

Natavar Bhai Lad - Transcription

Audio Quality : Good

Transcript focuses on process of coming, immigration and workplace culture

0:00:00

LMI: Right we're talking now. I hope you everything's coming through loud and clear. Would you just like to say something?

NB: Hello

LMI: Perfect perfect. Ok, so I'm here with Natavar and you...

NB: My name is Natavar Bhai Lad,

LMI: Yeah, and you are how old?

NB: I'm 82.

LMI: You're 82. Or maybe 83. We're not sure. And tell me about coming to Bradford when you first came to Bradford.

NB: Yeah, I came in Bradford in 1968, August. Before that I used to work in chemical factory or other dye factory in India.

LMI: Whereabouts in India?

NB: It was a town called Balsar, so our city called Atul.

LMI: Was that North India, South India?

NB: It's the middle of Gujarat.

LMI: Oh okay.

NB: So it's a Gujarat, you know, big province.

LMI: Yeah.

NB: And Balsar is one of the districts, and Atul is the city there.

LMI: And you came over in 1968?

0:01:19

NB: '68.Yeah.

LMI: And that was your first visit to Bradford?

NB: Yes, well. first visit to... UK even, you know, or rather abroad first time.

LMI: And how was that for you?

NB: Well, I was 26 then, you know, because normally people used to come where there's some relations, because being a foreign land there is not many contacts.

LMI: So did you have family here?

NB: Yeah, my uncle was living here. He came two years prior to me, you know. So I had one contact here at least anyway.

LMI: So you came up to Bradford?

NB: Yeah, and then I think initially when I came, obviously we have to find the... or register with the government, you know, for the NI number and that sort of thing. So... but for that purpose also we need at least some job promise, or something like that.

0:02:30

NB: So I think I can say easily that about three weeks after coming to this country I was looking for the job around. And then somebody suggested me that 'If you want to work in the mill, there is a possible job there, but you just go there and find out whether you are suitable there or not.'

LMI: So did you do that?

NB: So we went there, well myself and my other colleague there and visited the Thomas Burley in Gomersal, which is, you know, in the Bradford district itself anyway.

LMI: I think it's just outside Bradford.

NB: Yeah, Bradford. It used to be the very big textile mill. You know, used to make everything like, you know, but...

0:03:22

LMI: Did they do spinning *and* weaving?

NB: Yeah, but you know... I was put on the basic, well, basic thing, like drawing the ball... They used to make the wool ball, you know, that sort of thing. So, combing department.

LMI: Combing?

NB: Combing, yeah.

LMI: Was that like a labouring job?

NB: It is semi-laboring, you can call it, because you have to work on a machine, but doing this...

LMI: So you were dealing with the raw wool?

NB: Yeah, raw wool used to come with the combs... things, you know,

LMI: Combed?

NB: And then the comb[ed?] things, then you have to make into balls.

LMI: Oh, right.

NB: To send it to the, you know, for the processing department.

0:04:03

LMI: To the spinners.

NB: Yeah, yeah. So you know we were there.

LMI: And what was it like?

NB: Well obviously you have to be on the ball, like. You can't just... that because you have to work with the machine.

LMI: Yeah.

NB: As machine prepare the balls you have to be ready to change the carton, you know, where the other balls can go, you know. And then you take the ball out, weight up, put into the bag, make sure bag is clean, there is no other debris there that... because that particular wool ball will go for the further processing, where they will just take out from the bag and put it there. If there is any debris or different color things it could ruin the whole processing.

LMI: Oh, my word.

NB: So you have to... obviously that bag also get tested or checked by other department, and if us found in some fault the police just pulled out and they give warning or questions or, you know, that sort of things.

LMI: So can you remember how much your first wage was?

NB: Oh my first wage was just five pound fifty pence.

LMI: Five pound fifty pence in 1968?

NB: Yeah. I think fifty pence is wrong words. I think that he is...

LMI: Five pound twelve shillings.

NB: Yeah, because that...

LMI: Or ten shillings?

NB: Ten shilling I think. Because I think after that year... not year even, I think eight months or something like that. I think February something '70 they introduced the decimal.

LMI: That's right, 1972 we were decimalized.

NB: So I think I saw first 50 pence then, you know. But that time I used to work in the Bradford Corporation, in the buses.

LMI: Oh, you moved from textile to buses?

NB: Yeah, to buses afterwards.

LMI: How long did you work in the textile industry?

NB: Well, I didn't work, that's what I say, I worked about... I think a couple of months. Not not... very short...

LMI: Very short time.

NB: Not very long.

LMI: And what was the atmosphere like in the mill?

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NB: Well as I say that... because I was the new, I know the language, but because of the dialects I had some problem with... I not me, but they had problem to follow me, like.

LMI: Oh, right and could you understand their Bradford accents?

NB: Well, you know, mainly I can make it out, but they had... you know... in the beginning definitely some problem anyway.

LMI: You had some English, did you?

NB: Oh yeah, I learned myself. And as I said that... we were familiar. I can write it down, follow the written, you know, maybe not [the] all words, but definitely I can make it out what it says.

