

The Regional Political Parties and the Leaders of Odisha: A Brief History of Odisha During 1961-1980

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Abstract:

Odisha has been in part a tradition-bound, underdeveloped, backward, and feudal state struggling in the path towards modernity. Hence, the emergence, development, and working of party system and party leadership in Odisha present an interesting study. Odisha, offers a unique opportunity to examine the capacity of political development to effect socio-economic change. Looking at the political instability which was persistent in the state for almost two decades between 1961-1980.

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the repeated failures of Odisha's administration and legislative, which led to the imposition of president rule between the years 1961 and 1980. Thus, the study examines party politics in Odisha in all of its varied facets. The present chapter will first provide a historical background of the state of Odisha in order to properly understand the politics of Odisha in the post-independence period to the eighties of the last century. Secondly, the details of party politics and political leadership in Odisha in between the years 1960 and 1980 will be debated upon. This will allow for a proper understanding of the politics of Odisha in the post-independence period to the eighties of the twentieth century.

Keywords: Regional Political Parties, Leaders in Odisha during 1961-1980

Introduction:

Odisha became a separate independent state on 1st April 1936. Elections to the Odisha Legislative Assembly were held on March 27, 1952. This election was officially known as the 1951 Odisha Legislative Assembly election, even though through delays, actual voting didn't take place until early 1952. Six National parties along with All India Ganatantra Parishad and three registered unrecognized parties took part in the assembly election. Indian National Congress emerged as the single largest party while All India Gantantra Parishad emerged as the main opponent to the Congress party.

Due to the twists and turns of history, Odisha only had three districts by the beginning of the 20th century. These districts were Balasore, Cuttack, and Puri. The historical region of Odisha eventually became fictionalized as a result of administrative conveniences and military victories. The fragmentation of natural Odisha and the dispersion of Odia-speaking people throughout neighbouring areas and tracts were both the result of foreign rule in Odisha, which was in charge of the region at the time. Because of this, Odisha has always been seen to be a geographical expression. The lengthy disintegration and defacement of the Odia-speaking tract of Odisha was finally what kicked off the unification process at the turn of the 20th century. The amalgamation and integration of the Odia-speaking groups was

accomplished via the concerted efforts of a large number of leaders, associations, and the people of the area.

The regional parties with strong social and emotional bases in their communities and religions have been a significant feature of Indian politics since Independence. Against this background, the study of regional parties in Odisha seems to be very relevant and justified to the understanding of the dynamics of Indian politics since independence to till today.

The Ganatantra Parishad:

Early on after gaining independence "The congress was a national power to be reckoned with because of its historic importance. Beginning in 1948, the "Gantantra Parishad," a potent regional party, posed a threat to the Congress' dominance. There were, of course, additional national and regional parties, but the Indian National Congress held the starring role.

In Odisha before independence, the national movement served as the primary organising principle for the party-building process. These parties later regrouped to compete against the Congress in the general election of 1952.

The natural outcome of this matter was the birth of the first regional political party of Odisha named 'Ganatantra Parishad' under the leadership of two powerful Persons R.N. Singh Deo of Bolangir-Patna and P.K. Deo of Kalahandi. It was initially known as "KoshalaUtkalPrajaParishad" of 1948 with its headquarters at Sambalpur which was later known as 'Ganatantra Parishad' in 1950.¹

The Gantantra Parishad proposed a plan to guarantee each cultivator an economic unit of land in its election manifesto. The Parishad demanded the establishment of significant companies on a state-led initiative, a targeted decrease of educated unemployment, free basic and secondary education, the implementation of health insurance for the average person, and the opening of maternity centres across the province.

Founder of the party:

Maharaja Sri Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo was an Indian politician and the last ruler of the princely state of Patna in Odisha before Indian independence in 1947. He was the President of the Ganatantra Parishad political party from 1950 to 1962 and the President of the Odisha state unit of the Swatantra Party after its merger with the Ganatantra Parishad in 1962. He was the Chief Minister of Odisha from 1967 to 1971.

Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo was born to Raja Aditya Pratap Singh, the ruler of the princely state of Seraikela and Rani Padmini Kumari Devi. He was adopted by Maharaja Prithwiraj Singh Deo of Patna state. He studied in the Mayo College in Ajmer and the St. Columbia's College in Hazaribagh. He became the Maharaja of Patna state in 1924 and assumed full powers in 1933. He was appointed a Knight Commander of the Order of the Indian Empire (KCIE) in the 1946 New Year Honours list. In 1948, the princely state of Patna was merged with the Union of India.

Political Career:

In 1951, Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo was elected to the 1st Lok Sabha from Kalahandi Bolangir constituency in Odisha as a Ganatantra Parishad candidate.

