

# Naveen Patnaik : The Undisputed Leader of Odisha

*Satya Narayana Sahu*

While in Bhubaneswar on the day of counting of election results on 23rd May 2019 it was fascinating to see Biju Janata Dal under the leadership of Chief Minister Shri Naveen Patnaik defying national trend of voting BJP back to power and creating an unparalleled record of receiving a massive mandate of people consecutively for fifth time. In winning 112 out of 147 seats for State Assembly and securing 12 out of 21 Lok Sabha seats yet again a new trend has been set in the political domain. The entire nation marvels at the statesman Chief Minister Shri Patnaik in scripting a remarkable success which is at once historic and devoid of hubris.

The extraordinary victory of BJD and Shri Patnaik proved his own pre election assertion true. In March, a month before elections, while answering a question if there was going to be brand Modi vs. Naveen Patnaik in Odisha Shri Patnaik said with quiet dignity “Modi will not have much impact and you will see from election results. I am indeed sure of victory”. Stating that fighting every election is hard he confidently claimed that “We will win the elections handsomely” and “the results of this election will show that there is no anti



incumbency”. Indeed the triumph of BJD under the leadership of Shri Patnaik is absolutely splendid and he unmistakably proved that there was no anti-incumbency for his party and himself.



Registration of such historic and path breaking victory after his internationally acclaimed performance of shifting 1.2 million people in twenty four hours to safe places and greatly minimizing human casualties from colossal disaster of Fani is indeed worth cherishing and celebrating. It is in continuation of his earlier track record of excellence in disaster management recognized by the UN and world at large.

Absence of anti incumbency is the distinguishing aspect of Naveen Patnaik's tenure as Chief Minister of



that he has been a rare breed of a leader who speaks less and works more and whose performance is more expressive and eloquent than his written or spoken words or even unspoken articulations. This perception of people based on facts and lived in experience on a day to-day basis is wholly true and is evidenced in the wide spectrum activities undertaken by his Government during the eventful tenure of twenty years. In implementing welfare policies for

Odisha consecutively for four terms. It is rare in Indian politics and public life to see a chief minister enjoying such popular mandate for two decades and embarking for a fifth term with a huge majority. No wonder that Shri Patnaik while receiving the award of Ideal Chief Minister in India from the former President of our Republic Shrimati Pratibha Patil in Pune in January 2018 had prophetically said that when people are at the core of politics there would not be any anti incumbency. Profound and prophetic words indeed.

Common people and women are the source of pro incumbency.

Pro people policies and their transparent and effective implementation created pro incumbency for Naveen Patnaik. During the last four terms the BJD Government did put the people at the forefront and heralded an era of good politics, the chief attributes of which are numerous welfare policies for poor and underprivileged people of the State which include a kilo of rice for one rupee, special scheme for farmers KALIA, (Krishak Assistance Livelihood and Income Augmentation), Biju Swasthya Jojana, construction of high quality roads across the State and above all economic and political empowerment of women through self help groups which enlisted a massive seven million women across the State.

It is often said that in politics perception is truth. In case of Naveen Patnaik the perception among people is

ensuring food, human and health security to vast masses of ordinary people and ensuring massive mobilization of women through a well conceived policy of Mission Shakti which created more than half a million of self help groups and enlisted seven million women in them, the leadership of Shri Naveen Patnaik has created a bulwark of strength on an enduring basis. It is an idea, a movement and a revolutionary action of far-reaching significance engineering social transformation and change and enhancing capability of people. What one sees in the practical implementation of these policies of Chief Minister Shri Patnaik is the exemplification of capability approach of Professor Amartya Sen who enunciated that public policies in a democracy should be framed for enhancing capabilities of people and fulfillment of their legitimate entitlements.

As far as women's empowerment is concerned it was Shri Naveen Patnaik who made history in our country by fielding women from his party in one-third of twenty one parliamentary seats





of the State. It was extraordinary decision which fructified the vision of Mahatma Gandhi who as early as 1931 wanted that there should be more women in our legislatures. Shri Patnaik's decision in tune with Gandhi's vision set a national narrative and inspired leaders like Mamata Banerjee and Rahul Gandhi to announce similar measures. It is heartening to note that five of the seven women fielded by Shri Patnaik for Lok Sabha have won the elections and thereby the exceptionally impressive victory of BJD for fifth term stands distinguished in history of our Republic for investing an invaluable gender dimension to our politics and proved the point that "democracy minus women is no democracy".

