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EAST-WEST CENTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Tauseef Ahmed Interview Narrative

3-30-2006 interview in Islamabad, Pakistan

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The **East-West Center Oral History Project** strives to capture the Center's first 50 years as seen through the eyes of staff, alumni, and supporters who have contributed to its growth.

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Tauseef Ahmed

3-30-2006 interview in Islamabad, Pakistan

Personal Background

My name is Tauseef Ahmed. I was born in city called Rawalpindi in 1953. I was born in a lower middle class, urban-educated family. My first 10 years of education were from one school, started in 1958 -- all the way to 1968. The school I attended was called Cantonment Public Secondary School, in Rawalpindi. It was an English medium school. For my higher school I moved on to a college called Gordon College in Rawalpindi. It was one of the premier colleges of that time, and I studied science subjects in my grades 11 and 12. I took economics and statistics as subjects during my bachelor's degree. I did my master's in economics from Islamabad University which is now known as Quaid-i-Azam University. I completed my master's education in 1974-75 and joined public sector institute called Pakistan Manpower Institute, as Research Associate in 1976. My father had migrated from India in 1947, right when Pakistan came into being and my mother lived in Rawalpindi city. They got married in 1948. We were four brothers and a sister. I have lost two of my brothers. My father's family went through migration twice. My father's grandfather or their grandparents moved from Kabul to India in late 19th century, I think around 1880s, and they settled in a city called Ludhiana in India. And, my grandfather along with his family moved to Rawalpindi when Pakistan came into being. My parents got married in the city where I was born, Rawalpindi. They had an arranged marriage – both families did know each other prior to this marriage. Well, back in 1950s and 1960s having five to six children was normal and considered as a small

family. We were five children, but relative to today's standards, we were surely a large family.

My father was not getting a handsome salary, but my parents tried their best to get us quality education. We were all sent to English medium schools even though it was difficult for him at that time. He had put all children -- all five of us -- in the same school, and it was quality schooling. We were not only taught English language, but also had this liberal subjects like math, science subjects, social studies, geography, along with the languages including Urdu and Arabic. It was a great sacrifice that he had made for our education.

The Rawalpindi city at that time was very small city. It was, I think, a few hundred thousand people in the whole city. But it was only in '70s and '80s when the population boom took place in the city. Today, there are millions of people in Rawalpindi and with capital moving to Islamabad, twin cities emerged with distinct characteristics. On the whole, we were brought up in town with all urban characteristics, I don't have any connection with any rural community, and as such have no rural touch. Both of my parents were urbanite and so are we. I don't have -- what you say -- an understanding of the rural life.

But my children now ask me, "Where do we belong? Which is our rural area?" They ask these questions as they have several friends coming from rural background and they refer to their rural areas.

Now I realize that there are millions of people and families who never had a connection to rural areas. They too are fully urbanite and understand urban lifestyle.

Life Before EWC

Well, soon after I graduated my master's degree in economics, I worked in a government semi-autonomous body called Pakistan Manpower Institute. I stayed there for about five years, and met one of my senior colleagues. His name is Dr. Makhdoom Ali Shah. He had just returned from Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore. He was a technical advisor to the institute. And his wife, Dr. Nasra Shah, who was at that time working in Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, in the demography section. We worked together for about three years.

At that time, they were young, and they were fresh back from the United States. They had high motivation for others especially youngsters to do higher education. They advised me to go for higher education, but unfortunately I didn't have any resources to go out for higher studies – as I came from lower middle class family. So I – basically looked for alternate opportunity. When Dr. Nasra Shah and Dr. Makhdoom Ali Shah told me that they're moving to Hawai'i, I think they hinted for a possibility of working together again. I forgot about it soon thereafter. But within six months of their leaving Pakistan, I received a letter from Dr. Nasra Shah informing me of her project on Pakistani women, and that she needed an intern to help her in data analysis, data crunching, and so forth. And since she knew me for our work at the Manpower Institute where she had liked the way I worked dedicatedly on a number of papers/documents, I considered fortunate to be asked to join the project.

I did not have any second thought and excitedly informed them "I'll join you." It was sort of a dream come true for me. In late '70s, there were lots of people who wanted to go abroad, specially to UK. I too wanted to go for high studies, but was constrained because of funds. I remember I did not have any problem in getting my J1 visa.

Life at EWC

Population Institute, '80s

My first flight from Islamabad via Karachi and Tokyo reached Honolulu on April 26, 1980 around 8 in the morning. It was a very long flight, took almost 24 hours but reached Honolulu the same date on which left Pakistan. This is how I got to the East-West Center, specially the Population Institute.

