARJUN: I need to ask about the twins. Ira and Asha. From fifteen years ago.

GADKARI SAHEB: (face clouds) Those children. (long silence) What do you know?

ARJUN: I know Kalyani worked here. I know you... were close to her. I know the children looked like you.

GADKARI SAHEB: (tears form) They were mine. (voice breaks) My daughters. My blood. My only healthy children. The one I have with Vasundhara... he was sickly from birth. Never wanted the Wada. Left for Bombay. Never comes. But those twins... they were strong. Beautiful. Everything I wanted in heirs.

ARJUN: You acknowledged them? Legally?

GADKARI SAHEB: I tried. (coughs) I made a trust. Put land in their names. Not much - small parcel near the orchard - but enough to give them right. To acknowledge them as mine even if I couldn't do it publicly.

ARJUN: Vasundhara found out.

GADKARI SAHEB: (nods slowly) She has spies everywhere. Even among people I trust. Someone told her about the deed. About the land. About... about my visits to see the children.

ARJUN: What did she do?

GADKARI SAHEB: (looks at door, lowers voice) We fought. The night before the puja. Terrible fight. She called me names. Called Kalyani names. Said I had shamed the family. Said those bastard children would never touch Gadkari property. I said they were my children. My decision. She went quiet then. Very quiet. That's when she's most dangerous - when she's quiet.

ARJUN: And the next night, the children were dead.

GADKARI SAHEB: (weeping now) I didn't know. I swear I didn't know she would... I thought she would make legal trouble. Challenge the trust. Not... not murder. They were children. Eight years old. My children.

ARJUN: Did you confront her? After?

GADKARI SAHEB: (shakes head) I was afraid. She is... she is capable of things I cannot imagine. And I had no proof. Just suspicion. Just the timing. Just the way she looked at me when the news came - satisfied. Like a problem had been solved.

ARJUN: You've lived with her for fifteen years knowing this.

GADKARI SAHEB: I have lived in prison. This Wada is my prison. She is my jailer. I am old, sick, weak. What can I do? Go to police? Say I suspect my wife of killing my illegitimate children? They would laugh. Or worse.

ARJUN: There's been other deaths too. At that lake. Other children.

GADKARI SAHEB: (confused) Other children? But those are... the curse. The twins' ghosts...

ARJUN: There are no ghosts. There are only murderers using the story your wife created.

GADKARI SAHEB: (stares) What are you saying?

ARJUN: The curse narrative. It was invented to cover up what happened to your daughters. And now other people - the kiln people - are using that same cover to hide their own crimes. The legend your wife created has become a shield for multiple murderers.

GADKARI SAHEB: (horror dawning) All these years... all the children who died at that lake... they were murdered? Like my daughters?

ARJUN: The later ones, yes. By different people. But the original murder - your daughters - that started everything.

GADKARI SAHEB: (buries face in hands) I should have spoken. Years ago. I should have told someone. But I was weak. Selfish. Afraid. And now... now more children are dead because I kept silent.

ARJUN: It's not too late. You can testify. Against her. Tell the truth about what you know.

GADKARI SAHEB: (looks up, determination through tears) Yes. Yes, I will. Whatever time I have left, I will use it for truth. Write down what I say. Record it. Before she finds out you're here. Before she can stop me.

INTERVIEW #42

Person: Vasundhara **Age:** 65 **Role:** Zamindar's wife, T1 mastermind **Location:** Wada drawing room **Interviewer:** Arjun **Phase:** 3

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Vasundhara is a commanding presence even in old age. She sits straight, hands folded, watching Arjun with cold intelligence. She has refused to leave during the interview - this is her house, she says.

VASUNDHARA: You've been speaking to my husband. To the servants. To that woman in Vasti. Asking questions about ancient history.

ARJUN: I'm investigating child deaths. All of them.

VASUNDHARA: The deaths were ruled. Years ago. Suicide. Drowning. Tragic but closed.

ARJUN: The rulings were wrong. There's evidence now.

VASUNDHARA: (slight smile) Evidence. How interesting. What kind of evidence surfaces after fifteen years?

ARJUN: Testimony. Documents. And I should mention - I've spoken to your husband. He's prepared to make a statement.

VASUNDHARA: (face flickers, then composes) My husband is an old man. Confused. His mind wanders to guilt and fantasy.

ARJUN: His mind seemed clear when he described the fight you had. The night before the twins died. About the trust deed.

VASUNDHARA: (long pause) There are family matters that are not police business. Property disputes. Inheritance questions. Normal in any family.

ARJUN: Normal families don't resolve inheritance disputes by murdering children.

VASUNDHARA: (stands abruptly) You forget yourself. This is accusation without proof. I could have you removed from this investigation. I have connections. Friends in appropriate places.

ARJUN: Your connections are why this wasn't investigated properly the first time. But I'm from outside your network. CID Pune. Different chain of command.

VASUNDHARA: (sits slowly, recalculating) What do you want? Money? Everyone wants money.

ARJUN: I want truth.

VASUNDHARA: (laughs, cold) Truth. How naive. Truth is whatever people with power say it is. Those children drowned. That is truth. Anything else is gossip and speculation.

ARJUN: Raghoba. Where was he the night the twins died?

VASUNDHARA: (slight hesitation) At the Wada. Where he always is. Doing his duties.

ARJUN: His bed was empty that night. The cook remembers. The cook also remembers you crying and shouting. Unusual behavior for someone as... composed as you.

VASUNDHARA: Servants gossip. It means nothing.

ARJUN: Kalyani heard Raghoba that night. Outside her hut. Saying "It's done."

VASUNDHARA: (face hardens) That woman would say anything. She hates me. For taking in her bastard children's charity. For paying for their education. For being the one with the legal marriage while she was just...

ARJUN: Just what?

VASUNDHARA: (catches herself) Nothing. She was nothing.

ARJUN: The children weren't nothing. They were your husband's blood. Healthy. Strong. Unlike your own son.

VASUNDHARA: (sharp) Do not speak of my son.

ARJUN: Was that the fear? That he would never inherit because these children would make claims? That your position would be undermined?

VASUNDHARA: (stands again, walks to window) You are constructing fantasy. A story that sounds dramatic but proves nothing. Where is your evidence? A confused old man? A bitter mistress? A cook who overheard crying? This is not case. This is gossip.

ARJUN: What about the trust deed? The one that was cancelled because the beneficiaries "died"?

VASUNDHARA: (turns, face controlled) Land matters are handled by talathi. Cancellations happen when there are no living beneficiaries. Administrative procedure. Nothing more.

ARJUN: Very convenient timing. Your husband creates deed acknowledging illegitimate children. You find out. You fight. Two days later, children are dead. Deed is cancelled.

VASUNDHARA: Coincidence. Unfortunate. But coincidence.

ARJUN: I don't think so. And I don't think any court will think so either.

VASUNDHARA: (moves closer, voice low) You are young. You have career ahead of you. This investigation will lead nowhere. It will only create enemies. Powerful enemies. Think carefully about what you are doing.

ARJUN: Is that a threat?

VASUNDHARA: (smiles, cold) It's advice. From someone who has lived long enough to understand how the world works. Some things are better left buried. Like children in lakes. Like inconvenient truths. Like ambitious officers who ask too many questions.
