



Sub-Regional Politics and Regional Political Parties: Biju Janata Dal

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Abstract:

The new party Biju Janata Dal (BJD) had attracted a surprisingly large number of supporters, including 29 MLAs. Inherent contradictions and tensions among the Janata Dal Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs), which had vitiated the political life in the state for last few months, after the demise of Biju Patnaik, came to an end with the formation of Biju Janata Dal in 1997. After the Lok Sabha election of 1998, in Odisha BJD-BJP combine became a major political force. This had resulted in the marginalization of the ruling Congress (I) and the decimation of the Janata Dal and its Left allies.

Keywords: Biju Janata Dal, historical, geographical, vote bank

Introduction

While regionalism, in general, is essentially a product of India's diversity, sub-regionalism in particular is the result of historical and geographical factors in it. The term 'sub-region' refers to a smaller area within a region or 'nation' which for economic geographic, historical and social reasons is aware of possessing a distinct identity.⁽¹⁾ Sub-regional conflicts have often been found to take the shape of movements claiming their separate identity in the formation of regional political parties on the basis of local support. For the emergence of Biju Janata Dal in Odisha factors like political pluralism, religion, regional imbalance, anti centre, and caste factors are not largely responsible. It cannot identify a regional party in terms of its ethnicity or religion-cultural identity.

In 1997 after the demise of Biju Patnaik, the Odisha unit of Janata Dal showed the way for a split. There was also disagreement in the party over the leadership issue. At least 15 Janata Dal legislators out of 46 in the state legislative Assembly had advocated a pro-

Bharatiya Janata Party line for the party. Three senior leaders who were cabinet ministers in the previous Janata Dal government of Biju Patnaik-Biswabhusan Harichandan, Vedprakash Agrawal, and Sarat Kar joined the Bharatiya Janata Party. A section of the state Janata Dal legislators had taken enthusiastic interest to shape a joint opposition front together with the Bharatiya Janata Party against the congress in the fourth coming Odisha Assembly election of 2000. Naveen Patnaik, who was elected an M.P from the Aska parliamentary constituency after his father's death and was holding a key portfolio under the Atal Behari Vajpayee at the central cabinet, was extensively leaned to be the leader of the dissenter group. Leaders like Dillip Roy, union Minister, Vijay Mahapatra, and other MLAs of western Odisha including Ananga Udaya Singh Deo and Prasanna Acharya were openly came in support of Naveen Patnaik's leadership.

The plan of a magnificent deal with Bharatiya Janata Party did not find helping hand with Ashok Das, leader of



opposition in the state legislative Assembly and Srikant Jena, Union Minister. They provoked the central Janata Dal leadership to meddle in this matter. A resentful Janata Dal President, Sarad Yadav warned, “we made it clear to the dissidents that we were willing to go to any length to accommodate their views, the only condition being that there should be no truck with the Bharatiya Janata Party”. Old friends of Biju Patnaik like Surendra Mohan, Minister of Information and Broadcasting S.Jaipal Reddy and Planning Commission Deputy Chairman Madhu Dandavate were asked to meet Naveen Patnaik and talk to him.⁽⁵⁾

I.K. Gujral one time Prime Minister of India met Naveen Patnaik for an hour and tried to impress upon him the need to avoid, “compromising with the very forces your father spent his lifetime fighting”. Ignoring all the request of the senior Janta Dal leaders Naveen Patnaik group was all set to form a regional party. Subsequently Asok Das, who held both the state units Presidentship of the Janata Dal and the leadership of the Janata Dal legislature party, was asked to quit his Assembly post.⁽⁶⁾

So by the time the wooing of Naveen Patnaik began, the split was almost a certainty. In his last attempt Sharad Yadav, the President of the Janata Dal at national level phoned Naveen Patnaik from Mumbai, “Come to Delhi tomorrow and you will get the letter appointing you as president of the Janata Dal at the airport itself. Naveen Patnaik did not take into account the plea of Sarad Yadav and at the same night he and his group decided to break away.⁽⁷⁾

