

## A Morning in Kabul

### By Bilquees Daud

One morning in 1992, I woke up and looked out from the window to see my home town of Kabul looking saddened and calm. I, along with my six siblings and parents, was living in a 4<sup>th</sup> floor apartment in the Makroyan area. I wanted to open the balcony door to feel the rainy morning breeze, but my sister shouted, "Do not do that, they will see you!" I got very scared and came inside immediately.

It was not safe for a woman or young girl, even as young as 12 years, to be seen by the armed men standing out on the street. These armed men belonged to one of the armed groups involved in fighting. They used to search houses for women and young girls. As soon as they see women, they would either rape or marry them off by force. A week before, a young girl was standing in the balcony of her apartment and the armed men standing down in front of the block saw her. They went up to get her. They first beat up the father of the girl who had protested. Seeing this the girl locked herself in the room, but the moment the armed men reached to the room, she jumped out of the window of her parent's 5<sup>th</sup> floor apartment. She died instantly. The young and beautiful girl's body was buried a few miles away from our neighborhood. This is how other families in the neighborhood got furious, longing to get out of the country before facing the same or even worse situation.

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After shutting the balcony door, I heard my mother say, "Hurry up, dress up! We have to leave before people are awake." Downstairs a big bus was waiting for us; my brothers were putting our stuff into the bus. The house was all messy, the furniture, kitchen and clothes were full of dust. For days we did not live here since we were in the basement to avoid hitting by the rockets coming down every day from another part of the city. After withdrawal of Soviets army, the last communist government was replaced by a coalition of seven Mujahedeen parties based in Peshawar. In 1992 the Mujahedeen proclaimed Afghanistan as an Islamic Republic for the first time in its history. The city was divided among seven different armed groups, each struggled to have the power so they fired rockets, bombs and bullets. This situation persisted up to the end of 1994, when the Taliban entered the arena and installed law and order but at the 'cost of human rights abuse'. Thus, many Afghans had no way but to escape to the neighboring countries and save their lives. We were one of those families.

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The situation got worse on the day a rocket hit the playground of our block. The rocket took lives of many young boys, girls and small children who were playing in the playground. I remember that day very well. My uncle came to visit us. It was lunch time my mother told my

brother to bring yogurt from close by shop. The moment my brother opened the door for going out we heard a huge sound. All the windows of our house broke down. No one knew what had happened, everywhere was full of dust. I heard my mother cry and search for my brother “where is my son”. My brother reply “I am fine, do not worry”. Then my father told us “run to the basement, do not wait for a minute”. As we were crossing the stairs I saw parts of the human body, blood, shoes and many more things. In the basement people around us were screaming. Some of them lost their family members and others could not take their injured ones to the hospitals. Soon we got to know that many of our childhood friends lost their lives.



Source: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2005/07/06/blood-stained-hands/past-atrocities-kabul-and-afghanistans-legacy-impunity>

After that the fighting just did not stop. The families buried their loved ones in hurry. Many of the injured ones lost their lives too as there were few functional hospitals and going there was almost impossible. The next day as the bullets were coming down as raindrops my older brother ran upstairs to our apartment to get some food for us. The only food we could get there was boiled potatoes and rice because the fighting did not give us a chance to cook or buy something else. We stayed there for three days before we decided to leave.

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We sat down in the bus with the suitcases full of our clothes. My mother was crying. She did not want to leave our house. The house was full of our belongings and most importantly full of the memories we spent there. There was no other option but to leave everything behind and save our life. I was looking at our apartment from the bus window. The whole area was looking very empty and gloomy. As the bus moved on I kept looking at our house all the way down till it got disappeared. The feeling that will I be able to see my home again kept coming

to my mind. On the way, our bus was stopped and searched by different armed groups. They came in several times just to see that we 'women and young girls' are wearing 'Chadar' and/or do we have money to give. Every time they entered into the bus, my mother prayed that nothing happens to us. We traveled all the way with the fear that we might lose our lives.



Source:- <https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2014/08/the-soviet-war-in-afghanistan-1979-1989/100786/>

A long day travel through harsh and jumpy roads came to an end when we reached Peshawar, Pakistan. The first day in Peshawar was very different from Kabul, no voice of bullets and rockets, and no armed men around. We stayed in our extended family's house. They already came to Peshawar and rented a small house. Almost 30 people lived in this two-bedroom house for a month till we managed to find a bigger one. Soon we found out the reality of living as a refugee. Rapidly our saving was spent.

Searching for jobs had already started but getting a job there as a refugee was extremely difficult. My parents looked up for schools for us but private schools were very expensive. My father had to put only two of my brothers in a private school. I always wished to go to a better school to learn English but we could not afford it. Government schools were cheaper but as refugees we could not get admission there. So I had to study in a refugee school. Nonetheless, getting out alive and being able to get education was enough to be thankful for.

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As a refugee women living in a country with strict laws and regulations I and my sisters had to cover our faces. On the street people called us ‘Mahajer’ meaning refugee. So we never felt at home. Every time we settle down in a house the owner made us leave. In a year’s time we had to shift so many times. However, we spent ten years of our lives in a country that we had never expected to visit in our lifetime. We lived all those years with uncertainty, and mystery. Life took a totally different route than we desired or predicated to have.

Today when I look back to my life I get mixed feelings. On one hand, I have got to experience the harsh realities of life at a very young age which made me grow as a person. On the other hand, I feel I have lost those ten beautiful years of my life in distress and ambiguity.