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MUSLIM SELF-DETERMINATION: JINNAH CONGRESS CONFRONTATION, 1943-44

by Simonetta Casci

The Muslim League Annual Session, held in Lahore in March 1940, led to the enunciation of the two nations theory and with the approval of the Lahore Resolution marked a turning point in the communal conflict. In his presidential address, Jinnah argued that Indian Muslims were not only a religious-cultural minority but formed a nation separate from the Hindus. Labelled by the press as the Pakistan Resolution, the Lahore Resolution evolved Jinnah's theory along territorial lines, requiring the separation of the Muslim majority areas. In later years, during the struggle for independent India, while the League hoped to become the sole representative of Muslim India in spite of the contradictory interests of Muslim majority and minority provinces, Jinnah's two nations theory was at the centre of the political debate.

Jinnah's presidential address and the Lahore Resolution were part of a complex operation which aimed both at the construction of a national identity for the Muslim minority and at the solution of the communal conflict by introducing the principle of equality between Muslims and Hindus. The complexity of this operation was reflected by the vague and ambiguous language of the Lahore Resolution which mentioned the formation of Muslim states in the North Western and Eastern zones of India without any reference to the centre failing to specify whether it indicated the definite separation of these areas from the rest of India or the formation of a loose confederation with a minimum central authority in which the two communities were to be equally represented.

Jinnah's two nations theory was a battle cry for the protection of

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Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Orientali, Università di Bologna.

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the Muslim community, which challenged Congress supremacy and above all countered the exclusive concept of Hindu nationalism. Orthodox historiography which views the Lahore Resolution as the culmination of the Hindu-Muslim conflict and as a clear separatist decision appears simplistic. A revisionist school, mainly represented by Ayesha Jalal, argues that the Lahore Resolution was a strategic move and was used by Jinnah as a bargaining counter in the negotiations with Congress and the British Government (1). It was the Congress desire to create a united India with strong central government which led to partition.

The aim of this paper is to test the revisionist thesis with special reference to the Jinnah-Congress confrontation in the years 1943-1944.

At the League sessions, which took place in April and December 1943, respectively in Delhi and Karachi, there is no clear evidence of the inevitability of partition. During his presidential addresses in Delhi and Karachi Jinnah confirmed his two nations theory denouncing the impossibility of the democratic principle of counting heads in India. His insistence on establishing first and foremost the principle of equality between Muslims and Hindus was a precondition to any discussion to replace the 1935 Constitution, therefore his idea of Pakistan remained vague. Jinnah's flexible strategy was further reinforced by his stress on the economic viability of Pakistan, which did not necessarily mean a desire to take Pakistan outside the confines of India, but meant the inclusion of undivided Bengal and Punjab in Pakistan.

The events of March-October 1944, however, cast some doubts on the revisionist logic. Jinnah's desire to challenge the influence of Hindu communal elements on Congress through a meeting with Gandhi for the discussion of the Rajagopalachari formula proves Jinnah's hope for a gradual acceptance of the Pakistan project, which still remained undefined. But Gandhi's attempt to reconcile Muslim India granting self-determination within India, while rejecting not only the two nations theory but also the inclusion of undivided Bengal and Punjab within the Muslim zones, was not acceptable to Jinnah. This suggests that, if the worse come to the worse, a definite parting of ways was not excluded.

Involution of Congress

At the beginning of 1943 India's political future looked bleak. The Raj had brutally repressed the Quit India movement in 1942 and

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(1) A. JALAL, *The Sole Spokesman. Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*, Cambridge 1985.

had arrested the nationalist leadership, leaving the Congress weak and ineffective. Now that the Japanese offensive on the Assam border had been stopped and the military situation had improved, British rule in India did not face a serious challenge: the prospect of negotiations for the release from jail of Congress leaders, for the formation of a national government and for a gradual transfer of power had receaded.

After the suppression of the nationalist revolt the Congress was partly controlled by right-wing communal elements, who did not favour an understanding with the League. This further alienated the Muslim party, which had already kept aloof from the Quit India movement, accusing the Congress of bypassing the League and forcing the government to surrender to Hindu Raj. The detention of the nationalists restricted contacts between the Congress leadership and Jinnah, whilst meetings between him and those leaders who remained out of prison were rare.

In September 1942, however the industrialist Birla, a personal friend of both Gandhi and Rajagopalachari, met Jinnah and found him willing to discuss the communal issue; but, according to Birla, Jinnah's incapability to define Pakistan had obstructed a fruitful dialogue. This did not prevent Birla from encouraging Rajagopalachari who « was now working very hard to bring about a solution of the present deadlock », as Birla wrote to Lord Wedgwood in November 1942 (2). The result of Rajagopalachari's hard work was a formula sketched together with Birla, which he submitted to Gandhi during his fast at the Aga Khan palace in early 1943. Gandhi gave his assent to the scheme which accepted the principle of separation subject to several conditions. Gandhi's acceptance did not imply the consent of Congress, which in April 1942 had voted against Rajagopalachari's resolution promoting the co-operation with the League and had induced the Madras leader to resign from Congress. Thus an atmosphere of frustration and helplessness prevailed in the country while Congress and League leaders showed no desire for a settlement. On the other hand, the British insisted on the solution of the communal deadlock as a *sine qua non* for the concession of constitutional reforms.

