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MAHARASHTRA  
POLITICS IN MAHARASHTRA  
PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

BY

V.M.SIRSIMAR,  
University of Poona,  
Poona-7 (India)

## POLITICS IN MAHARASHTRA- Problems and Prospects.

I. Politics of a State or a region can be understood within the general framework of its socio-economic structure with special reference to its historical background and cultural milieu. The approach of this paper is mainly descriptive-analytical rather than normative. Effort has been made to be as objective as is possible to a person who is emotionally committed to the region. It is also felt that some attention should be paid to the psychological factors which may appear prima-facie to be not so significant. The paper is an attempt to put the politics of the region in the socio-economic setting with its historical and cultural overtones.

Can it be said that political life of a community which has a certain cultural and linguistic homogeneity expresses itself in a distinguishing manner ? It is of special interest to political scientists to know about the trends and under-currents in State politics. This has a special significance in the context of federalism and the democratic growth. Political development depends more on how the State politics develops than on the Union-politics. It is obvious that the federal government could always draw on the human resources - the political elites and the bureaucratic elites-marshalled and husbanded in the State, but the State has to feed for itself to secure these scarce resources. The political growth-capacity of a State could be judged from the way it is able to develop its leadership group. This would be true not only of politics and administration, but also of other fields of life.

If politics is an expression of the socio-economic and cultural trends of a community, it can be argued that Maharashtra has certain characteristic trends which are a little different from the rest of the country. This is not to suggest that it is unique and entirely different from the other States

II. BACKGROUND : The State of Maharashtra came into existence with the bifurcation of the bigger-bilingual Bombay

fairly wellknown and need not be repeated in detail here. The States Reorganization Commission Report and the subsequent events led to the experiment of the bigger bilingual Bombay State. In the succeeding 1957 elections, the Congress in the central Maharashtra lost as many as 120 seats to the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti, an alliance of the opposition parties for securing the establishment of a United Maharashtra. The Congress could retain power on the support of Gujerat and Vidarbha areas of the new State.

The emergence of Shri Y.B.Chavan, as a leader, could be regarded as a result of certain accidental circumstances at the time. Shri Morarji Desai, the then Chief Minister of Bombay State insisted on his unanimous re-election. Shri Hirey the protagonist of Samyukta Maharashtra refused to withdraw from the leadership of the Bombay Legislature Congress Party contest. Shri Chavan was acceptable to Shri Desai and to the Gujerat Congressmen. The outcome was that Shri Hirey was defeated by Shri Chavan, with the support of Gujerat Congressmen.

Shri Chavan proved his abilities, as a leader, after taking over the mantle from Shri Desai. Though there was a landslide victory for the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti, Shri Chavan did not lose his patience, either with the stormy opposition or with the adamant Congress High Command. With the passage of time, he could convince the High Command of the futility of the experiment which was ruining the Congress Party in both Maharashtra and Gujerat. The successes of the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti and Maha Gujerat Janta Parishad in the elections to the Corporations and Municipalities, after the general elections of 1957, strengthened the case for bifurcation of the unnatural province. The cold reception which the late Prime Minister received in Maharashtra indicated the intensity of the feeling about the establishment of Maharashtra. The alliance- the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti- was functioning with the not unexpected inter-party bickerings, but a reasonably satisfactory way. The High

Command finally veered round to the idea of Maharashtra with Bombay as its capital.

The whole tragic episode of the effort to force a bigger bilingual Bombay State against the wishes of the people of Maharashtra and Gujerat was ~~found~~<sup>b</sup> found to fail. The vested interests of the non-Maharashtrian capitalists of Bombay were the main bulwork of reaction against Maharashtra. The Bombay Pradesh Congress Committee represented in a certain measure this reactionary group. But it was realised even in these circles that their interests would not be ~~jeopardised~~<sup>je</sup> jeopardised by the inclusion of Bombay in Maharashtra. Shri Chavan could claim a certain credit for creating this confidence amongst the 'Cosmopolitan' capitalists of Bombay.

