UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT

Interview with: Muhammad A. Siddiqui
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UQ: Oral interview with Muhammad A. Siddiqui by Uzma Quaraishi of the University of Houston, June 17, 2007. All right, you can begin by telling us a little bit about yourself, your background.

MAS: My name is Muhammad Ashfaq Siddiqui, who was born in India. Then, my parents migrated, back in 1949, to Pakistan. I went to high school, then the college, and then started working back in 1963. And then after one year or so, we all decided that I probably did not have enough education. So, we started looking here and there. There was some opportunity to go to Germany one time as somebody who was trying to set up carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide plants in Lahore. That didn't work out, so then we started looking again. We had a couple of friends who were trying to come to America. And since I was working, my major field was the air-conditioning. And the only place that the air-conditioning was going was in the States. Europe doesn't need air-conditioning, I don't believe. They still don't have enough. So, that was one reason to start looking in the States and it wound up that the University of Houston had a program.

There was another college in California so one of my friends, he went to California and I came to Houston.

UQ: So, the main reason that you left your home country was for higher education then?

MAS: Yes. Well, 99% of the people in those days who came to America, mostly came for the higher education. There were not that many educated people, you know, who came to America. Most of them who went to Europe, mostly went to England and Germany.

UQ: Did you have opportunities to go to England because many people also went there?

MAS: Never thought of that. With our backgrounds and our experience with all those colonialists, you know we probably never thought of that. For us, there was no opportunity in England or any other place. There was also one other reason that we considered was the job opportunities while going to school. We knew that in those days, that a lot of people who went to England, they were mostly doing the manual work - cleaning the shops, working in the factories, things like that - and myself and my friends were not actually interested in going and doing those kinds of work so it was better for us. And most of

us, I believe, we landed decent jobs. Even while going to the school, not just working at the gas stations and some of those places.

UQ: So, when you came here, you came with the intention to study and return back to your country or to remain here?

MAS: That was the intention, you know. We came for 3 years. Then, I got my degree. Then, I decided to do the master's, you know. That was the other reason. So, my stay got a little bit extended. We did go back after getting my master's but then, at that time, we had the war with India, Bangladesh or East Pakistan, went away. When we got to Karachi, there were a lot of problems and even the locals did not have enough work. Every place you would go, the first question was, "Why in the hell would you want to come here? We are trying to get out." So, after going once or twice, I believe, for the intent, you know, we just gave up. We still had the visa to come back.

UQ: Who is "we?" You keep saying, "we." Were you married at that time?

MAS: Oh, yes. I was married back in 1964, so when I came here, you know, not only I was married, I also had a daughter.

UQ: O.K. So you all came here together?

MAS: I came first in 1966. Then, my wife came in 1967, I believe, the last part of November.

UQ: O.K. So that first time that you came in 1966, you did a bachelor's degree here at U of H?

MAS: Yes, from 1966 to 1969, I was at the University of Houston. And then, I worked for a little bit. Then, I went for a master's to A&M back in 1970, I think. The fall of 1970, the spring of 1971, I was at A&M for 2 semesters. And I came back to Houston again. I had a job, so that was not a problem.

UQ: What was your living arrangement when you first came here in 1966?

MAS: Well, luckily, your father-in-law was here. He is the one who picked me up and he was packing up to go back. So, he left and I went in his room. So, that was easy. That was the easy part. Even before coming here, I knew his brother, Sarfaraz, because we were in the same college, you know, way back. And we were still meeting and he is the one who told me

that my brother was there. So, when I came to Houston, Kazi Saheb, he is the one who picked me up.

UQ: So, you already had established contact with him regarding him to expect you?

MAS: Right. I never met him, never talked to him. The only connection was his brother. So, he said, "Well, when you are going there he can pick you up." So, that is what happened.

UQ: O.K. And did you have any other friends here?

MAS: No, nobody else. We knew there were some host families that would pick us up if he was not available but then we found out he was there so it made it a lot easier.

UQ: So, how did you know about the host families? Did they let you know that in the application process?

MAS: Yes, any university that has a program, you know, they normally send you the information, you know, that if you are interested, sign those papers.

UQ: And did you? Did you avail yourself of that?

MAS: I don't believe so. Once we knew, you know, that somebody was going to pick me up, we said "well, forget it."

UQ: O.K., so did you ever have a host family later on while you were here?

MAS: It was a long time . . . in Houston, this organization was at the campus. They used to invite you every Wednesday for lunch, give you some sandwiches. That was only the extent of my involvement. I never went to anybody's home or anything. Since he was here, I already had a place to live. There was no need to go someplace else. My other two roommates were also from Pakistan so that made it a lot easier -- where to go to shopping, which bus to take and all that good stuff.

UQ: How many people do you remember being here as far as students at that time?

MAS: At that time, there was one from East Pakistan which was called Bangladesh and there were two . . . no, there were actually three. Two were my

roommates. The other one was also married at that time. And [beyond] those three… there was another gentleman who was teaching. He used to be a student at University of Houston but then, after getting his master's, he started teaching so those are the only people that we knew at that time. But there were a lot of Indians. A lot of Patels.

UQ: There were?

MAS: There were lots of Patels.

UQ: O.K., so they outnumbered you by a long stretch?

MAS: Yes, by 1 to 5 maybe.

UQ: O.K., and what was your interaction with them, with the Indians on campus?

MAS: Coming from the same background, you know, we never felt that they were against us or we were against them. We all used to meet. They used to come to our apartment and we used to go to their apartment. Plus, you would meet them on the campus. A lot of them . . . we all had the same classes. That also made it easier.

UQ: What was your bachelor's degree in?

MAS: In air-conditioning technology.

UQ: O.K., and then your master's?

MAS: Master's was in industrial engineering, which I never practiced. I was still doing what I was doing back home. I worked with a contractor for about one year and then I was working for a consultant for about 8 or 9 months. So, 1963 to 1966.

