

This is Your Heritage –

South Gloucestershire Stories of the Indian Community

Interview: Parmjit Kaur Full Interview Audio Transcription (21-01-2022)

Transcription and translation from Punjabi to English by Bristol Transcription & Translation Services and edited by a member of the South Gloucestershire Museums Group, June 2022.

Interviewer: Hardik Gaurav

Recorder: Hardik Gaurav

Location: At Home at Wick.

Parmjit Kaur Full interview audio (21 mins)

Participant prefix key:

I: Interviewer
R: Respondent

Transcript begins 00:00

I: Good evening!

R: Good evening! [Laughs]

I: So, today we are sitting in Paramjit home in Bristol. It is a beautiful home and we are going to interview her. It is 7.43 pm. And today is 21st January. So, Paramjit let's begin with the introduction.

R: Introduction. My name is Paramjit Kaur and I was born in Khehraduna, district Kapurthala.

I: District Kapurthala.

R: Hmm. Punjab.

I: Where? Punjab.

R: Punjab.

I: So, if we go back in time when you were born so can you share some memories of your childhood?

R: I don't remember too many things but we played together. The time was very good. Because we used to spend time with our neighbours. Now we don't even get to know if somebody is in the house or not. if there is any neighbour or not. I remember initially we used to play a lot with our neighbour's kids in the evening. In the morning we used to go to the school together. I had a social life over there. I used to participate in the songs, games and I used to take part in anchoring. I was interested in these activities mainly but we were 10 siblings. But we were very good. We used to eat together nice food in the afternoon when we came from school. I mean the life was really nice. And everything was nice. My father was really good because he never used to wake up children. We had holy Guru Granth sahib at our place. Because my grandmother and grandfather used to worship a lot. He was a head teacher; he used to worship a lot and used to celebrate Sikh festivals. And used to worship a lot that day. He used to wake us up in the morning and used to help us in folding our beds if we had slept outside. And he used to tell us to wash our faces and pray to God first of all. After offering prayers we used to have tea. My mother's health was not too good. But my father had to work a lot. His duty was to take care of all the children. He used to do all the shopping. At that time monthly shopping was done. He used to go to the city to get all the groceries on the bullock cart.

I: Did you travel with him?

R: No, we were not allowed to go to the city. Girls were not allowed at that time. We used to go sometimes. We used to have samosas over there. There was a special samosa and bhatura shop over there. And we used to definitely have it. When we used visit after a month, two months or six months. My father used to bring clothes for all the children for summers and winters we used to get two – two suits. My father a really nice man. My mother used to remain sick. But we still miss our mother. She passed away when she was 55. I just came to England at that time when she passed.

I: What about your father?

R: He also passed away.

I: You have 10 siblings?

R: What?

I: You have 10 siblings?

R: Yes, 10.

I: What is your number? [Laughs]

R: [Laughs] I was in the middle.

I: [Laughs] Do you celebrate Lohri in Punjab?

R: Yes we celebrate Lohri with great pomp and show.

I: Would you like to share something about that?

R: We celebrate Lohri when someone gets married or a child is born. When a new daughter in law comes to your place then we celebrate Lohri. We have a place in our village where all the relatives, neighbours and known people used to gather together. They used to form a group and ask for Lohri. People used to give cow dung cakes. On the traditional day of Lohri people used to give ladoos, rewris, peanuts. Girls used to ask for Lohri. At our time some people used to give money. Initially rich people used to give money but otherwise people used to give these things only. For so many days we used to get cow dung cakes and on the day of Lohri our parents did not allow us to go. My uncle, my father's elder brother and my brother was very strict. So we were not allowed to go out. And we were honoured in our village. My family was a famous Sikh family in the village. So we were not allowed to go out to ask for Lohri. But we used to sometimes tell a lie and go. We have gone once or twice like this. But we were not allowed to go. My uncle and my brother were very strict and did not allow us. Girls of our family were not allowed to go out. Even we never used to go to the farms to get vegetables. The people who used to work under us would get that for us.

I: That is beautiful. You have a lot of beautiful memories.

R: Hmm.

I: Really nice. So, your education is also from there?

R: India. Then I got married in Punjab, India. I studied till tenth and then did not continue my eleventh standard.

I: Okay what year did you get married?

