CHAPTER IV

GANDHI'S CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAMME
AND MILITANT NATIONALISTS OF BENGAL

In the previous chapter the response of the militant nationalists of Bengal to the Gandhian leadership over the nationalist struggle for independence has been analysed. But one important aspect of the Gandhian movement was represented by the Constructive Programme. It was an attempt to start the process of building up, within the framework of the existing social structure, a non-violent society through non-violent means. From Gandhi's point of view this was an integral part of the struggle for independence or swaraj. Its fulfilment, in his opinion, was the attainment of Swaraj, and moreover, it was "calculated," as Nirmal Kumar Bose pointed out, "to develop those particular qualities which are useful in periods of intensive non-cooperation."¹ The response of the militant nationalists of Bengal to this Programme of Gandhi would be examined in this chapter. Along with this response the extent of the success of the Constructive Programme of Gandhi in Bengal would also be attempted.

Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Objectives:

Gandhi developed the idea of Constructive Programme along with his essentially negative movement of non-cooperation. The programme adopted by the Congress at Nagpur (December 1920) under Gandhi's leadership for the non-cooperation movement had a constructive side also. It included such items as the revival of hand-spinning and weaving, organization of national schools, removal of untouchability from the Hindu society, promotion of Hindu-Muslim unity, prohibition

¹ Studies in Gandhism (D.N. Library, Calcutta, 1940, p. 19.)
of the use of alcoholic drinks etc. The Congress Working Committee which met at Bardoli in February 1922 immediately after the Chauri Chaura incident advised the Congress organizations to devote themselves exclusively to constructive activities. In order to implement the constructive programme Gandhi, in course of time, set up various institutions such as All India Spinners' Association (Charkha Sangh), All India Village Industries Association (Gram Udyog Sangh), Harijan Sevak Sangh, Hindustani Talimi Sangh. The All India Spinners' Association (AISA) was formed in 1925 as an expert body for the development of hand-spinning and khaddar in the country. It was organized as an integral part of the Congress but with autonomous existence and powers. The All India Village Industries Association (AIVIA) was set up in December 1934, because, it was felt, as Gandhi has put it, that the khadi work was not enough "to rejuvenate the villages". Prafulla Chandra Ghosh was chosen a member of its first board of management and four more persons from Bengal - Rabindranath Tagore, Jagadish Chandra Bose, Bidhan Chandra Roy and Prafulla Chandra Roy - were included in its board of advisers. The Harijan Sevak Sangh was founded in September 1932 after Gandhi's fast against the Communal Award undertaken at the Yervada jail. Its headquarters were at Delhi and it had an able secretary in Amritlal V. Thakkar. Its objectives were the

eradication of untouchability from the Hindu society by truthful and nonviolent means, to promote the moral, social and material welfare of the untouchables, who came to be known as Harijans, and to secure for them absolute equality of status with the rest of the Hindus. It sought to convince the caste Hindus that untouchability, as it was practised in the Hindu society, was "repugnant to the fundamental principles of Hinduism and to the best instinct of humanity."\(^5\) The organization was first called the Anti-Untouchability League, and later its name was changed into Servants of the Untouchables Society and finally into Harijan Sevak Sangh. The Hindustani Talimi Sangh owed its origin to a resolution passed by the Congress in its Haripura session (1938)\(^6\) and its purpose was to develop and implement Gandhi's ideas on Basic Education which came to be known as Navee Talim (New Education). There were many other institutions such as Goseva Sangh, Hindi Prachar Samity, Gandhi Seva Sangh, Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Fund which were closely connected with the Constructive Programme of Gandhi.

In mid-December 1941 Gandhi issued a booklet, *Constructive Programme*, which, as Tendulkar records, was written by him in the train while going from Sevagram to Bardoli.\(^7\) In this booklet he tried to explain, in concrete terms, the activities which he wanted to include under the term 'Constructive Programme'.

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5. The objectives of the Sangh are mentioned in its constitution which is reproduced in Mukut Behari Verma, *History of the Harijan Sevak Sangh 1932-1968* (published by Harijan Sevak Sangh, Delhi, 1971), Appendix 1, pp.231-236.


Here he prepared a list of eighteen different activities and maintained that the items specified in the booklet were only "illustrative" and "not exhaustive". "Local circumstances, he wrote, "may suggest many more items not touched in the printed programme". A cursory reference to the eighteen items of activities mentioned in the booklet will be helpful for understanding the nature of Gandhi's Constructive Programme. They were as follows:

1. Communal unity - By communal unity Gandhi meant not simply superficial political unity but "unbreakable heart unity" among the members of all communities of India. Such unity, he wrote, would make the power of the Indian people irresistible and he asked the Congressman to achieve it by showing equal respect to all religions.

2. Removal of Untouchability - The Hindu Congressmen must work for the removal of this evil for the survival of Hinduism and not simply to gain some political objectives.

3. Prohibition - He asked the Congressmen to take effective steps to introduce this moral reform instead of leaving the matter to the government that would be formed after independence.

4. Khadi - It was at the centre of Gandhi's Constructive Programme. He wanted every Congressman, and for that matter every Indian, to take up this work seriously and to devote themselves to the entire process of the production of khadi, from cotton growing to spinning and weaving.

5. Other Village Industries - The Congressmen should take a living interest in such village industries as hand-grinding, hand-pounding, soap-making, paper-making, match-making, tanning, oil-pressing etc. and they should try to re-organize them on a new basis.

6. Village Sanitation - "If the majority of the Congressmen were derived from our villages, as they should be", Gandhi wrote, "they should be able to make our villages models of cleanliness in every sense of the word". 9

7. Basic Education - This was, according to Gandhi, a big field of work for many Congressmen through which they should transform village children into model villagers.

8. Adult Education - The Congressmen, particularly those Congressmen who were teachers, should, Gandhi suggested, lay down a scheme for this and implement it.

9. Women - The satyagraha movements brought many women to the broad national life from their narrow domestic surroundings, but this was not enough, according to Gandhi, for full female emancipation. "It is up to Congressmen", he wrote, "to see that they enable them (women) to realize their full status and play their part as equals of men". 10

10. Education in Health and Hygiene - Apart from looking after the sanitary conditions of the villages, the Congressmen must take measures so that the villagers might know and observe the laws of health and hygiene.

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10. Ibid., p.22.
11. **Provincial Languages** - These languages must be enriched to promote mass enlightenment.

12. **National Language** - Hindustani should become the national language of India and every Congressmen should learn it.

13. **Economic Equality** - According to Gandhi the process for realising this ideal should begin immediately, and not after the achievement of independence. The rich Congressmen should lead their lives according to the ideal of trusteeship.

14. **Kisans** - The Congressmen must seek to remove the specific grievances of the peasants non-violently without using them for any political purpose. Peasant organizations might be formed locally around a specific wrong but not on an all-India basis to realise a general political objective.

15. **Labour** - The Ahmedabad Labour Union, which was formed by Gandhi was recommended by him as a model for all India to follow. It contributed substantially towards promoting the labour welfare but it did not take any part in the party politics of the Congress or in the movement spearheaded by the All India Trade Union Congress.

16. **Advasis** - Service of *adivasis* was regarded by Gandhi as an essential part of his Constructive Programme. He understood that without this work India's claim to be one nation might be challenged.

17. **Lepers** - In Gandhi's scheme the lepers obviously stood for the most neglected section of India's people. "If we were all in earnest about winning independence in the quickest manner possible by truthful and non-violent means," Gandhi observed,  

11. *For Gandhi's leadership to the Ahmedabad labour strike* Contd...
"there would not be a leper or beggar in India uncared for and unaccounted for." 12

13. Students — he wanted the students to prepare themselves for national work by accepting 'sacrificial spinning in a scientific manner', by using Khadi, by abjuring communalism and the practice of untouchability, by learning the national language, Hindustani, and by leading a pure life of self-restraint. The students must take no part in party politics and must not resort to political strikes. Like his attitude towards the peasants and workers Gandhi was opposed to formation of national students' organization with a general political objective.

Gandhi also wanted to include goseva or improvement of cattle as an important item in the Constructive Programme. 13

It is quite obvious from this programme that it was not related to the struggle for independence, at least as the militant nationalists of Bengal understood it. It was not a fighting programme but a programme of socio-economic reforms and humanitarian activities. But in Gandhi's view this Programme had a revolutionary significance, and it was not only directly related to swaraj, but identical with it. Explained in the form of a number of socio-economic reforms and humanitarian activities, the Constructive Programme actually represented, in a nutshell, the ideal social order which Gandhi had in view, and, according to him, the wholesale fulfilment of this Programme was swaraj. He wrote: "Workers should definitely realize that the constructive which gave rise to this Union see M.K. Gandhi, An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth (Navajivan, Ahmedabad, 1956), pp. 427-28.

13. Ibid., p. 38.
programme is the non-violent and truthful way of winning 'Poorna Swaraj'. Its wholesale fulfilment is complete independence. Imagine all the forty crores of people engaged in the whole of the Constructive programme which is designed to build up the nation from the very bottom upward." A decade earlier he wrote: "Once I said 'In spinning wheel lies Swaraj', next I said, 'In prohibition lies Swaraj'. In the same way I would say in cent percent Swadeshi lies Swaraj. Of course, it is like the blind men describing the elephant. All of them are right and yet not wholly right".

In the pamphlet Constructive Programme Gandhi tried to collect all the major points (though they were not exhaustive) the fulfilment of which would necessarily mean the rise of non-violent swaraj.

Gandhi confidently believed that it was possible to win freedom through the Constructive Programme alone if the support of the entire people could be secured behind it. It wrote: "Civil Disobedience is not absolutely necessary to win freedom through purely non-violent effort, if the co-operation of the whole nation is secured in the constructive programme." But since this was not practicable ("But such good luck rarely favours nations or individuals", he wrote).

15. Ibid., p. 36.

Gandhi possibly thought that if all the internal conflicts of the country were resolved through communal unity, abolition of untouchability, co-operation of the adivasis, establishment of economic equality etc., and if the villages were developed and the people used only khadi and other products of the village industries to the exclusion of all foreign goods, the foreigners would have neither any scope or any interest to remain in the country.
Gandhi felt the need of Civil Disobedience. He, however, believed that Civil Disobedience was closely related to the Constructive Programme. The Constructive Programme would prepare the country for Civil Disobedience, and would give the people necessary training for its success. He observed: "Civil Disobedience, mass or individual, is an aid to constructive effort and is a full substitute for armed revolt. Just as military training is necessary for armed revolt, training in constructive effort is equally necessary for civil resistance. And just as the use of arms becomes necessary only when occasion demands it, even so is the use of civil resistance only occasional."  

17. A successful non-violent Civil Disobedience movement would require the mobilization of the general mass of the people under the banner of the Congress, and this could not be achieved unless the Congress workers could establish sustained and meaningful relations with the people. The Constructive Programme provided them with the opportunity to develop such relations. As Gandhi pointed out: "I have said and I repeat that there is no Swaraj for the masses except through khadi and village crafts. For there is no non-violent disobedience without sustained constructive effort. A living, continuous mass contact is impossible without some constructive programme requiring almost daily contact of the workers with the masses.  

