

AUDIO TAPE LOG

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Fieldworker(s): Maggie Holtzberg and Nora Martinez-Proctor

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Brief summary of tape contents:

The following interview is a conversation from March 18, 2016 with mehndi artist Noureen Sultana and her husband, Waheed Khan. The recording includes first a summary of Noureen's history learning and practicing mehndi in her native India, her journey to the United States after her marriage and the couple's efforts to expand her art beyond the traditional ways of mendhi, both in materials and in cultural and popular use. Noureen and Waheed explain the ways in which traditional mehndi is practiced, how patterns and styles are conceived, how they change and the custom's traditional significance at weddings and other religious celebrations. They then display several artworks that incorporate mehndi design and some traditional materials into less traditional decorative arts, such as canvases and glassware. Following that, Noureen talks briefly about teaching her children to practice mendhi, about the traditional work she does for local brides, and about the exhibitions and competitions in which she participates with her more modern pieces. At the end of the interview, she can be heard applying henna designs to MH and EMP and further discussing how she creates designs and how she feels about her work.

Counter/ABS	Contents
MH:	Today is March 18th, and we are here with Noureen Sultana and Waheed – same last name?
WK:	Khan, Waheen Khan.
MH:	Waheed Khan. And we're at a beautiful surrounding here at Dover rug here in Natick, where you have worked for – what is it, fifteen years? Fourteen? Fourteen years. My name's Maggie and Nora is also here with me. So we're here to learn about – well you have a multitude of art forms, so in addition to the painting which we will get to but first I wanted to ask you about mendhi, or henna tradition, if that's okay or do you want to start with the painting?

NS: Start with the henna.

MH: Now I have to – see, this microphone is a very nice microphone but you have to be sort of close, so if you want to hold it you can, or you don't have to. Do you want me to hold it? Okay.

NS: Hi, my name is Noureen, Noureen Sultana. I come from the city of Hyderabad, which is the best part in India, Hyderabad is very famous in Mughal. So I work with the henna and the paintings. So we use not only the one type of art, we do multiculture art, we're doing the multi-color, multi things to use the color with the henna, this is the first time to show in the U.S., to do henna with paint this is the first time. So people are so excited to see my artwork so this year we launched four or five places.

MH: Okay. I want to start with your earlier influences, because it looks like you're doing something very innovative and interesting in this art form but give us a little background, um, on how you first learned to do henna art, and do you call it mendhi?

NS: Yes henna, mendhi – somebody calls it mendhi. Explanation is the same, the word is different, henna, mendhi is the same word for different people.

MH: And it comes from a plant?

WK: Basically mendhi, henna, this is a leaf. After it gets dried, we make a powder and then we mix it with essential oils, then when we put it in your hand it stays a few times and once it's dried, it falls off and leaves a dye on your hands. The dye on your hand, time passing, it will be on your hand in a red color for two to three weeks.

NS: Yeah henna powder has a tendency to, where you put your hand to, the color stains your hand. The color stays for approximately two to three weeks.

MH: And is it associated with bridal customs?

NS: Yes, Muslim culture – in the Muslim culture this is associated with very good wishes, and now everyone believes henna is for good wishes. Now half of my brides are American, so everyone believes this is good wishes and good luck.

MH: Is this something that's a family tradition in your family?

NS: This is an art which comes from my family tradition which basically starts with calligraphy. Then this was the ladies work, so calligraphy comes from my grandparents and my mom comes from the henna art, so all this comes from a mix of arts.

MH: Oh – say a little more about your grandparents' work in calligraphy.

NS: Calligraphy – my grandfather, he is writing with the calligraphy, Urdu writing, and is the motifs we use the calligraphy is different only for the people who knows, this

comes from Iran, and Turkish, and people come to India and work with rug repair, rug designing, they use the calligraphy and Urdu writing also.

MH: How is Urdu spelled?

NS: U, r, d, u. Urdu So writing is the Urdu calligraphy, my grandparents were writing this art, different forms of arts.

MH: Okay. Were you both born and raised in the city you mentioned?

NS: Yes. Both the same, next town, both the same in Hyderabad. Hyderabad is a poor city (laughs.)

WK: We were hardly like three miles apart.

NS: Yeah, arranged marriage.