This could be regarded as one of those factors which shapes politics in Maharashtra. Bombay represents at the same time modern progressive and cosmopolitan trends and also the elitist, anti-egalitarian, money-dominated reactionary trends in Indian life. Shri Chavan, with a rural background and peasant-family tradition, was able to deal with them to a certain extent. The continuance of the Bombay Pradesh Congress Committee as a separate Congress Committee for the city of Bombay not under the control of the Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee could be described as an eloquent proof of the strength and tenacity of the power of the big-money in the politics of Bombay. The B.P.C.C. has stood firm against any proposal for merger, as it would mean the submerging of the group in the rural mass. There is not much in common between the two. It would be interesting to compare the social composition of the Executive Committees of the two bodies, the B.P.C.C. drawing mainly from the rich urban, non-Maharashtrian business community while the M.P.C.C. recruiting from the rural peasantry.

The Congress party in Maharashtra, could be regarded as one of the few state units of the All-India Party, which does not suffer, as yet, from any open factionalism. The two

wings - the parliamentary and the organizational- have maintained good relations. Here again Shri Chavan could claim a large amount of credit for galvanising a party which had been badly battered in the 1957 elections. He became a father-figure at the State level. He was able to build up the party from below as he was a 'son of a peasant', who had much in common with the people, specially in the rural areas.

The unity of the Maharashtra Congress has been achieved with the use of those techniques some of which could be called as bordering on the traditional. At the same time, there has been some hard bargaining by those who came from the Vidarbha. The number and importance of the Vidarbha Ministers is indicative of this bargaining. After the 1962 Chinese aggression, there was a widespread move to reduce the size of the State Ministries in most of the States. In Maharashtra also, there was a reduction in the number of ministers. The emergency 'massacre' of ministers did not affect them. The use of a sly caste appeal strengthened with the sentiment of the glorious historical past and the plurality caste group, the Marathas-all these factors have been pointed out as the socio logical basis of the Congress in Maharashtra. There is a certain confusion about the social basis of Maratha caste-power. Marathas constitute what Dr. Iravati Karve calls as the caste-group. It is not one single caste. This caste-group forms about 40 % of the population. Thus, with universal franchise, it was natural that this caste-group capapulted into political prominence.

The overwhelming victory of the Congress in the 1962 elections was due to several factors. The unified leadership of Shri Y.B.Chavan, the break up of the alliance - The S.M.S., the widespread satisfaction amongst the people by the establishment of Maharashtra, the internecine quarrels of the opposition parties, and the pro-Congress tide of public opinion and of the press.

III. SOCIO -ECONOMIC FACTORS : What follows is a broad listing of factors which affect the present politics in Maharashtra. Some of these could be regarded as socio-economic, while others are socio-psychological. A mention is already made of the factor of caste. But as regards this factor, Maharashtra could not be singled out. The factor is present in the politics of other states in more or less the same manner(1). The degree of intensity of its influence depends on the situational factors. In Maharashtra, it could be claimed that the intensity is lower than what it is in Tamilnad or in Mysore. As a footnote, it can be added here that the leadership of all the opposition parties in Maharashtra except P & W.P. is predominantly Brahmin, as compared to the predominantly Maratha leadership of the Congress. This fact influences to a certain extent the political trends.

Regionalism within the new State still remains a factor to be reckoned with. The integration of Vidarbha, Marathwada and Western Maharashtra into one political community is one of the most difficult, yet urgent problem. The people of Vidarbha might not be much interested in a separate State of their own. But the more vocal sections were able to secure some support in the 1962 elections. Vidarbha's fears could be spelt as follows. Western Maharashtra would exploit the natural prosperity of the region. Vidarbha was free from the Brahmin-Maratha tensions, so prevalent in Western Maharashtra. The contagion might spread. The same could be said about the class conflicts which were not significant in Vidarbha. The merger of the five districts of the old Nizam State with Maharashtra created new tensions in the economic field (2). These were the neglected areas before 1956. Thus, these suffer under certain handicaps. Some of these, absence of industries, absence of major irrigation works, better roads, could not be removed in a short

time. This leads to a feeling of being discriminated against, among the people of the region. Maharashtra is regarded as one of the most developed States of the Union. But the economic and industrial development is concentrated in certain areas, like Bombay, while Marathwada, Konkan are the underdeveloped areas.

