



EAST-WEST CENTER
COLLABORATION • EXPERTISE • LEADERSHIP



EAST-WEST CENTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Muhammad Ibrahim 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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Muhammad Ibrahim

3/30/2006 interview in Islamabad, Pakistan

Personal Background

I was born in a farmer family in a village very close to a big city, Lahore, and my father was a small farmer, and we used to work together on the farm. When a school opened, my village and the teachers and the students came to my house, and they said, we'll take you to school. It was new, you know, to me, and I was a little hesitant.

So they dragged me to school, and I was put in the first class. At that time, nobody knew what age I was or anything about me. So according to my size and body they gave me an age. So after passing primary school education near my village, then I went to high school very nearby my school, you know, my village. So I completed intermediate type. Then I left that intermediate school and came to another high school which is in fact away from my village, and I lived with my cousins. They put me in the high school, and I did high school there, during 1964.

And then I joined the Agricultural University of Faisalabad and did my B.S. and master degree. So this is how, you know, I got educated.

My father had two daughters and three sons. I am the youngest one, you know. And my two sisters were married in the village. They are not educated, they are now working housewives. And my two elder brothers they are still farming in the village, which is about 50 kilometers from the city. So the children, they are not educated, you know.

There are several children, you know.

Several times I go to them and ask them to have less children. They get angry with me, "You are not a son of a farmer anymore." So they are not much educated. I requested

them several times to send them to school. Well, you know, it's very difficult to convince them. Their children that passed primary school and middle school -- and that I think one or two they went to high school and that's it.

Life at EWC

Arrival, 1970s

Well, after I passed the M.S. degree, I joined the Department of Agriculture with the Punjab government. Then I saw an ad in the newspaper, the East-West Center scholarship. I applied for the scholarship, I could not get selected, you know. Next year again I saw the ad, I applied again, I could not get it. Third time when I applied for the East-West Center, I was able to get selected and it was a big change in my parents, my wife. We were very happy that we will be making good fortune, good qualifications, you know. That's when I got the East-West Center scholarship.

It was my first time traveling through India, Hong Kong, and then to Honolulu. I met two or three, I think, East-West Center grantees who were traveling with me to Honolulu, and we landed in Honolulu. Then we saw the nice ladies with *leis*, they were waiting to take us to the East-West Center. It was very exciting to interact with them and it was just a new world for me to get into that, you know, since I had a village background. So I went in very much excited and happy to be in Honolulu and to go for education.

I, you know, sometimes write poetry. Several times I mention East-West Center, Hale Manoa, and my friends living in the co-op. You know, it was very interesting. We had at least 12 to 15 co-op members, mostly Pakistani and Indian. And we cooperated nicely and we rotated our turn so that we enjoy the Hale Manoa [dorm]. It was a wonderful experience to be in Hale Manoa, as you know.

You know, I cooked a lot, got experienced in cooking many different cultures... because, you know, there's one festival where we celebrate our annual activities for the East-West Center. We set up our food stalls there every year and we sell off the food there. That's why you have cooking experience.

Graduate Work, Tropical Agriculture

Since my background was agriculture, I was selected for M.S. degree in agriculture, so I went to the College of Tropical Agriculture in Hawai'i. And that was a very nice college and I specialized myself in agricultural economy and finance.

And then Ph.D., yes. East-West Center was very nice. They accepted my application to extend my scholarship up to Ph.D., with the help of *[Program Officer]* Rose Nakamura and *[Dean of Students]* Sumi Makey. So I did Ph.D. and M.S. both degrees for East-West Center and I got a degree from the [University of Hawaii] College of Tropical Agriculture.

And during Hawai'i time, I remember my experimentation in the field and also two to three times in a month I drive to the Palolo *[Valley]* and Waimanalo also for my experiments. And I remember my supervisor Dr. Yoshinori Kanehiro; he all the time accompanied me and we worked together in the field and it was wonderful to be there. Later on I called my wife and my daughter to be with me in Hawai'i. They joined me and I put my daughter in school and she has learned English and now I'm happy she is very good in English. She is much better than me in speaking because a child, you know, they pick up English very fast.

Community Service

It was one of the most wonderful experiences I had, with the East-West Center. At East-

West Center, in fact, I came to know how to volunteer, you know, how to do community service. So I led three to four projects, you know. Manoa Stream forestation, you know, I led that. And we cleared under the trees and put a very nice little tree in Manoa Stream. Then I visited, you know, several schools. Especially schools in Hawai‘i, and I used to go there as a volunteer. Then there was also one more program where you help the immigrant.

EWC's Impact

On Perspectives, Career

You know, to be in the Center ... it seemed to be a very international center. And that gives me the chance to interact with various nationalities, with different ethnic backgrounds, with different cultures. Just a variety of things you learn and you learn how to behave with the people. You have to develop a lot of tolerance because people have different habits; so you need to learn how to live with the international people and that is one of the wonderful experiences. We were exposed and certainly we learned a lot how to live with other people, how to learn the other habits and like this. It was wonderful, you know.

Actually when I left my country, I was still connected with my parent department. When I came back, I re-joined the parent department and then I started my new career after getting my Ph.D. degree.

It's knowledge we obtained during a Ph.D. degree and it is gratefully applicable to my field here in Pakistan. Particularly the nutrition management in the fields, in the orchard, in the crops.

And I continue still in my department. I got a promotion after that, and still I'm with the department.

Ties That Last

Pakistani Alumni Chapters

When I came back, I think this is the first activity I started. I collected my addresses of my old East-West Center alumni in Faisalabad. So I made a small organization which is called "chapter." I think this was the first [*Pakistani EWC alumni*] chapter, which was much more active and motivated in Pakistan since 1985. Since then I'm associated with the East-West Center very actively through e-mails and letters, and I think I'm the first Pakistani attending the most East-West Center international conferences.

Recently, you know, we have an active region of people, and developed three or four more chapters in Pakistan and then, you know, in the Japan conference I was nominated as the region coordinator, so we worked very actively. We raised three more chapters in Pakistan and I hope we will do much better in the next regional conference which is going to be in Pakistan during 2007.

Forging an Alumni Network

You know this is human nature. You want to be very popular among the friends. Almost every friend I know I try to make contact with, even, you know, I announce at various meetings that if any East-West Center alumni are traveling through Pakistan to let me know, I will provide the transportation, accommodation if possible. So this is the way I made contact with the people. I said I can say that now if I traveled in Asia and through this network, I can say I had addresses of alumni in different countries. If I travel and I request them, and if I call them, they will be there to wait for me at the airport whenever

so they could help me.

Last month alumni were here in Islamabad, and one of the alumni called me. Then I drove from Faisalabad to Islamabad, about 400 kilometers away. I drive myself and met with the Jefferson Fellow who was visiting Pakistan. Today Dan [*Berman*] is here in Pakistan. He's interviewing me. This is one who we keep contact with.

I will wish that we have more contact with East-West Center. So several times I see e-mails from East-West Center, someone else like Jefferson Fellow announcement, New Generation [*Seminar*], Ladies in Leadership [*the "Changing Faces" Seminar*], et cetera. So I try my best to select some candidates and send to the East-West Center so we can keep in touch with East-West Center.