Learning English at Star: The pathway to my success

A message from Essa Omid

Essa Omid is a Star Alumna and a current branch admission coordinator of Star Educational Society in Bamyan. He is working with MADERA as a Regional Monitoring and Evaluation Officer. He wishes to get a scholarship for his Masters in English Literature.

When I was in grade eight at School, I learned greeting in English language using some simple sentences such as “How are you? Or How do you do?” At that time PRINZ New Zealand was in Bamyan. Once a group of PRINZ had come to my village for helping a disabled child, and accidentally I saw a PRINZ soldier outside the disabled center. I was very much excited to talk to him for the first time. I started talking to him in very simple greeting terms. “How are you?” Although the conversation was merely the exchange of some very simple terms which I repeated several times, I felt very special as it was for the first time that a throng of village elders accosted us and began to praise me for my language skills. I did not only like to hide that I was not fluent but I also tried to sound as if I knew the language perfectly.

After the foreign troops left our village, all village elders admired me for my English ability. Some of them came to meet my father in the evening and told him what a talented son he had. My interest in English escalated and I started to learn English academically and professionally. Therefore, after graduating from high school, I decided to select English literature as my major of the four years of Bachelor’s Degree.

Entering the English Literature department was not easy at all. After taking a general Gokurak exam, and after I was selected as a student of literature, I had to take another exam specifically designed for English Literature Department in Kabul University. I took the exam for entry test of the English Literature Department and I unfortunately failed. This was the first time I had ever failed in something I so badly wanted. My heart so badly ached to possess it and my passion for getting it seemed nonstop. The entry exam would not happen twice and my fate of studying English literature did not seem achievable. I was short-listed and forced to study Arabic literature. I was deeply disappointed and did not see my future in Arabic language. My friends often said, “Arabic too is a modern language with intricate and sophisticated standards, many books and literature have either been translated to Arabic or are available in Arabic literature first hand.” These things did not please me.

Luckily after I had shared my concerns with my friends and classmates, they showed me Star Educational Society as an institution where my long-lasting dream would come true. They added that it was not only an institution of English language, but also an academy of languages which had helped many students set their feet to some of the best schools and universities around the globe. My friends often said, “Arabic too is a modern language with intricate and sophisticated standards, many books and literature have either been translated to Arabic or are available in Arabic literature first hand.” These things did not please me.

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Ignorance is not an Ideology

About the author: Ahmad Murtaza Ahmad graduated from Kabul University with a degree in Political Science in 2011. He studied English at Star from 2006 to 2008 and began teaching for Star in 2009. Currently working at the Ministry of Higher Education, this is the third in a series of stories that he has contributed to the Interstellar Bulletin.

City, the Man and God arena of competition

About the author: Yasa Hakimi is a Star Alumna, a journalist, an instructor and a social and political researcher. He graduated from Sociology Department of Ilmi-e-Sina University with honors.

It’s narrated in Jews myths that humans once struggled to reach God’s city. They built a tall tower to go up and visit him. For many years, they strangled, and thousands of bones were shattered as they were building a tower to the tallness of sky. God showed indignity as a result of rebelliousness of his created beings and overthrew the tower completely for it to be an example for rebellions that had aspired reaching God. However, he didn’t content to this; he expelled his creatures to different regions and changed their languages to avoid interaction among them. This interpretation was dominant, as it was believed that God had owned a splendid palace in the seven heavens. The palace and the city that God used for his residential purposes were visionary for human beings. Humans had not witnessed such a visionary city in planet earth’s history, and the establishment of such cities was unreachable on earth.

After a while, metaphysic were interpreted totally abstract by appearance of monotheistic religions. So, after abandoning the physical apparatus and there were no more palaces in the seven heavens. Although he did not exist, he was present everywhere. He was far from the reach of human beings, but at the same time, he was next to them. God, who had owned a splendid palace in the sky, suddenly descended to earth as a result of monotheistic interpretation that had been raised by monotheistic religions. For the first time, the dominant and the only trajectory to reaching God was metamorphosed, and reaching God by building a tower was perceived as insanity.

