

Interview with Ms. Guljaan Adil

Interviewer: Fatima Framarz

Question: Hello Ms. Adil! Welcome. Can we start with your name and surname?

Answer: Thank you. My name is Guljaan, and my surname is Adel.

Question: Where were you born in Afghanistan, and in what year, if you are comfortable sharing?

Answer: I was born in Bamiyan, but I do not know the exact year. My birthday, according to my official documents, is September 20, 1959. Whether that is correct or not, people back then were never told the exact date of birth. You know that in Hazara history, there was no such thing as this sort of record.

Question: Do you remember anything about your family history? Any traditions or cultural practices passed from your mother or grandmother that you still follow?

Answer: My grandmother lived her whole life in the homeland¹ (Bamiyan). It was mostly traditional things — I remember rugs, saddlebags, and things like that. Those kinds of things. I do not really know much else.

Question: What did your father and mother do in Afghanistan? How did they make a living? Was it farming? Livestock?

Answer: My father was in Kabul, Afghanistan. My mother was from the homeland, from the village area in Bamiyan. I was only one year old when my mother passed away.

Question: And what did your father do? How did he provide food and expenses for you?

Answer: He was in Afghanistan, in Kabul. I do not know what work he did. I was in the homeland, and I was still very small then.

¹ It's common among Hazaras to refer to their hometown as their homeland.

Question: Did anyone ever tell you how your parents met and married?

Answer: No. You know how things were back then: people would go to ask for girls' hands in marriage, the fathers and mothers would go, and they would arrange a proposal. If they liked a girl, if she suited their village or family, they would go and ask for her hand and bring her to their son. Back then, a person was not allowed to simply look around and choose someone for themselves.

Question: Did your father choose Mr. Adel for you, or did you choose him yourself? How did you meet?

Answer: Mr. Adie was chosen for me by his family. We were close, and in Afghanistan, in Kabul, we were relatives too. The proposal came from his family.

Question: Can you tell us a little about the wedding? About the engagement, and the wedding ceremony?

Answer: No, we did not even have an engagement ceremony. We had a very simple wedding.

Question: Was that simple wedding held at home?

Answer: Yes, at home. Someone would cook a little food, a little rice, a little meat on the side, invite a few people, and that was it — they would eat, drink tea, and it was over.

Question: Did you have a henna night and a wedding feast the next day, or not?

Answer: No, no henna night. We had only one wedding day, and that was all. Because of the economy, families did not have that much money at that time.

Question: What do you remember most about daily life in Afghanistan? What did you do after marriage?

Answer: After marriage, my husband worked, and his salary was good. He was an engineer, educated, and his income was good. I stayed at home as a housewife.

Question: How many children do you have?

Answer: Children belong to God — I have six.

Question: While you were in Kabul, which ceremonies and celebrations did people take seriously?

Answer: We celebrated Eid, we celebrated Nowruz, and we also made Mawlud-e- Sharif in our homes and shared it with family and relatives. Those were the things we did.

Question: Which of those was most exciting for the family and especially for children?

Answer: Nowruz was the one when we would go out and walk around the hill. Eid was also exciting. When we were younger, we would put henna on our hands, play, and spend time. Those kinds of things.

Question: Was there a dispute in Kabul over Eid al-Fitr, where Sunnis celebrated one day earlier than Shia? Did that happen in your time?

Answer: I do not remember. I do not know.

Question: Later, when we were in Kabul, Sunnis always celebrated one day earlier and Shia one day later.

Answer: I do not remember. So many things are no longer in my memory.

Question: How was Muharram celebrated in Kabul at that time?

Answer: We celebrated Muharram. Because it was a major occasion, we made a sweet **shola** and shared it among families on Ashura day. We respected Muharram, but we did not do anything elaborate. In our homes, families would make shola — sweet shola or meat shola, or any kind of food — or halva, and then share it between households in the neighborhood.

Question: And for Nowruz, did people go out to the hills or perhaps to Mazar for the Red Flower festival? Was that common?

Answer: No, we did not go there, honestly. We did not go to Mazar. We went to Sakhi² for the Nowruz celebration.

Question: What was your relationship with your own community like? And your relation with other Hazaras?³ What about non-Hazaras? Was it close or hostile?

Answer: We were not that close to other Hazaras. In Bamiyan, we lived in a small village, maybe 20 or 30 households. There were not many Hazaras around us; everyone was from our own people. In Kabul too, we did not have much contact with others.

Question: What was your relationship with your relatives like? Who supported whom? In what matters did relatives help? How did you support them?

Answer: Support? Everyone was busy with their own problems, so no one really...

