Odisha is one of the territorial units of the Indian federation. The State became the first linguistically organised one. This has completed eight decades. But the land is not new. It is an old one having Civilisational roots. The land was known through various names and prominent among them were Kalinga and Utkala. The people of the State have ‘Puranic’ connections. Kalinga king sent forces to fight against the ‘Pandavs’ on behalf of the ‘Kauravas’. History has recorded 261 B.C as a landmark when the great Kalinga War was fought and the sight of the loss of human life converted Samrat Ashok to adopt the path of peace and Buddhism under his patronage went beyond the then Indian boundary. Later King Kharavela of Chedi dynasty expanded the territorial boundary and imprinted his name as well as his motherland in the annals of history. The land became a source of inspiration for the debate, discussion, adoption and proliferation of many religious faiths and strands. The biggest among them is ‘Jagannath Cult’.

Odisha remained independent for many years. It came under Muslim, Mughal, Maratha and British rule. The State was last to fall to the British in 1803. The visit of many Saints, religious preachers and practitioners helped the people of the State to acquaint them with different Socio-cultural living. The 19th century gave an opportunity to recapitulate its past glory and locate the factors that caused decline. When we are celebrating eighty years of Odisha, we are also surging ahead to remind us the origin of Linguistic movement in 1866. The period between 1866 and 1903 was the era of identity formation and consolidation to save our motherland. In 1903 the foundation of ‘the Utkal Union Conference’ began the era of fighting the historical injustices in the political platform as well as apprising the colonial authorities about the justification on demand for amalgamation of Odisha speaking tracts. This organised movement helped to end Bengal-Bihar-Odisha syndrome into a dual province of Bihar and Odisha and later in 1936 a six district base linguistic State of Odisha by ceding Ganjam and Koraput from Madras Presidency and adding them to existing Balasore, Cuttack, Puri and Sambalpur districts.

From Statehood to Independence of India:

The colonial administration could realise the demand for amalgamation and recognised this urge in 1905 and this was given effect to in 1936. In the notification of Government of India (Constitution of Orissa) Order, 1936 it was provided that “the Governor shall be deemed for all purposes for the local government of Orissa”.

Odisha: A Laboratory of Political Experiences

Prof. Surya Narayan Misra
Further, there shall be an Advisory Council consisting of not more than twenty members to be nominated by the Governor and of those persons not more than three shall be officials, the council may advise in all such matters as the Governor may refer to them.” This was prelude to the introduction of ‘Provincial Autonomy’. The council was composed of some eminent personalities like Kanika Raja, Parala Maharaja, Godavarish Mishra, Mandhata Gorachand Patnaik etc. The formation of separate State geared up political activities to capture the seats of future legislature and Congress was ahead of all these preparations.

The election to the Orissa Legislative Assembly commenced from 18th January, 1937 and continued till 23rd January, 1937. For a truncated electorate composed of five to six lakhs of voters out of 82 lakh population the number of seats were 60 out of which 50 members were directly elected, Congress captured 36 seats out of 37 contested and it received support of 80 per cent of voters who voted. The political groups led by Rajas and Zamindars were rejected by voters and they won only 10 Seats. Independence got 10. The other four were nominated by the Governor. After election the UPCC (Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee) which fought the election under the leadership of Pandit Nilakantha Das went for fresh party election. Pandit Das was defeated by Harekrushna Mahtab and prominent leader of socialist group Nabakrushna Choudhury became General Secretary and Nityananda Kanungo was the new Treasurer.

The policy of non-co-operation pursued by the Congress party stood on the way of accepting offices and twisted to appointment of Parala Maharaja as the Premier of the State. After a debate in AICC where persons like Acharya Narendra Dev, Achyut Pattardhan, Jaya Prakash Narayan etc opposed review of non-co-operation, Gandhi persuaded AICC Working Committee to accept office on some conditions like the non-use of special power by the Governor and also not to set aside the advice given by ministers. On Satisfactory resolution of the Stalemate Congress formed government in all the States it won including Orissa. Biswanath Das was the new premier and took oath on 19 July, 1937. The other ministers who took oath were Nityanand Kanungo and Bodhram Dube. On 28th July 1937 in the Hall of the Ravenshaw College the members of the newly formed OLA attended the inaugural session of the Legislature. Sri Mukunda Prasad Das and Nanda Kishore Das were elected as Speaker and Deputy Speaker. This ministry continued till 4th November, 1939. The resignation was due to colonial administration’s unilateral decision to declare war without the advice of responsible government.

