CHAPTER IV

CASE STUDIES: AN EXPLORATION IN LIFE SKETCHES OF A FEW GANGSTER YOUTHS

As mentioned in earlier Chapter, in recent years, the entry of a significant number of youth into the criminal syndicates has appalled the Metropolis Mumbai and threatened law and order situation in the city. Youth's joining gangs and engaging into hard core crimes is not an overnight phenomenon but a gradual process, where psychological, socio-economic and cultural forces appear to play crucial role in the process. There are hardly any studies in Indian situation which probe into this growing phenomenon which has relevance to future shaping of Indian youth.

The present study makes an effort to explore and extrapolate the process of development of some of these gangster youth from their childhood to adulthood, where their life histories may reflect their entry into the hardcore crime. Intrinsic case studies in the form of drawing sketches of the lives of these youth, by probing their life-histories, form the main focus of the present study. While achieving so, a conscious effort is made in the study to explore if there is any co-relation between the criminal careers of a section of the youth and the processes of socio-economic and technological changes within the city that may lead to criminogenesis foundation to organized crime syndicates as an offshoot of such a processes of development. In this context, the case studies are prepared to provide insight into the process of human development and developmental forces. Case-studies are usually meant to bring out uniqueness of personalities and behaviours of social actors. In that sense they are not meant for generalizations, but they may provide clues and trends about the process, leading to formulation of hypotheses for their future validation.

In all, 20 case histories in the form of self-reports are included for the present study. These belong to four distinctive categories: the arrested youth for hardcore crime who are under police custody; the accused youth who are out on
had the past background of severe gang activities like extortion or killing but are presently facing much less serious and non-gang-related offences; the youth who are under trial and are housed in the prison in the city; and finally, the structuration cases of those youth who claim to have come out of the gang activities, and now trying to live a crime free life.

**Process of Data Collection and Problems Faced by the Researcher**

A routined study into the causes of growing involvement of the youth in hardcore crimes could have focussed on an 'opinion survey' across the population, supported by expert opinions from the law & order personnel, academics and practising lawyers. That was not considered very useful, without direct information from the involved youth in hardcore crimes. Any analytical study of the criminal youth through a sample survey would have been virtually impossible, due to difficulty in identifying such respondents. Instead, the researcher chose an unusual and courageous path — to directly confront the involved youth in criminal acts, by having access to them through cooperation of a few police officials, prison in charge and even a few 'bhais' (the gangsters) operating in some localities.

At first, like all formal and mandatory protocol procedures, permission was sought from the Police Commissioner of the city. After a detailed discussion on the mondus operandi, his advice and encouragement, the researcher decided to go for the case studies. The knowledge about the real gangland of Mumbai city posed a challenge from the very beginning and the 'known truth' through newspapers and other visual media later seemed 'a tip of iceberg' of the confronted truth. To reach the final stage of contacting the respondents, turned out an exercise in research methodology and a daring approach full of risks and dangers. The following points bring out the process in detail.

1. To answer the question 'where to begin?', the researcher contacted the nearby police station, Cheeta Camp. A helpful constable introduced the researcher to a group of pick-pockets who commonly engaged in petty
crimes. Through them, the researcher had the first knowledge of existing gangs of yesteryears in the area and names of a few those who are still alive and live now a normal life. A middle aged police officer (API) helped the researcher to reach out to such a former member of Naru gang, of the seventies, which operated from Cheeta Camp area, Chembur. The process of contacting the respondents thus began.

2. For every police zone, it was mandatory that the Zonal Deputy Commissioner of Police would be contacted. The researcher went to Kurla and surrounding pockets of Chembur area, which are actively criminal pockets. Slum lords of specific slum pockets were contacted who provided important information on various anti-social activities in their areas. These local leaders are usually in co-operation with the local police stations, as observed by the researcher. Through these slum lords, a small but significant part of public opinions was also collected as it was impossible to keep the interview secret in the dingy life of slums where there hardly existed a concept of "private" or "personal".

3. In Kurla area, thus, the slum lords, the police personnel and sometimes even the 'spoilt youth' helped in making contacts to a few hardcore youth criminals. Initial contacts did not prove adequate as several such potential respondents suspected the researcher and refused to cooperate. Then, the hunt would start for more contacts.

4. There were a few police stations where researcher contacted gangsters in lockup who were kept under the police custody. In contrast, the youth who were out on bail were identified informally through the concerned police or a local leader, a slum lord or even a lawyer.

5. As it was difficult to convince an 'involved' youth the purpose of the research and therefore his cooperation, so it was difficult to get cooperation of police personnel in several areas. Some police personnel reacted sharply
to the question if somebody in the area operated as a gang member? Their terse reply was: "If we know such a youth, we would arrest the person". Such difficulties in identifying the respondents were repeatedly confronted, inspite of the fact that many police personnel collected regular "hafta" from the anti-social persons, including the gangsters. Days went by just to convince the contact persons for getting a few addresses of the 'involved youth'. Further challenge was experienced in reaching out these youth, sometimes in presence of their family and much later (after gaining their trust) alone. In very rare cases, thus, a few bailed out youth could be interviewed, as they were not easily willing to share their 'secrets'.

6. To cover adequate number of cases, the researcher approached the Crime Branch. Under the strict security and vigil, a few youth were brought to the researcher and interviews were conducted without any interference from the police — though the bureaucracy had its own powers to delay or cancel the proposed interviews for the days with some genuine problem or official excuses. Under all these obstacles, the researcher identified a few those youth who were bailed out. Then, the third source was tried - getting permission of the jail authorities for interviewing the imprisoned criminal - youth (or those waiting for their trials). There also, with several difficulties, the researcher succeeded in approaching a few respondents.

7. The problems did not stop there. Once the researcher succeeded in approaching a 'fit case' for the case study, there was no surety whether the respondent would cooperate in sharing his/her life experiences. There also, both the success or the failure confronted the researcher. Such were the odds against which the research virtually struggled to give shape to the field study.

8. The first and the foremost youth to whom the researcher met and could convince him for the interview, belonged to the Rajan Gang. Even the gang rivalry posed problems in the field. The case - belonging to a particular
ethnic gang (mostly the Hindu or Muslim gang, as identified by the crime world and even police personnel), would become suspicious of the researcher's intentions of approaching a particular gang.

9. It also happened that the researcher was once a while misled - more so while interviewing a youth in some residential locality - by his sending a 'fake case' so that the main purpose of this enquiry could be revealed, or to escape any future harassment by police. Even in the jail, such ordinary 'criminals' were imposed as the 'genuine cases'. All these brought repeated frustrations to the researcher during the field work. However, the success in a few cases kept the morale of the researcher high.

10. Compared to the above situations, the 'structuration' cases were rather easy to handle and less risky.

**Preparation of Case studies**

Under the above circumstances, the researcher with great difficulty, succeeded in interviewing over 20 hardcore youth criminals. One of them was a female. The interviews were held more than once and under top secrecy. A few respondents continued to suspect the researcher till the process was over, while the others became 'free' in sharing their secrets with the researcher. They even broke down during the sessions and made the researcher emotional under such moments.
SECTION I: SELF-REPORTS OF ARRESTED YOUTH

The present section deals only with the arrested youth and a few cases on the bail. These accused youth were under police custody. As the researcher was visiting several sensitive pockets of North-South, South West, South and Eastern Suburbs of Mumbai, she came across a few those young gangsters who were especially under the police custody. Researcher spoke to them at respective police stations. The bail cases were more difficult to catch and make them speak. Interviews of the bail cases were mainly conducted with the help of the police personnel in respective police stations and a few defense lawyers, dealing with the cases. But under the category of arrested ones, researcher had to depend on the Commissioner of Police or the Crime Branch, Mumbai. The special permission had to be taken from the Joint Commissioner of Police (Crime) and Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime) for each interview that the researcher had covered, as these youth were under the police custody and under severe interrogation process. They were kept under strict security and vigil, due to their (supposedly) heinous crimes.
I do not know why I should be telling you all that happened with me, but I feel like sharing...So, I would. No, I won’t be telling them (the co-gang members) that I shared all this with you. Why?...because, as you said this is something personal, details of my life, not the kind they (police) ask....about our ‘company’. I guess you would like to write a novel on me!...

