

Interview 50

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: Female

Age: 26

Q. Okay. I would like to start by asking you a few questions about yourself.

A. Sure.

Q. Where were you born?

A. In India.

Q. And where did you grow up?

A. In India.

Q. And how old were you when you came to live in the United States?

A. Sixteen years.

Q. Okay.

A. Sixteen, seventeen, about.

Q. Okay. And where was your father born?

A. India.

Q. And your mother also?

A. Yeah.

Q. What do you consider to be your ethnic background?

A. Indian.

Q. And what is your religious affiliation?

A. Hindu.

Q. Okay. And how old are you now?

A. Twenty-six.

Q. Are you a U.S. citizen?

A. Yes, I am.

Q. And what is your highest level of education?

A. What would you call it over here? High school.

Q. So you've completed high school.

A. Um-hum.

Q. Where did you obtain your education?

A. In India.

Q. Okay. And what is your main occupation?

A. I am a cashier in a drug store called Genovese.

Q. Okay. And what is your marital status?

A. Married with two kids.

Q. Okay. How old are your children?

A. [age].

Q. Okay. Now I would like to ask you a few questions about how you experienced September 11th. Where were you around 9am that day and how did you hear of the attacks?

A. I was home. I was getting ready to go to work and I had the TV on, turned on, which I normally do in the daytime to watch the news and the weather. And all of a sudden, around nine o'clock, or before nine this happened, the, you know...

Q. Yeah, 8:45.

A. Yeah, there was, like, news about the Towers, the plane hitting Twin Towers. And like, no. How could that be? It's probably just a plane, you know, that hit and they'll take care of that, this and that. But ... but then, after fifteen minutes, again, fifteen, twenty minutes, again another plane comes and hits the second Tower. And it was, like, so surprising. You know? It was, like...so it was very surprising that it happened ...and then I just sat down, started listening to the news. And I called up my work to find...so then I called up my work and I asked them if they knew what was going on and they're like, yeah. And I told them my ... my baby sitter's not coming because of this ... because of this my baby sitter's not coming and I can't come to work.... if I don't have ... if I don't get a baby sitter then I won't be able to come to work. And they were like: "Okay, don't worry, don't come."

Q. So what was your first reaction when you saw the attacks on TV?

A. I was very surprised that this happened.

Q. Was there any possibility of you thinking that the terrorists might be Muslims?

A. Oh no, no. Hell no, no, no, not at all. Not at all.

Q. What is your most vivid memory of September 11th, which you will never forget; something that will always stand out in your mind?

A. Oh, the buildings falling down. I can never forget that. I can never forget that: the buildings collapsing.

Q. What were your feelings about what happened immediately afterwards? Did you feel anger, pain, grief, sadness?

A. All that, yeah, sadness, pain, everything. Not angry because I wasn't angry about anyone, about, you know, anyone. So ... pain and sad.

Q. Before we were recording you mentioned that you have a lot of Muslim friends, did you feel any guilt...?

A. I felt sad for them, sad for ... I felt sad for them because, you know, of what they were going through after that. It wasn't easy for them. And I still think that it's not easy for them, what they're going through.

Q. So have your feelings changed since the events, this feeling of pain, anger and grief?

A. Well, every time, you know, when they show it on TV ... or the Discovery Channel, you know, the pain just comes back. I ... I don't have no ... no pain. I don't have no guilt or no anger over anybody. And it's just because I have a lot of Muslim friends so, you know?

Q. When people asked you about your ethnic background or origin before September 11th what did you tell them?

A. I'm Hindu; Indian.

Q. What about immediately afterwards?

A. The same.

Q. Have your feelings towards the United States changed since 9/11?

A. No.

Q. Okay. How about your level of political awareness?

A. Oh yeah, that's increased a lot.

Q. Yeah?

A. Yeah. I never used to watch news so much before, but now I'm very much involved in watching news, CNN and any time any news comes on I am very ... very much aware. I will keep up to date, keep myself up to date in whatever is going on all around the world.

Q. Okay. Do you feel a sense of belonging to the United States? Do you feel at home here?

A. So far, yes.

Q. Have you always felt like this?

A. Yeah.

Q. Do you think that there has been a change in the way people from the Middle East and South Asia living in the United States are treated since 9/11?

A. Yeah, because I have ... like I have mentioned, I have a lot of Muslim friends so they feel very ... they ... they feel a difference. So I ... they ... they do feel a difference ever since 9/11. So ...

Q. What kind of difference? Can you briefly explain?

A. I had this friend, a couple of friends, who were looking for jobs and their name was Muhammad. And you know, which is a very common Muslim name and they wouldn't get a job because of the way Middle Eastern ... so they were refused, like, not, like, right on the face, but that's how ...

