

**Cooperative Movement and Politics in Solapur District: An Analysis
(In the context of changing political situation)****Dr. K.T.Vhanhuve**Assistant Professor,
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The cooperative movement in Maharashtra is one of the most dynamic and influential movements in India, profoundly shaping the socio-economic and political landscape of the state. Originating in the early 20th century under the British Cooperative Societies Act of 1904, it began as an alternative to rural credit and exploitation by moneylenders. Farmers and small producers came together to form cooperatives to obtain affordable credit, market their produce collectively and reduce financial vulnerability. Over time, these cooperatives expanded beyond credit to include sugar factories, dairy units, spinning mills, housing societies and cooperative banks, making Maharashtra a leader in the cooperative sector in India. Notably, the country's first cooperative sugar factory was established at Pravaranagar by the Sahakar Maharshi Vitthalrao Vikhe Patil. The dynamic leadership of the cooperative movement has witnessed many positive transformations in the socio-economic and political life of Maharashtra.

The cooperative movement in Solapur district has played a significant role in transforming the agricultural economy and the socio-political structure of the region. Emerging in the early decades of the 20th century, cooperatives were established primarily to meet rural credit needs and to support farmers against moneylenders. With fertile land suitable for sugarcane cultivation, Solapur became a major centre in Maharashtra for cooperative sugar factories, along with credit societies, dairy cooperatives, spinning mills, a central district bank, cooperative banks and housing societies. These institutions not only

increased agricultural production and employment but also created opportunities for collective ownership and rural empowerment. Over time, cooperatives in Solapur developed not only into economic institutions; they became centres of political power. Local leaders used the platforms of the cooperative movement to enter mainstream politics, with sugar cooperatives in particular acting as stepping stones for political influence. The strong link between cooperatives and politics gave the district a distinct identity, where control over cooperative banks and factories translated into electoral power. Despite challenges like drought, financial mismanagement and changing political equations, the cooperative movement in Solapur has been a driving force for socio-economic development and is deeply rooted in the rural life of the district. The political landscape is undergoing significant changes. The long-standing dominance of the Congress, followed by the rise of the Nationalist Congress Party and the Shiv Sena, and now the growing influence of the BJP and regional alliances, is reshaping the cooperative-political relationship in Solapur.

Objectives of the study

1. To trace the historical development of the cooperative movement in Solapur district.
2. To examine the role of cooperatives in political careers and elections.
3. To study the impact of the changing political situation on cooperatives.
4. To assess the socio-economic contribution and challenges of cooperatives in contemporary Solapur.

Various stages of the cooperative movement in Solapur:**Congress era (1950 -1990) Since Post Independence**

Inspired by the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi during India's freedom struggle, many political families had linked up with the ideas of Congress. After independence, political families maintained their dominance in politics through the Congress. This generation had established its dominance in politics through the cooperative movement. It was very loyal to Gandhiji's Sadhansuchita Therefore, the common People had a lot of faith in the political role taken by this generation and the cooperative movement that was formed from it. This second generation, filled with patriotism, was striving for the development of the common people beyond caste, religion, and sect. The Indian National Congress had a strong dominance in politics and cooperatives in Solapur district from 1960 to 1990. During this period, most of the sugar factories, cooperative banks and credit unions in the district were either established or brought under the control of the Congress. Cooperatives became a powerful base for the party, providing not only financial resources but also networks that reached deep into rural society. Farmers and workers benefited from employment in sugar factories, better access to rural credit, and the creation of infrastructure such as schools, hostels, and roads, often initiated by Congress-led cooperative efforts.

This period saw the emergence of prominent local Congress leaders who used cooperative platforms in state and national politics. The dominance of the Congress in Solapur made electoral politics and cooperative management closely linked, with cooperative elections often reflecting legislative outcomes. However, this centralization also led to criticism of elite control, where a few influential families or groups controlled decision-making in cooperatives. Despite these problems, the Congress era laid the foundation for Solapur's strong cooperative network and shaped the socio-political trajectory of the district for decades to come. The Congress dominated the cooperative sector. Most sugar factory presidents, bank directors, and cooperative heads were Congress loyalists. Cooperative elections became an extension of party politics. The state politics was also dominated by the

leaders of the cooperative sector of the Congress party. During these decades, except for the Progressive Democratic Dal government, there was an undisputed Congress government in the state. Its direct and indirect impact on the politics of Solapur district was felt. During this period, the institutions of the cooperative movement were financially strong and all sections of the society were seen benefiting from it. District banks, cooperative societies, credit unions, cooperative banks, cooperative sugar factories, market committees, Sholapur district weavers' co-operative federation. Western Maharashtra weavers' co-operative board. Power-loom federation Co-operative mills Hand-loom weavers' societies Power-loom co-operative societies Wool weavers' co-operative societies etc., were functioning in a very financially viable situation.

Post-1990s:

After the 90s, many developments took place in Maharashtra's politics. But the Congress party dominated the cooperative sector. In the next decade, the Shiv Sena and Bharatiya Janata Party coalition government, Shivsena was formed in the seventies. for the first time after independence, came to power in the state's politics. From there, the opposition parties seem to have tried to challenge the dominance of the Congress party. Between 1995 and 1999, the coalition government was in power in the politics of the State After that, the Congress split and the Nationalist Congress Party was formed in 1999. And most of the Congressmen in the cooperative sector joined the Nationalist Congress Party, so in this decade and the next decade, the NCP was in power in the cooperative sector. Specially In the Western Maharashtra Region. For fifteen consecutive years in the state's politics, the Indian National Congress and the Nationalist Congress Party and their alliance with other parties were in power. During this period, the top leaders of both the parties were playing important roles in important positions due to their power in national politics In Delhi. It seems that the leaders in the state's politics and cooperative sector benefited directly and indirectly. But during this period, the Bharatiya Janata Party and Shiv Sena were playing the role of opposition party very well. And especially the Bharatiya Janata Party tried to increase its strength. During this period, the Lokpal movement was held. And it Supported by Many Civil Societies Movement and after that,

Indian politics was shaken and from there the dominance of the Congress party over power was decreasing. And in the coming elections, the Bharatiya Janata Party came to power at the center. Due to this, it also had an impact on the politics of the state and the change started from there. It also had an impact on the politics of Solapur district. And that politics has also had an impact on the cooperative movement.