There could be no definitive statement as regards the influence of big-money on politics. But it is obvious that democracy anywhere in the world is a costly game. India is no exception. In Maharashtra, it could be suggested that there are two centres of economic power. The non-Maharashtrian capitalists mainly concentrated in Bombay and the so-called 'cooperative capitalists' in other areas. The cooperative sugar factories in Maharashtra constitute an interest group with financial power of crores of rupees. It is anybody's guess that these become the centres of economic and consequently political power. The Congress controlled most of these sugar factories. The same is true about other cooperative societies with crores of rupees capital. The party-in-power gets the major share of the financial help from these bodies.

IV Socio-psychological Factors. : It is felt that a brief account of the socio-psychological factors which influence the politics of Maharashtra, would throw light on some of the trends.

New Buddhism is a socio-religious factor which has assumed certain political significance. The conversion of the scheduled castes-specially the Mahars - to Buddhism has resulted in creating new social tensions in rural areas. The newly converted Buddhists refuse to continue to do the age-old functions in the village-society. This is generally construed as a challenge to the power of the caste-Hindus-mainly the Marathas who form the bulk of the peasantry in rural Maharashtra. Thus, a new dimension has been added to the social cleavages and conflicts. Moreover, the Neo-Buddhists generally



sympathise the Republican Party. Recently factionalism has been growing in the party, still the community is, by and large, apathetic to the Congress.

In recent years, it could be said that the Shivaji legend has come to occupy a certain place in the minds of the political strategists of all parties in Maharashtra. It is possible that political parties were interested in manipulating the loyalties of the common people to Shivaji and securing their support. Whether it is the S.M.S., the Congress or the Jan Sangh, everyone thought of Shivaji as the blessing deity. Shivaji, with his legendary character, occupies a place of deep respect in the minds of the common people. Thus, in the psychological warfare between the parties, every party found it necessary to exploit these sentiments. It would be difficult for an outsider to understand the politics of Maharashtra, without knowing his Shivaji. In this respect, Maharashtra stands out from most of the States.

The glorious historical past, from Shivaji to Peshwas, has contributed its own share in shaping the psychology of Maharashtrians. They honestly believe in their superior capacity to fight for freedom, to sacrifice for the nation and thus, claim an honoured place in the Union. This particular strand in the mind of Maharashtra, has led to another opposite psychological trait. This refers to the feeling of being discriminated against by an anti-Maharashtrian bias at the Centre. It is believed not only by common people, but also by men in high office. A senior Minister of the Maharashtra government publicly decried this discrimination. He alleged that the Central Government prefers other States for setting up of industries by manipulating the sanctioning of industrial licenses (3)

This feeling of being chosen for discrimination, has resulted in making some of the leaders of Maharashtra ethnocentric (4) . This ethnocentric feeling is reflected in

some of the Marathi literature (५). There is a complimentary psychological trait, which is found to be very deeply ingrained. It is the hostility to the non-Maharashtrian capitalists - mainly the Gujeratis (६). It is always suggested that owing to these exploiters that the common people have remained poor. It might be due to the fact that the proletariat in Bombay is predominantly regional while the entrepreneurs are mainly Gujeratis. The feeling has been strengthened due to the intense opposition of the Gujerati capitalists to the inclusion of Bombay in Maharashtra. The anti-Maharashtrian bias and the venomous writings of the Gujerati Press in Bombay contributed its own share to this animosity.

The other blind spot for the Marathi mind is the Mysorean. This has its relation to the inclusion of predominantly Marathi speaking areas in Mysore. The people of Maharashtra have never reconciled to this inclusion of the Belgaum -Karwar region in Mysore all these years. In addition to this injustice is Mysore's opposition to Goa's merger with Maharashtra. The debacle of the Goa Congress in the first elections on the merger issue and the failure of the High Command to read the writing on the wall, have provided the constant theme in the Marathi press. It is felt that the centre has again discriminated against Maharashtra.

It is not possible to make any dogmatic statement about the withdrawal of intelligentsia from the politics of Maharashtra. But some years ago, a leading intellectual publicly advocated such a policy. The withdrawal if at all, it is there in a time perspective, it might be due to certain circumstances. The dastardly murder of Gandhiji by a Maharashtra Brahmin, the caste associated with the intelligentsia and the post-Gandhi-murder riots, have contributed to this tendency (८). The so-called capture of the Congress by the middle castes might be another factor. But

it is equally possible that the intelligentsia have chosen other fields of life rather than politics. It is probable that the challenges and opportunities offered by modern science and technology might have attracted the intelligentsia more than politics. But the fact remains that this withdrawal of the intelligentsia is lamented by political leaders, parties & the press.

