BLOGS

Ajit Pawar: A Key Figure in Maharashtra Politics

Adtiya Aryan · 28 Jan 2026

Ajit Anantrao Pawar, born on July 22, 1959, in Baramati, Maharashtra, was one of the most influential and controversial leaders in state politics.

As the nephew of Sharad Pawar, founder of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), Ajit Pawar grew up in a politically active family. Over more than three decades, he became a central figure in Maharashtra's coalition politics.

Early Life and Background

Ajit Pawar came from a farming family and completed his education up to Class 10. Unlike many politicians with elite academic backgrounds, he built his career through grassroots work.

Before entering electoral politics, he worked extensively in the cooperative sector, managing sugar mills and milk federations. This helped him gain strong support among farmers and rural voters and shaped his understanding of Maharashtra's agriculture-driven economy.

Entry into Politics and Rise

Pawar entered Parliament in 1991 as a Lok Sabha MP from Baramati, a seat earlier held by his uncle. However, he soon shifted to state politics and won the Baramati Vidhan Sabha seat repeatedly from 1993 to 2019.

After the NCP was formed in 1999, following Sharad Pawar's split from the Congress, Ajit Pawar emerged as one of its most powerful leaders. His rise reflects how regional parties grow and operate within India's federal system.

Ministerial Roles and Governance

Ajit Pawar held several key portfolios, most notably the Water Resources and Irrigation Ministry from 1999 to 2014. He played a role in passing the Maharashtra Water Resources Regulatory Authority Act, which aimed to ensure fair distribution of water.

However, his tenure was also marked by allegations in the irrigation scam, involving large cost escalations in irrigation projects. Although investigations later cleared him, the episode raised important questions about transparency, accountability, and anti-corruption laws.

Deputy Chief Minister and Political Maneuvering

Ajit Pawar served as Deputy Chief Minister five times under different coalitions. His political career clearly shows how state governments in India often depend on alliances rather than single-party majorities. I

n 2019, he briefly formed a government with the BJP, only to return to the NCP-led coalition days later. This episode highlights constitutional provisions related to government formation under Article 164 and the realities of post-election alliances.

In July 2023, he led a major split within the NCP and joined the BJP–Shiv Sena (Eknath Shinde) government. The Election Commission later recognised his faction as the official NCP, leading to two parties, NCP (Ajit Pawar) and NCP (Sharad Pawar).

This development brought the anti-defection law under the Tenth Schedule and the role of the Speaker in disqualification into sharp focus.

Stand on Reservation and Development

As a prominent Maratha leader, Ajit Pawar strongly supported Maratha reservation. He backed the 16% quota law, which was later struck down by the Supreme Court for breaching the 50% limit set in the Indra Sawhney case.

His political work also focused on rural development, farmer subsidies, and infrastructure, particularly in Baramati, which became a model constituency with educational institutions, industries, and improved connectivity.

Tragic Death and National Response

Ajit Pawar passed away on January 28, 2026, in a plane crash near Baramati airport while travelling from Mumbai. The accident triggered nationwide shock and renewed concerns over aviation safety.

Leaders across party lines, including the President and Prime Minister, paid tribute to him, recognising his long contribution to Maharashtra’s politics and governance.