BEING THE OTHER
The Muslim in India

Saeed Naqvi
THREE

Partition’s Long Shadow

Ours was a family steeped in politics. As I have pointed out in previous chapters, many of my ancestors were at the forefront of the First War of Independence in 1857. My great-grandfather in Rae Bareli had spent years in Naini jail with leaders like Motilal Nehru. My father’s elder brother, Sayyid Wasi, was a senior Congress leader from Rae Bareli. My great-uncle Syed Mohammad Sadiq, a brilliant lawyer in Kanpur, spent a lifetime in the Congress with leaders like Maulana Hasrat Mohani. My father’s family were Congressmen, but my mother’s family, with rather larger landholdings, were communists. Feudalism to communism was an interesting transition, but it came about after the family’s fortunes went into precipitous decline.

Our family’s immersion in the politics of the time greatly influenced how we responded to Partition. August 1947, therefore, registered with the family not as independence but as the partition of India. I do not recall any celebration of independence. True, I was only seven, too young to remember. But a bevy of senior relatives recall only suspense and uncertainty. Heart-rending stories of sudden death and penury were commonplace.

Women those days did not work and the professions favoured by men were law and teaching. Just as English literature was the ‘snob’ subject in Delhi University of the sixties, Urdu was the snob subject among genteel Awadhi elite in the fifties. This was ironical because after Partition, Urdu scholarship was giving diminishing returns. It was the sheer momentum of pre-Partition interests which carried Urdu scholarship forward after 1947. Most of these Urduwallahs had enhanced their unemployability by taking to communism as a creed. When the Party was banned in 1951, many of these relatives were in jail unless they were nimble enough to go underground.

Sayyid Mohammad Nasir Naqi, a dear uncle, with a strong aquiline nose, light green eyes and a penchant for being caught, beaten up and tossed in jail, almost epitomized the tragedy of the times. With his past, it was difficult to find jobs.

CPI leader B. T. Ranadive’s suggestion that some Indian leaders must take advantage of the open borders and cross over to Pakistan to stoke armed struggle a la Telangana inspired hotheads as well as the most effete of communists. Sayyid Sajjad Zaheer (Banne Bhai), country gentleman with a degree from Oxford, chose Pakistan as the laboratory for revolutionary field work. Along with poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Banne Bhai was arrested in what came to be known as the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case.

The cover of communism gave Naseer a suitable excuse to find work as a lecturer in Pakistan, a country he was otherwise vehemently averse to.

Problems arose when his attempts to visit India, the land of his family and ‘beloved’ comrades, were repeatedly thwarted because of a confidential report which became a black mark against his name in the consular section of the Indian High Commission in Karachi, then the capital of Pakistan.

For seventeen years Naseer tried for his visa in vain. He overcame his homesickness by seeking out friends from Kanpur, the city of his college and communism. His closest friend became a former Kanpur policeman. They were in the same city at a time when Naseer was repeatedly on the wrong side of law for his revolutionary pranks. It was ironic that his friend, the ‘plainclothes’ cop who had recorded Naseer as the ‘city’s most dangerous and violent communist’ when in India, was now an inseparable friend in Pakistan.
One has to rewind to events before the Partition to understand why, for a large percentage of India's Muslims, this writer included, Partition was a great betrayal. After the 1857 Uprising—which, as I mentioned, was the first pan-Indian revolt against colonial rule in India—any news that showed the Empire in poor light was officially blacked out by the British. One such example is the very high-profile murder of the Viceroy Lord Mayo on 8 February 1872 by Sher Ali Afridi, a cavalry trooper from Peshawar.

Sher Ali was a much-loved mounted soldier with certificates of appreciation from his superiors. At one point in his career he was imprisoned for reasons that were never really clear. The British were averse to give the Sher Ali episode any political colour. The story put out was that he killed a relative in a family feud. If this was indeed the case why was he transferred all the way from the North West Frontier Province to a penal colony beyond the southern tip of India? Lord Mayo was on an inspection tour in the Andaman Islands when Sher Ali pounced on him with a knife, killing him on the spot. It was unclear if this was an act of political revenge because of British actions in the North West Frontier Province, where Sher Ali was born, or something else altogether. The murder of the Viceroy sent shock waves through London. A thick curtain was pulled over the incident. This was exactly the sort of event that would serve to demolish Britain just as it was recovering from the 1857 Uprising.

The timing of the incident was awkward for the British for another reason. Queen Victoria had just about persuaded herself that the most loyal subjects of the Crown were Muslims, and now Sher Ali had gone and turned everything upside down by murdering the Viceroy. This was at a time when the Queen's fondness for her favourite servant, Abdul Karim—whom she adoringly called 'Munshi'—had become something of a scandal in the royal household.

