

The Ideological Evolution of Shivsena in Maharashtra

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Introduction:

The Shivsena, a prominent political party in Maharashtra, has undergone an ideological evolution since its formation in 1966. Founded by Balasaheb Keshav Thackeray, son of a Well-known social reformer and progressive thinker, known as Prabodhankar Keshav Sitaram Thackeray. The party initially focused on issues of ‘Rights of Marathi Manus’ advocating Marathi regionalism. This regionalist stance was emerged out of concerns about the immigrants from other States of India which was perceived as a threat, by the leadership of Shivsena, to the cultural and economic dominance of Maharashtrians particularly in Mumbai.

However, over time, the Shivsena's political ideology gradually shifted towards Hindutva, a Hindu nationalist ideology that emphasizes the cultural and political dominance of Hindus in India. This shift was influenced by various factors, including the rise of Hindu nationalism in Indian politics, the changing demographics of Mumbai, and the party's desire to expand its political base in Maharashtra beyond Mumbai.

In recent years, the Shiv Sena has experienced further ideological evolution, particularly after the death of Balasaheb Thackeray. The party has witnessed internal divisions and factionalism leading to the formation of two groups: one led by Uddhav Thackeray, the son of Balasaheb Thackeray, and the other by Eknath Shinde, a Shiv Sena leader and current Chief Minister of Maharashtra. The Uddhav Thackeray faction has taken a more moderate stance, emphasizing inclusive politics and social justice. In contrast, the Eknath Shinde faction has aligned itself more closely with the BJP and its hardline Hindutva ideology.

Research Methodology and Scope of Research:

The paper is based on the historical inquiry method under the qualitative approach, it relates the contemporary political and ethno-religious formation of Shivsena. The paper will discuss the key attributing factors in the conceptual understanding of Political party's evolution. It will focus on the formative phase of the philosophy of Shivsena and how Shivsena ideologically and politically evolved in Maharashtra. Thus, the study is historical in nature that evaluates ideological shifts of Shivsena and its role in politics. It also analyses its leadership and nature of inconsistency in its ideology. Scope of analysis of this research is limited. This research considers Shivsena's ideological evolution till June 2022, as Shivsena splits into two factions in June 2022. One led by Uddhav Thackeray and other by Eknath Shinde. A decision regarding original political party is sub-judice and is before the Supreme Court of India.

Keywords:

Regionalism, Immigrants, Hindutva, Hindu Nationalism, Nativism, Conservatism.

Ideological evolution of Shivsena:

Shivsena is one of the many political parties that draws its ideology from the Hindu nationalist movement known as ‘Hindutva’. Shivsena's origin may be traced back to liberal Nativism, but the organization has later on embraced Hindu nationalism i.e. ‘Hindutva. The party founder late Balasaheb Thackeray modified Shivsena's ideology and its party's structural dimension towards more conservative and centralized party structure with pro majoritarian sentiments. In the

subsequent years, Uddhav Thackeray revisited the original ideological perception behind Shivsena's foundation and worked to modify and restructure the party. In June 2022, Shivsena splits into two distinctive factions on contrasting stance taken by group of leaders led by Eknath Shinde within the Shivsena on the ideological grounds and decision of alliance by Paksha-Pramukh (Party Chief) Uddhav Thackeray, with its traditional ideological opponents i.e. Indian National Congress and Nationalist Congress Party

Phases of Shivsena's Ideological Evolution:

The Shiv Sena has undergone significant ideological shifts and changes since its founding in 1966. We can majorly distinguish its evolution in three phases since its formation. Those are Nativism, Hindutva and Pragmatic Politics.

1. Nativism (1966 to 1987):

The party promoted a nativist ideology, prioritizing the interests of native Maharashtrians over migrants from other states of India. Shivsena was founded in the background of 'Sanyukt Maharashtra Chalval' (United Maharashtra Movement) which was a movement to include all regions where Marathi speaking population is in majority in areas adjoining Maharashtra.