UQ: O.K., and you said that you had a short stint at Texas A&M. Can you tell a little bit about that, why you considered going . . .

MAS: Well, the choice was, you know, where are you going to get the admission? That was the big deal. You know, University of Houston . . . there were a lot of students from overseas. There were a lot of problems with the foreign student advisor at that time.

UQ: At U of H?

MAS: At U of H. It was a big deal. But A&M, I went there, had an interview and they said, "Well, you can join." So, that was the deal. University of Houston was difficult to get into the graduate school.

UQ: I see. And I have heard that there was a large community of Pakistani students at A&M. Did you know about that?

MAS: Well, yes, in those days, there was a program between Memon Singh University in East Pakistan being an agriculture university and A&M in those days was basically mechanical or the agriculture. So, there were a lot of people who were coming through Ford Foundation. They didn't come on their own. They came here for 2 years or 3 years, got their degrees and they went back home. But they were mostly from East Pakistan. So, we had a lot of Bengalis there. The only other Pakistani was a gentleman from Behar. But he [went] from Behar to Dhaka. And then, from there, he went to Japan and then somehow, he landed at A&M. So, that was the extent.

UQ: So, you don't know any of those students from A&M who actually still live in Houston?

MAS: No. There was this guy who was from Behar. We were in contact until 1976 or 1977. I do not know where he is now.

UQ: Do you know if any of them ended up settling in America?

MAS: The crowd from A&M? No. I mean, there is this guy who got his Ph.D. and I am sure he stayed here somewhere.

UQ: How difficult was the process of actually migrating to America? Did you find any difficulties or struggles in doing that?

MAS: Not really. Getting the visa was easier for me, you know, because my father-in-law had some connection at the Embassy and he had a friend who was working there. So, that made it easy. I just filled out the form and signed it. The next [thing] I got was my visa. And those things do happen, you know. There is no other way, you know, that he can . . . you probably have to line up for a couple of days before they even let you in but that connection did make it easy.

UQ: O.K., and you said that you were married. Why did you decide to come here and your wife remain there for that first . . .

MAS: Financial condition, you know? Everybody is not rich in Pakistan. So, we just had to come here . . . September to the first part of January, I

did not do anything but then in February, I got permission from Immigration to start working and never worked without their permission.

UQ: So, September to January of what year?

MAS: Of 1966. The only thing I did was just go to school.

UQ: And you were here?

MAS: I was here. September of 1966. And then, when I got the permission, then I started looking for the work.

UQ: And what kind of work did you find?

MAS: The same that I was doing back home. Designing the air-conditioning systems. It was easy. I mean, in those days, most of the people [students] were either working at gas stations, grocery stores. And then, I believe in 1967, Texas Instruments started their factory so they hired a lot of people. And a lot of these students went there.

UQ: Students of India and Pakistan at that time?

MAS: Oh, yes. There were a lot of people that I knew.

UQ: So, that was the college job?

MAS: That was the only college job other than work in the library. In those days, those people were getting $1.00 an hour if the job was available. I mean, everybody just can't get the jobs. Minimum wage was $1.99. Now, you can hardly find somebody working for the minimum, even doing the minimum work for less than $10. Gas was 19 cents a gallon. What else?

UQ: Did you have a car?

MAS: In those days, no. Well, I could have bought it but I had the loan for the first 4 months I was here. I had to pay that one off so I worked from, I believe, the middle of February the whole summer to pay off that and have some money. And then, I had to get my family here. So, it took a little while but no debt. I had to get rid of my debt before I began it. So, it did work out.

UQ: And at Texas Instruments, did they pay better for these college-type jobs than the dollar an hour . . .

MAS: Oh, yes. I am sure. They were assembling the computers, the chips and all that so I am sure they paid more. I didn't go there because I already had a job.

UQ: Designing air-conditioning . . .

MAS: Designing . . . so that was my field. There was no reason for me to go there.

UQ: I see.

MAS: I think in those days, the Vietnam war actually helped a lot of us, to be honest with you. If the war was not there, a lot of those Americans would be here and then it would have been harder to get a job. A lot of those guys were shipped out, you know, there was a vacuum and they will hire you. You knock on their door. If they had a job, chances were, you know, you were in. And with Texas Instruments, they probably hired 10,000 people in those days. So, where those guys were going to come [from]?

UQ: Can you tell a little bit about what your interaction was like with people on campus versus the people off of campus? And in the Anglo community, the white community?

MAS: Most of the people, you already knew. The Americans normally did not want to be friends with you. Just like our neighbors. Even now, we only see them outside. You know, "Hello, Muhammad. How are you?" "Everything is looking good." Blah, blah. Then, they go inside. You invite them. Chances are they won't show up. Back in 2002, my son got married. I invited these neighbors. Only one showed up. This guy didn't even bother to knock on our door and thank us. And they are still here. So, my youngest one got married last year, we never invited this guy. We said, well, no sense wasting our money on making the reservation, making the arrangement and then he is not going to show. It is very difficult. Even the neighbors here . . . you wave and that is it. The only people that interact are mostly at work. And some of them, they do become your friends. You know, you go out for lunch and they come and visit you. We had a family on my first project, we became friends with the family for almost 40 years. And he passed away last year. But we were friends, and he came to our home 2 years ago. We had lunch. But other than that . . . our biggest problem has always been that we don't go out to the bar. And their first preference is let's go. That makes a big difference because most of these guys, if you are not drinking, if you are not going out to a ballgame with them, they already have too many friends. So, most of the friends, in a sense, were mostly at the masjid.

UQ: When you were on campus, the same thing? You didn't really . . . hi, hello, but nothing beyond that?

MAS: Nothing beyond that. Well, in those days, we didn't have time. Student, working, going to school, concerned about paying the fee, taking care of the kid, so it did make a difference. You didn't have any time at that time. It was just meeting them on the campus.

UQ: You came after desegregation so officially, there should not have been an issue of race. What did you find?

