

Interview with Mr. Dawlat Bakhairi

Interviewer: Fatima Framarz

Question: Hello and welcome, Mr. Dawlat Bakhairi. To begin, may we use your full name in the interview? If yes, what is your full name?

Answer: Dawlat Bakhairi. My first name is Dawlat, my surname is Bakhairi. As for me, I was from Afghanistan, from Hazarajat, a long time ago — no, in 59.

Question: Where were you born, and in what year?

Answer: I was born in 1962 in the English calendar. In the Persian calendar, that would be 1340. I was born in 1340 in Hazarajat, in my ancestral land, my father's land; that is where I was born and grew up. I lived there until I was 17.

Question: Which part of Hazarajat is your ancestral land?

Answer: Bamiyan Province, Punjab district, in an area called Kerman. It is a very broad place, with good freedom. In the past it was very cold; now it has become a bit warmer. It is a very good place.

Question: What do you remember about your family history?

Answer: If you ask about family history, the whole history of the Hazara people is basically history. If you talk about the conflict with the *Awgho* (Afghan), if you talk about regional disputes, all of that is history. Which part should I tell you about?

Which part do you want? What do you clearly remember and want to talk about?

Our family history is this: our family actually migrated during the time of Abdul Rahman and the rest. My grandfather, according to us, was Dowlat Hussein and Ali Hussein, migrated to Iran. Ali Hussein, who was the younger brother of them, settled in Iran. Then Dowlat Hussein, who was the older brother and had died, and my other ancestors, three brothers, along with my mother, went back to their land in Afghanistan. But in Hazarajat, other people had already taken that land, as far as the story goes. They fought and took that Hazarajat land. Originally, the place

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where we live has a region called Kerman. The settlement where we were born is on ancestral land called Qalaicha Bakhairi. This surname, Bakhairi, was given to my grandfather by people in the area. His name was actually Ghulam Hussein Karbala'i. He was a very charitable man. During Abdul Rahman's time, when many poor people had no money, bread, water, or anything, and were barefoot and so on, there were even times when he would be wandering around the fields of his land wearing his black wool coat, and if he saw someone without clothes, he would give his own clothes to that person. He would wrap his black *mašwi* or *bark* coat, and if someone was there, he would tell someone to go tell the children to bring clothes from my house. If there was no one, he would go to a place on our side called Koush, toward the settlement side. He would stand by the corner and then go and bring clothes from there. That is why people called him Ghulam Hussein Karbala'i Bakhairi. Our place became known as Qalaicha Bakhairi.

Question: Was the Bakhairi tradition from your grandfather passed on to later generations as well?

Answer: Absolutely. It continued until our fathers. Later, in that era, it had changed. He passed away, and then my grandfather Dowlat Hussein also migrated again. He came back. My fathers also came back to the land. Then again the conflict with the nomads began. There were always disputes over our region's land — a very good place, with grass, water, and a very pleasant spring climate. In winter it was icy. It used to be very cold. The nomads kept coming and fighting with them. My father was always fighting in spring in the Punjab district of Bamiyan, and in winter, when the nomads left, the fight would be carried to Kabul so he could go and continue the dispute there.

Question: What kind of work did your grandfather and father do? How did they make a living?

Answer: Their income came mostly from landholding, farming, rent, and the mills. We had three water mills. Water mills. They were fed by a stream that came through like that. One was called *asye blena*, (upper mill) one *asye miyna* (middel mill), one *asye shiyona* (lower mill). There were three mills, and all of the income came from farming, cultivation, and the mills. In one period they worked the water mills, but not anymore. Now one of the mills has been replaced by an electric mill.

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Question : They replaced the water mill with an electric mill?

Answer: Only one. Because one was equal to the other three and worked even more. But electric is faster. Back then there was no river like that... We are at the source of Kerman, where the water begins, and then that river is a very large one that goes toward Lal, then toward Farah-rud, which does not go to Iran, that river, the Helmand River. It originates from our region, a little higher up.

Question: How did courtship and marriage work in those days? How did people marry each other?

Answer: Marriage customs there were mostly arranged by the parents. In our time, when someone got married, it was basically because the parents or their relatives, like a cousin from the maternal side or paternal side, were involved. That was the custom in earlier times. The boy or girl from that side would be proposed to, they would do a engagement visit, they would call it a kinship connection there, and then they would marry. There were also matches where the girl and boy simply suited each other, and then the parents would be told “we want to get married,” but that was rare in our time. Now it is more common.

Question: Did you choose your wife yourself or was it your parents’ choice?

Answer: No, my mother was very young when she died. My mother was the senior wife of my father. My father had two wives. Then my father also died when I was 16. I stayed in the area for one year after my father. My older sister, whose child is also living there now, was named Javad. My wife was actually my paternal aunt’s daughter, and we used to go to their house often, and my older sister chose her and spoke with her. I did not stay there long. Then the People’s [communist] era came, and then conscription began. They used to take soldiers at 16–17 years old. Our area was completely free. Then I migrated, went to Pakistan, and then Iran. I did not stay long in Iran either — I stayed there two and a half years, then went back to Pakistan and got a passport, and from there Canada attracted me.

Question: If you are comfortable, please tell us the names of a few relatives, including your brothers, so we can draw a short family tree.

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Answer: Absolutely. I remember three generations, even four generations. My father's name was Ousien, and people called him Ousien Ali. My grandfather was Dowlat. After that my great-grandfather was Ali Sen, and after him Bairaqli. That is a Turkish name originally. Hazaras have also of Turkish roots, have not they?

Question: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

Answer: We are four brothers. There were many children, but many passed away. I have two sisters; one is still alive, and she is in Australia. My older sister, who was my full sister, has passed away.

Question: What do you remember about everyday life in Afghanistan — something related to social life?

Answer: In social life there were the holidays there: Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, and Nowruz, and these things, as the English say, were celebrated. My father also had many *dehqans* (peasants). There were many neighbors; tenants rented land and cultivated it. Our village now remains only with six or seven houses around us, but at that time it had 30 to 40 houses. They also celebrated Eid, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and Nowruz. There was also Muharram. Ten days of Muharram were observed in our village. Horse riding was also very common there. There was spear racing, spear throwing, horse racing, and shooting at a target with a gun. They would also aim through a ring. Horse racing was very common.

Question: We will talk about horse racing later. From the holidays you named — Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and Nowruz — which one created more excitement for children?

