

## **Louis Parker, *Pakistan: The Accidental Birth of a Nation?***

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### ***Abstract***

*On the 3 June 1947 South Asians learned that the Indian subcontinent was to be partitioned creating two new independent states: India and Pakistan. Communities, families and friends were to be torn apart as the territory was split apart by a British man who had never before been to India, while using six-year-old data to separate the land on religious grounds. As a result of this decision twelve million people emigrated and around one million died. The leader of the Muslim League, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, argued that the Muslims in India were a 'nation by any definition', by doing this he was building on earlier Muslim sentiment echoed by Sir Syed Ahmed who argued that the desire that Hindus and Muslims 'remain equal is to desire the impossible'. As a result, two communities who had lived next to each other separated in bloody fashion. This essay will look to investigate the reasons why this happened and focus on the arguments perpetrated by the different religious communities.*

### **Introduction**

On the 3 June 1947 South Asians learned that India was to be partitioned into India and Pakistan.<sup>1</sup> East Bengal, West Punjab, the North Western Frontier Province (N.W.F.P) and Sindh formed Pakistan, while West Bengal and East Punjab comprised India.<sup>2</sup> Urvashi Butalia describes the partition as one of the 'great human convulsions of history' as twelve million people emigrated between the new states and around one million died.<sup>3</sup> The causes of why this happened remains contentious among historians.

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1 Phillips, 1962: 397-402.

2 Raychoudhary, 1980: 301-02.

3 Butalia, 2000: 3.

Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal state that Pakistani nationalists push the ‘two nation’ theory propagated by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the Muslim League leader. This argues that Indian Muslims comprised a distinct community from the Hindu majority, while Indian nationalists blame British imperialism for tearing apart India.<sup>4</sup> Jalal is known for her revisionist view, where she argues Jinnah pushed for partition despite not actually wanting this outcome, instead seeking a ‘union of India on the basis of Pakistan and Hindustan’.<sup>5</sup> This runs contrary to traditionalist views promulgated by Percival Spear, who takes a more literal reading of events, arguing the creation of Pakistan was Jinnah’s aim.<sup>6</sup>

This essay argues that Jinnah’s ultimate goal was to secure protection for his community, in whatever form was achievable. This appears to be the most logical way to explain how Jinnah was ready to accept less than partition in 1946 yet continued to push for an independent state after negotiations broke down. A ‘high politics’ approach focusing on Jinnah will be taken, Mushirul Hasan agrees with this approach stating that ‘never before in South Asian history did so few divide so many, so needlessly’.<sup>7</sup>

### **‘Two-Nation’ Theory**

Jinnah stated in March 1940 that the Muslims were not a minority but a ‘nation by any definition’ as they were a majority in ‘Bengal, the Punjab, N.W.F.P, Sindh and Baluchistan’.<sup>8</sup> The notion that Indian Muslims comprised

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4 Bose and Jalal, 1997: 165.

5 Jalal, 1985: 293.

6 Spear, 1965: 382.

7 Hasan, 2001: 43.

8 Gwyer and Appadorai, 1957: 440.

a separate nation was not a new idea, in 1888 Muslim leader Sir Syed Ahmed argued that India was ‘inhabited by two different nations’ and ‘to hope that both could remain equal is to desire the impossible and inconceivable’.<sup>9</sup> The same sentiment can be observed in a speech by Dr Muhammad Iqbal at a presidential address of the all-India Muslim League in December 1930. Here he states, ‘The Muslims of India are the only Indian people who can fitly be described as a nation in the modern sense of the word’.<sup>10</sup>

The traditionalist view takes the two-nation theory at face value with Richard Symonds claiming that Muslims and Hindus lived alongside each other but lived differently and the fear of Islam being in danger under Hindu domination existed within the Muslim community.<sup>11</sup> L.F. Rushbrook Williams agrees with Symonds, stating that partition arose due to the differences between the Muslim and Hindu ways of life, again citing the fear Muslims had at life under Hindu domination.<sup>12</sup> However, it appears that before the 1940s Muslims did not, at least through electoral methods, translate any fear of Hindu domination into support for the All- India Muslim League. In the 1937 provincial elections the Indian National Congress, a primarily Hindu organisation, won majorities in five of the eleven provinces and were the largest party in two others.<sup>13</sup> This fact lends itself to the argument that the separation of communities was due to successful campaigning of Jinnah in asserting himself as the leader of the Islamic community, polarising society.

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<sup>9</sup> Moon, *Divide and Quit*, 1999: 11.

<sup>10</sup> Gwyer and Appadorai, 1957: 439.

