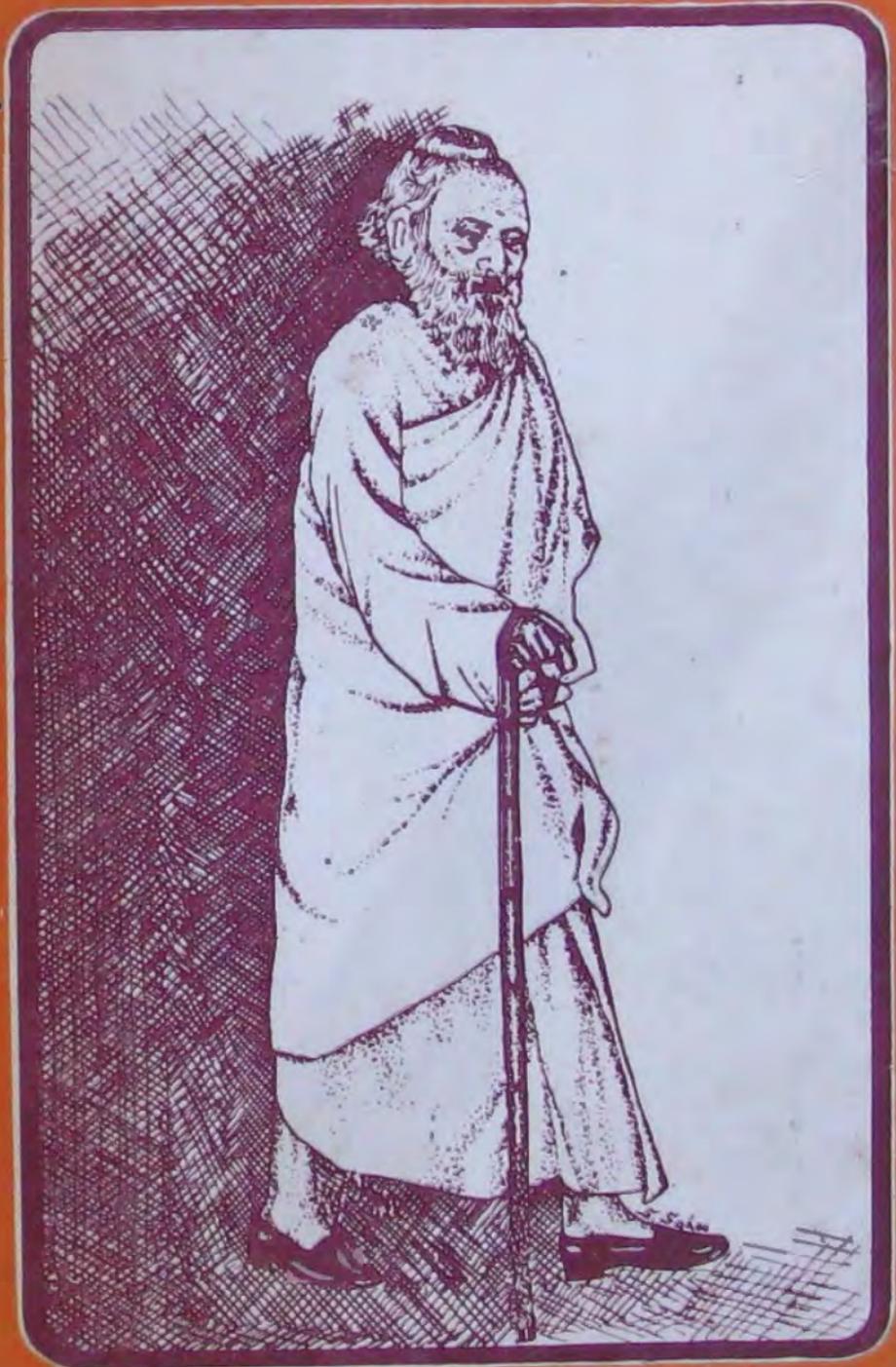


# Pandit Nilakantha Das



LILA RAY

**PANDIT NILAKANTHA DAS**  
( LIFE AND ACHIEVEMENTS )

**LILA RAY**

**Pandit Nilakantha Smruti Samiti**  
303, Kharavela Nagar  
Bhubaneswar - 1

PANDIT NILAKANTHA DAS

by  
LILA RAY

First Published : August 1985

**Price :- Rs. 50.00 Deluxe**  
**Rs. 30.00 Ordinary**

*Printed by :*

**Kwality Press (P) Limited**  
**A/67, Industrial Area**  
**Bhubaneswar-1.**

*Published by :*

**Pandit Nilakantha Smurti Samiti**  
**303, Kharavela Nagar**  
**Bhubaneswar - 1**

**Address of the Governor, Orissa**

**Dr. B. N. Pande**

**at the**

**Concluding Function of**

**Pandit Nilakantha Das**

**Birth Centenary Celebration**

**and Opening the Book**

**PANDIT NILAKANTHA DAS**

**HELD AT SOOCHANABHAVAN, BHUBANESWAR ON 5-8-1985.**

President of the Pandit Nilakantha Smruti Samiti, Vice-President, Centenary Celebration Committee, the Finance Minister, Revenue Minister, Education Minister, Secretary of the Committee, Ladies and Gentlemen :

I am happy at the coincidence that Pandit Nilakantha Das's Centenary coincides with the Congress centenary.

Pandit Nilakantha Das was a total personality. He had his hand in many walks of life, He was an educationist, a man of letters, a Parliamentarian, a social reformer and a freedom fighter and above all a very noble soul. Pandit Nilakantha Das was one of the Pancha Sakhas who established the Satyabadi Ashram. Satyabadi Ashram inculcated in the heart of Orissa, the moral principles and it produced persons and individuals who later occupied very important places in Orissa's society. Although, there was a generation gap between him and me, but when he was a Member of the Central Assembly, I used to follow his speeches with interest. He was a great orator and his speeches thrilled the House in the Central Assembly. He prepared his speeches with much diligence and marshalled facts and figures in such a way that it was difficult for the treasury benches to repudiate them. As a patriot, as a freedom fighter, he suffered much for the liberation of his country. Later on, he joined the fiery spirit, Netaji Subash Chandra Bose. He became the right hand man of Netaji in the movement which Netaji inaugurated. Like Netaji, he was also restless for the freedom of his country, and to the best of his ability, he tried to serve the people of Orissa and the cause of freedom of the country. We remember him today with gratitude. Such noble personalities not only make the society of their own time, but they

reflect on the future society, the future generations and the principles for which they lived and died. In those days, our country was not free and everybody had to work under great strains. But even in those days, people found the way, how to circumvent the foreign diplomacy, and the best course, he chose, was through education, by inculcating education to free their mind from servitude, to make them bold and to make them the servants of the people.

Like Satyabadi Ashram, many educational institutions were started in those days. Poet Rabindranath Tagore's Shantiniketan, Swami Shradhanand's Gurukul Ashram, Mrs. Annie Besant's theosophical society and theosophical Institute and several institutions in Maharashtra. Swami Dayanand also got opened series of schools for women and boys. The hunger for knowledge was tremendous in those days and people believed in moral principles. They believed that life is not for their own personal benefit, but for the entire society. Of course, they earned their livelihood to maintain their family. But they also contributed in making the society. Their contribution was made and without an inkling for any reward. Pandit Nilakantha Das, tried to build a society, an egalitarian society, free of all prejudices and bias. He did his level best to encourage the study of Oriya. In fact his contribution in this direction was noteworthy. And as an educationist, he occupies the foremost place and can be put on the same category as Sir Asutosh Mukherjee or Ashutosh Choudhury of Calcutta University. His contribution in reforming the Oriya society was also great and valuable. We remember him on this day when he completes his centenary. And, we pray to God that let his spirit guide us, guide the new generation and present generation of Orissa so that, they may also continue the

virtues for which he lived and died, the principles for which he fought. Let the people of Orissa create memorials in his memory, which will go a long way to cherish the principles that he enunciated.

These days, unlike ours, when we were students, we used to read Vivekananda's memorable lectures from Comoorin to Himalayas. We used to read Bhagbat Geeta, we used to read literatures which inspired us and showed us the moral path. It is a pity that present generation is not encouraged to imbibe the hunger for reading moral literatures, spiritual literatures. That is why, there is dearth of principled life in the present generation. That is why, corruption is rampant in our present society, as we do not inculcate the spirit of morality from the very childhood, from the very grass-root and our education lacks in that direction. Unless and until, we start from the grass-root level there can be no hope for the future generation to lead the life of morality and honesty. We remember Pandit Nilakantha, let us work so that we can inculcate the ideals for which Nilakantha Das lived, in the present and future generations of our State.

He was a great leader, a great social reformer, a great freedom fighter, a great orator, a great Parliamentarian, and a great educationist, and all combined in one person. Not only he, but all the Pancha Sakhas of Satyabadi Ashram were gifted with these gifts. Let the life of Satyabadi Ashram come up again in various parts of the Country/State so that the people may realise the same principles and live for them, as the Pancha Sakhas lived for. With these words, I join with you in remembering the great Patriot on the completion of his Centenary.

Thank you

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Pandit Nilakantha was an outstanding personality and of rare calibre. He evinced traits of this calibre from his school days. He fought relentlessly against the prevalence of dark rituals and degrading superstitions. He was convinced that education should be designed to turn out "whole men" equipped not only with knowledge, but also with flair for community service, rational attitude and nationalist fervour. The Satyavadi School was the outcome.

Pandit Nilakantha was a talented scholar. He stood out as a versatile literateur. He joined ardently the non-cooperation movement of Gandhiji right from the beginning and went through all the stages of fight for freedom. In the prolonged course for the amalgamation of the Oriya-Speaking regions, he played a prominent role and it was he who first moved a resolution in the Central Assembly in 1927 for a separate Orissa Province. As a legislator, he earned wide appreciation. It is difficult to enumerate his achievements and contributions.

The Pandit Nilakantha Smruti Samiti was formed in 1978. Since then the Samiti has not only celebrated his Birth Centenary, but has made earnest efforts to organise research in respect of all the various fields of Panditji's achievements. It has endowed a Research fellowship in the Utkal University, instituted Memorial lectures and disseminated information and knowledge about the illustrious Pandit. It has, in the mean

time, brought out a number of publications about his life and works and critical assessment of his writings and activities. All these have created interest and earned appreciation, not only in the state, but also outside. This work of the Committee will continue unabated.

All these publications have been in Oriya language. The committee considered it necessary to bring out some books in English, depicting his life and contributions, for wider circulation. Pandit Nilakantha's speeches in the Central Assembly were delivered in English. These are being compiled and will be published with relevant notes on the occasions.

On our request, Srimati Lila Ray has written this book "Pandit Nilakantha: His Life and Achievements". She is not well-versed in Oriya. She is a celebrated writer. She had stayed long in Shantiniketan. Dr. Narendranath Misra of the Oriya Department managed to furnish relevant informations about Pandit Nilakantha to her in Bengali. He and his colleagues in the Department were of great help to her. Srimati Lila Ray prepared the manuscript with laborious efforts and devotion. This is the first book, on Pandit Nilakantha's life and achievements in English. We are grateful to her. We hope, this book will be appreciated by readers, particularly those who are not versed in Oriya language.

**Sadasiv Misra**

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## THIS BOOK

When the celebrated Bengali writer, Shri Annada Sankar Ray, whose contribution to modern Oriya literature is graciously acknowledged alongwith his high rank as a writer of Bengali, was invited to deliver the Pandit Nilakantha Memorial Lecture arranged by the Utkal University, I accompanied him to Orissa.

Pandit Nilakantha Smruti Samiti spoke to me of their desire to publish a biography of the Poet, Literateur and Politician Nilakantha Das in English as part of their programme for the celebration of his birth centenary in 1983-84. They suggested that I undertake it. As it was not possible for me to collect the necessary materials or do the required research on my own, an arrangement was made with Dr. Narendranath Misra of the Viswa-Bharati University. Dr. Misra was requested to write a biography of Pandit Das in Oriya, which he did, taking much time and trouble over the collections and arranging of available materials. On the completion of his book, his son Sriman Asok Misra, M.A., a research student of Viswa-Bharati, translated it into Bengali for my convenience. This book is based on his Bengali version, although the English-reading public for which I write, require a degree of freedom in my approach. Dr. Narendranath Misra has gone through the manuscript carefully, checking and approving or changing. The result is, we all hope, as valuable a biography of Pandit Nilakantha Das as it is possible to write in the present circumstances.

July 1984

Lila Ray

## INTRODUCTION

Biography is the oldest form of literature. Poets and writers of prose have always drawn their subjects from the actual lives of those who are either very dear to them personally or to the public.

Pure biography is an adjunct of history. The lives of the great are inscribed on the pages of the past. Historical biography depends upon historical records. The creative play of the imagination has to be held in check by verifiable facts. The biographer has to choose from the available materials the event which throw light on the public or private life of his subject and open the way to an understanding of his or her development in particular historical circumstances.

No biographer can neglect any source of insight relating to the time and place and person he has chosen for his subject. Letters, diaries, memoirs, autobiographies and the comments of chronological order and their relative importance determined in the light of available evidence and a judgement made. The lives of political leaders are usually better documented than others.

Unfortunately the historical sense is not yet very highly developed in Oriya literature in spite of the introduction of the chronological method

in the early eighteenth century by Dibakar Das in his **Jagannatha Charitamrita**. Radhanath introduced the historical approach in the nineteenth century in his **Life of Raja Sudhal Dev**. A modern feeling for what is important in biography has developed gradually but a general backwardness or lack of interest still hampers efforts in this direction.

Any attempt to write the life story of Pandit Nilakantha Das must be judged against this background. I have studied the essays he wrote when he was young and his many journalistic pieces. I have studied the memoirs he wrote in his old age. His writings have not yielded as much information as I hoped. They are the products of a conscious and wary mind, detached, critical, objective. For assistance, I have turned to other sources. Shri Madhusudan Das, the Secretary of the Nilakantha Memorial Committee, has been very helpful. On the 6th May 1981 a meeting was held to consider the situation. Dr. Kunja Bihari Dash was the Chairman. He appealed to those who had known the Pandit personally to help with information, letters, diaries and so forth. Dr. Dash, as Chairman of the Literary and Cultural Section of the Memorial Committee, has given generously of his time and advice. A resolution was passed at the meeting urging the collection and publication of the speeches made by Nilakantha during the eighteen years he was a member of the Central Legislative Assembly and the ten years he was a member of the Orissa

Legislative Assembly, for five of these years he being the Speaker of the House.

Shrimati Indira Devi, Pandit Nilakantha's daughter, and Shri Madhusudan Das took me to Sriramchandrapur to see the ancestral home. Nilakantha's tomb is at Satyavadi, close to the beloved forest school known as Vana Vidyalaya with which he was so closely associated. I saw it there.

I have included here what I learnt personally from Nilakantha Das. He was the subject of the first essay, I wrote. The essay was published in 1956. He was and is, my favourite Oriya writer. I have studied his works and his life through the years and I am now gratified to be able to place in the hands of my readers a full biography. No doubt, much will be added to our knowledge of this great patriot and leader as more material becomes available, but I shall consider my efforts fully rewarded if I am able to shed some light in advance on the course, research will inevitably take in future.

Santiniketan  
June 1983.

**Narendranath Misra**



## P R E F A C E

Nilakantha Das was part of a generation of singular distinction in the history of Orissa and India. He was closely associated with Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Subhash Chandra Bose and many of the other great leaders to whom India owes its independence. He was an intellectual, a teacher of his people, whose study and independence of judgement remained undiminished to the end of his life.

Nilakantha Das was one of the three architects of the mind of modern Orissa. The other two were Gopabandhu Das whom he regarded as his guru and Madhusudan Das, who declared Nilakantha as his heir. Besides, Godavarish Mishra was his contemporary. Living as they did in the period of transition from traditional orthodoxy to reformist nationalism, from subjugation to the Brahmin absolutes and the British to a creative and independent flexibility free from arbitrariness, they worked for a better organisation of society. Nilakantha was a humanist, who trusted in the growth of knowledge to put the life of the country on a sound and rational basis.

Nilakantha started life as a teacher at Satyavadi. The medium of instruction was English. Yet emphasis was laid on Oriya literature. For expanding the knowledge of both teachers and students, he built an extensive library, with various English Books. He became aware of the civilising and liberalising function of language very early. Language is the unparalleled agent for a greater realisation and articulation of the individual human potential. In no other way can the habit of solving personal problems, through traditional categories of cliches or ritualistic psychology, be broken and a forward movement to independent thinking made possible. Nilakantha championed the cause of Oriya all his life.

Though not a wholetime writer having spent much of his time in active politics, Nilakantha succeeded in establishing a standard of good writing that has deeply influenced later generations of writers. In his re-discovery of the past, of the rural community, of the village, in turning to the ancient Oriya local lore, in his efforts to put the spoken language on an equal footing with the classical tongue, Nilakantha inducted the young into world free from the domination of absolutism.

Nilakantha was a great innovator, speaking and writing with the authority of his cultural heritage, but without its arbitrariness. Yet he was not combative by nature. If he was didactic he

was not satirical and sought to inform tradition with contemporary experience. His approach was ameliorative rather than defiant, though he was uncompromising in the independence of his judgement and the strength of his convictions. He was free from the rigidity of both classical and new-fangled western' models, a universalist without being cosmopolitan, passionate and controlled in his advocacy of the progressive causes of the day.

Nilakantha was a leader of his people. His stature was in no way less than the stature of any other Indian leader of the time. As years pass, the magnitude of his contribution to the growth of national life will become more and more widely realised and appreciated.

**Lila Ray**



PART - I  
LIFE

## LIFE SKETCH

Pandit Nilakantha Das is one of the most striking figures in Indian politics. He is amongst the earliest champions of Indian Independence to which he dedicated his whole life. Very early in 1921 he joined the Independence Movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. He is held in great esteem by his contemporaries for his political achievements as well as for his erudition. He was not only an erudite scholar but also a great educationist, a social reformer as well as a patriot.

### Early Life and Satyabadi Vana Vidyalay

Born on 5th August, 1884 in a respectable Brahmin family of Puri, he progressed brilliantly well in his academic career till he became an M.A. in Philosophy from the Calcutta University. It would have been then very easy for him to obtain a lucrative post in some departments of the Government. But his ambition was to be a servant of the nation and try for its emancipation and upliftment. With this end in view, he chose to be a teacher in the National School at Satyabadi in the district of Puri, a School which he was mainly instrumental in starting in 1909 in a collaboration with the late Pandit Gopabandhu Das who was his Guru and was older by 6 years to him. He was the main spring of the spirit of inspiration of the self sacrifice not only for Pandit Das, but also for his contemporaries and associates. This School was a unique national institution in those days. It refused alluring Government grants-in-aid and got recognition from the then Vice-Chancellor of the Calcutta University, Sir Dev Prasad Sarbadhikari and not by the Bihar and Orissa Education Department which was then a parallel institution in this respect. The classes of the School were being held under the shades of trees in a

garden with a simple shed for the rainy season. It was a big residential High School with more than 500 boarders who were living in thatched boarding houses just fit for the living of the village-folk. Pandit Nilakantha was throughout the residential Head of the institution and under him the educational system of the School was organised with a basically new outlook

### **His Social Reforms**

From the beginning Pandit Nilakantha had a remarkable zeal for social reforms and he had no love for any distinction of caste or creed. He actually joined the school in 1911 and since then he openly revolted against 'untouchability' and similar other undesirable social relations. He inspired both the school and its hostel with a community feeding of students belonging to all castes and creeds. This created a situation saturated with a sense of suspicion and distrust as Satyabadi was the most orthodox Brahmin centre of Orissa. Pandit Nilakantha's social ideals and activities were too much for such orthodox people. They warned and even alarmed the community as best as they could and engaged themselves in organised attempts to excommunicate the Pandit for such 'wild' actions and went even to the extent of setting fire to the thatched bungalow in which the big library of the School as well as the classes were housed. But Panditji, alone as he was then in the midst of this conflict, remained undaunted. A new house was immediately put up and the valuable and authentic books were again collected. The Pandit was in those days so studiously absorbed in the study of those books that famous pilgrims from other parts of India and visitors from outside India who saw him there in the Garden School and

library wrote in papers and magazines not only highly about his educational activities and out-look but his deep habits of studies and his erudition. It may be mentioned, however, in this connection that from about 1912 he began a movement for the scientific remodelling of the Oriya script called 'Lipi Samskara' which created a literary commotion throughout Orissa. In the beginning, orthodox Oriya literary men were vehemently against it in their criticisms in papers and magazines. It is to be regretted, however, that since then no more reform has been taken up by the Govt. of Orissa.

Next to Pandit Gopabandhu Das, he was the person who made the Satyabadi School famous all over India and he received praises of such high personages as Sir Dev Prasad Sarbadhikari, Sir Asutosh Mukherjee, Sir Krishna Gobind Gupta, Sir Edward Gait. Mahatma Gandhi himself and others.

### **Professor of Calcutta University**

After getting his M. A. Degree from the Calcutta University, Pandit Das worked for 7 years until 1918 as the Head of the National High School. His brilliance attracted the late Sir Asutosh Mukherjee who invited Pandit Das to Calcutta University in 1920 where he worked as a Professor of Post-Graduate Studies in Modern Indian Languages. But he was there only for three months.

### **•Pandit Das joins National Movement**

The National call for non co-operation came to him as a directive from within and he joined the movement early in January, 1921. He was elected to the then Central Legislative Assembly from Orissa towards the end of 1923. He was

elected more than once to the Delhi University Court where he served until 1930.

As an old associate of Pandit Motilal Nehru, Vithalbhai Patel, Bullabhai Desai and Mohammand Ali Jinnah in the old Central Legislative Assembly, Pandit earned a good deal of popularity not only in the Parliamentary politics but also in home province which elected him as the Chief of the Utkal Provincial Congress Committee. He held this office for many years. He was the first to visualise that the formation of a separate province for all Oriya-speaking tracts and not their amalgamation to be tagged to some neighbouring province, was the real goal of Orissa. He distinctly demanded it in the Central Assembly on 8th February, 1927. This demand ultimately culminated in the formation of the present State of Orissa in 1936. He was elected President of the All Party Conference of Orissa in 1931 for the promotion of this cause. He was also elected Chairman of the Reception Committee of the proposed Puri Session of the Indian National Congress of 1932 which was declared unlawful just before the session. The success of the Congress in 1936 elections was almost entirely due to his single handed effort and to his dynamic personality. He moved like a whirlwind all over Orissa leading to the first Congress Ministry of Sri Biswanath Das in 1937.

Panditji, during the course of his non-co-operation struggle, went to jail 4 times during the period from 1922 to 1933. First he joined the Swaraj Party of late Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das as a 'pro-changer' after coming out from his first jail life. Then in 1927 he was elected as a Congress M. L. A. which he gave up in 1930 under the mandate of Lahore Congress

and then in 1930 he joined Sri Madan Mohan Malaviya's independent Party and got elected only to resign and come out from the Assembly after only 12 days in April, the same year along with Madan Mohan Malaviya, Vithalbhai Patel, T. Prakasham and others in response to the Dandi Salt March of Mahatma Gandhi.

### **His Association with Subhas Bose**

In 1939 Subhas Bose came to Orissa and Panditji as the President of the Utkal Congress made a tour with him throughout the province during which he got convinced that the then Congress policy of giving up Councils and Assemblies would end in division of India into Hindu India and Pakistan. Subhas Bose had come out from Assam after establishing there a coalition ministry between Sir Saddullah and Baradolai. In Bengal he made all arrangements for a similar coalition between Fazlul Haque and Sarat Chandra Bose. From Orissa with the same purpose he left for Bihar and Panditji was called to Calcutta for discussion regarding Orissa. It was decided to have a coalition at any cost in Orissa in view of the future of the country which would otherwise be communally rifted as-under and for reasons not to be disclosed then. The result was the inclusion in the coalition Ministry of Sri Sobhan Khan, the then Secretary of the Muslim League of Orissa formed by the Maharaja of Parlakemedi.

Of course, Panditji was not connected with any office in the Ministry. But as a Central M. L. A. he made serious attempts time after time to make the Federal part of the then Constitution of 1935 a success. He gave several resolution to the effect, but the Congress Party even outside the Assembly vehemently opposed

it from time to time with the expressed theory that such a step would alienate the Muhammadans, so essential, in their opinion, for Indian independence. The attempt was consequently frustrated. It may be mentioned in this connection that during the time the Pandit was in communication with Sri Rajagopalachari, who, by himself for fear of this communal division of India, did not like to boycott the Assembly and made serious attempts in his own way for coalition.

### **Panditji's new Party**

After the disappearance of Subhas Bose, during the Provincial election of 1946, Panditji was not accepted by Congress in Orissa on account of his activities for Coalition described. It was later known that the real motive behind forming the Coalition in the Eastern Provinces was to allow easy ingress of the I. N. A. to India, which expedited Britishers to give independence. During the 1951 elections he started a Party called "Independent Janasangha" and got elected himself as the leader of it with some followers into the Orissa Legislative Assembly where he proved a very outstanding member in the opposition.

### **He re-joins the Congress**

He was sounded whether he should again like to come and join Congress and he agreed. Upon this Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru wrote to the Pandit on March 25, 1955 as follows :

My dear friend,

I am happy to learn that you have expressed a wish to come back to the Congress. You were in the old days a pillar of the Congress in Orissa and it was a matter of sorrow to me, as to others, that you should have left it fifteen years

ago. I shall be happy indeed if you come back and help us with your wise counsel.

With all good wishes,

Yours Sincerely,  
**Jawaharlal Nehru**

In response to this, Panditji joined Congress after getting approval of his constituency through Public meetings and otherwise.

### **Formation of Utkal University**

Since 1935 Pandit Das had been working ceaselessly for the establishment of Utkal University having contributed his services as the Chariman of the Berhampur Convention called for the purpose in 1935 as well as the Chairman of the Committee (appointed in the year 1938 by the State Government). The report submitted by him led to the establishment of the Utkal University. He was made an Honorary Doctor and was also appointed the Pro-chancellor of the University for long 7 years.

### **Speaker of Orissa Assembly**

In the present democratic politics, he was in 1957 elected uncontested to the Orissa legislative Assembly where he was elected the speaker and as such practically dragged out of his calm and incessant studies. As the speaker it is very gratifying to note, he was just to all parties and opinions and was loved and respected by all sections and interests both inside the house and in the state at large. Thus he had been the most respected man in politics in the state of Orissa

Yet he was keeping himself engaged in his special studies and writings on the Vedic and Pre-vedic philosophy and culture, which mainly centre on his mature philosophic theory of Matri i. e. universal kinship, so inherently associated

in the conception of Jagannatha and the only panacea for all national and international maladies besetting the world of humanity to-day.

### **A Journalist and a writer**

As a Journalist, critic and editor, he has earned a wide reputation by editing one of the most popular and cultural magazines, the 'Naba Bharat' for 8 years to which he added afterwards weekly and a daily Naba Bharat which he edited for a few years.

A prolific writer of Oriya, Pandit Das has to his credit the monumental gloss and commentary on the Bhagabat Geeta. His book "Odia Sahityara Krama Parinama" (two volumes of which have already been published) is a critical study on the development of Oriya Literature and Culture in a very unique and outstanding manner. So also is his paper on the "Cult of Jagannatha" read in the Viswa Bharati University of Santiniketan, and published in the Orissa Historical Research Journal, Vol. VII, No.1 under the name, "Hints on the Significance and History of Jagannatha". It is an erudite discourse on the history, philosophy and religion connected with that ancient institution. This is also considered to be an authoritative writing of reference on the subject. He is known to be an outstanding poet too. His well-known works on poetry, are "Konarke" "Kharavela" "Pranayini" and "Dasanayak". His contributions on children's literature are also worth-mentioning. His 'Bhaktigatha' is a book of great value for recitation of children in Schools and Colleges.

He passed away on an autumn evening on the 6th November 1967 to be grieved by thousands and thousands of his country men. The state offered homage by carrying his dead body from Cuttack to Satyabadi Bakul Bana his first place of work with great State honour.



**PANDIT NILAKANTHA (Photo 1957)**  
**Born on 5.8.1884      Died on 6.11.1967.**

## **PANDIT NILAKANTHA AND VILLAGE SHRIRAMACHANDRA PUR**

Pandit Nilakantha Das derives his name Nilakantha from Lord Siva. With such an ancestral belief, he was born to his parents at their old age, with the grace of Lord Siva. There is an interesting story on this. Nilakantha was preceded by seven sisters. Only three of them lived to adulthood. Infant mortality was high in those days. His parents were a staid, devout couple, firmly set in traditional ways. They dutifully performed all the rite prescribed for those desirous of having a son. Daily they had to go six miles to worship the famous Deity Balia Nilakantha before they took any food. It is also said, the deity Balia Nilakantha appeared before the father in his dream and gave this boon.

Nilakantha was born on the 5th August 1884 on the fourteenth day of the waxing moon, in the Indian month of Shravan and the Indian year 1261. His father was Ananda Das and his mother, Hira Devi. Nilakantha was their eighth child and was the only son. His parents were elderly at the time of his birth by standards of the day, his father being forty five and his mother thirty-six. When the son was born, he was named Nilakantha after this deity, by whose grace he had been given to them. All the customary ceremonies were observed in the household.

His birth place, the village of Shrirama-chandra Pur, is in the district of Puri, under the Police Station of Satyavadi. Satyavadi stands on the bank of the Ratnachira river.

Beside the river, is the temple of Sakhigopal, the tutelary deity of Satyavadi, in the shade of large bokul and other flowering trees. The temple was built by a sanyasi and towards the end of Marahatta rule, a settlement sprang up around it to accommodate the growing numbers of pilgrims to the shrine. Railways came to Orissa at the close of the nineteenth century and Sakhigopal became a railway station.

Shriramchandra Pur is a very old Brahmin Shason not far from Sakhigopal. The Brahmin Shasons of Orissa trace their origin to the reigns of the Soma Bansa Kings.

Nilakantha himself tells us that neither education nor culture was lacking in Shriramchandra Pur. Nearly one fourth of the male population comprised either graduates, undergraduates, trainees of various kinds, Kabyatirthas or Sanskrit Pandits. The entire older generation and most of the younger men were involved in the traditional rites and rituals. It may have been that the people of Shriramchandra Pur were prouder and more public spirited, more skilled in the conduct of affairs and ceremonials than people elsewhere, because their Shason was founded by a great king. The high moral tone of the community had so pervasive an influence in the countryside that people of lower castes round about came under its sway. Any departure from common usage, religious practice or accepted standards of conduct was regarded with apprehension.

#### FATHER AND FAMILY

Nilakantha's family was large and poor, His grandmother, parents, sisters and other

relatives lived together, sharing a single household. His father took pride in his ancestry. He never forgot that they were descendents of the puranic Pandit, Mukunda Das, and had seen better time. Nilakantha's grandfather had been highly esteemed in the Shason. He had been the first Tahasildar appointed by the British Government. A Tahasildar collected taxes in grain and other commodities under Marhatta rule. The British Government demanded cash. The tax money had to be deposited in cash at the Government Treasury within a specified time. How he collected the money was left to the Tahasildar. When Nilakantha's grandfather, Banamali Das, died suddenly of cholera in 1838, his wife and young children were left quite helpless. They could neither collect the taxes nor discharge his debts. Within four years of his death the family property was gone, auctioned away. A family so prosperous once reduced to destitution. "My father and uncles were very young," writes Nilakantha, "and so was my grandmother. She was without experience in the way of the world. How she managed to hold the family together can only be imagined."

Nilakantha's father sets to work grimly to repair the family fortunes. He had lost none of his ambitions and refused to be deterred by any obstacle placed in his way. It was considered demeaning for a Brahmin to engage in agriculture personally, but Ananda Das did so without any hesitation. He was, of course poor. The death of his father had deprived him of the opportunity to acquire some formal education and what he knew he had learned by his own efforts. He memorised the multiplication tables

himself. But Ananda Das was a tireless worker and, being a man of much foresight, could disregard the dictates of his kinsmen and go his own way. He married into a wealthy Brahmin family of a social status slightly beneath his own and paid the expenses of his father's debts with the Rs. 120/- he received as dowry. The family's financial position steadily improved.

Nilakantha has described in his memoirs how his father sought to develop his son's character by setting him an example. He sternly and methodically eliminated all his own weaknesses. His son was expected to restore to the family the patrician status it had lost and redeem its caste pride as well as its finances. Nilakantha was brought up to fulfil his father's dream. His childhood was steeped in sweetness and tenderness. His mother was loving, his grandmother fondly indulgent. His sisters were his playmates. The village was an ideal environment for a child. Nilakantha's attachment to Shri Ramchandrapur was life-long. He chose it as his permanent residence and built a dignified house on the site of his father's hutment.

### CHILDHOOD

Nilakantha's first school was the village Pathasala. He had a good memory and was an intelligent boy. Within the limits of the opportunities provided by the school he gave ample evidence of his ability. And he was the first to come to school regularly to compete with the other boys. The method of instruction was based on the belief that to spare the rod is to spoil the child. Everyday the cane used to touch Nilakantha's palm lightly as he was the first to come to school. But it soon began to come

down on the hands of the boys, who come later splitting their palms open. At first it descended cautiously, with only one stroke. Then two for the second, three for the third, till the condition of the late comers became indescribably pitiful. The teacher contented himself with setting the pupils tasks. Nilakantha learnt to form his letters with a pen cut from the stem of a palm frond, unlike quill pens or fountain pens that came in later years.

Nilakantha was promoted from the pathasala to the Middle Oriya School. He was the youngest boy in his class. The older boys ragged him. His teacher was a gentle and affectionate elderly gentleman named Lokanath Das. His concern for his students was genuine. In those days it was the practice to reward a teacher whose pupil won a scholarship by giving him a raise in pay. Nilakantha writes : "The older boys boycotted me because I was the youngest. They refused to answer my questions or help me in any way. I did not have all the text books, we had to study but they never allowed me a peep into theirs. I was so miserable, I went to the teacher in tears. He was dozing but I woke him up. He studied me for a few minutes as I complained. Then he turned to the other boys and said, "you fellows can boycott him as much as you like now but a day will come when you'll scramble for the honour of carrying his kerchief". "What he saw in me that led him to make such a statement, I do not know but the people of Shri Ramchandrapur have not forgotten. It was a prophecy that was to come true."

Other school systems may possibly accommodate learning about the world at large

or the acquisition of wisdom but none of these had a place in his syllabus. It was no part of the routine teaching of the day.

