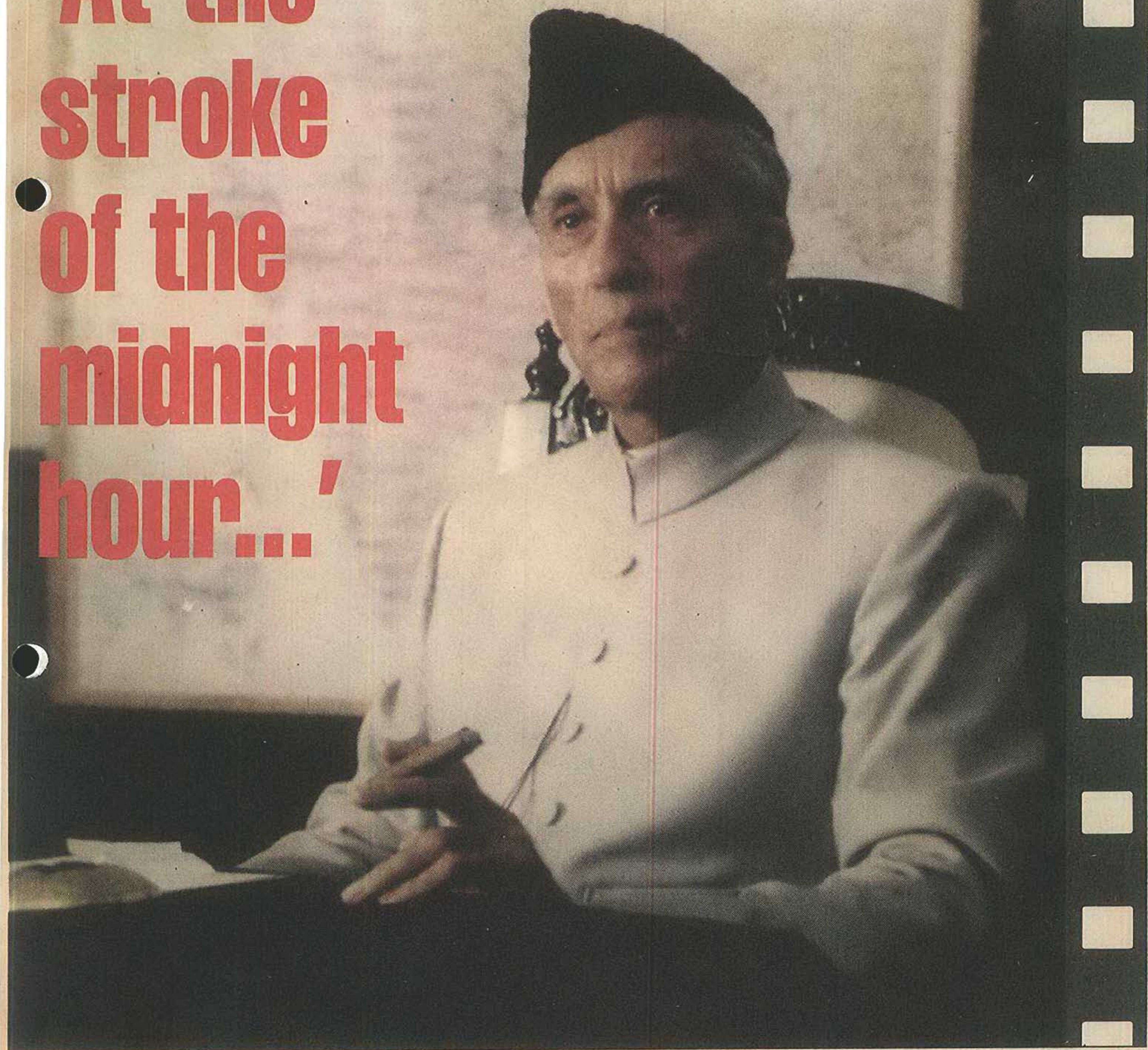


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THE NEWS

ON SUNDAY

'At the stroke of the midnight hour...'





