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## Bisla, Raghbir Interview

Abby Hicks

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# Stockton Immigrant Women Oral History Collection

by Sally Miller

## **BISLA, Raghubir (Indian)**

August 5, 1980

Interviewed by Abby Hicks

Transcribed by Robert Siess

**[TAPE 1, Side A]  
[Begin Tape.]**

ABBY HICKS: Tell me about your early life, that is, before you came to this country.

RAGHUBIR BISLA: Well, I'm from India, and I went to school there. And when I was 18 years old, I got married, and my son was three years old when I came to the USA.

HICKS: How long did you live there, in India?

BISLA: In India? Oh, I was I think 23 years old when I came to USA.

HICKS: Was that out in the country or the city?

BISLA: Oh, I lived in [Billays?]. Not in the city. It was little.

HICKS: And your birth date?

BISLA: 7-15-48.

HICKS: When did you come to the U.S.? You say you were 18?

BISLA: Oh, I was 23 when I came to USA, but I was 18 when I got married. I came to USA in 1971. Yes, I was on permanent visa because my husband came before I came. And so he filed petition for me and for my son, and then we both came.

HICKS: Okay, but you were married in India, right?

BISLA: Yes. We lived there five years while I was married. I got married in '65. So we both lived there, and then my son was born, and my cousin came to USA, and after him we came. After one year.

HICKS: One year? How many brothers and sisters did you have before you arrived?

BISLA: I have two brothers. No sister. I still have two brothers.

HICKS: Just your immediate family came?

BISLA: No. My younger brother came six months after me to Canada, and my oldest brother came to USA in couple years ago.

HICKS: Do you have relatives in Canada?

BISLA: Yes.

HICKS: I see. Is that a popular area, Canada, that Indian people go?

BISLA: Yeah. There are so many there.

HICKS: What town is it?

BISLA: Vancouver and Victoria. Those two are popular.

HICKS: How many persons arrived with you?

BISLA: My son and I.

HICKS: And you all lived together when you got here?

BISLA: Yes.

HICKS: Did you ever go to school?

BISLA: I did go to school at night time, and that was couple semesters here at Lodi Adult Education.

HICKS: And back at home before you arrived here? Did you have any schooling when you were in India?

BISLA: Oh, yes I do. I went to high school there. I completed my high school education there.

HICKS: And these go further?

BISLA: No. I didn't go to college in India, but when I came here, then I started to go to adult education, night time school. And then I went a couple semester, couple days a week, at Delta College.

HICKS: Are you still?

BISLA: Yes, this is my second year as student go to Delta College.

HICKS: Are you getting your BA?

BISLA: Yes. I will be expecting my AA degree next semester. Then I will go to Sac State to get my BA.

HICKS: Sac State.

BISLA: Sacramento.

HICKS: Oh! Oh, okay. Parents' education background?

BISLA: My father and mother both didn't go to school. They didn't have any education at all.

HICKS: Your parents' religion?

BISLA: Yes. Their religion is Sikh.

HICKS: And yours is?

BISLA: Same.

HICKS: Have your religious views changed since then?

BISLA: Not really. I still believe in my religion.

HICKS: Why is that do you think?

BISLA: Well, that's the way my parents brought me up. Because they taught me, so whatever they taught me, I still believe. Maybe I will change. Like my children, they learn here. I can't train them the way my parents did to me. Maybe I will change for them, but not for me. I still believe in my religion.

HICKS: Do you still have a strong time in the household? Like traditional, going to church, or?

BISLA: Yes, we go to Sikh temple. This is located in Stockton, on our street. Sometimes we go on Sundays and sometimes we go once a month. There are some special gatherings. Yes. We do go.

HICKS: Did your mother work outside of the home?

BISLA: No.

HICKS: While you were in your old country. How about when you were in the United States?

BISLA: I, myself? My mother?

HICKS: No, your mother.

BISLA: No, she still lives in India, and she doesn't have to work outside the house.

HICKS: What does your father do?

BISLA: My father died, passed away 17 years ago. So she has property, and that's on lease and she gets money from that. She lives by herself there.

HICKS: Your brothers don't...?

BISLA: Oh, if she needs money, they can send her money, but she doesn't need it. She has property. She has land.

HICKS: How did you feel when you were leaving the old country?

BISLA: What do you mean by old country? My birthplace, India?

HICKS: Right, before you came to the U.S.

BISLA: Well, at that time I felt like it was easy. I could go back. But the way I thought that time, it's not so easy. I came in '71. I didn't go back. But at that time, I thought, "I will be back after one year."

HICKS: Has that happened?

BISLA: No.

HICKS: Did your feelings change once you got here?

BISLA: Yes. At that time I missed it so much. Now I'm used to, and I like more here. I still miss my mother.

HICKS: When you say you miss so much of...?

BISLA: Because at that time, America was new to me. Everything was new. I didn't know language and I didn't know the people, and everything was so strange. So I missed India. But now I got used to it and I have my house and my children, my husband, and I enjoy it here more than India.

HICKS: What do you think made a difference from here?

BISLA: In India? I think mostly the freedom. That they shouldn't [ ].

HICKS: For the women?

BISLA: Because in India, there are joint families. Mother-in-laws, sister-in-laws, father-in-laws, brother-in-laws live together. Especially you have to give great respect to your in-laws. Father-in-law, mother-in-law. Here, you mind your own business. [laughs]

HICKS: I was wondering, your mother was alone without your two brothers. Where did they live? Are they still back in India?

BISLA: No. One is here in Lodi. I told you already, he came a couple years ago. And my other brother [ ] that lives in Victoria in Canada.

HICKS: Well, you're not so spread out. Half and half. What did you like most about your life in the old country?

BISLA: The other way in the joint family you get more attention and more love, and in case you have pain or something happen to you, all the family get together and help you. You feel more secure, and that's the thing I liked there.

HICKS: The security?

BISLA: The security.

HICKS: Was that important in India?

BISLA: Yes. Emotional support. You don't have psychological problems so many like here, because many times people stay at home and think about those things. In India, if you have

something in your mind, there are so many people you can talk to them. You have choice. You can make several friends.

HICKS: And talk it out and get it out?

BISLA: Yes. They give you solution.

HICKS: Was there anything about the old country you didn't like?

BISLA: Well again, as I told you, I didn't like the joint families. Like especially when we go to in-laws' house and you have to work all day for your mother-in-law. I didn't like that, because you are not independent. You are dependent. But some families still do it, so people have to live that way. So I don't like that idea. Still I don't like that idea.

HICKS: Okay, you're saying you do like the family security, but yet you don't like...

BISLA: The way mother-in-law treats you.

HICKS: Oh, I see.

BISLA: Because everything has both ways. So that's the bad part.

HICKS: How does she treat you that you didn't like?

BISLA: I mean, like a dictator. She will order you. You have to do this and that and you have to do for her.

HICKS: Does she have a daughter of her own?

BISLA: No, my mother-in-law did not.

HICKS: So that was something new for her. Yeah. Were you ever able to do anything about it?

BISLA: Yes. You can tell your husband. At night time. And he can find the solution. He can't directly say to his mother, "Look, you are giving hard time to my wife." But in that way, he can do something. Yes. But even if he won't do anything, at least you will get emotional support from him.

HICKS: Did it used to work?

BISLA: Yes. Yes. It does.

HICKS: What do you remember about what life was like when you first came to the United States? What kinds of things did you expect to find in the United States?

BISLA: What did I have in my mind? Oh, I was thinking that it would be really nice. But when I came, we didn't have any house, and I felt like homeless. When we went to rent our house and the people were asking us, "Do you have children?" Oh my God, it was so hard. So my husband was working in the field. I wasn't really happy, no.

HICKS: You said the apartment didn't like kids?

BISLA: Yeah, my son started to cry. And the man said, "Tell your child not to cry, not to make noise." So we pay money and you are not allowed to do these kind of things, I didn't like, because these things were new for me.

HICKS: What did you expect before you came to the United States?

BISLA: Oh, my expectation was totally different. I thought there would be beautiful houses, and people told me there are so many gardens, so many foods. I thought that easily you could buy a ranch, land, house, cars. But that's not so easy. You have to work for it.

HICKS: Right. It's called money. And what did you think when you got here?

BISLA: When I got here, as I told you, it was totally different. But my husband started to tell me that we can get settled in few months or in few years. And that's the way there is. And there were other Indian families who told him. So then I felt [ ].

HICKS: Did you go to the Sikh church when you got here?

BISLA: Yes.

HICKS: Did that help you get adjusted?

BISLA: Yes, because there are so many Indian people, and even you have degrees in India, most Indian people were working in the '70s in the fields. That was new for me. For my husband's father was doctor, and he daren't work in the fields in India. So here he was working in the fields, and it's so less money. So when I found out it was [ ] because it was the next best thing. Nothing else to do. You have to make payment.

