

Under British colonial rule, white skin was associated with power and female beauty. It is still considered a sign of high status to be light-skinned. Most Pakistanis will not be so blunt about this colour prejudice, but you will see subtle reminders of it everywhere, as in the television commercials for skin bleach creams and lavish praise for fair-skinned brides. People will laugh at you if you tell them you want to acquire a tan.

Some foreigners contribute to Pakistani feelings of inferiority by projecting a sense of superiority or optimism about the West. Regrettably, some westerners, Canadians among them, look down upon Pakistani society. Because Pakistani goods, customs, values and religious beliefs are alien, foreigners assume they are of less value than their own. Ironically, many Pakistani customs and values are similar to what Canadian customs and values were at the turn of the century. Many expatriates retreat into their own communities, isolating themselves and impeding relationships with Pakistani

acquaintances and work partners. Pakistanis perceive such behaviour as arrogant, and, like all peoples, they are very sensitive to any insinuation of foreign superiority.

Some Pakistanis think most westerners are morally decadent. They are aware that Christianity is no longer a dominant force in western societies. They cite extramarital sex and high rates of divorce, crime and alcoholism as examples of western decay.

Many Pakistani men assume that western women are promiscuous and open to advances. This stereotype results in unwelcome remarks and, on occasion, advances from Pakistani men. Foreign women should dress conservatively in public and maintain a degree of personal reserve when interacting with men. A few well-timed phrases in Urdu or English will help ward off advances. A woman who is accompanied by her children or husband is less likely to be harassed than is a woman on her own.

Toward Mutual Understanding and Respect ◆ ◆ ◆

Pakistani methods and systems have evolved over centuries in a collectivist, hierarchical society. Most western societies are pluralistic and individualistic. Canadians and Pakistanis must learn to understand and appreciate both sets of cultures and historical

backgrounds. They need to recognize that culture determines attitudes and values. The way we perceive ourselves, our social roles and obligations, and the way we go about our work are shaped by our experience. If we recognize this, we are less likely to