
Open Letter to Mr. L.K. Advani about M.A. Jinnah

9 June 2005

Dear Mr. Advani,

It is painful for me to see you being brandished as a hollow opportunist, in the wake of your comments about M.A. Jinnah. Many years ago, I learnt the nuances of practical politics by observing you from close quarters. In a way, you are one of the many gurus that I have had the opportunity to learn from, though surely you do not look upon me as one of your students.

The best *guru-dakshina* (offering to a teacher by a student) I can give you is to take you seriously when the whole world doubts your sincerity and views your comments on Jinnah as nothing short of gross opportunism. I accept your invitation for an open debate on Jinnah with intellectual honesty and sincerity. I hope that you will take this letter with this spirit and will not mind my addressing you as an equal, which is necessary since everyone must be on equal footing in an intellectual debate.

In your statements in Pakistan you have highlighted two portions of M.A. Jinnah's life (1876-1948) – first from 1904 to early thirties when he migrated to London and second period from August 1947 to his demise in 1948.

In the first phase of his public life (1904-1920), three main influences shaped Jinnah's personality:

- a) Nineteenth century British liberalism, first absorbed during his four-years' (1892-96) stay in England as a student of law,
- b) The cosmopolitan atmosphere and mercantile background of metropolitan Bombay where he had established himself as a successful barrister since the turn of the century, and
- c) His close professional and personal contact with the Parsis, who, though only a tiny community provided an example of how initiative, enterprise and hard work could overcome numerical inferiority, racial prejudice and communal barriers.

Jinnah joined Congress in 1906. Even while remaining a member of Congress, he joined Indian Muslim League in October 1913 and became its President in 1916. As a leader of Muslim League, Jinnah worked to bring Muslim League close to Congress. From 1913 to 1920, he helped the two parties work in cooperation. Lucknow pact of 1916, enabled the two parties to act in concert and settle the controversial issue of separate electorate.

The turning point in Jinnah's life came around 1920 when Mahatma Gandhi became active in Congress. Jinnah was a firm believer in constitutionalism – appealing to British using

constitutional means only. He opposed Gandhi because according to him Gandhi's agitation-based approach amounted to using unconstitutional methods. Jinnah left Congress in December 1920 after he was ridiculed at Nagpur Convention of Congress for opposing Gandhi.

Jinnah had also opposed Gandhi's exploitation of Khilafat movement. As late as 1928, Jinnah said, "What we want is that Hindus and Mussalmans should march together until our object is achieved. ... These two communities have got to be reconciled and united and made to feel that their interests are common." At this time Jinnah was getting disillusioned with the direction of politics in Indian sub-continent. It is difficult to say whether this disillusionment was due to ideological reasons or due to growing frustration on being sidelined on the political stage by Gandhi and his team. We do know that he did not see eye-to-eye with Gandhi on most issues and as Gandhi's influence grew Jinnah found himself politically isolated.

Jinnah migrated to England in early-thirties. He returned to India in 1934. After his return, he had no truck with Congress. His metamorphosis from a liberal to a leader of Indian Muslims was completed after his return from England.

Even before his departure to England, in March 1929 Jinnah prepared his famous Fourteen Point Muslim Agenda. This included the following:

11. Provision should be made in the constitution giving Muslims an adequate share, along with the other Indians, in all the services of the state and in local self-governing bodies having due regard to the requirements of efficiency.

12. The constitution should embody adequate safeguards for the protection of Muslim culture and for the protection and promotion of Muslim education, language, religion, personal laws and Muslim charitable institution and for their due share in the grants-in-aid given by the state and by local self-governing bodies.

13. No cabinet, either central or provincial, should be formed without there being a proportion of at least one-third Muslim ministers.

Muslim League had accepted the Fourteen Point Muslim Agenda. The party passed a resolution, according to which no scheme for the future constitution of the Government of India would be acceptable to the Muslims unless and until it included the demands presented in the fourteen points.

In due course, the Fourteen Point Agenda evolved into Two-Nation theory, which led to partition of India. From 1934 till the formation of Pakistan in 1947, Jinnah built and propounded the Two-Nation theory. The high point was in March 1940 at Lahore where he argued, "Islam and Hinduism... are not religions in the strict sense of the word, but are... different and distinct social orders", that "the Hindus and Muslims belong to two different religious philosophies, social customs, literature", "to two different civilizations", that they "derive their inspiration from different sources of history"... (with) different epics, different heroes and different episodes." "We wish our people", he declared, "to develop to the fullest our spiritual, cultural, economic, social and political life in a way that we think best and in consonance with our own ideals and according to the genius of our people."

