

Biju Patnaik, the Son of the Soil

Balabhadra Ghadai

Man and women come and go and most of them became only distant memories. A few, however, leave behind an impression powerful enough to continue to remain almost a living presence long after they have gone. A front ranking freedom fighter, daring pilot, dedicated industrialist, towering politician and the architect of modern Orissa. Bijayananda Pattanaik, affectionately called “Biju Babu” has earned the epithet of “Emperor of Kalinga” by his countrymen.

Born to Laxminarayan Patnaik and Ashalata Devi at Anand Nivas, Tulsipur, Cuttack on 5th March 1916 Biju Babu, having the imagination and vision of Viswakabi Rabindra Nath Tagore pledged to revive the glory of the days of emperor Kharavela. He recalled the days when Kalinga was the greatest empire of India extending from Ganga to Godavari. Its army had thrown them across the border of India. It was the largest maritime power ever known in the world whose merchant sons had to brave the rivers and seas to establish commercial trade link with Java, Sumatra, Bali, Borneo and many other South East-Asian countries and made the Kalinga Empire affluent. The epoch also witnessed a galaxy of architectural marvels at Puri, Konark and Bhubaneswar.

Biju Babu was a patriot par excellence. It was her loving mother Ashalata Devi who moulded the emotional life and character of young Biju and had left her imprint on this personality. Her advice was, “Beginning from the dust every object of this world is working for the benefit of human beings, you will also work for the human society”. At a later stage he was profoundly influenced by Gandhiji’s call to free India from the British rule and came forward to associate himself with the underground movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan and Ram Manohar Lohia in 1942. He was arrested on 13.01.1943 and was put behind the bar for two years. Soon after his release from Jail in 1945, Biju Babu appeared as a vibrant leader in the political firmament of Orissa.

In the year 1946 Biju Babu was elected uncontested to the Orissa Legislative Assembly from North Cuttack constituency. In 1952 and 1957 he won from Bhanjanagar and Jagannath Prasad and Soroda respectively. On 13 February 1961 Biju Babu assumed the presidentship of the State Congress. The overall responsibility of the Congress Party in fighting the mid-term election in 1961 was that of Biju Patnaik. The Congress Party captured 82 seats out of 140 securing 45% of the total votes polled and he won from

Choudwar Constituency. The poll verdict was astounding and as a reward for securing absolute majority for the Congress first time in the Legislature, Biju Babu took over as the Chief Minister on 23rd June, 1961. On 7th May 1971 he was nominated to the Rajya Sabha.

Biju Babu was elected to the Orissa Legislative Assembly in 1971 in a by-election from Rajnagar. In 1974 he won from Rajnagar again and became the Leader of Opposition. In 1977 he won from the Kendrapara Lok Sabha Constituency and became the Union Minister for Steel & Mines from 1977 to 1979 and Union Minister for Steel and Mines and Coal from July 1979 to January 1980. He was the member of the Lok Sabha from 1980-85. In 1985 he resigned his Lok Sabha seat to contest from the Bhubaneswar Assembly Constituency and became the Leader of the Opposition in Orissa Legislative Assembly. In 1990 Assembly Polls he steered his party Janata Dal into victory and became the Chief Minister of Orissa for the second time. It is worth mentioning that his party could secure 123 seats out of 147 and reduced the main opposition party strength to 10 as against the required number of 15. Biju babu contested the 11th Lok Sabha election (1996) from Aska and Cuttack Constituencies and won both the seats. Later on he resigned from Cuttack Parliamentary seat.

Biju babu's first spell of Chief Ministership lasted for only 15 months but during this short period he made a mark in the history of Orissa by giving his people a powerful and efficient administration. He sought to inject a rare dynamism into the administration. He succeeded in setting up the Paradeep Port, the MIG factory at Sunabeda, a Thermal Plant at Talcher, the

Express Highway connecting the iron ore deposits of Sukuinda with Paradeep, Balimela Hydel Project, Engineering College of Rourkela, Saninik School and Regional College of Education at Bhubaneswar and Orissa University of Agriculture and Technology at Bhubaneswar.

The name of Kalinga was so dear to the heart of Biju Babu that he set up Kalinga tubes, Kalinga Airways, Kalinga Iron work, Kalinga Refractories and the Kalinga, a daily Oriya Newspaper. In 1951 he established the international Kalinga prize for popularisation of Science and Technology among the people and entrusted the responsibility to the UNESCO.

Biju Babu was well aware of the fact that Orissa was a poor and backward state in the country inspite of having good deal of natural resources and its reason was the lack of proper planning for development. He set up the State planning Board and a number of public corporations. Ayodhya Nath Khosla, the internationally reputed engineer as the Governor of Orissa gave a helping hand to Biju babu in formulating the development of the river basin of Orissa, by preparing a ten-year plan popularly known as the Decade of Destiny.

