

ASIAN VOICES

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INTERVIEWEE: Balbir Singh
INTERVIEWER: Andrew Jilani
LANGUAGE OF INTERVIEW: Punjabi

(BEGINNING OF TAPE 11, SIDE A)

ANDREW JILANI: July twenty-sixth, it's Monday afternoon. I'm sitting at the home of-, er.... Balbir Singh. Er... he has just come from-... er working in the restaurant, and taking a two-hour break. He has been very kind to give me this time to interview him. I'm sitting in one of the rooms. It's pretty hot outside, and the fan and the air-conditioning is on, and we're about to begin our interview. [recorder is turned off and on]

And--. Mr. Balbir, first tell me-, my first question is-, where did you spend your childhood?

BALBIR SINGH: Childhood-, was spent in Punjab.

AJ: Where in Punjab?

BS: Jallunder.

AJ: Jallunder proper?

BS: Jallunder city-, proper.

AJ: And-, tell me a bit about your family. How big is your family?

BS: My family is-, quite big. First of all, my papa-, they are five brothers.

AJ: Okay.

BS: And--.

AJ: Daddy?

BS: Yes, daddy. They are five brothers.

AJ: So you have four uncles.

BS: Yes, four uncles. And-, about four years ago, all the brothers separated.

AJ: Okay.

BS: I-, I have three brothers, and-, the two that are older than me had already been married, and they had children before separating [from the family].

AJ: Okay.

BS: It means that our total family at the time-, we-, we used to work together. We had a business of potatoes.

AJ: Potatoes?

BS: Potatoes. We had a farm, we named it M.A. Farm. I used to work there, too.

AJ: What--? What was the name of farm?

BS: M.A. Farm.

AJ: What does M.A. stand for?

BS: Em-, there's a village called "Munda".

AJ: Munda?

BS: Yes. Our lands were there.

AJ: How much land do you have?

BS: Our own land is twenty-eight killa's.

AJ: Twenty-eight killa's?

BS: Yes, twenty-eight killa's. The rest we acquired on contract. We did a potato business at a very high level.

AJ: Okay?

BS: Approximately-, we grew potatoes on approximately one hundred seventy-five to two hundred acres.

AJ: Great.

BS: But when we were together.

AJ: Okay. All the uncles--?

BS: Uncles, and all. And at that time we had five tractors also. And--.

AJ: What do you mean by together? Did all of you stay in one house?

BS: Together--. No. Some of them lived in Kapurthala-, two of the uncles lived there. The other three lived in Jallunder. And-, all the work used to be combined for all of them. All expenses, etc., were shared. Whenever they needed assistance, we would go there and help them out, and if we needed help, they would come to help. All of it-, I mean, all expenses were shared, and all income was shared also.

AJ: It [income] was distributed?

BS: Among all of us-, whatever each one needed, was given.

AJ: Then, what--? What was the reason for the separation?

BS: Separation--. Then-, things get more complicated. Now, imagine that we are four brothers, two older than me-, their children are at a marriageable age now.

AJ: Ah. Okay.

BS: Then you have to [separate]. One day it has to happen.

AJ: As the family grows bigger.

BS: Yes. The was growing bigger and bigger, and there's a limit you can stretch things to [quotes an idiom meaning, "a piece of thread will go just so far"]. In our locality, we were commended for staying and working together for so long.

AJ: And where did you get your education?

BS: Education-, I got my education in Jallunder.

AJ: How much schooling did you do?

BS: I did "plus two".

AJ: Plus two?

BS: Yes.

AJ: Plus two mean grade two? No?

BS: Twelve.

AJ: Oh, twelve! Okay, plus two-, sorry. I'm sorry. Okay, twelve grades. F.A.
[faculty of arts—ten years of high school and two of college]. You appeared for F.A., or
F.Sc. [faculty of science]?

BS: Er.... After matric [high school] comes plus one, and then plus two. Which
means that I did not make it to B.A. finals.

AJ: Not to B.A. finals?