In 1957, he was elected to the Odisha Legislative Assembly from Titlagarh constituency and became the leader of the opposition in the Odisha Legislative Assembly. After the fall of the minority Congress

government, the Ganatantra Parishad formed a coalition government with the Congress on 22 May 1959. Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo became the finance minister in this government. The coalition government collapsed on 21 February 1961 and the President's rule was imposed. In 1961, he was re-elected to the Odisha Legislative Assembly from Kantabanji constituency.²

Maharaja Pratap Keshari Deo was the last ruler of Kalahandi State 1939-1947 and an Indian politician in post-independence India. He was elected from the Kalahandi in Odisha to the Lower House of the Indian Parliament the Lok Sabha. He was deputy Leader of the Opposition, Orissa Legislative Assembly, 1952—1956. Deo was a Member of Orissa Legislative Assembly and subsequently of the Lok Sabha. As a member of Swatantra Party Deo aligned with Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo who became the chief minister in 1967.

Deo initiated Kalahandi Science College in 1960, the predecessor of Kalahandi University. As a member of parliament he continues to push for the Indravati Dam and rail connectivity from Kesinga to Ambaguda via Bhawanipatna and Junagarh. In 1962-1963 he had pointed out in the Parliament that Parkers had done a railway line survey from Kesinga to Nabarangpur to join Kothavalasa-Kirandul (KK) line, because Koraput-Kothavalasa and Koraput-Rayagada are e-special category railway routes having many tunnels and high-level bridges; the speed is limited (often less than 50 kmph) and number of wagon can't exceed 30 during mineral transportations in these two routes. Subsequently, Lanjigarh–Junagarh section under East Coast Railway Zone was completed in March 2014, which was sanctioned when local MP Bhakta Charan Das was minister of state for railway in 1990-91.³

He had a special interest in archaeology and established the archeology society of Kalahandi.

The birth and growth of the Ganatantra Parishad, the first regional party in Odisha, has been a remarkable one. So far as its successful electoral performance is concerned in all the three-general elections of 1952, 1957 and 1961. It was not only the dominant party in Western Odisha, but also it was the largest opposition party in state politics. However, this party lost its identity in 1961 when it merged with the Swatantra Party, a national Party, so bringing an end to the first powerful regional party in Odisha which played a dominant role in state politics for nearly one decade.

The party raised a strong voice for the resettlement and rehabilitation of those displaced by the construction of the Hirakud Dam in Sambalpur. However, it shared power with the Congress in a coalition government that ruled the state for about twenty one months from May 1959, to February 1961. It also removed long-standing grievances of regional imbalance in the power structure of the state.

The Jana-Congress:

Another regional party appeared in the political History of Odisha, named the 'Jana Congress' in 1966 under the leadership of Dr.HarekrushnaMahatab. The birth of the Jana Congress was the end result of factionalism and internal 'groupism' in the Congress party. The party played a significant role in check-mating the Congress Party by forming a coalition government in the state with Swatantra party which lasted for a little period.

For instance, in 1964, tensions arose between the two Congress leaders Biju Patnaik and Pabitra Mohan Pradhan due to their disparate perspectives on the organisational problems facing the Congress Party. At the UPCC (Executive) meeting on August 22, 1964, Patnaik made the decision that Pradhan should retract some of the accusations made against him and other Party members.

Several prominent members of the Congress, like Mahtab, Banamali Patnatk, Surendranath Patnaik, and others, supported Pradhan. In August 1965, these Congress-dissidents established a separate Committee

and began operating on their own. A three-day conference of the dissident workers was held in Bhubaneswar from November 26th to November 28th, 1965. They made a decision during the convention to operate independently while adhering to the Congress Party's tenets and philosophy. Mahtab, who oversaw the Convention, declared that it was their moral obligation to depose the leadership of the Odisha Congress, which was to blame for the misuse of the rule of law, corruption, and demoralisation of the government. On April 10, 1966, these rebels made the decision to officially form a distinct political party in order to air their grievances and mobilise the populace against the corrupt congress administration.

Founder of the Party:

Harekrushna Mahatab was the leader of the Indian National Congress, a notable figure in the Indian independence movement and the Chief Minister of Odisha from 1946 to 1950 and again from 1956 to 1961. He was popularly known by the sobriquet "Utkal Keshari". Harekrushna Mahtab was born at Agarpada village in Bhadrak district of Odisha.

