



By **Anwar Akhtar**

A recurring theme when you speak to many Pakistanis, both in Pakistan and among the diaspora, is a prolonged list of complaints about how Pakistan and Pakistanis are presented in the media.

The diversity, cultural heritage and complexity of Pakistan, a vast, beautiful, complex country, which encompasses the great metropolises of Karachi, Faisalabad, Lahore and Rawalpindi, to the mountain regions of North West Frontier Province and Balochistan, and also hundreds of villages, towns and the fertile plains of the Punjab.

Sadly whilst the current trials and tribulations Pakistan faces are well observed and widely reported, rarely is any depth or context given to Pakistan's many cultures, communities and pluralistic history.

Sadly, this suits both those pernicious forces that wish to enforce a right wing, sectarian orthodoxy upon Pakistan, and those with either an anti-Pakistan agenda or another negative narrative they wish to convey or develop.

[Pakistan Through a Lens](#) showcases a Pakistan rarely highlighted by the mainstream media.

It is a Pakistan that is thankfully being highlighted by increasing interest in the photography coming out of Pakistan as well as its neighbours, as seen in the recent [Three Dreams](#) exhibition in Whitechapel.



Congratulations should also go to young student Sadia Malik, a human dynamo who has single-handedly pulled this exhibition together, from liaising with the photographers and curating the show to booking the venue and the many other tasks involved.

The exhibition has been divided into separate themes exploring people, places, urban life, women, festivals, costume and ideas of nationhood, showing work by 25 contemporary Pakistani photographers. The work is powerful, showing on an ethnically mixed, religiously tolerant and diverse Pakistan.

The images of fashion shows, street life, the exuberance of the young and the beautiful at a cricket match, the dignity of the old, to the beauty of the city and the rich heritage of Pakistan, is all shown in a range of work that is both powerful and often subtle. Some of the images such as the female security guard and the professional swimmer clearly are there to represent women,

especially those from the cities who do not always fit with many perceptions of Pakistani society usually shown in the West.



The photograph of the ancient fort of Makli with a young girl walking through catches beautifully Pakistan's past, present and future. Another recurring complaint amongst Pakistanis is how a country with so many [priceless heritage sites](#) and monuments from antiquity has neglected to protect and educate so many of its children and allowed the voices of ignorance to be the loudest.

This exhibition, and the work of Sadia Malik, is one of many voices by many Pakistanis that are now also being raised.

Art exists because it does, photography has always occupied a role as art and as reportage, as witness to the world and its ways. The best compliment that can be paid to this exhibition is not that it does a great service to the people and cultures of Pakistan, which it absolutely does. It also acts as witness and reportage for what Pakistan is and represents the best traditions of photography as an art form and as photojournalism.

The exhibition will continue at Redbridge Museum until 19th June, and is then expected to tour different cities in the UK and, at a later stage, in Pakistan.

## Gallery Review: Pakistan Through a Lens

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*Photo credits: Top - Mehmood Qureshi; Middle - Mohammad Arif Ali; Bottom - Nadeem Khawar*

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