In the last week of December, 1997 Naveen Patnaik stood under a giant cut out of his father at ‘Naveen Nivas’,

Biju Patnaik’s house in Bhubaneswar and announced that he and a large number of legislators were breaking away from the Janata Dal (JD) to form the Biju Janata Dal (BJD). “My father had a lot of dreams for Odisha,” he intoned, “to realize those dreams are our goal”. He also promptly declared that the new party would have an alliance with the Bharatiya Janata Party. Shortly afterwards, Asok Das, State Chief of the truncated Janata Dal, reacting to the new development demanded, “We are the real party which will strive to fulfill Biju Babu’s dreams”.⁽⁸⁾

The new party Biju Janata Dal (BJD) had attracted a surprisingly large number of supporters, including 29 MLAs. Inherent contradictions and tensions among the Janata Dal Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs), which had vitiated the political life in the state for last few months, after the demise of Biju Patnaik, came to an end with the formation of Biju Janata Dal in 1997.

Going by the ground realities in Odisha, the Bharatiya Janata Party could not be kept at arm’s length. Though the Bharatiya Janata Party was yet to win an election in the state both for 147 Assembly and 21 Lok Sabha seats - the party had emerged as a major factor in the state, especially in western Odisha. In the 1996 elections, the Bharatiya Janata Party secured over one-lakh votes in half a dozen parliamentary seats, helping the congress to win by default. Logically, therefore, the Janata Dal leaders had to ensure their own survival by working out an arrangement with the Bharatiya Janata Party to counter the challenge of the congress.⁽⁹⁾ As things stand then, the BJD was the second largest party in Odisha. They had 29 legislators, while the Bharatiya Janata Party had only 10



members. Therefore, in the BJD's working relationship with the Bharatiya Janata Party, the B.J.D was "A" team and the Bharatiya Janata Party was "B" team.

On the contrary, the Congress Chief Minister J.B. Patnaik was wary about the emerging alliance between the BJD and the Bharatiya Janata Party. Both the parent Janata Dal and the congress had been found wanting in framing a political response to the sudden development. The Janata Dal central leadership badly misread the warning signals emanating from Odisha and could do little to retrieve the situation. Even J.B.Patnaik realized he had few options before him. Naveen Patnaik's main slogan was going to be "Save Odisha" and there was little that the rivals could do to oppose such an emotive plank.⁽¹⁰⁾

Naveen Patnaik had clearly underestimated the clout and support Vijaya Mahapatra enjoyed in the party. His decision to induct Damodar Rout and Sarat Kar had disaster written all over it. If Naveen Patnaik really believed that the entry of these gentlemen would soar up his party, it was a genuine error of judgment. After all both of them had lost the last Assembly election badly - Damodar Rout from two places and had done precious little till then. But Naveen Patnaik's subsequent moves suggested that his action was designed to snub Vijaya Mahapatra who had a long-standing rivalry within them. His decision to reconstitute the party organization to ensure that no Mahapatra loyalist remains in a position of authority had brought the party to the brink of a split. And it could have a miracle of sorts if it continued the crisis.

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Naveen Patnaik suspended five party MLAs for anti-party activities. Naveen Patnaik badly faltered at the first test of his leadership quality. Not only had he failed to rise above the various factions within the party and to keep them on a leash, he had also failed to enthuse the party cadre. Apart from an occasional memorandum to the Governor or a stray press statement demanding the resignation of Chief Minister J.B.Patnaik, there had hardly been an agitation worth the name against the state Government. In the wake of law and order situation, attacks on the Christian minority, Anjana Mishra case and the ongoing battle of attrition with his powerful deputy Basant Kumar Biswal, J.B.Patnaik was at his most vulnerable during 1998-99. In view of the slender majority of the ruling party in the Assembly, a concerted opposition attack could have made life miserable for him. But, the intra-party conflict, it was the opposition, which was gasping for breath.

