

**Transcription: BV022.29.5**  
**Interview with Surjeet Kaur Parmar**  
**Audio Recording: 2022\_0029\_0001\_003.mp3**  
**Interviewer: Anushay Malik (INTVWR)**  
**Interviewee: Surjeet Kaur Parmar (SP)**  
**Date of Interview: December 6, 2022**  
**Language of interview: Urdu/Hindi/Punjabi**  
**Transcriber: Rajdeep Dhadwal (RD)**

- 1 INTVWR: Shall we start now?
- 2 SP: Yes.
- 3 INTVWR: Today we are doing an interview- I am interviewing Surjeet Ji at her house. I am  
4 Anushay Malik and it is the 6<sup>th</sup> of December, 2022. Okay, we can also talk in Urdu, we can also  
5 talk in Punjabi, we can also talk in English, they will translate it.
- 6 SP: Yes.
- 7 INTVWR: Firstly, could you please tell me a little bit about your family's migration story? In  
8 what time did you come here, in what year did you come here, I know you have a very long [?]  
9 in Burnaby, so first of all, who were the very first elders to come here from in your family?
- 10 SP: The very first who came was my- Mayo's big brother, Ginaya Singh.
- 11 INTVWR: Ginaya Singh
- 12 SP: The very first elder to come- I've forgotten his name now, I wrote it in that book, he came  
13 here for the first time<sup>1</sup>, then he went back after 2-3 years, then he brought four cousins with him
- 14 INTVWR: Are you talking about Ginaya Singh or the one who came before him?
- 15 SP: The one who came before him.
- 16 INTVWR: The one before him.
- 17 SP: Ginaya Singh, Doman and two others were with him that he brought with him.
- 18 INTVWR: I see [1:30]
- 19 SP: One of our nephews and three others. And in terms of my family, there was my grandfather,  
20 he was younger in age, he was very weak. He said "this is difficult, we could get sick during the  
21 journey, death could even happen", so they didn't send him. First he came here<sup>2</sup>; after that, Mayo  
22 came here a year or two after, because he wanted to come and his father had told him "let [*the*  
23 *unnamed elder who came here first*] settle here first and then you will go. He said, "If you won't  
24 send me, if you won't make my passport, I'll go on my own" and his father said "You're  
25 stubborn" [?] and then he came. For a year he wandered around San Francisco, suddenly by  
26 chance he went to Kamloops and he met [?]
- 27 INTVWR: I see

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<sup>1</sup> This is an unknown figure who may or may not be Ganda Singh (mentioned later in the transcripts) who came here first in Surjeet's family

<sup>2</sup> Surjeet is talking about the very first elder who came here, and not her grandfather who she just mentioned was not sent here

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- 28 SP: Yes, they got together and they started working there. They came here to Paldi- they're the  
29 ones that made Paldi, right?
- 30 INTVWR: Yes, Mayo did
- 31 SP: They were initially in Duncan.
- 32 INTVWR: Yes
- 33 SP: And then over there they just kept working, Mayo and Ginaya Singh started understanding  
34 all the mill work, they [the mill owners] wanted to sell the mill and they sold it to [Ginaya and  
35 Mayo]
- 36 INTVWR: I see[2:35]
- 37 SP: They were the first ones to come here. Then [*unintelligible*], then Ginaya shifted to  
38 Vancouver.
- 39 INTVWR: And what was Ginaya Singh's relation to you, so that it can be recorded?
- 40 SP: He was my father's second cousin
- 41 INTVWR: Father's second cousin.
- 42 SP: Yes
- 43 INTVWR: Okay. So after this, what about the rest of your family or your father, where were  
44 they? [3:00]
- 45 SP: My father- my chacha ji<sup>3</sup>- because my grandpa became really- even after my father- after a  
46 year and a half, were here, after six months, my chacha was here, three months my bua<sup>4</sup> was  
47 here<sup>5</sup>; at home, there were no men. His younger brother was married but then he passed away,  
48 and then afterwards, my grandpa. There were no men living at home. When Mayo's father was  
49 alive, he looked after them. So then afterwards when my chacha was 16 years old, he was in  
50 grade 8 [*unintelligible*], he passed and they adopted him and brought him here in 1926. Mayo  
51 came here in 1906.
- 52 INTVWR: In 1906, Mayo came here?
- 53 SP: Yes.
- 54 INTVWR: And Ginaya Singh- [*unintelligible*][3:55]

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<sup>3</sup> Paternal uncle; specifically, dad's younger brother

<sup>4</sup> Paternal aunt; used for younger or older aunts in relation to father's age

<sup>5</sup> Clarification needed

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- 55 SP: No, he came a year before.
- 56 INTVWR: Oh I see, before 1906?
- 57 SP: Yes, beforehand
- 58 INTVWR: Okay... did you know anything about which ship or plane he came on?
- 59 SP: That I don't know[4:00]
- 60 INTVWR: No?
- 61 SP: He came on a ship.
- 62 INTVWR: Okay
- 63 SP: It took a long time to get here. If someone ran out of money, then they could work hard on
- 64 the ship and managed like that. That's what they told me.[4:16]
- 65 INTVWR: I see. These are the stories I wanted to ask about
- 66 SP: That's what they said. That's why my grandfather never came. He was too weak, he said, if
- 67 something happened, "I'll have to work, and even if I don't, who knows if I'll survive or not", so
- 68 they didn't bring him.
- 69 INTVWR: Grandfather as in paternal grandfather?
- 70 SP: My paternal grandfather.
- 71 INTVWR: Your paternal grandfather. Okay. And Ginaya Singh also- how did the rest know
- 72 Ginaya Singh? Mayo, Dolman- were they friends?
- 73 SP: No, they were all cousin-brothers.
- 74 INTVWR: Cousin-brothers
- 75 SP: That's how they were all able to come together, right? When his father was around, when his
- 76 paternal grandfather was around, they said to him, "now that you've arrived there, take one
- 77 cousin from each side with you"
- 78 INTVWR: I see
- 79 SP: They were all second cousins. Take each one (a cousin from each family) and the whole
- 80 family will be over here.
- 81 INTVWR: I see.[5:08]
- 82 SP: So in our- there were four brothers. One was [from] Mayo's family, the person who brought
- 83 him was his second cousin, real cousin. The rest were second cousins, two- Dolman and one

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84 other. And the fourth was my grandfather. They were my grandfather's cousins. Cousin brothers,  
85 there were four. It was these four.

86 INTVWR: I see. But everyone's village was one?

87 SP: Yes, it was all one village. Look, our great-grandfather wanted- because firstly, he worked in  
88 a business type of environment. He said that, how long will this go for? [?] so this family is  
89 growing bigger, how long will this go for? So let's send someone abroad. [6:00] So our great-  
90 grandfather wanted someone to go abroad and he sent them here. So the first that came, you  
91 know the first [*that was previously mentioned*]? Then he [the first] brought four more.

92 INTVWR: But why here? Why not somewhere else in America-

93 SP: It could have been anywhere. He liked it here so he stayed here. He did his research and said  
94 this was [a] good [place].

95 INTVWR: Do you know what kind of research he did?

96 SP: I don't know anything about that. I don't even know my grandfather's name. In our house,  
97 where- you know the pots that have names written in them?<sup>6</sup> There was a glass and at the back of  
98 it, it was written my father's name- Baldsher Singh. Even my mother- because even my paternal  
99 grandmother, [6:35] when she was little, and [?] died<sup>7</sup>- in my house, I've never seen any elders.  
100 My father never saw his father either, he was too little. We were little, he was 18 months- so,  
101 there was just my elder brother and I've just seen him. And after that, my mother told me, this is  
102 your father's side. [6:57]

103 INTVWR: I see

104 SP: Baldsher Singh. That's how I got to know about it.

105 INTVWR: Do you have any pots/pans/dishes now that have names engraved on them?

106 SP: No, I don't have those with me.

107 INTVWR: Okay. So, this is a family tradition that everyone partook in in which records of  
108 everyone's names were kept? [7:11]

109 SP: Yes, because pots/pans went from here to there, [?] maybe you even know, whatever food,  
110 milk, chai, [?]

111 INTVWR: I see

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<sup>6</sup> In Punjab, it is common practice to get names engraved into steel pots, especially for babies.

