VILLAINS, VICTIMS, AND HEROINES:

CONSTRUCTING FEMALE SECURITY IN THE CASE OF THE SHIV SENA MAHILA AGHADI IN MUMBAI, INDIA

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*This article examines the question of how outside actors understand and interpret vigilantism. Restricting its focus to female vigilantes in Mumbai, India, the article underscores the role of female collectivization as a response to gendered security threats –– often neglected in traditional analyses of vigilantism. I maintain that understanding observers’ constructions of female identity and security can help explain societal reactions to women filling traditionally male dominated spaces. By looking at these women through the prism of outside observers, I hope to shed light on female participation in violence, especially in the context of rising right-wing nationalist groups whose goals appear to oppose women’s interests. A postmodernist analysis of the discourses surrounding the women of the Mahila Aghadi Shiv Sena political party highlights the competing identities projected onto slum women in Hindutva culture in Mumbai, India. The study exposes how three conflicting discourses coexist, portraying women as victims of male violence, villainous criminals, and empowered heroines, concurrently. This analysis reveals how actors construct these identities based off their own interests and the context of their surroundings, creating opposing single-faceted images of complex women. These competing discourses offer perspectives into how concepts of identity and gendered security are constructed, and violence is legitimized or condemned, in the realm of vigilantism.*

Key words: vigilantism, Shiv Sena, narrative, slum, security, violence, women, India

**Introduction**

In India, vigilante activity has increased over recent decades as a response to violence, unresponsive police forces, and corruption.[[1]](#footnote-1) Today, vigilante groups have established themselves across India, from the Gulabi Gang in the northern Uttar Pradesh state to young boys in the slums of Hyderabad.[[2]](#footnote-2) In many places, these groups bridge the realm of formality and informality, engaging in politics and formal governance, while partaking in violence on the streets.[[3]](#footnote-3) Because vigilantism is generally constituted by men (although there are a few notable exceptions), studies of vigilantism focus nearly exclusively on men.[[4]](#footnote-4) Little research has been conducted on the topic of female collectivization and women have often been misconstrued as helpless recipients of violence.

In this article, I add to the existing literature and argue that discourses on female vigilantes simultaneously pity and vilify women. These narratives range from portraying women as those that should have no participation in violence to allowing for a degree of empowerment, but limited in scope. My research focuses on women in the Shiv Sena political party, which was founded in the 1960s in Mumbai, India as a pro-Marathi movement and has since expanded to encompass Hindu Nationalism.[[5]](#footnote-5) Since its foundation, members of the Shiv Sena have repeatedly acted violently in attempts to campaign for their interests, with a large portion of their work extending into Mumbai’s slums. The Shiv Sena push for government initiatives promoting Hindu nationalism, yet organize local vigilantism against rival ethno-religious groups – most commonly Muslims. The Mahila Aghadi – the women’s wing of the party – came to prominence globally during the 1992-1993 Bombay Riots, in which they played a large role in acting violently against Muslims.[[6]](#footnote-6) Since then, they have been known for rioting against the 1996 film *Fire* – which depicted a lesbian relationship – and banding together to fight and publically shame abusers.[[7]](#footnote-7) Mahila women are part of a far-right, nationalist movement, yet also fight for women’s security; some describe the group as feminist, while others balk at the idea.[[8]](#footnote-8)

My research question, then, is “How do outside actors construct female security, identity, and empowerment in the context of the Shiv Sena Mahila Aghadi in Mumbai, India?” I am specifically interested in how outside actors – the general public and political party leadership –understand these concepts. I do, however, include a few Mahila women’s voices in my analysis. The divide between discourses embodies the underlying puzzle of discourses on vigilante women: vilifying women by association with violent groups, yet victimizing women as agents to be pitied. A third, alternate discourse imagines women as empowered and celebrates their ability to secure their own safety, but limits the extent of this empowerment.[[9]](#footnote-9) This research reveals in what contexts slum women act violently and how urban women’s needs can be addressed, given discourses surrounding them. Researching outside actors’ discourses on vigilante women can help explain how groups and individuals in Maharashtra construct female identity and security. These understandings might aid policy-makers or other researchers as they consider female needs and the perceptions of women within society. This research is applicable to India, but also can be used – provided context is considered – to understand female vigilantism and responses to it in slums geographically elsewhere.

To illustrate my argument, I first give a short overview of the scholarly conversation into which I am entering. I have identified three schools of thought that explore the concept of vigilantism. Each separately highlights the importance of state inadequacy, communalism, and the psychological impact of marginal living. I explain how other scholars have informed my research and situate my research in respect to them.

The article then details the methodology I used in determining actors, gathering data, and analyzing these discourses. I research discourses by the general public, the Shiv Sena, and a few Mahila women themselves and conduct a discourse analysis drawing upon social media and news articles from well-known English-language websites based in India. I constrain my research to the Maharashtra state and 2011 onward, roughly grouping my texts into two time periods: one based around 2013-2014 and one around 2016-2017.

In the next section, I analyze official and popular discourses by the Indian public, Shiv Sena male leadership, and Mahila leaders on the women of the Shiv Sena. Discourses surrounding female vigilantism in Mumbai’s slums make up a multifaceted socio-political background entrenched in colonialism, ethno-religious violence, and gendered violence. I am particularly interested in understanding how these actors construct concepts of female security and empowerment in different and often contradictory ways through a villain discourse, victim discourse, and heroine discourse.

The final, concluding section of the article explores the potential consequences of these competing discourses on vigilante women and future avenues of research. It is important to note that Mahila women are the subject of these discourses, yet carry very little public, online discourse of their own. Future scholars may choose to research the Mahila Aghadi by considering how these women understand their own roles. Through discourses, women’s actions are framed by outsiders’ understandings of them, concurrently illustrating them as victims, villains, and empowered women.

**Literature Review**

This study involves an inquiry into female vigilantism; more specifically, I am conducting a discourse analysis with an ultimate view to how the concepts of female security, identity, and empowerment are constructed in the context of Mumbai slums. Overall, little research has been conducted strictly on the topic of female collectivization, as women have often been portrayed in scholarly literature as merely the helpless victims of gendered violence. Studies have cited several instances of vigilantes being perceived as heroic, yet just as many cases in which they are viewed as criminals.[[10]](#footnote-10) The challenge, then, is reconciling this disparity. What explains the approval of vigilante behavior by some and not others? More broadly, how do actors construct female security and understand vigilante behavior?

Various schools of thought seek to explain the presence of and support for vigilante groups. It is important to note, however, that these frameworks rarely zero in on women, and instead address individuals without reference to gender, or at times solely male groups. Nonetheless, these theories inform my research in that they address the underlying research puzzle: How is vigilantism understood? Some theories stress the role of the state’s institutions and perceptions of justice.[[11]](#footnote-11) Others emphasize a strong presence of communalism.[[12]](#footnote-12) A third set of theories highlights the psychological impact of living on the margins of society.[[13]](#footnote-13) These three core scholarly groups inform my own research into female vigilantism in Indian slums.

The Legal Group

This group of scholars stresses external forces, namely the illegitimacy of state institutions: police forces and legal systems. These scholars analyze vigilantism as a response to state systems; this links the role of the state (either as overbearing or lacking) to vigilante behavior.[[14]](#footnote-14) Their argument is that a corrupt state ineffective at solving security issues is the primary precipitate for vigilante action.[[15]](#footnote-15) This argument relies on the assumption that vigilante groups emerge to fulfill services that government officials have failed to provide.[[16]](#footnote-16) Several scholars in this group make a nuanced distinction, however; they argue that although directly witnessing police abuses increases support for vigilantism, a broader sense of disillusionment with the state plays a larger role.[[17]](#footnote-17) A lack of confidence in the criminal justice system along with a sense of police illegitimacy – as evaluated by the perceived injustice in police decision-making – dramatically increase support for vigilante behavior among the general public. This relates to my research because it expounds the role perception of the state plays in creating discourses surrounding vigilantism, especially among the general public.

