

The BJP and the Shiv Sena: A Rocky Marriage?*

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India today is governed by the National Democratic Alliance (hereafter NDA), a loose coalition led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (hereafter BJP). In that coalition, the Shiv Sena plays an important role because it has 15 seats in the Lok Sabha. Although only a moderate number, they flag the Shiv Sena as one of the largest blocs backing the BJP, and in recognition of this the BJP has given the Shiv Sena three ministerial positions within the ruling Cabinet. Despite this, tensions between the two alliance partners abound. This paper seeks to identify them and explain how they have arisen.

The Electoral History Of The BJP And The Shiv Sena

In the volatile politics of India since the mid-1990s, it is easy to forget how long it took the BJP to emerge onto the national stage and how fragile its hold on power has been. When, after the general elections of 1996 the first national BJP government emerged, it survived for a mere thirteen days. Accordingly, the BJP began to build alliances and coalitions as a way of broadening its appeal.¹ In preparation for the 1998 general elections, particular attention was paid to building support structures beyond northern India.² In the aftermath of these elections, the BJP managed to form a fragile coalition government made up of parties of almost every colour except the extreme Left.³ Yet the BJP's hold at the Centre remained weak until late 1999 when it secured a clear electoral victory. This victory, however, was also built on alliances that have continued to present the BJP with as many problems as solutions.⁴ By the time of the state elections of February 2002, the fragility of BJP

* In addition to the sources noted below, I am grateful to numerous politicians and journalists for speaking to me during fieldwork in India in December 2002. I have respected their requests for confidentiality. The interviews were selected to reflect a wide variety of political perspectives.

¹ *Country Report India* (The Economist Intelligence Unit [hereafter EIU]), 15 July 1996.

² *Ibid.*, 1 Feb. 1998.

³ *Ibid.*, 20 May 1998.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 6 Dec. 1999.

leadership in Delhi had reasserted itself with the party showing a weak electoral performance in four states.⁵ As this paper goes to press, the BJP is pinning its hopes on the state election in Gujarat. A win there would make Gujarat only the second Indian state still ruled by the BJP—all other BJP state governments, with the exception of Goa, having fallen in recent years.

In building political partnerships to increase its popularity, the BJP has shifted beyond its narrow communal agenda and adopted policies that are more pragmatic. The nature of these fragile alliances is exemplified by the election campaign in Gujarat where, amongst others, the BJP enlisted the public support of Mayawati, India's most prominent *dalit* politician. The Shiv Sena, on the other hand, has used its alliance with the BJP to give it a national presence designed to help shore up its reputation in Maharashtra and Mumbai. The first three maps (see Appendix) show how difficult it has been for the Shiv Sena to do this. The Shiv Sena first made an appearance in the Lok Sabha in the 1989 election when it won a single seat. Since then, its representation at the Centre has never exceeded fifteen, as Table 1 shows.

TABLE 1. Number Of Constituencies Won by the Hindu Right in Elections to the Lok Sabha

Year	BJP	Shiv Sena	Constituencies	Comments
1999	182	15	543	BJP-Led Coalition
1998	182	6	543	Fragile Coalition
1996	161	15	544	13-Day BJP Gov't.
1992	0	0	13	By-Election
1991	120	4	543	
1989	85	1	529	
1985	0	0	27	By-Election
1984	2	0	514	

Source: 'Internationalising South Asian Scholarly Data: An ARC Project', Monash Asia Institute [<http://www.monash.edu.au/mai/southasianet>]. The data is from the Electoral Commission of India.

In late 2002 the Shiv Sena's presence in the Union government is still limited to fifteen Lok Sabha members and three Cabinet ministers. Beyond the Indian parliament the party depends in north India on the cells that have been established in a number of states including Delhi, Gujarat, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. Not much is known about these,

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1 Mar. 2002.

except for press reports about the threats issued by the cell leaders and the civil disturbances attributed to Shiv Sainiks.⁶

Table 2 shows that even within its home state of Maharashtra, the Shiv Sena took longer to emerge as a political force than the BJP which, prior to the 1984 election, had replaced the Bharatiya Jan Sangh—founded in 1951—as the main Hindu political party in India. While the Shiv Sena was unable to match the BJP’s political presence in the Maharashtra State Assembly during the 1980s, in 1990 it won ten more constituencies than the BJP. This lead was maintained during the Assembly election of 1999 when the Shiv Sena won a dozen more seats than the BJP. Moreover, an analysis of voter behaviour has shown that in Maharashtra, whilst popular support for the BJP stagnated between 1989 and 1998 at between 20 to 23 percent of votes, the popularity of the Shiv Sena increased from 1.2 to just under 20 percent.⁷ These electoral failures and successes in themselves are a source of tension between the BJP and the Shiv Sena. The rest of this paper takes up a number of key economic and ideological issues that have also strained the alliance between these two partners.

TABLE 2. Number Of Constituencies Won by the Hindu Right in Assembly Elections in Maharashtra

Year	BJP	Shiv Sena	Constituencies
1999	56	68	288
1990	42	52	288
1985	16	0	287
1980	14	0	287
1978	0	0	287
1972	0	0	270
1967	0	0	269

Source: ‘Internationalising South Asian Scholarly Data: An ARC Project’, Monash Asia Institute, [<http://www.monash.edu.au/mai/southasianet>]. The data is from the Electoral Commission of India.