<sup>7</sup> Clarification needed to know who died

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112 SP: Even I have had things written in my pots *[unintelligible]* [7:30] then my name was written.  
113 Even my pots, you know the big ones, even when we all did catering, we made everything at  
114 home and we used to take our own pots, then we knew whose were whose. My mother gave me  
115 big sets, we're four sisters including my sister in law, and everyone gives it. When we [?], we  
116 would get together, the *thaal*<sup>8</sup>, you know the tray? [?] so it's sixty, right?

117 INTVWR: Yes

118 SP: We used to use those, but now disposables are around [8:04]. The tray machine came  
119 around, in the washing machine<sup>9</sup>. We wrote names there too, and I have those too, I think I've  
120 kept a few and donated the rest. I don't do art that much now, the kids do, we did catering and  
121 we did all that from home, we just use disposable plates now, but before I used to use these.  
122 [8:30]

123 INTVWR: If you have any of those with your name?

124 SP: My name-

125 INTVWR: We can keep it-the museum can show it to people and it would be really nice [8:43]

126 SP: I actually have a something to give to the museum- you know the thing that you use to put on  
127 kohl? I want to give it

128 INTVWR: A kohl bottle! How beautiful that must be!

129 SP: I have it, I don't have any use for it anymore. My mother from me would or my daughter  
130 would two or three times use it *[unintelligible]*- I would use it, my kids would use it, their kids'  
131 kids would use it, it's used even now, it's beautiful, I'll show you [9:13]

132 INTVWR: Please!

133 SP: I want to give that to you. I also used to have a homemade blanket that I want to give to you,  
134 I learned how to make it, it's *phulkari*.<sup>10</sup> We displayed it in the dining room, the colour of it was  
135 dark blue [?]. So I gave that away. My husband-

136 INTVWR: I see.

137 SP: It was [a] *phulkari* blanket, there were two or three other things-

138 INTVWR: I see. And you made the blanket yourself?

139 SP: I made it myself. It's displayed at a small museum over there in Coquitlam. [10:00]

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<sup>8</sup> An Indian tray

<sup>9</sup> Clarification needed

<sup>10</sup> *Phulkari* is a type of Punjabi embroidery design.

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- 140 INTVWR: Yes, yes, yes. I know about that, Nadeem ji told me.
- 141 SP: I thought I'll give one or two things to them that I don't need and a few things that my kids  
142 and I don't need. I have a shawl- I've given it away now to my middle granddaughter- it was my  
143 wedding shawl. It's a purple colour, a nice colour, It has a pearl embroidery on it- my suitcase-  
144 that my father made for me, so I used the shawl and kept it with me and none of my kids were  
145 interested, so I thought- when I took it out, then everyone was saying "this is so beautiful, I'll  
146 keep it". My daughter said "I'll keep it" so she kept it. Then I also have a sari, silky- it has a  
147 silky embroidery and it's as old as my son. My mother- You can wear it whenever, at any time.  
148 So I thought, I'm not going to wear this. There's no point in wearing suits, it's a nice sari, and I  
149 saw they displayed my sari there too at the museum.
- 150 INTVWR: Yes, absolutely!
- 151 SP: So I thought I would give it to them. It's old, it's nice, I'll show it to you. If you like it, you  
152 can take it.
- 153 INTVWR: Absolutely! It's not necessary for us to keep it; if you want, we can give it back and  
154 you can keep it-
- 155 SP: No, no, no. Not now. Who knows how long we have now left in our lives, what are we going  
156 to do later with it? It's enough for us that we have these big, big suitcases. The new ones I got,  
157 the ones with the heavy embroidery, I gave a few of those away for donation, I only kept the  
158 ones that I can wear anytime
- 159 INTVWR: This is really great. If the kohl bottle and the sari are things we can keep for the  
160 museum exhibit that would be really great
- 161 SP: Yes, I wanted to give it to you and now that you're here, I'll show you.
- 162 INTVWR: Please, please. And you were saying- And about the kohl bottle, because you had said  
163 that "my elders had used it-" *[Unintelligible]*
- 164 SP: No, that was a different kohl bottle, this one was a simple one that my mother gave me.
- 165 INTVWR: I see, I see
- 166 SP: I still have the kohl for that.
- 167 INTVWR: Okay, I see
- 168 SP: No one uses it anymore, I don't use it, so no one does, so it's just with me. It's my mother's  
169 [?]. My mother used to make kohl. You rub the kohl with your hands, then you leave it, then you  
170 put cardamom in it, and one or two other things you put into it, you know when it [?], then you  
171 fill water in a bottle to the top, then you put it in, when it soaks, then you rub it again. There are-  
172 there are other things people put in as well. So... then it's fine.

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- 173 A:I see. So, how did you acquire eyeliner here?
- 174 SP: No I put it on in India by myself
- 175 INTVWR: Very nice.
- 176 SP: By myself
- 177 INTVWR: By yourself, very nice. And the rest- you were saying, a *giani ji*<sup>11</sup> came and he- I've  
178 forgotten his name, he shifted to Vancouver, someone you mentioned- Ginaya.
- 179 SP: Ginaya Singh.
- 180 INTVWR: Ginaya Singh. He then shifted to Vancouver-
- 181 SP: [We made] Maya Singh into Mayo, Ginaya Singh stayed Ginaya, he was the older and  
182 [Mayo] was the younger.
- 183 INTVWR: I see, I see. So Ginaya Singh, why did he come to Vancouver?
- 184 SP: He just shifted here, [?], then afterwards, he came here after his death and they moved to  
185 Burnaby.<sup>12</sup>
- 186 INTVWR: His death?
- 187 SP: I'm not sure how he died. I think a heart attack.
- 188 INTVWR: I see.
- 189 SP: I was young when my younger brother was born. You know about Lohri?<sup>13</sup>
- 190 INTVWR: Yes
- 191 SP: For 3 years we didn't celebrate because one died. Out of four brothers, after a year or two,  
192 they died. And then his son. Ginaya Singh's younger son. Because of this, our house didn't get  
193 any *shagun*<sup>14</sup>. But I was also very young back then, I don't really remember. But in our house,  
194 we had beautiful photos of kids up, we had such beautiful photos up, we would dress them all up,  
195 we would dress all the kids up back then; at first, it had never been like this, we would just wear  
196 whatever, even ripped clothes, that was the fashion. But it wasn't like this, coat, pants, the whole  
197 thing- and we never wore suits<sup>15</sup>. Suit fashion didn't really come about until the after the 70s.

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<sup>11</sup> A Sikh priest

<sup>12</sup> Not sure whose death Surjeet is referring to here.

<sup>13</sup> Winter festival that celebrates newborns (traditionally only newborn sons) and newly married couples

<sup>14</sup> Gifts/blessings

<sup>15</sup> Punjabi dresses are called "suits" in Punjabi

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198 INTVWR: After the 70s

199 SP: In the 80s when new people came- until '85, even I didn't wear them.

200 INTVWR: I see

201 SP: After that, when I- when the freestyle [fashion] started, then I began wearing them. Up until  
202 then, only white people wore them. [?], then we all started wearing them. Up until then, we  
203 didn't wear them.

204 INTVWR: Can you now tell me a little bit more about yourself- Ginaya Singh came to  
205 Vancouver and your father too at this time?

