

Jahangir Ahmed - Transcript

Audio Quality : Background noise throughout. A couple of interruptions.

Transcript focuses on Jahangir's work today in Keighley and his previous employment in the 1980s

0:00:00

LMI: All right, hello there, I'm recording and I'm talking to Jahangir Ahmed. And Jahangir, you just told me that you work in a mill today. You're a young man.

JA: I might look it, but I'm not.

LMI: You're quite young. You're certainly younger than me. So, do you want to tell me how old you are?

JA: I'm 56.

LMI: Wow, you do look... you're very good for 56. And where do you work?

0:00:37

JA: I work in a textile firm in Keighley. It's called West Yorkshire Spinners.

LMI: Yeah. And is it... and have you worked there for long?

JA: I worked there two years. Yeah. And I've had a break for four weeks. And then after that, as you know, not many people want to get into this textile business.

LMI: So what do you do?

JA: I'm a spinner, textile, spinning machine.

LMI: And what do you spin?

0:01:09

JA: We spin yarn.

LMI: Artificial? Or... wool?

JA: All sorts. Wool...

LMI: Oh, okay. Yeah, okay. And how big is it?

JA: It's quite big. And just a few months back...they've expanded, and they've put some more machine[s] in. But you can't get the workers.

LMI: Oh really?

JA: Oh, they're crying out for workers.

LMI: So there's plenty of work, but nobody to do it?

0:01:43

JA: Nobody to do it. And you think, why would they put the machines in, you know, when they can't get workers? Even though they're willing to train people. But most youngsters these days, they don't want to... they'll train for a few weeks, then they'll think, 'Oh no, it's not for me.'

LMI: Is it because it's physical labour?

JA: I wouldn't say... it's not that bad. I mean...

LMI: It's not physically hard?

0:02:21

JA: Not physically hard. You see, you know, to get used to it, you need six months, you know, to improve on things. But, you know, they're willing to be... they're willing to help anybody who wants to come into this sort of business.

LMI: So do you know how long this business that you work in, the factory you work in, how long has it been going? Is it very old or is it...?

JA: I think it's been going, I mean... quite old, yeah.

LMI: So it's survived?

JA: It's survived and...

[**LMI:** Sorry.

JA: Are you sure? You want to talk to somebody?

0:02:48

LMI: No, no, no, no.]

JA: Alright. Survived, yeah. You know, I remember when I was a youngster, when I was working in textile, them were the days! You know, John Haggas, Robert Goose, Greenwood's Textiles.

LMI: So, have you always worked in...

JA: No, no. I worked in...

[**LMI:** Can I just stop you one second? Sorry. Marie, there's someone who's just turned up here. Sorry, carry on.]

0:03:20

JA: When I first started was 1987, my first job in textiles, in Keighley, West Lane. Robert Blues.[Booth's] And I was there a couple of years then. And after that, you know, I went to Pakistan and came back. And I became a...

LMI: What prompted you to do it? To go into textiles?

JA: Them days?

LMI: Yeah.

JA: Basically... Them days, you could get a job straight away, you know, something...

0:03:56

[**LMI:** Just one second. Marie, do you want to go over there. It'll be a bit easier. Sorry.

Hiya.

LMI: Carry on, sorry.]

JA: You know, work was available. And I think I just left school then. And I picked money in the sand.

LMI: Did you grow up in Keighley?

JA: I grew up in Keighley.

LMI: Yeah.

JA: You know, I came to England when I was about 5, 6.

0:04:26

LMI: Straight to Keighley?

JA: Straight to Keighley, yeah. I've lived in Keighley since then. I mean, I've tried to... Is that...

LMI: It's alright, keep going.

JA: I mean, I've tried a couple of places in London, but... you know, where you grew up, that's your home.

LMI: Yes, exactly.

0:04:48

JA: You know, I went there, and it was so busy. It didn't... Essex...everybody's running about and everybody's... But here, it's nice and peaceful. No rushing about it. It's a sort of rhythm. And I enjoy that. And er...

LMI: So tell me what life in the mills is like now, then. Do you enjoy it?

