Determinants of politics of Maharashtra

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Question paper pattern

T.Y.B.A. – Semester VI
Subject: Political Science – Paper VI
Title: *Determinants of Politics of Maharashtra*
Duration: 3 Hours
Total Marks: 80

Q.1 – Module 1: Political Economy of Maharashtra

(a) Explain the interrelationship between **business and politics** in Maharashtra.
 OR
 (b) Discuss the role and impact of **cooperative institutions** in the political economy of Maharashtra.

Q.2 – Module 2: Political Parties

(a) Examine the **rise and development of the Republican Party of India, the Peasants and Workers Party, and the Shiv Sena** in Maharashtra's political landscape.
 OR
 (b) Analyse the evolution and role of **coalition politics** in Maharashtra since the 1990s.

Q.3 – Module 3: Contemporary Issues and Movements

(a) Critically evaluate the **farmers' movements and agitations** in Maharashtra in recent decades.
 OR
 (b) Write a detailed note on **tribal issues** in Maharashtra with reference to land rights, displacement, and political representation.

Q.4 – Module 4: Civil Society and Development Alternatives

(a) What is **civil society**? Discuss its nature and significance with reference to Maharashtra.
 OR
 (b) Assess the role of **Right to Information (RTI) movements** and **environmental initiatives** in Maharashtra's development discourse.

प्र. १ – विभाग १: महाराष्ट्राचे राजकीय अर्थकारण

(अ) महाराष्ट्रातील उद्योग आणि राजकारण यांमधील परस्परसंबंध स्पष्ट करा.
 किंवा
 (ब) महाराष्ट्रातील सहकारी संस्थांची भूमिका आणि परिणाम याचे विश्लेषण करा.

प्र. २ – विभाग २: राजकीय पक्ष

(अ) रिपब्लिकन पार्टी ऑफ इंडिया, शेतकरी कामगार पक्ष आणि शिवसेना या पक्षांचा महाराष्ट्राच्या राजकारणातील विकास आणि योगदान याचे विश्लेषण करा.
 किंवा
 (ब) १९९० नंतर महाराष्ट्रात उदयास आलेल्या आघाड्यांच्या राजकारणाचे स्वरूप स्पष्ट करा.

प्र. ३ – विभाग ३: समकालीन प्रश्न व चळवळी

(अ) महाराष्ट्रातील शेतकरी चळवळी व आंदोलने यांचे समकालीन परिप्रेक्ष्यात विश्लेषण करा.
 किंवा
 (ब) महाराष्ट्रातील आदिवासी प्रश्नांचे स्वरूप आणि त्यांचे सामाजिक-राजकीय परिणाम लिहा.

प्र. ४ – विभाग ४: नागरी समाज व पर्यायी विकासाच्या संकल्पना

(अ) नागरी समाज म्हणजे काय? महाराष्ट्राच्या संदर्भात त्याचे स्वरूप व महत्त्व सांगा.
 किंवा
 (ब) महाराष्ट्रातील माहितीच्या अधिकारासाठी झालेल्या चळवळी व पर्यावरण रक्षणासाठीचे उपक्रम याचे विश्लेषण करा.

Interrelationship between Business and Politics in Maharashtra

1. Historical Context

Maharashtra, especially Mumbai, has long been a financial powerhouse of India. Since the colonial period, Mumbai (then Bombay) evolved as the centre of trade, commerce, and industry—especially cotton mills, banking, shipping, and later, media and film.

Even after independence, Maharashtra remained economically dynamic. This economic significance naturally attracted political interest. Over time, **political control became essential to manage economic levers**, from land acquisition to industrial licensing, and later infrastructure projects and real estate.

2. Business as a Driver of Political Patronage

- Maharashtra's **industrialists and cooperative sector leaders** often used their economic clout to enter politics.

- The **sugar cooperative movement** in western Maharashtra is a perfect example. It helped leaders like **Sharad Pawar, Vasantdada Patil, and others** rise in politics.

- The cooperative sector—sugar factories, banks, and dairies—became a **nursery for political leadership**.

- These institutions were not just economic entities but also political vote banks. Running them offered access to employment, contracts, and credit—thereby building loyalty.

3. Politicians as Business Facilitators

- On the flip side, many politicians have supported or directly run businesses. This includes not only sugar factories but **educational institutions, construction firms, transport companies**, etc.

- Real estate development in **Mumbai, Pune, and Nashik** often involved political leaders or their associates.

- Politicians have also helped corporates navigate bureaucratic hurdles, land clearances, and environmental permissions.

This dynamic often led to the **nexus between politicians, bureaucrats, and businessmen**—a pattern seen in Maharashtra's urban development.

4. Role of Mumbai as Financial Capital

- Mumbai being the **headquarters of the RBI, SEBI, BSE, NSE, and many corporates** means that policy influence in Maharashtra can have a ripple effect on national business decisions.

- Political decisions in the state (e.g., regarding tax incentives, infrastructure projects like metro lines, coastal roads, SEZs, etc.) have enormous business implications.

- Hence, **corporate lobbying** is visible not just at the central level but also in the Maharashtra state government.

5. Rise of New Political-Business Alliances

- Post-1990 liberalisation saw **new sectors like IT, retail, telecom, and finance** emerging.

- Politicians began aligning with these sectors. Pune's IT parks and Nagpur's logistics hubs emerged due to such business-political collaborations.

- Politicians now also invest in or promote **private education, medical colleges, and infrastructure firms**, which generate both wealth and influence.

6. Corruption and Crony Capitalism

- This closeness has not been without criticism. **Adarsh Housing Society Scam, Lavasa project controversies**, and allegations around **PMC Bank** reveal how politicians can misuse state apparatus to favour certain business interests.

- Land acquisition for SEZs, sometimes at throwaway prices, has also triggered accusations of **crony capitalism**, often involving politicians from all major parties.

7. Changing Nature in the Age of Coalition Politics

- Coalition politics since the 1990s (with Shiv Sena-BJP, Congress-NCP, and more recently, the Maha Vikas Aghadi or Eknath Shinde's government) have complicated the business-political dynamic.

- Different factions have different business loyalties. For instance, **builder lobbies, transport unions, Bollywood, and educational barons** may support different camps depending on policy positions and regulatory stances.

8. Influence of Political Dynasties and Business Empires

- Political families in Maharashtra often diversify into business. E.g., the Pawar, Patil, and Thackeray families have been linked to sectors like education, media, and real estate.

- This intertwining results in **cross-investment of political capital and financial capital**, blurring the lines between public service and private gain.

9. Urbanisation and Infrastructure Development

- Massive infrastructure projects (like **Mumbai Metro, Coastal Road, Samruddhi Mahamarg**) involve huge contracts and land transactions, where political approval and business execution go hand in hand.

- These projects become sites of **business-political contestation**: which contractor gets what, who gets land at concessional rates, etc.

The Role and Impact of Cooperative Institutions in the Political Economy of Maharashtra

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1. Introduction

The **cooperative movement in Maharashtra** is not just an economic strategy—it is a deeply **embedded social and political force**. It began with the intention of empowering farmers and rural communities but soon evolved into a **platform for political mobilisation**, **leadership building**, and **economic patronage**.

From the 1950s onwards, **sugar cooperatives, milk cooperatives, cooperative banks, and housing societies** became central to the functioning of Maharashtra's political economy.

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2. Emergence of Cooperatives: Historical Context

- After independence, Maharashtra (especially western Maharashtra) saw a concerted effort to promote cooperatives as an alternative to exploitative private capital.

- With the **Bombay State Cooperative Societies Act, 1925**, and later the **Maharashtra Cooperative Societies Act, 1960**, the institutional and legal

framework was laid.

- This coincided with the Green Revolution, making agriculture more input-intensive and thereby necessitating cooperative credit, procurement, and marketing structures.

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3. Sugar Cooperatives as Political Nurseries

- **Sugar cooperatives** became the most significant force, especially in **Pune, Satara, Kolhapur, Sangli, Ahmednagar, and Solapur**.

- These cooperatives required large investments and operated with government subsidies and quotas.

- Control over a sugar factory meant control over jobs, contracts, transport, fertiliser distribution, and loans—making it a **source of political capital**.

- Leaders like **Vasantdada Patil, Shankarrao Chavan, Sharad Pawar**, and others rose to prominence through the cooperative route.

- These institutions became **power bases**, eventually dominating local bodies, the State Assembly, and even Parliament.

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4. Cooperative Banks and Financial Power

- Cooperative banks (district and urban) were closely tied to political leaders.

- These banks controlled **agricultural credit, working capital, and even election funding**.

- Misuse of funds and politicised lending were common, but they also played a huge role in **rural financial inclusion**.

- Control over such banks enabled leaders to **reward loyalty and punish dissent**, reinforcing patron-client relationships.

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5. Educational and Housing Cooperatives

- Several **political families started educational institutions under cooperative banners**, including engineering and medical colleges.

- In urban areas, **housing cooperatives** were another avenue for influence and money-making, especially in Mumbai, Thane, and Pune.

- These institutions often received land at concessional rates and permissions via political influence.

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6. Political Patronage and Electoral Advantage

- Cooperative leaders became MLAs, MPs, Ministers, and even Chief Ministers.

- The **'power of patronage'**—jobs, credit, admissions, infrastructure—was wielded to secure votes.

- During elections, the cooperative networks functioned like **informal vote-delivery machines**, mobilising rural and semi-urban populations.

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7. Transformation and Decline in the 1990s-2000s

- Liberalisation and the rise of **private sector alternatives** eroded the monopoly of cooperatives.

- Many cooperatives became **financially unviable or were mismanaged**, leading to losses and scandals.

- Yet, some adapted by **commercialising operations** while retaining political influence.

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8. Criticism and Challenges

- **Cronyism and corruption** became endemic in many cooperatives.

- Leadership often remained within dominant caste groups, especially **Marathas**, leading to **exclusion of marginalised communities**.

- There were allegations of **nepotism, fund misappropriation, lack of transparency, and politicisation** of administrative decisions.

- The original **Gandhian and democratic ethos** of cooperatives got diluted as they turned into power centres.

