

## Reviews

### *The High Politics of India's Partition: The Revisionist Perspective*

A real need for revaluation of the high politics of India's partition has been boldly underscored by some recent developments. One of these is the most valuable revisionist contribution of Ayesha Jalal of the University of Cambridge.<sup>1</sup> Whether or not the centenary years for the Indian National Congress [henceforth the Congress] witnessed any significant publications on the Congress politics, two major studies in the politics of the All-India Muslim League [henceforth the League], its 'Great Leader' (*Quaid-i Azam*), Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and the partition have come down to us in quick succession: 1984 saw the publication of Stanley Wolpert's *Jinnah of Pakistan*,<sup>2</sup> and the following year received Ayesha Jalal's, as mentioned above. The importance of these studies does not merely consist in the wide polarity of their approaches and views. Much greater significance is attached to the fact that their sharp difference underlines a strong and long-felt need for questioning some of the great old assumptions and myths enshrined in the orthodox historiography of British India's partition, as discussed below.

February 1988 saw the beginning of a series of developments, focusing on the politics of partition, which stemmed from the much expected disclosure of the thirty pages of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's book<sup>3</sup> left sealed for thirty years, and due to be released at the time. The delayed public disclosure of the material in early November 1988, due to some legal tangle, fuelled public curiosity and speculations about the politics of partition.<sup>4</sup> The contents of the excised portion, though it appeared disappointing to some for not making startling revelations,<sup>5</sup> deviates vitally from the book at least in one major respect. In this section, the release of which almost coincides with the birth centenary of Jawaharlal Nehru, Azad points his finger in a much more determined manner at the former's responsibility for the partition. He claims to have initiated the move for Nehru's succession as the Congress president in 1946, and regrets his decision as a 'blunder' of 'himalayan' proportion. He writes:

<sup>1</sup> A. Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP [University Press], South Asian Studies No. 31, 1985) [henceforth *Jinnah*].

<sup>2</sup> S. Wolpert, *Jinnah of Pakistan* (New York, Oxford UP, 1984).

<sup>3</sup> M. A. K. Azad, *India Wins Freedom* (Calcutta, Orient Longmans, 1957).

<sup>4</sup> *The Statesman Weekly* (Calcutta & New Delhi), 29 October 1988, pp. 3, 7.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 'The Maulana's Lament', Editorials, 12 November 1988, p. 9.

I can never forgive myself when I think that if I had not committed these mistakes the history of the last 10 years would have been different . . . I warned Jawaharlal that history would never forgive us if we agreed to Partition. The verdict would be that India was not divided by the Muslim League but by the Congress.<sup>6</sup>

These are indeed strong words, and may even seem bizarre to the multitude who have been brought up with the traditional assumptions about the partition. This brings us to what recent historical research clearly reveals as long-cherished myths of India's partition.

### I

The polarity between the historical theses of Wolpert and Jalal as well as Azad's contentions touch respectively on the twin partition myths locked in a symbiotic relationship: 'the League for partition' and 'the Congress for unity'. The traditional understanding of the political process leading to partition has remained strongly rooted in these two 'unquestionable' popular assumptions, reinforced by a long and powerful tradition of academic sanctification. It would be most surprising not to find a great majority of people, having a basic familiarity with the major developments preceding the Indian partition, identifying the Lahore Resolution of the League (March 1940) with the demand for Pakistan and partition, and regarding 14 August 1947 as its logical culmination.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, the Indian nationalist component of this historiographical orthodoxy has been content to project partition as the tragic finale of a heroic struggle of the Indian patriots against the sinister Machiavellian forces out to destroy the sacred Indian unity. Like all myths one may find a modicum of truth to defend more moderate versions of such perceptions. But, with greater accession to our knowledge in recent times and accentuation of clarity to our perceptions on modern politics in India, such positions have become totally indefensible.<sup>8</sup> The traditional perspective seems desperately remiss in not conveying not merely the true nature of the high drama but also

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 November 1988, p. 6. For a further discussion, see below.

<sup>7</sup> ' . . . there is universal agreement that Mahomed Ali Jinnah was central to the Muslim League's emergence after 1937 as the voice of a Muslim nation; to its articulation in March 1940 of the Pakistan Demand for separate statehood for the Muslim majority provinces of north-western and eastern India; and to its achievement in August 1947. . . . ' R. J. Moore, 'Jinnah and the Pakistan Demand', *Modern Asian Studies* XVII, 4 (1983), p. 529. Cf. also: 'In August 1947, the Muslim League was the only party to achieve what it wanted.' A. I. Singh, *The Origins of the Partition of India* (Delhi, Oxford UP, 1987), p. 252. See also A. Roy, 'Review' of Jalal's *Jinnah in South Asia* X, 1 (June 1987), p. 101.

<sup>8</sup> The most valuable recent edition of the documentary sources on the transfer of power in India is undoubtedly N. Mansergh [ed.-in-chief], E. W. R. Lumby and P. Moon (eds), *Constitutional Relations Between Britain and India: The Transfer of Power 1942-1947*, [henceforth *TP Documents*], 12 vols (London, 1970-83). In addition, the *Quaid-i Azam Papers*, All-India Muslim League Papers, and the 'Partition Papers'—all rendered accessible in the National Archives of Pakistan, Islamabad, together with a variety of private papers and other documentary material made available in the Indian National Archives and the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, form a substantive corpus of new material on the politics of partition.

its nuances, subtleties and intricacies. This flat and linear perspective is astonishingly indifferent to or ignorant of the undercurrents as much in the League as in Congress high politics during the critical decade before partition. As early as December 1938, while moving the tenth resolution at the twenty-sixth League session in Patna, repudiating the federal scheme under the Government of India Act of 1935 and investing Jinnah with the supreme authority 'to adopt such a course as may be necessary with a view to exploring the possibility of a suitable alternative which would safeguard the interests of the Mussalmans', Maulana Zafar Ali Khan spoke about the League's 'antagonism' not 'towards the Hindus generally, but against the Congress High Command', foreshadowed the ensuing struggle between the two parties as a gigantic 'battle of wits', and expressed his concern to see 'who emerged victorious from the contest'.<sup>9</sup> The revisionist perspective offers a much clearer and more logical and convincing interpretation of this 'battle' between Jinnah and the Congress in which both openly stood for what they did not want, said what they did not mean, and what they truly wanted was not stated publicly but only betrayed in their vital and purposive political decisions and actions. The long persistence of orthodox beliefs in these matters has clearly been in accord with the most commonly perceived interconnections among Muslim 'nationalism', 'separatism', the Muslim League, the Lahore Resolution and partition. But 'the conspiracy of silence' resorted to both by Jinnah and the Congress in regard to the real motives underlying their respective political strategies and tactics must also be seen as largely contributing to the perpetuation of these traditional myths. The acceptance of the emerging historical truth makes a huge demand on everyone grown up with the old verity in as much as the new is totally opposed to what has so far been largely given to the world, namely, that it was not the League but the Congress who chose, at the end of the day, to run a knife across Mother India's body.

## II

Jalal has initiated the much needed task of historical reconstruction by taking upon herself the challenge of demolishing the first of the twin myths which concerns Jinnah and the League's actual role in the making of Pakistan. It seems a remarkable coincidence that Wolpert's precedes Jalal's and provides a perfect foil, in its orthodoxy, to set off the critical significance of Jalal's valuable revisionist contribution which deserves a very special place in the corpus of the modern South Asian historiography on the partition of India. The academic popularity of this orthodox historiography is clearly attested by the fact that Wolpert is both preceded and followed, within the short span of a decade, by some powerful advocates of the conventional position, such as U. Kaura (1977),<sup>10</sup> R. J. Moore (1983),<sup>11</sup> and A. I. Singh (1987),<sup>12</sup> leaving aside a

<sup>9</sup> S. S. Pirzada (ed.), *Foundation of Pakistan: All-India Muslim League Documents: 1906-1947*, II (Karachi/Dacca, National Publishing House, 1970), p. 321.

<sup>10</sup> U. Kaura, *Muslims and Indian Nationalism. The Emergence of the Demand for India's Partition 1928-1940* (New Delhi, South Asia Books, 1977).

<sup>11</sup> R. J. Moore, 'Jinnah and Pakistan', pp. 529-61.

<sup>12</sup> A. I. Singh, *Origins of the Partition*.

host of scholars supportive of this position but whose involvements with this issue are peripheral.

