



Oral History Project Interview

Arab and Muslim Women's Research and Resource Institute (AMWRI)

Number of Interview: JEA 3.00

Date: July 30, 2010

Gender: Female

Name: Anonymous

Country of Origin: Pakistan

Year of Immigration: 1993

Abstract: This interview was completed with a young Pakistani born immigrant living in the United States. This interviewee addressed topics including her immigration to the United States, her assimilation into the American culture, racism she has faced and her pursuit of education. This interview is valuable because it informs the reader about the lives of young immigrants, the question of cultural identity and their endeavor to make America their home.

Key Themes: assimilation, immigration, education, politics, religion, involvement in community, and racism.

Note: In the transcript, I refers to Interviewer, and R refers to Respondent/Interviewee.

I: This is an interview with participant number 1. The interview is conducted by Javaria Asad on July 30, 2010, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin for the Arab and Muslim Women's Resource and Research Institute. Where is your homeland? Including country and city?

R: My homeland is Pakistan, and the city is Jhelem.

I: Is this where you were born?

R: I was born in Jhelem, actually my home city would be Kharian (not sure on city (0:37)).

I: Did you live in any other countries before coming to the U.S.?

R: Yes, I did. I lived in Pakistan.

I: And how long did you live in Pakistan?

R: I lived there for two years before coming to the United States and then I returned there after a few years.

I: Okay. When did you immigrate to the U.S.?

R: In 1993.

I: About how old are you now?

R: I'm eighteen, almost nineteen (laughter).

I: Okay (laughter). Were you the first in your family to immigrate to the U.S.?

R: Yes, I was.

I: Did you immigrate alone, or did you come with someone?

R: No, I came with my parents.

I: After you were in the U.S., did any of your other family members immigrate here?

R: Yes, my uncles and my aunts from my father's side all immigrated.

I: Are you married?

R: No.

I: Do you have any children?

R: No, I do not.

I: What was your level of education before immigration?

R: I had not started school; I was two at the time (laughter).

I: Okay. And did you work outside the home? (Laughter) I'm guessing not prior to immigrating because you were only two.

R: No (laughter).

I: Are you currently employed or working outside the home?

R: No, I'm not.

I: What were the main reasons you immigrated to the U.S.?

R: My family and father and mother decided to immigrate so I was brought along with them.

I: Do you know why your parents wanted to immigrate here to the U.S.?

R: Mostly for business reasons.

I: Okay. Initially how long, did you know, were your parents planning to stay here? Do you know if they were planning to live here forever or was it just a trip?

R: It was intended to be a permanent trip. Yep.

I: Okay. How did you decide where to settle in the U.S.?

R: I guess my father found a business here in Milwaukee and he settled here.

I: Okay. Was Milwaukee area the first choice of settlement for your family?

R: Yeah.

I: Have you lived in any other places in the U.S. besides Milwaukee?

R: Kenosha.

I: Okay. When you first immigrated to the U.S., what was your life like? (Laughter).

R: I don't remember much but I do remember school and I guess it's how I started. I never had any cultural background before that because as a child I was put into the United States culture.

I: Okay.

R: So, it was interesting, and I guess I have adopted it.

I: Yeah. What obstacles did you face when you immigrated here? Like any problems or any hardships?

R: Not until I started using the scarf and that was when most people realized that I was Muslim and it was after September eleventh so some racism, judgment, stereotypes, I was faced with those but eventually you get used to them and I guess there were learning experiences overall.

I: Yeah. After you arrived when you were very young so this questions wouldn't apply, but back to the obstacles. How did you deal with your obstacles?

R: At first, they did anger me, but I learned from all the elder women that had faced the obstacles before me and, just to reply nicely and not to be rude and to aggravate the situation more. Just answer any questions if they have them otherwise remain quiet.

I: Okay. Did you pursue any kind of education like English classes or ESL maybe?

R: No because English was my primary first language.