206 SP: No, my father didn't come at this time. My chacha came. And then, before that, they stayed  
207 in Paldi

208 INTVWR: What was his name?

209 SP: His name was Kashmira Singh

210 INTVWR: Kashmira Singh

211 SP: Then they lived over there in Duncan, then when they came to Vancouver, they started their  
212 own mill in North Vancouver [*unintelligible*] they had a lot of properties, lots of people worked  
213 there when the mill started. Everyone stayed there

214 INTVWR: I see. In North Vancouver?

215 SP: Yes, everyone lived there.

216 INTVWR: In North Van?

217 SP: Yes, West Vancouver, North Vancouver. Then my father came in 1953

218 INTVWR: I see. So your father came in 1953. But, just one minute- I just want to ask- Kashmiri  
219 Singh, did he know Kapoor Singh?

220 SP: Yes

221 INTVWR: Okay. And do you know why Kapoor Singh started his mill here in Burnaby?

222 SP: That I don't know. but I do know that they had kept him as a manager, he was educated, and  
223 that's why he took care of all the work. But then, I don't know why, maybe because of his death  
224 or maybe just because, but in '52, Mayo, his wife, and eldest son went to India, that's where I  
225 saw them. I had another chacha, he was his first cousin. It was his daughter's wedding, we were  
226 kids, there was a really big house, [?], my bua's sons came to visit and wander around, and they  
227 all said "they're here", we were all so happy they came for the wedding after such a long time.



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228 His house over there was so big, it was right next to ours. My *chacha*'s house was over here, his  
229 (Mayo's) house was right here, this was the [?] Inside it was a door, half of it was inside and the  
230 other half was outside. By the door, was a bathroom made, with a tub. On the side of it was a  
231 window, and the water would go into the tub through a pipe. There was a big gate, it was by a  
232 room, they called it a motor room. At first, when they used to go places, that's where they would  
233 park. Then there was a room over there where they tied up the buffalo, the people who took care  
234 of the buffalos, I'm not sure what you would call them. Then there was a kitchen and in there  
235 was a wooden stove. Over there was a stove, they probably brought it in on a ship. Then there  
236 was a chimney on the outside and it's still there.

237 INTVWR: I see

238 SP: There were four bedrooms there, upstairs. There were [?] made there, there was one stair  
239 here and another in the back, it went all the way upstairs, three stories. On the second floor, there  
240 was a hallway, we called it a hallroom, next to it was a room with lots of coloured windows.  
241 Yellow, red, green, like that. And the curtains that hung were bejeweled, what do you call that,  
242 *nalpi*?<sup>16</sup> The little mirrors? They had that design with peacocks and peahens on them. The room  
243 was very big, all the windows were coloured. [18:42] There was another room here with our-  
244 with whom we call our Guru, Baba Ji, Guru Granth Sahib Ji, its *benti*<sup>17</sup>, there was a room on the  
245 other side here. There was a gallery made upstairs, with the hallroom made big, there was a  
246 hallway alongside it to go there and there was a roof [?]. Another room was made here [RD:  
247 *ghoomghar?*]

248 INTVWR: I see, what a grand house.

249 SP: Really! [?] is still kept there, it was a big- what's it called- you know what they call jasmine?  
250 What do they call it? I've forgotten now, they had that displayed grandly, it was so big and a  
251 great fragrance came from it. After they finished the end of the hall, there was a gate made and  
252 [?]; then afterwards, a gate was erected outside. The gate was large and made of iron. The  
253 bathroom was made outside.[19:35]

254 INTVWR: And since everyone was a child at that time, what did the house dwellers think of it?

255 SP: No one lived there. They all came here. The younger brother- I believe he was the youngest  
256 out of everyone- when he came here, but he liked the work there in Bombay. He came and  
257 argued with his wife, her name was Vishan Kaur, he said "I'm going to go wander around San  
258 Francisco", and then from there, he went back to India. He lived there. His wife lived there, his  
259 name was Nand Singh. [20:27]

260 INTVWR: Nand Singh. When he went to San Francisco, was he involved with the Ghadaris-?

<sup>16</sup> *Nalpi* is a type of bejeweled embroidery design

<sup>17</sup> The prayer room where the Holy Book is kept

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261 SP: No, no. He just roamed around and from there, he went back to India. He said, “I don’t want  
262 to do any work here, I like the work over there”. He had some kind of transport business there, he  
263 lived in Bombay. Then afterwards his land, [?], his kids also lived over there, one or two. Two  
264 sons came here. The younger one always stayed sick, he passed away, the older one has also  
265 passed away by now. He went to India and afterwards, the rest- there was one more brother. His  
266 name was- I’ve forgotten it now. It’ll come back to me-

267 INTVWR: It’s okay, your story-

268 SP: It’ll come back to me. He went to Duncan, he had a heart attack- he knocked on someone’s  
269 door, and no one opened the door, they thought maybe he’s drunk and right there, he died on  
270 their doorstep. [?]

271 INTVWR: I see. Then your-

272 SP: His name was Ganda Singh

273 INTVWR: Ganda Singh. Then, I wanted to ask- when you were young, when you were a little  
274 girl, a child, and you saw this huge house, what did you think about it? [22:00]

275 SP: When he lived in India, he had two wives. The eldest of two sisters<sup>18</sup> lived there. Her  
276 granddaughter lived there, and I would play with her. Together at the house, when he first  
277 brought [?] here, when he brought his nephew and his wife, he went back- his wife lived there.  
278 He had a son and he lived here and his wife lived over there. But I would go to their house and  
279 they were very loving and I would play with them.<sup>19</sup>

280 INTVWR: I see. So one wife was here, the other was over there?

281 SP: No, no, no. The wife was the other wife, Mayo’s brother’s.

282 INTVWR: Oh, I see, I see, I see, okay.

283 SP: She used to live in the village and the other wife lived in Ganganagar, they had land there.  
284 One of them lived here too with us. The older one lived there.

285 INTVWR: Okay, please tell me, at this time, you went from your father in the 1950s?

286 SP: My father went in ‘53. In ‘52, Mayo went there he was about to come, it was his son’s  
287 wedding, because his son, over here started an affair with a white woman. He said “we’ll take  
288 them there, we’ll stay there, six months or more, they’ll fall in love with each other and then

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<sup>18</sup> I’m unsure whether the two wives were related as sisters. In traditional Punjabi culture, if a wife died, the widower could marry her sister if she was unmarried; the same could happen if a husband died and the widow remarried her husband’s brother.

<sup>19</sup> Clarification from interviewer or interviewee needed for this paragraph

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**Interviewee: Surjeet Kaur Parmar (SP)**  
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289 we'll return". But his wedding, afterwards, *thayiji*<sup>20</sup> died. I don't know what illness it was, but  
290 she didn't recover. For this reason, they came back.

291 INTVWR: I see. What was her name? [23:25]

292 SP: Mission Kaur

293 INTVWR: Mission Kaur

294 SP: Mission Kaur, Mayo's wife, Mission Kaur. The reason they came here was that their son  
295 didn't even call them here, even though they all lived together here and married her. The one  
296 who lived here [?] and his wife, and the marriage they were going to do there, they did here, to  
297 his younger brother. Then they had two sons. His death happened 8-10 years ago now, so they  
298 came to Vancouver. His second son, he went over there and father was still alive. He married  
299 there and while he was getting married, his father passed away over here. [24:13] He was really  
300 upset, when he was there, his mother died here, when he was here, his father died there. Then  
301 Mayo- a hospital had been built in the village, in Paldi, [?] was studying; it was a lot of fun, there  
302 would be a function there, or lots of festivals, [?] there were so many nurses, so many doctors.  
303 Our school- where our land was, on this road, where the GT road went, the hospital was here, our  
304 land was here, the other side went to the village and beyond that, the school, our land was right  
305 in the middle. So we always knew what was going on. The school [*unintelligible*], if we got  
306 headaches, there would be medicine, for no reason, it was fun. For sixpence, that's how much a  
307 prescription cost. We would lose it, and what would the doctor say? The doctor would say, it's  
308 not sixpence, it's now six *anna*<sup>21</sup>.

