ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER AND HIS THOUGHTS: INTRODUCTION AND OVER-ALL ANALYSIS

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A B S T R A C T

Asghar Ali Engineer (1939-2013) is one of the modern scholars from India who has written extensively on Muslim issues. His writings revolve around the exploitation of Muslims in the hand of religious and political leaders, subjugation carried out on Muslim women in the society, compatibility of Islam with modern socio-economic and political concepts, and 21st-century thinking and lifestyle. The ongoing article discussed the life of Asghar Ali Engineer in brief and introduced some of his thoughts for the aforementioned topics. An overall analysis is presented in his thoughts as well. The article is qualitative in nature where data is collected from both primary and secondary sources.

A GLANCE AT ENGINEER'S LIFE

Asghar Ali Engineer (1939-2013) which is referred with the 'Engineer' in the latter part of this article is one of the famous, extensively published, liberal, and modern scholars from India. He was born in Salumbar, near Udaipur, in Rajasthan (Centre for Study of Society and Secularism (CSSS), n.d.). The surroundings in which he lived and brought up made him rethink the Islamic rituals people used to carry in their day to day lives. He belongs to a religious and affluent Ismaili Bohra community of the Shia sect. He graduated with a civil engineering degree from the University of Indore and served in his profession in Mumbai for almost twenty years (Centre for Study of Society and Secularism (CSSS), n.d.). His religious learning came through self-reading and from his father, Qurban Husain who was a

religious scholar and an 'Amil (local priest). Under his father, he studied Islamic sciences such as Tafsir, Hadith, Fiqh, and Tawil. He believed that a truly religious human will never accept injustice. He was against the blind surrendering and asserted that it sometimes leads to exploitation (Hunter, 2008).

The engineer felt sorry for what he has observed in his community where innocent and poor Muslims were being exploited by Syedna, who is considered the head priest of the Bohra community. Since he had gone through Islamic literature, he intended to change the face of his community and devoted himself to this cause. Therefore, firstly, he resigned from his white-colour job in the government in 1972 and started writing on problematic issues prevailed in the society and joined numerous organizations aiming to reform the society. Due to his activeness and continued effort for change, he faced several challenges from the established leadership of the community. He was assaulted and harmed physically (Centre for Study of Society and Secularism (CSSS), n.d.). However, due to the same reasons, he was awarded and appreciated by many. He earned Communal Harmony Award by the Government of India in 1997 and was presented with the Right Livelihood Award in 2004. One of his greatest achievement was he established the Institute of Islamic Studies in 1980 and the Centre for Study of Society and Secularism in 1993 through them, he promoted his ideas. His writing mainly discusses Muslim women's issues, modern economic and political systems, and communal and religious harmony. It appears he is influenced by different ideologies and personalities such as Marxism, Western liberalism, M'utazilite, Isma'īli rationalism, Iqbal, Gandhi, and Sayyed Ahmad Khan, etc. (Sikand, 2004).

OVERVIEW OF ENGINEER'S THOUGHTS

As mentioned above, the Engineer's main focus was to protect the exploitation of Muslims by the religious authority, where everything used to happen in the name of Islam including exploitation of women especially in Muslim society. He wanted to demonstrate that Islam is fully compatible with the modern socio-economic and political developments. Whatever the contradiction looks related to Islam and modern developments in the society, according to him is due to neglecting the core principles of Islam which is valid for all time and space. He believed that the problem is due to relying on medieval jurisprudence which emerged in its own specific time and space (Engineer, A Harmonious Marriage, 2013). He has written around 50 books and numerous articles on such issues.

According to the Engineer, there are two types of issues, faced by the Muslims in India. The first one includes illiteracy, poverty, and poor representation in the government and private sectors. In these areas, Muslims are more backward than the other communities. The low level of education of Muslims is mainly due to their financial condition. The second issue is confined within Muslim community, such as interference in Muslim personal Law by the authority, the problem of Muslim identity, struggle for minority status of Aligarh Muslim University, and negligence of the due

place of Urdu language (Engineer, 1985). These are the internal issues of the Muslim community which are time to time further multiplied and not resolved. In this way, the resources and energy of the Muslim community are spent in resolving such issues. Due to this, the Muslim community as a whole is unable to contribute to the development of society.

Engineer considered that the condition of Muslims clearly shows the failure of the leadership of Indian Muslims. The leaders are not able to resolve the issues of the community. Even he mentions that in pre-independence, the Muslim League's fourteen demands charter had no demand for the betterment of poor Muslims, and the League only struggled and fought for the representation of hierarchy Muslims. It only benefited none but the upper-class Muslim elites. Even Dr. Iqbal, the great philosopher, was ignored by Jinnah when he tried to draw his attention to the economic condition of common Muslims (Engineer, 1985). Therefore, some of his significant thoughts and ideas are presented below.