The village itself provided Nilakantha with his real education. The oral lore of the countryside and the ancient habits of the rural folk held an irresistible attraction for him. The songs of boatmen, rustic ceremonies, the intoning of cantos and dramatic declamations of storytellers, children's games with their runic recitations, the singing of wandering birds, the gay chatter of young people, austere practices of yogis, and the comings and goings of homeless monks, fascinated Nilakantha as a boy. The ceremonies calling for fastings and feastings were lavishly celebrated in Shri Ramchandrapur. The famous local goddess, Harachandi, was carried from house to house in a palanquin. A feature of the festivities was the prognosis for the coming year by the Jyotish Pandit. At the Spring or Dol Festival Naga Sannyasis came out in procession. The young men of the village dressed up as paikas accompanied them. Murals on the walls of the Brahmeswari temple on the Western side of the open common still testify to the feats of the Nagas. The boy Nilakantha found in all these goings-on a source of inspiration. Many were the tales told by the villagers in their formal and informal gatherings. Nilakantha's oral heritage was rich and provided an unfailing source for his later creative writings.

The Brahmins did not depart from their traditional way of life by so much as a hair. Every step they took was hedged in by rigid impositions. In both their private and public lives they were subject to endless hardships,

hardships that were not attributable to want of money. Spontaneous affection and the expression of natural sympathy was ruthlessly suppressed. Yet a certain comradeship of caste and a feeling of kinship did exist. People concerned themselves with each other's troubles; the trouble of one was the trouble of all. Everybody took part in the annual and seasonal festivals, co-operating to make them a success. Nilakantha gradually came to know the life of the Shason well and could spot both its strengths and its weaknesses. He owed his career both as a reformer and a servant of the people to his early experience in Shri Ramchandrapur.

Again and again Nilakantha was to return to the scenes of his childhood, abandoning the heights of fame and name temporarily to listen to the people singing and note characteristic turns of speech. On the lips of irreverent young men and their more cynical elders, personages were nick named into mice, sparrows, monkeys and even spinning tops. Light and witty and entertaining were the stories they made up. Nilakantha always knew who among the village people had been honoured with a new title, whether as a Bahinipati or a Brahma or a Patajoshi.

Nilakantha's father used to take his son with him when he went to attend a function at a distance from his home. Nilakantha rode on his shoulders. Wherever he went, he participated in whatever was taking place, helping with funerals, standing by at weddings or assisting priests in religious services.

Once during rains he was invited to the nearby village to attend a feast. On the way he got a big fish and got back home. The fish

was cooked and both the father and son feasted on it sumptuously and proceeded to attend the invitation. His father, Ananda Das, was fond of food. Many stories are told of his inability to resist delicacies.

Nilakantha was fifteen when he left Shriramchandrapur to study in the Puri-District School. He got a scholarship of four rupees a month. He was to move steadily farther and farther away from it although he never let pass any opportunity to visit it again. He married at the age of twenty-one when he was preparing to sit for the Entrance Examination. He was, for that reason, considered a very eligible bridegroom. Many marriage proposals came to him, some from wealthy families, offering four thousand rupees cash. But Nilakantha chose a little village girl he had known since childhood although she came from a higher middle-class background. Between her village and his, there was only a patch of 5 miles of paddy field and a patch of jungle. Radhamoni Devi lived in in Birpurusottampur.

After taking his B.A. degree from Ravenshaw College in Cuttack in 1909, Nilakantha returned to Shriramchandra pur to establish the school at Satyavadi that was later to become so famous. The school was started in a lovely grove of great bokul trees. Nilakantha brought the benches and tables from the village Oriya school and put them in it to help Gopabandhu Das in founding Satyabadi Vana Vidyalaya. Nilakantha went to Calcutta to study M.A. and came back to take charge of the school as Headmaster. Seven years later on 17.9.1918 Nilakantha left the Headmastership and Superintendentship of

Satyavadi High school and its Hostel to live entirely at Shriramchandrapur, of course still continuing as a Teacher. He rebuilt the small house of his father between 1918 and 1920, giving it a shape of his own liking. Later, in 1924, he added an upper storey, turning it into a comfortable and commodious residence.

In 1922, when Nilakantha was preparing to join the Civil Disobedience Movement, Gopabandhu, his friend and mentor warned him, saying, "Your father is old. He lives in a village. So does your mother and your wife. Who will look after them if you join politics? Who will feed and clothe your family? It is no easy matter to serve one's country."

Nilakantha asked for seven days time. He made arrangements for the cultivation of his fields and the tending of his orchards, so that there would be no shortage of food and then placed his family under the care of his father-in-law. In later years, he was to keep an eye on the village himself always, however, coming whenever he could. The cooing of the doves, the shimmering horizon in the distance, the brightness of the noon and the cool verdure of the banana plantation filled his heart with joy. He was so integrated with this natural surroundings that he cannot be fully understood without this backdrop of walking on the banks of Ratnachira, loitering in the mango groves or standing beneath the great fragrant bokuls.

Shriramchandrapur may no longer be what it was when Nilakantha was young. The village has become a small town. But children still play in the dusty lanes, the voices of elders are still raised in the temple pavilion or on the high porch of the Samantas, the saris of village

maidens still rustle as they pass and the sound of their bare feet is soft. The fronds of the coconut palms can be counted by the neon lights in the houses, however, and the village is no longer plunged into scented darkness on moonless nights or flooded with silvery light when the moon is at the full. Yet the spirit of the great teacher is a pervasive presence as one approaches the two-storeyed family residence of Nilakantha on the North side of the village common and in the early rays of the rising Sun the bearded bust of Nilakantha becomes almost visible. He is not dead. And the golden glow of the setting sun marks only the passing away of that time.

A feeling of exhilaration comes over as one mounts the high steps of the building. It is a fitting memorial, tasteful and beautiful. Did the saintly Nilakantha really sit here? Did the children of the village who swarmed around his knees receive the mantra of fearlessness from his smiling lips as they gazed up into his serene face here? Did not the life of the village revolve about the Rishi-like figure that rested here?

The simplicity of the house is its most striking feature, recalling a long tradition of high thinking and simple living, importing into the present a past, radiant with self-denial and dedication. There are two large rooms on the ground floor with two smaller rooms attached. Upstairs are two rooms and a wide verandah. The rooms are open on three sides, East, South and West. The room on the East was Nilakantha's. The sweet light of morning caresses every corner of it and the air plays through it freely. Tall coconut palms brush against the sides of the building. Their low rustling is deeply moving.

This was the only comfortable accommodation Nilakantha possessed, the only place where this noble-hearted lover of nature could be at peace, and get on with his creative work. This was the place where Ananda Das spent his entire life, where Radhamani lived till about her death. It is here that Radhamoni's warm hospitality enchanted the visitors who came to see Nilakantha in unending streams. She was a fine cook and generous with her culinary skill, serving as many as nine curries and six fries, three or four kinds of fish at a single meal. And no villager could get back without his/her desire fulfilled by Radhamoni.

Nilakantha, so highly educated, so modern in his thinking, was never attracted to the city. He never bought a town house and never felt at ease in the town houses of his sons. He even sold away the only plot of land bought by Radhamoni at Puri, without her knowledge. His heart held him to the village and he always felt at home with his poor villagers.

Throwing a thin red towel (gammuchha) over his shoulder, he would walk from one end of Shriramchandrapur to the other as soon as he arrived and changed over from his urban clothes. He always had time to listen to the villagers and passed hours in their company, attentively hearing their tales of pleasures and disappointments. Even the smallest detail interested him. His heart grew light as he sat beside the village altar. The heavy seriousness of his many responsibilities as a leader of the country dropped from his shoulders.

## **STUDENT LIFE : (School & College)**

In 1899 Puri was linked by rail to Calcutta, the then Capital of India. Nilakantha enrolled himself as a student in the Puri District School that very year. Puri was the traditional meeting place for the great men of India, the place where the past was a living force in the life of the country. The voices of the countless devotees that rose continually in ceaseless prayer vied with the thunder of the breakers rolling in from the sea. The priests of Lord Jagannath solemnly intoned the ancient scriptures as they performed the daily rites of worship. The coming of the railroad now linked Puri also with the thought and teaching of modern India.

Nilakantha came under the spell of Puri on his very first visit. His parents were reluctant to let their beloved only son, leave home but he won a scholarship standing first in the Middle Vernacular Examination and was keen on his studies. Nilakantha writes, "One day I went away secretly to Puri and borrowing a postcard from my uncle Jagannath Mishra, informed my father by letter. I had made up my mind to study at Puri with or without a scholarship. If he wished he could send me rice and money."

His father did not have the means to bear the expenses of his education and Nilakantha luckily got the scholarship. Being an intelligent boy, he soon became prominent amongst student and favourite of teachers.

At Puri Nilakantha met Godavaris Mishra. Godavaris was the first friend he made and the two were to remain closely associated throughout their lives. "My story is his story too in many

chapters" wrote Godavaris. It is strange that two of such differing dispositions should have become friends at all and strange also that they should oppose each other. "I held him in high regard and he on his part gave me much affection."

Godavaris was younger and came from a relatively poor family. He studied in the class just below Nilakantha. He was clever in debate and knew how to use his skill to advantage. But at night, when the sea wind sighed in the boughs of the casuarinas, he could not sleep. Nilakantha used to comfort him, saying, "Don't be afraid. I'll stay awake. Go to bed."

It was also at Puri that Nilakantha first saw the great Gopabandhu Das. Gopabandhu had left the Puri Zilla School going onto the Ravenshaw College at Cuttack the year Nilakantha took admission. Gopabandhu had already made a name for himself by writing a poem in which he satirised the popular poet, Radhanath. The poem had been published in the *Indradhanu*.

Nilakantha was fortunate and benefited greatly from his contacts with his Headmaster, Chandra Mohan Moharana, who was a humanist and a reformer. The cast of his mind was modern. Under his guidance, Nilakantha came to realise that anything could be accomplished with sufficient determination. At the outset he was made to sit in the lowest class because he had no English education in his village school. But within a year he earned a double promotion and was soon able to read English, Sanskrit and Bengali fluently as well as Oriya. Madhusudan's *Prabandha Mala* (Collected Essays) was one of his text books.

So was Radhanath's **Kavitakalpa** (Poems and Legends). Nimai Ballav Bidyasagar's **Sarvasar Byakaran** (Best Grammar) was prescribed for reading. Nilakantha was very intelligent. He also began to study Kalidasa, the Hitopadesa and the Dwatrinsha (Thirty-two) Putulikas in Sanskrit. He even began to compose Sanskrit couplets. Under the influence of Chandra Mohan Maharana, he improved his writing. "Curricues of all kinds sprouted from my letters", Nilakantha wrote, "One day my teacher said I ought to do better, so I set to work at once to make my writing clear and legible". Nilakantha soon became one of Chandra Mohan's favourite pupils and he sought Nilakantha's help in everything, from maintaining the discipline in the Hostel routines to the deciphering of the movements of the planets and stars in the open skies.

Nilakantha with some other boys once entered a church at Puri. One of the school teachers, Sadasiv Mishra, was extremely annoyed. He reported the incident to the Headmaster, alleging that Nilakantha had defected from his own religion. He was apprehensive lest Nilakantha should turn a Christian and use his influence to convert other boys in the hostel as well. But Chandra Mohan Maharana was more pleased than alarmed when Nilakantha explained that he and the other boys had gone to the church to better understand the poem they were taught in class, **The Village Blacksmith** where there is a line that runs 'here's the parson pray and preach. Chandra Mohan was generous and benevolent by temperament. Nilakantha's character began to take shape and predetermine his manhood during the years he spent in the Puri Zilla (District High) School.

Nilakantha's education had never been confined to the prescribed books or the memorisation of texts. He had become sceptical about the role of deities when he was a child. He had, once, eaten 2 bananas from the bunch his mother had put aside to offer to the village deity Harachandi. She was terribly upset. So was everybody else. Harachandi was thought to be vengeful by nature. Would the boy be punished for what he had done ? Nilakantha was unmoved. He did not believe Harachandi would do anything. He consoled his mother telling that Harachandi, the Goddess is like our mother. His attitude to all religious matters from his very childhood was sceptical and detached. Time and time again he was to witness manmade calamities. During the Cholera epidemic of 1899, Nilakantha saw the ten-mile-long highway from Puri to Shriramchandrapur strewn with the corpses of the dead when he made the journey in the company of the cook of his hostel in Puri Zilla School on his way back home. Indignation at indifference to disaster and the failure to take adequate measures to prevent and control the after effects by the authorities was to become deeply embedded in his character. The bringing of relief to the afflicted became second nature to him.

Nilakantha went to see Gopabandhu at his house in Suando, taking his older cousin, Harihar Das with him. Suando is about five miles from Shriramchandrapur. Gopabandhu was on a week's fast at the feet of the tutelary deity of the village, Jogeswari. In the evening, Nilakantha, Gopabandhu, Harihar and Ananta, sat beneath a great Banian tree on the bank of

river Bhargabi. Gopabandhu had long deliberations with these young men around him on effective ways of engaging in various patriotic activities. Nilakantha records the experience :

“The stories Gopabandhu was telling us were thrilling”. He writes, “He had few equals as a speaker, and we were young. The accents in his speech became a part of our lives. We sat and listened until the moon set and night turned to dawn. There and then we took a vow, **“Never to take employment under the Government when we finished our studies. Instead, we would work for the country and our people. We would see the country something very different from what we saw when we were born.”**”

Climate of Puri did not suit Nilakantha. The temple of Jagannath was considered a place, where cures are effected by the deity and sick people came in large numbers in the hope of being restored to health. The town had become insanitary and Malaria was rife. Nilakantha fell ill. The doctors advised a change of climate. Nilakantha left for Cuttack and enrolled at the Cuttack Collegiate School.

Madhu Sudan Das had begun to preach Swadeshi in Orissa and the National movement of Gandhiji was yet to get underway. The Utkal Sammilani was started at Cuttack in 1903, long before Gandhiji appeared on the Indian scene. Student Nilakantha was among the young men present at its founding.

Nilakantha returned to Puri from Collegiate School at Cuttack and joined Puri Zilla School at the beginning of the session in 1904. This year he was the first to sign the Swadeshi Pledge at the meeting in Puri called by Madhusudan Das. The signing of the pledge was an act of great



**Pandit Nilakantha (second from left) and his  
School mates with his father, Ananda Das**

daring at that time when no body ventured to do so in spite of Mr. Das's exhortive speech. Reprisals by the British authorities were feared. Everything, from pins to clothes, was of foreign manufacture, imported chiefly from Britain. Raw materials were purchased in India, processed in British factories and made into commodities that were sold in India at high prices. India's indigenous economic structure was completely disrupted. The leaders of the country were exhorting the public to pledge themselves to use only commodities manufactured in india itself. This was proposed as a corrective measure. There was every possibility that those who signed the pledge would incur the displeasure of the Govt. Men who were regarded as pillars of society and even lawyers hesitated to run a risk of such magnitude. Nilakantha, in signing the pledge showed both his independence of mind and his courage. From that time on he dressed only in Khadi and clothes made in India.

#### NILAKANTHA BACK AT PURI

On getting himself readmitted to Puri Zilla School, Nilakantha became a boarder in the old Brahmin Samiti Hostel. Here the students lived in a cluster of thatched cottages. It was here that Gopabandhu after his B.A. examination was preparing for law. Nilakantha came to know him better and they came closer.

Ram Chandra Das, a Muktar, was living in Puri at that time. He was an idealist and akin to them in his way of thinking. Ram Chandra was the founding spirit of this Hostel although he himself was neither very well off nor established in his profession. He was warm hearted by nature and easily became involved in the

affairs of the young men who stayed in the Hostel. He spent very little time in the law courts practising as a muktar. His days were given to study. He was fond of literature and active in the service of his country. Madhusudan's newly published book *Basanta Gatha* (Tales of Spring) once came up for discussion. Nilakantha participated and so did Padma Charan Pattanayak, later a famous Oriya poet. Ram Chandra Das's exposition was so stirring and so lucid, both of them felt deeply drawn to the study of literature and became passionate defenders of Oriya language. They were both to become good speakers and writers later.

Shri Ramchandrapur was a citadel of Brahmin conservatism. The people were proud and touchy, their lives regulated by old superstitions. After spending his childhood among them Nilakantha found the atmosphere of Puri liberating. Modernists like Ram Chandra Das lived there. So did traditionalists like Jagannatha Mishra. The memory of Pandit Punyasloka Harihar Das, the founder of the Puri Sanskrit College, was very much alive although he died in 1872. It was in Puri that the Reformist Movement took root and gradually acquired the strength that was to change the face of Orissa. Sashi Bhusan Roy Choudhury, known as 'Sashi Da' also lived in Puri at this time. He was a leader of the terrorist movement of Bengal.

The focus of the national movement was the proposed partition of Bengal. Calcutta was the centre of the agitation. Sashi Da had been brought to Puri by some of his highly placed friends and at first given shelter by Chandra

Mohan Maharana, Nilakantha's Headmaster of the Puri Zilla School.

Sashi Bhusan's influence on young men like Nilakantha and Godavaris was profound. Sashi Bhusan, Gopabandhu, Nilakantha and Godavaris formed a closed circle of which the mainspring was an intense hatred of foreign rule. Godavaris writes in his memoirs :

“When Nilakantha was a student in Class Eleven, he became a close friend of Gopabandhu. Gopabandhu was a rising leader who was soon to become famous. He had a charisma that powerfully attracted young men. Sashi-Bhusan had already made friendship with him. He declared Gopabandhu was the man who, like the mighty Hanuman, was destined to destroy the Ravan's rule of the foreigners. Sashi Bhusan felt a small squirrel beside him. Nilakantha was too close to Gopabandhu to need Sashi Bhusan's help. Besides, he was too busy for his Entrance examination to have much time to spare with Sashi Da but he was deferential to Sashi Bhusan whenever they met. Sashi Bhusan showered him with unsolicited affection.”

Nilakantha confirms this assessment in his own memoirs. “Godavaris completed his studies at Banpur in 1900, a year after I finished mine at Shriramchandrapur. His father, through the good offices of a highly placed friend, brought him to Puri and enrolled him in the District School. He was a boarder and so was I. We met there. We became friends. There we met Sashi Bhusan, who was the catalyst. He was at the root of the terrorists of Bengal. Whenever he met young men he exhorted them to devote their lives to the

liberation of the country. He was the source of many of our revolutionary ideas."

Nilakantha arrived in Puri full of eager curiosity in 1899, the year Puri was linked to Cuttack and Calcutta by rail. He was fresh from the oppressive moral rectitude of the orthodox atmosphere of Shriramchandrapur. Travel had become easier than it had ever been. Nilakantha had to go to Cuttack for about a year during his Entrance life for reasons of health. Cuttack was the centre of Orissa's budding nationalism and Puri was the centre of its culture.

There were fewer news-sheets and journals in those days and the few there were like Gouri Sankar's 'Utkal Dipika' and Biswanath Kar's 'Utkal Sahitya' had good influence. But India as a whole was awakening to a sense of dawning nationhood and Oriya Patriotism sought an identity of its own.

The Indian National Congress was trying to strike a balance between the intellectuals of the country and the British Government. The terrorists were influenced by the success of the Japanese in the war with Russia. India was not isolated. The great metropolitan cities on her shores were depots of ideas as well as centers of trade. Universities had been established in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay as soon as the Mutiny of 1857 was suppressed. Orissa also felt the effects of the new learning. Modern science was being taught for the first time. The Ravenshaw College in Cuttack was the center of this modern movement in education and Nilakantha having lived for about a year during his Entrance life was well acquainted with the cultural life of Cuttack long before he joined it

in 1905. He had already trained himself as a social worker and learned to care for the sick and afflicted. He had joined the Utkal Sammilani. Leaders of the day were among his acquaintances. Gopabandhu Das, Braja Sundar Das and many others were his friends.

Orissa's problem was to discover its own identity in the context of India as a whole. Orissa was not merely a geographical area. Oriya-speaking people were scattered in neighbouring provinces like Madras, Bihar and the Central Provinces, in Bengal and the twenty-six princely states or the "Gadajats". The three chief centers of Oriya culture, Cuttack, Sambalpur and Berhampur, were in three different provinces. When Hindi was made the official language for court use in Sambalpur, the local Oriyas protested strongly. Their demands, under the leadership of Sripati Mishra, were placed before Lord Curzon at Simla in 1905. Oriya was retained in Sambalpur. Likewise Oriyas in Ganjam felt stifled by the pervasive use of Telugu. The formation of a separate Oriya-speaking province had not, however, been thought of at that time. Opinions differed over the unification of the Oriya speaking areas. Some favoured including them in Bengal and others favoured keeping them in the Central Provinces. The teaching of Oriya had no place in the universities. It was made a compulsory subject at the B. A. through the efforts of the Kartavyabodhini Samiti, a society founded by Gopabandhu in 1899 upon his entry into Ravenshaw College.

#### UTKAL SAMMILANI

Nilakantha was deeply stirred by the establishment of Utkal Sammilani. Madhusudan

Das was one of the foremost leaders of the Bengal Congress. He hoped to work for Orissa on behalf of the Congress but he left it with the dream of a national uprising by the Oriyas. The Utkal Sammilani made the plight of Orissa its special concern. Its first sitting was held at Cuttack in 1903. Gopabandhu wrote a booklet describing its aims and Nilakantha was given the task of distributing it. Nilakantha describes his feelings as follows :

“The highly esteemed Maharaja Ram Chandra Bhanja of Mayurbhanj was the Chairman of the first sitting of the Utkal Sammilani. I still remember the manner in which he read out his speech. Madhusudan had designed a pink turban as the symbol of Orissa. Everyone was wearing it. Ram Narayan Mishra, M.A., B.L. of Sambalpur was on the dais. So was Jugal Kishore Tripathy of Singbhum, Fakir Mohan Senapati of Balasore, Gouri Shanker Roy of Cuttack, Raja Rajendra Narayan Bhanjadeo of Kanika, the late Harihar Panda and some land owners from Ganjam. I was only a spectator. I can still see the whole scene clearly. Madhusudan moved about restlessly as the deep and well-modulated voice of Ram Chandra Bhanja filled the hall. I cannot describe the emotion that welled up in me. I was young. Gopabandhu’s face was suffused by a pure strong beauty as he spoke with Balunkeswar Mishra. I can never forget it. How excited Cuttack was ! What enthusiasm ! It was as if my first initiation. The memory has not faded with the years”.

#### NILAKANTHA’S FIRST ESSAY

Samanta Chandra Sekhar passed away at Puri not long afterwards. Gopabandhu

asked Nilakantha to write an article on his life. It was Nilakantha's first literary effort. The article was read at the public meeting called to pay respect to the memory of Chandra Sekhar. Nilakantha writes, "I had just obtained a copy of his **Siddhanta Darpan** (Mirror of Conclusions) intending to read it. A short account of his life was given in its introduction. I based my article on it. Gopabandhu read it. When it was finished, he showed it to Ram Chandra Muktar that evening, reading it out aloud. Ram Chandra used to stop at the Brahmin Samity Hostel on his way home from the courts." This found a place in Utkal Sahitya after about 2 years and that in fact, was my first writing published." How it was published, we shall see later.

Nilakantha's eager and seeking mind made itself apparent in his childhood. His contact with modern education opened his heart to the whole world. He strove tirelessly to discredit supersititious practices of all kinds and took every opportunity that offered to add to his knowledge. He was to become an ideal teacher, a great leader, dedicated in a self-denying spirit to the service of his country and humanity. It was during these early years that his life took shape by coming in contact and being staunch to these personalities. The publication of the essay on Chandra Sekhar was one more step on the road, he was to take.

#### NILAKANTHA'S MARRIAGE

When Nilakantha had hardly crossed 20 (because that was then the marriageable age), his marriage proposals came. Nilakantha was unwilling to marry, because he had already taken the oath with Gopabandhu to serve the Country. His old father had to approach

Gopabandhu for this who could, with great difficulty, persuade Nilakantha to agree. A proposal came from a very wealthy person of Puri town. He would give all gold ornaments to his daughter and Rs. 4,000/- cash dowry, besides a promise to bear all expenses for Nilakantha's study. Finding his father's attitude to agree, Nilakantha recited a sloka from Bhababhuti that self-earning is the best, earnings from father and brother are of second and third category, whereas any earnings from wife's side is the worst of all. Father Ananda Das could realise Nilakantha's mind.

Nilakantha married Radhamani, a girl of a lower middle class family a few days before his Entrance Examination. He stood first in the first Division from Puri District and got a Scholarship of Rs. 15/- per month. This Radhamani Devi, Nilakantha acknowledged, was a true wife and a life's partner in all his activities.

#### NILAKANTHA AT RAVENSHAW COLLEGE

1905 was a memorable year for Asia. The mighty Russian Empire, as wide flung and powerful as any at the time, was defeated by Japan. Japanese were a nation of small people scattered among islands in forbidding isolation.

The wave of exaltation that swept over the entire East was unprecedented. India awoke to an enhanced sense of potential power. Her people, like people in every Asian country, felt stronger psychologically and physically. They began to overcome the feeling of inferiority which had kept them down so long.

Now that a Western power as great as Russia had been defeated by Japan, it seemed

more unthinkable than ever that a country as large and potentially as great as India should be ruled by people from a small island many miles away in the North Sea. The British Isles had never been heard of when India was at the height of its civilisation, creating works of art of enduring beauty. In the light of their own history and the history that was being made in the world, the young men of India began to look around them with new eyes. They abandoned the imitative ways by which they had hitherto been enslaving themselves.

It was in this atmosphere that Nilakantha entered Ravenshaw College and began to study for the F. A. Examination. Chandra Mohan Moharana had become the Headmaster at the Cuttack Training School. He knew many of the country's leaders well. Nilakantha, from the outset of his career, was associated with men of high moral principles, public-spirited and altruistic by nature.

Among his new acquaintances was Sarangadhar Das who at one time raised high expectations in Orissa. Sarangadhar Das came of an undistinguished lower middle-class family in Dhenkanal, a small native state of Orissa. He studied in Japan and later in the United States of America and was full of ideas for the development of the country. In the United States, he met and married a writer and artist who was appreciative of India's struggle for freedom. Frieda was an American national, Swiss by birth, who accompanied her husband into the forest lands of Dhenkanal and tried to set up house there. Before Sarangadhar, Frieda had come in closer contact with Mahatma Gandhi and supported India's cause for freedom. Sarangadhar was perhaps the

first Oriya young man to make an international marriage and it is not surprising that the difficulties posed in their married life became unsurmountable. Frieda left India and has told her side of the story in a book 'A Marriage to India'.

Nilakantha quickly established himself as a leader. The experience of student life he had gained at Puri stood him in good stead in Cuttack. The new boys came from village homes of moderate affluence. They missed their rural surroundings and the gentle care of their mothers. It was some time before they began to look up and take in their new circumstances. Little by little they began to feel the attraction of a wider world than they had known before. Their interest was fostered by contacts with boys from other parts of Orissa and lectures by outsiders, or boys who had studied abroad and still had the glamour of foreign places about them. Nilakantha looked after them with the concern of a brother. He was confirmed in the way of life he had envisioned for himself, a life dedicated to the service of his people.

In Calcutta the terrorist movement was at its height and the move to partition of Bengal was not unconnected with it. Terrorism was less strong in Cuttack and Orissa but the younger generation of students was resolved to drive the British from the country by violent means if necessary. A secret society was formed. Nilakantha joined it and so did Godavaris and Gopabandhu. Nilakantha joined Bengali students in the hostel when they observed a day of mourning for the partition of Bengal.

The Society met in secret, deep at night, when the students were asleep and the lonely plain around the fort on the banks of the Kathjuri river was deserted. Godavaris writes in his memoirs, "The Society had only a handful of members. Gopabandhu was the spokesman. Nilakantha took the lead. It was against the rules for students to leave their hostels at night but Nilakantha went out without any qualms. He always had a name of being a boy of good character and authorities did not take serious notice of his going out at night. But the C. I. D. was constantly on the look out."

Nilakantha fed his imagination on tales of the French Revolution, stories of Mazzini and the feats of Garibaldi. In a futile attempt to assassinate some Englishmen, several young men lost their lives. The British Government retaliated with strong repressive measures.

Terrorists of Bengal haunted the Gadajat jungles of Orissa, towns like Cuttack and Balasore. Binoy and Badol were caught in an encounter with the British police at Chasakhand, a place not far from Balasore and sent to the gallows. College students staged protests, breaking caste rules and fasting. They refused to be intimidated by the disciplinary efforts of the authorities. Of course there were leaders who constantly urged the young men to stick to non-violence in what they did and deal straightforwardly. Foremost among them was the noble hearted Gopabandhu, humanist, moralist and patriot. Around him grew up at this time, an organisation called the Young Utkal Association.

There was no secrecy about the activities of the Young Utkal Association. Its aims were

high and many. The members were expected to immerse themselves in the customs and culture of the country, in order to direct the energies of young men into creative channels.

At the time of the annual Matriculation Examination young men from all parts of Orissa came to Cuttack. They were welcomed by the Young Utkal Association. The Association arranged classes in the art of self-defence, Japanese Judo, physical training and sports of various kinds, It also included the performing arts in its programme and the study of literature as well as politics was provided for. Advisers were Brajasundar Das and Viswanath Kar. Gopabandhu was the presiding influence and Nilakantha, the foremost young worker.

#### NILAKANTHA'S FIRST ESSAY PUBLISHED

Nilakantha's earliest piece of writing "A short life of Samant Chandra Sekhar" was published in the "Utkal Sahitya" when he was a student of Ravenshaw College. It was written two years earlier while he was preparing for the Entrance Examination at Puri. He was a shy village boy and dared not approach the great editor, Shri Biswanath Kar. One of his Collegemates, Shri Padma Charan Pattanayak was a frequent visitor to Shri Biswanath Kar's house. After some days, Nilakantha read his article to Padmacharan. He promised to show it to Biswanath Kar. Some time later the piece was printed in the "Utkal Sahitya". What the young author felt that day can only be imagined. Madhusudan Rao gave him his blessings. Nilakantha's literary career was launched here.

## NILAKANTHA'S SOCIAL WORKS

The teachers at Ravenshaw College were, most of them, Bengalis. The Principal and Deans were English. The Englishmen were very particular about dress. Students were not allowed to enter examination halls unless they wore shoes and tunics. Mr. Halward, the Principal, taught English himself. It was thought that the learning of English was greatly facilitated in his classes. Halward was succeeded by Nilakantha Majumdar and Majumdar by Bipin Bihari Gupta. Mr. Gupta taught Mathematics. His textbook of Arithmetic was the authorised text for many years. He was a large hearted person, always ready to help out in any good work.

Nilakantha once went out of the hostel without taking the permission of the Superintendent in order to give relief to people afflicted by the floods at Kendrapara in Cuttack District. The English District Magistrate of Cuttack did not approve of students taking part in relief work and principal Gupta was obliged to be very strict with the boys. Nilakantha describes what happened on one occasion, when the Principal called him to his office. Two peons took Nilakantha by hand. Every one thought Nilakantha may be rusticated.

"You have a father," the Principal exclaimed, "He placed you in my care. What answer am I to give him if he demands an explanation?"

Nilakantha was undeterred. He had gone to serve the countrymen during an emergency. He felt no guilt and answered :

"Elders always talk like that and young people do like this. I have not done anything wrong, Sir."

The Principal's anger disappeared. Nilakantha had touched him at his weak spot, the deep compassion that lay under his stern exterior.

"You're a naughty boy, now you can go." He said laughingly.

On another occasion, there was an outbreak of cholera in Cuttack. Relief work was risky but urgent. Nilakantha went away to nurse without taking necessary permission from the Principal. Matter was reported to the Principal, who called for Nilakantha and asked why he did not take permission. "Cholera Patient could not wait for permission", replied Nilakantha. Knowing Nilakantha well, the Principal did not take it as an act of indiscipline. Nilakantha of course had taken adequate precautions to protect his own health.



## **PLAN FOR A NATIONAL SCHOOL NILAKANTHA READ M.A. IN CALCUTTA**

Gopabandhu was Nilakantha's guide and mentor throughout. He was planning to found an educational institution of a new type, a national school with new ideals. His enthusiasm was shared by Nilakantha, Harihar and Ananta Mishra, a cleric. The first plans for the school were drawn up in 1903-1904. They materialised in 1909. On the day of the Kumar Purnima ( full moon day of Aswin ), at a spot hallowed by the memory of the saint Pandit Harihar, Satyavadi school was founded in a grove of great bokuls. Gopabandhu and Nilakantha carried all materials required for the school.

Nilakantha needed to be as highly qualified as possible if he was to head the school at Satyavadi. After taking his B. A. from Ravenshaw College and attending the formal inauguration of Satyavadi School, he went to Calcutta where he had a Mayo Scholarship to study law. Law was the subject usually studied by Oriya students at Calcutta at that time. Nilakantha was almost the first who preferred philosophy and opted for M.A. There was no provision for post-graduate study in Orissa and University for Orissa was not even contemplated at that time. Later, we will see how Nilakantha got one established in Orissa.

### **CONDITIONS AT CALCUTTA**

Living conditions at No. 9 Panchanan Ghosh Lane, Calcutta where about fifteen Oriya students stayed, were deplorable. The two-storeyed building was of ancient design and

dilapidated. The lane in front was narrow and stifling. Smoke from the kitchen circulated through the rooms more freely than air. There was no electricity. All that was left of the plants in the tiny garden was a neem tree that barely screened the desolate facade.

Nilakantha Das, Bipin Bihari Ray and Godavaris were the exceptions among the law students who came regularly and left as soon as they had their law degrees. These three friends turned No. 9 Panchanan Ghosh Lane into a centre for the endless discussion of the problems of the country at large and Orissa in particular.

The common people of Orissa were illiterate. Their contacts with educated young men were tenuous and few. They had not developed a sense of ethnic or linguistic unity. Educated people hesitated to speak Oriya in Calcutta. Those who did were slighted and mocked. On the stage they were caricatured and ridiculed. The younger generation of educated young men were offended by the situation and resolved to win acceptance for Oriya. It was one of the major languages of India. Calcutta was the capital of India, an intimidating metropolis, but Oriya was spoken there. The urban way of life did not change speech habits.

The Utkal Sammilani fostered the development of the Oriya identity. Madhusudan Das advocated the wearing of a red cap as the symbol of new Oriya patriotism. This cap had a long tail hanging down the back. Nilakantha, Godavaris and other young men attracted to the cause wore the cap to public functions, to college classes and wherever they went out of the hostel. This had its effect and the ordinary Oriyas, responding to the

gesture made by their educated young men, began to speak out boldly in their own tongue. Resistance to all forms of discrimination became an article of faith, sustained and encouraged by the humanism of the new Indian nationalism. Oriya patriotism got fire, giving rise to a determination to establish equality among all sections of the people. To this end the caste prejudices and superstitious practices of Hindu society had to be overcome.

Nilakantha and Godavaris were in the forefront of the movement. Nilakantha's first act of defiance was the growing of a moustache. Brahmins in Orissa did not keep only beards or moustaches in those days but could keep both. The effect of Nilakantha's action was to be far reaching.

