

## **Spectrum Spirituality & Community Day, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2004, Rottingdean, Brighton**

My name is Tamsila Tauqir and I'm the Chair of the Safra Project. I have always been conscious of my faith in Islam and my sexuality. They have never been in contradiction to me, instead, it has been Qur'anic principles of justice that have given me the strength to fight the institutional bigotry, prejudice and heterosexism which is rife within the country.

I shall present briefly an introduction from the beginnings of the Safra Project, to some of our current activities and some of our hopes for the future, since we all need hope.

The Safra Project is a resource project working on issues relating to lesbian, bisexual and transgender women who identify as Muslim religiously and/or culturally (Muslim LBT women). The Safra Project was set up in October 2001 by and for Muslim LBT women. This was in response to the multiple, intertwined issues uniquely expressed towards Muslims LBT women and currently insufficiently addressed. These issues faced by Muslim LBT women include a combination of prejudices based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender, religion, race, culture and immigration status.

Islam, like all faiths, is about respecting those around us and along with the growing Progressive Muslims movement the Safra Project aims to show the true face of Islam rather than that which is propagated by both mainstream and gay, Western media. In particular there is one free gay paper that is notorious for Muslim bashing and is quite anti-faith in general. Unfortunately this is not uncommon of white, patriarchal power structures being reproduced in the gay media.

Hence, I emphasise justice rather than equality, since the term equality has been hijacked by conservatives, and liberals, arguing for "dialogue". In reality they define this as the equality to oppress and be part of oppressive power structures. Voicing prejudice promotes bigotry, reinforces it and gives the bigots the belief that they are not alone. As seen in the recent local elections where the BNP were allowed television air-time to whip-up racism, xenophobia and Islamaphobia.

To redress some misconceptions the Safra Project has recently been researching the subjects of sexuality, gender and Islam, the introduction of which is available to read on our website ([www.safraproject.org](http://www.safraproject.org)). The information on the web pages provide for people the knowledge that faith and sexuality are not exclusive to one another and very importantly that they are not alone. This common question of LGBT people and our right to our faiths is not exclusive amongst Muslims. However, in an Islamic context, faith requires no intermediary but is between you and your maker. This knowledge can be of great empowerment when facing bigotry from within and outside.

The Safra Project does not seek to provide ultimate answers or solutions, and is not a faith group. Our ethos is one of inclusiveness and diversity. In this we strive to assist the empowerment of Muslim LBT women and, forming solidarity with others, also seeking justice.