

Jinnah

Syed-Mohsin Naquvi

It is natural that Pakistanis living in North America would reminisce about the life and times of the Quaid-e-Azam come December 25 every year.

However, I see so much mention of Muhammad Ali Jinnah's drinking and eating pork. I do not understand why this is being given so much publicity.

The greatest and the best Companions of the Prophet of Islam were wine drinkers, stone worshippers and they used to kill their neighbours for the littlest things. Once Islam came into their lives, they were totally different human beings. They dedicated their lives to Islam and made such great sacrifices that what we have today is owed to them. Similarly, Jinnah had envisioned a different life for himself before he got involved in politics. But, once he was involved in it, he had dedicated himself fully to the cause he was going to serve and gave everything to it. He changed his lifestyle completely. He worked as a professional and at the end of his struggle he produced what he had envisioned he would.

If you read Wolpert's biography of Jinnah, you would see a very clear change of direction taking place in Jinnah's life. I remember at least one occasion in Bombay when he was going to meet some people and his wife brought him lunch, which were ham sandwiches. He is visibly displeased and refuses to eat that and actually tries to explain to his wife Ratti that his life is completely changed, the days of his eating those things and the drinking habits were over.

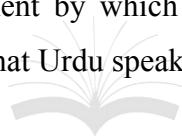
Jinnah had never envisioned a state based on Islamic theocracy. He was a pluralist and a true parliamentarian through and through and all he had seen was a democratic state where people would have their respective religions in their own personal lives without having to mix public life with private beliefs.

Jinnah was an honest Muslim, he was not the most knowledgeable of Muslims neither was he a fully practicing one, but he was honest in his devotions and beliefs. There was a case where he was arguing in the court opposite Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru. There was an occasion where a Qur'anic verse needed to be quoted. He did not remember the text but Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru did. However, he knew the significance of religion both in his own life as well as in the lives of the people for whom he had been .

Jinnah was born in an Agha Khani family. In later years his entire family converted to Sunni Islam but he himself and his one sister, Fatiam Jinnah, who had been his ubiquitous companion, converted to Shia Ithna Ashari Islam. However, that change was hardly visible in his everyday life. He knew that that difference could have caused some controversy, he therefore had ordered that no photograph will be taken while he was standing in congregational prayers. There is not a single press photo in the archives where Jinnah could be seen standing in salat. He is either in *ruku'* or he is sitting down (with the congregation). Akbar Ahmed, screenwriter of the film *Jinnah* took the liberty of showing Jinnah (portrayed by Christopher Lee) actually standing in *salat* with his hands folded before him, as if he was a Sunni Muslim. After the showing of the film, I took this up with Akbar Ahmed. My contention was that he should have skipped over the scene. He just laughed it up and did not want to discuss the issue. I thought that was journalistic dishonesty. Jinnah never made a big thing of his own religious beliefs but he respected other's beliefs. There were three things that Jinnah had imposed unilaterally on Pakistan: (i) that Karachi would be the capital, (ii) Urdu would be the national language, and (iii) for the first twelve days of Muharram, Radio Pakistan would not broadcast any music. This third item shows his commitment to religion.

In all other governmental and policy matters, Jinnah was fully pluralistic. He appointed Sir Zafarullah Khan, a Qadiyani, the permanent UN representative. There were numerous Parsee and Christian officers in both foreign and domestic civil services, and they had held senior positions.

The question is, if he was such a pluralistic politician, why did he fight for a separate nation for the Muslims of India? If you follow his career, he was a member of the Congress Party and was fully committed to a united India free of British Rule. Two things changed his mind about it. He had watched the Urdu-Hindi debate hotting up in the country. There were stage plays being written in which Hindi would be shown as a faithful wife and Urdu as a marauding prostitute (Vayshiya) who had come to destroy a happy and prosperous family. Things had come to such a point that Gandhi and Mawlvi Abdul Haq clashed publicly in a largely attended meeting on the issue. The second thing that was obviously related to the language issue was the fact that the Muslims living in India. Although they had been there for a thousand years, they were still being seen by the Hindu majority as the heirs of their conquerors. The majority was not in the mood to accept that minority as equals. The Muslim culture was going to be diluted, the Muslims were going to be side tracked in education and employment, and their public life was going to change drastically. By asking for and establishing Pakistan, Jinnah created an instrument by which the Muslim culture of India was going to be preserved. It is true today that Urdu speaking Muslims are the largest Muslim entity in the world.



Connecting Communities Through Education