

PARTITION, INDO-PAK RELATIONS AND KASHMIR

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PARTITION JINNAH, NEHRU AND THE GHOST OF INDIA'S PARTITION

Controversies over India's Partition

The partition of India has been haunting the Indian and South Asian psyche time and time again. Jaswant Singh of the BJP, in his book, *Jinnah: Independence, India, Partition* (Rupa, August 2009) presents Singh's version of the partition process and his evaluation of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, not only as a great man but as a secular person. According to Singh, Jinnah was not responsible for the partition process but Nehru and Patel were the culprits. He also went on to praise Jinnah, stating that, 'I admire certain aspects of his (Jinnah) personality... we needed a demon because in the 20th Century, the most telling event in the subcontinent was the partition of the country'.(TOI Mumbai, 17 August 2009.) This formulation was so very contrary to the popularly held belief in India that the BJP could not stomach it and expelled him from the party. Singh also stated that Jinnah has been demonised in India and that Muslims have been treated as aliens in India.

Few years ago, Lal Krishna Advani, when he visited Pakistan for the inauguration of the Katasraj temple and went to Jinnah's mausoleum, stated that Jinnah was a great man as he had achieved what he had

struggled for and that he was secular as shown by his 11 August 1947 speech, dealing with religious freedom of citizens. This speech by Advani also shocked the BJP and other affiliates of the RSS. The result was that Advani had to step down from the BJP president's post. It is another matter that since at that time BJP was facing elections and Atal Bihari Vajpayee had withdrawn from politics, Advani had to be allowed to continue in the party as an electoral necessity. But, due to this, he permanently lost his stature with the RSS combine (a group of organisations which owe allegiance to the RSS and are run by RSS-trained swayamsevaks or volunteers).

Interestingly, an ex-RSS Sarsanghchalak (supreme leader), K Sudarshan, also jumped into the debate, upholding Jinnah to be secular. Sudarshan stated that since Jinnah had entered the Lucknow pact with Tilak and since he opposed Gandhi on the Khilafat issue, Jinnah was secular and that had Gandhi wanted, he could have avoided the partition. Jaswant Singh's book was banned in Gujarat on the ground that it is against Sardar Patel. As such, earlier another top RSS functionary, HV Seshadri in his book, *The Tragic Story of Partition*, had anti-Sardar Patel views, but it was sold as at that time, Gujarat society was not as much communalised.

All in all, Jaswant's book raised the debate afresh, and many a commentator jumped into the debating ring, 'Jaswant Singh has done a great service by sensitising us to the importance of a better understanding of India's immediate pre-Independence history. His book and the controversy which surrounded it have led me to undertake a closer scrutiny of this critical period', wrote

ArvindPanagariya in the *Times of India*, Oct 2009. This does seem to have been the response of most political commentators.

It is true that in India, the view of partition held by the majority is that it was due to Jinnah, the representative of Muslims, that India had to be partitioned. Despite the partition process, despite the formation of 'Islamic Pakistan', only slightly less than half of then India's Muslims chose to make India there home. However, the Muslims whomigrated were probably the biggest victims of partition as Jaswant Singh correctly points out. Over a period of time, in Pakistan, majority of Muslims who were not locals, were pushed to the margins of society, bereft of social provisions and facilities, and this added to the insecurity created due to communal violence and the highhanded attitude of the state machinery, and the police in particular, towards them.

In India it was propagated that partition had taken place due to Muslims, Muslims have got 'their' Pakistan, so why are they here? This propaganda laid the ground for their gradual exclusion from the socio-economic-political arena and also made themthe target of communal violence.

RSS-trained pracharakNathuramGodse, in his book, *May it Please Your Honour*—his confessional statement in the court— said that it was Gandhi's 'appeasement policy' towards Muslims that emboldened Muslims and made them demand and get Pakistan.This was one of his stated reasons for murdering Mahatma Gandhi. While broadly Gandhi is looked up at as 'Father of the Nation', a Mahatma, the

Dalits in India look at him as someone who upheld the caste system. Right-wing leaders also hate him, though in public they will not say so. They hate him as they consider him a betrayer of the Hindu cause and supporter of Muslims, their propaganda mill holds him responsible for India's partition.