Perhaps, the experience of Iblis tower was the most serious defeat of human beings in reaching God’s city. After that, human beings disillusioned and realized that reaching to God’s palace and city in the seven heavens was insanity. Hereafter, the human beings started establishing the splendid city in the earth and with it, the competition between God and human beings started. In religious literature, it is claimed that nature is created by God. It is the glory of God, and therefore, it should be protected. However, the rebellion humans embezzled in the nature by starting to split the heart of earth, and ended the dominant control of God on nature by taking control over. Cities are the most serious arena of competition between humans and God. City is the result of rebelliousness of human beings, and it is the period of adventure for rebellions. In addition, city is the glory of human creativity. In religious literature, nature is described as a perfect painted picture that reflects God’s creativity. However, it would be sad for the painter to see his/her worthy tableau in hand of a kid who dyes and repaints the tableau the way he desires. So, now, it was the man’s turn to show his creativity, and reflect it through the city arena.

Humans have rented the heart of the earth and have expelled its resources. They have constructed roads, manufactured engine and trains, and have built skyscrapers. I have always been suppressed by creativity of humans in big cities. The architecture used in churches, mosques and buildings are the glory of human’s creativity. Whenever I stare at towers, I see the human’s rebelliousness to these skyscraper towers. I also think that the tallness of towers in a city glorifies the ambitions of people. Humans failed to reach God’s city by building Iblis tower, but didn’t stop attempting to establish idealistic cities on earth. God succeeded in demolishing the only tower, however, it would be interesting to know how would he react to millions of towers that are standing today.
In Afghanistan, it is customary to remove your shoes before entering a home. Typically you will find a jumbled pile of the inhabitants’ shoes immediately inside and outside the entrance of houses, apartments, some shops, offices and hotels. Sometimes there are a collection of communal slippers inside the door, but since I was coming from an individualistic culture, I had brought my own indoor sandals and learned to hide them so that they did not become communal.

I was prepared to remove my shoes upon entering Afghan homes. But I didn’t know that Afghans wear different shoes in different rooms. There are bathroom shoes, kitchen shoes, roof shoes and maybe more. If you want to use the bathroom, there are sandals inside the bathroom door. There are also special shoes to wear in the kitchen. The bathroom I used in my first Afghan home was inside the kitchen, so if I followed the protocol, I would remove my house sandals outside the kitchen door and put on kitchen shoes, then remove my kitchen shoes outside the bathroom door to put on bathroom shoes and reverse the process to exit the bathroom and kitchen. Sometimes it was easier to just stay in my room.

In traditional Afghan homes, people sit, sleep, prepare food and eat on the floor. When I was there, the streets in Kabul were either very dusty, very muddy or completely flooded – a disturbing state of perpetual extremes. So I understood why it was so important to remove our outside shoes. At mealtimes, a plastic cloth, called a sufra or dasterkhan, is spread on the floor like a tablecloth. As I struggled to sit cross-legged with one stubborn and protesting knee, I was told by my first host that it was extremely offensive to allow your feet to touch this cloth. However, in other homes I saw the hosts walking barefoot across these mats when serving the food, so sufra etiquette seems to vary from home to home.

In Afghanistan, people have hospitality competitions. Before our departure from some homes, the really competitive hosts neatly positioned our shoes facing outwards to accommodate putting them on more easily. The less hospitable hosts will put salt in the shoes of their guests as a superstitious way to make their guests leave sooner. My friend, Parisa, told me that she once tried that trick and it didn’t work. She suggested that it may work better if you tell your guests that you just put salt in their shoes as a not-so-subtle hint that it is time for them to leave. I never found salt in my shoes and my hosts in Mazar-e-Sharif won the hospitality competition with our neatly lined-up, outwardly-facing shoes. They also made me feel less paranoid about my feet touching the dasterkhan when they walked on it with bare feet to serve our food.

I experienced my first Afghan picnic in Mazar-e-Sharif. In Afghanistan, it’s common to see people spreading a full-size carpet on the ground in the middle of a field, on the side of the road or anywhere else where they decide to sit to have some tea or a picnic. In the U.S., we may use a picnic blanket or a cloth of some kind – but I have never seen people carrying around something as unwieldy as a carpet. I learned that the same shoe removal custom prevails when crossing the threshold between the bare earth and the carpet-covered ground.

