

ASIAN VOICES

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INTERVIEWEE: Sawaran Singh

INTERVIEWER: Andrew Jilani

LANGUAGE OF INTERVIEW: Punjabi

(BEGINNING OF TAPE 13, SIDE A)

ANDREW JILANI: Today is Sunday-, er... morning, around ten thirty-, and-, er.. it's the twenty-fifth of July. I am sitting in the apartment of Sawaran Singh and we are just to begin our interview. So-, Sawaran Singh, I thank you very much for your time. We will talk in Punjabi. Is that okay?

SAWARAN SINGH: That's okay.

AJ: Both of us speak Punjabi--.

SS: Yes, yes. Punjabi--.

AJ: My first question to you is, how did you decide to come to America?

SS: I-, I had a desire in my heart to go to America, see the country, what kind of people live there, and what their lifestyle is like--.

AJ: Okay.

SS: I just always had this desire in my heart. I had no intention of coming and settling down here, or working here-, no--. It was just a desire to go abroad once in my life and see for myself.

AJ: Must go abroad? Okay. When you got here, how did you like America?

SS: When I came here, I liked America. Then, after coming here, I stayed for some time and saw the way things worked here, saw their lifestyle-, and in the end, I did not like things here very much.

AJ: Okay? What did you not like here?

SS: The thing is-, in India we live among our family-, bothers/sisters, friends, you can talk with them, or visit relatives-, over here I am all alone, with the exception of a few friends that I interact with a little bit. And that's all. It's not a fun life like we have in India.

AJ: No fun here? Okay?

SS: It's one's personal opinion, I mean. In my opinion, the good life I can have in India is not for me here. Personal opinions do differ, and a lot of people find America better than any other place-, even better than India. It's one's own understanding of things.

AJ: One's own understanding of things. And-, what are the things that you don't like here?

SS: Like--. Now look-, I mean to say, everyone here speaks English. I don't know much English. Because of that-, that's one problem.

AJ: Okay. Right.

SS: And then-, I mean to say-, all men and women there [in India]-, wear their clothes properly. Over here, you know, they have their own ways--. [laughter]

AJ: These people don't wear that many clothes.

SS: Yes, they don't wear too many clothes. I have that men wear pants and shirts, and all they wear is this much-, and shorts--.

AJ: they wear shorts.

SS: That's all.

AJ: Doesn't that look good?

SS: Good--? According to our customs-, like, if a girl was to go around dressed like this even once, everyone would talk about her-, and all the men of the family—father, brothers, relatives—would be pointed fingers at [shamed]. How bad would it be considered!

AJ: Yes. People would talk about it. Okay. What did you do in India?

SS: In India-, my brothers are farmers-, and I used to drive [operate] a combine.

AJ: Combine? What is this combine?

SS: Combine is-, one that harvests wheat, and crops.

AJ: Oh, what you also call thresher?

SS: Thresher--. Thresher is a different thing. Combine is one that has four wheels.

You drive it in the fields and harvest the crops.

AJ: Okay. So, you were involved in agriculture?

SS: Yes, we did-, and from the beginning I started into this driving work.

AJ: Okay. And you have your own farm there?

SS: Yes, we have our own farms.

AJ: Okay. What do you grow there?

SS: Wheat, (), corn, sugarcane, vegetables--.

AJ: Okay. Right. And you get by well [from the income]?

SS: Oh yes, very well.

AJ: Have you kept any cows, etc.?

SS: Cows-, yes, we do have--.

AJ: Where's you-, it's a village, or what--?

SS: Yes, we live in a village.

AJ: What's the name--?

SS: The name of our village is Dhani Ram Singhpura.

AJ: Dhani Ram Singh pura? Okay. And it's village of Punjabi's?

SS: Yes. All Punjabi's.

AJ: Okay. Right. You have talked about this country-, that when you first came here, you found it to be alright. Will you tell me what did you see that you found it alright? When you were new here?

SS: When I was new here-, I mean to say-, one thing that I liked was that when you come and sit in a room-, like-, this-, on the floor--.

AJ: Carpet?

SS: Yes. We don't have these in India.

AJ: You don't have carpets in India?

SS: No, we don't.

AJ: Okay. And you have brick floors?

SS: Yes, brick floors. Over here, floors are carpeted, you just vacuum them and-, it's wonderful. And also-, houses here are mostly made of wood.

AJ: Okay.

SS: And then, if it's cold, you can turn on the heat-, as per your requirement. And if it is hot, you can turn on a fan or the air-conditioning. It's a luxury.

AJ: It's a luxury. Okay.

SS: The thing is that the work here-, you have to work very hard here.

AJ: Here? Okay. What kind work are you doing here?