HICKS: What about when he wasn't working in the fields? Certain seasons, certain times that they finish?

BISLA: No, he was a regular worker. Full-year worker, not seasonal.

HICKS: Oh, okay. Was there anything in the United States that surprised you?

BISLA: Well, I heard the people were going to the fields in cars. I thought how they can do that? When at home they leave so much place so you can drop your car. It's not hard.



HICKS: What did you think that they did?

BISLA: In India, your bikes and you walk.

HICKS: Walk to the fields? That surprised you, huh?

BISLA: Yes.

HICKS: Was there any other surprise?

BISLA: Oh, not that I remember.

HICKS: Did your family settle in Stockton when they first arrived?

BISLA: No.

HICKS: Did your family settle with family from the old country? No, that's not. Did you live in neighborhoods mostly with persons from your own country?

BISLA: Not really. I just came and I lived on Cardamom Street in the farmer's house where my husband was working. And in '73 we moved in this house. So there was nobody Indian by my house. Nobody was there.

HICKS: What groups were present?

BISLA: Oh, I met my husband's brother, his wife, and his good brothers were in Linden. And also when he was working in the field, American, white people.

HICKS: I mean, when you were living in the apartment by the fields, were there Mexican, or?

BISLA: No. Those were white people. American.

HICKS: And here is...

BISLA: All Americans. White, and the one is Mexican. He's also white. White and Mexican the most.

HICKS: Did your family encounter any problems when you got here?

BISLA: Just new [ ] problems. Especially the language problem. Even maybe still I don't speak correct English, but at that time, I didn't know English at all. I didn't speak. And you had to have driver's license to drive your car.

HICKS: What language did you speak?

BISLA: Punjabi. I'm from Punjab State. So I didn't know the language. That was the main problem for me. Because if you know the language, you can find job, you can have driver's license. You can talk with other people.

HICKS: You didn't know any at all?

BISLA: Just A B C, because we never spoke English in India. We learned it as a second language in school, maybe two hours a week. We learned it as second language, so they started in the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> grade. We learned it for three or four years twice a week. But we never spoke one word.

HICKS: You sound really good, I think. What did you or your family members do about the language difficulty?

BISLA: I started to watch TV, because my husband told me if you watch TV, you can learn it. So first I started to understand, then speaking when I was watching TV. And we also bought some books from the library, and that's the way I started to learn it.

HICKS: On TV, did you talk with them?

BISLA: If I don't understand the language, at least I can understand their reactions. Sometimes you understand those reactions.

HICKS: And then did you have any classes? When was it?

BISLA: When I took my license, after bungee. In '72 I took my first classes.

HICKS: That was really good. Were there any other problems?

BISLA: There was also job problems. Major problem was job. I applied in the unemployment office to get job in the cannery. They didn't call me. So I applied in the **Delta School [Spear?]**, and they took my interview and put me in the waiting list. They didn't call me, and after a couple of months, I checked back. I went myself and they said, "Okay, you can come." So I started to work there, and my sister-in-law was working there, so she gave me [ ]. I had car problems.

HICKS: Where was that again?

BISLA: That was when I came in '72.

HICKS: No, I mean where was the job?

BISLA: **Delta School Spear**. They call Catarina Company in Lodi. That's sewing factory. It is still there. There is piecework. Very hard work.

HICKS: What kind of things did you sew?

BISLA: They give you all kinds of jobs. First they give you to make [ ] on the pants, and there is the wage by the pieces. They pay you a dollar ninety. That time they paid me dollar ninety five, 200 [ ]. Actually, their wage was \$1.75 an hour, so when I started to make more than \$1.75 an hour, they had to pay me. But next day they changed my job. They put me on hemming. When you start anything new, you make less money. When you got used to, you make more than [ ]. And with so many jobs, it will take years to learn. So many new machines, different machines. So it was very hard.

HICKS: Are you still there?

BISLA: No, I don't work anymore. I just worked one year and four months. Luckily I got pregnant, and the company's rule is, if you are pregnant, you can't work more than six months. So they gave me leave. My daughter born and I never went back to work.

HICKS: What languages were spoken at the home?

BISLA: Punjabi. That's Indian language from Punjab State. There are so many dialogues in India. Our language is Punjabi.

HICKS: Did English ever become the main language at the home?

BISLA: My children feel more comfortable with English than our own language. They don't read and write my language, but they know how to speak. And still they will speak half and half. They can't speak only Punjabi, but they can speak total English.

HICKS: Do you talk totally when you get home, when they get home?

BISLA: Yes. We like to talk in Punjabi. That's the only way they can learn.

HICKS: When did English become the main language?

BISLA: When I started to work in the Catarina Company, **Delta School Sphere**, I had to leave my son in the day care center. So all they would do is speak English. Children catch very easily. So my son started to speak English.

HICKS: Did he do pretty well picking it up?

BISLA: Sure. He is gifted student. He went to UOP this summer in summer school. He is very intelligent.

HICKS: What languages were spoken in your neighborhood.

BISLA: Spanish and English. Those two.

HICKS: Who lived in the household during your growing up years?

BISLA: Where, in India?

HICKS: Both places I would say.

BISLA: In India, I grew up mostly with my mother, because my father was living in [ ]. Here, mostly I and my husband and my children. We lived together.

HICKS: No grandparents or uncles or aunts in residence?

BISLA: No. Nobody lived with us. We might visit to their houses.

HICKS: Were there ever boarders?

BISLA: Boarders?

HICKS: Did you live with another family?

BISLA: No.

HICKS: Did the children have regular chores?

BISLA: Yes. They play games and watch TV and study.

HICKS: How about you when you were at home?

BISLA: Well, so far I haven't felt like I am obligation, because I took summer school and one week ago my summer school is over. And I started to paint my house. I painted the other rooms, kitchen, bathroom, bedrooms. And now we are going to clean our carpets. Because I keep myself busy all year, so in some time I'd like to spend with my children and not do so much cleaning my house.

HICKS: When you were back in India, did you have chores?

BISLA: If I would go back to India?

HICKS: No, when you were growing up in India, back at home.

BISLA: We had to learn housework, sewing, cooking, and we were playing.

HICKS: Playing? What do you mean?

BISLA: I mean there are special places where you can go and play football, basketball, just for fun.

HICKS: What was expected? What is different from you and your brothers, like chores?

BISLA: Oh, there are total difference, because there are special games which my brothers could play but I could not. I was not allowed to play. Like fighting especially. Even they didn't mean, they could do that, because my brother's far aggressive. But I don't think I ever did. Because that was very serious if I would have done that. Also some places my brothers had permission to go, I did not. There was night shows or something like that, and he had permission to go. I never went. Indian girls are very restricted.

HICKS: And around the house, what was different from your brother?

BISLA: Around the house, like cooking, cleaning, and washing, these kind of jobs are for girls. And I don't think boys had to do these kind of jobs there. They had to do work in the farms.

HICKS: None of them?

BISLA: No. They don't usually, no.

HICKS: They don't help you at all, pick up dishes or clean up?

BISLA: No, no. Not in India. Other people will laugh at them if they will work in the kitchen.

HICKS: Like me, my parents and I, we did the dishes together.

BISLA: Yeah, here I teach my son. [laughs]

HICKS: Yeah, that's what I mean. "When are we gonna get started?" I always say that to my brother. Usually it means I would have to wait for him until we could do it together, but at least we did it together and got it done.

BISLA: Yesterday.

HICKS: Did your mother expect anything from your brother, like considered the main in the house or anything like that?

BISLA: My older brother's big responsibility was when my father died. He was responsible for me, for my younger brother, for my mother, and for his family. Because he had to consult with my mother and he had to make important decisions, and he had to do that.

HICKS: He's the one that lives in Canada or here?

BISLA: Here.

HICKS: Did you ever work in a job outside the home while you were growing up?

BISLA: No.

HICKS: Did you work for a person from your own country?

BISLA: No.

HICKS: Okay. What kinds of homes did you live in when you arrived in the United States? You say you lived in an apartment.

BISLA: Yes. I think we lived in apartment less than a month. That was one-bedroom apartment on second-story building. It was very hard.

HICKS: Was it furnished?

BISLA: Furnished. But I don't think that was good, because... We had a big house in India. We had a big back yard, front yard, and open house like. But the apartment was too tight, and especially when you don't know the language, you don't know about the country. So it was really hard. So I was feeling tight.

HICKS: How did you overcome that? Just by moving out?

BISLA: Yeah. When my husband was working, his boss was fixing that house for us. He had two houses, one for worker and one for him. And within one month, he fixed that house, so we moved there.