I was born here in Mumbai, but my father came from a village in Firozpur district of Punjab. He died when I was only 9 years old. He was a truck driver. As I recollect, it was an accident on the highway that took his life. That time we used to stay in the Dadar area. It was a good locality. We lived in a two-room rented flat. After my father’s death, I do not know why my mother didn’t go back to village. I guess she did not have any relatives here. In the last 15 years, I have only one ‘mamu’ (maternal uncle) visiting us who stayed in Delhi.

I was admitted to a English medium school. But after my father’s death I had to give up schooling for two years. I have two sisters. One is married now and stays in Delhi. The other one studies in class XI in a junior college. She wants to study. In 1990, my mother had to vacate the Dadar house and move into a ‘chawl’ in Kurla. I remember that we were all very sad at having to leave the house we were born in. But we had no money and my mother took up a job to support the family. At first, she worked in a beauty parlour but gave it up. Since the last 10 years she has been stitching clothes on orders from customers.

I resumed my schooling after we shifted to Kurla. But this time it was not an English Medium school as my father had wished. My mother could not afford it. Instead, it was a municipal school. At first I did not like the school; but later, as
I made friends I settled down. But I began failing in my studies. My mother would scold me; but I insisted that I wanted to work as we needed money. She would agree but she also wanted me to become a graduate.

My "peer group" was quite large and we had lots of fun. None of my friends were interested in studies. We played cricket in school and, sometimes also in other places like Matunga, Tilak Nagar and Chembur. Fun also meant watching movies and drinking. I was particularly fond of films with lots of love, emotion and romance. I first tasted liquor in class eighth. My mother did not know about my drinking, but my sisters did.

When I reached class IX, my journey into another world began. I was already 18 by then. Kareem, a boy of my age, used to tease my sister often. She did not tell me about it for a long time as she was afraid of my short temper. But I came to know from one of my friends who lived in the same chawl as we did. We knew that Kareem was close to the Abu Salem 'company' (gangs are known as company in the underworld.) When I asked my sister about Kareem harassing her, she pleaded with me to ignore it as the boy was a known local goonda (thug).

However, I spoke to Kareem one day and told him to keep off my sister. But he laughed at me and dared me to stop him from approaching her. Soon enough, one day my sister came home crying that Kareem had grabbed her hand and pulled her close in the presence of his friends. I immediately spoke to my friends about this and we all agreed that Kareem should be taught a lesson.

One night, when Kareem was with his friends in his club, my four friends and myself surrounded him with sticks and knives. Kareem immediately fell at my feet and promised to behave. Being trusting in nature, I let him off. Kareem behaved normally for just two days after that night. The following Thursday night, as I was returning home with my friends Babu and Shekhar after a late night movie, Kareem and his gang, who were armed with sticks and lathis, attacked me. The attack was so sudden that we had no chance of resisting. My friend Babu was
severely injured. I was injured in my neck, shoulders and stomach and was hospitalized for 28 days. Kareem fled to Bandra.

In hospital, Babu and Shekhar visited me regularly. Shekhar is Marathi-speaking and knew someone from the "Nana Bhai Company". He suggested that I meet the gang leader if I wanted to avenge the attack on me. As soon I left the hospital, I met Sawant Bhai, a gang-member. He listened to me very attentively. I was surprised to learn that he knew about Kareem. Sawant also confirmed that Kareem was a member of the Abu Salem gang.

Within a week I was informed of Kareem's whereabouts. I was also told that he would be visiting his mother to attend a function. Sawant provided me with two of his boys while Shekhar and Babu were already with me. At about midnight we saw Kareem coming out of his house. There were two persons with him and he was about to get into a Maruti Omni van when we attacked him. I slit Kareem's throat with a knife and kept stabbing him even after his body became still. I had lost my sense and did not realize that I had killed a man. Kareem's two friends managed to escape.

We fled in Sawant Bhai's car, which was waiting for us. That night I cried before Sawant Bhai in his flat. I also drank a lot and could not remember anything.

In the days that followed, the police visited our neighbourhood several times but could not get any clues to my whereabouts. This was because of the influence of the Marathi-speaking toughs in the area. I evaded being caught for three years and was impressed with Nana Bhai's Company and its influence. Being Hindus, we like Nana Bhai as he is against the D-company and other Muslim gangs. Soon after I joined the gang, I started getting good money. I was not being paid a salary; instead, I used to get money whenever I needed it. I was able to give money to my mother regularly. I never visited my house but I could get my family to stay with
me whenever I wanted to be with them. I don’t have a fixed place to stay in. We (the group) kept moving from Kurla to Thane—the areas where we did ‘business’.

We lived in a group of six and shared a Maruti Van and a cellophone. Several times, after carrying out crime operation, we would leave Mumbai for a few months and stay at Kolhapur, Nasik, Nagpur and Pune. Because of the bonding amongst us, I felt stronger and was not scared of getting caught. More than the money I made, it is the sense of unity and belonging (to the gang) that made us feel special.

During the three years I settled disputes, mostly related to property. Of course, if someone defies us, or denies us the amount we demand, he may get killed. I have helped in the killings of two businessmen. This was on the orders of Bhai as the two men were believed to be close to the D-company. The killings are never performed alone. We take the target and watch his every movement and routine. We struck when the victim was at his most vulnerable. The operation is during daytime as it is least expected then. Once we fled by car to Bangalore. Another time we took a state transport bus from Mumbai to Nashik. I remember having visited the Sai Baba temple at Shirdi at that time.

My elder sister was married two years ago and now lives in Delhi. The marriage was arranged by my ‘mamu’. My brother-in-law owns and operates two autorickshaws in Delhi. I felt sad that I could not attend the wedding. But I gave her a gold necklace and two bangles. Her in-laws did not know about my activities. But as my mother and sisters are aware of it, very soon they will know, too.

The police frequently enquire from my mother and sisters about my whereabouts but could not get any information. My mother cries and wants me to come out this (life), but I am obliged to ‘Bhai’ who has helped me in difficult times.
I started thinking differently when I fell in love with Kusum. I saw her in Thane where I was staying most of the time. At first I told her that I was doing a business but later on told her the truth. She has passed twelfth class, is better educated and more intelligent than I. Kusum insisted that I give up this line and 'go straight'. I agreed to give it up after our marriage. My mother was also very happy.

I approached 'Bhai' and told him about my desire to leave the 'company'. 'Bhai' gave his consent. He also gave me Rs. 50,000 to help me starting business. I decided not to get involved in any more criminal activities. I got married about one-and-a-half months back and with plans to settle in Kolkata. Then, one call ruined my dreams.

One of the gang members requested me to make an extortion call to a builder. I did it, and within two days I was arrested by the police. I am not sure whether it was my greed that brought about my downfall. Or did 'Bhai' engineer my arrest? I will never know. All I know now is that my arrest has shattered my dreams.

I do not know what will now happen to me - a jail term or death in an encounter. Or hope for a new life? I do not know. You might well ask, what pulled me into this life? I will answer in one word, destiny. Even though I feel I did the right thing in killing Kareem, it was destiny that drew me into this line. I believe in God which is why I am telling you all this.