A subsection of scholars within this group posits that these groups emerge not just to supplant the inadequate state, but out of strongly symbolic reasons based in morality. Jim Handy claims that state-led mishaps arise notions of the state not only as inadequate but illegitimate, inspiring a vehement disgust with state officials and the legal system, and further prompting individuals to take matters into their own hands as vigilantes.[[18]](#footnote-18) This disgust with the state makes vigilantism – though still tied to shortfalls of the state – a moral activity. Vigilantism is perceived not just a moral choice, but a “moral obligation.”[[19]](#footnote-19) This argument provides a unique segue from which this group of scholars connects with the community group, both speaking in terms of morality and communal obligations. Haas et al. use a large-N approach to explore public support for vigilantism, and contend that the type of precipitating crime the vigilante responded to is one of the most important factors affecting public support for the vigilante.[[20]](#footnote-20) For example, disapproval ratings of a vigilante who attacked a sex offender were considerably lower than disapproval ratings of other vigilantes.[[21]](#footnote-21) The morality factor of the legal group has helped me consider texts on the Mahila Aghadi in terms of specific, violent actions they have taken, and who or what their actions are responses to.

The Community Group

Theories about community emphasize collective context when explaining vigilante behavior. These scholars contend that vigilante groups that have emerged operate on deeply-held moral imperatives and often seek to continue historical practices of community-policing.[[22]](#footnote-22) Crime, then, is perceived by vigilantes and their supporters not just as harmful to the workings of society but indicative of loathsome character and even immorality; criminal behavior is an assault on the culture and practices of the community at hand.[[23]](#footnote-23) White and Rastogi explain that in these tight-knit groups, personal insult is comprehended as a collective injustice, which then demands a collective response.[[24]](#footnote-24) Theories that attest to the precedent of community-policing have focused on vigilantism in Nigeria as a continuation of an older “night guard” system.[[25]](#footnote-25) The reasoning is that if vigilante activity was a historical practice, there is a stronger normative argument for vigilante behavior in the present.[[26]](#footnote-26) Vigilantism, then, is a demonstration of communal ties, deeply rooted in local history.

Furthermore, these scholars highlight the unitary strength of a community’s moral values as they form a collective identity, such as the emphasis on the O’odua People’s Congress “moral outrage” in response to a perceived injustice to explain women taking up arms in Nigeria, or Hyderabad’s militant boys shaping a “soldiering” culture of morality.[[27]](#footnote-27) Notable here is the deliberate use of “morality,” suggesting that vigilantism is inherently tied to and understood in terms of morality. This is a departure from traditional literature on vigilantism: the legal group, which explains vigilante behavior as a direct response to state inadequacy – arising as a response to a need for law and order.[[28]](#footnote-28) This group of scholars informs my research by emphasizing the importance of communal history and cultural morality in understanding vigilantism. They suggest that communal factors – especially morality – play a role in how vigilantes understand their actions. Concepts of communal morality can be extended to my own research: do outside actors understand the roles and actions of the Shiv Sena Mahila Aghadi in terms of morality as well? Furthermore, are supporters members of the communal in-group and condemners farther removed?

The Identity Group

Other scholars argue that psychological security and the integral role of identity remarkably affect those living along the margins of society in organizing vigilante groups.[[29]](#footnote-29) Within this framework, asserting one’s dominance through violence is equivalent to asserting one’s claim to the city.[[30]](#footnote-30) This concept is especially important as it connects communal violence to compact space, relating vigilantism to slums and the economically poor. Through this lens, violence is defined not just as physical acts of force, but as a reaction to psychological exclusion.[[31]](#footnote-31) Place, then, plays a dramatic role. Girling explains that vigilante behavior occurs most commonly in places that are “on the fragile lower-borderline of respectability but [that are] still worth defending.”[[32]](#footnote-32) One’s perception of self-identity is intimately tied to the space they occupy within society and the physical place they inhabit. This is especially relevant to my research, as most Mahila women are lower-middle or middle class and live in or on the edge of slums, matching Girling’s description of places where vigilantism occurs.[[33]](#footnote-33)

The role identity plays could explain the actions of female vigilante groups like the Mahila, which work to secure safety for members of the in-group (Mahila women), but otherwise espouse far-right conservative ideology.[[34]](#footnote-34) By rallying against brothels, lesbianism, and women of other ethnic groups, these women are acting to secure their safety in public spaces and claiming their right to intimacy and place within a city that rejects them.[[35]](#footnote-35) It is their way of “return[ing] themselves to the city.”[[36]](#footnote-36) This group of scholars can be distinguished from the community group in that they emphasize the *lack* of space and community, rather than the *presence* of historical and moral values. Historically, vigilantes have faced harsh criticism from local communities, yet continue to insist upon their heroic righteousness; this suggests that they are driven by a moral imperative based in identity over external community support.[[37]](#footnote-37) These scholars inform my research by helping explain why women might collectivize for safety, yet deny this safety to all women.

Conclusions

These three schools of thought make up a scholarly conversation that identifies core concepts central to the idea of vigilantism, key actors, and spaces in which I might observe discourses. The Legal Group emphasizes state inadequacies and the role of morality in inspiring vigilantism and curating public support for or against vigilantes.[[38]](#footnote-38) The Community Group focuses on in-group communal history and shared moral values as cause for vigilante behavior, while the Identity Group recognizes vigilantism as “a way for the marginalised to use marginality to their advantage.”[[39]](#footnote-39) All three groups weave themes of justice and morality into their arguments, either explicitly or implicitly. I analyze texts with a ‘moral lens’ to further explore how morality interacts with my three identified discourses. My research addresses a gap in existing research: most literature explains the causal factors behind vigilante behavior and very few describe factors that shape discourses about vigilantes. My research addresses multiple competing discourses on specifically vigilante women.

**Methodology**

I chose to employ a discourse analysis in this paper because it correlates closely to what I am most curious about regarding female vigilantism: meaning-making, how actors construct complex concepts of female security, and the resultant effects of discourses largely on the women, rather than by them.[[40]](#footnote-40) Using a discourse analysis, I am able to gain a greater understanding of the complex meanings generated through discussions of female vigilantism.[[41]](#footnote-41) I am analyzing official and popular discourses and have identified three predominant discourses illustrating: 1) Women as derivative villains (villain discourse), 2) Women as passive actors (victim discourse), and 3) Women as empowered (heroine discourse) in the context of the members of the Shiv Sena Mahila Aghadi. The actors producing the discourses are the general public, political party leadership (including the Shiv Sena), and a few of the Mahila women themselves.

I chose to focus on discourses by outside actors due to my inaccessibility to Mahila women. I do not speak any Indian languages, so all the texts I analyzed were in English. Outside actors provide the most prominent discourses on the Mahila in English. Without knowing Marathi or Hindi and not having physical on-the-ground access to Mahila women, I have had to shift my research away from analysis of Mahila women’s understandings of their own roles and toward how outside actors construct discourses surrounding the Mahila.[[42]](#footnote-42) I made this decision because I felt that there were not enough data sources available for me to achieve trustworthiness in a research project with a focus on Mahila women’s constructions of their own identities.[[43]](#footnote-43) I have, however, included a few Mahila voices through Twitter and included these texts in the analysis. Nevertheless, analysis of outside constructions of female identity and security provides valuable insight to understanding the contexts in which these women are able to create a space to act as vigilantes. Additionally, these actors offer discourses that appear paradoxical: celebrating women as empowered, yet also limiting this empowerment and relating the victim discourse. I explore these discourses to determine their relation to and interaction with one another.