HICKS: In this one?

BISLA: No, [ ]. We bought our house in '72.

HICKS: And this is your new house. Who made most of the family decisions?

BISLA: Both I and my husband.

HICKS: Did your parents together make decisions?

BISLA: [laughing] No, I don't think so.

HICKS: What influence did your mother have in deciding things about the family?

BISLA: I think from her mother. She was mostly influenced by her mother.

HICKS: I mean your mother on...

BISLA: Oh, you mean my mother influenced me?

HICKS: Yeah, your family. With the kids.

BISLA: Not since I'm living there. Since she is living in India, she cannot influence me, because here is totally different than in India.

HICKS: But when you were back in home?

BISLA: Still that would be my decision. She won't interfere that much. She can give me suggestions, but the decision would be mine.

HICKS: Did you ever do anything that upset her?

BISLA: No. I didn't do it, I won't do it, and think like that. Because I don't want to hurt her. If I like to, I can. I'm sure I can. But I'm that kind of person, I easily forgive somebody. Even my enemy. But she is my mother. I don't think I would do anything like that. I won't do it.

HICKS: Is that what allowed her to let you do anything?

BISLA: She will feel good. She is proud of me.

HICKS: I mean that she was able to let you do whatever you wanted to.

BISLA: I can explain her, because if you are living there and I live here, my children want to do, like my daughter likes to dress and some things Indian people don't like to do. Especially my mother is very conservative. She's old-fashioned. But if I would like to train my daughter same way she did to me, no way I can. I don't. So I can explain to her that maybe I can ignore and I won't tell her, instead of hurting her.

HICKS: Does she ask how you train your children?

BISLA: No, she won't ask. She just ask me, "How is children?" I say they are fine and they are doing okay in their schools.

HICKS: But she won't say, "How come she..."

BISLA: No, she won't say that. She doesn't know how to write a letter. Because when you tell your feelings to other person, it's hard, you know. You can't tell other persons these kind of things.

HICKS: Did your parents ever disagree on things?

BISLA: Of course they did.

HICKS: How were their disagreements handled?

BISLA: Oh, my father was the boss. My mother had to give up.

HICKS: How old was your father when he died?

BISLA: He was 42. My mother was about 39 at that time.

HICKS: How did he die?

BISLA: He died in India with cancer.

HICKS: So they had disagreements.

BISLA: Yes, they had disagreements. I was little. My father was the boss.

HICKS: Did you ever disagree with your parents about things?

BISLA: I might have disagreed with my mother, not with my father. Because especially daughters don't speak front of fathers. Whether fathers are wrong or right, you can't say "You are wrong" or "I disagree." I did a couple times I think, with my mother. It wasn't serious.

HICKS: What did you usually do about things when you disagreed?

BISLA: I stay quiet and she could guess from my face and passion. So after few minutes or half an hour, she would ask me and I could tell her. So I think that could take care of it. Some things she had to leave and some I had to agree. We could compromise.

HICKS: What if any customs and practices from the old country did you observe at home?  
Religious rituals?

BISLA: Yes. There are some rituals, but since we are living here, we cannot observe that many as in India.

HICKS: Could you tell me the ones that you do observe?

BISLA: Like you don't wash your hair on Tuesdays, because when the husband dies, that woman had to wash her hair on Tuesday. So my mother told me never wash your hair on Tuesdays, because I wish you very best of luck for your husband. So I still believe she would get mad at me if I do that. So these kind of superstitions or rituals still believe, but in India, there are so many. We can't keep up here, because there are different holidays in school and different [ ] than in India. You know, I forgot many of them.

HICKS: And food or recipes?

BISLA: Yes. We have our specialty, chicken curry. And the turkey has an egg. And actually, we make the same foods as other groups, but our recipes are different. We make different way.



HICKS: Do you find it hard finding food here?

BISLA: No. There are some Indian stores too where you can still find Indian foods.

HICKS: Is there a restaurant here? There is, isn't there?

BISLA: Used to be. Not anymore in Stockton. But there are so many restaurants in other places, especially in San Francisco. There are several. Very expensive foods and very tasty.

HICKS: Holidays?

BISLA: We usually observe American, white people's holidays. Whatever our children have in school holidays. Not Indian holidays. Because there is special holidays, 26<sup>th</sup> January when we got our independence in 1947. So sometime Indian people to celebrate in Yuba City. There are so many Indian people in Yuba City. Many.

HICKS: Yuba? Is that here? No.

BISLA: Yes. It is close to Sacramento, 23 miles away from Sacramento. It's Marysville and Yuba City.

HICKS: Ceremony?

BISLA: I don't know. Bedding. Marries.

HICKS: Marriage?

BISLA: Mmm. On Sikh temple, when people do celebrate their children's marriage, then they go to Sikh temple like the way we do in India. We do celebrate that.

HICKS: Children's games?

BISLA: Not really.

HICKS: How about folklore or superstitions?

BISLA: I think some superstitions are same. Like I heard here, if cat cut your way when you're walking or in front of your car, it's bad. So same thing in India.

HICKS: Is there a lot of folklore or superstition?

BISLA: In India there are. But here I don't believe so.

HICKS: What is the reason?

BISLA: Superstitions?

HICKS: That you don't practice here.

BISLA: Wherever you live, you learn their customs, their superstitions from their people. So you change. So that's why I changed myself, because there is nobody my neighbor who is Indian who could tell me, "This is the superstition, you shouldn't do that or that." [laughs] So I don't remember, I don't care anymore.

HICKS: What groups did you belong to while growing up?

BISLA: What kind of group do you mean?

HICKS: Like any groups.

BISLA: Like there is a caste system. My caste was Sikh. Jatt Sikh. So I was that group and I stayed in that group.

HICKS: But the Sikh don't have a caste.

BISLA: Sikh in Africa?

HICKS: Oh, you were saying Sikh the caste. The caste system.

BISLA: No, Sikh is one caste. Hindu would be other caste. And there are so many castes.

HICKS: Right. Were your friends mostly of the same religious or ethnic background?

BISLA: Yes, yes.

HICKS: And did you and your friends often relate to, play with children of other backgrounds?

BISLA: Yes.

HICKS: So did your parents object to that?

BISLA: Sometimes they did, because the other castes were inferior than my caste, and sometimes they told us not to play with them because you won't learn good habits, they told me. Because they didn't know as much as our caste did. But since we were going to school and we were playing with them, it would be hard to listen to them. We continued to play. Other than that, they didn't have any objection. My parents, we tell them, "Look, they are the same kind of people. God made everybody." So we go to school. In the books, nowhere is written we shouldn't play with them or we shouldn't touch them. So we explain to them. So then they felt okay if she's not mine, they don't care.

HICKS: That's good. Did you ever bring your friends into your home as visitors?

BISLA: Yes.

HICKS: And how did your parents feel about visitors or friends from other cultures?

BISLA: My friends or visitors were not from another culture, but they were from other castes, as I told you. Because I told them, "They are my friends." They went to school with me and I liked them, and we had good feelings because they thought they were our daughter's parents.

HICKS: And there was no conflict?

BISLA: Oh, no.

HICKS: Did your parents set any rules about dating?

BISLA: Oh sure, of course. We never went on dating. Indian girls don't go on dates.

HICKS: What about the men?

BISLA: They don't go either. They should not.

HICKS: Did your brothers ever tell you if they did?

BISLA: No, they never told me. I don't think they were allowed to do that. Especially for me, no. Never had a dream about dating.

**[End of Tape]**

**[Tape 1, Side B]**

**[Begin Tape.]**

BISLA: ...then we were allowed to live as husband and wife. But before that, I never did.

HICKS: Did you ever talk with your friends about it?

BISLA: We don't talk to women about boys. No. We just had girlfriends. Girls had girlfriends and boys had boyfriends. If I had ever talked about dating or these things, my parents wouldn't let me.

HICKS: Okay. Was it ever difficult for kids from your country to grow up and stuff?

BISLA: No. Not really.

HICKS: Was there supposed to be good things about growing up in Stockton?

BISLA: I don't think I heard so many good things either about Stockton. [laughs]

HICKS: Like when you first got here and you went to the Sikh temple, did you hear anything bad?

BISLA: Oh, Sikh temple? There were only Indian people. They come from all over, because there was only one Sikh temple. Now they made Fresno and Marysville and different. But there were all over people.

HICKS: Do people still usually travel to the Stockton Sikh temple?

BISLA: Mmhmm, because that way you can meet your friends. That's the common place. If you come to my house and they had to call me and make sure I would be home, so that way they know anyway I will be at Sikh temple. So we could see each other.

HICKS: Where did you usually talk? I mean, Sikh temple isn't that big in the church itself. Usually outside or what?

