

Biju Patnaik : Architect and Builder of Modern India

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“To be born poor is not a crime but to remain so is indeed a crime.”

- Biju Patnaik

Some people are born to be legends, the others create one in themselves. Biju Patnaik is one of those people who strived for the ordinary people, for our nation with a collective spirit and constructive force. In that way, he carved out a legend in himself. A self-made legend, he was multi-talented and his contributions continue to spark out all over the world today. Known as the architect and builder of modern India, Biju Patnaik had the potential to build not only India but various nations. His thoughts and perspectives on Modernism are quite moving. Such a hero remains in the hearts of the posterity. Biju Patnaik was born on 5th March 1916 at Cuttack. His real name, however, was Bijayananda Patnaik. His parental home belongs to Nuagan, a place 80 kilometers away from Berhampur in the district of Ganjam. His father Laxminarayan Patnaik was a proud Odia nationalist and a member of the Odia movement whereas his mother Ashalata Devi was a Bengali lady. As a kid, Biju was always interested in flying. He had two brothers and one sister.



EDUCATION

The Mission Primary School and Mission Christ Collegiate of Cuttack were the parts of Biju Patnaik's early education. In 1932, he took admission to the intermediate science class of the Ravenshaw College where he turned out to be a talented sportsman and sports champion for three years. Then, realizing his passion for aviation, he studied Aeronautics at the Aeronautical Training Institute of India.

PERSONAL LIFE

Biju Patnaik was married to Gyan Kaur, a Punjabi lady. The couple was blessed with three children – Prem Patnaik, Gita Patnaik, and Naveen Patnaik. Prem Patnaik is one of the great industrialists of India and Gita Patnaik, who became Gita Mehta after tying a knot with Sunny Mehta (a famous publisher of USA) is a well-known author. His youngest son Naveen Patnaik serves as the Chief Minister of Odisha currently, following his footsteps. He too is a well-known author, having some of the best-selling books to his credit.

CAREER

Biju Patnaik discontinued his studies from Ravenshaw College when he realized his real dream of aviation. Then he started taking his training from the Aeronautical Training Institute of India and became an eminent pilot and a navigator. Eventually, he joined the Indian National Airways and became an ace pilot. During the Indian struggle for independence, he became the chief of the air transport command. While he was in service an interest fostered in his mind for nationalist politics and he used air force transports to deliver subversive literature to Indian troops.

He took part in the Quit India Movement and was sent to jail in 1943 for two years since he was found guilty of taking freedom fighters to secret places in his plane. In the Second World War, he joined the Royal Indian Air Force and gelled with the British, ultimately becoming friends with them. In 1941, when Japan stepped into the war and attacked Myanmar, he rescued the British. He also helped the Soviet Army fight against Hitler, during the World War II and was honored by the Russians for his service. He

became the Chief Minister of Odisha at the age of 45.

‘Odisha is a rich state where poor people live’

- Biju Patnaik

INTERESTS

Biju Patnaik was highly interested in sports. A talented sportsman, he headed the football, hockey, athletics, and cricket team of his university. He was the sports champion for continuously three years and an avid bridge player. Later, aviation became his source of interest and he became a pilot. Apart from these, another hobby that kept him alive was cycling. During his college days, he cycled a long way from Cuttack to Peshawar.

ROLE IN INDIAN FREEDOM STRUGGLE

Biju Patnaik was associated with two other architects of modern Odisha - Utkal Gourav Madhusudan Das and Utkalmani Gopabandhu Das. Inspired by them and by Mahatma Gandhi, Biju Patnaik dedicated himself to the Indian Freedom Movement. In 1942, Biju Patnaik decided to join the Quit India Movement under the guidance of the Father of the Nation to make India free. In 1943, he was sent to prison for two years as a result of participating in the Quit India Movement.

He was jailed for dropping political leaflets to Indian soldiers by the British. These soldiers were fighting under British command in Burma and flying missions that carried Congress Party leaders to secret meetings across India.

Aruna Asaf Ali, recalling Biju Patnaik's role during this period, mentioned: *“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.”

