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**Leadership, Economic Reforms and Policy Processes in an Indian State:  
The Regime of ‘JB’ (Chief Minister Janaki Ballav Patnaik) in Odisha**

by

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## **Leadership, Economic Reforms and Policy Processes in an Indian State: The Regime of 'JB' (Chief Minister Janaki Ballav Patnaik) in Odisha<sup>1</sup>**

**Radhakanta Barik** <sup>2</sup>

### **ABSTRACT:**

*In Indian society, political leaders play a creative role in the process of modernization by integrating diverse social groups. Mobilization of diverse social groups under effective leadership channelizes the energy of these groups into the political system. Dialogue among these groups, the political leadership, the bureaucracy and the civil society bring synergy. This synergy gets articulated in the policy-making process. Constant dialogue and feedback processes make these policies work and produce positive results. JB Patnaik, a leader of the Provincial Congress Party, succeeded in creating an environment of giving impetus to the development of a traditional society like that of Odisha. He remained the Chief Minister of the State for three terms. A stable political regime supported the State government to move ahead in the process of modernization. However, his leadership style and the venality and corruption at the core of his regime, led ultimately to the decline of the Congress Party in Odisha.*

Keywords: Janaki Ballav Patnaik, Odisha, Congress Party, Leadership, Economic Reforms

### **INTRODUCTION**

Few textbooks on politics in India contain a section dealing with political leadership. Kaviraj (1999), for example, explains politics based mainly on structural reasons. The text ignores politics as a lively activity, where leadership, ideology and party interact to transform society. Interaction between the leadership and the institutions is defined as a political regime (Rudolph, Rudolph 1987). In a society, which is in transition to modernity, a politician plays a creative role in channelling the energy of people, though there are constraints imposed by the institutions. They have imagination and vision to put men and matter in the right perspective. Some politicians, more energetic than others, dominate the politics of a transitional society. Leadership qualities are taught but not political leadership yet. Politics is more complex than any other area of human activity (Aristotle 1992).

### **A TRADITIONAL SOCIETY**

Indian society was a traditional society where political authority was determined by the feudal class interfaced with upper castes (Saberwal 1999). Both these concepts were related to leadership. The relationship had both economic and social dimensions. Economic power was located in the production relation between the peasants and the feudal lords. Feudal aristocracy did many benevolent activities that created respect for them in the hearts of the peasants. Besides these economic factors, one could not ignore the location of feudal authority in the caste hierarchy in Indian society. The

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caste system had a generative value, which brought legitimacy to the upper castes in the minds of the people (Dumont 1970). Power and authority in a traditional society brought the question of interface between class and caste.

In the first phase after Independence, the social relationship based on the patron-client model helped the traditional elite to get power in democracy (Frankel 1990). In a democracy, it had a supportive role to play for the politicians, who hailed from this class. India's Independence provided space for them to work as a class of politicians. Democracy allowed them to have a close contact with people belonging to various castes and classes. Interaction made them more mature. In the process, they lost their feudal privileges. In politics, both tradition and modern ideas worked together (Morris Jones 1964). They created a hierarchical political apparatus, consisting of people who used to work with them and some new members were allowed to enter the ranks of the old elite. They had an apparatus in each constituency where they used to rule (Myron Weiner 1968; Kohli 1988). Those who nurtured the apparatus survived in democratic politics. The second rank leaders, who used to work with them prior to Independence, replaced them. Political democracy created space for work for both types of politicians. Those who came from the ranks of the traditional elite survived in politics. They had to tolerate new types of leaders, with a different outlook and from a different social background. The Congress Party mediated between the traditional political elite and new elite.

### **THE ROLE OF THE CONGRESS PARTY**

It was the Congress Party-led national movement that created a disorienting impact on the traditional society. It brought a class of politicians who acquired respectability and legitimacy among the people. The mobilization of people, both at the level of caste and class during the national movement, created the basis for a new leadership in Indian society. This new class of leaders could be called a new elite or a counter to the traditional elite (Khilnani 1997). They established themselves vis-à-vis the colonial state. The colonial state recognized them as politicians and treated them as political prisoners. In the process, a profession of politics took shape in modern India. The national movement provided a laboratory for creating a class of politicians. At the same time, the traditional elite in due time got de-recognized. This process of de-recognition and the creation of a new class of politicians were executed simultaneously. This was a moot point in the political history of modern India.

#### *Congress under Nehru and Indira:*

During the Nehruvian era, the provincial leaders played an important role. Nehru, on a regular basis, used to consult the provincial leaders on various national and international issues. His regular correspondence with the Chief Ministers of different states indicated that he used to consult and cajole them into making public policies. Nehru used to warn the leaders, wherever necessary. He had the moral authority of having worked as an architect of modern democratic India to play the role of the dominant political personality in Indian political system (Kaviraj 1980). He was able to use his political authority in the political party to build a consensus on crucial public policies. Nehru succeeded in persuading various sections within the party to come to a compromise, thus bringing about a moderate legislation, although his own stand on such issues was very radical and clear. He did not impose his views on them. He persuaded them to accept his views. The politics of persuasion and pressure, which started during Nehru's time, produced a moderate result. Implementation of moderate land reforms created a tenuous relation between the old and the new elite. These values became critical in the construction of a political culture in democracy. Functioning in a democracy created a sobering influence on political leaders. Circumstances made them feel frustrated, but one had to accommodate various viewpoints to remain in power.

