Introduction

Towards the end of a rather long day of research in the India Office Collections at the British Library in London, I stumbled upon a rather unexpected document. It swam into view in the middle of one of the many microfilms containing the private papers of *Qaid-i-Azam* Mohammad Ali Jinnah. The handwritten document, with its ink fading, was the record of a special séance with the spirit of the *Qaid-i-Azam* (*Great Leader*) held at 6 pm on 13 March 1955, nearly seven years after his death and eight years after the birth of Pakistan.[1] The séance was conducted by a spiritualist hired by a government officer, a certain Mr Ibrahim, who was present on the occasion to direct the questions. The spiritualist began the proceedings by politely offering a seat to his esteemed guest. The spirit tartly responded that it was already seated, also reminding him that they had previously met there for another such session. The spiritualist solicitously enquired about the *Qaid's* well-being since on that occasion the spirit had complained about being 'in a dark and cold place', which it did not like very much. It replied that it was much happier now for it was 'in a very good place' that was 'brilliantly lighted and had enough flowers'. As a final courtesy before the proceedings started in right earnest, the spirit was asked if it wanted to smoke a cigarette since the *Qaid-i-Azam* in life had been a heavy smoker. On the basis of an affirmative answer, a cigarette was lit and fixed on a wire stand for the spirit to smoke while it answered questions. Mr Ibrahim began, 'Sir, as a creator and father of Pakistan, won't you guide the destiny of the nation now?' The *Qaid*'s spirit reacted testily, stating that it was not for it to guide Pakistan's destiny any more, even though, it ominously added, it often saw 'flashes of evil pictures about Pakistan'. A worried Mr Ibrahim enquired, 'Don't you think there is a prosperous future for Pakistan?'. The spirit responded icily, 'I don't think so. Prosperity of a country depends on the selflessness of people who control its Destiny. None at all is eager to be selfless there.' Mr Ibrahim pressed further. 'What advice would you give to the present rulers of Pakistan?' Prompt came the response — 'Selflessness, selflessness. That is the only advice I can give them now.' The spirit then made a telling remark. 'It is

[1] *Qaid-i-Azam Papers*, Neg10811, File 1067, Oriental and India Office Collections (henceforth OIOC), British Library, London.

easier to acquire a country, but it is extremely difficult to retain it. That is in a nutshell the present position of Pakistan to gain which rivers of blood flowed.'

The story of how the transcript of the séance found its way into the archive would no doubt be fascinating and also raise interesting questions about procedures involved in the constitution of the archive. But what is striking about the document, as also of the spiritual testimony contained therein, is the sense of crisis it communicates about Pakistan not long after its birth. Jinnah's death a little over a year after the Partition on 11 September 1948, war with India over Kashmir, Liaquat Ali Khan's assassination in 1951, inconclusive deliberations between 'secularists', *ulama*, Islamists, and regional groups over Pakistan's Constitution, political instability in East Pakistan, musical chairs over government formation at the centre – all these finally culminated in the first declaration of martial law in 1958. Pakistan's martial law administrators justified the short shrift given to its sputtering democratic experiment in the name of preserving the nation's unity and integrity threatened by venal and 'rascally' civilian political elites.[2] Successive martial law administrators have trotted out some of the same reasons to justify the abrogation of democracy or violently quell threats to national integrity over much of Pakistan's history.

Yet, such decisive military interventions have not resolved, and indeed worsened, Pakistan's post-colonial crisis marked not just by fragility of democratic institutions, but a vexed relationship between Islam and State, secessionist and insurgency movements, internecine sectarian conflicts, not to mention violent death, assassination or forced exile of four former or serving heads of state. Security analysts, journalists as well as a burgeoning body of scholars have sought to make sense of Pakistan's troubled post-colonial condition.[3] It is a trend that has intensified over the past decade as the country's internal security environment has deteriorated significantly in the context of a complex evolving relationship between its regime and Islamic militants, leading to exaggerated fears that this nuclear armed nation might become the first failed state of the twenty-first century.