18. Civil disobedience for the removal of some local specific grievance, Gandhi maintained, might be organized without elaborate preparatory work, but a nation-wide response of the people to a movement for swaraj could not be expected unless the Congress workers could win their confidence through

17. Nirmal Kumar Bose, n.8, p.141.
18. Harijan, 23 March 1940.
sustained work of social service. Gandhi explained his ideas clearly thus: "Constructive programme is not essential for local civil disobedience for specific relief .... Tangible common grievance restricted to a particular locality is enough. But for such an indefinable thing as Swaraj, people must have previous training in doing things of all-India interest. Such work must throw together the people and their leaders whom they would trust implicitly. Trust begotten in the pursuit of continuous constructive work becomes a tremendous asset at the critical moment. Constructive work therefore is for a non-violent army what drilling etc. is for an army designed for bloody warfare. Individual civil disobedience among an unprepared people and by leaders not known to or trusted by them is of no avail, and mass civil disobedience is an impossibility. The more therefore the progress of the constructive programme, the greater is there the chance for civil disobedience." Gandhi referred to this point in his pamphlet on Constructive Programme also. There he wrote: "It should be clear to the reader that Civil Disobedience in terms of Independence without the co-operation of the millions by way of constructive effort is mere bravado and worse than useless." The Constructive Programme would give the Congress workers an opportunity to organize the people in their respective localities, and to mobilize them in the non-violent struggle for swaraj at the right moment.

Gandhi believed that this organizational work could best be promoted through the khadi because all the people of the country could be drawn to it. Explaining the special significance of the

19. Young India, 9 March 1930.
20. M.K. Gandhi, n. 9, p. 36.
khadi, Gandhi observed: "Khaddar has the greatest organizing power in it because it has itself to be organized and because it affects all India. If Khaddar rained from heaven it would be a calamity. But as it can only be manufactured by the willing cooperation of starving millions and thousands of middle class men and women, its success means the best organization conceivable along peaceful lines." 21 The organizational work through khadi would bring the educated middle class and the illiterate millions into close contact with each other, and thus the elite-mass gap would largely be narrowed. In his pamphlet on Constructive Programme Gandhi referred to this role of khadi and stated: "In our country there has been a divorce between labour and intelligence. The result has been stagnation. If there is an indissoluble marriage between the two, and that in the manner here suggested, the resultant good will be inestimable." 22 It is evident that Gandhi attributed to the charkha and the Constructive Programme not only an economic but also a political significance. They might be used for various purposes. "(The) charkha in the hands of a poor widow brings a paltry pice to her, in the hands of a Jawaharlal it is an instrument of India's freedom", wrote Gandhi. 23 He asked the people to accept charkha not simply as an economic instrument but as a symbol of non-violence and swaraj.

Thus, in Gandhi's technique, organizational work on the basis of the Constructive Programme and particularly khadi would not only lay the foundation of a new social order, but would also enable the Congress to launch Civil Disobedience movement when necessary. 24

23. Ibid., p.37.
were the two major objectives of the Constructive Programme. Its third objective was to help the process of nation-building in India. Gandhi wrote: "The true building up of Swaraj consists in the millions of India wholeheartedly working the constructive programme. Without it the whole nation cannot rise from its age-long torpor. Whether the British remain or not it is our duty always to wipe out unemployment, to bridge the gulf between rich and poor, to banish communal strife, to exorcise the demon of untouchability, to reform dacoits and save the people from them. If crores of people do not take a living interest in this nation-building work, freedom must remain a dream and unattainable by either nonviolence or violence." Explaining the importance of constructive work among the adivasis he further observed: "Our country is so vast and the races so varied that the best of us cannot know all there is to know of men and their condition. As one discovers this for oneself, one realizes how difficult it is to make good our claim to be one nation, unless every unit has a living consciousness of being one with every other." The constructive activities, Gandhi believed, would help the growth of this consciousness.

Attitude of the Militant Nationalists of Bengal to Gandhi's Constructive Programme

We shall now discuss the question: how did the militant nationalists of Bengal respond to Gandhi's Constructive Programme? After explaining their attitude towards it we shall also refer to the activities of Gandhi's followers (those who accepted Gandhi's philosophy as a whole and came to be known as Gandhites)

24. Nirmal Kumar Bose, n. 8, p. 147.
in Bengal in relation to this Programme. The militant nationalists of Bengal adopted a critical attitude towards it, while the Gandhites worked out the Programme with courage and devotion but without unity among themselves. We shall discuss the nationalist attitude first, and in this context the views of C.R. Das and Subhas Chandra Bose would be stressed, because the militant nationalists of Bengal were represented mainly by them during the Gandhian era. Both these leaders were critical of the Constructive Programme of Gandhi and both carried the earlier tradition of nationalist Bengal, though Das tried to adopt a more accommodating attitude towards Gandhi's Programme and Bose was more outspoken in his criticism of it.

The tradition of the nationalist movement of Bengal of the pre-Gandhi period had also a constructive aspect, but as we have seen earlier, this constructive side was submerged in the rising tide of patriotic fervour that arose against the foreign rule. The Constructive Programme of Gandhi was also viewed by the Bengal nationalists largely in the same light. It was more unacceptable to them because of its anti-industrial character. The constructive programme of the Bengal nationalists of the Swadeshi period included attempts to foster the industrial development of the country and to promote science and technology in the nationalist environment. The Gandhian concept of Constructive Programme had no root in this tradition of earlier Bengal nationalism.

In actual practice, C.R. Das was concerned with the struggle against the foreign rule rather than with Constructive Programme.

26. See pp. 48-49.
He did not think in terms of any organization or scheme devoted exclusively or mainly to constructive activities. He, however, gave his support to the Constructive Programme as far as it was related to the nation-building activities and to Civil Disobedience, though he thought that the Programme, by itself, was inadequate to organize and inspire the people for a struggle for national independence. In his Presidential address at the Gaya session of the Congress (1922) C. R. Das pointed out that it was a challenging task for India to consolidate the different forces such as Aryans and non-Aryans, Brahmanism and Buddhism, Islamic culture and Western civilization into one great nation. Referring to this problem he, in his speech at the Bengal Provincial Conference held in Faridpur (now in Bangladesh) in May 1925, said that Gandhi's Constructive Programme would be of immense help to bring about the national consolidation of India. He observed: "This work of consolidation is a long process, may even be a weary process; but without this no Swaraj is possible. Herein lies the great wisdom of Mahatma Gandhi's constructive programme. ... With that programme I entirely agree and I cannot but strongly urge upon my countrymen to give it not merely an intellectual assent, but practical support, by working it out to the fullest extent." Das also recognized the importance of the Constructive Programme for preparing the country for a Civil Disobedience movement. In his Faridpur speech, from which we have just quoted, he further stated: "But let us also face the fact that

28. Ibid., p.318.
civil disobedience requires a high stage of organization, an 
infinite capacity for sacrifice, and a real desire to subordinate 
personal and communal interest to the common interest of the 
nation and I can see little hope of India ever being ready for 
civil disobedience until she is prepared to work Mahatma Gandhi's 
constructive programme to the fullest extent.29

But in spite of this acceptance of the Constructive Programme 
by C. R. Das there remained a vital difference between him and 
Gandhi regarding its interpretation. Gandhi's Constructive Programme 
was not simply politically motivated, and he did not conceive it 
only as a means to organize the people for Civil Disobedience. In 
his view the Constructive Programme was an end in itself, and he 
asked the people to follow it because of its own intrinsic worth. 
He regarded it as an autonomous movement, and though closely rela-
ted, he did not consider it simply as one aspect of the non-coopera-
tion struggle. He was confident that the Constructive Programme 
would help the satyagraha movements when they would be organized, 
but he did not consider them causally related. The Constructive 
Programme implied continuous activities, but the satyagraha move-
ments would take place only occasionally. In reply to a question 
Gandhi said: "The two issues of khadi and political organization 
should be kept absolutely separate. There must be no confusion. The 
aim of khadi is humanitarian, but so far as India is concerned, its 
effect is bound to be immensely political." Emphasizing the distinc-
tion between the khadi work and the political work he further

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29. Ibid., pp. 336-37.
observed: "While working out the khadi programme, our aim should be purely humanitarian, that is, economic. We should leave out all political considerations whatsoever. But it is bound to produce important political consequences, which nobody can prevent and nobody need deplore." Gandhi said this in 1934, but this was the underlying idea behind the Constructive Programme from the beginning.

G.R. Das, on the other hand, regarded the Constructive Programme as integrally related to Non-cooperation. In his view it was essentially a political programme - the constructive aspect of the struggle against the British rule. He did not believe that fruitful constructive activities were possible unless they were related to a programme of destroying the foreign domination. Referring to the Gandhian scheme of Constructive Programme he said in his Presidential address at the Gaya session of the Congress (1922): "The work of Non-cooperation, according to these patriots - I have the highest reverence for them - is only to build our national life, ignoring altogether the existence of the bureaucracy. ... As I have already said, that principle (that is, the principle of non-cooperation) countenances destruction as well as creation. As a matter of fact, circumstanced as we are with the bureaucracy to the right and the bureaucracy to the left, bureaucracy all around us, it is impossible to create without destroying, nor must it be forgotten that if we break, it is only that we may build." Gandhi's Constructive Programme was not conceived in a


spirit of struggle against the foreign rule. But C.R. Das, representing the tradition of Bengal's militant nationalism, held that the Constructive Programme itself should be animated by a spirit of struggle against foreign domination and by an urge to destroy the foreign rule. In the same Gaya speech he said: "The infant nation in India requires constant struggle for its growth and development." 32

C.R. Das believed that just as the Non-cooperation movement had a positive aspect, so the Constructive Programme must have a negative aspect. The Constructive Programme, as suggested by the Congress Working Committee at Bardoli, which has been referred to earlier in this chapter, was interpreted by him in this light. His interpretation of one major point in that Programme, namely, the organization of national schools, would explain his attitude clearly. In the Non-cooperation movement the boycott of government educational institutions was emphasized and the organization of national schools followed from it. In a similar way, C.R. Das argued, when in the Constructive Programme the organization of national schools was emphasized, the boycott of government institutions would naturally follow from it. The Constructive Programme, he maintained, would simply change the 'direction' of activities followed by the Congress during the Non-cooperation movement, and not the activities themselves. In his Presidential address at Gaya he said: "Take the Bardoli Resolution. In the matter of boycott of schools and colleges the Bardoli Resolution alters the direction of our activity, which does not in any way involve the abandonment

32. Ibid., p. 160.
of the boycott. During the Swaraj year the idea was to bring the students out of Government schools and colleges, and if national schools were started they were regarded as concessions to the "weakness" of those students ... Under the Bardoli Resolution, however, it is the establishment of schools and colleges which must be the main activity of national education ... Here the boycott of schools and colleges is still upheld, but the direction of our activities is changed." 33

The Gandhian interpretation was, however, entirely different. It was given by the Civil Disobedience Enquiry Committee which was formed by the All India Congress Committee at a meeting in Lucknow held in June 1922. With regard to the boycott of the Government educational institutions the report of the Enquiry Committee stated: "We recommend a strict adherence to the Bardoli resolution in regard to these by suspending for the present active propaganda calling upon boys to come out of schools and colleges. As required by that resolution, reliance should be placed upon the superiority of national schools for drawing scholars from Government institutions and not upon picketing or other aggressive propaganda." 34 This was the Gandhian interpretation with which C.N. Das did not agree. In his famous Gaya speech he said: "I am firmly of opinion that the boycott of schools and colleges should be carried on as effectively as before. I differ from the Civil Disobedience Enquiry Committee when they propose the abandonment of the withdrawal of boys from such schools and colleges." 35 Thus, though C.N. Das accepted the Constructive Programme of Gandhi, he tried to give it

33. Ibid., p. 150.
34. See P.C. Bamford, p. 80.
35. Manindra Dutta and Haradhan Dutta, n. 27, p. 164.
what we may call a militant interpretation. The militant nationalists of Bengal were not interested in constructive activities which were not directly related to the struggle against the foreign domination.

