

Optional Reading: What Did Jinnah Want?

Mohammad Ali Jinnah is one of the most controversial figures in history. Beloved by his followers, hated by his enemies (including a fellow Muslim who tried to assassinate him), Jinnah's personal life seems a mass of contradictions. A wealthy attorney trained in England, through most of his life he wore expensive English suits and even sported a monocle, yet later wore a "karakul," a sheepskin hat of Central Asia. He was more at home with English than Urdu, the future national language of Pakistan. He enjoyed alcohol and was a chain-smoker, although Islamic law forbids both liquor and cigarettes. Yet millions of Indian Muslims knew him as the Quaid-i-Azam—the Great Leader.

At first glance, his political career seems just as puzzling. Of all the political leaders of early twentieth century India, Jinnah worked the hardest for unity between Hindu and Muslim. One reason he broke with the Congress Party in the early 1920s was Gandhi's support of the caliphate movement (to maintain the authority of the Caliph of the Ottoman Empire), which, Jinnah feared, would cause a split "not only amongst Hindus and Muslims but between Hindus and Hindus and Muslims and Muslims...." As late as 1935, Jinnah declared that "...religion should not enter politics." Yet, a few years later, he would speak of Hindus and Muslims as two different nations and demand not just communal safeguards for Muslims, but a separate state.

The view of many historians is that without Jinnah there would have been no Pakistan. But the question that intrigues them is: Did Jinnah really want Pakistan?

The traditional view is that Congress's arbitrary and dictatorial rule in the provinces it controlled after the 1937 elections made Jinnah realize that Muslims needed a homeland of their own. Historian Stanley Wolpert agrees. In his biography of Jinnah, he wrote that in 1939, "...Jinnah had long since decided in favor of a separate and equal nation for Muslim India." The Muslim League's Lahore Resolu-

tion of 1940, which called for Muslim-majority provinces to be grouped into "Independent States," was but the first step on the road to Pakistan. Taking a similar view, Sir Penderel Moon wrote of Jinnah's "obduracy" over the creation of Pakistan.

In 1985, historian Ayesha Jalal, born and raised in Pakistan, published *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*. Her view dramatically differs from these historians. Jalal contends that an independent nation of Pakistan was not what Jinnah intended. Instead, he had two major goals. First, Jinnah's Muslim League had to strive for recognition as Muslim India's only representative, not only from the British and the Congress Party, but also (and perhaps more importantly) from Muslim provincial leaders. Jinnah needed to create a united Muslim political community under his leadership to stand up to Congress. Second, he wanted an arrangement for power-sharing in the central government that would adequately protect Muslims from Hindu majority rule. In Jalal's view, Jinnah did not really want partition and a separate nation of Pakistan. She states, "The Lahore resolution should therefore be seen as a bargaining counter..."—a threat to get the British and the Congress Party to give the Muslim League more power in the federal government of a united India.

Certainly, the small Pakistan that was eventually granted independence was not what its supporters, or Jinnah, had hoped for. Punjab and Bengal, the two most powerful Muslim-majority provinces, were themselves partitioned at the cost of incredible suffering. Calcutta was given to India, although Jinnah had earlier warned, "Pakistan without Calcutta would be like asking a man to live without his heart." The two parts of Pakistan were separated by one thousand miles of Indian territory. And thirty-five million Muslims were left behind in India, the largest Muslim population in a non-Muslim nation. Even within Pakistan, Muslims from smaller provinces resented the

Views of Jinnah

“I have much sympathy with Jinnah, who is straighter, more positive and more sincere than most of the Congress leaders.... He is a curious character, a lonely, unhappy, arbitrary, self-centered man, fighting with much resolution what I fear is a losing battle.”

—A.P. Wavell, Viceroy of India (July 8, 1946)

“The two things that made the greatest impression on me were seeing the Taj Mahal and Mr. Jinnah for the first time. These overwhelmed me as nothing had done in the whole of my life.”

—Yahiya Bakhtiar, Senator from Baluchistan

“...blatant, vulgar, offensive, egotistical. What a man! And what a misfortune for India and for the Muslims that he should have so much influence! I feel depressed about it.”

—Jawaharlal Nehru, Congress Party leader (1943)

“He was like God—although we Muslims can’t say God. He was on a pedestal; he was our salvation.”

—Zeenat Rashid, daughter of Jinnah’s close friend, Sir Abdullah Haroon of the Sind

“...there emerged on the India side a number of notable figures and two outstanding characters, Gandhi and Jinnah, the former a unique personality of absorbing interest, the latter less remarkable and less attractive as a man, but a striking example of a single individual influencing the broad course of history, for without Jinnah there would have been no Pakistan.”

—Sir Penderel Moon, British member of the Indian Civil Service, author and historian

control of western Punjab.

To avoid this, Jinnah had wanted, through negotiations, “...to be able to play a long, slow game with the Congress,” until a power-sharing arrangement in the government could be made. But Congress leaders like Nehru were concerned that any agreement with Jinnah would lead to a weaker central government, the opposite of what Congress wanted. That, coupled with the British desire to leave India as soon as possible, doomed Jinnah’s strategy. Ironically, unlike what traditional historians contend, Jalal argues, “It was Congress that insisted on partition. It was Jinnah who was against partition.”

Jalal’s thesis has been controversial. One can argue that it questions the very creation of Pakistan as a Muslim nation. Besides those who take the more traditional view, other historians have different reservations. Some question her paying so much attention to Jinnah and not enough to local Muslim politics or to what a “Muslim community” actually meant. Then there is the question as to whether anyone can know what such a private man as Jinnah really wanted.

What is not questioned is that Jinnah will never stop fascinating students of South Asian history. For without him, there would have been no partition and no Pakistan.