The vernacularisation of Hindutva: 
The BJP and Shiv Sena in rural Maharashtra

Thomas Blom Hansen

The recent conquest of political power in Maharashtra by the Shiv Sena-BJP combine was 
promised upon the advances made by these parties into the rural districts of the state in the late 
1980s. This political expansion was made possible by a growing dissatisfaction with the 
immobility of the Congress organisation, which in the course of the 1980s proved incapable of 
incorporating the new upwardly mobile groups thrown up by the intensified commercialisation 
in the rural areas. Taking fear village studies in the Aurangabad region as its point of departure, 
the article argues that it was the Shiv Sena’s and BJP’s successful assumption of the discourse of 
‘aggressive Hindus’ in a region marked by long-standing communal tension, along with a 
growing opposition to ineffective Congress policies in the region, which made the region into a 
stronghold of the two hitherto urban-based parties. It is finally argued that it was especially the 
Shiv Sena’s translation of the Hindutva discourse into the dominant political idiom of Marathā 
vālour and rustic virtues, rather than the Ramjanmabhoomi agitation, that provided a crucial 
imperative to Hindu communal politics in the state.

The state of Maharashtra was until recently regarded as an unassailable 
citadel of the Congress party. The electoral victory of the Shiv Sena-BJP 
aliance in Maharashtra in March 1995 broke the Congress monopoly on 
forming governments in Maharashtra, but was also full of ironies. One of 
these ironies is that the electoral victory of the Hindutva parties arrived 
somewhat unexpectedly, after several years of local setbacks, defections 
and splits since the initial success of the alliance as a powerful force in the

Thomas Blom Hansen is Assistant Professor, International Development Studies, Roskilde 
University, P.O. Box 260, 4000 Roskilde, Denmark.

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1990 state elections where both the Shiv Sena and the BJP secured a substantial following in rural Maharashtra. Another irony is that the coming to power of the Shiv Sena and BJP was premised on the weakness of Congress power, and on a campaign targeting Congress failures, than on a campaign on the well-rehearsed themes of Hindutva. There is, finally, also a profound irony in the fact that the BJP could only win power in the old cradle of the RSS by becoming the political junior partner of the Shiv Sena.

From an all-India perspective, these peculiarities may be seen as moments in a long-term regionalisation of politics that render political discourses, mobilisation patterns and alliances in each state ever more discrete and distinctive. The differentiated trajectories of the BJP in different states since the late 1980s have made it abundantly clear that the continuing momentum of Hindu nationalism in Indian politics is becoming regionalised. Hence, any understanding of the trajectory as well as possible futures of Hindutva must take as its point of departure the local and regional dynamics that have provided the conditions for the current advances of Hindu nationalist forces.

An important key to an understanding of the recent victory of the Shiv Sena and BJP in Maharashtra lies, therefore, in the structures and effects of the initial 'Hindutva wave' in the state from the late 1980s to 1992. In this period both parties expanded out of their previous urban confines in Bombay, Pune and Nagpur, and successfully established themselves as viable alternatives to the Congress in the rural areas, especially in the regions of Konkan, Marathwada and Vidarbha. The electoral successes of the alliance in both 1990 (94 seats) and 1995 (138 seats) were achieved in these regions and in Bombay, whereas the Congress remained dominant in both western and northern Maharashtra.

I will argue, in the following pages, firstly, that the Hindutva wave in Maharashtra from 1987 to 1992 was a contingent articulation of a growing disgruntlement with a crumbling Congress hegemony whose discourse of secular encompassment and mechanisms for distribution of political patronage were being undermined by the growing commercialisation of the rural economy, by the concomitant social differentiation in the villages, and by the sedimentation of a 'paradigm of rights' vis-à-vis the state as a still more widespread popular political idiom. Secondly, I shall, through a brief presentation of four village studies carried out in the Aurangabad district in Maharashtra in 1992–93, seek to demonstrate that it was the co-presence of (a) a relatively unarticulated 'availability' for oppositional discourses of younger, displaced, unemployed Hindu men, (b) a sizeable Muslim minority in the villages, and (c) internal factional politics in the village, which provided the conditions for the success of the Shiv Sena and the BJP in these villages. Thirdly, I shall try to show that both the Shiv Sena and the BJP have been compelled to operate upon the discursive and
institutional terrain rendered by the hegemonic Congress machine, and thus compelled to appropriate parts of the dominant idioms on caste and patronage institutionalised by the Congress culture. It will be argued that it was the Shiv Sena’s ‘communal populism’, cast in the distinctly regional ‘vernacularised’ idiom of Maratha martiality and rustic values, combined with a flexible and innovative mode of organisation, rather than promises of a Hindu rashtra or the Ramjanmabhoomi agitation, which enabled the alliance to acquire a substantial electoral base in rural Maharashtra.

I

The democratic revolution and mass politics in Maharashtra

The crux of de Tocqueville’s understanding of the democratic revolution as a continuous expansion of the notion of equality into ever more societal spheres has, in an interesting reinterpretation, been described as ‘the conditions in which a relation of subordination becomes a relation of oppression and thereby constitutes itself as a site of an antagonism’ (Laclau and Mouffe 1985:153). The democratic revolution may, in other words, be seen as the process whereby hitherto unquestioned social relations become objects of intense politicisation and political struggle; whereby more discourses and social practices become publicly contested; and whereby larger social groups become effectively enfranchised and politically mobilised. The dynamic in the democratic revolution flows from the contingent combination of transformations of economic and social structures with the unsettling of certitudes and values brought about by notions of equality and individual rights. On the one hand, commercialisation and economic development constantly displace and differentiate social structures; differentiation and refinement of modes of bureaucratic regulation of social life create new fissures and new political conflicts; and processes of urbanisation and the spread of communication facilities further deepen the secularisation processes and confront still larger groups with new imaginations, uncertainties and ambiguities. On the other hand, various forms of democratic ideology are gradually disseminated to larger groups, for instance through the ‘vernacularisation’ of notions of freedom, equality and rights, and through the internalisation of these notions—however fragmentary—by still larger groups. Far from producing a homogeneous modernity, the combinations of these two clusters of processes tend to undermine existing forms of authority and hierarchy, and tend to crystallise popular political practices within a ‘paradigm of rights’ vis-à-vis the state and other authorities, manifesting itself in growing popular assertiveness in the public realm.

Political articulations of protest are not necessities flowing from the social structure, but are basically contingent, and yet are conditioned by
the structure of dominance in the political field, the viability of oppositional forces, the legacy of popular insurgencies, etc. Nevertheless, the socio-economic, institutional and cultural structures inherited from an earlier epoch always render a certain set of problematic, contradictions and differences as urgent and 'legitimate problematics' (Bourdieu 1991: 172–73).

Similarly, structural processes constantly produce various distributions of political 'availability' that, contingently, may be articulated in multiple, though not infinite, ways. The political field is thus never fully determined, but is at the same time always (pre)structured. It is, in other words, open to a limited set of historical possibilities, though the limitations and possibilities can never be fully known in advance. Political mobilisation and the creation of new identities can hence be said to take place as structured contingencies (see Hansen 1991, 1996b).

Contemporary Maharashtra is marked by a high level of politicisation, widespread political consciousness and popular assertiveness. The mass polity in Maharashtra may plausibly be seen as a product of a gradual democratic revolution over the last century, structured around the two clusters of processes outlined above: in terms of structural transformations, Maharashtra has seen an uneven industrial growth heavily concentrated around the Bombay-Pune corridor; a gradual but penetrating commercialisation of agriculture; and a concomitant emergence of a numerically and economically significant stratum of middle-peasants in the rural areas, and a large urban middle class. This economic development has been accompanied by an expanding 'governmentalisation', i.e., an active public regulation of industrial growth and a spatial allocation of investments; a successful cooperative structure promoting commercial farming; a rapidly expanding educational system—especially higher education—spurring expectations of social mobility; and a fairly empowered system of Panchayat institutions which, especially at the district level handles considerable and important resources. The cooperative structure and the Panchayat system have contributed to the entrenchment of the power of local landowning castes (rich and middle peasants), but they have also produced new arenas for a progressive politicisation of still larger segments of the electorate, often as moments in factional and inter-party competition (see Attwood 1993; Rosenthal 1977).

The democratic revolution in Maharashtra has, in brief, created a rich repertoire of antagonistic and competing political discourses, which has progressively induced ever larger social groups into local political arenas—in a bid for recognition, resources, identity and self-respect. These political arenas have grown in number and importance after Independence, but have also to a large extent been monopolised and enveloped by the patronage politics and the power structure of the Congress.

The historical marginality of Hindu nationalist forces in rural Maharashtra prior to the 1980s can largely be ascribed to the strength and persistence of
Congress dominance in the rural areas of the state. This strength has historically been based on three pillars: Firstly, the importance of the large and rural-based patronage power of the strong cooperative movement in the state, particularly active within sugar, banking and irrigation in the western districts of the state, cannot be overestimated.

Secondly, after Independence the Congress had rather successfully managed to represent the Maratha pole in the overriding 'Brahmin-Maratha antagonism' which throughout the 20th century has emerged as one of the most enduring discursive constructions in Maharashtrian politics, and as one of the most popularised and widespread modes of historical knowledge in the state. The construction of this antagonism refers to (and produces) these caste groups as empirical categories with objectified boundaries, as well as to phantasmagoric constructions of these caste groups as historical essences and conspiracies that organise historical and societal imaginations or what Zizek aptly calls 'ideological fantasies structuring reality' (1989: 33).

In the 1980s, the Congress hegemony in Maharashtra was gradually undermined by an intensified economic development and an intensification of the democratic revolution. The general growth in the consumer goods sector in the 1980s had very appreciable effects in Maharashtra. Industrialisation picked up outside the Bombay-Pune corridor and many provincial towns and smaller talukas experienced a rapid growth in population, production and commercial diversification. Provincial cities like Aurangabad, Jalgaon and Jalna more than doubled or tripled their population in less than a decade. Along with rapid urbanisation, the agricultural economy became increasingly commercialised, rural incomes grew steadily and a growing market for consumer goods developed in the villages. In less than a decade, a wide range of new consumer products, television sets, video libraries, etc., became widely available in most of the larger villages in rural Maharashtra. This development boosted social differentiation and bred a host of new socially mobile groups, many of whom had both commercial and urban contacts and educational qualifications.

