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SHIV SENA WOMEN *Violence and Communalism in a Bombay Slum* Atreyee Sen

This fascinating book, based on Atreyee Sen's immersion in the low-income, working-class slums of Bombay, tells the story of the women and children of the Shiv Sena, the radical Hindu nationalist party of Western India. The women's front of the Sena, known as the 'Mahila Aghadi', has been instrumental in creating and sustaining communal violence, and the infamous Hindu-Muslim riots in Bombay (1992-93) brought them into the limelight.

Sen charts the Aghadi's transformation from a submissive support group within a manifestly male movement into a militant and partially autonomous women's task force. She also reveals how poor women and children use violence and 'gang-ism' to develop a unique social identity in the volatile social environment of the slums and how the Aghadi's popularity was pegged to an unofficial and brutal law-enforcing system which offers speedy retributive justice to women who were victimised by male slum-dwellers. Sen also develops an understanding of the Aghadi's own rationale for creating what they perceived to be a militaristic society, and of why these women organize themselves along paramilitary lines. In participating in an essentially masculine performative arena such as

communal rioting and attendant 'nationalistic' activities, these working-class 'warrior' women remain loyal to a fundamentalist cause even as they covertly wrest social spaces and economic leverage for themselves.

Atreyee Sen's book turns feminist scholarship on its head by documenting a situation where women have become the primary retainers and perpetrators of a violent nationalistic discourse, acquiring social and economic status either by default or as reward. It will be of interest to anthropologists, sociologists, political historians, religious, cultural and metropolitan studies, and South Asianists, apart from the general reader.

Atreyee Sen is a Research Council United Kingdom (RCUK) Fellow on Conflict, Cohesion and Change at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research in the Arts (CIDRA), University of Manchester. She has held lectureships in Social Anthropology at the University of Sussex and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. Her areas of interest are gender, nationalism and urban violence.

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Advance Praise

'*Shiv Sena Women* is a riveting account of the Shiv Sena's 'Mahila Aghadi' or women's front and their children in Bombay. Sen addresses urgent contemporary issues that are relevant not only to India, but to all those interested in the growing social support for fundamentalist movements.'
 —**Professor Kumkum Sangari, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee**

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