

DIALOGUE SERIES

Relations between the  
MUSLIM WORLD  
and the WEST

# Pakistani Diaspora in the West: Part of the Solution or Part of the Problem?

Discussion Paper



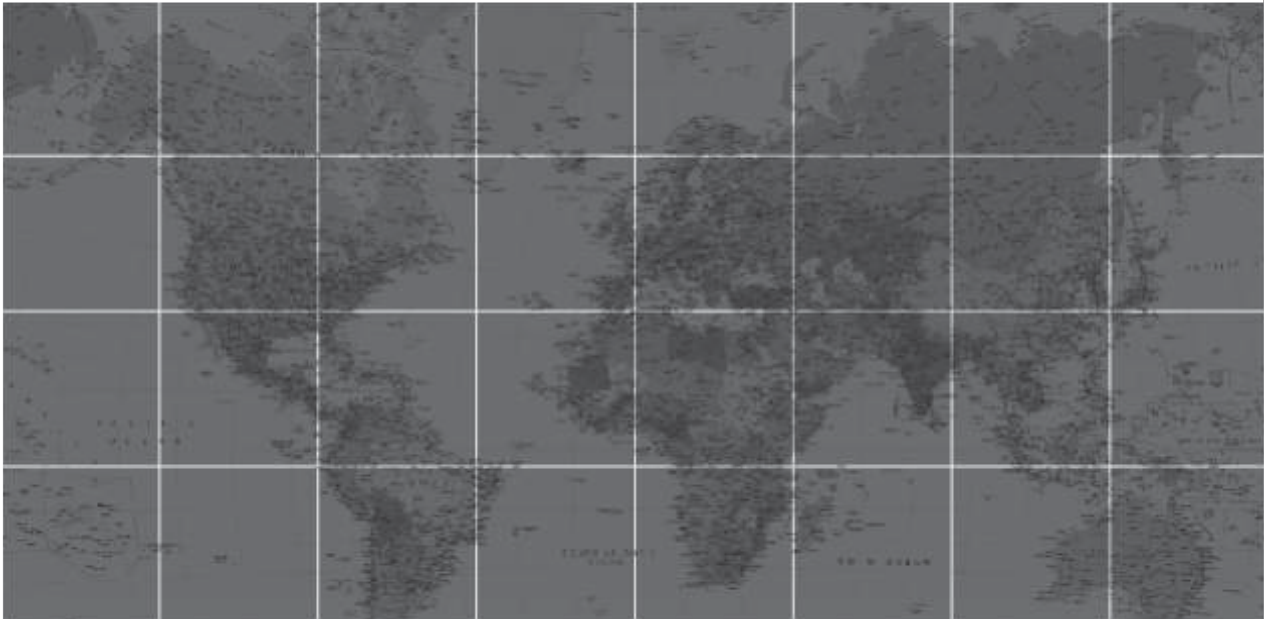


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**Pakistani Diaspora in the West:**  
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# Pakistani Diaspora in the West: Part of the Solution or Part of the Problem?

## FOREWORD

The Discussion Paper on Pakistani Diaspora in the West: Part of the Solution or Part of the Problem? has been prepared by PILDAT as a backgrounder for the interlocutors of the Dialogue Series on Relations between the Muslim World and the West. Foreign Legislators of Pakistani origin from a number of countries are scheduled to take part in the dialogues.

The paper highlights some of the major issues that define relations between Pakistani Diaspora settled in Western countries and the role they play in defining relations between the Muslim and Western worlds. Towards the end, the paper outlines a set of key questions on the issue that are proposed to be taken up during the course of the dialogue.

### **Acknowledgement**

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### **Disclaimer**

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Islamabad  
April 2008





# Pakistani Diaspora in the West: Part of the Solution or Part of the Problem?

## Introduction

Does the Pakistani Diaspora worldwide have a role to play in influencing or improving understanding and relations between the Muslim World and the West? This paper focuses on the profile and the role of Pakistani Diaspora in the Western countries especially Western Europe and North America. As is the intent of the paper, it seeks to put forward questions and issues for the Dialogue process on Understanding Relations between the Muslim World and the West.

## Defining Pakistani Diaspora and the West

The term West broadly refers to European and North American countries and the European settlements around the world including the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Pakistani Diaspora comprises individuals and communities settled around the world with a common origin and background in Pakistan.

## Composition of the Pakistani Diaspora

By the year 2005, nearly four million persons of Pakistani origin were living outside of the country,<sup>1</sup> according to official figures. The estimates increase in 2008 as well as when illegal immigrants are taken into account.