A related development was the increasing social mobility and social ambitions among young men from poorer Maratha and OBC groups, particularly Malis, Kolis and Agris, but also the nomadic Dhangar and Banjara communities. Fairly large segments of these caste groups had in

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1 The exact empirical boundaries of the Maratha caste obviously remain difficult to establish and have been an object of competing political interpretations. In the *Gazetteer of Thana* district, vol. XIII, part 1 from 1882, Kunbis, Agris and Kolis are all described as discrete castes, and yet within each of them there are 'Maratha-Agris', 'Maratha-Kolis' (pp. 115-29), etc., indicating the use of the Maratha label as a symbol of superiority even within caste groups that are not endogamously connected to Marathas. In the *Gazetteer of Pune* district from 1882, vol. XVII, part 1, Kunbis are described as falling in two classes—Kunbis and Marathas—that cannot be clearly distinguished (p. 284). In the 1931 Census quoted by Lele (1990: 120-21), Marathas and Kunbis are lumped together in one category: The Kunbi Jati,
the 1980s received education in the mushrooming colleges and educational institutions in the smaller towns and provincial cities all over the state. Many of the young, semi-educated, and underemployed men graduating from these colleges tried to make it as minor businessmen and contractors in the expanding economy. They were, however, facing difficulties in penetrating the tight-knit clientelistic networks in the politico-administrative set-up, where the brokerage of political connections, contracts and official permits take place. These groups of young men were, in other words, located in the almost classically volatile situation of rising, but unfulfilled social expectations. In Bombay, similar groups of young unemployed men became important carriers of the emerging ‘dada’ culture which, in a somewhat paler version, percolated to smaller towns and villages as well where groups of younger businessmen and their associates were running smaller shops (electronics, cold drinks, video libraries), small contracting firms, country bars, small transport businesses, etc. They were at the fringe of the organised and clientelised economy, and marginal in terms of economic power and social status. This social group was often communally divided between young Marathas and OBCs, on the one hand, and younger Muslims, traditionally engaged in trade and commerce, on the other hand. The former group, i.e., of young Marathas and OBCs, socially mobilised but marginalised from power and social recognition, politically ‘available’ but rendered somewhat homeless between the well-established political identities of the Marathas, Dalits, Muslims, Brahmins, etc., became the core group from which both the Shiv Sena and the BJP successfully recruited activists and local leaders. Finally, the political homelessness of young Marathas and OBCs was compounded by the return of Sharad Pawar and his dissident Congress (S) to Congress (I) in 1986, stalling many promising political careers in the Congress (S).

This obviously ripe and available constituency of young disgruntled Marathas’ and OBC groups was wooed by almost all non-Congress forces which makes up a substantial section of the Maratha caste, has actually been classified as OBC since the 1950s. This has more recently given rise to the interesting situation that Maratha-Kunbis often classify themselves as Kunbis when asked by government officials, while they classify themselves as Marathas in a political or local social context. This only proves that caste labels must be regarded as loci of changing identification and meaning rather than as a sort of sociological ‘rock-bottom’ objectivity of permanent jatis.

2 This apt phrase is borrowed from Gerard Heuzé’s analysis of the Shiv Sena in Bombay (1993). Dada (elder brother) is the popular designation for local strongmen/criminals, or young boys aspiring to that status.

2 The Maratha caste myth was articulated in an aggressive and chauvinistic direction by the caste organisation, Maratha Mahanag, started by a dissident Congressman from southern Maharashtra in the early 1980s. The organisation won a considerable following among angry young Marathas from poor backgrounds in the sugar belt in western Maharashtra—in Bombay and Marathwada. Many of these followers were later absorbed by the Shiv Sena (Chouwarkar 1989: 84–88).
in the state in the latter part of the 1980s and the early 1990s. The BJP promoted Gopinath Munde, a Banjara from Marathwada as a political leader, and promoted many other OBCs as local leaders all over the state. The appointment of Sudhkarrao Naik, coming from the same community in Vidarbha, as Chief Minister in the Congress cabinet in 1991, was also a move to present the Congress as attractive to OBC groups. The pertinent question arising from this is, therefore, how the Shiv Sena, and to some extent the BJP, emerged victorious from this scramble?

I will throw light on this issue from three angles. Firstly, I will show how the general features of the Shiv Sena and the BJP in Maharashtra have conditioned their expansion strategies in the 1980s. Secondly, I will scrutinise the specific background and trajectory of the Hindutva wave in Aurangabad district from 1985 to 1992—specifically Aurangabad city and four villages in various parts of the district. Finally, I will try to assess the effects of the Hindutva wave in Maharashtra and the durability of the rural constituencies of the Shiv Sena and the BJP.

II

The Hindutva wave in Maharashtra: Strategies, contingencies and compulsions

The Shiv Sena must be understood in the context of the peculiarities of the social structure and political culture of Bombay which gave birth to it. The Shiv Sena condenses the diversity and constant fluctuations of social and cultural identities in the city into articulations of a series of 'thin', communal antagonisms which, by virtue of their simplicity and flexibility, have allowed the Shiv Sena entry into both the middle classes and the slum population of the city.

The Shiv Sena's loose, widely dispersed and localised organisation in Bombay permeates the neighbourhoods. At the same time, it is permeated by, and articulates many ideals, languages and practices prevailing in the slum and lower-middle-class neighbourhoods in which a majority of Bombay's inhabitants live. The ability of the Shiv Sena to engage with, and negotiate, popular identities in their own language, sets the organisation apart from the Sangh parivar, and from most of the established political parties (see Gupta 1982: 70–153). A second crucial feature of the Shiv Sena was, and still remains, its emphasis on action and maailiness. The Shiv Sena endows its followers with strength and self-respect through a brotherhood; with an identity as defenders of their families—especially women; and with a populist idiom—coined by Bal Thackeray—defying the social norms and authority of the city establishment, though never in a socially radical fashion. The central operative principles in the Shiv Sena are sudden, quick, collective action, physical strength and anti-intellectual resoluteness. Nationalist ideology is central to these outbursts of energy and aggression
so typical of the Shiv Sena, though never employed as the central constitutive material of an alternative civil society (as in the RSS). The nationalist discourse of the Shiv Sena exists as durable, simple, pervasive slogans and agendas of 'exorcism of the Other'—be they south Indians, Communists or Muslims (Hansen 1996a).

Thirdly, the Shiv Sena, as a political party, is in many ways shaped by the dominant political culture of clientelism, patronage, vote banks and electoral populism which the Congress has parented. At the same time, a considerable part of the Shiv Sena's appeal to younger people lies in its anti-establishment and anti-political image as an organisation that does social work for the 'people'. In spite of this carefully nurtured image, the Shiv Sena leadership, steeped in a middle-class world, has in the 1980s (and earlier) eagerly grabbed whatever opportunities are available for accumulating political power, wealth and other benefits flowing within the political institutions, and has propelled itself to membership—albeit never fully recognised—of the city's parvenu elite. This has engendered conflicts within the leadership, and it constantly threatens to deplete the populist, anti-establishment credentials of the Shiv Sena.

The thin and flexible discourse, and the flexible mode of its operation facilitated the Shiv Sena's expansion beyond Bombay from the mid-1980s onwards. The appeal to violence and manliness as a means for coping with the loss of self-respect in the face of blocked prospects of social mobility, had a still wider appeal in the many growing cities and towns in inland Maharashtra. The Shiv Sena's brash, self-confident, 'street smart' style represented to many young men in villages and towns the essence of what Bombay's tantalising modernity was imagined to be.

Success in the Bombay Municipal Corporation elections in 1985 and the sudden control over vast resources caused surprise and some disarray in the Shiv Sena leadership. In the following couple of years most of the efforts of the Shiv Sena leadership were directed towards consolidation of its political structures, and occupying the positions in the network of clientelistic relations which attainment of political power always offers.

In this period, Thackeray and his lieutenants were approached by a large number of young enterprising men from small towns all over Maharashtra, seeking admission to the Shiv Sena and permission to start local shakhis in small towns and remote areas in Marathwada and Vidarbha. These permissions were granted, the circulation of the Shiv Sena's weekly magazine Marmik was encouraged, but no systematic effort to consolidate the organisation was undertaken until after 1988. At this point, the Shiv Sena had accumulated enough manpower and money to boost its image and organisation all over the state, and several initiatives were launched. The most effective instrument proved to be Bal Thackeray's extensive tours and mass rallies all over the state. The reputation of Thackeray was already well-established at this point, and the massive turnout to these rallies even
in provincial towns and rural areas broke all previous records. Images of Thackeray, audio tapes of his speeches and photocopies of his cartoons and editorials started to circulate all over the state. Simultaneously, the larger units of the Shiv Sena were given financial assistance and organisational backing to consolidate their local networks, as well as to contest local elections wherever possible. After the Assembly elections in 1990, party MLAs were deputed to oversee the activities in various districts. Yet the density and discipline of this organisational endeavour never came close to the strictly controlled system of the Sangh parivar. The Shiv Sena’s constituency and new branches were often spontaneously created and loosely coordinated by local leaders whose main function was to ensure loyalty to the upper rungs of the party leadership.

The Shiv Sena has never systematically attempted to become the central vehicle for the articulation of OBC interests, but has at various points appealed to OBC groups by criticising the dominance of the Congress and the Marathas, and by ridiculing Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit movement. In particular, Chagan Bhujbal, a prominent Shiv Sena leader belonging to the Mali caste, sought actively to project the Shiv Sena as promoting OBC interests. Bhujbal was a central figure in the Shiv Sena’s attempts to counter the persistent charges that the party was dominated by upper-caste leaders, and he was instrumental in recruiting a large number of lower-caste men as local leaders and candidates in the elections both in Bombay and in the rural areas. In spite of Bal Thackeray’s employment of elements of the Maratha mythology of strength and martial prowess, and his open opposition to any caste-based reservation policy and the Mandal formula, Bhujbal’s efforts and the prevailing structure of ‘availability’ in the electorate nevertheless ensured a substantial Shiv Sena following among OBC groups in Vidarbha, Marathwada and Bombay. In the late 1980s the Shiv Sena thus emerged as a distinctly non-Brahmin party, whose style, rhetoric and activist stance appealed in multiple ways to Maratha and lower-caste youth.

