CHAPTER X
ABOUT GANGS AND EXTORTION

This research did not originally set out to study gangs and extortion as a form of criminal organisation and activity. It was a study to understand the profile of the group and the factors that influence entry into and exit from the crime world. However, during the course of fieldwork, a number of respondents spontaneously spoke at length about the composition of gangs, their hierarchy, organisation structure, its activities and its changing nature, norms and values and their nexus with the police, local officials and politics. As in most research studies, this chapter on gangs and extortion is the result of a serendipitous discovery, an area of knowledge that the researcher had not sought to explore, nor anticipated that respondents would speak about so openly.

Based on the analysis of the narratives, this chapter is thematically divided into the following sections:

Gang history, structure, hierarchy and organisation

History

The growth of gangs in the city of Mumbai happened in three phases, or over three generations of gangs, each building on the platform built by their predecessors. The first generation of gangs rose in the sixties and seventies from being local groups (tolis) who fought turf wars over running petty extortion rackets, gambling and illicit liquor dens, land grab and black marketing of cinema tickets. Small-time dadas extorted money in their local areas from shopkeepers and people living in encroached lands. Some of them graduated to smuggling of gold, imported goods (e.g. watches) and charas and ganja and cocain. The bigger smugglers financed the work of the tolis and they in turn worked for them and shared the profits.

The senior members of the first generation of gangs split from their gangs and and fought bloody turf wars with each other to form the second generation of gangs in the seventies and eighties. These gangs took the form of organised gangs or companies, a more sophisticated and expanded version of the original tolis. Ramesh points out that the
second generation of gangs gradually diverted their attention from small time betting, gambling and black marketing activities to involvement in construction, film and share markets.

...Company dhanda was an attempt by the gangs to convert the money generated through the earlier dhandas into legal businesses – mainly by investing in films, shares and the construction industry. The major source of income of these gangs is through drug trafficking. Another aspect of their activities is land grabbing and then constructing buildings on them by flouting existing laws/rules.

However, they continued with supari killings, land grabbing, betting and extortion activities. The money made through these activities was invested in legal businesses, in an attempt to convert black money into white.

The 1990s witnessed the peak of violent forms of gang activities – extortions, supari killings and kidnappings of businessmen, film personalities, diamond traders and real estate developers. The city was gripped by a fear psychosis and the media highlighted the issue as a sign of weakness and collusion of the police with the underworld. This was followed by a period of a severe clampdown on extortion related activities and several members of gangs were killed in police ‘encounters’. Joseph says that this led to gangs changing their tactics and type of activities.

Gang activities have come down by 90%. Some ... have entered politics. Others ... have been forced to lie low due to police encounters and also because they have now made enough money. They are not interested in crime any more. They are converting their wealth into ‘white’ businesses. Some leaders have been killed due to territorial rivalries. Some of the second rung leaders have been killed either due to intra-gang rivalries or by the police.

PI Shirishkar, a key informant says that a severe crackdown on the underworld’s violent activities and charging extortionists under MCOCA broke the backs of gangs involved in these activities. He adds that recruitment of local youth to carry out extortions is not profitable during times of recession. It is also possible that complainants prefer to pay up rather than complain to the police, due to fear of the underworld.

The main reason is the application of MCOCA against all gang related activities including extortion. This has broken the back of extortion as a profitable venture. The second reason is that most of the leaders who were involved in organising extortion activities have either been killed or
are in prison. The youth who were the recruits to carry out extortion activities have realised that at the end of the day, one eventually lands up in prison with no support from the gangs. Another factor is that due to recession, the costs of maintaining armies of youth who are required to carry out extortions are too heavy.

The gangs now prefer to hire upcountry youth on a job basis, who vanish after the work is over. Therefore it is difficult for the police to catch these offenders. Another reason why extortions have come down is that victims – builders and businessmen involved in illegal activities prefer to pay than complain to the police. This is because many of the extortion calls are made by bhais from inside prison or on their way to the courts, thus increasing the fear of the victims (if they can make threatening calls while they are still in custody, they are capable of carrying out the threats once they are out.).

Since 2000, there has been the emergence of the third generation of gangs, which are splinter and smaller gangs – in size and operations. These gangs claim being part of the bigger gangs and use their names if they need to use threats. Aftab Qureshi, a key informant, says that many of these claims may be lies.

These gangs may be satellite gangs of one of the four main gangs. They are mainly involved in settlement of financial disputes as their main income source. Some gangs are also into robberies to supplement their income.

It is however possible that these splinter gangs may fight a fresh round of turf battles in the days to come in an effort to establish their ‘name’ and dominance in the city, through a series sensational killings and extortions. The lull in violent crimes in the city may be broken if this were to happen.