During the second term of Chief Ministership from 5.3.1990 to 15.3.1995 Panchayati Raj movement gained momentum under his dynamic leadership. He took a revolutionary step to reserve 33 percent of seats for women in the three tiers of the Panchayati Raj system and subsequently Orissa Zilla Parishad Act of 1991 and the Gram Panchayat Samiti.

Amendment Act of 1992 were passed by the Orissa Legislative Assembly, which provided 33% of reservation for women including

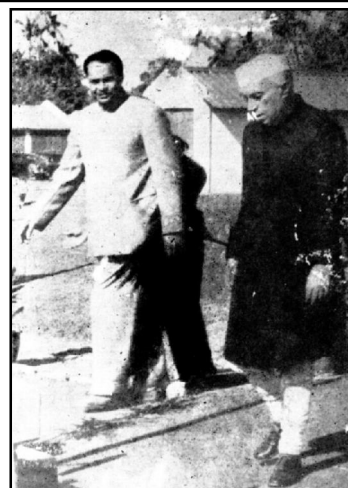
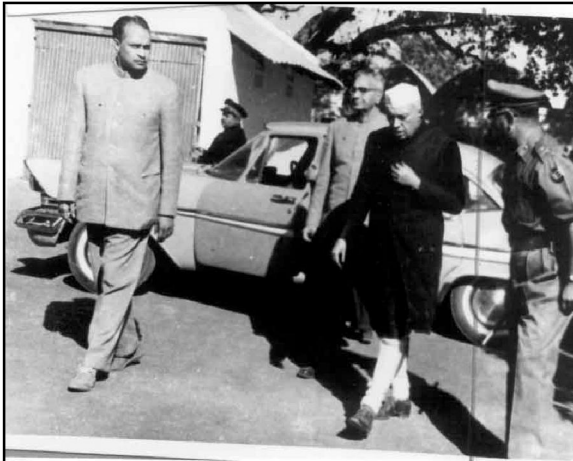
SC and ST women. Further provision was made so that one third of the Aila Parishad would have inclusively women chairpersons. In the case of Panchayat Samities and the Gram Panchayats one of the two office-bearers, i.e. Chairperson or Vice-Chair person in case of Samiti and Sarpanch or Naib-Sarpanch in case of Gram Panchayat must be a woman. As a mark of his profound love for Panchayati Raj institution the people of Orissa observe his Birth Day (March 5) as Panchayati Raj Divas.

Many of his dreams remained unfulfilled. He was rightly honoured by the Indonesian Government with the highest citizens award of that country Bhumiputra. The “Son of the Soil” breathed his last on 17th April 1997 at the age of

eighty-one. The whole country was stunned and messages condoling his death and eulogizing his contributions started pouring in from far and near. Manoj Das the eminent writer and thinker wrote on his sad demise, “Perhaps Biju Patnaik was having a developed inner-self which was known to a very few of his fellow beings. He seems to have achieved many things in one life which might be impossible to achieve in a number of lives.”

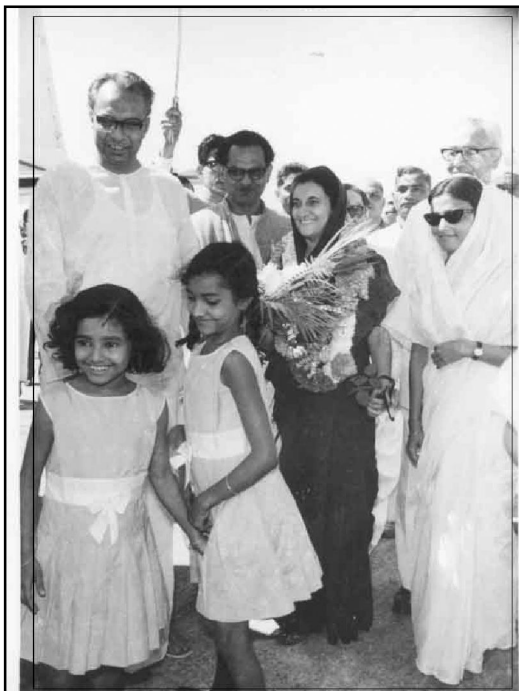
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BIJU SHARING MOMENTS WITH PANDIT NEHRU

