

TRIBUTETO JAHANARA IMAM: A PHOTO FEATURE

From the Exhibition of Photographs by Ekatturer Jatree (Voyagers '71)



10 December 1992: Forming a human chain to implement the verdict of the Gonoadalat against Golam Azam. — Photo: Shamsul Haque Tinku



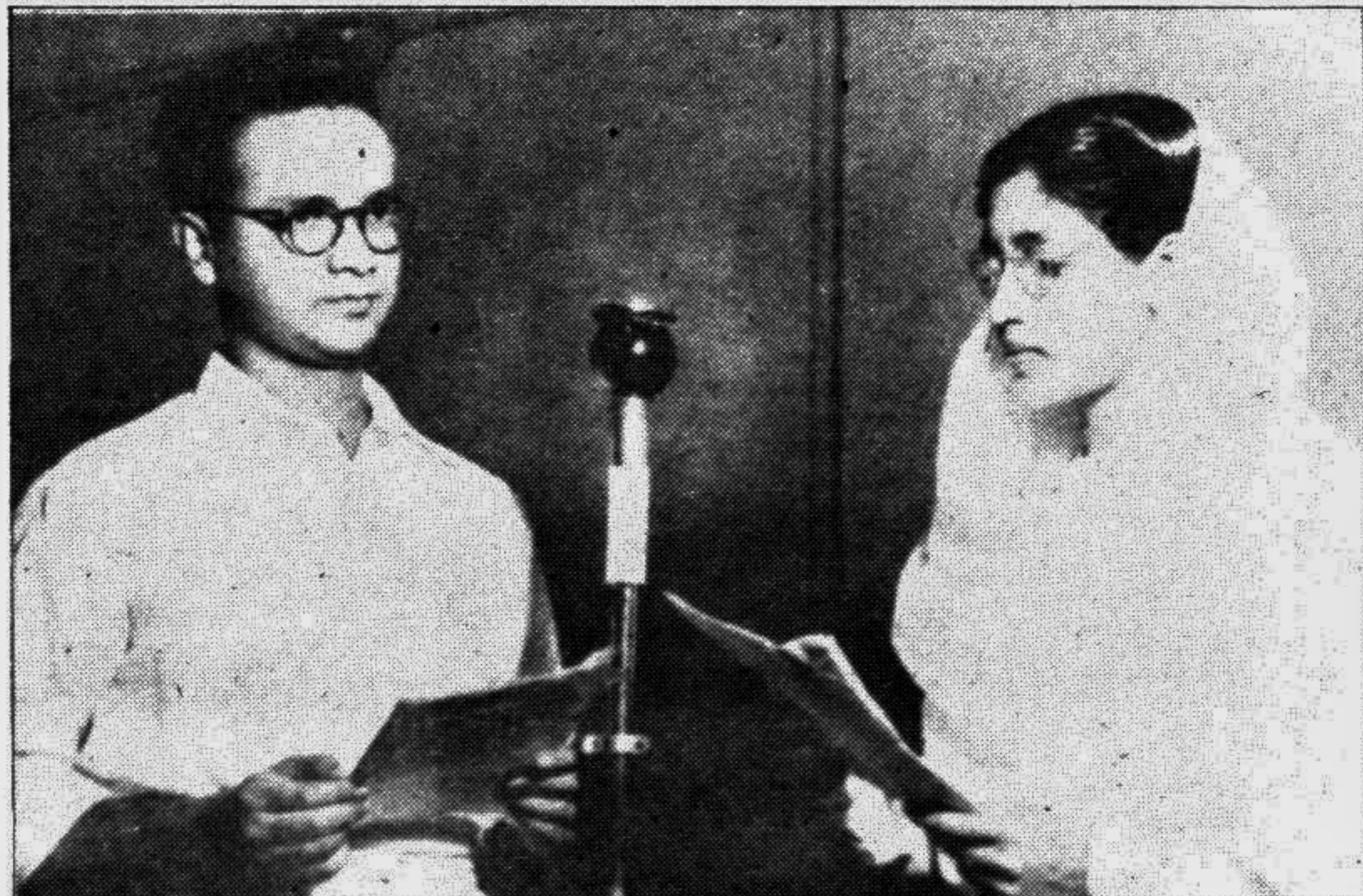
26 March, 1992: Declaring the verdict of Gonoadalat at Suhrawardy Uddyann. — Photo: Pavel Rahman



A 1994 portrait of Jahanara Imam.