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At the home of my first host, there was a collection of special shoes, sandals and slippers waiting at the door to the roof. In the U.S., most of our roofs are peaked, so it’s not common to walk on the roof. But in Afghanistan, the roofs are flat and are commonly used as an additional outdoor living area, more like a patio in the U.S. It’s also where this family kept their washing machine and where the female relatives begrudgingly taught me how to wash and rinse my clothes – laughing at and video-taping my feeble efforts. Next to the garden hose and the large metal bowl where they rinsed my clothes was a desk with a metal contraption on it. I thought it was a device to make French fries. I guess people also make French fries on their rooftops. And when the refrigerator had disappeared from the kitchen one day, I found it three days later on the roof. So I think you can understand why I felt like Alice in Wonderland during my first month in Afghanistan.

My bedroom was on the third floor – the same level as the roof. My host’s family has a menagerie of beloved fowl in their large and lush garden – peacocks, geese, turkeys and chickens. So one morning when it seemed that one of the roosters was crowing directly through my window, I was surprised to see him standing in his cage, on the roof, right outside my room. Roosters don’t have to wear special shoes on the roof because they are carried to a small carpet made from a burlap bag and covered with a bottomless cage. However, the roosters have to wear special shoes made of cloth and tied around their ankles (if roosters have ankles) where they are loose because they have a tendency to spar and hurt themselves or others with their claws.

A few weeks later when looking out my bedroom window, there was another rooster in a cage on the roof. But this one was dead – lying on his side, with his barefeet extended horizontally in mid-air. Why cage a dead rooster? Why put a dead rooster on the roof? I thought perhaps they put him up on the roof and forgot he was there – accidentally allowing him to die from hunger, thirst or the elements. When I texted the owner to let him know there was a dead rooster on the roof, he said he knew and assured me they would take care of it. How do you take care of a dead rooster? I wanted to tell him it was too late, but he was the expert, so I said no more. Later I learned that the rooster was accidentally shot... indoors. I guess they should have taken care of the dead rooster before they accidentally shot it. I remembered Alice’s words as things seemed to be getting “curioser and curioser!” in the rabbit hole that was disguised as a beautiful, peach-colored house near Yosnoi Bangi High School.

May 07th, 2016

Wonderful feast in Mazar-e-Sharif

Making mantoo in Karte-sah

Barefeet and bolani

Picnic in Aualai region of Balkh Province

This is where they rinse their clothes and make french fries

Hiding the refrigerator outside my bedroom window

My first rooster sighting on the roof

Entrance to the rabbit hole

About the author: Kara Lozier has been a long-time supporter of Star Educational Society and, most recently, has been very instrumental in the success of the Interstellar Bulletin. She is a former community coordinator for American Councils for International Education and has worked with Afghan students and students from many other countries through the Youth Exchange and Study program, a one-year International Education and has worked with Afghan students and students from many other countries through the Youth Exchange and Study program, a one-year...
Afghan Refugees get Bronze Medal in Bonn running competition

Translator: Emran Poya
Source: Eliaat-e-Rooz

These refugees say that the reason behind their success is the hardships of the long way they had to go through to reach Germany. They had never participated in any running competition before, but the obstacles they faced to reach Germany made their muscles ready for the difficulties of life.

There are different ways to amalgamate refugees into the German society. Exchange of experience is considered to be the easiest way among the manifold methods to coalesce the refugees. These exchanges of experience open the doors for the refugees to know and become familiar with different aspects of the German society.

On April 10, 2016, the running competition took place with more than a hundred participants in Bon City of Germany. Afghan refugees were among the participants. “Douche Post” held this competition. The Four members of the group could run 42 KM within one hour and 45 minutes.

