

By Anwer Mooraj

Historical Interlude

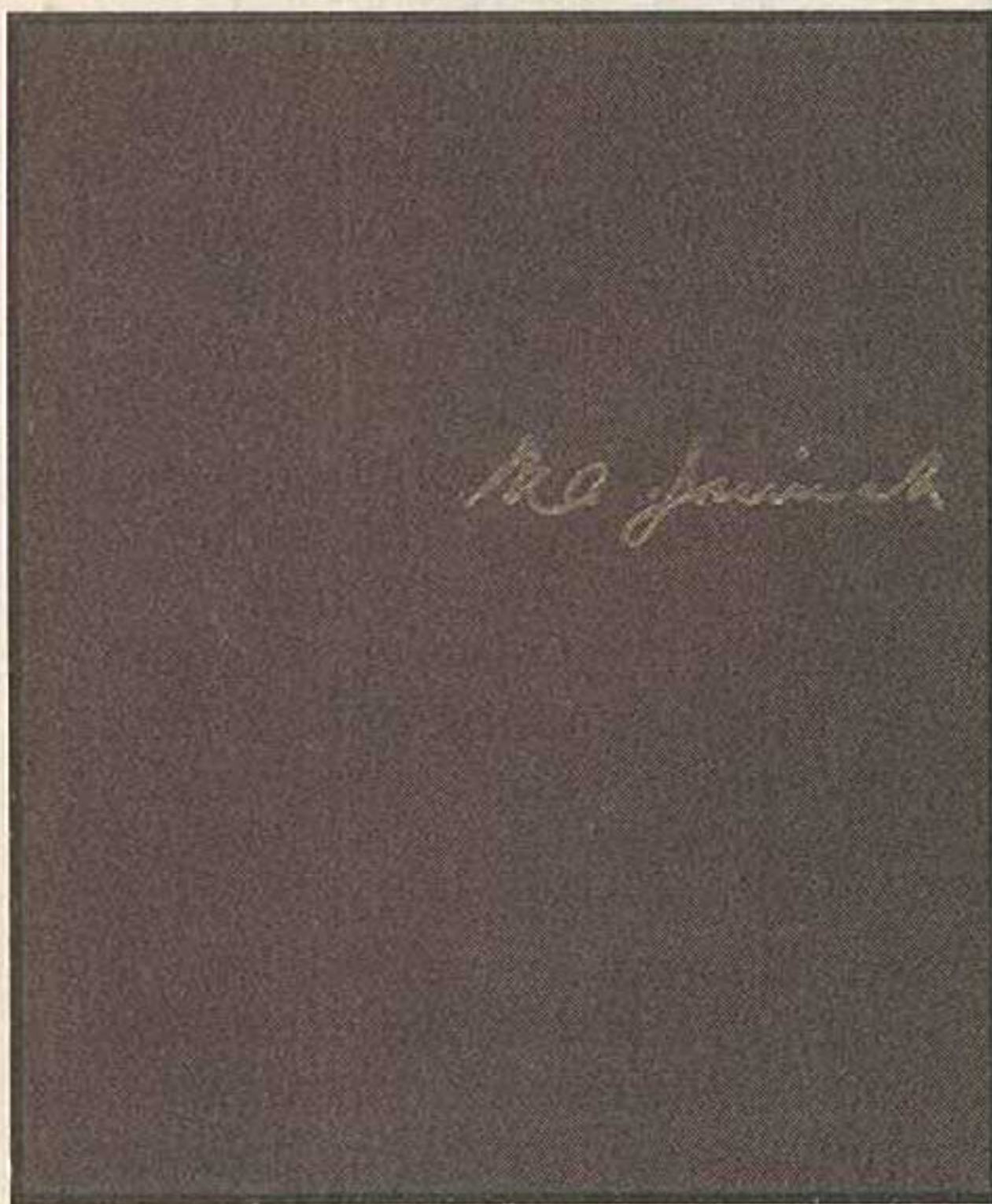
The literate public craves good biography. *The Jinnah Anthology*, compiled and edited by prominent lawyer Liaquat H. Merchant, is a serious and concerted effort to provide just that. Traditional and tightly focused, it is the best one-volume illustrated narrative yet produced in this country on one of the most extraordinary statesmen of our era.