Where does one draw the line between the conventional and the revisionist positions on the issue of Pakistan and partition in relation to Jinnah and the League? On both chronological and thematic grounds the Lahore Resolution of 1940 clearly emerges as the divide between the two distinct interpretative approaches. Until then no sharp differences and disagreements seem to figure very prominently in the orthodox and revisionist analyses of Muslim politics between the two world wars. In the orthodox view, the resolution adopted at the Annual Session of the League at Lahore on 24 March 1940 was the first official pronouncement of the 'Pakistan' or 'partition' demand by the party. Though the term 'Pakistan' is nowhere to be found in the resolution, it is, nonetheless, seen to have provided for the separation of the Muslim majority areas in the north-western and eastern zones of India as 'sovereign' and 'independent states', and thereby formed the basis of the 'Pakistan demand'. Along with this perceived reformulation of the League's political objectives, there is also, intrinsic to this view, an equally significant assumption of a major turn and break in Jinnah's political development: the Islamization of the 'nationalist' and 'secular' Jinnah—the ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity—emerging as the most potent and dynamic influence in partitioning British India on religious ground. Both these assumptions are challenged in the revisionist analyses: the Lahore Resolution was not meant to be the 'Pakistan demand' but a 'tactical move' and a 'bargaining counter', and hence, it implied no ideological or religious metamorphosis of Jinnah, no basic changes in his political aims but a significant shift in his strategies and tactics.

In the period between Jinnah's declining influence in the Congress that led to his resignation from the party in 1920, with the corresponding rise of Gandhi and his populist politics, and the adoption of the Lahore Resolution, Jinnah and the League's political aims and objectives are commonly perceived by both orthodox and revisionist writers as seeking to ensure a secure and legitimate place for Muslims in the changing world of India as well as build up the League's position and power as central to the interests of all Muslims in India. In achieving these goals the central league leadership were internally confronted with a serious challenge of working out a delicate balance of interests and power with the growing authority and influence of the provincial Muslim political bosses in the Muslim majority areas, especially Bengal and the Punjab, reinforced by the enlarged political opportunities under the 'Montford' Reforms of 1919. Externally, their attempts, as a 'weighted minority' to secure a 'substantial' representation at the centre, were subjected to the competing claims, machinations, and much greater strength of the Indian majority represented by the Congress. Both the traditionalist and revisionist opinions find concurrence in stressing the League and Jinnah's political efforts throughout this period, towards a resolution of the Muslim problem within the constitutional framework of a united India. The detailed political analyses of the major developments of the period are aimed at revealing how, as a moderate constitutionalist and nationalist, seeking adequate safeguards for the minority interests of Indian Muslims, Jinnah's political aims were as much frustrated as was his political position under-

mined, in stages, during this period. The steady demise of constitutionalism and moderatism in Indian politics since 1917; Jinnah's relegation from the centre of nationalist politics consequent upon the simultaneous rise of the Pan-Islamists and Gandhi in Indian politics since 1919-20; the aggravation of communalist tendencies in politics both by the introduction of representative institutions under the 1919 Reforms, and the bitterness, frustrations and confusions resulting from the collapse of the Non-cooperation-Khilafat Movement (1922) as well as the abolition of the Khilafat (1924); the steep and significant rise in the position and influence of the provincial Muslim political bosses in the Muslim majority areas in the northwestern and eastern regions in the inter-wars period; the reluctance or inability of the Congress to strengthen the hands of the 'left' faction of the League under Jinnah in the course of negotiations among the Indian political parties in the years 1926-28; the unilateral declaration by the Congress of its political goal of total independence (*purna swaraj*)—all find, in varying degrees of importance, common historiographical recognition as indicative of the predicaments of both League and Jinnah, forcing the latter to withdraw temporarily from Indian politics and move to London. The growing impotence and irrelevance of the League in the world of Muslim *real-politik*, *via-à-vis* the growing authority of the Muslim provinces and provincial leaders, as revealed in the subsequent developments in the Round Table Conference and the Communal Award in the early nineteen-thirties, prepared the ground for Jinnah's return, on the supplication of the League leaders of the Muslim minority areas, to resurrect the central role of the organization and liberate it from the suffocating embraces of the provincial leaders. An essential continuity in Jinnah's aims and policies, on his return, finds general acceptance among most writers. The continuity is to be found in the common Congress and League objectives of promoting their respective national or central dominance at the expense of the provincial bases of power. Likewise, the League was not uninterested in the Congress efforts to make the British concede power at the centre which they continued to monopolize under the provisions of the Government of India Act of 1935, the ultimate League objective being a negotiated pattern of sharing power with the Congress on the basis of a substantial League representation at the centre.

The agreements between the orthodox and revisionist views are also extended to a recognition of the supreme importance of the provincial elections of 1937 held in eleven British provinces under the Act of 1935. It is, however, in regard to the nature and meanings of this significance that their divergences begin. There is no room for disputations about the crippling discomfiture of the League candidates in the election as against the overwhelming success of the Congress in the non-Muslim constituencies. Of the eleven provinces of British India, the Congress emerged with a clear majority in six and as the largest single party in three others. The revelation of the utter weakness of the League and Jinnah positively diminished their importance to the Congress, as soon experienced by the League in the growing intransigence of the Congress revealed in their post-election attitudes and dealings. For Jinnah, who had striven for Muslim political unity at the national level, the political reality of the post-1937 British India that while Hindus would dominate in all the

Hindu majority provinces, Muslims seemed unable to dominate even the two largest Muslim majority provinces of the Punjab and Bengal, looked menacing. It seemed more so in view of a clear prospect of the Congress dominance at the centre as well, should the British ever decide to implement the federal provisions of the 1935 Act which offered Muslims not more than one-third of the central representation. More than ever he now clearly saw the lack of any political choice other than turning the League into the 'third' focus of power in India and the 'sole spokesman' for Muslims. 'An honourable settlement', he came to realize, 'can only be achieved between equals' and 'politics means power and not relying only on cries of justice or fair play or goodwill'.<sup>13</sup>

The conflicting perceptions of Jinnah's realization are quite significant. The orthodox perception is one of a complete transformation of the mores of Jinnah's personality, ideology and policy. His old secularist idea of a Muslim minority problem to be resolved through substantial representation at the centre and provincial autonomy stood totally discomfited, and came, therefore, to be discarded in favour of the radically new demand for 'parity' at the centre based on the recognition of the Muslim claim of being a separate religious 'nation'—the much-publicized 'two-nation theory' of Jinnah. The use of religious slogans and symbols proved immeasurably useful not just in rousing sentiments against the Congress ministries in the provinces. It also helped the League in reaching the Muslim masses over the head of the provincial leaders. Jinnah's task was facilitated further by the political exigencies arising from the outbreak of the second world war. The Congress 'intransigence' drew the government closer to the League and made them realize the obvious importance of promoting Jinnah as the spokesman for Indian Muslims. Reassured by the government suspension of efforts at federation and armed with a practical veto upon any further constitutional advance offered by the government, Jinnah found the British ready to concede his demands. On 24 March 1940 Jinnah told the world what he wanted. In Jinnah's mind, so a major protagonist of the orthodox school tells us, 'partition . . . was the only long-term solution to India's foremost problem' and, having arrived at and taken this decision, he 'lowered the final curtain on any prospects for a single united independent India'.<sup>14</sup> From that moment Jinnah was 'set on his seven year campaign to realize the sovereign state of Pakistan'.<sup>15</sup> *Quaid-i Azam* had indeed forged the 'League into a political weapon powerful enough to tear the subcontinent apart'.<sup>16</sup> The academic judgement thus lends its weight to both the popular 'hagiology' and 'demonology' of Jinnah, the former representing the teeming millions of adoring believers whom Jinnah led to 'the promised land', while, to even greater numbers of the latter persuasion, his memory is perpetuated as a diabolical and sinister influence behind 'the vivisection of Mother India'.

The revisionist view, in contrast, envisages no real change in Jinnah's

<sup>13</sup> Pirzada, *Muslim League Documents*, II, p. 269; also J. Ahmad (ed.), *Speeches and Writings of Mr Jinnah*, I (Lahore, S. M. Ashraf, 7th edn, 1968), p. 32.

<sup>14</sup> Wolpert, *Jinnah*, p. 182.

<sup>15</sup> F. Robinson, 'Review' of Jalal's *Jinnah*, in *Modern Asian Studies* XX, 3 (July 1986), p. 613.

