

Nehru, Jinnah and Partition

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No doubt Jinnah is a highly controversial figure. He is greatly admired and is father of the nation in Pakistan. He is often referred to as *Baba-e-Qaum* by Pakistanis. But he is hated by many in India and is considered mainly responsible for creation of Pakistan and hence a villain. Such extremes can never adequately define a person, let alone being understood adequately.

The motives for describing Jinnah as secular by two top Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders may be different but there is an element of truth in what they say. Shri Advani was speaking as a politician during his visit and may be he tried to please his hosts in Pakistan. Mr Jaswant Singh is under no such obligation and is speaking as a scholar as he is known to be of fairly independent mind and may not be much concerned about what RSS and BJP leaders might think.

It is not only in India that Jinnah is subject to different interpretations, some hating him as breaker of India and some absolving him of total responsibility for partition. Jinnah is subject to different interpretations in Pakistan itself, some moderate and liberal Muslims describing him as secular and often quoting his speech in the Constituent Assembly as a proof of his secularism. The conservatives and orthodox Muslims, on the other hand, projecting him as believer in two-nation theory and true Muslim who created Pakistan for Islam and Muslims.

Many people hold Nehru as responsible for partition and among those who hold Nehru as responsible there are all types of people, secular as well as communal. The question arises who is really responsible? Indians and Pakistanis while holding their own leaders as responsible they have completely exonerated the British rulers of their responsibility for partition.

Though secular elements at times do refer to the role of the British, communal forces in both the countries have completely absolved British. In RSS propaganda main culprits are Muslims led by Jinnah whereas in Pakistani propaganda it is Hindus led by Gandhi who are mainly responsible for partition. If one studies the complex developments carefully in mid-fifties it is difficult to fix total responsibility on any one person or one party. Different actors played different role adding up to partition of the country.

In truth Jinnah was secular more in western sense. Both Nehru and Jinnah never were religious as Gandhi and Maulana Azad were. Nehru was closer to Jinnah than to Gandhiji and Maulana Azad was closer to Gandhiji than to Jinnah. Maulana Azad also was deeply a religious person like Gandhiji though he was more liberal in religious matters than Gandhiji.

Jinnah was thoroughly westernized right from his younger days. He never had any religious training. He did not observe any Islamic taboos like liquor and pork. He never observed religious rituals. He even disagreed with Gandhiji about involving Ulama in politics and he opposed Gandhiji taking up Khilafat question. He believed in separation of politics from religion. He was described as Muslim Gokhale by friends. Gokhale was liberal and so was Jinnah.

Jinnah was certainly secular in this sense. He until 1935 described himself as Indian first and then Muslim. And, until 1937 he had never thought of partition

even in his dreams. He even entered into an informal understanding with the Congress in 1937 elections in UP. His differences with Indian National Congress had begun from 1928 onwards when his demands were rejected by the Nehru committee set up by the Congress to solve communal problem. He had even ridiculed the concept of Pakistan initially propounded by Rahmat Ali, a Cambridge University student.

The two-nation theory was deeply flawed and Jinnah had formulated it as a sort of political revenge on the Congress leaders like Nehru who refused to take two Muslim League nominees in the UP cabinet after Muslim league lost 1937 elections and Nehru was responsible for this. Maulana Azad tried to persuade Nehru to take the two nominees but unfortunately Nehru did not budge. Some scholars suggest that Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, an influential Congress leader from UP prompted Nehru. Whatever the reason politically it was unwise not to take two Muslim league nominees. Maulana Azad has pointed this out and has criticized Nehru on this count in his political biography *India Wins Freedom*.

For Jinnah it was outright betrayal and he decisively turned against Congress and gradually it led Jinnah to propounding two-nation theory. Thus two-nation theory was a politically contingent proposition rather than any religiously grounded proposition. Had Nehru shown little political sagacity this theory would not have come into existence at all. And in no sense of the word Jinnah ever wanted to establish an Islamic state in Pakistan. Jinnah would not have even approved of Pakistan having Islam as an official religion. That was not his bent of mind. If one goes by Jinnah's speech in the Pakistan Constituent Assembly it is doubtful if he wanted even a Muslim state, let alone an Islamic state. He was all for a secular state in Pakistan.

In those days of freedom movement communalism was not opposite of secularism, but of nationalism. Anyone who was anti-national was described as communal. Thus if at all Jinnah could be described as communal it is in this sense. And as pointed out above, Jinnah opted for partition not as a part of his conviction but as a result of political contingency.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was responsible in a way as he was not very happy with the Cabinet Mission Plan as it would have resulted in a weak centre as except defence, foreign policy and communication all residuary powers would have rested with the federating states. Both Nehru and Sardar Patel were not happy with this scheme. And as Azad has pointed out in his book Nehru, on being elected as president of the Congress in 1946, gave a statement that Cabinet Mission Plan could be, if necessary, changed. This infuriated Jinnah as Muslim League had also accepted the Plan and a composite Government was formed after 1946 fall elections.

This finally drove Jinnah to accept nothing less than partition. The greatest culprit was British rulers as they also wanted India divided so that they could easily establish intelligence and military base in Pakistan to stem the tide of revolution which by then had become a certainty in China. Nehru Government would have never allowed such bases in United India.

Apart from Jinnah the British and Nehru were also responsible for partition of the country. The greatest responsibility of partition, however lay on the British shoulder. They cleverly manoeuvred the complex situation in a way to make

partition a reality. Partition, as Maulana Azad also pointed out, was neither in the interest of India nor in the interest of Muslims themselves.

The ultimate result of partition is that Muslims of Indian subcontinent stand divided into three units and Kashmir problem is also the result of this tragedy. And both the countries are spending billions of rupees on their armies and now such powerful interests have developed in keeping conflict between the two countries alive that all efforts for peace talks fail. Now the only solution is in confederation of nations of South Asia, with no visa and common currency. If European countries could form a viable union despite the fact that they were at each others throats until late forties why can't people in South Asia?□