SS: In the restaurant.

AJ: What--? What do you in the restaurant?

SS: In the restaurant, I work on the oven.

AJ: You make roti's [bread], and do you also cook curries, etc.?

SS: Yes. Yes.

AJ: Okay. And--. So, the one thing you like is the carpeting, etc., and when it's hot you run the air conditioning, and when it's cold, you turn on the heat. Other than this, how do you like the people here? Did you like them, or not--?

SS: No. Like--. I mean to say, that I didn't like the whole area. In India, where we lived, you can go anywhere you like-, there's nobody to stop from going anywhere. And then you have your relatives, brothers/sisters, etc. You can go and visit them whenever you feel like, and-, there's home. And now I am here.

AJ: But nobody stops you here. Can't you go anywhere you feel like?

SS: I could go anywhere, you're right. But-, I mean to say, I have no relatives here, no brothers or sisters. Who would I go to?

AJ: Okay. So, that's it. And-, do you miss your brothers and sisters, and your mother--?

SS: Yes, I do.

AJ: Okay? And when you miss them, what do you do?

SS: What can I do? When I miss them, I sit around just thinking of them.

[laughter]

AJ: You don't write to them?

SS: Yes-, I do write and send them letters, and sometimes call them also.

AJ: call them also? Ask of their welfare--. So, what do they say? Your mother-, brothers and sisters-, what do they say?

SS: They say we are fine, and are happy.

AJ: Okay. But-, when you say you feel like going back to them--?

SS: And they say, sure-, come back. It's okay, you went to look around, and when your heart is not into staying there, you should come back any time.

AJ: Okay. When this desire was born in your heart-, that of going to see America-- . I am from Pakistan also, and in Pakistan also people have this desire—and still is—to go to America, earn in dollars and see what the place is like--. So, in India-, in your village and around your village, do a lot of people have that desire?

SS: I mean to say that-, from my village, nobody has gone abroad. I am the first. And then-, all my relatives live in Punjab. And in Punjab, none of my relatives have come abroad. Other than that-, like you normally hear that several young men from villages have gone abroad and they say that living abroad is great and that they have luxurious lives--. Okay, I admit there are luxuries-, like, you have easy access to phones. You have any trouble, just pick up the phone and call and an ambulance or help is there within minutes. Phones are installed in every home. Then there's the facility of power [electrical]. There are no power outages.

AJ: Load shedding--.

SS: Yes. There are all these facilities, but still-, my heart is not happy staying here.

AJ: Heart is not happy? What if all your brothers and sisters were to come here, would your heart be happy here? If your mother was to come here--?

SS: If all my brothers and sisters were to come here, even then the heart will not be happy, because once my family is here, they in turn will miss the other relatives, friends, etc., that we all visit and talk to frequently.

AJ: What is "pariwaar"?

SS: Pariwaar, you can say that-, I mean to say--.

AJ: The whole family.

SS: Yes, the whole family.

AJ: Ah... the whole family. Now that you live here, do you at all interact with any of those that live in your neighborhood?

SS: Not really. Like, when I leave my apartment, I run into someone-, I greet them, and they greet me. That's about all.

AJ: How many days do you work in a week?

SS: In a week-, I work six days, and get one day off.

AJ: And-, how many hours in a day? How many hours do you work in a day?

SS: Work-, I mean to say, I start at ten in the morning.

AJ: You start at ten in the morning?

SS: Yes. Till about ten in the evening.

AJ: So-, twelve-hour workday. Do you like this work:

SS: Work-, not really. But I mean to say, now I've come here with some friends of mine. So we go to work together, and after work we sit together and talk-, for a couple of hours. I mean to say, that every one has his own opinion, but I personally don't like this atmosphere.

AJ: And when you came from India, did you spend a lot of money to get here?

SS: No.

AJ: Okay? Right.

SS: When I came, all I spent was forty-two thousand [rupees] on the air ticket.

AJ: Forty two thousand? Okay. One way, or return?

SS: Return.

AJ: Return? And the visa?

SS: I have a visa for one year.

AJ: Okay. That's good. And you came together with some other friends.

SS: Yes, some friends.

AJ: How many friends?

SS: There were four of us.

AJ: Four. And all four of you work here?

SS: Yes.

AJ: Okay. So-, you work twelve hours a day, six days a week-, you must be getting no time for yourself? Going around, etc.

SS: No, sir. No time to go anywhere. That's why I don't like this country. All I do is work. If I had some relatives, etc., I'd go see them. All I do is work, so I do not like this lifestyle at all.

AJ: Okay. Right. Did you get some education in India?

SS: Yes?

AJ: Did you study--?