BISLA: Yes, yes.

HICKS: What about when it rained?

BISLA: This is second story building. There is another building, library.

HICKS: Oh! That's the library?

BISLA: Mmhmm. Have you gone there?

HICKS: Oh yeah, I've been there. But I didn't realize that that building was...

BISLA: When did you go?

HICKS: I went a couple times. I went for a wedding. Somebody got married.

BISLA: Oh, who was married? Just recently?

HICKS: No, no, no. It's just that one building, a library, or is there like a nursery?

BISLA: No, that's all.

HICKS: Was it helpful to have brothers and sisters when you were growing up?

BISLA: Yes. You can share your feelings and you don't have to take that much responsibility by yourself. I like that way.

HICKS: Did your brothers share with you?

BISLA: Actually, they shared with me. I didn't share with them that much. I listened more to their problems than they did mine.

HICKS: Did they have more problems?

BISLA: There was different kind of problems, like sometimes if they couldn't get along with my mother, they could tell me, and I won't tell my mother, "My brother told me." I will talk to her indirect way. We should do that way, could be easier.

HICKS: Did your brothers confront more to your father than mother?

BISLA: The same. Because father was the boss, and my brother couldn't speak in front of my father. But they could talk to my mother. My mother's lenient.

HICKS: Okay, this is when you went to school in the U.S. You came in '71, so you went through Delta, right?

BISLA: No, I started just a couple years ago.

HICKS: Okay, I don't think we could get... How did you learn to speak English?

BISLA: Mostly I learned while I was working in Catarina, and some from the TV. Mostly I learned when I started to go to college, because I took ESL classes, English Second Language classes. So I have been learning. I still learn English from college.

HICKS: The people that were in your classes, what were some of the other languages? People that were with you.

BISLA: In the beginning, most of the classes I took, there were other students who were same like I was, because they didn't know how to speak English. Either Spanish... Most people were Mexican, and some Indian. Some Iranian, from Arab countries.

HICKS: Were there any Vietnamese?

BISLA: Yeah, there are Vietnamese, but they don't go that far. I don't know why. I haven't seen them. Because I took English 80, there was nobody from Vietnam. There are groups of English classes. There are some beginning groups and some intermediate, some advanced. When I started, I was in the advanced group. So after English 80, one class, I moved into English 1A. That was American students class. And English 1B, that was also American students class. But mostly in the ESL lab, you will see people from Vietnam, yes. They take so many classes. But in the advanced classes, you won't see that many as in the beginning and intermediate classes. I don't know they only go far to learn English or to get degrees, or maybe they need that much.

HICKS: What did you think about the teachers when you went to Delta?

BISLA: Oh, I like them very much. I have great respect for them. They're really nice. I don't know, everybody say I am friendly. I think they are friendly.

HICKS: How did they treat you?

BISLA: They treat me as a person. They don't treat me as I am Indian or minority group or anything like that. They treat me just as a person. And I feel myself if somebody else can do anything, I can do myself. The same way they treat me. Sometimes they say, "You are smarter." [laughs] I think everybody is smart, but I have respect for the teachers, because especially I learned that in India. So I think American teachers do deserve that.

HICKS: What was the reason why you didn't go further than high school?

BISLA: In India?

HICKS: Yeah.

BISLA: In India, usually high school was where I was living. It was in my village. But if I had to go to college, so I have to go to a different city, I have to live away from my parents' eyes. So I was not allowed to go because they didn't want to leave me alone.

HICKS: Did your brothers go?

BISLA: They could go, but they didn't want to go by themselves. I wanted to go, but they didn't send me.

HICKS: [laughing] I heard that before! Especially my dad won't let me do certain things, I say, "I'm big enough!" Do you recall the teachers being able to handle the language difficulties with you when you were at Delta?

BISLA: Yes, they do. I don't know, maybe they are used to, because they have so many nationalities and different accents and different groups. They understand us very well. That's true.

HICKS: That's good. Do you recall any funny incidents while you were in school here, and then when you were in school at home?

BISLA: Well, sometimes you say one thing but the teacher understood other way, and you couldn't explain it. [laughing] And it's funny. It happened a couple times in the beginning, but not anymore.

HICKS: Well I have problems like if I say one thing and they misinterpret. "What did you say?"

BISLA: Yes. Especially accent. They could understand your English, even you speak broken.

HICKS: Still if I speak English, it isn't clear enough, right?

BISLA: Yeah.

HICKS: And back at home, did you have any funny incidents when you were in school?

BISLA: From school? No, I don't think so.

HICKS: Was there anything that bothered you about going to school in the U.S.?

BISLA: No. I liked it. Because that was my dream. I wanted to go to college. So when I started to go and I completed my first semester, then I completed my second semester, I told one of my teacher, "Now I have plan to get my AA degree." He said at least four years. I thought that was big dream for me to get AA degree, but right now, if you ask me, that's nothing for me. [laughs] Maybe I will go all the way. I liked it very much.

HICKS: How did your children respond to that?

BISLA: Oh, because that's the way we trained them. They both go to school and they made Mom go to school and she had to study. They give me time, they help me, my son helps me sometime in study. So they like it. They seem to enjoy it.

HICKS: And your husband?

BISLA: Oh, very much. That's all his sacrifice. He helps me. He takes the responsibility of children and at home and he helps me study. So I get all the help I can want.

HICKS: What was your family's attitude toward school?

BISLA: My husband?

HICKS: Your mother, or...

BISLA: Actually, my mother didn't want to send me to school. After 5<sup>th</sup> grade she said I should stop, because I knew how to write letter. She said, "That's all you need to know." After 8<sup>th</sup> grade, she said, "You should stop." "No, no," I said. I still wanted to go after 11<sup>th</sup> grade. She didn't want to send me, but that was naturally my own idea. I wanted to go. I wanted to continue my study.

HICKS: And your father? Did he say anything?

BISLA: No, he was with my mother. They both were very conservative. They didn't want to send me to school.

HICKS: What was the reason?

BISLA: They said especially because girls don't go on dates and they said too much education is not good for girls. You should learn house things, cleaning, cooking...

HICKS: But you already know that.

BISLA: Yes, I learned all things, and I went to school. Because they didn't go to school themselves. Even like I and my husband, we both went to school, and we like to send our children. They go like to the doctor's, because my husband's family, they have four members doctor.

HICKS: That's a lot of schooling, definitely.

BISLA: But my parents were uneducated, so they didn't know that much about education. Since you don't know, you don't want to send your children.

HICKS: That's true. What was your own attitude? You wanted to go.

BISLA: Oh, I wanted to go. I loved it. I still love it.

HICKS: How did you handle the difference between your attitude toward school and your parents' attitudes?

BISLA: There was one neighbor lady who was widow there, and I always go to her. "Sister, I wanted to go, would you tell my mother?" And then she explained to them, and she was older than my parents, so I used the parent person to compromise.

HICKS: How about your brothers?

BISLA: Not brothers. As I told you, neighbor widow lady. And they listen to her and they agree.

HICKS: That doesn't work here.

BISLA: Oh no, not here.

HICKS: Did your parents try to help you with problems in school?

BISLA: Yes.

HICKS: Could you rely on anyone else to help you?

BISLA: Here?

HICKS: Back at home.



BISLA: My mother.

HICKS: Wait a minute. She helped you with problems, but was there anybody else?

BISLA: Besides my mother? The other lady, I told you before, that one. She was very close friend of mine, and also she was friend of my mother. So I told her.

HICKS: How much help did your mother give you? Was she able to give you the help that you needed.

BISLA: Yes, in study. There are other people she knew, they knew about study. They went to schools and colleges. If I needed any help in my study, she took me with her to their house, and they help me. At least she knew I was going to school and I needed that help. So she did that. Sometime on tuition, she paid the money and she sent me to another teacher at home where I could learn.

HICKS: Like a tutor?

BISLA: Yes, tutor.

HICKS: If you had brothers and sisters, did girls or boys stay in school longer?

BISLA: No.

HICKS: Okay. What did your parents expect you to learn in school?

BISLA: They expected me to learn good things, and especially reading, writing, or religion. Nothing about sex. Nothing about marriage. That was restricted in India.

HICKS: Did you ever take classes at the YWCA or other places?

BISLA: I don't understand the meaning of YWCA.

HICKS: Did you tend to participate in neighborhood or church activities?

BISLA: Not the church activities, but I did participate very often in school activities. There was always program every Saturday or special occasions. And actually always, I played in main role in the dramas or plays or anything like that. I did participates.

HICKS: And were there special activities for your age group?