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2 See K. J. Newman, 'Pakistan's Preventative Autocracy and its Causes', *Pacific Affairs* Vol. 32, No. 1 (March 1959), 18–33; Wayne Ayres Wilcox, 'The Pakistan Coup d'état of 1958', *Pacific Affairs* Vol. 38, No. 2 (Summer 1965), 142–63.

3 See among others, Anatole Lieven, *Pakistan: A Hard Country* (New York, 2011); Farzana Shaikh, *Making Sense of Pakistan* (New York, 2009); Shuja Nawaz, *Crossed Swords: Pakistan, its Army and the Wars Within* (Oxford, 2008); Stephen Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan* (New Delhi, 2005); Husain Haqqani, *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military* (New York, 2005); Owen Bennett Jones, *Pakistan: Eye of the Storm* (New Haven, 2002).

Much of this scholarship invariably locates the roots of Pakistan's precarious condition in the circumstances surrounding this nation-state's traumatic birth in the bloody Partition of British India in August 1947. It is broadly understood that this nation-state emerged accidentally in the context of a sharp disjuncture between inchoate aspirations of Indian Muslim masses and secret politics of their pragmatic and ambivalent political elites who may not necessarily have even wanted Pakistan. As Pakistan came into being against the backdrop of the breakdown of negotiations between the British Government, Indian National Congress and Muslim League (ML) over transfer of power, it has been assumed that it remained an exceedingly vague idea in both elite and popular consciousness. Scholars enquiring into the roots of Pakistan's post-colonial instability have, therefore, grounded their explanations in the 'insufficiency' of its nationalist imagination especially after Benedict Anderson when emphasis on nationalism's seeming artificiality or illegitimacy has been replaced by enquiry into its fecund imaginative dimension.[4] In this regard, it has been pointed out that while the ideology of Pakistani nationalism – the strident two nation theory – was spectacularly successful in rallying together the Indian Muslims, it was inadequate in as much as it lacked any programme around which the nation could coalesce subsequent to its realization. It has also been noted that while ML rallies resounded with the popular but vague slogan, '*Pakistan ka Matlab Kya, La Ilaha Il Allah*' (What is the meaning of Pakistan? There is no god but God), Pakistan was not articulated any further beyond this emotional slogan. An inchoate anti-Indianism, it is presumed, became the default mode for this new nation-state after its creation in the absence of any substantial content or futuristic vision in its national imagination that particularly solidified following the violence accompanying the Partition. It is in this vein that the political scientist Christophe Jaffrelot conceptualized Pakistan as a 'nationalism without a nation' since it does not possess a 'positive' national identity but only a 'negative' identity in opposition to India.[5] More recently, the political scientist Farzana Shaikh has extended this argument by arguing that this lack of positive content or consensus in its nationalist ideology is indeed the primary reason behind Pakistan's nearly continuous post-colonial travails.[6]