In the United States, official number of Pakistani Diaspora in 1980 stood at 40,000. However, 20 years later, the number grew 5 times to 201,309 by the year 2000<sup>2</sup> and then to 600,000 by 2005 (Table 1). In the United Kingdom, the British Pakistani population stood at 800,000 in 2005, and made up the largest Pakistani community in the West. However, the estimated figure of Pakistani Diaspora in UK now stands at 826,000.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the above two areas, over 1,050,000 Pakistanis live in countries of the Western Europe. In

Canada, according to some estimates, 75,000 Pakistanis reside, and have been said as being the most successful group of Pakistani expatriates abroad.<sup>4</sup>

In the Western milieu, especially compared within Europe and North America, educational, professional and economic background and profiles of Pakistani Diaspora differ sharply from each other. Whereas more and more students and white collar professionals have migrated to United States and Canada as their adopted homelands, the UK and Europe have received more blue collar workers and manual labourers who were recruited back in the 1950s to fulfil the labour shortages after World War II.

**Table 1: Number of Pakistanis Settled in the West, 2005**

No	Countries	Overseas Pakistanis
1.	UK	800,000
2.	USA	600,000
3.	Canada	250,000
4.	France	50,000
5.	Germany	52,668
6.	Greece	32,500
7.	Netherlands	40,000
8.	Norway	36,400
9.	Denmark	20,250
10.	Australia	20,000
11.	Italy	18,624
12.	Belgium	14,500
13.	Ireland	7,000
14.	Sweden	5,250
15.	Austria	3,500
16.	New Zealand	3,000
17.	Switzerland	2,415
18.	Spain	2,000

Source: Overseas Pakistanis Division, Government of Pakistan

<sup>1</sup> Government of Pakistan, 2005. "Year Book 2004-2005", Overseas Pakistanis Division, Islamabad

<sup>2</sup> Roels, Britt, 2005. "The Indian and Pakistani Diaspora in the U.S: Interest Groups, American Politics and Policy Process", Columbia University USA

<sup>3</sup> Office of National Statistics, 2008. UK Statistics Authority [www.ons.gov.uk](http://www.ons.gov.uk)

<sup>4</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pakistani\\_diaspora](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pakistani_diaspora)



# Pakistani Diaspora in the West: Part of the Solution or Part of the Problem?

## Integration, Multiculturalism or Religious Pluralism?

One of the leading questions attached to the Pakistani Diaspora worldwide is whether they have integrated enough into their adopted homelands? Following closely behind is the debate whether integration or assimilation should indeed be the desired outcome in proud and pronounced “secular” western democracies or should they pursue the ideals of multiculturalism or better yet, religious pluralism?

If the profile of the Pakistani Diaspora's integration in the Western societies is reviewed, a mixed picture emerges although there are yet again sharp differences within the Pakistani-British and Pakistani-American communities.

In the British context, Pakistani Diaspora has been a well-studied phenomenon well before 7/7.<sup>5</sup> Resistance to integration and cultural assimilation, “myth of return”<sup>6</sup> and “ghettoisation”<sup>7</sup> are terms that have specifically applied to the British-Pakistanis living in the UK. Studies looking into the question of integration have pointed out that integration remains slow in large numbers of Pakistani-British community mainly owing to economic deprivation and strong cultural and religious orientation of the Pakistani-British.

Pakistani-Americans, on the other hand are known to assimilate into American culture while at the same time keeping the culture of their ancestors and retaining a high ethnic identity.<sup>8</sup> This is perhaps due to the largely professional make-up of the community and also because they have “fewer language barriers,” more educational credentials (compared to other heritage groups in the United States, Pakistani Americans are better educated with 54% holding a bachelors degree or

higher) and professional representation in the fields of medicine, engineering, finance, and information technology, although a large population of Pakistani Americans also comprises manual workers.

The Pakistani-American community is also well-known for its philanthropic activities, both for political and religious causes within United States and in Pakistan. Research shows that in the year 2002, this community gave nearly US \$ 1 Billion in philanthropy (including value of volunteered time).<sup>9</sup> Another recent study on the philanthropy trends of Pakistani Diaspora in the United States<sup>10</sup> sheds light on an interesting pattern of their spending. Of the nearly \$250 million donated and spent on charity causes by the Pakistani Diaspora, \$100 million is spent on causes unrelated to Pakistan, of which a large section is spent on religious causes within the United States and in Pakistan. Furthermore, in the aftermath of 9/11, September 11, 34% of Pakistani Diaspora interviewed for the survey indicated an increased spending on “causes that relate to being better and more active citizens within their American neighbourhoods and communities.”<sup>11</sup>