BISLA: Just whatever we were allowed to do in school. Whatever our teachers told us. Other than that, because there was special celebrations, special days, like Independence Day, Mahatma Gandhi's birthday, things like that. So we gave lectures or we played, these kind of things.

HICKS: Did the Sikh people have their own certain days they celebrated as compared to the Hindus?

BISLA: No. Because Independence Day, that's for whole country.

HICKS: Right. But did the Sikh people have certain days for themselves that they celebrate?

BISLA: Yes. Maybe some. But mostly for all the people.

HICKS: Were these activities that you were in helpful to you?

BISLA: Yes. Because I developed confidence, and I was kind of person more growing and going on, and I knew I did.

HICKS: How far did you go in school?

BISLA: High school.

HICKS: That is, what, 12<sup>th</sup> grade?

BISLA: 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Actually, there is high school 10<sup>th</sup> grade, but that was higher secondary school. That was 11<sup>th</sup> grade.

HICKS: Is this the education you hoped you would have?

BISLA: No.

HICKS: Right. During your years in high school, did your family give you some independence in certain ways?

BISLA: Yes. In some ways they did.

HICKS: How did you feel about your family in those years?

BISLA: I felt, because I was thinking just my books and myself, I never thought other anything else. I think it was fun.

HICKS: Did your parents speak English?

BISLA: Not at all.

HICKS: Was it ever difficult for you or your friends who were present in your home?

BISLA: No, because we spoke the same language they did.

HICKS: What kind of things did they allow that gave you independence? Could you give me some examples?

BISLA: Especially in my education, they gave me independence, because mostly, they didn't know many things about education. So if teachers told me something and I told my parents, and even though they didn't like, it wasn't serious anything, so I told them, "My teacher expects me to do that." Especially like take part in the plays. Otherwise they might say I can't come into the class, and they said, "Okay, you can."

HICKS: Did you still require...

BISLA: Parents' permission? Yes.

HICKS: Did you have any special hopes or ambitions while you were in school?

BISLA: Yes. My ambitions were to continue my schooling and then go to college and get master degree, and I never thought about marriage. But I couldn't stop, because I had to get married. I couldn't study and still get [ ]. I was thinking about my study, not [ ].

HICKS: How far is it from Sacramento to here?

BISLA: 45 miles. I still go to Delta College. I will go one more year, because I would like to complete my 70 transfer units here. That is cheaper than Sacramento.

HICKS: But Sacramento is a state college. Yeah. Compared to UOP.

BISLA: Oh, UOP's too expensive.

HICKS: Oh God, you're telling me. Did the school help you achieve your ambitions?

BISLA: As long as I went, yes, they do. Yeah.

HICKS: Did school help you to understand life in the United States?

BISLA: Not Indian school, but American school did. Delta College did much. Like any class you go here, there is the language about sex or marriage or whatever. But those things are never written in Indian books, so I couldn't understand that much in India about USA. No. But now I know.

HICKS: Yeah. They need it more in school I think too. Was there ever anything you felt confusing about what you heard or learn about the United States in school?

BISLA: First somebody told me, "Their teachers are so easy, their education is so easy." Then I thought, "What will I learn?" But that's not true. Education is not easy. Teachers are not so

easy. The teachers are easier than Indian teachers, but the way they teach you, you will learn the same as you learn in India, but easy way. Their ways are easier than India.

HICKS: How do you compare?

BISLA: Because in India, the study is very hard. Everything, whole book you have to memorize by your heart. Here they will test you. There are techniques they will tell you. That way you can train yourself. You don't have to work that hard, and you will learn the same as in India.

HICKS: Okay, this is about your life when you came to the United States and that of your grown children now. Are the customs celebrated at your home when you were a child celebrated in your children's homes?

BISLA: You mean the customs when I was child?

HICKS: When you were growing up. Are they the same customs you have with your children here?

BISLA: I think I left my customs in India, and here, they learn from their classes and their peer groups. So I don't think we have the same, no.

HICKS: Is that the way you wanted it?

BISLA: It's not so much difference, like birthdays, they like to celebrate. Sometimes they want to go to Great America, sometimes they like to go to McDonald's and like that. But in India, we didn't have that many places, so it was a little different. So it's alright if they want to.

HICKS: How much do you try to keep your old customs here, with your children?

BISLA: I try to keep as much as I can, but sometimes it is hard. You can't change 100% your children. You have to change yourself too. So especially in the Marysville, I won't change myself as much as I can change myself in other respect.

HICKS: Like dressing?

BISLA: Dressing was alright, because my daughter thinks she looks funny. I can't put her in Indian clothes when she goes to school. She has to be with other children. But especially in the marriage arrangement, we would like to keep if we can. Otherwise it won't be a matter of life and death since you're living in USA. You can't live in India. You have to live here.

HICKS: Is that valuable, keeping customs?

BISLA: Yes. We want to.

HICKS: But to a certain degree you are.

BISLA: Yes, certain degrees I am and certain degrees I'm not. Maybe when the time will come, you have to change more degrees. [laughs]

HICKS: Are the foods the same?

BISLA: Mmhmm.

HICKS: I mean, you have Indian food.

BISLA: We eat both American food and Indian food.

HICKS: And you celebrate both the American and the Sikh holidays. Do your children help each other with home responsibilities? Sharing babysitting or shopping, or?

BISLA: Yes. Yes, they do.

HICKS: Does this resemble your mother or aunt sharing the various responsibilities?

BISLA: Yes.

HICKS: Is it different in some ways?

BISLA: Not really.

HICKS: You don't see any difference in how you share?

BISLA: My children share whatever we have here, the way we go here, better than India. So I mean yes.

HICKS: What do you think is one big change you see from here as from back home of responsibilities?

BISLA: Like here, as I told you, my son can wash the dishes and he can clean the house. In India, wives won't do that. You don't have to do it. So there is a difference. So even I don't feel that if my son does, if my husband will do.

HICKS: Will he?

BISLA: Yeah. He doesn't do the dishes, I mean sometimes he can help me in the cleaning. But in India, no way he will do that.

HICKS: Do your children have anyone living in the household besides their sprouts? No. You don't have anybody living here?

BISLA: No.

HICKS: Do your children assign their children chores? No, you can't say that. Do your children have husband and... No. How do the younger people growing up in this background feel about having their parents or other family members living in their home?

BISLA: Well, my husband's parents came a couple years ago, and actually, in India, you never ask. Because they usually live with us, and when they came here and my children started to ask us, "When they are going to come back?" [laughs] I said, "You can't ask them. You shouldn't say that." They didn't mean it. They didn't know. But it's really bad. So it was embarrassing. Now they understand that's different.

HICKS: How do you feel about this?

BISLA: I think they shouldn't ask them, but they didn't know. It wasn't their fault nobody ever lived with us. That was first time. They came here and they lived couple weeks or one month with us, then they went to my husband's brother's house and other brother's house like that, back and forth. And then we told them, "It will happen so long, and you shouldn't ask them. You should give them respect," and they didn't ask them.

HICKS: Would you prefer to live with your children if you can?

BISLA: Yes, I would.

HICKS: How do you feel about them having friends not of their own nationality?

BISLA: I think it's alright. They interact very good. Most children have mostly Spanish friends and American friends, and they liked it. I like them.

HICKS: Think of the kind of lives your children are now living. What are some of the best things about their lives now?

BISLA: Best thing I think, whatever they want, they tell us. And especially my husband pays I think too much attention to them. He buys for them and he likes them. And sometime even we give them reward and we said, "If you finished your study, we will take you San Francisco and we will do this and that." And I think this seems to me really helping.

HICKS: What are some of the less desirable things?

BISLA: I think when we make them to work when they don't wanted to do.

HICKS: Like any other kid. [laughs] No.

BISLA: Like sometimes I said, "You should shut the TV, turn off the TV," they didn't want to. And I said, "You could see two hours." But they do, one guy would see two hours, the other is sitting. The other one say two hours. I said, "No. You both are sitting it will come two hours." [laughing] And today I told them, "You can watch only half an hour because you have to study." So maybe they didn't like what I turned off.

HICKS: If you were to do something to help them, what would it be?

BISLA: Well, I would start with [ ] and I will explain to them when they will do it. They know they had to obey me.

HICKS: Have you felt close to the old country?

BISLA: Yes.

HICKS: Could you elaborate more on that? Like you were saying, would you go back and live there?

BISLA: Yes, I will. Maybe I won't live there, but I have land to go back. To take my children, to show them our cities where we lived, where my son born. So they are looking forward to it. We will have time to go back a visit. Three months or six months. We can't live in India since our children go to school here.

HICKS: And you keep in touch with your mother.

BISLA: Yes.

HICKS: Do you usually ask about people around that area, like cousins?

BISLA: Yes, I do ask. She tells me.