JA: I love it! You know, I love it so much. You know, the only reason I wanted to get back was I had the memories, you know, of my youth working in textiles. And it was easy, an easy life. I mean, I've done other jobs that are never ending. You know, like taxi driving.

0:05:33

JA: You're always rushing about. You've got no time for yourself. You're working days in, days out. And with this, you work your eight hours. And it's sort of a luxury.

LMI: That's...and...so you know when you start, you know when you finish.

0:06:01

JA: Yeah, yeah. And occasionally they ask you to work Saturday, and... you know, which we do, you know, to help out. But there's nothing like textile. I mean, I worked in plastic firms, this and that. But here, you start your shift...[?]

LMI: So what makes it special?

JA: Special? Just basically...you know, producing something. You know, when you see something, and then you've turned it to...you know, wool, from start to finish.

LMI: So you're doing the spinning,

JA: I do the spinning.

LMI: And so do they then weave it in the same building? Or does it go on somewhere...?

0:06:34

JA: No, no, no, no.

LMI: It's all spinning.

JA: Basically, once we've done the...produced the yarn, it goes into the winding department. I mean, it's... you know, further up, I think, sometimes. They've got another department that dyes the...

LMI: I see, you've got dyers there as well.

JA: Yeah, but it's a different place.

LMI: It's a different...part of the same company?

JA: Part of the same, but you know, different place. It's only about half a mile away from there, where they can colour it. And you know, basically, end product is, you've got your wool, you know, things. You can...

LMI: Oh wow, brilliant.

0:07:14

JA: It's sent to different countries and all that. Mostly I think it's sent to Finland. They've got sister...

LMI: It goes to Finland?

JA: Yeah, it's got a sister...

LMI: That's interesting.

JA: You know, I think...[sister company]...

LMI: Is it high quality stuff?

JA: High quality stuff, yeah.

LMI: Because somebody has told me that, you know, the bits of the weaving industry and the textile industry that have remained are the high-quality end of the market. The mass-produced stuff has all gone abroad.

JA: Yeah. I mean, you see...you know, things that are producing abroad you know they're not the same.

0:07:55

LMI: Yeah.

JA: But here we've got your your overlookers looking at what you do. When one type of yarn finishes, we have to stop the machine and clean it, so it doesn't...

LMI: Oh, so it doesn't contaminate the next one.

JA: That's it.

LMI: Did you have to train? Did you have to do an apprenticeship or anything?

JA: Because, you know, when I was in my youth, you know, you slowly picked it up. But when I came to this place... I always, you know, look through jobs and I saw this job. And I rang them up and they says to me, 'Oh, can you send me your CV?' I said, 'I'm not good at CVs, but I've got application forms.' And I went there, and I give it. And in the office was the manager. And he says, 'What are you in...?' 'I'm looking for a job for a textile spinner.' He says, 'Come in.'

0:09:08

JA: And they interviewed me, and they told me, 'Oh, this is the machine, test it out.' Even though I haven't done it for... '80... '90... about 40 years, I still know how to do it.

LMI: You still knew how to do it?

JA: Yes.

LMI: That's amazing.

JA: And they says to me, 'When do you want to start?' You know, I don't like going to a company and they say, 'Oh, we'll let you know.' And all this nonsense. 'When do you want to start?' I says, 'I'll start now.'

LMI: Oh, brilliant.

JA: That's what I says to him. And he started laughing, I says, 'If you want me.' Yeah. So I started the next day.

LMI: And that was how long ago?

JA: Two years ago. And I've been there and I'm very satisfied.

LMI: So what did you do in the... in-between times? So, you did it in your teens?

JA: Yeah.

LMI: Did you have lots of different jobs?

JA: Lots of different jobs, but... because there were no textiles.

0:10:06

LMI: Yeah. So, when you were a young man, the textile industry in Bradford was shrinking.

JA: Shrinking, yes.

LMI: So, do you remember that time?

JA: Yeah, I can remember that. There were John Haggas, you know, these big places, you know what I mean? Like they say, 'Every dog has his day'. They were the big companies, you know, John Haggas', Greenwood's, and Robert Booth's, and you know, they were at the top.

