

JEHAD IS TO BE UNDERSTOOD IN ITS TRUE SPIRIT

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

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PROF. KHURSHID AHMAD



Interview of the Month
Islam and the West

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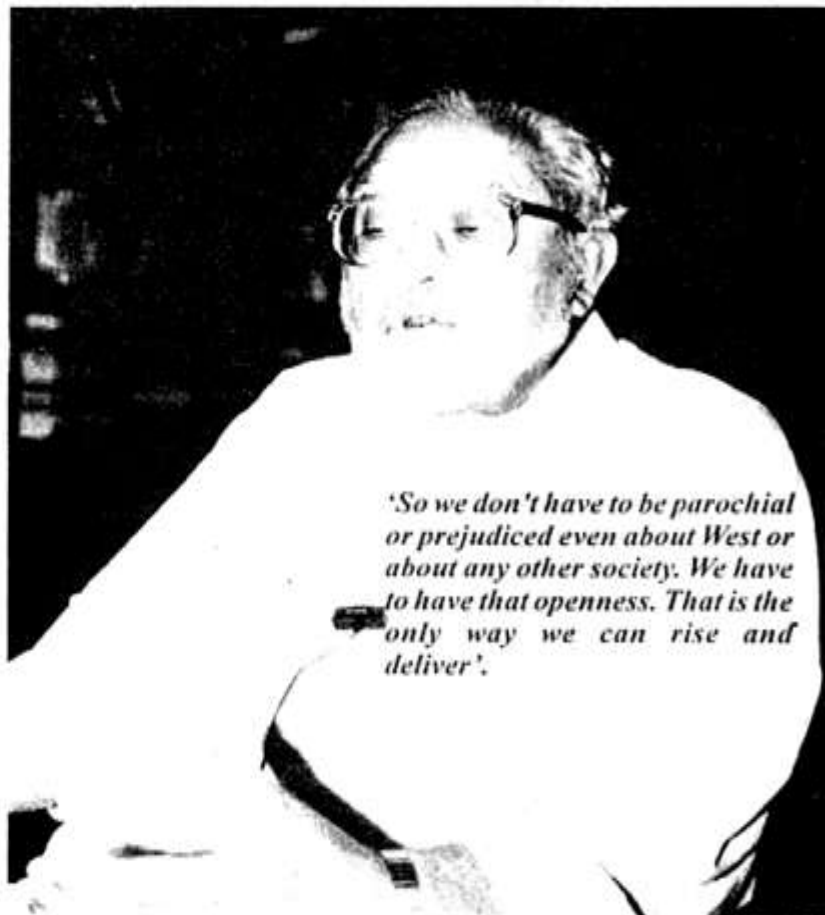
An exclusive interview with Senator Prof Khurshid Ahmed

Professor Khurshid Ahmed is the author of several books. He is a renowned economist, a veteran politician and the head of the Institute of Policy Studies -- a powerful think tank based in Islamabad. 'The Voice' talked to him to know his views on the ongoing tussle between Islamic societies and the US and some of the issues confronting Pakistan.

by syed shafiq abbas

Q: A lot has been said about conflict between Islam and the West. How do you view it?

A: Tensions are there, even rivalries are there. Conflict and potential conflict do exist. But we summarize two things before we examine it. First when we talk about Islam and the



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Ummah, which is not confined to Pakistan.

The Arab world or even the 57 Muslim countries. When we talk of *Ummah*, it exists in all parts of the world including America and Europe. Secondly, whether we like it or not we cannot run away from history. The last 700-800 years from the period of crusades in particular, have been the periods of confrontation, which in my view were primarily one-sided. Then the colonial era during which for the first time in Islamic history Muslims lost power. From the advent of Medina till the end of the Nineteenth Century, Muslims have played the role of important power. The 19th Century saw their decline and beginning with Twentieth Century they were no more a major actor on global arena. So we have to keep these two things in mind. I am one of those who do not believe the conflict but who believe that conflict is not the correct way. That it is not inevitable. In fact the

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where we have no option but to resolve our differences through peaceful means -- through dialogue.

