

What is your relationship with Quaid?

Well, Quaid had four sisters Rehmat, Sherein, Mariam and Fatima. I am a grand son of Mariam Peerbhoy

Tell us about your professional life?

I am a lawyer; I got my law degree from Bombay in 1964 and completed five years practice with Akber Peerbhoy in the same city. Then I migrated to Pakistan in 1967-68 and worked with Fakhurddin G. Ibrahim till 1974. Since then I have been practicing law in "Liaquat Merchant Associates".

The High Court passed an order and the property was transferred to the government on three conditions, namely:

1) The Building would be restored to its original condition and used in benefitting manner in keeping with the dignity of Mohammad Ali Jinnah.

2) A Public Library and audiovisual centre would be established for the public where all books on Pakistan's political leaders would be available, audiovisual centre would provide films and documentaries on the Pakistan movement and leaders.

3) A portion of the House would contain the personal belongings of Quaid-e-Azam.

However, the Government of

"Jinnah Society aims to promote ideas, principles and vision of Quaid-e-Azam"



There are many people who have both power and money, but only few of them know the right way to use them. Liaquat Merchant is one of them. He is the grand nephew of Quaid-e-Azam Mohammed Ali Jinnah and founder of Jinnah Society. He recently spoke with Southasia on the Society's aims and objectives.

Why Jinnah Society was formed?

Fifty years have passed since Quaid's death. With the passage of time people tend to forget their leader's vision. Jinnah Society aims to bring back Jinnah's value in the country. If you forget the vision and principles of the founding father, it would not be good for the country. Jinnah Society is therefore, propagating the ideas, principles and vision of Quaid-e-Azam.

What are the focus areas of Society?

Presently, the Society intend to assist "Jinnah-related institutions", both in education and health sectors. We are currently emphasizing on six projects which include Quaid-e-Azam House (commonly known as Flagstaff House). It was the property of Quaid. In 1984, the administrators i.e. Syed Hashim Raza and myself agreed to sell the property to the government.

Pakistan did not start the public library and audiovisual centre. The building only contains articles of furniture and belongings of Quaid. To enforce the agreement, the former administration have gone to the High Court. Jinnah Society has offered that it would manage all the three sections of Quaid-e-Azam House without acquiring the ownership.

Second, Jinnah Society is working on "Fatima Jinnah Girls School". Fatima Jinnah established *Khatoon-e-Pakistan Educational Welfare Board* (KPEWB) in 1961-62. Presently 2,500 girls are studying there. I am the current president of the Board and discussing with the Government on denationalization of the school and college. Governor of Sindh, Moin-uddin Haider has recommended that KPEWB should be involved in the management of the school. The board is now looking forward to upgrade the whole institution. At present, the school does not have any auditorium,

well-equipped modern library and playground. They have shortage of classes. In short every thing needs to be restructured. Jinnah Society will work with and assist KPEWB and the Government.

Third, though the Sindh Madarsa-tul-Islam is an established institution, but due to its association with Quaid, Society would like to help the Maddarsa.

Fourth, Jinnah Society intends to extent support to "Jinnah Hospital" – the biggest public hospital in Karachi. The Society wants to improve the infrastructure of public health in Pakistan. The hospital has every thing but what is needed is a reg-

ly involved in the project. The Foundation building also provides full day medical facilities consisting of pre and postnatal care, gynecologist, Ultra sound department, X-ray section, laboratory and four bed emergency centre for ladies.

What is "Quaid-e-Azam - Aligarh Education Trust"?

According to "Quaid's Will", his financial assets were distributed among his four sisters. Fatima Jinnah got the biggest share because she was living with him and not married. He also gave money to educational charities like Bombay University, Anjuman-e-Islam, Arabic

Quaid-e-Adam. Therefore, Aligarh University issue went to High Court in 1984 where Chief Justice Abdul Hai Qureshi declared that the money should not be sent to India but should be used for granting scholarship to the poor students. High Court made a trust called "Quaid-e-Azam- Aligarh Educational Trust". Three trustees were appointed, Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada, Justice (Retd.) Z.A. Channa and myself. The allocated money was 1 crore 8 lac. We invested the money in the 'Khas deposit certificate' and 'Special Saving Certificate'. This money has now increased up to one crore fifty five lac and so far. 2,700 scholarship have been



ularized system so that people could benefit from the Hospital. Not every one in Pakistan afford Agha Khan or OMI. We should endeavour to provide similar standard in the Jinnah hospital.

