

Biju Patnaik : The Legendary Hero

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Bijayananda Patnaik popularly known as Biju Patnaik was born in Cuttack, Orissa on March 5, 1916. His father was Laxmi Narayana Patnaik and mother was Ashalata Ray. Although his father was in judicial service, he was a great nationalist and a prominent leader of the Oriya Movement. He was closely associated with two architects of modern Orissa - Utkal Gourav Madhusudan Das and Utkalmani Gopabandhu Das. Biju had his early education in Mission Primary School (Christ Collegiate School) at Cuttack. In 1927 he joined the famous Ravenshaw Collegiate School, where Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose was once a student. In 1932 he passed Matriculation with first division and got admitted into the intermediate science class of the famous Ravenshaw College. During his College days Biju first saw Mahatma Gandhi in 1927 during the 'Khadi Tour' to Orissa and came under his spell. He was assaulted by a British police officer as he tried to get a glimpse of the Mahatma, who was visiting Cuttack. Biju discontinued studies for B.Sc. Degree to undergo training as a pilot at the Aeronautic Training Institute of India, Delhi Flying Club. In fact, as a child Biju was fascinated by aeroplanes and from his school days, he had decided to make a career in flying. A small aeroplane had landed at Cuttack's Killa Fort, when he was a student of Mission School. Biju ran away from school to

touch his dream object. But he was chased away by the security police. "At that time I had only seen pictures of aeroplanes in books" - He recalled later.

During his study at Ravenshaw College he was athletic champion for three times. While he was a student of Ravenshaw Collegiate School at Cuttack he joined hands with Mahatma Gandhi to remove the British. After studying Aeronautics at the Aeronautical Training Institute of India, he started his career with Indian National Airways. Subsequently, he became a Pilot of Indian Air Force and earned great deal of reputation for his adventure during freedom movement. The Indonesia Government had honoured him with *Bhumi Putra* (Son of Soil) title. In 1961 he became the Chief Minister of Orissa. He started his career in Politics in 1946 and hold the following posts at different times as follows.

- 1952 - M.L.A., Bhanjanagar
- 1957 - M.L.A., Jagannath Prasad
- 1961 - Chief Minister, Orissa
- 1968 - M.P., Rajya Sabha
- 1974 - Opposition Leader
- 1977 - Minister, Steel & Mines, Govt. of India
- 1980 - M.P.

1985 - Opposition Leader, State Assembly

1990-95 - Chief Minister, Orissa

Contributions:

The following were some of his outstanding contributions.

1. The Choudwar and Barbil Industrial Belts
2. The Cuttack-Jagatpur Mahanadi Highway Bridge
3. The Bhubaneswar Airport
4. Regional College of Education at Bhubaneswar
5. The Orissa Aviation Centre
6. Paradeep Port
7. The MIG factory at Sunabeda
8. Thermal Power Plant at Talcher
9. Hydro-Electric Project at Balimela
10. The Orissa University of Agriculture and Technology
11. Engineering & Medical Colleges at Burla
12. The Orissa State Planning Board
13. Reorganisation of districts
14. Ferro Silicon Complex at Theruvali
15. Engineering College at Rourkela
16. Express Highway linking Daitari with Paradeep
17. Sainik School at Bhubaneswar
18. Regional Research Laboratory of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, Orissa

Besides, He established the Kalinga Foundation for dissemination of knowledge in Science. He also founded the Kalinga Prize for promoting scientific knowledge. The idea behind setting up of Kalinga Prize was that every one should have at least a basic understanding of

science. The prize, given away by the UNESCO every year, is considered a prestigious award by the international scientific community. When Biju Patnaik contemplated this prize, he gave it the name KALINGA, an empire which existed two thousand years ago. It is a matter of pride and distinction for the people of the State that so much could be done in such a short time with so much of feeling and involvement and so much of passion and concern for the people of the State. Like Nehru, Biju passionately advocated inculcating scientific temper in the minds of the people. A second steel plant in the State remained one of his unfulfilled dreams.

Role in Indian Freedom Struggle:

In 1942, Biju decided to join the Quit India Movement under the guidance of the Father of the Nation to make India free. He became a leader of Congress movement with Jay Prakash Narain and Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia and underwent imprisonment. In 1943, he was sent to prison for about two years for participating in the Quit India Movement. Aruna Asaf Ali recalling Biju's role during this period mentions : "Among the thousands who came forward to take up the challenge, Biju Patnaik, Chief Pilot of the Dalmia-Jain Airways was one of the most fearless who mobilised the fellow pilots."