The record victory for fifth term combined with a huge women's political empowerment brings out the inclusive ideals in Shri Naveen's personality profile which represents soft power the defining aspects of which are persuasion and attraction and not coercion, imposition and domination. This soft power of Shri Patnaik manifested in his day to day conduct in politics and public life eschewing harsh words, bitterness and acrimony even against his bitterest opponent has endeared himself to people across India and set out a fine example of statesmanship, sanity, dignity and decency which are seriously compromised even among the top



leadership of our country. This soft power is a form of non-violence which is derived from Mahatma Gandhi's worldview. He has consistently promoted the cause of non-violence. On the occasion of hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi he suggested for inclusion of non-violence in the preamble to the Constitution of India and stated that by doing so the country could pay real tribute to Mahatma Gandhi. In thus promoting the cause of non-violence he has promoted the cause of democracy and deepened its roots.

Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt in their latest best selling publication "How Democracies Die" have insightfully written that one of the potent

causes behind death of democracies is toleration and encouragement of violence by leaders who seek mandate of the people and play a determining role in politics and public life. In stressing on non-violence and taking forward the cause of dialogue and debate the leadership in Odisha represented by Shri Naveen Patnaik has taken a very significant step to save our democracy which is facing mortal danger from political formations openly espousing the cause of violence and lynch people in the name of food, dress and faith.

Apart from providing effective



governance on a day to day basis he has set global standards in successfully managing disasters, both man made and natural. Such many splendoured activities undertaken on a recurring basis generated a momentum of pro incumbency beyond the comprehension of psephologists and analysts of Indian politics and democracy.

Odisha, the Cinderella of Modern India is getting transformed by effective governance.

Let us understand the effective governance of Shri Naveen Patnaik in meeting the challenges posed by storms, cyclones and other natural calamities often causing havoc in Odisha and resulting in huge loss of life and property. During freedom struggle Mahatma Gandhi deeply reflected on recurrent natural disasters hitting the State and described Odisha as “the land of tears and sorrows”. That was in late 1920s.

The Justice H.R. Khanna Commission of Enquiry set up to go into charges against some leaders of Odisha had observed in its report that the State has been treated as the Cinderella of modern India. It means that the State hardly received legitimate attention and care at the hands of the successive Union Governments. The State of Odisha of twenty first century was condemned to be the Cinderella of modern India in spite of the repeated demand by the Chief Minister that the State should be accorded special status because



of its vulnerability to natural calamities and other social and economic problems.

More than Elections Effective Governance is important for running the machinery of State and dealing with natural disasters.

Odisha “the land of tears and sorrows” and the Cinderella of modern India was yearning for a leader to shape its destiny and harness its potentiality. A leader with quiet dignity marked by grace and decency was the need of the hour. It was Shri Naveen Patnaik who provided that leadership which has transformed the State in a major way. Focusing attention more on performance than on proclamations he is spearheading the State and enhancing its stature and standing on a continuing basis. His selection as the Ideal Chief Minister validated the benchmark of excellence he has set at the national and global level.



The tears and sorrows of people of the State endlessly flowing because of intensity and frequency of natural disasters made its people objects of pity and it was woefully evident in 1999 when super cyclone hit the State and there was complete collapse of political leadership and governance in dealing with and managing it. It was in the backdrop of that utter and dismal failure that people reposed faith on Shri Naveen Patnaik when they elected him and gave their mandate to provide leadership to the State and ensure effective governance. Since 2000 the State of Odisha under his stewardship has received attention and admiration for giving an architecture





of statecraft marked by efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and result oriented action. In fact the minimum human casualties and loss of property in Odisha during natural disasters has set a new benchmark of excellence in employing government machinery for dealing with calamities. The United Nations has acknowledged that the role played by Odisha under the leadership of Shri Naveen Patnaik in successfully handling natural disasters deserves replication at the global level. It testifies to the high quality leadership of Shri Naveen Patnaik as Chief Minister of the State. It is sad that when Philine, Hudhud and other natural disasters struck the State no top leaders from the Centre visited it.

It is worthwhile to again quote Shri Patnaik's memorable words while receiving the award of ideal Chief Minister Award. He said, "...election is not important, but change and transformation is important. If you love your people, you don't fight for elections, you fight for change and transformation." Wise and profound words indeed.

It is fascinating to note that Shri Naveen Patnaik echoed the same message while receiving the award of ideal Chief Minister. He said, "If you

work for the people, you will continue to live in the hearts of people like Mahatma Gandhi and Biju Babu. If you keep people at the forefront, it is not a political journey, it is a spiritual experience. "This wider meaning of politics in terms of people centered approach invested with spirituality is factor for pro incumbency for Naveen Patnaik. It is much above crude power game and is of paramount significance for twenty first century India. This 2019 election victory for BJD and Naveen Patnaik augurs well for turning a new leaf in the book of politics in India. It is an affirmation of pro incumbency based on love for people and for social change and transformation.

Satya Narayan Sahu, Officer on Special Duty and Press Secretary to President of India late Shri K. R. Narayanan and had a tenure as Director in Prime Minister's Office and Joint Secretary in Rajya Sabha Secretariat.