Liberation Theology
One of his most prominent idea which he has discussed repeatedly is that Muslims must develop a new theology compatible with modern time. This theology is named with liberation theology. According to him, the liberation theology deals with concrete reality increases vital knowledge and establishes a revolutionary framework for countering all types of dehumanization, fundamentalism creates utopia, invests in constant propaganda and dulls the minds of those who embrace its messages by making them feel full and superior to the Others (Taib, 2006). For such purpose, it is significant to analyze today's existing theology. Theology, as Engineer noted, provides powerful motivation for action upon this world. Thus, it needs to be divested from its present "ritualized, dogmatized and incomprehensibly metaphysical" forms, which only seeks to serve the interest of powerful establishments and not the masses (Taib, 2006).

In his book *Islam and Liberation Theology*, Engineer identified what he considered to be the transformative elements in Islam and how these could constitute a liberation theology for Muslims. According to him, there are four aspects to be found in any liberation theology: (1) primary concern for the here and now of human life and only then for the hereafter; (2) does not support the status quo which favors those who have as compared to those who do not; (3) plays a favorable role in the rights of the oppressed and dispossessed and provides powerful ideological support to these parts of society (Taib, 2006).

Engineer focused on the importance of the context in which the Qur'an was revealed. He suggested that the contextual interpretation of the Qur'an is important and believed that a legal declaration in the Qur'an and Islamic *Shariah* cannot be validated universally. Besides some basic values, these declarations were meant for the specific context of the 7th century Arabia, when all these pronouncements were made. Hence, to implement them in the contemporary world is not only outdated but it would also be against the Will of God. He argued that to apply some of the instructions, stated in the

Qur'an and the *Shariah* in our contemporary time, it is important to critically examine the social contextual background of the revealed *ayaths* (Engineer, Is Sharia Immutable?, 2013).

Considering the context, the verse would contain a very different meaning if we follow a correct approach for the interpretation of the Quran. Using the pick-and-choose method, the theologians have concluded that the Quran allows the beating of women. That contrasts fully with the other verse, 33:35 in Qur'an. There are some other passages in the Quran using the word *daraba*. Imam Raghib, a lexicographer of the Quran from the 12th century, says that a male camel should go to a woman camel to mate in pre-Quranic Arabic. If we take this context in the verse, it would be more fitting if she abstains from her "rebellion" as the previous line in the verse indicates that the man isolates his wandering wife before resorting to drastic actions. That means that the husband will get close to her after reconciliation between the husband and the wife who had been separated. (Engineer, 2012).

In the hermeneutic design of Engineer there are three basic considerations which one should bear in mind when reading a certain verse or text of the Qur'an: (1) a distinction exists between the normative and the contextual verses; (2) that all readers approach a text with a specific worldview and a specific position; and (3) each text exists and has to be interpreted in the social context. For example, during the time of the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH), the Qur'an accepted slavery and the patriarchal system which were part of the society's social norm. However, they cannot be implemented in today's world because as per Engineer, they are against the Qur'anic notion of human dignity. In support of his argument, he quoted the following verse from the Qur'an:

> And We have certainly honoured the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them over much of what We have created, with [definite] preference [17:70].

Hence, he argued that the Qur'an had demolished slavery as it goes against the foundation of Islamic values. However, slavery was inevitable during that time and, therefore, the Qur'an pronounced some concessions. Hence, the main objective could not be implemented by merely freeing all the slaves from slavery. Instead, the Qur'an emphasized to improve the condition by improving societal treatment towards the slaves. Nevertheless, the main goal was to discourage slavery, must be recognized. Thus, in the 21st century, the implication of the Qur'anic revelation is to mainly observe human dignity (Engineer, n.d.). Engineer also said the formation of such theology requires interpretation to be based on basic values of the Qur'an which include *Haq* (truth), *ḥikmah* (wisdom), *'aql* (intellect and reason), *'adl* (justice) and *iḥsÉn* (compassion). These values provide the moral base and stability to society (Engineer, Reformists at Work, 2010).

Further, he says that context plays an important role in carrying justice. It can be social, political, economic, and depends on the form of social

structure. Fair punishment is, for example, deemed to comply with justice in a tribal society. The Quran calls it a *qisas* (equal retaliation) and since Arab society was organized tribally, *al-hayat fi'al-qisas* was declared that is, life is comprised of retaliation (equal). The context is overlooked by many theologians and proclaimed as an immutable law of justice. Justice will become an injustice if we disregard the background. At present, such tribal retaliation would be unreasonable when human rights and dignity are extremely significant. Principles and ideals are far more important than the laws of the past when the definition of justice was different (Engineer, The Concept of Justice, 2012).

He mentions Yusuf al-Qaradawi's 10 reasons for modifying fatwas, all of which are highly important to support his theology. Firstly, Qaradawi provides four explanations for the change of fatwas, i.e. shift in time, a shift in place, changing circumstances, and changes of what it calls the '*urf*. He further explained why improvements are beneficial, namely: improvements in knowledge; people's needs; people's willingness to change; the spread of calamity (when any acute issue is common); changes in the national economic or political situation and changes in opinion or thinking (Engineer, Fatwas can be Changed, 2012). That's why, Engineer asked Muslims to change their attention from 'jihad' to 'ijtihad', which means to strive intellectually to comprehend problems facing the Islamic world and find their solutions in keeping with the basic principles and values enshrined in the Qur'an (Engineer, From Jihad to Ijtihad, 2010).

