# CHAPTER XXV

JINNAH AND GANDHI

M ohamed Ali Jinnah, who considered himself

Gandhi’s opposite number, lived in a large, crescent¬

shaped marble mansion from which a classic flight of

marble stairs and a series of carefully moulded terraces led down

to the sea at Bombay. He had built it during the second World

War and he apologized, when I saw him in 1942, that it was still

inadequately furnished. His little study, however, and other

parts' of the great house on Malabar Hill revealed the cultured

and opulent touch.

Jinnah was over six feet tall and weighed nine stone. He was

a very thin man. His well-shaped head was covered with thick,

long, silver-grey hair brushed straight back. His shaven face was

thin, the nose long and aquiline. The temples were sunken and

the cheeks were deep holes which made his cheekbones stand out

like high horizontal ridges. His teeth were bad. When not speak¬

ing, he would pull in his chin, tighten his lips, knit his big brow.

The result was a forbidding earnestness. He rarely laughed.

Jinnah wore a knee-length straw-coloured tunic, tight white

Indian trousers that clung to his bony legs and black patent-

leather pumps. A monocle dangled from a black cord. He often

dressed in European clothes. He was, wrote George E. Jones

in the New York Times of May 5th, 1946, ‘undoubtedly one of the

best dressed men in the British Empire’.

Jinnah, the first child of a rich skins, hide and gum-arabic

merchant, was bom on Christmas Day 1876 —seven years later

than Gandhi — in the Kathiawar peninsula, Gandhi’s birthplace;

his native language was Gujarati. ‘Jinnah’ is a Hindu name; the

family were recent converts to Islam. Jinnah was a Khoja Mos¬

lem. Many Khojas carry Hindu names and maintain the Hindu

joint family system. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,

the Khojas attempted to return to Hinduism but were rebuffed.

Hinduism and Mohammedanism are dissimilar religions, but

Hindus and Mohammedans are far less dissimilar. Most Moslems

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of India are converted Hindus, converted by the invading Arabs,

Afghans and Persians who began thrusting into India during the

eighth century. Jinnah said converted Hindus were 75 per cent

of the Moslem community; Nehru put it at 95 per cent. In parts

of India, Moslems worship in Hindu temples. There are castes

among some Indian Moslems. In many areas, Hindus and Mos¬

lems are indistinguishable from one another in appearance,

costume, customs and language. Hindi and Urdu, the predom¬

inant tongues of Hindus and Moslems respectively, are written

with different scripts and the former has absorbed more Sanskrit

words while the latter uses more Persian words, but Hindus

understand Urdu and Moslems understand Hindi. Hinduism is

an insidious, emotional religion, native to India, which clings to

the descendants of those who were converted to the Koran by the

sword. Religious leaders have succeeded in widening the gulf

and poisoning the relations, yet ties remain. Jinnah, Gandhi,

Nehru, the Viceroy, Wavell and all the British officials, Hindus

and Moslems one met in India agreed that Hindus and Moslems

lived peacefully side by side in the villages — and the village is

80 per cent of India. In the Indian Army, moreover, Hindus,

Moslems, Sikhs, Christians, in fact all religions and races, ate,

slept, trained and waged war side by side without friction.

I suggested to Jinnah that religious hatreds, nationalism and

boundaries plagued humanity and had caused the war; the world

needed harmony, not new discords.

‘You are an idealist,’ he replied. T am a realist. I deal with

what is. Take, for instance, France and Italy. Their customs and

religion are the same. Their languages are similar. Yet they are

separate.’

‘Do you want to create here the mess we have in Europe?’ I

asked.

T must deal with the divisive characteristics which exist,’ he said.

Jinnah was not a devout Moslem. He drank alcohol and ate

pork, which are un-Islamic acts. He seldom visited the mosque

and knew no Arabic and little Urdu. In his forties, he went out¬

side his religion to marry a Parsi girl of eighteen; when his only

child, a beautiful daughter, married a Parsi turned Christian, fye

disowned her. His wife left him and died shortly thereafter in

1929. In the remaining years, his sister Fatima, a dental surgeon

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who looked like him, was his constant companion and adviser.

‘Moslem women are the real force behind their men,’ she

said.

Early in his career, Jinnah tried to unite Hindus and Moslems.

On returning from London where he studied law at Lincoln’s

Inn, and after establishing a lucrative practice in Bombay, he

threw himself into politics. Addressing the Moslem League in

1917 on the alleged threat of Hindu domination, he said, ‘Fear

not. This is a bogey which is put before you to scare you away

from the co-operation and unity which are essential to self-

government.’

