

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT

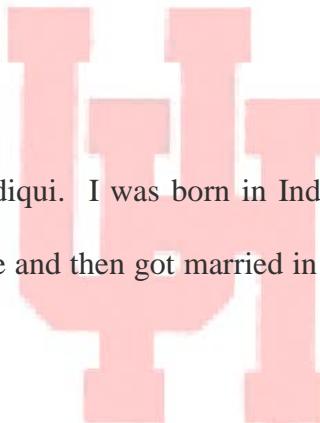
Interview with: Imroze Siddiqui

Interviewed by: Uzma Quraishi

Date: July 25, 2007

Transcribed by: Suzanne Mascola

UQ: Oral history interview of Imroze Siddiqui at her home in Houston, Texas, July 25, 2007. Interview conducted by Uzma Quraishi for the Center for Public History at the University of Houston. O.K., you can begin by telling about your background, your name, things like that.



IS: My name is Imroze Siddiqui. I was born in India. I was raised in Pakistan. I finished my education over there and then got married in Pakistan. I came to Houston in December, 1967.

UQ: Where in India were you born?

IS: I was born in UP, close to Allahabad, a small town close to Allahabad.

UQ: Is it a village?

IS: A small village.

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UQ: What was the name of it?

IS: Nowgong.

UQ: Can you remember what your life in India was like?

IS: Well, I was very young when my parents moved in 1948 but the reason I remember, because my mother's parents and her brothers and sisters, they were in India and after we went to India to visit with her when we were little, so that is how I remember. I think the last time I went was 1953 or 1954, something like that. I was in maybe 7th grade, 8th grade, something like that, around that time. So, I had the recollection from those visits - not when I was born over there, moved to Pakistan - I don't remember much. But yes, I do remember it was a very small, clean town. Some of our relatives are still there but it has changed a lot. But it was very peaceful. There were a couple of Muslim homes. Not very many. But the thing that strikes me is that it was a very clean town. Clean in a way that the streets were not paved but I do remember early in the morning, I think the whole town maybe consisted of a few lanes on both sides. And, in those days, because the women were not – Muslim women did not used to go outside without covering themselves. So, I remember early morning after *Fajr*, (pre-sunrise prayer) my grandmother, she had to go and visit somebody 10 houses down - she would just go in the dark and come back in the dark. We used to follow them all around. I did see the sweepers early in the morning cleaning the streets. On both sides of the

streets were the ditches where they used to put water and wash it off. All the dust would go . . . I remember the little marketplace that they had for fresh fruit and vegetables. They were not paved but everybody had small baskets and fruits in there and it was really clean. The population was low so there was more cleanliness. Now I've heard there are more people.

UQ: You said there were Muslims there as well as . . . what were the others? Hindus?

IS: Hindus. Muslims were not in majority. Mostly our own family, they had a couple of houses. Distant family members were close by. My uncle, my mother's brother, was there. My grandmother was there. And then, a few houses that I remember that Muslims were there. Mostly were Hindus.

UQ: Do you know if your family had lived in that village for a very long time?

IS: That is what I heard from my grandmother, that they were there during the war for independence in 1857. Yes, 1857, against the British Empire. They were there at that time. It is a strange story. Not strange, but funny kind. They heard that the *gora fauj* were coming [white people's army]. They used to call *gora*, OK? “*Sepay* – soldiers are coming. Soldiers are coming.” So, I learned from my mother-in-law, those peasants, they were peasants and they were small businessmen, my grandfather's father, so they heard that the *fauj* or *sepay* or police are coming or the army is coming. Couldn't do

anything. They wrapped some roti, some bread, and some *achar* [pickle] and they went to the field and fed themselves. They left the town basically. And then, when the army passed, they came back. They came back in their homes. And then, I heard that they left that city for the time being for 5, 6 months and then they came back again. So, they were there in 1857, around that time. And I don't know any history before that - whoever moved from my ancestors, from where they moved or when they moved exactly. But around that time, they were there.

UQ: How long did you live in India before you and your family moved to Pakistan?

IS: I was 5 years old at that time when my parents moved.

UQ: And where did you go in Pakistan? Where did you live?

IS: A couple of months or maybe one year, we lived in Hyderabad and then from Hyderabad, my father was working for the government and he was transferred. He was a government of Pakistan employee. So, he was transferred to Karachi so we came back to Karachi and we lived there up until now.

UQ: So, when you said Hyderabad, you lived there for a couple of months in India still?

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IS: No, after we moved from India, we went straight to Hyderabad. Hyderabad City [Pakistan]. We lived there. I can't recall how many months or 1 year. I don't think more than that. We lived there for 1 year almost and then we moved to Karachi. And then, all my life, over there. My parents stayed behind [in Karachi, after I moved to America] and everybody was there.

UQ: And did you ever go back to India to visit?

IS: Yes. I went with my mother a couple of times because my mother's family - brothers, sisters, and mother was there. So, we went a couple of times afterwards. That is how I remember or can recall that place very well.

UQ: You didn't come here with a lot of other uncles or aunts or cousins? They didn't come with your family?

IS: Where?

UQ: To Pakistan.

IS: Oh, yes. From my father's side - my father had a small family - one sister, one brother. So, they moved with them. But from my mother's side, only 1 or 2 uncles came.

The rest stayed behind. And my mother's parents, they didn't come. They didn't come at all.

UQ: Why? Do you know?