In December 1938 Congress had forbidden its members to join the Hindu Mahasabha, branded as communal, but the influence of the Hindu Mahasabha on Congress conservative elements was still strong as prominent Mahasabha leaders resigned from their organisation and remained within Congress, constituting an important pressure group. At the same time the paramilitary RSS, due to its appeal to young Hin-

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(2) M. M. KUDAISYA, *The Public Career of G. D. Birla, 1911-1947*, PhD. thesis, Cambridge, 1992, p. 232.

dus, had registered considerable expansion in North India and was denouncing the Congress as an ineffective answer to the Muslim challenge. Gowalkar, the RSS ideologue, who considered *mlecchas* « those who do not subscribe to the social laws dictated by the Hindu religion and culture » (3), by 1939 had launched an attack on foreign races amongst which he included Muslims. He rejected the idea of a multi-ethnic nation and declared that foreign races in Hindustan either had to adopt the Hindu culture and learn to hold Hindu religion in reverence, or had to remain in India, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment and not even holding citizen's rights! As « People's War » (4), weekly of the Communist Party, commented, in India the continuance of the deadlock and the failure of the patriotic parties to solve it brought with it its own nemesis. The continuous frustration of patriots was leading to the growth of disruptive forces and tendencies and, it perceptively added, the failure to bring about unity was driving one of the major organisations (the League) into channels which would only bring disaster to the country as a whole.

Muslim minority feared assimilation. It was the desire to assert its own national identity that, in those years, transformed League sessions in celebration of renascent Muslim India. In April 1943 the League session took place in Delhi, where an atmosphere reminiscent of lost splendour was the perfect scenario for this theatrical performance. Attended by over a lakh of persons it took place in a *pandal*, where pictures of Jinnah dominated the scenery. A map of Pakistan was placed at the head of the dais. The Karachi session, in the following December, displayed even more grandeur. Jinnah, wearing a traditional Muslim dress, was taken in a long procession, preceded by camels and horses ridden by *hajis* in Arab costumes. Muslim national identity crystallised through the narrative of its own history from the Mughal glory to its decline. « We come under the category of the fallen » had said Jinnah a few years before. Now time had come to build a new Muslim nation and this would be the most formidable task that Muslims had undertaken since the fall of the Mughal Empire (5).

Notwithstanding this show of grandeur, Jinnah was conscious of Muslim backwardness and of the League's weakness. In April 1943 he

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(3) M. S. Gowalkar, *We, or Our Nationhood Defined*, Nagpur, 1939, p. 32, in C. Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics, 1925 to the 1990s*, London 1996, p. 56.

(4) « People's War », Bombay, 9 January 1944.

(5) Jinnah's presidential address delivered at the Special Pakistan Session of the Punjab Muslim Students Federation, 2 March 1941, in J. Ahmed (ed.), *Some Recent Speeches and Writings of Mr. Jinnah*, vol. I, Lahore 1958, p. 246.

openly admitted that Muslims were divided by local intrigues, sectional interests and jealousies; the Muslim majority provinces had failed to play the part they were entitled to and the League's machinery was still ineffective (6). He compared Muslim India to a phoenix being resurrected from its ashes. Yet, as he often declared in his speeches, Muslim India evoked in him the image of a sick man, who had scarcely recovered from his deathbed (7).

At the Delhi session Jinnah made it known that he favoured a direct contact with Gandhi, however leaving to the Mahatma the final move. Since the Lahore Resolution the League had ceaselessly and virulently attacked Congress denouncing the growing influence of the Hindu lobby that described the making of Pakistan as « India's vivisection », thus precluding any dialogue. Now that Birla's and Rajagopalachari's concerted efforts had weakened Gandhi's faith in India's indivisibility, Jinnah hoped to outmanoeuvre his enemies, by reaching an understanding with the Mahatma, in spite of past frictions and deep political divergencies. A settlement with the Mahatma would be all the most beneficent because, as the Viceroy wrote to Lord Amery, Gandhi alone could prevent « a swing to the Hindu Mahasabha » with the « adoption of an even more intransigent attitude towards Muslim pretensions » (8).

Jinnah's eagerness was not lost on Gandhi. A few weeks later, from jail, he wrote a note to Jinnah suggesting a face to face meeting rather than communicating through correspondence and added that he was in Jinnah's hand. The Government announced Gandhi's request to forward a note to Jinnah expressing his wish to meet him, but it refused to forward the note. Still a door to negotiations was left open. At the League session in Karachi, Liaquat Ali Khan briefly mentioned without further comment an undelivered letter addressed from Gandhi to Jinnah and intercepted by the Indian Government. Jinnah, after his appeal to Gandhi, waited more than a mere non committal reply: the meeting with Gandhi had to be on the basis of Pakistan and of the two nations theory.

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(6) Jinnah's presidential address to the AIML's session at Delhi, 24 April 1943 in S. S. PIRZADA (ed.), *Foundations of Pakistan: All-India Muslim League Documents: 1906-1947*, vol. II, Karachi 1970, p. 405.

