

**Interview 61**

**This interview was conducted by the Middle East and Middle Eastern American Center (MEMEAC) of The Graduate Center, City University of New York (June 2002 – March 2003).**

**Gender of respondent:** Male

**Age:** 32

**Q. Okay. I would like to start by asking you a few questions about yourself. Where were you born?**

A. In Bangladesh.

**Q. And where did you grow up?**

A. Bangladesh.

**Q. How old were you when you came to live in the United States?**

A. Twenty-four year old.

**Q. Okay. And where were your parents born?**

A. In Bangladesh.

**Q. So you would be first generation. And what do you consider to be your ethnic background?**

A. East Indian.

**Q. Bengali?**

A. Bengali Indian.

**Q. Your ethnic...**

A. Yeah.

**Q. Yeah. Okay. And what is ... what is your religion?**

A. Muslim.

**Q. Okay. And how old are you now?**

A. I'm thirty-two.

**Q. Are you a U.S. citizen or a Green Card holder?**

A. No. No Green Card, no ... no ... no U.S. citizen.

**Q. You're here on a visa?**

A. Asylum.

**Q. Oh okay. And what is your highest level of education?**

A. I went to college in Bangladesh.

**Q. You said you went to college. Right? Did you get your Bachelor's or your Master's?**

A. Yeah. I got four years in Biology.

**Q. Oh, okay. What is your main occupation? What is it that you do right now?**

A. I'm driving a taxi in the city.

**Q. Okay. And what is your marital status? Are you married?**

A. Single.

**Q. Okay. Do you have any children?**

A. No.

**Q. Now I'm going to ask you a few questions about September 11th. Okay?**

A. Okay.

**Q. Where were you on September 11th at 9am and how did you hear of the attacks?**

A. I was in the city driving a yellow cab. I was uptown on the West Side, 110 Street. I was there. You know? And then I saw--you know--everybody standing on the street. You know? And then I heard on 10/10 news.

**Q. What was your first reaction? How did you react when you heard?**

A. Nothing. You know? I mean, I thought maybe a small plane--you know--hit the World Trade Center. Yeah.

**Q. Okay. And did you think that whatever it was, maybe it's the Muslim people who did it?**

A. No!

**Q. What is your most vivid memory of September 11th, something you will never forget about that day?**

A. Nothing. I was in the city--you know--and when I saw so many people running here and there. You know? And I couldn't go to the World Trade Center in that time because is so much--you know--police car going down and traffic was blocked. They said nobody is going down. So nothing. You know? It's just people all over the place.

**Q. I see. So you think you will never forget that chaos and all that?**

A. No. No, no.

**Q. What were your feelings immediately afterwards? How did you feel? Did you feel sad, guilty, frightened. ... How did you feel?**

A. I feel like frightened. You know? I mean, because the same time--you know--these radio people start saying Muslim, Muslim, Muslim so I was so scared. You know?

**Q. Have your feelings changed? Are you still ... still scared?**

A. No. But I think it's getting more--you know--more worst. Right? Yeah.

**Q. Did you feel any guilt .... Did you feel guilty being a Muslim?**

A. Personally I don't. But--you know--when people sit in my cab they ask me questions--you know--when they see my name and my pictures they ask me, Where are you from?

Oh, you're a Muslim. Yeah--you know?--sometime I feel [scared]--you know--when I see people.

**Q. When Americans asked you about your ethnic background, like, where you're from, before September 11th what did you tell them?**

A. I mean, it was okay before. You know?

**Q. So ...**

A. But now I ... sometime I tell them I'm from Sri Lanka or some other place. You know?

**Q. Oh, that's what you say now and after September 11th?**

A. Yeah. Yeah.

**Q. Have your feelings ... have your feelings towards the United States changed after 9-11?**

A. I don't know. You know? I work here. You know? I live here. I'm ... I'm not no criminal. I working hard driving yellow cab. Yeah. You know?

**Q. I see. So ... so do you still feel the same about America, the way you felt before September 11th?**

A. You ... you know? Yeah. You know? Sometime ... you know?

**Q. Okay. Okay. So has your level of political awareness increased or decreased?**

A. I don't understand.

**Q. Okay. Like, your domestic ... America's domestic policy and then foreign policies, are you more interested in them or ... or you were .... you were always interested? How do you feel towards them?**

A. I don't know. You know? The ... when I watch TV and this, the only thing I see is--you know--Muslims are bad, terrorists. You know? I don't know what to say. You know?

