

Interview 52

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

A. Pakistan.

Q. And where did you grow up?

A. Pakistan.

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

A. Six.

Q. Where were your parents born?

A. Pakistan.

Q. So you are first generation. What do you consider to be your ethnic background?

A. American-Pakistani.

Q. American-Pakistani?

A. Yes.

Q. And what is your religious affiliation?

A. Muslim.

Q. And how old are you now?

A. Twenty-six.

Q. And are you a U.S. citizen or a Green Card holder?

A. Green card holder.

Q. And what is your highest level of education?

A. I ... I go to college.

Q. Okay. And what are you studying?

A. I'm studying biology.

Q. Okay. And what is your main occupation?

A. Student.

Q. You don't work?

A. I work part time.

Q. Can you describe what it is that you do?

A. Just a cashier in a Key Food.

Q. Oh, okay. And what is your marital status?

A. Single.

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

A. That was Tuesday so I was in my class, so in my class I didn't hear it.

Q. So when did you find out?

A. When the class finished we came out and there was, like, a big chaos going around and I was, like, what is everybody just, like, running around and--you know--whatever. And because we have television in the school cafeterias so everybody was just running over there and whatever and trying to see what was happened and that's how I found out. It was round, like, I would say around eleven o'clock.

Q. Oh. You found out at eleven?

A. Um-hum.

Q. So you found out through the people around you or through the TV?

A. Um-hum. It was through the people around ...

Q. Okay. Who was the first person who told you?

A. It was one of. ... 'Cause I just asked somebody what is this happening 'cause we just, like, see people. You know? Just somebody passing by on the campus.

Q. Oh, okay. What was your first reaction?

A. I was like, no way! Holy shit! That's not happening!

Q. Did you think that whoever did this ... any possibility in your mind that it must have been the Muslims?

A. No. I was just thinking--I don't know--some enemies. But I didn't even know Muslims could do something like that, if they did it.

Q. What is your most vivid memory of September 11th? Is there anything that stands out in your mind that you think you'll never forget?

A. Well, I ... since I didn't see it, like, first hand experience of ... because both of the towers had collapsed already by the time I found out. So I just remember the ... the moment that I saw the towers go down. Like it took them ten seconds. The whole tower just fell down so fast.

Q. Oh, when they were replaying the...

A. Replaying the ... the ... the videos.

Q. Oh, okay. So that's something you will never forget? What were your feelings immediately afterwards about what happened?

A. Oh my God! Are we safe? Is this going to happen again or some other attack or something, or whatever. You know?

Q. Did you feel any sadness or did you feel any guilt being a Muslim?

A. No. I didn't feel any sadness or guilt because--you know-- at that moment we weren't sure who did it--what happened. And, no, I didn't feel any sadness. I was just, like ... it was shock: Did this really happen in New York?

Q. Have your feelings changed since the events?

A. No. I just feel very sorry for the people that happened to and I don't think it should have happened here 'cause, you know everything was just doing their usual. But then that, you know?

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

A. American-Pakistani.

Q. How about immediately afterwards?

A. American-Pakistan.

Q. And how about now?

A. American-Pakistani.

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

A. No. It's my country now.

Q. And how about your level of political awareness?

A. Well, I think it has gone up. I mean, it increased a lot.

Q. Towards domestic or foreign policy?

A. Both, I guess.

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

A. Always.

Q. Have you always felt like this?

A. Um-hum.

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

A. Well, not that I have seen many experiences but I just hear about it on the ... on BBC, not that they show on CNN or any of the news channel might--you know?--not even on the newspaper. I don't hear it and I don't see it. But I ... I would say that and if you watch BBC sometimes they'll just show you, like, the things that are going on. And I would just hear, like, in my classes people just talking or the teachers just talking about how ... how people have to go for registration and things like that. So I think people probably have--you know--faced the real differences I would face than. ...

Q. Have you personally experienced any backlash after September 11th, any discrimination or racial profiling?

A. I don't really think so that that I wouldn't recall anything. I don't think so.

Q. Have any members of your family experienced anything?

A. No.

Q. Anything you've heard around you, your friends or friends of friends?

A. No. The only thing is now that ... you know, before people were not aware. ... If they asked you where ... where were you born and you tell them in Pakistan: Oh? Where is Pakistan? But now if you tell them ... if you ... if they ask you where you're from?

Pakistan. Oh my God! You're from Pakistan? So I guess that ... I don't know the view they have. They might think--you know--something is going on, but now they ... they sound really astonished.

Q. Do you think that Middle Eastern and South Asian organizations have been effective in handling--you know--backlash that you've heard or on TV against different groups? Do you think they've been able to mobilize the community?

A. I don't really think so. I don't think they ... they've done anything. They're just doing what they always did: nothing.

Q. Nothing? Have you joined any ethnic or religious organization?

A. No, I haven't. I never did and I won't join them.

Q. Why not?

A. Because I have my own beliefs and I think that all human beings should be treated equally regardless of their color, religion, race or ethnicity anywhere.

Q. So you don't want to be associated with one particular organization?

A. No. I am Muslim. I know that. I practice or whatever. But it doesn't mean that the person next to me if he's a Muslim I don't have to respect him. No.

Q. But what does that have to do with not joining any organization?

A. No. It's ... well, first of all, there aren't that many, I guess. But if there are any I don't think they are doing an influential job anyway.

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 the time? Do you think the relationships are more oppositional and strained or they're more harmonious and tolerant after September 11th?