But then slowly, slowly, cheaper labour. Start sending it to abroad. India, all different countries, producing cheaper. But now...

0:10:44

LMI: Is that why you stopped doing it?

JA: That's why I stopped doing it. I mean... I missed it.

LMI: Oh, that's interesting. So you... that's really interesting! So you were there as it all closed down.

JA: Yeah, and it's great to be back!

LMI: It is?

JA: It is great.

LMI: It's a fantastic story!

0:11:04

JA: Yeah. That's not...

LMI: So do the other people you work with, do they feel like that?

JA: Oh, yeah.

LMI: Are they all ages? Or are they...?

JA: All ages, yeah. You know, I'd say, the youngest probably maybe 25? 24, 25. And what, er... 60s?

LMI: Fascinating. And just tell me, do they still smell the same? Do mills still have that smell of...? I mean...

0:11:29

JA: I don't...you know...yeah, sometimes, you know, when it's pure wool, [sniffs]you have that...

LMI: You walk in and go, 'Ooh.'

JA: But apart from that, you know...

LMI: I loved it. I loved the smell of mill.

JA: You know, I was just saying, talking to your... this lady, Emma. I says, you know, 'One of these days...' You know, I mean, I just got to know the director. You know, I were in the gym, but... normally you see the director in a full suit.

0:11:59

JA: And er... that was about a week ago. And I was there training with my son. And he walks in. I didn't recognize him. And I was there training. And you know when you see a familiar face? You know somebody. [but] Where from? So I said, I went up to him and said, Do I know you?

0:12:21

JA: And he said, What are you looking at? I says...

Spk2?:[Why don't you speak up a bit.]

JA: I like this bit. I says, 'Do I know you?' And he says, he said, 'Yes, I think you do.' I says, 'Where from?' And he says to me, 'West Yorkshire Spinners.'

0:12:38

JA: That got me baffled. What I don't know. Then you know, slowly, I went, 'Oh, shit! Shit! The director!'

LMI: Was he like the owner of the whole business?

JA: Owner of the, you know... basically the person who runs it! I mean, I thought you won't see somebody like him, doing like...

LMI: So how many of you work in the mill?

JA: I'd say between 40 to 50.

0:13:04

LMI: And he recognised you?

JA: Yeah, of course.

LMI: Like a teacher, I suppose, in a school.

JA: I mean, even though he doesn't see me that often, you know, probably, yeah, when I'm going... er, when I start my work, and I go past, he probably sees who you are. But, I mean, I've seen him, you know. But, you know, when he's in a suit...

LMI: Different person.

JA: Different person than when he's in gym gear, you know. Different. But no, we've started talking, you know. I never used to talk to him. But after [I'd come to that], I came and [said] 'Listen, when are we going to do a class ourselves?' You know, like, you know, spinning class.

0:13:46

JA: I mean, the cycling spinning class.

LMI: Oh, right, Ok. Not spinning really?!

JA: No, no, no, no, no, no. A studio spinning class. And he said, 'Yeah, we'll definitely get time and just come through to you.' And then, just getting to know the directors. I said to Gemma, listen, 'I've got two weeks holiday.' I mean, when you're in a taxi, you never get any holidays. Odd days, you understand. But now, you know, I feel so relaxed. You know, you get paid for it. And it's a lot of fun. You know what I mean? Enjoying the time, you know.

LMI: Oh, that's great. So would you encourage a young person to go and work in the mill?

0:14:35

JA: Of course, of course, you know. They need people. And it's not difficult, you know. If you put your mind to it. You can learn anything, you know.

LMI: So the wages are okay, as well?

JA: Wages are good.

LMI: Oh, great.

JA: It's more than a minimum wage. But... I mean, they've just put it up, but... what would I say...? The taxman takes it.

0:15:07

JA: You know, they've put it up, but when you see the difference, you know, where's it gone?

LMI: Well, it's a few percent, I guess.

JA: Yeah, where's it gone? You know, you get the... And, uh, some of it goes to the pensions, the... You're left with nothing, basically. Wherever you were.

