



THE MUMBAI PRESS CLUB VISIT TO PAKISTAN - II

Rose petals of love

An Indian journalist's impressions of Karachi and Hyderabad on a first-time visit to Pakistan

By Leela Solomon

The same sea, the same sky. The distance between Mumbai and Karachi is only 877 km. But the distance created by politics and religion is so much more! Before landing at the Jinnah International Airport, my views about Pakistan were mixed. Pakistan is a "declared enemy" for India; for religious and political reasons, it was separated from India in 1947. The Islamic prayer recited inside the plane reminded me that I was going to a country that is not based on secular ideals. On landing, however, I realised that what we have learnt, what we have "understood" about the people of Pakistan was completely wrong.

We received a warm and royal welcome at the airport, with garlands of roses. Everywhere I looked, I saw friendly, smiling faces. We were received as if we were close relatives expected for a long time. We shared anxieties, worries and thoughts. I discovered that the wounds of Partition have not yet healed. Everyone we met



When people meet: Leela Solomon at the Hyderabad Press Club with schoolgirl Fatima; a family at Ibrahim Hyderi, waiting for their loved ones imprisoned in Gujarat, India, for 15 years.

was eager to unbundle her or his sweet memories about India.

Our week in Karachi was hectic, with meetings and discussions mainly on Indo-Pak relations. How can a journalist strengthen this relationship? Instead of exchanging furious words, how can we pen words of love and fraternity? How can we be messengers of peace?

Before coming to Karachi, I

had heard that it is similar to Mumbai. But I found it totally different. It is not overcrowded like Mumbai and it has more open spaces. The heart of the city is really beautiful. With flyovers and malls, Karachi shines like any other modern city. But parts of it are gloomy with no greenery, mud-coloured buildings, slums and congested roads.

Unlike Mumbai, we did not

see working class women thronging the streets to reach their workplaces. Public transport is crowded with mostly male passengers; there are no transport services exclusively for women like our Mumbai's Ladies' Special. Women vendors are rare.

I thought all women would be in *purdah*. But they only cover their heads with scarves and *dupattas*. We met some strong, enthusiastic and capable women, leaders in media, politics and in NGOs. I hope they bring change in the political history of Pakistan and succeed in their fight against the pernicious trend of "honour" killings.

The poor in the Karachi are overburdened with daily struggles. We visited Ibrahim Hyderi where we found children uninterested in education, going to sea to fish. There are many child labourers, many sadly addicted to tobacco and *supari* even at a tender age. Because of poverty, parents send their children to sea instead of

school. All of them struggle to make both ends meet. We met a lady who has been waiting for her husband and four



other male relatives who have been imprisoned in Gujarat, India, for the past 15 years, for crossing the maritime border. Fishermen's arrest is a common occurrence and a serious issue between the

two countries.

The *ajraks* we received as a symbol of love and respect are very colourful. Places like Port Grant, Clifton and Karachi beach are mind-blowing. The Indus River is vast and beautiful. But along with this beauty of Sindh, we saw our brothers and sisters struggling to cope with their uncertain life. In the eyes of women we saw hidden tears and pain mixed with trauma.

At Hyderabad, a schoolgirl drew flowers in my notepad and wrote: "My name is Fatima, I like India. I want to go to India. Thank you". That was the most beautiful gift I got on this tour.

I hope at least the next generation can be free of any ill-feeling between our countries. Let us delete words like "enemy", "terror", "war" forever from our dictionaries! Let us live in peace and harmony.

The writer is Assistant Editor, Economic & Political Weekly, Mumbai, who spent a week in Karachi recently as part of a 22-member delegation of journalists from The Mumbai Press Club.

Some of the journalists who visited Karachi and Hyderabad recently as part of The Mumbai Press Club delegation share their impressions

'Increased interaction between the people is necessary'

Although I've been living in Mumbai for over twenty years, I still can't fully understand or speak Marathi — a gap in the linguistic sphere that is visible between any two states in southern India. But I felt none of this discomfort while conversing with Pakistani senator Mir Hasil Khan Bizenjo for about an hour during my recent visit to Karachi. The reason: he spoke in pretty much the same language as over 70 per cent of Indians. Except that while Pakistanis term it Urdu, we call it Hindi. Mutual awareness can increase somewhat only with increased interaction between the people of both countries. This is necessary, at least between journalists and writers, who can record news and developments in each others' countries and help reduce mutual suspicions and animosity. This will become possible only if the ruling establishments of both countries want it to happen.

— **Om Prakash Tiwari**, Special Correspondent, Hindi daily Dainik Jagran

'For a book lover, Karachi is pure bliss'

Whatever little apprehensions I had about Karachi and Pakistan melted the moment we landed in Karachi to a rousing welcome. Despite my Marathi-laced Urdu, communication was never a problem. I was struck by the fact that the common Pakistani seems to know more about India and its politics than the common Indians do about Pakistan. I was even asked questions about the political dynamics of Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra!