Jinnah wrote to Gandhi on 17 September 1944, "We are a nation," "with our distinctive culture and civilization, language and literature, art and architecture, names and nomenclature, sense of values and proportion, legal laws and moral code, customs and calendar, history and traditions, aptitude and ambitions; in short, we have our own distinctive outlook on life and of life." This definition of Muslim nationhood as distinct from territorial nationhood was Jinnah's contribution to political thought of the world. Religion, divorced from territory, had not formed the basis of any nation in mankind's history till the declaration by Jinnah that Indian Muslims were a separate nation.

It must be mentioned at this point that Jinnah's espousal of a Muslim nation did not include support for a theological state. Muslim scholars have argued that technically speaking; theocracy means a government "by ordained priests, who wield authority as being specially appointed by those who claim to derive their rights from their sacerdotal position." Unlike Catholicism, there is no established church in Islam, (in fact, it decries such a church). Moreover, since Islam admits of no priestcraft, since it discountenances a sacerdotal class as the bearer of an infallible authority, and since it concedes the right of ijihad to "men of common sense", the concept of theocracy is absolutely foreign to Islam.

Three centuries ago, when Europe was just coming out of a centuries-old debate of King-versus-Church, secularism meant belief in a state that was not controlled by Church. In other words, secularists were those who believed in separating government from theological authorities. If secularism is taken to mean as opposite of theocracy, there can be no doubt that Jinnah was a secular person throughout his life, just as every Muslim fundamentalist in the world would be. Kashmiri militants, who kill Hindus and preach ethnic cleansing, can also claim to be secular by the same logic. Al Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden would also be classified as seculars by this definition of secularism.

In today's world and in particular in present-day India, secularism does not mean antithesis of theocracy. Today secularism is equal rights to all creeds and religious communities to practice their faiths, non-interference by state in matters of religious beliefs and above all peaceful co-existence of different faiths in one nation-state defined by territorial, historical and emotive considerations rather than by religion and sect. The last point makes secularism diametrically opposite to two-nation theory.

Jinnah believed that Hindus and Muslims are two distinct and separate cultures and nations. After 1940, he did not try for co-existence of Hindus and Muslims as he did in the early part of his public life.

A close study all of Jinnah's pronouncements during 1934-48, and most of his pronouncement during the pre-1934 period, shows that the word, 'secular' (signifying an ideology) does not find a mention in any of them. Even when confronted with the question, he evaded it -- as the following extracts from his 17 July 1947 press conference indicates:

Question: "Will Pakistan be a secular or theocratic state?"

Mr. M.A. Jinnah: "You are asking me a question that is absurd. I do not know what a theocratic state means."

The choice between secularism and theocracy appeared absurd to Jinnah probably because Islam does not have a theocratic institution like the Catholic Church. This does not mean that Jinnah was accepting secularism and rejecting the two-nation theory.

Even though India was partitioned on the basis of two-nation theory, the truncated country left after carving out of Pakistan did not accept the two-nation theory. If the theory had been accepted, it would have been natural and logical for truncated India to go Hindu just as Pakistan had gone Islamic. But India decided to be secular and to guarantee protection of minority rights.

India's rejection of two-nation theory has always threatened Pakistan, whose greatest fear is secularism. Partition is subject to constant questioning in the Pakistani psyche, which is living through the pain of alienation from its historical and cultural roots. It troubles them to see Indian Muslims talk of a common heritage with Hindus and live with Hindus in peaceful and harmonious coexistence – something that was impossible as per Jinnah's two-nation theory.

Indian secularism and harmonious Hindu-Muslim relations (barring stray incidents) over the past five and a half decades have shaken the foundations of two-nation theory, more in Pakistan than in India, where it is forgotten by most. But just because it is forgotten, it does not mean that it is no longer relevant to Indian context.

RSS, Jansangh and, till a few years back, BJP used to consider removal of article 370 from constitution and common civil code as key issues. These issues were and are still important because by acting on these matters, the country can hope to wash off the last vestige of two-nation theory from its shores. Article 370 gives a special status to Jammu & Kashmir because it is a Muslim-dominated region. This is unacceptable because it is against the basic principle of secularism and smacks of Jinnah's famous rhetoric as expressed in his Fourteen Point Agenda and innumerable speeches from 1920 to 1947. A separate civil code for Muslims is also opposed for similar reasons: if Hindus and Muslims need separate laws, then surely they are two separate nations as Jinnah used to argue.

Mr. Advani, article 370 and different civil laws for different communities have been unacceptable to nationalist Indians because we are not willing to even accept a shadow of two-nation theory on Indian soil. I remember that you, as Home Minister, had opposed trifurcation of Jammu & Kashmir on religious lines. Your words to a delegation of Jammu leaders who had come to plead for trifurcation were that the medicine is worse than the disease. Trifurcation on communal lines would have led to acceptance of two-nation theory in Kashmir. And then it would have been natural for the theory to raise its ugly head in other parts of India.