Subhas Chandra Bose, the mighty exponent of Bengal’s militant nationalism, continued the criticism of Gandhi’s Constructive Programme. Three years after the death of C.R. Das, Bose, in his Presidential address at the Maharashtra Provincial Conference held at Poona on 3 May 1928, said: "Friends! you will remember that when, after the Gaya Congress of 1922, there was a tendency among a large section of our countrymen to concentrate wholly on the constructive programme to the exclusion of everything else, Deshbandhu Das pointed out in the manifesto of the Swaraj Party that it was absolutely necessary to keep up a spirit of resistance to the bureaucracy. He firmly believed that without an atmosphere of opposition it was not possible to push on the constructive programme or to achieve success in any other direction. But this basic principle we often seem to forget". Like his political guru, Bose also believed that without 'a spirit of resistance' and 'an atmosphere of opposition' against the British government, the Constructive Programme of Gandhi was of little use for the freedom movement of the country.

For a clear assessment of the response of the militant nationalists of Bengal to the Constructive Programme of Gandhi it is necessary to examine Subhas Chandra Bose's attitude towards it in greater detail. Gandhi adopted the Constructive Programme in a non-political, non-agitational, humanitarian way.

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in order to lay the foundation of a new social order for which he fought throughout his life. Subhas Chandra Bose had no sympathy for the Gandhian social system, and, therefore, the Constructive Programme lost its major appeal for him. He wrote: "There are millions of his (Gandhi's) countrymen who accept his method owing to the pressure of circumstances (it refers to the non-violent method), but not his programme of reconstruction and who would like to build up quite a different India if they had the power".\footnote{Subhas Chandra Bose, *The Indian Struggle 1920-1942*, (Asia publishing House, Bombay, 1964), p.316.} Gandhi's Constructive Programme was primarily based on his 'programme of reconstruction', and, therefore, a large number of nationalists who supported him politically did not follow him in this field.

Secondly, Subhas Chandra Bose believed that the foundation of a new social system would be laid only after the removal of the foreign rule. The attempt to remove social evils and to reconstruct the social system on a new basis without achieving independence appeared to him like putting the cart before the horse. He said: "It would be clear to the man in the street that before we can *endeavour* to re-construct Indian society on a new basis, whether socialistic or not, we should first secure the right to shape our own destiny. As long as India lies prostrate at the feet of Britain, that right will be denied to us".\footnote{S. A. Ayer, n.36, p.33.} In the same speech he observed: "Indeed it would be far more true to say that without political freedom - i.e. without the power to shape our own destiny - we cannot have either compulsory free education or social reform or industrial advancement.\footnote{Ibid.}
He pointed out that even prohibition could not be introduced in the country as long as it would remain under foreign yoke. "You pass resolutions in your Municipalities and in your Councils in favour of prohibition and you find that the Government meets you with a stonewall of indifference or hostility." Gandhi, however, thought differently. He believed that real reforms would come from within the minds of men, and they could not be imposed through legislation and with power even by an independent Government. He stood for moral reforms — reforms through conviction and conversion — and, therefore the foreign rule did not appear to him an obstacle. Gandhi, for example, wanted the Congressmen to follow and preach prohibition even under the foreign rule, and believed that moral prohibition during the struggle for swaraj might make it possible to introduce legal prohibition after attaining independence. He wrote: "The non-violent approach to swaraj is a novel approach. In it old values give place to new. In the violent way such reforms may find no place. Believers in that way, in their impatience and, shall I say, ignorance, put off such things to the day of deliverance. They forget that lasting and healthy deliverance comes from within i.e. from self-purification. Constructive workers make legal prohibition easy and successful even if they do not pave the way to it." Explaining his view about the relations between reforms and swaraj Gandhi further wrote: "Those who think that the major reforms will come after the advent of Swaraj are deceiving themselves as to

40. Ibid.
the elementary working of non-violent Swaraj. It will not drop from heaven all of a sudden one fine morning. But it has to be built up brick by brick by corporate self-effort." If Bose thought of Swaraj in terms of power which the removal of foreign rule would bring to the Indians, Gandhi thought in terms of self-purification which the Indians would acquire during the struggle. "For me, the movement of Swaraj", Gandhi wrote, "is a movement of self-purification". But the concept of self-purification appeared irrelevant in the struggle for independence as conceived by the militant nationalists. They divided the struggle for Swaraj into two clear phases — struggle against the British for national independence, and then, after its success, a new struggle for the social and economic development of the country. Gandhi's concept of Constructive Programme did not recognize any distinction between the freedom movement and post-independence reconstruction. The constructive activities which would begin under the foreign rule would continue after independence. The struggle for swaraj, as Gandhi understood it, was a continuous process.

Thirdly, Subhas Chandra Bose felt that as a technique for mobilizing the people to a struggle or Civil Disobedience, the Constructive Programme of Gandhi was not only inadequate, but also harmful. He believed that the political consciousness of the Indian people had already been raised to such a level that no elaborate programme of Constructive activities was necessary to secure their participation in the freedom movement.

42. Ibid., p. 27.
43. Young India, 12 June 1924.
the ideal of national independence. In his Presidential address at the Maharashtra Provincial Conference, he stated in 1928:

"Mass consciousness has been roused in India, thanks to the extensive and intensive propaganda undertaken during the non-cooperation movement; and the mass movement cannot possibly be checked now." 44

This consciousness, he thought, should be further intensified by an appeal to nationalism, and by creating in them an irresistible urge to be free. In his address as the President of the Students' Conference held at Lahore in October 1929 Bose said: "When the will to be free is roused within us, we shall then proceed to plunge headlong into an ocean of activity. The voice of caution will no longer deter us, and the lure of truth and glory will lead us on to our cherished goal. ... Rouse this intense desire for freedom within yourselves and in your countrymen and I am sure India will be free in no time." 45 He wanted to bring the youths and particularly the students directly into the field of national politics. But in his Constructive Programme scheme Gandhi asked the students to remain aloof from politics. He wrote: "Students must not take part in party politics. They are students, searchers, not politicians. They may not resort to political strikes". 46 Bose could not agree with this approach of Gandhi. He said: "I know that there are people in this country - even eminent personages - who think that a subject race has no politics and that students in particular should have nothing to do with politics. But my own view is that a

44. S. A. Ayer, n.36, p.34.
45. Ibid., p.57.
46. M. K. Gandhi, n.9, p.33.
subject race has nothing but politics. ... Consequently students cannot afford to blind themselves to the all-important problem of how to achieve our political emancipation."47 "If, in India, students do not take active part in politics, from where are we to recruit our political workers and where are we to train them?" asked Subhas Bose.48 He wanted to bring the women of the country also directly into national politics. Said he: "There are various non-political organizations among women in different parts of the country, but I venture to think that there is room for a country-wide political organization among them. It should be the primary object of this organization, which will be run by women alone, to carry on political propaganda among their sex and to help the work of the Indian National Congress".49 The Constructive Programme of Gandhi, however, had nothing to do with the political aspect of the women's movement. It simply sought to establish complete equality between men and women. He wrote: "They (Congressmen) have not realized that woman must be the true helpmate of man in the mission of service. ... In a plan of life based on non-violence, woman has as much right to shape her own destiny as man has to shape his ... Let Congressmen begin with their own homes. Wives should not be dolls and objects of indulgence, but should be treated as honoured comrades in common service."50 Subhas Chandra Bose also believed in complete equality between men and women, but since his main purpose was to win national

47. S. A. Ayer, n.36, p.53.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid., p.36.
independence, his emphasis was upon the political aspect of the women's movement.

It appears that Subhas Chandra Bose believed it was possible to mobilize the middle class by a direct appeal to their sense of nationalism. When he appealed to the youths, students and women to take part in the national movement, he referred to the middle class people. But to mobilize the masses - the workers and the peasants - he felt the need of an economic programme reflecting their class interests. The communist attempt to form class organizations of the workers and peasants along the Marxist line of class struggle was denounced by him as 'anti-national', because that would weaken the united struggle for independence. He did not oppose the class organizations of the peasants and workers as such, but tried to integrate them with the nationalist movement. He stood for what he called "a coalition between labour and nationalism" (labour included peasants), and insisted that the Trade Union Congress and the Kisan Sabhas should be "inspired by Congress ideals and methods and work in close cooperation with the Congress". The labour problem, he said, was "ultimately a political problem", because "until India wins her freedom and establishes a democratic - if not socialist - Government, no ameliorative programme for the benefit of labour can be given effect to." He, therefore, wanted the Congress to mobilize the workers and peasants to the freedom movement by an appeal to their class

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51. S. A. Ayer, n.36, p.34.
52. Ibid., p.33.
54. S. A. Ayer, n.36, p.68.
interests. The Constructive Programme which was suggested by Gandhi for the workers and peasants was conceived, as we have already indicated earlier in this chapter, in an entirely different way. He recommended that the specific grievances of the workers and peasants of different areas should be remedied non-violently without linking them up with national politics and without trying to build up their organizations on an all-India basis. With reference to the Ahmedabad Labour Union which he regarded as a model for all India to follow he wrote: "The organization has never taken part in party politics of the Congress. ... It has never sought to intrude itself upon the All India Trade Union Congress and has been uninfluenced by that Congress".55 Explaining the nature of constructive activities among the peasants Gandhi observed: "The secret of success lies in a refusal to exploit the kisans for political purposes outside their own personal and felt grievances. Organization round a specific wrong they understand."56 Referring to the activities of the promoters of all-India Kisan movements he stated: "I hold that the method that some Congressmen have followed to organize kisans has done them no good and has probably harmed them. Anyway they have not used the non-violent method. ... My advice to such workers would be that they should neither use the Congress name nor work as Congressmen."57

56. Ibid., p.28.
57. Ibid., pp. 28-29.
The primary concern of the nationalists like Subhas Chandra Bose was to prepare the country for an all-out struggle against the British rule. Their outlook was entirely political. They believed that the anti-imperialist struggle itself was an important part of the nation-building activity. Gandhi's Constructive Programme appeared to them absolutely non-political, and they considered it not only irrelevant but also harmful in the context of the national struggle for independence. They considered it harmful because the activities under the Programme were bound to divert popular attention and energy from the central problem facing the country, namely, struggle against the British. Subhas Chandra Bose, therefore, wrote: "The various non-political organizations which Gandhiji had started for the Gandhites (e.g., the All India Spinners' Association, the Gandhi Seva Sangh, the Harijan Sevak Sangh, the All India Village Industries Association, the Hindi Prachar Samity etc.) will also undermine the political dynamism of the Gandhi Movement in future by creating non-political vested interests, as it has already been doing." 58

The Constructive Programme, in so far as it was an attempt to prepare the country for non-violent Civil Disobedience movement, was based on the assumption that the people were not yet fully prepared for the non-violent struggle. This was possibly true in so far as the people's preparation was judged in terms of the Gandhian values. The nationalists, however, thought in different terms. They

58. Subhas Chandra Bose, n.37, p.401.
believed that the people were ready for a struggle, but the Congress under Gandhi's leadership was not. While discussing the political situation of the country during the time of the Calcutta session of the Congress in 1928 Subhas Bose wrote: "There was tremendous enthusiasm all over the country at the time and everyone had expected the Congress to act boldly. But while the country was ready, the leaders were not. The Mahatma, unfortunately for his countrymen, did not see light." Bose felt that under Gandhi's leadership, and largely because of it, the Congress was not yet able to develop itself into a mighty instrument to channelise the mass consciousness into a total struggle against the foreign rule. Similarly, at a later stage, on the eve of the outbreak of the war of 1939, Subhas Bose and the militant nationalists, particularly of Bengal, were, as we have referred to earlier, eager to launch an immediate struggle against the British. They were confident that the people were prepared for it, and urged Gandhi to give it a start. They were in favour of a struggle on the model of Non-cooperation or Civil Disobedience but with a more militant and uncompromising spirit. Gandhi, however, could not agree with them because he smelt violence in the air. He tried to remove that atmosphere of violence by promoting constructive activities.