Before I go on, it is important to reflect on my own role in the research process as a biracial, upper-middle class woman. Most Mahila Aghadi members are middle or lower-middle class women living in or on the outskirts of slums.[[44]](#footnote-44) Given my socio-economic standing, I am distanced from Mahila women’s economic positions and do not intimately understand the fears and concerns that accompany immense financial pressure and difficult living conditions. As a Chinese­–Caucasian woman who grew up without a religious background, I do not easily relate to the ethnic and religious conflict between Muslims and Hindus that these women experience. As a woman, I can relate to some female security threats and feminine identity; however, these meanings can be created and understood very differently in disparate contexts. Additionally, I am a college-educated woman, while many Mahila women live in slums and have limited access to education; this may affect my ability to understand the importance of economic opportunities and the lack of non-violent pathways to ensuring safety for women.[[45]](#footnote-45)

It is also important to note my cultural competence for analyzing these discourses. As someone who is not Indian and whose knowledge of India is limited to personal background research, I have run into some difficulty analyzing actors’ discourses. I don’t understand Hindi, Marathi, or any other Indian language, nor do I have a thorough grasp of colloquial slang and humor, even in English.[[46]](#footnote-46) However, I have read a large amount of scholarly literature on female vigilantism and feel that I have a solid base of knowledge in feminist thought and vigilante behavior, which will help set me up to research these discourses. I have found enough data sources in English that I have not relied on translation to help me analyze my research question. However, this does have research implications. I am leaving out a swath of people who do not speak English; this has made it difficult for me to include in discourses lower-income populations, including many Mahila women.

Broadly speaking, I am analyzing my selected discourses in the context of feminist literature and India’s political background. My research question analyzes meaning-making in regards to female security and empowerment, yet feminist theory largely originates from the West.[[47]](#footnote-47) Modern feminism focuses on individuality, equality, and diversity, all politically associated with the left.[[48]](#footnote-48) This is divergent from the female vigilantes of the Mahila Aghadi, who act for female security, yet are part of the far-right, ultranationalist Shiv Sena political party.[[49]](#footnote-49) Accordingly, I draw on the work of Srila Roy, and Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, grounding my research question in South Asian feminist thought and non-western International Relations theory.[[50]](#footnote-50) The ideology of the Shiv Sena is based on Marathi folklore and Hindu nationalism, often referencing India’s political background. Embedded in multiple discourses is rhetoric referring to ethno-religious conflict (Muslim and Hindu) and the Partition of India.[[51]](#footnote-51)

I am researching discourses on the Mahila in the context of the 1992-1993 Bombay Riots to the present. However, I am specifically analyzing texts from 2011 onward, categorized into two groups: one from roughly 2013-2014 and one from 2016-2017. I chose this timeframe because although the Shiv Sena and the Mahila Aghadi emerged in the 1960s, the Mahila did not gain prominence until the riots, largely due to members’ active participation in the violence.[[52]](#footnote-52) From 2011 onward, there have been much larger, present discourses on the Mahila, recognizable through online texts.[[53]](#footnote-53) I categorized the texts for analysis as either of the two camps: 2013-2014 or 2016-2017 because narratives across these groups differ due to political changes and elections within Mumbai. I have limited myself to discourses from actors physically based in the Maharashtra state of India by analyzing texts originating from cities within this state. The Mahila Aghadi is largely present in Mumbai; however, discourses on the Mahila – although most widespread in Mumbai – are common throughout Maharashtra.[[54]](#footnote-54) I have identified these discourses through online spaces, some entirely virtual and some reported on physical events. The voices I am analyzing are therefore not representative of people within the Maharashtra state. For example, many of the Mahila women and other slum inhabitants do not have access to social media sites or know English; these people’s discourses are not included in this analysis. Identifying texts according to these geographic limitations was easily accomplished with news articles, which stated the city the writer was reporting from, but more difficult with social media. For this, I used my best judgment, with the knowledge that some of my texts may not be originating from the Maharashtra state.

Among my identified discourses, there is a notable power hierarchy, with politicians from the Shiv Sena and other political parties (victim discourse) as the most prominent, followed by the Indian public (villain discourse), then the Mahila women themselves (heroine discourse). Political actors propagate the dominant discourse with accessible media platforms and political ethos through rallies and press conferences; the Indian public is very vocal via social media (specific texts have garnered large-scale attention); and the women of the Mahila Aghadi may have a large presence within their communities, but do not have a large public persona online, especially through English mediums.[[55]](#footnote-55) Of the three discourses, the victim discourse is the most dominant, followed by the villain discourse. The “empowered women” (heroine) discourse is echoed almost exclusively by Shiv Sena leaders and Mahila members. Curiously, Sena leadership alternates between the victim discourse and the heroine discourse.[[56]](#footnote-56)

I analyzed two types of texts: newspaper articles and social media. These texts are concentrated either around 2012-2013, following the infamous Delhi rape, or the 2016-2017 elections. Selecting texts across several English-speaking media outlets and on two social media platforms: Twitter and Facebook allowed for exposure to a “wide variety of meanings,” as my texts will not be from only a few actors.[[57]](#footnote-57) This also allows me to explore intertextuality, possibly of texts from different actors.[[58]](#footnote-58) The newspaper texts are from leading newspapers in India as well as global newspapers with an Indian-specific regional focus, such as *Hindustan Times, The Hindu*, and *The New York Times*.[[59]](#footnote-59) They largely reports on events, with a few op-eds. The number of texts by English newspapers in India that discussed the Shiv Sena and Mahila were limited, so the articles I selected comprised of what I could find within my previously defined temporal and geographic parameters. These texts ranged from 2011 to 2017.

The social media texts came primarily from Twitter, with some from Facebook. Tweets came from general citizens of Maharashtra, especially Mumbai, along with Shiv Sena leadership, a few of whom were Mahila women. The tweets I analyzed were all from 2016 and 2017, spurred by elections and concurrent political events. The Facebook comments and posts were mainly from 2013 to 2015 and were derived from comments on and references to a Facebook page called “BAN ShivSena.”[[60]](#footnote-60) I collected my social media texts through popular hashtags and search terms, including: Shiv Sena women, Mahila Aghadi, #DidYouKnow Shiv Sena, #BanShivSena, and #ShivSenaForMumbai across 2016-2017. I chose this timeframe due to difficulties selecting texts going further back. I selected all tweets and Facebook comments I could find which expressed an opinion and were within this timeframe.[[61]](#footnote-61) Social media, videos, and photos helped me analyze the Shiv Sena’s discourse on vigilante women, and allowed me direct access to the Indian public’s narrative on female security in the context of the Mahila. The news content, meanwhile, serves as another platform for direct opinions through op-eds and for providing factual accounts of actors’ remarks on the Shiv Sena and photos of the Mahila.

There, are however, limits to my approach. For an interpretivist research design, I narrowed down my original research question to a specific context in Indian slums: the Mahila Aghadi in Mumbai, with discourses in Maharashtra. The main tradeoffs in this approach are: 1) I narrowed my focus to just the Mahila Aghadi, and 2) my findings will not be easily generalizable to female vigilantism, as they are inherently dependent on the context of the Mahila Aghadi. However, I feel that the benefits outweigh the tradeoffs I made. Although I cannot say that I have “found” anything universal or enduring about female vigilantism, *how* to study female vigilantism and research processes can be explored in other settings. Insights from this research project may be a good starting for broader comparisons in future endeavors.