I: Okay and you haven't had any jobs since you came here?

R: I did have a summer job once.

I: Oh, okay. What kind of job was it?

R: I was actually a teacher, a summer school teacher at the Islamic Society of Milwaukee.

I: Great, great. What role, if any, did your family have regarding your decision about the job that you took up?

R: They didn't have any role in my decision. I just decided to take up the job myself.

I: Okay. So, do you think your family, like, in the future, if you do decide to take on a job, like, will your family have involvement in that decision?

R: They do. My dad expects, I guess it's a cultural thing, either medicine or engineering or some job of that sort and I've decided to pursue a career in engineering, so I guess there role is a big one.

I: Um-hmm (yes).

R: And.

I: When you, well you don't have any children either, but I guess my next question would be for you. Would you, if you did have children, would you find any reason to raise them differently?

Do you think that boys should be raised differently than girls?

R: I don't think. Just to teach them equality but then to show them that there are differences and that men should respect women and that the girls should show that respect to the guys as well.

I: Okay. This question, it's prompted a little different but, what kind of husband would you like for yourself?

R: Probably an educated one. One who understands that lifestyle that I've lived and has experienced it. One who understands that I need to work if I want to and respect where I come from, what I do and what I believe.

I: Okay and these next questions are going to be about your currently life right now and how you define yourself. So how do you define or identify yourself? Is it with a particular religion, a country, a culture?

R: I think all of those. I'm primarily a Muslim, I follow Islam. I'm a Pakistani-American I've lived here for the majority of my life and yeah.

I: Okay. And you said you identify with the Pakistani culture more or with the American culture?

R: Equally, equally?

I: Equally?

R: Yeah.

I: Okay. So, what languages or language do you guys speak at home?

R: At home we speak mostly Punjabi sometimes Urdu and with my father its mostly English. So, all three languages.

I: Okay. So Punjabi is more emphasized in your home?

R: Um-hmm (yes).

I: Okay and how would you describe your religious life? Do you attend the mosque and, or activities at the mosque?

R: I attend the mosque for prayers frequently. I'm usually there for most of the activities. It's a way to connect with peers that are from the same religion and just like a home away from everything else.

I: So, going back to that, how do you describe your religious life? Is it very, is religion a big part of your life? How does it impact your daily activities?

R: Religion is a big part. I see myself looking at religion and consulting what has been told to me through my religion before I decide anything. And I do pray, I usually the holy book and just to learn more about my religion and to show it to others.

I: Okay, great. In what ways, if any, do you participate in community activities?

R: During high school I was the vice-president of one of our Friends of Islam clubs through which I organized many interfaith activities and events so usually I do participate in religious clubs so I can teach others about my culture and religion. And other than that, I was part of the journalism group, so I did work on the school newspaper and magazine. In college I'm hoping to take the same route and follow that again.

I: Um-hmm (yes). You mentioned you were the vice-president of the (Friends of Islam? 9:40) and you said you took part and led some interfaith. These interfaith activities they not only helped like you become more aware, you know, of the status of the religion and whatnot but from my understanding don't these interfaith help other communities as well like you know, we build a kinship not only amongst Muslims but like amongst non-Muslims and do you guys do any activities besides like, mosque related?

R: What we did was actually invite all of them to the mosque and then sometimes I did visit others so like churches, synagogues even the Sikh temple and we shared all of our religions just to see there are more similarities than differences and I found that all these people were kind of skeptical about our religion and did have judgments and they didn't want to clear them up by coming up to us because they thought that that was offensive so reaching out to them myself was actually a better step because they learned about my religion and realized we're not as portrayed to be.

I: Um-hmm (yes) okay. How would you describe your political participation in the U.S.?

R: I haven't voted yet so (laughter), but I've kept up with debates and such.

I: So, you do keep up with the general "what's going on" with politics and stuff?

R: Yeah.

I: Okay. And do you intend to vote though when you become...

