CHAPTER IV

DR. MAHTAB AND HIS MISCELLANEOUS ROLE IN POLITICAL CAREER
4.1 Dr. MAHTAB AS CABINET MINISTER AT THE CENTRE
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Dr. H.K. Mahtab was not only a political philosopher but also a practical and pragmatic politician. He was a political Yogi. Politics, for him, was an activity of a certain type directed towards the achievement of certain goals shared by a class or state or community for group or party.

Being a practical politician he never hankered after power. He believed that for a true politician power should be divorced from politics. Remaining in power and practising politics might breed corruption.

Politics be practised selflessly with a spirit of devotion and dedication. The end of politics is to serve the people. It is not like enjoying powers as per one's own sweet will, he felt.

"Dr. Mahtab was an ideal politician. It was his inner view to serve people by remaining outside politics. But his outstanding personality, commanding leadership,
rich thoughts on politics forced him to occupy different positions and ranks in public life. Therefore, even before he could complete full five years as Chief Minister of Orissa, Dr. Mahtab was called upon to join the Central Cabinet of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. He was at the height of popularity because of his excellent performances as people's leader and Chief Minister.  

His tenure in the Central Cabinet as Minister of Industry, Supply and Commerce was for a short period of two years and he continued as a member of Parliament from 1952 to 1955. During this period he was made Secretary General of the Congress Parliamentary Party.

When Dr. Mahtab completed four years as Premier and Chief Minister of Orissa from 1946 to 1950, he was invited by Nehru to join Central Cabinet. Dr. Mahtab got the new job of a Cabinet Minister of Industry and Supply on the thirteenth May, 1950. His inclusion in Central Cabinet was no special favour to him by Pandit Nehru. He deserved it from the day Nehru's Ministry took over at Delhi and this was felt very much even by British dignitaries. When an interim Government was planned, Viceroy Lord Wavell had chosen Mahtab as one of the

Union Ministers. Mahtab's name had been highly recommended to him by Sir Stafford Cripps who had come with Cabinet Mission. But before Mahtab the most important responsibility and foremost duty was to take over Orissa affairs. The demand for his talent and acumen at Delhi did not rest there. Mountbattens were highly impressed with him and "in 1949 Lady Mountbatten in the presence of Jawaharlalji persuaded" Mahtab "to join the Central Cabinet as persons like" him, "according to her, should undertake the responsibilities of the nation at that juncture instead of confining themselves to states". As Jawaharlal had close intimacy with Lady Mountbatten, he immediately agreed with her and asked "Mahtab" to consider it. Then on March seventh 1950 Nehru in a letter to Mahtab referred to this and suggested "I would very much like you to join here as a Cabinet Minister". On May second the Prime Minister again wrote, "we have to finalise our new Cabinet very soon......... Naturally I want to include your name". His belated inclusion in the Cabinet was noticed by his well wishers abroad. Their affection and

193. Ibid., p. 2.
194. Ibid., p. 2.
195. Ibid., p. 2.
regard for Mahtab were evident from their reaction. Cripps, by that time Chancellor of the Exchequer in Britain wrote on tenth May 1950 to Mahtab, "I am sure you will be of even greater service in your new post than you have been in Orissa". Lady Mountbetten in her letter to Mahtab said, "You may imagine how delighted my husband and I were when we learnt that you had at last been persuaded to join the Cabinet of the Government of India. I knew fully well what a tower of strength you will be to the Prime Minister and how such your loyal support, efficiency and high integrity will benefit the Government and the people of India generally". "Even his appointment as a Central minister was widely published abroad. Some of them went to the extent of suggesting that Mahtab was being groomed to succeed Nehru. When Mahtab joined Central Cabinet the post war and the post-independence problems haunted the whole shape of administration so much that still it was in a phase of transition. Officers had not even begun efforts to adjust themselves to the change. While some of them were over-playing their loyalty to the new masters in order to cover up their past anti-national activities, others were behaving as unbridled

196. Ibid., p. 3.
197. Ibid., p. 4.
horses endangering always inexperienced riders". However, though the assuming of the new office was welcomed by many at home as well as abroad, still Dr. Mahtab found everything in a mess.

"There was altogether a different style of functioning, lot of hinderances for positive way of work. Dr. B.C.Roy, the then Chief Minister of West Bengal had rightly warned him that one would be completely lost at Delhi and there would be no achievement to satisfy oneself. After he took over Mahtab thought that since he was at the helm of affairs he had to prove his worth. His colleague Rafi Ahmed Kidwai warned him to be careful about the officers in the Centres. "They were a power in the Secretariat and they could do and undo a minister, Kidwai said".

