

## Oral History Transcript

**OH #:** UA-016-07  
**Interviewee:** Aishwarya Gowda  
**Interviewers:** Elena Payan  
Alia Gorman  
**Location:** Chico, California  
**Date:** November 15, 2024

**0:03**

**Alia Gorman:** My name is Alia Gorman, and today is November 15, 2024. It is 11:29am. My partner, Elena Payan and I are conducting this interview at the Bell Memorial Union at Chico State. We are here with the Director of Social Justice and Equity for the Associated Students Government affairs, Aishu. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this oral history project. I want to remind you that this may be published as a part of the Oral History Archives project for Dr. Gloria Lopez in my ethnic studies methodologies class here at Chico State University. The project Preserving Chico State Voices for Change aims to archive and narrate the history of community activism at Chico State. Before we get started, I need your permission to record this interview. Do I have your permission to record this?

**Aishwarya Gowda:** Yes,

**Alia Gorman:** Thank you. Okay, I'm just gonna start with some like, just brief background questions. You can be like, as brief or like, say as much as you want, as little as you want. So first off, where were you born and raised? And where did you moved to Chico from?

**Aishwarya Gowda** So, I was born in Karnataka, India, and I was I moved from India, but I grew up in Pune, Maharashtra, and then I came to Chico in 2021.

**Alia Gorman:** Nice, so just tell me a little bit about yourself, like, maybe some areas of interest, like, any hobbies like or special talents, anything like that.

**Aishwarya Gowda** So, like, I was single mother grew up. So, my mother, like my mother, raised me as a single mother, and I lost my father when I was younger. I have lived in poverty, and like that, I have lost face a lot of discrimination. But besides this, also, like I have seen the luxury side of the life, and I grew up with my stepfather.

**1:45**

**Aishwarya Gowda:** He was there, but not most of the times. And then I came to Chico State to pursue my education over here. And after coming over here, I- my mom used to love dancing, and so she enrolled in me into dance classes. And I used to hate those dancing classes. And after I lost my first relationship, and my grandfather, you know, you started like, feeling like you wanna express somewhere, yeah, so my mom told me start dancing again. And I started creating YouTube, reels videos and all of those. And it got a lot of appreciation. And I did my choreography. So, I came here and I didn't had any Bali dance club. Sorry, any of the dance clubs that I used to dance so I like started dancing over here. So, I love dancing too. I love traveling. I love meeting new people.

**Alia Gorman:** Yeah, that's so cool. So why did you choose Chico State?

**Aishwarya Gowda:** So, because Chico was very affordable as an international student, it's very like we have to pay a lot. And also, Chico was good for engineering and business, and it was in California. It's a Silicon Valley somewhere, a village, good, perfect location for its students.

**Alia Gorman:** Yes, um, you might have already mentioned it, but what is your major and what made you choose that major, like to go in that career direction?

**Aishwarya Gowda:** So, I was an engineering major for four years then I switched my major to business. I did engineering because I come from an Asian family, so everyone wants to do either engineering,

**Alia Gorman:** yeah,

**Aishwarya Gowda:** - lawyer or doctor. So, yeah, it was really hard convincing my parents. It took me three, three and a half years, and then I switched my major after four years.

**Alia Gorman:** Wow

**Aishwarya Gowda:** - to business I love, and I'm graduating next year. Finally, after six years of undergraduate,

**Alia Gorman:** congratulations on that. What do you plan on doing with your degree? Like, do you have a career in mind that you really want to pursue?

**Aishwarya Gowda:** Yeah. So, my mom has a salon in India, like a parlor beauty parlor, yeah. And also, she runs my dad's business. So, growing up, I never thought- like business was something I was really going into but when I came here, when I started taking classes of business, I took business because it was a easy major. And then I started going to classes, and I was like, so passionate, because what you have learned throughout the year, you are learning it, but yeah, more theoretical way. And I have realized that after doing a lot of community things and services like and doing on-campus job, I feel like sales and marketing, yeah, like is very fascinating that I love to becoming HR manager.

