

The politics of Odisha since independence has gone through several transitory phases and led a “paradigm shift” after a “crisis stint”. But the contemporary Odishan politics already manifests itself into a democratic transformation and political maturity. It follows by a number of welfare measures, social security policies, and inclusive growth. **The biggest achievement of the present Odishan politics is political stability, restoration of law and order and efficiency in administrative management.** Obviously, the Odia people learnt many things from the politics of 1970s Odisha which was simmered with a lot of unprecedented political crises such as mass political defection, unstable governments,

elections were held for the first time. The Anchal Sasan Act was adopted with a view to streamlining revenue administration of the State. This was a revolutionary measure for the transfer of power to the hands of the common man. Transport was nationalized for the purpose of better management and administration. The Five Year Planning was started in the country from 1952 and Odisha also introduced development planning. Community Development Projects started operating from October 2, 1952. Steps were taken for the rapid industrialization of the State by generating electricity from Duduma and Hirakud.

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## Nandini Satpathy and the New Grammar of Odisha Politics

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president’s rule, coalition politics, factionalism and political infightings.

But the first era of Odishan politics from 1950-57 was an era of development and transformation. Mostly the era was headed by former Chief Minister Naba Krushna Chaudhury. It was during this time that the construction work of multi-purpose Hirakud Project, Muchkund Electricity Project and Rourkela Steel Plant were inaugurated. The Zamindari Abolition Act was adopted and steps were taken for abolition of the system, the Orissa Gram Panchayat Act was adopted during the period and Panchayat

The second phase of Odishan politics was the phase of unprecedented political crisis. The rise of Nandini Sapathy (1931-2006) as first female leader in Odishan politics was not all of sudden but inevitable. Her appearance was politically contextual and cropping of the time. Her stint showed another phase of development era: 1972-76. She restored the foundation of progressivism, subalternism and feminism in Odishan politics followed the political legacy of Naba Krushna Chaudhury. Nandini was young and dynamic who was also known as “Agni Kanya” (daughter of fire). In her entire lifespan, Nandini nurtured her political ideology through

three major ideological apparatuses: Gandhism, communism and feminism. Nandini was also imbibed the literary value from her family. She firmly stood against feudalism and bureaucratic democracy. She opposed a prayer song of her school when she was in class one. The prayer was as follows: “Ehi mora janmabhumi ehi maharaja, janme janme karuthibi e duhinka puja” (this is my motherland and there is the great king, in every birth of my life I would worship both of them). As a school child Nandini took active part in Quit India Movement. She learnt spinning and made clothes for herself during her school days. She came to the politics through student activism. Nandini while pursuing MA in Ravenshaw College joined in ‘Students’ Federation’, the student wing of the Communist Party. She was elected as Student Union’s president of Ravenshaw College. By the time she was inspired by communism and established herself as a firebrand student leader at state level. In 1951, there was a student movement in Odisha against the rising cost of college education. Nandini took the leadership and while protesting, she was lathi charged by the police. The movement later developed into a national youth movement. She along with many other student leaders was jailed.

Daughter of a noted Odia writer and poet, Kalindi Charan Panigrahi, Mrs Satpathy wields a powerful pen and is an equally powerful speaker in Odia. Her short stories have already been translated into several languages. She joined Congress party and became the President of Women Forum. She met Indira Gandhi in Chennai during the annual meeting of Congress party and then they became close to each other. Mrs Nandini Satpathy who came to the Congress via the Student Federation had spent several years

in jail. Though she got her first political lessons from her uncle, the late Bhagawati Charan Panigrahi, founder of the Communist party in Odisha, Mrs Satpathy has an intensely religious bent of mind. She and her husband, Debendra Satpathy, were devout Aurobindoites.

Nandini, as a Chief Minister delivered service to the downtrodden and managed a sweet link between administration and development. She broke the bureaucratic egoism in Odisha Secretariat. The Indian Civil Servants were called as “sir” by cabinet ministers. She sharply reacted that how the people’s representatives could be insulted and underestimated by “clerical staffs” in a liberal democracy. She also changed the culture of allotting big bungalows to civil servants and smaller one to ministers. She used to say, “baadeile malaa, na baadeile amalaa” (officers need to be shown their limitation, otherwise they would be dictator”. Nandini Satpathy attempted to resist Indira Gandhi’s policies during the Emergency and she also opposed the proclamation of national emergency.

A United Front Government was formed under the leadership of an independent non-member, Biswanath Das in April, 1971. In June 1972 ten members of the Swatantra Party led by Shri Gangadhar Pradhan resigned from their party and withdrew their support from the Coalition. Subsequently, all the 32 members of Utkal Congress decided to join the Congress Party. The coalition government of Biswanath Das was dissolved and a Congress Ministry under the leadership of Mrs. Nandini Satpathy came to power on June 14, 1972. Mrs. Satpathy resigned her office of Minister of State in the Union Ministry of Information and Broad-casting and was formally elected leader of Congress Party.

