



# Birendranath Sasmal, Neglected in National History: A Case Study

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### **Abstract:**

True scientific history is written by facts, theories and accurate evidence. A philanthropist with an ever-improving spirit, a workaholic, an uncompromising fighter of Bengal, Birendranath Sasmal, the uncrowned king of undivided Medinipur, was a historical figure to whom neither the colonial government nor the later independent government gave him the same value as before. He has always been neglected in the pages of history. From 1901 to 1934, he associated himself as a member of the Indian National Congress, but that National Congress also did not give him a place as a national leader at the level of the national movement, instead, so that he could not be a leader at the national level, various plans and unfair injustice were done to him. His evidence is discussed chronologically. Adopting a qualitative research methodology, the study draws on oral histories, semi-structured interviews and an analysis of local publications.

### **Keywords:**

*Philanthropist, Uncrowned King, Swaraj, Boycott, Union Board, Kaivarta, Mahisya*

### **Introduction:**

The colonial history of India has witnessed the sacrifice of numerous freedom fighters. The colonial history witnessed the emergence of freedom fighters from the various corners of the British India. In this context Bengal had enormous contribution in the anti-British movement. Such a pioneering figure was the emergence of Birendranath Sasmal from the undivided Medinipur. He had been a staunch supporter of nationalist movements against the British rule. Since his childhood he laid his life for the independence of India. In his life he never supported flattery and co-operation from the British Government. He strongly opposed the policies and rules formed by the Britishers. He was born on 26<sup>th</sup> October, 1881 in the lap of his mother Anandamayi Devi. His father was Biswambhar Sasmal, a zamindar in Chandivetti, Contai.

### **Objectives of this paper:**

1. To analyze the life of Sasmal
2. To analyze the struggle of Sasmal in the colonial era
3. To analyze the manipulative politics and his victimization
4. To analyze the neglected condition of the spot of his birthplace
5. To analyze the ignorance of the struggling past of Sasmal

### ***His step in Indian Congress:***

In 1901, Birendranath was a student of 'Metropolitan College' in Calcutta. At that time, the session of the Bengali Provincial State Conference was held in undivided Medinipur. Narendranath Sen, editor of Calcutta newspaper 'Indian Mirror', was the president of that session and Kartik Chandra Mitra, a famous lawyer in undivided Medinipur, was the president of the '*Abhyarthana Samiti*' and Birendranath was the host of the reception society at that time and gave special help to make the conference a success. That is, the bridging of relations with the Congress is from the beginning of the twentieth century, but to see what the provincial or national Congress has achieved.

### ***Struggle for Swaraj and Union Board Boycott:***

The special features of the undivided Tamluk and Contai Sub-divisions of undivided Medinipur district are undeniable in the nationalist movement. The modern historian Hitesh Ranjan Sanyal has also admitted that the All India Movement, especially the Non-Violent and Non-Cooperation Movement (1921-22), the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-34) and above all the Quit India Movement (1942-44) achieved some success in the context of the movement of undivided Medinipur. Birendranath Sasmal was the biggest Congress leader in undivided Medinipur in the 1920s. During the Non-Cooperation Movement, the union board boycott movement took place. When the Union Board was established in undivided Medinipur district in 1921, the general public felt that the Union Board was harmful but this institution had to be supported by taxes at an increased rate. Birendranath Sasmal awakened this idea in the public mind and started a more intense non-violent resistance movement in the month of November 1921. Under the leadership of Birendranath, there was such strong resistance and all-out agitation that the Bengal government was forced to withdraw the union board from undivided Medinipur district. This time under the leadership of Birendranath Sasmal occupied a prominent place in the politics of Bengal. But since then the Congress leaders of Bengal became hostile to him because he was not born in the so-called upper caste among Hindus. For that reason, the Bengali Congress leaders were always on the lookout to ensure that even a small share of the political leadership of Bengal did not fall into the hands of Birendranath.