WK: Yes arranged marriage. I used to visit the place she lived there, nearby one of my grandmothers used to live there. So I used to pass by that side, but I never knew that I am going to marry her. (laughs)

MH: And you came to the United States when?

WK: I came in the United States, uh, 2001. Then I was here for one year, then I went to India again to get married, and in 2002 she's here.

NS: Yeah – after marriage I'm coming here but uh, as the proposal comes from my husband my mom is worried as the U.S. is too far! So, but I'm a happy person because I feel you know that India is not allowed, especially places like Hyderabad, ladies are not allowed going to work. But I am a person, you know, I am lucky living here in the U.S. As soon as this proposal comes, I am inside my heart saying "I'm (happy), I'm happy with this marriage because I know I'm going to show my mom's art. Basically this is my mom's art, so we're proud to my work, you know my mom and my parents are happy to see my work, my brother is always saying "You know, you're lucky you're living in the U.S."

MH: Well, that's right because were you trained to do something else? Were you always... [her web site says that Noreen was trained as an architect, but she doesn't tell us that.]

WK: Well basically what happens in India is after getting married it is up to the spouse. So, I told her that she should not be working.

NS: Yeah, usually it's not allowed, to work, with women in Muslim culture, but, you know, my husband is helping me to show my art and as soon as I'm here I'm pregnant and at that time you know every night we're sitting out and we're doing my practicing, and he saw me like one, one and a half months and he's asking me, like "why do you come out in the room? What do you do?" and I'm doing my practice! If I'm not doing my practice, I am losing my art. So he said "you want to show your art?" and I said "yes, if you allow it, you." So he said "I'll work with you, I'll stand with you to show you art." Thank goodness for my husband!

WK: Well, what happened was, um, every night, as soon as I get to bed, she gets up and she comes out in the living area, and she started doing embroidery, she started doing artworks and everything, so then I spoke with her and said, "What do you want to do?" I told her before that, I need a housewife, I don't need any...

NS: Yeah before marriage is a contract: "I want only a housewife," but . . .(laughs)

MH: Was that okay with your parents too?

NS: Yes

WK: Because that's traditional.

MH: Yes because that's traditional

NS: So now my parents is feeling very happy and excited because, you're not allowed but you know my daughter is going so far with this country, U.S. country, and she's showing and the Boston Globe is coming for articles, so my mother is so happy and my article (has) my parents' name, so now is everybody pushing me, "Go on, go on, go on!"

WK: So then what happened was when she was doing this, then I asked her, "What do you want to do?" and she said, "If I don't do this, I am going to lose this art. I just want to keep this life." I said, "That's fine with me," then from that time I'm with her every time. So she's very talented and as you see here, some of her designs she does for brides. It looks more pretty on the hand then on the paper, and this is what it is. So now she's into the arts like making paintings with henna, and this especially is very special for us. When you see this on this? [Waheed points to the painting about American-Indo weddings] When you see the bride and groom on it, and you see all the material used. You see here you have bridegroom, garland, instrument used for the drums and then you will see the peacock here,

NS: And then you see the horse,

WK: And the groom coming,

NS: And the man is used for the...

MH: Tabla?

WK: Yes, that's tabla.

NS: The bride and groom are sitting in one chair, and you know...

WK: This is all - she made this one [the lamp], and we secured this and this has been since like two years now.

MH: Ah - can you turn it on?

WK: Yeah

MH: So this is in a glass, painted on glass? Wow that's beautiful.

WK: Yes.

EMP: And this is using all the same materials that you would use on a person?

WK: Yes all this is on the person and in the painting

NS: And this work with the processing, it's not just only used for the powder, it's all mixing the different things to secure all the...

ELM: Ah, sure.

MH: And on the hand to would be lemon?

NS: Yeah, people believe if you're putting the henna, it's just for stick for the henna, it's not smudge anything, but if your henna is best quality, colors come good. The main thing (laughs).

(loud inter office announcement heard in the background)

MH: That's okay, that's because we're at Dover Rug. Yes?

EMP: I have a question. How long does something like this, like a complicated bridal pattern on a hand or an arm, how long would you spend on that?

NS: One bride is three to three and a half hours. Yeah, depending on the design that she's selected but usually three and a half hours one bride.

