

Surendranath Sarkar and the Nationalist Movement in Birbhum: Navigating Local and National Agendas

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ABSTRACT

The nationalist movement during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a remarkable-phenomenon in Indian history, culminating in reshaping the entire country's political landscape. The masses of India responded to the exploitative British rule by vigorously engaging in the freedom struggle. However, an attempt to draw a universal pattern for the nationalist movement across the entire subcontinent would inevitably result in a fiasco. As a result, recent historiography of the Indian Freedom Struggle has placed the diverse local aspects of the movement at the centre of discussion. The intersection and interaction of various forms of consciousness and their spontaneous outbursts at the grassroots level metamorphosed the local movements in nearly all provinces into distinctive forms. The Bengal Presidency was one of the storm centres of the anti-colonial movement. The uncontrolled wave of anti-British struggle inevitably reached various remote parts of the Bengal province, and our Birbhum district was no exception. Unfortunately, many of the architects of these micro-regional activities have been overshadowed by the metanarratives of the mainstream national movement. This paper aims to examine the contributions of Surendranath Sarkar, one of the unsung architects from Birbhum district, who, by moving away from manipulative ideologies, crafted mass movements guided by the local principles that have remained uncelebrated and unrecognised in our mainstream history.

Keywords: nationalist, movements, micro-regional, local principles

I. INTRODUCTION

The latter half of the nineteenth century witnessed the nascent development of a sense of collective belongingness as various social, cultural, and political movements started to foster a shared identity among diverse groups. The personification of the motherland (Bharatmata), the composition of patriotic songs, dramas and novels, the publication of vernacular newspapers, magazines, and journals, the formation of various regional associations and the rejuvenation of the glorious past were powerful tools used to create a 'Zone of Proximal Development', ultimately instilling a shared identity in the collective consciousness. The more British colonialism pushed the Indians into its dark dungeon, the more it illuminated their collective sense of identity and resilience. But fostering nationalism among the common masses was indeed a complex process, mainly due to the plurality of Indian society.

As a result, the unilinear interpretation of the nationalist movement in our country is undoubtedly a deviation from its originality. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay stated "India was a plural society, and therefore Indian nationalism was bound to have many voices, as different classes, groups, communities and regions interpreted their 'nation' in various, sometimes even contradictory, ways."ⁱ The introduction of Gandhian ideology into Indian society in the early twentieth century served to reinforce the thread of nationalism. The undivided Bengal Presidency was undeniably the cradle of Indian nationalism, laying the groundwork for its further expansion. From the sprouts of early political associations to the manifestation of Swadeshi and Boycott movements, every development of the Bengal Presidency contributed to infusing the spirit of nationalism into the veins of the Indian people. As with other areas of Bengal, the local inhabitants of the Birbhum district, also played a crucial role in achieving-independence, with their responses to the call from mainstream leaders being significantly influenced by localised ideologies.

With the outbreak significant mass movements- namely, the Non-Cooperation Movement, the Civil Disobedience Movement, and the Quit India Movement across the country, the local leaders of Birbhum mobilised people in their distinctive way. Some of the pioneers who bridged the state of isolation and separation of Birbhum district from mainstream national politics and inscribed the district's name on an indelible plaque of pride were Mihirlal Chattopadhyay, Moulavi Modeshwar Hossain, Jagdish Chandra Ghosh, Dukoribala, Moulavi Akharam Khan, Dwijapada Dutta, Pannalal Dasgupta, Moulavi Din

Muhammad, Yugulpodo Das, Sharatchandra Mukhopadhyay, Abdul Rahaman, Satyabala Devi, Surendranath Sarkar, Damodor Brajrobasi and many more.ⁱⁱ