In another significant development, 18 Janata Dal legislators from Odisha had announced that they were opposed to any type of understanding or alliance with the BJP. These MLAs included Narasingha Mihsra, Judhistir Das, Surendranath Nayak,, Prafulla Ghadei, Prafulla Samal, Mangala Kissan, Ranendra Pratap Swain, Duryodhan Majhi, Bira Sipka, Balabhadra Majhi, Jogendra Behera, Suryamani Jean, Prasanna Kumar Patsani, Bijay Ranjan Singh Bariha, Hrushikesh Nayak, Bikram Kesari Aruk and Madhabandna Behera.

Later the leaders of the BJD led by its President Naveen Patnaik Staged a *dharana* in front of the residence of the Speaker of the State Legislative Assembly for not granting recognition to their break-away group in the State



Legislative Assembly even as the house was adjourned sine die.⁽¹⁴⁾ Speaker of the State Legislative Assembly later, on December 19, 1997 recognized the break-away group of Janata Dal, thus formalizing the split.

Meanwhile dates for the election to the 12 Lok Sabha was declared. In the 1998 elections to the 12th Lok Sabha the BJP and Allies⁽¹⁵⁾ secured 252 seats (BJP-179, Siva Sena -6, Samata Party-12, BJD-9, SAD-8, TC-7, Lok Shakti-3, H.V.P -1, AIADMK-18, PMK-4, MDMK-3, TRC-1 and J.P.-1) The Congress (I) and its allies⁽¹⁶⁾ secured 166 (Congress (I)-140, RPI-4, IUML-2, KC (M)-1, UMF-1, RJD-17, RJP-1. The United Front secured⁽¹⁷⁾ 96 seats and independents and others⁽¹⁸⁾ secured 23 seats. The BJP-led Government assumed power at the Centre. The withdrawal of support of one of its allies, the AIADMK resulted in its losing the trust vote by one vote 269-270.

After the Lok Sabha election of 1998, in Odisha BJD-BJP combine became a major political force. This had resulted in the marginalization of the ruling Congress (I) and the decimation of the Janata Dal and its Left allies.⁽¹⁹⁾ The BJP won seven seats out of nine it contested. Most of the seats were in Western and Northern Odisha. The BJP has won 9 out of 12 seats it contested.⁽²⁰⁾ Significantly, the BJD-BJP combine also made inroads into Congress (I) strongholds in constituencies with a substantial number of people belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The huge margins with which many of the candidates of BJD-BJP combine won were indicative of an upsurge of popular support in favour of this combine.⁽²¹⁾ The combine fought with the slogan "able leadership and stable government". Some Congress (I) leaders, however, saw a strong anti-

establishment mood, combined with the Janata Dal's obliteration, which led to a consolidation of the opposition votes, contributed to the Congress (I) debacle. The people of Odisha also stamped their approval on Naveen's status as the real inheritor of Biju legacy. The BJD not only appropriated the Dal vote bank but also formed a powerful combination with the ever-growing section of the BJP sympathizers.

The exceptional success of the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Biju Janata Dal in the elections to the 13th Lok Sabha elections in Odisha had started a new trend in the politics of the state. Out of 21, the BJD-BJD combine had captured nineteen seats. This was three more than the number of constituencies it had won in the last Parliamentary elections. The BJD has scored 33 per cent of votes as compared to 24.6 per cent by the BJP. In the two constituencies, Dhenkanal and Koraput, where the Congress had won, the margin of victory was really small. The victory of K.P.Singh Deo, a former Union Minister from Dhenkanal was attributed to the presence of a rebel BJP candidate in the constituency. Another significant trend was that the BJP-BJD combine led in 128 assembly segments out of 147. In the coastal area, the alliance got nearly 58 per cent of votes. In the 1999, elections to the Lok Sabha the BJD-BJP combination secured 19 seats (BJD-10, BJP-09) out of 21 seats. Naveen Patnaik-led BJD had declared unconditional support to BJP-led Government at the Centre, unlike other partners of the coalition.⁽²²⁾

Achievements of the Party: The party under Navin's shrewd dynamic and transparent leadership has attained marked popularity as is evident from re-



election of Navin and triumph of his party in the assembly election.

