

Interview 51

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

A. In Pakistan.

Q. Where did you grow up?

A. In Pakistan.

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

A. Twenty-four.

Q. And where where were your parents born?

A. In India.

Q. Okay. Both of them?

A. Yeah.

Q. So you're second generation. Okay. What do you consider to be your ethnic background?

A. Pakistan.

Q. Pakistani?

A. Yeah.

Q. And what is your religious affiliation?

A. Pakistani.

Q. Your religious affiliation?

A. Oh, Muslim--Muslim. I'm sorry.

Q. Okay. That's all right. And how old are you now, if you don't mind?

A. Thirty-two.

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

A. A citizen.

Q. Okay. And what is your highest level of education?

A. I'm a graduate from Pakistan. [high school]

Q. Oh, okay. I see. And what is your main occupation right now, your job title?

A. I was a salesperson in a lot of ... a lot of shops.

Q. Okay. You still are?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay. And for whom are you working? Is it a private company or ...

A. It's a private company.

Q. Okay. And what is your marital status?

A. I'm married.

Q. Okay. Do you have any children?

A. None.

Q. Okay. Now I'll ask you a few questions about how you experienced September 11th. Where were you on that day around 9 a.m. and how did you hear of the attacks?

A. I'm ... I was home and heard about it from news.

Q. You were watching the news?

A. Yeah.

Q. I see. So what was your first reaction when you saw all that or heard all that on the news?

A. What do you mean by reaction, like...

Q. How did you feel, like your feelings or your reaction?

A. Well, I feel sad and ...

Q. Did you think in your mind that: Oh, this is an accident or this is a terrorist attack? Or what did you think when you were watching all this?

A. I wasn't feeling nothing 'cause it's so ... so much, like, pain and like, you can't figure out what was going on.

Q. Okay. So did you ... did you think in your mind that, okay, if this is a terrorist attack it's done by Muslims?

A. No.

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

A People jumping out from the windows. That's the worst thing I could watch and I can never, like, forget this.

Q. Oh, okay. You mentioned that you felt ang--you felt sad?

A. Yeah.

Q. When you were watching all this, did you feel any pain or grief or did you feel any guilt? Did you feel guilty being a Muslim and knowing that the Muslims were involved in this?

A. No, no guilt, no.

Q. Have your feelings changed since then, these feelings of pain and sadness?

A. It's still there; still there.

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

A. I'm from Pakistan.

Q. And how about immediately after September 11th?

A. The same thing, Pakistan.

Q. And now?

A. Yeah, same.

Q. Have your feelings towards the United States changed and your level of political awareness? How much more involved are you in politics now?

A. Not really. I was too busy working and, you know ... it's hard to make money. But what's going on, you know, it's ... can't figure out. It's bad politics everywhere so--you know--you never know where you're going to end. And that's it.

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

A. Yeah, always.

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

A. Well, all people are different. They're, like, thinking level is different so--you know--who cares about them.

Q. But, I mean, how do you think the Middle Easterners and, you know, South Asians are treated after September 11th? Do you think that there has been a change? Was it different before September 11th and has it changed after?

A. Obviously, yeah. It's changed after September 11th.

Q. How?

A. Like, how? What do you mean by how? Like, which way? Everywhere it's ... it's ... they curse. They, like, there's too much hate in their hearts.

Q. I see. Have you personally experienced any discrimination or racial profiling?

A. Not me. Not me.

Q. Any ... anyone that you know?

A. Yeah. You know?

Q. Can you briefly explain?

A. Yeah. Some of my, like, Bengali friend and Pakistani who were, like, a little darker than ... like, in skin, they say some things about, you know? They've been treating [sic] wrong everywhere and that's about it. Not me.

Q. Okay. Do you think that the Middle Eastern and South Asian organizations have been effective in taking care of the discrimination that people are experiencing? Do you think these organizations have been good in handling such issues?

A. I can't answer this question. It's, like, too deep politics. I ... I'm not the right person to answer this thing.

Q. Okay. Have you joined any ethnic or religious organization ever since September 11th?

A. No.

Q. In your opinion, what do you think is the nature of the relationship between, let's say, the Muslims and the Hindus or the Muslims and the Jews after September 11th? Do you think that these groups are more together now or they're more oppositional and strained from each other after September 11th?

A. What I think ... You know, as time passes everybody's, like, killing each other. There's so much--you know--hatred coming--you know--as soon the time was passing everyone is--you know--going separate ways. That's what I think.

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

A. The ...yeah. They could talk to the people more often and go to their ... visit them and talk to them.

Q. Okay. Given your understanding of the status of the Middle Eastern and South Asians living in the U.S. and what's going on with them right now, would you still encourage these people back home to emigrate here? If you were to call Pakistan or some friend in India, would you still tell these people: Hey, come to America?

A. If they could, yeah. Why not? They could come. It's a better life over here.

Q. You think so, after September 11th?

A. Yeah. I still think so.

Q. Okay. We've spoken a bit about the negative consequences. Do you think there was anything positive that came out of September 11th?

A. Nothing yet.

Q. How about more visibility of the Muslims and Islam? What do you think about that?

A. Well, what I think ...

Q. Being more aware ...

A. A lot of people--you know--just talking about Muslims and they ... they like ... they like to know what this religion is--you know--religion about so it's more like they want to explore that. That's all.

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

A. ... Get this question. What was that?

Q. Why do you think the attacks took place? Do you think it's because the Arabs or the Middle Easterners in the Middle East hate America?

A. Well, you know...

Q. That's why?

A. No, no. It's ... what I think, it's personally experience. It's a big scam, like, against Muslims. That's what I think.

Q. Okay. I see.

A. That's it.

Q. What do you think that the United States can do to resolve the issue of terrorism which is directed against it? What do you think the U.S. can do to stop the terrorism, prevent it from happening again?

A. They should go into the roots and--you know--check the roots and what's going on and that's about it. They could prevent everything from harming us.

Q. So have you traveled after September 11th by plane?

A. Yeah, a couple of times.

Q. Do you think ... How is the security at the airports?

A. Oh, it's the same--same thing. You know? Nothing happened especially. Nothing happened. It's like, no more--what do you say? It's the same thing.

Q. I mean, the way people are talking that there is a tighter security, if this tighter security was there...

A. They're just talking. They're just talking and there is nothing happening. You know? What I--you know--experienced was nothing.

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

A. All the answers I give to you. What else I can tell you?

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

A. Thank you.