

Interviewed: 28/2/2023, Southall, London, UK

I studied in the Tandoor Saazi school in Shor Bazaar. It was for half day, the other half day we studied Punjabi in the dharamsal. With Afghans, there was much love. My House was in Shor Bazaar, ten minutes walking from school. Ever year or so we would visit our orchard in Charikar. There were big fort-like houses. My uncles lived there. I remember going there. We used to stay for two months. We used to cut grapes and bathe in the water canals. In Charikar, there were fewer Sikhs; in Kabul there were many. Then in Gukbahar and Dara Suf there were Sikhs, but not as many as in the cities.

There was gurdwara in Shor Bazaar called Guru Harar Sahib, another one called Khal Sahib Gurdwara, and Baba Siri Chand, and others too; they were close to each other, like here in Southall. There were either five or six gurdwaras in Shor Bazaar.

The gurdwara in Karte Parwan was built later. First, we moved to Shar-e Naw and then to Karte Parwan. When we got there, there was already a gurdwara

Wife: As far back as I can remember there was a gurdwara in Karte Parwan

Husband: My father lived in Shor Bazar. We lived in a rented house in Shar-e Naw. We had a shop in Pul Bagh Umumi. It was by the river in Timor Shahi. We stayed in Shar-e Naw for some months and then we moved to Karte Parwan. We lived there for six years.

The time was good. We went to school. We had friends. Sometime we fought with Muslims, then we made up. We were happy. The weather was also good. Life was good and business was good.

We used to buy cloth from Sikhs and Muslims in Mandawi market between Saray Shahzada and Hazar Gul market. The traders used to bring cloth from Japan. We bought it on loan, sold it and paid them back. We were retailers; they were wholesalers. Sometimes we also bought it in cash.

We didn't do hakimi. But I knew many who did do hakimi. Many Sikhs did textiles and maybe 5 or 10 did hakimi. They were very good. There was a hakim in Ghazni and another in Charikar. There were also good Sikh doctors. They were respected by Muslims.

Wife: I went to school. We used to celebrate mother's day in the gurdwara. After we left, after the regime changed, the situation got worse. The Russians came and after it gradually got worse.

Husband: My wife went back in 1990, and she knew it had got worse.

Wife: I was married very young, I had a chance to go in 1990. Sometimes I remember it. I used to think, 'where have I come? Everything has changed so much'. Such people had come that to the city that it was like they were going to eat people. After I left, I cried a lot because my family were there. I thought, 'what will happen? How can they live there?' My mother in law said 'I wish you hadn't gone. Before you were strong but having gone there you have become weak'. Sometime later, everyone left. Every day we went to gurdwara. We read the Guru Granth in 48 hours, and prayed every day. I used to pray for my family to be safe and live in respect. Because of doing that, my family were protected.

We became vegetarian in 1986. Before that we didn't know if it was allowed or not. After we studied we realised it was not allowed. We eat lots of Indian and Punjabi food. There are so many things without meat. In Afghanistan, we would eat meat maybe once a week. In a market, one part is meat,

but there are many other things. There are so many vegetables and fruits, God has given us everything.

We lived in Germany for several years. But here there was English. We didn't want to be dispersed to Holland and Poland. I was in Germany my brothers were elsewhere – we didn't want to have that for our family. We wanted to come to London so we could all be in one place.

Husband: Before askari [military service] I went to Germany in about 1977. I went by bus from Afghanistan to Germany. I stayed in Iran for two months before but people said its better in Germany. I went back to Kabul and then went to Hamburg. I lived in Hamburg and worked for one year. I didn't trade in Hamburg but I worked in a hotel cleaning dishes. I worked for 11 months. Then my parents sent me a letter saying come back, do your askari, get married and then go back. I did my askari and then I got married. Then I came to Germany. The first time I was in Germany, Afghans lived there, they and came and went, and they sold motors. In those days there was no need for visa. I thought of doing the cloth business there. I was 17. I wanted to make capital for myself and be independent from my family. When I went back to Germany, I did it. I started a shop in Hamburg. By 1985, I had my permissions and I started a grocery store. My brother came. Gradually the business was blessed. At first, we had a basement, and then we got a shop near to the station in Langarei. The shop is still there today. If you go, you should go and say you met me. I gave them the shop. We had retail and wholesale grocery. In 2008, we came here. We rented for a year and then got a property. In Germany, we had everything, house, shop, warehouse. We sold it. When we sold it and they gave us 200,000 VAT. [Houses and property come and go but the real house in which we live is in ourselves. We meditate to understand ourselves. This is the real house].

In Iran, I worked in a pickle factory. People said you should go to Germany. I went without passport to Iran. We used to go to the dharmasal in Iran. The factory in which I worked was owned by an Iranian. At night, I stayed in the dharamsal. Then I went back to Kabul and made my passport. When I first came to Germany we didn't need visa.

The military service of Sikhs was in the day between 8 and 4. In the evenings we came home, we had permission. I volunteered to learn to drive. I got a license. Sometimes we used to drive to Gardez. The officers there would send me to the houses of Hindus and Sikhs. Muslims respected Sikhs a lot. I stayed with Hindus and Sikhs in Khost. I was in Khost as part of my military service. There was a border near Pakistan. The officer said you shouldn't stay at the post, go and stay with a Sikh family here who I know. I spent the night there. Life was good there and they had a dharamsal and they lived a good life.

Wife: In that time life was good, there was no poverty. Not like what we see in India. People's food and accommodation was good. Later on, it was very bad. There were attacks in Jalalabad and elsewhere and people's lives were very difficult.