

Main Yashwant Shinde Bol Raha Hoon

An RSS worker trained in firearms and bomb-making reveals the Sangh's extremist underbelly

SAGAR

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Yashwant Shinde, a member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the former head of the Bajrang Dal in Maharashtra. Shinde claims in an affidavit that senior RSS leaders facilitated training for him and others in the use of modern firearms as well as bomb-making in preparation for a widespread terror campaign.

ILLUSTRATION BY SHAGNIK CHAKRABORTY

In a series of four interviews over the course of September, Yashwant Shinde, a former Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh pracharak—full-time worker—spoke to Sagar, a staff writer at The Caravan. Shinde explained how he was trained to carry out covert operations in Pakistan and conduct bombings across India that could be blamed on Muslims. In 2003 and 2004, he alleged, his fellow trainees bombed mosques in the Maharashtra towns of Jalna, Purna and Parbhani. Others who allegedly helped facilitate the conspiracy have been tied to a bombing campaign that killed more than one hundred and twenty people over five years. Most of Shinde's claims line up with the details of these cases in media reports and court records. It is not possible to fully verify Shinde's claims unless they are tested against evidence such as phone records, training-camp registers, forensics reports and crime scene videos and photographs, which can only be accessed by investigative agencies. Many of these allegations were

mentioned in an affidavit that Shinde submitted to a district court at Nanded, in which he asked to be made a witness in the 2006 Nanded bombing case. The Central Bureau of Investigation, or CBI, which had investigated the case and filed a closure report, has opposed his application.

Shinde is still devoted to the Sangh Parivar's Hindutva ideology. However, he has slowly grown disillusioned with the RSS leadership after seeing many friends lose their lives conducting extremist violence for the Sangh. He has grown to believe that the sacrifices of ideologically driven extremist workers have been squandered for the political gain of the Bharatiya Janata Party, instead of the glory of Hinduism itself. He came to believe that extremist violence would only harm the Sangh Parivar in the long run. Without fully understanding their level of involvement, Shinde claims to have alerted several senior leaders in the Sangh Parivar, either directly or through intermediaries, that members of their organisation were conspiring and conducting a terror campaign.

These leaders include Indresh Kumar, a member of the RSS national executive; Shrikant Joshi, a former RSS national executive member; Venkatesh Abdeo, a former central general secretary of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad; Sunil Deodhar, a national secretary of the BJP; Tapan Ghosh, a former RSS leader and founder of Hindu Samhati; Pramod Muthalik, the founder of the Shri Ram Sena; and Mohan Bhagwat, the sarsanghchalak —supreme leader—of the RSS. If Shinde's claims are true, much of the leadership of the RSS and VHP were either part of the conspiracies behind the bombings or knew that Sangh members were part of the conspiracy and failed to act on that information.

Worryingly, Shinde's claims, as well as charge sheets produced by previous investigations into these cases, detail how many members of the conspiracy were trained by serving or retired personnel of the Indian Army and the Intelligence Bureau. The evidence suggests that since the early 2000s, the Sangh Parivar cultivated and trained multiple cells of people to conduct an organised terror campaign across the subcontinent, with the help of individuals from India's security establishment.

Detailed questionnaires regarding Shinde's claims were sent to Kumar, Bhagwat and Deodhar. Questions were also sent to Milind Parande, the current secretary general of the VHP; Pragya Singh Thakur, a BJP member of parliament; and LK Advani, a former home minister and BJP president. Organisations named by Shinde in the interviews, including the CBI, the Indian Army, the National Investigation Agency and the Tripura Baptist Christian Union, were also sent questions. None of them had responded at the time this interview went to press.

The interview has been translated, edited and condensed.

Sagar: When and how did you join the Sangh? I learnt from your affidavit that you ended up in Jammu and Kashmir in 1994. Were you an RSS or Bajrang Dal member then?

Yashwant Shinde: In 1990, the situation at home was such that I could not complete my education. I could not finish my tenth standard. I had to take responsibility for my family's expenses. ... I worked as a "side actor" in films. ... I would get eight hundred or twelve hundred rupees per day. At the time, that was a huge sum. ...



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From there, I took this path. At that time, Jammu and Kashmir saw many brutal killings of Hindus. They had been displaced in the lakhs. The government was Jagmohanji's and president's rule had been imposed. [Jagmohan Malhotra served as governor of Jammu and Kashmir between 1984 and 1989, a period

(<https://caravanmagazine.in/vantage/jagmohan-padma-vibhushan-kashmir>) of unfettered repression in the state. He later went on to join the BJP.] I made a commitment to go and work there and took membership in the VHP, in Mumbai. I saw that people would talk and meetings would occur but, practically, nothing was happening. I then spoke to Vinayakrao Deshpandeji. At that time, he was the *sangathak* [organiser] in Maharashtra. [Deshpande is now the organising secretary general of the VHP.] ... I was nineteen or twenty years old. I wanted to go to Jammu. He said yes, to placate me. He never said no to anybody. I worked with them for two or three years, then realised that these people would not send me. I got ready and went there myself.

Sagar: You spent your own money to go? How did you get connected with Indresh Kumar there?

Shinde: Yes. I went to Jammu and met the displaced people from Kashmir. They thought that someone has come from Mumbai and will help economically. I said that I would not help economically but physically. I explained my intentions to fight terrorism. They said that they did not need any such help. But, they said, the Sangh was in need of a youth like me. Then they sent me to the Sangh office in Jammu, which is called Veer Bhawan. ... They said that there is a person called Guruji there. He is also from Maharashtra.

I went there and met Muraliji. [Murali was the caretaker of the VHP's Jammu office. Shinde does not remember his full name.] He interrogated me properly, asking who I was, whether I was telling the truth. It was an environment of panic and treachery. After that, he made me meet Indreshji. My work started after that. Indreshji was the *prant pracharak* [regional head] of the Himgiri province. Himgiri for the Sangh means a joint region of Himachal and Jammu. [In the Sangh's administrative vision, India is divided (<https://caravanmagazine.in/politics/rss-coronavirus-lockdown-sewa-bharti-ngos-government-funds>) into 41 provinces that are territorially demarcated and named after ancient Hindu kingdoms.]