HICKS: Are you in contact with relatives or friends there? Yeah, you are. Do you feel that you are affected by what happens there?

BISLA: Too much. Because I am very sensitive person, and whoever I love, I love with my heart. So I will feel something if something bad happened there. I would feel bad a couple months at least.

HICKS: When you first got to the United States as an Indian American or American Indian?

BISLA: I still feel I am Indian. Not American Indian. I'm still Indian, I'm not American.

HICKS: How about your children?

BISLA: We teach them, "You are Indian," but my daughter born here, she always said, "I'm not Indian. I'm born in America."

HICKS: Why do you feel this way?

BISLA: Well, nothing wrong with your nationality. You should be proud of your nationality. Even somebody say, "I'm brown or black or Indian." I don't mind. Color is not the only thing. Whatever color you have God gives. You should be proud of your nationality. So I'm Indian. I'm very happy.

HICKS: Have your attitudes toward the old country changed over time?

BISLA: Not really.

HICKS: What makes a person Indian American?

BISLA: If some person changes, what makes them?

HICKS: What makes a person Indian American? What would you think?

BISLA: I think they change too fast too much. That's why. They forget about their country. Especially if somebody's conservative, he can become liberal so easy, but if you ask liberal people to become conservative, they won't do that. They think that's the good thing, but after observing and going through all these things, then they know there is not all the positive side. You have negative too.

HICKS: To you is it maybe the culture or religion, or?

BISLA: My beliefs. Whatever my mother trained me. I stick to them, and there is nothing wrong or right if somebody else is from other religion or American or girls go on date. Nothing wrong with that, because that's what they learn. I have respect for a person just as a person. So it's okay for them, but if somebody asked me to change, I can't do it. I would feel guilty.

HICKS: Did you ever return to the old country for a visit?

BISLA: Not yet.

HICKS: Do people from your country tend to live in the same neighborhood? Well, can't really say that. When you were there, what neighborhood were the people?

BISLA: They usually live in the same neighborhood. It's not easy to move there, no. The houses are brick houses, and so expensive even your grandchildren, great-grandchildren would live in that house. It's not easy like in USA.



HICKS: What did you like best about these neighborhoods?

BISLA: In America or in India?

HICKS: India.

BISLA: India? When you're used to, you like it because you love your neighbors and you share activities if you have good neighbors.

HICKS: Sometimes that doesn't happen, huh?

BISLA: Most of the time it does, but sometimes it does not. So if it doesn't, there are other ways you can go to them.

HICKS: What do you do?

BISLA: You won't talk to them, you won't interfere with them.

HICKS: But they're related in some ways. Aren't they related in some ways to you?

BISLA: No. You can do that.

HICKS: Have you had cousins or relatives you don't get along with?

BISLA: Yes. Some of them I couldn't, and their moods when they are angry or they are happy. So then you started to learn to get along. Because here are some ways you can move easily. But there you have no other alternative. So you learn to get along.

HICKS: That's right. That's true. What kind of thing did the parents of your neighborhood, for instance, do for a living?

BISLA: Mostly people do farming, and mothers stay home, take care of babies, children and cooking, cleaning. And fathers and brothers work in the farms. They had their own farms. And some people are teachers, clerical jobs, and if the ladies will be working, that will be only in the banks or they will be teachers. Girl teachers.

HICKS: What is the main crop?

BISLA: Wheat. Sugar cane. Coal. These are the main.

HICKS: They don't have very much livestock raised there.

BISLA: No.

HICKS: Were there ever any things about these neighborhoods that were not so good for the people living there?

BISLA: Too much noise. Sometime they even fight each other, so you have to interfere and stop.

HICKS: Did your neighbors ever try to do something about these things?

BISLA: Yes. If two brothers are fighting, all the neighbors try to tell their parents to stop it. "You are bothering us, and you should stop it. At least they are brothers." You could say these kind of things.

HICKS: And how about yourself?

BISLA: I usually never interfere these kind of things. Only where I could do... The other day, when there was a fight, so I could talk to them and tell them.

HICKS: Do you usually try to help out?

BISLA: Yes. They were drunk at that time. They won't.

HICKS: [laughing] What do you do when they're drunk?

BISLA: Oh no, no used to that, no.

HICKS: What aspect of the old country and its culture do your children retain? What have your children retained from the old country? Culture-wise, what do you keep?

BISLA: Well, I try to teach them, but sometimes they don't understand. Even most of time I take them to Sikh temple with me. When they sit inside, they said, "Why are you taking us? We don't understand." Because they don't understand Punjabi, especially that holy book. But they are saying what they mean.

HICKS: So do they go?

BISLA: They have to go. I told them, "You can play with your friends. At least there will be so many Indian children."

HICKS: What do the children do there?

BISLA: Oh, they just climb on the trees, they play outside, they run and fight.

HICKS: I saw some that were just sitting out there on the stairs. They were probably waiting for their parents.

BISLA: Children, that's hard problem really. They don't want to go because they don't understand.

HICKS: Have you often as an adult relate to neighbors or others whose background was different?

BISLA: Yes, I do.

HICKS: Was that hard getting used to from back home?

BISLA: Not for me.

HICKS: Have you ever felt discriminated against on account of your background?

BISLA: [No?]

HICKS: Have you participated in organizations or groups?

BISLA: Not here.

HICKS: What kind of recreational activities do you enjoy?

BISLA: I don't like to travel. I...

**[End of Tape]**

**[TAPE 2, Side A]**

**[Begin Tape.]**

BISLA: I'm kind of person who likes to stay home and do sewing and making different kinds of [clothes?] different ways. This is [ ].

HICKS: Have you been as active in church...?

BISLA: No.

HICKS: ...In the past as you are today?

BISLA: No.

HICKS: Or has it changed?

BISLA: No. No.

HICKS: Where you grew up, did you ever work in job outside your home? What can you tell me about working jobs... Okay. Have you ever worked part-time?

BISLA: No. I didn't work part-time.

HICKS: Until you came here, you worked.

BISLA: I worked full-time as long as I did, but I never worked part-time.

HICKS: When did you have your first paying job?

BISLA: Oh, it was in '72 in January. I started work in **Delta School Spear**, Catarina Company sewing factory.

HICKS: Did you work before marriage?

BISLA: Not outside the house, no.

HICKS: Did you give up your job after marriage? No. Or upon the birth of your child? That was when you quit working there.

BISLA: First child born in India.

HICKS: That's right, but your second one.

BISLA: Second one born here, then I had to take leave, and then I can go back to work.

HICKS: Did you enjoy working?

BISLA: No. I wanted to work that time, but I didn't enjoy my work.

HICKS: Would you have liked to have held a job for a long time?

BISLA: Unless I couldn't find anything else. If I were not, then I would have kept it, but I didn't like it.

HICKS: What did you find most satisfying about working?

BISLA: It was at least better than nothing.

HICKS: Least satisfying?

BISLA: Oh yes. It was hard. They were paying very less money, and it wasn't worthwhile what I was doing. But at that time I didn't know I could find any other work, so I stuck with that.

HICKS: How long would you think you would have stayed on?

BISLA: As long as I couldn't find anything. At that time, I was [ ]. I found there are other jobs I could try. Especially I needed money. That's why I kept.

HICKS: Kept on working 'til you got money. But then after you did, you didn't work anymore.

BISLA: No. Because I had to pay babysitter. So if you [ ], you had to pay babysitting. How much could you save? And especially work was so hard.

HICKS: That's true. Would you have worked if you had stayed in the old country?

BISLA: No.

HICKS: Why do you say that?

BISLA: Because I had only high school education, and there was so much work inside the house, you can't work outside the house.

HICKS: If you worked after marriage, did you have any help at home with chores?

BISLA: Yes, I had to.

HICKS: Did you? You mean your husband helped out?

BISLA: Yes.

HICKS: When you first held a job, did it seem any certain types of jobs were available to you as a woman?

BISLA: Mmhmm. Yes, that was true.

HICKS: Or because your ethnic group seemed to be in certain types of jobs or industry?

BISLA: Both ways.

HICKS: Yeah. Why was this?

BISLA: Because I was Indian and minority group, and also as a woman, and there were not so many jobs. The first day I started my job, it was big deal for other Indian ladies. They say, "Oh, that Indian lady got a job." Because at that time, they were working just in the canneries or fields. Nothing else. I never worked in the field. I couldn't work in the cannery because I have very big [stomach?], so I was very glad I got job.

HICKS: Was it possible you could do anything about this?

BISLA: Not at that time when I started, but later on, as I found from other friends and other coworkers. So it was possible.

HICKS: What did you do?

BISLA: Oh, I tried to put applications on some other places.

HICKS: Did you ever join a union?

BISLA: I didn't had to.

