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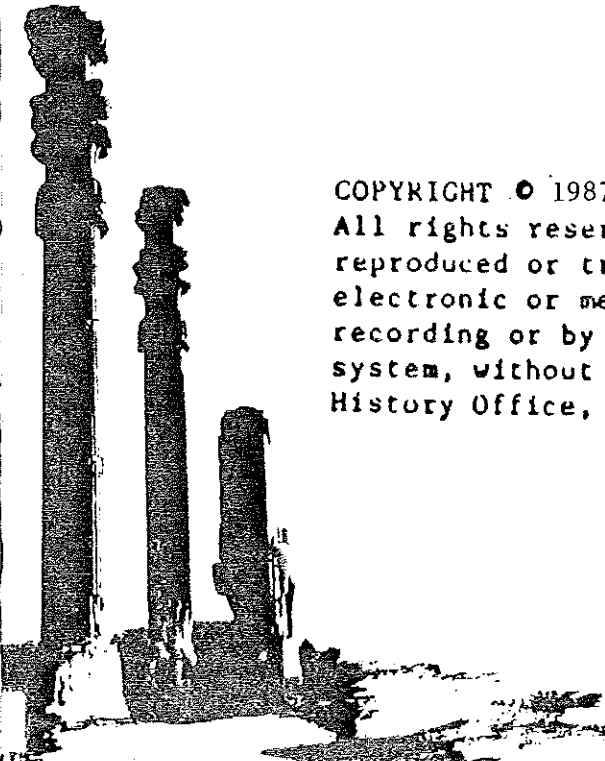
Program of Oral History

JUNI FARMANFARMAIYAN

INTERVIEWEE: JUNI FARMANFARMATYAN

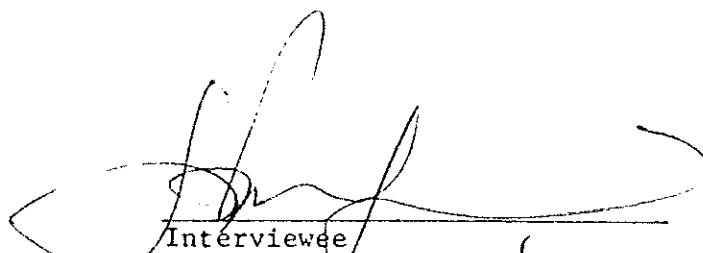
INTERVIEWER: MAHNAZ AFKHAMI


WASHINGTON, D.C.: AUGUST 19, 1986



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Interviewee  
J. Faenushian

  
Ms. Mahnaz Afkhami  
Interviewer

Aug. 19, 1986  
Date of Agreement

Alashatar Project  
Subject of Tapes

## PREFACE

This manuscript is the product of a series of tape-recorded interviews conducted for the Oral History of Iran Program of Foundation for Iranian Studies by Mahnaz Afkhami with Juni Farmanfarmaiyan in Washington, D.C. in August 19, 1987.

Readers of this Oral History memoir should bear in mind that it is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, narrator and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. Foundation for Iranian Studies is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Juni Farmanfarmaiyan was born in Boulder Colorado in 1953. While still young her parents moved to Iran, where she received her primary and highschool educations. Later on she continued her education at Oxford University in England and Stanford University in the U.S. For the interim period, between her B.A. and M.A. degrees, Ms. Farmanfarmaiyan participated in the Alashtar Project in Lorestan. Her experiences with the Alashtar Project shed much light on the rural scene in Iran in the 1970s, and in addition provide insights into the dilemma of development in the Third World in general and in Iran in particular.

SPB

Interviewee: Juni Farmanfarmaiyan

Interview #1

Interviewer: Mahnaz Afkhami

Place: Washington, DC

Date: August 19, 1986

Q: Let's start, Juni, by talking about your background a little bit. Tell me a little about where you were born and when.

Farmanfarmaiyan: Okay. I was born in 1953 in Boulder, Colorado in the United States where my father was getting his Ph.D. at the University of Colorado. We stayed in the United States with my family, I have an older sister; my mother and my father and I. Until '57, I think it was. I had my fourth birthday in Tehran.

I went to, first, the American school there and then I went to Community School. I graduated from Iran Zamin in 1971. After that I took some time to study German and prepare myself for the Oxford entrance exam, which I succeeded in and went to Oxford and studied Islamic history; more specifically Persian history and Qajar history of the 19th century, until 1975. In 1975 I came back to Iran and I wanted to go on to graduate work but I thought I would take some time off for a year. That's when I went into Alashtar. I went on to Stanford in 1977 and did an M.A. degree in education.

Q: So, you actually did most of your education, most of your studies, in English?

Farmanfarmaiyan: Everything was in English and, in fact, that's one of the unfortunate things is that I have a very weak Persian; reading and writing specifically. I don't feel comfortable with it at all, except when I went to Oxford I had to do a lot of reading and writing in Persian. I did a lot of history in Persian, obviously. But that's an unfortunate -- My mother's also American which added complication on the Persian side but everything was in English.