Indira Gandhi succeeded in combining organizational leadership with the administrative position of the Prime Minister (Gandhi 2007). She became very decisive in the party matters. A new power equation formed within the Congress party. The central high command became more powerful than the provincial leaders. This partly weakened the party as a democratic organization (Kothari 1970). She was able to win a massive mandate single-handedly in the general elections of 1971 and 1980. Post-Emergency splits created some vacuum in the middle order leadership. Some of the top provincial leaders decided to go with the Janata Party. They sided with the Janata Party which came to power in 1977. Some of them built the mass base of the party at the provincial level. Their support base, which was articulated in the name of Mrs. Gandhi, got disoriented (Manor 1980). A fragile and nebulous relation was created between the provincial leaders and the central leaders of the party. Indian democracy, during the Emergency, could bring to the fore faceless politicians like JB Patnaik. JB Patnaik, an unknown politician at both the provincial and national levels, came to the forefront because of the nature of the reorganization of the Congress Party under Mrs. Gandhi. He rose to prominence because of Sanjay Gandhi who was the *de facto* leader in the organization during Emergency. JB was a known face in regional journalism. In the process of disappearance of known leaders in politics, new faces came to the surface. We would analyze one such unknown face in Indian politics.

*Social and Geographical Environment of JB:*

Janaki Ballav Patnaik belonged to the region of Khurda which had a key position in the history of modern politics. Khurda region had never reconciled to British rule. In the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the peasants of this region rebelled against the colonial state. To crush this rebellion, the colonial state used armed forces. Perhaps this was the first rebellion in the history of colonial rule in India. During the national movement, this region played a decisive role. The Congress leadership mobilized the peasants of this region against the feudal lords. In the field of education, this region was very much advanced. During the national movement, the school students belonging to this region became very active. JB belonged to this region. He was quite aware of the political history of this area. As a school student, he led a movement against British rule. When the Khurda High school joined the 1942 movement, he was a student there and was active in politics. When he came to Ravenshaw College, he found that this college was the nerve centre of the national movement. As a student of this college, he joined the national movement. Hostel inmates played an important role in student politics. Students staying in the hostel could hold discussions and chalk out plans. In 1946, under JB's leadership, the West Hostel students demonstrated against the college authority and hoisted the national flag on the sports day of the college. He decided to take part in politics notwithstanding the element of uncertainty in this field. He was a man of self-respect, who did not want to depend on anyone financially. As his family had not left enough resources, which he could fall back on, he looked for a profession that could satisfy both his needs – earning his livelihood and engaging in political activities. Journalism enabled him to combine the two (Jaffrey 2004). It is interesting to note that the history of regional press could not be separated from national politics. Nationalist intelligentsia at the provincial level initiated themselves into journalism, both as an occupation and as a means of propagating ideas of nationalism. Odiya journalism was no exception.

The city of Cuttack played a definite role in shaping JB's intellectual and political life. It was the hub of both intellectual and political activities. It was the headquarter of the then Orissa division of Bengal Presidency. Cuttack was an important commercial and business centre. In ancient times, it was the capital of many Odiya kings. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Cuttack city provided a forum for debates. Many of the intellectuals of 19<sup>th</sup> century Odisha aspired to settle down in Cuttack town. The city had town hall and

other community centres for holding debates and discussions on crucial social and political issues. Most of the important newspapers and weeklies started being published from here. Students from all over Odisha came here for study. Many of them became student leaders. Later they took public life seriously. There were politicians from each district, who were elected to the college unions. This indicates the cosmopolitan character of the city. JB came to Ravenshaw College as a student, and started his journalist career here. The cultural and political life of the city shaped his mental outlook. He inherited a broad social consciousness and a cosmopolitan outlook. He had friends from each part of Odisha. He nurtured these relationships in a meaningful manner. Such a wide network of relationships among castes, communities, and regions brought out the best human qualities in him. He valued human relationships and cultivated friendship with as many people as possible. He did not make any distinction between public and social life. His political life could be located in the cultural matrix of the city. In 1971, he started his political career from the city. That is why he got popular support, cutting across castes and communities. The city had a substantive Muslim and Christian population who supported him. The business communities were either Gujaratis or Marwaris, who gave him material and monetary support. He got the trust of these powerful trading communities of Odisha. Politics in parliamentary system brought unity across class and caste. Max Weber elucidates this crucial linkage function of caste with the larger civil society: "Caste was the transmission belt between the speculative ideas of an intellectual elite and the mundane orientation of religious observance among the people at large." Circumstances helped the provincial leaders to come up and dominate the politics of a region. Rajiv Gandhi and Narasimha Rao allowed themselves to become friendly with the provincial leaders. However, at the same time, the logic of provincial politics removed many provincial leaders of the Congress from the political scene. The Provincial Congress Committees were ridden with factionalism. These factions very often took the shape of the personalities and castes. The Congress Party was like a good football team where the midfield was more important. Unless the midfield players created chances for the strikers, no strikers could score a goal. The midfield players played a double role as compared to the strikers. They created chances for the strikers and provided a shield for their defence. The leaders at the provincial level were playing the role of the midfield players in a football team. The Congress Party had some of the best leaders at the provincial level. Their contribution in strengthening the party needed to be underlined (Chibber 1999; Bendix 1960: 196). At the same time, the caste leaders working as middlemen or brokers were not correct (middle men as 'pyraveekar') (Reddy and Hargopal 1985). In the political process, interaction got established between the caste leaders and politicians, mediated by a political ideology and political party. As a pre-modern society, Odiya society functioned in a segmented way. Each local leader or leaders behaved like a king. As Fox describes, "the rajas, choudharis, talukdars or babus" "usually inherited their prerogatives of power and influence either as autocratic leaders or republican representatives of their kin groups," as the "pivotal figure," and a "hinge linking the local stratified lineage with state authority" (Fox 1971:47-8).