IS: Well, they had a big business. My grandfather died within 1 year when Pakistan was made. We moved. We moved in 1948 and then he died . . . I don't remember. I only remember that my mother was crying - she got the news. We were still small kids. We heard that he passed away. So, he died before we went to visit. That was maybe he died in 1949 some time. I don't remember the exact month and things. My mother's father died but my mother's mother was alive for a long time, like maybe before I moved to America or I came to America, she was alive. She died maybe in 1966. I came here in December, 1967. She was alive. So, my mother used to go often and visit her. That was the main reason. And then, her sisters were there, too. So, in the early part when we were in the early classes my mother used to take but then afterwards, you know, she left [us with our grandparents]. My father's parents were living with us in a joint family system. They were living with us. She used to take the younger siblings and leave us with her.

UQ: Why did your parents decide to come to Pakistan when some of the family members decided to stay there?

IS: I don't know but my father was working for other people. So, maybe it was easier. He was transferred from India to Pakistan. So, it was easy. So, my uncle, my father's younger brother, he came. My father's parents, they also moved. But the reason I think my mother's parents did not move - because they had a big business over there. In that town, they were very rich and it is very hard to leave everything behind and move to another place, you know, so they didn't move.

UQ: Do you still have family in India?

IS: Oh, yes. There are a couple of homes that are still there in the same town. I heard the town has grown a lot. I don't know how many million people live there but it is not the same town that I recall. I have not visited since the early 1950s, so I don't know. But yes, I used to get news from my mother and sometimes I do write to them if they need help. There are a couple of family members that sometimes they are in need so we try to help them.

UQ: By sending them small amounts . . .

IS: Yes, money for business, for weddings and things like that, or if somebody is sick. So, we have been almost 2 or 3 times a year I send whatever to India.

UQ: Can you recall your childhood in Karachi - where abouts in Karachi did you live and what your life was like?

IS: Yes. We lived first a couple of years in, there was a little newly established colony that was called Pir Ilahibaksh Colony. In short, it was just Pir Colony. Later on, Pir Colony. So, I stayed there a couple of years and it was a rented property. We lived there.

UQ: Now, when you say colony, do you mean a very small neighborhood?

IS: Just like, you can say, a subdivision over here. The houses or the quarters were built after Pakistan was made. So, we lived there in a rented house and then, my father bought a plot in Nazmabad Number One. So, my father built a house in different stages. First, we had two rooms with a shed on top.

UQ: An attic?

IS: No, [speaking in Urdu] instead of a permanent roof, they used to put several layers of tin. [in English] And then another room was built, another room was built, so it took like another 10 years for the whole house to be completed. So, we moved to Nazmabad. Up until when my father died, he lived in the same house.

UQ: Does the house still belong to your family?

IS: No, after my father died, all the brothers and sisters moved. Sisters got married. One brother was here, one was in Pakistan. But he bought a house in Defense [a neighborhood in Karachi]. So, my mother was left alone. The house was sold like in 1997 when my father died.

UQ: So, that was the house that you grew up in, that was your childhood home?

IS: Yes, that was the childhood house. That was sold when my father died, passed away.

UQ: What was your father's job after coming to Karachi?

IS: He was working for PWD. I don't know what it stands for, but he was an accountant.

UQ: It was a private business?

IS: No, it was government. This was a government job. But then, he left that after a couple of years and then he worked for some private companies as an administrator. There was this architect company, Nun Qayyum & Company that was, you know, Firoz

Khan Nun, he used to be prime minister for a little while. Some of his descendants, they had a share in it. They were part owner of that company. So, it was an architect company and my father was working there. It was a middle-sized company, I will say, like 25, 30 employees. They had a branch in Karachi. They had a branch in Lahore. Head office was in Lahore. And they had a branch in Karachi. Which area? What is that area? Where the Continental Hotel is. PDIC? I don't remember. I left Karachi 40 years ago, 35, 40 - I don't remember. So, my father was like an administrator taking care of the whole office over there.

UQ: Do you remember what your childhood was like growing up in your home?

IS: Yes. I mean, I wish I could go back to the time, just like I said before. It was simple. We were happy. The neighbors knew each other very well. We used to get together and play on the street. I don't think there was any park close by. We had homemade dolls. My mother used to... during summer vacation, we had to sit down and make clothes, learn how to sew, how to embroider, things like that. Maybe at the most, we had a rubber ball that we used to play with. All the neighborhood kids, you know, we thought we were very rich, very lucky. So, good memories. Simplicity and closeness is what I miss now. A small house but my uncle and my father were living together, both the brothers.

UQ: For a long time?

IS: For a long time.

UQ: So, you always had not just brothers and sisters, you also had cousins?

IS: Oh, no, my grandparents lived with us until they passed away. My *dada, dadi* [grandfather, grandmother]. My uncle, he lived for a long time with us, you know. He didn't want to move. He didn't want to leave my brother. They wanted to stay together for as long as it was possible. So, closeness. Even if they had small things but they shared everything.

UQ: It sounds like a busy, bustling house. Lots of kids.

IS: Oh, yes. And then, all the relatives would come. There was no telephone. Nobody had to call, they would just come and visit whenever they had time. Just expect people. And whatever you have, you just offer it to them. No formalities, no lavish things to serve them. Whatever is cooked, just sit down, share and eat. I have fond, very pleasant memories.

UQ: No modern technology toys?

IS: Oh, no. Didn't even know what the future would have. I don't understand with my grandkids - they have some things there and I don't know how they work. I still don't know how to turn a DVD on. Before DVD, we had VCR. I learned it when my grandkids used to come, "Nani, I want to watch this. Nani." I don't know how it is . . . then I said, well, I'd better learn now. So, I learned. If you put them on the computer or give them a cell phone, they can operate it better than me.

UQ: Did you have any bicycles or things like that?

IS: I am sure bicycles were available but . . .

UQ: Not to play with but maybe for transportation more?

IS: My uncle had it. He used to go to his work on the bicycle and come back. But we were living in a neighborhood where average kind of people were living and it was really everybody was settling . . . right moving from India to Pakistan, they had to provide first the food and then really the beds and basic necessities. Everything comes slowly.