The historical problem of the Sangh parivar in Maharashtra was always its social and cultural isolation. Ideologically, it was invariably located at the Brahmin pole in the overarching ideological polarity between Brahmins and Marathas. This situation had been dramatically compounded by the anti-Brahmin riots and popular stigmatisation of the Chitpavan Brahmins, in particular after the assassination of Gandhi by a Hindu nationalist Brahmin from Pune. Socially, the Sangh parivar was confined to the urban high-caste middle class, and it was politically locked in opposition to an extraordinarily powerful Congress party. The deep-running ambivalence in the Sangh parivar regarding electoral politics and patronage politics, and the quest, especially in the RSS, for ideological purity and principled stands, only exacerbated this isolation. Most of the attempts to create a broader mass-following through various front organisations found few
takers because of the condescending paternalism that characterised its approach towards poor and lower caste groups. Maharashtra society was from early on highly politicised, and probably one of the most secularised in India. The historical processes of popular political mobilisation had disseminated notions of equality and a paradigm of rights, and had also compelled the Congress in Maharashtra to be more 'progressive', i.e., more responsive to demands for poverty eradication programmes and concessions to weak groups than most of the Congress machines in other Indian states. To 'make it' as a political or social movement in Maharashtra, therefore, required more than the Sangh parivar's classical condescending dissemination of higher caste and middle class norms.

In the 1980s, this situation changed gradually. The BJP sought to project itself as a broad popular party, and it systematically projected non-Brahmins as candidates in elections, as leaders of mass organisations, etc. The party also took up a wide range of economic and social issues, and succeeded in organising several huge rallies of cotton producers against government price policies. The BJP's rural following was, however, mainly confined to Vidarbha, where Congress power was traditionally weak and the Maratha caste numerically far smaller than in the rest of the state. The breakthrough did not come until the late 1980s when the Shiv Sena was able, through radical communal populism, to build a large mass-following all over the state, and to acquire a substantial following also among the Marathas and other rural groups. In 1989 the BJP formally joined the bandwagon of open communal politics and the mass-following the BJP hence acquired in the rural districts was primarily reaped from the communal sentiments stirred by the Shiv Sena juggernaut. The prominence of the BJP-Shiv Sena electoral alliance in pushing the Hindutva wave in Maharashtra has caused deep dissension within the Sangh parivar in the state. Among the so-called moderate BJP leaders and activists committed to refine the political strategy of the BJP as a political party (rather than as a Sangh parivar subsidiary), the alliance with the Shiv Sena remains a convenient electoral arrangement. The alliance enabled the BJP to profile itself as a relatively sane and moderate party, while at the same time reaping some benefits of the more radical communal discourse of the Shiv Sena. Many RSS cadres of a more purist mould nevertheless disliked the association with the Shiv Sena, and felt that the politicisation and 'vernacularisation' of Hindutva in Maharashtra made the entire organisation vulnerable to what was called a 'creeping Congress culture', i.e., factionalism, electoral arithmetic and corruption. To these forces, the Ayodhya countdown, the demolition of the Babri Masjid, and the subsequent ban on the

* In the State Assembly elections in 1990, the Shiv Sena went from 2 to 52 seats, while the BJP went from 12 to 42 seats. The two parties together attracted 27 per cent of the vote, while the Congress led by Pawar won 39 per cent of the vote and 141 seats, i.e., 4 seats short of absolute majority (Sheth 1992: 174).
VHP and the dismissal of BJP state governments provided a welcome opportunity to cleanse and re-unite the organisational body of the Sangh parivar, and once again establish the unrivalled authority of the RSS within the movement.

III

Shiv Sena mobilisation in Aurangabad district

The seven districts of the Marathwada region were among the economically and infrastructurally least developed in western India at Independence and until the 1980s have remained the most backward areas in the state of Maharashtra. In the 1980s there was a flow of industrial investment to Aurangabad city and several areas in the region, and the city expanded within a decade from around 250,000 people in 1980 to an estimated 800,000 people in 1991. The entire occupational structure of the city changed towards more industrial jobs and more qualified manpower with expansion in construction, trade and transport. The surrounding talukas were affected in several ways: many younger people went for education, jobs, and business to Aurangabad; the commercialisation of the entire rural economy was boosted due to the proximity of a fast-growing market, and many of the big villages and towns along the main roads experienced a rapid growth in trade, commerce, income and employment. Most of the immigration to Aurangabad came from adjacent districts and western Maharashtra, but there was also very substantial in-migration, especially of professionals, traders and skilled labour, from north India and Bengal.

Aurangabad, founded by the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb in the 17th century, was the principal administrative centre for the entire Marathwada region within the princely state ruled by the Nizam of Hyderabad. Most of the powerful positions in this state were occupied by the local Muslim elite, who also held important positions in the trading community and as landowners. The formerly powerful educated Muslim elite in Aurangabad city is today excluded from most administrative posts, and their political influence has dwindled. In the rural areas in the district, the Muslim population is considerable (c. 20 per cent). Most Muslims are poor small-holders, labourers and petty traders, wholly dependent on the local, landowning Maratha elite. In the rural areas, the social position of the Muslims has also declined since 1948, with the disappearance of the limited privileges and patronage which the Nizam’s administration extended to Muslim landholders and traders. The most important asset left to the Muslim population in the Marathwada region after 1948 was their electoral utility seen from the point of view of the local Maratha elites and the Congress party.

Congress chose to build its electoral base in the area on a horizontal alliance between the dominant landowning groups (mainly Marathas), which could deliver much of the rural vote (including Muslims) organised in vertical alliances (Carter 1975). Muslim candidates catered primarily to the sizeable urban Muslim electorate. Hence since the 1950s, most of the MPs and MLAs from Aurangabad district (and the region as such) had been Marathas in rural constituencies, and Muslims in urban constituencies. Muslim politicians also figured prominently at the civic level in the Municipal Council, as Mayors, etc.

The rapid urban growth in the 1980s in Aurangabad naturally modified the social structure profoundly. It produced a large first generation working class, partly drawn from the rural areas around the city. This large mass of newly, and yet only partly, proletarianised younger workers, still somewhat overwhelmed by the new city life, proved to be extremely receptive to the Shiv Sena's communal populism. The professional and educated middle class also expanded rapidly and, due to north Indian migration, became increasingly oriented towards Hindi newspapers and north Indian customs. In the 1980s the BJP found a large constituency in these strata. Finally, urban growth also threw up a large group of petty traders, small manufacturers, shopkeepers, and petty contractors in Aurangabad and in major villages and towns in the district. This group, mainly younger Marathas and a few Muslims, provided local leadership, resources and organisation to either side in the open communalisation of the political field from 1985 onwards.

The large Muslim community (40 per cent of the city population) was further marginalised in the social and economic structure, as it was poorly educated, and poorly equipped in terms of institutions and social networks to meet the challenges of rapid urbanisation (see Sinha 1989). Most of the poorly educated Muslim men work in marginal jobs as drivers and occasional labourers, and the rate of unemployment among men in the Muslim community is estimated to be as high as 50 per cent. The frustration with these social conditions, and with the generally declining status of Muslims in the region, was amplified by the fact that Muslim MLAs and MPs had represented both the region and the city for decades, without delivering any tangible benefits to their constituencies. In this situation of despair and marginalisation, two alternatives emerged attractive to young Muslim men in Aurangabad. Muslim communal organisations, like the Muslim League and Jamaat-i-Islami, were encouraged by the general wave of Islamic revivalism in the early 1980s, the agitations in conjunction with the Shah Bano case, and the expanding ties with the Persian Gulf. As a result, the membership, especially of the Muslim League swelled. There were now more young men who wore beards and caps, and Muslim religious and educational institutions strengthened their links with Islamic institutions in the Middle East and north Africa. The ensuing influx of students from Jordan, Palestine
and north Africa to the city exacerbated the standard myths of the 'anti-
nationalism' of Muslims. The credibility of such myths was strengthened by
a growing number of small Urdu newspapers in the city, carrying the
names of leading papers in Karachi and Islamabad, spreading a clear-cut
communal message among Muslims in Aurangabad city.

The other and more common alternative was the rapidly expanding
underworld in Aurangabad run by a number of strong Muslim dadas with
links to the Bombay underworld, especially the powerful gangster-king
Haji Mastan. In the early and mid-1980s, the criminalisation of Aurangabad
expanded due to a corrupt and compliant police force, a compliant civic
administration, and municipal politicians and MLAs who were both unwilling
and unable to curb the power of the Muslim underworld. To the ordinary
Muslims in Aurangabad, and in particular the young unemployed boys,
dada politicians-cum-social workers, like the Hasan brothers, became
protectors, ideals and social success-stories. During this period, the power
and riches of the Muslim underworld-kings grew rapidly. They sponsored
Muslim religious festivals, held with unprecedented splendour, and financed
the construction of dozens of small Muslim dargahs on roadsides and
vacant land. The rapid urban growth was, as so often, accompanied by a
growth in gambling, prostitution, smuggling and drug-peddling, but in this
case these features were wholly communalised. The image of the old city of
Aurangabad as a den of sin, crime and corruption run by communal
Muslims was compounded by the obvious protection and patronage which
the Muslim dadas enjoyed from the upper echelons in the state government.\(^{6}\)

It was in this situation of seething social frustration with strong communal
undercurrents, not yet articulated in a public discourse, that rumours of the
Shiv Sena's communal populism, its aggressive role in the Thane-Bhiwandi
riots in 1984, and its success in the Bombay Municipal Corporation in 1985,
reached Aurangabad. In 1985 the agitations of Muslims against the Shah
Bano verdict had been rather violent, and communal emotions had run
high on a much-publicised criminal case in which a group of Jordanian
students stood accused for the rape and murder of a young Hindu middle-
class girl. The latter case had confirmed all the fears and myths of Muslim
aggressiveness and potency, i.e., as a threat to Hindu women. On that
pretext, a group of angry young educated men—some former RSS-swayam-
sevaks—got together to form the first Shiv Sena shakha in Aurangabad.
All non-Brahmin and from rural backgrounds, they had come to Aurangabad
in search of education and work. The party grew rapidly in Aurangabad,

\(^{6}\) The socialist journalist and writer Nishikant Bhalerao from Marathwada alleged that the
Congress Chief Minister (and Muslim) A.R. Antulay was instrumental in protecting and
nourishing the nexus between the Muslim clergy, gangsters and Muslim politicians in Aurangabad
in the period from 1980 to 1985, when the local Municipal body had been dissolved and
the city was administered by corrupt bureaucrats and policemen (Marathwada, Diwali issue,
1988).
and within a few months a young energetic man, Subash Patil, took over the Shiv Sena organisation in the entire district.\footnote{Subash Patil, alias Subash JadHAV, comes from a poor family and belongs to an OBC community. He explained that he had changed his name to Patil to make himself more acceptable to the Marathas and to higher castes (Interview, Aurangabad, 3 September 1992).}

From 1986 to 1987, Subash Patil and other young leaders toured the entire district intensively and started shakhas in hundreds of villages. In many cases groups of young Marathas and OBCs contacted the Shiv Sena in Aurangabad and asked for authorisation to start a shakha in their village, and invited Patil or others for the inauguration. Most of these rural shakhas consisted merely of signboards displaying the symbols of the Shiv Sena (tiger, bow and arrow), a shakha pramukh appointed by Patil, and an informal group of young boys attracted by the thrill and excitement associated with the Shiv Sena's name during these years.

