

ਮਾਵਾਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਕਹਾਣੀਆਂ: Interview Transcripts

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Hardeep Kaur (recording)*

Introduction

In 1989, I came to Singapore. My wedding happened in India, and I came to Singapore in 1989. So when I came here, National Day was in a few days and I remember there had been a lot of flags (now there are few) , there was a flag in every apartment hung in the flats and I really liked that they celebrated so grandly. I came after my wedding- my in-laws and husband were born in Singapore, they are local Singaporeans.

Challenges

Actually, when I came, it was a joint family in the house- MIL, BIL, SIL- in a big flat (5 room flat). But when I came from India, I miss the big open homes, and even though it is a five-room flat, I still found it small.

Food wise, we matched with India because my father and mother in law were elderly and so home-cooked food was like in India. But when we ate out, there was very little vegetarian food because I was vegetarian then.

In the market then, most people spoke Malay and Malay was a new language for me, because they didn't speak English and they were all Malay so I would go with my father-in-law and I learned some market Malay- how to shop, how to do small tasks. That time, there was less English spoken. Today, all the shopkeepers speak English. Even the Chinese spoke Malay then,

because there was probably less English in school. Because I was vegetarian then, there was a stench in the market for me because as a vegetarian, everything was fish and meat (everything was very close to each other in the market), and because of the smell, I tried not to go, if I didn't have to go, it was a good thing.

Here, to travel was very easy, even then. There were numbers on the bus and all the street names were in English. To go wherever, we could take the bus based on whatever the family member says to take a bus. But in India, it was difficult to travel with government buses, for new people. But in Singapore, I found that great. I could shop and come home alone, and I never got lost.

Memories of India

Family was definitely missed. Because while there was a phone in India, the phone would work sometimes and not other times, the phone would be dead for a month. It was costly, it was 2 dollars for a minute to call from Singapore. Now, we have so much that is free, Whatsapp. We mostly wrote letters to each other. Because I was a housewife and whenever I had time or was sad, I would write a letter and post it. Now, I haven't written a letter, it's a direct phone call. My mummy was a school teacher and she would write a letter every week. Because as a government school teacher, she would have time to write a letter whenever she had time because I was quite young when I came, I was 19 when I got married.

In India, there was a lot of love around you in your neighborhood, and I missed interacting with them. Here, the neighbors are Chinese and they are very closed-off.

Going Back to India (Operation Blue Star)

I went back after 1991, after 2 years, because once I got permanent residency in Singapore, I went back to India.

When I first came, there were a lot of terrorists in India, like what happened with Blue Star. My daddy was the pindh's sarpanch and so, the terrorists would come to us once a week at night or sometimes, in the morning. Before I came to Singapore, we couldn't sleep at home and had to hide in our relatives' place. Because he was a sarpanch, the terrorists wanted to do something to him, whether kill him or something else. Because of that, we couldn't stay at home- all of us siblings. When I came to Singapore, I found it nice that I was safe. Then, in 1991, I went to my own home to stay, because things cooled down then. But I also had a grandmother and I missed her a lot, and I only went shopping for one or two days. I spent one month at home. After a month I went home. I went alone and I came back alone.

My in-laws knew, and I think everyone knew it. Because whoever used to travel to India, they reduced their travels because it wasn't safe for them at that time. But my in-laws would go, but they got scared on their travels and so, they stopped going. That's why I went alone. My

husband didn't go. Because my parents said I can go because I would be fine, but if their son-in-law comes, it's not very safe.

I was in India during Blue Star. Our village is quite far from Amritsar, but we would hear the bombs from Amritsar because the bombs were so strong. And Blue Star was not actually Indira Gandhi's fault for me, but the Bindrawale's fault. He put all the terrorists in our Golden Temple together to train them, and Pakistan would supply guns, and they formed a strong gang there. There was their main station. As a sarpanch, they wanted to meet my father but my daddy wanted to meet him. They went to meet my father multiple times, but my father refused to meet them. Even when I went to India, they came to look for my father. My father said it would be safer to not live at home. So, because of that, we didn't go home for two years.

Early Experiences

I spent time with my family members- my father-in-law and mother-in-law and sister in law and their two kids (12 and 14 years old). So I spent time with them at home. My in-laws were nice people, I can really say. My mother-in-law said if there is anything you can share about it to me- and it can be any household or husband problem, I will solve your problem. Because of that, I had a few problems mixing in Singapore.

I didn't speak English fluently, but I would understand it. Still, I would use my broken English and hang signs to get the job done. I didn't join any classes. But I would watch TV and use the subtitles in films and through those I improved my English a lot. Because I didn't go to an English-medium school, but I had an English class. So, I could read and write very well, but I had difficulties speaking because no one spoke English at home in India.

Differences in India and Singapore

I went mostly to the gurdwara, every Wednesday to Silat Road. In gurdwaras, Singapore's Punjabi faces looked very different. Singaporean Punjabi ladies like to wear gold, and bright and shining suits. Even I told my mummy that people here wear a lot of shiny clothes and they put on a lot of gold to go to the gurdwara. My mother in law would also tell me to wear gold to go to the gurdwara, and I would do it because you have to listen to them, you know the olden days. I didn't like having to wear it, internally. Their clothes were shining, shining. Everything else was good, their speaking was good.

In India, we didn't see any difference between whether someone was Mahja, Malva and Duaba. But in Singapore, there is a language difference. I have a masi in Duaba, and we visited them, there were language differences but not really. But in Singapore, I see a lot of differences in gurdwaras- that this is a Majha gurdwara, this a Duaba gurdwara. I was wondering if Punjab had different languages or what, why they were separate. I didn't know that these gurdwaras were different. I found that different. Yes, we are Punjabi and there are a few of us, but yet, they make the differences in the gurdwaras.

Sikh and Punjabi Identities

Sikh is religious and Punjabi is the language. We refer to those people living in Punjab as Punjabi. So, the Sikhs consider that Punjab is ours, but it isn't only Punjabi, there are Christians, Hindus and Muslims. But the Sikhs also think that the Punjab is only just the Sikhs. It's not even Sikh 90%, maybe Sikhs will be 60%, they are not, but there are other people (other jaats). In India, it's okay because almost everyone has long hair and beard so it's great. But in Singapore, there are some people who are vegetarian and who are in Sikhi, but they stay separate from the rest of the Punjabis (who are non-veg and those with cut hair). They think that we are in Sikhi so our kids should be Sikh and should have long hair and beard, but they cut their hair and they eat non-veg. They also want their partner to be in Sikhi and to have kes-dari (long hair and beard). For me, as long as they are Punjabi. But other than that, it is okay.

Note: Again, it is difficult to distinguish between Punjabi and Sikh at moments even though the difference is acknowledged.

I have met Hindus (not Punjabi Hindu), and an Indian Muslim girl, Fatimah, who was my age and who spoke Hindi. For me, it was easy to speak to a Hindi speaker because I couldn't find a Punjabi speaker. From them, I slowly learnt about Islam and what kinds of food they made- like why you call it Halal food because I didn't have the religious knowledge in India because there weren't Muslims near us. The teachers didn't teach us about the Muslims, but we knew about the Hindus.

I joined Punjabi school in 1991. In those times, all the students in Punjabi class were Sikhs. There were no Hindus, nor Hindi speakers. Then, most of the students were in Sikhi, with long hair, now most cut their hair. This time, there are two children whose parents speak Hindi but they took Punjabi as a second language.

Gendered Differences

I grew up in a farmhouse. If my brother comes to visit, he says I won't live in Singapore even if I get free citizenship. In this country, the people are so fast, like they have batteries in them and they are running around. He can't live in the flats and he says he can't work like the way he gets his servants. His thinking is different. So, women have to settle because they have no choice to go back. Men can return because they have houses. It is easy for ladies to follow the rules and regulations of a new country, but maybe not for men, unless maybe if they are well-educated.

