

at pluralism

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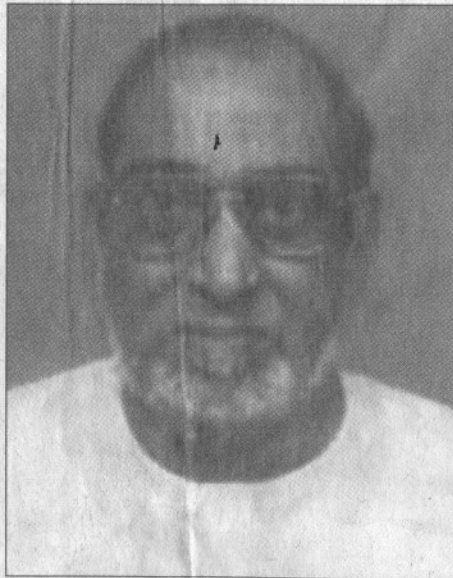
Pakistani counterpart, which is has a hawkish streak?

A. They are not extremists or hawkish, particularly the ones outside the Kashmir valley. There are two JIs: one in Kashmir and the other outside Kashmir. BY their own claims, they are two separate organizations. The Indian Ji talks about *Ikamat-e-Deen*, and do not target the establishment of a Islamic government. After the Babri Mosque incident, they accepted secular democracy and formed the Secular Democratic Front.

Q. Pakistanis are very emotional about Kashmir. How the Indian Muslims react to the happenings in the valley?

A. As far as Muslim intellectuals are concerned, they do not support the cause of separation of Kashmir from India. They think like the rest of the Indians. On the contrary, they

think, with a few exceptions here and there, that Kashmir is a symbol of Indian secularism. Kashmir is the only Muslim-majority state in India. There are Muslim-majority districts in India, but



ASGHAR ENGINEER: Different views

not a state. They feel proud of having a Muslim-majority state in India.

Q. How do they look at the armed struggle in the valley?

A. There are different views. I can tell you about mine. I oppose the armed struggle. I do not support violence for any cause. I strongly believe that Islam's fundamental message is peace, not violence.

Q. What about all the battles that featured the Holy Prophet?

A. These *ghazwaat* were forced on the Holy Prophet. He never initiated any battle by himself. He had to defend the entire city of Medina from the non-believers of Mecca. Quran's injunction is also very clear: Fight those who fight you. That means a Muslim should never be an aggressor. Muslims should not start any war, battle or violent incident. Violence is the last measure in certain circumstances. It should never be the general rule.

As far as my study of Quran goes, peace is more fundamental in Islam than war. Many Muslims think that Jihad is more fundamental. I

would like to explain that the word Jihad has not been used in the Quran in the sense of war. It has been used in the sense of making utmost efforts for spreading the good and containing the evil. For war, there is another word in Quran i.e. Qital.

Q. But the Jihadis can claim that they are actually defending themselves from the atrocities of the Indian army.

A. Let's understand things clearly. We are living in a democratic age in a democratic country where you have certain rights. Defence against what? If you exercise your democratic rights peacefully, no one will unleash any violence against you. I am not giving any certificate to the Indian army. If you commit a small measure of violence, the state can commit hundred times more violence. Citizens can never match state power. Whenever citizens have used violence, they have faced much greater degree of violence. So, you must use all democratic avenues to settle your grievances. And, by the way, all grievances are never settled. Some will always remain.

In any case, Kashmiris alone don't have grievances in India. When some Kashmiri militants tried to meet me and get our support, I told that it was not possible. 'Why have you taken to violence?' I asked them. 'We tried to solve our problems. We failed and

picked up our guns. There is no electricity in Kashmir. In winter, we shiver. There is no employment. How long will we wait for such things?' I asked them if only Kashmir had problems like unemployment and power shortages! In UP, usually there is no power during the scorching summer. Should they also take to guns? Should all the unemployed in India take to guns?

Q. What do you think of the element of suicide bombing?

A. I totally disagree with that. First, suicide is un-Islamic. Second, a suicide bomber not only he takes his own life, but those of scores of other people as well, and they are almost always innocent people. How could they be true Muslims? I would not consider such person even a nominal Muslim. Your fight is with the state. Why are you killing innocent people? In Bombay, some Muslim youths killed 16 people in a local train. Is it Islam? Islam gives you the spiritual strength to fight against the mighty by your will, not by sword or bombs.

Q. To what extent the Pakistani perception is true that Indian Muslims are a terribly oppressed lot?

A. There are prejudices against Muslims. Violence breaks out here and there. Communal rights have taken place in India. But things are more complex. No government

It's all about

'The Pakistani perception of the Indian Muslims being an oppressed lot is an overdrawn picture. They do have problems, but no government in India has ever denied fundamental rights to the Muslims,' argues Asghar Ali Engineer

ASGHAR Ali Engineer, the renowned Islamic scholar from India, believes there is no clash between Islam and secularism, the latter being a

much misunderstood word in the Muslim world.

Born on March 10, 1940, a graduate in civil engineering, Asghar was trained in Islamic theology, *tafsir* (commentary on the Holy Quran), Islamic Jurisprudence and Hadith. He speaks seven languages — English, Urdu, Hindi, Arabic, Persian, Gujarati and Marathi.

With more than 40 books to his credit, Asghar writes frequently on issues of current interest in leading Indian publications. He was awarded the National Communal Harmony Award for his efforts to promote inter-religion dialogue in India.

Asghar Engineer was recently in Islamabad where *Dawn Magazine* spoke to him on a broad range of subjects. The following are excerpts:

Q. Secularism is a dirty word in the Muslim world. Why?

A. With the exception of Indonesia, all Islamic states perceive secularism as anti-Islam, and believe that the two cannot co-exist. This is an extremely misleading conception. There is no clash between the two. Our reli-

By Mohammad Sher

gious scholars acknowledged and admitted the importance of secularism, and opposed the two-nation theory. In their opinion, the state could have become composite through secularism.

Islam is based on certain values. Islam is about showing respect to all human beings irrespective of their religion. It is not that you should respect only Muslims and hold others in contempt. Quran stresses pluralism. If Allah so willed, he could have created only one community. But He didn't do that. Why? So that He could test us.

In India, Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) has set up a Secular Democratic Front, and, mind you, they all are faithful Muslims, and will not deviate a millimetre from Shariat. But still they accept secularism. So, there is no clash between Islam and secularism, or Islam and any other religion. Because, in the Indian context, secularism is not atheism.

Q. Is the Indian Jamaat-e-Islami different from its