LMI: So you went to the mill, and that was it very big mill with a lot of people?

NB: Lots of people, yeah, you know, and I think I'm really grateful to them that they gave me the first job without... I had no knowledge of anything about that.

0:07:21

NB: Obviously on my first day, they put me with somebody else, under the training.

LMI: Oh right.

NB: Before they gave me the machine itself.

LMI: So you had one day of training?

NB: I think one day, one and a half day. And because the overlookers used to be, you know, around, and I think they may have some instruction that either [they] keep eye on me. So they regularly come out and check[ed] on me, and - how it's going? And you have to keep looking - all those things - make sure that it doesn't stop. If it stops that's a inching, that's a starting - you know, that's... They are introducing the switches, and obviously safety things.

0:08:11

LMI: Was it very noisy?

NB: Yeah, that's one. But even though it is noisy, that time they do not religiously provide the noise barrier.

LMI: No, no, no noise barrier,

NB: You know those things, you know, because, but I noticed then some people used to buy their own

LMI: Oh, did they?

NB: Yeah, they keep muffles, yeah, they used to keep their muffles, I do remember that.

LMI: Oh right. Well, that's very sensible. One or two people have said they were using sign language in the mill?

NB: Yeah, because of the noise.

LMI: Yeah.

NB: But as I say, I think... where I was... putting on that floor, it was like one compartment, and we had four boxes. They used to call the box machine.

LMI: Yeah.

NB: And we just... well, obviously when it is important, you can always stop machine for a while and talk.

LMI: Yeah.

NB: And I think during the day, twice in the morning and in the afternoon about four o'clock, they used to give a cup of tea, but they used to give at the place.

LMI: So where you were sat, you'd have a little tea break?

NB: Yeah, just you know it's just tea or if you've got a biscuit with you, you may eat.

LMI: And was there a canteen where you could eat?

NB: Yeah, for the eating we used to go in the canteen.

LMI: Because I've talked to one or two people who used to eat at their machines.

NB: Well, that's their privilege, because people, as I say, that with the Asian origins, you know, at that time they are not very much in... food what do you call conversation because some people, if I say this, may not like the smell of the Asian food *then*.

0:10:06

LMI: Very different now.

NB: Now they are more than us, to be honest.

LMI: It's Bradford traditional food now.

NB: Yeah, it is. Well, that's why they call it... Bradford is the centre of the curry.

LMI: Yes, absolutely, absolutely. And what was it like for you coming to Bradford? How did it feel?

NB: The thing is this, you know, well, if I say myself that I'm the economic migrant, I won't be wrong.

0:10:35

LMI: No.

NB: Because when I was there, the government has the policy that with the certain industrial background, and at least two years industrial experience, they used to issue the voucher. And after two years of my... industrial... I used to work on the, as I said, the dye factory. So, on the...

LMI: So you had the background.

NB: Oh, yeah. I was one of the chemists over there, you know, so they call it the... Even though I was chemist, not doing any chemistry work, but we used to produce chemicals.

SP2: Dyes.

LMI: Oh, you produced dyes?

NB: Yes.

LMI: So you had a background in...?

NB: Oh, yeah, manufacturing

LMI: manufacturing and plenty of dyeworks in Bradford.

NB: Yeah.

SP2: Yeah. It's a it's a bad days.

LMI: It's connected.

SP2: Yeah It's a bad days. Yeah.

LMI: Oh, that's interesting. So, you were used to working in industrial.

0:11:38

NB: Industrial, yes.

LMI: Because many people come over from very rural backgrounds.

NB: Yes, my factory was the 49% ICI.

LMI: Oh, was it?

NB: Yeah, 49% ICI, 51% Indian company, Atul. You know, Atul ICI called ATIC, A-T-I-C-I.

LMI: Oh. And so what did you think of Bradford as a place?

NB: Well, yes, I can call it... it is the culture shock to be honest, because even though we were living in the city or suburb life, but here, after coming, I have to... well, I didn't take much time to adjust me, myself, you know, because where we used to live over there, more or less similar environment where I used to live in my bungalow.

0:12:35

NB: Well, they used to, you know, give two bedrooms. It's not an apartment, it's a single unit like, you know. And there, company provide electricity, water, everything in the house itself. You know, I don't have to go and fetch water or anything. But my village, where I come from, I used to have, you know, everything... that well water, you know, for my family, ladies.

LMI: The very basic...

NB: We had to farm land, you know, in the village. But where I work, I'm talking about the factory. It's all like here.

0:13:11

LMI: Small houses...

NB: Electricity and everything, you know.

LMI: But not very large houses. So did you live in a terraced house, or back to back?

NB: No, no, it was a single unit, like.

LMI: No, in Bradford, I mean.

NB: Oh yes, when I came I stayed with my uncle first. And then I hired the house... in a room... Next year my family came, so I hired the room. And then up to two years I bought the house. You know, it took a little bit time, anyway.

LMI: So you were already married when you came over?

NB: Yes, I had one daughter.

LMI: And you had a child, and eventually they came?

NB: Came the following year. So they came in to '69.