(7) Jinnah's presidential address to the AIML's session at Karachi, 24 December 1943, in S. S. PIRZADA (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 450-451.

(8) Field Marshal Viscount Wavell to Mr. Amery in N. MANSERGH and E. W. R. LUMBY (eds.), *The Transfer of Power 1942-7*, vol. IV: *The Bengal Famine and the New Viceroyalty, 15 June 1943 - 31 August 1944*, London 1973, p. 887 (henceforth TP. IV).

Jinnah's Concept of Nation

By 1943-44 Jinnah had clearly defined the concept of a Muslim nation in separatist terms. And yet, this new approach to the communal conflict did not contradict Jinnah's political vision, which envisaged Muslims as part of the Indian nation. From the Lucknow Pact of 1916 through the policy of the 1920s and 1930s, his trajectory had been permeated by his commitment to the safeguard of Muslims' interests. The policy of power devolution to the provinces, the Congress dependence on the provincial Hindu element and its refusal to an agreement with the League after the elections of 1937 had changed the all-India picture so much so Jinnah had to reconsider his strategy entirely (9).

Jinnah's nationalist theory was the result of various, sometimes contradictory elements: the transformation of the Muslim community into a political minority; the influence of Western rationalism on the modernism of Aligarh and Jinnah; the growing ferment which pervaded the Muslim community in the 30s; the need to recognize and reconsider Muslim identity, the desire for independence combined with the difficult integration with the Congress, all these factors were reflected in the two nations theory or, at least, could be projected within it.

In Jinnah's view, in the Indian context, it was impossible to apply an universalist and territorial pattern of nationalism. He maintained Muslims to be a separate nation. He recognized that the community was fragmented because its members belonged to different states, often talked different languages and were divided between Sunnis, Shias and other sects. Nevertheless, a Muslim, when converted, merged in a separate and antagonistic social order, as in the view of Hindu religion, he became a *mleccha* (10). This transformed the community into a nation because, in Ambedkar's words, the Muslims as an exclusive group possessed « a feeling of consciousness of kind » and « a longing not to belong to any other group », the essence of nationalism (11).

Jinnah's division of Indian society into two opposite communal blocks, denied the fusion of the two civilizations. As Ambedkar explained the peculiarity of Indian Islam, any apparent social fusion was « the result of certain purely mechanical causes. They are partly due to incomplete conversions. In a land like India, where the majority of the Muslim population has been recruited from caste and out-caste Hin-

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(9) see D. PAGE, *Prelude to Partition: The Indian Muslims and the Imperial System of Control 1920-1932*, Oxford 1982.

(10) Jinnah's presidential address at the Special Pakistan Session of the Punjab Muslim Students Federation, 2 March 1941, in J. AHMED (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 253.

(11) B. R. AMBEDKAR, *Pakistan or Partition of India*, Bombay 1946, p. 13.

dus, the Muslimization of the convert was neither complete nor effectual, either from fear of revolt or because of the method of persuasion or insufficiency of preaching due to insufficiency of priests » (12). Therefore, concluded Ambedkar, « common features are not the result of a conscious attempt to adopt and adapt to each other's ways and manners..... » (13).

Yet, the two nations theory expressed the necessity to protect Muslim minority and was not based on an exclusive concept of nation. Jinnah's frequent reference to the existence of two Indias, even if expressed in a negative context, implied the acceptance of a shared Indian identity. He admitted that the great majority of Muslims were converted from Hinduism to Islam and belonged to the same race as Hindus. Jinnah's rare appeals to religion did not challenge Hindu religion, but aimed at creating an united platform for Muslim India transcending sectarian and regional divisions. *Dawn*'s frequent articles on the meaning of the battle of Kerbala and of the *hijra* in the process for reconstruction of a national identity reflect such strategy. « A nation's progress depends much on its memory, » argued an editorial, which invited Muslims to learn from the sanguinary struggle of their ancestors that « discord has been the root cause of their (Muslims) decline and fall.... Unity is the watchword of every nation with a will to live and progress. » (14).

Jinnah's construction of a national culture was very much inspired by the Mughal past, to which he often referred as a symbol of Muslim power. One might claim that even his own image, his personal aloofness and his obsessive concern for aesthetic perfection partly drew inspiration from the Mughals. It was this evocative recalling of the past which accentuated both the sense of grief and loss pervading the Muslim community and led the desire to sacrifice for its national assertion. Mughals evoked a culture, where the fluidity of religious identities diluted conflicts and favoured synthesis and integration. But the appeal to the Mughal past was anyway bound to divide and create unities which were difficult to integrate, being based on archaic categories (15).

