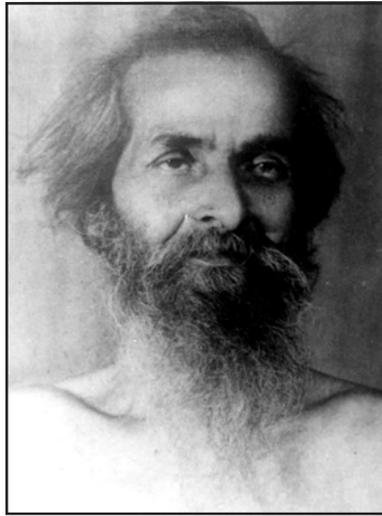


## Acharya Harihar Das : A True Nationalist

*Dr. Binodini Das*

Harihara, one of the leading soldiers of the freedom struggle of India, was born to Mahadeb Brahma and Sradhadevi on the fourteenth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Phalguna in the year 1869 A.D. He hailed from the village of Sriramchandrapur of Sakhigopal in Puri district. His educational career began with the village chahali and the middle vernacular school after which he joined in the Puri Zilla School with a scholarship from the government to complete the entrance examination. He did his F.A. from the Ravenshaw college. Though, he went to Calcutta to study LL.B at the instruction of Gopabandhu, he could not complete it.

"Non-possession of other's belongings" is a lesson was taught to him by the grandmother who insisted Harihara to return back the coconut that he lifted from the road while coming back to the house after finishing bath in the village pond. He tried to maintain village harmony by organising and participating in the fairs and festivals and serving to the people afflicted with the diseases alongwith the friends. The childhood friendship with Gopabandhu, Nilakantha, Krupasindhu and Ananta really



matured at Ravenshaw College. Being bound by the self-resolution, Harihar accepted the invitation of Uma Charan Patnaik to join as teacher in Nilgiri school. But he left Nilgiri alongwith Gopabandhu Das when the political agent outrightly refused to establish a high school there. Then he joined on a request in the Ravenshaw Collegiate school as a substitute of a teacher who went on leave for some days only to leave after three months when he found that the later was not returning.

He accepted the request when he was asked to join in the Pyari Mohan Academy at Cuttack established by Pyari Mohan Acharya. He took the challenge to confront the naughty and unmindful boys of the classroom. He innovated a novel technique how to set these boys in right terms. He visited their houses and watched their movements and established a cordial relationship with the parents offering the scope to teach the boys freely. This changed the relation between the two. He did never punish boys for their faults rather he explained them convincingly so long they would admit their faults. In one occasion when the school was facing problem for purchasing certain sports articles due



to financial crisis, a suggestion was given by some teachers to raise the funds through organisation of a lottery among the student. The headmaster Nimai Charan Patnaik sought the decision of other teachers. When Harihara was asked he told that "Lottery system was a symbol of cheating and earning a lot without any kind of labour. Knowing it how could we teach the method of cheating to our students ? The headmaster got convinced and the proposal was stopped.

While staying at Sahebzada Bazar with some of his students, he made them how to be self-dependant and taught them writing, and yogasanas. Besides, he volunteered to distribute the relief among the flood-stricken people at Kakatpur alongwith the students. "How to liberate India from the British-Yoke" was the sole thought from his childhood which he tried to translate into action through creating people of extra ordinary calibre who could face all the grim situations heroically. He wrote a book called "Child's Easy First Grammar" for the development of English Grammar among the students. He left Pyari Mohan Academy to join in the nearly opened Satyabadi Open Air School which was to be conducted in the green verdant trees of vakula and chhuriana at Sakhigopal. Virtually, the school was the brain child of Utkalmani Gopabandhu Das and Acharya Harihara. The school came into existence because of the persistent effort made by Nilakantha, Godabarish, Krupasindhu, Basudev and Ananta. As a Superintendent of the hostel, he became popular among the students. Though students referred to other teachers as 'Pundit', but Harihara was referred by them as 'Acharya'. The basic objective of the Satyabadi school was to inculcate the sense of nationalism among the masses through uniting the whole people irrespective of caste, creed and religion. The decline of Satyabadi school did not cast any negative impact on his mind rather he cheerfully accepted Gopabandhu's proposal to work for

"Bidhaba Ashrama" opened in the house of Dr. Balakrushna Misra at Puri. The young girls who were widow just at the age of 5/6 were brought to this ashram where all sorts of care like education, for moral and mental development was extended by Acharya Harihara. But this ashram could not run for a long time due to peculiar trouble and it broke down just two years after.

