

I was trying to maintain a queue while buying a cinema ticket. One hour later, I was standing where I had been. People had pushed their way past me and got their tickets. Exactly one and a half year later, with my sleeves rolled up, I found my way amidst the crowd and got my ticket earlier than anybody else. I was ready to face the Pakistani society”.

These were the sentiments of an expatriate who had spent 18 years of his life in the Middle East and had come to Pakistan to continue his education. This, according to him, depicts the working of the Pakistani society, chaotic, opportunistic, and unorganised. This society moulds people who are new to it, accommodating all, creating personalities, undoing the training of years and years altogether. There are numerous other examples which reveal the social and the mental hindrances that one has to face here after having lived abroad for a couple of years.

Every society has its own norms and traditions, way of living, social, psychological and economical set-up. These Pakistanis live in these countries for many years, gradually attuning their physical, social, psychological, even cultural habits to the patterns of these societies. This ensures their better acceptance and amalgamation into an alien society.

The lifestyle of every country is different from the rest. Pakistani expatriates living abroad become accustomed to the particular lifestyle prevailing in their country. As most of the Pakistani expatriates are settled in America, UK and the Middle East, they are used to a comparatively better standard of living. Being exposed to a cosmopolitan culture, they acquire a broader vision and a progressive outlook on life.

Their social circle is limited to a few family friends, relatives and colleagues of their community. Away from their relatives and families, these expatriates either come home occasionally

A strange world back home

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AMBER KAFIL KHAN discusses the social problems the Pakistani expatriates face here, and concludes that they can reverse the situation by investing in their home country

or pay a visit to Pakistan once in a blue moon. These sojourns to Pakistan rarely acquaint them with the temperament of the Pakistani society and its social set-up.

Many factors may compel them to return to their native land. These include stringent visa and

optimistic of them are excited over the prospects of setting in their homeland amidst eager relatives, cousins and friends. They face new challenges ahead in a dynamic society constantly reached by political, economical and social upheaval.

Riaz Ahmed, 45, had to send

immense noise outside. The horns of cars, vans etc. are deafening. Back in Abu Dhabi, the traffic police could book us for blowing horns. I realise the extent of the traffic disarray when I first took my car out on the road. It seemed that the entire traffic was heading

towards me!! My husband does not drive when he comes here.

“Relatives, she admits, are sometimes a nuisance. “In 20 years, I had grown to be a private person, focusing on my family and myself. Relatives often indulge in gossiping, interfering and intruding into private family matters which makes life miserable.”

“Every new day began with a new set of problems. The telephone is not working, there is an electricity breakdown, a marriage ceremony is coming up and the

petrol prices have shot up,” she continues non-stop.

“In Abu Dhabi, life was smooth and unhindered. We were away from our country but led a peaceful, serene life. We always had a long day at work, but since it was organised, it didn't seem much of a burden. Here, I always seem to run out of time. My life has become a vicious cycle of work, home and relatives. In two years time I have lived twenty years. Some times I feel like packing up my



immigration rules, higher education, finding spouses for their children, negative influences of the Western societies and other family and personal matters. Many families are aware of the myriad of problems awaiting them in their homeland. They are also painfully aware of the huge difference of lifestyle and mentality that exists between them and the people here. Usually, years of separation result in a vacuum between them and their families. The more

his family back to Pakistan after living for 20 years in the UAE capital, Abu Dhabi. He had migrated to the Emirates in the late 70's in search of a good job. Soon he found a lucrative job as the department manager of one of the largest construction firms in the Middle East. In 1999, his family shifted permanently to Pakistan, Lahore, while he stayed in the UAE. His wife Shehla Riaz had interesting experiences to share. “The first thing that I realised was the

luggage and going back home," she says.

Uzma is not satisfied with her children's education here. "In Middle East, schooling is expensive but quality education is provided. We are satisfied that the future of our children is in safe hands. But here, even the best of schools do not provide good education." Uzma is aware of the vast difference in the nature of her children and the children here.

Usman Afridi, an MBA graduate from the University of Arkansas, America, plainly refused to settle in Pakistan even on the insistence of his parents. "In America I am enjoying a highly paid job in a software manufacturing company. How can I give away my house and all the luxuries that I enjoy and most importantly my peace of mind in return for the troubled, tension filled existence here? This is a poor bargain," he states in a business-like manner.

The most incredible experiences are those of the students who come here to pursue further studies. They live in the hostels or with their relatives and thus, have to face the music alone. After the first few months, and in some cases years of homesickness, they are at last able to adjust themselves well to the Pakistani norms and traditions. At times, they feel like a fish out of water. Interesting experiences were related regarding their first contact with the Pakistani society. "My first day at college, was very strange. I felt as if I was in a jungle of human beings. I had no friends, I did not know where to go," says Fiza Khan, an MA graduate who came to Pakistan after completing her secondary education. She sought admission in one of the largest girl's colleges and lived with her relatives. Initially she had problems developing and understanding with her relatives. "Growing up in a world of opulence, I took every thing for granted. They dislike my, as they say, "Shahana" (royal) habits. I was used to a luxurious lifestyle, watching TV till late in the night, getting up late in the

afternoon, long telephonic conversations," she reminisces.

