

that was a smaller shed containing a panel with a confusion of wires sprouting from it. The village received no electricity from the government so many villagers got their power from these makeshift hydroelectric projects.

As the day went on and the sun climbed higher in the sky, more and more of the White Mountain would be bathed in golden sun. Then as evening came it fell in shadow as the sun moved up the Black Mountain. We timed our prayers by the shadow on the mountains. When the sun hit a certain rock, we used to say our *asr* or afternoon prayers. Then in the evening, when the white peak of Spin Ghar was even more beautiful than in the morning, we said the *makkam* or evening prayers. You could see the White Mountain from everywhere, and my father told me he used to think of it as a symbol of peace for our land, a white flag at the end of our valley. When he was a child he thought this small valley was the entire world and that if anyone went beyond the point where either mountain kissed the sky, they would fall off.

Though I had been born in a city, I shared my father's love of nature. I loved the rich soil, the greenness of the plants, the crops, the buffaloes and the yellow butterflies that fluttered about me as I walked. The village was very poor, but when we arrived our extended family would lay on a big feast. There would be bowls of chicken, rice, local spinach and spicy mutton, all cooked over the fire by the women, followed by plates of crunchy apples, slices of yellow cake and a big kettle of milky tea. None of the children had toys or books. The boys played cricket in a gully and even the ball was made from plastic bags tied together with elastic bands.

The village was a forgotten place. Water was carried from the spring. The few concrete houses had been built by families whose sons or fathers had gone south to work in the mines or to the Gulf, from where they sent money home. There are forty million of us Pashtuns, of which ten million live outside our homeland. My father said it was sad that they could never return as they needed to keep working to maintain their families' new lifestyle. There were many families with no men. They would visit only once a year, and usually a new baby would arrive nine months later.

Scattered up and down the hills there were houses made of wattle and daub, like my grandfather's, and these often collapsed when there were floods. Children sometimes froze to death in winter. There was no hospital. Only Shahpur had a clinic, and if anyone fell ill in the other villages they had to be carried there by their relatives on a wooden frame which we jokingly called the Shangla Ambulance. If it was anything serious they would have to make the long bus journey to Mingora unless they were lucky enough to know someone with a car.

Usually politicians only visited during election time, promising roads, electricity, clean water and schools and giving money and generators to influential local people we called stakeholders, who would instruct their communities on how to vote. Of course this only applied to the men; women in our area don't vote. Then they disappeared off to Islamabad if they were elected to the National Assembly, or Peshawar for the Provincial Assembly, and we'd hear no more of them or their promises.

My cousins made fun of me for my city ways. I did not like going barefoot. I read books and I had a different accent and used slang expressions from Mingora. My clothes were often from shops and not home-made like theirs. My relatives would ask me, 'Would you like to cook chicken for us?' and I'd say, 'No, the chicken is innocent. We should not kill her.' They thought I was modern because I came from town. They did not realise people from Islamabad or even Peshawar would think me very backward.