Answer: For children, especially Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr were the most exciting, because they got clothes, gifts, and sweets. People also visited each other's houses — their uncle's house, aunt's house, neighbors' houses. That was the custom. In winter they had evening gatherings at home. They would set up the chair, cover it with a big quilt, and gather around it. If there was a chair, they would put it near the warm stove, because there was fire, and people would sit with their feet around it, and they would tell stories.

Question: Was Muharram usually observed for ten days?

Answer: Yes, it was ten days. During those ten days the houses would share the duty — two

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houses or three houses would give a vow offering on one day. Whoever had a vowed sheep, calf, or cow would use it. On the last day of Ashura my father would slaughter a cow and prepare meat and broth. It was winter then, not summer, and in winter people would only celerated once in the day and once at night. There was no special mullah then; anyone who could, even if they recited a quatrain, would do so.

Question: In daily life in Hazarajat, what was the main routine? What did adults do? What did children do?

Answer: In spring, all the adults were busy with farming. They watered wheat, cut grass, brought fuel wood or brush, and worked in the fields. From early spring there was plowing, then watering, and then these sorts of things. Later in the year there was grass collection and more farming. The children went to school. I myself went to school for one or two or three years, not much more. The school had only recently been established under the name *Maktab* نو گوسلگو. When children got a little older, they would herd animals — take sheep, cows, or goats. Life in Hazarajat had two main elements: agriculture and animal husbandry or livestock. Especially in our area, livestock could not be kept safely because nomads came often and ate all the grass and related resources. Our place had a lot of grass, very abundant grass. I saw Jaghori — it has no grass, its mountains are stone. Bamiyan has a lot of grass, but the nomads came and consumed it. This changed after the revolution to some degree, but not entirely. In our area it is not like before.

Question: You said your village had 30 to 40 houses. How was the relationship among the families there?

Answer: Everything was shared, as people used to say in the homeland. They would say that life and death were the same thing there — everything was shared. Bread, vows, weddings, memorial ceremonies, meals, all of it was shared. People used to say, “We share the vow and share the water,” and that was how it was in that settlement. Even major funerals and weddings were shared with the surrounding villages. It was not just one village or one nearby clan; even from far away, relatives would be involved in funerals, weddings, and the like.

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Question: How was the relationship between the Hazara community and non-Hazara communities? You gave the nomads as an example.

Answer: Honestly, it was not good with them — only fighting and conflict. When they came, they caused trouble.

Question: What was the main reason for fighting?

Answer: The main reason was water and grass. They would come and leave their camels and herds, and conflict and fighting were common. The problem was also that in spring, people could not move freely because the nomads used the public route and if they met someone, they stripped them of clothes and belongings. In the early days, especially when I was young, no one could travel much in our area. In the early period under Zahir Shah and his father, people could not move freely. When the nomads came, wherever they stayed or camped, they would then move on.

Question: Were people afraid to go out because of the nomads?

Answer: They would strip people; no one could travel. Especially in our area, when spring came and they arrived, nobody used the main road.

Question: If they stripped people, could Hazaras complain anywhere?

Answer: No, even if they complained, the district governor was on the nomads' side. At that time the governor, district head, and all of them were Pashtuns. The soldiers were Uzbeks from the north; in Panjab and Yakawlang the central places had them. The whole administration was Afghan/Pashtun.

Question: If a Hazara complained to them, wouldn't they make a fair decision?

Answer: No, no! No one's word reached their ears. There was a saying among them: if someone went and made a complaint, nobody listened. Then someone would say, "You are crazy — we go and complain to them, but the commander is Afghan, the district governor is Afghan, the provincial governor is Afghan, and probably God is Afghan too." It was a way of saying you are complaining from Afghan to Afghan. No one listened; if they beat you, you were beaten; if they robbed you, you were robbed. Especially in the early Zahir Shah period. Later, in our time, things got a little better. The older men in places like Azra and Miro had a lot of conflict and

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constant fighting. People called one place Bandar, and one person was called Mir Haidar Baig Bandar. He fought with the nomads every year. On our side, toward Daykundi and Sarmil and Ashtarlai, they also kept fighting these nomads. They took positions and fired. But our area was one where the nomads had all the land and pasture, so we could not fight too much. They fought to defend their water and grass, but when spring came, they sometimes looted. They would come at night to the settlements. They had weapons and very good dogs — skilled dogs. People were afraid of both their guns and their dogs. Even when there were no thieves, they would still come in the autumn and loot some villages before leaving. Once, when I was a child, we had planted radishes, and at night they came and pulled the radishes out and took them.

Question: Which side of Afghanistan did the nomads usually come from?

Answer: They came from Peshawar. From Logar, Khost, and the warmer regions. They came via the route to Behsud. From the Kabul side, via the Oonai Pass, Behsud, and the Mullah Yaqoub Pass — that is how they came. Once they reached Oonai Pass, they split into branches; some went toward the mountain areas of Behsud and some toward Bamiyan and Yakawlang. Those coming toward us came by that route. Toward Lal in that area there was a place called Band-e Khar; there were many uncultivated places there because of heavy snow and hardship. The nomads spent three months of summer there. They themselves did not move; they left their herds and camels there. There was a lot of grass there. Or they came through Behsud. There was no other route. They spent winter in the warmer east, and came there in spring and summer. Hazarajat had the best weather, and in our area they called it a paradise for animals. We had many horses, cows, and sheep, but some poor people could not keep animals because their water and grass were consumed. Life there had two sources of income: cultivation and livestock. In some places now it is better because vaccines exist and animals can be kept more widely, but in our place animals also died.

Question: Were there special family or social ceremonies that marked important stages of life — separate activities for children, youth, and elders?

Answer: Yes, there were. One custom in our area during Nowruz was like Halloween; they called it *Kampirk*. They wore a thick coat, put flour on their faces, and blackened their eyes. A

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few others would carry a bowl or pot and go around asking people for flour and oil and such things, then they would prepare it and eat it. They called it *Kampirk*. It was exactly like Halloween here. That was how they welcomed spring. It was part of youth culture. Another custom was called *Chardeh Pal*. It was for girls. Girls would go and sit in a circle, a bowl of water would be placed in the middle, each girl would drop in her ring in turn, and a poem would be recited. When the poem was recited, the bride or girl in the circle would have a shawl placed over her head so she could not see. The bowl of water with the rings was under the veil. Then in the dark she would put her hand into the water and take out a ring, trying to see whose it was. Then they would interpret the poem. If the poem was good, the interpretation was good; if the poem was sad, the interpretation was disappointing. *Chardeh Pal* was for girls.

