

close to 3,000. But these Armenians, who had adhered to their Armenian identity, culture, religion and traditions for 1,600 years under foreign rule, were lured to Soviet Armenia by repatriation propaganda in the 1940s. They sold their livelihoods and moved to Tehran in the expectation of receiving the appropriate paperwork and repatriating to Soviet Armenia forthwith. Many did so, but many others remained stranded on the outskirts of the capital when the repatriation project abruptly came to a halt. Finding themselves in dire financial straits with no hope of repatriating, they struggled to start new lives as city dwellers. As to the few who remained in the villages, they tried to carry on as before. But with Turkic encroachment in their villages leading to increasing economic and religious repression, they were forced to migrate to urban centers and join established Armenian communities such as those in Tabriz or Tehran. Although no Armenians live in the villages of Gharadagh today, when my father was born, Gharadagh had a definite Armenian character.⁴

Baghdassar lost his father, Khachatur, at an early age, and creditors stripped the family of all their belongings, leaving Baghdik's mother, Yeghissabet, in abject poverty with four little children to raise.⁵ The poor woman took

4 Here I must mention a special trait of Gharadagh Armenians: they are known as good painters, that is, artisans, house painters. Curiously, I too like to paint, mostly wall decors, and every time I take a brush in my hand and surround myself with colorful paints, I am told, "the Gharadaghtsi in you is acting out." Hovhannes Hovsepian explains the origins of this trait in *Gharadagh Armenians*. He says the plush vegetation of the region was rich in plants, roots and flowers from which the locals learned to extract natural dyes.

5 Hovsepian (ibid., p. 113) mentions the local khans tyrannizing the villagers of Gharadagh, looting and murdering and confiscating their properties, especially