



EAST-WEST CENTER
COLLABORATION • EXPERTISE • LEADERSHIP



EAST-WEST CENTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Khaleda Rashid Interview Narrative

4-3-2006 interview in Dhaka, Bangladesh

Please cite as: Khaleda Rashid, interview by Dan Berman, April 3, 2006, interview narrative, East-West Center Oral History Project Collection, East-West Center, Honolulu Hawaii.

These narratives, which reflect interviewees' personal perceptions, opinions, and memories, may contain errors of fact. They do not reflect positions or versions of history officially approved by the East-West Center.

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.

Co-coordinators: Terese Leber and Phyllis Tabusa

Narratives Editor: Susan Yim Griffin

Copyright East-West Center, 2007.

Khaleda Rashid

4-3-2006 interview in Dhaka, Bangladesh

Personal Background

I would love to share the feelings of my childhood, my family background and the lessons learnt here and there specially at the East-West Center, Honolulu, Hawai'i.

I am an architect – urban designer, presently serving as a professor in the Department of Architecture, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), Dhaka, Bangladesh.

I was born in Dhaka in 1950. My parents were from different districts; it was an arranged marriage. There was an interesting turn in my father's career, and I wish to mention it here. After graduation my father studied law and got a First Class in LLB (Hons) from Calcutta University, India. In his first day at the court he had to lie. He sensed it would not suit his temperament. He resigned from his job, giving up the lawyer's profession. He went to London for higher studies in Educational Psychology at the University of Edinburgh. That was way back in 1936. On return he took up the profession of an educationist. First he was in teaching, and then he joined the government service.

My mother was the 4th Muslim graduate of the Indo-Pak sub-continent. Right after appearing in her bachelor's degree from the Bethoon College of Calcutta, at the age of 20 years, she got married in the same year my father went to England. After the marriage she enrolled for the master's degree in Bengali literature at Dhaka University, Dhaka.

Towards the end of her pregnancy, when my eldest sister was about to be born, most likely in 1941, she gave up her studies and concentrated in the family life.

Of the four sisters I am the third one. I do not have any brother. My eldest sister, she is in London now. She did her Ph.D. in Plant Pathology from England, got married there with another Bangladeshi. They have settled there. The second sister after completion of M.S. degree in Economics from London joined Bengali Program Division of British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) of London. The youngest of the four, after completing her master's degree in English joined a college as lecturer. Two of my sisters are deceased now.

At my very childhood my father was posted respectively in two different districts namely Jessore and Sylhet. I remember only a few things of these two places. In Jessore we had swans at our house, as there was a pond in our compound. I am told that as a child I was rather calm and quiet in nature. I loved to draw and paint. I was admitted to a school of art.

Eventually my parents settled in Dhaka – the capital city. I stayed mostly in Dhaka during my young age and also afterwards. I had my schooling in Dhaka, went to Holy Cross College, Dhaka. Then studied architecture in Dhaka. I am talking of the year 1968. My father wanted me to study in physics or engineering. It was quite an indecisive situation.

A family friend's son was an architect trained from the United States. I saw lots of models and drawings in their house and I desperately wanted to study architecture. The admission tests for architecture and engineering were administered separately. I sat for the admission tests for both architecture and engineering. My admission test result for engineering was better than that of architecture. In the engineering admission test out of more than 2,000 students my position was 3rd and in architecture of the 700 students I

became 5th. Anyway, I took admission in architecture. I was the only girl in the class. After graduation I joined the same department as a lecturer from where I did my bachelor's degree.

Life Before EWC

Applying for EWC

Within two years in 1977, I got this East-West Center scholarship. A colleague, T.K. Barua, from the same department at that time, was in Hawai'i with the East-West Center scholarship. So I learnt that the East-West Center was a very welcoming place, the people at the University of Hawai'i were friendly and the climate was magnificent. Dr. Barua, after doing his master's with the East-West Center grant, later acquired his Ph.D. degree from Wisconsin University. Dr. T.K. Barua is now working as a consultant for the World Bank in Dhaka.