It is significant that Gandhi laid special emphasis on Constructive Programme twice during the freedom movement — once, after the Non-cooperation movement, and for the second time, after the Civil Disobedience Movement. (He emphasized it for the third time after independence when he suggested the dissolution of the Congress

59. Ibid., p. 158.
60. See pp. 279.
and its conversion into the Lok Sevak Sangh). After the Non-cooperation movement he virtually left politics to the Swarajists and asked his followers to devote themselves fully to constructive activities. In 1934, following the Civil Disobedience movement, Gandhi decided to retire officially from the Congress politics in order to launch upon bigger constructive work. While announcing this decision to the press immediately after the annual session of the Congress held in Bombay in October, Gandhi said: "My interest in the Congress organization will, henceforth, be confined to watching, from a distance, the enforcement of principles for which the Congress stands ... if we would be truthful through and through, we should recognize that the predominant part of the Congress programme has been progressively social, moral and economic. And it becomes a powerful programme because it is intimately connected with the political ...". He then referred to two resolutions passed by that session of the Congress, one on khaddar and the other on labour franchise, and added: "Let me also utter a warning. I hope no one will think that the khaddar clause and labour franchise clause and labour franchise clause do not come into immediate operation. They do. ... I plead guilty of negligence in that I had not in the past insisted on these things so as to make them a condition precedent to launching out any civil disobedience. ... My retirement from the Congress may be regarded as a penance for the

61. It stated that no member of the Congress would be eligible for election to any office or to any Congress Committee unless he was a habitual wearer of khaddar.

62. According to this resolution no person would be eligible to be a candidate for election to the membership of any Congress Committee unless he had performed some manual labour continuously for six months immediately before the date of nomination for election. The labour might take the form of spinning or any other form which would be prescribed by the Congress and the All India Village Industries Association.
negligence although it was wholly unconscious ... What I am aiming at is development of capacity for civil resistance so that there never may be any need for civil disobedience ...".

Gandhi was not satisfied with the way in which the Non-cooperation and Civil Disobedience movements were conducted. They did not appear to him really non-violent in character, and hence his emphasis on the Constructive Programme after both these movements. The growing militant and uncompromising attitude that grew among the Indians against the British rule satisfied the militant nationalists but not Gandhi. He believed that a genuine Civil Disobedience movement would arise not from a negative anti-British sentiment, but from the positive love for a non-violent society which was represented by the Constructive Programme and by Khadi in particular. Obedience to new values would provide the sanction for non-violent disobedience against an unjust system. As Gandhi has put it in 1934: 

"... Before civil disobedience can be practised on a vast scale, people must learn the art of voluntary obedience ... Through khadi we teach the people the art of civil obedience to an institution which they have built up for themselves. Only when they have learnt that art can they successfully disobey something which they want to destroy in the non-violent way. This is why I should advise all workers not to fritter their fighting strength in many-sided battles, but to concentrate on peaceful khadi work in order to educate the masses into a condition necessary for a successful practice of non-violent non-cooperation." 64 He, therefore, tried to create through the Constructive Programme a new

63. The Hindu, 31 October, 1934.
64. Interview to N.K. Bose, see fn. 30.
mentality and a new leadership for a genuine non-violent movement. For the militant nationalists of Bengal this was simply a wastage of time and misuse of energy.

Activities under Constructive Programme in Bengal.

In spite of the criticism and disapproval of the militant nationalists, the Constructive Programme of Gandhi had its impact on Bengal. A group of leaders was attracted by it and a number of organizations was set up to carry out the Programme. Of these organizations two became very prominent, namely, the Khadi Pratisthan and the Abhoy Ashram. The Prabartak Sangh, which owed its origin to the tradition of militant nationalism, was also largely influenced by the Constructive Programme of Gandhi. We shall now discuss the positive impact of Gandhi's Constructive Programme in Bengal with reference to these three organizations.

The Khadi Pratisthan was the most important Gandhian organization in Bengal formed with the purpose of carrying out the Constructive Programme. It was founded by Satish Chandra Das Gupta. He was a student of the famous scientist P.C. Roy, the founder of the Bengal Chemical. Persuaded by his teacher, Das Gupta joined the Bengal Chemical as a superintendent in 1906, and gradually became the most influential figure in the firm. But Gandhi's call for non-cooperation brought about a profound change in his outlook and he was determined to spend the rest of his life by serving the people along the Gandhian lines. Accordingly he left the Bengal Chemical and met Gandhi who advised him to start a Khadi organization in Bengal with his money and trusted men. Das Gupta had already amassed a good amount of money (while he was working in the Bengal Chemical he earned 20,000 by inventing a new device of a fire extinguisher) and had built a
house of his own at Sodepur, a suburb of Calcutta. He formed his organization there to which he gave the name Khadi Pratisthan.  

Das Gupta made his teacher, P. C. Roy, who was a great patron of the khadi movement in Bengal, the President of his organization and his own wife Hemaprabha its Secretary. The main purpose of the Pratisthan was, as Gandhi explained, "to manufacture and sell pure khaddar and popularize the wheel and khaddar through publications, lantern lectures etc." It believed in the Gandhian principle that khadi was the way to swaraj. The weekly organ of the Pratisthan, Rashtravani, wrote: "We should look upon khadi only as an instrument of establishing swaraj. We had khadi in the past, still we could not maintain our swaraj. That is true. But we have never used khadi in the past as an instrument for establishing swaraj." In the initial stage it was built up essentially as a khadi organization, but gradually, and particularly after 1936, for reasons explained later on, it tried to develop along with khadi a number of cottage industries such as hand-grinding, hand-pounding, paper-making, match-making, oil-pressing and preparation of ghee, mustard oil, honey, button etc. There were arrangements for training in all these.

65. Based on my interview with Satish Chandra Das Gupta on 25 and 26 October 1974.
67. "I have written to him (P.C.Roy) asking him to come to Wardha if he will. His severing the connection with the Pratisthan has given a severe shock to Satis Babu". CWMG, Vol.XXXII, p.410.
village industries in the Sodepur Ashram (Khadi Pratisthan was also known by this name). Twelve centres were opened in Calcutta for selling the products of the Pratisthan and there were some centres outside Calcutta also including East Bengal. There was a separate organization known as Gramonnyayana (village upliftment) which was fully under the control of the Pratisthan. It had a leather department under its control and, it provided training in leather-craft. It took lease of the dumping ground of the dead cattle at Howrah, and all parts of the dead animals—their skin, bone, flesh, fat, hoof, horn—were properly used. In 1938 the Gramonnyayana sold leather worth Rs. 65,437 and bones, horns, hoofs, fat, manure etc. of Rs. 12,737.

One of the major problems of the Pratisthan was, however, the high price of the khadi. Referring to this problem Gandhi wrote in 1925: "The charge may be considered true in a sense. The idea is to manufacture khaddar on the largest scale and to introduce the wheel in every home. The authors of the trust want to make khaddar self-supporting and improve the quality of the yarn. The management must work in those centres too which are not at present favourable for its activities."
for khaddar manufacture. Thus, it pools all the khaddar it manufactures and charges an average price. It follows, therefore, that those who operate in favourable centres only can sell khaddar cheaper than the Pratishthan. This is no matter for embarrassment for the time being, as the few centres that are manufacturing pure khaddar have their own customers who do not concern themselves with the prices. The pratishthan sells khaddar even now at a loss but it seeks to minimize the loss. It cannot always be run on donations. I am satisfied that every attempt is being made to reduce the price of khaddar sold by the Pratishthan. But even in 1939 the price of the khadi could not be reduced and the Pratishthan appealed to the people to purchase khaddar even at a higher price for the sake of the country. It still continued to sell khaddar at a loss and in May 1939 it was announced that till then the Pratishthan was not able to earn any profit.

In order to extend its operation to other provinces Satish Das Gupta had formed in 1929 a new organization within the Pratishthan known as Rashtriya Sangha. Gandhi was invited to inaugurate the Sangha and in his speech on that occasion Gandhi said: "Satis Babu of Khadi Pratishthan who is the founder of the Sangha is concentrating his attention on villages being self-supporting for their cloth requirements. The Sangha is taking in its orbit parts of Jtkal also."

72. "Khadi Pratishthan", Young India, 4 June 1925.
73. Rashtravani, 6 March 1939, p. 80.
74. Ibid., 29 May 1939, p. 176.
75. Young India, 27 June 1929.
could not attain any appreciable success in its activities in Utkal, because the organizers remained too busy with the problems of Bengal. They worked effectively among the peasants of Midnapore, Bogra, 24.Parganas, Hooghly, Burdwan and Calcutta.\textsuperscript{76} Gandhi, however, had full faith in the potentialities of the Sangha, and he wrote: "The Rashtriya Sangha deserves every encouragement in its efforts. Its work bears the seeds of a majestic tree."\textsuperscript{77} In 1936 the All India Spinners' Association, however, divided Bengal into a number of separate zones, and each zone was allotted to one particular khadi organization of the province. They were not allowed to compete with one other. As a result, the field of operation of the Khadi Pratisthan became restricted even within Bengal. It could sell its khadi only in its own zone, and naturally, therefore, the total volume of its sale was largely reduced. In 1935 it sold khadi worth Rs. 160,000 but in 1936 it came down to Rs. 79,000 only. Moreover, by that time the price of its khadi was further increased because of a rise in the wage of the spinners, and this also had adversely affected the sale of the Pratisthan khadi. Under such circumstances, the Pratisthan decided to start other cottage industries along with khadi. At first the programme was launched on an experimental basis, but after the Pratisthan authorities became certain about the prospect of these industries from the business point of view, they followed it with great vigour. From 1939 the Pratisthan's activities did not remain confined to khadi alone.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{76} See "Progress of Self-support Khadi", CWMG, Vol.XLI, p.226.
\textsuperscript{77} Young India, 10 October 1929.
\textsuperscript{78} Rashtravani, 4 December 1939, p.382.
Apart from these economic activities, the khadi Pratisthan adopted an educational programme also. In order to promote education in accordance with the Wardha scheme of Gandhi it opened a Teachers' Training Centre at Sodepur. It accepted spinning as the central craft through which to impart education, and proposed to make experiments with other crafts in future. The first basic school on Gandhian lines was established by the Pratisthan at its Atrai branch in November 1939. The experiment started with nine boys who were between six to ten years of age. The Pratisthan tried to promote education among the Harijans also and there were eight primary Harijan schools under its supervision in Mymensingh district, East Bengal. Spinning was introduced in all these schools which had more than 250 students.

The Khadi Pratisthan also worked for the emancipation of women along the Gandhian lines and distributed charkha, free of cost, among the widows and old women. The women volunteers of the Pratisthan asked the village women to stand by the male members of their family in all walks of life, explained to them the evils of frequent maternity, advised them to follow a life of self-control and thus keep the size of the family within limitation. This work was guided mainly by Hemaprabha Das Gupta, wife of Satish Das Gupta and secretary of the Pratisthan.

79. Ibid., 29 May 1939, p.175.
80. Ibid., 20 November 1939, p.366 and 25 December 1939, p.406. During the interview Satish Chandra Das Gupta told me that the experiment did not succeed and the school was closed after four months. He further said that Bijoy Bhattacharya, a member of the Pratisthan from Burdwan, founded a basic school at Kalanabagram at Saltora in Bankura district which still exists as a higher secondary school.
81. Based on interview with Satish Chandra Das Gupta on 25 and 26 October 1974.
Satish Das Gupta and his colleagues in Khadi Pratisthan were inspired by the ideal of communal unity as preached by Gandhi. They made no distinction between Hindus and Muslims and served them equally. But the organization remained essentially Hindu in character and the Muslims remained outside it. One journal of Calcutta has rightly observed: "The Khadi Pratisthan, a predominantly Hindu movement, benefits as many Muslims as Hindus." The Pratisthan came in close contact with the members of the Muslim community during its relief operations, either during flood or famine or communal riot. Referring to its relief activities during the flood of September 1922 mainly among the Muslim population, Gandhi wrote: "This experiment marks, too, real progress in the Hindu-Muslim Unity. A predominantly Hindu organization is helping a predominantly Mussalman population with the sole purpose of improving their economic status. It has Mussalman workers who are never made to feel that they are not as valuable as the Hindus".