**Structure, hierarchy and organisation**

Any criminal gang is headed by a leader, with usually four to five people reporting to him, usually known as ‘handlers’. The leader may be assisted by a chief handler, often known as his ‘right hand’. The ‘right hand’ acts like the leader’s personal assistant-cum-chief manager, overseeing all operations. Asif says that the right hand sometimes runs a ‘white business’ which acts a front to run the illegal empire of the gang leader, who may be based abroad.
The bhai abroad has a ‘right hand’ who operates from a fake business enterprise and an office in that city. He is actually the front for that bhai. Calls are made from this space via satellite phone and using multiple sim cards.

For each city, there may be one or more financers, who finance the activities. These persons usually also have a ‘white business’ to conceal the illegal activities they are involved in.

Then there are operators / handlers for each city who manage the operations and activities in the city / areas assigned to them. Under each operator or ‘handler’, there are a number of ‘boys’ who get into action whenever required – threatening, assaulting, killing, kidnapping, etc. Each area handler looks after the business of that area and may have ten or more boys working under him. Vijay indicates that the boys are like the working class of the company or the gang; they carry out the tasks assigned to the handler. He adds that the remuneration of a handler may be on ‘salary’ or ‘share’ basis.

The remuneration of a handler is based on either a fixed salary or a share of the extortion amount or both, depending on the importance and ranking of the handler in the gang. The share system is better – you earn your share after a job is over and then sit tight till the next job comes up.

Handlers could also be organized on the basis of the type of activity they specialize in e.g. specialized handlers for extortion, supari (contract) killings, kidnappings, land grab, running gambling or betting clubs, or investing in the film industry, stock market or real estate. Aftab Qureshi, a key informant says that these are subject specialists who are chosen to handle a sector based on their expertise and contacts.

These handlers/operators have expertise in the subject matter of that ‘line’ and have contacts and connections in that field to expand business and increase income from that source.

The number of handlers in a city depends on the size of operations in the city. Asif says that a handler has direct contact the gang leader, while the boys only know their handler.

What separates a ‘handler’ from one of the ‘boys’ in a gang is the fact that he is in touch with the bhai abroad. He takes direct instructions from bhai to carry out extortions and carry out extortions and supari killings. Most suparis are given by people who have rivalry with the purported victim either in business or in politics. The bhai accomplishes the job at a price.
Asif says that the boys under a handler come into play only when a party refuses to pay or when there is a supari killing involved. There is always the risk of getting caught by the police while carrying out an extortion threat or a supari killing. The consequences of getting caught can lead to the arrest of the handler too.

If the boys get caught and if they are kachcha they will spill the beans and the handler too will get caught. All the boys under this handler who get arrested will get the stamp of being members of the ‘company’, irrespective of their levels of involvement in the activities of the gang.

According to Asif, it is possible to rise from being one of the boys to being promoted as a handler by the gang organization.

If one is a good shooter and accomplishes a good job, one gets noticed by bhai. Usually after a successful operation, bhai makes inquiries as to who was the main person involved – that is how one gets noticed. More challenging the work more is the reward if one succeeds. It can also lead to his salary being increased. He could also come into direct contact with bhai and can be promoted as a handler. If a handler, a sharp-shooter or a big-gun gets arrested, his lawyer’s fees, monthly expenses of the family and prison expenses are taken care of.

Similarly, it is possible to rise from being an area handler to becoming a region or city based handler or operator. Joseph says the gang leader may sometimes ask more than one handler to carry out an operation to test who comes out the winner.

Sometimes, if a job is very important and the risks are high, the same job may be given to 5 handlers. The one who succeeds first may get a promotion to become a sub-operator.

There are also smaller district or area based gangs. They may choose to function independently or may be in touch with the bigger gangs. Robberies are done by smaller and independent gangs. One does not have to be a permanent member of these gangs. Membership is floating. One can come and go. Some make money and leave, others continue. Those who continue become known members of the gang.

Activities and operations

Rocky says that the main activities of a gang – it’s like their bread and butter – are extortion, supari killings and kidnappings. But for the new gangs, it’s very difficult to get
into these activities, due to police pressure, which in turn is due to increasing political pressure.

The activities of gangs can be analysed as operating at three levels. Level one includes the violent face of gangs i.e. carrying out extortion threats, kidnappings, settling financial disputes between two parties involved in illegal businesses, *supari* killings, land grab and forced evictions. Level two consists of running illegal business which has some level of social sanction such as running betting and gambling clubs/rackets, and illicit liquor dens, dance / beer bars and involvement in illegal constructions. Level three consists of investing the money illegally earned into legitimate businesses such as real estate, films, stock market and legitimate businesses with the help of a ‘frontman’. Then there are a few gangs who are into drug trafficking, human trafficking, fake currency rackets and arms trade.

