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CHITTA RANJAN

Sukumar Ranjan Das



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Dedication

To The Sacred Memory of

Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak,

**The Prophet of Nationalism
in India,**

**This Life of a Noble son of
Mother India**

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CHITTA RANJAN

CHAPTER I.

[1]

Family Connections and Early Life.

Encircled by the rivers Padma and Meghna lies the famous land of Bikrampur, once the pride of Eastern Bengal and the cynasure of the whole of Hindusthan. In its days of prosperity it not only supplied many fashionable articles of fine taste to the people of the East but also attracted scholars from all parts of India as it was then one of the greatest centres of culture of the Hindus. Round the land of Bikrampur sailed down the river Padma many a vessel loaded with merchandise when in its palmy days it carried on trade with Ceylon, Sumatra and Arabia.

In this land of learning and culture was born the great Brahmin prince Silavadra who was the teacher of the Chinese traveller Hiant-Chuang. It is this Bikrampur which can claim to be the birth-place of Dipankar Srignan, the great teacher of atheism. Here was also born Biravadra, the highest prelate of the famous Buddhist Temple at Nalanda. Lastly towards the beginning and end of the nineteenth century many a noble son of Bikrampur played a great part in the religious reform of the Brahmo Samaj and in the national awakening of the Swadeshi days.

In this land of Bikrampur there is a small village called Telirbag which is the ancestral home of Srijut Chitta Ranjan Das. He comes of a respectable Vaidya-family of Eastern Bengal. His great-grand-father Babu Ratan Krishna Das was highly respected for his charity and benevolence. Chitta Ranjan's grand-father, Babu Jagadbandhu Das was the eldest son of Ratan Krishna. Jagadbandhu was the senior Government pleader of Rajshahi and had an extensive practice. He earned a good deal but spent even the last farthing in allaying the distress of his poor relations and neighbours. His charity was proverbial in Bikrampur. He maintained a guest-house in his village and was very keen about its proper management. There runs a very interesting story of his unique zeal about this guest-house. One day it occurred to him that he should see if his servants of the guest-house performed their duties regularly. He at once set out in a boat and reached his native village just at midnight. He then sent a man to the manager of the guest-house

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to enquire if there would be board and lodging for a fatigued stranger. The servants in charge of the house were much annoyed as they were just then going to sleep after their usual hard work and did not care to entertain a guest at such a late hour. At this Jagadbandhu's anger knew no bounds, he came there immediately and severely scolded his servants warning them for the future. Jagadbandhu was also very kind-hearted. There are many instances of his goodness of which we shall here relate only one. In his old age one day Jagadbandhu was going to a distant village in a palanquin; on the way he noticed an old worn-out Brahmin trudging along the road barefooted. Jagadbandhu was much moved, he got down and asked the Brahmin to take his seat in the palanquin. Thereupon he himself walked the whole distance covering over three miles. Besides, Jagadbandhu was a poet and a patron of learning. His verses on some of the sacramental rites are still read with admiration in every Hindu house of Eastern Bengal; their pathos and sentiment are no less admired by all lovers of poetry. These noble qualities of the grand-father—his hospitality, benevolence and poetic endowment came down to Chitta Ranjan as a natural heritage.

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Chitta Ranjan's father Babu Bhuban Mohan Das, was a well-known Attorney of the Calcutta High Court. For a great part of his life he was connected with Bengali journalism. As editor, first, of the Brahmo Public Opinion and subsequently of the Bengal Public opinion, he made a very high position for himself among Bengalee journalists. His style was simple and lucid, and his manner of exposition was so forcible that it was rare even in more successful periodicals of those days. His courage and truthfulness were exemplary. Once in his capacity as editor of the Bengal Public Opinion he severely criticised in his paper a judgment delivered by one of the Judges of the Calcutta High Court. As luck would have it, shortly after this, Bhuban Mohan had to file an appeal before the same Judge on behalf of an accused on whom the sentence of death was passed by the Sessions Court. The Honourable Judge showed signs of indifference for the appeal. Bhuban Mohan with his high sense of duty had the courage to remind the Judge that even if His Lordship had any personal feeling against him, he still hoped to get adequate justice for a poor accused whose life was trembling in the balance. These spirited words had the desired effect. The Judge was highly pleased and acquitted the accused after an impartial review of the case.

Bhuban Mohan was a sincere patriot and had always the welfare of his country at heart. Like many English-educated Bengalees of his generation, he threw himself heart and soul into the Brahmo Samaj movement.

Bhuban Mohan's Brahmo faith was but the development of the monotheistic element in Hinduism. His Brahmoism was but a spiritual form of the religion taught by the Hindu Sastras. He did not believe in Idolatry it is true, but he was no less a Hindu than the followers of the Sastras. He showed in word and act, that his Theism was not an exotic, planted and watered by the licentiousness of European influences, but a plant of native growth rescued out by the men of his school from the thorns and thistles of popular Hinduism that choked it.

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His personal life and more particularly in his dealings with his Hindu relatives, he belonged to

the old Hindu type. His sincerity, generosity and modesty were things very rare in this selfish world. As an attorney he earned a good deal, but spent whatever he earned for the support of his poorer relatives. Indeed he spent upon them more than his finance allowed and consequently got involved in heavy liabilities. He was not a slave to fashion nor did he spend his earnings recklessly. Yet he was forced, during the closing years of his professional life, to take refuge in the Insolvency Court. This was mostly due to the treacherous way of the world. There are some people amongst us who find delight in deceiving others in any way possible. Bhuban Mohan was not in want of such lip-deep friends who were good enough to relieve him of much of his earnings as a return for the many benefits they derived from Bhuban Mohan. His elder brother Babu Durga Mohan Das who was one of the leading Vakils of the Calcutta High Court, spent his all to free him from heavy debts. But as fate would have it, he had to get himself declared as an Insolvent. This turn of fortune weighed heavily on Bhuban Mohan's mind and caused the break down of his health.

Bhuban Mohan's eldest brother, Babu Kali Mohan Das, was noted for his courage and uprightness. In his most brilliant career at the Bar which was unfortunately cut short by death, we get an unique account of his spirited championship for truth and justice. We shall here give only one instance from among many. Once in a civil suit before Justice Louis Jackson who was known to be a man of an irritable temper Kali Mohan was arguing some law-points which the learned Judge failed to be convinced of. Kali Mohan was annoyed and remarked that he was surprised to see that His Lordship could not understand in two hours what any of his first year law-students would in half an hour. His Lordship was highly offended and said in a fury that he would refer Kali Mohan's conduct to the Chief Justice and if his argument was considered to be wrong, his Lordship would disbar Kali Mohan. His many friends at the bar advised him to make an apology but Kali Mohan was firm and if it was his fate to be disbarred he would rather earn his livelihood by serving as a school-master than submit to the ignominy of an apology. Sir Charles Barnes Peacock, the then Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court, gave his verdict in favour of Kali Mohan when the case was referred to him and Kali Mohan came out honourably acquitted. The noble example of Bhuban Mohan's liberality, Durga Mohan's self-less philanthropy and Kali Mohan's uprightness went a great way towards shaping the future character of Chitta Ranjan. [5]

Chitta Ranjan was born at Calcutta on the 5th of November 1870. Shortly afterwards Bhuban Mohan came to stay at Bhowanipur and Chitta Ranjan was admitted into the London Missionary Society School whence he passed the Entrance Examination in 1886. He was subsequently educated in the Presidency College and took his degree in 1890. He was much disappointed with the result as he narrowly missed Honours in the B. A. Examination. However he sailed for England to qualify himself for the Indian Civil Service. From his boyhood he was rather deficient in Mathematics and therefore with all his proficiency in literature he could not secure high position in the University examinations. But Chitta Ranjan gave considerable promise of exceptional literary and oratorical gifts even when he was a student in the Presidency College. The habit of making speeches grew upon him even in his boyhood when he would gather his friends and playmates in his house and begin to deliver a speech imitating the voice and posture of an orator to the great amusement of his people. Professors and fellow-students at college all hoped that he would one day turn out as one of the most powerful speakers of India. This hope has amply been justified. [6]

Chitta Ranjan went to England and began to prepare for the Indian Civil Service. At that time the late Dr. Dadabhai Naoroji was trying to get himself elected a member of Parliament from Finsbury so that he might personally state Indian grievances before the British Parliament. Chitta Ranjan had then just appeared in the Civil Service Examination, but the result was not yet out. He came to Dadabhai's assistance and made some political speeches in connection with the Electioneering Campaign. Some of the speeches were very favourably noticed by the English and the Indian press.

While in England, deeply versed in the literature of western countries, Chitta Ranjan grew a thorough-bred Englishman in dress and manners. But not-with-standing all this he was a true Indian at heart. A single instance from Chitta Ranjan's life in England would justify this remark. In 1892 when Chitta Ranjan was still in England one Mr. James Maclean, a member of Parliament, while delivering a lecture, passingly remarked that Indian Mahammadans were slaves and the Hindus were indentured slaves. This offensive remark wounded the feelings of young Chitta Ranjan. He at once set about in convening a meeting of all the Indians in England. The Indians assembled in Exeter Hall where Chitta Ranjan made a powerful speech protesting against the conduct of Mr. Maclean. The city of London was in a state of excitement over this matter and the leading journals of London in commenting on the speech of Chitta Ranjan gave a prominent place to the subject of the meeting. The Liberals in London convened a huge meeting at Oldham under the Presidentship of Gladstone where Chitta Ranjan was invited to make a speech on Indian affairs. In a speech on "Indian Agitation" he gave a powerful display of his oratorical gifts and love of mother-land. In that huge assembly he stood erect and boldly said:— [7]

"Gentlemen, I was sorry to find it given expression to in Parliamentary speeches on more than one occasion that England conquered India by the sword and by the sword must she keep it! (shame) England, Gentlemen! did no such thing, it was not her swords and bayonet that won for her this vast and glorious empire; it was not her military valour that achieved this triumph; it was in the main a moral victory or a moral triumph. (cheers) England might well be proud of it. But to attribute all this to the sword and then to argue that the policy of sword is the only policy that

ought to be pursued in India is to my mind absolutely base and quite unworthy of an Englishman." (Hear, hear)

In the same speech he also remarked:—

"We now find the base Anglo-Indian policy of tyranny; the policy of irritation and more irritation, of repression and more repression; the policy which has been beautifully described by one of its advocates as the policy of pure and unmitigated force."

The result of this agitation was that Mr. James Maclean had to submit an apology and was forced to resign his seat in Parliament. [8]

But all this opened the eyes of the Bureaucratic Government by whom Chitta Ranjan was not considered fit for the Civil Service and though he came out successful in the open competitive examination, his name was chucked off from the list of probationers. Even now in many a table talk he speaks of this event and says with a smile—"I came out first in the unsuccessful list." Chitta Ranjan's near relations were mortified at his failure, for at that time his father was involved in heavy liabilities and was passing his days in mental agony. During Chitta Ranjan's stay in England the whole family were put in such pecuniary embarrassments that for want of proper allowance from home he had to live upon hot water and a piece of bread for a couple of days together. For this reason his well-wishers thought that it would have been a great help to his family if he could secure a lucrative post under Government, on the other hand it required patient waiting even for a brilliant scholar to make a name at the bar. However Chitta Ranjan joined the Inner Temple and was called to the Bar in the early nineties.

It was no doubt a great gain for the country that Chitta Ranjan could not get into the "Heaven-Born service". For once a Civilian, he would have exerted all his powers to reach the highest rung of the ladder and could have found no opportunity of ever mixing with his countrymen and of working for their welfare. Happily, Providence wished it, and mother India was not deprived of the services of a patriotic son who would in future lay his all at her feet.

CHAPTER II.

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Choice of profession and career as a lawyer.

In the year 1893 Chitta Ranjan came back to India and joined the Calcutta Bar. The profession of law was not to his taste, for his literary talents dictated him to take up the role of a teacher. But the consideration of the heavy liabilities of his father left him no other alternative. He thought that in the legal profession alone was there any chance of clearing off his paternal debts. To choose a profession is always a perplexing business and it was doubly so in the case of Chitta Ranjan. It is especially perplexing if to choose a profession means to discover one's own capability and to do the work one is fitted to undertake in life. "How unfold one's little bit of talent; and live, and not lie sleeping while it is called To-day." That is the great problem. But it occurs only to those who are troubled with a sense of duty and not to those whose ambition is to "get on". It was therefore no small embarrassment for Chitta Ranjan to choose the legal profession.