LMI: So, they had they had a bit of a culture shock as well?

0:14:03

NB: Yeah, well it is, you know, because I think at that time the language was the main barrier. Not in the house, when you go out. But you know, then I think the following year, when my wife came, after some time, she started working as well, you know.

LMI: Did she work in textiles?

NB: No. She work in AIS. Where the...you know those...cloths...where they segregate the factory clothes, you know, the dusters.

LMI: Oh dusters. Oh, right, yes, okay. So did you leave the textile industry for any particular reason?

NB: Yeah, because I personally was looking for some sort of job in my line, then. And little bit more money, you know. So after this textile, Thomas Burley I went into the engineering firm in... So, there they used to use the electric motors.

LMI: Oh, right. Yeah.

NB: You know and then they put me on the left [lathe] machine and...

LMI: The...?

NB: ...the basically... left [lathe] machine, you know, the cutting and I have to serve that... smoothen the surface of the motor surface.

LMI: Ok, like a plane or...

NB: Yeah, that's right. Yeah, now so and the...

LMI: Lathe.

NB: Left [lathe] machine, you know. So, see still we have dialect problem.

LMI: Your English is fine.

NB: So but then I heard that with more money into the... Corporation as a bus conductor, and you have chance to go into the driving things and things.

0:16:03

NB: So after a while I went, you know... this is between over one and a half year period, you know. And then I worked in the corporation about five, six months. And then while there I was trying for my chemical job. And then in Leeds, I started my job in 1971.

LMI: In a chemical factory.

NB: In a chemical factory, you know. And there is a state, ABM, they used to call it. And I worked there nearly 43 years.

LMI: Wow.

0:16:42

NB: Then I retired. But during that period... I started there and then 2007 I retired... And during that time my factory changed four hands.

LMI: Four different owners?

NB: Owners, yeah. Same place, four different owners.

LMI: But you managed to keep going through all of them?

NB: Yeah, keep going, you know. I used to work in the laboratory.

LMI: Oh right. So you kind of went back to the thing that you'd started...

NB: Well, you know, in a way. But you know, obviously only one thing - I know is not very nice to say for myself, that even though we used to put a lot of effort in there, but looks like because of my colour, or my accent, or anything, I did not progress.

LMI: You weren't promoted.

0:17:45

NB: Well, you can call it that way, you know. But obviously, I'm not regretting that anyway, because in the long run, always something will benefitted, which is what I'm doing now. Even though I'm not loaded with money but I'm comfortable.

LMI: you're comfortable, you've got a pension.

NB: I got pension, company pension. I got government pension.

LMI: I think it's very interesting though the way people, you know, I mean... I think people... I've talked to a few people, and they've talked about kind of the sort of quiet discrimination that goes on.

NB: Yeah, you know, they don't show it, but it is behind.

0:18:25

[NB: Couple of minutes.]

LMI: They don't...?

NB: It doesn't show it. I never experienced directly, but that's what I said, that you can see that... those my colleagues which was there, I know that they came after me, they were not [as] knowledgeable as I am. I taught them and they pass on me. So you know, that must be something which I cannot see, or they won't tell me. But there is something.

LMI: Well, you are very philosophical about it, I must say.

NB: Well... so what else can you say? You can't just... Because this discrimination is such a wide thing, you... before you can describe yourself or disclose yourself, you must have some solid proof or written things, or that's, you know.

LMI: Evidence.

NB: Evidence, you know, so you can't say that. But, as I said, that overall, I was not treated badly.

LMI: One more very quick question, because I know we've got to stop. When you came to Bradford in the first instance, did you think you would stay here all your life? Or did you think you would go back to...

0:19:41

NB: No, no, no. I think, well, I was silly anyway. I went to America as well.

LMI: Oh, really?

NB: Yeah, but not very...very briefly. And because certain things I didn't follow there, and I had a cushy job here, so I came back. And I started the same job there in my own factory again! They took me in.

LMI: So, which factory was that? The one in Leeds?

0:20:10

NB: In Leeds. Yeah.

LMI: So you went to America, and then came back again?

NB: Within three months, I think.

LMI: Oh right. But did you think you were just earning some money to go home again? Or did you know that you would stay in... away from India?

NB: Well, I had to because I know that... As I told you, that I came as a kind of migrant.

LMI: Yeah.

NB: I do have the more money than India definitely.

LMI: Yeah, you wanted a better life.

NB: Well, you know, because I had a family there. And I'm the elder son of my father. So obviously... it's a different lifestyle here anyway, with the family and father. But there is always... elder son, or earning son always contribute to the father [family?] itself, you know. Until father says, 'You don't do it.' But I don't think any father will do it - 'all right, keep it there.' - you know, because after father goes, it's all yours anyway.

0:21:20

LMI: Well, I obviously made a mistake. I had two daughters. But they are wonderful daughters. That's been great. Thanks for your interview. It's been brilliant.

NB: You're welcome.

LMI: Really, really appreciate it. Great stories as well. Two months in a textile mill, but a lot happened.

NB: All right, yeah. Thank you.

LMI: Thank you.

Transcribed with Cockatoo