



Sarala Devi Chaudhurani (1872-1945)

Educationist, Social and Political Activist

Sarala Devi Chaudhurani was an educationist, social and political activist. She earned her graduation degree in English literature from Bethune College and received the Padmavati Gold Medal. Her father Janakinath Ghosal was one of the earliest secretaries of the Bengal Congress. Her mother was Swarnakumari Debi, daughter of Debendranath Tagore. Sarala Debi was at the age of twenty-nine when Mahatma Gandhi first saw her conducting an orchestra as it played a song she had written for Congress. She got married to Rambhuj Dutta Chowdhury who was a lawyer and journalist. Although Rabindranath Tagore created the tune of the first two lines of *Bande Mataram*, it was Sarala Devi who put tune to the rest of the music. She sang the nationalist song in her mellifluous voice in the Benaras session of the Congress and contributed widely to its nation-wide popularity. After marriage she got even more involved in political activities and helped her husband in editing the powerful nationalist Urdu weekly newspaper *Hindustan*. Later when the Rowlatt Act was passed she used the medium to criticize vociferously the Government's stand. She came in touch with Mahatma Gandhi in Lahore and was greatly influenced by his principles of truth and nonviolence. However, in the beginning she was not a supporter of the Congress but was attached to the revolutionary philosophy. She maintained connection with *Suhrid Samiti*, a secret revolutionary Society. She also took part in the Swadeshi Movement and inspired the women to start using swadeshi products. One of the primary goals of her life was women empowerment. She took it upon herself to educate women and formed the *Bharat Stree Mahamandal*, first women organization. Subsequently it opened several branches in Lahore, Allahabad, Delhi, Bankura, Calcutta, Hazaribagh etc. Her outfit aimed to develop a system of home education for married girls and helping them have greater access to medical knowledge and medical care. Sarala Devi also rendered valuable service to the cause of Bengali literature and introduced *Bir-ashtami Utsav* (Festival of Heroes), in which poems with names of heroic men were chanted on the second day of Durga Puja with a

view to inspire the youngsters of Bengal with the ideals of heroism. On the top of being a prolific writer Sarala Devi was also the editor of the prestigious journal *Bharati*.