4 The phrase that Pakistan was an 'insufficiently imagined' nation-state has been coined by the writer Salman Rushdie.

5 Christophe Jaffrelot, *Pakistan: Nationalism without a Nation* (New York, 2002).

6 Farzana Shaikh, *Making Sense of Pakistan* (New York, 2009).

This book challenges these fundamental assumptions regarding the foundations of Pakistani nationalism and questions the current understanding of its post-colonial identity crisis. It charts a new direction by analysing how the idea of Pakistan was developed and debated in the public sphere and how popular enthusiasm was generated for its successful achievement in the last decade of British rule in India. In this regard, it examines the trajectory of Pakistan movement in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (now Uttar Pradesh, U.P., India), whose Muslims played a critical role in this nation-state's creation despite their awareness that U.P. itself would not be a part of Pakistan. U.P. presents a particularly appropriate site for exploring popular underpinnings of Pakistani nationalism for it is here that the idea of Pakistan arguably found the earliest, most sustained and overwhelming support, much before it found traction in the Muslim majority provinces of British India where it was ultimately realized. My study argues that far from being a vague idea that accidentally became a nation-state, Pakistan was popularly imagined in U.P. as a sovereign Islamic State, a New Medina, as it was called by some of its proponents. In this regard, it was not just envisaged as a refuge for the Indian Muslims, but as an Islamic utopia that would be the harbinger for renewal and rise of Islam in the modern world, act as the powerful new leader and protector of the entire Islamic world and, thus, emerge as a worthy successor to the defunct Turkish Caliphate as the foremost Islamic power in the twentieth century. This study specifically foregrounds the critical role played by a section of the Deobandi *ulama* in articulating this imagined national community with an awareness of Pakistan's global historical significance, a crucial narrative that has been written out of most accounts of the Partition. Moreover, it highlights their collaboration with the ML leadership and demonstrates how together they forged a new political vocabulary fusing ideas of Islamic nationhood and modern state to fashion the most decisive arguments for creating Pakistan.

As Pakistan became the focus of raucous debates in the public sphere, ML propagandists were not just keen to defend its economic, political and military viability, but to portray Pakistan as potentially a far more powerful state than India and indeed the largest and most powerful Islamic state in the world replacing Turkey. Over time, in public meetings, through columns of the Urdu press and widely dispersed popular literature on Pakistan, they publicized its maps, listed its natural resources and infrastructural assets, highlighted its strategic location alongside contiguous and powerful Muslim allies in the Middle East, and celebrated the boundless potential of its inspired population once it was free from both British and Hindu domination. Moreover, Pakistan

was hailed as the first step towards a broader solidarity in the Islamic world culminating in its ultimate political unification under Pakistani leadership. This celebration of the nation's 'geo-body'[7] was accompanied by invocation of the 'hostage population theory', which held that 'hostage' Hindu and Sikh minorities inside Pakistan would ensure Hindu India's good behaviour towards its own Muslim minority. But while this theory was frequently invoked in U.P., what was emphasized above all was Pakistan's strength as a potential 'first class power' surpassing Turkey, thus enabling it to extend its protective umbrella not only over Muslims in Hindu India, but over the Islamic world at large in a setting dominated by western powers.

These secular conceptions of territory were intertwined with theological conceptions of utopian space by the *ulama* to theorize Pakistan as an Islamic State under God's law that would renew Islam and revive Muslims for the new era, a move that proved critical in bridging the gap between politics of the ML elite and aspirations of the Muslim masses. Generally identified in the existing historiography as opponents of Pakistan, prominent Deobandi *ulama* led by Maulana Shabbir Ahmad Usmani (founder of the *Jamiatul Ulama-i-Islam* and later acclaimed as Pakistan's *Shaikhul Islam*) declared that Pakistan would recreate the Islamic utopia first fashioned by the Prophet in Medina, inaugurating an equal brotherhood of Islam by breaking down barriers of race, class, sect, language and region among Muslims and establishing an example worthy of emulation by the global *ummah*. Usmani further prophesized that just as Medina had provided the base for Islam's victorious spread in Arabia and the wide world beyond, Pakistan would become the instrument for the *ummah's* unification and propel its triumphal rise on the global stage as a great power, besides paving the way for Islam's return as the ruling power in the subcontinent. These ideas meshed with the Pan-Islamist ambitions of the ML leadership and also helped resolve the contradiction between the ideal of Islamic nationhood whose category of belonging is the global *ummah*, and the territorial state that revives the divisive category of national belonging for Muslims. The run up to the Partition witnessed osmosis of ideas between the *ulama* and the ML leadership. Thus, while the *ulama* borrowed the ML's vocabulary of the modern state to project Pakistan as a powerful entity that would make its mark on the global stage, the ML leadership hailed Pakistan as the new laboratory where definitive solutions to all the problems of the modern world would be found

