

The Search for the Real Jinnah

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Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah was a charismatic and history making leader who transformed the Muslim community of the South Asian Subcontinent into a nation rooted in their religio-cultural historical identity and a shared perception for the future against the backdrop of the political experience gained during the British rule. No other Muslim leader enjoyed such a political stature in South Asia and his popular support bypassed the linguistic, ethnic, and regional cleavages among the Muslims.

The Quaid spoke eloquently on the major themes of the future shape of the polity in the course of the freedom movement and as the first Governor General of Pakistan. However, he died on September 11, 1948, before his political assertions could be translated into constitutional and political institutions and processes. His untimely death did not give him time to transfer his charisma to the political institutions and processes of the new state of Pakistan.

None of his successors enjoyed such a commanding political stature to give a definite shape to the Pakistani polity and make it acceptable to different political leaders, parties and regions. Most of them had strong roots in some region or province, lacking a nationwide support base which narrowed their worldview and restricted their capacity for political mobilization.

The political leaders were unable to evolve mutually acceptable solutions to the political, legal, and administrative problems that surfaced in the early years of independence. This

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delayed constitution-making and eroded the spirit of cooperation and sacrifice that manifested in the last phase of the struggle for independence. The lack of a broadly based consensus was the major reason for discontinuity and non-sustainability of the political institutions and processes. These trends accentuated due to repeated assumption of power by the military and the attempts by the military rulers to shape the political institutions and processes on military ethos of discipline, control from the top, and management of affairs rather than participatory governance and political management. Pakistan faced constitutional and political breakdown, regional disharmony, political polarization, and ideological disorientation. This gave rise to a brute struggle among the competing interests for structuring the polity and society on their desired worldview and political priorities to the exclusion of others.

The contending interests, civilian and military, did not use Jinnah's speeches and statements for consensus building on the contours of the political system. Rather, every group invoked Jinnah to seek legitimacy for advancing its partisan political agenda and projected his image and views in a manner that served its current political needs.

The attempts by the competing interests and groups to justify their pursuit for power with reference to the Quaid-i-Azam, subordinated his views to their political whims. They made a selective use of his views and role to suit their current needs, and thus distorted his image and role. If we go through their interpretations of Jinnah's views, we get the impression that there are several Jinnahs.

The partisan invocation of national heroes is a common practice in the countries that lack consensus on the operational norms of the polity, and where controversies abound on its nature and dynamics. Each contending group adopts the strategy of 'pick and choose' from history, especially from the statements and roles of the national heroes in order to strengthen its position in the ongoing struggle for power and dominance. Such a selective use of history creates historical distortions and causes controversies about the role of the national heroes and the principles they advocated or subscribed to.

Those who dominate the present or wish to do so, often endeavour to rewrite history in order to justify themselves. Generational change or the changed political and economic contexts also produce changes in disposition towards the national heroes and important historical developments.

In Pakistan, the political groups and interests with strong stakes in politics and power management have freely employed the image of Jinnah and used his statements to serve their partisan interests. The political circles advocating that Pakistan was created for implementing Islam repeatedly quote only those statements of Jinnah that emphasize Islam as the basis of Muslim political identity, state and society. His emphasis on modern notion of state, civil and political rights, and democracy is ignored.

Those in need of a secular Jinnah to advance their political agenda project him as a typical British gentleman and focus attention on his address to the Constituent Assembly on August 11, 1947, to demonstrate that he did not want any linkage of the Pakistani polity with Islam. They ignore his statements before and after this address, where he talked of connections between Islam and Pakistan. The supporters of modernist view of Islam find enough supportive material in Jinnah's speeches and statements where he talks of Islamic principles and teachings as the source of guidance but also highlights the modern notions of the state and governance. The advocates of enlightened moderation can also find enough supportive material in Jinnah's advocacy of the broad features of the polity and the society.

