

# THE GANNDHI OF SAMBALPUR: NRUSINGHA GURU

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While remembering Nrusingha Guru, the illustrious son of Sambalpur, one naturally recapitulates the most famous stanza of Gray's 'Elegy written in a country Churchyard':

Full many a gems of purest rays serene.  
The dark unfathomed depths of ocean bear  
Full many a flowers are born to blush unseen  
And waste their sweetness in desert's air...

May be, had he been born some where else, he could have been a national hero. He could have been a leader of people. He could have earned name, fame and material wealth. But, this humble son of Gurupali, a small village near Sason, was of different cast. He believed in silent work. He shunned publicity, pomp and show. But in his own way, left his footmarks on the sands of time. He was too good a man to be forgotten.

He was almost a perfect replica of Mahatma Gandhi. Dwarfishly short, bald, naked from waste upwards. A thick khadi dhoti barely crossed his knees, and a pair of clean bare feet marked his personality. An everlasting smile pervaded his roundish face. His Gandhian bag dangling on his waistline was packed with reports and information. And of course, few copies of 'Samaja' of which he was the local reporter. This was my first impression of this friend of people; the Mahatma of Sambalpur.

Here was a man who was ever ready to help people in distress, - selflessly. I first saw him in a cholera-afflicted village towards the end of June in 1943. I was barely ten years old then. Almost

everyone had left the village in panic. But here was a man, who moved from house to house and assisted the medical team, disinfected the ponds and nursed the deserted patients. It was a treat to watch him while he faced a crisis. His eyes glowed with determination and his muscular body lurched like a menacing puma while in action. He was a leader of people ... aggressive enough to confront a challenge and if necessary, to beat the first lathi on his head.

He was a regular visitor to the Nandpara house of our elder father late Bodh Ram Dubey. This house was the nerve center of freedom movement and Congress activities of Sambalpur during the pre-independence days. We used to call him 'Dada' in fondness and affection. He mixed with us freely and narrated episodes of the freedom struggle. Some times he worked upto late night and slept on a mat on which he drafted the hand bills and phamflets. He worked for days together at a stretch and then vanished for months together.

Once Shri Bishwanaath Das, the first premier of Orissa stayed for dinner at our Nandpara house. He was very fond of fish and choiest dishes of fish curry was prepared for him. Nrusingha Dada stayed for dinner along with other invitees. He argued at length on the plus and minus points of consuming fish. He randomly quoted from Sanskrit texts on both sides of the case. An amused and amazed Biswanath Das remarked ' your 'Guru' surname justifies your wisdom.'

He was the eye and era of 'Samaja' for entire Western Orissa. His reporting were short sharp and

to the point and often his objectivity touched the fringes of bitter criticism. He faithfully served the cause of 'Samaja' till his health permitted him.

Towards the last part of his life, he was a frustrated man. He was very critical of the political leadership of Orissa. He repeatedly regretted that counterfeits had captured political power and that those who struggled for freedom were almost forgotten overnight.

He clung to his principles till his last breath.

Like Gandhiji, he kept away from the game of power politics. A saddened old man, he watched the decline of value-based politics. He gradually withdrew from limelight. But those who worked with him and watched him from close quarters agree that he was a 'lion amongst men' - a real Narasingha!!

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