After the shock of 1857, the British strategy was obvious: devise ways to keep Hindus and Muslims in conflict. The arrival
of more British troops to boost the British component in the armed forces in India led to an unexpected complication. When numbers rose from 20,000 in 1857 to more than 60,000 in the next two decades, the provision of beef for British troops became a priority. This became a sensitive issue because of the rapid increase in gauraksha or cow protection organizations across north India which, in the early twentieth century, were patronized even by national leaders like Mahatma Gandhi.

The British establishment kept itself insulated from Hindu anger by allowing official underlings to point fingers at Muslim butchers who actually performed the physical act of slaughtering the cows. This led to numerous Hindu-Muslim riots. Exhaustive correspondence between British officials, quoted by senior Gandhian scholar Dharampal—who spent months in the India Office Library and the British Museum in London studying British records on the subject—shows the Raj deliberately provoked Hindus against Muslims, sowing the seeds of their divide and rule policy. In 2002, Dharampal and his colleague T. M. Mukundan published their research. The title of the book says it all: *The British Origin of Cow Slaughter in India*. The book is replete with instances of Muslim leaders, editors, social workers joining cow protection groups as a mark of solidarity with the Hindus. But the British persisted in hiring Muslim butchers, who were blamed whenever the administration was faced with an agitation.

Queen Victoria gave the game away in a note to Viceroy Lord Lansdowne on 8 December 1893: 'Though the Mohammedans' cow-killing is made the pretext of the agitation, it is in fact directed against us, who kill far more cows for our army than the Mohammedans.'

The partition of the country in August 1947 led to the birth of two distinct states—India and Pakistan—from the same colonial womb, one cloaking its Hindu aspirations in multiculturalism (Nehru called it secular) and the other overtly committed to Muslim theocracy. The equation between the two was conflictual from the very start.

In March 1945, Lord Wavell, the then Viceroy of India, had returned after a long meeting with Prime Minister Winston Churchill, convinced that the division of India was Churchill’s preferred scenario. This, because the northwest of India, which was to be the core of Pakistan, had become strategically important for British interests in the Persian Gulf and West Asia. All the more so because with the end of the Second World War in 1945, the hostility for the Soviet Union that the West had kept in abeyance during the war in order to jointly defeat Hitler was no longer concealed. A protracted Cold War would soon follow. In this scenario, the Islamic state of Pakistan would become an essential ally of the West for strategic reasons.

These global geo-political imperatives, along with local demands, had a very strong bearing on the decision to partition India and create Pakistan. As I have explained in the Introduction, and as the reader will discover throughout the book, I have dealt with momentous historical events in the post-Independence era that had an impact on the way Muslims have fared in this country in a somewhat unconventional manner. I have not provided detailed histories of the events in question, as these can be found elsewhere, and are anyway beyond the scope of the book. With the exception of Partition, which I was too young to remember, I have analyzed these events in the light of my own experience of them. Often, I have chosen one or two aspects of the event to illuminate it as a whole. This is the approach I have followed for Partition as well, except that I have relied on the accounts of others.

Sir Cyril Radcliffe, chairman of the Border Commissions, was given the task of delineating the boundaries of 450,000 square kilometres of territory and dividing the population of about 400 million between India and the new state of Pakistan. He was told
to complete his assignment in five weeks. Why was Jawaharlal Nehru in such a hurry to have Sir Cyril Radcliffe demarcate the Indo-Pak boundaries? We have Nehru's correspondence stating that the work of the Border Commission had to be done 'fairly rapidly'. That this complicated task was done in such a rush could be attributed to the fact that news had leaked that Jinnah was terminally ill. After Jinnah, no one knew with whom, and for how long, negotiations would have to be conducted. It is argued that Congress leaders like Nehru were getting on in years and were therefore impatient and accepted Partition in a hurry. But Nehru was only fifty-eight in 1947! A much more straightforward theory is that only in a partitioned India did Congress leaders see themselves coming to power, without having to share it with the Muslim League.