He began to attend office regularly for six hours everyday but he had nothing to do as no file was sent to him. He asked his Secretary, Venkatraman that why nothing was being referred to him. Then the reply came that he could send for the files in which he was interested.

198. Ibid., p. 1
199. Ibid., p. 4
By enquiring about the rules of business he came to know that there were none, as the rules have gone with British. This forced him to frame the rules of business. Still nothing worked according to his plans. "Inspite of all his efforts no rules of business could be framed till he left the ministry. He asked the Prime Minister and Home Minister for the transfer of his Secretary but it would not materialise. It was a period of transition. So Nehru and other ministers were helpless. The Secretaries were so adame'nt and uncommitted that any one of this age would be surprised to know that without the knowledge of the Prime Minister who was also the minister of External Affairs, the then Secretary of the ministry permitted U.S.A. to station a much larger number of troops then stipulated by the International Control Commission in Saigon and when the fact was brought to the notice of the Prime Minister by Dr. Ansari who was then the representative of India in Saigon, Jawaharlal Nehru felt very much embarrassed. But nothing could be done". Also once it so happened that Venkataraman, the Secretary of Mahtab went out of the way to issue a big licence to a Madras firm without his knowledge". He took the officers to task. He wanted

200. Ibid., p. 8.
to impose discipline. Nehru appreciated this. In a letter to Mahtab Prime Minister said, "I am glad you have taken disciplinary action in the case of a number of officers in your ministry. One purpose of disciplinary action is that it might serve as a warning to others". 201

Then he made up his mind to bring some sort of policy decisions regarding certain matters. By accepting the suggestions of Sri J.R.D. Tata, Mahtab piloted the Industrial licensing bill which was passed in the Parliament with great enthusiasm. But regarding the Constitution of the Board of Industries and bringing some reforms in agricultural economy his proposals did not come out successful.

On many issues whether he was officially or politically concerned or not, he expressed his views conscientiously keeping in mind the interest of the people and the nation. He did not bother whether his views or suggestions were accepted or not. But not only as an office bearer but also in his personal capacity he wanted to know about the issues and affairs around him and suggested something which he felt essential. He was quite free, frank and

open in his manners and temperament on matters of common interest. His conviction was that the matters of common interest affect one and all. He was a true democrat, not only a political democrat.

Many of his statements, public reactions were widely debated though his colleagues in Government and Party were pushed to tight corner over the same. In June 1950 at Bombay, Mahtab made some remark about prohibition that raised many eyebrows in Congress Party committed to the Gandhian Principle". Prohibition, to my mind is an impracticable proposition, said Mr. H.K. Mahtab, Minister of Industry and Supply replying to a variety of questions...... at a question-answer meeting held at Green's Hotel under the auspices of the progressive group, in Bombay on Wednesday. Mr. Mahtab said that although at one time he had fought for the cause of prohibition and even courted imprisonment on that issue he had subsequently changed his opinion entirely when faced with reality. "I am not an orthodox Congressman, but a practical man, he said".202 His statement drew a lot of flak. Even the Chief Minister

of Bombay, Mr. B.G.Kher expressed surprise and dismay over Mahtab's public announcement of his view. During that time Bombay had prohibition but later on when Mahtab went as Governor to that Province he found that liquor was being sold at certain places inspite of the prohibition. This proved that whatever he had said earlier was the correct assessment of things.

He created a furore in political circles when he made a public statement for the abolition of Privy Purses of ex-rulers. But his spirit dampened when Nehru wrote to him, "............... you have been making some positive and far reaching statements about princes. You have said that their privy purses must be put an end to. Many of us feel that privy Purses are too bloated. Nevertheless we have committed ourselves to them and we cannot easily walk through our committment........".203

"From the correspondence he had with the then stalwarts of the Congress, it could well be said that he was no less than anyone. He was a prominent member both in the Party and in the Cabinet".204 During his ministership he played a prominent role on some important issues.

204. Ibid.,
One of the most important issues was the 'Decontrol of Import Trade'. Then Sri Prakash was commerce minister at the Centre. Pabitra Mohan Pradhan was the Commerce Minister of Orissa. Dr. Mahtab forwarded one letter of Pradhan regarding the non-entry of the 'new-comers' into the 'import-trade' market to Sri Prakash. Then Government made an amendment in the rules there by allowing a percentage of 'new-comers' along with the 'established importers into the trade which terribly affected the position of Sri Prakash by the "vested interest group". Ultimately Sri Prakash resigned and took charge of the responsibility of other portfolios. And, then Commerce was added to the ministry of Industry and Supply which were the portfolio of Dr. Mahtab. But Dr. Mahtab who was instrumental for the change and this sort of reform was criticised by those vested interest groups. Dr. Mahtab also suggested that articles 14, 19 and 31 of the Indian Constitution should be amended for the social and economic development of the masses. Regarding community development programme he had conveyed his views to the Prime Minister that such programmes should not be taken up by the aid of the U.S.A. as there was an apprehension of large scale conflict of ideologies.  