A. I don't think they're harmonious. I think that everybody's just keeping an eye on one another person and that's it. You know? Everybody's trying to be secure and trying to just protect themselves from whatever is happening. I don't think they ... it's-- you know-- it's. You can't ... the discrimination will never go away. It's a fact, you know? Everybody discriminates in one way or the other. But it's just going to ... they're not going to go out openly and talk about it. It will just remain.

Q. So you think. ...

A. I think people just pretend. They just go on doing their own business and that's about it. As long as they're secure, they're safe, they don't care about anything else.

Q. What can members of your community do to improve these relationships between ethnic and religious groups?

A. Well, Islam ... members, I think they ... should provide security and everybody can just mind their own business.

Q. Given your understanding of the Middle Easterner and South Asians here in the United States after September 11th would you still encourage these groups to emigrate to the United States?

A. Yeah. I think it's the land of the free. This is where people come to have life, liberty and happiness so they might as well. Why not?

Q. But after September 11th the situation ...

A. I still think they should still come. But of course our government has to be more strict; make sure all the researches are done before they let the immigrants come in. I don't think they should be blocked by not coming. But if people have ... if they're ex-felons or ... or they have been involved in any kind of drugs or some kind of fraud or some kind of

crime they shouldn't be permitted. But other than that they shouldn't stop because America is based on immigration anyway. That's what made America: immigrants.

Q. Right. Okay.

A. The people who first came here were immigrants so we can't say you know, immigration to be stopped.

Q. We've talked a bit about the negative consequences of September 11th. Do you think there was anything positive that stemmed from those events?

A. I guess the only positive thing I would be thinking about is that, although it's very sad that people do come together, they come together and they're so united. I mean, it's ... it's in a sad way they do. But we can still see that it's the positive things that people feel towards each other and then. ... You know, it's a sad thing to say that such a thing--such a tragedy has to bring them together but they still do. So you can see that there is unity.

Q. How about more visibility and an improved understanding of Middle Easterners and Muslims in the U.S.?

A. Well, peo--I think people have no doubt of ... know we're Middle Easterners. I don't think people have any doubt of we're Middle Easterners now. Before they didn't know. Now every person knows where it is and what Muslims are.

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

A. I think it's basically because of ... I don't know--I think Palestine and Israel.

Q. You believe that's the core issue?

A. Probably, because if Osama did it, that's what he probably wanted. I don't think anything else. What else does he want? So I guess that since things are not breaking out

over there, okay, let's just do it over there, which he should be caught and killed for. But it's ... what can you say. This is just life and this is part of the game, I guess.

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

A. I think the U.S. should go out, look for Osama and kill him and whoever ...

Q. They're trying to do that but ...

A. And hopefully they'll find him and they should hang him and cut him into pieces and throw him out to the dogs.

Q. And that's the ... and that's the way they can resolve terrorism?

A. That's one thing. And secondly, they should try to make, I think, peace resolutions with all the countries in the world so nobody can go ahead and try to do the same thing,-- repeat the same thing in any other country in the world--you know?--be it Iraq--whatever. You know? If ... if Saddam is involved in it he should be taken and killed too, I guess, because we don't need any culprits in our society to promote terrorism.

Q. Have you traveled after September 11th by plane, internationally or ...

A. Yeah. I went to Miami.

Q. So how did you feel toward the security?

A. Security over there? You don't want to be dealt with. [sic]

Q. Oh yeah?

A. It is ... forget about it! All those people, they make you take off your shoes. They make you take off your shoes. And they put you in a room, no ... I was coming back from there and there's no air conditioning or nothing. People jammed into a room. And the customs officers they don't care. They're taking their time. They don't care. They're taking

their time. They don't care if you miss your plane or not, but they're checking you out there. And it's been very strict, but it's better to be late than to not be riding the same plane again, I guess. So they've been very much strict.

Q. Do you think that if these security measures were taken before September 11th the event could have been prevented or the impact could have been less?

A. Most likely, probably, because I think before they were not that strict. They were just, okay, fine. Because I don't think in America we have the mentality to think that something can ever happen in here, and especially if it was to happen not ... not in New York. So I think we kind of neglected ... not neglected. We never took this kind of precautions about this ... this type of a thing. So now that it has happened we have to be more careful because--you know--it's better to miss your plane rather to be never riding it again. So I think--you know--yes. I mean, I had to wait. I was there for four hours but thank God I was safe.

Q. Do you feel more secure now with the security measures?

A. Oh yeah, definitely I think it's much better. They should check you out ... if they ... even if you have to strip, you should take it off cause--you know--I mean, you have only one life. If you let it go and the plane is never going to fly again, so then what are you going to do?

Q. Right.

A. Oh my God! I had to go and I didn't catch my plane or the plane that I didn't catch was the one that went down. So ...

Q. Right. Are there any other issues or points that you'd like to comment on which we haven't covered in this survey?

A. No. I just think that united we stand and that's the thing ... model we should have. And then--you know--we should fight against terrorism. And whoever is behind it, we should catch them and they should be punished.

Q. I'm sorry I forgot to ask you: you mentioned you were obtaining your Bachelor's in biology?

A. No. I'm taking my Associate's.

Q. Your Associate's in Biology. And what college are you obtaining it from?

A. Me, I'm going to Queens College. Sorry.

Q. Queens College?

A. Yeah.

Q. Oh, okay. Well, thank you very much for your time and your responses. This was a good interview. Thanks.

A. Thank you.