

**ONE HUNDRED YEARS  
ONE HUNDRED VOICES**

**The Millworkers of Girangaon: An Oral History**

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**WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
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NEERA ADARKAR  
MEENA MENON

## PREFACE

For over a century, the textile millworkers held centrestage in the history of Bombay. They were among the first migrants who came to the city, braving the arduous journey to work under extremely adverse conditions which included sickness and inhuman living arrangements. They put down roots, evolved social institutions and associations, fought great political battles, entertained and educated the city with their plays, their music and verse and influenced its economy, politics, culture and space in innumerable ways.

Over the past 20 years this community has been systematically displaced, dispossessed and marginalized, all in the name of progress and development. The two of us are an active part of a campaign questioning the desirability of such development. We have been associated with the workers, their families, local residents and Girangaon for 13 years now and continue to be part of the movement. This book was written because we wanted to give a voice, a platform, to the millworkers and their families. We wanted to share the inspiration we have gained through this association and to record their contribution to the city. We feel that the hitherto documented history of Bombay suffers from not having acknowledged this contribution adequately.

The history of India over the past 100 years is complex and full of unanswered questions. The history of Girangaon, part of this larger

canvas, offers many factors for study and analysis. We decided to restrict our parameters to a few important questions that were of personal interest to us as activists, as part of the left movement and as part of this history. We were among those who watched helplessly as communal riots ravaged our city, resenting the transformation of a place thought to be secular, hospitable and cosmopolitan. How did a city of migrants with such a diverse population, a history of left and secular movements, a strong trade union movement and democratic traditions erupt into violence against 'outsiders' and Muslims? What were the mistakes made by the left and secular forces? What was the reason for the support that people lent to forces like the Shiv Sena? What is the history that contributed to the formation of the collective consciousness of Bombay's people?

For the two of us, this book has been an educative and enlightening experience. We had seen the slow disintegration of the mills and the chawls and of the way of life that had evolved around them. We had fought alongside these people for their right to their future and continue to do so. Our research into the history of the millworkers and the area called Girangaon turned into a journey of discovery, a journey that took us through the history of which we ourselves are a part, a history that transcended the local to ultimately affect events and imaginations which in turn shaped modern India. We learnt much from the people we interviewed and gained valuable and sometimes surprising insights into many of the modern-day issues faced by the citizens, the political parties and even the policymakers of this country.

We chose the form of the oral narrative to write the story of Girangaon; it seemed appropriate and authentic that the story be told in the words of the actors. Many incidents referred to in this book are well known, even documented, but some are not. What emerges is the significantly different way of viewing history between those who participated in its making and the official documented version of the same. Sometimes these personal memories are inaccurate and this makes a statement about perception; often it casts doubts on the accuracy of the official or mainstream representation. This is workers' history, viewed through their eyes and recorded in their words. We have supplemented the interviews with our own research and documentation and have tried to use our experience and familiarity with the area and its people for the sake of authenticity. And we have been fortunate to be supported by a comprehensive introduction from well-known labour historian Prof. Chandavarkar whose research regarding Girangaon is without parallel.

Girangaon or the 'village of the mills' started its evolution in the mid-nineteenth century with the setting up of the first textile mill in 1851. The tall brick chimneys are, even today, a familiar part of the city's skyline. A journey from the southern tip of Bombay, past the Gothic and art deco structures, the graceful avenues of the residences of the prosperous to the central part of the city where the textile mills are located, seems to transport us into a different city altogether. Leave the broad main road and turn into the smaller lanes and this feeling grows more acute. The high walls that surround the mills, the chimneys looming above them, the unpainted chawls like three- or four-storeyed boxes, the vegetable and fruit vendors crowding the lanes and, when the shifts change, the streams of workers flowing to and from the mill gates—all combine to create an impression of a time warp, although this holds true for some areas only. There are others that have changed completely. Gleaming new high-rises soar up into the sky alongside the chimneys. Walled-in, exclusive upper middle-class residential complexes, exclusive restaurants, a fashionable studio and a popular discothèque stand cheek by jowl with the old, shabby tenements; the gentrification of the area is hard to ignore.

However, a vibrant community life still exists. In lane after lane, there are crowds of men at street corners, talking, arguing, gossiping; women in printed sarees accompanied by taffeta-ribboned young girls shop for groceries. Small shops sell colourful 'cut pieces' from the mills for skirts-and-blouses, cholis and shirts. In the courtyards and corridors of the chawls, women sit chatting, cleaning grain, cutting vegetables while some others roll bidis all day long. Children do their homework here, in the open, so as not to disturb fathers or brothers who may be sleeping after the night shift. The air reeks of tobacco and the typical aroma of sautéed onions and coconut, the base for any self-respecting Konkani<sup>1</sup> dish, whether fish, vegetable or the ubiquitous sprouted lentils. The powdered tobacco doubles up as toothpowder in these parts. Because of the different shifts there are always some workers lying asleep, inside or outside the tiny rooms. The continuous hiss of the kerosene stove hints at the ceaseless bustle in the kitchens since mealtimes within the family differ.

Unlike the rest of Bombay where each family in the neighbourhood speaks a different language and has a different cuisine, Marathi is the language that is most in use here, although dialects and pronunciations vary. A majority of the people belong to the Konkani belt although people from the Ghat<sup>2</sup> are present in large numbers too.

Girangaon stretches over a thousand acres, from Byculla to Dadar and from Mahalaxmi to Elphinstone Road, the central part of the island city of Bombay (see map). There are over 53 mills here, most shut down with the land sprouting high-rises, housing corporate offices and residences. There was a time when the community of millworkers was the very core of Girangaon which in turn formed the life and soul of the city. Today, although there are fewer millworkers, this continues to be a working-class belt with a population of almost 1,300,000, with its own community life and social structures which have evolved over the past 150 years.

Although Girangaon has traditionally been a working-class district, the prices of real estate have soared over the past decade and the chances of further 'developing' overcrowded and expensive South Bombay—the business district—diminished. Hence, the avaricious eyes of Bombay's powerful builder lobby turned to this area. Meanwhile, the once-flourishing mills had been rendered sick due to the sustained and illegal diversion of funds by the millowners into newer and more profitable industries. An irrational textile policy and globalization (represented by the Multi Fibre Arrangement which resulted in export-import quotas in favour of the developed countries) helped the dissolution. However, as far as the millowners were concerned, there was a killing to be made in real estate if the now prime land of the mills—an area comprising a total of 600 acres—could be sold. These lands were protected by legislation which stated that industrial land could not be easily turned into commercial and residential land. The requisite Floor Space Index was not available but this was speedily remedied by a more than willing state and municipal authority in 1990 with a new development plan. The mills went into a rapid state of decline faced with a situation where development was more lucrative than production. The power of the 'free market', the new mantra of the 'liberalization' pundits, again made its presence felt in the land policy. The private millowners acquired permission to sell their land after declaring it surplus (since permission in the Development Control Regulation applied only to surplus land) for the stated purpose of the revival of sick mills or modernization of others. No systems were set up for the monitoring of these monies and nor was the money ever spent for these stated purposes either by the Shiv Sena, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) or the Congress governments. Although the DC Regulation stipulated that one-third of the land should be used for public housing, millowners exaggerated the figures of the land under mill use (even if the mill was closed) in order to reduce the mandatory share of the land to be

handed over for public use. Land, the only remaining asset of great value in the Bombay mills, was disposed off and, in most cases, the owners then shut down the mills. A huge scam involving the sale of mill land is still in operation. Much of the land has been turned into luxury apartment complexes and entertainment centres for the rich, places which have nothing to do with the lives of the 1,300,000 people living in the area. There is not an inch of land that has gone into any productive employment-generating activity or even workers' housing. Phoenix Mills applied for permission to create a club and recreational facilities *for the workers of their mill*. What they did build was a fashionable bowling alley and a popular discothèque, places where millworkers and their families will never be allowed entry.

The struggle launched by our organization, the Girni Kamgar Sangharsh Samiti (Millworkers Action Committee) and the Bhadkaru Sangharsh Samiti (Tenants Action Committee) resulted in the State Government declaring an amendment to the existing DC Regulation 1991 in what seems, at a cursory glance, to be an action intended to protect millworkers and mill chawl tenants. The amendment allowed mill land to be developed, but laid down that the workers and their families had a right to the jobs generated by such development. The rights of the existing tenants of textile mill chawls was recognized. That, at least, was something to start with.

There is a history here that is in danger of being rewritten or forgotten in what is happening now in the name of modern development. For the people of Girangaon, this means the loss of jobs and the future of their children. It also means that there is a world growing around them in which they no longer have a part to play. For better or for worse, Girangaon was at the centre of the evolution of Bombay as a modern metropolis. The textile industry was one of the first modern industries in India and millworkers were among the pioneers of trade unions in the country. Girangaon was a stronghold of the Communist Party and therefore an important part of the history of Indian Independence. It is here that the Rightwing Marathi Hindu-chauvinist party called the Shiv Sena took shape and only later grew to occupy centrestage in Maharashtra and make forays into national-level politics. The Bombay mafia was born here. So the history of Girangaon can, in a sense, be called a history of modern India.

This volume does not deal with the present state of the textile industry in general nor Mumbai in particular but covers the period

from the mid-nineteenth century to 1983, a period crucial to the history of modern India. It is not an academic exercise as much as it is the story of people through which we get a perspective on the history of India, of the Indian working class and of Maharashtra and Bombay. The attempt has been to understand why they thought and did what they did, and we have tried to be empathetic rather than judgemental so as to give each interviewee the benefit of the doubt. This is modern history and if one believes that people are the motive force of history, then this is a history that needs to be told. Our foray into history helped us to understand, or at least get a glimpse of, what went wrong and why. We hope that this book will help provide some insight into how people create history, how they react to or influence events and how their consciousness translates into action.

This book represents our journey into our collective past and we hope our readers derive as much enjoyment from the reading as we did from the writing of it.

#### *Notes*

- 1 From Konkan, the western coastal strip of Maharashtra (see map).
- 2 The fertile plateau region of western Maharashtra including Kolhapur, Satara and Sangli.

#### **FROM NEIGHBOURHOOD TO NATION: THE RISE AND FALL OF THE LEFT IN BOMBAY'S GIRANGAON IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

If you stand at night on the roof of one of the recent, still under-occupied high-rise buildings erected on the property of a defunct mill in central Bombay and often named with a surreal flourish like Kalpataru Heights, or the Phoenix Towers that sprang from the ashes of a spinning mill, you will be treated to an instructive, indeed, allegorical, view of the city. Immediately at the base of the Heights upon which you stand will be a discernible circle of gloom. Further afield, a mile or two away, whether towards the bustling suburbs to the north or the old town and the business districts to the south, the city will be awash with electric light. As the city's textile mills have closed down, so the residents of Girangaon are enveloped in darkness in the geographical centre of one of the world's largest cities.

Two events in recent times have marked the ways in which Bombay's residents view their city, its culture and character, its position in the wider world and the social and political relations by which it is constituted—the decline and in large measure the closure of the textile industry since the late 1980s and the brutal pogrom against Muslims in December 1992 and January 1993 that followed the destruction of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya. Bombay's prodigious growth in the late nineteenth century and its claim to be a major metropolitan centre has, until recently, been

inextricably tied to the rise and growth of the cotton textile industry. The apparently precipitous decline of the industry has not only proved calamitous for some of its residents but has unsettled the city's sense of its own identity.

No sooner had the orgy of violence in 1993 ceased than Bombay's residents began to wonder how communal violence—perhaps an endemic feature of the wild and backward plains of the north—could have consumed their modern cosmopolitan city. The city's inhabitants, including those who had declaimed at the time that the Muslims needed to be taught a lesson or two, now picked over the causes and assessed who was to blame. Some perceived the manipulations of politicians and underworld bosses at work. Others saw in it the malevolent hand of 'anti-social' or 'lumpen' elements thus absolving themselves from any complicity in the violence. Many took it for granted that both these events were closely linked. De-industrialization and large-scale unemployment, it is said, gives rise to anger and frustration, lawlessness and anomie, and communal hatreds and elemental violence. Mounting evidence about the involvement of the 'respectable' middle classes, skilled workers, sometimes police and other officials—in itself wholly compatible with, and rendered plausible by, what we know about the appeal of *Hindutva* among high-caste, urban middle-class groups—suggests that such brisk conclusions might profitably be postponed.

On the other hand, these two determining events of the past 20 years—industrial decline and communalism—may be linked in a different perspective. They reflect fundamental changes that had been working their way through the city's social fabric. Perhaps the most significant of these changes has been the increasing marginalization of the urban poor and the working classes. Their claim to a stake within the city's social framework, never very secure, has been increasingly undermined, sometimes seemingly brushed aside. At first sight, the notion that the working classes could lay a stronger claim to inclusion within the social contract of the city in the early twentieth century may seem as implausible as the notion that it had weakened in the context of a vibrant, raucous democracy. But it merits some consideration. The rights and claims of the working classes in the early twentieth century, weak as they may have been, were neither created by the colonial autocracy nor granted by the city's ruling elites. They were seized by the momentum of popular political and industrial action. Conversely, the marginalization of the city's poor reflected the gradual breaking down of workers' resistance. At various times in the history of the cotton mills, workers' resistance has

been contained and beaten back. Its revival in the form of the general strike of 1982 hastened the flight of capital as the millowners sought to diversify their investment, outsource production to powerlooms and garment factories and realize the value of their vastly inflated real estate.

The closure of the industry was thus intimately related to the defeat of labour, the clawing back of their employment rights and the dissipation of their stake in the city. At the same time, the Shiv Sena, characterized by its explicitly communal agenda, actively contributed to and was at times even instrumental in undermining workers' resistance and in breaking the communist trade unions. The marginalization of the claims to citizenship of the working classes and the urban poor could not have been achieved without a wider degradation of governance. The closure of the industry was the culmination of political choices to which, in effect, some communal organizations contributed. Moreover, the stripping down and dismantling of the industry and the handling of its consequences reflected the ungenerous parameters within which the ruling elites and employers weighed up and calculated the rights which the poor and the working classes deserved. Conversely, the dismissal of the rights of the poor has sometimes, as one of a range of responses, elicited a communal turn. For it is through some communal organizations in their assertions of community that the urban poor have been able to declare, and sometimes no more than momentarily display, their claims to equality. In this sense, if de-industrialization and communalism are closely linked, it is not directly as economic cause and social effect but because of the immediate and intimate connections between the processes by which the stake of the poor in the city has been swept aside, and the quickening degradation of governance.

In this book, Neera Adarkar and Meena Menon offer a perspective on these transformations in the social relations of the city by examining the recent history of Girangaon, the mill village, as the cotton mill districts of Bombay city came to be known to its residents. Their history is based on the oral testimonies of millworkers, Girangaon residents, trade union leaders, political commentators and political activists. Since these interviews were conducted at the end of the twentieth century, the oral testimonies reach back into the 1930s but necessarily tell their most concentrated story for the period between the 1940s and the general strike of 1982. Neera Adarkar and Meena Menon have made a vital contribution to the recent history of the labour movement and of Bombay city. As a work of oral history, its significance is pioneering. The oral testimonies collected here illuminate not only the past but also the crises that the city and its working classes face today.



The book makes its most powerful contribution by enabling 'a hundred voices', frequently silenced in the archives and the historical records, to be heard. Indeed, for the most part, the working classes have remained silent in Indian history. The voices of their political representatives have sometimes been treated interchangeably with their own expression of their concerns, aspirations and social experiences. Workers' concerns are thus often made available through the petitions mounted on their behalf by lawyers and activists. Their acts of resistance and protest are transmitted through newspaper or police intelligence reports. The significance of their strikes and political activism is sometimes gleaned through the assessments of civil servants, political commentators and trade union leaders. Their motives and ideologies are briefly glimpsed through the prism of collective action or in the claims and the rhetoric of their spokesmen.

As a result, historians who have sought to unravel what they saw as the specificities, even peculiarities, of working-class culture have often found themselves replicating the stereotypes and social prejudices of its many interlocutors: civil servants and employers, police reporters and political commentators, social observers and political leaders. The sometimes unexamined assumptions of contemporary elites, whether these have related to the characterization of the 'rural mentalities' of the workers, their caste, 'communal' or 'pre-industrial' consciousness, their inherent religiosity, their filial dependence on their patrons and leaders or their volatility and inherent propensity to violence and roughness, have thus often passed seamlessly into the conclusions of historians and social scientists. For this reason, by systematically recording the testimonies of workers, as well as those who led, fought, observed or attempted to control them, Adarkar and Menon have moved our inquiries forward in promising directions. Moreover, oral history remains an unduly neglected field and an under-used technique in the study of Indian society. It is to be hoped that this book will stimulate a greater interest in and engagement with the methods and possibilities of oral history.

It has become increasingly apparent that urban space has exerted a major influence in shaping the history of the working classes in India, as indeed elsewhere. For this reason, it is important for historians to pay particular attention to the social relations of the neighbourhood. Terms like 'neighbourhood' or 'community' have often nudged historians and social scientists towards an assumption of their homogeneity or even of an inherent social harmony. However, collectivities, shared values and a sense of mutuality are not necessarily predicated upon proximate living.

Indeed, to a large extent, close connections are forged in the neighbourhood most extensively in conditions in which the survival strategies of its residents force them to draw heavily upon their friends and relatives. Yet it is precisely in these conditions that social relations are most explicitly characterized by competition and conflict. It is by recognizing how far the social relations of neighbourhood are constituted by antagonisms and conflicts, rather than by assuming a natural harmony, that it might be possible to discern and delineate more accurately the bonds of commonality that are forged within them. The social relations of Girangaon were constituted primarily by its daily tensions and conflicts and increasingly by its experience of political and industrial struggle. The making of Girangaon was in a fundamental sense an explicitly political process.

The character of social relations in Girangaon, as well as its place within the city as a whole, changed substantially since its formation in the late nineteenth century. In the early twentieth century, the neighbourhood represented the most crucial social arena in which the solidarities of the working classes in Bombay were forged. In fact, in important ways, the social relations of the neighbourhood, particularly in the case of Girangaon, were constituted neither by social homogeneity nor by a harmony created by the act of living together but by political conflict, at various levels, from the family and the chawl to the mill and the state. At the end of the twentieth century, as the cotton textile industry was dismantled, the politics of urban space impinged upon the residents of Girangaon, and indeed of the city as a whole, in a radically different way. For the residents of Girangaon, and for the millworkers among them, the portentous question was, as it remains today, how they might extricate an equitable settlement from the debris of industrial collapse. At the same time, the deployment and usage of the mill lands as well as the vast expanses of dock lands pose important questions both for the fate of those who live within them as well as for the character of the city and its future. The strategic utilization of these lands in the centre of one of the world's largest and fastest growing cities could determine how far its urban future can be secured, how sustainable its growth might be and how habitable it will be for its residents and its workers over the next few generations.<sup>1</sup>

#### THE MAKING OF GIRANGAON<sup>2</sup>

From the earliest days of the industry, Girangaon had witnessed extensive industrial action. Commentators observed the frequency of strikes since at least the 1880s. In the early 1890s, workers coordinated strikes across

several mills, for instance, in the Heeramaneck and subsequently, the Sassoon group. When mills began to extend the working day competitively, with the introduction of electricity, they also manipulated wages and thus provoked further strikes, culminating in a general strike when Tilak<sup>3</sup> was sentenced to transportation in 1908. During the First World War and in its immediate aftermath, strikes occurred with increasing frequency, both within the industry and outside, until the millworkers mounted and sustained industrial action on an unprecedented scale and for extensive periods in the general strikes of 1919 and 1920. Between 1918 and 1940, eight general strikes occurred in Girangaon. None of them lasted for less than a month. The general strikes of 1928–29 lasted in effect for 18 months.

From the late 1920s onwards, especially during the general strike of 1928, the labour movement came to be dominated by a communist leadership. Around these general strikes in the 1920s and 1930s, there occurred over 1000 strikes in individual mills and departments. Not surprisingly, Girangaon sometimes came to be seen by the city's elites, especially in the late 1920s, as an insurrectionary centre. By the late 1940s, the support that the communists commanded among the workers had begun to dwindle by comparison with the heady days of the late 1920s. Nonetheless, they continued to elicit substantial support in Girangaon until the 1970s. The communists played a prominent role in the general strikes of 1950 and 1974 and they remained a major electoral force in the area. They were capable of mobilizing votes and winning seats and, at the very least, of determining the outcome of elections to the Municipal Corporation, the State Assembly and indeed the Lok Sabha. This scale of industrial action, especially that witnessed between 1918 and 1940, could only be sustained because workers were able to draw heavily upon the social organization of the neighbourhood. Similarly, the decline of the left, and indeed the weakening of workers' resistance, was closely connected with fundamental changes in the social character of Girangaon and its relationship to the city after the Second World War.