During his stay in Delhi, he was providing asylum to freedom fighters to avoid arrest by the British police. A foreign freedom fighter was aware of this and he had named his house *Absconders' Paradise*.

ROLE IN INDONESIAN FREEDOM STRUGGLE

Biju Patnaik had met with Jawaharlal Nehru while participating in the Indonesian freedom struggle. Eventually, he became one of his trusted friends. Nehru felt the freedom struggle of the Indonesian people parallel to that of India. The Dutch attempted to suppress Indonesian independence on 21 July 1947 and President Sukarna ordered the former prime minister of Indonesia—Sjahrir to leave the country and attend the first Inter-Asia Conference, organized by Nehru and to foment international public opinion against the Dutch. But Sjahrir was unable to leave because the Dutch controlled the Indonesian sea and air routes.

Then, Biju Patnaik and his wife flew to Java and brought Sultan Sjahrir out with the help of Dakota military aircraft and reached India via Singapore on 24 July 1947.

ROLE IN SAVING KASHMIR

On the dawn of 27 October 1947, Biju Patnaik helped to airlift the first Indian soldiers to Srinagar. He flew from Palam Airport in the dawn and landed at the Srinagar airport bringing 17 soldiers of Sikh regiment along with him. He flew at a very low level to look around whether the

enemy had already taken over the airport or not. Nehru had given very clear instructions not to land if he detected Pakistani presence over there. However, Biju Patnaik acted very skilfully and with great bravery accomplished the work. India's Kashmir history is often untold by many because we had lost Srinagar in 1947 war but Biju Patnaik is always remembered in the annals of Kashmir history for, without him, we would have lost the entire territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

ROLE IN POLITICS IN INDEPENDENT INDIA

Biju Patnaik was elected uncontested to the Odisha Legislative Assembly from North Cuttack constituency in 1946. In 1952 and 1957 he won from two others. In 1960 he got the presidentship of the state Congress. Under his leadership, the Congress Party won 82 of 140 seats and he (representing Chowdwar constituency) became the Chief Minister of Odisha on 23rd June 1961 and continued to be in the position until 2nd October 1963. It is when he resigned from the post under the Kamaraj plan to revitalize the Congress party.

Biju Patnaik was close to Indira Gandhi. She took over the Congress Party in 1967. However, unfortunately they clashed in 1969 over the Presidential election. Biju Patnaik then, left the Congress and formed a regional party—the Utkal Congress. The Utkal Congress party did reasonably well in the 1971 assembly polls. He then re-established contact with his old friend Jayaprakash Narayan and plunged into the Jaya Prakash (JP) movement as soon as it picked up momentum in 1974. When Indira Gandhi declared an emergency in 1975, Biju Patnaik was one of the first to be arrested along with the leaders of opposition.

He was released in 1977. Later he got elected to the Lok Sabha for the first time from Kendrapara constituency and he became Union minister of steel and mines in both the Morarji Desai and the Charan Singh governments until 1979. He was re-elected to the Lok Sabha again in 1980 and 1984 from Kendrapara constituency as Janata Party candidate even after the Congress wave in 1984 for Indira Gandhi's death. With the Congress defeat in 1989, he was back into the political limelight. After playing a key role in maneuvering V.P. Singh to the Prime Minister's post, he chose to go back to Odisha and prepare for the assembly election.

In the 1990 state assembly election, the Janata Dal received a vast majority (two-third assembly seats) which rose Biju Patnaik being the proud Chief Minister of Odisha for the second time until 1995. Biju Patnaik was re-elected as a Janata Dal candidate to the Lok Sabha in 1996 from Cuttack and Aska constituencies. He retained the Aska Lok Sabha seat until his death.

BIJU PATNAIK'S ANTI CORRUPTION STAND

Biju Patnaik, unlike the current age politicians, hated corruption in all ways. He provided no place for corruption neither in his personal nor professional life. He was a strong believer in justice and morality. His morals kept him away from all evil practices. He tried his best to protect the nation from corruption. However, the task was difficult enough to be successfully done. But the strong determination and desire of Biju Patnaik never let him quit trying. To fight against corruption, he once proclaimed 'beat up all corrupt officials'.