Paramjeet Kaur (recording)*

Introduction

I came to Singapore in 1995. I came after marriage had happened for almost 2 and a half years. Before the marriage, my husband came to Singapore and then, my engagement had only happened for two months. Then, he was an engineer and he was doing the first job in his career in Singapore. So his life's starting, he was doing in Singapore. After our wedding, he was in

Singapore for one and a half years. After that, when my daughter was about to be born, and after she was one year and three months old, we moved to Singapore for the first time and have lived continuously in Singapore since.

We don't have any family members here. When my husband came, he also had no friends or family or relatives, both of the in-laws and parents are staying in India. When I came here, I knew nothing, I had no friends, no relatives. Even when my husband came, there were no friends. We didn't know anything, about where to go and what to do. Only the company's there were some colleagues who went to pick him up with the name plate, they didn't know him, they received him at the airport. Same for me, when I came, my husband came to bring me from India and we brought our daughter.

Challenges

First of all, we had loneliness. We had no friends. We were very lonely, life was too lonely, passing the day was difficult, without not friends. My husband would go to work and my daughter would be at home. She had to leave all the family in India because she would also miss the love and the attachment of family members and friends.

Even when I brought her to the playground, the Chinese did not accept her, they would play with each other and they were their own friends, and she was alone, and she saw them. I felt sad that my child was lonely and that she didn't have friends. To spend the whole day without friends and family and no relatives, not going anywhere, without knowing the country.

Second difficulty was not knowing where to go, how to move around. was the lack of knowledge of the country. I had to go to the market for the first time, I went with my husband twice, but I didn't figure out the MRT station, and we didn't have phones then, very difficult, and we only had house phones.

Even to contact India, we had a card. We couldn't just call whenever we wanted to. The calls were very expensive, and we would pay the \$10 card. We would go to the void deck of the building block where there was a common phone and where there were long lines of people who came from overseas to call home. Before going down, we would have to see if there were people, and then, we would have to wait for a while and there would be problems connecting the phone. We would have to try for 30 minutes to connect to India, but India did not have a good connection then. Then, we started calling from home and it would be expensive. It would be hello and goodbyes and that was it, there was no opportunity to talk more. And three people needed to talk, my parents would hear my voice and then, talk to my husband, and in five minutes, we could hardly talk. Even then, we couldn't talk to everyone in the family, sisters and brothers, within the five minutes. That was a very tough time.

Salaries were low then. I still remember when my husband started, he came for a \$1500 job. Then, the Singapore dollar value was huge (15 or 16 rupees per dollar). There was a huge

difference. The expenses were a lot- house rent, house bills, and all the rest, even the savings, everything was tough. We couldn't call for long because of that.

There was also the problem of talking with others in English. The English we used to speak (the grammatical English) was not understood by the local people. Whenever I asked the kids, they would give wrong answers (She go working already). I couldn't understand their English. The language problem was huge in making friends because most of the Chinese people here or there were Indians. There were very few Punjabis and even those who saw us treated us as Indians and didn't want to speak to us, they would pass us.

To mix with others it was also difficult. People don't trust strangers very much. We also had to face that trouble. We still don't have many Singaporean friends. There were some Indian friends who spoke our language Hindi (not Sardars, but Hindus).

And after the kids started going to school, we started making some friends and we made a little group of two to four friends. Even then, we lived in rental flats and we had to move so the friendships were hard to maintain. Still I feel that I wished that we had our own relatives. We treat it as our right to grab our bags and go to our grandparents' place for as long as we want, to go to any relatives. Some wedding or some other event, we all missed that. My family members passed on and there were so many weddings, and until today, I haven't even gone to visit any cousins. Even in Singapore, we didn't know people so we didn't get that many opportunities to go to events.

Yes, when I started teaching at Punjabi school, I made friends with Punjabi teachers. That's when my loneliness improved and I went to their weddings and functions. But then, there were very few. Then, we didn't have our own house, and this was a huge problem. Living in a shared house was a problem, with my husband's colleagues who were all men. I would help them with cooking and cleaning, but it was a difficult time, but we didn't have our own house.

This was very tough because we had very big homes in India. Even though in India, there is a difference in city and village life, but we lived 3-4 km from the city in a village. We lived in the village and both my parents were teachers and we had a good family and a good home. Even my in-laws had a large house.

I miss these big houses and I didn't feel good living in a rental house. Within 2 years, we bought an apartment with 3 bedrooms, and there, life started to feel better because we had our own home.

We are vegetarian and there was a huge problem with the smell. Whenever we went shopping or to the hawker center, there was a smell of meat, and I did not like these things.

Still- remember the big houses in India, there are large open yards and there are plants and agriculture and we would grow our own fields and freshly pick our vegetables from the fields and the entire family would sit together in the open years. Here, in the inside of the home, even in a five bedroom flat, I find the house very small relative to India. I still feel the same.

Now, we have everything, but then, we didn't have anything. All these problems were difficult- the language, mixing with everyone, not having friends or family, in terms of salary. In India, we had a lot- our own vegetables and there is so much at home, but here, we had to buy everything. Even when we had to go to India, we would have to think about which gift to buy and we would have to think a year in advance. It was hard to balance all of these things.

Men and Women

At that time, when I saw the lives of people here, I liked that everybody was working, ladies worked. In India, there are very few people working, (now of course, people are all working) but when I was studying, I did a Masters of Education because my parents were both teachers. But my mother was a teacher and she was the first woman to be so qualified in my village. Even in my village, no woman was that qualified.

But here, women always worked. In India, only men would work, like they would work at home or in agriculture with a few government jobs, and the rest do small jobs, like drivers. Here, most of the ladies were working.

But in my life, I had to sacrifice. When I first came, in 1996 I went to Khalsa Club to get my daughter admitted [to kindergarten], and I would find a job since I used to teach in India. Even when I applied for the job, Khalsa kindergarten, they gave me a job, but I didn't have family arrangements to take care of my daughter and the school didn't let my kid do both sessions while they needed me to teach both sessions. Even in 1996, I also got a job at a Punjabi school, but because of my daughter, I had to sacrifice a lot. I was asking the childcare to feed my child homemade food. I'll cook and bring it for her, but they said no. So because of my daughter, I had to sacrifice my job. I couldn't work because of my responsibilities. I got work for 6 days, and they also recommended me for Punjabi school because I had a masters in Punjabi. Punjabi school was very far away and I didn't understand the public transit and it took an hour and a half to get there and my husband would have to bring me back home. It was very tiring and so, finally, I didn't. I saw so many ladies working and I really liked it, but I couldn't work.

Punjabi Identity

There is a lot of difference in Punjabi identity. [In Singapore,] People cannot speak Punjabi grammatically even after they learn Punjabi in school, that's also Punjabi identity. The ladies also do not speak fully Punjabi, there are Malay words in their Punjabi, it could be a fashion or a habit. Even in the gurdwara, the ladies didn't speak Punjabi clearly. We speak pure Punjabi. The people here, those who were raised here, their language is very different from ours, it isn't pure grammatically. When they speak, there will be Malay and English words coming in.

When I came, as someone who lived in Punjab, people did not wear shorts and pants. Here, Punjabi women wear T-Shirts, pants to gurdwara, even dresses, I still don't like it. In our Punjab, women wear full salwar kameez. Those in Punjab, the Sardars were turbans, but in Singapore,

they don't always. Turban tying style is also very difficult. Here, people tie smaller turbans than in India. People will tie printed turbans but in India, people tie plain turbans.

There is also language, where there are respectful families, but there are some that do not speak respectfully. For me, they will say tu instead of tusi, even when they speak to each other or their parents. Ladies will refer to each other as tu. We never speak to anyone with 'tu'. There was no respect for each other.

Even when we went to the gurdwara, they would recognize us maybe because of our proper dressing, like the styles of our suits or the colors of my husband's turban which is with kanji. They know that we are from India and they will ask if we came from India. Even when serving food in the langgar, I felt that they saw us as Indians.