LMI: Yeah, that, well, that is tricky. But then, you know, I suppose we do like to have our roads cleaned, and that kind of stuff.

0:15:35

JA: Yeah, yeah. And, uh, I was saying to him, you know... I'll have a word with him, and pop down sometimes.

LMI: I think that might be quite a nice thing to do, actually.

JA: Yeah.

LMI: I mean, it would be interesting to talk to the owner as well and get a different kind of view.

JA: Yeah, of course. Of course, because the director's father is still there and all.

LMI: Oh, really? So...

JA: Oh, he'll have a lot to talk about it, because my dad used to work for him.

0:16:04

LMI: Oh really?

JA: In the '70s.

LMI: Yeah.

JA: And he's still going well.

LMI: That's amazing.

JA: He must be 75 to 80 and still, you know. He just gave his directorship to his son now. So he's still over there. And if you want anything, you know...

LMI: So is your dad still...

JA: No, no, he passed away.

0:16:28

LMI: He passed away. Oh, right. So did you... so you remember him going to work in the mill when you were a child?

JA: Oh yes, of course.

LMI: Did you ever go in there when you were a child?

JA: No, no, no, no. Them days, it was different, it's not... But nowadays, people, you know... if you phone them up, they'll walk in here and take you for a tour. I mean, there's quite a few people, you know, some people that... have come there and... have a look around.

LMI: Just to see what it's like.

0:16:57

JA: Yeah, yeah.

LMI: That's interesting. It's really interesting.

JA: You'd like it! Yeah.

LMI: I'm sure I would, actually.

JA: Yeah. And definitely I'll have a word with the director and... [?]

LMI: Because I've been interviewing some men at the Sangat Centre. Do you know the Sangat Centre?

JA: Oh, I know the Sangat Centre, yes, yes.

0:17:14

LMI: And they're all a lot older than you are.

JA: Right.

LMI: And so they.... I'm taking them to the...

JA: Yeah, yeah, that's what I mean. I'll send my brother over here...

LMI: Yeah?

JA: ... he's good at talking.

LMI: Oh, really?

JA: Yeah.

LMI: Yeah, yeah. Well, you've got our details, haven't you?

JA: Yeah, so I'll ask him to pop round sometime and have a chat here because he's been there a few years now.

0:17:37

LMI: And I like the fact that, you know, we're talking to people in Keighley rather than Bradford because everybody thinks Bradford's where all the textiles were - Bradford City. But actually, in Keighley it is really important.

JA: Of course. There were a lot of people who... there used to be loads of factory... mills in here.

LMI: There were. There were.

JA: I think most people [that] are still here, you know, retired.

0:18:00

LMI: Yeah, yeah.

JA: Yeah. I worked with my uncle and all. I'll tell him to come down.

LMI: Yeah, yeah, do. Do. So what we'll do is, we'll probably have another session like this in the autumn sometime...

JA: Right.

LMI: ...and we'll... this is a bit of a trial, this is the first one we've done.

JA: How long are you here for now?

LMI: Just till... for another couple of hours.

JA: No, no, no, no, how many days..?

0:18:26

LMI: Oh, the whole project lasts until... a year's time. So, a one-year project.

JA: Oh, well... I'll get plenty of people here, you know.

LMI: Yeah, yeah.

JA: ...to come and talk to you.

LMI: We're not here all the time.

JA: Oh, you're not here all the time?

LMI: No, no, no. We're based in Shipley.

JA: Are you?

0:18:38

LMI: Yeah.

JA: What...

LMI: Oh, this is...

JA: Textiles?

LMI: No, no, no. So, we do... It's an arts organisation. So, we run... I run an arts organisation...this company called 509 Arts. That's us there.

0:18:50

JA: Guess what? My brother lives in Nabwood.

LMI: Oh, does he?

JA: I'll make sure...you know.

LMI: Oh, right. Well, I live just off, I live sort of next to Nabwood.

JA: Yeah?

LMI: Yeah, yeah.

JA: So, so, where's your arts...

0:19:10

LMI: Yeah, that's where the company is based. We work...everybody's freelance. We work from my house. Got an office in my house.

JA: Right.

LMI: In Sherwood Grove. Which is near Bromley...