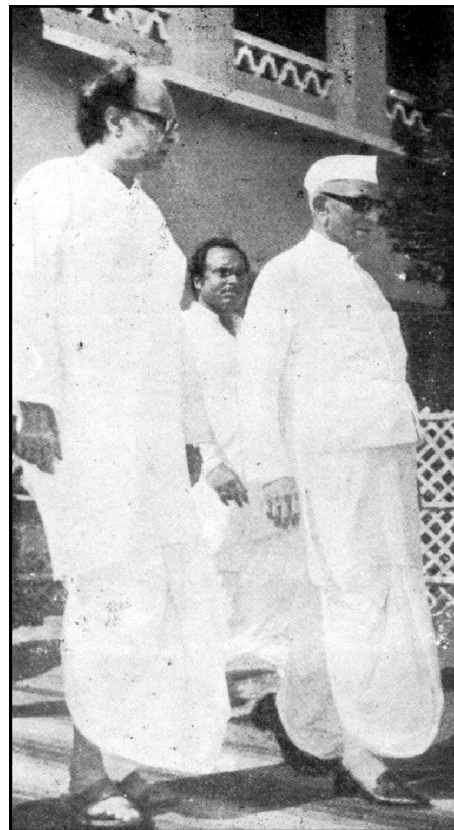




Biju, administered the Oath of Office as Chief Minister by H.E. the Governor of Orissa, Dr. A.N. Khosla in 1961.



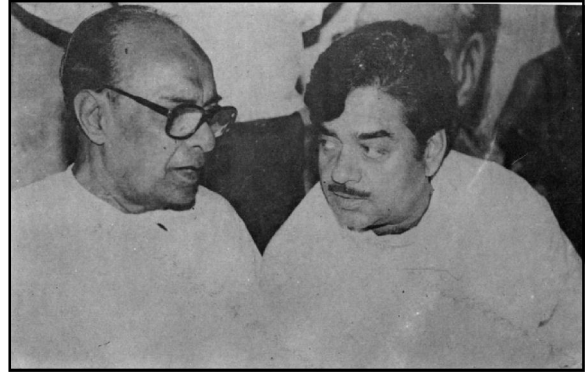
Biju with Indira Gandhi, the former Prime Minister of India



Biju with Shri Morarji Desai, the former Prime Minister of India



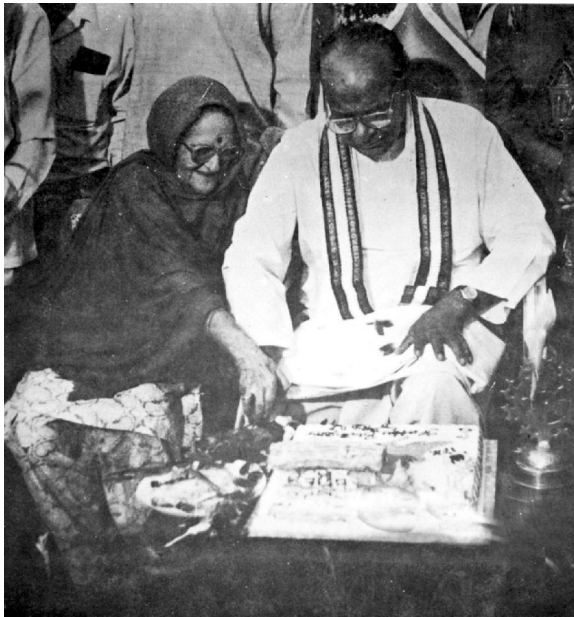
*H.E. the Governor of Orissa
Dr. Jagnyadutt Sharma administering
Oath of Office to Biju as Chief Minister of
Orissa in 1990.*



Biju with film star Shri Satrugan Sinha



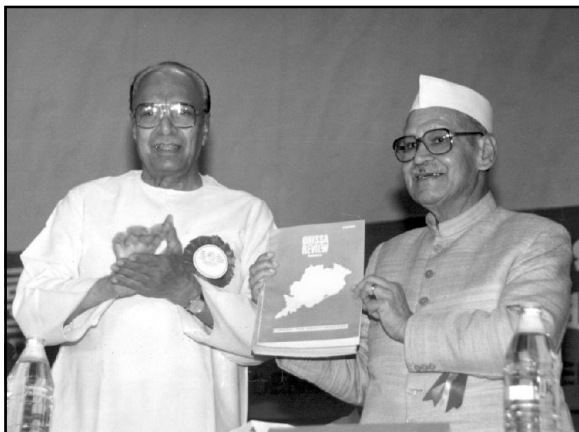
*Biju with Shri V.P. Singh, the former
Prime Minister of India*



*Biju sharing a happy moment with wife
Mrs.Gyan Patnaik*



Biju going to the State Secretariat riding a bicycle



*Biju with former Vice-President of India Late Dr.
Shanker Dayal Sharma, releasing the Orissa Day,
1992 issue of Orissa Review at Bhubaneswar.*



Biju in Indonesia