Regional Identity

We would know from the boli where they are from. For example, we are duabe, our boli is different, and when we would hear their use of words, we would know (e.g. bayiji, bebe would be used by the Majhe). The style of speech would tell us that they are not from Duabe. We are Duyabe, our city's Jalandhar. With the Majhe, we would know too (e.g. they say Baoo). Most of the people are Majhe or Malvey, very few are from Duabe. Most people are from Amritsar or Moghe in Singapore, but there are few Duabe here, most went to America, Canada and Australia. There are two or three families who are Duabe that I met. One was the Kheri auntie, then there's us, and then there's my friend, two sisters who are from Duabe, and then, there's one teacher.

In India, there will be some attachment to the area we live in. People don't have many relatives in other areas and so, they don't really get to go to the other areas, so that makes a difference. In Punjab, they do not really make the difference. I felt it in Singapore. No one looks down there.

In College in Moghe (Malve area), I learned about Malve people and I went to a few friend's houses. Their living style and our living style was very different- their crops and their spacious properties. They had a lot of land, we do not have much land, but the living standard of the Malve is very different from the Duabe. Those who are Duabe live to high standards. The Malve might be rich, but they didn't make houses of high quality. I saw that their living standards were not high. They had big houses, but despite being rich, they didn't maintain their lives. This was a matter of 1989.

But they didn't make any difference in their life. In Singapore, I saw the difference in gurdwaras. I found it strange that this is a Malve gurdwara, this is a Mahja gurdwara. Gurdwaras are for everyone, where did this come from to separate the gurdwaras. These people give preference for their own people here.

In India, people will never ask where you are from. You can go to any gurdwara and they will respect you- they won't see if you are rich or poor. They won't ever ask the question where you are from. You just sit in the langgar and you get the full langgar service.

We didn't have much land (2-3 jile, but no more than 7-8, but we cleaned and maintained the houses well. But the Malve and Majhe will have more than 100 jile, but this is from 1989, and now, there is a lot of change because the people improved their life standards and made nicer houses. But then, in 1989, I went to stay with my friend for 3-4 days. I saw that they owned 100 fields, but their standard was low, their house wasn't nicely made, I saw them using sand to clean the dishes, their food wasn't very good. When my friend came to ours, she too agreed that our living standard was better. But now, people have made a very good living standard, because the world has changed.

But in their hearts, there was no difference. They treat you with respect and with love and they won't even ask you where you are from.

Punjabi and Sikh Identity

No, we are all the same. Those who are Hindu, they are also from Punjab and they are also part of us. Sure, now, Sikhs cut their hair. But in Punjab, most Sikhs have turbans, but Hindus don't tie their turbans. They worship goats and their own Gods, which we don't believe in, like them do pujas. Our gurus told us to worship the Guru Granth Sahib. Apart from that, we don't have much differences. We speak the same language. Those from the South also have their own language, they are Indians too and there are also Hindi speaking people, mostly in the cities. We Punjabis- Hindus, Muslims and Punjabis- we all speak the same language. But there are those in the cities, like those who go to international schools, they don't speak Punjabi but Hindi. There are some differences in dressing- but those who are Hindu, they will wear saris, but Punjabi women will not wear saris, they will wear Punjabi suits. Even though we live in the same villages, those who are khatri, brahman, they will wear saris even in the same villages, but us Punjabis, we never wear saris.

Our people [the Sikhs] we won't say anything, but we consider them Hindus. The Punjabis will be in their own culture, and Punjabis will feel close to other Punjabis. But we won't say anything to Hindi speakers. In gurdwaras, we cannot turn anyone around, whether they are Muslim or Hindu.

Note: There is a clear conflation between Hindi/ Hindu and Punjabi/Sikh in the narration. It becomes unclear how to distinguish between the two aspects.

Cultural Preservation

We must stay with our culture, our heritage should be preserved, and our kids should love our language, love our dressing. We will definitely tell them that. Our Punjabi foods, like in the food culture in Singapore, we see different dishes, and we like that. Still, we also have our special

Punjabi dishes that we will make for our kids. Like at the Vaisakhi mela, we have samosas and chaat, and at your home too, I am sure, maki di roti is made, and kadhi chawal that we make at special functions.

Through these we introduce our children to keep them involved with the culture and to live according to their culture. We are going to Punjabi functions, and even if they go to parties, we will advise them to wear Punjabi food.

We will tell them to stay in Sikhism, how to speak in Punjabi and how to talk to each other respectfully. We will tell them to do sewa and service, to give them these values. To remain involved in our culture and to mix with Punjabi people and befriend each other. To speak in Punjabi we will definitely teach them, which is why we open Punjabi school for our kids to remain connected with our religion, read bani, listen to kirtan to stay in contact with their culture and religion. If there are elders they see, we will tell them to speak to them, to respect them and to learn from their experiences.

Positive Associations with Singapore

There are also good things about Singapore. When I first came, I saw the cleanliness. When we landed at the airport, I felt very good because India does not still have that level of cleanliness that is well-maintained. I saw big malls here for the first time. At the airport, I saw that it was a disciplined country where people are queued up (in India people cut the queues). Langgar system was good because people stood in queues. It was also weird that people sat on chairs for their langgar (India still doesn't have these dining areas). The langgar system was of a higher standard- the variety of food. Maybe now the standard is better in India, but when I was here, there were very few functions where there would be langgar. There were more functions at the gurdwara here. There, if there is gurpurab, people do their functions at home since their houses were big. Because of that, the langgar system would be at home and the langgar at the gurdwara would only happen during weddings, but now weddings happen in gurdwaras but langgars would be in the palace. Gurdwaras in Singapore have more programs and functions. In India, there are no daily programs, there might be Sangrand, but even then, there might be no langgar, you just get prasad and go home. In Singapore, people have many major functions at gurdwaras.

In terms of discipline, there are a lot of rules and regulations, the streets are clean, the bus system is great. In India, people throw the fruit peels as they eat in the bus and the seats are torn, but no one says anything to you. Now, there are new and nice buses in India, but these are expensive. But the ordinary public buses in India don't exist like in Singapore. The conductors are also cheaters, and passengers don't buy tickets. They will not pay and then run off. In Singapore, they are honest, they are well-managed, they are clean and green. Everything that is managed is good, not everything is bad.

Memory of India

I miss the family. The wedding functions, we always miss them because we cannot go. We attended very few. When I first came I felt sad that we didn't celebrate with them, but now we are used to it. Now, if I go back to India, maybe I would find it more difficult to live there than in Singapore. Because the weather is hard and it is hot, the places are far away, there is no public transport, it is not convenient, there are many scheming taxi drivers. Even in our own country, we would not feel safe to take a taxi. In Singapore, I would feel safe and we never feel unsafe sitting in the taxi, but we still feel afraid to take the taxi. If I get off at the airport at Amritsar, I won't feel safe on the three hour journey home. There are also thefts, but that's also what I liked here. There, women cannot walk home alone at night, there is a lot of theft, this is risky. People will break things or rob you, taxi drivers are risky, they also kidnap unwed women and there are rape cases. Here you don't have that, parents are not afraid, these things are better than in India. I don't feel the need to fetch my doctor at midnight, she can take public transport or a taxi. In India, I would not feel safe letting my child go home in a city in India at night. This is safe, this is what I like in Singapore. I accepted the weather- it isn't extremely hot, but if you need to go anywhere, it is convenient to take the taxi or take the bus. If you miss something, you can wait at the MRT station, and you can take the next train. In India, these are things you are afraid of, that there are long journeys, from Delhi to Punjab, we have to take 7-8 hours, which is terrible and risky. The system here is great- the car driving system, the MRT, the road signs, the traffic lights, these things are very convenient in Singapore.

When I came to Singapore from India, I thought it would be difficult for me to stay here, and I wanted to go back. Now, I feel that if I go back, I've gotten used to Singapore for 25 years, I cannot go home. This is my home.