Nilakantha returned to Orissa and went to his chosen place of work, Satyavadi, as soon as his exams were over, without waiting for results. He did not do too well in the exams, in spite of the fact that he was a good, intelligent student, reason being that he suffered badly for some time from dysentery and had an acute attack during examinations for which it was not physically possible for him to appear in 2 of the 8 papers. Godavaris had described how he studied all night, to teach philosophy to Godavaris who was much less diligent. Nilakantha read all the text-books required for the Honours course in Philosophy to teach the subjects to Godavaris. Nilakantha had sharp memory and did not forget what he once read and took Godavaris under his wing, coaching him for six nights with the greatest interest. Godavaris declared that he would not have been able to pass the examinations without Nilakantha's help.

## SATYAVADI

The Ratnachira, a slender stream with a lovely poetic name, flows from the narrow Kanjiya waterway into the Bhargavi river and from there into the Chilika Lake. Its banks are wooded. Flowering trees abound and fill the air with fragrance. Gangeswar Dev, the hero of the poet Radhanath's long poem, Parvati, describes the elight of a noontide passed in the cool shade of the tamals, the punnags, bokuls, Chhurionas and strands of reeds. He tells how bees, blinded and drunk with sweetness, stagger about the enchanted spot. It was the poet Madhusudan who advised Gopabandhu to establish the school of his dreams in this surroundings that Radhanath had so well described. Gopabandhu accordingly selected it as his place of work, giving it preference over all other places in the fragmented Orissa of his day, looking around for places from Puri to Ganjam, to the Nilgiris and Kalahandi and from Mayurbhanj to Sambalpur.

Satyavadi was a forest school. There, in the most beautiful surroundings, a great experiment in education began. The time was the early twentieth century. Through the ideals of the founder, the latent strength of a great people was to be released; a sense of human brotherhood developed and the inner man given the freedom to grow. All activity was to be raised to higher realms of feeling and understanding. Such was the dream of Satyavadi. It was Gopabandhu's brain child but Nilakantha was the one who gave actual life to the institution.

In October, 1911, Nilakantha came straight from Calcutta to teach at Satyavadi. He was prepared to devote himself heart and



**Head Master of Satyavadi High School  
Pandit Nilakantha (1911-1918)**

soul to the realisation of his dream, bringing with him his experience of life in a restless metropolitan city, like Calcutta the turbulent capital of India and the high ethical standards he had acquired through a modern education.

For Nilakantha, his arrival at Satyabadi was a homecoming. Shriramchandrapur, his village was not far away. The benches and desks were from his old village Pathasala. The school had started in 1909, two years before he came back from Calcutta by him and Gopabandhu.

"One day we drove up to Satyavadi in an ox cart," Nilakantha writes, "took out our measuring tapes and set to work. The place was completely covered with shrubs. It was impossible to hold the measuring tape straight. There was no place to stack the bricks we had brought. But we could not be bothered with obstacles. There was no time to waste. We got going," That, "he concludes," was the beginning of the great Satyavadi institution of learning."

Madhusudan Mishra, the Headmaster of the Shriramchandrapur Vernacular School, began taking classes when at first Satyavadi was a Middle English School. There was a plan to make it a High English School. The requisite resources were not available at the time and neither were there teachers. Gopabandhu had no intention of establishing a school of the conventional type. He and his friend Nilakantha were dreaming of a school that would be to India what Eton and Harrow were to England. And they had heard of the Ferguson College of Poona. Teachers with the highest qualifications were needed. It is for this that Nilakantha went to Calcutta for higher studies to prepare himself for the great task ahead.

## NILAKANTHA JOINS AS HEADMASTER

The efforts to make Satyavadi a High English School were renewed after Nilakantha's return from Calcutta. He joined as the Headmaster of the School and Superintendent of the hostel on a salary of Rs. 40/- a month. Then came Harihar Das leaving the Cuttack Akademy School and got also a salary of Rs. 40/- p.m. Godavaris joined later. Gopabandhu became member of the newly formed Governor's Council for Bihar and Orissa. The major part of the responsibility for the school was consequently Nilakantha's. He took upon himself the teaching of nearly all the subjects in the higher classes. He set the syllabus. He was everywhere, seeing to everything, labouring mightily like a giant among dwarfs. He was serious about his job and strict with himself and others. Every one in the school was aware of the significance of what he was doing. The slightest dereliction from duty was severely dealt with. Nilakantha writes about a very interesting incident. Once or twice he saw his old teacher Madhusudan Mishra dozing in the class. Mr. Mishra did not lack in sincerity or discipline. He was getting old and was coming half a mile from his home after meals to the school. Nilakantha asked the peon to remove the chair for a stool from the next day. Madhusudan Mishra could know this, but was unperturbed. He sat on the stool and taught the students. He knew Nilakantha was as warm hearted as he was firm. There was no lack of understanding. In later years, Nilakantha in his old age, felt how cruel he was in matter of discipline, even to his own teacher."

Godavarish joined the teaching staff of Satyavadi in April 1913. "His arrival roused

much interest and enthusiasm amongst the students" writes Nilakantha.

By about 1914, the foundations of the Satyavadi Gurukul were laid. The students had to volunteer to put up the hostel themselves. They set about it in an orderly manner and when the building was complete, young men from all walks of life, rich and poor, touchable or untouchable were lodged in the thirty rooms of the Hostel. Monitors were chosen from among the intelligent students of good character to look after different groups.

The difficulties were however many. Nilakantha had much to cope with. Conservatism held undisputed sway over society in the neighbouring areas. Separate cooking arrangements for Brahmins and non-Brahmins were demanded. Nilakantha was firm.

"I am the head of the Gurukul," Nilakantha asserted his authority with a display of his characteristic courage. "The boys here are all sons to me. My wife would cook for them all by herself if that were possible. I cannot discriminate among them."

A mysterious fire broke out in the largest of the thatched school buildings, reducing it to ashes. It is quite likely that those who were not satisfied with Nilakantha's attitude had something to do with it. Nilakantha and his associates stood to it. Not only the classes were held from the next day in the open forest, but brisk preparation for putting up a pucca building started.

#### SATYAVADI LIFE

Satyavadi was much more than just a school. It was a complete society in itself, a living community, vital and developing. During

school hours the teachers and students sat separately, playing their different roles, but in the garden they shared the labour equally, drawing water and digging the ground together. Together they fetched straw, bamboo and wood from the villages round about, carrying it on their heads like labourers. Everybody ate at the same time and the same food, coarse-grained rice. Hardship was laughed away. The teachers worked as they would work for their own families, without any reservations and the students felt to be boys of the same families.

Official recognition was slow in coming to Satyavadi. The ideals on which it was founded were regarded with *askance*. The Government of Bihar and Orissa and the University of Calcutta kept blaming each other for their dilatoriness. Satyavadi was suspected of being a terrorist hideout in the Government circles and the authorities were reluctant to sanction its unorthodox teaching methods with wide extracurricular activities.

Satyavadi did not lack funds. Gopabandhu donated to it a substantial part of his income as State Lawyer of Mayurbhanj. There were other donors. But the founders of Satyavadi were full of plans. The school was to be autonomous, self-regulating and self-supporting. And it was to be the mother institution of some more schools.

The qualified young people were encouraged to spend at least three years there. During that time they could be trained in the new methods of instruction and acquainted with the ideals of Satyavadi and would later be organisers of the school in whatever position of life they may be there-after. Young men from all

levels of society were welcomed and accommodated. Gopabandhu sat with the teachers and students, chatting and working with them as one of their natural leaders, whenever he came. He was not a member of the staff however and was remaining away.

The Governor of Bihar and Orissa came in person to see the school and so did the authorities of the University of Calcutta. Puri attracted visitors from all over India and few of the most distinguished among them left without having a look at Satyavadi. The forest school caught the imagination of a large number of people. It was the perfect place for philosophers and thinkers who deplored the glitter and noise of the city. Poets and writers were charmed by its lovely and romantic setting. It was described as the Nalanda of the age by the elderly leader, Madhusudan Das.

The significance of Satyavadi was not limited to the banks of the Ratnachira. The students, and there were over a thousand of them, spread its message far and wide. Everywhere they made their presence felt, either by devoting themselves to the keeping of the peace and order over Utkal Sammilani, Cuttack or working as volunteers at festival like the Rath Jatra at Puri.

The relationship between teachers and students at Satyavadi has been described by a number of its students—Chandra Sekhar Mishra in his book, '**Satyavadire Sata Barsha**' or "**Seven Years at Satyavadi**," details a revealing incident. While a student at Satyavadi, Chandra Sekhar lost his father. He was overcome with grief. Nilakantha consoled him by saying that a true man is not broken by the blows of fate and bears them with fortitude.

Grief is often self-centered. People mourn for them, whose further help they have been deprived of. They regret the disappointment of their hopes more than anything else. A man of character will, by his own efforts and out of his own resources, strive to provide for himself and those dependent on him, no matter how badly he may feel the loss of a beloved person. He becomes the protector and provider of the family for the sake of the deceased. He said to Chandra Sekhar, "You are still a boy. The opportunity has come to you to enter the life of work as an adult. It is a blessing of God and you should soon enter the world to take your responsibility with the strength of a lion". It was at such times that Nilakantha showed how deep was his affectionate concern for the students.

Trekking was a special feature of life at Satyavadi. Teachers and students set out on foot to visit places of historical and artistic interest. Under Nilakantha's leadership they saw and learned to appreciate the art of the temples of Bhubaneswar, the sculpture of Konark and the scenic beauty of Nila Madhab. At trek time, the whole school became animated and full of bustling activity. Camps were set up along the route, tents pitched, meals cooked on open fires. Yet study went on uninterruptedly, according to the established school routine.

At the end of each school year, a public function was held to which distinguished guests were invited.

## CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Satyavadi became a part of the cultural history of the period. The teachers were creative writers as well as educationists. Two influential journals, the 'Satyavadi' a literary magazine and the 'Samaj' a weekly, were published from Satyavadi. The 'Satyavadi' was a novel venture for the time. It did not publish short stories or poetry. The tone was one of high seriousness. Critical appraisals of literary, cultural and political matters were its mainstay. The responsibility of editing was on Nilakantha. Many of the articles were his. Gopabandhu wrote the editorials, often discussing one of the many problems facing the country and considering possible solutions. The declared object of the journal was to serve the country through literature. Orissa and the Oriya language were chosen as the place and medium of giving concrete expression to an all-embracing humanism. Orissa was an inalienable part of India although it was separated from the bare plains of the North by mountains and rivers. India was an inalienable part of the world. One of Satyavadi's cherished aims was to awaken an awareness of Orissa's place in the world. The editorial policy of the 'Satyavadi' (**Sahitya Patrika**) was to integrate the universal with the regional and make the beauty and wisdom of the whole world available to the Oriyas in their own language. The writers associated with the journal exerted themselves sedulously to achieve this very laudable end. The 'Satyavadi' (**Sahitya Patrika**) formulated the profoundest and highest aspirations of Satyavadi.

The 'Samaj' or News paper had a different role. Its job was publicity. The Satyavadi teachings had to be made known and their

importance impressed upon the public as a way of spreading popular education. Ways of enriching the cultural life of the Oriya-speaking public was a topic much discussed at the time.

A weekly journal named 'Asha' was published from Berhampur. Gopabandhu wrote editorials. Nilakantha contributed a lot to it and so did Godavaris. The writing was going on to the very last minute. There was never any time to put the contributions in the mail. Every evening Godavaris had to run to the railway station and put the precious manuscripts in the hands of the guard in charge of the mail. If he was late by any chance, the train was held up for two to four minutes.

This was hardly a satisfactory arrangement. It was decided to print the 'Satyavadi' and the 'Samaj' at Sakhigopal. The first was a monthly and the second a weekly. Gopabandhu asked one Radhanath Rath to give up Govt. service and take charge of the Press there. Radhanath resigned and came at once. Nilakantha was given charge of 'Satyavadi'. Gopabandhu, astute as he was in other matters, was incompetent in business affairs. It is not unusual to see two brothers' fortunes taking different turns. One may rise to success and the other decline to penury. Gopabandhu's writings in the 'Samaj' were formative and gave direction to the social developments of the day. It flourished. The 'Satyavadi' declined and later went out of existence.

Satyavadi played another important role in the life of the nation. "All that is old," wrote Gopabandhu, "is not necessarily worn out and valueless, fit only to be discarded. The success of life lies in our efforts to revive and renew

those values of our heritage, even if we die in our efforts. They are to be treasured." The Satyavadi reformers took the traditional festivals, purged them of superstition and integrated them into the modern life of the country. They studied them systematically, trying always to strike a harmonious balance between the old and the new, a balance that would preserve the best of the ancient heritage and enrich the new contributing to the greater life of the country and the world. An image of Siva was set up in front of every room of the hostel at the time of the 'Jagar' Festival and worshipped by all, regardless of caste and creed. The reciting of the Siva mantras was thought to have a purifying effect. The Saraswati and Ganesh Puja were celebrated as a public function. Dramas were performed, musicals held and processions taken out. The image of Saraswati or Ganesh was carried to the Ratnachira by a vast concourse of people and submerged in the flowing waters of the river. Villagers from the countryside round about came forward to participate of their own accord and were welcomed. The roads around Satyavadi bazaar had to be widened to accomodate the vast throngs. Nanda Kishore Bal, Fakir Mohan Senapati, Gopal Chandra Praharaj and Jagabandhu Sinha etc. were among those associated with these activities.

#### BEST DAYS OF SATYAVADI

The year 1917 appears to have been Satyavadi's best year. In April Edward Gait, the Lieutenant Governor of Bihar and Orissa came to see the school. He was particularly impressed by the holding of classes in the open. The selfless attitude of the teachers also

impressed him favourably. The enthusiasm of the students and their skill at games pleased him so much he sanctioned a grant of five hundred rupees for the purchase of tennis equipment. On the 2nd of June in the same year, Sir Asutosh Mukherjee visited Satyavadi. He said, "The ideals are high. The founders of the school have set the whole country a noble example. They know the value of education and culture. All aspects of individual development, mental, moral and physical, are provided for. There can be no doubt their humble efforts will meet with great success, I wish every village in Bengal, should have such a school."

#### DIFFICULTIES AT SATYAVADI

Satyavadi had been founded as an unpretentious and quite ordinary, unconventional, village school in a place far from the town, away from urban contacts. Many people began to congregate there as the country at large began to take interest in it. Students came from very different backgrounds with diverse likes and dislikes, even though travel facilities were poor in those days. Therefore, no arrangement could be made for the accommodation of such a large number and variety of visitors. Students and teachers lived in the same lodgings at the school in the early days, sharing what they had. Godavaris, describing the life they led, writes, "Elder Brother Harihar had a big mosquito net. Five or six of us slept in it. Proper medical facilities were also lacking."

But everybody was not willing to put up with such conditions indefinitely. The shortage of funds that had curtailed their activities in the beginning was remedied. The distinguished guests that began to arrive every month, Rajas

and princes among them, made handsome donations. A separate guest house was built. Teachers began to show a preference for family quarters. Local teachers had always lived at home and taught in the school from outdoors. Teachers who came from a distance had no such advantage. They wanted to live with their families. Disparities in living standards became noticeable. Up to that time salaries had been determined by need. Godavaris, Kripasindhu and one or two others lived with their families and also took higher pay. No equilibrium could be established in these matters. Even when the school received the official recognition of the Government and the salaries of graduate teachers came under the prescribed rules and regulations, in practice, the old ways continued to be followed. Teachers contributed the additional part of their salaries to the school fund. This made it possible for the school to expand its activities beyond imparting mere instructions. A press was set up. But the unrest persisted. Ugly incidents occurred. Differences arose between local workers and teachers and those from outside. The hostel became a storm center. Claims were made to things by individuals what were the achievement of combined efforts.

#### EFFORTS TO SAVE SATYAVADI

Gopabandhu went to Santiniketan to study the way the school was organised there in an effort to save Satyavadi. On his return he announced the introduction of new rules. The students of the day, he said, should be trained to cope with all situations inside and outside the home and school. They must be able to look after domestic affairs as well as

hold jobs. Most students, he said, were incapable of anything but holding jobs. To complete their training they should take upon themselves all the work of the hostel so that each can look after himself in his after life. Teachers will have powers, but there was to be no abuse of power. Gopabandhu asked the teachers and students to think about his suggestions and draw up their own plans for putting them into practice.

A large number of plans were drawn up, studied and discarded for one reason or another. Then Nilakantha made out one, which was approved and was introduced in the students' hostel but the opposition to them grew stronger, the more strictly they were enforced. The initial sense of equality and cooperation could not be maintained under the artificiality of imposed rules. Separate kitchens were set up, one for rich boys and the other for the less rich. Rich boys paid five rupees a month for their food and poor boys paid three. Many of the poorer students fell ill. No arrangements for medical treatment existed, excepting Acharya Harihar providing his only care available. A student of the time, Baikuntha Patnaik, has described the situation. "There was only one pond to bathe in", he writes, "All the boys used it. We lived on kochu, (an edible root), purchased from the market in the sack. Of course, there was very little to buy even if a boy could and wanted to. Boys who had come to Satyavadi with high hopes left for town schools with broken health and hearts."

"Many things were lacking at Satyavadi," Godavaris admits, "Permission from at least some one was necessary to go for urination.

smoking, the using of snuff (Gudakhu) and chewing of betel were forbidden inside the hostel. The penalty for an offence of this kind was heavy. We forgot that children learn by imitation. Occasions were not rare when their backs were split open by the cane. Teachers chewed as much betel as they liked. They stood in line to rub snuff on their gums. The boys hid theirs in tins and put them in the hollows of trees, getting up to chew betel and use snuff in their turn when the teachers were asleep."

The internal problems of Satyavadi were not limited to the conduct of teachers and students. The small compact community that had been founded in mutual concern and affection was rent from top to bottom by the misuse of power. Gopabandhu and Harihar, out of the goodness of their hearts, tried their utmost to eliminate the causes of the trouble. Nilakantha describes his experience as Headmaster.

"I was very serious. I was also very much concerned/active," he says, "as to hostel boys could read well and memorise and could express themselves well. Any sign of flippancy or insolence irritated me exceedingly. The boys were afraid of me. I was harsh with teachers who took their duties lightly or led the students in wrong path. The close association of so many young boys and teachers gave rise to objectionable behaviour. I was easily exasperated and inflicted very hard punishments."

"The world is a big place, one cannot visualise" wrote Godavaris, 'of the many possibilities open to me, I chose one which would allow me to work intensively in a small place. The students and teachers both welcomed me, eagerly. The magnitude of the change from

Calcutta to Satyavadi was apparently very great. My arrival was celebrated. No such celebrations were held for others. I came to know later Nilakantha Babu had joined the school two years earlier. He was first to make sacrifice to teach at Satyavadi, being the first to come. To forego every kind of comfort and pleasure in order to live and work in the school on a salary of forty rupees a month was like jumping into a fire. We followed in Nilakantha's wake like the proverbial swine. Yet there must have been some special reasons for the welcome, I was accorded. They were all local people. I was the first outsider. And I was not intimately involved in the affairs of the School. To me my welcome seemed intended to establish close ties."

Not only the welcome ceremony but Nilakantha and Harihar, to great astonishment of Godavaris, had been to the Railway station to receive him with about 50 students and brought him in a procession to the school.

Very close ties continued to be maintained particularly between Nilakantha and Godavaris to great amusement of Gopabandhu. Godavaris writes in his memoirs," The thickness of relationship that existed between Nilakantha Babu and myself was not found with others, either of me or of Nilakantha Babu. We two used to take our food together, sit together, walk together and think together.

I was not only a friend and colleague to Nilakantha Babu but also his obedient servant. When we took our bath together, I used to clean his clothes and carry them on my shoulder. On reaching the Hostel, I used to bring water and his wooden slippers to the place of his washing feet."

Godavaris writes, "I was having very close ties with Nilakantha Babu for about three years, so close as if water could not penetrate. But when I came back from Calcutta after 9 months, I felt as if some leak has developed in its place and when a leakage starts in an embankment, it becomes a great breach very soon."

After passing out B. T. examination from Calcutta University where he stood first class first, Godavaris wanted a job somewhere else. Gopabandhu burst into tears when the future of the school was discussed in private with Godavaris, Nilakantha, Harihar and Kripasindhu. It was decided that they would take turns serving as the head of the institution, by rotation, for a period of three years.

#### DECLINE OF SATYAVADI

This was the turning point. Justice Harihar Mohapatra, an ex-student of Satyavadi remarked recently, that had not this decision been taken that evening, Satyabadi could flourish for many more years and even had a decision been differed, there could be no difficulties for some time, because Godavaris Babu could not perhaps break the ties of his attachment with Satyavadi.

"I realised this was not and could not be a satisfactory solution," writes Nilakantha. "The ideal for which Satyavadi was founded was never going to be fulfilled. My heart broke then and there. Gopabandhu Babu asked me not go, stay in the hostel. Godavaris became the head of Satyavadi. I went back to my village."

Godavaris thought nobody was to be blamed. No two of them could agree about anything.

Work was carried out in a lackadaisical manner. Some of the teachers did not bother to attend classes, preferring to stay in their homes reading and translating English poetry during school hours. Others went to see friends. A few even stayed at home in their villages on the excuse of looking after family affairs. Gopabandhu was upset when these things were reported to him. One hot noon, he walked the twelve miles from Puri to see things for himself. Classes were held out of doors in the grove. Gopabandhu found many unattended. Only Godavaris and Harihar were teaching the higher classes. Godavaris writes, "Gopabandhu put his hand on me and found my body hot. The School was given a holiday. Gopabandhu Babu asked the teachers to meet him in the evening. After some discussion it was decided to abolish the post of Head teacher.

Harihar was made the Acharya. It was the highest post. Harihar had many fine qualities of character. He was compassionate and truth-loving, patient and persevering, possessed great willingness to serve. But he was devoid of administrative gifts. Nilakantha Babu was often blunt. In a personal discourse, he said, Hari Bhaina is like a cow and that Gopabandhu Babu is blind to many things. I knew Hari Bhaina's bovine nature. When it is tied in a cowshed it puts out its neck for the rope and moves its horns carefully so as not to hurt anybody. But I could not think of Gopabandhu Babu as blind although I saw no excuse for his having approached the Director of Education on behalf of his son-in-law and obtained a permanent post for him when he passed his M.A. whereas Nilakantha Babu, Kripasindhu and me, we were all M.As. and it was Gopabandhu

Babu who had taught us all to dedicate ourselves to the service of the country at the price of self-denial."

At another meeting a week later, Godavaris was requested to shoulder the responsibility for the institution. He agreed because Godavaris admits in his memoirs that he had a certain degree of ambition. He took over charge of the School and the Hostel on 17.9.1918 from Pandit Nilakantha Das and seated himself in the Head teacher's chair and pocketed the key to the files.

Nilakantha was a realist as well as an idealist, active in both capacities like the 'Sabyashachi' of Mohavarat. Satyavadi had become a part of his life. He had started his career there. Yet he had to leave it and return to his village home. With a resilience that was to characterise him all his life, he immediately busied himself with other things, enlarging and repairing his ancestral home and making it into a permanent residence of grace and charm. And Nilakantha found the time, he needed to read and write. His talents had not had full scope at Satyavadi and his fond of knowledge had remained largely unutilised.

Within two or three months however, it became apparent that the school was on the verge of closure. Everybody had grown lax. The teachers were not helpful. Mess dues ran to arrears. Nilakantha was asked to arrange realisation. He did once. Again it went to arrears. People are not always logical in their behaviours. Gopabandhu realised, there was not going to be any peace, unless some of the teachers are sent out.

Godavaris left Satyavadi on the 7th February, 1919 to join the movement launched by the Oriya-speaking people of Singbhum within 5 months of holding the post of the Headmaster of the School. Nilakantha continued as a teacher. Soon after, he had to fully engage himself in the famous Davar famine works in Puri District.

In 1920, Nilakantha left for Calcutta where he was to see the report on the Puri famine through the press. In Calcutta he met Sir Asutosh Mukherjee and, at his persuasion, joined the Department of Modern Indian Languages as a Professor in Oriya-cum-Comparative Philology at the University of Calcutta on 21st. October, 1920.

In 1921, Gopabandhu joined the non-co-operation movement and consistent with his ideology, converted the Satyavadi School into a national school. It ceased to remain affiliated to the University. Consequently strength in the school rapidly declined.

The rise and decline of Satyavadi may not have left a very deep mark in the history of the country but the people were never to forget it. Satyavadi was founded, flourished and fell into decay within the short span of only ten years.

“In the beginning and for several years afterwards”, Gopabandhu writes, “the re-organisation of village life had a place on the Satyavadi curriculum. Night classes were started in village round about to train young men in self-reliance. A school was started for children of the lower castes. Arrangements were made for free supply of medicines for the treatment of common diseases particularly for epidemics like Cholera etc. Relief work was

undertaken in times of such epidemics. Efforts were made to arbitrate in village disputes and settle them out of court. Ways of earning their livelihood were provided for students. They were encouraged to work in orchards, fields and lumber mills or start small independent industries. The boys of the school built up a buffer stock of rice by going from door to door and asking for a handful of the grain. This rice was kept as a reserve against famine. Other village activities were organised. Classes were held under trees. Benches and chairs were dispensed with. Students sat on the ground. This was thought to be more in consonance with a rural way of life. Ancient village pavilions and meeting places were repaired. Physical training was arranged for the rural youths in boxing, wrestling and other village sports. Participation in sports was encouraged.

None of these things could have been done in an urban environment. In a village such activities are feasible. Experiments in methods of education were also possible in a place remote from the city. And it was to turn the minds and hearts of educated young men away from the city to their village homes that Satyavadi was founded. In no other way could the countryside be developed and modernised.

Unfortunately, the teachers started worrying about their students passing the University examinations. The more they worried the less time and attention they gave to all these extracurricular activities. Enthusiasm for them waned. The hectic pace of the early days could not be sustained for long. The school became an institution. Its fame spread. The Governor and other celebrities came to see it. The University Examinations became more and

more important. It was necessary for the Satyavadi boys to do well in it. Satyavadi inevitably began to turn away from the countryside and face back to the town."

Gopabandhu went to the Council. The large problems, the country was facing held a strong attraction for him. He felt he had something to contribute to their solution. He developed into a politician on a national scale. With his new role came pride and ambition. He dreamt of turning his humble school into a great College. But incidents continued to occur which were not just straws in the wind. His dream was not to be fulfilled.

A move was made to turn Satyavadi into a College. The Govt. agreed to donate twenty thousand rupees for the construction of a building to house the College. Gopabandhu converted Satyavadi into a National School on the 22nd January, 1921 after the Congress Session at Nagpur, as part of the Non-Cooperation movement. Pre-University classes were opened with 12 students. A society was formed to raise funds for the School so that the students would not have to pay fees. Janakinath Bose, the father of Subash Chandra Bose, was one of the founding members and the Chairman of the Committee. Other members were Jagabandhu Singh, Secretary and Principal, Kripasindhu Mishra, Joint Secretary, whereas Govinda Chandra Mishra was one of the members. Their object was to put the National School on a firm footing by establishing a permanent fund from the donations they were able to raise. One and a half lakhs was their target.

IN March 1921 Mahatma Gandhi came to see the School and on the 13th April he wrote about it in his journal *Young India*, declaring that with workers as selfless as Gopabandhu Das and his associates, it would not be surprising if the country achieved Swaraj within the year. The teachers of Satyavadi, as a gesture of loyalty, voluntarily reduced their salaries to ten rupees a month. Gandhiji praised the austere simplicity of their living and the frugality of their diet. He went on to say the School was well worth a visit. Gandhiji passed an entire day in the company of the students and teachers. He praised the experiment being made and the holding of classes in open. But, he added, there is a limit to what a man can sacrifice. Most of workers are from the poorer classes. For them, It is an opportunity. They know better than anyone else what poverty means. They are determined to serve the living and dying poor. All they want to do is to improve the conditions of the neighbours as far as possible. Workers of this calibre have to be supported by the common people. Self-reliance is stressed through the development of skills. Spinning can provide an income. But, he added, greater investment is required for young students to be properly trained and the aims of the School realised in practice."



## NILAKANTHA TEACHING ORIYA AT CALCUTTA UNIVERSITY

The first Indian Vice Chancellor of the Calcutta University, Gurudas Banerjee, kept his promise to give Indian languages and literatures their rightful place in the University Curriculum at the convocation held on the 24th January 1891.

“I deem it not merely desirable but necessary”, he said, “that we should encourage the study of those Indian vernaculars that have a literature, by making them compulsory subjects of our examinations in conjunction with their kindred classical languages.” He went on, “I firmly believe that we cannot have any thorough and extensive culture as a nation unless knowledge is disseminated through our vernacular. Consider the lesson that the past teaches. The darkness of the Middle Ages of Europe was not completely dispelled until the light of knowledge shone through the medium of the numerous modern languages. So in India, notwithstanding the benign radiance of knowledge that has shone on the higher levels of our society through one of the clearest media that exist, the dark depths of ignorance all round will never be illuminated until the light of knowledge reaches the masses through the medium of our vernaculars.

In a letter to the Registrar, in March 1891, Sir Asutosh Mukherjee, raised the issue again. He had recently become a Fellow of the University and immediately taken up the cause of the Indian languages. He suggested in his letter that students of Sanskrit be allowed to write the answer to questions in their examinations

papers in their local languages. The students should be given the opportunity to use their respective mother tongues up to the post-graduate level. His proposal was discussed by the Arts Faculty on the 11th July of the same year but was dropped as it was supported by only eleven members and opposed by seventeen. Bankim Chandra Chatterjée and Haraprasad Shastri were among its supporters.

The University Syndicate approved of the stand taken by Gurudas Banerjee, nevertheless a committee was set up to explore ways and means of making the study of Indian languages the subject of a separate examination paper. The University Commission made the following recommendations in 1902. The study of Indian languages should be compulsory up to the B.A. Indian languages should be retained at the M.A. level on an equal basis with English. The University, out of its own funds should create professorships in the Indian languages and encourage research. Prizes should be awarded for research and the scientific study of the Indian languages.

Lord Curzon, the Governor General at the time, gave his support to these proposals and Sir Asutosh Mukherjee refused to be deterred by any obstacle placed in his way. He was convinced that integration of India could best be accomplished through her languages.

Sir Asutosh Mukherjee became the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calcutta in 1906 and served in this capacity until 1914, becoming the Vice Chancellor a second time in 1920. Under his stewardship the Calcutta University became a shrine of India's awakening sense of nation-hood. The study of Indian

languages duly played a part in it. Tagore described Sir Asutosh as a daring innovator. He had the courage to dream. There was a magic promise in what he said. Sir Asutosh was unconquerable. He knew he was going to win. This conviction sustained him in his struggle to reach his goal. To the lifeless automaton of the University he gave a living heart.

In 1917 a Commission was set up to advise on the restructuring of the University and the introduction of reforms. G.T.M.E. Sadler was the chairman. Sir Asutosh was a member. He discussed the problem of the Indian languages at length with the other members. They were the most learned and distinguished educationists in India. Subsequently he drafted a programme of language study and the study of Indian languages was introduced in the University in accordance with its recommendations.

In 1920-21 the university appointed twenty-seven teachers of Indian language. There were in all sixty students. The languages for the study of which provision was made were Assamese, Oriya, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Telegu, Tamil, Malayalam, Kanarese, Maithili and Singhali.

In a draft programme for advanced study in the Indian languages, drawn up by Sir Asutosh in 1918, he wrote that the time was long past when Indian pandits required any explanation as to the usefulness of the Indian languages in the teaching of science or history as well as literature. For the past twelve years the responsibility for the development of Indian languages had lain with the University. He had personally advocated the inclusion of modern

Indian languages and literatures in the post-graduate course for a long time. During his extensive tours of India, he had conferred with educationists everywhere and made a study of educational institutions. What he had learned confirmed and strengthened his convictions. The draft programme was approved by Vice-Chancellor who at the time was Devaprasad Sarvadhikari. The decision to open M.A. courses in modern Indian language was taken. The University authorities, assuming it was only a matter of time until the Government made grants for these studies, thought that, in the beginning, the easiest way was to rely upon the generosity of the public. Patriotic feeling was strong in India during the aftermath of the first World War and the thoughts of all alike, rich and poor, were suffused with an ardent concern for all things Indian.

The Maharaja of Sonepur, Sir Bir Mitrodaya Singdeo Dharmanidhi, made generous donations so that the course in Oriya could get under way without delay. He endowed a chair in his own name so that Oriya might be included in the M. A. syllabus, also sanctioning a monthly grant of one hundred and fifty rupees for three years. Later he donated a consolidated sum of sixty thousand rupees to the University.

An anthology of representative Oriya writings was compiled by Vijay Chandra Mazumdar and published with funds supplied by the Maharaja. The anthology was the first of its kind. Neither Vijay Chandra nor his collaborator, Pandit Vinayak Misra, were sufficiently qualified to teach and an Oriya professor was required.

Nilakantha happened to be in the city in connection with the publication of the report of the Puri Famine of 1919. His mastery of Oriya was unquestioned and his credentials impeccable. Sir Asutosh Mukherjee had sum his woress at Satyavadi and both Sir Asutosh and Shri Devprasad Sarvadhikari had been favourable impressed with the work being done at Satyavadi. They met Nilakantha in Calcutta.

“Sir Asutosh requested me to teach Oriya at the University,” Nilakanthe writes, “and I agreed to do so until a student could be trained to handle the work.”

On the 20th September 1920 Nilakantha, with the consent of Gopabandhu and his other colleagues at Satyavadi, left for Calcutta & the next day joined the newly established post-graduate department of the Calcutta University as the first professor of Oriya. It was understood, he would stay for at least two years during which time he would train a successor. His choice of a future successor fell on Lokanath Mohapatra, a student from Eiswanathpur in Puri District. He took Lokanath with him to Calcutta. Lokanath passed his M. A. examination creditably in the prescribed two years, but was not appointed in the Calcutta University.

In Calcutta Nilakantha stayed at No. 9 Panchanan Ghosh Lane, the hostel where Oriya students usually put up. Gopabandhu stopped there on his way to Patna. He was member of the Bihar and Orissa Council and was going to attend it for the last time. Gopabandhu had made up his mind to join the Non-Cooperation Movement. Mahatma Gandhi had indicated of the Movement already, at the special session of

the Congress held in Calcutta. The subject came up while he was eating and Nilakantha serving. In the course of their conversation Gopabandhu said, "I am going to join the Non-Cooperation Movement. You may go back to Satyavadi and take charge of the school or do whatever you want."

The proposal was not at all to Nilakantha's liking. He answered that he was going to follow Gopabandhu's example and join the Movement too. They would act together and would sail in the same boat, which they had boarded so long. No more was said about it that day. Gopabandhu left for Patna and then went back to Orissa.