Shivsena took the political stance of 'Marathi Manus First'. On the foundation day of Shivsena at Shivaji Park, Mumbai in 1966, Prabodhankar Thackeray in his speech declared that "Shivsena will fight for the interest and rights of Marathi Manus. The only purpose of this organisation will be to brought justice to the doors of Marathi Manus." Thus, the party initially focused on championing the rights of Marathi-speaking people in Mumbai and Maharashtra, opposing the dominance of other linguistic groups specifically in Mumbai.

This first phase of ideological evolution can be understood by understanding the following directive principles laid down by the Shivsena for its members and all Marathi Speaking peoples;

1. *The Marathi people should help each other and take care to see that the Marathi Manus traverses the path to abounding prosperity.*
2. *Maharashtrians should not sell their property to outsiders, and if any local is found doing so, the nearest Shakha (Branch of Shivsena) should be immediately informed.*
3. *As far as possible, Marathi shopkeeper should buy their goods only from Marathi wholesale traders and behave with their customers with decorum.*
4. *Maharashtrians who have their own establishments should only employ sons of the soil.*
5. *Young Marathi-speaking boys should develop excellent communication skills in the English language and learn English steno-typing as well.*
6. *Casting away laziness, Marathi people should form their own cooperative housing Societies; and they should show willingness to go to any place for job.*
7. *Celebrate Marathi festivals and functions with Marathi brothers and sisters by participating eagerly in huge numbers.*
8. *Local should involve themselves in the activities of institutions, schools, ashrams etc belonging to Maharashtrians and also donate generously for their cause.*
9. *Boycott all Udipi hotels and do not buy anything from shops of non- Maharashtrians.*
10. *Don't discourage the Marathi speaking people involved in business and other professions and keep them from losing heart instead extend as much help as you can.*
11. *Do not behave arrogantly and crudely with your own Marathi brethren, and in case of any one of them faces any difficulty other should collectively support him.*

From the above principles, we can trace and analyse the ideological stance of Shivsena during its first phase. That can be described as Nativistic ideological phase. Shivsena started its ideological journey with the ideology of Sons of Soil and Nativism.

2. Hindutva (1987 to 2014):

The second phase of ideological evolution of Shivsena was proved crucial to its political expansion. Shivsena remained committed to the issue of Marathi Manus since its inception and continued to fight for the interests of Marathi speaking people. But this ideological stance had not helped much to Shivsena to expand beyond Mumbai and gain political power in Maharashtra. This political obligation led Balasaheb Thackeray to restructure its ideological dimensions. With this realization, He came out with the ideology of Hindutva in politics. In 1987, during the Maharashtra Assembly by-elections, he declared Hindutva as an official ideology of Shivsena and gave a slogan of ‘Garv Se Kaho Hum Hindu Hain’. For the first time in the electoral history of Maharashtra, the religious appeal was made to the voter on the basis of religion and this led to the second phase of Shivsena’s ideological evolution. The second phase was a shift from Nativism to Hindu Nationalism under the Hindutva ideology.

Since the decade of 1970s, Shivsena as a political party has built a reputation for promoting local aspirations of Marathi speaking peoples. Later on during the decade of 1980s, Shivsena shifted towards conservatism and majoritarianism through the Hindutva ideology. It is this ideology that Shivsena follows, but this ideology can be associated with different roots. Prabodhankar Keshav Sitaram Thackeray, one of the founders of Shivsena, believed that Hindutva was a pure version of Hinduism in which everyone is equal regardless of caste or religion.

