

A Critique of Dalit-Muslim Politics of Jogendra Nath Mandal (1904-1968)

Dr. Kamna Lohani

Asstt. Professr, Deptt. of History, Govt. Degree College, Dehradun (Uttarakhand)

Dr. Dinesh Narayan Verma

Director, Study and Research Centre , Uttarpalli, Rampurhat, Birbhum,W.B.

ABSTRACT

Jogendra Nath Mandal (1904-1968) was a noted and popular Dalit leader and one of founding fathers of Pakistan. Dr.B.R.Ambedkar was the first Law Minister of India, the first law minister of Pakistan was Jogendra Nath Mandal(1947-1950). They belonged to Dalit community. Mandal also served as minister of Commonwealth and Kashmir affairs. In the cabinet of Interim Government of India, Mandal had served as law minister. (Ahmad2004:77; Bandyopadhyay2013:231) He had very clear idea of partition of India and its ultimate recrudescence, so he opposed division of Bengal in 1947. He believed that the divided Bengal would mean that Dalit would be at the mercy of the Muslim majority in East Bengal (East Pakistan, now Bangladesh) and at the thralldom of majority caste-Hindu in West Bengal (India). However, Mandal decided to maintain his base in East Pakistan and hoped that the Dalit would be benefitted from it. So Mandal chaired the inaugural session of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan and joined the first cabinet in Pakistan as the Minister of Law and Labour. (Sen2018: 172; Sengupta2012:159)) However, a series of incidents in Pakistan, especially the targeted persecution of minorities made him realise that the idea of Pakistan was bound to fail eventually. He decided to quit from the newly formed Pakistan government. His resignation letter submitted to PM of Pakistan Liaquat Ali Khan, displayed that not only how Hindus and others minorities in Pakistan were systematically persecuted but also on the active support of the founding fathers of Pakistan to commit such crimes against the Hindus in their quest to transform Pakistan into an 'Islamic republic.' His Dalit-Muslim politics failed miserably. He was branded as "traitor" in Pakistan and condemned by upper castes as "political untouchable" and dubbed as "Jogan Ali Mulla" in India.

Keywords: Dalit, Minister, Hindu, Muslim, Bengal, Politics.

Introduction:

Undoubtedly Mandal was a great Dalit leader but he became a political untouchable after returning to India in 1950. However, Mandal continued his work to rehabilitate Hindu refugees from East Pakistan who were then fast immigrating West Bengal. He had also helped Muslim League getting Sylhet in Assam by mobilizing his support in their favour. He was one of the 96 central and leading Founding Fathers of Pakistan. (Heyworthy-Dunne11952:79) and supported Muslim League for better future for Dalits. As a legislator Mandal served as Pakistan's first minister of Law and Labour, and also was second minister of Commonwealth and Kashmir affairs. Unfortunately he has to resign from the Cabinet of

Pakistan on 8th October, 1950 and died as a refugee in West Bengal on 5 October 1968 in Bongaon, North 24 Parganas. His resignation letter to the Prime Minister of Pakistan disclosed everything about the nature and scale of serious and heinous atrocities that were inflicted on minorities in Pakistan. Thus his idea and slogan of Dalit Muslim politics and co-existence failed miserably and proved to be a political blunder of his career.

Hypothesis:

History of politics reveals that the political life of a leader is bound to be doomed for ever when he commits even a political blunder in his career. Fall

and defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte (1815) of France and Adolf Hitler (1945) of Germany are its glaring examples. History repeats itself so hypothetically this was repeated also with Jogendra Nath Mandal, the great Dalit leader of undivided India once he committed a political blunder. Though he realized it but could not reemerge and died unnoticed and unsung.

Purpose :

The purpose of the study is to trace and analyse the rise and fall of political career of Jogendra Nath Mandal. Interpretation and assessment of his Dalit-Muslim politics and co-existence are also within the scope of the purpose. It is traced how the politics failed miserably and affected Dalits and Hindus severely in Pakistan.

