

21<sup>ST</sup> May 2024

## NAVIGATING DESIGN SCHOOL AS A VISIBLY MUSLIM STUDENT: MY PERSPECTIVE

As I contemplate the intersection of faith, identity, and academia, I find myself navigating a complex labyrinth of experiences. As a visibly Muslim woman of Colour in my early twenties, and an international student in an art and design college, I often find my journey punctuated by moments of both resilience and reflection.

In traversing the academic landscapes of New York, and New Delhi, I have encountered a myriad of challenges and triumphs. From the subtle nuances of cultural assimilation to the more overt dynamics of inclusivity, my path has been shaped by the interplay of faith and belonging.

Within the corridors of academia, where creativity and critical thought converge, I have sometimes felt the weight of invisibility. Despite the industry's outward embrace of diversity, the absence of representation can leave one questioning their place in the field of design.

Growing up, and even now, I have longed for role models who reflect my own identity - a sentiment echoed by many in similar circumstances. The dearth of visible Muslim women and youth in the field of design calls for an urgent need for greater inclusivity and representation.

Yet, amidst these challenges, my faith remains a steadfast anchor. It imbues my journey with purpose and resilience, guiding me through moments of doubt and reaffirming my sense of belonging. I have found solace and strength in community. Discovering societies like the Islamic Students Society has been instrumental in serving as spaces of connection, understanding, and support, where individuals with shared experiences can come together. These communities provide a refuge where faith and identity are celebrated, rather than marginalised. Even small gestures, like providing a prayer room for Muslim students, can have a profound impact. It offers a sense of being welcomed into a space that respects their faith.

As I continue to navigate the intersections of faith, identity, and academia, I am reminded of the transformative power of community. By fostering spaces of belonging and solidarity, we not only combat isolation but also amplify our collective voices, advocating for greater representation and inclusivity in all spheres of life. By sharing our narratives and amplifying diverse voices, we pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable future. In embracing our unique identities and experiences, we enrich the social fabric of humanity, weaving together threads of resilience, creativity, and belonging. It is not easy, navigating the complexities of our respective journeys, but in this shared pursuit of belonging, may we continue to

cultivate spaces of inclusion and find the strength, inspiration, and the courage to shape a world where all are seen, heard, and celebrated.

“In the tapestry of design, she seeks a reflection,  
A muse, a guide, a source of affection.  
But the canvas remains stark, void of her face,  
A silent plea for belonging, in this artistic race.

Yet through it all, her faith holds fast,  
An anchor in storms, steadfast.  
For in the rhythm of creation's song,  
She finds her strength, where she belongs.

So let the world ponder, let them see,  
The beauty in her diversity.  
For in the intersection of faith and design,  
Her voice, her vision, shall forever shine.”

xx