*CHAMPION OF PEACE*

J.Salik has been working for better understanding between Muslims and Christians. He wants nothing for himself. He only seeks time for prayers on PTV. Are Christians not religious people? And not Hazrat Umar (the second of glorious caliphs whose piety is acknowledged) returned chapels and cathedrals of Jerusalem to Christians after conquest. There is a lesson in it. Pakistan Christians are not a conquered people like those of Jerusalem. They are part of Pakistan’s body politic and have a claim on it.

Laying prostrate of 8000 strong crowd with rise of a finger may be a grand sight. No less spectacular was the public show of a camel caravan carrying domestic articles of thitherto-cabinet minister J.Salik from federal capital Islamabad to provincial metropolis Lahore. Since animal carts are prohibited to ply on the federal capital roads J.Salik had sought a special permission from Meraj Khalid who had been appointed care taker prime minister on dismissal of Benazir Bhutto cabinet in 1996.

J.Salik is a true devotee of peace. It had been his earnest passion to collect portraits of those stalwarts of peace who had won the Nobel peace awards since the prize was instituted in 1901. Alfred Nobel was a Swede, born in Stockholm in 1833, but by his life very much an international man. Frail from childhood, Alfred Nobel never seemed to have had gained true happiness.

On November 27, 1895, a year before his death, Alfred Nobel signed the famous ‘will’ which would realize the goals to which he had devoted so much of his life. A most generous philanthropist while alive (“I’d rather take care of the stomachs of the living than glory of the departed in the form of monuments”), Nobel stipulated in his will that the major part of his estate more than 31 million Swedish kronor (today apparently 840 million kronor, 1 Swedish kronor = $ 0.15) should be converted into a fund and invested.

The income from the investments was to be “distributed annually in the form of prizes to those who during the preceding year have conferred the greatest benefit on mankind”.

The five fields in which he wished to stimulate progress, as outlined in his will, were physics, chemistry, physiology or medicine, literature and fraternity among nations (peace).

Nobel’s choice of scientific subjects was obviously based on his own scientific interests and activities. But what was the reason behind prize for peace? All his life, Alfred Nobel was in search of spiritual values for the good of mankind for his own peace of mind. He had never married but did develop friendship and affair with two ladies. Instead of leading to the happy marriage that he envisioned, the affairs only added to his innate melancholy.

J.Salik is at one with Alfred Nobel in the progress of last of the five fields the latter had enumerated namely fraternity among individuals and nations.

J.Salik is in a way taller than Alfred Nobel. Alfred Nobel was a great scientist, inventor and a wealthy international investor. He lived in a comparatively peaceful period.

J.Salik’s period and circumstances are different. The twentieth century had seen two world wars. It had seen rise and fall of Russian Communist revolution. Materialistic pursuits had generally suppressed spiritual values.

J.Salik was born in Pakistan which had emerged on the world map only one year earlier than his birth. The new country had started from a scratch. Being a part of the third world Pakistan did not match in material resources a European country like Sweden.

J.Salik has modest education. His resources were limited, rather negligible. He has risen from dust. Yet he is vying with Alfred Nobel in promoting peace and feelings of fraternity among communities and nations.

The institution of Nobel peace prize however, conformed to J.Salik’s highest conception of human excellence. He decided in 1995 to collect portraits of Nobel laureates. They were not available at one place anywhere. The laureates were scattered all over the world. Nobel Foundation directory only carried names of the winners, no photographs. After a long search finally he found a book at the American centre, Karachi which carried small size pictures (4cm x 4cm) of 80 champions of peace. (For the first time the Nobel peace prize was awarded in 1901. On several occasions organizations, rather than individuals, had won the peace award).

The American centre would not lend the book. After great persuasion and provision of security, the management agreed to make the book available for one hour or so. With help of camera the pictures were duplicated and slightly enlarged. This however, did not satisfy Salik’s sentiments.

J.Salik conducted a competition of photography and paintings on the basis of the pictures of the prophets of peace that he procured. He gave ad in national newspapers to invite artists to produce their art pieces in oil paint, water paint, pencil work or any other medium Prizes for outstanding entries ranged for artists participated in the competition.

Thus J.Salik was able to get 300 portraits. On acquiring them he had spent Rs. 700,000. He also arranged exhibition of his collections at Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad. The exhibition was organized under the auspices of J.Salik’s Peace Education Foundation. Under the portraits were inscribed famous sayings of the prize winners.

Barbed wire had been placed around the portraits. “We have arrested all these Nobel peace prize winners who were asking for restoration of peace in all the parts of the world so that they could be set free”, J.Salik said on the occasion.

In Lahore the display of portraits was held on Kashmir Martyrs Day (July 14, 1994).

