

Interviewee: Jerbanoo P. Bhadha

Interviewers: Arnaz Mistry and Jehangir Mistry

Date of Interview: May 3, 2014

Transcribed by: Arnaz Mistry

Audio Track Time: 37:27 (Minutes:Seconds)

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Interview Transcript:

**Key:**

JM	Jehangir Mistry
AM	Arnaz Mistry
JB	Jerbanoo P. Bhadha
-	Speech cuts off; abrupt stop
...	Speech trails off; pause
<i>Italics</i>	Emphasis
(?)	Preceding word may not be accurate
Brackets	Actions (laughs, sighs, etc.)

JM: This is Jango Mistry at the Zoroastrian Association of Houston Center on Saturday May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014.

AM: And this is Arnaz Mistry, accompanying Jango.

JM: We are going to interview Mrs. Jerbanoo Bhadha today. Welcome, Mrs. Bhadha.

JB: Thank you.

JM: We are going to listen to your life story. So, are you ready to start?

JB: Yes. I'm ready.

JM: So, tell me about yourself. Your childhood, your background.

JB: Well, I was born on 25<sup>th</sup> February, 1922. I was the only child of my parents. I have no brothers or sisters. After I was born, my mother had high diabetes and it was in blood, so she was advised that if she had other children later on, they would be diabetics before their birth because it was in the blood. So I have no brothers or sisters. I am the only child. You can imagine, an only child with nobody of my age to play with, it wasn't very pleasant. Well, that was my childhood.

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JM: So you had a lonely childhood. You were with your father. You and your father, that's it. No brothers, no sisters.

JB: After a few years, my mother expired. She died at the age of 44. Very young. So we were – the father and daughter. My father used to go to work in an English firm, going at 8 or 8:30, and come at about 7 or 7:30 at night. So you can imagine a young girl like me being alone the whole day. Of course, when it was school days I used to go to school, but on holidays I was alone at home. My father – since my mother was not there, my father used to give me good advice, and he said that I should have good manners. I should have good manners and respect the elders. All the important things he told me, and –

JM: So you got your values from your father.

JB: Yes, I had values from my father. He was very strict but he was very loving because I was the only child.

JM: Right. So you were born and grew up in what city?

JB: Bombay.

JM: Bombay, India?

JB: Bombay, India.

JM: Ah-ha.

JB: I used to go to school, I passed Matriculation exam and – I did not like cooking because my mother died very young and I was not taught cooking at all. So we used to have food from outside. I never cooked, but I loved and loved embroidery and I was very fond of music. These were my two passions – embroidery and music. I had all the designs. I started the embroidery, but there was a condition from my father. He said you can do as much embroidery as you can, to your satisfaction, but you cannot sell it. I emphasize that you cannot sell it, because when a lady of the house sells something done by her, then it means the man of the house is not able to provide for the house and lady has to sell -

JM: To make ends meet. So how did you learn embroidery? What prompted your love of embroidery? How did you –

JB: Even when my mother was there, she loved embroidery too, and then she'd make me sit and embroider tablecloths, counterpanes, and curtains and all that. That's how I had the love for embroidery. I used to do all the stitching also. My clothes and all that. I had learnt that also. So my time passed. But I had nobody, even to talk to, the whole day. (6:03)

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JM: Um-hm. So you were a good student. You passed through High School, graduated-

JB: Yes, I passed through High School. I used to go to school, but I didn't go to college.

JM: You didn't go to college. In those days, how was it? Did women go to college that much.

JB: Oh yes. Some of my friends from school – They had gone to college. But my father was rather strict and he said that you should not mix with other people. Even some of the neighbors, we didn't go to their house and all that, because everybody will point that this girl is alone in the house and she is moving about.

JM: So most Indian women – Did they go to college in your time or –

JB: Some of them.

JM: Only some did.

JB: Some of them do go. Some get married, like when you pass your Matric and all that. Then it is time to get early marriage and all that.

JM: Did you do anything else outside of education? Anything home-related, home science, anything like that? Did you take any extra courses?

JB: No, not much. Because I was going to school and my mother had diabetes. I was a lonely child, without brothers or sisters to be with you. (7:25)

JM: Good. Good. So tell us about your life after you graduated from High School. What happened to you?

JB: Well, after I graduated, as I said, when I was home I would do this embroidery which is of not much use to me because how many tablecloths can I do, how many purses do I embroider, and this and that. And music was there. So I begged my father to allow me to play some instrument. He like violin and so did I. So I attended – not classes; classes - My father definitely said I won't send you to any classes to learn some instrument. So it was a school. And one of the school-teachers used to teach music to the ... I went there and she taught me violin. In my spare time I would play the violin, whatever notes I was given, whatever pieces I was to play, and go to the teacher and play there. (9:00)

JM: So did you play in any concerts or recitals or anything like that?