UQ: Who provided these kinds of things, food and bedding? The government?

IS: No, you had to provide your own but I was getting into it . . . the household responsibility, you know. Who ever was there. In my case, my father, my uncle. They were busy, you know, getting things, small things for the home. Like the beds. Like the sheets, after food, you know. So, maybe bicycle, I am sure it was available but nobody in the neighborhood had it so we didn't miss it either. It was afterwards when we had the kids, we bought the bicycles, tricycles for the kids and things like that but we didn't have it in our childhood.

UQ: What about your schooling? Can you tell about what school was like?

IS: I went to Fatima Jinnah Girls Secondary School. Before that, it was a primary school close to our house. I don't remember the name. This school is located now on Garden Street, Karachi. It was a newly built school. It was a huge school and we had really, a basketball court and a baseball court. It was beautiful. It is not in good condition right now but because that was a newly-built school, it was very spacious, very open, lots of windows and doors and we had a baseball court, good landscaping and trees. Very strict school, you know, just like all the schools in those days. I don't know now what is the situation but whatever the teacher said, that goes. You cannot just stand up and argue, things like that. So, I still remember a few teachers. They were very strict but they were very kind, too. They were strict because they wanted us to do our best.

UQ: And it was an all girls school?

IS: All girls school, yes. I went to college afterwards that was all girls college.

UQ: So, after this school . . . you went to this school, Fatima Jinnah . . .

IS: I did my high school from 6th until I finished 10th grade. And then afterwards, I went to Government Women's College on Fray Road. I got my graduate degree from there.

UQ: Is that where you also got your master's?

IS: No, then you had to go to the university, Karachi University.

UQ: What was your major in college?

IS: I had psychology and I had history. These were the two electives. And then, of course, you had English and Urdu and Islamic studies that were compulsory subjects. But when I went to Karachi University, I selected Islamic Studies.

UQ: So, you have a master's degree?

IS: Yes, which I finished after I got married, a couple of months after I got married.

UQ: What year did you get married in?

IS: I was married March, 1964.

UQ: Do you mind me asking how old you are?

IS: Guess now? I am almost getting to the age of collecting Social Security. Almost getting to that age. Being eligible for Medicare now, which is a relief.

UQ: So, when you got married, you were how old?

IS: I was like 22.

UQ: And then you continued your education after . . .

IS: A couple of months were left. That is all. Usually, the exams were done in May and June and I got married in March. So, just 3, 4 months afterwards.

UQ: What was your husband doing when the two of you were married? Was he a student? Did he have a job?

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IS: No, he finished a couple of months or 1 year before he finished his education and he worked there. He was working when we got married at that time. So, not more than 1 year, maybe less than 1 year. He is just 1 year older than me, so he was _____ family. He got married very young.

UQ: He lived with his parents?

IS: Oh, yes.

UQ: So, when you married, did you go and join them?

IS: Right. My husband has . . . there were altogether, 5 sons. No sisters. So, he is in the middle. Two brothers older and two brothers younger.

UQ: O.K., and the all lived in the same house?

IS: All lived in the same house.

UQ: The older two were already married?

IS: Yes.

UQ: O.K., and you joined them?

IS: Yes.

UQ: What was his job?

IS: He is a mechanical engineer now. He was working the same thing, although when he graduated from there from Polytechnic, they did not offer a degree in engineering over there. It was an associate degree and he had it in power technology. They used to call it power technology. And then, when he came over here, he took the same field. He designs the mechanical, electric, and plumbing systems of the buildings. So, a couple of years after finishing his bachelors from the University of Houston, then he went to A&M. He got his masters from there. And afterwards, he worked for two companies over here in Houston. The first company was Bovay Engineers – the same type of work. And then, he joined Naman & Associates. Their office is in Greenway Plaza. So, he worked for them for a couple of years. He was promoted to be a project manager. And there are a couple of buildings in downtown that he designed [the systems for]. He designed the Summit, the ice rink Summit. He designed the high-rise buildings that are in Greenway Plaza, this residence. I should have his list. When he was working with Naman and Associates, he designed the Pennzoil Building and a couple of other buildings.

But when he left them . . . there were two of his friends and they started their own company but they didn't have the professional engineering license. You cannot send the drawings out unless some engineer with the license seals the drawings. So, they invited him and he, at that time, thought maybe it was a better chance for him. So, he came and joined them. But that partnership did not last more than 1 year because he is very, how should I say it . . . he goes with the rules and regulations, with the codes. He will not seal his drawings if they don't agree with the code, if they are not according to the code. He will not. And those people were just taking it easy. And he said, "No, I am not going to seal those drawings unless they are applicable with all the codes and ordinances of the city and the state." So, 10 months afterwards, not even 1 year, he left that. And then, he started his own work. The same consulting engineering firm. Up to now, he was doing this and we did a lot of work . . . the City Hall renovation, he did it. City Hall Annex renovation. It was all renovation. He did it. There were a lot of parks projects, he did it.

UQ: So, he does the . . .

IS: He does the air-conditioning, ventilating, heating, plumbing systems. I am saying "we," because when he started his work, I was there. I was in the office. You can say I was the office manager in a small firm. We never had more than . . . at the most, we had 3 employees besides us, and sometimes we had only 1. And we did a lot of schools, HISD schools.

UQ: What was the name of your company?

IS: It was MAS. So, we did all these projects around. We did a lot of churches.

There was the First Presbyterian Church on Main - he did the renovation. The Memorial Drive Presbyterian Church, we did it. And there was the South Main Baptist Church, he did it. He did a couple of churches in the Woodlands. He did it. He has designed some area mosques which was free of cost.

UQ: O.K. Let's back way up to when he came here. What year did your husband come to Houston and were you with him?