EMP: Such patience!

NS: Yeah, patient (laughs).

MH: Now one thing that occurs to me or that I notice that's reminding me of Turkish art, Islamic art, is that there's very little white space, that everything is filled in, I see that in your paintings as well.

NS: Yes. My art, is, people saying, people know this is Arabic art but this is usually we inspire in flowers. So most of the time I'm using a flowery style, people is watching my flowers. Main thing, people is standing two hours, three hours in line in Eid, because my style is different, we create new flowers in henna painting, that's why my style is different.

MH: You create what kind of flower?

NS: The most unique and very dynamic, you will see, everything is new time, new creative, new paints.

MH: Okay.

WK: If she'll see a flower, on the road,

NS: We sketch my hand! I don't have any paper or anything, we sketch my hand, yes and then we'll go to home and put in the folder!

MH: Yes, yes I get that! That's beautiful. So paisley and peacocks and flowers, those are common?

WK: Common for the Indian designs. So there are two different type of things: like traditional design and contemporary. Traditional are used like flowers.

NS: Contemporary, yeah, and Arabic style, Turkish style and Dubai style, Khalij design - every style is different. If people come to me, we just ask, "what style do you want?" Say I want Arabic style, Dubai style, we'll do this.

MH: I see. And when you were growing up, your mother would do what style?

NS: It's now, before, she's only doing traditional style. She doesn't know because she's not going in the outside. I'm here, I've met so many cultures of people so you know it's my, uh, work is different because we've met so many peoples. Like many countries, people come to me and we show like this and that, so that's why my knowledge is a different way from my mother. But you know, we learn to my mother all this art.

MH: Yeah, no that's very interesting because it's evolving.

WK: It is all in the details, so (laughs.)

MH: And remind me - do you use . . . what are you actually using to make the design? Do you pack the powder into a cone or do you use a brush when you're doing it on a woman's arm?

WK: Yes, she's going to do some designs for you also, and basically what she does is, um, she does it with a cone.

MH: The cone.

NS: We'll make the, we'll use the powder and we'll mix the water and essential oil, then the paste we can put it in the cone and then we can do it with the design.

MH: And in the old days?

NS: Old days we used the, you know the stick, what do you call - like toothpick. We use and in the line, one line and we do it.

MH: Okay. Just because it's so fascinating - this painting that hung in, was it the capitol in Rhode Island? Tell us about that because that's unusual.

NS: City hall -

WK: There was an event called "More Than My Religion," so we submitted this painting and it was selected for that and it was in the City Hall,

NS: The invitation, because we want to show the Muslim culture art because the "More than My Religion," so the, like the demand is "what is like architecture things, like the Muslim culture?" So we're thinking you know henna is the Muslim culture most often used, so we'll make the Taj Mahal painting and the henna, so we'll put in the henna designs painting.

MH: So it's the - I'm just trying to understand this - the Hindus that will use the word "mendhi", and Muslims more likely to say henna?

WK: What happens is basically mendhi and henna is the same word, but used by different people in different places. Like when you go to Saudi, Dubai or Emirates here, people recognize this like "henna." In India, this is "mendhi." Mendhi is henna. And the most important thing about mendhi is every festival, every wedding, starts with mendhi. Because people think this is a very auspicious start, with the mendhi, you know.

NS: And why I like to do henna work, as soon as I start my work, because the first thing, why I'm like to start to do henna because as soon as you put the henna on people's hand, people is so happy! That's why I like most of the work with the henna and paintings, both same designing in both sides of the work.

WK: We do all events with people in a very happy mood.

NS: A very happy mood. And standing two hours only for just one line design! Other artists can sit but they say, "No, no no, Noreen I want your design because your design is very unique!" And you see my designs.

MH: (pointing to photo) How do you get the two colors there though?

NS: That's the shading - the light shading.

MH: That is beautiful.

NS: After I start my work here doing henna, my side of family is complaining, because their Indian thinking is, you know, "It's not work, oh you're doing also and your boys also are doing henna work?" I said "Mama, here, this is the - what do you say - this is the art scene! So I want to show the different levels!" This is not just for the Indian type of henna. I am working with a designing line. So I don't want to stay like with the henna inside. Don't think like Indian, come from the India and you doing henna. Please! You know, I'm living here, my mentality has changed in a different way! (laughs) A different level."