Literature reviewed:

There is abundance of literature on the Dalit leader in form of research papers published in Journals and articles in Newspapers. Halder (2007/2008), Apurba (2012), Burman (2012), Sengupta (2012), Sen (2012/ 2018), Balouch (2015), Dam (2016), Anwasha Sengupta (2017) focused on the locations of religious minorities in East Pakistan and viewed caste as an important factor. Mahitos Mandal (2022) and other scholars wrote on the leader but we do not find proper tracing and analysis of the leader's dream of Dalit-Muslim politics in most of scholars' writings. Undoubtedly Sen (2012/ 2018) wrote extensively on the leader but his work is in nature of biography. "Barishaler Jogen Mandal" is a famous Bengali Novel by Debes Ray (Kolkata 2010) and better known for its literary qualities.

Methodology:

The paper is mainly based on secondary sources i.e. published sources in shape of books and research papers published in journals available in different archives and libraries. Google search and different News Papers and Journals etc. are other significant sources. The detailed resignation letter of the Dalit leader is itself an important source wherein the leader himself exposed the failure of making of and continued atrocities on Dalits and Hindus in Pakistan. So for proper presentation, the topic is discussed in four phases i.e. 1904-1937, 1937-1947, 1947-1950 and 1950-1968.

First Phase 1904-1937:

He was born on 29 January 1904 in a predominantly Namasudra (an 'untouchable' caste,

formerly called 'chandala') village called Maisterkandi of northern Barisal District of Bengal Presidency of British India. He was youngest of six sons and daughters of Mother Sandhya and Father Ramdayal Mandal. After partition, the district came under East Pakistan presently in Bangladesh. Since his early years, he was a diligent student and passed Inter in 1924 in First Class from Brijmohan College, Barisal. He got graduation degree in 1929 and started study of post graduation at first in Dacca then completed it from Calcutta University. Though he completed his law degree in 1934, but he decided to commence his vociferous and unabated struggle against the unjust and oppressive social structure which had hitherto humiliated and exploited his community. Mandal, a man of acute intellect and pragmatic perspectives, swore to dedicate his whole life for betterment of the Dalits and society as a whole. It marked first turning point in his career and soon he came to be known as a Dalit leader like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. (Apurva 2021). He started his political life from Barisal Municipality and devoted much of his time and attention to improve and ameliorate the condition of lower classes. He struggled for their rightful representation across politics, education, employment, judiciary, economy and umpteen domains.

Second Phase 1937-1947 :

The year 1937 proved to be another turning point in the political career of Mandal as he first contested as an independent candidate in the Indian Provincial Assembly Election of 1937. He contested Bakharganj North East Bengal Constituency and defeated Saral Kumar Dutta, the president of District Committee of the Indian National Congress and nephew of the Swadeshi Leader Ashwini Kumar Dutta. (Sen 2018:28). Before this he was nominated as a member of District Council in 1937. In 1938 Mandal founded the Independent Scheduled Caste Party with twenty MLAs. During 1939-1940 he associated with the top leadership of the Congress and soon realized that there was nothing for his Dalit society in the agenda of Congress. The realization paved the way for his gradual association with Muslim League. About this time Mandal was considerably influenced by Subhas Chandra Bose and Sarat Chandra Bose. In 1940 when Subhas Chandra Bose was ousted from the Congress, (Ghosh 2011:182-183/Wikipedia) Mandal involved himself with the Muslim League, the

