

# The Creative Launcher

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## Revisiting Deshapran Birendranath Sasmal

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### Abstract

The historical literature dealing with memoirs, biographies, auto-biographies, diaries etc. is fairly rich and it has no doubt opened new dimensions in discovering areas of research. In India the tradition of historical biography is bears a meaning because it can be traced from ancient time down to our age. It is a fact that when a nation seeks its identity, it has to go back deep in to past. The biographies seem to be valuable in a way that they tempt us for enquiry to answer questions or queries about past human actions as evidences particularly in terms of our social formation and nation making. The frame work of history is one of thought and the biography is one of narration, which revolves round the life story of an individual from birth to death, subject to interpretation. India is very rich for a galaxy of biographies of many personalities and studies on them have brought to light several points to look at Indian history from different perspectives. In respect of national history but also in terms of regional one the study of biographies are no less important to find out the missing links of our modern historical research irrespective of time, place and person.

**Keywords-** Narration, Biography, Trends, Conventions, Politics

Deshapran Birendranath Sasmal who not only dedicated themselves for the cause of the nation but also at the same time deliberately stood for the feelings of the people as well as the identity of their own. A study from biographical perspective can thus be used as a window to examine such complex problems rather than in the classical sense of writing about the live histories of prominent individuals. Birendranath Sasmal in conventional sense, the stormy petrel of Bengal politics during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Surprisingly enough, Birendranath's valuable service to his motherland has not been given its due recognition by most of the Indian historians. The paucity of systematic records make the job of proper estimation of Birendranath a daunting task until the partition of Bengal in 1947, the personalities like Chittaranjan Das, Sarat Chandra Bose, Subhas Chandra Bose, H.S. Suhrawardy, FazlulHuq and Shyamaprasad

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Mukherjee stayed as the originating spirit of different political developments and set the pulse of colonial Bengal politics. They were the few among others who had contributed in their way to make their political ideology more special than their contemporaries. It is amazing that most of the scholars on Birendranath Sasmal only given importance to political activities of Sasmal. We have quite a small number of researches on Birendranath Sasmal like Sushanta Kumar Giri in his Unpublished thesis *Deshapran Birendranath Sasmal: Rajnaitik Jiban Katha*, Jadavpur University, 2002 discussed about the political contribution of Birendranath Sasmal upto 1934 relating to Swadeshi movement, Anti-Union Board agitation, Chairman of the District Board of Midnapore, Midnapore Partition, etc. Bimal Kumar Shit in his book *Deshapran Birendranath Sasmal O Banglar Jatiyatabadi Andolan* which has been published by Arpita Prakashani, Kolkata in 2009 is an another important work highlighted nicely about the how Birendranath Sasmal influenced the trend of Bengal politics and lastly Swadeshranjan Mondol in his book *The Cracked Portrait of a Patriot: Deshapran Birendranath Sasmal (1881-1934)* which has been published from Institute of Historical Studies, Kolkata in 2012 discussed briefly about Sasmal's role in freedom movement of India.. Scholarly works have been made on the Bengal Nationalist Movement. But in those researches the scholars have only mentioned the name of Birendranath but they did not get into detail about his thought and political activities. We have quite a large number of monographs and recent researches on different aspects of the nationalist movement in Bengal. But surprisingly Sasmal got only passing references and any connected account of his ideas or activities are lacking. The present research paper will enrich the understanding of his life and contributions with some reflections.

Birendranath was born at Chandibheti in the Contai sub-division of Midnapore in 1881. In this Connection he remarked about his homeland in his autobiography that '*Emon Deshti Kathao Khuje Pabe Na Ko Tumi, Sakal Desher Sera Se Je Amar Janmabhumi.*'<sup>1</sup> Birendranath was a son of Biswambhar Sasmal and Anandamoyee Debi. He passed the Entrance examination in 1900 from the Contai High School. Birendranath was greatly influenced by his teachers Tarak gopal Ghosh and Sashibhushan Chakraborty. He entered the Metropolitan college, Calcutta, but on the urge of being a student of Surendranath Banerjee, one of the nationalist of his time, he got admission to the Ripon college. In 1905, he jumped into the Swadeshi movement. Midnapore was indeed need of a leadership that ultimately could be provided by Birendranath Sasmal. Earlier outsiders had dominated the Midnapore Politics.

Birendranath was very much influenced by the principles of Congress. In this connection Birendranath stated that '*Congresser Bani Sunei Amar Sikha Dikha O Adarsher Sange Amar Bastab Jibaner Tumul Sangram Upostit Hayechilo.*'<sup>2</sup> In January 1921, Birendranath was elected the treasurer of the Bengal Tilak Swarajya Fund where he proved his worth by tracing the loop-