**Q. Okay. Okay. Do you feel at home here? Do you feel like this is your home? This is where you belong?**

A. I don't know about future. You know?

**Q. Um-hum. But right now how do you feel after September 11th? How did you feel before September 11th, let's say?**

A. It was okay, no--you know--we ... after September 11<sup>th</sup>--you know--it's new rule, immigration registration. You know? So--you know--and the people scared. And I have to go there too. You know?

**Q. I see.**

A. Yeah. So I don't know.

**Q. So do you feel like this is your country or you ... you want to just go back to Bangladesh?**

A. I don't want to go back, but--you know--what can I say. You know?

**Q. Okay. Do you think that there has been a change in the way people from the Middle East and South Asia are treated after 9-11?**

A. Yeah. Sometime I feel--you know--sitting in the ... in the train and--you know?

**Q. How?**

A. I don't know. People just look at me--you know--sometime and go to the ... any American store or--you know ... sometimes when I saw a policeman they watch me. You know? Those check points that--you know--we have in the city--you know?--they stop you, they ... and they check the car, the taxi license and everything.

**Q. Okay. Have you experienced any backlash, any discrimination or racial profiling after September 11th, like, while driving the taxi or outside in a public area or anywhere else?**

A. No. You know? Sometimes--you know--people on the street-- you know--some of the people who's driving--you know--and we are on the street, sometime they say go back to your country--you know--and they--you know--sometimes--you know ... yeah. You know? I don't know, sometimes. Yeah.

**Q. Oh, okay. But you mentioned that people do look at you weird, right?--when you're taking the train or ....**

A. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

**Q. So how about your passengers when they sit in the car? Have they ever said anything to you, knowing that you're a Muslim and you're from Bangladesh or you look South Asian or Middle Eastern? Have those passengers ever said anything to you?**

A. Not ... not too many people. But sometimes they do.

**Q. Like what?**

A. I mean, they ask you--you know--questions. You know? How's everything in Bangladesh? And is ... is you would ... time. [sic] You know?

**Q. Has any member of your family experienced any backlash?**

A. No. My nephew--you know--is too young and--you know--it's ...I don't know, it's ... I mean, they do sometimes. You know? Everyone have their own experience. Yeah.

**Q. Would you mind sharing a little bit? Like, your nephews, your sister-in-law or your brother's experience?**

A. Well--you know--when my cousin, she used to--you know--she wear, like--you know—to cover the head.

**Q. The hijab.**

A. Yeah. So in the train--you know--when so we stop ... stop her not to take it. You know? So because people look at her and she complained there. You know? So we said: Okay. If you're Muslim it's not ... it's not so important. You know? So you ... you don't have to--you know--cover your head. You know? You just wear it sometime.

**Q. So when she was wearing the hijab people used to say things to her?**

A. Not ... she never had experience, but I think--you know-- people look at her in ... in that way. You know but ... Yeah.

**Q. Oh, okay. I see. Okay. Do you think that these Middle Eastern and South Asian organizations have been good in handling this backlash?**

A. No. I think they are more other people, the American people, some--you know--groups they ... they are good. They're better--you know--than, yeah, these ... Yeah.

**Q. Okay. Have you joined any religious or ethnic organization?**

A. No. I'm even scared to go to the mosques sometime. You know?

**Q. Oh yeah?**

A. Yeah, because--you know?

**Q. Because why?**

A. I don't know. I scared maybe I go to the mosque--you know--these ... some police appear--you know--come and pick me up.

**Q. Has it happened? Has ... have they done that?**

A. No. I heard so many places--you know--in Brooklyn and places. You know?--they went there. I don't know, but ...

**Q. In your opinion, how do you think the relationship between, like, the Bengalis and the Indians is, or the Muslim and the Jewish is, the nature of the relationship between your ethnic group and others in the United States right now? Do you think they're more, happy, happy, harmonious and tolerant towards each other or do you think they're, like, stay away from us, oppositional and strained?**

A. I don't know, but I think it's ... it's ... it's okay. You know? You know? It's not any personal thing. But if they have any business or this, they do--you know--do business things. But I don't think so. It's too much--you know--personal. Yeah.

