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Revisiting Jogendra Nath Mandal: Post Partition Socio-Political Activism And Historical Evaluation.

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The 3rd and 4th decade of 20th century marked some remarkable significance in cast and class politics in Indian History. Cast politics emerged as prominent when the Assembly election in 1937 was held as per the Government of India Act which was based on Communal Award or Puna Pact the SC leaders were trying to establish their potentiality in constitutional politics and provincial autonomy. In addition to these efforts were being made to establish a separate identity for the Dalit people. There had been search for the separate existence for the Dalit people by creating a new and distinct self-identity for themselves to compete with the caste Hindu Bhadralok who were claimed to have been the hierarchy in the society and oppressor to the low caste Dalit people. In this regard some leaders came forward to hold the leadership of this kind separate existent movement. So, this kind of movement played a tremendous role when the country was going to divide based on two Nation theory in 1947. In this regard first name came to be highlighted in the field is depressed class leader J.N. Mandal who had been forgotten in the History after his death in 1968. Mandal a follower or supporter of Ambedkar supported the demand for separate Pakistan as Ambedkar also did. In return Jinnah also prized him selecting the representative of Muslim league in the interim Government. J.N. Mandal decided to remain in Pakistan after Partition of the country and joined the Liaquat Ali Khan Ministry as Laboure and Law minister. J.N Mandal believed Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Muslim league Government to treat the Scheduled Caste Hindu people with equality and fraternity comparing with Muslims. My paper is to explore how his faith was broken immediately and returned to India and tried to establish his second political career in West Bengal keeping himself involved in refugee rehabilitation movement and constitutional provincial politics in West Bengal. However, this time he wanted to rejuvenate his political struggle as he had to face a lot of criticism when he supported the demanded for Pakistan and opposed to the partition of Bengal and supported for United Bengal with Sharat Bose, Kiran Sankar Ray and Suhrawardy. After partition he lost his political credibility even among his own community Namasudra people and other high caste political leaders of Congress and Mahasabha. Naturally his main endeavor in West Bengal after his return from Pakistan was to search for new political identity as a politician, leader of depressed class and national icon of depressed class struggle for equal right and doing away with his alienation from his own community.

After the two years of his joining as Cabinet Minister in Pakistan the amity between East Bengal Federation and Muslim League broke down to ashes. The illusion of amicable treatment towards scheduled caste people and vesting equal right as promised by the Muslim League and Jinnah wiped away very soon. A series of communal riots in different parts of East Bengal and Pakistan in January 1948broke

the spine of amity between the two-community(1) Rather the scheduled cast basically Namasudra people were being oppressed in different ways which created aggrieved situation in East Bengal to migrate to West Bengal in a huge scale. No improvement in relation was taken place even after the Nehru Pack in April 1950 and no substantive effect was made on the huge ongoing migration of S C people. In spite of being a cabinet minister J.N.Mandal could not protect this section of people from Pakistani oppressions. After Jinnah's death Mandal ruefully lamented that the SC people did not get a fair deal in any matter in Pakistan. According to him the East Bengal Government started the Anti- Hindu policy of which the Namasudra and other minorities were equal victims. He was even critical of the officer in charge of recovery of abducted girls in Pakistan for not treating scheduled caste women as Hindu.(2). The other process initiated by Islamization policies of the Pakistani State thus seemed to have collapsed the internal social boundaries within its protected other(3). The League leadership not only failed to fulfill Mandal's and the Federation's demand for the Dalit rights adequately, but seemingly enabled forces given to the destruction of their lives, exploding expectation born of theories of Dalit- Muslim political economic solidarity (4).

All these things continued in Pakistan made J.N.Mandal compelled to decide to write his resignation to Liaquat Ali Khan. This was made public that brought his career in Pakistan to a close (5). He began to write his long resignation letter of 800 words saying that it was with a heavy heart and a sense of utter frustration at the failure of my lifelong mission to uplift the backward Hindu masses of East Bengal that I feel compelled to tender resignation of my membership of your cabinet (6). Consequently, he took decision to leave Pakistan immediately.

