DAS GUPTA, SATISHCHANDRA

A prominent nationalist of Bengal and closely associated with the Khadi movement, Satishchandra Das Gupta was born in 1881 in a well-to-do Vaidya family at Kurigram in the Rangpur district (North Bengal). His father Purnachandra Das Gupta was a physician. From his mother he received his early lessons in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata which had an abiding impact upon his character. His literary tastes and interest in social reforms may partly be traced to her. He married Hemaprabha, sister of Nareshchandra Sen Gupta, a well-known Bengali writer and an advocate of the Calcutta High Court.

After passing the Entrance Examination from Cooch Behar, he graduated from the Presidency College, Calcutta, in 1901. His intellectual pursuits have been wide indeed; he has taken interest in Philosophy, Social Sciences, European literature as also in Indian literature, in Bengali, Hindi, Gujarati and Sanskrit.

Surendranath Banerjee, Bipinchandra Pal and Brahmanandav Upadhyaya were among his "heroes" in early life. Later he became a great admirer of Mahatma Gandhi. In contact with C. R. Das, Subhaschandra Bose, Motilal Nehru, Birendranath Sasmal and Sarojini Naidu, and also with foreigners like Horace Alexander who were interested in the Indian struggle for freedom.

In 1902-3, at the instance of his teacher, Acharya P. C. Roy, he joined the Bengal Chemical where he remained his right-hand man, along with Rajeshwar Basu. He later established centres for cottage industries such as dairy, match-box, handmade paper, printing ink, tannery and bee-keeping.

His participation in the movement against the Bengal Partition of 1905 was the first notable event in his political career. He was associated with relief-work in connection with the North Bengal (1911) and Burdwan (1915) floods. In 1919 he met Gandhi. As an associate of C. R. Das, he first supported him in organising the Swarajya Party. But subsequently he became a follower of Gandhi and joined the "No-Change" group. In his later life he became an ardent Gandhite and devoted himself to constructive work as a member of the Indian National Congress. He founded the Khadi Pratishthan in Calcutta in 1923 and the Sodepur Ashram in 1924. In 1930 he was arrested for violation of the Salt Law in connection with the Civil Disobedience Movement. Shortly after his release in 1932, he was again imprisoned.

A few years later he went to Assam to fight for the farmers' cause against the Government. During the August Movement (1942) he was once more put in prison. Later he accompanied Gandhi during his tour through the riot-sticken (1946) Noakhali district for the restoration of communal harmony.

After Independence he was associated with various bodies, e.g. Khadi and Village Industrial Board, Sundarban Development Committee, Khadi Commission and Bharat Sevak Samaj. Since 1966 he has been engaged in agricultural research at Bankura.

For the attainment of complete Swaraj for the motherland he subscribed to the method of non-violent extra-constitutional struggle championed by Gandhi. He is opposed to India's post-Independence connection with the Commonwealth. He is a believer in parliamentary democracy.

He was opposed to British rule on economic grounds too. He has advocated land reforms and improvement of the condition of labourers. His establishment of centres of cottage industries testifies to his concern for the same, though he supports the setting up of big factories for basic industries.

Though in favour of Western education, he has supported such a system of national education that would enable the students to know their country with its glorious past and also develop a patriotic feeling in them. He has also stressed the need of an agriculture-oriented educational set-up, while subscribing to Gandhiji's basic training formula. Author of several books on cottage industries, the rearing of cows etc., and editor of the Harijan (Bengali edition) and the Rath nanop (now defunct) for some time, he has contributed articles to these journals as also to the Pratap. A number of books on or by Gandhi have been translated by him into Bengali.

A liberal Hindu, Satishchandra is opposed to casteism and untouchability and has taken an active interest in the uplift of the Harijans. A champion of female emancipation, he prefers to leave to the widows themselves the question of their remarriage.

The philosophy of activism propagated by the radical and militant sections for the overthrow of foreign domination did not appeal to this orthodox nationalist, whose passivism fell in line with the Sabarmati school of thought. His contribution to the nationalist cause lies chiefly in his constructive efforts for the attainment of Hindu-Muslim unity, the removal of untouchability and the promotion of Khadi and other cottage industries.

[Materials collected from Satishchandra Das Gupta himself, his daughter Taralika Sen and his nephew Barunchandra Das Gupta; Nirmal Kumar Bose—My Days with Gandhi (Calcutta, 1953); M. G. Fyarelal—The Last Phase, in 2 Vols. (1958); Jogeshchandra Bagal—Mukti Sandhane Bharat (in Bengali, Calcutta, 1867 B.S.)]

(Amiya Barat) SUKUMAR BHATTACHARYYA

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Chapter 4

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