***Hindutva*: Contesting The Moral High Ground**

2002 has been a violent year that has seen the re-emergence of *Hindutva* as a major factor in Indian politics even though the regional focus of the

⁶ See for example, ‘Keep Off Temples, Sena Warns LeT’, *The Tribune*, (30 Nov. 2002), relating to the Shiv Sena unit in Punjab; and ‘Shiv Sainiks set NCP Vehicle Ablaze in Delhi’, *The Tribune* (25 Nov. 2002).

⁷ Sikata Banerjee, ‘Political Secularisation and the Future Of Secular Democracy in India: The Case Of Maharashtra’, in *Asian Survey* (Vol.38, no.10), Oct. 1998.

Hindutva campaigns has shifted from Ayodhya to Gujarat.⁸ It is widely assumed that the BJP and the Shiv Sena share common ground on the Hindutva issue. For example, one commentator has recently noted that India is moving down the path of ‘the growing power of irrationalism’ and that the country was governed by the RSS, ‘an obscurantist organisation that has never been elected to anything.... Sixteen out of 30 Indian cabinet members belong to the RSS, including the Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.... There are, in addition, three ministers of the Shiv Sena, a rougher sort of outfit than the RSS’.⁹ Statements of this kind miss the point: instead of a cohesive alliance based on ethnic-religious policy, the BJP and the Shiv Sena have a marriage of convenience driven by only practical and tactical considerations.

The Shiv Sena’s objective has been simple—to mount an ideological campaign to outshine its partner and rival in its anti-Muslim, anti-Pakistan and pro-Hindu campaigns using over-blown rhetoric:

The Muslims in India are behaving as if they are Pakistani citizens. It is as if there are two countries within this one. Hindus, open your eyes and see what is going on! Your funeral pyres are burning.¹⁰

Bal Thackeray, widely described as the ‘Supremo’ of the Shiv Sena, goes by the nickname *Hindu Hriday Samrat* or ‘Emperor of the Hindu Heart’. Ironically, the Shiv Sena has been able to contest the BJP’s leadership of Hindutva despite it having played a marginal role in the physical destruction of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya.

To make its point, the Shiv Sena has selected high-profile public events and used its daily newspaper, *Saamna*, to encourage its Hindu readers to act.¹¹ Some examples of these follow. In January 1999, the Shiv Sena

⁸ Numerous observers have commented on the collapse of the Ayodhya campaign which ten years ago threatened to crush Indian democracy into a war of ethnic retribution. See for example, Sakina Yusuf Khan, ‘Ayodhya Cell Now Defunct, Babri Masjid Case Crawls at a Snail’s Pace’, *Sunday, The Times of India* (1 Dec. 2002), p. 5. Moreover, the Supreme Court of India in November 2002 ordered Deputy Prime Minister A.K. Advani to stand trial (together with Murlī Manohar Joshi and Ms Uma Bharati) in the Babri Masjid case to go before a special court in Rae Bareilly. ‘Ayodhya Trial in Rae Bareilly’, *The Tribune* (30 Nov. 2002). Mayawati, the chief minister of UP and the leader of the dalit party Bahujana Samaj, has continued to insist on the trial proceeding as a way of putting pressure on the BJP.

⁹ David Gardner, ‘Fear and Loathing in India’, *The Spectator*, internet edition (19 May 2001), accessed Dec. 2001.

¹⁰ ‘Editorial’, *Saamna* (11 Jan. 1993) quoted in Praveen Swami and Anupama Katakam, ‘Ayodhya: A Hysterical Campaign’, in *Frontline*, internet edition (18-31 Aug. 2001), accessed Dec. 2001.

¹¹ For example during the Hindu-Muslim riots in the wake of the destruction of the Babri Masjid, *Saamna* deliberately exaggerated the number of Muslim attacks on Hindu temples in Mumbai as part of its communal campaign. *Ibid.*

tried to prevent the Pakistan cricket team from playing in India by digging up cricket pitches and attacking the offices of the Cricket Board of Control in Mumbai.¹² Then, in July 2001, they opposed General Musharraf's visit to Delhi. After Musharraf left Delhi they performed *puja* at the sites he visited in order to purify them.¹³ In Jaipur, the Shiv Sena managed to get the support of fifty trade organisations to close down business in protest against Musharraf's visit.¹⁴ In Mumbai, the Shiv Sena has deliberately exaggerated the threat of Muslim terrorism and insisted that local terrorist-criminal elements are part of a global Pakistani-sponsored terrorism to forcibly claim Kashmir. At the national level, they have attacked the Vajpayee government for not doing enough to respond to this terrorism, including the attacks on the Indian parliament in December 2001.¹⁵ As one commentator has noted, the Shiv Sena has been careful to avoid acknowledging that the victims of violence in Kashmir have been mainly Muslims.¹⁶

Throughout western and northern India the Shiv Sena has counterbalanced its anti-Muslim sloganeering with campaigns to prevent Hindu shopkeepers from using wrapping paper decorated with the images of Hindu gods and goddesses.¹⁷ They have declared this commercialisation of religion to be disrespectful. The Shiv Sena campaigns have also included general opposition to foreign cultures, languages and religions. Demonstrations and attacks have been organised against McDonald's restaurants in Delhi and Mumbai.¹⁸

In January 2001 the Shiv Sena ran a campaign in Ahmedabad compelling shopkeepers on C G Road to put up signs in Gujarati and Hindi as well as English.¹⁹ And attacks on convent-run kindergartens and schools such as the Sacred Heart in Worli, Mumbai, have been suspected as the work of the Shiv Sena.²⁰ Partly in response to these challenges, the BJP has also become increasingly virulent in its own expressions of communalism. In particular it has encouraged the BJP youth movement (Bharatiya Janata

¹² 'Indian Hindu Group Backs Down in Anti Pakistan Cricket Row', *CNN.com* (21 Jan. 1999).