However, Balasaheb Thackeray changed its dimension and transformed Hindutva into an aggressive ideology in which rights and interests of Hindus should be protected firstly. He propagated that the Hindus should get priority in every sector of public domain. This aggressive stance taken by Balasaheb Thackeray emerged out of contemporary political situations and obligations. Considering the social bases of then Political Parties, during the decades of 1980s and 1990s, there was little political space available for any newly formed political party. He believed that “Caste matters in Indian politics and have decisive impact in India’s electoral outcomes but basis of Religion might play a more important role in Indian politics than Caste”. Because, statistically Hindus are not only in Majority but also culturally dominant in India. Thus, he realized that if a caste could be a factor to garner votes, the basis of Religion will also change the dynamics of voting behavior in India. With this understanding, He gave a slogan of ‘Garv Se Kaho Hum Hindu Hain’ (*Proudly Say that We are Hindus*) during the Maharashtra Assembly by-election of Parley Constituency in Mumbai in 1987. During this by-election Balasaheb Thackeray adopted the Hindutva ideology as Shivsena’s official political ideology and surprisingly candidate contesting this election won this by-election and this was the first successful electoral experiment of Hindutva in Maharashtra’s Politics. Since the electoral victory in 1987 Shivsena started expanding beyond Mumbai and established its strong footholds across Maharashtra. Shivsena’s Hindutva ideology had the exclusionary and aggressive elements like prioritizing Hindus over other communities. This fundamentalist stance of Shivsena led to Shivsena’s portrayal as a party of Hindu people.

In this ideological transition, Hindutva was defined as ‘Rashtriyatva’ meaning national identity by Balasaheb Thackeray and thus Shivsena aggressively advocated for Hindutva as an official ideology.

3. Pragmatic Politics (2014 to 2022)

In recent years, the Shivsena has adopted a more pragmatic approach especially after 2014. Officially the leadership of Shivsena changed after the demise of its founder Balasaheb Thackeray in 2012. His son, Uddhav Thackeray, took over as a ‘Paksha Pramukh’ i.e. Party President in January 2013.

The leadership of Uddhav Thackeray led Shivsena to undergo another ideological transition after 2014. Though Uddhav Thackeray claims Hindutva as a Shivsena’s official ideology but his Hindutva is more influenced by Prabodhankar Thackeray than any other Hindutva proponent.

Shivsena had ally with BJP in 1989 for the first time during then Maharashtra Lok Sabha and State Assembly Elections based on the common political ideology of Hindutva. Since then, this Hindutva based alliance was continued till 2014 despite having political differences to avoid division of votes.

But in 2014 Maharashtra Assembly elections Uddhav Thackeray left the alliance with BJP despite the commonality of Hindutva ideology. He took a stand and said that “Hindutva cannot be a tool to bear injustice forever rather it is a weapon to rebel and destroy the wrongdoer.” Uddhav Thackeray went beyond the Hindutva limits of Shivsena and fought 2014 Assembly elections independently and after the election Shivsena again allied with BJP to form the government and continued this alliance till 2019 Maharashtra assembly elections. After the results of Maharashtra Assembly elections, there was a rift between BJP and Shivsena over the Chief Minister’s post. Uddhav Thackeray demanded CM’s post for 2.5 years but BJP rejected this demand. This rejection proved crucial in Shivsena’s political stand in Maharashtra’s politics.

Uddhav Thackeray went beyond the ideological limits and formed an alliance with its traditional political opponents i.e. Indian National Congress and Nationalist Congress Party. These three, an Ideologically different parties came together and formed the government in Maharashtra in 2019 under the leadership of Uddhav Thackeray. This can be seen as a Shivsena’s pragmatic approach in politics. Uddhav Thackeray led Shivsena adopted a pragmatic approach by keeping its traditional Hindutva belief intact.

Conclusion:

The Shivsena’s ideological evolution is a testament to the complexities of Indian politics. From its roots in Marathi pride and regional identity, it embraced Hindu Nationalism under Hindutva and aligned itself with BJP. However, in recent years, Shivsena has witnessed ideological transition reflecting the changing political landscape. We can conclude from the above analysis that The Shivsena’s ideological journey is a fascinating case study in the interplay between regionalism, Hindutva and political pragmatism in contemporary politics.

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