

boys. When a chicken was slaughtered for dinner, the girls would get the wings and the neck while the luscious breast meat was enjoyed by my father, his brother and my grandfather. 'From early on I could feel I was different from my sisters,' my father says.

There was little to do in my father's village. It was too narrow even for a cricket pitch and only one family had a television. On Fridays the brothers would creep into the mosque and watch in wonder as my grandfather stood in the pulpit and preached to the congregation for an hour or so, waiting for the moment when his voice would rise and practically shake the rafters.

My grandfather had studied in India, where he had seen great speakers and leaders including Mohammad Ali Jinnah (the founder of Pakistan), Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, our great Pashtun leader who campaigned for independence. *Baba*, as I called him, had even witnessed the moment of freedom from the British colonialists at midnight on 14 August 1947. He had an old radio set my uncle still has, on which he loved to listen to the news. His sermons were often illustrated by world events or historical happenings as well as stories from the Quran and the Hadith, the sayings of the Prophet. He also liked to talk about politics. Swat became part of Pakistan in 1969, the year my father was born. Many Swatis were unhappy about this, complaining about the Pakistani justice system, which they said was much slower and less effective than their old tribal ways. My grandfather would rail against the class system, the continuing power of the khans and the gap between the haves and have-nots.

My country may not be very old but unfortunately it already has a history of military coups, and when my father was eight a general called Zia ul-Haq seized power. There are still many pictures of him around. He was a scary man with dark panda shadows around his eyes, large teeth that seemed to stand to attention and hair pomaded flat on his head. He arrested our elected prime minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and had him tried for treason then hanged from a scaffold in Rawalpindi jail. Even today people talk of Mr Bhutto as a man of great charisma. They say he was the first Pakistani leader to stand up for the common people, though he himself was a feudal lord with vast estates of mango fields. His execution shocked everybody and made Pakistan look bad all around the world. The Americans cut off aid.

To try to get people at home to support him, General Zia launched a campaign of Islamisation to make us a proper Muslim country with the army as the defenders of our country's ideological as well as geographical frontiers. He told our people it was their duty to obey his government because it was pursuing Islamic principles. Zia even wanted to dictate how we should pray, and set up *salat* or prayer committees in every district, even in our remote village, and appointed 100,000 prayer inspectors. Before then mullahs had almost been figures of fun – my father said at wedding parties they would just hang around in a corner and leave early – but under Zia they became influential and were called to Islamabad for guidance on sermons. Even my grandfather went.

Under Zia's regime life for women in Pakistan became much more restricted. Jinnah said, 'No struggle can ever succeed without women participating side by side with men. There are two powers in the world; one is the sword and the other is the pen. There is a third power stronger than both, that of women.' But General Zia brought in Islamic laws which reduced a woman's evidence in court to count for only half that of a man's. Soon our prisons were full of cases like that of a thirteen-year-old girl who was raped and become pregnant and was then sent to prison for adultery because she couldn't produce four male witnesses to prove it was a crime. A woman couldn't even open a bank account without a man's permission. As a nation we have always been good at hockey, but Zia made