

**Akshardham victim's long road to recovery**

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Scars of the Akshardham terrorist attack in September are still fresh for Hitesh Dhariya (32). Dhariya was hit by four bullets, which left him unable to move his left shoulder and robbed him of sensation and mobility in his right arm and fingers. He also sustained two bullet wounds in his right waist.

**Hitesh Dhariya**  
recovering  
from reconstructive  
surgery  
of the right hand at  
Bombay Hospital,  
Marine Lines

Dhariya is now recovering from reconstructive surgery of the right hand at Bombay Hospital, Marine Lines. If the operation turns out successful, he will regain sensation and mobility in his arm.

Dhariya will have to first undergo physiotherapy. Plastic surgeon Dr Ashok Gupta said, "It will take three months since nerves don't function immediately."

Dhariya was showing visitors round Exhibition Hall 1 in the Akshardham temple at Gandhinagar on September 24, 2002, when the militants attacked. "They bombed visitors rushing out and turned to us. We surrendered and lay down on the floor in a semicircle. But they fired two rounds at us anyway," Dhariya remembered.

Dhariya didn't feel the bullets hit. However, his bleeding right hand shocked him. "I also realised I couldn't move my left shoulder," he added. He then requested a less-injured volunteer to bind his handkerchief around his right hand, and they walked to the projector room.

Realising the air-conditioned interiors were bad for his bleeding wounds, he walked toward Gate 6. “Outside, I saw people screaming for help. There were broken limbs lying around,” Dhariya said.

Later, Dhariya was shifted to the Gandhinagar Civil Hospital, where he passed out while being wheeled in for operation.

Following the operation, he was treated at the Ahmedabad Civil Hospital and a private hospital. He also underwent physiotherapy at the Ahmedabad temple and resumed his duties at Akshardham on December 3.

Meanwhile, Dr Gupta, founder of the Indian chapter of Fresh Start Surgical Gifts, had written to the Pramukh Swami of the Swami Narayan sect and Union Home Minister L K Advani offering medical assistance.

Dhariya underwent a 10-hour surgery on January 7 at Bombay Hospital. The microsurgical procedure involved removing four inches of damaged nerve and replacing it with one from the leg. “We also filled all the damaged muscles and did skin grafting,” Dr Gupta said. Part of Dhariya’s expenses were borne by Fresh Start Surgical Gifts.