There was clearly an important spatial dimension to the development of workers' politics in Bombay. The neighbourhood was a crucial arena in which the solidarities of the working-class politics were forged. Indeed, the workplace and the neighbourhood cannot be treated as neatly distinguished social spheres in examining the development of workers' politics in Bombay, and perhaps elsewhere. Rather, the social contours of Girangaon were shaped by the nature of the labour market, the division of labour and the organization of work. They were also influenced by the

close connections that workers' families maintained between the urban neighbourhood and their rural base.

Girangaon began to take shape in the late nineteenth century. Between 1840 and 1880, Bombay city grew rapidly and first acquired the character of a major metropolitan centre. By the early twentieth century, its claim to be an industrial centre turned wholly on the cotton mills. Although the first mills were built in the 1850s, the industry expanded substantially only in the 1870s and 1880s. Mills now proliferated to the north of the 'native' town. The average number of workers employed daily in the mills increased from 13,500 in 1875 to nearly 76,000 in 1895 and then doubled again by the early 1920s.<sup>4</sup> But this figure conceals the fact that at least a third as many additional workers were needed to sustain this daily average through the year. In the late nineteenth century, workers moved out of the northern areas of the 'native town' and into Girangaon. The mill districts expanded rapidly in the early twentieth century. The population of Parel and Byculla, for instance, doubled between 1891 and 1921 while Sewri and Worli expanded nearly five-fold.<sup>5</sup> Increasingly, those who hoped to work in the mills began to settle in their vicinity. A survey conducted by the Labour Office in 1925 revealed that 90 per cent of the millworkers lived within a 15-minute walk from their place of employment.<sup>6</sup> As Bombay's population grew exponentially after Independence, workers slowly began to disperse and larger numbers travelled into Girangaon from further afield in the city.

This growing concentration in Girangaon of mills and ancillary workshops, millworkers and job seekers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reflected in some measure the inadequacy of the city's infrastructure, especially the cost and scarcity of transport and housing. But it was also influenced by the labour policies and business strategies of the millowners. Inhospitable and sometimes arbitrarily changing conditions and hours of work, uncertain and irregular employment and low wages made it essential for workers to live near their place of work. The mills hired labour according to need, which varied not only from day to day but at times also fluctuated on a single day within the same mill. Notionally at least, workers were hired at the mill gates each day. By virtue of their connections with a jobber, their particular skills and experience or their role within a team, some workers acquired a semblance of a grip on their jobs. But only the most optimistic and foolhardy could rely upon the permanence of their employment. Their social connections built up in the neighbourhood, often originating in affinities of caste, kinship and village, became vital to workers both in their attempts to find

jobs, housing and credit and in seeking support in times of unemployment, sickness or family crisis.

Most workers were migrants to the city. In 1921, about 84 per cent of the city's population had been born outside Bombay.<sup>7</sup> Fifty years later, the city's labour force still consisted largely of rural migrants.<sup>8</sup> The predominant pattern was for young males to come to the city in search of wages, generally leaving their families behind in the village to look after their holdings. They came to the city to work and often returned to their village in old age, in periods of sickness or unemployment and, of course, each year to help with the harvest.<sup>9</sup> For many working-class families, the purpose of migration was to enhance the family's resources in order to enable them to hold on to their stake in the village, not generally for the individual to escape from its clutches.<sup>10</sup> The access to cash and credit which urban employment, especially industrial wages, sometimes afforded them, also enabled them to settle their debts in the village, buy seed and hold on to their plots. It sometimes enabled their families to subsist even after the village plot had become a fading memory. It was a matter of the utmost significance for the social relations of Girangaon that migration was driven not by social mobility but by poverty.

Not surprisingly, therefore, workers rarely migrated alone but usually within the framework of their caste, kinship and village connections. They came to the city along already established routes. It was with the help of relatives and friends, co-villagers and caste fellows that they tried to find work, shelter and sometimes credit in the city. Workers who were already established in the city maintained and renewed their rural connections by helping kin and caste fellows when they first arrived. This pattern of migration thus forged for most workers a nexus of social connections which integrated not only the rural and urban economy but also workplace and neighbourhood. They served to constitute the working-class neighbourhoods and, indeed, to shape the organization of work even if they were by no means the only or the determining influence upon these social arenas. These social connections provided the basis of their welfare protection in times of crisis. To be known in the neighbourhood eased workers' paths in raising credit in a period of unemployment or sickness and in finding shelter when they could no longer pay their rents. It enabled them to organize to defend their wages or conditions of work or to protect their jobs when they went on strike. It is not intended to suggest that their place in the working-class neighbourhoods was sufficient to provide such protection but it was often a necessary minimum to help tide them over a crisis.

This nexus between workplace, neighbourhood and village was further soldered by the methods of recruitment that prevailed in the industry. In the early twentieth century, certainly until the 1930s, the millowners depended very largely upon jobbers to recruit and discipline workers. They looked to the jobbers to maintain an adequate supply of relatively docile labour with an optimum level of skill and experience in the face of fluctuating demand. This was never easy to achieve. To ensure a regular supply of labour and to exert their control over the workers, the jobbers in turn recruited within networks of kinship, caste, village and neighbourhood. Through these networks, jobbers often acquired considerable influence in Girangaon. They sometimes acted as creditors, as landlords or as the intermediaries for grain dealers, moneylenders and landlords. In this way, they performed a significant role and acquired considerable influence in the housing, credit and labour markets. No jobber could expect to impose his authority in the workplace unless he also cut a figure in the neighbourhood. In any event, the jobber's connections were valuable to the workers whom he hired when they sought credit or housing. The jobber's patronage was particularly crucial for workers who had recently arrived in the city. In this way, as Girangaon formed, the jobber's role served to integrate the workplace and the neighbourhood. It should not be supposed that the jobber was the only kind of patron in the working-class neighbourhoods. However, by straddling workplace and neighbourhood, his role became symptomatic of the social relations that developed around the textile industry and that served to constitute Girangaon and to shape its social character.

By enumerating his functions, it would be easy to conclude that the jobber was a monolithic and homogenous institution. In fact, there were many kinds of jobbers and their influence in the neighbourhood often varied according to their place within the labour process in the mills. Conversely, not all jobbers sought and developed extensive social and political connections in the neighbourhood. Some jobbers obtained their position because they were *dadas*, who led and organized gymnasiums and built up links with other greater patrons, politicians and power brokers in Girangaon. Others were more modest figures, whose reputation did not extend far beyond the mill or their chawl and immediate neighbourhood. While the jobber's role was not monolithic, nor was it unchanging. The power and influence of the jobber, and his place within the workforce, changed substantially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. As general strikes occurred with greater frequency across the industry, it soon became apparent to the millowners that the

jobbers could no longer be relied upon to deliver a docile and pliant labour force. More crucially, perhaps, the jobbers could no longer serve as an effective bulwark against industrial action. By the 1930s, the millowners had begun to look for alternative methods of labour control in the industry. By the 1950s, the jobber's influence was considerably diminished and his role within the mills was radically transformed. The jobber now ceased to be the agent of recruitment and discipline and was integrated into the structure of supervision and pacemaking in the mills. Workers with aspirations to influence in the neighbourhood now no longer saw their appointment as jobbers as a necessary, let alone a significant, step towards their goal.

Clearly, labour migration was a highly gendered process. Women's experience of migration cannot be readily assimilated to these generalizations.<sup>11</sup> The sex ratio of the population of the city reflected the fact that it was primarily young males who came to the city. Until the mid-twentieth century, there were at least two men for every woman living in the city. Girangaon was, in particular, a predominantly male space. The predominance of adult male migration was not simply the consequence of traditional, culturally specific inhibitions on women's work and migration. Certainly, it reflected a continuing attempt by families, castes and villages to retain control over female mobility and labour. However, it was determined largely by the gendered character of employment opportunities. After factory legislation began to restrict the hours of women's work in the cotton mills in 1891, their employment dwindled. Until then, the proportion of women employed in the cotton mills had been increasing. In the 1890s, the proportion of women employed in the mills declined. Subsequently, the introduction of maternity benefits in 1929 further dissuaded millowners from hiring women except in defined and restricted occupations. As Rukmini Ainpure and others testify in the pages that follow, the millowners 'did not like to employ women mainly because they did not like to give maternity benefits' (Chapter One, p. 103). In other words, millowners prized their freedom to deploy labour as flexibly as they chose and on their own terms. When categories of workers, such as women and children, were protected by legislation, they preferred to exclude them as far as possible from the labour force. Women's employment in the Bombay cotton mills was thus restricted from the late nineteenth century onwards to the two occupations of reeling and winding.

Once the cotton mills began to hire fewer women, it left no large, staple employers of female labour in the city. From the late nineteenth

century onwards, women who migrated to the city often found themselves consigned to the casual labour market or what later came to be called the 'informal sector'. Low wages, irregular employment and poor conditions, and thus low skill and low status, characterized women's work. Thus when men migrated to the city, women frequently remained in the village to cultivate their plot or supplemented their earnings through agricultural labour. For the most part, women migrated to the city only in distress. Whole families migrated either only when they were sufficiently prosperous to live together or when they had no other options, for instance during famines or when they had completely lost their stake in the village. Thus jobbers and skilled weavers sometimes brought their families to the city. Similarly, women migrated to the city when they had no other options—for instance, when they were widowed or deserted by their husbands or when they were cast out of the family. It would be folly to underestimate the number of women who came to the city to escape the control of their families.

Since women's work was associated with low status, low skill and low wages, it was often a mark of status and respectability for male workers in the city to withdraw the labour of their wives and daughters when they could, especially in periods of economic buoyancy. Conversely, it was when their husbands, sons and fathers were thrown out of work, when the market slumped or when their village base was undermined by a crop failure, that women were forced to seek employment. Thus, it was frequently the case that women sought to enter the labour market when jobs were scarce and to withdraw in times of buoyancy when their bargaining position was strong. As a result, their efforts to entrench themselves within the labour market were undermined. In the long run, it became impossible to remedy and transform the structural weaknesses in their bargaining position.

Women's work and mobility thus became subject to, and dependent upon, the circumstances of the family and especially its adult males. Necessarily, this also limited their control of the family's resources. In this way, patriarchal control over women's mobility and employment created the conditions for the exploitation of their labour as well as their bodies. Just as social aspiration was expressed through the withdrawal of women's labour, their commitment to the labour market was, because of the association of women's work with low status, meagre wages and poor conditions, accompanied by the withdrawal of respectability from working women. Women who worked in the cotton mills, often single, widowed or deserted, were usually assumed in public discourse to lack respectability

and to be promiscuous and morally tainted. The weakness of their position in the labour market often served to undermine their status within the household. Moreover, this discourse about women's work was often elaborated in times of labour resistance and political conflict. In effect, it fortified attempts to limit their claims to, and control their use of, public space. Sexual taunts, for instance, were commonly used both by women against those who attempted to cross the picket lines and against women when they attempted to go to work during a strike. Similarly, in periods of communal violence, women were taken to symbolize their 'community' and both venerated and violated accordingly. Political assertiveness, indeed labour activism, often proliferated similar representations of women. As Prema Purav recalls, 'When a woman became [politically] active, the first thing people would say was, she has questionable morals'. Indeed, this is how, according to Prema Purav, they spoke about the redoubtable Parvatibai Bhor, one of the legendary figures of the city's labour and communist movements since the 1930s [Chapter Two, p. 163].

It was not simply the means by which workers found and defended their jobs but especially the widespread and shared experience of unemployment that brought workplace and neighbourhood closely into relation with each other. To deal with the inherent insecurity of their existence and arbitrary and unpredictable changes in their circumstances, most workers had to organize outside the mill by maintaining close connections with their villages, their caste fellows and kin. Frequently room—and rent—sharing arrangements in the city were organized along lines of caste, kinship and village, whereby those who were earning would help those who were unemployed to tide them over periods of difficulty. Several testimonies in the pages that follow describe the workings of the *galas*, the *khanavals* and the *gaonkari mandals* around which these arrangements for mutual help were based. Similarly, when grain dealers, moneylenders and landlords extended credit or rolled over debts, they were acting in part in their own commercial interests. But they were also thereby paying heed to their debtors' social connections in the neighbourhood or responding to and respecting the familiarity of neighbourhood acquaintance. Sometimes they recognized that they could, by tightening credit, incur the wrath of the whole neighbourhood. In an important sense, therefore, the social organization of Girangaon was shaped by the survival strategies of its residents. This social organization had, after all, formed around the struggle to secure and retain jobs, gather and defend wages, find housing and obtain credit.

Caste, kinship and village connections were therefore vital to workers as they organized for life in Girangaon and, not surprisingly, their significance has endured. Since recent migrants as well as longer established inhabitants of Girangaon found a measure of security and protection through these affinities, it followed that caste clusters formed both in occupations and in residential patterns. But this did not mean Girangaon was neatly segregated by caste and religion. The patterns of association and sociability of Girangaon's residents formed around overlapping and intersecting affinities of caste and kinship, village and urban neighbourhood, religion and occupation. Caste and religion were not by any means the sole organizing principle of social life. In any case, caste differences were neither defined nor deployed in a systematic and consistent manner. In the early twentieth century, the caste groupings that contemporary observers identified within the working classes were often large caste blocks rather than endogamous jatis and sometimes nothing more than loosely defined regional, religious or even linguistic groupings. Caste associations in Bombay sometimes brought together those related by jati and kin who belonged to a collection of villages in the district from which the workers had migrated. Sometimes they limited themselves to the residents of a particular neighbourhood in the city. Some caste mandalis operated across the boundaries of jati. In the 1960s, the majority of caste mandalis among migrants from Ratnagiri were organized by village rather than by jati, while no more than two-fifths of their number bothered to join mandalis defined by caste.<sup>12</sup> Migrants from Maruti Satkar's village, already established in Bombay, had set up and organized the room in which he lived on coming to city. 'Only people from our village,' he recalled, 'are allowed to stay in those galas. There are people from all castes' [Chapter One, p. 100]. Maratha, and to a lesser extent Muslim, weavers fought to defend their skilled position within the workforce partly by keeping dalits out of the weaving shed. Despite the very considerable restructuring and reorganization of work which occurred from the 1930s onwards, and which quickened after the 1940s, weavers continued successfully to sustain these exclusionary practices. Since these reforms, passing under the label of 'rationalization', sought to undermine the status and bargaining power of weavers, it is especially remarkable that they were able to continue to insist upon the exclusion of dalits over such a long period. Indeed, in view of the millowners' attempts to break the bargaining power of weavers since the 1910s, it is even more surprising that they tolerated the latter's stance of caste exclusion.

Forms of caste exclusion were indeed practised, not only by weavers seeking to avert the dilution of their skilled status but by various workers across the industry. It is still sometimes too readily assumed that urbanization dissolved caste differences or that workers' perception of their common interests allowed them to transcend its divisions. In practising caste exclusion, workers sometimes expressed no more than a narrow bigotry and sometimes a general social aspiration. As Datta Iswalkar points out, 'upper-caste workers' would not drink water from a pot filled by a mahar, or indeed, eat with dalits:

They would sit and chew paan with him [Vishnu, a mahar worker in Modern Mills] but they would not drink water from his hands! They never treated him badly, they were friends with him, but they would never go to his house. Or eat out of a lunchbox bought by any of the mahars. The funny thing is the Marathi workers were unable to judge the caste of the North Indian workers. So they could not practise untouchability with them! [Chapter One, p. 113]

Similarly, Sheikh Jainu Chand, a communist and one of Girangaon's leading *shahirs* (bards), recalled that the *khanaval* at which he boarded when he first came to Bombay in the 1940s was run by a Hindu woman from the Ghat and attended by 'Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, etc. . . . The textile workers would all eat very well. No, there was no untouchability or casteism in the *khanaval*.' [Chapter One, p. 140]. Although Sheikh Jainu Chand's *khanaval* may not necessarily have been exceptional, it would be unduly optimistic to suppose that workers practised no caste exclusion. In any case, as he pointed out himself, it was only after the communal riots of 1946-47 that 'Muslims lived together for security.' Social segregation was necessarily accentuated by communal violence, but it rarely endured.

The physical structure of the working-class neighbourhoods ensured that the distinction between private and public space was sometimes worn to the point of obliteration. Social life often acquired an essentially public quality. This was the consequence in part of proximity and overcrowding. It also followed from the patterns of building and settlement. Girangaon was by no means among the most densely inhabited areas of the city in the 1920s and 1930s. Nonetheless, its ramshackle, jerry-built chawls were often packed closely into spaces between streets and municipal thoroughfares. Since land was expensive, tenurial conditions complex and, most crucially, returns on rentals for the poor invariably low, builders filled their sites with chawls and squeezed into them as

many tenements as they could. They also economized on the quality of materials and construction and on the provision of sanitation. Since the late nineteenth century, observers noted 'the sacrifice in durability' in these buildings. Chawls which boasted more than the most minimal plumbing were, as if for their hubris, subjected to 'the speedy dilapidation of timber-frame buildings' as 'the constant soaking from the washing places produces rapid rot of pillars and posts.'<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, several of these older chawls have endured better than more recent attempts to build low-rent accommodation for the poor.

Chawls were usually one- or two-storeyed buildings in which rooms ran off an ambulatory corridor or verandah. Common washing facilities and lavatories were located at one end of the corridor. Taps were scarce, quickly ran dry in the summer (and even more consistently as the city's water problems grew in the 1950s) and often became a flashpoint of conflict between neighbours. Overcrowding of chawls and rooms within them made it even harder to gain access to the tap. Anxiety about the water running out or the fear that they would not get to the mill on time added an edge to the often frenzied competition among neighbours for their moment at the tap. Water probably generated more feuding, enmity and violence than any other aspect of chawl life. The tap should douse cold water upon any romantic assumptions about the natural warmth and camaraderie of neighbourhood life. In fact, fighting around the water pipes in the chawls contributed to a steady flow of assault cases to the city's police courts.<sup>14</sup>

The extent of overcrowding ensured that the distinction between the home and the street, between private and public space, could not easily be sustained. The residents of Girangaon's chawls spilled out into the verandahs, the *wadis* (small residential precincts) and the streets. In view of this overcrowding, the Census Commissioner in 1931 found 'nothing remarkable in the fact' that 'the streets are used at night as sleeping places'. For three-quarters of the city's population lived in single-room tenements in 1931 in which 'the average floor space available for each occupant cannot be more than what can be covered by a small mat.'<sup>15</sup> Already at the time, between 30 and 40 per cent of the residents of Girangaon lived in one-room tenements inhabited by more than six people. In Byculla, barely one per cent of the population, and in Parel and Mazagaon no more than 12 per cent, lived with fewer than three others in a single room.<sup>16</sup> This density of occupation only became greater as the twentieth century wore on. The implementation of multiple-shift working from the late 1930s, a practice that increased considerably in the

1940s and 1950s, enabled landlords and rent collectors to pack their chawls yet more intensively. Shivaji Divte describes how, in the 1960s and 1970s, as each shift set off for work from the gala of the Pimpalgaon Gaonkari Mandal, another returned from the mills to sleep. 'There are 20 to 30 people in each room. How do we manage? Well, because there are three shifts.' Once night shifts ceased, the number of tenants became yet harder to manage. If a mill closed, if there was a public holiday or if a strike occurred, 'we had a real problem' [Chapter One, p. 96]. The social organization of the neighbourhood was so closely integrated with the rhythms and imperatives of work that the decline and the closure of the textile industry in the 1980s posed major, often insuperable problems for the institutional arrangements and social relations of Girangaon.

#### THE POPULAR CULTURE OF GIRANGAON

The public spaces of the street and the neighbourhood thus had a private dimension, just as the private spaces of the family and home were constituted by public processes. Moreover, the processes that acted upon the social organization of the neighbourhood in the early twentieth century transcended locality and linked Girangaon to the villages of the Desh (western Maharashtra) and the Konkan coast or, increasingly, further afield to the Gangetic plains and the Tamilnadu countryside. The arena of the street and neighbourhood did not simply derive from the material needs of the working classes. It was substantiated by leisure and sociability as well. It was in particular constituted in important respects by the politics of Girangaon and especially the traditions, memories and experience built up by decades of industrial conflict and political struggle.