The land of Birbhum is predominantly an agricultural area where the majority of the population depends on farming for their livelihood- a pattern rooted in its historical background. The district's agrarian economy largely shaped the local mass movements against colonial rule. Surendranath Sarkar, who also belonged to an agricultural family, was born in Khayrasole in 1893 (1300 Bangabdo, Bhadra Maas), Birbhum. He lost his father at the tender age of six and was subsequently raised solely by his mother and grandmother. When he was a student at Nakrakonda High School in Khayrasole he raised his voice against casteism for the first time, challenging the discriminatory seating arrangement in the classroom. He directly experienced caste-based prejudice for being a child from a kayastha family.ⁱⁱⁱ At this time, Lord Curzon's insidious plan to bifurcate the Bengal Presidency under the guise of administrative convenience provoked the people of Bengal to protest vehemently. The fervour of the protest reached our district as well, instigating the local populace to react spontaneously. Unconventional for his age, Surendranath, despite being only nine years old, ventured beyond his comfort zone by actively participating in the Rakhi festival, which symbolises unity. Not only that, he also encouraged all of his villagers to observe Arandhan Day, abstaining from cooking to demonstrate resilience. Even the women of the village, recognising the severe implications of the partition plan, participated in a boycott of bangles and burnt foreign clothes.^{iv} Amidst this period of upheaval, Surendranath Banerjee, a prominent leader from the Bengal Presidency, arrived in Dubrajpur to address a public meeting. His inspiring speech kindled in Suren Sarkar a fervent desire to liberate his country from the shackles of foreign control.^v

Surendranath Sarkar began his professional life as a clerk in the Forestry department in Chaibasa, Bihar. However, in 1913, he left that position to work at the Sijua Colliery, where he became associated with the labour movement.^{vi} During his time at the colliery, a British official, Mr Case physically assaulted a native worker named Bholanath. In response, S.N.Sarkar and his associates compelled the officer to apologise. But that was not the end of the chapter; his associate, Shibkali Bose, was determined to enforce a harsher lesson. Shibkali Bose, Surendranath Sarkar and three other associates executed their plan by attacking the accused officer with rods, lathis and other weapons at night. At dawn the next day, Suren Sarkar and Bholanath fled to Dhanbad, seeking legal assistance from Kshetranath Sengupta, a widely respected nationalist leader.

Meanwhile, three others were arrested. Immediately after returning from Dhanbad, the two absentees were arrested. However, within a few days, they were released on bond. S.N.Sarkar visited Calcutta to approach the eminent lawyer Chitta Ranjan Das to fight for their case, but by then, he was already occupied with the Dumraobad Case. However, Mr C.R. Das recommended I.B.Sen of the Calcutta High Court, and fortunately, Sen consented to take on their case. At the Dhanbad court, the verdict sentenced Mr. Sarkar to six months imprisonment and the others to four months each. The case was then transferred to the Purulia court and subsequently to the Patna High Court. When the case was transferred to the court in Purulia, Justice Mr. Scroop made a derogatory remark, asserting that "evidence from a European witness cannot be false." After the case was shifted to the Patna High Court, Justice Jwala Prasad responded, "evidence from an Indian witness cannot be false" (translated from the original Bengali version).

Finally, Justice Jwala Prasad released them all at the Patna High Court. The Sijua assault case had a life-changing impact on Sarkar. Through this case, Sarkar became directly involved in active politics. Eventually, the 'All-India Coal Mining Labour Association' was formed, with I.B.Sen serving as President and S.N.Sarkar as Secretary.^{vii} Tarashankar Bandopadhyay, a renowned Bengali novelist and a contemporary of Mr. Sarkar, wrote the novel 'Chaitali Ghurni', set against the backdrop of the Sijua Assault Case. One of the protagonists in the story, 'Suren', is, in fact, a representation of Surendranath Sarkar. Tindal's response (one of the characters in the novel) to the fireman's allegation against Suren and Shibkali Babu (two protagonists) illustrates Gandhiji's teachings on them.^{viii}

