

Ishtiaq Ahmed. *Jinnah: His Successes, Failures and Role in History*. Delhi: Penguin Random House, 2020, pp 808.

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Ishtiaq Ahmed draws on public speeches, letters, and accounts written by biographers such as Stanley Wolpert and Hector Bolitho for his book on the 'Quaid-e-Azam' of Pakistan, titled 'Jinnah: His Successes, Failures and Role in History'. Many consider Mohammad Ali Jinnah to be an exceptionally puzzling and enigmatic figure in the history of British India and post-Partition Pakistan. Ahmed introduces us to his personality with the aid of Wolpert's description: "Few individuals significantly alter the course of history. Fewer still modify the map of the world. Hardly anyone can be credited with creating a nation-state. Mohammad Ali Jinnah did all three."

The first half of Ishtiaq Ahmed's book looks at the formative years of Jinnah as a politician involved in the wider socio-political landscape of 20th-century India that was striving to establish an independent state edifice for itself, in opposition to the repressive colonial state. The author categorises Jinnah's political trajectory into four stages: as a nationalist who was a part of the Indian National Congress, a communitarian, a Muslim nationalist, and finally, as the founder of a new nation-state—Pakistan. By undertaking such an exercise, Ahmed attempts to show us how an individual, who also happened to have historically unique and sociologically distinct prerogatives, transformed over a period of approximately three decades. He utilises theories proposed by leading thinkers of their age such as Thomas Carlyle, Georgi Plekhanov, and even Karl Marx, to delineate the shifting roles played by influential individuals across the course of history. Since Ishtiaq Ahmed is first and foremost a political scientist, his voluminous book—going beyond 700 pages—is one that records the political exigencies of the 20th century. It does appear as a work of political history that goes deep into the nuances of negotiations between the major political actors of this period that included several prominent figures from the Congress, Muslim League (from the 1930s

onwards), and the British colonial state. It brings forward the complex nature of events that stand out and were/are associated with several controversies. The Lucknow Pact, the 1937 Elections, and the Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946 have drawn the attention of several students and scholars, and these events have been given special attention in the book as well. Above all, this opus is carefully laid out in a linear fashion and does not abandon history's major preoccupation—contextual sensitivity.

Jinnah's disillusionment with party politics, the responsibility for which seems to have been placed on the Congress' doorstep, prompted him to give up his nationalist allegiances and tendencies. Further, this was accompanied by a rather unhappy exit from the Indian National Congress. The Lucknow Pact of 1916, that had been formulated while keeping Hindu-Muslim unity in mind, fell through as well. The Congress-League understanding started to lose stability. The 'ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity', a noble-sounding title bestowed upon Jinnah by Sarojini Naidu, now began to traverse the paths that eventually led him towards communitarianism. This move was also reinforced by political clashes between him and Gandhi, especially during the Khilafat Movement. Employment of overtly Hindu symbols and the politics of mass mobilisation did not appeal to the diligently constitutional Jinnah, and the ideological chasm between him and Gandhi only seemed to widen over time. In fact, at this juncture, the former appears to be giving in to the theory of a Congress government being equivalent to Hindu Raj, a rumour that he had himself denounced as a 'bogey' in one of his speeches, which was also a call for self-government in British India. Concessions given by the colonial state on the basis of communal identities had a strong and divisive role to play in the career of Jinnah as well. The Two-Nation Theory devised by him, chronologically following the release of his 14 Points and the Nehru Report, can be viewed as an outcome of this divide-and-rule policy. However, the period between 1930 and 1934 witnessed a detached and distraught Jinnah in 'exile' in London with his sister and daughter, following his wife Ruttie's demise. He gave up politics and returned to practising law again. This estrangement from politics did not last for long; his comrades, including Mohammed Iqbal and 'Nawabzada' Liaquat Ali Khan, urged him to return. There are significant gaps in the literature dealing with this phase of Jinnah's life, and it has not been explored adequately by historians.

The elections of 1937 were a major turning point in Jinnah's life. Not only did they mark his return to a life of proactive politics, they also showed how scattered voting preferences of the Muslim populace were. Regional parties of Punjab and Bengal enjoyed a better position among Muslim voters, and the Muslim League's dismal performance attests to this fact. The Congress, too, secured an overwhelming majority. Jinnah recognised factionalism and a lack of proper organisation behind his party's defeat and was willing to cooperate with other political units in the face of a major loss. Before the elections, it had been decided that a coalition government would be formed in the province of U.P., notwithstanding the election results. However, Congress reneged on its commitment. Resentment and anger made Muslim League members accuse the Congress of bad faith and having a dictatorial leadership. According to Ishtiaq Ahmed, this was "the blunder which elicited a communalist reaction in Jinnah" (p. 126).