There is a link between Jinnah's secular representation of the Muslim community and the representation of the Muslim community in terms of the high tradition which accentuates the class element un-

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(12) B. R. Ambedkar, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
(13) B. R. Ambedkar, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
(14) « Dawn », Delhi, 17 January 1943.
(15) See in a different context S. Kaviraj, *The Imaginary Institution of India*, in P. Chatterjee, G. Pandey (eds.), *Subaltern Studies*, vol. VII, Delhi 1992, p. 9 « ... on the generation of a "past principle"... ».

derlying the two nations theory. This link is stressed by the importance of the concept of power in Jinnah's nationalist discourse. As Farzana Shaikh rightly points out from a traditionalist perspective, major exponents of the Muslim community had overlooked the importance of power in concepts such as *millat* and *qaum* arguing in favour of a composite nationalism which considered the Muslim community « a *millat*, which could coexist together with other religious communities » keeping its separate identity (16). It was Iqbal who restored the importance of power in the « modern Muslim's *din-i-qa'yym*: a faith coextensive with, not exclusive of, the nation "in its true cultural and political sense" » (17). Jinnah evolved this concept on secular lines: as soon as this parity between the Muslim and the Hindu elite was accepted by the Congress, recognizing the power of the Muslim minority, the two nations theory and the Lahore Resolution would not necessarily imply a separation leading to the definite parting of ways.

The main point behind Jinnah's stand was that in India, because of the pervasiveness of the two civilizations it would be necessary adjust democracy by the introduction of qualifications and limitations. In an article published in 1940 under the title « The Constitutional Maladies of India » he asserted that a democratic system based on the concept of a homogeneous nation such as England was not applicable to heterogeneous and fragmented countries such as India. This simple fact was the root cause of all India's constitutional ills. The Hindu Muslim conflict could not be solved in the same way as centuries ago European states had solved religious controversies through the separation of state and church, he argued. « ...both these religions are definite social codes which govern not so much man's relation with his God as man's relations with his neighbours » (18) and bring about vertical rather than the horizontal divisions democracy envisages.

As he declared at the Delhi League session in India « .. One society and nation, will by its permanent majority, destroy another nation or society in permanent minority » (19), because where parties represented communities based on set cultural religious identities, a minority, especially so in a majority system, would remain so forever.

These ideas were reflected in his stringent criticism of the

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(16) F. SHAIKH, *Community and Consensus in Islam-Muslim Representation in Colonial India, 1860-1947*, Bombay 1981, p. 203.

(17) F. SHAIKH, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

(18) Article published in « Time and Tide », London, 19 January 1940, cited in M. H. SHAHID (ed.), *Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah (Speeches, Statements, Writings, Letters, etc.)*, Lahore 1976, p. 122.

(19) Jinnah's presidential address to the AIML's session at Delhi, 24 April 1943 in S. S. PIRZADA (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 415.

Congress, whose evolution proved the pervasive character of communal identities. In April 1943 he argued that the secular approach of Gokhale, who separated political from social issues and understood the Muslim fear of assimilation, made possible a cooperation between the two major Indian communities. Nevertheless, the infusion of Hindu ideology in the nationalist discourse by extremist leaders such as B. C. Pal, had made the communal divide irreversible. And, according to Jinnah, Gandhi, whose religious drive evoked Hindu values and traditions, did not encourage the fusion of the two civilizations but favoured the Muslim assimilation by the Hindus. Congress refusal to form coalition ministries with the League in 1937 and the Congress effort to enlist Muslim support through the mass-contact campaign, which was considered by Jinnah as an attempt to liquidate the League confirmed the antagonism of the two cultures (20). Only the League could represent the Muslim minority as in a society permeated by pervasive culture only communal parties could guarantee the dignity and self-esteem of national groups and their economic advancement.

Jinnah's Idea of Pakistan.

This said, it is necessary to stress that, in Jinnah's presidential addresses in Delhi and Karachi there is no evidence that partition was the inevitable consequence of the two nations theory. *Inter alia* the inherent weakness of the Muslim community and the League's difficult position in the Muslim majority provinces, forced Jinnah to keep his options open.

Jinnah's flexible strategy was reflected in the ambiguity of the Pakistan idea. Jinnah was deeply influenced by modern Western culture and was persuaded that the imposition of a Western model on the complex Indian structure was impossible without a drastic solution which would reconsider *ex novo* the irreversible conflict between Hindus and Muslims. The ultimate solution was the formation of Pakistan and Hindustan, which would cancel Hindu majority and Muslim minority as categories. This could imply the formation of two completely independent states, but could also imply the merging of the two units in a confederation.

In Jinnah's view, the formation of a loose federation with widest freedom and residuary powers to the units could not solve the communal issue. As he argued in front of the League delegates in Delhi, « Federation however described and in whatever terms it is put, must ultimately deprive the federating units of authority in all vital mat-

(20) *Ibid.*, pp. 405-414.

ters » (21). In India this would lead to the annihilation of the entire Muslim nation, as the state would not be neutral between the two national groups. Therefore, the creation of a territorial state was imperative for the protection of the Muslim minority.

Yet, nations can attain various degrees of political independence: self-determination and claim for a territory do not necessarily envisage secession but often express a demand for autonomy inside the framework of a multinational state. In December 1943, in Karachi, at great length Jinnah quoted John Bright who, as early as 1857, had recognized that, if in future England would withdraw from India, it « should leave so many presidencies built up and firmly compacted together, each able to support its own Government... » (22). The formation of a voluntary federation of autonomous states had been a recurring theme in Jinnah's speeches. In 1941, while discussing the economic structure of the independent subcontinent, he had configured the creation of autonomous and independent zones without a defined Indian centre. In defence matters Muslims would guard the frontier and Hindus would guard South and Western India telling « the world hands off India » (23).