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9. Recent Developments and Changing Trends

- New actors like **Devendra Fadnavis and Eknath Shinde** are trying to break the old cooperative strongholds, especially in western Maharashtra.

- BJP's growing presence in cooperatives is changing their **caste composition and political orientation**.

- Digitalisation, audit reforms, and RBI/ED interventions have led to **stricter regulation** and scrutiny.

Conclusion: Dual Role in Political Economy

Cooperative institutions in Maharashtra have served a **dual purpose**—on one hand, they **democratised credit, empowered farmers**, and enabled rural development. On the other hand, they became **tools of political control, patronage, and enrichment for elites**.

They remain a **unique and influential feature** of Maharashtra's political economy, reflecting both the **possibilities and perils of institutionalised grassroots power**.

The **rise and development of the Republican Party of India, the Peasants and Workers Party, and the Shiv Sena** in Maharashtra's political landscape.

The political landscape of Maharashtra has been shaped significantly by the emergence and growth of various political parties that represent different social, economic, and regional interests. The Republican Party of India (RPI), the Peasants and Workers Party (PWP), and the Shiv Sena have each played crucial roles in Maharashtra's political development.

1. Republican Party of India (RPI)

Rise and Development:

- **Origins:** The RPI was founded on 3rd October 1957, inspired by the thoughts and ideology of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. It was established to represent the interests of the Scheduled Castes, Dalits, and other marginalised communities, particularly those affected by caste-based discrimination and socio-economic injustice.

- **Leadership:** After Ambedkar's death in 1956, the leadership of the movement was taken over by his followers, particularly Dadasaheb Gaikwad, who played a prominent role in the initial stages of the RPI.

- **Ideology:** The party aimed to establish a society based on social justice, equality, and the eradication of caste discrimination.

- **Electoral Performance:** The RPI enjoyed considerable popularity in Maharashtra, especially among Dalit communities, during the 1960s and 1970s. It participated actively in state and national elections.

- **Fragmentation:** Over the decades, the RPI has experienced numerous splits, resulting in various factions such as RPI (Athawale), RPI (Gavai), and RPI (Kawade), among others. The fragmentation diluted its influence over time.

- **Recent Trends:** Some factions of the RPI, particularly RPI (Athawale), have allied with mainstream parties like the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Shiv Sena to stay politically relevant.

2. Peasants and Workers Party (PWP)

Rise and Development:

- **Formation:** Established in 1947, the PWP emerged as a left-wing party primarily representing the interests of peasants, agricultural labourers, and industrial workers in rural Maharashtra.

- **Leadership:** The party was led by prominent leaders like Nana Patil, Keshavrao Jedhe, and others who were deeply rooted in socialist ideology.

- **Ideology:** The PWP aimed to promote agrarian reform, workers' rights, and economic equality. It was influenced by socialist and communist principles.

- **Electoral Base:** The party has been influential mainly in the rural regions of Maharashtra, particularly the Konkan, Raigad, and parts of Marathwada. It enjoyed significant success in the 1950s and 1960s.

- **Decline:** With the rise of regional parties and the increasing dominance of the Congress in Maharashtra, the PWP's influence gradually declined. However, it still retains pockets of support, especially in the Konkan region.

- **Recent Status:** The PWP continues to exist as a minor political entity, aligning itself occasionally with larger opposition fronts or contesting elections independently.

3. Shiv Sena

Rise and Development:

- **Formation:** Shiv Sena was founded by Bal Thackeray on 19th June 1966 in Mumbai, originally as a regionalist movement aimed at promoting the rights of the 'sons of the soil' (Marathi Manoos) against perceived economic and cultural domination by outsiders, especially South Indians and Gujaratis.

- **Ideology:** Initially, the Shiv Sena espoused a regional and ethnocentric ideology, advocating for the protection of Marathi identity, culture, and employment opportunities for locals. Later, it expanded its agenda to include a strong Hindutva orientation, particularly from the 1980s onwards.

- **Growth:** The party quickly established itself as a powerful force in Mumbai and its adjoining areas, capitalising on Marathi pride and dissatisfaction with the Congress's policies.

- **Political Alliances:** Shiv Sena aligned with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) during the 1980s and 1990s, gradually broadening its appeal beyond Mumbai to other parts of Maharashtra.

- **Electoral Success:** The Shiv Sena-BJP alliance won the Maharashtra Assembly elections in 1995, forming the government for the first time with Manohar Joshi as Chief Minister. Bal Thackeray remained the de facto leader and ideological guide of

the party.

- **Factionalism and Transformation:** After the death of Bal Thackeray in 2012, the leadership of Shiv Sena passed to his son, Uddhav Thackeray. Internal factionalism emerged in 2022, resulting in a split between the faction led by Uddhav Thackeray and the one led by Eknath Shinde.

- **Current Status:** As of now, the Shiv Sena is divided into two factions, with Eknath Shinde's group currently recognised as the official Shiv Sena by the Election Commission of India. Shinde is also serving as the Chief Minister of Maharashtra with the BJP's support.

Comparison and Analysis:

- **RPI:** Initially powerful, especially among Dalits, but weakened by fragmentation and lack of unified leadership.

- **PWP:** Ideologically consistent but limited in appeal, mostly confined to rural areas, particularly the Konkan region.

- **Shiv Sena:** Most successful of the three, evolving from a regional outfit to a mainstream player in Maharashtra's politics through aggressive regionalism and later Hindutva politics.

Conclusion:

The **RPI, PWP, and Shiv Sena** reflect the diversity of Maharashtra's political landscape, with each party rooted in a distinct social base and ideology. While the RPI represents the Dalit struggle for equality, the PWP reflects agrarian socialism, and the Shiv Sena capitalises on regionalism and cultural identity. The trajectory of these parties reveals the complex interplay of caste, class, and identity politics in Maharashtra.

Evolution and role of **coalition politics** in Maharashtra since the 1990s.

Coalition politics in Maharashtra has been a defining feature of the state's political landscape since the early 1990s. It emerged as a practical necessity due to the decline of single-party dominance, mainly the Congress, and the rise of regional and ideological parties such as the **Shiv Sena, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP).**

Evolution of Coalition Politics

Pre-1990s Scenario

- **Congress Dominance:** From Maharashtra's formation in 1960 till the late 1980s, the Indian National Congress enjoyed overwhelming dominance in the state's politics. Despite internal factionalism, the Congress managed to retain power largely due to its broad social coalition encompassing Marathas, Dalits, Adivasis, and minorities.

- **Opposition Fragmentation:** The opposition, which included parties like the **Peasants and Workers Party (PWP), Janata Party, and Republican Party of India (RPI),** was regionally concentrated and ideologically diverse, failing to effectively challenge the Congress's monopoly.

1990s – The Emergence of Coalitions

- **Decline of Congress:** The **Congress** began to weaken due to **internal factionalism, socio-economic changes, and the rise of regional sentiments.** The Mandal Commission's implementation in 1990 also created fissures within the Congress's traditional voter base.

- **Rise of the Shiv Sena-BJP Alliance:**

  - **1995 Elections:** The **Shiv Sena-BJP coalition** formed the government for the first time in Maharashtra. The alliance, built on the platform of **regionalism (Shiv Sena) and Hindutva (BJP),** proved effective in challenging the Congress's dominance.

  - **Power Sharing:** Manohar Joshi of the **Shiv Sena** became Chief Minister, and the **BJP** was given the Deputy Chief Minister's post.

- **Fragmentation of the Congress:** The **formation of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) in 1999** by Sharad Pawar and his associates led to a split in the Congress's vote base, making coalition politics inevitable for Congress to retain power.

2000s – Institutionalisation of Coalitions

- **Congress-NCP Alliance (1999–2014):**

  - Formed **Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA)** for the 1999 state elections to avoid splitting the anti-Shiv Sena-BJP vote.

  - This coalition successfully retained power for **three consecutive terms (1999, 2004, and 2009).**

  - Power-sharing was formalised with **Congress occupying the Chief Minister's post and NCP holding the Deputy Chief Minister's post.**

  - Despite ideological differences and occasional disputes, the alliance remained stable due to a shared interest in keeping the **Shiv Sena-BJP alliance** out of power.

2010s – Fragmentation and Realignment

- **Shiv Sena-BJP Rift (2014):**

  - After the **death of Bal Thackeray in 2012,** Shiv Sena underwent a leadership change under **Uddhav Thackeray.**

  - The **2014 state elections** saw the **Shiv Sena and BJP contesting separately** for the first time in over two decades due to **seat-sharing disagreements.**

  - The **BJP emerged as the single largest party** but required Shiv Sena's support to form a stable government. This marked a **shift in power dynamics**, with BJP becoming the dominant partner in the coalition.

- **2019 Elections:**

  - The **BJP-Shiv Sena alliance** won a majority but **split** over power-sharing disagreements, particularly on the **issue of rotational Chief Ministership.**

- ○ The **Shiv Sena broke ties with the BJP** and formed an **unexpected coalition** with the **NCP and Congress**, called the **Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA)**, with **Uddhav Thackeray becoming the Chief Minister.**

  - ○ This alliance was **centred on a common agenda of anti-BJP politics, regional pride, and welfare schemes.**

- ● **Factionalism within Shiv Sena (2022):**

  - ○ Eknath Shinde, a senior leader of Shiv Sena, **revolted against Uddhav Thackeray's leadership**, leading to the formation of a **rival faction that allied with the BJP.**

  - ○ Shinde was **sworn in as the Chief Minister with BJP's support** in June 2022, resulting in a significant realignment of coalition politics in Maharashtra.

Role of Coalition Politics

1. **Fragmentation of Votes and Need for Alliances:**

   - ○ The emergence of regional parties and the decline of Congress as the sole dominant force led to **vote fragmentation.**

   - ○ Parties with **narrower social bases** realised the importance of coalition-building to form governments.

2. **Power-Sharing Mechanisms:**

   - ○ Maharashtra's coalitions, especially the **Congress-NCP alliance**, established a **structured approach to power-sharing** with clearly defined roles, particularly in government formation and resource distribution.

