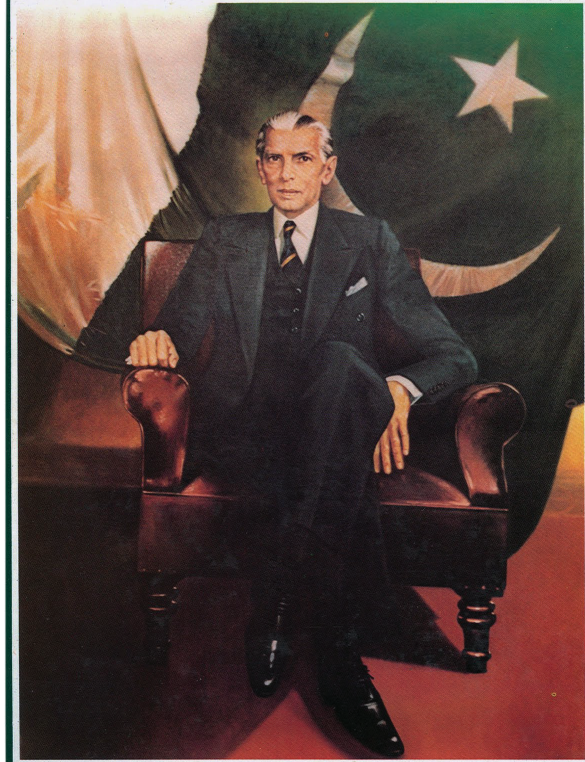
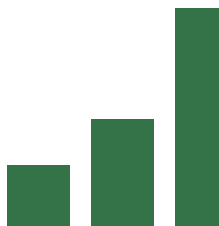


# COMMUNALISM TURNED INSIDE: JINNAH'S PAKISTAN



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The creation of Pakistan was based on a confessional ideology which asserted that Indian Muslims, on the basis of their shared faith in Islam, were a nation apart from all other religious communities of India based on their faith in Islam. Such an ideology was in turn premised on the assumption that India comprised two nations – Hindus (about 70 per cent) and Muslims (25 per cent) who shared nothing in common and their worldview clashed on all levels of life. A Hindu variant of the Two-Nation Theory also existed. Both these versions of nationhood based on religious beliefs and faith were social constructs rather than some objective descriptions of Hindus and Muslims. While Hindus were deeply divided because of caste, Muslims were equally deeply divided because of sect and sub-sectarian differences. The politicization of religion inevitably led to the sacralization of politics. The generic name for such politics was communalism. Demonization and dehumanization of the Other was the hallmark of communalism.

Opposing the Two-Nation Theory was the Indian National Congress (founded 1885). Its construction of an Indian national was based on territoriality: all bona fide inhabitants of India were part of the Indian nation by virtue of sharing a common homeland. It combined the Western idea of individual rights with notions of inclusivity and pluralism representing traditional Indian communitarianism to advance the vision of a liberal, secular democracy as the basis of government for a free and independent India – which set forth the idea of secular democracy.

As it gained momentum and began to assume the character of a nascent nationalist movement, the British countered it by giving constitutional recognition to the separatist tendency prevalent amongst the Muslim gentry by granting separate electorates to them.

Electoral seats were reserved for Muslims and Muslim voters voting only for Muslim candidates. They were even accorded weightage (over representation than numbers) in 1909. Such a measure, irrespective of whether it was meant to separate Muslims from Hindus and others or was simply a response to give fair representation to Muslims in the long run, alienated the Muslims from the mainstream freedom movement. In 1919, the Sikhs in the Muslim-majority Punjab and Europeans and Anglo-Indians in Muslim-majority Bengal were granted separate electorates and weightage.

Muslim communalism moved centre-stage in the wake of the provincial elections of 1937 held under the 1935 Government of India. The electorate had been expanded and about 35 million or 10-11% of the total population of India was enfranchised. The INC performed impressively in the Hindu-majority provinces as well as in the province with the highest proportion of Muslims, 93 per cent, i.e., the North-West Frontier Province (now known as Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa). It won 903 seats out of 1500 general seats. In the Muslim-majority provinces of north-western India, Punjab and Sindh, regional parties led by Muslims made a clean sweep of the reserved Muslim seats. The Hindu Mahasabha which represented Hindu nationalism was ignored by the Hindus who voted overwhelmingly for the INC.