Sagar: When did you go to Kashmir?

Shinde: On 9 December 1995, Farooq Abdullah came to the post office at Rajouri for an election rally. [Abdullah became the chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir for the fifth time in 1996.] He had come to set the atmosphere. After his rally, he said that if anyone wants to meet, they can come and meet him. I also went to talk to him. ... Twenty-five or thirty people had come to meet him. They asked him how Jammu and Kashmir would separate from India. He answered that they would get everything in some time.

One of the people said, “We have been hearing the same thing since the time of our fathers and grandfathers. How are we supposed to believe you when you say this?” He replied, “If this does not happen, then you can also raise your weapons and start doing the same thing that happened to Hindus in the Kashmir Valley.” He said this and got up immediately. As soon as he got up, I grabbed him and gave him a good slap. [Abdullah did not respond to questions about Shinde’s claims about this incident.]

A case was filed against me. ... I stayed in jail for four months, under PSA [the Public Safety Act]. I got bail in twelve or thirteen days, but they did not let me go. ... The people of the Sangh got me bail. I was doing the work of the Sangh only. ... The case went on for three and a half years. I got free from it in 1998.

Only after this incident did my family find out where I was. The day after the incident, the news was everywhere. Then the CBI team came to Mumbai and met my parents, who got to know where I am.



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Sagar: Did Indreshji make you a *vistarak* [junior worker] directly? You did not have any formal training in the Sangh, right?

Shinde: Physically, I was already strong. He also saw my dedication, my ideological thinking and my mindset, and accepted me. ... As a vistarak, whatever work is happening, it is your job to maintain it. When one becomes a pracharak, he has to increase the area of activities taking place. I became one in two years.

Upon becoming a pracharak, there are many things to manage: the BJP, the VHP, the Bajrang Dal, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, the Rashtriya Suraksha Samiti, the Durga Vahini and other organs of the Sangh Parivar. ... The life of a pracharak is as simple as that of a saint. All the costs are met in the form of donations that are collected once in a year in front of a saffron flag. Daily costs come out of this. We get breakfast and lunch at the homes of Sangh volunteers if someone calls us.

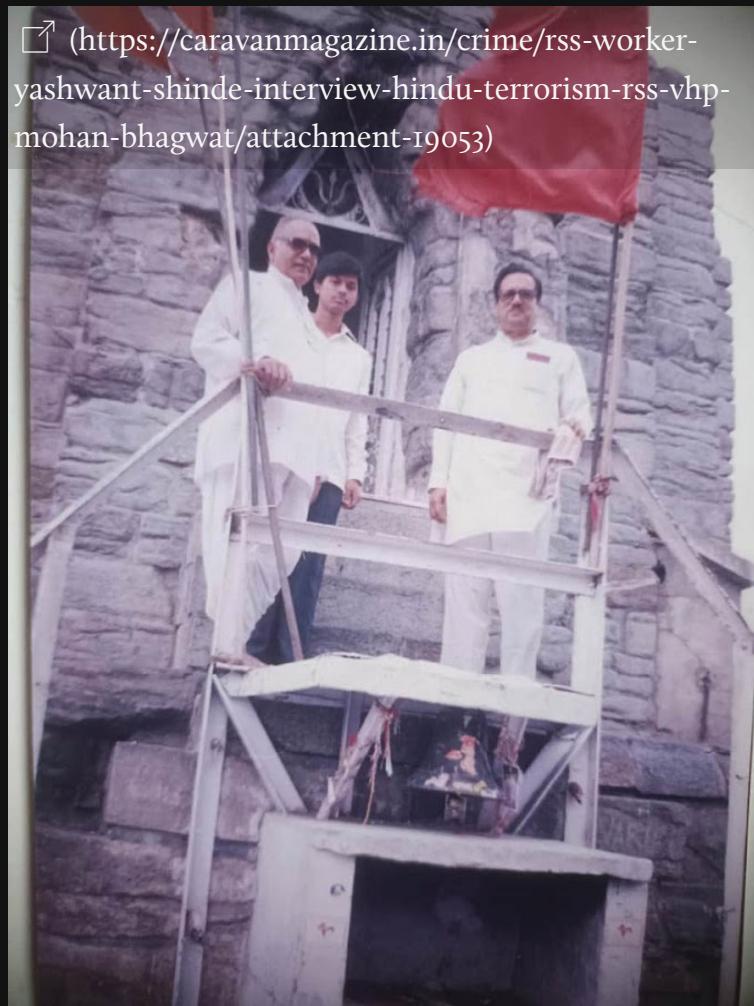
Sagar: You said you had gone with Indresh Kumar to Ladakh. Could you tell me about that time?

Shinde: In 1998, I had gone for Sindhu Darshan [a Hindu festival held in Ladakh on the banks of the Indus River]. It was my childhood wish. ... Shrikant Joshi was there. [Joshi was a senior RSS leader from Maharashtra, who would go on to be in the RSS's national executive. He was also a secretary to Madhukar Deoras, the RSS's third sarsangchalak. He died in 2013.] It was in early September. On the way from Jammu, I stayed once in Ramban, in Srinagar. Srinagar had many people, including BJP MLAs, Shrikantji and Indreshji. From there, the route goes through Ganderbal, Farooq Abdullah's assembly constituency. ...

We went further, and it was the same time that intruders from Pakistan had captured some part of the border. People from the army

were known to Indreshji. They said, “Don’t go immediately, there is a risk. The enemy have taken control of the mountains and are targeting the highway.” They said that we should leave at night with the army’s vehicle. ...

We had to reach Ladakh the next day. The army said, “If you have to go, go on your own.” But the army official still came to leave us around one and half hours down the path in his own car. ... We stayed in Kargil for a day. We visited many Sikh sites there. Viewed the Sindhu, as soon as we went. ... Then, by the route through Himachal, we came down to Manali. [India officially launched a military operation in response to the Kargil occupation in May 1999. Shinde claims that the army was aware of the occupation as early as September 1998.]



