out of the village and realise his dream.

My father was at his wits' end and wept with frustration. His beloved mother had died just before he graduated from school. He knew if she had been alive, she would have been on his side. He pleaded with his father but to no avail. His only hope was his brother-in-law in Karachi. My grandfather suggested that he might take my father in so he could go to college there. The couple would soon be arriving in the village as they were coming to offer condolences after my grandmother's death.

My father prayed they would agree, but my grandfather asked them as soon as they arrived, exhausted after the three-day bus journey, and his son-in-law refused outright. My grandfather was so furious he would not speak to them for their entire stay. My father felt he had lost his chance and would end up like his brother teaching in a local school. The school where Uncle *Khan dada* taught was in the mountain village of Sewoor, about an hour and a half 's climb from their house. It didn't even have its own building. They used the big hall in the mosque, where they taught more than a hundred children ranging from five to fifteen years old.

The people in Sewoor were Gujars, Kohistanis and Mians. We regard Mians as noble or landed people, but Gujars and Kohistanis are what we call hilly people, peasants who look after buffaloes. Their children are usually dirty and they are looked down upon by Pashtuns, even if they are poor themselves. 'They are dirty, black and stupid,' people would say. 'Let them be illiterate.' It is often said that teachers don't like to be posted to such remote schools and generally make a deal with their colleagues so that only one of them has to go to work each day. If the school has two teachers, each goes in for three days and signs the other in. If it has three teachers, each goes in for just two days. Once there, all they do is keep the children quiet with a long stick as they cannot imagine education will be any use to them.

My uncle was more dutiful. He liked the hilly people and respected their tough lives. So he went to the school most days and actually tried to teach the children. After my father had graduated from school he had nothing to do so he volunteered to help his brother. There his luck changed. Another of my aunts had married a man in that village and they had a relative visiting called Nasir Pacha, who saw my father at work. Nasir Pacha had spent years in Saudi Arabia working in construction, making money to send back to his family. My father told him he had just finished school and had won a college place at Jehanzeb. He did not mention he could not afford to take it as he did not want to embarrass his father.

'Why don't you come and live with us?' asked Nasir Pacha.

'Oof, I was so happy, by God,' says my father. Pacha and his wife Jajai became his second family. Their home was in Spal Bandi, a beautiful mountain village on the way to the White Palace, and my father describes it as a romantic and inspirational place. He went there by bus, and it seemed so big to him compared to his home village that he thought he'd arrived in a city. As a guest, he was treated exceptionally well. Jajai replaced his late mother as the most important woman in my father's life. When a villager complained to her that he was flirting with a girl living across the road, she defended him. 'Ziauddin is as clean as an egg with no hair,' she said. 'Look instead to your own daughter.'

It was in Spal Bandi that my father came across women who had great freedom and were not hidden away as in his own village. The women of Spal Bandi had a beautiful spot on top of the mountain where only they could congregate to chat about their everyday lives. It was unusual for women to have a special place to meet outside the home. It was also there that my father met his