(a) The Power to the People: To strengthen the Panchayati Raj system, the state government has kept 21 subjects concerning 11 departments under the control of Gram Panchayats.

(b) Pani Panchayat: To involve farmers in the maintenance and operation of irrigation, 9182 Pani Panchayats have been set up under the irrigation management scheme. So far, 4498 Pani Panchayats have been given over 3.41 Lakh hectares for irrigation management.⁽³⁴⁾

(c) Biju Krushak Vikas Yojna: Nine hundred fifty one Pani Panchayats have been formed under Biju Krushak Yojana which facilitates irrigation of 30,000 hectares of land.

(d) Watershed Mission: It involves the setting up of drought proofing mechanisms to harvest rain water for agriculture.

(e) KBK (Kalahandi- Bolangir Koraput) Development: Poverty reduction, social security coverage and road connectivity—important areas of development in the districts of Kalahandi, Bolangir and Koraput—have been undertaken vigorously.

(f) Development of Backward Areas: The Western Orissa Development Council has been established to initiate, execute and accelerate projects in the western districts of Orissa.

(g) Sarba Sikshya Abhiyan: Three hundred and twenty five new primary schools have been opened. Plans are

afoot to open 780 more primary schools and 2,771 upper primary schools.

(h) Inception of Regional Centre of AIIMS: In order to provide better medical and health care in the region, A.B. Vajpayee—the P.M. laid the foundation stone for the regional centre of AIIMS at Bhubaneswar.

(i) Paradip Oil Refinery: Indian Oil Corporation is to operations the oil refinery project at Paradip in the near future.

(j) Industry: Six integrated steel projects in the State are being launched. The alumina project of starlight industries of Laujigarh is already in progress. Navin—the C.M. Orissa emphasised that Orissa's abundant natural resources untapped energy and vast work force make it a potential gold mine for the investors while its rich cultural heritage is a haven to visitors,' He remarked in an interview, "I believe that Orissa will be one of the most advanced states of India in 10 years from now. We have the vision and the resolve to realize this." He is rated as one of the best C.Ms, of India.⁽³⁵⁾

As a regional party, the BJD has made a number of significant contributions to the political scenario of the country. Some of these are listed below:

- The BJD is committed to a holistic development of women and children in the state, through education and empowerment. A 50% reservation has been made for women in the Odisha Municipalities. It has implemented a number of schemes for women and children, such as the 'Mamata Yojna', 'Mission Shakti', 'Tupti', 'Nua Arunima' and the very



crucial 'Self Help Group Energy Franchisee Arrangement (SEFA) Program'.

- Essentially an agricultural state, the farmers of Odisha is the backbone of the state. The BJD government initiated a separate agricultural budget for the farmers, increasing the budget allocation for agriculture from rupees 2,000 crores to rupees 7,000 crores.
- Through a number of schemes such as the 'Biju Krushak Vikas Yojna' and the 'Biju Krushak Kalyan Yojna', Naveen Patnaik has ensured agricultural loans at a nominal 2% rate of interest.
- Odisha is the first state in India to organize animal health camps, operating in more than 12 districts and treating more than 24 lakh animals so far.
- **Ideology and Party Base of the Biju Janata Dal:**

The character of politics at the national and state level has been changing and regional aspirations are getting more prominence in the national politics too. There is some commonality among national and regional parties so far as there are changes in the process of adapting to the new situation. It is against this theoretical background of a transitional polity that the Biju Janata Dal has been singled out for the analysis. Some broad conclusions drawn from this analysis are given below. These should not be taken either as definite or even as authoritative because we deal with an entity, which is nascent and still growing.⁽³⁶⁾

a. The Biju Janata Dal emerged as a product of political developments at the national level and state level. In the national level, the decline of the congress party, regionalisation of national politics,

coalition culture, political realignment, etc., on the one hand; and at the state level two political developments within the inter party leadership crisis and factional conflicts on the other hand. In this situation of an open division, the state unit of Janata Dal would not be in a position to function as an effective opposition; rather it plays an effective role as a state party to consolidate anti-Congress politics by forming an alliance with the BJP. Naveen Patnaik was a true inheritor or Biju's Janata Dal, he has formed the BJD, a typical regional party.