One of the distressing factors which was a matter of concern for Mahtab was the fast deteriorating administrative machinery. He had the guts to point out the vital problem of administration to Pandit Nehru in a secret note to the Prime Minister, on twenty third April, 1952. He warned that if this adverse phenomenon was "not tackled boldly and tactfully, it might land the country in an enormous difficulty later on". He said the administrative machinery in the country was inherited from the British. They had built it to suit their purposes which was served to the fullest extent. But "it must be remembered", he told Nehru, that the British administration in India was not only a foreign administration, but also an undemocratic administration. It was an administration most efficient for the purposes of foreign rule, which was not responsible to the people....

Evidently therefore the administrative machinery is not suited to the present conditions now obtaining in the country. Today it is not only Swaraj but a democratic Swaraj which the administrative machinery must be turned to serve as efficiently as possible..... the machinery is not in the same conditions today, as it was handed over to us.

There is considerable deterioration in all spheres of administration and further deterioration is inevitable unless some effective steps are taken.... Not I think the time has come when this has to be attended to.  

Prime Minister Nehru did not disagree with him in his reply on May fourth 1952 he said, "I agree with a great deal with what you said......we should have to look into the matter soon". But it seemed the matter ended there. Nothing was done on Mahtab's note of caution. And slowly the administrative set up continued deteriorating. Far sighted Dr. Mahtab had foreseen this eventuality. Really he was a political prophet.

However, this short period of two years clearly reveals his foresight, personality, bravery, sincerity, honesty, integrity and patriotism of a true Congressman. What he had suggested regarding the articles 14, 19 and 31 of the Indian Constitution, Privy Purses and ideological conflict by receiving U.S.A. aid for Community Development Programme materialised afterwards during his own lifetime. A Pragmatic and practical politician can never

207. Ibid.
commit the mistake of not expressing something which he can clearly visualise. Dr. Mahtab has proved himself a politician of this category.

From his "while serving my nation (Recollection of a Congressman)" it is obvious that he was quite unhappy with the developments after 1952, but he had no other way out except to accept Nehru's mandate. It was a fact that Nehru was not 'pleased' with him. But the reason behind it is too difficult to be traced out. As it seems, perhaps Nehru did not have full confidence on Dr. Mahtab and he was deprived of a berth in the Cabinet at the Centre after 1952. This ignominy did not allow him any peace of mind for a while. Then he was always for a look out to be at the centre of active politics. Though in the general election held in early 1952, Dr. Mahtab was elected he had to tolerate very awfully his exclusion from Nehru's Cabinet. The young politician as he used to be known by that time who could dream of succeeding Nehru just before two years on the strength of the forecasts by some eminent persons after his swearing in ceremony in 1950, had a sudden fall by being dropped from the ministry.
On May nineth of 1952 Mahtab was informed by Pandit Nehru that his services were no longer required in the Government of India. Pandit Nehru suggested to him that he could take up some other work. Next day Mahtab in a letter to Prime Minister said about the letter's offer "I do not know at present if I can make myself available for this work". Prime Minister in his reply on the same day said I am sorry you do not like the suggestion I made about taking up the secretaryship of the party...... I consider it of the greatest importance......I hope you will think over this again. Same day Panditji wrote another letter to Mahtab in which he said,.... "I mention to you two ideas.... one was that you should become the Secretary of the Legislative Party in Parliament. I consider it a position of highest responsibility today. It means constant touch with developments in Parliament and consultations about them. The other was my suggestion that you should function in our Central A.I.C.C. Headquarters as something in the nature of a Deputy Chairman or by what ever may you might call it in effect it meant the close contact of a member of the Working Committee with the work there helping the President to carry it out".


Being dropped by Pandit Nehru he has offered the office of the Chairmanship of the Bharat Sevak Samaj. For him a special post of Secretary General of the Congress Parliamentary Party was created. He accepted this Office and tried to organise the Party on a solid basis.