According to Jinnah the unity of India was artificial and had been created by the British. Therefore British refusal to grant Pakistan was the real obstacle to the independence of the Indian subcontinent. At the end of February 1944, in an interview with the « News Chronicle » of London Jinnah replied to Lord Wawell's assertion, made in front of the legislative assembly, to the effect that India was a geographical unity. In the interview Jinnah insisted on the immediate concession by the Government of a new constitution dividing India into Pakistan and Hindustan. The formation of Pakistan and Hindustan would not weaken India's geographical unity in the same way as Russia's geographical unity was not weakened by the division of its territory into 16 autonomous states. He argued the Pakistan principle was already working smoothly « in the five predominantly Muslim provinces where Hindus are holding cabinet offices in the Muslim League governments » (24), implying that the Government should only provide a constitutional frame. After the concession of Pakistan there would follow a transitional period leading to a gradual approach, during which

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(21) *Ibid.*, p. 426.

(22) Jinnah's presidential address to the AIML's session at Karachi, 24 December 1943 in S. S. Pirzada (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 458.

(23) Jinnah's presidential address at the Special Pakistan Session of the Punjab Muslim Students Federation, 2 March 1941, in J. Ahmed (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 258.

(24) Jinnah's interview with the « News Chronicle », London, 20 February 1944 in J. Ahmed (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 61.

the British would have paramount authority over the armed forces and over foreign affairs (25). As Twynam later wrote to Wavell, several points had emerged: the League was determined to have Pakistan and did not eclude negotiations with Hindustan; Pakistan's main objective was to secure a base for negotiations on an absolute equal footing; the union might amount only to agreement as to a « minimum centre »; many years might elapse before the union was effected (26).

Jinnah's interview caused an outcry in the Indian press. His assertion that « if British government announced its intention of setting up Pakistan and Hindustan, Congress and Hindus would accept it within three months » (27) was considered a refusal to negotiate with Congress. His request to settle the Pakistan issue before independence by a constitutional procedure was explained as collusion with English interests. Khaliquzzaman maintained that Jinnah requested a clear British declaration in favour of Pakistan which was not conditional on Hindu acceptance of Pakistan nor on the formation of a National Government.

There is a strong analogy between the interview with the « News Chronicle » and Jinnah's article *The Constitutional Maladies of India* published in January 1940. There he argued that Muslims would never accept « a federal constitution framed by Congress methods in accordance with the Congress maxim of majority rule » and added « that there are in India two nations, who both must share the governance of this common motherland » (28). Jinnah's emphasis on a constitutional procedure to be started before English withdrawal seemed to postpone the question of the definite separation between Pakistan and Hindustan, hinting at an agreement between Congress and League during the period of transition on a final solution. Ambedkar, who also advocated the necessity for a constitutional procedure and for a period of adjustment, suggested that an experimental Pakistan should be tried for ten years. After this period, if the Muslims in Pakistan decided to amalgamate with Hindustan, they would be free to do so.

The economic case for Pakistan

The Pakistan project was further defined by the discussion of the new country's economic viability started with the appointment of the planning committee during the Karachi League session of December

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(25) *Ibid.*, p. 61.

(26) Sir Twynam to Field Marshal Viscount Wavell, in TP IV, p. 840.

(27) Jinnah's interview with the « News Chronicle », London, 20 February 1944 in J. AHMED (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 61.

(28) M. H. SHAHID, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

1943. The League's primary concern was Muslim total control over a viable economic territory, which would enable Muslim middle class to challenge Hindu supremacy. Jinnah, as the great majority of Indian nationalists, believed in the interdependence between nationalism, democracy and economic progress. His modernist drive, a challenge to the traditional Muslim world still anchored to feudal values, had permeated his political action from the very beginning. It reflected the legacy of Gokhale, one of his early mentors, whose nationalism did not indulge in revivalism, but aimed at the construction of a state where democracy was linked to growth (29).

The idea of Pakistan, with its emphasis on modernity and on economic liberalism, created great expectations amongst the Muslim middle classes, who felt neglected and emarginated by Congress. Jinnah's efforts were directed at promoting education, land reforms and state industrialization in the Pakistan area. He encouraged the Muslim community to keep pace with the economic development of the country. He urged students to improve their education to acquire a scientific and technical knowledge, which would allow them to enter commerce and business instead of applying for second class government jobs. Muslims had no wish to harm their sister communities, but they had to remember that a nation could never assert itself as long as it was dominated economically (30).

At the beginning of 1944, in concomitance with the publication of the Bombay Plan, « Dawn » launched a propaganda campaign denouncing the economic domination of the Hindu majority. The Muslim awareness of being barred from economic advancement available to others reinforced the already strong sense of identity of the community tying the need to protect its culture to the grievances of discriminatory redistribution (31). The League's newspaper explained the communal divide in economic terms and attacked Hindu supremacy. Hindu economic superiority was denounced as the cause of Muslim backwardness: the middle class was excluded from professional opportunities by better educated Hindus, peasants were oppressed by Hindu landowners and moneylenders, Hindu shopkeepers and traders dominated the market. One of the recurring grievances was that Mus-

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(29) M. G. Torri, *Nazionalismo indiano e nazionalismo musulmano in India nell'era coloniale*, in A. V., *Dietro la bandiera — Emancipazioni coloniali, identità nazionali, nazionalismi nell'età contemporanea*, Pisa 1996 p. 175.