On 8th October 1950 J.N. Mandal migrated to West Bengal after resigning from his ministerial post in the Liaquat Ali Khan Cabinet as a mark of protest of the continuing oppression on Hindu minorities in East Pakistan(7). While leaving Pakistan Mandal was torn between his two identities. One was Dalit and another was migrant which was going to define his social and political marginality (8). As a refugee he felt alienated, as a political leader he was condemned by the East Bengal Caste Federation and was expelled, as a Dalit leader he was unacceptable, and his credibility was openly questioned by C.M. Bidhan Chandra Ray considering his past in West Bengal. So, in all the fields he was alienated and isolated. Mandal tried to fight for his political survival and found a new support base among the Namasudra refugee to reinvent his political leadership as they also felt marginalized and torn between identities (9). So, he kept his significant role after he migrated to West Bengal in three different fields of movement and leadership like constitutional politics, refugee rehabilitation movement and the di implementation of reservation policy of the government.

The first election of Independent India was held in January 19148 and in this election caste factor had an important role to play as all political parties were watching for all reserved seats. In this assembly election in West Bengal from Beniapukur- Balligunj assembly as an independent candidate he contested on which every constitutional party had a curious eye. J.N.Mandal did not project him as a Namasudra leader and did not use his Namasudra identity rather he projected himself as the representative of the Dalit and refugee identity because he wanted to secure the votes of all Dalits of different cast and communities. On the other hand, the vote of all refugees of different caste belonged to high caste Hindu as well as depressed class. In spite of having support from different groups and associations like Dalit Group, Refugee Lawyers Association, caste Hindu led Refugee Women's group, Mandal lost the election to an unknown Congress candidate.

After the first election defeat in 1952, Mandal momentarily made an alliance with the Congress in May 1955(10). From both end efforts were being made to organize meetings and processions. Mandal had praised for the Congress describing the party's success in handling the refugee and rehabilitation problem and

somewhere shared the dais with Chief M Minister Bidhan Chandra Ray though before partition he was against the Congress led by high caste Hindu. So, there had been a possibility to support J N Mandal in the next election in 1957 but it failed to come into existence and the relation collapsed (11). Once again, he contested election as independent candidate and lost once more. This time also his electoral appeal was explicitly directed at the Dalits unlike five years previously (12)

Once again, having been disillusioned with the Congress on the issue of supporting him in the election he concentrated on the thinking of mobilization of Dalits and refugees within the political atmosphere of West Bengal. To materialize his thinking he established a socio economic organization called the 'Krishak Praja Parishad' along with different SC leaders like Mukunda Behari Mallik and Manohar Dhali in 1961. The ultimate objective of this organization was the unity of all classes like agriculturist irrespective of caste. It emphasized on question of reservation, education, and rehabilitation, mainly on Krishak and their economy. In 1962 state election he again contested as the candidate from Krishak Praja Parishad in two different assembly constituency, from Hanskhali against PR Thakur and from Bagdha against Manindra Bhushan Biswas. This time also he had to face defeat to Congress backed scheduled caste candidate.

In spite of repeated defeat in consecutive election his effort was going on to get rid of his political marginality. His next attempt at political office came in late 1964 when P.R. Thakur an influential Congress Dalit MLA vacated his seat in assembly seat being frustrated with the Congress on refugee rehabilitation issue and he disassociated himself from his party to protest the oppression on Namasudra refugee. Henceforth Mandal contested the election from Hanskhali assembly seat from which P.R. Thakur resigned. This time Mandal was supported by PR Thakur, existing MLA Mukunda Behari Mallik but Manual's dreams of being winner did not come true this time also. He had to face another defeat at the hands of the Congress supported Ramendra Kishore Mallik.

In the Lok Sabha election in 1967 he reached an understanding with the Communist Party of India (Marxist) that each would support the other in their respective constituencies. Mandal extended support to the CPIM candidate under the aegis of United Front of West Bengal. He urged his followers to vote in favour of communist, on the other end he sought communist support so that high cast Hindu voters cast their vote in favour of Mandal. In this election Mandal contested as the Republic Party of India candidate. For securing the Communist vote he met with Jyoti Basu and Biswanath Mukherjee the leader of CPIM and CPI and they had also agreed on the understanding. Unfortunately, another defeat was waiting for him.