**Alia Gorman:** Yeah, that'd be really cool. I know a lot of people who are, like, really into marketing. Yeah, it's really cool. It's a good field. Okay so I'm going to move on to campus

organizing or like social change questions. So why did you choose to join the Associate Students Government Affairs, or how did you become, like, interested and involved in this?

**Aishwarya Gowda:** So, I had my friend, so I went to Cross-Cultural Leadership Center one day, and there was a one friend who was who actually became my friend later, and her name was Shraddha. And so.

**5:00**

**Aishwarya Gowda:** So, she told me to do the internship away there, because they didn't have the Asian community in Cross-Cultural Leadership. So, I started doing internship. And while I was doing internship, I saw cross culture. So, I'm an international student. So, growing up, I always felt the need of discrimination. Like, you know, to raise the voice for the discrimination and poverty and equality. And when I came here, I thought it was only international students who are facing these issues. When I went to cross culture leadership center, I thought, no, it was like, everyone, everyone, all of us share some story somewhere, and it just needs, you know, one people, to just bring it on the table, so that the change can actually happen. So, I ran for elections that year. I couldn't win, but I got- but the number of votes told me that I can try again,

**Alia Gorman:** yeah,

**Aishwarya Gowda:** and I try again, and this time I won. And after that, the only thing that I have learned over the years is that every person is unique, and every person wants to tell their story, and we just want to be the bridge from that story to the solution.

**Alia Gorman:** Yeah, that's really cool. How long have you been a part of this program for? Or this organization for?

**Aishwarya Gowda:** The Associated Students?

**Alia Gorman:** Yeah.

**Aishwarya Gowda:** I started in May, so now its November. So, after May, June, July, August, September, October November, so six months

**6:25**

**Alia Gorman:** So, what are some of the things you do as the Director of Social Justice and equity?

**Aishwarya Gowda:** So, I run my own committee called as a social justice and equity committee, and it's public. Anyone can join anytime it's on Fridays, from 10 to 11 at BMU, 205, Besides this I sit on several committees which is called the Special Action Team which is the reimagining of Academic Affairs. I also sit on the Artificial Intelligence Committee, where we are trying to create a guidebook separate plagiarism into from the AI and work on those causes. And then, besides this I'm a board member, a GAC member. So, Board of directors is the place where we make all the decisions to guide Associated Students. GAC and vice play. Commissioners and directors come together to talk about the discusses. And besides this, we have multicultural showcase tonight, which I'll be the host, and I'll be also performing through one of my club and we have the cultural fashion show where I have collaborated with the Cross-Cultural Leadership center, which is also next week. And so, my job is to just collaborate with everyone. Sit on committees. Do you have you seen the BMU heritage table that is down? Yeah, so we decorated that as a committee too.

**Alia Gorman:** Oh, that's so cool. You guys do like, a lot then,

**Aishwarya Gowda:** yeah,

**Alia Gorman:** I did not realize that. How did your- I know you mentioned your mom before. How did she react to you being like a part of this? Like did she think it was really cool and like support you?

**8:00**

**Aishwarya Gowda:** So, my mom is not educated, like she didn't even finish her high school, yeah, so, um, and she grew up in the village of India, and India is like little baking, no, not forward as compared to U.S. So, when I tell her things about like these things, she doesn't understand much, but she somewhere appreciates that I'm growing. So, when I tell her, she's like, okay, what is it? I try to explain her, but sometimes she doesn't understand, and then I have to send her the photos from the Google and everywhere. But over the years, I have realized that it's okay, because all the parents want is to see you happy. It's I struggled a lot convincing her to change my major. So, it was one of the biggest deals too, and she was not happy with it. But I had to take my decision, yeah. So not every time parents are going to be happy with you, as long as you are going to be happy and making them proud is what matters exactly.