309 INTVWR: Huh?!

310 SP: So we always lost it. It was fun for me.

311 INTVWR: [?] What did it seem like when you came here, can you tell me a little bit about that?  
312 How was your marriage arranged?

313 SP: My marriage happened like this. My father came here and my brother as well. They came  
314 here together with me, after a few months. A few months after my father came here, about eight  
315 months, my younger brother was born. When my- after 6-7 years my dad wanted to get my  
316 brother married off, and I only had one *chacha*, so they went for the wedding, and they said- I  
317 was in tenth grade, my *chacha* said "everyone will go after her, let's take everything over

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<sup>20</sup> Dad's older brother's wife

<sup>21</sup> An anna is a very old form of currency that was used in Punjab; "An anna (or ānna) was a currency unit formerly used in British India, equal to 1/16 of a rupee."

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian\\_anna#:~:text=An%20anna%20\(or%20%C4%81nna\)%20was,therefore%20equivalent%20to%206.25%20paise](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_anna#:~:text=An%20anna%20(or%20%C4%81nna)%20was,therefore%20equivalent%20to%206.25%20paise)

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318 there”<sup>22</sup>, it felt to my dad that things wouldn’t work out for me here [in India], whatever the  
319 circumstances may be here, he didn’t want to bring the family over. So after my brother was  
320 married in January, it was difficult to come back, right? So it was decided to quickly get me  
321 married, because it would be difficult to go back. So I got married too. I was in school. And  
322 then-

323 INTVWR: How old were you?

324 SP: I was in the tenth grade, whatever age that is. I must have been 17

325 INTVWR: How did that feel to you at that time?

326 SP: It didn’t seem good to me back then.

327 INTVWR: Didn’t feel good? Aw.

328 SP: And then my father came here and then afterwards, I went to England. [?], his daughter, we  
329 had met each other for a while. He [*referring to her husband, Nadeem*] went there and I went  
330 there, and then we came here.

331 INTVWR: Can you tell me how England seemed to you, you had never left India by air?

332 SP: When I wanted to come, then my father applied for the entire family, he wanted everyone to  
333 be over here.

334 INTVWR: I see

335 SP: Maybe because of me - I had to pass the medical exam, which was hard. Then we all passed-

336 INTVWR: Can you tell me why the medical exam was hard? Can you please explain?

337 SP: [?] They did a school test, [?] was left behind and then six months passed. So my mother was  
338 left behind [?] My elder brothers and sisters, even before their marriages they came here, they  
339 were also 16, I was also 16 when I got married [?] you won’t be able to return quickly, so you  
340 had to get married.<sup>23</sup>

341 INTVWR: I see

342 SP: They had applied for her too and she wanted to leave the country, my father thought, “that’s  
343 my nephew, he does work” but afterwards, to my mother, six months passed, and after six  
344 months, whatever she did, she had to do it all over again.

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<sup>22</sup> She was of marriageable age and “everyone would go after her” meant that she would receive lots of attention now from suitors

<sup>23</sup> This point needs further clarification from the interviewer/interviewee.

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- 345 INTVWR: I see. What subjects did they test you on?
- 346 SP: They did a school test, [?]<sup>24</sup> I don't know, nobody does it anymore. If we knew how to do it,  
347 we would have passed. It was so tough. You had to go to Delhi.
- 348 INTVWR: I see!
- 349 SP: There was no other place to go for it. So my younger- my sister that was younger from me-  
350 she passed and that was fine, they told her to take this medicine for the school test and she didn't  
351 take it, she said "I'm going to pass anyways", she didn't pass the school test, the rest passed. My  
352 two- I have two sisters and a brother- and they said, "we should go now, it took so long for  
353 mom", they left me at my *nanke*<sup>25</sup>, and my *mama*<sup>26</sup> had already come here but she wanted to  
354 come here, so she studied, passed and came here.
- 355 INTVWR: I see.
- 356 SP: My *mama* also came here at a young age.
- 357 INTVWR: I see.
- 358 SP: My- Ginaya Singh's wife was here, she was my *thayyi* here too as well as my mother's  
359 *bua*.<sup>27</sup> They did our matchmaking at home, we didn't call her *thayyi*, we called her *bua*<sup>28</sup>, *biji*<sup>29</sup>,  
360 that's what they called her so we called her that. Her sons were like brothers to us, but we called  
361 them *mama*. They brought me here to my older uncle. And then my older uncle sent for my  
362 younger uncle here as well.
- 363 INTVWR: I see. How did it seem to you that your entire family was going to Canada while you  
364 were going to England?
- 365 SP: That's what I'm telling you, when I went there, whether I would meet them or not, I lost so  
366 much weight that I no longer felt hungry
- 367 INTVWR: Aw
- 368 SP: There were good people there with whom [?], they were a good family, [?], and if I didn't  
369 go, then I would prepare all the vegetables and lentils, then I would go, if I was a little late, then  
370 we would all come back together with me, have some tea and sit together, gossip [?]. In the first  
371 days when I came here from India on the plane, he brought me to his home, we ate at our home-

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<sup>24</sup> They seem to have tested her on something else that I cannot understand.

<sup>25</sup> Maternal family

<sup>26</sup> Maternal uncle

<sup>27</sup> Need clarification on this

<sup>28</sup> Paternal aunt

<sup>29</sup> Respectful, informal way to say "grandmother"

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- 372 INTVWR: Whose house?
- 373 SP: Just someone who lived here. At first we rented a house. Well, it wasn't a whole house, it  
374 was one room we rented
- 375 INTVWR: They were Punjabi people?
- 376 SP: Yes, they were Punjabi. There were lots of Punjabis back then.
- 377 INTVWR: In England?
- 378 SP: Yes, lots. We all lived close together. There would be one street, then the second street, then  
379 turning around, there was a third street, [?]
- 380 INTVWR: Then how did you come to Canada?
- 381 SP: Canada- he-my husband studied engineering and there (in India) he finished it. In the  
382 evening, he'd go to college and in the daytime, he'd work. When he finished, then my father said  
383 "let's come together, let's all live together" but then my dad died in 1960. He came home from  
384 work, and that was it. He came inside into the living room, and saw that his slippers weren't  
385 there, then he walked around, to the living room, kitchen, upstairs, then he went into the hallway,  
386 my brother was young, my sister was asleep because she had to go to school, then he skipped my  
387 bedroom, [?], just puttering around like this, my mother went to the bathroom when she came  
388 outside, it was around 11 PM and he came home around 10:30 PM, don't know why, and saw  
389 around six men downstairs. We went to look downstairs, looked and there was snow outside, and  
390 then all at once, death came. And then after that, we came here.
- 391 INTVWR: After that, you came. Do you remember the year?
- 392 SP: Here? '60-We came here in '73.
- 393 INTVWR: February-
- 394 SP: No, June. We came in June.
- 395 INTVWR: Not but- when did he pass away?
- 396 SP: My father? '70. '70. 1970 November. Last month. It's been 52 years.
- 397 INTVWR: 52 years?
- 398 SP: My mother too, in '98. In 1998. She had a heart attack too.
- 399 INTVWR: At that time, you were here in Vancouver?
- 400 SP: We were here in Burnaby, over at Capitol Hill
- 401 INTVWR: I see, so you were living in Burnaby?

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402 SP: First my father lived in North Van, then they bought a house at Hastings and Eaton Street, by  
403 the ocean over there, we lived there. And then after his death, a year or two later, my younger  
404 brother bought a house at Capitol Hill [?]

405 INTVWR: I see.

406 SP: With my mother.

407 INTVWR: Do you remember the address of that first house? It was on Hastings by the ocean?

408 SP: Maybe if I remembered in my mind, I used to write letters, you know how we used to write  
409 letters? I used to remember everything, here I'm talking about my *bua*, in case, I remember her  
410 name, and I still remember her phone number. I know that in this house, in 1970, when we lived  
411 here in this house- on top- even that was 3 blocks up.

