

COMMENTARY / POLITICS

## Two Faces of Terror

Yashwant Shinde's affidavit further proves the BJP's hypocrisy on terrorism

BHARAT BHUSHAN

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Narendra Modi, who was the chief minister of Gujarat at the time, speaks during an anti-terrorism rally at Delhi's Karol Bagh, on 19 September 2008. The failures of his government at the centre to extradite terror-accused from Pakistan make abundantly clear that terrorism remains a purely rhetorical issue for the BJP, useful to mobilise voters even as he lacks any real ability to take action.

VIRENDRA SINGH GOSAIN/HINDUSTAN TIMES/GETTY IMAGES

An affidavit submitted in late August to the sessions court in Maharashtra's Nanded district by Yashwant Shinde—a member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the former head of the Bajrang Dal in the state—is a watershed moment in the Bharatiya Janata Party's claimed record of combating terrorism. Shinde in his affidavit—as well




[worker-yashwant-shinde-interview-hindu-terrorism-rss-vhp-mohan-bhagwat](#))—claims that he, along with several others, was trained in making bombs and conducting blasts in the lead up to multiple national elections, including in 2004 and 2014. Shinde said that they were trained by members of the RSS and the Vishva Hindu Parishad. He also claims that these RSS and VHP members facilitated members of the Indian Army in training them in the use of modern weaponry. So far, the RSS has not conclusively denied Shinde's affiliation with it and neither the VHP nor the Indian Army have denied the contents of the affidavit. Shinde has also not been arrested or sued.

The affidavit includes names that have been frequently mentioned in the bevy of chargesheets related to a string of nine bombings, from Parbhani in 2003 to Malegaon in 2008, that killed more than one hundred and twenty people and injured more than four hundred. Others he named still maintain senior positions within the RSS or VHP. Among those who trained with Shinde were Himanshu Panse and Naresh Rajkondawar. The training was allegedly organised by Rakesh Dhawade and Milind Parande—the current secretary general of the VHP—and conducted by a mysterious figure called Ravi Dev.

Dhawade was later arrested for the 2008 Malegaon bombings, while Panse and Rajkondawar died in the Nanded blast of 2006. In a recent court hearing regarding Shinde's affidavit, the Central Bureau of Investigation, which had investigated and filed a closure report in the Nanded case, [refused \(https://caravanmagazine.in/crime/yashwant-shinde-cbi-affidavit-rejects-accused-vhp-leader\)](https://caravanmagazine.in/crime/yashwant-shinde-cbi-affidavit-rejects-accused-vhp-leader) to add Parande as an accused despite fresh evidence pointing to him as the mastermind. If he were to be added, he would become one of the senior-most office bearers of the Sangh Parivar to be investigated in a terrorism case.

Shinde is not the first from the Sangh Parivar's fold to make such allegations against his parent organisation. In a series of four interviews (<https://caravanmagazine.in/reportage/swami-aseemanand-interviews>) given to *The Caravan's* Leena Gita Reghunath between 2012 and 2014, Naba Kumar Sarkar—popularly known as Swami

Aseemanand—admitted to participating in a conspiracy to carry out five bombings that killed 119 people. These were the Malegaon blasts of 2006 and 2008, as well as the 2007 attacks on the Samjhauta Express, Hyderabad's Mecca Masjid and Ajmer Sharif. In the interviews, and in a confessional statement he later recanted, Aseemanand admitted to receiving explicit instructions to participate in the bombing campaign from senior RSS members, some of whom have been named in Shinde's affidavit too.