Nusrat Amin witnesses 'Jinnah'

More than a record of a historic epoch, it was more of a show of close-shots and overwhelming sound effects. The much awaited and debated venture 'Jinnah,' jointly produced by representatives from Hollywood, Bollywood, Lollywood and European Cinema, finally comes to town for a presentation amidst looming controversies.

The film, which remained under a heavy cloud of controversy while in making in 1997, was finally released by the local censor board and shown at the Sindh Governor's House.

This was the first premier in Pakistan of the film based on the Quaid-e-Azam's philosophy vis-a-vis the creation of Pakistan. According to the producer, Akber S. Ahmed, the production is based on; why Pakistan: how Pakistan?

In fact, the movie does not venture deeply into the life of Mohammad Ali Jinnah and the history of the Pakistan Movement. It, however, illustrates how Jinnah was concerned with state oppression under the British Raj; and his basic idea to leave the Congress and join Muslim League. Moreover, the theme aims at dismantling the false image of Jinnah and to justify his firm belief in the two-nation theory.

In the first scene, as shown in 'Gandhi,' this film also has the last moments from the life of the nation's leader. It portrays Jinnah's deteriorating condition as an anxious Fatima Jinnah takes him to hospital and on the way, the ambulance breaks down. And before Jinnah breathes his last, Fati rushes out of the van and cries out for the doctor. Here the scene changes.

Enter Jinnah. Played by Christopher Lee, he is a towering, domineering figure who looks

around and hears Shashi Kapoor shouting at a clerk working on a "wretched future machine" — a computer. Although Shashi's role remains indefinable till the end, but going by the manner in which he questions Jinnah about his political decisions before declaring him dead, makes one suspect that he is carrying out Gabriel's task. And only an angel can make an aristocrat like Jinnah respond so gravely. But in order to steer clear of further controversies, the producer denied the presence of an angel. Hence, Shashi's role was deprived of definition.

So, it would be safer to call him a 'prompter' as he opens Jinnah's file on the 'wretched machine from the future' and the story unfolds. "I have no ambitions except for fighting for the Muslims of India," is how Jinnah begins.

The snorkel takes the camera

upwards and, in the next scene, it comes down to depict the past. In this scene one sees a British policeman, played by Lateef Charlie, remove a refugee hutment as Fatima resists.

Enter Gandhi. The naked fakir is seen discussing pre-partition political conditions with Lord Mountbatten and Jawaharlal Nehru. And Gandhi suggests that, after the sun goes down on the Raj, the Congress should designate Jinnah as the Prime Minister of India, making Nehru envious. And as history has it, Jinnah refused to accept the proposal. Here, the prompter rebukes: "Jinnah Sahab! Why didn't you accept the proposal." And Jinnah responds: "It wouldn't work."

While James Fox presented a remarkably accurate and apt rendition of Mountbatten, Rashid Suhrawardy failed to extricate himself from the Shakespearean mould. This was a result of his 30-year-affiliation with the Royal Shakespeare Company. The theatre's enduring spell did not allow him to play Nehru the way he was.

On one occasion, he imitates Jinnah in private with Lady Mountbatten. And the lady interrupts: "Jawahar, Jinnah has never played Shakespeare." This was perhaps to show how conscious the director was of Rashid's theatrical tone.

Jinnah, at one stage, reminisces about falling in love with Ratti. A foggy scene emerges on the screen, showing how Ratti's Parsi father refuses the proposal from a younger Jinnah, played by Richard Lintern, because of their diverse religions.

And then we have the scene where Ratti leaves her parents to come to Jinnah and the founder of the nation is shown kissing her hand. The story recalls how Ratti converted to Islam, married Jinnah and had a girl child they call Dina. At this moment, Jinnah's nostalgia dissolves.

