What makes us different is the difference we make

A message by Sajed Abrar, a Senior Teacher at A Branch

Star Educational Society

English Language Program

Our promise is to provide our students with the knowledge, attitudes, values, and dispositions of the students. Our excellent outcomes and long hardworking journey only tell part of the story. During the last 18 years, Star had graduated thousands of students and counseled hundreds of students about the benefits of studying overseas – particularly in top ranking colleges and universities of the world. As education agents, Star alumni have played a vital role in enhancing Afghanistan’s global reputation. Star Educational Society has assisted students on their ‘journey of a lifetime’. It has provided a reliable and informative service to students sharing their wealth of knowledge and guiding students to make the right decisions in their higher education and absolutely future career.

Afghan students today who are living and working in the country and abroad have also the lack of English language skills. Star offers Afghan students opportunities to learn the language of the world and teaches them the skills to meet challenges they will face in life in particular the challenges of higher education. Despite the strict financial matters confront our people and government, we have been intending to provide best quality of the language. We sincerely ask for your continued understanding and also strong support for a developing Afghanistan.

Star Educational Society is the continuing service they provide to students. At Star you will find struggle of a generation; engagement; a variety of activities and a strong sense of progress, along with a very special teacher-student relationship.

For us, teaching and learning are something that we do with our students, not to them or for them. So every lesson becomes a dialogue as we seek to balance study skills and also life-skills so that each and every student will find their spark – understand their strengths and aspire with realism to be the best they can be. Our promise is to provide our students the best language quality which not only makes them known to the world, but also a dignified and honorable Afghan citizen.

I would like to congratulate Star on its 18 years of outstanding success in English language field.

Lastly, we say that what makes us different is the difference we make – to each and every one. Come and visit us to see our approach in action. Our students are truly our best ambassadors; if you let them amaze and delight you; think you will see what makes Star Educational Society special.

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Quote of the Week

“If my mind can conceive it, and my heart can believe it – then I can achieve it.”

-Mohammad Ali Clay - from The Soul of Butterfly

Afghan women break barriers in filmmaking

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What life means to me

For me, life is to understand and find different ways of learning, gaining knowledge, and experiences. Our life is constantly changing and with it, it will change our mind, thoughts, ideas, and vision. Personally, my life has been very complicated to such a point that I cannot imagine how crucial it was to my family and me since my childhood. I was born, and grew up in a family of twelve children. Starvation, hunger and unemployment were not only challenging for my family, but also for all the people in our community, which made our life even more difficult. As far as I remember, people would struggle and fight for their survival.

We did not have enough land for cultivation and plantation of wheat, barley and other necessary agricultural products, which would leave us with no food or bread to eat for many days. I did not have any skills to be able to work and make a living. As timed passed, our life got better and better. When I became a teenager, my lovely mother suggested to our father and family to rent lands who had enough cultivated lands in order to work on. My father was ill and could not work, therefore, my younger brother and I had to work as farmers and shepherds on those lands. This was when two of my sisters who were older than me got married, and left our home. My brother and I would work very hard from the dawn till dark. In addition to work, my younger brother and I would go to schoool in two different shifts in order to be able to help and fulfil family needs besides schoolwork. One of my life changing stories is that, one night my younger brother Wahid Baqeri and I were told to go to the farm that was located in the neighborhood of my grandfather’s house in order irrigate wheat and barley fields. No one was aware of us except my parents. Then, we went to the field and watered them. The moon was bright, which had enlightened the cultivated lands. It was about one o’clock. The weather was cold and the moon gradually disappeared behind the rocky and grassy mountains. Since it got very cold, we could not be there anymore so we decided to go inside our uncle’s shop. As we got closer to the village, a nearby dog suddenly started barking at us. My cousin and nephew had been sleeping outside with a gun to protect our grapes and apples trees from robbers. As the dog continued barking, they woke up from their sleep. We finally arrived and spent the rest of our time in the barn till dawn in the morning.