 **The RSS leaders allegedly warned Joshi that nothing about the attacks should be publicly linked to the RSS and endorsed Aseemanand's involvement in the conspiracy, as his presence would keep the violence linked to “ideology” and prevent it from getting “criminalised.”**

Prime among these is Indresh Kumar, a member of the RSS's national executive. Kumar's name had figured earlier in relation to several bombings, including Samjhauta Express, Mecca Masjid, Ajmer Sharif and the 2008 Malegaon blasts. In his interviews with Reghunath, Aseemanand claimed that the need for violence in the name of Hindus was discussed at a meeting held in Gujarat at his Shabari Dham Ashram with the RSS leaders Mohan Bhagwat, Sunil Joshi and Kumar. Bhagwat is the current *sarsanghchalak*, or supreme leader, of the RSS; Joshi was later murdered, allegedly by members of the same conspiracy. The RSS leaders allegedly warned Joshi that nothing about the attacks should be publicly linked to the RSS and endorsed Aseemanand's involvement in the conspiracy, as his presence would keep the violence linked to “ideology” and prevent it from getting “criminalised.” According to Aseemanand, they said, “This is very important for the Hindus. Please do this. You have our blessings.

“This is very important for the Hindus. Please do this. You have our blessings.”



the RSS's leaders maintained plausible deniability as those close to them carried out a terror campaign across the subcontinent.

In his affidavit, Shinde frequently mentions asking others in the conspiracy if the only goal of the bombings was to aid the BJP in winning elections. It is unpredictable if terrorism—whether spontaneous or engineered for electoral purposes—works in determining voter behaviour. How well such an incident is leveraged is also important to understand. Shinde himself notes that bombings his colleagues allegedly carried out before the 2004 general election did not benefit the BJP.

More recent examples show a better leveraging of such tragedies by the ruling party. The Pulwama attack on 14 February 2019—where a suicide bomber killed more than forty paramilitary personnel in Kashmir—cast a long shadow over the 2019 general election. The Narendra Modi government claimed that terrorists belonging to the Pakistan-based outfit Jaish-e-Mohammad were behind the attack and retaliated with air strikes against Pakistan, successfully amplifying Modi's nationalist rhetoric to a crescendo on the eve of the 2019 polls. A communally charged, radical Hindu constituency had been successfully whipped up when the party needed it most.

Terrorism was a major talking point in the 2014 general election too. In the run-up to the polls, the BJP made shrill accusations that the incumbent Manmohan Singh government had failed to extradite Dawood Ibrahim and 20 other terror-accused individuals from Pakistan. Dawood is wanted, among other crimes, for the 1993 bombings in Mumbai, which killed more than two hundred and fifty people.

Yet today, even after eight years of the Modi government, Dawood remains elusive. One wonders if Modi and the BJP's anti-terrorism rhetoric was serious. On 5 May 2015, Haribhai Parthibhai Chaudhary, the minister of state for home affairs, gave a written reply in

opposition uproar, another junior home minister, Kiren Rijiju, claimed that the gangster lives in Pakistan. In the seven years since, there has been no report on any serious attempt to extradite him. In late-August 2022, the National Investigative Agency announced a cash reward of Rs 25 lakh for anyone who provides information leading to Dawood's arrest—suggesting that the Modi government does not have the requisite information or ability to bring him to justice.

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There is also no evidence that the Modi government has managed to extradite or eliminate even one of the 20 most-wanted terror-accused in Pakistan. These failures make abundantly clear that terrorism remains a purely rhetorical issue for the BJP, useful to mobilise voters even as the government lacks any real ability to take action. Just keeping the discussion alive keeps the party in power.

Instead of taking meaningful action against terrorism, the ruling party has only worked to widen the ambit of who is considered a terrorist, what counts as terrorism and who is allowed to use violence to combat supposed anti-national elements. BJP-controlled state governments, as well as security and intelligence agencies that answer to the union government, can increasingly use state violence against minorities while legitimising it as executive action. State governments, for instance, have cited rules against “illegal construction” to justify bulldozing the homes and businesses of members of the Muslim

community



This organised bulldozing campaign was initiated by Uttar Pradesh's saffron-clad chief minister, Adityanath, during his bid for re-election earlier this year. It has since been emulated by other BJP chief ministers. In Assam, Himanta Biswa Sarma has begun to use bulldozers to bring down madrassas allegedly linked to terror suspects, an increasingly broad catch-all category for targeting Muslim organisations. Such executive action is, at least officially, directed against "rioters," "criminals" and "terrorists," but it is seen by the perpetrator, victims and the wider public as a violent warning to Muslims not to question their continued marginalisation. The Kashmiri leader Mehbooba Mufti has described the bulldozer as the symbol of "state terror against Muslims." The resemblance to the actions of the Zionist Israeli state against the people of Palestine in the occupied territories is undeniable.