R: Yeah.

I: Of age? Okay. And when it comes to candidates from your own culture and homeland or religion in what ways if any do you think that would affect your voting behavior?

R: Just to find a person who's not judgmental, who can have, who can provide a better lifestyle for not only Caucasian mostly considered American people but all the multicultural people that have started coming to the United States.

I: Okay. So, do you feel like when someone from like, let's say Pakistani descent or a Muslim comes into politics does that, are you more interested in them now? Or do you consider them or how do you feel about that?

R: Honestly, I feel like I would be more interested, but I would only consider them if they have all the qualifications and qualified to become what they say they will. If they're just standing there but have no idea what they're gonna do then, just being Muslim or of the same culture is not going to affect.

I: And you mentioned that you were involved in interfaith, have you been involved in any other community issues or activities like, any examples, for instance like, you know, does the mosque have any events, community events that you might have taken part in?

R: I don't think I have any. I did during grade school participate in the 4K run where all the children actually race for four kilometers.

I: So just like community building activities basically that you were involved in?

R: Yeah.

I: Okay.

R: There are youth nights too that by going to you get to hang out with your peers and even learn more.

I: Yeah, yeah. Do you read the daily newspaper?

R: I don't read the newspaper but whenever I get time I go online and check up on what's new.

I: Okay, so you get your news from the Internet?

R: Internet yeah.

I: Okay. What are your connections with your homeland?

R: Most of my family does still live there and my sisters frequently visit so I guess just talking on the phone and knowing what their life is still like is my biggest connection.

I: Okay. Have you visited your homeland and, if so, when was this?

R: I visited when I was six and stayed there until I was eleven, and over there I attended school and lived the Pakistani life you could say.

I: So, you still have relatives that you are in contact with back in Pakistan?

R: Yes, um-hmm (yes).

I: Have you encouraged your family, or have you had a desire to go back and visit? Or I mean, have you, actually sorry, let me rephrase that. Have you encouraged your family back home to visit you guys or to come here and live in America?

R: I have not. I think it is more of their decision. I don't usually find myself to be the person who encourages someone to change their lifestyle.

I: Okay. In what ways, if any, have political events in the homeland affected you here? Any events in Pakistan that have affected you here?

R: The government over there is facing a rough situation right now and I feel like I find it's safer here. I trust the government here and the authorities here more than I do over there.

I: Uh-huh (yes). So, it's shifted your, who you trust, where you find safety now?

R: Yeah.

I: Have you ever taken action on any of these issues or situations that happen in your homeland? Have you protest or spread the word?

R: I have not officially been to a protest or spread the word movement, but I have participated in fundraisers for any hardships that people over there are facing due the governments lack of attention.

I: Where do you get your information about your homeland?

R: Either the news, we do have news from overseas that we watch. If I don't have the time my parents inform me. Otherwise, the family that I have living over there are usually nice enough to let us know.

I: Is there anything else about your history that you would like to tell me?

R: Not really, no (laughter).

I: Are there any particular services or resources that you think the Arab and Muslims Women's Resource and Research Institute should provide to meet the needs of the communities to which you belong?

R: I guess websites but those that are officially recognizing everything and giving the truth.

I: Um-hmm (yes). Okay. Do you have any other family or friends that you think we should interview?

R: Not really. My mother is actually participating later.

I: Okay. Lastly do you have any letters, old photographs, notes or any kind of documents that you think will help us understand your family's history?

R: I'm not willing to disclose those.

I: Okay. Thank you so much for your time and energy.

R: Of course.

I: And for sharing your experiences with me. You have given us valuable information about your life and your family history. Again, I never consider an interview completely finished. There are always so many things to be discussed but I do think we covered as much as we could and if you need to contact me, please do so. Also, if you have any additional questions, if I have any additional questions can I contact you?

R: Yes, you can. I will provide you with my email and phone number.

I: Okay, thank you very much.