



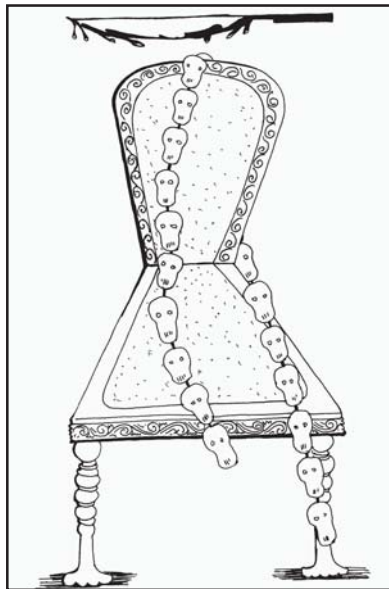
## Enmity as Programme Shivsena's Cult of Militancy

○ Julia Eckert

*This is the fourth in a series of articles on Shivsena by Julia Eckert. In the earlier three pieces, Eckert had analysed the mobilisation techniques of Shivsena, its organisational structure, and the manner in which it has been able to get deeply entrenched in the social and political fabric of Maharashtra. (See issues 129, 130 and 131). In this article Eckert describes the inherent compulsion of Sena's ideology to seek out real and imagined enemies and hate targets.*

The Shivsena presents itself as a movement for action. It is explicitly anti-intellectual. "Getting things done" is, as we have seen, the credo of the movement: direct action replaces parliamentary politics and is said to be superior in efficiency and moral rectitude. True to this spirit, the organisation does not engage in the production of a programmatic ideology. "I don't believe in programmes," declares Bal Thackeray. "In the last 40 years, too many manifestos have been published and then consigned to the dustbin. I believe in implementing..."

What Thackeray offers in his speeches or in his editorials in *Saamna* are stances relating to issues. These stances are always militant and rhetorically uncompromising; issues are presented as clear-cut ("obvious") confrontations and as demanding equally clear-cut ("natural") responses. *sainiks* usually declare their values, their norms, and the reasons for their actions to be common sense, to be necessary, and obvious. Their pragmatic and short-term solutions are oriented to a view of the world which is unequivocal about how things are and which, thus, offers clear guidelines for action.



An inherent simplification of social relations is insisted upon. Any complex analysis is denigrated as "ideology." "All that political talk is ideology. Even the BJP just talks ideology," explained *shakha pramukh* Vaikar. What is, thus, termed as ideology is, in the *sainiks'* eyes, opposite to their professed belief in "getting things done."

### The Vigilante Saviour

Most clearly, the organisation "speaks" through its actions and activities. The violent agitations, above all the communalist attacks and the rioting of the Shivsena, have been the

most encompassing statements about the organisation's values and political stance. Here, nationalism, regionalism, combativeness, and a world view which distinguishes between good and evil, friend and foe solely based on its own arbitrary definitions, are put into action. And, here, the Sena is projected as the sole defender of the community, be it Maharashtrians, the Hindus, or "the Common People." The Shivsena poses as the conscientious defender, the vigilante saviour of right order. Action, struggle, and defense of the community are the basic elements of the Shivsena's ideology and self-representation.

True to its cult of militancy, enemy images have been the mainstay of the Sena's stances. It has always attributed the ills that it detects in society to specific social groups. Social and political problems are personalised. The Shivsena does not call for structural changes, revolution, or reform; rather, it calls for the elimination (in whatever way) of those it holds as guilty among the targets it identifies. The targets are interchangeable: it is the mode of distinguishing between friend and foe, rather than specific public enemies, that characterises the Sena's ideology. What is common to the depictions of all of its enemy images is that those images are

made out to be existential threats to the lives and livelihoods of every “good Indian.” The justification for the urgency to fight them lies in their portrayal as being connected to larger threats, be it Pakistan, the Soviet Union, or the general category of “evil” in the form of decadence, dishonesty, poverty, crime, dirt, and scarcity. And it is their alleged hold on the Indian state that is the real threat to the legitimate citizens of that state.