Related Information:

The researcher learnt from police that Karan served for a long-time in Rajan's gang. The police claim that he was on the wanted list and there are at least twelve cases of extortion and killing registered against him.
They trapped me. I wanted money badly and was in a hurry to achieve my objectives without thinking about the means. They (the gang) took advantage of my "needs". I do not know whether I can come out of it. Once you are trapped, the police will harass you for money or they (the gang) will be constantly inciting you with money. One gets sucked deeper and deeper into it. I do not know what will happen to me.

I studied in a boarding school for poor students. We stayed in our own place, the place that is my address even today. I loved cricket. I was coached in the same group as Sachin (Tendulkar) and (Vinod) Kambli. I dreamt of becoming a cricketer. After my tenth standard, I had to give up my studies, as we had no money. My mother got a job in Sharjah. I soon joined her and dreamt of playing cricket there.

I worked in a grocery store in Sharjah. My mother also got me admitted to a club where I could play when I was not working. I soon got bored of playing there as it was not taken seriously and I did not see any future in it for me.

My mother worked in a beauty parlour and we stayed in Sharjah for ten years. But I could not save much there and decided to return to India to start a business. But I had no money for that and felt like a complete failure.

In Sharjah I met Yusuf whose brother worked for Dawood. Whenever I spoke to him about my money problems he would say, do not worry, kaam mil jayega you will get work. He offered to help me whenever I was in need of money.

Nairn and I returned to India together. Nairn was running a business of import-export of garments, according to him. I was soon having a lot of money and attracted the attention of many friends who thought I had made a lot of money abroad. I enjoyed the treatment. One day, Nairn spoke to me about recovering
money from a builder. He said that one of his friends had lent the man "one
khokha" (Rs. 1 crore). Such transactions are made on trust and there are no
records. When the builder did not return the money, Yusuf's brother threatened
the builder. The builder went to the police and very soon Yusuf was arrested. My
name was also mentioned and I was also arrested. I had no money. My mother did
not come to see me, as she could not get leave from her job. I had spent more than
Rs. 70,000 to come out (of jail) and was desperately in need of money. That was
when Yusuf made a formal offer to me to join the "company".

The offer was attractive. I would be paid for each job and be given legal help
whenever required. I was given a parcel, which, I found, contained a revolver. I
remember that I was sweating heavily. I was given money in advance. My main job
was to threaten people on the phone and then make the (extortion) deal.

Extortion is the major business of all "companies". There is so much black
money in the hands of people, they would settle for anything to avoid an inquiry.
Most of the time they pay up willingly. We have all details of the financial dealings
of our target in advance; this information is used to break them.

I have not killed anyone. My mother visited me once and urged me to give it
up and stay with her. But, by this time, I had married and had two children. I was
also badly in need of money. How would I provide for my family? My wife thought I
was in the export-import business. She is not educated and was happy with the
life I had given her. When she came to know the truth she was very sad and cried
a lot.

My case is being taken care of by the company. I can decide what I want to
do after my release. I want to raise my children and spend more time with them. I
would like my son to be a cricketer. I need lot of money. Maybe, if I am not
finished off in an encounter, I will go back to Sharjah and try my luck there. What
kind of job? I do not know. I am not educated. But I can drive (motor vehicles). I
will try my luck as a driver.
I do not think of coming out (of prison). If I come out, it will be because of the legal help, I will be getting from "Nana Bhai". The police do not want me to live, so they will kill me in an encounter. If I manage to survive I will do what I have been doing all these years.

My name is Suresh Thapa. My parents are Nepali; but my mother’s family has lived in Panvel for three generations where I was born. My mother married twice. My father deserted my mother when I was 13. He was a taxi-driver and all I can remember about those days was the fighting between him and my mother. He used to beat her regularly. I cannot forget the day he left our home. My parents were fighting so badly that, for the first time, I stepped in and told my father to stop. He hit me so hard that my jaws hurt for three days. I still hate him for what he did and will not hesitate to kill him if I see him again. My father left my mother, my 15 year-old sister and myself to fend for ourselves.

We were staying at the railway colony at Panvel with my grandfather and maternal uncles. I went to the Railway High School there. We could not stay there for long due to financial problems. Soon, our uncles and grandfather also began to harass and abuse us. My mother would confide in me only. She would weep at night and talk about the things she wanted to do for her children, but did not have the money for. She would not share her worries even with my sister.

About six months after my father left us, my mother decided to remarry. She asked us, her children, about our opinion. We told our mother that it was alright if she would be happy with the man she had chosen. Mother married Suraj Kawe whom she knew from her childhood days. He had three children from an earlier marriage. After the marriage we all stayed together.
At first she was happy. But things began to go bad after a year. Kawe began to drink and abuse my mother. One day, when I was 18 or, maybe, 19 he was drunk and was beating my mother. When I intervened, he hit me. I hit him back. I have no regrets about beating him. I also began to hate him, so much so that I stayed out of the house most of the time. But he never hit my sisters. I do not think he dared to.

There was always this feeling of helplessness and anger within me. The anger would come out in the fights I had with the boys of other groups. I was fairly good at Javelin throw and sprints; I even attended coaching camps for a year. But Host interest in all these and was only interested in a job. My mother wanted me to get good education so that I could land a decent job. All I wanted was to make some money and get into business. I loved her a lot and wanted to give her all the comforts of a good life.

My first police case: We had a fight with Vijay Talwale, a shopkeeper in our locality, over the catching of pigeons. Talwale lodged a complaint against us with the police and I was arrested. Mother arranged Rs 300 to get me out on bail.

I got a job in a garment factory on a salary of Rs. 1000 per month. I gave my mother Rs.750 and kept the rest. The job did not last long as I was not paid on time and I demanded more pay to support my large family. I was soon unemployed and began to drink. I borrowed money from friends as I could not bear to see my mother suffering.

The next time I found myself on the wrong side of the law was in a case of assault. Datta was a local thug who had a good rapport with the police. He often used to fight with me. During the Navaratri festival, one year, he got drunk and abused me. I was also drunk at that time and beat him up badly. I was put in the lock up. This time, a kind neighbour gave my mother Rs.6000/- for my bail.
As I had no work I used to visit my friend Dharmaraj often. One day he introduced me to Kamble. Kamble’s sister was getting married and they needed money for the wedding expenses. It was planned that the money would be arranged by extorting the amount from a doctor at Thane.

We went to the doctor’s house and demanded money. He refused. I got angry as he seemed well off (and could have parted with some money). As he would not budge in spite of our threats, I slit his throat. We fled. Later, we came to know that he bled to death. We were not suspected and for sometime I had some money.

One day Dharmaraj asked me to accompany him to the Bhoiwada court to meet Vaidya, an under trial. Dharmaraj, Kamble and I went there and were immediately arrested by the police. I then came to know that both Dharmaraj and Kamble claimed to be Rajan’s men and had cases of extortion pending against them. I was released after six months when my mother arranged for bail and surety for me.

I then worked with Jaggu, a bootlegger. I had to present myself at the police station every day. I was earning Rs.200/- every day so this did not bother me. One day, one of Rajan’s trusted men, who used to visit the place and knew about me, asked whether I would like to join the ‘company’. I agreed without a second thought.

I was trained to use a revolver for two days. Then I was given a weapon and instructed to kill a businessman. This was my first job in the ‘company’ and I did it successfully. After the killing, I was given Rs. 10,000 and sent out of the city for two months. I stayed in several places and sent money to my mother. I also got money from my contact whenever I needed it. I ate and drank a lot. My interest was only in money. I kept away from women and drugs. I was also not interested in knowing the identity of my contact.
I got married last year. My wife is from the same neighbourhood. She knew about my activities and agreed to marry me in spite of it. We have a daughter. Most people in my area know about my associations and speak to me with fear and respect. But I have not 'recruited' anyone into the gang. My mother came to know later; she is not happy but she keeps quiet. I know she is worried about me. Life became somewhat comfortable. My sisters got married. I was charging Rs.20,000 to Rs.25,000/- for each crime operation. I was uneasy at first, but I realized that I had to do this to survive. I also tried to help people who did not have money.