Communal and Religious Harmony
The second most prominent idea on which Engineer wrote a thousand pages is about communal and religious harmony between different religious, linguistic, and ethnic communities. He believes that everyone is driven by the values of their respective religions to achieve common causes such as justice, equality, and peaceful coexistence because every religion is created by God and no religion is superior to the other, including Islam. He stated that being religious today means to be interreligious and, one must be mindful of the pluralistic aspect of society while elaborating about Islam (Engineer, 2009). Hence, as per him, the understanding of Islam by traditional scholars is irrelevant in the contemporary context as they have overlooked the pluralistic aspect of the society, which is the most important feature in today's social context. He also argued that, as per the Qur'an, every human being deserves to be loved and respected, as every human being is the creation of God. He further stated that the source of every religion is one, which is God, and hence, each religion carries some truth, one way or another (Engineer, Pluralism and Islam, 2011). From this point of view, he demonstrated his commitment to religious pluralism. Furthermore, he explained that all Prophets (PBUT) of God were sent with a central religion: *Dīn,* al-Islam, which means submission to God. Thus, he argued that the Qur'an emphasizes believing in every prophet (PBUT), either they were mentioned in the Divine Book by name or not. As per the need of their people, they were given the law (*Shariah*).

As per Engineer, the Qur'an is against any forms of religious friction. Islam believes that Judaism and Christianity were revealed to the Prophets (peace be upon them all) of God; Islam even allows Muslim men to marry women from *Ahl al KitÉb*, which means people of the book. In this context, people of the book refer to the Jews and the Christians. Based on this literal interpretation of the Qur'an, the Engineer concluded that Islam accepts Judaism and Christianity as revealed religions. Whereas, it was revealed in the Qur'an that:

They say: "Be Jews," or "Be Christians." "Then you will be rightly guided," Say to them: "No, follow exclusively the way of Abraham who was not one of those who associate others with Allah in His Divinity." Say: "We believe in Allah, and in what has been revealed to us and Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the descendants [of Jacob] and in what was given to Moses and Jesus and in what the other Prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and we are those who submit to Allah. [2: 135-136]

He further stated that religions are particularly different from one another in terms of their secondary practices which include rituals and modes of prayers. Thus, it is important to focus on the values and good deeds of a person rather than one's beliefs, religious practices, and rituals. Additionally, he said that the psychological effect of rituals of any religion has its effect on people, but it is not the central idea of any religion, rituals might be ignored but not the essential values. Therefore, Engineer believed that a religious person is the one who concerns more about one's values rather than ritual practices (Sikand, 2004).

Furthermore, he stated during Abbasid and Fatimid administrations, the Muslims were not allowed to persecute the Jews and the Christians. This, he uses as a piece of evidence to justify his position of religious pluralism. No administration will persecute any community due to the differences in religion. However, for him, there were political reasons which brought a clash between Muslims and other societies. Moreover, The Jews enjoyed religious freedom and coexistence in the middle eastern countries until 1948. Nevertheless, as per him, the establishment of Israel led to a political clash between Jews and Muslims, but it is not a religious conflict. A great portion of the modern history of Islam revolves around Israel's issue, even the relationship between Arabs and the US was affected and it was then called 'clash of civilization' by Huntington, instead of 'clash of interest'. Thus, the problem is not pluralism but a clash of interest (Engineer, Pluralism and Islam, 2011).

A per Engineer, equal treatment to all religions in a democratic manner might resolve the issue. For a peaceful coexistence for all communities, it is necessary to start a dialogue by establishing democratic values and diversity in the country. Besides, Engineer believes that the Qur'an does not only recognize religious pluralism but also linguistic and ethnic pluralism. To validate his argument, he quotes *ayaths* of the Qur'an such as:

And We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], the Book in truth, confirming that which preceded it of the Scripture and as a criterion over it.

So judge between them by what Allah has revealed and do not follow their inclinations away from what has come to you of the truth. To each of you, We prescribed a law and a method. Had Allah willed, He would have made you one nation [united in religion], but [He intended] to test you in what He has given you; so race to [all that is] good. To Allah is your return all together, and He will [then] inform you concerning that over which you used to differ [5:48].

And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colors. Indeed, in that are signs for those of knowledge [30:22].

Today people seek jobs and education in far-off countries across continents. Also, it is Allah's will to create diversity among His creation. The Quran says: "And if Allah had pleased, He would have made you a single people, but that He might try you in what He gave you. So, vie one with another in virtuous deeds" [5:48]. Thus, diversity is Allah's will and it is a trial for us if we can live in peace and harmony with one another other despite our diversity. Also, Allah wants us not to assert our superiority but to vie with one another in good deeds only. But the fact is that if there is diversity there are likely to be misunderstandings and misconceptions about one another (Engineer, Pluralism and Islam, 2011). This can and often does lead to conflict and breach of peace. Such conflicts apply to both the faiths themselves and the interfaith communities.

