

Saiyara Uddin Interviewed by Bianca Diaz
January 9, 2021
Mount Vernon, New York

Bianca Diaz: Hey Saiyara.

Saiyara Uddin: What's up?

BD: How are you doing?

SU: I'm good, and you?

BD: I'm okay, are you ready for this interview?

SU: Yeah.

BD: Before we start, I want to remind you that if there is at any time a question that you are not comfortable answering that is completely fine, just let me know and we can move on or take a break if needed.

SU: Okay, thank you, I'm ready when you are.

BD: So, my name is Bianca Elena Diaz and I'm interviewing you, Saiyara Uddin over zoom on January 9th. Do you give me permission to record and distribute this oral history?

SU: I do.

BD: Alright. So, I'm going to have you fill in some basic stuff first, So, what is your full name?

SU: Saiyara Uddin.

BD: Age?

SU: I'm 22.

BD: 22. Occupation?

SU: I am a Discharge Planning Assistant at a Mental Rehabilitation Center, "Four Winds".

BD: Okay. What do you racially identify as?

SU: Bengali-American

BD: Gender Identity?

SU: I'm a cis female.

BD: Your sexual orientation?

SU: Bisexual.

BD: Where are you from?

SU: Bronx, New York.

BD: Okay, would you mind telling me how you and your family ended up in New York City?

SU: So, I grew up in the Bronx but my parents were born in Bengali and moved here so that my brother and I could live nicer and happier lives with a little more freedom.

BD: Okay so, why do you think the anti-racist protests have erupted?

SU: I think people of color are just fed up with being used and abused by everyone and it's finally time we can all say enough is enough. We need equality.

BD: Why do you think New York has become an epicenter for protests?

SU: We all know NYC is a melting pot of cultures, why wouldn't we start here?

BD: Understandable. How have the uprisings across the country shifted how you think about your ethnic identity in your place, in U.S. society?

SU: It just reminds me that I am not someone with privilege and every day I realize there is something new to be proud of because of my differences.

BD: Do you have any stories you are willing to share about encounters you've had with racism or the police?

SU: Thankfully my neighborhood is pretty decent, but in the past, I've been called ISIS, Osama, and a terrorist. Middle schoolers are not nice, and they forget that people come in all variations, not just one.

BD: Are more stories among friends and family members being shared about racism and the police, since the protests started?

SU: Friends? Yes. Family? No. They aren't my stories to tell so I'd rather not if that's okay.

BD: Yeah, no problem. Why do you think the protests are making these stories arise?

SU: Our society needs to see there are many differences between everyone, not just the color of our skin or who we believe our higher power is.

BD: Have you learned about an experience about someone close to you?

SU: Not really.

BD: Were you at all in digital or in person activism in the last 6 months?

SU: Yeah, I went to one on 14th street in August of 2020.

BD: Why did you decide to get involved?

SU: I think as a person of color you kind of have to. We all get discriminated against in one way or another.

BD: How have protests in the context of the Coronavirus shifted the way you think, when you think about race in America?

SU: I believe that the people who really want equality, want freedom from a society held together by years and years of discrimination and hardship of their own people who deserve a chance to make themselves heard no matter what is happening around them.

BD: Okay. How have the last few months changed how you think about police and racism in the U.S.?

SU: It's really just solidified my opinion that our society and our police system are complete shit. Our government doesn't care about us and anyone that isn't a white cis man is useless.

BD: Did you learn more about the history of racism since the protests started?

SU: I'm not white so, not really.

BD: What have you seen your peers doing that inspires you?

SU: I've seen a lot of my classmates going to protests and sharing their stories of injustice with the police online.

BD: What do you think about cops' response to protests that began in May 2020?

SU: I think it's sad to see how badly people of color are treated when they peacefully protest versus how white people protested on January 6th at the Capital, you didn't see rubber bullets or tear gas when armed white people invaded the Capital.

BD: Yeah, right. What do you think about the local and national government's response to protests that began in May 2020?

SU: Well, this is anarchy not a government system. Many people are just running around like a chicken with no head hoping something makes sense and the government is just sending out troops and police doing the same exact thing.

BD: How would you like to see this movement resolved?

SU: Peace and Equality. Point, blank, period.

BD: Okay. What do you think your role would be in achieving the outcome?

SU: Honestly, I'm not sure but I need to find out, I want to be on the better end of this civil war.

BD: Okay. Is there anything else about the racist uprisings you'd like to share?

SU: We just need to fix our society.

BD: What made you overall want to partake in the Black Lives Matter protests in August, was it your family, your identity, your friends, what made you feel like you had to go?

SU: I think... all of those reasons were a part of my need to go to the protests last summer.

BD: What was the hardest part for you in terms of being a person of color in a protest that was quickly becoming dangerous, as a fairly small Bengali woman?

SU: Well, of course there is a physical danger but what the opposing people don't realize is, our mental health and physical health is at stake when we go out and protest. We aren't out there endangering our lives or our family's lives for fun. We are there to make sure in the future we won't see our young citizens dying from the hands of officers within our government. I think the hardest part is mental... mentally, figuring out how you will explain to your children one day that you were a part of this momentous part of history if that makes sense and it went either positively or negatively. Finding the in-between of staying neutral and keeping our heads up high whether we win this battle or not and what challenges will our children have to face without us.

BD: What was the best part?

SU: Keeping our faith that one day we, as a collective people, will finally be free.

BD: How do you feel now that you've gone, do you feel like a difference was really made?

SU: Even if being there made no difference even, sorry. Even if being there made no difference what would have happened, I still would have gone. I would still fight for my people and all others- all others whose voices are or were silenced.

BD: How does the transition of presidential power make you feel in terms of your own safety and well-being?

SU: Well Trump being out of office makes me feel better for sure but we need to see the changes, not just believe in them.

BD: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

SU: We need to do better as a nation.

BD: Alright, well said, thank you very much Saiyara for participating in this interview for my oral history project for CUNY.

SU: Well, thank you for having me.