

Interview 54

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: 28

Q. I'm going to go ahead and start by asking you a few questions about yourself.

Where were you born?

A. I was born in India.

Q. And where did you grow up?

A. I grew up here in New York.

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

A. I was six.

Q. Where was your father born?

A. My father was born here.

Q. Oh, okay. And where was your mother born?

A. My mother was born in India.

Q. Okay. And your father, he was born here where?

A. He was actually born in Boston.

Q. That's interesting. You would be second generation.

A. Yeah. That's right.

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

A. My ethnic background is Indian Muslim.

Q. And your religious affiliation, Muslim?

A. Right.

Q. How old are you now, if you don't mind?

A. I'm twenty-eight.

Q. Are you You were born here so you're a U.S. citizen.

A. Yes. Actually, well, I was born in India. But I took my citizen test so I'm a citizen now.

Q. So you weren't born here?

A. No. I was born in India but then I came here when I was six.

Q. I'm sorry about that. And what is your highest level of education?

A. A Master's.

Q. Master's in what?

A. Economics.

Q. And where did you obtain your Economics degree?

A. I went to Queens College.

Q. Can you briefly explain what is the title of your job, your main occupation, and what it is that you do?

A. Okay. I'm actually working for ... I'm actually working as an accountant at an accounting firm.

Q. Are you working for a private company or a federal agency?

A. It's a ... a private company.

Q. And what is your marital status?

A. Married.

Q. Okay and do you have any children?

A. Yeah, one child.

Q. How old?

A. He's ten.

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

A. Okay. Around 9am, I was getting my child ready so I can ... You know? I was getting her ready so I can drop her off to my baby sister. And I usually have the news on in the morning so then I just heard it. I heard something saying--you know--a plane crashed into a building. So then I ran over to see what ... what was happening.

Q. What was your first reaction when you heard of this?

A. My first reaction? Well, to tell you the truth, I thought that maybe it was a replay out of a movie because it just looked so fake.

Q. Right.

A. It was just very unbelievable. And I thought it was some sort of accident. I'm, like, well--you know--this pilot doesn't know how to fly. Maybe something happened to him. He had a heart attack or God knows what. Then I saw the second plane hit and--you know--I thought--okay--once again I thought maybe it was an accident. I never thought it could be a terrorist attack.

Q. I see. Did anywhere in your mind the possibility of the terrorists being Middle Easterners come up?

A. Well, in my mind it didn't, but then in the news they kept saying stuff so then I realized--you know--okay, maybe it is.

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

A. Well, it is something that I'm never going to forget, but then, then again, I have to move on. I can't keep thinking about it or I'm going to drive myself crazy.

Q. Right. But one specific thing ... one specific thing you believe you will never forget.

A. Well, I'll never forget--you know--watching those buildings go down like a toy.

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

A. Yeah. I was very upset. I couldn't believe that--you know-- such a historical--you know--monument in America had just--you know--vanished in thin air. So I was very angry about that and very sad that so many people died.

Q. Were you ... did you feel any guilt being a Muslim?

A. No. I mean, that's my religion. I practice it. I mean, just because one person from--you know--a certain religion does something doesn't mean everybody--you know--is bad.

Q. Right.

A. So I don't care. It doesn't matter.

Q. Have your feelings changed since the events?

A. No, not at all.

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

A. I told them I was Indian and I told them I was Muslim.

Q. And how about immediately afterwards?

A. Immediately after I was very hesitant. You know? I tried not to act like ... you know, I wouldn't really say anything.

Q. And what do you say now?

A. I still ... I hesitate. In fact, I ... many times I've lied.

Q. Are you serious?

A. Yeah.

Q. Um-hum. So ...

A. I don't want to get beaten up.

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

A. No.

Q. How about your level of political awareness?

A. No. It still remains the same.

Q. Is it I mean, were you already into politics before or ...

A. Somewhat--you know?--just regular local news. I wasn't really into the--you know--tensions between countries.

Q. I see. So do you think that you were ... are you ... do you pay attention more to the foreign policy or no?

A. Yeah, a little more than before.

Q. Okay.

A. I need to know what's going on around me.

Q. Do you feel a sense of belonging here in the United States?

A. Sometimes I do; sometimes I don't. You know, when things like this happen I feel like running back home.

Q. Right. So how did you feel before September 11th?

A. Before September 11th I was happy. You know? I was actually seeing a change in America, how everybody was getting--you know-- culturally ... cultural ... culturally diverse and--you know--everybody was into everybody's cultures and learning different ... different things about each other. But now it's just different. I just see a lot of discrimination.