JB: Well, as I told you, my father was very strict.

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JM: He wouldn't let you play –

JB: Would you like to hear an example of it?

JM: Sure, sure.

JB: I used to have high... When I was in school, I used to be in the top class. I used to be a very good student. Anybody, in any class, who was first and second, used to get a prize from the school. They would give a prize, if you came first and second. But the prize was given during a concert when all the parents of the students were there. Fortunately I had ... my result was either first or second, third; usually first and second. The guest – the invited guest would go on the stage and give the prize to the particular girls who were first or second. Now, sometimes, mostly I was a top student and I had to go on the stage and get a prize from the guest. My father would not allow me to get my prize, because going on the stage he didn't like. But my mother argued – She will take a prize and walk down the other way; she won't talk, she won't do anything. Just go the guest who was invited, whatever books or something that was given and come down the other way. But even then, I was not supposed to go on the stage. Going on the stage was very degrading.

JM: Even though it was just to receive a prize for which you had worked hard and been awarded.

JB: I would go the next day after the concert to the principal and say – May I have my prize from you, madam? She said – Why didn't you come yesterday? You were lazy enough, or you must have been late. That's why you were not in time to go on the stage and get your prize. Well, I didn't have to repeat what my father had said – not to go on the stage...

JM: So your father was very old fashioned and very protective of his only daughter.

JB: He loved me as a daughter but then he was – he showed me good manners; how to respect the elders – that was the main thing.

JM: Very good, very good. So, he did let you marry though. How did that happen. Tell us about that. (12:18)

JB: Well, it was an arranged marriage.

JM: Arranged marriage. Uh-hum.

JB: There was no love affair or anything else before that.

JM: Is that what was mostly common in those days? Arranged marriages?

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JB: Yes. It was very common, because some of the families don't - don't have young men or no young men, and that's why the matchmakers – they pick – see that the girl and the boy, they love each other; not love each other; they like each other, just by seeing, and then it goes further.

JM: Hm-Hmm.

JB: So by that matchmaker, we were married.

JM: And you're still married – after how many years?

JB: Well, I'm married for the last 65 years.

JM: Very good, very good.

JB: I am 92 at present, and my husband is 96.

JM: Very good. So you married in what year?

JB: I married in 1946.

JM: 1946. So that's – You're almost 68 years, not 65. Married 68 years.

JB: Yes, may be –

JM: But that's been a very long time.

JB: OH yes.

JM: Very good, very good. So after marriage, what happened? You had children? Tell us about your married life in Bombay. Were you happy? What kind of a life was it?

JB: Well, I was used to Bombay, which is in India. My husband is a very kind gentle person. He doesn't get excited, ... so we get along very well. We had 2 children. First, a boy, and after a few years a girl. Later on, when we grew up and then after they passed exams and all that in schools and colleges, my son was interested in Hotel Management. Well, he came to know about the Tatas, and they have a hotel in Bombay – Taj Mahal Hotel. And they liked my son and they gave him a very high post in the Taj Mahal Hotel for – to look after it and all that. So that's how my son was in hotel management.

JM: Let's talk about your husband a little bit. Did he have a good job? Was he a good provider?

JB: My husband (?) - After graduating from school and college, he (?) (son) entered the hotel business and he was employed...

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JM: Husband entered the hotel business?

JB: No, no. My son.

JM: Oh, your son. No, we were talking about your husband. What job he had, what did he do during your married life?

JB: My husband – my husband (?). He (?) (son) passed out in school exams and college exams, and then he was interested in hotels ... My husband used to go to Godrej. He was working in Godrej. He was appreciated by his bosses and all that, and he was working in Godrej for 48 years. He was there, worked there –

JM: What position did he have?

JB: He was the head of a department. He was a Plant Manager.

JM: Plant Manager. Very good, very good.

JB: Plant Manager of a department, and he was very gentle and all that, and all the employees and all that, loved him very much.

JM: So he was good with his employees in those days when employees were not treated that well. So they appreciated him.

JB: Yes. As a boss they used to show off that they are superior but my husband did not behave that way, so he had many friends there.

JM: So they loved him. Very good, very good. No wonder he stayed so long. OK. So, now - you told us about your son and your husband. Tell us about your daughter a little bit. Did she also pass through high school and go to college?

JB: Yes. My daughter passed out in school and in college, and later on, as time came for marriage, we were on the look out for a nice boy; and a friend of his ... he was introduced to us. My daughter liked him, and the boy liked my daughter; and that's how she got married. Later on, my son-in-law had a job in America and so my daughter joined him after some time when he was working in a company. (18:48)

JM: And what about your son? Was he still in Bombay with you all these years or –

JB: Yes. Sam was with us, - staying with us, and then he got married too, to a nice girl and left for – and the Tatas. He was working in the Taj Mahal Hotel, but they had a hotel in America too.