412 INTVWR: I see. And what did they call the area on top of Hastings?

413 SP: They call it Capitol Hill

414 INTVWR: That was when your brother bought his house (?)

415 SP: Yes my mother bought it with my brother. It was on Eaton and that was in '70- no-

416 INTVWR: Eaton?

417 SP: Eaton was the name of the street

418 INTVWR: Eaton. Okay, that's enough.

419 SP: It was Eaton. Its front was in front of a big park and on the other side was the ocean

420 INTVWR: I see.

421 SP: At first- the paternal aunt I was talking about, she lived here in Burnaby and the other person  
422 who lived here was my father. The rest of the family lived in North Van. Then my paternal  
423 aunt's son bought a house here in Burnaby [35:14]

424 INTVWR: I see. And why did your paternal aunt come here?

425 SP: My paternal aunt didn't come here, my paternal aunt's son came, and he applied for my  
426 *chacha*<sup>3031</sup>.

427 INTVWR: Okay, I see

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<sup>30</sup> Dad's younger brother; paternal uncle

<sup>31</sup> Applied as in, he sponsored her *chacha* to come to Canada

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- 428 SP: The boys all came, one or two stayed behind, [35:23] [?] he had three daughters, they also  
429 came here.
- 430 INTVWR: And your brother-
- 431 SP: Furthermore, my *nanke* and my *bua* all lived here
- 432 INTVWR: And why did your [?] also come here-
- 433 SP: My [?], just because.
- 434 INTVWR: In Burnaby
- 435 SP: [?] invited them.
- 436 INTVWR: No, no, Burnaby
- 437 SP: He bought a house in Burnaby. First he lived with my *chacha*, and then he bought a house in  
438 Burnaby and brought his family here. I don't know why he bought it here, I never asked him, but  
439 he bought a house here in Burnaby. He bought the house before his family came here.
- 440 INTVWR: I see, before the family came to Canada. So tell me a little more about how it felt like  
441 to you when you came here?
- 442 SP: When I came here- I had a bit of an attachment to England at that time, before coming here, I  
443 was a bit nervous that now I had to leave, I had friends there, the road and streets were all fancy,  
444 because we walked a lot over there, if we needed something, we would get it because we only  
445 had to walk a few blocks. I also went to work, we'd go on the bus. I also worked downtown
- 446 INTVWR: You also worked downtown? What did you do?
- 447 SP: At that time, the kids were still young so I didn't do anything. Then I- someone we knew  
448 opened a shirts factory, I did sewing.
- 449 INTVWR: I see. In England as well?
- 450 SP: Yes, in England too. I only did it for about two years.
- 451 INTVWR: Did you do any work when you came here?
- 452 SP: Here? Yes, I did some sewing because I did it there too
- 453 INTVWR: How did you find work?
- 454 SP: There were lots of [?]. Someone told me they were hiring over there, so I went there.  
455 Otherwise, even at home, [?]. So then they kept me.
- 456 INTVWR: And where was that?



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- 457 SP: Water Street, in Vancouver
- 458 INTVWR: Walter Street?
- 459 SP: Water. Water Street in front of the ocean.
- 460 INTVWR: I see
- 461 SP: Second to Hasting, Gastown
- 462 INTVWR: And you did sewing work there?
- 463 SP: They had lots of sewing factories there
- 464 INTVWR: I see. And how would you get there?
- 465 SP: It was on the fifth floor.<sup>32</sup> Bus.
- 466 INTVWR: Not tram, but bus
- 467 SP: The bus picked us up on Hastings, people would change there at Kootenay Loop, in
- 468 Vancouver. There was a Woodward's store there, we'd get off there and get picked up there,
- 469 then change again and go home
- 470 INTVWR: I see. [38:21] *[Conversation then veers to Anushay's pen no longer working and they*
- 471 *look for a pen, then they resume the interview]* [39:20] CYou were telling me when you did your
- 472 sewing work, and the bus would drop you off by Woodward's?
- 473 SP: Yes. We'd go one block behind Water St, we also call it Gastown
- 474 INTVWR: Walter Street
- 475 SP: Water. W-A-T-E-R (*spells it out*)
- 476 INTVWR: I see. Water Street. Did you go alone or with someone?
- 477 SP: Alone
- 478 INTVWR: I see. Can you tell me how it felt coming to a new place, even though your family
- 479 was with you?
- 480 SP: When- at first, I really felt it. It felt great over there, there, the people- here, the houses were
- 481 too far apart, relations were here but my friends were there. People there were really friendly,
- 482 really friendly.
- 483 INTVWR: Not friendly here?

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<sup>32</sup> I think she says fifth floor, but they are talking over one another.

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484 SP: They were but over there, we'd say, let's go to each other's houses, then I started working,  
485 everyone started working [?], the person's house we stayed at, I called her sister-in-law, she also  
486 started working there, [?] it felt great there with family. Here, we had family but they were all so  
487 far apart, they weren't that close that we could go to people's houses [?]. There were white  
488 people, English folk everywhere, Spanish- all were friendly

489 INTVWR: What kinds of things did you bring in your suitcase?

490 SP: Just- suits, sari. Not suits, but saris. Our quilted blankets- *rijai*, that's what we call them. Just  
491 clothes, not really household things.

492 INTVWR: What about your *rijai*?<sup>33</sup> Did you bring that from India?

493 SP: That was from India.

494 INTVWR: That was from India. Now can you tell me how you made it?

495 SP: In India, we just made it at home. We had cotton from the village at home. We had a  
496 machine there, we would put it through that

497 INTVWR: I see

498 SP: We would put it there, and then the workers who worked there would bring it back in and  
499 then we would begin to sew the quilt.

500 INTVWR: I see. And women made them?

501 SP: Women made them.

502 INTVWR: Okay, that's fine. Can you tell me when you got here where you stayed? On Capitol  
503 Hill?

504 SP: Yes, I stayed with my mother for two years because my brother hadn't gotten married yet.  
505 So I stayed with the two of them. Mom, dad lived separately and my older brother lived  
506 separately, he had two kids. My younger brother lived with us for a year, then he got married and  
507 got a house over there down the hill

508 INTVWR: Down the hill where?

509 SP: The name was- I'm remembering my house in England-Fell Avenue- by the [?] hospital. One  
510 block behind Hastings there

511 INTVWR: I see

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<sup>33</sup> Indian blanket

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512 SP: There we stayed there-we made this house in '82-in '83- '82- in '75, we moved here, so in  
513 '82, we came here. So 5 years.

514 INTVWR: So 5 years-

515 SP: 5-6 years, we stayed there

516 INTVWR: So first Capitol Hill and then Fell Avenue

517 SP: Yes. Over there, in '76-'77, over here by Brentwood in the front there was a building, I  
518 started work there. One year or maybe for two years I worked there

519 INTVWR: And that was sewing work?

520 SP: It was for- we made window coverings there. There we did what we call shades, you fold  
521 them and put them at the back

522 INTVWR: I see.

523 SP: They're still there [?] I made that, we would have to laminate them [?], that was my work

524 INTVWR: And this was a factory in Brentwood?

525 SP: Yes, in front of Brentwood, on the opposite side, across the road

526 INTVWR: What was it called?

527 SP: It was called Canadian Window Covering, it was an American company. And then what  
528 happened was they made a union

529 INTVWR: They made a union there?

530 SP: 130 workers worked there. It wasn't that [?] they made everything. I knew how to do all the  
531 work [?]then they closed down because now the union came [?], then it closed because the union  
532 came [?] you know what, young employees they tend to over-act, if you keep doing this, how is  
533 anything going to run? From their end, they wanted to stop fraud

534 INTVWR: Do you remember what demands they wanted?

535 SP: They had a lot of demands, I don't really remember, it's been 33-34 years, 35. But they were  
536 high demands. But that's fine too, but [?], but now that the union was here, they would say "we  
537 don't want to do this work, we don't want to do that work".