V. Opposition Parties : Amongst the opposition parties which operate in Maharashtra, the first place is claimed by the Peasants and Workers' Party. The party came into existence in 1950. The leading figures of the party, Shri R.K.Khadilkar, Shri S.S.More, Shri Tulsidas Jadhav and few others are now back in the Congress. The party has certain strong pockets in rural Maharashtra. It claims the largest number of members of the legislature on the opposition benches -15. The party is wedded to a Marxist ideology. But the social base is the rural peasantry mainly of the Maratha caste. There have been some efforts at a merger with the Samyukta Socialist Party. But these have proved futile. It appears that the party is torn between its ideological and sociological bases. Though the party is still functioning, the decline has set in. The prospects of the party in the future political life of the region do not appear to be very promising. It may continue to hold some of its pockets in rural Maharashtra. But it would not be able to pose any major challenge to the Congress as regards capture of political power.

The Praja Socialist Party stood next to the P.W.D. in the present Legislative Assembly in 1962. The merger attempt between the P.S.P. & S.P. resulted in further weakening of the party. At present, the picture is very confusing. The rank and file is still dazed and confounded. The father-figure for many of them was Shri S.M.Joshi. He has chosen to be the President of the Samyukta Socialist Party. The two socialist parties have a urban middle class leadership with the industrial proletariat as the social base. But the parties have not succeeded in making any serious dent in the rural support of the Congress except in the Ratnagiri district of the Konkan area. The Socialist Parties, together

may have some chance to win a few seats in the next election. But it seems that the fratricidal fight would be more intense than their opposition to the party in power.

The C.P.I. could be listed as the third most important opposition to the Congress. With the bifurcation of the All India Party into rightists and leftists, the party has suffered in both its strength and its influence. The party's main strength lies in Bombay's textile workers and a few other industrial areas. The leadership is again mainly urban and middle class. The party has not been able to make any impact on the rural masses. The failure of the S.M.S. at the 1962 elections affected the party most. Through the alliance, the party had benefitted most in securing seats in the Bombay Corporation and in the Legislature. Bombay had the first Communist Mayor during the hey-day of the Samyukta Maharashtra agitation. But the party is now suffering from bitter intra-party struggles between the Dange-led Rightists and the leftists. There is not much chance for the party in the near future to make any significant headway in the politics of Maharashtra. But it would continue to remain a force in the labour movement specially in Bombay.

The Jan Sangh made a determined bid to make an entry into the politics of Maharashtra in the 1962 elections. But the then Chief Minister, Shri Y.B. Chavan proved prophetic in declaring that the Jan Sangh would not get a single seat in the Assembly. The Jan Sangh's failure was not unexpected. The ridiculous attempt to contest seats with meagre resources, both in men and money, was destined to be futile. Except for a few seats in the local government institutions in the State, the Jan Sangh could not make any impact on the State politics. The reasons were obvious to anyone who knew the political life. The leadership of the Jan Sangh is predominantly urban middle class and Brahmin in caste. The Congress could

could exploit relation of Jan Sangh to R.S.S. by a sly reference to Gandhi murder. The social base of the party is typically urban middle class. The policies and programmes of the party have failed to attract the rural masses. It would be a miracle if the Jan Sangh would be able to make any substantial gains in the 1967 elections. It may continue to hold some of its strongholds in the urban areas. The Jan Sangh would not cause any headache to the Congress strategists for a long time to come. The under-current of anti-Brahmin feeling could be skillfully and cleverly used against the Jan Sangh any time with disastrous consequences for the party.

This leaves only the Lal Nishan Party, Swatantra Party- important at the centre as the major opposition- and Hindu Mahasabha in the field. Of these, the Swatantra and Hindu Maha Sabha would not constitute any threat to the Congress monopoly of power. The Swatantra Party is still in its infancy and is limited in its activities to the city of Bombay. The anachronistic platform of the party, the urban rich class leadership and the failure to grasp the social needs of the region guarantee its failure. The Hindu Sabha could be written off as a spent force. The party never had an appeal for the masses. But, the Jan Sangh has now weaned away the social classes which supported the Hindu Sabha previously. Thus, the party is facing its extinction as it has failed to recruit any newcomers to its fold.

