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# Pas-e-Parda

(Behind the Veil)



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## Introduction

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Welcome to the first edition of *Faith Matters'* E-Magazine, Pas-e-Parda (Behind the Veil). The prime objective of this initiative is to highlight the beautiful and colourful aspects of Pakistani society which are often overshadowed by the present environment of violent extremism prevailing in this part of the world.

As the name of the magazine, Pas-e-Parda suggests, it is aimed at showing a Pakistan that we normally do not see in the media. It will tell the stories of courage and optimism of Pakistanis who have suffered enormously in the fight against extremism which has been corroding their society for decades. It will reflect the rich culture and diversity of Pakistani society and stories will reflect the resilience of Pakistanis.

The release of the first edition of this magazine is indebted to a number of contributors from various parts of the world who are linked culturally and socially to Pakistan. Foremost among those individuals are:

- Sarah Ferozedean
- Saira Niazi
- Sahar Amin
- Rehman Anwer

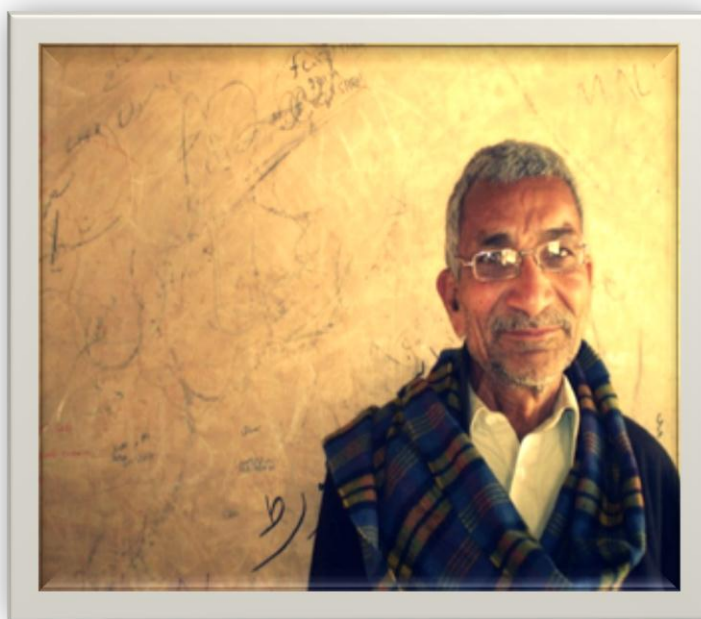
On behalf of *Faith Matters*, we express our sincere gratitude to all of the above contributors.

**Faith Matters Pakistan**

## Stargazing in Lahore – Connecting Beyond

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A day before I flew out to Lahore I went to Argos and bought three large boxes of Duracell batteries for my cheap second-hand Olympus camera. Although I didn't quite have a plan for what I would be doing in Pakistan for the next three months, I did know that I would be taking a lot of pictures. I have always been interested in photography and the powerful role images can play in challenging views, changing perceptions and facilitating change. Over the last few years I have worked on various writing, art and photography projects all of which have sought to override shallow and reductive representations of certain nations and peoples and go deeper in conveying a sense of shared humanity by emphasizing our similarities over our differences.



*Illustration 1: Guarding the Fort, 2012*

Pakistan is currently ranked the fourth most dangerous country in the world - plagued with calamities such as political instability, frequent natural disasters and terrorism. When I first arrived in Lahore I half expected to be met by angry mobs, explosions and hordes of dengue mosquitoes on the prowl. The reality of life (in Lahore at least) was not so dramatic - or menacing! And although my first few weeks had been pretty hard living especially with the constant cuts in power, gas and water, it wasn't half as difficult as I'd imagined it would be.