I worked as an intern with Dr. Nasra Shah on Pakistani women's project. My initial visa J1 was for one year. Lucky the project got extended for three months to complete some remaining task. In the meantime, a second project was launched at the Center by two other colleagues -- Peter *[Smith]* Xenos, and one of his Pakistani friends, who was finishing his Ph.D. at Cornell University -- and now my friend, too, Dr. Mehtab Karim. They had done a survey in Pakistan and three other Asian countries and was known as Asian Marriage Survey. They wanted somebody -- an intern -- to help them out in the analysis.

So I applied with them and ended up moving from finishing one project to another. I was lucky -- really very lucky that, even though there was no precedence before that, where INS *[Immigration & Naturalization Service]* had allowed moving from project to another one using J1 visa. I was scared that day and was not sure if I will get my visa extended. I think that was my lucky day, that I went to INS in downtown Honolulu, and this gentleman looked at my paper and said, "No problem."

He gave me an extension of my visa, and there I go. I moved on to my second project, working with Peter *[Smith]* Xenos and Mehtab Karim for another year and a half. During this period, Drs. Makhdoom and Nasra, and Mehtab and Peter and other colleagues told me that it would be unfortunate if I go back to Pakistan (after completion of the project)

without doing higher studies. I remember getting advice from Linda Martin in selection of courses and how to proceed with seeking financial assistance. So I took admissions in evening courses at University of Hawai'i.

I took courses in agricultural economics, then later applied at the main economics department. But unfortunately, at that time, I did not get any assistance, what is called "student assistantship" from economics department or agriculture economics department. I extended my search and tried in another department. I got assurance from sociology department that if I produce good results in my first semester, there would be something available for me to stay on. This is how I joined UH, three years after reaching Honolulu, that was in 1983.

Right, this is without any East-West Center fellowship. I moved on to UH as a student assistant in Fall 1983 and stayed there for my master's and moved on to my Ph.D. program in Fall 1985. With the Grace of Almighty Allah, I completed my Ph.D. in sociology in 1989. During my master's and my Ph.D., I had exhausted my four years of teaching assistant period -- the maximum the UH could support any student. It was really good experience being a teaching assistant to several professors and also teaching computer courses in data analysis.

I had more lucky days in Hawai'i. Minja Choe, who was and who is still my mentor along with Peter and Jay Palmore, came forward to bail me out to enable me carry on my studies. She was looking for some research assistant and she asked me about it. I said, "Well, lucky day for me!"

So I joined her. Minja is a very, very kind lady, and a thorough professional. She not only helped me in my analysis of my dissertation, but also she gave me internship in my last two years of my Ph.D.

I was in the East-West Center throughout my stay in Hawai'i, participating and also organizing several functions like International days, commemorating national days, etc. I was back in the East-West Center in 1987. I was part of the UH doing my Ph.D. dissertation, and I was part of the East-West Center doing my research assistantship. Peter [Smith] Xenos was my thesis chairman. This is how I completed my studies, even though in '87, '86, '85, I thought there's no end -- there's no light at the end of the tunnel, it looked like unending thesis-writing process and analysis of my data. But, luckily that day came in June 1989, when my committee agreed that, I can go and defend myself. And *Alhamdulillah Alhamdulillah [Praise be to God]*, with the help of Allah I was lucky that my dissertation was accepted in one go, with small, and few modifications and resubmitted within few weeks. It was in July that I cleared my dissertation. In August, I had my graduation ceremony, August 1989 -- from the UH with my Ph.D. That was definitely a big day for me and my family.

Family Life, '80s

I came to Hawaii for one year, and in 1989 I completed my Ph.D. It was a tough period for all of us. All family members faced the tough period, my wife and my children were with me throughout my studies. When I went there in 1980, uh 1980, I had only one son. My two children were born there, and I think the credit of my Ph.D. goes to my wife. She was not only rearing our children, but also, she was making livelihood for our family. She worked part-time, initially in a store in Waikiki. And later on, when we had our second child in 1983, she started her babysitting business at our home. She had to get clearance from the State Department for that purpose. She had always three to four kids. And, this babysitting paid off well, not only for the bills and also for contribution towards savings that we had when we returned.

Two of my children are American by birth. My daughter Ayesha, who is 23 now, and my younger son Irfan, who is about 17 or 18. Both of them are American citizens, and look forward to go back to their birthplace some day. I should acknowledge here, that during my stay in Hawai'i, in 10 years, I got a substantial help from State Department in terms of rental for my housing.