### The Forgotten Enemies

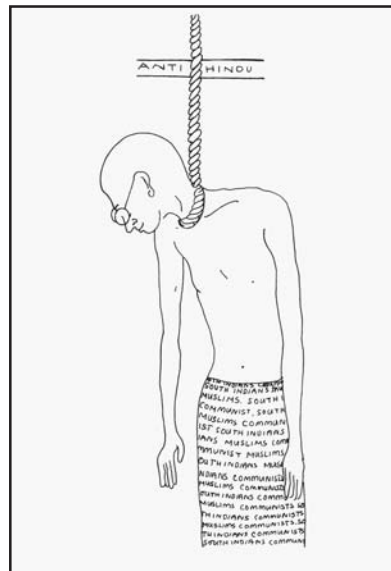
Initially it was the South Indians of Mumbai who were the target of the Shivsena. The Sena had inherited the regionalist logic that had inspired the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement, which, in the 1950s, had fought for the Marathi linguistic state of Maharashtra. At the height of the Sena’s regionalist agitations, South Indians were not only accused of “stealing” the jobs of the “sons of the soil,” they were, as were all of Sena’s subsequent enemies, denigrated as criminals, as thieves, and as smugglers; they were held responsible for bootlegging, corruption, and crime.

However, South Indians turned out to be a poor choice as targets of hate for two reasons. Firstly, the narrow regionalist stance of the Shivsena inhibited electoral expansion after its initial success. Non-Maharashtrian groups had to be incorporated into the Sena’s definition of legitimate citizens in order to claim their political representation, particularly since those declared to be true Maharashtrians, as defined by linguistic descent, constituted only 38 percent of Mumbai’s population. With the electoral expansion of the Sena, the criterion of linguistic descent gave way to the criterion of “identification” with Maharashtrian culture, which, of course, is in itself open to further definition. Secondly, the regionalist stance, as connected to the many linguistic and regional movements of

the 1960s in India, smacked of renouncing national solidarity, an impression that Thackeray is so skilful in avoiding with his nationalist version of regionalism. Furthermore, South Indians “were not behaving like good enemies. They willingly learnt Marathi and spoke it fluently, put up busts or portraits of Shivaji in their Udipi restaurants, some even joined the Shivsena.”

### Communists as Rivals

In those initial years, the declared arch-enemies of the Sena were the Communist organisations with a strong base in Mumbai. Their electoral



constituencies in the working-class areas and their dominance within unions was, in every sense, a red rag to the Sena, which derived much of its following from its “conquest” of jobs by fighting left unions, breaking strikes, and being paid off by the management through the employment of the Sena’s clients. Communists were slandered as the most anti-national forces of all, stooges of the Soviet Union, disinterested in fellow Indians, exploiting workers for their own ends, unscrupulous and treacherous. “Those who have till date sucked the

blood of the Marathi *manoos* should not teach us lessons of peace. If anti-national communists begin the naked Naxalite dance in Mumbai and Maharashtra, our answer will be tit for tat. If such a situation arises, we won’t even care for the law. Today we don’t have our own government, otherwise we wouldn’t have allowed a single communist to remain...,” screamed Thackeray at an election rally in Lalbaug, a working-class area with a strong communist presence in 1973. According to Thackeray, the only effective means to counter the Left was violence: “Beat them by their own means” (Katzenstein 1979:129; see also Gupta 1981:134-136). Thackeray congratulated “his” *sainiks* for murdering Krishna Desai, the communist MLA from Lalbaug whose death paved the way for the Sena to become the dominant force in this former communist stronghold in Mumbai.

### Muslims as ‘Traitors’

In the long run, however, it was the Muslims who proved to be the most useful enemy image for the Sena; the societally, well-entrenched construction of the Muslim as the “enemy within” (Kakar 1995:15-30). The Sena had from its beginnings engaged in communal agitations. As early as 1970, it was calling on Hindus to emulate Shivaji and destroy the mosques that had allegedly been built over destroyed temples. After the riots in Bhiwandi, an industrial town close to Mumbai, in that same year the organisation claimed that “because of the Shivsena, Hindus in Bhiwandi were saved.” As early as the Assembly election of 1973, the Shivsena had made the singing of *Vande Mataram*, Bankimchandra’s alternative national anthem with its Hindu nationalist slant, its main election platform (Purandare 1999:178).