In a century that has seen great political upheavals, biographies on exceptional leaders such as Lenin, Mao, Gandhi, de Gaulle, Mustapha Kemal, Kenyatta and a host of lesser

mortals have bombarded the public with numbing predictability. But this is the first time that someone in Pakistan has put together a meticulously reproduced selection of sepia tints, cobbled together by sympathetic write-ups which chronicle the life of a man who spent much of his time inviting, indeed demanding, controversy and disagreement against a backdrop of coalition-forging politics. Like Gandhi, Jinnah was a highly complex person, but unlike the former he was a member of an embattled minority who stood athwart history and yelled "stop".

Liaquat H. Merchant, president of the Jinnah Society and the driving force behind the publication, begins the book grandly with a list of impressive contributors who in one way or the other, however obscure, were connected with the Pakistan Movement. These worthy individuals comment on or reminisce about some aspect of the Quaid which endeared them to the great leader. While some of the country's lachrymose political and literary heavyweights whose pronouncements make a regular appearance in the country's newspapers on historical occasions are absent, the anthology is nevertheless tinged with a wistful, almost childlike longing for another less frenzied age.

Though there are brief, crisp



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write-ups by literary luminaries including Beverly Nichols, Edgar Snow and S. M. Burke, and longer passages of praise from Sahabzada Yaqub Khan, Shaista Ikramullah and Ata Rabbani among others, the book is also strewn with quotations from the Quaid's statements and speeches with which almost every Pakistani schoolboy is familiar. The quotation referred to by Merchant in his introduction, however, which was published in *The Manchester Guardian*, is perhaps not as well-known: "...



Mr. Jinnah's position at the Round Table Conference was unique. The Hindus thought he was a Muslim Communalist, the Muslims took him to be pro-Hindu, the princes deemed him to be too democratic, the Britishers considered him an extreme Nationalist, with the result that he was a leader without a following ..."

After a well-written publisher's preface, an introduction to the Jinnah Society by the editor and Dr Akbar S. Ahmed's comment on Jinnah's 'Gettysberg Address', pride of place is given to Stanley Wolpert, who in a sense sets the tone of the book. There are some stinging

critiques, but no rebukes. Without even the slightest hint that he might have made some mistakes, Jinnah is presented as the liberal intellectuals knew him — a thoroughly principled man who believed in the rule of law, parliamentary democracy and the protection of women and minorities.

Recording the first of a series of eulogies, Wolpert highlights one essential difference between Jinnah and the Congress leaders. While the latter decided to spend the war years behind prison bars or engaged in terrorist acts crippling railway lines or blowing up British troops, the former believed instead in a



constructive programme of nation building.

Two prominent Pakistani personalities who have recorded their reminiscences, probably for the first time in a project of this kind, are Princess Abida Sulthan, the

EXCERPT:

"Mr Jinnah was something more than Quaid-i-Azam, supreme head of the State, to the people who followed him; he was more even than the architect of the Islamic nation he personally called into being. He commanded their imagination as well as their confidence."

