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## Jogendra Nath Mandal

Human civilization, from its earliest days, has undergone numerous transitions, shaping society into a multi-layered and multifaceted entity. Initially grounded in labour-based systems, society gradually evolved into one stratified by caste, giving rise to deep-seated discrimination and hierarchies. In Bharat, the caste system entrenched itself deeply, leading to the systemic exploitation of labourers at the lowest strata of society. In the 20th century, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar emerged as a mighty force in the fight against this centuries-old oppression. In this struggle, another significant figure emerged in Bengal: Jogendra Nath Mandal, born into the Namashudra caste of the then Bengal province. Jogendra Nath Mandal played a crucial role in supporting Dr. Ambedkar's efforts, including facilitating his election to the Constituent Assembly when The Congress opposed Dr. Ambedkar's entry into the Constituent Assembly. Yet, a heart touching question arises: why has the name of Jogendra Nath Mandal, a pivotal ally in the movement against caste oppression, faded into obscurity?



Jogendra Nath Mandal was born on January 29, 1904, into a Namasudra family, the largest marginalized caste group in Bengal, previously known as Chandals. His birthplace was Maisterkandi village in Barisal district, then part of the Bengal Presidency under British Bharat (now in Bangladesh). He was the youngest of six children of Ramdayal Mandal and Sandhyadebi. Despite limited resources, Mandal pursued his education with determination, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1932 from BM College, Barisal, and completing his law

degree from Calcutta Law College in 1934. Although not much is known about his early life, his journey shows his commitment to education and his determination to fight for the rights of the oppressed, making him one of Bengal's most important leaders of his time.

Mandal's political career began in 1937 when he contested the Bengal Legislative Assembly elections (as per Government of Bharat act of 1935) as an independent candidate. Despite facing a strong opponent Saral Kumar Dutta, the president of the district committee of the Congress and nephew of the Swadeshi leader and educationist Ashwini Kumar Dutta backed by the Congress he gained victory, marking the rise of a leader determined to champion the rights of the so-called lower caste. Early in his career, Mandal was influenced by prominent nationalist leaders like Subhas Chandra Bose and his brother Sarat Chandra Bose, whose support initially inclined him toward the Congress. However, the expulsion of Subhas Chandra Bose from the Congress party in 1940 disillusioned him, and he began to explore other political avenues, at that time there was only one counter party to congress called as Muslim league. From 1930 onwards he was a strong ally of the Muslim League and remained so till he resigned from the Pakistan cabinet under Liaquat Ali Khan.

Being charismatic leader of Marginalised, Mandal firmly believed that Marginalised and Muslims shared common interests as oppressed communities and could work together to challenge upper-caste dominance. He supported the idea of Pakistan, hoping it would provide marginalised communities with opportunities to secure their civil rights and improve their socio-economic status, but here while trying to cure small ill he invoked bigger syndrome.

Jogendra Nath Mandal, in his analysis, superficially portrayed Islam as a casteless and egalitarian religion. However, he overlooked Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's critical perspective on the matter. Dr. Ambedkar, in his work *Pakistan or Partition of India* pointed out the inherent nature of Islam that often go unnoticed. He stated, "*Hinduism is said to divide people and in contrast, Islam is said to bind people together. This is only a half-truth. For Islam divides as inexorably as it binds. Islam is a close corporation and the distinction that it makes between Muslims and non-Muslims is a very real, very positive and very alienating distinction. The brotherhood of Islam is not the universal brotherhood of man. It is a brotherhood of Muslims for Muslims only. There is a fraternity, but its benefit is confined to those within that corporation. For those who are outside the corporation, there is nothing but contempt and enmity.*"<sup>1</sup>

Here Dr. Ambedkar's words reveal the complex reality of Islam, offering a more nuanced understanding of its social dynamics. While it indeed creates a sense of brotherhood among Muslims, this fraternity is exclusive, and its benefits do not extend to those outside the community.