Jinnah was once a leader of the Congress party. ‘I have been

in this movement for thirty-five years,’ he said to me in the first of

two interviews at his home. ‘Nehru worked under me in the

Home-Rule Society. Gandhi worked under me. I was active in

the Congress party. When the Moslem League was organized I

persuaded Congress to congratulate the League as a step towards

Indian freedom. In 1915, I induced the League and Congress to

meet at the same time in Bombay so as to create the feeling of

unity. My goal was Hindu-Moslem unity. The British, seeing a

danger in such unity, broke up an open meeting. The closed

sessions, however, continued. In 1916, I again persuaded the two

organizations to meet simultaneously in Lucknow and was

instrumental in bringing about the Lucknow Pact in which both

agreed on elections and weightage. So it was until 1920 when

Gandhi came into the limelight. A deterioration of Hindu-

Moslem relations set in. In 1931, at the Round Table Conference,

I had the distinct feeling that unity was hopeless, that Gandhi did

not want it. I was a disappointed man. I decided to stay in

England. I did not even go back to India to sell my possessions

but sold them through an agent. I remained in England until

1935. I took U P law practice before the Privy Council, and con¬

trary to my expectations, I was a success. I had no intention of

returning to India. But each year friends came from India and

told me of conditions and told me how much I could do.. Finally,

I agreed to go back.’

He had been speaking breathlessly, with excitement. He

paused, puffed on his cigarette. ‘I tell you all this,’ he continued,

‘to show that Gandhi does not want independence. He does not

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want the British to go. He is first of all a Hindu. Nehru does not

want the British to go. They want Hindu raj.’

Writing ‘In Memory of Jinnah 5 , in the London Economist of

September 17th, 1949, a correspondent, who knew Jinnah well,

declared that while Jinnah was practising law in London someone

‘repeated to him that Nehru, whom he despised and hated, had

imprudently said at a private dinner party that “Jinnah was

finished 55 . Outraged, Jinnah packed up and sailed back to India

at once just to “show Nehru 55 . . . To Cleopatra’s nose as a factor

in history one should perhaps add Jinnah’s pride 5 .

George E. Jones, the New York Times correspondent who inter¬

viewed Jinnah several times, writes in his book, Tumult in India ,

‘Jinnah is a superb political craftsman, a Machiavelli in the amoral

sense of that description . . . His personal defects are a somewhat

hostile reserve, conceit and a narrow outlook . . . He is an ex¬

tremely suspicious man, who feels that he has been wronged many

times in his life. His repressed intensity borders on the psychotic.

Withdrawn and isolated, Jinnah is arrogant to the point of

discourtesy. . . .’

Jinnah withdrew from the Congress party just when Gandhi,

backed by the masses, ousted the rich lawyers from control. He

never liked Gandhi. At public meetings in those days, he would

refer to Gandhi as ‘Mr. Gandhi 5 which most Indians regarded as

less respectful than Mahatma or Gandhiji; yet when members of

the audience protested he persisted. Later, after he returned to

India and became the undisputed leader of the anti-Congress

Moslem League, he zealously guarded his prestige. In 1939, upon

the outbreak of the war, the Viceroy invited Gandhi and Jinnah

to the palace. Gandhi offered to come to Jinnah’s house to fetch

him. Jinnah welcomed that appearance of an obeisance. But he

refused to go in Gandhi’s car. They both rode in his. Subse¬

quently, when they conferred, Jinnah insisted that the meetings

take place in his home. Gandhi, who was completely indifferent

to such considerations, gladly complied.

Vanity, jealousy and dislike undoubtedly 'play a major role in

politics. Some of the great political feuds of history were personal

before they became political. The Hindu-Moslem problem, to

be sure, would have existed Jinnah or no Jinnah. His intensity

and hates blew on the coals and brought forth flames.

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Apart from Jinnah, all the leading figures in his Moslem League

were large estate owners and landholding noblemen. They

watched the rising tide of peasant discontent with mounting

concern. In the North-west Frontier Province, the Congress

party, led by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the ‘Frontier Gandhi 5 ,

was a popular movement of Moslem peasants directed against

Moslem landowners. In the United Provinces, Moslem and Hindu

peasants made common cause against Moslem and Hindu land¬

lords.

The landlords who financed the Moslem League used religion

to divide Moslem from Hindu peasants.

