

Br. Mohammad Ullah - New Canadian Citizen, born in Bangladesh

Interviewed by: Br. Ryan Ramchandar



Q. Please tell us a bit about yourself (where you were born, your work/education).

A. I was born in Bangladesh. My father was a government serviceman who worked for the Ministry of Foreign affairs (he retired 5 years ago) in Bangladesh. I lived in Bangladesh during my early childhood where I studied until grade 3. I also had the opportunity to live in Tehran, Iran from 1992 to 1997. I also briefly lived with my brother in Orlando, Florida, USA and went to a small community college there for 2 years. It was by chance that I came to Winnipeg in December 1999 to study after having received admission to the University of Winnipeg to a 4-year undergraduate degree. I completed my Bachelor of Science in Applied Computer Science from the University of Winnipeg in 2004. I met my wife, Nusraat Masood, in Winnipeg in 2003, during a joint MSA conference between the University of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg. We were married in 2005 and Winnipeg is now home.

I have been active in the Winnipeg Muslim community ever since my University days. I was actively involved with the MSA and I volunteered and participated in various Islamic conferences and youth camps in our Winnipeg community. I strive to participate whenever the opportunity arises. I also managed the Manitoba Islamic Association's website miaonline.org website during its early years.

Professionally, I currently work as an IT Manager of a leading human resources recruiting firm in Winnipeg. I am also a freelance information technology consultant and work with both for-profit and non-profit organizations to provide information technology solutions.

Q. How long have you lived in Canada?

A. I have lived in Canada for over 10 years now. I have only lived in Winnipeg all this time. However, I have travelled to all the major cities on the west coast, Prairie provinces and east coast. Inshallah, my goal is to visit the Northern provinces in the next 1-2 years.

Q. Having just recently received your Canadian Citizenship, how do you feel?

A. I feel accomplished and recognized for all my hard work and contribution to Canada. My path to citizenship was not an easy one. However, I was fortunate to be sponsored for permanent residency by the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program under the Skilled Worker class. Everyone in my shoes can relate that the immigration selection and approval process in Canada is not easy and requires a lot of time and patience. I can now say that the rewards far outweigh the difficulties. I feel an equal among Canadians. I have to admit, I felt like an outsider before becoming a Canadian citizen. I am also very excited that I can now vote in federal elections!

Q. What things make you feel proud to be a Canadian Muslim?

A. As a Canadian Muslim the freedom to practice my religion, live and work freely anywhere in Canada and exercise the right to vote is something I seriously value. In my more than 10 years here, I have noticed that if you are honest, truthful and hard-working this country will reward you.

Q. How easy or difficult is it to practice your faith in Canada?

A. I don't find it difficult to practice my faith in Canada. Having lived in various countries and being exposed to different cultures have given me some advantage in relating to and dealing with different situations. At work, I made it a point during my first few weeks to inform my co-workers about my faith, eating habits and most notably fasting. Currently, I am proud to be the only Muslim employee at my work. I am blessed with all the love and understanding I receive from my co-workers.

Q. How does living as a Muslim in Canada compare to living as a Muslim in your country of origin?

A. In my country of origin, Bangladesh, which boasts a majority Muslim population, practicing the faith and being a Muslim is never a challenge. Due to its high density population, there are mosques everywhere within walking distance. No one asks if any food is zabiha. During Ramadan restaurants are closed until iftaar time, etc.

In comparison, Muslims are a minority group in Canada. As such, extra effort needs to be made to accommodate practicing one's faith. One thing I constantly struggle with is food. Eating outside always requires extra care and asking questions people here are not used to hearing e.g. does this salad have bacon bits, is this an all beef hot dog, etc.

Q. Does being a Canadian mean leaving behind who you were before coming to Canada? Do you think of yourself differently?

A. In my opinion, being a Canadian certainly does not mean leaving who I am, a Muslim, a Bangladeshi and a Canadian. Canada is a mosaic where the country is built with diversity. This diversity is what makes Canada a great country and an envy of the world.

I am a Bangladeshi by birth and nothing can change this fact. I owe my birth country for what it has provided me- my birth, early education, my native language Bengali and my faith. I have no doubt about my loyalty to Canada, however, having being exposed to various cultures and societies all my life I am a mosaic just like Canada.

Q. When people ask where you're from, what do you tell them?

A. I tell them I am from Winnipeg. If asked where are you originally from, I tell them I was born in Bangladesh and raised in 3 different countries. Almost always, this gets them very interested in me and is a good conversation starter!

Q. Do you consider being Canadian an important part of your identity? If so, how?

A. Yes. Having lived in Canada for over 10 years, I have spent 1/3 of my life in this country. I have made lots of good Muslim and non-Muslim friends in this country. I have been involved in this community for so long that my roots have grown here.

Q. Is there anything you would like to add?

A. As a new Canadian and having lived here for a long time, I believe I have learnt a lot and adjusted to this society well without losing my identity, cultural background and faith. My advice to would-be Canadians and others pursuing opportunities to settle in Canada- be yourself and understand the society you

live in, adjust in a positive way that brings benefit to the society you live in. Do not forget who you are and your origins.

This country appreciates hard work, diversity and people who strive to make this country a better place. As a Muslim Canadian I feel it my duty to strive to reflect Islam and Muslims in a positive light to my fellow Canadians.

** Br. Ryan Ramchandar is a member of the Manitoba Muslim Editorial board.*