Mandal's repeated defeat in all the elections indicated that he had not been accepted by the masses due to his past activities before and after independence. The successive defeat in election of West Bengal made him a bitter man. In spite of support from caste Hindu he did not succeed as he gradually understood that the caste Hindu would never vote for him even if they promised to do so at the time of the election. To his realization the Communist party did not urge its caste Hindu voters to vote him though he himself did this. He considered it as a betrayal to him. Actually what troubled him most was one that he was claimed to be responsible for the partition of Bengal in 1947. In this case the scheduled caste people were divided into two group who did not accept Mandal till then, the reflection of which was made on election. The second one was that he was considered be reactionary for his opposition to the high caste Hindus as he opposed to some unethical behavior of the caste Hindus like untouchability, non-entry to temple, separate meal in hostel etc. So, caste Hindu always turned aside Mandal. Finally, he was considered to be communal because of his proximity to Jinnah and Muslim league and his decision to support the demand for Pakistan and choose to remain in Pakistan. So, since his return till his death in 1968 he was marginalized though he kept significant role in refugee rehabilitation movement and reservation policy of Government.

After the independence the first challenge faced by State and Central Government was innumerable refugee Influx in Bengal and Punjab. In west Bengal this marked a crucial problem for settling the refugees in different camp in and out of West Bengal which had given to the rise of another tumultuous refugee movement that jeopardized the Government of West Bengal in the 50s. A series of communal riots in post partition in East Bengal compelled the Hindus basically low caste in origin to migrate to West Bengal after suffering a lot in their journey from East to west.

Refugee influx begins in 1947-48. During that period about 60% high caste Hindus took refuse in West Bengal and was settled in Calcutta or any other else of the state which was legalized by the state. The problem started when the second wave of refugee influx began in 1950. Second wave influx of refugees was identified as Dalit refugee following anticommunist counter and insurgency in the village kalshira in Khulna District in December 1949. The Namasudra and Shantal peasants had suffered unbearable loss of life and property and they decided immediately to migrate in India. In the first week of January 1950 the first batch of Namasudra families arrived at Bongaon Station and since then thousands of refugees began to arrive every day (13), By the beginning of 1951 about 1.5 million refugees had arrived in West Bengal. In 1956 after Pakistan adopted an Islamic Constitution about more than 320000 refugees crossed the border among whom 70% were Namasudra and Dalit peasants (14).

The Indian state was not willing to give them full citizenship though assurance was given before partition. Actually the focus of the state policy was therefore on an attempt to give temporary relief to displaced people rather than providing them with any form of permanent rehabilitation (15). Immediately a reverse migration Pact called The Delhi Pact was signed on 8th April 1950 between JL Nehru and his Pakistani counterpart Liaquat Ali Khan, consequently another struggle to secure rehabilitation and to acquire citizenship had been originated against the government of West Bengal. In this respect new leadership immerged among Namasudra community like J.N Mandal.

After return in West Bengal from Pakistan J.N.Mandal, an exhausted and defeated man did not concentrate much on Dalit political autonomy and establishment of separate identity rather he eventually focused his attention on the refugee rehabilitation issue and he accommodated himself in the refugee rehabilitation movement in West Bengal. He was invited by the Hindu Mahasabha to speak on the atrocities on Hindus perpetrated on Hindus by Pakistani arsons, but he declined to do so in fear of fresh inflaming communal tension.

The two refugee organization that emerged at the early 1950's were the United Central Refugee Council (UCRC) and Sara Bangla Bastuhara Sammelan(SBBS) while the UCRC was affiliated to CPI and dominated by the CPI party leaders, the SBBS was affiliated to Praja Socialist Party and was dominated by the leaders of PSP. About 70% refugees were Namasudras and they were organized by the leaders of United Central Refugee Council backed by CPI. The leaders claimed to have been high caste Hindu Bhadralok under whose leadership the Namasudra Dalit Refugee were mobilized. To the Namasudra community it was their own battle and as the high caste Hindu refugees from quarter colonies in Calcutta refused to join them (16). Despite the battle for rehabilitation initially was started under the leftist leadership eventually it led to the emergence of a Dalit refugee leadership. Naturally J.N. Mandal appeared at this stage and became a prominent face of Namasudra refugee movement. He was ostracized and subdued for a long time when he declared that he would join the refugee movement upon coming to Calcutta but it was not possible to keep J.N.Mandal outcast from their movement for long time (17).