538 INTVWR: Yes, absolutely

539 SP: It became a bit too much and it didn't seem good to me. If you want to work, then work hard.  
540 Even if the union is there, you can only work if the work is there. But then through the union, I

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541 found work at a brewery, where they make beer, it was here at Labatt's by the hospital, it was a  
542 big building.

543 INTVWR: Can you help me understand how you found work through the union?

544 SP: The union came here and I applied there. After one year, they called me to come and to  
545 apply to certain places [?] So then they did my medical, they did quite a bit, then they called me.

546 INTVWR: So the union helped you?

547 SP: Yes. One more from here went to work there, two or three more [?] the work seemed good to  
548 me, it wasn't just one thing I'd do, there would be multiple things I'd do, sometimes I would sort  
549 the bottles, sometimes do packaging, it was different kinds of work, but the work was all good

550 INTVWR: A lot of strength

551 SP: Yes, a lot of strength [?] I made orders [?], I did all kinds of work but even then, everyone  
552 was friendly

553 INTVWR: Where was this brewery?

554 SP: It was here by Columbian Hospital, right next to it

555 INTVWR: Columbian Hospital?

556 SP: Columbian Hospital.

557 INTVWR: Ah, Royal Columbian Hospital

558 SP: Yes, next to Royal Columbian. It was a very big building, but then what happened  
559 afterwards is that they sold it to an American, and then they closed it here.

560 INTVWR: I see. What was the brewery's name?

561 SP: Labatt's.<sup>34</sup>

562 INTVWR: Lavatt's?

563 SP: Labatt's, it's a name, isn't it? There's one B in it. Labatt's was its name.

564 INTVWR: I see. Labatt's.

565 SP: Yes. There was also one here, by Union, in Vancouver. It's name was [?], there's one in  
566 Toronto as well and also in Edmonton. They didn't stop the beer, but they closed the plant, I

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<sup>34</sup> I believe it may be this one: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/labatt-closing-brewery-in-new-westminster-b-c-1.479130>

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- 567 don't know why, then the beer started coming from Edmonton. In Toronto too, they have a lot of  
568 plants. Then I started working through the union as a bottle sorter,
- 569 INTVWR: Water sorter?
- 570 SP: Where all the bottles are gathered for distribution, over there. With me [?] railway, what is-  
571 train, the skytrain-
- 572 INTVWR: Which station?
- 573 SP: A few rooms were closed, but it was there- factory-
- 574 INTVWR: Which station was it?
- 575 SP: Braid Street
- 576 INTVWR: Braid Street. Okay. Where Braid Station is. Okay, I understand now.
- 577 SP: Yes, behind that. And what they've made there now, there was a building behind there,  
578 they've taken it down and then they moved
- 579 INTVWR: Are you talking about Labatt's?
- 580 SP: No, its name was-maybe I'm mistaken- bottle sorter-its name-
- 581 INTVWR: Water sorter?
- 582 SP: No, its name was something else, I should have a card around here. And then from there,  
583 then I - then I was having some pain, and in 1960 I left the job [?]
- 584 INTVWR: This is a huge story that has come out. What is this bottle sorter work, can you  
585 explain it?
- 586 SP: We would set down a bottle, an empty bottle, everyone would [?] it, we would sort it, there  
587 was a conveyor belt that ran, on top of it, were [?] if it was fine, then you could put it in, the belt  
588 would run, you would put it on there [?], we would stack them, on the other side, someone else  
589 would be doing work, a line was made and everyone would be doing their own work
- 590 INTVWR: And were there any of our own who worked there?
- 591 SP: Of our own?
- 592 INTVWR: Yes, of our own.<sup>35</sup>
- 593 SP: Of our own- at first, there was one woman like me.

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<sup>35</sup> *Apne* = of our own community; she is asking if there were other Punjabi workers there

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**Interviewee: Surjeet Kaur Parmar (SP)**  
**Date of Interview: December 6, 2022**  
**Language of interview: Urdu/Hindi/Punjabi**  
**Transcriber: Rajdeep Dhadwal (RD)**

594 INTVWR: Just one.

595 SP: And then her sister came, and that was it. There were some men, about 2 or 3. One came  
596 with me from Labatt's, he used to work there. So, he was one, and there were about 2 or 3 others.

597 INTVWR: Two or three others, not many.

598 SP: There were the two sisters and me, and one of our men.

599 INTVWR: And what was the union's name- what union was it?

600 SP: I've forgotten it now

601 INTVWR: IWA?

602 SP: IWA was only one

603 INTVWR: IWA was only one? Was it 1357? No?

604 SP: I'm sure I have the card here somewhere.

605 INTVWR: Yes please, that's of great use

606 SP: I have it. BLD. BLD was the name.

607 INTVWR: BLD was the union's name?

608 SP: No, not the union, the factory's name.

609 INTVWR: Ah, okay. Where you sorted bottles.

610 SP: Yes. [?]

611 INTVWR: Do you remember which year this was?

612 SP: When I left that job, it was in 2001.

613 INTVWR: In 2001. So you were a bottle sorter in the 90s. And Labatt's?

614 SP: Labatt's.

615 INTVWR: Do you remember the year?

616 SP: Labatt's, I left there in 1995. Well, I didn't leave, they shut down. I went to India and when I  
617 came back, they had sent us notice of layoff.

618 INTVWR: I see. And this- this is the union card?

619 SP: This is the union card.

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- 620 *[They are looking at the card]*
- 621 SP: 27-
- 622 INTVWR: 217? It is- ah, okay, I'm just going to write this down. It is brewery-
- 623 SP: Its name was BDL
- 624 INTVWR: Winery- the local was 300 and distillery workers.
- 625 SP: Distillery workers-
- 626 INTVWR: Local 300.
- 627 SP: BMW<sup>36</sup>, when they closed, it was over here, in Brentwood on the opposite side, which was
- 628 the one. That's when they took my application and called me
- 629 INTVWR: I see. So this is the union where you first [?] when you were in the Brentwood place,
- 630 where you made-?
- 631 SP: In '90.
- 632 INTVWR: So this is the one you're talking about?
- 633 SP: In 1990, it closed. This is the one.
- 634 INTVWR: This is the one? Okay,
- 635 SP: It happened in '90.
- 636 INTVWR: I will do research on this one as well.
- 637 SP: In '91, I started over there.
- 638 INTVWR: In '91, you started in Brentwood
- 639 SP: A year later. No, no, over there in the brewery, at Labatt's. In '90, I finished my work over
- 640 there, it got closed down.
- 641 INTVWR: In '90, the one in Brentwood [?], Canadian Window Coverings.
- 642 SP: Yes, Canadian Window Coverings.
- 643 SP: In '90, you finished working there. When did you start working?
- 644 SP: In '91. Over here?