(<https://caravanmagazine.in/crime/rss-worker-yashwant-shinde-interview-hindu-terrorism-rss-vhp-mohan-bhagwat/attachment-19053>)

From left to right: Shrikant Joshi, Yashwant Shinde and Indresh Kumar, at Srinagar's Shankaracharya temple in 1998. Shinde claims to have accompanied Joshi and Kumar to the Sindhu Darshan, a Hindu festival held in Ladakh. COURTESY YASHWANT SHINDE

Sagar: You were working under Indresh Kumar after that too?

Shinde: I saw that intruders had come into India. I made up my mind and came to Mumbai after that. I was responsible for the Bajrang Dal in Mumbai when the Kargil War started. Graham Staines had been murdered in Odisha, and his two boys also. [Staines, an Australian missionary, was burnt to death along with his sons by a mob led by Bajrang Dal activists.] ... My old acquaintances in Mumbai came to meet me. I told them, “Now I will not do the Sangh’s work. Now I will take Hanumanji’s mace. Right now, that is what is needed—not to explain but to die.” ...

The VHP office is in Firoza Mansion. I stayed there for six months. ... I had the same uncomfortable experiences there as I had in Jammu. So, I stepped aside and started working for Garjana. Garjana was a team that was made up of ABVP members for the protection of BJP politicians, usually against Bal Thackeray’s goons. Thackeray’s Bharatiya Vidyarthi Sena was responsible for much of the hooliganism in the colleges of Maharashtra. But the people of Garjana soon scattered. They were running it only in name. For some days I tried reviving it, but there were many economic constraints. I tried to revive it by including the old workers of Garjana, but all our economic conditions were bad. We could not take it forward, and that was when Indreshji called. He said, “We have a situation. Bring some young men and come here.”

Sagar: When did you meet Milind Parande?

Shinde: When I was a campaigner in Jammu and Kashmir, I had come for a short visit to Mumbai. People working with the VHP and Bajrang Dal in Mumbai had organised a *satsang* [religious gathering]. My first acquaintance with Milind Parande happened there. ... Later, in 1999, I attended a meeting. There is a town next to Mumbai called Thane, where the workers of Maharashtra would meet every year. ... It was an organisational meeting joined by all workers and representatives of the VHP and Bajrang Dal from Goa, Konkan [region] and Maharashtra. Everyone who worked for them full-time attended the meeting. It went on for two or three days. ... Himanshu Panse had also come

there. [Panse is a key accused in the Nanded blast case. Shinde claims he was a close friend of Panse.] Our thoughts were the same, our behaviour was the same, that is how our friendship happened. Milind Parande was the VHP organiser for Maharashtra, so he was also there at the meeting. Panse and I spoke at the meeting about Indreshji asking me to come to Jammu. After that, I spoke to some ten or twelve people and took them there.

Sagar: In your affidavit it says you returned to Jammu in 1999. How did you go to Jammu? What happened there?

Shinde: We were ten or twelve people in total and we went by the Swaraj Express to Jammu Tawi. We stayed at a *dharmshala* [pilgrim lodge] first—I don't recall the name, but it was near the Veer Bhavan office. I stayed in Veer Bhavan; the others stayed in the dharmshala because it was not safe for them to be with us. We were there for some months' training. A few days of training was facilitated by the army men. ... Near Jammu, there are many cantonments ahead of the Talab Tillo area. That is where the training happened. ... There is no question of recognising anybody who trained us, it has been so long. There were rank-holders in the army and workers to train us.

Sagar: Was this weapons training? What weapons were they?

Shinde: Yes, it was cutting-edge weaponry of the time. I don't remember much, but we were trained in the leading weapons of the time.



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Sagar: Was Indreshji in the army? How did he have so many contacts there?

Shinde: That is all normal. He was the provincial campaigner for [the RSS in] Jammu and Kashmir, so it is natural to have connections in the army. This is because our local people help the army.

Sagar: What was going on in your mind? This would have been the first opportunity for you to do what you wanted, to protect the Hindus. Was that happening?

Shinde: In Indreshji's mind, the goal was to go to Pakistan and carry out activities. ... We would have gotten caught ... Just like Pakistan has a network here, we must also have a network there. During the time, we would have to stay undercover as Muslims ... In Veer Bhavan, Indreshji expressed his will. He said, "Take this group and go to Pakistan. Work there, all arrangements will be made for you." ... I said, "No, these terrorists, who were involved in attacks, in killings, the entire chain of people who are related to them, the racket, we should target them." This was my stand, but Indreshji did not let this happen. He did not want this to happen. If we did that, then we would have targeted people like the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front, Yasin Malik, Shabir, Abdul Gani Lone. [Malik is the chairman of the JKLF. Shah is the founder and president of the Jammu and Kashmir Democratic Freedom Party. Both of them are currently imprisoned in Delhi's Tihar Jail. Lone was the founder and chairperson of the Jammu and Kashmir People's Conference. He was assassinated in 2002.] Those who are involved in terrorist activities should be targeted. What would we gain by killing regular people? That is wrong. ...

Anyway, I protested against this. I could not do a traitor's job. Then he offered me the chance to work in Ladakh for the Sangh [presumably between 1999 and 2001]. I refused. Then he asked me to go to the Terai region, which touches Nepal. They said it was a Naxalite region. That also I refused. I have never been to that place. I think it could be Yogi

Adityanath's constituency. He is the chief minister [of Uttar Pradesh] now, right?

Sagar: In your team, was nobody ready to go to Pakistan?

Shinde: They were not ready. I was the one to make the decisions. I said no personally. I talked to Indreshji. First, I said that I would not go there, I would work here itself. And I tried for many years, but he never became ready for me to work here. He never wanted such a scandal to take place in India. ... The reason was that, if we needed to do any work, the issue would also involve the wrong people sitting in the BJP. That is why they did not let this happen, for the BJP's betterment. ...

The whole situation changed because of the attack on parliament [in December 2001]. All the officials at the border were replaced, and the villages there were emptied. Then Indreshji said that, "For now, take this last group and send them back." This is how I sent them back to wherever they came from.

↗ (<https://caravanmagazine.in/crime/rss-worker-yashwant-shinde-interview-hindu-terrorism-rss-vhp-mohan-bhagwat/attachment-19021>)



Indresh Kumar during a seminar in Delhi, on 24 April 2017. Shinde claims that Kumar, currently a member of the RSS national executive, organised modern firearms training by the army for several youth from Maharashtra and then asked them to go to Pakistan disguised as Muslims. QAMAR SIBTAIN / THE INDIA TODAY GROUP / GETTY IMAGES

Sagar: Shrikantji, whom you worked with, was the secretary of Balasaheb Deoras. That must have been a very big post?