IS: No, I followed him after like 14, 15 months. He came before. I came here in December, 1967. So, he came here in the fall semester, September or late August in 1966. He came here in 1966 to attend the fall semester and I came in December, 1967.

UQ: And so, when he was here, you remained back in Pakistan?

IS: Yes.

UQ: Did you want to come to the US?

IS: Well, if I wanted to be with my husband, I had to come because I knew that he was not going to go back in a couple of years, you know. First, like everybody else, OK, we came for education. We will go back. That was the impression. But later on, you know, so many things happened back home and over here that we just stayed.

UQ: What did you know about America before you came? What impression did you have in your mind?

IS: O.K., that it is a very rich country, it is a democratic country, that there are no crimes in America. That's what we learned, you know. You leave the things outside and nobody will even look at it or touch it. Yes, this is really . . . and also that even the postmen, now I remember, even the postmen they come and deliver the mail, they have the car at that time which was not imaginable in Pakistan. So, things like that. The richness and freedom and crime free country.

UQ: O.K., where did you get these ideas from?

IS: People talking. Sometimes when we were in college and somebody came for education over here, the professors they went back and they told us that people are helpful. And, to some extent, that was true, too. And crime free. And sometimes you are reading in the articles or listening to the radio. TV station was not there when I left

Pakistan. It opened after a couple of months so I cannot say that I watched any TV programs, no.

UQ: Do you remember your earliest days in Houston?

IS: Yes. It was lonely because I came from a big family, living together. My parents' home, too. My in-laws' place, too. And then, all of a sudden, me and my daughter were home all by ourselves from early morning until late night, until my husband was outside going to school and then working part-time. Yes, lonely is one thing. I don't know what else can I recall here?

UQ: How did you pass your time?

IS: Taking care of the house, reading to my daughter, spending time with her. Sometimes, we used to go outside just for a walk if she was too bored inside the home. I used to do a lot of sewing and all these things. In the evening when my husband was home early, we used to go and visit friends if they were close by. We didn't have the car for maybe 1 year, 1-1/2 years, so we had to depend on buses or walk, whoever was close by.

UQ: And you were close to the bus lines?

IS: Yes, not very close but could easily walk.

UQ: Did you speak English?

IS: Well, I could read and write very well. I mean, I could read very well. Writing, I still don't know. I might make a lot of mistakes, you know, in composing the sentences and grammatical but you could understand every word, but not fluently speaking English because unless you speak it, you know, you don't pick up the speed, things like that.

UQ: So, the books that you read for your daughter, you got from the library?

IS: From the library, too, and sometimes we used to buy them from the store, or some friends, they just gave them to her as a present, things like that.

UQ: Where abouts did you live? What neighborhood? What area?

IS: We lived close to Medical Center, close to Hermann Park. We stayed there like maybe 3 years. Then, we moved to College Station when my husband got admission over there to do his master's. We stayed there for 1-1/2 years and came back to Houston again. I lived in the same area close to downtown. When we came back from College Station, it was close to . . . Greenway Plaza, because his job was there.

UQ: So, when you were home with your daughter, you took her out for walks in your neighborhood?

IS: Yes, the park was close, the zoo was close.

UQ: Hermann Park?

IS: Hermann Park was close. Just the Medical Center, you know. So, we were there. Maybe two times at least we used to go and visit the park.

UQ: And you felt safe?

IS: I felt safe. Sometimes, I really went, not in the evening but maybe at 3 o'clock, 4 o'clock. I wasn't scared. At that time, you can imagine, the parks were empty. Not very crowded - a couple of people here and there. I wasn't scared.

UQ: And the people that you encountered out and about, you know, when you were going to the park or here and there, they were friendly?

IS: Very friendly. Very friendly, because I was mostly dressed in *desi* clothes, you know. So, they used to wave and sometimes they had to find out how do I wrap my sari around. I used to explain it is just one six yard piece straight. You don't need anything to

do it. You don't need to sew it. Easiest thing. So, it was out of curiosity but I think they were very friendly.

UQ: And your interactions with your neighbors?

IS: Well, we were living in the apartment and people were coming and going very often.

UQ: To your apartment?



IS: Yes, apartment building where we were living.

UQ: To you or your building?

IS: No, they were coming and going from the building, so we didn't get to know . . . except "hello, hi, how are you?" when we met outside, or if there was a family who had a kid with whom my daughter could play - sometimes they used to come and sometimes my daughter used to go. So, we got to know them very well as compared to just the bachelors or just the family with no kids, you know, because I am sure everybody was going in the morning, coming back late at night or in the evening. Then, there is no time. We stayed in those apartments for almost 3 years and I think nobody else stayed there for that long. Always there were new people coming and going.

UQ: People were comfortable sending their children to visit with you even though you were from another country?

IS: Yes. My doors were open. I took good care of them. I think I trusted people at that time more than I would trust now. So, my daughter used to go. I was close by.

UQ: Was she in preschool, like a daycare center part-time?

IS: Yes, she was in preschool. And afterwards when she was in first grade, second grade, they were playing outside and I used to go and check through my windows or doors that they are right there. She was told she could not leave this place but as compared to Houston, College Station was much more safer for the kids because they were all students living there and there were international students and there were swings and a big play yard in the back of the houses, so they used to go and play over there and I felt much better, much safer.

UQ: When you first came here, did you take any kind of classes, any courses in anything?

IS: No, I did not.

UQ: Did you have a television?

IS: Yes, we bought a small TV because without that you cannot live . . . it was one thing the kids in the afternoon could watch and I could listen to the news. The programs were very good at that time. Bewitched, Lucy Show, Andy Griffith Show, Leave it to Beaver. And then, of course, on Channel 8, Sesame Street, Mister Rogers' Neighborhood. This is all we watched. We passed a little time with that.