**Q. What do you think that members of your community can do to improve the relationships with other groups?**

A. I don't know. You know? I just work hard. I don't know what to say. You know?

**Q. What can, like, the Bengalis do to be more nice with other members of the community?**

A. I think everybody should--you know--go respect the law. You know? We live here and respect the country. You know? If anybody trouble--you know--go check ... call the police--you know? This ... this ... yeah. You know?

**Q. So after September 11th would you still tell, like, people from Bangladesh or people from the Middle East to come and emigrate to the United States? Would you still tell them: okay, come over here, and...**

A. The time come--you know?--but ...

**Q. Would you still tell them? You live here. You see how the situation is. You see how everything is going right now. Would you still encourage those people, like your relatives, or someone from another country, from the Middle East or from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, would you still tell them: Okay. Come to America!**

A. I mean, no. You know? If my family wants--any member--you know--wants to come I tell them not to come. If they ... if they come with a Green Card it's okay, but not to study here or not to--you know?--no visitor. You know? So it's good to come with ... with papers.

**Q. Oh, okay. So you wouldn't encourage ... don't come illegally.**

A. Yeah.

**Q. Come ... come with a legal status.**

A. Yeah.

**Q. We talked about the negative consequences a little bit. Do you think there was anything positive from September 11th?**

A. No positive. You know? World Trade Center, everybody loved that. You know? So many people died. You know? It's ... and I was in that building all the time--you know--picking up people. You know? So ... positive.

**Q. How about your thoughts on people in America found out more about Islam and Muslim people, do you think that ....**

A. I think the ... a lot of people--you know--find out a lot. Too much people talking on the ... on the TV and this. You know? People start reading Koran. You know?

**Q. Oh yeah?**

A. Yeah. So I don't know.

**Q. Okay. Why do you think the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon happened?**

A. I don't know.

**Q. So nothing in your mind? You have no idea why they attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon? Do you think that the Middle Easterners or the Arabs hate America? Maybe that's why they did this?**

A. I don't know. Maybe they hate--you know--but they ... a lot of people, rich people, they have money over here. Yeah. You know? They come here all the time. They love this country more than I love.

**Q. Oh yeah?**

A. Yeah.

**Q. That's true.**

A. So maybe some people hate it. I don't know. Maybe they--you know--somebody don't like it, those .. so the whoever. You know? I don't know if they ... if they did it, maybe they don't like it. They hate America. So ....

**Q. What do you think the United States can do to resolve this issue of terrorism? Like, no more terrorist attacks over here, to stop that from happening what do you think the United States can do or should do?**

A. I think--you know--United States can--you know--play a good ... good role--you know--to ... in Israel and all the Middle East-- you know?--and make it equal--you know--both sides equal. You know, one side it's ... the other side is ... You know? Let them live together--you know--the way they live here--everybody live here. You know?

Happy happy. You know? So if over there people live very happy, so for me I don't think so--you know--any ... any attack or anything. You know? I don't, think so. You know?

**Q. Did you travel by plane after September 11th?**

A. No.

**Q. No?**

A. Not yet.

**Q. Did you ... do you know the security that is in the airports? Do you know about that?**

A. You know, I drop so many people on the airport every day--you know--to La Guardia and there ... there used to be people just, go. You know? Before the plane and--you know--maybe half an hour, or forty minutes. Now everybody go there like, two hours or this and that. It's too much security. You know?

**Q. Okay. Are there any other issues or points you would like to comment on that we haven't mentioned in here?**

A. No. I ... I think it's okay. I just wanted to say--you know--it's ... it's ... sometime I feel--you know--it's no good--you know--everybody ... so many people die, and now this America war--you know--against Iraq--you know--it's too much problem--you know?--to much problems. So ... also everywhere, you go--you know--people don't like us any more. It's going to go bad.

**Q. Us who? The Muslims you mean?**

A. Yeah, for ... for--you know--us, everybody. You know? We working people. You know? We work hard. We ... we have nothing to do with these things. So I think it's ... it's no good. You know?

**Q. Okay.**

A. I think they should go ... because Afghanistan war is not over, so I think--you know--it's ... it's no war. Peacefully. You know? Yeah. So ...

**Q. Well, thank you for your time and cooperation.**

A. Thank you.

**Q. And thank you for your thoughts.**

A. All right.

**Q. Thanks.**