

The struggle within

By Kuldip Nayar

Kashmir

SAJJAD Lone, leader of the People's Conference, which is an ally of the Hurriyat Conference, has come to realise that the bullet cannot defeat the ballot.

He has thrown his hat in the ring from the Baramulla Lok Sabha constituency, north Kashmir. This is the stronghold of his father, Abdul Ghani Lone, who was killed by militants nearly a decade ago.

To argue that Sajjad has returned to the 'right path' is to misinterpret him, because many from among the youth chose the gun when they found that both New Delhi and Srinagar had once again rigged the 1987 state elections. His faith in the Election Commission has been revived since it held a free and fair poll for the 2009 state assembly only four months ago.

He found how some 68 per cent of the electorate queued up before the polling booths in severe winter to cast its vote despite the Hurriyat's call for a boycott. Sajjad too had lent his voice. He has felt from then onwards that there was a message in what the voters did. They wanted to convey that they were sick of violence and were looking for normality in their lives.

Whether Sajjad wins or loses is not the point at issue. The point is the futility of violence. He has openly advocated peace. By not giving the call for a boycott of the Lok Sabha election, the Hurriyat has also backed him in his initiative to take the protest to the Indian parliament. It was reportedly an arduous task for Sajjad's brother Balal, a member of the Hurriyat executive, to convince the Hurriyat to keep quiet. But he won because the Hurriyat has come to the end of the road and does not know how to move forward. Yet, in a positive way the decision has prepared the ground for a serious talk on Kashmir with Delhi after the new government takes over.

It will be a mistake, however, to believe that Sajjad, if elected, would be India's voice in Kashmir. It may be the other way round. He has himself clarified that he would be Kashmir's voice in India. He may wake up the slumbering Delhi which does not know how to retrieve the valley from the alienation in which the people live.

ideology, however egalitarian, is tainted with blood. They may have set up a 'free corridor' in 17 districts, but they know that the armed struggle will lead only to a short-lived triumph achieved somewhere in the interior by gunning down members of the police.

Violence has taken another shape in Pakistan. The Taliban is not today's creation, nor is their violence. Martial law administrators in Islamabad have been their father. They used the Taliban first to try and gain 'strategic depth' by dominating Afghanistan and then to needle India in Kashmir. Now the Taliban is not under their control.

General Pervez Musharraf, who has drawn attention to the serious situation in Pakistan, connived at the activities of the Taliban when he was in power. Even the Americans doubted his bona fides. What credibility does he have when he ran with the hare and hunted with the hounds?

The democratic government of Asif Ali Zardari should have dealt with the Taliban more firmly. But it lacks strength and stamina. His political rival, Nawaz Sharif, should have volunteered help. But what surprises me is the nonchalant manner in which the Pakistani leaders are trying to face the Taliban. It looks as if they are sympathetic to the Taliban's philosophy. Otherwise, the Pakistan National Assembly's resolution to support different religious affiliations only stokes the fire of bigotry. One member has warned them that they are playing with the future of Pakistan, but his lone voice was drowned in the 'yes' of the majority.

I am not surprised over the minimal line of resistance which members of the National Assembly and others are adopting. When I met ANP leader Asfandyar Wali Khan in Islamabad after the Swat valley agreement, he said this was the best course available but assured me there would be "no more". Already Taliban militants from the Swat valley have moved to Buner district, only 100 kilome-

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I wish Yasin Malik, leader of the independent Kashmir movement, and other Hurriyat members had accepted my suggestion many years ago. I had told them to capture the state assembly through elections and raise their demand from the floor of the house. Their reply was that they did not want to sign the nomination papers which wanted a candidate to avow loyalty to India. Surprisingly, it has never struck them that the passport form they sign requires them to say that they are Indian nationals.

What Sajjad has tried to convey is that violence either by the state or the militants is not a solution to the problems faced by Kashmiris. Thousands of people have died in vain. There are still many separatists who favour the resumption of the insurgency. Already the Dukhtare Kashmir, a militant women's organisation, has given a call to denounce persons like Sajjad. They do not realise that violence has in no way brought them nearer to their demands.

In fact, the gun has become such a dangerous tool to achieve ends that it can set fire to all that the region wants to protect. Violence is destructive by nature and suppresses free expression.

In the elections held so far in India, the Naxalites have killed some 15 people because they do not believe in democracy. Their

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tres from Islamabad. They have refused to vacate the area under their occupation.

Religion is a private affair and it has nothing to do with politics, so said Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, founder of Pakistan. Jinnah did not want to mix religion with politics. I heard him in early August 1947, while I was still in Pakistan, saying that you can go to temples or mosques, the state would never interfere in what faith you pursue.

The National Assembly's resolution runs counter to what he advocated. It has given the Taliban a shot in the arm, encouraging them to demand the imposition of Sharia law not merely in the Swat valley but all over Pakistan. No one in Pakistan objects to the Sharia. But the Taliban have a different view and it is contrary to the spirit of Islam and its values.

Muslims can adjust their faith to the changes of time and history. The spiritual problems are the crucial ones. As Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) once told his followers on returning from battle, "You have to come back from the lesser to the greater struggle." They asked, "What is the greater struggle, O Messenger of God?" And he replied, "The struggle within." ■

The writer is a leading journalist based in Delhi.