

NRUSINGHA GURU

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Nursinga Guru adorns a very important niche in the history of Freedom Movement in Sambalpur. Infact he along with Chintamani Pujari, Laxminarayan Mishra, Bhagirathi Pattnaik and Dayananda Satpathy constituted the Five comrades of the Freedom Movement in Sambalpur. He was noted for his Gandhian ideals of simplicity, sincerity and dedication. He was born at Gurupali, under Sason police station of Sambalpur district in 1902. His father's name was Ganesh Ram Guru. Guru got his education at Zilla School, Sambalpur. From his very school days he was deeply influenced by the Indian National Movement. The first spark of nationalism was fired in him in 1921. By that time the Utkala Union Conference in its Chakradharpur Session had accepted the aims and objects of Indian National Congress and the Non-Co-operation Movement had aroused great enthusiasm in Orissa mainly on account of Gopabandhu's sincere efforts. Sambalpur did not remain outside the orbit of the Non-Co-operation Movement. In the evening of 2nd January 1921 the students of Zilla School under the leadership of Laximinarayan Mishra organized a meeting at the feet of Budharaja hill. Nrusingha Guru was a student of class XI at that time. Along with Bhavani Shankar Mishra, Abdul Mazid, Krutartha Acharya, Chandra Sekhar Panigrahi, Nrusingha Guru invoked the students to boycott the classes. Next day it was found that about 200 out of 300 students had not attended the classes. This created sensation in the town of Sambalpur. From among the public persons Chandra Sekhar Behera, Dasarathi Mishra, Ramkrishna Behera, Baikunthanath Behera and others lent their moral support and encouragement to the students.

Nrusingha Guru in a group of students went round the town and called for a Hartal. These developments in Sambalpur were immediately sent in wire to the leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Gopabandhu Das and others. In the evening of 17th January a meeting was organized at Balibandha, which was attended by Gopabandhu Das, Nilakantha Das and Bhagirathi Mishra. Here the leaders called the students to boycott classes and join the National Movements. Immediately after the meeting was over the students left their hostel with bag and baggage. A National school was established at Fraser Club and it admitted all those students who had boycotted their schools and joined the Non-Co-operation Movement. Nrusingha Guru, Jagannath Mishra, Md. Hussain, Abdul Mazid, Arun Das, Chandra Sekhar Panigrahi, Benimadhava Supkar, Gouri Shankar Sahani were the pioneers among them.

The strike of Sambalpur spread to other parts of the district like Jharsuguda, Bargarh, Attabira, Bheden, Padampur, etc. The leaders of the district made intensive tours to rural areas preaching to the people on spinning, withdrawal of students from schools and colleges, dissociation from law-courts etc. Nrusingha Guru was placed in-charge of Jharsuguda, which was an important center of the Movement. He was also deputed to Chandrapur and Padampur for the propagation of the Congress Movement. As a result of these activities Sambalpur district was considered to be an important center of Non-Co-operation Movement in Orissa in 1921.

In 1922 there was an outbreak of cholera in the village Manpur. Nrusingha Guru along with

Nilkantha Das, Ganesh Prasad Padhi went to the village with medicines and tried to mitigate the suffering of the people. He took steps for cleaning the tanks and houses of the infected areas and provided homeopathic medicine to the patients. As a result of this, cholera could be controlled in Manpur. At that time cholera also broke out in Jharsuguda and Guru went there to provide relief to the people

By the end of 1922 there was a fall in the activities of general public. In 1923 Swaraj Party was formed in Orissa. The party aimed at Dominion status and adopted such methods as obstructionism in legislatures and local Boards. Its members eschewed the boycott policy and decided to seek election to various representative bodies so as to obstruct the Government in functioning. Pandit Nilakantha Das and Bhubanananda Das became the candidates of the congress from Orissa and achieved victory with overwhelming majority. Nrusingha Guru paid his attention to the rural areas of Sambalpur District during the election. Gandhiji visited Sambalpur in December 1928 which provided great incentive to the congress workers apart from popularising his programme. He was accorded a warm reception in Sambalpur. Meeting was organised at Brahmapura Ghat. On this occasion Nrusingha Guru came in personal contact with Gandhiji and Kasturba and was moved by their simplicity which left deep imprint in his life.

Nrusingha Guru also played a significant role in Sambalpur during the Civil Disobedience Movement. In 1930 he defied laws and courted arrest.

Nrusingha Guru will be remembered in history as a social reformer. After his release from jail Guru took up constructive work and made all out efforts for the upliftment of the Harijans. It was through the efforts of Nrusingha Guru and Chandra Sekhar Behera that a committee for removal of untouchability was formed in 1929. Nrusingha Guru also organised the District Harijan Sangha and the

advice of Chandra Sekhar Behera served as guidelines in this regard. Nrusingha Guru was invited by Gopabandhu Choudhury to attend the meeting at Cuttack for the formation of the Provincial Harijan Sangha. He attended the meeting where he was asked to remain in charge of the organization in the district level. Accordingly the District Harijan Sangha was formed under the Presidentship of S. S. Gupta and Guru acted as secretary of the Sangha till his arrest in 1942. After his release from jail in 1944 he again became the Secretary. The Harijan Movement aimed at cleaning Harijan Bustees, recruiting Harijan boys for schools, digging wells, establishing schools and hostels and providing various amenities to Harijan boys. 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 by the achievements of Guru in this regard. Gandhiji had to pay a short visit to Orissa in connection with the Harijan Movement. In the beginning Sambalpur had been excluded from the tour programme. But the strong arguments of Guru convinced Thakkar Bapa to include Sambalpur in the tour – programme of Gandhiji. And Gandhiji started his Orissa tour from Sambalpur itself. He addressed a public meeting at Balunkeswar Ghat. On this occasion a sum of Rs. 998-50 had had been collected from Jharsuguda and Sambalpur. It was decided to spend the money for the establishment of a hostel for the Harijan students and the decision was highly acclaimed and approved by the All India Harijan Sevak Sangha. Janardan Supkar provided a house for the purpose. Guru was placed in-charge of the management of the hostel. Thakkar Bapa, Harihar Das, Nanda Kishor Das and Pandit Lingaraj Mishra had visited the hostel and were impressed at the management of the hostel.

The Quit India Movement of 1942 had its manifestation in Sambalpur. There was wide spread protest against the British Government in towns and villages of Sambalpur. The students took active part in the Movement and organized strike and mass demonstrations. Large number of Congress workers

were arrested in different parts of the district. Nrusingha Guru, R. K. Sukla, Durga Prasad Guru and Dayananda Satpathy were arrested under India Defence Act. But the police could not establish the charges. They were released but detained at Sambalpur. (8)

The elections to Provincial Legislatures took place in March 1946 leading to an overwhelming victory of the Congress Party. The Congress candidates of Sambalpur namely Bodhram Dube, Laxminarayan Mishra, Lal Ranjit Singh Bariha and Mohan Singh achieved victory and were declared as members of the Orissa Legislative Assembly. Every body became conscious of a new era in Indian history. The expectations of the people

culminated in the passing of India Independence Act in July 1947, which ended the British Raj and heralded a new era in India after a long period of suffering and sacrifice.

In the post Independent period he kept himself away from political activities and took up journalism as his profession. As a journalist he was fearless. He made intensive tours in bicycle to the nook and corners of the district and collected authentic news for the 'Samaj' during the flood of 1982 he organised relief works with unprecedented zeal. A true Gandhian as he was, he always strove to translate the ideals of Gandhi into realities. In fact he was the visible embodiment of the Gandhian principles for which he is rightly called the 'Gandhi of Sambalpur'.