War is not an option to resolve political or civilization issues. It becomes obsolete, although at the moment conventional war remains a possibility. Through nuclear deterrence a very important factor has been introduced to local affairs that would lead to making war redundant. So I firmly believe it is a question of dialogue, contact and communication. The West also has to realize the fact that no superpower has remained superpower forever. And we have seen this at least in two cases. Britain was a superpower, the most important superpower, which has now shrunk to a cluster of islands where one does not see the sun rise even for weeks. Second is the brake up of the former Soviet Union, which was a contemporary superpower.

We are weak today, economically, politically, militarily and scientifically. Yet the presence of 1.3 billion (Muslim) people is a very important factor. We occupy strategic positions on the globe in addition to energy resources, financial resources and mineral resources. A dozen Muslim countries have reached medium stage of economic development and industrialization where they are in a position to emerge as an economic force. And Pakistan is a nuclear power while Iran is heading in the same direction. As far as technology is concerned, we are on the thresholds. Keeping this picture in mind, the only option for us and for them (West) is dialogue and even I would say cooperation because humanity's future is at stake. There are problems shared by all human beings the world over. The 9/11 incidents have a clear message - that people around the world, Muslims non-Muslims, Europeans, Africans, Asians, Australians and even the Americans, have come out against war, against unilateral use of force, against unilateral regime

change and against discarded philosophy of preemptive strike.

So there is a commonality of interest regarding problems. From Seattle to Concoon, you may have had seen how people from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and political background had become a joint spectrum of protest. In view of this scenario, I feel the future would be a better opportunity. Through dialogue, communication, cooperation and through a processes of justice and fair play problems could be resolved in an agreeable fashion. And that is what the democracy is all about.

Q: A particular class argue the 'conflict between reasons,' scientific approach, a thinking based on reasoning and religion -- a major factor behind our problems. Your comments!

A: It's a misconception. Yes, under the impact of European colonial rule a group of people did emerge in Muslims societies in the name of modernization, humanism who would like to copy Western values and dub religion an obstacle -- particularly Islam which unlike Christianity does not believe, i.e. Christianity, in dividing life into compartments.

Islam's basic philosophy is that 'Allah is Supreme.' Allah is kind enough to give us our freedom, discretion and opportunities. This is subject only to certain moral norms, behavior and boundaries within which we have all the freedom. Islam is a secular religion as well as it addresses secular issues. It is concerned with prosperity, development, justice and caring for the poor and needy. So we are seeking good in this world and the good hereafter. From that viewpoint secularism is encompassed in Islam, but it has been futurised and given a moral orientation. Regarding other dimensions, yes there is a degree of extremism in our society, as witnessed everywhere else, in other

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non-Muslim societies are.

Extremism is also prevalent in secular societies. We are witnessing a worst form of extremism in today's America. The US is currently been ruled by extremists, who give no importance to the voice of their people and the people around the world.

Fundamentalism is not our term. In fact it is a term coined in the American history in the late 19th and early 20th Century, when a group of evangelical thinkers went to the extremes in use of violence in politics. Now they try to implicate others, specifically Muslims. Islam does not encourage violence or discount reason. The beauty of Islam lies in the fact that it is built on reason. Science had been the discovery of Muslims. To assume reason and science as in one category and 'deen' in the other is mere ignorance or confusion. Our 'deen' is based on science but it is a science in its proper prospective. Science also needs certain moral and

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universal values as a framework otherwise it can become humanity's adversary. Wisdom comes from experience also but it comes from divine revelation and the values given by religion and within their framework reason, science and technology have to play their

respective roles. Look at the Islamic concept of knowledge. The first Quranic verse says: "Read in the name of Allah, who has created." So Creation is a 'physical word'; Alaaq is 'biological word' and Qalam is 'technology.' All of them are integrated into the divine revelation and wisdom. These are the instruments integral to Islamic approach towards knowledge and civilization. These are no two parallel extremes. In Islam reason and intellect, science and experiments and revelation and eternal values are fused together in an integrated entirety. That is the beauty of Islam.

Q: Even if we do not consider West as an adversary, competition would be the right word to explain positions of the two sides. Our preachers are still confined to teaching how to perform ablution and we take refuge in the word contentment to avoid competition in material pursuits; science, technology, IT (with the West). Why?