I do not feel guilty about killing all these businessmen and some of Dawood's (a rival gang) men. Why? Society did not help me; so I survived and earned in the manner I could. I have a motorcycle, a cellophone and some money, which is not all that much. I feel this is a profession you cannot come out of. I know I will die here. I will be loyal to 'Nana Bhai' for as long as I live.

The contact, through which I work, has assured me that I will be given help to leave the country. If this happens, it will mean a promotion (in the ranks of the gang) and more money. So, if I survive, more opportunities will come my way.

Life is all about money. If you have money, you have life. If you do not have money, forget it. My happiest moment was seeing my mother happy at her remarriage. We dreamt of a good future. Since then, I have never been happy.

The interview was conducted in a secure room in the Office of the Crime Branch, Mumbai. There were no interruptions, no interference. Thapa disclosed that he was under severe interrogation. Thapa also felt lighter and happier at sharing his life's details with this researcher as he felt that "she" empathized with him. He was not clear as to what the research was all about, but he understood who a "social worker" was and thus related with her quite easily.
"Please help me come out (of this nightmare). I know that once I come out of jail (on bail) I will be finished off in an encounter. Even now the police taunts me—tera to encounter hona mangta hai (you deserve to be killed in an encounter). I want my family to help me, but they even refuse to acknowledge my existence. I swear on Jesus Christ that I want to return to a normal life.

I am talking to you as I would to my sister - you are about her age and a bit like her, too. I was born in Kalina, Santa Cruz (E), a suburb in Mumbai. I have two older brothers and a younger sister. My family comes from Mangalore. My father worked in an accountant’s firm. He died when I was studying in the tenth standard. My mother, who taught the primary classes in a convent school, brought us up. Later, my eldest brother also helped.

All of us were given a good education. I studied in the National College and have a commerce degree. My brothers are working and are living in Matunga with their families. My sister married five years ago. I was present at her wedding.

I had a normal childhood and schooling. I enjoyed football and cricket and being in the company of friends. I liked being in large groups. But the kind of friends I had in college was different. You could not be looked down upon as a coward amongst such friends; thus I did things that would show me up as a strong person. I was very popular in my group.

There were several groups in my college as well as from other colleges with whom we had an ongoing rivalry. The causes were several, from sports to just wanting to show off our strengths. This is a part of college culture. We would chase the other groups-whom we called gangs- and beat them up with anything we had in our hands. To us, it was a glamorous life and the fact that we were not
fixed made us feel even better. My group was rowdier than the others and all of us dreamed of having our own gang. I never wanted to be noticed by the other gangs as I was thinking of starting one on my own.

By now I had begun to drift from my home. The outer world was more attractive. My mother noticed and often expressed her annoyance. This would make me angrier and I would do things just to annoy her more. She soon realized that I was going astray and began to avoid me. My brothers were too busy with their lives to bother about me. My alienation from my family was worsened by my mother's closeness to my eldest brother. The only person I was close to was my sister. She was the only person in my family who cared for me.

I stuck to college and studies for two reasons. One, I was dependent on my mother for money. Also, my friends were also in college and I liked being with them. We drank often and went on cheap dates. "You can get such dates if you have the right contacts. Everything is cheap in this city, even life. The only thing which is expensive is money."

My career began with a dacoity at the house of a friend's neighbour. Our target was an elderly man who had retired from service. We had guns and knives. We got angry because we could find only Rs.25,000/-. To make matters worse, he also began to argue with us. We beat him up and fled leaving him bleeding and unconscious. We read in the following day's papers that our victim had bled to death. We had no intentions of killing him.

We went into hiding in the eastern and western suburbs. Sometimes we would meet but, mostly, we stayed separately. On the third or fourth day one of us was arrested. Within a week, all of us were rounded up and behind bars.

We were kept in a general cell. We got in touch with one of Shakeel's men, Ali, who promised to help if we agreed to join them. We were promised a far better life than the one we were leading till then. We could have everything we wanted in
Hi. I accepted the offer and things changed immediately for me. I was treated differently from the other prisoners. The food I ate was of the type one could get only in a (decent) hotel. In three months I was out of jail. And, by the way, my mother never visited during this time. Neither did I think of her. My thoughts were only on how to make money.

I worked for four years in the 'company'. I was not involved in extortions. I settled disputes and if the party did not fall in line, I would kill. Killing was necessary, as it would instill fear in the minds of others. We never got a fixed salary but got whatever money we asked for. It used to vary from five to fifteen thousand rupees. It was not enough, but at least it took care of my needs. The senior members of the 'company' get more and one could rise high enough to become a millionaire.

We also learnt to use guns. The training method was simple: at nights or, sometimes during daytime, we would be taken to a quiet place and made to fire at a target.

In the areas where we had control, the company would demand a hafta (protection money). The collections did not go to our bosses; rather, it was needed for our routine expenses (kharcha pani).

Having joined the 'company' there was no question of getting out. You have to be hundred percent loyal all the time or you are finished. Orders have to be carried out without any questions asked. I used to be sent out of the city after a murder. Once it was Ooty, on another occasion it was Chennai where we have people to look after us. We would return to Mumbai after things cooled down for us.

I never wanted to kill. I used to do it for the money but I would have preferred extortion over murder. It was hard to kill someone you did not know. After my first job I could not sleep and eat properly for several days. But, as I saw
The other members of the gang cope, I managed to survive. Today, I would call myself a sharpshooter (one who does the actual killing).

The only disturbing thing was that I could never stay in one place for long. I had to keep moving to avoid being caught. When I saw a friend being killed in an encounter with the police, the fear of death haunted me. Since that day I have not slept properly. Drinking became a must to keep my nerves calm; sometimes I took drugs, too.

One day, as I was on my way to Nashik to hand over some money to another 'bhai', the police arrested me. If I had tried to flee or resisted arrest, I would have been killed. (The police claim that Daniel was hiding in the Haji Ali area when the crime branch caught him.)

I now realize that my world is not so simple. You actually begin to hate after a while. Today, the beggar on the street looks a happier man than me. I believe in God. I think it was destiny that brought me here.

What next? I might be sent to the Arthur Road Prison. If I come out on bail, the police will finish me off. I would like to go to small place where I could be safe. But how can I leave this city? If I try to, they (the gang) will kill me. Who will give me a chance to lead a normal life once again?

Nowadays I think about my mother a lot. Will you call and tell her that I am here? (The police officer also said that Daniel's mother was informed about his arrest, but she refused to see him.)
Related Information:

The senior police inspector of the police station in charge of Daniel's case says that there are a dozen cases against him of which three are about robberies. Daniel was hiding in the Haji Ali area when the crime branch caught him. He has claimed to be a resident of this area (which is under the jurisdiction of the police station); so he will remain there for the duration of his judicial custody.

Daniel also denies links with any gang. The police are sure that he is associated with a gang but are not sure which one.
I am repenting now. Perhaps, if I had made more money, I would not have felt this way. I feel cheated and used by them (the gang). I do not think the police will help me. My family does not have the money for my legal expenses. So I have no choice but to accept help from them. Thus I will be obliged to them even more. I will have to remain with them. My future is dark. I feel scared.