Life at EWC

Late '70s/Hale Kuahine

When I look back and think of old days, I feel contented that I availed this scholarship. I should also mention I was very lucky. That was the first application of mine for a scholarship to study abroad and I got it. At that time I was married and had the eldest daughter. I left for Hawai'i alone.

I stayed in Hale Kuahine, a four-storied residential accommodation designed by famous architect I.M. Pei. Hale Kuahine is a beautiful piece of architecture with a central courtyard of indefinable quality and intimate scale. I do not know about the present set up. At that time women grantees occupied almost all the floors of Hale Kuahine. Only

one floor, most probably first floor, of only one side of the building, I cannot recollect, was for male participants. It was basically women-dominated accommodation.

We used to go to the courtyard and talk loudly to get back the echoes. We would call each other's name to see how it sounded. We could talk from one side of the inner corridor to the opposite one or the adjacent ones. There were single- or double-seated rooms, had common kitchens and shared bathrooms. My roommate, Sharon McCoy from Chicago, was a fine woman.

At the Center there were participants from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Japan, New Zealand, Australia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong and from mainland U.S.A., of course. Though we had the Liberation War with Pakistan in 1971, Bangladeshi and Pakistani participants were friendly with each other. Gradually I made couple of friends there.

We went on a hike to Kauai island. Ms. Hasina Begum, another Bangladeshi participant from previous year, also took part in the hike. We, about eight/nine of us, flew from Oahu island to Kauai. From the airport by a microbus we went up to the starting point of the hiking trip. Sadly enough now I cannot recollect some of the names of the hiking mates and also the names of the places -- the starting point, and the trail. After hiking for about 10 miles in the mountains, ultimately tents were pitched on a flat site by the side of the beach for spending nighttimes. The breath-taking beauty of the natural environment - the clear blue skies, azure blue water, beautiful natural ambience, the vast bluish-green to deep-blue ocean on one side and mountain with lush green tropical forest on the other - were unforgettable. The hiking trip was so strenuous yet enjoyable.

Scholarships/Spouses/Hale Manoa

The next year, my husband got the EWC scholarship, and he joined me there. I guess we were the first couple who enjoyed East-West Center scholarships at the concurrent time. When my husband came, I moved to Hale Manoa, a multi-storied building with split-levels designed by the same architect, I.M. Pei. This building had almost 10 times more accommodation than Hale Kuahine. I do not remember exactly how many stories it was, certainly more than 12 stories. It was always crowded, a long queue for lifts and also for the front desk - anyhow I felt that way.

Our next-door neighbor was a Malaysian couple – Chee Wah, a degree participant, and his wife Dorothy. Chee Wah and me were in the same department at the University of Hawai‘i (UH). Bangladeshis are known for taking hot food; believe me, they -- Chee Wah and especially Dorothy, used to take such hot food that me and other Bangladeshis became astonished. They used to blend ripe hot chilies with little bit of garlic and vinegar. Often Dorothy would give us some of her blended sauce. I learned a few cuisines from her and I taught her how to cook chicken curry, and egg curry. Fatema, wife of another degree participant from Hong Kong, whenever she was asked what was she cooking? “A fantastic dish,” she used to say.

Best Memories

I taught my roommate Sharon to wear sari, our national dress -- the unstitched six-yard cloth that we wrap around on top of a long petticoat, from waist up to ankles, and a tightly fitted short blouse. With little bit of assistance Sharon could put it on but she had difficulty walking with it. Only once she went out in a sari.

Sharon and me, we became very friendly. She was from Chicago, but worked in Japan for about six, seven years. She understood Asian culture, trends and lifestyles very well, especially of women. Till late at night even up to 2, 3 a.m. in the morning we used to talk, share our experiences. She would tell me about Japan and I would tell her about all the things that happened during the Liberation War. The topic usually boiled down to gender-related issues and conditions of women even of mainland America.

Maybe because of these exchanges of experiences and thoughts I was inspired to be the gender focal point for over 12 years of an Institutional Linkage Program between University of Alberta, Canada, and BUET, Bangladesh, funded by Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

In fact, I am very thankful to her! She was the one who taught me how to ride the buses.

We used to go to different shopping malls and supermarkets together.