Owing to Islamic precept, the bulk of Moslem wealth was

invested in land instead of trade or industry. Hindu and Parsi

business men often preferred to engage their own co-religionists.

Mohammedans, moreover, encountered considerable difficulty in

entering government employ; their education was usually inferior

to that of Hindus, Parsis and Christians. The Moslem urban

middle class, which began to emerge in the twentieth century,

looked to Jinnah to get them British government jobs, and he did

so by persuading the authorities to establish quotas for Moslems

irrespective of qualifications.

The Moslem upper class (the landlords) and the Moslem middle

class were ready for Jinnah. But they needed the peasantry for

numbers. They soon discovered that they could win it by arousing

religious passions. The formula was Pakistan, a separate Moslem

state. Such a state would be officered by Moslems and in it Hindu

and Parsi firms would be at a disadvantage. The landlords

believed they had less to fear from a country they controlled

than from an independent, liberal, secular India where a land

reform that would dispossess them was expected to be one of the

first pieces of legislation.

One hundred million compared to three hundred million

Hindus, the Moslems could never hope to win a political majority

unless religious aims ceased to dominate politics. The separate

religious electorates, introduced by Lord Minto in 1909, militated

against such a consummation. In a number of districts, however,

— the North-west Frontier, Punjab, Sind, Baluchistan, Kashmir

and Bengal — Moslems formed a majority. Pakistan, as Jinnah

conceived it, would embrace the sixty million Mohammedans

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thickly settled in these Moslem-majority provinces where they

were safe from Hindu domination. But to achieve Pakistan,

Jinnah would have to inflame Moslem religious and nationalistic

sentiments and risk inflaming in turn similar feelings among

Hindus at the cost of the forty million Moslems dispersed in

provinces where Hindus were the majority.

Jinnah was prepared to take this plunge.

The irreligious Jinnah wished to build a religious state. Gandhi,

wholly religious, wanted a secular state.

The hope of religious peace in India lay in the unifying national¬

ism written on the Gandhi-Nehru-Azad-Rajagopalachari banner.

No doubt, the relations between Hindus and Moslems required

adjustments and mutual concessions and depended greatly on

economic expansion which would lessen the competition for

government posts and increase business opportunities. Gandhi

had enough faith in man to think that, with patience, it could

be done.

Jinnah, on the other hand, urged immediate bisection. Herbert

L. Matthews, a veteran foreign correspondent of the New York

Time?, quotes a frank admission by Sikander Hyat Khan, the

Moslem prime minister of the Punjab, ‘that he considered a

Bengal Moslem as foreign as a Chinese’. Yet Jinnah believed that

the Punjab and Bengal yearned to be one in Pakistan.

The fact is that India, a backward country without adequate

communications, still lived in the grip of provincialism, like

Europe in the Middle Ages. Gandhi wanted to use the cement

of nationalism to make it one; Jinnah wanted to use the dynamite

of religion to make it two.

The bisection of India could not be done gently with a surgeon’s

scalpel. It could only be achieved with a blunt butcher’s knife

and heavy cleaver, and leave broken bones, mutilated muscles,

severed nerves and bruised brain matter robbed of the capacity

to think.. The partitioning of the United States or France would

be no more painful.

The tragedy of partition hung over Gandhi’s head from the

time of his liberation in 1944 to the day of his death in 1948.

In June 1944 Gandhi, partially recuperated from his illness,

came back into the political arena. He asked Viceroy Wavell to

receive him. Wavell replied, ‘In consideration of the radical

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difference in our points of view, a meeting between us at present

could have no value.’

Gandhi now focused his attention on Jinnah. Gandhi had

always felt that if Congress and the Moslem League came to an

agreement, the British would have to grant India independence.

Spurred by Rajagopalachari, who evolved a formula for a Con¬

gress-League understanding, Gandhi wrote to Jinnah on July 17th,

1944, suggesting talks. Gandhi addressed Jinnah as ‘Brother

Jinnah 5 and signed, ‘Your brother, Gandhi 5 . Jinnah’s reply was

addressed to ‘Dear Mr. Gandhi 5 and was signed ‘M. A. Jinnah 5 .

In subsequent letters, Gandhi addressed Jinnah as ‘Qaid-e-Azam 5

or Great Leader, a recently assumed title. Jinnah still wrote,

‘Dear Mr. Gandhi 5 .