The principal excuse given for Partition is the two-nation theory credited to Muslim League supremo Muhammad Ali Jinnah. However, what is not widely known is that the theory about Hindus and Muslims being separate entities was actually first articulated by a colonial theorist James Mill who belonged to the Utilitarian School. In 1940, Jinnah gave a speech during a Muslim League session in Lahore in which he stated that Hindus and Muslims were two separate and irreconcilable monolithic religious communities. However, as is well known, Jinnah was anything but a devout Muslim; he rarely went to the mosque, drank whisky, was clean-shaven and favoured bespoke suits and ties—far from the Islamic-attire-wearing Father of Pakistan that he appears as on that country's currency. In fact, as senior Congress leader K. M. Munshi points out, 'it was [Jinnah] who warned Gandhiji not to encourage the fanaticism of Muslim religious leaders.' And it was Jinnah who, in 1916, succeeded in allaying the fears of Hindu domination among League members, which resulted in the famous Lucknow Pact—a list of demands for the establishment of self-government submitted to the British jointly by the Congress party and the Muslim League.

Note Nehru's tone in a letter he wrote to Jinnah on 6 April 1938, after refusing a coalition with the Muslim League:

...the Muslim League is an important communal organization and we [Congress] deal with it as such. But we have to deal with all organizations and individuals that come within our ken. We do not determine the measure of importance or distinction they possess.

Jinnah replied:

Your tone and language again display the same arrogance and militant spirit, as if the Congress is the sovereign power. I may add that, in my opinion, as I have publicly stated so often, that unless the Congress recognizes the Muslim League on a footing of complete equality and is prepared as such to negotiate for a Hindu-Muslim settlement...a settlement would not be possible.

The Nehru-Jinnah personality clash was not a negligible factor when it came to events that led to Partition.

Although there have been many versions of the various factors that led to the partition of India, the story is still incomplete. Much more new material has to be incorporated—like the Transfer of Power papers published in Britain in 1983—to get a complete picture of what actually transpired. The Transfer of Power papers constitute a comprehensive record of all that passed between Indian leaders and the British government during the crucial period between 1942 and 1947. Its unveiling should have excited subcontinental scholars. It did not. The truth is that the establishments in India and Pakistan had made their adjustments with the reality handed to them in 1947. Upsetting this status quo would expose leaders of the freedom struggle as men with feet of clay. The Economist of April 1990, reviewing H. M. Seerwal's
book based on the Transfer of Power documents, recommended that 'there must be a reappraisal of reputations.' This 'reappraisal' has never taken place.

Two years after the Transfer of Power papers were published, Pakistani historian Ayesha Jalal was able to establish in her Cambridge dissertation, The Sole Spokesman, that 'it was the Congress which insisted on Partition. It was Jinnah who was against Partition.' It has been widely accepted that the call for partition was a bargaining ploy whereby Jinnah hoped to strike a better deal for Muslims in a united India. But partnership with Muslims would have made it impossible for the Congress to achieve what Maulana Azad described as 'unadulterated Hindu Raj.' Partition, in a way, was the gift the Congress gave to the Hindu right, which in the fullness of time, is today's Hindutva.

Among the revelations made in the Transfer of Power documents was the fact that Lord Louis Mountbatten, who arrived in the country in March 1947 as Britain's last Vicecy, specifically tasked with overseeing the transfer of power, concealed from public view the Punjab award—the Punjab border delineated by Sir Cyril Radcliffe's Border Commission. It was expected that violence would most certainly follow the award—this would spoil the Independence Day festivities in which he was to star. The delay in publishing the report multiplied the scale of the Holocaust. Timely publication of details of the award would have enabled the administration to take preventive measures. It could be said, therefore, that Mountbatten was largely responsible for the scale of the massacres. As an aside, but one which has a bearing on the events of the time, I should relate an incident which shows how enamoured Nehru was of Mountbatten. In 1957, he advised organizers to tone down the commemoration of the centenary of the 1857 Uprising. Mountbatten was still alive and Nehru was averse to the scab being lifted from an old colonial wound. The existence of this 'injunction' was disclosed to Kuldeep Nayar in 2007 by a Congress minister after an all-party meeting in the prime minister's residence to chalk out plans to observe the 150th anniversary of the First War of Independence.

In his book, India Wins Freedom, Maulana Azad, one of the foremost leaders of the political establishment at the time of Independence and president of the Indian National Congress from 1939 to 1946, exposes the role his colleague in the Congress Working Committee played in partitioning the country. He argues that, until the very end, Jinnah was merely using Pakistan as a 'bargaining counter.' The Maulana was vocal and vehement in his opposition to partition and tried to persuade Nehru and Patel to stop it. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, a barrister and statesman, was convinced that there were two separate nations within India and rather than be like brothers bickering every day, they should have 'one clean fight' instead. The Maulana was pained that Patel had now become an even greater supporter of the two-nation theory than Jinnah. 'Jinnah may have raised the flag of Partition but now the real flag bearer was Patel,' he notes in his book.

