

Journal of Peace Studies Vol. 5, Issue 1, January-February, 1998

India and Islamic world
Edited by Riyaz Punjabi and A.K. Pasha

Book Review by Saleem Kidwai*

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Islam has the second largest following in the world. It is the principal religion in a region that extends from Morocco on the Atlantic through North and East Africa and into sub-Saharan Africa, across the broad expanse of central and South-West Asia to the headwaters of the Indus in the tableland of Tibet, and southward to the Java sea. There are about one billion Muslims all over the world who constitute majority in about 50 states. They control most of the oil and occupy world's most strategic areas where politics is enmeshed with religion. The end of the cold war has even intensified the rise of religious fundamentalism in Muslim countries. All over the Muslim world, from Algeria, Morocco, Libya and Egypt to Iran, Pakistan and Indonesia, there has been a persistent undercurrent of religious revival, taking the form of an aggressive political ideology. The media and academic circles, more often than not, have been referring to this phenomenon as Islamic fundamentalism.

Senator Larry Presler during his visit to India in early nineties, portrayed a frightful picture of an Islamic fundamentalist grouping emerging on India's vicinity in the wake of the disintegration of the erstwhile Soviet Union. Presler's argument was that after the demise of international communism, Islam is presenting itself with renewed vigour as the sole ideological alternative in the vast land mass stretching from Kazakhstan in Central Asia to the Atlantic coast of Morocco. The significant point is that the Presler thesis was propounded on the Indian soil. Consequently, some Indian commentators and columnists started sending alarming signals: "Beware of the Islamic Republics of Central Asia. These Muslims are likely to gang up with their co-religionists in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey and endanger the security of India." There is a general tendency to lump together all these Muslim states as one entity.

Interaction between India and the so-called Islamic world is a very interesting theme. It raises a number of questions. Is there any such thing called the Islamic World? Is Islam really advancing? Is there any substance in the theory that Islamic fundamentalists are ganging up and posing a threat solely from the perspective of a security threat? How far and to what extent the recent developments have affected Indian policies towards the Muslim countries of the world? What are the problems and prospects? The book under review seeks to find answer to these and many more similar questions. It is a collection of papers presented at a seminar organized by *India and Islamic World Study Group*, New Delhi. The rationale of the Seminar as reflected in the volume was to deliberate on many a concept associated with Muslim societies and politics around the world. The issues raised and discussed in the seminar have acquired significance in the post-cold war period. Containing fifteen papers, the study focuses on the multi-faceted dimension of India's relations with the Islamic world.

The first two papers by M.S. Agwani and Zafar Imam examine in detail India's relations with the Islamic world in general. It is rightly argued that the Islamic world is neither a monolith, nor is it on the way of being one. The term Islamic world is more of a rhetoric than a reality. Muslim states have diverged more often than they converged. They are divided by national rivalries, territorial disputes, sectarian differences, economic conditions and last but not the least, international alignments. The Islamic world is dominated by nation states where the concept of 'nation' is more geographical and ethnic than religious in nature as well as in manifestation. Every Muslim state guards its sovereignty zealously. None of them is prepared to shed a whit of it. Each one is determined to preserve its own identity. All attempts to unite Muslims under a single political banner proved futile. Various Muslim groupings such as OIC and RCD are fragile. Most of the Muslim states have much greater economic dealings with non-Muslim countries across the globe than with the Muslim countries. Muslim countries have often allied their foreign policy goals with those of non-Muslim states as evidenced by their covert or overt alliances with the US and the Soviet Union during cold war period. They conclude by laying stress on a realistic view of the Islamic world and suggest that India should shed its obsession about the Islamic world being too keen to gang up against New Delhi. Certain developments like demolition of Babri Mosque and turmoil in Kashmir can and do create problems they would never set a pattern in India's relationship with the Islamic world.