Engineer mentions that communal politics emerged in the colonial era in India due to emphasis on religious identity than culture and civilization shared by both Hindus and Muslims. For example, the Urdu language was communalized as its script is similar to that of the Arabic script. However, those who communalized the Urdu language do not realize that the existence of Urdu language is not only due to languages such as Arabic, Turkish and Persian but the existence of local linguistic communities in India. Some north Indian languages- *Khadi Boli*, *Sanskrit* and *Punjabi* contributed greatly towards the development of the Urdu language. All these languages which existed in India together with Urdu contributed a lot towards a new culture and civilization- *Ganga Jamni Tahzib* which became the identity of the urban elites of northern India. Both the communities later used Urdu as a medium of communication (Engineer, www.csss-isla.com, 2010). This civilization produced countless poets, singers, calligraphers, and artists and enriched the society with religious harmony and tolerance that can be seen this day to some extent. However, communal politics disguised that the Urdu language is the language of the Muslim community. This reflects the negative intention of those leaders who play the communal card for their political benefits, especially during elections. Thus, Muslim and secular organizations in India need to develop a mechanism to educate and bring awareness about such baseless claims.

He believed that the traditional approach is irrelevant for contemporary India because it was mainly influenced by the interests of Sultans and leaders in their attempts to preserve their control and to legalize their oppression towards their subjects. He asserted such an approach may lead

to disagreements among people of different faiths. Thus, Engineer formulated his liberation theology, based on the current Indian context to overcome religious, caste-based, and race-oriented conflicts and, to develop a pluralistic and harmonious society. He believed that there is a need to establish a just and practical ideology based on various social components and pluralistic aspects of present-day India. He also encouraged interfaith dialogues and said to make dialogues succeed and achieve results, certain laws must be followed. The first requirement is not to have an attitude of superiority which contradicts the spirit of dialogue, as well as debate, must be on particular topics such as women's rights or war or non-violence, etc.

Religious leaders, scholars with a detailed understanding of matters, Journalists (who propagate misunderstandings), and laypeople who sometimes are victims of misinformation should be part of the substantive dialogue. Secondly, one does not contend based on beliefs but rather based on understanding. Participants must always be able to challenge themselves to overcome their doubts. Thirdly, one needs to be firmly rooted in the teachings of one's religion and can justify why such actions have taken place or provide the justification for certain teaching. Any doubt or ignorance can destroy the dialogues' spirit. Besides, one should be able to remove any doubts posed by his detailed knowledge, argumentative conviction, and clarity of thought during the discussion. Fourthly, one must be exceedingly tolerant and capable of listening and respecting the viewpoint of the other side, without seeking to silence the opposition by arguing talents or using polemics (Engineer, On Interfaith Dialogue, 2012).

Women Rights and Islam
Women's rights are another most significant area of Engineer's writings. In his book *The Rights of Women in Islam*, Engineer discusses several Qur'anic verses that accord gender equality for women and men. The implications of this view are two-fold: firstly, one must accept the dignity of both sexes in equal measures. Secondly, one must see both sexes enjoying equal rights in social, economic, and political spheres (Engineer, Rights of Women in Islam , 2004). He also states that: It is often assumed by those not well versed in the origin and development of shariah that, firstly, it is divine and, secondly, it is immutable. Such a view is often aired in common discussions and encouraged by the conservative 'Ulama. These facts are to the contrary. Firstly, shariah did not come into being all of a sudden; it went through a torturous process of evolution over the centuries; and, secondly, it never remained static, and hence immutable as commonly assumed. Even after it assumed a recognizable shape the jurists had to admit the principle of ijtihad (literally, exertion), i.e., creative interpretation and application of Islamic *fiqh* (jurisprudence) in the face of new circumstances. (Engineer, Is Sharia Immutable?, 2013)

According to him, the whole discourse about women in the Qur'an is right-based and men duty-based. What is surprising is that the whole discourse is right-based for men and duty-based for women in Islamic jurisprudence. Muslim intelligentsia would be extremely important to

reconsider and to put into line with the Quranic sense of justice, equal rights, and the human integrity of the full body of Islamic jurisprudence (Engineer, Woman Judges and Sharia, 2010). Imam al-Shatibi, a 13th-century Spanish imam of great eminence, addresses the aims and objectives of Shariah laws in his writings in *Al-Maqasid al-Shariah* and *Al-Masalih al-Shariah*. The law is structured to fulfill specific purposes and is intended for people's welfare. If it is rigid it can neither serve the intent nor strive for people's welfare. Also, Imam Ghazali who in his views appears to be orthodox discusses the intent behind any provision of shariah. Among the Ulama, there is unanimity that customary (*'ÉdÉt*) law also is an integral part of Shariah law. For this reason, Arab customary law (Arab *'ÉdÉt*) became an integral part of Islamic Sharia law. If Arab customary law had not been a part of Shariah law, Arabs would not have approved it. (Engineer, Justice Central to Sharia Law, 2010)

Engineer states that there are many issues Muslims need to be aware of. Firstly, in no uncertain terms, the Qur'an supports gender equality. Second, because of the first, past thinkers and theologians had formulated opinions and laws for men. Third, Muslims need to recognize that past scholars and theologians have done so because of historical pressures, i.e. they have been patriarchal in society. These lead us to a fourth issue: the need for women's laws to be rebuilt in the light of Qur'anic ethos and present circumstances (Taib, 2006). The Engineer believes that wrong perception among Muslims occurred due to the cultural mediation of religion which resulted in the form of an *Arabised Shariah*. He also commented on Muslim intellectuals and argued that they cannot be titled as intellectuals in true meaning unless they are well qualified in Qur'anic knowledge, Islamic law, and philosophy. The main concern for Muslim intellectuals is to ensure justice, both at individual and collective levels. They must also defend women's rights in Muslim societies.