**Analysis**

In this analysis, I first describe and discuss the results. This is discussed in three parts based on the three major discourses I identified: women as villains, victims, and heroines. I discuss the discourses in this order because the first two are the most dominant, with the last being communicated mostly by Shiv Sena leadership, including a few Mahila women. In addition, I chose this order because the villainous tale appeared most often embedded in the larger Shiv Sena party. The discussion of broad party politics will provide greater understanding for discussing constructions around women and gendered violence in India in the victim discourse. I then narrow in on how these specific Mahila women are described and understood in the empowerment discourse. In the progression of discourses discussed, I get closer to the women’s voices themselves, with discourses becoming more positive as they shift based on speakers. Throughout this analysis, I reference past literature reviewed, as well as three key themes that repeat throughout several texts: shame, honor, and respect.

Mahila leaders (female)

Mahila women

General Public of Maharashtra

Shiv Sena leaders (male)

*Image I*. There are layers to outside actors. As I proceed in my analysis I grow closer to the Mahila women’s voices, but stop short, only ever reaching the Mahila’s female leaders.

The villain discourse is particularly notable because discussion of these women is wrapped up within larger critiques of the Shiv Sena and their relation to women. Here what is significant is the continual absence of direct mention of women within the Shiv Sena party; instead, there are only references to how Shiv Sena men treat women. For example, Twitter user @DevangVDave writes in light of recent elections: “Party office bearers of @ShivSena who openly degrading and disrespecting the dignity of Women will protect Women rights ? #Shame.”[[62]](#footnote-62) This discourse emphasizes the hypocrisy of the Sena in their actions and stresses the violent tactics they use, even comparing them to terrorists.[[63]](#footnote-63) Common words employed in this narrative are those identifying the Sena closely with religious hatred, or alternatively, stupidity.[[64]](#footnote-64) Mahila women alone are not constructed as villainous, but the broader Shiv Sena party is; actors who make up this discourse condemn all dimensions of the party, including Mahila women. The complete absence in mention of women as active members of the Sena and the derivative vilification of these women as part of the broader group suggest that these women’s needs are being dismissed and their actions summarily condemned. Much like the victim discourse, which I will later address, these women are denied their own agency and depicted as single-faceted, present only to discuss the male Sena leadership.

The actors who construct the villain discourse continually emphasize religious aspects of the Sena, focusing on their ideology and tactics, rather than directly addressing female participation.[[65]](#footnote-65) One Twitter user criticized the Sena’s disproportional focus on respecting the national anthem while they disrespected women.[[66]](#footnote-66) There are, additionally, vague mentions of how the Shiv Sena has *not* made Mumbai safer for women are common on Twitter and Facebook as a response to Sena claims that they have made the city safe for women.[[67]](#footnote-67) By emphasizing the hypocrisy of Shiv Sena leadership (i.e. instances of gender abuse within the party) and using words that suggest stupidity (“illiterate,” “asshole,” “dumb,” “bigot”), these observers dismiss and discount party views and legitimacy, including anything the Sena says in favor of women and the women within the party.[[68]](#footnote-68) The victim discourse similarly discounts female agency, but directly addresses women.

At the heart of the victim discourse is the belief that women are a cultural touchstone symbolic of India. Within this discourse, women are understood not as active agents of change, but as “a dream” to be respected.[[69]](#footnote-69) Narratives relating women to morality are far from unusual; scholars’ studies of vigilantism link it closely to morality, especially in the case of women.[[70]](#footnote-70) In the victim discourse, however, respect and security are understood through a narrow lens; there is little to no mention of agency. In one Shiv Sena advertisement, two women are harassed by three men while out walking at night until a Shiv Sena man sees this, stops the men, and rescues the women.[[71]](#footnote-71) The video implies that the women might have been assaulted had it not been for the Shiv Sena man who saved them. As sacred beings, women are meant to be preserved, however this preservation limits and simplifies them; they are not treated with the depth one would afford to a human being. Women are victimized because they are fashioned as morally valuable, but always vulnerable to attack. The response, then, is to protect women without recognizing their own agency. It is possible, however, from my own position as a Western woman, that I have over exaggerated their disempowerment and underemphasized their security, or vice versa.

This narrative is reiterated by Shiv Sena leadership who in recent times have argued with grandiose hyperboles that Mumbai is safe for women because of the Shiv Sena.[[72]](#footnote-72) This sentiment was repeated almost word-for-word by several tweets.[[73]](#footnote-73) The Sena’s rhetoric is a distinct departure from their position only a few years before, that Mumbai was unsafe for women due to failures of the Congress party.[[74]](#footnote-74) Since then, the Shiv Sena has risen in prominence to have a majority hold within Maharashtra and especially Mumbai.[[75]](#footnote-75) Whether or not Mumbai is constructed as a haven for women, then, is most-likely based on political rhetoric and election campaigns. The reality of the situation is difficult to know, reflecting the inaccessibility of Mahila women to external groups. I analyzed women indirectly through outsiders’ lens due to their limited online presence. There are few Mahila women on Twitter and although they have a Facebook group, it is used sparingly and is followed only by 233 people.[[76]](#footnote-76) Furthermore, all posts are in Marathi, in line with the Shiv Sena’s website, which is also entirely in Marathi. Ultimately, the inaccessibility of these women to outsiders, along with the claim by male Sena leadership that they have secured Mumbai for women, mean that discourses about women are, to some degree, removed from the women themselves.

A critic might argue that I am unaware of how much voice these women truly have due to my reliance on English newspapers and tweets. It is true that women may have a greater voice in Marathi mediums. However, English is one of two official languages in India (the other is Hindi). The removal of women from these public and official discourses in English texts suggests that constructions around gender issues and violence in Indian culture focus on male-propagated narratives at the national and state level, even if women are able to claim spaces on the communal level. Yet some Mahila women’s voices are present in the online sphere, most notably speaking for the heroine discourse.

The heroine discourse heavily works in constructions of shame, honor, and respect, depicting the Shiv Sena as “protecting women’s modesty,” while permitting women to promote this protection themselves.[[77]](#footnote-77) This narrative is most highly propagated by Shiv Sena leadership and their supporters. The use of fear and violence to achieve Mahila goals is considered unquestionably morally just in this narrative, although the terms “fear” and “violence” are rarely explicitly used to describe their actions.[[78]](#footnote-78) Beating men accused of sexual assault and coercion is common amongst the Mahila, with the Sena aggressively claiming that their violent behavior was “right on their part.”[[79]](#footnote-79) Similarly, in 2013, the Sena’s male leadership handed out 2,500 knives to women, explaining that “this government has failed to provide security to women so we are distributing these knives to empower them,” and encouraging women to be bold in using it in self-defense.[[80]](#footnote-80) They are echoing the beliefs of the Legal Group, which points to state failure in explaining vigilante behavior.[[81]](#footnote-81) Their accusation of the government and the decision to distribute the knives on the anniversary of their founder’s birthday is heavily symbolic and suggests that the move was highly political, targeting the Congress party that held power at the time. Addressing female issues as a political device brings about larger speculation about their aims in supporting women. By encouraging and justifying the use of violence for the protection of women, specifically “women’s modesty,” the Shiv Sena is more broadly justifying using violence to protect traditional Marathi values. In other words, it is acceptable to prioritize Hindutva over outsiders, as it is a form of empowerment.

Curiously, the Shiv Sena leadership has alternated between espousing the victim discourse and the heroine discourse, based mainly on political context of the time. The victim discourse was a common thread in 2016-2017 with the Sena in power, and they claimed that women’s modesty in Mumbai was secure because of the Sena. Contrastingly, the Sena imagined women as empowered and responsible for their own safety when the party was not in power in 2013-2014. The politicization of women opens avenues for further investigation: How is this politicization affecting women in slums? In other words, to what extent might women be accessing new avenues of agency, despite whether these avenues were opened for outsiders’ political aims?

