The present study deals with the Government and politics of Orissa during the decade from 1952 to 1961. Both the starting and ending of this decade are greatly significant. After the commencement of new constitution of the Indian Republic, the First General Election was held all over India in 1952 and it constituted one of the most significant events in the history of Independent India. In the First General Election of 1952, the Congress Party faced a major debacle in Orissa and came out only as the single largest party. The result of the Assembly Election was disappointing for the Congress. Out of 140 seats, it was able to win only 67 seats, four short of absolute majority. It fared well in the coastal districts but had no base in the upland or hilly areas of the Western Orissa. The politics of regionalism had led to political instability in the state for which a stable party did not emerge after independence. In the preindependence election of 1946 the Congress Party seemed to be acceptable and popular as the Congress captured 47 seats out of 60 seats in the Orissa Provincial Assembly. A comparative
study of the results of the pre-independence and the post-independence election of 1952 would show that there has been a steady decline in the popularity of the Congress in the Assembly Election of Orissa. This was due to the emergence of Ganatantra Parishad with the objective of highlighting the problems and promoting the interest of Western Orissa. Ganatantra Parishad gave a serious blow to the electoral prospects of the Congress in that region. Another reason for the defeat of the Congress in this election was the setting of many parallel candidates by the factional leaders of the party under the leadership of Pt. Nilakantha Das.

Orissa politics is characterized by political instability and never in its history since 1952, has a single ministry completed its full five-year term till 1980. In this respect the Congress Government of N. K. Choudhury of 1952, Mahtab Government of 1957 and Congress-Ganatantra coalition government of Mahtab-Singhdeo of 1959 have equally failed. The towering figures like N. K. Choudhury, H. K. Mahtab and R. N. Singhdeo could not stay in power for a complete period of five years. Mahtab headed the Congress Government thrice - once before independence and twice after independence. During this period the Congress Party had often suffered from factionalism. In the first half of fifties, there ensued a bitter struggle between "Mahtab Group" & "Choudhury Group" who were fighting for capturing power at the state level. Thus the history of Congress in Orissa is the
history of intermittent factionalism, inspired and aided by the inner motive of the leaders to capture the reins of the state. As no party was coming with a clear majority in 1952 Election, the ministry making became a problem and at last N. K. Choudhury was sworn in as the Chief Minister of Orissa. Apart from enjoying the full support and confidence of Pt. Nehru, Choudhury also got the support of the then Orissa Pradesh Congress Committee President, Biswanath Das and backed by the Independent People's Party headed by the erstwhile Congress leader, Pandit Nilakantha Das.

When Naba Krushna Choudhury formed the ministry after First General Election in 1952, there was tension and dissension in the Congress Party. Both Biju Pattanaik and Biren Mitra were trying tooth & nail to be included in the Choudhury Ministry. Mahtab very cleverly blocked their entry in the ministry as he thought their inclusion in the ministry might be injurious to the party and the government. But Biju was very much interested to join the Cabinet in order to quicken the industrial growth of Orissa. In his Cabinet, Naba Krishna Choudhury also did not include Pabitra Mohan Pradhan, the Ex-Praja Mandal Leader of Ex-State areas, who was a minister in his previous ministry. This created some dissension in the party as the Garjat Representatives felt that they were neglected.