Women cannot be compelled to whatever men want. Now things have shifted radically, and women's understanding is not what it used to be like when Shariah laws were developed by the previous *Ulama*. The entire approach to the divine text will shift in line with the transcendent vision of our time. Not only does it allow the Qur'an to research in-depth, but it also focuses more on its true vision. In the past, *Ulama* regarded women as a reproductive agent and as a means of satisfying men's desires, in conformity with the spirit of their times. Sadly, with similar logic even contemporary *Ulama* talk of polygamy often and interpret it, since women experience menstrual cycles and pregnancies. There can be nothing more ridiculous than this. (Engineer, A Harmonious Marriage, 2013) He proposed, for example, that a man should not be allowed to marry another wife unless he is permitted to do so by the marriage council (or Shariah court) presided by a *qazi* and his first wife after a thorough inquiry, which could include the need for a second wife and his capacity to do justice because both the Quranic verses on polygamy [4:3 and 4:129] stress justice, not numbers, and justice is primary in the Islamic value system (Engineer, Rigidity of Ulema, 2012).

He questioned the practice of not allowing women to enter in Dargah and Masjid in India. He noted that marriage between children is possibly more cultural than religious. It is also well known that both parties will stipulate conditions, i.e. husband and wife, without fulfilling which marriage would not be valid. A child should stipulate a condition? Marriage is a lifetime relationship and it cannot be assumed that a child would have the maturity or intellectual capacity to select a partner in his or her life. Therefore, child marriage cannot be Quranic or Islamic in any situation. Because marriage is a contract in Islam, Imam Abu Hanifa while allowing child marriage for sociological rather than religious or Quranic reasons, still had to make allowance for what is known as the option of puberty (*khiyar al-bulugh*) i.e. the girl could accept or refuse the marriage to attain puberty or age of proper understanding and her guardian (usually the father) could not compel her to do so either. Imam Abu Hanifa had to make this clause since he knew the guardian was not an absolute authority to marry the child (Engineer, Child Marriage and Islam, 2012).

Related to the inheritance of women, he writes that today many women feel that it is injustice with them and that they should get an equal portion in their father's property. Based on the following premises, he suggested a daughter could not always get a significant *Mahr*, she occasionally gets only a nominal *Mahr*. Second, both men and women are contributing to the family income these days and a woman has the right to a greater share. Women generally weren't working in those days (though in some cases they did). Fourth, in many cases, may a woman does not get married and have no *Mahr* thus, she will have to maintain herself after the death of her parents. Yet separate Muslim law schools say a daughter cannot get more than half that a son gets. Yet the Qur'an is not disrespectful and leaves space for justice. The Quranic verses on inheritance ends with the proviso that after paying "a bequest you may have bequeathed or a debt" [4: 11-12] — and the Qur'an has repeated these four times — the rest will go to the inheritors as set out in the Qur'an (Engineer, Women`s Share in Property, 2009).

Related to *wali*, he mentions that generally Muslim societies were much male-dominated if a woman wished to marry, she needed to have a *wali* or a guardian, which still exists in various Muslim societies. On the contrary, as per him, the Qur'an does not insist having a *wali* for women to marry. For the Engineer, such exercise must be abolished in the modern context because Islam having a democratic system, gives equal rights to both men and women. Engineer considered that the existing Islamic law was interpreted based on personal opinions and cultural milieus of the jurists, particularly with women's rights. Such interpretations and opinions had projected a negative image of Islam. Hence, the Muslims must not blame the media but the rigidity of such ideas and views (Noor, 2002). *Adl* and *qist* are two words repeatedly used in the Qur'an, and both mean justices. Islamic jurisprudence is also based on this central, social value, be it marriage, divorce, inheritance, or criminal laws. Some punishments for certain crimes may appear very harsh and Muslim jurists have differed

regarding their application but they all agree that the ends of justice must be met (Engineer, Justice Pivotal to Islam, 2009).

Modern Concepts and Islam

Many socio-economic and political concepts emerged during and post-colonial era in the world. Here some of his thoughts related to secularism, democracy, and bank interest are noted down along their justifications. He believes that secularism and democracy are rather similar to the system established by the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH). As per him, there is no such thing called political system in Islam, but it stands for the establishment of an ideal society (Sikand, 2004). He also argues that protecting secularism is not against Islam. For him, religion and culture are interrelated. The Engineer suggested that secularism must be viewed from a political point of view rather than philosophical perceptions to avoid blind faiths (Hassan, 2008). He viewed secularism as a means that can broaden up one's worldview and as a result, positive changes in different parts of the world are possible. As per him, the most significant features of secularism are pluralism and equality, irrespective of gender, colour, religion, and race. From this point of view, all citizens of a secular state are equal. Thus, he considered that secularism had been adopted by most countries for its benefits.