BS: No. (). I attended college for two years, and--.

AJ: And what--? You had no intentions [of studying further], or what?

BS: Intentions-, were not really there. The family business is a better option, so we
did not emphasize much on studies. Family business is so much better, so that's why-,
started there--.

AJ: Potato business.

BS: Potato business.

AJ: And-, they are still working on the potato business-, your father, and uncles?

BS: Yes. Now-, it's like this--. Almost-, about two years ago, we reduced our potato business. We gradually began relinquishing the lands we worked on contract. Because our-, about two to three members from each of the families had moved to foreign countries.

AJ: Uh-huh.

BS: Two of my uncles-, they immigrated to Canada.

AJ: They are settled there.

BS: They are settled there. They had married a daughter there, and also married a son. These children in turn sponsored the rest.

AJ: What do they do in Canada?

BS: In Canada, they have a press [printing] business.

AJ: Press. Okay. Where do they live in Canada?

BS: Vancouver.

AJ: Vancouver? Okay.

BS: So, that's why we had to reduce the business there.

AJ: For lack of manpower?

BS: Yes, because of a lack of manpower. The potato business depends on manpower.

AJ: Okay. And--. Er... I have heard that potatoes grow better in higher elevations. Is that correct? No? In mountain regions.

BS: No, not in the mountain areas. The best potatoes in India are from Jallunder and Kapurthala.

AJ: Kapurthala?

BS: Yes. These two places. In India, the potatoes grown here are considered the best. Yes. These are sandy areas, and the sand here is of the white variety.

AJ: White sand?

BS: Yes, and there are sand dunes. These dunes are leveled, and the potatoes grown here are white.

AJ: White potatoes.

BS: Yes, and if you look at the potatoes, they look like eggs. Farmers from Bihar, UP, Gujrat get potato seeds from our area. This potato is used to produced seed also. And it is also the most expensive variety of potato.

AJ: And--. How did you get interested in coming to America?

BS: Interest-, I saw many people coming here, and so I got interested also.

AJ: Who did you see? Some friends of your?

BS: No, not friends-, first, my younger brother went to Germany eight years ago. He got married there, and he now has a residence permit now.

AJ: With a German girl?

BS: Yes, he married a German girl, and he now has residence permit. He has started a pizza business now. He encouraged me also to try.

AJ: To go to America?

BS: Yes. So, I thought I'd give it a try. And the money here is good. You can gradually make a life for yourself here.

AJ: You can make a life here?

BS: Yes. It takes some time, but one can make a life here. Over there, no matter how much you do-, we have worked at a pretty high level, but still, we wee not able to

save much over there. You can barely meet your basic necessities there. And-, here if we work one day, we can earn enough to last us a week. There's no inflation here. If you work a little bit, you can get by. Although you do have to work hard, but no big worries. If you have your family here, you can have a good life here.

AJ: You have a family?

BS: I have a family. I have a son.

AJ: Okay. How old is he?

BS: When I came here, he was five weeks old.

AJ: Oh.... He was very young. He must be a year old now?

BS: Just about.

AJ: Just about. Do you miss him?

BS: That's the thing that bothers one. I miss him every day. We had a love marriage. We love each other very much. Circumstances force you to come here. At that time, we thought two or four, or even six years is no big deal. I'll have my papers and things will be okay. But when I got here, I began to realize that we're far apart. I began to think that we will not be able to meet [in the near future]. So, I control my feelings [quotes a Punjabi idiom "to put a stone on your heart"]. AJ: So, you've placed a stone on your heart?

BS: You have to place a stone on your heart, what else can one do? ()

AJ: What do you do when you miss your son?

BS: Not much--. You shed a couple tears-, and then things become better. I keep myself busy in my work, that way you don't miss them so badly. [pause] So, that's it. Other than that, I don't have any problems here.

AJ: Okay.

BS: No other problems.

AJ: You miss your family!

BS: Yes, I miss my family. I miss my mom and dad.

AJ: Miss your mom and dad?