Through my friends, my friends from Punjab, there are many divorce cases here, not so much in India, where people accept marriages. I noticed this difference when talking to my friends, I will always tell them I miss my family, that my family isn't here and we feel lonely. But they say that those people with family here, they struggle too. You're lucky. Those with families here, they torture them. These girls who came were very troubled by their families, the families forced the husbands to divorce them and they still don't respect their daughter-in-laws. A lot of the girls who married and came here, they tell me that you are lucky because in their families, there is no love between them. I noticed that there is no [love] with the husband. She has been married for 17 years to a Singaporean, she has an 11 year old daughter, and she is getting divorced. Those who came here from India for marriage, those with families, they are also not that happy, that's what I have seen.

There are those with culture, there are religious people. The system is great here, I have never seen such amazing kirtan jathas, the systematic way they organize kirtans everyday and the religious programs. I attended more religious programs here in Singapore than in India. The programs in the main religious sites in India happen daily, but in the village gurdwaras, they only celebrate certain festivals. When you go to the famous gurudwaras, you will get langgar, but in the normal village gurdwaras, you won't get langgar everyday.

Kuldeep Kaur (recording) *

Introduction

I came in 1996 because in March, I got married and in November, I came to Singapore. Actually, I never had any intention to go overseas, but all of a sudden, karam si so I came. My own family is in India, and I was brought up in India. My in-law's family is from Singapore (but they initially came from India, but the next generation like my husband and his sister were born and brought up here).

When I first came, I was very young, I was still 20 years old, and I was still very young. It was my final year of studying. I was away from my family and I came from a small family (we are 2 siblings). It happened all of a sudden and there was no intention. When it's going to happen, it happens.

When I came, I wasn't sure what would happen. But my mother-in-law was also India's jamme pale and so it made it easy to adjust. It might have been some time passed since they moved, but they understood what I am facing and what I needed to adjust here because I was so young and away from my family, and that's why it was easy for me. My family was very supportive and they wanted me to as soon as possible and learn about my surroundings in Singapore.

Comparison of India and Singapore

India's Punjabs are mehelvertan (friendly) and they are always welcoming you. But the Punjabis are not much different here, but when you look at the lifestyle, everyone works so people don't have time and so we don't meet until the weekend or at the gurdwara when there is a program.

Those who live overseas (not only Singapore but Canada and the UK), they preserve their cultures very well and they educate their future generations about it whereas Indian people are becoming modern very easily. It's sad to see that the next generation is forgetting their rites and rituals and culture, and that they are becoming more modern. Because of course, now, a lot of people travel (Punjab people are educated and travel), but still if I compare, those who live abroad of India, they have taught (and are teaching) their kids about their sabhyachar and they want to teach their kids about the sacrifices our gurus made and so they understand that our Sikhi didn't come easy. In that sense, I think the future generations in India, their parents might not even be telling their children about the guru's stories.

I'll tell you a real thing about my children who lived in Singapore and they learned Punjabi all the way. When I bring my daughters to India, my brother will tell me that I think that it's great that they speak very sweet Punjabi (even though they study other things, they still know Punjabi), whereas in India, kids want to go to private school and they forget their maat bahasa. So, when people live abroad, they still love their mother tongue, and you can see it.

Memory of India

Yes, there are many times when you feel down (emotional voice), you know sometimes you think positively, and you miss home, of course, and then, it wasn't much but now, there are a lot like video calls and Whatsapp. But when I came in 96, the technology was not that advanced, and of course, when you miss home and miss your family, but then, when it comes to my family, my husband is very very supportive. There are mood swings that come and go.

Jaats: Regional and Caste Identities

Actually, when I was studying in India, we would hear that the people from Hoshiarpur speak differently from those in Amritsar, but it wasn't not that obvious until I came to Singapore. It was a shock to me that we have different temples- for majhe and malve. I used to ask my husband why the majhe people do their programs in this gurdwara. He said, like initially when people came, those people came from a specific side and they had a more interest in building this temple, so that's how they separated, according to the different areas they came from.

Caste is not really a thing here. When we compare with India, there isn't that much. There still is a bit. I will say that this jaat and all that, it is also not the local born people who know, but it is also mentioned by people who are born and brought up in India, and they are the one who know more. To the locally born, as long as you are Punjabi and you speak Punjabi, that's enough. They don't need to know about your caste and all.

Adjusting to Life in Singapore

When I came from India, I applied for Permanent Residency (PR) first, my husband applied for PR. When I was waiting for PR, my husband enrolled me in English classes so at least I can go out of the house and learn how to travel and feel comfortable. At the same time, once I got my PR, my MIL used to feel like I was lonely at home because everyone goes to work, so she asked me to go to Punjabi school so once a week, you will get in the mood boost. And at Punjabi school, most of the Punjabi teachers are like me, they are married here (from India). I used to look forward to meeting my friends. That's how I slowly started adjusting.

When I started working at Punjabi school, at the same time, I also started working at an English school (in kindergarten) where I had friends there as well who are also Punjabi. So, I am a full-time preschool teacher.

Punjabi Language in Singapore

As I explained, my daughters also studied at Punjabi school, they write well and they speak well. But as long as the kids know that the person speaks English, the kids will speak in English, maybe it is natural, even if they speak good Punjabi. But in the house, they speak Punjabi to their dadi, and I used to have a helper who is also from Punjab. For example, when I call my family, they speak Punjabi to their uncles and aunties. When there is a necessity, of course, they will speak.

There is a big difference between kids born to local-born parents and those with parents from India. Those with local born parents, the children have a lot of trouble learning Punjabi, especially when they go to a higher grade because their parents cannot help them. Compared to my family: before they started primary schools (when they were in kindergarten), I used to spend every day teaching them Punjabi and other subjects as well. So when they started school, they already knew how to read sentences. Whereas the local born children are not exposed enough. The other thing is that I am lucky that my children stay with their grandmother because since I got married we stay together. Local born are mostly on their own when they are married and so the kids don't have much bonding with their grandparents, so the learning also won't happen. Where you mingle everyday or when you mingle once a week, there is a lot of difference. The other thing is when you stay with your grandparents, they take care of you, and you learn a lot of things, especially when the parents are not around and are at work.

Punjabi Identity

When I teach kids in Punjabi, the kids know very well from scratch the Gurumukhi letters and numbers. Even though I was born in India, we never learnt the numbers in Gurmukhi, so I found something new. So in these countries, when they start from scratch, which is hidden in India where they go straight to the point.

The other thing is - the kids from Singapore in secondary school, when they write compositions, they think in English and they write, but the children who study in Punjabi in India, there's a totally different ability to stretch. When you think in English and write in Punjabi, it is very obvious. Maybe you're good in English, but in Punjabi, you don't know how to elaborate.

When you look at your culture, overseas people are very strong and it's kudos to the parents who want their parents to continue with this, and I am happy to see that, which is missing in India these days.

We stay together. They spend time with their grandparents and they learn a lot. We also teach our children when you wake up to do your japji sahib and dio your path, and you must make time to go to the temple on weekends. We tell children that during exams, we tell them when they feel down, to just do their best and remember that Waheguru will be there (we will start any job by doing path). As and when the situation arises, we always tell them. Also, the kids will know all their relations (in Punjabi), who is who and the relations in Punjabi. This is very important and this must come from the parents. And also, we tell our children like when they go to Punjabi school and English school, your teacher is your guru and you should never talk back to your teachers, and a respect you must show to the elders, siblings because it goes a long way. And respect is to earn: so if you want people to respect you, of course, we need to respect first.

Harleen Kaur (recorded) *

Introduction

First time I came was when Sunny's father [my cousin's father] got married. My first trip in 1979 I came then for travels (gumun pheren). Then, in 1982, I came for my brother's engagement. Then, I came again in 1983 for his wedding. The Singaporean experience was very good, your grandmother and all, we're all one family and everything was great.