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<sup>36</sup> I believe she meant to say BDL

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- 645 INTVWR: Yes, Canadian Window Coverings
- 646 SP: I started working there in '81.
- 647 INTVWR: Really? You were there for a while. And that-
- 648 SP: I started there right after coming from India. In '80, I had to go to India, and I worked there
- 649 for a bit in '81, and then after, I came here and finished working here.
- 650 INTVWR: I see, so you have a long history of working in Burnaby. Okay. Can you tell me your
- 651 story of working, [?], but this [?], can you tell me, at home, what kinds of things did you eat,
- 652 what tasted good?
- 653 SP: We mostly went to Safeway
- 654 INTVWR: To Safeway? Okay.
- 655 SP: If we needed vegetables, then we went to Gastown, Chinatown or Main Street
- 656 INTVWR: Why there?
- 657 SP: You couldn't find it here, if you wanted things like *karela*, *bhindi*, *aam*,<sup>37</sup> the Chinese had
- 658 everything
- 659 INTVWR: And why would you go to Chinese grocery stores?
- 660 SP: There were just Chinese grocery stores, no other stores were there
- 661 INTVWR: I see. And why did you go there to get vegetables?
- 662 SP: If we couldn't find it at Safeway, our kinds of vegetables, we'd go there to find it
- 663 INTVWR: I see
- 664 SP: At first, you couldn't find *bhindi* here, I'll tell you this story. My father lived in North Van,
- 665 came here to get his vegetables, and even then [?]
- 666 INTVWR: Oh really?
- 667 SP: [?] I've heard it myself [?], he phoned everyone and said "I found *bhindi*, everyone come
- 668 here and get it, it's in Chinatown, *bhindi* has finally arrived in Chinatown". We didn't have any
- 669 vegetables like that here. Only the Chinese had *karela*. You could only get it in the summer [?],
- 670 right? What we did in the summer is we would buy a box of *karela*, we would make it, and then
- 671 we would freeze it to eat for the whole year.

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<sup>37</sup> Bitter gourd, okra, mango



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- 672 INTVWR: [?]
- 673 SP: At Safeway, you couldn't find anything like *bhindi*, we couldn't even find *aam*. *Aam* grew in  
674 the summer, we would have to go there to get them.
- 675 INTVWR: I see. You sure missed *aam*, right
- 676 SP: Yes. Now you can get everything. Even now, I see- there are so many superstores now- even  
677 now, I saw the flyer for this week, \$10 a box. I can't eat them because of diabetes, but even the  
678 kids- I got a box and no one ate it.
- 679 INTVWR: I see, so they came from India?
- 680 SP: They came from Africa, they came from Fiji
- 681 INTVWR: I see. Sorry, I've taken a lot of your time, I just have a bit more- what about spices?
- 682 SP: Spices, you know what, there was only one store, Famous Foods. Now it's by Kingsway and  
683 Edmonds, over there- what was the name of the street? First it was there by Commercial Street,  
684 what's that street there? It was over there by Hastings. Everything was there, it was an Italian  
685 store, Famous Foods. We got everything from there, flour, lentils. There was only one kind of  
686 flour we could get, there weren't different kinds. [?] There was only one. Then we got white  
687 flour, what was its name? So we used that. First we got everything from there. Dried fruit,  
688 almonds, things like that, we got all of that from there-
- 689 INTVWR: Famous Foods?
- 690 SP: After that, one of our stores opened on Commercial, it was Fijian, what was the name, and  
691 there were two there- 6<sup>th</sup> and- it was on 6<sup>th</sup> and Commercial- Patel.
- 692 INTVWR: Patel.
- 693 SP: Patel. But they closed that down too now, but Famous Foods is still around. They have our  
694 flour. Everything of ours is made there, like *maida*<sup>38</sup>, flour, all kinds of flour, all our kinds of  
695 foods, they had a grinder.
- 696 INTVWR: Did anyone ever say that since they couldn't find chickpea flour, they used green pea  
697 flour instead?
- 698 SP: There was only green pea flour,
- 699 INTVWR: I see! Can you make things like pakoras with it?

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<sup>38</sup> Wheat flour

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- 700 SP: You could make good pakoras with it, you could make good *kahdri*<sup>39</sup> with it too, although I  
701 never made it with that [?]. Making *besan*<sup>40</sup> with it wasn't good. The taste was off because it was  
702 cheaper, but we didn't use it. We could get besan.<sup>41</sup>
- 703 INTVWR: You could get besan? From where?
- 704 SP: Famous Food.
- 705 INTVWR: From Famous Foods as well?
- 706 SP: There was only one store. Everyone went there. Afterwards, lots of stores opened but our  
707 store (for the community) was started by Patel.
- 708 INTVWR: I see. I want to ask, clothes, what did you wear here?
- 709 SP: No one wore their own<sup>42</sup> clothes since I was here at first. My mother, as she got older, in  
710 middle age, wore clothes up to here, and up to here, with a gown, skirts up to here, the young  
711 people wore anything, they wore whatever they wanted
- 712 INTVWR: Why didn't anyone wear their Punjabi clothes?
- 713 SP: They didn't wear their clothes because there were no rights, we had to try to become like  
714 them. My *chacha*, my sister-in-law, cousin's wife, didn't leave the house without wearing  
715 [Western clothes], they [white people] would still get upset and would say, "do you know what  
716 rights there are to live here?" They had bought a plot in Duncan [?], when they went there to buy  
717 it, the previous owner said "now that you've bought it, make sure you built a nice house" and he  
718 said "What do you mean? This is my property, whether I make a shack or a house, what's it to  
719 you?" [?]
- 720 INTVWR: Oh I see, so they didn't even let them have it?
- 721 SP: [?] Obviously if I bought this expensive of a place, I'll make sure the house that is built is  
722 nice. No one had any rights. We were all living in fear.
- 723 INTVWR: How- do you mean that the owner had put up a sign or-?
- 724 SP: No, no, no. They hated us.
- 725 INTVWR: I see. Have you ever experienced anything like this? [1:00:00]

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<sup>39</sup> *Kahdri* is like a gravy curry.

<sup>40</sup> *Besan* means chickpea flour and is also a sweet (made of chickpea flour). Besan made out of green pea flour was not good.

<sup>41</sup> She is referring to the flour here, not the sweet.

<sup>42</sup> As in Punjabi clothes

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726 SP: No, I haven't experienced anything like this. In the beginning, when people settled here, it  
727 was very difficult.

728 INTVWR: I see.

729 SP: "Become like this and stay like this", as in, how the people are here.

730 INTVWR: I see. So everyone was thinking that in order to keep everyone safe, we have to  
731 become like this.

732 SP: Because, when the plane would bring us here, by the [?]

733 INTVWR: I see

734 SP: My mother's cousin brother [?] his wife came and their daughter came, the next day, snow  
735 had fallen and [?] and they said "tsk, tsk, tsk, and now-", they were in Duncan-Paldi- no, they  
736 lived over there in Nanaimo. I had to take them out, the next day I was told to go with them and  
737 get some clothes for them, they wore them and then they left [?]. They wouldn't leave otherwise.  
738 I had a (male) cousin over there in Duncan, I believe he lived there, and I had a (female) cousin  
739 and a school friend, and when I came, her sister in law had a son, and no one gave [?], no one  
740 went out like that, no.

741 INTVWR: I see.

742 SP: No one would go out like that.

743 INTVWR: I see, I see.

744 SP: When I went to the gurdwara, I would wear a sari. Even when I went to work, I would wear  
745 a sari.

746 INTVWR: Sari?

747 SP: Yes.

748 INTVWR: I see

749 SP: [?] The boss I had, the supervisor, they were all so happy, I brought printed saris, [?] they  
750 said we'll wear these to parties.

