

Biju Patnaik : A Short History of his Career and Achievements

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Introduction:

Biju Patnaik was undoubtedly a great intellectual legislator, political leader and above all a reformer of Odisha. He was a brilliant student. His early occupation was business. His hobby was aeronautics and industry. He travelled abroad U.K., U.S.A., U.S.S.R., Paris, Indonesia and several other countries. His Political activity since boyhood was full of adventurous work. During student life he set out on cycle from Cuttack to Peshawar. He joined Indian National Airways and became its ace pilot. During “Quit India” Movement he collaborated with underground leaders and was imprisoned for thirty months. At the risk of his life he brought the Indonesian Premier Mr. Sultan Sjahrir to New Delhi by plane at the time of Indonesian Freedom Struggle. First Indian plane was landed by him in Kashmir in 1947, when Pakistan attacked India. On returning to Odisha he took interest in industries and established many. He became President of U.P.C.C. and active member of A.I.C.C. In 1961, during Mid-term election under his leadership he brought unprecedented absolute majority for Congress Party. He became Chief Minister during the period from 1961 to 63 and resigned under “Kamraj plan.” He also regained the political post



and prestige subsequently and did much more for Odisha in fields various.

Life of Biju Patnaik :

The full name of Biju Patnaik was Bijayananda Patnaik. He was born in Cuttack, Odisha on March 5, 1916. His parents Laxmi Narayana Patnaik and Ashalata Ray belonged to Bhanjanagar in Ganjam. His father was a judicial servant, a great nationalist and a prominent leader of the Odia Movement respectively. He has close link with Utkal Gourav Madhusudan Das and Utkalmani Gopabandhu Das, the two architects of modern Odisha. Biju had started his school education in Mission Primary School (Christ Collegiate School) at Cuttack. He joined the



famous Ravenshaw Collegiate School in 1927. He became matriculate with first division and started intermediate science education in famous Ravenshaw College in 1932. From his College career he was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi and became a fan of Gandhi during his Khadi Tour to Odisha. Even, he was assaulted by a British police officer as he tried to get a glimpse of the Mahatma, who was visiting Cuttack. He dropped his B.Sc. Degree to start training as a pilot at the Aeronautic Training Institute of India, Delhi Flying Club. From his childhood, Biju was fascinated by aeroplane. From his school days he had determination to be pilot.¹ A small aeroplane had landed at Cuttack 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.² Biju Patnaik liked sport a lot. During his College career he was athletic champion for three times. From his school education he was a fan of Mahatma Gandhi and worked with him to remove the British from India. After his aeronautics engineering education, he started his career with Indian National Airways. Subsequently he became a Pilot of Indian Air Force. He earned great deal of reputation for his piloting service during freedom movement. For his braveness he was honoured with Bhumi Putra (Son of Soil) title by Indonesian Government. He started his career in Politics in 1946 and held different posts as a politician. Elected to the Orissa Legislative Assembly in 1952, 1957, 1961 from Jagannath Prasad, Sorada (Ganjam) and Choudwar (Cuttack) respectively; again elected in 1971 and 1974 from Rajnagar (Cuttack); Chairman, Planning Board, Government of Orissa from 1971 to 1972 June. Took active part and rendered

valuable service to the people of Rajnagar area in particular who suffered from the havoc caused by the cyclone in October, 1971. Elected to Parliament in 1977 and Cabinet Minister of the Central Ministry from 1977 to 1979. Elected to Lok Sabha from Kendrapara Constituency in 1980. Again Shri Patnaik was elected to Lok Sabha from Kendrapara Parliamentary Constituency in 1984 Lok Sabha election. He was also elected from Bhubaneswar Assembly Constituency to Orissa Legislative Assembly in 1985 General Election. He resigned from Kendrapara Parliamentary Constituency and became the Opposition Leader in Orissa Legislative Assembly. Again he was elected to Orissa Legislative Assembly in 10th Orissa Legislative Assembly Election from Bhubaneswar Assembly Constituency. In 1990 under his dynamic leadership the Janata Dal secured more than three fourth majority of the Orissa Legislative Assembly which is quite unprecedented. He was unanimously elected as the leader of the Janata Dal in Orissa Legislative Assembly and on his birth day he was sworn in as the Chief Minister of Orissa on 5th March, 1990. Again he was elected from Bhubaneswar Assembly Constituency in March, 1995 and became Leader of Opposition. Later he contested for Lok Sabha election held in June, 1996 from Aska and Cuttack Constituency. He was elected from both the Constituencies. He resigned from O.L.A. and joined as Parliament Member from Aska Lok Sabha Constituency.³ Biju Patnaik was married to Gyan Patnaik. Biju Patnaik's younger son, Naveen Patnaik, is the present Chief Minister of Odisha. His daughter, Gita Mehta, is an English writer. His elder son Prem Patnaik is a Delhi based industrialist. He breathed his last on 17th April 1997 at Escort Hospital, New Delhi.