It was only when the communalism propagated by the Hindutva campaign of the Sangh Parivar became a political force on the national stage in the early 1980s, when the Congress (I) too pandered to communalist moods, did anti-Muslim communalism become the Sena's main ideological plank. From then onward, the Sena relentlessly alleged that Muslims were anti-national; that their loyalties lay in Pakistan and Mecca; that they burdened the economy with their poverty and, more so, by their refusal to adopt family planning; that with their high birth-rates they were supposedly threatening to outnumber the Hindus; that Muslims had slandered the heritage of India and had destroyed its temples; that they had first conquered and then divided the country and now were not willing to accept the law of the land; and that they were allegedly pampered by the state:

"Muslims in Hindustan are behaving as part of Pakistan. There are two countries in this nation," declared an editorial in *Saamna*. "These poisonous snakes who under the name of religion like rats nibble at our country, and like snakes bite the stone of liberty (...) if, by tightening the ropes around their necks we do not show them their place, then after 50 years no Hindu will remain on the world map." "They have gone beyond 150 million now. Why so much is our question? Go to the cinema. Go to the drama. What are you doing sitting at home? We go to the cinema, everything is in order, that is fine family planning. ... They do not have any other work! You asses, haven't you been given Pakistan? Then go there. Lessen the burden on the land."

And *Dopahar ka Saamna*, the Hindi afternoon edition of *Saamna*, merges those comments with the seemingly neutral "general news" item: "Big rush for millennium baby in Kashmir."

Such vituperations echo those long pronounced by various organisations of the Sangh Parivar, which engaged in constructing a systematic ideology around fear and mistrust of Muslims. The Sena concentrated less on the historical and theological construction of a clash of civilisations and more on fomenting the perception of a threat and of the need to fight, the need for defence and retaliation :

"The criminals of Pakistan and Bangladesh are dancing right in front of the police... The nation is in danger. The traitors have eaten into the vitals of this country." "You should have a tit for tat. Don't spare anybody, anybody who goes against your nation. You must maintain your sovereignty."

#### **Muslims as *Sainiks***

After the violence accompanying the *yatras* of the Hindutva campaign threatened to discredit the whole project in the eyes of parts of the BJP's constituencies, the anti-Muslim stance mellowed. The Sena, too, made offers of acceptance and insisted that it had always opposed only "anti-national Muslims."

The Sena has showcased its "token" Muslims for a long time. There is Shabir Sheikh, the former Minister for Labour. He is "more a Konkani than a Muslim," other Muslims said. And there was S.M. Khalid, President of the Mumbai Bakers' Cooperative (MBC) and, thus, called Bakerywalla, who joined the Sena in 1996 and was then shot on February 4, 1997, probably by a killer hired by Chhota Shakeel, Dawood Ibrahim's lieutenant who claimed, in a press release, that he had wanted to take revenge for Bakerywalla's treason. But Muslim *sainiks* of the lower ranks have no fear. They also have their own reasons for joining the Shivsena, one of them being that it is the best way to prove that you are, in the Sena's understanding of the term, a 'good Muslim.'

#### **Integrative Hindutva ?**

Accordingly, the Shivsena has proposed an "integrative" meaning of Hindutva:

"Shivsena Hindutva is not related to *religion*. It is related to *nationality*... It is Shivsena's belief that whatever may be our religion, whatever may be our form of worship, our culture is Hindu. We are a national force. Hence we say with pride that we are Hindus... It is time that everyone, irrespective of his political affiliation, religion, caste or creed should come under Shivsena's saffron flag in Hindustan for building a strong Hindustan. If this happens, it will be a new and successful experience which shall draw the attention of the world..."

In this integrationist version of Hindu nationalism, even the Muslims are given a chance: "The Muslims are showing signs of maturity. They want to live in peace... If they are willing to honour the law of the land, where is the need to fight with them?" Thus, by placing the responsibility for communal disturbances onto the behaviour of the minority community, the Shivsena is discovering the "good Muslim," that is, the Muslim who is loyal to India, who explodes crackers for the Indian national cricket team, who works hard and doesn't burden the economy with many children. The good Muslim says, "Country first and then religion."

