

## PREFACE

CHITTA RANJAN DAS was perhaps the greatest Bengali in the first quarter of the twentieth century, and the founder and builder of the best organized school of political thought in India. In 1922, some of his grateful countrymen bestowed on him the title of "Deshbandhu" (Friend of his Country), and from that day he was throughout India better known by this title than by his name. The record of his career, with that of the evolution of the political thought of the country in his day, is bound to fill many pages in the annals of Modern India.

During the lifetime of Deshbandhu Chitta Ranjan Das, Bengal had covered the track of centuries, and, casting off the traditions and languor of the feudal and the Middle Ages, pushed herself forward as one of the most advanced and progressive provinces of Asia. Under the influences of a series of most wonderful changes, the bhadralog, or middle classes of Bengal have begun to think of life and politics in terms of Western culture and modern democracy. The masses have thrown off the shackles which centuries of social tyranny had laid upon them, and are beginning to feel the pulsation of a new and free life. The untouchable classes no longer feel life a curse and a burden, and find no occupation or avenue shut to them; and the women of Bengal enjoy and exercise to-day almost all the rights that belong to the daughters of the most advanced countries of Europe. They have torn the purdah to pieces, are admitted freely to the universities, are not barred from succession to real property, preside over national congresses and conferences, and share the responsibilities of administration by going to the polls.

In the republic of letters and science, Bengal has now gained a position of great distinction; in the arts also, her

recent contributions have brought her the admiration of both the East and the West. Her industrial activities have also brought her prominently into line with modern European nations.

About the end of the nineteenth century Bengal lay helpless at the feet of her conqueror, and all the topmost places of the various learned professions were occupied by men of the ruling race. The Bar and the professions of medicine and engineering were all led by Englishmen; even the chief educationalists of the day were Europeans. Now, as I am writing this book, there are Indians at the head of the profession of law, medicine and engineering; and even in education, young Bengali students would rather sit at the feet of their own countrymen for inspiration and knowledge than seek them of teachers who come from the west of Suez. Following closely on Indian success in the various professions, the administration of the premier city of India and of the biggest University of Asia has now also passed into Indian hands.

The history of these various changes makes a brilliant chapter of progress in Eastern life, and it is confidently expected will interest everywhere.

In writing this Memoir I have extenuated nothing, nor set down aught in malice. Though I have myself taken some part in the active politics of contemporary India, I have tried to make the study as impartial and dispassionate as possible.

I have to thank Mr. Sukumar Dutt of the Dacca University for assisting me in writing the chapter on the literary career of Chitta Ranjan, and Lt.-Col. A. G. Hamilton, of the Salvation Army, London, and my youngest daughter, Bina, for having helped me with many valuable suggestions.

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