On the other hand, the Muslim League lost miserably: winning only two in Punjab and none in Sindh. In Bengal it secured 40 seats out of a reserved 114 seats. Its performance in the Hindu-majority provinces was somewhat better but nowhere did it win most of the reserved seats. Controversy surrounds what happened subsequently but the INC made it conditional that those elected on the ML ticket must first resign from it and join the INC if they wanted to be considered for a ministerial post in the provincial governments formed by it.

Such an ultimatum evoked an angry response from Mohammad Ali Jinnah who had emerged as the main leader of the ML in the 1930s. He confided to the Governor of Bombay, Presidency Lord Brabourne in 1937 that henceforth he would deploy the communalist card to arouse among Muslims fear and anger against the Indian National Congress describing it as a Hindu party which would enslave Muslims in a united India. His speeches, statements and messages from at least 22 March 1940 onwards when he delivered the presidential address at Lahore followed by the Lahore resolution of 23-24 March, ad infinitum demonized the INC, Hindus and Hinduism as veritable threats to Islam and Muslims. Interesting to note is that he described the INC as the soft face of the Hindu Mahasabha. Borrowing ideas and arguments from Choudhary Rahmat Ali, he described Hinduism and Islam as two diametrically opposite worldviews which could not be reconciled to ensure peace and harmony between Hindus and Muslims. Proceeding thus he demanded that India should be partitioned to create Muslim states in areas where Muslims were in a majority: north-western and north-eastern India.

What Jinnah successfully projected was the idea that Indian Muslims constituted a homogeneous community. The Congress could not counter such propaganda as the British, after World War II broke out, extended all help and patronage to the Muslim League because Congress refused to support the war effort. The 1945-46 election was charged with communalism (essentially by ML) and produced a polarised result. The Congress received a clear mandate to keep India united while the Muslim League won a landslide from the Muslim voters to create Pakistan. British efforts to broker a negotiated settlement between the INC and ML proved futile and in the end India and the two Muslim-majority provinces of Bengal and Punjab were partitioned to create the dominions of India and Pakistan. Since the 3 June 1947 Partition Plan did not include an exchange of population, minorities were left behind in both India and Pakistan. Communal riots had broken out in 1946 and spiralled in 1947. Consequently, the transfer of power by the British entailed communal riots and pogroms, resulting in the death of at least a million Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. 14-15 million of them crossed the border between the two states largely in search of safe havens.

Now, Jinnah had successfully overcome stiff opposition from Muslim leaders, parties and sects who were opposed to the partition of India. Fears of Sunni domination were present among the Ithna Ashari Shia minority (about 10-12% of the total Muslim population) and the Ahmadiyyas of Punjab. More importantly, Sunni scholars Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a leading light of the INC, Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani, president of the Deoband Seminary, among many others, warned that the partition of India would mean the partition of the 1000-year-old Muslim community of India and Pakistan would become a battle ground for sectarian and sub-sectarian differences and disputes among Muslims.

Jinnah ignored such criticism of his Two-Nation theory, describing the critics as renegades to Islam. He convinced the Shias and Ahmadiyyas that Pakistan would be a non-sectarian Muslim state, and to counter the opposition of Azad and Madani he not only won over some dissident Deobandis but mobilised the Sunni-Barelvi ulema and pirs whose rivalry with the Deobandis and the smaller Ahl-e-Hadith sub-sects of Sunnism was proverbial. In the 1945-46 election campaign, ML gave a free hand to the Barelvis to project Pakistan as the panacea of all spiritual and material woes of the Muslims. Such a strategy worked wonders for Jinnah and Pakistan came into being constituted by two separate wings a thousand kilometres apart with India situated in between. Ironically, Jinnah had not demanded a complete transfer of populations and one-third of the Muslim population was left behind in India. In fact, he is on record for saying he was willing to sacrifice and get smashed twenty million Muslims of the Hindu-majority provinces to liberate seventy million Muslims of north-eastern and north-western India from the yoke of Hindu rule.