only other significant national party in India. In 1943, when Shyama Prasad Mukherjee and Fazizul Haq had asked for Mandal's support to save their government, he demanded representation of Scheduled castes in the ministry and administration, affirmative action for SC. students in education and employment. As his demands were not met, Mandal extended his support to Muslim League who accepted his demands. He became a Minister in the cabinet headed by Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy of Muslim League. Mandal was also profoundly influenced by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and they around this time established the Bengal Branch of Scheduled Castes Federation. (Gaikwad 2016:301) It was Mandal who played a big key role for Ambedkar's election to the Constituent Assembly from Jessore-Khulna constituency in Eastern Bengal by the greatest majority in 1946 when Ambedkar failed to secure a seat from Bombay. (Bandyopadhyay 2013:231). Mandal also played a pivotal role in the framing of Indian Constitution as he was repeatedly consulted by Ambedkar through letters on umpteen imperative aspects pertaining to the framing of the Constitution. (The Indian Express, 1 March 2020). Mandal understood the attempts of the Hindu Mahasabha attracting the Namiasudra community when the politics was dominated by the oppressed Dalit and Muslim. He also understood the distinction between communal affairs and political disputes between Congress and League. In 1946 he travelled violence affected areas of East Bengal and urged Dalits not to participate in violence against Muslims. He was of the opinion that not only Dalits but Muslims also oppressed by upper caste Hindus. Under the perception, Mandal supported Muslim League after he argued that the Dalits would be better off with the Muslims than with high caste Hindus. This perception of Mandal impressed Jinnah who nominated Mandal as one of five representatives of the League when it joined the Interim Government of India in October 1946. King George VI duly appointed Mandal to the body and he became the Law Minister. (Ahmad 2004: 77) Later, he presided over the historic session of the Constituent Assembly on 11th August 1947, where Mohammed Ali Jinnah was sworn in as the first Governor-General of Pakistan. (Mandal 2004:23). Jinnah trusted Mandal for his vision and righteousness. Jinnah's decision reflected his desire to bring religious

minorities into the mainstream as he wanted Mandal, a Hindu member of the Assembly, to preside over the session. But Jinnah's death on 11 September 1948 gradually changed the situation for Mandal as it ultimately compelled him to resign and left Pakistan for India. On Jinnah's death, Mandal said, "Fate has ruthlessly taken Quaid-i-Azam from us at a time when he was most needed." Thus chosen by Jinnah, Mandal was eventually ousted and banished by bureaucracy dominated by Muslim majority and communal thoughts and ideas. All of Hindu leaders had to leave politics, some of them also this world in pitiable states.

Third Phase 1947-1950

But his perception of Dalit-Muslim politics soon dashed to the ground as repeated atrocities on Hindus and Dalits in Pakistan compelled him realize his political blunder. When Mandal had decided to leave India for Pakistan under his dream of Dalit-Muslim unity and coexistence, his associate the greatest Dalit leader of India Dr. B.R. Ambedkar had given him warning and made aware of communal politics of Muslim League and its leaders. (see Ambedkar: Pakistan or the Partition of India 2013) Though 'Mandal Day' celebrations (43rd birthday of Mandal) on 19 June, 1949 were celebrated with much pomp and show especially in Karachi and Dhaka, the alliance between the Pakistan government and Mandal did not last long. (Mandal 2004:94-95). In spite of his warnings, his repeated notices to the government regarding communal disturbances was intentionally overlooked rather he was condemned as "liar, traitor and coward." He was totally isolated by bureaucracy and government of Pakistan. Moreover, continued incidents of plundering the properties of Dalits and Hindus and kidnapping and raping of Hindu women inflicted excruciating pain on Mandal. He realized Pakistan is not worth to live in, the country he had considered his own home. He felt Pakistan would not do justice to Dalits and Hindus. Thus the dream of Dalit-Muslim politics of unity and co-existence of Mandal broke within two years. He was highly impressed by the ideological speech of Jinnah (11 August 1947) wherein Jinnah had declared to keep "riyasat" (dominion) away from "mahjab" sketching out future of Pakistan and had pointed out that Muslims and Hindus would be citizens of a country. The Muslim League elected Mandal

temporary chairman of its inaugural session after partition of India. When Mohammad Ali Jinnah was to be sworn as the first Governor General of Pakistan, Jinnah is said to have asked Mandal to preside over the session. (Tan and others 2000:45) Jinnah had immense faith in Mandal for his vision and righteousness and appointed him Pakistan's first Minister for Law and Labour (Amrita Bazar Patrika, 21 August 1947:4) But his position did not last long because of continuous suppression under Muslim-majority bureaucracy. He was disappointed when Muslim rioters with the support of the police committed atrocities against Dalits, "the worse victims of Partition." (Halder 2007:53; Halder 2008:19-20) He strongly protested it that caused strife between Mandal and the Pakistani Prime Minister. Under heavy frustration and disappointment he resigned from the cabinet and left Pakistan for India. In his resignation letter he cited inaction of Pakistani administration against the rioters who had committed atrocities against Dalits and minorities (Wikilivres).