After that, I would come and go for functions: my nephew was born- I came, my niece was born, I'd stay for one or two weeks. After that, when my grandson was born in 2005, I came to Singapore and stayed here continuously for 13 years. After that, I would take the kids to Malaysia on their school breaks for a month. After that, when the kids grew up, I went back.

I got married in 1969 in India and came to Malaysia in March 1970. I have been in Malaysia for 50 years, first trip. In between, I came to Singapore.

Language Learning

The first time, I took a plane for the first from the pindh, so my flight was via Bangkok and so, it was a big shock. All the people were different and at that time, I couldn't speak English. I could read and write but couldn't speak English. There was some difficulty. From Bangkok, I had a flight to Penang. My relatives picked me up from the airport in Penang. I stayed one night in Penang and the next day I went to my place in Alastar.

Our neighbors were a Malay family and our helper was a South Indian who spoke Malay. English- I learnt it in school in India to read and write, but no experience in speaking because we all spoke in Punjabi in India. After coming here, I learnt it easily because I could read it, read the newspaper. After children were born, I learnt it from them as they spoke it at home. That's how I learnt it.

Memory of India

First, miss the family. Then, the festivals in India because Malaysia culture is different and Indian culture is different.

There was no telephone so we had to write letters, that would take tens of days and weeks and we would have to wait months for a reply from the family. Sometimes, we heard back after months. Everyday I would wait for the postman for a letter from the family.

Particularly, I missed Vasakhi and Lodhi.

Teeyain during a rain season, during which the girls would come together and head out to dance giddha. Now there is little left, but in our time, there was a lot. The girls from neighboring villages would come by and we would dance. There would be kheer made at home, and we would celebrate on every Sunday of the month (four Sundays). There would be kheer and pudhe (roti

with godh, like dosas) that would be made every Sunday. We were young and there was a lot of fun that the festival would come and we would get pudhe to eat.

Vasakhi would bring a lot of happiness because it marks the start of a new year. And the kanak would be ripe and we would harvest it. So, there will be joy in the house, and the wheat will come in the house. On Vasakhi day, mother would make pakode and we need to heat up oil in the pan on Vasakhi day. Puriyan and Pakode would be made. I miss the festivals.

Gurpurab too, we would celebrate all of them in the gurdwara, and we would celebrate it here too in Malaysia. There was also hola mahla in March, which was a religious festival, when the Sikh faith was founded. The Khalsa panth was established on Vasakhi day, when Singhs and Kauras were made. There was a lot of kirtan during hola mahla and there was a huge celebration at Anandpur Sahib gurdwara and we would go there to see the events.

India was fine, we studied in school and then, I came to Malaysia.

The Malaysian experience was good because the family was good and then, I got three boys.

Jaats: Regional and Caste Identities

There wasn't very much about caste. In that time, just like in Malaysia how there are different states, there are also these states in India. Majha district has cities like Gurdaspur and Amritsar, which is us. And other than that, in Jalandhar and the nearby areas, these are called Duaba. Then in Ludhiana and Ferozpur and Mogha, these are called Malvey. There are some cities in the Majhe area and the Duaba area. Chandigarh comes under the Malvey area.

When coming to Malaysia, people would ask me how people live in the Malvey region. But I would tell them I do not know. In my time, no one talks about this, and everyone thinks that we are all Punjabi and we are all the same. But sometimes, we had relatives from Malvey, and we would meet them in the village very excitedly, and we would say the guests from far are visiting. But there was no big difference then that they were Malvey and we were Majhe.

But now there is a difference. In Singapore there are different gurdwaras. Like Singh Sabha is for the Majhe [elaboration on the difference]. Malaysia has it too, especially Kuala Lumpur because there is a lot of such differentiation. There is only one gurdwara in our city so we all go to it.

The differences are just the state, but the people are the same. Just like in Malaysia, there are different states. Malvey have a little difference in their language, but very little, but enough to identify them. But their food and drinks are the same.

These are differences that people made, not baba ji. Jaats are also their work, we were baptised in the same bowl, but it doesn't get out of humans. But compared to the old times, there has

been a lot of improvement. Previously, those of lower caste, you wouldn't even let them come close. But there was "same da ferek".

We would call those who work in our houses majbi singhs. When the majbis come to our house to cook and clean, they eat away from our kitchen. Until today, those who work are majbi.

When my oldest son went to India for the first time, he asked why the helper had to sit outside to eat. My mother explained that they are of a lower caste and they cannot eat with us. But the seven year old grabbed his plate and went to sit with the helper, and said he wanted to eat here. Until today, he doesn't believe in these differences. He still invites the helper (his favorite) whenever he goes to India to eat and he even gives him money.

My sister-in-law would make daal and sabji and there was remainder food, and then, there was paneer. But my kid got mad that we gave the helper (Papi) daal and sabji, but not the paneer. I asked my sister-in-law why we didn't give Papi paneer, but she said it was because it wasn't made and he was in a hurry to go back. I still remember this story clearly because since [my son] was young, he wanted to help the poor. Until today, my son helps the poor a lot. He doesn't tell me, but he does.

They might have cut their hair (I kept their hair when they were young), but still, their mind is very focused on Guru's teachings. But their heart is all focused on guru ghar ki sewa, his thinking is that no one should get any suffering.

A mother knows her child's behavior. The others care too, but this son, he cares particularly.

For instance, our helper in Malaysia cannot go to work due to Corona. I still pay her, but my son says no, call her, I'll send her money. Right now, she cannot even go to the bank because I was the one who brought her to the bank. So, I have money at home, so I told her to use the money at home. Dev [my son] told you to. She has worked at our house for 46 years, she has worked there since two weeks after I gave birth to my son. I trust her and can stay in Singapore because she takes care of the house. I still call her on Saturdays. She is kind, not the greedy type. She says no, I don't need the money, if I need it, I will ask. Through this, I have gained a lot of life experience. My son doesn't want her to face pain since to him, she has "taken good care of us for a while- she showered us, fed us, took care of us, especially when my mother was busy".

But Singapore is very good, I like it. Singapore's government is very fair. Now, like the Corona injections. As we are dependents, we also got vaccinations, even though we are Malaysian passport carriers, just like the local people. I am very happy with the government, the government is very strict and people listen to the government, but the Malaysians don't listen and the Corona is very bad.

People here are also very nice. So far, any relations are very nice. So far, all our relatives are very good. I've no single complaint for the family and Singapore. I am very happy here.

Comparison of India and Singapore

What are the differences- now, in India, there are a lot of educated people. When I was in India, only 4 girls matriculated and matriculation was a big deal because it would be easy to get jobs even before the results. You would get offers from all sides (teaching, police), and there was a lot of value in education (in those days when I studied in the 60s).

Now, there are many people who finish their degrees and multiple degrees, but there are no jobs. But people are fine, people there have studied and made do, educated their children.

In terms of culture... I was 22 when I came from India to Malaysia. I have lived in Malaysia for 50 years two years back (in 2019). So, I only know a little about India, I have family there and I visit. But most of my interest is in my family in Malaysia or Singapore.

When I visit, there has been a lot of time, houses have changed.

First the houses were made of kacha, and now the houses are big and cities have been made. Last time, only some houses had bicycles, but now, in each house in the village, there are 20-30 cars in the village. Now motorcycles are like bikes, and you have them everywhere.

Thought has changed. Now there is more cleanliness. In our time, our house was clean because our father was in the army and so, he would bring discipline in the house. How to keep clean, to speak. He would educate his daughters even if no one else wanted to. But I noticed that the neighbors did not send their daughters to school, they were made to stay at home to do house work.

But now, everyone is educated and the time has changed (akal aa gayee). Girls are not lesser than boys.

Jaspal Kaur (recording) *

Family Introduction

I don't really know about when he came. But he would work here in the Telegraph office (the post office). Your grandfather (nana), we would all live there.

