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Book Review

Jinnah: Beyond the Hero-Villain Concept

Mr. Jinnah

A Play by Narendra Mohan,
Translated from the Original Hindi by O. P. Arora,
New Delhi: Authorspress, 2012,
pp. 132,
Rs. 300. ISBN 978-81-7273-630-9.

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Ever since the Partition of the Indian subcontinent and creation of Pakistan, Jinnah has been depicted as one of the most controversial figures in the modern history of South Asia. Although Pakistan regards him as *Qaid-e-Azam*, Father of the Nation, but from an Indian perspective he is mostly portrayed as an obdurate and wily racist having compromised the unity of India for his political aspirations and certain subjective motives. However, it is also believed that personal animosity between Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Jawaharlal Nehru led to the creation of two separate nations. As of late, Jaswant Singh, a Member of the Parliament of India and former cabinet minister, has viewed Nehru, not Jinnah, as causing the division of India into two separate states for Muslims and Hindus, mostly referring to his highly centralized policies for an independent India in 1947, which Jinnah opposed in favour of a more decentralized India. All the same, only history can tell its actual truth. Whatever be the concrete facts, Jinnah was and still remains a big controversy.

In his recent play, *Mr. Jinnah*, noted Hindi poet and playwright, Narendra Mohan makes an attempt at unravelling the enigmatic and tangled personality of Jinnah. The play covers different phases and various paradoxes associated with Jinnah's socio-political as well as familial life, besides certain psychological kinks, which finally led to the social, cultural and political crisis in the Indian sub-continent. As professed by the writer, Jinnah in the play is a real figure, not the mythical or glamourized or devilish image as most of us have of him. Narendra Mohan has dwelled on a range of historico-political and biographical resources about Jinnah in reconstructing him in a dramatic design, at least, beyond the hero-villain concept. He delves into his subconscious and delineates him as a man torn between his personal and socio-political selves. In his well-crafted dramatic design, Mohan unfolds Jinnah's convoluted psyche at different stages of history. And, in doing so, he has gone much ahead of the preconceived notions he had about him.

The play *Mr. Jinnah* was originally written in Hindi and was published in 2005, and, as per blurb, it was scheduled to be staged in a theatre in Delhi, but was banned by the Congress-led Government in Delhi for political reasons. The visual impact of the play can be ascertained only after its enactment on the stage, but in its print form, this play has the power to cast a remarkable influence on the mind of the reader. The present English translation of the play by poet-novelist O. P. Arora brings out the niceties and nuances of Hindi drama in an effective way. The two-act play is ingeniously structured and the sequence of events is well-related. The story has been woven around some factual historical events (based purely on the author's research), but the aesthetic quality of the play is never marred. A deft dovetail of political, social, cultural, religious, personal and emotional aspects of a person makes the drama engaging and imposing. At places, the elements of stinging satire and sarcasm, besides temperate humour arising out of witticisms and irony of circumstances grab the attention of the reader. The frequent and intelligent use of pun, jibe and word play, besides certain symbols, suggestions, motifs and verse citations from Shakespeare's plays including *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *Othello* enhance the histrionic sway of the play.

The play opens with the scene of a public meeting being held in a hall at Lahore. Jinnah is delivering his momentous address about the creation of a separate homeland for the Muslims while his drivers Hamid and Hanif enter an ideological banter and come to clash, reconciled by Jinnah's servant, Badru, with his subtle and jovial wit. Hamid is an activist of Muslim League and a dire supporter of Jinnah, whereas Hanif Azad is a Communist revolutionary and a tacit detractor of Jinnah. Hamid praises Jinnah as a messiah of Muslims for giving them a new racial identity, but Hanif Azad censures him for being a hard-edged politico. Badru, the servant, witty, satirical, sarcastic, sardonic and always taunting and casting aspersions, more-or-less a Shakespearean jester or fool / clown, enters the scene and with his cryptic and double-meaning statements mediates the altercation between the two drivers telling them it was useless to fight or indulge in discussions as they were "slaves of the same Master" (p. 23) and that Jinnah "is not a small player", rather

"He is a torment to everyone. On the one hand he has his sharp eyes on Gandhi and Nehru, on the other on the hypocritical cunning tricks of the British. Who does not know that our Sahib's aim never misses the mark? You'll see that he defeats both Gandhi and the British." (p. 28).