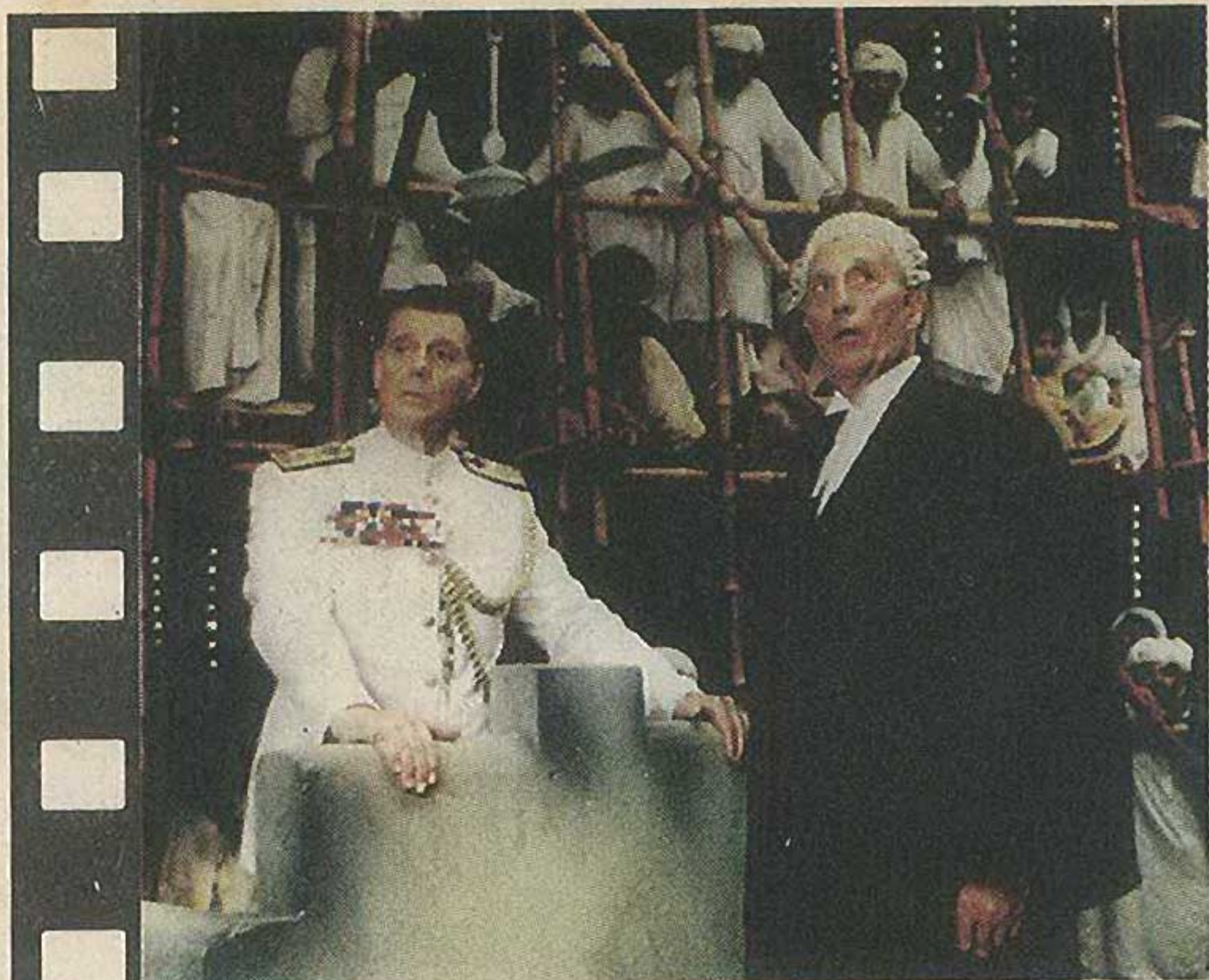
The story continues: From here follow scenes showing Jinnah's resentment about the success of

Gandhi's non-violence policy and his stopping of British Indian policemen from beating people who protest against the Raj. This forces him to abandon the Congress and join the League. To announce his decision, he speaks at a convention where people react negatively.