In the context of overcrowding, the street corner offered a meeting place. Street entertainers, from monkey players to *kadaklakshmis*, were a recurrent feature of Girangaon's daily, public theatre.<sup>17</sup> The tea vendor, it was said, provided an information exchange, acquiring and dispensing news and gossip. At the teashops and the pleaders' offices, those who could read the newspapers out to those who could not.<sup>18</sup> Liquor shops and akhras drew their members from the neighbourhood. Landlords sometimes owned grain shops on the ground floor of their chawls and required their tenants to patronize them. In this way, the landlord hoped that his tenants would deepen their debts and their dependence upon him. Chawls, streets and neighbourhoods organized communal activities, including occasions of religious observance whether satyanarayan pujas, Moharram tolis, Gokulashtmi melas or what became the increasingly popular observance of Tilak's invention, the Ganeshotsav. Often, chawl

committees and gaon mandalis even acted as tribunals, settling disputes between neighbours and on occasion, imposing their moral expectations upon tenants and members. Chawl committees sometimes organized to represent the interests of the residents against landlords and his rent collectors, or in their dealings with municipal officials or the police. Local and neighbourhood organization thus reached into the more rarified spheres of institutional politics in the early twentieth century.<sup>19</sup> The growth of democratic politics and electoral competition after Independence further developed and elaborated these connections.

Several voices in the pages that follow attest to the long historical memory of Girangaon's culture. Speakers identify the changing character of Ganeshotsav across the twentieth century. Tilak had sought to establish the festival to wean Hindus away from participation in Moharram. Its observance imitated many of the collective and popular aspects of Moharram which British officials, ashraf elites and high-minded reformers had darkly perceived as 'saturnalian'. The final procession, which led to the immersion of Ganpati in the sea, was its high point. Like the *waaz* (sermon) delivered in the mosques, lectures on political themes were often associated with the festival. Until the 1970s, the public observance of Ganpati had an important secular dimension. The characteristics for which Ganpati elicited both admiration and affection were his irreverence, his benign sense of mischief and his good-hearted fallibility. As Vijay Khatu recalled,

The Ganeshotsav was not just a religious festival, but a means to gather people for a comparatively harmless purpose . . . There was a pride in one's own locality, which is the case even today [Chapter One, p. 107].

Khatu, a leading sculptor of Ganpati idols, linked himself, with considerable historical precision, to 'the second oldest' Ganeshotsav mandal in Bombay. He was able to date the growing 'practice of making huge Ganpati idols' precisely to 1953 and the institution of *chakri vyakhnamalas* and lectures on political and moral subjects, akin to the *waaz* heard during Moharram, to the days of the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement in the late 1950s. However, political discourses were, to a greater or lesser extent, associated with the festival from the outset. The observance of the festival increasingly acquired a religious significance as well as a narrowing communal definition. By the 1980s, in the wake of the Shiv Sena's increasingly prominent public presence, what had been an open, all-comers ritual of inversion and celebration of mischief and irreverence became an expression of 'Hindu' triumphalism.

As various artists and performers describe their lives in the 1940s and 1950s, Adarkar and Menon disclose, for the first time, the depth and liveliness of a popular artistic culture in Girangaon. The 'theatre of the street' now acquired an increasingly organized shape. The popular entertainers of the 1910s that Parvatibai Bhor recalled in her memoir had given way, by the 1940s, to increasingly differentiated and sophisticated forms of cultural production.<sup>20</sup> Significantly, the artists themselves, in their testimonies, differentiate specialisms within their art forms, distinguish carefully between them, locate themselves rather precisely within their particular history and identify the provenance and complex development of their art forms. Performers had a lively sense of their own artistic history. Annabhau Sathe's 'Mumbaichi Lavni' was a conscious tribute to Pathe Bapurao. The loknatya tradition explicitly drew upon and closely associated itself with the tradition of the Satyashodhak *jalsas* or dance dramas. Nivrutti Pawar recalled how his first visit to see Pathe Bapurao's tamasha shaped his future as a shahir: 'with the very first beat of the dholak, I felt a tingling throughout my body.' (Chapter One, p. 119). Subsequently, he took his first steps towards becoming a singer when he began to accompany Shahir Haribhau Bhandari as he peddled *khaja* through the streets of Girangaon. As a result, he began to acquire a reputation as a singer. 'I started getting invited to sing at functions' and thus, gradually became a professional singer and poet. 'Shahir', as he pointed out, 'is a title people give you. It is not a title conferred by any institution.' (Chapter One, p. 120). In this sense, it was not very different from those who came to be known as *dadas*. In much the same way, Vijay Khatu was closely aware of the legends of his own craft as a sculptor of Ganpati statues and indeed his own artistic lineage: Shyam Sarang from the Chinchpokli Ganeshotsav Mandal and 'then there was Welling—he was a great artist. He was the guru for our generation, a perfectionist.'

Several people testified to the range of artistic performance that inundated the streets and wadis of Girangaon by the mid-twentieth century. As Nivrutti Pawar described it,

When you walked down the streets, you would hear bhajans and kirtans. We would go and watch the sculptors work on the Ganpati idols in Lalbaug for the Ganeshotsav in September. There were rangoli artists who made beautiful paintings. There were so lifelike, when you looked at them, you felt they would open their mouths and speak. They were drawn on the road, and people would come to see them. Where is the space to do

that now, when the cars even climb the footpaths? [Chapter One, p. 120]

Similarly Vijay Khatu recounts the range of cultural activity around Ganeshotsav itself: 'bhajans, song and dance competitions, loknatya, one-act plays, fancy dress competitions and folk art on every street. There were painting competitions in Peru Chawl.' (Chapter One, p. 115). Moreover, both producers and consumers of this output were fully aware of the differences between, and the manifestation of, the distinct cultural forms of the Konkan and the Ghats.

By 1946, when the Hanuman Theatre was started, there were already 19 tamasha theatres in Bombay. Some operated on a significant scale and were commercially successful. The city's tamasha players also possessed a highly developed, complex and socially differentiated sense of their craft. According to Madhukar Nerale, the owner of the Hanuman, the theatre distinguished between a proletarian 'loksangeet' and a middle-class 'natyasangeet', between the 'baithakichi lavni' in which the players sat down and sang for a polite audience and the 'bahurangi tamasha' which was often improvised, rambunctious and bawdy, and more closely approximated to the style that was popular in the rural Deccan. In this form, 'there was a lot of ad-libbing and there was hardly any written script. There would be topical comments, the language and lyrics were colloquial, the music folk.' (Chapter One, p. 122). The performative genre of the tamasha was associated largely with the Deccan districts. The traditional genre of the Konkan, known as 'the dashavatar', entailed improvisation upon stories and characters from the epics and had its own variations along the coast. In Girangaon, these genres adapted to and borrowed from each other. Although some attempted to retain their distinctiveness—the Hanuman Theatre, for instance, maintained its affinity with tamasha—they often fused or at least, like their performers, entered into a lively and engaged dialogue.

The influence of this cultural renaissance could scarcely be contained within Girangaon. The loknatya tradition which emerged in the mid-twentieth century brought together the form of the tamasha with the formal disciplines of the theatre. It was associated with many of the leading figures of the Marathi literary canon. Among the great poets of the canon were some of the shahirs of Girangaon, like Annabhau Sathe, Amar Shaikh and Gavankar, who also wrote and performed tamashas and who emerged and remained within the city's leftist tradition. Through Dada Kondke, Vasant Sabnis and Shahir Sable, tamasha was brought, with its own transformations, to the heart of the Marathi cinema.<sup>21</sup>



Leading figures of the nascent Bollywood were closely associated with the city's communists and many with the Progressive Writers' Association. As Vasant Bhor, Parvatibai's son, recalls, Balraj Sahni, Kazi Azmi and Dina Gandhi lived for a time in the Party commune in Sandhurst Road. The smell of urine that pervaded the building made the communist gentry feel especially highminded and selfconscious about the righteousness of their cause, the seriousness of their struggle, the purity of their beliefs and the gravity of their sacrifice.<sup>22</sup> Progressive writers, dramatists and actors became in the following decades the interpreters and purveyors of India's indigenous and authentic aesthetic. In this elusive quest for authenticity, they enshrined loknatya within an increasingly standardized canon of an Indian folk tradition that they had in effect begun to invent, freeze and invite the middle classes to revere. Similarly, mainstream Hindi cinema in the 1950s, on the verge of developing into a behemoth, could scarcely escape the influence of Girangaon's high culture. Following its own agenda of nation-building, Bollywood sought to borrow, incorporate and pay homage to what it imagined as India's folk tradition and popular culture.

In the 1940s and 1950s, Bombay city was the locus of a wide range of creative and artistic activity. This burst of creative activity often emerged from an explicit political engagement. The Progressive Writers' Association had originally formed in a Chinese restaurant in Denmark Street in London but in India it found its home in Bombay.<sup>23</sup> It was here, on the eve of Independence and Partition, that many of its leading figures, Sajjad Zaheer, Ali Sardar Jafri, Sadat Hasan Manto and Mulk Raj Anand worked, wrote and organized. The IPTA flourished in the mid-twentieth century as the city's communist intelligentsia favoured the theatre as a powerful means of spreading their political message. Between the 1930s and 1950s, Bombay city witnessed the emergence of a modernist movement in architecture and revelled increasingly in the exuberance of art deco. At this time, too, the Bombay modernist painters came together around Ara, Hussain, Gaitonde and, above all, Raza, who must belong among the great painters of the twentieth century.<sup>24</sup> The range and vitality of this cultural production could not have taken shape in isolation from the similar vibrancy that was witnessed in Girangaon at the same time. They emerged from similar influences and from connections and contexts that were closely related and unavoidably in dialogue with each other. Their interconnections remain yet to be fully explored. Some of the voices heard in the pages that follow indicate the urgency of this task.

The prodigious cultural production of Girangaon had significant political roots. They were in important ways formed by the political and

industrial conflicts waged in Girangaon in the early twentieth century. Many of the leading performers in Girangaon clearly conceived of their art in explicitly political terms. Some played a prominent role in political mobilization. Amar Sheikh, Annabhau Sathe and Gavankar wrote and performed as members of the Communist Party. Annabhau Sathe's troupe, which was formed in 1943 and with which Narayan Surve came to be associated, was in fact known as the Lal Bawta Kalapathak. Amar Sheikh was said to have trained several *kalapathaks* in Girangaon. Shahir Sable and Raja Mayekar ran their own troupe in DeLisle Road. Narayan Surve and Krishna Desai became leading members of the Lalbaug Kalapathak. The communist shahirs 'did much to propagate the Party's politics amongst the ordinary people,' as Madhukar Nerale recalled. They wrote songs about 'the problems of workers who lived here and on political issues.' Indeed, 'the communists', he suggested 'were able to reach the workers this way.' Socialist shahirs, however, characteristically concentrated their efforts on 'sermonizing on moral and ethical issues.' (Chapter One, p. 131). Similarly, there were others like the rangoli artist Gunvant Manjrekar who saw themselves as artists rather than political agents. Nonetheless, as he pointed out, 'my art is not separate from my political opinions. I am not an activist, but my association with political leaders and organizations has been important to me.' Indeed, he proclaimed that rangoli 'is a socialist art form' not only because 'it can be appreciated by rich and poor alike' but especially because it is 'a social art, one that is practised by every woman, rich or poor, outside the house.' [Chapter One, p. 117]. It was commonplace for kalapathaks to perform at public meetings, to sing political songs or lay on a tamasha. Crowds pulled in by these performers, so the theory ran, then usually stayed behind to hear the speeches and watch the main act of the tamasha that followed. As Vasant Bhor put it, in the 1950s, 'we would sing in order to gather the public, then after the speeches, there would be a tamasha announced so that no one would run away during the speeches!' [Chapter One, p. 136] It is at least open to speculation that the crowds that collected at the public meetings which Bombay's communist leaders addressed had gathered to hear the legendary shahirs and to watch the staging of the real, rather than the figurative and political, tamasha. Perhaps the communists who immersed themselves in arcane revolutionary discourse and embarked upon the political adventurism of the late 1940s and early 1950s had in fact mistaken the passion for tamasha for a popular revolutionary zeal. Nonetheless, it was clear that the highly active and vibrant cultural life of Girangaon had been shaped by its own

entrenched political traditions that looked back to the struggles of the 1920s and 1930s.

#### WORKERS' POLITICS AND GIRANGAON

If the social organization of Girangaon was constituted by its political traditions, politics in turn formed a part of the theatre of the street.<sup>25</sup> Regular processions, demonstrations and public meetings contributed to the pageantry of political activity. Increasingly, in the 1920s and 1930s, the Congress agitations consisted of specifically chosen symbolic and ritualized acts: prabhat pheris, the picketing of liquor shops, the manufacture of salt or the bonfires of foreign cloth. These public actions were characterized by their dramatic, even theatrical quality.<sup>26</sup>

Frequently, there was also a theatrical side to the beginning and the end of strikes, especially when they were conducted on a significant scale. Some of the theatre of industrial action arose from the fact that it could only occur in the face of formidable opposition. Mill managers, supervisors and jobbers in the early twentieth century often treated complaints, let alone the expression of grievances, by workers as a breach of discipline. Workers who went on strike were liable to be dismissed. Industrial action placed jobs in jeopardy. Faced with a strike, the employers' first option was simply to replace those who had refused to work. If the mood of the strikers was too determined and the strike too complete to be broken with a few dismissals, the employers could declare a lockout and wait for the workers to be hounded to return by starvation, by their landlords or by their moneylenders.

The threat to jobs was greatest when a strike was partial. In the face of workers' solidarity, it was difficult for employers or their jobbers to recruit strikebreakers. But it was difficult to estimate how complete a strike would be, soon after it was called. Because industrial action jeopardized their jobs, the strength of the strike was an important element in the decision of workers and jobbers to join it. For this reason, the beginning of strikes was marked by hesitancy and vacillation. Workers would appear at the mill gates on the morning of the strike to check whether the general tendency favoured a stoppage. In many ways, this constituted a vital stage in the conduct of a strike. Workers thus collected might join the stampede to cross thinly manned pickets or, alternatively, turn upon those who were trying to go to work. At every stage of a strike, the commitment to industrial action imposed complex calculations upon the workforce. They had to consider not only their immediate chances of success but also the extent to which their urban as well as rural resources

would enable them to bear the costs of industrial action. At the same time, to obtain concessions from the employers, to create the possibility of negotiations, or even to preserve their jobs, it was imperative for the workers that the strike be complete.

Employers attempting to end a strike swiftly often sought to keep production going, essentially by recruiting blacklegs, shepherding them into the workplace and working as many machines as possible. Necessarily, the employers hoped that, faced with this threat to their jobs, the strikers would drift back to work. As soon as some workers returned, the danger of losing their jobs might bring several others back. Once set in motion, this reaction could overcome a sizeable section of the workforce. The employers could then dictate the terms on which the rest of the workers might return. Frequently, of course, under such circumstances, they simply replaced their most militant workers. When workers sensed that their solidarity was ebbing away, or suspected that some groups of workers might be offered favourable terms to return to work and that the strike might be broken, they would assemble at the mill gates. Once more, as they gathered, their aim was to judge the general mood, watch developments closely and decide whether to continue or abandon their struggle. Once more, the excitement and anger that marked the beginning of strikes—the arguments, the debates and, at times, the violence—would necessarily characterize its final stages.

Thus, strikes frequently spilled out of the mills and into the streets and neighbourhoods. It was in the neighbourhood that mills and their jobbers recruited blacklegs and strikers mobilized pickets, moneylenders extended or withdrew their credit and landlords demanded their rents with menace or waived them with apparent magnanimity. Large-scale strikes often encompassed the social organization of the whole neighbourhood. For grain dealers, moneylenders and landlords could not simply call in their dues when a large proportion of their customers were on strike and therefore, in effect, unable to obtain their wages. The neighbourhood connections of the workers, which helped them to survive when they were jobless or sick, could also provide a basis for organizing industrial action. The repression of workers' combinations in the mills often forced them to organize in the chawls, teashops and akhras. Workplace and neighbourhood were closely integrated not only by the business strategies of the millowners and by the workings of the labour market but also by the patterns of industrial action. These intimate connections between workplace and neighbourhood ensured that even the daily conflicts and minor disputes in the mills were repeatedly placed

before Girangaon and, in the process, acquired an explicitly political meaning. In turn, the political concerns of limited groups of its residents often swiftly became public knowledge in Girangaon as a whole.

The politics of Girangaon was integral to the public performance of the neighbourhoods. It was not unusual for political meetings to be choreographed as entertainment. Indeed, sometimes, public performance and political action came to be even more directly connected. Shahir Sheikh Jainu Chand described in detail how he developed his passion for singing after attending a dramatic public meeting at Kamgar Maidan, probably in the late 1940s. The meeting occurred at the end of 'a big morcha'. Before the meeting, rumours circulated that Dange, who had 'gone underground' to avoid arrest, would make an appearance. At the meeting Amar Sheikh, Annabhau Sathe and Gavankar sang

without mikes to this huge crowd. The communists were powerful then; they could do whatever they wanted. All this was new to me. It was an illegal meeting, no stage, no mikes. If the police came they would have to flee . . . There were some songs where the whole crowd would sing along [Chapter One, p. 140].

When Dange was announced, 'fire crackers went off, for almost half an hour.' Presumably, Dange had felt no need to make a discreet entrance or perhaps the option was taken away from him. Jainu Chand recounts how Dange's speech was integral to the magic of the moment. 'Everyone was talking about the speech the next day in Girangaon. I had the songs in my head. I bought the song book for two annas.' After that he would plead illness with his employer and go to communist rallies to hear the shahirs and to sing along with them. Thus entranced, Jainu Chand began to attend the meetings every day. Eventually, he persuaded 'my friend Hassan who sold eggs' to introduce him to Amar Sheikh and they in turn became friends. Jainu Chand was with Amar Sheikh when they met with the car accident that killed the latter.

The intense militancy that Girangaon witnessed in the 1920s and 1930s, and the forms that it took, were in part the unintended consequence of the millowners' repressive response to workers' discontents. It was also shaped by the extreme reluctance, even outright hostility, of the employers to the formation of trade unions. The Bombay millowners, like most employers in India, assumed that it was inherently difficult to pin workers down to their machines. Max Weber had expressed this conventional wisdom when he claimed that increased earnings led Indian workers to stop working, take holidays or decorate their wives with ornaments.<sup>27</sup> Thus, employers remained liable to calculate rather harshly

what they deemed to be the margin of fairness in the returns to, or conditions of, labour. Similarly, the millowners took it for granted that workers' discipline was difficult to secure and impossible to maintain. They often feared that if they showed signs of weakness, say by submitting too readily to workers' demands, they would encourage a spiral of unreasonable claims from which they would not escape. As a result, they often showed a propensity to 'face down' their workers' demands and to lock out strikers. Sometimes, these lockouts caused the millowners considerable losses but they also calculated that the corresponding gains from better discipline would compensate in the long run. The consequences for the industry and for individual millowners, however, were often highly counter-productive. By treating workers' grievances as simply a problem of discipline, worked up and fomented by troublemakers, the millowners rendered the politics of the industry highly confrontational. Indeed, throughout its history, the industry paid a high price for its inability to institute adequate systems of bargaining and negotiation and its refusal to countenance trade union organization. The Currimbhoy group never fully recovered from the general strike of 1925, which lasted three months, when the state of their finances would have made it imperative that they keep production going. Similarly, the strikes of 1928–29 ensured that the industry lost a considerable share of their market to their Japanese rivals.<sup>28</sup> By adopting a similar approach to the strike of 1982, the millowners hastened the demise of the industry.<sup>29</sup>

While the millowners were determined to face down seemingly truculent workers, they also took it for granted that there was no real need for trade unions to exist. Since the earliest days of the industry, the millowners had relied upon jobbers to reconcile workers to their imperatives. In a sense, by delegating responsibility for the recruitment and disciplining of labour to the jobbers, the millowners also expected them to manage workers' discontent and thus to prevent or, if necessary, break strikes. When these grievances could not be satisfactorily resolved on the shopfloor, the millowners often claimed to be available to lend a sympathetic ear to their workers or to adjudicate upon disputes. In this line of reasoning, trade unions appeared redundant. Indeed, there seemed little need to tolerate the meddling of trade unions in the affairs of their mills. However, workers who lost their jobs by appearing troublesome or truculent recognized another harsher reality. The risks that workers incurred in expressing their grievances too vehemently led them inevitably to seek the help of 'outsiders'—lawyers and social workers, publicists and politicians—to act as their champions and their spokesmen. In the 1910s, a growing number of politicians and publicists grew

increasingly interested in organizing labour. For some, this was part of a widespread strategy among Indian politicians to expand their constituencies in preparation for the political reforms and the wider electorates that they anticipated.