Early in January 1921, the Non-Cooperation Movement was started, with great enthusiasm all over India. Nilakantha came to know from one Sri Bhagirathi Misra, a student of Sambalpur studying Law at Calcutta that people at Sambalpur will be eager to start the movement. There and then he decided to launch the movement in Sambalpur and sent a Telegram to Gopabandhu to please go and join them. Gopabandhu arrived at Calcutta and both Nilakantha and Bhagirathi Misra along with Gopabandhu left Calcutta on 6th January for Sambalpur.

Nilakantha was long to remember an incident which took place when he went to say good bye to the authorities of the Calcutta University. Dr. Romesh Chandra Majumdar, the famous historian, was a close friend and a colleague of Nilakantha. They had studied for the Entrance Examination together in Cuttack and passed together. And while studying for his B. A. at Presidency College, Calcutta, Nilakantha had

stayed at the Eden Hostel, they knew each other well.

"Nilakantha," Dr. Romesh Chandra Majumdar asked, "are you going to leave all this ?" and he gestured towards the University buildings.

"Yes," Nilakantha answered without making any comment.

Tears welled up in Dr. Majumdar's eyes and streamed down his face unchecked. Nilakantha never forgot it.

Thus, Nilakantha's sojourn at the University of Calcutta was brief. It was, actually, a minor event in his long and very active career. But the cultivation of Oriya as a language and a literature was a task he chose to make life long.

Professors of the University of Calcutta were expected to meet many requirements in those days. Original work was necessary to establish a Professor's prestige and disseminate a knowledge of his special field of study throughout the country. Students depended upon him for correct guidance and training. He had to awaken a genuine love of their subjects in them.

Being the first Oriya Professor to join Calcutta University, he brought some reputation to Orissa and by utilising his talent to teach the subject in the best possible manner, he has left in the University an ideal method of teaching for his successors to follow.

Again, Nilakantha's leaving the lucrative post for a very difficult and uncertain path in life leaves a landmark in his bid to do something for the country and not remain content with self-satisfaction.

It is good, the University of Calcutta is reviving the post in his honour.

In later years, Nilakantha was closely connected with various Universities to the end of his life, the Utkal University and Viswa Bharati in particular. He was also a Fellow of Delhi University court for long 7 years. He was deeply involved in encouraging research in Oriya language, giving freely his time and advice to the task. He guided study for thesis and also examined them. Nilakantha advocated the establishment of a centre for Advanced Studies at which research could be done on the Charjya Giti and the cult of Jagannatha, As President of the Orissa Sahitya Akademy, he was instrumental in initiating various study programmes although he was its President for only a year. His involvement in politics curtailed his opportunities for other work. But wherever he was and whatever activity engaged him at the moment, Nilakantha remained a student at heart and humble research worker himself in the Oriya language and literature, he loved so well.



## **INDIAN POLITY : NILAKANTHA'S JAIL LIFE AND ORISSA POLITICS**

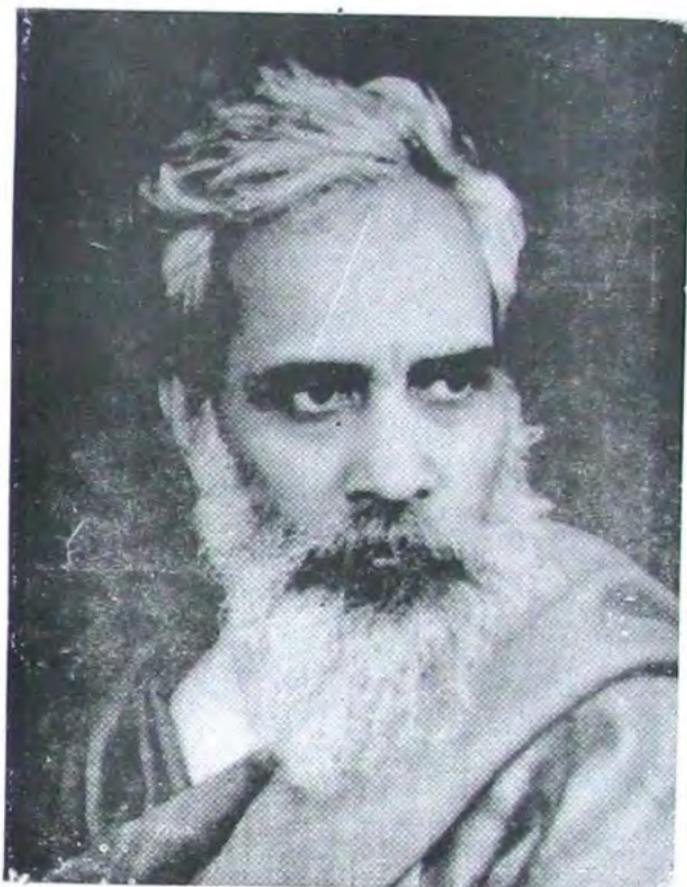
On the 6th January 1921, Pt. Nilakantha Das resigned from the University of Calcutta to join the Non-Cooperation Movement. He was then thirty-seven years old and over forty years of active participation in politics lay ahead of him.

The Non-Cooperation Movement had been launched on the 1st January by the Indian National Congress at its Nagpur Session. Work in Orissa began immediately. Gopabandhu Das had provided a base in Orissa for the Indian National Congress by turning the Utkal Sammilani into the Utkal Provincial Congress Committee at the end of December 1920 in a meeting at Chakradharpur of Singbhum District in Bihar.

From Calcutta Nilakantha left for Sambalpur alongwith Gopabandhu. They were received with a warm welcome at the station and taken in a grand procession all along the main Road of the Town. During the nine months Nilakantha was there, he established the Sambalpur National School and started a journal, **Seva**, through the pages of which he spread the Congress message. Besides, he attended to Social Works and treated the sick when epidemics like Small Pox & Cholera broke near about with the students of his National School.

In September, Nilakantha was called to Cuttack to take active part in the affairs of Utkal Congress in Cuttack and Puri areas and work as a Lecturer in Oriya in the National College at Satyavadi.

On the 30th November Nilakantha was nominated to the Working Committee of the



c/s

Nilakantha, the Central Legislator—(1924-30, 1935-45)



Pt. Nilakantha at the Central Assembly Session  
with Sri A. S. Ayangar and Sri R. S. Sukla

reorganised Provincial Congress by its President Gopabandhu. He had been the most trusted colleague of Gopabandhu.

### NILAKANTHA'S JAIL LIFE AND ENTRY TO CENTRAL LEGISLATURE

On the 13th March, 1922, Mahatma Gandhi was arrested. Many Congress leaders followed him to prison. It may be recalled that after the Chouri Choura incident in which Police men were burnt to death by non-cooperators Mahatma Gandhi desperately asked for cessation of the non-co-operation movement. An Enquiry Committee was formed to find out if the country is prepared for such a movement. Pandit Nilakantha met this Committee at Cuttack in August '22 to state that the country was not yet prepared for such an agitation but that the Congress people individually could take part in it. The Committee after visiting other parts in the country reported in a likewise manner. As a result, even though this movement in a massive scale was stopped, non-co-operation was still on in the country, Pandit Nilakantha was mainly in charge of this movement in Orissa, Pandit Gopabandhu having been jailed in connection with an agitation in Kanika (Kanika Meli). Nilakantha was arrested on 16th Feb. 1923 on a charge of intimidation against Government under section 16 of IPC Act 14 of 1908. Nilakantha was sentenced to 4 months imprisonment. An interesting event happened, which shows not only Nilakantha's bravery but the regards and esteem with which the jail authorities hailed Pandit Nilakantha even in those stormy days. The event : In those days, the political prisoners

were taken out with hand-cuffs and chains around their waste, walking on Roads. Even Gopabandhu and others were taken like that. But when the jail authorities at Puri came to take Nilakantha hand-cuffed to Railway Station to proceed to Hazaribag Jail he strongly protested and said, "You should behave with me like a gentleman." The jailor turned to tears and had to cancel his transportation to Hazaribag that day and was obliged to arrange a hackney carriage to take Nilakantha to the Railway Station like a 'Gentle man' the next day.

During his four months imprisonment in Hazaribag jail, Nilakantha wrote his poetic works 'Dasa Nayak' after Tennyson's famous poem "Enoch Arden". Nilakantha wanted to write in colloquial language and one wonders how he had such a vast vocabulary of colloquial Oriya when his earlier writings were all in chaste Oriya language.

Nilakantha also translated Raghubansa and was reading it to Acharya Kripalani during this period. Besides, he was having a class in Oriya Grammers in the morning hours, in line with the class, he took while at Satyavadi, as stated in his memoirs. These lectures have later been compiled and published as a Book 'Oriya Byakarana.'

Central Assembly elections had been announced in 1919 as a part of certain reforms, the British Government proposed to carry through. They were turned down by the Congress. Objections were now withdrawn and those in favour of participating in the elections were allowed to do so. This decision was taken at a separate session of the National Congress under the Chairmanship of Moulana

Abul Kalam Azad. After the calling off the Non-co-operation Movement, the country was divided into 'No-changers' ( those who did not want a change ) and 'Pro-changers.' A new party named 'Swaraj' Party emerged. Nilakantha joined this party, alienating himself with the Pro-changers as per his discussion with and the advice of his guru Gopabandhu he being a revolutionary by nature. C. R. Das, Motilal Nehru, Hakim M. J. Khan and Vithal Bhai Patel were among those who belonged to this party and felt the country would benefit if the congress joined the Central Legislature and opposed the policies of the British Government from within.

Nilakantha on being released from Jail, propagated this policy and was elected to the Central Assembly in Nov. 1923. He became also the Secretary of the Congress ( Swaraj ) Legislative Party under the leadership of Motilal Nehru.

In 1926 election, Nilakantha won the support of the Orissa Congress through the advocacy of Gopabandhu, who supported him unequivocally and was elected again to the Central Assembly with a thumping majority, inspite of the strong opposition of a powerful wing of the Congress, led by Gopabandhu Choudhury of Cuttack group. It is this group which in 1928 published in paper alleging Gopabandhu to have defalcated the Flood Relief Funds. It gave Gopabandhu the greatest shock in his life. Nilakantha consoled Gopabandhu and the allegation was proved baseless.

In 1928, Pandit Gopabandhu Das died, leaving the leadership of the Orissa Congress to Nilakantha. He had out-lined plans for the development of 'Satyavadi' a year earlier.

Nilakantha founded the Gopabandhu Sevak Samity to carry out his wishes.

Nilakantha strove to meet his many obligations as a Legislator, the head of Satyavadi group, a constructive social worker and a political leader. The opposition encountered by Gopabandhu in the last years of his life turned on Nilakantha and subjected him to strong criticism.

#### JAIL LIFE DURING LEGISLATOR-SHIP

In the Central Assembly, Nilakantha had demanded total abolition of Salt Tax in 1929. When the salt campaign was started in 1930, Nilakantha resigned from the Legislature as a disciplined Congressman, even though he did not believe that Swaraj can be achieved through this means. He joined the Nationalist party and got himself elected to the Assembly again. After attending the Central Legislature for only 12 days, he resigned his membership again along with Madan Mohan Malavya, Sardar Patel even though his other colleague from Orissa Sri B. Das did not. Nilakantha came to Orissa to start the salt campaign in Puri and Ganjam Districts.

Nilakantha was arrested at Satyavadi on 30th May 1930 and was produced at Puri court on the 31st. A total Haratal was observed at Satyavadi on this occasion. The hearing date being fixed on 10th June, the trying Magistrate ordered that Nilakantha may be set free furnishing a security of Rs. 50.00. Nilakantha declined to pay such security money and stated that he would not sell his prestige for Rs. 50/- and if the Magistrate believes in him, he may set him free or not. The Magistrate looked at him and allowed this. Pandit Nilakantha came to court on the scheduled date. He was sentenced

to 6 months imprisonment on 2 charges and was placed as an 'A' class prisoner in Hajaribag Jail.

During this period in Hajaribag jail Nilakantha wrote an Annotation to Labanyabati, the famous Kavya of the great Oriya poet Upendra Bhanja of the 17th century. One of the important factors of taking up the annotation of this love story was to give a befitting reply to the Bengalees that Oriya was a rich and flowery language even at that period. When Nilakantha brought in a resolution in the Central Assembly for the amalgamation of all Oriya speaking lands together and put them under one administration, the Bengalees tried to exclaim that Oriya is only a Dialect of Bengali and not a language. Unfortunately for reasons beyond his control, the book, a voluminous one, could not find the light of the day during Nilakantha's life time. It has now been published by his daughter Smt. Indira Devi, which adds to Panditji's reputation on his depth of knowledge.

Nilakantha was released on 22. 12. 30 along with his co-prisoner Sri Jagannath Rath, who took the dictation of the Kavya from Nilakantha in jail. Nilakantha left the manuscript with Sri Rath for making it Press-worthy and proceeded straight from Hajaribag to Banares Via Tata Nagar to present his paper "The ideal and out look in Education" (in India and the East), in the Banares session of All Asia Educational conference held on 29. 12. 30.

On return from Banares, Nilakantha again joined the salt campaign in the Puri District and was arrested on 19. 1. 31. He was sentenced to 2 months imprisonment and placed as a 'A' class prisoner in Puri jail. He was released before due date on 10. 3. 31 as a result of Gandhi-Irwin Pact.

The longest period, Nilakantha was jailed for 1½ years when Indian National Congress was declared unlaw full in January 1932.

It has been shown how a group of Congress men were antagonistic even to Gopabandhu. In 1931 Nilakantha as leader of U.P.C.C. invited Indian National Congress in its Karachi session to hold the next Congress Session at Puri. This was accepted. Nilakantha became the Chairman of the Reception Committee against a great clique of the Cuttack group with some amount of difficulties. Nilakantha writes in his memoirs, "it was decided in the P.C.C. meeting at Balasore that the Reception Committee and the Working Committee would be from the district that could enrol more members by 20th Sept. midnight, wherever the Congress Session be held. It appeared very odd to me, the intrigues of the party is let known. The population of Cuttack district is 22 lakhs, whereas that of Puri district is 10 lakhs. Besides Cuttack has a High Court and has the only College of Orissa; there are many big Government offices and wealthy inhabitants. How can there be more members in any other district than Cuttack?" It was to the credit of Nilakantha however, that 297 members could be enrolled from Puri district against Cuttack's 230 by the scheduled time. Of these, 166 members were from amongst the Puri 'Pandas' enrolled by Nilakantha himself, where as other members of the Committee could plan to enroll 'at least' one Panda as a member. This speaks out the organisational capacity of Pandit Nilakantha.

It was however a difficult period for Nilakantha. He was not only the Chairman of Reception Committee of Puri Congress but also

the sole Representative of U.P.C.C. and was to meet the O' Donell Committee at Jamshedpur to give evidence on the claims of Orissa on outlying Oriya Speaking areas of Singbhum, Midnapur etc. Unfortunately for Orissa, Congress having been declared unlawful, decided to boycott this Committee. Nilakantha who had been to Jamshedpur with a long Memorandum was directed telegraphically by Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the Zonal head of the Congress not to appear before the Committee. Nilakantha had to come back disappointed.

He was arrested immediately at Puri on 16th January and sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment, placed as 'A' class prisoner in Hazaribagh jail. During this period, Nilakantha wrote his master piece an Annotation on Gita which is termed as the best philosophical works of Pandit Nilakantha. It has gone through three revised editions during the life time of Pandit Nilakantha.

Here again, Nilakantha fell very ill. The most sorrowful part is that Nilakantha being an 'A' class prisoner had got some special advantages and other co-prisoners who were addicted to tobacco, cigarettes, bidies etc. used to keep them hidden under the pillow of Nilakantha. This caused reeling of his head and developed stone in the kidney. Nilakantha was very serious. He was sent to Patna for treatment and it was only after his release that he got cured with a long treatment by his friend Dr. B. C. Roy of Calcutta.

#### PUBLISHING THE 'NABABHARAT'

In 1933, on his release, Nilakantha gave a new direction to his activities by setting up the Naba Bharat Press. For the next twenty years a

literary monthly, Naba Bharat, and for about 3 years, the weekly, Lokamat were published from this press. A daily Naba Bharat also appeared in 1942, when Nilakantha managed to instal a Ministry in Orissa during the Second World War days to explain his policy. We will discuss more of it in the next chapter.

In 1934 Nilakantha was elected President of the Utkal Congress and remained its uncontested head for five years. Madhusudan Das, the grand old leader of Orissa announced on his death bed that Nilakantha would succeed him and that he would do every thing for Orissa and every body should work conjointly with him. Nilakantha now bore the dual burden of Gopabandhu's legacy and Madhusudan's ambitions and continued to serve the State both as a Central Legislator and the Congress Leader.

In 1935 December, Nilakantha was again elected to the Central Legislative Assembly. He again became the Secretary of the Congress Block in the Legislature, this time under the leadership of Bula Bhai Desai.

In 1936, Pandit Nilakantha was at the peak of his power both in Orissa and in Delhi. After the First General Election in 1937 he became subject to many cliques. Yet he was the President of U.P.C. in 1939, at the out break of World War II.



## NILAKANTHA AS LEGISLATOR

The late twenties and early thirties were a time of great activity for Pt. Nilakantha, who rose to the height of his eminence as a Parliamentarian and a true leader. In the Central Assembly, on 4th February, 1927, Nilakantha made a name in opposing the Public Safety Bill. On the 8th February 1927, he raised the demand for amalgamation of all the Oriya Speaking lands together, and put them under a separate administration. This paved the way for a separate Orissa Province and had the full support of Gopabandhu. Outside the Legislature, he worked hard to rouse public opinion both in Orissa and in out-lying areas for the purpose.

On 7th March 1929, Nilakantha demanded for reviving the Salt manufacture in Orissa and its free Trade, where it was there long since as a Cottage Industry.

On 22nd March, he moved for remission of Salt Tax pleading that by such Taxes, it is the poor who suffers the most for want of the required quantity of Salt in his food.

After about a year from hence Mahatma Gandhi launched his famous Dandy Salt March and courted imprisonment. We have seen Nilakantha followed him after tendering resignation of his membership in the Central Assembly and then he came to Orissa and start his Salt March at Kakatpur in Puri District to be arrested on 30th May 1930 and sentenced 6 months imprisonment as a 'A' class prisoner. He was released from Hazaribag jail on 22nd December 1930.

Needless to say that Nilakantha took very active part in the deliberations of the Central Assembly and spoke on most of the important Bills having all-India importance and concern. In view of the highly important views expressed in his speech. We will narrate only four of them here e.g. 1) The Public Safety Bill. 2) Salt manufacture in Orissa and its free Trade. 3) Remission of Salt Tax and 4) Amalgamation of the Oriya speaking lands.

### THE PUBLIC SAFETY BILL

It was proposed to circulate this bill or refer it to a Select Committee. Nilakantha opposed both suggestions, taking exception to the Bill in its entirety. He did not approve of restricting entry of communism into India on the grounds of ideology.

“There has always been an existing order of things which was threatened by any new ideals that came up.” Nilakantha pleads. “Galileo died in prison for something” he said. “But who has lived? Galileo or the Pope who imprisoned him?”

“I say communism has come in. Let it come. We are here to face it. You cannot now make this Indian Empire a harem, a Zenana of the British imperialism, to be exploited in the dark. If you are so very suspicious of your own position here, if the Government is not broad based on the very will of the people that our Govt. is good x x x how can you protect your existing order in this manner? Can you ward off all the ideas of communism and such other ideas from the shores of Bombay? You may deport half a dozen or dozen Englishmen x x x. You may suppress the beautiful youth movement, for you have power, but can communism be warded off?”

“You call it a revolutionary something. What is revolution ? As a student of Philosophy I do not understand the meaning of revolution. I do not even understand it in the dictionary. In the order of progress, I know everything new is a stage in evolution. The idea of revolution is the creation of unscientific understanding of the people interested. x x x Who knows that this new ideal that is coming is not the best stage in the evolution of human culture ? Let it have a trial all over the world; let it have a trial in India. No ideas or ideals have ever been shut out of our doors. Even in the days of Brahminism, we had our Charvak Philosophy which preached, “Enjoy as long as your live, borrow money, drink ghee (with that money) for after your body is done to ashes you are not coming again.” x x x It was not only tolerated in India, but was given as free a scope as any other Philosophy in the land. Culture was not damaged x x x You speak of preserving culture against ideas, which are foreign to the Indians. x x x It is impossible” Nilakantha went on to say that the very principle of the Bill is wrong and vicious and concluded by saying, “I oppose it, I oppose the very principle of the bill.”

## 2. INDIAN SALT, PARTICULARLY SALT MANUFACTURE IN ORISSA

A year before the Dandy March of Mahatma Gandhi, Pt. Das in putting up a claim in the Central Legislature on 7th March 1929 for reviving the salt manufacture in Orissa and its free trade, said :

“Panga” salt which was being manufactured in Orissa—is called panga, and it means salt obtained by evaporation of sea water by fire i. e., salt obtained by artificial evaporation—

it was declared by Mr. Sterling in 1822 as the "finest salt of all India". I have myself seen Panga salt prepared in times of famine and it is as fine as, if not better than, Liverpool salt. It is white and has small grains and there is no difficulty in connection with magnesium chloride, as in the case of Tuticorin salt."

x                      x                      x                      x

"Panga salt was prepared as a cottage industry. When there was famine in Orissa, I know people used to take sea water in pans or in pots and prepare a certain amount of salt, which they not merely used in their own homes but also sold it to some outsiders. That was how it was being prepared. It was formerly also more or less a cottage industry sometimes on a rather big scale, and there was no big factory to manufacture panga. That panga salt, as well as Orissa Karkach of Puri used to command markets even up to Raipur and Jabbulpore in those days."

Pandit Das went on to press that Government should give lease to Private individuals or firms to manufacture salt on the Orissa coasts. He cited how Raja of Parikud was trying for a lease for the last 3 years, without success. He then attributed the delay to be motivated and said, "I say there is some motive behind it. Foreign imports of salt into this country are not being tabooed. On the contrary various facilities are afforded to them. Why?"

x                      x                      x                      x

"I should not enter into details. But the gist of the whole thing is that salt is plentiful in India and able even to compete in quality with foreign salt. It is there in Tuticorin, which has only 16 to 30 lakhs of maunds, which will go for local consumption and the Ceylon supply."

Pandit Das then vehemently criticised the policy of Government on Salt Taxation. He argued "Is the motive far to seek?" But the secret of the whole thing is that it must be made a source of revenue. That is the main difficulty."

x                      x                      x                      x

Pandit Das criticised "Salt cannot be made for all times a revenue reserve, and a poor scapegoat for fresh taxation."

x                      x                      x                      x

"I say it should be revived again as a cottage industry, which it used to be. Salt is the gift of God and nature and so very necessary for man, animal and the fields. We are not able to give salt to our cattle, and our fields are starving.

x                      x                      x                      x

So it should be made free. There should be no preventive measures against its manufacture. Let the old cottage industry be allowed to go its merry course. You say panga salt is costly for there is scarcity of fuel. But in Orissa only a few years ago, when free manufacture was allowed in the famine area, I know how it was cheap to poor man.

x                      x                      x                      x

A villager in his cottage does not purchase his fuel and the members of his family find occupation in the activity. Thus all over the land people were happy in their cottages with industries like this. Salt making was thus a good industry. Now the whole thing has been stopped."

Pandit Das also spoke for about 2 hours on remission of Salt-Tax on 21st March 1929, so that at least the poor man's life is not endangered for want of sufficient quantity of salt in his food.

### 3. REMISSION OF SALT TAX

Moving an amendment for total remission of salt tax on 21st March 1929 Nilakantha stated, "I have got an amendment—xx xx xx It is remitting the salt duty in its entire extent."

x x x

"This salt tax painfully puts me in mind of a tax, which I call mediæval, I may even call it primitive. It is, Sir, a poll tax, and as such, is full of the humiliating memory of the days and dealings of ancient slavery, as well as mediæval fanaticism. I need not go into details of this historical significance of the problem for obvious reasons. Let me say this much that it is all unseemly for a people to fight with their Government in this second quarter of the 20th Century on the issue of a tax around which cling the associations of barbarism.

It is a poll tax, a capitation tax, and more so from the view-point of the Government. We know, it can be proved on authority that consumption of salt decreases, when the tax is increased. xx xx xx xx xx True, it puts one in mind of the days of human slavery. Which was the Government that thought of poll taxes ? Not an organised, not a civilised Government. A poll tax can only be thought of when the Government wants to make money out of the ignorance of the people. xx xx xx xx

"It is tax on human blood. The poor man is bled to find money for the coffers of the State under this tax. xx xx xx You are always tempted to grasp the poor man, to bleed the poor man, xx xx xx xx It stands to murder humanity in ignorance and weakness. This is such a tax. xx xx xx

“I was going to say, Sir, that the salt tax should not be made a source of revenue. One may very well ask if it is not to be a source of public revenue, what do you propose to have in its stead. There are two reasons for the total abolition of the entire tax on indigenous salt in India. I have got to explain them a little. One reason is that this is a measure of protection. India should be made self-supporting in matters of salt. Indian salt should be made to supply the whole of India. There is a difficulty and the main difficulty is foreign imported salt. If we cannot make Indian salt very very cheap, as compared with foreign salt, we have no hope, at least for the next 20 years, of making India self-supporting so far as salt is concerned.”

“My second reason is that it is not possible for us to propose an adjustment of tariff duty perhaps on this occasion. Had I wished to increase it, I am afraid, Sir, I could not have done so. It is only the duty on excise salt which I propose to remit—perhaps some of my friends do not understand the significance of it; I apologise to them as I have not perhaps been intelligible. The bill says “salt manufactured in, or imported by land into” India and not Burma. That is xx xx This Bill is for excise salt duty only. Our difficulty arises there. In this Bill, by no amendment, shall we be able to conveniently adjust the duty on imported salt. xx xx xx”

Pandit Nilakantha then went on to say whether such Tax as are prevalent in other countries and the history of Salt Tax if any in the past in India. He continued “So far as the other countries are concerned, I have said, I refuse to enter into the circumstances prevailing there; our main concern is India and in this connection, I confess, to a certain extent, also

England. England is the home of my honourable friends who rule over our financial and political destinies. When they think of making money out of the poor man's pinch of salt, will they look back across those 6,000 miles of the blue ocean and tell me what are the things obtaining there? Is there a salt tax in England? I know there was one some hundreds of years ago. That was in the middle ages. The world has advanced since then, and much water has since flown under the bridge of the Thames. They had a salt tax then; but as soon as the people realised that they had a certain right, a substantial right to govern themselves, as soon as their eyes opened towards the political and national future of their country, and their particular share in it, they did not brook a medieval, a primitive tax like that.      xx      xx      xx

"An English salt manufacturer, giving evidence before a Select Committee on Salt in 1836, by name William Worthington, said this. A member of that Committee put the question, "Since the repeal of the duty, has there been an increase in the demand for that sort of salt which is used for household purposes? The answer—what is the answer! "Very considerable."

"I should like to remind you of the history of the salt tax in this country. We are sometimes told that the history of this tax is a very long one; I know how long and painful it is under British Rule in India. xx xx xx xx xx xx Now what was the principle of taxation in India in those days? The land today belongs to the Government, or the zamindars—for that matter, through the zamindar it is Government's land—the land then never belonged to Government. It was never the Raja's land. When the kingship

was first conceived as is illustrated in the story of Bena, there was no idea of King's proprietorship over the land. It was a willing contribution of one-sixth of the return on the land, later on supplemented by a land tax that maintained the King and maintained him to please the people and to work for the good of the people, to consider himself the real servant of the people. This was the principal theory of our Indian taxation. How can it be possible that there was a salt tax? If there was a salt tax, the men who made salt perhaps used to give one-sixth of what they made out of it to the King, probably a little land tax in addition in later days." x x x

"It is during the Muhammadan period we are told that there was a salt tax; but what was that?  $2\frac{1}{2}$  to 5 per cent. Was it a tax? I cannot say what it actually was. Perhaps just as the produce of the land was taxed, so was the produce of the sea, or the land which produced salt. It was like a common tax, an ordinary tax; it was no salt tax, it was no poll tax, it was no capitation tax, that is what I want to impress upon the attention of the House. It was  $2\frac{3}{4}$  to 5 per cent. How, will any one compare the percentage of the present tax.

"Salt price some times 1a. 6p. whereas the tax is Rs. 1.4a. i.e., the Salt tax comes to 1,600 percent." x x x x x x  
Pt. Das went on to say that even during the time of Muhammad Tughlok, who was in want of money and went from house to house to collect a poll tax, we do not hear of a Salt tax. x x x x

"I maintain, Sir, that the Salt tax had no history before the coming of the East India Company. x x x x x

I shall simply rapidly pass over the Sikh regime in the Punjab, when some little money was realised from leasing out mines in the Salt Range. x x x x x x  
These were the days of East India Company in other parts of India x x x x  
when we might expect to hear of a Salt tax in this Punjab Salt Range. x x x x  
Sir, all over India there is a Salt earth from which salt can be made easily, x x x x  
and I may tell you that, this Salt Industry was almost a Cottage Industry throughout India and it afforded occupation to people in their slack season for which Mahatma Gandhi is now putting, I cannot say unwelcome or wel-come,—the Charka into their hands x x x x”

“Sir, You have heard of the floods in Orissa in Balasore district in 1927. That was a salt producing district. Formerly there were monopoly centres, but now there are not even those centres, and people are thrown out of employment and they are sinking in floods and dying of famine. x x x x x  
They were out of pity, in 1927, allowed to make their own Salt for a full year. x x x

Then came the days of Regulations, Regulation X of 1819 and Regulation X of 1826, to which I shall refer here. One of them, namely of 1819, makes the boiling of salt water criminal. Then there occur in the other, i.e., of 1826 a peculiar thing, a very interesting thing. Under the Regulation of 1826 burning of straw soaked in salt water was to be severely dealt with. x x  
The zamindar was to be fined Rs. 500 for each single case found out among the tenants, and the cases were dealt with not by judicial officers. x x x If the zamindar had

co-sharers. each of the co-sharer was to be fined Rs. 500 for each single case. x x x

“In the Famine Report of Orissa of 1866, page 222, paragraph 49, it is said that “salt manufacturers, who had turned to landless labourers through sheer helplessness” on account of the Government monopoly in salt were the people upon whom “the utmost severity of the calamity had fallen.” You do not, perhaps, know the extent of the mortality in that famine. Now, I am quoting from the Government Report on the famine of Orissa and Bengal. 20 lakhs of people died out of a population of 60 lakhs. That is one-third of the population died, and this salt monopoly was substantially responsible for this calamity.”

Pt. Das's speech was so lengthy but interesting that at last Mr. President wanted him to cut short, to which Pt. Das got his approval to take another opportunity to say many more things that he had got to say and closed his speech.

#### 4. AMALGAMATION OF ALL THE ORIYA SPEAKING LANDS TOGETHER AND CREATION OF THE PROVINCE OF ORISSA

Before re-producing the speech of Nilakantha in the Central Legislature we would like to give an account of the back ground prevailing at the time.

Nilakantha was elected to the Central Legislature from Orissa in 1924 and used his position there to further Oriya interests. The interplay between the local and national was also mutually strengthening. Local issues,

became national ones and national issues became known to and the concern of the local people, broadening their outlook by making them aware of their place in India and the world as well as at home. The people of Orissa began to see themselves in a new light.

Pandit Nilakantha's role was dual from the outset of his career. It is not easy to separate his national All-India figure from that of the Orissa politician. His efforts to further the formation of a separate province for Oriya-speaking areas and the articles he published in the important papers of Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi and Madras illustrate this very well. In the process, the formation of provinces on a linguistic basis became an All-India issue and was accepted by Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress.

The unification of Oriya-speaking areas in a single homogeneous unit was a cause Nilakantha Das made his own very early in his career. He was inspired by a passionate love of his own language and culture and enthused by the great Oriya patriots Madhusudan Das and Gopabandhu Das.

Oriya-speaking areas were divided among four contiguous provinces, in each of which, as a minority, the Oriyas had a disadvantageous position. The Oriyas had, however, sturdily resisted absorption into the local population in their geographical situation. Their own cultural identity was strong and had a long history that lent it a distinction of its own. The Oriyas retained their unity down the centuries despite the break up of their ancient kingdoms and subsequent historical vicissitudes. The Oriyas remained as Oriyas. No attempt to change them had succeeded.

At the beginning of the Century, a movement named Utkal Sammilani was started, under the leadership of Madhusudan Das, demanding amalgamation of all Oriya speaking areas, on the principle of cultural homogeneity. This was resisted and the Sammilani continued pressing its demand. Madhusudan, Gopabandhu and Nilakantha dreamed of a time, when the Oriyas would take their place in a free and independent India and make their special contribution. Nilakantha made the cause of Orissa his own. The urgency of demarcating the border between Orissa and Andhra led him to speak of the problem at the meeting of the All India Congress Committee at Kakinada in Dec. 1923. A body was set up to try for a compromise. Nilakantha and Niranjana Pattanayak represented Orissa. Sitaramayya and Venkat Satyanarayana represented Andhra. Rajagopalachary was the Chairman. When he resigned, Dr. Rajendra Prasad was appointed Chairman and attempted to arbitrate but no solution was reached.

In order to take a decision on Orissa's demand, the Govt. of India setup a Committee known as Phillip-Doff Committee. It gave a report in favour of Orissa. To protest against this the Andhras arranged protest meetings and held a conference at Mukhalinga in Parlakemedi Taluk on 16th-17th June 1927. An account has been given of this Meeting by Dr. S. N. Rajguru, the celebrated historian of Orissa, who attended it. He has narrated how Madras got well prepared by setting up various Research units in Ganjam and Koraput Districts to plead the case and Oriyas in Berhampur area got very desperate having no preparations. At last Sashi Bhusan Rath, Editor

'Asha' requested Nilakantha to attend the meeting. Nilakantha with his strong and learned arguments surprised all the Madras Pandits and the officials and made them mute. Dr. Rajguru states that but for this successful achievement of Pandit Nilakantha in this meeting and his other efforts, all the lands south of the Chilka lake would have remained in Madras. He writes, "I vividly remember Pandit Nilakantha arguing that area around Dantapur in Ganjam District where the holy tooth of Buddha is being worshipped indicative of Orissan Culture cannot belong to Madras." He further states that all elderly persons including Sri Rath, Maharaja of Parlakhemedi and the Maharaja of Jeypore warmly greeted Pandit Nilakantha, whereas the youngsters like him fell flat on his feet in the meeting itself. ("Pandit Nilakantha-O-Tanka Prativa", a publication of Utkal University in Oriya, page 16).

It is perhaps mostly for this reason that Nilakantha was regarded as "Dadhia Gandhi" meaning Gandhiji with a beard, in these southern districts of Orissa and people used to take the dust from the road on which Nilakantha walked in these areas.

#### RESOLUTION REGARDING AMALGAMATION OF THE ORIYA-SPEAKING TRACT

In 1927, on the 8th February. Pt Nilakantha raising the demand, said :

Sir, I beg to move :

"That this Assembly recommends to the Governor General in Council to be pleased to take immediate steps to put or publish the schemes for putting all Oriya-speaking tracts under one local administration."