**Alia Gorman:** So, do you consider yourself an activist? Why or why not?

**9:02**

**Aishwarya Gowda:** I feel like as a woman also, or as a person who grew up under single mother, we were always told not to see, not to speak, it's okay. You have to go through it. You have you're a woman you're a girl. So, it always felt like a suffocated and, you know, there's a certain point that a person can feel suffocated to an extent after that you cannot keep quiet. and growing up, I saw that in my mom, and she always told me one thing is that you go you are

not a girl. You are also everything. You are not like a woman or a guy or a girl. You have everything. You are both. And she always told me to be bold, to have- to have the spirit that if you are having an injustice, no matter if you die fighting for it, but never, ever fly away from it. And that's why I feel like there are certain things that you have to go. And I feel like if you're not a leader, you have to be a follower, and if you have the capacity to become a leader, you should become a leader.

**10:08**

**Alia Gorman:** Yeah, I like that. That's really good. So, like, what your mom taught you and told you growing up, like, you still, like, like, hold on to that today. Yeah. That's good. So, tell me about any challenges you've encountered at Chico State, if you have encountered anything like.

**Aishwarya Gowda:** Yeah, so as English was my English is my fourth language.

**Alia Gorman:** Oh, that's so cool, yeah, sorry, what are the other languages you speak?

**Aishwarya Gowda:** So, I Kannada. was my first language. Then I learned Hindi, then I learned Marathi, and then English. And I speak mostly Marathi. My third language is my primary language, but my native language is Kannada. But as you know, like I speak in so many languages, and so how English is structured straight, but other languages are not structured straight. We like talking a different thing. So, when I'm thinking, sorry, when I'm talking, I'm thinking, translating and talking.

**Alia Gorman:** Yeah

**Aishwarya Gowda:** So that was one of the hard parts with my fourth language English. I was very underconfident growing up. Because in India, English is so like hyped language. So, they're like, if you don't know English that – then – you are- not educated. you are not good enough to

portray or everything. And I grew up in a poverty, so it was very hard for me to grow up in a discriminated place where they were like, oh, your mother doesn't know English. You doesn't know English. And that lowered my under confidence a lot. And when I came over here, I was very scared to talk with people. And there it was my Ari, so I used to stay in Konkow Hall, okay, yeah, and there used to be my one of the residential advisor. And I went and I told her, where is the dustbin? She's like, what do you mean? She didn't know it. And then I told her, trash can. So, she didn't understand. And then she told me, oh, do you mean trash can?" Like, yeah. So, every time I encountered that at Chico State, I felt like, okay, like I'm saying something wrong. People will think like, you know, I'm a funny girl, or I don't know how to speak. So I never used to speak with professors, faculty. I never went out in the events. I always used to be like- I'm very social person. I love going out. But because of that, I always used to, like, stay in, yeah. And then few of my friends is to come, and they used to take have patience in what I'm listening and I said, like, sorry, I'm taking a long time to tell you what I'm feeling. And they're, like, no, no, you're telling good, you're telling us fine. And that gave me motivation. And then after joining Cross-Cultural Leadership center and International Office, they helped me a lot to understand the slang languages. I never used to understand slang languages, but that was one of my I always felt that I was not belonging to that group, or I was not belonging to the Chico State. Yeah, because language was my barrier, I never felt about my dreams, at insecurity, because I used to embrace everything from, where I came from, and everything, but only thing was English, and that was a mode of communication. But now I'm comfortable.

**Alia Gorman:** That's good, yeah. But at first, you'd say, like, that was like, kind of like a like, a barrier?



**Aishwarya Gowda:** Yeah, so I was very natural for my first year. I failed my semesters, yeah.

And I remember. I used to run away from my advisor. So, we have an international advisor for international students. I'm an international student, yeah. So we used to have an advisors when wishes to come. I used to run away. So, I went into a depression not knowing what to do. And I felt like, if I had that one year back again, I would have done so many things.