Politicians and publicists who thus developed an interest in labour problems brought with them a range of objectives, styles and ideologies. Some hoped to widen the social base of particular competing nationalist factions, for instance, the Home Rule Leagues or the extremist rump of the Tilakites or the emergent non-brahman group. For others, like N. M. Joshi, their interest in the labour question emerged from their dedication to 'social service.' Such publicists often hoped to represent the labour interest in the councils of state, or indeed, before employers while also interpreting the policies of officials and the millowners to the workers. They met with varying degrees of success. Most, however, found themselves squeezed between the militancy of the workers and the intractability of the millowners. Indeed, their position often seemed untenable. They were called upon to secure, both and at the same time, the trust of the workers and the confidence of the employers. To retain their credibility with the working classes, it was necessary at times for these publicists to confront the employers in the interests of their followers, but it was also essential for them that the employers accept and accredit them as the bargaining agents on behalf of labour. Yet, from publicists with whom they were willing to treat, most employers required compliance. Moreover, the millowners for the most part remained averse to surrendering to 'outsiders' the freedom to represent the grievances of their own workers. As a result, in their intermediary role, these publicists rarely succeeded in persuading the employers to accede to the workers' demands. But the more limited their influence with the employers appeared, the less compelling were the reasons for workers to accept their leadership. Conversely, the repeated failure of these publicists to secure the workers' acceptance for deals they had negotiated on their behalf rendered them unreliable intermediaries for the millowners. Thus, during strikes, their leadership was often thrown over by the workers. Yet in ordinary times, their inability to secure concessions from the employers limited their value for workers and sometimes propelled, even necessitated, industrial action.

Into this setting, the young communists of the Bombay labour group brought a novel political style. Perhaps the point is more accurately made in the opposite way. They entered the labour movement on a rising tide of militancy. In 1925, the textile workers had succeeded, after a general strike that lasted three months, in securing the restoration of a substan-

tial wage cut. Three years later, the attempts in individual mills to cut wages, increase workloads and retrench workers provoked a wave of strikes across the industry, which culminated in a general strike by April 1928. It was during the course of this general strike that the communists entrenched themselves as the leading force on the joint mill strike committee and developed a substantial following among the workers and more generally in Girangaon. When the strike ended, the millowners sought as far as possible to exclude the communists from the workplace and to victimize their followers. They had often adopted this strategy against all but the most pliable trade unions. What made it so difficult to sustain in 1928-29 was the massive support that the communists had evoked. To beat back the tide of communist support in Girangaon, the millowners needed the sustained intervention of the colonial state. From 1929, whether through police actions justified by the imperative of public order, legislation to control picketing or to define the conditions in which a trade dispute could be conducted, or most dramatically, through the Meerut Conspiracy Case, the colonial state acted increasingly, together with the employers, to narrow the space within which the communist Girmi Kamgar Union (GKU) and the millworkers were able to manoeuvre.

In the late 1920s and 1930s, the millowners tried to exclude the communists from the workplace, dismissed their followers within the labour force and, whenever they could, refused to countenance representations made by them as well as their claims to negotiate on labour's behalf. Despite the extensive support they gained in Girangaon, the communists were only intermittently able to establish, and never really to sustain, a permanent organizational presence at the workplace. For the communists, it became clear that the most effective method of developing a base within the industry, in the face of employer hostility and state repression, was to intervene relentlessly in every dispute and to seek to generalize it beyond the individual mill and department. This energetic intervention was wholly compatible with the larger political strategy to which the communists were committed. To various degrees, the communists expected that industrial action, trade union struggle and repeated confrontation with the employers would serve to develop the political consciousness of the working classes. Their theory about their current political position and the best means by which it might be developed in the future led them to the same conclusion as their assessment of the pragmatic and optimal means of overcoming the very severe constraints that employers and the state imposed on workers' organization and action. This conclusion was that they should give workers' militancy its

head, to encourage it where it existed, to foster among workers a clearer consciousness of their class interests and to heighten their levels of political action. They expected thereby to establish themselves so powerfully across the industry as well as in the neighbourhood that the millowners and the state would no longer be able to exclude them from conducting disputes in individual mills and departments. At the same time, it would enable them, by repeatedly leading strikes, to generate an enthusiasm for revolutionary action. It was only by repeatedly and tirelessly intervening in individual disputes that they could hope to build up a following across the industry. By establishing themselves across the industry, they could effectively exert pressure on the owners and managers of a particular mill. At the same time, the vulnerability of workers to disciplinary action when they went on strike in small groups, jobber gangs, specific departments or even whole mills had developed the propensity among workers to generalized action. In other words, in the 1920s and 30s, there was a symbiosis between the militancy of workers and their growing propensity to act on a wider scale on the one hand, and the political strategy adopted by the Bombay communists.

That the public spaces of Girangaon became a site of acute class conflict in the early twentieth century was in part the outcome of the nature and practice of industrial relations in Bombay. As workers organized and took action on a wider scale, and especially when they did so after 1928 under the red flag, colonial officials and the police began to perceive their threat to the public order. Sometimes they simply anticipated it. In the 1920s and 30s, the state intervened increasingly in the conduct as well as the negotiation of industrial disputes. The police now escorted blacklegs across the picket lines while fresh legislation defined the conditions of picketing so stringently that it became almost indistinguishable from 'intimidation'. Violence on the picket lines, at the mill gates or the chawls, between strikers and blacklegs, resulted in increasing police intervention.

As strikes proliferated in the mills, they were lodged in the collective memory of Girangaon. Strikes, their causes and conduct, the ruthlessness or generosity of the millowners' responses to workers' demands and the nature and style of state intervention informed the political consciousness of the working classes. They became an integral part of the social experience of Girangaon. In this sense, too, Girangaon was constituted as a social arena by industrial action and political struggle. As these struggles furnished the collective memory of Girangaon, the cumulative experience of these conflicts in the past provided a yardstick by which the

responses of employers and officials, patrons and political leaders, jobbers and dadas, policemen and the state in the present could be judged. From these elements, the political consciousness of the working classes was forged.

Of course, the increasing intervention of the state was neither singularly nor consistently hostile to all forms of trade union organization. Indeed, by the 1930s, as colonial officials found that the Congress and mass nationalism appeared rather less threatening than they had once feared, they began to contemplate the possibility of associating labour more fully with their rule. Nonetheless, the fact remains that the working classes encountered the state most immediately in the form of police actions, often during strikes. Perceptions of the repressive, unjust or arbitrary character of the state fostered for workers at particular moments a sense of their shared interests and informed a political understanding of their situation and how it might be changed.

These possibilities of change were captured and reflected most clearly in the rhetoric and political style of the communists in the late 1920s and 30s. By contrast with other politicians and publicists who had begun to take an interest in labour questions, the communists appeared to be motivated by nothing more than an interest in the issues that confronted the working classes. They paid close attention to the daily issues of the workplace, rarely set out to act as a brake upon workers' militancy, often showed a willingness to lead them in confrontation and, above all, appeared consistently to refuse to collaborate with employers and the state. The stance of continued opposition to employers and the state which the GKU adopted in this period was matched by the unremitting hostility that they encountered in return. Frequently, their leaders were themselves subjected to state repression. Indeed, the repression to which they were subjected was a familiar part of the experience of most workers on strike. In this period, the communists emerged as the only political group associated with labour that remained untainted by their association with the state. They were unique in Girangaon for being able to present themselves plausibly as the only element within the labour movement that acted in the interest of the working classes alone. This is not to suggest that the communists found uncritical acclaim and unswervingly loyal devotion in Girangaon. Their insistent claim that they were, above all, the party of the working class was challenged and interrogated by some of their constituents even in the late 1920s and 1930s. What was perceived as their adventurism after the 1928 general strike and their refusal to associate with the Congress during civil disobedience in

1930–31 cost them considerable support. Their failure to consistently address the dalit question and their inability to encompass the rural as well as the urban context of workers' lives were exposed by the success of Ambedkar's mahar movement and the Independent Labour Party in the late 1930s. In the 1940s, their conciliatory posture towards the employers and the state in the shadow of the People's War began to unsettle their pre-eminence within working class politics and contributed to their slow decline after Independence.

Nonetheless, even as they were repeatedly subject to scrutiny and challenge, the communist leaders of the GKU established a massive following in Girangaon after the general strike of 1928 and dominated the politics of the labour movement for the following decade. From the late 1920s onwards, Girangaon appeared to be a communist stronghold, at times even an insurrectionary centre. What the communists had created in Girangaon was an extensive community of political sentiment. Their rhetoric, their actions and their political strategies appeared to the working classes in Girangaon not only to grasp the nature of the problems that they encountered and reflect a plausible understanding of their social and political conditions but also seemed to offer a realizable method by which they might be transformed.

#### THE DECLINE OF THE COMMUNISTS

The communists of the GKU had acquired a position of dominance in the labour movement in the 1920s and 1930s largely because they had emerged as the only political group that appeared to the working classes to be untainted by their association with the employers and the state and to be motivated solely, even exclusively, by their concern for the workers' interests. The communists had understood the workers' interests largely in terms of the workplace and in terms of their relations with the millowners. Yet the political solidarities of the working classes had also been forged by their changing experience of the state. Their support for the communists, invariably a matter of constant scrutiny and debate, arose in part from their understanding of where they stood in relation to the state. The solidarities of the working classes in Girangaon had been formed through politics and shaped by their experience of the state.

It was in this wider context that the limitations of the communist leadership were most fully exposed. The communists entered the labour movement with the belief that the working classes had an inherent propensity for revolutionary action. The considerable political momentum that the labour movement had already acquired in Bombay, and

especially in Girangaon, by 1928, even before the communists rose to prominence, seemed to uphold and justify their axiom. In a sense, the Bombay communists, suddenly catapulted into prominence during the general strike of 1928, were undone by their own success. In the late 1920s and 1930s, their leadership had been characterized by a certain pragmatism and flexibility in the conduct of strikes and in the organization of labour. Increasingly, this pragmatism came to be overlaid with a more rigid theory that derived its wisdom from the Comintern. This theoretical rigidity dogged their footsteps as they addressed wider political issues. This was especially apparent as they attempted to define their relationship to the nationalist movement. The Communist Party now set itself the task of both promoting 'bourgeois nationalism' in its struggle against imperialism and asserting its hegemony over it so as to direct it in the revolutionary interests of the working class. In practice, this posed a major problem. The Communist Party of India (CPI) was small and its influence localized. If it sought to encourage bourgeois nationalism, it might quickly be submerged by the Congress within the 'anti-imperialist' movement. If they tried to retain their distinctive political identity, what was there to prevent the bourgeois nationalists from simply ejecting them from the Congress? Their problems were complicated and deepened by the fact that the Civil Disobedience campaign evoked a massive popular response in Bombay city in the early 1930s. Having adopted the language of the Comintern, the communists found themselves taking their own political bearings in relation to the Congress. Over the next four decades, they found that the more they took their political bearings in relation to the Congress, the more fully they passed, kicking and screaming, under its hegemony. It is possible to see in retrospect how far this process had advanced by the 1970s.

In the 1930s and 1940s, their relationship with the Congress and bourgeois nationalism still posed major theoretical and, therefore, tactical problems for the Communist Party. Its decision, following the Sixth Comintern line, to liberate the masses from the thralldom of bourgeois nationalism at the height of the civil disobedience campaign in 1930–31, had considerably weakened its position. Far more damaging, however, as several workers and activists recall in the following pages, was the decision to follow the Comintern into the People's War. In the 1940s too, Bombay city was one of the most significant centres of nationalist resistance directed against the colonial state. After all, the political experience of the working classes had been constituted in relation to the state. The communists had developed an extensive following in Girangaon over

the preceding decade and a half largely through their willingness to pick up the daily disputes of the workplace and the neighbourhood and to pursue redress through industrial and political action. Once the People's War was underway, the communists, and the leadership of the GKU, adopted a conciliatory attitude towards both the employers and the state. While they had barely a few years earlier assiduously intervened in workplace disputes and energetically championed the workers' interests, now they advocated restraint and sought to mediate conflicts. Similarly, when workers expected them to fight for their interests, severely threatened by the tensions, scarcities and disruptions of war, the communists seemed to ask their followers to endure immediate hardship in the name of 'historical necessity' and long-term salvation. 'Wherever there were strikes, party members would stand at the gates and tell the workers, don't strike because the war is on. That alienated workers from the communists' just as, in the previous decade, their willingness to stand at the gates and support the workers in their disputes had helped to build their following. Gangadhar Chitnis, subsequently the General Secretary of the GKU, recalls this simple reasoning: 'Russia was a bastion of the workers' movement . . . So it was necessary to protect this bastion' [Chapter Two, p. 178]. Yet, as Narayan Samant, then a clerk in Tata Mills, put it:

[The communists] said, we must defeat fascism and defer the struggle against the British government . . . Ordinary people could not understand the concern with fascism. All they knew was that the communists were supporting the British. Millworkers felt deeply about independence, so they were not happy with the Party's stand [Chapter Two, p. 185].

By the end of the War, the communists had lost their position of unchallenged dominance in Girangaon. Millworkers had begun to drift towards the Congress union, the Rashtriya Mill Mazdoor Sabha (RMMS).

Looking back from the vantage point of Independence in 1947, the communists' achievement had been considerable. They had consolidated and developed a nascent labour movement in Bombay and established their presence in Girangaon. Their offices in Dalvi Building remained a landmark in Girangaon until at least the 1970s. Their connections in the neighbourhoods and the mills had survived waves of severe repression by the state. By leading a powerful workers' movement in the city, they had ensured that the working classes had secured a substantial public presence in the politics of the city. As a consequence, Girangaon had acquired a

certain social and political identity. This identity had been shaped by politics and in particular by numerous conflicts over wages and working conditions. It had yielded, by the 1940s and 1950s, a flourishing artistic and literary culture in Girangaon. This vigorous cultural life in Girangaon, from the loknarya tradition to rangoli art and Ganeshotsav sculpture, had effects beyond the neighbourhood. It contributed to and stimulated the very significant artistic and literary movements which emerged in the city in the same period.

The communists, however, entertained explicit revolutionary objectives. It would be pertinent to ask, therefore, how successfully they were able to transform the political culture of Girangaon once they had established themselves within it in the 1920s and 1930s. Whether their influence would yield fundamental, even revolutionary, social and political change would depend largely on how far they were able to create and develop a new and transformative political vision. By this measure, the communist achievement in their heyday in Girangaon was rather more limited.

In the aftermath of the 1928 strike, they had appeared to develop a political language which allowed their followers to interpret their discontents within its terms and to identify a realizable means of remedying or even resolving them. By the 1940s and 1950s, it would seem that their political language was no longer sufficiently capacious or flexible to provide an equally wide and diverse constituency in Girangaon either a means of political interpretation or a method of transformation. Whereas in the late 1920s the communist leadership had remained alert and sensitive to the particularities of local circumstance, now they were more constrained by their wider theoretical alignments. By the 1940s and 1950s, it was to become increasingly difficult to reconcile the complex needs of the locality with the Comintern's interpretation of Marxism. As this task grew more demanding, and their efforts to fulfil it more heroic, the communists surrendered a considerable measure of interpretative flexibility and they came to rely increasingly upon authority for grasping the changing social and political predicament of the working classes.

At the same time, their political methods and practices became increasingly hierarchical. In part, this submission to hierarchical practice arose from their concern to maintain discipline in their ranks. In part, it was an effect of ideological compulsions and the fancy of theory. The more difficult it became to interpret the particular social and political circumstances of the working classes in Girangaon in the increasingly

remote and arcane discourse of the Comintern, the deeper grew their dependence upon the authority of theoretical orthodoxy. The authority of theory and the imperative to maintain discipline acted upon each other to deepen hierarchical practices which in turn were sometimes absorbed unwittingly and enforced by their members and sometimes resented by them. Vasant Bhor, son of the redoubtable communist leader Parvatibai Bhor, illuminated the nature of this hierarchy that was almost taken for granted. There were, he observed, 'three different levels' of communists. There were those 'at the top whom you cannot expect to live in a chawl. They do what is possible for them to do.' There was a second level of member 'who earned money and worked free of cost for the Party.' He put his mother in a third category, who were 'not very educated, who lived in a chawl in Lalbaug and who worked full time for the Party.' As Bhor observed,

The middle-class women cadres and leaders were different from her. They were not so involved. The ways of the middle-class woman are completely different; even if they become communists, this cannot change [Chapter One, p. 134].

Yet, it may at least in theory have been their ambition to generate a political culture in which these differences would have been broken down and dissolved.

For similar reasons, Soloman Kudgaonkar left the communists 'because I did not like their attitude' [Chapter Two, p. 188], particularly when they attempted to dictate terms to the mill committee in the China Mill strike in 1954. The leaders increasingly perceived signs of independence from the mill committee as 'arrogance' that had to be contained and disciplined. In the 1920s and 1930s, the communists had entered the social networks of the neighbourhoods and mobilized them in their struggles. They had been able to strengthen the hand of workers as they acted to constrain their patrons, landlords, jobbers, grain merchants and *dadas*, and to force them to operate within the moral economy of the neighbourhood. The mill committees, that had been thrown up for the first time in the general strike of 1928, now embarrassed the leadership in 1954. Similarly, B. D. Parab described how 'we looked down upon' the neighbourhood toughs in the 1950s and 1960s. 'We only used them' and 'never gave them any place in the organization.' This was, as he pointed out, in marked contrast to the Shiv Sena. For, 'if there is a dashing activist in the organization and he is known to be a *goonda*, the Sena gave him status and prestige.' The Sena, according to Parab, provided 'those who were on the bottom rungs—of the organization', a substantial stake with-

in it, while the Communist Party only 'talked in theory of doing this, but they never did.' Thus, 'earlier, all the gymnasiums were with us, but we did nothing for them. We were only concentrating on the millworkers.' By the 1970s, 'the new generation', not only the younger members of the Party but even 'the children of the communists' abandoned the Party, so that it was no longer possible to raise enough union dues for the subsistence of their cadres [Chapter Four, p. 308].

The strategy of immersing themselves in the social organization of the neighbourhood had in the late 1920s represented a highly innovative move by the communists in their approach to popular politics. In the 1950s and 1960s, this engagement with the neighbourhoods was gradually crushed by the weight of supra-local Party organization, its attention to orthodoxy and its hierarchy, the compulsions of ideological rectitude and a propensity for reciting the *slokas* of high theory that only a few could possibly know. Behind their growing distance from the neighbourhood lay a wider problem. As L. Y. Shinde, who joined the Party in 1940 put it,

The Party had one line—struggle. They paid attention only to the trade union, not to culture. They should have paid attention to the social norms and rituals which were part of peoples' lives. Now everyone from Moscow onwards is trying to analyse what went wrong.

Where there had once been a hundred Party supporters in Tejukaya Mansion, he observed, 'now I am the only one.' [Chapter Four, p. 307]. Communist orthodoxy stifled the systematic and serious consideration of the various social identities to which the working classes subscribed, whether these formed around kinship or village, language or gender, caste or religion. They refused to address questions of caste and religion, not always the case, for instance, among their comrades in Malabar,<sup>30</sup> because they feared 'it would divide the class struggle' [Narayan Surve, Chapter Two, p. 212]. As a result, to many dalits, it seemed that 'the traditional left parties never really understood or paid proper attention to the dalit question' [Bal Khairmoday, Chapter Four, p. 322]. Similarly, Muslim workers seemed intermittently reluctant especially, for instance, during the general strike of 1929, to follow the lead of the GKU. In effect, the communists in Bombay focused so closely upon strikes and trade unions that they lost sight of their own wider political objectives and more crucially, ceased to subject them to critical scrutiny.

In an extended reflection upon the communists' failure to transform and create a new more progressive political culture, Narayan Surve,



among the leading literary figures that the city has produced in the late twentieth century, offered illuminating insights into this process of decline. The left 'read Marxism' as he put it, but they had 'no idea as to how to link it with the specific cultural and social and historical questions of this country's history.' [Chapter Two, p. 212]. Indeed, their engagement with this history continued to grow weaker. 'Marx did not write much about India', as Surve points out. 'It was *our* duty to have done that, not anyone else's.' The failure to engage effectively with India's history weakened the communists' grasp of its society and its culture and culminated in theoretical banality and political bankruptcy. 'We kept on talking about the working class', Surve recalls, 'but they only related to us on economic issues, and sometimes on political issues; we were not with them at the social and cultural level.' [Chapter Two, pp. 212–13]. The left propelled itself towards 'economism' and obscured its political imagination by an adherence to an increasingly arcane theoretical orthodoxy. Indeed, it had been largely as innovative and effective trade unionists that the communists had developed an extensive political following in Girangaon. But it was precisely as trade unionists that they were most readily undermined by their rivals, by employers and by the state.