“To the Government this is not a new subject. It has been before the country practically in the forefront of our political issues for the last 25 years or so. The history of this movement is a very long one, and since 1903, when first the then Home Secretary considered it necessary that all Oriya speaking tracts should be put under one administration for some reason or other of purely administrative convenience, it has been postponed from time to time. We are given assurance that all our outlying tracts should come under one Government. Sometimes some hope of sub-province has been put forward but nothing practical has come of it yet which would satisfy the Oriya people. In 1920, just towards the end of the last Imperial Legislative Council, a Resolution was moved by the Hon'ble Mr. Sachchidananda Sinha on this subject. Government gave assurances that they would enquire into the matter and probably they meant to do something as early as the Reforms scheme was put into operation. Practically the first term of the Reform Council was over and the Government did not move in the matter. At the beginning of the second term, to a question of my friend Mr. B. Das, Government however agreed to institute a Committee of enquiry so far as the Madras Oriyas are concerned. Accordingly the Phillip-Duff Commission were sent out to enquire into the matter and their report, though it has not been published to all the Members of the House, has been published in the office. After all their enquiries in the Ganjam and Vizagapatnam districts they have made out a clear case that the people expressed a very strong desire and anxiety to be united with their fellowmen in the present Division of

Orissa—mean the four or five districts in Bihar and Orissa. In case of a few of these outlying localities in the Ganjam and Vizagapatnam districts there may be some difference of opinion on account of our census figures ; but I may here inform the House that Oriyas have been under several administrations in several tracts, and practically in each of the tracts an intermediary ruling race with vested interests has been created, and the Bengal Government puts it clearly that the census supervisors and enumerators are afraid to record people as Oriya-speaking, because they fear if they put it like that, the tracts will be transferred to Orissa. It is there in the letter which was written to the Bengal Government and came to the Government of India in 1922, Actually the Superintendent of Census at a meeting of Enumerators and supervisors heard it remarked by one of them that they were not willing to record people as Oriya-speaking even though they had evidence to that effect.

I may quote the passage :

(in the gathering of enumerators and Supervisors).

“I heard someone say that if there is a large number of Oriya-speaking population at Danton, there is every likelihood of Danton being transferred to Balasore.”

This was the remark he heard. It is in a letter by Mr. A. M. Chakravarty, Circle Officer, regarding Oriya-speaking people in Danton and Mohanpur, dated the 5th July, 1921.

Another reason is advanced that the expression of desire on the part of the people is sometimes due to agitation. It may be fact that when a movement is started, some leaders

create a public opinion in favour of something which they know will be conducive to the interests of the country. Ordinary people do not understand generally the future of any new movement and it is a fact everywhere in the world that opinions are created when the masses are not in a position to understand that is what.

But before I go into the history of this movement and criticise it, I should like to enlighten the House about what Orissa is; what it was in history and what are its claims for being constituted as a separate province or to be put under one administration, as I have called it, for I am put in mind of a very curious incident. I was talking to one of my friends in this House—I mean the last House. He asked me, where I came from. I said "Orissa". He looked as if he could not understand me. (Laughter.) Yes; it was a fact; then I said, Bihar and Orissa. He said "Yes, yes; it is some where near Assam." I need not say what then followed and how I explained where I came from. But it is perhaps a fact that our people being for the last two hundred years in a state of practical vivisection, so to say, other people in India do not sometimes understand who we are and who we were.

The present Orissa inherits the culture of three ancient provinces; one is Kalinga, another is Utkal, and the third is Udra. Ancient Kalinga was the first colony of the Aryans, on the fringe of the Dravida country. The clear history extends so far back as the 7th century B.C. It comprises the coastal strip from Calcutta or Tamluk to the southern extremity of Ganjam. This was the Kalinga, which was conquered by

Asoka, the king of Magadha, whose conquests made a saint of him. Kalinga had a robust culture and the present colossal art of Orissa which is a distinct type of Aryan art is the remnant of the development of ancient Kalinga art, which in original may be found even now in the cave temples of Orissa. The sea-faring habits and navigation of Kalinga are well known. The name Bijay Singha is well known to Indian history. He himself is claimed by four provinces, Orissa, Bengal, Gujrat and Burma. But it is a certain fact that his wife who accompanied him to Ceylon and colonised and civilised that land belonged to Kalinga. She was the daughter of the king of Kalinga ; and the colonisation of Kalinga in Burma and the Eastern Archipelago is also a fact of history. The local name of the present Pegu is Ossa, which is a corruption of Orissa, and some temples in Burma were constructed after the pattern of the cave temples of Udaygiri in Orissa. Kalinga navigation was still being practised in Orissa till the seventies of the last century when it was practically crushed out of existence by the high export duty on saltpetre and the salt trade which was killed on account of the ballast system of foreign salt—foreign salt being carried into this country as ballast. It was still living in Balasore and some other coastal towns in Orissa till practically the later half of the last century and the sloops and small ships in a broken state may still be found in some seaports of Orissa.

Then again Kalinga was a strong Buddhist centre of culture; the Buddhist religion made a stronghold there; when it was again Hinduised the stream of culture came from the Udra country which extended over the south-east

portion of the present Central Provinces; and I may say here that the present temple of Jagannatha, which stands out as a religious monument throughout India, is a gift of the Udras, and the present Orissan culture may well be proud of that temple, where no caste or untouchability is in practice. You will find it no where else in India. The culture is purely Orissan; Orissa has kept it up, but that Orissa is not recognised to be a distinct individual factor in the Indian federation of races.

Of Utkal, I should not say more and tire the patience of this House, by detaining them any longer in the domains of ancient history. It would be seen, however that the ancient Utkal influence came from the side of Singhbhum and added many permanent and highly delicate elements of civilisation and advancement to this synthetic stream of culture. Thus it stands out as a fact that we in Orissa, from ancient times developed a distinct and individual culture of our own, whose identity could not be killed, though the attempt has been perhaps seriously and continuously made to kill it for about two hundred years.

Orissa was in history, always a separate province. It is not in this 20th century that we appeal to the British administration for the first time and claim it to be so. History shows, Sir, that it was always a separate province not only maintained anyhow with its slender revenue, but it was a flourishing State. Even during wars with neighbouring races, it could build up a robust art and literature and it could spend enormously on religious art and other institutions of religious and social importance. The extent of Orissa which is now claimed to

be from Midnapore to the southern point of Ganjam and from the shores of the seas to somewhere beyond Singhbhum and in the Eastern Central Province is not a recent discovery. In olden times it was much larger in extent and a powerful kingdom. Even during the palmy days of Bahmani, Vijayanagaram and Bengal, our kings kept up their independence and carried their mighty peasant militia into the very heart of those countries and our separate existence as an independent race and Kingdom was kept up till the later half of the 16th century when no other province in India except Khandesh—which perhaps succumbed about the same time, kept its independence against the Imperial Moghul arms. Then when Akbar took it, he understood the position. He was a statesman, and not a mere Conqueror. He could understand the necessity of the separate existence of the Oriya people and he made it into a separate province. Throughout, the Moghul rule it remained separate, and so I must inform the House that our Muhammadans are a respectable class of people and therefore in Orissa you will seldom find any tension between the Hindus and Muhammadans, nor has any kind of communal rowdyism ever disturbed the peaceful atmosphere of that land.

Then conquest after conquest came, and we were treated like a football. Perhaps during the British regime matters have been carried to extreme lengths. Sometime before the time of the battle of Plassey, it was made a part of Bengal. A little before that it was given to Nagpur. I do not know whether and it is quite probable that Orissa was given in lieu of the tribute of Bengal to the Mahrattas by the Governor of Bengal under the influence of the

merchants of Calcutta who were afraid of the Mahratta raids. Then again, it was made a part of the Central Provinces. During the second Mahratta War, it was again thrown on to Bengal, and what happened? The famous historian in his statistical accounts, I mean, Sir W. W. Hunter, has admitted how the British Government was responsible for the famine and poverty of our ancient land. It was in Calcutta that the headquarters of Orissa were situated and without practically any notice to the Oriyas, our zamindaris were sold in Calcutta for paltry sums, and many of our zamindars now are therefore absentee zamindars, and they live in Calcutta. This is distinctly an act of the British Government, as has been pointed out very rightly by Sir W. W. Hunter, in his statistical accounts of Bengal.

This has been out fact, Sir. Since that time we have been made something like a commodity. When it is necessary for the safety and happiness of a major province, we have been thrown about, either partially or wholly, practically like a football. The last of such cruel and heinous experiments was made in putting us with Bihar. Perhaps the Government remember that we were told that we were to supply the sea-board to Bihar. If by supplying the seaboard was meant that we were to wash the feet of Bihar by the gentle offerings of the breezy waves of our hoary and sacred coast of ancient Kalinga, one could well understand it. Or, was there any port open? Was the sea coast of Orissa a sea-board of Bihar? It was simply an experiment to supply a portion of feeder land to Bihar to enable it to maintain itself as a separate province.

Maulavi A. H. Natiq (Central Provinces : Muhammadan) : Do you want that Orissa should be a separate province independent of, and distinct from, Bihar, and that it should have no concern with Bihar ?

Pandit Nilakantha Das :

Sir, we should like to be a separate province as Assam or the Central Provinces. Assam has been made into a separate province with practically the same or even less population and with about the same amount of revenue. It has not yet got a High Court nor even a University, but it is recognised as a separate province, and the people are expected to determine and rule over their own destinies, while we are always being thrown about. It is quite natural that we should like to be a separate province as we have been throughout the course of our history, but for about these 200 years, when on account of the fault of the Imperial Government we have been thrown about from place to place, as I have said, like a football, and we have been vivisected and thrown in portions here and there. And it is natural that even at a great risk to our economic life we should much like to be a separate province. But perhaps here I feel called upon to refer to the amendments of my friends from Bihar.

They always like to put in an amendment to say that we should remain under Bihar and Orissa, not the present Orissa Division but a little bigger territory. When in 1921 early in the Reforms a Resolution was moved in the Bihar and Orissa Council, such an amendment failed, and the Resolution as I have put it now was unanimously passed I do not know that charm there is in putting in the words, "under the

administration of Bihar and Orissa." I have left the question quite open. I have said, "under one administration" with the distinct intention that I do not commit myself either to remain under Bihar and Orissa or to be a separate province, which later course we should like very much. Here I may be allowed to put in a word about the advantages and disadvantages of being under any other province. If the experiment to tag us on to some other like a barge to steam boat is to go on, then I think it would be much better first if we are tagged on to the Central Provinces, for there we shall count for something. Our population is almost as large and the railway communication from Cuttack to Sambalpur, which is under contemplation, I understand, may be extended up to Nagpur through some station on the Bengal Nagpur Railway, while the Vizagapatnam Harbour railway will also be another advantage. Or if we are to be put under another province, then Bengal with its High Court and University, which have not only a tradition but which command and certain amount of influence and independence, is nearer our home and is within easy reach of any part of Orissa, not more than 12 hours rail journey. I do not know what charm there is in putting us with Bihar, to wash the feet of the province, as I have said. Patna is perhaps more distant from Cuttack than any other centre, and besides, throughout our history we have never been with Bihar. We were once with Bengal, then with the Central Provinces, and then we were thrown back into Bengal. It was only 1911 that to annual the partition of Bengal and to give Bihar some advantage of territory, we were put under Bihar. Still the wheels of Government sometimes are

calculated to crush our destinies and to dictate what we should be, and if it is still found convenient to the Government that we should be with Bihar we must submit to our destiny, but we should like all the Oriya-speaking people to be under Bihar together. That is the only desire now. We are practically a dying race under the present arrangements of administration, and in this state who or where are we to choose between Provinces except that we appeal and plead for being under one administration. For the present, any administration that is given us we shall and we must accept, for there is no other way out. Then we shall wait and when we develop as a united race we shall compel the hands of our destiny, I mean the Government, to give us a separate province, which is our hope and goal and without which we cannot have rest. And as to the redistribution of areas, whatever be the objections from the Government standpoint, if the Government do not put one and all our areas together that is, the remnant which still remains after all the killing agencies have been in operation for ages and generations, nay, even centuries if all those areas be not now put together if some are still left out the process of killing in this present age will not continue any longer. It cannot. Discontent will never vanish; it will still flourish even in the smallest outlying parts. You may say that some parts of Bengal are unwilling, that the Central Province Government does not like the idea, or that a portion of Singbhum is not naturalised in Oriya culture although it has taken that culture for two or three generations; you will see to your great disadvantage that the agitation will go on. The present age is an age of agitators in the political world and

our agitators I confess it will come out again into the outlying areas. They will again give you trouble and the question will not be finally settled till all our people still living are put together under one administration, and if possible and as soon as possible, under a separate administration, a distinct provincial administration.

Some suggestion has been thrown out to us under the name of a sub-province. I do not understand, nor does my friend the Hon'ble Home Member understand what it actually means. To call a province, a sub-province is somewhat odd. If I may define it now as I understand it, it is a province without a High Court and a University, which we are told we shall not be able to maintain independently, although I hold that in spite of the famished condition of our land and its economic disadvantages so often flung in our face, we shall try our best to maintain a separate University and a High Court. But if it is not found possible by the present master of our destiny, it may be made into a province like Assam, which has not a University or a High Court. But what does a sub-province mean? That is something rather derogatory in name, and our people are afraid that by calling our province a sub-province we may again be put under disadvantages.

Mr. President : Order, Order. The Honourable Member from Orissa must now conclude his observations.

Pandit Nilakantha Das: Thank you. I should like rather to have a province like that than an administration with the prefix 'sub' which would give some one the idea that we shall again be tagged on to another bigger province with similar disadvantages to those under

which we now have to live. With these words, Sir, I move my Resolution.

### OTHER EFFORTS OF NILAKANTHA FOR THE FORMATION OF A NEW PROVINCE

After placing the above demand for an Orissa Province in the Central Legislature, Nilakantha turned to the National Congress hoping to receive its support. The Congress had just decided to non-cooperate with the Simon Commission and an All-India meeting summoned. The delegates to this meeting were Nilakantha Das, Bhuvananda Das and Rajkrishna Bose from Orissa. The report drawn up by the meeting is known as the Nehru Report. It agreed to the setting up of a separate Orissa Province provided financial resources made it feasible. The Congress would support it in that case.

Niranjan Pattanayak on the advice of Nilakantha placed an amended proposal before the All-party Subjects Committee in Calcutta. Motilal Nehru was the Chairman. He refused permission to discuss it. Nilakantha walked out. The other delegates from Orissa left with him. The following day Nilakantha made a public protest and took out a procession in Calcutta city. Amity was restored by the intervention of Mahatma Gandhi.

On the 2nd May, 1931, a meeting of both Congress and non-Congress organisations of all shades of opinion, with delegates from all parts of Orissa, was held in order to draw up a programme for the formation of the separate province. Nilakantha recently released from Jail after about 6 months in prison for having participated in the Salt Campaign at Puri, was made the Chairman. The discussion went on for

several days. A plan was drawn up to implement the resolution that was passed in favour of the province. Nilakantha became the President. Gopabandhu Choudhury was the Vice-President. Lakshmi Narayan Pattanayak and Sashi Bhusan Rath were the Secretaries. Bichitrananda Das was the treasurer. Niranjana Pattanayak and Lingaraj Panigrahi were among the members.

In a Committee formed for the purpose by the Provincial Congress, Nilakantha was also made the President.

Nilakantha Das and Sashi Bhusan Rath chose the Singbhum area as their venue and set to work. The history of every royal line was studied and interpreted. The rulers were discovered to be all Oriyas. Bihar's claim to that part of the country was proved baseless. Proof was put forth before public meetings and the statistics explained. Everywhere Nilakantha decried anti-Oriya feeling. In some places Nilakantha had to put up with a lot of hardships and courted it in spite of his failing health in having served his term of imprisonment for the Salt Campaign.

In 1929 the Indian Cabinet decided to set up a committee to go into the question of making a new province. The O'Donnell Committee was appointed. Nilakantha was nominated to testify before it on behalf of the Utkal Congress Committee. He drew up two lengthy memoranda which he submitted to the Orissa Committee on the 28th November, 1931, setting forth the viewpoint of the Utkal Provincial Congress. But Nilakantha could not appear before O'Donnell Committee even though he went to Jamshedpur for the purpose as we have seen in the foregoing pages because

Dr. Rajendra Prasad as the Zonal Head of Congress ordered Nilakantha to boycott the Committee.

Nilakantha was the Secretary of the Opposition of Congress party in the Central Assembly and the Government could hardly take a decision without consulting him. They thought of offering a Sub-province as a solution. Mr. Mudiman, the Finance Secretary, Government of India, came to Nilakantha's residence again and again, discussing the issue at length. Mr. Mudiman had been deeply moved by Nilakantha's presentation of Orissa's case. Nilakantha was offered a "Knighthood" and agree to the Sub-Province. To this he retorted rather curtly with the words, "You have come to a wrong door." Nilakantha would settle for nothing less than a full-scale province.

To the Government's economical viability question, Nilakantha replied by stating "I am strongly of opinion that we will be able to manage the Province with both a University and a High Court." When the Government advocated that as they cannot allot more than 40 lakhs of rupees a year for the purpose, meaning that Nilakantha should agree to a Sub-Province, Nilakantha pressed for 80 lakhs and a Separate Province. There was a stalemate. Government tried to persuade Nilakantha through other co-members of the Central Legislature and at last Nilakantha reluctantly agreed to the proposal of a Separate Province with some Oriya speaking areas still remaining outside with the understanding that these will be considered later. The O'Donnell Committee report was finalised and the new Province was made with Koraput and Ganjam being amalgamated to Puri, Cuttack, Balasore & Sambalpur.



**Pandit Nilakantha with Pandit Nehru on the eve of  
1937 election at Satyavadi**

## ELECTIONS

On the 1st April 1936, the Orissa Province became a reality. Elections were held immediately for the Provincial Legislature. It was difficult to get qualified and honest people to be enrolled as Congress members. Biswanath Das from Bērhapur (Ganjam) and Sadasiv Tripathy from Nawarangpur (Koraput) who became Chief Minister later were picked up and enrolled as Congress members with great persuasions by Nilakantha. Thirty-six out of a total of thirty-seven candidates set up on behalf of the Congress, won the election by large majorities under Nilakantha's leadership, an unexpected success, first to come in the whole of India and Nilakantha was hailed with "Bravo Orissa" by Congress High Commands. The first Congress rule was established in Orissa. Biswanath Das became the Prime (Chief) Minister. Nilakantha could not become Prime (Chief) Minister, even though it was his due and he enjoyed the full support of 21 members out of a total of 36 in the party, due to many cliques. The cliques were like this :

In the meeting of the party called to elect the leader, the election was scheduled to be held in the afternoon session. But in the Rules Committee's morning session, not attended by most of the supporters of Nilakantha, it was decided that no outsider can stand for the party leadership. Nilakantha hadn't contested the provincial election, as all his attention was required to get the Congress candidates elected in the State, where the organisation hadn't been strong, particularly in the new areas added to

the Province. Now it is a common procedure get an outsider to be the Chief Minister of a state. But at that time the Congress High Command also did not help Nilakantha.

To meet the challenge of the Rules Committee, an understanding was made with Biswanath Das, brought into the Congress by Pandit Das himself on the eve of the election that he would contest for the party leadership and would bring in Pandit Das as the leader on changing the rules and himself would remain a Minister in Nilakantha's Cabinet. "After taking over as Chief Minister, Sri Das went to Sakhi-gopal to pay respects to Pandit Das, but forgot it soon after", writes Nilakantha in his memoirs "and himself became a party to the clique."

Thereafter Nilakantha wanted that the Government set up by the Congress should work as per the policy laid down by the P.C.C. He directed Biswanath Das, "The majority in the Assembly was secured and consequently the Government was set up by the Congress and as such it should be responsible to the P.C.C., was practically gave the pledge, explained its terms and implication to the people and asked them to vote for candidates without any consideration of their personal tendencies and qualifications. Thus for all activities of the Government, P.C.C. is directly responsible to the people. The members of the Assembly and consequently those of the Government are in fact creatures of the P.C.C. to which they are primarily responsible. The P. C. C. should always be at their back and by their side". But the power lovers seldom give their ears to reasonings.

The Problem exists with the Party Chiefs and the Government Chiefs in Indian politics even now.





**Pandit Nilakantha during the first election campaign  
in South Orissa**

## FOUNDING OF THE UTKAL UNIVERSITY

Pandit Nilakantha Das with his remarkable resiliene, turned his attention to the consolidation of the cultural foundation of the new province. He had dreamt of a University in proposed Province since 1927. While putting up a claim for a new Orissa Province, he said, we cannot accept a Sub-Province i. e., a province without a University and a High Court. After formation of the new Province in 1936, Nilakantha advised the Prime Minister Biswanath Das to work for the founding of a University in Orissa. Biswnath pleaded want of funds, Nilakantha retorted through the pages of his Naba Bharat that unless a University is founded, how can teachers be obtained, without which it is never possible to spread education. Seeing Biswanath inactive, Nilakantha tried to force the issue by creating Public opinion in his home town, Berhampur. He became the Chairman of a Convention held at Berhampur in 1937 called to consider the founding of a University for Orissa. He was then made the President of the Committee appointed by the State Government for the purpose in 1938. The report of this Committee submitted to Biswanath Das ministry was never to be found after the Ministry resigned on the issue of giving assistance to the British Govt. in their war efforts. On the request of the next Government, the one set up by Nilakantha himself a separate report was again submitted which led to the setting up of a University in Orissa. The Utkal University came into existence in 1943. In 1955 Nilakantha became the Pro-Chancellor of the University for 7 long years and was awarded a Doctorate from this University.

## **SECOND WORLD WAR AND COALITION MINISTRY IN ORISSA**

In September 1939, the out break of World War II presented the country with yet another crisis. On September 3rd Britain declared war on Germany. The same night the Viceroy of India Lord Linlithgow, declared war on Germany also, on behalf of India, without consulting any of the Indian leaders or elected representatives. There was a great outcry. Opinions in the Country was divided. Gandhiji himself was having differences with the Congress on the issue of helping Britain in its war effort. Subhas Bose, the elected President of the Indian National Congress, was forced to resign from the Congress in the same month. He at once formed a new party of his own, the Forward Block.

Pandit Nilakantha Das was deeply attached to Subhas Bose. He had great revolutionary ideas all through his life. He was at one with the opinions expressed by Subhas Bose and published these opinions. Subhas's father had been associated with Satyavadi at one stage. Nilakantha as the President of Orissa Provincial Congress Committee welcomed Subhas to Orissa and in a unique and long procession both riding an elegantly dressed elephant marched along the main roads of Cuttack town to rouse public opinion in favour of Subhas Bose and his party.

Thereafter Nilakantha did not hesitate to break all his connections with the vacillating Congress and ally himself with Bose. He had always acted independently according to his conscience and in the best interest of Orissa. Subhas invited him to Calcutta and in a long



**Pt. Nilakantha (extreme left) during deliberation with Subhash Chandra Bose regarding formation of Ministry in the provinces in Eastern Region in 1941.**

deliberation with him, could convince Nilakantha that by installing ministries in Eastern States e.g. Assam, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, the entry of Japan, the enemy of the Allies in the War to India would be easy and through Japan it may be easier to obtain independence. Nilakantha was asked to instal a ministry with the help of the representatives of muslims, the Muslim-League. He managed to set up a Coalition Government, in November 1941 with the Maharaja of Parlakemidi as the Chief Minister and Godavarish Mishra of his party as the 2nd of the 3-member Government & the third was the Provincial Muslim-League Secy. Abdus Scbhan Khan.

There were other Congress members who defied the Congress directives also but few of them had the courage to stick to their own convictions in defiance of the Congress High Command like Nilakantha.

For Orissa, the situation created by these developments was especially poignant. The Oriyas had won a separate province for themselves only recently, after a long and hard struggle. Schemes dear to the hearts of the people were just beginning to be implemented. These schemes would have to be abandoned entirely or shelved indefinitely if there be no representative Government in the State.

Nilakantha's action was justified by the way this non-Congress Government went ahead with the schemes for the advancement of Orissa and carried them through inspite of war conditions. Nilakantha did not openly associate himself with the wartime Government but he was influential in shaping its policies, and had to come forward and became the Leader of the

National War Front. He spoke out with a loud voice, "Let the people of India, unarmed as they are, train themselves so that they may take the opportunity given them by this war and seize their freedom." He went on, "It may so happen that we'll have to fight for the freedom of our country alone." His speeches in a National War Front meeting at Cuttack where he ordered replacement of the banner, 'God save the King' by 'God save the Nation' brought him in conflict with the then Governor of Orissa.

Nilakantha's plans at the time with Subhas's party, the Forward Block, to a great extent were frustrated by the imprisonment of Sarat Bose and the disappearance of Subhas. Nilakantha decided to break the coalition Ministry when he saw there was no possibility of forming a Socialist Government. Godavarish demurred. But Utkal University having been founded Nilakantha, in the interest of India as a whole had made up his mind. The Ministry broke up within about 3 years. Orissa was soon placed under Governor's rule.

In a speech delivered in the Orissa Legislature on the 4th March 1952 in which he defended Pandit Godavarish and himself against the charge of being a traitor during the war, Nilakantha said,

"In 1941 a Coalition Ministry was formed in Orissa with which I was associated. Not a single person in it was a traitor. Nobody had sacrificed more for their country. The British were still our rulers at that time. We were their subjects, their slaves. Yet we accomplished more within the limits of our servitude than other have been able to do since the country has been freed. We fought from the inside

as well as the outside. It is for history to decide to what extent our actions can be described as thereof traitor."

### NILAKANTHA BACK TO ORISSA AND TO CONGRESS

From the time of the Second World War, Nilakantha turned his attention more to the problems of Orissa. He had been able to found a University in Orissa at the long last in 1943 during the period of the coalition Ministry, that had been set up with his endeavour. In 1946 Election, he wanted to contest for the Central Legislature as a Congress candidate. He is in fact, applied for this, explaining his war-time stand for obvious reasons. Unfortunately however, the Congress High Command did not appreciate this and refunded him the deposit made by him.

Nilakantha did not contest the Election, even though he was sure to win. He explained to his followers that he must respect the pledge given to the Congress, along with his application, even though it was a formal one. Nilakantha spent the entire 5 years period in literary pursuits.

For the next election in 1951, however, Nilakantha would not remain silent. He formed a party of his own, called 'Swadhin Jana Sangha' and got 4 persons elected from Puri and Ganjam Districts including himself and his close associate Pt. Godavarish Mishra. As their leader, Nilakantha strongly criticised any incompetence or failure of Justice or flaw in the administration. This exposed him to much adverse criticisms from the treasury bench i.e., the Congress particularly for his being instrumental in the formation of the Ministry during the war

period. Nilakantha's rebuff has been given in the above chapter.

The Chief Minister of Orissa Sri Nabakrushna Choudhury was however extremely moved by the constructive criticism and approach of Pt. Nilakantha in Assembly matters. He persuaded both Nilakantha and the Prime Minister Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru that Nilakantha be back to the Congress. Pt. Nehru met Nilakantha at Rajbhawan, Cuttack. On 25th March, 1955, Pt. Nehru, the Prime Minister of India and President of the Indian National Congress wrote to Nilakantha in the following words :

“My dear friend,

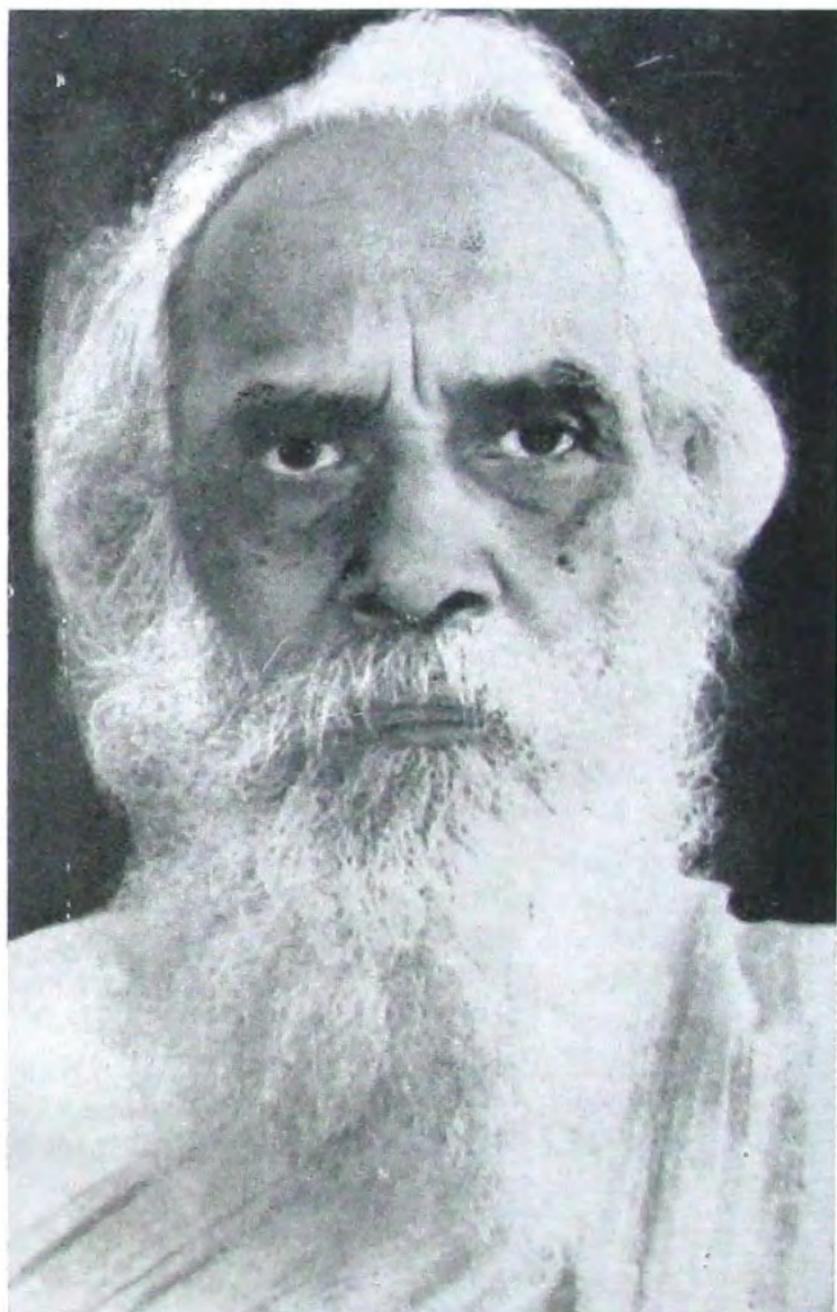
I am happy to learn that you have expressed a wish to come back to the Congress. You were in the old days a pillar of the Congress in Orissa and it was a matter of sorrow to me as to others that you should have left it fifteen years ago. I shall be happy indeed if you come back to the Congress and help us with your wise counsel.

Wish all good wishes,

Yours Sincerely,  
Jawaharlal Nehru”

Nilakantha consulted his constituency through personal discussions and public meetings and in May, 1955 returned to the folds of Indian National Congress.

Consequently he was elected unopposed to the Orissa Legislative Assembly from Satyavadi as a Congress candidate. It is recalled that Pt. Nilakantha had never lost in any election from whichever party he contested. His leadership of Orissa was fully restored when he was elected its Speaker on 27th May, 1957.



**NILAKANTHA,**  
Speaker, Orissa Legislative Assembly 1957-61

As the Speaker of the State Assembly, Nilakantha brought out two reforms in the existing rules and procedures. The Orissa Legislative Assembly Secretariate like those in other States was under the control of the Home Department. To Nilakantha this appeared to be an anomaly that the State Governments that are to execute the rules and bills passed by the Assembly should control its administration. He fought against it. Nilakantha states that it had taken him two long years to obtain the independence of the Secretariate from the State Government. An interesting thing happened at the last stage. When the Committee started delaying, Nilakantha gave a threat to the then Chief Minister Dr. Harekrushna Mahtab that he holds the key of the Assembly and neither Dr. Mahtab nor the Governor could call the Assembly to session till the point is decided. The Assembly having been told of it, orders were immediately passed under instructions of the Chief Minister.

His Second achievement was the change in the States' Legislative procedures after a fight with the Government of India. When as per the prevailing practice the State Government issued a notification that he ceased to function as Speaker with the fall of Dr. Mahtab's ministry in February '61, Pandit Das brought out a constitutional point under Article 179 that the Speaker is to continue in office till a new Speaker is elected. After long examination by the Union Government, Nilakantha was not only declared to have continued in his post, but a convention was created, whereby the Speaker remains in office till the new Speaker is elected.

## NILAKANTHA RETIRES FROM POLITICS : HIS LAST WORKS AND HONOURS

Soon after at a mid-term election in May '61, Nilakantha's candidacy was not approved by the Congress and he had to retire from politics against his will at the age of seventy seven. True, he was weak due to diabetes and an attack of Thrombosis, but he was vigorous, full of interest in public affairs and confident of his ability to make a contribution to the welfare of the State and the Country. He also had the full support of his constituency—Satyavadi. His ousting in such a premonitory manner pained him, but he told his supporters "I must honour the pledge have given to the Congress". This however provided him with an opportunity to devote full time to studies and writings.

Some portions of his Autobiography (Atma-Jivani) written earlier were lost and renowned literateurs of Orissa, including Dr. Kunja Bihari Das, one of his staunch admirers, requested him to re-write and complete it. At their earnest request Pandit Nilakantha started the work stating, "I do not possess the materials to write my biography—whatever comes to my mind, I will say, but I cannot say chronologically." This dictated Autobiography was published in 1963 and Nilakantha was awarded the Central Sahitya Akademy Award for this, the same year.

Then the collection of his works led to the publication of 'Nilakantha Granthabali'—part I, in 1963 and part II, in 1965. The part III was published on the 12th day of his death, whereas the materials given for the last part is yet to find the light of the day.

Apart from getting the Central Sahitya Academy Award for his Autobiography, thrilling honours for Nilakantha's contribution to Oriya literature in particular and Orissa in general were shown in various functions including the one by the Orissa Sahitya Academy, arranged by Dr. Harekrushna Mahtab, its President in 1961. Mention may also be made of the reception accorded to him on his 80th birth day, where Acharya Harihara, Dr. Radhanath Rath, Editor, Samaj, Prof. Bipin Bihari Roy and others wished him a long and happy life. Utkal Sahitya Samaj, an oldest literary organisation of Cuttack of which Pandit Nilakantha was a life member also unveiled his portrait at the Sriram Chandra Bhawan, Cuttack.

When Nilakantha got sick at the last stage of his life, he liked to stay with his eldest son-in-law, Shri D. Rath, a Superintending Engineer of the State Government. The Chief Minister of the time Shri Biju Patnaik and others who followed had given orders that the S. E. be not disturbed and Pandit Nilakantha be comfortable in this Government quarters. There were no procedures for any financial aid at that time and his wife Radhamani Devi was all along present to meet all the heavy expenditures from their property earnings and the royalty of Panditji's books.