Within a short time of his joining the Calcutta Bar, Chitta Ranjan took upon himself the responsibility of all his father's debts; but as a newly enrolled Barrister, he earned very little and therefore could not hope to clear the heavy debts of his father immediately. This forced him at the very commencement of his professional career to join his father in seeking the protection of the Insolvency court. It was not because he wished to get rid of the liabilities but in the absence of any other alternative he declared himself as an Insolvent which act weighed heavily on his mind and was the source of much uneasiness. However it was not only a filial duty, but a point of honour with Chitta Ranjan to share the indignity with his father. This was the first instance of Chitta Ranjan's honesty and uprightness during his professional career. [10]

The first stage of a professional career is very tormenting. There lies all around only palpable darkness where occasionally beams forth the flickering light of hope. At that time the whole future life appears to be a desert where the faint ray of hope glimmers like a mirage. But it is almost unconceivable how tormenting must have been the state of mind when over and above this uncertainty there was the uneasiness arising from heavy liabilities and consequent loss of social prestige. But one thing haunted his mind day and night and caused him the greatest pain. By his insolvency he was very seriously handicapped not only in his professional but also in his public life. But for it, Chitta Ranjan would have long ago thrown himself into all political and patriotic movements of his country and won the position of leadership which has now fallen upon him and to which he was entitled by his capacity, patriotism and uncommon talents.

Though his exceptional abilities were universally recognised, from the very beginning of his career, as a member of the High Court Bar, he could not secure adequate scope for them for a good many years; pecuniary struggles forced him to abandon the chances of a successful practice in the High Court for the mofussil practice which is more profitable to a junior Barrister. Indeed at that time he was put into such pecuniary difficulties that he could not even meet his household expenses with all his exertions and on many an occasion he had to walk the whole way to the

court for want of *tramfara*. But his was a spirit which the frowns of adversity could not daunt. By dint of energy and perseverance he pushed on and on till at last he became one of the most prominent and honoured members of the Bar. True genius does not long remain concealed, it waits for an opportune moment to reveal itself. Chitta Ranjan's genius as a lawyer waited for such an opportunity and in no time manifested itself before the admiring gaze or the public.

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The years 1907 and 1908 are ever memorable in the history of Bengal. The current of a new spirit had flowed in, inundating every nook and corner of the province. The soul of the nation became awake. A divine touch had just broken the eternal sleep of the nation. Lashed into action by the high-handed measures of Lord Curzon, the lethargy of the people died away, they tried for the first time to stand upon their own legs and boldly face the world without fear of death. In an evil moment Lord Curzon sanctioned the partition of Bengal against the united voice of the people. This led to the manifestation of a new spirit in Bengal. A heavy out-burst of Anti-European feeling followed; a strong hatred against every form of Europeanism, a revengeful attitude to their commerce and industry, a growing apathy to everything associated with them, led to the repudiation or abandoning immediate Anglicised past, and a new spirit entered into politics and created a mighty and dynamic yearning towards a truly national future. This had for its realisation at its basis *Swaraj*, National Education and *Boycott*.

Persecutions were inaugurated by the Bureaucratic Government. On the third of May 1908 in the still hours of night Srijut Aravinda Ghosh, the leader of the national movement of Bengal, along with other brilliant young men were arrested on a charge of being implicated in a conspiracy against the established government. Evidence of all sorts was piled up by the prosecuting counsel. At this critical moment Providence sent Chitta Ranjan to take up the case in defence of Aravinda and other accused. The prosecution dragged on for more than a year. For this long period Chitta Ranjan conducted the defence case at a great personal sacrifice. This celebrated conspiracy case pushed Chitta Ranjan into the fore front of the Calcutta Bar. For more than six months he was engaged in this case, and even for his house-hold expenses during these months, he had to incur a large debt. The acquittal of Aravinda at once raised the reputation of Chitta Ranjan in the eyes of his countrymen. After this he took up the defence of the famous *Dacca Conspiracy* case without charging any fees at a great personal loss and also volunteered to defend the *boycott* cases of Bengal earning thereby the lasting gratitude of the whole nation. Providence also rewarded him amply for his good work and from the very day that he came back to take up the broken threads of his High Court practice, he found himself on the high road to both fame and wealth.

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We have already said that under peculiar circumstances Chitta Ranjan was forced to take shelter in the *Insolvency* Court. But it was never his intention to deceive his creditors and no one could with propriety ascribe this motive to Chitta Ranjan who spent his earnings right and left for allaying the distress of the needy and the poor. Consequently as soon as he found his position in the legal profession secure, Chitta Ranjan's first thought was to remove the stain of *insolvency* from his father's name and his own and he started to pay off every pie of those old debts. "This is the first time", said Mr. Justice Fletcher, "that a discharged insolvent publicly accepted his old liabilities and applied for a formal discharge of his *insolvency*." This unusual act of strict uprightness raised Chitta Ranjan Das to the position of a great moral hero.

During his professional career Chitta Ranjan conducted many cases. Since the release of Aravinda he was engaged in almost all the note-worthy cases of the High Court and of the *mofussil* on one side or the other, his daily fees exceeding a thousand rupees. His reputation as a profound lawyer spread even outside Bengal. In the long-drawn *Dumraon Raj* case he has all along been engaged on the side of the *Dumraon Raj*. When Mr. Vaidya, the then secretary of the Home Rule League in the Central Provinces was sentenced to eighteen months' rigorous imprisonment, Chitta Ranjan went to Nagpur to defend him. Mr. Vaidya was acquitted and Chitta Ranjan became very popular in the Central Provinces. On the acquittal of Mr. Vaidya, Chitta Ranjan addressed many meetings on *Swaraj* and although he earned nothing in the case, he gave a large donation to the local Home Rule League. The citizens of Nagpur as a mark of deep gratitude and respect presented to him an address in a silver casket. After a few months of this case Chitta Ranjan went to Rangoon to defend Dr. Mehta and his co-workers in the national cause who were convicted under the Defence of India Act. Mr. Das addressed the court on the illegality of the Act itself securing thereby the release of Dr. Mehta and others. Shortly after this he was engaged by the *Kutubdia Internees* at Chittagong. Those young men were kept in a house infested with serpents and they were compelled to fly away for fear of death. But this was a grave offence in the eyes of the Government.

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In all these cases Chitta Ranjan charged no fees, but conducted them with the utmost zeal. Whenever he was engaged in a case he made it a point to bring all his intelligence and capacity to bear on it. It was not rare in his life that he meditated on a case for hours together before coming to any conclusion. He would then be so deeply immersed in contemplation that he lost all external consciousness like a *Yogi* wrapt in meditation upon something serene and divine.

He had often returned briefs of cases to which he thought he would not be able to give proper attention. Legally he was not bound to return the fees but moral scruples dictated him this course. For such acts of honesty he was much respected by the litigants. Often he had taken up the cases of the poor without charging them any fees and thereby earned the lasting gratitude of his countrymen. It was for his honesty and integrity apart from his legal acumen that the Government of India selected Chitta Ranjan from among the leading counsels of India to conduct the *Munition Board* case even when they knew him to be the leader of the extremist party in

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Bengal. At first Chitta Ranjan hesitated to represent the Crown and told the Government that unless he was allowed to follow the dictates of his conscience to the best interests of his country he would not accept the brief. When the Government agreed in all these conditions he gave his consent to the contract. The accused party knew that Chitta Ranjan had not yet received brief for the Crown, they came to his house, placed before him a cheque of several lacs and entreated him again and again to come to their defence. But Chitta Ranjan, true to his words, said with a smile, "Gentlemen, I am sorry I cannot comply with your request, when I have once given the Government my words of consent, I am morally bound to take up their case." The greedy merchants were taken aback at such indifference to money and faithfulness to his promise; they could not but admire this act of Chitta Ranjan, though they had to go away disappointed.

Throughout his professional career he showed courage and independence. We shall here cite an instance of his uprightness. In a case at Noakhali one Mr. Cargil, the local magistrate, was an witness for the Crown. He was given a special seat in the Court. Chitta Ranjan was on the defence-side, his searching cross examinations annoyed Mr. Cargil who in an insulting tone called him "Babu." Chitta Ranjan would not tolerate this. He said with a retort "Mr. Cargil, you know that out of courtesy I have allowed you a special seat instead of making you stand in the witness box. I hope you will not fail to return the same courtesy to others." Chitta Ranjan was not made of such stuff as to bear any insult. Whenever there was any injustice done in a court, he would protest against it fearlessly and if it was not rectified he would leave the court unhesitatingly. It was for this reason that Chitta Ranjan left the court in the Dacca Conspiracy case when in spite of his protests the court was not just to his cause. [15]

As a lawyer Chitta Ranjan earned a good deal. For the last three years his income was about fifty thousand rupees a month. Many are of opinion that no lawyer of India had ever earned so much. More over there is no doubt that his income would have been much enhanced if he could exclusively engage all his time in the legal profession. He took up the political cases almost without any fees and also served on the Punjab Enquiry Committee for more than four months at a great personal sacrifice. This unrivalled practice he has given up unhesitatingly at the call of his mother country.

Such was the career of Chitta Ranjan at the Bar for about a quarter of a century, rich in details, famous for acuteness and noble in uprightness.

CHAPTER III.

Chitta Ranjan's Contributions to Bengali Literature.

Long before Chitta Ranjan was able to take an active part in politics his genius was revealing itself in literature. In 1895 he published a volume of lyrics, "Malancha", which introduced a new element of freedom and realism into the modern literature of Bengal. Some poems of Malancha support atheism and this made Chitta Ranjan very unpopular in the Brahmo Samaj. Many Brahmos headed by the late Pandit Shivanath Sastri did not even attend the marriage ceremony of Chitta Ranjan which took place in 1897 shortly after the publication of "Malancha". After this he published four more volumes of Lyrics—Mala, Antaryami, Kishore-Kishori and Sagar Sangit. The first three volumes contain poems inspired by the Vaishnava cult which is the special heritage of Bengal. Chitta Ranjan's lyrical talent is sufficiently prominent in these four volumes, some of the poems are in matter and form gems of perfect beauty, the charm is much enhanced by the pathos with which the poet describes his yearning for God whom he seeks with the enthusiasm of a lover.

But most popular of Chitta Ranjan's lyrical volumes is his Sagar Sangit (or songs of the sea). In this work the poet has woven in lyrics the high sentiments which stole into his heart as they came dancing on the waves of the sea. Here he has touched a new chord of his musical lyre which sang out emotionally:—

Straining my ear
I listen to thy chanting
O sea, in the midst of this
Light—encircled dawn!
What words, what tune!
My heart is full even to over-flowing!
Yet do I not understand
What is it that sounds
Amidst this morning
So resonant with this music.

Enchanted by the sublime beauty playing upon the waves the poet addresses the sea and sings:—

What hast thou made me to-day?
My mind is like a harp of hundred strings!
With the touch of thy finger it trembles and quivers
It bursts out in music in pride and in glory!

The closing song of Sagar Sangit is indeed very charming, full of pathos and wrapt in high sentiment it leaves behind a serene harmony—

Full of dumb weeping with no tears to ease
To-day my heart is mad for thee, O soul;
I have sought thee within thy million waves
And wherever the sound of thy song resounds
In the wonderous light and shades which to thee belong,
I have sought thee every night and every day!
O my friend Eternal; unknown to me my friend!
O pilot of my soul!
Take me away to-day, O take me thither
Where thou art shoreless indeed!

In order to spread the Vaishnava culture and to give a healthy tone to modern Bengali literature, Chitta Ranjan started a new Bengali monthly the Narayana which secured for its contributors some of the highest litterateurs of Bengal. In recognition of his literary services the Literary Conference of Bengal which had its annual session at Bankipore in 1915 elected him to be the President of the Literary section where he read a paper on the lyrics of Bengal. Next year he was elected the chairman of the Reception committee of the Literary Conference in its annual session at Dacca. In the Narayana he wrote many articles on the nature of Bengali poetry which show his intimate acquaintance with the Vaishnava literature. It is necessary to mention here that Chitta Ranjan's whole life is influenced by the ennobling ideal of the Vaishnava poets; even his patriotism and love of country are to a great extent modelled on that ideal. To understand Chitta Ranjan one must know his poetry and to understand his poetry one must be acquainted with the Vaishnava Culture of Bengal.