Q. But that's how they felt?

A. Felt ... they felt, yeah.

Q. Because of their names?

A. Because of their names.

Q. Have you personally experienced any backlash, any type of discrimination or racial profiling?

A. Well, because, you know, I look...

Q. Go ahead.

A. ...a little bit of Indian, because I'm Indian, so a bit like that. So people sometimes look at me, but I could care less about it.

Q. Um-hum. I see.

A. But I could imagine what those people are going through right now.

Q. I see. Have any of your family members experienced anything?

A. No. They're all light complexioned so I don't think ...

Q. Do you think that Middle Eastern and South Asian organizations have been effective in handling the backlash against their communities after September 11th?

A. I think so. I think so, yeah. They pretty much helped out a lot ... a lot of TV. On the TV you heard a lot more about Muslim and everything, so people who had misconceptions about some things they were, like, pretty much cleared out.

Q. Okay.

A. Where people thought if ... if they were Muslim, terrorist attack, so they know ... know what Islam really says to do and Islam is not supposed to do so.

Q. Okay. So you think all the misconceptions have been cleared out?

A. Not all, no, no. No, not all. There's still a lot more ... It's never enough. It's never enough.

Q. Have you joined any ethnic or religious organizations since September 11th?

A. No, never. No, no.

Q. Okay. In your opinion, what is the nature of the relationship between your ethnic and religious group and others in the United States at this time? Do you think that Hindus are more tolerant of Muslims? And how do you think the relationship is between Hindus and Muslims, Muslims and Jews, or Hindus and Jews at this time?

A. Well, you know, what's been going on ... in the whole wide world, even back home between India and Pakistan, the tension between India and Pakistan, it doesn't look so beautiful. It's not so nice. But I ... over here we are like one community. You know? Like I said, I have a lot of Muslim friends so it doesn't feel anything like that. But back home, or back in Israel or Palestine and stuff

like that ... and that is, you know, a big issue, which I don't know will anyone ever take it under consideration or solve that.

Q. What's the relationship like amongst those communities over here?

A. Over here ... I don't think they have any problems over here in their communities.

Q. Okay. What do you think members of your community can do to improve relations?

A. To improve these relations, to hold, like, more seminars ...

Q. Given your understanding of the status of Middle Eastern and South Asian immigrants in the United States right now, would you still encourage these groups to come to the United States; to emigrate here?

A. The Middle Eastern?

Q. Yeah, Middle Easterners and South Asians?

A. Why not? Why not? I mean, they ... they're innocent people. If you want to go after, go after the people who've done that, not the people who have nothing to do with that. Every ... You know? There are good and bad everywhere, whether they're Muslim, Hindus, Christian or Jewish, you know, there're good and bad and you find them anywhere in the world.

Q. Okay. So you would still tell them to come?

A. Of course. Of course. I ... You know? Of course, it's not going especially for Muslims I would never say that, no, you shouldn't come over here. But ...

Q. Okay. We have talked about the negative consequences. Were there any positive consequences of September 11th?

A. Positive?

Q. Do you think that anything positive came out of September 11th?

A. Positive?

Q. Do you think people became more aware...

A. Aware for ... to ... toward Islam, yes. That's ... I think that's one of the positive things, especially for people, like I mentioned before, for the people who had misconceptions. And people have gotten more into the Islam and learning more about Islam and everything. I think that's a very good thing and very much more getting, you know, more like, learning about any religion and before even going ... taking first steps about someone is learn more about it and say something.

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

A. Why? I ...I don't ... I would never even think that anything like that ... like that would happen to the World Trade Center. Even though it happened in '93, nobody had this thing in their mind that would never happen.

Q. Do you think that the Arabs or the Muslims in the Middle East hate America?

A. I don't ... I don't think so. I don't think so.

Q. What do you think the U.S. can do to resolve this problem of terrorism which is directed against it?

A. Resolve? I don't know. I'm not ... I'm not too much of a politician person so I can't really say anything about that.

Q. Okay.

A. Whatever they do, I hope it's for the best and it doesn't take any further conflicts. You know?

Q. Okay. Have you traveled after September 11th?

A. No, I haven't, no, not because I'm scared or anything. I'm not afraid of dying.

Q. Do you think that these attacks could have been prevented?

A. Nobody ... nobody knew about it, so I don't think so. I don't think so.

Q. Do you think that the security measures that exist now could have prevented September 11th from happening?

A. I ... I don't know 'cause nothing happens until something happens. You know what I mean?

Q. That's a nice quote: Nothing happens until something happens. That 's good. Okay. So are there any other points or issues you'd like to comment on, which we haven't covered in this survey?

A. No. That's about it, basically. I ... I don't have anything to ... else to say but ... besides saying this: that this was a very good, you know, whatever you call this. This interview was really nice, to get peoples' point of view. And I just hope that you get a lot more people and get their point of views, what they think about all this. And this was ... this was really nice... a very nice survey.

Q. Well, thank you very much for your time and cooperation. Thanks.

A. You're welcome. You're welcome.