Abstract: The Charisma of Direct Action

This book explores how movements that are explicitly anti-pluralist in nature still manage to succeed electorally within a democratic framework which they themselves reject. The book studies the ideologies and practices of the successful but minor affiliate of the Hindu nationalist movement: the Shiv Sena, a party which has dominated the political scene in Maharashtra—especially in its capital city Mumbai—for several years, and has been characterized by its culture of direct—often violent—action, its militant images, and its autocratic leader, Bal Thackeray. The author explores the internal dynamics of the party, its local mode of operation, and its strategies of mobilization within a democratic set up. It also examines the movement’s dilemma between norm-breaking and norm-setting as well as its role within the Hindu nationalist agenda of which it has become the most vociferous propagator. While studying the movement’s need for creating opportunities for action, the role of militant enemy images, and the integration of diverse interests and motivations in the politics of struggle, the author also analyzes the deliberate and repeated creation of space for such anti-pluralist violent movements within democratic environments.