From 1986 onwards, the Shiv Sena gradually developed a more differentiated set of political demands beyond the formula of communal populism. Most of the demands were uncontroversial, like the construction of more dams, the implementation of better employment schemes, and the allotment of more funds for sanitation, water supply and infrastructure in the villages. But some of the demands also had wider repercussions, such as the demand for the removal of all illegal encroachments on public and private land. This demand struck a chord among the landowning and dominant sections in many villages, who took the opportunity to let all hell loose on Dalit encroachments on pasture land, and on alleged encroachment on public land by the many Muslim petty traders in villages and towns. After the large anti-Dalit riots in 1978—regarding the renaming of Marathwada University—caste feelings had been tense in many villages. When the Shiv Sena started its state-wide campaign against the publication of Dr. Ambedkar's book *Riddles of Hinduism* in 1987, anti-Dalit sentiments flared up in many places. In Aurangabad district, the high profile of Dalit Panthers and other Dalit organisations in the 1970s had created widespread hostility among the Marathas and OBCs towards the neo-Buddhist Mahars. The Shiv Sena quickly exploited this sentiment and called for a struggle against the dominance of the 'Ms—Mahars and Muslims'. Maratha youth in the villages—many of them formerly active in the Maratha Mahasangh whose anti-Dalit stand was well-known—started, in the garb of the Shiv Sena, to harass and assault Dalits and drive them away from the encroached land.

Although anti-Dalit sentiments played a significant part in the Shiv Sena's expansion in the rural areas in 1987, the anti-Muslim wave remained by far the most powerful mobiliser. In Aurangabad, as well as in villages and small towns, the Shiv Sena sponsored and encouraged large, conspicuous celebrations of Hindu festivals as well as the construction of new temples at roadsides and in vacant plots. This symbolic contestation of public space...
The vernacularisation of Hinduva

was particularly condensed during the religious festivals where the Shiv Sena replayed the classical communal theme of reclaiming the urban space for the Hindus. Religious processions went slowly through the Muslim neighbourhoods, playing loud music and bursting crackers. Predictably, this had the desired effect, and most of the minor and major riots in the area were triggered off by tensions during religious festivals. This is turn exacerbated communal tension, and facilitated the Shiv Sena’s favourite self-representation as ‘the protector of all Hindus’.

I will briefly demonstrate the strategies and contingencies of the Shiv Sena’s expansion in two of the villages south of Aurangabad which in the late 1980s became Shiv Sena strongholds in the region. As space does not permit a more detailed account of local social dynamics, I will in the following confine myself to a summary of the political events unfolding in the villages from 1985 to 1992. *

Bidkin is a relatively large and prosperous village 35 km south of Aurangabad, located on the main road to Aurangabad, and deeply affected by the social and economic transformations in the city. Only 40 per cent of the population of 12,000 people depend directly on agriculture as Bidkin is a relatively undeveloped dryland farming village with less than 10 per cent irrigated land—all owned by rich farmers. The main source of income in the village is roadside trade and workshops in almost 100 shops and stalls along the highway, as well as petty contracting, transport, etc. The population is divided into 45 per cent Muslims, mainly shopkeepers and traders; 40 per cent Hindus (Marathas and Malis, and a sizeable upper-caste group), mainly in agriculture; and 15 per cent Dalits, mainly labourers. Due to the proximity to Aurangabad and good civic facilities, the level of literacy and education is fairly high, and there is a wide circulation of newspapers. The RSS newspaper Tarun Bharat, published in Aurangabad, has a daily circulation of 100 copies in the village. The paramount problem in Bidkin is, as elsewhere, unemployment among young people. The local government official had registered more than 1,500 young un- or under-employed youths with some education in the village.

The social conflicts in Bidkin had a communal dimension from early on, due to the precarious balance in the village between the two main communities. Communal feelings were also boosted by the long-standing presence of the Jana Sangh in the village among the Marwaris, Brahmins and leading Marathas, who had been recruited for the party during their

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* From October 1992 to March 1993 I undertook a study of eight villages in two talukas in Aurangabad district. In three of the villages, the Shiv Sena had won local political power (and subsequently lost it), in three villages the BJP had acquired a dominant position in the Gram Panchayat, and in the remaining two the Congress had retained power in spite of a significant presence of the BJP and the Shiv Sena. The following four case studies summarise the political development in the villages where either the Shiv Sena or the BJP had most clearly influenced local politics, and should therefore not be regarded as typical or average cases.
education in Aurangabad. The VHP had conducted programmes in the village since 1980, and several young men regularly conducted RSS *shakhas*. In the same period a few of the young Muslim men in the village had grown beards to indicate their sympathies with Muslim radicalism. From 1985 the social tensions in Bidkin took an open communal turn, as Muslim activists and politicians came to Bidkin to recruit support for the Shah Bano agitations taking place in Aurangabad.

Access to the attractive trade opportunities along the highway and at the bus-stop has been the most contested field in the village within the last decade. Setting up a small shop or stand is one of the few ways to generate income and self-employment. The trade-cum-encroachment issue now took a communal turn. In 1985 a group of young traders and contractors, all from higher caste families in the village, founded a local branch of the Shiv Sena. The general stand taken in 1986-87 by the Shiv Sena against encroachments on public land worked as an energiser for the Shiv Sena in Bidkin. The organisation soon became a major rallying point for many of the young unemployed men, demanding almost exclusively one thing: the removal of Muslim encroachments from the roadside and the bus-stand in the village. Amplified by communal ideology, this demand was quickly expanded to encompass some of the local mosques in the village which, it was claimed, encroached upon the public space in the village. As was the case in Aurangabad too, the Shiv Sena in Bidkin also embarked on a symbolic contestation of the public space: the Shiv Sena simply wanted to scale down the 'undue visibility' of the Muslims, and it wanted, plain and simple, the business opportunities at the bus-stand for the Hindu youth.* As a young degree-holder from the Dhangar community and RSS-VHP activist bluntly put it:

You see this mosque in front of the guest house. Over the years it has expanded. Earlier it was half of its present size. It is an encroachment—the road next to it used to be wide, now it is narrow as an alley . . . Before the riots the Muslims of this area encroached upon the area in front of the guest house and the bus-stand. Anyone entering the village would think this was a Muslim village. We too wanted to put our stalls. But there was no space. During the riots we burned all their shops except one (interview with Ganesh Kale, Bidkin, 23 January 1993).

The ensuing Gram Panchayat (village council) election in 1987 inevitably became a communal referendum on the issue of encroachments and access

* The structure of the communal conflict in Bidkin resembled several other places in the area, where the construction of communal antagonisms and competition over trade opportunities were closely intertwined. Several riot-affected areas in the neighbouring Beed district had seen similar structures of conflict. Even the initial campaigns of the Shiv Sena in Aurangabad were directed against Muslim shops and alleged encroachments.
The communalization of Hinduism

...the voice was sharply divided on communal lines. After the young aggressive Hindutva groups had come to power in the village, tensions between the communities turned into a communal conflict, with every little incident leading to communal tensions. Rumors of the past in Ayodhya, a communal riot in Ayodhya, united the communities against Hindu and Muslim alike.

The Shiv Sena, led by a young leader, decided to capitalize on this situation. They organized a rally in the village, with the non-Buddhist Dhais of the Siva Sena, led by the local MLA, and Babban Waghmare, the local Congress, in support. The rally was attended by a large number of people from both communities.

Meanwhile, two Muslim boys allegedly killed a Hindu girl. This led to a heated argument, and the Muslims were accused of the murder. The police arrested the Muslims and released the Hindus.

The experience of the riots exacerbated the communal conflict in the village. The allocation of development funds from the Shiv Sena-dominated Gram Panchayat also took a communal turn, favoring the Marathas and ignoring the Muslims.

The violence continued, with Hindus and Muslims brutalizing each other. Seven people were killed and dozens were wounded. The entire village was in a state of terror.

The police were unable to control the situation, and the conflict continued for several days. The community was divided, with Hindus and Muslims refusing to communicate with each other. The situation was getting out of control, and the government had to intervene.

...
be indirect and discreet to be effective. Pathan’s tactical move, on the basis of a tacit alliance between leading Marathas, Muslims and Dalits (represented by a Dalit elected on a BJP ticket), was to make a prominent Maratha and former Congressman the Sarpanch, and thus to defuse the communal bifurcation in the village. The formula worked, and as communal violence raged in Aurangabad in December 1992, Bidkin remained peaceful. The initial impetus of the Shiv Sena in Bidkin arose from a long fermentation of social conflicts directly engendered by the rapid economic transformations in the area which had produced a large number of socially ambitious young men from Maratha and upper caste families. The Shiv Sena provided a political discourse that made sense in a communally charged climate and an avenue to social influence that was otherwise sealed off by the immobility of the Congress apparatus in the area. The spell of Shiv Sena dominance in the local arena produced two main effects: firstly, that several of the Shiv Sena leaders established themselves as influential and prosperous businessmen in the area; and, secondly, that communal enmity, in spite of the moderation displayed in December 1992, became an accepted element in the local political common sense.

Adool village is located 30 km from Bidkin. Like Bidkin, it is a busy trading centre with almost 100 shops along the highway. The population is approximately 7,000 people, and the village, like Bidkin, constitutes a Gram Panchayat in itself. Though trade and petty contracting have picked up dramatically since 1980, agriculture has remained, due to good irrigation facilities, the solid basis of the economy of most families in Adool. About 60 per cent of the families depend primarily on farming, 20 per cent primarily on farm labour, and the remaining 20 per cent mainly on trade and employment outside the village. Adool has a less explosive composition than Bidkin: 35 per cent of the population is Muslim, about 35 per cent is Maratha–Kunbis (mostly Kunbis), 5 per cent Marwaris, 10 per cent Dalits (mainly Mahars), and the remaining 15 per cent nomadic communities (Dhangars and Banjaras) and artisan OBC groups. While the Marwaris own both land and big shops, only a few Maratha families are wealthy, while the majority of the Maratha–Kunbis are small and middle farmers and labourers. The Muslims are small farmers and petty traders, but twenty-thirty Muslim families own good irrigated land, and some bigger shops and workshops. This local ‘elite’ has been instrumental in forming a local Urdu Educational Society, and running a primary school in Adool. The Dalit community is rather poor, but is the most well-educated group in the village with several graduates, and men with considerable vocational training.