'Be loyal not to me but to the destiny of the state'

- Biju Patnaik

RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER PERSONALITIES / VIEWPOINTS OF OTHERS

1. Megawati, Indonesian President Sukarna's daughter, was named by Biju Patnaik and his wife.
2. Biju Patnaik was closely associated with Madhusudan Das and Gopabandhu Das.
3. During the Sino-Indian War in 1962, Nehru consulted Biju Patnaik repeatedly for advice. For some time, he was Nehru's defense advisor, though unofficially.
4. Sir Julian Huxley, the first Director-General of UNESCO and also a Kalinga Prize winner described Biju Patnaik as a "*remarkable Indian whose adventures would fill a book*"
5. When Nehru was criticized in the Parliament for his decision to provide more aid to Odisha, Nehru replied, "Biju Patnaik has the courage, dynamism, and zeal to work. So, there is no blunder in giving more aid to Odisha."
6. The prime minister was dazzled by Biju Patnaik's familiarity with military subjects and wrote a political commentator of the time.

HIS THEORY ON MODERNISM

Biju Patnaik had a true spirit of Federalism in his mind as well as his heart. According to him, modernism is where the minds of the people hold federal spirit with equal courage to fight every odd with bravery. Modernism, as an era isn't only made of modern traditions, beliefs, cuisine, and fashion but also broad-mindedness, strength,

fearlessness, determination, intelligence, and strong will power, all in a positive way. The modern era requires to be protective for the nation, gather constructive thoughts and do productive actions to reach the heights.

HIS POLITICAL THOUGHTS

Biju Patnaik's political ideals were centered on socialism and federalism. He had strong advocacy for equal resources to all Indian states. This made him rise in the eyes as well as the hearts of the people all over the nation. He was a fierce politician and he wanted to achieve various goals during his term though few could not be achieved. His political thoughts were derived from his experience. According to him, politics isn't a negative situation as it sounds in the present day. It is what can build up a strong nation and can also mark its fall. It is a powerful weapon that needs to be in safe and constructive hands. Otherwise, it can lead to a nation's demise.

ROLE IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Biju Patnaik had taken a very leading role in empowering women. He was the first in the nation to reserve 33% seats for women in the three-tier Panchayati raj institutions.

HIS THOUGHTS ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

The multifaceted Biju Patnaik never gave a place to the word impossible in his dictionary. He believed that development is impossible without the spread of knowledge of Science & Technology. So, to popularise Science & Technology and to draw the attention of world scientific community towards Odisha, he instituted an international award in science namely the "Kalinga Award" at the age of only 35 years and entrusted the responsibility to UNESCO.

UNESCO Kalinga Prize was founded by Biju Patnaik in 1952 for the Popularization of Science.

DEATH

Biju Patnaik has proved his brave heart when a journalist asked him on his 79th birthday how he would like to die, he had quipped, 'certainly not in an air crash or from prolonged illness. I would like to die instantly, just fall down and die'. Biju Patnaik died at Escorts Hospital, New Delhi on 17 April 1997 of cardio-respiratory failure, at the age of 81.

HIS DREAMS

Biju Patnaik had always wanted a corruption-free nation. And this is the biggest of his dreams which has remained unfulfilled to date. He had taken a tremendous stand against corruption i.e. the anti-corruption stand but it didn't lead to a wide change. However, he continued dreaming of officials and the public to be anti-corrupt. Secondly, he always had encouraged a politically conscious public. However, that too can be seen unfulfilled in the present political scenario of India. The achievements and respect that he had acquired, sadly couldn't be achieved by any other leader of the nation till date after his death. This can be noted as a failure point in our country. We haven't seen another Biju Patnaik in a personality after him.

AS A VISIONARY

He looked up to Napoleon and thus followed up his footprints. He was proficient in inspiring and gaining the confidence of his people. He was also inspired by Mahatma Gandhi – the father of our nation.

His pictorial biography titled “The Tall Man - Biju Patnaik” was released on 27th January 2018.

He left this quote for the people of Odisha: “In my dream of the 21st century for the state, I would have young men and women who put the interest of the state before them. They will have pride in themselves, confidence in themselves. They will not be at anybody’s mercy, except their selves. By their brains, intelligence and capacity, they will recapture the history of Kalinga.”

