**[On Quaid and heartbreak](https://www.dawn.com/news/1664954/on-quaid-and-heartbreak)**

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IN Bombay, 1929, one of the subcontinent’s top lawyers plunged into a prolonged cycle of grief. His political career was on the ropes, leaving him dejected enough to move back to London months later. Though the cause would never truly be clear, his wife had just been found dead in a hotel room after swallowing a fistful of sleeping pills. Their whirlwind romance had collapsed in a series of blazing conflicts. In one of her last letters to him before her death, she implored in words as poetic as they are moving: “Try and remember me beloved, as the flower you plucked, and not the flower you tread upon.”

Though greater writers than myself have come close, it’s impossible to fully unpack the beauty, pain and complexity in “the marriage that shook India”, as Sheela Reddy titled it. But a deeper understanding of the man that was Mohammad Ali Jinnah holds immense value for the people of the nation he founded. Amidst the many conflicting perspectives on his personality, what consistently seems to slip through the cracks is one that is strikingly human.

Stoic and reserved, Mr. Jinnah was known to have wept only twice in public — the funeral of his beloved wife Ruttie in 1929, and the last time he visited her grave in 1947. M.C. Chagla wrote of the former; “That was the only time when I found Jinnah betraying some shadow of human weakness. It’s not a well-publicised fact that as a young student in England it had been one of Jinnah’s dreams to play Romeo at The Globe. It is a strange twist of fate that a love story that started like a fairy-tale ended as a haunting tragedy to rival any of Shakespeare’s dramas.”

This haunting tragedy wasn’t just a tale of loss, either. Evidence suggests that Mr Jinnah was struck with the guilt of responsibility. He was 24 years older than Ruttie Petit, the daughter of a Parsi heir he had befriended long before her birth. She doted over him as ‘J’, accompanying him on holidays around the world, hosting grand balls in their mansion, and playing an integral role in crafting Mr Jinnah’s signature style. But her demanding nature proved too much for a man devoted in workaholic obsession to his political struggle. Things fell apart. Years after her death, he would confide in a friend, “She was a child; I shouldn’t have married her. It was my mistake”.

He wept only twice in public.

While no one can investigate the mind of the notoriously private Mr Jinnah, the years after Ruttie’s death proved to be the most difficult of his life. His movement struggling, he retreated from Indian politics to practise law in London. Hector Bolitho called this period “Jinnah’s years of order and contemplation, wedged in between the time of early struggle, and the final storm of conquest”. While the worst would pass and he’d return to triumph in 1934, it seems his grief would never fully subside. As Mr Jinnah’s chauffeur would later recount, even 12 years later he’d often wake in the dead of the night and order a large wooden chest to be opened. It contained her belongings. “He would gaze at them for long in eloquent silence. Then his eyes turn moisten…”

This softer side of Quaid-i-Azam is largely ignored. But the problem with elevating the greatest among us to the status of saints is that normal people cannot become saints. History books paint our heroes as men of unquestionable resolve. Superhuman levels of perseverance. The willingness to work endlessly in pursuit of their goals. And while that portrayal may be well intentioned, it’s a disservice to the depth of their character. Mr Jinnah was a hero not in spite of his flaws, but precisely because of his ability to push through them.

To paint him as devoid of those flaws is to deprive our children, and ourselves, of an invaluable source of inspiration. One plagued with grief, burdened with the weight of unimaginable guilt, and repeatedly confronted with the one thing he detested most — failure. Yet he never gave up hope. He surmounted impossible odds to change the face of the globe and make history forever. For the next generations, that sounds like a greater, and more relatable, role model than the expressionless monolith staring down at them from their textbook pages.

Remembering this side of the Quaid opens an honest conversation about the past, paving the way for deeper introspection on the present. Recently, a man jumped off the roof of a Karachi shopping mall. A video of his last moments is seared into my memory. It’s a story no longer uncommon. He’d been unemployed for years and struggling to feed a family. Every rising number in the inflation charts is countless lives impacted, every economic setback a precursor to a growing mental health crisis. For many struggling through dark times, the little things matter, and to know that even the greatest among us faced familiar struggles is powerful. When in the dead of night, they too find themselves gazing out in eloquent silence, may the memory of a resilient man help sow their wounds.

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