German participants appreciated these youths’ achievements. At the end of this program the participants took pictures with the winners. In addition, the program holders also honored these Youths with the certificates and appreciation letters. Abdul Basher Takhtari and Omid Shahzada are two Afghan Youths that looked happy and determined after this program. Moreover, they emphasized that participating in such kinds of programs gives them hope and joy. These two youths say that the hardships of illegal ways they crossed were the main cause of their success. The pictures of the participants were hanged on the walls of their Camp. They also emphasized that they had run more than 10 KMs with their empty stomachs to reach Germany said Doutehe Wale.

Noor: Politicians dispute on power causes growing insecurity.

Translator: Hadi Shaikhzada
Source: Eliaat-e-Rooz

Ata Mohammad Noor, the Balkh Province Governor, said in a gathering to support National Forces that the National Unity Government’s leaders are involved in discord of the political power. Therefore, it has caused the spread of insecurity in the country.

“We see our politicians are trying to have the power and also have problems. Sometimes the national issues pose, sometimes regional issues pose, none of which are according to our constitution or according to our people’s will”, He says.

He also asked the people to get ready to protect the country’s consistency. Moreover, the Governor of Balkh said that the armed Taliban tried to trick the government and they would never attend peace negotiation with the government of Afghanistan.

He includes that Talibans propose peace negotiation to the government of Afghanistan in order to get prepared for war and prepares army equipment in the winters but later in the spring they declare war against the government.

The gathering was held by the scholar’s council, council of Balkh Province, the Local Grandees and Civil Society in the plenary masque of Hazrat Ali’s Shrine. Sayed Mohammad Halim, a religious scholar, said that the security forces were the complete forces. They brought peace and protected our country by their bravery, spunks, and pity. The scholars also said that terror, civilians killing and using their homes as fortress were the biggest sins.

In the name of Allah
Dear attentive people and sensitive to your destiny!

The latest decision of the cabinet about changing the route of the TUTAP, unlike the national spirit and values of the constitution, is ignoring one of the most just wants of the people regarding the transferring TUTAP power line from Bamyan and Maidan Wardak. This is despite the fact that the previous government had assigned a German Company to conduct scientific and technical survey and share the result to government in order to take actions based on the findings of the survey. Mentioned company, determined Bamyan province the best route for the line.

Now, contrary to the findings of the technical and scientific survey, government has decided to change the route of transmission. We see this decision as a clear discrimination against the spirit of brotherhood and unjustifiable move.

Based on the principle of justice and equitable development, the central regions’ people have the right along with other compatriots benefit from public services. As CASA-1000 power line, the TAPI project and the existing power line of Kabul have been transferred from other provinces of the country – which we welcome and support them – this time central Hazarajat regions have the right to benefit from energy project of TUTAP.

In relation to this issue, I remind the following points:

1) As right now the country is facing a variety of imposed and inner challenges, this decision of the government is just increasing the crisis, and is against the principle of justice and equitable development.

2) Transmission of this power line from Bamyan rout, in no way opposed to the interests of other citizens in other provinces. Any person or group that is using from the name of this project, and put the citizens against each other, this is a betrayal of national unity and the vital national interests of the country.

I ask all our compatriots, residents of the provinces, political parties and civil society, with all due respect and one voice, support this justice claim of central Hazarajat regions. This claim, in fact, is not and individual or demand of a group, but is in favor of “justice”, “equality”, “brotherhood”, balanced growth and development, and is eliminating the distances, the economic and social gaps between citizens of the country.

3) People certainly know that the “right” is taken not “given”. Therefore, I want all of you distinguished and honorary people to stand, through civic actions, for your right until the government doesn’t change its decision. As you proved before, in every magnificent civil movements, especially in the demonstration 20th Aqrab (Tabasoom Revolution) last year, in all your decisions and civil movements consider the vital interests of the country, national unity and the principle of civil society, and in the framework of the laws of the country, defend from your legitimate right of citizenship.

4) I want the leadership of the National Unity Government, especially the president of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to rethink about this decision and transfer this power line from the route of Bamiyan, which previously had been determined based on a technical-scientific survey. Otherwise, the decision makers, for the sake of neglecting justice, will be accountable against people.