BS: Yes. In all my family, we love each other very much, so missing them is natural. [pause]

AJ: How did you have a love marriage? Where did you meet your wife?

BS: About love marriage-, er.... One of my aunts lives close to us.

AJ: Aunt-, your father's sister?

BS: Yes, and of her husband's cousins was studying in a college.

AJ: In Jallunder?

BS: In Jallunder. It was close to our place-, maybe a couple kilometers. And-, I used to visit them very often, and saw her there a few time. I took the first step. I asked my aunt's daughter-, I had her deliver letters to my wife. Well, gradually, we fell in love. But we-, we talked face to face on very rare occasions. Most of our communication was through letters. And we had never touched each other.

AJ: Never touched.

BS: Never touched.

AJ: And then got married?

BS: Yes. We got married. But before that, we never touched each other.

AJ: Is that necessary?

BS: What?

AJ: This-, not touching each before marriage.

BS: Well, that's how each person thinks. Well-, even if you do-, it could cause misunderstandings between the two--.

AJ: What's that?

BS: Misunderstandings between the two. And-, you could also ruin the life of a girl. Now, when we got married, we had many obstacles in our way.

AJ: Obstacles?

BS: Obstacles. I mean--.

AJ: From the families? Your family or hers?

BS: No. My aunt's husband would not agree to our marriage. He said that your dad is a brother-in-law to me, how do you expect me to be your brother-in-law? Because she is his first cousin.

AJ: Ah...

BS: First cousin of my aunt's husband-, my wife. He is a bus driver, and is a very brave man. He could not get used to the idea of becoming my brother-in-law when my dad was his brother-in-law. And that became an obstacle in our way.

AJ: Then what happened?

BS: We brought him around gradually. My grandfather talked to him, and convinced him that this is not a big problem. And when my wife's brother came to know about it, he agreed that if the boy is good, and comes from a good family, then it's okay. There's no harm in them getting married. She has to get married one day, so it may as well happen now. So, finally my aunt's husband also agreed.

AJ: Okay. And-, er.... When you arrived in America, how did you like it?

BS: I liked America, and I thought it was beautiful. In the beginning-, for the initial three or four months, it looked very beautiful I was not missing my family so badly then. And after that, I began thinking more of my family and missing them. And then--.

AJ: Which city did you come to first?

BS: I came to New York first. Yes. I worked there-, about four months.

AJ: New York? In a restaurant?

BS: In a deli.

AJ: Deli where?

BS: A deli. Kitchen? A biscuit kitchen.

AJ: Oh, deli! Okay.

BS: That's what I did there, and after that I came here. It's been about four months that I came here.

AJ: How many months?

BS: About four--.

AJ: What made you come here? To Chapel Hill?

BS: Over here-, it happened this way. Over there, I had to go at seven a.m.

AJ: To work?

BS: Yes. To my job. And I worked till seven p.m. And besides, I had to leave home an hour earlier to get there by train, and an hour by train to get back home. So, my workday was fourteen hours. That was a very long time. Then, a little bit-, I don't know English very well, so language a problem there.

AJ: Okay.

BS: So, that is why--. This person we work for is from our area. I got his phone number and I asked him. He said I could come and work here.

AJ: Who, Swaran Singh?

BS: No. Parvinder.

AJ: Ah... Parvinder, the owner.

BS: Yes. He's from our area. About twenty minutes from my place.

AJ: In Jallunder?

BS: Yes, in Jallunder. Then I arrived here. I didn't know much about this work, and he taught me. And now-, I'm an expert. You know, I'm here to earn money, so I have to concentrate on my work.

AJ: Concentrate--. And-, how many hours a day you work now?

BS: It comes to about ten or eleven hours. Sometimes twelve. Sometimes less than that, or sometimes even more than that.

AJ: How much time off do you get?

BS: In the afternoon, from three to five, but sometimes if there is more work, we work more hours. Or sometimes I have to get back to work earlier if some customers are there. Only these things make the hours vary, otherwise on an average, about ten hours.