"Towards the end of 1952, he was invited by the U.S. Government to visit their country and watch the Presidential Election which was being held then. He toured a number of universities in U.S.A. and delivered talks which impressed the white people much. He, therefore caught the imagination of the U.S.A. public. Everywhere after his speech he faced a series of questions regarding Chinese aggression, Community Development Programme, growth of Cattle population, birth Control, Socio-economic principles, basic structures of the Indian Constitution, Nehruvian Policy, both national and International, Gandhian Principles and ideologies. Dr.Mahtab answered these questions very clearly and tactfully with his presence of mind. But sometimes he was put into a maze."211 While in U.S.A. Dr.Mahtab met more important international personalities like Einstein. The conversation with him was very interesting. Dr.Mahtab asked him about the remedies of the hazards

of atom bomb. The latter rather replied humourously that it would be invented in India, as it is an area of the 'Spirit'. The western development of Science had led to the discovery of the mystery of the matter, whereas in India the mystery of the spirit had been discovered long ago.

"From U.S.A. he went to Japan. Though his stay in Japan was very short, still he tried to know the land and Subash Chandra Bose's activities there. For Japanese Bose was a divine person". 212

He visited some Universities and three typical industries and gained a different experience. In India regarding Land Reform he had tried his best to convey his opinions to the Planning Commission.

As Secretary General of the Parliamentary Party, Dr. Mahtab made it very active. It "became so active that some of the Ministers felt embarrassed because the party began to point out the lapses in the administration of various spheres. The Prime Minister himself also on some occasions felt embarrassed and annoyed". 213

212. Ibid. 73.
213. Dr. Mahtab, H.K.; 'While Serving My Nation', Opp. Cit. p. 82.
Minister's annoyance provoked Mahtab to send in his resignation letter to Nehru. But then the problems were solved. Finally in 1955 Dr. Mahtab was persuaded by Congress leaders to accept the post of the Governor of Bombay. After that the Secretary General post of Congress Parliamentary Party was abolished in his honour. But inspite of the fact that he had accepted this party post for more than two years reluctantly in an unhappy state of mind he contributed his best to the party and its members in the Parliament. Above all he never hesitated to putforth his views on different matters aimed at strengthening the Congress Government and the Nation during this period.
4.2 Dr. MAHTAB AS GOVERNOR
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Dr. H.K. Mahtab was one of the few seniormost leaders of the Congress Party who were put in-charge of shaping and destiny of the country after they led the nation in its struggle for freedom to success. It was naturally expected that Dr. Mahtab would hold important positions in the Government after independence. He was one of the lucky few to occupy two very important posts i.e. Chief Ministership of Orissa and Union Cabinet Minister, one after another continuously for five years after independence. When he was not included in the Cabinet after 1952 General Election he was offered many posts which included posts in the Party and the assignment of Governor, which he had straightway declined. But he was persuaded to accept a Party post which was specially created for him. Of course Nehru was bent upon utilising his services as Governor. Ultimately Dr. Mahtab yielded to the pressure from his senior political friends like Rajaji to accept the Governorship in undivided Bombay Province.

In a country like India the suitable posts for a senior politician like Mahtab were Chief Ministership of
a state, a berth in the Union Cabinet, Governorship of an important state, and finally Prime Ministership of the country. These were the handful of Government posts for senior politicians. Dr. Mahtab had the privilege of experiencing the first two. Since the last post was being held by titanic Pandit Nehru nobody in the then Congress Party could dare to dream about it as long as Pandit Nehru was there, "Then the other assignment which was left for Mahtab was the post of Governor. Interestingly when he was dropped from the Union Cabinet Nehru asked him to assume the office of the Governor which he refused. His contention was he was too young for the post". 214

Then even when he was functioning as the Secretary General of the Parliamentary Party he could not know "Why and how Jawaharlalji became intent upon sending me out as a Governor of State........ he tried through some friends of Orissa and Delhi to make me agree to go to Bombay as Governor where the office was lying vacant after the death of Girija Shankar Bajpai, I.C.S." 215. Though he was reluctant yet in the Avadi Session 'of Congress at Madras he was requested by the then Chief Minister of

215. Ibid. p. 98.
Bombay Morarji Desai to accept the offer. Till that time retired senior bureaucrats were being sent as Governors to different states but Morarji was fed up with bureaucrat Governor. He wanted a political leader to be the Governor of the State. Mahtab was advised by political friends like Rajagopalachari, Dr. K.N.Katju to accept the offer. But he was in a dilemma. He had a lot of personal problems. The family burden was there. He was passing through financial difficulty after Zamindari was abolished which had forced him to accept salaried directorship of a Private Company. He was worried about the future of his own creations, i.e. institutions like the Prajatantra. The most important issues which were causing concern to him, was the fate of his pet projects like Hirakud Dam and New Capital at Bhubaneswar. The then State Congress Governments was opposed to this projects. However, he decided to accept the post of Governor and "mark time till the next General Election in 1957 when "he would" take a chance to project and further" his 'pet projects'.