But what about Mountbatten? In May 1947, he began to market partition. Why? That remains a subject for historians to enquire into, the evidence thus far is not entirely clear. What we do know is that he met with all the key leaders of the time to persuade them to accept partition. How willingly did they fall in line?

Ghalib's couplet comes to mind:

Dekhna taqeer ki lazzat ki jy use kaha,
Maine yeh jana ki goya yeh bhi mere dil mein ha

(Just look at his persuasiveness,
Everything he says was in my heart too.)

Once Patel had agreed with his proposition, Mountbatten turned his attention to Nehru. This is the Maulana's testimony.

A multicultural India had been a passionate article of faith with Maulana Azad, of course, and he thought this was true of Nehru, too. The Maulana was understandably disappointed at
seeing his friend Nehru, whom he considered a man of principle, abandon the idea of a united India. He notes in his book that one of the factors responsible for Nehru being won over was the personality of Lady Edwina Mountbatten—"who 'is not only extremely intelligent but 'has a most attractive and friendly temperament.'" He adds that Lady Mountbatten admired her husband deeply and tried to 'interpret his thoughts to those who would not at first agree with him.' Whatever the case, by now it was clear that despite Nehru's initial repugnance and resistance to the idea of partition, he was growing used to the idea that there was no other alternative. The Maulana told historian K.-M. Ashraf that Nehru was impatient and wanted to become prime minister while Mountbatten was still in India. For Nehru, one sequence of events was non-negotiable—British rule must be replaced by Congress rule in Delhi. If that entailed partition, so be it. And thus it was that the British Raj was replaced in this country by a Raj that was less than satisfactory—one that was billed as being secular was, in fact; what the Maulana described as, 'undiluted Hindu Raj'. Partition would cast a long shadow upon independent India.

The Maulana had left careful instructions regarding thirty-odd pages of India Wins Freedom—these were to be made public only after he and Nehru were dead. When Azad's brutally honest version exposing the duplicity of the Congress finally came to light in 1988, it invited some motivated criticism but it did not inspire the extended debate which it deserved.

History owes the Maulana gratitude for having recorded crucial facts which may have been erased by time. Where Azad disappoints is in his own role during this phase. The Congress volte face on partition was strong enough reason for him to resign from all posts in the party, even from the primary membership of the party. Why did he not resign? Had he resigned, the Congress would have been exposed for having partitioned the country into two entities—one led by Hindus and the other by Muslims.

By staying on, Azad provided the Congress with a fig leaf of secularism. It is instructive to note that the Frontier Gandhi, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, one of the tallest Muslim leaders of the time, wept at the meeting where the partition decision was taken.

The Maulana writes about the time after Patel and Nehru had become supporters of partition and Gandhiji remained his only hope. When the Maulana met Gandhiji on 31 March 1947, he told him categorically, 'My only hope now is in you. If you stand against Partition, we may yet save the situation. If you however acquiesce, I am afraid India is lost.' Gandhiji replied passionately that if the Congress wished to accept Partition 'it will be over my dead body.' He added that as long as he was alive he would never agree to the partition of India nor allow the Congress to accept it.

But soon after, events took an astonishing turn.

Later that same day Gandhiji met Lord Mountbatten. He saw him the next day as well and again on 2 April. Sardar Patel came to Gandhiji after his first meeting with Lord Mountbatten and was closeted with him for over two hours. When the Maulana met Gandhiji again, he got 'the greatest shock of my life.' Gandhiji had changed: while he was not openly in favour of partition, 'he no longer spoke so vehemently against it.' What further surprised and shocked the Maulana was that Gandhiji had begun to repeat Sardar Patel's arguments. The Maulana proceeded to plead with Gandhiji for over two hours but failed to make an impression on him.

"In despondency I at last said, "If even you have now adopted these views, I see no hope of saving India from catastrophe."

Gandhiji replied saying that he had already made the suggestion that they should ask Jinnah to form the government and choose the members of the Cabinet. He said that he had mentioned this to Lord Mountbatten and Lord Mountbatten was greatly impressed by the idea.

When the Maulana met Mountbatten the day after, he told him that if the Congress accepted Gandhiji's suggestion, partition
could still be averted. Lord Mountbatten agreed that such an offer on the part of the Congress would convince the Muslim League and perhaps win the confidence of Jinnah. Unfortunately, this move made no headway as both Jawaharlal and Sardar Patel opposed it vehemently. In fact, they forced Gandhiji to withdraw the suggestion.

