

Biju Babu and District Reorganisation

Dr. Tusar Kanta Pattnaik

“If the area of operation gets limited and fragmented too, the managerial efficiency becomes seemingly developed and the success reaches very smoothly” once advised Napoleon Bonaparte to his military generals. Biju Patnaik who idolized Napoleon had taken a cue from his remarks, strived passionately to crystallize his long cherished desire for district reorganization. Although it was not materialized in his first tenure owing to his short stint, but in his second spell as Chief Minister, Biju Babu started with renewed vigour and unremitting zeal for district reorganization in order to make administration transparent and closer to the people.



election to the Orissa Assembly in January, 1937. The new province was then consisted of only 6 districts and the income of the new state was less than rupees two crores. The income was just enough to maintain the administrative machinery. No major development, could be undertaken with such meagre income. The immediate task of popular ministry formed in July, 1937 was to bring all the districts under one unified law. While the three coastal districts in Cuttack, Puri, and Balasore were being administered under Bengal Laws, Ganjam and Koraput districts were being administered under Madras Presidency Laws and Sambalpur being administered under Central Provinces Laws.

Formation of District after Independence :

Government of Orissa, soon after the merger of states in 1948 declared seven new districts over and above the already existing six

Since the inauguration of the new province of Orissa on 1st April 1936, which was administered by an Advisory Council consisting of the former Orissa members of Bihar and Orissa and Madras provinces council till 1937 March. A council of ministers was constituted after the

districts. The new districts were Dhenkanal, Sundergarh, Mayurbhanja, Phulbani, Balangir and Kalahandi. By formation of these new districts, comprising some major and important ex-states, Government of Orissa tactfully managed to somewhat assuage the feelings of the ex-rulers and the people of those former states. There were as many as 471 districts in India in 1992 as against a total of 300 districts in India in 1952. This means that there was a rise of 57% of districts in All India level within a span of 40 years as against absolutely no rise in Orissa. Chief Minister of Orissa Naba Krushna Choudhury was contemplating to form new districts in order to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the district administration. Government of India set a Commission for reorganization of states known as the State Reorganisation Commission (SRC) in 1955-56. The state government then decided to put forth its legitimate demands for merger of the outlying Oriya-speaking tracts of Sareikela and Kharasuan in Bihar with Orissa before the Commission. Accordingly the work started in marathon speed in a new department specially opened for the purpose under Shri Radhanath Rath, the then Development Minister in 1955 to prepare Government records and relevant documents in support of the government's stand to take its claim for Sareikela and Kharasuan in the North and other out-lying Oriya tracts in Andhra in the South and in Madhya Pradesh in the West. Shri Radhanath Rath worked day and night for months together and led unimpeachable evidence and advanced irrefutable arguments before SR Commission on behalf of the Government of Orissa to support its claim. But owing the strong Bihar lobby in Delhi, the Commission in their recommendation in 1956 rejected the demands of Orissa on the border areas in question. Following the announcements of the SRC rejecting Orissa's just and reasonable

claims of Sareikela and Kharasuan, there was a very strong movement in Orissa known as the SRC movement in 1956 which took a toll of a few lives after which Naba Babu voluntarily stepped down from the government and thus his dream of reorganization of districts could not materialize. District reorganization could not also be possible in the following years because of continued political instability in the state.

Biju Patnaik brought stability to the Government as Orissa's Chief Minister in 1961 and started the "Age in Industrialisation" in the state. Unfortunately Biju stepped down from power in October 1963 in the Kamraj Plan. Because of his busy engagements for all round industrialization of the state, reorganization of districts could not be made possible within his short tenure of Chief Ministership.

Political instability again continued in the state after Biju Patnaik left his office. However, shortly before the proclamation of President's Rule in Orissa in 1973 Government appointed a "District Reorganisation Committee" under the chairmanship of justice Raj Kishore Das which gave its report in 1975. Despite certain recommendations of this Committee, Government could not take any definite decision on reorganization of districts for want of resources or for their lack of political will till 1990.

Janata Dal in Orissa under the leadership of vibrant Biju Patnaik won the 1990 General election in a thumping majority. In its election manifesto, Janata Dal promised for reorganization of districts. Mr. Patnaik desired and evinced keen interest to give priority to district reorganization which he could not fulfill within short span of his first Chief Ministership during the year 1961-63. Biju Babu gave Revenue Minister Surendra Nayak green signal to go ahead with the onerous

task of reorganization of districts and immediately formed a cabinet sub-committee under his chairmanship for necessary guidance and timely aid and advice. The stupendous job was accomplished in time as the officers cooperated sincerely. By the beginning of October 1990 the Cabinet decided for formation of ten new districts in the state for which a grant of rupees five crores was also made. On further demands from the breadth and length of the state for creation of more and more districts, Government later on decided to form five more new districts thus making a total of 15 in all. Considering the recommendations of the 15 year old reports of the aforesaid District Reorganisation Committee and keeping in view the changes in the contemporary political, geographical, economic and social sectors and such other relevant factors and above all, the opinion of the people Government decided to form these new districts in the state. Sequel to the formation of these new districts, of course, the overhead cost of expenditure on the administration head was increased for which Government made demands to the 10th Finance Commission of India for the release of the

proportionate share of claim from the Centre on this head to meet this deficit with limited resources. Govt. also made a budget provision of Rs. 6 crores for this purpose for the year 1993-94. Even Government was ready to observe economy and timely financial austerity in case of amounts falls shorts of requirements. To achieve and implement this noble purpose of instant reorganization some inconveniences in the matter of office and residential accommodations, conveyance and vehicle, furniture and other facilities and prerequisites in the new district headquarters, was palpable but with the utmost sincerity of Biju Patnaik Government, it was gradually diminished. Finally district reorganization which was chimera for myriad Oriyas became a reality.

Dr. Tusar Kanta Pattnaik, Head of the Department, Political Science, KISS (Campus 10), Patia, Bhubaneswar-24.