UQ: You had mentioned earlier that when you first came here, you did not plan on staying permanently.

IS: Yes, at least in my mind. I don't know about my husband but at least in my mind, I was ready to go back.

UQ: Did you want to return back to Pakistan?

IS: At that time, yes, I wanted to. I was after him for a long time, "Let's go back," because we were alone here. No family member was here except my brother. He came but he was not married. He was living in another town. And all the family, the parents . . . it was very hard to go at that time, you know. Being a student, you don't have the kind of money that you can go and visit. And the people from there did not come that often as they come now. So, I was kind of very lonely the first 5 years, you know. A lot of things

happened back home. My brother got married. My sister got married. I couldn't go. So, it was kind of a lonely feeling that you had. Yes, I wanted to go back at that time.

UQ: When did that feeling change or when did your mind change about going back?

IS: Well, my mind changed really . . . I was after my husband for a long time to go, not only the first 5 years but after that, too. But when my kids came in higher grade, like 8th grade, 9th grade, then I thought I don't know whether they can adjust to the schools over there or not. And then, by that time, there were a lot of people coming from Pakistan and the community grew. So, then you were not that lonely. And then, you have already settled here for 10 years now. I gave up after that.

UQ: What was the early community like? You said the community grew but before that when it was a small community when you were here, were there any other Pakistani families in Houston?

IS: In the beginning, there were 1 or 2 families and a couple of bachelor students, you know. Maybe a group of 15. Maybe a little more, little less - I am just estimating it, you know. It was a close-knit group because when you are little in number, small in number, you tend to stay together. At that time, everybody was on their own. Their families were not with them. Everybody left family behind. So, yes, there were certain occasions on Eid festivals, on Pakistan Day or just a picnic - we would get together and go out or

somebody just comes to visit, because we were in the radius maybe of 5 to 8 miles - everybody was there, so it was not very hard to visit. And sometimes, some people were just across the street so it was not hard. So, this is how . . . since the family members were not there, the friends were the family.

UQ: And in that, there were only 1 or 2 women though?

IS: In the beginning, yes, there were only 2 or 3 women. And then, some of the students went back, they got married, they brought their wives back.

UQ: Do you remember the names of the women?

IS: The first was Doris Hosain. She was there and she used to live across the street with us. The other lady, I told you that her husband got the Ph.D. from University of Texas. Her name was Naz [her nickname], Mehnaz. She was there. She left maybe after 1-1/2 years when I came over here. She left. And after a couple of months, some other people came from Pakistan. So, they filled the gap.

UQ: You said that you had some activities, even in the very early, early days when there were maybe only 15 or 20 people - even then, you had some activities?

IS: Yes, we did.

UQ: What kind?

IS: Just like I said, on Eid functions, they used to come to our house or to go to the people who had the families, you know. We would invite the bachelors. Or sometimes, they just wanted to eat something. "O.K., tell *Bhabi* [an Urdu term of respect, literally meaning 'wife of my brother'] to cook something." They would come and knock. I didn't even have to go and serve it to them. They would just open the fridge door and find whatever is there, they would eat it because no restaurants, no Pakistani restaurants. So, they were tired of eating whatever they'd cook - hamburgers, things like this. So, whenever they wanted to eat some *desi* foods, they used to come and eat functions. Pakistan Day, Afreen's [the interviewee's daughter] birthday – she was the only child. Sometimes, we just got together and went out to Hermann Park, stayed there for a couple of hours, came back - things like that.

UQ: There was no official organization by any name in those early days, right?

IS: Pakistan Association was there. Pakistan Association was there when I came.

UQ: And you said they had a Pakistan Day celebration?

IS: Yes.

UQ: What did they do?

IS: Some speeches, some guests invited, about the history of Pakistan, about the situation in Pakistan - things like that generally, you know, which was much better in those days than what it is right now. And then, of course, some snacks or food. Get-together.

UQ: What do you find that is good about living here versus living in Pakistan?

IS: Security. The situation in Pakistan, before I came, it was a peaceful country, too. We were not scared to . . . my mother used to go and come back, like 9, 10 o'clock at night, taking the public buses. Until I came, I never heard in my life that a bank had been robbed over there. But the situation, everybody knows, you know. Security is one thing. I guess, you know, financially, you are better off over here. Basic needs like water and electricity shortage, things like that.

UQ: Back then when you first came, there was an Indian community already here. Do you remember about how many and who were their families or students?

IS: We had a couple of Indian friends, they were living close to our house. So, we used to go and visit them. Because they were so little in number, you know - Indian and

Pakistani - we got along very well. But there was a larger community in Houston, Indian community, than compared to the Pakistani community. This, I found out sometimes when we went to the University of Houston and we saw the students over there, if they had some function over there. So definitely that was the largest community at that time.

UQ: So, there were functions where the Pakistani students and the Indian students got together?

IS: Not really. Not that I recall. But sometimes, there were some movie shows or something in the beginning where we went over there because Pakistanis were so little in number, they didn't have showing movies and things like that that much. So, a couple of times, I went with my husband over there and you would see a lot of Indians were over there.

UQ: So, they had Hindi movies?

IS: Hindi movies, yes, they were showing.

UQ: You would go and watch them with them?

IS: Yes, with the Indians.

UQ: So, the families would come to see that, not just the students?

IS: Families, students, everybody.

UQ: Who did you most frequently meet with? What kind of . . . Indian friends or Pakistani friends or American friends? Who specifically? Not just your husband but both of you?