3. **Ideological Flexibility:**

   - ○ Coalitions in Maharashtra often reflect **pragmatic rather than ideological alliances**.

   - ○ For instance, the **MVA coalition** (Shiv Sena, NCP, Congress) demonstrated remarkable flexibility despite significant ideological differences.

4. **Regional Identity Politics:**

○ Parties like the **Shiv Sena** have capitalised on **regional identity politics**, often aligning with national parties like the **BJP** for strategic gains.

5. **Stability vs. Instability:**

○ While coalition politics brought a degree of stability through power-sharing, it also led to **frequent factionalism and realignments**.

○ The **Shiv Sena split in 2022** was a prime example of how coalition compulsions can lead to **instability**.

6. **Impact on Governance:**

○ Coalition politics often resulted in **delays in decision-making**, bureaucratic inefficiency, and at times **policy paralysis** due to conflicting interests among coalition partners.

Maharashtra's political landscape has undergone significant transformations between 2023 and 2025, marked by party realignments, electoral outcomes, and evolving coalition dynamics. Here's an overview of these developments:

1. Party Splits and Realignments

● **Shiv Sena's Division (2022-2023):**

○ In June 2022, Eknath Shinde led a faction of Shiv Sena MLAs to form a government with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), becoming Chief Minister. This move caused a split in Shiv Sena, with Uddhav Thackeray leading the opposing faction. In February 2023, the Election Commission of India recognized Shinde's faction as the legitimate Shiv Sena, granting it the party's name and symbol. [DD News](#)

● **Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) Split (2023):**

○ In July 2023, the NCP experienced a division when Ajit Pawar broke away from his uncle, Sharad Pawar, and joined the ruling coalition with the BJP and Shinde-led Shiv Sena, forming the 'Mahayuti' alliance. [Wikipedia+4The Indian Express+4Countercurrents+4](#)

2. 2024 Maharashtra Legislative Assembly Elections

● **Election Overview:**

- ○ Held on November 20, 2024, the elections witnessed a voter turnout of 66.05%, the highest since 1995. [Wikipedia+1The Indian Express+1](#)

- **Mahayuti Alliance's Victory:**

  - ○ The BJP-led Mahayuti alliance achieved a landslide victory, securing 235 out of 288 seats. Within this coalition, the BJP won 132 seats, Shinde's Shiv Sena secured 57, and Ajit Pawar's NCP obtained 41 seats. [Countercurrents+5Wikipedia+5DD News+5Medium+1Countercurrents+1](#)

- **Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) Performance:**

  - ○ The opposition MVA alliance, comprising Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena (UBT), Sharad Pawar's NCP (SP), and the Congress, faced significant losses. The Congress managed to secure only 16 seats, reflecting its declining influence in the state. [Wikipedia+3DD News+3The Indian Express+3](#)

- **Chief Minister Appointment:**

  - ○ On December 5, 2024, Devendra Fadnavis of the BJP was sworn in as Chief Minister for the third time, leading the Mahayuti government. [Wikipedia](#)

3. Post-Election Developments

- **Coalition Dynamics:**

  - ○ Despite the Mahayuti alliance's electoral success, internal disagreements among coalition partners have surfaced, particularly concerning policy decisions and ministerial allocations. These tensions have occasionally hindered governance and policy implementation. [Countercurrents+3Reuters+3DD News+3](#)

- **Opposition's Challenges:**

  - ○ The MVA alliance continues to grapple with internal cohesion and strategic direction following its electoral defeat. The splits within Shiv Sena and NCP have further complicated efforts to present a unified opposition.

4. Broader Political Implications

- **Coalition Politics as a Norm:**

  - ○ Maharashtra's recent elections reaffirm the state's reliance on coalition politics, with no single party able to secure an absolute majority independently since 1990. This trend underscores the necessity for alliances to achieve

governance mandates. [The Indian Express](#)

- **BJP's Ascendancy:**

  - The BJP has solidified its position as the dominant political force in Maharashtra, consistently increasing its seat share and leading governing coalitions. This shift marks a departure from the state's historical Congress dominance. [DD News](#)

These developments between 2023 and 2025 highlight the fluid and dynamic nature of Maharashtra's political environment, characterized by shifting alliances, party realignments, and the ongoing prominence of coalition governance.

Farmers agitations in Maharashtra

Farmers movements and agitations

Sharad Joshi and the Shetkari Sanghatana

Sharad Anantrao Joshi (1935–2015) was a prominent Indian politician, economist, and farmer leader who left an indelible mark on the agricultural landscape of Maharashtra and beyond through his founding of the Shetkari Sanghatana, a farmers' organization. Known for his liberal economic views and advocacy for farmers' rights, Joshi's life and work bridged intellectual rigor with grassroots activism, making him a unique figure in India's rural mobilization efforts.

Early Life and Career

Born on September 3, 1935, in Satara, Maharashtra, Joshi hailed from a family with no direct connection to farming. His parents were Anant Narayan Joshi (1905–1970) and Indirabai Joshi (1910–1992). He pursued higher education at Sydenham College in Mumbai, earning a master's degree in Commerce in 1957. His academic brilliance earned him awards like the C.E. Randle Gold Medal for Banking (1955) and the Cursetjee Dady Prize for his work on irrigation benefits computation.

Joshi's early career was diverse and international. He served as a lecturer in Economics and Statistics at the University of Poona (1957–1958), joined the Indian Postal Service (1958–1968), and later worked as Chief of Informatics Service at the International Bureau of the Universal Postal Union (UPU) in Bern, Switzerland (1968–1977). He also earned a Diploma in Informatics from Lausanne in 1974. Despite a successful stint at the United Nations, Joshi returned to India in 1977, driven by a desire to address rural poverty and the struggles of farmers firsthand. He purchased 23.5 acres of rain-fed land in Ambethan near Pune, renaming it "Angarmala," and became a full-time farmer.

Founding of Shetkari Sanghatana

Sharad Joshi founded the Shetkari Sanghatana (Farmers' Organization) in 1979, following his direct experience with the challenges faced by farmers. The organization emerged from a significant agitation in 1978–1979, when Joshi mobilized onion farmers in Maharashtra to protest against depressed prices due to an export ban. In 1980, he led a massive protest blocking the Pune-Nashik highway at Chakan, where farmers dumped onions to demand better prices. This action, which saw villagers using bullock carts to halt traffic, pressured the government to intervene, with the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED) stepping in to purchase onions.

The Shetkari Sanghatana was established as a non-political union of farmers with a clear and focused mission encapsulated in its slogan: "Freedom of access to markets and to technology." Joshi believed that the root of farmers' distress lay in restricted market access and excessive state control over agriculture. Unlike other farmer leaders who demanded subsidies, Joshi advocated for open, competitive markets where farmers could realize fair prices for their produce. The organization quickly gained traction, mobilizing millions of farmers across Maharashtra, particularly those growing crops like onions, cotton, sugarcane, and tobacco.

Ideology and Vision

Joshi's economic philosophy was rooted in liberalism, drawing inspiration from figures like C. Rajagopalachari, founder of the Swatantra Party. He argued that Indian farmers faced "negative subsidies," where domestic prices were kept artificially low compared to global rates, and government support failed to bridge the gap. His key demands included:

1. **Remunerative Prices**: Farmers should have the right to determine the price of their produce, free from government suppression to favor urban consumers.
2. **Market Access**: Removal of restrictions like the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) monopolies and bans on inter-state trade (e.g., cotton and sugarcane zoning).
3. **Technology Adoption**: Support for innovations like Bt Cotton to improve yields and profitability.
4. **Farmer-Owned Enterprises**: Advocacy for joint-stock companies owned by farmers to control the farm-to-fork value chain, reducing dependency on middlemen and government acquisition.

Joshi coined the term "Bharat vs. India" to highlight the urban-rural divide, accusing urban elites of neglecting rural farmers. His vision was to transform peasants into entrepreneurs, integrating agriculture with global markets—a stance that set him apart from traditional farm leaders who opposed globalization.

Major Agitations and Impact

The Shetkari Sanghatana spearheaded numerous agitations in the 1980s and beyond, often drawing over a million farmers. Notable movements included:

- **1980 Onion Protest**: The Chakan blockade forced government action on onion prices.
- **1984 Cotton Monopoly Challenge**: Joshi declared war on the Maharashtra State Cooperative Cotton Marketing Federation's monopoly, ending its sole buyer status and addressing corruption and delays.
- **Sugarcane Zone Limits**: Successfully campaigned to lift restrictions compelling farmers to sell to specific mills.

These protests transcended caste, language, and religious divides, uniting farmers under Joshi's leadership. His ability to simplify complex economic concepts into actionable demands earned him widespread support. The Sanghatana also influenced policy, with some of Joshi's ideas—like a nationwide agricultural market—partially realized decades later.

Shetkari Mahila Aghadi and Women's Empowerment

Joshi founded the Shetkari Mahila Aghadi (SMA), the largest rural women's organization in Maharashtra, to champion women's property rights. The "Lakshmi Mukti" program transferred land titles to lakhs of rural housewives, empowering them economically. Despite this, Joshi controversially opposed the 33% women's reservation bill in Parliament in 2010, arguing that strengthening women through grassroots systems like Panchayati Raj was more effective than top-down quotas.

Political Journey

Joshi's political foray included founding the Swatantra Bharat Paksh (SBP) in 1997, an ideological successor to the Swatantra Party, allied with the BJP and advocating for a separate Vidarbha state. He served as a Rajya Sabha MP from Maharashtra (2004–2010), using the platform to raise farm issues. His lone vote against the women's reservation bill in 2010 stirred debate, reflecting his nuanced stance on empowerment.

Despite early mass support, Joshi couldn't sustain lasting political success. His compromises, like aligning with Shiv Sena for a Rajya Sabha seat, dismayed some aides and led to factionalism within the Sanghatana, including a split in 2004 when Raju Shetti formed the Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana.

