

Nrusingha Guru : Man of the Masses

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Among the few who adopted themselves in the practice of Gandhian ideals in their day to day life, Nrusingha Guru was not only one among them but also a true representative of the Indian ideals of 'Bhumiputra' and 'Sevaka'. He lived for the upliftment of the downtrodden and worked for the betterment of the masses. His life is a saga of suffering and sacrifices for the good of his fellowmen and the propagation of the message – 'Service is God'.

In spite of his brilliance which was known from his success in passing the examinations for class I & II at a time in Saranda Primary School and his acquaintance with Lilavati Sutra and Child's Easy First Grammar at this tender age he preferred to remain satisfied with only passing the matriculation from the National School established by Pt. Nilakantha Das and others to accommodate the stu-

dents who came out of their classes from the Zilla School to join the mainstream of the freedom movement of India. Since then Sri Guru became a devout follower of Gandhian ideology and took active interest in spreading the message of self-reliance, non-cooperation, non-violence and Harijan Movement. He is not known to have drifted from the path of assiduity trying to mitigate the suffering of the people either by helping them personally or by making it public through newspaper. He moved round the untrodden places around Sambalpur either in bare-foot or by a bi-cycle to acquire firsthand knowledge about the people and even helped them near Jharsuguda during the outbreak of cholera without any precautionary arrangement and adequate medical facilities. His heart was filled with spontaneous response to human suffering.

In between 1922 and 1930 he was baptized

as a social activist by the sheer strength and thrust of Gandhian methods to rejuvenate India. His personal contact with Gandhiji and Kasturba in 1928 at Sambalpur left in him a deep impression as to how one can endear the hearts of millions by simplicity, fearlessness and truthfulness. After his release from the jail in 1932 he took up the responsibilities to remove the stigma of untouchability with the formation of the provincial Harijan Sangha with Gopabandhu Choudhury and the establishment of the district unit at Sambalpur under the presidentship of S. S. Gupta. Nrusingha Guru remained in charge of this unit as the secretary till his arrest in 1942. The Harijan Movement in Sambalpur became so conspicuous for its achievement that Amritlal V. Thakkar, in charge of Harijan Movement in the National level came down to Sambalpur in 1933 and after being deeply moved, impressed upon Bapuji to visit Sambalpur to see for himself how selflessly people like Nrusingha Guru are trying their utmost for the upward movement of the Harijans. The impact that was generated because of fruitful efforts of the leaders like Sri Guru saw the establishment of a hostel for the Harijans. This was taken care of and nurtured by Sri Guru as his adopted son and eventually it became a nuclei from where a number of poor Harijans could educate themselves and become worthy sons of the soil. Nrusingha Guru was not only humiliated and deprived of his means of livelihood for this act but also treated as an outcaste by his fellow brethren. But he never cared for such social ostracisation nor did he succumb to any pressure or exacting domestic trouble burdening starvation. This was like an act of Dharma for him.

Nrusingha Guru identified himself as one among the teeming millions of half starved Indians by self-imposing a code of conduct which was true Swadeshi. He spun for his own cloth, avoid even taking sugar as it was a mechanical product, walked barefoot and used an umbrella made of palm leaf to protect him from the scorching sun and torrential rain. The simple way of living like a common man of rural India with barest possible articles often draw sarcastic comments but he adhered to it till his last. His sense of humanism was so deep and

intense that he did not hate or harm any body. One is reminded of his concern for the well being of some one from a incident which took place during his visit to the Samaj office at Cuttack. On an evening after depositing all his belonging in the Samaj office where he used to stay during his visit to Cuttack, went out for some work to a nearby place. When he returned back it was too late in the night to disturb any body to avail his belongings for which he decided to spend the whole night on a bench in a park. During night patrolling the police picked him up and threw him into lockup suspecting him to be a vagabond. Next day morning he phoned the Samaj office to take him back from the police custody. An official who was deputed to help him was shocked to see him in such condition, while he enquired as to how it happen Sri Guru narrated the entire episode. The official was taken aback to learn that Sri Guru did suffer only for the undisturbed sleep of an individual who could have allowed him to enter into the premises of the Samaj office during that night. When the official became apologetic to Sri Guru he comforted him by saying that the lock-up was more comfortable and mosquito free than the open ground. Such was the humility of this distinguished man and concern for other man's comfort. When he was told rudely by Dr Radhanath Rath, the then a minister in the Government of Orissa, to change his way of living and the mode of dress to suit modern times, he politely decline to do so even it cost him his means of live hood. He was, in fact, Gandhian to the core in words, deeds and practice. Dignity of labour and inner satisfaction in helping others to emeliorate their problems made him widely known as a true votary of humanism. All and sundry has easy access to him and his large heart was full of solace for every individual. Such a man is a thing of the past and even someone strives to become such is beyond comprehension. He was in reality, a "Yuga Purusha" who lived and moved amidst us beleving in external sacrifice as the greatest gift of God to man.

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