In Hale Manoa, almost every evening some thing or the other took place in the main lounge space of ground floor. Even when I used to make up my mind not to go down and waste time, somehow it was almost impossible to resist. Someone would call and insist or I myself felt like taking a short break. At times the function went on till late at night, and if it was an interesting one, we would be there till the function was over. The next morning, in the class, it became difficult to keep the eyes open and hold concentration.

Only our eldest daughter was born then. During my research work for the thesis, I went home and brought back our daughter with me to Hawai'i. Obviously we had to move out of Hale Manoa. We rented a small apartment near the Star Supermarket. It was a small apartment on the 3rd floor but was very cozy and the interior was neatly finished. The apartment had two bedrooms, a living space, a small kitchenette and two bathrooms.

The rent was high, so later when our turn came we moved to Palolo Valley government subsidized housing. One needed to apply for these apartments and there was a long waiting list. We lived on the first floor of a double-storied building. It had two apartments in each floor with entry to the apartments through separate stairs on both sides. There was a huge play field, as required by the city code, in front of the apartment that was hardly used by anyone. Somehow we did not get to know any of the neighbors there. Muhammad Ibrahim of Pakistan and a few other participants lived in Palolo Valley. At times during the weekend farmers' market we used to meet them. I was busy working on my thesis then; my husband was busy too, and our daughter used to go to school. For me, Hawai'i was a place of beauty, pleasure and wisdom.

International Days

It was always fun during the celebration of International Days; we used to serve *shingaras* – a Bangladeshi snack of rounded triangular shape having chicken or potato stuffing within handmade thin round breads. It was liked by Hawaiians, EWC participants and staff, other students – everybody. The *shingaras* used to be finished within minutes.

Host Family

We felt wonderful in Hawaii. Even the very crowded Waikiki beach of weekends was a safe and lively place for loitering. I learnt driving in Hawai'i, and loved to drive around. We used to go round the whole island, often visiting Ms. Adelaide Beste, my host mother. Ms. Beste was an elderly lady, most probably she was in her 60s then, always very well-dressed, very good at sewing and other household chores. She made *muumuus* for my daughter and me. We had contacts even after we left Hawai'i, then as usual,

gradually we lost contact, I cannot say when. I earnestly hope that wherever she is, she is in her high spirits as before!

For Asian women -- young women or maybe most Asian men also -- often, this is our first trip abroad. And when we were there, the East-West Center really took special care of us. Like, the first day we went shopping, we could take a car from the East-West Center, and then there were some participants from previous years who went with us ... and we learned from them how to shop, and what to look for, what not to look for as well. And then we had these host parents assigned to us -- and they were very helpful.

Oh! I forgot to tell you this about my host mother. She lived in a condominium right on the beach with a private backyard through which she had access to the ocean. "You cannot swim with a *sari* and neither can I teach you when you are in it. You better have a swimming suit, and then let me try to teach you," she said. She helped me to choose the swimming suit and spent quite a bit of time to teach me swimming. I was a bad student, scared of water – naturally her efforts went fruitless.

Inter-island trip

Like many other activities, the hiking trip I mentioned was arranged by the EWC and the participants paid for the expenses, of course. In Kauai, we used to sit by the beach, almost all daylong, watching how the water is splashing on the huge boulders. Every time we had any leisure time we used to sit at the "Blow Hole," just looking at it.

I could watch surfing for hours together. They were simply splendid scenes. I presume waves or any kind of moving water have deep impact on peoples' mind.

The kind of joyous experiences I had in Hawai'i, they are unparalleled. I did mention about the hiking trip to Kauai. It was the first and the last hiking trip so far of my life. I

was so damn tired after hiking for miles in that rough terrain, at times the width being hardly 14 inches, that after reaching the camping site I could not wait. I just fell asleep with my shoes on before the tents were even pitched. In the morning I found myself within a tent. Everybody was tired, still they took the trouble of putting me in the sleeping bag inside the tent. We had deep feelings for each other and came forward to help each other at whatever time it was needed.