MAS: Well, not in Houston, there was no problem. But in some areas, there was still a problem. When we came here, I don't think they discriminated us. We never had that problem. Most of the people, when you would go downtown in those days, thought that you were Spanish and they'd start [speaking to you] in Spanish. That was the only problem we had. Every other person who was on the street was Spanish.

UQ: Here in Houston?

MAS: Yes. Even in those days.

UQ: Off of campus?

MAS: Off of campus. And that was the only place we used to go in those days because with no car, you can't drive out. We had a family at the University of Houston book store that your father-in-law knew so he introduced us. So, we went to their home a couple of times. Sharpstown was the new mall in those days. They bought a home probably a couple of blocks away from there. So, we went there one time and jokingly, I said, "You couldn't find any other place rather than coming out of town?" Sharpstown was out of town in those days. There was nothing there. There were no high rise buildings downtown. There was only one HL&P building in those days, probably 25, 30 floors. That was it.

UQ: Were you able to maintain contact with your family back in Pakistan after you arrived here?

MAS: Oh, yes.

UQ: By what? Phone? Letters?

MAS: Well, mostly initially, it was the letters. Even until the mid 1970s because the telephone charges were pretty high. And then it was not even easy to get the line through. If you had to make a call in those days, you had to go through the operator. You give them the number and then you wait. And if you were a student and you had to go to class, you know, you didn't have time to sit . . . in those days, a couple of times, it took 10 to 12 hours before you even got through the line. They would call you when the lines were available. And it used to cost $3.00 a minute. And with the minimum wage at $1.99, $3.00 a minute was a lot of money. Our rent for the apartment that we moved in, my share was only $35 a month. So, now you can think of paying $3.00 a minute to make an overseas call, how difficult it is. So, most of the communication in those days was through the mail. and then, late in the 1970s, there were more lines, more access, and prices started going down.

UQ: Were you a regular letter writer?

MAS: I will say once a month. Then, my family came and she [wife] started writing so I got a little relief.

UQ: Did you keep up with popular culture or politics from back home once you came here? Did you maintain any interest in that?

MAS: No. It [Pakistani news] used to be a joke because one day in the morning, the guy is making one statement; in the evening, his statements are different. So, the heck with that. Not going to keep it up. I don't have time. In those days, you know, we probably never had time. Even now, I don't care because that is not the politics, you know. I remember back in 1973, I was there and in the morning, the statement was read, "why the government is not doing this?" In the afternoon, the government started doing it. And then late in the evening, the same guy, you know, making another statement that "we should not do it." So, since then, I never actually had any interest in the Pakistani politics other than whatever we hear on CNN of who is the president or who is the vice-president. Even Bush doesn't know who is the prime minister of Pakistan.

UQ: After you came here, did you have feelings of homesickness or were you comfortable here? Were you content here once your wife arrived?

MAS: Well, we always had something in the mind that we want to go back home. That was the . . . because all my family, her family - they were there. And back in the 1980s, the door got open. So, her brother came in back in 1971, I believe. Then, my brothers came in 1982, 1983.

UQ: Is that what changed your mind or did you change your mind prior to that?

MAS: Well, the condition in Pakistan, the way everything works is very difficult. Even the people who went back . . . I have a real good friend who's from the Shi'a community and he also came, I believe, in 1968. He went back and with his connection, he started some contracting business and he wrote me once . . . I think a friend brought his letter, that everything is great, you know, getting a lot of projects and why don't you come and join us? And we started debating again . . . I believe that was back in 1975, 1976, and we started debating again to see if we could go back.

UQ: Because of family?

MAS: Because of my family, right. And then, after a couple of weeks, you know, he sends another letter. "Hold it. Don't come. I'm coming back." And then, we had another friend, you know, he went back and he came after a year or two. And now, he is back again. He retired and so he went back. He is in Islamabad now. But most of the people who eventually went back couldn't make out. They had to come back [to the U.S]. It is very difficult to move, especially if you have lived in this country and you have done all your work without any connection. All of a sudden, you want to go back and then you

find out even if you had to step out from your home, you have still got to have a connection [contacts], otherwise, you can't do anything. And that is _____. I mean, if we had a job, probably we may have survived but it is difficult. It is really difficult. I have never taken any bribe. I have never given any bribe to anybody. After coming to this country, even when I had my work, I never had any problems with somebody telling me, you are this, you are *desi* or Indians or Pakistani. Most of the Americans in those days never knew what Pakistani was so we had to teach them gradually, you know, that there is something else. It would have been difficult to go back.

UQ: Did you find that at the workplace, there was a level of professionalism that your co-workers maintained with you?

MAS: Oh, yes. We never had any problem with anybody. The only thing that they had always complained . . . "Slow down. We don't need to finish the job." That became a joke. My first job was part-time work. My interest was to finish my work and I need to go back. The arrangement that I had, that whenever I had my exams, you know, the finals, I will take off, you know, 1 week, 2 weeks, 3 weeks, whatever I wanted. So, it was very flexible. So, I had to give them whatever they were paying me, you know. I am here for 8 hours, you know, let me just do 8 hours work and pay it back. But most of these guys, if they worked for 4 hours, they think they have

done enough. There was a guy working under me in those days and I see him a couple of times, you know, he is just scribbling with a pencil on a piece of paper. I said, "Look, why don't you use your imagination and just make these drawings, you know, and we will be done with the project." He said, “no, no, I’m relaxing.” Yet, it was really difficult for those guys, especially with a lot of people overseas. Enough jobs. The employers were begging people. They never told people, you know, that you had to stay late to finish the job. They will come and beg you. "Can you stay? We will appreciate it." And those were the things, you know, that were going on at that time. So, people were not concerned. They never cared. Plus, once you told them your background, things that you don't do, they really appreciate everything there. I told them, you know, that we don't drink. Period. They never asked me a second time to drink. They always gave me Cokes, soft drinks, whatever they had, but they would never even tell us . . .