Very few gangs are involved at all four levels. Most gangs may end up at level one or level two. Only those who reach level three and four are able to make substantial financial gains and become powerful and have enormous clout with the police, the bureaucracy and politics. Asif says that the level of collusion between the underworld and the police can reach the level of the two ‘working together’

*The main businesses are extortion and drugs. The money earned through drugs is invested in other businesses, thus converting black into white money. This is done in partnership with builders, local politicians and the police. The nexus is very strong. The police are in fact involved in many of the supari killings. They can earn up to fifty lacs for a single supari killing on behalf of a rival gang.*

The operations of the underworld are often a mix of legal and illegal activities, in which black money is converted into white and vice versa, and there are a number of players involved, including those whose responsibility it is to check such practices, according to Aftab Qureshi, a key informant.

*The activities are a mix of legal and illegal activities. For example, in the export business, there is over valuation of the quantity of an item being exported to get higher duty drawback from the government (the duty drawback is given on the basis of the value of the exported item). This overvaluation is done by the exporter in collusion with the customs and port authorities. Because*
of this overvaluation of the export commodity, the purchasing party has to pay a higher amount to
the exporter than the actual quantity he is receiving. This extra amount is financed by the gang
through hawala transaction. When the exporter receives the total amount, he returns the extra
amount to the gang and shares the extra drawback (earned from the government) with the gang.

Changing nature of activities

The mainstay of gang activities is changing from more violent forms such as extortions,
*supari* killings and kidnappings to involvement in the real estate business, especially the
redevelopment of slum settlements in collaboration with builders. Aftab Qureshi says that
the current political economy does not permit violent acts of the gangs to flourish.

There is pressure on the under world from the police to stop their violent activities, particularly
after 9/11. Due to globalization, many MNCs have set their offices and bases in the metro cities
such as Mumbai and Delhi. They will not invest in a city if there are law and order problems and
sensational incidents of violence involving gangs, as it creates a fear psychosis among investors.
There is pressure on the government to reduce such crimes.

The current activities of gangs mainly include forcing people living in slums and chawls to agree
to redevelopment under the SRA scheme, and the redevelopment of rented chawls in partnership
with the landlords.

Chetan Patil, a criminal lawyer and key informant says that violence is used only to
exterminate business rivals and increase monopoly power of a few.

Economic offences are on the rise now, where the involvement of syndicates is reducing, except in
the land development business, they are required to ‘finish off’ rivals (through supari killings).

The glamour associated with gang wars is on the wane, as far as the youth are concerned.
Joseph says that in the current socio-political and economic scenario, the youth are more
likely to get involved in white collar crimes rather than violent activities associated with
erstwhile gangs.

Times have changed. Youth have become more sensible. They understand the ‘use and throw’
policy of gangs. So they are reluctant to join gangs. The glamour factor has been dented due to
encounters. Violent crimes are reducing and white collar crimes are on the rise. These crimes are
committed without using arms and by using one’s brains – bank frauds, cyber crimes, etc. These
are bailable offences, so one can get away if caught. The same semi-educated youth who used to
get involved in gangs are now into white collar crimes. Bhaigiri is giving way to money culture.
Poverty and corruption is leading to money culture crimes. Corruption leads to poverty. Money meant for the poor through government schemes do not reach the poor. Poverty gives a feeling that there are no chances to move up in life. It creates a feeling that it is necessary to make a fast buck.

PI Shirishkar reiterates Joseph’s analysis about youth involvement in gangs and predicts that youth are likely to get involved in white collar crimes in future.

Youth are not interested in joining gangs today. They have realised that it is fraught with risks and tragic endings. They are getting into localized group-based activities such as robberies and kidnappings. The educated youth are in more into economic offences – credit card frauds and cheating cases and cyber crimes. It is easy to commit these crimes and in case of arrest, they are able to come out on bail within a few days or months. The future of crime in Mumbai city lies in such crimes.

The use of violence to settle turf wars and disputes between gangs is giving way to sophisticated ‘deals’ on partnership basis, says Shashikant Jadhav, a social worker with a voluntary organisation working on rehabilitation of ex-offenders and a key informant. The form and nature of operations is giving a false sense of security to the common citizen that the underworld is not active in the city anymore. Jadhav says that in fact, we are witnessing a phase whereby the underworld is now becoming a part of the overworld.

