

Questions for Discussion

September 20, 2010

Text: Pakistan, a Modern History, Ian Talbot. Chapters 3 & 4

1. Jinnah, a British educated lawyer and a secular Shia, left the Congress Party for the Muslim League. Muslims made up one quarter of British India. The serious demand for an independent country of Pakistan came in 1928, when the Congress Party offered the League only one quarter of the Indian Parliamentary seats. Jinnah wanted one third. For Jinnah it was a parting of the ways. Discuss the Pakistan independence struggle in the future West Pakistan and East Pakistan. Include the role of the masses and the elites, the ability of the Muslim party to put down roots and win elections, the role of the Hindus, and separatism versus nationalism.
2. Abdul Haskin, an organizing genius, became secretary of the Bengal Muslim League. He trained Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who became the first President of Independent Bangladesh. Discuss Jinnah's leadership skills in working with the Bengali speaking Muslim League members who were active in the independence struggle. Were Abdul Haskin or Suhrawardy appointed to the All India Muslim League (AIML) working committee? Why?
3. Partition was really the result of multiple failures: the failure of Congress and the Muslim League to make concessions and the failure of the British to act up to their responsibilities after WWII. Jinnah argued himself into a corner and the Muslim League got their independent country. The governments of Baluchistan, Sindh, and the North-West Frontier provinces opted for Pakistan. Punjab and Bengal decided that they would be partitioned with Muslim majority areas going to Pakistan. The new Pakistan government was in crisis mode from the very start. Discuss the economic, geographical, and institutional inheritance; the mass migration and violence; and the Kashmir problem.
4. Jinnah kept his palatial 1930's bungalow on Malabar Hill in Bombay where he planned to retire. His daughter, Nina 91, who lives in New York, owns it now. Both of Jinnah's wives had died. Jinnah's daughter, Nina, stayed in Bombay. While the independence struggle was being fought, Jinnah was battling tuberculosis (only a few knew). He died September 12, 1948 a year after partition. The only time Jinnah's daughter went to Pakistan after partition was for his funeral. Jinnah is buried in Karachi. "Recent revisionist scholarship has speculated that partition was the unintended consequence of his trumpeting the Pakistan demand as a bargaining counter for power in a United India." Ian Talbot.