<sup>16</sup> S. Wolpert, *A New History of India* (New York, Oxford UP, 1982), p. 325.

political goals but in his political strategies and tactics. His aims still continued to be to secure Muslim interests 'within' and not in total separation from India. No doubt he came to realize the grave limitations and political danger of Muslims trying to operate on the basis of the formula of a majority-minority differentiation. With the abandonment of the minority status was also discarded the notion of a simple unmodified federation which, as the 1937 election at the provincial level had clearly shown, was likely only to condemn Muslims to a virtual and perpetual dominance by the Congress. The political answer to the problem of all Indian Muslims, scattered unevenly over the subcontinent, could not have been in a total separation of the Muslim majority areas. As Muslims living in areas where they formed the majority had different needs from co-religionists in Hindu areas, Jinnah had to balance the demand for a separate Muslim state against safeguards for Muslim minorities. Viewed from this position, the Lahore Resolution, though couched in terms of separation of Muslim majority areas, did not reflect Jinnah's 'real political aims'.<sup>17</sup> It is simplistic, in this view, to take it as a final commitment to partition or Pakistan, if the latter term is used in its conventional sense of embodiment of the recognition of the Muslim right and claim of being a nation—a recognition that could then be used to overcome the obvious political disadvantages of a minority status in a federal constitution. The thrust of Jinnah's political strategy underpinning the resolution was initially to secure the recognition of the Indian Muslim nationhood on the basis of acceptance of the 'Pakistan' demand by the British and Congress, and thereby gain an equal say for Muslims in any arrangement about India's political future at the centre. Once the principle of the Muslim right to self-determination, as embodied in the Lahore Resolution, was conceded, the resultant Muslim state or states could either 'enter into a confederation with non-Muslim provinces on the basis of parity at the centre' or make, as a sovereign state, 'treaty arrangement with the rest of India about matters of common concern'.<sup>18</sup> The resolution, in this sense, was, therefore, nothing more than a 'tactical move' and a 'bargaining counter'.<sup>19</sup>

### III

How do these two views bear comparison on logic and evidence? The conventional view, on a close analysis, reveals serious inadequacies, and fails to accommodate certain pieces of the jigsaw.

The Lahore Resolution has given rise to three main issues, of which we have

<sup>17</sup> Jalal, *Jinnah*, p. 4; Roy, 'Review' of Jalal's *Jinnah*.

<sup>18</sup> Jalal, *ibid.*, p. 241. Jinnah's vision perhaps anticipated the contemporary Canadian situation in relation to Quebec. French Quebec decided against separation in 1980. In accordance with the arrangements of the new Accord signed between the Canadian Federal Government and the Provinces, Quebec's power in the Centre has been substantially reinforced without compromising its right to contract out of Federal Programmes.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

already mentioned two: the first concerns its relation to the Pakistan demand, and the second has reference to Jinnah's political aims and strategies in the most critical years between the resolution and the actual partition. There is a third question which caused some political dissent between the League and the provincial Muslim leaders, especially of Bengal, having resurfaced much later during the political conflict between West and East Pakistan. This relates to the doubts concerning the federal or unitary character of the separated Muslim majority areas as envisaged in the resolution.

Of all these three issues the last is the least ambiguous. Adopted at a time when the League's authority over the Muslim majority provinces was far from established, the resolution found it expedient to make unequivocal reference to 'independent states' rather than a single state. Only in 1946, as Jinnah needed to present a collective Muslim front to the Cabinet Mission, and also as the League and Jinnah had indeed emerged as the 'sole spokesman' for Indian Muslims, Jinnah felt himself strong enough to change the wording of the resolution from the plural to the singular 'state', providing a rather amusing justification, though no Leaguer seemed to have had the courage to ask for one at the time, that the plural was a 'misprint'. The decision was carried through the meeting of the Muslim League Council in Delhi. The provincial Muslim leaders, like Fazlul Huq, who tried unsuccessfully to resist Jinnah's centralizing arm, subsequently felt bitter about this change. Huq, the mover of the resolution in Lahore, later accused Jinnah of 'betrayal' of its letter and spirit. Significantly enough, the United Front, led by Huq, H. Subrawardy and Maulana Bhasani, which decimated the Muslim League in the general election of 1954 in East Pakistan, justified its claims for the provincial autonomy, contained in its 'Twenty-one Demands', in terms of the Lahore Resolution.

The traditional understanding of and explanations for the other two seminal issues are patently uncritical and inadequate. A whole range of doubts concerning a facile equation between the resolution and the Pakistan demand as well as Jinnah's political calculations are either ignored or glossed over.

To begin with, the very omission of the word 'Pakistan' from the so-called Pakistan Resolution cannot but raise doubts in this context. Much greater significance is added to such doubts when Jinnah's initial displeasure at this equation is considered. Why did he find 'fault' with Hindus for 'foisting' and 'fathering' the word 'Pakistan' on Muslims? In his Presidential speech at the thirteenth Delhi session of the League in April 1943 Jinnah spoke his mind quite strongly:

I think you will bear me out that when we passed the Lahore Resolution, we had not used the word 'Pakistan'. Who gave us this word? (Cries of 'Hindus') Let me tell you it is their fault. They started damning the resolution on the ground that it was Pakistan. . . . They fathered this word upon us. Give the dog a bad name and then hang him. . . . You know perfectly well that Pakistan is a word which is really foisted upon us and fathered on us by some section of the Hindu press and also by the British press.<sup>20</sup>

Jinnah was quite right about the beginning of this identification: the adoption

<sup>20</sup> Pirzada, *Muslim League Documents*, II, p. 425.



of the resolution was widely reported in the Hindu and British press as the acceptance of the 'Pakistan demand'.

The second major source of doubt about the logic of Jinnah demanding partition, in 1940, stems from a consideration of the obvious and callous disregard or 'sacrifice' (*qurbani*) of less than two score million Muslim, unfortunate enough to be born and/or live on the wrong side of the 'holy land' namely, the Muslim minority areas. If anything, partition was likely to increase their vulnerability and render their position more precarious. Much of the rationale underlying Jinnah's long political career is inseparable from his anxiety to ensure a secure and rightful place for all Muslims of British India in transition. One could scarcely afford to forget that it was the Muslim minority-area leaders who made Jinnah's return from the political wilderness in London possible, and he would have been unlikely to turn his back on them, that is, as long as he could help it. He was, of course, eventually unable to help it, and the paradox of the resultant Pakistan is 'how it failed to satisfy the interests of the very Muslims who are supposed to have demanded its creation.'<sup>21</sup>

Thirdly, not even the interests of the Muslim majority areas were either expected to be or actually served by the partition. There is as much sense as paths in Ayesha Jalal's most critical and searching question about the most publicized creation of the largest contemporaneous Muslim state in the world (about sixty million Muslims, leaving another thirty-five million out of it in India where it became the largest number of Muslims in a non-Muslim state): 'how did a Pakistan come about which fitted the interests of most Muslims so poorly?'<sup>22</sup> The situational and circumstantial differences as well as the disjunction of interests between the Muslim majority and minority areas were significant determinants of Muslim politics. The Muslim political bosses of the majority areas, who benefited most from the expanded political opportunities in the inter-war period, were both dependent on and adept in intercommunal politics increasingly dominated by Muslims. Their political future was assured in a federal structure with provisions for strong provincial governments. The Lahore Resolution based on the principle of a separate Muslim nationhood communalized politics and destroyed the rationale and basis of intercommunal politics. Logically and surely, the two largest Muslim provinces—Bengal and the Punjab—were later partitioned with all its economic, political and psychological consequences. As for the Muslims of Sind, NWFP and Baluchistan, the creation of Pakistan 'bundled them willy-nilly into a state dominated by their more numerous co-religionists from western Punjab and placed them under the tight central control . . . [of] Pakistan', and the depth of their fervour for Pakistan 'can be gauged by their efforts since independence to throw off the yoke of the Punjab.'<sup>23</sup>

Fourthly, barring some zealots of the likes of the 'Cambridge student group', the viability of a partitioned Pakistan had been a crucial question in the minds not only of the British and non-Muslim Indian contemporaries but also of most thinking Muslims, including the *Quaid-i Azam*. Serious doubts had been expressed from time to time on the economic and defence implications of

<sup>21</sup> Jalal, *Jinnah*, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

the partition, given particularly the geographic absurdity of its two major western and eastern components being separated by nearly a thousand miles of Hindu-dominated territory. Jinnah's desperate appeal for a small corridor interlinking eastern and western wings of Pakistan in the final stages of the partition-talks is a pointer to his own sharing of such doubts.

