



Jinnah: India-Partition-Independence

Jaswant Singh

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The partition of India, 1947, some call it vivisection as Gandhi had, has without doubt been the most wounding trauma of the twentieth century. It has seared the psyche of four plus generations of this subcontinent. Why did this partition take place at all? Who was/is responsible - Jinnah? The Congress party? Or the British? Jaswant Singh attempts to find an answer, his answer, for there can perhaps not be a definitive answer, yet the author searches. Jinnah's political journey began as 'an ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity' (Gopal Krishna Gokhale), yet ended with his becoming the 'sole spokesman' of Muslims in India; the creator of Pakistan, The Quaid-e-Azam: How and why did this transformation take place?

No Indian or Pakistani politician/Member of Parliament has ventured an analytical, political biography of Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, about whom views necessarily get divided as being either Hagiographical or additional demonology. The book attempts an objective evaluation. Jaswant Singh's experience as a minister responsible for the conduct of India's foreign policy, managing the country's defence (concurrently), had been uniformly challenging (Lahore Peace process; betrayed at Kargil; Kandahar; the Agra Peace Summit; the attack on Jammu and Kashmir Assembly and the Indian Parliament; coercive diplomacy of 2002; the peace overtures reinitiated in April 2003).

He asks where and when did this questionable thesis of 'Muslims as a separate nation' first originate and lead the Indian sub-continent to? And where did it drag Pakistan to? Why then a Bangladesh? Also what now of Pakistan? Where is it headed? This book is special; it stands apart, for it is authored by a practitioner of policy, an innovator of policies in search of definitive answers. Those burning 'whys' of the last sixty-two years, which bedevil us still. Jaswant Singh believes that for the return of lasting peace in South Asia there is no alternative but to first understand what made it 'abandon' us in the first place. Until we do that, a minimum, a must, we will never be able to persuade peace to return.

Jinnah: India-Partition-Independence Details

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Mansoor Azam says

Coming from Jaswant Singh, an old hand in Indian politics this one is a treat for anyone who wants to know about Jinnah. I had definite doubts about this one and thought an Indian can't do justice to the great man.

But as i started i was in for the ultimate treat considering the few and far efforts in recent times by men in power corridors. the book and its theme just got me more and more into it. In a way i'll admit that i got a whole new picture of Jinnah in Indian politics, "his role as an Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity". Before this the idea was that although initially he tried to reconcile the two communities but once onto the idea of partition the man put heart and soul into it and shunned every effort of Congress to avoid Congress. But indeed once you go through the pages of this book you realize that the only man who till last time had some thought of preserving a united India was Jinnah.

An absolute treat for the students of Indo-Pak history. A brave effort from Shri Jaswant Singh. A must read for anyone interested in Indo Pak history

Penandinkpot Uzma says

After interviewing my grandmother,her brother, uncles, various other relatives and friends and getting various perspectives and as an individual who has little knowledge except what relatives who went through this partition--as I am the grandchild and child of partition grandparents and parents-- although raised in Canada and the USA, this book is a great overview of a history and a perspective by the author who was in the ministry during this period.

Rishika says

Jinnah has forever been painted as the villain of India's partition in 1947, the man who stabbed the Indians in the back and walked away with a fifth of the ancient country's landmass. He's reviled as. The traitor who created Pakistan, which has ever since been a festering wound in India's nationhood.

But Jaswant Singh, finally, shows there were several players more culpable - the British, the Congress Party leaders such as M.K Gandhi and fundamentalist Muslim and Hindu leaders. He gives us a brilliant account of the machinations and mistakes that happened behind the scenes as well as revealing a fascinating collection of correspondence between Nehru, Gandhi, Jinnah and all the various Viceroys of India.

Singh does a fantastic job of personifying Jinnah - who to this day remains something of an enigma to most people. Worth a read.

Siddharth Sharma says

Its a good book,certainly not in the 'great' category,but good and to the point.

As far as I know Jinnah was as not a religious man in personal life. He ate pork, drank wine and it is widely believed that his counterpart Mahatma Gandhi knew more verses of Qoran than him.

Thus, his kind of Islamic fundamentalism was just a tool to embarrass the Congress with Gandhi and Nehru in Particular by carving a seperate nation called Pakistan.

Jinnah, though flawed in some important issues, should always be remembered as the one who created history and edited the World map.

Both tremendous achievements!

Siby says

This is probably the most honest book covering the period of the Indian independence struggle that I have read so far. Jaswant Singh has done justice to himself and to his readers by writing this book from an unbiased perspective of a historian and not as the spokesperson of a political organization, largely perceived to be communal.