We are six brothers and sisters. We were all born here (in Mumbai). My father came from Allahabad to make a living in this city. Two of my sisters are married and are living near my father’s village. The third sister had a love marriage and is living here. My elder brother is working in Saudi Arabia. I do not know what he does. My younger brother is an electrician. My father was a taxi-driver who could barely make ends meet. We were a typical lower middle class Muslim family who could not enjoy even the smallest of life’s comforts. We were always short of money.

Even though I was doing fairly well in school, education was a luxury we could not afford. I was also in the company of boys, who did not attach any importance to studies but were ambitious. All of us wanted to do business. In the place where I stay there were people having different vocations - vegetable sellers, rickshaw drivers, etc. Some of them owned two-wheelers and used cellophones. They were the models we wanted to emulate. I dropped out of school after the tenth standard and told my family that I wanted to work.

My first job was in a dye-making unit. I earned about Rs.250/- to Rs.300/- a week. I would give most of the money to my family keeping enough to sustain my gutka (chewing tobacco mixed with flavours and scents) habit. I also loved to see films. I would often go with my friends Arif and Aziz.
During this period, my family also arranged my marriage. The pressure for money increased and I was desperate. Aziz would often tell me about the glamorous life one could lead after joining the underworld. He was a smooth talker. He also managed to convince me that the chances of death in an encounter were very less. After all, if you look at the number of people involved, very few have died in this manner. We liked Aziz’s easy style and believed him. He would talk about the gangs casually.

One day Aziz told us that we could earn Rs.50,000 each if we carried out a job. We were given an advance of a few thousands and told to keep a watch on the movements of a businessman. Arif’s brother, Aslam, also accompanied us, as he did not want his brother to take the risk alone. All of us were sure of one thing - we wanted money to better our lives. We watched the businessman’s movements for a few weeks. By then, we got a good idea about his routine. Aziz then told us that we would have to do the job for ‘Shakeel Bhai’. The businessman had refused to meet Shakeel’s demands and he wanted to teach him a lesson. Aziz did not want to use guns; instead he had planned to kill him in his office in Crawford Market in daylight. It was important that the “rich businessmen” live in fear of the company.

Aziz spoke to our target a few days before the killing. We were excited that we were finally a part of the gang. We had no idea about what it was to feel about finishing off someone whom we did not even know. On the day we had planned the murder, there were too many people in the businessman’s office. So decided to carry out the job another day. Finally, the day arrived. Aziz was guiding us. We went inside and closed the main door of the office. Aziz delivered the first blow. Then Arif, Aslam and I attacked him. It was as if it was a dream; I did not even realize what was going on. The glass wall broke during the scuffle and there was blood all over. We rushed outside and dispersed in different directions. I ran in the direction of a sports stadium. I was in a daze as though under the influence of drugs.
Aziz gave us Rs. 8,000 each that night. We were all disappointed and felt cheated. Aziz promised that we would be paid more later. I then realized that we had made a mistake (in getting into this business.). We left the city and went to Arif’s village in Azamgarh District in Uttar Pradesh. When we returned, Aziz gave us Rs. 3,300 more to each of us. We were still not happy as we felt that such a job should have fetched us more money. Three months after we returned to Mumbai, we were arrested.

I am not certain about the future. I am afraid as I do not know what will happen to me after I come out. I would like to go back to my father’s village to make my living there. Nobody will give a chance to reform myself in this city.

Related information:

The interview was conducted in the premises of the Office of the Commissioner of Police, Mumbai. Shaikh was taken there for interrogation. Though he had confessed to this crime, police reports claim that Shaikh is involved in more cases related to gang activities.
I am aware of the fact that I was caught when I was working for Shakeel Bhai, but that was long ago. I wanted to come out. Unfortunately, once you are in, there is no coming out of it. You are trapped by the gang and by the police. My picture has appeared on TV and in the papers as a notorious gangster. Do you really think I can lead a normal life after this?

I was born into a well do-do family. My mother is a schoolmistress in a secondary school and my father is a share broker. We never had financial problems. My three sisters have finished school, which is not common in Muslim families, and are now married. My brothers are also doing well - one of the brothers is a model and the other two have a garment business at Mohamed Ali Road.

But I could only study upto the ninth standard. My peers were different and I was swayed by their influence. By the time I had realized this, it was too late. I had come a long way by then. Since the fourth standard, I was influenced by Arif who was three years older than me. Arif introduced me to group of boys from a nearby Urdu-Hindi medium school. The school had a bad name as most of the bad elements in the area were from there.

There, I met Rashid whose father was a notorious pickpocket and had his own gang. Rashid rode to school on a motorbike. Arif and a few others, who did not have their own vehicles, used to ride pillion with Rashid. For me it used to be a matter of pride to have friends who were older, mature and who drove motorbikes. One day, Rashid took us to a hotel at Malabar Hill (a posh locality in Mumbai), and spent Rs. 5,000/-. He was 19 years then and I was 16. I was...
impressed on seeing Rashid spend so much money like that! From class VI, I started to fail. My mother used to express her worries about me to my father and also scolded me several times; but father was too busy to bother. Mother tried to convince me that I should study but by then I had stopped listening to anybody. I had my own dreams of fun and a glamorous life with friends. "Bahar ki duniya zyada rangeen lagne lagi thi (the world outside looked more attractive and exciting)". We went to bars, smoked, and often went to dance parties. I started stealing from my mother's wallet and sometime asked my elder sister for money. She used to give me money as she was very fond of me and could not bear to see me unhappy.

Once the police came to our neighborhood club and picked me up, along with Rashid, Arif and three other friends. That was my first experience of a police station. The police asked us separately about Rashid - about how much money Rashid spent on us, how frequently, and so on. We later got to know that he used to steal money from neighbors and spend it on us. But we were released in two days, as we were not party to his crimes.

But after class IX, I told my parents and brothers that I did not want to study and would like to have my own business. My father didn't object; in fact, he gave me enough money to put up a garment fashion shop at Mohammed Ali Road. I was only 20 and I had my own shop. My business was doing well, but at the same time, I also had a lavish lifestyle. I was drinking heavily and would often move around the city with friends. We also spent a lot on prostitutes, mostly on college girls who entered this line. You can have them for a reasonable amount for a few hours. When I made some money in the business, I bought the latest model of a motorcycle.

Meantime I met young men like Rehman, who was fascinated by "bhai's duniya". Rehman knew Rajjak Kashmiri and Haji Mukhtar, associates of Chhota Rajan. He used to tell us stories of that world, of the power of money, the influence they commanded, and the fun they had. "Log unko salaam karte hai aur..."
I was very close to Rehman and even used to go to his house. It was in Rehman’s locality that Haji Mukhtair came for shelter when he was out on bail. Rehman introduced me to him. He also described how glamorous life was in the underworld, about how Razzak Kashmiri was treated like a king, even in jail, and how Kashmiri ran his business from jail. Throughout our conversation, Rehman was talking to several people, including Nana Bhai, on his cellophone. I was so impressed that, when I came back home, I was only dreaming about that life.

