

Fatima Jinnah: She Broke A Dictator's Back

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Late on the evening of this day in 1967, the revered Miss Fatima Jinnah, the beloved sister and inseparable companion of the Father of the nation, Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, left this ephemeral world to rejoin her brother in the boundless realm of the departed.

During the Quaid's lifetime, she shared his hopes, his joys and anxieties during the struggle for Pakistan, and always gave him solace in his moments of depression whenever the Nehru-Mountbatten alliance threatened to throw a spanner into the works, and impede peaceful transfer of power to the Dominion of Pakistan which was to be liberated from alien domination along with the Dominion of India under the instrument of partition of the Subcontinent. The intrigue did succeed in shaping the insidious Redcliffe Award which gave a moth-eaten Pakistan to the Quaid and his Muslim League.

Miss Jinnah, like her great brother, was deeply committed to the concept of democracy under which all power belongs to the people. But even before democracy could strike root in Pakistan, and the incipient country could blossom to fruition and generate a government of the people, for the people and by the people power-hungry politicians tinkered with the apparatus of the State and Pakistan slid into the hands of a line of successive dictators beginning with Ayub Khan. Ayub abrogated the 1956 Constitution

* *The Muslim* (Islamabad), 9 July 1982.

and promulgated his own version of the fundamental law under the system of Basic Democracies which disavowed adult suffrage and reduced the several cross-strong electoral college to a mere 120,000 henchmen so as to make things more manageable for the man at the apex of power.

For Miss Jinnah who was deeply committed to democracy and had cuddled Islamic values even before the birth of Pakistan, it was a national calamity that things had come to such a sorry pass. Only two months after the Quaid's demise, while the anguish of his death was still fresh in her heart, she said in an address to the country's youth:

We have to organize our polity on the principles of Islam, and transform our state into a formidable power according to the wishes of the Quaid-i-Azam. We will have promptly to destroy and remove all impediments that come in our way. Pakistan has to help the world in general, and the Islamic world in particular... The ills like graft, nepotism, black-marketing and exploitation are essentially the products of an education which ignores moral values and lays stress only on material progress.

Six years later when Ayub Khan ordered elections to seek the electorate's mandate for another term of the Presidential office, Miss Jinnah took up the gauntlet. Despite her advancing years, she went on a hurricane tour of the country to tell the people that she was contesting the polls. Her arrival in Lahore by an early morning flight from Karachi will be remembered by the citizens of that city as long as they live. Anxious to assess public response to his adversary's arrival, Ayub Khan had come on an unannounced visit to the metropolis, and secretly watched from the Governor's House, the mammoth procession led by all top leaders of the Combined Opposition Parties, standing in open jeeps with the streaming population of Lahore following Miss Jinnah's car driving at a snail's pace. It called back to one's memory the unforgettable lines from Shakespeare's King Henry V:

*.... Like to the Senators of antique Rome
With the plebeians swarming
at their heels,
Go forth and bring their
conquering Caesar in.*

So unparalleled was popular enthusiasm that the entire fleet of Lahore's taxis and motor rickshaws shuttled between the city and the Airport all morning, carrying thousands of people to the city's air terminal free of charge.

The spectacle not only baffled Ayub; but it completely unnerved him. Losing all hope of support from the Western Wing, he flew a secret sortie to East Pakistan and managed, through the good offices of a powerful political leader of the Eastern Wing (who had better remain unnamed) to get all Bengali votes cast in his favour. That was his way of rigging the so-called election and smothering the voice and hopes of the people at large. Miss Jinnah may have lost at the ballot box, if a defeat it was, but the moral victory was hers for the resurgence of the popular will to overthrow a dictator. Miss Jinnah is no more among us, but she lives in the hearts of her people – the Quaid-i-Azam's nation – and shall live to the end of time.

Miss Fatima Jinnah Zindabad

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