

TIMEZONES KARACHI TRANSCRIPT

Chaotic Karachi: Expressions for Sanity

a podcast by Ali Gul Pir

[0:11] **Ali Gul Pir**

A city of 17 million plus people with only two public hospitals. This is a motif repping how so many of us have to make do with so little. That is the mentality of everything here. Get yours if you can. Balochis, Sindhis, Pathans, to Parsis, Ahmadis, and even half a million Afghani refugees. This is a big apple. Our Mumbai. Our home. This is Karachi and we are its artists. And my name is Ali Gul Pir. I'm an artist, satirist from Pakistan and I am conducting this episode of *TIMEZONES* from my hometown with my fellow artists in Karachi, Pakistan.

[0:58] **Bigfoot Music feat. Gul Mohammad: «Haiderum»**

[1:46] **Ali Gul Pir**

Karachi has been my home for most of my life. My first love, my first fight, my first job which was in a bank, I quit a month later. I like money, just don't like managing it for other people. What I did learn was that my humor got me friends.

[2:03] **Ali Gul Pir**

I got accepted there. And that's why, now all in my works, you'll see a strong sense of Karachi in it. Maybe the feudals I mock, or the taro men who stare at women in the streets of the city. Let me introduce you to my city by introducing you to my friends.

[3:21] **Ali Gul Pir**

Yes, even though we are in millions, as an artist you often feel disconnected. Because very few Pakistani artists get the privilege of collaboration with artists from around the world. Create. Upload. Create. Upload. And repeat. Without knowing what's in store for the future.

[3:46] **Ali Gul Pir**

I talked to Babar Mangi. A young artist who makes his music, writes his raps, and also makes his own music videos. I asked Babar how important are collaborations for an artist like him.

[3:56] **Ali Gul Pir X Babar Mangi: «Ghareeban Ja Khwab»**

[3:58] **Babar Mangi**

That's the first thing I should do I think. Artists must come out of their comfort zone cause the poverty level is high. A lot of people who are playing classical music are not well educated. They don't have access to computers. So I think people should come out who are already producing and help others make their music; that should happen.

[4:20] **Babar Mangi**

And yes, as a producer, I... it's been like a few months I have been brainstorming ideas and I have already done something like that. There is a thing called *sehra* in Sindhi and women sit and like if there's a wedding they sit around and they sing together like it's an acapella kind of thing. So just like a while ago, I record it these six to seven women who were doing *sehra* with claps. It's like clap is the tempo for them and I have tried to do few beats on them and they sound fire.

[4:54] **Sehra music recorded by Babar Mangi (unreleased)**

[5:10] **Ali Gul Pir**

Babar is pushing these boundaries and that signifies the mentality of Karachi artists.

[5:25] **Ali Gul Pir**

It's easy for a rapper, beat producer, and one man army artist to collaborate with others. But what about a classical musician? I talked to Gul Muhammad, a sarangi player and a classical musician from Hoshiyarpur *gharana*. For people who don't know what a *gharana* is, umm... Western classical music history has been documented well with its own language. But on our side, the Eastern classical music fundamentals were made by different families, which are *gharanas*. Different *gharanas* founded different *raags* and they passed them down to their off springs.

[6:01] **Gul Muhammad**

بینڈ میں جانے کا مقصد بھی یحیٰ تھا کیونکہ یہ ہمارے گھرانے سے چلتا ہوا آرہا ہے۔ ہوشیارپور گھرانے سے تعلق ہے۔ یہاں کلاسیکل میوزک تھوڑا کم ہوتا جا رہا ہے پاکستان میں۔ ہلانکہ ہمارے پاکستان سے بڑے لیجینڈ کلاسیکل سنگرس، میوزیشنرز، تبالا پلیئر، سارنگی پلیئر گزرے ہیں۔ تو ابھی کلاسیکل لوگوں کے سننے میں آ نہیں رہا۔ اسلیے ہماری یوتھ موڈرن میوزک کی طرف ہے۔ تو مینے سوچا کہ اسکو چینج کروں۔ بلوز کیسے ڈالتے ہیں سارنگی میں اور جیز میوزک کی طرف اسکو لے کہ جایا جائے۔ تو میں اپنا جو ایلبم بنا رہا ہوں وہ مینے تھورا سا موڈرن۔۔۔

That was my purpose of joining a band. I belong to Hoshiyarpur gharana and I am already linked to classical music because of that. Pakistan is losing its classical music though we have had many legendary classical singers, musicians, and instrumentalists. Since not much classical music is being produced, the youth is leaning toward the modern music. this is why I thought I should also change sarangi by mixing it with blues and turning it into jazz. I am working on a solo album that consists of this fusion.