<sup>11</sup> Symonds, 1950: 60.

<sup>12</sup> Rushbrook Williams, 1966: 32.

<sup>13</sup> Symonds, 1950: 53-55.

R.J. Moore claims that after the 1937 elections the Muslim League were able to represent the Muslim population as a whole.<sup>14</sup> Jinnah was able to do this without an electoral mandate by claiming that as they were an exclusively Muslim party, they were the authentic representatives of the Ummah.<sup>15</sup> Farzana Shaikh provides the reasoning for this claim, stating that political legitimacy in Islam is derived from a shared communal identity, so the League could claim to be the sole representatives without an electoral mandate.<sup>16</sup> Asim Roy argues that after the 1935 Government of India Act, which offered Muslims just a third of central representation, Jinnah needed to turn the League into the third power in India, after the Congress and British, to ensure the status of the Muslim minority.<sup>17</sup> Jalal writes that to gain this power Jinnah needed to ensure the support of the Muslim majority provinces.<sup>18</sup> Gyanendra Pandey proposes that this may be an easier task than first thought because of how Indian Muslims act and think. She states that while the Hindus were nationalists first and Hindus second, Muslims were always Muslim first and foremost.<sup>19</sup> Gilmartin writes that Muslim unity was important in Jinnah's campaign for support and that he invoked the danger of a fitna (civil war) between the Muslims if the prospect of Hindu domination came true.<sup>20</sup>

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14 Moore, 2001: 160.

15 Shaikh, 2001: 85.

16 Ibid: 84.

17 Roy, 2001: 108.

18 Jalal, 1985: 35.

19 Pandey, 1999: 610.

20 Gilmartin, 1998: 1080.

This viewpoint is reflected by Akbar S. Ahmed who emphasises the cultural importance of Jinnah through the way he responded to perceived cultural threats to Islamic society.<sup>21</sup> This is illustrated by the inquiry committee set up by the League to investigate Muslim grievances in Congress provinces in 1938. The report reveals Muslim fears stating ‘in India we have a permanent Hindu majority and other communities are condemned to the position of perpetual minority’ so they must fight to ‘secure their political rights’.<sup>22</sup> This argument for securing rights was at the core of Jinnah’s mission, he believed unity within the Muslim community would give them the best chance to achieve security, either through a united India or an independent state. The League extended their organisation into the countryside and used propaganda to rouse Muslim support in the face of potential Hindu domination.<sup>23</sup>

On the 2 March 1940 the Lahore Resolution was passed by the League, rejecting the idea of a united India and stating that an independent sovereign state was their ultimate goal.<sup>24</sup> The resolution specifically stated that areas where ‘Muslims are numerically in a majority as in the North-West and Eastern zones of India should be grouped to constitute ‘Independent States’ in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign’.<sup>25</sup> This was the first time the League demanded an independent state.

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21 Ahmed, 1997: 89.

22 Gwyer and Appadorai, 1957: 411.

23 Moon, 1999: 18.

24 Dar, 2015: 150.

25 Gwyer and Appadorai, 1957: 443.

## **Cabinet Mission Plan**

In the 1945 elections Congress won 91% of the non-Muslim vote and 57% of seats in the central assembly, with majorities in every province but Bengal, Sindh, and Punjab. However, the league won 87% of the Muslim vote, suggesting that they now had considerable support from the community they claimed to be the sole representatives of.<sup>26</sup> It would appear that the League had split India down religious-partisan lines. Soon after the election the British Prime Minister Clement Attlee announced that ‘his colleagues are going to India with the intention of using their utmost endeavours to help her attain her freedom as speedily as possible’.<sup>27</sup>

Peter Hardy claims that Jinnah did not think the British would deny him Pakistan by force and he had two options; a loosely federated India with strong provincial powers or some form of Pakistan.<sup>28</sup> Hardy believes that Jinnah wanted Pakistan and it is easy to see why he reaches this conclusion. Jinnah had called for ‘Independent States’ in 1940 and the League claimed Muslims comprised a separate nation. However, Bose and Jalal contest this claim and argue that the Pakistan demand was just the means to win an equitable share of power for Muslims within an all-India centre.<sup>29</sup> In 1946 he would get a chance to be part of negotiations as the Secretary of State for India, Lord Pethick Lawrence announced a British cabinet delegation would be sent to try and ‘secure the widest measure of agreement’ with the ‘support of the main Indian parties’ for a resolution to the India problem.<sup>30</sup>

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26 Knight, 2012:148.