Legacy and Later Years

Joshi was a prolific writer, contributing columns to *The Times of India*, *Business India*, and *Lokmat*, and authoring books in English and Marathi on agricultural issues, such as *Shetkari Sanghatana: Vichar Aani Karyapaddhatee* and *Swatantrata Kyon Naakam Hui*. He served on the Advisory Board of the World Agricultural Forum and founded the Kisan Coordination Committee, linking farmers' groups across 14 states.

Sharad Joshi passed away on December 12, 2015, at his Pune residence at age 81, after a period of illness. In his will, he left most of his estate to the Shetkari Trust to continue his work. His death marked the end of an era, but his ideas remain relevant amid ongoing farmer agitations and debates over market reforms.

Shetkari Sanghatana Post-Joshi

Under leaders like Anil Ghanwat, the Sanghatana continued Joshi's legacy, notably supporting the 2020 farm laws for their potential to open markets—though it criticized their repeal in 2021 as a politically motivated setback. The organization remains distinct for its pro-market stance, contrasting with subsidy-focused farmer groups.

Sharad Joshi and the Shetkari Sanghatana transformed Maharashtra's farmer movement by blending economic liberalism with mass mobilization. His emphasis on market freedom, technology, and rural empowerment challenged conventional narratives, leaving a lasting intellectual and practical legacy in Indian agriculture. Though his political ambitions faltered, his vision continues to inspire discussions on sustainable farmer prosperity.

Leadership of the Agricultural Prices Commission of India

Sharad Joshi's brief tenure as Chairman of the Agricultural Prices Commission of India (CACP) in 1990 under V.P. Singh's government was a pivotal moment, though it ended abruptly due to political upheaval.

- **Appointment**: In early 1990, V.P. Singh appointed Joshi as Chairman of the CACP, recognizing his expertise in agricultural economics and his leadership in the farmers' movement. The CACP, established in 1965, advises the government on minimum support prices (MSPs) for key crops, aiming to balance farmer incomes with consumer affordability. Joshi's appointment was a nod to his long-standing demand for remunerative prices based on the full cost of production, including labor, inputs, and a reasonable profit margin.

- **Vision and Approach**: Joshi sought to overhaul the CACP's methodology. He criticized the existing system for setting MSPs too low, arguing that it favored urban consumers and industrial interests over farmers. He advocated for:

    - **Cost-Plus Pricing**: MSPs should reflect the total cost of cultivation (including imputed family labor costs) plus a profit margin, aligning with his "remunerative prices" philosophy.
    - **Market Integration**: Prices should be linked to global benchmarks, adjusted for India's context, rather than suppressed to subsidize urban markets.
    - **Farmer-Centric Policy**: A shift from viewing agriculture as a tool for cheap food supply to treating it as a viable economic enterprise.
- His ideas challenged the entrenched policy framework, which often used MSPs as a political tool rather than an economic one.

- **Tenure Cut Short**: Joshi's chairmanship lasted only a few months, ending with the fall of V.P. Singh's government in November 1990. The National Front's collapse, triggered by the withdrawal of BJP support amid the Mandal-Masjid controversies, halted Joshi's efforts to institutionalize his reforms. He resigned following the government's dissolution, and his ambitious plans for the CACP remained unrealized.

- **Impact and Aftermath**: Though brief, Joshi's stint at the CACP reinforced his reputation as a thinker unafraid to challenge orthodoxy. However, it also exposed the limits of translating grassroots demands into policy within a fractious political system. Post-tenure, Joshi returned to the Shetkari Sanghatana, focusing on agitations rather than bureaucratic roles, and later critiqued successive governments for failing to implement meaningful price reforms.

Sharad Joshi's agitation known as "Vithobala Sakde" and his reputation as a crowd puller comparable to Mahatma Gandhi highlight his extraordinary ability to mobilize farmers and resonate with rural India. These aspects underscore his charisma, organizational prowess, and deep connection with the agrarian masses, cementing his legacy as one of India's most influential farmer leaders.

"Vithobala Sakde" Agitation

The "Vithobala Sakde" (or "Vithoba Sakde") agitation was a significant protest led by Sharad Joshi under the Shetkari Sanghatana banner in the early 1980s, specifically targeting the pricing and procurement policies for sugarcane in Maharashtra. The phrase "Vithobala Sakde" is Marathi, invoking Lord Vithoba (a form of Vishnu revered in Maharashtra, especially by the Warkari sect), symbolizing a call to action steeped in cultural resonance.

- **Background**: Sugarcane farmers in Maharashtra faced chronic exploitation due to the state's zoning policy, which restricted them to selling their produce to designated sugar mills—often cooperative factories controlled by political elites. These mills dictated low prices, delayed payments, and imposed unfair deductions, leaving farmers economically crippled despite high cultivation costs. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, discontent was brewing, and Joshi seized this opportunity to channel it into a mass movement.
- **The Agitation**: Launched around 1981–1982, "Vithobala Sakde" was a call to defy the zoning restrictions and demand remunerative prices for sugarcane. Joshi urged farmers to withhold their produce from mills unless fair prices were assured, effectively staging an economic boycott. The protest took various forms:
    - **Blockades and Demonstrations**: Farmers blocked roads and disrupted supply chains to sugar mills, notably in western Maharashtra, a sugarcane belt including districts like Pune, Ahmednagar, and Kolhapur.
    - **Symbolic Acts**: The invocation of Vithoba tied the agitation to Maharashtra's cultural and spiritual ethos, galvanizing rural communities. Farmers rallied with slogans and songs, turning the protest into a quasi-religious crusade for justice.
    - **Mass Participation**: Hundreds of thousands of farmers joined, with women from the Shetkari Mahila Aghadi playing a key role, amplifying the movement's reach.
- **Outcome**: The agitation pressured the Maharashtra government and sugar cooperatives to negotiate. While it didn't immediately dismantle the zoning system, it forced mills to offer better prices and prompted policy discussions on liberalizing sugarcane trade. The success reinforced Joshi's strategy of using non-violent, Gandhian-style resistance to achieve economic demands, further solidifying the Shetkari Sanghatana's influence.

- **Significance**: "Vithobala Sakde" exemplified Joshi's knack for blending economic grievances with cultural symbolism, making the movement accessible and emotionally compelling to farmers. It also showcased his ability to target specific, tangible issues—unlike broader ideological campaigns—ensuring immediate relevance to his constituency.

Reputation as a Crowd Puller Next to Mahatma Gandhi

Sharad Joshi earned a reputation as a crowd puller rivaled only by Mahatma Gandhi due to his unparalleled ability to draw massive gatherings of farmers, often numbering in the lakhs (hundreds of thousands), during the peak of the Shetkari Sanghatana's agitations in the 1980s. This comparison, while hyperbolic in some respects, reflects the scale of his influence and the reverence he inspired.

Comparison to Gandhi: The Gandhi parallel, often cited by contemporaries and journalists, stemmed from:

- **Scale**: Few leaders post-independence could muster such numbers without party machinery or state backing.
- **Non-Violence**: Joshi's agitations—like blocking highways with bullock carts or dumping produce—echoed Gandhian civil disobedience, avoiding violence while maximizing disruption.
- **Moral Authority**: His ascetic lifestyle (living modestly on his farm) and focus on rural upliftment drew inevitable comparisons to Gandhi's simplicity and village-centric vision.

However, unlike Gandhi, Joshi's mission was narrowly economic—focused on market freedom rather than a broader social or political revolution—limiting the analogy's depth.

Split in the Shetkari Sanghatana

The split within the Shetkari Sanghatana, particularly the notable schism in 2004 that led to the formation of the Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana under Raju Shetti, was the culmination of internal tensions, ideological differences, and leadership struggles that had been simmering for years. While Sharad Joshi founded and led the organization with a clear vision of market-oriented reforms for farmers, several factors eroded its unity, resulting in fragmentation by the early 2000s. Here's a detailed explanation of why the Sanghatana split:

1. Ideological Divergence

- Joshi's Market Liberalism vs. Pragmatic Populism: Sharad Joshi's core ideology—emphasizing free markets, remunerative prices without subsidies, and global integration (e.g., his support for Bt Cotton)—was rooted in economic liberalism. However, many within the Sanghatana, including younger leaders like Raju Shetti, leaned toward more immediate, populist demands like loan waivers, higher minimum support prices (MSPs), and government intervention. This clash became pronounced as farmers faced acute distress in the 1990s and early 2000s, with Joshi's long-term vision appearing detached from their short-term needs.

- Shift in Focus: Joshi's insistence on dismantling monopolies like APMCs and cooperatives alienated sections of the membership who saw these institutions—despite their flaws—as lifelines. Shetti and others favored reforming rather than abolishing them, reflecting a pragmatic shift that Joshi resisted.

2. Leadership Style and Centralization

- Joshi's Dominance: Joshi was the intellectual and charismatic face of the Sanghatana, but his top-down leadership style frustrated emerging leaders. Critics within the organization felt he monopolized decision-making, sidelining grassroots voices. By the 1990s, his aura as the unassailable founder began to wane as younger activists sought greater autonomy.
- Generational Divide: The Sanghatana's early leaders, active in the 1980s, were aging, while a new generation—including Shetti, a fiery orator from Kolhapur—wanted to steer the movement. Joshi's reluctance to cede control or groom successors created resentment, fueling demands for a more democratic structure.

3. Political Missteps and Alliances

- Entry into Politics: Joshi's decision to form the Swatantra Bharat Paksh (SBP) in 1997 and enter electoral politics marked a departure from the Sanghatana's non-political roots. His alliance with the BJP-Shiv Sena coalition for a Rajya Sabha seat in 2004 dismayed many followers, who saw it as a betrayal of the movement's independence. Raju Shetti, among others, opposed this political entanglement, arguing it diluted the Sanghatana's farmer-first ethos.
- Perceived Compromise: Joshi's stint as a Rajya Sabha MP (2004–2010) and his softening stance on some issues (e.g., not aggressively opposing cooperative elites) led to accusations of co-optation by the establishment. This eroded trust among hardline activists who felt he was drifting from the confrontational spirit of the 1980s agitations.