This art of negotiation with politicians of different views helped him as the Chief Minister of the state. Most of the powerful politicians did control newspapers of the state; JB controlled one of the leading Odiya papers.

#### *JB as an Apprentice under HK Mahtab*

The major part of JB's life was dominated by politics. His was, in a profound sense, a political life. He first found a meaningful career in state politics under the patronage and guidance of HK Mahtab, the Chief Minister and a prominent national leader during the national movement. Building on this foundation, he became a major political leader in his own right. Politics demanded a lot of mediation between the kin

and the political party. As both belonged to the same caste, the “fictitious kinship” provided them a social basis for their joint enterprise in politics (Bailey 1970). Odisha had small number of elite who associated themselves with the lineage of some established families. Caste and kinship created a social imaginary which worked well in a backward state like Odisha. The foundation of this style of politics was laid by Mahtab and pursued by JB. As Fox puts it, “their intermediary role between state and kin defined locality sometimes brings affluence and power, at other disinheritance or even rustication and banditry” (Fox 1971: 165). He was able to remain CM for three terms, which was a rare case in the history of Congress politics. His first two terms were the most fruitful years in his public life. Very few leaders had remained at the helm of affairs for such a long period. Given the fact that JB was CM for three terms and PCC president for such a long period, he surely belonged to a different species. Leadership qualities cannot be learnt from textbooks. One can learn from field experiences and an active political life. This can sometimes create frustration and disorientation in one’s public life. It was not the case that JB had not experienced such moments of crisis. He could bear and manage these situations by resorting to his natural hobby of reading and writing books. He was a passionate reader of books as well as a versatile writer. Whenever he had time, he went to his distant village to enjoy his hobby. This helped him rejuvenate his physical and mental strength, and be ready to face challenges. In solitude, he planned and prepared strategies to face his opponents. He had acquired this quality from his political *guru* Mahtab who was also an intellectual stalwart in national and post-Independent politics of India.

#### *JB Patnaik as a Provincial Leader*

JB, who remained at the helm of affairs for three decades, was the most fascinating leader at the provincial level of the Congress Party. He had leadership qualities. A leader is supposed to have a vision shared by many of his followers, along with leadership qualities to lead the party. The Congress Party had branches at the village and block levels. The DCC (District Congress Committee) played a mediating role between the provincial congress and the block level leaders. The party was a human organization. Human beings played a role at every level. They had certain physical and emotional needs that needed to be satisfied. The party did not have the arrangement for taking care of the needs by paying them monthly salary, as it was the case with a cadre-based party. The responsibility was on the party leadership to see whether their basic needs were taken care of. JB could do so on a day-to-day basis. Financial needs of the party had to be carefully handled, otherwise it would create distrust among workers; it might also lead to corruption. It is interesting to note that JB as a fund manager of the party functioned as a trustee of the party fund. Political leaders are not supposed to use party funds for their personal aggrandizement, but not to use it for personal purposes is a challenging task. At the same time, the leader is supposed to create a relationship of trust with the fellow-workers. The latter had to carry out his orders and communicate at the local level through messages. The feedback process sustained a political party (Bailey 1970). The local leaders carried out his instructions so well that the party did not lose its support base. At the same time, the legitimacy of his authority was affirmed. In this process, a leader attained legitimacy in the party. Interaction on human level played a critical role in the creation of this legitimacy. Legitimacy paved the way for interaction between the individuals and upholding of the symbolic values of society. Susanne Rudolph observed, “As we address the state in Asia we must treat the symbolic as a phenomenon. We must try to create theoretical frameworks that combine a demystified, rationalist worldview with an understanding of the phenomenology in societies where the gods have not yet died” (Rudolph 1987: 742). This is possible when a political leader has a high level of EQ (emotional intelligence). To handle so many people was a strenuous job. JB knew most of the grassroots level leaders. This was his strength, which could not be underestimated. All other dissidents in the party had their support base confined to

some regions or social groups, whereas JB's support base cut across all regions and castes. He had an advantageous position vis-à-vis the dissidents. "The single most significant variable, then, in the establishment of stable government thus far has been the political skill of the Congress leadership the skill to build coalitions of factions or to place their own faction in a dominating position both in the government and in the Congress party simultaneously. Therefore no other variable degree of urbanization, literacy, patterns of social organization or for that matter the speed of economic growth correlates with the stability of government." (Weiner 1968:54) JB had leadership qualities to get the support of the majority as well as innovative management strategy for various factions, so that they do not cross the boundary or *the Lakshman Rekha*. But a difficult art was to be assimilated in one's style of politics. There were other smaller factions led by different personalities. Very often, they united to embarrass him. One had to keep an eye on the movement of each dissident leader. Their movements needed scrutiny on a day-to-day basis by the leader. A leader was supposed to manage the factions within the party, which was more difficult than fighting the opposition. The party high command played a decisive role in selecting and retaining the leader of the PCC (Provincial Congress Committee), though he or she had to be selected from the group of leaders who were at the helm of affairs. The national leadership understood the grammar of politics. They were not supposed to violate this grammar. Their choice was final with regard to the selection of the leader at the provincial level. The leader, at the provincial level, was the captain of the team, with the backing of the management of the team. He or she was not independent of the management. His performance was evaluated both by the teammates and by the management. He had to function at a high level, without which he could not survive. Here, a PCC leader was supposed to keep track of the movements of dissidents in the national capital. He had to make a pause at each stage of the political move and take a calculated stand. Such a careful planning was needed for each move in politics, otherwise his/her chair could be taken away. It is interesting to note that far from being its antithesis, the region had emerged as the nursery of the nation. Findings of the survey research corroborated this view. The 1996 election study showed that on the whole, more people evinced a great deal of trust in the local government (Mitra 2006). A national party depended more on the organizational and leadership qualities of a provincial leader who could negotiate between the state and the civil society at various levels. It demanded political imagination and shrewdness. One had to have such political shrewdness to be a leader at the provincial level. JB had the astuteness to be successful for three decades. As the Indian Federation demanded a lot of cooperation between the provinces and the central government, provincial leaders faced greater challenges of a monolithic political party than did a regional party. India got a lot of praise for her method of combining the power sharing norms of federalism with those of consociationalism (Lijphart 1996).