Kauai is memorable for another reason. Since I left Bangladesh, I saw, for the first time, the jasmine flowers (known as '*Beli*' in Bengali language) in Kauai. They grow in small shrub like groves. I was kind of excited, and Hasina and myself proudly showed it to others. Like plumeria (frangipani) leis of Hawai'i, leis of jasmine flowers are found in abundance – in flower shops and also small children, boys and girls sell it by the sides of the roads often coming up to the cars at the stop signs. It is quite common that while going out in the evening women would put jasmine leis on their hair, in many different ways. It smells real nice -- they have light fragrance but lasts for a long time.

Unfortunately, the jasmine flowers of Kauai, though were bigger in size than those of Bangladesh, it did not have much scent. While camping in Kauai I kind of felt as if I am living into the realms of the divine.

Negative Memories

It is not really negative [*memories*]. I did not feel comfortable with a few little bit of things. There weren't too many Bangladeshis in Hawai'i then. So whenever I used to go at the supermarkets, the shopping malls and even during meetings and get-togethers, in a *sari*, someone would ask whether I was from India or not. Often they would take it for granted that I was from India.

Another thing made me a bit unhappy, when I found out that most of the people did not know about Bangladesh, even when I explained that it is in South Asia, liberated from Pakistan in 1971 and is a neighboring country of India. They did not know much about Pakistan either. At that time I used to be a little sentimental. I was there from 1977 to 1981, and we were liberated from Pakistan in December 1971. Now I realize it was a trivial matter.

Community Service Project

I worked in two community service projects. In one of the community service projects, the Manoa Valley Trail Project, I was actually the co-chair. It is the trail that goes behind the Jefferson Hall and beside the Manoa canal/ stream.

While on a reconnaissance survey of the trail all of a sudden we found a very small cave and strangely enough someone was living there – a small stove, some books, a few T-shirts and trousers, a sleeping bag and a backpack, etc., were there. Couple of days later also we passed by that area but could not see any one though the things were there along with an empty cup of freshly finished coffee. In some of the functions of Hale Manoa Lounge, we noticed that a poorly dressed man came, took a seat and listened. Towards the end he had the *pupus* and then silently walked away. He never talked to anyone.

Once one of our fellow mates of that project followed him. It seemed that he was the one who lived in that cave. That was really surprising to all of us. After a couple of days, one of us noticed that in the cave there were only a few torn papers, no books, no clothes. We were kind of feeling guilty for invading his privacy -- thinking maybe he found out that we have come to know of this arrangement of him. From then on, we never went to that side of the trail. I guess I was a bit disturbed for a few days. I wondered why a

person in an affluent society where there were provision of social securities and unemployment benefits chose such a life devoid of any facilities and utilities. Now I presume, who knows, maybe he was having a taste of a very different lifestyle! Till today at times I question what made him leave his tiny habitat.

Life After EWC

Working in Hawaii

I got master's degree in Urban and Regional Planning. I went for the Practical Training Program. I took a job in an architectural consulting firm Michael T. Suzuki & Associate. I worked there as an assistant architect planner for five months, as my husband completed his degree by then.

In that office, I worked on three projects. I did the master plan of Housing Development at Keawanui, [on] a different island, not Oahu. Nine-storied Academy Business Center, Honolulu, Hawai'i, was already designed by one of the architect owners of the firm. I did the working drawing only. I designed a studio apartment building – Ala Moana Condominium, Honolulu, Hawai'i. Since I was not a registered architect of U.S.A. -- I could not sign the drawing sheets.

Most probably this office designed the Physical Science Buildings of the Oahu campus of University of Hawai'i. I enjoyed my work there. It was a small office, two architect owners, a draughtsman and myself.

Designing Housing in Dhaka, Bangladesh

We came back to Dhaka in 1981, and I joined the University. In 1986 I became associate professor.

In 1992, I went to Sweden to participate in a post-graduate program at the Lund University of Sweden. That was an extensive program and my work was related to housing for urban low-income families with provision for community facilities. After coming back, within three years I became professor. I mostly teach in the undergraduate design studios of Level IV or V. At the post-graduate level I teach three courses, two of Urban Design Stream and one of Housing and Settlement Stream.