27 Phillips, 1962: 378.

28 Hardy, 1972: 247.

29 Bose and Jalal, 1997: 193.

30 Gwyer and Appadorai, 1957: 571.

The Cabinet Mission Plan proposed a three tier Indian Union with the three sections comprised of different provinces. Section A would consist of Madras, Bombay, the Central Provinces, United Provinces and Bihar, Section B would contain N.W.F.P, Punjab and Sindh while Section C would be made up from Bengal and Assam. Each section would choose their own constitution and the B and C sections would essentially provide the League with two semi-autonomous 'big' Pakistan's within a minimal federation.<sup>31</sup> Jalal believes this plan essentially contained Jinnah's demands as the principle of equality was now the 'essence of the proposal'<sup>32</sup>

This proposal is similar to a publication made by the League on the 12<sup>th</sup> of May 1946. Their proposal called for the six Muslim provinces of Punjab, N.W.F.P, Baluchistan, Sindh, Bengal and Assam to be grouped together alongside the Hindu provinces, essentially leaving a Pakistan and Hindustan. The groups would have autonomy in all but foreign affairs, defence and communications which would be dealt with by 'constitution making bodies of the two groups of provinces.'<sup>33</sup> Jinnah was ready to accept the Cabinet Mission Plan and the similarities between what was demanded by the League and proposed by the Plan have been used by revisionists to show how Jinnah did not want a sovereign Pakistan. Jalal believes that this would have gained the approval of provincial Muslims who wanted to 'hang

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31 Hardy, 1972: 248.

32 Jalal, 1985: 186.

33 Gwyer and Appadorai, 1957: 573-74.

on to, or perhaps even to improve their autonomy and standing against the centre', and the Cabinet Mission Plan would protect their autonomy.<sup>34</sup>

This plan was similar to the demands made by the League, and they were very different to the demand of sovereignty in 1940, so it can be suggested Jinnah's main aim was just to secure protections whatever form they may appear in. For Jalal the acceptance of the Plan was the first time that Jinnah actually showed his hand in negotiations.<sup>35</sup> It seems feasible that as time progressed and Jinnah was able to gain Muslim majority support, he believed the Plan offered the best opportunity for protecting his community.

The Congress rejected the plan, stating that 'India must necessarily have a strong central authority capable of representing the nation with power'.<sup>36</sup> So the Cabinet Mission declared that 'after prolonged discussion' the Indian leaders failed to 'arrive at an agreement'.<sup>37</sup> Pandey believes Congress leaders were agitated by the compulsory provincial groupings and the weak centre was the reason the plan broke down.<sup>38</sup> Jinnah pins the blame for the breakdown of the plan on the Congress, stating that they he had to 'emphatically repudiate their Bogus claim that they represent India' as 'the Congress are a Hindu organization and they do not represent any other community' and they have 'no right to represent or speak on behalf of the Muslims and their refusal to accept the proposal for an Interim Government

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34 Jalal, 1985: 179.

35 Jalal, 1985: 179.

36 Gwyer and Appadorai, 1957: 591.

37 Ibid: 593.

38 Pandey, 2001: 22.



is based on sinister motives... they wanted to break the parity between Muslims and the caste Hindus'.<sup>39</sup>

He claims to be their sole spokesman and cannot accept the 'Hindu organization' to have a say over Muslim affairs. We can refer back to Sir Syed Ahmed who claimed a strong central government in India was impossible because 'the large community would totally override the interests of the smaller'.<sup>40</sup> This is Jinnah's fear and is why he was willing to accept the plan as it diminished centralised power. Hasan writes Jinnah's intentions do not matter, what matters was his successful articulation of the two-nation theory and the mobilization of the community.<sup>41</sup> This is in part true, as he needed this to be able to gain any outcome that was beneficial to his community, however it is clear that by pushing for partition and then accepting something less his aims were flexible.

After the plan broke down partition was deemed inevitable and the British announced the Indian Independence Act in July 1947, stipulating that from the 15 August 1947 'two independent Dominions shall be set up in India, to be known respectively as India and Pakistan'.<sup>42</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion it appears that the only consistent aim of Jinnah was the protection of his community and that he was prepared to be flexible in achieving it. The demands of Congress and refusal to accept the Cabinet

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39 Gwyer and Appadorai, 1957: 615.

40 Moon, 1999: 12.

41 Hasan, 2001: 42.

42 Phillips, 1962: 407.

Mission Plan left no alternative to Jinnah but to accept partition if he wanted to protect the Islamic community from domination, so the birth of Pakistan was not accidental but what was believed to be the best option for protecting his community.

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