¹³ 'Shiv Sena Activists "Purify" Rajghat with "Ganga Jal"', *IndiaExpress.com* (16 July 2001), accessed Dec. 2001.

¹⁴ 'Shiv Sena Burns Musharraf's Effigy in Rajasthan', *Hindustantimes.com* (16 July 2001), accessed Dec. 2001.

¹⁵ 'Why the Backpeddling', *Saamna* (3 July 2002).

¹⁶ Praveen Swami, 'Tentacles Of Terror', in *Frontline*, internet edition (1-14 Sept. 2001), accessed Dec. 2001.

¹⁷ 'Shiv Sainiks up in Arms', *New Briefs* [www.resurgenceonline.com/cissues/news_briefs.htm], accessed Dec. 2001.

¹⁸ 'Quit India, Shiv Sena Tells McDonalds', *ExpressIndia.com* (5 May 2001), accessed Dec. 2001.

¹⁹ 'Go Gujarati or Have Your Shops Painted Black', *Ambedabad.com* (Jan. 2001), accessed Dec. 2001.

²⁰ 'India', *Human Rights Watch World Report 2000* [http://www.hrw.org/wr2k/Asia-04.htm], accessed Dec. 2001.

Morcha) in acts such as the defilement of the Taj Mahal in October 2001.²¹ The Shiv Sena continues to goad the BJP into adopting more aggressive postures on issues such as the reconstruction of the temple at Ayodhya by accusing the BJP-led Central government of ‘failing in its duty to fulfil the aspirations of Hindus’ after a long wait of nine years.²²

What does all this rhetoric mean? The Shiv Sena’s Hindutva campaigns need to be placed in the context of the fortunes of the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra. Playing the role of the BJP’s major alliance partner is an important way of retaining the Shiv Sena’s public image and prestige. Amongst other things, involvement in national politics gives the party legitimacy and protects its election symbol—the Tiger—from being taken over by other contenders. Such national posturing is especially important when the Shiv Sena is out of power in Maharashtra—which is the case at the present time. The lack of state power encourages the Shiv Sena to increase the rhetorical volume and adopt simplistic solutions to national issues such as the presence of thousands of Bangladeshis in India, terrorism in Kashmir and communal conflict. To all of these, the Shiv Sena’s standard response is: ‘truck them’ out of India. On its home territory, however, the Shiv Sena is much more careful and considered in its approach. For example, there is a long-standing tradition in Mumbai of protecting the important Muslim Bohra business community in exchange for generous donations to party funds.

Economic Reform And The Poor

Economic reform is another area in which there has been a continuous conflict of interest between the BJP and the Shiv Sena. However this has nothing to do with the virtues of economic reform but rather reflects the fundamental electoral needs of the two parties: the BJP, as leader of the national government, needs to address matters of national interest; whilst the Shiv Sena must continue to look after its base in Mumbai and Maharashtra. In public, both parties insist on their commitment to economic liberalisation, globalisation and disinvestment but because of the immediate needs of their constituencies, these ‘commitments’ work out very differently on the ground.

The Shiv Sena’s long history of electoral success within the city of Mumbai has been based on its ability to attract the support of the poor migrants from rural Maharashtra by providing essential services which the state, NGOs and other parties have failed to develop. To this extent, the power of the Shiv Sena is a terrible indictment of the failure of civil

²¹ V. Venkatesan, ‘Ayodhya: Hindutva Aggression’, in *Frontline* (27 Oct.-9 Nov. 2001).

²² *ExpressIndia.com* (6 Dec. 2001).

society to deliver meaningful opportunities to the urban poor in Mumbai. Organised around the party's branch offices (or *shakhas*) these essential services include free public entertainment, the provision of venues for social activities, financial loans and training programmes for young people, and religious parades and celebrations that, according to observers like Sikata Banerjee, are specially timed to clash with Muslim prayers on Islamic holy days. In particular, the Shiv Sena has attracted a disproportionate following amongst the Konkan migrants into Mumbai from very poor coastal districts such as Ratnagiri where population pressure within an insecure agrarian environment has ensured a steady flow of labour to Mumbai since the early nineteenth century. According to one survey, some 90 percent of Konkan migrants in Mumbai support the Shiv Sena compared to only 50 percent of Marathas.²³ Retaining this support base, and the support of upwardly-mobile elements that have entered into the lower-middle classes of Mumbai society, is a priority for the Shiv Sena.