His appointment as Governor of Bombay in early part of 1955 created tremendous enthusiasm in Orissa

and West Bengal and among Congress circles all over India. As he was a popular, towering personality with an active career in politics having bright future, his selection evoked positive reactions in the country because before him the posts of Governors were the domain of senior I.C.S. Officers or old retiring politicians.

"Since he was the first in Orissa to be appointed as Governor, that too of an important State as that of Bombay, he was given tremendous evation. Till then Governor's post used to carry great honour and respect which in course of time has eroded almost to the vanishing point. In those days, a Governor in his state was superior in rank even to that of the Prime Minister of India". 217 Governors were not receiving or seeing off the Prime Minister whenever he visited their states. As soon as the oath-taking ceremony was over Dr. Mahtab invited the Congress Workers, freedom fighters and other elites to Raj Bhawan. He developed such a contact with the common people that K.K.Shah, Secretary of the Bombay P.C.C. exclaimed that it was no longer Raj Bhawan, it was Janata Bhawan. At that time there was a serious difference between the Chief Minister

217. Ibid., p. 102.
Morarji Desai and P.C.C. President Sri S.K. Patil. Dr. Mahtab mediated to bring both of them closer. The differences between the Chief Minister and the Chief Justice M.C. Chagla was an important development. Differences between the Universities and the Government also prevailed. Dr. Mahtab played a very active and constructive role in resolving these differences.

He visited all the important Places in the State of the Maharastra portion, the Gujarat portion as well as the small Karnataka portion. After seeing all these regions he came to the conclusion that this state had diverse elements to be kept in view. The Gujarat portion was economically far superior as the Gujaratis were proficient in trade and industry, while Maharastrains were intellectuals at the top and working class below Karnataka region remained under developed.

His visit to Bombay Museum and the National Library also proved more successful. Apart from that his visit to Sabarmati Ashram and other important places of Bombay were appreciated by all. Regarding the liquor prohibition in Bombay, Dr. Mahtab, after direct and practical experiences, came to know that it was no more than a farce. He commented
before the Chief Minister that the law did not hold good. But the Chief Minister defined and told him that the implementation of the law was successful. Thus, Dr. Mahtab believed, "Throughout the ages, the Indian mind has been turned to profession of high moral values to such an extent that it refuses to accept the realities in action of these professions. Artificial life is the bane of Indian Society".\(^{218}\)

Due to his efforts the 'Udyoga Bhavan' was established in the Raj Bhavan premises to employ the wives of the Raj Bhavan employees to have some extra earnings when the employees demanded higher salaries. By virtue of his intervention the carvings of Shivaji were protected and this removed the possibility of regional violence. On the occasion of Lord Buddha's 2500th Birth Anniversary he took initiative for a week long function at Bombay on account of the encouragement of Madam Sofia Wadia. Moreover, after the function was successful, he created a mission named Buddha Jayanti Mission to work for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. But after he left Bombay, Buddha Jayanti Mission ceased to function as was the case with Udyoga Bhavan in Raj Bhavan premises.

\(^{218}\) Ibid., p. 111.
By that time Government of India appointed a Commission under the Chairmanship of Sri B.G.Kher to look into the problem of the languages in India and to recommend solution therefore.²¹⁹

The germination of the nationalistic spirit in Dr. Mahtab is clearly evidenced from his ideas to impart instructions through the medium of National Languages, the stress was more on Hindi to be the national language as the medium of instruction in schools and colleges. In this connection Dr. Mahtab made an appeal to the head of the State where he pleaded for Hindi to be the national language and that the national language should be the medium of instruction at the Universities. Also it should be a compulsory subject at Higher Secondary Schools and Colleges, he suggested. It was his impression that imparting teaching without a national language has no sense for Indian subject. Denying to impart teaching through Hindi appears to be anti-national in character. This proves Dr. Mahtab to be a patriot. Through his full devotion towards the development of Indian culture and language,

²¹⁹. Ibid., p. 105.
he brought a great reform to the national language, for bringing uniformity in imparting of teaching throughout India. He, thus, heralded a new era, so far language is concerned. Thus, with him a new renaissance and reformation in the sphere of national language evolved. It is, therefore, said Dr. Mahtab became modern political philosopher in Orissa.