At the instruction of Gopabandhu, he roamed around Kanika to collect information and direct evidence on the tyrannical and oppressive measures of Kanika zamidar. When Gopabandhu was imprisoned, he became the editor of 'The Samaj'. After the breaking down of 'Bidhaba Ashram', he organised a 'Seva Samiti' to which people like freedom fighters and social-workers became the member. Apart from serving the diseased, other works like Khadi, prohibition of liquor and social-reform, etc. were carried out. It also helped the poor to earn something. After the death of Gopabandhu Das, he left Puri on the request of Gopabandhu Choudhury to manage the Swaraj Ashram at Cuttack.

The clarion call of Mahatma Gandhi to carry out Salt-satyagraha in 1930 created a stir in the nook and corner of India. Accordingly Gopabandhu Choudhury took the leadership of the Satyagrahis by taking a march on foot from Cuttack to Inchudi at Balasore to break the salt-law. Gopabandhu was arrested at Kakatia village after which Acharya Harihar led the procession to Inchudi receiving welcome from village to village till arrival at the destination. All of them were arrested there by the police who were well aware of them. He spent six months at Hazaribag jail in Bihar. Then he spent a number of times in the Hazaribag jail for spreading messages against the British rule.

He was a true disciple of Gandhiji who sincerely worked for attaining freedom of India. He spent hours together in the 'Harijan' residences



sharing cold-watered-rice with them, sometimes spinning thread with the girls, collecting contributory funds from the people to people and instructing them to dig the latrines in their homestead lands. The creation of separate province of Oissa on 1st April 1936 made some leaders hankering after power and leading there to play hide and seek game. Harihara kept himself away from such type of vested interests and devoted his time for the development of the village. Once a tough conflict arose over the issue of selecting the President for Provincial Congress Committee. The discussion was going inside the Satyanarayan temple of Nayasarak at Cuttack. The apple of discord was where to organise the next conference of the congress whether at Puri or at Cuttack. Two names for the President came to the front, one was Pandit Nilakantha and other one was Gopabandhu Choudhury. Finally a group of workers suggested Acharya Harihara's name which was not objected and he was elected unanimously as the president.

A group of youngsters proposed that a moral pressure should be imposed on the wealthy people for the removal poverty and hunger of the poor which was outrightly rejected by the National Congress Committee. This group formed parallel committee named as 'Congress Samajvadi Committee.' Harihara became a prey to such type of ideological conflict in the year 1938 when the election was held. He was called as "Acharya Harihara" by the Congress Samajvadi party and got defeated by oen of his former students named as Mohan Das of Nuapara.

The launching of Quit India Movement by Gandhiji in the year 1942 gave new incentive and moral boost to the freedom fighters. Acharya Harihara and other freedom fighters were arrested because of their active participation and imprisoned at Berhampur jail. A number of students leaving studies joined the movement

without carrying for the cudgel-beat and bullet firing of the police. They were also arrested and put to jail. Acharya taught these fellows inside the jail. Inside the jail he did hard labour as he did in the Swaraj Ashram. The trio Gopabandhu Choudhury, Acharya Harihara and Brajamohan Singh (nicknamed Chatu) formed their own mess inside the jail to maintain their resolution i.e. to take the food just for sustenance. While others resorted to delicious dishes, the trio-mess popularly called as 'go Achu' remained stick to rice, dal and a curry. Here he translated of Bhagabat Gita. He got released from the jail in the year 1944. He took initiative for mosquito-eradiction from the district of Puri. Both Pandit Krupasindhu Hota and Acharya Harihara decided that a day would be fixed for algae-cleaning from the ponds and tanks just like people were celebrating Raja or Kumarapurnima, Dipabali, Holi etc. Both of them requested the Zilla Board Chairman to extend financial support to expedite the work. But the Chairman refused to come into aid showing the plea that the Zill-Board had certain limits. But this did not deter Acharya and Hota who incited people adopting a novel technique. A day was fixed and the cleaning process was carried out which was visited by Chief Minister and other ministers. He became active member of Bhoodan Movement and accompanied Vinobajee from village to village in the year 1955. Presiding over the 12th Annual Conference of Sarvodaya Sammilani held at Sevagrama on 26th March, 1960 the day coinciding with his 83rd birth day, he told that, "Freedom has come. But it does not reach village. The sun rises in the east. But does not find the bright sunrays as we close our doors." The great soul did the unceasing work for the uplift of the people of Orissa and passed away on 29th February, 1971.

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