Sri Biju Patnaik and Shri Biren Mitra had to quit the Chief Ministership in quick succession, having committed administrative improprieties as stated by Shri Lal Bahdur Shastri, the Prime Minister.

On the 21st February, 1965, Shri Sadasiv Tripathy was sworn in as the Chief Minister of Orissa. He phoned Pt. Nilakantha immediately to

express his gratitude and went to Cuttack to receive the blessings of the great old scholar and poet and leader. He felt the need of his good wishes. Shri Tripathy's esteem for Nilakantha had a long history behind it.

When the first elections in Orissa were held in 1937, no suitable Oriya candidate came forward to stand on behalf of the Congress at first. Everybody was terribly afraid of the British Government. Tripathy was an humble school teacher. He was reluctant to give up his job and become a candidate. His father was one of Nilakantha's admirers. When Nilakantha suggested that Tripathy stand for election as the Congress's choice, his father agreed. Tripathy joined the congress and won the election. Since then he had all along been a member of the Orissa Legislative Assembly. From that day Nilakantha became his guru in politics.

Illustrative of the extent to which he acted on Nilakantha's principles is the verdict of the enquiry made by the Khanna Commission into charges of corruption against the Orissa Ministry in 1967. The Commission commended the high moral tone of Tripathy's administration in the most glowing terms, whereas all other Chief Ministers in the enquiry had a black report.

Shri Tripathy was succeeded in 1967 by the leader of Orissa Swatantra Party, Shri R. N. Singh Deo, whose father was a great friend to Nilakantha and helped him in the Oriya movement. Nilakantha was not only being consulted by Shri Singh Deo, but his eldest son Ashok Das, a leading Advocate of Cuttack also became a true Advocate General in Singh Deo's administration. This was the last Chief Ministry Nilakantha saw in his life time.



## NILAKANTHA'S LAST DAYS

Pandit Nilakantha Das never possessed power. He had no liking for the role of disciplinarian and had little aptitude for administration. But his influence was irresistible. His was the power that could bring floods of tears to our eyes. From him flowed the strength to oppose and establish peace and contentment. His earthly body has returned to the earth in a blaze of glory. He was too candid by nature and too straightforward to be tainted by corruption. He was far removed from politics and mud-slinging. He had wanted to see how the people of the country made use of their newly acquired freedom and he saw. There was one thing about which he felt strongly, the Oriya language, his language. He loved it and he loved its literature. He was always looking for ways to develop its latent richness. He was the President of the Orissa Sahitya Academy and was contemplating the establishment of a 'Oriya Gabesana Sanstha', (The Oriya Research Institute.) It did not materialise.

In 1962 he was forced out of the political arena. It was not easy for him to take his departure in the manner he was obliged to. Once, as a child, he had to write a short piece on an old ox. "Perhaps," he commented drily, "I am as much of an encumbrance as that ox." ( Granthavali P. 121 ).

Great honour and fame had come to him but he had also to put up with much injustice. In 1955 the Utkal University conferred on him its highest degree in Literature. In 1956 he was awarded the Padma Bhusan by the Indian Government. In 1963 he won the Kendriya

Sahitya Akademi Prize for his Autobiography 'Atmajivani.' These honours, great as they were, added little to his own stature. The institutions that conferred them were more honoured in the giving than he in the acceptance. Nilakantha remained as Pandit Nilakantha.

At no time, in either victory or defeat, did Nilakantha's eyes lose the clarity of their vision. He was never heard to give expression to any disappointment or grief. When, at the end of his life, he was stricken with paralysis, he commented, "Nothing can harm me as long as my brain and my eyes are clear."

The light of eternity shone in his eyes as he lay on his death bed.

On the 6th November 1967, the fifth day of the bright fortnight of the Indian holy month Kartik, Nilakantha passed away. The Swatantra Govt. of Singh Deo arranged for the last rites to be performed with full state honours. A funeral procession set out for Satyavadi in the early hours of the evening. It was an open orderly procession, the State Police Party leading it. From Cuttack and Bhubaneswar, where it went round the main places, it proceeded, stopping at each of Nilakantha's favourite spots on the way. Flower offerings from Government and non-Governmental organisations were piled upon the bier as it passed. The Governor laid wreaths on it and so did the stream of common people and the leaders. Dr. Radhanath Rath, one of his associates of Satyavadi, arranged the procession.

The procession reached Satyavadi towards the end of the night, stopping at Pancha Sakha Pitha, the place of the Five Friends. Thousands

of people were present. Never before had a public figure been so richly honoured. A new precedent was set with show of the State Honour to this great man with no Government power. As the Eastern sky reddened and dawn came, the last mortal remains of the great Nilakantha were scattered to the winds. Lamentation rose in the groves of Satyavadi and the trees shook as the last strains of the material bugle died away.

Pandit Nilakantha Das was laid to rest in the beloved bakul grove at Satyavadi, the place of his first devotion, where Gopabandhu and Godavarish had already been laid, in the last hours of Monday, the day of Nilakantha, Lord Siva, on the 6th November, 1967.

In the grove where Nilakantha had at one time taught more than a thousand young men voices from his beloved countrymen, Ministers and Leaders rose crying.

“He was a man such as a man should be.”

A memorial was later built on the spot inscribed with the immortal words of the poet in his famous work ‘KONARKE’.



## FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Pandit Nilakantha Das stands before our admiring gaze in the full glory of his final achievement, a national figure of whom the country is rightly proud. He was far above the ordinary freedom fighter or petty politician. Even in his old age portrait, his eyes look out at us with a childish directness, twinkling with humour, curiosity and amusement. His face had a serene detachment. He has an absorbed, remote expression. When he spoke in public his pointed words came out forcefully in a kind of droll. Those same eyes could flash above the full white moustache and flowing beard. He was critical in his judgement, stern and realistic in his assessment of situation.

The situations he had to face were not only political; they were social, cultural, national. To know any leader, it is necessary to know the conditions in which he grew up, the crisis he faced in his formative years, how he dealt with personal problems, what explanation he gives to them in his memoirs and how he was regarded by his friends and colleagues.

Nilakantha's laughter was rich and full. It came easily. He was a strong and fearless man who could not be intimidated, a man to whom veneration and honour came spontaneously.

The community in which Nilakantha was born and grew up was tight and secure. It had the firm support of ancient and unquestioned tradition. Nilakantha enjoyed the emotional and psychological freedom from anxiety that makes for the development of a strong personality and its vigorous growth. His

place in the community was impregnable. But the community took precedence over the individual. This was not a handicap because the relationship between the community and individual was harmonious. The individual did not feel any threat. His position was not affected by anything he did or said.

Within this firm and sustaining network of relationships, Nilakantha enjoyed a special degree of affection and indulgence as the only son of the parents, having been born to them at a very last stage. The other children were older. They were girls. It may be safely assumed that he was their pet. He appears to have been a healthy, happy child, fond of games. He does not appear to have been thwarted. He was guided. And his father had his own way of guiding him. Ananda Das had to give up his bad habits like taking 'Bhang' setting him an example of how to deal with weaknesses that needed to be overcome. The boy Nilakantha was deeply and permanently influenced by his father's austere self-abnegation. Until he left home to study at Puri he was completely dominated by his father an ideal guardian. His departure for Puri was his first independent act. He left home secretly, without telling his father, informing him from Puri through a postcard of his decision to study at Puri away from the Village.

Of the companions of his childhood who remained Nilakantha's lifelong friends and associates, Harihar was the most devoted. He was his cousin, older by about three years. It was Harihar who introduced him to Gopabandhu Das. Harihar was a generous, warmhearted man who always had a good word for everybody. He never thought of himself and was

untroubled by personal ambitions. He had no enemies. In the early, strenuous days of Satyavadi, Harihar often took a broken-down cycle and rode into town to get some fish for Nilakantha. Incidentally it may be mentioned that Nilakantha was renowned as a pond-fish-eater throughout his life. Harihar possessed an exceptionally large mosquito-net and invited others to share it. He looked after the young idealists of Satyavadi like a loving parent. In 1921, when Satyavadi became a National college, the Satyavadi Vihara, it was Harihar who was chosen to be its head.

Kripasindhu was also a kinsman from a village, nor far from Satyavadi. Kripasindhu was two years younger than Nilakantha and three years below him in the Puri District School. Kripasindhu was a tireless and steady worker. He took his M. A. in Philosophy and became a research scholar of extra-ordinary erudition. He married a girl of little education, Savitri, taught her himself and succeeded in making her the kind of wife best suited to a man of his temperament.

Kripasindhu joined Satyavadi in 1914, left it when decline set in and founded an Oriya School at Bahadagora in Dhalbhum district in Bihar returning in 1921. Kripasindhu was the first of the five friends to die. Gopabandhu himself completed the unfinished portion of his fine 'History of Orissa', a study to which Kripasindhu devoted his whole life. As far as it is known, Kripasindhu kept no personal records. His detached historical outlook is sure to throw invaluable light on the relationship between the friends if any ever comes to light. Harihar also left no record. Kripasindhu and Harihar were

silent workers who sought only the best in everything and everybody.

Gopabandhu Das was the inspiration of Satyavadi. It was his idea. He was a charismatic figure who attracted many idealistic young men. They came from far and near, eager to participate in the work being done at Satyavadi. Nilakantha, Harihar, Kripasindhu and Ananta Misra were local boys. Nanda Kishore and Godavarish came from some distance away. Gopabandhu infused them with equal enthusiasm. They became his co-workers and proselytes. Gopabandhu was convinced that the greatness of a people lies in their capacity for self-denial, their willingness to cheerfully undergo hardship in a noble cause. He dreamt of training a band of revolutionary workers at Satyavadi who would change the face of Orissa. For the difficulties faced by Satyavadi from its inception he blamed his own inability and that of his colleagues. In an article written in his old age, Gopabandhu says, "It is to be regretted that we could not sustain our efforts. Students had to be sent up for the University examinations. Concern for their results gradually became paramount. Less and less time was given to our other activities. We, who had regarded ourselves as humble servants of the villagers, became interested in colleges. Little by little we became involved in the larger affairs of the country as a whole. Without realising it we were turning back to the towns, away from the country side. The purpose for which the school was sounded was not realised in practice."

Gopabandhu died in an humbly thatched cottage at Satyavadi. None of his former

associates had come to join him in his last efforts to train a band of young men Nilakantha was a member of the central Legislative Assembly. So was Godavarish in Provincial Legislative, Nilakantha, after Gopabandhu's death, established 'Gopabandhu Seva Prasthan' at Satyavadi to carry on his work but even that was not a success.

In 1902, Gopabandhu had initiated Nilakantha into the service of this country. Nilakantha cherished the memory and his esteem for Gopabandhu never waned. He did not, however, approve blindly of everything Gopabandhu did. He found the political role Gopabandhu sought to impose upon Godavarish, Kripasindhu and himself repugnant. In 1918 Gopabandhu sent him away from Satyavadi and forbade him to stay in the hostel. The remarks made on this incident by Nilakantha became known from Godavarish's memoirs. Nilakantha spoke about it with some bluntness. Nilakantha's assessments of situations was not always the same as Gopabandhu's. He thought Gopabandhu was too pious, too abject a devotee of the Lord Krishna. He was frankly critical of Gopabandhu's poems on **Dharmapada** and **Gomahatmya**. Readers he declared, would respond with contempt. Gopabandhu protested against this attitude of Nilakantha.

There were other differences between the two leaders. Nilakantha took exception not only to his writing but also to his conduct. The affair of the 'Samaj' Press was one such example. The press was purchased with a fund built up from contributions made by the teachers of Satyavadi. The salaries of graduate teachers were equalised as per the scale of the Government when the school became a

recognised Government institution. Up to that time salaries had been paid according to need. The teachers now continued on the old basis and the balance was put into the fund. The fund was for the general use of the school. Gopabandhu had the press separated from the school and put in his own name. Nilakantha had purchased a building to house the press at Satyavadi in the meantime. Gopabandhu, without informing Nilakantha, sold the building to the Emar Matha and moved the press to town. After Gopabandhu's death Nilakantha became the Editor of the 'Samaj' for some time, but was forced to forego the editorship of the weekly 'Samaj' in a deplorable manner.

Mention must be made here of the Servants of India Society or Lok Sevak Samaj, and Nilakantha's relation to it. The Lok Sevak Samaj was founded in Lahore in 1920. In February 1926 Lala Lajpat Roy invited Gopabandhu to become a member. Gopabandhu joined. A branch was established in Cuttack. Shri Lingaraj Misra and Shri Mathura Nanda Mahanty joined the following year. Both of them were inspired by Gopabandhu's example. Gopabandhu handed over the Satyavadi Press to the Lok Sevak Samaj on his death bed.

For a man of as independent a mind as Nilakantha, it was not possible to identify himself with the Lok Sevak Samaj. He was an intellectual, an individualist. He could not submerge his personality to the extent demanded by the Lok Sevak Samaj. But Nilakantha was careful to spare what he regarded as weaknesses in Gopabandhu. He attended on Gopabandhu and was by the side of his Guru constantly when he fell ill at Satyavadi, coming all the way from his village at

Sriramchandrapur. Nilakantha writes in his memoirs, "I stood dumb for 10-15 minutes before his death and felt like groaning in darkness, when Gopabandhu, our friend and guide, passed away."

Two leaders remained in Orissa after the passing of Gopabandhu, Nilakantha and Godavarish. It is astonishing to consider how different they were from each other, despite the closeness of their association down the years. Their friendship passed through four distinct stages beginning from when they were students at Puri. They were both boarders and Nilakantha became Godavarish's unofficial guardian. Nilakantha was the monitor of the Hostel. He was Godavarish's ideal. A revolutionary movement was in progress among the students. And the spirit of change persuaded them both to pledge themselves to work for the reform of Hindu Society when they were staying at No. 9 Panchanan Ghosh Lane. This reform is usually known as Moustache Revolution.

But how long did Nilakantha keep his moustache only? Godavarish tells up that, "A big celebration was held at Satyavadi when the school was given Government recognition. Shri Ramaballav Misra, Collector Puri, presided over the function. At his suggestion Sri Sadasiv Misra, the Mahamahopadhyay, was invited. This gentleman had always regarded the Satyavadi School with extreme distaste. He considered it a source of trouble. But we were all his pupils, even Gopabandhu. We all welcomed him bowing to the ground to touch his feet in a body. He forgave us then and there. It was, I think, after this that Nilakantha added a beard to his moustache. So did Harihar. I did not."

Godavarish describes his relationship with Nilakantha in the following terms, "I was not exactly a friend nor was I a colleague. I was no more than a devoted attendant really. Some of the students called me his serving man. When Nilakantha and I bathed at the same time, I used to wash and bring his wet clothes home over my shoulder. For this, many students called me 'Nilakantha Babu's load carrying servant. In many ways there was no resemblance at all between us. He idealised the best : I idealised the most liked. He was of dark-complexioned : I was fair. He was addicted to the chewing of betel : I was not. He used snuff to clean his teeth : I did not. He was fond of fish : I preferred sweets. He was good at disciplining others : I was not." Elsewhere Godavarish writes, "I was closely associated with Nilakantha from my very first day at Satyavadi. Our friendship was unmarred by any disagreement but when I returned from Calcutta I felt a rift appeared in our relationship within those nine months. It was a small crack at first but small cracks widen into open breaches." Godavarish and Nilakantha worked together at times but also grew steadily more and more apart. That is a separate chapter in this National life. Nilakantha spoke of Godavarish in the highest terms, describing him as an elitist, cultivated and refined in his tastes and conduct, a perfect gentleman. Nilakantha knew Godavarish had been born very poor and that he had a hard struggle to grow up and educate himself. Godavarish dreamed of establishing himself, of getting a good job. Godavarish was ambitious. Every week he would work out the cross word puzzles in the Times of India and sent them in with the hope of winning. He was persistent

in his efforts to become chairman of the Puri District Board. Gopabandhu once sent for Nilakantha and others to advise them secretly, 'not to put Godavarish in any post where money is concerned.' Ultimately Godavarish was dragged to the High Court for the misappropriation of money belonging to the Berhampur Cooperative Bank.

Godavarish describes his plight himself. To him Nilakantha was godlike, both in his character and his conduct, but he did not refrain from noting and commenting on his frailties. In a letter written in 1945, he tells his party workers how he felt to be a minister during 1941 to 1944 in war conditions. "I had to serve my country as best as I could, humbly and in silence. I had accepted the post of a minister against my wishes. It did not seem proper to me to align myself in a poor way with any particular group. I had never done that. I resolved not to do it when I became a minister. The winning of independence for India as a whole was our programme. Part of it was the regeneration of Oriya Society. I pledged myself to work for the realisation of our aims through justice and truth. No sectional interest or party funds ever influenced my judgement. I hoped the newly established journal, 'Naba Bharat', would affirm the principles by which we swore, and that the income from its sales would be our main source of financial support. Organisational work is not congenial to me. I made no attempt to do it. "Let me be off," I said, "and follow the instructions of my guru and not me. I am a small man."

When, at the insistence of Gopabandhu, Nilakantha returned to his village in 1918, he had lost nearly all his sympathy for Satyavadi.

The decline of the school dates from this time. "Gopabandhu founded Satyavadi with high hopes", Godavarish recalls. "To me he seemed to be planting a seed. It grew rapidly and became a sturdy sapling. But when it flowered and bore fruits it soon began to wither. It turned out that we were not of one mind. Differences arose among us. The work of the school lost urgency and slackened. Some of us began to translate English poetry during school hours. Others, instead of taking classes stayed at home and looked after their family affairs." Nilakantha who was the head of Satyavadi from the 11th. October 1911 to the 17th. September 1918, became almost powerless after this. "He loss his leadership" says Jastice Harihar Mohapatra, a former student of Satyavadi and with that Satyavadi declined.

Nilakantha of course tried to revive the institution when he joined it as a lecturer sometime after he came from Sambalpur in 1921, but Satyavadi disintegrated in course of time. From 1928 after the death of Gopabandhu to 1943 Nilakantha was at the helm of the Orissa Congress and preoccupied with its affairs. He often found himself isolated in party politics because he remained independent in his way of thinking and an inveterate individualist.

When the supreme moment came in the fight for freedom he found himself very far removed from the Congress High command. The opponents of Satyavadi took advantage of the situation. He was slandered. Some even sought to turn Bhallavbhai Patel in 1938 against him. The vilification had started even before Gopabandhu's death.

Nilakantha has told the story of how he was turned out of Gopabandhu's beloved Samaj. Lala Lajpat Roy sent in a worker from outside. Shri Mohanlal went to Satyavadi and Nilakantha's enemies there apparently succeeded in turning him against him. As a result, Nilakantha had to leave 'Samaj' shortly after Gopabandhu's death.

His own family home in Shriramchandra-pur was the only place left to him. He kept a sharp eye on its welfare. His father had said, "May I see this thatched cottage replaced by a permanent structure before I die." Nilakantha carried out his father's wishes in the two years he spent in Shriramchandrapur after leaving Satyavadi. The new residence was a tasteful and comfortable building set in a grove of cocoanut trees. The trees had been planted and the good bit of landed property acquired were managed by his father and then his father-in-law.

Godavarish also, in pursuit of the Satyavadi ideals, built a house for himself in his home village, Banpur. After the death of his brother, Narayan Das, Gopabandhu had also to look after his landed property as long as he was alive. Unfortunately, neither Gopabandhu nor Godavarish could stay in their villages. It is said that after his brother's death Gopabandhu discovered there were over a hundred debtors. In his anxiety to avoid a clash with the villagers which appeared to be imminent, he set fire to the incriminating documents.

Godavarish derived his personal income from fourteen acres of orchard and ten acres of paddy land. He looked forward to a quiet and peaceful old age in Banpur but his hopes were not realised and he was eventually forced out.

Nilakantha's hold on his village and his home and family was firm. He did not hesitate to resort to the courts when necessary in order to protect his property and his rights. Nilakantha was a staunch friend, a fervent patriot, a selfless servant of the country, a teacher devoted to the welfare of his students, a poet and a thinker. There was no limit to his magnanimity. But he could not tolerate anyone taking advantage of his goodness in order to deprive him of what was his, by right.

He was the father of five daughters. Two died in infancy. He performed his duties as the father of the three remaining girls faithfully. When the children were small, he saw to it that they received the best education, though for the girls, higher education was not easy in those days. He was not in favour of discriminating between sons and daughters. And he risked the disapproval of his sons by giving a share of some land he had bought out of his own earnings to his daughters. This was another aspect of the sense of justice and generosity of Nilakantha.

Widows who had no one to look after them always found shelter with Radhamoni in his village home. Nilakantha frequently took his family with him on his trips to Delhi and Calcutta. He wanted them to see India's capital and famed beauty spots. His father and mother never lacked the veneration and care due to their age and position. After their death Nilakantha and Radhamoni travelled to Gaya to perform the last rites as per the wishes of his father.

In the early years of his life as a family man in the village, Nilakantha made much of

the easy fellowship of community life, encouraging the young men to develop self-reliance and enterprise. He wanted his own children to acquire these traits too. A letter he wrote to his younger son, Bikram, when he was a boarder at the Cuttack Collegiate School, shows this concern. He lays stress on the most difficult of all examinations, that of life, in order to pass which the cultivation of one's own humanity is necessary. The letter, written in Oriya when an examination was pending is quoted here in full.

May the Lord Jagannath do good.

Dear Bikram,

How do you think you have fared in your examinations ? Don't let it worry you, whether you have done well or otherwise. A man must work. Yet he has little to do with the fruits of his efforts. This way he has to engage himself in all works, otherwise he grows restless and his humanity suffers.

Your wellwisher,

Nilakantha Das.

The dream Nilakantha first dreamt at Satyavadi stayed with him all his life. It was still vivid in his old age. For the sake of the village, for the sake of Satyavadi he continued to be active in politics with the spirit of a youngman even after he himself had been cast out.

In 1951 Godavarish became his colleague once again in spite of all the misunderstandings that had separated them. All was forgotten. In that year Nilakantha was once again elected from Satyavadi defeating the rival candidate set up by the powerful Congress, by a wide

margin. Radhamani Devi and Bikram, his second son were at his side throughout the campaign. Bikram has stated that his father did not look like a beggar of votes. They saw in him a helmsman. People of all conditions, old and young, looked upon him as one of themselves, their own man.

Nilakantha wanted the support of the young men and it was in the hope of winning it, and with much of self-confidence he became a leader of the Swadhin Jan Sangh in the opposition party, when he joined the Orissa Assembly. Bikram was in America at the time. Nilakantha wrote from the Naba Bharat Press ; "A great deal of work is waiting for me in the political field. Circumstances are changing slowly. I am not a person to give up hope. ... I have the energy of a much younger man... .. I am very busy." In another letter, he wrote, "I do everything. But there is nobody with me and I feel very much lonely. There is nobody either in front or behind me now. The way I used to be trusted still surprises me. Now I regret circumstances do not favour my kind of activity although there is plenty of scope for it. Godavarish is unwell for about two months. x x x No body is able to diagnose the disease."

His political associates had been like members of his own family to him throughout his career. And so had been the writers and poets associated with him in his literary life.

Nilakantha often said, "My writing is still suffused with a sense of spiritual inadequacy. I am fearful of being misunderstood and read whatever I write to anyone who will listen. If my hearer objects to a sentence or statement, I atonce change it and read it out to him again."

Many distinguished people, writers themselves, were eager listeners and eager to praise. Raghunath Misra, Basudev Mohapatra and many other literateurs belonged to the Satyavadi circle. Basudev Mohapatra helped him to write the explanations in the first edition of "Konarke" and wrote a commentary. The second edition was published at the Naba Bharat Press. At that time Nilakantha sought the opinion of Dr. Mayadhar Mansingh. He had just returned from abroad and was acquainted with the newest literary trends. Among the numerous others who admired Nilakantha and enjoyed listening to him were Pandit Banamber Acharya, Radha Mohan Garanayak, Karunakar Kar. A kinsman and a mature poet and one of the foremost literary figures of our times, Dr. Kunja Bihari Das, was also a member of Nilakantha's literary family. "For nearly thirty years, I was closely associated with this large hearted man," Dr. Das writes, "He wrote to me and I wrote to him when I was the head of the Department of Sanskrit and Culture and when I was a lecturer in Oriya literature in Balasore. We also corresponded while he was writing his "Oriya Sahityar Krama Parinam," his great history of the evolution of Oriya literature."

Nilakantha's concern for the young writers who came to his assistance was as deep as ever. It can be seen in the following letter :

Kunja Bihari—

You are doing so much for me. My debt to you will never be paid... .. Why should I object to my essays being put in an order that is more scientific ? But please send me a copy of the final form you give them... .. (letter dated 19. 2. 55).

## CONCLUSION

In the woodlands of Orissa where recluses practised their austerities, Nilakantha was a mighty forest giant. His mind was as calm as a lake, deep in the heart of the wild. Waves rose and flowed on his surface, subsiding like dreams. A great book could have been written if somebody close to him had taken the trouble to record his thoughts and feelings during these last years. He had inspired hundreds as he made his painful way forward on foot. His youthfulness was legendary. His countenance shone with a regal radiance. What if he was an uncrowned king. He walked with his head high.

Nilakantha was also a strong man Physically, as much at home in the countryside as in the city. He never lost himself in the fascinating novelties of the towns on his many journeys from Cuttack to Calcutta, Delhi and Simla. Five to ten miles a day was a short walk to a man of his hardy physique. An elderly resident of his village recalls: "He was most at home among the rural people. His character had been formed among them as a child. He understood them and they understood him well". To his country heart an urban-mind had been perfectly matched. The blending was a boon. When Nilakantha put on his country clothes and walked among the people he was one of them. Old and young came crowding round. He was very much their own even though for us he has now become a part of history.

### DR. MISRA'S EXPERIENCE

Dr. Narendra Nath Misra, the Reader in Oriya, in Santiniketan described his experience.

“India had just achieved independence. Freedom was only a month-old. The liberated country of our utopian dream had broken in two. Disillusioning clouds often overcast our hopes.

One evening, by chance, I happened to see Pandit Nilakantha from a distance. He was seated on a platform, speaking. His face glowed in its frame of flowing white beard. I heard him say.

“A developing Society expresses itself in literature. By literature we had always understood something contained in and confined to books.” That day Nilakantha turned our eyes away from books. He made us see, we looked into the living heart of mankind. He guided us skilfully out of our landlocked lake into the open sea. How many things he spoke of. Folk literature, oral literature, fairy tales, legends, rhyming games, children’s songs, the study of the best and highest ideals of social freedom, the emergence of a world order, the self-fulfillment of the individual, Russian as a language and literature. Would I ever have the privilege of bowing at the feet of this wonderful man ? I never thought it possible.

The opportunity came seven years later, in September 1954, at Santiniketan. He was the examiner of my thesis on **Balaram Das and the Oriya Ramayana**. He had read it in advance and commented on it from many angles in a way that made its publication by Viswa Bharati possible. That day, I faced the hardest test of my life. I do not remember what questions he asked me or what replies I gave. I do remember that the discussion was not confined to Oriya literature. He went on to speak of a Sanskrit metre of which I had only a superficial knowledge. He rebuked

me gently, saying that my culture would never ripen to fullness no matter how much I studied, unless I was familiar with Sanskrit. His manner was so persuasive, he won my heart completely during his two days' stay at Santiniketan.

Acharya Kshiti Mohan Sen was the head of Viswa Bharati at that time. A meeting was held at Cheena Bhavan. Pandit Nilakantha was seated in the center in a comfortable chair with Kshiti Mohan Sen on one side and Annada Sankar Ray on the other. Annada Sankar was the Chairman. He spoke with a good deal of emotion, saying Pt. Nilakantha was the living symbol of the spirit of India and the art of Orissa which produced Konarka, preserving in exquisite stone carvings the magnificent concept of the spirit and soul of the province and the country. Nilakantha was a school teacher, a freedom fighter, a servant of the people but, over and above everything else, a poet for all times. The Santiniketan ashram was honoured by the visit of a poet of his stature.

Kshiti Mohan Sen, in conclusion, said,

“I have toured the whole of India with my bag on my shoulder. I have known Nilakantha and Gopabandhu from the early days of Satyavadi. The opportunity of attending meetings at Puri with Nilakantha had come to me. In knowledge and wisdom he is far beyond me though he may be younger in years. He is like my brother. In the way he has interpreted the Maitri Dharma of Jagannatha heretoday, he has been able to show a noble humanity that supplies all out lacks and establishes the foundation of a complete realisation of human destiny.” The aged Vice-Chancellor of Viswa Bharati and the Guru of Rabindranath's Ashram

thus gave finality to Pandit Nilakantha Das's contribution to his country and his time.

After the meeting the Oriya teachers and students followed him to Ratan Kuti where he was staying. He had already partaken of his evening meal. We had made up our minds to bow to the ground and take the dust of his feet when we took our leave of him.

Panditji came out of his room and invited us into the sitting room. He asked each of us separately about ourselves. What could we tell him? We poured out our hearts as we replied. His lecture had moved all of us profoundly. He seemed to be suffering deeply, looking at us with hope and encouragement in his eyes. "We could not save Satyavadi" he said and continued, "Satyavadi would have survived and become what Santiniketan is to-day, an ideal forest school in a free and independent India. But Gopabandhu was born an Oriya and there had been no Nationalism and no man equal to Bengalees. Janaki Nath Bose father of Subhas Bose had prepared a scheme to revive Satyavadi. It is our fault that the scheme was not implemented." Nilakantha had a great deal to say about the ancient Oriya ideals and their wide influence. "This place, Birbhum, chosen by Rabindranath Tagore for his forest school was once a part of Rardh, a part of Orissa, and had stretched from as far north as Gaya to the Sea." Nilakantha urged us to examine ourselves and discover what was hidden in the depths of our hearts rather than look to outside things, no matter how glamorous they might be. He considered it the special role of Orissa to bring friendship and goodwill to a world torn by conflict and hatred. Orissa's destiny was

her own. It would not change. That was the noble conviction he inspired in us that evening.

The night was half over when we at last took our leave, bowed before him and returned to our hostel.

A year or so later, I had another opportunity to meet Panditji. This time I worked with him closely at the Naba Bharat Press where my book was being printed. The press was not doing very well and I helped it with the work in many ways in addition to attending to my own galley proof. It was a never-to-be-forgotten month.

The country was suddenly devastated by a flood at this time. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru came to show his sympathy with the afflicted people. In the course of his speech he made the statement that floods are not wholly a disaster because they enrich the land with a deposit of silt that ultimately increases the yield.

Nehru met Nilakantha at the Raj Bhavan later in the day. He was in the opposition in the Orissa Assembly. He faced Nehru squarely. "People were starving and without shelter," he said. "The floods had swept away all Orissa's stocks of grain. What they need is to be made to feel their welfare was of some concern and the country they were living in was their own."

Nehru was so impressed, he requested Nilakantha to return to the Indian National Congress, there and then.

Another incident that was memorable occurred at this time. Panditji had agreed to write an introduction to my book. Time passed, The introduction was not forthcoming. The printing of the book was completed. Panditji

was still unable to get down to the writing. I being an humble young student, began to take down what he had to say by dictation. He began with the Ramayana. When was the Ramayana composed? Of what time? Which Dasaratha was he? Was Dasaratha from Mesopotamia or Egypt? Or somewhere else? He rambled on and on at greater and greater length. I did not say a word. To me it seemed a strange and wonderful chapter was being added to my book may be more than the book itself, both in volume and quality.

Paramananda Acharya arrived at this juncture. Panditji introduced me asking me to read out what he had just dictated. The Acharya was a puratattvavid, an Archaeologist. His criticism was penetrating and he always favoured brevity. The first eight or ten pages were quickly reduced to a single paragraph.

As we worked Panditji told us a story. The Acharya liked it so much, he wanted it to be put into the introduction.

“There was a very poor family,” Panditji said, recalling his childhood,” and on a certain very stormy evening the children, gathered around their grandfather and in course of their talk asked him,

‘What will the Raja be going now?’

The grandfather answered,

‘Must be enjoying rice fried from a painted cocoanut shell.



**PART - II**  
**ACHIEVEMENTS**

*“Man is not immortal. However active and powerful a man might be, the end of his deeds is inevitable. Man dies, but his deeds do not. In the kingdom of God, the idea is eternal. The idea manifested through the deeds is the seed of progress in the law of creation. The deeds of progress implanted by Gopabandhu in Orissa are the contributions by him to the Nation.”*

—NILAKANTHA

## NILAKANTHA, THE SOCIAL REFORMER

Nilakantha's experience as a teacher led directly to his becoming a social reformer. An association called the Hindu Samaj was formed at No. 9, Panchanan Ghosh Lane, Calcutta to implement his revolutionary ideas of changes that would be of benefit to the people. The Hindu Samaj was enthusiastically welcomed by the Oriya students although some were more enthusiastic than others. It was resolved that caste distinctions would not be observed either in matters of food or in matters of marriage. As the opening salvo in their campaign, Nilakantha shaved off his beard. He retained his moustache. Godavarish, who had never shaved in his life before, did the same. To keep a moustache without a beard was not the practice among the Brahmins of Orissa. The non-conformity to the age-long practice by these two young men made their reform movement known as 'Neesa Andolan' or 'Moustache movement.' It soon began to gain a lot of momentum as the movement was in fact against all long-standing evil social customs.

In an Essay written by Nilakantha on the subject he describes at length how the orthodox Brahmins of the Shasan penalised his impertinence. Opinions were gathered, the Shastras quoted. Statements were taken from the most ignorant and the most learned Brahmins. Chapters and verses were cited from Panini's *Astadhyayi* and the Vedas. The magnitude of the fuss dumbfounded Nilakantha. An offender against caste rules was usually asked to pay a fine of eighteen rupees or eighteen paise even with eighteen pahulas if a Sudra was involved. Brahmins were immune. Nothing a Brahmin did

was an offence. But expiatory rites were drawn up for Nilakantha. With remarkable restraint Nilakantha enquired of the Brahmins what his offence was. It was not easy to get a straight answer. With much difficulty Nilakantha finally learned he had committed a sin in retaining his moustache and shaving off his beard. Beards and moustaches are allowed to go together; either both or neither.