TUTAP: Declaration of Mohammad Karim Khalili, leader of Islamic Unity Party of Afghanistan

Mohammad Karim Khalili spoke on TUTAP project
Translated by: Junakhan Rahyab
Source:
French supermarkets banned from throwing away and spoiling unsold food

Source: The Independent

"Supermarkets will be obliged to sign a donation deal with charities." Supermarkets in France have been banned from throwing away or spoiling unsold food by law.

The stores are now required to donate unwanted food to charities and food banks. To stop foragers, some supermarkets have poured bleach over the discarded food or storing binned food in locked warehouses.

This law was voted unanimously by the French senate on Wednesday after a petition was launched by Courbevoie councillor Arash Derambarsh. It will apply to any supermarket with a footprint of 500 square metres or larger. If companies flout the law they could incur fines up to €900,000.

Jacques Balaert from Banques Alimentaires, a network of Food banks, told the Guardian: "Most importantly, because supermarkets will be obliged to sign a donation deal with charities, we'll be able to increase the quality and diversity of food we get and distribute to food banks because this is a real source of quality products, coming straight from the factory." Mr Derambarsh is now looking to get an EU-wide law banning supermarket food waste.

He said: "The next step is to ask the president, François Hollande, to put pressure on Jean-Claude Juncker and to extend this law to the whole of the EU. "This battle is only just beginning. We now have to fight food waste in restaurants, bakeries, school canteens and company canteens."

TUTAP path will not change from Salang to Bamiyan

Minister of Water and Energy of Afghanistan says, "The confirmation of TUTAP path belongs to two years ago so that this project will be applied in Salang path." Ali Ahmad Osmani in a press conference on Tuesday May 3, 2016 said "According to studies of Fyshnr Company which was conducted by Electricity Master Plan. The (500 KW) electricity which will transfer from Poli Khomri to Kabul, will transfer from Bamiyan."

The meeting which was held with the contribution of Minister of Water and Energy, Finance, Economy and Breshna Company and also sponsor of this project such as Asia Development Bank, World Bank, USAID and Islamic Bank came to an agreement. Not only should we study Bamiyan path but we also should study Salang path.

Mr. Osmani said when they investigated Salang path, they found out that Salang path was shorter than Bamiyan path and it takes short time and has low costs. Osmani said after studying this report TUTAP project plan started on Salang path. The reports were submitted to National Procurement Committee. Minister of Water and Energy said, "The importance of the issue caused us to study both paths and the reports were sent to cabinets." Moreover, he said, "Bamiyan path was selected by Fyshnr Company, yet the Salang path was not studied."

Osmani emphasized that after studying Salang path, they started the project on Salang path, and now in terms of timing, it is impossible to change Salang path to Bamiyan path. Meanwhile, people protest against government’s decision and the protesters sentenced the government because of this discriminatory action which government had against the central part resident.

Over two hundred terrorists murdered in invasive operations

The ministries of defense and interior affairs have announced that in invasive operations more than two hundred terrorists have been killed and injured. The ministry of defense says that these operations have been to defeat terrorists in Nangarhar, Ghazni, Khost, Kandahar, Balkh, Faryab, and Helmand. The operations resulted the death of 96 and injury of over 93 terrorists. Ministry of defense has added that part of these operations is done by artilleries and Air Forces.

According to this ministry, during the operation, 82 terrorists were killed and 69 more were injured in Dash-e-Archi, Khan Abad, Chahar Dara, and the center of Kondoz districts. Also the same operation has killed and injured 40 terrorists in Garmishan district of Faryab. Ministry of Interior Affairs has announced the heavy loss of the Taliban forces in Kondoz province. The ministry says that one of the major commanders of Taliban by the name of Haq Yar with his seven assistants were killed. Ministry of Interior Affairs says that Haq Yar has been killed in a battle between Afghan forces and Taliban groups in Qala-e-Zal district.

The mentioned ministry has emphasized that this battle happened when the Taliban groups attacked the check point in Qala-e-Zal and they received a serious response by security forces. According to the Ministry of Interior Affairs, killing Haq Yar with his seven men, four other terrorists are injured. The corpses of the terrorists remained in the battle field. The Ministry of Interior Affairs has announced that 12 terrorists of Taliban were killed and 36 terrorists were injured in Darqad district of Takhar. The Ministry of Interior Affairs says that this battle occurred when a group of Taliban terrorist attacked a security check point.

