

Rehabilitating Jinnah

Within the saffron elite there is a swelling wave of dissatisfaction with Jaswant Singh's attempt to rehabilitate Jinnah in Indian history. It was too much for the saffron brigade. After all the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that has been demonising Jinnah for all these years is not yet at a crossroads. For them Jaswant book was a stirring manifesto, a reference point in India's bloody history, affecting the very core ideology and belief of BJP. The fear of ideas was so pervasive that the top leadership replied with summary expulsion of Mr Singh without bothering about issuing a show cause notice. Jinnah did not make a 'revolution in the revolution.' He wanted something simple, something that could be replicated even by poor muslims in remote villages. And he got it—Pakistan—because Congress Party failed to confront an explosive and unpredictable challenge from below.

Incidentally Pakistani Politicians irrespective of their colour and flag seem to have lost interest in Jinnah, the architect of two-nation theory and founder of Pakistan. The reason is simple: Jinnah is irrelevant in Pakistan's political theocracy. Also, Jinnah doesn't sell in vote market.

Only the ex-military ruler Musharraf used to occasionally quote Jinnah, in most cases as a trajectory to India-centric diplomacy. But it is not the case in India. He has been a villain since 1947.

Several factors combined to make Jinnah a villain and communalism certainly played its part. Both Congress and Muslim League were responsible for vivisection of India though British rulers were the real culprits for the trauma and nightmare that followed the bloodshed. No doubt Jinnah was instrumental in accelerating the pace of communalising India's age-old secular polity and contaminate the society. But objective conditions were very much there for communal division because of the failure of the progressives and liberals. Even in the absence of Jinnah someone else would have appeared on the scene to articulate the aspirations of the privileged section of muslim society.

They were desperate to have their exclusive world of their own under the sun and Jinnah simply delivered.

In truth the hindutva lobby in the Congress and the saffron establishment in its earlier incarnation were not unhappy over the partition award, rather communal award. They might have thanked Jinnah privately because they saw in it a real safety valve to get rid of a large section of the aggrieved.

Before Jaswant Singh BJP stalwart L K Advani while in Pakistan took a calculated risk by showering praise on Jinnah. But there lies a 'basic' difference between what Jaswant tries to convey to the world through his Jinnah book and Advani's remark about Jinnah. It was actually a tactical reference to Jinnah speech in Pakistan's constituent assembly. But Jaswant has tried to make a saint out of Jinnah while vilifying Nehru to some extent. And it was more than embarrassing for Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi to stomach uncharitable words about Sardar Patel. As Nehru too gets his due share of irresponsibility and arrogance in Jaswant's 'academic' exercise, Congress just made a mild protest to keep it on record.

The book that has got wide publicity for wrong reasons as the saffron ideologues allege, may sell well. Amidst the resurrected Jinnah debate Jaswant's proposed trip to Islamabad may be a business ploy. Maybe, there is something else in the game.

BJP is in a deep political crisis. They are a divided house over how to revamp the party, particularly after the debacle in the 15th parliamentary election. They are in search of voters, they are in search of a strategy that can work. Whether the Jinnah debate can make them appear moderate before the minority community is open to question.

For one thing history is replete with so many instances of rehabilitation of villains of yester years. In the dying days of Soviet era during Gorbachev's rule a number of Russian stalwarts who were earlier victimised and dumped into dustbin were gracefully rehabilitated. Nearer home the official communists have reevaluated the role of Subhas Bose in India's independence movement. And they have no problem in Jaswant's desire to rehabilitate Jinnah in Indian history.

When they supported Pakistan resolution and partition of India by invoking the popular notion of self-determination they had no problem. They reacted to spontaneity, having failed miserably to influence public opinion and explain the entirety from a marxist perspective. It was left to Gandhian Rajendra Prasad to challenge the two-nation theory and quote Stalin to define 'nation' in his famous 'India Partitioned'.

Today it is immaterial to duel over whether Jinnah was secular enough or Congress forced him to abandon secularism, even of his kind. Religion based nationalism is not the last word in nationalism otherwise Pakistan would not have been partitioned further to create Bangladesh. And yet the world continues to witness religion-based nation-state, even in recent decades. Creation of Bosnia was not accidental. Nor did Turkish Cypriot take place in vacuum. □□□