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CHAPTER IV.

[19]

Chitta Ranjan in his private life.

The unfolding of a man's character depends to a great extent on the atmosphere created by his family. Brought up by an ideal mother Chitta Ranjan came to regard his country as the other self of his mother. The sweet remembrance of his dear mother brings tears to his eyes and gives him strength to suffer for his country. His mother was a noble lady whose sense of duty was exceptional, whose piety exemplary and fortitude unique. During the evil days of her husband when she could not even meet her house-hold expenses and had no servants to wait on her, she did every house-hold work with her own hands and prepared the meals of her husband and children and other members of the house, while she herself had to fast now and then for want of food; but all this time a sweet smile played on her lips. Of her generosity and liberality we shall here cite an instance. In her house at that time there lived a poor relation of her husband. This man was a habituated drunkard. Almost every day whenever he lost his sobriety he used abusive language to Chitta Ranjan's mother. Bhuban Babu was much annoyed and wanted to turn him out of the house, but his wife prevented him by saying that the poor man would then die of starvation and as for herself she did never mind the man's conduct. She was an incarnation as it were of sincerity and generosity, to her could justly be applied the maxim of "weeping with them that weep." In fact the knowledge of other men's distress drew a flood of tears to her eyes. She was a fountain of affection which was not reserved only for her children. One of her husband's friends lost his wife on child-birth. Chitta Ranjan's mother took charge of the newly-born baby but unfortunately it did not live long. A few months before her death at Purulia a poor maid servant of her house fell seriously ill and was dying for want of diet, she arranged everything for the proper treatment of the servant and saved the life of the poor woman. She was always at the bedside of the poor, was ready to give a helping hand to the needy and tried her utmost to allay the distress of the afflicted. No beggar went away disappointed from her door. She never desired for luxury. She gladly parted with all her ornaments to repay her husband's debts.

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But in the midst of all these softer feelings she had a very strong element in her composition. She was very sensitive. She would not tolerate any injustice done to her. She was equally noted for her liberality and uprightness. Chitta Ranjan's character was moulded to a great extent on her mother's ideal. He was much devoted to his mother who also loved him very dearly. But unfortunately she could not see her dearest son at the time of her death. She laid on her breast Chitta Ranjan's famous work "Sagar-Sangit" and privately told her husband before she breathed her last that if she was to be born a woman again she would like to have such a son. Just at the time of his mother's expiry when Chitta Ranjan was coming from Bombay, he saw in a dream in the train his mother appearing before him. Was it a presentiment?

About six months after the death of his mother Chitta Ranjan lost his father. He performed the Sradh ceremony with great eclat, the chief feature of the celebration was the feeding of the poor. Chitta Ranjan was personally present to see the hungry beggars take various sorts of rich food to their entire satisfaction. It was his explicit order that the poor should be given all that was liked by his father. It was even a treat for the gods to see the poor beggars ring the sky with loud shouts of applause and for many months it was a general talk in the localities how Chitta Ranjan

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had fed the poor.

In his private life Chitta Ranjan had to pass through many tests. He was the eldest son of his father and as such since his father's illness the burden of maintaining and educating his brothers and sisters fell upon him. He gladly took up this charge and the result is well-known.

His youngest brother, Basanta Ranjan was a rising Barrister of the Calcutta High Court when his career was cut short by death. His only brother now living is Srijut Profulla Ranjan Das who is a puisne Judge of the Patna High Court, Profulla Ranjan is a renowned writer of English verses some of which are inserted in Mr. Dunn's Bengali Book of English verse. His sister Srijukta Amala Devi was famous throughout India as a singer of songs, even the other day at the Besant session of the Indian National Congress at Calcutta she thrilled the audience with her charming voice when she sang the famous song "Bande Mataram." A few years ago Amala Devi started an orphanage at Purulia where with the financial help of her eldest brother she gave shelter to the blind, lame and the suffering. While engaged in this noble work Amala Devi passed away after a short but active career. Chitta Ranjan's eldest sister lost her husband at an early age and Chitta Ranjan had to look after her children. Another of his sisters died very young. Chitta Ranjan's another sister Srijukta Urmila Devi who has recently lost her husband has dedicated her life and energy to the services of her country and has started an ideal institution for educating Bengali girls on national lines. [22]

In 1897 Chitta Ranjan married Srijukta Basanti Devi, the beautiful and accomplished daughter of the late Babu Barada Halder, Dewan of the Bijni estate. In her Chitta Ranjan has found an ideal house-wife and a noble partner in life. She is the best consoler in her husband's distress, the most impartial critic of his poetry and now the constant companion in his patriotic activities. Her face always beams with a holy light of virtue and her eyes smile with a pure lustre. She is highly educated though without any degree. In 1919 the ladies of Amritasar in the annual session of the All-India Ladies' Conference nominated her as their President. Basanti Devi naturally fought shy of public appearance but she could not disregard the request of her sisters of the Punjab in the hour of their trial and suffering. In her address she greatly dwelt upon the building-up of the Indian womanhood on Eastern lines. "Remember" she said, "the ideal of Indian womanhood is Sati, Sabitri and Sita. If our experience so requires it, reform Indian ideal to suit the present times but seek not to destroy the eternal ideal of India. Our home shall always be the Indian home."

Chitta Ranjan earned a good deal in his life, but spent his all for the cause of the suffering humanity. Charity gives him unmixed pleasure. He who takes is blest but thrice blessed is he that gives. For that pleasure consists in the fulfilment of one's life-mission. So unlimited was his charity that when in this non-cooperation movement he gave up his practice to serve his mother country he had no standing income but a debt of about three lacs of rupees. For he never cared to provide for the future. Had he wished it, he could have now become one of the richest Zamindars of Bengal. But wealth has no charm for those whose heart is moved by the sufferings of others. Even now when he himself has taken the bowl of a beggar for the cause of his country, the poor never return from his door disappointed. It reminds us of a story we heard in our childhood that there lived once in our locality a poor beggar, he was so kind-hearted that he used to give away his day's earning to any of his fasting neighbours, while he himself had to fast the whole day. [23]

Christ once said to his disciples that their right hand should not know what their left hand does. This is also true of Chitta Ranjan's private charity. His charities have been many though the general public know very little of them. He has a fine heart, which is ever ready to help a fellow in distress. We shall here cite an instance which though of a trifling nature compared with his public donations, yet goes a great way in indicating the natural bent of his mind. About five years back a poor boy who was a candidate for the Matriculation Examination was going from door to door collecting money for his fees. Accidentally he came to the house of a near relation of Chitta Ranjan. This gentleman advised the boy to see Chitta Ranjan who would pay his fees for the mere asking. The boy acted accordingly. Now Chitta Ranjan rises late from his bed in the morning and the boy being impatient asked a servant of the house if he could have an interview with Chitta Ranjan. The servant was not in a happy mood and accordingly to get rid of him answered him in the negative. The boy came back disappointed and reported the matter to the former gentleman who then advised him to go again and wait on the staircase without asking the favour of any servant till Chitta Ranjan would come down and hear everything from him personally. It was easy for the boy to act up to this advice for no surly durwan ever blocks the door-way of Chitta Ranjan and the custom of presenting visiting cards is unknown in his house. The boy succeeded in getting an opportunity of telling his story to Chitta Ranjan. He at once ordered to give the boy the whole amount of his fees and also made an arrangement for his stay at Calcutta till the examination was over. This is one of the many instances of Chitta Ranjan's private charity which have never been known to the public. [24]

Chitta Ranjan possesses a very tender heart which ever feels pained at the suffering of others. As a devotee of Sri Krishna and Sri Gouranga sympathy for the poor and the distressed is naturally a part and parcel of his life. As we have already mentioned that he started an orphanage at Purulia which was managed under the supervision of his sister and was a boon to the suffering humanity till she was snatched away by the cruel hands of death. He has spent a good deal in the upkeep of many orphanages and is now the president of the Bhowanipur Orphanage which is managed by a band of self-less workers.

Chitta Ranjan is a great patron of learning. He has financially helped many litterateurs and has borne the expenses of publishing their works. For this act alone Bengali Literature will ever remain grateful to him. He also gave pecuniary assistance to many educational institutions; he was one of the special donors to the building fund of the Belgachia Medical College. He also financed to a great extent the literary conferences which were annually held for the cultivation of Bengali Literature. The other day he presented about 350 rare manuscripts of old Bengali literature to the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad. In fact Chitta Ranjan has always been connected with almost all the literary activities of this country which owed much to his pecuniary assistance. [25]

In concluding this chapter we should mention here that as a human being Chitta Ranjan had some frailties in his private life, some blemishes in his character; but an impartial review of his whole private life would justify the remark:—

"Take him for all in all
We shall not look upon his like again."

CHAPTER V.

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Chitta Ranjan as a symbol of Neo-Hinduism.

The study of western Philosophy led Chitta Ranjan to believe in atheism. This revolting note has found expression in some of his poems. But providentially the light of Vaishnava Philosophy came to dispel this atheistic gloom from his mind. Chitta Ranjan gradually understood the lofty ideals of Vaishnavism, the sublimity of Hindu theism. This Religion of Love and Sacrifice became a part and parcel of Chitta Ranjan's life. For this transformation in him his mother's teachings were to a great extent responsible, for they had a great deal to do in fostering and developing the germs of excellence with which he was born. He came to believe in the religious rites of Hinduism and on the death of his mother he performed the Sradh ceremony according to the Hindu rites. He is very fond of Vaishnava Sankirtana which he held now and then in his house. Chitta Ranjan gradually became a zealous devotee of Hinduism and had his name struck off from the role of members of the Brahmo Samaj.

But Vedantism which is the source of the Brahmo faith in Bengal left its marks on Chitta Ranjan's mind. The key-note of the Vedanta is its doctrine of Oneness. One reigns everywhere,—in the rippling of the waters of the ocean,—in the murmuring of the leaves,—in the melody of the birds,—in the charming beauty of blooming flowers,—and in the effulgence of the moon and the sun. This one is the Self. There is nothing but this self. For this reason, though a Hindu in the true sense of the term, Chitta Ranjan is an avowed opponent of the caste-distinction prevalent in our society. He has two daughters and a son. His elder daughter was married to a member of the Kayastha community and he married his only son to a Vaidya girl of Western Bengal. These marriages he celebrated according to the Hindu rites with the sanction of great Sanskrit scholars. But as usual the whole orthodox Hindu society was in a state of tumult over the inter-caste marriage of Chitta Ranjan's elder daughter. The bigoted leaders of society who sacrifice even their conscience for the so-called social prestige got very nervous and tried to create a scene but Chitta Ranjan was firm. He was at first not in favour of even appointing a Brahmin priest to conduct the ceremony. He argued as he had no caste-prejudice he should not prefer a Brahmin. He should rather select a Vaidya scholar deeply versed in the Sastras to conduct the marriage ceremony of his daughter. For days together Chitta Ranjan and his wife had long discussions over this matter but could not arrive at any final conclusion. One evening about a fortnight before the celebration, his wife, who was in favour of appointing a Brahmin priest left the room, when she failed to convince her husband. She did not come back till a late hour at night and found her husband alone in the room and in great mental agony tears were rolling down his cheeks. She approached him and said:—"Just consider a bit coolly. You want to reform the present Hindu society but not to leave it altogether. Then you should do it step by step. If you now do not even have a Brahmin priest, no one will have the courage to follow you and your purpose will not be served. On the other hand, if you try to introduce inter-caste marriages only and do it now with the sanction of a Brahmin priest, many will perhaps follow your lead. So that considering everything you should now have a Brahmin priest to conduct the marriage ceremony of our daughter". Chitta Ranjan was convinced and exclaimed with deep emotion, "Oh! What light have you shown me!" The matter was settled and Chitta Ranjan was relieved of his mental agony. The marriage ceremony was also smoothly performed according to Hindu rites by a Brahmin priest. In fact on every critical occasion Chitta Ranjan has found in his wife a wise counsellor and a true friend. Many a Sastric scholar of India-wide fame approved of this marriage, the list included men like Mahamahopadhaya Pandit Haraprasad Sastri, late Mahamahopadhaya Dr. Satish Chandra Vidyabhusan and Mahamahopadhaya Pandit Yadeveswar Tarkaratna. We must mention here to Chitta Ranjan's credit that this marriage took place long before Mr. Patel's Bill was introduced in the Imperial Legislative Council. [27]

To purge the Hindu society of the thorns and thistles that have beset it is a problem very dear to all true Hindu patriots. With this end in view Chitta Ranjan never fails to protest against the degrading customs of our society. Once in a table talk he remarked, "What a pity that our society is not even now roused from its eternal sleep. Take the instance of the present dowry system. [28]

Many a Snehalata has been sacrificed in its burning flame, yet the parents of bride-grooms are not brought to their senses. They are ever determined to make money by selling their sons even at the cost of social well-being and family happiness. But the parents of brides do never rise up against this degrading custom, fearing lest they mar the future of their girls by losing desirable bride-grooms. The parents should rather educate their girls; if by chance they do not get married, they can earn their own livelihood and may be so many Carpenters and Nightingales in our society". Such is the view of Chitta Ranjan about the present Hindu society. Generous, large-hearted and magnanimous as Chitta Ranjan is, there is something in the texture of his mind that is above the ordinary run. Few men who battle for the right, have the calm fortitude, the cheerful equanimity with which Chitta Ranjan battles to fulfil the burning aspirations of his soul. He stands high among those who have been able to display

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"One equal temper of hearts,
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield".