My mother kept 20 cows and she would milk and use them to work. My mother was from India, and my father is too. They are from Punjab, from Amritsar's jela.

Temporary Move to India

We went to India when the Japanese came and the war started, and then, again when the British came. I was 12 years old then. We saw the (World War) war, we saw the planes flying past. My mother died then, when the bomb hit her.

We went but we stayed for two or three years. We didn't like it. Your nana did not like India and then, he went to Bombay and then, we went to Kanpur. We stayed there in Kanpur, for 15-20 years. (Your grandma also went with us, she was born in India and she lived in India for 2 years.) My brother said "dil nahi lagda India vich" and then, we went to Kanpur and spent 15-20 years there. My grandma went to English school, and she studied Hindi and English.

Family Migration Chain

My relatives were my uncle's [taye's] daughters and sons in Singapore. (Draws comparison to my family tree). First my father came, and then, they came, and it was fine because we were one family.

I don't know why my father first came to Singapore. Then, he brought over his brother's kids, and then my pua's kids, and he brought everyone over to Singapore. (mangaiya). In India, we only have our chachi's family, and her kids live in front of her. Other than that, they are all in Singapore. There are some in Malaysia, and there are some family members who went to Australia and the US, and some stayed in Singapore.

Visit to India

We went to India in 1993. We all went (with my daughters) to Amritsar. We went to Saduke [the name of the village] (even though we stayed in Amritsar) because it is still our pindh, we went to meet our relatives. We saw that our father made a huge house of 3 stories and I really missed that [bahut yaad aaya] and the house is still standing there, but my mother-father is gone. We all (your grandmother) saw the house, we also saw the mansion, where the chachi stays now.

Jaats: Regional and Caste Identities

When we went to the pindh, the chachi would tell us: don't talk to this class, they are this lower social class. In Singapore, we don't have this. We are all one family and we live together. It was only in India that we found out about this.

I didn't know that until I got married at Silat Road Gurdwara about the regional identities. Your grandfather did not know this [jaatain] either. It was there I learned that there were these differences. They call these people this and that. We just thought that we were "eeki family".

Jaats are like those of the lower castes, such as majbi who are the workers. If you keep animals, they look after the animals, we call them a lower jaat. We are jaats, a jaat family. There are halwayi who make sweets, and we say that they make sweets. This isn't a jaat, but they

were Punjabi and they were Sikh, but they learned this work of making sweets. Some people work here and some people work there.

Some are jats and some are of lower jaats. There will be pipes installed for water in some houses in India, but sometimes, there are none. The lower jaats will bring water. Some keep animals, and there will be people who milk the animals. My mother also had animals, she had 20 cows, and she milked them herself, but then, the people would bring the milk to the houses. She would clean the milk to ensure that there is no water in it. If there was water in the milk, I will send you back [jahaj charadoin].

Linguistic Differences in Regional Identity

There are majbi, but you won't know in Singapore because we are all one family. In India, we will know because that's where it started. This person is this, and that person is that. For example, in Singapore, there are majbi who are officers in the army. We won't know because we will just say that they are educated and high class, we won't know their class. Only the older people would know this, and we only know if they say.

Malvaye's boli is different, their boli is about [tu and hain]. They speak very rudely. Those who are duabe speak very sweetly, and they speak with love. They refer to their elders politely (like hanji). The malvey are very well educated, but they don't know how to speak (ohna nu bolna nahi aunda). Those who came from India in the early days kept the Indian style.

In India, we say we are jats, and we live in pure Sikhi. We are maje, because our village is from Amritsar. There are others who are from Gurdaspur. My husband is from Gurdaspur. We are Randhawa, this is our goet. We say that the Randhawa have 12 villages, and they say that the Randhawe form the majority in Singapore (and in India). There are also Sidhu's goet (my husband's).

Duabe boli is very good, they speak with love. Those who are Malvey, they sound like they're from India. But those who came here and became educated, they changed their boli.

Singh Sabha Gurdwara was made by my father. Dharam Sabha was made by the Malveyein. Then, there is the Big Gurdwara [Towner Road], which is for everyone to share (sarein da sanjha), and no one can say anything to anyone. The bape (the business [vapaari] people), they wear blue belts and white clothes, their gurdwara is at Katong. They do business, and they make their gurdwara. We finish prayers at 12 or 1pm, but they finish at 9.30-10am and they pack the food [langgar] and go home, because they start early. They made a beautiful gurdwara, they made it among bungalows. They start early and they end at 9.30-10am.

Maje speaks politely, they say hanji. Like you can me Maaji and I reply well to you. This is the best boli. This is the Amritsar jali's boli. In Amritsar, I saw on the TV that the best boli is the Amritsari boli. We cannot refer to our elders as tu, and we must use tus, and we teach our kids

that. Pyaar di boli. When we were learning Punjabi, the teachers were great, because we would be told to say aap.

Japanese School in Singapore

We (also) went to Japanese school during the Japanese Occupation. I learned Japanese too. They teach Hindi too. My brother said you need to learn Punjabi at Singh Sabha. We started the day at Punjabi school at Singh Sabha gurdwara, and we would change and go to learn Japanese and Hindi from 1 to 6pm. There was a teacher teaching Japanese.

There were also Tamils, three classes of Tamils. There were two classes of us [Punjabis].

My brother worked in the INA, and because of that, my brother would put us in the school. When Chandra Bose came, the entire school would have to go visit. We would stand for 3 hours, and have to keep standing in rain or shine.

This school is still there. It is where we go to eat Dosas. One day we went to eat dosa, I recognized it and I told Shela [my daughter] that I think this is our school. Rama Krishna school is the name.

Sindhi daughters would also come. There were three classes of boys and three classes of girls. The English left and so they started teaching Japanese.

My brother was with Chandra Bose. My brother would always be with him. He had a uniform, and they gave him a driver too. He was working with Chandra Bose for three years. Then, when the English came back, everything changed back. Then, after the Japanese lost, my brother said we should go back to India. He really couldn't stay there and then, he went to Bombay, and then, he went to Kanpur. He put his daughters in Hindi and Punjabi school.

Kanpur

I am remembering Kanpur. The name of the road was 14/24 Civil Land Kanpur. Once we went to Punjab, and when we were in Delhi and then, the next station was Kanpur. I told my Bhabi "my city is here". The conductor asked if we wanted to get down at Kanpur, and I said no we have to go to Calcutta. I told him I stayed in Kanpur, and I told him where we lived. He said you remember everything about the city.

I really liked Kanpur. There were many mills, including clothes mills. Your grandpa worked in mills. When Chandra Bose was there, he would work with him. Clothes were made there. There were clothes mills, shoe mills. It was a great city. You couldn't drink. Drinking was banned. There was alcohol in Naklok. When the train from Naklok came, the police would arrest anyone with alcohol. There was no fear, boys and girls could walk anywhere.

Japanese Occupation

Japanese would come to the house and angrily ask this or that. They would also have knives and were very strict. They were short, but they bahut tang kita.

They got the British to clean drains, cut the grass. When the Japanese were going back and the British came back, they made the Japanese do the same thing they had made them do. They told them to wash the streets and all.

There was also a change in money. If the Japanese were here, you used Japanese money, there were no 1,2,5 dollar notes, but instead 100 dollar notes, 500 dollar notes (Japanese currency).

Satwant Kaur (recording) *

When I first came, it was [year]. It was fine, it was like in the old days, when you have to take the ship. We couldn't talk to the Malays, so we passed the time by talking to siblings, and then, I came over. I was 17 years old when I came.

I came here after getting married. We got married in India (during the Japanese fighting) in 1942. That's when the war happened, we got married and we came over. When I came, the war just ended and everything was fine. That was it- Singapore was something else then and now it has become something amazing.

I didn't speak English and Malay. We looked at each other and talked with hand signs and we learnt the language slowly. If there was someone by, they would tell me how to say this or that.

I came alone. My husband went over to India, and then, I came here on my own. The births of my children all happened here.