Role in Indonesian Freedom Struggle:

Biju Patnaik came in contact with Nehru during his participation in Indian Freedom Struggle. He became one of his trusted friends. Nehru was sympathetic to the freedom struggle of the Indonesian people who had traditional links with Indian Sub-continent especially with Orissa, from the ancient days. Indonesia is an archipelago state in the Indian Ocean consisting about 13,000 islands. It was under Dutch rule from 1816 to 1941. When it was occupied by the Japanese, the Indonesian freedom fighters declared the

independence of Indonesia on August 17, 1945 two days after the Japanese collapsed in the Second World War. The Dutch tried to regain control over these territories and started formenting trouble for the new Government. The new Government under Dr. Sukarno as President, launched a vigorous propaganda activity to gain support for their cause. Dr. Sjahrir who became Prime Minister of Indonesia on 14 November, 1945 and continued till June 27, 1947 with a gap of one month during June-July, 1946 was a trusted Lieutenant of Dr. Sukarno. He also became friendly with Nehru who was at that time the Foreign Minister and the leader of the Interim Government of India. In July 1946, Government of Indonesia concluded an agreement with India Government to supply 40,00,000 tonnes of rice in exchange of textile, agricultural implements, tyres and other goods which India would send to Indonesia for her economic rehabilitation. Even after his resignation President Sukarno chose him as his representative to mobilize international public opinion against Dutch action. He maintained contact with Nehru and consulted him when needed. He was also instrumental in signing the Linggadji Agreement on 25 March 1947 which brought an end to the Dutch hostilities in Indonesia. On March 23, 1947 Nehru called 22 Asian countries for First Inter-Asia Conference to which Dr. Sjahrir was specially invited. He addressed the conference after concluding the Agreement with Dutch on March 25. The Dutch continued to forment trouble on one pretext or the other. Finally they launched a large scale attack on Indonesia on 21 July, 1947. Immediately President Sukarno consulted Sjahrir and ordered him to leave the country to create international public opinion against the Dutch and also persuade the friendly countries to raise the issue before the UNO. He tried to come out but could not succeed as the Dutch had absolute control

over Indonesian sea and air routes. He was also under surveillance. Nehru came to his help at this critical juncture. He entrusted this task to Biju Patnaik, who was an expert Pilot and was famous for his passion for adventurous achievements. Biju Patnaik sprang up to instant action. As an avid reader of the history of Kalinga, Biju knew how Kalinga and Indonesia had a long-standing cultural link in the past and the opportunity now at hand to render some service to the people of Indonesia at their crucial hour of need should never be lost sight of. He braved all hazards. He flew to Java and brought Sultan Sjahrir aboard from Java islands on 22 July 1947 by his own Dacota and reached India via Singapore on 24 July.

On reaching Singapore, Sjahrir addressed a press conference to declare that at the behest of President Sukarno he had to leave Indonesia at a short notice and had been entrusted with the mission of visiting overseas countries with a view to eliciting help and assistance for his country. He would report personally to the President. Sjahrir strongly criticised the Dutch military action that came upon without prior warning. He was hopeful that Indonesian force would be able to thwart such atrocious design. He reached New Delhi on 24 July and had consultation with Mr. Nehru. After the meeting, Nehru issued a press statement and denounced Dutch action describing it as "an astounding thing which the new spirit of Asia will not tolerate." He also added that "No European country whatever it may be has any business to set its army in Asia, against the people of Asia, when it does so, Asia will not tolerate it." On 28 July Nehru announced that India would raise the Indonesian issue in the Security Council and forbade Dutch air trails over Indian territory. On 30th July India and Australia led the issue before the Security Council. India charged the Netherland Government with having

“embarked without warning on large scale military action on Indonesian people” and also called upon UNO to take action as it had been a situation endangering the peace and security of a country under Chapter VI of UNO Charter. Sjahrir was successful in his mission at last. The noble and heroic deed of Biju Patnaik was duly recognised by the Indonesian Government. For his act of bravery at this critical juncture, he was awarded ‘BHOOMI PUTRA’, the highest Indonesian award and a rare distinction ever granted to a foreigner. People of Orissa lovingly called him the ‘Hero of Kalinga’ and the ‘Kharavela of Kalinga.’ He was respected by the masses for his charisma. He was a man who created history, changed history and shaped history.

Some of his critics said that he talked much and did things impulsively, disregarding the means, but history shows that whatever work he did was not trivial but a work of monumental glory.

The Seventeenth of April 1997, the day Biju Patnaik passed away, was a sad day not only for Orissa but for the whole country.

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