No one in India is willing to reopen the wounds of partition. The general mood in India is to aim for integrating the communities into one integral whole. Sangh clan has been saying that Congress and allies are pseudo-secularists because they emphasize and promote such elements within Muslims, who instead of promoting a common Indian heritage continue to further Muslims as distinct from ancient Indian culture, heritage and traditions.

Mr. Advani, I remember that during the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, at various instances, you talked of Ram being a common ancestor of all Indians, whether Hindus or Muslims. At that time you did not see any wrong in pleading with Muslims to help in building Ram temple. In your view at that time this represented a true integration of Muslims and Hindus into one common national identity.

Much water has flown in the Ganges since then. Now, you have changed your views about the most important and largest mass-agitation that you led. You were the mascot of this movement and now you consider it the biggest mistake of your life. In a way, your position is similar to that of MA Jinnah.

Towards the end of his life, Jinnah was asked about the greatest mistake of his life. If hearsay is to be believed, Jinnah is rumoured to have replied in one word – Pakistan. You have quoted from Jinnah's speech of 11 August 1947. The remarks on that day were somewhat off-the-cuff and were preceded by, "I cannot make any well-considered pronouncement, but I shall say a few things as they occur to me". This has led many Pakistani scholars to put it down as "loose thinking and imprecise wording". But most scholars and journalists accepted Jinnah's August 11 pronouncements as "a remarkable reversal" and one of them asks, "Was he [Jinnah] pleading for a united India - on the eve of Pakistan?"

Jinnah's broadcast to the people of the United States (February 1948) is in a similar vein:

I do not know what the ultimate shape of this constitution is going to be, but I am sure that it will be of a democratic type, embodying the essential principles of Islam. Today, they are as applicable in actual life as they were 1300 years ago. Islam and its idealism have taught us democracy. It has taught equality of men, justice and fairly play to everybody. We are the inheritors of these glorious traditions and are fully alive to our responsibilities and obligations as framers of the future constitution of Pakistan. In any case Pakistan is not going to be a theocratic State -- to be ruled by priests with a divine mission. We have many non- Muslims -- Hindus, Christians, and Parsis -- but they are all Pakistanis. They will enjoy the same rights and privileges as any other citizens and will play their rightful part in the affairs of Pakistan.

Jinnah was speaking all this a few months after my parents and grandparents had been forced to flee empty-handed out of their homes in Lahore and Bahawalpur. Jinnah had not raised a little finger to help them or anyone like them.

When we try to analyze the lofty pronouncements made by Jinnah during 1947-48 there are two possibilities – the first and apparent one is that he was only playing to the international gallery, while his associates and colleagues indulged in open ethnic cleansing. Assuming that Jinnah was sincere, the second possibility appears to be that he had jumped on the bandwagon of Islam but his version of Islam was not acceptable to most of his fellow travelers on the bandwagon. It is interesting to look at the views of a Muslim scholar (Sharif al Mujahid http://members.tripod.com/~no_nukes_sa/chapter_5.html) in this regard:

It is, however, not usually recognized that political equality in general terms (because absolutism was the rule at the time of the advent of Islam) and equality before law in more specific terms are attributes Islam had recognized long before the world discovered them as secular values. They were exemplified in the Misaq-i-Madinah, the pact between the Prophet (PBUH) and Aus and Khazraj, and in his letter to Abul Hairs, Christian priest and the accredited representative of the Christians of Najran, and in the conduct of the Khulfa-i-Rashidun. This covenant, comprising 47 clauses, lays down, inter alia, that the Quraishite Muslim, the Medinites and the Jews of Banu Auf from one community apart from other people, that the Jews shall have their religion

and the Muslims their own, that they shall help each other against one who fights with the people of the covenant. Now, how could these disparate tribes characterised by differing religious affiliations from one political community unless their entitlement to equal rights, privileges and obligations are conceded in the first place. A community postulates such entitlement, and it may be conjectured that Jinnah believed that Islam concedes equal citizenship to one and all, without reference to creed, colour or race.

It is also likely that the bloodshed of partition had unnerved Jinnah. He was shaken up (just as probably the events of 6 December 1992 did to you). He had been leading a movement for creation of Pakistan but he was least prepared for it when the movement reached its logical conclusion.

