

Reflections

Reality of Life: Face the Way it Comes

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My life changed when I was 12 years old. I was in 8th grade. It was the summer of 2000 in Zahidan, Iran. My mother woke me and my little brother up in the middle of the night and told us that we are secretly leaving the country. She was in an abusive marriage for over 13 years and this was the day she decided to escape. According to the Iranian divorce laws, the children's custody is handed over to the father. And my mother simply could not give us away, so she decided to quietly leave the country and move to Canada.

Iranian calendar is different from the rest of the world. In Iran solar calendar is used instead of Gregorian and the dates differ. We reached the airport to find that my mother had mistaken the date conversion and that the flight had already left a day before. Devastated, we returned to my aunt's place, lived there for a week and decided to move to Pakistan.

We crossed the border on foot, in the middle of the night. The plan was to reach Islamabad and apply in United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). But as we crossed the border and reached Quetta, we were kidnapped by a gang of Balochis for ransom. They kept us locked up in a room for about 2 months. My mother made arrangements by calling our relatives back in Iran. Finally, we were able to pay the ransom of 20,000 dollars and they let us go.

Moving on, we found an old, kind man who helped us get to Islamabad. We reached Islamabad, applied in the UNHRC and waited for our case to be analyzed. It was to take a few months so we started living in Islamabad. After a few months, when the hope started fading away, and we needed money, I started working in a small local restaurant. I used to work full day, peel 20 kg onion every day and take the leftover food home for my mother and brother. Days passed on like that and the UNHRC rejected our case.

We moved back to Quetta because it was easier for us to survive there. Also my mother found out that there is a UNHRC office in Quetta as well, so we decided to move back and apply again. It was after this second rejection that we realized we were stuck in Pakistan forever. We did not know the language well, I was out of school for about 2 years and we had to practically



start our life from scratch. We stayed in Quetta and applied through proper channels to acquire Pakistani citizenship. It was not an easy life in Quetta. As we settled there, I decided that I was not going to live like this forever. This is not the kind of life I had imagined for myself. At the age 14, I decided to learn English language. And I had to learn from the alphabet as English is not taught in schools in Iran.

So here I was, away from my relatives and friends, away from the comfort of familiarity, working part time in restaurants. There were days when we didn't know how we would buy food. I was earning a little and saving money to be able to pay for my English classes for which I used to go on a landlord's bicycle. It was at a one-hour distance. In 2 years I learned enough English to be able to teach it. The landlady we were living with was a principal and was kind enough to give me and my brother admission in her school. So meanwhile I also did my Matric. I started teaching English in the same academy from where I learnt it. I was earning 40 rupees per hour and teaching 5 hours a week. This was year 2005.

My mother also started working as a beautician. Things started getting somewhat better. In 2006, Akbar Bugti was killed and the situation in Quetta got

very tense. I had started F.Sc. by then. Our college was taken over by army and there were looming threats against everyone who was not Baloch. It was not safe for us to move around in the streets and we were held at gun point and robbed multiple times on the street. For quite a long time I used to get flashbacks of being at gunpoint and feeling frozen in fear. We managed to survive and I continued on with my education. I saw education as my only way out of this dark life.

Completing my matric was not an easy feat. I was not good at English yet and I remember sitting alone in the library and crying because I could not understand a single sentence of the Pak Studies book. F.Sc. was better because I was already teaching English by then.

All through intermediate and bachelors, I kept teaching in academies and kept on improving my teaching skills. By the end of my bachelor, I had 4-year experience of teaching. I applied in Lahore Grammar School in Quetta and they hired me. It felt like such an achievement. I worked in LGS for a year and in evenings I was working in SOS village. While I was doing well apparently, I was hitting depression. With all this uncertainty, struggle and years of threats, my energy levels went really low. There were days when I was not able to get up from my couch. I would just sleep, sleep and sleep. I had suicidal thoughts. Life did not hold any positive meaning for me. It was all struggle.

After a year I decided to quit LGS and continue with my education. I did my Masters in Psychology from Balochistan University. Studying psychology helped me understand my own self, helped me cope with my depression, and equipped me to deal with people in a better way. Psychology became the passion of my life. While I was doing my Masters, I realized there is no place for psychology in Quetta, so I decided to move to Lahore.

I visited Lahore once during my college for a youth declamation contest in 2013 and I was really impressed. This was the best city I had visited so far, and during my Bachelors I had decided this was my

dream.

In 2015 when I moved to Lahore, another chapter of my struggle started. I found a job in special education and was very active in youth training and development programs. In one such event as a volunteer, the organization was quite impressed by my leadership skills, so they gave me internship in training and event management. From there on, I got a job at Rs. 10,000 per month in another training company. I kept moving steadily, one step up at a time. I did my Training and Development certification and began my career as a corporate trainer.

While I started conducting trainings with my boss, I learnt about this Hypnotherapy certification which I knew I had to get. I put my job at stake and went for it. Little did I know at that time that this would become my profession. I got certified by a United States certifying body in 2016, after which I started my clinical practice as a hypnotherapist. At this time, I was also studying M.S. Organizational Psychology at GCU Lahore.

It is the year 2021 now. In 5 years I have grown to become one of the most recognized hypnotherapists, not only in Lahore but in Pakistan. Hundreds of clients have found healing for their troubles. I am now an international hypnotherapy trainer certified by NGH and running an institute for mind sciences education in Lahore. Students from all over Pakistan are benefitting from our courses. I have a beautiful wife who is a doctor. We are living a comfortable life in a peaceful neighborhood. We have a beautiful dog who loves to play around in the neighborhood. I made an international trip for the first time, and it felt like a dream. I could not believe that a young poor boy in an unknown place without knowing the local language had grown so big and affluent. I had certainly dreamt it, but had not imagined reaching here. Today I truly believe that with hard work and passion, we can achieve anything in the world. My story is yet to continue. I am 32 years old and there is still a long, exciting life ahead.