Extortion, kidnappings, murders and supari killings are passé now; only to be used sometimes – to retain the balance of power and establish their authority or send a message about their ability to kill if required. Most activities are done on partnership basis with a ‘front’ businessman, builder, or a politician. The top brass of the police and the bureaucracy are also hand-in-glove, and earn from the profits earned. Local officials are bribed to get permissions and approvals. It’s very sophisticated now; no need for crude tactics any more. With reducing violence, the public gets an impression that things are peaceful and the police have succeeded in cracking down on the underworld. Little do they realise that the scale and the modus operandi of the game has changed.

The above findings are borne out by the statistics provided by the AEC of the Crime Branch, Mumbai Police for the years 2005, 2006 and 2007 (see Table 4.1, Chapter Four: Trends in Extortion Crimes in Mumbai (2005-2007)). There has been a steady decline in
the number of arrests made by the AEC in cases relating to extortion over the three year period.

**Norms and values**

Akash says that while the main purpose of the gang is to make money, there are some norms and values which members are expected to adhere to. First and foremost, the gang is supposed to take care of boys who get arrested – their families, their legal expenses and basic comforts in prison. This is important to assure members that the gang functions like a ‘family’ and is a caring organization. Vijay however adds that that this norm is applied to individual members depending on whether or not the gang sees them as an integral part of the organization.

At a general level, the ethos of the gang supports a view of helping the poor and the destitute. Many gang members help the ‘innocent’ or poor people in prison without any motives. Respecting women is another avowed value. All gangs have a golden rule – gang rivalries should not lead to harming each other’s family members.

The gang allows members are allowed to quit the gang world, provided they promise not to work against the interests of the gang e.g. becoming informers or revealing information about the gang to rival gangs. Members who become police informers are loathed in the gang community and if the gang comes to know about it, one may have to pay heavy consequences. The gang may create hurdles in getting out of crime if they view the person’s role in the organization as important and crucial to their effective functioning.

The gang is a very hierarchical organization with a strict command structure. There is a high premium on loyalty. Seniors are to be respected and obeyed. Disobeying orders from the top may be met with fatal consequences. One is not supposed to change one’s territory or ‘line’ (specialization) without taking the consent of the top bosses. Use of violence is only advocated to accomplish a given task; the emphasis is to be able to solve disputes through dialogue and discussion as far as possible. Vijay says that members who are casual about using violence are seen as a liability by the gang.
If you are flippant about using violence, be prepared to be chastised by your boss. You may be pardoned once or twice, but in case of repeated instances of indiscriminate use of violence, it may lead to removal of your responsibilities, demotion in the hierarchy, getting beaten up or ‘arranging’ for your police encounter.

Vijay adds that what matters in the gang world is one’s behaviour and relations with co-members, apart from one’s financial status.

*Dosti, yaari aur dashmapi be sab kuch hai* (Friendships and rivalries matter the most).

Chetan Patil says that the most important value in the gang world is how true one is to one’s word (*zabaan*). He adds that the gang world has traditionally been a very secular space. However, this value has taken a beating after the Mumbai riots and the subsequent gang rivalries based on religious sentiments.

**Membership, recruitment, training and exit**

**Membership**

PSI Shinde, a key informant, gave a vivid description of the types of youth who may be involved in extortion. This is reproduced below:

*College youth with lifestyle problems* – These are young boys from middle class families who get lured into gangs or into extortion due to lifestyle problems. They develop expensive habits – going to pubs, bars, restaurants, gambling dens, dance bars, etc. ...If they come in contact with criminal elements, they can easily get lured into crime. There is the added factor of the glamour associated with gang land; they want to experience the thrill of the crime world, picked up from films or even in their lived experience – some one from their area may be a member of a gang and they have seen their life from the surface.

*Unemployed youth facing economic hardships* – Unemployed and semi-educated youth, usually coming from families facing economic hardships, can get into extortion as it an easy way to make money. They choose soft targets – small businessmen, small time builders, jewellery shop owners and bar owners. These victims usually have a lot of black money and would rather pay up the amount demanded than come forward and make a police complaint.

*Local youth recruited in prison* – Youth from lower middle class families, who are school drop outs, may initially get into petty crimes. When they get arrested and land up in prison, they may get lured by gang members to join them. These gang members take care of their basic comforts in prison and their legal expenses to get out on bail. Once they have taken the help of a gang
member, they feel obligated towards the person and are ready to work for them, especially as there is good money to be made through extortion. Many a time, the families of these boys may not be aware of their involvement in gangs.

Migrated youth with criminal record – Youth from other parts of India with a past criminal record sometimes end up in Mumbai. They may be involved in robberies, dacoities, extortions, etc. in their native place. Once they come to Mumbai, they may get involved in offences and get arrested. Once in prison, they are ideal recruits into gangs as they have no supports in the city and are easy prey for the local gangs by offering them legal support and basic comforts in prison.

