

STUDY CASE ONE

The applicant's name is Salim Mohammad, a 25 year old single male Tajik. He went to school in Kabul from 1995 until 2007. His education was interrupted from time to time by the fighting which occurred in Kabul.

After school Salim enrolled in a private institute where he studied English and computer programming. When he completed his studies he began work as an interpreter for a security company in 2010 - 2011. Salim then began working in a school as an English tutor. His salary was low and the fact that they taught both male and female students brought the school to the attention of the Taliban. The applicant feared that there may be recriminations for him because the institute accepted students of either sex. He left the school and in March 2012 the applicant began work at a spare parts shop.

In 2013 Salim had to leave Afghanistan due to threats received from the relatives of a girl Azita whom the applicant loved and who died as a result of a suicide. Salim arrived in Belarus in January 2013. He made a claim for asylum on arrival.

EXTRACT FROM AN INTERVIEW

Please tell me about your family.

My father was a self-employed mechanic. He retired from this job and now has a shop. My mother is a housewife. Also I have an elder brother about 5 years elder than me; he sells cars. My elder sister lives in Belarus. She is about 10 years older than me. She left Afghanistan at least 10 years ago. She returned only once and I was unaware that she was living in Belarus until my arrival here.

Please tell me about your relationship with Azita. When and how did you meet?

We met in 2007. She was a Pashtun girl, she lived on my street. I saw Azita on the street and we began to contact each other via our mobile phones. We met in shopping malls where we would go walking together. This was the only way we could meet and have conversations. We could not stop and converse in a coffee shop because people would notice us and be curious about us. This would draw attention to our relationship.

Why couldn't you have dated openly?

It is unacceptable for an unrelated young man and woman to consort in public.

Did you try to get acquainted with anybody from her relatives?

I knew her brothers but only distantly because they were Pashtun. I was aware of the hostility between Pashtun and Tajik.

What happened then with your friendship?

We continued in this fashion for eight or nine months. I was very attracted to Azita and my feelings were reciprocated. We decided that we would marry. At the time I did not think that it was really dangerous to have a Pashtun girlfriend; the government had told people to give up their tribal rivalries. After the fall of the Taliban we had not experienced problems with Pashtun in his neighbourhood.

Did you start to prepare to the marriage?

I asked my mother to approach Azita's family with a proposal of marriage. After her initial resistance my mother agreed to the idea.

What did Azita think about the reaction of her parents?

She thought that her parents would agree.

What happened then?

My mother and sister went to Azita's mother with the betrothal proposal. Her mother replied that she would have to consult the men in the family. Then my mother and sister made a second visit. Azita's mother told them that the men in her family would not agree to the marriage because I was Tajik.

How did you react?

I thought this would be the end of the matter but Azita said she would continue to put pressure on her mother to persuade her father to agree to the marriage. Azita told her mother the truth, namely that Azita and I knew each other and wished to marry because of our love for each other; it was not a proposal that had come from my parents but as a result of our friendship. Once she had told her mother this, Azita advised me that it was dangerous for us to continue meeting because we might be watched.

Did you meet after that?

Only three or four times. I thought that our relationship was probably at an end, and I believed that we would not be able to marry. And in June 2012 he I was told that Azita had committed suicide.

What happened then?

At her funeral I was approached by Azita's brothers who threatened that they would kill me because I had been the cause of her death. They decided that their family honour could only be restored by seeking revenge against me.

What was your attitude towards the threats?

In fact I didn't take them seriously. I thought that they were just too upset because of the death of their sister. But a short time later I was followed on the street by Azita's brothers who again accused me of being the cause of her death and threatened to kill me. Thereafter they followed me in the street several times.

Were there any serious attacks?

One evening I was walking home from work when a car drew up beside me. There was nobody else around and Azita's brother and his associates got out of the car and attacked me. They hit me on the head with the butt of a handgun. I fell to the ground. When I awoke I was in hospital. I had stitches in my head and pain all over my body. After five days I was released from the hospital.

Did you apply to police?

No. It was futile to approach the police because they would demand bribes and then go to Azita's family and demand larger bribes from them.

Why do you think so?

Her family was far wealthier than mine and they were therefore likely to pay higher bribes to the police which would result in no prosecution being taken against them. Furthermore, at the current time the government is dominated by Pashtuns. Being a Tajik, I would not receive help if I appealed to those of higher rank than the local police. Formerly there were many Tajik policemen in Kabul but now only the lower-ranking police are Tajik. Their superiors are Pashtuns.

What happened then?

After discussing the matter with my family we decided that I should go to live with my mother's sister in Pakistan. So I went to stay with my aunt in Peshawar.

Did you have any problems in Pakistan?

After I had been there a few days my aunt's son Jafar told me that he had been advised by a friend in the neighbourhood that someone was asking about Salim who had left Kabul about 10 to 15 days earlier. This description fitted me exactly and I became very alarmed. I knew that this person was sent by Azita's brothers to look for me. As a result I decided to return to Kabul.

So how long did you spend in Pakistan?

About two weeks.

Did you lead your usual life in Kabul?

No. I stayed hiding in the house but I went out to see my colleagues at my workplace when I knew that none of Azita's family was around.

How did you decide to leave Afghanistan?

We discussed the situation with the family and agreed that the only solution was for me to leave Afghanistan. In December 2012 we sold our house and moved to live with grandmother in a different part of Kabul. My father contacted a people smuggler and arranged to pay him US\$8,000 in return for getting me to a safe country.

Why didn't you try to discuss the situation with Azita's family again?

We did not think there was any point in it because their minds were made up.

Did you try to solve the conflict in some other way?

My father had earlier approached Tajik elders in order to persuade them to approach Pashtun elders so that the matter could be discussed at the tribal level and resolved without any further violence. The Tajik elders refused to do this. They did not want to go begging to the Pashtuns.

Why was it not safe for you to stay in Afghanistan, maybe in another part of the country?

The Pashtuns have very extensive social networks and once anyone moves to a new place in Afghanistan, people are very curious and find out about their origins.

Did you choose Belarus as a country of asylum because your sister lived here? No. I learnt that my sister lived here only when I arrived in Belarus.

Do you often meet you sister?

I used to see her once a week but now I don't have further contacts with her because I don't get on well with her husband.

Have you been in contact with your family since coming to Belarus?

Yes, three or four times. My mother told me that Azita's brothers had visited them at his grandmother's home in Kabul, where they are now living. My mother told Azita's brothers that I was a fugitive who had lost his home and family because of them. Azita's brothers replied that as far as they were concerned I was dead; they never wanted to see me again. They had told people in their neighbourhood that they had killed me. This was in order to satisfy their family honour.

What may happen to you in case of your return to Afghanistan?

If I return to Afghanistan Azita's family would inevitably discover me and would kill me or avenge themselves on one of my family members.