In the morning when we went back home in the village, my cousin asked me if I had seen something strange while watering the fields the night before. I told him that I had not seen anything. He said, “Last night, wolves and jackals attacked on the dog in neighborhood of your uncle’s barn, and I was there with my gun and I was about to shoot them, but they escaped”. Meanwhile, my younger brother and started describing the story of the whole night and we all laughed a lot. Afterwards, all the villagers were talking about us and we were role model for other teenagers in our society.

The garbage collectors

About the author: Engineer Mohsen Mokhtari

The garbage collectors who come and remove the garbage. They normally come twice or three times a week to pick up the garbage. If they miss a day or two, the garbage bins in our neighborhood overflow onto the roads and streets, which invites no end of dogs and other scavengers. We can see how important these garbage collectors are to us.

When they come, they usually make a lot of noise. Often times they are moody. We should bear with them and treat them well because their job is not a very pleasant one. I don’t think there are many people out there who would want to do this job. Everything they deal with at work is dirty and smelly. Besides, God knows what sort of rubbish they have to handle every day. How they can stand the filth and stench, I don’t know. Perhaps they are used to it. I know for sure that they do not love their jobs. Who would do so? Nevertheless, they do come regular to perform this important job. On some special occasions, people give them gifts, usually a small amount of money.

Since someone has to do this filthy job, he or she needs to be treated well. The least we can do is to make their job easier by keeping our garbage in proper bins, and to show them a little respect, sense of humanity, and appreciation every now and then.

Big Surprise and My Great Life Lesson

About the author: Ms. Maryam Ameneh

I woke up and stared at the sky; the sky looked terribly dark. My body hair bristled and I did not dare to step out of my room. I could see the bright stars in the sky through the window.

Later on, it was about 4:45 AM when suddenly it began to snow heavily and fog cast all the air. For me as a female instructor, getting to the center seemed overwhelming since all the streets and roads in Dasht-e Barchi had become muddy coinciding with terrible weather conditions. Afterwards, we started the class and finished at 6:30 AM. At the end of class, I witnessed the smile, joy, and the efforts of the students, which gave warmth to my heart, and I could not feel cold anymore. It warmed all my bones, and I felt that my blood was running faster as my heart started to beat faster and stronger.

I came out of the class with surplus energy and enthusiasm. My eyes were in tears, which fortified my eagerness and enhanced my commitment. I never had the chance to thank my students for the feeling they had given to me. However, I am writing today as this might be a medium through which I can express my gratitude to them. This story also accentuates the responsibility and commitment of students. Students’ attitude and eagerness towards the lesson, class, and teachers spark better motivation in teachers to endeavor and strive harder in order to provide better quality lessons.
Shahrbanoo Sadat was announced as the youngest filmmaker ever selected for a Cannes Festival award this week. Sadat’s film, ‘Wolf and Sheep,’ won Art Cinema Award at Cannes’ Directors’ Fortnight section in the globally acclaimed festival. Her accomplishment has made our entire nation proud and given hope to other Afghan women across the country. Coming from a country where women continue to be deprived of basic human rights, it was inspiring that Sadat’s film competed with films made by great director such as Paul Joseph Schrader, Alejandro Jodorowsky and Marco Bellocchio.

While Sadat’s film has been praised for beautiful storytelling, her accomplishment itself is a beautiful story. Despite the decades of war and violence, which have had the deadliest impact on women, it is awe-inspiring that Sadat is rising as a powerful woman with a can-do attitude shining not only in national level but also internationally. Born in Iran as a refugee, Sadat returned to Afghanistan with her family after the collapse of the Taliban in 2001. Sadat’s family lived in Bamyan province where she went to school and spent her teenage years. She moved to Kabul after a few years to study film at the university level and start her career in filmmaking.

A different side of Afghanistan

‘Wolf and Sheep’ is inspired by Sadat’s life and day-to-day experiences in a remote village in central part of Afghanistan. The village depicted in the film is a place far from war and violence, a spot where not much happens and where everyone knows everyone else’s business and discusses it endlessly. The film successfully displays an image of Afghanistan that is not familiar to many outside—one where normal life exists despite war.