Eventually, Gandhiji conceded to the Maulana that partition appeared inevitable. All that was left to decide was what form it would take. This was the question which was now being debated day and night in Gandhiji's camp.

As we have seen, the Maulana was convinced that Sardar Patel had had a big hand in playing Gandhiji changing his opinion. Another probable consideration could have been Lord Mountbatten arguing that the Congress had agreed to a weak centre in order to meet the objections of the League. Provinces were therefore given full provincial autonomy, but in a country so divided by language, community and culture, a weak centre was bound to encourage fissiparous tendencies. Without the Muslim League, they could plan for a strong central government and frame a constitution desirable from the point of view of Indian unity. Lord Mountbatten advised that it would be better to give up a few small pieces in the northwest and the northeast to build up a strong and consolidated India. Sardar Patel was impressed by the argument that cooperation with the Muslim League would jeopardize Indian unity and strength. The Maulana was increasingly convinced that these arguments repeated by Sardar Patel and Lord Mountbatten had weakened Gandhiji's opposition to partition.

The distressing truth is that in all these exchanges between Mountbatten, Gandhiji, Nehru, Patel and Azad, there is no evidence that there was much thought given to Indian Muslims and their plight. Today's population of 180 million Muslims have to cope almost daily with a biased state. How could Nehru not have foreseen this state of affairs? Maulana Azad certainly had.

In his book Guilty Men of India's Partition, socialist leader Ram Manohar Lohia wrote:

[Congress leaders] paid no heed to Gandhiji's wish to let the Muslim League govern the country by itself, because they were far too eager to do the business of governing themselves. In fact, they were shamelessly eager. They could have been somewhat more patient, for their own personal advantage. They might not have needed to be patient for too long. Mr Jinnah would either have called them back to keep him company or they would have known how to make him go, if he acted too hurtfully. Congress leaders did not have at this time even that little patience, which is necessary for all selfish interest of a somewhat big size. Not only did they put their personal interest before the national interest, but they had also become incapable of striving for some big-size selfishness, if that meant sacrificing an immediate personal interest, however small it may be.

Such was the tearing hurry to accept partition that Congress leaders had no time to consider precautionary measures that would be required to maintain minimal law and order. What followed Independence was no ordinary breakdown of order but rather communal riots, carnage and arson on an unprecedented scale. It resulted in more than 14 million people being uprooted and between 1 and 2 million being killed. As Khushwant Singh writes in Train to Pakistan about partition, "Hundreds of thousands of Hindus and Sikhs..."
in terror or in hiding."

A suggestion that a neutral army and police force be maintained for peace in the early days of Partition was overruled by a majority of Congress leaders. Nehru and Patel opposed it, of course, but not as vehemently as Dr Rajendra Prasad who emphatically opposed a unified army ‘even for a day’. Why this extreme aversion to a joint army, ‘even for a day’? Because Congress leaders were eager to seal Partition. They wished to leave no room for the issue to be re-opened. Leaders who otherwise stood on a platform of a united India were now adamant that the army must be instantly partitioned just in case a united army signalled the Congress’s ambivalence on the question of Partition.

The undivided Indian army had remained untouched by the politics of religion. But once it was hurriedly divided on communal lines, a communal poison was injected into the army. When, after 15 August, the blood of innocent men and women flowed on both sides of the frontier, ‘the army remained passive spectators’. Let us have the tragedy described in Maulana Azad’s words:

Lord Mountbatten said to me more in sorrow than in anger that Indian members of the army wanted to take part in [the] killing [of] Muslims in East Punjab, but the British, officers restrained them with great difficulty. This, however, I know from personal knowledge that members of the former undivided Indian army killed Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan and Muslims in India.

Not only were Congress leaders eager to wield power in Delhi, they very quickly lost interest in keeping up the pretence that partition had been imposed on them. They made it look like their first choice. Having brazenly embraced partition, the Congress Working Committee then watched the consequences of this decision from the sidelines. For decades thereafter, the blame for Partition was heaped on Indian Muslims.

Did Nehru not know that there was not a single member in

the senior echelons of the party (who later served in his Cabinet) who had any sympathy for the 90 million Muslims (at the time of Independence) who were to be left behind in India? Take the home minister, Vallabhbhai Patel, for instance. Lord Archibald Wavell made the following entry about him on 17 March 1947 in his book The Viceroy’s Journal: ‘He is entirely communal and has no sense of compromise or generosity towards Muslims, but he is more of a man than most of the Hindu politicians.’

