

Basanti Devi Das (1880)

Basanti Devi was born on 23rd March, 1880 in Calcutta. She was the second child of her father Diwan Baradanath Halder of Bijni. The first ten years of her childhood were spent in Bijni and Abhayapuri. She was sent for schooling to Calcutta, where she eventually joined Loreto House.

In 1897, she was married to Chittaranjan Das, who was a struggling Barrister then. She took up the management of an enormous household composed of the joint families of Chittaranjan Das. Her first child was born in 1898, followed in 1899 by her only son, and her youngest daughter in 1901.

When her husband suddenly submerged himself in active politics in 1917, she immediately assured him of her wholehearted cooperation. She played an active part in the Non-Cooperation Movement, as a result of which she was arrested, along with her sister-in-law Urmila Devi and another lady worker, Suniti Devi, on a charge of advocating the use of 'khaddar'.

This was followed in quick succession by the arrest of her son and her husband in December 1921. Several eminent Barristers of India raised violent objection against the arrest and humiliation of Basanti Devi and brought their protest to the Viceroy, Lord Reading, thus securing her release. Immediately after her release, far from relinquishing her prominent position in the move for national awakening, she redoubled her activities. An important political figure, she did much to encourage national appreciation of literature, dramatics, art and science through her friendship with intellectuals such as Tagore and others. She was her husband's constant companion, and provided the natural impetus his followers required in their untiring welfare work.

Basanti Devi, already widely travelled abroad, toured her own country spreading her husband's message. While her husband, along with his famous comrades including Maulana Azad and his disciple Subhash Chandra Bose, was arrested, she personally represented her husband and presided over the Chittagong Provincial Conference in 1922. She accompanied her husband to Darjeeling in 1925, where he died. It was Basanti Devi who was partly responsible for the instigation of

her husband with the idea of sacrificing his stupendous fortune to join the national movement. Owing to her determination, the marriage of her daughter Aparna was the first inter-caste marriage in Bengal to be conducted according to strict Hindu rites without registration. Even after her husband's death, Basanti Devi's welfare work in the centres set up by Deshbandhu did not cease till her last days.