MH: Oh, that's great! So tell me about your son learning.

NS: Yes - the older one, he's twelve years old, he's started learning henna, he's started coming, learning half of line designing but he's working to learn my art but the younger one, he's just started learning, he's crying, "Mama, hand is too pain!" (laughs) I said, "That's why it is very hard work! Not everybody does it! But you

guys are lucky to come from blood, this art." Not too easy, everyone wants to, so many people asking me "Noureen, you start doing classes?" Uh, Inshallah we'll start it next year because I want to have my son with me as soon as I teach (him). So the older one now he's started half learning and the younger one, he's just started.

WK: So, basically we are interested to have an institute where she can teach how to do this in the future, but she wants to train both the kids first, then we'll have it.

NS: This is partially why I told you about the apprenticeship, which is an opportunity you might want to look into. Which is, you would apply as a master artist with your older son. The other one could observe as well. So, that could be a nice sort of pilot for him to see how this would work later.

WK: Yes because this is a very unique art she has and we want to spread this out. And just like we don't want to keep it to ourselves, like a lot of people approach us right now but she's because she's doing so many things, we didn't do that but in the future yes.

NS: And my art is a very specialty, I'm an ambidexterity artist, we're doing both work, left and right. This is a specialty too, I want to teach my kids.

(taking photos)

MH: So, try to get some shots...

EMP: Do you want some details of it and the whole thing?

MH: Yes. Um, now I don't know if this is something still done but I've heard at a wedding where there's the party the day before perhaps where the women get together and the sing and the bride is having the henna put on, are there songs? Are there traditional songs or not so much?

NS: No, no, it depends on the fashion, what type of music they use. But the henna designs change, every year is changing.

MH: Changing?

NS: Yeah, every time, every new year, designs come in new styles.

MH: So that's like fashion?

NS: Yes, the fashion.

WK: She creates it. Basically if you give her a flower, she'll create it wholly on your hand.

MH: Okay.

NS: Anything, anything. Just show me any picture, anything we can draw. Very easily. Yeah. As a painting, as henna, anything.

MH: So, that's interesting because there are probably a lot of people that say they do this, but what makes you special?

WK: The kind of designs she does, nobody can come near to her designs. And the motifs - this is not her, like, her hobby and we are working on it, so that makes it a specialty. People come and say, "Oh, I can also do it," but once they're started I bet half of the time their hands are shaking and they just cannot do it properly, so yeah.

EMP: Can I just ask what was sort of the inspiration behind creating this piece? Because I think it's so interesting that you're reflecting an Indian wedding and,

NS: This is basically the Indian wedding, can call it Hindu, Muslim, and this is the American wedding. Nowadays, mixed marriages, half of marriages are mixed marriages, so we're thinking, you know, it's one place to show in Indian American weddings, all the rituals, what you are doing, step by step, so we'll make this painting.

EMP: That's so interesting! My sister had a mixed wedding because her husband is Islamic and she had a Sangeet and this is the first thing I've ever seen that depicts both of those traditions together, so that's so innovative. So nice to see!

WK: Two months ago we did a wedding where the bride was Hindu and the groom was southern Punjabi. So they did a wedding in the Hindu style PLUS they did it in the Punjabi style, so they did all the events in both. So they ended up doing seven to eight events. We did twenty four hours continual, two guys, sitting and doing henna. Twenty four hours!

MH: Wow!

NS: Yeah, I have so many ladies coming from artists saying, "We want to work with Noureen as a professional." I said, "See if you want to work with me, think of your work only for your passion, not only for money. We work where my passion lies, I'm not only thinking of money, that's why my work most of the people like. We'll create the new designs. The ladies come to work with me only for working just to work for half an hour, an hour they say. "I finish my work." I am sitting, booking for the two hours, two hours after people is asking me, "Noureen, can you possible do one hour extra?" I say with a smile, "Okay, no problem." Other artists are thinking, "No, my time is over." This is my passion work, not only work for money.

EMP: It seems like you can't spend that kind of time on that unless you love what you're creating?

NS: Yeah.