The politics of Orissa took a dramatic turn with the merger.
of Princely States in 1948 (only Mayurbhanj was merged in 1949). Before the merger and during the pre-independence period, the Congress was accepted as the undisputed party in the state. The Congress Party became unpopular in the newly merged areas of Western Orissa because a vast area got submerged with water due to the construction of Hirakud Dam in the district of Sambalpur. Another reason for the unpopularity of the Congress Party was the withdrawal of Socialists from the Congress Party throughout India in 1948 who formed the Socialist Party consisting of prominent freedom fighters and functioned as the main opposition to the Congress in the coastal districts. Mahtab had earned name and fame after the merger of Princely States and it was possible largely due to the initiative of Mahtab who took a bold step in this direction. He had developed a charisma in Orissa politics and Pt. Nehru thought that Mahtab was indispensable for Orissa. Pt. Nehru was so much impressed that he inducted him in his Central Cabinet in May 1950 as the Minister of Commerce & Industry, though his tenure at the Centre was for a brief period of two years. Pt. Nehru became dissatisfied with Mahtab for his meddling in the affairs of other ministries of the Government of India and even wrote to him drawing his attention. After the First General Election of 1952, Pt. Nehru formed his ministry where Mahtab could not get a berth. However, he was appointed as the Secretary General of the Congress Parliamentary Party. In 1955, Nehru appointed him as the Governor of Bombay to keep...
him away from Central and State Politics of Orissa. Mahtab felt uncomfortable as the Governor of Bombay due to his differences with Morarjee Desai, the then Chief Minister of Bombay. At this juncture, the ministry of N. K. Choudhury assumed its identity of a progressive government for its policies and programmes. Mahtab started manoeuvring from the Bombay Raj Bhawan to cause the ouster of Choudhury from Orissa politics. He made up his mind to come back to Orissa politics and started preparing the ground for it. His strategy was to create instability in the State and tension for the Chief Minister. For this purpose, he utilised his young trusted Lieutenants - Biju Pattnaik, Biren Mitra, Nilamani Routroy, Dinabandhu Sahu, Banmali Pattnaik and Brundaban Naik to create troubles for Choudhury by criticising him and the policies of his Government. In September, 1955, Dalai Gai collapsed due to terrible floods in Cuttack District. Thousands of people had been marooned in vast areas of Cuttack causing devastation by the unprecedented flood in Mahanadi. But this natural calamity too was given a political colour by the young supporters of Mahtab. A vote of no-confidence was brought against Choudhury Government on the ground of Government's total negligence and irresponsibility in protecting the lives and properties of the flood-stricken people but it ended in a fiasco. Mahtab visited the flood affected areas four months after the collapse of Dalai Gai and openly criticised the in-effective handling of the situation by the Government. In 1956, the report
of the States' Reorganisation Commission was published in which the Government of India took the decision of transferring the Oriya speaking tracts of Saraikala and Kharsuan to the State of Bihar. The people of Orissa got dejected and vexed with the report of the S.R.C. All these incidents were politicised and utilised by Mahtab and his supporters in weakening the cohesion and discipline in the party. He instructed his trusted supporters to make frequent petitions to the Congress President and the Prime Minister against N. K. Choudhury and engaged them in launching campaign to oust Choudhury from power. His followers successfully created a climate of political instability in Orissa and at last a gentle, honest and peace loving man like N. K. Choudhury got disgusted with the politicking of Mahtab and took a firm decision to resign and retire from politics. The disrupted economy of the state and divided party loyalty were factors for which Choudhury decided to resign in 1956, although he was enjoying majority support as evident in the result of the President of Orissa Pradesh Congress Committee in 1955. In this election Biswanath Das, N. K. Choudhury's nominee defeated Banamali Pattnaik, who was Dr. Mahtab's nominee. The defeat of Pattnaik was considered to be defeat of Mahtab at the time. The notable persons opposed to Mahtab's come-back to Orissa Politics were Radhanath Rath, the then Finance Minister, Bhairab Charan Mohanty, Surendra Nath Pattnaik, Bijoy Pani and Pabitra Mohan Pradhan. Despite Pt. Nehru and Central and State's Ministers requests, N. K. Choudhury
became adamant on his decision to resign and leave politics for ever to join Sarvodaya Movement. Pt. Nehru did not like to hand over the reins of Orissa to Mahtab. Moulana Abulkalam Azad, the then Education Minister of India, also requested Nityananda Kanaongo to take over the charge of Chief Ministership of Orissa. But the latter refused the offer due to personal problems. At this juncture the Congress High Command selected H. K. Mahtab as the successor of N. K. Choudhury who left the Governorship of Bombay and became the Chief Minister of Orissa on 19th October, 1956.

After assuming the office of the Chief Ministership, Mahtab had to lead the party in the Second General Election of 1957. Mahtab's promise in 1955 to secure the restoration of Saraikala and Kharsuan to Orissa from Bihar having failed, there was widespread dissatisfaction among people. Under this circumstance, the Ganatantra Parishad took full advantage of the situation and also the prevailing 'Anti-Katki' feelings of the people of Western Orissa. Another factor that had its impact on the General Election of 1957 was the growing factionalism in the State Congress based on caste consideration. The Anti-Mahtab faction prevented the Congress Party to secure an absolute majority. At the same time, Mahtab tried to take revenge on those Congress leaders who opposed his return to Orissa Politics. In this process he antagonised a sizeable section of the party including important Congress
leaders like P. M. Pradhan, B. K. Pani, S. N. Pattnaik. He also betrayed some of his trusted followers who had worked hard and prepared ground for his return to Orissa. The Congress could not attain the position of a single majority party rather it presented a poor image of its electoral performance with its strength reduced to 56 falling short by 15 for a majority and securing only 38 percent of votes. As against the Congress, the Ganatantra Parishad achieved grand success having returned 51 members with 29 percent of votes. It seemed that the Ganatantra Parishad would replace the Congress as the dominant party in Orissa. Mahtab was very much upset in the post-election situation because the party could not secure even half of the total strength of the House with its strength reduced from 67 to 56.

Biju Pattanaik and Biren Mitra managed the party by controlling U.P.C.C. and enjoyed power behind the scene.

Factionalism inside the Congress Party became rampant after the election to the three vacant Rajyasabha seats from the state was held on 24 March, 1958. Only one Congress candidate Bibhudeendra Mishra could get through. Md. Haniff, another Congress leader was defeated due to cross voting. The outcome of the result of the Rajya Sabha Election was a major setback for Congress and personally for Mahtab. Mahtab who came back to Orissa politics with the strong backing and manipulation of his young
supporters by factionalism and defection became its victim. Biju, Biren & Nilamani were disappointed as their expectations were belied. Mahtab also got displeased with Dinabandhu Sahu, the then Minister of Mines & Geology who did not oblige him by granting a mining lease to Md. Seerajuddin, a leading mine-owner of Orissa and a staunch supporter of Mahtab.

The post-election period of 1957 was one of intense manipulation. The three Muskateers, Biju, Biren and Nilamani were entrusted with the task of winning over vacillating legislators of the opposition parties. Mahtab managed to get the support of five Jharkhand Members, four Independent and three defectors from the Ganatantra Parishad. Thus, through intense politicking and horse trading Mahtab came to power in the Second General Election. It was an invisible coalition like the one formed after the First General Election of 1952 as supporters of the Government did not share formal powers. The independent Jharkhand members exploited the situation extracting benefits from the Congress Ministry.

The Congress Party was always struggling to gain the support of the opposition both inside and outside the Assembly in order to remain in power. At that time, the Ganatantra Parishad like the Congress, tried ceaselessly to win over the support of the Congress.