SS: Yes, I did ten classes. [high school]

AJ: Okay. Excellent. And--. [pause] Where you live, is pretty close to the restaurant. So, do you like any other things-, or rather do you like any thing here at all?

SS: I mean to say, that I really like nothing here. I like to see little children here. There are many of them here.

AJ: What's that?

SS: Children-, children of the American that live here. The little kids look very nice.

AJ: Look very nice.

SS: And sometimes the kids play football around here. I like to watch them. They are very beautiful children, very fair-skinned--.

AJ: Fair-skinned?

SS: Yes. [laughter]

AJ: And our children are also fair-skinned, you don't like them?

SS: Oh, they are-, certainly, but the children of white people have fairer skins. The children have a lot of energy in them. Very small kids-, are running around, playing all the time.

AJ: And-, white color [of the skin]-, is that the most beautiful color?

SS: There are only two colors. One is black and one is white. And this is not in the hands of you and me to choose the skin color. That is up to God. And one should have the sense. It's not necessary that anyone who's white is beautiful. A person can be very fair-skinned, white, and well built, but if he doesn't have the brains-, then it's no good. A person should be intelligent, whether he's black or white or whatever. One should have the brains, and one must be courteous to others.

AJ: Okay. Right. And-, have you ever been invited by an American family-, whether white, black, Mexican, or Indian?

SS: No. I have never had much interaction with them at all. I have never met such a woman, and neither have I talked to anyone.

AJ: If a family says that on a certain occasion, like Christmas, or new year, or such-, to come over and have tea, or dinner- with tem?

SS: No. Never.

AJ: Any Indian family-, or Pakistani family-, or a Punjabi family? If anyone ever asked you to accompany them to the gurdawara, and after prayers, come to our house and have a meal with us, or even eat at the lugar with us?

SS: No. I mean to say, neither I go anywhere, nor anybody ever invited me.

AJ: Okay? You just go to work, and come back here.

SS: Yes.

AJ: Have you been to the gurdawara?

SS: Yes, I have.

AJ: How many times?

SS: I've been to the gurdawara-, about three times.

AJ: How do you like the gurdawara?

SS: At the gurdawara, there are our brothers-, the Punjabi's. When we go there, we do not feel that we are so far away from India-, my home. Whatever we do in the gurdawaras in India, we do here. We have our family attending with us, and there are many people here also. At such times, I do not feel any difference between India and here.

AJ: And-, you made any friends at the gurdawara?

SS: At the gurdawara-, I have made no friends, and I never went there with such an intention. I mean to say, that if one goes there daily, then you meet many people regularly and start friendships, but I have been only three times.

AJ: Okay. Right. [pause] Ahm....And-, since you've come here—you said you've been here seven months—do you think you have changed in any way? In your thinking, in your lifestyle?

SS: The changes-, I mean to say, I keep saying to myself-, I'm away from my family, my brothers and sisters, what am I doing here? [laughter]

AJ: What am I doing here?

SS: I mean to say, that I keep thinking of them.

AJ: Keep thinking of them?

SS: That I should go back. I should go to India.

AJ: Okay. And-, have you ever thought of going back to India, and to return again after a visit?

SS: No. Once I go back to India, what am I going to return here for. I have seen America now, I do not feel like coming back once I go [India].

AJ: If a friend of yours living in India is interested in coming to America and contacts for advice, saying that you have lived here, worked here-, and asks for some advice. What would you advise him?

SS: I will tell them-, I have been asked already--.

AJ: People have asked you already?

SS: Yes. They wanted to know how I was finding America-, and I told them that I didn't like it. I am here without my relatives, brothers and sisters, friends, well-wishers. Over there you have all of these, you can visit them, talk with them, attend readings of the Garanth with loved ones, and weddings, etc. You can enjoyed their company and talk--.

AJ: Tell me about the Garanth readings-, "Akhand Paat"?

SS: Akhand Paat.

AJ: Akhan Paat.

SS: Yes, akhan paat. It's like-, we bring the Guru Garath Sahib [Sikh holy book] home, and it is read from all day--.

AJ: Read it?

SS: We continue for three days, until it has been read through. That's what we call akhand paat.

AJ: What is "poag"?

SS: It's like-, when you finish the reading on the third day.

AJ: But, I'm still not clear about "poag".

SS: It's like-, like, if I were to go back to India and arrive there safe and sound, and happy--. My father would make a resolution that if I arrive back home safe and sound, I'll arrange akhand paat. As a sort of a thanksgiving to God for granting something important to him.

AJ: Okay.

SS: I mean to say-, like I pray to God to take me to my home safe and sound and happy, and I resolve to do offer akhand paat when my wish is granted.