The film offers a counter narrative to the predominantly negative portrayal of Afghanistan in Western media. While people outside the country know it only as war zone bursting with terrorist training hubs, there is much more to Afghanistan. In a society where war and terrorism is part of everyday life for many, cinema and the arts in general can play a massive role in bringing hope, change and normalcy in the society and Afghan women filmmakers are aware of this. The country is currently experiencing a golden age for its cinema and arts in general. Sadat one of the many woman filmmakers in Afghanistan who is using film as a tool for change inside and outside the country. Earlier this year, Sahraa Karimi won Best Film Award at the Dhaka International Film Festival for her film, “Afghan Women behind Driving Wheel.”

Despite progress challenges remain

Though ‘Wolf and Sheep’ focuses on a peaceful narrative, the film’s production was impacted by the war nevertheless. Due to security concerns, Sadat’s film was shot in the dusty mountains of Tajikistan. It took two months to build a village and bring 38 Hazaragi-speaking villagers, adults and children to play versions of themselves. The difficulties in filming ‘Wolf and Sheep’ mirror the challenges Afghan filmmakers and artists have ahead of them. Perhaps the biggest obstacle is restrictive cultural norms that view women’s participation in society and in media as a sign of promiscuity and keep women in isolation and darkness in a male dominant society. Another major challenge is lack of literacy. Only 12% of women can read and write and even fewer have access to higher education to pursue filmmaking or any other field. Women who do have the chance to seek education face discrimination and harassment on the street and at workplaces. Perhaps it is these obstacles that make the accomplishments of Sadat and her peers more significant. Despite the difficulties and restrictions they face, Afghan women have always been and continue to break barriers and move the country forward. As one film director, Saba Sahar proclaimed in an interview, “Afghan women are capable of doing anything men do.”
How 500 Kilovolt power line rerouted from Bamyam to Salang? part(1)

Written by: Showkat Mehran
Translated by: Masooma Jafari
Source: Elkhayat-e-Roze

Protests increased when Afghanistan’s energy organizations, especially Da Afghanistan Bereshna Sherkat (DABS), chose Salang route to transmit 500 Kilovolt Turkmenistan’s power line. While the Master Plan that was made by Fichtner, the German Company, has recommend- ed the Bamyam route. Thousand people in Bamyam, Herat, and Ghazni provinces protested. Finally ten thousand people in Kabul demonstrated on Monday, May 15, 2016 which is called the “Great Monday.” And these protests had been organized by the “Light Movement.” The demonstra- tions caused the government to suspend the project and make a review commis- sion. Now the main question is that when the story of rerouting the power line from Bamyam to Salang started and who had the roles in this rerouting? I emphasize that this writing tries to explain the story of redirecting power line and has noth- ing to do with the Light Movement, and the accuracy or inaccuracy of the govern- ment’s decision on rerouting the power line pass. And also this writing does not talk about a comparison between Salang and Bamyam routes.

Possibly for the first time the Open Society News on January 28, 2015 revealed the government’s decision that in contrast with the Afghanistan Energy Scheme wanted to pass the 500 KV electricity line through Salang. Open Society News in its report writes,” Now the govern- ment contrasting with Fichtner’s survey, wants to pass the three big north to south transmission power lines through Salang. Asian Developmental Bank (ADB) insists that they should not do this but the gov- ernment says this power line should pass through Salang route.” Then on March 24, 2015, the Hash-e- Sobh Daily in its report claimed that. Documents which has become available to Hash-e-Sobh Daily indicates that Fichtner German Company is insisting on transmission of the power line through Bamyam but DABS has opposed this project. But on January 09, 2016, Sarwar Danish, the Second Vice President, in an open letter, criticized DABS for changing the power line route. However, Sarwar Danish had already propounded his criticism in the govern- ment and then on February 22, 2015, the government held a sitting with represen- tatives of Bamyam people, DABS’s tech- nical representatives, and representa- tives of Sarwar Danish and Muhammad Mauhaq. But DABS inactively bid for the project and after finalizing the win- ner company and rerouting the power line route, sent the issue to the National Procurement Committee on January 02, 2016 for confirmation. After Sarwar Dan- ish’s letter, President Ghani requested the DABS and Ministry of Energy and Water (MEW) to reach to an understanding with the Second Vice President. The commit- tee, which was formed on guidance of the president, presented its report after four sessions and insisted on Bamyam route. But they did not give the importance to this report in practice.

