

By Muneeza Shamsie

STANLEY Wolpert is one of the most eminent chroniclers of South Asian history today. In Pakistan his name is synonymous with his ground-breaking biography, *Jinnah of Pakistan* but his general history book *A new history of India*, is now in its sixth edition. He has also written two novels and the biographies of Morley, Gandhi, Nehru, and Bhutto. He was in Karachi at the invitation of the AKU to speak on "Jinnah's vision of Pakistan" and later spoke at a function hosted by the Jinnah Society and the OUP.

He revealed that his involvement with the subcontinent dates back to 1948: He sailed into Bombay, as a 20-year-old marine engineer and saw huge crowds on the shore. He learnt that the ashes of India's great leader, the assassinated Mahatma Gandhi were to be immersed in the sea that day. He was so caught up with emotions of the event, that he decided to study South Asian history and wrote a novel, *Nine hours to Rama*, about Gandhi's assassination.

Translated into nine languages, the novel was made into a film with Horst Bucholz. It draws upon the court record of the assassin Godse's trial published in a quarterly, banned in India, but available in the British Library. The book and film have also been banned in India since. "I think I was too close to the truth. This means there was an inkling of the assassination, but not enough precautions were taken. There might have been some support in the government because some people thought Gandhi was pro-Pakistan," Professor Wolpert said.

Meanwhile, in 1959, he began to read about Jinnah while working on his doctoral thesis on Tilak and Gokhale. Jinnah, who

admired Gokhale, had been hailed as "the ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity" and had represented Tilak against charges of sedition. He came across more on Jinnah while researching *Morley and India* because Jinnah had admired Morley's work, *On compromise*, about the importance of truth and ethical ideals.

"For Jinnah of course truth always came first, as well as the rule of the law, impartiality and justice," Professor Wolpert said.

He also found many adulatory references to Jinnah by the Congress in the early days, but after 1935, Congress members as well as some British officials, referred to him as "unprincipled" and "dangerous". Wolpert found it extraordinary that Jinnah could elicit such contradictory statements. While the Muslim League referred to him in "terms that were more than human".

He kept wondering why so little has been written about him? There appears to be a reluctance on the part of Pakistani scholars to tackle his life. There was only an authorized biography by Bolitho, which was "interesting" but "not comprehensive" and had "a lot of gaps". But it spurred Stanley Wolpert to write *Jinnah of Pakistan*.

"While writing the book, I came to regard Jinnah as a most admirable man with remarkable tenacity and an ability to fight and retain a battle that changed the course of history," he said.

Jinnah of Pakistan was the first comprehensive life of the Quaid-i-Azam and provided many personal and political insights; it also chronicled events, speeches and important details, which had either been forgotten, censored, omitted or glossed over, by Pakistan's derailed political culture and the

passage of time. Following the entire span of his career from his childhood in Karachi, the book traces the events which caused Jinnah to leave the Congress because he disagreed with Gandhi and accused him of mixing religion with politics and later, alienated further by the Congress' Hindu leaders, he crystallized the aspirations of the Muslim League and negotiated hard for an independent Muslim state, Pakistan.

This largely supports and bears out the traditionally held view in Pakistan about its genesis. The subsequent release of the *Transfer of power* documents has not changed his opinion.

Jinnah was banned in Pakistan, however, because of the personal passages, which the government of Ziaul Haq considered was improper and an offer was made to publish thousands of copies, if the requisite deletions could be made. Stanley Wolpert refused.

He said his only aim had been "to write as true and honest an account as possible" of an important public figure he had come to admire "for the tenacity, incorruptibility and strength of character". He did however find the ban "hurtful", because this was the one country in which people were really interested in Jinnah. In 1987, however the unexpurgated *Jinnah of Pakistan* was published in Pakistan and has enjoyed enormous success.

Professor Wolpert's talk at the AKU was

Stanley Wolpert: profile

Brought up in New York, Stanley Wolpert did his doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania in 1959 and has been teaching and writing about South Asian history ever since. Author of over 20 books, he is Professor Emeritus at the University of California at Los Angeles.

also deplored the fact that "Nehru took it upon himself" to set up "a Ministry of Atomic Energy" in the 1950's and "started the atom bomb with Homi Bhabha as its first scientist" and then, his daughter Indira Gandhi exploded the first plutonium bomb. "The more I learnt of Nehru, the more I realized that his populist socialist Fabian rhetoric and his actions were quite different, as was his personal and public persona," he said.

"He was not a man who pushed for reform and change. Instead, he often did nothing because he was ruled by ideas of Indian domination and power politics."

In the immensely readable *Nehru*, the author relies heavily on Nehru's own writings to interpret his character and his contradictions and brings out his remarkable ability stand back and look at himself from a distance. His rebellion against his father, his adoption of Gandhi as a surrogate parent, his disdain and dislike for Jinnah, the overwhelming fascination for Mountbatten and Edwina, comes through very clearly, as do the constant tensions which arise with Gandhi, due to Nehru's impetuosity and his inability to compromise.

For decades Professor Wolpert had been "daunted" at writing Gandhi's biography, because there was so much already, that he felt he had nothing new to say. But on May 11, 1998 he landed in Delhi and learnt India

Major works: Novel, *Nine hours to Rama* (1962) and non-fiction, *Tilak and Gokhale: revolution and reform in the making of modern India* (1962), *Morley and India 1905-1910* (1967), *A new history of India* (1977), *Jinnah of Pakistan* (1987), *Zulfi Bhutto of Pakistan* (1993), *Nehru: a trust with destiny* (1996), *Gandhi's passion* (2001)



Stanley Wolpert

Revealing the secrets

originally scheduled for October, to launch a new lecture series, but was postponed due to political uncertainty and rescheduled to coincide with the Quaid-i-Azam's 125th anniversary. The speech essentially summed up salient points from Jinnah, particularly the Quaid-i-Azam's many attempts for a rapprochement with Congress, but "Nehru's arrogance, particularly after the Congress success in 1937, made it virtually impossible".

He also referred to Quaid's emphasis on education, social and economic uplift, political training, religious tolerance and the rule of law in Pakistan, as essential pre-requisites to national harmony.

In 1993, to "carry forward the history of Pakistan", Stanley Wolpert published *Zulfi Bhutto of Pakistan*. He found Bhutto "attractive superficially because of his rhetoric, his popular appeal to the masses, his title Quaid-i-Azam and its populist nature".

But the more he learnt about him, the less he liked "his mercurial, violent character" and the tendency "to vent spleen on those close to him". He found the Bhutto archives in 70 Clifton "illuminating, puzzling and disturbing" for Bhutto often adopted "totally irreconcilable positions" and had "a multiple personality in many ways". The book does have much of interest, but its main problem is that the author never does quite come to grips with Bhutto's convoluted personality. Readers here are also likely to be irritated by the minor errors and misspelt names.

Professor Wolpert's biography *Nehru: a trust with destiny* is much more rewarding, though the account of Nehru's personal life has created a storm in India. Wolpert was drawn to Nehru intellectually through his *Autobiography* and *The discovery of India*, but the more he read about him, the more he discovered "weaknesses, contradictions, flaws". He felt that Nehru "was responsible for many problems that have plagued the sub-continent" specially because of "his long tenure as prime minister", the "most obvious being Kashmir".

Stanley Wolpert was very critical of "Nehru's expenditure on Kashmir to keep it within the Indian Union" since "there are only three million people in Kashmir and over 900 million in India" and his "refusal