As the GKU established its hegemony in Girangaon, the millowners and the state—successively 'colonial' and then 'national'—between 1930 and 1960, devised novel strategies for containing the threat of labour. The repressive actions of the state against both strikers and communists, combined with the propensity of employers to dismiss workers who associated with trade unions, severely constrained the development of the labour movement. But repression alone was insufficient to break what had become in Girangaon a bastion of the left. Between the 1930s and 1960s, the employers and the state adopted two strategies in order to contain the threat of labour. They served to fundamentally alter the structure of labour relations and determined the terms on which trade unions could organize and act.<sup>31</sup> In the process, they eroded the foundations on which the communists had built. First, they developed an increasingly elaborate legal framework for the conciliation and arbitration of trade disputes. The effect of this legislation was largely to blunt the instrument of the strike and to narrow the space with which trade unions could manoeuvre. Of course, this was not a necessary consequence of trade disputes legislation. It could have served to strengthen collective bargaining. But these measures were introduced against a background of hostility against workers' organizations. Lightning strikes, for instance, especially if they were sufficiently widespread, protected workers

who took action. Conversely, strikes localized to a particular department or even a whole mill, undertaken decorously after due notice, usually enabled the employers to sack the protagonists. Similarly, if trade unions found themselves excluded from individual mills, it was only by establishing their presence across the industry as a whole, usually by proving their value to workers during strikes, that they could force individual employers to deal with them. In this political context, it is hardly surprising that workers' organizations rarely acquired a formal and permanent institutional shape, however extensive the following that they commanded at particular times. Trade disputes legislation since 1929 attempted to create an official mechanism for addressing workers' grievances that would tend to distance trade unions yet further from the daily problems of the workplace and thus, to gradually render them superfluous. It also defined more stringently the conditions under which strikes would be deemed legal and trade unions would qualify to represent workers and negotiate on their behalf. Not surprisingly, these definitions tended to undermine those unions which were not favoured by the employers and especially those which adopted a more militant and confrontational style. Arbitration procedures did not always provide a mechanism for justice for they often tended to favour the stronger side in an industrial dispute, in this case mostly the millowners. After all, no arbitration award could be implemented if it was obstructed by the stronger party to the dispute.

This series of trade disputes legislation culminated in the Bombay Industrial Relations Act (BIRA) of 1946. It was passed before Independence by the Congress government elected to power in the Presidency immediately after the War. The provincial Congress government explained that its aim was 'to supply a very real impetus for the growth of sound organizations of industrial and other workers' and 'to ensure that . . . efficient production is not hampered by thoughtless and needless stoppages of work.'<sup>32</sup> By the provisions of the Trade Disputes Act of 1938, passed under the aegis of the previous Congress ministry, only those unions whose membership included a quarter of the industry's workforce, qualified as a representative union. Given the nature of industrial relations in Bombay, it is hardly surprising that no union, not even the GKU at the height of its popularity, could claim this proportion of the workforce as its members. The new legislation in 1946 sought to establish a single union within the industry. It introduced a new category of 'approved' unions. To qualify, trade unions had to renounce the option to strike until all other means of resolution had been exhausted and they could initiate action only when it was sanctioned by a majority

vote by secret ballot. In practice, this meant that the union would have to renounce strikes in return for 'approved' status. An 'approved' union was allowed access to the workplace. It could collect dues from workers on wage payment day. It could deploy conciliation procedures on behalf of the workers. Most crucially, it could gain 'representative' status by enrolling a smaller proportion of the workforce—15 per cent—than the trade unions that were not 'approved'. An approved trade union that gained representative status also acquired the exclusive right to negotiate for the workforce and to represent it in conciliation and arbitration proceedings.<sup>33</sup>

As the GKU began to lose its appeal in the shadows of the People's War, the Congress hoped to acquire for the first time a significant base among the millworkers through the RMMS, founded in 1945. In 1949, the RMMS was officially granted representative status on the basis of the membership list it claimed. No ballot was held to establish the preferences of the workers. The fact that the RMMS could collect its dues at the pay desk was a convenience for the union. That it was allowed access to the workplace and to seek redress for the daily problems of the workers proved a major advantage. As Bhai Bhonsle, later the General Secretary of the RMMS recalled, workers

felt that all they had to do was give 12 rupees a year to those people and their problems would be solved—so what was the loss in doing so? Textile workers always know where their interests lie [Chapter Two, p. 196].

The representative status of the RMMS was challenged almost immediately. Certainly, the general strike of 1950, called by the GKU and the socialist Mill Mazdoor Sabha (MMS) and sustained for over two months, cast grave doubt on the 'representative' character of the RMMS. As unions scrambled to claim 'representative' status, in the wake of the BIRA, fierce competition to enrol members led to considerable turmoil and violence in the mills in the late 1940s. The advent of Independence, and, with it, the prospect of universal adult franchise, provided an incentive for political parties to create their own unions as means of gathering workers' votes and mobilizing support during elections. As unions proliferated, the competition for members and for a foothold in the industry and in Girangaon only intensified. In the long run, the BIRA created a highly sclerotic and increasingly corrupt system of industrial relations which favoured and entrenched the official union, the RMMS, while obstructing channels for the expression and representation of workers' grievances. For the communists, their strategy of relying increas-

ingly on the workplace, precisely at the moment when they were most effectively excluded from it, served to accelerate their decline.

The second strategy for managing labour, adopted increasingly in this period, was to deepen the divide between permanent and casual labour. Until the 1930s, the millowners had relied upon jobbers to discipline labour and break strikes. The growing propensity of millworkers to coordinate strikes across the industry from 1919 onwards had increasingly shown the weaknesses of the jobber system as a bulwark against industrial action. Legal measures for strangling unions at the workplace were a necessary precondition for replacing jobbers. The jobbers' power had derived from their ability to increase or reduce the supply of casual labour. To replace the jobbers, it would also be necessary for the millowners to find a method of ensuring that a large pool of casual labour was brought into the industry and then held within it. This was precisely what the *badli* control scheme of the late 1930s sought to achieve. In return, the millowners recognized they might have to accept labour legislation that expanded the employment rights and benefits of 'permanent' workers, while marking them off more clearly from the *badli* workers who were excluded from these gains. In the boom of the 1950s and 1960s, the wages and conditions of permanent workers improved considerably.<sup>34</sup> Even more substantial wage increases were granted in the new industries especially pharmaceuticals where, in addition, skill thresholds were higher.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, employers regulated entry to the permanent workforce with great care. In other words, employers, politicians and officials had begun rather actively to create within the industry what has, as a term of art, been described in a wider context as the 'informal sector'. Here conditions of work remained insecure and wages low. *Badli* workers depended even more fully on contractors and intermediaries, patrons and caste fellows and assorted peddlers of influence, power and credit. Before 1930, the line that divided 'permanent' and '*badli*' workers was extremely thin. Workers who seemed securely employed one day could lose their job the next, for a wide range of reasons, from participation in a strike to a downswing in trade or the changed composition of output or the dismissal or, most arbitrarily, even the death of a jobber. Conversely, the barriers to entry onto the permanent muster were relatively low for *badli* workers. The creation of an abyss between 'permanent' and '*badli*' workers had portentous consequences. Obviously, it divided the working class. More fundamentally, for permanent and *badli* workers, the relationship between their village and urban networks and between workplace and urban neighbourhood diverged significantly. No

longer was the experience of irregular employment common to the working classes as a whole. Yet this experience had largely shaped the institutions of Girangaon. It had provided the foundations on which the labour movement of the 1920s and 1930s had developed and which had created the GKU and its communist leadership. As the political conditions of Girangaon changed, the communists remained tethered to an old style that now appeared increasingly inadequate and vulnerable to the initiatives of their rivals, the millowners and the state.

#### THE RISE OF THE SHIV SENA

The Indian communists in the 1920s and 1930s consisted largely of leaders without followers. They operated as small circles of intellectuals who feverishly debated the labour theory of value, the nature of the revolutionary vanguard or the coming proletarian consciousness. By contrast, the communists in Bombay had developed a significant working-class base by the late 1920s. By the late 1940s and 1950s, when the left elsewhere in India began to attract substantial support, largely by leading peasant struggles in east UP and Bihar, in Kerala, West Bengal and parts of Andhra,<sup>36</sup> the Bombay communists began to lose their position of dominance in Girangaon. Of course, it is only with hindsight that the slow decline of the left in Girangaon becomes most apparent. Its decline was neither inexorable nor inevitable. Indeed, in the late 1940s, as in the following decades, the left witnessed significant moments of revival.

The communists hoped that their intervention in the naval ratings' mutiny in 1946, for instance, would help them recover some of the ground that they had lost during the People's War. The RIN Mutiny has often been represented as a potentially revolutionary moment when the millworkers came out onto the streets in support of the naval ratings. For the communist leadership, it seemed, in retrospect, that the Naval Mutiny had 'saved us' [Kusum Ranadive. Chapter Two, p. 180]. At least, by calling for a general strike in support of the naval ratings, they had been able to find some correspondence once more with the old core of their support. On the other hand, the Congress, aspiring to inherit the state from the British, held aloof. It could scarcely be seen to be fomenting mutiny in the armed forces on the eve of Independence. In their demonstrations in support of the naval ratings, the millworkers expressed their long-standing antagonism to the state rather than any lasting wish to make common cause with the armed forces. The revival of the left continued during the general strike of 1950, led largely by the socialist MMS and, following their initial opposition, the GKU.<sup>37</sup> The collapse of

the strike led to a further drift of support from the MMS, and especially the RMMS, to the communists.

The performance of the communists in the general elections of 1952 provided further evidence, albeit of a negative kind, that they still commanded considerable influence in Girangaon. The decision by the socialists and the communists not to forge an electoral pact, let alone join together to combine with Ambedkar's Scheduled Caste Federation against the Congress, lost them the Central Bombay seat. Dange, for the CPI, Asoka Mehta for the socialists and Ambedkar stood separately and fell together. Significantly, Dange instructed his supporters to spoil their ballots in the reserved constituency for Central Bombay rather than vote for Ambedkar. Indeed, Ambedkar duly lost and attributed his defeat to the communist campaign. Although the communists could not win the Central Bombay seat, their influence in Girangaon, including its dalit voters, was sufficient to decisively influence the outcome. The election campaign created a lasting bitterness. As Dinu Randive recalls, 'Because of this event the differences between the dalits and the communists became so sharp. Even today it has become difficult for the communists to appeal to the republicans or at any rate to some sections of dalit voters.' (Chapter Two, p. 208).

In a sense, the election campaign of 1952, and its outcome, illuminates the predicament of the communists in that decade. Although they had begun to regain some of the ground that they had lost in the People's War, their base had begun to fragment. The advent of universal adult suffrage provided an incentive for every political party to organize more extensively in Girangaon. At the same time, trade union rivalries had sharpened considerably in the late 1940s and early 1950s. It was precisely as their position of dominance in Girangaon, and thus in the city as a whole, grew weaker that the issue of states reorganization acquired an increasing prominence. The Bombay State after Independence comprised diverse regions joined, like most Indian states, by little more than historical accident, the residue of colonial habits of administration and the arbitrary nature of Partition. It did not reflect either administrative convenience, geographical unity or cultural coherence. As the pressure for the linguistic reorganization of the states gathered force, the political future of Bombay city was thrown open to debate. This debate necessarily provided a stimulus for the city and its residents to define their identity. Yet the city's ethos was eclectic. Neither did it derive from nor did it dominate its immediate hinterland. Its streets teemed with people of every faith. Its wadis and gullies echoed with the sound of every

language spoken by residents who had migrated from all over the sub-continent. To some, this suggested that the city could plausibly be deemed a union territory and administered from the Centre. To others, it seemed that if Gujarat was to be separated out, it might also have a large claim to the city by virtue of long and close association. About two-fifths of the city spoke Marathi as their mother tongue and perceived its spirit to be quintessentially Maharashtrian. In the controversy that followed, the communists now discerned the shape of a populist cause that might enable them to regain their position of dominance. In retrospect, this judgement seems to have expressed the triumph of hope over diffidence, if not as yet despair.

The issue of states reorganization highlighted the arbitrary nature of as well as the particular mix of strength and fragility that characterized the Indian Union. In the 1940s and 1950s, as Indian elites strove to create a domain for the exercise of their power, powerful regional interests organized to resist the Centre and, in asserting states rights, to extract a larger share of its resources. Some regional elites threatened secession from the Union, rather as Jinnah had done in the 1940s,<sup>38</sup> as a means of acquiring a stronger grip on its power and resources. Others sought to redraw state boundaries on a linguistic principle in the hope that the new arrangements would suit them better than their political rivals. The widespread appeal of regional nationalism suggested, of course, that the identity of the Indian nation remained unsettled, labile and open to revision and redefinition. Conversely, by competing for the political and economic resources of the Centre, regional elites served to strengthen and legitimize it and indeed, paradoxically revealed their own commitment to it.

In the 1950s and 1960s, linguistic nationalism sometimes evoked considerable popular support.<sup>39</sup> By identifying a state and especially its administration and its educational institutions with a particular language, its agenda promised to create new and wider opportunities for some in education and government employment. Those whose mother tongue was the language of the proposed state but who lacked the education or the literacy to seize the new opportunities themselves recognized nevertheless that their relatives and friends might, by securing jobs in the bureaucracy, get things done for them or offer them patronage and protection. In the long run, their own children might profit from the opportunities for social mobility. Thus, cultural nationalism sometimes secured the passionate support of some among those who stood to gain little directly from its programme.

It was soon apparent that there was a considerable and widespread antipathy in Bombay to the alienation of the city to a central administration. There was also, by the mid-1950s, a significant groundswell among Marathi speakers, including the working classes, in favour of the city's incorporation into a Maharashtrian state. In Bombay, the question of states reorganization deepened the suspicion for some that the provincial Congress, dominated by Gujaratis, might swing the city into their state or that Gujarati capital would acquire a closer grip on the city. As G. L. Reddy, a communist activist, recalled, workers identified the industrialists and the millowners with Gujaratis. Bombay's workers 'of all castes and religions—even the Muslims in Madanpura' supported the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement because they 'wanted that administration and government should be in Marathi and workers should have power in the new state. They were for a socialist state.' This was why 'the people of Girangaon came out of every house, every chawl to fight for Bombay.' [Chapter Three, p. 231]. Similarly, Sahdev Jagre, a former jobber from the Swan Mills, described their fears that if the city was centrally administered, 'it would not remain a working-class Bombay. This was more important to us than Marathi and non-Marathi.' Thus, workers from UP 'also supported the Movement' [Chapter Three, p. 232]. Even the women of the poorest classes, according to Ahilya Rangnekar, 'knew that if they went to an office, they should be able to speak in their mother tongue.' [Chapter Three, p. 234].

For the communists, and for other intellectuals on the left, it was possible to perceive the aspirations of the Samyukta Maharashtra movement as largely progressive. It seemed to attract considerable support from the predominantly Marathi-speaking working classes and it appeared to transcend caste, religious and regional identities. The benefits of making government more accessible, perhaps even more accountable to all its citizens, could scarcely be decried. Yet perhaps the most compelling and recurring theme of the movement was the definition of a Maharashtrian identity. No less than caste, religion and nation, language offered an ethnic identity that could be counterposed to class. It is paradoxical, therefore, that the communists, who had been quite so averse to engaging with the question of caste and religion, because of its potential for dividing the working classes, should have so fully advanced the cause of the Samyukta Maharashtra. Shanti Patel, the socialist politician and trade unionist, offered at least a partial explanation when he pointed out that the communists 'wanted to utilize the mass upsurge on this issue' and by doing so 'they got political mileage', at least for a while [Chapter Three, p. 245].

However the nature of the mass upsurge may have been grasped in Girangaon, the fact remained that the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement had its widest appeal around the symbols of regional nationalism. In some measure, the communists were pulled into the Movement by the tides of popular opinion. By contrast to their stand against popular opinion in the early 1930s and in the 1940s, their submission to it in the mid-1950s suggests a growing diffidence about their own standing within their old stronghold of Girangaon. In addition, the Communist Party of India was now committed to a strategy of working with democratic institutions and of allying with the progressive elements of the 'national bourgeoisie' to push it leftwards. Under the circumstances, they prized highly the electoral dividends that participation in the Movement might yield. Undoubtedly, their espousal of the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement brought them some immediate gains. It may even have enabled the communists to halt their apparent decline and to protect their position in Girangaon and among the working classes. But this venture into regional nationalism, associated inevitably and closely with the prior claims of 'a people' defined by language, posed complex problems for the development of a political agenda built around class and seeking to transcend ethnic, regional and religious differences. As Shanti Patel put it, in explaining his own opposition to the movement,

Actually, I don't agree that language is the basic history of the masses. This thinking is against progressive concepts and philosophy. The agitation served no purpose. The exploitation and difficulties of the masses have remained the same [Chapter Three, p. 245].

In fact, in important ways, their 'exploitation and difficulties' may have got worse. The discourse of linguistic nationalism necessarily also carried chauvinistic and racist themes. The principal beneficiaries of this discourse in the long run were not the communists, but the Shiv Sena. In the late 1960s, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) was to achieve massive success in West Bengal as the champions of regional nationalism. For in the specific political circumstances of West Bengal in the 1960s, they emerged as the only plausible bearers of this mantle. In Bombay, the communists had entered the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement largely on the terms that were set out for them and they had failed to swing it to their own advantage in the longer term. In the 1957 election campaign, the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti fought on the basis of 'a common minimum programme' for a 'socialist Maharashtra'. By signing up for it, the right, especially the Jan Sangh and the Hindu Mahasabha, may have

shown that they had interpreted the trajectory of the politics of cultural nationalism with greater accuracy than the communist leadership. The Marathi *manus*, with all his rage, was nurtured in the womb of the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement. He emerged fully formed with a belief in his own victimhood and in the injustice meted out to his folk.

The Shiv Sena, founded in 1966, was the legacy of the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement, whose aims had seemed to some of its protagonists at the time to be progressive.<sup>40</sup> The Sena drew upon the programme of Samyukta and developed it to its furthest extreme. First, it built upon the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement's emphasis on the exploitation of the 'sons of the soil' and its quest to secure their rights. Its agenda to ensure justice for the Marathi *manus* sometimes proclaimed the imperative for direct action. Of course, there were substantial, sometimes fundamental, differences between many of the political parties that coalesced around the Samyukta Movement and the Shiv Sena. Indeed, from the outset, the Sena treated the communists, together with Muslims and South Indians, as their principal antagonists. However, the fact that the major political parties, including some factions of the Congress and the communists, had embraced, and sometimes subscribed to, the nativist rhetoric of Samyukta Maharashtra made it impossible for them to adequately confront, let alone plausibly counter, their fundamental differences with the Shiv Sena. In the mid-1960s, the communists still constituted a formidable force in Girangaon. At first, as long as the Sena appeared to be marginal—and, outside Bombay and Thana, so it remained for a while—the Congress hoped to deploy it against the communists and divide their followers. Increasingly, employers too began to see its value as a strikebreaking force. The encouragement provided by some employers and the ruling party provided an impetus for the Sena's early growth.

In addition, the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement had orchestrated the revival of the symbols and iconography of regional nationalism, which had not been deployed on this scale since Tilak first brought them into play in the early twentieth century. The Shiv Sena played upon and developed this imagery. It recalled, and made central to its own iconography, the glories of Shivaji's heyday and his resistance against the Mughal Empire. It also offered itself as the repository and arbiter of a pristine Maharashtrian culture and the purity of its values. Thirdly, Samyukta Maharashtra, by securing the creation of the state and the inclusion of Bombay city within it, had enabled Maharashtrian politicians to acquire a tighter grip on power and an easier access to the massive resources of India's leading industrial and commercial centre. Necessarily,

the politicians and political networks that dominated the new state used its patronage to favour their friends and constituents. Yet since the resources of even the Maharashtra government were insufficient to provide lasting pleasure for all, the serried ranks of its disappointed clients grew rapidly. On the one hand, the city's Marathi-speaking middle classes discovered a certain confidence from the triumphs of Samyukta Maharashtra as well as from tasting the fruits of state patronage. On the other hand, they could not overcome the feeling that they had as yet gained little from their struggle to create a 'Maharashtra for Maharashtrians'. The Sena's nativism tapped into precisely these rapidly accumulating resentments. In the early 1960s, Bal Thackeray's journal, *Marmik*, both fed and expressed the general anxieties of middle-class Maharashtrians in the city, whose fears for being so unspecific became all the more haunting.