Fifthly, one of the major weaknesses of the conventional interpretation is that it offers no convincing explanations for the strange dichotomy between the rhetoric and reality of Jinnah's politics since the adoption of the resolution. His responses, in particular to the Cripps Offer (1942) and the Cabinet Mission Plan (1946), remain the weakest links in the traditional arguments. His rejection of the former as well as the acceptance (until the Congress attitudes and response forced its rejection) of the latter clearly run counter to the popular view that Jinnah craved for partition. The principle of 'secession' embodied in the Cripps Offer, whereby any unwilling province could 'opt out' of the Union, was a direct British response to the Lahore demand, providing Jinnah and the League with the surest means of fully realizing the stated goals of the Lahore Resolution namely, independent and sovereign Muslim 'states'. Yet the proposals were rejected by the League, ostensibly and curiously on the ground that 'Pakistan' was not explicitly named. Most writers remain content with this tenuous explanation, regardless of the fact that Jinnah himself did not care much for the magic word and deliberately excluded it from the Lahore Resolution, as noted above. Not totally unaware of the problem, perhaps, some others have sought explanations elsewhere. Wolpert believes that the 'Muslim League were prepared to accept the offer, since it essentially embodied their Pakistan demand, but the Congress rejection left them no political option but to do likewise in order to compete most effectively for mass support.'<sup>24</sup> Masselos emphasizes 'the political disadvantages' of the League 'being the only open supporter of the scheme in the current climate of opinion. . . .'<sup>25</sup> Attribution of such political concerns to the Muslim League, in the period following the election of 1937, and more so, after the Lahore Resolution, may seem more than dubious. Leaving aside the resolution itself which was a total rejection of the Congress platform and the wishes of the large majority of Indians, the League's political strategy, throughout this period, was geared to the object of reinforcing its political identity and position as the sole spokesman by exploiting every opportunity of opposing as well as discrediting the Congress. When all is said and done, the simple fact about the Cripps Offer remains that Jinnah and the League could, had they so desired, take the Muslim majority provinces out of the Indian Union. The Cabinet Mission Plan, on the other hand, categorically rejected partition—nor was Pakistan mentioned anywhere in the document—yet on 6 June 1946 the League accepted the Mission's Plan, long before the Congress indicated its 'conditional' acceptance. These two responses put together raise unqualified doubts about Jinnah's attitudes to the partition demand, the intent of the Lahore

<sup>24</sup> Wolpert, *New History*, p. 335.

<sup>25</sup> J. Masselos, *Indian Nationalism: An History* (New Delhi, Sterling Publishers, 1985), p. 206.

Resolution, and also the uncritical assumptions of the orthodox historiography.

Finally, the most serious objection to the conventional viewpoints relates to their inability to identify the continuity in Jinnah's political career, as already mentioned. This view is both misleading and unfair to Jinnah in presenting him as a paradox: one who had been a firm believer in Indian nationalism and also in essentially secular political values chose, in 1940, to throw away all he had striven for at a time when partition was by no means a certainty. Undoubtedly, Jinnah's politics since his shattering discomfiture in the 1937 election entered into a new phase, but the change, properly understood, is not so much one of political goals as one of tactics, as noted above. Additionally, the paradoxical view of Jinnah seems to contradict Wolpert's own psycho-analytical approach to Jinnah's politics. If Jinnah possessed those traits underlined by Wolpert—vanity, ambition, and a 'need to play the starring role'—he was even more likely to be seeking a dominant role in the much larger political arena of India, comprising about four-hundred million of which ninety-five million in the whole of India and eighty million in British India were Muslim, than his 'moth-eaten Pakistan' with its total population of about sixty million.

#### IV

Serious misgivings and inadequacies of this nature in the orthodox views created demands for revisionist historical research and studies in this area. Ayesha Jalal has precisely filled this disturbing historical gap, and thereby laid South Asian historiography under an enormous debt to herself. Irrespective of the enormous significance of her study, the question of the originality of Jalal's thesis needs, however, to be set in clear perspective. In his otherwise excellent review of this particular Cambridge publication in the *Cambridge Journal of Modern Asian Studies*, Francis Robinson calls Jalal's 'a novel thesis'.<sup>26</sup> No discerning student of the history of Indian partition should find this claim totally acceptable. Like all major works of historical revisionism Jalal's edifice is reared on an existing foundation. The centre piece both of Jinnah's political strategy in the last crucial decade before the partition and of Jalal's thesis on Jinnah has been, as already observed, the Lahore Resolution with its intriguingly 'vague' and 'amorphous' wordings. The mainspring of this thesis has clearly been a marginal, unorthodox and lesser known minority view that has long questioned the purpose of the resolution and found Jinnah's political strategy more 'a tactical move' or 'a bargaining counter' than an outright demand for partition or Pakistan.

The 'ambiguity' of the resolution drew contemporary attention. Dr B. R. Ambedkar, whose thoughts on the idea of Pakistan or partition met with Jinnah's approval, noted in 1940:

<sup>26</sup> Robinson, 'Review' of Jalal's *Jinnah*, p. 617.

... the Resolution is rather ambiguous, if not self-contradictory. It speaks of grouping the zones into 'independent States in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign.' The use of the terms 'constituent units' indicates that what is contemplated is a Federation. If that is so, then, the use of the word 'Sovereign' as an attribute of the units is out of place. Federation of units and sovereignty of units are contradictions. It may be that what is contemplated is a confederation. It is, however, not very material for the moment whether these independent states are to form into a federation or confederation. What is important is the basic demand, namely, that these areas are to be separated from India and formed into independent states.<sup>27</sup>

Reginald Coupland, who met Jinnah in the early nineteen-forties, expressed similar doubts:

It was not clear exactly what this paragraph of the resolution meant. It could scarcely mean that the constituent units of the independent States were really to be 'sovereign', but that it did mean that the States were to be really 'independent' was shown by a subsequent paragraph.<sup>28</sup>

The notion of some ambiguities built into the resolution was juxtaposed to a less publicized but responsible view, both contemporaneous and later, that it was not intended as a specific demand for partition but as a 'bargaining point'. Penderel Moon, an observant contemporary British official, wrote later in 1961: 'Privately Jinnah told one or two people in Lahore that this Resolution was a "tactical move"; and the fact that six years later he was ready to accept something less than absolute partition suggests that in 1940 he was not really irrevocably committed to it.'<sup>29</sup> Hugh Tinker wrote, in 1967, that many British politicians and administrators considered the resolution as a 'deliberate over-bid'.<sup>30</sup> Jalal himself cites several important contemporary sources casting doubts on the notion of a total separation as integral to the resolution. H. V. Hodson, as the Reform Commissioner in 1941, reported that the Muslim Leaguers 'interpreted Pakistan as consistent with a confederation.' Hodson found it the least surprising, as 'Pakistan' offered nothing to Muslims in the minority areas.<sup>31</sup> I. I. Chundrigar, a Leaguer who later became a Prime Minister of independent Pakistan, saw the object of the resolution as not to create 'Ulsters', but to get 'two nations ... welded into united India on the basis of equality.' He believed that the resolution looked for an 'alternative to majority rule, not seeking to destroy the unity of India.'<sup>32</sup> Jinnah himself blamed Hindus, in 1943, as mentioned above, for having 'foisted and fathered' the word Pakistan on the Muslim League.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>27</sup> B. R. Ambedkar, *Pakistan or the Partition of India* (Bombay, Thacker, 3rd edn, 1946), pp. 4-5.

<sup>28</sup> R. Coupland, *Indian Politics 1936-1942. Report on the Constitutional Problem of India* (London, Oxford UP, 1944), p. 206.

<sup>29</sup> P. Moon, *Divide and Quit* (London, Chatto & Windus, 1961), p. 21.

<sup>30</sup> H. Tinker, *Experiment with Freedom: India and Pakistan 1947* (London, Oxford UP, 1967), p. 24; also P. Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, South Asian Studies No. 13, 1972), p. 232.

<sup>31</sup> H. V. Hodson, *The Great Divide: Britain, India, Pakistan* (London: Hutchinson, 1969), p. 69.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted, Jalal, *Jinnah*, p. 70.

<sup>33</sup> See above p. 392.