The common people of Pakistan and India share the same con-

cerns and aspirations. People to people contacts are essential for the creation of a 'constituency for peace', and for debunking stereotypes that we have about each other. Both governments must be pressurised to take conflict de-escalation measures. Exchange of journalists between the two countries must be encouraged.

For a book lover, Karachi is pure bliss. Regrettably, while Mumbai is fast losing its reading culture to a creeping anti-intellectualism, Karachi has managed to hold its own in this regard. I bought books by Arthur Koestler, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn etc at bargain prices at Frere Hall; Liberty too had its gems.

— **Dhaval Kulkarni**, Special Correspondent, The Indian Express

'So much like India and that famed hospitality'

I didn't feel like I was in a different country, till the police security guards told me that I couldn't walk in the morning wherever I pleased. We had high security as an Indian press delegation. In Gulshan-e-Maymar where we stayed, the roads were deserted except for people who left very early for work. One of them, ten-year-old Afzal decided he would race me and show off that he was faster! Afzal has never been to school. Every day he walks 40 minutes to work at a bakery. So much like India. Everywhere you see children working, carrying bags, in hotels serving tea.

By now it's a cliché to speak about Pakistan's famed hospitality but I have to mention it. People gave us so much time, affection and warmth, *ajraks* and gifts — it was unforgettable. In Karachi you realise that people themselves are under a siege of sorts — co-ed schools are attacked, mosques are bombed,

landgrabbers and extortionists are sending the crime graph spiralling. In Karachi we were warned not to speak on our mobile phones in public — you can be robbed at gunpoint! There were two bombing incidents while we were there but no one seemed to mind except my taxi driver who was upset that those frequent incidents didn't seem to disturb anyone.

Yet you have flourishing art galleries, defiant university teachers and a society that is opposing all forms of religious extremism and violence. Few mentioned Kashmir; those who did, didn't seem to think that it was the hitch in Indo-Pak relations. Not a single person we met had anything other than nice things to say about India.

"When you go back to India hug Salman Khan for me," said a researcher fervently. Most people are gaga about Indian soaps. During serious political discussions, journalists would break off to ask about Aishwarya Rai and her baby. One TV channel asked us to offer our reactions when the baby was born — which we declined!

— **Meena Menon**, Deputy Editor, The Hindu

Pakistan is not a monolithic entity'

I feel that Indians have to see Pakistan and understand that it is not a monolithic entity, opposing India. Anyone who visits will easily understand and experience the difference between common Pakistanis and their ruling class. I saw great interest in India... People were always happy to talk about India. I felt many were comparing these twins and their present health. I have great confidence about our democracy. If Pakistan had also had democracy throughout, the situation and progress parameters could have been much better...

— **Sarang Darshane**, Assistant Editor, Maharashtra Times, Mumbai

Touching hearts, changing minds

India and Pakistan are not inherited enemies. We are inherited neighbours with shared histories and much more.

The single greatest hurdle between us is bureaucratic and political — obtaining visas



By Laleh Habib

Peace is not simply the absence of conflict between two countries, but strong ties between their people, economies, and establishments. To develop peaceful ties between Pakistan and India, what's needed is not only an uninterrupted dialogue between the two governments, but also people-to-people confidence building measures.

Aman ki Asha, a peace initiative, launched by the Times of India and the Jang Group of Pakistan on January 1, 2010, has a three-pronged approach towards promoting peace: providing a platform for open and honest discussion on all issues, advocating economic collaboration as the most important driver for peace, and promoting people to people contacts in healthcare, sports, trade, and so on. This is backed by an intensive media campaign that seeks to lobby both governments to make the requisite legislative changes to facilitate peace.

A significant difference between Aman ki Asha and other people-to-people initiatives is that Aman ki Asha is powered by the two largest media houses of India and Pakistan. The media, a significant player in the public and political domain, is the fourth estate, a champion of causes, a platform where opinions can be voiced in the public sphere. The media can galvanise

public opinion and lobby governments. In South Asia, it has the power to reach 1.6 billion people, and to sustain a narrative amenable to peace.

The media has been the platform for many successful Indo-Pak collaborations focusing on music and entertainment. Aman ki Asha's scope is more expansive and includes economics, policy, and people-to-people contacts. This platform has brought together senior members of the armed forces and intelligence agencies to discuss possibilities for collaborative counterterrorism measures and intelligence sharing. Our last strategic seminar brought together the former Director General of RAW, Mr. A. S. Dulat, and the former head of the ISI, Gen. Javed Ashraf Qazi, along with Gen. Mahmood Durrani, the former National Security Advisor, and the former head of IB. At a previous strategic seminar, the former foreign minister, Mr. Khursid Mahmood Kasuri, revealed how a solution with regards to Kashmir had already been struck — it was simply a matter of getting the three parties to sign.