During one of the visits of Mr. Dan Berman to Bangladesh, either in the year 2004 or 2005, Mr. Berman took some photographs of the design projects of Level IV Term II. We just finished grading the projects then. Most probably it was housing for middle and lower-middle income families – there were five different sites, all at the fringe areas of Dhaka City. The challenge was in accommodating 30,000 people (6,000 families) with necessary community facilities, such as primary schools, clubs, mosques, etc., in 30 acres of land. Mr. Berman may have the photos.

Community Service in Social Work

My hobby is social work. I am an honorary advisor of Bibi Khadeja Kalyan Sangstha -- a non-profit social welfare organization. It is voluntary work. I suggest on how to go for low-cost improvements in the squatter settlements, such as road layout and its pavement, installation self-help sanitation improvements, setting up of hand pumps for drinking water.

Gender Equality Work

From 1992 till December 2004, I worked as a focal point of a group on a gender project. I mentioned about it earlier. This group was known as Gender Equality Policy (GEP)

Group. It was quite a fascinating coincidence, being an architect - urban designer -- how I became fully involved with this gender program.

Around 1990/1991 we had about 4 percent female students at BUET. Somehow, the next year, the number of female students decreased -- it became little less than 3 percent. The then Canadian high commissioner came on a visit to BUET, my university where I teach, and our vice chancellor mentioned it to him. The high commissioner readily offered his support. Then and there our vice chancellor called me in his office, as I was the senior-most female teacher. The vice chancellor introduced me to the high commissioner.

Within days a female colleague of mine, Dr. Dil Afroza, and myself were invited to the high commissioner's residence. We met the gender specialist of Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) there. A fund was initiated from CIDA and we started our work motivating prospective female students to study in technical fields. There is no quota for girls neither for admission nor for employment at BUET. Merit is the only basis to join BUET either as a student or as a teacher.

I truly concentrated on the project. Dr. Dil Afroza was very helpful. Now in our university of the total students more than 24 percent are female students and they are doing well having positions within the first 10 of the merit list.

Before the closure of the project we submitted an action plan for removing barriers in employment of women technical professionals. This is now under active consideration of the Bangladesh government. Lately an association of Women Architects, Engineers and Planners Association (WAEPA) has been launched in Bangladesh. I am its advisor.

At the East-West Center Women's Conference in Sydney, Australia, I read a paper on women entrepreneurs of Bangladesh. In that women leadership conference there was an

interactive discussion among women of different countries updating knowledge on the gender issue. My involvement in gender-related projects, seminars and workshops has given me lots of different exposures and insights. I took my son with me to Australia and he kind of felt shy when everybody called him “our son.” Nevertheless he too enjoyed the trip.

EWC's Impact

On Career, Perspectives

I easily mix with people of different cultures. In Swedish food, in almost everything there was pork. As a Muslim, I do not take pork. When I was in Sweden I had problems in choosing foodstuff especially ground meats, and all that. Even when little bit of pork is mixed with beef I could tell the moment I put it in my mouth. Anywhere I ate or while shopping I explained it and never received any rude reply. I sense the way I spoke they were not offended. The shopkeepers in Sweden did not know much English. They knew German, Danish and/or Swedish language. Subsequently I managed to find the managers or someone who understood English, and often they would read the label translating it to me.

They even explained like this, “Well, it doesn't have pork but it may have pork fat,” at times adding, “foodstuffs have lard and are fried in lard because then it becomes crisp and tasty.”

My degree, the practical training helped me in later years. At BUET every position is advertised and each appointment is a fresh appointment. I had to compete with applicants from outside as well as from the department. Eventually I was given chairmanship of the department and in 1999 I became the first woman dean of a Faculty

amongst all the universities of Bangladesh. The intense discussions with my roommate Sharon McCoy about social norms and women's issues channeled me to do social work and get immensely involved in gender projects.

On Personal Life

My feeling is Asians by nature are very much like Hawaiian people, at least, the people who were at the Center. In Bangladesh, people are very friendly and to some extent are eager to help others specially foreigners. Ms. Sumi Makey, Ms. Rose Nakamura, Mr. Ramon (sorry, cannot recollect his full name) [*True*] were easily approachable, always gave a patient hearing to our problems. They had a broad vision; no wonder discussions often took place on many diversified topics and continued for quite a bit of time.

