

Interviewed 27th Feb. 2023, London, UK

My grandfather worked in gold. He used to bring Palestinian gold from Baghdad. We used to have lots. My mother used to say there was so much gold it was difficult to gather it. They used to sweep it in a corner and cover it in a cloth. He was a gold trader and a landowner. When he died, there was nothing. My uncle had nothing. One of my uncle's had something. My father had nothing. He worked. We had land. We worked hard and built ourself up. In 1960 we moved to Kabul. We had a shop in mandawi between Hazar Gul and Afghan Saray. We had the biggest shop. It was two floors. We used to work in textiles. In 1992 when we left. Life changed completely. We lived in India. I went back to Kabul for 6 months in 1993. In 1994 I moved back to India after saray shazada was burning. I spent four months in Jalalabad then moved to Pakistan. I worked in Pakistan for 2 months. I made good money 60,000 rupees moving crockery and hing [asafoetida] between Karkhano market [Peshawar] and Lahore. I used to travel overnight and take the stuff to the gurwara in Lahore where traders would but it from me. In Peshawar I used to stay in the gurdwara. My parents tracked me down in Peshawar, in Jogir Singh Gurdwara. I spoke to them. They said its your sister's wedding, come to Delhi. I got there in February 1994, two weeks before the wedding. I spent 6 years in India and then came to London. The problem in India was the visa. It wasn't possible to live there. I reached London on 1st December 1999. I started work and have now achieved something. That was my aim. Now life is going on. I came alone and then 6 months later my wife and daughter came. I have one daughter born in India and one in London. In 2003 I bought a shop. Before that I worked in shop owned by an Afghan. For six months I worked in off license. I also worked in pizza shop. Now God gives us everything. The Afghan I worked for was a famous trader in textile. The cloths he sold were from London and were advertised in the TV. The shop of Hamayun Sakhi was in New City of Kabul. He had a shop here and I worked for him for three years.

We were the biggest family in Jebul Seraj. They were four brothers and we had four houses It was a very good house. There were four houses. We had a lake. There was a mullah and a mosque. The mullah asked my grandfather to hand over the lake so it could be used for ablutions. My grandfather donated it. His name was Karan Singh. It was a big lake. There was a big plane tree and between cement factory. It still belongs to us but we haven't claimed it. It is impossible to go there. Money can be made but peace is hard.

First we went to Charikar. In Charikar the Sikhs used our house to prayer in. Everyone came to our house. We did trade in Charikar. We had a house and a shop in ishqabad. Now we don't have anything. In Kabul we still have a shop. Other things we sold. We came here and built things here.

My brother moved to Tashkent in 1994 and stayed there until 1997. Fron India they went to Tashkent. After three years they left. 240,000 USD was stolen from them there. We came back to India. Nothing worked there and we came to London.

My uncle's daughter lives in Dubai and has done for 35 years. They have good business. They move goods from Dubai to Afghanistan. They sell gurj abreshmi and kripnak [cloth]. They supply these to Afghanistan and Iran. The goods go to Dubai from Japan. Then it is sent to Kabul. Its not opened just goes straight. Nowadays the business is slow due to the Taliban. [They make 3 million USD per year without doing anything].

We are a trading family. Trade is in our blood. Our work was mostly textile. We brought tea from India and China. We dealt in medicine and yunnanu medicine. We brought electronic goods. We also established the money exchange in Saray Shahzada, 90% it was in the hands of Sikhs. People didn't

trust banks but they trusted Sikhs. Even now in London people still keep money with Sikhs. People will say look after 10,000. We keep it as amanat. We must have the money ready to handover. They call us two days ahead and we must have it ready to give. We do work, but the money is entrusted to us. A Muslim came to me and said I need a house. He said I don't want to buy a mortgage with interest. I said you give the rent and we'll buy the house. Ultimately, the house will be yours. We connect people with halal mortgage. People need mortgages. Its difficult without a house to always change contract. We try to help each other.

In Kabul we did skins but we did not touch cigarettes. Here unfortunately Sikhs sell them. They do it in the name of business. According to religion we should neither use not sell cigarettes. They are not good for religion or for health. But here we do it because the easiest thing to do is off licence. In Afghanistan alcohol wasn't important but cigarettes were never sold.

When we sit at home, we say the best country we have seen is Afghanistan. I've been everywhere – Philippines, Thailand, Korea, China, Singapore, Kuwait, Bahran, Dubai very often. I've never seen a country with water, air and food like Afghanistan. Sometimes we say this to our children. The best thing is mulberry. We haven't seen it anywhere like in Afghanistan. We used to cool it and eat it with yoghurt. There was no need for bread! Sometimes I say at home if the situation improves, I will go there. If the situation gets better, I will live there. The place where a person is born the land calls you to come. If its peaceful, we can live there. Maybe for retirement I will live there. If God wants.

People have been. My uncle in law lived back and forth between Kabul and Delhi. He left Afghanistan two months ago. Life isn't left there. People live in fear. My brother-in-law was in Kabul and was killed [in the DAESH attack]. His son is in London and two sons in America. His wife is with his son in London. Such events cause a great fear. Its forty years since Afghanistan is unstable. We have seen conflict there since I was 7 years old.