In April this year, we invited the ambassadors of France and Germany to make a presentation on how their countries have overcome the baggage of history and now exist as part of a borderless EU. For centuries, there existed deep enmity be-

tween the people and the governments of France and Germany. They regarded each other as the 'inherited enemy.' The German ambassador shared how his father had been a soldier during World War II, while French ambassador was a prisoner of war. Yet, within a generation, their countries have moved beyond that state of hostilities and 'made war impossible' as the ambassador put it.

Perhaps the greatest deterrence against war is war itself. The devastation that World War II unleashed was the biggest impetus for peace. However the road to peace between these countries has been paved by various people-to-people confidence building measures, including the twinning of cities, the creation of joint history books, and various student exchanges.

The Indo-Pak example is different. We are not inherited enemies. We are inherited neighbours, joint inheritors of the Gandhara, Indus Valley and other ancient civilizations. Whenever Indians and Pakistanis come together, there is fraternity, friendliness and a celebration of shared values, culture and tastes. The enmity is between our establishments, not amongst ourselves. This discon-

nect is evident at every Aman ki Asha event. The single greatest hurdle is always a bureaucratic and political one — obtaining visas. Every time people come together, there is camaraderie and goodwill.

At the last Aman ki Asha event, all members of the Pakistani delegation traced their roots back to India, while all the Indians traced their roots back to Pakistan. This was at one of a series of cross-border CEO forums organised by Aman ki Asha, taking forward a joint declaration drafted at the end of a major economic conference in Delhi in May 2010. Six committees with Pakistani and Indian chapters were created in the sectors with the greatest potential for collaboration, to work towards promoting bilateral trade and investment and formulate policy recommendations that will facilitate increased trade.

Earlier this year, members of Aman ki Asha Committees, influential business leaders in their own right, met with the Commerce secretary of Pakistan, Mr. Zafar Mahmood, and put forward a series of policy recommendations to facilitate trade between the two countries.

We are now starting to see some of the fruits of greater eco-

nomie collaboration as the two countries begin to work towards increasing bilateral trade and investment. The positive list is being replaced by a negative list, there is talk of increasing levels of trade from 2.7 billion to 6 billion, starting up banks, etc.

Increased trade and investment will drive the peace process; CEO forums and Indo-Pak business meets lend impetus to Aman ki Asha.

But perhaps the heart of the movement is another Aman ki Asha project, launched in March this year in collaboration with the Rotary Clubs of India and Pakistan, Heart to Heart, sending 200 underprivileged children from Pakistan to India to undergo heart surgery at no cost to them. The Rotary Club of India has sponsored the project as a goodwill gesture, an extraordinary people-to-people confidence building measure.

By touching hearts, we change minds. The results of the independent surveys prior carried out to the launch of Aman ki Asha and again on its first anniversary, have been positive beyond expectations. In Pakistan, the brand recall of Aman ki Asha was 92%, whereas prior peace campaigns levelled out at about

4%. Negative perceptions of each other had decreased and positive perceptions improved. Some 87% of Pakistanis and 75% of Indians felt that Aman ki Asha helped create greater awareness about the core issues between the two countries. The terror perception had dropped from 75% to 42%. Most significantly, two thirds of respondents believed that peace was attainable within their lifetime, up 35% from the previous year.

Aman ki Asha aims to move beyond the realm of talk and candlelight vigils and to strive towards substantive gains: business deals, collaborative partnerships, life saving surgeries. When we collaborate with one another, do business together, and heal each other, we will no longer want or be able to fight each other. By building confidence between the peoples of India and Pakistan and developing ties and connections on multiple levels, we hope to build a web so strong that it will make war impossible. Through these people-to-people contacts, and through the many other initiatives and exchanges taking place, we hope to contribute towards making the dream of lasting peace a reality.

The writer is coordinator Aman ki Asha. This article is based on her paper presented at a conference titled "India-Pakistan Peace Process", organised by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Dubai, October 10 - 11, 2011. Email: amankiasha@janggroup.com.pk

PICNIC-SHICNIC

There's something about it that uplifts the mood and the appetite... **Vasundhara Chauhan** shares memories and recipes



In December my home becomes an ice-box, dark, cold and depressing. The sun could well be blazing outdoors, but inside, it's freezing and we need 100 watt bulbs and thermal underwear on. Which is why, to misquote Tennyson, In the Chill a woman's fancy turns to thoughts of parks. There's something about sitting out on a *durrrie* in a park — thorns, flies and hungry mongrels notwithstanding — that uplifts the mood and the appetite.