All this should dispel the illusion of any claim of 'novelty' at least in regard to the core of Jalal's thesis that the resolution of 1940 had been a 'bargaining counter'. The critical importance of Jalal's work lies, therefore, not so much in presenting the resolution as a tactical manoeuvre as in her success in elevating this interpretation basically from the realm of doubts and speculations and giving it an academic authenticity, coherence and credibility. Her success in this regard is facilitated as much by her own ability as the availability of a large corpus of new documents, as mentioned above.<sup>34</sup> Admittedly, many of the building blocks in Jalal's edifice have been drawn from the steadily expanding store-house of historical knowledge and interpretations derived from prior researches and investigations. These are, for example, the dichotomy of interests between the Muslim majority and minority areas; the vested and entrenched position of the provincial Muslim leaders; Jinnah's aim and strategy to acquire for the League and for himself the position and the right to speak for all Indian Muslims; his determined and sustained efforts at securing theoretical and/or practical recognition of that right and position by the recalcitrant Muslim provincial bosses, the Congress and the British government; the political expediency of the transition of the League politics conducted from the vantage point of a religious and political minority to that of a nation; refurbishing the religious contents of the Pakistan idea to facilitate the League's cause; Jinnah's political calculations behind the rejection of the Cripps Offer and the eagerness to accept the Cabinet Mission Plan, and so on. But Jalal has put them all together for us into one whole coherent piece—authentically as well as creatively refined, modified and enlarged—a piece of historical study that for its thoroughness and excellence is most likely to remain for quite some time the paradigm of a revisionist thesis on Jinnah's politics in the decade before partition.<sup>35</sup>

The revisionist critique is logical and persuasive. Its seminal contribution consists in demystifying the politics of the League, Jinnah and Pakistan in that critical decade, as presented in the conventional historiography which is riddled with confusing paradoxes and inconsistencies, as discussed above. The essential integrity and continuity in Jinnah's long political life, subject to a significant shift in his strategy, broadly since 1937, for achieving his political aims, the overt and covert meanings of the Lahore Resolution, with the very specific contents of 'Pakistan' in Jinnah's mind, his rejection of the Cripps Offer and the intriguing wheelings and dealings with the British, his determined and persistent political manoeuvres to pull all provincial Muslim leaders into line, his eager acceptance of the Cabinet Mission Plan until the Congress forced him to reject it, and his 'continuing attempts to preserve his strategy in his many shifts and ploys' even in those closing months of the undoing of his strategy 'down to his May 1947 demand for a corridor through Hindustan to connect the two halves of Pakistan, and his June 1947 proposal that the constituent assemblies of the two new states should both meet in Delhi'<sup>36</sup>—are some of the major disconcerting puzzles in the orthodox versions which the revisionist historical reconstructions help to resolve so convincingly.

<sup>34</sup> See above, note 8.

<sup>35</sup> Roy, 'Review' of Jalal's *Jinnah*, p. 101.

<sup>36</sup> Robinson, 'Review' of Jalal's *Jinnah*, p. 617.

Jinnah's tasks, in the revisionist perspective, emerge infinitely more complex and daunting than what the traditionalists would have us believe. For Jinnah, it was far easier to aim at rousing the primordial instincts of Indian Muslims, with a view to mobilizing them to achieve a division of the land, as we have so far been told, and as it eventually happened. This now seems a rather simplistic as well as distorting perception of the more mature, intricate and delicate political position of Jinnah, adept in playing a 'long, slow game'. While he undoubtedly needed the Islamic fervour to rally the Muslim masses to achieve his political aims, he could scarcely afford to push it too far to jeopardize his constant and vital objective of securing the interests of all Indian Muslims which could only have been possible within a framework of Indian unity. This was not all. Jinnah was no less interested in a strong centre than the Congress in the interests of securing and maintaining the dominant national position of the League against the provincial Muslim bases of power. But here again, Jinnah and the League, unlike the Congress, had to curb their natural instincts for a strong centre in a federal structure which would have provided a strong leverage for the Congress dominance. Thus, confronting Jinnah was a political challenge that seemed almost a 'political sphinx' and almost impossible to achieve: a Muslim nation with its 'right' to be independent, but not actually willing to break away from India, forfeiting, thereby, the control over thirty-five million Muslims to be left in a partitioned India; a strong centre essential for keeping the League in a dominant position and the Muslim provinces in line, but not without some constitutional and structural device to prevent the total Congress dominance by virtue of its brute majority. Jinnah's ideal solution lay in two federations—one Muslim- and the League-dominated, the other Hindu- and the Congress-dominated—making it in every way possible to bring the two into a system of political unity on a confederal basis or a similar structure based on treaty arrangements between them.

This view goes a long way in explaining many of those perplexities mentioned before. We understand better why the Lahore Resolution seems rather interested in the 'right' of the Muslim majority areas to be independent, and leaves every other vital concern shrouded in ambiguity. We can also see why Jinnah would not originally intend or even like the use of the word Pakistan in the resolution, though later accepted it as a 'convenient synonym' for 'this long phrase'.<sup>37</sup> We get the feeling that the word, which gradually came to symbolize Muslim nationhood, would recommend itself to Jinnah. Again, Jinnah's rejection of the Cripps Offer, which has been one of the weakest points in the orthodox case, provides a strong justification for the revisionist arguments.

Jinnah's strategy centring round the Lahore Resolution was almost immediately welcomed by the British Government through its 1940 'August Offer'. The Cripps Offer carried it even further by conceding, through its 'opt out' provision, the effective demands of the resolution. The League's rejection,

<sup>37</sup> Pirzada, *Muslim League Documents*, II, p. 426. 'We wanted a word and it was foisted on us, and we found it convenient to use it as a synonym for the Lahore Resolution.' (*Ibid.*)

though intriguing, is better explained from the revisionist position. Cripps's proposal contained two serious problems for Jinnah. If Jinnah was rather more interested, as noted above, in the matter of recognition of the Muslim right for self-determination than the actual severance of the Muslim states, he was denied explicit recognition of that right—a denial given as the official justification for the League's rejection of the offer. More importantly, Jinnah, in the early nineteen-forties, unable to assert his full authority over the Muslim majority provinces, maintained a calculated silence—quite apparent in the Lahore Resolution—on the issue of the centre, its nature and its relationship with the Muslim provinces. A weak centre was integral to the demand of the Muslim provinces for provincial autonomy, while the League's entire political strategy, as representatives of all Indian Muslims, demanded a strong centre. Before such time as Jinnah could indeed become the sole spokesman for all Muslims and impose his will on the provinces he chose not to raise the awkward question until the Cripps Offer resulted in 'flushing Jinnah out into the open and forcing him to show where he stood on the question of the centre.' The Congress rejection of the offer made it easier for Jinnah also to reject it and avert what seemed 'the gravest threat to his entire strategy'.<sup>38</sup>

The Cabinet Mission came to recompense Jinnah for much of what was denied to him by Cripps. The compulsory grouping of Muslim provinces—leaving Bengal and Assam in a separate grouping for ten years—offered him the effective contents of the Muslim federation on a platter, and brought the Muslim provinces under the control of the League at the centre. It denied the principle of secession and preserved India's integrity. It stipulated for a weak centre, thwarting the prospects for a total Congress dominance. The Mission Plan came so close to so much of what Jinnah's political vision embraced. The offer, certainly, was not his ideal: the prospects for the 'parity' he would have wished at the centre were very doubtful coming from the Congress; the centre itself would not have been as strong as he would have liked to ensure his authority over the Muslim provinces. But the communal provisions held out the promise of a powerbroking role at the centre. *Quaid-i Azam* had indeed come the closest to realizing his political dream.

Jinnah could not, however, have shown total indifference to the likely impact of the denial of a 'sovereign' Pakistan on his followers. The League acceptance of the Plan on 6 June 1946 was justified on the ground that the 'basis of Pakistan' was 'inherent' in the plan.<sup>39</sup> He also had to give them an undertaking that he would join no interim government without parity for the League.<sup>40</sup> In the League's statement of acceptance there was further mention of the League's cooperation with the constitution-making apparatus in the 'hope' that their efforts would ultimately be rewarded with the 'establishment of a completely sovereign Pakistan.'<sup>41</sup> This is an extraordinary response if one adheres to the view that Jinnah really wanted a sovereign Pakistan. How could

<sup>38</sup> Jalal, *Jinnah*, p. 76.

<sup>39</sup> Mansergh, *TP Documents*, VII, Doc. No. 469, Enclosure, L/P & J/5/337: PP 418-20, p. 837.