The policy of rehabilitation of Bengali refugees outside West Bengal was announced in early 1956. The grounds depending on which government proposed the plan were the paucity of land to settle refugees permanently, paucity of financial resources to maintain the already existing camps and their inmates' food crisis. So, the government proposed an alternative settlement to Dandakaranya, an 80,000 square mile area covering Bastar District of Madhya Pradesh, the Koraput and Kalahandi District of Orissa and the agency tracks of Andhra Pradesh. The plan was proposed by planning Commission adviser S.B Ramamurthy and the plan was considered to be the feasible solution to West Bengal refugee crisis (18). The plan was also to close camps and cash doles. The CPI leaders of UCRC organized mass protest against this policy and the threat of stoppage of cash dolls and closure of camps.

At this stage Mandal engaged himself in mobilizing the refugees in different camps. From late 1957 he was actively involved in SBBS's various meetings and plan. In the early month of 1958 Mandal started to mobilise the refugees in different District camps of 24thPorgonas.Nodia, Murshidabad, Howrah, Burdwan, Birhum and tried to prepare them for civil disobedience campaign to be launched on 17th march 1958 to protest against the government policy of rehabilitating them in Dandakaranya (19) At this stage he was not leading exclusively Namasudra protest but also turned it into a political and caste less movement giving emphasize on the refugee identity.

As per the decision taken in a meeting the SBBS members and representatives of refugee camp decided to give a memorandum to Chief Minister Bidhan Chandra Ray describing their numerous demands. When they failed to gain any result they took a decision to undertake Satyagraha outside Writers Building. It was made a routine work, and the refugee would gather and give slogan at Wellington Square and attempted to break police barricades. Many of them were arrested, including J,N.Mandal on the day he participated and spent months in jail.

During the time of spending days in jail he felt the need for an organization because during Satyagraha and imprisonment the SBBS leader's attitude made him to feel the lack of faith on this organization. The camp leaders repeatedly pressed him to establish an independent refugee organization which Mandal himself began to think since his entry to the movement. Mandal thus established the East India Refugee Council which was also considered to be the sole organization of the camp refugees. The SBBS and UCRC had to wind up any trace from all the camps (20). The main objectives of the EIRC included a national resolution to the crisis free from the constraint of party politics, helping refugees with the work of rehabilitation as first as possible, repressing the administrative mismanagement, and following up refugee camps news and acquire of special facilities and opportunities for refugee businessman and agriculturist.

During the Satyagraha launched in March 1958 Mandal refused to embrace UCRC. As the Satyagraha campaign had been weekend due to not having been a powerful one the Satyagraha campaign had been withdrawn on 20th April without any gain from the government end. After realization of the ground reality Mandal reconsidered his decision and aligned with UCRC to launch a joint movement with the UCRC but the CPI leaders already then decided to abandon the movement because CPI did not want to jeopardize its election interest. Naturally the joint movement was halfheartedly launched in January 1959 and withdrawn at a mass rally at Wellington Square on 18th February 1959(21). Praffula Chakraborty described the rally as "the requiem for the UCRC" (22).

Being disappointed at the decision of CPI of UCRC Mandal made himself the undisputed leader of refugee movement. He kept contact with different camp basically Cooper's Camp on regular basis in Nodia where 80.5 percent of refugees were Namasudra, spent knights in the camp and gave inspirational speeches. A police intelligence report concluded that UCRC became weak to a great extent (23). The EIRC (East India Refugee Council) under the leadership of Mandal launched another Satyagraha in late 1959 and early 1960. On 22nd December 1959 at the meeting at Calcutta Moidan the Namasudra refugees marched upholding his picture (24). Mandal was arrested and he appealed to victimized refugees from jail to remain non-violent when a huge protest movement was going on. Following the protest movement, he was released and held a meeting on 15th February 19160 at Bagjola Camp to support hunger strike already going on there. In his perception it was realized that if a percent of money which was being spent to Dandakaranya in the name of refugees would have been spent to reclaim the fellow land in West Bengal it would have benefited landless peasant. Unemployed youth as well as refugees (25). Mandal submitted his own plan about land development policy which could have benefited the above mentioned depressed elements of West Bengal but like other it was also ignored.