[7] See Thongchai Winichakul, *Mapping Siam: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu, 1994).

within Islam, thus inaugurating a new rhetoric that would find echo in other parts of the Islamic world.[8]

These heady ideas about Pakistan as a powerful twentieth century Islamic state were bitterly but unsuccessfully attacked by opponents. Most prominent were a section of the Deobandi *ulama* aligned with the Indian National Congress led by Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani, who himself first utilized the metaphor of Medina to conceptualize a common nationhood of Hindus and Muslims in an undivided India. This *Muttahida Qaumiyat* (composite nationalism/nationality) of Hindus, Muslims and other Indian communities, he argued, had an auspicious precedent in the common nationality forged by Muslims and Jews during the Prophet's era under the Covenant of Medina.[9] Insisting that Muslims could form a common nationality with Hindus just as they had done so with the Jews at Medina under the Prophet, Madani summarily dismissed the ML's Islamic vision of Pakistan and scorned the ability and intentions of its non-observant leaders in bringing about its realization. He and his associates also contested ML's assessments regarding Pakistan's viability in terms of its economy, security, social and political stability, its place in the international community of nations, and warned of its disastrous ramifications for Indian Muslims in general and U.P. Muslims in particular. Madani was a respected *alim* who had spent over a decade of his life as a renowned teacher of Hadith in the holy city of Medina. He articulated the metaphor of Medina at a time when the ML began a protracted public campaign that Hindus and Muslims were separate nations. His views were pounced upon by *ulama* allied to the ML such as the redoubtable Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi, the poet Muhammad Iqbal, and the Islamist Abul Ala Mawdudi among others, who publicly savaged his interpretation of the Covenant of Medina, and affirmed the ML's claim that the Muslims constituted a separate nation in India. Later, Shabbir Ahmad Usmani, Thanawi's disciple, would fashion the vision of Pakistan as the new Medina against Madani's vision. The bitter contest over Pakistan led to a major split in the *Jamiatul Ulama-i-Hind* (JUH), the premier organization of the Indian *ulama.* Questions regarding problems and prospects of the Partition exercised the minds of not only English-speaking political elites but also a larger public

[8] See Richard Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim Brothers* (New York, 1993); Brynjar Lia, *The Society of Muslim Brothers in Egypt: The Rise of an Islamic Mass Movement, 1928–1942* (Reading, 1998).

[9] See Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani, *Composite Nationalism and Islam* (*Muttahida Qaumiyat aur Islam*), translated by Mohammad Anwer Husain and Hasan Imam (New Delhi, 2005).

inhabiting the vernacular public sphere. Pakistan was thus intensely debated and vigorously contested within the Indian Muslim community as it was outside. In highlighting the extensive public debates which fed popular conceptions regarding Pakistan and the accompanying hopes, apprehensions and questions that confronted U.P. Muslims who indeed led the struggle for its creation, this book contends that Pakistan was not always 'insufficiently imagined' in the process of its creation as has been assumed thus far in Partition historiography.

Partition Historiography and the 'Insufficient' Imagination of Pakistan

Pakistan, by most accounts, seems to have happened in a fit of collective South Asian absent-mindedness, the tragic end result of the 'transfer of power' negotiations gone awry, hastily midwifed by a cynical, war weary Britain anxious to get out of the morass of an imploding empire, leaving unsuspecting millions to face its brutal consequences. The most powerful argument in this regard has been made by the historian Ayesha Jalal, who began her seminal work with the question, 'how did a Pakistan come about which fitted the interests of most Muslims so poorly?'[10] In addressing this puzzle, Jalal analysed the struggle for Pakistan through M. A. Jinnah's 'angle of vision', primarily taking into account the actions and imagined political strategy of this 'sole spokesman' of the Indian Muslims in the cause of what she claims was a vaguely defined Pakistan. In a novel and controversial thesis that has become the new orthodoxy, Jalal argued that a separate sovereign Pakistan was not Jinnah's real demand, but a bargaining counter to acquire for the Muslims, political equality with the numerically preponderant Hindus in an undivided post-colonial India. Jalal contended that the British government's Cabinet Mission Plan, which envisaged a weak Indian federal centre where Muslims and Hindus would share political power equally, came close to what Jinnah really wanted. This was rejected by the Congress leaders, who Jalal implied, were thus the real perpetrators of the Partition. A fundamental assumption underpinning Jalal's thesis was that this was a secret strategy that Jinnah pursued that remained hidden from even his closest lieutenants, let alone the general public. As regards popular conceptions of Pakistan, Jalal dismissed them tersely, noting that 'a host of conflicting shapes and forms, most of them vague, were given to what remained little more than a catch-all, an undefined slogan.'[11]