AJ: Okay. Right.

SS: I mean, pray to God, and gather some believers to read His word.

AJ: To read the Garanth Sahib.

SS: Yes. Yes. On such occasions, loved ones get together and-, enjoy it.

AJ: Okay.

SS: You speak very good Punjabi.

SS: Yes, I speak pure Punjabi--. I speak both pure Hindi and Punjabi.

AJ: You know any poetry in Punjabi?

SS: No. I was never interested. I mean to say, when I finished tenth grade. And right after tenth grade, I got into this--.

AJ: Combine?

SS: Yes, started on the combine. I always had busy seasons of work.

AJ: Okay. And-, how much do you normally make in a season?

SS: In a season, about fifteen thousand rupees.

AJ: Fifteen thousand rupees? Okay. For driving?

SS: Yes.

AJ: And-, is fifteen thousand enough--?

SS: Fifteen thousand is enough.

AJ: It's enough? [laughter] You can't finish them!

SS: The thing is-, I don't drink liquor. I don't eat meat.

AJ: You don't eat meat?

SS: Although I started since I've come here.

AJ: Okay? But the meat here is not good at all. [laughter]

SS: Thing is-, when I came here-, I started drinking liquor for about a month or so.

AJ: Here?

SS: Yes. I didn't like drinking at all. In India also I didn't like it. If some relatives were visiting us and we had to serve it for them, only then I would drink a little bit. But I was never happy drinking liquor. From the beginning-, I mean to say-, people in the driving profession, usually are habitual drug users, be it liquor, cigarettes, beeri [cheroots], or-, chewing tobacco, opium, etc. I-, but-, I never had either "zarda", nor opium--.

AJ: What is zarda?

SS: Zarda is tobacco.

AJ: Ah..... the tobacco you put in the mouth.

SS: Yes. They rub it like this, and keep it here in the mouth.

AJ: Yeah. Between the lip and the teeth.

SS: Yes, yes. I have never touched zarda, beeri, cigarettes, or opium.

AJ: Okay?

SS: But-, liquor-, I have had a little bit here and there. Just a beer sometimes, but never more than that.

AJ: Okay. And whiskey?

SS: Yes, I've never had more than one drink at a time. And even that, I started drinking when I came here, but stopped doing that in less than a month. I just eat my food, and drink water. That's all.

AJ: You have any Punjabi songs, etc. here for listening?

SS: Yes, we have some Punjabi cassettes. We listen to them.

AJ: You have cassettes. Can you write Punjabi also?

SS: Yes. I can write Punjabi.

AJ: Right. Okay. Very good. Ahm.... [pause] Over here-, there are many people who are-, from India and Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and such--.

SS: Yes, yes.

AJ: they have children who are being raised in this culture--.

SS: Yes, yes.

AJ: Whatever the culture here is. And-, if such a person asks for your advice-, and he has two young kids he wants to raise here, because he can't go to India--.

SS: Right.

AJ: And you-, you have mentioned that you don't like the vulture here--.

SS: Yes, yes.

AJ: What advice will you give to such a person as to how he should raise his children here?

SS: Now-, a lot of people have come to live here. Everybody have their own opinions and thinking-, some think that they will stay here, get their green cards, and raise their children here. The culture and lifestyle here is different from India, but it's okay. I would say that for such people it may be okay, but for me it is not. Even if a Punjabi girl living here was to offer to marry her and get a green card that way--. I mean to say, that I will never agree to getting a green card. People tell of a lot of different ways to get a green card, but I have no intentions of staying here, so what do I need to get a green card for? Even if someone tells me that the culture, lifestyle here is okay to live in, I would say it may be okay for him, but not for me. Like-, in India-, we have our women-

-. Over there, we also dress properly, and so do our women. Over here-, I mean to say, they wear shorts, and a little "this" up here-, and that's all.

AJ: A small vest.

SS: Yes. And in India, our people would consider this very bad indeed.

AJ: But our women here don't dress like that. The Indian/Pakistani women here.

SS: I mean to say, that those that have come from India, they actually don't dress like that. But, I have seen many-, I don't know if they do it out of interest, but they have discarded our way of dressing up, and wear clothes like people here. Not all of them, but occasionally here and there.

AJ: Okay. But-, what I meant to ask you was that this is your opinion.

SS: Yes.

AJ: They like this country, and its culture. But you want to go back to India, right?

SS: I do-, I'm sure I want to go back.

AJ: But-, if such a person asks you for advice, saying that you are going back to India, but we have to raise our children here, let us have your thoughts, or advice how we should raise our children here. What will you advise such people?

SS: The advice I will give is that I will tell them that I personally don't like this [culture], but if you wish to stay, you're most welcome--.