Q: These schools that you attended, did they mostly have student bodies of the same type of background as yourself?

Farmanfarmaiyan: Well, obviously at the American school there was all army type American kids and I was glad to be out of there. But Community, Iran Zamin, which was from sixth grade to twelfth grade, was a very wonderful international body. Yes, in terms of the Persian students that were there, more or less I would say, came from the same kind of backgrounds and families. The international people were from all walks of life. Many of whom I've kept in touch with and still see.

The teachers were a very important factor in that you had young teachers that would come in from excellent schools like Harvard or Yale and want to just teach for one year because they wanted to be exposed to Iranian culture and everything. We would benefit from that. In fact, the man who influenced me in wanting to go and study Islamic history was an American who taught me Persian history. Actually, as it turned out, he taught it to me

all wrong and I had to relearn it at Oxford. This was the type of education. It was really fascinating.

Q: And having this mixed nationality parents, what type of traditions and customs did you follow at home; Iranian or American?

Farmanfarmaiyan: Both, and both equally strongly I should say because the Persian holidays -- Well, I think this is actually true. The Persian holidays in terms of a jovial sort of [unclear] -- More so than the others. It's sort of a more morbid thing so we put in Christmas and Easter and those other things because of the schools we were in. In fact, Community school was run by a Missionary. We were required to go to Chapel and celebrate Christmas and Easter and those things, so we did. Obviously, with my mother, we'd fit in Halloween as well, come to think of it. But the Persian side of it was equally important. For me, later, after I left the American school, the Persian side of it was always much more important because I wanted to make a point of being Persian. It was always so much more -- In fact, I rebelled against my mother half because of that. I almost resented her for being American. So I always tried to pick up as much of the Persian side as I could. I used to have great arguments with my father for not speaking to me in Persian; teaching me the real Persian as he had it. I got it only from the cooks, basically in the Persian that I have.



Q: How about the religious side of it? Did you get mostly Islamic or Christian?

Farmanfarmaiyan: That is an interesting question. I certainly didn't get anything from my parents. Both of them, if anything, are agnostic and probably know nothing about any of their own religions. I used to go -- With some American friends I used to go to the church, they were Protestant I believe, a couple of times. I was fascinated by that but more interesting I used to go with my cook to the mosque in the bazaar in Tajerish. I used to love to do that. Even though, that's funny, I always used to be a little bit afraid, but there was sort of this sense of excitement and fear going into the mosque. Later, as I was growing and I went to many more mosques in areas throughout the country, I always felt that the reason of the fears, somehow for me in Iran and I guess it's more in Qom and Mashhad really; there seems to be such grief and morbidity surrounding those mosques that I think even in my childhood I picked up on those senses and there wasn't really -- It seems to be that. My own personal leanings in religion are not Islamic or Christianity either. I have other interests in Buddhism and Zen.

Q: When you were a child what did you think of yourself? I mean did you think of yourself as one of the others?

Farmanfarmaiyan: Not at all. I think, just out of curiosity, I just was wondering was there a God. I often went in search of

that question. As I say, Islam always seemed a little bit scary to me. Especially we had this Sinezani and that was always such a frightening spectacle that I used to watch behind the gates, you know, behind the walls.

Q: And what is that exactly?

Farmanfarmaiyan: At Hosein's death when they beat themselves. Now it's been banned in Iran, or it was. Now, since the revolution I'm sure it's been reinstated very forcefully but at one point it was banned. That was when they used to walk down the streets at the time of Hosein's death beating themselves and crying. I remember once my mother, not being very smart, she walked literally ten feet from one gate to another in shorts and they stoned her. She almost didn't make it into the gate. I mean it just put a horrible, you know, image in my mind about what it was.

Q: This position was mostly--

Farmanfarmaiyan: Men.

Q: Men?

Farmanfarmaiyan: Absolutely, men. I actually remember distinct times of seeing them with the chains and with the nails, you know, and blood and bleeding. I remember that as a child when we

lived in Tajrish that that -- And then it was banned later when I was older. But I remember distinctly those scenes and watching so afraid that, you know, what if this crowd would turn on us and everything. Which they did on my mother but it was her own fault at the time.

Q: Okay, let's go now to your experiences in Alashtar. That's a very interesting project. Could you start from the beginning of how you came to know the project and how you became involved in it?

