

Bal Thackeray Biography, Facts and Life Highlights

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Shiv Sena chief and founder Bal Thackeray, also called Balasaheb Thackeray, passed away on Saturday afternoon. He was 86 years old. Shiv Sena officials said that Thackeray had been suffering from respiratory and pancreatic ailments. We look back at the life of the dynamic leader.



Facts About Bal Thackeray

1. Bal Thackeray was the founder of the Shiv Sena, a key political party in Maharashtra.

2. Balasaheb Keshav Thackeray was born on January 23, 1927 in Pune, Maharashtra.
3. Balasaheb is popularly referred to as 'Hindu Hriday Samraat' (Emperor of Hindu Hearts)
4. With a view to fight for the rights of the native Maharashtrians, Shiv Sena was launched on June 19, 1966.
5. His son, Uddhav Thackeray took over the reigns after Balasaheb's retirement from active politics.
6. Balasaheb was also a well-known cartoonist. His cartoons were published in 'The Free Press Journal'. Later in 1960, he went on to launch his own cartoon weekly named 'Marmik'. Through 'Marmik', Thackeray began propagating his 'Marathi Manos' agenda.
7. He had campaigned against Gujarati's, Marwari's and South Indians for "threatening" the job security of the natives.
8. Balasaheb's political life was marred with a number of controversies.
9. His 'sons of soil' campaign was highly criticized by many regional parties.
10. He lost his wife Mina Thackeray in 1996 to a heart attack.
11. Thackeray's Shiv Sena launched its Marathi newspaper 'Saamna' in 1989.
12. Thackeray once praised Adolf Hitler and compared himself with him.
13. Balasaheb's political speeches were highly anecdotal.
14. An avid speaker, Balasaheb Thackeray was also known for his mimicry of rival politicians in his speeches.
15. Balasaheb's nephew Raj Thackeray parted ways with the Shiv Sena to form the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena.
16. Balasaheb's 'rule with an iron fist' style has formed part of his legacy.

Highlights of Bal Thackeray's Life

Son of a social reformer Prabhodankar Thackeray, Bal Thackeray started out as a political cartoonist in the early 1950s with the English language daily the The Free Press Journal in Mumbai. His cartoons also appeared in the Japanese daily newspaper Asahi Shimbun and in the Sunday edition of The New York Times.

In the early 1960s, Thackeray became increasingly involved in politics and developed a strong regional following through his work for a weekly Marathi-language journal called 'Marmik', which he published with his brother.

As the anti-migrant sentiment gained prominence in Mumbai, Thackeray was quick to seize the opportunity. Through 'Marmik', he campaigned against the growing influence of Gujaratis, Marwaris, and southern Indians in Mumbai and became the spokesperson for the Maharashtrian middle-class.

In 1966, he founded the Shiv Sena as a "sons of the soil movement", to fight for the rights of the native Maharashtrians, who he believed were under threat. The Shiv Sena stoked the flames of regional pride to emerge as an anti-outsider party.

By the early 70s, Bal Thackeray-led Shiv Sena built a formidable grassroots network across Mumbai and he consolidated his party's position by forming temporary alliances with nearly all of Maharashtra's political parties.

After returning to power in the 1985 Mumbai municipal corporation, the Sena formed an alliance with the BJP in 1988 and the alliance has since then stood the test of time. In the 1995 Assembly elections, the Shiv Sena-BJP combine emerged victorious. Though Manohar Joshi became the chief minister Balasaheb controlled the government indirectly.

With his high pitched rhetoric, aggressive body language, violent politics and rabble-rousing ways, he became biggest endorsers of Hindutva politics. In the post Babri Masjid riots scenario, he cleverly positioned himself to be seen as the sole protector of the Hindu community.

Shiv Sena's role in the 1992-93 riots in Mumbai, which led to more than 1,000 deaths reinstated Thackeray as the Hindu militant leader. He emerged as the uncrowned monarch of Mumbai - an individual feared by Mumbai's rich and powerful and as the one who ruled through fear and intimidation.

An unexpected electoral setback for the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance in 2004 hastened the Shiv Sena's decline. There were cracks within the party and several top leaders like Chagan Bhujbal and Narayan Rane moved away from the sena.

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