In his hour of crisis of faith Jinnah turned back to the beliefs that he had nurtured during his early days. But he could no longer become a liberal in the British mould that Jawaharlal Nehru had adopted. He could neither shed his Islamic image nor live with it especially considering that his family had virtually deserted him and he was lonely in Pakistan. Under these circumstances, Jinnah espoused a new term – Islamic Democracy, which, while retaining the institutional appurtenances of a democratic structure, is congruent with Muslims' ethos, aspirations and code of morality.

Jinnah refused to accept the label of secular even in the period of 11 August 1947 to his death in 11 September 1948. Though, of course, he did not want a theocratic state either. Generally speaking, he avoided giving detailed description of his political beliefs seeking refuge behind Islam and Democracy, as the following example illustrates:

A correspondent suggested that a theocratic State meant a State where only people of a particular religion, for example, Muslims, could be full citizens and Non-Muslims would not be full citizens.

Mr. M.A. Jinnah: "Then it seems to me that what I have already said is like throwing water on duck's back (laughter). When you talk of democracy, I am afraid you have not studied Islam. We learned democracy thirteen centuries ago."

Islamic Democrat – that is the only label that Jinnah would have countenanced. It would have been anathema for him to be called a secular. This would have negated all that he stood for.

Interestingly, no one in Pakistan would dare to call Quaid-E-Azam (The Great Leader) Jinnah as secular. For Pakistanis, Quaid-E-Azam Jinnah represents embodiment of two-nation-theory, which is the *raison d'être* for the existence of Pakistan. Mausoleum of Jinnah in Karachi is a symbol of Pakistani nationalism. By visiting the mausoleum, Mr. Advani, you paid tributes to the two-nation theory. By doing *sajda* (traditional Islamic method of bowing at the time of prayer with knees on the ground and head touching the ground) at the mausoleum, you did something that is prohibited even in Islam. A Muslim doing such a *sajda* would have been considered a kafir and excommunicated. Jinnah was no prophet. He was not even a saint in any sense of the term. Doing *sajda* at his grave makes mockery of a sacred Islamic ritual.

Mr. Advani, your ignorance of Islam may well be accepted, but surely, the country expects you to be aware of the fact that the mausoleum was of Quaid-E-Azam of Pakistan and not of a private individual named MA Jinnah. The guard of honour that you received at the

mausoleum made it clear that this was no private grave. Jinnah has been accepted as Quaid-E-Azam in Pakistan not because of his 11 August 1947 address but despite it. Pakistani establishment ignores the thoughts and pronouncements made by Jinnah during last year or so of his life. Whenever Pakistani establishment refers to Quaid-E-Azam, they are referring to pre-partition-post-1929 Jinnah. They do so because it suits them.

As outsiders, you and I are not bound by the compulsions of Pakistani establishment. Yet, it would be a grave distortion of history to overlook the period of Jinnah's life that made him Quaid-E-Azam in the eyes of Pakistanis and only focus on last year of his life. Mr. Advani, you (and your speech writer, if you have one) have chosen to do just that.

Even if Jinnah is judged based on the last year of his life only, he can only be called "Islamic Democrat". I admit that I do not know what that term means. Probably, you also do not what that means. We should accept our ignorance on this account and not try to fit a historical personality into the mould that we know.

You wrote in the visitor's book of Jinnah's mausoleum, "There are many people who leave an inerasable stamp on history. But there are a few who actually create history. Qaed-E-Azam Mohd Ali Jinnah was one such rare individual". No dispute with that. Jinnah did create history just as many before him like Mohammed Gauri, Babar and Nadir Shah had done.

Mr. Advani, I refuse to bestow greatness on everyone who has created or creates history. History is often created and shaped by the worst of men and women. If you wish to call all such men and women great, it is your value judgment. You are free to call Mohammed Gauri, Babar, Nadir Shah and Jinnah as great men. But, I most humbly differ with you on that.

To my mind, Gandhi and Jinnah are two opposite extremes of political spectrum. The rivalry between Gandhi and Jinnah was not a game of personal one-upmanship. Despite all my differences with Gandhi, I cannot deny that Gandhi represented efforts to integrate Hindus and Muslims into one harmonious society. On the other hand, Jinnah, notwithstanding his brand of Islamic Democracy and a few stray pronouncements toward the end of his life, represents two-nation-theory which says that Hindus and Muslims can never live together in harmony. My vote is for harmony and Gandhi. I lack your political skills to be able to call both Gandhi and Jinnah as great. In my humble opinion, Gandhi was great, while Jinnah was a clever politician who achieved significant success in his career.

Lastly let me thank you Mr. Advani for raising this issue. The present generation in India does not understand the debate about two-nation-theory. It would have been good if RSS, Vishwa Hindu Parishad and your cronies in BJP had debated on the issues involved instead of making you, personally, as the focus of controversy.

With Best Wishes and Regards,

Anil Chawla