I went back to India after 25 years for the first time. The village was completely different, I recognized some people but not others. The people were "she came back after so long". Some people didn't recognize me.

When I first came, I would miss my family I left behind (pechleyaan). The people here, I wouldn't understand their language, it all seemed the same. Slowly, I learnt to mix with the people here.

Here, I would spend time with the uncle's daughter (chache di dhi), and his brother and wife, whose wedding happened here. We spent time with them for 4 months, and then moved where [her husband] found work. This was in Sissen Street, where we spent 35 years.

I didn't know what the regional identities were. They used to say in Singapore, there was the power of the Malveyi. But I realized that they were Malays and not Malveyi.

I knew about the castes [from India], but in Singapore, you couldn't tell, everyone looked the same because we all do the same work so no one knows who is who.

Keeping in Touch

We would write letters, but because I couldn't write, we would get someone to help us write one. The letter would take two weeks to get to India.

Yaad India di aundi. How can you forget our Punjab? No matter how happy we are here, Apna Punjab da yaad juror aunda.

There were already Punjabi people, a lot of them, even from our village, when I came. We would ralde and aaode jaande. Here, we went to the gurdwara and came home.

[Reminisces about playing as young girls in India] We used to have a lot of space, and now, everyone lives in flats so people would just go to the gurdwara.

Gurdeep Kaur (recording) *

Introduction

Okay what happened is that- My grandmother has passed on and it has been eight years. Her father, my grandmother's dad, was a freedom fighter and then, he had to go to prison. In the prison, he passed away. And then, he left my grandmother, her two sisters and one brother. When she was 13 years old, a rishta from Malaysia - my grandfather (my nana is born in Malaysia). So he and his mother went to India for the rishta and got married to my grandmother. My grandmother was only 13 years old then.

So because everybody was saying that life abroad was better and she had no father, and the whole situation of being poor and all. So, She got married and came to Malaysia. She was only 13 and she was like only a child, she was very close to her mother-in-law. So she was groomed and taught by her mother in law and all.

Her journey from India to Penang was by ship and the ship took 30 days- the old ship lane, they probably took it from Mumbai, one of the ports. The main thing was that she had very bad travel sickness and she had a lot of phobia- she was afraid of the whole journey. She was throwing up because she was thrown here and there, and she felt that the whole world was throwing up.

She had her first child when she was 16 or 17. In total, she had seven children. What she basically did- was she learned the housework and how to look after the cows. She learned it from her mother-in-law, and she settled in Malaysia.

What happened is she had a lot of fear and she didn't want to go back to India to meet her family (for holidays and all that). After at least 10 to 15 years, she received a letter to say that

her mother passed away. At this point of time, she already lost her dad and her mother passed away- so there was not much hope and her sisters were married. At one point in time, her brother came to Malaysia and stayed here for 2 years and he couldn't get adjusted to the lifestyle and he went back. So, my grandmother was left alone, and she was quite busy taking care of the kids, taking care of the household. My grandfather was the oldest child so he had the responsibility of getting his siblings settled (because he lost his dad as well) so he had the responsibility to get his sisters and brothers mattered. So my grandmother got involved in this.

My grandmother also went through the Japanese occupation. So they stayed in a joint family, together with her brother-in-law. My grandparents had six and seven children and her sister-in-law as well. Those days, there is not much communication. There were no letters or phone calls or all that. The only news she got was when her mother passed away.

Visiting India

Then, she didn't go back to India until I got married, and after 62 years. Her youngest son managed to convince her, because in between they used to talk to her, but she had a terrible fear of the ship, but they explained to her it was going to be a flight. My uncles were able to track the two sisters, and I think they were married in Mumbai, not even Punjabi.

That was the reunion of coming back to India to meet her sister. What I was told, it is something you could make a documentary about, they hugged each other and couldn't let go of each other, a couple of hours they were holding onto each other- that was the scene. She came back after visiting them, but she felt that there was not much connection left in India and that was the only person she knew and she came back to Malaysia. Then, my uncle arranged for the two ladies to come to Malaysia from India. She passed away when she was in her late eighties.

Punjabi Community in Malaysia

We stayed in a kampong and that land belonged to my grandfather. A few of the ladies would go back and take the ship to go home, they were quite brave to take the chance and go to the ship. But going back took a lot of persuasion and she went back to Punjab and she didn't recognize anything.

She did not recognize anything in the village, but she recognized a tree that she would play at. She met an old man like her, and he said that I remember that we used to play (and of the same age). He told her about her other siblings from his parents and what he remembered. Trees give her a lot of reminders and at specific locations.

Moving to Malaysia

She learned Malay.

She was absolutely uneducated, she couldn't read and write, nothing. She couldn't even do her mool mantar, towards the end we taught her gurbani and did her mala and all that. She learned to speak Malay from people around her. And I must say her Malay- she was quite a reserved person, but my grandfather was outcoming. So she could speak Malay and she could manage but the husbands used to do everything. She was very much indoors.

It was Punjabi throughout. She did introduce the family to desi food, such as makki roti and kheer. And I remember clearly because I loved the roti. During Sawan, they would make puri and how they would eat it. So she did bring in a lot of this influence. In Malaysia, there are a lot of Malaysian dishes. When I was young I didn't even know.

Punjabi Identity

For me personally, because my nani was from India, but my nana and my other relatives were all very Malaysian (my mother and dad were from Malaysia). For me, Punjabi, the language was a language I picked up from my parents I picked up from my parents and grandparents. I couldn't relate myself to India because of my background. When I got married and came to Singapore, I did see a lot of difference in my in-laws because my mother-in-law is from India. There is a lot of connection- this pindh, that pindh, they have a very strong lineage. I don't see myself, I am Punjabi because I am Punjabi. I know it originated from there, but maybe the connection is not strong. To me, I am Punjabi, and I read and write the language. Mostly the music we listen to is Bollywood so it is Hindi.

I can share a bit, my husband's the youngest so I am the youngest daughter in law, so not much. I know that she used to say this lady is Gholia wali. I used to wonder what happened to my husband's (real) uncles, which I have because they are all in Malaysia. My husband doesn't have his uncles in Singapore. When they came, from Gholia, all the pindh wale, they became very close. When I got married, in the barat, they were all from the pindh. I found it strange, but I started to understand it. because my husband does not have his

Satvinder Kaur (recording) *

Introduction

I came in 2004. I wanted to come here and look for a job because my background was poor so I wanted to come here to support your family.

I chose Singapore because I had friends and they encouraged me, that you could come here and that it was safe to come here. Safety was why I chose the place.

I didn't have many migration problems. I worked on a work permit for some time. When I first came, there were some police problems, and then, there were some job problems, but then it became better.

Comparison of India and Singapore

For culture, for example, to go to the gurdwara, we will wear salwar kameez but here people were wearing t-shirts here. When we go to the gurdwara, there are some cultural habits, such as we would be fully vegetarian, you would fully cover your head and you cannot wear tight t-shirts. Here, the women with joint pains sit on chairs, that's also a bit different.

Memory of India

I mostly missed my parents and the food and all that. Now I have nobody behind (in India). My father and mother have passed away, but I still miss India and my hometown.

Comparing India and Singapore

The boli is different there and here, and the clothes and behavior are also different. India is more friendly than here, you don't need to inform anyone when you go to someone's house, but here you need to phone to inform.

Actually, India and here, not much difference, almost the same. So, in India, they have kampongs and they stay in the village, and the cities have a different culture. Village is a bit slow and the city is a bit faster. Indian culture is better than here, everything is better.

Everybody is the same. There are people who like Indian food and clothes and they don't make any comment, but there are people who like to make fun of people from India, like these people are from there, these people have no brain. But still people in Singapore understand what India is, how the Punjabi people are and what their culture is, and they still follow it.

They are more focused on food and culture, but there are people who are old enough to remember 1984. Some people just follow the trends and all that.

