

# NRUSINGHA GURU

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Nrusingha Guru was born in the year 1902 at Gurupali near Sason about 12 KMs from Sambalpur town. He was among the few, awarded with scholarship at the lower and upper primary education. The genius is declared by such award and largely the credit we must give to the parents. The born genius was not a bookworm in spite of academic excellence. He commanded respect from his peers by his leadership quality and organizing capacity and gave positive direction to his followers. In his time a matriculate can easily get a service and have a useful lifestyle like a family man. But Nrusingha Guru was un-usual as revealed in his activity in 1921. The clarion call of the Father of the Nation repeatedly harp his mind and rip apart his heart and he joined the Non-co-operation Movement without a second thought. The spirit of youth and the excited mind invoke patriotic feelings. He collected his friends, classmates at Budharaja Hill. Under his leadership one and all decided to jump into the bandwagon of Bapuji with maiden initiation into freedom struggle. Immediately after i.e on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1921 Nrusingha Guru, Laxmi Narayan Mishra, Arun Dash and other students boycotted Zilla School. The rally went through nook and corners of Sambalpur town propagating non-cooperation movement making awareness of the public to join the freedom struggle. They did not look back to Zilla School but joined Jatiya Vidyalaya, established by Pandit Nilakantha Dash. The non-cooperation movement taught them through Jatiya Vidyalaya, the art of learning thread making, weaving, carpentry and cottage industry. After learning the same they made a mass contact visiting villages for production of our own cloth, not

depending on British mill or factory. As a political scientist he also understood Gandhian strategy, where to hurt the Britishers, the nation of shopkeepers.

The second incident of his leadership quality is evident in Jharsuguda, in the same year that is 1921. In Jharsuguda, a meeting was to be addressed by Pandit Gopabandhu Dash. The local administration was afraid of the meeting and clamped section 144 Cr.P.C. banning group of four or more. But Gopabandhu Dash knew that the young Nrusingha Guru could take the lead and he handed over his message to him. Nrusingha Guru organized impromptu meeting at an open space belonged to a *karmee*.

He read out the message of Pandit Gopabandhu. The delivery was emotional pouring out all his heart. The audience were spell bound and stayed in a trance as if Gopabandhu himself was present. All the local leaders as well as the audience praise the leadership quality and organizing capacity of this young man.

His encounter with Gandhi was a turning point of his life. In 1928 Gandhi and Kasturba became guest of Chandrasekhar Behera. Nrusingha Guru was in charge of organizing meeting for Gandhiji and he was also given the responsibility of taking care of the guests. This served him an opportunity to have close contact with Gandhiji. His contact served him to the lifestyle of Gandhiji. Not only dress but he also imbibed simplicity, high thinking, determination, humility and discipline. From there onwards he dressed himself like Gandhi, whom the Britishers



called half-naked Fakir.

For making of the state of Orissa, Madhu Babu came to Sambalpur on 8<sup>th</sup> February seeking support for agitation of Oriya speaking state. Young Guru knew that they have no identity like Bengalees, Punjabi, Madrassi or Bihari. To get rid of identity crisis of Oriyas he supported the call of Madhu Babu and joined in his mission. With friends he toured intensively to propagate the message visiting places like Phuljhar, Padampur and Chandrapur.

In 1930, Gandhiji took up the challenge of British draconian law i.e. salt law. He along with his followers broke the law, which is popularly known as Dandi March. For joining the agitation Laxminarayan Mishra was arrested in Bombay. Guru was not left far behind. He organized mass agitation in Sambalpur to support Dr Harekrusna Mahatab who organized salt law breaking agitation at Inchudi in Baleswar District. For his protest in Sambalpur the local administration arrested him.

In 1942 Gandhiji started Quit India Movement as the last phase of freedom struggle. The local administration were afraid of the popular leader i.e. Nrusingha Guru who justified his nomenclature with blessing of Nrusingha Nath deity. They promptly arrested him by implicating in a false case. At that time all was not well in his home front as his daughter was running a high fever. He was a strong man with indomitable spirit and high level of self-respect. He did not bow down to get bail nor he was perturbed. For him motherland was really superior to anything in his life. In the process he lost his daughter. What a supreme sacrifice for the noble cause of our country.

Nrusingha Guru had also contributed his might for social reform. Like a social scientist as he had deeply studied the prejudiced mindset of the public, the deep rooted superstition affecting health and mind of the society at large and engaged himself for the cure of the malady. At that time the schedule

cast people, or one may say Harijans were looked down upon by the upper caste. They were neglected, socially isolated and became a deprived weaker section. The practice of untouchability was also in vogue. Gandhiji at that time was preaching against this untouchability. Nrusingha Guru already had a soft corner for these *Harijans*. He encouraged and supported Gandhiji's view by lifting our fellow brothers from morass of social ostracism to help the cause of humanity. He dedicated himself to the cause of their well-being. It was Nrusingha Guru and Chandra Sekhar Behera who first established a committee for removal of untouchability at Sambalpur in 1929. Guru was invited by Gopabandhu Chowdhury to attend the meeting at Cuttack for provincial Harijan Sangha. The state level forum decided to entrust Guru to organize district level branch considering his work and efforts for removal of social stigma from this part of the state. Then the district Harijan Sangha at Sambalpur was formed, and Guru became the secretary of the Sangha and Chandra Sekhar Behera was the President. Nrusingha Guru was perfectly a social reformer, an active social worker. The Harijan movement had taken up many programmes for the upliftment of these weaker section like, collecting funds for their development, developmental work like digging wells for them, cleaning harijan slums, organizing training programme for their children on health and sanitation. He tried for enrollment of Harijan children for schooling. Not only like this, to boost up their moral courage he used to sing Kirtan, Bhajan, with their company. Just imagine the time, and the courage of Nrusingha Guru. Without any fear he continued his mission, his effort. A right, decisive headstrong person he was. He was a personality with impeccable character who knew that what he was doing was right guided by his own conscience not by social pressure. Pandit Jawaharlal Neheru was so much pleased that he personally had given a letter of appreciation to Guru and his team for their success. Amritlal V. Thakkar, who was in charge of Harijan Movement at the National level paid a visit to Sambalpur in 1933 and was deeply impressed with the achievement of Guru. Mahatma