Question: Why was it called *Chardeh Pal*? Why not fifteen or thirteen?

Answer: They took *Chardeh Pal* from the fourteen nights of the moon. When the moon was full on the fourteenth, they called it *Chardeh Pal*. There was a joke that our area is very flat. A person from Bamiyan came and said, “This is Kerman moon,” meaning the moon in Bamiyan looks different. The moon there was not obvious, but when he came to the fourteenth night, he saw that the moon was very big and bright and said, “This is Kerman moon.” It was called *Chardeh Pal* because it was done on the fourteenth night.

Question: Was it once a month?

Answer: Not always. In winter, when people were free, they would wait for the fourteenth night to do *Chardeh Pal*. Another custom was that in weddings, young girls would dance with small movements of the knee — they called it *Pishpo*. They would spin and dance. The elders would mostly recite *amalah* during winter. In winter they would recite *Amalah* and the book *Firdawsi-e Tusi*.

Question: Was this for old men?

Answer: Yes, for old men. For young people and children, when spring came, there was a lot of work and a lot of horse riding. I do not even remember when, I was so small that I used to ride horses. Since childhood my feet did not even reach the horse’s place properly, but I was a rider.

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Question: What did you do during horse riding? Was it usually a competition?

Answer: They did spear throwing, horse racing, and shooting. There was something called *kandolu*, which they aimed at. They would make the horse run and shoot from the horse. A spear was a long stick with three prongs at the end; they used to throw that at weddings too.

Question: While the horse was running?

Answer: Yes, yes! There was no bow in our father's time. They used pistols. They fired pistols.

Question: Was it mostly competition?

Answer: Yes, it was a competition. There were bets. They used to do those spear and horse-racing events at weddings too. Weddings were mostly in spring there, because winter was snowbound. Spring and especially Tir month were when the bigger events happened, because the work had finished and people were free. In Tir month there were more gatherings. In our area there was horse racing, spear throwing, and *buzkashi*. One time it happened, one time not — I do not remember. My grandfather used to tell stories about spring, when there was so much snow there that it reached two meters. When the snow melted, in the morning they would take the horses to the top of the snow and throw spears and shoot on top of the snow.

Question: What was *kandolu*?

Answer: It was the horse running at a target; it was a marker, and they would hit it with a pistol. The horse would run and the rider would have one hand forward. Or they would shoot a sling-type target.

Question: Was there any betting or cash involved?

Answer: Yes, there was betting. There were prizes. Whoever won, the host would give them a gift.

Question: Who gave the gift?

Answer: The person who owned the gathering, the wedding or celebration host. Or if it was a gathering in our area, mostly my late father did it. When my own family hosted, there was a custom of visits. My father would saddle their horses in autumn and travel, and they knew the elder men of every major Hazara region. One night they would stay at someone's house, then

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take him and go to another house. This kind of visiting happened from Dizanagi and Kerman to Daykundi, and from Daykundi to Behsud and back to Bamiyan. It was a kind of inter-clan visiting and meeting of communities. Then with those nearby communities — and even the ones farther away — they would visit their aunt's house, cousin's house, or uncle's house during Tir month.

Question: What stories, songs, or proverbs do you remember from your parents or grandparents?

Answer: The music there was *dambura* and *ghichak*. Later, radio came and tape recorders came, and we listened to cassettes. Safdar Tavakoli was more common; later we learned that almost everything was sung by Safdar Ali and very little by Ab-e Mirza. We also had many proverbs. One was: “Kote af kad af kad, gard-e khod ra por qaf kad.” That response was about the mill — when the mill wheel turned, it spread flour around itself. I remember many such things, though it has been 43 years since I left Afghanistan. Another proverb was: “Think a thousand times, throw once.” That means think carefully before acting. It is an example from people who have said something wise. It means every word should be measured and thought through. Another saying was: “If no one is there, consult your own hat.” That means if nobody is around, at least think once by yourself, consult your own judgment and decide whether this is good or not. If someone was there, you would consult them. In those days people were very devout and, if someone consulted, they would speak with goodwill. Now that time is gone; something has changed.

Question: While you were in Afghanistan, what foods and handicrafts were common in daily life?

Answer: The food there, to start from the bottom, was *oshirk*. *Oshirk* was an omelet or *khagineh*, sometimes without onion. It was cooked in yellow butter. Then there was *siyasro liti*. *Liti* had two kinds; one kind was called *dooghi*, made with yogurt. Another was called *liti*. Then there was *alva* — white *alva* and red *alva*. Another dish was *saf roghan*, where bread was mixed with milk and butter, then softened and eaten. There was also *qorooti*. *Qorooti* is similar to *saf roghan*, but *qorooti* is made from yogurt while *saf roghan* is made from milk. In the local language they call milk *saf*, and yogurt they also call *shir*. There was red *alva*. For weddings there was rice, and *shirberinj* was rice cooked with milk. That was called *shirberinj*. If you count

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it strictly, you should call it *saf berinj*, but it was called *shir berinj*. Then there was pilaf, soup, potato *oshirk*, meat soup. Nomad meat was often cooked for Muharram vows. At weddings, rice and soup were common. In some places they also cooked rice. In those days rice was cooked less in our region because the economy was weak; rice was scarce. Soup was cooked because it was easier.

Question: What handicrafts were common among women and men?

Answer: In the years we lived there, they called it *barak* or *mashew*; that was woven and used a lot. They spun thread, made thread for *palas* rugs. They also made *namad*; they would card wool and make *namad*. That custom is not in your area; it is in Dizanagi. They used sheep's wool: they carded the wool, then put a *gilim* under it, and the *gilim* would get wrapped inside like that. Then they would wet it and press it. They would press it two or three times, and then the *gilim* became very hard. Some people dyed the wool and made flowers or used white wool. If it was black, they did not wet it there; in fact black wool and the cream-colored or yellowish sheep wool — not yellow exactly, but creamy — when they were fresh it was very red, and they called that *surkh barah* (red hair lamb); they prepared it too. One was for *namad*, one for carpet. They also made hats and socks for themselves. They made gloves too; that was women's work, and women made them. Men made carpentry, doors, and windows. There was blacksmithing. Knives and daggers and tools like that they made themselves. These were things done in winter. Because winter was a time of unemployment, people made these things then. They also made baskets for carrying grass from the valley.