There was a family working at TI in those days and all these guys who started working there . . . either she was a receptionist or she was working with them . . . she was older than us in those days. She started talking to them and they became friends and then we all started knowing them. And we still do. About six weeks ago, we went to Dallas and we went to see them. We had fun, you know, whenever we went to their home . . .

"You can eat this, you can eat this, you can eat this. Don't touch this. Don't touch this. Don't touch this." That kind of thing.

Even at work, my second project at work was a Jewish firm but most of the people were Christians working there. They wouldn't dare . . . they never asked me to drink or eat pork or whatever. And when I left that company back in the late 1980s, even in those days, you know, when we had any kind of meeting . . . most of the time, I became the project manager. There were 7 or 8 of us and we always had a meeting during lunch time to decide what we were going to be doing next week. Monday, we would bring a sandwich. They would always bring special to make sure that I am not getting [the wrong food] and they always had a little tag - this is Muhammad's sandwich. So, most of the people were very concerned, very cooperative.

UQ: So, it sounds like you had positive interactions.

MAS: Yes, though you always find somebody here or there, you know. Mostly, uneducated, they will make fun of you sometimes. But educated people, probably never had any problem.

UQ: While you were at school in those early days and your wife was here with your daughter, was she at home taking care of the . . .

MAS: Oh yes, she only worked for me when I started my business.

UQ: And so, your daughter was how old when you came here?

MAS: When I came here, she was only 18 months.

UQ: O.K., and then when she came?

MAS: 2-1/2, close to 3.

UQ: And then, she started school here? She went to public school?

MAS: She went to public school.

UQ: What were your thoughts on raising your children here?

MAS: In the earlier days, it was no problem but lately, for the last couple of years, my kids are not in school, but my grandkids are, and the school system is going downhill. There are a lot of drug problems. You never know what is going to happen next.

UQ: So, you really didn't have any concerns about . . .

MAS: Not in those days. When my kids were in high school, sometimes they did bring news here and there, when there was a problem. Nothing to worry about in those days but the last 10, 15 years, I think it has gone down, really bad.

UQ: Once you finished your master's degree, what did you end up doing? Where did you end up working? Where did you live?

MAS: Going back to the same company. I went back to the same company.

UQ: And you stayed with them for how many years?

MAS: Well, I finished my degree back in 1972. We went back home. We spent about 3 to 4 months. Came back. Went to A&M. Enrolled in the Ph.D. program. And then, something happened. They were supposed to give me some stipend which never materialized. They didn't have enough funds. This employer was willing to take me back, so I just came back to these guys. Back in 1973, now thinking back, I worked for the same company in the summer and a little bit earlier. And then, we had to go to Canada because my visa expired and I was not in school now after some of my roommates went back to school. So, we wound up living in Canada for about 15 months. Then, we got

the green card so we came back again to the same company. We came back in 1975, February of 1975. Then, I stayed with them until October of 1980. Then, the friend who used to work at the first company with us, he had a partnership with another guy and they were looking for somebody. So, I joined them and that partnership didn't last more than 6 months. So, I left them and started on my own. And I had that company for almost 20 years. And then, I gave it to my brother-in-law and I rested for 4 years. Three years ago, I started again. So now, I am only doing it part-time. I mostly go at 9 and I am home at 3 unless there is a lot work, you know, then you have to stay. Sometimes it will happen. But mostly, it is 9 to 3. And my wife doesn't have to go. She only goes once a week for an hour or two.

UQ: So, you were here and you mentioned there were maybe 4 or 5 Pakistani students when you came. When she came, were there women for her to interact with, Pakistani women?

MAS: There was nobody else. They all used to get together mostly at my home. We had another gentleman who is still here. He was married to a German girl. And so, either get together at my home or at his home. It so happened that we were just living across the street. He was on one side of the street and we were on the other side, so it was easy to just walk on down.

UQ: So, she had no Pakistani friends?

MAS: There were no Pakistani women at that time.

UQ: And so, did she have Indian friends?

MAS: There were a couple of Indians. When they started coming in, there were two girls that were enrolled in the PhD program. They used to visit us because they were also in the same complex. Then, she started going out to this host program at University of Houston, mostly on Wednesdays. There, she met a couple of people. But other than that, no. She was sitting home, and taking my daughter to Hermann Park which was close by. So, it was almost an every day walk.

UQ: So, when you started working full-time, where did you live? Which location in Houston? Which area?

MAS: We generally lived where we . . . when I started working full-time in 1969 . . . the government had sort of a training program. If you were on a student visa, they would let you stay for 18 months. When I started, at that time, we stayed in the same location for 1 year. And then, instead of

running through the full 18 months, I stopped and I went to A&M. And then, when we came back, we found a job at Greenway Plaza, so we got a place close by.

UQ: What were the cultural activities, Pakistani cultural activities with your very limited group of . . .

MAS: Not a whole lot. On most of our religious occasions, you just get together and then that is it. Sometimes you go out for a picnic with a lot of people in those days. In those days, I would say the majority of those guys were staying late. You get into the habit. When you have to study, you know, you have to spend a lot of time so a lot of us, we stayed until midnight. So those functions started late and ended late. So, in those days, picnics - that was the only thing that was done other than staying home and eating.

UQ: So, getting together at someone's house to eat dinner?

MAS: Well, not someone's dinner. We were at home or I would be at their home because there was no other home. You couldn't go out. In those days, there were no *desi* restaurants so you could not afford to go any place. The first time we started getting meat was back in 1973, 1974 when somebody

opened a shop at Kirby. He was attached to the masjid. So actually, they started out selling the meat from the garage of the ISGH property.

UQ: Were you part of the founding of ISGH, part of the initial . . .

