

Road to a Democratic state: Learning from Yudhishtir Mishra's anti-feudal politics in Odisha

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Abstract

We have to study many regional sub-histories from the grassroots level to make our national history reliable and rich. Due to various reasons, the history of many peripheral levels is neglected. However, from the point of view of historical analysis, the central issue of power is as important as the surrounding content. Hence, the connection between work of national leader with the socio-political life of many local leader or leader at regional levels, should be properly integrated. In this regard, the critical analysis of the socialist, communist, liberal and democratic ideas of political leaders of the regions have become very important today. In this context, this article studies how far late Yudhishtir Mishra deserves special attention and how his political principles are relevant in contemporary time.

Introduction

Yudhishtir Mishra is one of the prominent political leaders and social activists in the state of Odisha. Yudhishtir Mishra was born On August 19, 1914 in Chhatamakhana village of Bolangir district of Odisha, India. After completing his education at the Prithviraj High School, Bolangir, Odisha he obtained a B.A. (English Honours) from Ravenshaw College, Cuttack. While studying at Ravenshaw College, in 1938, he joined the freedom struggle. After completing his B.A., he taught at Prithviraj High School for a year. In 1938, while studying law in Patna, Bihar, he was the general secretary of the All Bihar Students' Union. In 1941, while practicing law in Bolangir, he became the president of the All Patna State Farmers' Party and led the freedom struggle (The Samaj, 1981).

In 1946, after the merger of Krushak Dal with INC, he joined the INC and became a member of the AICC. In 1950, he became the Member of Parliament. In 1953, he resigned from the Congress and joined the CPI. In 1956-58, he was the president of the All Odisha State Transport Employees' Union. In 1961, he attended the Moscow Conference of Soviet Russia, leading the Indian delegation to the International Peace and Disarmament Conference. In 1968, he retired from active politics and worked for the spread of education in Western Odisha. From 1968 to 1978, he was a member of the Syndicate of Sambalpur University.

The writing is intended to create a space for new debate, thoughtful essay on the life, contributions and ideals of late Mishra. It is a modest attempt to dive into the life-affirming aspects of the leader and his political ideas and principles.

As member of Constituent Assembly

In 1946, the Constituent Assembly was constituted to frame the Constitution. It was first formed with 296 members through elections and nominations from the various Provincial Assemblies and Princely States of India. There were members from Odisha and Yudhishtir Mishra was one of them, which notably was a matter of pride for Patna Bolangir at that time because he was lone member from Western Odisha. Starting from the first meeting on December 9, 1946, till January 24, 1950, different sessions of the Constituent Assembly were held. In the sessions, various aspects of the Constitution were discussed by the members. Keeping in mind the issues, peculiarities, culture of every province and community, the drafting of constitution was finalized. A critical analysis of that part of history reveals Yudhishtir Mishra's visionary personality, uncompromising hardship, intellectual ideas. Representing Odisha, the poorest state of India, in the Constituent Assembly, Yudhishtir Mishra raised the issue of cultural, economic, social and political security of the tribals and other communities of Odisha and especially the peculiar situation of the KBK region.

An educationist

When emphasizing the contribution of late Mishra in the field of spreading consciousness and the growth of education, his contribution in the field of education is undeniable. He used to invest a lot of time and effort for the development of education. He played a major role in making the existing educational institutions of Bolangir more functional and in building many new educational institutions like Women's College, Ayurvedic College etc. After the establishment of Sambalpur University, he contributed as a member of the Senate, Academic Council and Syndicate to the growth of the quality and scope of education in this region. The act discipline, impartiality, generosity and transparency he displayed in the discharge of that arduous task has left a lasting mark in the history of Sambalpur University.

As lawyer

After graduating as a law student, he started working in the town of Bolangir in 1941. He moved forward in his field with deep faith and determination. During this time, his reputation as a brilliant lawyer in the district increased and his public relations got strengthened. He also knew and understood the true picture of the mismanagement, injustice, administrative negligence, and exploitation of the British and the feudal regime. He decided to create a public awareness to solve these problems.