Farmanfarmaiyan: Well, I guess the real reason I became involved in the project before I even knew what it was or where it was going, what it's intentions were, was simply on a personal basis with Majid Rahnema the director of the project who was the father of a very close friend of mine and who, himself, is a very close friend of mine. He had initially asked me if I would be willing to go down there, if I wanted to, to see what it was all about. Not necessarily do anything. Which was, I believe, when he put me in touch with you, Mahnaz Afkhami, to talk about possibilities of doing things for women; whether it would be setting up day care centers or what. I went down there, it was in September of 1975, right after I graduated from Oxford and I really had no idea what I was going to expect. Some of my friends, Kaveh Rahnema, Majid's son, had told me a little bit about it; what he had been doing on the economic side. They had a very interesting project in Shiraz also with the Behvarz doctors; both for

medicine and agriculture and education. So, I just assumed that I would probably be doing something with women or children because, obviously, that would be the area I'd be most equipped to work with.

I got there and one of the first issues that I had to tackle was simply being who I was among who they were, so-to-speak. Even though Majid Rahnema, his family, obviously, are of a very well known background. I think that Farmanfarmaiyan name has had a reputation in Iran for years that people take for granted that either we're very extremely rich or extremely, I don't know, aristocratic. Had all the wrong connotations that one would want to walk into a village in southern Iran, in Alashtar, which is next to Khorramabab. I think it's fifty miles north of Khorrambab. I was totally the wrong person with the wrong background; the wrong name to walk into that situation. Not so much because of the actual villagers themselves who were -- Probably they thought I was from Mars, anyway, just the way I dress as a woman and a woman being down there under those circumstances. The other women who were there were mainly foreigners, so they were not to be compared to me as a Persian woman being down there in that situation. Apart from the villagers, who looked at me in a strange way, the actual project members, people who were from a different kind of educational background I should say, and probably a different kind of financial background though that's not necessarily a given, though in this case it would have been. I think they had immediately preconceived ideas about how was I going to react and

what I was doing there; the little rich girl come down to, you know, see what the poor people do. Which was just not the case at all. I really spent, oh I would say, the first -- I was in Alashtar a total of six months, seven months and I spent the first two, two and a half months just fighting my identity. Not really fighting my identity but fighting to maintain my identity and to make them understand what that identity was, basically. And I had a lot of battles. I remember they used to play a game because I have many uncles. Thirty, I think I have thirty uncles and aunts. Yes, I do. They used to play a game with me in the evenings when we'd all be sitting around, you know, and talking and you remember the fact that my Persian is not so excellent, you know, as people that are raised in the Persian language. They used to play this game with me, teasing me: a, about my Persian and my accent and calling me "Bache Emrika'i" which is sort of "little American kid" and things like that, but then, also, they'd say, "Who are we going to kill tonight? Which one of your uncles should we kill?" And it would be this game of me saying, "Oh, no. We should save my uncle so-and-so because he really is a good guy. He did this, he did that and we don't want to kill this one but on the other hand we could sacrifice this one", and it was just a silly game that we were playing of them testing me out to see how far they could push me and how far I would bend. I think my message of trying to get across to them -- I was saying, "Fine, you can have your preconceived ideas but first come and talk to me; see who I am. Forget the Farmanfarmaiyan side and ask who the Juni side is. If you can

deal with that then I'm willing to deal with you on other issues that you might have with my family", because some of them were probably true. It was very fascinating. It took a long time to break those barriers and resentments and I was faced with a lot of coldness. They didn't want to accept me. I had to -- Also, of course, Majid didn't make it any easier because anytime Majid would appear on the scene he would have me on his right hand side, continuously. I think that there was a lot of resentment built through that. That was because Majid has known me since I was a child and I think -- I mean there's a true affection there and he liked to spend time with me. As well as apart from the fact that he would talk to me about he'd like to get my vision of what was happening. It was a lot of internal politics going on all the time; one group against another. They used to literally overthrow each other. I arrived at a period of an overthrow when there were two parties. The Bafikr party was the winning side and fortunately I fell into that category so I could stay there. The other side I think it was Razavi's group that had to leave because Bafikr had won. It was literally a political battle field. Majid would sometimes pit me -- Not pit me, but get my reactions to see what was going on. That would make it difficult. Depending on whether they wanted to get a message to Majid or not then I would be favored or not favored. It was interesting.

Q: Tell me, how many people were involved in terms of the work team in that development project?

Farmanfarmaiyan: You know, I don't really know but I would say in Alashtar there was probably ten, twelve of them. I lived out of Alashtar in Hunan, and there was only me and another person. Actually was just mainly me. There were two other villages where they had people. One person would be there and, you know, the cars would come and go bringing people in on a daily basis. In Alashtar twelve to fifteen maybe. After, the workers would bring their families with them; their wives; their children. The doctors all had their wives and they would do things there. The wives were either nurses or would work in the project.

Q: And this covered an area with what kind of population?

