



Bangabandhu with his political mentor Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy (1949).

Encounter with Suhrawardy and Fazlul Huq

(1938)

In 1938 a significant event of my life occurred. Mr [Fazlul] Huq was then the prime minister of Bengal and Mr Suhrawardy the labour minister. They were scheduled to visit Gopalganj. A huge meeting was to be organized for their visit. It was decided to hold an exhibition on the occasion too. After all, the two eminent leaders of the Muslim community of Bengal would be coming to town and all Muslims of the area were excited at the prospect. I was still in school then. As I noted before, I was older than the boys I used to hang out with and so was given responsibility of the volunteer brigade. I formed the brigade with everyone who was willing to join it regardless of their religion or beliefs. Later, it became apparent that the Hindu boys were leaving the group one by one. Unable to figure out why this was happening, I asked a friend what was going on. He told me that the Congress party had directed them not to participate in the event and had even instructed them to make sure the leaders were not given a grand reception. They were also asked to ensure that shops were made to shut down on that day. In those

days Hindus owned 80 per cent of the shops in town. The news surprised me since we didn't treat Hindus and Muslims differently then. I was very friendly with the Hindu boys. We used to play, sing and roam the streets together.

Our leaders said that because Mr Huq had formed the government with the help of the Muslim league, the Hindus were fuming. This information had an electric effect on me. Mr Huq and Mr Suhrawardy were to be given a reception. We had to do everything that was necessary to achieve this. I formed a volunteer brigade with the help of the Muslim boys. Some Scheduled Caste Hindus joined our brigade too. They did so because Mukunda Bihari Mullick was a minister of the cabinet and he was part of Mr Huq's entourage. The Hindus formed a majority of the town's population. People came from the villages, armed with all sorts of weapons, ready to fight if there were any attempts to thwart the event. There was even the possibility of a communal riot breaking out.

Mr Huq and Mr Suhrawardy arrived as scheduled and the meeting was finally held. The exhibition was

inaugurated formally. Everything took place peacefully. Mr Huq went to the Public Hall while Mr Suhrawardy went to the Mission School. Since I was a student of the Mission School I welcomed him. He inspected the school and then walked towards the launch and I followed him all the way. He asked me a few questions haltingly in Bengali that I answered as well as I could. He looked at me and asked me my name and wanted to know about my family. A government official told him about my family's origins. He took me by the arm and asked me affectionately, 'Don't you have the Muslim League in your area?' I told him that there was no such organization and that not even the Muslim Students' League was active here. He made no other comment but wrote down my name and address in his notebook. A few days later I got a note from him thanking me and asking me to meet him if I ever went to Calcutta. I replied to his letter. This is how I started to write to him from time to time.

Source: Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's *The Unfinished Memoirs* published by University Press Limited.

Bangabandhu's first imprisonment

(1938)

The Hindus and Muslims were somewhat wary of each other. There were a few Hindu villages surrounding Gopalganj town. One or two Muslims were tortured in them. I had a class friend called Abdul Malek who was a kinsman of Khondokar Shamsuddin Ahmed. One evening, probably in March or April, I was coming home after playing football. Khondokar Shamsul Huq, aka Basu Mia Muktar (later president of the Awami League, Gopalganj subdivision), called me and said that Malek had been forcibly taken to the house of a Hindu Mahasabha leader called Suren Banerjee and beaten up there. Could I look into the matter? He stressed that since Malek was my friend I should try to free him from their clutches. I decided to waste no time. I gathered some students and went to their house and requested them to let Malek go. A gentleman called Ramapada Dutt started to abuse me verbally as soon as he saw me. I protested and immediately sent for the boys of my band. In the meantime Ramapada went to the police to inform them about me. Three policemen arrived. I declared that they would have to let Malek go or I would snatch him away. My uncle, the late Sheikh Serajul Huq, was then a student and used to stay in a hostel. He was the first cousin of both my parents. I had an uncle in Narayanganj called Sheikh Zafar Sadek. His older brother had died soon after he had passed his matriculation examination. When he heard that I had sent for people he came to help me with a group of boys. By this time we were involved in a fight with the Hindus. Both sides were in the thick of action. We managed to break the door and snatch away Malek. The whole town was tense. Nobody dared to say anything to me.

