

Remembering Biju Babu

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Bijayananda Patnaik, popularly known as Biju Babu was born on March 5, 1916 at Cuttack in Odisha though his forefathers hail from Bhanjanagar region in Ganjam district of southern Odisha. Ganjam district is known for its rich culture. Biju's ancestral homeland, Bhanjanagar is famous for Upendra Bhanja, the late medieval well known Odia Poet who boasted of the dignity and greatness of the Odias. His father was Lakshminarayan Patnaik and mother was Ashalata Patnaik. His father was a great nationalist leader of Odia Movement. Biju Babu was a brilliant student. Biju Babu started his early education at Christ Collegiate School, Cuttack. Thereafter, he joined Ravenshaw Collegiate School and passed Matriculation with first division and was admitted Intermediate Science in the Ravenshaw College. He discontinued from B.Sc degree and underwent training as Pilot. He became a Pilot in British India, but actively participated in the Indian Independence struggle.



His days as a Pilot are more memorable and thrilling for his historic Indonesian operations to assist in the Indonesian independence struggle. He was offered the lavish present by the Indonesian government in 1950 for his contribution to Indonesia as a skilled pilot and act of bravery. Biju Patnaik flew to Java and rescued Sultan Sjahrir out on a Dakota military aircraft reaching India safely via Singapore on 24th July 1947. For this act of bravery, Biju Babu was given honorary citizenship in Indonesia and awarded **Bhoomi Putra**, the highest Indonesian award rarely granted to a foreigner.

Then he started his political career and joined Odisha politics. In the year 1946, he was elected to Odisha Legislative Assembly from North Cuttack Constituency. In 1952, he was elected from Bhanjanagar Assembly Constituency, in 1957 from Jagannath Prasad Assembly Constituency both in Ganjam district. In 1961, he became the

President of Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee. In the same year the Congress Party won Mid-term Assembly Elections under his leadership. In that election, Congress Party secured absolute majority by winning 82 seats out of 140 seats in the Odisha Legislative Assembly and formed the Government. Biju Babu won from Choudwar Constituency. He became the Chief Minister of Odisha for two years and later resigned from Chief Minister's post on October 2, 1963 because of Kamaraj Plan. Biju Babu took a lot of steps for the rapid industrialisation of Odisha as Chief Minister. He managed to set up **M.I.G (Aero-Engine)** factory at Sunabeda by persuading the then Prime Minister Nehru.

There was significant development in the field of education - both Technical and General Education during the first Chief Minister's tenure. The Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology (**O.U.A.T**) and **Sainik School** were set up at Bhubaneswar. **Regional College of Engineering** was also set up at Rourkela. For the promotion of technical education, he arranged stipends to poor meritorious students for the first time. He made an arrangement for setting up of a General College in each Sub-divisional headquarters of the State ensuring Higher Education for all.

Talcher Thermal Power Plant, Balimela Hydro-electric Projects etc. are the memorable testimonies of his successful achievement. During this period, seven Sugar Mills, twenty one Tile Making units, ten small Foundries and one Paper Mill were also established in Odisha. He gave a boost to Panchayat Industries. He created Tribal and Rural Welfare Department and nationalized the Text

Books. He introduced corporate system of administration as a step towards decentralization of power of administration at Government level. **The Industrial Development Corporation, Odisha Mining Corporation and Odisha Forest Corporation** are three giant Corporations which were created by him.

He had keen interest to restore the glory of sea trade for which Odisha had earned great reputation in the ancient past. Biju Babu believed that without State's own port, the rich natural resources could not be exported to other countries and foreign exchange could not be earned. Therefore, the project of Paradeep Port came to his mind and he took personal interest for its immediate function. Finally, late Jawaharlal Nehru the then Prime Minister of India, laid the foundation stone of the Port on 3rd January 1962 near the confluence of the river Mahanadi and the Bay of Bengal at Paradeep. After the foundation was laid by Nehru for connection of Paradeep Port, the Government of India did not clear the Project raising some technical objections. But this did not stop Biju Babu to fulfill his dream for which he had sanctioned Rs.13 crore from the Odisha Contingency Fund to march ahead with the progress. That Paradeep Port is now one of the leading ports in the Eastern India. Biju Babu also translated the idea of connecting the Paradeep Port with the rich mineral area at Daitari in Jajpur district and introduced road traffic for which the Express Road Ways came in to being, in record time. It is one of the great achievements of Biju Patnaik.

In 1974, he fought elections in Patkura and won and became the leader of opposition in the Odisha Legislative Assembly. He was the key player in the formation of **Janata Party** and was the head of its Odisha State unit. In 1977, he

contested from Kendrapara Loka Sabha Constituency and won. After 15 years, he came to power again when he was made the Minister, Steel and Mines at the centre under Morarji Desai. In 1980, leaders of erstwhile Janata Party in different outfits and camps fell before the Indira wave. But he retained the Kendrapara seat. He made a hat-trick when he retained this seat in 1984 despite the tremendous Indira sympathy wave in favour of the Congress Party.