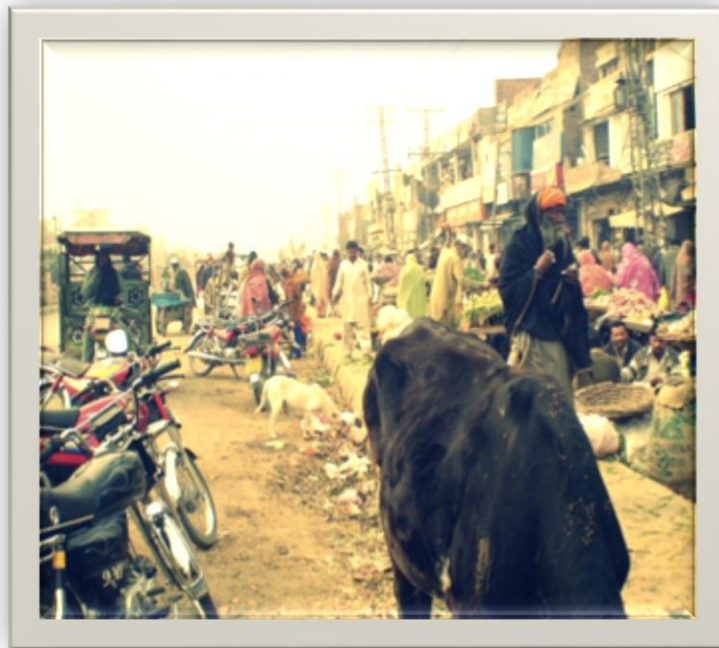
During my three months of working and living in Lahore I discovered a new Pakistan, one which often remains hidden from the public eye. It is a beautiful Pakistan filled with colour, magic and intrigue. Despite all its problems, to me, Pakistan remains one of the most interesting places in the world and I found the people living there to be incredibly resourceful, sincere, generous and spirited. This is what I wanted to capture through my photography. I wanted to take pictures that depicted the true reality of everyday life in the city. I wanted to capture images that told stories and really conveyed the true essence of the people I came across.



*Illustration 2: Weigh Yourself, 2012*

What really struck me was the resourcefulness of the people of Lahore, very rarely did I come across someone begging, rather one would always have a service on offer- one man would be selling balloons, another mending pots on the side road, a few children would gather shoes to shine. The people made the best of what they were given - they worked hard to receive the little they got. Compare that to the materialistic society that has developed in the UK and it seemed to me that we had much to learn from the discipline and the hardships that many Pakistanis, young and old, men and women, were willing to endure.

I also wanted to capture the colour and the mysticism of Lahore, for all the stereotypes perpetuated of Pakistan as a dark, dangerous and violent country, I found the city to be a very colourful place from soft pastels to garish neons, colour was to be found everywhere, on buses, trucks, markets, peoples clothes, decorations, even within graveyards, this to me reflected the qualities I found in many of the Lahori people I came to meet. A side that presented a certain creativity, humour, playfulness-all very human qualities.



*Illustration 3: Jallo Market, 2012.*

I also wanted to focus on taking pictures of children. I believe that wherever you go in the world, the children are the same. They love to play and laugh and to cause mischief. I think children are symbolic of truth and purity given the free-spirited nature they possess. Children remind us of how we used to be, back before we became aware of our differences, before we formed ideas and identities rooted in securities and fear. They remind us of simpler times, and I believe if we let them, they can inspire us to recreate those simpler times - that sense of freedom, trust and exploration.

I plan on going back to Lahore in a few years and setting up a tuition and play centre for street children. I feel as though I left a part of myself in Pakistan and I can't wait to go back and work hard to see that my dream becomes a reality. If you'd like to stay posted on my projects - visit my blog at [sysprints.blospot.co.uk](http://sysprints.blospot.co.uk). Pakistan has so much to offer, who knows, it may even touch your soul with its vibrancy and spirituality.

**Saira Niazi**

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Saira is mainly interested in conveying a sense of shared humanity of all people. She has explored this through a number of mediums including film, art, photography and writing. In the past she had her photographs exhibited in a number of locations including Goldsmiths College, the Candid Gallery, Factory 41 and Brixton Village. She is also very interested in writing and has recently started working on her third novel, *Conversations with Mad Clarity*.

