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## Formation and electoral achievements of Biju Janata Dal (BJD): A brief study

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### Abstract

India as a democracy has the multi-party system in place, which means there are several political parties competing for power. Apart from the primary political parties, each state has their own local political parties that rule and compete in their region. In the present political scenario of India, the role of regional political party is more important. The paper attempts to explore the factors that were responsible for the formation of largest regional political party of Odisha, Biju Janata Dal and its electoral achievements in Assembly and Lok Sabha elections since its formation. Within 25 years of its formation, the Biju Janata Dal achieved massive electoral success in all elections including Local Bodies, Assembly and Parliament. Naveen Patnaik, the president of Biju Janata Dal and Chief Minister of Odisha ruling the state since last twenty-three years. In Current political scenario of India, Biju Janata Dal occupies a unique place for its organizational strength in the state of Odisha.

**Keywords:** Democracy, political, regional, electoral, organizational

### Introduction

The sad demise of Biju Patnaik, the supreme leader of Janata Dal Odisha Unit on 17 April 1997, who was a colossus in Odisha's political field for half a century whether in power or out of power created a political vacuum in non-Congress politics in the state of Odisha. The charismatic leader with noble intentions had refused to choose a political successor. During his lifetime, Biju Patnaik never believed in family politics and had always kept his Delhi based family members away from political limelight<sup>[1]</sup>. During the time of the death of Biju Patnaik Janata Dal was the chief opposition party in the state. Prior to 1995, Janata Dal was ruling in the state of Odisha from 1990 to 1995. Death of Biju Patnaik in April 1997 made the stalwart leaders of the Janata Dal to think about the future of the political party and in mean time, the Janata Dal was divided into several regional political outfits. Leaders like Lalu Prasad Yadav, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Ajit Singh, Devi Lal etc. formed new regional parties in their respective states.

In order to fill the political vacuum in Janata Dal state unit, the prominent leaders of the state decided to give the leadership of the state unit to the family members of late Biju Patnaik. In the process, they first approached Prem Patnaik, elder son of Biju Patnaik, a known industrialist, who straightaway rejected the proposal by saying that he had no interest in politics. Without late they proceeded to Gita Mehta, the only daughter of Biju Patnaik who was an internationally acclaimed author based in New York, but she also expressed her unwillingness to join politics. Then they pleaded with Biju Patnaik's widow, Gyan Patnaik who initially hesitated, but later on persuasion from the then Prime Minister, I.K. Gujral, agreed to spare her younger son, Naveen Patnaik to carry on her husband's legacy. Then the leaders were managed to convince Naveen Patnaik, the younger son of Biju Patnaik to lead the party after his father. Finally, Naveen came to Odisha and contested the by-election for Aska Lok Sabha seat in 1997 and was elected to Parliament as Janata Dal candidate. With the entry of Naveen Patnaik in Odisha politics, the split of Janata Dal Odisha Unit was averted temporarily<sup>[2]</sup>.

A majority of leaders of Janata Party state unit realized to have a regional political party to fight against the Congress in Odisha. Though the Janata Dal state unit was divided into various camps during the arrival of Naveen Patnaik, later most of them were united to form a new regional political party to fight against mighty Congress. Many prominent leaders of Janata Party opposed the decision to form a new regional party.

But leaders like Patnaik, Acharya and Ananga Udaya Singh Deo played crucial role for the formation of a new regional party. It was on 26 December 1997 the new regional political party was floated with the name of Biju Patnaik in the sky of Odisha as Biju Janata Dal with 26 legislators of Odisha Legislative Assembly from Janata Dal joining in it and electing Naveen Patnaik as the President of the newly formed party<sup>[3]</sup>.