A: Its an important question! Things are not well in their entirety among the *Ummah*. Islam's basic value has been struggle. The key concept of Islam is *Istaqlas* which means human beings are God's viceregents and their responsibility was that of stewardship to create and to fashion history. *Istaqlas* means *Ilm* (knowledge) effort, sacrifice and the struggle. Jihad is not just brandishing of swords. It means struggle and strive. In fact contentment is very misplaced because in Islam contentment is the natural result of struggle. The emphasis is on effort. "Everyone would have only what is he strives for, and it is your efforts that is going to be seen." We should not be critical of



everything that is in the West. No society can prosper if it lacks goodness. But we have to see the balance between good and bad. If anybody thinks that immorality, loss of family values, illegitimate children, HIV and AIDS are a Western civilization, they are mistaken as these are only the results of their (West's) follies. There is lot in education, science and technology, organization, good-governance, rule of law, respect of law, democracy, accepting liberty and tolerance that we need. In this context Islam makes beautiful observation -- Wisdom is the lost property of a Muslim, from wherever he or she may get it. Acquire what is good and leave what is bad. So we don't have to be parochial or prejudiced even about West or about any other society. We have to have that openness. That is the only way we can rise and deliver.

Q: With regard to Iraq, there were more protest demonstrations in the West than the Islamic world. Rich West had been more open and fair to our people instead of rich Muslims (i.e. Arabs) who refuse to

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absorb even Muslims from other countries. How do you interpret it?

A: The Muslim world situation was slightly different and has to be understood in the context of overall condition obtaining in it. In Pakistan you had about six 'million' marches on the Iraq issue and they were real million marches. In Turkey, there were demonstrations to an extent that they blocked even normal movement of American military there. According to the Gallop Polls, 92% of the people protested in Turkey and 95% in most of the Muslim states including Egypt. But the problem is that in many Muslim countries there is no freedom. In Egypt students stage demonstrations in university campuses and when they came out they were arrested. Even in Bahrain and Kuwait whose rulers support America, demonstrations were staged and the authorities detained considerable number of protesters. Almost everywhere in the Muslim world between 80-90% people were against the US war on Iraq. Unfortunately we (the Muslims) are still under a feudal, monarchic despotic system. There are very few Muslim countries where there is freedom and democratic systems in function. That is the reason behind this suffocation and lack of people's participation in anti-US demos. Regarding tolerance in Western societies, there are certain virtues and acceptance of variety is one of them. I have been visiting Europe and America from mid 1960s, since over forty years. I have seen how racial discrimination, ethnic discrimination and color discrimination is there. Today look into the services, in police, in media you find how minorities are discriminated. As far the Arab world is concerned, the royal families are not ready to treat others on parity basis. Even senior officers are not invited to the weddings of the royal class. This is obnoxious and not in line with Islam. But if you go to the people there, even

the common man in the Arab world, welcomes you. Go to any mosque for Ifar or go to any house, they would welcome you. Today we are fighting for labour rights around the world as guaranteed by the I.L.O, but labours are brazenly denied all rights in present-day Arab world. This is not in conformity with the Quranic instructions. It is just the elite who violate the Quranic charter of freedoms. Otherwise if you go to the people in villages, you would find the implementation of Allah's commandments.

Q: Professor Sahib, the word Jihad is under discussion these days. What are the situations where Jihad becomes a compulsion? Also bids are in progress to obliterate this particular phenomenon of Islam.

A: Any attempt to scrap the word Jihad is doomed. Quran has used this term not once but hundreds of times. Jihad is a part of our religion but we have to understand what Jihad is. Those who are critical or upset by Jihad should know that the term war is part of international diplomacy. There is a famous saying of a German international affairs expert that 'war is diplomacy with a difference.' If war is a part of the international law, if war is part of UN charter, why we are so confused or apologetic about Jihad. Jihad is not a simple war. It is a very comprehensive term. Literally its means to strive and struggle. The first target of this struggle is one's own self -- to reform morally, ideologically even physically. Jihad is also through mouth, which means spreading the message of Islam and sharing it with others. And it is through the power of the pen. But if there is a situation that is called 'war situation' in international law, then you have to use force. That is why all international laws accept the doctrine of 'defensive war.' Jihad applies where there is oppression; where human liberties are

suppressed and denied. Then of course the need arises to help the oppressed and that too not unnecessarily by sword. Sword is for sure the last option, nobody can obliterate it (Jihad) and we have no reason to be apologetic about it. Jihad means discipline. It is not just the warfare. Even in war Islam is the only religion that stresses what is now part of Geneva Convention that you have to differentiate between belligerent and non-belligerent while fighting a war. That those who are not fighting you, must be spared. You cannot kill people in their homes, in their churches or mosques. You cannot even destroy vegetation, trees etc. Weapons of mass destruction, which do not differentiate between belligerent and non-belligerent, are not the invention of Muslim societies. So Islam has a discipline and war is

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not just a madness that somebody has provoked you and you just go and kill others. Not at all.

