

Ajmer Sharif: An Ambassador of World Peace and Harmony – A Case Study

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Although we have advanced in the science and technology but we are in danger of losing touch with those aspects of human knowledge and understanding that aspire us towards honesty and altruism (HH Dalai Lama). Every day media announcements of the sad news of violence, crime, wars, and disasters make every one tense, worried and apprehensive. No place and person is free from it. Every nation, society and human being is concerned about peace and harmony today. Many humanitarians and religious practitioners share the common concern about the present worldwide moral crisis and the lost roots of compassionate, just, and equitable society.

In order to understand the turbulent and undercurrents of peace and harmony, we need to understand people and the places they belong to. Cities have unique personality that is congruent with the individual personalities of its residents, and is reflected in terms of their character strengths (Florida, 2008; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Character strengths are recognized as central components of well-being (Peterson, 2006) and good character is the foundation of happy, healthy and moral life (Park, 2004; Park & Peterson, 2006b). Peterson & Seligman, (2004) identified 24 such character strengths that reflect how people think, feel and behave and the combination of these character strengths can determine important outcomes like achievement, health, leadership, law abidingness, social relationship and psychological well-being of the people and the city they reside in. The happiness of its residents signifies a good fit between a city and person (Park & Peterson, 2010).

Those cities that are known for their accomplishment and creativity, with intellectuals, self focused innovative, wealthy and skilled residents, (strengths of head) are called elite cities, (Murray, 2003), hot spots, (Florida, 2002), talent hotbeds, (Coyle, 2009) and superstar cities, (Gyuorko, Mayer & Sinai 2006), whereas, cities having higher indices of helping behavior (Levine, et al., 1994) are known as dutiful cities (Florida, 2008), where the residents are hard working, friendly, trusting, and compassionate (strengths of heart: gratitude, love, fairness, forgiveness, honesty, hope, humor, humility, religiousness, citizenship, social responsibility, loyalty, etc.). Residents of these cities are agreeable and conventional, as speculated by Florida, (2008). Heart cities are smaller and less crowded, have a lower cost of living and are warmer in temperature; they are more likely to be populated with the families with children; have more pro- social behavior, positive affect and greater sense of meaning; their culture centers on other people and emotional ties that bind people together (Dunn & Munn, 1986; Murray, 2003; Lepore, Evane & Palsane, 1991; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Heart cities are kinder and gentler because they provide greater opportunities for close relationships and more pleasurable and more meaningful lives (Zelinsky, 1992). Important contributors of good city are safety, health and affluence of

its residents (Bloom, Canning & Flink, 2008). Ajmer, a city of Rajasthan state and its residents seem to be governed by the character strengths of heart (although, an empirical study of character strengths of Ajmer city is yet to be conducted). This paper attempts a critical appreciation of the role of Ajmer city and its residents in the contribution towards and manifestation of world peace and harmony. Ajmer is a sleepy town, founded by Raja Ajay Pal Chauhan in the 7th Century A.D. depicts a kaleidoscopic range of historical images, myths, legends, folklores, myriads of cultural divergence and convergence. Cocooned safely by the green hills of ancient Aravallis, this small city stands as a striking symbol of communal harmony, unity, peace and fraternity and unbelievable example of cohabitation of Hindus and Muslims in this world that is torn apart with violence and mutual distrust.

The city is the final resting place of Khwaja Moin-ud-din Chisty, the founder of the Chistia order of Fakirs and hence, is lovingly known as Gharib Nawaz (the protector of the poor by his devotees). He was the symbol of love, harmony and truth who taught peace, non violence and right conduct to his people. Every year during the first six days of Rajab (seventh month in the Islamic Calendar), Ajmer celebrates the death anniversary of Khawaj Moin-ud-din Chisty as Urs Fair. The Dargah Sharif (The Tomb of the Sufi Saint) is revered equally by the Hindus and Muslims and is a popular pilgrim centre for people belonging to different religions, regions, cultures, castes, creeds and colours. Lacs of pilgrims from around the globe come every year to pay their respects to the humble saint who lived and died serving mankind for the peace, prosperity, welfare and promotion of brotherhood amongst people. People receive blessings for peace and prosperity (aman & chen) from here.