Shinde: It was a very big post. From 1998, I had quite good relations with him. My introduction to him happened only in September 1998 ... during my travel to Sindhu. My relationship with him was quite good. He saw me, he saw my nature, saw my commitment, then only he gave me that operation, of rescuing those people from abduction. I was in that operation for one and a half to two years. Nadia Zila in West Bengal, Kolkata, Tripura, Agartala, all those places I visited for this work.

[On 6 August 1999, four members of the RSS—including Shyamal Sengupta, its organising secretary for the eastern zone—were abducted in Tripura's Dhalai district by the National Liberation Front of Tripura. Alongside the state government's investigation into the abduction, the RSS formed its own team, which included Shinde, to free the workers. The NLFT demanded a hefty ransom. The RSS and the Tripura government have claimed that the NLFT was backed by the Tripura Baptist Christian Union. The bodies of the four RSS workers were discovered in July 2001. Mohan Bhagwat, then the deputy sarsanghchalak of the RSS, protested against the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government for its failure to save the RSS men. Following the BJP's rise to power in Tripura in 2018, the state government constituted a special investigation team to reinvestigate the case. A chargesheet was reportedly filed in the case in August 2020, but no arrests have been widely reported yet.]

Sagar: Could you describe that operation?

Shinde: Four people were abducted from Agartala, from Tripura. They were seniors. I was on the search team. Shrikantji and myself were working as a team. ... The abductors were terrorists in association with the Baptist Church. They had asked for a ransom of Rs 2 crore. Their aim was to make money and spread terror. ... The church people run gangs. Otherwise also, they have money that is unaccounted for. It also comes from foreign countries. ...

Sushanta Sen was an RSS worker at that time from Tripura. I had only interacted with him for a couple of days in Agartala. ... Acharya Dharmendraji was also there at that time. [Dharmendra was a Rajasthan-based godman and part of the VHP's Kendriya Margdarshak Mandal, a body of priests and RSS members that partially manages the organisation.] Now he has grown very old. He lives in Punjab or Rajasthan and is very famous there. [Dharmendra died on 19 September 2022. Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted to express his grief over his death. Dharmendra was accused in the Babri Masjid demolition case, but a CBI court acquitted him last year.]

Sagar: Who else did you meet during that operation?

Shinde: I met Mohan Bhagwat. Shrikantji made me meet him in Kolkata. ... I was there for fifteen days. ... He was my co-worker at the time. ... He talked to me from the perspective of finding them [the abducted RSS workers]. There was no other topic. The subject was to get them out.

Sagar: You did not tell him that Indreshji wanted to send you to Pakistan?

Shinde: No, I did not talk to him about that. The topic was different, so I focussed on that.

Sagar: How did that operation end?

Shinde: They were all killed. ... Shrikantji even gave the news to Advani that two people from the Baptist Church gang were coming to the Delhi airport, asking him to catch them and do an investigation. No investigation was done. Shrikantji asked for answers from Advani. Advani said that if they took action, the Christians would be angry. So, it broke my heart that he has joined the terrorists. ... Shrikantji told me in Mumbai, in the Nav Yug office, that Advani said that Christians would get angry. He had tears in his eyes because of Advani's answer. My eyes also welled up.

<https://caravanmagazine.in/crime/rss-worker-yashwant-shinde-interview-hindu-terrorism-rss-vhp-mohan-bhagwat/attachment-19022>



BJP leader LK Advani in Delhi, on 24 December 2015. Shinde claims that Advani refused to arrest members of the National Liberation Front of Tripura, who had kidnapped and murdered four RSS workers, because it would anger Christian voters. Mohan Bhagwat, then the deputy sarsanghchalak of the RSS, protested against the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government for its failure to save the RSS men. ARVIND YADAV / HINDUSTAN TIMES

Sagar: Did you get the offer for bomb-making training from Indreshji or Shrikantji?

Shinde: No, the offer came from neither. Milind Parande sponsored it. He thought that, if we have to win the 2004 Lok Sabha elections, we have to spoil the atmosphere. I got to know this immediately after talking to his associates. Then, I said, “The Lok Sabha elections are coming, that is why all this is going on.” His associates were sitting quietly in front of me. I joined them thinking that only that way could I come to know what is going on.

Sagar: So how did they approach you for the training?

Shinde: Men who worked with Milind Parande delivered the message. They came to meet me, and I spoke to him after that. He proposed the plan to me. Actually, I had known earlier when I spoke to Himanshu Panse about it. Himanshu had already told me that Milind was going to propose this. I understood it and received this message from the other end.

Sagar: How was the bomb-making training? How long did it last?

Shinde: This was three or four days. ... When I went to Sinhagad [a fort near Pune], where the training happened, there were boys from many

places in Maharashtra. ... There were about twenty men. ... The requisite arrangements for food, water and sleeping were made there itself. Rakesh [Dhawade] used to bring “Mithun Chakraborty” on his bike and then take him back the same way. During the day we used to roam around the resort, eat, rest and then roam around again after the training. That place was a little different for us. ...

We were trained in the mornings. There were flammable substances there. It was a white, saffron-coloured powder. It was kept with us like this, on paper. He [“Mithun Chakraborty”] had lit the match sticks. After burning, it was not completely extinguished, and he threw it, which was a mistake. It landed on that piece of paper. It was just two inches away from the powder and he himself was scared. He said, “That was a close escape.” It could have been a great disaster, all of us would have been shredded to pieces. And the quantity of that powder was about half a kilo. ...

In 2003, we did not have mobile phones so we could not contact our families. ... We went to a nearby forest and tested [the bombs] there. The whole resort was booked for us. The training took place on the floors above, and we lived on the ground floor. No one else was allowed to take a look upstairs.

Sagar: Was Himanshu also there? Did he also go to Goa for the training?

Shinde: He was there, but it is false that he went to Goa for training. What happened in Goa was not a two-year-long training; he was working there for the VHP. The VHP does religious work and aims to use the same for the unity of people. There was no training involved. All of these things are lies.