This position has increasingly brought the party into conflict with the BJP, which is more determined to proceed with economic reform regardless of the short-term unemployment this will create. As leader of the NDA, the BJP is driven by an overriding compulsion for political survival that increasingly turns on economic survival. The main game in Delhi today is the rising fiscal deficit generated by ongoing government subsidies, the burden of running public sector units, and the difficulty of broadening the tax base. In this scenario, the disinvestment policy is a partial quick fix, driven by the need to do everything possible to stem the financial 'bleeding' that has caused the fiscal deficit to blow out to alarming proportions. As a result, the human insecurity that will be generated by the unemployment caused by disinvestment is a much lesser concern for the BJP than for the Shiv Sena.

To protect its populist base, the Shiv Sena has found itself supporting even the ultra-Left. On 25 April 2001, for example, the Shiv Sena provided strong backing to a Left-wing workers' strike in Mumbai. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) was jubilant and reported that backing from the Sena would ensure that the strike was a 'total success'. The strike was another protest against economic reform, in particular the privatisation of government corporations and new labour laws that allowed managers to sack workers without referring the matter to government.²⁴

²³ Sikata Banerjee, *Warriors in Politics: Hindu Nationalism, Violence and the Shiv Sena in India* (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 2000), p.64.

²⁴ Deepal Jayasekera, 'Indian "Left" Forms an Unholy Alliance with Fascistic Shiv Sena', *World Socialist Web Site* (11 May 2001), accessed Dec. 2001.

Criticisms raised against the privatisation of the Centaur Hotels in Mumbai have also been motivated by concerns about the electoral base of the Shiv Sena. The Centaur Hotel group constituted a public sector unit that managed four hotels, one of which was ultimately sold to a private company called Batra Hospitality for Rs83 crore. Within four months of this acquisition, Batra resold the hotel to Sahara Airlines for Rs122 crore. Sahara plans to convert the premises into its IT headquarters for airline bookings, database storage and general administration. Ordinarily, once a public sector asset has been sold, the government's interest in it ceases; this has not, however, been the case with the Centaur. The Shiv Sena has raised serious objections within the Indian parliament about the manner in which this Centaur Hotel was privatised.²⁵ The Minister for Disinvestment, Arun Shourie, was charged by the Shiv Sena with corruption and running a scam for an old school friend. The virulence of the attack astonished Delhi, given that the Shiv Sena is a key factor keeping the BJP in government. The matter has now been referred to the Law Ministry but not before questions were raised about the financial benefits which the Shiv Sena expected to extract as a result of challenging the original sale.²⁶

One component of the Shiv Sena's challenge to the resale of the Centaur Hotel is the fact that the 700 hotel employees who are about to become retrenched all belong to the Shiv Sena trade union. Retrenchment is inevitable, given the lack of any compatibility between the kind of human resources needed by the hotel business and the needs of the new Sahara IT centre. Indeed, one reason that the Centaur Hotel was re-sold so quickly was the inability of the first buyer to convert the Centaur into a profitable hotel business. Batra management also wanted to retrench workers, but given the obligations to do so in accordance with the Voluntary Retirement Scheme, the Batra group found that it lacked the liquidity to pay for the necessary retrenchments.

The controversy over the disinvestment of the Centaur Hotel demonstrates the extent to which the Shiv Sena is prepared to go to protect its loyal supporters, in this case the 700 hotel workers belonging to the Shiv Sena union. Another dramatic example of this kind can be found in the scandal surrounding the United Trust of India (hereafter UTI). Here the Shiv Sena's intervention was more broadly aimed at maintaining the loyalty of its lower-middle-class voters. It was prepared

²⁵ The criticisms were raised by Sanjay Nirupam, a Shiv Sena member of the Rajya Sabha. 'Shiv Sena MP Accuses Shourie Of Corruption', *The Hindustan Times* (5 Dec. 2002); Hemendra Singh Bartwal, 'Sena Charge Stunned Shourie', *The Hindustan Times* (9 Dec. 2002).

²⁶ 'Thackeray: I'm Not Involved in Centaur Selloff', *The Times of India* (9 Dec. 2002).

to do so by tainting the Prime Minister; in the Centaur case it had only targeted the Minister for Disinvestment.

On 30 July 2001 Sanjay Nirupam, the Shiv Sena representative in the Rajya Sabha, raised serious questions about the links between the collapse of UTI and the prime minister's office. UTI was India's largest mutual fund holding the savings of thousands of small investors. Like all mutual funds, UTI was in the business of giving loans to a range of companies as a way of growing the savings with which it was entrusted by its members. The lending policy and programmes of UTI are typically decided by a special UTI committee and in normal circumstances the chairman of UTI would accept the committee's recommendations. In the matter of Cyberspace, a small IT company from Lucknow, the chairman P.S. Subramanyam, went against the advice from this committee when he personally decided to give Cyberspace a loan. In defending his decision, the chairman of UTI said that he had acted in response to a request from a 'powerful person' in Delhi. Investigations by Nirupam revealed that at the time of the chairman making his decision, he had indeed received three phone calls from someone working within the prime minister's office. Nirupam released these three phone numbers in the Rajya Sabha, thereby creating a public storm and deeply destabilising the partnership between the Shiv Sena and the BJP.²⁷ Further investigations revealed that UTI's investment in Cyberspace was not an aberration. In 1999-2000 UTI had invested in some 1,300 companies of which half were loss-making companies and a quarter not legally constituted.²⁸ The chairman of UTI had clearly become a force in his own right, making decisions over the head of his advisory committee. Yet until the Cyberspace scandal, this had not drawn any adverse comments.