751 INTVWR: To work [?]

752 SP: [?] I wore them to work because they wanted to see me wearing it [?]

753 INTVWR: [?]But when you went with someone or with yourself, was there any racism or  
754 discrimination?

755 SP: Yes, there were. There were lots. But we didn't let it show.

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- 756 INTVWR: I see
- 757 SP: There were lots outside, but not that much. Not as much as it used to be.
- 758 INTVWR: The museum wants to also show that there was racism and discrimination at all times,  
759 absolutely
- 760 SP: It's still around, absolutely. You know what it is? Our generation has learned how to stand  
761 up in front, then how to be afraid. The people who came here first were afraid because they were  
762 alone, they had to settle down here and make a home from scratch, but the ones who came after  
763 had everything already built and made. So no, it's fine now.
- 764 INTVWR: I'm going to write a quote for the museum of what you said, and I'll say it to you first  
765 so you can hear it, *[in English]* "Our generation learned to stand up in front, then they got scared  
766 of saying anything". Is that correct?
- 767 SP: Yes, that's correct
- 768 INTVWR: I really like what you said
- 769 SP: It happened like that, that's why they had to take a stand. At first they were scared and they  
770 stopped themselves, they knew, "we would have to settle down when we go there" and "we can't  
771 turn back and go home"
- 772 INTVWR: Yeah
- 773 SP: I read that book by Mewa Singh, when that ship- at that time, when Mewa Singh was  
774 around- I read that, how he settled, how he [?], how we did what we did, I read that whole book  
775 and it felt like I going on the journey with him, that's how I learned everything about it, I read  
776 that book
- 777 INTVWR: And with your people-
- 778 SP: How people helped one another,
- 779 INTVWR: Absolutely
- 780 SP: You know the gurdwara over there on 2<sup>nd</sup> street, all the ships went there and we all went  
781 there too, and people would get water, there would be a place for all people, all people, how we  
782 helped one another, [?] but everyone helped them over there [?]
- 783 INTVWR: In your story, is there anyone else who helped you?
- 784 SP: That I did myself?
- 785 INTVWR: Absolutely. Or someone else-

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786 SP: No, we can't remember that kind of work, we don't keep memories of that, it just happens-

787 INTVWR: No, of your own, because we want to show, like [?]

788 SP: Yes, my husband's sister came. She came- actually, we tried hard to get her to come here, we  
789 looked for boys [for her to marry], but she didn't come, she didn't agree to any proposal, no  
790 kesmat, then when she got married, she went to over to Assam, then she had a son, she had her  
791 husband, her mother in law, go over there, call your husband, I said, when she was single, she  
792 didn't come because- my mother and father in law didn't come because of her because she was  
793 in India, now she's married and has her own children and they've grown, and now we can't do  
794 anything for her in order to come? It's against her, Then her [?] lived in Toronto and when they  
795 came, they came as refugees, on Dec. 4<sup>th</sup> was the last day, I believe, and quickly her brother was  
796 refused a visa, and she said her son and my father should live with me, my father in law, she said  
797 my father is over there, he can't come here, I want to show my son, they sent her a sponsorship  
798 and she got a visa. She had to go to Calcutta to get a visa and from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup>-  
799 something like that in November, and over there, she didn't go home, she went to Delhi, there  
800 bought a ticket, clothing, brought nothing. There her *mama*, her mother in law's brother, he was  
801 a secretary to the PM went through him, went to Punjab for two days, my brother [?] bought  
802 some stuff for the house, some she took, and here, [?] last date to come, she came that night. I  
803 had a phone call from [?] , that how I found out. I didn't even know.

804 INTVWR: I see, I see

805 SP: Then within a month, she came. She had two sons, one was my [?] wasn't even a year older  
806 than him, a year maybe. She said, "For me it's hard". I said, "But I also work, how can I look  
807 after them?"

808 INTVWR: Absolutely

809 SP: "How will I do work?" And she said, "Your sister is here too", my sister was with me, and I  
810 said "she works too, it's not like-", and she said "what child does she have? Your brother's child,  
811 you brought him, you can't take care of him, my sister will take care of him".

812 INTVWR: Oh no.

813 SP: I said "whatever you're doing is fine, whatever you say, I'll do it, even if you don't want to  
814 do it, I'll still do it, even if it's difficult, whatever, but I can't leave work, I can't afford it". Then,  
815 in December she came, and in March, I had enough money and she went to India. She's such a  
816 fool, I'll call her a fool because if you're going to come, then bring all your stuff. Her brother in  
817 law shouldn't have come, that was the problem. She had one suitcase, the kids had no things,  
818 then she didn't bring them. Then my father in law was with us, we're also hand to mouth as well  
819 [?], we got married and came, took out a loan, [RD: for whose marriage?], two years after, she  
820 came- his father, his mother died, he went to India, brought father back, so much happens, right?  
821 All of this took about 4 years for him.

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822 INTVWR: I see

823 SP: He had to apply as a refugee, right? He did that for his father from over there. And then I  
824 could continue working over there at Canadian Window Coverings, there were three shifts in 24  
825 hours. They gave me afternoon work. I would take my son with me, I would bring him back,  
826 work the whole day, make food, take care of father-in-law as well, I would get everything ready  
827 and made for my father in law early in the mornings, I would get up really early. After having  
828 kids, you have to take care of them, have to make food-

829 INTVWR: It's really difficult

830 SP: You can't rest by yourself, if I needed to rest- from there, I would get groceries, I could get  
831 up and get groceries, but I couldn't do much else. The child at night, have to get him, feed him,  
832 give him water, bathe him, put him to sleep.

833 INTVWR: How did you get your work done? Were your children with your sister or with your  
834 mother?

835 SP: No, my kids went to school, they were older.

836 INTVWR: Ah, okay. They had grown up.

837 SP: At first, it was like this with my children while I was raising them. I will tell you something-  
838 it was snowing, I left them - [?], They would get out at 4:30 and I would drop them off at 4:00.  
839 We reached home at 8:30. Kids alone, they would phone whomever they could- sometimes  
840 they'd phone my brother, sometimes my sister. We'd say, what can we do? We didn't even have  
841 cell phones back then. "She'll come" "where did she go? Where can we find her?" If the bus  
842 didn't arrive, then how would they understand? The bus came [?] there was no place. I reached  
843 home at 8:30, 4 children [?] in the morning, I'd go to work, come home in the evening. I would  
844 get the kids ready and then go. The school was nearby, my son came home, we lived in a  
845 basement. After 2-3 months we moved upstairs, we got a house within 2 years because [?], so we  
846 could apply for my husband's brother and afterwards then everyone could come (?), the house  
847 we couldn't get because we took money from here, if we wanted to give the downpayment, we  
848 would have had to give \$15,000, \$5,000 we took from here, \$10,000 someone gave us a  
849 guarantee to the bank, 10,000 second mortgage, it got to \$15,000, the whole amount ? We got the  
850 house, it wasn't like this where they looked at your tax return, no, they just believed you. We  
851 would just show them that we have this much money and they showed us the house, gave the job  
852 [?], we applied on his behalf and he didn't come. After 6 months, we asked again and he gave the  
853 papers again, [?], I said I filled it, he said, "no I'll fill it out", he didn't come and said he didn't  
854 want to work here. He played for a soccer team there, he was having fun, and how long could  
855 that go on for? So he didn't come. If he came with his mother and father-

856 INTVWR: Then he could have settled down.

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- 857 SP: Then my husband's sister could have come instead. but nobody did and then that was it. His  
858 marriage didn't happen either, not even my husband's sister, she didn't like any boys. I looked  
859 here [for suitors for her] too, and [?] went to [?] Toronto, and said nothing [?] So then the  
860 marriage happened. It's been 4 years now, her husband came. [?]
- 861 INTVWR: At this point, they were older
- 862 SP: They came too, and he stayed behind, and left him behind
- 863 INTVWR: Oh really?
- 864 SP: [?] He's the one I'm waiting for. The mother in law stays over there and sometimes comes to  
865 visit. Then when he comes, then she'll come [?] when he comes, then over there we'll all be  
866 together. [?] I already studied here for 4 years, [?] I was educated, I did my MA, Master's  
867 degree, after that, teacher in India, over here, three month course to be a nurse, standard care aid,  
868 I did that. Then got a job and-<sup>43</sup>
- 869 INTVWR: Everything was fine after that
- 870 SP: Yes. Then- I didn't get along with my husband's sister. And she wanted to stay here and we  
871 stayed there, and we would stay together. Should have kept her here in the first place then.
- 872 INTVWR: Absolutely
- 873 SP: She didn't go. And then her mother in law came here.
- 874 INTVWR: Thank you so so much. Thank you for telling this amazing story. [1:15:32]

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<sup>43</sup> Not clear if she is talking about herself here or not