### ***Neglected for being Mahishya:***

By caste Mahishya high educated barrister Birendranath took his footstep like a whirling storm coming from south-east of Bengal's politics. He was secular, righteous and fearless devotee against British agitation, "completely free from the British rule i.e. independence" wanted Birendranath. On 21<sup>st</sup> May, 1926 as a president of Bengal's Provincial State Conference he said in his speeches

*"The ideals of Bengal India is nothing but to Replete freedom of thirty three crore of people's independence. I do not believe freedom can be gained by Terrorism or Anarchist conspiracy even by brilliant defeat by council chambers. It can be obtained only by a long process of mass movements, gradually spreading education, political consciousness and moral values among the masses can be gained by revolution".*

At the meeting of the *Swarajya Dal* chaired by Chittaranjan Das, the Congress leaders of Bengal openly declared that since he was born in the *Kaivarta (Mahisya)* community in undivided Medinipur, he had no right to come to Calcutta and take political leadership.

Secondly, Sasmal was a leader of peasant class especially in undivided Medinipur. A peasant leader would eventually dominate the Congress leaders of the elite, which led much to the chagrin of the Congress leaders. Congress leaders of Bengal passed two no-confidence motions against him from the Congress. He arranged for expulsion.

Thirdly, it was announced in a public meeting from the Congress that it was Birendranath Sasmal who had handed over Subhash Chandra Bose to the police. Even when he was away from politics, the Congress leaders of Bengal did not give peace. On a controversial claim of only Rs 300/-, the famous

Congress leader of Bengal, later Mayor of Calcutta Nirmal Chandra, Birendranath Sasmal was arrested and sent to civil jail by issuing an arrest warrant.

Fourthly, When Birendranath found everything in the work of the country to be empty, dejected and empty, Congress leaders of Bengal started spreading false propaganda in the name of Birendranath as a British spy because it was Birendranath Sasmal who handed over Subhash Chandra Bose to the police. At this time the Governor of Bengal, Lord Lytton, through Fazlul Haque, sent a proposal to Birendranath Sasmal to take over as a minister in the Government of Bengal. At that time, the mouthpiece of the English merchants' meeting "Capital" wrote

*"Stars in their courses are fighting for Lord Lytton if the strong man of Midnapore (Mr. Sasmal) is after a diarchical Ministership,"*

Birendranath Sasmal was in dire straits, friendless, a kind of destitute. Under the circumstances, he grudgingly rejected the British offer of ministerialship. Yet he never made any complaint against anyone even against the Congress during his lifetime did not ignore myself but never ignored anyone.

### ***Dominion Status vs. Revolution:***

Nationalist leaders especially Balgangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Motilal Nehru, Chittaranjan Das - all of them favored colonial autonomy rather than full independence status wanted to prove that better. Its meaning is very difficult to understand. But in 1926, Birendranath Sasmal, the popular leader of that time, said in a written speech in a public meeting –

*"Union Autonomy, District Autonomy, Provincial Autonomy and even maybe Dominion Status or Equal partnership within the British Empire can be obtained by non-violent non-cooperation. But Bengal and India's full state independence will not be achieved by anything....Bangla i.e. India's full state independence is not likely to be achieved by Terrorism or Anarchist conspiracy. It is not to achieve its radical eviction. Therefore, to achieve the independence of Bengal and India, it will not be achieved through Civil Disobedience but it should be possible through Revolution.... We believe that if I have the Divine Right to liberate my subjugated homeland, I will also make it work with the help of Revolution my Divine Right remains."*

Birendranath was the only person who was the first to declare in a public meeting that India's political rights would never be fully independent, regardless of the Revolution. He gave clear instructions in his written speech about how to prepare the country for the path of revolution, how to spread the message of revolution in the villages of the country.

But the unfortunate thing is that the Congress leaders of Bengal arranged for his expulsion from the Congress by passing a motion of no-confidence against this public figure, public leader and did not stop insulting him by spreading many kinds of false accusations and heinous slanders against him, thus forcing him to active political life. Stood back from Only *Bigyanacharya* (renowned scientist) Prafulla Chandra Roy stood by him then and raised a rebuke against falsehood. Birendranath Sasmal is also neglected in this case. So it is pertinent to say here that this was a scandalous aspect of Bengali Congress.

But 1928 AD at the Calcutta Congress session only Subhash Chandra Bose called for a struggle for full independence. But his proposal was not accepted by Congress. He also left the Congress for that reason and did not try to prepare the country for full independence as before. So a burning example of group or individual *kazia* culminating in the ideal of Dominion Status vs. Full Independence is the 1928 Calcutta Congress session when Subhash Chandra Bose debated the ideal of Dominion Status vs. Full Independence with Motilal Nehru, Gandhiji etc.