Farmanfarmaiyan: Alashtar had a population of six thousand. Hunan had a population of maybe two hundred. Pedesk was another village not far from Hunan and had a population of about a little over two hundred, maybe. I may be wrong. Hunan might have been smaller than that. It might have only been about a hundred and fifty or a hundred. It wasn't enormous. The population was not enormous. There were a few other smaller villages in outskirts areas which had twenty, fifty population that we would try to touch with them. That's where, in fact, the doctors would go, to those littler camps in the mountains and outskirts. Roads were being built to get access to them. That was -- In fact, one of the main parts of it was trying to get roads to get access to these smaller villages; literally little hamlets in the mountains, awfully beautiful. Beautiful mountain area. We'd

ride horses. It was lovely.

Q: The group, the working group, was divided into various areas?

Farmanfarmaiyan: Right. Medical and agriculture and education. Those were the three groups. The medical I think was probably more defined at the line; knew what they wanted to teach. They were really teaching first aid, basically, and bringing in the teenagers. I'd say people from fifteen to twenty-one, twenty-two and teaching them about the basic anatomy; teaching them about wounds, how to care for wounds. There was one doctor that I -- Dr. Hamidi, a very interesting character. He came in later when I was living in Hunan. He started a gynecological clinic, which was a major source of curiosity and conflict because the women did not want to submit to a man, you know, sort of dealing with their gynecological needs. That was interesting but previously -- That was not part of the Behvarz, the medical section in terms of they did have midwifery, obviously. That was very much part of it but not for a man. The women would only do that. It was not the male doctors that would do that.

The agricultural side I don't know that much about, really. They had -- I remember they would bring in different animals, which was crazy. They brought in this huge -- What is that huge cow?

Q: Bull.



Farmanfarmaiyan: That bull, yes. You know, for breeding purposes. It has a special name. It was one of those huge American bulls and all the complications of getting that bull to mate and this, that and the other was very funny. There was a big laugh, there. I mean it was a big joke. And other things about planting and teaching people about erosion; what kind of seeds, trying to get them to plant different kinds of seeds. The villagers were often against it. You know, they said, "No, we're doing just fine with our," I think it was soy product they were producing at the time. These kind of things.

The education side is what I was dealing with. There were two types. One was the education of the elder, which was the literacy program. I didn't have anything to do with that. There was, also, the education of making teachers. There was the teacher training program, so-to-speak. That was a very interesting program. I wished I could be involved in it but again because of my lack of Persian I was simply not equipped to do that. I dealt with the kindergarten. When I arrived there was a Dutch woman, I don't remember her name any longer, who was handling that program. She had set up -- Had managed to get a hold of a building. I suppose the project had got it for her and it was a brick, concrete building with very little facilities. I remember that it was divided into the four corners. It was one room divided into the four corners of the room. It was fairly large. Then she had her teachers who were around the ages of nineteen to twenty-six, older than me. I was, I guess, twenty-one at the time. She would be training these four

teachers and she was going to be leaving ten days after I arrived. I was going to just take over having had no experience at all in any of this. At the same time, that building which they had acquired was going to be lost. I think the person who had rented it wanted it back. Whatever the case was that building was going to be -- We would have to give it up and we went in search -- One of my projects was to go and find another room, another area with these teachers because they knew the people of Alashtar. So I would go with them and we would see, you know, how we could talk to the people and get the rooms for the project. Very interesting, those girls. Those four teachers were very, very interesting. It was -- Some of their parents didn't want them doing this; women shouldn't be exposed; shouldn't be working; shouldn't be doing this kind of thing. Anyway, what was curious was that in the classrooms these were girls and women, too, themselves. See, the Dutch woman had, I don't know by what means or ways, had actually acquired all sorts of western toys. You know, dolls, cars, all sorts of educational toys; Fischer Price even and all that. These girls were like children, more fascinated with the toys than the kids themselves were. It was really interesting. I had a lot of problems with that whole concept. I felt, you know, when these children go home they don't go home to Fischer Price under any circumstances. They barely go home to, you know -- Some of them were extremely poor. Some of the people in the villages were not so badly off. In fact, I remember there was the man who used to bring in the oil to the village. He was extremely well

off and his children were well off. You could tell from the way they dressed; you could tell from their cleanliness. These were all differences you could tell but some of these children were extremely poor. It really hurt me to see them. They'd come in, they'd see all these fascinating things and they'd go home to nothing. Not only did they go home to nothing but when they go into first grade they go into less than nothing; they go into worse. The first grade there was a -- The first grade to six grade was room literally twice the size of this table. What is the size of this table? I mean it was maybe six by six. It was a small room; dark; no windows; a blackboard and a teacher with a whip. It was really your classical medieval schoolroom situation. I'm thinking these poor children, here they are in this rosy situation of toys and, I don't know, stories and fairy tales and snacks. We used to make sure -- That was one of the requirements was that they got a daily snack of either fruit but always milk. We would bring that in. That, for many of them, was their main source of nutrition, which was one of the greatest things about doing that whole thing. They would go from that to, you know, nothing at home. My feeling about that whole thing was that they should have -- I say this now, in retrospect, now that I've studied education and I have seen my own children grow up and I've seen nurseries and it's easy for me to say it now. At the time, I myself, I don't think -- Though I had a sense that this wasn't right I don't think I would have had any of the answers. I'm not saying that at all but what they really needed at the time was things that they could develop. We tried this

