



In 1936, a new mansion was built over 2.5 acres of land at Mount Pleasant Road, now known as Bhausaheb Hirey Marg in Malabar Hill. Complete with Italian marble work, it was considered contemporary for its time and quickly became the talk of the town. The house would become a beloved residence for Muhammad Ali Jinnah and also leave its mark in history as the chamber of political discussion inviting Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru to mull over the formation of a new nation, Pakistan (Kapoor 2023). The house, constructed for a sum of 2,00,000 rupees, was designed under the artistic direction of Claude Batley, a distinguished British architect. Batley belonged to a generation of architects who immigrated to India in the 1930s (Desai, Desai and Lang 2012, 126-137). Batley was renowned for his expertise in the Art Deco and Indo Deco styles, which are reflected in the architecture of the Jinnah House and its majestic proportions that still overlook the Arabian sea today.

Mount Pleasant Road, accented with pink cassia flowers, previously led to a more modest home than the present Jinnah House (Reddy 2017, 109-110). It isn't common knowledge that the mansion was built over the remains of a Goanese-style bungalow known as South Court in which Jinnah resided with Ruttie, his wife. It was a smaller bungalow in comparison to the other lavish houses of Malabar Hill and it was also destined to bear witness to a tumultuous love story.

Jinnah was a welcomed guest at Sir Dinshaw Petit's residence, Petit Hall, nestled at the foot of Malabar Hill. His daughter, Ruttie, a vivacious 18-year-old, and Jinnah, a 42-year-old visionary, defied all odds to unite in matrimony in 1918 and moved into South Court. However, their love, like the bungalow they called home, was a contrast of beauty and turmoil. Their union was tinted with moments of blissful early marriage life and unhappiness during the tapering years. In 1928, the unthinkable happened when Ruttie left home to move into a suite in Taj Mahal Hotel, Bombay, and within a year, she reportedly passed away due to prolonged illness (Reddy 2017, 368).



Jinnah's life, however, continued to follow an unpredictable path. He rose to become a prominent legal luminary in London, marking his ascent on the global stage. Years after the loss of Ruttie, Jinnah returned to India in 1934, where a new chapter awaited him. This time, he emerged as the champion of India's Muslim community. His newfound prominence demanded a residence that reflected his soaring stature. Money was no longer a constraint after he parted with his lavish London home. In 1936, with unwavering determination, Jinnah razed the South Court bungalow to build what is now generally known as the Jinnah House. In the meantime, he had made his home in Little Gibbs Road, higher up on Malabar Hill (Ali 2018).

He naturally consulted the leading architect of Bombay, Claude Batley to build the new mansion. Batley recalls that Quaid-i-Azam asked for "a big reception room, a big verandah, and big lawns, for garden parties". He appointed people from different social backgrounds to put the house together including a Muslim clerk of works, a Hindu plumber, an English builder, and Italian marble workers. "Jinnah insisted on choosing the colours of the marble for the terrace and standing by when the pieces of stone were fitted, much to the annoyance of the Italian who was doing the work", said Mr. Batley. "He was most correct in his ideas", he added (Bolitho 2007, 71-76).

Vikas Dilawari, a conservation architect, notes that the entrance gate, internal court and arcade area of the Jinnah House feature an Islamic aesthetic resemblant of the Indo Deco style. The first floor, however, was designed in the modern style, also known as Art Deco, which mirrored the personal taste of the owner. Both comments are a nod to the medley of Claude Batley and Jinnah's vision for the house. Jinnah House, a magnificent creation that emerged from the vision of Muhammad Ali Jinnah in 1936, was undoubtedly his most treasured possession of all the grand residences scattered across Delhi, Lahore, and Karachi (Dahiya 2021).



Jinnah moved into his new house in 1940, the same year the news of a separate country for the Muslims was announced. The house then witnessed the departure of Jinnah to Pakistan on 7th August 1947, a week before the bloody massacre of the partition. While the wounds of partition were still fresh, sometime after 1947, Jinnah even expressed a desire to return to Bombay and reside in Jinnah House once more. This longing, conveyed to the Indian high commissioner in Pakistan, is seen by many in Pakistan as evidence that Jinnah never anticipated the strained India-Pakistan relations that would unfold in the future (Raghavan 2019, 147).

Vikas Dilwari gives a timeline of the events that transpired post independence, highlighting that in 1948, the house was leased to the British High Commission. In 1997, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) sought to breathe new life into its timeworn chambers. They envisioned its transformation into the South Asian Centre for Arts and Culture (SAARC), a one-of-a-kind centre in South Asia. However, this vision didn't materialise due to legal dispute of ownership. The Indian National Trust for Cultural Heritage (Intach) was asked to lead the charge, however this measure too is at a standstill. Vikas Dilwari says that he envisions the Jinnah House as an SAARC sub-regional centre or as a significant conventional centre for bilateral talks. He also says that it could be a smaller version of the India International Centre, respecting the structure, Art Deco style, heritage aspects and its trees.

The concerns regarding the Jinnah House shouldn't be viewed entirely through the lens of ownership. Its metaphorical value is far deeper. Jinnah House, standing today remains a silent sentinel to a past of ambitious fervour, holding within its walls the echoes of love, loss, and the pertinacious spirit of a man who shaped the destiny of nations.

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