

## The Biju Phenomenon

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Recently, former Indonesian President Meghawati Sukarnoputri was on a special visit to Bhubaneswar. The visit was indicative of emotional attachment of the family members of the late legendary Indonesian leader and President Mr. Sukarno with the family of another legendary figure of Odisha, late lamented Biju Patnaik. The relationship dates back to late 1940s, when the Indonesians were carrying on their freedom struggle against the colonialist Dutch. It was on the advice of the Indian Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru, Biju Patnaik took up the challenging task, and safely escorted and flew the Indonesian leaders out of Indonesia under a skilled and intelligent flying operation. It speaks of volume about the capacity of Patnaik and also the confidence reposed in him by the Prime Minister of India.

Late Biju Patnaik belonged to a rare breed of politicians. He was a politician among statesmen and a statesman among politicians. He was and is a household name in Odisha and shall

continue to remain as same as long as the present herd of politicians remain in currency. Thus, he had emerged as a legendary hero during his life time and will continue as a phenomenon.



Biju loved adventure. The evidence of his adventurism was writ large in his dare devil cycle journey from Cuttack to Peshawar during his college days. When top brass among the Congress agitationists were confined in the Ahmednagar jail, Biju could intercept the system and contacted them. Further, he could land with the first group of security personnel when Pakistan launched a deceptive limited war to annex Kashmir immediately after independence.

He was a multi-national freedom fighter. Not only did he play a significant role in the Indonesian freedom struggle, but also exhibited the similar enthusiasm when situation in Nepal demanded action.

The institution of UNESCO-Kalinga Award bore testimony to his love for science and



technology. His association with JBS Haldane was not between a politician and scientist, rather it was between a visionary statesman who was ahead of age and class in terms of scientific temper and a research scientist.

The Balimela Dam, Paradeep Port and Express Highway give us a taste of Biju Patnaik and the material which made such a great soul. When he led Congress to a decisive victory in the first mid-term poll held in 1961, not only many eyebrows were raised in the opposition circle, but the erstwhile coalition leaders Mahtab and Singh Deo started choosing a new course in their political career - founding of Jana Congress, and merging of princely party Ganatantra Parishad with All India Swatantra Party respectively.

Whereas Jana Congress could not make a major dent in the non-Congress opposition circle in the country, the Utkal Congress formed by Biju could become a centre of future non-Congress formation through Pragati Party; then Bharatiya Lok Dal to Janata Party and the Janata Dal.

Biju was a crisis manager. He was a frontline legislator. The remarks and observations made by late Patnaik on the floor of Assembly and Union Parliament were of quality participation.

Once during Desai government, the opposition grilled the party in power and the then Steel Minister Biju Patnaik's strong defence of the government on the floor of the House speaks about his capacity to respond during crisis situation. V.P. Singh could become Prime Minister because of Mr. Patnaik and the centre of the activity was Odisha Bhawan during early December 1989.

Mr. Patnaik's second term as Chief Minister was of stupendous legislative support. He personally could cause 123 out of 147 seats fall in his bag. The same Patnaik was rejected twice in 1980 and 1985 by Odishan voters. Even Biju lost all the elections he fought in 1971. But within less than a year he bounced back with a record margin in the by-election held for the Rajnagar seat. Since then he never lost any election he fought. On couple of occasion he was the match winner. The Biju Phenomenon continues unabated when a regional outfit was constituted under the banner - Biju Janata Dal.

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