

Book Review

**Waheed Ahmad, *The Punjab Story, 1940-1947: The Muslim League and the Unionists: Towards Partition and Pakistan* (Islamabad: National Documentation Wing (NDW) of the Cabinet Division, Government of Pakistan, 2009)
pp.555+xxiii: Hardbound
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After working quietly for several years in London where he is now settled, Dr. Waheed Ahmad has come up with another publication on Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah. This is *The Punjab Story, 1940-1947: The Muslim League and the Unionists*, published by the National Documentation Wing (NDW) of the Cabinet Division, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad. His earlier work, the seven-volume *The Nation's Voice* published by the Quaid-i-Azam Academy (Karachi) that highlighted Jinnah's statements and interviews between 1935 and 1948, had received good reviews. The present work contains the Quaid's correspondence available in the Syed Shamsul Hasan Collection donated to the Cabinet Division by the family of the late Syed who was the linchpin of the All India Muslim League's central office in Delhi. The Collection, in fact, was handed over by the Quaid himself to late Shamsul Hassan for safekeeping and transfer to Pakistan during the troubled days of the Partition of India. It was Jinnah's express desire to make these letters public twenty years after his death as a reminder to the posterity of the complexities and challenges encountered during the movement for Pakistan. We are lucky to have this collection now safely deposited otherwise, as Mr. Mehmud Ahmed from Brampton in Canada tells us in his letter to the *Dawn*, they would have been lost for ever. The credit for acquiring, organizing

and now editing the Shamsul Hasan Collection at the NDW goes to Dr. Waheed Ahmad and for this he deserves appreciation.

Methodically edited, *The Punjab Story* deals with the politics of the Muslim League and the Unionists in the background of the high drama of the partition of India based on the correspondence that emanated during the 1940s. It is woven around five files of the Shamsul Hasan Collection dating from 1940 to 1947. Collectively, they contain 477 documents out of the 10,000 that comprise the collection, written mostly in English and some in Urdu. They deal mostly with the politics of the undivided Punjab province under the British. Obviously, there are many gaps but one cannot underestimate their historical importance. Waheed Ahmad frankly admits in his 23-page Introduction that many of the documents were either pilfered or lost. But these gaps can be filled in by documents from the Quaid-i-Azam Collection and the Muslim League Records at the National Archives of Pakistan. Fortunately, a major portion of the Collection has survived. More importantly, it provides the political setting in the Punjab and elsewhere in British India when the documents were written.

Most of the letters published here are those written to Jinnah by his associates, party workers and sundry other correspondents and some by him to others. Put together they provide the behind-the-doors story of the Pakistan movement and its leaders. For instance, we get an inkling of the inner working of the Muslim League in the Punjab on such aspects as the party organization and its financial position, the publicity and propaganda work, mutual recriminations, the nature of the party's relations with the Congress as well as with the Sikhs and Muslim organizations such as the Ahrar and the Khaksars, and, most importantly, Jinnah's response to the Punjab affairs.

Scanning the volume one finds that the League had gradually gained ground in the Punjab. As Bashir Ahmad informed Jinnah, the League movement had spread even in the rural areas with 'unexpected rapidity'. (Part 3, Doc. 20) This was the result mostly of the publicity work done by Nawab Mamdot, Mumtaz Daulatana and other leaders and workers. Jinnah was fairly impressed and suggested that Mamdot should take over the League's leadership in the Punjab Assembly. (Part 1, Docs. 6 and 30; Part 3, Docs. 4-5;

and Part 4, Doc. 23) But within the party, several young men were jockeying for power. Daulatana informed Jinnah that since Mamdot was unwilling to accept the leadership, it should be offered to Shaukat Hyat instead (Part 3, Doc. 27). Firoz Khan Noon was another contender who had recently resigned from the Viceroy's executive council to try his luck in politics. At his back was his pretty but ambitious young wife, Vicky, who did not feel shy to push her husband's case. (Part 4, Docs. 25, 32, 37 and 44). Shaukat Hyat was also waiting in the wings and he tried to turn his dismissal by the Punjab governor to his advantage. He requested Jinnah for advice but the latter declined, saying that he could not act as his legal adviser nor judge his innocence without knowing full details. He advised Shaukat to fight his case with the governor himself. (Part 3, Docs. 42-52)

The Collection shows that Jinnah was not impervious to criticism. Sometime, there were inquisitive questions, such as from Nazar Fatima, whether the future Pakistan government would be democratic and popular and dared to tell Jinnah that she had consulted the text of his correspondence with Gandhi as recommended by him but had found no satisfactory answer. (Part 1, Docs. 15-16 and 19). Others advised him that the gulf between the League and the Ahrars and the Unionists must be bridged. (Part 1, Docs. 38, 47 and 49). He did not even mind Vicky Noon's brash complaint for not nominating her husband to the Committee of Action or for allegedly accusing Firoz of 'intriguing against Mamdot'. She frankly told Jinnah that she would not in future write to him 'ever again in that open and frank way on matters which I think you ought to know'. (Part 4, Docs. 37 and 44).

