The Contribution Of Muhammad Ali Jinnah

Significant individuals contribute to periods of change and to a large extent this can be said for Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the man who lead the movement for an independent Pakistan. Throughout his political career spanning from 1896 to his death in 1948, Jinnah made many significant contributions towards the improvement of India's Hindu-Muslim relations and later in the founding and developing of Pakistan, an independent Muslim state. However, periods of conflict during the partition which resulted in millions of lives destroyed, and lack of suitable long-term policy after the creation of Pakistan, demonstrates the additional negative impacts Jinnah had in his time.

One of Muhammad Ali Jinnah's significant contributions to change, was his work in India to promote positive Hindu-Muslim relations. Jinnah joined the Indian National Congress Party in 1896 and it was here Jinnah was able to build himself the platform to discuss with, the idea of Indian self-government. In 1910, he was elected to the imperial counsel and rose to prominence in India's fight tor rights and freedoms, in particular Hindu Muslim unity. In 1916, Jinnah had joined the All India Muslim League and was responsible for the Lucknow pact. This was significant as it was the only pact signed by Indian Congress and the All India Muslim League. It gave rights for Muslims to have their own electorates and therefore gave them representation in a Hindu dominated India. However, Congress later revoked this right of a separate electorate in the Delhi Muslim proposal 1927 and the Nehru report 1928. Jinnah's hopes for unity were destroyed and this set back his contributions to Muslim relations in India. In 1937 Indian congress dominated the Indian government elections, winning in six provinces. Muslims believed that without representation, they would become 'second class' citizens, utilising this belief Jinnah forged the idea of a separate Muslim nation. Jinnah was able to skilfully campaign to promote unification of Muslims onto one platform, turning Muslim India into a powerful political party. Despite ultimately failing to promote positive Hindu-Muslim relations, Jinnah's advocacy for unification within the Muslim community, set the scene for the acceptance of Pakistan.

Jinnah's most significant contribution to society was his work in the creation of Pakistan. When the violent Muslim-Hindu riots erupted in 1946 in India, Britain sent Lord Mountbatten to India to negotiate with its various leaders. Pakistani academic and politician states 'It was his (Jinnah) powerful advocacy… remarkable strategy in the delicate negotiations that made Pakistan inevitable.' Jinnah was a significant role in the partition of India and the separate Muslim state, Pakistan. Jinnah was a key figure in the fight for land and rights for the Muslim people. Pakistan was created from the predominant Muslim states (Northwest and East India). The partition caused a large upheaval of both Hindus and Muslims as each fled across the border into India and Pakistan respectively. Jinnah desired a democratic constitution, providing peace and equality. However, as the governor-general of a new state, Jinnah had the responsibility to solve Pakistan's many problems. Pakistan had no defence and areas were in ruins after multiple riots and influx of immigrants. The treasury had no money and Pakistan was already lacking in natural resources. To add to this, Indian factories were cut off from Pakistan therefore halting agricultural and industry. Jinnah secured acquisition of state especially Khalat and resolved the dispute of Karachi and oversaw aid for the eight million people who had migrated to Pakistan. By reversing policy in the North west frontier and ordering the withdrawal of troops,

Jinnah demonstrated his respect towards the tribal people of Waziristan. This strengthened his relations with marginalised groups, therefore demonstrating effort to unite his people. He had strength and possessed a ‘dynamic personality’ which sustained Pakistan through this initial period of turmoil. Bangladeshi activist Mohiuddin states ‘Pakistan owes its very existence to his drive, tenacity and judgement.’ Therefore, supporting the statement that Jinnah was a significant individual who contributed to change in his creation of a new Muslim state.

Despite being a significant individual of positive change, Jinnah’s negative impacts on society are important to consider. His role during the partition would be characterised by a series of negative changes and contributions to society. During the partition of India, violent riots spread rapidly through Punjab and Bengal. Without Jinnah’s demand for Pakistan or the government‘s lack of forethought, it is possible that these riots would have been avoided and the loss of one million lives and millions of displaced could have been spared. As previously stated, Pakistan’s beginning was tumultuous. Despite his law background, Jinnah was not able to successfully agree with India and on a fair partition. Pakistan was formed without a constitution and without defence. Additionally, land disputes on bordering states would later lead to three major wars between India and Pakistan. Therefore, Jinnah’s significant role in the partition lead to negative change in his society.

Secondly Jinnah’s failure to enact long term policies that would prove favourable to Pakistan is also a negative factor in his contribution to society. Pakistan was geographically split into two areas with India between them. The west was composed of mostly indigenous Punjabis, Sindhis and Balochis who spoke their own respective languages, and Urdu speaking migrants from India. East Pakistan was largely Bengali speaking and was economically more developed. To an extent Jinnah continued an oppressive government over East Pakistan, taking wealth out from Bengal and into West Pakistan. This created tensions between the two sides, which were further heightened by Jinnah naming Urdu the official state language, therefore limiting the culture of the Bengali people, angering them further. In 1948 after Jinnah refused to head the Bengali’s demands to change the national language, protests spread through the East and Pakistan was once again thrown into chaos. This would be the first step in strained East-West Pakistan relations and would ultimately lead to the Bangladesh Independence War which resulted in East Pakistan’s Independence in 1971. Jinnah’s lack of foresight in his policies and laws were significant for the future of Pakistan and created long term political and economic unrest.

Therefore, despite the partition between India and Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah was vital in Hindu-Muslim relations in India leading up to the event and was able to skilfully use the existing conditions to his advantage in the formation of Pakistan. However, his lack of foresight into the repercussions of the partition and his policies had many negative effects, lasting beyond his death in 1948. Nevertheless, Jinnah was to a large extent a significant individual who contributed to substantial change in both India and Pakistan.