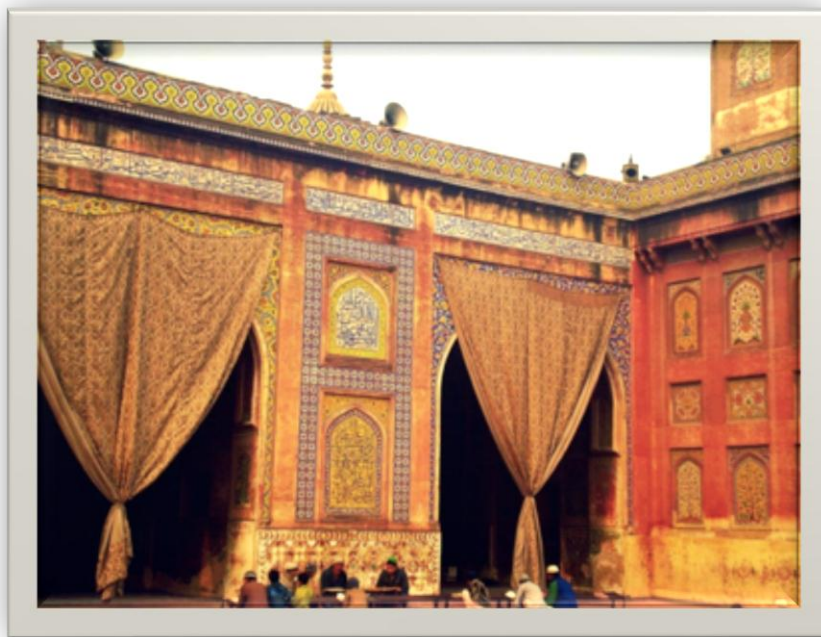
## Artistic Pakistan

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Pakistan is one of the few countries which is rich in its cultural diversity. The number of ethnic groups residing in this beautiful region range from Punjabis and Kashmiris in the North; Sindhis in the east; Mujahirs and Makrani in the South and Baloch and the Pashtun in the West.

Further north the ancient Dardic, Wakhi and Burusho communities reside in and around the valleys of Gilgit-Baltistan, adding further to the rich plurality of ethnicities.

These cultures have been greatly influenced by a number of customs from surrounding countries, primarily Turkic, Persian and Arab from the North and West, and Indian from the subcontinent in the East.



*Illustration 5: Wazir Khan Masjid, 2012.*

Religion is often confused with culture, indeed the two are somewhat separate elements, however they are not mutually exclusive. Celebrated poets such as Allama Iqbal and Mirza Ghalib wrote profoundly religious poetry, while Sadequain painted Islamic calligraphies in various galleries. Art has always been crucial to Islam and is a wonderful way to spread the teachings of this beautiful faith. It has also blended with South Asian artistic styles which infuse long brush strokes with the flows of Islamic calligraphy.



Art is an integral part of society which enables Pakistan's cultural opulence to thrive. Syed Sadequain Ahmed Naqvi and Abdur Rehman Chughtai are two very notable artists whose works sell for hundreds of thousands of dollars at auction houses such as Christies and Bonhams in London and New York. A R Chughtai's pieces are also on display at the British Museum, the Hague, and the United Nations Headquarters in New York; while Allama Iqbal, Pablo Picasso and Queen Elizabeth II were amongst his admirers.

Additionally, Pakistan's singers and musicians have gained recognition across the border in India, notably Noor Jehan, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Mehdi Hassan and Arif Lohar amongst many others.

Runa Laila started the pop industry in Bangladesh, best known for "Dama dum mast Qalander"; while the 15 year old pop sensation Nazia Hassan with her brother Zohaib Hassan steered the birth of pop music in South Asia. "Dil Dil Pakistan" sung by Vital Signs was voted the third most popular song in the world by a BBC poll. In 1998 Channel V accredited the "Best International Group Award" to Junoon among with Aqua, Boyzone, the Prodigy and Back Street Boys.

In recent years, with the likes of Atif Aslam and Ali Zafar dominating Bollywood, Pakistan is certainly making a name for itself in the music and film industry.

And the talent does not stop here. Pakistan's fashion industry is also making it's mark, alongside Paris, London, New York and Milan. For the third year running, Lahore has showcased the Pakistan Fashion Design Council's fashion week which has made waves in Vogue. Pakistan's designers are world renowned such as Rizwan Beyg who famously designed a dress for the late Princess Diana.

I recently went to see Taming of the Shrew at the Globe Theatre in London performed by the brilliant "Theatre Wallay" from Lahore. This was a fantastic adaptation of the Shakespeare play, set in Lahore with a Punjabi twist. Full of humour, love and melancholy, the well-rounded production was performed beautifully with colourful costumes, bhangra and folk dancing and a Pathan named Rustam.

I was in awe of the fantastic delivery of a well-known classic which could easily have not been done justice. The versatility of the actors to perform such a recognized play, yet challenge the chauvinism and patriarchy in a stimulatingly sarcastic manner, demonstrated that Pakistan has a vast pool of talent that has been largely untapped. This certainly made me feel very proud as a Pakistani and I can only hope that such talent is encouraged and nurtured in the future.

The Arts are an excellent way to engage with young Pakistanis who have so much to offer and a conduit through which positive social change can be enacted. Art is therefore a form of education that is understood by all, not just the erudite. It is a form of liberation for those who cannot be heard otherwise.

Pakistan has so much to offer the world as well as to itself. The beautiful Mughal architecture is just one of the jewels that attract tourists to this vibrant land. The people's hospitality is second to none and the cuisine is nothing short of delectable.