As in Bidkin, unemployment among the village youth is a problem of paramount importance in Adool. There has been a similar pressure on trade and contracting as alternative career and employment paths for young people in the village. However, the comparatively good state of
agriculture in Adool has made this pressure less than in Bidkin, and the conflicts emanating from this field have consequently been less dramatic, though deceptive, for the recent political development in Adool.

Rustom Patil is a large farmer with more than 100 acres (mostly irrigated), and he is the single most powerful man in the village. Patil exercises considerable patronage through his many external contacts, and through his position as the largest employer in orchards and fields where many of the Dalit and Muslim agricultural labourers work. Patil was Sarpanch until 1989 and he based his solid majority on the classical Congress coalition in Marathwada: Muslims, Marathas and Dalits. As in Bidkin, it was the pressure on economic assets from a growing group of disgruntled unemployed young men which broke up this coalition. The Dalits started to encroach upon the common village pasture land in 1985. The situation escalated and violent episodes occurred after young educated Marathas from the village had started a Shiv Sena shakha in 1987. Rustom Patil stepped in and worked out a compromise which would give some land to the Dalits—1.5 acre per family. This enhanced his standing among the Dalits and further antagonised the angry young men behind the Shiv Sena in Adool. The other contentious issue was the question of encroachment on public land at the marketplace, and the availability of vacant land for new shops. Rustom Patil had for years sanctioned shops for Muslims at the market, and in return Patil counted on the political support of the Muslims. Among many Marathas and Marwaris there was an uneasy feeling growing—in the midst of the even more communalised atmosphere emanating from Aurangabad in 1988—that no one was looking after the ‘Hindu-interest’. At the Gram Panchayat election in the village in 1989, the rapidly growing group of Shiv Sena activists were able to win the election on a communal platform, in many ways directly adopted from their admired counterparts in Bidkin. The Shiv Sena was banking substantially on the issue of encroachments of Dalits on pasture land and on the promises of removal of the Muslim-owned stalls at the market.

The new Shiv Sena Sarpanch proved to be an able broker of contacts and resources to the village. He managed to implement a number of development schemes in the village in his brief tenure. He also abstained from the sustained hate-campaign perpetrated against the Muslims in Bidkin, and communal relations never deteriorated to the extent they did in Bidkin. Throughout, the local elite, both Muslim and Hindu, remained on talking terms, and neither side felt confident that they would gain anything, or even win in a direct confrontation.

Though the local communal tensions were still at a manageable level, the rumours and news from Aurangabad and Bidkin impressed the villagers in Adool, which due to the marketplace and its roadside location receives and circulates information and rumours very fast. There is a circulation of almost 200 newspapers every day in Adool, and among them a few dozen Hindu or Muslim communal papers from Aurangabad.
Widespread defections from the Shiv Sena to the Congress in 1991 necessitated fresh Gram Panchayat elections in October 1992. However, political and communal equations had been modified in a communal direction by the strong presence of Shiv Sena in the village, and by the general shift in the political atmosphere from 1989 to 1992. Rustom Patil once again emerged as the de facto village leader after the dissolution of the Gram Panchayat, but his earlier strategy of assembling a Maratha-Muslim-Dalit coalition was simply foreclosed by the communal rift in the village. Patil now had two options: either to construct a Hindu-Dalit coalition, or a Muslim-Dalit coalition. Patil decided to win over a part of the former support for the Shiv Sena, and formed an exclusively Hindu-dominated panel for the elections. The latter panel secured twelve out of fifteen seats in the election, and only three Muslims were elected. Minor quarrels and some tensions ensued in the course of the election in October 1992, but after a few days this gradually subsided. The Muslim leaders in the village were not alarmed by the defeat, though they had lost both influence and patronage. They still trusted Rustom Patil's credentials as Saranchal. A Muslim farmer said:

With the entry of the Shiv Sena, the tensions and the differences between the Muslims and Hindus started to become visible in every aspect of life. There are no Muslims or Dalits in the cooperatives, they are totally in the hands of Marwaris and Marathas... but whatever tension is generated during an election, it does not last long because the Hindus and the Muslims are dependent on each other economically (Sheikh Jabhar, Adool, 1 November 1992).

The fact that communal violence never erupted in Adool can be explained by the moderate attitude of the local elites, prosperous agriculture which reduced the pressure on trade and business, and a Shiv Sena leadership which was not single-mindedly committed to violence. But an additional factor needs to be mentioned: the assertiveness of the almost exclusively Mahar, relatively well-educated and well-articulated Dalit community remains as important in the structure of social conflict in Adool as the Muslims. The situation in Bidkin was marked by the Shiv Sena's mobilisation of a large number of educated youth from higher castes, aspiring to become bureaucrats or businessmen. In Adool, however, the prime Shiv Sena constituency was drawn from young Marathas and Kunbis, uneducated sons of small and middle farmers. To this constituency, the encroachment on pasture land by the Dalits was in a sense more provocative than the disputes over shops and stalls in the market. Hence, the tensions between Dalits and Maratha peasants constantly deflected the focus away from a pure Hindu-Muslim conflict axis. This made the social structure in Adool...
no less oppressive or contested, but merely prevented communalisation
from taking on the ominous quality it did in Bidkin.

The Shiv Sena strategy seems also to have been the same in most
villages: rallying young Marathas and OBCs under the slogan of combating
the ‘Muslim Congress’, systematically escalating the symbolic warfare
against Muslims, upgrading festivals and religious sites to more spectacular
proportions, thereby aiming at a systematic ‘Hinduisation’ of the public
space in the villages. This strategy was always most successful—as in the
villages under scrutiny—when the Shiv Sena could successfully enter directly
into factional politics and transform one faction, at least temporarily, into
the dominant rallying point for all Hindus in a village. The momentum in
the Shiv Sena wave in most villages was provided by two groups: a leading
group of young ambitious Maratha or high-caste men seeking to establish
themselves in the local power structure; and a group of followers drawn
from the large group of Maratha-Kunbi small farmers, OBC artisans and
petty traders, and in many cases groups of young Dalits from the Natang,
Dhor and Chambhar communities, often in opposition to the predominance
of the assertive and organised neo-Buddhist Mahars.

IV

The BJP consolidation in Aurangabad district

From the 1960s, the Jana Sangh had established a limited but solid support
base in the trader community and professional middle class in Aurangabad.
The breakthrough in Aurangabad city and district came, as in most places
in the country, in the 1977 election where the Janata party won a convincing
victory in Aurangabad. The Jana Sangh cadres were very active in the local
Janata party branch, and established themselves as serious alternatives to
the Congress in several villages and towns in the area. After the formation
of the Bharatiya Janata Party in 1980, the new party organisation attempted
to consolidate the gains from the Janata party period and position itself as a
centrist alternative to the Congress at the local and state levels. However,
it was not until the open communalisation of the BJP strategy and discourse
from 1989 onwards, and the weakening of the Shiv Sena in 1991 and 1992,
that the BJP emerged as the most important rallying point for political
dissent and communal sentiments in and around Aurangabad, as well as a
leading oppositional force in Maharashtra.

The BJP has faced severe difficulties in constructing a popular and rural
base because of its lack of patronage power, its weak foothold within the
dominant cultivating castes and, of course, the strength of Congress. In the
1980s, the BJP tried to challenge the power of the Congress in rural
Marathwada through mass agitations, institutional politics, and the mana-
gement of caste symbols. On the agitational side, the BJP has worked
systematically to extend its organisational base in the villages and to project its parliamentary leader, Gopinath Munde, as a peasant mass leader in Marathwada. In the mid-1980s, the party effectively appropriated a substantial part of the peasant leader Sharad Joshi’s rhetoric and mobilisation techniques and managed to stage massive peasant rallies in Bombay, Nagpur and Aurangabad.

The agitational strategy of the BJP seeks to instil a feeling in its supporters of being part of a much larger organisational whole tied together by an ethos, style and set of principles radically different from the Congress and other organisations. After 1990, the BJP agitations relinquished socio-economic issues in favour of the Ramjanmabhoomi issue, Kashmir, etc.—exploiting the broader mobilisational potential of the communal discourse, in the belief that ‘Ram’ rather than ‘rooi’ would endow the party with a separate and clear-cut identity. Both the shila pujan in which bricks were consecrated and collected for a Ram temple in Ayodhya, and the rath yatra in 1990, reached most of the larger villages in the region and evoked a considerable response.

On the institutional side, BJP workers have for years attempted to get a foothold in the elected boards for village multipurpose cooperatives, in cooperative banks, sugar factories, and at various levels of the Panchayati Raj structure. The party has been partly successful in gaining a foothold in the relatively weak and unimportant multipurpose societies, whereas the advances made in the strategically and economically far ‘heavier’ banks and sugar factories are marginal. The BJP organiser of the region at the time summarises the state of the BJP’s rural power rather accurately:

Now, in every election, the Congress candidates are challenged. We set up a panel from the village level up to the district cooperative. We even set up panels for sugar factory elections and we are getting support, and try to get inside wherever possible. But since the power involved is quite big, [and] money involved is quite large we have not yet got a big breakthrough. But slowly, like the village cooperatives, we have success. (Sharad Kulkarni, BJP Secretary of the organisation for the Marathwada region, interviewed in Aurangabad on 19 January 1993).

Finally, caste is a crucial dimension in the BJP’s attempt to cope with what BJP workers call ‘the compulsions of politics’. At the level of state and national politics, the BJP tries, as I pointed out above, to overcome its ‘Brahminical stigma’ by projecting OBC and Maratha candidates in elections, and as leaders in the formal organisational apparatus in the party. Thus, the BJP seeks to establish itself as a respectable alternative for dissenting individuals from the dominant elite. At the local level, the BJP often aligns with the weaker Congress faction, or absorbs dissenting Congressmen for some time. While this balancing function has given the BJP a limited influence at the local level, it has helped it to perform quite strongly.
in Assembly and General elections, where party images and general appeals count more than the local delivery of services and brokerage. The BJP has emerged in many villages as an electoral alternative located between the Congress factions, projecting itself as elevated above the nitty-gritty of patronage politics while still acceptable to the dominant castes.