WK: Her paintings are starting from April seventieth - sorry, April twenty seventh - in Brookline Public Library, until June seventeenth.

MH: Oh, that's wonderful.

NS: Yes, it's a long time though, you know, I'm very happy! Last year is the Newton Free Library, and this year Brookline, after the More Than Religion is another promotion we're invited to again, "Noureen your painting is best last time, so we want to first re-invite you," I said, "I'm always, everybody, I'm with you! (laughs) So as soon as there's a scene with the art, I'm there, no problem!"

MH: Is there - this is probably not relevant, but - is there a tradition of hiding the name of the groom somewhere in the henna?

NS: Yeah, just putting in the name because the word is, henna is special because the groom, after marriage the groom is searching and if he finds, he believes is lucky! So this is a game, yeah, part of a game.

MH: Okay, so you're showing us another painting here,

WK: Feel it.

MH: Yes it's like a raised surface.

WK: Yes, you'll feel it like a feather you're touching.

NS: I want to see if you touch, this very different, I've not seen anything in U.S. anywhere this kind of art! So I want to teach, as a professional, kids to learn to do this art coming from the Mughal side. Here I'm not seeing any artists doing this kind of art.

WK: The finish and the texture.

NS: See the difference, we'll make words and these kind of things. And the paints are from the Turkish, from Iran, here is not easy to buy these paints.

MH: What kind of paint is it?

NS: It's acrylic paint but most of the use of this one is Iran, Turkish and mostly this is mixed of gone, it's a very unique art this mix of gone, and we use the paste and we use the ceramic also inside of paste. So it's coming to the thickness.

MH: The first word you said, the mix of the - what was the word you said?

WK: Gone.

MH: What's that?

NS: From the tree, natural tree. It comes from natural tree, this is why Indian people call gone.

MH: How do you spell that?

WK: G-O-N-E.

MH: Okay.

WK: It's like a tree, so it comes, they put it - in Turkey they make bubblegum also with that.

MH: Okay, wow.

NS: Yeah, homeopathic people use this for medicine also.

MH: Wow, okay. So this kind of raised surface, textured surface, is that done overseas, where you're from?

WK: She learned from her mom,

NS: My mom, yeah, because before, first, when I'm not selling my paintings, I want to show everywhere what I'm using so people think, "Noureen is different," so I want to first show my painting with my kids and then we plan next year to sell my paintings.

MH: Yeah!

WK: So you can see this is the design, my sons,

MH: Oh that's beautiful!

NS: This is a 2017 bride, she's asking, "If you do this, uh design, I'm giving you my wedding order!" He said "Okay! I'm doing!" and now he's doing this art (laughs). We put in front of camera, cell phone, and he did it, and she booked 2017, a 2017 wedding order.

MH: And is it unusual for a male, or a boy to do this?

NS: Not is not is, everything is fashion - before is - as soon as I'm starting this work, everyone complaining! But now everything is relaxed.

WK: The thing is, in India, men don't do that. No men will do that.

NS: Ladies have the skill.

WK: But now that we want to promote, we have two boys, so now we want a girl so she'll have more art than the boys. But still they are doing good, better and better.

NS: Yeah - we like to change our thinking that henna is only girl work and thinking only for "this is the art." This is the art thinking. I'm not thinking, "This is the henna, this is the painting," No! I'm only thinking of "this is the art." This is the natural art we want to be showing, both girl and boys same. The best thing of U.S. is everybody's rights same! I like that - thank God I'm living here! (laughs)

MH: So if you were living at home, your original home, would you?

WK: She would not be doing this, because the thing is, the way I saw her, the way she was started doing it, then I promoted her. Back home what she will be doing was, we

are from like a big family. I have nine brothers and three sisters. She has seven brothers. So, it's like the life, housewives, they don't do anything, okay, just get the kids ready, send them to school, you have like four servants to take care of the cooking, you have everything. So just like spending this time. Here, you learn. So before married, I never carry, like, a bag in my hand. My mom, you know, used to take care of the groceries, everything is at home. I used to have about eight or nine servants at home, they just come, so my stuff, if I step out of my home, my car is ready, nice and clean, everything ready to go out.

EMP: Very different.