Whenever a communal riot broke out in any part of Bengal Satish Das Gupta sent his Pratisthan volunteers to work among the people of both the communities. Das Gupta, his wife Hemaprabha and other members of the Pratisthan rendered most remarkable service

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84. Interview with Das Gupta. Das Gupta said that during a communal disturbance in 1936 he once went to Mymensingh in East Bengal and was about to lose his life in the hands of the Muslims. He admitted that his life was saved by the timely arrival of the police force.
when Gandhi went to Noakhali after the severe communal disturbance of October 1946. Before going to Noakhali Gandhi at first came to the Khadi Pratisthan at Sodepur and the Pratisthan sent an advance party to the affected areas to prepare the ground for Gandhi's arrival. The contributions of Satish Das Gupta in organizing Gandhi's Noakhali mission were fully acknowledged by Gandhi himself.

Satish Das Gupta was also in charge of the Harijan movement in Bengal. Regarding the origin of the term 'Harijan' Gandhi wrote in February 1938: "Years ago a Kathiawadi Antyaja had written to me that names like Antyaja, achhot, esprishta hurt his community. I could appreciate their feelings. ... It was this correspondent who had pointed out that the poet-devotee Narasinh Mehta in one of his bhajons had referred to the Antyajas as 'Harijans'. ... I liked the name 'Harijan' immediately. 'Harijan' means a devotee of God, beloved of God." In Bengal there was a protest against this new term. Rabindranath believed that the term 'Harijan' which was applied to a particular section of the Hindu community would simply help to perpetuate division among the Hindus. In a conference of the Depressed Classes held in Dacca, the president, Birat Chandra Mandal, raised objection to this term and said that Gandhi had no right to use this word to designate them. Satish Das Gupta, however, tried to justify the term 'Harijan' through his journal.

88. See Rashtravani, 3 April 1939, pp. 106-07.
The focus of the All India Harijan movement was on the right of the so-called untouchables to enter the Hindu temples. As a reaction to Gandhi's fast unto death against the Communal Award the famous Kali temple of Calcutta was thrown open to the Harijans.\(^89\) The report of the Harijan Sevak Sangh for the year 1932-33 shows that during this period 55 temples were opened to them in Bengal.\(^90\) But the temple entry movement did not take a formidable shape in Bengal as it took in several provinces of India. This was possibly because the untouchability problem was less acute in Bengal than in many other parts of the country, particularly Madras. In a letter to Satish Das Gupta Gandhi wrote on 30 March 1933 that "untouchability in Bengal is of the mildest type and that real untouchability is confined to Bhangis, Methors and the like who are after all imported".\(^91\) "In fact," Gandhi wrote in another letter (18 March 1933), "there is no pollution by touch or sight or shadow in Bengal as in Madras. Bengal untouchability is peculiar and confined to the restriction upon the handling of water. Bad as even this is, it is wholly different from the unthinkable atrocities of the Madras type".\(^92\) There was only one important temple entry movement in Bengal - Kunshiganj Kali temple satyagraha. This movement which took place in Kunshiganj, a

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89. Kukut Behari Verma, n.5, p.54.
90. Ibid., p.81.
Sakti Ranjan Bose who was President of the Bengal branch of the Harijan Sevak Sangh during the time of the interview on 15 September 1974 told me that these temples were opened to the Harijans not because of any temple-entry movement in Bengal, but due to the impact of the all-India movement. Moreover, in most cases there was no strong opposition in Bengal to the right of the Harijans to enter the temples.
92. Ibid., p.117.
sub-divisional town in the district of Dacca, was organized by the namasudra community and led by the Hindu Mission, and not by the Gandhian constructive workers. The movement was launched on 30 August 1929, and after a long struggle of 261 days, the right of the namasudras to enter the temple was established. Though not led by the Gandhiites, the movement was largely Gandhian in character.93

Under Satish Das Gupta's leadership several measures were taken in Bengal for the economic development of the Harijans. Special attention was given to improving the tanning industry in which they had been engaged from time immemorial. Gandhi also drew the notice of his followers to the importance of this industry through his article 'village Tanning and Its Possibilities.'94 Accordingly, a Cottage Tanning Institute was opened in Calcutta. Satish Das Gupta who supervised this Institute also started the Calcutta Carcass Disposal Scheme at Howrah. The Dead Cattle Institute under this Scheme not only utilized the hides of animals for making leather articles, but also converted by chemical processes fats, bones and meat into rich and useful manures. The new Institutes had provisions to teach Harijan boys tanning, carpentry, weaving, tailoring, homoeopathy, Aurveda, mat-weaving, leather work and other crafts.95 Several schools were also set up in different parts of Bengal for the Harijans.96

93. For a detailed account of this movement see Buddhadeva Bhattacharyya, Satyagrahas in Bengal 1921-32. (Minerva, Calcutta, 1977), pp. 159-184.
94. Harijan, 7 September 1934.
96. Pravasi, Kartik, 1340 B.E., p.152.
Satish Das Gupta was an outstanding Gandhian leader not only in Bengal but in the whole of India. In the Belgaum session of the Congress (December 1924) which was presided over by Gandhi he organized lantern lectures tracing the history of the ruin of the weaving industry of India and showing the possibilities of its revival. When the AISA was formed in 1925 he was chosen a member of its Executive Council and he became one of the 12 permanent trustees of its Board in 1928. He was also a member of the Executive Committee of the Gandhi Seva Sangh. In 1934 Das Gupta was made a member of the Board of Trustees which was set up by the Harijan Sevak Sangh. Gandhi himself wrote eloquently praising Das Gupta and his organization, Khadi Pratisthan. In 1925 he wrote:

"The Khadi Pratisthan has an advantage over all (that is, other Khadi organizations) in that it has men who have dedicated themselves solely to the spread of the message of the charkha. It has great organizing talent at its service. It has a celebrated name behind it. It has, therefore, limitless scope for expansion. Hence it is that I commend its activities to the whole of India in general and Bengal in particular. "I was recommending", he further wrote in the same article, "the universal adoption in Bengal of the Pratisthan charkha as I have found it to be the best available in Bengal, and as experiments are being daily made to improve it".

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100. Mukut Behari Verma, n.5, p.130.
101. "Khadi Pratisthan", Young India, 4 June 1925.
Gandhi considered Das Gupta a 'specialist' in charkha and believed that his organization was in a position to supply 'experts' to supervise the charkha movement in India. He wrote: "It is also necessary for an expert to travel to all the places where wheels are working and put the wheels in order and destroy where repair is impossible. The expert may also demonstrate the superiority of the wheel he may recommend. All this work can only be done by men who know and who will give the whole of their time and attention to khaddar work to the exclusion of everything else. Such an organization is the Khadi Pratishthan and such a specialist is Satish Babu who has given up everything for the sake of the wheel." Referring to the sacrifice of Das Gupta Gandhi wrote in another article during that period: "I praise Satis Babu's work because though he has sacrificed his business worth millions and dedicated his intelligence, the services of the members of his family and his resources to the propagation of khadi, he is not in the least conscious of his self-sacrifice, or rather he has no trace of pride for having done all this. This is because he has found joy in self-sacrifice. It would be impossible for him to live without it". Satish Das Gupta was an ardent follower of Gandhi so far as the constructive programme was concerned and Gandhi had full confidence in him. In one of his letters Gandhi wrote: "All I know is that I had nothing unflattering to say about Satis Babu that I could not mention to him".

102. "The Drawbacks", Young India, 28 May 1925.
letter he, referring to Das Gupta, wrote that he had "for many years accepted my word as law".  

The Abhoy Ashram was another important organization in Bengal based on the Gandhian principles of Constructive Programme. The genesis of the Ashram is to be traced to a small organization formed in 1913 by a group of freedom-loving, religious-minded youths of Bengal. This organization was called Anami Sangha and its membership included Suresh Chandra Bandyopadhyay, Prafulla Chandra Ghosh and Subhas Chandra Bose. Bose who, as we have seen, became the most vigorous exponent of the cult of Indian nationalism, did not remain a member of this Sangha for long and in 1915 he severed all relations with it. Inspired by the Gandhian philosophy, most of the members of the Anami Sangha decided to start an Ashram and take part in the non-cooperation movement. After preparing the objectives and regulations of the proposed Ashram they met Gandhi in the house of C. R. Das (1920). Gandhi approved the scheme and suggested the name Abhoy Ashram. The Ashram was then started in a rented house at Dacca with eleven


Satya Ranjan Sen, one of the most prominent leaders of the Abhoy Ashram, told me during the interview on 11 November 1974 that the organizers at first proposed the name Sabita Ashram, but Gandhi changed it into Abhoy Ashram, "Sabita", in Sanskrit and also in Bengali, means Sun, but it is also commonly used as a name of Bengali girls. Gandhi pointed out that this name would not indicate the real purpose of the Ashram. Abhoy literally means 'no fear' or 'fearlessness', and Gandhi told the organizers that they should teach fearlessness to the people through all their activities.
members and few workers. Suresh Chandra Bandyopadhyay was made its President and Prafulla Chandra Ghosh its Secretary. Later on, in 1922, land was purchased for the Abhoy Ashram in Comilla and the organization was shifted there. Bandyopadhyay gave about Rupees five thousand to the Ashram and the members had to collect money from different sources in order to build up their organization.

The Abhoy Ashram of Comilla was the centre of various constructive activities along the Gandhian line - spinning and weaving, dairy and agriculture, spread of education and removal of untouchability. It had also a medical unit which was of immense benefit to the people, though its Gandhian character was open to doubt.

In 1928 Gandhi visited the Abhoy Ashram, and in a note published in the Young India he referred to its major activities without any adverse comment on its medical department. But, during his earlier visit to the Ashram in 1925 Gandhi in his speech made some unsavory observations on its medical unit which may be quoted here. He said: "According to me the youths who come forward today to serve the country should have before them only one aim - how to provide work for the idle millions. They will see then that we have no other

108. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh, n.106, pp.25,35,42. Besides the President and the Secretary, the important members of the Abhoy Ashram were: Nripen Bose of Burdwan, Ananda Prosad Chowdhury of Midnapore, Haripada Chatterji of Nadia, Susil Palit of Bankura, Deben Sen of Mymensingh and Manindra Bhattacharya of Dacca (Based on interview with Sanjib Kanti Guha Raja, the present Secretary of the Abhoy Ashram, on 4 November 1974).

109. Gandhi had no faith in modern medicine. "I have", he wrote, "little faith in doctors as such, i.e., in the medical profession itself, and my distrust is daily increasing. They fail to discover the right remedies because they hunt for the laws of the body without any reference to the soul". Letter to D.B. Kalelkar, 20 April 1926, CWMG, Vol.XXX, p.333.

means of doing so except the spinning wheel. Hence I regard the medical work and the running of a medical school (Gandhi said this with reference to Suresh Bandyopadhyaya's statement that they had planned to set up not only a dispensary but also a medical school) here as unimportant activities. Both these activities have a place only in so far as they can supplement the spinning movement. There are, of course, many other dispensaries. Running a dispensary is nothing new and that is why young men are able to take up this work. I hope that all persons who have taken a vow of service and renunciation will go in only for those activities which are most difficult, which can be universally adopted and will be most productive of results in our country.\footnote{In the same speech Gandhi pointed out that all the patients who would be treated in the dispensary of the Abhoy Ashram should be "dressed in khadi". This was obviously an indirect method of popularising the khadi through the medical service. In spite of this unconcealed disapproval by Gandhi, the Abhoy Ashram authorities did not give up the medical unit.