Rise of Power of BJP (Post-2014):

From 2014, the political landscape of Solapur district began to change significantly with the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Traditionally weak in the cooperative sector compared to the Congress and the Nationalist Congress Party, the party began to strengthen its influence by targeting cooperative banks, sugar factories and agricultural institutions that had long served as centers of power for regional leaders. BJP leaders made strategic inroads into cooperative elections, gained control of major cooperatives and aligned themselves with emerging farmers and young cooperative members. This move allowed the BJP to weaken the grip of the established Congress and Nationalist families, which changed the traditional nature of cooperative politics in the district. Politically, the BJP used its control over cooperatives to expand its rural base in Solapur, using cooperatives not only as a hub for economic development but also as an electoral platform. The emphasis was on professional management, reform and state-level control of cooperatives, which reflected the BJP's governance model. However, critics argue that despite the new leadership, issues such as drought, sugarcane dependency and financial strain on cooperatives have not been resolved. The rise of the BJP is indicative of a new development. Where the politics of the cooperative movement in Solapur has become more competitive and multipolar, the decades-long monopoly of traditional parties has ended and the socio-political balance of the district has been reshaped. The BJP has made strategic inroads into cooperatives by aligning with local leaders. Government policies and regulatory reforms have reduced the traditional dominance of the Congress/NCP. A new leadership has emerged, breaking the monopoly of cooperatives. It has contributed not only to economic empowerment but also to social transformation, laying the foundation for rural progress and political participation.

Employment: Sugar factories and cotton mills provide a large number of rural employment. Infrastructure, development, roads, schools, hospitals funded by cooperative surplus. Also, rural farmers get loans through cooperative banks. Cooperative platforms create leadership opportunities.

Challenges of Changing Politics:

The cooperative movement in Solapur, though a pillar of rural development, is facing serious challenges in the changing political scenario. With the shift of control from Congress to NCP/Shiv Sena and now to BJP, cooperatives have become political battlegrounds rather than purely economic institutions. Frequent leadership changes and political interference disrupt long-term planning and business management. Many cooperative sugar factories and banks are plagued by financial mismanagement, corruption and elite control, where a few influential families dominate the decision-making process. This has weakened member participation, reduced transparency and eroded trust in the cooperative model.

At the same time, external challenges such as climate change, drought and over-reliance on sugarcane production have further increased the financial strain on cooperatives. Political competition often prioritizes short-term electoral gains over sustainable reforms, leaving cooperatives vulnerable to debt and inefficiency. The changing political scenario has also led to factionalism, where rival parties try to capture the same cooperatives, leading to instability. If steps are not taken for depoliticization, diversification and professional governance, Solapur's cooperatives risk losing their original purpose of empowering farmers and will struggle to remain viable in the future. Political interference in rural employment and credit management is increasing. Infrastructure for villages etc. are challenges. Farmers' empowerment is losing faith in farmers, mismanagement, social cohesion and integration factionalism and polarization are the cycles of change Congress dominance, regional capture, BJP's entry into the cooperative sector are changing the political equations in the district.

If we study the political and cooperative movement period after 2014, we will notice that in the initial period, the senior leaders of the cooperative sector in the Congress and the Nationalist Congress

Party got close to the BJP in the district to maintain their political existence. If we consider the elections of sugar factories, market committees and various executive societies and various cooperative organizations held in the last ten to twelve years, we will see that the BJP has tried to expand its power by giving strength to the leadership of the cooperative movement in the original Congress and the Nationalist Congress Party. Now we will see its results in the upcoming urban and rural local body elections. And the opposition political parties will also have to re-establish the trust of the stakeholders in the Sukar movement along with maintaining their existence. The Central Government's Cooperative Department has also been functioning for the last few years. The Central and State governments are trying to strengthen the cooperative movement.

Conclusion:

In reality, politics in the cooperative sector should be liberalized and decisions should be made in the interest of farmers, workers and the public beyond politics. Cooperatives should work as member institutions and not as party assets. Transparency and reforms are needed to break the monopoly of traditional political families, for strong audits, digital platforms, accountability etc. The cooperative movement of Solapur has been a double-edged sword: while empowering farmers and boosting the rural economy, it has also become a political tool for power consolidation.

Considering the current situation, the condition of the cooperatives in the state and the district is very bad. The financial condition of sugar factories, central banks, cooperative banks, spinning mills, milk unions, etc. is getting worse. And due to this, the debts have increased. Everyone from the central government to the state government should make every effort to revive the cooperative movement. And efforts should be made to strengthen the cooperative movement, which has the power to bring about a change in the lives of the common man.

The changing political situation from the dominance of Congress to the dominance of NCP/Shiv Sena etc. and now the rise of BJP reflects the dynamic relationship between cooperatives and politics. In balancing the future of Solapur's cooperatives, economic objectives and political influence, not only power but also development should remain at the heart of the movement. This is the key issue. Going beyond politics and party divisions, efforts will have to be made to strengthen the cooperative sector once again for the progress of all components of the cooperative sector. So that the living standards of the people at the grassroots as well as the farmers and working classes will improve.

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