AJ: About ten to twelve hours.

BS: Ten hours.

AJ: And-, you get a weekly day off?

BS: One--. Half!

AJ: half a day in one week?

BS: Yes. What would I do with more time off? If I sit here alone, it makes me sad. At work, we joke around with one another, listen to music, and the time passes quickly. But over here-, in the morning-, I sometimes have to do my laundry. I do that every other weekly off, so I have time on the following off day. Sometimes I go to a store nearby, and just walk around. It's very difficult to pass time for a full day.

AJ: have you made any friends here.

BS: No, not yet. I can't speak English yet. But-, even those that can speak English have made no friends.

AJ: There are a lot of Punjabi people here. In Durham.

BS: But I don't know much about them yet.

AJ: There's a gurdawara also.

BS: I've been to the gurawara two or three times, but each time I went with them.
With Ravinder.

AJ: Okay.

BS: And-, I'll get familiar with the surroundings when I have some time. I don't get much time these days anyway. I spend the whole day at he restaurant, and on the weekly off day, time just passes quickly.

AJ: How much do you get paid?

BS: My salary-, here, is three hundred seventy-five.

AJ: Three hundred seventy-five--.

BS: Per week.

AJ: Per week? Okay. And-, Any leave? Sick time-off, or something.

BS: No. Nothing like that. We lose our wages.

AJ: lose wages?

BS: So far, it's been all right, but they'll deduct wages if I take time off.

AJ: And-, you pay the rent for this apartment yourself?

BS: Yes. This we pay ourselves.

AJ: Okay. The restaurant people don't provide that.

BS: No.

AJ: Right. And--. What do you think of America now?

BS: Not bad. I wish I get my papers done. For one thing, that will open the avenue of being able to go to India, and then-, gradually I can get my family over. I will have them come over-, once I have my papers.

AJ: Okay. You intend to do that?

BS: Yes. I'll do something. I'll start my own business.

AJ: Here? What kind of business?

BS: Yes. My line of work now is the restaurant business. In the beginning it will be this, later on, we'll see. Because if you adopt a line of work, it's difficult to get away from it.

AJ: Yeah. You get involved in it. And when you have a half day off every week, how do you spend that?

BS: I go to the store. Sometimes I go for laundry-, that takes two or three hours. I wake up at about ten in the morning. And sometimes, I go to this other store-, I go there to buy some fruits, etc. That takes up a couple of hours. Anyway, that's how I spend the time, going here and there. I don't feel like just sitting here alone. If I stay here, I feel sleepy. That's why I don't stay at home. One gains a little knowledge that way. You get

to know things only if you move around. You learn nothing by just sitting at home.

Moreover, just sitting around here is very difficult for me.

AJ: Okay.

BS: I was jobless in New York for about-, fifteen days. Passing that time was like moving a mountain!

AK: Okay? Without a job?

BS: Yes, and it was very cold. And-, I did not have a job. I hardly knew anything, so I had to spend a few days with nothing to do.

AJ: When you came here to Chapel Hill, how did you find this apartment?

BS: They found it for us.

AJ: The owners?

BS: The owners, yes.

AJ: And the papers for it-, the lease-, is it in the owner's name?

BS: In the owner's name.

AJ: Not in your name?

BS: No.

AJ: And all of you share the rent?

BS: Yes, we share the rent.

AJ: Uh-huh. [pause] Okay, Mr. Balbir, is this American society, and the lifestyle here suitable for us to live in-, those of us that come from South Asia?

BS: It's okay. We are living our life according to our ways and standards. Some-, most people say that [Americans] don't wear too many clothes, and all, but it's okay.

That's their way of living, it's okay.

AJ: Who wears very few clothes?

BS: Like-, they say, girls from here. Very few clothes-, they go around in shorts.

In comparison, our people wear a lot of clothes. That's what you meant to ask?

AJ: Yes, that-, and other aspects of the local lifestyle, the society here-, is it suitable for people like us?