The Congress Ministry in the State besides the important policy decision of AICC, was sieged with the Provincial problems relating to poverty, stagnation and agrarian issues. The Das ministry is remembered for their seminal contribution to Legislative supremacy. It passed a resolution against 1935 Act as it did not represent the will of the nation and also against the scheme of All India Federation. It exhibited strong attitude when Governor Hubback applied for leave and the Revenue Commissioner Mr. Dain was asked to deputise for which Mr. Hubback had to cancel his leave programme. The government also initiated tenancy reforms and took steps to combat agrarian and economic problems and initiated welfare measures.

After the resignation of Das ministry, Parala Maharaja was again appointed as Premier
by the Governor. This non-Congress Ministry remained in power up to 1944. Governor Hubback had completed his five year term and he was succeeded by Sir William Hawthorne Lewis. The post-Congress government coalition could be formed due to infighting and factional feud in congress. The coalition had to confront a strong congress led opposition. The coalition government is remembered for their development activities despite war period. The most prominent of them was foundation of Utkal University, the first one for the State. The establishment of a separate High Court owe to this period. Despite vast potential Orissa was poor and the Industrial Sector was almost non-starter. In this regard a ten-year term was planned for Industrial development on Russian line. The coalition functioned during critical hours of world history due to Second World War. It was the period of rising tension due to mass movement like Quit India. However, it tried to make few people oriented legislation.

The Second Orissa Legislature was constituted in 1946. The command of conducting the election fell on Biswanath Das and H.K. Mahtab jointly. Mr. Das was prohibited from contest due to electoral malpractice led ban on him with regard to election of Uma Charan Patnaik from Balliguda. In this election Congress won 48 out of 56 Seats. Due to ban on Mr. Das, Mahtab emerged most powerful leader and he could elicit the support of Governor in getting three of his choices out of four nominations made by Raj Bhawan. Sir Chandulal Trivedi, Governor of Orissa administered the oath of Mahtab led Ministry. The other Ministers were Sri Naba Krishna Choudhery, Pandit Lingaraj Misra, Sri Nityananda Kanungo and Sri Radhakrushna Biswas Roy. Sri Lalmohan Patnaik and Smt. A. Laxmi Bai were elected as Speaker and Deputy Speaker.

The Mahtab Ministry had a number of challenges to be faced. The most daunting task was release of political prisoners and political adjustments when the stage for formation of interim Government came Viceroy nominated Mr. Mahatab and under great difficulty and pressure Mahtab declined the offer keeping in eye Sardar Patel's suggestion for integration of princely State with Orissa. During the formative period members from Orissa to Constituent Assembly were elected by the Legislature. Nine members (H.K. Mahtab, Santanu Kumar Das, Malati Choudhury, Raj Krishna Bose, Bhubanananda Das, Bodhram Dube, Nanda Kisor Das, Biswanath Das and Laxmi Narayan Sahu) were elected on 17 July, 1946. The period also found communal frenzy in the Country due to mischievous two-nation theory adopted by colonial administration and India was partitioned into India and Pakistan. Due to intensive and planned approach 23 princely states joined Orissa and Mayurbhanj remained adamant causing Sadheikala and Kharasuan joining Bihar. In fact there was no common boundary between Orissa and these two Princely States due to the obstinacy of Mayurbhanj. Ultimately after one year Mayurbhanj acceded to Orissa. It increased the territory and her population. Six district State became thirteen district, The size of Legislature was increased to 91 from 60.

After Independence the responsibility of the socio economic development became the major agenda of the Mahtab ministry. The government accorded priority to Industrial development. The policy for Industrialisation adopted by Nehru government helped in this process. The State got following quotas for the Industrial Development from the Centre- Textile
Mills (5 Units) Sugar Mill (1 Unit) Rayon (1 Unit), Vegetable Ghee (1 unit), Paper Board (1 Unit) etc. Besides these Mahtab government was insisting upon cement Industries, Iron and Steel works, Jute Mill, Paper Mill, Pottery works, glass works and Rolling mill and Foundary. Further, the policy of the State Government was also to enhance small scale and cottage Industries. It also planned to initiate Industrial Schools to impart necessary technical skills. The Orissa School of Engineering was also reorganised.