March 3, 1993: Leading an anti-fundamentalist procession holding high the national flag for which her son and millions of others laid down their lives. — Photo: Rashid Talukder



1951: During a programme on Radio Pakistan, Dhaka — Sharif Imam and Jahanara Imam. — from family album



1954: At their Azampra flat



1958: At the Ramna Garden on a family outing — Sharif Imam, Jahanara Imam, Rumi and Jami. — from family album

Ekatturer Jatree (Voyagers '71) Pays Homage to Shaheed Jononi

STRICKEN with the dreadful disease cancer, and when pain became unbearable she found remore in Kahlil Gibran's poem — "Pain": "Your pain is breaking of the shell that encloses your understanding". She set aside her personal pain, problems and hardship and always expressed the joy of life and living.

Shahed Jononi Jahanara Imam, born on May 3, 1929 in Shunderpur of Murshidabad in a well-to-do family was raised wellprotected. Her father, a deputy magistrate, was a modern man and under his guid-

only at the age of 23, she was appointed as headmistress to Siddeswari Girls' School. The second son Jami was born in 1954.

In 1964 she went to the United States on a Fullbright scholarship. After returning, she joined the Teachers' Training College as a professor. She remained with that institute till 1968. She got involved in writing and different socio-cultural organisations.

In 1971 when the Liberation War broke out her eldest son Rumi took off to answer the call of motherland. After receiving training as a freedom fighter, he came to Dhaka for 'operations' and Jahanara Imam was always a willing participant in their activities as an aid and conduit.

Towards the end to the great Liberation War, Rumi was taken in by the Pakistani Army along with some of his comrades. He was put under severe, painful and inhuman torture and his not disclosing the whereabouts of his comrades resulted in his death in the hands of his captors — the heinous Pakistani Army interrogators. Sharif Imam, father of Rumi, could not bear the grief and soon after died of heart failure.

The joy and pleasure of liberation on December 16, 1971 was shrouded with tears and sadness in the Imam family. "Of Blood and Fire" (Ekatturer Dingu) by Jahanara Imam, first published in 1986, vividly describes the dark days of 1971 and the hope of rays that the brave sons of the soil — the

freedom fighters — brought to the people with their courage and heroism when fighting the stronger and better equipped enemy forces. The book was and instant best-seller and rekindled the spirit of the liberation war that was getting diminished by calculated anti-liberation activities of the defeated forces who still could not accept the reality of Bangladesh. Besides this book she has written scores of books on various subject; that have yielded her a place in our literary world. In the late 80's when the doctors diagnosed her disease she seemed to rejuvenate and vowed not to give in to the dreadful disease. Her book "Cancerer Shathey Boshobash" can inspire anyone who thinks life has not much to give.

In 1991 when the rehabilitated anti-liberation forces, Jangal-Shibir axis, began to really challenge the very existence of our nationhood by making Golam Azam their Amir, the spirited people retaliated by establishing Ekatturer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee. In January 1992 Jahanara Imam was made its Convenor and declared March 26, 1992 as the day of Gonoadalat — people's court — where Golam Azam would be tried by the people for his war crimes. A symbolic gesture, in the line of Bertrand Russell's tribunal against crime in Vietnam by the American forces, gained tremendous momentum and support of the people on March 26, 1992 the Suhrawardy Uddyann became a sea of people inspite of police

barricade and restraints. Streams of people from all walks of life began to gather in that national uddayn and show their support to the Shaheed Jononi, mother of a martyred freedom fighter, who was able to wake up the nation from a deep slumber and make them proud of the great liberation war that all the people of Bangladesh participated in.