WK: Very different. But here when we came, we know what is self working. And here I was a manager for 7/11, I was here, so we know what it makes here, it keeps you healthy, it makes you...

NS: The best quality in U.S. too, you know the value of time! What's the value of what you learn, what you do! Anything you know, you are teacher, you are artist, but how to use the quality of your work - this is the best place to. My mother, she is doing so many things but you she's never got the chance to show your art. She's feeling, you know, if I'm doing something she tried me, "you do this and that," at that time I was crying "mommy, you're always telling 'you do this and that'" I'm not playing anytime. As soon as my seventh grade exams go to time, we'll go to stitching classes, as soon as finish my tenth grade, before college start time, we'll doing the fashion designing. I'm not waste any time, so my mom, if I'm say "I want to do hairstyles," she said "Noureen, you do. Don't say 'I'm not doing, I'm not thinking, I don't know.' I want to be, you're my daughter, you learn everything." So she's the amazing person, all the credit goes to my mom. My parents, my father. My father is the best, best person in the world! He's my best friend, and then the next the same is my husband! He's the person my father's choice, he's the man I like! (laughs)

EMP: A good choice!

NS: My parents, my brothers, they are arranged marriage.

EMP: But you've always been motivated to be creative and be doing those things for your whole life? That's great.

MH: Yeah! Well we're lucky we found you.

NS: Thank you so much (laughs).

WK: She's going to do some designs for you, so can you? (gestures)

MH: Yeah, that's great, thank you. We can - sure.

(rearranging)

NS: My son, he is very excited. He says, "I want to see!" (laughs)

MH: What grade is he in?

NS: Seventh grade and third grade.

(observing henna cone)

EMP: So its just a tiny, tiny tiny snip (off the tip of the cone) to get those tiny lines.

WK: This is the only way how there's a technique.

EMP: Yes, to get the tiny lines.

NS: India is very easy to learn any art, but here is different. I don't don't know why is the kids, what do you say, own decisions, is the first main thing. India is everything decided through parents, everything. Here is a lot of, what do you say, what do you call, kids has a lot of own decisions, I want to say, what words to use...

MH: You mean they're more self directed, more independent?

NS: Not more independent, its more benefits kids to decide own thing, not to decide anything through parents, so if I'm teaching hardly because is hard thing to learn, so he said, "mama, you're forcing me, always tired," I said "Then you'll feel! Now mama is feeling the same way!" (laughs) Lots of feeling at that time, okay mama is giving you a good thing! Because this is for, you know, as soon as we start this hand, his hand you know is pain.

MH: Oh because, yeah - did you like drawing as a young person?

NS: yes.

ELM: (taking photos) Can I just come around? I don't want to knock anything.

MH: It smells good.

NS: This is lemon smell and moghra.

MH: What's moghra?

NS: This is the Indian jasmine flower.

MH: Ah, moghra.

EMP: Oh Maggie that's beautiful.

MH: Yeah I know! I have to be really careful and not bump it against anything. So its an ephemeral art form - because it doesn't last.

WK: Yeah, because you know, what happen is some religions, Jews and everything, we can't do in Muslims, we cannot do permanent tattoos. This can stay for like two, three. We can do public library and..teen..what is...

NS: Teenagers.

WK: Teenagers, they come in this library through the golf club and kids come there, we do like for two, three hours we do the henna, kids love this.

MH: And do you go, for your religion do you practice at a certain mosque thats close to home? Do you travel or not?

WK: We have, because of our business we are all around, so I go sometime in Framingham, we have in Wayland, we have in Burlington, we have um, Boston, Roxbury, yeah.

MH: Right. So anywhere.

WK: Yeah, it depends on the town, where are you.

MH: Why am I associating some Somalis that have temporary tattoos? Or not temporary? Is that true?

WK: They can do only temporary. Muslim, we can do just temporary only.

EMP: Maggie, I'm so jealous, its so beautiful - and so quick! You get the feeling its something this detailed, you must move very slowly, but it just blooms like a flower.

MH: No, she's got a really good hand, I can see.

WK: She does for like eight hours, and you'll see her face, you'll not see that she's been working for like eight hours.

MH: I love the dimensionality, the quality of it where its raised more in certain spots.

WK: Once it is dry, your hand will wear it for the next two weeks.