Mahanadi River was the major river of the riverine State. The Government planned for Mahanadi Valley Project. During Das Ministry M. Vishwasaraya visited the State and laid stress on building dams to check the flood flurry. Some initiatives were taken later. But displacement issue stood on the way. Mahatab government on the advice of Sardar Patel tried to educate people on the need of the dam. There was also anti-Hirakud dam agitation led by Bodhram Dube and others. This agitation in fact became the coastal-Western Orissa conflict. In August 1947 the Hirakud dam project as prepared by Sri A.N. Khosala was unanimously adopted by the State Legislature. Thus this multi-purpose dam was a big beginning for the State.

The Congress Ministry under H.K. Mahtab is responsible to think ahead and in fact, despite controversy, the Machhkunda Duduma hydro-electric project work was initiated. During this government capital of the state was located at Bhubaneswar. It also undertook some fiscal reforms and for Socio-educational development the government adopted programmes for Harijan Welfare and it laid emphasis on ‘Basic Education’. It adopted Orissa Removal of Civil Disability Act and Orissa Temple Entry Authorisation and Indemnity Act which were necessary for the upliftment of Harijan Community.

Among Social reforms the important acts were prohibition Act, opium smoking Act and amendment of Bihar-Orissa Excise Act. The Assembly experienced during its tenure independence of India and a special session was held from 27th Aug to 29th Aug, 1947 where resolution was passed for re-construction and development of the State and removal of poverty.

**Constitutional Democracy and Development:**

The First General Election under the Constitution and Representation of Peoples Act was held from December, 1951. Among all political dispensation, the Indian National Congress was ahead of others due to its contribution to the freedom struggle and the forward looking leadership of Gandhi-Nehru-Patel. Both Gandhi and Patel left their heavenly abode prior to the writing of political fortune of the nation and the responsibility was with Nehru who could develop a Congress system by winning first three General Elections with landslide victory. After his death Congress had a mixed fate during Indira Gandhi, Rajiv and after. However, the party was able to provide stable government and Scheme for planned economic development for more years than other Parties.

The electoral history of Orissa was written in different ink. When the whole country was functioning under one party dominant rule under Congress, the party was struggling to secure even a legislative majority. In 1950s two elections were held but in both Congress could not secure majority. The State which had a strong Congress government during pre-Independence era and piloted the merger of princely States encountered politically with Princely Party, the Ganatantra Parishad and the Socialists who were frontline leaders in Congress led freedom struggle.
It is to be remembered that the leader of the second Congress Government Mahtab was inducted as Union Minister at Delhi for which the responsibility of leading the State was given to most prominent Congress Socialist leader Naba Krushna Choudhury who had better equation with Pandit Nehru. The 1952 elections experienced better Congress performance for national legislature but it failed to live up to people's aspiration. However with the support of independence the Ministry under Choudhury was formed. This post-independence government took charge when the national Legislature was making Legislation to end age old feudalism and introducing community development programme and Five Year Plans. The Orissa Legislature was equally interested for pro-poor policies and revamping the village administration. The previous Congress Ministry took steps for multi-purpose dams and prepared blue print for industrial development.

Political instability and leadership crises arose when SRC Report was published and Orissa's demand for incorporation of Sadheikala and Khurasuan was not accepted. The State experienced agitation which later on turned violent. The Chief Minister was found running short of steps.

Prior to 1957 election the CLP leadership was changed. H.K. Mahtab who was Governor of the then Bombay led the party to the 1957 poll. The master political strategist had the worst electoral debacle and the 1957-61 legislative history was a black period. Even in 1959 an unholy coalition between INC and main opposition Ganatantra Parishad was formed to save the legislature. The coalition made young aspirant legislators hostile. Finally UPCC had to face the music and Biju Patnaik who was the architect of the above coalition ended it and the first President’s Rule was imposed. Thus, 1950s experienced political instability, electoral reverses for INC, rise of political base of Parishad and Socialists and unfair means to save the government leading to ruling-opposition combined coalition. This period saw some administrative changes, completion of Hirakud Dam and Rourkela Steel Plant and establishment of some Cultural Academies.