According to Engineer, the fundamentalist rejection of secularism appears to lie in many theories. Among these are: (1) there is no place for divine laws in a secular state; (2) secular laws (being man-made) is in direct contrast to divine rules; (3) Islam does not allow any distinction between religion and politics; and (4) secular philosophies do not provide room for belief in the afterlife, which Islam emphasizes. In response, the Engineer calls the usage of the word 'Islamic State' into question first. He wrote:

> *"It is important to note that there is a difference between an Islamic State and Islam being the State religion. In an Islamic state, all laws must strictly conform to the Islamic Shariah, but if a country declares Islam as its religion, it means that Islam is preferred to all other religions and it enjoys more privileges in the country (Engineer, Islam and Secularism, 2006)."*

However, as far as Shariah laws are concerned, Engineer points out that they evolved and are not divine in the sense of being absolute. In other words, as discussed above, the corpus of Shariah law is a human attempt at locating the Divine Will.

Concerning Muslims in India, he suggested that Muslims in India should develop a strategic plan based on secular values to ensure political growth in the country especially at the moment when they are threatened by Hindu fanaticism. They should support existing secular political parties to retain pluralistic and diverse principles of Indian culture. Similarly, the visionary leaders of India, such as Nehru, had envisioned India as a pluralistic country, based on democratic and secular values instead of being dominated by the hegemony of one religion (Hassan, 2008). Engineer

asserted that there is no formed political structure provided by the Qur'an. Moreover, he also pointed out that even thirty years after the demise of the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH), the democratic method of the caliphate system was eventually replaced by a monarchical system. Thus, he believed that Muslims must develop their political structure which should be based on the core values of the Qur'an, which include *ḥikmah* (wisdom), *'aql* (intellect and reason), *'adl* (fairness) and *iḥsÉn* (compassion). As per him, modern, secular, and democratic states promote such values in the best manners (Engineer, Islam and Secularism, 2006).

As per Engineer, some Muslims did not understand secularism properly and believed that it is against Islam. They think that democracy replaces the Shariah law with man-made law. Engineer also stated that the connection between democracy and the Shariah is not holistic. He argued that the Shariah in its totality cannot be established in the modern world but some of its values can be practiced, especially the value of agreement and disagreement. Therefore, he concluded that Muslims need to accept secularism and democracy because it is the most appropriate political strategy for Muslims. In this way, the Muslims will be able to ensure equality and freedom for all and their representatives in the parliament will develop laws for them. Engineer believed that the Shariah must be confined within the personal domain and it should not deal with any of the worldly affairs in a secular state. He considered that the body of the Shariah, which was developed during and after the Prophet (PBUH) period, had become outdated. Hence, he asserted that the authority of the secular and democratic country should be able to develop new laws based on the fundamental values of the Qur'an (Sikand, 2004).

He went a step ahead and mentioned that what have been the characteristics of modernity? Freedom of conscience, individual and human dignity, democracy, gender equality, and a scientific outlook. The Qur'an lays stress on freedom of conscience (22:56); democratic and collective decision-making (42:38); the dignity of human beings (17:70); gender equality (22:28; 33:35). Numerous other verses urge one to reflect on the creation of the universe, the creation of human beings, animals, and so on to encourage a scientific outlook through inductive reasoning. He says:

> "I would also like to assert here that the Qur'an is no less compatible with post-modernity thinking; in fact, it is most compatible with it because it makes religious pluralism and multiculturalism the very basis of creation (5:48 and several other verses). It exhorts Muslims to show equal respect for others' prophets (biblical and others), as all were sent by Allah in different cultures, with teachings handed out in different languages"

The Qur'an is in Arabic only because it specifically addressed the Arabs and others through them. Quranic teachings state that the presence of various tribal, races, people of different colours, and speakers of different languages are recognized and owned in deference to the identity of the

respective people; there is no space here to create any superiority; no religion, language, or culture has supremacy over others.

Another characteristic of post-modernity is the negation of total supremacy of rationality, while modernity appears to be rather intolerant in its dismissal of all extra-rational stuff. Postmodern thought, like Islam, acknowledges that faith and spirituality are central to meaningful human life besides reason. Therefore, while acknowledging the importance of material life and earthly human needs, the Qur'an does not ignore the forces of faith, tradition, and culture as modernists do (Engineer, Postmodernism and the Quran, 2010). According to him, banking interest is far from ruinous, and market operations set its pace to increase or decrease liquidity in the event of inflation or deflation. A bank cannot be viewed as an agency of exploitation. By comparison, it is a regulatory body that enables financial transactions between borrowers and lenders. Some jurists claim that interest is not permissible because there is no risk factor in it and its rate is set. There is no statement of that kind in the Qur'an itself. If this claim is true, then it would also not be appropriate to invest in a building and to give rent premises as rent is set and there is no risk involved. The Qur'an denounces *riba* as a practice of exploitation which leads to unjust development, not because there is no element of risk in it. Because of the reasons discussed, it can be argued that interest in banking cannot be regarded as *riba* and should be allowed (Engineer, Postmodernism and the Quran, 2010).