"He had his own personal opinion and suggestions on the issue like 'Indian, Socialism', 'Kashmir Problem', 'Education in Parliamentary System', 'Land and Village Industry', 'India's Planning', 'Administrative Reforms'. On the above matters he had discussions with some important personalities whom he received and entertained as his guests. He conveyed all his opinions to the Prime Minister and other competent authorities who gladly accepted his suggestions. He wanted to do something positive and constructive on the above matters. It is a matter of great regret that the wonderful ideas of Dr. Mahtab could not be implemented successfully since he has to face many oppositions. It was not really the opposition but it was actually an affair of heart-burning and jealousy which was but natural for a human being. But he could not be able to find any support. Only the process of
correspondence continued". But he could not send an article on 'Indian Socialism' to the 'New York Times' in compliance with the latter's request because he did not get Prime Minister's permission. The talks he had with King Saud-I of Saudi Arabia on 'Kashmir Issue' could not be kept a secret. Regarding the education in 'Parliamentary System', 'Land and Village Industries', 'Administrative Reforms' as well as India's Planning he wrote to all those concerned and received due response through letters but nothing tangible could come out of all these efforts.

Practically, the self analysis of Dr. Mahtab was proved to be correct. He was too young to be Governor on all public matters, both regional and national, he was quite serious and concerned which perhaps, a Governor is not expected to be. He was quite enthusiastic and had a dream for all round development of India particularly in the fields of culture, education, industry technology, democracy, Planning, Secularism and administration.

It is generally said that men are inherently good but it is only the circumstances which makes a man good

220. In all the above matters the letters from both the sides are published in While Serving My Nation, Opp. Cit. p. 107.
The failure of Dr. Mahtab in implementing his ideas may mostly rest with the prevailing political circumstances. People around Dr. Mahtab could not tolerate the leadership and the wisdom of Dr. Mahtab. The brilliancy of Dr. Mahtab created more enemies in his life.

As the Governor of Bombay he had shown his skill and competence in matters of administration. On many issues, whether he was officially or politically concerned or not, he expressed his views conscientiously keeping in mind the interest of the people and the nation. He did not bother, whether his views or suggestions were accepted or not. But not only as an office bearer but also in his personal capacity he wanted to know about all the issues and affairs around him and suggested something which he felt worthy suggestion. He was quite free, frank and open in his manners and temperament on matters of common interest. His conviction was that the matters of common interest would affect one and all. He was a true democrat, not only a political democrat, but also a spiritual democrat.
4.3 Dr. H.K. MAHTAB AS OPPOSITION LEADER
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It was home coming for Dr.H.K. Mahtab when he came back to Orissa from Bombay Raj Bhavan as Chief Minister for the Second time. This time he could not be as effective in power politics as he was earlier. Critics say that he manipulated his return to Orissa by ousting Sri Nabakurshna Choudhury from Chief Ministership. "Living in distant Bombay Dr.Mahtab grew apprehensive as Choudhury stabilised his position in the organization. In this he saw the prospect of his political future in Orissa being sealed. For Dr.Mahtab Bombay Governorship was like political exils which actually it was. He was therefore, intently looking for the first opportunity to return to his home state."221 Of course "as an administrator Sri Nabakrushna Choudhury was not a great success, at least he did not compare well with Dr.Mahtab on this score."222 Congress leadership was apprehensive about next general election which was due in 1957. The question was who would shoulder the responsibility of the election. The then Union Education Minister Moulana Abul Kalam Azad who was in charge of

222. Ibid., p. 78.
party affairs in eastern region contacted Dr. Mahtab and suggested that the latter should take over Orissa affairs. Since there was a suspicion that Dr. Mahtab was creating destabilisation in Orissa, he was hesitant to accept the offer. He was not also sure of Pandit Nehru's mind. He wrote to Mr. Azad on April 1956, "If I say yes then it might be thought that I was working for it. If I say no I might be accused of self diffidence and perhaps of disobedience to high command..... I have no desire to go to any place where the Prime Minister and the High Command will have any suspicion or prejudice about me. I am at the disposal of the Prime Minister and the High Command. If they ask me to go and take charge of Orissa I shall do it and try my utmost to retrieve the situation." 223

Finally on October nineteenth, 1956 Dr. Mahtab assumed power in Orissa but the next four years on Chief Minister gaddi was no smooth sailing for him. According to Dr. S.C. Dash, an eminent political scientist of Orissa "this was a wrong decision for him (Mahtab). Otherwise with his reputation as a Governor he might have developed just on the model of one of his distinguished contemporaries. Dr. Zakir Husain who left education to become the Governor

223. Ibid., pp. 84-85.
of Bihar from where he ultimately entered the Rastrapati Bhawan through the office of the Vice-President. Had not power hunger obsessed Dr. Mahtab the history of Orissa would have flown through a different course and he himself would have been a different man."  