JA: Put your number down here. Under...He's the one....

LMI: My number's on, my phone number's on here. Look, that's my phone number.

0:19:23

JA: He's the man... I need to talk.

LMI: I'll write my name here. I put, it's a... I'll give you my email address.

JA: You'll have a very interesting conversation with him.

LMI: Because... ? [Gives details] So that's my email address, but that is my phone number there.

JA: Ok. No, no, so...he can talk.

LMI: Does he work in the mill as well?

0:19:53

JA: Yeah, he works with me.

LMI: Oh, does he?

JA: Yeah.

LMI: Oh, ok.

JA: Similar story. When we were young working together, then cab driver. Then he's been in this one on and off for a while. He got [?]

LMI: So do you work eight-hour shifts?

JA: Eight-hour, you know. Alternative shifts. 6-2...

LMI: Oh right.

JA: 2-10, you know. Every week.

0:20:25

LMI: You start at six o'clock in the morning?

JA: It's difficult. I wish it was like the same time. You don't want to mess your mind.

LMI: So, do you do...is that alternate weeks? Or...?

JA: Yeah.

LMI: So, one week you do 6 till 2?

JA: It would be better if it were just one shift, 6-2, then your body doesn't mess up.

LMI: You would get used to it.

0:20:47

LMI: Yeah.

JA: And next week, you'll work 2-10.

LMI: Yeah. I talked to a man who did night shifts for like 15 years. I said, 'How do you cope?' He said, 'You get used to it.'

JA: No, yeah. Yeah, I think...You know, just permanent nights, that's...

LMI: So they must have plenty of work if they can keep the machines running from 6 in the morning till 10 at night.

0:21:05

JA: I mean, the thing is, they've expanded.

LMI: Yeah.

JA: And they've put more machines in, but we haven't got the workers.

LMI: Ahh, well, maybe I ought to...

JA: You worked in textiles?

LMI: No, I just did some labouring when I was a student. I worked in a mill in Wilsden.

JA: Wilsden, Wilsden? Oh, Wilsden. I know Wilsden.

LMI: It's not there anymore. It's a housing estate now.

JA: Right. I used to work in Cullingworth.

0:21:37

LMI: Oh, yeah, yeah.

JA: Er...and another housing estate, Greenwood's Textile.

LMI: Oh, right. Has that gone as well?

JA: That's gone. You know, turned into houses.

LMI: Yeah. So many places like that, aren't they?

JA: That's it. And this is, I hope I...

LMI: So your dad worked in textiles. You worked in textiles. Your brother's working in textiles.

JA: Yeah, I've got another brother. He used to work in textile an' all.

LMI: And is that what your dad came to this country...was it your dad came over here?

JA: He came over because he was in the army.

0:22:09

LMI: He was in the army?

JA: Army.

LMI: Oh, yeah.

JA: And with that, you know, when he retired, then... you know...The Queen used to give permission.

LMI: Oh right, yeah.

JA: To come here to work. And in them days, he could work from one job to another.

LMI: When did he come over?

JA: I'd say... 1965?

LMI: Right, yeah.

0:22:33

JA: Then we came...

LMI: Did he come straight to Keighley? Or did he move around a bit? I talked to a man the other day, he went from Slough to Leeds to Nottingham to Birmingham to Egham, to back to Slough.

JA: Of course, yeah.

LMI: Then he finally settled in Keighley.

JA: Keighley, yeah. Yeah, most of the people... because they didn't have their own houses, were shared accommodation.

LMI: Yeah.

JA: So he used to live in a...

0:23:01

LMI: Yeah, he was telling me how much it cost. You know, he was paying 50p a week for his bed. And £1 for his food. Or something like that. Tiny amounts of money.

JA: Tiny amounts of money, you know. Nowadays, it's totally different. So... I'll have a word.

LMI: That'd be great.

JA: And I'll tell my brother to ring you or email you.

LMI: Yeah, yeah, definitely.

0:23:26

JA: And we'll arrange an appointment to see him.

LMI: Right, I'm going to turn this off now. Thanks very much for the interview.

JA: No problem.