MAS: Well, in a sense, yes and no. We started out . . . there was an Iranian family, Ibrahim Yazdi. He was working at M.D. Anderson. So, back in 1968, we started going out to his home every Sunday. And then, when the crowd started getting bigger, we moved to Rothko Chapel back, I believe in 1970 or 1971. And then, we brought a property on Richmond back on 1956 Richmond. So, we started going to that mosque. And then our apartment was also close by. And then from there, back in 1979, we moved to Eastside [mosque]. Buying a property in those days in the name of a religious organization, especially Muslim was next to impossible. We bought there. We made an offer a couple of times, you know, and it was just rejected. The properties were withdrawn from the market. So, the earlier properties then after learning the problems, you know, all those properties were bought each in the individual names. Then they got transferred. Nobody would sell it.

UQ: Why is that? Since they weren't as familiar with . . .

MAS: Were not familiar but I think the Jewish propaganda was there, the 1967 war. A lot of those guys when they know . . . mostly you can say it was ignorance because they thought this is a group coming from overseas and these guys were fighting. We don't know how they are going to live here. That was the reason. Because nobody wanted to have another group, alien group to them, coming into their midst and then creating a problem for them. So, the decision was made to just go ahead and buy it in somebody's name.

UQ: Were there Muslims of other cultures? Arabs?

MAS: Yes, there were more Arabs, you know, than us in those days but they mostly were nonpracticing. I will say even today, I think if you are going to use any kind of percentile, Indian and Pakistanis are mostly going to the mosques and not the Arabs.

UQ: Why do you think that is?

MAS: I have no idea. One time when my first *Eid* here in Houston, I wound up signing up the MSA at University of Houston because Mazhar was responsible when he was leaving and said, "Well, I am leaving. There is nobody else but we still need to keep the organization active on campus, at least the name will be there." So, I signed up. It became my

responsibility to let the people know when the *Eid* was. I only knew one Arab at that time and I called him for *Eid*. He said, "I didn't fast so why should I celebrate?" That kind of attitude. So, we prayed with only two guys. We were in the chapel over there.

UQ: Two?

MAS: Two in those days. And then, gradually when we started going out to Yazdi's home, I think that we got in contact with more Arabs. And then, we found out one by one that the Pakistanis became the majority and then his home started getting smaller and we went to Rothko Chapel and then from Rothko Chapel to Richmond to Eastside. At East Side, I became one of the board members. Before that, I was just in the community and then we started devising how we were going to set up the system because a lot of people started buying homes in the north and south zones [of Houston], the Alief area, and it was difficult for them to come to the Eastside. So, in those days, the zoning system wasn't devised at that time and we didn't have *masajid* [mosques] in the zones, so everybody does not have to crowd. Parking was the big problem plus the space was small also. Now, nobody goes to the Eastside. Everybody goes to the zones.

UQ: So now, Yazdi, he was a physician?

MAS: He was doing cancer research. He was a physician.

UQ: Medical researcher?

MAS: Right. And he was associated with Khomeini and he was his right-hand man in the States. So, he was doing a lot of paper work which, in those days, we didn't know. But when the [Iranian] Revolution came, he just packed up and he left. One time, I think he was the foreign minister. Then, there was a threat on his life because he probably met somebody here and there which he was not supposed to. So, there was a threat on his life. And then, he was kicked out [of the U.S.]. He is still there [in Iran]. He is still there.

UQ: In Iran?

MAS: In Iran. His children are still here. One is a physician. The other two guys are still here. I haven't seen them for a long time. But they are still in the States. The daughter is here in Houston living in the same home where her father used to live. But he comes for medical treatment. Most of the time we find out that he is in town, we go and visit him.

UQ: You still maintain that contact with him?

MAS: If we find out that he is here.

UQ: And he receives you cordially?

MAS: Oh yes, there is no problem. He was willing to give us all the ins and outs of what they did, you know, to influence the various governments that we don't want to know. That is the problem. Our biggest problem is, you know, that he's Shia and we're Sunni so we don't want to listen to that. That became very open. So, he gave up. He said, "people don't want to listen, that's fine." What can you do?

UQ: Now, your life was centered around the campus and interaction was centered around the campus. Were you aware of any Pakistani families specifically outside the campus in Houston who had no connection to the campus, maybe running businesses or anything like in those in those early years?

MAS: We actually don't even have connection nowadays these days. Most of the families that we know are the ones who came to the masjid. We still maintain with them. Once a month, we still have a group that we meet at somebody's home but our relationship is mostly with those people, the ones

who came back in the seventies. There was an influx of so many people; we probably have 10 or 15 families that we know very well. The more you meet, the more problem you have.

UQ: So, you try to keep it limited?

MAS: If we meet at the *masjid* [mosque] or any other functions, there is no problem. But the good relationship and the family relationships, going out and inviting them is very limited because their interests and our interests sometimes they clash. We see a lot of people coming to the *masjid* and also going to the bar. We cannot have two faces; just stick to one. A lot of those things we have. Different people have different ideals, you know, so we just keep with the like-minded people, to put it this way, and they're very limited.

UQ: What actions did you take to pass on the Pakistani culture to your children?

MAS: We tried but this is very difficult. Our kids were taught Urdu at home. We took them to the masjid. Most of the clothing, you know, we got from overseas. My wife used to sew at home for my daughter, you know, when it was not available but when we started going out to Pakistan or somebody started coming in from there, a lot of things got imported. But now, peer

pressure - they want to be in jeans. What can you do? Especially when they start working and the money starts coming in their pocket, you probably don't have much control. They decided what they are going to do.

Food wise, they all eat the same food we are still eating. I mean, you went in their homes and they did most of the *desi* food.

UQ: Your children all are married?

MAS: Yes, they are all married.

UQ: Did you feel that while they were growing up, they were comfortable with their American friends since there weren't very many Pakistani children for them to be around?

MAS: In their schools and in the neighborhoods, you know . . . well, mostly in the neighborhoods because at school, they never brought those guys. But schools in this country, they are so close to your neighborhoods. So, you become friends in the classrooms and they become your friends if they are in your neighborhood. They never had any problem. They used to come to our home or my kids used to go to their home. They were told what they can eat and what they cannot eat . . .

(MAS: Today is Father's Day, right?)

(UQ: It is.)

(MAS: We need to go for lunch.)

