

# Man with many facets: "Nrusingha Guru"

Hemant Kumar Mahapatra

Journalism was his favourite hobby after a life full of struggles for the Nation. His passion to free India from the clutches of Britishers brought him close to national leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Thakkar Bappa. He is regarded as Gandhi of Western Orissa—he is Nrusingha Guru to all of us.

Sri Guru was born at Gurupalli village under Sason police limits of Sambalpur district in 1902. Deeply influenced by the Indian National Movement he joined freedom movement in 1921. By then the Utkal Union Conference in its Chakradharpur Session had accepted the aims and objectives of Indian National Congress (INC) and the non-cooperation movement (NCM) had aroused enthusiasm in the State. On the evening of January 2, 1921, when Nrusingha Guru was in Class XI of Sambalpur Zilla School, he invoked the students to boycott classes and join INC, and they did. The students of Zilla School were the first to adopt the NCM in the Country. The activities of a passionate youth were reported to Gopabandhu Das and other national leaders. As a first step towards joining the INC, they left their hostels. A National School established at Fraser Club absorbed all those students who boycotted their classes and joined the NCM.

The stir from Sambalpur spread to all other areas like Jharsuguda, Baragarh, Attabira, Bheden and Padampur. Guru was asked to look after the activities in Jharsuguda and he was later deputed chairman of Chandarpur and Padampur for propagation of the Congress Movement. Due to these activities, Sambalpur was considered as an important centre of NCM in Orissa.

By 1922 freedom movement had begun in full swing in the State and Swarajya Party was formed in 1923. Pandit Nilakantha Das and Bhubananda Das were elected to the Congress from Orissa. After the elections, Gandhi visited Sambalpur in December 1928 which provided great incentive to the Congress workers apart from popularising his programme.

During Gandhiji's visit to Sambalpur in 1928 Sri Guru was entrusted with the responsibility to look after Bapuji and Ba. Greatly influenced by the Gandhian Principles and his simplicity, Guru opted for Khadi dhoti and led a life like a true Gandhian till death. He never used umbrella and sugar and worked barefoot.

He also played a prominent role during the Civil Disobedience Movement in the district in 1930. In 1932 he defied laws and courted arrest. After his release from jail, Guru worked for the uplift of poor and Harijans. A die-hard Gandhian he was determined to abolish untouchability.

A committee for removal of untouchability was framed in 1929 and a District Harijan Sangh was set up the same year. At a meeting at Cuttack for the formation of a Provisional Harijan Sangha, Guru was given the charge of the district-level organisation. Although he hailed from an orthodox Brahmin family he did not hesitate to shoulder the responsibility. Even he used to feed Harijan boys in his house during the Sradha ceremony of his father. Later, he was made its secretary till his arrest in 1942. Amritlal V. Thakkar, who was in charge of the National Harijan Movement was impressed by the de-

velopment in the State. Nrusingha guru was also arrested for his activities in Quit India Movement.

A social reformer, Gandhian to the core, a

journalist of repute and a vital actor in the freedom struggle are all which makes Nrusingha Guru the man he was.