[10] Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge, 1985), 4.

[11] Ibid.

While Jalal's Cambridge thesis challenged existing common sense about Pakistan's creation, the spirited counter-response by her Oxford counterpart Anita Inder Singh steered the argument towards more conventional Congress party waters. Contesting Jalal's thesis, Singh contended that Pakistan, as it finally emerged in 1947, bore a close resemblance to the demand that was couched in the ML's 1940 Lahore Resolution and indeed corresponded to the logic of the resolution.[12] Arguing that Jinnah's vision of Pakistan was based on the repudiation of any idea of a united India, Singh charted in great detail the process by which a determined Jinnah outmanoeuvred a war weary British establishment and Congress led by 'tired old men', as Nehru put it, to successfully accomplish his goal of partitioning India and carving out a sovereign Pakistan. Yet, while refuting Jalal's thesis, Singh nevertheless agreed with her that as far as ordinary Muslims were concerned Pakistan was an extraordinarily vague concept and that it 'meant all things to all Muslims'.[13]

This view, ironically, has also found support from the subaltern studies scholar Gyanendra Pandey, a fierce critic of Great Man history and the concurrent tendency to reduce South Asian history to a teleological biography of the nation state. Thus, while foregrounding 'fragmentary' histories involving ordinary Hindus and Muslims possessing 'un-partitioned' selves, multiple identities, shared life-worlds, along with a topping of hard-nosed political rationality, Pandey has noted that 'the Muslims had fairly widely supported the movement for Pakistan, though, as was already becoming evident, few had clear ideas about what that goal meant'.[14] The most recent general historical account of the Partition largely echoes this theme, emphasizing the confusion and uncertainty that gripped India regarding its future at the end of World War II, with the only certainty being that Britain would quit India sooner rather than later.[15]

This line of thinking finds further support if one were to turn to regional studies of the Pakistan movement, especially those concerning Muslim majority provinces of British India such as Punjab and Bengal that were partitioned. These studies point to Pakistan's late popularity in these provinces, besides its insufficient and uncertain comprehension amongst its Muslims. In the case of Punjab, Ian Talbot's studies have moreover downplayed the role of religious ideology and popular agency, and instead explained Pakistan's

12 Anita Inder Singh, *Origins of the Partition of India, 1936–1947* (Delhi, 1987).

13 Ibid., 107.

14 Gyanendra Pandey, *Routine Violence: Nations, Fragments, Histories* (Stanford, 2006), 135.

15 Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* (London, 2007).

creation primarily in terms of its rural Muslim elites 'rationally' switching loyalties in the treacherous sands of Punjabi politics to a rising ML as Jinnah gained prominence at the centre, and the Unionist Party hemorrhaged almost continuously in late-colonial Punjab.[16] Neeti Nair's recent monograph on the politics of Punjabi Hindus again emphasizes uncertainty about Pakistan as well as the sheer unexpectedness of the Partition.[17] These studies on Punjab have been complemented by similar studies on Bengal. Thus, Haroon-or-Rashid's monograph on Muslim Bengal has again underlined the lack of clarity or consensus over Pakistan, arguing that its imagination by influential sections of Bengal ML was very different from that of Jinnah, for they saw it more in terms of an independent Eastern Pakistan or an undivided and sovereign greater Bengal.[18] For Rashid, the struggle for Pakistan therefore 'foreshadowed' the arrival of Bangladesh in 1971. Joya Chatterji's subsequent study has affirmed this thesis besides adding a further dimension by arguing that it was Bengal's Hindu *bhadralok* who were primarily responsible for partitioning the province by ruling out alternative approaches to Bengal's unity.[19]