Question: How did your community express its Hazara identity?

Answer: In our area, being Hazara was not very difficult. I felt these things only after I left and saw people in Kabul, in Iran, and even in Quetta becoming more intense about it. In the early years, the people of our area did not really emphasize it. Only the sayyids — the *sadat* — lived among the local people. There were very few of them. They were not troublesome, but they did cause mischief.

Question: What kind of mischief?

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Answer: They were all informants from the Safavid era onward, coming against us. Throughout history they were informants against us. Even in Abdul Rahman's time they informed on people. In those days, even in the year 98 when the Taliban came, I was in Hazarajat. Wherever the Taliban came, all of their guides were these sayyids. Otherwise, among ourselves there was much less conflict. In our area the elders used to call all of them *naghchi*; in your area you call them *mama*. Our elders referred to the whole area as *naghchi*. Because there were many things there, we lived by the flatland; we had mills, and everyone's work depended on those. In autumn especially there was a lot of rain. We would grind wheat into flour for winter. That is why they were called *naghchi*. That was a local custom there. Among the villages there were many competitions — horse competitions, running competitions, and holiday competitions. In our own village there were many such contests, and in other places too.

Question: Do you remember whether you or your family faced a specific problem because you were Hazara in Afghanistan?

Answer: Not in our own area. But in the disputes with the *kuchi* nomads when they came in spring — that conflict was always there. In the district there was fighting and quarrelling, that was the situation. They were so oppressive that we could not overpower them. When we could not overpower them, they would loot and steal, and then people would gather, or they would leave their sheep and camels there. Even in our area there was a road cutting through the middle of our lands. My fathers were stuck because of it, so they blocked that road completely. They took it over, plowed it, planted it, and turned the road into a cultivated field. Then the herds would come and graze there, eating the crops. There was nothing else to do — our area above the stream itself was under the rule of Abdul Rahman.

Question: Can you share the story of why you left Afghanistan and how you ended up in Canada?

Answer: The history is very long. I was 17 years old, just about the age for military service. That was basically the excuse. And then there was some family unrest too. My father was from Hazara elders. When the revolution happened, the children of Hazara elders were not allowed to stay. That was one reason, and then there was conscription. One could not go to Kabul; Hazarajat

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was somewhat restricted for us. Then I came to Pakistan in autumn. After my father died, there was my uncle — my older paternal uncle, the eldest of the brothers. I did not tell him much; my older sister lived a little farther from our place, and I went to her and said I was leaving. She herself told me, “I feel very unsafe; go.” There was a lot happening there. Have you heard the story of Dawood Sarkhosh? They are also from the Hazara elders. They killed 23 of them at the border — 23 people, including his father, his grandfather, his cousins, and his son-in-law.

Question: Who killed them? In which period?

Answer: In the period when the revolution began, these parties came from Iran. It was the era of the Khalq government, under Taraki. That was the Khalq period, and then there were many people in Iran; the mullahs came. Back then we did not think about these things at all, that these things existed. Iran did not accept those families. The *Sazman-e Nasr* party did not accept those families either. At first the Khalqis did not accept them either because they were looking for something else. At that time poor Hazara people were under the control of the elders. Then they lifted the poor people up and brought down the landowners and the *khans*. The *khans* did not accept that. Then the parties that came from Iran — you can see that in Iran too Hazarajat people were killing one another. There was no war where you were; here there was fighting under the names Sazman-e Nasr, Sepa, Nehzat, and the movement factions all beating each other. That was Iran’s doing. Iran did not want the *khans* — the Hazara *khans* — to find out that they had always been at the head of government. That has been the whole history of Afghanistan, going back more than 200 years. Those people had always been there. Have you seen the *Ganj-e-Bakhtar* (Treasure of Bakhtar)? They made Afghanistan’s currency stand on its feet. If that treasure had not existed, Afghanistan’s currency would have been even worse than the revolutionary period. That is what it was. Iran itself is from the Nishapur region on the other side of Afghanistan. If you look historically, the real Iran is Afghanistan. The land where Iran now sits is very little compared to Afghanistan if you remove that part. At that time Iran feared that the elders and those with land or village influence would be attacked. Many regional elders were killed. The only person who remained there and did a lot of service was someone called Wakil Akbarkhan, who was from our maternal side, from Panjab, Bamiyan. In our own side, if I speak by generation, my mother’s side was from Mirkhan, from Yakawlang, with a person named Qamar

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Agha. My father's side was Mirkamil, from Kerman itself. Then there are the Jamshed people, from whom Mazari's mother also came. From Panjab toward Behsud there is a valley called Marke, and there is a tribe from there, the Marke tribe. Some came from Kerman and bought land there; their land there was limited, so they came here. Their population increased, there were many sons and uncles, and land became scarce. The Kerman land was very far from Marke, but they took it. That is why we could not stay. There was no space; it bothered us. My late father was the village elder there, an important man and a local center figure, so I said there was no one else to stay for. My uncle was old, and I did not tell him; he was an old man, and the poor man would be heartbroken. I was young, 17 years old, just a boy — what would I know of these routes and where to go? So I left from there and went to Pakistan. From Pakistan I went to Iran, and I stayed in Iran for two and a half years. There one of our relatives, who had been taken to Iran during Abdul Rahman's time, was my father's cousin's daughter. She had lived there in Iran then. Her brothers were in Iraq. I found them at their house. In a village called Chatehgo near the Iran-Afghanistan border, *Fariman* — that was the village where I went. They showed me that the house was my father's house. It had become that way. Then I said no, it is difficult to stay here; there will be too much trouble. So, I did not stay long in Iran either. I stayed there two and a half years. It was good that our relatives worked in knitting, making jackets. I learned from them, and in Tehran I worked for six or seven or eight months. Then I came to Pakistan. I did not like Iran. I was being harassed a lot. Even then it troubled me, though not as much as later. I did not like Iran. I also sent a message to my maternal uncle. He was deeply in debt, and I told him to send his son and he himself came. When he came, he did not settle there. He did not work anymore because of that he was in debt. Twenty or thirty thousand tomans (Irani Real) was a huge amount in those days; Iranian money was very high in value. With 17 or 18 thousand tomans you could buy a car, and I gave it away. Then I worked another six months, and with two thousand dollars — which was a lot of money then — I came to Quetta. In Quetta I got a passport and a visa for Syria, Turkey, and Iran. From there I came alone to Mashhad, where my employer said he had some work and told me to come and work with him for 20 days if I needed money. I worked there for 20 days with a friend of mine who is now in America, in California; we worked together, and I received payment for that work. That is life. I worked there for 20 days, then

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came to Tehran, from Tehran to Turkey, then Syria. I stayed there four years — two years in Syria and two in Lebanon. From Lebanon, through the United Nations, we registered ourselves as refugees.