JM: Where - where in America?

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JB: Radisson Hotel.

JM: Where? In which city?

JB: In New York. And he was sent by the boss - the Tatas sent him to New York to look after the hotel which they owned in New York.

JM: So now both your children were in America then. Right?

JB: Yes. My daughter married a man – he had a job in NY, no, in America too and my daughter joined him in America.

JM: Very good.

JB: We two, husband and wife, getting old but we were still in Bombay.

JM: OK. So did you visit in America when your son and daughter were here? Did you come to America for a visit, for vacations and so on?

JB: As I said, my husband was working in Godrej and they had about 10 or 15 days holiday every year. And then he wouldn't take the holiday for one year, and save it for the next year. Then have 1 month of leave, we used to visit sometimes in America to our children.

JM: So did you like America when you came for a visit?

JB: Yes, we did like it. We did like it very much. Besides, our own children were there.

JM: Right.

JB: And that's why –

JM: And by that time, you had grandchildren too, I suppose.

JB: Yes, we had grandchildren too. Yes. And once in a year or so, we used to visit them. Once in 2 years. Once in 2 years.

JM: Right. Once in 2 years.

JM: So then your husband retired after 47 – 48 years. What happened then?

JB: Yes my husband retired from Godrej after 48 years service. And now he was at home. As he was working all of his life, he found it – he didn't like it.

JM: Big adjustment for him.

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JB: And my daughter came. She asked me – Why are you staying in Bombay still? You can join us in America. For that, I had been quite a few times at her house for a month or so. I liked the atmosphere, and I liked my son-in-law also. They had 2 children too. So we thought of coming over and staying in America.

JM: Very good, very good. So tell us a little bit about life in Bombay, when you were there, before you moved here; and then we'll talk about how things are different over here. So tell us about Bombay.

JB: In Bombay, there is noise and people, every day from morning to night. Bombay is a very crowded place. But people come on the road and sell vegetables or sell fruits. Most of the things they sell – whatever we want we would come to the door and buy it. We don't have to go to the market.

JM: Ah. People came to your doorstep with fresh vegetables and fresh fruits.

JB: Fruits, vegetables, sometimes fish – whatever. Most of the things that we need for the house for eating, we would get it raw at our door. In America, you have to go to the -

JM: Grocery store.

JB: Grocery store and ... bazaar and all that – and buy it over there. Nobody would come to the door and sell them to us. And there were postmen. Here you get letters in the mail. They had postmen. So the whole day the doorbell will ring – In the morning, with the milkman, then breadman, and newspapers

JM: One after another people are coming to your house.

JB: Whole day the doorbell will ring and someone or the other is always there – postman and all that. Here, you hardly listen to the doorbell in America because people have to go to the market or wherever the provision is. Nobody will come to the door and offer it to you. I had many relatives in Bombay, and friends too. School friends. We were in our building; we were all Parsis and we used to have friends. But here I hardly have any friends or anything, because I'm new in America, though my daughter has made good friends and all that. And then we – I and my husband – feel a little lonely sometimes because there's no need to go to the – the vegetables and fruits don't come to our house; we have to go to the shop and buy it. So –

JM: So you don't have the freedom here that you used to have over there. Do you drive over here? Do you drive in America at all?

JB: We had a car in Bombay

JM: But not in America.



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JB: I and my husband - - to drive. We had a chauffeur. So we were, as you say, (upper) middle class.

JM: So that was in Bombay – what is now called Mumbai. So in Mumbai, you had a car - company car – with chauffeur. That was quite a good thing to have in those days. What about after you came here. Did you drive at all over here?

JB: I hadn't learnt driving. I don't know driving. My husband would drive over here but he doesn't know - - We were new in Houston and we didn't know the different roads, where to turn and which lane to go, so we hardly drive. Our children take us wherever we wish to go.

JM: Very good. Tell us one more thing – about your religious practices and the religious environment. What was it like to be a Parsi Zarathushti in Bombay, India vs. being a Parsi Zarathushti in Houston, Texas, for example, where you are now? How is it different? How could you practice your religion there and how are you practicing it here?

JB: I was about 10 or 12 years old, and I was the only child at that time; and I was supposed to pray the full prayers every single day. If I was late in the morning in going to school, I would rather like to miss the prayer, but my parents would insist: Say your prayers and then go to school. You can miss your school, so next day you would be more prompt. I used to pray every day, even when I was young. And that practice I have continued even today. But the prayers are more now, since I have nothing else to do; and I pray for about one-and-a-half hour every day. As far as the prayers are concerned, as I told you, I had to pray every day – even when I was small and going to school. Without prayers, I was not allowed to go. My parents would not like it. So saying prayers wasn't new to me. But now that I have all the time and I can pray as much as I want, I pray for one-and-a-half hour every day and I continue the prayer. But in Bombay we had fire-temples, and on auspicious days and birthdays and all that, we used to go to the fire-temple, offer sandalwood, that was the custom of the Parsis to offer sandalwood, and a little gift – money – to the priest. But here in America there are no fire-temples and so –

JM: So you pray at home mostly.