The good Muslim has to prove that he is not bad, that is, that he is not a Bangladeshi migrant, or a Pakistani agent, or a criminal. Most important of all, he has to demonstrate that he is not "disloyal" to Bharat. However, since he is a Muslim, it is very likely that he will be a bad one. And, who could tell the difference for certain? "In the end we can't trust them," summed up one *shakha pramukh* (leader of a local branch), mirroring what many people of various political affiliations and sympathies expressed.

### **Allying with Enemies**

The Shivsena has wooed many of its former “enemies” and has also, frequently, entered into strategic alliances with organisations of its “enemies” in order to win formal positions of power. The Sena supported the South Indian Cariappa for MP in the parliamentary election of 1971. It was then that Sena slogans appeared in South Indian languages in Mumbai. It formed an alliance with the Republican Party of India of Dalits in 1973 and was helped by the Muslim League to win its first mayoral election in the same year. It also joined hands with the Socialists in 1968 and has several times supported, or offered to support, the Congress Party in its various factions.

Ideological pose and political practice in the Shivsena can diverge without the leaders showing any embarrassment, even though ideological pose is frequently affirmed through spectacular agitations and attacks on members of the enemy group. Such strategic alliances are presented as part of a clever strategy to further the Party’s goals, which is the capture of formal positions of political power. As the conquest of formal institutions of power by the Sena is presented as a necessary requirement to rescue the nation, alliances with alleged threats to the nation turn into guerrilla tactics that are supposedly reminiscent of those of Shivaji’s army.

It was particularly to forge a numerical electoral majority over the Congress that the Sena wooed South Indians and Dalits, especially in 1998 when it had a seat-sharing agreement with the Dalit Panthers and published one article after another in its mouthpiece, *Saamna*, to praise Ambedkar. These articles and other proclamations by Thackeray projected Ambedkar as the true nationalist, as basically anti-Muslim, and as a realist

unlike the utopian Nehru. While a few years earlier the Sena had engaged in a fierce agitation against the publication of Ambedkar’s volume *Riddles of Hinduism*, claiming that it insulted Hinduism and defiled Hindu Gods, and had prompted Chhagan Bhujbal, then still with the Shivsena, to proclaim, “I want to be communal!” the Shivsena now attempted to co-opt Ambedkar posthumously for its communal agenda. Thackeray had always insisted that the Sena’s violent agitations were actually not against Dalits but against the threat to the community posed by the government: “Our fight is not with Dalits, and this morcha [agitations over Ambedkar’s *Riddles of Hinduism*; JE] isn’t against any caste or community. It’s against the government which has consistently humiliated Hindus.” In order to protect the Hindu community from the disrespectful government, it was Dalits who had to die, however.

### **Wooing the Muslims**

The Shivsena has also wooed Muslims, largely by including an implicit threat in the appeal for their votes. Shortly before the Lok Sabha elections in February 1998, the Sena put out many articles presenting themselves as the true friends of Muslims. In a cynical twist, *Saamna* declared that: “No political party has been able to solve the problems of Muslim community... the last government did not take note of the injustices, atrocities and shelling of the Muslim population that took place in connection with Muslim personal law, the Babri Masjid debate and the Salman Rushdie incident. Enquiries were suppressed.” In addition, it presented the attitude of Bal Thackeray, who had issued calls to kill, as benevolent paternalism, aiding the Muslim community to “enter the mainstream,” as the widely used phrase goes: “If Balasaheb uses strong words to open their eyes, then what is wrong

in that? (...) Behind this intimidation is the sincere desire to reform the student. It is essential for the Muslim community to understand that this is the role of the Sena Chief towards the Muslim community to this date...The hand of friendship extended by him [Thackeray; JE] should be tolerated on one’s hand.” Meanwhile, Thackeray has attending Iftar parties, a method long cherished by politicians to exhibit secular credentials.

