

## Biju - The Greatest Oriya in Living Memory

*Rajkishore Mishra*

The future generation in Orissa will hardly believe that there was once a man born in Orissa who strode into unbelievable heights.

Indeed, he did let loose legends enow. A vibrant patriarch, a renaissance rebel, a revolutionary, a statesman of international repute, a zealous industrialist, a veteran politician, a humanist, an activist even though a dreamer - and a mighty force — was all that what Biju was. The graph of his life was awe-inspiring.

As the young Ulysses of Orissa Biju pedalled away to Peshwar (4000 kms on road) from Cuttack on his bicycle with his friends Bhramarbar Sahu and Amar Dey at the age of sixteen. He topped the list of selected apprentices of the Imperial Royal Air Force in 1934 and became a dare devil pilot in 1937. The trumpeting call of the Father of the Nation to free India from the British yoke coloured his fancy. Quite surreptiously, he rendered all help to the nationalists like Aruna Asaf Ali, Jayaprakash Narayan, Achyut Patwardhan, Narendra Dev and Ram Manohar Lohia by risking his life. The alien government tried to desist him from such misadventure, but Biju paid no heed. The young rebel was arrested on 13.1.1943 and was put behind the bar for two years. He was released on parol in 1945. His hatred against colonial governance and commitment to the cause of the

Nation made him appear as a vibrant leader and Oriya patriarch. He was elected to the Orissa Legislative Assembly in 1946 from the Cuttack constituency at the age of thirtyone. The year 1947 brought special distinction to Biju. Hardly three weeks before India's independence at the behest of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Biju startled the world by braving a perilous air voyage to Indonesia on 22.7.1947 in his post -world war vantage Dacota to rescue Sultan Sjahrir, the-then Prime Minister of Indonesia and flew him back to Delhi on 24.7.1947. A marvellous feat indeed ! His unique adventurism and commitment to Indonesia's independence (from the Dutch occupation) was gratefully acknowledged and he was crowned with Indonesia's highest national honour, i.e., *Bhoomi Putra*. Again hardly six weeks after India's independence Biju was summoned by Prime Minister Pandit Nehru to thwart Pakistan's sinister design of occupying Kashmir. The king of Kashmir had already signed the Instrument of Accession with India on 26.10.1947, but Pakistan had by then, forcibly occupied a major chunk and was advancing toward Srinagar. Even an hour's delay would have cost India heavily. At this critical juncture, Biju landed in Srinagar airport with the 1st platoon of troops on 27.10.1947 at 10 a.m. braving all possible hazard. Pakistan was forced to recede.

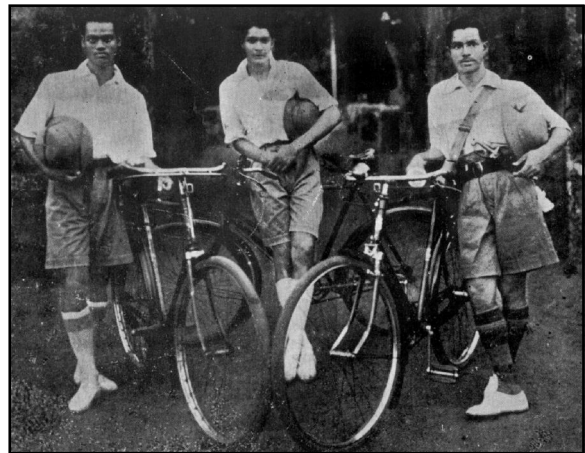
Constituencies supported Biju althrough from 1946 to 1995 barring aside a few occasions when forces of adversity envied him. Bhanjanagar (1952), Jagannath Prasad (1957), Patkura (1967), Rajnagar (1971), Patkura (1974), Kendrapara LSC (1977), Patkura again (1980), Bhubaneswar (1985), Aska and Cuttack LSC (1996) voted him to power with overwhelming majority. This shows how loving and endearing was he among the people of Orissa. His was a fifty-year march with unabated zeal and love for the people. When he felt that others were not sharing his grand vision and were stooping low, he hastened to wriggle out of such party folds, and did never hesitate to abandon his old veteran political acquaintances. He trusted the mute millions of the State who were struggling for mere existence, the dreaming youth who were struggling for a station in life, the skilled but deprived artisans, sculptors, musicians and scholars, who were sheepishly clinging to their past heritage, the motherland Orissa, alias Kalinga, which after historic vicissitudes was struggling for distinct identity, the untapped potentials of nature and the untamed water resources which would revolutionalise state's economy and above all, the ignominy that by and large, had permeated through all his fellow brethren which besides others, included the folk, the tribes and the female populace. For them he bled. And no crocodile tears. For them he became

restless— an untiring vigil. He scoffed at motivated administrative machinery. He disparaged the political parasites who were sucking the blood of the laity. He wished he had powers to impose Draconian laws and punitive measures to check corruption in public life. He further suggested the armed forces to take over the govt. if need be, to purge off the scourge of corruption. The over-staffed bureaucracy was constantly worrying him. Reflecting on caste-

based reservation policy, he reacted sharply : the poor have no caste.