Additionally, this discourse suggests a nuanced and subtle distinction between equal representation and equality, a distinction that contends with modern-day feminism and the goals it aims to achieve. This discourse might help explain the extreme differences in reaction of scholars and individuals, with some calling the Mahila Aghadi “decidedly pro-feminist,” while others say they would never call them feminist.[[82]](#footnote-82) The question they are answering might not be “Is the Mahila Aghadi feminist?” but “What is feminism?” My most useful texts here originated from Twitter and specifically were captions and responses to photos of Mahila women gathered together.[[83]](#footnote-83) Shiv Sena men and the few Mahila voices repeatedly celebrated the women in these images for “sisterhood” and “solidarity” while pairing these terms with “empowerment.”[[84]](#footnote-84) One tweet featured an image of a woman symbolically “tied” to another at the wrist with fabric, accompanied by the caption “Long live sisterhood & solidarity.”[[85]](#footnote-85) This suggests that these women, or at least the larger party, understand the furthering of women as achievable through establishing and developing close communal ties among women.

Much like scholarly studies of vigilantism in Nigeria, the communalism aspect could potentially help explain why these women are spurred to vigilante activity.[[86]](#footnote-86) However, that cannot be concluded from this research project due to limitations in accessing Mahila voices. Regardless, actors constructing Mahila women as empowered through community gender ties suggests that communal ties are important in Hindu culture and a lens through which women are understood. Female empowerment in this context may only provide a narrow window of feminism which is culturally acceptable for these women. Alternatively, there is the possibility that Mahila women are constrained by traditional constructions, yet still presented with an all-female space through which they can expand their constructions of female identity and security.

**Conclusions**

With the brutal Delhi rape and murder of a female student in 2012, female security issues and gender violence have been pushed to the forefront of Indian politics. Political parties are more eagerly promoting the importance of female security and extending this into the slums as well. Now, most major political parties have female ‘Mahila’ wings. How outside actors respond to these Mahila wings brings into question how they understand female security and, more broadly, the female identity. One political party, the Shiv Sena, a right-wing nationalist group known for violence, has aggressively welcomed and promoted their women’s wing, the Mahila Aghadi, with founder Bal Thackeray referring to them as the “backbone of the Sena.”[[87]](#footnote-87) Variate and contrasting narratives surrounding these women and the political party in which they are embedded reveal how the larger community of Maharashtra understands female vigilantism and constructs female security.

That few scholars have discussed female participation in vigilantism means a key aspect for analyses of communal action and female security is absent. Studies of discourses surrounding vigilante behavior are even sparser and practically unseen for female vigilantes. In this article, I have argued that discourses by outside actors surrounding vigilante women in Mumbai, India construct them as either villains, victims, or heroines. However, all three discourses politicize women to further outside actors’ own political objectives, with Shiv Sena leadership oscillating between the victim and empowerment discourses to achieve political aims. Women are simplified in both the villain and victim discourse, either as absent actors who are villainous by association, or passive actors who are to be valued, but not agents of their own. The actors within the heroine discourse use terms such as “empowerment,” but advocate for a limited form, with women promoting traditional Hindu values and themes of shame, honor, and modesty present.

Still, this study sheds little information on how Mahila women understand themselves.

I do not have access to Mahila women themselves, so I analyze them through the prism of outside actors’ discourses; my findings vindicate literature on vigilantism. Literature on state failure corresponds to how the Sena characterizes the heroine discourse, calling on women to empower themselves as the government has ‘failed’ them, while literature on communal morality corresponds with Mahila women’s emphasis on “solidarity” in achieving security and empowerment. This “solidarity” appears a democratizing or equalizing element solidified in communal bedrock, but is isolated solely to Hindu women. Across all three discourses, there is little reference to or concern about caste, surprising considering the historical significance India has consistently placed on castes. However, these women are still operating within an intensely nationalist framework. By arming themselves and attacking male perpetrators, these vigilante women are making the claim to defending not only themselves, but the broader community of Hindu women. Muslim women are left in the dust as the primary out-group, allowing intense attacks on them by Mahila women – as in the 1992-1993 Bombay Riots – to occur.

Most notably, however, is how literature on psychological security ties women’s identity to place. The concept here is that acting violently may be a way or returning oneself to a city that rejects you – physically, by living in slums, but also psychologically, as a stigmatized member of society due to economic status.[[88]](#footnote-88) With consideration of Mahila women’s notable absence from the public, online sphere, my research brings me to the question: if women’s images are being co-opted, are these women really returning themselves to the city, as the Identity Group suggests? Do these women have agency? And if so, to what extent? Future projects might endeavor to analyze how Mahila women understand their own roles and actions. Does their understanding contest other popular conceptions? An analysis of discourses by Mahila women would generate a better understanding of how much agency these women have, how they reconcile their limited empowerment with the larger ultra-nationalist party to which they belong, and the extent that their presence is felt within their communities. Despite limited scholarly discussion of female vigilantism, analyses of violent female communalism allow a lens through which one can gain insight on broader conceptions of female identity, security, and empowerment.

Appendix I: Tweets Analyzed

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| User | Date, Time | Text | Retweets | Likes |
| @neelamgorhe | 9:59 AM – 31Aug 2015 | Parbhani shivsena Mahila Aghadi organizer sakhutai Latpate has tied Rakhi to me .Long live Sisterhood & solidarity | 3 | 8 |
| @alakshya2 | 6:16 AM – 21 Feb 2017 | do you mean to say that prior to #ShivSena coming on the scene in the 60s, women were not this safe? I am not sure | 0 | 0 |
| @winningalways | 2:49 AM – 21 Feb 2017 | It is wholly and solely because of #ShivSena and #Balasaheb in particular that Mumbai is safe for Ladies. #MaximumCity. ShivSena For Mumbai. | 1 | 1 |
| @DevangVDave | 8:47 AM – 13 Feb 2017 | Complained Filed Against @ShivSena Up Sakha Pramukh for disrespecting Women & using derogatory language for CM @Dev\_Fadnavis 1/2 | 18 | 10 |
| @DevangVDave | 8:53 AM – 13 Feb 2017 | Party office bearers of @ShivSena who openly degrading and disrespecting the dignity of Women will protect Women rights ? #Shame | 7 | 7 |
| @Mishu27 | 5:38 AM – 21 Feb 2017 | @OfficeOfRG @narendramodi @ShivSena respecting the national anthem is wonderful when will the women here feel as respected or valued???? | 0 | 0 |
| @Mishu27 | 5:44 AM – 21 Feb 2017 | @OfficeOfRG @narendramodi @ShivSena how long will a screwed up patriarchial mindset have a say in deciding women’s choice over their bodies? | 0 | 0 |
| @Mishu27 | 5:46 AM – 21 Feb 2017 | @OfficeOfRG @narendramodi @ShivSena what have you done to make the women of India feel safe ?? If not...you have no right to our vote! !!! | 0 | 0 |
| @dna | 11:14 PM – 27 Jan 2017 | Shiv Sena promised a slew of women-centric schemes ahead of 2012 BMC polls, but many haven’t been delivered on dnai.in/dLBp | 6 | 8 |
| @mddusane | 1:39 AM – 28 Jan 2017 | I truely agree that PM himself and Shivsena people should learn to respect women, own experience | 0 | 0 |
| @neelamgorhe | 3:26 AM – 9 Feb 2017 | #shivsena pune published Vachannama :we aimed to safe guard Environment.We oppose politics of Ciminals.Cities should be safe for women | 9 | 28 |
| @ameharia | 7:57 PM – 2 Mar 2017 | Shiv Sena should first abandone it’s Marathi Manus agenda before teaching @BJP4India on checking burqa clad women voting in UP | 0 | 0 |
| @parishapsarnaik | 2:53 AM – 8 Feb 2017 | Mangala Gauri – Social event initiated by Mrs. Parisha Sarnaik to bring women together and celebrating womanhood. #VoteForParisha #ShivSena. [Photo with image of women in matching saris and the words “Fostering Unity Among Women”] | 0 | 5 |
| @ramesh94\_bithar | 11:25 PM – 27 Jan 2017 | #BJPMaHa should get rid of in BMC Poll #ShivSena a fradist goome in #DienartyThakre by run by UddavThug like #Pappu | 0 | 0 |
| @sumitasarkarTOI | 10:02 AM – 23 Jan 2017 | More than 50% applicants for @ShivSena candidature @NashikCorp election are women, most of them highly educated @NashikNews @WeAreNashik | 2 | 8 |
| @siddheshsawant\_ | 12:54 AM – 4 Feb 2017 | Every party talks abt giving opportunities to women in electoral politics, but only @ShivSena has done that in #BMCpolls 2017. @AUThackeray | 6 | 1 |
| @siddheshsawant\_ | 12:58 AM – 4 Feb 2017 | While all other parties are only speaking on #womenempowerment, @ShivSena has taken a step forward to empower women in reality! | 6 | 1 |
| @siddheshsawant\_ | 1:01 AM – 4 Feb 2017 | Kudos to @ShivSena party president #UddhavThackeray ji & @AUThackeray for giving our women activists, an opportunity to lead in #BMCpolls. | 3 | 0 |
| @indianscrewup | 3:14 AM – 25 Jul 2016 | Raj Thackeray might have said a bit too much but Shiv Sena is the reason why Mumbai is so safe for women | 16 | 11 |
| @Yamma73190722 | 4:06 AM – 25 Jul 2016 | R us serious??? Women in Mumbai are safe due to a shivsena!!!! | 0 | 1 |