In the meantime, national political issues gradually began to penetrate Birbhum district. The district organisation of the Indian National Congress for Birbhum was established in 1908, with its first session presided over by Surendranath Bandopadhyay. During the Swadeshi Movement, several activists from Suri played key roles, including Harinarayan Mishra, Bagolananda Mukherjee, Rakhachandra Choudhury, Gopalchandra Chakraborty, and many others.^{ix} With the emergence of Gandhiji in India's national politics, the entire country experienced an ideological shift. Regional leaders, including those in Birbhum, inevitably felt the influence of his charismatic personality as well. Surendranath was an active member of the Congress party and a follower of Gandhiji. Despite being influenced by Gandhian ideology, his inclination towards the left was clearly visible. He leaned towards extreme ideology and saw extremist leaders as source of inspiration for the nation's youth to give their lives for their country. On the eve of the Non-Cooperation Movement, the Congress party held a session at Wellington Square (now Subodh Mallick Street), Calcutta, where Suren Sarkar represented the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee. Soon, he was elected to the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. He attended the 1921 Ahmedabad session of the Congress, wearing 'Khaddar' clothing to promote Swadeshi handicraft.^x

The continuous misgovernance by the British, the selfless participation of British India in the war, forceful conscription, the ravages of the influenza epidemic, and their unpopular acts, such as the Defence of India Act of 1915, the Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act of 1919, the disillusioning Montague-Chelmsford Reforms (Government of India Act of 1919) and most notably, the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, compelled Indian leaders to launch a nationwide movement.

When the whole nation rose in protest against the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, Gopika Bilas Sen from Suri, Yugalpada Das from Kopa, Murarai, and of course, Suren Sarkar from Khayrasole joined the protest movement in Birbhum district.^{xi} Subsequently, the Congress launched the Non-Cooperation Movement in January 1921, steering it under the guiding principles of 'Ahimsa' (non-violence) and 'Satyagraha' (truthfulness). Birbhum district, like other parts of the Bengal Presidency, rose to the call of the Non-Cooperation Movement by embracing its distinct principles. On January 20 1921, the students of Hetampur Krishnachandra College and on January 24, the students of Benimadhab Institute left their respective institutions in response to the movement. In September, Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das conducted a public meeting to mobilise the masses. In the same year, Nabinchandra Sen was elected as the President, and Gopikabilas Sen as the Secretary of the District Congress Board of Birbhum.^{xii} Despite the inclusion of various strategies by leading congress figures, including Gandhiji, the 'no-tax campaign' was never incorporated into their programme in fear of class division within Indian society, which underscored the development of regional variations. In various parts of the Bengal Presidency, including Pabna, Bogra and especially the Rampurhat sub-division of Birbhum, peasants resisted the newly introduced Union Board, which significantly increased local taxes. In Rampurhat, the movement was led by Jitendralal Banerjee.^{xiii} With the outbreak of the movement, Mr. Sarkar resigned from his position as a stenographer with the TATA company and dedicated himself entirely to the Congress party. During this movement, nearly 20,000 individuals were detained and arrested. Concurrently, the 'Swaraj Ashrama' was established in Suri to spread Gandhiji's message throughout the district, with Narendranath Banerjee in charge of the organisation.^{xiv}

The second annual session of the All-India Trade Union Congress took place in Jharia, presided over by Joseph Baptista and was attended by Suren Sarkar. At the same time, Gandhiji also visited Jharia for a different reason, where Suren Sarkar met him for the first time. By 1923-24, he wanted to spread patriotism through his constructive activities. He arranged a feast for all local people, irrespective of their caste or creed, to promote harmony and condemn untouchability. At this time, extreme impoverishment coerced him into joining the Kumardubi colliery in 1924, where he established a primary school to promote the education of worker's children and a cooperative society to regulate the prices of essential commodities. During his stay in Kumardubi, many Congress leaders, including Bipin Ganguly and Jagadish Ghosh met him, and he was always in touch with Satyendra Mohan Kar, the Secretary of the Birbhum Congress Committee, which revealed his political identity to the British authority. All these formative activities made him a suspect in the eyes of the British police, leading him to resign from his job as a consequence.^{xv} After the withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation Movement, the Congress party focused on constructive activities, including a rural reconstruction program. Gyananjan Neyogi, the coordinator of the rural resuscitation program, advocated for a 'lantern lecture' series to instil a sense of nationalism among the rural population. Suren Sarkar actively campaigned for the 'lantern lecture' series in the late twenties. The magic lantern furnished an alluring experience, breaking the tedium of speeches by illustrating the past, present and future of our nation through projected slides. It vibrantly portrayed the brutal oppression imposed by the British, heightening awareness among the people.^{xvi} In 1928, while preparing for a lantern lecture at the Goshtho Fair (a religious fair celebrated by the Hindu community) in Khayrasole, the police, under the direction of District Magistrate Mr. Stevens of Birbhum, conducted a raid and arrested Bipin Das, Jagadish Ghosh, and Suren Sarkar. Mr. Stevens mocked Haridas Singh, the barrister representing Suren Sarkar in court, saying, "Well, Haridas Babu, your client Suren Babu has missed a golden opportunity to be garlanded!" (translated from the original Bengali version).^{xvii}