Though, so far, Gandhi is not spared the blame from the Hindu communal stable, it is for the second time (earlier Sheshadri) that ideologues (Jaswant Singh) have pointed a finger at the iconic figure of Sardar Patel, who is generally held in high regard by most Indians, more so and in a special way, by the followers of the RSS, especially in Gujarat. Jaswant Singh blaming Sardar Patel for the partition is something which many could not tolerate. Some other people hold Nehru's ambition for Prime Ministership to be the cause of partition.

In Pakistan, matters are the other way around. There, Jinnah is regarded as Baba-e-Qaum (Father of the Nation), Quaid-i-Azam (the great leader) and held in highest esteem. Even in Pakistan, there are differing interpretations of Jinnah. Liberal Muslims describe him as secular and for supporting their point they quote his 11th August 1947 speech. In this speech he said, 'You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed that has nothing to do with the business of the state' (Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Speech in Constituent Assembly). The Conservative Muslims describe him as a believer of 'Two Nation

theory', and a true Muslim who created Pakistan for Islam and Muslims.

The nationalist streams have seen partition as 'vivisection', and 'imperialist betrayal', and a 'historical denouement' of the two nation theory (SurendraRao, *The Hindu*, 5 Jan 2010).

Some of the Western and other writers try to present partition as the conflict for state power between Hindus and Muslims (SurendraRao, *Ibid*). This work recognises that 'partition was a conflict for state power, and that the British remained reluctant partitionists right till the end'. As Rao said, this book argues that, 'Partition was not foisted on reluctant Indian political leaders but in a large measure willed into existence by them'.

Same phenomenon, so many interpretations, so many opinions! The reasons are obvious; we judge the phenomenon according to our own prisms guided by our interests, and according to our ideologies. The commentators have picked up a few events of the partition process and made inferences accordingly. For Advani, Jinnah's 11th August speech is enough to certify him as a secular person; for Sudarshan, Jinnah's Lucknow pact is good enough for evaluating him etc. So, the same phenomenon of the partition of India is differently presented in India and Pakistan. The same Jinnah is looked at differently in different countries and by different people.

There is not only a Roshomon (same phenomenon being looked at differently in the famous Japanese film) effect, there is also the case of the six blind men and the elephant. If we look at the limited span of the trajectory, we will see Jinnah as the ambassador of Hindu-Muslim goodwill but will conveniently ignore that the same Jinnah gave the call for Direct Action for getting Pakistan in 1946, leading to the massacre of thousands and triggering one of the major pre-partition violences. In this, we will see just one of Gandhi's viewpoint in supporting the Khilafat movement but will ignore all his efforts to be all-inclusive in the freedom movement, without submitting to the communal demands from either side. What is needed is to look at the process from the dynamics of colonial powers, the interests of different groups of people and consequently, the type of role Gandhi, Nehru, Jinnah or Patel could play. Any selective and narrow looking at events will deprive us from understanding the real cause of the partition process, something which operated at multiple levels, and in which the primary and secondary factors need to be identified.

All the same, partition did vivisect the people. Later, the theory that religion is the basis of nation state lay buried with the formation of Bangladesh. While Muslim League and Jinnah wanted a homeland for Muslims, the same Muslim community became split in three countries in due course. The colonial powers who presided over the partition went smiling all the way and achieved their strategic interest's safety in the form of their military base in Pakistan. The Muslims of India got divided into three parts, with diverging interests. In Pakistan, where Jinnah is regarded so highly, his messages started

being censored, paving the way for the rule of the military-mullahcombine over a period of time. His concept of 'secularism' and 'democracy' lay shattered at the hands of those who kept adorning their offices with his portraits.

The Tragedy

The Indian partition can easily be ranked amongst the worst tragedies of the world. There were many ironies hidden in the historic event. As Mushirul Hasan points out, 'No other country in the twentieth century has seen two such contrary movements taking place at the same time. If one was a popular nationalist movement, unique in the annals of world history for ousting colonisers through nonviolent means, the other, in its underbelly, was the counter movement of partition, marked by violence, cruelty, blood shed, displacement and massacres' (MushirulHasan, 2005).