Ajmer is also famous for the world's 'The only Brahma Temple' (TRINITY- the three prime Gods who undertake the task of creation, preservation and destruction, completing the cycle of the universe) and a picturesque Holy Lake only 14 kilometers away from it. . As per an ancient legend, Lord Brhama was contemplating over a place to perform Yajna, when the lotus from his hand fell down. Water sprang from the place where the flower struck and thus the Holy Lake of Pushkar (popularly known as Tirthraj Pushkar) was created. The Lake is surrounded by 52 Ghats, where devotees flock in large number and take a ritualistic holy dip, especially on Kartik Poornima. It is considered as the sacred and crowning pilgrimage of Hindus for the final journey to heaven. Many Saints and Sages reside in the deep interiors of surrounding hills and offer their prayers for universal welfare. The tranquility of and serenity of Ajmer and Pushkar provides quiet, peaceful and isolated stay to lots of international tourists to meditate and contemplate and find peace.

Ajmer being sacred to the Hindus and the Muslims equally, occupies a unique position on the world map. It has a composite culture as there are holy places belonging to Sikhs, Hindus Parsis, Jains and Muslims. Festivals like Navratri, Garbha, Holi, Diwali, Ide, Gurunanak Jainti, Navrose, Cheti Chand are celebrated by all with a great vigor and a good will. As a small cosmopolitan city it has tolerance and respect for diversity. Interfaith understanding brings about the unity necessary for all religions to work together, advocates HH Dalai Lama. Ajmer plays an instrumental role in promoting interfaith understanding and creating a workable degree of unity among all religions by respecting each other's beliefs and by emphasizing common concern for human well-being. Probably the Priests, Mullaha, Pandits and the sages of Pushkar valley and Dargah are submitting silent prayers and educationist of Ajmer are silently working towards this noble cause of maintaining peace in Ajmer.

For the peaceful cohabitation, education, administration and religion are three institutions of paramount importance. They provide a safe supportive, facilitative environment and fertile land to sow the seeds of core values in its residents. Education impacts its benefactors slowly but deeply. Ajmer was distinguished in its educational status in Rajasthan, much before the other cities like Jaipur, Jodhpur and Kota came in to existence in their educational status. City has age old well established schools that blend the traditional value based education with modern professional temperament. Under the British Rule Ajmer rose to prominence as a centre of learning and education and retains the positive impact of British culture even today. Mayo College was established by Britishers to educate the blue blooded Indians. Sophia Girls College was founded by the Mission Sisters of Ajmer, to educate Rajput girls belonging to affluent class who otherwise had no chance of getting education due to their conservative family traditions. Besides, St. Mary's, St. Anselm's, St. Paul, Military School, Savitry School and College, Government college and Dayanand Anglo Vedic School and College, (DAV) have made Ajmer the education hub of Rajasthan, The first accredited Music College of Rajputana for teaching Classical Hindustani Sangeet was opened in (1942) in Ajmer. During post independence, its prominence in education continued to rise with the establishment of the Central and Rajasthan Board of Secondary Education, Regional Teachers' Training Centre just to mention a few.

Values naturally percolate from noble pursuits at a young age and influence human behaviour in positive directions and promote positive relations. Values like tolerance and non-violence contribute towards peace and harmony. Tolerance enables us to understand and accept differences, promote friendliness and germinate peace, security, tranquility and endurance. The value of non-violence germinates from fearlessness, chastity, non-attachment and truth. Whereas, violence impairs a person's dignity or integrity. The inculcation of these values helps in fighting fanaticism, violence, fatalism, dishonesty, avarice, corruption, exploitation and other social evils. On the positive side they promote the development of key qualities like self-discipline, self-control, a sense of duty, a desire to serve, accountability, enterprise, creativity, equality, a democratic attitude, a sense of obligation to environmental protection and a love for social justice. The educational institutions of Ajmer still retain their age old traditions of imparting value based education (the heart strengths), that leaves long lasting and deep seated impact on the pupil and the climate of the city that makes Ajmer distinct in retaining its peace with tranquility in such turbulent times. The cohabitation of people of various cultures and religions in Ajmer facilitate filtering the best values of each and help in building common cluster of core values for all instead of mine and yours. These values tested against tough criteria of different culture and religion becomes the frame of reference to screen and clarify one's own. Such value system never stands in conflict with others.

Social reformists and sages have a great role to play in promotion of the peace and harmony by building values and promoting healthy social practices and condemning the evil. Ajmer is also a place of many such people who have radiated the spiritual inspiration and healthy practices all over the world. Maharishi Dayanad Saraswati breathed his last on Diwali at Bhinai House on 30th October (1883) in Ajmer.

What is required today is not religious education but education about religions (Shrivastava, 2004). This is exactly what educational institutions of Ajmer are doing today,

while imparting education to diversified population under one roof. Peace and loving attitudes have to be carved on the tender minds at an early age. The role of missionary and DAV institutions in Ajmer had been crucial in teaching, learning and value building of children of all community. They are rendering a great service towards imparting quality based educations that is affordable. They sensitize youth towards noble cause of greater humanity and peace and harmony with their vows of chastity, poverty and obedience along with austerity as their way of life.

