

Bachittar Singh Gill (Jatta Singh) Transcription

Interview Date: February 9th, 2015

SB: Uncle Ji, what is your name?

JS: Jatta Singh Gill

SB: Uncle Ji what is your date of Birth?

JS: 1932,

SB: what month and date?

JS: 1932, July 5th

SB: Uncle Ji what is your Place of Birth?

JS: Village Jhanjeri, Punjab, India.

SB: When did you come to Canada?

JS: 1950

SB: Do you remember the date?

JS: 1950, 9th month, Date 10th I landed at Vancouver

SB: what was your immigration status?

JS: My father and brother were here already. My father came in 1906 and my brother came in 1948,

SB: hummm where did your father live?

JS: when he came first?

SB: yes

JS: he lived in Vancouver

SB: then he returned back to India?

JS: He came many times here and many times went back to India

SB: ok. So he sponsored you?

JS: yes

SB: What is your immigration status now?

JS: What?

SB: Are you a Canadian Citizen now?

JS: yes for long time

SB: ok. Uncle Ji, where did you live before coming to Canada?

JS: Jhanjeri, in India

SB: were you studying there or you were working?

JS: I studies also and worked (giggles)...I did not work much...hum

SB: Farming?

JS: yes, did some farming

SB: what did you study there?

JS: (laughs)...what study? Used to go to school and come back after playing around (... all giggled)

SB: What was your age when you came here?

JS: I was 18 years old

SB: 32...42...yes

SB: So uncle, when did you start working in the mill after coming here?

JS: in the mill I started working...hum...My father brought me here...my father and brought me here ...and approximately I did not do anything for two weeks and approximately I started working on 5th October.

SB: Did you come directly to Duncan from Vancouver?

JS: first I landed at Vancouver where our village people lived and then my father were living here and they brought me here

SB: where? In Duncan?

JS: no in Youbou

SB: ok Youbou! Oh....Did you find work there only? In Youbou?

JB: yes.

SB How did you feel it there?

JS: I felt good to work there. First I lived there for a month. First it was bit tough but after a month everything was ok.

SB: Yeh tell us.

JS: First I felt the work was hard, as I had never done this work before, it was heavy work of lumber boards, I did not know how to work, as you also know...the board....(Fatteyian da)

SB: Uncle Ji, what was your first job in the mill?

JS: on green chain...we used to pull the lumber

SB: Futtet Khichde si, Lumber used to come and come

JS: Yeh, Lumber was coming continuously, it might stop for a while but it was coming and coming all the time

SB: how many shifts?

JS: At that time, the mill was running for 2 shifts

SB: was it Indian owned mill?

JS: It was Caucasian owned mill

SB: what was the name of the Mill?

JS: BCFP

SB: British Columbia Forest Products

JS: Yes

SB: Uncle Ji, how many Indian people worked in the mill?

JS: when I started working there, they were total 850 people working there, whites also and there must be approximately 80-85 Indian people.

SB: ok. Was there a cookhouse? Where were you living there?

JS: yes, cookhouse. The Company had made a bunk house for us.

SB: there were all men and only men and there was no family?

JS: yes, only men. No there was no family

SB: And the houses...were there bunks made in the houses?

JS: In the bunk house, there were rooms build for each one person

SB: like cabins?

JS: No, they were not cabins, it was a single house. The washrooms were also very good and the cookhouse was very near (as near as that van---he was pointing a finger towards the door outside the Sikh temple)

SB: Oh ok!

JS: Cookhouse was also very big

SB: Like a kitchen...there was a kitchen, dining room

JS: yes. For some time there was one cook who used to cook Roti and daals, then he could do it all alone, then they brought another cook, so there were 2 cooks later, then they used to cook together

SB: was it arranged by the company or you people arranged it?

JS: The work people used to pay them. Earlier there was no rent for the bunk house, but later they started the rent for the bunk house as \$2.5 per month

SB: per month?

JS: yes per month.

SB: how much was the pay?

JS: \$1.25.

SB: and you used to save from that pay and send money to India also?