[6:49] **Ali Gul Pir**

اچھا اپنے سولو ایلبم پہ اپ کام کر رہے ہیں؟

You are working on a solo album?

[6:51] **Gul Muhammad**

جی، ویسے تو کلاسیکل بیس ہی ہے۔ مگر اسکو موڈرن ٹچ دیا ہے۔ جیسے راپ سٹائل چل رہا ہے آج کل۔ تو میری کوشش ہے میں سارنگی میں ویریشن کروں، کولیبریشن کروں، علی گل پیر جے سے آرٹسٹوں کے ساتھ۔

Yes. It has a classical music base, but I have added a modern touch to it. Just like the new rap style, I wanted to create some variations in sarangi so I can collaborate with artists like Ali Gul Pir.

[7:07] **Ali Gul Pir**

Gul goes on to talk about how Pakistan has so many classical music legends but now less and less musicians are getting to it, and therefore, less people are interested in it. People are more into modern pop music. Although he belongs to a Hoshiyarpur *gharana*, he realized he needs to abandon his classical approach and play blues or jazz with sarangi. Even his new album has a modern touch with many collaborations, and he says he would love to do a rap song with me. Let's see how that works out.

[7:42] **Bigfoot Music feat. Kami Paul, Gul Mohammad & Khurram Iqbal: «Maslat»**

[8:24] **Ali Gul Pir**

I'm feeling glee as I leave Gul's apartment. All this collaboration talk reminds me of my friend Sarah Waqar, who is a guitarist and a teacher, and her TikTok collaboration story. Let's go hear it.

[8:36] **Sarah Waqar**

Well he made a video of... he played something on guitar and I really liked it and I played on that video. I made another video and I joined both these videos and it came out really good so that artist messaged me and he was amazed that omg I never knew there are female artists in Pakistan who can play guitar really well and I was really happy that that I just did it for fun but it had a really good impact.

[9:07] **Ali Gul Pir**

When you talk about playing music as a woman or as an artist what are the challenges you face in day to day life.

[9:17] **Sarah Waqar**

Well there's one thing I faced immensely that is that I feel that I realized that it's a male dominant career. There are female artists in Pakistan there are a lot of female vocalists but there aren't many female instrumentalists. I encourage many females to come and play and I even teach guitars. Mostly I am the only female instrumentalist in the room. I feel like I make the guys insecure. There are certain people who are genuinely happy too. They have helped me and like I want to mention both the sides.

[9:54] **Sarah Waqar: «Nothing Else Matters (Acoustic Instrumental)»**

[10:15] **Ali Gul Pir**

It's unfortunate that artists who are supposed to be more sensitive and empathetic treat each other badly because of their gender or some other reason. Sarah tells me that despite all of this, she continues to perform with her all girl band and even teaches music to little girls. I decided to meet my friend and comedian/podcaster Shehzad Ghias in his studio. He tells me his battle is the socio-political state of Pakistan. He talks about how it impacts his work.

[10:53] **Shehzad Ghias**

Any person who lives in Pakistan, for them and especially for artists, there's a certain amount of mental bandwidth that will always be devoted to what's happening in the country. I don't think in developed countries people sit every day to discuss politics all the time – whether that is a legal case or a politician getting arrested... The fact that that is being discussed at every *chai dhaba*, at every meeting, everywhere that you go, it occupies so much of your mental space that sometimes you don't get the space to think. You don't get the space to read. You don't get the space to disconnect from all of that. Even if you want to there's no running away from inflation, there's no running away from security issues. Both of us grew up in Karachi at a time when there was this thing. It is not now. But it came to a point where there was a bomb blast on the side of the road you could drive on a different lane on the same road as long as you could get to where you wanted to go.

