

# BEFORE THE HON'BLE SPEAKER

MAHARASHTRA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

VIDHAN BHAVAN AT MUMBAI

PETITION NO. 01 TO 16 OF 2022

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**SHRI. SUNIL PRABHU**

PETITIONER

VERSUS

**SHRI. EKNATH SHINDE & ORS**

RESPONDENTS

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*APPEARANCES:*

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**For the Petitioner:** Sr. Adv. Devadatt Kamat, Adv. Rohit Sharma, Adv. Sunny Jain, Adv. Harsh Pandey for the Petitioner.

**For the Respondents:**

Sr. Adv. Mahesh Jethmalani, a/w Adv. Chirag Shah & Adv. Mugda Pande for Respondents in Petition No. 01, 03, 06 & 07 of 2022

Sr. Adv. Anil C. Singh i/by Adv. Manini Roy for Respondent in Petition No. 04, 10 & 13 of 2022

Sr. Adv. Pradeep Sancheti, a/w Adv. Utsav Trivedi & Adv. Arpit Gupta for Respondents in Petition No. 05, 11, 12 & 14 of 2022

Sr. Adv. Anil Y. Sakhare, Adv. Piyush Tiwari, i/by Adv. Himanshu Sachdeva for Respondent in Petition No. 02, 08 & 16 of 2022

Adv. Harshad Bhadbhade i/by Adv. Vishal Acharya for Respondent in Petition No. 09 of 2022

Sr. Adv. Nikhil Sakhardhande i/by Adv. Shyamsundar B. Jadhav for Respondent in Petition No. 15 of 2022

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CORAM: Hon'ble Speaker Adv. Rahul Narvekar

Reserved on: 20<sup>th</sup> December 2023

Delivered on: 10<sup>th</sup> January 2024

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**(I) FACTUAL BACKGROUND & PROCEDURAL HISTORY OF DISQUALIFICATION PETITIONS CONCERNING SHIVSENA**

*Factual background*

1. The elections to the 14<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly of Maharashtra were held in October 2019. Of a total of two hundred and eighty-eight seats, the Bharatiya Janata Pary (*BJP for Short*) returned candidates in one hundred and six seats, the Shiv Sena in fifty-six seats, the Nationalist Congress Party (*NCP for short*) in fifty-three seats, and the Indian National Congress (*INC for short*) in forty-four seats. Independent candidates were returned in thirteen constituencies and the remaining



constituencies returned candidates from various other parties. In November 2019, the Shiv Sena, the NCP, and the INC formed a post-poll alliance which came to be known as the Maha Vikas Aghadi (*MVA for short*). The MVA successfully staked a claim to form the government in Maharashtra and Mr. Uddhav Thackeray was sworn in as the Chief Minister. On 25<sup>th</sup> November 2019<sup>1</sup>, pursuant to a meeting dated 30<sup>th</sup> October 2019 of the Shiv Sena Legislature Party (*SSLP for short*) chaired by Mr. Uddhav Thackeray, all fifty-six MLAs of the Shiv Sena issued a communication to the Speaker of the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly intimating him that Mr. Eknath Shinde was appointed as the Group Leader of the SSLP, and that Mr. Sunil Prabhu was appointed as the Chief Whip of the SSLP.

2. On 21<sup>st</sup> June 2022, the Chief Whip of the Shiv Sena, Mr. Sunil Prabhu, issued a whip<sup>2</sup> directing all MLAs of the Shiv Sena to attend a meeting at Mr. Thackeray's residence on the same day. Many MLAs, including the Group Leader Mr. Eknath Shinde, (allegedly) did not attend this meeting<sup>3</sup>. The MLAs who were in attendance (allegedly) passed a resolution removing Mr. Eknath Shinde from the position of the Group

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<sup>1</sup> Communication dated 25<sup>th</sup> November 2019 caused by all 56 MLAs of the Shiv Sena to the Speaker of Maharashtra Legislative Assembly. [Page No. 710-714 of the SC Convenience Compilation Volume II.

<sup>2</sup> Copy of the Whip dated 21<sup>st</sup> June 2022 issued by Shri Sunil Prabhu [Annexure-P1 at Page 10 of the Petition No. 01-16 & 18 of 2022]

<sup>3</sup> Petitioner relied on the 'Attendance Register' dated 21<sup>st</sup> June 2022 [Annexure-P2 @ Page 11 of the Petition No. 01 to 16 of 2022]



Leader of the SSLP and appointing one Mr. Ajay Choudhari in his place<sup>4</sup>. The decisions taken by way of this resolution were communicated to the Deputy Speaker on the same day, i.e., 21<sup>st</sup> June 2022<sup>5</sup>. Also on the same day, the Deputy Speaker communicated his recognition of the change in the Group Leader of the SSLP<sup>6</sup>.

3. Concurrently, 31 MLAs of the Shiv Sena (i.e., the respondents) organized a separate meeting and passed a resolution reaffirming that Mr. Eknath Shinde "*continues to be*" the Group Leader of the SSLP<sup>7</sup>. It was further resolved that the appointment of Mr. Sunil Prabhu as the Chief Whip was cancelled, and that Mr. Bharat Gogawale was appointed in his place. Petitioner claims that this resolution was received by the Deputy Speaker only on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2022 while the respondents claim that it was sent on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2022. The record available with the Legislature secretariate indicates that the resolution is dated 21<sup>st</sup> June 2022 but received by the office of the then Deputy Speaker on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2022.