Atul Vajpayee felt personally insulted by the innuendo surrounding Nirupam's statements in the Rajya Sabha and threatened to resign. Bal Thackeray ordered Nirupam to apologise to Vajpayee in order to avert such a crisis; whereupon Nirupam wrote a personal letter to the Prime Minister saying that he had not intended any slight or criticisms against him personally. Congress Party members noted, however, that the apology was muted. Sanjay Nirupam had not withdrawn his allegations—only said he was sorry for hurting the Prime Minister's 'sentiments'.²⁹

²⁷ Purnima S Tripathi, 'A Role Reversal', in *Frontline*, internet edition (1-14 Sept. 2001), accessed Dec. 2001.

²⁸ 'PM's Resignation Possibly Linked to Shiv Sena Charges', *People's Daily Online* (31 July 2001), accessed Dec. 2001.

²⁹ 'BJP-Shiv Sena Rift Widens', *Deccan Herald*, internet edition (8 Aug. 2001), accessed Dec. 2001.

In parliament Nirupam's revelations received the backing of all the government's opponents. The Shiv Sena's impertinent conduct was far removed from what might be expected of an alliance partner. Moreover, Bal Thackeray himself insisted on his right to determine how and when the Shiv Sena should act in the 'national interest': 'Where did Nirupam go wrong? He has spoken the truth. Twenty million people have invested their small savings in UTI'.³⁰

Cyberspace played only a very minor role in the collapse of UTI which was brought to its knees owing to a combination of managerial malpractice and the volatility of the Mumbai share market. But the collapse of UTI provided the Shiv Sena with a wonderful opportunity to champion the rights of the lower-middle classes and demonstrate how its defence of the public interest was more passionate and more effective than that of the BJP. It was an opening that the party found irresistible. A different interpretation is that the Shiv Sena was using these revelations to bargain for an increase in numbers in the Indian cabinet.³¹ Yet another is that the Shiv Sena was angling for some kind of lucrative financial payoff to keep quiet about what it knew about how and why UTI had collapsed. Given the speed with which the issue then disappeared from public view until the question of restructured UTI's disinvestment was raised in November 2002,³² the latter hypothesis is quite plausible. Such payoffs are also eminently compatible with the objective of protecting the Shiv Sena's lower-middle-class vote-banks in western India.

Wooing The Dalits

Both the BJP and the Shiv Sena have developed special relationships with the emerging dalit leadership of India. What significance can we assign to this? What relationship is there between the dalit-oriented policies of the two parties?

The Shiv Sena's willingness to promote the rise of new dalit political parties is another example of an ultra-Left alignment motivated by the need to protect its electoral appeal. The Shiv Sena fears the possibility of an emerging challenge by the dalitist Bahujana Samaj Party (hereafter BSP) in western India. It sees the success of the BSP in Uttar Pradesh as the face of the future in Maharashtra, unless a wedge is driven now between the competing untouchable castes that constitute the dalit electorates. And the Shiv Sena's fears are not unfounded, given Kanshi Ram's long association with Left-wing political activism in Mumbai and

³⁰ Quoted in *ExpressIndia.com* (14 Aug. 2001), accessed Dec. 2001.

³¹ T. Ramachandra, 'Vajpayee Opens His Heart', *The Tribune online* (2 Aug. 2001), accessed Dec. 2001.

³² 'Govt to Divest from UTI-II after 3-5 Yrs', *The Times of India* (29 Nov. 2002).

Maharashtra. Kanshi Ram's political awareness evolved in Pune where, with D.K. Khaparde, he formed BAMCEF³³ in 1973.³⁴ Despite this, the party's epicentre has remained Uttar Pradesh, where it has picked up many Chamar votes which formerly went to the Congress Party.³⁵ In this the BSP has been greatly helped by the fact that both Mayawati and Kanshi Ram are themselves Chamars.³⁶

The Shiv Sena's strategic response to the BSP threat has been to foster the establishment of the Maharashtra Charmarkar Sangh, a Chamar party supposedly grateful to the Shiv Sena for its patronage. This new party represents a blatant attempt to wean Chamar votes to the Shiv Sena. The strategy relies heavily on the long history of divisions between the dalits of western India, in particular the feeling amongst the much poorer Chamar and Mang untouchable castes that the Ambedkarite parties are run by, and for, the numerically dominant Mahars. By harnessing this traditional animosity amongst the Chamars, the Shiv Sena hopes to cut short any ambitions of the BSP in Maharashtra³⁷ and prevent Mayawati and Kanshi Ram from using their caste identities as a possible source of appeal in western India.

The Shiv Sena strategy of wooing the Chamars to its side is based on the failure of the Republican Party of India (hereafter RPI) to establish any legitimacy as the representative of the dalits in western India. The party's electoral strategy has been so weak that it has been accused of preferring to waste time throwing stones at the BJP office in Mumbai rather than trying to win elections. The greatest problem for the RPI is the factional divisions within it, many of which continue to revolve around the contested leadership between the grandson of Ambedkar, Ramdas Athavale, and R.S. Gavai.³⁸ From its beginnings the RPI, and the Ambedkarite majority within it, has been primarily representative of the better-off urban Mahars. Whilst the urban leadership of the Mahars has articulated a strategy of forging a wider dalit alliance across caste boundaries, their arguments have never been persuasive, partly because of the considerable gulf which divides the rural Mahars, Mangs, Chamars and other dalit castes from the much more prosperous urban Mahars.

