

## QUESTIONS FOR Dr. Pervez Hoodbhoy

Q1 - You are an academic and a scholar and teach Physics – with that background it does surprise that you made this documentary on the Kashmir situation. Why?

As a physicist I try to understand the physical world in terms of science. As a social activist, I try to convince others that resolving conflicts peacefully is essential if we are to sustain human civilization in an age where science has created terrible weapons. Kashmir is one example of a terrible and needless conflict that has consumed tens of thousands of lives, caused immense human suffering, and could be the cause of a devastating nuclear war. I made this documentary film, together with my friend Zia Mian of Princeton University, to show people in Pakistan that there is a side to this conflict other than the one that my government chooses to show. And, similarly, to show Indians what horrific violence their government has inflicted upon the people of Kashmir.

Q2 - What were the basic challenges you faced from both the governments - India and Pakistan - while making this documentary and then actually screening it. Especially in the context of the fact that there are some very stark comments by social and political activists, which lie inter-webbed in this documentary.

I was denied a visa to travel to India last year and lost many filming opportunities. Fortunately I had excellent cooperation from Indian colleagues, Ajay Raina and Anand Patwardhan among others, who were able to make up for this. On the Pakistani side of Kashmir, my travel was allowed but filming was not. Creative efforts were needed; I will not say more. As for the screening: Pakistan Television would never even think of broadcasting it but ARY television broadcast it some weeks ago in the context of a discussion between hawks and doves on the film. The documentary has inspired much debate and discussion in Pakistan, so it was an effort well worth making.

Q3 -This documentary was screened last week at least four venues in New Delhi (Anhad, JNU, DU, Jamia). Were you tempted to screen it in the Valley. And if yes why didn't you?

I am tempted. But my 3-day trip to Delhi simply could not allow for going anywhere else, especially in view of the large number of public lectures I gave. Indeed, I would very much welcome the chance to visit the Indian side of Kashmir, meet people, learn more facts, show the film, and perhaps even do a bit of filming. I do not know if I could get permission from the Indian government, or even my own.

Q4 - Some viewers in the Delhi audience did comment that you should have shown shots of what's been happening in POK. Why did you not include that particular segment of the undivided Kashmir in this documentary?

The documentary is overtly critical of Pakistan's policy of proxy war. But let's stick to facts – the situation in Pakistani Kashmir is nowhere as bad as in Indian Kashmir. It is true that there the people living on the Pakistani side of the LOC cannot exercise their democratic right to vote, but that is true for the rest of Pakistan as well. However, you do not see people there being terrorized by the ISI. It is simply not true.

Q5 - Do you feel there is a positive change in the leadership in both countries vis-a-vis the perception of the Kashmir problem or will nothing substantial come through or be allowed to come through?

There have been positive changes. After years of lobbing artillery shells at each other across the LOC, the guns are finally silent. Just think from the point of view of a villager who lives in those areas. What a wonderful change that must be! Its true that there is no real change of heart on either side. But it is still good that Pakistan and India keep talking to each other even if nothing comes out of the talks. As someone said, better to jaw-jaw than fight-fight.

Q6 - Comment on America's role in the Kashmir crisis and would it at some stage use it at its base for furthering into South Asia.

The US is an imperial power and we have every right to be suspicious of its global ambitions. Nevertheless, we need recognize that Kashmir has almost zero strategic or economic value to the US. I cannot conceive that it would ever send troops to Kashmir and involve itself in a hopelessly messy situation. We should also realize that intense US diplomatic mediation has prevented limited conflict between India and Pakistan from escalating into war four times since 1987. This reflects very badly on the leadership of our two countries.

Q7 - Also, lately EU has been trying to sort the Kashmir crisis - this year a delegation of EU parliamentarians visited the Valley and before that had also visited POK. Your comment?

EU does not have much clout as yet, but let's hope that at some point it leads us away from a unipolar world. On Kashmir: ideally India and Pakistan should sort out the issue themselves. If they cannot, then I see no harm in allowing EU to mediate.

Q8 - I heard you speak at two forums here - at Anhad and then at the India International Centre. You have been rather outspoken on some sensitive ground

realities. Have you encountered any reactions from your government for your stark views.

All matters of real importance are sensitive, and the truth is often bitter and unpalatable. It does not matter to me that my government, or the Indian government, does not like certain things in the film or in what I speak. There is unspeakable suffering going on in Kashmir, and our governments are responsible.

Q9 – What in your opinion should be done immediately to lessen the human misery in the Valley?

The LOC must be softened by allowing easy transit of people and goods, a process of speedy demilitarization should begin on the Indian side, Pakistan should stop its covert war and publicly announce that it does not support jihad in Kashmir, and political leaders in Kashmir should be allowed to travel freely to either side of the LOC and the two countries. The climate of goodwill created will make the final resolution of Kashmir less important and, hopefully, irrelevant some day.

( THE END )

PS - This is the backgrounder (got from Anhad) - 'Dr. Pervez Hoodbhoy is a nuclear physicist, teaches at Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad. He has been at the forefront of the anti-nuclear, anti-war movement in Pakistan. ...The film is about a story of people at war over borders and boundaries. After four wars, Kashmiris and their land are divided between Pakistan and India, the source of recurring crises. The next war may well be a nuclear war. In this tragedy, each side tells the story of the injustice and violence of the other, and feels only the suffering of their own. This path-breaking independent documentary film, made in Pakistan, challenges us to look at Kashmir with new eyes and to hope for a new way forward'.

Would you like to add few lines - esp on your work etc -to this backgrounder.