to a certain extent, feebly, from their own natural resources. Creating toys, creating activities, creating something from their own natural resources. I think that was crucial. And making them understand, too, that their own life -- And working from there into bettering it. Again, Alashtar, unfortunately, was a victim of the whole -- Ironically, because Majid would want anything but this. But ironically, again, it was the victim of the whole westernization concept. It was really a question of instead of coming and finding what you have and building upward, I mean from outside and putting inward, which often just does not work. I think, again, in that case it didn't. It was funny how those girls, of course -- I think maybe because I was younger but also because I was Persian. You see, with the Dutch woman, she was a total stranger. A total -- A new entity and they really didn't know how to put up fronts with her or whatever and anything she said must have been right because she came from Europe. I was Persian; I was young; they were there before me; they had already worked with her. Her name was Yvonne. Her name was Yvonne. They had already worked with Yvonne and they felt, and probably rightly so, that they knew a great deal more about it than I did. They weren't so ready to work with me, though, I think in some places they had an incredible fascination about me. They wanted me to come home with them. They wanted to talk to me. They wanted me talk to them, even about my boyfriends, about anything; they wanted to know. They even wanted me, one time, to undress so they could see what my underclothes were like. I mean, it was really interesting. They didn't ever feel

they had the right to be like that with Yvonne, but I was Persian. Yet, at the same time, they also felt that they didn't have to listen to me. It was a very delicate balance of trying to work with them, yet, at the same time be a friend with them. I guess -- I'm sorry, did you want to --

Q: Did these girls live with the other working people there?

Farmanfarmaiyan: No, they were of the village. They were Alashteti and they lived at home. They would come in in the morning; they'd do their work. Kindergarten worked from nine to twelve, just like in America.

Q: And then the workers, they had their own compound? Where did they live?

Farmanfarmaiyan: No, they lived there. Doctors had their own compound. It wasn't really a compound it was just that the medical system was set up there and it had to be in better facilities. They needed better facilities so they had their own compound for that reason. But a lot of the people, no, they had their own rooms. When I was in Alashtar, where did I live? I lived in a room with -- Oh, I don't remember who I lived with but in the village the villagers would give rooms. We'd rent rooms from the villagers and we'd live there. There was a project quarter, headquarters, where we had our meals. There was a cook there and the head of the project, the director, had his

office there and there was conference room there. The cars would be -- They had a garage area, you know, an area where the cars would be kept.

Q: Was it easy living with the villagers? I mean was there any antagonism, any curiosity, anything?

Farmanfarmaiyan: Curiosity? There was a lot of curiosity but I didn't feel antagonism at all from the villagers. Now, I moved out of Alashtar, which was really a little city. It wasn't a village. It had all the electricity and everything of a little city. I moved out and went to Hunan which was a village that grew up around a beautiful little "cheshmeh"; spring. They had no electricity there. They had no toilets, no facilities. There was an outhouse that one had to go to. I moved there all by myself into a two bedroom house. I mean a two room house; that was it, the sum total. I had one room and then there was two other people had the other room. They would come and go because most of their work was in Alashtar and I think, basically, they were there to keep me company. As it turned out then, you know, I ended up having a relation with one which was, also, very complicated.

Q: These were workers in the group?

Farmanfarmaiyan: These were project workers, yes. One of these people -- Shall I get -- Do you want to know any of this, or

not?

Q: Yes.

Farmanfarmaiyan: Because he was the director of the project. This is Hushang Bafekr and he came from a village in the north, right on the tip of the Russian border, in the northeast of Iran. Very interesting and probably a village not much bigger than the one we were living in at the time. Though he was "The Kadkhoda"; his family was the main, head family there I'm sure. Bajgiran, in fact, his name was Bafekr Bajgiran; that's the name of the village that he came from. The other one was an Esfahani, Niazi, a wonderful character. Anyway, they would come and check up on me to make sure I was alright.

The villager -- There was a wonderful man who took care of me. He was a villager there, Kheyrali, and he was my guardian angel. He absolutely -- It was incredible how much this man loved me and it developed over time. I used to spend hours with this man talking to him about his life and about his children and about the village life, the history of the village of Hunan, which is, as I say a very small village; with every baby included maybe a hundred and fifty. There were twenty-seven families, so if you put twenty-seven times five it runs about that, yes. Anyway, he was a fascinating man. It was incredible that he had no qualms about who, what or where I was, my name, nothing. Of course, my name didn't mean anything to him but he just had such an affection for me, this man. To this day, I can't tell you how

guilty I feel that I haven't been in touch with him because I'm sure he still thinks about me and what happened to me; he wonders, you know. The day I left, this man was crying like a baby. Anyway, my education in that village, a great deal came from him.