Fourth Phase 1950-1968 :

Mandal ultimately had to leave Pakistan in 1950 for raising the issue of atrocities on minorities in Pakistan and took shelter in a refugee camp in Calcutta. But the great Dalit leader became a political untouchable after returning to India. Though upper castes ridiculed him as "Jogan Ali Mulla", however, Mandal continued his work to rehabilitate Hindu refugees from East Pakistan to Bengal. (now West Bengal). But he could not win the confidence of the Congress Party and Jawaharlal Nehru also commented against him. Four times he contested election but every time defeated even lost his security deposit. He attempted to publish a Newspaper but could not be successful because of its limited readers. Most of his friends and supporters left him and joined main political parties. He died of heart attack on 5 October 1968 in Bongaon, North 24 Parganas in West Bengal. (Bandyopadhyay and Ray Chaudhury 2014:10) Thus the great Dalit leader Jogendra Nath Mandal as a refugee left this world unnoticed and unsung.

Lessons of Rise and Fall of Jogendra Nath Mandal 1904-1968

His experiences and resignation letter (Sengupta 2012:181-195) displayed that Dalit-Muslim politics of Muslim League proved disastrous for Dalits as most of them were either forcibly

converted to Islam or migrated to India. This was the worst part of his hypothesis. It is clear apparently that Mandal's realization about his destiny is a great lesson. He believed that Muslims and Dalits in Eastern Pakistan are a lot similar and they could have a shared history. His support for Muslim League, his sacrifices for Pakistan, and his love for Muslims cannot be discredited. (Balouch 2015:DAWN) But history proved Mandal's hypothesis wrong as it brought miseries to lakhs of Dalits in Pakistan. When Pakistan did not respect their Law Minister, the condition of common Hindus in Pakistan is not beyond imagination. His realization about the destiny of Hindu-Muslim brotherhood is a great lesson for all Hindus. In his resignation letter Mandal expressed his disillusion with idea of Pakistan. He not only listed unfulfilled promises made to him prior to his decision to remain in Pakistan but also cited cases of atrocities against Dalits and the involvement of Pakistani establishment in them at several places where Dalits and Hindus were massacred and forcibly converted. A close analysis of his resignation letter gives the impression that he himself had realized that his decision to leave India for Pakistan for fulfillment of his dream of Dalit-Muslim politics and coexistence was wrong and admitted it as a political blunder of his life. Not only as a Minister in Pakistan but also as a refugee leader in West Bengal, Mandal failed miserably. The resignation letter revealed that Dalit-Muslim politics was not possible because of communalism and communal politics of Muslims and Muslim League. It was his duty to bring back safely all his lakhs of followers first, then he must have come back. So Mandal not only paid price for his misadventure but also changed the geography of India and East Pakistan in respect of Sylhet district. His close associate of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar did not agree with his theory for the Dalits of joining hands with so-called Muslim brothers. Dr. Ambedkar advised him not to form such equation and cautioned him not to go with East Pakistan and warned that consequences would be un-repairable. But Mandal paid less attention to the words of caution by Ambedkar and followed what he has in his mind. He supported the idea of Jinnah for a separate country based on the Muslim religion. But very soon his hopes and dreams were dashed and his big realization came when Mandal saw himself that his so called Muslim brothers are ill-treating the Dalits. Repeated reporting of

incidents of plundering, massacre and forced conversion of Hindus, kidnapping and raping of Hindu girls etc. wrenched his heart. Though after coming back to India and his active involvement in raising the status of Dalits in West Bengal, Mandal failed to gain the faith and support of Indians who looked down him as “political untouchable” and ridiculed him as “Jogan Ali Mulla.”