³³ BAMCEF or the All India Backward and Minority Employees Federation was the first national association of untouchable government servants.

³⁴ Oliver Mendelsohn and Marika Vicziany, *The Untouchables: Poverty, Subordination and the State in Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.221.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.225.

³⁶ Kanshi Ram is a Raedasi Sikh (a community of Punjabi chamars who converted to Sikhism) and Mayawati is a Jatav (Chamar). *Ibid.*, pp. 219, 224.

³⁷ Raghuthaman Opeh, 'Elephantine Headache for Shiv Sena: Doing a UP in Maharashtra', *The Human Concerns* [www.geocities.com/Athens/Forum/2088/d_mahars.html], accessed Dec. 2001.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

These divisions have been so deep that during the 1960s, the RPI paradoxically found it easier to build a temporary support base in Uttar Pradesh, than one in its home state of Maharashtra.³⁹ In response to its failure to develop a dalit constituency, the RPI has instead a long history of forging electoral alliances with other parties, even the Shiv Sena: for example in 1973 the RPI and the Shiv Sena joined hands to counter the emergence of the radical Dalit Panthers.⁴⁰

The BJP has also been compelled to develop a relationship with the emerging dalit politicians, but unlike the Shiv Sena it finds itself confronted by a formidable dalit force in the Hindi heartland. In the Uttar Pradesh state elections of 2002, the BSP emerged as the second largest political party in the state assembly: it won 98 seats relative to the BJP's 88 and the Samajwadi Party's 146.⁴¹ In the coalition government that emerged on 3 May 2002, the BSP drove a hard bargain with its coalition partner the BJP. Mayawati, having learnt from the experience of two previous coalitions with the BJP, insisted on the BSP holding the majority of ministerial seats in the new cabinet: 11 out of 24, with only 7 ministerial positions being allocated to the BJP.⁴² The BJP agreed to this with little hesitation. Why? Tripathi quotes the following explanation provided by senior BJP leaders:

We realise that we may not reap any long-term political advantage from this alliance. But the aim was not long term but a very short-term one: to save the Vajpayee government in Delhi on the eve of the vote in the Lok Sabha on Gujarat.⁴³

In other words, the BJP's political weakness at the level of state politics within Uttar Pradesh was regarded as an acceptable price to ensure the backing of the BSP to the BJP coalition government in New Delhi.

In summary, both the BJP and the Shiv Sena have sought to woo the dalits to their side, but this carries no meaning beyond the purely tactical. There is no evidence that the BJP and the Shiv Sena have reached some kind of agreed policy response to the emerging dalit intelligentsia. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. There is no common ideological or pragmatic strategy. The BJP and the Shiv Sena are

³⁹ Mendelsohn and Vicziany, *The Untouchables*, p.213.

⁴⁰ Jayant Lele in Sujata Patel and Alice Thorner (eds), *Bombay: Metaphor for Modern India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.198.

⁴¹ Purnima S. Tripathi, 'Once More, with Hope', in *Frontline*, internet edition (27 April-10 May 2002), accessed Nov. 2002.

⁴² Purnima S. Tripathi, 'The Great Game' in *Frontline*, internet edition (May 2002), accessed Nov. 2002.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

independent actors merely responding to the political necessities underpinning their power aspirations. In the case of the Shiv Sena, dalit politics in western India remains weak and divided. The Shiv Sena's intervention has helped to ensure that it remains so. The BJP, by contrast, needs to address an entirely different scenario in which the BSP in northern India has significant clout both in the politics of Uttar Pradesh and, as a result of political bargaining, within the parliament of India. These pragmatic differences also mean that we need not fear that the dalits of India have been hijacked by the politics of Hindutva. Their alignment with the BJP and the Shiv Sena comes by entirely different routes, although with the common motivation of tasting the power of government.

Respectability Versus Criminality

In Mumbai the rivalry between the BJP and the Shiv Sena has also taken on criminal dimensions, with both parties being implicated in various murders for a variety of reasons that reflect the eagerness of each to develop a wider electoral base in western India. In September 1996 Amar Naik was gunned down by police in a stolen car chase. According to one report, Naik was a 'powerful mafia boss in Bombay...wanted in connection with 28 crimes'.⁴⁴ *Saamna* openly acknowledged that Naik belonged to the Hindu underworld but went even further, suggesting that the police should allow Hindu gangs to take over Mumbai's criminal world because the Muslim gangs had too much power and the majority of the residents were Hindu.⁴⁵

The BJP was blamed for Naik's death. It has been suggested that because the BJP is seeking respectability, it increasingly regards the Shiv Sena's involvement with Mumbai's criminal gangs with abhorrence.⁴⁶ According to the Committee for the Protection of Democratic Rights, the Shiv Sena branches have become collection centres for extortion.⁴⁷ Routine criminality, not merely incidental murders, threatens the BJP's electoral ambitions. At the time of Naik's murder, the deputy chief minister of Maharashtra was Gopinath Munde, a member of the BJP. The inference is that Munde was instrumental in removing Naik. Munde has also been implicated in the murder of Ramesh Kini, a 45-year-old Sainik. The concern of the BJP is that the growing criminalisation of life in Mumbai is having a negative impact on its image both in Maharashtra