HIS VISION ON AN IDEAL NATION

According to Biju Patnaik, there are four important things and they are unity of nation, secularism, democracy and imperialism. As a man of sheer excellence in various fields, he has left no stone unturned when it came to national development and struggle.

An ideal nation, according to him is a corruption-free nation. It is a nation where unity rebounds over all the diversity and arguments. It is a nation where justice frames over prejudices and truth and intelligence over blind beliefs. An ideal state has various interpretations by various political scientists, sociologists, and politicians. However, Biju Patnaik’s interpretation was simple and understandable by all.

AS THE ARCHITECT AND BUILDER OF THE NATION

Architects of Modern India didn’t possess modern clothes or consume modern cuisine, but they carried modern minds.

Most of Biju Patnaik’s ventures were named Kalinga, the erstwhile name of Odisha. Some of the ventures were Kalinga tubes, Kalinga

Airlines, Kalinga Ironwork, Kalinga Refractories and Kalinga, a daily Odia newspaper. In 1951 he established the international Kalinga Prize. The above-mentioned contributions and incidents make it clear enough that Biju Patnaik was one of the greatest architects of modern Odisha as well as India. He has played wonderful roles in uniting India to the string of federalism. His thoughts, actions, and services are highly appreciated by not only the people of India but also Indonesia and Russia. Without his innovations in various fields, we’d never have come across the growth that we see today in our society.

Biju Patnaik is considered as a pioneer of the industrial growth of Odisha due to his establishment of a string of industries in the state. His contributions are the living records of his memory that prove he was a strong architect who shaped the state to ‘Modern Odisha’.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NATION

“To hell with the Government of India. I will build the Paradip Port with state government and my own money.”

– Biju Patnaik

And he spent Rs. 1.60 billion on it. Later, of course, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru sanctioned funds for the project and inaugurated the Port also.

Biju Patnaik has contributed immensely, directly or indirectly, in the establishment of the following projects/industries / educational institutions:

1. Paradip Port, Paradip
2. MIG Engine factory (NAL) at Sunabeda

3. Ferro Silicon Complex, Theruvali
4. Hydroelectric Power Project, Balimela
5. The Thermal Power station, Talcher
6. Regional Engineering College, Rourkela
7. Rourkela Steel Plant, Rourkela
8. Engineering and Medical College, Burla
9. Express Highway linking Daitari with Paradip
10. Sainik School, Bhubaneswar
11. Regional College of Education, Bhubaneswar
12. Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology, Bhubaneswar
13. Regional Research Laboratory of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research
14. Kalinga Foundation Trust
15. Kalinga Airlines
16. Kalinga Ironworks at Barbil
17. Kalinga Refractories
18. The Kalinga, a daily Odia newspaper
19. Odisha aviation centre
20. Bhubaneswar Airport
21. Rengali hydroelectric project
22. NALCO (National Aluminium Company) at Angul & Damanjodi
23. Choudwar and Barbil Industrial belts
24. Cuttack-Jagatpur Mahanadi highway bridge

COMMEMORATION

The Government of Odisha has named several institutions after the name of Biju Patnaik. They include the Biju Patnaik International Airport at Bhubaneswar, the Biju Patnaik University of Technology at Rourkela, Biju Patnaik Stadium at Nalco Nagar, Angul, etc. Also, his son Naveen Patnaik has declared his birthday 5th March as the Panchayati Raj Divas, as Biju Patnaik had contributed immensely in strengthening the panchayats. The Biju Patnaik 5 Rupee commemorative coin was released in 2016.

CONCLUSION

A heroic personality, he achieved his name and fame through hard work alone. Being a politician, an aeronautical engineer, navigator, industrialist, an ace pilot, popular freedom fighter Biju Patnaik never failed to be the most outstanding personality for the nation. Biju Patnaik can be termed as the invincible who set nationalistic feelings and goals higher than his own. A legendary personality, his contributions will be remembered by one and all for eternity.

"Be a pride to your State and not a shame."

– Biju Patnaik

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