Sarwar Danish’s letter and the men- tioned committee’s report shows that DABS has already had an emphasis on Salang route. But these reports cannot explain that basically when and how the opposition started. Has this route been selected during National Unity Gov- ernment or the Salang route had been selected during Karzai’s Governance. Whereas, Light Movement as the main core of recent protests insists that Fichtner Company has codified the power line scheme and has an emphasis on Bamyam route but the government has chosen the Salang route.

On the other hand, The National Uni- ty Government’s reasoning is that why political figures like Karzin Khalilzad and Sadiq Muddahber, who were both parts of the previous government, did not protest in that time. Whereas Karzin Khalilzad and Sadiq Muddahber denied that the decision of redirecting the power line was made during Karzai’s governance and Emal Faiq, Hamid Karzai’s spokesman, denied the National Unity Government’s claim either and has said that the decision of redirecting the power line has been made in December, 2014 by the present government. In addition, the Minister of Energy and Water of Afghanistan, Mr. Ali Ahmad Osmani, in his interview with Tolo News said,” Afghanistan Govern- ment suggested the Fichtner Company to survey the Salang route as well and Fich- nter Company found out that the Salang route is cheaper and more possible.” The Minister of Energy, in this interview, in re- sponse to the question that why Fichtner has selected the Salang route in its second report said,” This is exactly the problem that why a valid company one time se- lects one route and another time selects another route.”

The reality is that in Fichtner’s Mas- ter Plan, the Salang route has not been mentioned as a more possible pass and in the meantime, the ADB’s documents shows that Afghanistan government of- ficials oppose the Fichtner’s Master Plan and insist on Salang route. It has been recommended in Fichtner’s Scheme that Salang route is more suitable in terms of economy and security than Salang route. In fact, the main document that protest- ers refer to is this Master Plan. It has been emphasized in this Master Plan that Salang route in terms of natural disaster and ruggedness causes the project to be vulnerable and on the other hand, does not have any economic efficiency. While, Bamyam route is safe and also has an eco- nomic importance for the future econom- ic projects such as Iron mine, Coal mine, Power generation and entrepreneurship. The Fichtner Company has enough expe- rience in making Master Plans for other countries including Afghanistan’s Energy Master Plan which is one of the most suc- cessful Energy Master Plans in the region. After Sarwar Danish’s protests in Cab- inet, again Dr. Ashraf Ghani ruled that the 500 KV power line have to pass through Salang Pass. It happened while technical analyses and recommendations of the experts also had an emphasis on Bamyam route.

In fact, according to Asian develop- ment Bank’s documents, Afghanistan Government requested the ADB to codify the Afghanistan Energy Master Plan. The Afghanistan Energy Strategy that was mentioned in the Afghan National Devel- opment Strategy in 2004 was not detailed enough. Therefore, a technical work- ing group which consisted of Ministry of Finance (MoF), Ministry of Energy and Water (MEW), and ADB, was created to oversee the development of the Master Plan. The ADB and Afghanistan govern- ment finalized the decision of codifica- tion of Master Plan on November 6, 2010. The survey of the north to south power transmission and formulation of a Na- tional Energy Master Plan, with Japan fi- nancial supports with one and a half mil- lion dollars’ worth was given to Fichtner Consulting Company by ADB. Finally in 2013 this Master Plan was formulated by Fichtner Firm and was approved by the Afghan governmental officials and parliament. The Master Plan studied the two paths of Salang and Bamyam and fi- nally recommended the Bamyam route. On April 10, 2013, the Fichtner firm pre- sented this Master Plan in the Ministry of Energy and water’s hall and in this ses- sion the previous Minister of Energy and Water said,” Afghanistan’s power Master Plan for the first time had been made in 1981 that means 32 years ago and was re- vised in 2005. But with population growth and the economy, MEW decided to re- new the Power Master Plan.” ISmail Khan added that,” Building Kunar, Kajaki dams and Sheberghan’s Gas and 500 KV Turk- men’s power transmission are in the first stage of this Master Plan and other proj- ects have been also included in this plan step by step.” In May 2013, the Afghan- stan’s Energy Master Plan was officially published by ADB.

