

ARLINGTON

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ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICANS | ONE IN AN OCCASIONAL SERIES

## Couple help improve lives of U.S. Muslims

■ Dr. Basheer Ahmed started the Muslim Community Center for Human Service, a free clinic that treats medical and mental health needs, in 1995.

By **KATHERINE CROMER**  
STAR-TELEGRAM STAFF WRITER

ARLINGTON — Two photographs of Dr. Basheer Ahmed's life show images as polar as the Indian and American cultures he embraces.

One photograph in his Arlington home is a black-and-white portrait of him and his wife standing shoulder-to-

shoulder in traditional Indian wedding dress. It was taken in Hyderabad, India, a week after their arranged marriage in 1967.

A second photograph shows Ahmed at a table in 1979 with President Jimmy Carter, who invited Ahmed and other Muslim leaders to the White House as consultants during

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■ Asian Pacific American heritage month calendar. **9B**

the Iran hostage crisis.

Ahmed, 69, moved to the United States in 1968, and to Fort Worth a decade later. He and his wife, Shakila, 59, hold on to their Indian culture as they prosper — and work to improve life for Muslims — in America.

The Ahmeds are from More on INDIA on 9B



STAR-TELEGRAM/R. JEENA JACOB

Dr. Basheer Ahmed and wife Shakila, who immigrated to the United States from India in the late 1960s, sit next to a wedding portrait in their Arlington home. The Ahmeds are from Hyderabad in southern India.

## India: Family moved to Arlington in 1993

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Hyderabad, the capital of the south Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. During the British colonization of India, the city maintained its own currency and king.

"We enjoyed a semi-independence," Ahmed said. "A lot of educated people get the jobs and respect. It was more like typical Indian culture." Ahmed's father was an accountant, and his mother was a schoolteacher who became a physician.

Ahmed graduated from Osmania University in Hyderabad, and then from Dow Medical College in Karachi, Pakistan. Then, in 1962, he went to Britain and finished training in psychiatry at the University of Glasgow in Scotland.

But in 1967, he set his sights on the United States, a country that had captivated him even in high school. He got a job and a visa.

"In the meantime," Shakila Ahmed said, "his mom was looking for girls."

Before Basheer Ahmed took a job as the director of the St. Louis State Hospital in Missouri, he returned to Hyderabad, where his mother had found Shakila, a medical student at Osmania, to be his wife. Ahmed saw her once, at the hospital where she worked.

"Arranged marriages is how you grow up," Ahmed said. "It is normal."

Shakila said that tradition is changing, even in India.

"And here, to our children, it's a total alien concept," she said.

After their marriage in December 1967, Ahmed moved to St. Louis. His wife followed in August 1968.

In the 1960s, mental health care focused more on confining patients than treating them.

"People were getting into the hospital, but they were never getting out," said Ahmed, who focused on therapy rather than just custodial care.

In 1971, Ahmed became director of the mental health center at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York, where he was also on the faculty.

Shakila Ahmed returned to India with her infant son, Sameer, to complete a required yearlong internship so she could practice as a radiologist.

The Ahmeds became U.S. citizens in 1973.

In 1976, the family moved to Dayton, Ohio, where Ahmed became a professor at the Wright State University School of Medicine and was

chief of psychiatry at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Dayton.

But a small Muslim population and cold winters drove the Ahmeds south.

"One night, an icicle punctured my tire," Shakila Ahmed said. "No more winters," I said. "We will either go to California, Florida or Texas."

From 1978 to 1982, Ahmed was the director of psychiatry at John Peter Smith Hospital, and he has spent 20 years working at medical institutions, hospitals and in private practice. Shakila Ahmed worked as a radiologist at the Dallas Veterans Affairs Hospital.

The family moved to Arlington in 1993.

Ahmed started the Muslim Community Center for Human Service in 1995. The free clinic treats medical and mental health needs, offers a 24-hour help line for victims of domestic violence and promotes a "Know Your Muslim Neighbor" campaign.

"In this country, when I came, I imagined what this country would be, and it proved to be much better," Ahmed said. "You can't just get something for nothing. You have to work hard, and usually hard work gets recognized and appreciated."

Sameer Ahmed, 35, respects his father's work ethic and service to the community.



COURTESY OF BASHEER AHMED

Basheer Ahmed meets with then-President Jimmy Carter in 1979. Ahmed and other Muslim leaders were invited to the White House as consultants during the Iran hostage crisis.

"He does it without asking anything and does it without any personal gain," said Sameer Ahmed, a lawyer in Houston. "He just wants to help."

The Ahmeds' daughter, Araj, is in law school at American University in Washington, D.C.

While the Ahmeds typically eat only Indian food, speak Urdu and attend mosque every Friday, their children lead very American lives.

"I believe in most of the tenets of the Islamic faith," Sameer Ahmed said. "But I think it's more guidelines for how you carry yourself."

**IN THE KNOW**

**Republic of India**

- Population is more than 1 billion (2001 census)
- 17 major languages with 844 dialects are spoken
- Major religions are Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism
- The tiger is the national animal
- There are 9,821 Asian Indians in Tarrant County.

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