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Sagar: Can you tell me about “Mithun Chakraborty,” whose real name you say is Ravi Dev?

Shinde: He had a sharp nose and was dusky-skinned ... 5'4" maybe. He was not taller than me. ... His age at that time was sixty-two or sixty-three, he would be seventy or eighty now. ... He was from north India and spoke pure Hindi. ... My interaction with him was limited to the training. ... Once he scolded me. He hit me on the head even though it was not my mistake. I wanted to retaliate but I avoided it. It was at the time of the training.

Sagar: Why did Ravi Dev have to hide his identity? He belonged to the organisation only, right?

Shinde: He did not want people to know his real name so he went around with a pseudonym. He was responsible for the training. He was the national co-convener of the Bajrang Dal at that time. That is why he got scared when he met me four year later at Firoza Mansion. He did not recognise me at first. Then I called out to him, “Raviji.” He came and said, “Do you know me?” When I told him how I did, his face went pale. Then, when I went downstairs, I saw him whispering into Milind Parande’s ear and both of them were looking at me. ... I knew to what heights they must have planned things.

Sagar: Who else was there in the training? Rahul Pande, who is in the Nanded case charge sheet?

Shinde: No no, he was in Nanded. ... Sanjay Chaudhary [another accused in the Nanded blast case] was there in Nanded.

Sagar: How about the others who were accused in the case? Maruti Wagh, Yogesh, Gururaj, Milind Ektate?

Shinde: I don't recall these names. I might remember if I look at their faces. A lot of people came from Aurangabad, Jalna, Poorna and Parbhani to Nanded.

Sagar: What happened at the end of the training?

Shinde: On the last night, he [Dhawade] asked everyone to take a pen and paper and submit in writing what they have learnt, what they will do with the training and where. I scolded him a lot and told him that they have not simply picked us up from the road. Nobody will give anything like that in writing. Nothing like this happens on paper. I asked him who he was to ask this. Everybody was quiet. Nobody gave anything in writing.

The next day, when our class was done and we were going, he was sitting on the bike and we were in a four-wheeler. He told us “*sambhalcha*,” meaning go carefully. ... This was Rakesh Dhawade. And “Mithun Chakraborty” was sitting behind him on the bike. ... He seemed to be saying, “We will kill you.” This was his tone. ... I quickly replied, “You all go and be careful on the bike.” I did not let his remark sit. I replied immediately.

Sagar: When you said no to him, did you face any pressure? What happened after the training?

Shinde: No. Nobody pressured me, nor did anyone discuss this. He [Milind Parande] got Himanshu and some other people. Himanshu had come under their influence. I tried explaining to him. I even went to Nanded twice. When he would come to Mumbai, I would explain to him that their policy is wrong, that they were using people like him, that they were using the Sangh's workers for the BJP's elections. He used to say yes but work at the same time behind my back. He was killed in Nanded. [Panse died in an accidental bomb blast at the home of his accomplice Naresh Rajkondawar on 5 April 2006.] That was a murder. I say they have murdered their own workers.

Sagar: You have written that they were putting some pressure on people like him? How do you think he was pressured?

Shinde: He was not pressured. He was swayed by his emotions. And they used that. What happens is, sometimes, duty has a different effect on you. I had taken a step back from the life of propagating [the vision of the Sangh]. I had no other duty. So, the influence of my words was limited. Those who held positions in the organisation, the influence of their words, the money they had, all of that mattered. Who asks for an opinion such as mine then? Who asks for the truth then?

Sagar: What did you tell Himanshu when you went to Nanded?

Shinde: They planned the bombings at Jalna, Poorna, Parbhani, Aurangabad and Nanded. [On 21 November 2003, four people on motorcycles hurled bombs at a mosque in Parbhani, killing one person and injuring 35. Similar attacks were carried out in Jalna and Poorna on 27 August 2004, injuring 18 people. Panse and Naresh Rajkondawar were killed in an explosion in Nanded on the intervening night of 4–5 April 2006, allegedly while assembling bombs that were to be used in Aurangabad.] ... Himanshu's house was not very big. It was just the ground floor, of about a thousand square feet. His father was an engineer, I think. I went and stayed at his house two or three times. Naresh Kondawar also went to his place to talk to him. We visited Naresh's house too and discussed things. ...

I said this was just for elections but they wouldn't listen. ... Himanshu Panse told me that Milind Parandeji is saying that this has to be done. I told him in the beginning itself, even before training, that these people cannot be trusted, so be alert. But, after that, I received the offer for training, and then there were discussions between me and Himanshu. I got offers from others, not through him. When I got offers from many people, I thought now the elections are here.

[□ \(https://caravanmagazine.in/crime/rss-worker-yashwant-shinde-interview-hindu-terrorism-rss-vhp-mohan-bhagwat/attachment-19023\)](https://caravanmagazine.in/crime/rss-worker-yashwant-shinde-interview-hindu-terrorism-rss-vhp-mohan-bhagwat/attachment-19023)



Milind Parande, the VHP secretary general at a press conference in Mumbai, on 17 November 2019. Shinde claims that Parande was the mastermind behind the Jalna, Purna, Parbhani and Nanded bomb blasts. Parande's name also appeared during interrogations in the Maharashtra ATS's investigation of the 2006 Nanded bomb blast.
KUNAL PATIL / HINDUSTAN TIMES

Sagar: Did Parande do the entire planning for the bombings? Is there any evidence?

Shinde: It was a big conspiracy—he was not the only leader involved in this. There are many people from the Sangh and the BJP who were conspiring in this way. One of these chosen people was Milind Parande. If the NIA [National Investigation Agency, which investigated the Malegaon and Samjhauta bombings] arrests Milind Parande, the entire scheme will get unravelled.

About three or four months ago, a few sticks of gelatine were found outside Ambani's house. Something or the other was found, which was not important. [In February 2021, 20 gelatine sticks were found in a car parked outside the billionaire Mukesh Ambani's residence in Mumbai.] The NIA investigated that so thoroughly, for political reasons, just to please the government. And here, the NIA, ATS [Anti-Terrorism Squad] people quietly started working to save the accused, who carried out serious anti-national incidents. Milind Parande's name came up in an enquiry. Santkumar Bhate gave a statement during the enquiry for the murder in Nanded. [Bhate, a former merchant navy captain, was interrogated by the Maharashtra ATS in relation to the Nanded blast and revealed that Parande had asked him to train several people in the use of gelatine sticks as explosives.] Milind Parande's name came up.

