

Interview 24

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 – June 2003)

Gender of respondent: Female

Age: 22

Note from transcriber: This tape ended abruptly.

Q. First of all, I would like to start by asking you a few questions about yourself.

Where were you born?

A. I was born here in the United States, in New York.

Q. Where did you grow up?

A. I grew up in the same place.

Q. Great. Where was your father born?

A. He was born in India.

Q. How about your mother?

A. She was also born in India.

Q. And what is your ethnic background?

A. I'm Indian.

Q. And what is your religious affiliation?

A. I'm Hindu.

Q. How old are you?

A. I'm twenty-two.

Q. What is your highest level of education?

A. Highest level would be college.

Q. And what degree did you receive?

A. I got my BBA and I majored in computer information systems.

Q. Where did you obtain your education?

A. I obtained my education in [name removed].

Q. That's in the City?

A. Yeah. That's in Manhattan.

Q. What is your main occupation? I mean, what is your job title and what is it exactly that you do?

A. Okay. Right now I'm working in information technology and I work as a help desk analyst doing level one support.

Q. What is your marital status?

A. I'm single, unmarried.

Q. And do you have children?

A. No.

Q. Now I'll go ahead and ask you a few questions about how you experienced 9-11 and what were your experiences. Okay. Where were you on that day around 9am and how did you hear of the attacks?

A. Actually, around 9am I was on my way to work, which is about three blocks away from the World Trade Center. The minute I got out of the train there were, like, particles flying in the air. That's how I knew that something had happened. Somebody screamed: Oh, --you know--the World Trade Center ... a plane crashed into the World Trade Center. So then I went ... I went to the World Trade Center to take a look for myself and I saw

two planes had hit. So I just stood there and ... and saw the World Trade Center burn. So that's it.

Q. What was your first reaction?

A. My first reaction is I thought it was a big accident. I never thought it would be terrorism or anything like that. So I was basically waiting for--you know--the fire to be put out.

Q. What is your most vivid memory of 9-11? Is there anything that stands out in your mind that you'll never forget?

A. Well, I can't forget the people jumping out of the building, so that's what made me run away. Like, I never thought it was terrorism. So the second I saw people running out I was, like, okay, I have to get out of here. I didn't want to see that. So I just ran, not knowing that the building would fall five minutes later.

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

A. Yes. I felt all of them. I felt really angry. I was mad, but I still ... immediately afterwards I still didn't know what was going on.

Q. Mad at who or what?

A. I was just ... people were saying that it's by terrorism so I was just mad at whoever did it. But I didn't know who did it until way ... until a few hours later. That's when I realized. Then I was really upset. So...

Q. Did you think when people were mentioning terrorism--it's a terrorist attack--did even the Arabs even come into your mind?

A. No. I had no idea who did it. Like, no possibility ... I couldn't even think of who it could be.

Q. Have your feelings changed since the events? Those feelings of anger or sadness, have they changed?

A. No. I'm still angry at them and mad.

Q. At who?

A. I'm mad at Osama.

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

A. I told them the truth. I told them I was Indian.

Q. And what about immediately after 9-11?

A. Immediately after I still did. I still told them I was Indian.

Q. And what do you say now?

A. I still say the same.

Q. Have your feelings towards the United States changed since 9-11? Has your level of political awareness changed?

A. What do you mean?

Q. I mean to say, like, are you more involved in political issues now and the foreign policies?

A. Well, yeah, I am. I am more ... Like, ever since that day I started being more aware of the news and what's going on more around me. You know, I really want to know what's going on in the world 'cause I really feel I'm a part of it. I don't want to be cut off.

Q. Do you want to know more about the foreign policies that America is putting on other countries?

A. Yeah. Yeah. I'm more interested in all of that now.

Q. Do you feel a sense of belonging in the United States, or do you feel at home here?

A. Yeah. I still feel at home here, but I just wish that all of this didn't happen.

Q. Have you always felt like this: felt at home in the United States?

A. Yeah.

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

A. Yeah. I think there has been a change.

Q In what way?

A. Immediately afterwards there were so many, like, racial discrimination going on with these groups. A lot of people I knew or people who knew them were being discriminated against and bad things were happening. So they were effected and--you know--a lot of people are ignorant and they don't know the ... the difference between certain groups so they would label everybody as being Osama.

Q. Have you personally experienced any backlash after 9-11 such as harassment, racial profiling or discrimination?

A. Fortunately no. I haven't experienced ... I haven't experienced anything like that.

Q. Anything like the way people look at you outside or...

A. No. I mean, I used to be paranoid thinking that people might be looking at me thinking things. But nobody ever did anything.

Q. I see. Has a member of your family experienced backlash?

A. No.

Q. Do you think the Middle Eastern or South Asian organizations have been effective in handling the backlash against these groups after 9-11? Do you think these communities, like the Middle East and the South Asian organizations--the Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi people--have they been effective? Have they really done a good job in handling this backlash? Because as you know, a lot of people were discriminated against--a lot of people did experience a lot of backlash.

A. Well, to be honest, there's not much they can do. But I mean, they have handled it okay, I guess. I mean, I don't know what more they could do 'cause the people will bother them either way. There's no way that they could stop it completely.

Q. Have you joined any ethnic or religious organizations since 9-11?

A. No.

Q. In your opinion, what is the nature of the relationship of your ethnic or religious group and others in the United States at this time? Are the relationships between ... since you said that you were Hindu, are the relationships between the Hindu organization and the Muslim organization more tolerant of each other and harmonious or are they more strained and oppositional ever since 9-11?

A. I don't know. I don't know. I guess they may be more strained.

Q. And why do you feel that?

A. Well, actually, I ... I think that there's always been tensions between them so ... well, due to the Kashmir issue there's always been tensions between the two and this only made it worse. But ... but for me it's not a problem because I ... I have, like, friends of

different ... different ethnic backgrounds. I have a lot of Muslim friends so it doesn't bother me. But I ... I do think that in the media there's a lot of problems because of this.

Q. What do you feel that members of your community can do to improve relations between your ethnic and religious groups?

A. Well, I think the best thing to do is to teach people about religious groups. The more knowledge they learn, the better it'll be. Cause a lot of people are ignorant they'll--you know--just make remarks without knowing things. Like, for example, knowing more too 'cause they'll understand the religion. They'll understand other peoples' cultures, about the religion and culture. So the more information that these people get the better it'll be and relations will be better

Q. And what can Middle Eastern and South Asian organizations do?

A. I think they should do the same.

Q. Given your understanding of the status of the Middle Eastern and South Asian immigrant groups in the United States after 9-11, would you encourage people from these countries to emigrate to the United States?

A. Well, I know they would have a really big problem if they did emigrate.

(Note: Interview ends abruptly at this point and does not continue on side two of tape)