Jawaharlal Nehru ran out of the Congress hall. But here he had to withdraw from the Congress due to ideological differences with Birendranath Sasmal's call for revolution or full independence. In this case, he was neglected in national and provincial history.

### ***Swarajya Party vs. Birendranath Sasmal:***

Birendranath Sasmal was one of the editors of Nikhil Bharat *Swarajya Dal*. Motilal Nehru himself complained against him in this regard and Birendranath resigned from the executive council of the *Swarajya Dal* for deviating from the policy of the *Swarajya Dal*. At this time Birendranath resigned from the council as a member of the *Swarajya Dal*. He later entered the council as an independent candidate for re-election. The political highlight of the *Swarajya Dal* was the electoral defeat of Birendranath Sasmal by Narajol Zamindar Debendralal Khan. I hope everyone is aware of its history. Mahatma Gandhi, Motilal Nehru etc. as well as the big Congress leaders of the country used to flatter the big landlords; Narajol Zamindar Debendralal Khan is the best example.

### ***1926, District Board Election and Birendranath Sasmal:***

When Birendranath was the chairman of undivided Medinipur District Board, when the Governor of Bengal, Lord Lytton, visited Medinipur, Birendranath said that he could not welcome the governor under whose regime he was imprisoned for the crime of loving his country during the Buhlok Das. As a result, he did not approve a single penny from the district board. But there the Zamindar Debendralal Khan called the governor to his palace and conveyed his royal greetings. However, in view of this incident, the next time in 1926, when he was elected as chairman, the Bengal government rejected his election without approving it. Even after Birendranath Sasmal won the democratic election, the then Bengal government nominated Devendralal Khan, the Zamindar of Narajol, as the chairman of the district board, and this Zamindar Bahadur of Narajol easily took the position of chairman of the district board and managed the work by the order of the Bengal government. In this case also how Birendranath Sasmal, it should be evaluated as neglected.

Upendranath Bandyopadhyay, the leader of the revolutionaries of the burning era, is clear about how false is the history of the followers of Mahatma Gandhi's ideals of truth and non-violence, and all the nationalist newspapers of Bengal and the history of the Englishmen of Zamindar Debendralal Khan. Upendranath declared at a public meeting in undivided Medinipur that Birendranath Sasmal had handed over Subhas Chandra Bose to the police. But its history needs to be known a little.

Birendranath was a candidate for the post of Chief Executive Officer of Calcutta Corporation with a salary of five hundred rupees. Mayor Chittaranjan Das decided to appoint him to the post first. Deshbandhu's then private secretary Hemant Kumar Sarkar mentioned this in the book "*Deshbandhu Smriti*". Calcutta's elite Congressmen and fire-age revolutionaries called "*Midnipur's Chaots!*" In other words, Birendranath openly objected to the appointment of Sasmal as the Chief Executive Officer of the Calcutta Corporation. On their demand, honourable Chittaranjan Das changed his mind and finally nominated Subhash Chandra Bose and he was elected to that position. His salary is Rs.1500/- per month. Then when Subhash Chandra was arrested, the *Agni Yuga* revolutionaries grumbled that it was Birendranath Sasmal who handed Subhash Chandra Bose over to the police in revenge for not being able to become the Chief Executive Officer. The "*Congress Worker Sangh*", an organization of burning-era revolutionaries, once printed a manifesto and implicitly hinted at this. Self-esteemed leader Birendranath Sasmal since then, he gradually moved away from 'Dirty Politics.'

### ***Neglected Spot of Chandivetti, the birthplace of Birendranath Sasmal***

An unavoidable phenomenon is his birth-place which is ever worth-mentioning in the present concern. The country is under occupation of the dark night of disaster in the fate of India. The people of the country are confused by the rule and exploitation of the British. If we want to fight against the mighty British power, we need appropriate leadership. One those who came forward at that time to break the chains of subjugation of the mother country and performed the duty of a commander, risking his life, was the patriotic Birendranath Sasmal. The patriotic Birendranath Sasmal is a bright star in the history of India's freedom struggle. The brightest star of India's freedom struggle, yet the biography of a desperately neglected freedom fighter. Despite having all the qualifications to get a more important place in contemporary political

life and in the history of India's national struggle, Birendranath did not get it due to the ambiguity of the views of the then political leadership. Not only that, but it seems that a handful of mainstream historians of the freedom struggle could not free themselves from this narrow view, in an impartial analysis of India's freedom struggle. We are deeply saddened to see such a great soul forced to step away from the bright light of history due to the tradition of the upper class seizing power in the cities. Just as '*Deshpran*' Birendranath Sasmal is ignored in the pages of history, his birthplace, Chandivetti village, is similarly neglected. Despite the passage of 78 years of independence, neither the state nor the central government has taken any initiative to preserve the birthplace of this great freedom fighter. As a result, the memories of the countrymen and the world have faded under the ravages of time.