On 11 August, 1947, he made a momentary U-turn on the two-nation theory by declaring that in Pakistan, Hindus, Muslims and other non-Muslims will enjoy equal rights. However, on 14 August when the Pakistan Constituent Assembly was formally inaugurated, he returned to the organic connection between Islam and Pakistan by telling Mountbatten that Prophet Muhammad was the role model for Pakistan. Thereafter followed several other moves underlining the Islamic identity of Pakistan and Islamic law, the Sharia, as the source of constitution and law in Pakistan.

As long as Jinnah lived, the divisions among Muslims over belief and doctrines remained dormant. His early death on 11 September 1948 opened a Pandora box of sectarian, sub-sectarian and linguistic differences and disputes which existed among Muslims. It started with the 7 March 1949 Objectives Resolution which called for Pakistan to be an ideal Muslim democracy upholding the sovereignty of God. How that would translate into a coherent, tangible constitutional formula and define the laws of Pakistan remained unclear. Already in 1953, the fissures within the presumed homogeneous Muslim nation took a violent form when Punjab was rocked by anti-Ahmadiyya riots. The constitutions of 1956, 1962 and 1973 not only retained the Islamic character of Pakistan but the 1973 constitution added more Islamic features. In 1974 the Pakistan Parliament unanimously declared the Ahmadis as non-Muslims.

Under General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, Deobandi ideas received state patronage and many controversial and outdated laws were imposed on Pakistan. Moreover, the Hudood and blasphemy laws and a number of misogynist measures rendered Pakistan intolerant and encouraged a mob mentality preying on those suspected of deviating from 'pure' and 'true' Islam. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan publishes annually recurring violent mob attacks on religious minorities and free-thinking Muslims.

The introduction of zakat tax by Zia was rejected by the Shia minority which agitated for exemption from it. In the 1990s, a proxy war was fought on Pakistani soil between Shia Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia through their sectarian affiliates in the form of armed militias. The terrorism which followed claimed hundreds of lives, but the upper hand belonged to the Sunni extremists who not only formed a majority of 85% but were supported by state agencies. Such a tendency even resulted in angry polemics and terrorism between different sub-sects of Sunnis.

Also, because of Pakistan's involvement in the so-called Afghan Jihad sponsored by the United States and Saudi Arabia and assisted by many other states, extremism, militancy and violence had become endemic to Pakistani state and society. After the Afghan Jihad so-called non-state actors carried out terrorist attacks in the Indian Kashmir as well as in several Indian cities.

Communalism which before 1947 had been directed against Hindus had also concealed another deep division among Muslims: that deriving from linguistic and centre-periphery tensions and disputes. Rather soon after Pakistan came into being, the West Pakistani rulers began to treat the Bengalis as lesser citizens even when they formed a 55% majority of the Pakistan population. Ultimately the former East Pakistan broke away after a civil war which claimed thousands of lives and became Bangladesh in December 1971.

In Sindh, the native population too developed many grievances against the Urdu-speaking migrants from mainly North India. The latter settled in large numbers in Karachi as well as in major Sindhi cities and towns and in the early years dominated the federal government. In the 1980s and 1990s ethnic conflict between the Urdu-speakers resulted in shocking cases of terrorism. Currently, separatist tendencies in Balochistan and in the tribal areas of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa against the Punjabi-dominated Pakistan state has caused violence and terrorism on a large scale.

Considered in the light of the historical record, one can conclude that the logic of exclusion based on religion which underpinned the Two-Nation Theory and became the ideology upon which the partition of India took place turned inside and assumed a virulent form. If Pakistan was created for the Muslim nation of India, then inevitably the question, intellectual, theological and ideological, which followed from some reasoning was: who a Muslim is. Given the deep-rooted sectarian and sub-sectarian divisions as well as the existence of linguistic nationalities within Pakistani Muslims, the quest to find a pure Muslim identity has for all practical purposes resulted in the exclusion and alienation of non-dominant sects and linguistic nationalities from what in 1947 was projected as a homogenous Muslim nation. One can add that non-Muslim Pakistanis have always been marginalised and over the years their position has become increasingly vulnerable to majoritarian tyranny.

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