So, long after my children have outgrown excitement at the word "picnic", I haven't. When they were younger, we'd perfected the packing drill: water, plastic plates, paper napkins, a garbage bag, roast *moongphali* and *gur* (or chocolate) or *chikki*. Food was my responsibility, and this is so closely associated with my own childhood that only two menus were permissible. For many years, a picnic lunch had to have either sandwiches or *kabab-paratha*.

Sandwiches were chicken or ham, in soft, fresh white bread — this is before the whole-wheat and multigrain diktat — and bursting with filling. A large plastic box of salad: radishes (small *lal mooli*) cucumbers, tomatoes — no dressing, but sometimes a whole lemon — all cut on the spot with Daddy's pen knife. A bag of oranges and a flask of coffee. Soda wasn't encouraged.

I've always fantasised about another "local" packed meal seen on train journeys: piles of uncounted *pooris* and cold, yellow *alu ki subzi*, with homemade *aam ka achar* leaking strong smelling mustard oil from the wrapping: waxed paper from that week's Britannia bread. But the *kabab-paratha* menu wins hands down.

Some years ago six responsible adults and three children went prospecting for land on the outskirts of Delhi. We carried the usual sandwich story, and soon after we started walking, decided to unfold the *durrrie* and collapse. The brave men forged on. For me the whole idea of a picnic is to get outdoors and start eating — Frisbee etcetera are irrelevant. So two of us thought we'd start on the sandwiches and the third said she had brought a few kababs and parathas. We had a couple each; the start of the slippery slope. First we said that we should just taste them, then that they would be too spicy for the kids, then that we should leave four each for the men, then that the men would be hot and thirsty and would prefer cold sandwiches and salad, and finally, that by now they must have stopped and eaten at a *dhaba*, so two each should be enough for them... Because parathas kneaded in milk to keep them soft; and kababs made with the finest *qeema*, crisp outside and soft within, spiked with *garam masala*, are, like revenge, a dish best eaten cold. This *shami kabab* recipe is based on the one in "Curry: A Biography", by Lizzie Collingham, and suggests, among other variations, *masoor* instead of *chana dal*.

RED GRAPE AND FETA CHEESE SALAD

Serves 4

- 400g grapes
- 100g feta cheese
- Handful mint leaves
- 1 green chilli, chopped fine (optional)
- Pepper
- 2 tsp extra virgin olive oil

Halve grapes, cut feta into cubes and combine the lot with mint leaves and green chilli, if using. Grind some pepper over and drizzle with olive oil. Chill until ready to serve.

* For a picnic carry the oil and pepper in a separate leak-proof container. No salt — feta has enough.



SHAMI KABABS

Traditional Punjab and Uttar Pradesh recipe

Serves 6

- 2 tbsp vegetable oil
- 2 onions, sliced
- 1 tsp cumin seeds
- 4 cloves
- 1 tsp black peppercorns
- 1/2-inch cinnamon stick
- 4 green cardamoms
- 2 whole dried red chillies
- 3 tbsp red split lentils, masoor dal
- 500g finely ground minced meat
- 1/2 tsp ginger, chopped
- 2 green chillies
- 1/2 cup mint leaves
- 1/2 cup coriander leaves, chopped
- 3 tbsp yoghurt
- Salt
- 1 tsp raisins
- 1 tbsp sliced almonds

Heat oil and sauté onions till transparent. Add cumin seeds, cloves, peppercorns, cinnamon, cardamom and chillies and fry for 3-4 minutes. Keep aside. Cook lentils in about a cup of water until soft. In a blender, purée onion and spice mixture, lentils, minced meat, ginger, green chillies, fresh mint and coriander. Add yoghurt and salt and process again. Shape mince mixture into balls, press a few raisins and almonds into each and flatten balls into patties. Shallow fry and serve.



Months ago a local newspaper ran a column from NYT by Mark Bitten, an American food writer, listing 101 foods to take on a picnic. The dishes were obviously for another audience and included neither *poori-alu* nor *kabab-paratha*. But he had delicious ideas that I tried with a little adaptation, and they work.

He suggested pesto chicken rolls: seasoned and grilled chicken cutlets layered with tomatoes and arugula and wrapped in pita-like bread smeared with pesto sauce. Curried egg salad with hardboiled eggs, mayo, curry powder, mustard, onions and diced apples. Grapes — or grape tomatoes or watermelon chunks — with feta cheese, mint and chilli flakes. Watermelon isn't a winter fruit — even if you buy it after paying an arm and a leg. Once cut, it will spoil in a plastic box in the sun-warmed boot of a car. Grapes are better for a picnic, but the watermelon version is delightful to eat at home on a warm summer night.

A peace initiative whose time has come...

'Destination Peace': A commitment by the Jang Group, Geo and The Times of India Group to create an enabling environment that brings the people of Pakistan and India closer together, contributing to genuine and durable peace with honour between our countries.

THE FIRST STEP LET US KNOW WHAT YOU THINK

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