

## ***Madr-i-Millat: Symbol of Democracy***

**An Observer\***

Madr-i-Millat, Miss Fatima Jinnah, the loving and beloved sister of the Father of the Nation whose 17<sup>th</sup> death anniversary was mournfully observed throughout the country by the people of Pakistan, had been the closest companion of the Quaid-i-Azam during his lifetime, and had, after the Quaid's departure from, this ephemeral world, continued to remain the most forceful advocate of the cherished principles the architect of Pakistan had bequeathed to his nation. This succinct statement of Malik Ghulam Jilani provides for us a vignette of that noble and resolute lady:

She had her hour of loneliness, her hour of despair and her long hour of distress, yet her courage never felled her. Her voice never faltered. Her spirit was never overtaken by 'weariness', she had the strength of those who lived for great principles, the silent endurance of those whom the world needs.

Mohtarmah Fatima Jinnah had, always adhered unflinchingly to the principled stand of the Quaid. She was endowed with the courage of conviction and all the requisite qualities to sustain that courage even in moments of trial and tribulations. But it was only after the Quaid's departure from our midst that these qualities of hers caught the public eye. During the lifetime of her illustrious brother had preferred to live under his shadow, but when she found that the nation had drifted from the course charted for it by the architect of Pakistan that she was impelled to abandon her seclusion and prepared herself for a determined crusade for the revival of democracy which had been defaced and destroyed by Ayub Khan's deceptive formula of 'Basic Democracies'.

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Miss Fatima Jinnah had, no doubt, organised the Women's Wing of the Muslim League during the 1940's but she had scrupulously avoided coming into the limelight and assuming any prominent role on the public platform. It was only after the towering personality of the Quaid had faded out that the nation discovered her strength and her charisma when she came out in the open. The Quaid's concept of democracy having been reduced to a mockery by the creation of an infinitesimal electoral college of 8000 basic democrats, and abridged further to only 80 to manipulate the elections Ayub Khan ordered to be held in 1964. Miss Jinnah could no longer sit back and suffer such deceitful efforts to hoodwink the people.

In 1951 she spoke on radio, but the authorities had reduced that powerful organ into a handmaiden of the regime. Her broadcast was interrupted by lone moments of silence which indicated that the microphones were being switched off to muffle certain portions of her talk, unsavoury for the rulers' ears, from reaching the listeners. She was naturally chagrined, and so was the nation, at such a clumsy method of blacking out portions of her speech. She had no hold on any of the State's institutions and the people who ran these institutions and manned the audiovisual media had implicitly to obey every order of the authoritarian ruler and carry out every directive of his underlings.

Frail in body, but strong in mind, she took up the challenge and decided to come into active politics, not for crumbs of the power cake or even for the whole of it. She was coming in to serve the nation and deliver the masses from the tyrannical rule of a despot, and striving to hand over power to the people where it belonged. With this objective in mind she entered active politics in 1964 when she accepted the Combined Opposition Parties (COP) proposal of her name to contest the elections that were shortly to be held.

The responsibility Mohtarmah Fatima Jinnah had accepted was indeed an arduous one as she had to undertake extensive travel throughout the country by air, rail and road to motivate and inspire the people and, through them, the so-called Basic Democrats who constituted the electoral college that had shrivelled to a mere

eighty thousand from out of the body of a few million adult voters. This scribe was a witness to her arrival in Lahore which was a red-letter day in the annals of that metropolitan city. I had never before witnessed such surging crowds repairing to the Lahore Airport for a glimpse of that highly revered lady, the sister of the man who enthralled the Muslims throughout the four corners of the subcontinent. From the early hours of the morning all the taxis and rickshaws of the city had assembled at several important points in the city to take people to the airport free of charge and return to their Vantage points to pickup more people and rush to the air terminal. This labour of love continued without break till 10.00 a.m.

The milling crowds had filled the entire available space outside the airport. Bonfires of that morning's issue of contemporary English daily which had championed President Ayub's cause for the Presidential polls had projected him as the only candidate, worthy of the ballot, marked the route to the airport. The roads from the airport to the city were lined with a sea of ebullient men, young and old, to accord a welcome the like of which had not been seen even in the days of the Quaid himself, perhaps because they knew that he had no rival to contend with. As the aircraft landed, there was a stampede with everyone moving forward to catch at least a flexion and glimpse of their great leader, the late Father of the Nation's sister.

President Ayub had already arrived secretly in Lahore and positioned himself in a room of the Governor's House from where he could see, without being seen, the reaction of the *Zinda dilan-e Lahore* on Miss Fatima Jinnah's arrival. And then, the procession from the airport with quite a number of jeeps leading, and more following with all the COP leaders standing almost to attention the car she rode. Never before had such an impressive welcome to anyone else been seen in Lahore since the days of the Quaid himself. One has the feeling that this spectacle may have given the jitters even to President Ayub himself, and made many of his B.Ds see the light.

With no more than forty thousand in the then West Pakistan, and a like number of electors in the East Wing, it should not have

been difficult, for the servile officialdom of those days to rig the polls. The media jubilantly announced Ayub's success, after the fictitious counting of ballot papers was over. But the people knew in their heart of hearts that they had been defrauded.

Nevertheless, the people of what remains of this country shall to their dying day remember the Madr-i Millat's commitment to democracy -- the system of government that the architect of Pakistan had wanted to perpetuate in the country, and shall reverentially cherish the memory of the Quaid and his great sister for all times to come.