The Shiv Sena's rhetoric, with its assertion of power, its spectacular display of violence and racism on the one hand, and its sense of victimhood and injustice and its invocation of the fear of domination by 'outsiders' and by bureaucrats, corporate interests and politicians beyond their control, found its resonance not primarily in Girangaon, but especially among the upwardly mobile Maharashtrian middle classes in general. Their ranks included the growing army of clerks in the 1950s and 1960s, the children of skilled industrial workers and those who were the first generation in their families to finish secondary school or acquire university degrees. Some had gained substantially from the expansion of employment and rising wages in the 1950s and early 1960s and found themselves forced to confront the limits of their opportunities for social mobility. Others found themselves buoyed up by this period of expansion and then left stranded by the slump of 1965-66, which hit many millworkers especially hard. Yet others found themselves competing for clerical jobs in a shrinking market. In the Bombay municipal elections of 1968 and 1973, the Shiv Sena candidates performed best in constituencies like Girgaum and Dadar, that were dominated by the Maharashtrian middle classes.<sup>41</sup> In Girangaon, and in working-class constituencies, they won fewer seats by smaller margins. In 1968, the Sena received nearly a third of the votes cast in the municipal elections. Clearly, it had also attracted substantial working-class support. The communist stalwarts among the millworkers often lamented the fact that their children had joined the ranks of the Shiv Sena. Nonetheless, the working classes did not support the Sena necessarily for the same reasons as the voters of Girgaum and Dadar. As the surveys conducted by Dipankar Gupta and Mary

Katzenstein in the early 1970s showed, working-class *sainiks* showed little antipathy towards the communists.<sup>42</sup> The Sena's ferocious anti-communist rhetoric played far better with their more prosperous, middle-class members. Similarly, Katzenstein's survey suggested that the working classes in 1971 on the whole showed 'positive attitudes' towards Muslims and non-Maharashtrians and adopted 'a more tempered and moderate outlook' than the Sena.<sup>43</sup> Significantly, while working-class voters who held extremist views were more likely to join or vote for the Sena, Congress voters among the working classes on many issues, notably on the use of violence, or the need for authoritarian rule, subscribed to beliefs rather similar to the *sainiks*, and sometimes in larger numbers.

Bal Thackeray, and indeed the Shiv Sena, as a whole, had from the outset claimed to eschew politics. Rajkaran, as Thackeray proclaimed, was *gajkaran*.<sup>44</sup> The Sena was not to be thus sullied by political participation. Yet, from the outset, the Sena intervened in the political process, made and switched political alliances with some facility, competed in municipal and state elections and attempted to influence the outcome of elections to the Lok Sabha. Its early experience of elections indicated that to secure a closer grip on power, the Sena would have to expand its working-class following and to extend its appeal beyond the enraged Marathi man. To reach out beyond the disaffected Maharashtrian lower middle classes, the Sena concluded that it would have to develop its Hindu nationalist agenda and began to focus its antagonism more sharply against Muslims. More immediately, in order to develop its working-class constituency, the Sena had to establish itself in Girangaon. In turn, the attempt to do this brought them directly into conflict with the communists.

In the late 1920s, the communists had discovered just how closely interrelated were the social organization of the workplace and the neighbourhood. They had quickly grasped the significance of organizing in the neighbourhood to sustain strikes and, indeed, to strengthen their position in the politics of the industry. As a result, they had begun to immerse themselves in the social and cultural institutions of the neighbourhood. Ironically, the Shiv Sena extended their influence by the same means but often proceeded in ways that had scarcely been traditional in Girangaon and, as they did so, the political economy of the neighbourhood itself was being transformed.

Since discrimination against Marathi speakers in the job market, whether for clerical or blue-collar employment, was a recurrent motif in the Sena's nativist rhetoric, it is scarcely surprising that it offered itself in

Girangaon, as elsewhere in the city, as the champion of 'the unemployed youth'. The Sena blamed the condition of the young unemployed Maharashtrians on the presence of 'outsiders' and migrants, especially from Uttar Pradesh and South India. 'We could see it all before our eyes,' as Bal Nar, then a *sainik* himself, recalled,

the street vendors, the traders were all outsiders, Madrasi, Gujarati, Telugu. They would not treat us with respect, they would do *dadagiri* (bullying) and they were organized. No one could oppose them. As the Shiv Sena grew, some of them who got beaten started behaving with respect [Chapter Four, p. 270].

Violence, and the threat of violence was, from the outset, crucial to the Sena's strategy. It was also deployed to coerce employers to hire Marathi speakers. *Marmik*, Bal Thackeray's newspaper, published lists of appointments made usually to government, public sector and corporate posts, to show how Maharashtrians were being denied jobs. When Sena demonstrators assaulted the General Manager of Air India, it shocked the city, but 'convinced the youth that the Sena stood for Maharashtrians' [Bal Nar, Chapter Four, p. 270]. An important object of antagonism were the restaurants run by 'the Shetty community' from Udipi in Karnataka. They garnered a large share of the business in cheap eating-houses but brought along their own employees so that Maharashtrian boys could not even get 'the job of waiters in these hotels' [Dinu Randive, Chapter Four, p. 269]. Thus, Vijay Gaonkar, a local *dada* who later represented the Sena in the municipal corporation, explained that 'we burnt the Visawa Hotel' in 1969, 'because it had been taken over by the Shettys by force from a Maharashtrian. The Shettys always got workers from their villages, and they would not employ local people' [Chapter Four, p. 279]. Alongside these spectacular demonstrations of violence, the Sena cultivated a reputation for helping to 'find jobs for unemployed Marathi youth' [Bal Khavnekar, Chapter Four, p. 272]. Similarly, when the signboards on shops 'were not written in Marathi, we smeared them with tar' [Bal Nar, Chapter Four, p. 271].

At the same time, Sena activists attempted to draw Maharashtrian youth into their ranks by entrenching themselves within the neighbourhood. They opened a number of *shakhas* or local branches in Girangaon as indeed they had elsewhere in the city. Characteristically, the Sena opened one of its first *shakhas* in the old communist stronghold of Lalbaug. It would be easy to exaggerate the degree of organization in these *shakhas*, and in the structure of their relationship to each other or to the Sena as a whole. They often depended upon a few dominant fig-

ures and *dadas* and a loose network of followers and friends who collected around them. The *shakhas* most commonly operated as a meeting place on the street corner. They served as a centre for collecting dues for Shivaji Jayanti or for Ganeshotsav mandals. Sometimes, such collections resembled extortion and the youth who gathered around the *shakhas* ran what were more or less protection rackets. The money for the local *shakha* was collected 'naturally', as Bal Nar explained, 'from the liquor and matka operators' [Chapter Four, p. 300]. Sometimes, subscriptions were taken from 'local baniyas' and shopkeepers. This money was used to fund the Sena's local activities, including various festivals and public events, and sometimes to pay off the police and other officials or to stand bail for *sainiks* who had fallen foul of the law. Thus, money collected from the liquor distillers and matka operators by the Parel *shakha* paid for

everything—all expenditure of those accused in the Krishna Desai [murder] case, including their clothes and even their slippers and underwear . . . including money for their families [Prakash Bhogle, Chapter Four, p. 290].

Some *shakhas* acted as 'trouble shooting' and 'problem solving' centres. 'Local people', Bal Khavnekar, General Secretary of the Girni Kamgar Sena declared, 'would also bring their grievances to the *shakhas*' [Chapter Four, p. 273]. Bal Nar recalled the activities of his *shakha* near the Modern Mills:

We would solve domestic problems, say, arising from alcohol. We would advise the families to try and resolve the situation amicably. If not, then we would slap the chap around a bit and the problem would get solved. Then there would be cases of harassment on the road or at work; we would investigate under the guidance of the *shakha pramukh* (branch leader) and then act.

Often, they acted with the same brisk violence. In 1972, when the Sena agitated against rising prices, shortages and hoarding, 'we hijacked the lorries taking grain for the hotels and sold it at the *shakha* at two rupees a kilo to the people'. But since they could not distribute all the grain in this way, they 'handed the lorry over to the police' [Chapter Four, p. 300]. Thackeray liked to claim that the Sena was not a political organization. It did not dabble in politics. Rather, the Sena and its *shakhas* often revealed a preference for direct action.

At the same time, the *shakhas* also undertook what their activists called 'social work'. According to Bal Khavnekar, they opened 'health

camps, vocational guidance camps and eye camps' [Chapter Four, p. 273]. The Sena 'did a lot of community work . . . We have ambulances. When there is an accident, sainiks are the first to donate blood.' [Vijay Gaonkar, Chapter Four, p. 279]. By intervening in festivals like Ganeshotsav and Shiv Jayanti, the Sena tried to appropriate them and 'gave them a social content and made them more grand and colourful.' [Bal Khavnekar, Chapter Four, p. 273]. The Sena tried to place 'their cadres in the Ganeshotsav mandals which also helped the organization.' [Bal Nar, Chapter Four, p. 271]. Local youth, attracted by the prospect that the Sena would rescue the Marathi manus, invited them to their akhras and their kho-kho clubs [R. S. Bhalekar, Chapter Four, p. 272]. From the outset, as Bal Khavnekar described it,

Balasaheb [Thackeray] was confident that the movement would grow through activities in the cultural field. That is why he concentrated on capturing the vyayamshalas and with their help, he held local meetings in the chawls, in small halls and the maidans of Girangaon where he propagated his views. [Chapter Four, p. 273].

By the late 1960s, the communists could not claim to lead 'a single Ganeshotsav mandal' [Datta Iswalkar, Chapter Four, p. 280]. As the Sena gained prominence and popularity within Girangaon, they appeared to have captured precisely those social and cultural organizations of the neighbourhood that had allied themselves so closely with the communists in the 1930s and 1940s. The relative ease with which the communists were substituted in the social organization of the neighbourhood suggests how shallow their cultural penetration had been during their period of political dominance.

The Shiv Sena's capacity to fulfil the expectations that it generated, to find jobs for its boys, to resolve disputes in the neighbourhood and to do favours for its clients depended upon acquiring political power. Although Thackeray often claimed to eschew politics, the Shiv Sena participated in municipal and state elections. Within a year of its founding, it had emerged as the single largest party in the Thana municipal council. In the following year, the Sena won 42 seats in the Bombay Municipal Corporation and constituted the largest opposition party. Over the next few years, it intervened often decisively in state and parliamentary elections. In the process, the Shiv Sena showed an enthusiasm for making political alliances across the ideological spectrum and breaking them as expediency and opportunism dictated. The Sena in this respect matched every other political party whose opportunism it derided. Between 1967

and 1974, the Sena made various alliances and associated for electoral purposes with both 'the Requisitionist' and 'the Opposition' Congress, the Praja Socialist Party, the Republican Party of India, and the Swatantra Party and rarely held back from joining forces with parties that it had in the recent past attacked mercilessly.<sup>45</sup> Of course, the Sena's objectives had always extended well beyond Girangaon. However, its growing proximity to political power, especially in the Bombay Municipal Corporation, which commanded resources equivalent to a middle-ranking state, gave the Sena greater access to patronage and served to consolidate its position within Girangaon.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Girangaon became the scene of an intensive struggle for supremacy between the Shiv Sena and the communists. This conflict was not merely a battle for political ideas or a social vision. It was also fought for supremacy in the public spaces of Girangaon and it brought to the surface the rivalries between the *dadas* and the toughs of the neighbourhoods and their followers. It was as much the case in the late 1960s, as it was in the 1930s, that 'all the parties use *dadas* to some extent.' As the *sainik* Prakash Bhogle explained,

what is called terrorism on the part of the Sena is not that at all. These things have to be done, or else how is one to deal with the aggression of the other side? [Chapter Four, p. 285].

Indeed, 'the Lal Bawta did as much *rod-phod* when they were the main opposition union in the mills.' [Bal Nar, Chapter Four, p. 299]. The dominant figure among the communists in Girangaon was the charismatic Krishna Desai. According to Sahdev Tawde of the Rashtriya Seva Dal, Desai 'had a tough reputation . . . At first, he was a *dada*, yes. He was not an extortionist nor was he a contract killer. But he was tough and violent' [Chapter Four, pp. 276–77]. He was also 'known to be militant' [Govind Phansekar, Chapter Four, p. 291]. It was said that, if he took a patient to hospital, Krishna Desai would warn the staff, from the Dean to the ward boy, that 'if my patient dies, you are responsible so you'd better get cracking.' His objective was to ensure that they took 'proper care'. As a result, 'the moment people knew Desai had come, everyone would be galvanized' [R. S. Bhalekar, Chapter Four, p. 295]. Krishna Desai could place his followers in jobs and get his friends released by the police.

In the political economy of the street, personal allegiances were important but political boundaries were often opaque. Certainly, the *dadas* of Girangaon were sometimes closely connected, irrespective of their political differences. Thus, R. S. Bhalekar, a Shiv Sena *dada*,



revealed that Krishna Desai was supposed to take him to the Coca Cola Company to get him a job. But he was murdered the day before their appointment. Bhalekar remained forever devoted. 'I always voted for him', he said,

even after he died. I say that I am a Shiv Sainik, but I have always voted in his name for the Lal Bawta. I don't care if my vote is wasted. When the Sena is elected, I dance on the street but I don't give it my vote [Chapter Four, p. 295].

Similarly, the testimony of Govind Phansekar, a Congress dada from Prabhadevi, suggests the intimacy that marked the connections and the rivalries between these neighbourhood bosses. Phansekar regarded Krishna Desai 'like a family member'. He had in the past helped Desai secure his election to the municipal corporation. But Phansekar's political commitments to the Congress prevented him from supporting Desai in the elections to the state legislature in 1967. During the campaign, 'they [the communists] had sent a hundred people after me—but I too had a hundred people after Krishna.' Phansekar's mother 'got angry with Krishna' and reminded him that 'I have looked after you with as much love and affection' as her own son. Despite her exhortations, they fought after the election. 'I was known to be militant,' he recalled:

Krishna was too. I had an influence in my territory. No one messed with us. But we were both on the side of justice [Chapter Four, p. 291].

But when Phansekar thrashed the communists after the elections, he said, they had no one to blame but themselves: 'they had given me such a bad time [during the campaign]—and they were supposed to be friends of mine!' [Chapter Four, p. 292].

At least in part, these political rivalries turned on the reputation, skill and prowess of particular bosses. The outcome of these rivalries was likely to be explained in terms of their personal role. When Krishna Desai was murdered in 1970, several prominent sainik toughs were charged. The murder of Krishna Desai has been regarded on the left but also by other political groups as a major turning point for the communists. In retrospect, at least, sainiks as well as communists agreed that 'the Sena may have found it difficult to grow had Krishna Desai been alive' [Prakash Bhogle, Chapter Four, p. 289]. His comrades in the Party, according to Phansekar, were 'good people but no guts' [Chapter Four, p. 292]. Already in the late 1960s, as B. D. Parab recalls, 'the terror was so great that we [communists] could not move around freely.' [Chapter Four, p. 308].

Even the communist leaders were reduced to 'hiding their faces behind a newspaper' when they walked the streets [Chapter Four, p. 308]. Successively, the general election of 1967 in which the Sena ensured the defeat of Krishna Menon in north Bombay by its support for the Congress candidate, S. G. Barve, the attack on the communist offices in Dalvi Building and the murder of Krishna Desai (followed by the defeat of his wife by a sainik in the subsequent by-election) suggested that the battle for territorial dominance in Girangaon had turned decisively in favour of the Shiv Sena. Leftwing activists as well as sainiks attributed the Sena's successes in Girangaon to the role of individual dadas. Prakash Bhogle, a sainik, who believed that Krishna Desai was the left's last bulwark, similarly declared that 'the Sena, as it is now in Lalbaug-Parel, is because of the work that Wairkar-master did' [Chapter Four, p. 329]. Wairkar, a prominent Shiv Sena dada, was one of the accused in the Krishna Desai murder case. Similarly, Neena Sarmalkar, a CPI activist, attributed the success of Shiv Sena in Girangaon to Bandu Shingre 'their goonda in Parel' and Wairkar-master, who were both 'part of the first batch of gangsters' [Chapter Four, p. 303].

Of course, the Sena's expansion in Girangaon did not pass unchallenged. Roza Deshpande's victory as the CPI candidate for Parel in the state assembly election in 1974 suggests that the left still commanded substantial support in Girangaon. Similarly, in the same year, millworkers across the whole industry and indeed the whole political spectrum came together to effect a general strike under the leadership of the GKU. The strike lasted for nearly six weeks. There was considerable dissatisfaction in Girangaon when Dange called off the strike with very modest wage increases. Some suspected his decision was driven by the communists' increasing proximity to Congress. Others believed that it was a tactical masterstroke, worthy of his leadership of the strikes of the 1930s and 1940s. His aim, according to Iswalkar, was to maintain 'the morale [of the working class] to be able to fight again later.' [Chapter Five, p. 346]. Bhai Bhonsle, at the time General Secretary of the RMMS, likened Dange to the tiger who 'looks and calculates before attacking' [Chapter Five, p. 360]. However, by the end of the decade, it was becoming increasingly the case that 'the Lal Bawta exists only in name' [R. S. Bhalekar, Chapter Four, p. 296].

Similarly, from the mid-1970s onwards, the Shiv Sena's fortunes appeared to have waned. When Thackeray supported the Emergency, suspicion of and hostility towards the Sena began to grow in Girangaon. More widely, in Maharashtra, the Sena's vote began to shrink.

Thackeray's justification of Indira Gandhi's benevolent authoritarianism as the system of government best suited to Indian conditions did not convince his followers or fill the electorate with enthusiasm. Some even discerned that 'the Sena was almost finished at that time.' Thackeray calculated that its revival lay in 'playing his Hindutva card' [Datta Iswalkar, Chapter Five, p. 356]. The Shiv Sena began to shift its emphasis from fighting for the rights of local people to advocating the claims of Hindutva. The Sena propounded its new programme with the same stridency and violence that marked the old. The Bhiwandi riots of 1984, which extended to Thane and parts of central Bombay, appeared to entail the systematic participation of the Shiv Sena. In the organization and forms of violence, and the role of the police and the State government, the Bhiwandi riots seemed to prefigure the pogrom against the Muslims in Bombay in 1992-93.<sup>46</sup> This shift towards Hindutva was in part forced upon the Sena and it suggested the fragility of its own place within the political economy of the neighbourhoods. The volatility of its methods and organization enabled it to stage dramatic displays of power and influence but it did not always enable the Sena to embed itself within the institutions and social practices of the neighbourhood. Nonetheless, its adoption of an increasingly aggressive and violent anti-Muslim politics coincided with its growing association with the new style of *dadas*, increasingly observed in political life, who operated within wide networks of power and enterprise, usually on the margins of legality. In the 1980s, the Shiv Sena was reputed to be the party represented by the most candidates with a criminal record.<sup>47</sup> Once the Sena secured a majority for the first time in the Bombay Municipal Corporation in 1985, it gained access to vast resources and extensive webs of patronage. In the late 1980s, the Shiv Sena established a presence in the wider political arena.<sup>48</sup> It began to win a larger number of seats in the state assembly and founded branches outside Maharashtra. Barely two years after the pogrom of 1992-93, the Shiv Sena was elected to power in Maharashtra in a coalition with the BJP.

The party that had dismissed *rajkaran* as *gajkaran* now embraced politics and state power with enthusiasm. Having built its base on the rage of the Marathi *manus*, it now proclaimed the virtues of Hindutva yet more vociferously from the 1980s. The primary focus of their antagonism, 'Madrasis' and 'bhaiyas' were to be accommodated within their fold so long as they were Hindus. Muslims, whether they spoke Marathi or not, became the primary focus of their antagonism. The Marathi *manus* was in danger of being swamped by the Hindu nation. As a local

and neighbourhood movement devoted confessedly to 'social work', the Shiv Sena attempted to develop a more elaborate political machine that could effectively contest elections, run governments and at the same nurture its patronage connections in neighbourhoods and the localities. These tensions and contradictions which arose from the expansion of the political arenas in which the Sena operated clearly generated discontent and turmoil among the oldest and most loyal cadres. As Prakash Bhogle comments:

Now the *sainiks* beat up and kill for money. Every Sena leader, even an ordinary Corporator, needs a bodyguard now, otherwise he can't move around . . . That is what social service has come to [Chapter Four, p. 330].