CHAPTER VI.

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Chitta Ranjan's Patriotism.

In course of one of his lectures Chitta Ranjan once remarked, "Work for my country is part and parcel of all the idealism of my life. I find in the conception of my country, the expression also of divinity." In fact the welfare of our country is very dear to his heart, for this he has given his all ungrudgingly and spent his valuable time selflessly whenever the occasion demanded it. Keenly has he felt the unhealthy condition of our villages and the illiteracy of the people, and long has he striven to convince our countrymen that our national regeneration lies in the sanitary and educational reform of our villages. Under his guidance and patronage there has been started several years back a private society for the improvement of the Bikrampur villages. It has for its main object the sanitation of the villages and the education of the people of Bikrampur and last not least it tries to make the poor villagers independent of others in earning their livelihood. Chitta Ranjan has now and then given large donations to its fund. About three or four years back he gave in the hands of the workers of the society a large sum for digging a tank to supply pure drinking water to the villagers. In the early part of the year 1919 when with the visitation of a great famine in East Bengal most people of the villages were in imminent danger of dying of starvation, this society under the patronage of Chitta Ranjan and his cousin Satish Ranjan started relief work in the villages. The distress was no doubt acute but it was to a great extent being relieved. But just towards the close of the year a heavy cyclone passed over East Bengal and the ever-violent Padma as if to vie with the violence of the wind ran inundating both her banks; the whole of Bikrampur appeared desolate, and heaps of dead bodies were seen floating on the river for several days together. Most of the villagers were left houseless, their provision had also been swept away and they fell an easy prey to imminent starvation and contagious epidemic. Chitta Ranjan could no longer stay quiet at home. He himself appeared on the scene at a great personal sacrifice. Under his guidance was started a relief society called the "Bengal Relief Committee" of which Chitta Ranjan was the Treasurer. He himself gave a donation of Rs. 10,000 and persuaded many of the large-hearted Marwari Merchants of Bengal to contribute a large sum to the fund. On this occasion Chitta Ranjan visited almost all the villages of East Bengal in spite of all sorts of difficulties on the way; he went to the villages and started centres of relief work, each centre comprising three or four village unions. The centres were entrusted with proper funds to feed and clothe the distressed and homeless villagers. The relief committee tried a new innovation in social service which was very commendable as a means of removing poverty from the villages. It arranged to pay the poor villagers each a small amount of money with which they were to revive their home industries and thereby out of the sale-proceeds they would be able to make themselves independent of any external pecuniary help. For as regards the poor the great object should be to make them independent; the great danger is of making them more dependent. It is no doubt a good thing to make them comfortable, but in helping people if we know that we love them and not pity them, we must try to form their character, otherwise our charity will be cruel. We read a short poem in our early years which throw some light on the nature of true charity.

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"I gave a beggar from my little store
Of well-earned gold. He spent the shining ore
And came again, and yet again, still cold
And hungry as before.
I gave a thought, and through that thought of mine
He finds himself a man, supreme, divine,
Fed, clothed, and crowned with blessings manifold,
And now he begs no more."

Such is the nature of Chitta Ranjan's charity which has aimed not merely at alleviating want, but at creating independence.

Patriotism is with Chitta Ranjan another name for socialism by which we mean his ardent love for the suffering humanity. He loves this country as it gives shelter to his poor brethren whom his religion has taught him to look upon as incarnations of Narayana.

When in April 1917 the political leaders of Bengal asked Chitta Ranjan to preside over the annual session of the Provincial Conference, he delivered a speech in Bengali which was unique in character and form and in which Chitta Ranjan stated that socialism and patriotism were almost identical so far as our country was concerned. He said in course of this speech:—

"Some people might say: 'This conference is for political discussion; what has talk about Bengal to do with it?' Such a question would be symptomatic of our disease. To look upon life not as a comprehensive whole but as divided among many compartments was no part of our national culture and civilisation.... Must we not view our political discussions from the stand-point of the whole of our countrymen? And how shall we find truth, unless we view life thus comprehensively and as a whole?... After all, what are the ultimate object and significance of this political thought and endeavour? If we wish to express it in one word, we shall have to say—what has been said so often—that the object of our politics will be to build up the Bengalees into a nation of men.... It is therefore that we shall have to ascertain what our present condition is, and in order to ascertain this we shall have to take first into consideration the material circumstances of our people. This again will require that we shall have to enquire into the condition of our peasantry—whether agricultural wealth is increasing or decreasing and whether agriculture is flourishing or otherwise. This in its turn will lead us to a further enquiry still, viz, as to why our people are leaving their villages in increasing numbers and are coming to settle within towns. Is it because the villages are insanitary or is there any other reason for that? Thus we find that an adequate discussion of politics will involve a consideration of agricultural questions as well as the questions of village-sanitation. At the same time we shall have to consider whether we can improve our material condition even by bringing under tillage all the available culturable land of the country. If we can't, then we shall have to consider the question of industry and trade as well."

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But why do we fail to enquire into the condition of our country in this way? We never look to our country, never think of our countrymen, of our past national history, or our present material condition, for the vanity arising from false education has rendered us blind and callous. Chitta Ranjan has truly remarked in the same paper.

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"We boast of being educated; but how many are we? What room do we occupy in the country? What is our relation to the vast masses of our countrymen? Do they think our thoughts and speak our speech? I am bound to confess that our countrymen have little faith in us.

... Besides, we seem to look upon them with contempt. Do we invite them to our assemblies and our conferences? Perhaps we do when we want their signatures to some petition to be submitted before the Government; but do we associate with them heartily in any of our endeavours? Is the peasant a member in any of our committees or conferences?"

By the grace of God this mentality has now been changed. The masses and the classes of our country have associated themselves in the present national movement. The peasant delegates are now honoured members of even the Indian National Congress. The note of warning that Chitta Ranjan struck was very opportune. This set our leaders to feel the heart-throbbing of our mother country. But what led us astray? Chitta Ranjan has justly remarked:—

"Mimic Anglicism has become an obsession with us: we find its black foot-print in every walk and endeavour of life. We substitute meeting houses for temples; we perform stage-plays and sell pleasures in order to help charities. We hold lotteries in aid of our orphanages; we give up the national and healthful games of our country and introduce all sorts of foreign importations. We have become hybrid in dress, in thought, in sentiment, and culture and are making frantic attempts even to be hybrids in blood. What wonder, then, that in this new pursuit of western ideals we should forget that money is only a means to an end and not an end in itself?"

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What has made us shallow; why have we, the so-called educated, become strangers to our own countrymen? For like other ideals, our ideal of education also has become mean and impoverished; and so what was easy and natural—we have made it complex and difficult. We must even now beware and listen to the wise warning of Bankim—a warning all too unheeded when it was first uttered. But one thing is certain that unless we change the whole organism of our educational system and make it harmonise with our national ideals even our existence is threatened. For this education has created a wide gulf between the educated and the masses, which our national existence demands to bridge over. About our present system of education Chitta Ranjan has said:—

"It has imparted an element of unnecessary anglicism into our manners and modes of life—so that in outer seeming it might almost appear as if the educated Bengalee had little organic touch with the heart of his countrymen. Then, again this education has made us familiar not with things but with words; it has made us clever but not men.... We have acquired a despicable habit of looking down with contempt, upon those who have not received this English Education of ours; we call them "illiterate" and "uneducated" and sneer at their ignorance. But these uneducated countrymen have hearts and sympathies; they worship their gods, they are hospitable to guests, they feel for the suffering and distress of their neighbours.... To me it seems perfectly clear that if we want to lead our newly-awakened national consciousness in the paths of true knowledge, education should be diffused through the medium of our own vernacular and not through the unwholesome medium of English."

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The reason for this ghastly failure in our national life is palpable from other points of view also. We the educated few, never co-operated with the masses of our countrymen. We are not only proud of our education, but also proud of our wealth and proud of our caste: and this three-fold pride has so deadened and blinded our senses that, in all our endeavours we leave quite out of account those who are the flesh, blood and back-bone of the land. The gentry of our country are mostly ill educated and therefore their pride springs from emptiness. To speak the truth, the so-called educated have no right to mix with their countrymen. They are narrow, callous and anglicised. They fail even now to understand that in this crucial moment of Indian History, the whole country should stand as one in working out her future destiny. Here the Hindus and the Mohammedans should co-operate, the Brahmins, the Vaidyas and the Kayasthas should come out hand in hand with the peasants and the chandals. Chitta Ranjan harped upon the same theme in his presidential address at the Provincial Conference:—

"Those who constitute 40 out of 46 millions of our countrymen,—those who produce our bread by their labour—those who in their grinding poverty have kept alive the torch of their ancient culture and ancient polity—those whom our English civilization and English culture and English law-courts have yet been powerless entirely to corrupt—those whom the oppression of Zemindars and Mahajans have failed to crush—are we,—a corrupt and effete handful—are we their betters and superiors? We boast of our Hinduism; but with our false pride of caste we are striking Hinduism at its very root. Even now while there is time, let us perceive our fearful and heedless blunder. In our oppressed and down-trodden fellow-brethren let us recognise the image of Narayana: before that sacred and awful image, let us abandon all false pride of birth and breed and let us bend our heads in reverence and true humility. These seething millions of your land—be they Christians or Mahomedans or Chandals—they are your brothers; embrace them as such, co-operate with them and only then will your labours be crowned with success."

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In taking a survey of our present condition, we have to think of the poverty of the peasant-class, and closely connected with this question of poverty is the question of village depopulation. The village is the centre of our civilisation and culture; and hence the decay of village-life is bound to cripple and enfeeble our body-politic. Now the cause of this village depopulation is two-fold. In the first place, there is the ravage of malaria and in the second place, there is the temptation of city-life with its ease, luxury and commercial and money-making facilities. Thus modern cities like some huge reptiles are swallowing up the ancient village centres of our country; and one of our chief duties will be to re-establish the health, prosperity and welfare of the villages. In order to do this, we shall have to improve the water-supply of our villages, to remove jungles, to educate the common people in the laws of health and sanitation. Also in order that agriculture may flourish, we shall have to establish banking institutions upon a small scale. For this combined and harmonious work we must have a plan. Chitta Ranjan has suggested one in his presidential address at the Provincial Conference of 1917:—

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Our first step will be to organise all the villages of each district into a number of village groups or unions. Where one village is sufficiently large and populous, that by itself will constitute one union or group. In the case of smaller villages, several of them will be combined to form one group or union. Then a census must be taken of the adult males of each village-union: These will form the primary village assemblies; and they will elect from among themselves a panchayet or executive body of five members. This panchayet or executive body will have the sole administration of the village-group in its hands. It will look to sanitation; it will arrange for water-supply; it will establish night-schools; it will arrange for industrial and agricultural education; in short the domestic economy of the village-group will be entirely in the hands of the Panchayet. Besides, in each village-group there will be a public granary; each agricultural proprietor will contribute to this granary according to his quantity of land; and in years of drought and scarcity, the resources of this public granary will be drawn upon to feed the people.