Jaswant Singh has tried to bring to the forefront the hidden mechanics and negotiations that went on behind the partitioning of India and the reasons that pushed Jinnah from being an exponent of Hindu-Muslim unity to the leading figure in the demand for a separate Muslim Pakistan. History books usually paint one or the other as the villain, depending on whose version of events you are reading, but it is often not so black and white in reality. After reading this book, I can see why Jaswant Singh had to face such a barrage of criticism, even expulsion from his party. He has tried to be honest in trying to find the reason that precipitated one of the greatest tragedies in Indian history and certainly the most defining event in the Indian sub-continent in the last century. Indian authors vilify Jinnah; John Keay just reports the event and has no opinion; Dominique Lappierre eulogies Mountbatten; but I think Jaswant Singh has hit it on the nail when he tries to analyze the events that occurred, and correctly identifies the reasons behind Partition and the role played by each of the parties; Congress for pushing Jinnah away and pinning him in a corner from where Pakistan was the only option, Jinnah for demanding Pakistan as a negotiating tactic to gain more representation and voice in an Indian government and then not knowing what to do once his wish came true and finally on the British for widening the rift between the two communities for their own narrow gains and the haphazard manner in which it was finally executed.

What I also liked about this book was the collection of correspondence between all the main players; Nehru, Gandhi, Jinnah, the various Viceroys of India and the personal memoirs and notes of these individuals. This book also brings to light the oft forgotten political face and shrewd mind of Gandhi. Loved it!

Shadin Pranto says

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Nbcindia says

<http://www.nbcindia.com/Descriptions...>

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Jaswant Singh has come a long way from his home in the desert districts of Rajasthan. Commissioned in the Indian Army when barely nineteen, he went through two wars whilst in service (1962 and 1965) before resigning his commission to pursue a political career. He has served seven terms in Parliament, and, in the BJP-led governments of 1996 and 1998-2004, held charge of six ministries of the Government of India, including External Affairs, Defence and Finance. Regarded as an authority on Indian foreign policy and national security, Jaswant Singh is among the most respected names in the country's public life, and in the world of diplomacy.

Jrohde says

Finally finished this tome after 18 months of picking it up and putting it down. In the end very interesting, even if poorly written with poor grammar and story line jumping about and references to things and events totally unknown. Nonetheless, he deals with the partition of India with insight and shows convincingly that it was not Jinnah's intransigence (until the very end) that brought about Pakistan - it was every bit as much the insensitivity of Nehru and Patel and their unwillingness to recognise the necessity for some compromise to accomodate the Muslim minority. How much better it would have been had the offer of the Cripps commission in 1946 to establish a united India as a Federation, reserving the right for states to get out after some time if their population so voted, than the vivisection along religious lines that so fractured the nation and let to eternal strife between the countries. over all - I am glad I persisted and read it all, appendices included.

Rajiv Chopra says

This is an extremely good book. It starts with an excellent question - why were the invasions of the Turks, Afghans etc called Muslim invasions and not territorial invasions. This is clearly indicative of the bias that has pervaded much of Indian history through the last decades.

Jaswant Singh proceeds in a gentle manner, clearly unfolding the events of the times. He clearly explains how Jinnah moved from being a champion of Hindu-Muslim unity and nationhood to a champion of Pakistan. The roles that the great Indian politicians played in causing the division of India into India and Pakistan has been clearly explained. It is a sorry tale, where the actions of a few men caused such divisions and large scale displacement.

The book is meticulously researched, balanced and well written.

This is an honest book, and one that deserves the highest praise.

Zainab says

so far it is extremely well-written and showcasing Jinnah as an extremely hard working and noble man

Rahul Khanna says

I was reading a book by Bipin Chandra, India's struggle for freedom. In that book whenever the name of Jinnah came I felt a tickling going in my body which prodded me to read this book which was resting in my bookshelf for last five months. I picked this book before finishing the book in my hand. First few pages was very interesting but after that it became boring to ad nauseam. I am not scholar to understand this so called scholarly researched and detailed book but I unravel the basic information which author wanted to convey out of this massive drivel of 650 pages. Believe me, if you are not scholar, this is a boring book and writing style has power to put you to sleep after reading 10 pages.

Here is the summary of this book. Author writes about history of Muslims and India in brief and about birth and childhood of Jinnah in few pages. Then he write about political life of Jinnah. It is a political biography. Author quotes many letters and reports which are very boring and lengthy. The real gist of this book is that partition can be avoided if Nehru and congress had agreed on federal form of govt rather than unitary form of govt with strong centre. Nehru strongly advocated the theory of strong centre so he particularly blaming Nehru for partition.

One thing I learned from this book is that only scholarship or detailed knowledge can never make a good book if writing style is bland. Jaswant Singh is not a good story teller. I read books of Will Durant and I kowtow in front of this giant and greatest author who write about most complicated things (a thousand times more complicated than partition) in such good prose that you feel connected with the book but this mastery lacks in not only Jaswant Singh but also in many other amateur writers.