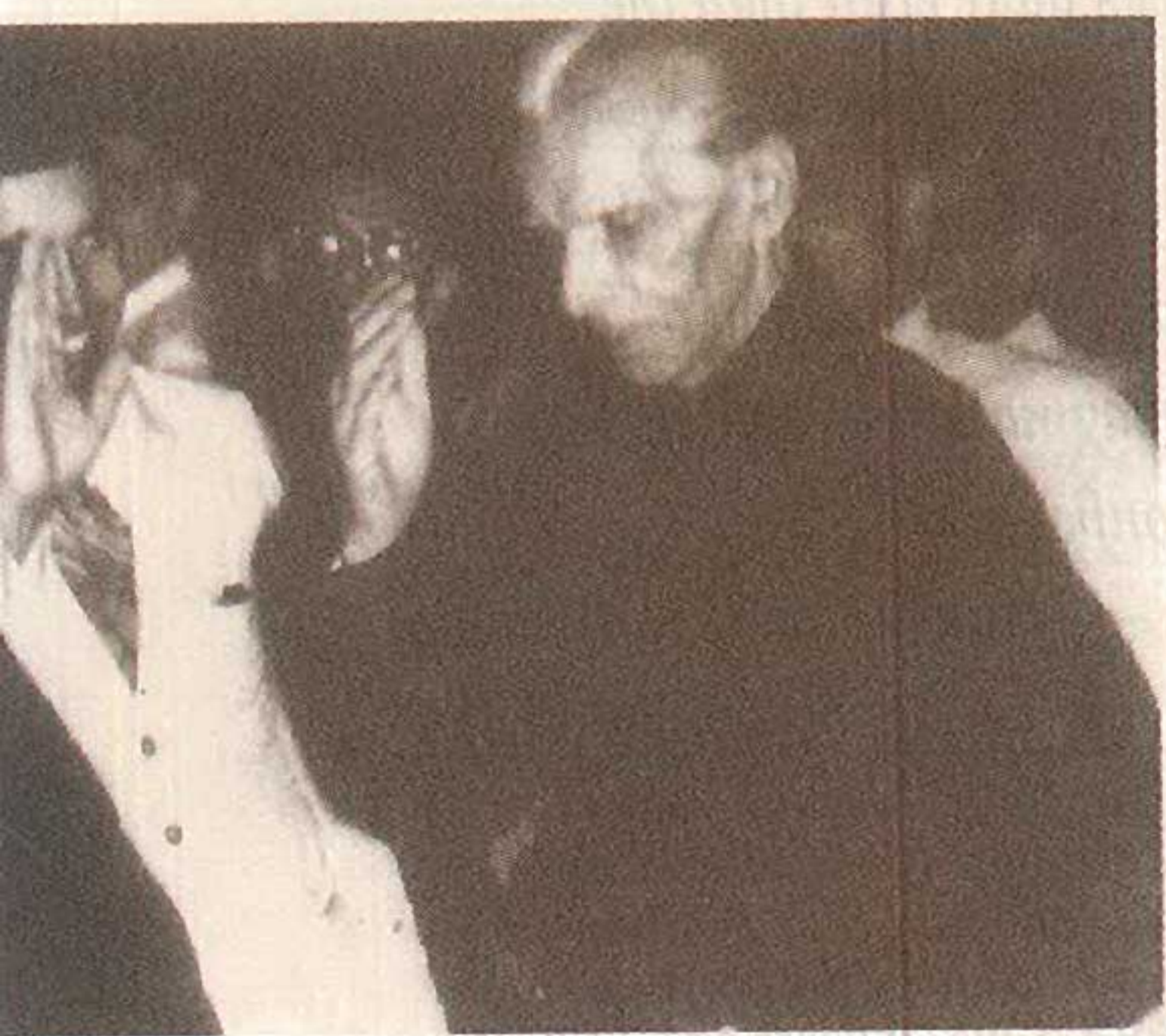
— Editorial: *The Times* (London)
September 13, 1948

former heir apparent of Bhopal State, and Justice Z. A. Chana, who retired from the Sindh High Court bench some 20 years ago. Princess Abida Sulthan recalls the time when, as a child, she was forced to sit in on conversations between the Quaid and her father Nawab Hameedullah Khan. She was obviously not interested in the proceedings as she found the discussions boring.

Nevertheless, listen she did and she formed the distinct impression that Jinnah, like her father, believed in secular democracy. Bhopalis like herself who migrated to Pakistan after Partition, contends Abida

Sultaan, did so under the impression that they were migrating to a secular democratic country. "But unfortunately, during the last fifty years of Pakistan's sovereignty, the entire concept of Mr. Jinnah's theories and policies has been shamelessly distorted, confused and mutilated," she concludes with a note of deep regret.

Justice Chana, who is considerably more cheerful and buoyant, delves into the great marshland of Muslim history and enlightens the reader with a bit of early Sindhiana. He writes that in 1938 when he was president of the Sindh Muslim Students Federation, he apprised the Quaid of the distinguished position of Sehwan's Chana tribe by recounting in an address that the tribe was the first to surrender to Mohammad bin Qasim and embrace Islam. As a result of this, the Chanas were granted a *sanad*, exempting them from the payment of taxes. The Quaid's reaction was a little incongruous under the circumstances. He is purported to have said that the appellation of a mere 'Mr' (used by



Chana while referring to the Muslim conqueror) was quite inappropriate when referring to historical figures like Mohammad bin Qasim. He apparently did not elaborate on what the correct form of address should have been.

Very well-designed and produced, *The Jinnah Anthology* will have a long shelf life. Indeed, it should also remain, for some time at least, the standard reference book on the life of Pakistan's most important and enigmatic leader. ■