For all of his beliefs, the premise behind them is what he believes that first of all, "no religion comes down from heaven in a social vacuum ... every religion comes into being in a given society with its principles, culture, practices, and traditions." Second, the conditions of social transition as civilization evolves and progresses materially and technologically. Third, values will change as new practices replace customs and rituals disappear or re-emerge in new ways. Such sociological shifts will generate new conflicts in society between the old and the new. Any religion that fails to participate in the creative process of mediating such tensions will eventually lose its survival-critical potency, relevance and dynamism. This is the groundwork of reformism (Engineer, On Developing Theology of Peace in Islam, 2003).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Asghar Ali Engineer's main concern was to develop a new theology which he thought will counter the challenges faced by Muslims in post-independent India and the world. The Engineer is seen as a scholar, specializes in liberal Islam and comparative religions. His understanding of Islam for contemporary India was appreciated by other liberal and secular Muslims. The discussed ideas in this article belong to several subtopics and each required detailed analysis. However, in this article, the concern is to provide an overall analysis of his ideas. First of all, what appears from those ideas is that Engineer is very much inclined to the liberal approach which goes against the contemporary traditionalist and Islamic revivalist scholars.

To explain who the traditionalist are or what features they possess, let us mention the arguments mentioned by traditionalist scholars who justify unequal inheritance between men and women noted down by the Engineer himself as he says that traditionally the objection is dealt with in various ways. Firstly, there was no share in inheritance for daughters, and Islam created it. Secondly, women were not earning and contributing to the family wealth, and, thirdly, a woman goes to her husband's place and gets a share in her husband's property. Also, her husband gives her *Mahr* at the time of marriage besides being obliged to maintain her. So, it is not injustice even if she gets half the share in her father's property (Engineer, Women`s Share in Property, 2009).

Related to his idea the religion *dīn* was always the same, not laws (Shariah). Similarly, many contemporary Islamic scholars share the same view about the *dīn* and the Shariah. However, the conclusion drawn by the Engineer goes against the views of contemporary Islamic scholars. The Engineer concluded that all existing ancient religions cannot be dismissed and considered untrue because of their one prime source. However, this belief is not parallel with some of the *ayaths* in the Qur'an and the narrations of the Prophet (PBUH). This is because, Engineer and all others who equalize and consider all religions as true overlook the fact that the worldview, the truth about the origin of man, and the world cannot be many.

Furthermore, Engineer argued that his understanding of the universality of revelation and unity of religions was based on the Qur'anic values. He elaborated that all religions are different forms of the same *Dīn.* However, his statement is questionable: then, how do we differentiate the differences which exist in the historical religions? He neglected this and the concept of corruption, *Taḥrīf*, in previous scriptures by their followers as mentioned in the Qur'an [2:75; 4:46; 5:13 and 41]. He believed that God did not guide people clearly and state which *Dīn* is true. As per him, it is God who will determine on the Day of Resurrection that which religion enjoys the highest degree of truth. Thus, he says, that human beings should strive for social justice and peace for every human by ignoring the religious and racial differences among them. They should contest with each other in doing good. Nevertheless, he ignored the declaration of the Qur'an that God "Indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam" [3:19]. The Engineer used several *ayaths* to justify his views on religious pluralism. Nevertheless, he does not differentiate between the religious pluralism and plurality of religions. He also suggested that Muslims must respect and help to propagate religious pluralism instead of religious diversity. Nevertheless, throughout history, Muslims never accepted and supported the idea of religious pluralism, but they strongly supported and practiced the existence of religious diversity. Therefore, religious pluralism was established based on liberal ideology.

He also ignored the fact that this social justice and peace cannot be guaranteed based on false worldviews. First, they must ensure the truth of worldview, origin, and destination of life. Furthermore, Engineer believed there is no contradiction between reason and the Qur'an as they are interconnected. He also believed that reason and the Qur'an complement

one another. He relates this to how the physical world may be understood by the reason and the revelation leads humans to understand the ultimate objective of their existence which helps to achieve their spiritual goals (Hunter, 2008). However, Engineer's views led to other questions: (i) does reason submit itself to the revelation or goes parallel with revelation? (ii) when one submits to God, does it not mean that he submits his reason to the guidance of the revelation? The reason which accepts the guidance of the revelation throughout its process of cognition, reflection, and understanding of anything reaches the right conclusions.

The Engineer also criticized numerous practices in Muslim societies of which he believed were non-Islamic and were motivated by cultural and local customs especially related to women. However, he did not realize that he contradicts his statement. He considered that a universal message is given by all religions. He also believed that the inimitable message of Islam was based on contextual circumstances. Hence, this reflects his inclination toward liberalism. This reflects that Engineer does not distinguish the difference between the meaning of democratic approach and consultation (*ShËra)*. For Engineer, insistence on the need of *wali* conveys an adverse perception to the world that Islam is a rigid religion and maintains the supremacy of men over women, while Islamic values are very much democratic and equitable. Some contemporary sociologists stated that most teenagers do not think rationally and decide things based on emotions. The idea of *wali* is to protect the future of young girls and it is a form of guidance and consultation. Both father and girl have to be reasonable and should decide mutually. Furthermore, his understanding of Islamic values concerning democratic nature seems to be problematic. Islamic values are Divine oriented whereas the democratic system is decided by the people without any reference to Divine guidance.

