

Notes

Zawwar Husain Zaidi: A Memoir*

*Sharif al Mujahid***

Zawwar Husain Zaidi, Editor-in-Chief, *Jinnah Papers* (1992-2008), died in Lahore on 31 March 2009, and his death was widely mourned and extensively reported in the press. The present piece is meant to be an initial assessment of his major contributions as well as a tribute to him.

First of all, let me establish my credentials to write on him. Except for his spouse, Parveen Zaidi, and a few worthies, I believe I had known Zaidi the longest and, possibly, more intimately than any one else still alive. I had personally met him at the Pakistan Historical Conference at Hyderabad late in January 1959, but we had known each other impersonally before that. Our common platform was the Pakistan Historical Society, the most vibrant body of Pakistani historians at the time. Equally creditable were my linkages with him: his two teachers at Aligarh – Syed Moinul Haq, General Secretary and the moving spirit behind the Society, and Riazul Islam, Professor Emeritus at the Karachi University (1980-2007). Not only had I met Zaidi over five decades ago, but we had also kept in touch with each other – during his visits to Pakistan since the middle 1960s and my numerous visits to the UK over the next three decades. I had also collaborated with him, both academically and professionally, during 1966-67 when he was obsessed with the retrieval of the Muslim League records and documents, and getting them a new home at the Karachi University. To this I would return later.

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Doing an obituary or a memoir such as the present one reminds me of Mark Antony's funeral oration over Caesar's dead body. 'I have come to bury Caesar, not to praise him. The good that men do is oft interred with them', so said Mark Antony, addressing the milling, seething, sweating and agitated Roman crowd on the Ides of March that afternoon some two millennia ago. But that should *not* be and is certainly *not* the case with Zaidi. Fractious as a nation as we Pakistanis are, with our deep sectarian, ethnic, and tribal cleavages, Pakistan has yet been able to hold aloft a stolid tradition of remembering those who have contributed in some way or another to the good of the community, the country and the nation. The plethora of anniversary articles published in almost all segments of the Pakistani press throughout the year is a standing testimony to this time honoured tradition of ours, and the present piece represents, in essence, an eloquent index how we remember those who had contributed not only materially, but also academically – to our national awareness, national consciousness, and to the reconstruction of our national history.

When any one speaks about Zaidi, the *Jinnah Papers* invariably come in for comment, discussion and commendation. His major contribution was, however, not (repeat *not*) so much the editing of some fifteen volumes of *Jinnah Papers*. That, to me, is mere nuts and bolts, which anyone, given the requisite expertise and the easy access to Jinnah papers, could well have done. But what is more important is the remarkable feat of establishing an institution on a durable basis – an institution to get critical segments of our national history to research upon and reconstructed on a continuing basis. An institution, after all, is more important and lasting than a mere scissor-and-paste task of stringing together a bunch of documents in a sequential order. Thus the establishment of the Jinnah Papers (JP) Wing was Zaidi's most spectacular accomplishment, and, behold, it has survived five regimes. Otherwise, the mere editing of the *Jinnah Papers* would, most probably, had ended with his retirement or earthly sojourn, even as the two projects – (i) Muslim League Documents, 1900-1947 and (ii) Quaid-i-Azam and His Times: A Compendium – I had set up when heading the Quaid-i-Azam Academy (1976-89) had with my exit from the Academy in July 1989. Although my worthy successor, Waheed Ahmad, in his unsolicited Foreword to the first volumes of the two works, which I had completed before my retirement and immediately thereafter, had assured the readers that 'the work [on the subsequent volumes of the Documents] is proceeding apace at the Quaid-i-Azam Academy' and that the 'Preparation of the second volume of this Compendium covering the

period from 1 January 1938 to 11 September 1948 is in hand at the Academy', none of them have seen the light of the day, twenty years down the road. Actually, the two projects were consigned to the deep freezer, as soon as Waheed Ahmad had assumed charge, and despite my best efforts in the 1990s, I failed to get them revived, courtesy the succeeding director(s). (So was the Urdu version of my Jinnah work, on which I had worked alongwith Khawja Razi Haider for some six years and whose calligraphed and pasted copy was ready for printing. That indicates how, in the absence of a redressal and accountability mechanisms, our authors/researchers are left at the tender mercies of the institutional head.) Fortunately, for now, however, I am working on the second volume of the Compendium, and it will, hopefully, be published by the National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research (NIHCR), Islamabad, next year, health, outages, and the present NIHCR Director permitting.

Zaidi is also more fortunate in his worthy successor, Akram Shaheedi. Instead of finding faults with his predecessor's work, as is the usual norm with the heads of Pakistani institutions, Shaheedi has pledged to carry on Zaidi's 'mission' faithfully. And as an earnest, he has clobbered together the next volume of documents within less than a year, which is dedicated to Zaidi.