(30) Jinnah's speech at a meeting of the Bombay District Muslim Students' Fed'ration, 2 February 1944, in J. Ahmed, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 52.

(31) see on self-determination and discriminatory redistribution A. Buchanan, *The Morality of Secession*, in W. Kymlicka (ed.), *The Rights of Minority Cultures*, Oxford 1995, pp. 350-374.

lims were excluded from the economic development both in Muslim-minority provinces and in Muslim-majority provinces. In Bengal, trade and commerce were in the hands of Europeans, Marwaris or, to a lesser extent, Bengali Hindus. The commercial communities were a caste in themselves and had shut the doors to Muslims, considered as outcastes (32). In the other Pakistan provinces, the economic progress of the community was as slow. Non-Muslims with non-Muslim capital financed and controlled industries, where educated Muslims would not be employed and where Muslims worked only as labourers (33). Muslims lacked all opportunities to industrialise their homeland. Therefore, Hindu industrialists, who had established their factories in Hindu India, bought staple cotton in the Muslim zone, compressed it in their own workshops and exported it to Hindu India. « ... (Muslims) get in exchange clothes manufactured in Hindu India. It would be surprising to note that even these anti-colonial industries are run by labour especially imported from Hindu India. In the heart of the Punjab there are some places like the districts of Lyalpur, Guardaspur, and Montgomery which they have converted into Hindu colonies by such immigration » (34).

But the prospects for Pakistan were not encouraging. The North-West zone was mainly agricultural. Industrially it was backward: while the population amounted to about 12.3% of the population of British India, the proportion of its industries being 5.1% of those of British India and its mineral development 5.4% (35) with very little reserve of coal and practically no iron ore. Bengal's industry was developed, but it was concentrated in Calcutta and its surroundings, while the rest of the North-East zone was predominantly agricultural and impoverished. In Bengal jute was mostly exported and processed in the Calcutta jute mills. Given this situation, according to the Coupland report, Pakistan would be financially practicable but with difficulty. Coupland calculated a small credit balance of about 297 lakhs of rupees or £ 2.2 millions for the North-West zone excluding defense expenditures, which according to Coupland was the crux of the financial problem (the economic viability of Pakistan was calculated on revenues and expenditures for 1938-39).

The distribution of the Muslim and Hindu population made the economic uncertainty of Pakistan more dramatic. In Jinnah's view, the only guarantee for the economic survival of Pakistan was the inclusion

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(32) « Dawn », Delhi, 12 February 1944.
(33) « Dawn », Delhi, 6 February 1944.
(34) « Dawn », Delhi, 25 July 1944.
(35) R. COUPLAND, *Indian Politics 1936-1942*, London 1943, p. 78.

of undivided Bengal and Punjab, which were predominantly inhabited by a Muslim population, but which included vast areas where Muslims were in fact a minority. If the logic of partition was applied to Punjab and Bengal, Pakistan would be left with a Punjab unsatisfactorily partitioned and with a block of backward rural districts in Bengal. The creation of a greater Pakistan would not provide a definite solution to the communal problem, but would dilute the Hindu Muslim conflict and enable the economic advancement of the Muslim middle classes.

It has often been argued that the inclusion of undivided Bengal and Punjab aimed at solving the communal problem through a system of communal hostages as the Hindu minority in Pakistan would ensure the safety of the Muslim minority in Hindustan. Evidence shows that Jinnah's logic opposed a Pakistan based on majority tyranny and retaliation. The Pakistan of Jinnah's dream was a secular state and not a theocracy. As he often said, he hoped that in the future, in the political sphere, Muslims would cease to consider themselves as Muslims and Hindus would cease to consider themselves as Hindus. Yet, Pakistan would provide special rights for minorities; would ask communities to choose their representatives who enjoyed their confidence; would find place for them in all cabinets. This suggests rather the desire to create a mixed secular state, where equality would be strengthened by the principle of political representation for minorities, given the extreme fragmentation of society. The inclusion in the cabinet of political leaders representing the more significant minority groups hinted at a democratic power sharing system. As there was no clear mention of a system of proportional representation, the majority system appeared to be maintained, with the safeguard of separate electorates for the minorities.

Jinnah's reference to a fair political representation for Hindu and Sikh minorities (36) showed an inclination towards a power sharing system, which was based on the predetermination of the groups which would be allowed to enjoy special privileges. There is no mention of the introduction of a more flexible system, which, through the proportional representatives or the concession of autonomy to geographically concentrated groups, would accept the rights of minor nationalities (Bengali, Sindhi). And this inferred the creation of a centralized state which would allow the state intervention in the process of development. Jinnah opposed the federal solution proposed by the Congress which would hinder smooth economic development both in Pakistan

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(36) Jinnah's presidential address delivered at the Special Pakistan Session of the Punjab Muslim Students' Federation, 2 March 1941, in J. AHMED (ed.), *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 259.

and Hindustan. He suggested the creation of a confederation formed by two economically independent and viable states, Hindustan and a greater Pakistan. These two states would coordinate their economic development in parallel with similar policies. If no agreement was reached between the two, than a greater Pakistan would still be able to pursue its own agenda.