Contemporary Muslim scholars such as Iqbal, Muhammed Asad, Naquib al Attas, and Mawdudi view secularism from both political and philosophical perceptions. They accepted the political notion of secularism and rejected its philosophy. Similar to the Engineer, the Jamaat-e-Islami also viewed secularism from a political point of view. The Engineer also believed that secularism, or modern political ideologies, share similar values as Islam such as benevolence, justice, wisdom, and reason. However, the major limitation with Engineer's view is that he considered that values of the world are originated and practiced in line with the framework of the view adopted by the world itself. Islamic values, on the other hand, such as benevolence, justice, wisdom, and reason are ingrained within the framework of the Islamic worldview. Furthermore, the scholars of Jamaat-e-Islami and others had demonstrated some reservations towards pluralism. They accepted the plurality of societies but reject the idea of pluralism.

The Engineer struggled to develop a new theology for Muslims which is suitable for India. He considered that politics and Islam both entail for an ideal society. He believed that there is no reference for establishing an Islamic system in the Qur'an, rather, the emphasis is given on Islamic society. The Islamic system established by the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH)

was not commanded by God. Furthermore, he considered that the formation of an Islamic system in the Muslim majority or minority country will be against the Will of God. In this way, most of the scholars who are influenced by liberalism and other modern ideologies argue the way the Engineer does. However, they fail to provide any concrete example of any secular state in which the values of wisdom, intellect, reason, fairness, and compassion have been practically materialized. Many secular states, racial discrimination, gender inequality, and poverty such as Philippines and India.

Here, he like many other scholars does not differentiate between the Shariah and its interpretation- the *fiqh*. The Shariah constitutes the Divine Will whereas the *fiqh* human. However, despite this, he still makes some statements that go against the Qur'an. He continues and insists that Divine Will truly exists in democracy and secularism. As per him, a secular state does not oppose religion but provides the freedom to all religions in the country. However, the state established by the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) in Madinah was an ideal state, where every religious community, including the Jews, Christians, and pagan Arabs, were given equal rights and religious freedom. Furthermore, they were free to practice their laws in their matters, but he ignores that the state of Madinah was never termed as a secular state. He also ignored the truth and reality that the Islamic system established by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was the first system in human history which followed a written constitution and guaranteed to all religions and parties' total freedom. Here, one more important point needs to be emphasized that the system developed by the Prophet (PBUH) was not a religious system rather it was based on the truth and reality of life, society, and the world as considered by Islam.

The Engineer suggested that Muslims should agree to be a part of a secular country that guarantees religious freedom and equal rights to every citizen regardless of faith and race. Here, he ignores that the Muslims in independent India never questioned the secular nature of India. They accepted it willingly as a reality. Anybody who lives in a secular state as a citizen has the right to freedom of speech and the right to bring a change in the state with the will of the majority of people of the state. The Engineer's views seem to be against some of the fundamental teachings of Islam. For example, he argued that instead of focusing on '*aqīdah,* Muslims should focus on the importance of good deeds and personal values. However, it was revealed in the Qur'anic that '*aqīdah* must be correct as it is the foundation for the development of a kind and compassionate personality who practices tolerance, equality, and justice. For example, *ayaths* 15:94, 5:67, and 68:9 in the Qur'an clearly stated the importance of '*aqīdah*. The Qur'an explicitly revealed that:

The example of those who disbelieve in their Lord is [that] their deeds are like ashes which the wind blows forcefully on a stormy day; they are unable [to keep] from what they earned a [single] thing. That is what is extreme error [14:18].

In another place, it states: But those who disbelieved - their deeds are like a mirage in a lowland which a thirsty one thinks is water until, when he comes to it, he finds it is nothing but finds Allah before Him, and He will pay him in full his due, and Allah is swift in account [24:39]. It seems that Engineer has adopted a selective approach by accepting some teachings of the Qur'an and ignoring some other fundamentals. For such behaviour, the Qur'an comments: so, do you believe in part of the Scripture and disbelieve in part? [2:85]. It also appears that he is in the state of *IfrÉt-o-TafrÊt* (Extremism and Negligence). It is true that due to cultural issues, injustice has taken place on women issues which no doubt needed to be removed from the society. One example can be cited that in many parts of the world, women are not allowed to learn which is a blatant contradiction with the teaching of Islam. Women have the full right to learn and serve the people by observing the prescribed limits of Islam including men. But the kind of reform or theology, Engineer is seeking for belongs to extremism form. It is not Islam that needed to be bend as per culture and lifestyle, rather it is people who have to mould themselves in the view of Islam. The truth is Islam does accept and accommodate the culture if it matches its tenets but if it does not, it rejects such culture and it happened during the time of Prophet (PBUH) itself.

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