Gendered Differences

In Singapore, the men have better understanding, like they understand the woman, she's work and they help her do the household. But in India, women have to do all of that- the housework and the work outside. It's a bit different.

So far, there is no real difference between men and women who come. When they see the people (in Singapore) are different, they change themselves to follow their rules. They have rules and regulations in Singapore. What they can do in India they cannot do here, most of the things they cannot do. They change their clothes and their behavior, their style of living.

Anmol Kaur

Introduction

It has been a long time since I came to Malaysia. The year 1962. I got married and came. My father got me married to your Nana, and since then, I needed to come. A relative of my mother found the relationship. I got married at 17, but I was young so I stayed in India for 5 years until 22. We made a passport in India and that took 3 years to make.

Challenges Faced

I missed all of Punjab. I missed my parents, my siblings, my angh-saakh. When I went back I couldn't recognize. We are Punjabi, and we cannot do anything bad. We need to stay like we did in our family. The other races would say do this or that. But wherever our parents send us, we have to stay with them. You cannot take things from others, but treat everyone with respect.

When I first came here, I had no siblings and I was alone. After the first 9 months of coming, I had a son. He passed away after 1 week. I was very sad because I had no one here. I stayed in grief, and passed 3 years. I went to learn, and I would go find people to help with letter-writing. Everyone here spoke Malay, but we were Punjabi. I had to ask them to get the envelope.

I would tell them I was good. Sad things and difficulty would not be told to our parents to avoid their worry. However, there were a lot of Punjabis from the village who came to Malaysia (in Ipoh) who would tell you what you do? Who did you get your daughter married to?

I was the only one from my family who came to Malaysia. This girl is *bholy* (innocent)- why did you send her over? But now the mistake has been made, the wedding has happened.

The people who visited from her village would teach her Malay. Her aunt-like figure's son would say he is her brother and he told her he would look after her any needs.

I went back to India after 22 years since I was married. I had 6 kids.

Family and Social Networks

My husband was a farmer, but I didn't do the farm work because I don't know how to make dung cakes and milk the cow. Hence, we came to Singapore. We lived near a military camp. There was a Chinese man from Malaysia, but he was the supervisor of where we worked. If there is any need, I will get you what you need.

Three years later, I got a daughter. With children, time started passing. Slowly, some relatives would come. I would go to spend time with them, she was from my village, but was like my aunt. I would spend one or two months with them.

I have seen a lot of pain in the country. After three kids, we came to Singapore. My husband worked for 3 years and we became better. But our daughter did not get into a public school in Singapore and we came to JB. We lived in the gurdwara for half a month. Our son (Jesse) was

born and then, Hari (the oldest son) was run over. We ended up living in the gurdwara for 6 months. We had to pay (50 dollars) because it wasn't good to live in God's house.

The person who helped us was also from our village. She became my sister. For instance, she would bring us back to the hospital when my oldest son got hurt.

There was also a Giani from Punjab, and his wife too. They would feed the kids, and they looked after Jesse (he wasn't even three months).

I would go to the giani to get letters written. We don't know what he writes or not. I would get the letters written with him. There was no one else who could help nearby.

I am happy and healthy and there is nothing to be written about. I had hoped you had educated me to send me here. These are different things to say. I would also complain to my father that we are 10 kids, but you sent only me away. We bought land in the UP, but you got me married at 17, unlike my older brother and sister who were still unmarried. People asked if you took money. My grandfather would argue too that you bought land in UP but only for your sons. We cannot see her in times of joy, in times of grief. They had promised to send me back every 6 months, but that didn't happen.

I have a brother who lives in Singapore. He didn't come until people told him.

We then found a rental house where we lived for 3 years. We were told to make a house near the railroad. After making the house, we lived in 1 or 2 rooms and gave up the other 1 or two for rent. Children started going to school and they managed to somewhat get educated.

No family, no members. We saw a lot of pain. My husband's family did not want to talk to us, because we were poor. It wasn't easy to leave your country and go to a random country. We will learn about how it feels alone. When there is any trouble, my daughters come. When I have my family (in Punjab), people come and go all the time. The whole world helps where you work. These people are a different race, they don't know what we do and what we don't do.

Harminder Kaur

Introduction

My father's brother first moved to Singapore (I don't know about the years). There were four brothers who worked at the same location. The oldest brother decided that their salary was low. He invited his brother (when he was 25 years), and then, both started doing business. They bought land and sold it, some income. Then, they kept doing this to make a lot of money. Then, they started a dairy farm to sell milk. My father got married and there were many kids, there were 11 of us- brothers and sisters. The older children went to university. The girls did not go to

English school and were educated at a Punjabi Baba's place. The younger girls went to Methodist school to learn English.

They worked with the Dutch in Indonesia. My father was the Governor (Kapitan) for the Dutch. The place was divided into different sectors who looked after Kapitan. He was very rich, with 17,18 shophouses with hundreds of cows and sheep. There was a dairy farm with food. When the Japanese arrived, the documents were buried in the jungle and nobody could locate these money and documents. There were pails and pails of gold coins.

Sikh Community in Indonesia

There was a sufficiently large community- there were Punjabis and Tamils in Indonesia, Malays. The Punjabis were mostly businessmen, they would sell clothes, rations, sports business, spare parts, and a lot of them were well-to-do. They were mostly Sikhs, with long beards. The culture was followed very strictly, the father was Akali and vegetarian (even if the children would eat meat). He would eat rice with brinjal and with yoghurt. The first group of family members who came were Akali. Weddings were done in a typical way. They do just the things like in India, but in Indonesia version: they drink milk but with sugar, and they stir to make ghee. They practise the same methods from India.

He opened the gurdwara in Medan, and was the main contributor. The Medan gurdwara is still there. The "long" family was known because of their contribution and connections.

Cultural Differences

We spoke Malay, but at home, we spoke Punjabi. My mother was from Penang. My mother spoke Punjabi, Hindi and Malay. She was Hindu Brahmin, and that's why their side of the family do pujas. She was 15 years old, and her father was a businessman and moved forward. Before that she was a Brahmin, and that's where [Medan] she became Sikh. She followed Sikh beliefs, but still maintained some Hindu practices because she was raised Hindu.

My siblings all passed away. I have only one brother in Kuala Lumpur and one sister in JB. My brother was a teacher.

Migration to Singapore

My engagement happened in Singapore and I got married here because my sister introduced the relationship. I moved to Singapore in 1959, it was during the British era. My husband was in the British Naval base as a policeman. We became Singapore citizens because the British were going back. The British asked if we wanted Singaporean or UK citizenships, but my husband wanted Singaporean citizenship.

I went back to India four times, my husband did too. My in-laws are from India. The different countries (Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia) consider the Punjabis positively.

We were listening to stories, because our father kept coming and going to Indonesia and India. We also had a lot in India. We also had a good business. All the brothers did that. The children of these brothers too. Then, the Japanese came and the ships (Rajunas) stopped and there was a restriction of movement.

Husband came with his uncle to Kota Tinggi rubber estates. The culture was different, he learnt to speak Malay (and Arabic), and Tamil because all the people were Tamil. The father was very strict and they didn't allow him to learn English. Great grandfather was a wrestler and that's why he was given the opportunity to work in the estates (he would work out and make concoctions for the family).

Gurmeet Kaur

Introduction

I think our grandfather was the first one to come to Singapore. He came to work here. My father was born in Singapore. My mother is from India. My father went to India to get married and came back with my mother. She has lived here since and has given birth.

Childhood Memories

Then, there was the Japanese invasion. My grandmother would look after livestock. When the bombs were dropped, my grandmother died in releasing the cows.

We went to Kanpur and my father worked in the clothes' mill. Then, we went to India in our village (Saduke). We came back to Singapore in 1954. We had a house in India and our uncle lives there.

I went to Punjabi school. I studied in Punjabi, but not in English. Two or three Punjabi schools, in gurdwaras.