4. Regional and Personal Rivalries

- Western Maharashtra Focus: The Sanghatana's strongholds—Pune, Nashik, Ahmednagar, and Kolhapur—developed regional factions. Shetti, from the sugarcane-rich Kolhapur region, built a local power base that clashed with Joshi's Pune-centric leadership. Personal ambitions amplified these geographic divides.
- Raju Shetti's Rise: Shetti, a dynamic leader who joined the Sanghatana in the 1990s, gained prominence for his aggressive advocacy on sugarcane pricing and farmer suicides. His growing popularity challenged Joshi's authority, setting the stage for a power struggle. Shetti's confrontational style contrasted with Joshi's cerebral approach, appealing to a newer, more impatient cadre.

5. Economic and Social Context

- Farmer Distress: The late 1990s and early 2000s saw a spike in farmer suicides in Maharashtra, particularly in Vidarbha, due to debt, drought, and crashing cotton

prices. Joshi's market-driven solutions—like promoting Bt Cotton—were criticized as inadequate or risky by some, who demanded state-led relief. This dissatisfaction fueled dissent, with Shetti capitalizing on the unrest to rally support.

- Changing Farmer Priorities: The Sanghatana's original demands (e.g., onion and cotton pricing) evolved as new issues—globalization, WTO impacts, and input costs—emerged. Joshi's focus on long-term structural reform struggled to adapt to these immediate crises, widening the gap with members seeking quick fixes.

The 2004 Split: Formation of Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana

- Trigger: The decisive break came in 2004 when Raju Shetti, frustrated by Joshi's political alliances and perceived drift, formally split from the Shetkari Sanghatana to form the Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana (SSS). The immediate catalyst was disagreement over Joshi's support for the BJP-Shiv Sena coalition and his Rajya Sabha tenure, which Shetti saw as compromising the movement's independence.
- Shetti's Vision: The SSS retained some of Joshi's rhetoric (e.g., farmer empowerment) but pivoted to a more populist, state-centric agenda—pushing for MSP hikes, loan waivers, and cooperative reforms. Shetti also entered politics, winning a Lok Sabha seat from Hatkanangale in 2009, blending activism with electoral ambition in a way Joshi had avoided until later.
- Impact on Shetkari Sanghatana: The split weakened Joshi's organization, reducing its mass base and visibility. While it continued under loyalists like Anil Ghanwat, it never regained its 1980s vigor. The SSS, meanwhile, carved out a niche, particularly in western Maharashtra, though it too faced internal challenges over time.

Other Factions and Decline

- Earlier Splinters: The 2004 split wasn't the first. In the 1990s, smaller factions emerged due to disagreements over tactics (e.g., some wanted armed struggle, which Joshi rejected) and regional priorities (e.g., Vidarbha vs. western Maharashtra).
- Post-Joshi Fragmentation: After Joshi's death in 2015, the Sanghatana further fragmented, with no unifying leader to sustain its momentum. The Shetkari Trust, established via Joshi's will, aimed to preserve his legacy, but the movement's cohesion dissolved.

Conclusion

The Shetkari Sanghatana's split was driven by a mix of ideological rifts, leadership struggles, political miscalculations, and shifting farmer needs. Sharad Joshi's uncompromising liberalism and centralized control clashed with the pragmatic, populist ambitions of leaders like Raju Shetti, whose breakaway in 2004 epitomized the divide. While Joshi's vision left an intellectual imprint—evident in later farm law debates—the Sanghatana's fragmentation diluted its once-mighty influence, marking the end of its era as a unified force in Maharashtra's agrarian politics.

Raju Shetti and the Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana

Raju Shetti, born Devappa Anna Shetti on June 1, 1967, in Shirol, Kolhapur district, Maharashtra, is a prominent Indian farmer leader and politician who founded the Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana (SSS), a farmers' organization that has significantly influenced Maharashtra's agrarian politics. Known for his fiery oratory and grassroots activism, Shetti has been a vocal advocate for farmers' rights, particularly in the state's sugar belt, while navigating a complex political career marked by alliances, splits, and electoral ups and downs.

Early Life and Entry into Activism

Shetti hails from a modest Digambar Jain family, the son of Anna Shetti and Ratna Bai Shetti. Growing up in rural Maharashtra, he completed his Secondary School Certificate (SSC) in 1983–84 at Bagani High School in Sangli district and later earned a diploma in Mechanical Engineering in 1985. That same year, his father's death thrust him into managing the family's small farm, exposing him to the harsh realities of agricultural life—low prices, exploitative middlemen, and bureaucratic indifference.

Inspired by Sharad Joshi's Shetkari Sanghatana, which championed remunerative prices for farmers, Shetti joined the organization in the late 1980s. He quickly rose through its ranks, honing his skills as an organizer and agitator. However, ideological and strategic differences with Joshi—particularly over Joshi's growing political alignments, including his tilt toward the BJP—led Shetti to break away in 2004.

Founding of Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana

In 2004, Shetti established the Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana (SSS), meaning "Self-Respect Farmers' Organization," to address the specific grievances of Maharashtra's farmers, especially sugarcane growers in the western sugar belt (Kolhapur, Sangli, Satara). The SSS emerged as a splinter group from Joshi's Shetkari Sanghatana, reflecting Shetti's desire for a more militant, independent approach.

- **Mission and Ideology**: The SSS aimed to secure fair prices for farm produce, particularly sugarcane, and challenge the dominance of politically connected sugar cooperatives. Unlike Joshi's broader market-liberalism focus, Shetti blended economic demands with populist rhetoric, emphasizing immediate relief—higher procurement prices, timely payments, and debt relief—while retaining some of Joshi's anti-establishment ethos.
- **Early Agitations**: Shetti's leadership saw the SSS launch aggressive protests. A key demand was the payment of the Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) for sugarcane, often delayed or undercut by sugar mills. His agitations—like blocking highways and confronting mill owners—gained traction, establishing him as a formidable voice against the sugar lobby, long dominated by figures like Sharad Pawar.

Political Journey and Swabhimani Paksha

Recognizing the limits of apolitical activism, Shetti founded the Swabhimani Paksha (SWP) in 2004 as the political arm of the SSS, aiming to translate farmer support into electoral power.

- **2004 Assembly Victory**: Shetti contested the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly election from Shirol as an Independent (backed by SSS) and won, defeating established candidates with a grassroots campaign fueled by farmer discontent.
- **2009 Lok Sabha Breakthrough**: In the 2009 general election, Shetti ran for the Hatkanangle Lok Sabha seat in Kolhapur district under the SWP banner. He defeated Nivedita Mane of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) by over 95,000 votes, upsetting the sugar belt's entrenched political order. This victory marked his emergence as a national figure.
- **2014 NDA Alliance**: Ahead of the 2014 elections, Shetti allied the SWP with the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA), capitalizing on Narendra Modi's rising wave. He won Hatkanangle again, this time by a margin of 1.77 lakh votes, cementing his status as a farmer leader with parliamentary clout.
- **Exit from NDA (2017)**: Shetti's tenure in the NDA soured over disagreements with BJP policies, notably the slow implementation of farm loan waivers and import-export policies hurting sugarcane and dairy farmers. In 2017, he quit the alliance, accusing the Modi government of neglecting rural India.
- **2019 Defeat**: Shifting alliances, Shetti joined forces with Sharad Pawar's NCP—his former nemesis—ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha election. However, this move backfired. He lost Hatkanangle to Dhairyasheel Mane of the undivided Shiv Sena, with Prakash Ambedkar's Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) splitting his vote base. Critics accused Shetti of compromising his anti-sugar baron stance by aligning with Pawar.

Key Agitations and Achievements

Shetti's SSS has been synonymous with high-impact protests, often targeting sugar mills and government policies:

- **Sugarcane Pricing**: Shetti led multiple agitations demanding higher FRP and timely payments from mills. In 2021, he protested outside the Sahyadri Cooperative Sugar Mill in Karad, managed by a state minister, highlighting arrears of over ₹2,385 crore owed to farmers.
- **Milk Procurement Prices**: In 2018, he spearheaded a dairy farmers' strike, threatening to cut Mumbai's milk supply unless procurement prices rose. The agitation forced government concessions.
- **Anti-Sugar Lobby Stance**: Shetti's early career was defined by battles against sugar barons, including physical confrontations. A notable incident saw him hospitalized after a lathi charge, an image that bolstered his martyr-like status among farmers.

His victories include forcing mills to clear dues, raising awareness of farmer suicides, and influencing state policies on sugarcane and dairy pricing, though structural reforms he sought—like dismantling cooperative monopolies—remain elusive.

Organizational Dynamics and Splits

The SSS faced internal strife, reflecting Shetti's assertive leadership and shifting priorities:

- **2004 Split from Shetkari Sanghatana**: Shetti's exit from Joshi's group was the first fracture, driven by his rejection of Joshi's political compromises.
- **2017 Sadabhau Khot Exit**: A close aide and Maharashtra's then-Minister of State for Agriculture, Khot split from SSS after Shetti opposed his son's candidacy in a Zilla Parishad election, accusing him of dynastic politics. Khot aligned with the BJP, weakening SSS.
- **2019 Devendra Bhuyar Defection**: The SSS's lone MLA, elected from Morshi in 2019, joined Ajit Pawar's NCP after expulsion, further eroding Shetti's base.
- **2023 Ravikant Tupkar Rebellion**: Tupkar, a senior SSS leader from Vidarbha, rebelled against Shetti's leadership style, skipping meetings and hinting at joining the BJP or NCP. He criticized Shetti for neglecting cotton and soybean farmers, signaling regional fissures.

These splits highlight Shetti's struggle to balance his domineering style with the demands of a diverse membership, reducing SSS's once-unified strength.

Current Status and Legacy

As of March 20, 2025, Shetti remains active, though his influence has waned from its 1980s–2000s peak. In 2024, he contested Hatkanangle independently, rejecting alliances with both the ruling Mahayuti and opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), but lost again. He has since pushed for a third front, the Parivartan Aghadi, uniting small parties ahead of the Maharashtra Assembly polls, with a rally planned in Shegaon in August 2024.