AJ: But how to raise their children here.

SS: They have to raise the children here-, so they have to work hard here. And when they make good money, they will educate their children here, and gradually they [the children] will adapt the culture here.

AJ: Other than the English language, and the lifestyle here, what other difficulties have you faced since you've come here?

SS: I mean to say that--.

AJ: Other than the lifestyle and English language--.

SS: Over here-, number one is that the good life we have in India doesn't exist here. And if I could speak English, I could talk to everyone. I can speak a little bit, but not enough.

AJ: Have you ever thought of taking English classes-, and learn English? In Chapel Hill, there are free classes. Have you ever thought of attending those? Have you thought of that?

SS: Right. I do think to myself that if I know English well, it is definitely a good thing, but I don't know it, so what do I do?

AJ: No. Do you ever feel that you should learn?

SS: I do feel like it, because I know it'll be good for me, but how do I find the time?

AJ: Where to find the time! Working twelve hours a day.

SS: Yes.

AJ: How did you find this job here?

SS: Job? There was one guy who used to drive a combine with me.

AJ: Drive a combine with you?

SS: Yes, we worked together.

AJ: Okay.

SS: That guy called me, and said if you come here, I'll get you a job.

AJ: That guy was here?

SS: Yes. He has been here for about-, three years.

AJ: In Chapel Hill?

SS: He called me, and I quit from new York and came here.

AK: Okay.

SS: Yes.

AJ: And you didn't question him what kind of a job it was, and what it was like?

SS: He said that all that's needed is someone who's willing to work, there's a lot of jobs. I asked what kind of work I'll have to do, and he told me there's dishwashing, baking, and that I could work as a waiter. But since I cannot speak English, so the waiting job--. He said, look, the person who works at the counter is one who is fully trained, and can speak good English. Other than that, you don't need anything-, like cleaning the tables, arranging glasses, napkins and spoons. [yawns] It's not a difficult job, you can do it. So I came here and started working.

AJ: Did you find it hard in the beginning?

SS: Yes, it was difficult-, I mean to say--.

AJ: Coming from a village, and working all day in a restaurant.

SS: Yes, Yes. I found it difficult.

AJ: Right. What are your plans when you go back to India?

SS: When I go back to India, I'll do what I used to do before coming here. [yawns]

AJ: What you used to do before. You have any hobbies? Like-, one could be interested in singing, or playing music--.

SS: Yes, yes.

AJ: You have any such hobbies?

SS: No.

AJ: Okay. Any poetry, or such?

SS: No.

AJ: Seeing places? Have you been around in America?

SS: No. I have not done that here.

AJ: Which places have you seen here?

SS: I have seen new York. And-, in New York is Manhattan. I have seen that.
New York and Manhattan [yawns]. Other than that, I once went to Kentucky.

AJ: Kentucky?

SS: Yes. I have a friend there. I looked around, and came back.

AJ: How did you like-, New York?

SS: I liked New York very much.

AJ: What did you like there?

SS: Over there--. I mean to say-, I liked it because that there are a lot of Indians
Punjabi, Pakistani Punjabis, Indians--.

AJ: A lot of them--.

SS: So, there-, my heart-, was very happy. I was happier there than here.

AJ: And-, if you get a job there? If someone offers you a job in his restaurant
there, would you be willing to stay on in America?

SS: No. No. I don't want to stay in America permanently. Yes, but if a friend gets
me a good job close to friends for six months or so--. Yes, I will work these five or six
months-, but then it's back to India. It is my heart's desire that I will not stay here.

AJ: Not stay here. Okay. Right, right. [pause] Ahm.....

SS: Like, you take India. In India, anyone goes from here, he's free to go anywhere, nobody asks him where he's from or why he's there. They can stay as long as they wish. Over here-, to come here, you need a visa, the other is that I'll have to go back before my visa expires. In India, one can stay as long as one wishes, nobody will check him or stop him.

AJ: Okay? Like, if I go to India. I have an American passport-, I have to get a visa to go there.

SS: Yes, I mean to say-, that those with American passport, will have to get a visa. But I'm talking about-, like someone comes from Bihar, which is within India.

AJ: Comes from the south.

SS: Whoever comes, we don't ask him anything, he's free to live anywhere for as long as he wishes.

AJ: Uh-huh. I have never been to India. I would like to-, because my mother and her family-, come from India. And if I go to India—you like India very much—which areas do you recommend that I go and see? Especially, the Punjab area.

SS: The Amritsar are is worth visiting. And Jallunder has also made a lot of progress. Jallunder city is good, Amritsar city is good.

AJ: What is there to see in Amritsar?

