



UNIVERSITY OF
WEST LONDON
The **Career** University

Summary of an interview conducted as part of the South Asian Heritage Project

Funded by the Heathrow Community Engagement Board (HCEB)

Interview conducted by interviewers from the University of West London.

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HCEB South Asian Oral History Project Interview 1

Interview Date: Tuesday, 15 February 2022.

Time: 15.30

Place: Online

Interviewers: Anne- Marie Purcell & Jane Rae Ross, UWL (University of West London)
Archives

Interviewee: Mehwish Kayani

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Mehwish is biracial – half-Swedish/half-Pakistani, born in Sweden because of her dad's work she spent 4-5 months in Pakistan and the rest of the time in Sweden. She moved to the UK (United Kingdom) in 2019. Currently studying a conversion course in psychology part-time at UWL, first degree is LLB (2008), she is a qualified solicitor.

Mehwish chose UWL as very few universities offer conversion courses in psychology, positive views of student experience by other students –UWL was highest, and distance, UWL is within comfortable commuting distance.

First time at Heathrow 6 months, first memory 5/6 years old, stayed at dad's best friends in London for a few days before travelling onto Islamabad, Pakistan. Remembers it being a lot bigger than the largest airport in Sweden. Remembers her dad buying her and her siblings a candy box -shaped like a suitcase. Main impression was that Heathrow was noticeably big, overwhelming, full of lots of people, noisy, and the language difference as she could not speak English yet - Urdu and Swedish.

Mehwish used to travel a lot before Covid to Pakistan twice yearly to stay with dad's family, due to her dad's work and her Mum worked for an airline so they got cheap tickets, also summer holidays- beach. She used to travel with her dad until she was seven which is when school starts in Sweden. Travelled with family and her sister. When older, travelled a lot as had that habit –Sweden (after moving to the UK – frequently), Pakistan, beach, and ski holidays. Also attended school in Pakistan with her cousins once she was 5/6 years old as she was old enough to go to school there. Spent 3-4 months in Pakistan at a time before old enough to attend school in Sweden then spent the summer holidays there.

She remembers there were no direct flights to Pakistan so always travelled via Heathrow with a stopover of a few days staying with family friends, when with family only on way to Islamabad but when travelling on her own with Dad both ways. Stockholm –London 2 hours, London – Islamabad 6 hours. Recalls they would go out to eat/shop but did not go sightseeing till she was about 14/15. She remembers going to the Natural History Museum and Harrods.

Mehwish loved the trips and flying, found it exciting, always got the box of chocolates, now she has a daughter she feels more anxious about flying. She loved the experience of flying but has only flown with her family, mostly with her dad as a child, then once over eighteen with her sister. Manwish mentions her dad's concerns about safety for herself and her sisters, so she did not fly without them till she was older. They usually flew Pakistani International Airlines (PIA) had good activities for children, she would be given a kid's pack which they no longer offer. She was also free to move around the plane and the staff showed her where to get the free cans of coke so she could get one herself, which is exciting to a child.

Mehwish recalls also flying with BA (British Airways), travelling from the different terminals - once from terminal 5 (T5) before Covid and using terminal 3 (T3) but does not remember which terminals she used as a child. She also remembers BA changing

terminals, 2014. Usually travels by tube to Heathrow, gets a cab from home to Acton Town.

Mehwish finds Covid has made travel much more stressful, has only travelled once (2020) before PCR tests/vaccinations/mask wearing, etc., were introduced but used to travel two/three times a year. Finds the thought of PCR tests/mask wearing overwhelming and that it would ruin her trip. Also voiced concerns about false positives and testing negative on arrival which would ruin her trip. It is too overwhelming, and she has decided that she will not travel again until all this is over because she wants it to be exciting and enjoyable and does not want to be stuck. She knows someone who got stuck in Morocco for 6 months. Covid has put her off flying 100%. She is waiting for Covid to end so that she can travel to Pakistan with her dad and daughter but repeated she will not do so until more countries drop restrictions and Covid is over.

Mehwish has travelled to Sweden, Spain, Turkey, and Pakistan with her daughter who is now five. She recalls travelling with her daughter when she was a year and a half, the only time her daughter has been anxious flying. Her daughter would like to go on holiday but has booked to go to Devon due to uncertainty surrounding Covid. Heathrow does not provide buggies for small children, which made travelling more challenging. She once missed a flight due to security issues as she had breast milk in a bottle for her daughter. The flight was rebooked free of charge. She mentions that Islamabad and other airports allow buggies to be taken to the flight and then they are taken and put in the hold so she does not understand why Heathrow does not allow this and mentions that this would improve the travel experience for people travelling with young children.

Mehwish used to work at Sweden's biggest airport as a teenager, so she is comfortable with being in an airport so knows how everything works. She used to work with check-in and gates, checking-in and managing boarding at the gates for (Nordic Aero). She mentions that she could walk from one end of the airport to the other in twenty minutes, however if she were working at Heathrow that would take much longer because it is so much bigger. She also does not think she would have much variety in the role as it would not be productive and thinks that she would stay in one place due to the size of Heathrow as it takes so long to get from one side to the other.

Mehwish thinks Heathrow is well-organised, mentions Oslo and Copenhagen are well-organised but that Charles de Gaulle is not so well-organised. She did not like travelling through Switzerland. She mentions that she likes travelling through Heathrow as she is also used to it. She comments that Heathrow would score seven out of ten because boarding information is put up late, not leaving much time to get to the gate. She also mentions that the monitors are not updated with flight delays, so she feels that these should be improved to make the travel experience better.

The most memorable memory is the little suitcase of chocolate and candy which could be re-used after all the sweets had been eaten. Mehwish remembers it was about the

size of a book, her dad always brought one back for her whenever he was travelling even when she was not with him.

She mentions that travelling for her relatives in Pakistan is difficult because it is difficult to get a visa to travel to Europe. One of her aunts came a couple of times but it was a negative experience, as she was travelling with children. She had a lot of forms to fill in, and questions asked at immigration.

Mehwish's main memory is the suitcase of candy and being a well-travelled child.

Anne-Marie thanked her for her participation and ended the interview at 16:18.