The keeping of a moustache may have been a fashion when Nilakantha was a student. Many students at the Calcutta University appear to have done so. No photograph exists of Nilakantha at that age. It is a matter of speculation how long Nilakantha kept only his moustache and when and in what circumstances he grew a beard again. During his early student life in Calcutta Nilakantha was an ardent modernist. It is possible that his moustache symbolised his modernity. It is unbelievable that Nilakantha would grow a beard under social pressure. It may be that he was influenced by ancient Aryan custom. He wrote at this time, "My moustache has no special features. It signifies my attainment of manhood. It is right under my nose, in its proper place. I know some people regard it as not exclusively mine, as if I had picked it up somewhere, a bauble that caught my fancy. Liking it is matter of taste. Nobody can object. But when I arrived in the village with it, the Shasoni Brahmins looked askance at me. They wanted to take it away. It was my sweet will to pick up a pebble on the way. On reaching the village I found them declaring it holy and worshiping it with elaborate rituals installing it on a holy cradle. The difference between having and not having a moustache is no greater than the

difference between wiping ones face with a hand towel and a handkerchief. I did not see anybody whom I could ask for an explanation. I had shaved off my beard and kept my moustache because of my personal preference, of my own free will. But the people of the village came forward with a set of expiatory rites, I was expected to perform..

Nilakantha tells us how such expiatory rites were forced on people of lower castes. Panu Dhoba, the washerman was found guilty of the Fly-Sin. It was a common belief that if a sore or wound turned septic when a fly alighted upon it, the Fly-Sin had been committed. Expiatory rites were obligatory. Nilakantha had himself seen punishment inflicted upon Kela Behera for causing the death of a cow. It is *gobadh*, a major offence, if a cow is accidentally entangled in the rope to which it is tied and strangles itself. But a Brahmin does not incur any sin or guilt even if he kills a cow with his own hands. An old cow put its nose into the field of Guna Rath of Sankarsanpur. Rath struck it so hard that his stick broke. The poor beast staggered off and died a short distance away. Rath lamented the loss of his stick. He did not grieve for the cow. Brahmins, by telling their beads and practising *pranayam*, cleanse themselves and others of all defilment and guilt. Nilakantha incurred the disfavour of the orthodox in other things as well as in the matter of his beard. Nilakantha condemned strongly the practice of drinking liquor at the holy service of the village deity, an image fashioned of clay, and other irregularities that had come to be tolerated by village society, as part of Tantric rites. The father of one of Nilakantha's friends, of the same age cursed him in the foulest

language because he maintained that young men sinned in not blindly obeying their elders. On another occasion Guna Rath quarreled with an elderly Brahmin of his acquaintance. Words led to blows. The old man fell to the ground. Others ran to his rescue and saved his life. The parties concerned invoked the law and a case was on the point of being started when Nilakantha intervened and settled the dispute out of court. Nilakantha comments sarcastically, "If, instead of protesting, I had just hit the old man myself, I would probably not have been cursed." In another place he describes himself as a person with the bad habit of asking the reason for things. "Beasts ask no questions. They do what has to be done under the circumstances without a murmur. A man who does that is no better than a beast. It gives me no pleasure to do anything without first considering what I am doing and why and the consequences of my action, past, present and future," He says.

Krishna Chandra Tripathy, a kinsman of Nilakantha, once broached the subject of doing penance in the matter of the beard. Their conversation on the subject is most curious.

"In what way does keeping a moustache so degrade a man that he commits a sin?" Nilakantha questioned him.

"The keeping of a moustache is not a common practice in our society," Tripathy countered, "that's why. What harm does it do to refrain from doing things of which everybody disapproves? Isn't it better to do what is generally liked, even if you have acquired an academic training? What's the good of all your learning if people have no regard for you? Of

what use is a moustache ? Can't you learn English without one ?"

Nilakantha and Tripathy were travelling by the same train from Sakhigopal to Puri. Nilakantha was teaching at Satyavadi. Students usually accompanied him on his trips back and forth from the school but that day Tripathy found him alone. He took the opportunity to launch a long dissertation. Nilakantha later analysed Tripathy's mentality for the benefit of his students (1) Nothing ought to be done that is not in accord with the practice current in the local society of the day, or of which people disapprove. (2) A man must conduct himself always in a manner that is pleasing to others. (3) What is the good of doing anything that is not conducive to the immediate benefit of one's own family ?

Nilakantha, in extremely harsh terms, proved to the students the fatuousness of these propositions, citing incidents of the way they are misused. Caste, he pointed out, is a commodity. It can be purchased. A man named Hari, by paying money, became Subal Mishra, thereby acquiring the status of a high-ranking Brahmin. No Brahmin had set foot in his house as long as his caste status was inferior, but everybody came to dine with Subal Mishra, stuffing themselves with pallau and fried rice. Hari's position in village society was transformed by his spending of a little cash. Nilakantha also told the story of a Deputy Magistrate who built a latrine next to his residence. That was, ordinarily, an extremely objectionable thing to do. The whole neighbourhood was polluted. But the man was a Deputy. No offence was taken. "Become a Deputy,

Nilakantha was advised, "keep retainers, provide for dependents. No-body will mind if you keep a moustache or not."

In his account of the Essays 'Nisa' and 'Mo-Nisa', Nilakantha decries the conduct of Brahmins in general and criticises the way they practice their religion. Once, when he was a boy, he was walking down a road with a Brahmin. They had some ten more miles to go. The Brahmin felt an urge to urinate whenever they came to a water point. Nilakantha, being a boy, relieved himself freely, anywhere. The Brahmin was extremely annoyed. The whole way he lectured the boy on the hygiene of urinating near water, quoting chapter and verse to prove his point. Brahmins, he claimed, enjoy good health because of their clean habits. When Nilakantha asked how the sides of a pond or river could not be polluted by taking a palmful of water from it, the Brahmin embarked on a long tirade. To Nilakantha what he said sounded like the raving of a superstitious drug addict.

There was a man in the village named Laru Das. Laru suffered from Filaria. He was addicted to opium. He would lift up his pipe and recite, "Bow to Krishna, the Black and He will take away all your pain." Then Laru would display his deformed limbs to explain what is pain.

People are subjected to all Kinds of humiliation in the name of caste. One Govinda Bhoi, one day mounted a horse belonging to the Samantas. A feast was held at which the caste elders discussed the matter. Somebody ventured to remark, "A horse is the Samanta's totem animal. To us, it is an elephant." Somebody else added, "Govinda has ridden the horse. He

has triumphed over our caste." Orders were immediately given to bind Govindha's hands and feet and throw him into a patch of brambles.

Nilakantha pinpointed many superstitions and bigoted social practices in two essays based on his own experiences, *Amar thila-o-karan thae pare*. He had to face the criticism of the Shashani Brahmins of his village in regard to his own conduct. The wearing of shoes or slippers was not approved. A dhoti should not be allowed to brush the ground in front. Villagers went barefoot and tucked their dhotis into their waistbands. Tunics were not worn during meals. On one occasion Nilakantha sat and chatted with a Muslim hakim who had come to visit the village. He accepted a paan (betel), the hakim offered. The Brahmins were furious. Yet the betel leaf was sold regularly in the village by Muslims and Lime was sold by a Christian and a Bauri (Harijan). But the Brahmins were outraged when Nilakantha accepted paan from a hakim. When Nilakantha asked them to explain the cause of their anger they declared their ancestors had never done such things, but were purchasing the betel leaf or lime as such and he should not go beyond that. Nilakantha used the incident to illustrate how blind adherence to past beliefs and practices demean a man and diminish his humanity. Anyone who questioned a belief or practice of this kind was considered to have at once lost both his caste and dharma. Society had become a herd of animals, an association of unreasoning beasts, senselessly activated by blind imitation of an outmoded past. Man can lose his status as a reasonable creature with such attachments for the past beliefs.

"Young men", Nilakantha went on to say, "are discontented with themselves and their"

own situations, when they scrutinise their childhood memories, turning them over and over in their minds."

"The thrill of hope can bring happiness," he writes, "but there is no satisfaction in it. Satisfaction and delight are to be found only in memories of the past. Everybody knows this. How much happiness I hoped for in my own small lives !" He had got what he wanted. But the happiness had never fully satisfied him. When he looked back at his life as a whole, he found it satisfying. Yet he questioned it. Had he really been happy ? What had he been able to accomplish ?

"At present", he said, "I am possessed of a mature youthfulness. My health is excellent. I have plenty of energy. I have arrived at my destination. No insuperable obstacle has been put in my way. All my dreams have materialised. But how strange ! It gives me no happiness. For happiness, I have to go to memories of my childhood, to a time when I did not have a single friend and my thoughts turned to suicide daily. It seemed the only escape from the cane that was plied so freely in my first school. What I hoped for then was a long-drawn-out illness that would permit me to stay at home, in bed, so I would not have to go to school. I was not the only boy who cherished such a hope. Everybody can understand that."

Nilakantha had many stories to tell so interesting about the practices being followed at that time.

It has to be seen what courage Nilakantha and his colleagues had to show in allowing harijan students to dine with Brahmins and start a revolution in Orissa about 2 decades before Mahatma Gandhi started his Harijan movement in 1930. ●

## NILAKANTHA, THE JOURNALIST

Nilakantha was a fearless fighter in the battle against dishonesty. He had the confidence of the privileged Shashani Brahmin. The story of his defiant behaviour in retaining a moustache and shaving off his beard reached the Mukti Mandap of Purí. At the house of a moneylender named Vikari Mishra, a meeting was held to which the pandits of the Mandap were invited. A resolution was passed to the effect that Nilakantha's conduct was blamable and deserved condemnation. This resolution was published in the Utkal Dipika (4.11.1911). A letter protesting against it was written to the editor of Dipika by a certain Dharmananda Sharma. The writer was, very probably, Gopabandhu Das and the name a pseudonym. The letter also mentioned about Nilakantha's essay "MO NISHA" (My Moustache) which was published in "Mukur" (Nilakantha Smaraki p. 219).

Nilakantha found himself obliged to address an audience wider than the one provided by the Satyavadi school. In self-defence he had to approach the general public and explain his ideas to the common man. He turned to journalism as the natural sequel of his work in the school. His activity could no longer be confined to a small institution as he had to spread his ideas to the general public. This was the beginning of his literary creation.

Gopabandhu was his mentor, friend and guide. He made the publication and propagation of Nilakantha's writings his personal concern. Nilakantha became the right hand man of Gopabandhu in editing the

monthly *Satyavadi*. The writing of articles for publication became a part of his duties at *Satyavadi*. *Asha*, a journal published from Berhampur, made the writings of the *Satyavadi* group a regular feature. Nilakantha was not new to journalism. At the outset of his political career, while working in Sambalpur, he founded a journal named *Seva* and wrote for it regularly. His work later appeared in the best English papers in India. Nilakantha wrote on all the problems of the country while he was a member of the Central Legislature. Gopabandhu planned to publish both an English and an Oriya daily on his return to Orissa. Nilakantha was to be the editor of the English daily. Unfortunately Gopabandhu died before his plans could be realised. Nilakantha took up the editorship of the *Samaj Sambadpatra*. It was appearing as a weekly from rented premises in Cuttack. But the *Samaj* could not provide Nilakantha with the scope he needed as a humanist and revolutionary idealist. A new journal, the *Naba Bharat*, was started as a monthly, five years after Gopabandhu's death. The *Naba Bharat* was a serious and literary journal, intellectual in tone. A weekly, *Lokamat*, was added to supplement its coverage. Chintamani Mishra, the Press Manager of *Naba Bharat*, became the editor.

#### THE DAILY NABA BHARAT

Nilakantha's activities as a journalist were bound up with his life as a politician. When *Naba Bharat* appeared in 1934 he was at the peak of his association with the Congress. He left the Congress and joined Subhas Bose's Forward Block during the War, becoming an advocate of its programme. A new Ministry came into power in Orissa through his efforts. The *Naba Bharat*

became a daily in 1941 and was made the official mouth piece of the party.

Nilakantha had to spend much of his time away from Cuttack. He was a member of the Central Legislative Assembly. Sri Rama Chandra Das shouldered the responsibility of editing the daily for sometime. The propagation of the new Government's policies was not its only purpose. Nilakantha used it to publicise his personal views on many subjects. He was worried how to save India from the clutches of Japan and advocated his views that Indians should at once learn the war tactics for the purpose. Japan was moving into Burma and Assam and there was no time to lose.

Shri Ram Chandra Das was a brilliant student of Political Science. He gives us a glimpse of the workings of the Naba Bharat daily in his essay **Nilakanthakara Sambadikata**, (Nilakantha's Journalism.) He writes, "I Joined the daily Naba Bharat in August 1942 and as Panditji was away in Delhi to attend the autumn session of the Legislative Assembly, I had to carry the entire responsibility. Nilakantha Babu gave me two rules to follow. No editorial matter was to be published without the previous approval of Godavarish. And the devastations caused on account of the Quit India Movement should not be supported.

Everyday, at eleven O'clock in the morning, Godavarish Babu went through the advance editorial. He kept eleven O'clock free for this although his ministerial duties were heavy. Once I published an editorial without his prior approval because he was on tour that morning. The subject was the renouncement of his title "Khan Bahadur" by Khan Bahadur Allah Baksh,

the Chief Minister of Sind. It was, I commented, only a public gesture by the Khan Bahadur as a protest and the harsh manner in which the Government of India was suppressing the Quit India Movement. Had he resigned his ministerial post, it would have shown his true love for his country. Nilakantha flared up in the way that was natural to him when he read the editorial in New Delhi. By telephone he informed me it was not our policy to suggest resignation to Allah Baksh. We intend to take over the administration of the country. He considered it an act of no little courage on the part of Allah Baksh to renounce his title and remain a minister at the same time. Why had I then criticised his action instead of applauding it? Godavarish also got a stricture.

On another occasion, during a visit to Orissa, Nilakantha came to know that certain Congress men were lending their support to destructive activities. He sent for me at three O'clock in the morning and said, "Bring your pencil and paper and sit down to write. I'm worried." At that time Jagabandhu Sinha, a lawyer of Puri, was the Director of the Congress. The title of the editorial Nilakanth Babu dictated that night was "Let Jagabandhu Sinha Answer." It was an unearthly hour but it only indicates his unusual honesty and ethical principle in matters of journalism. He had both to a rare degree.

In 1941 the Samaj was repressed during the Quit India Movement. Pandit Lingaraj was jailed. Shri Radhanath Rath and Shri Udaya Nath Sarangi followed him to prison. Their friend, Shri Ram Chandra Das, the Journalist, edited the Samaj on their behalf for a time. Ultimately it had to be closed down for a period

of four months or so. The Samaj was thought of by Nilakantha Babu as an elder brother to the Naba Bharat. Nilakantha Babu decreed that, in choosing articles for publication in the Samaj its role in stressing the importance of regional and local news should be kept in mind. When the eldest son of Shri Radhanath Rath was arrested while he was lying ill in the Cuttack Hospital under medical treatment, the news was not only flashed by Pandit Nilakantha, but Godavarish, the Home Minister was warned against the folly of committing such errors. The Samaj was founded by Gopabandhu, who was his mentor, guide and friend. Nilakantha Babu had said that the Samaj and the Naba Bharat were two flowers of the same branch. He was not only a journalist himself, but always sprang to the defence of his journalist associates.

The editor of any journal knows that advertisements provide a much needed source of financial support. No daily can become self-supporting by relying solely on subscriptions. In 1942, when the daily Naba Bharat was started, its object was to provide news and organise public opinion. When the Samaj closed down there was no journal that could take its place. Naba Bharat was the mouthpiece of the Government in power and an unrivalled purveyor of news. A substantial income from advertisements alone would have been forthcoming had they not been refused. But Pt. Nilakantha grudged space given to advertisements. He wanted readers to have the maximum amount of information about things of vital interest to them. He considered it unethical for a journal to depend heavily on advertisements for its income or clamour for Government subsidies. Since Government grants were frequently made

to the journals, Nilakantha Babu said, it would not be proper again to hauger after Advertisements, even though some copies were being supplied free of cost to officials and Ministers. (Nilakantha Smaraki pp. 192-193).

#### “NABA BHARAT,” THE MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Nilakantha never made journalism his vocation. It was not even an avocation. He was essentially a man of letters. His sight was whole. Although journalists are absorbed in the events of their own times, Nilakantha kept himself detached enough to give them direction, guiding them safely through the political whirlpools of the day. The Naba Bharat bears witness to his unfailing magnanimity and his distinction of style. The Naba Bharat was an inseparable part of his life. So was the Naba Bharat Press. He founded it not to serve any particular geographical region but to provide the common people with a means of expressing themselves and their opinions. In 1933-34 Nilakantha, as a member of the Central Legislative Assembly, had the opportunity to study the mood of the whole of India. The entire country was open to him. On what ethical and economic foundations did India stand? What were the traditions that bound the people together? How were they facing the many intricate problems of the modern world? These were the questions with which Nilakantha occupied himself. He felt that the Satyavadi ideals had not only to be revived but re-established on a broader basis. This could be done through Naba Bharat. The ‘Utkal Sahitya’ was on its last legs. It had provided an outlet for the rich flowering of Oriya literature in the late nineteenth century. The Naba Bharat

took up where it left off. Under Nilakantha's direction it became an institution. He lifted it far above the turmoil of day-to-day politics, the winning and losing of elections, party affiliations, triumph and defeat, and turned it into the instrument of his highest dreams and loftiest aspirations. He identified himself with all the Naba Bharat publications ( a monthly, a weekly and a daily ), pouring into them the immense learning and rich experience of over half a century. He gave his best work to Naba Bharat, bowed as he was by knowledge.

The Naba Bharat Press was situated in the heart of Cuttack, at Choudhury Bazar. The vital centre of Oriya culture was nearby, at Balu Bazar. At the present day this is the Binod Bihari Bazar. A road through Balu Bazar connected the two. The Naba Bharat Press was in a two-storeyed building at the very end of Balu Bazar. The Samaj Press was also close-by. One comes into the office first on entering the building from the East. Just beyond it is a well. A large jackfruit tree raises its head right up to the second storey. There are two rooms on the upper storey. The first was always locked. It was Nilakantha's library. Part of the small porch in front was screened off. It was his bathing place. The other room is quite large, almost the size of a small hall. It contained a large table, a large plank bedstead, a few chairs and a telephone. A grass mat was spread on the bedstead. This was Nilakantha's bedroom, study and guest room. There was an antiquated ceiling fan which gave the room its only touch of aristocracy. Large windows take up the East and West sides of the building. The soft light of the sunrise and sunset, both have free access. On the South, the top of the jackfruit tree can

be seen through the wide doors, nodding gently in the clear air. On the North side is a small door that opens on to the roof terrace.

Here it was that Nilakantha, in the years immediately preceding independence, gave himself up to his literary pursuits. At this time he was unfettered. The noise and clutter of politics did not disturb him much. When, in 1946, the Naba Bharat suspended publication, he turned to the writing of books, among them his monumental ORIYA SAHITYARA KRAMA PARINAM (History of the Development of the Oriya Literature and SANSKRUTA O SANSKRUTI (Sanskrit & Culture). The white-haired and white bearded old Pandit dressed in his white Khadi and white sleeveless shirt studied as he reclined on his unadorned bedstead. He was always reading and writing. His guests came and went. He entertained them with his laughter and witticisms. Nilakantha was an untiring conversationalist, alert and full of interest. He particularly enjoyed talking to the young, stimulating their minds, and arousing their curiosity with his encyclopaedic knowledge. He was oblivious of time, unconcerned with domestic matters, forgetting himself easily among his piles of books. The range of his talk was wide. He spoke with equal ease of Ahur Mazda, Trinatha and Jagannatha, Syntax, the Siddhanta Koumudi, popular speech and the language of the sophisticated elite, the satisfaction to be found in epic narrative, popular philosophy and world philosophy. He was a sage of modern times. Nilakantha was awake when the world around him lay deep in slumber, sat down with his books and papers, wrote articles and planned others (Mo Kahani by Dr. K. B. Das, P. 465).

In 1933 on his way back from Delhi, Nilakantha spoke to Chintamani Mishra, an old pupil of his, about starting a monthly journal. Shri Mishra was the tutor of Bhuyan Bhaskar Mohapatra's children. The project was approved then and there and the proposed journal became Naba Bharat. Nilakantha had been toying with the idea for a long time. Once, in discussing the problems of religions centered around personalities with Gopabandhu, the idea of propagating a creed in which no distinction is made between individuals came to him. The excesses of personality cults like that of Buddha, of Krishna, of Christ could, he felt, best be curbed by an impersonal ethical code. For that he required a journal of his own. The founding of the Naba Bharat was an important event in Nilakantha's life, as he himself states. ( Nilakantha Granthavali Vol. I, p. 109.)

Naba Bharat was established on an ideal. Nilakantha poured his vision and thinking fearlessly into its pages, in a great and noble effort to establish a world order in the tradition of India's tapasya. The first issue carried his essay on **Bidhatanka Shrusti** (The Lord's Creation) enlightening the reader about the gradual change in the world orders. In his essay **Manaba Pragatira Dhara** (The Evolution of Man's Development) which appeared in the fifth issue, the fourth year, 1945, he writes that the oppressive effects of wellguarded imperialism and capitalism are visible everywhere in the world today. Nothing is left of what can be called the human soul. Violence is shaking the world with its demands, clamouring for 'rights'. Progress is measured by basic physical needs, eating and sleeping. There is no place in it for duty or the development of the humanity of

man. The idea of human progress as a process of gradual self-realisation and a Sadhana of the spirit was strongly entrenched in Nilakantha's mind.

Hand in hand with the overall progress of the human race went the development of the Oriya Language and Literature, the particular making an original contribution of its own to the general. Publication of his various talks and discourses high lighting his original thoughts and logic lent tremendous value to the Naba Bharat. His powers of persuasion were great and intriguing. Nilakantha knew that the Oriyas have always expressed themselves in their own language, in their own way and in doing so, had been protected from the debilitating effects of the imitation of foreign models and cultural subjugation. Creation of a new literature totally free from all imitative ideas was his ultimate goal.

The pages of Naba Bharat were open alike to both the older and the younger writers. In the choice of pieces for publication the quality of the writing and not the name of the writer was the deciding factor. Translations of high calibre from English and Bengali writings were welcomed. The language of these translations was pure Oriya. A writer's job was not over when his piece appeared. Readers were called upon to give their opinions. A general discussion followed. These discussions were on a high level. The relevance of the article, its comprehensibility and the originality of the thought it contained, all came up for consideration. No quarter was given to personal pique, praise or blame. The aim was to establish a group of highly competent writers and thinkers and put

criticism on a sound ethical basis. The conclusions reached in the course of these open discussions were often commented upon by the editor in subsequent issues of the journal. Nilakantha's remarks on prose, poetry provide a good example.

Naba Bharat became a great institution. Nilakantha provided the organisational skill and the Maharaja of Jaipur gave generously of his wealth. It was not possible to pay writers a fair price for a long time. They were good writers and displayed a keen sense of the far-reaching effects of their work. They were sensible of their responsibilities. For them the very fact of publication in the pages of Naba Bharat was rewarded enough. The history of this famous journal has not yet been written. A great and famous chapter in the development of Oriya sensibility and culture will be documented and become a part of recorded history when this is done.



## NILAKANTHA, THE WRITER

Nilakantha was, to all appearances, a man of action. He did things and got things done. His creative writing was far from a wholetime occupation. He turned to writing and scholarly pursuits mainly during comparatively quiet periods in his public life, during lulls in politics.

With the defeat of Russia by a small nation like Japan a change came in the attitude of Indian intellectuals to their own country. The Russian empire was the mightiest in the world at the time. Its enormous extent and power were assumed to make it invincible. Japan was vulnerable, its population scattered over a number of isolated islands without modern means of communication. Consolidation was only possible because of the strength and unity of its culture and language and traditions. And Japan had never been a subject country. Its pride was intact.

In India the loss of freedom coincided with the coming of the British. They brought with them their language, their religion and their culture. All three became the hated instruments of domination. If Indian intellectuals were quick to take advantage of the opportunities a knowledge of English brought with it, they were also eager to prove they were the equals of their colonial masters and could handle their language as skilfully as the British themselves.

At the same time they turned scrutinising eyes on their indigenous culture. In what way was Indian culture inferior to Japanese? Was it not capable of supplying a strength and power comparable to that of Japan?

Nilakantha was in his teens at the time. He and his friends conceived the idea of founding a school named Satyavadi to teach the new ideas in a new way, through the language the people spoke, Oriya. After some initial experience Nilakantha went to Calcutta, took his M. A. degree and returned to Satyavadi, remaining there without a break for the next nine years, from the age of twenty-nine to thirty-six.

The Satyavadi period covered the initial phase of his literary activity. He wrote for the children of the school, making a special study of the kind of Oriya best suited to their needs. He created a whole new, joyous world of song and dance and story for them. In their games, their riddles, their nursery rhymes and the little stories they made up themselves, children seek to understand and control their environment. Nilakantha spoke to them and wrote for them in their own idiom, dispensing with the use of the cane from which he had shuddered so much himself in his own childhood. He recaptured the happiness he had lost in the happiness of the children he taught. He was still a child at heart. The extent to which he was able to identify with the children is astonishing. What he was trying to do was to awaken their latent sense of creativity, arouse the natural curiosity of the young mind about the world around it and amplify awareness to a point where the child would take over and pursue his search for knowledge, and truth by his own efforts. The child's mind would be self-functioning. To this end Nilakantha proposed to make intelligent use of established tradition as well as innovative methods.

He was a teacher and his writing had a didactic side. He composed hymns and songs, rewrote stories from the Mahabharata and Ramayana and the Bhagavata and brought the heroes of these great epics alive. In his hands they became villagers whose feet got dusty walking the roads. Their hurts and hopes became real. So did their ingenuity, courage and resourcefulness. The children became acquainted with the lore not only of Orissa and of India but of the whole World. And the World of nature. Bears came down from the hills to browse in the sugarcane fields beside the flowing streams. One day an old bear mistook a beehive for the fruit of the sugarcane and poked his inquisitive nose into it. And there were stories of snakes. All his writings for children centered round the natural surroundings and day to day village life—full of zest, humour and simplicity. Balancing child-literature are the various prayer songs, written by him during his Head Mastership of Satyavadi.

The songs and poems began to appear in 'Satyavadi' in 1912 and 1913. They were featured in its pages as the **Viswabani** the **Atmabani**, the **Kanhi Achha**. In 1918-19 Nilakantha composed his **Bhaktabani** (Songs of Devotion), dividing the book into four sections according to the advice given in the Gita. The deity celebrated in Nilakantha's poems is not to be found in any temple or house of worship. To ask where God is seemed meaningless. He is not to be found either on earth or in heaven for he is enshrined in the human soul. Only one who has set alight the lamp in his heart will find his way through the dark maze of the world, guided by its light.

Nilakantha's world of poetry came into existence between 1915 and 1920. Konarke and Kharavela, his best works, were both composed at Satyavadi. After he was relieved of the post of Head Mastership he gave his whole time to the writing of his verse. *Pranayini* was published in 1919. It is a translation of Tennyson's *The Princess*. *Enoch Arden* is his model for *Dasa Nayak*. It was written in the Hazaribagh Jail, between March and June 1923. The language and metre employed in this Book is easily accessible to the ordinary Oriya reader placing no obstacle in the way of his comprehension or pleasure.

'Konarke' is actually two books in one. The first is reflective and the second narrative, an epic in a ballad-style. The first part, divided into forty sub-sections, is a modern Oriya poem, both in content and form. It is an ode to a night and morning passed at the shrine of the goddess Ramchandi. The influence of Nilakantha's predecessors is easily detectable in the composition of these poems. Nilakantha followed their footsteps. Nilakantha's description of the Princess Kanchi's pleasure in boating on the Chilka lagoon is much more vivid than Radhanath's. The poet listens eagerly to catch the lilt of the song floating over the water in the music of Konarka too. Nilakantha's brilliance was not dimmed by his assimilation of the contributions Radhanath and, to a lesser extent, Madhusudan made to Oriya literature. A classic sense of form blended with a deep romanticism in his sensibility. He was, at one and the same time, a contemplative creator and a thinker.

The influence of Radhanth's romanticism is found also in his creation of a hero who is an invincible revolutionary in a dark age of subjugation. When, in a moment of defeat and

frustration, he thinks of leaving his native land he cries :

“To what hell will I go if I leave you ?

Will not the fires of separation burn me ?”

Nilakantha takes the whole of Utkal as the setting for his narratives. From Orissa's sandy beaches to the tableland at the foot of her hills, from Shrikshetra Puri to Kashmir, the geography of the entire country provides the background for his *Maya Devi*. The natural beauty of the countryside enchanted him. The story of *Maya Devi* is a plain one and in it he mingles realism with romanticism, describing the cottages of Peasants and the palaces of kings in simple clear language.

*Kharavela*, on the other hand, is an ornate historical tale, wrought with elaborate ornamentation and many rhetorical flourishes. In an age when narrative verse was fast becoming a lost art, Nilakantha composed these long poems, filling them with delightful scenes and beautiful natural prospects, even going as far as attempting free verse at places to relieve the monotony of traditional rhymed patterns. It is not strange that he should, for these reasons alone, be hailed as an innovator and path-finder and progressive writer. Stories that could easily have been told in prose and made into historical novels were skillfully executed in verse. Nilakantha insisted on the retention of traditional ways, infusing the narratives with as noble sentiments as possible, the use of rich imagery, dramatic situations and picturesqueness. As an example of the contrasts and consonances of his style we can look at the first part of *Konarke*. There is a storm, a starless sky, heavy clouds that

thunder, a fear-ridden black night. There is also the light of a full moon, the overflowing tenderness of a loving family evenings loud with the shouts of happy children and a boat vanishing on a tempest-tossed sea. All equally true. In all of them can be heard the passion of the poet seeking to awaken the somnolent sense of oneness and of nationhood that is latent in the hearts of the people.

In the dialogue between the victorious Narasingha and the captive Tanka, the suggestion of a possible love developing between Narasingha and Maya Devi, the courage displayed by Bajira Pati, in his conversation with the little village maiden as described in the *Kharavela*, the sweetness of loving speech and the simple directness of trustic responses, the poet shows his strong realism and makes full use of his remarkable power of insight. Nilakantha shows this insight more in his portrayal of unsophisticated men and women than in his depiction of princess and warriors. Tanka is the conquered but undefeated hero of all times. Narasingha faces retributive justice with the fortitude of a true revolutionary. Maya Devi and Dhushi seem to belong to our own age and time, the twentieth century. They are liberated women, exemplars of the new feminism, acting and thinking with freedom. Their sense of duty is strong, yet the poet has shown them in all their emotional softness, giving substance to the poet's personal ideals.

The characters in Nilakantha's narrative poems may have originated elsewhere, in distant historical times and places but Nilakantha has given them relevance to Orissa and India during a period when a national awakening was in progress. He has made

them great. In a sober, controlled way he makes the complicated and difficult easily accessible to the common man, giving shape to characters and events, subtle nuances of feeling, and profound emotions. The exuberance of youth, the thrill of love, heroic daring and age-old wisdom, all find expression in language that is vivid and sharp under the poet's pen. Nilakantha's use of metaphor and simile is delightful. The critic Dr. Mansinha has said, "The sources of these metaphors are various, Some have been taken from English, others from science, but most are to be found in the poet's own philosophy. They are as new and fresh as they are familiar and most appropriate to their subjects." (Introduction to Konarke).

Nilakantha did not write any novels or short stories. His stories are couched in verse narratives in the romantic and emotional style of the late nineteenth century. He was not a wholetime poet and his creative writing occupied a comparatively small part of his time and thought, being more illustrative of it than central. As a scholar and critic however, his activity was an integral part of his long life.

In 1904 Nilakantha was a High School student when he wrote the **Smrutl Tarpan** (Offering of Memories) for the funeral ceremony of Samanta Chandra Sekhar. It is written in imitation of Jogesh Chandra Vidyanidhi's similar work. The Tarpan was published in the Utkal Sahitya. Gopabandhu and Ram Chandra, the Puri muktar, both students of literature, praised it. Nilakantha was studying for his F.A. at Ravenshaw College when it appeared. For a young unknown writer to be published in the Utkal Sahitya at that time was not a negligible

honour. Nilakantha was an insatiable student. His interest was inexhaustible.

The beginnings of intellectual criticism were laid in the nineteenth century. They were slight, confined to an occasional article in some journal. There was no scope for original research and study. Radhanath called attention to this situation at the first meeting of the Utkal Sahitya Samaj. Neither he nor any other writer of the time was able to do more than write superficial reviews of the few books available. Madhusudan's efforts were limited to his Mahajatra series of essays. These were curbed by his sense of beauty and literary tastes. The art of poets and writers was not widely discussed against the historical or social background although a little literary criticism is occasionally found in studies of the poet's time or his biodata. Nilakantha was the first to explore the possibilities of a new approach. He examined the works of the great nineteenth century writers, Radhanath, Modhsudan and Fakir Mohan and in essays he wrote to commemorate their achievements, studied them from new points of view. With the publication of these and similar essays in the literary journals of the day a critical readership gradually emerged. How Nilakantha was able to analyse the entire corpus of these writer's works with such keen insight and in such powerful and elegant language is a matter of speculation. Of Fakir Mohan's novels he says, "There is a glory in them that transcends rustic crudity." Fakir Mohan was alive when Nilakantha wrote those words. Radhanath and Madhusudan had just passed away. For the funeral ceremonies of Radhanath and Modhsudan Nilakantha wrote.

two essays, **Oriya Sahityare Madhusudan** (Modhusudan in Oriya Literature) and **Radhanath-O-Utkal Sahitya**. ( Radhanath and Oriya Literature.) Nilakantha was an intelligent and perceptive critic. He wrote: "We have seen these poets and heard them speak. While conceding their great concern for literature, we maintain that life is more important." In Nilakantha's opinion the best of all critics is time. Only the modern age is dynamic. A critic cannot sit back and wait for the integration of a regional culture or its absorption into world traditions. For such absorption time moves at an extremely slow pace. Only one who has equipped himself with the available skills of the time can risk the assessment of a literary work. He alone can acknowledge the gifts of the past and bequeath to the future, the possibilities that bring hope. In this respect Nilakantha's intellectualism had tripple dimensions. What is there in the past ? What was there ? What has been added to it by one's own time ? These were the things Nilakantha analysed, beginning with the creative writing of Radhanath, Madhusudan, and Fakir Mohan and ending with an exhaustive study of Gopinatha Nanda's work in linguistics. Nilakantha made every effort to discover and define his own age. The characteristics he was able to pinpoint, setting them before us in comparison with the past, showing the continuity of tradition, were the distinctive features of the modern period. In Fakir Mohan's novel, "Chhamana Athaguntha" what we see and hear, feel and suffer, are acts of familiar everyday experience. This is the book's special attraction. This novel is not a love story. Nilakantha compares it with the ornate style of writing known as the 'Bhanjiya style' after its

originator. Upendra Bhanja, that was so popular at the time. No young bride pines with longing for her absent bridegroom. Lovers do not yearn passionately after each other. The excitement of secret rendezvous is missing. Birds do not warble. Streams do not babble. Nothing strange and wonderful happens as it does in the Arabian nights. The little things that move men, make a man smile or weep, forget himself for a moment, dance for joy, take on a pleasing importance and permanence. Nilakantha liked naturalness in narration and always sought it both in poetry and prose.

