

DREAMS OF A GREAT VISIONARY

Rural Prosperity Through Panchayati Raj Institutions

Dr. Damodar Rout

As per 73rd amendment of the Constitution of India PRIs are units of Local Self Governance. The prime objectives of the three-tier Panchayati Raj System are to eradicate poverty, uplift standard of living of people in the rural and tribal areas, bring about a healthy society by creating awareness for hygiene, sanitation and eradication of illiteracy. As the grassroot units of self-government-PRIs have been proclaimed as the vehicles of socio-economic transformation, particularly in rural and tribal areas. Effective and meaningful functioning of these bodies, however, depends on active involvement, contribution and participation of people both men and women.

Way back in 1961, at the time of inauguration of Panchayat Raj in Orissa, Sri Biju Patnaik the great leader of Oriyas have very rightly said, " The objective of this new experiment is noble and so is the work involved. Panchayat Raj will remove poverty, illiteracy and diseases. Reluctance to surrender power to them will be a continuing challenge for future leadership. We know that leadership is not possible without a leader who genuinely cares about the cause and the people behind it. I know for sure that dreams have no deadline and timelines till we reach the final goal. Sandbox wisdom is a delightful parable about suspicious system struggling with devolution. We must challenge conventional wisdom and

re-examine the development strategy. I dream of a day when Planning Commission and Palli Sabha will join hands in planning and implementing schemes of economic development and social justice."

Biju Babu as he is affectionately called is no more. The builder of Modern Orissa, who hailed from a family of freedom fighters and patriots, was born on 5th March 1916. From the very beginning of his childhood he was in the attempt to safeguard the prestige and dignity of Orissa in all respects. His role in the freedom movement is unforgettable and will remain as an example for the next generation for all the time to come. It is indeed incredible that very few could achieve in life time what this single individual could do, a rare combination of what is known as a forceful and towering personality, clear vision and deep insight into various matters relating to development, and capacity to instantly anticipate, comprehend and grasp the trend of events to come.

With his tremendous amount of ability and tenacity to push through development projects he could bring a sea change in the life of the common man in Orissa. During his golden era some remarkable achievements are : Paradeep Port, M.I.G. Factory at Sunabeda, Ferro Silicon Complex at Theruvalli, Hydro Electric Power Plant at Balimela, Thermal

Power Station at Talcher, Engineering College and Medical College at Burla, Engineering College at Rourkela, Express Highway linking Daitari with Paradeep, Sainik School, Demonstration Multipurpose School, Regional College of Education at Bhubaneswar, Regional Research Laboratory of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, Orissa University of Agriculture and so on. The list is a long one.

All these were logical but necessary contributions of what were started earlier viz., Hirakud Dam, Machakund Hydro-Electricity Project, Rourkela Steel Plant and a number of premier industrial establishments and educational institutions started in 50s and 60s. The Kalinga Prize instituted by Biju Babu is being awarded by UNESCO since 1952 for outstanding contribution towards popularization of science for the common man. It is a tribute to his relentless search for scientific ingenuity. There was only one dream, one mindset, and one mission associated with all these projects and programs - to lift the people of Orissa from the clutches of poverty, deprivation and malnutrition, and to bring them at par with the rest of the countrymen. It is a matter of pride and distinction for the people of our state that so much could be dared in a short time with so much of feelings and involvement and so much of passion for the people of our state.

Biju Babu's vision for rural prosperity was to strengthen the grassroot democracy through the Panchayati Raj system - a bottom-up approach towards socio-economic development. He hoped, "by their brains and capacity, people will recapture the history of Kalinga". Biju Babu used to sensitize people by saying, "We men and women of today have shrunk because we do not dream big. We have become little men and women with little

problems, little conspiracy, little likes and little dislikes, little gains or losses. Orissa can be lifted by a collective will. We are the descendants of great ancestors. Look at my beautiful hills, beautiful rivers, beautiful sea, rich forest which are gifts of nature, given to our people of my state. Prosperity in our hands - we can make it happen."

"My vision of Orissa : no cultivators would go with his field dry. Every drop of water that percolates through our soil is conserved in my dream of Orissa of tomorrow. I will not like to have a whisper about oppression to woman. I dream of a day when women will play equal role with men. They will exercise with men equal power and enjoy the same privilege. No child of my state will go hungry, without food or suffer from malnutrition. And all over my land there will be no illiteracy and ignorance. I would like to see every citizen of my state has a decent roof over his head."

PRIs in Orissa

At present there are 92,452 elected representatives of 30 Zilla Parishads, 314 Panchayat Samities and 5254 Gram Panchayats, participating in the local-self governance. The various Rural Development Works carried at the villages, Gram Panchayats, Block and District levels are planned, implemented, monitored and maintained by the Zilla Parishad. The Zilla Parishad at the district level is responsible for the development and welfare works carried through the central, state share and its own funding. Zilla Parishad supervises the works of Panchayat Samities as well as Gram Panchayats within its jurisdiction. The main functions of the Panchayat Samities are planning, execution and supervision of all development programs in the Block. It also supervises the works of Gram Panchayats within its jurisdiction.

At the Gram Panchayat level, the Gram Sabha is the most powerful foundation of decentralized governance by ensuring elected representatives, directly and regularly accountable to the people. The aim of the government has been to strengthen the Gram Sabha by introducing favourable policy changes. However, the Gram Sabhas are yet to become very effective operational entities and to do justice to their potential for making the Panchayat system truly self-governed and a bottom-up structure. Never the less, recommendations of the Gram Sabha is binding on the Gram Panchayat. The key roles entrusted to the Gram Sabha are microplanning, social audit of Panchayat functioning, ratification of Panchayat accounts, balance sheets, identification and approval of beneficiaries, and supervisory and functions. The nodal department in the Government of Orissa to support the PRIs is the Panchayati Raj Department which is responsible for:

- * Poverty Amelioration Program
- * Strengthening of Panchayati Raj Institutions as Self-Governing Units.
- * Upgradation of skill through training

Poverty Amelioration Program has four major components: Creation of wage employment opportunities; Self Employment Program; Construction of houses for the poor; and Development of Rural Infrastructure. Government has the obligation to bring up Panchayati Raj Institutions as unit of local self governance, and strengthen capacities in the functionaries so as to enable them to effectively plan and implement programs for eradication of poverty, uplift of standard of living of people, and bring about a healthy society by creating awareness for hygiene, sanitation, and eradication of illiteracy.

Gram Sabha:

Each village has to depend upon itself for its governance. People join together in the form of Gram Sabha or village assembly to discuss their problems and constitute a small committee for planning and implementing programs. Well informed persons who are interested in the welfare of the community may volunteer themselves or may be requested by the Gram Sabha to be the members of the committee. The key roles entrusted to the Gram Sabha are microplanning, social audit of panchayat functioning, ratification of panchayat accounts, balance sheets, identification and approval of beneficiaries, and supervisory and regulatory functions. The Gram Sabha is the most powerful foundation of decentralized governance. The aim of the present government has been to strengthen the Gram Sabha by introducing favourable policy changes so as to make the Panchayati Raj system truly self-governed and a bottom-up structure.

Our Goal is Set:

As said by Biju Patnaik, "the objective of local-self governance is noble, and so is the work involved. Panchayati Raj will remove poverty, illiteracy and diseases. Reluctance to surrender power to them will be a continuing challenge for future leadership. We know that leadership is not possible without a leader who genuinely cares about the cause and the people behind it." And truly, the present government with able leadership of Shri Naveen Patnaik is committed, all set to achieve prosperity by putting people on the front seat.

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