In 1928, Surendranath Sarkar became the Secretary of the Birbhum District Congress Committee. Meanwhile, he was captivated by Jawaharlal Nehru's speech on socialism at the Raja Ram Mohan Roy Auditorium that same year and subsequently joined the Congress Socialist Party. Before the outbreak of the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930, he organised volunteers, identified liquor shops and cannabis stores, and mapped the locations of police stations as part of his preparation. Some youths from Mallarpur joined them as volunteers, and together, they toured the entire district to inspire the masses to participate in the movement. However, their activities were closely monitored by the British police everywhere.^{xviii} On April 6, 1930, the violation of salt law by manufacturing salt on the eastern coast of India officially marked the beginning of the Civil Disobedience Movement. The officially accredited plan of action for the movement was restricted to violating the salt law, boycotting foreign clothes, and picketing liquor shops, among other measures. However, the territories inaccessible to the sea led the movement based on local needs. In fact, each social class developed its own plan of action according to its bare necessities. In April 1930, peasants in the Hissar district of Haryana refused to pay rent and seized the crops of local landlords. In September, in Kangra, they defied the forest grazing regulations. In Bihar, a significant agitation against the Chowkidari tax took place, while in Assam, student strikes in May successfully opposed the Cunningham Circular, which banned political participation. As a result, 3,117 out of 15,186 government school students left their schools. By this time, the Bengal Congress faced ideological factionalism, with Subhas Chandra Bose and J.M. Sengupta launching a rival organisation to carry out the movement. In Midnapur, Arambagh and other rural areas, the movement evolved around the issues of salt and chowkidari tax.^{xix}

In 1930, the local leaders of Birbhum decided to organise a procession from the District Congress office in defiance of Ordinance 144 to signify the onset of the movement. Suren Sarkar became the vanguard of the procession and chanted the slogan 'Vande Mataram' (Hail to Thee, Mother). Unfortunately, in an attempt to disrupt the movement before it could gain

stability, the British police arrested Suren Sarkar and imprisoned him for six months. He was initially sent to Suri Jail, followed by Berhampore, and ultimately to Dumdum Jail. Interestingly, jail served as a crucial environment for him to connect with many prominent leaders, expanding his political ideas. He met fellow revolutionaries from different prisons, including Prafulla Ghosh, Annada Chaudhury, and Pramatha Bandopadhyay. Just 15 days after returning home from imprisonment, he found himself back in custody, charged with carrying out picketing, though Mr. Sarkar considered the allegation to be false in his autobiography.^{xx} Tragically, he was entangled in the labyrinth of imprisonment in 1932. The contemporary newspaper '*Bangabani*' reported on February 4, 1932, that "Shreejukto Surendranath Sarkar, recognised as the champion of the Birbhum District Congress Committee, was arrested yesterday while delivering a speech to villagers in front of a liquor shop, defying the Magistrate's restrictions" (English translation of the original Bengali version). This time, he was sentenced to jail for one year. He was confined in Hijli Jail, which consisted of 28 wards. They formed the 'Bandisangha' (Association of the Prisoners) by electing one member from each ward to make decisions collectively, where Mr. Sarkar represented the 17th ward. They conducted a vote to decide on the issue of penal servitude, with Mr. Sarkar voting against it. According to the voting results, most revolutionaries voted against obeisance to penal servitude and conveyed this decision to the jail superintendent the next day.