When in the year 2010, international efforts and supports were to build the Af- ghanistan Energy Master Plan, according to a report of ADB; institutions like DABS, MEW and Central Statistics Office were selected to collect information (Data). It is while Special Inspector General for Af- ghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) in that time in its report has declared that the major reason for lack of progress in MEW and DABS was corruption.
I keep pair of his gloves display

"Muhammad Ali was The Greatest. Period. If you just asked him, he’d tell you. He’d tell you he was the double greatest; that he’d ‘handcuffed lightning, thrown thunder into jail.’

But what made The Champ the greatest—what truly separated him from everyone else—is that everyone else would tell you pretty much the same thing. Like everyone else on the planet, Michelle and I mourn his passing. But we’re also grateful to God for how fortunate we are to have known him, if just for a while; for how fortunate we all are that The Greatest chose to grace our time.

In my private study, just off the Oval Office, I keep a pair of his gloves on display, just under that iconic photograph of him—the young champ, just 22 years old, roaring like a lion over a fallen Sonny Liston. I was too young when it was taken to understand who he was—still Cassius Clay, already an Olympic Gold Medal winner, yet to set out on a spiritual journey that would lead him to his Muslim faith, exile him at the peak of his power, and set the stage for his return to greatness with a name as familiar to the downtrodden in the slums of Southeast Asia and the villages of Africa as it was to cheering crowds in Madison Square Garden.

'I am America,' he once declared. ‘I am the part you won’t recognize. But get used to me—black, confident, cocky; my name, not yours; my religion, not yours; my goals, my own. Get used to me.’

That’s the Ali I came to know as I came of age—not just as skilled a poet on the mic as he was a fighter in the ring, but a man who fought for what was right. A man who fought for us. He stood with King and Mandela; stood up when it was hard; spoke out when others wouldn’t. His fight outside the ring would cost him his title and his public standing. It would earn him enemies on the left and the right, make him reviled, and nearly send him to jail. But Ali stood his ground. And his victory helped us get used to the America we recognize today.

He wasn’t perfect, of course. For all his magic in the ring, he could be careless with his words, and full of contradictions as his faith evolved. But his wonderful, infectious, even innocent spirit ultimately won him more fans than foes—maybe because in him, we hoped to see something of ourselves. Later, as his physical powers ebbed, he became an even more powerful force for peace and reconciliation around the world. We saw a man who said he was so mean he’d make medicine sick reveal a soft spot, visiting children with illness and disability around the world, telling them they, too, could become the greatest. We watched a hero light a torch, and fight his greatest fight of all on the world stage once again; a battle against the disease that ravaged his body, but couldn’t take the spark from his eyes.

Muhammad Ali shook up the world. And the world is better for it. We are all better for it. Michelle and I send our deepest condolences to his family, and we pray that the greatest fighter of them all finally rests in peace.’ —President Obama

Muhammad Ali (1942-2016) was an American former heavyweight champion boxer and one of the greatest sporting figures of the 20th century. An Olympic Gold Medalist and the first fighter to capture the heavyweight title three times, Ali won 56 times in his 21-year professional career. Revered by millions worldwide and revered by millions more, Ali cut quite a figure, 6-foot-3 and 210 pounds in his prime. "Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee," his cornermen exhorted, and he did just that in a way no heavyweight had ever fought before. He fought in three different decades, finished with a record of 56-5 with 37 knockouts — 26 of those bouts promoted by Arum — and was the first man to win heavyweight titles three times.