IS: Well, in the beginning since I didn't have a car, whoever was living close by. Whoever's house I could walk to and if they were home, too. And if they had kids, that was one more reason to go because, you know, Afreen, she needed some playmates. So, this is what my criteria . . . I couldn't take the bus every day and go far away. We did have the car but it was only one car which my husband used to take to work and go to school. So, it was not really who I visited but whoever was close to my house and if they were home.

UQ: Earlier, you had mentioned that there were some Pakistani students who married non-Pakistani residents here in Houston. Can you elaborate a bit about that, talk a little bit about it?

IS: Talk about what?

UQ: I guess how often this occurred.

IS: Well, I could recall 3 Pakistani men at that time when I came early. They were already married. One was Azam Hussain. He married a German. She was not an American. I mean, she was in Houston when they got married but she was originally from Germany. And there were two brothers that married Americans. Mr. Hussain, because he was living very close to our house, so we used to see them every day or every other day. Just go there for one-half hour, sit down, come back, you know. But the other two families, they were kind of far away. We met only on special occasions, you know, not very often. Afterwards, a couple of other people got married. One married an Afghan girl from there. We went to visit them, too. And then, there were some people who married Americans and their marriage didn't last long, after one year or so, they were divorced. But we all got together, you know. Whenever there was a function or when we invited somebody, we invited everybody.

UQ: So, Pakistanis welcomed the couples no matter where . . .

IS: It didn't matter where they were from, no.

UQ: Where did you mostly meet with the Indian and Pakistani community? Were there more beyond just the few that you mentioned? You said there were a few families and a few students, maybe 15 or 20. Were there others also?

IS: We met them only if there was a movie showing at the University of Houston.

We went and saw those people over there. I don't recall any other occasion.

UQ: Were there any families who weren't connected to the University in any way, who weren't students?

IS: There were a couple of families who were not going to school because either they finished or they dropped out or they had the permanent visa, they didn't need to go. But they were a part of the larger group. Whenever there was a function, we would invite . . . see, there was an inner circle and there was an outer circle. Inner circle is just 1 or 2 families, O.K., we'd see each other every other day or every day or talk, at least. And there was this larger circle, you know, on special occasions, on Eid or other functions, O.K. Once in a while, if I would invite . . . [end of tape 1]

. . . inner circle is that I knew 1 or 2 families very well, so we used to see each other maybe every other day if not every day for just 1/2 hour, 1 hour. Had dinner at home, you know "Let's go visit across the street." And it was easier to just go over there and have tea and then come back. And then, there was the outer circle that was on Eid functions or after a couple of months, someone would invite us so they would invite everybody. Sometimes, I invited them in my home. Sometimes, Mr. Hussein invited them. So, we used to meet each and every one of them. As long as the circle was not

more than 10, 15. When it grew larger, then it was difficult to invite everybody in a 1-bedroom or 2-bedroom apartment, so it became difficult.

UQ: Did you have a lot of interaction with non-Pakistanis and non-Indians? Did you have interaction with the Americans here?

IS: We had just a couple of friends. One or two. They were the host family for my husband. She used to work at the University of Houston book store. Kazi Saheb knew her, too. What was her name now? I can't remember. It has been a long time. She was a grandmother at the time. I was a young mother. She was a grandmother. So, we went to visit them a couple of times, invited them to our home a couple of times. Or, if there was some function at my husband's workplace, I went over there, invited over there. That is all.

UQ: You didn't have any close friends who were American?

IS: Well, they were close enough but it is not that we met them every day or something like that because they were all living far away. And they had their own families.

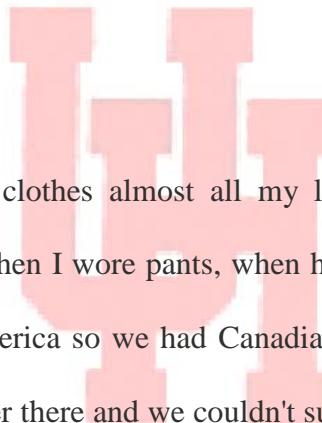
UQ: Can you tell about your first impression of Houston?

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IS: Well, I came to Houston in December, 1967, and if I recall it right, it was in April, 1968, that Martin Luther King was assassinated. And after a couple of months, Robert Kennedy, President Kennedy's younger brother, he was assassinated. And I think it was within 6 months of all that. So, Mr. Hussein's wife, she is from Germany and she said jokingly, "You must have a very good impression of America - two people assassinated." Then, I found out that America is not crime-free. [laughs]

UQ: The clothing that you wore, did you wear American clothing after you arrived here?



IS: No. I dressed in *desi* clothes almost all my life in the beginning. Then, I remember now, the first time when I wore pants, when he went to Canada . . . we didn't get permanent residency in America so we had Canadian residency. And I had to buy pants because it gets so cold over there and we couldn't survive in *desi* clothes, especially sari, you know. So, that was the first time when I had made some western clothes.

UQ: Where did you get your *desi* clothes from?

IS: I made them here in the beginning. I used to sew and if my mother could find somebody, she used to send it to us, if she found somebody who was coming or I made it over here. This is how.

UQ: Did you sew for your daughter as well?

IS: Oh, yes, I did a lot of sewing in the beginning. My younger son, he says, "You used to sew. Why don't you sew anymore?" I don't want to sew anymore. I visit Pakistan more often so I can go and get my clothes and get them tailor made over there. But in those early days, we didn't see anybody . . . I didn't see any of my family members for 5 years. Only the letters that we found out. Telephone was too expensive to call. So, only really by mail, you know. We didn't have this email that you send something to somebody and you can get the answer back within 1 hour or within a few minutes.

UQ: Did you sew for your daughter American clothes or Pakistani clothes?

IS: American clothes mostly which she could wear outside and inside. Sometimes on Eid and occasions like that, I did make the *desi* clothes for her, too.

UQ: Why didn't you just buy her clothes because certainly you can buy American style clothes in American stores?