With the formation of BJD a new chapter opened in the political scenario of the state. During that time the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) was searching for a regional partner in the state to strengthen his political position in Parliament. In the direction of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Pramod Mahajan came to Odisha and his meeting with Naveen Patnaik and other senior leaders of BJD became fruitful when both BJD and BJP agreed to form an alliance for the upcoming Lok Sabha election of 1998. As per the terms of the alliance, BJD contested in 12 Lok Sabha seats whereas BJP contested in 9 Lok Sabha seats in 1998 Lok Sabha election. BJD won 9 seats and BJP won on 7 seats. Similarly in the Lok Sabha election of 1999, BJP won 9 out of 9 seats whereas BJD won 10 out of 12 seats. Naveen Patnaik worked as the Cabinet Minister of Steel and Mines from 1998 to 2000 in Atal Bihari Vajpayee's Government, the same portfolio held by his late father under Morarji Desai and Choudhury Charan Singh between 1977 to 1979.<sup>[4]</sup> Arjun Charan Sathy and Braja Kishore Tripathy were also worked as Union Ministers in Vajpayee's Ministry from BJD quota.

In the year 2000, elections for 12<sup>th</sup> Assembly were took place. As per the alliance guideline, BJD contested in 84 seats whereas BJP contested in 63 seats. A new era dawned in the state in 2000 when BJD-BJP alliance won Assembly elections ousting Congress Party from power. BJD became the largest party in Assembly by winning 68 seats. After the Assembly Election, BJD and BJP formed a coalition ministry and Naveen Patnaik gave up his Union Minister's post to become the Chief Minister of new coalition ministry in first week of March<sup>[5]</sup>. This Coalition Ministry continued till 2004 when Naveen decided to dissolved the 12<sup>th</sup> Assembly. In the general elections of 2004 both BJD and BJP contested in same seats both in Assembly and Lok Sabha elections. BJD won 11 Lok Sabha seats and 61 Assembly seats in 2004 general elections. Again in 2004 coalition ministry was formed under the leadership of Naveen Patnaik and continued prior to the general elections of 2009<sup>[6]</sup>.

Meanwhile the schedule for holding the General Elections in April 2009 was announced. Due to the difference in seat sharing, Biju Janata Dal decided to break the alliance in 2009. Then BJD also left National Democratic Alliance. In 2009, BJD contested the general elections by forming alliance with parties like Nationalist Congress Party and Communist Parties. BJD won 14 Lok Sabha seats and 103 Assembly seats in the 2009 general election. BJD formed the ministry for the first time single handedly without the help of any other political parties<sup>[7]</sup>.

The landslide victory of BJD in 2009 general elections increased the prestige of party in national level. Naveen Patnaik proved himself as the most popular leader of the state. The same tradition continued in the general elections of 2014 and 2019. In 2014 general elections, BJD got 20 Lok Sabha seats and 117 Assembly seats and in 2019 general elections, BJD got 12 Lok Sabha Seats and 112

Assembly seats<sup>[8]</sup>. Naveen Patnaik is the first Chief Minister of the state to remain in the office for five times consecutively which is a record in the political history of Odisha.

No doubt Biju Janata Dal became a prominent regional party in India during the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and its leader Naveen Patnaik emerged as one of the popular leaders of the country by his effective leadership and administrative managements. Within a short span of 25 years, the BJD managed to prove a successful regional party in the state. During his 21 years of Chief Minister-ship, Naveen takes many steps by implementing many welfare schemes which made him the most popular leader of the state. Naveen's action against corruption and his bold steps made him a clean politician of the state as well as the country. During 23 years of Naveen's rule, BJD managed to attract the masses of Odisha through its large number of public centric policies.

### Conclusion

After Independence, a number of regional outfits were formed, but only four of them including Biju Janata Dal had tasted power. Before BJD came into the picture, the other three political parties formed by three former Chief Ministers, - Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo (Ganatantra Parishad), Hare Krushna Mahatab (Jana Congress) and Biju Patnaik (Utkal Congress)<sup>[9]</sup>. All the three above mentioned regional political parties tested power for once only and gradually slipped into oblivion. Out of the four regional political parties which had ruled the state at different times in the post-Independence period, Biju Janata Dal was totally different. The first three regional political parties were in power in coalition with other party, but never completed a full five-year term in office<sup>[10]</sup>. On the other hand, Biju Janata Dal continues in power for five consecutive terms – the first two in partnership with BJP and the next three alone.

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