Necessarily, as the Sena projected its presence into wider political arenas, its methods of patronage as well as of coercion became more complex and more attenuated from the moral economy of the neighbourhood. This discontent among its old cadres may suggest that, as its own strategic emphasis reached beyond the locality, its own links with the neighbourhoods of Girangaon, its informal institutions and its power structures, had begun to atrophy. In this respect, in relation to the neighbourhoods, it may have run into the difficulties that the communists began to encounter in the 1950s and 1960s. As the nature of their neighbourhood connections was transformed, the Shiv Sena established a greater public prominence, exercised greater leverage on the state and gained greater access to the power and resources with which they could shore up their position in the city.

#### THE CHANGING POLITICAL ECONOMY OF GIRANGAON SINCE THE LATE 1960s

By the 1960s, however, the social organization of Girangaon had begun to change. These changes certainly unsettled the foundation on which the communists had built since the 1930s and they may have served to undermine the solidarities they had helped to forge. First, the social character of Girangaon had begun to change as the city expanded. Certainly, a city that had grown slowly as Girangaon formed in the preceding 50 years now expanded rapidly as it absorbed a substantial inflow of migrants, as a consequence of the social dislocations of Partition and later of rural immiserisation. Between 1941 and 1971, the city's population grew fivefold and then doubled again in the next two decades. The scarcity of housing, rising rents and improved transport meant that a growing proportion of millworkers lived beyond Girangaon. Of course,

Girangaon was still very much a mill district. Nonetheless, it was no longer the case, as it had been in the 1920s, that nearly all workers lived within walking distance of the mill. Moreover, the new migrants who streamed into Bombay often came in distress. Yet the social economy of Girangaon had been formed by a particular set of relationships between town and country. Workers who came to Bombay to earn cash and hold on to their village base developed institutions in Girangaon, like the *khanavals* and the *gaonkari mandals*, that were geared to the maintenance of their rural connections. Those who arrived in the city because they could no longer maintain their village base perceived their position in the city and in the countryside in rather different terms. Workers without a village base had always been more easily recruited as strikebreakers. They depended more heavily upon their patrons and their kin, caste and village connections to secure jobs, credit and housing as well as help in times of crisis. In this way, the changing economy of Girangaon had begun to threaten social connections and networks that transcended caste, kinship and village. As a result, it was probably becoming easier to mobilize along lines of caste and language, religion and nation. At the same time, the effect of increased state regulation of working conditions, together with the response of the employers to the new laws and practices, had exacerbated differences between permanent and *badli* labour. Casual workers relied more extensively upon caste, kinship and patronage networks for organizing their lives in the city. They also found it more difficult to maintain their rural connections without sacrificing their position with the urban labour market. There was, as a consequence, a greater diversity of social experience within Girangaon, not only in terms of their conditions of work, but also in the way in which workers related to the institutions of the neighbourhood, from the employers, landlords and creditors to the *dadas*, 'social workers' and politicians.

Second, it would seem as if many of the cultural institutions and social practices that workers created as Girangaon formed were now in decline. These institutions, and the social relationships that they forged, had underpinned the particular style of industrial and political action that had emerged in the 1920s and had created the communist leadership of the GKU. Jobbers had primarily acted as agents of labour recruitment and discipline. But their role had been crucial in linking the social organization of the workplace and the neighbourhood. In the 1920s and 1930s, the millowners valued and deployed them as strikebreakers. Nonetheless, jobbers could not perform their essential functions of recruiting and disciplining workers if they stood aloof from the workforce and several were drawn into the labour movement by the momentum

of industrial action. This bridge between workplace and neighbourhood, between permanent and casual labour, gradually cracked under the weight of workers' militancy. By the 1950s, their role had largely been reorganized and their powers severely curtailed.

Similarly, the *khanavals*, where single male migrants took their meals, had once flourished in Girangaon and had provided a vital focus of sociability. At their height, there were, according to one count, about 650 *khanavals* in Girangaon. From the mid-1970s, they began to fold up [Indu Patil, Chapter One, p. 97]. *Ganeshotsav*, which had once simply been 'a joyful and collective celebration', began to acquire religious and Hindu nationalist overtones in the 1970s and 1980s. This religious dimension was, according to Vijay Khatu, reputed to be the best sculptor of Ganesh idols in Bombay, 'created by vested political interests' [Chapter One, p. 116]. Gunvant Manjrekar, the great *rangoli* artist, who had characterized it as 'a socialist art form' decided that it had no future and stopped teaching it in 1975. The Hanuman Theatre where *tamashas* were performed in Lalbaug since the mid-1940s finally closed down by the mid-1980s. Madhukar Nerale, its last owner, lamented the fact that 'our audiences have become almost extinct. The *tamasha* artistes are unable to survive. This artistic tradition is likely to die out' [Chapter One, p. 124]. No longer could they muster patronage from political parties, political 'movements or from the state.' Even the Shiv Sena which 'talks of Marathi culture' never did anything 'to encourage Marathi folk forms' [Chapter One, p. 124]. Similarly, along with the decline of *tamasha*, the *shahirs* began to disappear. 'Everything has been swept away now,' declared Shahir Sable,

The cultural movement is almost dead. The *shahirs* of today are starving . . . Today Marathi culture is almost gone from the city . . . On the streets you don't hear Marathi anymore. Only Hindi [Chapter One, p. 130].

This, then, was where the nativist agenda had led. From the 1970s and 1980s onwards, the *loknatya* tradition withered away. At one level, this evidence suggests that the cultural effervescence that was witnessed in Girangaon in the 1940s and 1950s, built upon its older political traditions, had begun to peter out. But at another, it also suggests that social ways of being that had underpinned this cultural activity, and that had been the product of the political momentum of the 1920s and 1930s as much as it had fostered it, were now being fundamentally transformed.

Finally, by the late 1960s and 1970s, the political economy of local dominance, and indeed the place of violence within it, had also begun to

undergo significant change. Local dominance had often depended upon the use of muscle. The dada had been an important, even ubiquitous institution of the neighbourhood. Respected for their physical strength, their fearlessness and their ability to get things done, *dadas* were often called in by landlords to collect rents, by creditors to recover debts, by politicians to acquire votes, by trade unionists to organize strikes and by employers to break them. Govind Phansekar, a Congress *dada* active in the 1960s and 1970s, explained that he attracted support and loyalty

because they respected me . . . Then of course I also had the reputation of being a *dada* and a *goonda*. So what is wrong with that? . . . See, this is the way to do it: however big a leader he may be, if he comes in your way, you must hit him [Chapter Four, p. 294].

*Dadas* also sought to perform services within the neighbourhood that were not dissimilar—even if they were conducted on a smaller scale—to those which the *Sena* provided: getting young men jobs, securing medical help for their neighbours, rescuing their friends from the clutches of the police or the grip of other institutions of the state. Necessarily, *dadas* sometimes entertained connections with the police, neighbourhood patrons, more powerful and prominent bosses and politicians. By the 1960s, some neighbourhood toughs discovered fresh opportunities and challenges by involving themselves in wider networks of enterprise and power.

The workings of democracy provided an important stimulus for local bosses looking for wider, more powerful and more lucrative connections. While politicians valued the *dada's* capacity to gather votes, the latter increasingly needed their connections with politicians in order to secure favours for their own clients and dependants. Their local prestige and influence could depend upon the efficacy of their connections. The insatiable appetite of politicians and political parties for cash, especially for their election campaigns, meant that their needs could only be met through the 'black' economy. In the 1930s, *dadas* collected subscriptions for Ganeshotsav or other festivals from local shopkeepers, who readily recognized that it was in their best interests to pay up. Thirty years later, Shiv Sainiks raised the income for their shakhas, to stand bail for their friends as well as to pay the costs of festivals and local events, not only from shopkeepers and baniyas but especially from liquor and matka operators during prohibition. In the 1970s, with the end of prohibition, smuggling gold as well as high-value consumer goods that otherwise attracted high import duties became a lucrative cash-fuelled business and

thus an important source of informal capital accumulation. By the early 1980s, the heroin traffic from Afghanistan, stimulated by war, passed substantially through Bombay. The complexity of these enterprises placed them beyond the reach of most *dadas*. However, the elaborate nexus of cash, violence and political power that developed around them impinged upon even the more modest *dadas* of Girangaon.

As tariffs were lowered, smuggling lost its value and even gold lost some of its lustre. The heroin trade quickly proved a high-risk specialism. Property development and construction became the focus of attention for what were now being described as 'mafia' networks. Catastrophic urban planning, archaic tenancy laws and land ceiling legislation served to push up property prices swiftly while the construction industry offered high returns within the informal economy. Now local bosses could claim generous subventions for their political campaigns. Property developers eyed the lands on which slums and squatter settlements had been built. Indeed, some settlements had over the years improved and reclaimed the land on which they stood and thus made them yet more valuable for builders. When these external pressures on slums mounted, it also created opportunities for profiteering and protection rackets within them. Similarly, landlords sought the help of *dadas* and local power-brokers to eject their tenants protected by law, while the latter sought favours from politicians and local toughs to protect them, sometimes at a considerable and continuing cost. Thus, when Sahdev Tawde drew a sharp distinction between the 'tough and violent' Krishna Desai and those 'like Arun Gawli or Ashwin Naik and those Mafia people', he drew attention to an important shift that had occurred in Girangaon. In the 1920s and 1930s, *dadas* were in some measure constrained by the demands and expectations of the neighbourhood. The nexus of cash, muscle and political power that had taken shape in the city by the 1970s and 1980s placed them beyond the reach and influence of those they had once, at least intermittently, served. No longer could the residents of Girangaon impose, to any great effect, the constraints and obligations of reciprocity upon their patrons. If the Shiv Sena had deployed some of the same techniques as the communists in establishing their presence in Girangaon, the social, cultural and political relationships of the neighbourhood had changed almost beyond recognition.

#### THE GENERAL STRIKE OF 1982<sup>49</sup>

By the late 1970s, millworkers were only too aware that their wages, living standards and working conditions had slipped far behind the levels that

prevailed in the new industries like engineering, chemicals and especially, pharmaceuticals. Substantial wage increases had been made in these new sectors, especially in pharmaceuticals, in the previous two decades. The deterioration of conditions in the city's premier industry had been accompanied by the continued stifling of representation for the workers. The RMMS, now lodged firmly as the representative union, proved wholly immovable under the existing legal provisions. Sindu Marhane, then working in Phoenix Mills, described a common predicament when she recalled:

I used to be influenced by the communists but in the mill, we were forced to become members of the RMMS. They are the representative union and we had to go to them for everything. So we had no choice . . . The RMMS would favour those who were close to them and ignore the demands of those who were not.

In fact, for those whose sympathies had not been captured by the RMMS, their only recourse was to 'become members of both unions.' [Chapter Five, pp. 345–46] Indeed 'the reason why all the workers were angry' in 1982, explained Kisan Salunke, who worked in the Spring Mills, was 'what the RMMS was up to. That was the real anger. The union was being forced down their throats whether they wanted it or not.' As the sole representative union in the industry, the RMMS often appeared to act with impunity. 'The RMMS oppressed workers,' declared Salunke, 'they were goondas. They would think of different ways to cut back on wages, they would collect union dues by force.' Consequently, in the early 1980s, 'the workers wanted a leader who would help them get rid of these people' [Chapter Five, p. 353].

The Shiv Sena had established its own union, the Girni Kamgar Sena (GKS), in 1980 in a bid to deepen its base among the millworkers. In protest against the deal struck between the Millowners' Association and the RMMS over the annual bonus, the GKS staged a successful one-day strike in November 1981 and then threatened to launch 'an indefinite strike' in two weeks if further wage increases were not granted. When, at a meeting on Kamgar Maidan, Thackeray called for a postponement of the indefinite strike on the basis of assurances he claimed to have received from the Chief Minister, A. R. Antulay, the workers smelt more than a whiff of betrayal. They concluded that they had been marginalized and their interests had been disregarded in a deal struck between the Congress and the Sena. They walked out of the Kamgar Maidan. The communists were now rapidly becoming a distant memory. Their future lay firmly

behind them. Workers in the Standard Mills invited Datta Samant to act as their spokesman. Samant's reputation had been built upon numerous successes in the engineering industry, the great Premier Automobiles strike of 1979 and the daring attack on the Shiv Sena in the Godrej factory at Vikhroli. It is clear from these testimonies that Samant was reluctant to take on the bonus dispute in the textile industry, even if the Standard Mills workers had invited him to lead them. Rather, it was the millworkers who 'forced the leadership [specifically Samant] to declare a strike'.<sup>50</sup>

The general strike of 1982 was Girangaon's last stand. It was sustained for at least a year. Indeed, it was never called off. By the time it collapsed, the textile industry had begun to be dismantled. In many respects, the strike harked back to the solidarities demonstrated in Girangaon in 1928–29, when the workers had effectively closed down the industry for about 18 months. A striker from 1928, parachuted into Girangaon in 1982, would have recognized the same massive, enthusiastic groundswell that drove the leadership forward in the initial stages of the dispute. He or she would have observed the caution as well as the determination that marked the first phase of the strike, the discussions at the mill gates and the calculations about how complete the strike might prove. The 1982 strike was indeed organized around a structure of chawl, area and zonal committees that had perhaps first come into existence in 1928. Following the pattern of 1928, some unionists encouraged those workers, who were in a position to do so, to return to their villages. Conversely, since a large number of strikers came from the Deccan districts of Satara, Sangli and Pune, 'thousands of bags of grain would come daily into Bombay from these districts' for the strikers, according to Bhilare, the general secretary of Samant's Maharashtra Girni Kamgar Union (MGKU). The grain was distributed to the workers and their families through the zonal centres established by the union in Girangaon [Chapter Five, p. 372]. Yeshwant Chavan of the Lal Nishan Party recalled that 'we thought that since that was going to be a long drawn-out strike, we should get the support from the peasantry. We thought of that as politically and economically necessary' [Chapter Five, p. 386].

In the first few months, the strike appeared to be complete. It proved impossible for the RMMS, the millowners and the government to recruit replacements for the strikers. As the strike went on, however, more determined attempts were made to start the mills once again. Certainly, in 1929, similar attempts to take workers through the pickets, often escorted by the police, had been elaborately organized. But they were dwarfed in

scale by the initiatives taken in 1982, beginning with the attempt to resume production at the Century Mills. Now the millowners' strategy was to ferry large contingents of workers into the mill to live and work for a week or a fortnight at a time until they could safely be relieved and replaced by another batch to replace them. Frequently, there was 'hardly any work on the machines, and very little production.' The workers, having been driven into the mill under guard, would simply 'clean the machines and the departments' [Arondekar, Chapter Five, p. 394]. As workers resisted such attempts at organized strikebreaking, violence began to occur in Girangaon. Our parachutist from 1928–29 would have recognized these patterns of violence, but dimly, because they had clearly become more elaborate. The protagonists were now armed with knives and swords in 1982, rather than with lathis and stones as they had occasionally been in 1929. Thus, in 1982, armed masked gangs attacked strikers in the Digvijay, Kohinoor, Ruby and Podar Mills and an attempt was made to burn down the tents in which workers on picket-duty slept at night. Similarly, the RMMS believed that 'Datta Samant's people were capable of doing anything. They once beat up everyone in a whole locality—in Koliwada—because they were going to work in the mills.' The age of Keshav-dada Borkar was steadily being overtaken by the age of Babu Reshim and Arun Gawli.

Necessarily, the longer the strike lasted the harder it became for workers to subsist. Some workers sought jobs in the city, in construction, as jobbing painters or as manual labourers. Some travelled to the powerloom towns like Bhiwandi and Ichalkaranji to find work. Children, it was said, took up 'small jobs' and 'millworkers' wives would go out to work as domestic workers, here and there' [Sindu Marhane, Chapter Five, p. 396]. Dhondu Mohite recalled that his children started a *batata wada* stall [Chapter Five, p. 394]. Several simply sold whatever they possessed. Kisan Salunke recalls having to sell 'all the vessels' and then to chop 'the lathis that belonged to my father' and that he had 'used for fighting during his communist days' to burn for fuel [Chapter Five, p. 394]. Some began to drift back to work because, as Arondekar put it starkly, 'they were starving' [Chapter Five, p. 394]. The long general strikes of the 1920s and 1930s had entailed a similarly continuous crisis of subsistence for the workers.

For all their similarities, however, there were important differences between the strikes of 1928–29 and 1982. Most obviously, the 1982 strike occurred within a more complex and intricately woven political context. Democracy, political parties and their varying stakes at different

levels of government impinged upon the strike and affected the negotiating position of the numerous parties to the dispute. Prakash Bhogle suggested, for instance, that the reason why the Shiv Sena did not press ahead with its threat to initiate a general strike in November 1981 was because some of its middle-ranking leaders were concerned that such action would raise the profile of the GKS and especially its secretary, Varadkar, and feared that they would be marginalized within the organization. Conversely, it was claimed that the RMMS put pressure on the Congress governments both at the state and at the centre not to allow a settlement with Datta Samant in case it undermined their own position within Girangaon. If Samant was able to present the strike as a triumph, he might have been able to attract sufficient support for the MGKU to dislodge the RMMS from its perch as the sole representative union. In addition, the eclipse of the RMMS would have adversely affected the Congress in several state assembly constituencies as well as damaging its prospects in the Lok Sabha elections. Another consideration for both the Congress and the Sena was the threat that a successful strike would greatly develop Datta Samant's influence in Bombay. 'I staunchly believe,' Anant Kumbhar, who went on strike in 1982, declared, and he was probably not alone, 'that this strike [i.e. its settlement] was disrupted to stop the Doctor's popularity from growing' [Chapter Five, p. 412]. Rival political parties thus had much to gain from driving the dispute into a stalemate. Certainly, the Congress, under Indira Gandhi's direction from the Centre, appears to have stopped the Chief Minister in Maharashtra, after Antulay was ejected, from settling the strike. Nor would the Bombay millowners countenance making a deal with Samant for fear of leaving him entrenched within their industry. 'The millowners and the Congress government reached their own understanding,' as Arondekar, a retired timekeeper in the Swan Mills, put it. 'The Indira Gandhi government did not care about what happened to the workers. They let them starve into submission' [Chapter Five, p. 393].

It was the misfortune of the millworkers that they had become embroiled in this political stalemate. However, Arondekar's assessment also suggests that Datta Samant miscalculated. The astute leadership of a general strike on this scale required not only impeccable timing in initiating action but also in bringing it to an end. Perhaps, Samant calculated that he could adopt and maintain his own tough, unrelenting position because Delhi and the State government would eventually persuade the millowners to negotiate. He would certainly have been aware of the massive gains that would accrue to him from even a moderately

favourable settlement, especially one effected through political intervention. For a successful conclusion to the strike would have greatly enhanced his political influence in the city, not only in Girangaon but also in relation to the millowners and within the long, dark corridors of the Mantralaya. Bombay's millworkers paid the price for his miscalculation.

In this light, the prolongation of the strike beyond the capacity of the workers to bear appears to have been a catastrophic mistake. Having embarked upon the strike with reluctance, the MGKU was unable to bring it to a stop. Perhaps, Datta Samant had given insufficient thought to a means of retreat or, to use a term that became fashionable among capitalists and officials as the industry collapsed, to his own 'exit strategy', once he had begun to lead a determined workforce in this massive strike. Perhaps, the difficulty lay with Datta Samant's style of leadership and its limitations. Datta Iswalkar's summation of Samant's leadership may throw some light on why a strike that began with such massive solidarity, enthusiasm and determination should have ended so disastrously:

He did not have his finger on the pulse of the people. He was a hero, but he did not know how to deal with the responsibility that people placed in him.

By contrast, Dange had shown repeatedly that he 'knew how far you could take the struggle' and 'when it was time to retreat' [Chapter Five, p. 408]. In retrospect, Samant failed to match the tactical acumen of the communist leadership of the GKU in 1928 (perhaps even in 1934), even if he borrowed their name.

When the strike ended, and statistics were paraded to show the loss of man days, production and revenues for the industry, it was remarkable that the closure of the industry in the leading centre of India's textile industry had resulted in no appreciable decline in the availability or output of cloth. Powerloom factories expanded rapidly. While minimizing fixed capital costs, the powerloom factories achieved more easily the flexibility in the composition of output and deployment of labour that the composite mills had long pursued with so much determination and even greater difficulty. By employing small numbers of workers, they often escaped the regulation of production conditions and employment practices that often, if too lightly, affected the formal sector. As the strike petered out, millowners found that they could spin yarn and outsource cloth production or even diversify into powerlooms themselves. It is one of the many tragic ironies of the 1982 strike that many workers had made ends meet during the dispute and thus sustained the strike by securing jobs in the powerloom industry. In this light, Samant's miscalculation in allow-

ing the strike to continue indefinitely looks more like a failure to grasp the harsh realities of the economics of the cotton textile industry. Samant himself led the strike as a political figure, as a 'hero' of other struggles, but without any previous experience of the textile industry.