While addressing the nominated Majlis-i-Shoora on August 12, 1983, President and Chief Martial Law Administrator General Zia-ul-Haq quoted from Jinnah's personal notebook and the text of Lord Mountbatten's two communications to the British government in July 1947 based on Mountbatten's version of his conversation with Jinnah to argue that the office of the head of state should be very effective and powerful. Nobody later heard about the Quaid's notebook; even Zia-ul-Haq did not subsequently talk about it. As far as Lord Mountbatten's communications, Altaf Gauhar questioned Zia-ul-Haq's interpretation of the Quaid's words. He wrote that there was nothing to suggest that the Quaid-i-

Azam wanted the office of the head of state to be “very effective as well as powerful.”¹

Raja Zafarul Haq, federal minister for Information and Broadcasting in General Zia-ul-Haq’s cabinet, defended the general’s plan to hold partyless elections by arguing in May 1984 that the Quaid-i-Azam “had opposed the holding of general elections on a party basis in Pakistan since he thought they would prove unsuccessful.”² In February 1987, Maulana Abdul Sattar Khan Niazi claimed that the Quaid-i-Azam told him in 1941 that he wanted the “caliphate” system for the new state of Pakistan.³

Instead of a selective and convenient use of Jinnah, it is important to examine his views in totality and against the backdrop of his personality and disposition. Several factors shaped his personality and political orientation. He was greatly influenced by the British liberal thought process of the late 19th century during and after his student days in England. On his return to India he developed strong association with the political leaders of liberal outlook.⁴ These trends were reinforced by his legal profession which imbibed in him the principles of constitutionalism, the rule of law, and the civil and political rights. These were coupled with the notions of freedom, political participation and self-determination.

It was with such an intellectual backdrop that he examined the impact of British rule on India, especially on Hindu-Muslim relations. His political experience led him to shift from a strategy of Hindu-Muslim unity for addressing the political and constitutional issues in British India to an exclusive attention to protection and advancement of the political identity, rights and interests of the Muslims of the South Asian region. He demanded safeguards and constitutional guarantees for the rights and interests of the Muslim community. When he realized that the Congress

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1. Altaf Gauhar, “Neither the Quaid’s Words nor His Ideas,” *Dawn*, September 22, 1983.
 2. *Dawn*, May 6, 1984.
 3. *Ibid.*, February 12, 1987.
 4. See Sharif al Mujahid, “Why Jinnah Joined Congress,” *ibid.*, March 3, 2002; see also by the same author, *Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah* (Karachi: Quaid-i-Azam Academy, 1981), pp.45-46.

leadership was not prepared to accommodate the Muslim identity and interests in a constitutional arrangement, he sought the establishment of a separate state for the Muslims of South Asia.

Islamic notions and terminology began to appear in his speeches in the mid-1930s when he was convinced of the non-accommodative disposition of the Congress. It may however be mentioned that Jinnah had started taking a visibly supportive position for the Muslim identity, rights and interests from the early years of his active political career. As an elected member of the Indian Imperial Legislative Council, he introduced the Muslim Wakf Bill in March 1911 which was adopted by the assembly. He was instrumental in the signing of the Lucknow Pact between the Congress and the Muslim League in 1916 on political and constitutional reforms. This trend became more pronounced as time went by, culminating in the popularly known as his Fourteen Points (1929), which could be described as the charter of the rights and interests of the Muslims towards the end of the second decade of the 20th century.

Islamic principles and symbols began to surface in Jinnah's public discourse when he embarked on the re-organization of the Muslim League after his return from England in 1934. This was done to articulate Muslim identity, rights and interests in the political context of the Subcontinent and to convince the Congress of the distinct national heritage and character of the Muslims which ultimately shaped the Muslim League demand for the establishment of Pakistan. The Islamic principles, teachings and symbols were also invoked for mobilizing support among the Muslims for establishing the representative character of the Muslim League during 1937-47. This trend was very pronounced in the course of the election campaign in 1946, when the students, *pirs* and *sajjadanasheens*, and others campaigned for the Muslim League and its demand for the establishment of Pakistan in the Muslim majority provinces.

He viewed Islam as being relevant to Muslim national identity formation in South Asia and talked of Islam's relationship with the new state of Pakistan. However, he did not talk of a religious or puritanical Islamic state and he never described the Shari'a as the

constitution for Pakistan. He maintained that the constitution would be framed by the constituent assembly/parliament.