In the first mid-term poll of 1961, the INC scored a spectacular victory under the leadership of Biju Patnaik. The stable Congress government received blessings from Pandit Nehru and a good number of projects and industries came up. Technology and technical education were accorded priority. Sunabeda MIG, REC, Rourkela, RRL, Bhubaneswar, Sainik School, Bhubaneswar, OUAT, Bhubaneswar and RCE, Bhubaneswar emerged as prominent features of a forward looking government. Steps were taken to establish Paradeep Port and construction of Express Highway to feed the port. However, the third legislature experienced three Chief Ministers. After exit of Patnaik who resigned under Kamraj plan, the lieutenant of Patnaik Biren Mitra had to bow down on charges of law and order problem and corrupt practices. He was replaced by Sadasiv Tripathy. The third legislature experienced turbulent national Scenario due to Sino-Indian war, Indo- Pak war, death of Nehru and later Shastri and rising Communalism in the country Smt. Indira Gandhi became the new PM and 1967 poll saw a declining Congress.

Politics in Orissa : Post-Nehru Era

Nehru’s death in 3 May experienced a new wave of politics in the States. Despite a soft-spoken Shastri in command, many State units of Congress revolted against central leadership.
Mahtab who won 1962 Lok Sabha poll unopposed and was made Deputy leader of the party in the House, could not find proper placement after Nehru’s death. The Congress in Odisha was also distanced then from him. During the crises in State Congress leadership, Mahtab gave a blow to the party by engineering a split and Jana Congress was born. After Shastris sad demise Indira took the command. In 1967 poll Odisha saw a pre-poll understanding and alliance between Swatantra and Jana Congress with support from P.S.P. A coalition was formed and R. N. Singh Deo led the government. In 1969 Congress entered into a new crisis after the death of Zakir Hussain, the President of India. On the issue of choice of his successor, Indira caused a split and led the party with a different message and approach. Odisha Congress which had a severe poll debacle and Biju Babu out of the legislature and reckoning at national level was denied a ticket to enter the Second Chamber. This humiliation led to the formation of Utkal Congress, a regional outfit.

Odisha provided a new image to regional party formation and post-formation politics. Jana Congress was born out of frustration and Utkal Congress was founded due to humiliation. Both these regional parties born out of womb of Congress became part of coalition formation immediately after their formation. Further, both these parties returned back to their home party within couple of years. After exit of Biju from Congress Mahtab returned to Congress fold and led an unsuccessful attempt to win election. Utkal Congress merged itself with congress but Patnaik was denied entry which led to the revival of Utkal Congress and this time became centre of opposition unity against Congress. The coalition era was also the period of political instability and defection. Odisha was under President’s Rule in 1961 but it had the central rule in quick succession in 1971, 1973, 1976 (suspended animation) and 1977. The last one was in 1980.

**The Era of big-majority Politics:**

Odisha began her legislative innings with political instability and peculiar coalition formations. For a decade the State politics was influenced by regional parties who deserted congress and also by political defection. But national politics played instrumental role in regulating the features of State politics. Nandini Satapathy who held the reign of power in 1972 by causing massive defection from Utkal Congress how to suffer as she lost blessings of Gandhi during the emergency. The post-emergency election held in March, 1977 saw the exit of Congress from centre and causing dissolution of State Assemblies where Congress fared badly and Odisha had to go for poll after a brief Period of President’s Rule.

The 1977 election for the State Assembly created a new era, big majority politics with Janata Party getting three figure Seats in 1977 and Congress winning in similar fashion in 1980 and 1985. After exit of Rajiv Gandhi in 1989 Biju Patnaik could set all time record by winning 123 Seats out of 147 in the State legislature. Of course, Biju Patnaik could understand ground realities and took the help of cadre based left parties in 1977 and after wards in the 1995 election, Biju Patnaik was pressurised by other party leaders to go to the election alone. Janaki Ballav Patnaik who provided 10 year Congress rule in 1980’s but lost miserably in 1990 was not given the role of conducting Congress strategy in 1995. This time Congress secured a comfortable majority with 80 seats. The number was encouraging but alarming as well. Hence, Janaki Ballav Patnaik was
preferred over others for a stable government in the State.