The portraits were also exhibited on mobile vans in order to give them wider viewing. He cherished them as a treasure.

These portraits remained displayed in his house before and after he became a federal minister. For their safe transport to his hometown steel roofs needed to be erected on camel carts which carried his belongings on his departure from ministers’ colony with fanfare. The portraits had been encaged to demonstrate that democracy was not free and elected national assemblies were frequently dissolved.

J.Salik had got steel roofs especially installed on the carts to protect from weather vagaries portraits of world winners of Nobel peace prize which he carried along with his household effects.

On the departure of camel cavalcade from the ministers’ colony a special band played national anthem and patriotic songs. Camels bore ornamental and musical anklets which provided festive air to the occasion.

A crowd from katchi abadis (hutments) had assembled to hold protest demonstration on the occasion.

Clothes which had earlier been collected in J.Salik’s pecuniary aid program were distributed among the needy. Representatives of national and international media were present to record views of J.Salik and others and report the event.

J.Salik had declared the ministers colony as orphans house which he now vacated for the coming orphans.

J.Salik who was clad in Sherwani, Pakistani national dress, burnt his personal three piece western suits.

J.Salik led the procession which he described as “The Camel Cart March”. The leading cart carried a chair and a couch for J.Salik to rest on, was fitted with public address system which relayed national songs.

Of and on J.Salik raised slogans which were enthusiastically responded. All this turned the occasion into a lively event.

Camel is known as a ship of desert. The camel has a capacity to travel for days without fodder particularly water which is scarce in deserts. Hence camel has become a symbol of calm endurance of hardship and tolerant perseverance. It is described as a poor man’s ride.

In cities too there is a poor man’s conveyance that is bicycle. J.Salik had described bicycle as a poor man’s pajero. Once he conducted his election campaign riding a cycle.

There was a time when possession of a bicycle was considered to be a sign of prosperity. Even after plenty of cars were plying on city roads, bicycle was still accepted as a gentleman’s transport. But in those days poverty was not that sign of social stigma or disgrace as today.

Dr. Mohammad Ajmal Niazi in his column captioned “Poor man’s Pajero” (Pakistan 26 October, 1995) after J.Salik’s description of bicycle, recalls a person parked his car on road kerb to greet a cyclist who happened to be a teacher. A celebrated principal of the prestigious educational institution government college, Lahore Dr. Nazir Ahmad used to go around the city streets on his bicycle. That may be a matter of past days.

In a bid to reinforce the impression that social status of a poor man had not lowered, J.Salik invited intelligentsia of Lahore including writers, poets, journalists and social lights to participate in a cycle rally. Among those who participated in the rally were Mujeeb-ur -Rahman Shami, Abdul Qadir Hassan, Munir Niazi, Qateel Shafai, Sarfraz Syed, Dr. Hassan Rizvi, Amjad Islam Amjad, Kanwal Feroz, Javed Iqbal, Ismail Qureshi Butt and Tariq Waheed Butt.

Such celebrities cycling on the fashionable Mall, where limousines line up bumper to bumper gave the bicycle a new prestige, new status, new power. Bicycle did become a poor man’s pajero.

J.Salik allowed the distinguished riders to take their bicycles home. The purpose probably was that they might use them off and on so that the poor man’s transport remained respected.

Columnist Dr. Niazi says Quaid-e-Azam had successfully led the Pakistan movement based on two nation theory i.e. caste ridden Hindus and egalitarian Muslims are two separate nations. The successors of the Quaid-e-Azam perpetuated the two nation but absolutely with different perceptions. They divided their compatriots into poor and rich communities. The poor community is numerically progressing. Wealth is heritage of a few. Corrupt bureaucrats and politicians are joining the latter’s rank yet their number does not exceed a few percent of the population. Ninety percent of populace is poor. That is the common man. They are deprived and oppressed. They are in majority yet they are being ruled by the elite minority. This is feat of western type of democracy. Parliamentary democracy in Pakistan might have been interrupted off and on by military governments. But in military governments too those found their way as ministers and advisors who had been in power in democratic set ups.

It had been said that the situation might not change in Pakistan until the poor men joined the government. J.Salik joined the government as a poor man and stubbornly remained poor even after becoming a minister. That is probably why J.Salik is still with the poor and for the poor.

On conclusion of the cycle rally J.Salik addressed the audience. He said “I am not a wazir (minister) but a faqir (poor beggar). With God’s grace one day all ministers would become ‘faqir’ like me”.

The contents of J.Salik speech spelt out a message of hope and in tone he was fully confident.

There is an idiom in Urdu: Diwanah Bakar-e-Khwesh Hushiar’ – a mad man may be sane in respect of his own or his relative’s interests.