#### *JB as Chief Minister*

Under his leadership, the Congress Party contested the general election of the Parliament and Assembly of 2004. This was the test of his political maturity and acumen to lead the party at a crucial moment when the Party was not in power—either at the center or in the state for the last six years. A political party like Congress faced many internal problems because of factionalism. Factionalism lost its moral code. Each faction could be involved in heinous activities against the other faction. Factionalism in a peasant society had a sense of moral order. As the peasant society of Odisha was deeply faction ridden, the political party used this opportunity to elicit factional support. During JB's rule one faction got integrated within the Congress Party. Factional politics of rural Odisha got articulated along vertical lines, cutting across castes and communities. This partly helped him remain in power for such a long period. This affected the efficiency of the institutions of governance. To protect the interests of a faction in a locality, he used police and civil administration. This

resulted in corruption and politicization of police. Governance faced the crisis of management. The last phase of JB could be characterized, as Kohli puts it, “the growing problem of governability is best understood as a product of uncontrolled politicisation within both the state and the civil society” (Kohli 1991: 199). JB succeeded in establishing linkages between the factions in a locality and the provincial party organization, which resulted in recruiting leaders of dubious records from the faction into the organization. These leaders did not have qualms over ethical and moral issues which a peasant society used to uphold. At the same time, it brought state–society synergy with the help of elite mediation, which was essential for governance in a changing society. JB’s regime brought institutional synergy where a specific organization, such as administrators, politicians, police, and judges, do not act alone but do so as part of an ensemble (Mitra 2006: 183).

#### *JB and Bureaucracy*

To remain CM, one needed other qualities such as a good sense of administration. One had to be a good manager to use man and material to complete projects. To be an administrator, one had to understand the laws of the state and administrative processes. With the legal sense he had, he could decide what was possible within the framework of an administrative system. Otherwise one could be the victim of one’s ego. Violation of the administrative law created problems for the survival of a leader. He was under public scrutiny. The media was ready to grab an issue and take it to the public to expose a leader. A leader needed to have control over administration. He had to confront powerful elites who were the permanent officials of the state. The Constitution gave them protection, which made the IAS (Indian Administrative Service) lobby a powerful interest group (Potter 1986). In a poor state, they sometimes functioned as a class. They might be from a lower class, but through their marriage relationship, they were absorbed into the rich and the landed elite of Odisha. Their relationship with other Chief Ministers was very tenuous. Unless one held their horns by one’s hands one could not have control over the administration. A politician needed to be both a manager and an administrator. Both ways, he had to share his dreams and vision with his administrators. JB combined both the managerial qualities and administrative leadership into one. This helped him to run the administration for three terms successfully. Politicians and administrators had the capacity to enhance governance. They had to act with the right motives to enhance the governance. To quote Mitra, “The convergence to a common agenda of rule abiding, fair and efficient administrator - leader cooperation can enhance governance whereas the lack of understanding between them can lead to a downward spiral” (Mitra: 183).

#### *JB as a Political Strategist*

Preparation for an electoral strategy needed a deep understanding of the social and political situations of a state. “What are the issues on which the public is agitating? Their issues have to be taken up. For instance today the public is worried of the distress sale of rice. This issue has to be taken up seriously by the Congress party. One has to bring a semblance of unity within the Congress Party. The dissidence has to be controlled. It has to be a united battle, which would produce success. The organization has to be strengthened. The local branches have to be made active. The local leadership has to combine the local issues with the issues of the state. That would bring the party on the agitational path. The continuous agitation by the party against the ruling party can bring us back to power. One has to make some tactical adjustment with the opposition to bring success. One has to sharpen the tactics to defeat the opposition party,” said JB. JB as a shrewd politician knew the distinction between strategy and tactics. Political strategy stemmed from the understanding of the social and economic situations. This depended on the political and ideological position taken by the political party. He was embedded in Congress ideology, which guided him to maintain a secular and democratic stand. For maintaining such a stand, they had to make

compromises with the opposition political parties. These adjustments, which were consequences of the tactics of the political party, followed a definite historical moment. At each historical moment, one had to see the balance between social forces and the strength of the Congress Party vis-à-vis other parties, and accordingly frame a political strategy and tactic. JB had a wide political experience, which guided him to frame a strategy. Given the complexities of the Indian political situation, age and experience play an important role. Perhaps this guided the elderly politicians to be in control of the political party more than the youth. It was a fact that in most of the political parties in India, it was the elderly politicians who controlled the parties. It was possible to guide the youth with their experience and wisdom. Politics demanded a good health, which was possible in old age. If one's memory was sharp, then with the deep understanding of the situation and human beings, it was possible for them to control the strings of the party. It is interesting to note that JB's actions were against his own political judgments. As an opposition leader, he had never led a movement on public issues. The people of Odisha were forced to sell rice in distress for a decade after 1990; but there was hardly any agitation either by the Congress or by the opposition. This resulted in the pauperization of the peasantry in Odisha. He could not reverse the trend, when he came back to power for the third time. The Congress, under his leadership, waited for an opportune moment to speak to the people. This way they could win the election without doing any political mobilization in Odisha.