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holes in the accounts. Sasmal had already joined the Swarajya party of Chittaranjan Das. After his return from Nagpur session, he plunged into the non-cooperation movement. He was elected as the Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Congress. His first local issue was Anti-Union Board movement. In 1921 he successfully led the anti-Union Board movement. By December, political unrest in urban Bengal reached a climax on the issue of the boycott of the visit of the Prince of Wales to India. Birendranath along with great leaders like Chittaranjan Das, Abul Kalam Azad and Subhas Chandra Bose and others were arrested on 10 December on the charge of organizing the boycott. He was sentenced to six months simple imprisonment. Azad writes that “The Government retaliated by arresting leaders throughout county. In Bengal, Mr. C. R. Das and I were among the first to be arrested. Subhas Chandra Bose and Birendranath Sasmal also joined us in prison. We were all placed in the European ward of the Alipur Central Jail which became a centre for political discussion.”<sup>3</sup> In jail Birendranath came in touch with great leaders like Chittaranjan Das, Abul Kalam Azad and Subhas Chandra Bose. In jail he wrote an autobiography *Sroter Trina*. Birendranath had deep respect about his political guru Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das. In this connection Birendranath remarked about Chittaranjan ‘*Tar Atuloniya O Abutapurba Swarthy Tyager Drishtante, Dur Theke Gopone Take Namaskar Karechilam*’<sup>4</sup> Birendranath had also deep admiration for Subhas Chandra Bose. In this connection he remarked about Subhas ‘*Murtiman Seabrata*’.<sup>5</sup> After his release from jail, Sasmal assisted Chittaranjan Das in organizing the Bengal Provincial Swarajya party and became its Secretary. Birendranath was also elected the whip of the party in the Legislative Council. In 1923, Birendranath elected as chairman of Medinipur District Board.

Birendranath Sasmal aspired to be the Chief Executive of the Calcutta Corporation. But Chittaranjan Das offered the post to Subhas Chandra Bose. The conspiracy about Sasmal and factionalism within the congress was evident in the newspaper of Capital. In this connection we recall here a statement which has been published in 1<sup>st</sup> may,1924, “ So the strong man of Midnapore was pushed out of the way to make room for the Ex-Civil servant who boldly left the celestials to become a non-co-operator.”<sup>6</sup>The internal contradiction between Deshabandhu and Sasmal was a tragic event of Bengal politics. The factionalism within the Swarajya party was led to rift between Deshabandhu and Sasmal. Prafulla Chandra Roy was very much anguished about the overthrow of Sasmal from Calcutta Corporation and sadly remarked that, ‘*Swarajya Daler Ki Abhisandhi Chilo Jani Na. Apnake Coolly Ignore Karla.*’<sup>7</sup>The sole point was that the crisis was the tripartite contest between Birendranath Sasmal, Subhas Chandra Bose and J.M.Sengupta for the domination of Calcutta Corporation.

Sasmal was elected President of the Krishnagar session of the BPCC in 1926. But his remarks about terrorism and violence in the Presidential Address led to the passing of a motion

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of no-confidence against him. During the civil disobedience movement of 1930, while serving as a member of the non-official committee appointed to enquire into the atrocities perpetrated by the Midnapore administration. During the time of Midnapore partition, Birendranath played an important role and vehemently protested against it. In this connection, it is interesting to note that Birendranath asserted in every meeting-‘I won’t allow any Government to cut off any limb of mother Bengal. If it occurs over my dead body.’

In 1934, at the request of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya Birendranath led Bengal Nationalist party.<sup>8</sup>In the election, Birendranath had won it by ninety-five percent majority despite strong opposition from the Congress. In November 19, 1934, on his way from Midnapore to Calcutta, Birendranath was attacked with thrombosis and became senseless. He was taken to his Calcutta residence where he passed away on the 24<sup>th</sup> November, 1934. According to his direction, written in a will, his dead body was burnt with his head held up towards the blue sky at Keoratala Burning Ghat on the Ganges. The Urban elite of Calcutta had denied Sasmal the rightful place in Bengal Politics. He was a man of liberal views, clear vision and also dedicated to the cause of people. He said

For whom shall I live  
If not for the people?  
I’m born of the people  
Trusted by the people  
I’ll die for the people. (195)<sup>9</sup>

Birendranath Sasmal came to the forefront of active politics since 1921, but he started his activities since anti-partition movement of Bengal in 1905. From that year to 1934, Sasmal was always a force to reckon with so far as the Bengal politics was concerned. Before he had taken to active politics, Birendranath made his mark as a successful member of the Calcutta Bar. But his successful career at the Bar could not keep him away from participation in the national liberation movement. Throughout his political life, Birendranath was always found working with a feverish energy to make possible for India the attainment of her national destiny-the Swaraj. Sasmal had a definite political line but there were inconsistencies and contradictions both in his theory and practice. Birendranath Sasmal tried to offer a political programme which could have provided a centre for Hindu-Muslim pact. But the urban middle class Hindu Bhadrlok -dominated nationalist politics of Bengal paid a deaf ear to his advice. Sasmal in his last days, detached from the mainstream of nationalist politics but he was uncompromising in his stand. The Rise of Sasmal in Midnapore politics helped the masses as new actors on the political stage of Midnapore. He believed that no useful purpose will be served by a policy of appeasement as it was not at all moving in attaining the Swaraj of India and all the movements of Bengal as well as

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of India should be for attaining full independence of its people.<sup>10</sup> Birendranath Sasmal also felt that education should be made free and imparted to all irrespective of caste and creed. He was thought about Education, Caste System and Hindu-Muslim Unity. He wrote beautiful essay and poems. Sasmal wrote *Amal o Ramakrishna*, *New York e Pachmas Bhakter Guru* and *Chotoder Gynadoy*. He had deeply hated rigid caste system. We need to develop the democratic ideals based on the thought of Birendranath Sasmal. The measure of Birendranath's success in the political movement of his country and the identification of his own self with the cause of so many millions won for him the epithet of Deshapran. It was the crowning reward of his political activities from his own people. Within a short compass an attempt has been made here to represent a special aspect of Birendranath Sasmal that may well be accepted as a worthy contribution towards the Colonial Bengal.

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