Q: What did he think of you, a woman, being so far away from home?

Farmanfarmaiyan: Well, you know, coming from Tehran already was as good as coming from Mars, quite frankly. And being a woman, it was just another dimension to that. It was so awe inspiring that you lived in a house in Tehran and this, that and the other that I think everything was beyond that. There was no longer a sexual implication anywhere. It was really dealing with a separate entity. At least, in Kheyrali's eyes. It was very funny because he used to beat his wife. I mean, beat his wife; pull out her hair and I used to have to go and reconcile them and I used to have the biggest fights with this man. I'd say, "For God sake, you love me, would you ever lift your little finger to me? Why? I'm the same human being as your wife. There's no reason why." I was a separate entity. His wife was just another lesser human being, literally; lesser human being. I think that's how a lot of them look at their wives. He had ownership over her, that's what he would say to me. He owned her was his image of her. He would say to me, "You're right. It's wrong. It's terrible," and when he would beat her and she would leave,



go to her father's house, he would come and ask me to go and bring her home. I'd say, "No, I'm not going to do it." I mean it got to the place where I said, "You're going to have to do it yourself." I think, eventually, by the time I left -- I wasn't that long there but it happened often enough that by the time I left I think he was willing to try and talk things out. The message I was trying to get across to him always, was, if you have a problem you don't have to beat, you can talk. You can talk or leave. If you're so angry you want to hit, leave the room. I think eventually he was coming around to it because when I left she came to me and she was asking me not to leave and telling me that he had been much better to her. At least that's one good thing.

Q: Did they have any children?

Farmanfarmaiyan: He had two children; two little children. All the children in that village were undernourished if not malnourished. There were some children that were downright malnourished. One of the things that I did when I got into that village I just threw up the whole kindergarten project. I said, "This is ridiculous." First of all there was no concept of education for these pre school -- I mean the school concept, first grade already was a difficult enough concept to deal with. I just felt that at that age if there was any way I could get the mothers to relate to the children we've come a long way. There was no way that they were going to -- The children already

-- You're talking about a different concept of childhood there. The children at five were already working. The girl of five was carrying the two year old on her back. She had responsibility. She had requirements. It wasn't as if she was a carefree, happy child that you see anywhere in a developing city or a developing country. It was a whole different idea and, yet, these children -- For me, at least, the biggest problem -- All that you could say would be fine; let them group up young, whatever. But what happened was their eyes -- This is what scared me; looking at these children's eyes, they were blank. These children didn't ask questions and that really bothered me. I was trying to get the mothers to interact with the children. Just talk to them. I didn't care about what. These mothers never talked to their children. It took me the full seven months of being there and even to this day, I mean it's only because I want to believe it that I'm convinced that there is really -- How shall I say? I mean there's a tremendous love for the mother and child. There's no question about that in my mind, but the kind of love that you and I or any other person understands, it's not the same. That child has a function in this world. That child, for that mother, has a function. That simple, pure adoration is what was lacking. The love was what this child was bringing into the family. There was a case of an orphan. Her name was Iran. This orphan -- There was a mother taking care of this orphan because the father was paying her to give her milk. The mother had another child who was breast feeding and the father had given this child to breast feed. This baby, Iran,

she was about eighteen months, up. Totally malnouritious. Not a question of undernourished; the child was definitely the Biafran type. The stomach; the thin arms. Really very, very sad case. Well, the father died and the mother was just literally going to throw this child out because this child no longer served a purpose. Before, the father was paying the family. They were eating off of what he was paying. It happened to be the poorest family in the village, as well, that had adopted this child or had agreed to take in the child for milk reasons. So I set up a foundation for that child. All my salary I put aside in a foundation. In fact, I had Kheyrali as the executor of that fund. I put it in a bank and, in fact, Hushang Bafekr helped me. We set it up that on a monthly basis they would get X amount of money that would feed the family on the condition that they promise that this baby would be well nourished and cared for and loved. It was incredible, as soon as that was done, the transformation that this woman had towards this child. I think that what really needed to be done then, and today anywhere in this village, is to establish a type of communication. But it's a vicious circle, I mean the mother never had it either. That's the real education process that needs, is with the mother and the child, the woman issue there. It was really trying for me. I used to have them come in. Every week I'd have them come in, weigh their children; for mothers that didn't have milk I had arranged -- And I almost regret it. I had arranged through a friend of mine in Tehran -- Mehdi Abdo, had a dry milk factory. He would give it to me free. Tons, and tons, as much