I remember there was rental assistance under which even the foreign students could get some subsistence. Some friends who were availing this opportunity told me about the rental subsidy, and again luckily the State Department accepted my application. The assistance varied between 50 to 75 percent of our rental. It was a big help for me to carry on my studies -- and also my endeavor, and efforts to complete my Ph.D.

Hale Manoa, Early '80s

Well, this was my first experience when I landed in Hawai'i in April 1980 -- my first experience to be out of Pakistan. On the first day I ended up in Hale Manoa [*dorm*]. I think it was April 26 that I entered Hale Manoa, early in the morning, and I was given a room there. I think it was the 9th floor, I don't remember exactly. But it's a small room for one person only.

I had no idea how to cook food -- and I asked around. I asked Dr. Nasra Shah how can they help me in this regard. I got utensils and cooking ingredients from them, and her husband gave me some lessons how to cook -- how he managed to cook food when he was student back in Johns Hopkins. So based on these lessons from them, I started cook food for myself. I was not happy with what I made but ate what I prepared and tried different recipes and I started to like my cooking.

And, that's how I started to live my life -- my second bachelor life. Hale Manoa was the place where I interacted with a number of students from different countries like from the

Philippines, from Indonesia, from Malaysia -- Chinese, Thai and others. They were mostly students while I was not a student. And there were hardly any interns, like myself.

Living in Hale Manoa with them was wonderful, and it gave me tremendous experience of how to talk to them, mix with them, exchange views and ideas. Making new friendships with a variety of persons from different countries was the first main aspect of living at Hale Manoa at East-West Center.

I think it was a unique experience for me, both working at the East-West Center as an intern, and meeting a number of professionals at the Population Institute. Working at East-West Center Population Institute, gave me a whole new horizon of not only listening to good research being done there by very senior, professional experts from Korea and the United States, and India, Malaysia and Indonesia and also meeting people, friends both in the Center who were also interns. I cherished to be like them and make presentation like them.

That experience as a whole was so great, not only in terms of sharing food in the kitchen, but also listening to a variety of languages and their way of life, and so forth. It was my first exposure to American way of life. Going from Pakistan, highly conservative society, I had some reservations regarding its way of life but I was ready to experience it on limited scale. I carefully observed the good and the bad of lifestyle, appreciated the values that made the American society strong and pointed out the matters that I see undermining the way of life. The openness and smiles as an American way of life and value I considered as a major element that I did not see in my own society. I took it as a challenge to adopt these in my lifestyle, as a complement to my own values.

Interfaith Dialogue

I maintained my Islamic cultural values in my life. I think my constant observation of American lifestyle also helped me undergo a change in my perspective of life. It built my character and values of “tolerance” by seeing people behaving differently.

It was later in 1980s, around '87, '88 and '89, when I interacted quite actively with local churches, with local Jewish community, and local Buddhist community, not only to tell them about what Islam stood for and its values but also listened to them, and how do they see their life as art of creation.

Let me take a small divergence here -- this was the period when the American Embassy *[in Tehran, Iran]* was taken over by Iranian students after their revolution, and later Salman Rushdie’s issue of his publication of anti-Islam publication, that we saw Americans asking questions about Islam and their desire for inter-religion dialogue.

They wanted to know more about Islamic culture, Islamic values and Islamic practices. And it was in '87, '88 and '89, that both the UH Department of Religion and Chaminade University approached the Islamic Center, where I was first the secretary general and later its president, and asked us to talk to their audience about Islam and various aspects. I think that was my unique experience of inter-religious dialogue – that Hawaii and East-West Center’s environment provided me the opportunities that I listen to them, understand them, and become more what I can call "more tolerant and build my inner self-pluralism."

My tolerance was to understand what other cultures and their religions teach how to live. I don't have to react to their belief system in order to see it. Let me add a footnote here. Since my children were being raised there, they used to go to local schools, and they were in their kindergarten, followed by their classes one through five. My children used to go

to attend all the ceremonies and functions they had in their schools. For example, Christmas, Thanksgiving, Halloween and others. We did not resist their taking part in it, and we wanted they should know the good part of the American way of life. What we resisted was use of alcohol, or boyfriend girlfriend values and norms.

But I taught my children and other Muslim youngsters, "what do we stand for and what is Islam about?" And whenever we had our religious ceremonies, our religious days, they were fully involved.