Question: Which year was it, and how did they accept migrants?

Answer: It was the year 86. We registered ourselves in Beirut, Lebanon. I stayed there for two years. There I worked; I used to go to the village and work in the orchard to cover expenses. Later I worked in a hotel. There were also children there. Hazara children from Quetta were there too — one was called Samad, another Taqi. Then in year 88, on May 19, when that passed, we came to Canada in 1988. We were accepted there through the United Nations and came to Canada. Then my brothers were still very young, my half brothers, and I sent them to Australia. One of my older sisters' health was not good, so I was always going back and forth, saying I should go back once. I wanted to go back, and we were accepted, but at that time it was only called PR. Back then it was called "Land the Immigrant"; I still have that long document with me. I did not even have a passport — I came to Canada from Lebanon with a UN passport. I still have that passport with me today. Then they gave me that, and I had to live there for three years before I could become a citizen. I had friends and companions then; in those days there was a lot of friendship and closeness, so I told my friends about it. They said, "Listen, you have suffered a lot — you endured hardship, trouble, and being a traveler. Now go. If you leave, you may be able to come back after six months, or maybe not, and then you won't be able to return. You don't even have the right to leave the country with your Travel Document and go to your own country. If you travel to another country, then your Afghanistan passport would not have allowed you to enter back then anyway. If you go now, maybe you can return, maybe not, and you may not be able to settle again. There is war, there is conflict, all your Canadian effort will be wasted. Stay now a few more years, three more years, and then take your citizenship." That was one issue. Another was that I wanted to go to Mecca for my father, but they did not give a visa. Saudi Arabia would not give a visa to someone with that foreign Travel Document. So that did not work. When both things came together, I said I had already been a traveler for about eight years, and I would stay three more years, making eleven years. After eleven and a half years I went

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back home. When I got my citizenship, I took a visa. In Canada, hardly anyone went anywhere else. Then I went to Mecca on behalf of my father and heard that my uncle had died, so instead of my uncle I performed the obligatory pilgrimage for him. In 1994 I went to Iran. Then from Iran, by the Teybad route, because revolution had happened and there was a lot of war in Kabul, we went from Teybad to Mazar, from Mazar to Bamiyan, and from Bamiyan to my area and home. It was very long, but it was youth, so it was not difficult. It felt like a trip or outing. In 1994 I went back home.

Question: When you returned, did you get married?

Answer: Yes, it did not happen before that. There were many people here, and I was the kind of person who would not wander around and was not into those things. I worked, and I also did a lot of cultural work. The mosque over there — we were the first 13 people who laid its foundation. Its name is Afghan Islamic Society Mosque. We had named it *Unity Muhammadiyah*. We built it in the years 92 and 93. At that time we rented halls — one in Warden and Eglinton, and a few other places. Then you could see that it would not work, and the population increased, so we bought this one. One of them is still there; he was from Jaghori and did business. He brought jewels and stones from Hong Kong. We used to joke with him and say, “Show us where your jewels comes from,” Engineer Janali. At that time there were no such businesspeople. We used to drive taxis.

During Muharram, from about for ten days of Muharram, if you took a taxi, you could make 400 or 500 dollars a week, and if there were seven or eight of you, you would take all the migrants and bring them so they could attend the mourning. Or the Qizilbash, or even now they do not do that much. In those days, they were basically freeloaders. We were among those who were there from the beginning. When I returned home, there was no longer that kind of company.

Financially, I did not stay there long — just three or four months — and I said I should leave and take care of my own life. I could not work there. I did not know farming, cultivation, or agriculture. I had not worked on those things when I was young. My father had hired laborers. Back then Hazarajat was full, but now it has become empty; only about 50 households were living there, and now only seven or eight households remain. Maybe four or five households are

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left from the grandchildren of the grandchildren. None of the elders remain. They have all died.

Mothers and fathers have all gone.

Question: What does being Hazara mean to you today?

Answer: Being Hazara today is an honor for me. It is the best time, and I congratulate you and the youth that this is the best time for Hazaras. I personally hold on to this idea. I have relatives in Quetta. We are not close to people there, nor are they close to us; there are my half -brothers' mother's side relatives. They were people who went to Iran and lived there, and later came to Quetta and settled. They were ashamed of being Hazara. In Iran, some of our relatives — even my father's cousin's daughter — did not call themselves Hazara; they called themselves *Khawari*. In Afghanistan's name they carry shame; we are not from Afghanistan. There they also used to oppress us, especially the Hazara people.

Iranian people?

Yes, because of that history, because they were the owners of the land, and people in the time of Karzai even said to an American general who wanted to send aid, “No, these Hazara people are the native people of this land, and they are under sanctions from the England” Karzai said that. Hazaras were sanctioned everywhere. But look at Iran: for fifty or sixty years the people from our area have lived there. If our fathers and our clans have been there for a hundred years or more, most of them are not educated at all. Look at Kabul during the twenty years of the republic — see how many scholars emerged. You see people like that and you are amazed. Up until now even in Canada and Kabul, *Hazaragi* dialect has not disappeared. Now it is the best time for Hazara people because, thank God, Mr. Mazari revived our pride. He said that being Hazara should not be shameful. There is nothing shameful about it, nothing. One thing is being Hazara, another is being Shia. If you go to meetings with Afghans, these Hazaras, if it suits them, pray with open hands; if not, they do not. The Qizilbash and the Heratis are Shia too, and they pray with hands folded. I once had two brothers from Herat with me in Lebanon. I joked with them and said we are all free people. A person should practice *taqiyya* about religion and pray with folded hands behind others. That is it. Hazaras have enough courage that the Qizilbash and Afghans could not say things to them face to face, but who said it? Our own people. That is what

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Hazara means. In Pakistan they used a word and called us *Awghoostani*. They said that to me a few times there.