A Freedom Fighter:

Biju Patnaik started his career as a freedom fighter in 1942. He joined the Quit India Movement under the guidance of the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi to make India free. He became a prominent leader Congress Movement with Jay Prakash Narayan and Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia. In 1943, he underwent imprisonment for about two years for his participation 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 mobilized the fellow pilots.⁴

Indonesian Freedom Struggle:

Biju Patnaik came in contact with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru during his participation in Indian Freedom Struggle. He became one of Nehru's trusted friends. Nehru paralleled the freedom struggle of the Indonesian people to that of India. He viewed Indonesia as a potential ally of Indians. When the Dutch attempted to quell Indonesian Independence on 21 July 1947, President Sukarno instructed Sjahrir, the former Prime Minister of Indonesia, to leave the country to attend the first Inter-Asia Conference, organized by Nehru, in July 1947⁵ and to foment international public opinion against the Dutch. "Sjahrir was unable to leave as the Dutch controlled the Indonesian sea and air routes. Nehru asked Biju Patnaik that, who was adventurous and an expert pilot, to rescue Sjahrir.⁷ Biju Patnaik and his wife flew to Java and brought Sultan Sjahrir out on a Dakota reaching India via Singapore on 24 July 1947. For this act of bravery, Patnaik was given

honorary citizenship in Indonesia⁸ and awarded the 'Bhoomi Putra',⁹ the highest Indonesian award, rarely granted to a foreigner. In 1996, when Indonesia was celebrating its 50th Independence Day, Biju Patnaik was awarded the highest national award, the 'Bintang Jasa Utama'.¹⁰

Kashmir Problem:

Biju Patnaik took up the first plane that left Palam Airport at Delhi on 27 October 1947 at dawn and landed at Srinagar Airport in the early morning. He saved 17 soldiers of 1-Sikh regiment commanded by Lt.Col. Dewan Ranjit Rai."... the pilot flew low on the airstrip twice to ensure that no raiders were around... Instructions from Prime Minister Nehru's office were clear. If the airport was taken over by enemy, you are not to land. Taking a full circle the DC-3 flew ground level. Anxious eye-balls peered from inside the aircraft – only to find the airstrip empty. The raiders were busy distributing the war booty amongst them in Baramulla."¹¹

Political Contribution:

Biju Patnaik was a successful politician of Odisha. He had the following contributions for Odisha.

1. The Choudwar and Barbil Industrial Belts.
2. The Cuttack-Jagatpur Mahanadi Highway Bridge
3. The Bhubaneswar Airport
4. Regional Collage 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. Reorganization 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.

Kalinga Foundation:

He set up the Kalinga Foundation for propagation of knowledge in Science. He also established the Kalinga Prize for Promoting scientific knowledge. The effort behind setting up of Kalinga Prize was that everyone should have at least a basic understanding of science. The prize, awarded by the UNESCO every year, is measured 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

prestige 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 ardently advocated inculcating scientific temper in the minds of the people.

A Builder:

Biju Patnaik established Kalinga tubes, Kalinga Airlines, Kalinga Iron work, Kalinga Refractories and the Kalinga, a daily Odia newspaper. In 1951 he established the international Kalinga Prize for popularization of Science and Technology among the people and entrusted the responsibility to the UNSECO. The projects which he was known to have spearheaded include the port of Paradeep, Orissa aviation centre, Bhubaneswar Airport, the Cuttack-Jagtpur Mahanadi highway bridge, Regional Engineering College, Sainik School Bhubaneswar, Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology, Bhubaneswar NALCO, Talcher Thermal Power Station, Balimela Hydel Project, HAL-Sunabeda, and the Choudwar & Barbil Industrial belt. He also established the Kalinga Cup in football.

Conclusion:

Biju Patnaik breathed his last on 17 April 1997. As a statesman, a learned person, matured political, social worker, champion of education and particularly women education, promoter of cottage, small scale industries, economic reformer.. he was in every sense the pride of Odisha. He was one of the leaders to sow the seeds of political consciousness very effectively on the soil of Odisha. He was a great builder of Odisha. He built Odisha's most prominent port by spending Rs.1.60 billion. He had courage,



dynamism and zeal to work for Odisha. Even the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was dazzled by Mr. Patnaik's familiarity with military subjects. He had also strong opposition to corruption. To fight against corruption he once ordered to beat up all corrupt officials. For the prestige of Odisha he did much more. Till today he occupies permanent place in the heart of Odisha people as the 'Hero of Kalinga' and 'Kharavela of Kalinga'. According to Biju Patnaik, "to be born poor is not a crime but to remain so is indeed a crime. In fact, Biju Patnaik contributed a lot for the state of Odisha. His contributions in different fields are matchless. He will be remembered for ever.

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