However, village elites generally find the BJP unfit to perform brokerage functions at the local level. Village elites tend to prefer Congress candidates within the panchayat structure as they ensure access to the essential power structure in the cooperative sector and the state administration. The BJP normally only becomes an option for rich farmers and big rural businessmen if they lose their positions in the local power structure and are marginalised by their competitors. In such situations the BJP and Shiv Sena have in some cases worked as alternative avenues of influence for ‘big men’. Often, when these ‘big men’ have reoccupied a position in the institutional power structure, they are reabsorbed by the Congress. The local MLA, Haribhau Bagade, admits the weakness of the BJP on this account:

We have been able to reduce support for the Congress and gain some strength because local Congressmen started to lose face in local politics. It is not that we have charismatic leadership, but because of sympathy for our work. All the big men are with the Congress.... At the local level elections are not fought on the party level, but on caste basis, on local politics, the candidate, his influence, etc., and not on the intellectual level. In local politics the workers count, but if a candidate is effective in one village, he is not necessarily also effective in the adjacent village. Caste and local relations matter (Haribhau Bagade, MLA for BJP in Aurangabad East, interviewed in Aurangabad, 13 January 1993, emphasis added).

The overall problem for the BJP in making inroads in the constituency of middle and rich peasants (mainly Marathas) is its limited influence within the patronage structures in the bureaucracy, licensed industries, cooperative sector, construction, etc. The BJP is supported by many industrialists and traders, and castewise by certain OBC groups, Marwaris and high-caste groups, but the party remains, nevertheless, fairly independent vis-à-vis the interests of these groups. The Congress, on the contrary, is a far more open and penetrable mechanism which can be effectively influenced and which can promote more effectively than the BJP the narrow interests of strong business groups, or rich peasants. The following two examples from Aurangabad district (Pimpri and Karmad) demonstrate the paradoxical situation of the BJP being relatively weak in local politics, while at the same time being able to win several Assembly seats in Aurangabad district.

Pimpri village is one of the largest villages in Aurangabad taluka. It has more than 11,000 inhabitants and is the administrative centre of a revenue circle comprising fifty villages. It is a fairly prosperous village, with a large
irrigation scheme enabling most of the farmers to grow sugarcane. The largest farmers run large orchards producing fruit marketed in Aurangabad and Bombay. Pimpri is, in many ways, the political centre of the entire taluka as many of the important political leaders in the area have come from Pimpri. The present MLA, Haribhau Bagade, is from an adjacent village; the legendary founder of the Jana Sangh in the taluka, Rambhau Gavande, was from Pimpri, and a village strongman, Sakharam Patil, the ‘local king’ controlling more than 200 acres of land was the chairman of the Zilla Parishad in Aurangabad district for many years.

The village is sharply divided along communal lines. There are 40 per cent Muslims, most of whom are small farmers, small traders and agricultural labourers. The Hindu groups, comprising 40 per cent of the village population, are overwhelmingly Maratha-Kunbis (most of them middle and small farmers and some landless labourers). In addition, there are about 10 per cent Brahmin and Marwari households and a number of smaller OBC service castes. The remaining 20 per cent are divided into a group of Dalits, mainly neo-Buddhist Mahars, who are predominantly landless labourers.

The socio-economic hierarchy is dominated by four strong families, each owning more than 100 acres of irrigated land. Each of these large patrons has a loyal following among the middle peasants, their labourers and other groups in the village. There is also a fairly large mosque, and the local Kazi family is the religious head of all Muslims in sixty-five villages in the area. Finally the neo-Buddhists have a community hall and a temple in the Scheduled Caste hamlet at the outskirts of the village.

Rambhau Gavande, an influential Maratha, founded the Jana Sangh and an RSS shakha in Pimpri in 1965, and gradually built a following among a section of the Maratha peasants and high-caste groups. The breakthrough came in 1977 when, in the anti-Congress wave, Gavande became MLA for the Janata party in the area and made a following for himself among younger Maratha peasants. In the early 1980s, communalisation picked up in the area. The permission to use loudspeakers on mosques and the Shah Bano case were quoted by most of the villagers as important reasons behind the Hindu assertiveness from 1985. Bhandari, a powerful Marwari owning 250 acres of irrigated land, left the Congress at this juncture and joined the BJP. Bhandari, a fierce and shrewd operator in the local political economy, had realised the possibility of beating his rivals by forming a Hindutva platform and constructing a Hindu majority around this platform. This move coincided with Bhandari’s ‘conversion’ to the Warkari cult which has a strong following among Marathas and OBCs in Pimpri. Bhandari promoted and financed Haribhau Bagade’s campaign in 1985, and emerged after the BJP’s victory as the leading figure in Pimpri.

A Shiv Sena shakha started in 1985 attracted many young Marathas and OBCs, mostly from families already supportive of the BJP and Bhandari.
The Shiv Sena thus became a sort of ‘youth wing’ of the BJP, forming a ‘task force’ which arranged high-profile Ganapati and Dassera festivals, and whose gang of boys intimidated the local Muslims and Dalits.

Hence, out of a multitude of alliances, two major blocks emerged in the village: on one side stood Bhandari and another rich farmer in the village. They were supported by most of the Marathas, the high-caste groups and a sizeable chunk of the OBC group, and had the support of Bagade and the BJP at the district level. On the other side stood the two other strongmen, followed by a section of the Marathas in alliance with the Muslim Kazi, and the Dalit community leaders on a Congress platform. In 1989 a Dalit was made the Sarpanch.

This polarisation along caste and community lines politicised the atmosphere in the entire village. Riots did not occur, but there were constant quarrels, abuses, and provocations from the Shiv Sena and BJP followers during festivals and public events, where the Hindu bloc effectively employed both Warkari symbols and the worship of Khandoba in a united Hindu communal discourse. The local Kazi managed with difficulty to control the fear and anger among the Muslim youth. The Dalits also suffered abuse and provocation but refrained from any confrontation. At the Gram Panchayat election in 1989, Bhandari’s election panel (BJP) got a majority of eight, while the Congress panel got seven seats. Hereafter, the factions were baptised ‘the group of eight’ and ‘the group of seven’ respectively, a labelling which was more accurate than any party labels. The losing ‘group of seven’ filed a case against the other group for election fraud. This case is pending in the High Court and all the proceedings of the Gram Panchayat have been stalled since 1989.

The expansion of BJP’s support in Pimpri was, in brief, premised on three factors: (a) the early presence of RSS support from influential families and middle farmers, and the legacy of the Janata party; (b) the presence of a large Muslim and Dalit community (almost a majority), which made it possible to portray the Muslims as rivals for power, and hence boosted communalisation; and (c) the reorganisation of factions along communal lines in 1984–85 which provided local support and prestige to the BJP from the powerful Bhandari and his followers. Somewhat paradoxically, the various BJP-led agitations since 1989 have evoked a relatively weak response in Pimpri. This, however, confirms the basic observation that the BJP constituency in Pimpri primarily has roots in the contingencies of factional alliance structures in the village, and the communalisation this had engendered from the mid-1980s.

Karmad is, like Pimpri, a fairly large village (7,000 inhabitants), a commercial centre with numerous shops and small restaurants, located 35 km east of Aurangabad. Urban growth in Aurangabad has opened new industrial occupations for the under-employed small farmers and agricultural labourers in the village. The population of Karmad has almost doubled
from the early 1980s to 1992. The newcomers are mainly in the lower income categories (labourers, drivers, clerks, etc.). The village is sharply divided into three communities: 40 per cent are Hindus, mainly Marathas, Dhangars and Malis—mostly landowners and traders; Muslims (35 per cent)—mainly traders and small farmers headed by a handful of better-off families; and Dalits (25 per cent), mainly landless labourers, dependent on low-paid sugarcane-cutting and on the public Employment Guarantee Scheme.

The RSS and Jana Sangh were started in Karmad in the early 1970s by four brothers from a prosperous Maratha family. The brothers were proselytes of the Pimpri strongman, Gavande, and in the factional fights between the leading families in Karmad, they built a stable BJP group in the 1980s, backed by several Maratha strongmen and traders from adjoining villages. One Brahmin member of the group, a degree-holder from Benares Hindu University, is in charge of a local unit of the VHP. This unit has conducted all the Ayodhya campaigns, evoking some response in the Hindu community, and has communalised the atmosphere in the village after 1988. As in Pimpri, Warkari symbols have been deployed in the communal discourse to posit a corporate Hindu identity, and the Brahmin leader of the local VHP unit claims to be a devout Warkari himself. However, these moves seem to reflect Sangh parivar attempts to co-opt Warkari symbols as markers of an inclusive Hindu community defined in opposition to Muslims, rather than symptoms of an incipient communalisation of the Warkari sect. I did, nevertheless, come across many respondents who claimed to be both Warkaris and Hinduva-wadis.

In 1986 the Shiv Sena established a shakha in the village, and in the following years the gradual communalisation of Aurangabad also spread to Karmad. In 1988 more than fifty Muslim families came to Karmad from the riot-affected and tense villages of Palghan taluka, among them Bidkin (see foregoing).

The BJP group in Karmad feared that a prospective Muslim-Dalit alliance could win the Panchayat election, given the anger among the Karmad Muslims on behalf of their relatives from the riot-affected villages, and the rather hostile and distant relation between caste Hindus and Dalits in the village. Many in the Hindu community were worried by the tilted communal balance and the BJP activists encouraged these feelings. A purely Hindu panel was set up for the Gram Panchayat elections, urging the warring Maratha factions to unite in the face of the 'Muslim threat'. Subsequently, Muslims and Dalits formed another panel. However, many Dalits feared a confrontation with their Maratha patrons, who threatened to deny them work, and voted for the Hindu panel which consequently won all seats in the Gram Panchayat, while neither Dalits nor Muslims got any representation.
After this incident the communalisation went further, and there were two incidents of communal violence, looting and arson, instigated by the local Shiv Sainiks during the General Election campaigns in 1989 and 1991. The village became visibly marked by the escalation of communal conflict. As in many villages in Marathwada, the mosques and temples are situated very close to each other—often opposing each other—as a very tangible representation of the contestation of sacred space which has been going on for centuries in this region. In Karmad, this pattern is represented by the large Hanuman temple just opposite a rather large mosque. After 1988 the mosque was renovated by funds collected among Muslims in Aurangabad; among Hindus this has confirmed all the myths regarding the ‘outside links’ and secret designs of Muslims. On the Hindu side, an old Shiva temple is now being renovated, and a temple for the Warkari deity Vithoba has been constructed recently.

The trajectory of the BJP in Karmad confirms the trend observed in Pimpri: the foothold of the Sangh parivar established by Gavande in the 1970s among Maratha families in the area, combined with a precarious communal balance and a Muslim–Dalit alliance, and the communalisation of factional politics in the village, have produced a situation where the BJP could emerge as a decisive force in local arenas. Yet it is also indicative of the so-called compulsions of politics that the driving leader of the BJP in Karmad defected to the Congress in 1991, after having been denied a BJP ticket for the Zilla Parishad elections. In spite of the waning influence of the BJP on local affairs, the communalisation of the village level alliances and the local public sphere have had lasting effects of distrust and increased communal enmity, which undeniably contribute to continued support for the BJP in the Assembly and General elections.