She felt a marked difference in the attitude of her relatives now that she was alone and a liability on them. she had to draw out guidelines for herself and improve her defence system to deal with the people around her. Gradually, she learnt to survive by the trial and error method. "I realised that I had to be more sharp, analytical and wise to survive here. Slowly, I learnt the tricks of the trade."

In the beginning Fiza avoided family gatherings and marriage ceremonies. She never participated in the hullabaloo in the marriage. She opposes the extravagance of the marriages here. "People have ample of time to waste here. We waste so much time and money in showcasing and masquerading. I am a total misfit as far as the social gathering are concerned."

Pakistan is a challenge for the people who want to prove their mettle and excel in their fields. "I had to try hard to get my recognition. I did not know how to make my place in the society that is already full of many talented, creative and ambitious minds." But her solitary experience in Pakistan has not left her distasteful or disheartened. Pakistan has been a learning experience for her. "There are so many problems in our society that hinder our performance individually and collectively. And an individual who learns to fight these odds is the real winner", she says having secured the first position in her university exams.

Thus, people may live anywhere and get all the riches of the world, they can never sever their roots embedded in the soil of their motherland. The sense of independence and freedom imparted by one's own country cannot be felt anywhere else. There may be problems and hurdles in Pakistan but these are not invincible. In fact, these expatriate Pakistanis can utilise their resources and invest in human development projects to make Pakistan a better country to live in. ■

Down
6.7.02
Society & Social Problems

Living on charity

Do physical disability and deformity help? They do — at least in the case of those living on alms as is evident from the growing number of handicapped and deformed beggars who swarm the city streets.

It is quite difficult, rather impossible, to ignore a teenager walking on all fours in Gulberg or a 30-year-old crawling on his stomach seeking charity on The Mall. Physically handicapped and deformed men, women and children imploring people for some coins are a common sight. In fact, they have become a permanent, though unwanted, part of the city's landscape during the last few years.

"People, particularly women, tend to give more in alms if you somehow succeed in arousing their pity. Physical disability (or deformity) helps," says 21-year-old Zarina, who is often seen seeking alms at Barkat Market, with a twisted arm and five children crying for food.

The number of the disabled and deformed beggars is increasing in the city at an alarming rate. The age of most beggars with some kind of physical deformity or disability usually ranges between 13 and 40 years.

A major factor responsible for the growing number of beggars is the rising poverty and unemployment in the country. According to conservative official estimates, at least 32 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line. It is not difficult to guess the number of those who live just "above" it. Drug addiction in men is another major cause of the increasing number of beggars.

Most of the women and children found seeking alms are actually forced by their men and families to do so. "My husband does not work at all and I just don't know

what else should I be doing to fend for myself and my children," says Karima Bibi, a mother of six. Her four elder children, between four and nine, also "help" their mother with her "job."

The daily income of the beggars ranges between a few to several hundred rupees, depending upon the area of operation. "Those who operate near the shrines of saints and sufis or mosques make money in the range of Rs500-2,000 a day as God-fearing visitors to these places tend to give more generously than others," says a social worker.

While some insist that they were born with their deformities, others say they lost their limbs in accidents. However, the number of those who agree to part with some body organ or the other to make "easy" money through begging is also growing.

Afzal, 14, who lost both his arms in an accident a few years ago, was spotted begging at Gulberg's Main Market. He said he had to seek charity to raise money for his sick mother and himself. "With my disability I cannot do anything else."

Saleem Khan, 38, who lives in Badami Bagh and begs at the Main Market, asserts that he had to get his legs amputated "because they developed some complications after a fever." "Since I couldn't do anything else, I had to beg in order to support my family." He claims that his children attend a school near his home.

For people like Afzal, Karima Bibi, and Saleem Khan, who have no means to support themselves, living on charity seems to be the only choice. For others, however, begging offers an "economic and business opportunity." It is well known that most professional beggars are controlled by a powerful

mafia which operates with police connivance. Many of them are dropped at their assigned areas early in the morning and picked up in the late hours by their operators.

The mafia also protects them from police "highhandedness" as well as "encroachment" on their "areas of duty" by other beggars. To avail of these facilities, they pay a substantial amount of their day's earnings to their "masters."

The fact that a mafia is behind the beggary racket is admitted by a report on the eradication of the menace prepared by a task force constituted by the Punjab governor in 2001. The report says: "The task force is convinced that a powerful mafia or perhaps more than one mafia is operating in large cities like Lahore. Unfortunately, no attention has so far been paid to identifying the ring leaders and bring them to book. The mafia is known for kidnapping children and at times maiming them in order to make them beggars, exciting pity.

"Again, unfortunately recovery of the kidnapped children has never been a priority of the law-enforcing agencies. It is, therefore, recommended that a strongly worded directive to the administration and law enforcing agencies should be issued by the governor to undertake special campaigns to unearth ring leaders and criminal beggars for trial under the provisions of the Punjab Vagrancy Ordinance, 1958, (which prohibits beggary) as well as other statutory laws. The deployment of special police force and nomination of honorary magistrates in this respect would facilitate the execution of the vagrancy law."

As has been the case with several other similar studies, no action has been taken to date by the provincial administration. — AMNAH ATIQUÉ