Self-examination and self-correction is achieved through Life Skills and Human Rights Education that builds the firm foundation for peace and harmony in children. The pioneer projects of introducing Life Skills (by Board of Secondary Education, Ajmer)and Human Rights Education (by Sophia Girls College, Ajmer and supported by People's Watch, Tamil Nadu) as regular courses in curriculum at school level are big steps towards inculcating the temperaments of equality, justice, peace and harmony in children at an early age.

For peaceful cohabitation enhancing personal growth, facilitating others growth, working towards some common social goal and reaching some super ordinate goal is vital. It makes people sensitive to the fellow people and motivates them to indulge in meaningful endeavors for greater and noble causes. By providing the opportunities of cohabitation to the people of different cultures and religions, Ajmer helps in developing emotional, cultural and spiritual intelligence (The emotional intelligence is an ability to understand and handle the emotions of self and others and use them in empathizing and motivating some proactive behaviour towards others, (Goleman, 1995; The cultural intelligence is an ability to interpret others' unfamiliar and ambiguous gestures in just the way that person's co patriots would, even to mirror them Early & Mosakowski, 2004; The spiritual intelligence is an inclination for observing some meaning, super ordinate goal and altruism in whatever endeavors a person undertakes and that paves the way to act, think and feel towards some noble cause, Zohar, 2000). These seemingly natural abilities, aptitudes and skills in turn, permits people to pursue their own interests without hampering others' and advancing towards self actualization and super ordinate goals.

The common and inter dependent trade and commerce reduces jurisdiction restriction and boundary for anyone. It encourages healthy interaction of different communities that facilitate proactive and positive behaviour, friendship, mutual liking and enhanced tolerance for each other. This also guards against formation of prejudices and promotes its correction by enhancing the knowledge about different communities. In Ajmer, people of mixed caste, creed and religion are working together in education, administration, health, railways in close proximity that generates symbiotic relationship and inter dependence among diverse people and allows them to develop strong bonds and ties. Ajmer en cashes the benefits of balanced tourism, trade and commerce complemented with religious blessings from both the Hindu and the Muslim cohabited pilgrimages. Pushkar being international tourist attraction besides its religious significance and Dargah being secularly trusted and worshiped by all religion people, attract a large population of diversified national and international origin. This extends some common advantage to both the communities (like pushkar tourism of international cultural fair offers a lot of trade to the residents of other communities along with the religious advantage of assured Nirvana after a Holy dip in the Sarovar to Hindus and Dargah provides solace and peace to the people of all religion and a

lot of trade and commerce during Urs fair). They carry the message of peace and harmony, unity in diversity, and universality from these fairs to the different parts of the world. The efficient and effective event management during Pushkar and Urs Fair (two big religious and international fairs organized every year in close proximity in time and space) by the committed local administration play a key role in germinating the peace and harmony and curbing normlessness. This further promotes world peace and harmony.

Administration, Police and the Judiciary system has a great role in enforcing the social equality and dignity. The powerful administrative, religious and educational institutions of Ajmer have kept a check against the sublime ulterior motivation of politicians and provocative politics here. The politically instigated activities have taken a back seat in Ajmer. The educated and law abiding masses of Ajmer have kept a further check on any asocial acts to germinate and deepen their roots. The city is conspicuous by its relatively low mal practices and absence of “**us and they**” feelings that are the big hurdles in maintaining peace and harmony. The upheavals and the undercurrents of any city reflect the mentality of its youth and the quality of life and satisfaction level of it's' people. The youth in Ajmer grow under the supervision of their parents, guardians and educators and spiritual leaders and are more inclined towards education and government jobs. The multinational corporate culture of over emphasis on pay package (head strengths), while under emphasizing social responsibility (heart strength) is dormant in Ajmer residents. There is greater emphasis on education and less money is circulated in the market. People in Ajmer are neither very orthodox, nor coloured by caste, creed and religious prejudices and superstitions. Blend of education and religious practices have bestowed rationality and empathy (the two big principles of peaceful cohabitation) in right proportion, in the residents of Ajmer

The life satisfaction and well being of Ajmer residents seems to be high as a result of the character strengths of heart. People have faith in the supreme power of all mighty. Being God fearing, they refrain from mal practices and short cuts to life. An alternate explanation could be that, though, every one may have an impulse to indulge in or fall prey to temptations, but, the fear of punishment keeps a check on them. In the multi cultural and multi religious Ajmer city, all communities are interwoven and relate intimately. Therefore, they can foresee the massive loss of property and people, and their intimate ties, if they ever dare to divulge from unity and brotherhood. Mutual respect, tolerance and good will should prevail in order to maintain peace and harmony. Ajmer neither has the history of experiences of violence and emotions of hatred, fear, and aggression among different communities like in Ahmadabad nor the fear of terrorist attack like Delhi or Bombay. Ajmer fortunately has no bitter past that may germinate cruel plans for future. Administrative and educational institutions complemented by the heads of religious institutions (the Priests, Maulvies and Pandits), are playing a vital role in keeping the law and order situation perfect and communal harmony and peace intact in Ajmer.