Consequently, they were all subjected to a penal diet known as '*Khudghanta*' in Bengali, which consisted of broken rice grains unsuitable for human consumption as punishment. They had to fast for three consecutive days to reject the consumption of Khudghanta. The newspaper '*Bangabani*' further reported that, under the Emergency Power Legislation, a ban was imposed on more than six members of the Congress Committee within the jurisdiction of the Khayrasole police station. Two more Congress workers from the same area, Radhakanta Thakur and Arun Chandra Mondal, were arrested by the police on January 29 for picketing in front of an excise shop.^{xxi} During this period, no-revenue and no chowkidari tax campaigns were launched in Dubrajpur and Khayrasole area. Mr. Sarkar was the mastermind behind organising the no-chowkidari tax campaign in Khayrasole area.^{xxii} The factionalism at the centre had also taken deep root at the regional level. In 1931, a dispute emerged within the District Congress Committee over the course of action, prompting the radicals to form the 'Birbhum District Youth Association at Kuchuighata. The president of this newly formed association was Narendranath Banerjee, and they supported Subhas Chandra Bose's approach. The Provincial Congress disapproved of this association, and the Congress office in Suri was fully occupied by the District Congress Committee, with Dr. Sharat Mukhopadhyay as its President and Surendranath Sarkar as its Vice-President.^{xxiii} The youths of Birbhum couldn't resist being drawn into the revolutionary movement led by Subhas Chandra Bose, Mastarda Surya Sen, and others. Resultantly, they formed the 'Savitri Club' in Bhalas, Labpur; 'Tarun Sangha' in Mallarpur; 'Khamarbari' in Halsut village of Dubrajpur; along with many other revolutionary associations.^{xxiv} At this juncture, Narendranath Banerjee and his associates worked tirelessly to promote the sale of Swadeshi goods by visiting local haats. To this end, they formed the Birbhum Palli Samskar Samiti (Birbhum Association for Rural Reformation) with the aim of safeguarding the interests of approximately 5,000 weavers in the Birbhum district.^{xxv}

Between 1931 and 1933, revolutionary activists in the Birbhum district engaged in a series of radical activities, including the theft of pistols from Aghor Roy's house in Suri and Tarakeshwar Babu's house in Bhavanipur, an attempt to release Ambika Chakraborty from Suri jail using dynamite to breach the walls, and a robbery at the house of the Raajbari of Banoaribaad. They also committed robberies at Subalpur and the post office in Dubrajpur, along with many other similar incidents. Many congress leaders were intrigued by the ideology of the revolutionary activists. Nityagopal Bhowmick, Prabhat Kusum Ghosh, Jagadish Ghosh, Jaygopal Chakraborty, Saatkodi Chatterjee, Satyanarayan Chanda, Rajat Bhushan Dutta, Kaliprasanna Chowdhury, Prangopal Mukherjee and several others were the architects of this new revolutionary political structure in Birbhum. But soon, the British watchdogs thwarted their plans in 1933 by detaining almost all of them. In 1934, the trial against 21 revolutionaries, widely known as the 'Birbhum Conspiracy Case', began in a special tribunal in Suri, following the criminal court procedure. While escaping from the police, Rajat Bhushan Dutta and Prangopal Mukherjee sought refuge at Sarkar's abode at 10 o'clock that night. Despite the high risk to their lives, his wife not only permitted them to stay but also fed them dinner, thus contributing to the country from behind the curtain.^{xxvi} This case failed to create any negative impression on the youth in the district regarding the revolutionary path to achieving independence, as evidenced by excerpts from a lengthy speech delivered by Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh at Jajigram (formerly a part of Birbhum district) on May 18, 1940, aimed at strengthening the Congress party's constructive program in Birbhum and Murshidabad. Dr. Ghosh stated "The main objective of Gandhism is non-violence, but at present, the Bengal Presidency is flooded with extreme intolerance, which is simply another name for violence" (English translation of the original Bengali version). He called on all followers of Gandhi to persuade extremists to return to the path of non-violence.^{xxvii}