Khadi was undoubtedly the central activity of the Ashram. From the note prepared by Gandhi on the Abhoy Ashram in 1928 it appears that its khadi department had 63 whole time workers attached to its 20 centres scattered through the province. Through this department the Ashram distributed in 1927, over Rs. 66,000 among artisans, of which Rs. 28,000 went to the weavers, Rs. 27,000

\footnote{"Reply to Welcome Address", \textit{CWMG}, Vol.XXVII, p.101}
to the spinners, over Rs. 1,200 to women who did embroidery work on khadi, over Rs. 3,000 to washermen and over Rs. 6,000 to tailors. Its sales amounted to over Rs. 1,42,000 during that year. The khadi department of the Abhoy Ashram worked at a profit and the profit earned in 1927 was over Rs. 1,200. The Ashram had a regular training centre for spinning and weaving and it sent charkha mission to the remote villages to popularize charkha and to attract more and more people to the charkha cult. The spinning instructors were sent to the villages to teach the people, particularly the women, the art of spinning. At the initial stage the Ashram supplied cotton to the spinners and later it encouraged them to grow it in their own spare land with the seeds supplied by the Ashram. The Ashram purchased Yarn from the villagers and manufactured khaddar. It was thus able to create a khadi atmosphere among the villagers. The khadi department was run efficiently by Annada Prosad Chowdhury.

In the field of dairy also the Ashram achieved a remarkable success. It did much to improve the quality of cattle by scientific cross-breeding, and encouraged people to start dairies on a profitable basis. The Ashram itself supplied milk and milk products, and, like the khadi Pratisthan, it also produced ghani oil, ghee and honey.

The Ashram tried to promote education among the people of the adjoining villages, and it set up a number of primary schools.

113. Based on interview with Sanjib Kanti Guha Raja, the present Secretary of the Abhoy Ashram, on 4 November 1974.
114. Ibid.
which remained under its supervision. The students who passed from these institutions were eligible for admission into the Ashram school where education up to the matriculation (Class X) standard was imparted. The Ashram gave merit certificates to its students which were, however, not recognized by the Government. When Gandhi came to visit the Abhoy Ashram in 1925 he was glad to learn that there were arrangements for "spinning and other khadi work" in its school and advised the authorities to make khadi dress compulsory for the students. He said: "I should have advised workers who run the school to take a vow that, after a fixed date, no boy or girl not wearing khadi would be admitted to this school. The parents should be informed that their children would be obliged to spin and wear khadi". Labanyalata Chanda, a distinguished educationist of the region, joined the Abhoy Ashram during the Civil Disobedience Movement after resigning from her position as the Headmistress of a government educational institution of Comilla, Faizannesa Girls' School. She was the first lady member of the Ashram. When she wanted to join it, the Ashram authorities found it difficult to come to a decision as to whether to admit a female member or not, and they ultimately referred the matter to Gandhi. Gandhi asked them to send Labanyalata to Sabarmati Ashram. In his Ashram Gandhi gave her training in constructive work for one month, and then sent her to the Abhoy Ashram. She built up in Comilla a

115. Ibid.
national school for girls under the name "Aboy Ashram Kanya Sikshalaya" (Aboy Ashram Girls' School). Labanyalata Chanda gradually started to work among the women of the villages. Gandhi entrusted her with the task of developing Basic Education in Bengal and she was also in charge of the Bengal branch of the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Fund. The object of this Fund was to promote the welfare and education of the poor and needy women and children in the rural areas of India. In her educational and social service activities among the women of the rural areas around the Ashram, Labanyalata was ably assisted by Jamuna Ghosh, the sister of Prafulla Chandra Ghosh. They, with the help of few others, tried to introduce charkha among the women of the villages, taught them embroidery work as well as scientific child care, made them aware of the evils of frequent maternity and sought to encourage education among them.

Various small institutions of educational significance such as reading rooms, libraries, gymnasiums also grew up around the Ashram. The Ashram authorities sold at a very cheap rate among the villagers various pamphlets on Gandhi's views and Congress ideology as well as Gandhi's portraits with his messages inscribed on them. They were sometimes distributed in exchange of a bowl of rice only. The Ashram also maintained seven schools for untouchable


119. Interview with Nripen Bose, present President of the Abhoy Ashram on 16 November 1974.

120. Interview with Sanjib Kanti Guha Raja on 4 November 1974. See also Gandhi's note on Abhoy Ashram in Young India, 27 September 1928.
boys and girls. Though the organizers of the Ashram were upper caste Hindus, they did not believe in caste distinction and followed no caste rules in actual practice. When Gandhi visited the Ashram in 1927 he was very much impressed by their total denial of caste distinction, and while addressing the people of two adjoining Namasudra (untouchable) villages, Rajapura and Muradpur, he exhorted them to follow the examples of the members of the Abhoy Ashram.

The Ashram had also a volunteer organization of both boys and girls formed under the leadership of Bolai Das Mahapatra of Midnapore district. It was a disciplined body which helped the Ashram in all organizational work and in times of natural calamities such as epidemic or famine, drought or flood it took part in relief operations.

The Ashram served the Muslims equally with the Hindus and its members were free of all communal feelings, but it could not promote cordial relations between the Hindus and the Muslims. In its second annual report it was stated that 4,175 persons received help from its outdoor dispensary of whom 2,396 were Muslims, and in its school, out of a total of 120 students, 72 were Muslims. But the Muslims regarded the Ashram simply as a Hindu organization, and in January 1927 the immersion processing of goddess Saraswati (Saraswati Puja was held outside the campus of the Ashram by the Ashramites and the local Hindus) gave rise to a serious communal riot. The Muslim League

122. Referring to the activities of the Abhoy Ashram a journal of Calcutta wrote: "The workers and conductors are all Hindus who observe no caste distinction on principle and in practice". *Modern Review*, March 1926, p.364.
124. Interview with Nripen Bose, present President of the Abhoy Ashram, on 16 November 1974.
tried to take advantage of it, and the matter was referred to the court. A case was started against the members of the Ashram causing much distress to Gandhi. The matter was, however, amicably settled through the intervention of the local zamindar, Asrafuddin Choudhury, who was a patron of the Ashram and held nationalist views. The members of the Ashram were all acquitted. In order to relieve Gandhi's tension Suresh Bandyopadhyay immediately wrote a letter to him stating: "We have all been acquitted. ....... I hope as a result of this ...... perfect harmony and peace will prevail at least for sometime to come". In reply, Gandhi wrote on 19 January 1928: "I am glad at the happy termination of the Comilla affair. Is it a reform from within or a reform superimposed?"

In addition to their constructive work, many of the members of the Abhoy Ashram were also politically active. Some of them such as Nripen Bose and Annada Prasad Choudhury dedicated their lives to constructive work only, but there were many who were equally interested in political movements. Suresh Chandra Bandyopadhyay, Deben Sen and Prafulla Chandra Ghosh were the leading figures of this group. Bandyopadhyay and Sen became deeply involved in the labour movement of the country, and Ghosh gradually emerged as the central figure of the Gandhian politics in Bengal. During the presidential election of the Congress in 1939 Ghosh voted against Subhas Chandra Bose and in favour of Pattabhi Sitaramaya who was supported by Gandhi. After Bose was forced to resign from the Congress Presi-

127. For text of Gandhi's letter see CWGC, Vol.XXXV, p.481. Suresh Bandyopadhyay's letter is also referred to here in a footnote. For another communal riot in which the Abhoy Ashram became involved see Prafulla Chandra Ghosh, n.106, p.63.
During the interview with Sanjib Kanti Guha Raja on the 4 No-
dentship, Rajendra Prasad, the new President, selected Prafulla Chandra Ghosh as a member of the Congress Working Committee from Bengal. During this time Prafulla Ghosh came to represent Gandhian politics in Bengal as against the left nationalist politics of Subhas Chandra Bose. In the earlier period the Abhoy Ashram played an important role in the Civil Disobedience Movement which has already been mentioned. 129

The Pravartak Sangha was another important organization which should be referred to in connection with our discussion on Gandhi's Constructive Programme in Bengal. The founder of this organization was Motilal Roy, the leader of the Chandernagore (a French settlement) group of revolutionaries. He was in close touch with the revolutionary elements of Bengal and was in correspondence with the Indian revolutionaries abroad including M. N. Roy. He was also suspected of being implicated in a conspiracy to smuggle arms into India with the help of his friend, Rash Behari Bose. He wrote a number of books which were prescribed by the British authorities and through his most popular book Kanai Lal he tried to incite the youths of Bengal to follow in the footsteps of the underground revolutionaries. 130 A deeply religious man with a creative outlook, Motilal organized the Pravartak Sangha at Chandernagore for the moral and spiritual development of the people and for the

129. See p. 252.
constructive national activities. Classes were opened by the Sangha for imparting special spiritual training. The constructive activities were mainly economic in nature and it included various industrial and commercial enterprises. The Pravartak Furnishers, Printing Press, Trading and Banking Company as well as the Pravartak Commercial Corporation soon developed into flourishing concern. The Sangha had also a jute mill at Belgharia (near Calcutta) and a handloom section. The Pravartak Sangha accepted charkha as a part of its constructive activities before Gandhi gave the call for its introduction at the national level. It at first produced pure khaddar dhoti, but the cost of its production went so high that the scheme was ultimately given up in favour of half khadi. The weavers were asked to use lengthwise thread made of mill and breadthwise thread made of charkha. This was called half khadi. The Sangha had an agricultural wing also, and Motilal Roy had the idea of producing paddy and cotton, but this part of the scheme had also to be abandoned since suitable land could not be secured. Two journals were published by the Sangha in Bengali - Pravartak and Naba Sangha.

When Gandhi came to Calcutta in 1921, Motilal Roy, on Gandhi's request, met him, but politely declined to join the non-cooperation movement. He told Gandhi that for the time being he preferred to continue his constructive work in the economic and spiritual field. Explaining his stand on non-violence Motilal said that though he was not thinking at that time in terms of an armed uprising and would welcome swaraj if it came through the Gandhian way, he was not, on principle, opposed to a violent struggle for independence.131

131. This account of Motilal's meeting with Gandhi is based on

Contd. ...
During this period the Pravartak Sangha was extremely critical of Gandhism and its journal criticised Gandhi's theory of non-violence and his charkha cult in strong language. In an article on "Soul Force" it wrote that though it was not proper for man to use physical force with the spirit of an animal, there was nothing wrong in using it after due human considerations. "Physically", it continued, "man is also an animal. Therefore, the external behaviour of both may be identical; the real difference lies within — man has the consciousness of the soul and the animal has only dark ignorance". True to the tradition of militant nationalism of Bengal the article tried to justify the use of physical force against the wrong-doers on the authority of Sri Krishna. It said that if God used physical force against Asura, He did not with any spirit of violence, but simply to change the evil nature of Asura. True non-violence, it maintained, did not mean the non-application of physical force under all circumstances. Referring to Gandhi's condemnation of western civilization as Satanic it wrote that the spirit of violence may be expressed not only through the use of physical force but also through the use of language. In another issue, the Pravartak criticised the charkha cult of Gandhi with equal force and frankness. It judged the charkha exclusively from the economic point of view, and maintained that as a business proposition it had absolutely no prospect. It has been noted earlier that the Sangha had to give up the manufacture of pure khaddar because of the high cost of its production, and referring to this experience it wrote: "Before the introduction of

my interview with Arun Chandra Dutta on 25 December, 1974. Arun Chandra Dutta, younger brother of the famous revolutionary Kanailal Dutta, was President of the Pravartak Sangha during the time of the interview.