A popular leader is a great communicator. One has to be a psychologist, who has an understanding of mass psychology. One has to have a command over the idioms and proverbs of the common man's language. One should know public mentality. One has to have command over the language used by the people in their daily lives. One has to use the cultural symbols to create political meaning. JB gave one example of that in the 1978 election. Under the Janata Party rule he used the cultural idioms that signify that in a democracy, the people were the real masters. It is up to the people to make a choice. The people were the masters, and the politicians were their servants. In an election campaign for NAC (Notified Area Council) in Phulabani, he used a popular Jagannath Janan to articulate the public feeling: "*dhan maguneih jana magu neinh maguchi saradha bali*" (O Lord Jagannath! I do not ask for wealth or for progeny, all I ask for is your affection.) Jagannath here was used as a metaphor, which could stand for many things. In the political history of Odisha, Jagannath has been used as a symbol for mobilizing the Odiya people to carve out a separate state. Jagannath was the symbolic head of the Odiya community. He was considered as the leader of the people. The king of Puri did not have a kingdom, but he was taken as the nominee of Lord Jagannath. The parallel in democracy could be something like the people being Lord Jagannath and the CM of the state being their nominee. This appealed to mass psychology. As Jagannath was part of the collective consciousness of the Odiyas, it was easy for the politicians to appeal in the name of Jagannath. The Jagannath cult had provided a legitimacy in the process of state formation in Odisha (Kulke 1995). JB had learnt this art of communication from Jadumani Mangraj who was a popular leader in the 1950s.

JB cannot be considered as totally a politician of the generation that belonged to the nationalist movement. He continued his studies till mid-fifties and joined a profession that was not as stormy as politics. He became active in politics in 1970s. JB acquired qualities from two generations. He inherited the scholarly approach to politics from the older generation, and the pragmatist approach from the post-Independence generation. A combination of these two qualities from different generations made him sturdy and professional. He did not abandon idealism totally nor did he accept the evils of parliamentary politics, like caste, communalism and criminality as a part of his political style. He was above these political values and was aware of the practices of *realpolitik*. As a symbolic leader, he was able to wed the values of an older generation

with those of a new one. He was a linking figure in the whole chain. He managed both state assembly and parliamentary elections. However, he was not a natural party politician: a wheeler and dealer, a fixer and a manager. In principle, he disliked the mechanisms, by which votes were gained but accepted it with great reluctance as Indian society was in a different stage of development, where caste, community, patronage and factions had a role to play in anchoring democratic political practices.

According to JB, Congress leaders must have commitment to socialism, planning, and reforms. Firstly, reform had to be accepted as part of the ideology. Secondly, planning was the key factor for improving the quality of life. Thirdly, the Party was committed to land reforms by which the majority of peasants could be free from bondage. Constructive works were to be pursued by the Congress workers with regard to reforms against the caste system in general, and the practice of untouchability in particular. JB took up the cause of the Sarvodaya with the Gandhian radicals.

### *JB's Political Thinking*

JB remained a Gandhian throughout his political career. He was a great supporter of the planning and development initiated by Nehru. He felt that Gandhi and Nehru were complementary to each other. Both leaders built a political tradition in India that should be nurtured by all Congress workers. JB was more aware of Gandhian values. Gandhi took up politics as a vocation, when he did not have any social obligation. Gandhi did not have any family burden. He was a good Sanatani Hindu, who divided life into four phases. Each phase had to be taken seriously. The third phase was Banaprastha, which meant detachment from the family and worldly life. This lesson of Gandhi was practiced by JB in his own life – that family burden had to be taken by himself; there should not be any help from anybody. He took the vocation of journalism to earn his livelihood. Circumstances helped him to join active politics. He brought out a journal, which became an immediate success. He was a good market strategist. He planned a new journal “Paurash”, which became a success. Politics, which had destroyed values in public life, had to be pursued with conviction and with a purpose, not as a business. The title of the publication “Paurash” itself explained the philosophy of democracy. “Democracy stands for demon, which means the people. It is the will of people, which should dictate. Birth within a family or caste and class should not debar somebody to play a definite role in democracy. This is the dictum of Karna when he is pleading in Mahabharata that one may not have control over one’s birth but one’s personality,” stated by JB. The statement created enough space for the formation of a political personality. JB was modern Karna of Mahabharata, who taught that a personality needed to be built with intelligence and physical strength. Mitra offers “a model of State–Society interaction in which the new social elites, themselves the outcome of a process of democratic political recruitment, play a two track strategy and institute processes of law and order management, social and economic reform and accommodation of identity as an operationally testable model”(Mitra 1999).