SS: Amritsar---. In the city, I like the gurdawara very much.

AJ: The one that's called Golden Temple?

SS: Yes. Yes. It's a very beautiful gurdawara. It's a very nice gyrdawara. I mean to say, that if one goes to that gurdawara, you don't feel like leaving the place. You want to just stay there, it's such a beautiful gurdawara.

AJ: Okay. It's open now? It used to be closed--.

SS: No, it's open. You can go in any time of the day or night. There's no restriction.

AJ: They have the lungar [free distribution of food] there.

SS: Yes, the lungar is there.

AJ: And what should one see in Jallunder?

SS: Yes?

AJ: And what should one see in Jallunder? You said jallunder is also a nice place.

SS: Yes, Jallunder--. The Jallunder city is very beautiful. Like, the TV Center in Jallunder.

AJ: TV Center?

SS: Yes. I like that very much. I went to the TV Center, and we used to watch TV programs there. I mean to say-, Jallunder city is very clean.

AJ: It's very clean?

SS: Yes. It's a beautiful city.

AJ: More than America?

SS: I mean to say-, if you think-, it's even more beautiful than America.

AJ: Uh-huh. Jallunder. Okay. And in Punjab-, also in Pakistani Punjab and in Indian Punjab also, a lot of people play "kabaddi". Have you played kabaddi?

SS: When I was younger-, I mean-, in school, I used to play-, what they call the open kabaddi.

AJ: ()

SS: I played national kabaddi.

AJ: national kabaddi?

SS: Yes. And-, when I was younger-, I was studying-, I played football also-, and played kabaddi also. I wrestled also-, whenever any friend wanted to wrestle with me, I'd go ahead. Sometimes I'd lose, and sometimes I'd win.

AJ: Sometimes you'd win. Okay.

SS: In the beginning-, when I was going to school-, we played a lot also. Sometimes when kids play, they make mistakes also. We used to get beatings from our teachers-, and sometimes from my daddy, because all my attention was in playing.

AJ: Okay.

SS: I wouldn't pay much attention to my chores at home. After coming home from school, I'd eat and go to play. My parents would tell me that I could play for so much time and after that I had chores to do. But when I was playing with friends, we'd continue to play and forget everything else. [laughter]

AJ: Then you got a beating from daddy?

SS: Yes, my daddy beat me three or four times. Like, when I was playing kabaddi-

-.

AJ: How did your daddy beat you?

SS: Daddy slapped me.

AJ: Slapped?

SS: Yes.

AJ: He didn't use a cane or something?

SS: No, never a cane. When I went to play, I used to lose all track of time, and suddenly he'd come and grab me by the arm, and sometimes slap me. Then I used to run!
[laughter]

AJ: Okay. Any other memories from your childhood?

SS: Memories from childhood--? I now see that children have a lot of facilities and freedom--.

AJ: Nowadays?

SS: Yes. Now I think that childhood is a very good part of life. The kids nowadays-, their mummy or daddy don't stop them-, they can play wherever they want and as long as they want to. If they want something, they just cry and their parents get them the things they want. There's a lot of difference in things nowadays and when we were kids.

AJ: Uh-huh. When we were young, there weren't so many thing then.

SS: There weren't so many thing then.

AJ: Now there are lots of things. And --er..... [pause]

SS: And till the time I was going to school, we did have responsibilities at home, and we did then also. In the morning, I had to cut hay for the cattle--.

AJ: Cut hay for the cattle. For cows?

SS: Yes.

AJ: How many cows did you have?

SS: We had four or five cows, and two bulls.

AJ: Uh-huh.

SS: I used to cut hay for them in the morning, wash, have breakfast, and then go to school. After school, [yawns] I mean to say-, have lunch, tea, etc., and then go out to play. While playing, I'd get late coming back home, and I had to be reminded of my chores-, like-, feeding the cattle, milking cows--.

AJ: Milking cows?

SS: Yes. I used to forget all that and keep playing--.

AJ: And daddy used to get angry.

SS: Yes, daddy and mummy both got angry that I kept playing and forgot about coming back home. They didn't stop me from playing, because one must play--.

AJ: One must play.

SS: But not that-, if you are told that you can go for only an hour, because you have to get back and do your chores, and you keep playing for two or three hours-, and forget your chores. My mother would be home alone, and she couldn't handle all these responsibilities.

AJ: Okay. Ahm... I forgot one question I meant to ask you--. When young kids play amongst themselves in your village, do they mostly speak Punjabi, or Hindi?

SS: Punjabi.

AJ: They speak Punjabi. Okay. And when did you learn Hindi? In school?

SS: In school. When we go to school, we learn Hindi right from the first grade. Punjabi starts from grade six.