In the meantime, the government started sending the refugee forcefully to Dandakaranya which tempered in the camp kept rising (26). On 26th June 1961 an incident of Police firing occurred at Bagjola camp. At this EIRC organised relay hunger strike continuously to protest the incident under the leadership of Mandel at Subodh Mallic Square in Calcutta with camp refugees and they demanded the punishment of Police officer in a meeting presided over by Mandel on 1st July 1961. Their demand also included compensation of affected families reinstated the cash dole and assurance from Govt. so that no family be forced to move to Dandakaranya (27) On this issue on 14th August nearly 3000 refugees under the leadership of JN Mandal marched to Writers' Building and to offer active opposition to the Dandakaranya scheme (28) A decision was taken in a meeting to launch a movement subsequently every day from Subodh Mallic Square. Small groups of refugee volunteers led by Mandal marched to the Writers' Building (29). On 15th September the March was led by J.N. Mandal along with Hori Podo Bharati and Satyen Bose of John Sangha, Dhiren Bhowmic and Sibnath Banerjee of the Praja Socialist Party. Chief Minister refused to meet them and only agreed to take their Memorandum describing their demands. A Satyagraha campaign once again was started on 26th September 1961 in Calcutta and Districts head quarter jointly by EIRC and SBBS under the leadership of Mandal. (30) Mandal was once offered the lucrative opportunity including authority over Dandakaranya Project in exchange for calling off his refugee movement.

Despite all kinds of protest movement, the Govt did not listen to the appeal of helpless Namasudra refugees who were compelled to move to Dandakaranya where by 1965 75000 refugee family were settled (31). Nor did Mandal's leadership of the refugee movement held him launch a new political career in West Bengal.He died on 5th October,1968 while conducting an election campaign. Meanwhile thousands of poor refugees continued to be sent off to Dandakaranya for settlement.

Mandal was very much concerned about the implementation of constitutional reservation policy upon which he wanted to monitor. In this activism he had played a critical and modestly assessed role. He was very much busy in his two fold activities, one in constitutional politics and another in refugee movement from 1950 to till his death. Despite his busy schedule in everyday life he did not forget to give attention on reservation policy of the Government. Actually his past political bitter experience led him to remain concerned on the Government policy taking matter. He noticed some policy taken by Government of West Bengal did not resemblance with that of the government of outside West Bengal. In a study of the Scheduled Caste in Indian politics, for instance Anupurna Sannyal concluded on West Bengal "it has been alleged that quotas in educational institution in the state are often not maintained rules and regulations pertaining

to services and posts are often flouted while funds earmarked for the different schemes for the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes are often misused or left unutilized" (32). So he wanted to keep a positive role in the field of reservation policy of Government of West Bengal and also monitored over Government activities towards scheduled caste students, service holders, special education etc. a brief statistical report of the Congress government's efforts in the 1960s to observe constitutional enjoinders offers a useful framing of Mandal's own initiatives in this regard (33).

Some adverse reports of the reservation policy taken by West Bengal Government towards the Scheduled caste and Scheduled tribe people indicated the matter of concern about the policies implemented and to be implemented. Report noted that despite every State Government and Union Territory Administration exempted the SC and ST students from paying tuition fees at various stage. The SC students of West Bengal did not receive the same exemption. The state explanation in this regard was that the state started this scheme only among the most backward caste and among the only deserving SC students falling in line with the policy followed in this regard in all other States of India (34). All states except West Bengal reserved seats for SC and ST representatives according to the population proportion in Municipalities and other local bodies. In West Bengal no provision has been made for reservation or representation of SC in the local bodies (35).

Enrollment of SC students as a percentage of total students in all educational institution in West Bengal surprisingly declined between 1960 to 61 and 1964 to 65 from 15 .7% to 13 .4 percent (36). Another report noted that despite the increase of SC population of the state to 19.84 percent the Government had reserved 15% of position for them only in certain specified services and post. West Bengal Govt refused to extend reservation order in some local bodies like Panchayat Samitis and Jilaparisad while other state Government did so successfully. Moreover, none of the three members of the state's public service commission was a Dalit (37).

