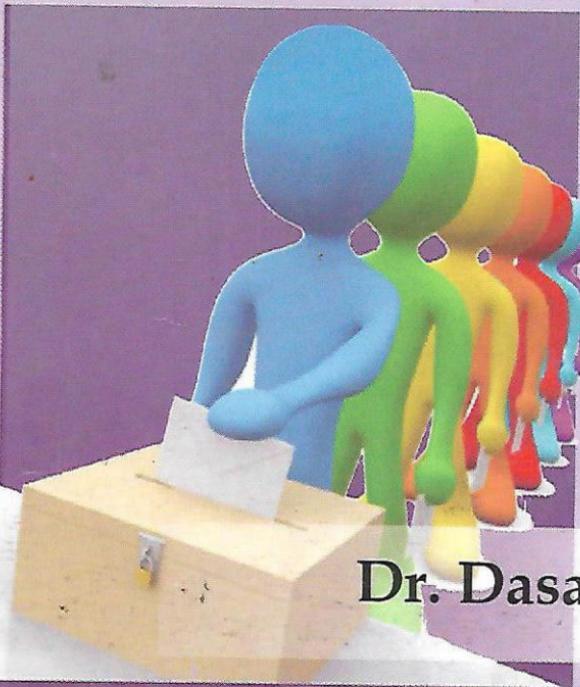
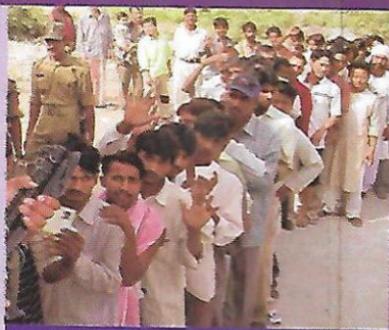


People's Mandate



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Preface

At the same time Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in Odisha were held in two phases—April 16 and 23, 2009. As Soon as the Chief Election Commission of India Sri N Gopal Swamy declared the schedules of elections on 2 March, 2009, the political scenery of Odisha took a sudden turn. Ending days of speculation, the Biju Janta Dal on 7 March 2009 severed its ties with the Bharatiya Janata Party. Overnight L.K. Advani of BJD had become *persona non grata* for Naveen Patnaik, and the likes of Prakash Karat and Sharad Pawar had gained currency. Political pundits had predicated that the divorce will help the Congress. But Naveen Patnaik had other ideas in his mind. The actual fact was that the BJP had been neglecting its own organization. Its lost base had presumably shifted to the BJD, which had made inroads into the bastions of its partner, including poaching some of its leaders. Naveen Patnaik's game plan was to gain the magic numbers by not only consolidating the vote that shifts from the BJP, but also adding to it by roping in smaller players like the Left, NCP and others. Having shed its non-secular credentials, inevitable after

Kandhamal, the BJD though the move will appease the minorities too.

Naveen Patnaik rode an electoral tsunami to wash away the Congress and the BJP by scoring a resounding hat trick in the Assembly elections and coming up with a fantastic performance in the Lok Sabha polls. The BJD won 103 Assembly and 14 Lok Sabha seats. In the 2000 and 2004 elections Mr Patnaik had two factors favouring him—being Biju Patnaik's son and a pro-NDA-Vajpayee wind. But in 2009 it was Naveen Patnaik on his own.

The victory enabled BJD supreme Naveen Patnaik to be the chief minister for the third consecutive term, a record in Odisha, but, also proved that the regional party established two-third majority even without the help of its pre-poll allies. Lack of leadership and factionalism within the party are the principal reasons for the humiliating defeat of the BJP. There was no cohesiveness among the senior leaders and those who became ministers in the Naveen Patnaik-led coalition government served their own interests. Factionalism within the party became more prominent during its second term in the government. The infighting among the top leaders had its negative effect on the party organization. After coming to power in alliance with the BJD, the BJP leaders started distancing the party cadre. While BJD workers received all political benefits, the BJP workers were ignored by their own ministers. The BJP workers lost their influence in their areas as the people had the impression that Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik as all in all and the saffron party is a mere an appendage.

After enjoying a piggyback for nearly a decade on BJD, the BJP leadership became complacent. Hoping that the alliance politics will continue for ever, the party only

concentrated on the 63 Assembly seats and nine Parliamentary seats in its share. The leadership did not think beyond its share of Assembly and Parliamentary seats while the BJD made slow but steady penetration to the BJP areas. While the BJD continued to reap rich harvest in Panchayat and civic body elections, the BJP performed to remain indifferent. After the break up of alliance, the BJP was at sea as it had no suitable candidates for the remaining 83 Assembly constituencies and 12 Lok Sabha seats. What was more humiliating for the saffron party was that not only all its senior leaders lost the election but were humbled by the lesser known opponents with huge margins. Most of the former BJP ministers in the Naveen Patnaik Government were placed in the third place. Senior leaders who were at the helms of affairs of the party remained completely detached from party organizations after becoming ministers in the Naveen Patnaik government.

