

How has North America changed since 9/11?

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The well going popular beliefs that life for Bangladeshis, as well as all other Muslims, has changed drastically since the events of September 11 in North America, which includes USA and Canada, is an exaggeration and result of motivated and biased views. Despite numerous accounts of racially motivated crimes by some American individuals and alleged harassment by the law officers, the overall situation is so much far from creating a massive concern in the Muslim community that it would be irrational and almost ungrateful to even generally suggest that Muslims are being suppressed or threatened. The government in these countries has taken drastic steps to make sure that the racial peace is not compromised.

To understand the overall situation in this part of the world since that senseless September a more passionate and involved look is needed as oppose to instant and blatant criticism.

Both America and Canada were build by the immigrants, primarily from Europe, who beat the harsh conditions and hostile Indians to propagate further and further deep in this land in their quest to escape either starvation or to build a better life by excavating gold or working in the mines. These early immigrants went through extreme sacrifices to create a land that would eventually become the land of two very successful countries. Their next generations fought numerous bloody wars including two world wars, Korean, Vietnam and the Gulf war to keep the sovereignty and the pride of the land intact. They had kept their doors wide open for the new immigrants and refugee seekers throughout the century and flourished using their knowledge, effort and labor. Unfortunately many new immigrants in North America, who often are quite critical of their new host, neither are aware of these sacrifices nor do they care to know. They are simply happy to be able to escape from the harsh and unsatisfactory conditions from their country of origin.

In the early 90s boom in IT section generated an unforgettable experience in American lives. The maddening pace of growth in the IT section caused unimaginable leap in compensation for IT and related professions, many became richer in the share market while some others founded IT consulting farms and became quick millionaires. Y2K bug, the computer programs that used two digit years and needed modification to account for the new millennium, also contributed greatly to this rush by pouring in the market about 6 billion dollars. The influx of H1B workers from around the world, primarily from India, China, Russia etc. and the consulting firms, many by the minority population, that sprouted everywhere in no time gave an impression of wealth transfer, from the majority to the alien minority. While a portion of ambitious America were quick to have a bite of this newly found fortunes most were left out, primarily because some of the other less affluent sectors like manufacturing were being relocated in other countries to cut production costs which obviously resulted in a large number of engineering and manufacturing job cuts. Many of these workers eventually ended up working in the computer section, very often in lowly paid support jobs and were forced to cut down their standard of living. And there was that portion of the population that lived below poverty line (around 33 millions), tried to support families with double jobs and controlled expenditures. An air of discontentment, jealousy and rivalry was building up in a certain level of American inhabitants. Certain Arian movements in the west revived and started to get heard in the national level. In between 2000 and 2001 the boom collapsed owing to corporate corruption, bad investment, share market fall and finally September eleven and resulting share market collapse. It was perhaps the appropriate steps taken by the authority in conjunction with the majority of good-hearted Americans that the long brewing anger against minorities failed to ignite any racial riots. While different sources revealed that the overall hate crime towards Muslims had increased considerably for a brief period, sometimes many times in some cities, the total numbers of such criminal acts never became a real threat to any community. There was no event of massive attacks, killings, attack on religious establishments or exodus of Muslims on safety reasons as experienced in many countries in the world faced with similar events (India, Indonesia, Nigeria etc.). Of course there were a few irrational killings and attacks, public harassment, manhandling and threats but while such events were met with nationwide outcry and disapproval, they never were serious enough to force people, of any descent and religion, in drastically adjusting their way of life.