HICKS: Did you take a job after the children were in school or grown?

BISLA: I wanted to, but my children went to school, and I started to college. So I don't work.

HICKS: Was it difficult for you to go back to school?

BISLA: Not really, because I made my mind. I was determined. I wanted to go, so I went.

HICKS: What do you think was the reason for – there was only certain types of jobs available.

BISLA: Certain types of job for women?

HICKS: Yeah, for women, or...

BISLA: Like sewing, I think sewing and cooking especially, only women can do. Men can do, but not as properly as women, I think.

HICKS: So they were all ladies?

BISLA: Yes.

HICKS: Did they have seniority?

BISLA: Mmhmm. Yes, seniority. There was no union. So it was women's work.

HICKS: Okay, how did you meet your husband?

BISLA: I didn't meet my husband. His mother saw me. She came to my village. And my father saw him. He went to his village. And there was a middle man, third person, who was friend of my parents and also friend of his parents. He told about each other. We didn't see each other before our marriage and we didn't meet. After the marriage, anyway you meet.

HICKS: How far is the village?

BISLA: Fifteen miles.

HICKS: Was that a far distance, or was it close difference?

BISLA: It doesn't matter, but it has to be from different village.

HICKS: Could you describe the courtship? How old were you when you got married?

BISLA: I was 18, he was 24.

HICKS: You got married, where at?

BISLA: His father and a hundred other people.

HICKS: In his village or yours?

BISLA: From his village went to my village, and my parents gave the party and gave dowry to me.

HICKS: What did that consist of?

BISLA: That's the custom.

HICKS: But I mean what did you...

BISLA: What did they give me?

HICKS: As a dowry.

BISLA: Oh, there was beds, like pillows, bedcovers, all these kind of things. And suitcases and my sari suits, jewelry...

HICKS: Did they have an agreement as to what they gave you? I mean, before you married, did they usually agree what they would give?

BISLA: No. No. And they won't ask. But that's the custom. Internally, they knew they had to get.

HICKS: Was your decision to marry him by your family?

BISLA: Yes.

HICKS: How is that? Some usually meet before they get arranged marriage.

BISLA: Well, as you know, my parents were very conservative, and I had to obey them.

HICKS: Would you want your children to meet their – if they were to have arranged marriage, would you let them meet their...

BISLA: No. I won't be that restricted. In my parents, I can show them. If they disagree, it's okay. They can say, "I don't like her. I don't like him."

HICKS: Did you have a picture of him?

BISLA: Just my parents had. They showed. You couldn't say anything [ ]. [laughs] What's the difference?

HICKS: Okay. What did he do for a living when you married him?

BISLA: He was learning mechanic. He wanted to be mechanic. I mean to fix cars.

HICKS: That's what he was doing? Did he ever change jobs after that?

BISLA: No.

HICKS: How did you feel about his working in these jobs?

BISLA: Oh, I didn't like it. I couldn't do anything, but I didn't like his job.

HICKS: Why is that?

BISLA: Because his plan was to come to USA, and his brother told him to learn that mechanic things. So he had to learn. So that was making him dirty. But he had to keep it.

HICKS: How did your husband's job compare with the things that other men from your country did in their work?

BISLA: They were working in the farms. Some were teachers. These kind of jobs.

HICKS: Other men working in Stockton?

BISLA: Some were also in the military and some were in the fields.

HICKS: Here in Stockton?

BISLA: In Stockton? No, most were working in the factories. Here. Yes. So my husband works in the factory too.

HICKS: I know like there's the caste system in the Hindu. Is there somewhat a caste system in the Sikh, like in job positions?

BISLA: In India?

HICKS: Yeah.



BISLA: Sikhs mostly have farms. They have land. And the Hindus mostly have clerical jobs. They don't have big farms.

HICKS: But they still can.

BISLA: Yes, they still can do both things.

HICKS: But they still are classified in the Hindus' castes. Are the Sikhs still?

BISLA: Yes. You can classify.

HICKS: But they don't make it like a big issue.

BISLA: Oh, no.

HICKS: After you married, how did the two of you make decisions?

BISLA: We both were making decisions.

HICKS: And how did you resolve your differences?

BISLA: Who took the most? Hard to say, huh?

BISLA: Sometime I have to give too much, and sometime I think he had to. But if he can't, it's alright. I give up.

HICKS: How did the two of you divide responsibilities?

BISLA: As long as he takes responsibility, I will give him, and I will continue to give as long as he can carry on. [laughing]

HICKS: [laughing] She's nothing!

BISLA: Well, men, I know, he's not in that mood when I will take it.

HICKS: What do you want to do with your schooling? What major would you like to go into?

BISLA: I told my husband that was my ambition. I told my husband that I couldn't go to college. I wanted to go. That was my dream.

HICKS: Yeah, what would you like to do? Become a schoolteacher, or?

BISLA: No, my major is social science. I want to be social worker.

HICKS: Oh, that's what I'm working for.

BISLA: Oh yeah?

HICKS: Yeah, I'm a sociology major, and social work is my business.

BISLA: Is this your last year?

HICKS: Who made most of the decisions concerning the children?

BISLA: My husband.

HICKS: And how many children do you have?

BISLA: Two.

HICKS: Are your childrearing practices different from your mother's?

BISLA: Mmhmm.

HICKS: Like?

BISLA: Well, I can't be that restricted as my mother was. And sometime they can say, "I'm disagree with you." And they can argue with me. I gave them chance. So there are many differences from when my mother was, from her children.

HICKS: Were your children very demanding on you?

BISLA: Not too much.

HICKS: Did you sometimes help your children with problems they had at school?

BISLA: Most of the time.

HICKS: Can you tell me about some of these problems and what you did?

BISLA: Well, I keep in touch with their teachers, and when they will start to go to school, after a couple weeks I would ask their teachers about them. If they have any complaint, I will go there and I will work for them. Even though if my children are talkative and they don't obey their teachers, they have to. So if there is any problem in their study, I keep in touch and I go there, and sometime even their teachers call to inform me.

HICKS: Do you go to open house a lot?

BISLA: Yes, I go to open houses and conferences.

HICKS: Did your relationship with members of your family change after you got married?

BISLA: No.

HICKS: Was there anything that changed?

BISLA: No, not really.

HICKS: What was your greatest satisfaction as a mother?

BISLA: Well, I wanted to have two children, so I have both boy and girl. And I think this is my work. My importance. They are part of my body, and I am raising them and I am looking forward to their lives. I will depend on them, but I won't make their lives.

HICKS: What were your greatest concerns as a mother?

BISLA: To take care of them. Provide all the food, clothes, money, whatever I can afford them. I will spend time with them.

HICKS: How did you handle these concerns?

BISLA: Well, I think my childrens are first and I am second. If they need anything – they wanted to work in library, and they wanted to buy clothes or food or something, I will do first for them. Then I will do my own.

HICKS: What were you especially proud of in running your home?

BISLA: I think we all are proud of our home. [laughs] Nothing special. I have a beautiful husband, American son born, and handsome children.

HICKS: At what age did your children really begin to be independent?

BISLA: I don't think they still are independent. They are dependent.

HICKS: Will they be when they turn 18?

BISLA: We are teaching them in certain fields you should make your decision. You should do this and that. And after 18, they will have any problem, that doesn't mean they are 18. We will be there physically, comunically, psycholically, anything they want.

HICKS: I mean, like here in America, usually when they're 18...

BISLA: No. I don't believe that. They wanted to do with me, "We are 18. We don't need your permission," and like that. They were so changed so much, I won't be able to anything. That will be their decision. Otherwise, I will keep in touch.

HICKS: In what ways were they independent?

BISLA: Independent?

HICKS: Yeah. I asked you what age your children really begin to be independent, and then, in what ways were they independent?

BISLA: Maybe in their study. Or especially in their clothes. [laughs] Especially my daughter. She wants to use herself. If I buy, she won't like. She will tell me, "No. I don't want to take that."

HICKS: Do they get allowances?

BISLA: No, I don't give allowances. I don't give as a money. I'd rather give them love and affection. Otherwords, whenever they need money... A couple days ago, that was my daughter's birthday, she got four or five games. I will give them, "I give you one dollar if you got A."

HICKS: How did their independence compare with you when you were young?

BISLA: Oh, I think I didn't have any permission like they do. Because especially my husband is.

HICKS: How do you feel about that?

BISLA: I feel okay. I like it. Because instead of saying, "Don't do that," you can talk it over. And there are other ways you could tell them. That way, you are respecting lots of feelings.

HICKS: What were your concerns as they begin to go more on their own?

BISLA: They haven't started yet. My son is still 11 and my daughter is 7.

HICKS: Would your interests have been different had you not married?