⁴⁴ Ajay Singh and Arjuna Ranawana, 'The Emperor's Troubles: The Shiv Sena Boss is Down, But Not Out', *Asiaweek.com* (13 Sept. 1996), accessed Jan. 2002.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Jeremy Seabrook, 'Very Political Crimes in Bombay', in *Le Monde diplomatique* (June 1998) [<http://mondediplo.com/1998/06/10india2>], accessed Dec. 2001. Seabrook cites other examples showing the links between organised crime, politics and the Mumbai police.

and nationally. With the expanding pool of criminal activity now also involving rural Maharashtra, the BJP has reason to be worried. In November 2002, for example, Satyavijay Bhise from the National Congress Party (hereafter NCP) that currently rules Maharashtra in coalition with the Congress Party of Sonia Gandhi, was allegedly murdered by Shiv Sena activists in the Konkan. This murder, seemingly activated by party competition over village *panchayat* elections, has compelled Sharad Pawar, NCP president, to say: 'The days of ideological political battles are over and the politics of murder has begun'.⁴⁸

The Kini case provides an interesting example of criminal activity that has ironically increased the contradictions within the power bases of the Shiv Sena. Given the economic pressures of living in Mumbai's de-industrialised hothouse, it is increasingly difficult to simultaneously satisfy the Hindu poor and the Hindu rich. Kini, a low-ranking member of the Shiv Sena, lived in a Mumbai apartment block. In typical Mumbai style, the landlord was keen to evict all tenants so that the site could be redeveloped. The landlord was a friend of the Thackeray family, well-known for their ability to persuade tenants to vacate. On this particular housing estate all the tenants except Kini had already agreed to leave; he refused and was later murdered. Kini's widow accused Raj Thackeray, the nephew of Bal Thackeray, of murder. Thackeray's son Jaidev was also implicated. Suspicion about the Kini case increased when, in the midst of the murder inquiry, a new State Attorney was appointed by the Maharashtrian government. Kini's wife at once asked for the murder case to be referred to a federal tribunal, fearing that a proper hearing in Mumbai was unlikely.

How the Kini case came to light is also an important indicator of the internal problems of the Shiv Sena and how competition for influence within the party has produced a large number of internal fights and defections. Chhagan Bhujbal, the then leader of the Opposition, brought up the Kini affair in the Maharashtrian parliament. Bhujbal was a former member of the Shiv Sena who had defected to Congress. Bhujbal declared: 'There are hundreds of cases against the Thackeray family that have been hushed up'.⁴⁹ These developments suggest that during the last few years, criticism about the Shiv Sena has increasingly come into the open. According to another Mumbai journalist, the Mumbai police have begun questioning members of Bal Thackeray's family—previously an unthinkable occurrence. Many more revelations about the inside workings of the Shiv Sena are coming from politicians who have defected

⁴⁸ Quaid Jajmi and Dnyanesh Jathar, 'Murder Politics: Is Sena Losing Sway over Konkan?', in *The Week* (8 Dec. 2002), p.44.

⁴⁹ Singh and Ranawana, 'The Emperor's Troubles'.

from the Shiv Sena and formed their own parties. For example in 1998, one heir-apparent to Bal Thackeray stormed out and established his own Akhil Bharatiya Sena.⁵⁰ Indeed Bal Thackeray's own family, motivated by personal ambition and faction fights, has added to the rising dissent. Thackeray's daughters-in-law have been involved in public fights over control of Mumbai's cable industry,⁵¹ and his nephew has been alienated by Bal Thackeray's grooming of his son Udhav as the succession leader of the Sena.⁵² Thackeray's own younger brother joined the flood of criticism that emerged in response to the Kini affair.⁵³ All this discord and competition has thrown up inside information about the functioning of the Shiv Sena—much of it very embarrassing to the BJP partnership.

The Kini affair was not, however, the only instance of Shiv Sena duplicity towards its working- and lower-middle-class supporters. In late 2001 compelling evidence emerged that another slum rehabilitation programme had failed. Under the Shivshahi Purnasvasan Prakalp (hereafter SPP) programme jointly sponsored by the BJP and the Shiv Sena, hundreds of slum dwellers had their homes demolished as they waited for 200,000 new apartments to be built by the end of 1999. Investigations by the Tinaikar Committee showed that only a small percentage of the apartments had been finished and that the vast bulk of them would not be built. A lot of money had changed hands, old slums had been demolished to make way for commercial buildings and the SPP had failed to control the unscrupulous interests behind the scheme.⁵⁴ Critics like Kalpana Sharma have suggested that the scheme was doomed once the Mumbai land market collapsed, threatening the high profits that developers had anticipated from the construction of new housing.⁵⁵ But this really misses the point, which is that the Shiv Sena lacks a socio-economic policy that goes beyond its own immediate political and financial interests.

Open criticism, internal divisions and criminal investigations raise serious questions about the political future of the Shiv Sena once Bal Thackeray dies. The Sena has created a legitimate role for *dadagiri* (goon power)

⁵⁰ Seabrook, 'Very Political Crimes in Bombay'.