Within a few weeks, Haji Bhai called us and offered work if we were interested. We agreed without a second thought. After all, we were going to get a taste of the life we had only heard about till then. We were told to go to a bus stop in Dadar and board a bus for Nashik. There were four of us, including Rehman and myself. At the bus stop, we met Haji Bhai with another man named Dhupchand. We were told to go inside the bus and pull out a passenger named Mule, a businessman. We presented Mule before Haji Bhai, who ordered him to pay Rs. 40 lakhs to Dhupchand. I realized that this was an extortion. It seemed that Dhupchand was Mule’s rival. Mule promised to pay the money but he said that we would have to go to Nashik for the amount. We went by car to Nashik and stayed in a hotel. Rehman and I were guarding Mule and were talking to him. I even gave him my home address etc. as we were told by Haji Bhai to behave in a friendly manner. Mule gave 20 lakhs to Haji Bhai and promised to pay the remaining Rs. 20 lakhs in a few weeks. So he was allowed to leave after which we left for Mumbai. While Rehman and I were returning to Mumbai, we were arrested. It was the bus conductor who had informed the police about his suspicions when Mule was pulled out of the bus. Haji Bhai recruited a defense lawyer and we were out of jail within 14 days. I knew that Rs 2 lakhs were distributed among the police to hush the matter.
But, soon after I came out, my troubles started and life took an altogether different turn. Chhota Shakeel's men were angry as Mule was from their area. Being Muslims how dared we join hands with Rajan? Rehman was murdered within two weeks and my house started getting phone calls. They threatened my family too, and to such an extent that my father suffered a stroke and was paralysed. My mother begged forgiveness, but they demanded that I join Shakeel. I dared not complain to the police, so I tried to evade them as best as I could. I could not sleep. The horrors of reality began to dawn on me. They even knew where I went, what clothes I wore, what I ate, who I spoke to, everything. I was completely under their watch.

One day, I gave my hat to my friend to wear while I made a phone call. All of a sudden I saw him fall to the ground. He had been shot and wounded badly. They (the gang) had shot my friend by mistake. I can recognize the assailants even in my dying breath. But I was scared to go to the police. They now threatened to kill even my family if I went to the police. It was even worse now that they had started threatening to kill my whole family if I dared to help the police.

I refused to identify the two gunmen. My photo was published in the newspaper and I was labeled as Shakeel's man. I was caught between the wrath of these two gangs. Rajan bhai's men were angry with me for deserting them; Shakeel's men were angry, as I became known to the public as one of them. In the process, I also became an enemy of Rajan's gang. Since then I have been obliged to Shakeel and have started working for his gang. I have been working with them for the past one and a half years and was caught while making an extortion call to a real estate businessman in the city.

I do not know what lies in the future. If I am alive, I will have work under and for them and if I die, it would be at the hand's Rajan's men, who hate me, or in a police encounter. When I look back, I would say that I alone am responsible for what I have gotten into. It was greed, bad company and a fascination for a glamorous life that made me go astray. I do believe in Allah and I know that what I
I have realized today, is because of him. I feel sad that I have brought embarrassment to my family. If I were given a choice, I would love to leave this city and go somewhere in Karnataka where I have my uncles and do some business and live a normal life.

Related Information:

It must be mentioned here that the youth spoke to the researcher in English and gave the impression of coming from a well-to-do family. About the police trivializing his first case, the concerned officer, presently with the Crime Branch, was supervising the interview. He shared the information that, in such cases, the investigating officers leave a flaw in the case. The concerned police officer who would be looking after the case then would recommend that "the granting of bail to the accused is left to Your Worship". This claim was to some extent verified by the police interrogation records with the help of some co-operating police personnel in the crime branch.
The bail cases were more difficult to reach out to. They were sensitive for both researcher and the interviewee. It was difficult to make the interviewees open up as they had the fear that, if the information were shared with the police, it might make them more vulnerable. The researcher’s requests for an interview were scrutinized and consent was obtained only after a great deal of persuasion. The interviewer was not allowed to record the conversation on paper or tape. In some cases, the interviewer was also escorted back to my institute campus on the stated grounds of courtesy; actually it was a means of ensuring the bonafides of the researcher. There was an element of danger; too, for the interviewee who feared that the information they revealed might compromise their safety.

The reluctance to be interviewed was evident from their responses. Some would not keep to the appointed dates and time. Sometimes the family members would exhibit aggressive behaviour to intimidate the researcher. Sometimes the interviewee was just not available; an unexpected inquiry with a neighbour would reveal that he was, in fact, hiding in the neighbour’s house. Sometimes, when a constable accompanied the researcher, particularly if the interviewee was living in a slum, the person would avoid the interview out of fear of police harassment.
SELF- REPORT - I

Name: Karim Khan
Age: 28
Education: XII
Gang: Abu Salem.

I want to leave the city. I want to lead a normal life. I would like the police to help me. My mother has said that I should go whenever the police summons me. My marriage has been fixed for next week, and I have come here to invite a few friends. I have to inform the nearest police station about my presence here. After the marriage, my mother doesn't want me to stay on in this city. I want to go to small town near Allahabad. My uncle stays there and I can join his business.

We come from the Azamgarh district in Uttar Pradesh. My father came here after his marriage. He had a jari ka kaam (weaving gold embroidery for silk garments). I was born here in Bandra and we lived in a joint family. My father died when I was in class XI. I think I have gone quite far in my education. In middle class Muslim families, we do not go far in education. Two of my paternal uncles are in the furniture business. It is not so big but 'guzar ho jata hat' (means of subsistence is secured). But my grandfather had business of zari ka kaam.

We are a big family. I have seven brothers (including cousins) and five sisters. Four are married. I am attached to my mother, but I got diverted for sometime. Among my siblings, I like my youngest sister and brother the most. My schooling went on quite well. But I always had friends who would take gutka (an addictive mix of tobacco and added flavors), bidi (rolled tobacco leaf), etc. I started studying in a madrassah and till the age of ten I did well. No, my marks were not great, but I did not fail either.
When I went to college (for twelfth/ higher secondary), I had friends who used to come on bikes and seemed to have lots of money. I had two friends, Saif and Aftab who used to take us almost daily to a hotel for snacks. Other friends also used to spend. I was junior to them. They used to like me. My friends were a rowdy group, but at that time I liked to be associated with them and was proud of it. While they all had bikes, I was still asking my mother for money. She never refused, as she loved me. But she never had an idea of what I did with the money. There were several festivals during which we drank and had lots of rowdy fun. I started failing in my exams. Whenever my uncles or my mother asked about it, I would say that I wanted to get into a business. I somehow finished the twelfth standard in my third attempt. I told Aftab that I wanted to do business. He told me that his brother was running an export-import business and I could join him. I went to meet him. He had an air-conditioned room and a car. He was talking to several people and there were many who were about my age, well dressed and speaking English. Aftab introduced him to me as “Salim Bhai”. He told me that I could join from that day, because I was Aftab’s friend.

Initially, my work was to be with groups of young men to keep watch on someone's movements and routine. Sometimes, Aftab would also be with us. I did not give it much importance, but I was wise enough to realize that ‘bhai’ had some do numberi (illegal) business. But I was enjoying it and was getting paid for nothing. In first week I was paid Rs.6,000/- for just roaming around with my group in cars. There was no one single car that we went around in, but three or four.

One day, the four of us walked into an office. After we entered, the one who was leading us closed the door and shot two people in the lounge. I did not realize what was happening, I just followed the man. We then entered the room of the owner (of the business) and shot him. I can still remember the day and what happened. No words were spoken, no fights, just shooting at point blank range. There was blood on the glass wall. In 15 minutes everything was over. I was in a dazed state. We ran to our car and got in as it started. We reached Mumbai
Central station and were on our way out of Mumbai in an hour. We went to
different places - Bangalore, Hyderabad, Lucknow and, finally, Delhi. It was
Abhi who did the shooting. He told me that I was now in this business and was
forking for Abu Salem. I was too shocked to respond. But after we reached our
destinations we would get calls from "bhai" who told us that "everything will be
alright". We stayed in good places - three star hotels and such places. We had
everything, I was given Rs. 15,000/- and was told that if I needed more, I would get
it. After three days when Abdul asked me what I would like to do now, I decided to
stay back with them. At first it was fear. But I got over it. Now, only "money" and
the good life mattered.