In the same breath, though, Zaidi's most magnificent failure needs a mention as well: the failure to groom a successor. As a rule, institutional heads in Pakistan, whether they perceive themselves under threat or opt for 'after me the deluge' as the guiding principle to validate their self-perceived indispensability, seldom groom a successor. Of course, there are exceptions – Syed Muhammad Husain Jafri, former Director of Karachi University's Pakistan Study Centre, for one, at the academic level. To put the record straight, though, Zaidi did try to get, at least, two middle range but scholastically sound academics, but to no avail since they couldn't possibly barter their well-established positions in two leading universities for an uncertain future in a make-shift set up under the bureaucratic canopy. Moreover, they hailed from other disciplines in the social sciences, and the period covered by the *Jinnah Papers* was not really their cup of tea, although, given their excellent academic grounding and their sense of commitment and discipline, either of them could well have made the grade as a worthy successor within a reasonable spell of time. Zaidi, of course, would not touch anyone in the peer group, perhaps because Waheed Ahmad, once exited from the Quaid-i-Azam Academy in June 1993, was after Zaidi, and possibly his job, demeaning Zaidi through circular notices about Zaidi's multi-

layered perks (seeking to demolish his ‘tall’ claims of working for free), the cost-benefit ineffectiveness of the JP Wing’s ‘huge’ expenditures as against its ‘poor’ performance in terms of volumes produced, and similar other ‘failures’. The net result was that Zaidi became wary of his peer group and professionally trained historians, and would leave an academic and professional desert behind him when he finally retired three months before his death. Yet, fortuitously though, the JP Wing has somehow survived and found a new lease of life under Akram Shaheedi.

As against this, infinitely barren was Zaidi’s chairmanship of the Quaid-i-Azam Academy (1999-2009), which he assumed in the footsteps of Z. A. Suleri, who was appointed earlier in 1997 at the instance of a leading Lahore Urdu daily’s editor, by Prime Minister Mian Nawaz Sharif as a favour for his ‘services’, and that in violation of the Academy’s constitution which provides for no such post. In ten and a half years of Zaidi’s tenure, no Executive Committees or Board of Governors meeting was held while the Research and Publication Committee met only once, in February 2004, but all its decisions and the projects it had recommended were put in cold storage. And only one monographic work (*Raja Sahib Mahmudabad*) in Urdu by Khwaja Razi Haider, initiated before Zaidi’s take-over, was published.

As most of my reading clientele is aware, I have never been a hagiologist – except when I was a student activist during the heady days of the Pakistan movement in the middle 1940s, as indicated by my writings on the Pakistan movement, Jinnah and other leaders during 1945-47. Otherwise, my Jinnah work, *Studies in Interpretation* (1981), would not have triggered such a raging controversy in the early 1980s. This I am mentioning as a preface to say that I had had my problems with Zaidi – I mean, problems not of a personal nature but at the methodological level. To put it briefly, he followed, rather routinely and religiously, the leading eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’ historians – von Ranke and Lord Acton in particular – while I have been a disciple of two of the most celebrated twentieth century historians – Benedetto Croce and Edward Hallet Carr. Remember, following von Ranke, Zaidi had plausibly argued in his Foreword to the first volume: ‘.... since it is the whole document which forms the piece of evidence for the scholar to interpret – to excerpt it is to impose on others the value judgements of the editor... we should publish these papers in their entirety. The evidence which a document conveys may be ‘trivial, revolutionary, scandalous, reasonable, pious, comic or dull’, but the evidence has to be produced and preserved completely’ (xix). This, to me, is ‘a fetishism of

documents' which seeks to complete and justify a fetichism of facts', to quote Carr.¹

From day one after the publication of the *Jinnah Papers*, Vol. I, in 1993, Zaidi was after me, given my record of reviewing for forty years, to get it reviewed in *Dawn*. But I dithered – because of my reservations about his editing methodology. His was a domineering and dominating personality, with a larger-than-life presence since the *Jinnah Papers*' publication, courtesy the calibrated, well-planned PR exercise since then. How, then, could I, albeit my recognition as a Jinnah researcher and an editor, to cross swords with him? But, then, I belonged to his peer group, and my commitment to the discipline bothered me quite a bit – since I felt that if I didn't join the issue no one else would, nor anyone did. Hence, finally, I did a longish review article in *Dawn*, on 20 March 1996. It was, of course, a combination of both an appreciation and a critique. More important: it represented the first dissenting note as against the chorus of unfettered praise by an army of uncritical enthusiasts and a rising crescendo of unabashed acclaim by professional reviewers, who, presumably, had hardly glanced through the documents and especially through the editorial pages of the volume delineating its format and the methodological underpinning of the selection and editing of the documents. No wonder, it took Zaidi a whole year before he could overcome the initial shock, to finally acknowledge that mine was the best review published on the *Jinnah Papers*.