Let's make Pakistan a better place, and make sure it is well-known the world over for its talented people who are its greatest asset.

**Sarah Ferozedean**

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Sarah is an accountant by profession, but her real passion lies within writing and takes a profound interest in current affairs and human rights issues. She feels to represent the voices of the unheard, while counter extremism is a subject close to her heart. She indulges in her own blog and has also written for The Prayer. As an avid photographer she loves to take a different perspective in life, and contributed in the "100 faces of London" exhibition to promote cultural and ethnic diversity in London.

## Changing Mind-Sets About Extremism

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It is said that peace building is an on-going process that may involve a number of approaches and mechanisms to put in place in conflict areas in order to achieve lasting peace.

In the case of Pakistan, there are multiple reasons for the prevailing environment of violent extremism. On one hand, it is sectarian and there are ethnic dimensions to this violence and on the other hand, it is the mis-use of religious text in the face of a contemporary war against terrorism in which Pakistan has been acting as a front line partner. In the aftermath of the murderous incidents of 9/11, Pakistan declared its desire to assist the United States in tracking down terrorists based in the lawless tribal areas of Pakistan. Consequently, extremists waged a war against Pakistan and started attacking the armed forces and civilians of Pakistan through indiscriminate suicide attacks, a phenomenon that was completely new to Pakistani society. According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), 41,651 people have lost their lives in terrorist violence in Pakistan since 2003. Insurgents have been targeting people especially the younger generation to brainwash and emotionally motivate them to attack civilians in the name of religion. It is also surprising to see that militants in Pakistan have been using technological tools including mobile SMS, Twitter and Facebook to further pull in and inspire new followers whilst consolidating those within respective groups.

Under these circumstances, Faith Matters decided to launch a technology oriented SMS based project in Pakistan named Peghaam (The Message). This peace building and conflict resolution project that also countered extremist narratives was based on one simple fact. That nearly 70% of Pakistanis have access to a mobile phone with and it is considered to be one of the cheapest ways to communicate in the country.

The Peghaam project involved sending out 100 million SMS messages in the conflict areas of Pakistan and that made it the largest ever SMS project that anyone undertook in Pakistan. Most of the messages were taken out from the Holy Quran and credible Hadith sources. Examples of the messages sent are as follows:

***The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: “You will not believe as long as you do not love one another.” (Sahih Muslim, Hadith 19)***

***The Prophet (PBUH) said “Attainment of knowledge is a must for every Muslim”.  
Terrorists destroy boys’ school in SWAT. How is this Islamic?***

All the messages were translated into the local regional languages in order to localise them so that they could be responded to.

It was interesting to see the variety of inbound responses that we received. The pattern of inbound responses included support to the project, Pakistanis offering their services to spread the messages in local villages, towns and cities and with blank replies (which we later found was because some of the recipients were non-literate though they were agreeing with the message).

Some of the interesting responses that we received are given below:

- **Indeed, violence and terrorism can never be stronger than peace. We need peace in Pakistan now.**
- **It is an awakening call and we are with you to spread the message of peace**
- **Pakistanis are victims of violence and strongly facing these acts. I really appreciate this encouraging message.**
- **This message is a challenge to all those who believe in hatred and claim to be Muslims**



The Peghaam project provided us with a unique dimension to look at the issue of violent extremism in Pakistan. The level of support and the thanks that we received from recipients clearly suggest that Pakistani society at large does value the importance of peace and harmony and is a population that is resilient against extremism and terrorism. Together with others who want peace and stability, the future outlook for Pakistan looks brighter and let us hope that the country has overcome the most difficult period in its history since its creation.

**Rehman Anwer**

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Rehman works as a Project Manager for Faith Matters and is focused on the organisation's Pakistan chapter. He is actively engaged in managing the operations of a wide range of interfaith, countering extremism and developmental projects in Pakistan. His work had led him to travel extensively within Pakistan and he has held various interfaith dialogue and cultural events. He has successfully carried out a number of counter-extremism campaigns in Pakistan and has managed to encourage the youth in the country to participate in those campaigns in order to raise their voices against discrimination and extremism

## Personal Stories From The Diary Of A Pakistani

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Pakistan is a land that has beauty - beyond measure, the view of which is darkened and blurred by the smoke that exists around it. Behind the many news stories, terrorism issues and global propaganda regarding this South Asian nation, sits a land full of treasures waiting to be discovered.