⁵¹ Rashme Sehgal, 'India's Cable Competition Gets Violent', in *Multichannel News*, Vol.21, no.2 (3 July 2000) p. 19.

⁵² Shiv Kumar, 'Nephew Raj has "Lost his Balance": Bal Thackeray', *Indo-Asian News Service* (22 Jan. 2002).

⁵³ Maseeh Rahman, 'A Hindu Hero Feels the Heat', in *Time* (24 Feb. 1997).

⁵⁴ Praveen Swami, 'Pie in the Sky', in *Frontline*, internet edition (29 Sept.-12 Oct. 2001), accessed Dec. 2001.

⁵⁵ The Dharavi slum in Mumbai was the focus of much of this 'paper' activity. See Kalpana Sharma, *Rediscovering Dharavi* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2000), pp.xxiii, 177-86. Every household in the Dharavi slum which agreed to be temporarily moved in order for high-rise apartments to be built was 'promised a 225 sq. ft area free in these high-rises with a built-in toilet', p.178.

within its own organisation and activities. In the words of Gerard Heuze, 'the Shiv Sena is a place where the bad can become good'.⁵⁶ In other words, harnessing violence to the social activities and objectives of the Shiv Sena is 'good'. However, as the Kini case shows, given the economic tensions that define the fundamental character of modern Mumbai, it is increasingly difficult for the Shiv Sena to hold all the different socio-economic elements together under the single definition of 'the good'. What is good for the Shiv Sena's landlord supporters is not good for the Kinis of Mumbai. This tension will grow as a result of India's increasing involvement in the global economy and the inevitable unemployment this will bring. Even in the medium term, it is doubtful if the Shiv Sena can continue to bind these forces together, despite its use of violence as a handy tool of social cohesion.

Conclusion

What kind of alliance exists between the BJP and the Shiv Sena? When I asked various Shiv Sena politicians this question in December 2002, I was surprised by their reluctance to answer. Instead of a confident, assertive or aggressive response, I found the politicians very reluctant to discuss anything that required them to comment on the nature of their alliance with the BJP. One politician replied: 'You are the expert.... You can see for yourself what is happening...you tell me what you see. Whatever you tell me is more than I know myself'. I have tried in this paper to explore the 'touchy' territory the Shiv Sena politicians I met in December 2002 refused to tread. The conclusion to emerge from this analysis is that the BJP and the Shiv Sena have an alliance of extreme convenience, unfettered by any loyalty or significant common ground on any political, social or economic question. If and when a convergence of policy interests appears to exist, it is a temporary coincidence driven by the electoral and financial interests that are uppermost for each party. Hence, to revert to the question posed in the title of this paper, the BJP and the Shiv Sena do not have so much a rocky marriage of convenience—they have no marriage at all, only the mirage of an alliance.

It is very easy to become disillusioned and cynical about modern Indian politics. The political architecture of India appears to consist of a loose affiliation of political and economic interests who engage in parliamentary debate mainly in order to divide the spoils of office. Cynicism about Indian politics, however, needs to be tempered by two further considerations: first, at least the spoils of office are being distributed more evenly and more widely than ever before in India's

⁵⁶ Gerard Heuze in Patel and Thorner (eds), *Bombay: Metaphor for Modern India*, p.226.

political history; and second, given the extensive nature of the party political fights, a common Right-wing front on Hindutva is unachievable. Political competition, the complex nature of the Indian electorate, the enormous size of the Muslim minority (about 12 percent of India's population of 1.3 billion), and bureaucratic and police incompetence together provide an upper ceiling on the extent of violence that can be directed against minorities under the banner of Hindutva.

At the same time, it is appropriate to end this paper by noting how the Hindutva programmes of the BJP and the Shiv Sena have permanently corroded the quality of civic life in India. Daily life in Mumbai, for instance, has been transformed forever. The riots of 1992/93 appear to have legitimated violence, with the result that bomb scares and actual bomb incidents are no longer a rarity. The community distribution of Mumbai's population has also shifted, with Hindus showing a marked preference for living with Hindus and Muslims with Muslims. Some commentators talk of the ghettoisation of Mumbai. Nor is Mumbai alone in manifesting raised communal consciousness. The Gujarati election campaign revealed a number of deeply disturbing trends including the emergence of a new militant Hindu consciousness amongst tribal groups, the unwillingness of the Congress Party to campaign against the communal policies of the BJP-Shiv Sena, and the willingness of dalit leaders like Mayawati to support the BJP during the Gujarat elections despite the virulent communalism of Chief Minister Modi. These fundamental shifts in attitude mean that whoever wins the Gujarat election will be unable to reverse the communal divisions and hatreds. If the BJP wins, the Gujarat election will provide a licence for communal violence throughout northern India. Stirring up communalism will be seen as an effective tool for winning power. If the BJP loses, the Congress Party and its allies will have to deal with ongoing communal ferment stirred up by an angry BJP; and it will have to do this in a manner that reflects its own compromised position on the question of Hindutva. Throughout northern India, communal and religious divisions will continue to grow, though it is unlikely that the level of ethnic cleansing witnessed in places like Bosnia will occur, for all the reasons already noted.