In the political domain, at least 2 Pakistani-Americans have been elected to State Legislatures within USA while professional organisations of Pakistani Americans have prominently participated within the political structures of United States through political funding, lobbying and public affairs committees, etc. Similarly, the first American of Pakistani origin was elected as Mayor of a New Jersey municipality in 2004.<sup>12</sup> A recent study comparing trends of Indian and Pakistan Diaspora in the US points out that now the Pakistani Diaspora's organizations have the “*aspirations to enforce changes in their home country while others try to find a place in the politics of their host country.*”<sup>13</sup> Organisations such

<sup>5</sup> Werbner, Pnina. Pakistani Migration and Diaspora Religious Politics in a Global Age: <http://p.werbner.googlepages.com/PakistaniDiasporaEncyclopedia.PDF>

<sup>6</sup> Anwar, M. (1979). The Myth of return: Pakistanis in Britain. London:Heinemann.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/09/2c5422de-c656-4b0d-879b-b30370a07b07.html>

<sup>8</sup> Najam, Adil. 2005. “Philanthropy by Pakistani Diaspora in the US”, Pakistan Centre for Philanthropy, Islamabad

<sup>9</sup> Najam, Adil. 2006. Portrait of a Giving Community Philanthropy by the Pakistani-American Diaspora, Harvard University, USA

<sup>10</sup> Najam, Adil. 2005. “Philanthropy by Pakistani Diaspora in the US”, Pakistan Center for Philanthropy, Islamabad

<sup>11</sup> ibid

<sup>12</sup> Roels, Britt, 2005. “The Indian and Pakistani Diaspora in the U.S: Interest Groups, American Politics and Policy Process”, Columbia University, USA



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as Association of Pakistani Physicians of North America (APPNA), the Human Development Foundation of North America (HDFNA), Pakistan Public Affairs Committee (Pak-PAC), etc., have all made useful political contributions in the US milieu in not only highlighting concerns espoused by Pakistani state but have all made political contributions and alignments within US structures in line with the work of many professional bodies, associations and lobbying groups in the US. Although no Pakistani origin US citizen has been elected to US Congress, Pakistani-origin legislators have been elected to State Legislatures in the United States and are active at the local level. In neighbouring Canada, a Pakistani-origin Member of Parliament serves as Advisor to the Canadian Prime Minister. Pakistani-origin MPs serve in the House of Commons and in the House of Lords in growing numbers, including holding cabinet positions in the British government. Denmark, Sweden, Norway and New Zealand have Pakistani-origin MPs selected to their respective Parliaments.

The British-Pakistanis however, are not a homogenous entity. Where there are complaints of lack of integration, there are also examples of Pakistani-origin British citizens taking active part in local and national politics, with the latest count of Pakistani-origin British MPs at 7 while the numbers going into hundreds at local level representation. Experts point out that while the media and policymakers tend to focus more on a “tiny minority of disaffected youths” who are unemployed and vulnerable to extremists, at the other end of the scale, “there are plenty of young Muslims doing very well...more and more are working in the City of London...and the numbers entering higher education are increasing faster than among the population as a whole..”<sup>14</sup>

### **To participate or not to participate...in Pakistani politics?**

The political activism of Pakistani Diaspora does not just include activism within the politics of western countries. Many segments of the Pakistani Diaspora actively follow the Pakistani politics in terms of running and joining overseas factions of Pakistani political parties. The most potent criticism against this trend comes not only from amongst the Pakistani Diaspora but from within Pakistan that the trend to actively engaged in Pakistani factional politics not only divides the Pakistani community but their active involvement in partisan politics of Pakistan deters them from taking an active part in the politics of their adopted homelands. Should or shouldn't the Pakistani Diaspora participate in partisan politics of Pakistan?

### **Muslim Identity of the Pakistani Diaspora**

The September 2001 attacks in US and the July 2007 London bombings have brought the “Muslim” origin of Pakistani Diaspora, especially the youth, under a sharp spotlight and scrutiny. While in the US context, more and more allegations of terrorist organisations and groups are traced to Pakistan, newer questions have entered the discourse on Diaspora as to how lack of integration of Pakistani-Muslims into the British society, may turn “dissatisfied youngsters” of the Diaspora into “easy prey” for extremist groups.