<sup>40</sup> Jalal, *Jinnah*, p. 202.

<sup>41</sup> Mansergh, *TP Documents*, VII, Doc. No. 469, Enclosure, p. 838.

this man, who as recently as 7 April had claimed: 'we cannot accept any proposal which would be, in any way, derogatory to the full sovereignty of Pakistan',<sup>42</sup> forsake the zeal that had consumed his career since 1940 for 'hope'? Rhetoric aside, Jinnah was clearly prepared on 6 June to accept something less than what almost every one else knew as Pakistan.

Just as Jinnah thought himself on the verge of reaping the harvest of a long, chequered and an almost stoically determined political career, a variety of political factors and circumstances combined to snatch the cup of victory from his lips. The Congress, apparently, began the undoing of his strategy, and the 'last thirteen months of British rule', in Jalal's words, 'saw the tragic collapse of Jinnah's strategy'.<sup>43</sup> On 25 June 1946 the Congress Working Committee gave qualified assent to the plan; the All-India Congress Committee, under Maulana Azad's presidency, voted its approval along the same lines, on 6 July, exactly a month later than the League's acceptance of the plan. Delighted with the prospects for success, the Mission left India on 29 June. Within days Nehru took over as President and declared that the Congress was 'uncommitted' to the plan. He cast grave doubts over the grouping procedures and stressed that the central government would require some overall power to intervene in grave crisis or breakdown, warning that such central power 'inevitably grows'. He also rejected parity for the League in the Interim Executive Council. The Congress did indeed seem to be trying to make it impossible for Jinnah to use the Cabinet Mission Plan as an answer to India's political impasse. It seemed hell bent on scuttling the plan. But why?

## V

The answer to this question raises the concomitant issue of the revisionist thesis: if Jinnah and the League sought to avoid partition how did it come about? It also brings us to the second myth of partition, based on a hoary assumption about 'the Congress for unity', as mentioned at the outset. If Jalal has been able to mount a successful challenge at the conventional assumptions about Jinnah and the League's politics of partition, we already have equally strong reasons and ample, though scattered, evidence enough to throw a challenge at the other 'verity' of the orthodox historiography, that is, the commitment of the Congress to Indian unity.

The Congress commitment to freedom with unity, which has been integral to the Congress ideology and politics ever since its inception, began to lose its fervour in the wake of the ineffectual and frustrating all-parties negotiations in the late nineteen-twenties, culminating in the unilateral declaration by the Congress, on 26 January 1930, of its goal of 'total independence' (*purna svaraj*). The Congress sublimated its frustrations and its own share of responsibilities for the failure in resolving the Muslim Question by taking a convenient line that freedom should precede and not follow the resolution of the communal problem. It began to speak of this as a basically 'economic' problem which was

<sup>42</sup> Pirzada, *ibid.*, II, p. 509.

<sup>43</sup> Jalal, *Jinnah*, p. 208.



incapable of being resolved in a country which was in chains. This shift of emphasis on 'freedom first' had considerable bearings on the issue of 'unity', as evident in subsequent developments where unity was sacrificed on the altar of freedom. Further, the changed League strategy, in the post-1937 political exigencies, sharpened the focus on what appears, in retrospect, the most vital, critical and determining factor in the partition namely, the nature of the central government. Provincial autonomy logically based on a weak centre had been an unchanging component of the perception of a secure future in free India among Muslims of all political shades, including the Congress Muslims. The demand for a combination of a weak centre and substantial Muslim representation therein had been a persistent item in Muslim negotiations in the pre-1937 phase. In the subsequent phase the concept of Muslim nationhood and its complementary notion of parity at the centre prompted the League to exert strong pressures on the government to revoke the federal part of the Government of India Act, 1935, which provided for a strong centre. Linlithgow obliged Jinnah by giving him a veto on India's political future.

Confronted with a choice between 'unity' and a 'strong centre', the Congress had been steadily coming to realize what might very well have to become the price for freedom namely, division. The unqualified commitment of the Congress to a strong centre stemmed from its vision of a strong, united and modernized India. Congressmen like Nehru, with socialist streaks in them, found the concept of a strong centre inseparable from the need and demand for India's economic reconstruction based on centralized planning. The bitter communal experiences of the provincial Congress ministries after 1937 as well as that in the interim government in the nineteen-forties reinforced the Congress reluctance to seek political accommodation with the League. Finally, the Congress could hardly have been expected to overlook the supreme importance of a strong centre to ensure its own dominance in India after independence, as has been the case with what is often characterized as India's 'one-party dominance system'.<sup>44</sup> V. P. Menon could not have better stated the Congress case for the strong centre. Partition, he said, would 'enable Congress to have at one and the same time a strong central government able to withstand the centrifugal tendencies all too apparent at the moment, and to frame a truly democratic constitution unhampered by any communal considerations'.<sup>45</sup>

It is difficult to trace closely the process of the major Congress leaders in not merely coming to terms with but actually favouring the idea of partition. V. P. Menon recalled that by May 1947 Nehru was no longer averse to a proposed partition.<sup>46</sup> Maulana Azad's contrasting positions, as revealed in the book and

<sup>44</sup> S. A. Kochanek, *The Congress Party of India. The Dynamics of One-Party Democracy* (Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton UP, 1968); R. Kothari, 'The Congress "System" in India', in *Party System and Election Studies*, Occasional Papers of the Centre for Developing Societies, No. 1 (Bombay, Allied Publishers, 1967), pp. 1-18; also G. Krishna, 'One Party Dominance—Developments and Trends' in *ibid.*, pp. 19-98.

<sup>45</sup> V. P. Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India* (Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton UP, 1957), p. 358.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 360.

the excised portion, have been mentioned above.<sup>47</sup> In the book he places the responsibility squarely on Lord Mountbatten, or rather, the Mountbattens:

Within a month of Lord Mountbatten's arrival in India, Jawaharlal, the firm opponent of partition, had become, if not a supporter, at least acquiescent to the idea. I have often wondered how Jawaharlal was won over by Lord Mountbatten. . . . Jawaharlal was greatly impressed by Lord Mountbatten but perhaps even greater was the influence of Lady Mountbatten. . . .<sup>48</sup>

Leonard Mosley held very similar views. There was, he believed, 'no doubt in any one's mind in India that the viceroy, in persuading Nehru, had performed the confidence trick of the century'.<sup>49</sup>

Such observations on either Nehru's or many other Congress leaders' attitudes toward the partition alternative derive credence and sustenance from an unquestioning faith in the Congress dedication to unity until the very last stage. With the arrival of the Mountbattens the patriots, in this romanticized view, seemed to gear up for the last-ditch battle, but found themselves emasculated and disarmed by the former's vice-regal charisma and charm. The historical truth seemed to lie elsewhere. There are strong reasons and evidence to suggest that long before the arrival of the Mountbattens on the scene, the upper echelon of the non-Muslim Congress leaders had been calmly calculating the distinct and pragmatic values of the partition formula. While making this assumption that it was Mountbatten who swung Nehru round to partition, Azad and others obviously ignored the possibility that the reverse might be true, and the Englishman was converted by the Indian. In a mirror-image of the dichotomy between Jinnah's professions and intentions, the Congress continued to present the façade of the ideal of unity, while it steadily and deliberately worked itself up to a position where Jinnah was forced to take his 'Pakistan' and leave the scene for good. The Lahore Resolution opened up the way for the Congress, groping since the *Purna Swaraj* Resolution of 1930 for an answer to the Muslim Question that made no demand on its 'sacred cow', that is, the strong centre.

Almost as early as the Lahore Resolution became public knowledge, most senior Congress leaders, like Gandhi and Nehru, had made known their feelings which seemed remarkably cool and pragmatic. Not many days after the Lahore session Gandhi observed:

Unless the rest of India wishes to engage in internal fratricide, the others will have to submit to the Muslim dictation, if the Muslims will resort to it. . . . The Muslims must have the same right of self-determination that the rest of India has. We are at present a joint family. Any member may claim a division.<sup>50</sup>

Further,

As a man of non-violence, I cannot forcibly resist the proposed partition if the Muslims of India really insist upon it. . . . it means the undoing of centuries of work done by

<sup>47</sup> See above p. 385.

<sup>48</sup> Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, p. 165.

<sup>49</sup> L. Mosley, *Last Days of the British Raj* (London, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1961), p. 97.