R: 1972.

I: 1972 and when did you shift here?

R: 1973

I: 1973 you came here?

R: Here on 21st September.

- I:** What was the reason of shifting?
- R:** What's the reason? Because my sister was living in Bristol and my husband had come here. He had come here 2 – 4 years before my marriage. My sister was a smart lady in Bristol and she had a cloth shop, boutique. And my mother in law used to get clothes from her. Then her personality was such that she used to get ready properly by wearing a saree, makeup before going out of the house. She used to match her sweater saree, sandals and flower everything. People were really impressed by her. So whenever a girl used to get married she used to do her makeup. She had a cloth shop and they had a business of selling clothes. She used to stitch clothes also. She was really a hard working lady. My elder sister was a hardworking lady. Then they met each other and my sister told him that she has a sister. So we got married. Then we got married in 1972. In 1973 in September I came here.
- I:** Your husband was already working here?
- R:** Yes.
- I:** In the same place?
- R:** Yes, yes.
- I:** When you came here in 73 then what is the first memory that comes to your mind?
- R:** [Laughs] When I came here for the first time I was pregnant. My son was born on 23rd October. I came here on 21st September. I was really afraid of hospital. This is my memory. I did not know anything. I was crying. Like I did not know what is going to happen. Some ladies used to die in India when they were pregnant. So I was really afraid of the hospital that I will not come back now. I was not able to see my mom and dad. I was really worried.
- I:** Did you travelled by plane before or that was for the first time?
- R:** First time.
- I:** First time. So you might be really afraid in that situation?
- R:** Yes. But they were asking that how much time is there in delivery? Because you are not allowed to travel then. But we did not tell them the right time.
- I:** Yes, obviously it is difficult to travel in such a situation. So that was your first memory in the hospital. [Laughs]
- R:** Yes.
- I:** So when was your son born?

R: 23rd of October.

I: 23rd of October 1973.

R: Yes.

I: Okay. So, which was hospital was that?

R: Southmead hospital in Bristol.

I: Southmead hospital. So he was also born here. So everything started from here only.

R: Yes.

I: Your married life and your real family.

R: Yes.

I: That started from Bristol.

R: From Bristol.

I: So, you must be very close to Bristol.

R: Yes.

I: When you came here were there many Indian families?

R: Not much Indian families. There were less. And we had a great bond with the Indian families who were Hindus and Muslims. We shared a great bond with them. We used to eat together at the weekend. Like there is 24 hours work so the store is open for 24 hours and also 12 hours during the night. Not at that time because there were more traditional whites. At weekends people don't work because they don't put thread in a needle on weekends. There were more traditional people at that time. But now they work for 7 days. But at that time it was not like this. Initially people were more connected to each other. Because there were not more Gurudwaras but people used to go at each other's places. Gurudwaras were like homes. We used to go there with our children.

I: Where was that?

R: Smerce road. Eastern.

I: Whose house was that?

R: It belonged to the Gurudwara community. They had bought it. They had a committee. And we used to visit there.

I: The minorities Hindus, Muslims and you guys used to live together and take care of each other.

R: Yes, we shared a great bond. And we loved each other. Also there was a Hindu family from Delhi. We shared a great bond. We worked together in a chocolate factory. We were all together.

I: Where was the cloth shop?

R: Of my sister?

I: Yes.

R: Bath Road, Totterdown.

I: Okay Totterdown. Towards Bedminster.

R: Towards Bedminster.

I: Okay. When you were here did you have your own house or you were living on rent?

R: It was our own house. My in laws house. They used to live here.

I: For how long were they living here?

R: They came here 6 years before me. Initially the grandfather of my husband came here. But he did not take a house. He lived on rent. At that time many people used to live together in a single house. When they came then they bought a house. At that time the house's cost was £600. Now those houses cost 3 – 4 lacs.

I: Let us go back. I left a point. Your great grandfather was in the army?

R: Yes.

I: [Inaudible]

R: [Inaudible]

I: If you can tell something about him.