Ninety-two years have passed since his death; he never bowed his head to anyone. Not even after his death, his descendants and local residents had hoped that his birthplace would at least be preserved after his death. But where is it? That birthplace, covered in creepers in the village of Chandivetti in Contai, still stands neglected. An oral interview with Neelkantha Sasmal, a descendant of Birendranath Sasmal, a tone of regret emerged. He said that "*the people of Contai and Midnapur are proud of him, politicians cite his example in their speeches, but no official initiative has been taken to preserve the birthplace of the patriot.*"

Far from being preserved, the birthplace of the '*uncrowned emperor of Bengal*', Deshpran Birendranath Sasmal, one of the leaders of the independence movement, has practically become a ruin due to apathy, administrative negligence and lack of reforms. However, Chandivetti village in Contai block, about ten kilometers away from Contai sub-district town of East Midnapur (at present name), is the birthplace of Deshpran Birendranath. A huge banyan tree has grown in the cracks of the ruined house of Birendranath Sasmal. And small ash trees have spread their roots in the yard. Bats, owls and poisonous snakes are roaming all over the yard. Even during the day, the people of the village are afraid of the three-dimensional boundaries of this ruin. In this ruin, the '*Black Bull of Bengal*', the patriotic Birendranath, has buried various memorable memories of his early life. In this house, he showed a tendency to lead from childhood, his determination to transcend caste discrimination while studying in college, and his holy life, which was a great surprise to others. From this house, with the blessings of his mother Anandamayi Devi, Birendranath went to study barrister in England. Later, he organized a movement to prevent the partition of undivided Midnapur and firmly prevented the partition of Midnapur. He volunteered to serve the people in danger of the floods in undivided Midnapur and devoted himself to service work. The road direction is to get off at the Marishda bus stop in Contai-III block on the Digha-Kolkata road and take a trekker, auto or rickshaw to Aurai and from there walk a mile to the village of Chandivetti, the birthplace of the patriotic Birendranath Sasmal. As the second child of the landlord of Chandivetti village, Birendranath was born on 26<sup>th</sup> October, 1881 in the lap of his mother Anandamayi Devi in the huge second floor house of landlord Biswambhar Sasmal. But that huge second floor house has become a ruin today.



## Conclusion:

However, the above discussion has a much more transparent history. Like a valid document at a very short scale, we brought down some parts of the neglected aspects of Birendranath Sasmal. But there is no way to deny that the main point of which is that he was ignored by the Elite Class Congress workers as *Mahishya*, calling him the *Chaos of Medinipur* in the national and provincial political platforms. Gandhiji knew that Birendranath Sasmal's political career was almost wiped out by the intrigues and whirlwinds of Bengal Congress leaders. As a result, Birendranath's personal life could have been very bad but he never deviated from the truth and never bowed down to injustice. Birendranath was one of the very few countrymen in India who gave their all for the country but wanted nothing in return. We all know that society is made up of individuals and it is very important to determine the overall view of the society by analyzing society's use of individuals. Hence, the person Birendranath witnessed an exceptional event in the history of the world who never bowed down to anyone in his life. After his death, he was immortalized in history with the intention of being cremated. During his lifetime Birendranath Sasmal (26<sup>th</sup> October, 1881 - 24<sup>th</sup> November, 1934) gave instruction that when he would die his head would be kept erect, as always, on 'the funeral pyre, because he had never lowered his head to any one during his lifetime and he asked the people to keep his head erect on the funeral pyre even after his death which was a unique feature not only in the whole of India, but in the whole world except perhaps in the case of Clemenceau of France whose head also was kept erect at the time of his burial. In the editorial of English Amritbazar, wrote with respect to his death- "His Bengal has lost a towering personality who alone was able, if any single is able, to restore the position of the province in the Council of India." He was neglected in the nationalist politics, similarly his spot on birthplace also being neglected today.

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