4. On 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2022, Mr. Sunil Prabhu issued individual communications to all MLAs of the Shiv Sena, calling upon

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<sup>4</sup> 'UBT faction' Resolution dated 21<sup>st</sup> June 2022 [Annexure-P3 @ Page 16 of the Petition No. 01 to 16 of 2022]

<sup>5</sup> 'UBT faction' Communication to the Speaker dated 21<sup>st</sup> June 2022. [Annexure-P4 @ Page 18 of the Petition No. 01 to 16 of 2022]

<sup>6</sup> Speaker' communication regarding recognition [Annexure-P5 @ Page 20 of the Petition No. 01 to 16 of 2022].

<sup>7</sup> 'Shinde faction' Resolution dated 21<sup>st</sup> June 2022. [Annexure-P9 @ Page 33 of the Petition No. 01 to 16 of 2022].



them to attend a meeting of the SSLP scheduled to take place that evening at Mr. Thackeray's residence<sup>8</sup>. The meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2022, too, was not (allegedly) attended by many MLAs of the Shiv Sena including Mr. Eknath Shinde<sup>9</sup>.

5. Mr. Eknath Shinde addressed a letter<sup>10</sup> to Mr. Sunil Prabhu on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2022 accusing him of misusing the letterhead of the SSLP. The letter stated that:

- (a) A meeting of forty-five MLAs of the Shiv Sena was held under the chairmanship of Mr. Eknath Shinde;
- (b) Mr. Sunil Prabhu was removed from the position of Chief Whip of the Shiv Sena;
- (c) Mr. Bharat Gogawale was appointed as the Chief Whip of the Shiv Sena in place of Mr. Sunil Prabhu; and
- (d) Mr. Sunil Prabhu did not have the authority to sign the communication dated 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2022 (issued by him to all MLAs of the Shiv Sena). It was therefore not binding upon Mr. Eknath Shinde to attend the meeting scheduled to take place at Mr. Thackeray's residence.

6. On 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2022, Mr. Sunil Prabhu filed petitions under Paragraph 2(1)(a) of the Tenth Schedule to the Constitution for

<sup>8</sup> Letter dated 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2022. [Annexure-P10 @ Page 41 of the Petition No. 01 to 16 of 2022]

<sup>9</sup> Petitioner relied on the 'Attendance Register' dated 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2022 [Annexure-P7 @ Page 25 of the Petition No. 01 to 16 of 2022]

<sup>10</sup> Copy of the Communication dated 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2022 sent by the Respondents. [Annexure-P10 @ Page 41 of the Petition No. 01 to 16 of 2022]



the disqualification of Mr. Eknath Shinde and fifteen other MLAs of the Shiv Sena. The Deputy Speaker issued notices in these disqualification petitions on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2022. [Disqualification Petitions No. 01 to 16 of 2022]

7. On 26<sup>th</sup> June 2022 Respondents approached the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India *inter-alia* challenging the letter/order dated 21<sup>st</sup> June 2022 passed by the then Deputy Speaker accepting appointment of Shri. Ajay Choudhari as the Leader of the Shiv Sena Legislature Party and prayed for consequential concomitant reliefs.<sup>11</sup>
8. On 27<sup>th</sup> June 2022 Shri. Sunil Prabhu filed another Disqualification Petition [Disqualification Petition No. 17 of 2022], under Paragraph 2 (2) and 2 (1) (a) of the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution of India against 3 MLAs. 2 Independent MLAs and 1 MLA from Prahar Janshakti Party. On the same day, i.e., on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2022, Shri. Sunil Prabhu filed yet another Disqualification Petition [Disqualification Petition No. 18 of 2022] under Paragraph 2 (1) (a) of the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution of India, against 22 MLAs of Shiv Sena.
9. On 28<sup>th</sup> June 2022, the then Leader of Opposition Mr. Devendra Fadnavis addressed a letter to the Governor *inter*



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<sup>11</sup> Writ Petition (Civil) 468 and 469 of 2022 filed before the Supreme Court of India.

*alia* conveying that he believed that the then Chief Minister, Mr. Thackeray, did not enjoy a majority on the floor of the House. He called upon the Governor to direct Mr. Thackeray to prove his majority on the floor of the House. Seven MLAs who were elected as independent candidates penned a similar letter to the Governor on the same day. They too requested the Governor to direct Mr. Thackeray to prove his majority on the floor of the House.

10. Consequently, the Hon'ble Governor of Maharashtra issued a letter to the then Chief Minister, Mr. Uddhav Thackeray on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2022, calling upon him to face a floor test on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2022.

11. On the very next day, i.e., 29<sup>th</sup> June 2022, Mr. Sunil Prabhu instituted a Writ Petition<sup>12</sup> before the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India for setting aside the communications dated 28<sup>th</sup> June 2022 issued by the Hon'ble Governor to the then Chief Minister on the ground that disqualification petitions against 38 MLAs of the Shiv Sena were pending consideration before the Deputy Speaker. The Hon'ble Supreme Court declined to grant any stay to the trust vote.

12. On 29<sup>th</sup> June 2022 the then Chief Minister Shri. Uddhav Thackeray resigned from the post of the Chief Minister.



<sup>12</sup> Writ Petition (Civil) No. 470 of 2022 filed before the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India.