I was given a gun, and was trained by Abdul on its use. After three months
we came back to Bombay. Work started and now I was willingly involved. Besides
communicating with our targets and keeping watch on people, I was also involved
in three murder cases - all builders. But we kept moving from one place to
another. There were always four of us in an operation but the group members
kept changing. I am also not sure if they used their real names. There were
Hindus and Christians amongst us also; what mattered was not religion but
money, only money.

Drinking and drugs are common. Quite a few of us spent on prostitutes
also. I visited several during the past three years. If we wanted, we could also call
them over.

The operations were never planned in advance; instead it would be on that
day or the day before. The person who coordinated the operation was the leader. If
you performed well you got the chance to lead. What could be the profit in it apart
from money? The motivating factor for most us was power and the urge to be one-up
on the other groups.

One cannot imagine how far one can go in this life. Greed and a lust for
power are the drivers. You also know that you cannot come out of it; so you go
bond fear. I felt this way till three of my colleagues were killed in an encounter day. I barely escaped, as I had left the place just an hour earlier. I was arrested about three and a half years later. In jail, I had the time to think. We had ill facilities in jail and I met many men from my company and a few known faces. My mother came to see me after I was arrested. She cried. She told me that I must leave the city if I wanted to survive. She also told me to refuse the lawyer they had arranged for me and that she would arrange for a good one for me. But my cell mates advised me that the "company" lawyers were very professional and could get me out on bail quickly. I trusted them.

I had information that Salim Bhai had left the country and was somewhere abroad. After one year, I was out and it's been nine months since. I do get calls from them. Salim Bhai also spoke to me and said that I could quit if I wanted to. I do not believe this as I know that I can be killed or betrayed to the police. I do not have a cellphone. I have also given up the gun.

Earlier I could not sleep unless I drank. But now I sleep well. I have agreed to marry because my mother wants it very much. She thinks that marriage would make me leave this line faster. She doesn't know that it is not easy. The police still come to my house often. I am afraid that they will just pick me up and kill me in an encounter. They have done it several times. They put a "burkha" on the victim, take him to some far away place and just shoot. The poor guy will be handcuffed. Otherwise, tell me, why are the police never injured anytime; why couldn't one of these gangsters who were killed hit back?

Family should help us in the beginning when we enter the crime world. It is only when we are deep into it, family members became scared. It is because of them that things become worse as we cannot come out it (for fear of getting killed). When I was arrested I had committed three murders, but there are 17 cases against me. They frame cases so that it becomes difficult for us to come out. Sometimes I feel they (police) are also responsible. But my mother has advised me
to cooperate with them and so have all my uncles. I am doing that. But I am also scared and unsure about my future as I do not trust either the law or the "gang".

In my mohalla, they treat me well. After I came out of jail, there were youngsters who came to me and were curious to know about life 'there'. They call me "bhai". It doesn't feel good anymore as I don't see any glamour in it, but they do not know because they have not been in it. I have seen some of my friends talking to these boys, and I won't be surprised if some of them join the gang. They come in cars and have mobiles and look happy from the outside, as I used to be.

Greed and the lure of money can pull a person into this life. I am surviving today because of my faith in God. I recite my namaaz four times a day.

Related Information:

The researcher met Karim's mother at the police station. She came a little late on the second day when researcher had almost finished talking with Karim. She was suspicious and refused to talk to the researcher. She kept telling that her son had come out of it and she should not be disturbing him. She (the mother) also confirmed that Karim was going to get married and would look after his uncle's business. The researcher could not convince the mother that she was a student and was working on this subject. The mother doubted her and thought that she was with the police and pleaded not to harass him. She also scolded Karim for talking to the researcher at length. But Karim invited the researcher to his marriage. He addressed the researcher as apa (elder sister). He also promised that whatever he shared would be confidential and he hoped that would be the same from the researcher's side as well. Karim was acquitted of gang-related charges. The other cases pending are individual offenses and not gang related. Thus, technically, Karim is not linked to any "gang" at present.
It is not correct to say that I am connected to any gang at present. There are no cases pending against me, except two assault cases, which are not gang-related. If it had been so I would not be alive today. After the bomb blasts they arrested four of us. We were told to run. Three of us ran and were shot. I was saved because I refused to run. I cried loudly and cut my chest. The police lost their nerve and left. They ran like cowards, which is why they do not fight; they only shoot.

I was born and brought up in this Nagpada slum. My father left my mother, but he sent us money even after leaving us. He had a fruit shop, but he was cheated by his brother and lost a lot of money and the business. Then he did some petty jobs in a factory. He also stayed in Nagpada. My mother used to fight with him a lot, but she loved me. Father felt that she would spoil me and wanted to send me to his relatives in Basti (Uttar Pradesh), but my mother wouldn’t let me go. There was a big fight and hathapai and then he left.

He sent money whenever he could, but stayed alone and did not marry again. Sometimes, I would go to meet him. He did not like my leaving school. Once my mother and I had a big fight and she returned to her parent’s village in Azamgarh. I was left alone with my father. I learned to fend for myself, as my father did not care for me.

In the mohalla (neighborhood) I was brought up in, fights were common. When we were kids we saw several famous gangsters of the eighties coming to take shelter in our area. The local dada used to collect protection money from the
local *matka* businessmen and small businessmen. This *dada* had several followers, mostly young men for whom it was a matter of pride. During the early 1980s, this locality was predominantly inhabited by Muslims from Uttar Pradesh, mainly Azamgarh and Basti districts. I have been to Azamgarh several times and seen that violence is a common feature there. Keeping a *katta* (handmade pistol) and *khoon kharabi* (bloodshed) is not uncommon there. We are not friendly towards each other there, why should it be any different after coming to Mumbai? Children are exposed to violence and crime of all sorts from an early age; so it is not surprising that one should take pride in association with a gangster. We were also a part of that culture. We do not choose our leader; rather, the leader establishes himself and gathers his men around him.

In every locality, there would be a leader. In my childhood we had our *takla* gang. Anna Baroda, who was shot dead in the nineties, was our gang leader and a member of the Amar Naik gang. Before that there was the *dudhwala* gang. The mother of the gang leader used to sell milk. But he became rich by picking pockets. After Anna’s death, we were looking for a leader who was experienced to take on the rival gangs.

In the early nineties, Hanif bhai came and took shelter in our community. He was *tadipar* (externee) and was basically from Dongri area of Mumbai. Hanif was working with Ejaz Pathan at that time. When the police came looking for him, all of us young boys got to know that he was hiding with a friend. We denied that he was there. Later we made Hanif bhai leader of the *takla* gang. Our main business was to collect *hafta* from *matka* and country liquor shops and small businessman. We did some petty thefts and snatching (of chains and bags) too.

The money we made was spent in a manner typical of street culture - drugs and cinemas. In the meantime, I had gone to jail for three years on a murder charge. I had stabbed a person who had an eye on my sister. After I came out of jail, I used to go to Mumbra (Thane) with my friends. There I met Jafar Kalia who was a member of the Shakeel gang. As I was not getting on with Hanif I joined
Shakeel was an associate of Dawood, though he operated independently. Faria and Usman Bhora used to operate together. When it became known that I was in Shakeel’s gang, my image among the youngsters went up.

Our main work was extortion. There was a brief period of one year when I went back to jail again for a robbery. I was declared a *tadipar*, and put on a train. After the policemen saw me off, I got off the train and came back.

We were well looked after and everything went smoothly till 1993. That was when the bomb blasts took place. We were not aware of the plan. We were only told that we have to prepare for a big gang war. Weapons and explosives were kept in milk cans and kerosene tins stored in safe places. After the Babri Masjid demolition, we were thinking of destroying all the Hindu gangs in the city. But our leader had different plans; he wanted to kill as many as possible. I had left the gang by then as I was thinking of starting my family. After the blasts I was arrested again, not as a gang-member and an accused, but because I was Muslim. Hater got bail.