MH: Yay! Thats great.

EMP: Everyone at the office will be jealous. (laughs)

MH: So are you still interested in doing the festival?

MH: Maybe we can bring your son too. Would he want to?

NS: Yeah, he'll want.

EMP: (at design) oh thats nice!

NS: I wonder how it started, years ago?

EMP: Yeah. When my sister had her sangeet, of course the mendhi artist did her but everyone else did each other. I don't know if thats a common thing, that the family will just do each others designs, but she certainly looked better then the rest of us!

MH: I'm sure she did! That's great. Ooh, that's pretty! So how many brides do you do a year, do you have any idea?

NS: Yeah, eighty to ninety weddings in a year. In Massachusetts.

EMP: Wow! So is that more then one every weekend?

NS: One or two every time.

MH: Oh boy.

NS: Most of them Thursday-Friday.

MH: Do you think it would be possible for us to be a fly on the wall coming up between now and the next few months, do you think we could just pop in and watch? I guess it would be up to the bride, obviously.

NS: Yeah!

EMP: (taking photos) How to get these without...

MH: Yeah, this is a little room, its tiny. Yeah its pretty, you've got a nice style.

EMP: I'm just snapping a lot Noreen - Maggie! Both of you - and whatever...

MH: Yeah! That's the thing about digital, you have no limit.

EMP: You can just erase, okay.

MH: So this main thing in the middle is the flower you mentioned? The jasmine flower and then it goes from there, right.

NS: If you like any flower just tell me so we can draw it. The English flower, any.

EMP: And what flower was that in the middle? Is that like a marigold?

MH: No she said its a jasmine,

EMP: Oh jasmine! Oh, pretty. It just appeared like it grew on your arm.

MH: I know, great.

NS: I want to work with my son so is, you know, like fluently so the same art. I want to start to teach my kids.

MH: I bet thats a good way to get a girlfriend.

NS: Mmhmm (laughs)

MH: You might not approve! (laughs)

WK: We'll tell him "you're going to do your own bride!"

EMP: Is that allowed? (laughs)

MH: Who did yours? Did your mother do yours when you were married?

NS: My friend. Yeah my mother was busy with the work. She's out there cooking, she's entertaining the guests!

WK: It was over a thousand people, so...

MH: Oh my goodness!

WK: Indian weddings are,

MH: Oh they're huge! So what year did you get married? In 2001?

WK: In 2002.

MH: That does sound amazing.

WK: It was a huge wedding, and like you have like - I did about eight or nine ceremonies, so...

EMP: Wow. Overwhelming!

NS: Yeah!

MH: And do you have any family here? Extended family?

WK: My brother in law used to live here but he moved to Canada. Yeah he used to be here till 2008, and then he went to Canada. My whole family is like, two in Canada, two in Saudi, one in Dubai. My mother travels everywhere.

MH: She does. Okay so here's a question, because you described living in a house with servants. Where - what did your father do for a living, to earn money?

WK: My grandparents, my grandfather was the accountant for the Museum of Hyderabad. So he was rich to have like cotton farms and all that stuff, so my mother was alone, one child, so...

MH: It all came down, yeah.

EMP: Are you able to both get back, often enough to see family in India, or its a very long trip?

WK: Yeah, the problem with us is right now because she's booked with her brides for the year and before it was like May, June, July, August, but nowadays throughout the year there are 2,000 Indian Pakistani weddings in New England.

EMP: Oh my!

WK: And we do eighty five of it. So our schedule is, so my mom comes every year.

MH: Okay thats good. She'll come to you. Oh great.

WK: She's planning to come next week.

NS: My mom and my brothers, everybody comes.

MH: Oh great.

WK: Now my kids are traveling alone to India. Last February -

NS: Because we like to, you know, kids learn. If going to parents only for this time, you want to go alone and learn what things is, you know, the culture or the art, now he's watching, he's going to and he's watching, you know in Charminthar, which is very famous in the world, Charminthar. Best architecture and art.

WK: It has, you know like a fort.

NS: And he goes by himself and he learn "mummy, hows this little thing in Charminthar, very very beautiful," and I say "Yeah, that's why you go alone and you learn!"

MH: That's fabulous.