Gandhi also paid a short visit to Orissa & started his tour from Sambalpur itself. On his public meeting at Balunkeswar Ghat, Sambalpur a sum of Rs 998.50 collected from Jharsuguda and Sambalpur was presented to him, a gift for the nation. Gandhiji decided that the amount collected should be spend for the development of Harijans of the area from which it was collected. Nrusingha Guru gave a proposal of establishing a hostel for Harijan school boys. The decision was highly appreciated by all India Harijan Sevak Sangha. Our late Janardan Supakar provided a house for the purpose with 20 students first. Guru remained in charge of the management of the Hostel. He stayed with them, personally collected funds for their daily needs, provided various amenities to these boys. Took all personal care and responsibilities.

Nrusingha Guru was a man ever ready to help people in distress. Like Dr. Janardan Pujari he did not care for his own health. In 1943, he visited the epidemic prone village and rendered essential services. In his time most of the people have the superstition of ascribing cholera as scourge of God, and known as *Mahamari*. Almost every one deserted the village in panic. Here Guru showed his indomitable courage to stay in the village for days together nursing the patients and assisting the medical team. He knew that sanitation was essential for the cure. So he engaged himself in disinfecting ponds of villages.

The beast like behaviour of the illiterate wage earners also needs correction. They used to spend their hard earned money in country liquor shop at evening after whole day hard labour. Nrusingha Guru realized the urgency of the demand to protest it. Their tragic flaw of alcoholism is to be resisted. Dependency syndrome of this liquor is to be checked. So with his friends he organized picketing in front of these country liquor shops, allowed nobody to enter. As a result all these shops were almost closed. It was so much effective that it effected the excise collection from alcohol and the

Deputy Commissioner was taken to task.

His service to the society as well as his dedication and sacrifice, although not recognized at national level nobody will disagree that he must get a place at national level. Actually if he would have born in any metropolis he would have been a national hero.

Nrusingha Guru as a journalist did not begin his career of a journalist as we are acquainted now. It comes naturally to him like a leaf to a tree. His experiment of social reform used to be reduced to writing and sent the same to 'Samaj' for the sole purpose of public awareness. He used to write the events associated with freedom struggle of this part of the country for general information of the public to support the cause of freedom. His reporting was clear, impartial, thought provoking and based on facts. His genre of writing was applauded and the then editor Pandit Lingaraj Mishra accepted him as a journalist for 'Samaj'. He was assigned the job of district representative of 'Samaj' for Sambalpur district. His simplicity was profound as he was working as an agent for 'Samaj'. He took the responsibility of distribution of 'Samaj' through the length and breadth of the district. He was interested for the increased circulation of 'Samaj' and as such he had to personally supervise the distribution of the same. His reporting was of high standard in the sense that his simple language was understood by one and all. Through journalism he did not want to earn name and fame. He was an idealist and used to hate yellow journalism. His talent was unparallel which catapulted him as president of Journalist Association of Sambalpur. He used to preach personal fact-finding mission, analysis of information if received and emphasized important events ignoring trivial issues. The aim of his writing was also to rise above for correction of the society. He was a role model for journalists and used to aid and advice the new generation to work diligently for the social cause. During the last phase of freedom struggle he was determined to adopt the profession of a journalist and did not change his mind after independence although he was a born congressman.

It is often said the pauper of 1947 became millionaire in the next decade. His aim was not for pelf and power, but service of the neglected, dejected, emaciated, enervated mass.

The real honour was given to him on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1983 for his service to the cause of journalism for a long period of 51 years at Sambalpur. In the welcome ceremony at Nariseva Sadan, Sambalpur the then Chief Minister J.B. Pattnaik along with renowned journalists, social workers, senior citizens of the town, high rank officers and thousand others gathered together to offer him heartiest welcome and respect which was unique and unknown in this part of the state.

In 1986 I came to stay at L.I.C. colony, Mudipara of Sambalpur town and as I remember I

first came to know about this towering personality from my neighbor late Smt. Sairindri Nayak. The great man spent his life in simple living and high thinking. He was loving and kind but very strong in determination like Gandhiji. His appearance, baldhead with loving smile on his face, his *khadi dhoti* and *chadar* closely associates with Gandhiji. Like Mahatma Gandhi his activity also covered all areas like social reform, fight against superstition and blind belief, freedom struggle, service to poor and sick. He appreciated and followed Gandhian principle and also applied the same in practical field with hundred percent success rates. So it is justified to call him not only Gandhi of Western Orissa but also of our state that is Orissa.

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