UQ: O.K. We were talking about your children and how they interacted with their friends. You said they were comfortable?

MAS: They were comfortable for elementary school. I am not talking about my daughter but my two sons. My oldest one was born in 1973 so we moved back to the Spring Branch area in 1977. We had a couple of Gujrati families living close to us. And so, they became friends in the elementary school. Both the boys. They went through middle school, high school and college all together for 10, 12 years - they are still friends. My daughter is the only one, she never had . . . she only had American friends, a couple of those. But now, they are also . . . then, she became friends at the masjid. But now, because of the job here and there, probably they don't have much communication.

UQ: What role, if any, did Pakistani music and those kinds of things play in your household and in your children's' lives?

MAS: The children don't care these days.

UQ: No interest?

MAS: No interest. My grandchild, she likes to listen. She doesn't understand what it is but she still wants to listen. Other than that, my boys, they mostly like American music. So, they listen to that music. Movie-wise, we probably don't go to any *desi* movie. We have not gone to the movies. My children probably have not gone for the last 25 years. I have not gone to any theater to watch an Indian movie since 1975.

UQ: PAGH started as a cultural move on campus at U of H. Did you have any interest, your family have any interest in their activities?

MAS: Initially, you know, when we were at the campus, it was PSA - Pakistani Students Association. Then, when all these immigrants, not the students, the immigrants, they started moving back to Houston in the middle of 1975, 1976, there was a big influx from the north.

UQ: From the north of Pakistan?

MAS: No, north of America. There was a recession there. There was a lot of work in Houston. People started coming. Once those guys got in here, the PSA shortly became PAGH because the majority of the people were not students. They were working people. We had a lot of interest in those but then, we started looking at the fights and we said, enough is enough. Let's just stay where we are. And so, the last time I was a member, I think it is about 20 years ago. And, at that time, we went because one of our friends who was running for election, he is the one who forced us to become members so that he can get the vote. We went there and there was a fight. We said, why in the hell did we come here? We knew it was going to happen and we just waited and we stayed there . . . since then, we have never gone back. I was invited to run their election back in 1985, 1986 because I ran the election for ISGH, you know. And then when they found out how the election was run, they offered me . . . I said, "No, not with that crowd. I am going there to fight with them."

UQ Now, you mentioned that there was a kind of migration from the northern cities to the southern cities. Which cities specifically . . .

MAS: Most of the people came from Chicago. The majority, I would say, were from Chicago.

UQ: And why do you think that happened?

MAS: There were a lot of jobs here. There was no work in Chicago. There was a big recession back in the 1970s and because of the oil here and the prices going up in the Middle East, you know, that created a lot of jobs. And that is how I came back in 1975 - because of the job.

UQ: You came back from?

MAS: I came back from Toronto, from Canada. But a lot of people came when we came back from there . . . we were only gone for 15 months. . . when we came back, what in the hell has happened?

UQ: So, that was a turning point?

MAS: That was the turning point. A lot of people were here. And then we found out, you know, that we were outnumbered because for every person that I knew, now we have 25 others, you know, that we have no clue from where they came. Then we started establishing all these mosques and different zones.

UQ: How has your view of the United States and of Americas changed since your arrival back in 1956?

MAS: Well, every country is changing. The politics is the main factor. We still don't have any problems for the Muslims but it could happen. Just like in Europe. Because if the jobs are gone from the Americans, we are lucky that most of the people who came were the educated people who were needed. There are a lot of people working in very high places. We met one gentleman in the 1960s who was working for NASA, had a lot of awards from the federal government for his research, that a lot of Indians in almost every university doing a lot of research work. So, as long as the educated people are here . . . but then, along with those educated people, you know, when they can get their brothers and their sisters sponsored, a lot of those . . . as long as we are within reason, I don't think that there should be any problem. But if we start getting hotheaded and we start talking nonsense, just like some people do.

Just like yesterday, we were watching CNN. This was the second time they were showing the same program. A lot of people in England, you know, were talking against the government. You can't make the country your home and talk against it. Within reason, it is O.K. to talk against their policy but

you don't bring your religion in it and we will be O.K. But the other problem is we are still not tuned to get into the politics. We just stay among ourselves. We don't go out to vote. That is the only way we have in this country . . . that we need to tell all the politicians that they need us as much as we need them.

UQ: Do you see that that is changing?

MAS: It is changing gradually. I have made it a point that whenever my kids became to the age that they can vote, I made sure that they were registered and I used to take them to vote, even though sometimes, we went to vote, not knowing exactly what the issue is, who we are going to vote, we said, "Go and sign the register. They will recognize that we have voted. You can go into the booth and come back if you don't want to vote but go and sign." And we still do the same thing. We go to the school district for their election, we go to the county election, we go to the city.

UQ: Your wife does as well?

MAS: We both go to them. We always still tell the kids, "Go and vote." And they are registered.

UQ: And do you see that your children are politically aware?

MAS: Oh, yes. They are more aware than us. Sometimes they are going in the wrong direction because they are influenced by the surroundings, so we get into arguments at times.

UQ: But some argument is better than no interest at all?

MAS: Yes. At least they know, you know, where everything is going.

UQ: O.K. Just a few more questions. How, if at all, do you think that race or immigrant status affected your life here in the United States?

MAS: I never noticed it. All the people that I know, I mean, the ones who were here from the 1960s, not the ones who are here now, all the friends that I have from the 1960s, none of them noticed anything. They were not bothered. The kids probably in the school, they will joke, they will curse, they will fight - that is different, - but work-wise, we never had any problem. Nobody told us, we came from overseas, we couldn't get jobs, blah, blah. So far, nothing has happened. I did my business, you know, with the city, with a lot of other architects, with the contractors. The only thing they knew . . .

if they are talking behind my back, that is different - but at my face, nobody has said that I am so and so and so. All they were concerned is the way it got done. Is it done right? And we had a lot of good relations also with the people working for the city because some of them complimented me, even to the contractor, "If Muhammad says this is wrong, then it is wrong. Fix it." And that kind of attitude. They never quarreled among themselves sometimes to try to pull me down somehow. They always appreciated me. "If Muhammad has done it, you know it's right" . . . those were the compliments.