- **Strengths**: Shetti's oratory, organizational skills, and farmer connect remain his assets. His autobiography, *Shivar te Sansad* (From the Fields to Parliament), and editorship of *Swabhimani Vichar* reflect his intellectual side.
- **Challenges**: Political flip-flops, internal dissent, and failure to sustain electoral success have dimmed his star. The SSS's de-registration in 2015 for financial non-compliance (later resolved) and Shetti's 2019 loss underscored his vulnerabilities.
- **Legacy**: Shetti reshaped farmer activism in Maharashtra, challenging the sugar lobby and amplifying rural voices. While less radical than Joshi ideologically, his pragmatic agitations delivered tangible wins, though his inability to institutionalize SSS's gains limits his long-term impact.

Tribal issues in Maharashtra with reference to land rights, displacement, and political representation.

The tribal communities in Maharashtra, which form approximately **9% of the state's population**, have historically faced marginalisation, inadequate political representation, and socio-economic deprivation. The major tribes include **Bhils, Gonds, Mahadeo Kolis, Katkaris, Warli, and Thakurs**, primarily concentrated in regions like **Palghar, Thane, Nashik, Nandurbar, Gadchiroli, and parts of Vidarbha and Konkan**.

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1. Land Rights

a. Historical Background

- During the colonial period, British land policies resulted in widespread **alienation of tribal lands**. Tribal lands were appropriated for commercial farming, timber extraction, and infrastructure projects.

- Post-independence, **land reform legislations** aimed at redistribution largely ignored tribal interests.

b. Major Issues

- **Encroachment and Alienation:** Non-tribal settlers, powerful landlords, and industries have frequently encroached upon tribal lands.

- **Non-Implementation of Land Reforms:** Despite legislative measures like the **Maharashtra Land Revenue Code, 1966**, and **Maharashtra Tenancy and Agricultural Lands Act, 1948**, land alienation remains prevalent.

- **Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006:**

    - Enacted to correct historical injustices by recognising the **individual and community rights** of Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFDs).

    - Maharashtra has made some progress, but implementation remains inconsistent, especially in tribal-dominated districts.

    - Many tribal households continue to struggle for the **recognition of their claims** due to bureaucratic hurdles and a lack of awareness.

- **Illegal Evictions:** Frequent evictions without adequate rehabilitation or compensation are reported, particularly in forested areas where tribes practice subsistence farming.

c. Recent Developments (2023-2025)

- The state government launched various **land titling schemes** aimed at ensuring proper documentation of tribal land holdings.

- Increased protests by tribal groups demanding stricter implementation of the **FRA, 2006**, especially in **Gadchiroli, Nandurbar, and Nashik**.

- Continued resistance against **industrial projects, mining, and development initiatives** resulting in large-scale land alienation.

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2. Displacement

a. Causes

- **Dams and Infrastructure Projects:** Construction of large dams like **Koyna, Upper Wardha, and Bhatsa** led to massive displacement of tribal populations.

- **Mining and Industrialisation:** Projects in regions like **Vidarbha and Konkan** have displaced tribal communities without adequate rehabilitation.

- **Protected Areas:** Declaration of **sanctuaries and national parks** such as the **Melghat Tiger Reserve** has led to forced displacement without proper resettlement plans.

b. Impacts

- **Loss of Livelihoods:** Displacement often results in the loss of traditional livelihoods, particularly agriculture and forest-based activities.

- **Cultural Erosion:** Forced relocation disrupts social and cultural practices, leading to the erosion of tribal identity.

- **Urban Migration:** Many displaced tribes migrate to urban areas where they face exploitation, lack of opportunities, and substandard living conditions.

c. Recent Developments (2023-2025)

- Increased resistance by **tribal organisations against projects like Adani's slum redevelopment plan in Mumbai** due to fear of further displacement and marginalisation.

- State government's efforts to **create compensation schemes** for displaced tribal families, though implementation remains uneven and often criticised for inadequacy.

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3. Political Representation

a. Under-Representation

- **Electoral Politics:** While **Scheduled Tribe (ST) reserved constituencies** exist, mainstream political parties often **ignore core tribal issues** in their agendas.

- **Panchayati Raj Institutions:** Even within tribal areas, genuine representation is often compromised by political elites.

b. Tribal Movements

- Movements demanding greater political autonomy and rights have been active, especially in **Gadchiroli, Nandurbar, and Nashik**.

- **Adivasi Ekta Parishad**, **Shoshit Jan Andolan**, and other grassroots organisations have been vocal about political representation and socio-economic rights.

c. Political Parties and Alliances

- The **Peasants and Workers Party (PWP)** and other left-leaning groups have historically tried to mobilise tribals, but with limited success.

- **Mainstream parties** such as the **Congress, NCP, BJP, and Shiv Sena** have courted tribal votes but often fail to address their core issues effectively.

- **Bhumi Sena (Land Army),** an emerging tribal-oriented organisation, is gaining popularity in parts of Vidarbha for its focus on **land rights and employment.**

d. Recent Developments (2023-2025)

- Increased focus on tribal welfare schemes by the **BJP-Shinde-NCP coalition government** post-2024 elections to consolidate tribal support.

- **Formation of Tribal Advisory Councils** at the district level, though their effectiveness remains debatable.

- Continued demand for **Autonomous Tribal Councils** in regions like **Gadchiroli and Nandurbar** for greater control over local governance.

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4. Government Measures and Policies

- **Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP):** Aimed at ensuring the flow of funds for tribal welfare, but often criticised for **poor implementation**.

- **Special Economic Zones (SEZs):** While intended to promote industrial growth, SEZs often lead to **land acquisition and displacement** of tribal communities.

- **Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006:** Though progressive, the **bureaucratic approach and inadequate awareness** have limited its success.

- **Maharashtra Tribal Development Department:** While tasked with implementing welfare schemes, it faces **administrative inefficiencies and underfunding**.

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5. Conclusion

The issues of **land rights, displacement, and political representation** remain critical for Maharashtra's tribal communities. Despite various laws and schemes aimed at addressing their concerns, the **implementation gap** continues to be a major challenge. Additionally, political representation has often been symbolic rather than substantive, with real power residing outside the tribal leadership.

Recent developments (2023-2025) indicate both **positive and negative trends**. While there are efforts towards improving political representation and land titling, continued displacement due to **industrial projects** and **forest conservation policies** remains a significant concern.

Civil society, its nature and significance with reference to Maharashtra.

Introduction

Civil society refers to the collective space of **voluntary associations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), social movements, advocacy groups, community organisations, professional associations, and informal citizen networks** that operate outside the direct control of the state and the market. It plays a crucial role in fostering **democratic values, promoting social justice, advocating for the rights of marginalised groups, and holding the state accountable**.

Maharashtra, being one of the most urbanised and industrialised states in India, has a **rich and vibrant civil society tradition**. From the **pre-independence reform movements** to **contemporary grassroots activism**, civil society in Maharashtra has significantly shaped the state's social, political, and cultural landscape.

Nature of Civil Society in Maharashtra

1. **Diverse and Multi-layered Structure**

   - Maharashtra's civil society encompasses a wide range of organisations, including **NGOs, advocacy groups, trade unions, self-help groups, farmers' organisations, tribal associations, and urban resident welfare groups**.

   - It also includes **social reformist bodies, religious organisations, caste-based associations, and educational institutions**.

2. **Historical Roots**

   - **Pre-Independence Era:**

     - Maharashtra has a strong legacy of **social reform movements** led by figures like **Mahatma Jyotirao Phule, Savitribai Phule, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, and Gopal Ganesh Agarkar**.

     - Movements aimed at **abolishing caste-based discrimination, promoting women's education, and advocating for social justice** formed the early foundations of civil society in Maharashtra.

   - **Post-Independence Era:**

     - The growth of trade unions, especially in Mumbai, and **farmer movements** in the 1970s and 1980s (like the **Shetkari Sanghatana**

led by Sharad Joshi) expanded the scope of civil society.

3. **Modern Civil Society Organisations**

   ○ Maharashtra has a **high concentration of NGOs and social advocacy groups** working on a diverse range of issues including **environment, human rights, education, health, gender equality, Dalit rights, and tribal welfare**.

   ○ Prominent organisations include:

      ■ **Adivasi Ekta Parishad** (Tribal rights)

      ■ **Narmada Bachao Andolan** (Environmental activism)

      ■ **Aamhi Parivartak** (Dalit rights)

      ■ **Shetkari Sanghatana** (Farmers' rights)

      ■ **Akhil Bharatiya Kisan Sabha** (Peasant rights)

4. **Grassroots Movements**

   ○ Maharashtra has witnessed several grassroots movements driven by civil society groups such as:

      ■ **Dalit Panther Movement (1972):** A militant Dalit organisation inspired by the Black Panther Movement of the USA, demanding justice and equality for Scheduled Castes.

      ■ **Anti-SEZ Movements:** Protests against land acquisition for Special Economic Zones, particularly in the Konkan region.

      ■ **Urban Housing Rights Movements:** Slum-dwellers' movements in Mumbai demanding rights to housing and basic amenities.

Significance of Civil Society in Maharashtra

1. **Promoting Social Justice and Equality**

   ○ Maharashtra's civil society has played a pivotal role in advocating for the **rights of Dalits, Adivasis, women, and other marginalised groups**.

   ○ **Movements led by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar** laid the foundation for Dalit assertion and rights-based advocacy that continues to inspire civil society

activism in the state.

2. **Political Mobilisation and Advocacy**

    ○ Civil society organisations have often acted as **pressure groups** influencing **policy-making and political processes**.

    ○ The **farmers' movements and Dalit movements** have significantly impacted electoral politics and the agenda of mainstream political parties.

3. **Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding**

    ○ Civil society has actively engaged in **mediation and peacebuilding efforts** during communal riots, caste conflicts, and labour disputes.

    ○ Various NGOs have also played important roles in **fostering interfaith dialogue and communal harmony**.

4. **Environmental Conservation**

    ○ Maharashtra's civil society has been active in **environmental conservation efforts**, particularly through organisations like the **Narmada Bachao Andolan** and initiatives aimed at protecting the **Western Ghats and Adivasi land rights**.