JB had a deep understanding of politics from the Mahabharata. He knew that the text was a guide to *realpolitik*. He had never got disoriented in his political life, was never afraid of any strong opponent. It is a point to be noted that Biju Patnaik had an aristocratic background that could not dishearten him. Most of his political battles were against Biju, the leader of the opposition. It is interesting to note that JB and Biju both belonged to the same caste but they had no kinship relationship. JB’s strength lay in work within the Congress Party and his managerial capacity to strike a balance between the party high command and the provincial leaders. His strength lay in being a middle field player, who knew well how to plan strategies and tactics to move ahead to reach the goal post. At the provincial level, the domination of a single party needed a shrewd and cunning politician who could make moves to defeat the opposition, rather than to make the party genuinely concerned about the welfare of the people of

the state. Here, Pampel's remark is worth quoting, "Long term dominance by a single party involves clever tactics of electoral mobilization, ideological positioning and governance. When blended skillfully, these are mutually reinforcing which suggest that one party dominance is far more an art than an inevitability" (Pampel 1990: 32).

#### *Issues of Corruption*

Janata Dal, under the leadership of Biju, fought on the issue of corruption. Once Biju came to power, he instituted an Enquiry Commission against JB. The Vigilance Enquiry did not succeed in bringing any startling news. JB was a politician against whom they did not find any corruption charge. This was a rare thing for a politician who had ruled Odisha for a decade and a half. They did investigate the charges, but found no substance. JB, as an administrator, knew the basic administrative laws that guide policy decisions. He was careful regarding the priority and legality behind administrative decisions. He was against blatant misuse of power. JB functioned as a shrewd administrator, helping his supporters by manipulations, without getting caught in the process. March and Olsen have given some insights into the process of governance in a democratic system: "Action is taken on the basis of a logic of appropriateness associated with roles, routines, rights, obligations, standard operating procedures and practices. Appropriateness refers to a match of behavior to a situation.... Though a series of stratagems like socialization, propaganda, material and moral incentives and sanctions, organizations seek to transform individual behavior into institutional behavior" (March and Olsen 1989: 30-31). This depended on the political parties and civil society, who sustained a high level of political culture. As Odisha had a weak civil society, people were prone to believe in wild allegations against the politicians. On the contrary, when JB, after coming to power in 1995, instituted the Vigilance against Biju Patnaik, some allegations were found to have substance.

#### **THE CASTE FACTORS IN ODISHA POLITICS**

Partly his family and caste helped him to nurture his literary taste. He belongs to Karan caste, which was a literate caste who took education seriously (Mohanty 1990). At the same time, unlike the Kayasthas of North India who had very little association with rural society, this caste had a close link with agriculture. The anthropological traditions helped us decipher the rise of the Karan caste, which made it possible for the people of the upper caste to play a role in public life (Barik 1985; Mohanty 1989; Bailey 1958). Liberal caste tradition created space for various caste leaders to play a role in political parties. At the same time, Dalits and backward castes had developed a strategy of every day protest, which accelerated the process of disintegration of hierarchical caste system (Scott 1976). This explained the deep factionalism in a village society. This affected the organization of public action on social and political issues (Dreze and Sen 1995). Lack of social trust among these factions explained the poor quality of social capital in the state. Lack of social capital and lack of public action kept them backward and poor. According to Krishna, "Collective action in support of shared goals is more where social capital is high. However, effective collective action and superior goal performance are achieved only where – in addition to high social capital – capable agents are also available" (Krishna 2002: xi). Their inability in articulating their economic demands explained their sale of rice in distress for a decade. They had been pushed to backwardness and poverty in the last three decades (Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti 1993).

#### *JB as a Scholar*

JB proved to be a multifaceted personality, which made him an asset for the party. JB as a scholar could not be ignored by the party high command, as the party needed intellectuals who had an eclectic understanding of Indian culture and religion. His command over the Sanskrit language helped him decipher the cultural idioms in a

beautiful manner. Party politics demanded knowledge managers. JB did not have straightjacket ideas; he was basically an eclectic like Narasimha Rao. Both of them depended on the central High Command to survive. It was ignorance, which provided fodder for Hindutva. They did not use their scholarship to counter Hindutva – that was a Congress tradition (Sharma, 2003).

*JB as a Parliamentarian*

He got elected to Lok Sabha for the first time in the 1971 general election. He raised the issues related to the expansion of railway facilities in Odisha. The state had not got due attention of the central government in the area of development of railway tracks. It should be pointed out that the railway line connected Calcutta and Madras through Odisha. This was executed during the colonial rule. Pressure politics on the centre was accomplished by JB in a much more gentle manner, without making any hue and cry. With his influence over most of the cabinet ministers under Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi and Narasimha Rao, he succeeded in bringing the mega projects. He was a good negotiator and capable of pursuing an agenda with vigor and passion. This helped the state of Odisha to get some projects from the centre. As a junior cabinet member of Mrs. Gandhi, he succeeded in impressing her. His performance as a central minister got a critical acclaim. He got promoted to the position of the Minister of State in the same ministry. He drew the attention of Mrs. Indira Gandhi to the perennial problems of Odisha such as cyclone, flood and drought. During the 1972 cyclone, he was given the responsibility of managing the reconstruction work. His management strategy brought an immediate result, which was appreciated by the people of Odisha. It is a point to be noted that the management of natural disaster had brought a lot of criticism of the ruling party, wherever it occurred. But JB's approach to the 1972 cyclone brought a lot of laurels for the party. JB, in a short time, succeeded in building a relationship with Mrs. Gandhi, based on trust and confidence. This continued till her death. She started giving him more responsibilities, both of political and administrative nature.