Michael Brecher in his biography of Nehru is equally blunt: ‘Patel was a staunch Hindu by upbringing and conviction. He never really trusted the Muslims and supported the extremist Hindu Mahasabha view of the ‘natural right of the Hindus to rule India.’ How did Nehru ever imagine that an India partitioned on Hindu-Muslim lines would somehow remain secular? Because that is what would make him feel good about himself? Such self delusion.

In the post-Partition mayhem, as Muslims were being massacred, Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru were unhappy with the inadequate police arrangements in Delhi. Patel thought otherwise. He said that the reports were ‘grossly exaggerated.’ When Gandhiji supported Nehru, Patel lost his temper. He said the situation in Delhi ‘was being competently handled. He would not tolerate any further criticism.’ He packed his bags and left for Bombay in a huff.

‘What is the use of my staying?’ he said when he realized Gandhiji was not prepared to listen. ‘He [Gandhiji] seems determined to blacken the name of the Hindus before the whole world.’ Patel was emphatic: he was concerned about the image of ‘Hindus’ not ‘Indians’.

In fact, to explain police inaction to protect Muslims, Patel put out a story that ‘deadly weapons’ had been discovered in the Muslim quarters of Delhi. Azad describes this in his book. Patel’s insinuation was that ‘if the Hindus and the Sikhs had not taken the first offensive, the Muslims would have destroyed them.’ Muslims were very well armed.
As proof, Sardar Patel ordered arms recovered by the police from Karol Bagh and Sabzi Mandi to be brought to the Government House and kept in the ante chamber of the cabinet room. This evidence was to be examined by Lord Mountbatten and the Union cabinet. Dozens of rusted kitchen knives, pocket knives, spikes and fences from old houses and cast iron water pipes were piled on a table. Mountbatten was amused at the exhibition. The Viceroy smiled and remarked that if they had really expected to take Delhi with penknives then they had an incredible sense of military strategy.

Patel, it turns out, may well have established the pattern for the future. In all Hindu-Muslim conflicts, it would be put out that Muslims were well armed. Subsequently, in cases of communal violence, 'arms' would inevitably be found with the Muslims. These were the earliest signals given out to the police force of independent India. Today, this is usually the knee-jerk response of the country's police force towards the Indian Muslim. In cases of alleged terrorism and communal violence, ready-made evidence will be found heaped upon him.

So overwhelming was the trauma of Partition that reputations remained unscrutinized except at the personal level—as was the case among my elders in Mustafabad. Icons only began to be questioned after the publication of the Maulana's 'thirty pages'. Twelve volumes of the Transfer of Power papers (covering the period from 1942 to 1947), published in Britain under the editorship of the distinguished historian Professor Nicholas Mansergh, added to this. This was also when Professor Philip Ziegler's official biography of Mountbatten and Ayesha Jalal's The Sole Spokesman opened up the whole 'issue of the guilty men who partitioned India'.

After all this new scholarship saw the light of day, writers like Arun Shourie tried to pile all the guilt on Jinnah. Shourie wrote three articles in the October and November issues of the Illustrated Weekly of India on Jinnah 'the man who broke up India'. He placed on Jinnah the entire burden of mixing 'religion with politics'. Distinguished jurist H. M. Seervai took Shourie to task in his masterly analysis Partition of India: Legend and Reality. It was Mahatma Gandhi who, admittedly, 'introduced religion into politics' against Jinnah's advice.

Maulana Azad's testimony about the reality of partition is valuable because few leaders command as much credibility. The premium Nehru placed on the Maulana's qualities of head and heart was enormous. Nehru's deep respect for the Maulana as a loyal friend and intellectual comes out clearly in the letters he wrote to Indira Gandhi from Ahmadnagar jail, including his intention to learn Urdu and Persian poetry from the Maulana, 'an ideal teacher, except that he is too erudite'. But, as we have seen, the Maulana felt betrayed when Nehru lined up with Patel and others to accept the partition of India on 3 June 1947.

Dramatic irony attends Maulana Azad's role in the proceedings after the acceptance of the partition plan. In a letter to Nehru on 24 July 1947, Gandhiji suggested that Maulana Azad need not be accommodated in the Cabinet. My guess is that the suggestion had its roots in the fact that many leaders were uncomfortable with the Maulana's vocal discomfort with the enthusiasm with which the Congress had accepted partition.

Let me quote the letter from Gandhiji that his biographer Pyarelal records.

Dear Jawaharlal,

I did not say anything yesterday about the Maulana Sahab. But my objection stands. His retiring from the cabinet should not affect our connection with him. There are many positions which he can occupy in public life without any harm to any cause. Sardar is decidedly against his membership in the cabinet and so is Rajkumari. Your cabinet must be strong.
and effective at the present juncture. It should not be difficult to name another Muslim for the cabinet.