Mrs. Satpathy had to quit office on March 1, 1973 and the State came under the spell of President's Rule on the 3rd March, 1973 for the third time which continued in operation till the 6th March, 1974. The mid-term election held in February, 1974. On the 1st of March when Mrs. Satpathy resigned, the Odisha Legislative Assembly was in the midst of its budget session and was scheduled to meet at 8am. On the same day, the Assembly had to pass the Appropriation Bill. The Congress was reduced to minority on the floor of the House. In the mid-term election held in February, 1974 no party could secure majority; it was an uncertain mandate, but Congress emerged as the single largest party with 69 seats. A Congress Ministry headed by Mrs. Satpathy was sworn in on March 6, 1974, with the support of the Communist Party.

Nandini government tried to reach out the marginalized sections: Adivasis, Dalits, poor and women. She ran her government from the below. The Indira government announced 20-point economic programme in June, 1975 in the context of the proclamation of National Emergency. Nandini government had already, in the meanwhile, initiated many of the programmes included in the 20-point economic programme. The Government had provided land to the landless poor. Dalits and Adivasis were primarily the focus of development. Tribal development works started in Koraput, Kalahandi, Dhenkanal and Mayurbhanj. The Odisha Money Lender's Act was modified to make the villagers free from the clutches of money-lenders. The Government had fixed minimum wages for the daily labourers, wage-earners and workers. Forced labour in the shape of Bethi and Gothi was abolished by the Government. Several novel measures were adopted for the poor and meritorious students

and the students belonging to weaker sections of the society. Book Banks were established as a matter of policy in many schools and colleges, more scholarships and stipends were instituted for the poor and meritorious students many of whom also got the advantage of free supply of books, note-books and papers. The primary school teachers were recruited and were given revised pay scale. Nandini government was instrumental in bringing numerous social reforms and several legal and administrative measures against social evils. Dowry Abolition Act was adopted as a measure of social reform. Prostitution was declared as a legal offence and abortions were legalized. Restrictions were imposed on production and sale of narcotic drugs and pills in order to save the young men from their impact. A system of pension was introduced for the old and helpless as a measure of social security familiar to the concept of Welfare State. The Government had increased Bus fares and had reintroduced land revenue, though road cess was decreased. A system of levy was introduced in 1974 on paddy which was not a successful measure of policy. Though a target was fixed for procurement of paddy the target could not be reached due to the failure of the system of levy and there was the verdict of the Orissa High Court that Levy was not legal. Again in 1976, Government had promulgated an Ordinance for procurement of paddy and rice by introduction of the system of Levy. Nandini had differences with the Governor because of which Akbar Ali Khan was the first Governor since independence to resign his office and to go away. Nandini Satpathy tendered resignation on December 16, 1976 and President's Rule was proclaimed in Odisha for the fourth time. Internal dissensions within the party forced Nandini to quit.

In a brief statement to the Press, Nandini appealed to the people to maintain peace and declared her readiness to be guided by the Prime Minister in her future activities. She stated that “for the time being, she would keep out of state politics and serve the people in her capacity as an ordinary legislator”.

The India Today (1977) magazine reports that “It was a touching scene at her residence where hundreds of Congress workers, legislators and friends stood in silence as the expected came true. The capital wore a deserted look with only dozens of police vans making rounds of the city. Even before her resignation was announced the Adviser to the Governor had reached the state. The people of Odisha, still unaware of the high drama, took the President’s proclamation stoically. Though frail and of indifferent health, she is known for her grit and unfailing sense of duty. Her intention to retire from politics for the time being should not be taken on its face value”.

However, the appearance of Nandini in Odisha politics was a milestone for social and political development. Her primary objective of inclusive growth was phenomenal. Truly, she founded the legacy of welfare politics of Odisha. She understood that development is not deprivation. It is always inclusive and exclusionary in nature. Under the leadership of Nandini, the then Odisha witnessed unprecedented growth in many areas such as rural development, tribal welfare, education, women empowerment, art and culture. Her subaltern approach to welfare made her popular among the common people of Odisha. The opposition leaders used to recite this poem to defame her in electoral politics which is as

follows: “Nandini Satpathy bhari chaturi, chaaula kilo tanke saturi” (Nandini Satpathy is very clever who makes rice so cheap available at Rs.1.70)”. The contemporary Odishan politics, no doubt, strongly strengthen with the past experience. The best part of the current politics is political stability and transparent leadership. The Odisha state has been able to draw the attention of global investors towards the resource-rich areas. Democracy is quite successfully persisting and dictating the liberal ethos of Odisha state.

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