The departure of Nandini Satpathy had created vacuum in the Congress Party. She brought him into the Congress in 1969 and gave him the ticket to contest the Lok Sabha election. Her departure cleared his path. J.B. Patnaik, as the President of the PCC, became the most important leader, after the desertion of many stalwarts. This opportunity proved to be a golden one. He, with his intelligence and political imagination, used this opportunity in an Olympian manner. He built the pyramid of the Congress Party. Under his leadership, they won 50% of the seats in the urban local bodies in 1978. This was the first test of his political acumen. In 1978, he invited Indira Gandhi to Odisha. All leaders of the opposition were opposed to Mrs. Gandhi's visit. In 1980, in the general Lok Sabha election, Congress got a landslide victory. In Odisha, out of 21 seats, 20 seats went in favour of the Congress party. Only Biju Patnaik managed to retain Kendrapara seat, by a victory of 5000 votes. JB's leadership qualities were demonstrated when Cong. (I) did well in Odisha. Mrs. Gandhi became Prime Minister. She gave all the credit of success to Patnaik. Then, Patnaik became the Cabinet Minister in her Ministry in 1981. Under his leadership, Cong. (I) won 117 seats out of 147 seats in Odisha. It was an absolute majority for Congress. Mrs. Indira Gandhi nominated him as the Chief Minister of Odisha. His style of politics was a beautiful blending of the trust from the central leadership and the management of the provincial Congress.

For the first time, the Congress Party negotiated with Odisha as a political entity instead of a geographical and cultural entity (Mohanty 1982, Patra 1977). The Congress Party did not get support from every region. Western Odisha was in the hands of the opposition party. The feudatory states and their chieftains played a decisive role in the politics of Odisha. The feudal elite died a slow death because of

the emergence of a new elite within the Congress, in opposition to the established feudal families. The land reforms, initiated during the Emergency, gave a blow to the landed elite. The second layer of the social elite, consisting of the *makdams* in the coastal belt and the *gauntia* (chieftain of a village), became active in politics, which brought the political unity of the State (Mohanty 1990). On 10<sup>th</sup> June 1980, he became the Chief Minister for the first time. He continued for five years. JB tried to give a new twist to the political identity of Odisha by integrating various localities into the political whole of Odisha. No chief minister could function for a five-year period. With the changing social support base of the Congress, he articulated a new political identity of the state. In the 1984 general assembly election, Cong. (I) retained its 117 seats, and J.B. became the Chief Minister for the second time and made history in Odiya politics. In the backdrop of Mrs. Gandhi's assassination, the assembly election took place. This resulted in the routing of the opposition,

In the 1995 assembly election, while JB was the PCC President, Congress came to power, but only with 80 seats and three independent MLAs supported the Party. JB became Chief Minister for the third time. There was a joke that he was the luckiest man in Odiya politics, who got the Chief Ministership for the third time. He was not elected to the assembly, but became the leader of the Congress Party. As the majority of MLAs were with him, he could win their trust more than the dissidents could. He had a political mind, which functioned as a computer, which could calculate who had got how many votes. This political arithmetic shaped his destiny.

He wanted to satisfy himself by clipping the wings of the main dissident leader Basant Biswal at any cost (Brass 1983). To contain dissidence within the party, he was given finance, irrigation and water resource. These were the most important portfolios. It was a management strategy of JB, applied for curbing dissidence within the party, with the objective of making the government most effective. JB virtually did not take action against his corrupt colleagues, which affected his public image and the Congress lost to a coalition of BJD and BJP.

### **ROLE OF LEADERSHIP IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Could governance improve the quality of life and bring economic growth in a society? This was a critical question in the political discourse on democracy. Democracy brings a leader to represent a state. He or she can plan a socio-economic programme which can produce a result over a short term and lay the foundation of a modern society. As an elected leader in a democracy, he has to work within the institutional framework of a polity. He has to negotiate with his electorate at every step, so that the political party does not lose its social support, which might be in jeopardy because of the developmental process initiated by the leadership. There were political groups who were outside the government, but were the support base. Their support gave a distinct style of consensus politics (Wood 1975). These were some parameters, through which a political leader pushed a developmental agenda, to make the governance deliver the services to the citizenry. It was a fact that "governance is a shared venture between the ruler and ruled but the strong motivation lies on the part of the former" (Mitra: 147). In a democratic process, the dialogue between the elite and the people is continuous. When the dialogue fails, it leads to the rejection of the elite by the people.

JB brought about a synergy of administration and politics. He built a consensus among the political class to have a strategy of development, which was accepted by both the ruling party and the opposition. He negotiated with the bureaucracy and civil society to elicit their support for the developmental work. It was possible to have good governance with a developmental agenda. Jayal has argued that the incorporation of liberal values and institutions is the normative basis of good governance (Jayal and

Pai 2001). Moreover, de-bureaucratization provided a boost for the investment of private capital. This was done on the basis of the quality of governance. In 1981, the biggest Alumina Project in Asia NALCO was inaugurated at Damonjodi. It was finalized in 1980. In 1982, he gave the slogan for industrialization. He said, "1000 industries in 1000 days." The industrialization process got accelerated during his term, with the intervention of the government, coupled with the provision of subsidies to private industrialists.

Contrary to his claims that many projects were taken up for the tribals and Dalits, the fact was that, during his period, there were reports of starvation and death of people belonging to the tribal community. This brought Kalahandi as a metaphor, which stands for starvation and poverty in the developmental discourse (Currie 2001). JB's developmental strategy was not inclusive from the community and regional point of view. Even the backward western region did not prosper as did the coastal belt. Odisha, a multi-ethnic society, needed a balanced developmental plan, as insights into the social process involved is provided by Howarth: "issues of identity formation, the production of novel ideologies, the logic of social movements and the structuring of societies by a plurality of social imaginaries" (Howarth 2002:2).