IS: First of all, it was expensive. Secondly, I liked to sew. And third, my daughter, she was tall and she was very skinny. The length would fit for a 10 year old but the width wouldn't even fit for a 6 year old. So, it was so hard to find, especially the pants.

And if I found something, I had to adjust it. It was no use. And the patterns were available, so I could make any thing for her.

UQ: What particular hardships did you face when you first came here?

IS: Hardship means what? Physical difficulties? Any kind?

UQ: Anything.

IS: First of all, I missed the family. Loneliness was there. Being all by yourself. Waiting for the letters to arrive. Secondly, yes, there were financial hurdles. We didn't have a car. You had to watch your budget. My husband worked only on as-needed. He never worked full-time because he paid attention to his studies. And we had the old car which used to stop everywhere. It used to heat up. I don't know how many times we had to leave the car on the road! [laughs] Once, we went to College Station. My husband had an interview to start his masters over there in postgraduate study. Oh, we were so happy - that old car, we went there, it was a big treat going out of Houston. On the way back, halfway, I think we were in Hempstead, we stopped to get gas and the car wouldn't start. For one hour, you sat there in the sun. I think it was 3 or 4 o'clock. No AC, nothing. Finally, gave up. Called Mr. Hussain. He was kind enough, he gave us a lot of rides. I am still very thankful to him. They were ready to go to a function. He left his wife home. He came like 40 miles, picked us up, took us home, and then they made a

couple of trips, my husband with Mr. Hussain, to start the car. It wouldn't start. Finally, we had to tow it and we had to pay like \$40, \$50. It was a lot of money at the time. The car was worth only \$400. We paid \$400 for that car. I mean, we had to get it somehow, we had to pay it somehow but yes, there were financial hurdles. And all the time we stayed in College Station, 1-1/2 years, we didn't have the car. We were living in the University housing. The rents were really low. It was very helpful.

UQ: Do you remember what the rent was, the amount?

IS: It was \$48, utilities paid. No air-conditioning, of course. No carpeting. It was small. It was the cheapest one in which we were living. Two bedrooms, furnished, but you can imagine, a two-seater sofa, small one, and one chair, rocking chair, wood, and a small dining table with 4 chairs, and we were blessed with a bed. That is what we had. It was close by so my husband used to walk there in the morning at 12 o'clock, after breakfast he would walk, and he was always coming back for lunch. Even in May and June, he used to walk in the hot sun and he would stay 1 hour, take his tea, eat lunch, go back walking. He never studied at home. He was always studying at . . . I think everybody did it . . . in the library. And then, he used to come for dinner, go back again. And then, I never saw him. For two semesters, I never saw him before 12:30, 1:00. And in December, a couple of friends together they used to walk, shivering, sometimes burning hot. We didn't have a car. For two semesters, it was like that over there. He just worked part-time.

UQ: Even in College Station he worked?

IS: In College Station, there was no work for him because it was just a small town. It was a college town. A college town means only professors and students lived there, you know. I don't think there were any places who could give him a job, although he had permission to work part-time, he could have, but there was no work for him over there. So, we just survived with whatever savings we had from Houston. And then, during the semester break, he used to come and he used to go to his company and they would give him a job. I am sure they had a good impression of him. He was hard working. So, for 1 month if he would work, at Christmas vacation, they used to get like 3 to 4 weeks off and he worked that time.

UQ: Would you be with him in Houston or you stayed in College Station?

IS: Well, sometimes, I came. One time I came here, stayed with a friend for 2, 3 days, then I went back. I didn't want to stay. He used to stay and just come back and sleep at night but I didn't want to burden anybody so I went back and forth.

UQ: Did you ever think about working during those days when money was . . .

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IS: Well, I was with an F2 visa and we didn't have permission to work. My husband was a student and I was a dependent.

UQ: So, you didn't have that choice?

IS: No, I didn't have the choice. We didn't have the permission to work.

UQ: When did you have your next child?

IS: O.K., Nadeem was born in 1973 and after he was a couple of months old, we moved to Canada because we had the Canadian residency. We moved over there, stayed there like 15 to 18 months, 1-1/2 years, and we applied when we were over there. My husband didn't like the working situation over there.

UQ: You were here and your husband had finished his schooling?

IS: Yes, about that time.

UQ: So, you couldn't live here after he was . . .

IS: Yes, because he didn't have the residency and he had already used up his training period, that 18 months we used to get . . . after you graduate, it was allowed for foreign

students to work here. That used to be called a training period, for 18 months, 1-1/2 years. So, we used all that and we still didn't have the residency.

UQ: You never applied for it?

IS: I think he applied one time but the situation was not very good so it was denied in the beginning. And then, he applied for Canadian residency and we did get that. So, he went over there and we stayed there 1-1/2 years. And during that time, he applied for American residency and he got it and we came back then.

UQ: You didn't want to stay in Canada?

IS: It didn't matter to me. It was almost the same. But my husband didn't like the working situation over there.

UQ: So, where were you in Canada?

IS: Toronto.

UQ: And when you came back to America, where did you . . .

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IS: We came back to Houston. We wanted to. They were offering my husband . . . the company that he left before, that company he was working with, once we left for Canada, they offered him a job. They had a branch in California, Santa Monica. And I said, "No, I don't want to go to a new place. I want to go back to Houston where my friends are." So, we came back to Houston.

UQ: Were there other Muslims in Houston that you knew, people who weren't Pakistani or Indian?

IS: We knew some people but we were not very close, you know.

UQ: Where were they from, the other Muslims?

IS: Oh, we met them in the mosque. So, they were from Syria, they were from Iran, they were from Turkey, Jordan and mostly Middle Eastern countries. Of course, from India, from Pakistan.