UQ: So, you gained their respect?

MAS: "If he has done it and if he is making this statement, then he is right." Sometimes, you know, you do have contractors who will make up their stories. There was one story that I can never forget. We did a project for University of Houston in Clear Lake, an old building that started out as some kind of disco place from way back. University of Houston bought that property and I wound up going and remodeling. And then, in one of the meetings, there were 15 people from the contractors and the University of Houston people. I went there to see what's going on. One of the contractors made a statement that, "I have gone to Muhammad and he has agreed to do certain things this way." And I am sitting here across. He has never seen my face, you know, or been to my office. And in charge at that time was a

black gentleman from University of Houston. He looks at me and I look at him. I said, "When did you come to my office?" Now, he realized that he goofed. "Oh, maybe that was another project." Well, there are not that many people working for this project. He made it up, you know. This guy says, "Muhammad would never agree to this. Period." We had a relationship that everything had to follow the procedure and we always stuck to it. If there were going to be any changes, it was going to be recommended, it was going to be passed down to the owner, the owner has to agree, the owner has to issue the change order to the contractor. But this contractor was saying that there was an agreement directly between us. I had never done that. In our business, we cannot agree to make any change over the telephone. It has to be documented. Even if I was going to agree to something, I will document it. A copy goes to the contractor. A copy goes to the owner that these are the changes that we agreed . . . here was a contractor telling everybody that he visited me and he had an agreement and blah, blah, blah. So now, he has made the change which was wrong. It was to his advantage, you know, and I was going to reject it. It got rejected anyway. But he was telling the owner, you know, that I had agreed.

So, we never had any problem. Most of the time, we had a good relationship. There were contractors who a lot of times were threatening me. "We will see you in court," "we will do this and that" . . . and these guys . . . contractors

do talk. Anything which is going to hurt, they will say something. Even now . . . on Friday, I went to . . . my daughter is setting up a shop in Sugar Land and I went to just see what the contractor was doing. Everything that he had done was wrong. And this is the third week I have gone there. This is wrong. Follow the drawings. But he doesn't want to do that because it is going to be expensive. He is just trying to save money. So, I told him, "The next time when I come, I am going to start charging. Right now, I am doing it for free. But next time, somebody is going to pay me. If you are making mistakes and you keep on calling me, follow the drawings. Otherwise, don't call me again."

UQ: You are saying that as long as you maintain an honorable protocol, that you earned their respect and it remains that way?

MAS: I have been called on some other projects that I have not done. A different opinion on whether this thing is done right or not. But that takes a lot of time. People need to get to know you for a long time before they understand that if you make any kind of judgment, it is going to drag on. Even sometimes, you know, some other people will call me even though I've never worked with them because they found out, they talked to some other people [who said] "You need to call this guy. Maybe he will tell you." And that is the only reason we said, "wow, we got the job." We never . . . in this town and most

likely in this country, bribes are uncommon but they are still going on. There are a lot of things that go under the table. And those people who support the politicians, they are the ones who are going to get the jobs. If you need to get a government funded or local state funded projects, unless you support them, you are not going to get it. I was told one time that for some school district, if you need to do their projects, you have to support them, the politicians, for 5 years before your name even gets on the list. I don't have that 5 years, you know, to support them. I never supported. The only time that we supported was when Lanier was running for election and that was not me. It was the architect that I was working with. He committed, you know, that he will support them. So then we all pitched the money. And that was sort of a form of bribery also. If you need to get the job . . . I even told one of the city guys sitting at my table one day, "What is the difference between this and what people overseas do?" Even here [laughs]. "You are only here because you need the work. That is why you are invited." So, we used to get the note, you know, not from the city but the committees and all that. They will send you a note. We need a $1,000 plate. Come for breakfast. Well, a lot of people go. A lot of people go. Directly I have never been involved myself.

UQ: You are not interested. You had mentioned your children, it seems that they feel American - they have embraced that identity. When they were

growing up, their friends . . . well, now when they were growing up but now, their friends that they have are mostly America or Pakistani or both?

MAS: Most of their friends are still the old friends from elementary and all those schools. But at work, I am sure they are making more friends.

UQ: So, still, they interact mostly with white Americans?

MAS: Yes. If they have any kind of family relationship, that is mostly with the people that they have grown up with. And maybe here and there, there may be some but as far as I know, when I go to their homes, the people that I see mostly are *desi*. That doesn't mean that they don't have American friends sometimes. If the American friends are coming to their home, we are not going there. We know there is no place for us, you know, They'll be talking a lot of garbage and you know….

UQ: Cultural differences?

MAS: Yes. Even if they will invite us, we will not even go. But yes, they will have some friends there and there.

UQ: Would you recommend that other family members or friends migrate to the United States now?

MAS: That is a really difficult question. It is very difficult. You need to look at the broader perspective. Whatever is happening back home, the cable, the internet, has made this whole worry very small. Whatever garbage we see here, we can see more back home. I was surprised . . . I started taking off from 1982 to 1993, 1994, I was never going back home because I was so busy with work. But then, I made a point during Christmas time and New Year, no matter what, I am going to take the 10, 12 days, and I am just going to fly. So, I went there in 1997, 1998, 2001, 2002. Whatever I see on the cable over there we have not seen here. Everything that you can think of is available at the flip of a switch with that kind of background over there plus the problems that we already have - the bribes, overcrowding, a lot of other problems - I tend to say they should migrate to better living conditions but then when you look around here, whatever is happening to the kids, that is scary, too. So, it is very difficult to go one way or the other because I am still told, you know, that our relations - the kids who are growing up now, they are still in good shape and they don't watch those programs. You don't know. Grownups are not sitting there all the time because, you know what, they are watching. A couple of movies that the kids were watching that the parents never knew . . . probably when my kids were growing up, I

will not watch it. But it is accessible. And if you look . . . even though they say, well, it is only a *desi* program, the Indian program, you can watch. Even now, we only had one channel because when my mother came here, and she does not speak English so we got ARY for her so she can see . . . some of the programs are good but a lot of times, in between, there are some American movies also, there are some *desi* programs. They are not properly dressed. And we just cut it off. She cuts it off. No need to watch. But with those problems here, you can make a decent living. There is no problem. You can go to school. No problem. There is nothing wrong. But when you see all these things . . . but then, on the other side, when you go there and see, well, what are we selling? America is still showing it there so what is the difference?