Given that these partitioned provinces witnessed unprecedented human displacement ethnographies exploring personal histories of ordinary people, especially women and refugees caught up in its violence, has constituted the newest wave of Partition scholarship. Studies by Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin have brought to light rape and abduction of women by men belonging to the 'Other' community, their murder by family patriarchs to save familial and community honour, besides the grossly paternalistic attitude adopted by Governments of India and Pakistan as they got down to the task of recovering these abducted women, often against their will, in the years following the Partition.[20] Even as they attempt to recover the agency of these women in these trying circumstances, these studies ultimately point to

[16] Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj 1849-1947* (Delhi, 1988); *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement* (Karachi, 1988).

[17] Neeti Nair, *Changing Homelands: Hindu Politics and the Partition of India* (New Delhi, 2011).

[18] Haroon-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh: Bengal Muslim League and Muslim Politics, 1936–1947* (Dhaka, 1987).

[19] Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947* (Cambridge, 1994).

[20] Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (Delhi, 1998); Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (Durham, 2000).

the absurdity of the concepts of nationhood or nationality in relation to their shattered lives. In the same vein, the anthropologist Vazira Zamindar's sensitive monograph on Partition refugees has explained the Partition primarily as a long, *post-1947* phenomenon during which post-colonial states of India and Pakistan actively produced 'Indians' and 'Pakistanis' by demarcating borders, establishing passport and visa regimes, and managing forced migrations and evacuee properties of displaced Muslims and Hindus.[21] Zamindar's provocative thesis thus implies that 1947 marks the beginning of the process of partitioning the land and its people and not the end point, as assumed by almost all of the existing historiography. Recent works by Willem van Schendel and Lucy Chester have emphasized this point further by highlighting the seeming lack of comprehension among 'Indians' and 'Pakistanis' about their national status, and the confusion on the ground that followed the drawing of the Radcliffe Line. They underline the massive human tragedies that accompanied this cartographic exercise in Bengal and Punjab executed by a British lawyer who had never been to India before, how it never resolved the 'national problem' in South Asia and instead created new ones for those living in the borderlands.[22] The anthropological turn has been accompanied by an increasing interest in Partition literature and cinema, now deemed more suitable than the 'historian's History' for articulating the pain, suffering, violence and displacement caused by the Partition.[23] It marks an ethical critique of the discipline of History for largely ignoring the suffering of millions, primarily concerning itself with mapping the biography of the nation-state in South Asia, endlessly searching for causes of the Partition by identifying its heroes and villains, apportioning praise and blame – an endeavour now deemed endlessly futile if not callous and puerile. What this newest wave in Partition scholarship again emphasizes is the utter bewilderment and helplessness of the people at what was happening as their worlds collapsed around them as a result of unfathomable political decisions taken at the top in the twilight of the Raj.

The picture gets muddied further if one turns to scholarship regarding the

21 Vazira Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories* (New York, 2007).

22 Willem Van Schendel, *The Bengal Borderland: Beyond State and Nation in South Asia* (London, 2004); Lucy Chester, *Borders and Conflict in South Asia: The Radcliffe Boundary Commission and the Partition of Punjab* (Manchester, 2009).

23 Pandey, *Routine Violence*, (Stanford, 2006); M. U. Memon, *An Epic Unwritten: The Penguin Book of Partition Stories from Urdu* (Delhi, 1998); Bhaskar Sarkar, *Mourning the Nation: Indian Cinema in the Wake of Partition* (Durham and London, 2009).