The 1940s seemed to be a propitious time for the League. The Pakistan demand was firmly articulated in the Lahore Resolution of March 1940. "... after delivering the 22 March 1940 presidential address in Lahore, Jinnah was never once willing to agree to a power-sharing deal with the Congress in a united India" (p. 329). However, Jinnah accepted the 16 May Cabinet Mission Plan (1946), which explicitly rejected the demand for Pakistan and recommended power-sharing between federal units. This political manoeuvre of his is quite intriguing, considering Congress' refusal of the same. However, he still did not compromise on the Pakistan demand made by the Muslims of India. Stafford Cripps, who led the Mission, reported the same regarding Jinnah's stance. The reason behind this surprising change lay in the tussles over constitutional issues. Congress leadership always wished for a strong centre, whereas the Muslim League demanded residuary powers for federating units, which would constitute a nation with a relatively weaker centre. The trouble of power-sharing between these two parties came in the way of fruitful negotiations. Jinnah's political demeanour was also shaped by his denial of playing 'second fiddle' to the Congress. The British rejection of Partition is surprising, as it marked a U-turn on their initial divide-and-rule policies that had a long legacy in the forms of the Bengal Partition of 1905, acceptance of separate electorates, and the Communal Award of 1932, among others. Britain wanted a united India that would be an ally of the Commonwealth during times of duress and tension. "In short, the Cabinet Mission failed to find a

constitutional formula which would satisfy the major protagonists while securing the overall British geostrategic and economic interests in the subcontinent” (p. 367). These historical events make Ishtiaq Ahmed’s observations more conclusive, especially with reference to Jinnah being a politically astute and aware individual who staunchly believed that India’s future could only be decided by the British government. The title of the 14th chapter—‘British Decision To Partition India’—highlights that the events of 1947 were driven by the colonial state, and the Muslim League or Congress alone was not responsible for the same.

The second half of the book delves into the role played by Jinnah after the Partition. Pakistan, whose structure had always been surrounded by riddles, came into being with him taking over the mantle as a stubborn yet strict Governor-General. To assert that the final years of his career preceding his death were surprising would be incorrect, since it has been argued that the contours of Pakistan were left undecided and uncertain till the very last moment. Therefore, it was very convenient for Jinnah to subvert several political precedents. He started campaigning for a united Pakistan with a strong centre and a homogenous cultural identity which would not have federal units with guaranteed autonomy. He exercised absolute power and tried to endorse the new nascent nation-state to ‘Western’ powers as a fortress against Soviet communism. This portion of the book also looks into the events that followed Jinnah’s death and examines the contemporary political issues that plagued the nation from the 1970s onwards, up to the first two decades of the 21st century. The successors of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, including Liaquat Ali Khan, Ayub Khan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and Zia-ul-Haque, changed the face of Pakistan. They charted a different course and diverged from the originally ambiguous ideals of their ‘*Baba-e-Qaum*’. The democratic interregnum of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif was also short-lived. Electoral rigging emerges as a pressing and concerning issue. Following the take-over of Pervez Musharraf, relations with India also shifted dramatically. Ishtiaq Ahmed brings our focus back to the present with references to the Prime Ministership of Imran Khan in recent times.

To conclude, it would be apt to state that Ishtiaq Ahmed’s book leaves its readers with a lot of questions. It is interesting to see that Partition was mostly about political disputes, and the phenomenon of ‘communalism’ was used to

mask them. Religion was used as a tool to mobilize the people and because of its sensitivity—along with being a topic close to people’s hearts—it worked. However, the major problem is related to the political foundation of Pakistan: Did Jinnah set the stage for his successors to take undue advantage of the loopholes that were inherent in the structure of the state? Did he make it easier for them to assume positions that were authoritarian and dictatorial in nature? To find answers, it is pertinent for us to dig deeper into the political economy of the Pakistani state, the study for which has been flagged off by the Marxist anthropologist Hamza Alavi.¹ The ‘bureaucratic-military oligarchy’ framework is helpful in understanding the class structure of the nation. However, one needs to go beyond this particular model, which has been critiqued and reworked by several scholars. Thus, Jinnah’s presence looms large whenever one wishes to look into the workings of the modern Pakistani nation-state, which, even today, is dealing with rampant factionalism. Its present condition can only be understood by analysing its convoluted past, which is incomplete without the towering figure of Mohammad Ali Jinnah.

References

Alavi, Hamza. “The State in Post-Colonial Societies: Pakistan and Bangladesh.” *New Left Review* 1, no. 74 (1972): 59-81.

¹ Hamza Alavi, “The State in Post-Colonial Societies: Pakistan and Bangladesh,” *New Left Review* 1, no. 74 (1972): 59-81.