[11:58] **Ali Gul Pir**

But all these things must have an impact on you. I mean how can you not be afraid?

[12:04] **Shehzad Ghias**

I have tried not to let it get to me to the point where I am afraid. To say things that need to be said. The caveat with that is you are always afraid you are always conscious. Sometimes when I do certain podcasts there are comments in which people are baffled as to how I can say these things and they often ask me «are you not afraid?». I am. I am. I am completely conscious, and I am completely connected to what is happening in the country and I completely understand the potential repercussions to what we are doing and what we are saying. It's not like the fire has not come close to home. As friends have been affected directly. So, at some point what needs to be said outweighs the fear that you have. The importance of saying something becomes more important than the fear that you may have.

[13:48] **Ali Gul Pir**

One of the best ways I have kept external factors at bay and not let it make me feel isolated is work. I just work a lot. I have gotten the opportunity to collaborate with many international artists which really made me feel like I am part of a larger, global art community which most Pakistani artists don't get to feel. I asked Babar if he plans to collaborate with international artists and if not then why.

[14:16] Babar Mangi

I have not tried yet to collaborate with international artists because my niche is like sindhi rap and I really don't know if it's a collaborative approach could be taken towards like English music and sindhi music because I think the audiences are like very narrowed down right now. Maybe in the future I can consider that. There's a part of me which says like the niche is narrowed down then there's a part of me that says there are songs like «Despacito», «Gangam Style», and a lot of Spanish artists like Bad Bunny and they are doing really good and people here in Pakistan are listening to them even though they don't understand a thing. So I think yeah that's a perspective that we don't think about. We should think about. I don't know why. Maybe we are like... I don't know, I don't have any answer to that.

[15:13] Babar Mangi: «Ghareeb Ka Bar»

[15:48] Ali Gul Pir

Why are we so insecure as artists? We don't think anyone would be interested in our work. I get the same kind of replies from Sarah and Gul as well. Shahzad on the other hand has a theory for this. He claims we have always had such bad rulers who have always made us feel unsafe and unsure. Maybe that's why we are this way.

[16:13] Shehzad Ghias

Look at Karachi. There was one time where we couldn't make fun of one man and that one man had the power to shut the entire city down.

[16:13] Sound from a political address

[16:34] Shehzad Ghias

The aura that man held, the hold that man had over the entire city where he would snap his fingers and the entire city would shut down. A part of that was we couldn't make fun of him, that he was larger than life and somehow when people started making fun of him, he became human. And at this point maybe people who are six, eight, nine, ten, twelve, they look at him on Facebook doing his live streams from London and wonder how could millions ever follow the whims of a man like this. If this man wanted to talk to everybody in Karachi at 3 am all news channels were duty bound to live stream that and if they weren't, there will be consequences as there were on May 12th. So the surreal life that we live in Pakistan, in Karachi, we don't question it every single day because you have to survive. But a comedian's job is to show you the absurdity of that life. To show you that the system that we all worship may not be as grand as we have made it to be. It's only the fool who can make fun of king here. As foolish as king here is being his servants and his subjects will never tell them that the emperor has no clothes. That job only falls to the fool. That's what I am.

[17:51] Sarah Waqar

So that artist messaged me and he was amazed that omg I never knew there are female artists in Pakistan who can play guitar really well and I was really happy that that I just did it for fun but it had a really good impact.

[18:09] **Babar Mangi**

So I think people should come out who are already producing and help them and make it into a track.

[18:20] **Gul Muhammad**

تو مینے سوچا کہ اسکو چینج کروں۔ بلوز کیسے ڈالتے ہیں سارنگی میں اور جیز میوزک کی ترف اسکو لے کہ جایا جائے۔

I thought I should also change sarangi by mixing it with blues and turning it into jazz.

[18:32] **Shehzad Ghias**

That job only falls to the fool. That's what I am.

[18:39] **Ali Gul Pir**

So that's the beauty and the curse. The state our country is in or our society is in. it boggles us down. It brings us down it isolates us but at the same time it also inspires us. It's like *biryani*. It's bad for your health but its *biryani*, right. Did you get it? Ok, never mind. That's us from Karachi, Pakistan, *TIMEZONES* out.