The closure of textile mills in Mumbai in the early eighties, as an aftermath of the strike called by the union leader Dr. Datta Samant, had a crippling effect on the employment situation of thousands of mill workers in the city. Most were rendered jobless and were too old to learn new skills. Ramesh says that many went back to their native place in different parts of Maharashtra. Those that remained tried their hand at driving taxis, running vada pav stalls, as security guards and odd jobs. The strike had a cascading effect of the lives of their children, especially the youth, who were mostly educated till higher secondary grade or above, but had to suddenly take over the responsibility of running the families. The emergence of gangs involved in illegal rackets and extortion around this time absorbed many of these youth into their ranks, and in fact, some of the leaders of these gangs had come from such backgrounds.

The closing down of the mills in Mumbai was a body blow to the employment situation. Most of the workers in mills were from rural Maharashtra. Their children would also get absorbed and this led to a stable employment situation. After the closing down of the mills, there was out-migration to rural Maharashtra. New migrants came from the rural Hindi belt since in those parts, agriculture is mostly rain-fed and hence income earned through agriculture is not sufficient. But in Mumbai, there were no regular jobs. Most jobs were in the informal sector now and the chances of getting pulled into crime and gangs were high.

Most of these ‘boys’ were locals – Marathi speaking, Hindu, lower middle class educated and unemployed youth. Some of them lived with their families and would go home at night to sleep. Those who were ‘wanted’ by the police would sleep here and would ‘secretly’ go home once in a while. Some of their families knew about their involvement in crime. The main reason for these youth getting into this life was a combination of factors such as poverty at home and a dream to become rich quickly.
There could also be larger reasons relating to the changing political economy of the city at work. Milind Kadam, a prison officer who was a key informant, pins it down to the ‘money culture’ and a mismatch between educational profile of the youth and the jobs available in the economy as key factors leading the youth to resort to illegal activities.

*The divide between the rich and the poor is increasing and that is also responsible for increase in crime. We live in a society where the value of money is overtaking values relating to right and wrong. Another factor is that many of our educated youth do not get jobs which match their educational qualifications leading to heartburn and creating conditions where they could get pulled into crime.*

**Recruitment**

The need for money and the glamour associated with gangs is exploited by gang leaders to recruits from their areas. Asif says that money power is used by the gangs to pull needy persons into their network. Another motivation is the need for creating a name for oneself.

*Fame leads to power and power leads to money. Your name and fame spread further when you spend the money lavishly. Fame also spreads when you are able to threaten and kill at will.*

Ramesh highlights the lifestyle and glamour factor in the recruitment process.

*The thrill of knowing a bhai and being in close proximity to him was enough to draw them into the net. ... The classic method is of splurging money on them first – getting them used to good food, wine and women. Once they would get habituated to this lifestyle, their need for money would automatically lead them to getting involved in the gang activities.*

Recruitment of youth in prison is based on a careful selection process, says Ramesh.

*The ‘recruitment’ of these ‘boys’ happens mostly through contacts made in prison – ‘boys’ selected are those who are not addicted to drugs or gambling.*

Vijay reinforces the selection element in the recruitment of boys. Youth arrested in violent offences in prison are offered to become a handler of a new area or work under a handler, if there is already a handler in the area where he lives. Handlers also cultivate boys in the area where he lives/operates from. Boys who show ‘daring’ / have cases of violent crimes registered against them are usually picked up. A third strategy is to help
young boys in prison with physical comforts and legal aid and gradually lure them into joining the company.

**Training**

Once recruitment is done, the youth are ‘trained’ for various jobs. Initially, they are asked to accompany ‘seniors’ during an operation. Youth who show courage and spontaneously commit acts of daring or bravado are ‘noticed’ and ‘promoted’ for more challenging tasks. Ramesh was a handler when he was in gangs and says that his job was that of a coach and mentor to his boys.

> My job was to collect boys, prepare them and send them for ‘jobs’ – always in a group. It was also my job to observe them during a ‘job’ or get information about them from each other after the ‘job’ was over. I had to ‘coach’ them to become part of the gang. If they showed presence of mind, acted bravely, cool-headedly, or sensibly, it was noted and suitably rewarded by promoting them in the hierarchy. If on the other hand, they made mistakes, became nervous, ran away from the spot or made hasty decisions, they had to be reprimanded and ‘coached’ to amend their behaviour next time.

**Advantages and disadvantages of being a gang member**

Being a gang member has its advantages and disadvantages. On the plus side, one is able to make quick financial gains and develop contacts with politicians and influential people. One lives a lavish lifestyle and has money to splurge on expensive clothes, jewellery, going to restaurants and pubs and ‘doling out’ money to family and friends. On the negative side, it means repeated arrests, losing all the money in the end, losing one’s family and true friends and having to leave home permanently. There is also risk to one’s life, both from rivals and from the police. Vijay feels that one is able to fight injustices against the poor and offer help to them by being a gang member.