But many viewers are confused by the appearance of the senior Jinnah who suddenly emerges from the crowd as the younger Jinnah delivers his speech, and shouts: "Mr Jinnah is right."

This symbolises the turning point in Jinnah's political life — he joins the League.

Jinnah's sentimental side surfaces when he misses his daughter — "Father you are always away," — and his wife who, by that time, has fallen sick. The young Jinnah finds Ratti unconscious and kisses her forehead. This is where Ratti leaves Jinnah forever.



(Clockwise) Capturing history... Liaquat Ali Khan, Sardar Abd-ur-Rab Nishtar, the Quaid, Fatima Jinnah. Played in the film by Shakeel, Khayam Sarhadi, Christopher Lee and Shireen Shah. Lee as the founder. James Fox as Mountbatten with Lee

The prompter is touched by such a poignant scene. And he takes Jinnah into the past to Ratti's grave. The two witness young Jinnah crying at her death and is comforted by Fatima. The senior Jinnah and the kindly prompter can hardly control their emotions.

"You still cry for her?" asks the prompter.

"Not for her. But for love," replies Jinnah.

At a later stage, his daughter falls in love with a Parsi and asks him to give his permission to marry him. When he disapproves of the Parsi suitor, she reminds him of his marriage to her Parsi mother — and leaves him.

There is also a scene where Jinnah is shown condemning Liaquat Ali Khan, played by Shakeel, for presenting objectionable photographs of Nehru and Lady Mountbatten: "It's more shameful for us." And when the prompter asks that he could have changed the entire political scenario by using the scandalous pictures, Jinnah replies: "You want me to play Satan."

Jinnah's 'moth eaten' Pakistan finally emerges on the map. Caravans arrive in the new land for Indian Muslims and Jinnah is deeply disturbed by the sight of bloodied bodies in a train that was carrying Mohajirs across the Punjab. Muslims retaliate and attack Sikhs and Jinnah is questioned about the phenomenal bloodshed. The next scene shows a courtroom surrounded by the destitutes of the country; the prompter becomes a judge, Jinnah pleads not guilty and defends his case.

Aggrieved by the tragedy, Jinnah hopelessly remembers one of the lost caravans and the prompter ensures: "It can be re-arranged." The prompter then takes Jinnah to a place where the caravan had just arrived. A little girl, who had lost her mother on the way, asks Senior Jinnah about her mother's whereabouts, unaware of his stature and position.

This ushers in the scene where Talat Hussain completely steals the show. As a member of the caravan, he sobs silently and comforts the child: "Mr Jinnah, I'm sorry she does not recognise you." He, then looks at the people with him and attempts to chant 'Pakistan Zindabad' but chokes on his tears. He tries again and the entire caravan joins him. This is undoubtedly the most haunting scene which ends with Jinnah in tears.

The prompter changes his mind and Jinnah's role is declared justified. The echoes of Pakistan Zindabad rise with the sounds of an improvised national anthem, played by a British symphony orchestra.

The movie's backgrounder was an excellent selection of themes by an English composer Nigel Clarke. Born in Calcutta, the composer was deeply fascinated by the basic idea of the film 'Jinnah' and spent many days with his companion musician Michael Csanyi-Wills, a former student from the Royal Academy of Music, working on the score.

The two blended Pakistani and Western music to create a remarkable soundtrack apart from an improvised version of the national anthem. The themes were recorded at a high tech studio in Budapest, Hungary.

This film is certainly in keeping with its director's controversial track record. As for technique, a seasoned Jamil Dehlvi has avoided too many long shots and kept to close shots in most scenes. While scenes entailing conventions and courts seem to be influenced by 'Gandhi.'

This time the people will definitely be presented with a far more liberal picture of their founder and it is difficult to gauge reactions. On the other hand, the experiments on the technical and musical fronts are expected to be successful.

However, there is little doubt that the film will educate a viewer to distinguish a leader from a prophet.