Their uprising was aimed not just at the foreign exploiters but also at the native power mongers. The emergence of absentee zamindars, who typically resided in cities and were utterly indifferent to their zamindari estates, was, a repercussion of the introduction of the Permanent Settlement in the Bengal Presidency. The 'Gomasthas' and 'Naibs' squeezed the peasantry, left vulnerable by the Zamindars, for excessive taxes. The gradual encroachment of the Communist Party into rural Bengal was undoubtedly a consequence of the Congress Party's reluctance to incorporate the no-tax campaign. The relentless ascent of the Communist Party in rural Bengal was an important phenomenon by this time. The inclusion of Saumyendranath Tagore, the

grand-nephew of Rabindranath Tagore and the first translator of '*Communist Manifesto*' into Bengali, in this context is inevitably essential. In 1934, he founded the Communist League of India to unite the entire peasantry of Bengal in solidarity. In the Birbhum district, particularly in Dubrajpur, Khayrasole, Murarai, and Labhpur, the influence of the Communist League of India was notably strong. Pannala Dasgupta, an eminent revolutionary, dedicated his life to the rural construction program after embracing Tagore's philosophy of rural resuscitation. He was a close associate of Saumyendranath Tagore, responsible for mobilising peasantry and workers in Birbhum. Their objectives were to impart political education to the peasants, present their grievances to the appropriate authorities, and prepare them to close the chapters of exploitation and extortion. In opposition to the CPI-led 'Birbhum District Krishak Sabha', Saumyendranath Tagore's Communist League of India established their own BDKS in 1938, with Surendranath Sarkar in charge of the newly formed Sabha. The first conference of the BDKS was held in Dubrajpur on April 19, 1938, and Mr. Sarkar highlighted increased taxation and inadequate irrigation system as the main obstacles to agricultural growth in the district. Their claims included forming a Debt Settlement Board, a complete stoppage of tax collection from peasants during drought-like situations, and the abolition of the Derabari paddy-lending system. After the second conference of the CLI-led BDKS, held in Khayrasole on April 9 1939, the Communist League of India and the Communist Party of India decided to campaign jointly to instil consciousness. In Khayrasole, a strong protest movement emerged against the Derabari paddy-lending system, where impoverished cultivators were forced to take paddy as a loan during the sowing season and had to repay it after the harvest within four months, with at least 150 per cent interest.

Under extreme pressure, the District Magistrate was compelled to advance short-term loans to the poverty-stricken peasants, enabling them to avoid borrowing under the Derabari system. In nearly all their meetings, the zamindars were consistently identified as the primary culprits behind the destitution of the peasantry, and the government was criticised for its failure to protect the peasants.^{xxviii} In 1940, Shree Surendra Narayan Sen, President of the Birbhum Zilla Krishak Samiti, and Shree Shashanka Kumar Sarkar, President of the Loba Union in Dubrajpur, sent a grievance letter to the District Magistrate of Birbhum. In their letter, they detailed the severe oppression faced by cultivators at the hands of the Gomastha, Sashi Bhusan Chowdhury, and the Naib, Pramathanath Ganguly, on behalf of the absentee Zamindar, Suhrid Kumar Deb. One month before this attempt, the peasants had submitted a mass petition to the zamindar, hoping to have their issues resolved.^{xxix}