Despite that, nothing happened to him. They quashed the matter entirely.

[SM Mushrif, a former inspector general of the Maharashtra Police, describes the Maharashtra ATS's investigation of the Nanded bombing in his book *Who Killed Karkare*. Based on the ATS's charge sheet and the interrogation of Bhate, he claims that, in 2000, Parande asked Bhate to attend a forty-day camp of the RSS and Bajrang Dal at Bhonsala Military School, in Nagpur. At the camp, Bhate allegedly trained 115 RSS and Bajrang Dal activists in the use of gelatine sticks, three hundred of which were provided by Parande. Mushrif claims that Bhate said former personnel of the Indian Army, as well as one former Intelligence Bureau officer, also trained the attendees of the camp. In his book, Mushrif says that Bhate was invited to yet another Bajrang Dal training camp in the town of Gadahinglaj, in Kolhapur district, that was run by a Bajrang Dal leader called Shankar Vaidya.]

Sagar: Himanshu is portrayed as the main villain in the charge sheet. His name is everywhere. A Bhonsala military school is also mentioned, was he there too? It was a forty-day camp?

Shinde: In Nagpur?

Sagar: Yes, the one in Nagpur. The one where Santkumar Bhate gave the training.

Shinde: Bhate has been interrogated in the Nanded case also, and his statement was taken. He mentioned Milind Parande too. No, I do not think Himanshu was trained before that. If that were the case, he would not be there with me in 2003. ... Parande included me in this training because, if I was there, then there could have been bombings all across the nation. In multiple states—eight, ten or seventeen states. It would have been catastrophic. I had written five hundred or six hundred blasts in the affidavit, but it would have been even more. People could not have digested it. I can do five hundred or six hundred blasts in Maharashtra itself. It is all about management. It is not just

about saying, “You go and do it.” You need to manage it, that is what is important.

Sagar: One can infer from the charge sheet that there were multiple training camps set up between 2000 and 2003.

Shinde: Yes.

Sagar: Did you know about it? That other people from the organisation were also being trained?

Shinde: No, I had no knowledge of it before 2003. Even after 2003, I did not know that they were training. But I always had a hint that they could be up to something, they must be. I had clearly said no. I had to explain my stand to Rakesh Dhawade. He was too excited for it and I was not going to be a part of it. ... They might have thought something after that and started including more people in this and handing them over for training.

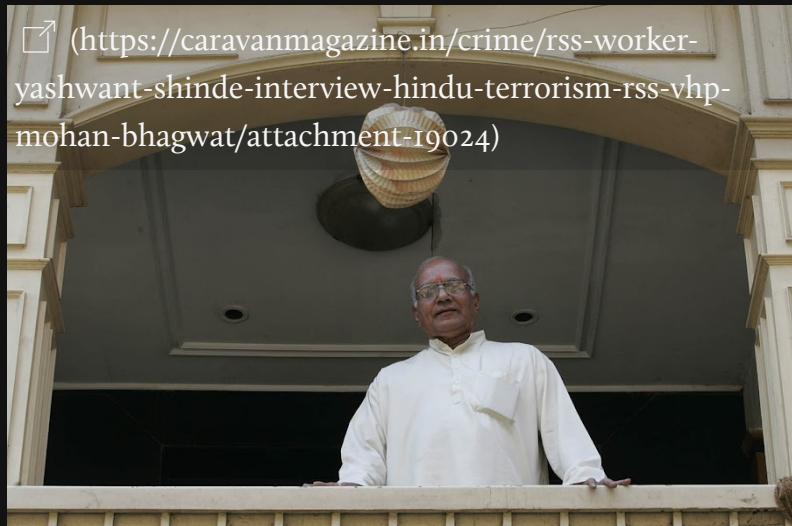
Sagar: You said you warned several people about the bombings. Who were they? What did you tell them?

Shinde: I did not talk to Mohan Bhagwat about this directly. I tried a lot with Shrikant Joshi. Shrikant Joshi also talked to Mohan Bhagwat. ... I told Shrikantji that they want to commit these scandals and this is how the BJP people are using our workers. When Shrikantji told Mohan Bhagwat, he did not pay heed to this issue. I also talked to Venkatesh Abdeo sir, who was the *kendriya adhikari* [central officer] of the VHP. He was in his own rhythm, meaning he said that my duty was not this. Meaning he was intoxicated by the BJP. This is how he talked. I knew him from 1999. I knew those people. They said, “Your whole life will be spent in jail, stop talking about this topic.” [Abdeo died in June 2019.]

I also talked to Sunil Deodhar about this topic. Sunil Deodhar is a close person of Narendra Modi and Amit Shah. In 2014, he managed Modi’s seat for the Lok Sabha. Now he is also in charge of some states.

[Deodhar is charge of the BJP's state units for Andhra Pradesh. He was previously in charge of West Bengal and Tripura.] I told him also. Now he is on cloud nine. In his mind, he is being a politician, giving speeches. When I spoke to him, he said, "*Mi pan bagto, mi bhato vicharun. Kai jhala tum?*" [I will see, let me think. What happened?] Beyond this he did not say anything. ...

Sunil was a campaigner of the Sangh in Meghalaya [in 1991]. He established the organisation My Home India and later joined the BJP. He is close to Mohan Bhagwat. He had heard my name and wanted to meet me and then we met. ... I first met him when he was a campaigner in Mumbai. This is before 2003. He organised an event for me in Shirdi to tell people about Kashmir. I cannot recall the year. But I have known him since before he established the organisation My Home India. ... I told him about the bombing in 2007 or 2008 ... I met him at his old house in Andheri, Andheri East. I told him there only.



