

Shiv Sena - From lumpens to fascist political force

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Starting as Maratha chauvinist outfit, Shiv Sena has emerged as a fascist political force threatening the very existence of a secular India.

The Shiv of this Sena is the 17th century Mahratta leader Shivaji; the Sena was organized by a newspaper cartoonist, Bal Thakre, who initially attempted to harness the resentment middle-class Maharashtrians living in Bombay (later renamed Mumbai) felt at being excluded from many of the structures of the civic life of Maharashtra's capital. Gujaratis dominated the capitalist and trading classes, Malayalees were numerous among industrial workers, Tamilians among government employees in the Atomic Energy establishment, Udiptis in small restaurants and so on. So Thakre's Shiv Sena enlisted the numerous criminal elements among Bombay's lumpen proletariat who happened to be Marathi speaking Maharashtrians, bootleggers, small scale racketeers, etc. to engage in violence against the "outsiders" in Bombay. The city's capitalist class also saw them at one point as a convenient tool to use against the Communist-dominated textile workers union, which also happened to be the largest working class force in the city at one time. Bolstered by financial support from capital and chauvinist political support from Marathi 'nativists' the Sena grew to a point where it became a violent mob type force with political clout, sufficient to achieve political control of the Bombay Municipality. Older, more established parties used it to promote their own interest whenever convenient especially at election time. By the late 1970s and 1980s the Sena had become a political force in Bombay and was extending its influence to other parts of Maharashtra.

With the rise of the Sangh Parivar, Thakre soon realized that while an anti-Tamil or anti-Malayali stance could fetch him popularity in Bombay, an anti-Muslim stance could make his name known all over India. The Sena then became a vicious anti-Muslim force; a decade earlier it has instigated communal violence in the textile mill town of Bhiwandi, 30 miles from Bombay, but it was earlier not clear if that was due to the Sena's "anti-foreigner" strategy (the Bhiwandi millworkers happened to be mainly Muslims from Andhra). However, in the 1980s, the Sena triggered communal pogroms against Muslims in Bhiwandi and in the Muslim areas of Bombay, which reached their zenith in the violence following the demolition of the Babri masjid in Ayodhya. Over a thousand Muslims were brutally killed in Bombay almost totally by the Sena's mobs who, for the first time, even targeted Muslims in upper class residential areas. The Sena had by now become one of the arms of the Hindutva movement spreading widely across much of India.

In India's financial capital, Mumbai, things have reached such a pass that the slightest negative comment on anyone or thing the Sena considers as an "insult", can lead immediately to violence; it may be a book, a play, a film, even a remark but the Sena's threat to unleash violence can lead to a book ban, closure of a cinema hall or theatre, demand for a public apology. This was somewhat understandable when the Sena in coalition with the BJP ruled the state of Maharashtra. But the fact that the Congress is currently ruling in the state makes no difference to this cultural terror exercised by the Sena. It permeates through all the layers of the establishment, including, most importantly, the police in Mumbai as well as in other towns in Maharashtra. The parallels with the

Nazis in Germany, a group that Thakre, incidentally, admires as he admitted in an interview in Time magazine, are only too obvious.

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P.S.

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