

Last Year of Gopabandhu's Life

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It was the third week of July 1927 when the unprecedented flood disaster came to Orissa. The destructiveness and suddenness of this flood was unparalleled by any flood of the past. Train communication from Calcutta to Puri was disrupted. Roads and railway tracks remained submerged. Gopabandhu received this information by wire. He came back and tirelessly worked day in and day out for the flood stricken people. His deep love for village upliftment led him to work unceasingly. He set up schools in the heart of the countryside to reform village, remove darkness of ignorance, eradicate the crippling evil customs and remove poverty through the spread of cottage industries.

He firmly believed in the ideal of plain living and high thinking and wanted to start a new school on the line of old Gurukul. In the sylvan setting of the Bakul grove behind the famous Sakhigopal temple, a middle English School was started with only 19 students on 17 August 1909. This was the nucleus of the famous Satyabadi School which played a



significant role in the cause of nationalism and freedom of the country. The school was converted into a High School on 11 October 1911. The bond of young selfless distinguished intellectuals also offered to serve as teachers, besides Pandit Nilakantha Das, Pandit Godabarish Misra, Acharya Harihar Das, Pandit Krupasindhu Misra, Pandit Basudev Mahapatra, Shri Ramachandra Rath, Shri Venugopal Achari, Shri Satyabadi Tripathy, Pandit Bhubaneswar Misra and Pandit Lingaraj Misra. This unique School was visited by Chancellors and Vice-Chancellors of several universities, eminent scholars both of India and from abroad including Mahatma Gandhi on 13th April 1921, Shri Asutosh Mukherji in 1917, Shri Devi Prasad Sarbadhikari, Dr.

Lancaster of Great Britain and Sir Edward Gait, the then Lieutenant - Governor of Bihar and Orissa.

Gopabandhu was very simple in his food and clothing. He worked to root out untouchability, casteism and all forms of orthodoxy from among the villagers being inspired by the ideal of austerity.

Once he asked Acharya Harihar to purchase a pair of dhotis for him. Harihar purchased a pair of superior hand woven cloth at a cost of a rupee and a quarter. Gopabandhu burst into tears and said Harihar, you have wasted so much money on a pair of cloth.

He stayed at Calcutta in a small house to observe the life of his poor compatriots. There was hardly any light and ventilation. Being very poor 12 to 14 members lived in each room of 10 1/2' x 10 1/2' size. On the floor multitudes of bugs and lice moved about, making it impossible for one to sleep. Gopabandhu chose to remain in one such room along with the poor Odia labourers. The unhealthy condition affected his already worn out body. He came to Satyabadi on 11 June 1929. He was down with fever. A number of workers gathered there to see him. Gopabandhu burst into tears to see them. His illness took a bad turn on 16 June. The civil surgeon of Puri was called on. He examined and disclosed that his heart had become very weak. Wires were sent to his elder son-in-law Ratnakar Pati and Radhanath Rath to come from Cuttack. At that time Pandit Nilakantha, Acharya Harihar, Pandit Lingaraj and Ram Chandra Rath were by his side. At the mid-night on 16 June his heart began to palpitate badly. In the morning the Civil Surgeon was again called in. He declared, 'No hope'. The last moment has arrived. He prescribed injection and left with warning - 7 PM, 11 PM and 4 PM are the critical hour. Though he was fast approaching his end, Gopabandhu's mind was quite clear and the face was bright as usual. He spoke clearly and firmly. At 1 PM Pandit Lingaraj asked him if he intended to say something. He asked Pandit Lingaraj to

take down his will. He made over the 'Samaj' and 'The Satyabadi Press' to the Servants of the People Society. On seeing Ratnakar Pati and Radhanath Rath, he said, 'I am just dictating my last will before death. You will all do everything after due consideration. Now my last moment has come. It was 5.30 PM. He began to breathe heavily. A little fruit juice was given. He asked his loving friends and co-workers to sit round him and offer prayers. Immediately prayers were started. On his bed he began to pray with his palms held together. After offering prayer for a short time he said, 'I am feeling pain all over my body. My breath is moving upwards. My waist is aching'. Acharya Harihar began to massage his waist lightly. As he lay in this condition, his pulse failed just before 6 O'clock. At last he placed his hand on his chest. He exclaimed, 'I wish this upward movement of the breath would stop'. Within a couple of minutes it stopped. He expired at 7.25 PM. It was 17 June 1928, the day before the Car Festival at Puri known as Netrotsav Day, the occasion of Navajaubana Darshan, for seeing the holy Trinity Jagannath, Balaram and Subhadra in fresh youth. The light went out, the like of which Odisha may not see for all years to come.

His body decked with garlands and flowers and festoons and draped in the National flag was carried in a huge procession to his dear Bakul Grove behind the Sakhigopal temple and was consigned to fire.

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