

## 'I didn't want to run away, so I fought back'

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<http://www.rediff.com/news/2008/dec/15sld1-the-man-who-fought-back.htm>

Attacked by a terrorist wielding an automatic weapon and a knife, Harishchandra Shrivardhankar was one of the few citizens who dared to fight back during Mumbai's night of terror, and survived to tell the tale.

Shrivardhankar, a resident of Kalyan, a township near Mumbai, sustained life-threatening wounds in the encounter. He suffered two gashes to his neck and two bullets in the back, but he put up a valiant fight. He managed to knee the attacking terrorist in the groin and hit him in the head with his carry bag.

And that is the last thing he remembers, because shock and loss of blood quickly sapped him of consciousness.

He woke up the next day, one of a hundred-plus victims being treated at the JJ Hospital. He, like many others, was admitted as an 'unknown'. When hospital staff found an identification card in his pocket, they alerted his wife by phone.

Today, he is almost out of danger, but he sports two deep, jagged, vicious knife wounds to his neck and two bullet holes in his back. One of the bullets sits lodged in his kidney, and can only be treated after consultation with specialists.

Dr M V Jagade, professor and head of the ear-nose-throat clinic at the JJ Hospital, says, "The neck wounds are quite substantial, but he is very fortunate that the knife missed the main arteries and veins. Else, he would have died. Today, looking at only those injuries, he is out of danger. Now, he will be shifted to the urology clinic, where the bullet in his kidney can be operated on."

None of the other patients in this clinic are 26/11 survivors, making Shrivardhankar a hero and a celebrity in the eyes of fellow patients. They sit around his bed and chat, while his wife sits proudly, albeit a bit nervously, by his side.

The encounter and subsequent operations have left him exhausted, but Shrivardhankar wants to share his experiences with the media. Though he finds it painful, the 56-year-old state government employee soldiers on with his narrative, because he thinks it should be heard.

"I have been working for the past two months at Mantralaya (*the administrative headquarters of the Maharashtra government*) on the voter registration drive for the upcoming elections," he says.

On the night of November 26, he was on his way to the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus to catch a train home. He took the shortcut, a narrow lane past the Cama Hospital and the Times of India building, but turned back when a panicky crowd talked of the station being attacked, and bullets rang out overhead.

"I heard the gunshots and ran inside the hospital in order to save my life. I figured I would be

safe in there. But there was a dead ward boy, all covered in blood, right at the doorway," he remembers.

At the head of a pack of fleeing would-be CST travellers, Shrivardhankar rushed up the stairwell, assuming that the terrorists were lurking somewhere outside. He was unaware of the chilling fact that they had already stormed the hospital.

"Suddenly, at the top of the stairs, in the corridor, I encountered a fair man. He was no older than 30, and was wearing a Pathani kurta. He had an automatic weapon slung over his shoulder," he recalls.

Even after the near-death experience, Shrivardhankar, a father of two boys, hasn't lost his sense of humour.

When asked to give a detailed description of the terrorist's attire and looks, he dryly replies, "If I had stood there judging his appearance, I'd surely be dead."

But he is quick to add that he remembers the man's face. "He looked like a Pathan, with a trimmed beard, and was about 5 foot 6 inches tall."

The terrorist grabbed Shrivardhankar, cursing him in Hindi and telling him that he was going to kill him.

After Shrivardhankar struck his attacker with his bag, the terrorist retaliated by inflicting a second cut on his neck, and this sent the government employee toppling to the floor. The terrorist then shot him twice, and left him to die.

Asked how he feels about his act of courage and defiance, Shrivardhankar shrugs, "I thought that either way, I was going to die. I did not want to run away like a scared cat, so I decided to hit the terrorist. Wouldn't you?"