

*Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah: Studies in Interpretation*

By Sharif Al Mujahid

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Quaid-i-Azam's biography is a living theme and an expanding subject. He still awaits his Boswell. The Quaid stood at the centre of a political struggle in the subcontinent from 1940-47. Understandably his personality became the subject of heated controversy laden with emotional overtones emanating from the political process culminating in the partition of the subcontinent. To the champions of united India he appeared as a veritable Ravana who was trying to tear apart their sacred motherland. Most of the Englishmen accustomed to secular statecraft could not bring themselves to accept a polity emerging on the basis of religion. This was equally an anathema for Gandhi who was otherwise deeply immersed in religion and had Hinduized politics. Since the English looked upon the unity of India as their most outstanding political achievement they were deeply hurt and even incensed when Muslims under the leadership of Mohammad Ali Jinnah strove to carve out a homeland outside the orbit of a united India. Hence most of English politicians and intellectuals for these two reasons were irreconcilably hostile to the Muslim idea of partition of the sub-continent. In general the Labour Party and English radical groups held views which were not compatible with Muslim theory of two nations. In their eyes Jinnah was rather an inexplicably enigmatic leader. How could a person ever be an exponent of nationalism based on Islam who sported Saville Row suits and ties, and for his punctilious sartorial tests ranked with best dressed Englishmen, and who addressed his own people in English. In thirties, Gandhi for his Hinduized politics was described as a semi-naked fakir from India, now it was Jinnah's turn to be dubbed as a snob and a humbug for being a protagonist of Muslim separatism. Jinnah was misunderstood in England and most maligned person in Hindu press. Even a cursory glance at the Hindu papers from 1940 to 1944 would show that he was their most hated person — a bogeyman. Downright denunciation, abrasive and insulting comments couched in a scurrilous language scathing satire and cutting cartoons and denigration through all sorts of literary artifices ranging from innuendos to sophistry were employed to abase the man in the eyes of his own people and the world at large.

Jinnah's personality was beclouded in a dust of controversy raised by the

English and Hindu press. By virtue of their wide spread circulation they were able to condition the opinions of uninformed outsiders on lines unwelcome and uncomplimentary to Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Pakistan. Muslims press raised its faint voice but its influence did not stretch beyond the subcontinent. In forties Z.A. Suleri wrote a small biography. Designed as a popular work it had no scholastic pretensions. However it served a useful purpose in Muslim press campaign for Pakistan M.H. Sayyid's "Muhammad Ali Jinnah": A Political Study" first published in 1945 can be regarded as the first detailed and authentic political biography of the Quaid-i-Azam. In later editions it was updated to 1948. This work has the distinctive merit of a participant observer in events as the Quaid's personal assistant. This is a pioneering work of abiding value. Hector Bolitho's work to borrow Mohammad Ali Jauhar's phrase was a 'command performance' in the sense it was commissioned by the Government and was not the result of some inner urge of the author. Again it was conceived as a popular book and has no claims to be a research work. Nevertheless it is a very readable narrative and the author has largely been able to capture the charisma of Quaid's personality. Of course a lot has been left out by way of contemporary evidence. Since then a considerable number of works have appeared on the Quaid—mostly of bibliographic type or of hagiologic nature.

However still a need has been felt for an authoritative biography of the Quaid. While biographies, source material and bibliographies of Gandhi and Nehru fill in endless rows the library shelves in India and London, no comparable claim can be made on Pakistan side for its benefactor. Not that Quaid's achievement was less epochmaking than his great Hindu contemporaries nor he had a lack lustre personality. The dearth of first rate biographies is due in a large measure to the paucity of highly trained manpower in history as it is due to the chronic ineptitude and lack of dedication on the part of intelligentsia to this cause. Mere lips is not enough, in fact it has been over done. Though the official zeal is not lacking it has failed to rise above the committee and seminar syndrome. Official orders can not make the flowers to bloom. Government should create conditions conducive to the growth of scholarship and fostering the utterly depleted manpower in the field of historical research. Not much can be accomplished with about 20 Ph.Ds in various fields of History, ranging from ancient, mediaeval Islamic and Modern. This strength falls far below any department of History abroad and even does not compare favourably with India. No bringing together of disparate scholastic and journalistic elements and commissioning them to produce Quaid's authoritative biography would bring about the desired result. Great biographies were not made to order like pieces of furniture but the work of persons who were genuinely interested or inspired by the personality and achievements of persons about whom they

choose to write. It is time that we developed a mature approach on this subject and set our priorities in order.