The Ministry of Interior Affairs has also announced the martyrdom of one police and injury of six other Afghan forces during Taliban attack on a police station in Darqad district of Takhar. Meanwhile, Ministry of Defense has announced the loss of 5 National Army soldiers’ lives. Parallel to the heavy loss of terrorists and Taliban, Ministry of Defense has announced the destruction of mine factory of Taliban in Shalwalik district of Kandahar. Ministry of Defense has announced that the factory had been destroyed as a result of bombing the area.
I was sitting near the window seat, watching the outside while the car was shaking unsteadily because of the destroyed road. I saw white colors in some places as if someone had spoiled white paint on the ground, but it was getting more and more. It was my brother who had painted the sky with white color. I would wake up by the noise of vehicles and shouting people. I could no longer see the flowing color the sky had was grey. I would wake up with the sound of singing birds. The sound of hooting owls at night led me to the far corner of my imagination where ‘genii’ and ‘fairy’ lived. Mountain were the place I could approach the sky and clouds. I had no reason to stay at home, I kept running with animals, climbing trees, and hiking mountains. Like many people I also had obsession and mine was nature. I wanted to show how smooth a sheep’s wool can be, how the sky changes its color, how the streams sing, how the stones were shaped and placed upon each other to make the mountains higher, how the trees dance with the blowing wind, how the flowers smile at the sun that comes up from behind mountains. How after rain would come the colorful rainbow to complete the beauty of nature and thus to further polish perfection into my imagination of the nature. I wanted to take something from the beauties of nature and the first thing that came to my mind was color. Color is the most important ingredient in nature and it is what could keep me connected to the living world. I used colors to paint the beauties of nature that had amazed me for years. As a child, my paintings were not good enough for enabling me to express the perspective of the nature I had in my mind. But mixing colors, finding new things and exploring new things was strong reasons to keep me painting. I drew my dreams and the characters that I had read in story books. I drew the snakes that scared me in my dreams and the tree that became my friend and playmate. I drew the ‘fairy’ that were hiding in the depth of water, and the ‘genii’ frightening the ‘fairy’. I was still carrying the love of colors in my heart and the vision of pure nature in my mind when we moved to the strange, noisy and crowded city, Kabul. Kabul was crowded with people preoccupied with perfection who were going through a life without living a life. I was lost among the people who could hear no one but themselves. Everything was different in Kabul; at night the stars were invisible for too much light. Sometimes the only color the sky had was grey. I would wake up by the noise of vehicles and shouting people. I could no longer see the flowing streams or the dancing trees, the stones with magical shapes or high mountains. Despite all those disappointments, there was still remaining child-like wonders in me. I saw Kabul as a door to many other places and nature. I found myself in painting and express my own reasons and delight in suffering and pain that belonged to people. Painting was the helping hand that helped me at any condition to fully express my feelings. Painting helped me to distinguish the wholeness between myself and nature. Painting was the light that led me towards originality and factuality. Only with painting I was ‘myself’. Only with painting I was fine with my imperfection and speechlessness. People thought I was sad, depressed, pessimist, quiet, reticent, and always into myself but they did not know how much I talk through my paintings and how expressive I am in my paintings. As Robert Delaunay says, ‘painting is by nature a luminous language’, I also chose to speak through my paintings.

The history of painting is one of the world’s wonder for me. There’s a depth and gravity in the history of art specifically painting that makes me feel all the tragedies and horrors or delights that humanity has been through. It was with the history of painting and painting itself that my world was expanded and I was impressed and influenced to read, write and paint. I see a whole new world ahead of me to explore and seek adventure. Every single detail of ordinary life, every movement of a newborn child, every growing plant, and every melodic sound astonish me and inspire me to capture them by painting and express my own reasons and notions. Painting might be painful, heartbreaking, or pathetic, but I find joy and delight in suffering and pain that begin with painting. I found myself in colors and nature. I found myself in painting, in a world where silence can scream the sorrow and grief.
A person's home is in his heart. You are young. You feel at home here, I am old. My home will always be in the mountains where I spent my childhood. Even after a lifetime away, I think about it everyday.