For all of the BJP's grandstanding about being tough on terror, the cases of Shinde and Dawood and the bulldozing of Muslim homes all paint a clear picture of what the party's approach to terrorism has been. Hindu perpetrators of mass violence and targeted bomb blasts can be either ignored or given a clean chit by the nation's premier investigative agencies. Dangerous organised-crime syndicates, such as Dawood's network, can become mere symbols of a latent threat, with no meaningful attempt by the state to bring them to justice. Meanwhile, the notional threat of terrorism can instead be situated in the homes and shops of innocent Muslims to legitimise the state acting out its deeply communal impulses.

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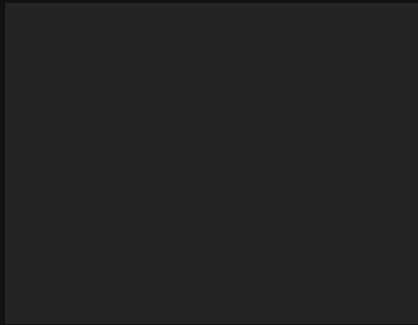
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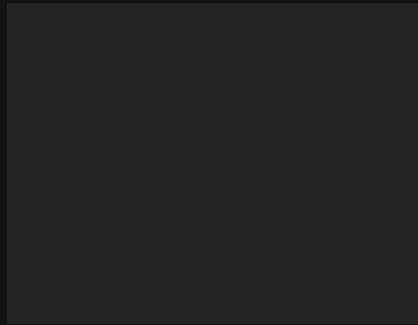


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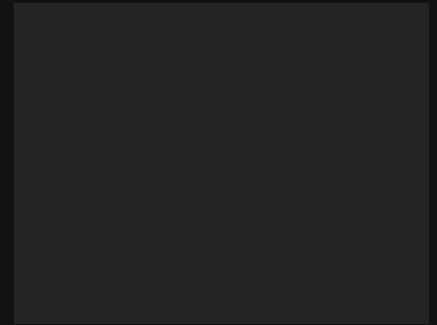


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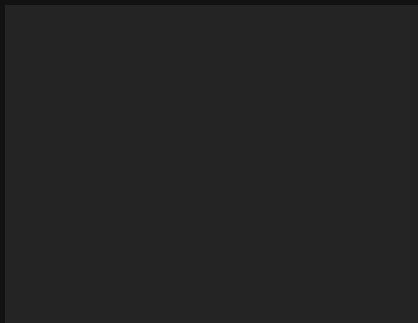


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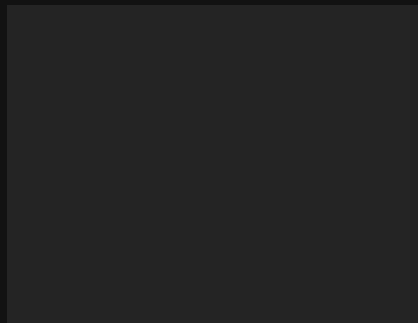


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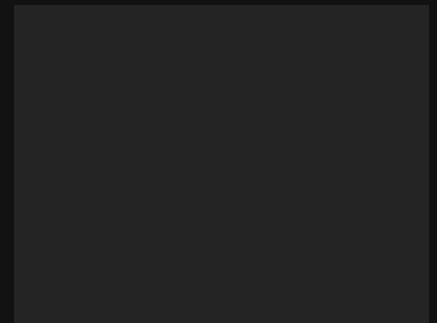


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