I used to feel proud of the times when I worked for the “gang”. The police resorted to encounter deaths mercilessly after the bomb blasts of 1993. I was scared only twice - once when the police was searching for me for a murder I committed. Before that I had no police record. The second time was when I was arrested after the bomb blasts. But when I was in jail things were not so bad. I gave the policemen money to get things done. Like for example, I used to pay two *takla* (one *takla* is Rs.500/-) to the policeman not to handcuff me when I was brought to court. I could even go home. I also attended a marriage during this time. I feel proud, instead of being scared or embarrassed on being escorted by policemen.

I now stay in this basti in Shivaji Nagar area and have my own house. You can actually buy such land from the police. Earlier the rate was Rs.300/- for getting a place to make one *kholi*, now it is Rs.500/-. This is part of the land
reclaimed from the sea used for dumping garbage. I sell fruits in this area. But this is not all that I do. I have my own gang, but we don't take *hafta*. Our major source of income is from this *kachra* (garbage). How? Actually, we see gold in garbage. We collect metal scraps from the garbage that is dumped here. Sometimes we even get pieces of jewelry, money, precious stones etc. I pay whoever works here. I even had to fight off rival groups to keep my hold here.

I want to become popular. I will make my mother contest the elections. If she wins it will not be easy for the police to harass me. You can see how clever Arun Gawli is. If we lose the elections, I would like to go to the Gulf and do some business there. Kuwait is one place I think of often; I have a friend there. I would like to do an export-import business from there.

I am married and have three children. I stay in a different kholi and my mother stays nearby. I have a brother who does nothing but wants to make money by doing business. He has dropped out of school. Whenever he is scolded he leaves the house and does not return for days. I will give him some money only if he is capable.

It is true that I am scared. If I do not keep the police happy they will kill me in an encounter. They do not look for active gang members now. People, like me, are enough to get their names in the papers. I do not know what I should do. Perhaps, I can survive by leaving the city.

If you want I can put you in touch with an active member of the S-company. You will see that these people do not feel proud anymore. This world looks attractive from the outside. I feel that it was the environment we grew up in that influenced us. We could see policemen being bought with money. I was impressed with Hanif bhai and Usman Bhora. There are kids around here who are now impressed by me.
Related Information:

The youth showed the researcher the wounds on his chest. The researcher also met his mother. She denied that her son had any association with a gang, but that he always wanted to be a leader which is why he was being harassed by the police and neighbors. He was a good son but emotional like his father. She admits that she should not have left her son alone when she went back to her native village. In fact, she held Aslam’s father responsible for the son going astray.

The police do not think he is associated with any gang now. They consider him more as an anti-social element who has to be locked up during festival time or any big events in the area. The police station also gave the information that the Muslims here are basically here from Azamgarh, Basti and Donga districts of Uttar Pradesh.

Aslam also invited the researcher to his dwelling and to see for herself how peaceful his place was. She saw that he had a big following of admiring children who were in awe of his courage.

The question that still remains unanswered is that if Aslam’s claim of having no links to the gang is true, how does he know so many things about the gangs, the police and prison?
Please do not disclose that I knew so much and disclosed the information to you. They will kill me if they come to know. No one in Nagpada will dare to admit that they are or were a part of any gang. These men now move about in the garb of holy men - a sadhu or a pir. My life depends on your keeping quiet. The police are not sincere about eliminating the gangs. They are only after small fry like me. The bosses are out of reach and live a life of comfort and luxury.

I was in the Madanpura locality of Nagpada. We are a poor Muslim family, my father came here from Azamgarh in search of a better life. A distant relative of his had a carpentry business here and my father joined him. We are 12 brothers and sisters. All my sisters are married and my brothers are either doing contract work for zari ka kaam or are working in a furniture factory. I am presently doing the same (carpentry).

Madanpura is a place where Muslims are in a majority. There are Buddhists and Christians also, but their numbers are very small. During the riots of 1992, there were no incidences of violence here. We had also started the first relief camp for Muslims who took shelter here from other areas. But Madanpura is also known for its hot-headed residents and fights are not uncommon. The people here are mostly butchers or carpenters or are in the zari ka kaam business. The people used to see often were gamblers, drunks or pimps.

As children, we would collect the liquor bottles left behind by gamblers. About eight or ten of us would mix water with the leftovers and consume it with
cheap snacks. The big gangs commanded a lot of respect, as they would often intervene to sort out local disputes. We never went to the police as we did not trust them and feared that they would harass us. The gang did not take hafta from us. This job was left to the local gangs who would collect from small traders and businessmen. These gangs would fight each other till someone got killed and another went to jail. There was intense competition among the gangs to attract the attention of bigger gangs of Dawood, Shakeel and Abu Salem.

I remember my mother as always cooking or looking after the children. I dropped out of school very early. I do not remember if parents opposed my decision or not. By the age of 13 (or 14), I was addicted to tobacco and country liquor. To meet my expenses I would do odd jobs. Later, I got a job in a carpenter's factory. My monthly salary was meager Rs.500-600/-. I was always in need of money as I had taken to mandrax as my latest addiction. You gradually form a circle of friends who have similar habits and activities. No one teaches you. It just happens that you progress to more and more dangerous drugs.

I met Rashid at the carpentry factory where I worked. He always had a lot of money to spend. I would wonder how. Rashid and I became close. He would tell me about the gangs and how a lot of money could be made and life's every want and comfort could be taken care of. I was tempted.

I formally joined the 'D' company through Rashid. I was given a cellophone, a revolver and Rs.5,000/- in cash. Rashid taught me to pull the trigger. I was happy as I had never seen so much money before in my life. My first job was a murder. Four of us killed a businessman who was a Hindu. I did not even know the names of my accomplices. Rashid was also not with us. The orders to kill came over the phone. It was an international call and the calling number did not appear on the screen of my phone. I do not know how. I think it was "bhai" himself who spoke to me; if it was not him it must have been a close associate. As it was my first job, I wanted to do it thoroughly and completely. I shot my victim at point-blank range to make sure I did not fail. Since I did not have a police record
and I would leave the city after every job, I was able to avoid detection for a long time.

I spent the money on liquor and women. I would spend it all and not bother about saving some of it. But I began to think of changing after I met Tahira with whom I fell in love. She knew about my activities and wanted me to come out of it and start a new life. I cut down on drinking and stopped visiting prostitutes. I was arrested in 1999 and released in December 2001. Two cases are still pending against me but are not related to gang-related offences. Otherwise, I would have been dead in an encounter by now. I present myself at the police station whenever I am summoned.

I have a carpentry shop and a small house of my own. I have two daughters.

If you ask me whether I am still involved with the gang, my answer is no. But, frankly, sometimes my need for money is so great that it also overcomes my fear of death in an encounter. I was drawn into the gang because of the influences in my childhood and the environment I grew up in. My addiction to liquor and drugs only made it worse. I have gone through a drug rehabilitation course for Tahira’s sake. Today, my only addictions are tobacco and bidi.

**Related Information:**

While talking to the researcher, Afzal provided a lot of information on the recent activities of the gang. This leaves an element of doubt whether he has completely left his past behind. He jokingly (and boastfully) also remarked how jail was a college for new entrants to the gangs. This is indicative of the fact that our correctional system is flawed and instead of reforming, it is actually a breeding place for criminals.

Afzal also shared some of the jargon the gangs use. For example, *chappals* (slippers) mean revolver; *bachha* (child) means bullet; *umar* (age) means the caliber of the bullet; *kagaz* (paper) is the money; and the target is called the *dulha* or bridegroom.