In case of petty disputes, civil or criminal the panchayet will be the sole deciding authority, but in the case of larger disputes, they will report to the district civil and criminal courts; and their reports will be treated as the sole complaints or complaints in such cases.

In the next place, the primary assembly of each group, will, according to its population, select from five to twenty five members to the district Assembly. These district assemblies will consist of members numbering from 200 to 500 and will exercise the following powers:—

(1) It will exercise general supervision over the working of the panchayets and the affairs of the village group.

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(2) It will devise ways and means of the better performance of the functions of panchayets; and it will be directly responsible for the education and sanitation of the district capital.

(3) It will devise means for the improvement of agriculture and cottage industries.

(4) It will supervise the sanitation of the villages included in each village-group: and will be directly responsible for the sanitation of the district council.

(5) It will start such industrial and business concerns as may be best suited to further the resources of the district.

(6) It will employ chowkidars and peace-officers for the villages.

(7) It will have sole charge of the district police.

(8) Each district assembly will elect its own President and will appoint sub-committees for the discussion of different subjects.

(9) For the provision of cheap capital, each district assembly will open a bank: this bank will have branches in each village-group.

(10) The district assemblies will have power to raise by taxation the money necessary for its requirements.

(11) The present local and district boards will be abolished.

(12) Necessary laws will have to be passed to place the primary and district assemblies on a legal basis.

This out-line of work is very closely connected with Indian socialism. This is what we now call Swaraj or self-government of the villages. These institutions did actually exist in our country from very ancient times; they grew and developed with our growth, and they have a peculiar harmony with the genius of our national character. Chitta Ranjan has therefore proposed only reversion to our older social institutions. But life among us now is not so simple as it was before; it has become complex, difficult and intricate. Hence what was inchoate requires to be put into a system. The panchayet was a natural out-growth of our ancient village community! It consisted of those five persons who naturally and easily emerged into prominence by their qualities of character and intellect. The authority of the panchayet lasted only so long as the community at large tacitly accepted their authority. Now the question arises, "Will the Government entrust so much power to us?" Again there are the Anglo-Indian papers crying themselves hoarse, "No no, there is so much of anarchism in the land, it will lead to fearful abuses if the people are entrusted with any large share of power." But the real fact is just the opposite, if the people are given opportunities of serving their country on a larger scale, the so-called anarchism will die out of itself. Of this Chitta Ranjan says in his address:—

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"Since the days of the swadeshi movement our young men have been possessed with the ardent desire to serve their country. At the time of the Ardhodaya yoga (the most auspicious moment for taking a bath in the Ganges), and again at the time of the Damodar floods of 1913, this desire for service found noble vent in action; and the help rendered by our young men on these two occasions has been repeatedly acknowledged even by high officials of the Government. But unfortunately much of this noble energy and zeal goes utterly to waste; there is no permanent channel through which it can be made to flow; there is no work of durable utility to which we have been able to apply it. Hence a feeling of impatience and despair has arisen in the minds of our young men; and sedition is the outer manifestation of this feeling of impatience and despair."

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It will be the part of wise statesmanship not simply to check the symptom but to cure the disease —not simply punish sedition but to root out the deep seated cause which gives rise to it. Our young men labour under the impression that the bureaucracy will give them no opportunity of doing real service to their country. This impression must be removed and they must be given opportunities for larger co-operation in the affairs of administration of the country. These young men have hearts and a burning zeal for service; they think that instead of being utterly suppressed the activities of these young enthusiasts ought to be given proper field and scope. The English have no doubt done us immense deal of good and we are grateful to them for that. By holding before our eyes the ideal of an alien culture and civilization, the English have roused us from the stupor, torpidity and lethargy of spirit into which we had gradually come to sink. They have helped to awaken our national consciousness and to re-establish our national vitality. We are no doubt grateful for these manifold services. But are there no reasons for the English to be grateful to India? Are they not in honour bound in return of the many benefits they have derived from us to give us every scope of shaping our national life? Chitta Ranjan has also harped upon this point in his address at the Provincial Conference:—

"I am confident that the praise and gratitude which are their due for these manifold services will flow forth in an abundant measure from our hearts. But let us look to another aspect of the question. What was England before her advent to India? What was her position in the hierarchy of world powers? Can it be denied that the sovereignty of India increased the power and prestige of England a hundred-fold and more? If then India has reason to be grateful to England, is not England also under a corresponding debt of immense gratitude to India? Of the gratitude of India, proofs have been forth-coming again and again. Of the gratitude of England, the proof is now to come; and if you refuse to grant our legitimate prayer, we shall take it that your gratitude is an empty and meaningless phrase."

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To a patriot when he goes to take a survey of the present condition of India, the first thing that presents itself is the deplorable state of the agriculturists; and that at once reminds us of our poverty. We all know that in the absence of trade and commerce agriculture is the chief means of our subsistence. In his address at the Bengal Provincial Conference Chitta Ranjan has presented before us a pitiable picture of our peasantry. The annual income of a peasant of our country ranges from sixteen to twenty rupees. This amount is certainly insufficient for a peasant even to keep his body and soul together. A prisoner in a Government Jail in India gets Rs. 48 annually for his subsistence. The comparison clearly shows that for bare subsistence the peasants have to incur debts. There is not one single village in Bengal where at least 75% of the inhabitants are not in debt; and there are villages where this frightful indebtedness extends to the whole of the population. Thus it appears, first, that the peasant by tilling his land does not earn enough to give him an adequate livelihood; and secondly, that out of the little that he earns a portion finds its

way into the pocket of the "Mahajan". And poverty is the source of all corruption, in the case of the peasants poverty grinds them in two ways. In the first place, it makes them weak, feeble, spiritless, and in the second place it has become a frightful source of theft and robbery. Thus from whatever point of view we consider the matter, the removal of poverty seems to be one of our chief and foremost problems.

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In order to fight out poverty agriculture will not be sufficient for us. Without industry and commerce our poverty will never be removed. We had commerce though not on European lines. Time was when we earned our own bread and wove our own clothes. We had corn in our granaries; our cattle gave us milk; our tanks supplied us with fish; and the eye was smoothed and refreshed by the limpid blue of the sky and the green foliage of the trees. All day long the peasant toiled in the fields; and at eve returning to his lamp-lit home, he sang the song of his heart. For six months the peasant toiled in the field: and for the remaining six months of the year he worked at the spinning wheel and distaff as was most consonant with the natural genius of his being. To-day that peasant is gone—his very breed extinct; gone too is that house-hold with its ordered and peaceful economy of life. The granaries are empty of their golden wealth; the kine are dry and give no milk; and the fields once so green are dry and parched with thirst. The evening lamp is no more lighted; the house-hold gods are no longer worshipped; even the plough cattle have to be sold in order to give us some poor and meagre sustenance. The tanks have dried up; their water has become unwholesome; and the peasant has lost his natural freshness and gaiety of temperament. What will remedy this? Chitta Ranjan has thus said in his address—

"Agriculture is not sufficient to give us our subsistence. Trade and commerce we must adopt; only our road must not be the road of Industrialism. In the days of old when our life was natural, normal, we had our own fashion and method of trade—a fashion dictated by the law of our being, by the genius of our soul. There we find that when the season of agriculture was over, our peasants would weave their clothes and prepare other articles of domestic use. They had not to look forward to Manchester to clothe them. Our cottage industries have perished; and the muslin-industry of Dacca and other parts of Bengal, once so famous and prosperous—has practically vanished. So also has vanished cotton cultivation—once conducted on an extensive scale but the secret of which now seems to have died out. Why should we not take to the spinning wheel as before and weave our own clothes? The brass ware industry of Bengal—that also has practically disappeared, chiefly for lack of patronage; for economic prudence aside, even our æsthetic taste has grown so coarse and vile that we prefer false and tawdry imitations to genuine and durable articles of value. Thus all our national industries have vanished and with these have vanished our wealth and prosperity."

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How to reconstruct these industries and restore a portion of our ancient affluence? We must have no traffic with industrialism, for our simple industries are powerless to cope with the dynamic force of western industrialism. In the first place we have to give up our luxury and licence. They have filtered down even to the cottage of the cultivator. We must give them up if we wish to awaken the powers of our latent self and so invigorate the whole of our social and national life. Home-spun and coarse clothes should not prick us. The temperance and restraint which will be necessary in order to sacrifice our luxury will be healthful and beneficent for our soul. Curtailment of luxuries which means non-importation of foreign articles will conserve our wealth and give a chance of new life to our dying industries and starved handicrafts.

As a true patriot Chitta Ranjan foresaw as early as the year 1917 that our national regeneration lay in the curtailment of our luxuries. To get rid of the materialism of Europe we must turn to our home industries. He advised his countrymen to fall back upon the spinning wheel and to weave their own clothes, be they coarse or fine. He has often said that until we, as a nation, are purged of the impurities consequent upon western license, all our healthy growth must become impossible. For it is certain, that

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"Nation grown corrupt
Love bondage more than liberty—
Bondage with ease than strenuous liberty."

CHAPTER VII.

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Chitta Ranjan as a Politician.

Chitta Ranjan's life may well be compared to an Æolian harp which gives out different notes as different gusts of feelings play on it. With the internment of Mrs. Annie Besant it sounded a new note—a note inspired by an ardent love of humanity. From this time dates his real entry into practical politics. At a meeting held on the 25th July 1917 to protest against the internment of Mrs. Annie Besant, Chitta Ranjan delivered a speech in course of which he remarked:—

"The Prime-Minister said the other day—"The development of India is not only an economic but a political necessity, the British Empire is founded not only upon the freedom of the individual but upon autonomy of its parts uniting in one common-wealth people differing immensely from one another in race, language, religion and colour.' The utterances of His Majesty's Ministers are at once a promise and a hope. Every order of internment is a protest against the redemption of that

promise and the fulfilment of that hope. I protest against these internment orders because whether any promises have been made or not every order of internment is a violation of natural justice and an outrage on humanity.... I do not think that the God of Humanity was crucified only once. Tyrants and oppressors have crucified humanity again and again and every outrage on humanity is a fresh nail driven through His sacred flesh.... The Anglo-Indian Press is never tired of saying to us: "Do not be impatient, there is plenty of time." There is no nation on the face of the Earth more patient than the Indian Nation. But there is a limit to human patience and I say to those doubtful friends, 'As soon as you transgress that limit, you forfeit the right of asking us to be patient.' When we find the utterances of our officials are at variance with their action, have we not right to say, "What is the good of your making promises?—You do not really mean what you say."... What are we that we should say "peace, peace," when there is none." [47]

In course of another speech delivered at a meeting on October 2nd 1917, Chitta Ranjan dwelt at length on the policy of internment and demanded the release of the gentlemen who had been interned. He said:—

"There is hardly a home in East Bengal from which one or more persons have not been interned. Every home in East Bengal is filled with sadness to-day because these people have been snatched away from their homes and imprisoned without trial or without proof. I say this policy is un-British, is opposed to all the time-honoured traditions upon which the British Empire is based. It is opposed to all rules of common sense and prudence and uprightness and the sooner this policy is abrogated the better for the peace and prosperity of the empire. At a time when the British Government in its wisdom has declared its policy that Home Rule in some shape or other must be granted to this country, that some sort of responsible Government is necessary for the foundation and preservation of the empire; is it wise then to detain these men against popular opinion, against the universal desire of the Indian people?"

On August 20, 1917, the Secretary of State made the most notable utterance in the House of Commons:—"The policy of His Majesty's Government, with which the Government of India are in complete accord, is that of the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire." This announcement gave rise to a new ray of hope in the minds of the people who were growing dissatisfied with the existing system of government and were demanding progressive reforms. The Anglo-Indians were mostly against the policy of Self-Government in India. Some of them made very angry speeches. One gentleman is reported to have said that if there was a government by the people and for the people there would be no security for life and prosperity. Chitta Ranjan gave a splendid retort:— [48]

"If the Anglo-Indians want to make India their home, let them do so and we will work hand in hand with them in the interest of the Indian Empire. But if they come here to make money, and all their interest lies in how best to make it, they are no friends of India, they have got no right to call themselves Indians, they have got no legitimate right to oppose the granting of self-government to the people of India."