Now we have 3 children; 2 daughters, and a son. They are grown-ups now -- one is doing master's degree; another one is in the final year of bachelor's program. The youngest one is in the 11th grade of schooling of the 'A' Level. Our children are capable of mixing with people from different cultures. I am not sure if it is for the exposure to different cultures through media or visit to other countries or for our attitude. I told them about the Hawaiian people and our experiences there.

I guess it is very natural that we would talk about EWC and Hawai'i a lot when we returned from there. The memories were fresh and that was our first visit to the Western world. An uncle of mine on his way back from mainland U.S.A. had a brief stopover in Honolulu in the late 1980s. I enjoyed every bit of Hawaiian culture: the hula dance, the Polynesian Cultural Center, the food – *poi*, the paste of powdered taro root, coconut milk, the salmon fish and all those things. In Bangladesh cuisines sometimes we use coconut milk, we take taro roots but in a different way. We cook it with chicken, beef or fish.

After we came back I tried to make *poi*, tried out some of the dishes that I learnt at the EWC.

Ties That Last

Alumni Network

Somehow, you know, these days, people are so busy with their own work and they are so pressurized with time, they cannot really afford to go for any voluntary work or social welfare kind of things. Because of traffic condition and non-availability of comfortable public transports, it takes lots of time to go from one place to another. Since this East-West Center Alumni Bangladesh chapter was formed after a long elapse initiated by Mr. Dan Berman's visit to Bangladesh in 2004, I communicated with many alumni over telephone. They all were happy that EWCA Bangladesh Chapter was formed again, but when it comes to attending meetings usually the attendances are very poor. This is really frustrating.

About 10 to 12 years back, when Ms. Mary Jo Furgal was the director of the American Center of Dhaka, she took extra interest in the running of EWCA activities in Bangladesh, as she was an EWC alumna. During her tenure, of about four or five years, we truly had an active East-West Center alumni group here. At that time, at least twice or thrice delegates from EWC or dignitaries from Honolulu, Hawai'i, visited Bangladesh. We arranged cultural programs, dinners, site visits and shopping trips. On the EWC Days, we invited important personalities from the government, from private sectors and educational institutions. Mary Jo Furgal was there as special guest or chaired the function. In those days we had quite big gatherings. However, these days when we invite people, we hardly have 15 to 20 people, at best 30. We inform them; we remind

them. We are trying to bring in EWC alumni together. For the last three years I have been publishing articles on EWC day in more than one newspaper. I am rather optimistic that once community service starts, other East-West Center alumni will make some time to come and join us. I look forward to it.

Personal/Professional Legacy

I guess as a teacher of architecture discipline. I enjoy teaching --- minding the young minds. In this globalizing world we need to be even more careful than before to retain our identity and culture. I believe as a physical designer I have a role to play in making visible the socio- cultural, even economic aspects of the communities. As a social worker and advisor of WAEPA, I am focused in doing my bit for my country.

As an EWCA member, my contribution is minimal in this otherwise chaotic world.

Nevertheless, I am confident that even small contributions of all rational human beings will eventually make this world a better place to live in. As a proud alumnus of EWC, I am certain our efforts would not go in vain.

Being the torchbearer of cultural understanding and better relations between the United States and the nations of Asia and the Pacific, I wish that EWC and EWCA would one day be able to bring peace in this world.

I love teaching as well as my professional career. I am sure my students also love me. My students, they call me from abroad. When I was in Australia for the EWC program, two of my students, who are now practicing architects in Sydney, came to see me in the hotel. Some of my students were pursuing higher studies there. During the workshop they took my son for looking around. The day I was leaving the hotel, they drove my son and me to my relatives' place. They arranged a get-together where there were 14

Bangladeshi architects; two of them came from Melbourne, one from Brisbane. I was so surprised.

I should not be continuing any further. If you allow me I can go on talking forever about Hawai'i, EWC and its numerous activities.