CHAPTER VI
The Congress-Ganatantra Coalition had secured a majority in the Assembly and thereby became capable to form a Government. Chief Minister, Mahtab believed and was confident that Ganatantra would merge with Congress and thereby the princes of Western Orissa can take the Congress leadership in these areas. Congress members were in favour of this merger but the Ganatantra Parishad was afraid of its own identity in a colossus party like Congress. Thus, the hope of merger was belied. Mahtab was showing least interest to resurrect the party where it was moribund and inactive. Because he was afraid that it would make the Parishad leaders dissatisfied. Those Congress workers coming from Sambalpur, Bolangir, Sundargarh and Kalahandi were not given proper treatment by the ministers of Ganatantra Parishad in the Capital. Though Mahtab was aware of all these things still he remained silent as he was too much crazy to keep his party in power. Mahtab had been publicly announcing that no party can form the Government unless supported by the Ganatantra Parishad. It was known to
all Congressmen including Mahtab that the result of the first and second General Elections to the State Assembly conclusively proved that the Congress failed to make a headway in the hill districts which voted predominantly for the Parishad and regarded as the fort of Ganatantra Parishad whereas the coastal districts largely supported the Congress and both were more or less of equal strength. Therefore, it followed that neither the Congress nor the Parishad was in a position to form the Government and assure political stability in the state.

The idea of a coalition government of the Congress and the Parishad was first mooted in the mind of Biju Pattanaik who worked hard to make a coalition of two arch rivals. At last, he succeeded in forming the coalition government due to his tremendous influence over the high command. The only motive behind this unusual coalition is to share power together. The coalition government was formed in 1959 with approval of the Central Parliamentary Board. In the meantime Mahtab had developed a close rapport with the Ganatantra Parishad leaders especially Singhdeo. Biju Pattanaik who was central to this formation of coalition ministry became alienated and was dissatisfied with the functioning of the coalition government. Both the rival parties could not solve the issues amicably and within a month the relations between the Congress and the Parishad became embittered. Biju Pattanaik who was instrumental in forming this government became eager...
to make it dissolved. For this, Biju Pattanaik instigated the Congress workers against Mahtab. In this regard, Biren Mitra joined hands with Pattanaik totally. Mahtab was having peculiar attitude towards his friends. He treated his friends like shoes which can be used and thrown away according to time and circumstances. He took the support of Biju and Biren in order to oust N. K. Choudhury and install himself in power. As soon as he came to power he deserted the two congress stalwarts, Biju Pattanaik and Biren Mitra, to enjoy the fruits of power alone. The anti-Mahtab lobby in the Congress seriously opposed the coalition and demanded the dissolution of the Ministry. Ultimately, the coalition collapsed on 25 February, 1961, and President's rule was declared in Orissa. Under the dynamic leadership of Biju Pattanaik, the Congress appeared to be stronger in 1961 than before. Biju Pattanaik started reorganising the Congress Party in order to make the Congress agile and active throughout Orissa. The mid-term election was held in Orissa in the first week of June, 1961. It started on 2nd June and ended on 8th June, the counting of votes took place from 8th June to 11th June. 95 lakhs voters exercised their right of franchise in the mid-term election of 1961. After proper scrutiny and withdrawal of nomination papers, the total number of candidates contesting for the Assembly constituencies came to 533. Candidates, in the mid-term election were set-up by recognising all India parties like Congress, Communist, PSP, and nominees of the regional party like Ganatantra Parishad
and Independents. The Congress put up 140 candidates which was equal to the total number of seats in Orissa Legislative Assembly. Biju Pattanaik was contesting from two Constituencies, i.e., from Dhenkanal and Choudwar. The Ganatantra Parishad set up 117 candidates: PSP 46, Communist 35, Independents 163 candidates. H. K. Mahtab, R. N. Rath of Congress Party and Udit Pratap Sekhar Deo and Laxmi Prasad Mishra of Ganatantra Parishad who were active ministers of coalition ministry of 1959 were receded in the mid-term election. Out of 11 ministers of the coalition ministry of 1959, 7 ministers of Congress Party and 4 of Ganatantra Parishad were contesting in the mid-term election in 1961. There were 3 women candidates, namely, Ratna Prava Devi, Rani of Dhenkanal, Ratnamali Jena of Ersoma Constituency, Cuttack; Saraswati Pradhan of Bhatli Constituency, Sambalpur. According to the abolition of double member constituency Act of 1961, it was decided on 22 April, 1961, that 25 seats were reserved for schedule tribe and 29 for schedule caste. It was also decided that out of the 20 parliamentary seats, 8 seats were equally divided and reserved for SCs & STs.