In a meeting of the Anglo-Indians one Mr. Arden Wood was reported to have said: "If racial feeling is to be dominant in Indian politics the time will come, when, we the British, will either have to leave India or reconquer it." It is difficult to take this foolish speech seriously. In course of one of his speeches Chitta Ranjan referred to it and said:—

"They may leave India if they find it unprofitable to stay in India. They may stay in India if they find it profitable to do so but the tall talk of reconquering India is a comical statement. If this gentleman does not know, he ought to know that India was never conquered. India was won by love and by promise of good government. India was never conquered and God willing, it will never be conquered for all time to come. India will impress her ideal, her civilisation, and her culture upon the whole world." [49]

Some of our countrymen believe that Chitta Ranjan bears an ill will against the Europeans as a class. This belief has no basis at all. Those Englishmen who had any opportunities of knowing him personally would bear this out that much as he condemned the present system of Bureaucratic Government he had no racial feeling against them. He has many intimate friends among the Europeans. Sir Lawrence Jenkins, the late Chief Justice of Bengal, who was on very good terms with Chitta Ranjan, once enquired of him why he alone was not seen in the Calcutta Club when many other respectable Indians graced it with their presence. Chitta Ranjan openly spoke out his mind and said, "My Lord, before answering your question, I should mention here a peculiar custom of our country. Every Indian house-holder of the higher castes has in his house a place fitted for religious discussions where members of the lower castes are not admitted, but adjoining it he sets apart another place where all are equally welcome. Your Bengal Club and Calcutta Club can well be compared to the above two places. You do not admit natives into your Bengal Club, but as if to show your generosity you have fixed the Calcutta Club as a meeting place of the Black and the White. But do you not think, my Lord, that when you make this distinction you rather insult the Indians by admitting them to the Calcutta Club?" Sir Lawrence Jenkins was much pleased with these noble words of Chitta Ranjan and thence forward his respect for him was enhanced in a hundred-fold degree.

Again in 1916 when Mr. Montagu came to India Chitta Ranjan was for the first time invited to the Government House. He went there and learnt that he was invited at the suggestion of the Secretary of State himself. The subject for discussion was the political condition of India at that [50]

time. In course of the conversation the question arose if India was just at that time fit for self-government and His Excellency the Governor was of opinion that she was not. Chitta Ranjan could not bear this unjustified remark; he said with a retort—"If after bearing the responsibility of educating India for the last one hundred and fifty years, you have failed to make us fit for self-government, the fault is surely not ours." His Excellency became red with anger at these fearless words of one of his subjects and immediately left the place. But Mr. Montagu was much pleased with this just remark of Chitta Ranjan and talked with him for hours together over many important topics relating to the welfare of India.

On another occasion when he was staying at England during the Puja holidays one of his Bengali friends introduced him to Lord Morley. After the formal introduction Lord Morley asked him, "Are you a Native?" Chitta Ranjan replied with a smile, "Certainly I am." At this frank reply Lord Morley was so very impressed that afterwards he mentioned this fact to his friend Sir Lawrence Jenkins (who had just then retired from the Chief-Justiceship of Bengal) and spoke very highly of Chitta Ranjan. Sir Lawrence could not but then utter these few words—"And this is the man your government wanted to deport."

In fact Chitta Ranjan has never borne any racial feeling against the Europeans but has only opposed the present system of Bureaucratic Government. In course of one of his speeches he has remarked:—

"When I ask for Home-rule or Self-Government, I am not asking for another Bureaucracy. In my opinion Bureaucracy is Bureaucracy, be that Bureaucracy of Englishmen, or of Anglo-Indians or of Indians."

When in accordance with the announcement of August 1917, Mr Montagu, the Secretary of State came to India to learn at first hand what reforms were actually wanted by the people themselves, the Nationalist party of India thought it proper to convene meetings at different places of the Provinces so as to advise the political associations of the country to demand full responsible Self-Government at once. None of the leading pleaders and barristers of Calcutta was ready to go to the mufassil for that purpose at a great personal loss. But Chitta Ranjan to whom the question of the welfare of his mother-country was ever dearer than life itself could not but respond to this call of duty. "Work for my country is part of my religion"—this is the motto of his life. He left Calcutta, and visited different places and educated the public in the question of national welfare on Indian ideals. For though he obtained western education, he never forgot our ancient ideals. Of this he spoke in a lecture at Mymensingh delivered in October 1917:—

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"Much as I venerate European culture, much as I love and much as I acknowledge my indebtedness to the education which I had in Europe, I cannot forget that our nationality must not rest content with borrowing things from European Politics."

In a lecture delivered on the 11th October 1917 at Dacca, Chitta Ranjan dwelt on the nature of the Self-Government that India stands in urgent need of:—

"There is one thing to which I desire to draw your attention and it is this; that in framing the scheme you must not be swayed by a feeling that the Government will not grant this or grant that. What the Government will grant and what the Government will not grant, that is the business of the Government, we have got only to consider what is necessary for our national well-being, if you find that certain steps are absolutely necessary for our national development, do not fail to put that down in your scheme out of timidity."

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In course of another speech delivered on the 14th October 1917 he added:—

"Our Self-Government does not mean the Self-Government of the Hindus, the Self-Government of the Mahomedans; Self-Government does not mean Self-Government of the land-holders; Self-Government means Government by all the People of India in which all interests are to be represented and if there are any classes who are depressed, they ought to be told that the sooner Self-Government is introduced into this country the better for them: they ought to be told that we have no desire to restrict the franchise in any manner at all to the disregard of any such interest, and if any kind of responsible government is introduced into this country, which is made responsible to the people, they will have the power in their hands to oppose any oppression or injustice in every possible way."

Lord Minto was undoubtedly responsible for the reign of terror in India; it was he who first introduced repressive laws in this country. They were directed against the natural aspirations of the Indians. While protesting against these laws Chitta Ranjan had the courage to tell the Bureaucratic Government—"That we are fighting for the ideal expressed by the King's Ministers; we are fighting for carrying out that very policy which has been declared in England by His Majesty's Ministers".

In 1918 the Congress and the Muslim League considered in a joint meeting that Self-Government for India could be delayed no longer. Otherwise the growth of Indian Nationality and the development of Indian manhood would be impossible. The Bureaucracy in this country would not grant it. Therefore it was necessary that Indian demands should be carried across the seas to the great British Democracy. The Indian National Congress and the Muslim League thought it proper to send a deputation to England to tell the British Democracy that Indians wanted the right to build up their own constitution—a constitution which alone would enable us to secure the development of Indian nationality and the development of Indian manhood. A public meeting of the Citizens of Calcutta was held on the 18th March, 1918, under the Presidency of Babu Motilal

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Ghose to support the Indian Deputation to England, when Srijut Chitta Ranjan Das said:—

"It is plain that you may agitate as long as you like; you may demand your right, as you have a right to demand, but you will not get the Bureaucracy in this country to support you. You must, therefore, go to their masters....

If we find that we are not to get Self-Government, we have at least the right to get an honest answer. Let the British Democracy say, if it likes, that this war is a war of liberation of humanity, but liberation of humanity does not include the liberation of India. When I consider the objections put forward to the grant of Self-Government, I can hardly keep my patience. They say we are not educated enough to get Self-Government. My answer is: whose fault is it? For the last 150 years you have been governing this country and yet you have not succeeded in educating the people of this country to such an extent that they may be fit for governing themselves. Do we not know that Japan was made only in 50 years? You have had 150 years. Why is it that at the end of that period we are told that we are not fit to govern ourselves? Nobody really believes that the time has not come.... We are further told that we are divided between many sects. We follow different religions, we have got different interests to serve and so on. If you say that we are not fit for Self-Government, because we are divided in our interests, and in our religions, my answer is that Self-Government and Self-Government alone is the remedy of that."

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It has in season and out of season, been dinned into our ears that a subject people has no politics. It was therefore that political discussions, had hitherto been carried on in the spirit of singing laudation to the administration of Government, however palpable its defects seemed to be. This mendicant spirit in politics has been overthrown by the exertions of Chitta Ranjan and his compatriots in the field of national work in this country. Chitta Ranjan's ideal of political life was neither Utopian nor Quixotic. All that he demanded was, that all men are entitled to have equal opportunities without which the progress of human society and consequently the progress of a nation comes to a stand-still. He wanted for his countrymen the opportunities for self-realisation which would render pointless and inappropriate at the present-day Matthew Arnold's remarks:—

"The East bowed low before the blast,
In patient deep disdain;
She heard the legions thunder past,
And plunged in thought again."

CHAPTER VIII.

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Chitta Ranjan's Part in the Non-Co-operation Movement.

While on the cessation of all hostilities in Europe India stood on the tip-toe of expectation for the new age of freedom that was about to dawn and while men conjured rosy visions of the future, Lord Chelmsford inaugurated in an evil moment a policy of depriving India of even the elementary rights of personal freedom and free speech—rights which are most valued in an enlightened democracy. Towards the close of December 1917 Lord Chelmsford thought it fit to appoint a Commission presided over by Mr. Justice Rowlatt of the King's Bench Division to investigate and report on revolutionary conspiracies in India and to advise the Government to frame such legislation as might enable them to deal more effectively with the reactionary movements. The Commission was appointed without any sort of compelling necessity and, to say the least of it, at a most inopportune moment. The Commission held its sittings at different places of India and after an one-sided and unjudicial enquiry published a long report towards the close of April 1918. The war having just then successfully terminated in favour of the Allies, the Defence of India Act and other war-time measures which could only last so long as the war continued, would necessarily cease to be in force any longer and therefore the Commission suggested certain penal laws as a more effective and permanent safe-guard against the so-called anarchists of India. The report was emphatically protested against by every section of the Indian press but in spite of all popular opposition, Government drafted a bill substantially embodying the recommendations of the Rowlatt Committee and hurried it through the Imperial Legislative Council within six months of the report. The bill is generally known as the Rowlatt Bill. The effect of its provisions was two-fold: the Provincial Governments would be vested with an authority similar to that which was given to them by the Defence of India Act, and every person accused of a revolutionary crime would be summarily tried by the tribunals specially appointed for the purpose.

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Against such a cruel and tyrannical measure the whole of India protested with one voice. Public feeling was in a state of high ferment and yet in spite of all this, and in spite of the fact that every Indian Non-official member of the Imperial Legislative Council voted against the proposed measure, the Rowlatt Bill was passed into Law in March 1919. The situation in India reached a state of very high tension. Mahatma Gandhi advised his countrymen to take the Satyagraha Pledge as the only means of securing redress for their grievances. The pledge ran thus:—

"Being conscientiously of opinion that the Bills are unjust, subversive of the principle of liberty and justice, and destructive of the elementary rights of individuals, on which the safety of the community as a whole and the state itself is based, we solemnly affirm that in the event of these

Bills becoming law and until they are withdrawn, we shall refuse civilly to obey these laws and such other laws as may be thought fit and further affirm that in this struggle we will faithfully follow truth and refrain from violence to life, person and property."

Mahatma Gandhi further suggested that the second Sunday after the publication of the Viceregal Assent to the Rowlatt Act should be observed as a day of humiliation and prayer, a twenty-four hours' fasting should be observed by all adults, all work should be suspended for the day and public meetings should be held on that day in all parts of India at which Resolutions praying for the withdrawal of the measure should be passed. Indians gladly and freely took this pledge. Of the leaders in Bengal Chitta Ranjan was the first to rally round Mahatma Gandhi in preaching the Satyagraha vow. In March 1919 at a huge meeting of the citizens of Calcutta he delivered a speech in Bengali on Satyagraha in course of which he said:—

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"To-day is Mahatma Gandhi's day. To-day is the day for us to express the afflictions of our heart. In days of prosperity we forget ourselves, but on evil days when fallen we realise ourselves and hear the message of God.