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

A. Oh yeah, definitely.

Q. How so?

A. There are so many attacks right after September 11th.

Q. What types of attacks?

A. Big burn down of--you know--mosques and--you know--people calling each other names and stuff like that.

Q. So have you personally experienced any backlash or discrimination?

A. Personally, no. I mean, I ... I have had ... once somebody called me a name. They called me a terrorist.

Q. Oh yeah?

A. And I've had friends ... you know, I actually knew somebody who got beaten up so--you know? They were actually going to school and they had--you know-- they had a Muslim name so they got beaten up 'cause of that.

Q. When you mentioned being called a terrorist. Was this at a work place, in a public place or ...

A. This was actually on my way commuting. This was on the train.

Q. Oh, okay. So has ... has any member of your family been discriminated against?

A. No, not that I know of.

Q. Do you think that Middle Eastern and South Asian organizations have been effective in this backlash which is--you know--spread after 9-11?

A. I'm not too sure about that. I know they're trying their best--you know--'cause they want to help out their own kind. But--you know--I'm not sure

Q. Do you think that they have managed to mobilize the community, bring the community together?

A. Yeah. They have.

Q. Have you joined any ethnic or religious organization?

A. No.

Q. In your opinion, what is the nature of the relationship between your ethnic group and others in the United States at this time? How do you think the Hindus and the Muslims are or the Jews and the Muslims are? Are they more strained and oppositional towards each other or more harmonious and tolerant of each other after September 11th?

A. Well, yeah. Like I said before in the beginning, before September 11th there ... they were getting to a point where they were going to be harmonious, but ever since that happened there have been more restraints so it kind of ruined it.

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

A. Well, I think they ... they can be more ... they can get people more aware of what's going on around them.

Q. How?

A. You know, teaching about cultures once again, try getting people more closer to each other in that way.

Q. So what do you think Middle Eastern and South Asian organizations can do?

A. I think they can do the same.

Q. Given your understanding of the status of the Middle Eastern and South Asian groups in the United States at the time, would you still encourage these people to emigrate to the United States?

A. Well, I know it's going to be very hard for them now to come 'cause there's tre--a tremendous work--paper work for them to do and they're going to get screened like crazy and they probably might even feel insulted at times, but I don't think it should stop them. If they're coming here for opportunities they should still come here.

Q. We've spoken a bit about the negative consequences. Do you think there were any positive consequences from these events?

A. Anything positive? No, I don't.

Q. Nothing?

A. I don't think there was anything positive.

Q. How about more visibility of the Muslims?

A. Well, somewhat. But at the same time--you know--they're actually putting Muslims more down so it kind of equals each other out. So I don't see it as being positive.

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

A. Personally I have no idea.

Q. Do you think that the Arabs in the Middle East hate America? That's why?

A. Yeah. That could be why. I don't know.

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

A. I think they should be more aware of what's going on around them. I guess more security.

Q. So do you think that the security that they have right now, if they would have provided it prior 9-11, the events could have been prevented?

A. No.

Q. Why?

A. Actually, it still could have happened. Anything could have happened. I mean, the USA can try as best as it can--you know-- they should try as best as they can to prevent--you know--terrorism again but they can't a hundred percent--you know--prevent it 'cause if it's ... if it's going to happen--you know--these terrorists will find a way to do it.

Q. Right. Have you traveled after 9-11 by plane?

A. Yeah, I have, a few times.

Q. Domestic or international?

A. International.

Q. How did you feel? How was the security? How safe did you feel?

A. I didn't feel safe at all.

Q. Why?

A. I actually felt insulted because--you know--out of a whole group of people it seemed as if they were all eyeing me and test--you know--checking me out more than others.

Q. Oh! What airline did you travel by?

A. British Airways.

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

A. No. That's basically it.

Q. Okay. Thank you so much for your time and cooperation.

A. You're welcome.