We had a program last Saturday at somebody's home and one of the ladies teaching it, Harris County Community College system, and she is running a program where she is checking the kids mostly in the school districts, you know, why they are dropping out and a lot of those things are going on. Things that we have never heard before. There are a lot of drug problems.

UQ: Is she a Pakistani woman?

MAS: Yes, she is Pakistani. She is trying to get some help, financial help and also time wise, that the people should go and teach these kids, you know, tutor them, whatever, but still she does not have enough help. But when you look at that and most of the kids, you know, are dropping out from the schools, belong to those people who are not home, the parents are working some place and most of the parents are doing the minimum [wage] work so they probably are not that educated, they don't go to the school to check what is happening to their kids. They send them, saying, "this is America so they will get educated." But a lot of those kids are dropping out of school. A lot of them are involved in drugs.

Twenty years ago, we knew that in the southwest, there were a lot of burglaries done by *desis* in the *desi* homes. A lot of kids were in drugs, alcohol. A couple of other people, personal, were involved. This lady is here and she is doing good. I think she is setting up something which can help the community. But still, the problem is not going to go away. There are too many people. There are too many people and she cannot manage. So, the answer to your first question was, it is difficult for anybody. It is very difficult. The people who are over there, if you tell them not to come, they will say, well, this idiot, he is already there, he is enjoying his life, his kids are making a decent living, blah, blah, and he wants us to suffer here. A lot of people who are still there and they have made it, they are living in a lot better conditions than we are here in this

country.

UQ: Do you think that over the years, that interest in migrating to America has increased, decreased?

MAS: I think it is slowing down. From 911, probably it is slowing down. We don't have that many people who want to migrate. Before, it was just "well, let's just go to America."

UQ: Could that be because it is not too easy to migrate here either anymore?

MAS: Yes, it could be both. Number one, there are a lot of people who have left after 911, either this could be that they were not legal and they thought if they got caught, they would be in jail and it could create a lot of problem. Before, if they were getting caught, they were taken to the Immigration Jail, they were locked up, there was a hearing and they get deported. These days, it doesn't happen. These days, if they lock you up, they are going to lock you for a longer period. So, that could be one fear - there are a lot of people who were illegal, they have gone back and when they go back and tell their stories, it could be difficult. A lot of people I will say who before were planning to come here anyway, either as students

or as an immigrant or coming here illegally. There were a lot of people who came on a visiting visa and never went back. I think those guys probably are not going to come anymore because now they know it is not going to be safe.

UQ: O.K. One final question before we wrap it up. We are going to back up, way back to the earlier times of when you first arrived here and your wife came here. What were your expectations for her and how did those expectations differ from the expectations for your daughter?

MAS: I am not following you.

UQ: Your expectations for your wife when she came here, how did those expectations for what you expected her to work or not work and those kinds of things compare to what you expected from your daughter?

MAS: Well, when my wife came, we all had the intention to go back so for her to work anyplace was already ruled out. Even when we got the green card, still she never worked for 10 years. We came back in 1974. Until 1982, she never worked.

UQ: And she had no interest in working . . .

MAS: The only place she has worked is my office because when I started on my office, you know, then my daughter used to come to do some typing and then she came to do some typing. That was the only work that she did. Type my specifications, type the invoices, letters and anything. That was the only time that she came.

UQ: And was she fluent in English?

MAS: Well, she is better than me. Put it this way! She can type. She has learned the hard way. She was put in a situation where we didn't have any choice. When she typed my thesis, that was the first experience. We bought a typewriter which weighed a ton and she typed it. We filed it and it got approved, so she did good. And then from that time until 1982, she didn't do anything. Then, she started typing my work at the office.

UQ: And your daughter, what profession did she choose or is she a housewife as well?

MAS: No, she is a doctor.

UQ: She is a physician? Is that something that you preferred for her, to pursue a career?

MAS: This is what she wanted to do. We never told our kids which profession they needed to go. We only told them, "You've got to have a degree. If you have a degree, that will be great." And that is what they did. They could have gone in the medical profession, they could have gone in the legal profession. That would have made it easier for them. Both of those [sons], they went into engineering and that is it, praise be to God. The oldest one is a manager at KPMG. He is not the only manager. These guys have 40,000 employees. So, I am sure that they have at least 1,000 managers also. So, he is one of the managers. And the youngest one, he was supposed to come and work with us and take over my business but then he decided not to. He got a job with the company that I used to work. I called them and they said, "Well, what Muhammad did, if his son will do the same thing, that will be great." So, he worked there for 2 years and then he decided that was not the profession that he wanted to stay so he left. He is working someplace else.

UQ: O.K. So, you had the same expectations for your daughter as for your son as far as education?

MAS: We told them education-wise, you know, she was choosing her own. We didn't force them, you had to go this way or that way, more money, this and that. A lot of people have done that. We said, "Well, you choose whatever you feel comfortable."

UQ: O.K. Do you have any photographs or documents? Did you keep a diary or any letters, anything like that from those days, I would say, from 1966 to 1970 or 1975 even?

MAS: From the 1960s to the 1970s, I would say they all went back home because when we moved, we just stuck everything … that was probably destroyed. We are not into writing. Everything is up in here. If somebody wants to ask a question - what happened on certain days, we can still remember.

UQ: All right. Well, thank you very much.