JB: We pray at home.

JM: Do you pray regularly? Do you pray every day?

JB: Yes, I pray regularly at home, and there's no fire-temple over here in Houston - very badly -

JM: So does it bother you? Do you feel bad that your children and grandchildren in America cannot practice the religion the way you used to practice in Bombay?

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JB: Well, here. From the very childhood we were given the prayer book and we used to read from the prayer book and pray. Some of the prayers I have by heart – but here I was afraid my grandchildren would not be able to pray. I don't say you take the book and pray, you can pray by heart also. But prayer was not given that – influence. Saying a few minutes and saying a few words, that ...

JM: Hm-hm. I understand.

JB: ... prayer. Not like one-and-a-half-hour. That's why I wanted to impress upon my children to talk about our religion, about our prophet and all that. And they were good enough to sit and listen to me.

JM: Good.

JB: I say, I tell them that if somebody offers you something, you say a thank you. But God has offered you so many things – the sun, and the rain, and this, and water, and this and that, and made your life so easy and what is the way to thank God for it? Prayer. Prayer. So prayer is not something you say because you have to say it. It is a thank you to God. It is a Thank you to God for all the good things He has offered us and made our life so easy. And that's why prayer is a thank you to God and you have to pray a little.

JM: Very good, very good. OK. So Mrs. Bhadha, we've talked a lot about your childhood, your life, your married life, your moving to America and so on. Looking back on your life, you had a long and pretty happy life. What, looking back, do you think you are very proud of, you're happy about? What things would you like to do differently that you're not so happy about, if you had a chance to do. Tell us a little about your feelings in that respect, OK?

JB: Coming to America in old age, when my children said – You two are getting old, why don't you come and stay in America so we can be together. After both my children were in America because of their work; one - and another was married to a man who was working here, we wanted to be with the children. We would like to be with our children. At the same time I had my friends and relatives in Bombay. Anyway, not being in company of our children, we felt – and we moved into America and left Bombay.

JM: So you were happy that you came to America to be with your children but you are sad that you had to leave a lot of other people behind – your friends, your family, and so on. What else do you feel good about in your life; and what do you regret? What do you feel –

JB: When I was in America and mixed with my daughter, I was really surprised that they had many good qualities. Good manners – which my father used to teach me; and they were well-mannered,

JM: So you feel good about that. You are proud that your children –

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JB: Yes, how I brought up my children and they are really nice –

JM: That's something to be proud about. What else do you feel good about, looking back?

JB: I used to play violin very well.

JM: Do you still play that?

JB: I still play. Sometimes. When I feel like, I take out my old violin, and when my son-in-law is not there, I play my violin because I don't want to show him off that at this age also, I can play violin. By the way, I'm 92. But I can play violin, I do stitching, I do still embroidery and –

JM: You're happy that you can do these things.

JB: These are my favorite things and I still do them.

JM: Tell us about your regrets.

JB: I regret that I left my relatives and friends over there. When over here, I realized that I should have gone to college. I only went up to the final in school. But I didn't go to the college. So I wish that I should have gone to the college and further educated and all that. And then I could have worked somewhere and made some pocket-money.

JM: Right.

JB: I didn't learn driving, because here, my son-in-law and daughter have got cars but I can't drive it myself because I never learnt driving.

JM: So you miss the freedom, going –

JB: We had a car. We kept a chauffeur.

JM: OK. So Mrs. Bhadha, we've come almost to the end of the interview, and I'd like to ask you one last question. Looking back on your life, years from now, when your children and grandchildren listen to your interview, and even otherwise, how would you like to be remembered by them and for future generations? What do you think people will say about you?

JB: Basically, I am a gentle, kind-hearted, loving person, and my grandchildren – I love them very much, because they come to me and they talk to me and all that, in their spare time, to do all this to an old lady like me. So I talk to them and tell them that sometimes you pray to God and do that; and give them some advice how to behave and all that. That is how I do it; and I'm kind-hearted,

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JM: So that's how you – remember you that way.

JB: So the children love me too. And after I'm gone, they will know that grandmother was kind-hearted and loving.

JM: And a good loving person.

JB: Good loving person.

JM: Very good, very good. Well, thank you very much, Mrs. Bhadha. We've enjoyed interviewing you and I want to thank you for your time.

JB: Thank you. Thank you.

JM: You're welcome. (37:27)