BS: Yes, it's okay. Now, you see that they don't work more than forty hours a week.

AJ: Americans?

BS: Yes. Is that how much they do? () So, that's good.

AJ: And then they get overtime also.

BS: Yes, if some work extra hours. And then, they have their weekend on Saturday-, Friday and Saturday. They enjoy life also. That's good, and one should do that. You should not spend your life in work only. You should work also, and save some money for the future also, and should have some fun also. That's what life is all about. Have some enjoyment, and work also. It should be like that.

AJ: If you have the time, how would you have fun?

BS: Me-, I would head for the beach.

AJ: To the beach?

BS: Yes. I'll move around there, and see what the situation is like, and enjoy the scenery.

AJ: Okay.

BS: There are many things that look beautiful to the eye, and I'll enjoy them.

AJ: And? How else would you enjoy? If you have a two-day weekend, Saturday and Sunday, or Friday and Saturday, what else would you do?

BS: Yes. If I have some money saved up-- I'll still go to the beach. Or, if I can find other things that are worth seeing-, in America, I'll go see those places. Even if I have to spend money to see those things, I certainly will. Yes, if I have the time. If I stay here long enough, and gradually learn more about this place. And also, I have this opportunity to come to America. It's a big name in the world, isn't it? And tomorrow if I go back, everyone will ask me what I saw there--.

AJ: Yeah, what have you seen there?

BS: How the life is over here, and what are the things that are worth seeing. And I'll be able to tell them only if I will have seen something.

AJ: And-, when you were in Punjab-, in Jallunder-, before you came to America, which were the things that you had heard about America that were supposedly very nice?

BS: No much. One thing [I heard about] was the World Trade Center.

AJ: World Trade Center? What did you hear about it?

BS: Oh, it was said that it's very high-, it has a hundred and two or something like that stories. And then there's the Liberty-, the Statue of Liberty-, I had heard about it. And-, then, I got an opportunity, and went to see it.

AJ: Okay, so you saw that? You were close to it in New York.

BS: Yes, when in New York I saw it. And-- The trains-, that run underground.

AJ: Underground trains?

BS: It was a big thing for us there. We used to think how that was managed. And I heard about New York, that it's a city of skyscrapers, and that the buildings there are very high.

AJ: So, when you came to America, you saw all of that?

BS: Yes. When I arrived in New York, I was shown all of these things first.

AJ: Did you like them?

BS: Yes, very much. Only because of not getting a good job, I had to move from there, otherwise I'd have lived there.

AJ: In New York?

BS: Yes.

AJ: In New York there are a lot of people from Punjab-, from the Indian Punjab, the Pakistani Punjab.

BS: Yes, I know. You know how the seventy-fourth avenue. It's like another Jallunder.

AJ: Uh-huh. Which place?

BS: Seventy-fourth street.

AJ: Seventy-fourth street? Okay. It's in the Queens? Jackson Heights.

BS: Yes, Queens. Jackson Heights.

AJ: That's just like India.

BS: Just like India.

AJ: Right. Are you interested in singing, or music?

BS: Music and singing-, a lot.

AJ: Punjabi songs?

BS: Punjabi, and Hindi. I-, play the tapes, to pass time, so that I don't miss them-, and I sing along. And the time does pass.

AJ: Which is your favorite song?

BS: Not one in particular-, there are many.

AJ: Would you sing a couple for us?

BS: No fun in singing like this.

AJ: Doesn't matter. It's just among friends. Maybe Punjabi, or Hindi. Whichever you feel like.

BS: [sings a Punjabi song]

I sing bits and pieces of songs like this.

AJ: You sing while you work?

BS: I hum along while I work. The time passes well.

AJ: Okay. Right. Ahm....[pause] In Chapel Hill-, can you get Indian newspapers, etc.?

AJ: In Chapel Hill--. We do have a desire to subscribe to some newspaper or such, but so far we haven't come to know how to go about it. If, at least, we could get a Punjabi newspaper-, even if it's weekly. At least we can read our news.