In 1985, he resigned Loka Sabha seat to contest Bhubaneswar Assembly Constituency and he won in spite of Indira sympathy wave for the Congress Party. He made another hat-trick when he retained the seat in 1990 and 1995 Assembly elections.

After a gap of 27 years, Biju Babu returned to the power of state politics. His second tenure of Chief Ministership started from 5th March 1990 which was very special for Biju Babu (Birth Day) to 15th March 1995. He was the second Chief Minister of Odisha next to J.B. Patnaik of Congress Party who completed his five years tenure and provided political stability to the state. In 1990 Election, Biju created an all time record by getting 123 Members elected out of 147. The Congress Party, which had remained in office uninterruptedly for ten long years, could secure only 10 seats. The significant features in the elections was that the age of voting right was reduced from 21 to 18 years.

The most important features of his second tenure as Chief Minister were the reorganisation of districts raising their number from 13 to 30. Though in this direction in early 1970s, a District Reorganisation Committee had been constituted with Justice Raj Kishore Das as its Chairman, Udaya Nath Sahu and Sudhansu Mohan Patnaik,

the then Revenue Secretary as members and a report was submitted by it, yet no decision could be taken during the last 20 years in this regard.

The process of renovation of Panchayati Raj system in the state was started by Biju Patnaik. Reservation of women seats increased up to 33% in Gram Panchayat and Panchayat Samiti level of Local Self Government. He was the first leader in the country to have achieved this object of emancipation of women much before anybody could conceive the idea and before the Constitution of India was amended. Minimum wage of labourer was enhanced from Rs. 10/- to Rs.25/- and he enforced its implementation with true spirit.

He gave emphasis for establishment of a second major Steel Plant in Odisha and took special interest in this regard. He invited MESCO, led by Rita Singh, Ratan Tata, Bhushan and Ganapati Companies and Lord Swaraj Paul for this purpose. Lord Paul had visited Odisha at the initiative of a German based Odia Engineer Dr. Rajendra Narayan Das and several rounds of talks with Biju Patnaik for setting up a Steel Plant at Daitari areas of Jajpur district were made. The foundation stone of Steel Plant was laid in the area of Kalinga Nagar.

As a token of economic measures, he abolished the system of surrender leave, Leave Travel Concession, Deputation Allowance, Special Pay and other fringe benefits previously enjoyed by Government employees for so many years.

During Biju Babu's Second term Chief Ministership, provisions were made to establish Special Courts by abolishing Lokpal system considered by him as ineffective, for trial of all

classes relating to corruption charges levelled against persons occupying higher posts and Ministers. Cases were filed against eleven Ministers who had held office during the period 1980-90. The residence of some of the accused persons was raided and their cases were tried by the Special Courts. Even more stringent action was taken by Government against the officers who were involved with corrupt practices. One of the privileges which many officers had been enjoying for long years was occupational a Government quarters paying concessional rate of rent to Government, while letting their own houses at exorbitant rates of rent. In order to curb this bad practice, he initiated steps directing such occupants to vacate the quarters under their occupation or alternatively pay the market rent. All these reformatory steps created a furore among the Government officials.

In 1996, he won two Lok Sabha seats from Aska in Ganjam district and another was Cuttack in Central Odisha, equalling the feats of P.V.Narasimha Rao and Atal Bihari Vajpayee both the Ex-Prime Ministers of India. The political career of Biju Patnaik witnessed upward and downward trend, almost critically and inexplicably. He dominated both State politics and Central politics of India for a period of fifty years, whether he was in power or leader of Opposition. His mission and message, his ambitions and dreams made him a magnificent leader, a munificent man.

He was a multi-faceted personality, full of contradictions, heterogeneities and opposites. Biju Babu demonstrated pride and self-respect of the Odia people. He never bowed his head before Nehru, Indira and Morarji to remain in power. The only vested interest he had was the dignity and honour of the Odia people. Biju Babu

is the most vocal proponent of Odisha's pride and prestige, glory and greatness, self respect, self-pride of the Odia people in the best part of the 20th century. Odisha and her people are extremely fortunate to have Biju Patnaik, the illustrious son of the soil served the state as Chief Minister with indomitable spirit, untiring zeal and enthusiasm and firm resolve.

Biju Babu is fairly well known all over India and abroad for his charismatic leadership. A large number of dignitaries and V.V.I.Ps attended his funeral in Swargadwar at Puri, Odisha. Three Helicopter-loads of VVIP including the then Prime Minister H.D. Deva Gowda, ex-Prime Minister Chandrasekhar, A.B. Vajpayee, Krishan Kant, Governor of Andhra Pradesh, and so many Union Ministers, ex-Union Ministers etc. reached Puri to bid tearful farewell to the beloved Biju. Biju Babu breathed his last on 17.04.1997. The death of Biju Babu was a great loss to India as a whole and Odia people in particular. The vacant place in Odishan politics left by Biju Babu was very soon filled by his younger son Naveen Patnaik who played key position in the state politics since 2000.

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