Whereas he did not subscribe to the classical Marxist distinction between religion and state affairs, he was not for religious domination of the state and politics. It was a middle of the road approach which viewed Islam as a civilization and culture, a social order, and a source of law rather than a set of punitive, regulative and extractive codes. Jinnah combined the principles and teachings of Islam with modern and universally accepted criteria of governance and political management. Pakistan was envisioned as a democratic state for the Muslims of South Asia which derived its ethical foundations from Islam. He perceived "Pakistan as a modern, enlightened and progressive democracy, underpinned by the principles of Islamic social justice and an egalitarian society free from all forms of exploitation."⁵

The notion of religious state, religious orthodoxy or extremism had no relevance to Jinnah's views on state policy and governance. "Jinnah's appeal was indeed a blend of traditional and modern norms, promoting on the one hand, the modernist concept of nationhood based on territory, language, culture and history and advancing the traditional, all-embracing character of Islam on the other."⁶

Jinnah's address to the constituent assembly on August 11, 1947 was a charter for political and cultural tolerance, advocating the notion of a common or equal citizenship irrespective of religion, caste and creed.⁷ As the governor general he repeatedly assured the minorities of protection of their rights. In one of his speeches in October 1947, he referred back to his August 11 address to assure the religious minorities that they would be treated as equal citizens. He said, "I have repeatedly made it clear, especially in my opening speech to the Constituent Assembly, that

5. Z. H. Zaidi (ed.), *Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah Papers*, First Series, Vol.7 (Islamabad: Culture Division, Government of Pakistan, 2002), p.xxiv.

6. Sikandar Hayat, *Aspects of the Pakistan Movement* (Lahore: Progressive Publishers, 1991), p.175.

7. For the text of Jinnah's address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan on August 11, 1947, see *Quaid-i-Azam Mahomed Ali Jinnah: Speeches as Governor General of Pakistan, 1947-48* (Karachi: Pakistan Publications, n.d.), pp.6-10.

the minorities in Pakistan would be treated as our citizens and will enjoy all the rights and privileges that any other community gets.”⁸

He expressed much grief on the killings of the Muslims in India and ordered his administration to extend all possible assistance to incoming refugees. He also regretted the looting and killing of the non-Muslims in Pakistan. In February 1948, Jinnah and Miss Fatima Jinnah visited a camp in Karachi set up for the Hindus whose houses and property had been attacked by the Muslims. Jinnah assured them of his government’s protection.⁹

Political magnanimity and diplomatic courtesies were conspicuous in Jinnah’s comments on the assassination of M.K. Gandhi on January 30, 1948. His statement expressed grief on Gandhi’s demise and declared: “Whatever our political differences, he was one of the greatest men produced by the Hindu community, and a leader who commanded their universal confidence and respect....The loss to the Dominion of India is irreparable, and it will be very difficult to fill the vacuum created by the passing away of such a great man at this moment.” The government of Pakistan declared January 31 as a holiday “on account of Mr. Gandhi’s sad death.”¹⁰ On February 23, 1948, the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan expressed grief on the death of Gandhi. Jinnah who was the President of the Constituent Assembly, associated himself with “the tributes that [had] been paid to this great man.”¹¹

A return to the real Jinnah calls for avoiding a selective use of his speeches and statements. His views should be reviewed in totality with reference to the Muslim search for identity and a secure future in the political context of British India. Jinnah’s personality, disposition and orientation must also be taken into account while analyzing his political discourse. His role as the father of the nation and his discourse on the shape of the Pakistani polity should be employed for consensus building. This underlines the need of working towards building Pakistan as a participatory

8. Waheed Ahmad (ed.), *Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah: The Nation’s Voice*, Vol. 7 (Karachi: Quaid-i-Azam Academy, 2003), p.76.

9. *Ibid.*, pp.138-39; see also Z.H. Zaidi, *op.cit.*, pp.16-18.

10. Z.H. Zaidi, *op.cit.*, pp.73-74.

11. Waheed Ahmad, *op.cit.*, pp.201-04.

polity that derives inspirations from the Islamic ideals, ensures socio-economic justice, promotes religious and cultural tolerance, and guarantees equality of status and opportunity to all citizens. It must adhere to constitutionalism, the rule of law, and individual freedoms and rights.