V

The structure of political constituencies in Aurangabad district

As part of my village studies, I also conducted a survey to map the possible correlations between class, caste, party preference, and political activity and participation. Fifty persons were systematically sampled in each of the eight villages (four in Paithan taluka and four in Aurangabad taluka), yielding a total sample of 400 persons. This sample is of course not representative of the district as such.

Table I gives a social profile of the entire sample and of each group of respondents indicating support for political parties. Bearing in mind that all the studied villages are important villages in areas that in 1990 returned a BJP MLA in Aurangabad taluka, and a Shiv Sena MLA in Paithan taluka, the most surprising finding in the survey was the relatively weak support for both the BJP and the Shiv Sena, and the strength
Table 1

Voters’ Profile in Aurangabad and Paithan Talukas of Aurangabad District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>All Voters (400)</th>
<th>Congress (172)</th>
<th>BJP (29)</th>
<th>Shiv Sena (37)</th>
<th>No Party (160)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forward</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maratha</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBC</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCST</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nomadic</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No caste</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>36.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper-middle</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower-middle</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>31.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>58.7</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>63.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>84.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th standard</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduates</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>89.6</td>
<td>91.8</td>
<td>63.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jain</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>(nec-Buddhist)</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: ‘All’ refers to respondents in Aurangabad district, rendered as percentages of figures in brackets for each category.

1 The category ‘Forward’ consists of Brahmans, CKP (Kayasthas), Marwaris, and various minor Khatriya groups, such as Rajputs and other high-caste groups.
2 The survey, covering 1,080 respondents, was conducted by the author and assistants in October–November 1992 in three localities in Maharashtra, all strongholds of the BJP, the Shiv Sena or both parties: Pune City (340 respondents), Thane City (i.e., suburban Bombay, 340 respondents), and Aurangabad taluka (200 respondents in four villages) and Paithan taluka (200 respondents in four villages) in Aurangabad district. As the localities in which sampling was done were selected according to criteria of the electoral or organisational strength of the BJP or the Shiv Sena, the sample is in no way representative of Maharashtra as such. But I will venture that the sample, with its urban, middle class, and hence upper-caste bias, is fairly representative for the Hindu constituency in Maharashtra. The features of this constituency and its variation in the selected localities are briefly presented in the Appendix to this article—Tables A.1 and A.2.
of identification with the Congress. This paradox may partly be explained by the conjuncture in which the survey was conducted, namely less than a year after Chagan Bhujbal had defected from the Shiv Sena to the Congress along with a group of MLAs elected in rural areas, among them Waghchaure in Paithan taluka. At the time of the survey, the Shiv Sena’s organisation and image were seriously shattered. The BJP-Shiv Sena alliance had been dissolved up to the local elections in February 1992, when the BJP’s local structures were also weakened by the scramble for local positions, defections and the general disarray which the announcement of local elections had spurred. The impression of weakness of the Shiv Sena and the BJP was further compounded by the Congress’ impressive performance in the local elections where it was returned to power at virtually all levels in the Panchayat structure in the area (as well as in other regions in the state).

Another explanation may be found in the more general disjunction between local elections and Assembly and General elections in terms of issues and political preferences. Dominance of local political arenas is not automatically transmuted to electoral strength in Assembly elections, for example, just as success in Assembly elections does not necessarily translate into local political dominance in Panchayats. Performance in Panchayat politics is judged on patronage and brokerage parameters, whereas the Assembly elections are more plebiscitary, with emotional issues, representation of caste symbols, and the construction of certain personal images of candidates being increasingly important.

Finally, the endemic factionalism within the Congress very often results in the pro-Congress vote being divided among the official candidate and several prominent Congressmen running as independent candidates. This spreading of votes often makes it possible to win a seat with a rather modest share of the votes, as was the case in both Paithan and Aurangabad Assembly constituencies in 1990.

The BJP constituency in this survey is thus numerically small and the picture of the social profile of a rural BJP voter emerging from it should not be over-interpreted. It is nevertheless clear that the core support of the BJP comes from upper-caste Brahmins, CKPs and Marwaris and from a section of Maratha peasantry. The BJP constituency is Hindu and Jain, more affluent and better educated than the average villagers, and the number of poor and illiterate persons supporting the BJP is lower than the average, and lower than in the case of the Congress, though slightly higher than in the case of the Shiv Sena. The support base of the BJP in Maharashtra has traditionally been associated with Brahmins and Marwaris, but the survey as such, as well as the village studies, reveal that the BJP has been able to expand its base beyond these very small groups. The BJP has gained some support from both middle farmers and poorer groups. However, as with all the political parties, a substantial part of the support from
the poor sections to BIP is generated by patronage structure, through which local political 'strongmen' associate their poorer clients to their respective parties. Bhandari, the Marwari strongman in Pimpri who supports the BJP, is a clear example and, in spite of its limited size, the BIP constituency emerging from the survey largely confirms the findings in the case studies.

The Shiv Sena following is also limited in number in this sample, and therefore hardly a strong case for more general conclusions on the general following of the party. The Shiv Sena draws a less upper caste, more Maratha, and even more affluent following than the BJP. The constituency emerging from the sample is predominantly Maratha (more than 50 per cent) and upper caste (with an element of Dalits as well), and class-wise it is better off than the average level of the respondents. The Shiv Sena is predominantly male (62 per cent), with a level of education corresponding to the average of the sample, though markedly lower than that of both the Congress (I) and BJP supporters. In addition, it might be noted that the age profile of the Shiv Sena supporters reveals a much younger constituency than the average for the sample. In spite of the limited material presented here, the main features of the Shiv Sena following do not contradict the case study findings concerning the characteristics of the core support for the Shiv Sena who come mainly from younger Marathas with some education. This was even more true of the local leadership of the Shiv Sena, most of whom came from Maratha families with a long tradition of political involvement with the Congress. The survey thus confirms that the advent of the Shiv Sena in this region to some extent expressed a 'youth-rebellion' within the Congress.

The Congress constituency emerging from the survey is still built on a Maratha-Muslim-Dalit combine; while the category 'no party' in terms of class and caste is close to the average composition of the sample. This latter category displays less political involvement and awareness, and comprises, not surprisingly, a large group of illiterate women. However, the large size of this category (40 per cent of all respondents) also testifies to the substantial size of the 'floating vote' that may move in either direction by effective campaigning. The campaign factor has been and remains the strongest card in the hands of both the Shiv Sena and BJP in terms of winning Assembly seats, while it plays a less significant part in Panchayat elections.

As Tables 2 and 3 show, there are clear differences between Paithan and Aurangabad talukas in the degree of politicisation. There is a marked difference in the degree of party identification—high in Paithan (71 per

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13 While 57 per cent of all respondents were below 40, almost 75 per cent of the Shiv Sena's supporters were below 40 years. Furthermore, 25 per cent of all respondents are below 30, while almost 35 per cent of the Shiv Sena supporters are below 30 years.
The vernacularisation of Hinduva

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>All (400)</th>
<th>Aurangabad Taluka (200)</th>
<th>Paithan Taluka (200)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discuss politics</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support a party</td>
<td>55.8</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>71.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend rallies</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active in voluntary organisations</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active in elections</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voting:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All elections</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>96.5</td>
<td>68.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almost all</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely/never</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about politics:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family/friends</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>78.5</td>
<td>61.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio/TV</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Figures indicate percentages of all voters in Aurangabad and Paithan talukas.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party Choice</th>
<th>All (400)</th>
<th>Aurangabad Taluka (200)</th>
<th>Paithan Taluka (200)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>53.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiv Sena</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No party</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Figures indicate percentages of all voters in Aurangabad and Paithan talukas.

still built on a y' in terms of the Shiv Sena's size, the BJP's findings in the
this sample, and on the general caste, more so the constituency are than 50 per cent class-wise in the Shiv Sena is correspondingly that of both the ed that the age
constituency division presented contradict the re support for me education. Sena, most of the political involvement of the 'allion' within

been Paithan is a marked than (71 per

cent) and moderate in Aurangabad taluka (44.5 per cent). Similarly, the frequency of political discussions and activism is much higher in Paithan than in Aurangabad taluka. The frequency of voting is high in Aurangabad taluka, and so is the reliance on family and friends in gathering information and advice on politics. In Paithan the voting pattern fluctuates more and the reliance on family networks for political information and choices is more limited.

These differences in politicisation may be explained in two ways: on the one hand, Paithan taluka in general, and the major villages in particular, is more entangled in the processes of commercialisation, industrialisation and urbanisation, than is Aurangabad taluka. The level of literacy is
slightly higher, and more people are involved in business and jobs outside the villages than in Aurangabad taluka. On the other hand, Paithan has also been the site of fierce political struggle between the Congress and Shiv Sena in the last decade. Several villages have experienced severe communal rioting and violence; the Shiv Sena has acquired a strong position in many villages, and the Congress has put considerable effort into dismantling the Shiv Sena’s sway over the taluka. This intensified political contestation has sharpened political identifications as a whole.

VI

‘Structured contingencies’ in the politics of Hindutva
in Marathwada

Neither the BJP nor the Shiv Sena created the communal myths, suspicion and fear complex viz-a-viz Muslims in this region. The Hindutva parties also did not create the Maratha caste ideology prevailing in the region. Nor did they create the widespread social disgruntlement and anxiety in the rapidly changing area, spawning a considerable political and ideological ‘availability’ for oppositional discourses in several parts of Marathwada. All this pre-existed and constituted the structural terrain of possibilities upon which the Hindutva parties operated. Hence, the contribution of the Shiv Sena and BJP to the communalisation of Marathwada was their specific articulation of a new mode of protest and opposition to the Congress, and their re-articulation of a cultural nationalist discourse built upon the re-activation of anti-Muslim fears and anger, and on the projection of all social grievances on ‘the Muslim Congress’, i.e., a corrupt Congress ‘pampering Muslims’.

The advent of the Shiv Sena and BJP in this region was, in other words, a genuine ‘structured contingency’: there was a very real ‘availability’ for mobilisation existing in large groups while, for a set of different reasons, the Shiv Sena thrived on its new-found recipe of communal populism in Bombay. It was the contingent initiative of a small group of men in Aurangabad, rather than a concerted strategy on the part of the Shiv Sena leadership, which set the Hindutva wave rolling in Marathwada. The speed and intensity of this wave, which almost overpowered its original carriers, were premised precisely on the structural transformation of the socio-economic field in Marathwada, which had thrown up a new set of questions and problematics to be addressed. The questions of employment, Muslim leadership, land encroachment, etc., were addressed in a distinct communal idiom by the Shiv Sena, which in return was carried on a popular wave of enthusiasm for a couple of years.