132. "Antaratmar Bal" (Soul Force), Pravartak, 30 Falgun, 1327 B.S., pp. 103-107.
Gandhi's **charkha** and handloom movement we made an experiment with it, and worked day and night for it; we are now convinced that it is impossible to carry on business successfully with cloth made of charkha-yarn". "It is useless", the article continued, "to get excited over a few rolls of charkha yarn. Hobby would not last long, and it is necessary to turn our attention to methods which would lead to real success". It did not oppose the introduction of **charkha** altogether. It wrote that without raising high hopes it might be introduced profitably among people who were in the habit of wasting their time. "We have said repeatedly", it warned, "that the country's poverty would not be removed through the charkha - other means must be adopted for that purpose".133

This attitude of the Pravartak Sangha towards the **Charkha** was largely changed as a result of the influence of Gandhi. Gandhi visited the Sangha in 1925 at the invitation of Motilal Roy and he was highly satisfied with its religious atmosphere. He visited different centres of constructive works undertaken by the Sangha, but was disappointed at the half-khadi manufactured by it. Though the Sangha leaders explained to him the reasons which forced them to give up the full khadi programme, Gandhi was not convinced, and he requested Kotilal Roy to give up all other projects and devote all the energies of the Sangha to charkha and khadi. Gandhi asked the Sangha leaders to find some suitable place in East Bengal for starting its khadi activities and promised to help the khadi programme of the

Motilal Roy agreed to take up the charkha in right earnest, though he refused to give up the other activities of the Sangha.\footnote{134}

On Gandhi's advice the Pravartak Sangha tried to find out a suitable place in East Bengal to start its khadi activities, and ultimately decided to open its centre at Kutubdia in the district of Chittagong. Kutubdia is a small island separated from the mainland by a narrow stretch of water. The people of the island were mainly agriculturists, who, except for a brief period of cultivation and harvesting, had no work to do. They lived in extreme poverty with no hope or initiative to change their conditions. In such an atmosphere the Pravartak Sangha opened its branch on the auspicious day of Akshay Tritiya (a religious festival of the Hindus) in 1925. The Sangha branch began to work tirelessly among the people of this area with a programme of better living through the proper utilization of the local resources and through spinning in spare time. In the initial stage it was very difficult to move these people to constructive work and to attract them towards the charkha, but within few years the situation was radically changed. In 1929-30 (1336 B.E.) the Sangha spun 148 maunds of thread with the help of 1,000 charkhas and the women of Kutubdia alone spun yarn worth more than Rs. 4,000. About 5,000 people used to come to the Sangha twice a week to sell their yarn. The entire economic life of Kutubdia was affected by the khadi activities of the Sangha-

\footnote{134. Interview with Arun Chandra Dutta the then President of the Pravartak Sangha on 25 December, 1974.}
the number of beggars was diminished, the demand for coolies and boats was increased and the people were engaged in productive work throughout the year. In addition to charkha and handloom, the constructive work of the Kutubdia branch of the Pravartak Sangha included dyeing and printing of cloth, as well as dairy and agriculture. It also organized a Rally Sanskar Samiti (a society for village reforms), started a number of schools and maintained a library.135

The success of khadi or pure khaddar activities in Kutubdia possibly encouraged the Sangha authorities to introduce it throughout the Chittagong district. Gandhi was much satisfied with this progress and he expected that the Pravartak Sangha as a whole would soon adopt full khadi programme. He wrote in June 1925: "The Pravartak Sangha has hitherto dealt in half-khaddar too. But it has now definitely decided to deal exclusively in pure khaddar so far as Chittagong is concerned. It had already started the experiment at Kutliandu (it will obviously be Kutubdia), but the management made the final decision for the whole of the Chittagong District during my visit there. They have still half-khaddar at their Calcutta depot and at the head office at Chandernagar. But they are striving to do away with half-khaddar altogether at the first opportunity. They accept the principle that it is not in the interest of the khaddar movement to deal in half-khaddar".136 In December 1925 Gandhi wrote that the Pravartak Sangha as a whole was by that time

135. This brief account of the history and activities of the Kutubdia branch of the Pravartak Sangha is based on the information found in Pravartak, Agrahayana 1336 (B.E.), pp.725-735 and Kartik 1337 (B.E.), pp.668-672 as well as the interview with Arun Chandra Dutta on 25 December, 1974.

136. Young India, 4 June 1925.
turned into a pure khadi organization. In a note published in the *Young India* he quoted a part of a letter written to him by Motilal Roy in which it is found that Motilal informed Gandhi that "the whole organization now stands for pure khadi but you are surely aware what considerable risks we have taken on our shoulders for such a venture". After quoting from the letter of Motilal, Gandhi wrote: "I tender my congratulations to Moti Babu on the change and hope that the change to pure khadi will persist in spite of initial difficulties which every khadi organization has to face". But, as a matter of fact, the Pravartak Sangha was not converted into a Gandhian full-khadi organization, and Gandhi's impression was certainly due to some misunderstanding. In an article under the title "Pravartak Young Bengal Sangh and Khadi" he wrote in March 1927: "The Pravartak Sangh of Bengal... had been steadily increasing its activity in the production and sale of khadi. But hitherto khadi in the Sangh has been a subsidiary activity - a little one among big ones. But Moti Babu is now determined to make it the centre of his system. I had a long talk about it myself with him when he said that the conviction was being forced upon him that it was not possible to render true service to the masses except through the spinning wheel as the central piece".

It is thus clear that even in 1927 the Pravartak Sangha did not concentrate its energies solely on khadi production. The

137. *Young India*, 10 December 1925. It appears that Motilal Roy first informed Gandhi about the conversion of the organization to pure khadi on 20 October 1925, but that intimation did not reach Gandhi. Motilal, therefore, wrote a second letter from which a part was quoted by Gandhi.

138. *Young India*, 10 March 1927.
position of the Pravartak Sangha vis-a-vis khadi was clearly explained by its journal in the middle of 1929. It wrote: "Khadi has been accepted by the Pravartak Sangha as one of its many activities. The members of the Sangha must earn the money necessary for the maintenance of about two hundred men and women of its centre and for the propagation of its ideals. Therefore, we could not concentrate all our energies on khadi work".\textsuperscript{139} It is thus clear that the Sangha still considered that the khadi production was not economically rewarding. The Sangha, however, started a \textit{Gharkha Sangsad} for khadi work, though its membership was not obligatory upon the inmates of the Sangha. In 1929 the \textit{Gharkha Sangsad} had only 19 members. The members of the Sangsad had to take an oath which consisted of the following pledges:

I shall never speak untruth,
I shall never speak ill of others,
I shall meditate four times a day,
I shall use no cloth except Khadi,
I shall never leave the Sangsad, and
I shall always help the poor and the needy.\textsuperscript{140}

Though the Pravartak Sangha did not become a full khadi organization, its attitude towards \textit{charkha} was thoroughly changed. It gave up the previous attitude of hostility towards the \textit{charkha} and its journal began to publish articles supporting its introduction. It should be noted that the Pravartak Sangha did not accept

\textsuperscript{139} \textit{Pravartak}, Sravan 1336 (B.E.), p.373.
\textsuperscript{140} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 373-374.
charkha as a sound business proposition, nor did it regard it as the basis of an ideal social order. It supported charkha mainly on the ground of patriotism, as an anti-British measure. It pointed out that India imported from England cotton thread and cloth worth Rs. 110 crores every year, and this drainage of national wealth could be stopped only by the introduction of charkha. The charkha, it admitted, would not be able to face competition with mill, but it appealed to the people to purchase khadi instead of foreign cloth even at a higher price in order to increase national wealth. "If the people of the country do not understand this", the Pravartak wrote, "they should no longer utter such high-sounding words as 'Swaraj', 'independence' in the name of nationalism." Another issue of the Pravartak wrote: "We have seen it by experiment that if charkha is used daily for half an hour, there will remain no problem of cloth in a family of five persons. ... The patriots must not ignore charkha, they should try to introduce it in every household."

The Sangha through its department of carpentry began to produce cheap but durable spinning wheels and adopted various other measures to make khadi popular in Bengal.

The Khadi Pratisthan, the Abhoy Ashram and the Pravartak Sangha were the three major organizations of Bengal with a con-

142. Ibid., Chaitra, 1333 B.E., p.768.
143. Ibid., Magh, 1335 B.E., p.768.
144. Ibid., Asar 1337 B.E., p.287. See also in this issue an article on "Khadi", pp. 203-207.
tructive programme. Of these, the first two were fully Gandhian in character, and the third one might be regarded at best as an allied organization. Gandhi regarded the Pratisthan and the Ashram as the Ganga and Jamuna of the Khadi movement of Bengal, and referring to these two organizations he told the members of the Abhoy Ashram on 5 January 1927: "You are the pioneers and the like the Jamnotri and Gangotri. Be you as those two streams. As I think of you I picture to myself two fine horses running abreast and drawing the khadi carriage at full speed, vying with each other. ... Let then the strength and weakness of each be the strength and weakness of the other, and let the Khadi Pratisthan look in its hour of difficulties the Abhoy Ashram and vice versa". The dynamism of the Pravartak Sangha also left a deep impression on his mind, and he wrote: "If the Sangh could concentrate its energies on khadi production, it could soon rival Khadi Pratisthan and Abhoy Ashram without in any way interfering with either ...." Gandhi wanted all the khadi organizations of Bengal to work in close co-operation according to a common programme. "What is, however, necessary", he observed, "is to coordinate these scattered forces (they refer to the khadi organizations of Bengal) and economize time, talent, labour and funds. The heads of these organizations must meet together, compare notes and evolve a joint programme of action".

145. A large number of local organizations were formed throughout Bengal for constructive activities such as Kumar Jana's Gandhi Ashram at Basudevpur in Midnapore district, Charu Chandra Bhandari's Khadi Mandir at Diamond Harbour, P. Sen's Alok Kendra at Alok Kendra Midnapore, Dhiren Majumdar's Vidya-asram Khadi at Sylhet, Prafulla Sen's Khadi Mondal at Hooghly.

146. Young India, 13 January 1927.
147. Ibid., 10 March 1927.
148. Ibid., 4 June 1925.
This expectation of Gandhi was, however, completely belied. Instead of co-operating with each other the two major khadi organizations of Bengal - the Pratisthan and the Abhoy Ashram - started an ugly quarrel between them which had its impact on the progress of the khadi movement in Bengal. In this context it may be said that they carried on the Gandhian programme of constructive activities in a most un-Gandhian spirit. We shall now refer, in brief outline, the nature of their quarrel.

We have already stated that one of the major problems of the Pratisthan was the high price of its khadi products. It was the Abhoy Ashram which repeatedly brought this charge of high price against the khadi Pratisthan, and it was in reply to a complaint by Annada Prosad Chaudhury that Gandhi had to issue a statement on this subject. To end all dispute between the two organizations there was, however, a proposal for their merger. According to the present leaders of the Abhoy Ashram the merger scheme did not succeed because of the following reasons:

Satish Das Gupta refused to accept any change in the name of the organization and he insisted that it should continue to be called Khadi Pratisthan even after the merger;

there was no democratic atmosphere in the Pratisthan - Das Gupta's opinion was final in all cases. The members of the Pratisthan used to address him as 'Baba' (father) and his wife Hemaprabha as 'Ma' (mother).