What is Jinnah Foundation all about?

Jinnah Foundation was formed in 1990. It basically deals with primary health and education. We established its first outlet in "Takri Colony" – slum area in Bath Island, which consists of a dispensary and a primary school. In 1992, the first phase of the Foundation building was constructed, having medical clinic on the ground floor with the facility of X-ray department and laboratory. The First and second floors were used as a primary school. In 1997 the second phase was completed. Now the school has 641 children from the underprivileged class of the society. There are 23 teachers and my wife Naseem Merchant is active-

College Delhi in India and Sindh Madarsa, Islamia College Peshawar in Pakistan. In 1995, the administrators of the Will gave Rs.1,08,11,000 by cross check the to Sindh Madarsatul Islam, Islamia College Peshawar got a similar amount. But the amount for the Aligarh University was not sent to India from 1984 onwards. None of the administrations sent the money. There are various reasons for that; such as hostility between the two-countries, problem with foreign exchange, change of Aligarh University constitution in 1951 and 1962. According to those amendments the Court of University would not consist of only Muslims. This decision has changed the character of the University for which Quaid had granted the money. Most importantly, the administrators learnt a bitter lesson from their experience with the Bombay University. Though they accepted the money but refused to acknowledge any link with

granted to the needy students amounting to an estimated sum of one crore fifty one lac.

Now tell us about the structure of Jinnah Society?

Society consist of 50 members belonging to different works of life but with the same belief in Jinnah and his values. Membership is not open for all. In fact the Society invites people to participate. Our sources of finance are various fund raising projects including the book "Jinnah Anthology," recently launched by the Society and we are lucky enough to find valuable sponsors. For example, book is being sponsored by eight different institutions such as Habib Bank Limited, Bank Al Falah, Shell Pakistan Ltd., Dewan Mustaq Group, Bank Al-Habib Ltd., ABN Amro Bank, Ghulam Mohammad Facto, Saddurddin Hashwani, Yunus Brothers and National Bank of Pakistan. We also got a very

good response from the public, 1400 copies have already been sold and 1000 more have gone for printing.

What is the relationship between Jinnah Society and film Jinnah?

Well, there is a link based upon to the film. In fact film Jinnah was the first project of Society. Both were started during the same period i.e. 1997. We support Jinnah on several grounds. Number one, we provided the a platform to the film-makers to propagate the project; we worked to create favourable public opinion about the project, we arranged funds for the film, and we provided support to the

ducer. Jameel Dehalvi is producer and director. While both have written the screenplay.

Do you think the Censor Board would pass the film?

I would expect them to pass the film for exhibition. If they don't agree with any scene they can talk to producer - director. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, Information Minister Mushahid Hussain and the GHQ all have seen the film. We did not heard any criticism from any side.

Our last question; about your personal life?

Yes, I am a happily married man. My wife Naseem



film when various groups targeted it. We also defended the film in court in 1997. And finally we organized the premiere for the film.

So you are associated with the Jinnah film?

No. We are not involve in production of the film. We actually supported the film on various grounds. Especially because it is a movies, which promotes Quaid's beliefs and ideas about Islam and Pakistan. He believed in Islam which gives equality, tolerance, justice, honesty fair play and rule of law and this is what Quaid's Pakistan should have. He did not want Pakistan as a theocratic state but a true Muslim state with democracy, honesty, dicipline and tolerance; a country where Muslims could live happily according to their culture and let the other minorities have similar rights. *Jinnah* is a brainchild of Prof. Akbar S. Ahmed who is an executive pro-

Merchant is a Lawyer by qualification and has also done a Montessori course. I have three children. Eldest is Faiza who is following her mother's footsteps. She is doing Montessori course. The second child is Fauzia who is a Barrister and working with a law firm in England. The youngest is Akbar who is doing his A-levels.

Any future plans?

We are basically concentrating on our current projects. The Society is also planning to open its outlets not only in Lahore but also in London and Los Angeles. Jinnah Society is an instifution, which aims to propagate Jinnah's, values, ideas, and the principles, both inside and outside the country and we are committed to our objectives. The same applies to Jinnah Foundation which I established to promote primary health and education. ■