The growing focus in the Western countries on “political Islam” and its followers propels the perception that Islamic identity of immigrants stands in the way of their integration into Western democracies. The focus of immigrant communities on carving and preserving a cultural identity, even though they may belong to different religions, races and origins, is a growing trend worldwide. The Asian

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Excerpts from Interview with Prof. Muhammad Anwar: <http://education.guardian.co.uk/egweekly/story/0,,2001197,00.html>

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Muslims, especially those belonging to Pakistan, identify deeply with the “Muslim” causes of Palestinians, Kashmiris, Afghanis and Iraqis, perhaps part of the same drive to maintain a cultural identity for themselves. Their internationally transmitted image, therefore, is that of “book- or effigy-burning, protesting Muslim mobs.”<sup>15</sup> In the British context, this image is further intensified by inner-city rioting of young Pakistanis in northern British towns and alleged joining of terrorist and extremist groups by some young British Muslims.

Elsewhere in Europe and North America, Muslim immigrants invoke much the same perception. In fact, as a growing trend in many international forums, this phenomenon is referred to as the “problem of Muslim immigrants in Europe.” Pakistani Muslims living at home or even worldwide tend to prefer their “Muslim identity.” This image seems to be in clear clash within many seemingly “secular” societies. Experts believe that the *“centrality of Islam in the lives of so many European Muslims is hard for increasingly secular Scandinavians, Germans and Frenchmen to comprehend. Europeans worry that Islam will make it difficult for their Muslim neighbours to accept many of the continent’s core values, such as tolerance, democracy and equal rights for women.”*<sup>16</sup>

Has the once peaceful relationship between the Pakistani Diaspora and the host countries turned into one of mutual unease? What is the responsibility of the host governments and policymakers in dealing with these perceptions and realities? What is, indeed, the responsibility of the Diasporas? Can and do the Diasporas play a role in bridging the divide between Muslims and the West, and especially Pakistan and the West?

## **Pakistani Diaspora and Problematic Relations with the West**

### **The Terrorism Link**

In the backdrop of terrorist attacks at New York, Madrid, and London Muslims worldwide, especially of Pakistani origin, have come to be closely associated with militancy and extremist values. In recent years, the number of Pakistanis arrested in connection with terrorism charges has risen dramatically, with high profile arrests made in Canada, Italy, France and the United Kingdom.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Economic Marginalization**

Whereas, the increased link between Pakistani Diaspora and extremism is a result of multitude of reasons, economic marginalizations as well as perceived injustices with the Muslims around the world have also been an important factor in young, second-generation Pakistani Diaspora resorting to a traditional and often strict interpretation of Islam. The war and Iraq and the continued Palestine-Israel confrontation continue to fuel the 'Muslim-victimization' theories put forward by many.<sup>18</sup>

### **The Cultural Traditions and Practices**

Arguably, one of the biggest challenges being faced by Pakistani Diaspora and other South-Asian Diaspora in the West is that of adapting the existing cultural traditions and practices to the needs of the modern age. In this context, the status of women in traditional South Asian societies had come under much scrutiny. The tradition of arranged marriages has led to the common phenomena of forced marriages. In a recent article in the Independent, UK, a district judge confirmed that three girls each week are flown back

15 Werbner, Pnina. Pakistani Migration and Diaspora Religious Politics in a Global Age: <http://p.werbner.googlepages.com/PakistaniDiasporaEncyclopedia.PDF>

16 Masci, David, 2005. “An Uncertain Road: Muslims and the Future of Europe,” Forum on Religion and Public Life, The Pew Research Center, USA

17 Laabs, Dirk and Sebastian Rotella, “Pakistan to Europe: a pipeline of terror”, Los Angeles Times, October 17, 2007

18 Hoodhboy, Pervez, 2005. “The United States and Islam: Toward Perpetual War?”, Social Research, 72: 4, pp-873-902



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from Pakistan and rescued from forced marriages.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, the number of honour killings, where a family member is perceived to have brought shame on the family and is punished by death, continue to blemish the image of the Pakistani Diaspora in the eyes of local communities. It is also reported that in the UK young women from South-Asian backgrounds are three times more likely than the national average to attempt suicide because of cultural expectations and familial pressures.<sup>20</sup> Similar incidents pointing towards a much bigger trend have also been reported by the media from other European countries.<sup>21</sup> Under these circumstances, it is argued that these cultural traditions and practices tend to shape the image of the communities on the whole and hamper acceptance by the natives of the host countries.