S.N. Sarkar had a deep connection with 'Aamar Kutir,' a meeting place for revolutionaries near Ballabhpur, Birbhum, that aimed to provide economic rehabilitation for the revolutionaries released from jail. It was at this location that he met other notable figures such as Manaranjan Dutta, Mani Ganguly, Pannala Dasgupta, and Suren Banerjee. They held secret meetings and exchanged their viewpoints. They took an active initiative in reconstructing the rural economy, and the continued production of popular leathercraft is the best evidence of their efforts. Even 'Aamar Kutir', founded by Sushen Mukhopadhyay as a clandestine refuge for revolutionaries, contributed immensely in advancing constructive programmes in support of the workers' and peasants' movements in Birbhum.^{xxx} With the cooperation of a few friends, Mr. Sarkar established the 'Nabashakti Insurance Company', modelled after the cooperative society of the workers, which was inaugurated by Shreemati Nellie Sengupta, a nationalist leader and the wife of Jatindra Mohan Sengupta, in Suri on September 21, 1934. In a rented room, they not only managed the operations of the Company but also secretly directed Swadeshi activities, which eventually drew the scrutiny of the British police. The surveillance agents conducted three to four raids on their rented house, causing the policyholders to lose faith in the Company, leading to its gradual decline. In 1937, Surendranath Sarkar became the President, and Radhagovinda Sarkar became the General Secretary of the Birbhum District Congress Committee. With this new designation and many responsibilities, another phase of Mr. Sarkar's life began. They began organising the peasantry to resist the native zamindars and moneylenders, as well as the primary source of their exploitation—the British blood suckers.^{xxxi}

The British government's decision to involve India in World War II without consulting Indian leaders caused widespread discontent among the Indian people. Furthermore, the failure of the Cripps Mission to meet Indian aspirations, coupled with large-scale unemployment, inflation, and food shortages, made the commencement of the Quit India Movement on August 8, 1942—an ultimatum for the British to quit India, inevitable. Birbhum was heavily affected during the Quit India Movement along with other parts of the Bengal Presidency. The arrest of all the national leaders in the nascent stages of the movement compelled ordinary people to take up leadership roles. Reflecting on this shift, one of the activists from Birbhum, Nepal Majumder, remarked in his article, 'Every Indian who desires freedom and strives for it must be his own guide.....'.^{xxxii} Though the guiding principles of the movement were based on a non-violent approach, it soon turned violent in the absence of its leaders, making it distinct from the other two nationwide movements—the Non-Cooperation Movement and the Civil Disobedience Movement. In Birbhum district, all the leftist organisations were actively engaged throughout the months of August and September in 1942. By this time, a competent leader, J.L. Banerjee, rejoined the Congress party after having left in 1927 due to an internal dispute within the party. This culmination can be seen in the changing pattern of politics in Birbhum district. He consolidated the already existing peasant movement in Birbhum. Mr. Sarkar was an eyewitness to the reunion of Subhas Chandra Bose and J.L. Banerjee. The local people participated in the movement by dismantling rail lines, seizing government buildings, and occupying courts. Shree Kaali Krishna Mitra, Nepal Majumder, and others played pivotal roles in the 1942 movement.

II. CONCLUSION

It is evident that Surendranath Sarkar is a personality who deserves to be discussed in mainstream history. An ideological dichotomy, and his surroundings, drew him even closer to the workers and peasantry class. He modified the plan of action for each nationwide movement, basing it entirely on regional guiding frameworks, making the grassroot-level movement distinct and independent. His unwavering devotion to the country ought to be honoured forever. His legacy is honoured with the erection of a stone plaque bearing Mr. Sarkar's name alongside other freedom fighters from our district. An award given to rank holders in the secondary and higher secondary final examinations at Nakrakonda High School is named after him—the 'Surendra Smriti Purashkar'.^{xxxiii}

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29. ^{xxix} Birbhum Barta, 27.05.1940.
30. ^{xxx} Surendranath Sarkar, *ibid.*, pp.67.
31. ^{xxxix} Nepal Mazumder. Birbhumer 42-er bharat chharo andaloner patabhumi o prak-kathan. *Dhusar Maati*, pp. 49-50.
32. ^{xxxii} *Ibid.*, pp.45-46.
33. ^{xxxiii} Interview taken of Mr. Samya Sadhak Sarkar (The eldest son of Surendranath Sarkar) on 26.03.2021.