Question: What stories and traditions do you hope Hazara youth preserve in the future?

Answer: Hazara youth should work hard. There is one thing scholars have said: rights are not given, they are taken. That is first. Second, whatever you lose with difficulty, you must regain with difficulty. Hazara people have lost everything through hardship. All of this — the war of Abdul Rahman, the massacres, the nomad wars, and so on — was a project. They always wanted to stop these people from moving forward. That is still the case today. Another thing is that young people should study very well. Learning is the best thing. Education and knowledge are what move a person forward. In our time, school was seen almost like a sorrow. My neighbors and farmers — my uncle's son is now in Iran — when we were children, we did not go to school because we were hosting some guest, but they went. The teachers came, one named Hasan. They said, "Hasan, tell us how many children are fit to go to school." He was very young. They said there were 12 children in the line. Twelve children of farmers and neighbors, some of them shepherds. In winter I still remember their sorrow. The children did not even speak. They said to us, "If you go to school, it's because you have land, you have mills to provide yourselves, so why should we send our children to school?" For us, going to school was sorrowful. My late father was a very religious man. Otherwise, he could have taken money from them and gotten his children out of that situation, but at that time I was still very young — about ten years old. 2500 afghani at that time was the price of two cows. Think about it — it was 1351. He spent 2500 afghani from his own pocket and said, "Cross out their names." Everyone was willing to move out of the village — neighbors and farmers — and we were people who migrated in order to stay. How could we send our children to school? Who would be a shepherd or laborer then? In my time they used to tell me not to send my children to school because they would become unbelievers. Now there is a light for you, and you young people must work hard. The time is now. Thank God, it is something to be proud of that we can speak with pride and say we are worthy. Hazara children and the Hazara generation are accepted everywhere in the world. I work in government offices here in Canada too. Even one of my Indian friends told me that people

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from Afghanistan come in two types: one type is like you — very good, honest, hard-working, and completely not thieves. I told him that if I say that, it would not be good for you. His grandfather was also old. This was about 20 years ago when we were in taxi work. I told him to go ask his father or grandfather who the leaders of this region were. He asked, and they said, yes, this person is like that. His grandfather said, “Are they Hazara?” He said yes. His grandfather said, “Then these are the people who used to administrate the region.” They ran the administration there. If you look at India’s history, they used to call them *Khorshid Najat* from one perspective. They brought peace and justice. India had very bad class inequality; if someone was poor, they oppressed him. They took everything. There was no place. Another thing is that there were many Hindus and Buddhists there; they used to call him “the child of God.” Then when they asked, “Are they Hazara?” they said yes. He said, “Then these are the people from those lands.” If you read Afghan history, the Koshani and all that, everything that exists in the land, even the scholars — I have an Afghan friend, and I told him that since you came to power in Afghanistan, Afghan scholars have dried up. Before that, al-Farabi, Mawlawi, Abu Ali Sina, and all of them were from that era. But when technology and science came and people turned to science, the unfortunate ones remained behind. Especially in our Hazara region, those Afghans who were there had one problem: they fought among themselves and called each other shepherds. In the province and district, the powerful ones were called shepherds. They would say, “You are shepherds.” No one accepted them as anything higher than shepherds. When I came abroad, I saw that here too, that shepherd-status and those problems of Afghanistan, everything about Afghanistan, came from those people. There was no one else. Now if you tell Hazara people, you should stand up. Try to become well educated first. Very well educated. I used to give an example back home. I would say, “Send your daughters to school.” Even if there is any gain, if they go to school, they become educated, they study, and their value increases. This is how I used to speak to my people. It was in the years 90, 95, and 96. I went once in 95, and once in 98, when I first worked there — that was still the first time. Later, in 2005, I would tell them to study, and all the small and big girls would go to school. The good thing was that neighbors and farmers did not say, “We won’t buy land so you can send her to school.” Everyone

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was studying. That was good. Now you have to pass that on to the new generation and tell them to try.

We worked very hard; it was in our blood. We even tried to say that whatever work you do, do it in your own place, not for someone else. The answer I got was that because I fought so much with the nomads, I do not like working with Afghans. But we were neighbors, side by side. Outside, there were not many big Hazara people. Only in Quetta. Not even in Iran. Later their children went. They themselves had not gone. Even here, the elders and the educated people had not come. Only the people who were under pressure fled and came. I said, yes, we were neighbors, side by side. I told that person a few months ago, “How are your side-by-side neighbors?” He laughed and said, “Yes, we understand.” During those three or four years up to 1996, we built three things here: the Afghan Islamic Society, the Hazara Culture Society, and Bamiyan Corporation — a business space, so that friends and relatives could put in their money and work on it.

We went to collect rent for a place we had rented for the Hazara Culture Society. A man with a beard asked, “Has your community not closed?” I said, “That is not our community; it belongs to your future and to your children. Tomorrow you will have children here too. Even if you do not have a wife or children now, if you die tomorrow, your children must learn this Hazara culture, learn their identity; this does not belong only to us.” We Hazara people have a problem: we do not think very far ahead. Otherwise, in places like Jaghori or all of Hazarajat, during the revolution it was completely free and could have formed a government. But there was no one at the top. Who was there? Four mullahs. And if only they had been educated mullahs. None of them had full education. I studied a lot before the mullahs. If one had complete education — some of those firebrand ones who studied both school and madrasa — by God, they would be like those people in Australia now. But that was not the case then. If it had been, Hazarajat would have been free in 1357, when the revolution happened. In autumn 1357, in a place that had once been a major government center, representatives from 28 districts gathered and held a meeting. Even people from Safi on the northern side came. They formed the Council of Accord. Representatives came from 28 districts; from the north, Ghazni, Behsud, Hazarajat, Dihzangi,

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Daykundi — everyone came. There was nothing in the heads of those people. The fate of those people was in the hands of the Iranians; the Iranians were saying, “Fight among yourselves.” They bombed houses; most homes were destroyed. Sarvar Khan Shahi had a thouse like a palace. No matter how much he went there, at night he would stay there, and his house was open, with horses standing in the stable and cows in the stable eating grass. They killed that poor man. They killed many of the elders. The only ones who remained were those whose clans stood behind them and did not strike them. In the fight over the Council of Accord, there was no government, no leadership; otherwise, Mr. Mazari himself said in his speech that we could declare a government in Bamiyan. You do not accept us in Kabul, nor in Peshawar.