Jinnah's well-planned rhetoric remains abstruse for the common man. Nevertheless, his mesmerizing speeches, with a coherent sequencing in the plot, form a very significant structural component of the play and an effective implement for untangling the knots of Jinnah's psyche. For his political mileage, Jinnah brings in the concept of race and exhorts the Muslims to join hands to make their own "destiny" and "fight a decisive battle for getting their own homeland" as "Muslims are not a minority, but a race. Their religious philosophy, their culture, ways of living and eating and their behavioural patterns . . . are different from those of the Hindus . . ." (pp. 25-27). However, the playwright attempts to get at the reasons behind the abrupt twist in Jinnah's

character. His research reveals that it was, in actual fact, the difference of opinion he had developed with Gandhi, Nehru, Azad et al. that led him on a divergent way.

Jinnah has been depicted as emotionally effervescing after his insult at the 1920 Session of the Indian National Congress at Nagpur. The issue was Jinnah's opposition of the Non-Cooperation Movement. According to the author of the play, Jinnah had forewarned Gandhi of the civil war and mass hysteria as the possible consequences and fallouts of the Movement, but Gandhi and his supporters did not pay any heed to Jinnah's arguments. Rather Mohammad Ali called him "a political imposter" (p. 44) and Maulana Shauqat Ali even manhandled him before the large gathering. Jinnah asked Gandhi to intervene time and again, but he remained silent. Gandhi's silence at that chaos and lawlessness in the party meeting was humiliating and intolerable to Jinnah and became the cause of his resignation / separation from the Congress and later the main reason for political vendetta against Gandhi and Nehru and their followers. That episode made Jinnah sad, hurt and panic-stricken and left an indelible mark on his psyche, as he states: "This insult captivated my total identity and I decided to take a revenge against Gandhi." (p. 46). It led him to his own presumptions, conclusions and decisions, which finally took the form of mass protest led by him.

From Jinnah's dialogues as well as his overall comportment, Gandhi appears to be a shrewd, clever, hardcore politician. Jinnah calls him "a dictator" who "makes his writ run large", "makes everybody accept his view" and "creates such an atmosphere that anyone who dares oppose him, loses his standing and respect among people." (p. 40). In Act I, scene iv, Jinnah accuses even Nehru for having deceived him, especially when the idea of "Confederation under the Cabinet Mission Plan" was accepted by him, as also by the Congress, "Nehru killed the plan that could have retained the country as one . . ." (p. 80) He tells his friend Yarjung,

"I was pleading for a united India . . . Lost my face . . . What should I do? The Muslim masses had put their trust in me, how should I face them, tell me." (p. 80).

Act II describes the post-Partition political scenario in Pakistan. Jinnah feels isolated, cheated, cornered and ignored in politics. He rues the Partition and tells his friend Jamshed he has got the documents that clearly show how Nehru and Patel "accepted the Pakistan Plan" and "didn't allow Gandhi to have even a hint of it . . ." and how even Mountbatten cornered him very badly: "He pounced upon him like lightning – Congress has accepted partition, you too should accept it. He didn't give me time even to blink." (p. 101). At this juncture, he praises Gandhi for having declined to the idea of partition, and proposing his name for the post of Prime Minister:

"This one truth raised Gandhi's stature very high in my eyes. I felt myself a dwarf. At the time of partition, he felt morally broken and lonely . . . I settled my scores with him, but I became very small in my own eyes. Will you now too ask me why I feel sad?" (p. 102)

Jinnah feels deeply hurt and disconcerted by the post-Partition riots, arson and bloodshed in the name of religion. The common masses are displeased with him and show their ire to him at the decision of Partition. His dream of making Pakistan “a modern state”, not “an Islamic state” (p. 94) seems to shatter. He censures the role of the then Government of Pakistan in being indifferent to the crisis in the country: “On both sides, people are becoming animals, we have to stop them. (*Abnormally angry*) To establish rule of law, is it the job of the government or not?” (pp. 94-95). Apologetically, he tells his sister Fatima, “A new country – it turned out to be a desert in empty hands.” (p. 91). It seems rather paradoxical of Jinnah (Act I, scene ii) who, inspired by poet Iqbal, had himself planned a separate space for the Muslim race:

“The basic structure is of Iqbal. I have only given it a political colour. You know, Iqbal has been a friend, philosopher and guide to me. In the dark period of our race, he showed me the way. He has understood the declining status, pain and suffering of Muslims in the country. Well, this resolution is the blueprint of the Pakistan Plan. We shall have to fight to give it the shape . . .” (p. 36).