JB gave due importance to human resource development, which played a critical role in the development of Odisha. "In the field of human resources it is one of the leading states in India. Skilled manpower like Doctors, Engineers, Software experts and even unskilled manpower like labourers, agricultural worker are available in plenty. Reputed educational institutions, technical institutions, engineering and medical colleges are there in Orissa. Above all Oriya people are hardworking, dedicated, intelligent, industrious, enthusiastic and talented people. All these things made Orissa rich in human resources" (Interview with JB).

#### *Industrial Development under JB*

It is interesting to note that the overall growth of Odisha, both in industry and agriculture, was positive during his period. He pursued public policies that produced results. Independent studies by scholars have proved it. A question arises (regarding both development and politics) as to why political personalities play a decisive role. This could be explained with Weber's understanding of a transitional society. Modernity and rationality could be nurtured in an institutional framework, which was lacking in Odisha, though the inventive talents existed in pre-modern Odisha, which one could see in the sculpture and art of the region (Bendix 1960). JB was, indisputably, a political visionary in his own way, fired and sustained by his commitment to forge Odisha as a modern state in the Indian Federation. His policies and sustained work released people from the bondage of poverty, ascribed social status, and gave new life chances and choices. It was a process, which offered him considerable personal fulfillment. JB became the key figure in the process of the foundation of the modern economy of the state. "The state income (Real Net State Domestic Product) in Orissa has not grown at a rapid rate since 1951-52. The rate of growth, which was only 1.2 per cent during 1951-52 to 1961-62, had increased to 4.1 per cent during 1981-82 to 1991-92 but it slowed down thereafter (Table-1). The slow growth of State income was due to stagnant agriculture on the one hand and uneven growth of manufacturing on the other. Even though the growth rate of the share of manufacturing had remained more than the growth rate of the state income up to 1981-82, the growth was uneven and was negative during 1961-62 to 1971-72 (Table-1). The growth of manufacturing's share remained still higher than the growth of state income during 1981-82 to 1991-92. This helped in increasing the state income during this period. The industrial growth due to a number of industrial policies in the state during this period might have helped in raising the state income to an appreciable level. However, since the liberalization process (1991), the share of manufacturing in

total state income has been declining and thereby there was a reduction in the growth rate of state income during 1991-92 to 1994-95. The problems of Odisha were gigantic, which might be creating a frustrating moment in his life now. Age was irresistibly catching up with its limitations on his energies and his abilities to learn new political skills. He was increasingly frustrated at the constraints on him. The tools with which he had to work seem to him blunt and unresponsive.

Table-1: Annual Compound Growth Rate of Not State Domestic Product (NSDP) and the share of Manufacturing in NSDP at 1970-71 prices

Period	NSDP	Share of Manufacturing
1951-52 to 1961-62	1.2	3.9
1961-62 to 1971-72	2.4	-0.7
1971-72 to 1981-82	2.6	2.9
1981-82 to 1991-92	4.1*	4.6
1991-92 to 1994-95	3.3*	5.9
1951-52 to 1981-82	-	1.9

Note: 1) \*Based on real NSDP at 1980-81 prices

2) Growth rate are calculated by using the semi-long equation:  $Y = ab^t$

Where Y = (NSD) or share of manufacturing  
and t = time period

Source: i) Calculated from the data available in the Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Odisha .

ii) (Kishor C. Samal, S. Meher and A. Rath), "Fifty Years (1947-97) of Industrial Development in a Backward State: The Case of Orissa." Occasional Paper, Nabakrushna Choudhury Centre for Development Studies, (Odisha ), Bhubaneswar.

### **CONCLUSION: REASONS BEHIND THE DECLINE OF THE CONGRESS PARTY IN ODISHA**

The rise of middle peasantry after the implementation of land reforms policies, brought changes in agriculture during 1980s, but it did not continue as Odisha became a classic case of the experiment in globalization. Privatization of electricity and water had pushed the price of inputs. Lack of state support for rice and sugarcane for more than a decade pushed the middle peasantry once more to subsistence psychology. This psychology was itself anti-growth. The peasantry was in the process of disintegration. They started withdrawing their support from the Congress Party.

The landed elite and former princely rulers moved towards BJP, which initially was a party of Gujaratis and Marwaris. Slowly it got entrenched in the soil of Odisha. BJD was supporting the party by making a coalition with it.

Factionalism in the Congress Party affected the party in fighting the Biju Janata Dal. JB remained a faction leader. His family and kin acquired a reputation for venality and nepotism, which led to the decline of his political authority. To satisfy his factional interest, he started patronizing the police and civil administrator, which created law and order problems. In some of the major crimes, his supporters were involved. The consequence was the loss of public support for his leadership.

As Brass spoke of a dismal picture of rules and legitimacy in North India: "Thus, what we have in the north Indian countryside are a set of formal rules and practices obeyed by few, a set of informal rules and practices followed by most and a lack of legitimacy

attached to both because the first are known to be ineffective and partial while the second set no limits to extortion” (Brass 1997: 279). This description captures the political reality of Odisha during the final years of the JB regime.

Odisha society had undergone radical social changes, which ousted the social elite from power. They had migrated from rural Odisha to cities. New groups came, who supported the BJD. The support base of the Congress Party, such as Dalits and tribals, steadily withdraw their support from the party. The Congress Party under JB could not create new leaders who could mobilize their traditional support to survive in the provincial politics of Odisha. The national leadership did not give due importance to the state in their political projects. The result has been a steady decline of the Congress Party over successive elections.

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