



The Right Livelihood Award

for outstanding vision and work on behalf of our planet and its people

Asghar Ali Engineer (India)

Joint Honorary Award with Swami Agnivesh (2004)



"...for promoting over many years in South Asia the values of religious and communal co-existence, tolerance and mutual understanding."

Asghar Ali Engineer

Asghar Ali Engineer was born in 1940, and took a BSc. in civil engineering from Vikram University. From 1980 he edited the journal *The Islamic Perspective*, and during the 1980s he published a string of books on Islam and communal violence in India, the latter based on his field investigations into the communal riots in post-independence India. By 1987 he was well enough known to receive the Distinguished Service Award from the USA International Student Assembly and the USA Indian Student Assembly. In 1990 he received the Dalmia Award for communal harmony and is the recipient of three honorary doctorate degrees.

1992 saw the destruction of the Babri Mosque and provided the impetus for the foundation by Engineer in 1993 of the Centre for Study of Society and Secularism (CSSS), of which Engineer is still the Chairman and which has been the organisational focus of his work since then. The objectives of CSSS are to spread the spirit of communal harmony, to study problems in the area and organise inter-faith dialogues. To this end CSSS undertakes research, organises seminars, conducts training and mass awareness programs, publishes books and pamphlets and networks with other organisations. Through CSSS and otherwise Engineer has given many lectures and been involved in many workshops (some abroad, mainly in India, some for the Indian police) promoting communal understanding and harmony. He has published 52 books, many papers and articles, including those for scholarly journals. He edits a journal, *Indian Journal of Secularism*, and a monthly paper, *Islam and Modern Age*. He also publishes *Secular Perspective* every fortnight. Through the 1990s, Engineer received a number of awards, including the National Communal Harmony Award in 1997, and the USA Award from the Association for Communal Harmony in Asia in 2003.

Engineer is a Bohra Muslim, and an important component of his work has been both to promote a better external understanding of Islam and to critique some of its manifestations from the inside (for example, *Rethinking Issues in Islam* in 1998). His progressive interpretation of the scriptures has often brought him into headlong conflict with the orthodox clergy at a great personal risk. Post-2001

some of Engineer's work has addressed the issues of globalisation, Islam and terrorism, but most of his work has remained focused on the communal situation in India and, to a lesser extent, its relations with Pakistan.

Quotation

"I was told by my father who was a priest that it was the basic duty of a Muslim to establish peace on earth. ... I soon came to the conclusion that it was not religion but misuse of religion and politicising of religion, which was the main cause of communal violence."

Asghar Ali Engineer

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