

Marathi in Mumbai

Why do people impose a language? Is it to share some sort of identity with others around them? Or, maybe because it unifies an ethnic group, knowing that you and a certain group of people share a special bond that you cannot share with anyone else. Or maybe because it gives them a sense of pride—that they can speak a certain language that another ethnic group cannot. Language can be an unseen barrier, as it unites people who can speak and understand it, yet it alienates people who cannot speak it. Imposing a language can help promote a political party's ideology, which is currently seen with the Shiv Sena. Is the Shiv Sena only supporting the idea of *Marathi mannos* to gain support of the local Marathi people, or do they firmly believe that the Marathi culture is being diluted? What are the real motives behind implementing Marathi in Mumbai—political or nationalistic? Are there ulterior motives to why the Shiv Sena is implementing Marathi in Mumbai?

Fifty years ago, before Mumbai became an international hub, where different people migrated along with their languages, Marathi was the official language and Mumbai was mainly comprised of Marathi people. However, over a period of time, immigrants from all over India have flocked to Mumbai, since it is flourishing with job opportunities. However, with immigrants coming to Mumbai, and imposing their culture, the Marathi culture is being diluted, rather than being embraced. The Marathi people feel that not only have these immigrants taken jobs that rightfully belong to them, not only have they have brought a different culture, which has started to weaken the Marathi culture, but also a different language. Language is the foundation of their culture which they feel is unique. Mumbai is becoming a city like New York City—rather than having one distinct culture, there are many different cultures. Known as the “melting pot”, New York City does not have one culture, instead it incorporates cultures from all around the world. In New York though, the English language is the primary means of communication, even though different ethnic groups live there. In the US, cultural diversity is tolerated and respected as it is a country made up of immigrants. India has many different languages and dialects. The Shiv Sena believes that Marathi culture should be restored by reinstating the Marathi language.

The Shiv Sena is a political party who has a very strong ideology that Marathi people should have preference over immigrants because they believe that Maharashtra belongs to them, since it is their region. They believe that immigrants coming to Mumbai are taking jobs that rightfully belong to the Marathi people. They also believe that politicians are also using these “immigrant vote banks” to get elected. They fear that if non-Marathi people get political power, then the Marathi people language and culture will be in jeopardy. The Shiv Sena feels that their main priority is to protect the local people in terms of job security and culture. However, The Shiv Sena occasionally resorts to violence and threats against people belonging to other Indian communities as part of its 'sons of the soil' ideology. For example the Sena, will threaten business people to hire Marathi people. They have been accused of being involved in coordinated political violence to propagate its ideologies and attack opposing ideologies. The party has been involved in organized protests, pickets, market shutdowns and strikes that have been known to lead to violent clashes and in some cases riots will start up. For instance, Shiv Sena activists have attacked shops in Mumbai selling gifts for Valentine's Day as part of the party's campaign against 'vulgar' western influences on youth. The Shiv Sena is making it difficult for non-Marathi people to make a living. For example there is a new law since January 2010 that states that all

taxi drivers must be able to know how to read, write, and speak Marathi. Marathi will become mandatory in schools. Marathi is now the official language of BMC, which is still a problem, as all members cannot speak or read Marathi since there are different dialects of Marathi.

In conclusion should language be imposed to establish the cultural identity off a dominant group and so exclude others? There is a thin line between language, cultural pride and being exclusive by alienating a part of the community. I believe that language and culture is a large sense of pride, especially in Mumbai, However, imposition of language on others can also alienate and divide people. It should not be used for political purpose, because it would have bad implications for society and the country. Instead cultural and language diversity should be respected and be embraced, rather than being opposed. Otherwise it would create resentment and barriers within people and result in a deeply divided society.