Conclusion:

Undoubtedly Mandal was a popular and noted Dalit leader of undivided India and rose to political eminence like another Dalit leader Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. But his hypothesis of Dalit-Muslim politics and coexistence proved wrong within two years as he failed miserably to understand communalism and communal politics of Muslims and Muslim League. His idea and slogan of “Dalit-Muslim Bhai-Bhai” could not materialize and proved baseless, bogus and loud-sounding nothing. Describing the communal situation in Bakarganj to the media, he apparently wept like a child. It failed his vision and mission of Dalit-Muslim politics. His detailed resignation letter dated 8 October 1950 is an authentic historical document for the study of crimes and atrocities against Dalits, Hindus and their women after partition in Pakistan, west and east. The greatest lesson of his life is that even only one political blunder even committed by a great leader is bound to destroy his whole political career for ever. This happened with the great Dalit leader. The ups and downs of his political life with the eye opener contents of his resignation letter are no less relevant in context of National Politics in Contemporary India.

References :

1. Ahmad, Salahuddin. 2004. Bangladesh: Past and Present, APH Publishing Co., New Delhi.
2. Ambedkar, B. R. 2013. Pakistan or the Partition of India. Mayank Prakashan, New Delhi
3. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 21 August 1947
4. Anandabazaar Patrika, April 12, 1950
5. Apurva, Ankita. 2021 Remembering Jogendra Nath Mandal ‘s Unwavering Fight for the Oppressed, Feminism in India.
6. Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar. 2013. Ed. Nationalist Movement in India A Reader, Oxford University Press, New Delhi
7. Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar and Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury. 2014. In Search of Space—The Scheduled Castes Movement in West Bengal after Partition, Policies and Practices, No. 59, Kolkata Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group, Kolkata
8. Balouch, Akhtar. 2015. Jogendra Nath Mandal: Chosen by Jinnah, banished Bureaucracy, in DAWN, Nov. 4, 2015
9. Burman, Rup Kumar. 2012. Partition of India and Its Impact on the Scheduled Castes of Bengal, Abhijeet Publications, New Delhi
10. Gaikwad, Dnyanraj Kashinath. 2016. Mahamanav Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (in Marathi), Riya Publication, Kolhapur, Maharashtra
11. Ghosh, S. C. 2011. Freedom Movement in India 1857-1947, Originals, Delhi
12. Google search: Essays on Jogendra Nath Mandal by Dilip Mandal, 2020; OpIndia Staff: 2020; Adv. Tapan Choudhury; Akhtar Balouch 2015 in Dawn, Dwaipayan Sen 2010; Anwasha Sengupta 2017
13. Halder, Dilip Kumar. 2007, “Dalits are the worse victims of Partition-A Human Rights Question in Biswajeet Chatterjee and Debi Chatterjee, Dalit Lives and Dalit Victims in Eastern India, Centre for Rural Resources, Kolkata
14. Halder, Dilip Kumar. 2008, Atrocities on Dalit Since the Partition of Bengal-A Human Right Question, Mittal Publications, New Delhi
15. Heyworthy-Dunne, James. 1952. Pakistan the birth of a new Muslim state, Renaissance Bookshop, Cairo
16. Mandal, Jagdish Chandra. 2004, ed. Mahapran Jogendra Nath, Vol. 4, Chaturtho Dunia, Kolkata
17. Mandal, Jogendra Nath. Wikipedia
18. Mandal, Monika. 2011. Settling the Unsettled—A Study of Partition Refugees in West Bengal, Manohar Publications, New Delhi
19. Rishi Bagree. 2019. Historic blunder of dalit leader Jogendra Nath Mandal of Bengal in 1947, Facebook: 19 December 2019
20. Sen, Dwaipayan. 2018. The Decline of the Caste Question, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