So I think, my children too, in one sense have a pluralistic approach to life. They do understand the American way of life and they fully hopefully understand the Islamic values and way of life and Pakistani culture. This is how I see my family, not only myself, was raised in that culture.

And they understand the differences and, hopefully, they evolve their own thought process, too. It's ingrained in their lifestyle.

They were born and raised there. The challenge for them is to go back to Hawaii. I do promise that they can go back someday. I don't have enough resources – to be frank -- my finances don't allow me to send them back to Hawaii.

My daughter applied at UH, and she applied for a fellowship for a master's degree to the East-West Center, but her application got turned down because East-West Center does not give fellowship in finance and accounts degree. There was some difference in the application process. She did not fulfill the requirements. But she still wants to go back -- let us see, when -- and do some studies, but hopefully when she gets a chance, she will go back to her birthplace.

My younger son wants to go back, too, and see how he can go, even though he is currently studying in Lahore.

EWC's Impact

On Career, Perspectives

East-West Center and my living in the UH on-campus and off-campus, I think gave me a very wide variety of opportunities of learning and building my character, my understanding of life, both professionally and at individual level.

Professionally, I interacted both through the *[EWC Population Institute]* Summer Seminars and also through interaction with the professionals at the East-West Center and at the UH. I established good links with number of professionals across the UH. When I came back, I used my capacities both learned as a professional in demography and sociology and methodological issues, and maintained my links as a person, and to my *[colleagues and friends]* in Hawai'i.

When I came back to Pakistan in 1990, I joined an institute called National Institute of Population Studies in Islamabad. It was my luck that when I was still in the States (in Hawai'i), the director-general was visiting East-West Center and he offered me the job at the institute. My better half and myself thought about the offer and concluded that the offer was timely and should have no hesitation saying "yes" to him. I was looking at a decent opportunity that would lead to my return to Pakistan.

It was again -- I think I had more lucky days. I came to the National Institute of Population Studies as a senior fellow when I returned to Pakistan. It looks like another lucky day that a huge project was being undertaken by the National Institute of Population Studies, called "Pakistan Demographic Health Survey" in 1990 with USAID's funding and with technical assistance of Macro Inc. Another East-West Center colleague, Fred Arnold, was working with Macro Inc., who was assigned to helping Pakistan to undertake the survey. I was affiliated with the survey as principal

investigator -- on part of government of Pakistan -- on part of the institute, and Fred Arnold was my counterpart from the Macro International.

In undertaking the DHS, I interacted not only with my colleagues in the Macro but also our American friends at USAID, Pakistan. My contribution after the survey also spread into other evaluation studies -- my in-depth analysis of the survey itself -- and so that collaboration with other colleagues in East-West Center and my colleagues in Pakistan. My research on social status identification was appreciated by a number of people in World Bank. Subsequently I joined the World Bank office in Islamabad, as Population Specialist on a project. I spent about seven years from 1995 to 2002 on the project called "Social Action Program Project" funded by World Bank, Asian Development Bank and others.

[It was the] Social Action Program Project. It was government of Pakistan project but funded by World Bank, Asian Development Bank, ODA (UK), Dutch government and a few other donors. The office I joined at the World Bank was called Multidonor Support Unit, (MSU), and focused on provision of technical assistance to four sectors:

population, basic health, primary education, and rural water supply and sanitation.

By joining the project I actually moved away from research in these seven years, and looked at programmatic sides and policy matters. In this assignment I was interacting not only with the government officials and learnt how bureaucracy worked, but also how people at the grassroots feel about public sector, and how did they perceive public sector especially in rural areas, for whom the project was designed.

I had a very rich experience, both working with NGOs, working with civil society, working with public sector, from a forum that was basically donor-supported in Pakistan.

It was very rich experience. Subsequent to 2002, I have been working as a freelance

consultant in the area of health management, program development, evaluation, population and reproductive health.

By the way, I was back in the same institute where I started my population career in Pakistan, and that's the National Institute of Population Studies, but in an advisory capacity. I worked on behalf of Macro Inc. to build capacity at institute to undertake much larger survey than what we did in 1990.

This survey has 100,000 households sample size. The sample size is large to undertake national estimates on maternal mortality; maternal health issues; infant, child and reproductive health issues; along with basic indicators of contraceptive prevalence, demographic changes and other social indicators under MDG, Millennium Development Goals.

Partnerships and Networks

My mentor, Peter Xenos, got an opportunity to work with UNICEF in Pakistan. And that opportunity I availed to link him with the capacity building of NIPS where the staff definitely needed to upgrade their skills and demographic techniques.