He whipped the fearsome Sonny Liston twice, toppled the mighty George Foreman with the rope-a-dope in Zaire, and nearly fought to the death with Joe Frazier in the Philippines. Through it all, he was trailed by a colorful entourage who merely added to his growing legend. 'Rumble, young man, rumble,' cornerman Bundini Brown would yell to him. And rumble Ali did. He fought anyone who meant anything and made millions of dollars with his lightning-quick jab. His fights were so memorable that they had names — "Rumble in the Jungle" and "Thrilla in Manila."

'But it was as much his antics — and his mouth — outside the ring that transformed the man born Cassius Clay into a household name as Muhammad Ali. ‘I am the greatest,' Ali thundered again and again. ZStar Distribution
Failure is not a person

There was an old man who had a broke merchant living next doors. One day he decided that he needed to consult a business matter with somebody, so he told his sons to go and ask the neighbor if he didn’t mind helping. One of his sons burst out objecting: “but he is broke! You can’t trust his consultation father!”

The old man replied: The failure is an event, it’s not a person! A person who has once failed is several steps ahead compared to a person who hasn’t had the experience. He has touched and felt the other side of success and knows the paths ending to failure. He is capable to tell us about the dungeons that lead to failure. When somebody succeed, he may not have learnt a lot! But surely when somebody fails, he has learnt so many things that if he hasn’t lost courage, he will be able to pass the experience to others. When a person fails, don’t assume him forever!

I doubt you can understand me. Maybe, it isn’t understandable for you, because you are a man and you have never experienced violence as we women have. When I say violence, it doesn’t mean only killing and beating women. It means how you look at them with your eyes, if you say something bad, if you abuse or harass them in the street… all of these are examples of violence against women. As a human, one should not be allowed to abuse another. We women are also human and free like you are.

A person who has lived in this country, especially a woman, will understand what I am saying; how it is difficult to be a woman in such a country. This is a country where we are not allowed to do what we want and to live without fear of being subjected to harassment, or even worse. We even cannot dress how we like. There is always the threat that men can harass us whenever and wherever they choose. I would like to relate a personal event, to serve as an example of the problems of women living in this society.

That day I felt very upset for the girls who are always facing these problems. However, it wasn’t the first time that I have experienced it. I had also heard from my friends that they were harassed in the street, but couldn’t do anything except escape. Because we live in a male dominated society no one will side with the women. If a man abuses a woman, all of the people will side with the man, stating that the women should take care of their hijab and should not go here and not go there. It is the woman who is blamed; the man is always innocent.

I wish for that day when the men stop engaging in violence against women. I hope one day the men will respect the women and not look at them as their possessions.

To those who cause violence

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What is Love?

Adoring someone for invisible reasons is love
A spark that creates flames in the heart is love
Magic that has no beginning and no ending is love
A feeling that you cherish without end is love
Being able to imagine a world beyond this world is love
A faraway dream that resides inside the heart is love

About the author: Qamar Nisa is a Star alumna who will be a freshman at Wagner College in New York. She plans to pursue studies in a health-related field.