AJ: Starts from grade six.

SS: And now, Punjabi and English start from the first grade, and-, even Hindi.

AJ: Three languages-, from first grade. And what other subjects did you study?

SS: Yes?

AJ: . What other subjects did you study?

SS: Hindi, Punjabi, and English. That's all.

AJ: In America, when people get married, they do that after seeing one another. Like, seeing someone in a club, or a party-, that's different from our culture--.

SS: But now-, it's also like that among us also. I mean to say, that the boy and the girl see each other before the marriage.

AJ: Okay.

SS: And if they agree amongst themselves to get married, they consent to the marriage, but if they do not agree, the arrangements are called off.

AJ: Uh-huh. So-, where do the boy and girl meet?

SS: They meet in gurdawaras, in restaurants also, and-, I mean to say-, there are gurdawars are in cities-, as well as villages-, or there are restaurants. Like-, in cities, both the families get together-, in a restaurant or in a gurdawara, and the boy and the girl are given the opportunity to se each other and talk to each other. And both the boy and the girl are advised to make their judgements and not blame the families in later life. The girl also has the liberty to make her judgement and either accept or reject the family's choice, so that she doesn't have to place the blame on the family later on, for pushing her into the marriage.

(END OF TAPE 13, SIDE A)

(START OF TAPE 13, SIDE B)

AJ: Yes-, you were telling about the marriage. That the parents tell the girl to see the groom for herself and let her choice be known.

SS: Yes, yes.

AJ: And-, is this how most marriages take place now?

SS: Yes. At least in our setup, that's the way it is done. And also-, during the wedding, previously, the girl used to have her face all covered. Now that is not followed.

AJ: Okay?

SS: Now, you can imagine that there are anywhere between one hundred fifty to two hundred people on the groom's side, and at least as many from the bride's family. So, among all these people, brides now don't cover their faces.

AJ: The bride doesn't cover her face?

SS: Yes.

AJ: Okay. You-, are you married?

SS: Yes, I am married.

AJ: Okay. How did you get married?

SS: I mean to say-, without covering her face--. My wife did not cover her face during the wedding.

AJ: Tell us how the wedding is performed?

SS: Well--. I mean to say-, like, Darbar Sahib is in this direction-, and the Baba is over there. In front of this, I sit [as a groom], and my wife comes and sits next to me. So, the Garanth reader from the gurdawara, he reads-, he has to read four parts--.

AJ: From the Garanth sahib?

SS: Yes. And while he reads, we walk around the Garanth Sahib him four times.

The groom leads, and the bride follows.

AJ: Ah.... and so the girl does not cover her face with a dopatta?

SS: Yes, yes.

AJ: This is how you got married also?

SS: Yes.

AJ: Uh-huh. And-, where did you meet the girl-, your wife?

SS: With us, it was this way. My sister's father-in-law, I mean-, he talked to my daddy, and I did not go to see her. My daddy, mummy, an uncle, and an aunt saw her, and liked her and they asked me. I consented. They said I might blame them later on if we didn't get along, but I trusted their judgement and it was not necessary for me to see her first. I told them that being my parents, they would not wish me any harm, so they said okay. Then I sent two of my friends with my parents, uncle, aunt, and sister--.

AJ: You sister also went?

SS: Yes. All of them went and saw the girl. And then, her family came and saw me. And thus, we had the "pakaar".

AJ: What's that?

SS: I mean-, both families agreed and made a final agreement of the marriage.

AJ: Okay. Where is your wife now?

SS: Right now, in India-, in my home.

AJ: India-, home. Okay. And-, she must missing you a lot.

SS: Yes, she does. Many times when I call, she tells me she misses me-, and I have a son--.

AJ: Have a son?

SS: Yes.

AJ: How old is he?

SS: My son is four years old now.

AJ: Okay.

SS: And he also misses me.

AJ: Misses you?

SS: Yes.

AJ: What does he say?

SS: he says he wants to go to daddy. And he cried for many days when I came here. He said he wanted to go to daddy and sleep with him. And he wouldn't sleep at night, saying that he wants to go to daddy. And they say if I was somewhere close by, they would have brought him to meet me, but this is too far. And-, I mean to say-, my son misses me, and so does my family. My mummy misses me a lot.

AJ: Okay.

SS: We often talk on the phone--.

AJ: Does your wife ever say she wants to come to America?

SS: No, she never said that.

AJ: Okay? To come and take her along?

SS: No. She never said that.

AJ: She never said that?

SS: No. She asks me when I'm coming back. I tell her it'll be another four or five months.

AJ: Okay. And-, when you go back, Sawaran Singh, which memories will you take back with you from America?