The issues raised in the 2009 Lok Sabha and Odisha Assembly election campaign by major alliances and the response of the voters to them presents a mixed picture. The voters did not consider some of the issues highlighted by political parties to have much relevance to them and these had almost no impact on voting decisions. They include for instance, the Bharatiya Janata Party's campaign issues such as the Indo-United States nuclear deal and the Ram Sethu controversy. However the economic concerns, basic services, welfare policies and citizen's security were significant in influencing voting decisions. Surprisingly the United Progressive Alliance's vote did not suffer much even though the price rise and terrorist attacks during the government's term in office were matters of concern to a majority of the voters.

In 2009, media pundits and politicians lamented

during the election campaign that this was an issue-less election as there was no overarching issue that had nationwide appeal. The *aam aadmi* (Common Man) pitch of the Congress did, but that did not mean there were no issues in the election. A review of the issues raised by the congress reveals that it made its record of governance and politics of inclusive growth during 2004-2009 its main issues for attracting votes. The promotional campaign of the party focus on its rural infrastructure development programme, "Bharat Nirman", and a progress report of the various schemes launched and implemented for the common people by the UPA government. On the other side, the BJP raised issues such as the indecisiveness of the UPA government and security. The party diluted its Hindutva image but raked up the issue of Ram Sethu, a chain of lime stone shoals between Rameswaram, Tamilnadu, and Mannar, Srilanka. The issues raised by Third Front were the nuclear deal made by the UPA. Which was said to be a sellout to the United States, the price rise and its impact on the poor? These issues were not only voiced by the three main alliances in their campaigns but also figured prominently in their manifestoes.

Thus the main issues of 2009 election at the national level were: price rise; terrorist attacks, livelihood; employment; farmers' suicide; Indo-US nuclear deal, Ram Sethu Controversy, etc. In Odisha the BJD represented the regional sentiments of the people in the state. Chief Minister, Naveen Patnaik is well known as a crusader against corruption; he has also symbolizes the developmental aspirations of the backward state and its regional pride. When he served links with the BJP, his erstwhile ally made the mistake of harshly criticizing him and making a hero out of him. Propaganda by the

BJP evolved around the theme of “treachery”—a strategy the party thought had worked well in Karnataka. By distancing itself from the BJP, the BJD could fend off blame for the loss of lives and safety in Kandhamal district. The BJD skillfully combined its clever politics with a strong pro-poor programme. The supply of the rice Rs 2 a kilogram for families below the poverty line was an example of this. The BJD’s election success points to a path that seeks to combine popular policies, effective performance and non-communal politics. While the Congress did not succeed in taking advantage of political victory may have pushed the BJP’s communal agenda to the background. Also the collapse of the BJD-BJP coalition further isolated the BJP.

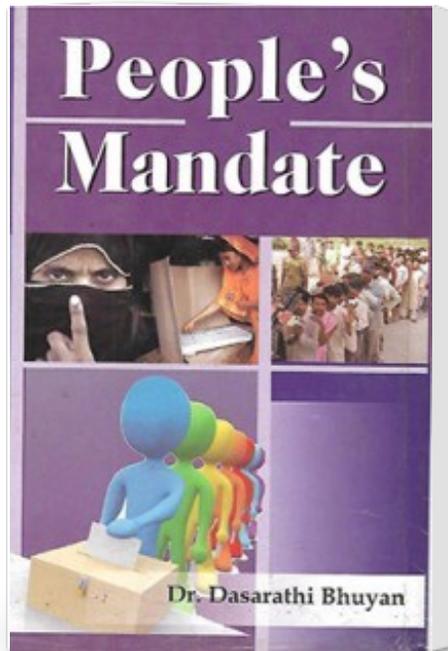
This volume analyses all the above issues and factors in detail. In its attempt this volume categorically finds out the cause of the immediate disintegration of the BJD-BJP Alliance which was lasted for 11 years. It further clearly makes an analysis about the defeat of the national political parties like the Congress & the BJP. It also investigates the fact why the BJD: a regional political party in the political history of Odisha for the first time came to power on its own.

Dr. Dasarathi Bhuyan

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