About the author: Rubaba Raha is a Star alumna and teacher. She graduated from Kabul University with a degree in French Literature.
We had heard there was a new king on the throne in Kabul. He was called Taraki. He was cruel. People suffered while he sat on the throne. Every day and every night we heard rumors and horror stories. People were afraid to recite the Quran and offer their prayers at their own homes. They feared it might offend Taraki, and he might send over his polooos to punish the people. We heard that people had been taken away for owning copies of the Quran. We had a Quran at home. I was afraid. I had to hide it. I dug a hole in the kitchen floor. I kissed the Quran, wrapped it in multiple layers of bags, and buried it in that hole. I was confident the polooos will not find it if they came and searched our home. Weeks passed. One morning as I sat on the floor sipping tea, I sensed that there was something crawling under the floor. I paid attention. There was something crawling from underneath the kitchen floor. I was alarmed. I began digging into the floor. I pulled out the Quran. Rats had tunneled their way through, gnawed through the multiple layers of bags, and had begun gnawing the Quran. In those days, the village mullah was Shaikh Raeesi from Anguri. We thought if the polooos took one person away, that would be him. He was terrified. He spent his days amongst the rocks in the mountains above the village. He descended upon us every now and then, filled his swag with food, and returned to the mountains. On another day, your auntie Zia Gul was reciting the Quran at home. She read as if she was whispering. At that very moment, there was a knock on the door. My body paralyzed from fear. She looked at me as if she was about to die. I was almost certain that the agents of the King had found us, they had heard Zia Gul read the Quran. They must have been eavesdropping, and they wanted to take her away. As these thoughts went through my head, there was another knock on the door. I trembled, got up and walked to the door. I feared that it was the end. I unchained the lock, peeked out, and there he stood, with no sign of worry on his face, the always oblivious, Ewaz Kakai. He wanted food and tea. To see him there made me happy and angry at the same time. Kakai did not understand. When one is afraid, one loses the control of their decisions. Fear controls everything.

About the author: Hadi Zaher was the first graduate of Quetta’s branch of Star Educational Society in the year 1999. He has an MA from the University of Wollongong in Australia and is currently a post-graduate student at the University of New South Wales.

Maxim Gorky

Aleksy Maximovich Peshkov was born on March 28, 1868, in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia. His father died from cholera when he was 5 years old. His mother soon remarried and left him to be raised by his maternal grandparents. His grandfather was a strict taskmaster and abusive, but his grandmother shared her knowledge of folktales with young Peshkov. Declining family income from his grandfather’s dye shop meant that Peshkov had to begin working when he was just 8. His jobs included working as an apprentice, a ship’s dishwasher and a factory worker. He learned to read and write along the way, but by the time he was 21 the misery of his life prompted Peshkov to become a hobo, and he spent the next couple years wandering about Russia. In the 1890s, Peshkov began writing. He adopted the pseudonym Maxim Gorky (choosing the name Gorky because it meant “bitter”). In 1892 his first short story “Makar Chudra,” was published in various journals and became very popular with readers. Then, in 1895, the short story “Chekash”—about a thief and a peasant boy—was published. In these and other pieces, Gorky wrote using knowledge gained from living in poverty and on the margins of society. His perspective won him great acclaim around the country, and he was soon viewed as one of its leading writers. In 1898 a Gorky collection, Sketches and Stories, was published. Gorky also produced full-length books and plays, beginning with the novel Foma Gordeyev (1899). His play The Lower Depths was performed in 1902; it became widely popular in Russia and throughout Europe. Gorky also penned the novel Mother (1906), a three-volume autobiography and literary portraits of fellow Russian writers such as Leo Tolstoy and Anton Chekhov.

Maxim Gorky explains Lenin's thoughts on this book:

"Now, the bald, r-slurring, strong, thickset man who kept rubbing his Socratic brow with one hand and pumping my hand with the other began to talk at once, with a kind twinkle in his amazingly alert eyes, of the shortcomings of my book Mother which he had, it appeared, read in the manuscript borrowed from I. P. Ladyzhnikov. I told him I had been in a hurry to write the book, but before I could explain why, Lenin nodded and himself gave the reason: it was a good thing that I had hurried because that was a much needed book. Many workers had joined the revolutionary movement impulsively, spontaneously, and would now find reading Mother very useful. "A very timely book!" That was all the praise he gave me, but it was extremely valuable to me. After that he asked in a business-like tone whether Mother had been translated into any foreign languages and what damage was done to it by the Russian and American censors. When I told him that the author was to be put on trial, he frowned, then threw back his head, closed his eyes, and gave a burst of amazing laughter..."
Afghanistan’s women have made significant gains in recent years, with more girls attending school and more women working outside the home. But fear still overshadows the lives of many. A resurgent Taliban recently provoked outrage by publicly executing two women, as this 101 East documentary shows, the greatest threat many women face comes from loved ones at home. Activist Noorjahan Akbar talks about the challenges in overcoming conservative attitudes in the face of rising "anti-woman propaganda".