Anil Swarup says

The book is more about India's partition than about Jinnah. However, as the chief architect of this vivisection he deserved to be the chief protagonist. Hence, perhaps the title of the book. The book is very well researched and the analyses quite objective. The focus is on the later years of Jinnah and the period when the the clamour for partition came to the fore. The author examines "How and why this 'ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity', the liberal constitutionalist, an Indian nationalist" went on to become the most fervent advocate of "two-nation" theory that led to the partition. The author describes Jinnah as "largely a self educated, a self made man, anxious as a youth that his merit should gain recognition and be duly rewarded". While comparing Jinnah with Gandhi, the author quotes Hector Bolitho : "Jinnah was a source of power. Gandhi....an instrument of it" How true. "Jinnah was potentially kind, but in behaviour extremely cold and distant. Gandhi embodies compassion. Jinnah did not wish to touch the poor, but then Gandhi's instincts were rooted in India and lifelong he soiled his hands in helping squalid poor"

Jaswant Singh comes up with some seminal conclusions as he presents his viesws against communal reservation communal reservation: "Reservation results finally in compartmentalising society, hence ultimately in fragmenting national identity". How true it is for all types of reservations.

The author is also extremely critical about how Mountbatten went about doing his job, in haste.

All in all an eminently readable, though long, book.

Atif says

Reading this books took me down the memory lane, when I was a student in college and had a pretty heavy subject of Pakistan Studies. Pretty much everything I have studied on indo-pak partition is present in this book. What I found intresting is the detail Jaswant went on explaining the relationship between the trio - Jinnah Gandhi and Nehru. The book in the middle becomes a bit too detail and complex I guess the author wanted to capture every bit of event that happend in the last 5 years before partition. However, Jaswant has summed up well in the end though I dont agree with a few things what he has put in .. but still a three star from a patrotic Pakistani.

Bharath Ramakrishnan says

When this book was published, it created a massive controversy for Jaswant Singh, when the BJP leadership immediately sidelined him for writing a book assumed to glorify Jinnah. Quite possibly this decision was before anyone bothered to read the book. The title of the book I suppose conveyed the impression it did. This book is well worth a read since it is largely objective, though it is also boring in parts and could have been much crisper and a lot more readable.

The book is actually quite balanced about Jinnah – certainly very sympathetic to him till about the late 1930s, but is critical of his ‘Muslims as a separate nation’ theory, vanity and inflexibility after that leading to the partition of India. The book is however, very critical of Nehru and the Congress (especially in the 1920s and 1930s and even after), and how it pushed Jinnah from being a votary of Hindu – Muslim unity to demand a separate homeland for Muslims, and emerge as the Quaid-e-Azam of Pakistan.

The book starts with exploring the entry of Islam into India and this part is largely academic with no new information. It then moves on to Jinnah, his early life, contrasting his approach with Mahatma Gandhi. While Jinnah was a constitutionalist, believing in being entirely legally correct in conduct, Gandhi took to non co-operation to protest unjust laws as well fight for freedom for the country. A major theme of the book is how the Congress made no attempts to be inclusive and brushed aside the Muslim league as a non-entity in the 1920s and 1930s. A hurt Jinnah gradually consolidated Muslim support and emerged as the primary spokesperson. There were windows of opportunities till quite late to reach a rapprochement between the Congress and the League, but only Mahatma Gandhi made a sincere attempt to do that almost right till the day of independence. Within the Congress too there were diverse opinions from people such as C Rajagopachari, Ram Manohar Lohia, Jayaprakash Narayan and Abul Kalam Azad.

His mistrust of the Congress, and the consolidation of Muslim support also leads Jinnah to become more inflexible and demanding in the later years (late 1930s and 1940s). For instance, he insisted on equal numerical representation for the League in the provincial government planned and also demanded that the Congress should not nominate any Muslim, as he was the primary spokesperson for Muslims in India. Right till the end, Jinnah leaves the definition of Pakistan open. The portions where Mahatma Gandhi questions him about what will happen to minorities in the new nation of Pakistan, leads Jinnah to claim that they will be taken care of. Beyond a point, it looks like Jinnah improvised his positioning based on circumstances. The part where he calls for a ‘Direct Action Day’ encouraging violence and communal rioting to prove his point is especially disturbing and so much out of character based on his earlier conduct and views. And yet, he seemed to return to a more broad minded approach once he got his Pakistan – assuring minorities of equal rights.

As Jaswant Singh points out, many disturbing aspects of the two nation theory and the event of partition remain with us today. Jinnah died too soon after the formation of Pakistan, leading to a nation devoid of a soul (which it was only just forming) where minorities face an uncertain future in the face of rising religious extremism. Just maybe, if he had lived longer, as also Mahatma Gandhi, our region could have been a different place.

My rating: 3.5 / 5.

Sameer says

One of the best writeups on the whole partition and Jinnah. Of course there is lot to the misery and mystery that will probably remain..

Jaswant Singh hs put an honest effort in this.
