

For the first few years after graduating from Jehanzeb my father worked as an English teacher in a well-known private college. But the salary was low, just 1,600 rupees a month (around £12), and my grandfather complained he was not contributing to the household. It was also not enough for him to save for the wedding he hoped for to his beloved Tor Pekai.

One of my father's colleagues at the school was his friend Mohammad Naeem Khan. He and my father had studied for their bachelors and masters degrees in English together and were both passionate about education. They were also both frustrated as the school was very strict and unimaginative. Neither the students nor the teachers were supposed to have their own opinions, and the owners' control was so tight they even frowned upon friendship between teachers. My father longed for the freedom that would come with running his own school. He wanted to encourage independent thought and hated the way the school he was at rewarded obedience above open-mindedness and creativity. So when Naeem lost his job after a dispute with the college administration, they decided to start their own school.

Their original plan was to open a school in my father's village of Shahpur, where there was a desperate need: 'Like a shop in a community where there are no shops,' he said. But when they went there to look for a building, there were banners everywhere advertising a school opening – someone had beaten them to it. So they decided to set up an English-language school in Mingora, thinking that since Swat was a tourist destination there would be a demand for learning in English.

As my father was still teaching, Naeem wandered the streets looking for somewhere to rent. One day he called my father excitedly to say he'd found the ideal place. It was the ground floor of a two-storey building in a well-off area called Landikas with a walled courtyard where students could gather. The previous tenants had also run a school – the Ramada School. The owner had called it that because he had once been to Turkey and seen a Ramada Hotel! But the school had gone bankrupt, which perhaps should have made them think twice. Also the building was on the banks of a river where people threw their rubbish and it smelt foul in hot weather.

My father went to see the building after work. It was a perfect night with stars and a full moon just above the trees, which he took to be a sign. 'I felt so happy,' he recalls. 'My dream was coming true.'

Naeem and my father invested their entire savings of 60,000 rupees. They borrowed 30,000 rupees more to repaint the building, rented a shack across the road to live in and went from door to door trying to find students. Unfortunately the demand for English tuition turned out to be low, and there were unexpected drains on their income. My father's involvement in political discussions continued after college. Every day his fellow activists came to the shack or the school for lunch. 'We can't afford all this entertaining!' Naeem would complain. It was also becoming clear that while they were best friends, they found it hard to work as business partners.

On top of that, there was a stream of guests from Shangla now that my father had a place for them to stay. We Pashtuns cannot turn away relatives or friends, however inconvenient. We don't respect privacy and there is no such thing as making an appointment to see someone. Visitors can turn up whenever *they* wish and can stay as long as *they* want. It was a nightmare for someone trying to start a business and it drove Naeem to distraction. He joked to my father that if either of them had relatives to stay, they should pay a fine. My father kept trying to persuade Naeem's friends and family to stay so he could be fined too!

After three months Naeem had had enough. 'We are supposed to be collecting money in enrolment fees. Instead the only people knocking on our doors are beggars! This is a Herculean task,' he added.