Nilakantha singles out and praises essential simple Oriya characteristic eves in the ornate style of Bhanja; things that transcend ornateness. Nilakantha writes, "By the time Bhanja started evolving his heavy and elaborate style the age of the Rishis had long received into the puranic past. New winds from the West had not yet begun to blow in the country. The poet has not coyly concealed himself behind translation or in any imitations. He described what he saw directly, without artifice, despite his style. Nilakantha quotes the poet's description of Labanyabati as she rises from her bath as an example. The good taste and simple sweetness of this poem are striking to a degree.

#### LABANYABATI TIKA

To popularise this great work, Nilakantha wrote explanatory notes to Bhanja's Labanyabati in 1930, while serving a term of imprisonment in Hajaribag Jail. This book covering over 600 pages has been published through the good offices of his daughter, Smt. Indira Devi recently. In its foreward Nilakantha wrote :

“Even though Oriyas had somewhat forgotten their culture within 300 years of subjugation, it has all through added its flowering cultural influence to the Indian nationalism. As the symbol of the culture, it has its language and on that we have our hopes.”

“Long time back in 1908/09, I started some study on an old literature. Amongst the Kavyas, Labanyabati is easy and contains almost all the aspects of mediaeval literature. I cut off some portions and edited one, suitable for a course for the boys. I wanted to publish it. I consulted, Bhakta Kabi (Devotee Poet) Madhusudan Das. Madhusudan approved my proposal. Unfortunately no publisher like to publish a destouted (broken) Kavya”.

“Then came Non-Cooperation Movement. Both the rich and the poor, the King and the subjects, educated and uneducated, the teacher and the taught became one in it. Heavy floods of politics. There was no such scope for literary activities. But as one cannot forget ones habit, I used to do some literary research at times.”

#### SARALA DAS

In the course of his study of Labanyabati, Nilakantha also turned his attention to older puranic literature. He even went so far as to hail Sarala Das as the inaugurator of a revolutionary period. This was at a lecture he gave in 1947 at the Sarala Gadi on the occasion of the Makar Sankranti.

“The great Siddheswar”, Nilakantha says, “was a genuine revolutionary. He was also a genuine Oriya. In both roles he initiated a new age. The rebellion of Siddheswar, the Sudra was real whereas the rebellion of Biswabasu, a sevāk sabar of Jagannatha, is legendary.”

## ORIYA SAHITYAR KRAMA PARINAM

It was at this time that Nilakantha wrote the first and second parts of his Oriya Sahityar Krama Parinam, (History of Oriya Literature). Politics was more or less at a standstill and he had little to do. Nilakantha was able to give his whole time to his scholarly work. His History is in no sense an ordinary book of the usual type. What he recorded was the unfolding of a great dream, the dream of a human fellowship embracing and including the whole earth. Orissa is seen as an integral part of the whole, from the first stirrings of the dream in the hearts of the impoverished and helpless people of the Orissa countryside to its full realisation in world brotherhood. Literature was, to Nilakantha, inseparable from social development. He relates the story of how Oriya society, in search of the inspiration that gives rise to literature, faces adverse circumstances and successfully defends itself. It was the story of his own experience in the world of the politics of his day.

Another volume of this monumental work is devoted to the study of Sanskrit and its culture, the revised and enlarged presentation of a lecture he gave at the Convocation of the Puri Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya. There was a time when Sanskrit, the elitist language of ancient India, contained and gave expression to an ideal capable of inspiring the entire world. In drawing our attention to this, Nilakantha threw light on the very real contribution it has made to the Modern Period and how it has influenced us and our institutions. His open mindedness shows itself in the way he moves, at relevant points, from the discussion of pure literature to a discussion of culture and from the discussion of culture to the discussion of religious faith.

As a great and noble humanist, he regards literature as an essential adjunct to a wholesome and robust life, not only as a special skill or art product. From ancient literature he has removed the mask of blind emotional faith and shown it to us as it really is, in its inherent beauty. And he pointed the way writers in the modern world must enhance their awareness of their heritage and sharpen their historical sensibility if they are to enrich the literature of their own times, rising above imitateness and plagiarism.

In a word, Nilakantha, as reformer and literature writer, was a man of independent mind. He exerted himself tirelessly to express himself nobly and creatively. He addressed himself to the hundreds and thousands of uneducated, half-educated people who spoke the regional language, Oriya, in his geographical area. Neither poverty nor grief could deflect him from his purpose. Nilakantha cultivated his local identity as an Oriya poet, grew into a national all-India figure and integrated both these roles into an inclusive and universal humanism. His vision was whole. It is by the light of this great personality that we live today amidst all the vicissitudes and frustrations of the current times. Let me close with lines from one of Nilakantha's own poems meant for children. He says :-

Gaze down from the hill top  
upon fields which, once seen,  
can never be forgotten as,  
rivers flow through them to  
merge in the mighty sea."

("Joy Bharat"-Nilakantha Granthabali-p.511)



## THE MIND OF PANDIT NILAKANTHA

"It is easier to break a house than build one," Nilakantha Das summed up his approach to the problems of his day admirably in this short sentence. He was born at a time when the winds of change were blowing in India and the old order was being questioned everywhere. But Brahmin absolutism reigned supreme in the Shasani village where he grew up. It was immured in the traditions of the past and irrational conventions that often had no other basis than superstitious practice. Arbitrariness was the rule. Caste was the unifying factor.

Nilakantha, as he moved away from the village to Puri, to Cuttack, to Calcutta, came in contact with minds that were critical of the old regime and fired by a disaffection for their status as colonial subjects of a hated foreign power. In their impatience they sometimes favoured very radical and violent action. Puri was the meeting place of the best minds in India, Cuttack was a center of secret terrorist activity and Calcutta the spearhead of intellectual advancement. As Nilakantha progressed from life under traditional forms of authority to life under rational ones, he began to exercise his independent judgement and assess things for himself. His way of thinking was logical rather than associative, concrete rather than abstract. He neither defended nor decried the old nor was he an indiscriminating partisan of the new. His attitude to both was cautious and sometimes challenging. He loved the old but was keenly aware of its limitations and favoured the introduction of everything that would lesson its strictures. At the same time he realised that the usual absolutes had become meaningless and

lost their relevance to the times. Meaningful substitutes had to be supplied, substitutes that would blend harmoniously into the general mentality of the people without causing painful and crippling dislocation. Only in that way could the focus of village life be shifted away from caste absolutism and an alternative unifying factor provided.

Truth was a hypothetical absolute that could marshal reason and logic in its cause and find acceptance. Even the most rigid-minded would hesitate to reject it. Nilakantha was quick to see its potential and made effective use of it throughout his life.

Satyavadi was the name of the school where he began his career as a teacher. Satya means truth. Satyavadi is the speaker of truth. There is no impartial truth or thing in the ethical world of human beings. The True remains the Truth as long as the place, the person and the age remain true to the contemporary human condition. Truth is what contributes to the welfare of all living creatures in any specific set of circumstances. Their happiness depends upon it. A man is wise and enlightened to the extent he perceives the possibility of this kind of happiness in his surroundings and practices Satya Dharma. For what is religion if not Satya Dharma?

What was the mentality of the people to whom Nilakantha proposed to offer the Satya Dharma as a substitute for the ancient absolutes by which their lives had been regulated down the centuries? A teacher cannot teach unless he can make his message understood and to understand a teacher's message the pupil must understand the language he speaks.

The language people understand best is the language they know best, the language they

speak in their homes and on the street. The language being used to impart instruction in the schools of the day was an artificial assemblage of bits and pieces from Sanskrit and English, an ill-digested amalgam that could only hamper the mental development of the child instead of helping him to learn how to think. The past era of isolation had come to an end; a child could no longer be driven through the sandalwood portals of temples and become capable of orienting himself in the social and political world of his time. No amount of caning could give divine sanction to the words of a guru. Reason and logic alone could equip a child to make his way in the modern world and reason and logic can best be developed through the language the child knows best and comes to him most naturally. Through no other language can a child's attention be directed to life itself and the living processes of growth.

Another absolute that is relevant to human development is pride in one's own culture and language, in one's local and particular place in the world. This pride originates in speech and grows into a patriotic passion for one's own language. Pride in oneself and what is most one's own is a powerful unifying factor. In India of the early twentieth century it was the rallying point of the struggle for freedom. Freedom is another hypothetical absolute that has wrought wonders in the history of mankind.

The mentality of a people is to be found in the language they speak and the language they speak is the language they know best, that comes most naturally to them, through which they can learn best. Nilakantha as a teacher turned his attention to Oriya. Oriya was the medium of instruction at Satyavadi.

Oriya is a separate, independent language, the product of an easy and natural intermingling of many historical cultures and languages. Nilakantha strongly opposed the tying of Oriya to Sanskrit. He felt its development had been hampered by such shackles and prevented it from keeping pace with the changes that had come to the Oriya countryside and its people. Nilakantha therefore laboured tirelessly to identify and master the special characteristics of Oriya, going to the remotest villages to hear Oriya spoken in its purest form. At the same time he lays great stress on the study of the ancient Oriya Puran and folk literature. In his own writing he dispensed with words like 'ebong' and 'sutarang' which, because of their affinity to Sanskrit, do not sound well in Oriya. His prose style, which has been hailed as one of his greatest achievements and gift to the Oriya literature, is smooth and strong, unmarred by discordant noises. It cost him a lot of trouble to discover the essential qualities of Oriya as a language and retain its vitality unimpaired. Little if anything had been done in this direction before him and his work was more than exploratory. He was a scholar as well as a teacher. His '**Oriya Sahityara Krama Parinam**'—(History of the Development of Oriya Literature) is a monumental work of pioneering importance. Nilakantha took scholarly discipline very seriously and never slackened in his study even after he himself had moved on and up into the larger arena of Indian politics.

Nilakantha took up his pen in the first instance to bring the living message of modern life to the common people of Orissa, incorporating science and knowledge, logic and sensibility setting their minds free from the rigidity of a

narrow past. The control impetus and beauty of his style led him to triumph in everything he wrote, from countless anecdotes, newspaper reports, editorials to his profound philosophical studies. But he gradually came into conflict with the society of his time. He opposed unreasoning practices and superstitions with a razor-sharp logic, remaining firm although he was at the same time conciliatory. His adversary seemed always to be confronting him. What Nilakantha consistently sought in the controversies that raged over rights and duties, revolution and change, judicious compromise and uncompromising struggle was the truth, the satya, that is the soul of India. When he got the opportunity he withdrew to a distance from the turmoil of public life and sat down to think in the quiet he found in his village home. His attitude to society was original to a high degree. Man was, to him, a creature of the mind. Man and his mind are at the root of all cogitation. The superiority of thought gives man his eminence.

Nilakantha had no faith in the conventional forms of religion. India's religious concepts are founded on a broadbased idealism that has stood it in good stead down the ages. He studied the Gita and was particularly drawn to its doctrine of noble self-abnegation in the interests of the soul. Nilakantha gave soul-force precedence over all other kinds of force. All independence of mind and self-reliance in living is based upon it. Nilakantha traced all men's woes to the neglect of this soul force.

Nilakantha's goal was to establish belief on a foundation of logic and reason but he did not reject out of hand the cult of Jagannatha. At the head of Nilakantha's letters he always

invoked Jagannatha's blessings. In his analysis of the ethical code of historical religions, Nilakantha reached the conclusion that they all had the same goal: to do away with man's sorrows and sustain the strength of his soul.

Nilakantha was an intellectual humanist but to him Jaganntha, a tribal god of the Sabars, had a special significance. This deity was the embodiment of a very special aspect of the Oriya heritage. He considered the tradition surrounding Jagannatha to be Orissa's very particular gift to the world.

For this reason perhaps some of his critics chose to attack him as a bhakta at heart, a devotee in the accepted sense. The traditionalists were not his only opponents. Intellectuals of the Western type who thought of themselves as progressives, attacked him mercilessly. But Nilakantha was always progressive and intellectuals who prided themselves upon their alignment with the West were no better than Charbak to him, lax and indisciplined, self-indulgent and luxury-loving. Throughout his life Nilakantha showed strength and independence in his judgements. He was also plain-spoken, forthright and, in addition, gentle. By force of his convictions alone he was able to blaze a path for himself between Brahmin orthodoxy on the one hand and western heterodoxy on the other, coming out ahead of them both.

In 1955 Nilakantha propounded for the first time, his idea of Maitri, good-will among men, a dynamic and universal human brotherhood based upon the development and flowering of particular regional cultures and individuals. He was in the last phase of his life and

approaching the end of his long labours. And so it was that he turned to his early concept of making use of available materials while preparing for the advent of the new, not breaking down a house until all that is required for the erection of a more commodious structure has been assembled. If the old is torn down thoughtlessly the situation gets out of hand. Society is like a house. Before demolishing any part of it the requirements of the future structure must be available, ready for use.

Nilakantha completed his long and arduous journey from static Brahmin absolutism to the no less binding absolutism of a coherent universal humanism.



## **NILAKANTHA FROM TEACHER TO LEADER**

The personality of Nilakantha Das took shape during the first decade of the twentieth century, a decade when the divisive tendencies which were later to tear the known world apart had already appeared and begun to operate. For India it inaugurated the age of nationalism. For the rest of the world it inaugurated an age of democracy versus authoritarianism the individual versus the institution. It was to see the beginning of a new doctrine, socialism. The individual emerged as a leader.

On the plains of India, in lands well served by the ancient Sabar and Dravidian peoples and in the Aryan regions of the North, there rose men who came forward to awaken mankind to a new realisation of their human destiny and world fellowship. These men were men of courage, inspired by the vision of a better state of things, eager to hold out their hands in friendship to countries rent by strife and poisoned by hatred.

In the forefront of this small and intrepid band was a village school teacher named Nilakantha Das. He discovered his role as he taught, studied and wrote among the most ignorant and helpless. From the countryside he went to Calcutta, the intellectual as well as the political capital of India at the time. There he taught the language in which he had taught the village people, the language that was their own, which they understood but could not speak in educated circles. Nilakantha was the first professor of Oriya at the University of Calcutta. Oriya has just received recognition as a language with a literature fit to be studied and taught at the university level. Pandit

Nilakantha made the cause of this language, the language of the common people in his part of the world, his lifelong concern.

But he left his post at the University to join the struggle for India's freedom as a whole. With it, he combined the struggle for a separate Orissa Province in which his people would have the freedom to develop in their own way. His idea of freedom included freedom from the shackles which bound their minds and circumscribed their social effectiveness. An undercurrent of discontent runs through all his writings. The established social arrangements were distasteful to him because of the prevalence of blind prejudices and object conformity contrary to all logic and reason. Freedom is the thing dearest to the heart of every subject people.

Modern industrialised society is ruled by an elite that rose from the ranks of the common people and has been dogged by a certain feeling of inferiority socially, which has found expression sometimes in intellectual defiance and sometimes in physical handicaps. Timur was lame. Napoleon was short of stature. Hitler was ugly. This has characterised leaders in the past as well as the present. They have traditionally made use of three classes of people to consolidate their position : the intellectuals, the bureaucrats and the managers. The last two hold the reins of power. The cooperations of the intellectuals is required to influence and shape public opinion. Their influence is greatest where the standard of education is highest. An education free from bigotry, from crippling preconceptions, conducive to the full development of the human being is still a rarity. Most educational systems are regulated by tradition and custom.

In the beginning society was egalitarian, being based on labour. Two things led to the emergence of the leader concept. One was the effort to lighten physical exertion and the other the effort to penetrate and understand the mysteries of nature. Members of society have played a heroic part in both capacities. Priests, poets, scientists and sorcerers worked and sang by the side of the sowers and reapers and winnowers of grain. As time passed records began to be kept in writing on clay tablets, stone slabs and palm leaves. Nilakantha learned to write his letters with a stylus on palm leaves. Paper was regarded with disfavour in his village school because it is easily defaced by a few drops of water.

Nilakantha began at the beginning, founding a school of his own to teach the basics of civilisation and humanity in a scientific manner through a language the poorest of the poor could understand. His experience at Satyavadi led directly to his public career as a social reformer, journalist and later as also a politician.

When a people overcomes the groundless fears and unmeaning practices by which their lives have been regulated to their own detriment a genuine revolution takes place. A sense of brotherliness replaces the strata of exclusiveness with impose a false inequality. Nilakantha discovered this brotherliness in the Jain tradition that was and is present among the common people of Orissa. It has not been lost in the course of time nor destroyed by injustice, the humiliations of subjugation or the corrosive forces of evil. Of the Jains Nilakantha writes that theirs is the one and only philosophical religion. The Jains are the friends of nature.

No deity has any place in their worship. They do not subscribe to the doctrine of the Guru or any other leader. They are content to enumerate nine basic truths and twenty-five kinds of falsehood, shun hypocritical practice and avoid artificiality. They seek to set themselves free from all kinds of bondage by the strength of spirit they find at its source, in a nature, and the power of the vital life force. In this they are true worshipper of humanity.

Nilakantha Das, in his own embattled life, discovered this greatness and sweetness latent in Oriya society, its folk customs and literature. He was a reformer. He also became a servant of the people. The heart of Nilakantha, the fighter was sustained and its strength renewed by the perennial renewal of life and growth in nature. His object was to clear away the dead wood of ignorance and weariness of soul. This noble intention inspired all his writings, all his philosophy, and all his politics. It is in plain view in his series of essays *Mo nisa* (My moustache) *Achhu o hebhu* (We are and we would be) and '*Amar thila o karon thai pare*' (We had and there be reason).

Nilakantha initiated the modern study of Oriya as an ancient language with a rich and distinctive tradition of its own. Literature and language was not a part of his original programme of study. He was a student of Philosophy.

Nilakantha understood very well the role of literature in the formation of the common character of a people. Oriya is now, the first language at our Utkal University although more attention is still paid to the study of Sanskrit, religion and linguistics. A suitable research programme for the study of Oriya literature has

not yet been formulated. Over a thousand years of Oriya life is involved and it is not easy to do it justice. Nilakantha was fully aware of the obstacles that could and probably would be put in the way.

"I started life as a humble servant of knowledge," he writes, "but a time came when I realised we would all have to go down into the battlefield and join the fray. The very existence of our people was in jeopardy. A time has come to the world at large when everybody is affected without exception. All of us, from Einstein to Bukharin, are being whirled about by a typhoon, in a mad and wild dance. India's art derives no benefit from all the turbulence but flight to the West is no escape. Our lack of direction is making us forget ourselves." He said, "the role of India and the East should be to add the real human aspect to the culture of World. This he expressed in course of his lecture the ideal and outlook of Education" read at the Benaras session of the All Asian Education Conference on 29.12.1930, soon after his release from Hazaribag Jail.(An extract being appended here to). But the voice of Nilakantha Das is still audible above the shouting. Have we forgotten that life can find fulfilment in the realisation of the teaching of our great men ?

### THE IDEAL AND OUTLOOK IN EDUCATION

( An extract from the paper read at the Benaras Session of the All Asian Education Conference on 29. 12 1930 by Nilakantha Das ).

The ideal of education is always the fulfilment of Human Destiny, at least in theory. This destiny has, for a long time, been fashioned

according to the wishes of the State... .. as a system of national education controlled by the state is a present necessity for the very cultural existence of the East, this arrangement has come to stay. But the basic outlook of Eastern life should not, therefore, be everlooked.

‘I have no antipathy for the English language as such for it introduces a man into one of the biggest literatures of the world. So also do languages like French and German in their own way. Men with educational and cultural ambition ought to study one or more of them. But the intention of making English the medium of education in this country was obviously different. To the convenience of a handful of Englishmen, as the ruling caste in the country the entire system had to be adapted ..... Indian youth were consequently made to learn a language and nothing else all their lives..... ..the growth of humanity in culture was stunted. A boy’s self-confidence, the very basis of his self-realisation, was undermined and inferiority complex. .... became the inevitable result. The educated and the common folk lost touch with each other. The ruling class.....came to a class different from the ruled. The educationist looking to cultural destiny of the race cannot afford to overlook things like these ( dress and eating habits ) small as they are, for reality is nakedly evidenced in things small and unguarded... .. For if India is at all destined to live, not merely as a mass of humanity, but as a cultural entity, the educationist must find out how to guide it and give it a creative character. For the present, we have no way out of the national outlook. The Nation has very little to do with the destiny and aspirations of man as man. The Nation is a kind of machine-made’

commodity and the State made to appear as the nation to all intents and purposes. Political control of education resulted.

The destiny of the East is to fulfil her destiny by adding the real human aspect to the culture of the world..... machine-made nationalism is a stage in the growth of humanity as a whole. It is not the ultimate destiny. Duty is self-emanating in the eternal interdependence of human relations, an ideal condition of human evolution.

The struggle for existence arising out of a militant demand for rights cannot be an ultimate goal.

“Out of the nation will rise the real and living humanity that is, not nations but peoples in synthesis, and the human destiny with its balanced existence of man in active happiness and living calm will be attained. Every one that feels that he is educated to-day, should also like the sages and savants, feel the burden in the matter. This is the vast and sacred task of the entire East, which has been the primaeval teacher of the World,” Nilakantha concluded.



## NILAKANTHA, THE LEADER

1884 witnessed the birth of a great revolutionary in Orissa and he was Nilakantha. A real revolutionary from the early childhood, Nilakantha also had a deep self-confidence.

As a student along with Gopabandhu, he took an oath on the bank of river Bhargavi "We will not serve the Govt. after completion of our studies; we'll work for the country and see our country more developed when we die than what we saw at our birth."

With this end in view Gopabandhu and Nilakantha started a School, Vana Vidyalaya at Satyavadi. This School not only created a new wave in acquiring knowledge but also assayed to create every individual into a better citizen, a social reformer, a man of letters and good philanthropist.

History records of few who could equal Nilakantha in his endeavour to create a better citizen through patriotism. His Governorship of the Satyavadi School underlines a successful period of his career. The Kavyas he wrote centered round the ancient glory of Utkal and their kings and rouses great patriotism on the readers.

The struggle for freedom was yet to start. But Gopabandhu and Nilakantha were well prepared for the great event. Nilakantha left Satyavadi and became a professor in Calcutta University, on an invitation from its Vice-Chancellor Sir Ashutosh. But soon thereafter the Mahatma gave the call for the struggle for Independence. The call was irresistible for Nilakantha. He immediately gave up his post of a Professor and wired to his mentor Gopabandhu of his intentions of starting the movement at

Sambalpur. During his nine months sojourn at Sambalpur, he organised the first Congress Movement in Orissa and did a lot of social service which bears testimony to his leadership and organising abilities.

Gopabandhu was extremely pleased with Nilakantha and took him in the working Committee of the Utkal P.C.C. For strengthening organisational work, Gopabandhu called him to Cuttack area after about 9 months in Sambalpur. Gopabandhu had full confidence on Nilakantha in every thing and it is said, Nilakantha was his righthand man. When allegations were made by the Cuttack group against noble Gopabandhu regarding defalcation of Flood Relief Funds, Gopabandhu started weeping and crying. He called Nilakantha telegraphically to Cuttack. Nilakantha consoled him and allegations were proved baseless.

After Gopabandhu's death the challenging task that befall on Nilakantha brought out his flowering personality in its fullness and Nilakantha became the real Congress leader in the state, but not easily. The Cuttack group became more violent and Nilakantha was their target. Nilakantha invited Congress to have its next session at Puri in 1932. Congress accepted it. The Utkal P.C.C. passed a resolution that its Chairman will be elected from the District which enrolls the maximum number of Reception Committee Members. Nilakantha could understand the motive and the clique, why such a condition is being imposed, when Cuttack has more than double the population of and is much more developed in every way than Puri. Nilakantha was sorry, but started working. He could enrol more than 30 percent over Cuttack

and became Chairman of the Reception Committee. Nilakantha's leadership was established. Details have been given in earlier pages.

Nilakantha's success was determined largely by his philosophy and attitude towards life to do what he felt right, whatever comes. He felt strongly that being a leader, he should not bow down to any thing like a coward. He should lead and not be led.

Gopabandhu and Nilakantha dreamt, it has been said, of a separate Oriya state even when they were students. During this period they also associated themselves with Utkal Sammilani. After Nilakantha was elected to the Central Legislative Assembly, he introduced the bill for Unification of all Oriya Speaking lands together and putting it into one Administration in 1927. Nilakantha had to work very hard for this. Not only he toured the entire out-lying Oriya-Speaking lands inspite of his shattered health during imprisonment, but had to fight hard with the Congress high Commands particularly with Dr. Rajendra Prasad.

Along with putting the demand for a separate Province for Orissa in the Central Legislature and creating the Public Opinion by publishing articles in the papers of all India repute, Nilakantha had moved the Congress in the matter. Congress agreed for a separate Province dependant on its economical viability. Nilakantha objected to this Proviso and argued that Orissa being often subjected to floods, draughts and famines, there should be no conditional support from the Congress on this Issue. He tried to bring an Amendment in the Calcutta Session of the Congress in 1930. The President, Pandit Motilal Nehru ruled it out. Nilakantha staged a

walk out along with all the delegates from Orissa and brought out a Procession in the Calcutta streets next day. Gandhiji intervened, Motilal expressed regret. Later, the Congress agreed that Orissa would be the first Province to be formed on linguistic basis. Not a small achievement for Nilakantha and his leadership.

After encountering many other obstacles, it saw the creation of a separate state for the Oriyas in 1936.

In 1937 the first election to Orissa State Legislative was held. The hold of the congress over the state was still weak, particularly in the newly added areas to the State. The kings and the royalty, the Zamindars still continued to exercise their sway over the populace. The situation was so adverse for the Congress that people even refused offers to contest election with Congress Party ticket. Nilakantha was advised by his friends and well-wishers to refrain from the election fray. Paying scant respect to such advices, Nilakantha travelled throughout the state to get good persons for contesting as Congress candidates and then for canvassing for them inspite frequent attacks of both Malaria and Filaria. He had rare gift of the gab which held his audience spell-bound. His forceful and enchanting speeches won for the Congress 36 out of the 37 seats it contested for. National Congress was stunned at this achievement and conveyed its thanks to Nilakantha saying 'Bravo Orissa'. Despite being the leader and having majority support of the elected candidates, Nilakantha fell a victim to machinations and was deprived from heading the Ministry in the State.

However, his choice Biswanath Das was made the first Prime Minister. Pandit Nilakantha records in his memoirs that Biswanath Das never honoured the understanding which he had with him.

Justice Harihar Mohapatra summarises the foul play in Orissa politics very beautifully. "Mud slinging and backbiting was not Nilakantha's cup of tea and he was above groupism. He was rather a symbol of sincere dedication to the cause of Congress. Twice he got the chance to lead congress and led it to victory. The victory of Congress bore the stamp and greatness of Pandit Nilakantha. Yet he was made a victim of party politics and was denied the right honour due to him". Nilakantha argued that the State Ministry should honour the State Provincial Congress, which has won them the power to administer. But neither the State Executives nor the National leaders, mad after power, agreed with Nilakantha's views. The powers of Congress P.C.C. Chiefs are well known even now. When the 2nd World War broke out, Congress Ministries all over India resigned. Nataji Subhash Chandra requested Nilakantha to instal a Coalition Ministry in Orissa which would enable the forward Block and Azad Hind Fouj to gain ground in the State. Nilakantha could instal one inspite of a great opposition by the Congress and in the State at large. One thing that is worth noting is that be it a Congress or a Coalition Ministry, the king maker in his time was always Pt. Nilakantha. What else could be a better evidence of his abilities ? The State Chief Minister Maharaja of Paralakemidi was not only showing great honour to Pandit Nilakantha but resigned his Ministry, on the advice of Nilakantha, when the Ministry

became reactionary, in the opinion and words of Nilakantha.

In 1951 Nilakantha founded his own party and won four seats. Godavarish and Nilakantha were among the four elected. With their presence in the opposition bench, a healthy trend of constructive opposition and criticism was initiated in Orissa Politics. Nilakantha never believed it to be proper to oppose just for the sake of opposing. While criticising the Government on its lapses and flaws, he never failed to appreciate the constructive work of the Govt. Naba Krishna Chowdhury, the then Chief Minister of Orissa, it has already been said, was so wonder-struck by the political acumen of Nilakantha that he wrote to the then Congress President and Prime Minister of India Pandit Nehru to invite Nilakantha into the folds of Congress. Pandit Nehru came to Cuttack and requested Nilakantha for this. He then addressed a personal letter to Nilakantha. On receipt of it, Nilakantha went round his constituency to obtain the approval. He then returned back to Congress in 1955.

In 1957 Election Nilakantha got elected uncontested from his favourite constituency Satyavadi and was the Speaker of the Assembly. As Speaker he was intolerant towards the tradition of keeping the Speaker's Secretariate subservient to the Home Department. With his efforts the secretariate of the Speaker was elevated and freed from Governmental Control.

Again the important constitutional tradition that with the dissolution of the Assembly, the Speakership is automatically dissolved, was broken through Pandit

Nilakantha's great efforts. He cited constitutional interpretations and fought with the Govt. of India. It was decided that Pandit Nilakantha was right. Nilakantha who was treated not to be in office since the day Orissa Ministry fell, was allowed to continue till a new Speaker was elected. A new precedence was created for the whole country.

Nation honoured him on his death, he was given a state funeral and another new precedence was created.

Pandit Gopabandhu records that there is no knowledgeable person in India, who does not know of Nilakantha. Binovaji showers him praise "I have toured the whole of India, but I have not yet come across a Pandit like Pandit Nilakantha Das".

Pandit Nilakantha has the reputation of following the sayings of Hitopadesh rigidly which says a true person would not buldge no matter whether praise or criticism comes from great persons, whether wealth or poverty is anticipated or death comes immediately or years after.

That was the essence of Nilakantha's leadership.



## **IMPORTANT EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF PANDIT NILAKANTHA DAS**

- 1884 Born on 5th August, Vill. : Srirama-  
chandra pur, P.S. Satyavadi, Dist. Puri.
- 1899 Admitted to 6th class of Puri Zilla School  
after passing the Middle Vernacular  
Examination from his village school with  
Scholarship.
- 1902 Came in contact with Gapabandhu Das:  
took an oath to do something for the  
Country.
- 1903 Attended 'Utkal Sammilani'.
- 1904 Was the first to sign a Pledge not to use  
British goods in a public meeting at Puri  
addressed by Utkal Gaurab Madhusudan  
without caring for the Police present.
- 1905 Married Radhamani Devi, a middle Class  
village girl by refusing a dowry of  
Rs. 4000/- from a wealthy urban citizen.  
Passed Matriculation Examination  
standing 1st in 1st Divn. in Puri District.
- 1907 Passed I.A. and obtained Mayo Scholar-  
ship of Rs. 15/-
- 1909 Passed B.A. and started the Vana Vidya-  
laya with Gopabandhu, but soon left for  
Calcutta to read M.A.
- 1911 Appeared in M.A. in Philosophy. Joined  
Satyavadi Vana Vidyalaya. Passed M.A.
- 1911-
- 1918 Became Kulapati or Vice-Chancellor(Head  
Master) of Satyavadi Vana Vidyalaya.  
Social Reforms vrs. 'Moustache Move-  
ment.' Managing 'Editor of Satyavadi.'
- 1918 Left the Head Mastership of Satyavadi  
School.

- 1919 Got engaged in Relief work in DAVAR famine in Puri District.
- 1920 Joined the Calcutta University as a Professor of Oriya-cum-Comparative Philology on 21st September.
- 1921 Resigned the Professorship of the Calcutta University on 6th January and started the Non-Cooperation Movement at Sambalpur, the next day. Carried on the Movement along with other social works for 9 months there. Edited the weekly paper 'Seva'.
- 1922 Courted imprisonment for 4 months.
- 1923 Joined the Pro-Changer group, i. e. the Swarajya Party of Congress, soon after release from jail.
- 1924 Elected as the non-Muslim Member to the Central Legislative Assembly and became Secretary of the Congress (Swarajya) Party under leadership of Motilal Nehru.
- 1926 Was elected for the second time to the Central Assembly and became the Secretary of the party again under Motial Nehru.
- 1927 Brought a non-official resolution on 8th February for amalgamation of all Oriya-Speaking lands together.
- 1928 Edited the 'Samaj' for some time after the death of Pt. Gopabandhu.
- 1929 Labour organisation at Tata and Calcutta.

- 1930 'Was elected for the third time to the Central Legislative Assembly. Resigned the Membership after only 12 days and started Salt Movement at Kakatpur in Puri district and courted imprisonment for 6 months. Was in Hajaribag Jail as 'A' class Prisoner. On release, presented the paper on "Ideal and outlook in Education" at the All Asiatic Educational Conference at Benaras on 30th December.
- 1931 Courted imprisonment for 2 months in Puri Jail. Became President of the Reception Committee of the Puri session of All India Congress.
- 1932 Courted imprisonment for 1½ years and was in Hajaribag Jail from 16.1.32 to 1.5.33 as 'A' class Prisoner.
- 1934 Edited the monthly "NABABHARATA" and was its Editor for long 18 years.
- 1934-  
1937 Became President of the Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee.
- 1935 Was elected for the fourth time to the Central Legislative Assembly and became the Secretary of the party under Sri Bholabhai Desai.
- 1936 Started an Oriya weekly 'LOKAMATA'.
- 1937 Conducted the first Election to Orissa Legislature and was responsible for the grand success, leading to the formation of a Congress Ministry in the Province.  
Became the President of the Non-Official Committee formed for the creation of a University in Orissa.

- 1938 President of the Official Committee for the creation of a University in Orissa.
- 1939 Was Elected as the President of the U.P.C.C. Joined with Subhash Bose and resigned the Presidentship of the U.P.C.C.
- 1940 Became an Hon'ble. and Life Member of 'Utkal Sahitya Samaj' Cuttack.
- 1941 -
- 1946 Edited the daily 'Nababharata'
- 1941 -
- 1952 Devoted mostly to literary activities along with publication of the 'Nababharata'
- 1942 Left Congress Party.
- 1945 Retired as the Member of the Central Legislative Assembly.
- 1951 Crowned with "Utkal Guru" at a Party conference.
- 1952 Formed a new Party "Swadhin Jan Sangha" (Independent People's Party) in Orissa and was its leader. Got elected to the Orissa Assembly from Satyavadi along with 3 others of his party in the State.
- 1954 Joined the Indian National Congress at the request of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru.
- 1955 Crowned with D. Litt. from the Utkal University. Became Pro-Chancellor of Utkal University.

- 1957 Was elected unopposed to the Orissa Assembly from Satyavadi and was elected its Speaker. As its Speaker, brought independence to the Orissa Assembly Secretariate.
- 1958 President of the Orissa Sahitya Akademi. Recipient of Padma Bhusan from President Dr. Rajendra Prasad at his residence at Bhubaneswar.
- 1962 Retired as the Pro-Chancellor of Utkal University.
- 1963 Got Central Sahitya Akademi Award for his "Atma Jibani"
- 1967 Died on 6th Nov. on the 5th day of the bright fortnight in the holy month of Kartik.