UQ: So, you said you met them in the mosque. What year are we talking about that there was a mosque?

IS: Late 1971, 1972, 1973. These two years. Before that, we used to get together . . . there was this president, he was from Iran, Ibrahim Yazdi (Kazi Saheb knows him very

well). Actually, your father-in-law is the one who introduced us to this community. He was instrumental, you know, in getting us the Islamic Society. It was at that time. And then, we bought a little place on Richmond and it was named ISGH [Islamic Society of Greater Houston] and we started from there. Then, we started going there every Sunday.

UQ: Prior to that, the Muslims met in people's homes?

IS: Only at brother Yazdi's home. That was a couple of months before we moved to College Station. And then, there were no activities like that. We came back. Then, we started going. And then, the mosque was established.

UQ: And in that group, all the people got together no matter where they were from?

IS: It didn't matter. Whoever was interested in going. They were Middle Eastern, from different countries. There were a couple of Bangladesh and, of course, from India and Pakistan. Mostly these. Not a very large number but like maybe 30 or so.

UQ: So, the lectures and sermons, they were in English?

IS: Yes, they were in English.

UQ: From the beginning?

IS: From the beginning.

UQ: What would you say that your religious upbringing was like?

IS: Back home?

UQ: Yes.

IS: It was moderate. I mean, it was like an average. It was not too religious and not free of religion. My mother was more religious than my father. And then, of course, the surroundings were such that ... radio, school, things like that.

UQ: O.K. What role did religion play for you in your choices, in your actions, day-to-day life, when you came to Houston?

IS: Well, I did practice, let's say, at least my basic tenets. I never missed Ramadan that came and went by. I didn't do that. Of course, I couldn't go to *Hajj* [obligatory pilgrimage to Makkah one in a lifetime] but whatever, you know, the daily obligations, yes, I did it. It was not that I was just don't care, you know, which month is this or the time for prayer is here. We didn't have money so we couldn't go for *Hajj*. We didn't have money to pay the *zakat* [percentage of income annually given by those who are able,

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to the poor and needy]. We didn't have that big savings. But I had a few jewelry that was back home. I always used to write my mother, O.K., whatever you think it is worth, give it to the poor people over there and I would reimburse it to her. So, we could only practice these three basic tenets.

UQ: O.K., and did you try to instill those same tenets in your children?

IS: Yes, I tried more than my mother tried with me because I had more time. My daughter was the only child for 7 years, O.K., so besides all that, talking to them, reading to them about the Prophets. I always told them, "O.K., you have to say *bismillah* [literally, 'in the name of God'] before you eat, do any work; say *alhamdulillah* [praise/thank God] when you finish." Basic things, you know. Get up, sleep, take the name of Allah. This is what I taught my kids.

UQ: Did you attend any kind of other cultural activities like music programs, things like that?

IS: Maybe a couple of times. One time, a singer from Pakistani, Munni Begum, came but it was a long time ago. My daughter wanted to go – the *ghazal* [form of Urdu poetry].

UQ: How old was she?

IS: She was in high school. That is all we had from Pakistan. Nowadays, there are so many shows. I don't know when I went the last time.

UQ: How did you keep up with political news about Pakistan, what is going on there, what the situation is like?

IS: This is now?

UQ: Not now but even back then. Now, it is very easy to find everything out.

IS: I think the TV or the people communicating or the news, in the newspaper, whatever you would read. People going . . . I mean, a lot of people going more often to Pakistan and they are coming back. Just like a friend of mine, she is gone. Sometimes, somebody else is gone. Sometimes, I am gone. So, just hear from them. This is how.

UQ: And what about politics in the U.S.? Did you find any interest in that?

IS: Well, there are some issues that I am very interested in and some issues that I am just blank which is not right - I should be informed. International level, I try to follow. Local level, I am sorry, I don't. I should. There are some issues that I am more interested. Economics, I don't know how it works, O.K., so don't ask me about the

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business and all those things, you know. I don't know and I don't follow it because I am not interested in it.

UQ: You said there are some issues you are interested in like international level and others. What kind of topics interest you in politics?

IS: Do you mean on an international level?

UQ: International and national.

IS: International level, what is going on in the world, especially with the Muslim world, especially all this uprising going on. Sometimes, I try to be informed and there are some days I just don't want to listen because it is too much killing and all that. I don't like it. Religious issues. Of course, this terrorism or fundamentalism, things like that. Business, I really don't know how this works, O.K., so I have no interest in business.

UQ: What about national politics? Elections?

IS: National politics, yes, I take interest, because I don't see much difference between the two parties. They keep changing their stands because they want to get votes. So, when I see that . . . whatever you believe, if you believe in something, stand for it whether you get elected or not get elected. That is what I believe for myself, too. And

this is what I would like people . . . you don't switch just to get the votes. See the public's reaction and then you just switch your stance with that? Everybody was with Bush, the senators, when they attacked Iraq but now, the public is wearing off, the public is not supporting them so they are changing their vote. But you have to select somebody.

UQ: Do you vote?

IS: Yes, I do.

UQ: Regularly?

IS: Regularly. I vote on national and local level, too. I do it.

UQ: The last question: Would you recommend other Pakistanis to come to Houston now?

IS: Come to Houston or come to the States?

UQ: Come to the States, sure, some to America?

IS: Well, it depends upon their situation. If they are living somewhere where they are happy, they have a source of income in which they can survive, I think stay where you

are but it is their choice. I can't help anybody, you know, if they should come. I won't encourage people to come. It is upon their situation. If they have better opportunities over here, fine, they can decide on their own.

UQ: O.K., well, I am done. If you have anything else to add . . .

IS: I don't know, whatever else can I add?

UQ: You have said a lot. It was a good interview. Thank you very much.



IS: I hope it works out this time.