> There is scope to help the poor, either by helping them financially or by stopping injustices against them. It is one form of social work – you use force to help people whom the police refuses to help as they are hand in glove with the other party. One can help needy people with jobs through your contacts.
The gang helps with legal and other supports if a member gets arrested, but as Vijay says, there is no guarantee of this.

If one gets arrested, being a gang member has its advantages, in terms of support from the gang for legal expenses, comforts in prison and financial support to your family while you are in prison. But this again depends on how important you are in the gang hierarchy.

Joseph says that being a gang member means money and power on one side and insecurity and loss of respect on the other.

The positives of being a gang member are money, support during arrest/imprisonment and contacts which can be useful in life. On the negative side is the threat to life, police harassment and absence of respect (izzat). Izzat cannot be earned through this line.

Exit

The main hurdle in getting out seems to be actions of the police in terms of re-arrest due to past record, harassment caused to family members, pressure to turn an informer and fear of fake encounters. Opposition from the gang is another area which needs to be negotiated with the gang if a person wants to get out. Akash says that very few are able to ‘make it’ once they decide to leave.

In the course of my involvement in gang activities, I came into contact with about 100 members. Of them, around 20 of them have since died due to illness or killed in police encounters. Around 20 of them have been able to come out of crime and are now leading ‘normal’ lives. Around 20 were able to earn a lot through crime and were able to get into other businesses such as construction or real estate. The remaining 40 odd have continued in the crime world; some of them have perhaps got into ‘lesser’ crimes because they could not make it in the gang world.

Ilyas says that gang members allow you to get out if you do not harm the interests of the gang. Farooq reiterates that the getting out process is full of threats to one’s life from rivals and the police.

As far as gangs are concerned, it depends on the level of involvement in the gang. If the involvement is superficial, there is no opposition from the gang if a person wants to get out of the gang. There is no dearth of new members entering the crime world; if one goes many others will come. But if the level of involvement is deeper, the person is likely to get killed – either by rivals or by the police. The police also stages ‘encounters’ at the behest of rival gangs and gets paid for it.
Nexus between the underworld, builder, bureaucracy, police and politicians

The nexus between the underworld, the police, local officials and the politicians emerged very clearly from the narratives. It seems like a win-win situation of all parties concerned to allow gang activities to continue. The political economy of the city seems to be an influencing factor in promoting this nexus. Rocky says that gang money is used to even finance the election campaigns of the political leaders. In return, if the political leader comes to power, he will provide protection to the gang against police action. Akash says that politicians act on behalf of the gang and influence the police to go soft on the arrested gang member, depending on who the accused is and how important he is to the gang.

*Through the use of this influence, cases involving the accused can be manipulated to lessen the charges or the facts in the facts (to his advantage), he may be provided alcohol and good food in the lock up, no third degree methods would be used against him, cases may be settled outside the legal boundaries, the case may be charged on another person (maybe involved in other offences), etc.*

The nexus between the underworld and politics is not limited tobestowing mutual favours but extends to partnerships in carrying out illegal activities for mutual financial gain, according to Ramesh.

*There also exists a politician-criminal nexus, whereby politicians finance the drugs trade and the gangs operate it and earn profits which are shared between them. It is impossible to rise up in politics without money and that can be earned through illegal activities, hence the nexus works well.*

The slum redevelopment scheme has created newer opportunities for the nexus to flourish. Shashikant Jadhav, a key informant, gives an example of the politician-builder-bureaucracy-underworld nexus. A criminal-turned-politician was a local don of his area. He has struck a deal with a big builder, whereby he has handed over the entire area for redevelopment of slums under the SRA; it’s an informal arrangement, whereby no other builder will get contracts in that area. In return, the politician has taken responsibility of getting the assent of slum dwellers (through his contact with the local gang) to agree to redevelopment, through muscle and money power.
People who refuse to sign up for redevelopment would be pressurized to agree by threatening them. People with insufficient proof of residence would be driven away by the goons and their rooms would be usurped by the builder by making false documents by bribing local authorities from MHADA and BMC. The profits earned through the redevelopment would be shared between the builder and the politician.

Chetan Patil, a key informant explains the legal loopholes in the redevelopment process which is manipulated by a joint collusion between the builder and the local officials with the money and muscle power of the under world.