Appendix II: Facebook Posts and Comments Analyzed

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| User/Group | Date | Text | Likes |
| BAN Shiv Sena | N/A | “About: This page is an appeal to the Indian government to put a BAN on the Shiv Sena that is spreading violence and hatred in India.” | 34,003 |
| Shivsena Raigadzilha Mahila Aghadi | N/A | [This is the page for the Shiv Sena Mahila Aghadi, page is mostly in Marathi] | 232 |
| Mumtaz Alam | October 12, 2015 | Not Sudheendra Kulkarni , Shiv Sena has in fact blackened the face of secular, plural, liberal, moderate India. | 23; 20 shares |
| Rakesh Sehgal | October 31, 2015 | Shiv Sena you are an Asshole organisation being run by illiterate idiots. Infact, people who have ever voted for such bastards just because of their caste, friendship or any other non-rational reason, are equal assholes. You are part of Talibanisation of our country. Since I have tagged these bastards, I may even be attacked for the same reason but I don’t care, because if that’s what may be required to awaken more people, let it be. BAN Shiv Sena. | 6 |
| Sumit Kumar | October 31, 2015 | Shiv sena and every other extremist groups in this nation. That RSS and its child BJP. Worst part is that they are misguiding youths of this nation and thus creating an army of dumb indians. | 0 |
| The Milli Gazette | October 12, 2015 | As Shiv Sena blackened India, did @TarekFateh do a lungi dance? #Shameless Bigots. #SudheendraKulkarni | 103 |
| Khalid Khan | October 9, 2015 | Another act of shame by Shiv Sena….honestly when will people rise and grow up……We should really BAN Shiv Sena…..Way to go Arvindjii and Delhi…..!!!!! | 11 |
| Balwan Rajput | December 27, 2013 | Shiv sena is a spiritual force of Hindustan. Danger /bad known as terest and their concern | 0 |
| Sanjeev Kumar | February 11, 2017 | any party segregating people on basis of religion instead of policies ,I am against.Talking about Shiv sena or ICF (indian Christian democratic part or All India muslim majilis.You need people to help people not Hindu’s or Christians or Muslims | 0 |

Appendix III: News Articles and Videos Analyzed

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Author | Date | Website | Article Title |
| N/A | February 23, 2017 | India Today Television | BMC election 2017: Women are safe in Mumbai because of Shiv Sena, says party MP Arvind Sawant |
| N/A | October 15, 2014 | News18 | Exit polls predict BJP surge, party set to form government in Haryana, Maharashtra |
| N/A | January 24, 2013 | Gulf News India | Shiv Sena gives knives to women: Party says move is to help protect themselves against rape |
| N/A | June 19, 2015 | IndiaToday.in | Shiv Sena, the regional political party was established today: All you should know about the party and its emergence with time |
| N/A | June 30, 2013 | Headlines Today | Shiv Sena’s women’s wing takes law into their own hands |
| DNA Correspondent | December 26, 2012 | Daily News & Analysis | Shiv Sena activists distribute chilli powder to women commuters |
| Neha Thirani Bagri | April 23, 2014 | The New York Times | What Female Voters Say About Women’s Safety in Mumbai |
| Sarah Gates | January 25, 2013 | HuffPost | Shiv Sena Party Gives Knives to Women For Protection in India |
| Sayli Udas Mankikar | November 19, 2012 | Hindustan Times | Mahila Aghadi, Sena’s women’s army that even scared the govt |
| Staff Reporter | June 8, 2013 | The Hindu | Now, Pune mannequins incur Shiv Sena ire |
| Jim Yardley | January 25, 2013 | The New York Times | India Needs to ‘Reset Its Moral Compass,’ President says |

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“Exit Polls Predict BJP Surge, Party Set to Form Government in Haryana, Maharashtra” (News18.com, 2014), accessed December 7, 2016, <http://www.news18.com/videos/politics/exit-poll-lead-720385.html>.