Question: What makes you hopeful about the future of Hazaras, and what makes you disappointed?

Answer: Well, what gives hope is education, schooling, understanding, and knowledge. The only thing that moves a person forward is knowledge. Science moves you forward, that is one. The second good thing, which I see now, is that Shi’a, Sunni, and Ismaili have all become united. Hazaras! Ismailis were in our regions; people would not even shake hands with them, as if touching them would make them dirty. The difference between Shi’a and Sunni was that big. It was the same with Afghans. You had no family relations with Afghans; you did not share bread and salt with them. That was the problem. There were no Sunni Hazaras in our region, only in the north, but Ismailis were in Bamiyan. They were in Shibar, in Behsud, in our very nearby region too — people had been there and later migrated. What gives me hope is education, understanding, and unity. You should be even better to me than I am to you, and even better with Ismailis and Sunnis.

May God have mercy on Wakil Akbar Khan; he was one of our clan leaders. He was the elder and the great man of the area. If you look at history, those were the men who reached those positions. His grandfather had been in Kabul’s prison under Abdul Rahman. He was taken to a household when he had been eight years old. He was brought into a house as a servant. There he grew up, worked in a stone-cutting factory, and as he got older — around 20 or 27 years old — he came and took his father’s land. Later his son became a wakil (parliament representative). He

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was a *khan*. We went to his house. The conversation turned to school again. Now about Sunnis and Ismailis: the Ismailis were with us, and we did not accept them then. But Sunnis were not in that area; they were in Sheikh Ali, Parwan, and Baghlan. This was something important he said about schools. In our area, Wakil Akbar Khan brought three schools here: a middle school, a boarding school, and a grade 12 class. Grade 12 existed everywhere, but he brought the boarding school to Panjāb, where they also provided water, bread, and shelter. He asked that these schools be established so people could study and become educated. Now, if in Kabul or anywhere else someone bothers you, if someone bothers a porter, he has to work very hard; if someone bothers a porter, he raises his hand against that portage. These people should study and go; we have seen a lot of hardship in the offices of Zahir Shah and Nader Shah, and they insulted me a lot. Let them go there and study, become generals, teachers, headmasters, professors, anything. Let them go there and be troubled, and then stand up for themselves. What years did he say this? In 53. In 53 he said that. He brought those schools in 35 and 38, when I had not yet been born. What he meant was that they should go and study there and face hardship so they can stand on their own. If schools do not accept them as teachers, do not accept them as generals, do not accept them as professors, do not accept them as ministers or prime ministers, then they should stand up. That man said this. He was not highly educated; he had only studied up to grade 12, and there was no university in Afghanistan then. The result of that interview came from Sunnis of the region, from a Hazara in Parwan, from an engineer from Jaghori who built bridges, and from Siraajuddin Badakhshi. Two of the were accepted for military service by the Tajiks, or the Tajiks themselves said they were Tajiks. Siraajuddin Badakhshi was a professor, and he was removed from the university. He stood firm and became one. Another person, now deceased, had connections with Karzai and with the current officials. He was in Karzai's assembly, along with Marshal Fahim and Mohqqeq. I forget the person's name. They said he had merit. Marshal Fahim said, "Appoint him as minister of planning through you." Then they said that this ministry was a quota for the ethnic group, and that it belonged to Hazaras. They said, "Look, he is a Hazara," and then Mohqqeq said there was no problem because he himself was a Hazara. So they appointed him to the Ministry of Planning. From that time, those Sunnis who had risen up had all risen. I was very young in 1953 when I went on horseback with my father. Most of our clan was

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in Panjāb, in the district where my maternal uncle and other relatives, Wakil Akbar Khan and others, were located. Think about it — the point he made was that if someone bothers a porter, that porter will work very hard. But if someone enters a university and is troubled there, he will definitely become something — maybe a general, maybe a minister, maybe an official — and then he will stand up. What years did he say this in Pakistan, when they fled there? We came from Iran later when I wanted to get a passport. Many of the elders had fled because of the Sazman-e Nasr and other groups that had spread in Pakistan. Wakil Akbar Khan was there. We used to visit him and sit and talk. What he said was that people should go and study.

There is another story: a friend named Yousefi, with whom I was very close, said that they took a group of Chinese to Jaghori to help them. They called him one of the foreigners. In the end, I myself got into a disagreement with him because he left the Chinese person alone, so that the thing we had with the Chinese government to help us would stop. Look at the sacrifice. Yousefi himself said that for six months he did not let me sleep because of back pain. He said that before starting, that Chinese man told Yousefi to first do one thing: educate these people so they understand. Education is a good thing. Literacy! When people are literate, they understand their own work. One of the elders, Mir Mamadali Beg, said this. During the revolutionary period from Kabul, weapons were being brought to Hazarajat, and the mullahs were told not to cooperate with us; if you take one day, it will later hurt you. There will be war; this is Afghanistan. That poor man was killed by his own people because he brought weapons from the communists to them. All the problems of Hazara people are illiteracy, backwardness, and misery. They looked at us as if it should be that way. At that time that was how they looked at us. Even now, we have tried to deal with the issue of literacy from Canada. We had two Japanese journalists, and we sent the Japanese with them to Hazarajat. They said the first thing for a society's progress — the Japanese are working with us on this — is electricity. They said you do not have science, and you do not have electricity here. He went to Behsud, to the Mullah Yaqoub Pass, and there is a narrow valley there. The Helmand River water is very abundant there. He said to build a hydroelectric dam there, and that he would bring money from Japan. One of them was called Sheikh Zahedi from Ghazni. They brought him in front of the Ghazni dam and said that if this place does not work, do not build it there. Then in the end that good man — he was a mullah —

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said there is a saying in Hazarajat: “Stone on stone, what you hit, the result is nothing.” No matter what he said, this place is a dam site, this place will produce electricity, this water is very useful, it will not benefit you to do it here; Ghazni is the gateway to Hazarajat, build a place in the middle of Hazarajat so electricity reaches all Hazara regions. What did he do? He tried, took the cost, and went to Pakistan himself. He wrote in his letter that as long as there is no government in Afghanistan, nothing useful will happen. Then Japan did not continue that. The Japanese were working with us on it, but they did not do it. These problems of our people — especially the younger generation — should be addressed by going like the mullahs to other countries, getting help from international organizations, working together everywhere. I was in Hazarajat in 1998 when the Taliban came to Panjāb. If the Kabul roads had not been blocked, they would have completely destroyed it. Even before reaching Panjāb, they were fighting and clashing with people in the district and holding meetings about what to do. Think about it — they came from Yakawlang to Panjāb and completely changed their clothes into someone else’s, dressed like the market people.