Shrikant Joshi, a former member of the RSS's national executive and a close mentor of Shinde, in Mumbai, on 24 October 2008. Shinde claims that Joshi informed Mohan Bhagwat, the supreme leader of the RSS, that his organisations cadre were conducting bomb blasts. Shinde claims that Bhagwat paid no heed to Joshi. ANSHUMAN POYREKAR / HINDUSTAN TIMES

Sagar: You had alerted Venkateshji and Shrikantji, but they didn't take note of it. So how will you prove that Mohan Bhagwat knew?

Shinde: See, it's not possible that Mohan Bhagwat didn't know. First of all, the name of the organisation and Milind Parande's name came up in many places. And such a person was promoted again and pushed to the national stage. ... Indreshji was in a very high-profile position at

that time, still in the national executive. Milind Parande was in the state unit, and he was brought up by Ashok Singhalji. [Singhal was the international working president of the VHP and a key figure in the Ram Janmabhoomi movement. He died in 2015.] Ashok Singhalji brought this man in as a full-timer. He [Parande] used to work in England or America, he used to do this earlier.

Sagar: What was Ashokji's intention behind getting Milind Parande?

Shinde: He [Parande] was working somewhere in America or England. He left his seventy-thousand-rupee salaried job to come back, and I used to earn a thousand or two thousand rupees in the 1990s. The VHP got a lot of funding in those days. ... Money is collected, right? Mostly businessmen join the VHP's team. Only people who have money occupy the top posts so that they can provide funds when needed. ...

I cannot say where the money went. A lot of people must have filled their pockets with it. It all goes in the name of the team of the province. All of it collectively then goes to Delhi. Even what was collected in the name of Kashmir.

Sagar: When you were asking these questions to leaders about the bomb blast, did they not think that you can be dangerous?

Shinde: No, no. They did not think this. That is why I am still alive. [Laughs] They murdered Sunil Joshi. [Joshi was a former district leader of the RSS in Indore. Investigative agencies proposed that he was the singular thread that connected the Malegaon bombings of 2006 to the Samjhauta Express blast, the Ajmer Sharif blast and the Mecca Masjid blast of 2007. Joshi was killed in December 2007. The NIA's investigation into the case found that Pragya Singh Thakur and two accomplices were behind the murder. Thakur was acquitted in 2017 and is a parliamentarian now.]

If he [Sunil Joshi] would have been arrested, then the links higher up in the chain would have become visible, showing who all are on top.

Pragya was there, so he did not get caught. She killed him. He was killed by Hindus. Pragya only killed him.

Sagar: Did you meet Tapan Ghosh?

Shinde: Yes, I alerted him also, because it is important that everyone understands the conspiracy. I understood, naturally, so I alerted many people. I had a good relationship with Tapanji. He had a lot of love towards me. He was more than twenty years older than me. It has been one year since he passed, during coronavirus times. [Ghosh died in 2020.]

Sagar: Did you also alert Pramod Muthalik of the Sri Ram Sena?

Shinde: I did not tell him myself. I told him through Tapanji.

Sagar: Can you prove that you told Venkatesh, Shrikant, Bhagwat and Deodhar? Do you have any photos or letters?

Shinde: These things are not stored in writing. ... Look, people like Milind Parande, Rakesh Dhawade and Ravi Dev were blamed before me. Bhateji had taken these names. Still, neither was Bhate made a witness nor Milind an accused [in the Nanded case]. The Malegaon incident happened in 2006, then again in 2008. When Karkare investigated, everyone, including Pragya, was caught. After arresting Pragya and all, everyone from the Sangh who was involved in the Jalna, Poorna and Samjhauta scandals was held.

[Hemant Karkare was the chief of the Maharashtra ATS who investigated the 2008 Malegaon bombing and arrested several high-ranking Hindu extremists, including Thakur; Aseemanand, the former national head of the RSS's tribal wing; SP Purohit, a lieutenant colonel in the army's intelligence wing; and the religious leader Dayanand Pandey. Karkare was shot dead in the 26 November 2008 terror attack in Mumbai. Mushrif's book is about the events surrounding Karkare's death. After his death, the ATS's investigation ground to a halt. The case was later handed over to the NIA, following which many of the

accused have been acquitted and the case has been severely weakened in court.]

Sagar: So, you warned all the people you could?

Shinde: Whatever I have been able to do, I have done it quietly, by making people aware of the situation. I was trying to protect the organisation. They would have killed me too otherwise, like Sunil Joshi. ... That was my idea, to warn people. In the state, my network is very big and in many areas. If I stay, I can make it very big in the whole country. They knew about my internal fire. It is alive today also. They wanted to make gains from this. But they thought everyone is stupid. They were under the impression that the others would never get to know what is in our minds and our mouths. This is what they thought.

Sagar: You said that these bomb blasts helped them till 2014?

Shinde: Yes, look carefully. It would keep appearing in the news, and they would keep reaping the benefits of that. And, in 2019, the ticket they gave to Pragya in Bhopal. [Thakur was elected as a BJP MP from Bhopal, after being granted bail. She remains an accused in the bombing cases.] That was all already decided in order to satisfy the Hindu voter.



↗ (<https://caravanmagazine.in/crime/rss-worker-yashwant-shinde-interview-hindu-terrorism-rss-vhp-mohan-bhagwat/attachment-19025>)

The RSS's sarsangchalak, or supreme leader, Mohan Bhagwat delivers a speech during a party gathering in Delhi, on 31 March 2009. If Yashwant Shinde's claims are true, much of the leadership of the RSS and VHP were either part of the conspiracies behind several bombings or knew that Sangh members were part of the conspiracy and failed to act on that information. STR / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

Sagar: When did you first feel that you were being used for political ends, that the gains of your sacrifices are going to the BJP?

Shinde: When I was working as a pracharak in Reasi [in Jammu in the 1990s], I started noticing things. There, the organisation's work, the work method, the position holders, their mentality, their policy was working wrongly. Looking from the Sangh's perspective, I found out who can cause harm to the image of the organisation. Many people worked towards their individual goals and spoiled the name of the Sangh. They were being forgiven, but I could not forgive them. I would have fights with them, and then they transferred me to Rajouri. ...

I was also disappointed by the Agartala incident. These people [referring to Advani] grew in stature in the organisation but could not protect the people of the organisation despite being in power. Then what are these people worthy of? These people are using the organisation for their personal goals. They are using Hindutva, the ideology of the country, to gain power.