You were too young to understand. I was never at home in Pakistan. The war had forced us off our home and farms, far away from our mountains, and far far away from those we knew. We ended up khusk-o-khali in a new country, and with no one to turn to in our time of need. Life was difficult. We ate half-cooked rice every day. It was never enough, and we were left hungry. At night, we all crammed into the little room that belonged to Yousaf's brother. We didn't have pillows to sleep on, so we tucked our clothes under our heads. At least we weren't out in the open.

Dunya's mother, may God bless her soul, brought food for you, the children, in secret from her daughter-in-law. She was an angel.

After that, we rented a room in the same house as Baqir's family in Sayedabad. Like your father, Baqir was also a member of the party. We lived as a collective. We took turns to cook, and prepared meals every other night. Your father left for the war or something related to the Party. The Party paid us small stipends. We moved to another house, and then another. He stole from the neighbors, and from us. The two older ones were very mischievous.

Your baby brother fell ill. He was weak and pale. We had no money to take him to a doctor. I asked Baqir for money. He said the Party couldn't pay us anymore. One day a Pashtun man from the Party visited us. He inquired about our well-being. He looked at you and your brother. I explained to him what was happening. He cursed Baqir, and accused him of keeping more for himself. He encouraged your mother to study. He gave us 200 or 300 rupees to see a doctor. I used some of it to take both of you to a doctor and buy medicine. I saved some, I don't know what happened to the rest. Perhaps I used it to buy knives, spoons, plates and cups.

Baqir's wife accused us of stealing her scissors, and later her cutlery. She took away the spoons and knives I had purchased. Her brother in law found out, and scolded her. She later found her scissors under the rug in her own room. She then returned to us the knives and spoons.

From there, we moved to Ali Dost's house, and then we rented a room at the house of Hafiz the blind. He had three children. The two older ones were very good kids. The youngest, Talib was a thief. He stole from the neighbors, and from us. He stole your mother's watch. We had to move to another house, and then another. From there we moved to the house of the Tahir. We spent a winter there. There we met Dunya Ali's mother. They were an excellent family. It was a good experience. Then we moved to Hazara Town. By that time, we had learned their ways. We knew enough to find our way around the city. Life became a little better.

Your father's obsession with his Party kept us poor and miserable, living life on meager stipends. People like him did all the work, people like Baqir kept all the money. Had it all been the will of the Party, we would have starved, and the men would have worked their lives off and died for people who cared neither for them or for us, but their own groups. I am glad that damned party shattered into pieces. It made us all better off.

We were not strong. Living in all those places, with all those different people, and dealing with them everyday made us stronger, and resilient. It opened our eyes and minds.

*khushk-o-khali = Dry and Empty

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Alice Munro

Alice Ann Munro (born 10 July 1931) is a Canadian short story writer and Nobel Prize winner. Munro’s work has been described as having revolutionized the architecture of short stories, especially in its tendency to move forward and backward in time.[2] Her stories have been said to “embed more than announce, reveal more than parade.”[3]

Munro’s fiction is most often set in her native Huron County in southwestern Ontario.[4] Her stories explore human complexities in an uncomplicated prose style.[5] Munro’s writing has established her as “one of our greatest contemporary writers of fiction,”[6] and “The Chekhov”[6] (told in the Greek Memin Proctor collection). The 2009 Man Booker International Prize for Lifetime Achievement for her lifetime work. She is also a three-time winner of Canada’s Governor General’s Award for fiction and was the recipient of the Writers’ Trust of Canada’s 1996 Marian Engel Award, as well as the 2004 Rogers Writers’ Trust Fiction Prize for Runaway.

Excerpt: Below is selection from the work of Alice Munro, who was awarded the 2013 Nobel Prize in Literature on Thursday, it is reprinted with the permission of Alfred A. Knopf.