Now, if you look at Hazara politics today, the biggest mistake was made by Khalili and Mohqqeq. They did not connect with the world. Their only relationship was with Iran. Iran is our enemy. Young people should understand that Iran absolutely does not want Hazaras to come to power. They accept Afghans as Sunni, because they are from the same race. They do not accept Hazaras. They have no relations with anyone except Iran. If you look at the war maps, in Kabul, Sayyaf took Sunni Hazaras into war, and Jamiat did too. Hizb-e Islami had less of a role. Harakat, whose leader was Sheikh Asif, was also Hazara. In Iran too, everything was dragging Hazaras into war. Even Khamenei wrote a book about these things — about the war in Iraq, how it was stopped, how Iran was much bigger than Iraq, with a larger population. In the book Khamenei wrote about Iran’s Hazaras, who are called foreigners, and also later he said something about the Turks. It was this Turk force and the Khawari people who stopped him from saying, “You do not accept us, so why do you fight?” This was the Iraq war — they accepted the ceasefire because of that. But now you must try! This is the age of advanced technology; you must work and behave with the whole world. The best future, the best position for Hazaras, is in the hands of your young people, because even in Europe Hazaras are accepted. In Australia, even

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more so... one criminal told me that your people have more credit with the Australian government than gold and diamonds. He was right. Besides some things we hear. You saw that one man from the Durrani tribe was not even there; it was a Safi who was beaten during Abdul Rahman's time, and look at what they said there.¹

Question: What message do you have that you want other Canadians to know about Hazara history and culture?

Answer: Now people know Hazaras everywhere. They know us. In British Columbia, I took my daughters to school, and within six months they were fully settled in. There the principal said there are two kinds of people from Afghanistan: one is you, who are completely familiar with gold-related things and do not have any problems; the other is different. People here know us. The best way for you young people, wherever you live, is simply to build your life within this society. Follow the law of whatever government you are in. Don't act like Afghans do. These Tajiks and Afghans, by God, cannot even sit still together in one room. In old times, whenever we went to gatherings of these Afghans and Tajiks, there was always fighting, always beating. I never went to a concert until I went to Dawood Sarkhosh's concert in Melbourne. I was in Melbourne and attended that concert. Even at his concerts there was fighting; these people do not even have the patience for public life, coexistence, or ordinary living. Neither the Pashtuns have it, nor the Tajiks. But the Hazara people do. The Hazara people are the ones who can do that.

A Kabuli woman told them in a mosque, "In Kabul, you would not hire Hazaras as laborers, and now one of them became the mosque chairman. Think about it — the mosque itself was built by Hazaras. That woman was from one of the other ethnic groups and said, 'What are you saying, dear? It is not just the Hazara chairman — all the expenses for this are paid by Hazaras.' Now the mosque spends its own money. Hazaras pay for it. In those days we were paying for everything ourselves. She said all the mosque's expenses are paid by these Hazaras, and you are on welfare." May God not let these people go free, especially these Qizilbash. They are such foolish people. They do not say these things to our faces; only that one woman said it in the mosque. In Australia it is good because Hazaras are concentrated there, and the whole market is

¹ A report prepared by a group of Pashtuns living in Australia claiming that Hazaras have not been subjected to persecution in Afghanistan and therefore should not be accepted as refugees in Australia.

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theirs. There was a boy from Ghazni named Abdullah. He opened a shop, but it did not work out. Afghans do not come to his shop. Hazaras were few, so he left it.

Question: Is there something I have not asked that you would like to add?

Answer: If you ask about the clans, this is the thing that matters for you young generation: you must work hard and make your future, and yourself, matter. For any human being, anywhere in the world, two things are very important. One is self-respect; the other is history. Do not forget your roots. Because an animal is an animal: in the morning it goes out and, if it ate good grass the day before, it goes back there again. Human beings are also like that. When you forget your history, you forget your life. The second important thing is that a person, wherever they are, whether in good or bad times, should not lose themselves. If you lose yourself, you lose even in good times, and in bad times too. Here, in these countries, some people from Africa or from Iran or from elsewhere come, and by God, if you look at them you are amazed. You see men in their sixties or seventies who have their backs straight and carry themselves with dignity. Or women with four or five children — look at how they dress. If you say these people are truly capable of having all these things, yes, maybe up to the age of thirty or thirty-five. After that, no. One thing is money. In Abdul Rahman's time, in Hazarajat, people could not even find wheat bread to eat. They were very thin, barefoot, and had no clothes. In winter, in our mountains, people froze in the snow — completely barefoot and stripped of everything, with no clothes. They had no money either. At that time, even these clothes that now appear in bargain sales would have been good enough. Back then there was no such cloth or things like that. My first clothes were made of *tafteh*. You wore tafteh, or maybe *karbas* — I don't remember exactly, I mean tafteh. We wore tafteh. Then cotton came, and *shari* came, and then more and more, and *strij* arrived. Try to make this your outlook. There is a saying from home: a person anywhere in the world should buy according to the day's price. Now that you live in Canada, you should respect the law of this country and everything about it, because this country is your country tomorrow. It is true that you and people like you work for the future of your community and your people, and that is good; it helps. I did not know much then. When we first arrived, I did not know English at all, or only very little. I had not studied much. I learned practical things very quickly, almost like lightning. In Lebanon there was a boy who had lived there for five or six years and still could not speak

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Arabic as well as I could after just six months there. When I arrived here, after six months Migration took me through. I was not given money because they said I had lied, that I knew English. I learned English very quickly here. I said no, I did not know it. I had worked in jacket-making in Iran; I knew that. Then I found a weaving factory there and got work. Working hard is good everywhere. But investment and some other things now occupy many people's minds too much. In our generation, there was not much investment. Now there is investment and calculation. That was not the case before; now it is much more common.

Thank you very much!