The freedom of India was accompanied by one of the biggest catastrophes of the subcontinent, the partition of the country into Pakistan (West & East) and India. The narratives of anticolonial struggle and its success have got mixed with the painful narratives of partition and its aftermath. Partition remains an unspoken horror, whose consequences are relegated to our collective unconscious. Though India had political heterogeneity, it was a culture steeped in composite traditions. This partition was done on the 'strange' basis of 'religion'. Millions lost their lives and were evacuated from their lands. On the night of 15 August 1945, East & West Punjab, North West Frontier Province, North India and Sind as

well as East Bengal and West Bengal were engulfed in violence that went on for months. Mammoth migrations of Muslims from India and Hindus from Pakistan took place under the heavy cloud of violence. The unprecedented violence, which took place, shook both the communities to their core.

For six frightening weeks, a mania for murder, loot and rape swept across northern India. Nearly 500,000 people died in the holocaust and 5,500,000 people were forced to migrate from their homes. Muslim-Sikh, Hindu-Muslim populations that were living in harmony was stretched to the limits of their tolerance by the communalised atmosphere. When the 'trains with dead bodies' arrived in Delhi, it further aggravated the situation with the local populace hearing ghastly stories of the massacre on the other side of the border.

People whose families were killed, whose everything was looted, came with bitterness and anger and questioned the existence of other communities in their area. 'We have been driven out, what are these fellows doing here (Gopal Dash Khosla)?' The other typical example is that of Shaikhpura, where Muslims and Sikhs lived in a happy state earlier. With the advent of Muslim refugees from India, bringing along with them rumours and stories of massacre of Muslim innocents, within hours the quiet Punjab town was soaked in blood.

The violence accompanying partition identified women and their bodies as markers for community identity and rape and abduction occurred on a mass scale, reports were there about cutting off of their breasts and they were even killed by their own families to save family

honour. 'In the history of communal relations, the year 1946-47 marked a period of unequalled mistrust, acerbity and frenzied warfare in almost all parts of India. Tension between Muslims and non-Muslim communities increased till the cords that bound them together snapped and flung them apart, it seemed for ever. Came the horrors of Calcutta, Noakhali, Bihar and after a brief interval, the tragic events enacted in Punjab, North-West Frontier Province and Sind (Gopal Das Khosla).'

Writing about partition violence, Nehru (quoted in Bipan Chandra, *Modern India*, NCERT, 1990, page 271) wrote, 'fear and hatred blinded our minds and all the restraints which civilisation imposes were swept away. Horror piled on horror, and sudden emptiness seized us at the brute savagery of human beings... We sorrowed for the dead and the dying, and for those whose suffering was greater than that of death'. Seeing the consequences of partition, Nehru had a total rethink on the whole process of partition, '...the consequences of partition have been so terrible that one is inclined to think that anything else would have been preferable. That partition has come and brought in its train other vast changes...' (Nehru, Speech in Bhopal, 9th July 1958, Hasan pg 100).

Meher Nigar Masroor pointed out in anguish, '...today, having seen the lacerated bodies of Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus, I feel the city has become a vestibule of hate. History, it seems, is an invitation of revenge. Religion, it seems, is the license to kill, the greater savagery denoting greater dedication' (quoted in Hasan, *ibid*). The penetrating observation by Urvashi Butalia sums up the plight of the common people, 'The disconnections between rarefied decisions leading to partition and searing consequences in individual

lives, remains one of the most powerful tropes that has been carried from partition fiction into work of Historians and social scientists' (Butalia, 1998, p 10).

The creation of Pakistan was accompanied by rivers of blood on both sides of the fence. It was an epic tragedy with loss of friends and families. 'There were memories on both sides of the living in close proximity with friends and neighbours, of a shared cultural and intellectual heritage, and of fighting together for independence and raising the banner of revolt against colonial rule. The birth of Pakistan, a prized trophy for some, destroyed Iqbal's melodious lyric of syncretic nationalism—Naya Shivala (New Temple)—once the ideal of patriots and freedom-fighters. It severed or fragmented cultural ties and undermined a vibrant, composite intellectual tradition' (Hasan, 2001, page 130).

Celebrated poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz expressed his pain and anguish in the immortal poem, Yeh Who Subah to Nahin

(This is not that Dawn):

*This is not that long looked-for break of day
Not the clear dawn in quest of which those comrades
Set to, believing that in heaven's wide void
Somewhere must be the star's last halting place
Somewhere the verge of night's slow-washing tide
Somewhere an anchorage for ships of heartache*

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