A comparative study of the efforts of the State Government for improving the scheduled Caste people condition indicated that the Government of West Bengal ranked low comparing to other 15 States. The study done by R.A.Schermohorn and published in EPW noted that West Bengal ranked the very lowest in terms of number and rank of Ministers assigned to such duties proportional to scheduled Caste population and jointly lowest in terms of per-capita expenditure combined with level of affluence (38). As relevant the incidence of caste discrimination was also reported and observed by J.N.Mandal. The Namasudras continued to face this kind of discrimination despite the constitutional and Governmental band on untouchability. Namasudras were being called in filthy language such as "Chandal" and "Chhotolok" (39). Over the course of the late 1950-60 Mandal corresponded with various central dignitaries about reservation policy in West Bengal and in other States as well. In 1957 he wrote to Prime Minister of India J.L. Nehru urging him to take measures to reinstate the facilities to Dalit students. In 1962 he wrote to C.B. Gupta, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh to enlist the Namasuda student as Scheduled Caste student in his State's SC list though Lokar committee recommended that Namasudra should be descheduled from the list of Scheduled Caste list of West Bengal on account of its relative advancement.

Mandal was aware of how the West Bengal Government attended to constitutional provision alongside his activities in the refugee movement. So as a president of the SC and ST Welfare Council of West Bengal he convened a meeting at the Calcutta University Hall on 8th December 1963 (40). In his address he highlighted the Government abuses of reservation policies and he described a detailed evaluation of the government efforts in this connection (41). Mandal's various attempts to highlight the abuses of reservation policy thus reflected a political culture wherein constitutional provisions were minimally observed at best a society whose political leadership and administration exhibited a pronounced reluctance to implement the safeguards available to Dalit despite a nominal asset to the terms of the exception in the first place(42).

J.N.Mandal was the astonishing character in pre and post partition India of the history. From 1933 to 1968 his life included various struggle, such as in search of separate existence before partition, to accommodate himself in a constitutional politics, to monitor to reservation policy and to fight for rehabilitation for the Namasudra and Dalit refugees. all those variable activities sometimes made him bitter, sometimes popular, sometimes marginalized sometimes centralized. Actually did not apprehend and make out the real situation of India.

In the field of constitutional politics, after his return to India, he did not keep any remarkable role. In every election he contested but the dream of being a winner political leader remained unfulfilled. In reality in every election he had to face defeat at the hands of Congress whom he once claimed to have been upper caste Hindu "Bhadralok Party". His own community could not believe him and could not keep confidence on him. High caste Hindus characterized him reactionary. Hindu Mahasabha stigmatized him as communal. So the voters upon which faith one could win the election did not caste vote in favour of him but he continued the effort till his death as he had undergone a hard attack while he was preparing for an another election and died. Though he had the support of P.R.Thakur his erstwhile competitor in the same assembly ,Law Association, Women's Association, but did not succeed.

After partition of India the main challenge was the refugee settlement of the nation as well as West Bengal. Government of West Bengal invented new alternative policy of rehabilitation sending refugees of Dalit origin to Dandakaranya. When it was the stage of proposal J.N.Mandal opposed to Government policy. Despite his disillusion with the UCRC and SBBS he himself and the representatives of the two refugee organization went to meet Chief Minister Bidhan Chandra Roy. He repeatedly wrote letters to Chief Minister B.C. Ray in late December 1959, to Meher Chand Khanna, Rehabilitation Ministerial Convenor in November, to Dr Rajendra Prasad and finally Prime Minister J.L.Nehru with the hope of assurance of Govt. responsibility of settling the refugees in India. While performing of the Satyagraha he was arrested and imprisoned. In this area of refugee movement to some extent he attained success when Chief Minister assured him that refugee would not be taken outside the State against their will, that the Doles on which camp refugee who refused to be transported outside West Bengal subsisted and would be reinstated. Though the assurances were short lasted and the Dandakaranya scheme could not be avoided. By and large he could accommodate himself in refugee movement.

After independence constitutional reservation policy was taken up by the Government of West Bengal. J N Mandal could catch up the loopholes and abuses of the policy towards SC and ST population. Obviously his monitoring over the reservatition policy and social discrimination reflected in the Government policy and political culture. In the same way he wrote at the time of refugee movement to Prime Minister Nehru, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh and Chief Minister of West Bengal B.C. Ray urging to follow the Govt. Policy of reservation.

Now the question arise what would happen if he remained alive. Would all the abuses in administration and society be done away with in the times to come? The question is unanswerable as J.N.Mandal made himself unanswerable to the question of his proper judgment.

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