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Divisive Politics Won't Work in Old City

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Hyderabad: It was soon after Hyderabad's worst riots in 1991 that left 150 dead and hundreds others injured, Mazher Hussain got himself involved in the relief works in the Old City for the first time. Now, two decades later, as the director of Confederation of Voluntary Associations (Cova), an NGO based in the Old City, Hussain says the old city is in need of an image makeover. Having worked at the grassroots level for 14 years, he says that Old City has been a victim of political agendas. Political parties bank on communal grounds and not on development. The issue of lack of civic amenities here is glaring considering the big difference between the amount of funds allocated for carrying out development works here and other parts of the city.

Hussain, 50, maintains that the image of the Old City has taken a severe beating over a period of time. If the bias in government and political circles against it is not enough, residents here lack the assertiveness needed to bring about any change. He adds that the general perception that only Muslims stay in Old City is incorrect, as a considerable 30 per cent of the population here is represented by all other communities. And today, Old City, which earlier extended up to Barkas, has expanded further and become more composite.

Insisting that the government policy makers need to change their mindset, he says: Old City is treated as an unnecessary appendage. There is not much investment, be it on development, human resources or infrastructure. This software businessman turned-social worker says that efforts are on to get people into governance and bring about a change in the system. People isolate Old City and look at it as a different world altogether, which is not correct, he adds.

And illiteracy still prevails. Over a lakh children are forced to work. This figure is often misrepresented as girl child labour is invisible child labour, he says adding that several families are living in pathetic conditions in this part of the city.

On the positive side, Hussain says that there has been a silent but decisive socio-economic revolution taking place here in the last few years, courtesy the economic boom and funds flowing from the Middle East. According to him, there is more emphasis on education as youngsters are trying to do their graduation in more numbers, which was not the case so far. Most importantly, he says that communities have come to a general understanding that fighting has no kind of positive outcome and Hyderabad has experienced a period of relative peace. Sooner or later, politicians are bound to realize that divisive politics is not going to work, he concludes.