While all the good stuff was going on in USA and IT professionals poured in to contribute in the industry, Canada didn't fall too much behind either. Due to its heavily dependent trading relationship with USA (80%

of total export goes there), Canada also enjoyed increased business and resulting growth in many sectors, especially in the manufacturing. But, obviously, it also craved for a share of the IT boom within its own geographic boundaries, which would have contributed directly and in much larger effect to the Canadian economy by creating new jobs. Unfortunately, its lackluster IT industry was unable to get much interest from the prospective investors and IT professionals. So, whenever any IT professional showed keenness to immigrate to Canada, it was a sure thing. Many came from different parts of the world including a good number of H1B tech workers from USA after failing to get an immigrant status. Some even accepted Canadian immigration while their American immigration process continued and came back to USA right after landing in Canada. A majority of them never had any intention to live in Canada and used the quick immigration process to avoid the extreme situation where they would be left with no other choices but to go back to their respective countries.

By the beginning of 2001, as the IT boom was becoming a myth, Canadian immigration officers were getting increasingly aware of the bad intentions of many new immigrants who came across the Southern border. They started to take stern measures to curb this kind of movement by assuring that these immigrants brought in enough money and proved beyond any doubt their intentions to live and contribute in Canada. In numerous cases IT professionals with valid landing documents were refused entry by the border officers on suspicion of less than honest intentions. As more time passed the immigration process from USA to Canada started to go through more and more scrutiny, though IT professionals still enjoyed welcoming attitude, despite lack of opportunities and comparable salaries. In recent days Immigration from USA to Canada has increased mostly due to the steps taken by the US government to find and deport illegal immigrants and fear of future terror attacks, not because of legal harassment and public rage or shift of attitude toward minorities or Muslims. In most part of the country a Muslim woman wearing a head cover can go on with her business uninterrupted despite the fact that the majority of North Americans, owing to the general nature of the open society and freedom of women do not approve wearing a veil, a sign of suppression and pull back.

Lately it is becoming a general concern that due to lenient policies toward capital punishment and loosened borders, immigration and refugee policies, Canada is increasingly becoming the heaven for criminals from around the world, especially of the southern neighbor.

But the truth is before September eleven USA Canada border in general was porous, loosely guarded and quite welcoming. Naturally the fear for further terror attacks has put the American counterpart in a state of commotion and very often they are quick to put blames on Canadians while their own border officers are yet to get efficient enough to be effectively able to thwart any threat. It may also be mentioned here that while new immigrants are generally welcomed in both of these countries a public attitude toward decreasing immigration is getting gradually stronger. In a recent survey in Canada about half the people who took part thought Canada lacked the resource and social systems to support the current inflow of immigrations each year (200,000) and needed to curb it down considerably.

Despite the fact that there are about six million Muslims in America the image of Islam hadn't been much to talk about due to the impression that it suppressed women and allowed polygyny. Even though Mormons in Utah still continues to carry on their tradition of polygyny, the general population has a common hatred toward such traditions on the basis of the lesser respect it pays to women. While the majority Muslim immigrants practices monogamy, a portion of the Black Muslims often exercise polygyny, creating a negative impression in a commoners mind. But yet in the recent years, Muslims prayed as they chose and number of mosques increased drastically, many small ones, located inside a rented house or apartment. There was never any fear of practicing Islam or any religion. After September eleven, Islam, Quran and Muslims overall in this country was put on focus, went through scrutiny of the general population, substantiated some people's fear for Islam while generated other's concern about the loyalty and patriotism of American Muslims, regardless of origin.

This is a hard time for America, even after more than a year of September eleven. The general perception of working hard to be rewarded with wealth and better life suddenly is shaken badly, forcing people to pause to think what is this all about? Considering the fact that this country also consists mostly middle class families who are continually trying to better their future by working harder and longer, it is not difficult to realize that many lack time or interest to gain much political knowledge. While all these commotion have richened their knowledge about international affairs to some extent there hasn't been any large shift of opinions yet, primarily because most do not believe that America is fighting a war against the Muslims and the issue of Palestinian sovereignty should become a burden on America. But, regardless of anything, beside a couple

of revealed plots of blowing up mosques and a stone thrown or a shot fired at mosques, no en masse intimidation or harassment has taken place. Muslims still goes to mosque to say their prayers the same way they did before, perhaps, with a scintilla of worry.