After this wave had put the Shiv Sena in power and institutionalised it as a political force, the party found itself confronted with a whole set of policy matters, factional politics, opportunity structures and patronage. The local
version of communal populism in Marathwada, predominantly playing on fears and hatreds vis-à-vis Muslims, and the loose and incoherent party organisation could not easily respond adequately to these new challenges. The Shiv Sena simply did not have the capacity or political acumen to hammer out lasting coalitions and compromises; it could not provide sufficient opportunities for the many ambitious young men it had mobilised; and it could not deliver sufficient patronage and resources to the local level. One of the reasons for this state of things was also a deliberate policy on the part of the central leadership in Bombay seeking to prevent any strong and competent intermediate leadership emerging in the party. As the Congress machine opened many new career paths in the early 1990s, a large number of leading Sainiks defected and threw the Shiv Sena into crisis, bereft of intermediate leadership, authority and a clear-cut cause. The longer term effect of the Shiv Sena’s expansion had, however, been a displacement of local Muslim political leadership within Congress in the region and a general weakening of the Congress networks of patronage and political power.

The organisational structure and stability in the BJP and the Sangh parivar, and the tight-knit atmosphere of ideological devotion that characterise its activist culture, made the party less efficient in quickly reaping the electoral benefits of the communalisation of Marathwada, but also less vulnerable to the counter-offensive staged by the Congress in 1991–92. As within other political parties, the local elections in 1992 released an immense energy of local ambitions and power tussles at the lower ranks that somewhat, but not decisively, shattered the party’s overall image. Also the ‘Brahminical stigma’ that continues to cling to the BJP in a region marked by a very limited proportion of higher castes has presented a major obstacle to the BJP’s expansion. Nevertheless, the BJP has been able to establish a reputation for sincerity and hard work in the political field, i.e., as competent though somewhat overly ‘honest’ players in local power struggles—and to position itself among dominant peasant castes—mainly Maratha–Kunbis—as a respectable alternative to the warring Congress factions in the region.

The ‘vernacularisation’ of Hindutva in Marathwada at the level of political discourse, constructed the true Hindu as a brave, masculine Maratha fighting Muslim conquerors. Mass communalism in Aurangabad district was articulated both by leaders and local activists around a desire, and a right, to recuperate a Maratha martial spirit (parilik) allegedly hurt and humiliated by Muslims for centuries. This trend was most pronounced in the Shiv Sena, but BJP activists also systematically employed these narratives of Hindutva. Additionally, the generally strong position of Maratha–Kunbis in the political arena in the region and the emergence of a large segment of ambitious young Marathas and OBCs gave the Shiv Sena in particular a large Maratha–Kunbi following.
To acquire a rural following in Marathwada and to break out of its urban and upper caste ‘cocoon’, the BJP not only vernacularised its discourse, but the party also sought to master the local political game and recruit local Maratha leadership, in order to make itself credible both among the Maratha–Kunbis and other caste groups in the region. As I indicated in the case studies, this strategy has been rather successful. The BJP’s local strongholds have often been built around the party’s recruitment of Maratha members of the village elite.

The vernacularisation of Hindutva based on a Muslim-Maratha antagonism holds true of Marathwada, just as the Shiv Sena’s and BJP’s more limited gains in western Maharashtra have also been won through a similar rhetoric. However, in the Konkan region the strong performance of the Shiv Sena is more linked to specific dynamics connected to migration from the region to Bombay, and the generally close ties that many Konkanese families maintain with family and kin in Bombay. The BJP’s persistent support base in Vidarbha is specifically connected to the party’s long-standing campaign for a separate state in the region, and the gradual support the party has been able to win in the relatively prosperous and politically ambitious OBC groups in the region—not least the Vanjaris.

VII

Conclusion: The ‘vernacularisation’ of Hindutva in Maharashtra

The Sangh parivar version of Hindutva was mainly carried by the BJP in Maharashtra, while the entire Ram Janmabhoomi agitation conducted by the VHP never engendered the same popular response in Maharashtra as it did in north India. Maharashtrian society, with a still vibrant non-Brahminism in its peasantry and its politically assertive lower-caste groups, did not respond to the Ram agitation and the entire Hindutva wave on a devotional/religious note. The BJP’s insistence in the 1995 Assembly election campaign on a clear-cut anti-Congress profile, and its reluctance—in spite of pressure from the RSS—to take up the issue of the ‘liberation’ of the Hindu shrines in Mathura and Varanasi, testifies to the recognition of the primacy of the political side of Hindutva in Maharashtra. The Hindutva wave in Maharashtra was initially articulated by the Shiv Sena as a political discourse and it has been broadly received on that note: as a part of an ideological and political battle between the Congress hegemony and new upcoming political forces. Because of the clear political character of Hindutva in Maharashtra—a Hindutva which never was able to parade as religion and thus conceal its central preoccupation with politics and power—the BJP and Shiv Sena were also from the outset bogged down in the predicament of all oppositional forces in Maharashtra: namely, to function in a political field whose limits, methods, basic discourse and caste arithmetics had been defined by the Brahmin-Maratha antagonism and the
peculiarities of the Congress machine in Maharashtra. The democratic revolution in rural Maharashtra undermined this hegemony and rendered a large constituency available for the articulation of protest and communal assertion by the Hinduva parties. This wave especially mobilised young and plebeian Maratha-Kunbis and various OBC groups and it thoroughly communalised everyday discourse and social relations. Yet, the Congress political culture in the rural areas proved resilient and hegemonic and in some years forced the Hinduva parties to "vernacularise" both their discourse and mobilisational strategies.

The success of the Shiv Sena-BJP alliance, forged at the last minute in January 1995, for the 1995 elections, may thus seem a little less ironic in the light of this process of vernacularisation. More than half of the seats won by the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance were in urban constituencies while the Congress was almost entirely ousted from all the major urban centres in the state. The rural vote for the BJP and Shiv Sena came from the Konkan where the Shiv Sena had already established its dominance in 1990; from Vidarbha where the BJP had also established itself strongly in 1990; and from Marathwada where the Shiv Sena in particular had regained a strong foothold, especially in Aurangabad city and district, Jalna and Beed, whereas the BJP had made somewhat slower progress in the region. Both in Marathwada and in Vidarbha several scandals, incidents of police brutality in Nagpur, and the fatal mismanagement of the quake-affected southern districts of Marathwada had seriously damaged the Congress' general image. Besides, the Shiv Sena's violent campaign against the renaming of Marathwada University had once more galvanised its popularity among the Marathas and OBC groups in the region. The BJP chose a strategy of distant support to the renaming as part of their larger and not entirely unsuccessful strategy of attracting various Dalit groups to the party. This reinforced the benevolent paternalism of the Sangh parivar that, as Gopal Guru suggests, obviously spurred by the fear of a repetition of the alliances between the OBCs, Dalits and Muslims in Uttar Pradesh, made the BJP the largest party in terms of Assembly representation among the Scheduled Castes in Maharashtra.14

14 Two issues have constantly caused trouble between the BJP and the Shiv Sena. The first is the question of political leadership and authority, where the BJP fears Thackeray's 'extra-parliamentary' authority and spell over the party, and where the Shiv Sena fears being used in a larger RSS-BJP game-plan. Secondly, the two parties are very different in style and ethos, and the Sangh parivar in particular has found the Shiv Sena irresponsible and plebeian. BJP leaders in Maharashtra, especially Pramod Mahajan, however, have always realised that, without the Shiv Sena, the BJP would have no future in the state (interview, 9 December 1992).

15 Out of eighteen reserved Scheduled Caste seats, the BJP won seven (three Chambhars, one Mahar, two Matangs and one from the sweeper community) and the Shiv Sena four Scheduled Caste seats (which all went to Chambhars). The remaining (mainly Mahars) went to the RPI, Left parties and Congress (see Guru 1995: 734). What is truly remarkable is that these communities, which for decades were a stable support for the Congress, now seem to have changed sides, at least temporarily. The shift in political loyalties is obviously connected
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. Pay.</th>
<th>1830</th>
<th>1840</th>
<th>1850</th>
<th>1860</th>
<th>1870</th>
<th>1880</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Notes:**

- This table is from Appendix A of the document.
- The table details population figures for different years.

**Appendix**

More visibly publicized with the advent of the story, the BFP Alliance has also made other significant contributions to Hinduism and communal historical preservation. The historical myths of Hinduism by and large reflect the continued presence of Hinduism in the modern world. However, the modern Hindu Alliance has also contributed to the growth of Hinduism in the modern world.

**Table A.1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. Pay.</th>
<th>1830</th>
<th>1840</th>
<th>1850</th>
<th>1860</th>
<th>1870</th>
<th>1880</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Notes:**

- This table is from Appendix A of the document.
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**Appendix**

More visibly publicized with the advent of the story, the BFP Alliance has also made other significant contributions to Hinduism and communal historical preservation. The historical myths of Hinduism by and large reflect the continued presence of Hinduism in the modern world. However, the modern Hindu Alliance has also contributed to the growth of Hinduism in the modern world.
Appendix A.1 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All (1,080)</th>
<th>Congress (360)</th>
<th>BJP (246)</th>
<th>SS (118)</th>
<th>No Party (331)</th>
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<tbody>
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<td><strong>Religion</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
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<td>67.2</td>
<td>95.9</td>
<td>91.5</td>
<td>75.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
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<td>17.0</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jain</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neo-Buddhist</td>
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<td>7.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 50</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>32.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 'All' refers to respondents in Pune, Thane and Aurangabad.

Table A.2
Indicators of Political Activity and Awareness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>All (1,080)</th>
<th>Pune (340)</th>
<th>Thane (340)</th>
<th>Aurangabad (400)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discuss politics</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>20.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support a party</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>55.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend rallies</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active in voluntary organisations</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active in elections</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Voting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voting</th>
<th>All (1,080)</th>
<th>Pune (340)</th>
<th>Thane (340)</th>
<th>Aurangabad (400)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All elections</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>81.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almost all</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely/never</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Information on politics from:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information on politics from</th>
<th>All (1,080)</th>
<th>Pune (340)</th>
<th>Thane (340)</th>
<th>Aurangabad (400)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family/friends</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>73.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV/radio</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>8.75</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 'All' refers to respondents in Pune, Thane and Aurangabad.

Table A.3
Party Choice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party Choice</th>
<th>All (1,080)</th>
<th>Pune (340)</th>
<th>Thane (340)</th>
<th>Aurangabad (400)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>43.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiv Sena</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No party</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