To-day at this national crisis we must search for the soul of the nation. This soul is to be attained by strength. What is that strength? It is not brute force, but the force of love. This is what Mahatma teaches us and this is the message of all India. The realisation of this message requires the abandonment of selfishness, envy, malice, and hatred. Why do we protest against the Rowlatt Act? We know it for certain that its enforcement means the dwarfing of our national being. To avert this calamity we should abandon all envy and malice and infuse into the hearts of our countrymen an ardent love for mother-country. This is why Mahatma has said—"Do not hate even your enemies, for the victory of love is ensured." This agitation, therefore, springs from love and righteousness; it is the throbbing of the heart of a nation. The only means to gain our object is self-sacrifice—self-sacrifice inspired by love."

The campaign of Satyagraha was started and what followed is written large in characters of fire and blood in the pages of Indian History. The Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab, Sir Michael O'Dwyer, did in an evil moment start a counter-campaign of repression. Drs Kitchew and Satyapal, two popular leaders, were arrested and Mahatma Gandhi who proceeded to the Punjab from Bombay was prohibited from entering the province, was arrested and sent back to Bombay. A strong rumour to the effect that Mahatma Gandhi was imprisoned spread over all parts of India and exasperated the populace. Disorder broke out at Calcutta, Ahmedabad and many other places, but it took a serious form in the Punjab where martial law was proclaimed, and scores of persons were illegally hauled up before the martial law tribunals. Counsel for defence was disallowed and the unfortunate victims were all sentenced to death. In April 1919 the civil population of Amritsar convened a public meeting at the Jallianwalla Bagh to protest against some of the high-handed and tyrannous measures of the Punjab Government. The military were ordered by their Commanding Officer, General Dyer, to open fire on the harmless and defenceless crowd of men, women and children. In the name of public peace aeroplanes bombed the civil population from above and men were made to crawl on their bellies as a sign of penitent submission. This conduct of the Punjab authorities met with the full approval of Lord Chelmsford.

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Independent public opinion demanded a thorough and sifting enquiry into the atrocities of the Punjab and in compliance with the insistent public demand, Mr. Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, appointed a Committee consisting of official and non-official members and presided over by Lord Hunter to investigate and report on the Punjab disorders. The Indian National Congress deputed a Committee consisting of Mahatma Gandhi, Srijut Chitta Ranjan Das, and other prominent leaders to conduct an independent enquiry of the disturbances. Chitta Ranjan was not then keeping good health, but the call of the mother-country was paramount with him. For about four months he served on the Committee at a great personal sacrifice. The report of the Committee which was published in due time contained a severe denunciation of the most cold-blooded atrocities committed by the authorities of the Punjab. The official report, though the European members forming the majority attempted at whitewashing, contained much evidence to show that there had been some excessive use of military force. Both the reports astounded the world with first-hand knowledge of the unparalleled atrocities of the Punjab. The matter was agitated in Parliament and the staunch friends of India there tried their best to get justice done to India. The Secretary of State expressed his confidence in the Viceroy, the Viceroy his confidence in Sir M. O'Dwyer, who in turn fully approved of the deeds of General Dyer and this gentleman openly prided over his bloody performances at Jallianwalla Bagh. But the most shameful termination of the affair was the fact that the House of Lords hailed General Dyer as the Saviour of India. However four things relating to the Punjab event augmented the discontented feeling of the people bringing home to them their utterly helpless condition. First, the minority report of the Indian members of the Hunter committee and the shameless whitewashing of the European members of the same committee; secondly, the non-impeachment of General Dyer and Sir M. O'Dwyer; thirdly, the heinous approbation of Dyer's conduct by the House of Lords; and fourthly the large contributions to the Dyer Fund both in England and India as a reward of his gallant deed.

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Simultaneously with these high handed and arbitrary proceedings in the Indian administration a fresh wrong was done to every follower of the Muslim faith. At the end of the European War, Mr. Lloyd George in replying to Indian representations on behalf of Turkey, assured Islam that Turkey would have full justice. But when peace was concluded, the treatment meted out to Turkey was extremely derogatory to her self-respect and dignity; the Khilafat, the supreme temporal and spiritual power in Islam was most shamelessly handled. The Prime Minister, when

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reminded of his previous promise, replied somewhat ironically that Turkey had had justice done to her.

At this moment Mahatma Gandhi came forward with his scheme of the passive resistance movement now generally styled, Non-Co-operation as the only means of rectifying the Punjab and Khilafat Wrongs. On the 4th of September 1920 at the Special Session of the Indian National Congress at Calcutta, which was presided over by Lala Lajpat Rai, the Non-Co-operation resolution of Mahatma Gandhi was adopted by an overwhelming majority. It laid down the following steps to prepare the country for non-violent Non-Co-operation:

- (a) National Education.
- (b) Boycott of Law Courts.
- (c) Boycott of Foreign Goods.
- (d) Call for Self-Sacrifice.
- (e) Organisation of the Indian National Service.
- (f) The Swadeshi Vow.
- (g) Tilak Memorial Swarajya Fund.

At the Special Session of the Congress held at Calcutta Chitta Ranjan was not in favour of withdrawing students from schools and colleges and boycotting Law-courts. But at Nagpur a prolonged discussion with Mahatma Gandhi about the details of the Non-Co-operation movement convinced him of the necessity for adopting the whole programme and at the session of the Nagpur Congress Chitta Ranjan himself moved the Non-Co-operation Resolution. Some of the delegates who did not know Chitta Ranjan well doubted his sincerity, but when he told them bluntly that in his whole life he had never failed to practise what he preached, the non-believers were silenced. In course of the speech he said:—

"I ask you to remember, that when I say anything, I mean it, and in my life on public questions, I have never said anything which I do not believe in." [61]

Chitta Ranjan came back to Calcutta, gave up his unrivalled practice at the call of his mother-country and devoted all his time and energy to the attainment of Swaraj by the peaceful method of non-violent Non-co-operation. The only thought which was uppermost in his mind when he gave up his practice was his solicitude for his poor countrymen. Some time after this one of his friends once asked him what would be the fate of his enormous charities. Chitta Ranjan kept quiet for a while and then replied with a deep sigh:—"What shall I do? A greater call of duty has reached me, I must respond to it. Those whom I have helped so long will be helped now by God Himself."

About two years ago when Chitta Ranjan was engaged in the Dumraon Raj case an ascetic once said to him:—"My child, this life of worldly enjoyment you shall have to renounce very soon." None could at that time have any faith in that prophecy. Who could have ever dreamt that the time was so near? Mysterious indeed are the ways of God which the limited intelligence of man fails to fathom.

Chitta Ranjan's sacrifice in the Non-co-operation movement has elicited admiration even from high-souled Englishmen. Sir Michael Sadler, the late President of the Calcutta University Commission wrote in the London Times:—"Chitta Ranjan's wonderful sacrifice is unparalleled in the history of the world. Indians would do well to follow him."

As we have already said Chitta Ranjan is never a politician in the true sense of the term; he possesses none of the diplomatic ways of a thorough-bred politician. He is only a high-souled patriot led by emotions. He has loved his country with all his heart from childhood; in manhood through all activities he has striven hard to keep alive its sacred image in his heart; and now on the threshold of age that image has become clearer and truer than ever. The late Lokamanya Tilak once said of him, "I believe the time is not very far when Chitta Ranjan will devote all his energy to the services of his country and his love of mother-land will burn as a torch-light to guide his countrymen in the right path." That hope has now been realised. [62]

The People of India also as a mark of their heart-felt gratitude for the noble sacrifice and selfless patriotism of Deshabandhu Chitta Ranjan Das has unanimously elected him to be the President of the Indian National Congress to be held at Ahmedabad in December 1921. For some time he hesitated to preside over the most momentous session of the Congress of this year, but at last in compliance with the united request of his countrymen he accepted the honour—the highest they had in their power to bestow.

It is after all the great ideal of Chitta Ranjan's sacrifice that has led the young men of Bengal to respond to the call of mother-country when even Mahatma's appeal has failed to move them. The student-community of Bengal came out in a body to rally round Deshabandhu Chitta Ranjan in attaining the object for which we are all fighting. In one of the students' meetings at Calcutta Mahatma Gandhi while addressing the students said:—"I knew that you were waiting for Srijut Chitta Ranjan's leadership and I hoped the time was not very far when he would sacrifice his all at the call of his country." In an appeal to the students of Calcutta he said:—

"I advocate the method of Non-Co-operation, as every other method has failed. I want you to cling to this method, come what may. This is our last chance and this, at least, will not be in vain. Do you know what Non-Co-operation means? You must withdraw your help in moving the powerful machinery of the Bureaucracy. Do you realise how you can move this machinery? The Bureaucracy works its wicked will through the pleaders, through doctors, through clerks, [63]

through their police officers and through Magistrates and Judges. And you now see what the Calcutta University contributes. It contributes all the strength upon which the strength of the bureaucracy depends.

The method that I advocate is the method of sacrifice. If you have to destroy what you consider your chance of success in life, remember, it is only to defeat the bureaucracy, and to attain Swaraj. How can Swaraj be attained unless you realise your own right clearly, unhesitatingly? How can you compel the bureaucracy to recognise that which you yourself do not realise?

I repeat, therefore,—wake up, wake up, wake up. We have slept too long. Realise the sense of your bondage and stand out boldly and firmly on the road to Freedom."

In his Sagar Sangit Chitta Ranjan once sang this song:—

"As thou didst call with the roar of thy thunder
In the infinitely musical voice of thy soul,
My life over-flooded its banks
In the heart-churning torrents of thy sound."

When actually this call came to him, he went forth from place to place to preach the Swaraj mantra. Bengal was already prepared to adopt it. Wherever he went, the local people responded in a splendid manner and national institutions grew up simultaneously. After starting a national college at Dacca when Chitta Ranjan proceeded to Mymensingh in the beginning of March 1921, the Joint Magistrate prohibited him from entering the town. As the Congress had not then sanctioned civil disobedience, he did not break that order. But on that occasion the noble message that he sent to his countrymen is even now vibrating in the air:—"We are treated like helots in our country. Life is unbearable without Swaraj." He then came to Tangail and in the large compound of Mr. Wajed Ali Khan Pani's house a mass meeting was held where the labourers and peasants were present in a large number; the large-hearted Zaminder Mr. Khan Pani started a national school and for the benefit of the peasants a granary was proposed. From Tangail Chitta Ranjan came to Sylhet via Maulavi Bazar and Habigunj and presided over the Assam Khilafat Conference. The local people accorded him a splendid ovation, the town was lighted in honour of his visit. In course of the speech at the Khilafat Conference he said:—"The dawn of a new era has come. It is the dawn of unity among the different sects of the Indian people. This unity is never to be broken. We are all united to attain Swaraj. If in our own home, we cannot preserve our self-respect, if in our own country we are treated like cats and dogs, then where shall we get justice? We starve for want of food, we are turned naked for want of clothing. Our wives and children suffer humiliation at all times and we lose our lives like insects and worms. To set this right we want Swaraj. This is needed not only for Hindus and Musalmans but by every Indian, by every righteous man."

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After completing a long lecturing tour in the Eastern Bengal Chitta Ranjan came to attend the Provincial Conference at Barisal. In one of his lectures he said that Swaraj was urgently needed to get rid of the cultural conquest of the West which has caused the denationalisation of the Indian people. At the Barisal Provincial Conference he delivered a very touching lecture on Swaraj in course of which he said:—

"Swaraj is our birth right, it is a divine gift. When you realise yourself by penances, you shall get freedom from within and without. We look to others for our education, commerce and government; this is bondage. We must get rid of that. We cannot even clothe our mothers and sisters. What servility! We must be free men and not bondsmen as we are at present. This yearning for Swaraj is meant for our liberation. We are inimical to no body, ours is a peaceful struggle."

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Chitta Ranjan came back to Calcutta in April 1921 and shortly afterwards went to Bezwada to attend the meeting of the All-India Congress Committee held in the middle of April 1921 where it was decided that as a first step towards the attainment of Swaraj three things would be necessary:—(1) a crore of rupees to be contributed to the Tilak Swarajya Fund, (2) a crore of persons to be enrolled as members of the Indian National Congress and (3) twenty lacs of spinning wheels to be distributed to the Indian Villages. This first step was to be completed on or before the 30th June 1921.