Another event that absorbed Jinnah's attention was the elections of 1945-6. He admitted that his 'whole mind' and his party's energies were 'concentrated upon elections'. (Part 1, Docs. 67 and 107). Several letters inform Jinnah of the harassment and coercion of the League candidates and voters as well as interference with the process of election by the Unionist government. There were also reports of the registration of false cases against the Leaguers for refusing to help the Unionist party. (Part 1, Docs. 81, 83-4, 91, and 104-6). Several correspondents, including Aftab Iqbal, the eldest son of Allama Iqbal, kept

pestering Jinnah with request for the League tickets for elections. His advice to them all was the same: proceed according to the constitution and contact the provincial parliamentary board. (Part 1, Docs. 70-3 and Part 2, 38) Jinnah had also to contend with the tirades of men like Khurshid Ali Khan, the Unionist spokesman, that the 'differences that divide the Punjab Muslims were mainly Jinnah's creation' (Part 1, 9-10 and Part 2, Doc. 16) or Tara Singh who alleged that he (Jinnah) was in pay of the government. (Part 1, Docs. 76-8).

The Cabinet Mission was another major event that occupied Jinnah's attention during 1946 though the correspondence on the subject does not deal with the process of the tedious negotiations but on the decision to accept the Mission's Plan and on the issue of the interim government. A number of correspondents wrote to him approving his stance on the Plan and supported his decision to enter the interim government. Some extended their felicitations on the inclusion of Raja Ghazanfar Ali Khan and Mandal, the latter representing the Scheduled Castes. A few, however, disagreed with Mandal's inclusion. (Part 2, Docs. 45-51 and 62-89, 92-103, 105 and 108)

An interesting exchange of letters took place between Pir Jamaat Ali of Alipur and Jinnah who advised the League president to proceed to Mecca and perform the Hajj that would take only two weeks by air and two months by sea. It would, he asserted, effectively stop his enemies from criticising him. He informed that he was performing the hajj that year and would be glad if he accompanied him as his guest. But Jinnah diplomatically expressed his inability to leave India at a time when rapid developments were taking place in the country. (Part 2, Docs. 54-7 and 60)

The massacres in Bihar occupy a good deal of space in the Collection. Many letters condemn the massacres of the Muslims and report on the activities of the RSS men, which points to the Bihar government's failure to prevent the carnage. Some letters highlight Muslim efforts to help the victims of the Bihar riots through rehabilitation and medical aid. (Part 2, Docs. 113-23 and 127-37)

Jinnah's health problem also engaged the attention of his associates and well-wishers. At one point he was so ill that he was

unable to attend the League sessions at Lahore. Several correspondents wrote to him enquiring after him and wishing him well. Some prayed for his speedy recovery while others offered their houses for his stay while recuperating. Jinnah thanked them all but declined the offers politely. In one of his letters Mamdot informed him that the Punjab League had set apart a 'day of prayer' for Jinnah's health. (Part 3, Docs. 9, 15, 18-19 and 31-4)

An ardent correspondent was Mrs. Rallia Ram, a Christian lady from Lahore, who used to send Jinnah clippings from pro-Congress newspapers with her own comments on them. She was particularly anxious that Jinnah should come to some arrangement with Ghaffar Khan. Jinnah was very appreciative of her work but relations with Ghaffar Khan and his brother remained tense. (Part 5, Docs. 1-65)

For the convenience of the readers, Waheed Ahmad has included a list of all seventy-two volumes of Shamsul Hasan Collection, which gives an idea of the extent and complexity of work that remains to be done. Another useful appendix is the list of the functionaries of the British government and post-partition Pakistan government as well as the office-holders of the Muslim League and the Congress. There are also brief biographical sketches of the persons who corresponded with Jinnah. For easy understanding of the political background a chronology helps the reader to keep pace with the fast moving main events between 1940 and 1947. Overall, it is a useful research tool and a welcome addition to the literature on the Pakistan movement and the partition of India.

There are, however, a few typographical errors and some slip-ups that need to be rectified in the next edition.

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