as I wanted he would give to me. I would take down to Tehran -- It wasn't very often. I didn't go very often, actually. In the six months I was there I think I went to Tehran made three or four times. I would bring in this SMA milk, this dried milk and give it to these mothers. Now, probably I did years of disservice by doing that because they did not -- I mean it was only through ignorance I think. I mean I was trying to help but now that I know all the facts about the dry milk, the lack of sanitary conditions that go with it, the dilution, it probably was much worse for these kids. But some of the mothers literally did not have milk. Some of them said they didn't. I don't know. Anyway, they'd come and we'd weigh the babies. I had gotten a weight and we'd talk and they were just beginning to open. They were curious about me. They didn't dare to be curious about me before. I mean really I was such a strange entity. How could a woman be living alone in their village doing these kind of things? Walking around in jeans. Who ever heard of such a thing. On top of it I was also making such an effort to be like them, only eating what they were eating, and you know, living in the same fashion and all that. I think in a sense that was even more bizarre to them. Had I maintained my own western standards they would have been able to respect me more because then it wouldn't have been, I think, a contradiction. I think there's a big fallacy that many people have when they go into villages in Iran or when they travel in Iran or whatever, they're always trying to emulate the people there whereas, in fact, the people there don't expect it and they don't want it of you. They

really don't. You've come there to do a service; you've come there to do something; they expect you to do that. They don't want you to copy them. They think they're miserable. Why would anybody want to copy them to be miserable? And that's exactly true. I mean in a lot of societies there is this over glorification of poverty, you know. I think that in my ignorance and youth or whatever you want to call it -- But, anyway, slowly these mothers started coming and I started a nutrition program. Through the nutrition program, of course, "what nutrition?" I mean this woman that I'm telling you Iran, they're literally -- I mean they had meat if they were lucky once a month; not once a week, once a month if they were lucky. They had -- In fact, one of the requirements that I set down in that foundation for Kheyralli -- Kheyralli benefited from that, too, I made sure of that. Was that they should have meat; they should acquire meat by whatever means because they had the finances to do so, at least once or twice a week for these children and themselves, the mother and the father. Through the nutrition program I was trying to bring on an education for these women that if their health was good they would be feeling better. If they were feeling better they would have more energy. If they had more energy they could do more work. If they could do more work they could et cetera, et cetera, et cetera and a lot of -- A tremendous amount of lethargy. Tremendous just through the lack of nutrition. To the children as well as the mothers. Trying to get them to understand that you can communicate with your children. Your children, you can talk to them. Children

have to have curiosity. These children had no curiosity.

Q: Who do the women communicate with?

Farmanfarmaiyan: I guess the women would communicate among themselves but there was a very strict hierarchy in that village. There was, as I said, there was the -- In that village, also, there was the person who brought in the "Naft", the oil. There was the head of the village. The previous head of the village who had now lost face because the project had overruled him. Then there was various degrees of farmers depending on the wealth of how much they had reaped from the land and their standing in the village. All this had a great deal of importance as to who could talk to who. I mean it wasn't, you know -- If you were on the lower end of the farming scale you didn't just walk up and talk to the person who was bringing in the oil who was a financially better off person. I got all this family history, and I wish I had it, of each household there. How many people lived in the houses. What each occupation was. They were all basically farmers except for those -- And then who went away. How many wives. The divorce situations, which did exist. What would happen to -- All these things were fascinating. Unfortunately, I don't have it with me anymore. Kheyralli was my main source and I think women -- I had a neighbor, Hamsayeh, who would come over and talk to me and she had a little girl who, believe it or not, I was teaching to read. She didn't know how to read but I knew enough Persian to start her with the

alphabet. I would teach it. I'd work with her about an hour a day and she would just love that. It was the greatest treat. I would enjoy it, too. I'd talk to her and find out about her life and her aspirations and these kind of things. They weren't very high, any of them.

Q: And what did she want?

Farmanfarmaiyan: Well, this little girl, she was I guess twelve and she had heard about the Behvarz, the medical program and she was hoping that maybe she could join one of those projects and do something but she had to learn how to read first. She worked at it so hard. It was all interesting, though. It was all memorization; total memorization. I actually tested her once. I just said, "Can you recite this for me?" and she did absolutely [unclear] but then when I'd ask her a question about it -- Anything, for example, I mean if we would be reading about the little boy -- Of course, that was another problem. The sources of the books, don't forget, were from Tehran so a lot of the stuff in there about refrigerators and God knows what else were just totally nonsense. But, for example, if I would say to her, "What did the little boy go and get when he went shopping?" she wouldn't be able to answer that question. That was something that I was working on with her, too. I think that was a lot of the problem with a lot of the teachers in the teaching system. I brought that up with Majid, too. There should be some form of a testing system and questionnaire constantly to make sure that

they're taking in information as opposed to just memorizing it. But that's a typical system, anyway.

Q: You said that the women interacted with each other?

