

# Breathe, Belong, Become: What Forced Diversity Forgets

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The trouble with certain strands of progressive, left-leaning politics is that they often overlook a simple truth: diversity doesn't work when it's forced. It's a hard, uncomfortable truth that needs to be said, but few are willing to say.

When diversity is pushed too quickly - wrapped in policy and paraded through institutions - it can backfire. People push back. Not always out of spite, but usually out of fear, confusion, or the sense that something familiar is being taken away from them before they've had time to understand what's being offered or what they've gained.

Real change doesn't come through pressure. It grows slowly, like seeds buried in the soil. It needs time, care, attention, and the right conditions to take root. And it only takes root when people feel safe enough to question what they've always known - and curious enough to imagine something new, something different.

A good example of this kind of organic growth is the British Muslim community - or rather, communities. It's a story many people don't know, and even fewer tell properly. British Muslims don't form a single, unified bloc. They're a patchwork - woven together over decades. Sometimes it's awkward. Sometimes it's beautiful. Often, it's both.

Sure, many British Muslims today trace their roots to South Asia. But since the late 20th century, Muslims from across the globe - Egypt, Somalia, Malaysia, Iraq - have made Britain their home. Each has brought with them their own beliefs, traditions, rhythms, memories, and ideas of what it means to live as a Muslim.

Naturally, they don't all agree.

How could they?

What inspires one Muslim may unsettle another. One person's Sufi saint might be another's source of concern. One woman's modesty could be another's freedom. Religious scholars quote different texts. Parents cling to their traditions. And young people often find themselves caught in the middle, trying to make sense of it all in a country that doesn't always make space for them.

But in this hodgepodge - this cultural stew seasoned with stories, sorrows, and skilled-cultural navigation - something delicious begins to brew. People talk. They compare. Borrow. Reject. Rebuild.

A kid raised in a Pakistani home may draw inspiration from the warmth and wisdom of their Sudanese neighbours. A young woman might turn away from a version of Islam passed down by her grandfather, only to rediscover its meaning at university - one that is still rooted in tradition yet reimaged to reflect her own convictions and lived experience.

One of the hidden perks of being a British-born Muslim is growing up in and around sub-communities - spaces where you can bounce around ideas, find people who understand you, and figure out what you actually believe. These networks aren't preachy (well, most of them aren't). They don't tell you what to believe. They give you the space to let your faith breathe, stretch, and grow at your own pace.

This isn't rebellion. It's evolution.

New communities form - new ones, strange ones, full of contradictions, but also full of hope. And in those spaces, people aren't just surviving. They're finding a faith that feels honest. Authentic. A faith that fits.

And this doesn't happen because someone tells them what to believe. It happened because they were given the space to figure it out for themselves.

That's the part no one likes to admit - diversity doesn't flourish under D.E.I mandates, slogans, or checklists; it works best when its given time.

Diversity is not a programme. It's a slow, human process. One story at a time. One choice at a time.

Give people that time. Let them breathe. And you might be surprised by what grows.