Crusader of Prajamandal movement in Bolangir

Bolangir was a princely state. From 1924 to 1932, Bolangir was under direct British rule as a "Court of Wards". It was during this period that the intensity of the freedom movement in India was evident. But not so much intensity found in Bolangir till he came into active politics. However, the late Bhagirath Patnaik, a great freedom fighter in western Odisha, writes in his biography that he was deeply saddened to see the unjust oppression of the members of the royal family and high-ranking royal officials in Balangir. (Mahendra Kumar Das: 2012)

Late Yudhishtir Mishra was from this backward region. But his rebellious mind could not tolerate injustice. In 1938, he first started organizing an uprising against the feudalism in Bolangir. Inspired by Gandhian ideals, Satyananda Mishra, Shri Yogeswar Kumbar, Shri Cintamahani Mishra, and Shri Dibakar Bahidar had already started agitating against the feudalism in the state. This helped Late

Mishra. A huge gathering of farmers was held in Chudapali. These farmers went to Bolangir in a procession and presented their demands. The then Maharaja Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo met these farmers' representatives at his palace. This incident was the first uprising against the monarchy in Balangir. It was only due to the efforts of Late Mishra that this was possible.

Formation of the formal political organization "Krushak Dal" with Shri Kapileshwar Prasad Nanda as the president, Shri Mishra himself as the vice-president had undertaken several legislative and programmatic initiatives, which undoubtedly strengthened similar efforts in Bolangir. Late Mishra became active in the "Farmers' Movement" organization in Bolangir in 1946. Later, he followed the movement as the editor of the Krushak Dal. The Prajamandal Committee when passed a proposal to recognize the "Krushak Dal" started a vigorous struggle in Patna. The struggle was for citizen rights and responsible government and against the feudal system of administration and feudal institutions. The programs of the Krushak Dal were exciting for the common people living under the yoke of slavery, various tactics were used to sabotage the programs of the Krushak Dal. However, the Krushak Dal, ignoring all these hardships, carried out its program.

As Nationalist

Since the Bolshevik Revolution, Soviet Russia has been governed by "Centralized Planning". The subject is widely publicized internationally. The first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, who was influenced by socialist ideology, was a great admirer of the "Central Plan" of Russia. In that spirit, he started a program to bring about massive progress in India through the "Central Five Year Plan". He had contacts with the communist leaders of Soviet Russia. Under the influence of Soviet Russia, the leader of Communist Party of India, agreed to support Prime Minister Nehru's program. Its effect was visible all over India at that time. The Congress Party and the Communist Party cooperated with each other everywhere and held joint programs in some areas.

This was a beautiful opportunity for the Congress, Socialist and Communist parties of Odisha, who were fighting with the same goal for the abolition of feudal institutions. The leaders of all the parties who were present in different places in the undivided Bolangir district fought in their respective places. In Balangir, Yudhishtir Mishra, Narasinha Prasad Nanda, Swapnananda Panigrahi from the Congress party were leading. Likewise, Shri Sarat Chandra Panigrahi of the Socialist Party was fighting in Bolangir.

On January 24, 1950, Yudhishtira Mishra returned to homeland after attending the last session of the Constituent Assembly. By then, the Krushak Dal had formally joined the Congress Party. A progressive group of the Congress Party was formed with old and new members. Yudhishtir Mishra, along with this group, took the lead in bringing the new Constitution to the people of India. The main challenge before them was to abolish feudal institutions (such as gauntia, zamindari) and create democratic institutions. To implement policies and regulations that ensures economic equality, to build a society with a just and scientific outlook and above all to transform the feudal psychology of the people into a democratic one. This group included personalities of both Gandhian ideology and socialist ideology. This group, located in various parts of the then undivided Balangir district, took ideological resolve to fight against feudal institutions and attitudes throughout the district.

The first agenda of the ideological resolve of this group was to participate in the first Lok Sabha elections of 1951-52 and in this order, it was unanimously decided that Yudhishtir Mishra would be the candidate of the Congress Party from the Balangir-Kalahandi constituency. He contested against

Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo of the Ganatantra Parishad. In this election, Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo won, while Yudhishtir Mishra got defeated. While the Congress party got good results in the coastal areas of Odisha, it is said that it was completely wiped out in western Odisha. The Congress party won 364 seats out of 489 Lok Sabha constituencies across the country.

Before independence, a process of many members of the Socialist Party joining the Communist Party of India had begun. The results of the first general elections of 1952 changed the course of many national and regional leaders. Jayaprakash Narayan joined Acharya Vinoba Bhave's Bhoodan movement. Ram Manohar Lohia was determined to give a new lease of life to Gandhiji's ideology and lead the socialist movement in a different direction. By 1953, this process had gained momentum. Leaders in the Congress Party who had leftist ideology and who wanted a quick change in the status quo turned their back on the Congress Party and joined the Communist Party of India.