BISLA: Yes.

HICKS: Do you feel you gave up your own interests while you were raising your children?

BISLA: No. No.

HICKS: If you weren't married, what would you be doing?

BISLA: Oh, I would be going to colleges, universities.

HICKS: Would you like to have been married?

BISLA: No. I mean, in India, you can't leave that. You have to marry. You couldn't think about that. But I had planned to finish my education, then you can think about. But there was no choice. That was not your decision.

HICKS: Are you saying that everybody got married?

BISLA: Yes. Especially girls. You had to. You had to.

HICKS: Did your children's activities sometimes involve you in different activities and lead to you meeting new people?

BISLA: Yes.

HICKS: Can you tell about some times this happened?

BISLA: If I am busy in my kitchen, they will bring their friends and they will go all in the playroom and ask me about their games and they will [ ] all over. So it will be much better if I will go there and help them.

HICKS: Were these people members of your own ethnic group?

BISLA: Yes.

HICKS: In the neighborhood? Neighbors too?

BISLA: Uh huh.

HICKS: Think of your family overall. How did it compare with other families of people from your country?

BISLA: Some families are the same as my family. Some families give too much importance to money and they don't spend that much time with their children. They think any way they are making money for their children. I think with that money, you can make your child's life, that is more important. Sometimes some have different values.

HICKS: Families in Stockton?

BISLA: There are not so many families in Lodi. Mostly are in Stockton. I go visit with them.

HICKS: Is your husband still living?

BISLA: Yes.

HICKS: Taking all things together, would you say you are happy, pretty happy, or not too happy with the way your married life turned out? Can you explain?

BISLA: Pretty happy. I am pretty happy.

HICKS: Could you explain?

BISLA: I think especially my husband. He did the best he could and he provided everything for me. And I think the best part of my life is right now, because of my husband. If something happened to me, psychologically or physically or economically, he is with me. So I am ready.

HICKS: Think of your life after you were first married. What did you expect to get out of life then?

BISLA: The same what I'm getting. [laughs]

HICKS: Did you expect things to change?

BISLA: No.

HICKS: What did you think you were getting?

BISLA: Our family should be separate and we should live our own life and to complete my education. So that's what I am doing.

HICKS: You said that you were separated?

BISLA: I mean from joint family. Like in-laws' family. Because in India, we were living with mother-in-law, father-in-law, sister-in-laws.

HICKS: Yeah, but...

BISLA: I mean that way. Because we were joint family. So we should have our own house. We are separate from them.

HICKS: They do expect eventually that you do have your own.

BISLA: Because in India, you had to live with them. But here, we were expecting we would go to USA. We will be living alone.

HICKS: Did they want you to move?

BISLA: It's alright, yes. They won't mind. But in India, you can't do that.

HICKS: You would've stayed in their house?

BISLA: Yes.

HICKS: Would you have been able to find your own place there?

BISLA: Not really, no.

HICKS: If there was a place, would you have moved?

BISLA: It wasn't proper. Society wouldn't accept it. At least we are your parents. That's your responsibility to take care of family.

HICKS: Did I ask you that question? Number 28? Yeah. Oh yeah. Were the goals that you had for your family different from those of your parents?

BISLA: Different from those of your parents?

HICKS: Your goals.

BISLA: Yes. My goals are different from my parents.

HICKS: And what were those?

BISLA: Because my mother was mostly living inside the house, and I used to say she didn't know that much about the other people, about world. And I was kind of person, I wanted to learn more and to find out more what the life is, what should be done. And especially in other ways, I don't keep in touch with other people or interfere in their problems. I stay away. But my mother's attitude was totally different, so her expectations, goals were different. She wanted me married, housewife, and stay home. Which I am both ways.

HICKS: And then for other persons from your country, your age, when you married?

BISLA: Yes.

HICKS: They were the same?

BISLA: They were not the same because every individual is different. Their goals were different and their feelings were different.

HICKS: Like your neighbors or friends?

BISLA: Mmhmm.

HICKS: Your friends, they're still back there?

BISLA: Some are back. Some are here in Stockton.

HICKS: Tell me, did your husband share these goals?

BISLA: Mmhmm.

HICKS: And how about your relatives?

BISLA: Yes, they did.

HICKS: Have you become a U.S. citizen?

BISLA: Yes, I am.

HICKS: When?

BISLA: In 1977.

HICKS: It takes five years?

BISLA: Mhmm. Because after five years, you apply. After six months or eight months, they will send you letter for interview. Then they take your exam. After two months, then they give you certificate. Give you oath. So that means that is six years.

HICKS: What made you want to get U.S. citizen?

BISLA: Whenever I went to find any job or everywhere, you had to fill, "Are you United States citizen?" So I made my mind. And also, my brother was in India. He wanted to come, to see the USA and to me. So when you are citizen, you can file petition for your blood relation.

HICKS: But your brother, the one who's here?

BISLA: He wasn't here before. He came couple days ago. The other one is in Canada. He came.

HICKS: How do you feel about the U.S.?

BISLA: Oh, I feel okay. It's very nice country. I like it.

HICKS: Considering your own life, what is the best age to be? I think you kind of answered that.

BISLA: In your late 20s and 30 years old. You have more responsibility and you are not old but you are not 16 or 18, you are not young either. So this is the best days.

HICKS: Again considering your own life, what is the worst age to be?

BISLA: I think worst would be maybe the old age, but also I think the teenager age, where you don't know how to make decisions. Especially in the USA, you have to make your own decisions. You have to find your own husband, you have to make your own living. But in India, we didn't have these kind of things. We didn't have these problems. That was our parents' responsibility. As long as we were in their house, that was their responsibility to provide us food and clothes and that kind of thing. So maybe worst would be old age.

HICKS: Why is that?



BISLA: If you are healthy, it's okay. If you can't take care of yourselves, so what could you do? You can't walk, you can't talk, you can't see.

HICKS: Oh, you're talking about like...

BISLA: 90 years old.

HICKS: That's the extreme.

BISLA: Yeah.

HICKS: What is that? Do you know what the average age of people who live in India is?

BISLA: I think average is 60, over 60.

HICKS: Looking back on your life now, can you think of some times when great changes happened that really changed your life or that gave it new direction?

BISLA: Yes. When my husband and I left to come to USA. But his brother didn't become citizen at that time, and we were thinking about. But I didn't feel until he came. It came true. So by that time, I felt like more secure and that one day I will go there, and we can make our life plans. But [ ] since he came here.

HICKS: What is it that made him come here?

BISLA: Because it was his ambition to come here. His brother was here. So he became citizen after five years. So then he filed petition for him, then he filed petition for I and my son, so we came after he was.

HICKS: How long did that take?

BISLA: For us? We could come with him, but he didn't invite us with him. So we came after couple years. Less than couple years.

HICKS: This is about your change in life. How did you deal with it?

BISLA: Well, these were great things. I liked these things, so I enjoyed it. I liked the changes.

HICKS: Did the Depression affect you or your family?

BISLA: Sure it does

HICKS: The Depression here. You weren't here during the Depression.

BISLA: Yes. It does affect our country. It did. Because I am very sensitive person, and I feel bad and sad and I started to think about it.

HICKS: How old were you when the Depression hit?

BISLA: Oh, I'm... Oh, the Depression was 1933. Oh no, I wasn't born.

HICKS: How about the war? World War II?

BISLA: It wasn't. Oh, no.

HICKS: Did any purchase made by your family change your life in any major way?

BISLA: No. We didn't do that kind of thing.

HICKS: Are there government programs you particularly enjoy having?

BISLA: Well, they are not getting in any government programs benefit. My husband works in the [Army?]. I've got money. And yeah, there are government programs, like in college. You can go to college in five dollars. That's a government program. I like it.

HICKS: Are you on that program?

BISLA: No. I mean, I'm not getting any [dollars?], no. But anyway, you can still pay five dollars for registration, but if you go to UOP, you know how many thousands dollars you...

HICKS: Don't ask. I don't know how I go. Have you ever heard of women's liberation movements?

BISLA: Yes, I did.

HICKS: What do you think of it?

BISLA: I like both ways. I like it and I dislike it. Some parts, like women do same work and they get less pay. But some parts, like in the army, in the military, it's not proper for a woman to go and fight. We are physiologically different. So our bodies not as strong as the men's. So I don't think women should have equal rights in that respect.

HICKS: But you believe in... Yeah.

BISLA: Yeah. Certainly dear.

HICKS: Have any of the Stockton events really affected you or your family?

BISLA: I think that there is too much violation. I heard, but they didn't affect me because I live in Lodi. Because sometimes I heard in my classrooms there were so many murders on the weekend.

HICKS: Oh God.

**[End of Tape]**