"After Dr. Mahtab assumed Chief Ministership, the immediate responsibility he was to take up was to lead the Congress party in second general election in 1957. But the Congress had a set back in polls, though it became the single largest party in the Assembly. The sad performance of Congress was mostly due to the sabotage of anti-Mahtab faction in the election. Any way Dr. Mahtab formed the ministry after the election with support from M.L.As. of other parties and some independent members. But when the stability of the ministry was affected he wanted to quit. Of course on the insistence of his party colleagues he formed the first Coalition Ministry with Ganatantra Parishad which continued till February 1961. By that time he was under lot of strain and stress and was almost a "helpless soul."  

Notwithstanding the murky politics during his second tenure as Chief Minister and his tacit

224. Ibid., p. 86.
225. Ibid., p. 120.
involvement in many developments which could be termed as unfair and unethical, he never compromised on the question of Orissa's development. Amidst turmoil in the political spheres he tried his best to give the administration a new direction. Inspite of lot of hindrances and shortcomings he saw to it that his pet projects fructified. New Capital at Bhubaneswar was his brain-child but during Nabakrushna Choudhury's period "the project of Capital Construction was given up. It was not included in the Five Year Plan all the work therefore stopped". "Mahtab got it included in the Second Five Year Plan and the work was restored after a lapse of about five years". During his time Orissa Museum, Nandan Kanan Zoological and Botanical Garden, New Raj Bhawan, New Assembly building, Permanent location of Utkal University came up. The construction of Secretariat building was completed. Three academics named as Sahitya, Sangita and Lalitkala started.

"After 1961 though he remained in party politics till 1977 he could never be able to come to power individually.

227. Ibid., p. 185.
what he did till his death and more particularly till 1977 was that he always remained in the background of Orissa politics. In the mid-term pool in 1961 with Dr. Mahtab practically out of state Congress was under the grip of Mr. Biju Pattnaik who led the party to victory employing all his resources. Dr. Mahtab's excellence in political career gained prominence particularly during '1962-1977'. This period for Dr. Mahtab is the greatest landmark in his miscellaneous role in political career. This period is an interlude from his philosophy of liberalism to constitutionalism. This period is rather a junction of his tremendous success and failure of his political career.

In 1961, Dr. Mahtab contested Lok Sabha election & was elected uncontested. In the Centre the Prime Minister Nehru appointed him as the Deputy President of the Congress Party in Parliament.

Since Dr. Mahtab was revered as a stalwart in the party his opinion on any matter was being viewed

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with all seriousness in the country. Again his special position as the Deputy leader of the party in Parliament added much to this. In his usual way Dr. Mahtab was not hesitating to make his opinion clear if the government was in default in any sphere or was having any ambiguous stand on any issue. The climax came "when India was defeated by China because of bad administration of defence ministry led by V. Krishna Menon. . . . . We insisted that Krishna Menon should resign under our pressure. Prime Minister was compelled to drop him from the Cabinet."

"His hypothesis was also valid in the case of the position of the Congress Party in Orissa during Biju Patnaik's ministry. Patnaik's dynamism and promises for rapid industrialisation along with the feasibility of their implementation did not carry any further sense and the political opponents whom he silenced in June, 1961 gathered strength and courage to act against him.

"Dr. Mahtab's faction joined the opposition in exposing the misdeeds and corruption in Government and

sometimes over exposing the pitfalls of Pattanaik's leadership that led the state almost to bankruptcy. Though there was still a lot to make Orissa industrially advanced, Panchayat industries were failures, the Congress organisation was discredited and the prospects of the party were bleak. Mahtab faction failed to check Pattanaik's ambitions despite protests from both inside and outside the party. This led to their decision to quiet Congress and form a Regional Party known as 'Jana Congress' Party on fifth May, 1966. Eleven M.L.As. and one M.P. joined this new Party".  

Then came the 1967 Election. Dr. Mahtab the founder of Jana Congress Party led the oust Congress campaign. "He had an electoral alliance with Swatantra Party on the basis of twenty second point Programme". The Congress was practically routed in the election and the Coalition came out victorious. The "poll outcome once again proved the supremacy of Dr. Mahtab as a shrewd political speculator". But since Swatantra Party had more number of legislators, Dr. Mahtab could not become

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the Chief Minister. The post went to R.N. Singh Deo, Mahtab's nominee Mr. Pabitra Mohan Pradhan became the Deputy Chief Minister from Jana Congress side.