JS: No I was not sending money to India

SB: where was your mother that time?

JS: Mother was in India

SB: did she ever come here?

JS: yes, she came and went back. She came twice here

SB: so she did not like it here?

JS: she came once and stayed for 2-3 months and second time she stayed for 4-5 months

SB: Ok

JS: I have also gone to India many times.

SB: so you used to come and go many time. And you started at \$1.25 and \$2.5 was the rent

JS: yes, at \$1.25 and \$2.5 for rent and where there was cook house, we used to pay \$18 to \$20, which included salary of the cook and everything included was that.

SB: were the cook apney our Gorey?

JS: Apney

SB: who was the cook?

JS: Cook... many cooks changed. One was Bawa Singh from Village Sidhwan, and there was another one whose name I don't remember

SB: did they know how to cook Roti etc.?

JS: No they had to learn. They were bit old and they were not able to work in the mill and there was no pension those days...no pension those days...as these days there is pension, but those days there was no pension.

SB: Ok

JS: Those days, the pension used to start at 70-72--75 years of age. The Government pension used to be \$46.00 per month. The salaries also were less those days

SB: So they used to make all that Daal and Roti?

JS: yes every thing

SB: our Indian food?

SB: so from where there would buy the groceries?

JS: from the stores

SB: was it available? Was there any Indian Store?

JS: yes everything was available, flour, daals, everything. There was only one Italian store from where everything was available in Victoria

SB: do you remember the name of the store?

JS: No I don't remember the name of the store, it was on Street

SB: so you people used to bring all the grocery from that store?

JS: first we used to buy grocery from that store and then sometimes from Vancouver, who so ever used to go to Vancouver used to bring it

SB: What you used to eat generally?

JS: in the morning generally in the breakfast, sometimes we used to eat eggs, whatever the cook used to make for us, either porridge, Kheer or Seviyan. Eggs we had to make ourselves. That's it.

SB: OK

JS: In the afternoon, we used to eat Roti. We had one hour lunch break. The mill used to be close by and we used to walk from there. The Roti was already cooked for use, we had one hour for lunch break.

SB: what was the common menu most of the times?

JS: Most of the times, there was meat 2 times a week, and if someone wanted to make it special for themselves, then 4-5 people would make it themselves. Otherwise dal roti

SB: otherwise, daal, Sabzi and phulka (Roti) in the afternoon?

JS: yes in the afternoon and same in the evening too for dinner

SB: was that okay for you?

JS: Very nice, as we have in our homes now. Very nice.

SB: did you learn to make something there?

JS: I did not learn at that time, when the bunk house from the company. But everyone got the notice that we should bring our families, this bunk house is only for one year. The company wants to close this bunk house, and it is not good now that you live here longer, and you bring your families, this way you won't learn anything in the bunk house. So the Gorey people came, who were the managers, and they gathered all the men in the cook house to tell us that we can keep you longer but you would not learn anything here, they said, you better buy your own houses and bring your families here. They were very nice people.

SB: mill owners?

JS: No, the people who used to run the mill, foreman

SB: were they gorey?

JS: yes, mostly gorey

SB: so what happened in that one year?

JS: so he gave us one year and then he closed the bunk house. Who so ever had money bought the house and others started living on rent.

SB: so what did you do?

JS: we bought our house

SB: along with your father?

JS: No, me and my brother. Father had nothing to do in in that.

SB: What happened after that?

JS: then both of us started living together there

SB: did you learn how to cook after that?

JS: yeh I had to learn it after that ...(laughs)

SB: Were you cooking Roti daal?

JS: yes I used to cook. Daal was easy which I knew, Roti was bit difficult which I learn too. Roti also, whatever shape it used to be, but we did it

SB: ummmm...yeh for stomach one would do everything whatever

JS: Yeh

SB: so for how long you worked here in Youbou?

JS: in Youbou, I worked here after 42 years

SB: 42 years!!!!

JS: yes

SB: Uncle Ji, when the apney and gorey worked together, it was okay to work together?