Question: Earlier, the person I interviewed told me that if someone died, even if the family was poor, relatives would gather for the funeral, burial, and fateha (memorial ceremony) and contribute money so the ceremony could be held respectfully.

Answer: Yes, that is true. They did that, yes. That is our custom. Even now we still have these customs: when a person from a family dies, all the family and close relatives gather. The family is supported for two days, until the body is buried and the fateha is held. For a few days afterward, we give food to the mourner family and stay together.

Question: How common was help in weddings? What kinds of gifts were normal for the bride and groom?

Answer: Everyone brought something according to their financial ability and means for the bride and groom.

Question: Do you remember any Hazara story or proverb?

² The Blue Mosque, also known as the Sakhi Shah Shah-e-Mardan Shrine or Ziyarat Sakhi is a mosque and shrine complex in Carte Sakhi area of Kabul.

³ Mrs. Adel belongs to the Ismaili community, which has been marginalized for many years in Afghanistan.

Answer: No, I remember nothing.

Question: What foods were common, and what did the family usually eat every day?

Answer: In Afghanistan, or in Bamiyan? Kabul and Bamiyan? In Bamiyan, we usually made food from flour, whatever we had. Things like **kaachi**, **daldah**, milk, and livestock products. There was animal husbandry, yes. There was milk, yogurt, butter, and similar rural foods.

Question: And in Kabul, what was usually eaten?

Answer: In Kabul, common foods were rice, potato qorma, or some kind of shola — whatever a family could afford, they cooked it.

Question: What kinds of handicrafts did you have?

Answer: In Kabul we would knit jackets, or bring in rented yarn and knit them. Or we ourselves would go and get wool from the banks of the Kabul River, wash it, give it to someone to spin, and then later take it back and turn it into jackets. Wool jackets, **chuqi** jackets — those were very fashionable at the time. When the Russians came, they bought many jackets. Russians bought them; they were among the people who had shops, and then they would buy from us and trade with us. Those were the things. There was also embroidery, tailoring, sewing table covers, socks, and all kinds of things. That was the handicraft work.

Question: Were the things you named made for personal use or for sale?

Answer: For personal use, mostly at home. We did not have much else.

Question: While you were in Kabul, of course your neighbors were from many different groups, right? Among Hazaras there are Ismailis, Twelver Shi‘as, and Sunnis, though the Sunnis have become closer to the Shi‘a people in recent years, I do not know how it was then. Then there are Tajik, Pashtun, Uzbek neighbors, and other people. I lived in Dasht-e Barchi, where there were many Qizilbash and Bayat families. In that environment, how did you show that you were Hazara? Apart from appearance and physical features, how did people know they were Hazaras?

Answer: As I said, in our homeland in Afghanistan — in Bamyan — we usually lived in one area and everyone was from our own people. That was all. Even if there were a few others, we did not have dealings with them. Sometimes we were insulted not for being Hazara, but because of religion or sect specifically, but we were insulted.

Question: What did they say?

Answer: They insulted us, as people do. For example, some Hazaras themselves would say these people are **ghali** or things like that.

Question: This is a very important question: as a Hazara and as an Ismaili Hazara, what problems did you face?

Answer: As an Ismaili Hazara — I myself am Ismaili. These were the problems: people simply did not like us.

Question: How did they show that they did not like you?

Answer: Because of our religion and sect, people insulted us and said things like, “This one is Ismaili,” and similar things.

Question: Please tell us if you are comfortable.

Answer: No, I already said those things to you.

Question: We want to hear what they said, so we can record it for the future, for your children and grandchildren, because we do not want those events to happen to them.

Answer: Well, we were not comfortable because of the insults. We were not comfortable because of our religion, and we were not comfortable because we were Hazara. Wherever we went, for example on the bus, we were insulted. “Hazaras are like this,” “Hazaras are like that.” They called us **moosh khor** [mouse-eaters], you know that. Because of religion, they also said what I told you: that these people are ghali and are such-and-such.

Question: What did they mean by ghali? What does it mean?

Answer: Ghali means, I do not know exactly. I do not know what it meant. It was just a label.

Question: Were there also things like not being allowed into the mosque or other such restrictions?

Answer: The mosque? I do not really remember those things. Maybe. There were many problems. There were many issues around religion and sect.

Question: Can you tell us why and how you left Afghanistan?

Answer: Why? Because when we left Afghanistan, there was so much unrest. First there was war between Hazaras and **Awghus** (Afghans), war between Hazaras and Panjshiris, then the mujahideen arrived. Even with the mujahideen, Hazaras were still harmed in every way. In our own case, every day when we woke up, we saw cars packed all around us and people leaving. And we had five children; my daughter was born in Pakistan. I fled because I was afraid that my children might be killed, God forbid, or something bad might happen to them. That is why we left for Pakistan. There was war; people fought in our streets every day and people were killed. Many of our relatives and friends were killed in our neighborhood.