In a way like poetry, biography except for its methodology, has a local ethos and colour which is best appreciated by the people whom the leader loved and for whom he laboured, sacrificed, suffered and achieved. Biography is often a tribute. Feelings of admiration and identification with a nationalist cause in their burning intensity cannot be shared in equal measure by a foreigner. If a Pakistani is commissioned to write a biography of Napoleon, Churchill, Lenin or Mao Tse Tung he would not be able to achieve that evocative response from his French, British, Russian and Chinese readers. Hence it was natural that Hector Bolitho's biography though very readable does not excite the same feelings in the hearts of Pakistanis as small stirring poem of Mian Bashir Ahmad evoked in the form of thunderous applause from thousands who attended the League session in Lahore in 1940. Hence there is an imperative need to promote home-spun biographies of Jinnah. Biography is a wide genre encompassing biographical literature of different types such as political, psychological, interpretative etc., and of different levels to suit requirements of students and scholars. Sharif-al-Mujahid's work is a pioneering effort in interpretative biography in Pakistan blazing a trail for others to follow.

Viewed in this perspective Prof. Sharif al-Mujahid's book *Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah—Studies in Interpretation* stands out as a product of dedicated effort, almost the fruit of his life time. Originally published as series of articles the author has revised, enlarged and enriched them and metamorphosed them into inter-locking organic unity of an analytical work par excellence. On the one hand, it unfolds the growth of author's mind and on the other hand it presents an ever-widening vista of knowledge and interpretation enlivened by painstaking study and research. His book stands as a class distinguished from the common rung of biographies, in the sense that it attempts to appreciate and interpret the perceptions and motivations which guided the Quaid at various times of his career. He has examined in detail the socio-political milieu which conditioned Quaid's political views. The unfolding of his leadership in space-time has been eruditely attempted on the basis of contemporary evidence and later day literature on the subject. He has cast his net wide, sometimes perhaps too wide, in giving comparative appraisal of the Quaid's achievement vis-a-vis other great liberators and nation makers like Washington, Napoleon, Lenin and others. These heroes being primarily military or revolutionary leaders do not belong to the typology represented by Quaid-i-Azam who may be more profitably with Saad Zaghlul, Abu Bakr Tafawa Balewa, Ahmad Bella and Tunku Abdur Rehman who employed constitutional methods to achieve freedom for their people. However, it shows the broad sweep of his scholar-

ship. He has framed the Quaid in global context. Rising above the hagiological adulation he applies the analytical techniques of modern historical methodology to build up his argument. This is no bald narration of events larded with extensive quotes, but is a finely constructed expose of the Quaid's life and times as well. He displays the vision of a discerning historian well versed in unravelling socio-political and economic forces which go to the making of a personality and shaping of events. Originality is often akin to unorthodoxy. No wonder then if many people have found his book to be rather too different. Mr. Sharif-ud-Din Pirzada, himself an erudite scholar, has not indulged in hyperbole in calling it a pioneering work, "the first theme-oriented work on the Quaid which attempts to interpret his public postures and to resolve some 'contradiction' and 'controversies' which are being canvassed by his critics".

Prof. Mujahid has portrayed the Quaid as 'an ordinary mortal' unlike most Pakistani biographers who "in their exuberant enthusiasm tend to discard his counsel and present him as a superman". He concedes the element of hero worship as a constructive element for national cohesion and as a source of inspiration for greater achievement. Hero is an essential symbol for nation making and as a model, but should not be idolized in a manner that he was "free from all blemishes" and should not be proved right in everything at the expense of truth. He has ventured to raise certain questions and re-interpret some of the familiar facts.

Prof. Sharif has in a way de-mythified the Quaid and taken him out of the publicist glare into the realm of cold inquiry. However he is second to none in his deep regard and admiration for the father of the nation. When he comes to this theme his words are winged and he soars into rarified realm of impressive diction. Prof. Sharif possesses a flair for English literature and writes smooth, limpid prose rippling with eloquence and tingling with logic. With his gift of clarity and felicity of expression he carries the reader with him. It is a rewarding experience to read this book.

With a penchant of a perfectionist he has profusely documented his book and availed of the original and secondary sources in a skilful manner. A detailed chronology and appendices enhance the value of this book and bear the unmistakable stamp of his erudition. Beautifully produced and fairly priced for its volume, it is an extremely readable book, a pleasure for the scholar and a reference work for student.

—Muhammad Yusuf Abbasi