Farmanfarmaiyan: To a greater or a lesser degree. I think, in fact, coming to me once a week was becoming a sort of a forum where they did but there wasn't a great deal. It wasn't like they go and have tea together, no. I mean they didn't have that kind of time first of all. All of them had a minimum of three and some eight children. They were always doing things. I don't know, farming or collecting seeds or sweeping up here and there or coming and fetching water. It seemed to me they were always doing things. Or calling after this or that child or down at the spring washing the pots, you know. Down at the spring, the spring was sort of a social area. They would sometimes talk to each other. I think that probably they talked about me a great deal in that village. I mean I must have been a great topic of conversation, you know, walking around.

Q: But with the husbands you wouldn't notice any interaction?

Farmanfarmaiyan: In fact, I very definitely noticed no interaction. Incredibly. And this is what I'm telling you with Kheyralli who was the most educated of them all simply by virtue of exposure to us and these type of people. It wasn't just me, but Hushang and Niazi and all these other people in the project.



Whoever came to Hunan they all knew Kheyrali. They never knew any of the others. I mean they knew them in hello, good-by but they knew Kheyrali. Kheyrali by virtue of being the most educated he still didn't even think of his wife as a human entity. He never would think of bringing his wife over and sitting over there and talking, having her talk to me, unless I requested it, which I did. You see what I'm saying? I think that basically that's how a lot of them treated their wives. In Islamic rights, you know, the women have half the right of the man.

There's another interesting aspect. You know, I still don't know -- And research should probably be done on this but I have a very deep suspicion that the people of Hunan, if not the Alashtar area were Sunni and not Shi'i Moslems.

Q: You never talked about it?

Farmanfarmaiyan: I did but it was all hush, hush. They wouldn't talk about it, you know. There were certain -- I remember distinctly, what was it? Certainly the Hosein era there was no big deal about that. There were things that were very much underplayed there and I don't know if it was just generally that they were apathetic to the whole religious thing or that they did have Sunni. There were other people there that -- There was a woman, evidently, who was a rebel in the mountains and she was Sunni and they talked about her. She had many followers so there was some rumor of being Sunni.

Q: What kind of a rebel woman?

Farmanfarmaiyan: Oh, she was fascinating. I wish I could remember about her. The fact that that woman -- Incredible. She had a gun and she was a rebel and she was a Nun. She was always running away from the gendarmeri. It was a rebel against the --

Q: Government.

Farmanfarmaiyan: Government, yes.

Q: An outlaw.

Farmanfarmaiyan: Yes, an outlaw, literally. It was a woman and that was what was really fascinating.

Q: What was the presence of the government there? What kind of government officials did you see around there?

Farmanfarmaiyan: Well, by the time I got there -- Let me think. The project must have been running at least a year before I got there. Now, evidently, according to Hushang and Majid, both, I guess when they came there there was a very strong military presence. There was a gendarmeri there. The project just ran them out of town; literally ran them out of town. Because of the bad experience that the villagers had had with the

gendarmeri, literally raping their women -- These are the stories that I was told. Raping their women. There were stories of on the wedding night the head of gendarmeri would come and say, "the bride has to be mine first." Kind of absolutely horrendous stories. But evidently the Kadkhoda used to do that, too. It was not out of tradition. I mean it was within the realm of tradition. They would take their food. They would say that you have -- In terms of taxation supposedly they were absolutely horrible in taxing. When they didn't have any money they had to pay in --

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Farmanfarmaiyan: -- anybody else doing it but anytime someone would answer one of Hushang's questions this guy would shout. The only thing he would say; he wouldn't say anything else. If Hushang addressed him he wouldn't even answer him. So that was the kind of reaction that they had. Evidently, again based on this experience with the gendarmeri. Now, I never came across one. They were not there. Their presence was absolutely not there when I got there. There was not one to be seen. I mean, you saw them in Khorramabad; you saw them elsewhere and you did not see them anywhere near the project.

Q: Was there a teacher there?

Farmanfarmaiyan: In Hunan there wasn't a teacher. There was

-- As I told you there was a one room classroom in Alashtar. In Hunan there wasn't and, in fact, the kids used to walk to -- I remember sometimes they'd try and hitch rides. We'd always give rides to kids or anybody, in fact, going. Because there were no cars there. It was just the project cars, the jeeps that would come and go. But they would have to go into Alashtar to this one room. There was a teacher there. Just your typical --

Q: How about the Molla?

Farmanfarmaiyan: You know, it's funny though, I don't have any memory of a Molla being around there. I'm sure there must have been especially in Pedesk. For some reason I'm thinking there was a Molla in Pedesk. There definitely wasn't one in Hunan, but Hunan was tiny. Alashtar definitely must have had one. There may or may not have been interactions with him by the members of the project.

Q: So, in fact, the governmental and religious figures so far as you saw, left the project more or less alone?

Farmanfarmaiyan: To my knowledge. What might have existed, and would have been taken care of on the Tehran side, is that there would have been complications --

Q: Higher up.