### The Religious Divide

The recent publication of satirical cartoons ridiculing Islam and its Holy Prophet by western newspapers led to large scale protests and boycott of western products by Muslim communities across the world. Large demonstrations carried out in Pakistan as well as by Pakistani Diaspora in the West have been crucial in re-defining the relationship between the two groups at a crucial time when an average western citizen views these demonstrations as a manifestation of the ingrained intolerance of the Muslim societies including the Diaspora settled in the West.<sup>22</sup>

Over centuries, the western tradition of secularism has meant a minimal role of religion in determining public affairs, separating religion from state. On the other hand, Islam has remained ingrained in every aspect of the Muslim societies and in particular, of Pakistani communities. The sacred role of religion in the lives of

Muslims is in contrast to the role of Christianity in the West and as argued by a British Muslim academician of Pakistani origin, the cartoon controversy *“has not been depicted as one between Christianity and Islam but between the West and Islam. Religion has not been ridiculed in the Islamic world as it has been in the West, and Muslims don't want it to go that way.”*<sup>23</sup> Similarly, attempts made by some of the western countries to mainstream the Muslims in their societies by introducing dress restrictions such as the hijab ban in France and Germany have been viewed by many as an assault on the religious traditions of Muslims and the basic human right of every individual to make choices.

### The Role of the Media

The role of media has been crucial in defining Pakistani-Muslim Diaspora's role within the Western societies. A 2005 study by the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF) found that in the United Kingdom, the media portrayed the Muslim terror suspects (usually of a Pakistani origin) with bias often implying convictions when most of the suspects get released without any charge.<sup>24</sup>

While the findings seem to confirm the general perception that media whips up the “religious” (Muslim) and “national” (Pakistani) identity of alleged terrorists or link-up or suspicion of terrorists, does the media really play that role in the western sphere of “demonising” Pakistani Diaspora? Do media have a role to play in the overall question of Diaspora?

<sup>19</sup> “A question of honour: Police say 17,000 women are victims every year”, The Independent, UK, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/a-question-of-honour-police-say-17000-women-are-victims-every-year-780522.html>

<sup>20</sup> ibid

<sup>21</sup> Povoledo, Elisabetta, 2006 “Murder of a Muslim prompts anti-immigrant feelings in Italy,” International Herald Tribune Europe, <http://www.iht.com/articles/2006/08/24/news/italy.php>

<sup>22</sup> Maha Azzam, Dr., 2006. “Cartoons, Confrontation and a Cry for Respect”, The World Today; 62, 4; pp. 7

<sup>23</sup> “Cartoon rows illustrate hard road to cultural understanding” [http://www.methodist.org.nz/index.cfm/touchstone/march\\_2006/cartoons\\_controversy.html](http://www.methodist.org.nz/index.cfm/touchstone/march_2006/cartoons_controversy.html)

<sup>24</sup> “Anti-Muslim bias ‘spreads’ in EU”, BBC News, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4325225.stm>





## Pakistani Diaspora in the West: Part of the Solution or Part of the Problem?

### Key Questions for the Dialogue

1. In what ways is the Pakistani Diaspora in the Western countries affecting relations between the Muslim World and the West?
2. How does the role of Pakistani Diaspora compare with the role of other Diaspora, for example, Indian, Arab, Chinese, Jewish Diasporas, in promoting or positively influencing the relations of their origin-countries with their adopted homelands?
3. What can be the possible role of the Pakistani Diaspora in positively influencing relations between the Muslim World and the West?
4. Is the Pakistani Diaspora part of the problem or part of the solution in improving relations between the Muslim World and the West?
5. Does the Pakistani Diaspora suffer from a “negative media”?
6. Is there a “policymakers' panic” in dealing with the role of Pakistani Diaspora in Western societies?
7. What is to be the “ideal” role of Pakistani Diaspora in their adopted homelands?
8. Should the Pakistani Diaspora participate into partisan politics of Pakistan?
9. Should the Pakistani Diaspora devote itself to the politics of their adopted homeland?
10. What should be the level of relations and reliance of Pakistani State and government on Pakistani Diaspora?
11. What is and what should be the role of Pakistani embassies and missions in interacting with the Pakistani Diaspora?
12. What are the key reasons behind the alleged problematic relations of the Pakistani Diaspora with the Western countries, particularly in Europe?
13. Is there a correlation between perceived social and economic marginalization of the Pakistani Diaspora and the increase in extremist activities of the same?
14. What has been the role of the western countries in providing Pakistani immigrants with equal opportunities to participate in the political and social institutions? Should that role be any different?
15. Does integration provide an answer to the existing conflicts between adoptive States and the Pakistani Diaspora? Are multi-cultural societies an alternative means to achieve the integration objectives?





## Pakistani Diaspora in the West: Part of the Solution or Part of the Problem?

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