b. So far as the question of its social base is concerned, it suffers from a dualistic approach. On the one hand, it originated in anti-Congresses that is; it evolved as a party of middle class/ caste, especially the three upper caste Brahmin, Karan and Khandayat. The other sections of society - women, dalits and minorities not neglected. No doubt, the party organisation is dominated by the middle caste but it claims to be a broad based, mass political body dedicated to the aggregation and articulation of the interests of a cross-section of the society. This is a characteristic of normal feature most of the Indian parties.

c. One of the important causes of the growth of the party has been the emergence of new social and political forces that have brought about vital changes in Orissa society. The emergence of new social group particularly woman. The consequences of Naveen Patnaik's progressive policies of "Mission Shakti". The increasing importance of women issues and interests has created a new set of leadership within Orissa party politics in post-Biju phase polity. Under such circumstances, other parties in Orissa failed to understand the changing situation and could not make necessary adjustment. As any party can maintain



its position in stiff political competition on the basis of new form of politics of mobilisation.

d. Orissa is one of the few states in the country that have not witnessed any major sectional mobilisation along caste or class lines. The absence of a large peasant caste has meant that politics is still the prerogative of the small upper castes and that mandalisation has had no effect. It is true that the OBCs, SCs and STs, all have been politically mobilized on the decision making processes but they are still too fragmented and are less dominant in the political scene in Orissa.

e. The changing pattern of party system from two party Congress-Janata Dal and then a triangular (Congress-BJD-BJP) competition has added little to the political agenda except the question of regional discrimination. But this pattern changed in 1998. The emergence of bi-nodal party system was the outcome of a process of alliance between the BJD-BJP in the 1998 general elections. The changing patterns of party System in Orissa since post mid 1990s as political observer pointed out in past as bipolar i.e. the Congress and the BJD-BJP shift towards the hi-nodal party system i.e. the anti-Congress vs anti-BJP at the State of Orissa. The BJD-BJP alliance is an example of anti-Congressism. This is due to the party merger, party splits and electoral alliance etc.⁽³⁷⁾

f. The leaders of the Biju Janata Dal are from higher socio-economic background. It does not mean that other socio-economic backgrounds are not represented in the BJD. The emergence of the educated legislators in BJD is a positive sign in party politics in Orissa under the leadership of Naveen Patnaik which was lacking under its predecessors party i.e. Janata Dal. They were centred on a single leader. However, the BJD as in the case of many other state level

parties lacks internal democracy and is centered on a single leader. This makes the party authoritarian in nature.

Conclusions:

The Study shows that the Biju Janata Dal has a member of achievements to its credit, for instance, providing a clean and transparent administration, achievement of socio-economic targets, a fair deal to the down trodden, especially the dalits and minorities. Most of these came as a package with the launched of "Mission Shakti" which became a social movement. This paved the way for gender equality enabling women's involvement in the political process. The opposition parties failed to take into accounts the hopes and aspirations of newly emerging classes. In these circumstances, the BJD could maintain itself because it has already created an independent political base. The future prospect of the Biju Janata Dal is seems to be better. A number of factors indicate the possibility of a rise of Biju Janata Dal in future. First, the internal fighting among the sister parties like Janata Dal and Orissa Gana Parishad and their close alliance with the congress; secondly, Naveen's shows more flexibility in adapting to the new development quickly; thirdly, the unfortunate record of Congress party while in power in the state and finally, BJD's alliance with the BJP will most likely favoured electoral competition.⁽³⁸⁾

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