The correspondence was voluminous. Gandhi arrived at

Jinnah’s Bombay house for the first meeting at 3.55 p.m. on

September 9th and remained till 7 p.m. He returned at 5.30 p.m.

on the 1 ith and stayed for two hours. The two men conferred a

third time on the 12th for two and a half hours, twice on the 13th

for a total of three and a half hours, again on the 14th, again on

the 15th and so on. After each conversation they wrote long

letters to one another confirming and continuing the oral argu¬

ments. At one stage, Gandhi suggested that he be allowed to

address the executive council of the Moslem League and, if the

council rejected his proposal, that he should go before an open

convention of the League. Jinnah called the suggestion ‘most

extraordinary and unprecedented 5 , and repulsed it.

The talks broke down on September 26th and then the entire

correspondence was published in the newspapers.

The wall between Gandhi and Jinnah was the two-nation

theory. ‘By all the canons of international law, we are a nation, 5

Jinnah wrote. ‘We are a nation with our own distinctive culture

and civilization, language and literature, art and architecture,

names and nomenclature, sense of value and proportion, legal

laws and moral codes, customs and calendar, history and tradi¬

tions, aptitudes and ambitions. 5

Gandhi did not make an effort to controvert this large statement.

He merely said, ‘I find no parallel in history for a body of converts

and their descendents claiming to be a nation apart from the

parent stock. 5 Do people change their characteristics when they

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change their religion? Would there be a third nation in India if

several million people adopted Christianity and a\* fourth if

several million joined the Jews?

The cleavage on this cardinal issue was known in advance.

Then why the discussions?

‘Can we not agree to differ on the question of “two nations”/

Gandhi pleaded, ‘and yet solve the problem on the basis of self-

determination?’

Gandhi proposed that Baluchistan, Sind, the North-west

Frontier Province where Moslems constituted a majority, and

those parts of Bengal, Assam and the Punjab where Moslems were

a majority, should vote on whether to secede from the Indian

Union. ‘If the vote is in favour of separation,’ Gandhi explained,

‘it shall be agreed upon that these areas shall form a separate

state as soon as possible after India is free.’ The two states, he

urged, would then set up one, unified ‘administration of foreign

affairs, defence, internal communications, customs, commerce

and the like’.

Jinnah said ‘No’ three times: he wanted the partition while the

British were in India, not after India was free; he wanted com¬

plete separation with no unified administration; and he had his

own remarkable plan for a referendum.

According to Jinnah’s plan, only Moslems would vote in the

plebiscite and if the majority of the voting Moslems voted for

separation then the entire province would go to Pakistan. ‘Separa¬

tion’, according to an analysis of Jinnah’s views made by the

British Embassy in Washington ‘for the information of British

officials’, ‘must be decided on by the votes of Moslems only.’

But the British census gave the Moslem population of Assam as

3,442,479, the non-Moslem 6,762,254. Yet Jinnah was demand¬

ing that a majority of the 3,442,479 determine the fate of the

entire province.

The Moslem population of the Punjab was 16,217,242, the

non-Moslem 12,201,577; the Moslems were not more than 56 per

cent of the total. Actually, two or three million Moslems, at

most, would have been entitled to cast votes. And if a majority

of the two or three million voted for Pakistan then the entire

province of over twenty-eight million would become a part of

Pakistan.

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In Bengal, Moslems were 52 per cent of the population. A

Moslem majority for secession would necessarily be a minority of

the total number of inhabitants.

Gandhi, obviously, could not agree to such a proposition.

Jinnah did not have the power to effect it by force. Only the

British could give it to him.

‘Mr. Jinnah’, reads the ‘Note on the Gandhi-Jinnah Con¬

versations’ compiled by the British Embassy in Washington (Lord

Halifax was Ambassador), ‘is in a strong position; he has something

to give which Mr. Gandhi wants very badly and without delay,

Moslem co-operation in putting pressure on the British govern¬

ment to hand over a substantial instalment of power at once . . .

Mr. Gandhi, on the other hand, has got nothing to give which

Mr. Jinnah is not prepared to wait for; in Mr. Jinnah’s eyes, the

prospect of independence a year or two earlier is as nothing

compared with security for Moslems. It is obvious that Mr.

Jinnah is content to wait and see how near Mr. Gandhi will come

to the price for which he is holding out.’

This is a shrewd analysis of the tactics of a shrewd bargainer.

Jinnah could wait for independence. Gandhi felt this was the

best time to get independence.

History now intervened to upset Jinnah’s calculations. Then

the able Jinnah upset history.

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