

Christmas is Also My Holiday

by Feroza Mehta



“Christmas is not a Zoroastrian holiday!” the tall, beautiful fellow news reporter screamed at me while leaning over my cubicle walls. It was Christmas Eve of 2003. I was working at a local TV news station as a reporter. She said she felt cheated out of a Christmas with her family. It was inconceivable to her that I got the time off instead of her.

To her, Christmas was her holiday and how dare I, a brown-skinned, Zoroastrian take time off?

How dare I?

It didn't matter to her that the The Three Wise men were probably Zoroastrian.

It didn't matter to her that the Christian faith has many tenets and aspects of Zoroastrianism woven into it. Most of the Abrahamic faiths do.

It didn't matter that I had worked every week since September because there was no other reporter. I was juggling this job with a full-time course load at university.

It didn't matter that my mother decorated the house with holly, wreaths, a Christmas tree, did all sorts of traditional Christmas baking.

It didn't matter that I grew up writing letters to Santa Claus, and that my cash-strapped parents would save up for the biggest item on my list and I would open it with glee on Christmas morning.

It didn't matter that we would eat a big pancake breakfast on Christmas morning.

It didn't matter that we would celebrate Christmas dinner with a potluck at our family friends' homes and have ornament and gift exchanges.

It didn't matter because all she saw was my skin color. All she knew about me was that I was not Christian like her and therefore not entitled to time off for Christmas.

It didn't matter that I grew up in a country that values a cultural mosaic, that we all make up a tapestry of culture and we can all celebrate what we want.

It didn't matter that Christmas was the biggest holiday in our home, next to Noruz, the Zoroastrian New Year. To me, those Zoroastrian holidays are just days when we got new clothes and a start of a new year. I didn't live that Indian life day to day. I was a Canadian. Stores had Christmas displays. TV showed Christmas specials. It was special to me. Zoroastrian holidays don't mean what Christmas means to me: the gift of family, love, joy and coming together as a community.

But to her, she saw a brown-skinned woman of a different faith, who couldn't possibly understand the true meaning of Christmas.

It was one of those moments in my life that I can only explain as a train derailment. Growing up second generation, we are told we are equal. That we can be whoever we want, whatever we want, celebrate whatever we want, because we are all one. It's a beautiful reality that is as fragile as a cloud. Sitting at my cubicle, writing out the script of my story, which was coincidentally about how Hanukkah and Christmas were so close together that year and how all faiths are celebrating the holidays. I was excited about getting on a plane to go home the next day, that I'd make it for my auntie's potluck turkey dinner and eat it in the same kitchen where she babysat me. That joy was temporarily taken by the reporter's yell that Christmas wasn't mine. That I was an "other."

I looked at her and said, "Christmas is mine, too."