SS: Memories--. I mean to say that-, okay-, when I see these white people-, and think that this their lifestyle. Compared to us--, I mean, they have a lot of freedom--.

AJ: Lot of freedom.

SS: Now, look-, we see people who come to the restaurant--.

AJ: White people?

SS: Yes white people-, with white women. Now, we take the food to them-, or take water to the table. Many times they have their arms around each other, and they're kissing each other. [laughter] It doesn't happen this way with us [in India]. Okay-, everyone does those things, but one should not do it openly. These people do it openly. That's the big memory I'll take back. [laughter]

AJ: The kisses of America, huh!

SS: But one thing. These white women-, they talk to everyone with a smile.

AJ: Okay?

SS: They would talk with every one with a smile.

AJ: How is that?

SS: I don't understand what they say, but I see them talking to each other, and observe that they never frown.

AJ: They don't frown? They're always happy?

SS: Yes.

AJ: Okay? And you think they're happy only when they come to the restaurant, or they're always happy?

SS: Yeah, we see them in the park. They're playing with males-, and they're always happy.

AJ: They're always happy. There's more freedom in America?

SS: A lot of freedom. Too much freedom. If you look at it, America is about one hundred years ahead of India, and India is a hundred years behind.

AJ: Which things is America ahead in? Freedom is one--.

SS: Number one is freedom. Number two is all the bridges they have-, one over the other [fly-overs]--.

AJ: Bridges?

SS: We don't have that many in India. And second, they have a lot of trains running underground, which we don't have in India. The bridges here are uncountable. Trains also run one above the other. And then, there are so many facilities here. The buses don't have conductors.

AJ: Don't have conductors? It's a facility?

SS: Yes, it is a kind of a facility. You enter by the driver and you either swipe the card or deposit tokens. Without that you can't get on a bus. And then, when you go in a train, you have to swipe the card. Unless you do that, you can't get on a train.

AJ: Can't get on.

SS: And now, look. With one and a half, you can spend your whole life on the trains. With just one and a half dollar! As long as you don't get out of the subway. [laughter] If you stay inside, you can ride trains indefinitely.

AJ: If one takes enough food in the subway, you spend your life in there. And what else? How is America ahead?

SS: And-, gas is very cheap here. In India, you buy one liter for twenty-five or twenty-six rupees-, here, you can get about four liters for one dollar.

AJ: Exactly. A little more than that. A dollar and ten cents. Right.

SS: And then-, there are many cars here. Every person has a car. In New York, there are so many cars that there must be two cars for every person there. A lot of cars.

AJ: And so many cars-, is that a sign of progress?

SS: Yes, it is a sign of progress. No see-, in India--. In India, you can't buy a car easily, and if you do buy one, the whole family uses one car.

AJ: The whole family--.

SS: Over here, every person has a car. That's for sure. There are as many cars as the members of a family in every home. This is a big facility here. And then, if someone falls sick. You can just nine-one-one, and an ambulance will be here in minutes. One of the boys was taken in an ambulance the other day.

AJ: Who, Lucky?

SS: Yes, Lucky. That day--.

AJ: Lucky is better now?

SS: He's okay, in a way. That day five vehicles were here.

AJ: Okay?

SS: Nine people came in five vehicles. They kept him in the hospital overnight. In the morning, he was okay, and he came back. Then they didn't ask for any money. Okay, they will-, they'll bill him later. In o India, you are asked to deposit the money first. [laughter]

AJ: Okay. I think that you like America a lot, and you say you don't like it?

SS: Now see here-, if you think about these facilities, you like it, but my heart is not happy here. That's the biggest thing-, if your heart is not happy here, what good are all these things?

AJ: Okay.

SS: Yes, I've been driving in India. I can drive a bus, I can drive a truck, I can drive a car, motorcycle, combine-, I can drive all machinery--.

AJ: Airplanes?

SS: Yes, not airplanes. But since I've come here, I haven't driven a car even for a few yards. And why not? Because I don't have a driving license here.

AJ: You can get one made.

SS: Yes I can. But they say--. I've heard it's hard to get one.

AJ: Okay? You have to pass a test.

SS: Yes, yes.

AJ: Okay, Sawaran Singh. Thank you very much.

SS: Thank you.

AJ: And-, you gave us this time. It's a day off for you today.

SS: Yes.

AJ: I'm very thankful to you, and wish that you go back to India someday, and may God grant that you fulfil your dreams--.

SS: Yes.

AJ: Okay?

SS: Yes.

AJ: I hope you take good memories of America with you.

SS: Yes, yes.

AJ: And-, Thank you very much once again.

SS: Okay. Thank you.

(END OF INTERVIEW)