<sup>50</sup> D. G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma* (Bombay, Jhaveri & Tendulkar, 1952), V, pp. 333-4.

numberless Hindus and Muslims to live together as one nation. . . . My whole soul rebels against the idea that Hinduism and Islam represent two antagonistic cultures and doctrines. . . . But that is my belief. I cannot thrust it down the throats of the Muslims who think that they are a different nation.<sup>51</sup>

On 15 April 1940, questioned about the resolution, Nehru was reportedly pleased, not because he liked it—on the contrary he considered it to be the most insane suggestion—but because it very much simplified the problem. They were now able to get rid of the demands about proportionate representation in legislatures, services, cabinets, etc. . . . [He] asserted that if people wanted such things as suggested by the Muslim League at Lahore, then one thing was clear, they and people like him could not live together in India. He would be prepared to face all consequences of it but he would not be prepared to live with such people.<sup>52</sup>

The very next day he rejoined:

Many knots of the Hindu-Muslim problem had been merged into one knot, which could not be unravelled by ordinary methods, but would need an operation . . . he would say one thing very frankly that he had begun to consider them [the Muslim Leaguers] and people like himself, as separate nations.<sup>53</sup>

In the confines of the Ahmedabad jail, in the early nineteen-forties, he wrote: 'wrong steps have to be taken sometimes lest some worse peril befall us. . . . Unity is always better than disunity, but an enforced unity is a sham and a dangerous affair, full of explosive possibilities.'<sup>54</sup> Nehru's thoughts and attitudes to the unity proposals, as in the Cabinet Mission Plan, were clearly revealed several months before the occurrence of the plan. In January 1946, during his 'four-hour discussion' with Woodrow L. Wyatt, Personal Assistant to Cripps on the Cabinet Mission, Nehru was reported to have 'conceded that the British Government might have to declare for Pakistan . . . granted however (a) a plebiscite, and (b) territorial readjustments so that solid blocks of Hindu territory were not included, he accepted Pakistan.'<sup>55</sup> In a letter of the same month to Cripps, we have even positive indications that he had already seen through Jinnah's game: 'It seems clear that he [Jinnah] is not after Pakistan but something entirely different, or perhaps he is after nothing at all except to stop all change and progress.'<sup>56</sup> Realization of this nature did very little for his respect of Jinnah. Duckworth, a British official covering Nehru's trip to Malaya during 18–26 March 1946, reported in April 1946, that Nehru was

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 336–7.

<sup>52</sup> *Leader*, 15 April 1940, quoted S. R. Mehrotra, 'The Congress and the Partition of India', in C. H. Philips & M. D. Wainwright (eds), *The Partition of India. Policies and Perspectives 1935–1947* (London, Allen & Unwin, 1970), p. 210.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 April 1940, quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> J. Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (Bombay, Asia Publishing House, reprint, 1969), p. 526.

<sup>55</sup> Wavell to Pethick-Lawrence, 15 January 1946; Mansergh, *TP Documents*, VI, Doc. No. 357, L/PO/10/23, p. 796.

<sup>56</sup> Nehru to Cripps, 27 January 1946; *ibid.*, Doc. No. 384, L/P & J/10/59: ff. 42–4, pp. 855–6.

scornful of Jinnah and doubted very much whether he had either the intention or the power to start a revolt in India if he did not secure Pakistan . . . 'Jinnah', he said, 'rather reminds me of the man who was charged with the murder of his mother and father and begged the clemency of the court on the ground that he was an orphan'.<sup>57</sup>

Later in his life Nehru indicated how both age and patience might have had their share in making the minds of the Congress veterans even more receptive to the partition formula. 'The truth', Nehru told Mosley in 1960, 'is that we were tired men and we were getting on in years . . . The plan for partition offered a way out and we took it. . .'.<sup>58</sup> There might also have been a lingering hope in the back of their minds that they had not perhaps been committing themselves to a final and irrevocable judgement, as Nehru also admitted to Mosley, 'we expected that a partition would be temporary, that Pakistan was bound to come back to us'.<sup>59</sup> Elsewhere he remarked: 'The united India that we have laboured for was not one of compulsion and coercion but a free and willing association of free people. It may be that in this way we shall reach that united India sooner than otherwise and then she will have a stronger and more secure foundation'.<sup>60</sup>

Such sentiments were also expressed by Azad: 'The division is only on the map of the country and not in the hearts of the people, and I am sure it is going to be a short lived partition'.<sup>61</sup> Other front-ranking Congress leaders also are on record to lend their support to the Pakistan demand, and some of them at an earlier stage than later. On 23 April 1942 the Madras Legislature passed a resolution, at the instance of C. Rajagopalachari, the Congressman with a reputation of being politically cunning, recommending a policy based on the acceptance of the Lahore Resolution. The resolution, though rejected by the All India Congress Committee, drew a significant early response from the Congress Working Committee which emphatically declared that it 'cannot think in terms of compelling the people in any territorial unit to remain in an Indian Union against their declared and established will'.<sup>62</sup> In early 1946 Sardar Patel, the 'strong man' of the Congress, emphatically asserted that the time had come to 'cut the diseased limb' and be done with the Muslim League.<sup>63</sup> V. P. Menon's claim that he converted Patel to the idea of Pakistan in early 1947 is, again, as in Nehru's case, misleading. The Sardar, in an interview with the Associated Press of America on 9 May 1947, maintained: 'Congress would like to have a strong centre . . . it was absolutely essential that there should be a strong army, and for a defence a strong central govt. . . if the Muslim League insists it wants separation, the Congress will not compel them

<sup>57</sup> Note by Duckworth, 4 April 1946; *ibid.*, VII, Doc. No. 54, L/P & J/8/636: ff. 3-6, p. 136.

<sup>58</sup> Mosley, *British Raj*, p. 248.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> M. Gwyer and A. Appadorai (eds), *Speeches and Documents on the Indian Constitution 1921-1947* (London, Oxford UP, 1957), II, p. 682.

<sup>61</sup> *Leader*, 16 June 1947, quoted Mehrotra, 'Congress and Partition', p. 220.

<sup>62</sup> Quoted in Menon, *Transfer of Power*, p. 132.

<sup>63</sup> D. V. Tahmankar, *Sardar Patel* (London, Allen & Unwin, 1970), p. 191.

to remain by force.<sup>64</sup> G. D. Birla, the capitalist devotee of the *Mahatma*, was also known to have favoured Partition.<sup>65</sup>

The Congress played the game in a masterly fashion. Jinnah's whole strategy *vis-à-vis* the Congress was to use the 'spectre' of the Pakistan demand which was clearly based on the assumption that the Congress would be forced, at the end of the day, to stretch itself fully to accommodate Jinnah's 'real' demands and prevent the calamity of Mother India's dismemberment. But, as Jinnah's game became apparent to the Congress, the latter chose to 'cut off the head' to get rid of the 'headache'. When all the chips were down, after Jinnah's acceptance of the Cabinet Mission Plan, the Congress called Jinnah's bluff and shattered his political strategy and ambition. Jinnah was caught in a bind because he had already presented his acceptance of the Mission Plan as a great 'sacrifice' and a proof of his 'goodwill'. By accepting something less than Pakistan, he had lost the bargaining counter which the demand for the fully sovereign Pakistan gave him.

There were the added dimensions of subtleties and dexterities involved in the Congress strategy in this regard. For the Congress High Command openly to push for partition would have been politically disastrous, and would have been viewed as an acceptance of the League's communalist view of Indian society. There was the added implication of betraying the Congress Muslims, especially when Azad remained the President between 1940 and July 1946. Azad, in his book, greets the initial acceptance of the Cabinet Mission Plan as 'a glorious event in the history of the freedom movement in India', and attributes its ultimate failure to the intransigence of the League. Nehru's press statements contributing to its destruction are glossed over as 'unfortunate events which changed the course of history'.<sup>66</sup> To Mountbatten he spoke of the Congress's responsibility in much more positive terms. The 'blame' for the breakdown of the Cabinet Mission Plan, he said, 'in the first place must be laid on Congress. . .'.<sup>67</sup> And, in the excised portion of his book, the finger he points at Nehru is unmistakable.<sup>68</sup>

Despite the Congress being 'on to Jinnah's game', it is conceivable that he could have gone on with his game for some more time at least had it not been for the totally unforeseen, abrupt and rapid change involving the British presence and policies in India in the aftermath of the second world war. The British refusal to impose a settlement on India and willingness to stay on until

<sup>64</sup> Mansergh, *TP Documents*, X, Doc. No. 375, L/P & J/10/79: f.248, p. 717.