### **The ‘Legitimate’ Citizen**

With this integrative concept of Hindutva, the Shivsena suggests that the articulation of diverse and, often, antagonistic interests would be considered anti-national and anti-Hindu and will, thus, be sanctioned in the Sena’s specific style. Many of the Sena’s “everyday” agitations and attacks target citizens who speak out against the Sena or for secularism. The Shivsena declares the members of its legitimate in-group to be whoever it considers worthy at that point in time: legitimate are only those who subjugate themselves to the Sena’s or to the Sangh Parivar’s definition of national culture, or those who will support the Party. “Those who like *quawwali* singers and *ghazal* singers more than *Vande Mataram* are enemies of the nation... Those who speak up for Ghulam Ali have no right to live in this country,” was the war-cry in 1998, when *sainiks* stormed a concert hall in Mumbai where the Pakistani artist was performing. “Why should elections in India depend on the votes of the Shahi Imam and Syed Shahabuddin? To honour their emotions, why are the sentiments of 60 crore Hindus trampled upon? To hell with your secularism! In this country Hinduism and Hindus should be respected first. This is our birthright, and if the government denies it to us, we know how to get it,” proclaimed Bal Thackeray. It is a concept of legitimate citizenship that refers to a cultural

essence, a “birthright,” and majority right of possession.

The relationship between integrationist and militant exclusion is part of one project. The Sena projects an existential conflict between the in-group and “the other.” There is no space between absolute integration and absolute exclusion in the ideology of the Shivsena (Heuzé 1995:234). To repeat: “irrespective of his political affiliation, religion, caste or creed: ...whatever may be our religion, whatever may be our form of worship, our culture is Hindu.” Either you are a friend, or you are a foe.

*Shivshahi* is presented as the rescuing variable in a situation in which *lokshahi*, or parliamentary rule, is seen as having failed. The state, or rather the Congress or centre-left governments of India, are accused of having successively “sold out” their country to their personal interests and to the minorities and of having neglected the Indian, or rather the Hindu people. “There is no dearth of leaders in India, but if each one of them tries to pull Hindustan in opposite directions for their own selfish advancement, the day is not far away when we might be balkanised,” claims Thackeray on the Sena website. Thackeray regularly slanders the political establishment, especially those members who are, in terms of the Hindutva discourse, “pseudo-secularists” and “secular worms” [*keed*] in his language. It is the corrupted establishment and the inability of the Indian state, as well as of Hindu society, the “docile Hindu,” to defend themselves against attacks by their enemies, which calls the Sena into action. “Nations which do not raise even a finger to resist, perish.” “Hindutva is not a wave. It is a question of survival of our future generations, it is the breath of our life! If a Muslim is thrown out of any country, there

are other Muslim nations where he can take refuge. Where will Hindus go? Except for our Hindu nation and neighbouring Nepal, there is no other place we can go to. That’s why we have to protect our Hindu land, and if need be, sacrifice our lives to save Hindutva. Destroy the forces which have converted the Lok Sabha into a Bhog Sabha!” (Assembly of Self Indulgence)

### Destroying to Protect ?

*Sainiks*, thus, pose as vigilantes of the “rightful order.” Vigilantism propounds protecting the norms which it breaks in order to protect them. It practically excludes certain actions and certain targets from the validity of the norm system. It limits the validity of the normative order to a specific community, thus, becoming anti-universalist, and defines the limits of that community by means of the limited validity of norms. Right and wrong become relative to the ascribed identities of the people involved in an interaction. Thus, vigilante violence connects to the Shivsena’s nativist legitimations of the opposition against a state that allegedly “pampers the minorities,” or what is defined as such by Hindunationalist discourse. Public violence, as a message, thus, also sets norms. Therefore, public violence, and also riots, become the *mise en scène*, the enactment of the Sena’s claims.

Thus, it is the mode of distinction, of drawing the border between the legitimate in-group and the “others,” and the enactment of this distinction through violent action that is fundamental to the Sena’s politics. The party is not concerned as much with an intricate definition of essences as it is with the various bodies of the Sangh Parivar undertaking it. The pre-eminence of the militant distinction over the definition of the “essence”

of allegedly antagonistic communities also shows itself in the swapping of enemies and in the enlargement of the in-group. Militant enmity can, in the case of the Shivsena, circumvent the contradiction between essentialist ideology and opportunistic practice because the inherent reduction of complexity favours vagueness. Vague militancy of this sort can combine the clarity of violence with real victims. At the same time, vagueness can integrate diverse interpretations of situations and objectives. What remains constant is a crass manipulation of the border, as well as the militancy of what is termed “defense.” It is the existential conflict, “the struggle,” the continuous latent and open conflict between “us and them,” “friends and foes” that form the movement’s ideology. □

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The author works at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle, Germany.