I have destroyed the two copies you sent me yesterday.

Blessings from Bapu

This is a startling letter. Gandhiji had always shown considerable respect for the Maulana. Despite the austerities Gandhiji imposed on living conditions at the Sewagram Ashram, he made exceptions for Maulana Azad. To the surprise of many ashrarites, Gandhiji allowed an ashray—the Maulana was a chain smoker—in his cottage during Congress meetings. Even so, the devaluation of the Maulana in national affairs was sharp once partition had been achieved.

Note Gandhiji’s tone in his letter to Nehru—‘it should not be difficult to name another Muslim’ for India’s first cabinet. Gandhiji is quite clear. All that Nehru needs to keep up the secular pretence is to have a token Muslim in his cabinet. How different is this tokenism from the one in vogue all the years since 1947?

Gandhiji’s introduction of religion into Indian public life was in stark contrast to the Ganga-Jamuni composite culture that we in Mustafabad found so attractive in Nehru. It was Nehru’s endorsement of ‘Bapu’ that imparted to Gandhiji an aura in our eyes. We were vehemently opposed to Muslim religious leaders. How could the Mahatma’s brand of politics have appealed to us?

We derived our pride from Mir Anis and Ghalib: the Mahatma was not conversant with their persona. Nehru befriended Urdu poets and scholars. He wrote to Indira Gandhi from jail that he intended to learn Urdu and Persian poetry from Maulana Azad. It was this aspect of Maulana Azad that elevated him in the eyes of the Urdu elite, not his mastery of the Quran. His writings in Ghubar-e-Khatir (Sallies of the Mind) were considered the most elevated form of Urdu, punctuated with choice Persian verses. His lyrical description of playing the sitar in front of the Taj Mahal during a full moon gave glimpses of the aesthete in him. How much of him could Gandhiji have appreciated? Nor was Gandhiji comfortable with the westernized cosmopolitan Muslim elite that Jinnah represented. He identified himself with the Muslim archetype who was the counterpart to the conservative/traditional Hindu archetype that he most identified with, the Hindu who was draped in a dhoti, drank goat’s milk and revelled in bhajan and kirtan. I am not in any way suggesting that Gandhiji did not fight sectarianism whenever he found it, I am simply pointing to the belief system he was most comfortable with.

The Mahatma understood leaders like Mohammad Ali and Shaukat Ali, and their fight to preserve the institution of Khilafat (Caliphate) in Turkey. Gandhiji supported this movement. In Young India of 20 October 1921, Gandhiji explained his support for Khilafat:

I claim that with us both the Khilafat is the central fact; with Maulana Mohammad Ali because it is his religion, with me because in laying down my life for Khilafat, I ensure the safety of the cow, that is my religion, from the Mussalman knife.

Was this not a rather obscurantist way to cement Hindu-Muslim unity?

Sunnis were the overwhelming majority among Indian Muslims. Shias—the intellectual and feudal aristocracy among Muslims—were totally indifferent to the call for Khilafat. In fact, the movement was lampooned:

Bo! amma Muhammad’ Ali ki jaan beta khilafat pe do do.

(Muhammad Ali’s mother has given the call.
Son, sacrifice your life for the cause of Khilafat.)

Abdalmecid II was both Ottoman Sultan and Caliph from 1922

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68 Being the Other

69 Partition’s Long Shadow
to 1924. After the Ottomans lost World War I, the valiant Turkish military officer who led modern Turkey to victory, Mustafa Kemal Pasha Atatürk, would go down in history as the father of the Turkish nation. As part of his drive to build Turkey into a modern, secular nation, he disbanded the decaying institution of the Caliphate. Gandhi and his friend Mohammad Ali Jauhar, the one who launched the Khilafat movement in India, were caught flat-footed. It was ironical that the Turks had disbanded an anachronistic system which Muslim religious leaders were still holding onto. Nothing of what I have said about the Mahatma’s brand of politics is meant to diminish the enormous sacrifices he made in the course of the national struggle or his relentless fight for Hindu-Muslim unity. The only point I am trying to make is that his view of Islam was not the same as the Islam we lived.

He was not a creature of the Hindu-Muslim composite culture we were most comfortable with. No leader other than Nehru was. Our anguish has to do with the fact that Nehru must have known how Congress leaders felt about Muslims who would be in India after partition.