What is important, though, is that in a society that is ridden by an acknowledgement-deficit syndrome this acknowledgement represents an index to Zaidi's approach to academic issues, his commitment to Milton's 'free marketplace of ideas' and his keeping his eyes and ears wide open – open to all sorts of comments, suggestions, even criticism. No wonder, he had accepted some of the suggestions I had made in his later volumes which are characterized by greater sophistication than the earlier ones in terms of including or excluding what he has. More refreshing, he has also included documents from the Shamsul Hasan Collection, Rizwan Collection and the American archives. Above all, he has finally moved away from the long abandoned 19th century Rankean tradition. Thus, as suggested in my review, documents such as seeking

¹ Edward Hallet Carr, *What is History* (New York: Vintage, 1961), p. 15. Actually, Zaidi's undue stress on the mere compilation of a mountain of objective facts tended 'to turn him from a man of letters to a compiler of an encyclopedia', to borrow an apt description from Lord Acton's introductory note to *The Cambridge Modern History*, I (1902), p.4, cited in *ibid*.

financial help or employment, soliciting Jinnah's patronage for a certain brand of tea or some other business enterprise, or detailing other such trivial matters have been judiciously and thoughtfully omitted. And, again, as suggested by me, Zaidi has also been extremely circumspect and choosy in the inclusion of easily available published material as Appendices, as against, especially, the first volume. The abandonment of the Rankean approach has brought the publication and printing costs down, making the later volumes more affordable, price-wise. I did another review in *Dawn* in 2007, and an extended 14-page review article in *Pakistan Perspectives* (Vol. II: 1; January-June 2006), arguably the best social science journal in Pakistan.

For now, let me reflect on another chapter of his professional achievement. I mean, the more significant and more durable contribution that Zaidi had made – and that in facilitating the task of reconstruction of our national history. Here I am referring to his critical role in the retrieval of the All India Muslim League (AIML) records and documents way back in 1966. It so happened that the British School of Asian and African Studies' (SOAS) historian, C. H. Philips, was organizing a conference on the partition of India in July-August 1967. Since there was such a dearth of material on the Muslim side, he sent out Zaidi, then a young Lecturer at the SOAS, to Pakistan in search of primary material on the Muslim side. Zaidi reached Karachi in the summer of 1966 and soon after established contact with Syed Shamsul Hasan, for office secretary of the AIML at Delhi. Hasan, who knew the whereabouts of the Muslim League documents after their seizure from the Muslim League office in October 1958 following the imposition of Martial law, briefed Zaidi about its current location. Soon after, Zaidi went after these documents, had them located, and subsequently went to Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi, then Vice-Chancellor, Karachi University, for critical assistance in retrieving them. Qureshi had an excellent equation with President Mohammad Ayub Khan who held him in high esteem. Qureshi approached the President, impressed upon him the value of these records and their importance, and also assured him of taking the requisite steps for their repair, restoration, preservation and maintenance, as well as of ensuring their availability to scholars if they were given in the custody of the University of Karachi. Qureshi's intervention proved critical and President Ayub Khan passed formal orders on 7 October 1966 for their transfer to the University.

Stuffed in 123 gunny bags and 46 steel trunks, the AIML records along with those of the Pakistan Muslim League were shifted to the Karachi University at 2 a.m. the same night. And with no archival

facility worth the name and with little experience to fall back upon, a small team of dedicated persons brought together at a short notice began, under Zaidi's supervision, the most arduous and long drawn-out task of fumigating, repairing and restoring and, finally, the sifting and classification of the documents. In those hectic days, Zaidi looked like a man possessed and worked continuously for hours on end, and inspired the team beyond measure.

Meantime, a Committee for the Preservation of Muslim League Records was set up, with I. H. Qureshi as Chairman, and Sharif al Mujahid as Secretary. The Committee included Mahmud Husain, A. B. A. Haleem, Z. H. Zaidi, Riazul Islam, M. H. Siddiqi, and A. Moid. The AIML records, when they finally took shape, were christened as the Archives of Freedom Movement (AFM) and were headed by Riazul Islam (1968-79), M. H. Siddiqi (1979-93) and Sharif al Mujahid (1994-2000). It was housed on the topmost floor of the Karachi University Library, since named as Dr. Mahmud Husain Library. The story of the Muslim League records' retrieval has been recorded in detail in an article by M. H. Siddiqi, Chairman, Department of History, in its journal, *Past and Present*, way back in 1967. It has also been dealt with in some detail in my work, entitled *Muslim League Documents*, Volume I, published by the Quaid-i-Azam Academy, in 1990.