Sagar: You had mentioned Chandrakant Sharma.

Shinde: Of those who were in Jammu with us for arms training, one was killed by militants in 2019. Chandrakant Sharma, in Kishtwar. It has been four or five years now since the militants killed him. [Sharma died in 2019. Shinde seems to misremember the number of years since Sharma's death.] He was very dedicated and patriotic. It is painful to even think about him. What can I even do? ...

I got introduced to him in 1995 ... He was from Doda district. He was a government worker, in a hospital. ... Chandrakant Sharma helped the army in fighting militancy, so it was natural to have such connections. Neither the army nor the Sangh used him, though—they never valued him. He did not have the security he needed and Chandrakant wasn't careful enough. It is saddening that a true patriot like him was killed. He was such an accomplished man, and I can understand his pain. There is a void now where once he was. ...

He was on the militants' hit list. ... The last time I spoke to him was in 2016. I even went to Kishtwar. But Chandrakant was not there. He was in Jammu. Anil Parihar was there. I met him. He is no more. Anil Parihar was killed eight months before Chandrakant was. [Parihar died in November 2018.] He had asked me to stay with him for a bit, but it was not possible for me, so I left. Then we continued to speak on the phone. I used to text him on WhatsApp, and he would tell me about the atmosphere there and about the location of the militants.

Sagar: He did not realise there was a threat to his life?

Shinde: There was undoubtedly a threat—that is why he had police protection. The bodyguard was also shot. ... Whenever I used to visit his house in Kishtwar, I saw him sleeping with an SLR rifle beside him. Imagine, such circumstances. ... He did not leave because he was also of the belief that it is either do or die. Everyone has the same mindset there.

Sagar: Did the Sangh help his family afterwards?

Shinde: They politicised it. When a man dies, they only take political advantage of him. It is how it is. ... For the family, they do not give any support. Nothing.

Sagar: Did you say they do not support organisations also?

Shinde: In many places, such organisations were set up by hard-working people. They were set up but later destroyed. They were not allowed to grow. For example, the Hindu Yuba Chattra Parishad in Assam. They would face hindrances and that is why they were shut. [HYCP is still active but its influence has considerably reduced.] The Hindu Raksha Samiti in Jammu and Kashmir was finished. Garjana in Maharashtra.

At the level of India, these are small organisations at the state level, not like the Bajrang Dal or VHP. They do not want to raise the flag of religion because if they have one, then it can also affect the BJP. The

work of the Sangh involves upholding the flag of religion, but now it will cause pain to the thieves and scoundrels who are sitting in high places, so it is silent. Because of this calculation, they do not let these small organisations grow. Uncountable amounts of money were being collected in the name of Kashmir but they are wasted. If this was used then I would have had no problem in doing this work.

Sagar: How did you ensure that you were not used for the same purposes?

Shinde: I remained vigilant all the time. That is how I made sure that no one was able to use me. Nowhere. Not even on the tip of a needle. But lakhs of people gave up their families for the nation because of the Sangh. So many people have never even seen their own home. By using these people, they have committed terrible sins. They are playing with the feelings of these people.

Sagar: If all of this is true, you have taken a huge risk revealing all of this. How will you deal with the fallout?

Shinde: The climate of the country has reached this level. My news has spread abroad as well. Even after all this, the Sangh does not have the courage to give any comments about me. I keep saying, let them come in front of me. I will take care of it. ...

Two people reached out to me in Mumbai recently. They asked me if I wanted to talk to anybody, because the Sangh is at a loss. I told them that they themselves are damaging the Sangh. They were from the Sangh only. People who know me well visited. I told them I am on my path to purification. They said, “Do you want to talk to Indreshji? Do you want to talk to Mohanji?” I told them, “You tell me, who listens to them anymore? The BJP doesn’t listen to them. If you think they do, kick out two people, Hare Narayan, if you dare.” By Hare Narayan I meant Modi and Amit Shah. In Marathi, Narayan means goons. Then he went silent, as if all that BJP workers do is serve these two.

Sagar: It sounds like you have a lot of love and respect for Indreshji in your heart. Did you ever try to meet him after you made all these allegations public?

Shinde: I still have the same amount of love for him as Arjun had for Bhishma Pitamah. [Bhishma is an elderly character in the Hindu epic Mahabharata, who is Arjun's granduncle and adversary.] But this is war, a war of religion. Here, duty is primary. I need to protect the Sangh, the country and the people who work for it. In this war, I cannot be soft and think that everyone is a father figure to me. I cannot waste time anymore.

Sagar: Do you think that you can save the entire Sangh by yourself?

Shinde: I can save it. Somewhere, someone must take the first step. For that, you have to endure wounds. You have to give up the life you might have had in the community, as a normal citizen.

SAGAR (/AUTHOR/915) is a staff writer at *The Caravan*.

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Vidya

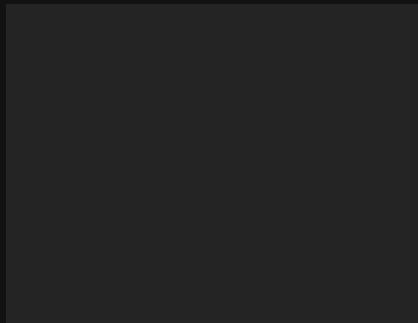
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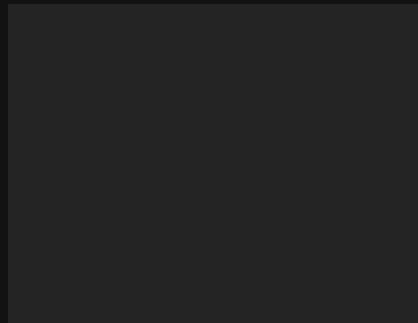
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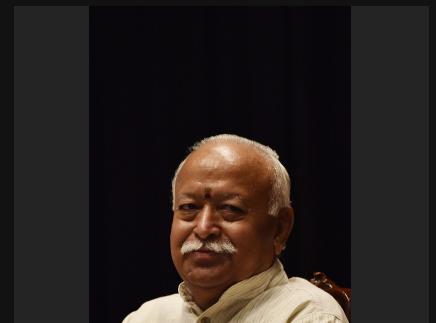
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