Pakistan has had the advantage of many culturally diverse people being a part of its population. People from various cultures and faiths have made this nation rich in its traditions, music, art and poetry.

As an overseas Pakistani, I craved going back to Pakistan every year. The people, the places and the food felt as if they were my other half; as if I fit in perfectly like a missing puzzle piece. Then it would be time to go and with tears I would wave goodbye to my grandmother and grandfather who would come to the airport to make sure they spent every possible moment admiring their grandchildren.



*Illustration 6: On the Banks of the Ravi, 2012.*

When I was younger, I was a restless child; curious to the point of annoying. Our neighbours were Christian and I remember going to their house each week to join them as they read their children's stories from the Bible. My grandmother always had to apologise to them as I would turn up at their home at odd times asking to hear another story. The lady of the house used to welcome me regardless and read me a story while I chomped on cookies and milk.

I remember telling my grandfather about the stories; and he used to listen eagerly. He spoke of going to Church when he was studying in England and told me of how loving his host family was to him during his stay. I asked him if I could go to Church too, though he spoke of how it was unsafe to do so in Pakistan. I felt really bad and told him that I would not speak to him if he did not let me go. He then asked me to join him for some Shezan (an addiction of mine at the time) and a walk in the local park where he would explain why he had refused to let me go.

I eagerly agreed and we went on our way. While sipping on my drink, I curiously asked my grandfather why I could not go to the Church even though he used to go to Church when he was in college. My grandfather pointed to some rabbits playing in the park; he showed me how the rabbit, differing in its colour, would be chased away by the other rabbits. He told me that people had forgotten how to love and always looked at what was different instead of what was similar. He spoke of the 'People of The Book' and told me how we all were believers in God and that there were various ways of looking to God.

I felt bad for my neighbours; they loved me so much and this was unfair! In a fury of emotion, I asked how I could help them. My grandfather said that we can only help each other by being friends. He said that he was worried about me and that is why I would not be allowed to go to Church; but after a lot of pleading my grandfather agreed with the condition that he would go with me.

It was that day and today every bit of me hurts when I remember how my grandfather was so open-hearted and loving and now, unfortunately, even the youngest of generations have closed their hearts. My father is very much like my grandfather.. My father's childhood best friend is an Ahmaddiya Muslim while my mother spends 3 hours a day chatting away to his wife; it has been this way for 18 years. Their children have always been my good friends.

Pakistan is so beautifully diverse; I have come across Bahais that live in Pakistan, as well as Hindus and Jains. With diverse traditions and rich backgrounds, we all unite as Pakistanis. Late night conversations, enlightening debates and a few coffees later, we all come to the conclusion that we all have a common ground, a belief in goodness and love. In his usual sultry accent, the always polite coffee shop owner pleads with us to call it a night. Smiling, he says that he enjoyed our debate, and tells us never to become too Godly as humans. Agreeing and thanking him for his patience, we all hugs and say our goodbyes as a new dawn breaks over the hills of this ancient land which has seen so many civilisations come and go.

As a Sufi Muslim, I have had my fair share of anger from extremist mind-sets, though I believe we as a community should begin recognising Islam for what it really is Islam. Islam is not just about peace and a common humanity based on mutual self-respect. It is about your dialogue with God which should not be anyone else's dialogue with God. Talking to my Hindu friend who talks about her love for Pakistan, I always tell her that there will be a day when we will overcome the hatred. She says that she never loses hope and as my Bahai friend from Islamabad says; 'Sunno sabki, karo apni...'

Well that was it today; I remembered my grandfather's words from many moons ago and thought that my reflections needed to be written down instead of letting them wash over me and away into the haze of a summer day. When I talk to him now in the recesses of my mind, I tell him that I go to Church every Sunday, and I pray 5 times a day. He laughs and says that he is happy for me and as always he cheekily throws a challenge my way; 'try going into a synagogue'he says, chuckling away. With another challenge thrown at me, I turn towards my Jewish friend and ask for her help in overcoming this one. She laughs and says, "your grandfather is a smart old man."

**Sahar Amin**

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Sahar is a student, a humanitarian and a patriotic Pakistani. She introduces herself as:

"I'm a believer; a Pakistani; green runs in my veins. I talk way too much, about everything under the sun. I'm obsessed with my nation; my first and last love, it's just going through a tough time. I think a culture of tolerance lives within each of us; I hope my perception and insight into the concept of tolerance gives everyone a different angle from which to see the world, especially Pakistan."



# Faith Matters Christian-Muslim Dialogue session Lahore

