



# Karachi's Ethnic Mosaic Peace through Diversity



The founding fathers of Pakistan conceptualized the country as a democratic polity with equal rights for all religious, ethnic and linguistic groups. All citizens were supposed to contribute to the progress and development of the country while maintaining their distinct religious, ethnic and linguistic identities thus creating a vibrant democratic culture.

“...no distinction between one community and another, no discrimination between one caste or creed and another. We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one State.” – Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Presidential Address to the first Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, 11 August 1947

Today that vision has been distorted with all sorts of violence ranging amongst the religious, ethnic and linguistic groups. This violence is particularly quite accentuated in Pakistan's largest and most cosmopolitan city of Karachi.

Karachi is enriched with diversity. The biggest community remains the migrants from what now constitutes India, are popularly known as Mohajirs. In addition, the Sindhis, Pakhtuns, Punjabis, Baloch, Hazaras and people from almost all regions of Pakistan try to make a living in Karachi. In terms of religion, most are Muslims, with the majority being Sunnis but a sizeable number are also Shias. A noticeable number of Christians, Hindus and Zoroastrians also live here.

This very diversity unfortunately is being perceived by some as an existential threat. The divisions along ethnic and sectarian lines have been allowed to deepen, despite the fact that this kind of diversity is not something peculiar to Karachi as people of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds peacefully coexist in all megametropolitans around the world.

Karachi's inhabitants must learn to embrace its diversity. There is no doubt that if the city's diverse ethnic, religious and sectarian groups manage to strike a workable socio-economic and political consensus, Karachi can become an 'Asian New York'. But that has yet to happen.

Karachi's ethnic diversity, especially after the mid-1980s, has remained a venerable entity in the hands of both military dictators and civilian politicians who have continued to exploit this diversity to encourage ethnic and sectarian cracks in Karachi's varied polity to meet their own selfish, short-sighted and exploitative



aims. It is so sad to see this happening as this city was once the thriving economic hub and entertainment capital of Pakistan.

Karachi is a city of more than 15 million people and produces 25 percent of the country's GDP along with 68 percent of governmental revenue, but lives at the mercy of misconceptions, stereotypes and no sense of nationalism. In order to have peace, nationalism needs to be projected. Our ethnicity, language, and religion is what makes up Pakistan as a whole. The people must realize that diversity can be used as an asset and a vital tool to promote peace and harmony.

Karachi's ethnic mosaic must be looked at through a positive perspective which promotes tolerance and peace. While it is good to be proud of one's cultural identity, one's humanity should trump everything else.

### **Methods of Promoting Diversity**

- One of the aspects of a true democracy is to have a more inclusive electoral process. Political parties should campaign in all ethnic communities and not isolate themselves to a particular ethnicity. By doing so it will reinforce harmony and solidarity.
- Educational institutions at all levels, primary, middle, metric, college, university etc. should promote and hold interethnic activities, events and dialogue.

- The media plays a major role in reaching out to the masses and shape narratives and ideals of a society. In order to create a more nationalistic narrative, media houses can run programmes such as talk shows, public service messages, advertisements and pen articles in the local newspaper dedicated to ethnic collusion and harmony.
- Civil society organizations can reach out at the grass roots level to help engage and bolster local communities via dialogue and consultations between varied ethnic localities. Moreover, they can urge more action by elected representatives to inculcate a sense of nationalism and pluralism amongst their constituents.
- Parents and children within their communities can donate their time to volunteer with civil society organizations that promote tolerance, solidarity and harmony.
- Amongst family and friends at home the message of interfaith harmony can be held in healthy dialogue.
- We encourage the youth to be politically and socially aware of the current affairs as well as the historical backgrounds of the situations in societies worldwide. This will promote awareness and lead to unbiased perspectives and shatter stereotypes.

There's a beauty in Karachi and that beauty lies within its ability to be so diverse.

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