- R:** Actually I have written in English and Punjabi. But I could not take it out. I have his photos but what I have written I don't have it know because sometimes you forget a point. He was a very nice man like my uncle told me. My uncle told me about that. He was a nice man. He used to do service. And he was a Lieutenant colonel when he retired. He was a soldier when he joined the army. He was a soldier when he joined the army. Then his rank was Lieutenant colonel. When he retired we celebrated a lot. Because at that time very less people achieved this rank, you know. Then once Lord Mountbatten came to our place. We have his memory. When the first world war ended, he visited us. Maharaja Jagjeet Singh from Kapurthala was very close to my great grandfather. He offered him land as a gift. Since you won. But my great grandfather did not take any land. Then partition was done. Then he tried to convince my great grandfather for many gifts but he did not take. He was content with whatever he had. He was not greedy at all.
- I:** Mountbatten came to your house?
- R:** Yes my house in India, Punjab village.
- I:** Where was he posted in the world war I?
- R:** He joined the army in Kapurthala, Indian regiment.
- I:** Okay.
- R:** After that when the war started the Indians and whites joined hands. On 11 November Remembrance Day is celebrated regarding the First World War and second world war we go there also. We got invited due to our great grandfather.
- I:** Do you have the memory when the first gurudwara was made in Bristol? When was the first Gurudwara
- R:** It was on the Smerce road. Then they bought a place at Fish pond for Guru Nanak Gurudwara.
- I:** He was the one whose house you visited?
- R:** Yes. The community bought it. We were also there. They are Sikhs but there is some difference. They bought another Gurudwara Mistri Singh Ramgarhia made their own. Now there are four gurudwaras in Bristol.
- I:** Where did you used to go?
- R:** Church road Gurudwara. Singh Sabha Gurudwara.
- I:** From when are you visiting that place?

- R:** It was bought in 1994. Then people worked very hard for it together. Then from then onwards we visit that place.
- I:** Have you ever been Head of that Gurudwara?
- R:** In 1960 I was the President of that Gurudwara. There was no lady in Southwest who had become the head. I think no one in England. But it was very difficult because it is very difficult for the Sikhs to give the lead to a lady in your community.
- I:** What were the circumstances since you were associated with them for a very long time. You have done quiet lot of community work.
- R:** Yes, yes. We used to work for the community. Then there is a multi-faith forum where I used to work. I used to participate in that for Sikhism and my community and also I used to work with the ladies. My skill was that I had initially worked for the Bristol city council in residential home. I worked for around ten years. Then I worked in care home. Like I gave medicines etc.
- I:** So you worked in care home?
- R:** Yes. I worked day and night. As you know when you come here it is very difficult to settle yourself. You have to work. You have to educate your children.
- I:** So you have one son?
- R:** No, two sons. This is second and also two daughters. One is living in Welson.
- I:** Welson.
- R:** Yes.
- I:** Do you now participate in community works?
- R:** We go to Gurudwaras. I was a member of the committee. But now I resigned. I retired from there. Now I will go if I will feel like going otherwise I have holy Guru Granth sahib at my place. I have a room. I worship day and night. I have everything.
- I:** At what age did you retire?
- R:** I was 50 when I left. Then I did not work.
- I:** You do whatever you want.
- R:** Yes, I go to the gym, I go work a walk, I go for swimming.
- I:** When you came here in 1973 did you miss India?

- R:** I missed India a lot. When my mother died I went there after five years. Then I came back then you get busy in your children. Then I went after 12 years. It is very difficult to go after that. You have to take care of the children.
- I:** When the children grew up?
- R:** Now I go too often. Too much. I go for 3- 4 times year.
- I:** Do they like India?
- R:** Yes.
- I:** Now in which area do you live? And with whom?
- R:** Here. I have no friend here yet. [Laughs]. We are new here. It will be two years in July. Corona lockdown was there. We have neighbours. There is a Muslim family and they come here sometimes. We exchange eatables like cake, parathas. The people who live downstairs are very close to us. The man is in police. He comes sometimes. But it is not like the way it was there.
- I:** If you get a chance to go back. Where would you like to live here or India?
- R:** India is also very nice. We have no palaces or bungalows in India. We have a room there and it feels like a palace of queen. We go there and live there. The house is old with an old bathroom. We did not construct new. It is near farm. We go there and enjoy our holidays. We like it.
- I:** But your home is in Bristol?
- R:** It is not like that. Our soul is still in India. We can go and die there also. It is nothing like that.

Transcript ends 21:08