The political climate in the country after 1996 was developed into non-Congress coalitions and rise of BJP. An undesirable period of political instability reigned the centre and Biju Patnaik who could have provided a better Government was denied the opportunity and the king maker Biju could not become king. He died in 1997.

‘Patnaik Era’ started in Odisha in 1980 and it is now continuing. In chronological order Janaki Ballava, Biju and Naveen represent the era. Though Biju Babu consumed only five years out of 36 years and junior Patnaik is at the helm for the last 16 years, Janaki Ballava remained in power for 14 years. Though economic profile of Janaki Ballava administration was not encouraging in terms of people’s benefit, yet the period when Janaki Ballava was Chief Minister, he had to confront Indira, Rajiv and National Front and NDA Government at the centre with less than one year of P.V. Narasimha Rao. He initiated some projects relating to irrigation, industrial development, tourism, cultural artifacts during golden jubilee of the State and during his second term he was pioneer in energy reform in the country. Biju Babu had lot of ideas and he was crest fallen when he returned to head the state after twenty seven years. He could not digest the economic collapse, moral degradation and mandal-mandir controversies. He called the spade a spade. He believed in austerity measures and man like Biju Babu who believes in giving, took away many continuing benefits from employees, announced expenditure cut, guest control and initiated daily wage of workers to make it living wage.

After Biju’s sad demise, his followers distanced them from Janata Dal and came closer to BJP. In fact BJD was formed as a new regional outfit which came closer to BJP and aligned itself with NDA. A surprise choice for the party was induction of Naveen Patnaik who was unknown to the people but the sympathy for senior Patnaik has given him unconditional support from day one in the state. BJD has not looked back since the days of its formation. It rode to power as NDA partner in 2000 and it had coalition with BJP till 2009 and since 2009 it has swept the poll all alone. The 16 years of BJD Government under Naveen Patnaik has more electoral successes than reverses. Both Congress and BJP are running short of strategies to unseat Naveen. 2019 is now eyed by them.

In 2000 and 2004 BJD-BJP combine had reasonably did well and during the post-supercyclone reconstruction era was on the alert. NDA Government under Vajpayee was source of inspiration for them. In 2004 UPA under the leadership of Congress came to power and the coalition in the state pursued a watch and work system and UPA due to coalition compulsion did not react in the manner it should. In 2009 the coalition arithmetic went in a different direction and BJD preferred to go alone. BJD was trying for a majority but the Odishan electorate showered all kinds of blessings. UPA-II had a hesitant start and it needed the support of BJD to keep it away from formation of a strong ‘Third Front’. As Odisha was on an industrial development mission and environmental clearance and other kinds of support were essential, it was observed that BJD Government in Odisha had diplomatically handled the relation and it received accolades from central ministers whenever they visited the state.

The 2014 election was fought with NDA pitching its Premier face and UPA dilly-dallying
over the matter. In Odisha from day one it was seen that Naveen is having a cake walk and in fact his party captured 117 seats and both INC & BJP had major electoral reverses. Both the opposition parties are trying for number two position in the state and that is why BJD does not apprehend any challenge to its number one status.

**Conclusion:**

In the political arena Odisha has carved out a special place. The electoral politics and legislative businesses during the pre-independence era gave indications of factional politics. After independence the post-merger scenario raised eyebrows as socio-political integration between British Odisha and princely Odisha did not take place. This caused political instability, uncertainty and unholy coalition in 1950’s to save Congress during one Party dominant era. The post-President Rule Midterm election held in 1961 was a sense of relief for Congress. But from 1967 to 1977 the state provided two coalition governments keeping Congress out, massive political defections and minority Congress government's with two doses of president’s Rule. Since 1977 till date big majority politics’ has again put Odisha in the national political map as a laboratory of political experiments and experiences. Since 1980 Odisha is under ‘Pataik Era’ (JB-BIJU-NAVEEN).

The State provided top leaders and political strategies. But all of them lost their credibility with central leadership. The State has experienced six doses of ‘President’s Rule’. Since 2004 the party in power in the state is opposed to the party/parties at the helm of affairs in Delhi. Party identification by the electorate in the State is very sharp. Thus, BJD is in power in the state for a record fourth time.

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