The Lal Nishan, a Marxist deviationist faction has certain pockets in Maharashtra. The leadership is a devoted one. But the group has not been able to grow into even a State-level party as the P.W.P. There were moves for a merger with the C.P.I. But the efforts proved abortive.

It could be said that at present or in the near future, there is no party which could wrest power from the Congress. The 1957 elections were a deviant behaviour on the part of the

traditional support for the Congress. It seems that the Congress monopoly of power in Maharashtra, would remain unchallenged at least in the near-future .

VI Problems : Before ending this short note, it is felt necessary to focuss the attention on some of the problems which Maharashtra is facing in other fields. This is a defecit State and there are no immediate prospects of over-coming this deficiency in food-grains. The industrial development is unbalanced and has brought in its train the problems of unbanisation, and disintegrated communities. The tensions between certain caste-groups, have shown tendency to increasing bitterness. The tensions with the neighbouring States like Mysore, Andhra and Gujerat have not yet subsided. The problem of integrating the neo-buddhists into the general community still remains unsolved.

An attempt could be made to visualise the prospects of Maharashtra in the near-future. Maharashtra aspires to be the first socialist State in the Indian Union. With the present background of industrialization, spread of the cooperative movement, and the measures of land reform, it is felt that there would be no major difficulty in achieving the goal. The government would be required to undertake certain genuinely socialistic measures to prevent the concentration of money and wealth. The intellectual and psychological climate in Maharashtra favours a socialistic pattern. The main obstacles appear to be the strength of the vested interests and the failure of the party-in-power to dislodge them from the commanding heights of the economy. But Maharashtra cannot be singled out for this failure. It is the tragedy of the whole country.

Appendix I.

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- (2) See Marathwada Weekly Files.
- (3) Shri S.K.Wankhede's speech in the Vasant Vyakhyanmala Poona, May 1965.
- (4) Lalji Pendse - Maharashtra Mahamanthan -Sahitya Sahakar Sangh Prakashan P.61)
- (5) S.A.Joglekar - Sahyadri : Poona 1952 pages 1-8.
- (6) R.M.Deshmulkh : Address to the Samykta Maharashtra Conference 16th,17th Oct.1948 at Bombay quoted by Lalji Pendse Maharashtra Mahamanthan Bombay 1965 p.108.
- (7) L.B.Bhopatkar's article in Kesari,1948 advising Brahmins to follow the Parsees in preferring to concentrate in urban areas,choosing technical professions and adopting non-interfering attitude in politics.

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Appendix No.2 :

GENERAL ELECTIONS : 1957.

ASSEMBLY.

Area	Congress	S.M.S.
Bombay City	13	11
Marathwada	35	7
Vidarbha	55	11
Western Maharashtra	33	102
Total	136	131

LOKSABHA

Bombay City	2	2
Western Maharashtra	2	20
Total	4	22

BOMBAY CORPORATION ELECTIONS : (MAY 1957)

<u>Party</u>	<u>Contested</u>	<u>Elected.</u>
Congress	110	54
S.M.S.	97	71
Independent	107	5
Lohia Socialist	5	-
P.S.P.	1	1
Jan Sangh	1	-

MAHARASHTRA ASSEMBLY 1960 Party Changes.

Congress	156
P.S.P.	0 = 0 0 0 0 0 0
Jan Sangh	
Kamble faction of Republican Party	
S.M.S.	39 ( S.M.S.dissidents)
	68

GENERAL ELECTIONS : 1962.

ASSEMBLY

<u>Area</u>	<u>Congress</u>	<u>S.M.S.</u>
Bombay City	22	2
Marathwada	33	9
Vidarbha	45	11
Western Maharashtra	136	12
Total	236	34

ZILLA PERISHAD ELECTIONS : MAY 1962.

Congress	...	826
S.M.S.	...	135
Jan Sangh	...	5
P.S.P.	...	46
Socialist (Lohia)		1
Independent	...	256
Total		1269



OMBAY CORPORAT ELECTIONS : (1961 March)

Congress. ...	59
P.S.P. ...	14
Kamble Group (Republican faction)	3
Jan Sangh ...	4
Socialist (Lohia Group)	3
Independent ...	10
S.M.S. ...	34
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	127
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