

It's all about pluralism

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has ever denied constitutional rights to the Muslims. All rights that are enjoyed by the Hindus are available to the Muslims. Violence can take place anywhere. But thousands of Hindus side with the Muslims. They fight for their rights. All the Hindus cannot be blamed. I work with the Hindus for communal harmony. I could not have continued without their support. The Pakistani perception is an overdrawn picture. You see, the Indian President happens to be a Muslim.

Q. But isn't he called a show-boy?

A. Well, it is not an ordinary thing to be the president of India. It is something if Muslims have a place of honour. Sometimes, symbols are also indicative of substance. I am not saying that the Muslims have no problem. They do have problems. The sense of insecurity happening in Gujarat was unthinkable. It was a carnage. I am continuously working in Gujarat for restoring communal harmony. I have covered all the riots in India since the first in Jabalpur in 1961.

Q. What are the reasons behind such riots?

A. Riots don't take place because of religion. They take place because of politics. This is a political problem, not a religious problem. So far, no one has denied religious freedom in India. Even when Shiv Sena came

to power in Maharashtra, Muslims continued to pray on the roadside. Shiv Sena made a lot of hue and cry saying that the Muslims block the road, but in their five-year term, they never banned the Muslim activity. We must try to grapple with the reality, and the reality is very complex. We must see it in totality.

Q. What do you think of Bal Thakaray?

A. He is a rabid militant who incites the Hindus for taking their votes. All secular Hindus oppose Bal Thakaray and Narindar Modi.

Q. How do you view the blasphemy laws in Pakistan?

A. As a Muslim and as a student of Islam, I don't consider the death penalty on blasphemy as the correct thing, keeping in view the teachings of compassion in Islam, and the behaviour of the Holy Prophet. Such a sentence has not been mentioned in the Quran. There are some incidents that quoted in Hadith literature, but, as I see it, they basically relate to sedition than blasphemy.

As far as the Prophet himself was concerned, we, the Muslims, consider him as the 'mercy for the world', and, that being so, he could never take someone's life just because some personal insult.

This blasphemy law is basically political. Certain sections of Muslims want to assert their power by legislating in this manner. It

women.

Aurora Murabayashi is one such person, a source of great motivation for Pakistanis and the diplomatic community. Wife of the first secretary at the political section, at the Embassy of Japan, she spent her time in community work during her three years stay in the Capital. Working all by herself but at the same time encouraging others, she took upon herself of helping the small communities in and around Islamabad. By holding weekly scrabble game sessions and English language classes at her residence where everyone donates money; she raised funds to support a school for street children in Rawalpindi and a hospital. A victim of the church bomb blast in the diplomatic enclave, the incident, rather than making her bitter, changed her for the better. Aurora underwent some major surgeries and still has some sharpens left in her body that cannot be removed. Always active and social, the incident, she says, has made her a much stronger person and taught her the 'value the life'. "I believe in God I became more appreciative of my friends who helped me. To appreciate the efforts of those who helped her all along, she hosted a dinner last week to say good-bye. Aurora returns home, leaving many Pakistani women and children with happy memories. ■

world. The world thinks that Pakistani Muslims have no tolerance. And what is the need of blasphemy law in Pakistan? The gross misuse of this law is taking place against the Muslims. Even indirect inferences are drawn and the accused is arrested under blasphemy laws, and the judges passes the death sentence under public pressure. Is this an Islamic country? I don't think so!

Q. To wind it up, how can relations between India and Pakistan be improved?

A. There are problems between the two countries. But this does not mean both should consider each other an enemy and go violent. We must establish goodwill between the people of the two countries. We should have trade and more interaction with each other. We should liberalize visa regimes so that more and more people could visit the two countries. We should not think that every citizen is a spy. Intelligence people are spies. They work with a certain mindset. But why punish the ordinary citizens who want to meet their relatives?

Unfortunately, both the countries are following a strict visa regime and harassing innocent citizens. That should not be the case. We should inculcate a state of friendship, and restore all the links. Snapping the links has already caused a lot of harassment to the people. ■