Looming over these economic realities, however, was a massive political, indeed cultural fact. The Bombay millowners, like employers elsewhere in India, had been, from the outset and throughout the twentieth century, highly averse to the formation of trade unions and chronically anxious that any system of wage bargaining would inexorably lead to a situation in which labour would prove impossible to discipline. In the theory of industrial relations to which employers most readily subscribed, they appeared to be the most enlightened guardians of the workers' welfare. Yet, they had also consistently sought to squeeze the returns to labour. The employers' intolerance of and hostility to trade unions, their reluctance to negotiate with 'outsiders' and their tendency to threaten workers who spoke up in their own interest had contributed over time to a highly confrontational style of labour relations. Yet, to the millowners, the confrontational nature of industrial relations only seemed to demonstrate the validity of their theory of managing labour. In turn, it strengthened their resolve to exclude meddlesome outsiders and troublemakers and to refuse to deal with trade unions. The genesis, scale and conduct of the 1982 strike were integral to this dynamic of confrontation, both as cause and consequence.

The fierce and sustained resistance of the workers, and the complex task for the millowners of cutting their way through the multi-layered intricacies of trade union politics, led the latter increasingly to regard the composite mill as obsolete. For some, the long strike had imposed an insuperable financial burden and rendered the task of mobilizing capital to restart the mills virtually impossible. The millowners' perception of 'the labour problem' had from the earliest days of the industry exercised a severe constraint on their business strategies. Now these anxieties about maintaining labour discipline and about extracting acceptable levels of productivity at the lowest possible wages led them to dismantle the industry altogether. Faced with rising land prices, sustained industrial action, severe competitive pressure and a hostile fiscal regime, the millowners diversified, outsourced and withdrew from the industry. The real estate on which the mills stood appeared to be worth more than the industry could realize. In the powerloom industry, by contrast, the threat of labour was easier to contain, fixed costs were low and greater flexibility possible in responding to market fluctuations. As Vikas Kasliwal,

Managing Director of S. Kumars Suiting, owners of the Sreeram Mills, put it, entrepreneurs and managers 'all want to reduce employment.' They took it as axiomatic that

labour is a headache, today they are demanding "x", tomorrow they are demanding "y". If you want to modernize, they say "no". So the mindset became that the less labour you have, the better it is [Chapter Five, p. 340].

The 'labour problem' had remained the persistent difficulty for the millowners in transferring the burden of the industry's structural crises onto their workforce. What appeared to them as the insuperable burden of managing labour in the formal sector eventually led capital to retreat into the relatively unregulated powerloom industry, where small groups of workers, with fewer rights, less bargaining power and weaker political traditions, could be deployed with greater flexibility and at lesser cost as the imperatives of the market dictated. This then was at least in part the substantive meaning that globalization was to acquire in the new lexicon of the international political economy.

The powerful public presence that the working classes had established in Bombay by the early twentieth century had exerted a determining influence on the formation and reproduction of the city's distinctive urban character and civic tradition. Increasingly from the late 1960s onwards, the public presence and political influence of the working classes was progressively cut back. The marginalization of the working classes in the late twentieth century was accompanied by fundamental changes working their way through the city's political culture. By the late nineteenth century, as Bombay had developed into a major metropolitan and industrial centre, it had also witnessed the emergence of a distinctive cosmopolitan and eclectic political culture. The city was characterized by its diversity and hybridity, not wholly surprising in a city of migrants. Its public life was marked by its secularism, its equidistance from the particularisms of caste and religious community and often its transcendence of their differences.

The emergence of this political culture had owed something to the degree of autonomy from colonial domination that the city's elites had been able to assert since the earliest days of the East India Company settlement. British power established itself late in western India and expanded slowly. The Company's political weakness and the relative

poverty of their merchants increased their dependence on Indian merchants and dubashes. As a result, Bombay's elites had been able to appropriate considerable influence and wealth. Commercial partnership lent itself to political collaboration. Bombay's mercantile elites acquired a grip on important and lucrative areas of the city's economy, including and indeed especially, the cotton textile industry. By marked contrast with Calcutta and Madras, the city's elites swiftly acquired a significant share of local power. From the 1830s onwards, they were firmly entrenched in local government. They were frequently consulted by colonial officials. They gained ready access to, and moved easily within, the Governor's court. Necessarily, they focused their attention on the city where political power and influence was open to them and ignored the hinterland over which they had little control. From this secure and significant base, they extended their influence over provincial affairs and by the 1890s began to exercise the determining influence within the Indian National Congress. As they battled for power within the Municipal Corporation where they gained, by the 1880s, greater representation on a relatively wide franchise, they took particular pride in public standards in the city. This civic pride was manifested in rhetoric, philanthropy and in a measure of commitment to the working of the institutions of urban government. Of course, their benevolence was often selective, their rhetoric was often disciplined by their parsimony and their best intentions were qualified by harsher calculations of particular interests. Nonetheless, this civic ideology served to ensure a certain minimum in standards of governance and in public expectations about the city's institutions. From their application, most of the city's residents gained something.

The opportunities opened up by Bombay's growth brought people into the city from the whole Presidency and, indeed, further afield. It ensured that no single social group, whether defined by caste, language or religion, dominated its commercial or political life. Conversely, as migrants streamed into the city, they had every reason to keep their eye on its opportunities rather than dream wistfully of their rural homes. Bombay's history ensured that it never really became a city of its hinterland. It was neither simply a Gujarati nor a Maharashtrian city until the reorganization of the state took an awkward, if decisive, step towards its definition in 1960.

However, the development of this civic ideology should not obscure the fact that, as the city expanded, its poor lived in appalling conditions and often barely at levels of subsistence. Their exploitation can be measured in their low life expectancy, in the high rates of industrial accidents



and the range of occupational diseases. Observers frequently noted in the early twentieth century how rare it was to see workers over the age of 45 employed in the cotton mills. However, the city's workers were by no means passive victims. They resisted the demands made upon them by the employers and the colonial state. Their ability to combine and strike work was observed from at least the 1880s. By the 1920s, in the face of the hostility of the employers and repression by the state, a powerful labour movement had developed in the city. From the late 1920s, witnessing the development of this labour movement, increasingly under communist direction, the city's ruling elites feared intermittently that Girangaon had become an insurrectionary centre. In the 1920s and 1930s, the city's workers had declared their political presence. The maintenance of the city's civic tradition and cross-communal political culture, even in the face of communal riots, would not have been possible without the stake which the working classes had claimed within its imaginary.

Nothing undermined the political culture of the city more seriously than the continuing failure of its cross-communal elite to accommodate the poor and manage labour more generously. This is reflected in part in their response to working class discontents. The Bombay millowners, like most Indian employers, refused to tolerate the presence of trade unions and when they came to be established, they sought as far as possible to weaken and marginalize their role in the industry. As working-class resistance gathered force, its public presence at times appeared menacing to the city's propertied elites, the employers and the state. Both before and after Independence, working-class resistance intermittently evoked severe repression. Colonial rule had given Indian mercantile and landed elites the means to discipline and control labour more effectively.

With Independence, they sought to extend and tighten their control. At the same time, the political solidarities of the working classes, welded together at least partially through the struggles of the 1920s and 1930s, began to fragment under the pressure of trade union rivalries and political competition by the 1950s. As trade unions became the instruments of political parties, their quest for followers served to further fragment workers' organization, sometimes along the lines of caste, language and religion. Thus, the advent of democracy held out the promise of consolidating the political presence of the working class and the urban poor but in practice served to incorporate them into the political process on terms of such subordination that their political influence was considerably diluted.

While working-class resistance had undermined existing methods of labour control, the employers and the state attempted to restructure the labour force and reorganize the framework of industrial relations. From the 1930s onwards, the textile industry differentiated with increasing clarity between 'permanent workers' and a sizeable 'informal sector' within the industry of dependent casual workers. The growing body of industrial legislation served to entrench this distinction and to extend it across the labour market. As these 'permanent' workers, whose employment rights were now better protected, drove up their wages or resisted efforts to alter work practices, employers and managers sought to assert their 'right to manage' against them. On the other hand, the informal sector continued to expand. Not only did workers here have few rights and poor returns, but employers, politicians and the state felt few obligations towards them. The closure of the textile industry, with the development of outsourcing to the power looms, and de-industrialization in the city in general, can be seen as the logical extension of this strategy of 'informalization'.

Casual workers and those employed in the so-called informal sector were often forced by their insecure conditions of work and low wages to depend even more fully on contractors and intermediaries, patrons and caste fellows, and assorted peddlers of influence, power and credit. By the 1960s, therefore, as the Shiv Sena emerged, the containment and repression of working-class resistance had created the conditions for exacerbating caste and communal differences. These shifts in the structure of the labour force and the nature of the labour market, accelerating since the 1960s, coincided with fundamental changes in the city's politics and together they pressed in the same direction. In the 1930s, the communist GKU had been an effective agent in industrial relations but it had also created a wider community of political sentiment around it in Girangaon. By the 1950s, the communists were still a significant force in the labour movement but they had begun to lose their position of dominance in Girangaon. The communists responded to the first signs of their decline by jumping aboard the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement and hoped thereby to revive and extend their wider political appeal. However, the argument that working-class culture was essentially Maharashtrian and that the workers' Bombay could only be safeguarded if it was integrated into the new state, served to reduce to a linguistic and communal base what had been a wider and culturally heterogeneous class movement. As a consequence, the communists surrendered ground to those who made the 'nativist' argument with more force and who felt free

to carry its implications further. As the Shiva Sena emerged from the interstices of the Samyukta Maharashtra coalition, employers began to see the advantage of inviting it to break up the base of the militant unions of the left. To a large extent, they succeeded. Trade union rivalries, with a sharpening political edge, fragmented the solidarities of the labour movement further and opened it up to greater violence.

In the aftermath of the 1982 strike, the public presence that the city's working classes had seized in the civic life of the city was increasingly nullified. Their claims to a stake in the city's social framework were swept aside. As the industry was dismantled, and the social organization of Girangaon began to disintegrate, workers sometimes sought protection in caste and communal affinities and the social connections built around them. With its active neighbourhood presence, its readiness to do favours for its clients, to find jobs for the boys, to confront authority and to terrorize the powerful on behalf of individual members, its spectacular displays of violence and its increasing access to state power, the Shiv Sena offered a kind of citizenship to workers, now seemingly disenfranchised and wholly subordinated, and created an arena in which they could at least fleetingly make a claim for dignity and equality.

At the same time, there was a more fundamental and, indeed, more general, process at work. It may be argued that the propensity of a democratic state to protect human rights and civic freedoms, including freedom from want, that is the civility of its practices of governance, will be determined largely by the attitude to the poor entertained by politically and socially dominant groups. De-industrialization, the diversification of investment and the stripping of the textile mills to capitalize on the value of land, was in part the outcome of political choices. They did not disclose a generous attitude towards labour or its stake in the city. Indeed, the formation of a new nexus of cash, muscle and office by the 1980s, operating on a larger scale of wealth and power, was facilitated by the workings of democratic politics, but also suggested a certain degradation of governance. Local bosses were now no longer simply the arbiters of social exchange within their own domain. Their reach had extended deep into, and at times apparently hollowed out, parts of the structure of the state. While the civic traditions and political culture of Bombay until the 1960s, characterized by its apparent secularism and its transcendence of caste and communal difference, was inconceivable without the assertion of the public presence of the working classes, the degradation of governance was a necessary pre-condition for the pogrom against Muslims in Bombay in 1992–93 or indeed in Ahmedabad and Gujarat in 2002. The

future of the city as a peaceful, habitable and successful metropolis will turn on the stake that its poorest residents, including the former mill-workers and their progeny among them, are allowed within its society. In this respect, as in many others, axioms that apply to Bombay city also apply to the workings of the nation as a whole.

#### Notes

- 1 For a recent investigation of these themes, see Darryl D'Monte, *Ripping the Fabric: The Decline of Mumbai and its Mills* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).
- 2 This section draws substantially on the arguments and evidence presented in my earlier work, *The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India: Business Strategies and the Working Classes in Bombay, 1900–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and *Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance and the State in India, 1850–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Chapter Four.
- 3 Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856–1920): prominent Congress leader from Maharashtra; scholar, mathematician, philosopher and militant nationalist.
- 4 Figures from the *Annual Reports of the Bombay Millowners' Association*, passim.
- 5 *Census of India, 1931* (Bombay, 1933), VOL. 9, part 2, pp. 158–59.
- 6 *Labour Gazette* (1925), VOL. 4, no. 7, pp. 745–47.
- 7 *Census of India, 1921* (Bombay, 1922), VOL. 9, part 1, p. 16.
- 8 K. C. Zachariah, *Migrants in Greater Bombay* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1968); Heather and Vijay Joshi, *Surplus Labour and the City: A Study of Bombay* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1976).
- 9 A more detailed analysis of patterns of migration is offered in my *Origins of Industrial Capitalism*, Chapter Four.
- 10 Some women who came to the city to escape the shackles of the family remained an exception to this rule. See also Samita Sen, *Women and Labour in Late Colonial India: The Bengal Jute Industry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- 11 Chandavarkar, *Origins of Industrial Capitalism*, pp. 94–99 and passim.
- 12 Kunj Patel, *Rural Labour in Industrial Bombay* (Bombay: Popular

- Prakashan, 1963).
- 13 *Gazetteer of Bombay City and Island* (3 vols, Bombay, 1909), VOL. 1, p. 199.
  - 14 *Indian Textile Journal* (August 1919), VOL. 29, p. 209.
  - 15 *Census of India, 1931*, VOL. 9, part 1, pp. 88–89.
  - 16 *Ibid.*, VOL. 9, part 1, pp. 88–91.
  - 17 Parvatibai Bhor, *Eka Rannaraginichi Hakikat* as told to Padmakar Chitale (Bombay: Lokvangmay Griha, 1977).
  - 18 *Bombay Confidential Proceedings, 1917*, General Department, VOL. 25, p. 15. Oriental and India Office Collection, The British Library; Patel, *Rural Labour*, p. 151.
  - 19 See Chandavarkar, *Origins of Industrial Capitalism*, Chapter Five.
  - 20 Bhor, *Eka Rannaraginichi Hakikat*.
  - 21 Communication from Neera Adarkar.
  - 22 For memories of the smells of the commune in Sandhurst Road and its effect on herself and her comrades, see Raj Thapar, *All These Years: A Memoir* (New Delhi: Seminar Publications, 1991).
  - 23 *Golden Jubilee of the Progressive Writers Association U. K., 1935–1985: Brief Report, Statement, Declaration and Resolutions of International Conference held on 3 and 4 August, 1985 at G.L.C. County Hall, London* (London, n.d.).
  - 24 Yashodhara Dalmia, 'From Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy to the Progressive Painters' in S. Patel and A. Thorner (eds), *Bombay: A Mosaic of Modern Culture* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 182–93.
  - 25 This section draws upon my earlier work, *Origins of Industrial Capitalism and Imperial Power and Popular Politics*.
  - 26 Jim Masselos, 'Audiences, Actors and Congress Dramas: Crowd Events in Bombay City in 1930' in Jim Masselos (ed.), *Struggling and Ruling: The Indian National Congress, 1885–1985* (New Delhi: Stosius Inc./Advent Books Division, 1987), pp. 71–86.
  - 27 Max Weber, *The Religion of India*, H. H. Gerth and D. Martindale tr. (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1958), p. 114.
  - 28 *Report of the Indian Tariff Board Regarding the Grant of Protection to the Cotton Textile Industry* (Calcutta, 1932), p. 118.
  - 29 D. Bhattacharjee, 'Unions, State and Capital in Western India: Structural Determinants of the 1982 Bombay Textile Strike' in R. Southall (ed.), *Labour and Unions in Asia and Africa: Contemporary*

- Issues* (London: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 211–37; Hubert W. M. Van Wersch, *The Bombay Textile Strike, 1982–83* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
- 30 D. Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India: Malabar, 1900–1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
  - 31 I have treated these issues in greater detail in *Origins of Industrial Capitalism*, Chapters Eight and Nine and in *Imperial Power and Popular Politics*, Chapter Three.
  - 32 *Labour Gazette* (1946), VOL. 25, no. 9, pp. 670–71.
  - 33 See Morris David Morris, *The Emergence of an Industrial Labour Force in India: A Study of the Bombay Cotton Mills, 1854–1947* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965), pp. 185–94.
  - 34 M. Holmstrom, *Industry and Inequality: Towards a Social Anthropology of Indian Labour* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).
  - 35 Jairus Banaji and Rohini Hensman, *Beyond Multinationalism: Management Policy and Bargaining Relations in International Companies* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1990).
  - 36 D. N. Dhanagare, *Peasant Movements in India, 1920–1950* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983); A. Satyanarayana, 'Rise and Growth of the Left Movements in Andhra' in *Social Scientist*, no. 152, (1986); Adrienne Cooper, *Sharecropping and Sharecroppers' Struggles in Bengal 1930–1950*. (Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi and Co., 1988); Stree Shakti Sanghatna, *We Were Making History* (New York: Zed Books, 1989).
  - 37 V. B. Karnik, *Strikes in India* (Bombay: Manaktalas, 1967), pp. 341–44.
  - 38 A. Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); J. Chatterji, *Divided Bengal: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932–1947* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
  - 39 There is of course a large literature on linguistic nationalism and the nature of Centre-state relations in India. See F. Frankel and M. S. A. Rao (eds.), *Dominance and State Power in Modern India* (2 vols, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990); and in relation to Maharashtra, J. Lele, *Elite Pluralism and Class Rule: Political Development in Maharashtra* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981).
  - 40 In a large and swiftly growing literature on Shiv Sena, see the fascinating study by Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Wages of Violence: Naming and*

*Identity in Postcolonial Bombay* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

- 41 Mary F. Katzenstein, *Ethnicity and Equality: The Shiv Sena Party and Preferential Policies in Bombay* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1979), especially Chapters Four and Five.
- 42 Katzenstein, *Ethnicity and Equality*, pp. 90–93; Dipankar Gupta, *Nativism in a Metropolis: the Shiv Sena in Bombay* (New Delhi, 1982), pp.144–45.
- 43 Katzenstein, *Ethnicity and Equality*, p. 90.
- 44 Literally, politics is like ringworm.
- 45 Gupta, *Nativism*, pp.159–66.
- 46 Hansen, *The Wages of Violence*; see also *Report of the Srikrishna Commission Appointed to enquire into the riots at Mumbai during December 1992–January 1993 and the March 12, 1993 bomb blasts* (2 vols, Bombay: Sabrang Communications and Publications, n.d.).
- 47 Hansen, *Wages of Violence*, pp. 98–99.
- 48 Usha Thakkar and Mangesh Kulkarni (eds.), *Politics in Maharashtra* (Bombay: Himalaya Publishing House, 1995).
- 49 For an account of the strike, see Van Wersch, *The Bombay Textile Strike*.
- 50 For instance, Jayprakash Bhilare, General Secretary, Maharashtra Girni Kamgar Union, Chapter Five, p. 363; Kisan Salunke, Chapter Five, 353; Lakshmi Bhatkar, Chapter Five, 367.

## THE INTERVIEWEES

AHILYA RANGNEKAR (75 years). Veteran communist with a reputation for militancy, active in the freedom struggle as well as in the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement. Was Member of Parliament, 1977–79. Played a leading part in the women's and the trade union movement in the city. Left the CPI along with her brother B. T. Randive, one of the founders of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), to become part of the CPI(M) when it was formed in 1964. In spite of old age and failing health has not lost her tremendous enthusiasm; her speeches still have the power to move audiences.

ANANT KUMBHAR (50 years). Millworker, Victoria Mills.

ARJUN DANGLE (53 years). Well-known Marathi writer and poet, also translated into English. Edited a collection of short stories in English translation by dalit writers. One of the founders of Dalit Panthers, still active in the Republican Party of India and the dalit movement in the state.

ARONDEKAR (70 years). Retired as timekeeper from Swan Mills, Sewri. Now living at the workers' quarters built by the RMMS at Goregaon.

B. D. PARAB (64 years). Supervises the printing department of CPI-affiliated Peoples' Publishing House.