Yudhishtir Mishra's defeat in the general elections was a clear indication of the deep-rooted feudal sentiments that existed in the undivided districts of Bolangir and Kalahandi and how the feudal institutions were entrenched at the grassroots level. In 1953, against such a backdrop, Yudhishtira Mishra left the Congress Party and joined the Communist Party to intensify his fight against feudal institutions and sentiments.

As communist leader

There had always existed ideological differences between the Congress and the Communist parties regarding labour organizations, peasant movements, and land reforms. Differences also persisted over the strategies and methods for securing the demands of workers and peasants. The two parties were divided on the question of the appropriate course of action required to bring about comprehensive agrarian reforms in the country.

In this context, it was natural that differences emerged in Bolangir between Yudhishtir Mishra and the Congress leadership regarding trade unionism and land reforms. While the Congress leadership actively participated in Acharya Vinoba Bhave's Bhoodan Movement, Yudhishtir Mishra did not take part in it. Under his leadership, the Communist Party remained far more active than the Congress in both organized and unorganized labour movements. However, since Bolangir was an industrially underdeveloped district, Yudhishtir Mishra had limited opportunities to attain prominence at either the state or national level through labour activism.

In 1957, E.M.S. Namboodiripad became the Chief Minister of Kerala because under his leadership, the Communist Party of India contested the Kerala Legislative Assembly elections and secured an absolute majority. This development of the formation of a communist government through democratic processes created considerable excitement among communist movements across the world.

However, such a development was not feasible in most of the other parts of India during that period. In Odisha, it would remain beyond the realm of imagination. Even in the district of Bolangir, the electoral victory of either Communist or Congress candidates was almost inconceivable. The principal reason lay in the persistence of feudal institutions and deeply entrenched feudal attitudes.

In such circumstances, Yudhishtir Mishra and several leaders had no option but to prepare for a prolonged struggle. Inspiring farmers, workers, students, teachers, and youth with communist ideals and preparing them for a future revolution with the basic philosophy of communism and democracy values. A major setback for the communist movement in India was in 1962 with the Sino-Indian War. The serious differences arose within the Communist Party and the party split into two factions- CPI and CPI (M).

However, Yudhisthir Mishra remained associated to the original organization, the CPI. After the Congress party split in 1969, the members of the Congress having Socialist ideology began implementing socialist program. Some of the measures were the nationalization of banks, control over big business houses, and most importantly, the abolition of the Privy Purse granted annually to former kings.

When Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo was the Chief Minister of Odisha, his Swatantra Party strongly opposed Indira Gandhi's Congress and its socialist programs. As a result, Congress and Communist Party workers across Odisha organized many programs against the Swatantra Party. With full support from the CPI in 1972, Mrs. Nandini Satpathi became the Chief Minister of Odisha with her well known socialist convictions. In Bolangir, these activities were carried out in a particularly influential manner. Therefore, the politics and political environment of Bolangir were the focus of discussion in the whole of Odisha at that time. Yudhisthir Mishra remained active in all these programs and gave guidance towards the movement.

Conclusion

In our modern society, the proclamation of ideals is frequent, but in most cases it is confined to rhetoric. It is becoming increasingly rare to see a truly educated, civilized person living in an ordinary environment, enriching his own life and his society. A general feeling of doubt and distrust towards idealism is becoming stronger.

In this context, the role of a sincere ideal-inspired life-style is very important. The biographies of leaders like the late Yudhistir Mishra are a valuable source of information and inspiration for us. His life and work and that of many of his contemporaries in India are of great importance to our society. They not just embody high qualities but adopted their socialist, communist, egalitarian and democratic ideals with deep devotion and sincerity, have a sense of sacrifice, faith, inspiration, a desire to improve the society.

In terms of modern civilization, the faint light of the time in the darkest corner of the consciousness of some young people boldly crossed a social, cultural, geographical and political barrier and created a new culture. The life of Late Mishra, who was closely associated with pre-independence and post-independence Indian life for a long time is significantly instructive for today's generation. His life story of courage and determination and his political principles should guide us to achieve a more democratic society.

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