

Jagat Kukrija

Interviewed 01 December 2024

I was born in Kandahar in 1942. My father was a businessman, and he was in the garment business. We imported garments from India and Japan. We used to buy from the traders who brought the garments all the way to the ports, and from there, we purchased them.

We lived in Kabul Bazar, District Four of Kandahar, and our shop and business were in Shahi Bazar, Jayai market. There were around 5,500 Hindus and Sikhs living in Kandahar.

Overall, we had six Gurdwaras (Temples): two big Gurdwaras (Temples), one Shakarpour Bazar, which was famous for the big temple (Loy Daramsar), and the other one belonged to the Bedi family, and four others were in Kabul Bazar.

In Kandahar, there were many types of business of Sikh and Hindu communities. Our majority of imports were from India. I had been several times to India, mainly New Delhi. We were bringing between 200 and 300 tons of imported materials from Delhi. We were travelling by air to India; we never used the roads.

We didn't have any relationship with Pakistan; others had, but Hindu and Sikh communities never had any business interactions with Pakistan. We only had with India and Japan.

In Kandahar, we used to speak Pashto or Farsi; at home, we used to speak the Multani language. Panjabi and Multani are our mother languages; we don't want to forget them, so we try to use them inside our homes. All Sikhs and Hindus lived in the cities, and we did not live in rural areas. We had very good interactions and relationships with Muslim communities; it was like a brotherhood. On Eid or any other festival, we observed it like family. We did not have the ethical issues.

I studied at Mashriqi High School (Mashriqi Laysa), which was in Shikarpour Bazaar, and then we went to university. I travelled several times to Kabul and sent our garments by road. There were limited Sikhs in Tirinkot, Lashkargah, and Helman, but the majority of us lived in Kandahar.

Inter-marriages were inside Kandahar. We were not trying to marry with families outside of Kandahar. We lived in Kandahar until 1974, and then we left for New Delhi, India. At that time, there were very limited Hindu and Sikh communities in New Delhi. The Hindus had their Mandars, and the Sikhs had their Gurdwaras.

Regarding our immigration to Afghanistan, I remember when I asked my father when we came to Afghanistan. He said that he asked the same questions as his father and grandfather, which means it's a fairly old one.

Bukhara businesses, if we look into the history of Afghanistan, there are 95% pure Afghanistan, where Hindus have been living since the 3rd century, and Sikhs have been living since the 15th century living in Afghanistan. We only have 5 % migrated Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan, with one part of that living in Kandahar that came from Sindh and Panjab (Multan). It happened in 1947 when partitions happened. King Zaher announced a welcome to Sikhs and Hindus in Afghanistan. Another narration is that in the second Afghan-British war, those Sikhs and Hindu soldiers that were in the British military had remained in Afghanistan and stayed here. In 1939-40, Daud Khan was governor of Kandahar and had close relations with Sikh communities, so he built a township for them and then integrated a roundabout called the "Sikhs roundabout". Then, he was given lands in Helmand provinces, and the majority of them went to live there and cultivate their lands. So, we call these two categories of people immigrants. President Hamid Karzai's terms were good for Hindus and Sikhs, but in 2014, the

international forces left some of the country, and that made the Taliban stronger. They united in Helmand and started torturing the Hindus and Sikh communities. They started attacking them, they asked them to turn Muslim or pay them money, and finally, they raised their voices and forced them to leave the country. Around 300 people left for Canada; 272 people were the second scheme that went to Canada after 15 August 2021, and the last 300 people left for Canada by our expenses.

Kabul and Kandahar had a joint connection, especially regarding their religious boundaries. The separation was more of an economic perspective; those with better economic situations were living in Kabul. The businesses were also good in Kabul. Around 85% of the business were in Kabul, only 50-55% were in Kandahar. If I categorise the businesses, it would be Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, and Mazar Province. Some of the items came from Herat and Mazar, but our people did not live in these two provinces. We used to live in Kabul, Kandahar and Nangarhar.

Once, Herat was a good business hub for Hindus. However, in 1896, when Amir Abdur Rahman Khan attacked India and converted around 60000 Hindus to Islam, the Herat Hindu communities left Herat out of fear and completely left the province. In the last few years, Hindus and Sikhs have been in eight provinces: Kandahar, Ghazni, Logar, Kabul, Nangarhar, Laghman, Kunar, and Kunduz.

There were no specific businesses that we were not doing due to our religion; we were looking more into the profit margin. None of us had ever done the business of Karakol and animal skin. Until 1921, we were doing the Tobacco business, but when King Amanullah came, he clearly ordered us not to do that business. Tobacco and butchering are not allowed in our religion, but for some of us who needed meat, after the 1960s, we had around 3-4 butchers preparing meat in their homes, and then we were going to collect it from their houses. Later, in the 1970s, they opened their shops next to the Daramsals (Temples) and sold meat.

There were around 5% Jews in the Kandahar, and they were there for business purposes. Jews were mainly based in Herat province, but then they moved to Kabul and Kandahar. They had good relationships with us because we both ran garment businesses. In 1973, when Daud Khan came into power, they were happy, but Mujahideen announced Jihad; the Jews left the country, and some went to Israel, and others went to the USA.

Yes, we had few Hindus and Sikhs in governmental jobs; around 99% of us were working in the Banking system because the government trusted our honesty and skills. We were everywhere, including Mili Bank, Commercial Bank, and other banks. We were doing Sarafai (Money Exchanges) as well. We were in Loya Jirga (Grand Assembly), and we had another Sikh who was Ambassador to Canada during Hami Karzai's presidency; all of them were from Kandahar. Kandahar people were very broad-minded, educated, and politically active. They had very close relationships with political elites.

There were different communities in Kandahar, and we lived in different places in the cities, as we have here in the UK, where some of us live in Southall, Hayes, and other areas. Police districts 1, 2, 3, and 4 were the main places in Kandahar where Hindus and Sikhs lived.

Kabul Bazar and Shikarpour bazar were the main one. Shikarpour's environment was so good that we had our lands and properties as heritages. We had our shops and Ghadwares either in Kabul Bazar or Shikarpour Bazar because our families lived with us there.

85% of the businesses in Kandahar were with Hindus. I have not heard any discussions about the Bukhara business in our family.