5. **Providing Public Goods and Services**

    ○ Several NGOs provide **education, healthcare, skill development, and welfare services**, especially in tribal and rural areas where government outreach is limited.

6. **Holding the State Accountable**

    ○ Civil society in Maharashtra has consistently worked towards ensuring **transparency, accountability, and better governance**.

    ○ RTI activists and advocacy groups have exposed **corruption, human rights abuses, and failures of the administration**.

Challenges Faced by Civil Society in Maharashtra

1. **State Repression and Legal Barriers**

- ○ Instances of **harassment, intimidation, and legal challenges** against activists have been reported, especially when they confront powerful political or economic interests.

2. **Funding Constraints**

   - ○ Dependence on external funding, including foreign contributions, often leads to **resource constraints and bureaucratic hurdles**.

3. **Fragmentation and Lack of Coordination**

   - ○ Competing interests among various groups and organisations can hinder effective advocacy and mobilisation.

4. **Political Co-option**

   - ○ Political parties often attempt to **co-opt civil society groups** to serve their electoral interests, compromising their independence and effectiveness.

Recent Developments (2023-2025)

1. **Increased Tribal Activism:**

   - ○ **Grassroots organisations** have intensified their campaigns against displacement, especially in **Gadchiroli, Nandurbar, and Nashik**.

   - ○ Protests against land acquisition for industrial projects have gained momentum, particularly involving **Adani's redevelopment projects in Mumbai**.

2. **Farmer Protests:**

   - ○ Continuing protests by **Shektari Sanghatana** and allied groups demanding **fair prices, debt relief, and comprehensive agrarian reform**.

   - ○ Heightened activism due to **climatic changes and agricultural distress**, especially in **Vidarbha and Marathwada**.

3. **Women's Rights Movement:**

   - ○ Increased awareness and mobilisation around **issues of domestic violence, workplace harassment, and gender discrimination**.

- ○ Organisations focusing on **urban slum women's rights** in Mumbai have gained prominence.

4. **Newer Forms of Activism:**

   - ○ Use of **social media and digital platforms** by civil society groups to **mobilise support, raise awareness, and coordinate protests**.

   - ○ Emergence of **youth-driven initiatives** addressing issues like **education, employment, and digital literacy**.

Conclusion

Civil society in Maharashtra remains a **vibrant and essential component** of the state's political, social, and cultural life. Despite facing challenges, it continues to assert itself in various domains ranging from **human rights advocacy and environmental conservation to political reform and social justice**. However, its efficacy largely depends on **navigating state opposition, political co-option, and resource constraints**.

The Amte Family: From Establishment of Anandwan Till Date

The **Amte family** is renowned for its **unparalleled contribution to social service, particularly in the field of leprosy rehabilitation, rural development, education, and environmental conservation**. The legacy began with **Murlidhar Devidas Amte**, fondly known as **Baba Amte**, and has been carried forward by his sons **Dr. Prakash Amte, Dr. Vikas Amte**, and their families.

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1. Baba Amte and the Establishment of Anandwan (1951)

a. Background

- Born on **26th December 1914** in **Hinganghat, Maharashtra**, Baba Amte belonged to a wealthy Brahmin family. Despite his privileged upbringing, he was drawn to the cause of social justice from a young age.

- A lawyer by profession, Baba Amte was influenced by **Mahatma Gandhi's teachings** and actively participated in the **Indian independence movement**.

b. Foundation of Anandwan

- **Founded in 1951** near **Warora, Chandrapur district, Maharashtra**.

- Initially started as a **leprosy rehabilitation centre**, with the intention of providing **treatment, dignity, and self-reliance to leprosy patients**.

- With minimal resources, Baba Amte established Anandwan on barren, arid land, which was transformed into a **self-sufficient, thriving community** through sustainable farming, cottage industries, and skill development programs.

c. Key Achievements of Anandwan under Baba Amte

- **Holistic Rehabilitation:** Providing medical treatment, education, skill training, and livelihood opportunities to leprosy patients and their families.

- **Empowerment through Work:** Ensuring that all residents contribute to the community through productive labour, fostering **self-respect and dignity**.

- **Vocational Training:** Establishment of various industries like **handicrafts, agriculture, and weaving** to provide employment to leprosy patients.

- **Cultural Integration:** Promoting **cultural activities, sports, and arts** to enhance the quality of life of residents.

- **Environmental Conservation:** Efforts towards **afforestation and water conservation** were initiated early on.

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2. The Second Generation: Dr. Prakash Amte and Dr. Vikas Amte

a. Dr. Prakash Amte

- **Born:** 26th December 1948.

- **Profession:** Medical doctor, social worker, and wildlife conservationist.

- **Lok Biradari Prakalp (1973):**

  - Founded in **Hemalkasa**, Gadchiroli district by Dr. Prakash Amte and his wife, **Dr. Mandakini Amte**.

- ○ Aimed at providing **healthcare, education, and development to the Madia Gond tribes**, one of the most isolated tribal communities in Maharashtra.

- ○ Dr. Prakash and Dr. Mandakini lived among the tribals, providing **free medical services, establishing a school, and promoting livelihood activities**.

- ○ **Animal Ark:** A sanctuary for **injured wild animals** rescued and rehabilitated by Dr. Prakash Amte, particularly for educating the tribals about wildlife conservation.

b. Dr. Vikas Amte

- ● **Born:** 1947.

- ● **Profession:** Medical doctor and social worker.

- ● **Role at Anandwan:**

  - ○ Oversees the **administration and expansion of Anandwan**.

  - ○ Spearheaded various initiatives to **expand vocational training, healthcare, and agricultural practices**.

  - ○ Focused on making Anandwan a **model of sustainable development**.

  - ○ Played a pivotal role in the establishment of **schools, hospitals, and training centres** within the Anandwan ecosystem.

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3. Third Generation: Carrying the Legacy Forward

a. Aniket Amte (Son of Dr. Vikas Amte)

- ● Actively involved in the administration and further development of Anandwan.

- ● Working on initiatives for **sustainable agriculture, water conservation, and community health**.

- ● Promotes the **use of modern technology** for improving the livelihood of the residents.

b. Dr. Digant Amte and Dr. Anagha Amte (Son and Daughter-in-law of Dr. Prakash Amte)

- Both are **medical doctors** dedicated to continuing the work at **Lok Biradari Prakalp, Hemalkasa**.

- Dr. Digant focuses on **medical services, wildlife conservation, and community health**.

- Dr. Anagha actively contributes to the **healthcare services and educational initiatives** at Hemalkasa.

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4. Major Contributions and Achievements (Till Date)

a. Social Work

- Rehabilitation of thousands of **leprosy patients** and providing them with **dignified livelihoods**.

- Advocacy for **eradication of social stigma** related to leprosy.

- Providing healthcare and education to **marginalised tribal populations**.

b. Education and Healthcare

- Establishment of **schools, hospitals, and vocational training centres** in Anandwan and Hemalkasa.

- Free medical services to tribals in **remote areas**.

c. Environmental Conservation

- Large-scale **afforestation and water conservation projects**.

- Promotion of **organic farming and sustainable practices**.

d. Awards and Recognition

- **Padma Vibhushan (Baba Amte, 1986)**

- **Ramon Magsaysay Award (Baba Amte, 1985)**

- **Ramon Magsaysay Award (Dr. Prakash and Dr. Mandakini Amte, 2008)**

- **Padma Shri (Dr. Prakash Amte, 2002)**

- **Padma Shri (Dr. Mandakini Amte, 2002)**

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5. Recent Developments (2023-2025)

1. **Expansion of Lok Biradari Prakalp:**

   - New healthcare initiatives for **maternal and child health** in remote tribal areas.

   - Efforts to incorporate **digital education** for tribal students.

2. **Environmental Initiatives:**

   - Introduction of **eco-friendly technologies** and renewable energy solutions in Anandwan.

   - Continued focus on **afforestation and water conservation projects**.

3. **Healthcare Modernisation:**

   - Expansion of medical facilities at **Anandwan and Hemalkasa** with modern equipment and better infrastructure.

   - Collaboration with NGOs and government agencies for **improved healthcare access**.

4. **Involvement of the Third Generation:**

   - Increasing participation of the younger generation in administration and expansion of **Anandwan and Lok Biradari Prakalp**.

   - Enhanced use of **technology and innovation** to meet contemporary challenges.

Conclusion

The **Amte family's work is a testament to selfless dedication and a holistic approach to social service**. From the establishment of Anandwan in 1951 by **Baba Amte** to the modernisation and expansion efforts led by the **third generation**, their contributions continue to impact **healthcare, education, environmental conservation, and social justice**.

Anna Hazare, His Hind Swaraj Trust, and His Work in Ralegaon Siddhi Village

Anna Hazare (born Kisan Baburao Hazare on **15th June 1937**) is a **renowned social activist, Gandhian, and anti-corruption crusader** from Maharashtra, known for his pioneering work in **village development, anti-corruption activism, and promotion of self-reliance and sustainability**.

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1. Early Life and Background

- **Birth and Family:** Born in **Bhingar, near Ahmednagar, Maharashtra**, in a poor family.

- **Education:** Dropped out of school after the seventh standard due to economic difficulties.

- **Military Service:** Joined the **Indian Army in 1963** as a truck driver and served during the **Indo-Pakistani War of 1965**. Retired in 1975 after surviving a near-fatal attack during the war.

- **Turning Point:** Deeply influenced by **Swami Vivekananda's writings** and Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy, he decided to dedicate his life to **rural development and social service**.

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2. Work in Ralegaon Siddhi Village (Since 1975)

a. Background of Ralegaon Siddhi

- **Location:** A small village in **Ahmednagar district, Maharashtra**.

- **Condition Before Hazare's Work:**

- ○ Severe **drought, poverty, alcoholism, illiteracy, and deforestation**.

- ○ Severe **water scarcity and degradation of agricultural land**.

- ○ **Out-migration** due to lack of employment and resources.