AJ: To know what's happening.

BS: But-, yes. Sometimes, when Parvinder goes to the gurdawara-, he used to bring some form there. They are still lying here--.

AJ: Are these the ones?

BS: Yes. But these are old issues.

AJ: These are old issues. Okay.

BS: I am an eager newspaper reader.

AJ: Are you?

BS: Yes. We got a TV, just for this. I had to convince all the guys. Having a TV, we will be able to understand some of the news. Although I can't understand, but someone from among us who can understand, can tell us what's going on.

AJ: So, you pooled in money to get the TV?

BS: Yes, all of us pooled in. I bought the TV, and everyone gave their contributions to me.

AJ: Okay. That's good.

BS: One must have ().

AJ: Since you've been here, has any American family-- white, black, Mexican, or Indian—ever invited you?

BS: No. We hardly ever come across many people.

AJ: And at the gurdawara, has anybody ever invited you over for a meal, or such?

BS: No. We always have just enough time to worship and come right back. At the gurdawara, we had tea, etc.

AJ: At the lungar [free food for worshippers].

BS: Yeah. It's like a lungar. They serve tea. At the time I've been there-, never been there at occasions like (). I've always been there on Sunday mornings when we're free from here. And at those times, very few people were there.

Companionship comes with time-, and at such times I've never been there. That's why we've always been there at the tea lungar.

AJ: Right.

BS: It gladdens my heart.

AJ: gladdens your heart?

BS: I wish I could go every week, but can't do that.

AJ: If you speak to the owner and ask for time off for the purpose of attending the gurdawara--?

BS: Then-, we have to take time off.

AJ: So your wages will get deducted?

BS: Yes. My wages will get deducted. And it's understandable, if anyone takes times off, his wages will be deducted, because the one whose business it is, has to look out for his interest.

AJ: How much will he deduct?

BS: Half a day's wages, at least. When I'm a little more stable, then I'll definitely go.

AJ: Other than that, Mr. Balbir, you said that you miss your family, and that you have to work a lot here--.

BS: Work doesn't bother me.

AJ: Work doesn't bother you? Okay. But you don't get time.

BS: I don't get time. That's a problem we have.

AJ: You have to work long hours.

BS: We don't get time to go around anywhere.

AJ: You have any other difficulties? Here in America?

BS: Yes. Till such time as I get my papers, there are difficulties. Those that have papers, also pressurize at times. And those that don't have papers have to bear.

AJ: have to bear. Okay.

BS: One must have a green card. Then things are okay. [pause]

AJ: If an American asks you to tell about the lifestyle in Punjab, in or around Jallunder, what will you tell them?

BS: In comparison with the American life-, life is much better--.

AJ: In Jallunder?

BS: Yes. Because-, there is a lot of love among the people there. It's a fact that one always like one's birthplace. But-, judging from what I've seen and experienced so far, Punjab is a lot better. Because there is a lot more love among us-, we gather in the evenings, talk about all things, and share jokes, etc. also. And such things pull one. Only-, because of the dollars, one gets stuck here. It's a "sweet jail".

AJ: This is a sweet jail [in your opinion]?

BS: It is really a sweet jail-, we can't go back, and we can't leave it. The dollars don't let you leave this place.

AJ: And if you get a good job or have a good business in Punjab--?

BS: I'll do it.

AJ: What will your decision be then?

BS: If it's good work, I can surely do it. If I have the opportunity, I would prefer to bring my family here. There's a lot of inflation there. There are much less difficulties here. And if I get a chance, I'd like to bring all my family here.

AJ: Mummy daddy?

BS: Including mummy, daddy.

AJ: Brothers and sisters?

BS: Most of my brothers and sisters are already abroad.

AJ: Okay.

BS: I have one brother in India.

AJ: Younger or elder?

BS: Older.

AJ: What does he do there?

BS: He's farmer.

AJ: Does farming?

BS: Yes.

