

BOOK REVIEW

UNRAVELING MYTHS - KARACHIWALA - A SUBCONTINENT WITHIN A CITY*

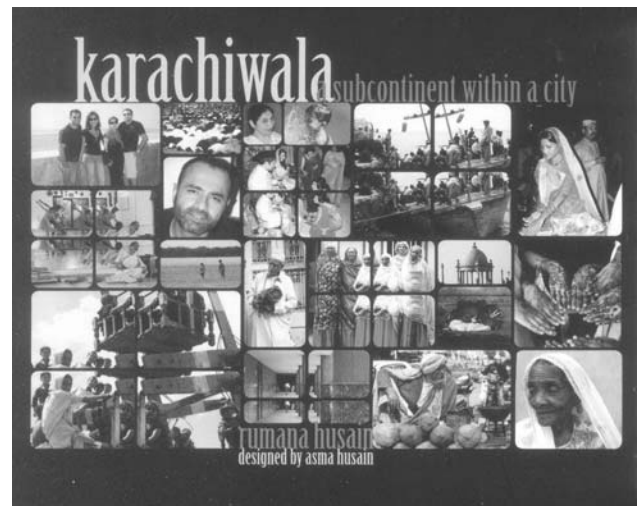
By

Rumana Husain
Designed by Asma Husain
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Reviewed by Dr Noman Ahmed

The The making of cities is a complex process. It happens in the mills of time and space with the interplay of several ingredients. Locational features, components of built environment, entrepreneurship, inhabiting communities and their evolving linkages with themselves and external milieu are some distinct mentions. If one may intend to pick one ingredient from this diverse array, it is the people that become the most powerful proponent in the metamorphosis of a city. Despite its short lifespan, Karachi has been able to absorb and subsequently display the polychromatic reflections of her inhabitants in a vivid manner. And the well researched treatise by Rumana Husain lives up to its title. Karachi truly mirrors the social and cultural shades of the sub continent in an unmatched way. This volume provides us the unique opportunity to stop and take notice of the colours and fragrance that are stretched through the existence and lifestyles of people the make Karachi its worth.

The contents of the books are comprehensive in coverage and illustration. Resorting to academic jargon, the writer has adopted a non-linear methodology of profiling the subjects of her research. For this reason the interest of readership from different backgrounds shall remain alive, despite browsing it several times. In other words, there is an element of surprise which lurks around the corner of every page ending. The double folds pop out to enrich the text and texture, adding the pleasure of exploring the book. Despite the fact that the book introduces sizable new information adds significantly to the body of knowledge about Karachi, the style of writing is simple which



makes it digestable to the most common of the Karachi wallas. An element of diversity is added by the well known personalities who contributed their essays. A note of epilogue by the learned author may have been useful to stamp the work for a final view and directions for the way forward.

On a profound note, Karachi wala is about recognition. A quick browse unveils many familiar characters, families and personalities. While the descriptions about the celebrities is understandable, it is the mirroring of images about the common Karachi wala that catches the attention of any folk who may decide to read it for pleasure. The family photographs, images of home and hearth, keyholes to adolescence and occasions, family / clan elders, photographic mention of hidden and even forbidden are some traits that will certainly leave deep imprints for on who shall experience

this book. The narration of rare Karachi wallas such as Bah'ai and Jewish communities will open fresh perspectives for serious researchers in their stride for discoveries and analytical findings.

This book has been produced with a careful approach of design down to the minutest of details. The acts of composition are applied in a manner where different textual, chromatic, graphical and photographic ingredients have been interlaced in appealing formats. That said, the composition retains the flavour of visual continuity without any rupture. Each and every page has been created with a prism of its own to catch the readers' interest in his stride of exploration. The collages and sequences of photographs and other visual details add graphical value and substance to the text in a flowing manner. However, in some instances, the pages have blank spaces which generate slight impression of compositional vacuum. Perhaps addition of dummy geometrical elements or abstract components may have maintained thematic continuity. Also some photographs could have been enlarged to fit the scale of the page ending. The wall papers that are inserted in the concluding part of the book are powerful depictions of the headings that they represent. One feels that an introductory brief towards the beginning may have added some clues for the lay readers! For the culinary delights of readership, the repository of rare recipes shall certainly prove as a real reward. Similarly the planners and social researchers would find the quasi-linear equation of in-city movement as useful evidences of transformations and upward social mobility. However the drawings about women's attire display an unclear and smudged message which adversely affect the otherwise articulate visual theme. In certain cases, one does not relate the color combinations with the dresses neither in the abstract nor in real symbols.

Finally, this labour of love by Rumana Husain is a gift – to no one else but all of us. A brows shall take us down the context and memory lanes of spaces and inhabitants of this wonderful city, many of which were very close to us. It shall nourish a nostalgia with a purpose – to know ourselves and our city better, with an

informed stand point. For the fleeting passers by, it shall certainly act as a window into the microcosm of the sub-continent that Karachi happens to be in reality.

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