Articles by Kalim Bahadur, S.K. Singh and A.K. Pasha deal with OIC, GCC and India. This relationship between international organisations and a sovereign state is very complex. It is a relationship between two units, which are dissimilar in several respects. The organic and ideological bases of both these units are patently incongruent. Yet the diverse variables of international relations have had their impact on the attitude and policy of the two towards each other. All these papers closely examine Pakistan's efforts to use the OIC vis-à-vis the larger international community for the purpose of putting India on the defensive in the debate on the Kashmir question. During the last few years, Pakistan has succeeded in securing, from the OIC, resolution particularly on Kashmir, according to its own political interests. It is rightly pointed out that there is no consistency among the stands of the OIC member-states. They tend to use one set of semantics while speaking in the OIC, quite another set of expressions when they speak in the UN, a third set of words in the NAM and in the G-77, and a fourth kind of language when talking to India bilaterally. Thus, they are extremely flexible and India should be as flexible while formulating its foreign policy options towards these countries at the bilateral level, without taking their deliberations in these plural forums too seriously. It is not necessary to react to them with any exaggerated sensitivity. Among all the GCC states, Saudi Arabia is the key country, India must strive to maintain close ties with it, for a variety of reasons: overwhelming Saudi influence in OIC, Saudi influence over GCC states and due to the location of Muslim holy places, coupled with Saudi financial muscle and massive oil reserves. Time has come for India to approach GCC countries much more seriously than has been the case so far.

Banshidhar Pradhan, Jajati Pattnaik, Jagdish P. Sharma and Akhtarul Wasay in their papers throw light on India's bilateral relations with the PLO, Iran and Egypt. The discerning shift in Indo-PLO relations effecting a corresponding change in Indo-Israel relations forms the major thrust of Pradhan's paper. It is argued that India's policy shift occurred with the changed broader international framework, which was mostly guided by ideological considerations despite the claims to the contrary. By establishing full diplomatic ties with Israel, India did not become anti

PLO but certainly it has developed an apathy towards it. India's message to the PLO seems to be "look-after-yourself-now." In brief, India has adopted a policy of no policy towards the PLO. Pattnaik while analyzing Indo-Iran relations refers to the strategic diplomatic support to India by Iran at the UNCHR and terms it very significant. That Iran could be persuaded to relax its avowed anti-India stance over the Kashmir issue, only shows the shifting levels of international relations, where the ideological stiffness of the earlier times is no more a constraint for the nation-states to pursue their own legitimate interests. Iran's consistent support to Pakistan over the Kashmir issue was a major stumbling block on way of a healthy Indo-Iranian relationship. The Iranian leadership realized that in the changed global context the call for creation of an independent Kashmir might have emotive value but no substantial advantage would accrue from any such eventual creation. The dramatic reversal of Iranian policies needs detailed analysis. It will require astute diplomatic acumen on India's part to inspire confidence of the Iranian leaders and turn it into a lasting and viable friendship. The two papers dealing with Indo-Egyptian relations highlight Nasser's role in checkmating Pakistan's Pan-Islamist approach. Egypt did not give outright support to India on Kashmir issue but adopted a neutral stand. One finds the mix up of religion and politics in the Arab world but Egypt has been an exception.

Saifuddin Soz in his presentation pleads that India should seek membership of the OIC. It is necessary to ward off adverse effects on India's position on various issues of domestic and international importance. He argues that without India and other significant Muslim minorities within its sphere, the OIC can never have credibility of a representative body.

Papers by Girjesh Pant and Mohamad Azhar examine at length the economic relations between India and the Islamic world. They analyze the trade, its import and export structures, the market share of OIC member states and India's competitors in OIC markets.

Shamsuddin and Warikoo in their contributions discuss India's policy responses towards Central Asian republics. They rightly point out that India has an advantage here because it has a role model of secular democracy to offer to them. Ahmad Mukarram in his interesting paper captioned "Indian Muslims and Kashmir: Response to Pakistani Propaganda", rightly maintains that Indian Muslims are a part of multi-ethnic and multi-religious Indian society. Therefore, their responses and reactions cannot be different from their other fellow citizens.

The book is a timely and valuable addition to the existing literature on the subject. All the papers are interesting, well-researched and thought provoking. They are brief enough for readers and scholars in a hurry. The contributors to the volume, coming from different branches of knowledge, enrich in their own way the thematic relevance of the book. The volume does not suffer from the general weakness of proceedings of the seminar because all these papers are revised and updated by their respective authors, in the light of discussion on them at the seminar. The book, thus, provides valuable insights into the complex inputs in India-Islamic World relations. It emphasizes the need to restructure India's policy in vital areas of cooperation, which are bound to increase in the years to come. It should be an essential reading for all those interested in various facts of the India-Islamic world relationship. It is hoped the research agenda proposed in the volume will get the attention it richly deserves.