AJ: Right. [pause] What do you like in Chapel Hill?

BS: It's okay, clean and neat, there's tranquility here.

AJ: Tranquility.

BS: Yes, there's tranquility. There's no fear. In New York, there's a lot of fear of the African Americans.

AJ: In New York, there's fear of African Americans?

BS: Yes, a lot.

AJ: Why?

BS: They do bad things-, frequently.

AJ: Did you have any experience.

BS: Over there, when I was working-, contraction work. They killed his brother-in-law.

AJ: Killed his brother-n-law?

BS: Yes. Shot him.

AJ: Whose brother-in-law was killed?

BS: The person I worked for.

AJ: Okay.

BS: He was also from Punjab.

AJ: He was from Punjab?

BS: he had married a Mexican, and his brother-in-law was Mexican, too. They had some altercation over money. He didn't pay them, so they shot him. [pause] And they are fearless.

AJ: Huh?

BS: They are fearless.

AJ: Who?

BS: African Americans. They don't care for anyone.

AJ: Okay?

BS: Someone like me would be scared just looking at them. They're mostly double my size.

AJ: And the whites? Aren't you afraid of the whites?

BS: No. Never heard much like this about whites. And never had any bad experiences with them. I used to travel with them in trains, and no such thing ever happened. And I worked there four months in New York, and in that time, there were at

least three or four cases, that my co-workers, etc., saw happening. Like, stabbing a young man who was just standing around. And it's mostly blacks that do such things. I never came across a white who did something like that. This is the biggest problem in New York. It's not like that here. The blacks in this area, are not as scary as those. They are good people. The greet also.

AJ: They greet you?

BS: Yes, they say "hi" or "hello". Even the whites greet you when passing by. I like this about the people here. When passing by—not only while walking—but even when someone is driving by in a car, the "hi" or "hello", or just wave of the hand.

AJ: You like that?

BS: Yes, it's a good thing. They treat you like a human being. [pause]

AJ: Any other Hindi song?

BS: There are a lot of songs.

AJ: Do you recall any?

BS: I know a lot of songs, that's not a problem.

AJ: Okay, so let's hear another one.

BS: [sings a Hindi song]

AJ: Excellent.

[recorder is turned off and on]

AJ: Okay, go ahead.

BS: As far as I'm concerned, this is essential. Look at Italia [Italy]. In Italia, a couple years ago, they issued legal permits [to all foreign workers]. The papers allowed you to travel to and from your country.

AJ: Okay.

BS: And in December last year, they did that again.

AJ: For every one?

BS: Every one.

AJ: Those that had no papers?

BS: And charged a small fee also. I feel that-, even if they charge a higher fee--.

Now, the government must have gained a lot. For one thing, people were working without papers, so they must be dodging taxation also. Now those people pay taxes, and the government has gained. And the other is that all those people are also happy. They can now go to their country and visit their loved ones. I hope it happens here also. I would be very happy if today Clinton says whoever wants can be issued papers [legalized]-, and specify a fee to be charged. We are willing to pay the fee, as long as we get green cards, and the permission to travel to and from our country. Then one can spend his whole life here. The biggest thing is to get papers made, get a green card.

AJ: Okay.

BS: And the government can make a lot of profit out of a move like this. I don't know how many are living illegally here-, and all will have an easy life, when they can go to India whenever they feel like it. There can be a lot of benefits. People will be travelling frequently-, at the airport-, [laughter] they are running such expensive

airplanes. They will gain when more people will be travelling. And only those that have papers will travel. People like me hardly ever travel.

AJ: Jallunder has a big airport?

BS: No. Jallunder doesn't have one. But Amritsar has one. And Amritsar may become an international airport soon.

AJ: Okay. And then there's Delhi.

BS: Yes, Delhi. We always travel through Delhi. Let's see, I have heard from many people that Clinton may do something.

AJ: Clinton will do something?

BS: Over here. About papers, etc.

AJ: Does something about papers, etc. I have not heard anything like that yet.