So I tried working both with NIPS and the East-West Center, with possible funding from UNFPA to organize a technical workshop at end of 2006, for not only the professionals in this institute, but across Pakistan. This was to be a three- to four-weeks hands-on workshop, jointly organized by NIPS and East-West Center. The workshop was to train Pakistani professionals on demographic techniques, advanced techniques of data analysis and demography data.

Over the years I have recommended several professional colleagues for participation in the [EWC] Summer Seminars – most were accepted for participation. All of them are

now part of alumni association and I am sure they have learnt and contributed to those seminars.

This is an area where I would like to link both East-West Center with my institute. My next step will be to build Pakistani scholars and colleagues to work in collaboration with the East-West Center colleagues for in-depth analysis of the DHS data, which will be generated by the end of this year paving way for long-term analysis and for long-term collaboration.

Another dream that I have is regarding the graduates of three Pakistani good universities – Punjab University, Faisalabad University, and Quaid-e-Azam University. The idea is to upgrade their skills so they can apply for East-West Center scholarships which will be available on regular basis. So that they can finish their master's here, and then go to Hawai'i to continue their studies for a Ph.D. in UH through East-West Center.

Now there is something I've looked forward to, and I'm suggesting to my colleagues at UNFPA, Population Council here in Islamabad and also NIPS. I'm trying to make my case little bit stronger in the coming months so that I can connect the graduate students from these three universities to groom them, so that they can apply and qualify for the standard where they can be accepted to the UH, East-West Center for financial help.

Life After EWC

People tell me that I am outgoing and helpful, I don't know, but people tell me this. I'll give you just one small example. Last year, I had four students who were doing their master's in Public Health, MPH, from a local academy called Health Services Academy (HSA), and this year I have only one student. My effort is to upgrade their skills and help them to be better epidemiologists, or, say, social scientists. It's all voluntary.

I have been with the Population Association of Pakistan for about the last five years, and four years I have been member of the Executive Committee of the Population Association of Pakistan, helping improve the image of demographers, demography professionals in Pakistan; I think this is one area where people try to, again, pull me because of my willingness to share and help them. That is where I think people remember me.

I can give another example. In the last six months, I have been associated with the earthquake relief projects [*Oct 2005 Pakistan earthquake*]. I have, with the Grace of God, people's trust. I was entrusted with several thousand of rupees, which I held with me. And even yesterday I received rupees 10,000 and people just give me and they tell me "just use this money for whatever purpose I want." I use such contributions in providing families affected by earthquake with rations, food, tents, medical support, whatever I could, education in terms of school supplies and books, shelter in terms of reconstructing their damaged houses, reconstructing their lives.

I have facilitated in the last four months binding earthquake-stricken families in marriages of their daughters. I think about -- in all eight such cases, I have helped eight families get dowry for the daughters-bride. These are the people who have lost everything in their life. They don't have anything. What I did was bought clothes and utensils and every basic necessity for a couple's kitchens, for their lives -- bringing their life together. So this is how I have helped them.

Whatever I do for such families, I share with my friends and colleagues through photographs and pictures to maintain trust. I visited some families in the worst weather days in remote village when there was snowfall on their tents. I visited them in the

remote areas to help them bring a little comfort in their lives through providing them blankets, quilts, heaters, stoves, etc.

I think it was my duty. I feel it deep down in my heart, I feel as a duty, as a Muslim, that I need to be with them. I do it with that spirit, and I thank my Allah - my God, for giving this opportunity to help them out. I take it back to those 10-15 seconds, or maybe 17 seconds of terrible shaking of earth, when I was sitting in my room at 8:52 when earthquake hit Islamabad and those few seconds shook everything. When my office building was shaking and I said to myself, "This is it. I'm going to die in next two seconds." But then I was safe. I thanked Allah and everybody else thanked, too. But deep in my heart, I thought I should thank Allah by contributing to the lives of the people who have been affected so severely, so severely, just can't imagine thousands of people have died and not even a scratch on my life, on my body? So I help out whatever I can. I don't think I've spent much money from my own pocket, but I've put in "some of my time." And that "time" is what matters -- time is the thing that people remember. Time is something people least contribute. Time spent for others is what earns you your name, trust and credibility.

People contribute money, they contribute in kinds of substance; time is something valuable people don't contribute. I take people's kind and contributions, and mix it with my time. This is how I think people remember me. And I thank Allah for the time that He's given me.