He was born to Krushna Charan Das and Tohapha Debi in a Khandayat family. After passing his matriculation examination from Bhadrak High School, he joined Ravenshaw College, Cuttack but left his studies in 1921 to join the independence movement.⁴

Dr. Harekrushna Mahatab was a multifaceted intellect who exhibited traits of a wonderful person. He was a true statesman in the truest meaning of the word, a freedom fighter, a clever politician, a prolific writer, a persuasive speaker, a social scientist, a renowned journalist, a recognised historian, a popular leader, the architect of modern Odisha, and a nation builder. In response to Gandhiji's rallying cry, Dr. Mahatab joined the Non-Cooperation Movement while he was a student at Ravenshaw College. He led the liberation movement in Odisha until India gained its independence after Pandit Gopabandhu Das' untimely death. He was proposed to the All India Working Committee of the Congress in 1938 by Subhas Chandra Bose, the then-President of the Indian National Congress. The only lucky person from Odisha, he was imprisoned at the Ahmed Nagar Fort for about three and a half years alongside other prominent Indian politicians who served as the face of modern India before being freed in May 1945.

Political career:

He was the Chairman of Balasore District Board from 1924 to 1928. He became the member of Bihar and Odisha Council in 1924. He joined the Salt Satyagraha movement and was imprisoned in 1930. He was elected as the General Officer Commanding of Congress Sevadal for the AICC session at Puri in 1932. He participated in the movement against untouchability in 1934 and opened his ancestral temple to all for the first time in Odisha. Later, he started Gandhi Karma Mandir at Agarpada. He was the President of Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee from 1930 to 1931 and again in 1937. He was nominated to the Congress Working Committee by Subhas Chandra Bose in 1938 and continued till 1946 and again from 1946 to 1950. He participated in the Quit India Movement in 1942 and was imprisoned from 1942 to 1945.⁵

Mahatab was the first Chief Minister of Odisha from 23 April 1946 to 12 May 1950. He was the Union Minister of Commerce and Industry from 1950 to 1952. He became the secretary general of the Congress Parliamentary Party in 1952. He was the Governor of Bombay from 1955 to 1956. After resigning from Governorship in 1956, he again became the Chief Minister of Odisha from 1956 to 1960. During his tenures as the Chief Minister, he played significant role in the merger and integration of

former princely states, shifting of the capital from Cuttack to Bhubaneswar and the sanction and construction of the multi-purpose Hirakud Dam Project. He was elected to the Lok Sabha in 1962 from Angul and became the vice-president of the Indian National Congress in 1966. In 1966, he resigned from the Congress and led the Odisha Jana Congress. He was elected to the Odisha Legislative Assembly in 1967, 1971 and 1974. He was imprisoned in 1976 for protesting against the emergency.⁶

The Jana Congress shared power in a coalition government with the Swatantra party from March 1967 till January 1971 under the Chief Ministership of R.N Singh Deo. This coalition earned the unique distinction of surviving for a longer period than other coalitions in other states during that period. Apart from giving stability, it took some significant steps for socio-economic development of the state along with an anti-corruption campaign against the corrupt Congress leaders.

The Utkal Congress:

The Utkal Congress, led by Shri Bijayananda Patnaik, was the second purely regional party to arise in the post-1967 era as a result of group struggle inside the Congress. According to the Kamraj Plan, Patnaik, who had earlier been a prominent congressman in Odisha, resigned as chief minister in 1961. The Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee suggested Patnaik for the 1970 Rajya Sabha election. The Supreme Command, however, would not accept his name. The Patnaik faction and the High Command were at odds, and on May 17, 1970, Shri Patnaik, Nilamani Routray, and Prafulla Chandra Gharori were expelled from the Congress. In a speech given in New Delhi on May 22, 1970, Patnaik pledged to create a party with a broad base of support in order to rouse the populace and make Odisha a powerful State. Although he had originally planned for the Party to be called the Socialist Congress, it formally changed its name to the Utkal Congress that same year.

The Odishan politics witnessed one of the most remarkable phases with the birth of the 'Utkal Congress', another important regional party under the leadership of another great stalwart, Bijayananda Patnaik, popularly known as Biju Patnaik. During the coalition government of the Swatantra and Jana Congress, when Congress was losing ground and Biju Patnaik was not given proper importance, the platform for the birth of a new political party was imminent. Consequently, Utkal Congress was formed in the year 1969 which was the brain child of the bold and daring Biju Patnaik. This was a huge blow to the Congress party, in general, and Mrs. Indira Gandhi, in particular.⁷

Founder of the party:

Bijayananda Patnaik was an Indian politician, aviator and businessman. As a politician, he served twice as the Chief Minister of the State of Odisha. His parents lived in Bellaguntha, Ganjam district, around 80 km from Bramhapur. He was educated at Ravenshaw College in Odisha but, due to his interest in aviation, dropped out and trained as a pilot. Patnaik flew with private airlines but at the start of the Second World War he joined the Royal Indian Air Force. He eventually became the head of air transport command.