From “Amundsen,” which appeared in “Dear Life”
inaugurating a publication in Afghanistan is being published in seven provinces of the country. The products of this organization is has three credible agencies in Kabul city, educational centers, universities or cultural places like schools, etc. In this period of time, this organization started its activities in 1394 and since then many cultural programs such as book reading, poem reciting and critiques, book exhibitions, appreciating and supporting writers in cultural places like schools, educational centers, universities or cultural organizations. Now, Wazha Publications has three credible agencies in Kabul city, and the products of this organization is being published in seven provinces of the country and also in foreign countries.

The story of how I got interested in inaugurating a publication in Afghanistan started from the point when we barely could find books introduced by professor who was born in 1369 and have a Bachelor of Economics (International Trades) in 1383. I am current manager of Wazha Publications. Nashir-e-Wazha Organization started its activities in 1394 and simultaneously received its license from Ministry of Information and Culture. The inauguration of this activity was the result of eight years of experience of working in the field of book-selling. After a year, we succeeded in attracting reliance of many writers, higher education institutes and many other credible educational centers.

In this period of time, this organization published more than 30 books of interior writers and distributed it to seven provinces of the country. This organization has been a reliable and trustworthy contributor for other cultural organizations and also held many cultural programs such as: book reading tournaments, book critiques, poem reciting and critiques, book exhibitions, appreciating and supporting writers in cultural places like schools, educational centers, universities or cultural organizations. Now, Wazha Publications has three credible agencies in Kabul city, and the products of this organization is being published in seven provinces of the country and also in foreign countries.

Please share a short and effective experiences of you with our readers and explain how did you get interested in becoming a publisher? I am Qasem Farzam who was born in 1369 and have a Bachelor of Economics (International Trades) in 1383. I am current manager of Wazha Publications. Nashir-e-Wazha Organization started its activities in 1394 and simultaneously received its license from Ministry of Information and Culture. The inauguration of this activity was the result of eight years of experience of working in the field of book-selling. After a year, we succeeded in attracting reliance of many writers, higher education institutes and many other credible educational centers. In this period of time, this organization published more than 30 books of interior writers and distributed it to seven provinces of the country. This organization has been a reliable and trustworthy contributor for other cultural organizations and also held many cultural programs such as: book reading tournaments, book critiques, poem reciting and critiques, book exhibitions, appreciating and supporting writers in cultural places like schools, educational centers, universities or cultural organizations. Now, Wazha Publications has three credible agencies in Kabul city, and the products of this organization is being published in seven provinces of the country and also in foreign countries. The story of how I got interested in inaugurating a publication in Afghanistan started from the point when we barely could find books introduced by professor of the university. And if we could find any, the high price would prevent us from buying the books. This matter made students use chapters, and this was the main reason why I started publishing books in our own country.

Another reason that made me sad was the statistics that showed more than eighty percent of books that are being used by students in Kabul or other provinces are imported books. This was how I decided to concentrate more on publishing interior writers, and immediately I started publishing the books which were written by interior writers. It is also good to mention that in the beginning, our works had some problems but now it has a considerable improvement.

I have a suggestion for Starirans. Always try to consider creating some books as educational resources or free-readings. And also to start translating some significant writings from books, magazines and so on. It is because sixty percent of imported books are translated from other sources, and we have to pay a big amount of asset for these books.

As an entrepreneur, what is your message for our readers? As a publisher, I only have a short message to all those who can read: Wisdom is power; so, read more, learn, write and teach to get the country out of poverty and illiteracy. What type of books you publish have better sales? And how? The books we have published were in the fields of literature, history, sociology and law. The books that were introduced as educational resources to students have had better sales. A big problem in our society is the level of free-reading between our citizens which is very low. What collaborations and plans do you have with Star Educational Society? As two cultural institutions I would really like to have long-term cooperation. I know Star for a long time, and I have seen Star has glittered very well and did its best for improving educational and cultural society of the country. I have a suggestion for Starirans. Always try to consider creating some books as educational resources or free-readings. And also to start translating some significant writings from books, magazines and so on. It is because sixty percent of imported books are translated from other sources, and we have to pay a big amount of asset for these books. The centers like Star can easily provide these translations and publish it through organizations like us. This can be very useful and long lasting for educational and cultural fields of the country.