The Rajagopalachari Formula and the Jinnah Gandhi talks

Whilst Jinnah wished to keep a flexible strategy, there were powerful forces limiting his options: Hindu Big Business which had prospered during the war required a strong central state. This would lead to a different and separatist solution to the communal conflict. Time was working against Jinnah as Hindu commercial interests would play a pivotal role in the economic reconstruction of India after the war reinforcing the Congress position and leading to the further marginalization of the League. Notwithstanding his desire to meet Gandhi, this induced Jinnah to a stiff attitude.

The League's fear increased with the publication of the Bombay Plan at the end of January 1944. The Plan published by the major Indian industrialists amongst them Birla, assumed that after the war India would have a national government constituted on a federal basis and that the economic planning would be the responsibility of the central government. The aim of the ambitious Bombay Plan was to raise the outputs from agriculture by 130%, from industry by 500% and from services by 200%. The Plan promised to double the per capita income but, in fact, it proposed a rapid expansion of the industry to the immense profit of Indian Big Business.

In the communal context industrialization was a particularly thorny issue. It pointed out the extreme backwardness of the Muslim areas and of the Muslim community, who, by 1944, felt threatened by the industrial development and by the improved relations between Congress and Hindu industrialists. In the past, major Indian capitalists, notably with the occasional exception of G. D. Birla, had more or less collaborated with government. Nevertheless, when war demand helped create a national market and industrialists (37) realized that only a national government would guarantee a capitalist development, the rapprochement between Congress and Big Business became inevitable. On their part Congress leaders, despite a moderate left wing opposition, adopted a conciliatory attitude towards industrialists, who became an important source of funds.

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(37) see S. SARKAR, *A Critique of Colonial India*, Calcutta 1995, pp. 119-121, on the impact of the war on industrial growth.

Although in the past Big Business had not subordinated industrial development to communal interests, its emphasis on rapid growth precipitated the communal conflict. Birla urged the Congress to accept the principle of separation as a lesser evil. Already in 1939 during an interview with the Viceroy, Birla told 25% of the Indian population should not be allowed to check the advance of the whole country « the fact that they (Muslims) are a minority must be realized. In democracy it is the majority which is generally bound to dominate » (38). Thus Birla suggested partition as the ultimate solution, but did not accept the League's request for the inclusion of undivided Bengal and Punjab within Pakistan.

The Rajagopalachari formula reflected Birla's intentions. The Rajagopalachari scheme proposed, at the end of the war and after the transfer of power from the British, the appointment of a commission for demarcating contiguous districts in the North-West and East of India where Muslim population was in absolute majority. In these districts a plebiscite of the inhabitants held on the basis of adult suffrage, or other practicable franchise, should decide the issue of separation. In case the majority decided for separation, the scheme proposed mutual agreement for defence, commerce and communication. If an understanding was reached by Congress and the League on these terms, the League would first endorse the Indian demand for independence and cooperate with the Congress in the formation of a provisional interim government for the transitional period.

As Ayesha Jalal points out, Rajagopalachari's Pakistan « ... necessarily entailed the partition of the Punjab and Bengal ... » and « the decision cut out of India ... would be taken not just by the Muslims but by a plebiscite of the entire population even in the Muslim majority districts, and this might well have diluted their enthusiasm about going their own separate way » (39). At the centre there would be common arrangements between Pakistan and Hindustan. But, as she points out, « some of this lay close to Jinnah's unspoken hopes for the future. » (40).

Jinnah received the proposals from Rajagopalachari, who put them forward on behalf of Gandhi commenting that « the weight of his (Gandhi's) opinion would most probably secure the Congress ac-

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(38) Birla's interview with the Viceroy on 11 November 1939 in M. M. KUDAISYA, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

(39) A. JALAL, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

(40) *Ibid.*, p. 122.

ceptance » (41). But, as Jinnah had failed to reply, Rajagopalachari released to the press their correspondence implying Jinnah's rejection.

De facto Jinnah had not wholly rejected the formula and negotiations were not over but had reached a delicate stage. Gandhi's hesitation in contacting him directly made him suspicious about the support of the Mahatma to the formula. At the same time he considered Gandhi's attempt to meet the Viceroy and his demand for the immediate concession of a national government as again a way to bypass the League's request for a Hindu-Muslim settlement.

At the end of July 1944 at the Council Meeting of the League, Jinnah denounced the Rajagopalachari formula as a parody of the Lahore Resolution. Yet, he realized that, for the first time, Gandhi had agreed to a practical and secular solution. Therefore he accepted to meet Gandhi after reading the Mahatma's renewed request for a meeting with him.

As the « Hindustan Times » wrote, the prevailing atmosphere of mistrust did not encourage the Gandhi-Jinnah talks. « Both Gandhi and Mr. Jinnah have to cut deep and remove the huge undergrowth of misunderstanding that has grown in the recent years between the Congress and the League. There is the fear-complex; there is the suspicion-complex; there is the bad faith-complex; there is the hostility-complex » (42).

