

## The King Still Lives in His Kingdom

*Geeta Devi*

It was 9th April, 1997, nobody cares the scorching April Sun. Perhaps a cydonic tide of the Bay of Bengal engulfed the entire 'Bodadanda' (the road leading to the temple of Shree Jagannath) to greet the chariot of the king. The chariot halted at the Lions gate to pay a parting tribute to the Lord of the Universe. The chariot was blessed with a sacred flag of the 'Neelachakra' (the blue wheel of the great temple) and a burning lamp, a rare recognition of the valour of the valiant.

The chariot moved, moved towards 'Swargadvara' ( a place on the beach considered as the gateway to heaven) for today the hero would have to fly to heaven to glare the glories of his kingdom from a Divine height.

It was 29th March, 1997. The hero left for New Delhi in his last flight and fell sick in the aeroplane itself.

But who could host him long within the four walls of a hospital ? The lion tried to roar from his sick bed – 'Bloody doctor, what are you doing ? I have to attend meetings'.

Then came the silence, Despite all efforts, steadily and steadily the hero was advancing towards coma.



Twenty five minutes past 7' o'clock morning on 7th April, 1997, the lion breathed his last in the Escort Hospital, New Delhi.

A baby son was born to Mr. Laxmi Narayan Patnaik, the Advocate, the eminent literary figure of Ganjam, one time Dewan of the Gajapati of Parlakhemundi, on 5th March, 1916.

That baby was a born pilot, perhaps born with the vigour of 'Veer Vajarang' (Veer Hanuman of the Hindu mythology) to make the sky his abode amidst horrors and hurricanes. When the sky of the entire world was overshadowed by the black clouds of the 2nd World War, this youth of Odisha was diving his plane as a pilot in the Royal Indian Air Force.

As a pilot of the Governor General Lord Wavell, this young man didn't miss the opportunity to procure the secret documents of the Britishers from the black box of the Governor General's aeroplane for the national interest and conveyed these to Mahatma Gandhi.

When the British Police was alert to arrest Mrs. Aruna Asaf Ali, it was this pilot of the Governor General who was carrying a disguised Mrs. Ali from one air base to another.

The year was 1949. Pakistan was advancing towards Kashmir. In a hurry, Raja Hori Singh announced the merger of his State Kashmir with the Indian territory. Now it was the responsibility of the Govt. of India to rescue Kashmir. News of Pakistan's advancement was reaching the Government every moment. Now they were only twenty miles away from Srinagar with powerful tanks. The fall of Srinagar would be the loss of Kashmir. So Kashmir was going to be lost for ever.

Pt. Nehru immediately convened a meeting of the defence officers. The Generals, the Marshalls expressed their helplessness for it was then impossible to approach Srinagar from any side.

The power and prestige of the Government of India was on the brink of challenge. A perturbed Prime Minister was asking the last

question – "Are we then going to lose Kashmir for ever?"

All defence officials bowed down their heads. A tall young man stood up to draw everybody's attention – 'I shall land on the Srinagar airport, capture the control tower, their the air force to follow soon.'

The plan of the youngman was executed. Kashmir was saved, this was saved the interest of a nation at the stake of the life of a young pilot.

Does the Government of India ever think of recognizing this jewel of India. He himself rescued a 'Ratna' i.e. Kashmir from the verge of being lost for ever for his nation. His nation didn't think of this valour, this Endeavour, this adventure as befitting to be conferred with the highest dignity, the 'Ratna' award of the nation. The man who, to reckon the achievements of the scientists, the technologists of the world over, could launch the prestigious 'Kalinga Prize', could he ever aspire for a 'Ratna' award for himself? Never and Never. That man was Bijayananda Patnaik, the beloved son of Odisha.

A group of islands, in the girdle of waves, the waves of the Bay of Bengal, the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean and the North Pacific, is Indonesia. The Dutch army had already captured all the routes, the land, the sea and the air to Djakarta, the capital city of Indonesia. The leaders of the freedom movement were confined in the capital city.

Who could pierce the garrison? Who could rescue the precious lives of the leaders of the freedom movement of Indonesia Pt. Nehru got confused.

A young pilot with the lone companion of his wife took off the flight. At the dead of night

when the world was asleep, he silently slipped to the capital town, rescued Sahariar and flew back New Delhi, risking his own life and the life of his spouse. The young pilot was Mr. Bijayananda Patnaik, the Kalingite who testified his cultural heritage 'Kalingah Sahasikah' in every walk of his life.

The world outside recognized this adventure. A nation in overseas, Indonesia, crowned this King with the greatest honour of its soil – 'Bhumi Putra' and 'Binatunga Yasa Uttam'.

India is yet to realize these risky hazards he undertook for his nation. When values escape recognition, decadence knocks at the door.

That youngman came back to the politics of Odisha, his native state, with a mission to make it flourishing.

Efforts continued. The express highways, the Airport of Bhubaneswar, the sea port of Paradeep, the steel plant of Rourkela, the MIG plant of Sunabeda, the Sainik School, the Engineering college and a series of others, all were built one after another, to make a state culturally rich and economically sound.

What is Odisha today is much due to the endeavour of this rare personality who could only be ranked next to Madhusudan Das. This man was Mr. Bijayananda Patnaik, the industrialist, the politician and the Chief Minister.

In the ninties, the man again became the Chief Minister of Odisha though he had already become the king of the million hearts. His success or failure in politics might change his political throne but who could dethrone him from the hearts of the present generation! For the coming generation also, he would be hailed as an inspiring hero, if history be recorded in the correct rail. He is none else than Mr. Bijayananda Patnaik, the loving son of the soil, the living king of the crores.

It was 'Swargadvara', the gateway to heaven on the beach. The son was sleeping on the pyre. The fire was lit. Oh, no, it was his own helicopter, perhaps on the start. The spontaneous outburst of tears was the fuel to take him off to heaven up for he was to attend meetings there.

---

Geeta Devi, Old Town, Nayagarh -2.