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1. This is based on several scholars’ competing explanations. These will be further discussed in the literature review section of the article. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Aaronette White and Shagun Rastogi, “Justice by Any Means Necessary: Vigilantism among Indian Women,” Feminism & Psychology, Vol. 19, 3 (313-327), 2009; Atreeyee Sen, “‘Exist, endure, erase the city’ (Sheher mein jiye, is ko sahe, ya ise mitaye?): Child vigilantes and micro-cultures of urban violence in a riot-affected Hyderabad slum,” *Ethnography*, Vol. 13, 1 (71-86), 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. White and Rastogi, 313-327. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Insa Nolte’s work focuses on vigilantism in Nigeria, with one article focusing exclusively on women’s role. Insa Nolte, “Without women, nothing can succeed’: Yoruba Women in the Oodua People’s Congress (OPC), Nigeria,” *Africa*, Vol. 78, 1 (84-106), 2008. Atreyee Sen also writes quite a bit on women’s issues and communalism in Indian slums. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Sayli Udas Mankikar, “Mahila Aghadi, Sena’s women’s army that even scared the govt,” *Hindustan Times,* November 19 2012, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/mumbai/mahila-aghadi-sena-s-women-s-army-that-even-scared-the-govt/story-872FX5i4QLU6rPCl45L8nJ.html> (Accessed: 16 November 2016) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Atreyee Sen and Rubina Jasani. “Mumbai (1992-1993) and Ahmedabad (2002), A Tale of Two Cities: Narratives of Violent and Victimized Women Enduring Urban Riots in India #Antroviolence,” *Allegra Lab,* November 4 2014, <http://allegralaboratory.net/mumbai-1992-93-and-ahmedabad-2002-a-tale-of-two-cities-narratives-of-violent-and-victimized-women-enduring-urban-riots-in-india/> (Accessed: 16 November 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Mary E. John and Tejaswini Niranjana. “Mirror Politics: ‘Fire,’ Hindutva and Indian Culture,” *Economic and Political Weekly,* Vol. 34, 10/11 (1999), 581-584. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Tarini Bedi. “The Dashing Ladies of the Shiv Sena,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 43, 17 (2007), 1534-1541. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Empowered is defined and used in how the actors creating these discourses use it. A piece that contributes to the heroine discourse is here: “Shiv Sena’s Women’s Wing Takes Law Into Their Own Hands” (India Today, June 13 2013), accessed November 16, 2016, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/video/shiv-sena-tehsildar-dhule-maharashtra-rana-bribe-sexual-favours/1/286188.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Nicole E. Haas et al. “Public support for vigilantism: an experimental study,” *Journal of Experimental Criminology,* Vol. 8, 4 (2012), 387-413. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Amy E. Nivette. “Institutional Ineffectiveness, Illegitimacy, and Public Support for Vigilantism in Latin America,” *American Society of Criminology,* Vol. 54, 1 (2016), 142-175; Haas et al., 387-413. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. David Pratten. “‘The Thief Eats His Shame’: Practice and Power in Nigerian Vigilantism,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute,* Vol. 78, 1 (2008), 64-83; Laurent Fourchard. “A New Name for an Old Practice: Vigilantes in South-Western Nigeria,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute,* Vol. 78, 1 (2008), 16-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ayona Datta. “The Intimate City: violence, gender and ordinary life in Delhi slums,” *Urban Geography,* Vol. 37, 3 (2016), 323-342; Atreyee Sen. “Ch. 9: ‘For Your Safety’: Child Vigilante Squads and Neo-Gangsterism in Urban India” in *Global Gangs: Street Violence across the World,* ed. Jennifer M. Hazen and Dennis Rodgers (University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 193-209; Lucy Bland. “‘Purifying’ the public world: feminist vigilantes in late Victorian England,” *Women’s History Review,,* Vol. 1, 3 (1992), 397-412. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Significant works are: Nivette, 142-175; Haas et al., 387-413. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Nivette, 142-175. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid, 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Haas et al., 387-413; Justice Tankebe and Muhammad Asif, “Police legitimacy and support for vigilante violence in Pakistan,” *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice*, Vol. 40, 4 (2016), 295-314. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Jim Handy. “Chicken Thieves, Witches, and Judges: Vigilante Justice and Customary Law in Guatemala,” *Journal of Latin America Studies,* Vol. 36, 3 (2004), 533-561. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Tankebe and Asif, 309. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Haas et al., 387-413. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid, 405. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Pratten, 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Fourchard, 16-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Aaronette White and Shagun Rastogi. “Justice by Any Means Necessary: Vigilantism among Indian Women,” *Feminism & Psychology,* Vol. 19, 3 (2009), 313-327. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Fourchard, 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. David Kowalewski. “Countermovement vigilantism and human rights,” *Crime, Law & Social Change,* Vol. 25, 1 (1996), 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Insa Nolte. “‘Without Women, Nothing Can Succeed’: Yoruba Women in the Oodua People’s Congress,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute,* Vol. 78, 1 (2008), 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Nivette, 142-175. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Sen, 199; Bland, 397-412. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Datta, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Datta, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Evi Girling et al. “A Telling Tale: A Case of Vigilantism and Its Aftermath in an English Town,” *The British Journal of Sociology,* Vol. 49, 3 (1998), 486. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Tarini Bedi. “The Dashing Ladies of the Shiv Sena,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 43, 17 (2007), 1534-1541; Girling et al, 486. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Bedi, 1534-1541. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Datta, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Atreyee Sen. “‘Exist, endure, erase the city’: Child vigilantes and micro-cultures of urban violence in a riot-affected Hyderabad slum,” *Ethnography,* Vol. 13, 1 (2012), 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Lisa Arellano. *Vigilantes and Lynch Mobs: Narratives of Community and Nation*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Handy, 533-561; Haas et al., 387-413. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Sen, “‘Exist, endure, erase the city’,” 71-86; Pratten, 64-83; Datta, 323-342; Sen, “Ch. 9: ‘For Your Safety’,” 193-209; quote is from Tankebe and Asif, 310 and refers to Pratten’s work (previously cited). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. I have included female voices, but public and official discourses are heavily male-dominated. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Here I refer to the work of Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, who explain the role of the interpretive research as “trying to understand things, events, and so on from the perspective of everyday actors in the situation.” Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow, *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes*, New York: Routledge, 2012, p. 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. I have, however, accessed and analyzed data sources from a few Mahila women via Twitter. These women are generally higher up in leadership in the Sena, one of whom is Dr. Neelam Gorhe. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. I draw upon Schwartz-Shea and Yanow’s description of trustworthiness, as achieved when I can be assured that I understand the meaning-making process, 92-107. They list deliberate ways of checking for this trustworthiness as: in-situ concept development, reflexivity, and constitutive understandings of causality, 99-100. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Tarini Bedi. “The Dashing Ladies of the Shiv Sena,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 43, 17 (2007), 1535. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Katherine Boo. *Behind the Beautiful Forevers: life, death, and hope in a Mumbai undercity* (New York: Random House, 2012), 1-256. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. I have learned some shortened terms by reading through my data, i.e.: UP = Uttar Pradesh (northern Indian state). [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. June Hannam, “Women’s History, Feminist History,” *Making History,* no date, <http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/womens_history.html> (Accessed 7 December 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Nancy F. Cott. *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987). [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Mankikar, “Mahila Aghadi, Sena’s women’s army that even scared the govt.” [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Srila Roy. *New South Asian Feminisms: Paradoxes and Possibilities*. (London: Zed Books, 2012); Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan. *Non-Western International Relations Theory: Perspectives on and beyond Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 1-256. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Atreyee Sen and Rubina Jasani. “Mumbai (1992-1993) and Ahmedabad (2002), A Tale of Two Cities: Narratives of Violent and Victimized Women Enduring Urban Riots in India #Anthroviolence,” *Allegra Lab,* November 4 2014, <http://allegralaboratory.net/mumbai-1992-93-and-ahmedabad-2002-a-tale-of-two-cities-narratives-of-violent-and-victimized-women-enduring-urban-riots-in-india/> (Accessed: 16 November 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. “Shiv Sena, the regional political party was established today: All you should know about the party and its emergence with time,” *India Today*, June 19, 2015, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/education/story/all-you-need-to-know-about-shiv-sena/1/445740.html> (Accessed: 7 December 2016). Article originates from New Delhi. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. A facebook page called “BAN Shiv Sena” has 34,213 likes. “BAN Shiv Sena,” *facebook page,* active since February 2010, accessed: December 7, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/BAN-Shiv-Sena-296699900777/>; “Exit Polls Predict BJP Surge, Party Set to Form Government in Haryana, Maharashtra” (News18.com, 2014), accessed December 7, 2016, <http://www.news18.com/videos/politics/exit-poll-lead-720385.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Ritika Tiwari, Tweet, July 25, 2016 (3:14 a.m.), accessed December 7, 2016, <https://twitter.com/indianscrewup/status/757519363943596033>. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. I draw on the work of Schwart-Shea and Yanow to understand exposure. Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow. *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 84-85. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Ibid, 84-85. One key example of intertextuality is President Mukherjee’s statement following the rape and murder of a woman in New Delhi in 2013: “When we brutalize a woman, we wound the soul of our civilization.” Here, audience members can only understand the full significance of this statement (a nod to the sanctity of women in Hinduism), if they have knowledge of Hinduism and India’s religious background. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. “Shiv Sena’s Women’s Wing Takes Law Into Their Own Hands” (India Today, June 13 2013), accessed November 16, 2016, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/video/shiv-sena-tehsildar-dhule-maharashtra-rana-bribe-sexual-favours/1/286188.html>; [Neha Thirani Bagri](http://india.blogs.nytimes.com/author/neha-thirani-bagri/). “What Female Voters Say About Women’s Safety in Mumbai,” *New York Times,* April 23 2014, <<http://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/04/23/what-female-voters-say-about-womens-safety-in-mumbai/?_r=0>> (Accessed: 16 November 2016) [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. This Facebook page has been liked by 34,050 people. “BAN Shiv Sena,” Facebook page*,* active since February 2010, accessed: December 7, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/BAN-Shiv-Sena-296699900777/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. I selected all tweets in a thread in which one person tweeted several times a few minutes apart to express a train of thought if they retweeted their previous tweet with each new tweet. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Denang Dave. Tweet, February 13, 2017 (8:53 a.m.), accessed March 2, 2017, <https://twitter.com/DevangVDave/status/831184415971799040>. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Balwan Rajput, Facebook post, December 27, 2013, accessed March 27, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/BAN-Shiv-Sena-296699900777/posts\_to\_page/; Sanjeev Kumar, Facebook post, February 11, 2017, accessed March 27, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/BAN-Shiv-Sena-296699900777/posts\_to\_page/; Rakesh Sehgal, Facebook post, October 31, 2015, accessed March 27, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/rakesh.sehgal.90/posts/10207177304884672>. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Rakesh Sehgal, Facebook post, October 31, 2015, accessed March 27, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/rakesh.sehgal.90/posts/10207177304884672>; *The Milli Gazette*, Facebook post, October 12, 2015, accessed March 27, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/milligazette/posts/1109266842424298>; Mumtaz Alam, Facebook post, October 12, 2015, accessed March 27, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/syedmumtazalam/posts/10205470394825280>. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Anurag Meharia. Tweet, March 2, 2017 (7:58 p.m.), accessed March 2, 2017, <https://twitter.com/ameharia/status/837512602548899840>. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Misha Dhorda. Tweet, February 21, 2017 (5:38 a.m.), accessed March 2, 2017, <https://twitter.com/Mishu27/status/834034508525600770>. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
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68. Denang Dave. Tweet, February 13, 2017 (8:47 a.m.), accessed March 2, 2017, https://twitter.com/DevangVDave/status/831183067700219905; Denang Dave. Tweet, February 13, 2017 (8:53 a.m.), accessed March 2, 2017, https://twitter.com/DevangVDave/status/831184415971799040; Misha Dhorda. Tweet, February 21, 2017 (5:38 a.m.), accessed March 2, 2017, <https://twitter.com/Mishu27/status/834034508525600770>; Misha Dhorda. Tweet, February 21, 2017 (5:44 a.m.), accessed March 2, 2017, <https://twitter.com/Mishu27/status/834036030193954816>; DNA. Tweet, January 27, 2017 (11:14 p.m.), accessed March 2, 2017, <https://twitter.com/dna/status/825240650610208769>; Madhuri D. Dusane. Tweet, January 28, 2017 (1:39 a.m.), accessed March 2, 2017, <https://twitter.com/mddusane/status/825277197820841988>; Ramesh. Tweet, January 27, 2017 (11:25 p.m.), accessed March 2, 2017, <https://twitter.com/ramesh94_bithar/status/825243467932696576>. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Much like symbolic statues of women popularized in the West, such as Lady Liberty and Lady Justice, women are constructed in abstract ways to represent the moral heart of the Indian nation. Following the rape and murder of a student in Delhi, President Mukherjee addressed the attack, saying that “when we brutalize a woman, we wound the soul of our civilization,” equating gender violence to an attack on the very essence of India. He is relating a narrative that portrays women as essential and valued for their traditional relation to morality. This is a reference to the belief in the sanctity of women within Hinduism; Yardley, Jim. “‘India Needs to ‘Reset Its Moral Compass,’ President Says,” New York Times, January 25, 2013, [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/26/world/asia/india-needs-to-reset-its-moral-compass-presidentsays.html?mtrref=undefined&gwh=262A13ACB58C3C4F3E2D2EDE670D4264&gwt=pay](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/26/world/asia/india-needs-to-reset-its-moral-compass-president-says.html?mtrref=undefined&gwh=262A13ACB58C3C4F3E2D2EDE670D4264&gwt=pay) (Accessed: 7 December 2016).. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Insa Nolte, for example, explains female participation in violence in Nigeria as based on recognition of women’s role as policers of morality, comparing their vigilante work to the work of mothers disciplining their children (Insa Nolte. “‘Without Women, Nothing Can Succeed’: Yoruba Women in the Oodua People’s Congress,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute,* Vol. 78, 1 (2008), 98); Laurent Fourchard. “A New Name for an Old Practice: Vigilantes in South-Western Nigeria,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute,* Vol. 78, 1 (2008), 16-40; Aaronette White and Shagun Rastogi. “Justice by Any Means Necessary: Vigilantism among Indian Women,” *Feminism & Psychology,* Vol. 19, 3 (2009), 313-327. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. “Shiv Sena power” (Youtube, 2016), accessed March 2, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B03gpUaQxtc>. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. “BMC election 2017: Women are safe in Mumbai because of Shiv Sena, says party MP Arvind Sawant” (India Today, 2017), accessed March 2, 2017, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/video/bmc-election-2017-civic-polls-shiv-sena-mp-arvind-sawant/1/889588.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Alakshya. Tweet, February 21, 2017 (6:16 a.m.), accessed March 2, 2017, <https://twitter.com/alakshya2/status/834044210814803969>; Gorhe, Dr. Neelam. Tweet, February 9, 2017 (3:26 a.m.), accessed March 2, 2017, <https://twitter.com/neelamgorhe/status/829652604271616000>; Siddhesh Sawant. Tweet, February 4, 2017 (12:54 a.m.), accessed March 2, 2017, <https://twitter.com/siddheshsawant_/status/827802572626857984>; Siddhesh Sawant. Tweet, February 4, 2017 (12:58 a.m.), accessed March 2, 2017, <https://twitter.com/siddheshsawant_/status/827803542182191105>; Tiwari, Ritika. Tweet, July 25, 2016 (3:14 a.m.), accessed December 7, 2016, <https://twitter.com/indianscrewup/status/757519363943596033>. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
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75. Manasi Phadke, “BMC results: Worrying signs for Shiv Sena despite victory in citadel Mumbai,” *Hindustan Times*, February 24, 2017 (Accessed: March 28, 2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. “Shivsena Raigadzilha Mahila Aghadi,” Facebook page, accessed March 28, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/MATAHIRKANI?fref=nf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. “BMC election 2017: Women are safe in Mumbai because of Shiv Sena, says party MP Arvind Sawant”; Staff Reporter, “Now, Pune mannequins incur Shiv Sena ire,” The Hindu, June 8, 2013, <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-newdelhi/now-pune-mannequins-incur-shiv-sena-ire/article4793611.ece> (Accessed: March 31, 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Staff Reporter, “Now, Pune mannequins incur Shiv Sena ire”; “Shiv Sena’s women’s wing takes law into their own hands” (Headlines Today, 2013), accessed March 2, 2017, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/video/shiv-sena-tehsildar-dhule-maharashtra-rana-bribe-sexual-favours/1/286188.html>; Sara Gates. “Shiv Sena Party Gives Knives to Women for Protection in India,” *The World Post*, January 15 2013, <<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/24/shiv-sena-india-political-party-distributes-knives-women_n_2545870.html>> (Accessed: December 7, 2016); [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. “Shiv Sena’s women’s wing takes law into their own hands” (Headlines Today, 2013), accessed March 2, 2017, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/video/shiv-sena-tehsildar-dhule-maharashtra-rana-bribe-sexual-favours/1/286188.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
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88. Datta, 323-342. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)