Such revolutionary attitudes often made him friendless which he never bothered as his goal was to march alone (*ekla chalo re*), come what may. He was the uncrowned sovereign in Indian peninsula.

He was preoccupied with Orissa's heroic tradition and cultural heritage. He floated the Kalinga card to enthuse the youth. In 1951, the UNESCO instituted the Kalinga Prize for popularisation of science with a generous grant from Biju and eventually he became the Founder President of the Kalinga Foundation Trust. He even wanted the Utkal University to be named as the University of Kalinga. In his Kalinga industrial empire he had set up the Orissa Textile Mills, the



Kalinga Tubes, Kalinga Tiles, Kalinga Iron Works, Kalinga Air Lines, Kalinga Refractories etc. with a view to highlighting the state potential. His first spell of Chief Ministership was hardly for 15 months (i.e. from 23.6.1961 - 2.10.1963) and during that glorious phase he did materialise the Rourkela Steel Plant, Hirakud Multipurpose Project, Talcher Thermal Project, MIG Factory at Sunabeda, Ferro Silicon Complex at Theruvali,

Hydro Electric Power Project at Balimela, Engineering College and Medical College at Burla, Engineering College at Rourkela (REC), Sainik School, D.M. School and Regional College of Education at Bhubaneswar, Regional Research Laboratory, Orissa University of Agriculture & Technology, the Express Highway and above all, the Paradeep Port. The three-tier Panchayati Raj system was one of his sought-after visions.

The Second phase of his Chief Ministership i.e. 5.3.1990 - 15.3.1995, though not as eventful as the first phase, sowed the seeds of political stability and greater understanding. It is still on record that the Biju Janata Dal in the 10th election to the Orissa Legislative Assembly could secure 123 seats out of 147 and reduced the Chief Opposition strength to 10 as against the required number of 15. This phase marked Biju more contemplative. His thoughts squarely lay on upliftment of women, tribal development, communal harmony, participation of NRIs in furthering the state economy, implementation of austerity measures and hard decisions and creating an atmosphere of harmony, broadmindedness and fellow feeling. The Samanta Chandra Sekhar Planetarium which was inaugurated by Biju Patnaik on 15th May 1992 is a fitting tribute to Pathani Samanta, the Great Astronomer, for whom he was always feeling proud. He was the architect of India's second liberation movement as was rightly commented by Prem Vaidya. He divided Orissa into 30 districts in 1993 with a view to bringing administration to the door-step.

Biju was summoned to Kansa's Durbar during the Dhanu Yatra at Baragarh which he faithfully obeyed. He beat gongs at the Lions Gate and took up extensive repairs of Lord Jagannath's temple. A dreamer, he was to dream of big dreams. He picked up Gomati Jharia and Sabi

Majhi, the fiery tribal women activists as members of the Tribal Women's Advisory Committee and had chalked out grand plans to iron out disparities between the coastal and the hilly and verdant hinterland.

Biju Patnaik over these years has grown larger than life, for, it is apt to reflect that he was legendary. He lived a full life (5.3.1916 - 28.3.1997) of two and four score years and has left behind an indelible legacy for the posterity to feel proud. Those who shared his vision and did not believe that 'power is for the pelf' and are still committed to the cause of the people are indeed the beloved ones of Biju. He was a loner in life despite the professed allegiance of so many which he hardly took them to be genuine.

The resurrection of Bijuism is being slowly felt with the process of actualisation of some of the unrealised dreams that Biju Patnaik lifelong cherished. The Biju Patnaik International Air Port renamed by Hon'ble Prime Minister on 17.4.98, the Biju Patnaik National Steel Institute (BPNSI) and the Biju Patnaik University of Technology are some of the modern monuments which recall the spirit of Biju Babu. It was quite befitting to cherish the hallowed memory of Biju Patnaik by recently showering on him the posthumous Kharavela Award.

---

Rajkishore Mishra is a retired Professor of English Literature, and former Secretary of the Orissa Sahitya Academy. He lives at Plot No. N-1/A-27 in the I.R.C. Village, Bhubaneswar.