The art and culture (that signifies the smooth merging of nature and temperament, feelings and sentiments of its people) here in Ajmer are rich and different from other cities of India. Ajmer presents a comprehensive museum of Indian art and culture. A unique combination of geography, art, archaeology, mythology and history makes Ajmer a great center of Indian culture. People can find the glimpse of several religions, beliefs worships here that symbolizes peace and harmony in cohabitation.

Compassion as against aggression based on altruistic considerations advocate wider love even for someone who has done harm to us. Moinudin Chisty spread the message of compassion long before that is endorsed by HH Dalai Lama along with other humanitarians. The teachings and preaching's of Garib Nawas still eco in Ajmer and its residents. He became the religious pioneer and harbinger of peace and prosperity not only in Ajmer but in the country. He pursued the objective of bringing together people of various castes, communities and races, elevating the humanity from the morass of materialistic concerns, which is the bane of mankind even today. He ruled over the hearts of people. He issued ways to get success in this world and achieve peace of mind and soul in the world hereafter. National integration, composite culture originated from his life style and teachings thereafter were spread throughout the world by his representative disciples. Gharib Nawaz loved humanity in general and the Indians in particular. He adopted the Indian tradition and culture. Sensing the inclination of Indians' towards music and singing he introduced Qawwali (Sama) to convey his message to people. His generosity, affection, and hospitality endears a man to God. His highest devotion to God, redresses the misery of those in distress, fulfills the needs of helpless and feeds the hungry (the basic ingredients of peace and harmony).

The Peace and freedom cannot be ensured as long as fundamental rights of people are violated. Similarly, there cannot be peace and stability as long as there is oppression and suppression. It is unfair to seek one's own interests at the cost of other people's rights. Happiness is a combination of inner peace, economic development, and, above all, world peace. We all primarily seek peace, comfort, and security. We must have the proper perspective of the universal life processes and need to develop the temperament of compromised self interest or the mutual interest where we think of others happiness while pursuing our own happiness (HH Dalai Lama). He argued that terrorism is not a natural calamity, but is created by our own misunderstanding and conflicts of political or religious ideologies that were made for our happiness to bind us all together as a single humane family. Supremacy of humanity over the ideology has always been maintained here by the residents of Ajmer.

At birth, all human beings are naturally endowed with the qualities we need for our survival, such as caring, nurturing and loving kindness (heart strengths). However, despite already possessing such positive qualities, we tend to neglect them. As a result, humanity faces unnecessary problems. What we need to do is to make more effort to sustain and develop these qualities (HH Dalai Lama). Ajmer can make further efforts towards harnessing qualities like caring, nurturing and loving to improve person-to-person contact, satisfying people at a heart-to-heart level; efforts to inculcate and sustain human qualities as morality, compassion, decency, wisdom, and so forth in multi religious cohabitation that makes the foundations of all civilizations. Through systematic moral education in a conducive social environment right from the childhood could be imparted to construct a more humane world. Ajmer could further attempt renewal of human values. The humanitarian and religious leaders of Ajmer need to exert greater effort to strengthen the existing civic, social, cultural, educational, and religious organizations to sustain human and spiritual values; commitment to ensuring social justice and to ensure peace and harmony.

People live together in large cities all over the world, but despite this proximity, many are lonely. Some do not have even one human being with whom to share their deepest feelings, and live in a state of perpetual agitation. People in Ajmer have a spontaneous feeling of empathy for others and a motivation to act on their behalf. It really is a peaceful and open society; in which individuals have the maximum opportunity to develop their human creativity and potential, where they can calmly judge how best to act within.

Note: This paper is based on the observations, discussions with and the reflections of the residents of Ajmer, who occupy significant position in socio-legal political system of the city. This paper recommends a systematic in-depth empirical study of the character strengths (Head/Heart) of Ajmer city and its residents to further validate this paper. It further recommends a comparative study of the character strengths of the different cities of Rajasthan, namely- Udaipur, Jodhpur, Jaipur, Jaisalmer to understand the personality of the cities of Rajasthan and its residents and their unique global impact.

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