After this Gonoadalat, 24 important citizens including Jahanara Imam were charged with anti-state activity. The high court gave them bail.

In 1993 the government stopped Shahed Jononi to hold any meeting in celebration of the first anniversary of Gonoadalat. On the 28th, the protest meeting against that was also disbanded and she was lathicharged and injured by the police and was rushed to the PG Hospital.

On March 26, 1994, she presented to the people the report on findings of the people's inquiry commission on the activities of the war criminals and the collaborators (against 8 war-criminals) in a grand public meeting at Bashani Shorok. This was going her last meeting and public appearance because soon afterwards the dreadful disease snatched her away from the people she loved and dedicated her life for on June 26, 1994. As her doctor informed her of her imminent death, she wrote with her won hand — as she had lost her ability to talk — the following message and instruction to the people.

My Appeal and Directive to the People of Bangladesh

My Fellow Warriors

You have been fighting the evil forces of Golam Azam and his war criminals of 1971, along with the detractors of a free Bangladesh for the last three years. As a nation of Bengalees, your unity and courage has been unparalleled. I was with you at the start of our struggle. Our resolve was to remain in battle until we had achieved our objective. Stricken with the fatal disease of cancer, I am now facing my final days. I have kept my resolve. I did not leave the battle. But I cannot stop the inevitable march of death. Therefore, I once again remind you of our resolve to fight until our goal is attained. You must fulfill your commitment. You must stand united and fight to the very end. Even though I will not be among you, I will know that you—my millions of Bengalee children—will live in a free Golden Bengal with your sons and daughters.

We still have a long and arduous road ahead. This struggle has been joined by people from all walks of life. People from different political and cultural groups, freedom fighters, women, and students, and youths have all committed themselves to this battle. And I know that there is no one more committed than the people. People is power. So I commit the responsibility of the struggle to bring Golam Azam and the war criminals of 1971 to justice and to continue to champion the Spirit of the Liberation War of you—the people of Bangladesh. For certain, victory will be ours.

Jahanara Imam

(Translated by Saif Imam Jami)



March 26, 1994: Her last public appearance with the chairperson of People's Inquiry Commission Report Poet Sufia Kamal, the day it was publicized. — Photo: Rakib Khan



The photographic exhibition was inaugurated by the respected poet Sufia Kamal on 24th July at the Zainul Gallery of the Institute of Fine Arts, Dhaka University. The exhibition organised by Ekatturer Jatree — an organisation of veteran freedom fighters now occupied in different profession — is dedicated to the life, struggle and light of 'Shaheed Jononi' Jahanara Imam against the conspirators and enemies of the great Liberation War. Rabul Hossain, the president of the organisation said "Shaheed Jononi was able to wake us up from a long 20 years slumber and join her in the fight to stop those forces who opposed the idea of Bangladesh and its struggle for liberation, and who had slowly began to regroup in strength and challenge our nationhood. For this alone we as a Bangalee nation shall always be grateful to her. The exhibition has a collection of about 200 photographs mostly taken during the 3 years struggle that began with the Gono Adalat on Golam Azam". Photographers whose outstanding skills are represented include Rashid Talukder, Dr. Shahidul Alam, Pavel Rahman, Shamsul Haque Tinku, Rakib Khan and Yusuf Saad, among others. Some rare photographs of the family and her early childhood, youth and adulthood make this exhibition unique and give an insight into the personality who was able to gain such popularity in such a short time and her courage to carry on a fight to rekindle the spirit of the liberation war. The exhibition remains open from 2 pm to 8 pm until Saturday the 30th.

—Akku Chowdhury