A year after India gained independence one would have expected remorse to have set in among the Congress leadership. But, during and after ‘police action’ (in reality military action) in Hyderabad, a brazenly anti-Muslim attitude surfaced. The Nizam of Hyderabad had refused to surrender sovereignty to the new nation which outraged Congress leaders. These were the very same leaders who had talked of a secular state and were opposed to the two-nation theory. But in the immediate aftermath of Partition they were beginning to fear the idea of a ‘Muslim State’ of Hyderabad in ‘Hindu India’. Patel called it a ‘cancer’ in the heart of India.

Nehru signalled for a division of the Indian Army, under Major General J. N. Choudhuri, to march in and take over Hyderabad in September 1948. The immediate pretext for military action were the misdeeds of members of the powerful Razakar militia—the armed wing of Hyderabad’s most powerful separatist Muslim political party aligned with the Nizam—who were terrorizing Hindu villagers. The Indian troops defeated the Nizam’s forces within days. According to official estimates, the massacre of Muslims that followed took the lives of more than 40,000: The stories of atrocities committed are horrifying. This is the estimate of the report of the fact-finding team under the chairmanship of Pandit Sunderlal. A 2015 BBC documentary revealed that the government (Nehru and Patel) tried to suppress the publication of the report, a fact echoed by the jurist and writer A. G. Noorani in his book The Destruction of Hyderabad. Once again, Nehru demonstrated his helplessness; or was it acquiescence?

The military action took place at a time when the communist-led secular Telangana movement against the Nizam’s feudal excesses was mobilizing Muslims and Hindus alike. The Nizam was terrified of the ‘people’s armed struggle’ and would not have minded New Delhi’s help to squash the armed agrarian movement. But instead of selecting its targets carefully, the Indian troops turned upon the left movement as well as supporters of the Razakars resisting Indian forces. The troops may not have had a hand in the massacre of Muslims that followed, but there were instances where the army facilitated these massacres by remaining neutral when Muslims were being killed and their properties destroyed.

The veteran CPI(M) leader P. Sundarayya’s book, Telangana People’s Struggle and Its Lessons, provides insights: ‘It is to be noted that the Union armies rescued the very Deshmukhs [sic] and Razakar leader Kasim Razvi who were responsible for setting fire to village after village and also for the killing of hundreds of people. At the same time, the ordinary Muslims, who stood against the atrocities of the Nizam, were pounced upon and untold miseries inflicted on them. The Hindus in those villages rescued such ordinary people to the extent possible, gave shelter to them.
in their houses and rescued thousands of Muslim families from the campaign of rape and murder indulged in by the 'Union armies.' Obviously class-conflict had got hopelessly mixed up with a massacre, mostly of Muslims, on New Delhi's instructions.

According to Sundarayya, 'the Telangana movement can take pride in this important achievement, namely, Hindu-Muslim unity in the villages. Just at a time when Hindu-Muslim riots could have been sparked off and could have spread like wildfire. In other parts of Hyderabad state, where the democratic movement was weak, hatred against Muslims and attacks on them were widespread.' It was in these areas that the massacre of Muslims took place on an unprecedented scale. RSS, Hindu Mahasabha and Arya Samaj groups from neighbouring states took advantage of the army's presence and fell upon the hapless Muslims in the rural areas.

Can Nehru be condoned for the killing of Muslims in Hyderabad (and Jammu) so soon after the Partition holocaust? I dwell on this later.

The irony is that my great-grandmother, an avid reader of Urdu newspapers, thought 'Nehru was more ours than even Maulana Azad.' My great-uncle, Saiyed Mohammad Taqi Naqvi, the Abbajan of my narrative, identified Nehru, not Maulana Azad, as the leader of Indian Muslims. He would sharply correct anyone less than respectful to the leader who eventually became India's first prime minister. Nehru's charisma kept millions of Indians in thrall. His proximity to Maulana Azad, Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, Dr Zakir Husain, Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari, Dr Asaf Ali and others in the vanguard of the Indian renaissance, gave him considerable traction with the Muslim elite. Scions of the feudal order in decline were smitten by him quite as much as revolutionary Urdu poets. Even the revolutionary leader of the Telangana movement of the 1940s and 50s, Makhdoom Mohiuddin, was moved to write on

Nehru's death in 1964.

Woh shashjahat ka aseer
Nikal gaya hai håhut door, justjoo bun kar.

(Like an arrow, that prisoner of day and night,
Has shot into the distant spaces like aspiration.)

This was the esteem in which Nehru was held by Indian Muslims all these years. Imagine then the disillusionment that began to set in over time with the growing realization that even for Nehru, like all the other leaders, including the Mahatma, the secular project was negotiable.