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149. For Gandhi's statement see f.n. 72 of this Chapter.
150. Gandhi himself affectionately called them 'Baba' and 'Ma' in the tradition of the Pratisthan. See Gandhi's letter to Biswanath dated 14 September 1935 in CMWG, Vol.LXI, p.419.
Khadi Pratishthan was a public institution but its Secretary never presented any audit report;

the Prathishthan was a vegetarian organization, but the Ashram was non-vegetarian;

the Ashram members were all bachelors according to the ideal of Brahmacharya, but there was no restriction on marriage for the members of the Prathishthan;

the Abhoy Ashram was a socio-political organization, but the Pratishthan was a non-political institution dedicated exclusively to constructive activities.151

Though the merger scheme did not materialise, Prafulla Chandra Ghosh once left the Abhoy Ashram and joined the Khadi Pratishthan. According to the version of Ghosh he left the Ashram and joined the Pratishthan because he believed that the latter was a better organization for carrying out the Constructive Programme. But within two years, he wrote, he found it impossible to work with Das Gupta and came back to the Abhoy Ashram.152 Satish Das Gupta, however, told me that though he at first welcomed Prafulla Ghosh within his organization in simple faith, he later on understood that there was a sinister motive behind this move of Ghosh. According to Das Gupta's opinion, Ghosh entered his organization only to learn the secret of its success, and then left it. But it was impossible for them (Abhoy Ashram people) to apply his technique with equal effi-

151. Interview with Sanjib Kanti Guha Raja (4 November 1974) and Satya Ranjan Sen (11 November 1974).
ciency, asserted Das Gupta with confidence. Whatever might have been the motive of Prafulla Ghosh, this episode served as an indicator of the nature of relations that existed between the two outstanding Gandhian leaders of Bengal.

The relations between the Khadi Pratisthan and the Abhoy Ashram became so strained that Gandhi himself had to interfere directly. Satish Das Gupta feared aggression from the Abhoy Ashram and he informed Gandhi about it. Gandhi thereupon asked Krishnadas to visit both Abhoy Ashram and Khadi Pratisthan and submit a report to him about the actual state of affairs. After receiving the full report he wrote to Satish Das Gupta on 24 October 1927: "I had a full account about Abhoy Ashram. From it, it appears that there was no aggression on their part". Earlier, in a letter dated 18 September 1927 Gandhi wrote to Das Gupta: "I look to you, as you have put it, to conquer Suresh Babu and everyone else. It is the best thing to blame ourselves when people cannot get on well with us. Boundless charity necessarily includes all or it ceases to be boundless. We must be strict with ourselves and lenient with our neighbours. For we know not their difficulties and what they overcome". This advice, however, could not resolve the conflict and remove their mutual suspicion. Their relations

153. Interview with Satish Chandra Das Gupta on 25 and 26 October, 1974.
154. In a letter to Krishnadas, Gandhi wrote on 11 August 1927: "I take it that you will have seen Suresh Babu, probably visited Comilla, and I would like you if you have not the thing in mind to go to Sodepur and visit the work of Satis Babu and Hemaprabha Devi in particular so as to enable you to tell me from a personal visit how they are looking and how far Sodepur has progressed". CWMG. Vol. XXXIV, p.329.
156. Ibid., pp.4-5.
soon took an ugly turn over the question of the sanction of a loan of Rs. 10,000 by the AISA to the Abhoy Ashram. The delay and difficulty in obtaining the loan was attributed by the Abhoy Ashram to Satish Das Gupta who was a member of the Executive Council of the AISA. The members of the Ashram believed that Das Gupta had prejudiced the mind of the President of the AISA against then, and one of his (the President's) letters led them to pass a very strong and offensive resolution refusing the loan which was after all granted and resolving not to take any loan from the AISA in future.  

The resolution of the Abhoy Ashram took Gandhi by surprise. In a letter to Prafulla Chandra Ghosh he wrote on 4 July 1928: "It (this is, the resolution) does not betray either humility or the khadi spirit. ....... I should expect you to be careful, patient and not distrustful. After all the Council (it refers to the Council of the AISA) has no easy job before it to manage. Instead of passing resolutions in condemnation of the Council, You should have appreciated its difficulty and corrected its error where it might have been found to be in error. If I were you, I should withdraw the resolution without being asked. But if you feel that you no longer need any assistance, and if you feel unconvinced that you have been hasty in your judgement, you will of

157. The text of the resolution was: "Whereas the letter dated Bombay, the 13th June 1928, of Seth Jamnalal Bajaj, the acting President, A.I.S.A., over the loan of Rs. 10,000 sanctioned in its Council meeting at Bashirhat is in contravention of the spirit with which the resolution was adopted in the aforesaid meeting, and whereas the treatment accorded to us is humiliating, and whereas injustice has been done to us in the past and is being done even now, this meeting of the members of the Abhoy Ashram resolves that the said loan of Rs. 10,000 be refused with regret and that no further loan be taken from the A.I.S.A. in future". This text of the resolution is given in the footnote of a letter written by Gandhi to Prafulla Chandra Ghosh on 4 July 1928. CWMG, Vol.XXXVII, p.19.
course stick to your resolution". The whole situation arose ultimately because of the Abhoy Ashram's lack of faith in Satish Das Gupta. The continued rivalry between the Abhoy Ashram and the Khadi Prathisthan appeared so exasperating to Gandhi that in a letter on 22 January 1929 he wrote to Satish Das Gupta: "It is a great pity that you cannot exchange with Abhoy Ashram".

Though Khaddar and Charkha came to represent the spirit of swadeshi during the Gandhian period, Bengal's response to it was not as enthusiastic as that of other provinces. Even during the non-co-operation movement when swadeshi was in full swing throughout the country, Gandhi, in a public meeting in Calcutta, expressed his regret at the weak response of Bengal, and he pointed out that Bengal lagged behind all other provinces in this respect. The Bengalis, he said, were intellectually strong and ahead of other provinces, but he failed to understand why they were so backward in this noble mission. In 1922 a correspondent in his letter to Gandhi observed: "My mind compels me to say that Bengal is doing nothing about Swadeshi in comparison to the neighbouring province of Bihar. It is lagging far behind. Even those who boast themselves of being volunteers are not clad in khaddar". In reply Gandhi wrote: "This letter is supported by several others, but I am not prepared to admit that even in Calcutta no progress has been done in the khaddar movement. At the same time I fear that the charge against

158. Ibid.
159. Ibid., Vol. XXXVIII, p. 378.
160. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 9 September 1921.
Calcutta is mainly true. Khaddar wear in Calcutta is rather an exception than the rule, and there is no denying the fact that full Satyagraha is impossible without full compliance with the conditions precedent. 161

Before closing this Chapter it is necessary to discuss the question: To what extent was Bengal affected by this Constructive Movement? Or, in other words, how far was this movement successful in Bengal? Due to Gandhi's insistence and due to the activities of the constructive workers khaddar attained in Bengal, as in other parts of India, a new status, and it became a symbol of patriotism. Along with khaddar, the charkha also attained a new dignity, but it could not raise its importance beyond that level. Describing the position of the charkha in Bengal immediately after the non-cooperation movement it was written in the Bharatvarsa: "Many people have purchased charkha not with the purpose of using it, but for house decoration. It is placed in the drawing rooms of the gentlemen as an article of decoration along with other furniture". 162 In subsequent period also the position of the charkha remained almost unchanged in Bengal. It was frequently argued here that as an economic proposition the charkha was a lost cause, and no amount of patriotism could make it a success. The Amrita Bazar Patrika, for example, wrote in its editorial column in 1939: "We shall be failing in our public duty if we do not point out to the manufacturers and promoters of khadi that merely by the exploitation of the patriotic sentiments of a people an industry cannot

161. Young India, 9 March 1922.
expect to make any headway for long. Economic factors are inexorable. If the promoters neglect them, they may have to come to grief”.

"Khadi", it continued, "has been enjoying 'promotion' (in the shape of public patronage based upon the patriotic feeling of the consumers) now for the last 15 or 20 years. It should have been able by this time to stand upon its own leg, if not wholly, at least to a large extent ... But unfortunately, in Bengal, at any rate, far from coming down, its price has gone up. It is now beyond the capacity of ordinary middle class people to use it. It has in fact become either an expensive luxury for the patriotic well-to-do men or what has been called 'meeting ka kapra' for ambitious Congress workers. We do not know how long the industry can continue to exist, not to speak of growing."

This pessimist attitude about the future of khadi was shared by the Bengalis in general, though in other fields of constructive activities the record was more depressing. The experiment with Basic Education was a complete failure. The Gandhian leaders admitted this frankly, and they understood that there was no demand among the people for this type of education. Their Harijan movement and the drive against ...  

163. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 3 June 1939.


It is also to be noted that in Calcutta the meagre work on education through Gandhian line was carried on mostly by the non-Bengalis. "About 20 schools", G.D. Birla wrote to Gandhi, "are being conducted, but all this being done by some Marwari workers". G.D. Birla, In the Shadow of the Mahatma (Vakils, Feffer and Simsons, Bombay, 1939), p. 98.

Sailesh Kumar Bandyopadhyay, a prominent leader of the constructive movement in Bengal, wrote that in no sphere of constructive activity was their failure so complete as in the field of Basic Education. They could not secure suitable teachers nor could they find students for their institutions. The few students who read even up to the post-Basic stage did contd .....
untouchability had little impact on the society. There was no outstanding Harijan leader in the Gandhian movement of Bengal. Jogendra Nath Mancal of the Namasudra group became the spokesman of the depressed communities of Bengal, and he had no sympathy for the Gandhian approach. Among the Dhangar (Sweeper) community, the followers of Ambedkar far outnumbered those of Gandhi and they adopted a militant attitude against the latter. \(^{165}\) To give the Harijans, engaged in scavanging, relief from the inhuman system of carrying the night soil on head, Gandhi suggested, in his journal Harijan, the use of cart for that purpose. But the hold of the followers of Ambedkar was so strong that even this suggestion of Gandhi was met with resentment. G.D. Birla in a letter to Gandhi wrote that Dr. B.C. Roy told him that "when they tried to introduce this system in the corporation they met with strong opposition from the sweepers. The reason was that if the night-soil is carried in carts, fewer men are required and they immediately put up opposition when they heard of this reform. Then there are some councillors who pose as the leaders of the sweepers, and they instigated them to put up this opposition", \(^{166}\) During the interview with Satis Das Gupta he said that he was ashamed to admit that their movement could not touch even the fringe of the untouchability problem of Bengal. He

\(^{165}\) Interview with Sakti Ranjan Bose, President of the Bengal Branch of the Harijan Sevak Sangha, on 15 September 1974.

had to give up the publication of the Bengali journal Harijan. In this connection we may refer to a letter written by Gandhi to Das Gupta on 2 February 1934. In that letter Gandhi wrote: "You will be well rid of Harijan if there is not a natural demand for it. You may issue leaflets now and then". So far as the emancipation of the women of Bengal was concerned the contributions of the freedom struggle were much more significant than those of the constructive activities. In the field of Hindu-Muslim unity the record of the Constructive Programme was equally disappointing. It could not attract the Muslims and the constructive Gandhian organizations remained essentially Hindu in character. The rising communal tension in Bengal culminating in the Great Calcutta Killing, Noakhali tragedy and ultimately the partition of the province showed how ineffective was the constructive approach of Gandhi towards this problem. All these factors led Sailesh Kumar Bandyopadhyay to conclude that the whole Programme had virtually failed. He wrote:

"Truth is one of the basic principles followed by the Gandhians, and for the sake of truth a constructive worker must admit that by their activities they could not make any progress towards swaraj as described by Gandhi."

The experiment with the Constructive Programme could not attain appreciable success in any part of India, but the militant nationalist challenge to Gandhi created such an atmosphere in Bengal,


particularly after the Tripuri Congress of 1939, that no fruitful work along the Constructive Programme could be undertaken here. Referring to this atmosphere the weekly journal of the Khadi Pratisthan wrote: "In 1939 it was difficult to carry on constructive or any Gandhian activity in Bengal because of the unfavourable political atmosphere". The communal riots, Bengal famine of 1943 and rivalry among the Gandhian organizations further retarded the progress of constructive work in the province.


Charu Chandra Bhandari, a distinguished Gandhian leader who later on guided Sarvodaya movement of Bengal, told me during an interview (7 August 1975) that the constructive activities suffered in this province more due to rivalry among the Gandhian organizations than to any other factor.