Jinnah sees things going wrong after the creation of Pakistan, which perturb him badly. Even in his family life he is a failure. The playwright has very deftly incorporated the happenings in the family into the plot of the play. Especially the trio of women in his life – his wife Ruttie (a Parsi lady), sister Fatima and daughter Dina – play a very significant role in the play. Because of his political ambitions, he becomes negligent of his responsibilities toward his family. Ruttie always feels neglected and remains restless in her privy. Dina finds her soulmate in Neval Wadia, a Parsi boy, but Jinnah straightaway refuses to accept this marriage, as it would affect his political career. He turns harsh to Dina: “You are unlucky that you are the daughter of Jinnah who is the centre of the current political storm.” (p. 51). Dina becomes sad and emotionally distraught by Jinnah’s sheer indifference to her, as is evident in her delusory self-talk and excessive fixation with her pet cat. Fatima who remains with Jinnah throughout has been depicted as ruining his life altogether with her intervention in his every decision, whether in politics or in family matters. He remains unaware of the associations between Ruttie and Kanji Dwarkadas and between Fatima and Jamshed which often become the cause of verbal exchanges between Dina and Fatima. Jinnah turned ruthless, self-indulged and egotistical: “I hear myself, I speak to myself. All owe their allegiance to me, I to no one” (p. 54). However, his egotism lands him in depression, as it is perceptible in his soliloquies, regrets and delusions. In all, he was a failure as a husband, and also as a father, and, in his last days, he found himself failure also as a leader:

“I am the Governor General of Pakistan – so helpless and lonely Deteriorating conditions Blood, blood, blood, what are these voices? Now I and fear, destruction and shame have become bosom friends. Blood? . . . My bloody ideas, why do they suddenly take the shape of incidents” (pp. 95-96).

Playwright Narendra Mohan has especially worked on the emotional side of Jinnah – taken by intermittent feelings of guilt, shame, disappointment and regret. The man whom his daughter fondly addresses “Grey Wolf” (after *Grey Wolf*, the biography of

Mustafa Ataturk, the founder of Modern Turkey) is seen mentally and emotionally feeble and helpless in his isolation in the last days of his life. He even feels nostalgic of his Bombay bungalow and desperately longs to go there to relive the warm memories of his past. All in all, Jinnah has been portrayed as an unsettled, depressed and repentant person in the end, ruing the developments taking place at variance with his inner yearnings in political as well as personal life.

Mr. Jinnah is neither a tragedy nor a comedy, nor even history or chronicle play in the precisely traditional form; rather it can be described as a 'biography play' with a mix of history and social verity of the day and an explication of personality with an insight into the psyche of the protagonist of the play. Nevertheless, the play is remarkable for the playwright's experimentation and architectonic skill. In its two-Act structure, the present play covers the total life of the protagonist – his interests, his philosophy of life, his likes and dislikes, his reminiscences, his opinions, notions and ideological standpoints. It is a well-researched and dramaturgically well-wrought play. Narendra Mohan has used the Macbeth model to demonstrate the guilt with which Jinnah remains occupied till his last breath. Besides quoting verbatim from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Jinnah's soliloquizing, being swayed by his ambition and feelings of vendetta, having the fright of blood, and particularly, having developed the habit of washing his hands rubbing hard with soap – all Macbethian motifs and images make the sway of the plot effective and interesting. The sequencing of historical events with personal life is involving. The catchy dialogues bespeak of the author's knack of handling the linguistic resources and rhetorical devices. Although a handful of slight solecisms and typographical oversights are difficult to pass over in this translated version, yet O. P. Arora deserves praise for rendering the play adeptly in English language. It is understandable that English cannot fully capture the subtle nuances of Hindi-Urdu idiom, but Arora has done a good deal in making readers comfortable with the language, particularly as it is used in the Indian subcontinent. Iqbal's Urdu couplets have not been translated into English. The English rendition of these *sheirs* would certainly be of use for the audience who don't understand Hindi and Urdu. In all, the play is an important historical-biographical document and adds significantly to the corpus of the Partition literature.

Work Cited

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