**Alia Gorman:** Is there anything else you'd like to add to this interview, like, anything else about yourself, or anything else you find, like, important that you want to share? **13:49**

maybe about, like, the Associated Students, government affairs, or just anything maybe you like mentioned before.

**Aishwarya Gowda:** Yeah, if you have want to, like, come to the cultural fashion show and having cultural fashion show from Tuesday four to four to 5:30pm at PAC 134 and PAC courtyard. So, we are gonna have fashion show from four to 5pm at PAC 134 and then mixer at the PAC court yard. And it's gonna be very fun. We all are gonna wear our cultural clothing, walk on the ramp, and talk about it.

**Alia Gorman:** I was gonna ask, like, is it like, all different cultures, like, walking?

**Aishwarya Gowda:** Yeah.

**Alia Gorman:** Oh, that's so cool. And like, you guys, like, have like, outfits that, like, you put together,

**Aishwarya Gowda:** yeah, so we are all gonna wear - if you all want to participate, also they have the participation sign. Open up. You all can wear your cultural outfits. And it doesn't have to be like, you know, something religious or ethnic, but the culture that you grew up during, you know what you're wearing. And so. Some of them are doing L.A. fashion. And then, next

Wednesday we're gonna have Multicultural Showcase night which is hosted by Associated Students. And it's a place where all the students and organizations will come out to show their culture and creative expressions. I'll be dancing and also emceeding hosting the night, yeah.

And then for the fashion show, are you gonna be walking in it?

**Aishwarya Gowda:** Yes.

**Alia Gorman:** Oh, that's so cool, yeah. And then are you, what do you talk about? Like, after you walk like, you give like, a little speech.

**Aishwarya Gowda:** Yeah. So, they would be asking that, what clothes is my made of? So, my clothes will be made up of chiffon or silk. You know, silk yeah? I know when I wear it that day, I'll show you it's like, it's a different kind of material you do it from. Do you know cotton? How cottons are made? Yeah. You know, after cotton, they silk, yeah, yeah, the clothing is made up of that silk, yeah, and it's a six yards clothing, and you drape around yourself. And then I'll be wearing my jewelries, like this is one of the Indian jewelry too, but I'll be wearing a junka.

**Alia Gorman:** Oh, that's pretty.

**16:00**

**Aishwarya Gowda:** yeah, thank you. And then I'll be wearing this bindi that's one of the culture. So, I'll be saying them that this I'm representing India, and I'm wearing the chiffon sari, and it's made from cotton after the cotton is done. And then I'll go, I'll be telling them when we wear these sarees, we wear it for functions, marriages, everyday life. Some people, you know, some people wear sari, and they sleep in that. I cannot do that. Yeah, it's like a costume for me.

**Alia Gorman:** Yeah, wow. Um, so, like, I know you've only been part of the Associate Students government affairs for six months now, but how has it like, changed or impacted your life in any way, like, so far?

**16:39**

**Aishwarya Gowda:** So, I would say, when I joined, I thought I imagined certain stuff. It was- I never imagined that I have to sit in a committees and do the greatest stuff about the university. I always thought that it was like, students, yeah, so I was like, oh, I'll be out with the students. I'll be doing work with the students. I'll be out. But after realizing they're coming, I got to know that there are certain committees also that you have to be in, and then you have to go to the events, and then you decide which part you have to go. And I went with the committee's part, because you know what you do for the future matters more than what you're doing right now.

**Alia Gorman:** Yeah

**Aishwarya Gowda:** That's what I felt. And I tried to balance most of the stuff. But I felt like, all these years, three years, I was on the student side, hearing them, yeah, what they wanted to say, and after this role, I'm trying to get what the university is trying to implement the change, and whatever they're putting and for me, it feels like a great experience, because I can connect them both.

**Alia Gorman:** Yeah, That's really cool. So, I think those are all the questions we have for you today. Thank you for taking the time to be a part of our project. It is now 11:46am

**17:51**

**Aishwarya Gowda:** Thank you again. Thank you.