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b. Transformation Through Developmental Initiatives

i. Watershed Development and Water Conservation

- **Objective:** To make the village self-sufficient in water resources through conservation and efficient management.

- **Techniques Implemented:**

  - ○ **Rainwater harvesting**, **building check dams**, **percolation tanks**, and **contour trenches**.

  - ○ Planting **trees and grasses** to prevent soil erosion and improve water retention.

- **Result:**

  - ○ Water availability improved dramatically, making the village drought-resistant.

  - ○ Agricultural productivity increased, leading to better economic conditions.

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ii. Sustainable Agriculture

- Promotion of **organic farming** and **mixed cropping**.

- Reduced dependence on chemical fertilisers and pesticides.

- Enhanced soil fertility and agricultural yield.

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iii. Renewable Energy

- Introduction of **solar power**, **biogas plants**, and **smokeless chulhas (stoves)**.

- Improved health conditions due to reduced indoor pollution and better energy efficiency.

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iv. Ban on Alcohol

- Anna Hazare promoted a complete **ban on alcohol consumption** in the village.

- This was achieved through **community consensus** and **village-level regulations**, resulting in reduced domestic violence and better health.

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v. Education and Literacy

- Establishment of a **school** with a focus on **value-based education and vocational training**.

- High emphasis on **adult education** to increase literacy among older villagers.

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vi. Participatory Decision-Making (Gram Sabha)

- Promotion of **democratic decision-making** through **Gram Sabhas (village assemblies)**.

- Every developmental initiative was discussed and decided upon collectively, ensuring **transparency and inclusivity**.

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c. Results of the Transformation

- Ralegaon Siddhi transformed into a **model village** of **self-reliance, sustainability, and participatory governance**.

- Increased **crop yields**, improved **standard of living**, and reduced **out-migration**.

- Recognition as a **model village in India**, attracting researchers, activists, and government officials from across the country.

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3. Hind Swaraj Trust

a. Formation

- **Established by Anna Hazare** in **1991** to institutionalise his vision for **rural development and empowerment**.

- Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's **concept of 'Hind Swaraj' (Self-Rule)**, emphasizing **self-reliance, local governance, and moral integrity**.

b. Objectives

- To **promote sustainable rural development** through water conservation, agriculture, education, and health initiatives.

- To **eradicate social evils** like alcoholism, corruption, and illiteracy.

- To **foster Gram Swaraj (village self-rule)** through **democratic participation and transparency**.

c. Activities and Initiatives

- Managing and supervising various **developmental projects** in Ralegaon Siddhi.

- Providing **technical assistance and training** to other villages seeking to replicate the Ralegaon Siddhi model.

- **Documentation and dissemination** of knowledge on watershed management, organic farming, and renewable energy.

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4. Anti-Corruption Crusade

a. State-Level Activism

- Played a key role in **exposing corruption within the Maharashtra government**.

- Advocated for the **Right to Information (RTI) Act**, which became law in Maharashtra in 2002 and nationally in 2005.

b. National Movement Against Corruption (2011)

- Became the **face of the India Against Corruption (IAC) movement** demanding the enactment of the **Jan Lokpal Bill**.

- Led a series of **hunger strikes in Delhi**, capturing national attention and inspiring a wave of anti-corruption activism across India.

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5. Recognition and Awards

- **Padma Shri (1990)**

- **Padma Bhushan (1992)**

- **Ramon Magsaysay Award (1996)** for Community Leadership.

- **Indira Gandhi Award for National Integration (1997)**

- Several other **state and national awards** acknowledging his contributions to rural development and social activism.

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6. Recent Developments (2023-2025)

1. **Ongoing Work in Ralegaon Siddhi:**

   - Continued focus on **water conservation and sustainable farming**.

   - Promotion of **eco-friendly technologies** such as solar energy and biogas.

2. **Expansion of Hind Swaraj Trust's Work:**

   - Initiatives aimed at spreading the **Ralegaon Siddhi model** to other drought-prone and underdeveloped villages across Maharashtra.

   - Conducting **training workshops for rural leaders and activists**.

3. **Criticism and Challenges:**

   - While Anna Hazare's work remains influential, some critics argue that his **Gandhian approach is too idealistic** for contemporary issues.

   - Lack of active engagement with **young activists** has been a noted concern.

7. Conclusion

Anna Hazare's **work in Ralegaon Siddhi** and his efforts through the **Hind Swaraj Trust** exemplify the potential of **community-driven, sustainable development**. His emphasis on **self-reliance, moral integrity, and grassroots democracy** has influenced **rural development policies and civil society activism across India**.

The role of **Right to Information (RTI) movements in Maharashtra**

The **Right to Information (RTI) movements** in Maharashtra have played a crucial role in **strengthening transparency, accountability, and participatory governance**. The state has been a pioneer in advocating for and implementing RTI, much before the **enactment of the national Right to Information Act, 2005**.

1. Evolution of RTI Movements in Maharashtra

a. Early Efforts (1980s - 1990s)

- **Maharashtra has been a frontrunner** in the RTI movement, primarily driven by grassroots activism and civil society organisations.

- Activists such as **Anna Hazare** played a significant role in spreading awareness about the **importance of transparency in governance**.

b. Role of Anna Hazare

- **Anna Hazare's Campaign (1997-2002):**

  - Began advocating for transparency in **village-level governance (Gram Panchayats)** through the use of RTI.

  - His activism against corruption in **Ralegaon Siddhi** set an example for broader movements.

  - Demanded the enactment of a **Right to Information Act in Maharashtra**, with a focus on **empowering citizens and ensuring accountability** of public

officials.

c. Enactment of Maharashtra RTI Act (2002)

- Maharashtra became one of the **first states in India** to implement an RTI law with the **Maharashtra Right to Information Act, 2002**.

- This Act provided **citizens with the right to access information** from public authorities and sought to promote transparency and accountability in governance.

d. National Level Influence

- The **success of RTI activism in Maharashtra** inspired similar movements across India, culminating in the passage of the **national Right to Information Act, 2005**.

- Maharashtra's earlier experience with RTI implementation served as a **model for drafting the national legislation**.

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2. Role and Impact of RTI Movements in Maharashtra

a. Enhancing Transparency and Accountability

- RTI activists in Maharashtra have played a critical role in **exposing corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and misuse of public resources**.

- The movement has led to the **public disclosure of vital information** related to land allocation, public welfare schemes, contracts, and municipal governance.

b. Empowerment of Citizens

- The RTI movement has empowered **ordinary citizens, especially from marginalised communities**, to seek information and demand their rights.

- Cases of **illegal land acquisition, misuse of public funds, and irregularities in welfare schemes** have been exposed through RTI.

c. Strengthening Local Governance (Gram Sabha Empowerment)

- Maharashtra's **village-level governance mechanisms** have benefited from the RTI movement, particularly through efforts led by **Anna Hazare** in promoting

transparency at the Gram Panchayat level.

- **Public audits and social audits** have become more common, ensuring better utilisation of public resources.

d. Prominent RTI Activists and Organisations

- **Shailesh Gandhi:** Former **Central Information Commissioner**, known for his work in promoting transparency at the municipal level.

- **Vijay Kumbhar:** Known as the **RTI activist of Pune**, credited with exposing several scams and bringing greater transparency to urban governance.

- **Anil Galgali:** Focuses on **exposing irregularities in infrastructure projects and municipal governance** in Mumbai.

- **Satark Nagrik Sangathan (SNS):** A citizens' group advocating for the effective implementation of RTI and accountability in public administration.

e. Important Cases Exposed through RTI

- **Adarsh Housing Society Scam (Mumbai):** An RTI application revealed irregularities in land allocation and construction, resulting in a major political scandal.

- **Irrigation Scam (Vidarbha):** Exposed large-scale corruption in the allocation and spending of funds for irrigation projects.

- **Housing Schemes and Slum Rehabilitation:** Irregularities in allocation and funding have been uncovered through RTI applications filed by activists.

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3. Challenges Faced by RTI Activists in Maharashtra

a. Bureaucratic Resistance

- Despite the legal mandate, public authorities often **delay or deny information** citing frivolous exemptions or procedural hurdles.

b. Harassment and Attacks on RTI Activists

- Maharashtra has witnessed several instances of **intimidation, harassment, and even murder of RTI activists**.

- Activists like **Satish Shetty** (Pune) were murdered for exposing land scams and corruption, highlighting the **dangerous environment for transparency advocates**.

c. Lack of Awareness Among Citizens

- Many citizens, especially in **rural and tribal areas**, remain unaware of their **rights under the RTI Act**.

- Insufficient awareness results in **underutilisation of the Act's provisions**.

d. Political Influence

- Political interference often obstructs the **appointment of Information Commissioners** and the effective functioning of the State Information Commission.

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4. Recent Developments (2023-2025)

a. Digitalisation of Information

- Increased focus on **digitising public records** and making them **available online** to reduce dependence on formal RTI applications.

- Implementation of **online portals for RTI applications** to promote accessibility.

b. Role of Civil Society

- Continued activism by organisations like **SNS and Parivartan** in promoting transparency and accountability.

- Greater emphasis on **using RTI as a tool for social audits** and community-level monitoring of welfare schemes.

c. Legislative Reforms and Advocacy

- Ongoing advocacy for **strengthening RTI provisions**, especially in the face of **attempts to dilute the Act** through amendments.

d. Increased Awareness and Participation

- Enhanced efforts to **educate the public, especially in rural areas**, about their **rights under the RTI Act**.

- Training workshops conducted by **NGOs and activists** to empower citizens to **file RTI applications and demand accountability**.

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5. Conclusion

The **RTI movement in Maharashtra** has been instrumental in **promoting transparency, accountability, and participatory governance**. It has empowered citizens to **question public authorities and demand better services**. However, challenges such as **bureaucratic resistance, political interference, and threats to activists** continue to hinder its effectiveness.

Despite these challenges, the **RTI movement remains strong and resilient**, with **activists and civil society organisations** continuing to advocate for greater transparency and better governance. Maharashtra's experience has also contributed significantly to the broader **national discourse on transparency and accountability**.