Chitta Ranjan came back and addressed many meetings at Calcutta and the mufassil asking the people of Bengal to contribute Bengal's quota. The Anglo-Indian Press and the Moderate Press with one voice declared that it was beyond human power to work out the Bezwada programme within such a short time. But when the soul of a nation is awakened, everything is done in an unexpected manner. On the 1st of July 1921 the All India Congress Committee declared that contributions to the Tilak Swarjya Fund exceeded one crore of rupees and that the other two parts of the Bezwada programme were also accomplished beyond dispute.

In the mean-time a most deplorable event took place in Bengal. This was the inhuman treatment of the Assam Tea-garden Coolies at Chandpur. The tea-garden coolies had been for a long time smarting under acute grievances. They did not get sufficient food, were now and then brutally assaulted and even their wives and sisters were subjected to occasional humiliation at the hands of the European managers. These exasperated their feelings to such a pitch that they determined to go back to their own country. In early May 1921 the Coolies of many tea-gardens at Assam went on strike and in spite of many persuasions from the Deputy Commissioner and the proprietors of the tea-gardens they left the gardens for Karimganj. Coolies,—men, women and

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children began to pour in from different tea-gardens. They were worn out, shattered, half-naked and starving. In fact they presented a most pitiable picture and the local people took charge of their feeding and clothing. They were also making arrangements for the repatriation of the Coolies. But the Railway authorities declined to issue tickets to them. Perhaps they thought that the Coolies would of themselves return to the gardens if they had to face starvation and were refused tickets to go home. But the authorities were mistaken. The inhuman treatment at the gardens had long overstepped the limits of their patience and now they stood at all costs determined to leave the gardens once for all. Even they suspected the Government of being implicated with the managers of the gardens and refused to take food from them when offered. At the request of the people of Karimganj Mr. J. M. Sen Gupta went there and wired to the Traffic Manager to withdraw the unjustifiable order of the local Station Master. The order was withdrawn and the coolies came down to Chandpur in large numbers. The Government declined to make any arrangement for their repatriation.

The coolies were left to their own fate and as it could have been expected epidemic broke out among them. About midnight on the 20th May the most horrible tragedy that was ever enacted in Bengal was witnessed at Chandpur. At the instigation of the local authorities a band of savage Gurkhas fell upon the innocent men, women and children who were starving and dying of epidemic. They butchered the coolies right and left amidst the glee of the Local Magistrate and the Commissioner. The people of Chandpur were so much agitated over this matter, that had not the leaders come in an opportune moment to the place of occurrence there would have ensued a riot of the severest type. Chitta Ranjan was informed of this event and was wired to come to Chandpur as early as possible. He at once sanctioned on behalf of the Provincial Congress Committee 5000 rupees for the relief of the distressed coolies. The Railway employees went on a sympathetic strike and Chitta Ranjan started from Goalundo for Chandpur in a boat. The violent Padma became turbulent and it was most unsafe to face the waves in a boat. Many of Chitta Ranjan's friends tried to desist him from such a rash step. But he was not to be stopped. His heart was moved at the agony of the coolies and so he must to send them back to their home. If it wished God that he would be drowned, he was ready to court death at the call of duty. He was accompanied in this perilous journey by his wife and constant companion Srijukta Basanti Devi. The wind was raging high, the waves dashed against the boat; cheerfully did Chitta Ranjan proceed on his journey with his wife. It was his firm determination to go to Chandpur and arrange for the repatriation of the coolies. For this he feared not death. After an eventful journey in course of which he was once overtaken by a heavy storm and narrowly escaped being drowned Chitta Ranjan reached Chandpur. There he managed to send a large number of coolies in a special steamer to Goalundo and arranged for the repatriation of the rest. He came back to Calcutta with his wife in a cheerful spirit—cheerful, as he knew that he had been able to do his duty as the leader of Bengal.

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Now when the first stage of the Non-Co-operation movement was so successfully passed, the Working Committee of the Congress met at Calcutta in the beginning of September to discuss the second step and it was decided that the next step would be boycott of foreign cloth. This step entailed a great difficulty as it would be necessary to make the people self-reliant and independent of foreign cloth. It necessitated that spinning should be introduced in every house and Indians should be encouraged to weave their own clothes. Chitta Ranjan proceeded on a lecturing tour all over Bengal to preach Swadeshi to his countrymen and to make it clear to them that the salvation of India lay in hand-spinning and weaving. In course of one of his lectures he said:—

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"At this commencement of a new era in the history of India, you must take the Swadeshi vow. I know Indians can do everything only if they wish it. Their fortitude is unique and determination firm. Once take the vow that you shall not use foreign cloth. If you cannot procure sufficient country-made cloth, cut one cloth into two pieces and use them separately. You have no reason to be ashamed of wearing a short dress. On the other hand if you import fine cloth from Manchester, the whole world will cry shame upon you. To-day at this dawn of national consciousness take the vow that you shall wear only country-made cloth, be it coarse or fine. With it is inter-woven the sweet affection of your brothers and sisters. It will help you to develop your manhood."

In another lecture Chitta Ranjan has said:—

"Our national life has become stagnant. We must purify it. This requires penance for our past sins, this means we should give up all our luxuries and strive for the realisation of our national spirit."

In course of one of his mufassil lectures he once remarked:—"Those who still do not believe in Swaraj, must very soon change their minds. For they also must strive to attain Swaraj as the only means of developing their manhood. Swaraj is the birth right of a nation. It comes to believers and non-believers as a divine blessing."

When this speech was published in the form of an article, many took it for a visionary statement; but the time was not very far when it was actually verified. People who did never believe in Swaraj have actually joined this movement all on a sudden as if led by Providence.

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While the country was being thus prepared step by step for the attainment of its ultimate goal, the complete hartal on the 17th November on the occasion of the Prince's arrival in India unnerved the Europeans and the Anglo-Indians who saw that without any act of violence or intimidation the whole of India obeyed the dictates of the Indian National Congress. Not a

murmur was heard, not a complaint lodged. This produced a heart-burning in the Anglo-Indians whose representatives urged the Government by saying that it was Gunda Raj not British Raj on the 17th to take steps in striking the national movement at its very root. The Bureaucratic Government of India, misled by the Anglo-Indian Press thought it fit to crush the movement and the Bengal Government in a fit of frenzy as it were, declared towards the end of November that the Congress and Khilafat Volunteers formed an unlawful association. The Working Committee of the Congress met at Bombay and decided to continue the national service corps in defiance of the Government notification and enjoined upon all Congress-men to enlist themselves as Volunteers. Chitta Ranjan came back to Calcutta from Bombay and convened a meeting of the Provincial Congress Committee which delegated all its powers to him. In that capacity Chitta Ranjan thought it proper to send volunteers who would go from shop to shop requesting the shop-keepers to sell Swadeshi only and to observe *hartal* on the 24th December on which day His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales would arrive at Calcutta. He knew that the volunteers were to be arrested; yet he sent his only son Srijut Chira Ranjan Das to lead a batch of volunteers. Chitta Ranjan is a very affectionate father, his heart is all affection; yet the report of Chira Ranjan's arrest and six months, rigorous imprisonment, nay, the cruel assaults on his person did not move Chitta Ranjan in the least for he knew that son was suffering in the cause of justice and righteousness. He sent the following message to the persecuted:—

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"What shall I say to those who have suffered, who are suffering, and to those who are prepared to suffer for the cause of freedom? I repeat the message which was delivered by a Persian Poet.

Truth, love and courage:—that is all you need to learn, all that you need to remember. "Faith, Fortitude, Firmness, will they falter and fail and fade at the hour of trial, in the moment of despair", asked the Saqi in a mournful strain, "Or will they, tried and tested emerge from the fire of life radiant, strengthened, ennobled, purified?"

"Not will I forsake them", answered the youth, "not even were the heavens to fall."

"Thine then" said the Saqi, "is the path of glory, thine a nation's gratitude, thine the fadeless crown.

Would that courage unbent, courage such as thine, be the proud possession of all!

For naught but courage winneth life's battle, naught but courage secureth souls' freedom, man's noblest and highest prize. Let, courage, then, be thy gift, O God, to this wondrous land of love and light."

The day following Chira Ranjan's arrest, Chitta Ranjan's worthy wife Srijukta Basanti Devi and his noble sister Srijukta Urmila Devi along with Srijukta Suniti Devi came out at the head of the volunteers. They drove in a motor car up to the crossing of Harrison Road and College Street. They got down from the car and walked by the foot path requesting every one to wear khaddar, to discard foreign clothes and to observe *hartal* on the 24th December. When they came back to the crossing again, they were arrested and sent up to the Jorashanko Police station. They were conveyed to the Presidency Jail from the Lalbasar lock-up. Close upon midnight when they had already retired to bed, they were released unconditionally. The splendid message which they gave to their countrymen on their arrest is worth quoting here:—

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"We came out fully prepared for arrest. It was torture for us as mothers to stay away when our young boys were going to Jail gloriously. We entreat all our sisters to take up the work left unfinished. Let them not forget that their place is with their brothers and sisters imprisoned. Let them realize that they are practically living in prison, only a bigger one. It is more honourable to live in a real prison than to breathe the polluted air of the slave-land. We appeal to the students of Government institutions to vacate the colleges in a body and take up the struggle for liberty. Now or never is our last word. This noble struggle will lead us either to victory or to death. Both are glorious. It must be life or death, not this slavery any more."

The arrest of the noble ladies produced a profound impression throughout the city. Crowds of volunteers began to pour in, in order to continue Congress and Khilafat work and to court arrest in the act of doing that. The students of the Colleges struck and enrolled themselves in hundreds and in thousands as National Volunteers. Even low class people responded to the country's call. The national work went on with a redoubled velocity. Srijut Das issued the following appeal to the people of Bengal:—

"Fear of Jail, fear of assaults and fear of being shot down—these are three fears which every worker must conquer before we can get Swaraj. We have conquered the fear of Jail; we are about to conquer the fear of assault. It depends on the Bureaucracy when we shall succeed in conquering the fear of being shot down. In the mean-time I charge every one to remember that our success can only depend on non-violence so real and so perfect that all God-fearing men must come over to our side."

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In the mean-time His Excellency the Governor invited Chitta Ranjan to discuss with him the present political situation of Bengal. The points of view of Chitta Ranjan and his party and also those of the Government were freely discussed, and criticised but no actual result came out of it. The Government decided to take the strictest possible measures and arrest all the prominent leaders. Leaders of other places outside Bengal—leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai, Pundit Motilal Nehru, and others were arrested and tried summarily. On the 10th of December at 4-30 P. M. two Deputy Commissioners went to the house of Srijut Chitta Ranjan Das and there arrested him along with Srijut Birendra Nath Sarmal, while they were taking tea. Srijut Das kept up a dignified

and smiling appearance all through. Srijuts Das and Sasmal were taken to Lalbazar in two Motor-cars. The ladies commenced blowing conches and crying *ulu*. A large crowd had assembled on the road and shouts of "Bande-Mataram", "Gandhi Mahatmaki joy", "Deshabandhu Das's joy" went up from them. The following is the last message sent to his countrymen by Deshabandhu Chitta Ranjan Das, on the day of his arrest:—

"This is my last message to you, men and women of India! Victory is in sight, if you are prepared to win it by suffering. It is in such agony as that through which we are passing that nations are born; but you must bear this agony with fortitude, with courage and with perfect self composure. Remember that so long as you follow the path of non-violence, you put the Bureaucracy in the wrong; but move by a hair-breadth from the path which Mahatma Gandhi has mapped out for you, and give away the battle to the Bureaucracy. Swaraj is our goal, Swaraj not in compartments not by installments; but Swaraj whole and entire. Now it is for you men and women, to say whether we shall attain the goal for which we are striving.

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To my Moderate friends I say this. Survey the history of the world from the beginning of all times. Has any nation yet won freedom by pursuing the path which you are pursuing? If the appeal should reach any waverer amongst you, I ask him to consider whether he will now stand on the side of India in her conflict with the Bureaucracy? There may be compromise in the matter of details, but there can be no compromise in the essential question that divides us from the Bureaucracy. And if you do not stand for India, you assuredly stand for the Bureaucracy.

To the students, I say this:—You are at once the hope and the glory of India. True education does not consist in learning to add two and two make four; but it lies in the service which you are prepared to give to the Mother of us all. There is work to be done for the mother: Who amongst you is prepared to answer the Call?"

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