

Julian Anthony Lynch

UW-Madison Anthropology and Ethnomusicology

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My dissertation project focuses on interrelated conflicts over loud sound in public spaces in Mumbai, India. These conflicts are often collapsed under the category of “noise pollution” in the context of contemporary Indian discourse, with debates about “noise pollution” disproportionately centering on sound sources associated with religion and politics, most notably Hindu religious festival events. Such events routinely reach remarkably high decibel levels, and occur frequently in residential areas throughout the calendar year (especially during the September-December “festival season”). The sound from festivals is generally produced by some combination of amplified music from live bands and DJs, firecrackers, and speeches delivered via loudspeaker. Funded in part by the IRIS Summer Fieldwork Award, I return to Mumbai from September 2016 through February 2017 to complete my field research for my dissertation.

During this particular trip, my goal was to devote my time to interviews and participant-observation with *mandals* (planning committees that organize festival events) as well as musicians that perform during those events. After meeting several *mandal* members, just after the end of the Ganpati festival in September, one *mandal* member introduced me to his friends from a local *banjo* group (a Maharashtrian style of street band typically comprised of drums and amplified keyboard or electric *bulbul tarang*, the “Indian banjo”). Bands like these, which perform at high decibel levels during festivals, are viewed as a major source of urban “noise.” The band I met was well established enough in Mumbai as to have an extensive network of

mandal contacts that hire them regularly throughout the year for festivals. After getting to know the members of the group and demonstrating my own musical abilities, I soon began practicing and performing with them at events, eventually making this my primary participant-observation activity in Mumbai. This offered me a very unique perspective on the inner workings of religious festivals.

This participant-observation experience made a few important things very apparent for me. First, it demonstrated, very concretely, that connections to several controversial Marathi Hindu nationalist political parties are a salient part of the band members' lives. Familial and personal ties to local politicians from these parties abound, and the band members often speak at length about the importance one such party in particular, Shiv Sena, holds in their daily lives. The Shiv Sena plays a significant and visible role in this community and other working-class Marathi-speaking communities (their primary base of support), providing social services and sponsoring entertainment and cultural/religious events. The party is an especially visible presence during Hindu festivals, when they or *mandals* associated with them organize events and hire musicians and DJs. During this trip, I met many Sena politicians who are involved with *mandals* setting up the events the band plays.

Second, through working with this band, I have come to a more complex understanding of identity issues involving class, religion, and regionalism involved the greater sphere of festival soundscape politics. In this band's community, there seems to be a presumed connection between identifying with a certain kind of Maharashtrian Hindu regionalism and a view of socioeconomic realities that aligns with Shiv Sena's platform (the assertion that native, working class Hindu

Mumbaikar's economic security is threatened by the influx of migrant labor from outside Maharashtra, especially northern Indian states). This contrasts in many ways with the composition of the anti-noise activist community (with whom I worked during a previous research trip in 2015), which includes more individuals from upper-middle class backgrounds who often use English and Hindi rather than Marathi when speaking with each other.

The Sena's presence in working class Marathi-speaking Hindu communities enables them to consolidate support within this crucial "vote bank" in Mumbai, thereby maintaining their power in the city. Hindu festivals, with their high visibility and audibility, are essential in maintaining this presence, and therefore are highly valued by political parties and by *mandals* associated with them. For musicians like those in the *banjo* group I got to know, paying work is scarce outside festival events (aside from performing at weddings). Shiv Sena, and associated *mandals*, have the financial means to subsidize musician labor. Issues of labor for those largely working class, Marathi-speaking Hindu musicians are compounded by their resentment of migrant workers, which only increases their support for the party. The Sena, as the party in power in Mumbai, also has the ability to hinder the measurement of decibel levels during festivals as well as the enforcement of noise laws. My experience on this trip therefore suggests that sonic participation in festivals — especially in Ganpati, which is seen as so characteristically Maharashtrian — serves as kind of an expression of agency and control for working class Maratha men, who otherwise feel their voices are being drowned out as a byproduct of large-scale migration to the city.