Question: Where in Kabul did you live?

Answer: We lived in Taimani, Chaman-e Babrak.

Question: During that war, who was killing your relatives and others?

Answer: That war was between Hazaras and Awghus, between Panjshiris and Hazaras — those conflicts where people were attacking each other one by one.

Question: But those are soldiers fighting soldiers. What did they have to do with unarmed people in the neighborhood?

Answer: They would come and attack. Or the men would all take positions in the street to protect their families. They stayed in the streets all night until morning, taking defensive positions.

Question: Was the road from Kabul to Pakistan easy or difficult?

Answer: No, it was not easy. When we went to Pakistan, we went by plane. Because Hazaras were being arrested; they would arrest Hazaras on the road if they saw them.

Question: And what would they do if they arrested someone?

Answer: They would either take them away or put them in military service or tie them up. That is what they did.

Question: Who was most commonly said to arrest Hazaras? Was it Hekmatyar? Sayyaf? Who?

Answer: It was Sayyaf, Panjshiris too, and Awghus. All of them arrested people.

Question: Did it ever happen that someone was arrested and outright killed?

Answer: Yes, it happened. Why would it not happen? Once, we ourselves went toward Mazar (the capital city of Balkh currently) when things became very unstable in Afghanistan. We went to Mazar. In Mazar, some of our young relatives were pulled down from the bus and arrested. They were arrested, and one of my uncle's grandsons was with us too and was also arrested. Then everyone collected money and gave it to the driver, and the driver left, rescuing them from the people who had arrested them. They were freed by paying money. That was the purpose: to take money from them.

Question: So it was good that you were able to leave by paying money.

Answer: Yes, it was good. We collected money, gave it to the driver, and he freed them. Then we went back to Mazar.

Question: How long did you stay in Pakistan?

Answer: Three years.

Question: What was life like during those three years? In Kabul you said Mr. Adel was an engineer and had a good job. What was life like there?

Answer: Life there was good. It was a normal life. We got by.

Question: Did you migrate to Canada through the United Nations?

Answer: We came through the Ismaili Committee.

Question: Naturally, people who come through the Ismaili Committee face a lot of hardship along the migration route. Some people are very religious, and their faith in God or the Imam helps them endure hardship. How much did your faith help you through the difficulties? Did you often rely on God or the Imam?

Answer: Yes, with trust in God we endured the hardship. Everyone in Afghanistan went through such hardship.

Question: What does being Hazara mean to you today? How do you feel when you say someone is Hazara?

Answer: Being Hazara is a great source of pride for me. Because Hazaras are a very honorable people, full of effort and courage. They never beg; they always find a way to survive. They become porters, work in any kind of job, and never stretch out their hands before anyone. Isn't that something to be proud of?

Question: Are Hazaras in Canada also like that? Hardworking?

Answer: Yes, they are. Absolutely. We are all proud of being Hazara.

Question: This story we are recording is for future generations of Hazaras. For example, your grandchildren, who are born here and grow up here — what Hazara cultural values and traditions would you want them to preserve?

Answer: We want this culture and **culture** we have — for example Eid, Nowruz, and whatever else we have — we should make an effort so these things become part of the future generation.

Question: What worries you about the younger generation, the Hazara young people, including your relatives? What gives you hope, and what makes you anxious?

Answer: There are many worries. Because this is a free country, and young people are happy to be free and do what they want, those things make us uneasy. What makes me happy is when a person raises a good and righteous child, no matter where they are — in Canada or anywhere else in the world — a child should be good, upright, and on the right path. Those are the important things.

Question: What message do you have for the future Hazara generation? What do you want from them?

Answer: My message is that our children should continue our Hazara culture and customs.

Question: What do you emphasize most — the hard work you mentioned, the festivals, and the other ceremonies?

Answer: Ceremonies such as Eid, Nowruz, Ashura — whatever they are, they should not disappear. Whatever we have now in this generation, our children should continue it. For example, fateha gatherings — we hold fateha, any ceremony we have. These things must continue from generation to generation.

Question: What is your message to other Canadians, those who are not Hazaras?

Answer: My message to them is that they should also keep their own culture and customs, and be good to Hazaras and friendly with them. Here in Canada, all of us together, this is our home. Everyone — whether Black or white, Afghan or Hazara — we are all one here. Everyone should be united and friendly with one another.

Question: Is there anything on your mind that you wanted to talk about, but that I did not ask?

Answer: No, I do not think there is anything left.

Thank you very much.