That day was a Sunday and my father was in Tungipara. He was expected back the next day. But the distance he had to cover was almost fourteen miles. My father used to go to Tungipara every Saturday and return on Monday in his boat.

The Hindu leaders huddled together with some Hindu officers and filed a case against me. In it Khondokar Shamsul Huq Muktar was accused of instigating this crime. The charges against me were homicide and of starting a riot and looting. In the morning we found out that my uncle, Muktar; the *muhuri* [clerk] of Khondokar Shamsuddin Ahmed, MLA, Zahur Sheikh; my good friend and neighbour Sheikh Nurul Huq; Syed Ali Khondokar; my class friend Abdul Malek; and a lot of other students were also among the accused. They seemed to have left no sons of distinguished Muslims of the area out of the list. At nine in the morning we learned that my uncle and quite a few other people had been arrested. But how could the police arrest us? The officer at the police station was feeling embarrassed. At ten the police officer stood outside in the field chatting to someone, clearly intending to let me use the opportunity to disappear. Our house was located next to the Town Hall. My cousin was from Madaripur. He told me, 'Why don't you go to the neighbouring house?' I declared, 'I'm not going anywhere! If I do, people will say that I was afraid.' At this point my father had come back from his trip. The police officer followed him into the house. He told my father what had happened. He showed him the warrant for my arrest. My father said, 'Take him!' The police official said, 'Let him eat. I am leaving a policeman behind. He has to be in the police station by 11 a.m. If he delays, it will be difficult to get bail for him.' My father asked me, 'Did you get into a fight?' I kept quiet, indicating thereby that I had.

I took my lunch and then went to the police station. I saw that eight others, including Malek and Syed, had already been arrested and brought to the station. As soon as I came, they rounded us all up and took us to the court. We were not handcuffed but had guards surrounding us. The police officer in the court was a Hindu. When we arrived there he had us shut in the small room in the court jail

that was next to the courtroom. As soon as he saw me he exclaimed, 'Mujibur is a violent chap. He has attacked Ramapada with a knife. He shouldn't be given bail under any circumstance.' I retorted, 'Don't talk nonsense, such talk won't do you any good.' Those who were sitting with the police officer said, 'Imagine the cheek of the boy!' The others asked me to keep quiet. Later, I found out that the others had lodged a complaint against me for trying to kill Ramapada with a knife. He was in a bad state and had been admitted to hospital. I had actually fought him with a stick; when he had tried to hit me with it I had grabbed it from him and had hit him instead. In the process I had managed to wound him in the head. The Muslim lawyers appealed to the court for our bail.

However, only Muktar was granted bail. We were to be sent back to the jail. The SDO was a Hindu and wouldn't grant us bail. The court officer attempted to handcuff us. I protested but the others restrained me and so I had to go to jail. It was a subjail and consisted of a single room. One part of it was screened off and had been set aside for women prisoners but since there weren't any we were kept on that side. We were allowed to have food, clothes and bed linen sent to us from our homes. After seven days in prison we were allowed to go. Within ten days all of us had been given bail.

Telegrams were sent to Mr Huq and Mr Suhrawardy. People were sent to Calcutta to contact them too. Gopalganj town was all astir. My father was friendly with the Hindu lawyers of the town. All of them respected him. The two sides met on a number of occasions and finally decided that all proceedings would be withdrawn and the case dismissed. We would have to pay 1500 taka as compensation. All of us pooled in to pay this amount. My father had to pay the most. This was the first time in my life that I had been to jail.

Source: Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's *The Unfinished Memoirs* published by University Press Limited.

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