In any slum settlement, there are mix of hutments – those that have legal papers i.e. ration card and photo pass\(^9\) which entitles the family to getting free housing under the SRA scheme and hutments which do not have the necessary papers to become eligible under the scheme. These hutments may either have been built after the cut-off date (therefore are deemed to be illegal) or the resident may be a ‘genuine’ owner (entitled to a photo pass or ration card) but for some reason has not been able to get these documents under his/her name. If one is staying in a hutment which does not have proper documents, one can get it regularised gradually. First, one has to get a ration card made. Then one can get electricity bill made under one’s name. Once these two documents are made, it becomes possible to bring the hutment under the SRA scheme. At each stage of the ‘regularisation process’, officials / relevant authorities have to be bribed.

There are also other ways to make money under the SRA scheme. There are a number of quality checks that the builder has to maintain without which MHADA will not issue the Occupation Certificate (OC). Without an OC, residents cannot be permitted to occupy the building. Builders often do not adhere to the prescribed quality standards, and get the OC issued by bribing the MHADA officials. Lets say that in a 100 crore project, the builder makes around 60 crores, 20 crores goes to the underworld and the balance 20 crores goes to get all the paperwork and permissions done. The money paid to the underworld is as protection money and for getting the consent of the residents to agree for the redevelopment project. Protection includes protection from other gangs from extorting money.

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\(^9\) The Government of Maharashtra has issued photo passes to slum dwellers who are living in slum settlements prior to 1995. Any photo pass holder is entitled to a free one room kitchen house under the SRA scheme or when they are displaced from the area due to any infrastructure or development project initiated by the government/civic authorities. This cut-off date has recently been extended to 2000 by the government.
Vijay highlights that the nexus is so deep-rooted that it becomes very difficult to expose the misdeeds and get the law enforcement agencies to act.

It works like a smooth network between the police, underworld and the politician. …If a complaint is lodged or a citizen agrees to depose in court against these scams, the underworld is used by the police to ‘remove’ him. It’s all a game of money. Paisa insaan ko bigad deta hai!

The police are like a puppet in the hands of the politician in large scams and ‘big matters’. The honest cop will get transferred. Also, the police are human too. They are susceptible to the temptation of money and pressure from above. …The media is also pressurized not to investigate the scam and keep its mouth shut.

In this entire drama, the politician is the director, the underworld is the actor and the police are the audience.

**Extortion and its forms**

There are various forms of extortion and not all types are carried out by gangs using violence and force. There is a thin line of distinction between corruption, blackmail and extortion. Aftab Qureshi, a key informant outlines the various ways of extracting monetary benefit from people which could be defined as a form of extortion.

1) Taking hafta from slum dwellers and shops in an area – limited to the galli and usually done by local boys without any gang connections.

2) Extortion of small businessmen – mainly arising out of business rivalries whereby one party may hire a gang to extort money from the other party. This money would then be handed over to the party who hired the gang on a commission basis. This money may be ‘due’ to the party which the rival is refusing to pay up.

3) Extortion of big businessmen – usually executed against big industrialists, people from the film industry, big builders etc. This form of extortion is on the wane due to political and police pressure.

4) Settlement of land deals which are disputed property – one party approaches the police to settle the dispute. Police in turn advises the party not to register an official complaint (suggesting that it would take years to resolve the matter officially) and uses the underworld connection to settle the matter. It creates a win-win situation for all – the party who wants to settle the matter, the police and the underworld, all make money.

5) Settlement of underhand monetary deals – When there is breakdown of agreed terms between partners in a deal involving underhand dealings or hawala transactions – since
there is no paperwork in such matters, the ‘aggrieved’ party cannot make an official complaint. They usually approach a gang to settle the matter.

6) Politician-official-contractor nexus – whenever contracts are to be awarded, the contractor may use force with the help of gangs to eliminate competition in order to bag the contract. This is done in collusion with the officials and the politician in power. The gang is used to threaten genuine parties to withdraw from the bidding process and in turn fake parties are made to bid whereby the final contract gets awarded to the favoured contractor. The contractor in return for getting the contract, has to pay the hired gang and give a cut from the contract to the officials and politicians concerned.

7) Extortion by police against persons with dubious image - such persons usually get associated with criminal elements on friendship basis. Police may come to know about this and extort money from the party by threatening to file a case against the person for maintaining contact with criminal elements or the possibility of filing false cases against the person.

8) Youth with criminal background involved in forced donations – during festivals, shopkeepers, small businessmen and builders are forced to make donations by small gangs operating under a cultural ‘front’ organisation. These youth usually have a criminal background involving violent or petty offences.

However, the form of extortion which is the focus of this study involves extorting money from individuals – builders, diamond traders, shop keepers, film personalities, professionals, and businessmen involved in illegal enterprises, though the use of force and usually by a group of youth under instructions from a gang.