<sup>65</sup> Tahmankar, *Patel*, p. 272.

<sup>66</sup> Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, pp. 135, 138.

<sup>67</sup> Mansergh, *TP Documents*, *Mountbatten Papers*, *Viceroy's Interview No. 14*, 27 March 1947, X, Doc. No. 27, p. 34.

<sup>68</sup> *The Statesman Weekly*, 5 November 1988, p. 6; also above, notes 3-6. It was reported that Rabindranath Roy, who was additional private secretary to Humayun Kabir, the co-author of the book, and who also typed out the manuscript, affirmed that the sealed pages contained 'no adverse comments on Jawaharlal Nehru or members of his family.' This statement was immediately contradicted by the publishers of the book, Orient Longmans saying that the excised pages 'do make critical references to Jawaharlal Nehru . . .', *Ibid.*, 29 October 1988, pp. 3, 7.

the Indians reached an agreement formed a major condition for the success of Jinnah's policy.<sup>69</sup> The return of a Labour Government to power, with its serious commitment to post-war reconstruction at home and demobilization and decolonization abroad, changed the Indian political scene rather dramatically. It was not merely the unilateral British decision to withdraw from India within a short specified period that constituted the sole threat to Jinnah. Equally importantly, or perhaps even more so, Britain appeared particularly concerned now about leaving behind a strong and centralized government in India capable of defending the British economic and political interests in the regions of the Indian Ocean. The Congress seemed keen, and looked both confident and able to take over that role. It did not take very long, in the altered conditions of time, for the British and the Congress to discover their common interests in an India with a strong centre, and the quickest way of achieving the purpose was to aim at Jinnah's 'Achilles' heel'—his Pakistan demand—to oust him by conceding his professed and not real objective.

The passion roused by the partition demand gave it a momentum too strong for Jinnah's sophisticated politics. The Pakistan idea, however vague and undefined, could not but touch a very tender point in the Muslim mind, continually nourished by dreams and hopes of an Islamic State. Jinnah's unspecified political designs, mystifying political actions, and desultory tactics left many of his followers increasingly confused and bewildered. The growing restiveness and discontent among them, especially after the fiasco and bitterness of the Cabinet Mission Plan, were bound to force his hand. Likewise, the logic and the inevitable political consequence of the Muslim 'nation' theory, with its right of self-determination, generated fear and agitation among non-Muslim minorities in the Muslim majority areas in the Punjab and Bengal, resulting in the partition of these two provinces and the further shrinkage of Jinnah's 'moth-eaten' and 'truncated' Pakistan which was destined to split even further in 1971.

## VI

The revisionist perspectives on the highly complex and complicated partition politics of the League and the Congress in the nineteen-forties diverge so substantially and significantly from the standard orthodox positions as to raise concern about some fundamentals of this history. There are strong grounds to challenge a few major dominant assumptions on the politics of partition, and to demand a reconstruction of the historical verities. Robinson expressed the desirability and likelihood of Jalal's work becoming 'the orthodox academic interpretation' of 'the role of Jinnah in the making of Pakistan'.<sup>70</sup> With greater accession to historical knowledge and, more importantly, given our willingness to forsake the comfort and complacency of the traditional and a blinkered view of the history of partition, one would like to think that the revisionist versions of both League and Congress politics of partition cannot but gain recognition as orthodox history.

<sup>69</sup> Jalal, *Jinnah*, pp. 243 ff.

<sup>70</sup> Robinson, 'Review' of Jalal's *Jinnah*, p. 617.

Undeniably, not all doubts can be answered at the present stage of our knowledge, and again, not all the answers given are, in themselves, unquestionable. Jalal's verdict on the Lahore Resolution and Jinnah's political astuteness, for example, seem to leave some lingering doubts. The 'vagueness' and 'ambiguity' of the wording of the resolution have been universally admitted. There is also a generally agreed suggestion of its being 'deliberately vague'. Jalal moves further than this position and stresses it as Jinnah's 'strength' and political sagacity. Both the assumptions of the alleged vagueness and Jinnah's astuteness seem a little dubious. Perhaps the resolution did initially appear vague, as we have discussed above. But we have also noted that the press and public soon identified it with the Pakistan demand. Jinnah did nothing to dispel this view so that ultimately, to all concerned—the Congress, the British, and indeed to most League members and supporters, except perhaps Jinnah and a small coterie of his confidants—it clearly implied a separate Muslim homeland. The words 'autonomous', 'independent' and 'sovereign' in the resolution could not have been interpreted any differently. Without a clear acceptance of such an identification—and Jinnah himself accepted and even welcomed this identification<sup>71</sup>—it is absurd to think that the Congress and the British Raj could have eventually found it possible to impose Pakistan on Jinnah and the League.

This, in its turn, casts serious doubts on the soundness and strength of Jinnah's political strategy. Given his ultimate political goal of maximization of Muslim interests within a framework of confederal or federal (under the Cabinet Mission Plan he was quite prepared to accept a federal scheme, as already noted) unity of India, comprising, ideally, a Hindu and a Muslim unit, as opposed to the idea of total separation, one has to question the rationale of his entire political strategy, centering round the resolution. No final judgement on Jinnah's politics could be offered unless we are in a position to determine the precise place of the partition formula among his political options. Was he totally opposed to the notion of partition? Or did he leave this option open, despite his preference for a solution short of partition? Answers to such questions alone can provide the true measure of his failure. Granted, however, the thrust of his policy to seek a solution other than partition, which we indeed believe to have been the case, it seems a rather dubious and self-defeating tactic for Jinnah to continue, since the Lahore Resolution, to play the way he did with the 'spectre' of partition. It seems very likely, as discussed above, that the resolution sought to gain recognition of Muslim nationhood through its demand for the right of Muslim majority areas to secede. Whatever vagueness one may talk about, the resolution does not appear vague about the right of Muslim majority areas to break away and form 'independent states'. The obvious political capital to be derived from a recognition of this right induced Jinnah not to contradict the almost universal assumption about the League's association and commitment to Pakistan in the sense of partition. Were partition an unwelcome prospect, these tactics risked its achievement. It was less than political good sense and foresight not to have secured the

<sup>71</sup> See above p. 396 also note 32.

interests of Muslims in the minority areas precisely against the strong possibility of the Congress seeking the easiest and hence the most tempting answer to this highly complex problem by trying to cut the Muslim League and Muslims out of India. The 'hostage theory' was nothing more than an after-thought—a later rationalization calculated to offer some psychological comfort to the minorities concerned. The Lahore Resolution could afford, so it may seem, greater political tact, maturity and vision in attempting to integrate, openly and clearly, the demands of Muslims of the minority areas with those of their co-believers in the majority areas. Alongside the demand for the right of the majority areas to secede, could the resolution not have indicated its preference, in the interests of all Indian Muslims, for a solution avoiding partition? There is a tacit admission of failure of this strategy as well as an obvious touch of sadness when Jinnah expressed his regrets to Lord Mountbatten, in April 1947, for 'his inability to re-consider the Cabinet Mission Plan', and added: '... it was clear that in no circumstances did Congress intend to work the plan either in accordance with the spirit or the letter.'<sup>72</sup>

One wonders about the ultimate logic of Jinnah choosing to adopt his secretive approach—not wanting partition and yet using the partition threat to hang, like the sword of Damocles, over the country until it was too late to be discarded. What if he tried to confront the Congress with his 'real' demands to secure the interests of all Muslims in India, openly rejecting the partition option, and continue to play his usual 'long, slow game'? If partition was never an option for the League and Jinnah, would the Congress and the British, even in the changed circumstances in the latter half of the nineteen-forties, have found it as easy as they did to force it on eighty million Muslims of British India? Instead of this precarious and dangerous gamble intrinsic to 'poker', would Jinnah have done better to match the strength and skill of the Congress in an open game of 'chess'? Then, perhaps, we have hindsight on our side.

Issues of this nature will engage us in debate and discourse, as revisionist efforts are elevated to the status of orthodoxy. Meanwhile, revisionism on Jinnah's role in the creation of Pakistan questions the very legitimacy of the state brought into existence by the *Quaid-i Azam* as the universally acknowledged 'Father of Pakistan'.

*University of Tasmania*

ASIM ROY

<sup>72</sup> Mansergh, *TP Documents, Viceroy's Personal Report No. 3*, 17 April 1947, X, Doc. No. 165, L/PO/6/123: ff. 42-9, p. 301.