BS: It's like word of mouth. He tells me and I tell him. And if it starts like this, you never know where it may get.

AJ: Have you visited any other country other than America?

BS: I've been to Paris. Been to Bahrain.

AJ: You've been to Paris. Why did you go there?

BS: I went to Paris to get to America.

AJ: To get to America? Okay. You went to Paris first?

BS: Yes, went back, and then came here.

AJ: Then came here. How much did you spend?

BS: I spent-, including air-tickets, I spent about-, maybe around five hundred thousand to five hundred fifty thousand rupees.

AJ: Okay. Tickets, and all.

BS: The agent's fee.

AJ: The agent's fee? You can't do it without the agent?

BS: It's difficult without the agent.

AJ: The agents get you the visas?

BS: The agent-, there must be something. They probably have nothing to do with the embassies, but they know the loop-holes-, how to get the visas, what documents to present-, so one gets it.

AJ: And--. How long did you stay in France?

BS: About fifteen days, or so.

AJ Then you went back to India? And then you went to Singapore?

BS: No, not Singapore. I went to Bahrain.

AJ: What did you do in Bahrain?

BS: In Bahrain, I stayed only two days.

AJ: Uh-huh. Then you went back. You went there to look around?

BS: Just to get the visas, and show to the American consulate that I have other visas.

AJ: Okay. That they see other visas in the passport, and know that the person is a frequent traveler.

BS: Yes. Otherwise, they wouldn't give a visa. [pause]

AJ: Have you or your family ever been to Pakistan?

BS: No--. My papa went.

(END OF TAPE 11, SIDE A)

(START OF TAPE 11, SIDE B)

AJ: You were talking about your papa.

BS: Yes, before the partition [of India], when the riots began, he came to India.

AJ: Did he ever go there again?

BS: Yes, he was there once. He went to Nankana Sahib [Sikh pilgrimage]. We go there every year. He tried two or three times, and got the visa once. He went then. Our Punjab people like Pakistan very much.

AJ: There's a Punjab there, too.

BS: Pardon?

AJ: There's a Punjab there, too.

BS: Yeah. That's it. A lot of people are from there, so they want to see what it's like now. There's a gurdawara there also.

AJ: Yes, a big one.

BS: That's the only excuse one can go there for. And-, one can go and see how the cities they left are like now. I have never seen them, but they must have seen them. He is from Sheikhpura.

AJ: Sheikhpura? It's very close from Lahore. I'm from Lahore.

BS: Are you?

AJ: About forty five minutes, or half an hour--.

BS: To Sheikhpura?

AJ: Yes. You can get there in half an hour by bus.

BS: It's a village?

AJ: It's a city. It's quite a big town now.

BS: It must be like towns in Punjab, like Jallunder.

AJ: Must be. I think. I have never seen, because I've never been to India. I was born in Pakistan, but I do want to go to India.

BS: There must be a lot of agriculture in that area.

AJ: Yes.

BS: So, it's just like our Punjab. It's the same.

AJ: It's all the same Punjab.

A THIRD PERSON: Is Lahore a big city?

BS: It's a big city.

AJ: Lahore is a very big city.

THIRD PERSON: It's a very big city?

AJ: Very big.

BS: It's one of the main cities.

THIRD PERSON: And Sheikhpura is also a city?

AJ: Sheikhpura is a small city.

BS: Like Jallunder and Shahkot.

THIRD PERSON: Okay. Right.

AJ: () Sorry, we woke you up. Okay, Balbir, thank you very much.

BS: Thank you very much.

AJ: In the end, would you like to say anything else.

BS: I have said all I had in my heart.

AJ: You have? Any Punjabi poetry, or a Punjabi song.

BS: I can recall them only when I'm singing.

[sings a Punjabi song]

BS: I forgot the words--.

[sings again]

AJ: Okay, Balbir, with this, thank you very much. Your memories, and your songs will remain on this tape. Thank you very much once again.

[recorder is turned off]

(END OF INTERVIEW)