



Biju Patnaik : A Legendary Hero

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The great dramatist Shakespeare rightly observed that life should be measured by deeds, not years. Life of Bijayananda Patnaik, affectionately called Biju Babu as a freedom fighter, a pilot, a nationalist, a leader and a statesman of national and international repute is a shining example. He was a man who created history, changed history and shaped history. And the history he shaped was the history of a progressive and prosperous Odisha.

Born to Laxminarayan Patnaik and Ashalata Devi at Anand Nivas, Tulsipur, Cuttack on 5th March, 1916, Biju Babu had his early schooling in Mission Primary School and Mission (Christ Collegiate) School. He joined Ravenshaw Collegiate School and passed Matriculation in 1932 with a first division and got admitted to Intermediate science class in the Ravenshaw College, Cuttack. He discontinued his B.Sc to undergo training as a pilot at the Aeronautic Training Institute of India and Delhi Flying Club. After completion of the pilot training, Biju Babu joined Indian National Airway. He married Smt. Gyana Devi in 1939, who hailed from an aristocratic rich family of Kashmir. His father-in-law's 'M.N. Radha Krishna & Co Ltd.' was a famous company at that time.

Biju Babu was a pilot par excellence of Royal Force of Indian Airways. He had the reputation being appreciated by the Governor General of India and chief executives of the British Government. His individual contribution to the Russians against Nazism of Germany was recognized as timely help at the critical juncture of the war. This apart, he could be able to evacuate the British families at Rangoon apprehending danger from the attack of Japan on Myanmar, during the period of war and he was praised by the British administrative authority for his dynamic and strategic act of bravery. To one's surprise, while he was the head of the Command under RIAF, he airdropped the leaflets of Quit India Movement on Indian soldiers fearlessly. His love for the country and freedom struggle were exemplified in his risky operation of air dropping leaflets supporting the cause of Netaji's Indian National Army. During that time, the freedom struggle was at its zenith at the call of Quit India slogan by Mahatma Gandhi. He was associated with underground movement led by Jayprakash Narayan and Ram Manohar Lohia and underwent imprisonment during 1943-45. Aruna Asaf Ali, one of the fighters of Quit India Movement, has said, "Among the thousands who came forward to take up the challenge, Biju

Patnaik was one of the most fearless and who mobilized his fellow pilots and inspired them to help the Underground Directorate”.

Biju Babu was a rare personality of valour, bravery, heroism and indomitable spirit. His role in the Indonesian freedom struggle was miraculous. Indonesian freedom fighters declared independence of the country on 17th August, 1945 from the Dutch. The Dutch created trouble to regain sway over the territories. The Dutch launched an attack on 21st July, 1947. President Dr. Sukarno asked the Prime Minister Sultan Sjahariar to leave the country for mobilizing the outer world to counteract the enemy but that could not be possible because the Dutch had absolute control over sea and air routes. At this crucial juncture Nehru came out to help Indonesia. He entrusted the task to his trusted pilot Biju Patnaik. Biju Babu accepted the proposal. He took off in an old fashioned Dakota with his wife Gyana Devi for Jakarta. On his way at Singapore he received a threat call from the Dutch to shot down his aircraft if it enters Indonesian air-space but he braved the hazards and flew to Jakarta (Java) and brought Dr. Sjahariar and Dr. Mahammed Hatta by his own Dakota and reached India via Singapore on 24 July, 1948 and held discussions with Nehru. For his act of bravery at critical moment, Biju babu was honoured in 1950 and rewarded with the forest land measuring 500 acres, a palatial building and special grant and opportunity for setting up industries which are accounted to be about five hundred crores. But at the request of his wife Gyana Devi, he declined to accept the offer with humility as a token of India's goodwill for the Indonesians. Later on, Indonesia conferred on Biju Babu the highest honour of the country 'Bhumiputra' (Son of the Soil) in 1973.

In the year 1946 Biju Babu was elected uncontested to the Odisha Legislative Assembly from North Cuttack Constituency. In 1952 and 1957 he won from Bhanjanagar and Jagannath Prasad respectively. On 13 February 1961 Biju Babu assumed the president-ship of the State Congress. The over all 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 23 June, 1961. In 1967 he unsuccessfully contested but next year he was nominated to the Rajya Sabha. In 1971 he contested from four Assembly Constituencies and one Lok Sabha Constituency as a candidate of his newly formed regional party named Utkal Congress but lost the election. In spite of successive defeats he was firm and headstrong.

Biju Babu was elected to the Orissa Legislative Assembly in 1971 in a by-election from Rajnagar. In 1974 he won from Patakura and became the Leader of the Opposition. In 1977 he won from the Kendrapara Lok Sabha Constituency and became the Union Minister for Steel & 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 Odisha 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.

Biju Babu contested the 12th 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 Odisha by giving his people a powerful and efficient administration. He sought to inject a rare dynamism into the administration and lifted the featureless and futureless people of Odisha out of the slough of despondence. 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 Sukinda with Paradeep, Balimela Hydel Project, Engineering College of Rourkela, Sainik School and Regional College of Education at Bhubaneswar and Odisha 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 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 UNESCO.

Biju Babu was well aware of the fact that Odisha was a poor and backward state in the country inspite of having a 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 Odisha gave a helping hand to Biju Babu in formulating the development of the river basin of

Odisha, 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 for 33 percent of reservation for women including S.C. and S.T. women. Further provision was made so that one third of the Zilla 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- Chairperson 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 Odisha observe his birthday (March 5) as Panchayati Raj Divas.

This great son of Odisha passed away on 17th April, 1997. It was an end of an epoch. The people of Odisha are inheritors of the great legacy left behind by Biju Babu. They should come forward to follow and adhere to this great leader's dream, idea and vision in right earnest and strive hard in creating a vibrant, progressive and prosperous Odisha of Biju Babu's dream and vision.

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