Q: It is said that Arabs talk about the Arabs first and the Islamic world later. In Pakistan we are more concerned about the problems of Muslims anywhere in

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the world, but we forget the plight of our own people. Your comments.

A: Islam does not mean mere sword brandishing in support of anyone, anywhere in the world. It means setting your priorities in the right direction. In such priorities first thing is build yourself, take care of yourself, your faith, your knowledge, your morality, your skills and your capacity to help yourself and others. If it is there then subject to the availability of opportunity, Islam wants us to be concerned about not only Muslims everywhere but even non-Muslims who are suffering. It is in the International Labour Organization (ILO) charter that poverty anywhere is a threat to prosperity everywhere. What does it mean? You are not concerned for

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yourself, you are concerned for others that is what Islam says. Islam does not mean a small circle, Islam is the largest circle and within that circle

come all priorities of knowledge, of food, of hunger etc. The Muslim *ummah* is an extension of us. We have to differentiate between the secular rulers who rule Muslim lands and who are against the very concept of an *ummah* and the people who want to be the *ummah*. If we take care of ourselves, fulfill our responsibilities and subject ourselves to a discipline regime, we can set the things right. Look at the scenario in Pakistan. Just 500 families, who are hardly more than 50,000 peoples, have been managing everything in the country -- politics, army, civil services, foreign services, bureaucracy. They are reshuffling powers among themselves. One brother is in army, the other in this party, another in that party, one in bureaucracy, the other in police; and they are just coalescing. That is the real problem with us.

Q: Your party's position on LFO!

A: No individual has the right to amend the country's constitution. Even the Supreme Court and General Pervez Musharraf have no right to do so. It's the sole prerogative of Parliament. We can accept martial laws as an exception, but we have to make a transition that is essential for giving legality to illegitimacy. The process is important and in this aspect the most important judgment is that of the Federal Court which use to be Supreme Court in 1955 when Ghulam Muhammad dissolved the Assembly invoking his right as representative of the crown while the Federal Court under the law of necessity justified his dissolution. But it was also said that the new constitution must come and be created. If this were not done the whole regime would have been illegal. So from that viewpoint there is a very valid point. The LFO is not all bad, neither it is all good; that is why MMA had differed with PPP and Muslim League (Nawaz). We have said that we are ready to examine it on merit. Out of 29 provisions, 20 are

acceptable even if we are not very happy with one or two; but they are tolerable and we don't want to create any problem. Nine are unacceptable but they can be made acceptable by reasonable changes, so that they can come in conformity with the basic structure and values of the constitution. So that is why we and other opposition parties agree on one point but there are other points which would be deliberated and that is why we have started negotiations. We have given the administration an opportunity, and the ball is now in its court. Although negotiations have been completed, there are 9 issues on which we have to develop consensus. The government has accepted the final draft it has reservations on three points. We have given the administration another chance so that the matter could be resolved in our nation's interest.

Q: What about reported split within the MMA?

A: Well, we have built this alliance with the commitment that Inshallah whatever sacrifices are needed we would offer, and whatever may be the problems, we would keep it intact. And I am sure it will remain together. Unfortunately, there are many agencies and the vested interests who are striving to divide the MMA. They tried it with the PPP, PM, N and others. It is a dirty way of horse-trading. Now they are targeting MMA and I am hopeful our brothers in the alliance will see the game. They must realize that by standing with the MMA everybody gains and anybody who leaves it will lose. It is correct that the Jamaat-e-Islami and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam are bigger components of the alliance; and we have to be fair in our own dealings towards the smaller units. If JUI (S) has a genuine complaint, the alliance should redress it. We think MMA is good for democracy and the nation at large. It must be allowed to play its binding role. ■