

AFGHAN YOUTH IN CANADA:

Cultural identity, religious pressure, and Western conformity

As a young female Afghan Muslim adult, slowly and progressively I have come to uncover my fears of being asked about my national heritage, religious foundations and sense of individuality

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Attention valued readers:

Ashian has decided to add an English section to the magazine for those who are experiencing some difficulties in writing and reading in their own languages (Farsi dari/ Pashto..) properly. Therefore we are accepting English written articles to publish in this section. We encourage our readers, especially Afghan youth, to send us their articles in English and use this section as a platform to share their thoughts and opinions about social and cultural issues. Thanks. (Ashian)

What does it mean to be a young Afghan Muslim in today's society? How does one maintain this unique distinctness in a multicultural society such as Canada? Question after question has been raised to challenge the youth about their faith, culture and identity. However, finding the answers is another hurdle of challenges full of confrontation, confusion, and liberation.

As a young female Afghan Muslim adult, slowly and progressively I have come to uncover my fears of being asked about my national heritage, religious foundations and sense of individuality. I have begun to understand and appreciate my individual, religious and cultural differences as I see it as a unique and positive aspect to me, to my community and to this society.

I clearly recall my early childhood years of attending mosque and not knowing why I was there or what I should expect from going there other than because it was required. I remained silent about my questions until my final year of high school. With my academic understanding, I began to challenge my family, friends and as far as religious leaders. I also turned to the Internet, innumerable scholarly books and the media. Nothing seemed to be

helpful because I realized being bombarded with information from different sources only lead to questioning my beliefs, values and morals. As a result, I found myself in the midst of life long journey to self-discovery.

Together we as leaders and followers and as members and coordinators can overcome our youthful struggles, to be proud of who we are and to maintain our unique and recognizable identity as Afghan people and Muslim practitioners.

Being a youth once, I think it is necessary to have a supportive and resourceful community that caters to the youths needs and acts as a guiding tool by providing information that can relate to their concerns and rights. It is essential to establish a system like this to produce a youth friendly community where the youth can discuss social, political and religious issues and trends. Furthermore, this would empower the youth to talk about their feelings and thoughts as well as

respecting their decisions in the same process. In addition, a resourceful, practical, and educational centre is not about enforcing one's belief onto another person but to let the youths come forward with their hidden mindset of ideas and thoughts that can be confusing and preventing them from opening up about their true identity of being an Afghan and a Muslim in Western society.

We live in a society where being different is accepted, tolerated and appreciated as it adds another rich element to the flourishing mosaic of Canada. There are laws that can protect an individual from being harmed, discriminated or judged. There are other legal documents that can guarantee freedom, justice and peace. However, with this highly authoritative protective and liberating forces of power, young Afghan Muslim individuals are still in denial and skeptical about their culture, religion and identity. What remains true is due to the lack of organization of communal systems, not much has been done to alleviate these youths from their fears and wonders. Together we as leaders and followers and as members and coordinators can overcome our youthful struggles, to be proud of who we are and to maintain our unique and recognizable identity as Afghan people and Muslim practitioners.