Al Jazeera speaks to Noorjahan Akbar, a human rights activist, about the immense challenges facing Afghan women.

When you talk about the threat of violence, I don’t just mean the Taliban - even though they are largely responsible for targeting and killing female teachers, police officers, journalists, and activists. On a daily basis, Afghan women face harassment in public spaces. In fact, nine out of 10 women say they have faced harassment at some point on the way to work or school, and out of those, 14 percent say they stopped going to school because of it. Eighty-seven percent of Afghan women have faced verbal, sexual or physical violence at home.

The vast majority of cases of violence against women, even the public targeted assassinations, are not met with any legal repercussions. Despite all this, Afghan women are teachers, ministers, parliamentarians, musicians, writers, journalists, photographers, vaccinators and more, and we are working hard to make things better for ourselves and the country. But in order for us to really participate in rebuilding Afghanistan, our security should be a priority for our government. When our bodies are fair game, when it is always open season on women, when we are fearful of losing our lives on a daily basis, how can we move the country forward?

The Taliban recently publicly executed two women - one of them in an apparent honour killing - in northern Afghanistan, according to news reports. Are you concerned that this could signal a downward spiral for Afghan women? The harsh reality is that even though this case caught the eye of the international press, these ‘honour’ killings are not out of the ordinary. Whether by the Taliban or family members, Afghan women are killed regularly for the simple fact of being born female or choosing their own husbands. However, what these specific public executions tells me is that the rule of law has further deteriorated in Afghanistan and that is not good for anyone.

Many Afghan women suffer domestic violence at the hands of their family. How difficult is it to change attitudes towards women? It is extremely difficult to change attitudes towards women and decrease gender-based violence anywhere in the world, but in Afghanistan it is hard also because radicalism, Talibanism and gender-based violence at home are all related and perpetuate one another. Especially in the last few years, there has been an increase in radical anti-woman propaganda in the big cities. Local mosques that were once moderate and somewhat accepting of women’s rights, now spend entire sermons on how women shouldn’t be allowed to work, study, or even speak in public.

In addition to using public executions to make a show of women’s punishment and terrorise women into silence and into the margins, today’s radical anti-television, social media, sermons, and even schools to perpetuate and sanctify violence.

Impressive gains have been made in the number of girls attending school in Afghanistan. Is there a danger that these rights could be eroded? Yes, and we are seeing the erosion right now. In 2014, 103 schools were attacked in Afghanistan. The majority of these schools were girls’ schools. This year, these attacks have increased. In January, a girls’ school was torched in Kabul - something that hasn’t happened in the capital city since the Taliban took power in 1996. In February, the Ministry of Education said 708 schools were closed due to insecurity depriving thousands of girls and boys of an education. Just this week, 20 school girls were poisoned in Ghur province.

These attacks are terrifying, not just for those who have faced the violence themselves, but for the country as a whole. International organizations have raised concerns that women’s rights activists are being deliberately targeted. How difficult is it for activists to stand up and demand change? I don’t know any human rights activist working for gender equality who feels safe in Afghanistan.

We have seen our sisters killed and asked for justice only to be threatened and sidelined more. We have called for the prosecution of those who killed Malalai Kakar, Hanifa Sadi, Safia Ahmed Jan, Zakia Zaki and many more journalists and activists killed for being outspoken women and we have been told to shut up. We are told on a daily basis that we shouldn’t talk about the issues we face. The threats we get, the violence against women happen because we are bringing shame to our country.

The reality is that the fact that these injustices exist is a matter of shame - not people demanding an end for it.

Afghan women still face numerous challenges in their daily lives. Are you optimistic about the future? Yes. I am optimistic because I see the passion with which young women are working for change - inside the country and because I know that despite the heartache, the threats and the disappointments this fight are worth it.

Being pessimistic will not help us. It will only discourage us from working. I prefer not giving up. Afghanistan belongs to me and my peers as much as it belongs to the radicals advocating for violence, and we will not surrender the country to them - not without a fight at least.