Congress did not accept Gandhi's decision to endorse the formula and to meet Jinnah. « People's War » noticed the passivity of the Congress provincial leaders, who gave their formal support to the formula but still considered Pakistan as the « vivisection of the Motherland ». Their attitude was « the less we campaign for the formula and the more latitude we give the anti-Pakistan agitation of the Hindu Mahasabha, the easier it will be to bring Mr. Jinnah round » (43). This created a political vacuum, which offered to the Hindu Mahasabha the opportunity to campaign vigorously against the Hindu Muslim unity. The leaders of the Mahasabha attacked both Congress and Gandhi, who they denounced as a traitor of the Hindu cause. Their agents disrupted the meetings held in support of Gandhi's policy, which was perceived as the surrender of Congress to the League (44).

The talks started on September 10 and ended on September 26. Though ending in failure, they are of special interest because they

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(41) C. Rajagopalachari to Jinnah, 4 July 1944, in J. AHMED (ed.), *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 131.

(42) « Hindustan Times », Delhi, 7 September 1944.

(43) « People's War », Bombay, 3 September 1944.

(44) *Ibid.*

were supplemented by an exchange of letters, in which the respective points of view were formulated in writing.

Gandhi made it clear from the beginning that he had approached Jinnah « as an individual » and that he himself « had no representative capacity » (45). Different pressures were behind him. Gandhi had accepted the principle of Pakistan only reluctantly and presumably had been driven to try for a compromise with Jinnah by the pressure of Big Business led by Birla and Tata (46). But the vehement reaction of Hindu opinion to his meeting with Jinnah made him conscious that chances of progress could only be minimal. Jinnah, though disappointed, had agreed to proceed in the discussion because, he writes, « I am anxious to convert you to my point of view » (47).

The discussion of the two nations theory as an attempt to convert to each other's political visions soon degenerated in mutual attacks. As a consequence the two leaders could not agree whether the communal problem should be solved before or after independence. They did not agree on the composition of the government, on the commission for the demarcation of boundaries nor on the plebiscite. Gandhi refused to accept the two nations solution and desired a federal solution, with the concession of autonomy to zones, where Muslims were in an absolute majority. Jinnah's reply was to restate the fundamental questions « Can you not appreciate our point of view that we claim the right of self-determination as a nation and not as a territorial unit, and that we are entitled to exercise our inherent right as a Muslim nation, which is our birthright? ... » (48). This was the basic contradiction between the two nations theory and the Lahore Resolution, which Gandhi's intransigence had underlined. Jinnah's historical speech of March 1940 was based on the generic request for « separate homelands » as « nations do not live in the air »; the Lahore Resolution asked for the regrouping of the « areas in which Muslims are in a majority to constitute independent states ... with such territorial adjustments as may be necessary. » In the Lahore Resolution the basis adopted for partition was territorial, while Jinnah had spoken in terms of a Muslim nation.

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(45) Gandhi to Jinnah, 11 September 1944 in J. AHMED (ed.), *op cit.*, vol. II, pp. 162-163.

(46) Sir M. Hallett to Field Marshal Viscount Wavell, 9 October 1944, in N. MANSERGH and P. MOON (eds.), *The Transfer of Power 1942-47*, vol. V: *The Simla Conference, Background and Proceedings, 1 September 1944-28 July 1945*, London 1974, p. 93.

(47) Jinnah to Gandhi, 11 September 1944, in J. AHMED (ed.), *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 164.

(48) Jinnah to Gandhi, 21 September 1944, in *ibid.*, p. 189.

Riassunto — Il saggio analizza lo scontro fra la Lega Musulmana e il Congresso negli anni 1943-1944 partendo da un'ottica revisionista. La storiografia revisionista si oppone alla interpretazione ortodossa, secondo la quale la teoria delle due nazioni, elaborata dal *leader* della Lega Ali Jinnah nel 1940, esprime una chiara scelta separatista. Al contrario essa considera tale teoria una mossa strategica, che Jinnah usa come *bargaining counter* per le trattative con il Congresso (un punto di partenza per i negoziati).

Negli anni 1943-44 Jinnah conferma il suo rifiuto alla logica numerica occidentale e chiede la concessione di una parità statutaria agli indomusulmani nei confronti della totalità dei gruppi non-musulmani. La sua politica rimane flessibile: il concetto di Pakistan è vago e non implica la spartizione. Vuole l'inclusione delle intere province punjabi e bengali nel Pakistan, ma allo stesso tempo indica la formazione di una Unione Pan indiana composta da Hindustan e Pakistan come una possibile soluzione.

Tuttavia la logica revisionista è messa in discussione dal fallimento dei colloqui fra Gandhi e Jinnah alla fine del settembre 1944. Gandhi non accetta la teoria di due opposte nazioni e si oppone alla inclusione delle intere regioni bengali e punjabi nel Pakistan, ma si dichiara pronto a concedere l'autodeterminazione ai musulmani in un'India unita. Il rifiuto di Jinnah è secco e forse indica che, in caso di mancato accordo, solo la spartizione potrà garantire gli interessi della minoranza musulmana.

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