Some 650 volumes of documents had been classified subject-wise, and made available to scholars till the middle 1996 when I was Honorary Director of the AFM before the original volumes along with the unclassified documents were unwisely shifted to the National Archives of Pakistan (NAP), Islamabad, where its DG was in quest of acquiring fresh and unique paraphernalia to refurbish his growing 'empire', to get qualified for the next grade. And this was done despite my stiff opposition since I feared NAP's inability to get the documents put in order and classified, given its expertise and priorities. And this was precisely what has happened during the past fourteen years. Here, at the NAP, the AFM records have been consigned to two or three rooms, and the unclassified material remains unprocessed, simply gathering dust and getting brittle without any one paying any attention to make them functional. Fortunately, while I was heading the Quaid-i-Azam Academy in the 1980s, I had, despite stiff opposition by the then Director, M. H. Siddiqi, got four photocopies of the Archives of Freedom Movement made on a continuing basis and had them distributed to the University of Karachi and the NAP, besides two copies to the Academy. And it was at the Academy that researchers and scholars, both Pakistani and foreign, generally consulted the AFM records in the 1980s since they were easily

accessible to them in a scholastic ambience, without any sort of inhibitive rules.

Zaidi had also organized the chunk of documents concerning Jinnah's correspondence with various leaders, which, for no explicable reason, remained in the personal custody of Syed Shamsul Hasan at his residence. These have since come to be known as the Shamsul Hasan Collection (SHC). (While Hasan must be credited and commended for preserving these documents, how they came to be separated from the mainstream Jinnah Papers and why they remained in Hasan's personal custody are still a matter of mystery, which my queries over the years have failed to yield any clue. But, for sure, they were *not* gifted away by Jinnah to Syed Wajid Shamsul Hasan, then a mere boy during 1947-48, as against what Muhammad Ali Siddiqi asserts in his review of *The Punjab Story 1940-1947: The Muslim League and the Unionists: Towards Partition and Pakistan*).² While heading the Academy, I had induced Khalid Shamsul Hasan, the eldest son of the late AIML Office Secretary and Senior Vice-President, National Bank of Pakistan, to let the Academy classify the Shamsul Hasan Papers, which he finally agreed to – of course, after much prodding. That's how the Academy was the first institution to get a photocopy of the SHC and make it available to researchers and scholars. The SHC is currently housed at the NAP, Islamabad, and a photocopy at the Sind Archives, Karachi. These documents Zaidi had utilized extensively in constructing his paper, entitled 'Aspects of the Development of Muslim League Policy, 1937-47', which he presented at the SOAS conference on Partition and is included in *The Partition of India: Politics and Perspectives*, edited by C. H. Philips and Mary Dooreen Wainwright, and published by George Allen and Unwin, London, 1970. It does call for a mention here, not only because it is the first study of an aspect of the AIML to be based on primary sources outdistancing Khalid Bin Sayeed's *Pakistan: The Formative Phase* (1960), but also because it is Zaidi's major monographic work, all others being mere edited works.

I had the honour of working with Zaidi as Secretary of the Committee for the Preservation of Muslim League Records, and I could say with complete confidence that but for Zaidi's role in their retrieval the nation would have well lost these papers and documents – documents that bid fair to be considered the mother of all records on the AIML which had guided and represented Muslim India since its inception at

² 'Books and Authors', *Dawn*, 18 April 2010. See also Mahmud Ahmad, Letter, 'Book and Authors', *ibid.*, 2 May 2010.

Dacca in 1906 to the creation of Pakistan on 14-15 August 1947. Without these precious records our national history cannot and could not possibly be reconstructed. Thus, to me, Zaidi had a very significant role to play in rousing national awareness and national consciousness and taking the initial steps towards a reconstruction of our national history. Hence this represents a contribution, at once substantial and significant, to our historiography and to our continuing endeavours towards reconstructing our national history.

An individual is a mix of both strengths and weaknesses, and he should be accepted as he is or was, and presented as such. Remember the meaningful query posed by King Henry IV to the ambassador of Dan Pedro: 'Do you mean say', asked the King in seeming innocence, 'your master hasn't enough virtues to afford some faults.'³ So impressed was Voltaire (1694-1778), the 'pioneer of a new type of history' with this 'fine saying' that he wanted to adopt it as a guiding principle for his projected account of Louis XIV (1638-1715), the most celebrated of all the kings of France, whose reign encompassed the country's golden age. In contrast, generally speaking, most obituaries done in Pakistan either idolize or demonize the person written about. And this I have tried to avoid.

One word more and I would be done. Zaidi spent some three decades at the SOAS, but I am not privy to his accomplishments if any. Hence the present piece concentrates on the last eighteen years, which were his glorious years when he shot into limelight as an editor and historian. On balance, I feel his accomplishments overshadow what he had failed to do. That we should all celebrate, and for that we should pay him our mead of tribute.

³ Voltaire, 'on History: Advice to a Journalist', in Fritz Stern (ed.), *The Varieties of History* (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), p.37.