"After the Coalition Government settled in power, the critical juncture of Dr. Mahtab's political life arrived. At the insistence of Dr. Mahtab, Khanna Commission was appointed on twenty sixth October, 1967 to probe into seventy charges of corruption against eight Congress Ministers and seven Deputy Ministers. But Sadasiva Tripathy along with twenty four others M.L.As. made a representation in May, 1967 to Dr. Zakir Husain, the then President of India and alleged that the selection of the period for enquiry was arbitrary", and that it should be extensive". Their target was Dr. Mahtab who was instrumental in digging up the holes for them".

Then Mudholkar probe Body was appointed to make an enquiry in respect of the allegations against the accused leaders, including the Chief Minister Singh Deo himself.

234. Ibid., P. 75, Also See Ghosh, Sunit, 'Orissa on Turmoil', Opp., Cit., pp. 153-154.
and submitted the report to the Chief Minister on twenty-eighth September of 1968. Mudholkar found Dr. Mahtab guilty of many of the charges and suggested that in public interest as well as in the interest of Dr. Mahtab himself, "an enquiry into these matters be caused to be made by a Commission of enquiry, appointed under the Commission of Enquiry Act". When Dr. Mahtab wanted to pull down the Coalition Ministry to join Congress, Singh Deo Government "decided to set up a one-man Commission headed by Sarjoo Prasad, ex-Chief Justice of Rajasthan and Assam High Courts to probe certain charged against Dr. Mahtab on the basis of Mudholkar Report. The sword of Democles kept hanging as far, fell at last". Prior to this Dr. Mahtab took every step to shake the Government, but in all the ways he failed.

Dr. Mahtab joined the Congress(R) with his group in 1971. Before that Biju Pattanaik had left Congress to form his own regional party, while Dr. Mahtab had a chance to reappear in Congress by adopting a career

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of political defection. However, after his entry into the Congress Mahtab thought of leading the Government, but the result of the election had taken a different turn. The Coalition Government of Utkal Congress and Swatantra Party (Biju Pattanaik and R.N.Singh Deo) came to be headed by the veteran Congress leader Biswanath Das.

"After the Sarojoo Prasad Commission report had been submitted on May twenty fifth, 1972 the Government issued a Press release incorporating the findings of the Commission and it was also widely circulated. The Report of the Commission in the eyes of the general public was highly subjective in treatment. It was rather parochial in approach, more partial than the impartiality of the Commission itself. Only about a month later the non-Congress Ministry fell and was replaced by a Congress Ministry headed by Mrs. Nandini Satapathy. Dr. Mahtab failed to have any favour from Mrs. Gandhi to take the reins of the administration of the State of Orissa." 237 "Dr. Mahtab was then in the Congress, therefore, the Commission report was set aside. He broke away from the Congress in November

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237. Ibid., pp. 222-235.
1972, the report was referred to the C.B.I. In January, 1973 for taking follow up action by the Satapathy Government. Though the C.B.I. filed an F.I.R. the State Police did not submit the charge sheet. Inspite of the findings of the Sarjoo Prasad Commission, Dr. Mahtab won the elections to the State Assembly in 1974. He repeated his performance of victory in each election, this time. A combined efforts was made by Dr. Mahtab, Mr. Singh Deo and Biju Pattanaik to defeat the Congress by forming a combined front named as 'Orissa Pragati Dal'. But they could not succeed as Mrs. Gandhi's charismatic personality was sufficient for the victory of the Congress. Mrs. Satapathy again came to head the Ministry with the support of the C.P.I. and Independent Members. In one of his (Mahtab) articles Dr. Mahtab wanted to draw the attention of the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to certain facts during the period of emergency for which he was detained in prison for about nineteen months, Orissa was then under the Chief Ministership of Mrs. Satapathy and was subjected to a type of repression which only

few other states in India experienced". He was very badly treated in 'Phulbani Jail', but after his 'agitation' better treatment was given to him in 'Bhanjanagar Jail'.

In 1977 he retired from active politics. His years of retirement witnessed certain changes in the Indian Political Scenario. After retirement from active politics in 1977, he was alive for about a decade and could have written about all these. His Political life from 1956-1986, for a period of 30 (Thirty) years, is neither written by him in detail nor has it been compiled by anyone else. So it is imprudent to come to any convincing conclusion about some political controversies to which he himself was a party.

Thus, the illustrious political career of Dr. Mahatab which spanned over six active decades enriched the political as well as socio-economic, fields of the country. More particularly it projected Orissa in an enviable positions in the country before and after Independence. Orissa

was proud of having such a most celebrated Oriya like Dr. Mahtab whose distinguished political career whether in power or in Opposition added glory to it.