JS: yes, they used to work together but they were living separately

SB: was there any problem working together in the mills?

No, no problems

SB: In the mills or outside in the city?

JS: no. There was nothing, there was no problem at all.

SB: Did they treat you nicely? Was there any discrimination of any type, any fights anything?

JS: yes it was good, there were no fights, and nothing like that

SB: ok

JS: we stayed 75 men in one bunk house together, there were no fights. We all lived together.

SB: so you bought your house in Youbou or in Duncan?

JS: we bought in Youbou

SB: was there a village in Youbou?

JS: Youbou is a small town, there were 2 stores also, and there were grocery stores also

SB: ok. How many apney homes were there?

JS: later on, there were about 14-15 homes of apney people

SB: that's it? So when the mill got shut down?

JS: I think the mill got shut down in 2000

SB: Ok, so what did you do after that?

JS: I got retired earlier when the mill was running

SB: ok, you got retired

JS: The 5 years money which Company used to pay to IWA, which Company used to pay earlier, then the same money I paid for my medical. I retired in 1960.

SB: ok, tell me the jobs now. First you worked on the green chain, then...

JS: then there were machines...

SB: automatic machines.

JS: then I went to machines

SB: they used to give the training?

JS: yes, they gave the training for 2 weeks, if someone would not learn then they would give training for 3 weeks also, but generally people used to learn in 2 weeks

SB: ok. And you did not need to move from this mill, as we are talking to some people that they were moving from one mill to another but you did not move?

JS: yeh, some people went, but I worked here in one mill only

SB: ok. So that mill is closed now?

JS: yes that mill is closed

SB: and are there any houses of our apney people there?

JS: No not now

SB: when did you come this side (she meant Victoria/Duncan?)

JS: Hummm...I came very early here. It is 2-0-25 years here now. I came before 1942

SB: ok

JS: then my family came here

SB: so you went to India to get married?

JS: yes, I got married in India

SB: which year?

JS: in 1954

SB: ok. So when did your family come?

JS: the family came in 1963

SB: So many years took to call them?

JS: no I went to India in between

SB: ok, so you stayed there?

JS: Yes I stayed there for 3 years

SB: but job was here, did it affect your job?

JS: I used to get the job after coming back here. I never faced any problem of the job, not even for one single day

SB: so jobs were there those days. What are the job conditions now? Is it bad?

JS: Now a days, it is difficult to get jobs. Now they have reduced the men on the jobs, earlier there used to be more men working, companies can't afford more men

SB: now there are machines

JS: now there are many expenses, companies can't afford that much. Earlier logs were also not that expensive, they were inexpensive. And then 850 men working in one mill was a big thing.

SB: was that mill so big?

JS: yes it was too big mill

SB: is it still there or vanished/decayed?

JS: the mill was stalled.

SB: is it still there...the mill is there or not?

JS: the place is there but the mill not there anymore.

SB: have they destroyed the mill? What happened?

JS: they did not run the mill anymore

SB: ok. So all the owners were Gorey for that mill?

JS: yes, gorey. For that mill all gorey owners.

SB: So you were the member of IWA and your wages were \$1.25 to start and how much were your wages at the end, union wages?

JS: I don't remember, how much were my end wages

SB: but you had good wages in the end?

JS: yes very good wage, that much that it was more than enough. And I did not have any problem because my father and brother were here too. I did not even work for one month. Then I was missing home also

SB: were you home sick?

JS: yes and I told my father, I don't want to live here, I want to go back

SB: then what did he say?

JS: he said, stay at least one more year

SB: he knew that you would stay

JS: yes, but when I was insisting to go, then he also got ready to go and then my brother and few other men planned to go. Then my father said, we can't go by aeroplane, so we went by ship.

SB: back home?

JS: yes

SB: then?

JS: then I stayed there for 3 years in India. Then my father said to do farming there, but we were not doing it. Then he said, I am going back and so we also came back with him

SB: those days it was not so difficult to go and come back from Immigration?

JS: No it was not that difficult. There was no difficulty...no difficulty at all.

SB: Thank you veer Ji