The following table would give an idea about different categories of contestants who took part in the Mid-Term Poll of 1961.
Total Number of seats of the Legislative Assembly: - 140.

1961 Mid-term election to the Orissa Legislative Assembly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Parties</th>
<th>No. of candidates set up</th>
<th>No. of seats own</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ganatantra Parishad</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communist</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.S.P.</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The result of mid-term election of 1961 almost reversed the process in the electoral politics of the state which had started in 1952. The Ganatantra Parishad's performance in 1961 was poor in comparison to the last two elections of 1952 and 1957. It secured 37 seats in 1961 which was 15 less than the number of seats it had own in 1957. On the other hand, the Congress emerged victorious with as many as 82 seats and for the first time in its history it could secured absolute majority in the Legislative Assembly. The Parishad polled 26.0% as against the Congress's 58.5% of valid votes cast in 1961 election. The reverse trend in 1961 will clearly reveal from a comparative analysis of the three election
of 1952, 1957 and 1961. Orissa had always been a problem state for Congress after independence. In 1952, Congress had own 67 seats out of 140. In 1957 its strength was reduced to 56. In 1959, the Congress virtually became a minority and was forced to form a coalition with the Ganatantra Parishad. In 1961, the Congress own 82 seats. In the earlier elections of 1952 and 1957, the Parishad was increasingly popular and secured 31 seats in 1952 which went upto 51 in 1957. In 1959, it shared power with the Congress. But in the Mid-term election of 1961, the victory of the Congress was magnificent and Congress came out as the single dominant party in the Orissa Legislative Assembly. The Congress which could not enter and had no root in the hill areas in the previous two elections came out very successful by defeating the Parishad in several constituencies of the hill districts. The most important straight battle was between Biju Pattanaik, the state Congress Chief and the queen of Dhenkanal Ratna Prava Devi, a Parishad candidate. Biju Pattanaik was defeated by queen Ratna Prava Devi in this prestigious battle. Unlike 1952 and 1957 General Elections when both Assembly and Loksabha Election were held in Orissa simultaneously, in 1962, Orissa faced only Loksabha Election, as the Assembly Elections were over in 1961. Ganatantra Parishad, because of its poor performance in mid-term election decided to put up candidates only in those areas where it had tremendous influence. The Parishad did not contest for any seat from Cuttack, Puri and Balasore districts. It also withdrew its candidates from Angul Constituency where H. K. Mahtab
was a candidate. Surendra Mohanty, one of the stalwarts of Ganatantra Parishad, resigned from the party before the election and contested for Lok Sabha on Congress ticket. Ganatantra Parishad put up 11 candidates as against 18 in 1957 and secured 4 Lok Sabha seats in 1962 as against 6 in 1957. Except P. K. Deo all other nominees were strangers to Lok Sabha Election. The Congress doubled its representation in the Lok Sabha by setting 20 candidates and thereby bagging 14 seats in 1962 as against 7 in 1957. Thus, the Congress in the mid-term Assembly Elections, could establish its supremacy over all other parties both in the Assembly and in Parliamentary Elections.

The disastrous flood of 1960 was a blessing in disguise for Biju Pattnaik who worked incessantly for relief work. Unfortunately, all the rivers were inundated with flood waters and thereby making a havoc in the state. Relief work was hampered severely as the roads and rails were submerged in water and the government could not provide relief to flood stricken people. At this sad period, Pattanaik requested the Chief Minister, Mahtab to provide to the flood-affected people by dropping succour food packets from aeroplanes to the flood stricken people but Mahtab turned down the proposal of Biju Pattanaik. Biju Pattnaik arranged two Dakotas from his "Kalinga Airlines" and air-dropped food packets to afflicted people. On seeing all these things Mahtab became jealous of his work and fame. Distribution of food packets
from the aeroplane to the affected people of the state created a history in the state of Orissa. The adventurous work of Biju Pattnaik was flashed in all leading newspapers of India and abroad too. And history repeated itself and now it was the turn of Pattanaik. The disastrous flood of 1955 rendered immense political help to Mahtab to oust N. K. Choudhury and install himself in power. The same thing happened in case of Biju Pattanaik, who came to power as the state machinery of Mahtab failed to provide relief work to the afflicted people in time. The Congress for the first time came to power as the single dominant majority party by securing a thumping majority in the mid-term election of 1961. For this, Biju Pattnaik employed all his organising ability, energy and quality of captaincy for winning the mid-term poll in 1961.

REFERENCES

2. Ibid, pp. 104.

7. Reports of the Election Commissioner for India, New Delhi, Government of India.

8. Pravakar Pradhan, "Orissa Re Sadharana Nirvachan (General Election in Orissa), Published in Oriya Daily, 'The Samaj', dated 6.5.1961.