In the context of Jogendra Nath Mandal, Shakespeare's words, "*The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings,*" resonate profoundly, reflecting the consequences of his decisions. Which are:

1. Despite Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's strong opposition to the idea of aligning with Pakistan, Mandal chose to ignore his advice.
2. He disregarded Dr. Ambedkar's explicit warning that if partition would happen then there should exchange of population.
3. Mandal was a first-hand witness to the atrocities committed against Dalit communities by Muslim groups, yet this reality did not deter his course of action.

4. He failed to recognize that Jinnah and the Muslim League were leveraging him as a tool to counter the influence of the Congress party.
5. Even though numerous instances before Partition demonstrated that peaceful coexistence between Marginalised communities and Muslims was fraught with tension, he still opted to align with Pakistan.
6. He also failed to analyse the historical fact that is. Bharat had been under the Muslim rule for over 600 years. If they had been fair and just towards Indian society, there would have been no inequality and inhuman social practices.

When Pakistan was created in 1947, Mandal was appointed its first law and labour minister, a historic moment for Jogendra Nath Mandal as a Dalit leader. However, the enthusiasm and aspirations with which he accepted this role soon led to disillusionment. The promises of equality and inclusivity, enshrined in Jinnah's speeches and the Lahore Resolution of 1940, were quickly abandoned. Instead, Pakistan moved toward an exclusionary Islamic identity, marginalizing minorities, particularly Hindus. A promise made is a debt unpaid, and Mandal soon realized that the debt of equality promised to minorities in Pakistan was left unfulfilled. And finally, he took decision to resign from his post of cabinet minister.

Mandal's resignation letter, dated October 8, 1950, is very important in today's time which particularly explains Pakistan's failure to protect its minorities. In his letter, he described the widespread violence against Hindus, including killings, forced conversions, rapes on Dalit Hindu girls and economic loot conducted by majority of Pakistan. He regretted that Hindus in Pakistan had been rendered "stateless in their own houses," bringing under notice the systemic oppression faced by his community. The resignation letter, which contains 35 paras, has become a historical document. It gives us an idea of how Pakistan had become a hell for the Hindus including Sikhs and other minorities. In the resignation letter he refers to a list of 363 Hindu temples & Gurudwaras of Karachi and Sindh, which were captured by the Muslims and converted into cobbler's shops, slaughter houses and hotels.<sup>2</sup> Mandal's shallow understanding of Islam and its complex social structures led him to underestimate the depth of religious and political militancy in Pakistan. His resignation was a powerful protest against the state's failure and a recognition that Pakistan was no place for Hindus. Pakistan's agenda stands in contrast to Bharat's post-Partition path, where a commitment to secularism, democracy, and justice empowered marginalized communities, thanks to Dr. Ambedkar's vision.

On October 8, 1950, J.N. Mandal left Pakistan for West Bengal, marking an emotional chapter of protest against the relentless persecution of Hindu minorities in East Pakistan. His departure was emblematic of a profound personal and political struggle, as he found himself caught between his dual identities—supporter of partition and migrant. In his new reality as a refugee, he faced alienation, stripped of the stature he once commanded. Politically ostracized by the East Bengal Caste Federation. Mandal became a symbol of divided loyalties. As a Dalit leader, his credibility was questioned, reflecting the harsh realities of social and political marginalization. After returning to Bharat, Jogendra Nath Mandal continued to fight for Dalit rights. He advocated for the proper implementation of reservation policy for Scheduled Castes and worked to support partition refugees. Through his writings, he raised awareness about Dalit struggles and discrimination. Mandal remained a dedicated leader for justice and equality throughout his life.

History bears witness to repeated attempts to mislead the Dalit – community with false promises of so-called unity. The harsh reality is that such promises often conceal selfish motives and deception. It is, therefore, imperative for the Dalit community to remain vigilant and cautious against such manipulations. The life and tragic end of Jogendra Nath Mandal teach us that misplaced trust and entanglement in political machinations can lead to both personal and collective disasters.

George Santayana's timeless words, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it," remind us that the lessons of history are not just for understanding the past but for shaping a better future. To truly honour the legacy of Jogendra Nath Mandal is to learn from his experiences, avoid repeating the mistakes of the past, and wholeheartedly carry forward his fight for justice and equality.

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Footnotes.

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