Vijay says that in a typical extortion operation, the area handler would go to a builder (for example) with four boys and in front of the builder, would call up the top boss and ask the builder to speak to him. After speaking to the don, the payment amount would be fixed. The handler would give the builder a number and ask him to call back at this number to convey his decision with regard to payment. In case the builder refuses to pay, boys would be sent to threaten him, show him a ‘trailer’ or finish him off, as per instructions of the boss.

The descriptions about their involvement in extortions given by Fazlu and Farooq reveal that extortion as a crime is broken up into several seemingly distinct actions; and each action is carried out by separate individuals, who find it simple to carry out, with
minimum risk. However, when one person in the chain gets caught by the police, the others too are likely to get arrested, sooner or later.

Vijay however adds that extortion as an organise crime activity is on the wane now.

*Extortion as a form of crime is reducing. This has happened mainly because of ‘encounters’ by the police over the last decade or so. If the police are seen to be acting strongly against the criminals, it boosts confidence in the businessmen to file complaints against the extortionists. Extortion thrives on the fear factor. If there is no fear in the minds of the victim, he will not hesitate to complain to the police. If the police start taking action against the offenders, the activity will no longer remain a popular way to make money.*

The police do not necessarily view all extortions as serious crimes, unless the victim is a famous or important person, the amount involved is high or there has been blatant use of force resulting in serious physical injury. PI Kudalkar, police officer and a key informant says that generally speaking, extortion is not seen as serious crime compared to crimes such as robbery, dacoity and murder by the police. He also points out the reasons why a very small percentage of extortions are eventually reported to the police.

*It is a widespread offence, but only a very small percentage of these crimes are reported to the police. The reason for this is most victims are usually involved in illegal or semi-legal businesses such as betting and gambling rackets, builders involved in illegal constructions, those involved in land grab, beer bars which operate beyond the permitted timings at night, dance bars, etc. Reporting to the police means that their illegal activities will also come to the fore. Also, if the amount asked for is not worth the risks involved in reporting, the victim usually pays up. The fear of injury or death is another factor which prevents victims from reporting and they would rather pay up.*

He further adds that owing to the nature of the crime, it becomes very difficult to catch the real culprits, those who direct and organise the activity. However, extortions create a sense of insecurity in society and therefore it becomes important to control these crimes.

*Extortion is part of organised crime activity and orders to carry out the activity come from organised crime network outside the national boundaries. It therefore becomes very difficult to catch the main culprits and the police can at the most lay their hands on those who carry out the extortion rather than those who are the main benefactors of the activity.*
Extortion threats disturb peace in any society and lead to stress for not just the individual victim but entire families. That is the reason that it hits the headlines, even though in terms of the money involved, they may not amount to much.

**Summing up**

Criminal gangs started off and built the foundations of their organisations in Mumbai city through violent crimes such as extortions and *supari* killings. But the money earned from extortion was not sufficient to flourish and expand their base. It does not require much investment to start an extortion-based gang apart from manpower – an army of boys who can act with daring and are willing to carry out the orders of the gang for sometimes very little compensation. The money earned through this activity can at the most suffice to take care of legal expenses when members get arrested or to manipulate the police and the witnesses, so that cases in courts end in discharge or acquittal.

These gangs invested the money earned through extortions and *supari* killings into subsidiary illegal businesses such as betting and gambling rackets, illicit liquor trade, drugs or human trafficking and fake currency rackets. They flourished and built large and expanded empires. If they were able to develop contacts with individuals who were willing to partner with them and start or invest in other legal businesses such as real estate, films and the stock markets, it strengthened their organisation and developed their financial power.

This financial power helped them to build a nexus with those in power – the police, local officials and politicians who formed powerful cartels mutually beneficial to all parties concerned. Any attempts to break this nexus by honest officials or citizens were met with stiff resistance through the use of money and muscle power.

As the gangs gained in financial and muscle power, its need to use violence was replaced by an ability to strike ‘deals’ and work in ‘partnership’ with people who stood to gain by the manipulation of the legal process and laid down procedures in implementation of schemes and programmes meant for the poor. This shift in its activities led to a gradual shedding of its earlier manpower base – an army of boys or youth ready to use force and
violence at a small fee. As this process gained pace, the gangs increasingly changed from an ‘actor’ orientation to a ‘network’ orientation.

This shift also led to leaner organisations with prominent members functioning in the open, as agents and wheeler-dealers, but backed by a small team of youth who could use force swiftly and ruthlessly if and when required. The gangs no longer required ‘loyal’ members; they operated through ‘dispensable’ youth who ‘vanished’ once an operation was over. In the changed scenario, violence is used sparingly, either to send across a message or to eliminate an adversary who is unwilling to budge from his position. The public feels safer and the police happier in this scenario as there are fewer violent crimes occurring on daily basis.