WK: So both went on, uh, on the fourteenth they went from here and they came back after twelve days.

MH: Lucky boys! Because they had school break?

WK: Yes.

NS: And the school also allowed because my kids is very famous in the arts in the schools!

MH: I'm sure!

NS: So school knows. (laughs)

WK: They went directly from Hyderabad and they send to us.

EMP: Here's a question - a bride who wants to book you for a wedding, how far out does she? How far out do you book?

WK: We are booked for 2016 already.

NS: A full year. Before we're booking, six months, seven months before, is my bookings start.

EMP: I mean I can see why, but still - you're so busy!

MH: Are you sure you can do the festival? Because that's on a weekend?

WK: Yeah, because we reserved it.

NS: But we won't do especially for the school events, college events, for the change of timings only, I'll not miss any especially for the colleges, libraries, we want to go and show this art.

WK: We worked for the last two weeks, there's a Holi in Merrimac college, we went there and we went to Biogen, Staples,

EMP: Wow

MH: Ooh, I just did something (to mendhi)

NS: And booking for the six month, any booking, people know I was busy so booking before.

WK: Normally yeah we book like six, seven months.

MH: Yeah. So, wow I'll be careful.

EMP: I'm so excited! I don't want to step on this.

WK I can take some pictures for you.

NS: And booking for the six month, any booking, people know I was busy so people are booking before.

MH: Yeah, I would think so.

WK: Normally yeah we book like six, seven months.

MH: Yeah. So, wow I'll be careful.

EMP: I'm so excited! I don't want to step on this.

WK I can take some pictures for you.

EMP: I don't want to step on this, if this goes around your work, right? Its under the chair. Thank you, I just didn't want t knock anything over!

WK: Here, give it to me.

EMP: Okay.

(speaking in Urdu)

MH: And what language is that?

NS: Urdu. Okay, you can go with the left, is more easy to manage.

EMP: Its better? Okay, either one for me. And where do you get your materials from?

MS: Depends on the quality. India, Pakistan and Iran.

WK: Also I have a question. On that day, we will be doing hands for the people, right?

MH: As much as - yeah.

EMP: So you sketch it first?

NS: Yeah. This is the English flower.

MH: English flower, okay. Jasmine.

EMP: Oh, my children are going to be jealous of me.

MH: So to properly dry takes how long?

WK: Normally this dries in 15-20 minutes, but leave it for more time. The more time it is on your hand, the more dark the color comes.

MH: Right. And what is it, something? They mix lemon and sugar? Or no?

WK: Okay, the thing is all psychological. The thing is, to get it dry and leave for more time, we put lemon and sugar, which is a thick paste, put it on so that the mehndi on your hand will stay for more time.

MH: Sort of protect it.

WK: And then it will stay for more time.

EMP: Would be best to try to sleep overnight with it? I know that sometimes people wrap it in plastic?

NS: No, no because this is the professional henna, Yeah, just leave it on your hand.

EMP: Until like this evening? Okay.

NS: Yeah.

MH: That's pretty.

EMP: Whats the longest time that you've ever sat and done this at one stretch?

NS: Is this your first time or have you had it done before?

EMP: I had it actually, I had it at my sister's wedding and in high school I used to go get it done in Providence, because it was so pretty.

MH: I think I should stand over here...

NS: Now these days, our bride wants to be matching her dress designing.

MH: Really?

NS: Yes. She come first and show me the design of dress, she'll show me the picture and I sketch the design.

EMP: It is all about fashion, huh?

WK: So that's the dates on that?

MH: It is...July 30 and 31st. Which is Saturday and Sunday. And its - um, you live close enough so you - the artist, its - well, there's a woman named Millie Raan, I don't know if she's been in touch yet?

WK: Not yet.

MH: She will. She handles all the logistics, like gives you your parking pass and meal tickets and all that kind of stuff. But you'll be in a tent. I'm hoping to get a few other aesthetic, like body art, hair braiding things but we'll see. But its demonstrating from noon to five, both days. That's nice. There's music. There are five stages of music at this festival.

WK: So what time is it?

MH: The demonstration is from noon to five, but you have to get there more like, to set up the first day more like ten thirty and you'll have a tent and then at five thirty it closes down. And then the same thing the next day.