During the "Quit India" campaign, Bijayananda Patnaik, also known as Biju Patnaik, joined the Indian national movement and worked with underground leaders. He was imprisoned for thirty months. He began his political career in 1946 and held a variety of positions. Elected in 1952, 1957, and 1961 from Jagannath Prasad, Sorada (Ganjam), and Choudwar, respectively; re-elected in 1971 and 1974 from Rajnagar (Cuttack); served as chairman of the planning board for the government of Odisha from June 1971 to June 1972. One-term President of the U.P.C.C.; member of the A.I.C.C. Under his direction, the

Congress Party won a historic absolute majority in the 1961 midterm elections; he then became chief minister from 1961 to 1963 before resigning in accordance with the "Kamraj" Plan. elected to the legislature in 1977, serving from 1977 to 1979 as a cabinet minister for the central ministry. elected from the Kendrapara Constituency to the Lok Sabha in 1980 and 1984. Afterwards, Biju Patnaik founded the Utkal Congress after quitting the Congress.

While in service, he developed an interest in nationalist politics and used air force transports to deliver what was seen as subversive literature to Indian troops. He was jailed by the British for dropping political leaflets to Indian soldiers fighting under British command in Burma and flying clandestine missions that carried Congress Party leaders from hideouts across India to secret meetings that charted the independence struggle.

Political Career:

Patnaik's political ideals were centered in socialism and federalism. His strong advocacy for equal resources to all Indian states who needed such, made him a champion of his Odia constituents. In 1946 Patnaik was elected uncontested to the Odisha Legislative Assembly from North Cuttack constituency. In 1952 and 1957 he won from Jagannathprasad and Surada, respectively. In 1960 he assumed the presidency of the state Congress. Under his leadership, the Congress Party won 82 of 140 seats and Patnaik (representing Chowdwar constituency) became the chief minister of Odisha on 23 June 1961 and remained in the position until 2 October 1963 when he resigned from the post under the Kamaraj Plan to revitalise the Congress party.

He was the Chief Minister of Odisha at the age of 45. Patnaik was close to Indira Gandhi who took over the Congress Party in 1967. However, they clashed in 1969 over the Presidential election. He left the Congress and formed a regional party—the Utkal Congress. In the 1971 assembly poll, his party did reasonably well. Patnaik then re established contact with his old friend Jayaprakash Narayan and plunged into the JP movement as it picked up momentum in 1974. When the Emergency was declared in 1975, Biju Patnaik was one of the first to be arrested along with other opposition leaders.⁸

He was released in 1977. Later, in the same year, he was elected to the Lok Sabha for the first time from Kendrapara and became Union minister for steel and mines in both the Morarji Desai and the Charan Singh governments until 1979. He was re-elected to the Lok Sabha again in 1980 and 1984 from Kendrapara as Janata Party candidate despite the Congress wave in 1984 following Indira Gandhi's death. With the Congress defeat in 1989, he bounced back into the political limelight.

However, after playing a key behind-the-scenes role in manoeuvring V. P. Singh to the Prime Minister's post, he again chose to go back to Odisha, and prepared for the assembly election.⁹ In 1990 state assembly election, the Janata Dal received a thumping majority (two-thirds of the assembly seats) which saw Biju Patnaik being the Chief Minister of Odisha for the second time until 1995. Patnaik was re-elected to the Lok Sabha in 1996 from Cuttack and Aska constituencies as a Janata Dal candidate. He retained the latter until his death on 17 April 1997 of cardio-respiratory failure. The Utkal Congress played a vital role in the coalition government of Swatantra, Utkal Congress and Jana Congress party under the leadership of Biswanath Dash. Later, this party merged with the Bharatiya Lok Dal and again it turned into Pragati Party, another regional party in Odisha. During the Congress rule under Nandini Satpathy, this Pragati Party was the strong opposition party.¹⁰

Conclusion:

From the debate above, it seems that political volatility was a defining feature of Odisha politics from 1952 to 1980. The turbulent political climate gave rise to a standard political culture with a variety of manifestations, including regionalism, sub-regionalism, upper caste dominance politics, factionalism, and defection, among others. The overall effect of this political culture was that President rule was frequently put into practice, and the state became behind. The political split of the state along geographic lines—coastal lowlands and western high lands—also took place. Congress ruled coastal Odisha, while the Ganatantra Parishad held sway in the western highlands of the state. However, up until 1974, there were more parties due to party mergers, party splits, electoral alliances, etc. There were new parties like the Jana Congress, Swatantra, Pragati Party, Utkal Congress, Bharatiya Lok Dal, and Janata Party. Hence, it could be summed here that although regional parties existed in different phases, these parties could not play any significant role till the birth of Biju Janata Dal in 1997. They did not build any new ideology nor did they project any radical programme. The leaders of those parties, for all practical purposes, continued to be a leader of a new party with only a new label in order to formally establish their separate identity. The regional political parties in Odisha could not last long during 1961-1980. However, the BJD party continued its dominance even against the national parties in today.

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