



Ekattorer Din Guli, those Days in 1971

The following is an excerpt from Jahanara Imam's renowned diary of 1971, *Ekattorer Din Gulo*. Jahanara Imam, a household name in Bangladesh, is one of our greatest woman writers and patriot.

by Jahanara Imam

Jahanara Imam during those tumultuous times. In the hope that her memory, her life's work and her fight for justice and freedom are remembered, honoured and most of all, exemplified.

16th March, 1971

I'm very nervous about Rumi. After spending the last several days at home, demolishing *moghla parathas* with the help of his friends and resounding the entire house, from floor to ceiling, with their arguments, he is out again. I have no idea where he goes, what he does, when he eats, or if he eats at all.

Today I went to clean my sons' dressing room, and found inside their wardrobe, hidden behind the shoe-stack, two gigantic pairs of mortar and pestle. What are these for? I wondered. Rumi wasn't home. Jami admitted, with much hesitation, that the mortar and pestle were essential tools in the making of bombs. Bombs? What will you grind with these? Where is your stuff? A tight-lipped Jami pointed at a few plastic bags behind the clothes hanging from the Ulna. They were fat bags, their mouths closed with string.

Shaking, I returned to my room. I lay down on my bed. What should I do? I thought. What will I say? The whole country was restless with the demand for independence. In Dhaka, Rajshahi, Chittagong — everywhere, peaceful Bangladeshis were picking up sticks, spears (whatever they could find) to rush in front of Pakistani bullets. In the name of independence. In every home, Bangladeshis were making hand bombs and Molotov cocktails to attack the enemy. How could I, at such a time, want to keep my son safe at home?

When Rumi returned, I hugged him and said, "I'm very scared." Rumi was silent for a while. Then he said, "We're no longer at the stage where we can be scared, ma. We don't have the option to turn back."

"I know everything will be alright," I said. "The Mujib-Yahya conference just started today. They will find a solution."

Rumi smiled. He started to say something, when Jami shouted from the foot of the stairs, "Ma, bhaiya, come quickly. The news is on. They're showing Sheikh Mujib on TV."

We rushed downstairs. Sheikh Mujib's car was coming out of the Presidential House. A black flag fluttered in front of a shining white car. Our hearts filled up at the sight. Our Sheikh Mujib had gone to meet the Pakistani President, flying his black flag of protest. Never before had the Pakistan government acknowledged this flag. But today, even that had become a reality.

17th March, 1971

At breakfast, everyone pored over the morning papers. Our attention was on the Mujib-Yahya conference. There wasn't much to report. They had talked for two and a half hours behind closed doors. In reply to questions from the press, the Sheikh had simply said, "We have just started to discuss the country's political problems. This discussion will continue, because it is not possible to solve such problems in a few minutes."

They're meeting again today, Wednesday, at 10 am. Rumi asked suddenly, "Amma, did you read this?"

Rumi passed me the *Dainik Azad*. The heading read: Janen Ki? (Do you know?). How many high-ranking officers of the Pakistan Army are in Dhaka at this moment? The news in short, was this: The following people had accompanied President Yahya to Dhaka — Army Chief Abdul Hamid, Principal Staff Officer Lt General Pirzada, Major General Omar, and six more brigadiers. But the government had not yet acknowledged the fact. At the insistence of some journalists, the President's public relations officer had admitted only the presence of Pirzada and Omar in Dhaka.

Kumi said, "This is a little suspicious. What is the meaning of coming to a friendly meeting with the army commander-in-chief and commanders?" My heart jumped suddenly. But I scolded Rumi, "You just run with rumours," I said. "This report has no basis. People are just assuming something bad is going to happen. Discussions have just started. Wait a few days — everything will be fine."

18th March Thursday, 1971

Dhaka Television has excited the Liberation Movement to a peak through its unique song programmes. Dhaka's most famous singers — Ferdousi Rahman, Sabina Yasmin, Shahnaz Begum, Anjum Ara Begum, Syed Abdul Hadi, Khandakar Faruk Ahmed, Rabindranath Ray, and many others — gathered to sing: "Sangram, Sangram, Sangram (This fight) will go on all night, all day, without rest." Their faces became a thousand faces. Then I felt as if a storm had risen in my heart, in my home; this very storm had spread all over the country.

19th March, Friday, 1971

Today Rumi brought home a unique sticker — "Each Bangla alphabet is a Bangali's life." This is the first Bangla sticker I have ever seen. Rumi put up the sticker on our car's rear wind shield. Artist Kamrul Hassan designed this sticker. Kamrul Hassan is member of a society called "Banglar Potua Samaj". This committee has made the Water Lily a symbol of the Bangali struggle. To spread the Liberation Movement to the masses, the artists were going to distribute cartoons, festoons, and posters.

22nd March, Monday, 1971

Alarmed by Rumi's activities, I had said to Ekram bhai (Jahanara Imam's brother-in-law) a week ago, "Please speak a few words with Rumi: Find out what he thinks, what he wants..." Today he said to me: "I was stunned after speaking to Rumi. This little boy knows so much? I used to think he was a rich kid, used to driving his car around, wearing fashionable clothes, speaking in English. But now I can see, he's something. He has digested all of Marx, and Mao Tse Tung. So much brains, such clear conception, at his age!"

I said tearfully: "You say he is so wonderful, but with all his brains, can I keep him alive? I don't know what he's up to. Please talk to him a little more. He's just a kid, he has just finished his intermediates — his whole student life lies ahead of him."

Ekram bhai was silent for a while. Then he said: "The situation in the country doesn't look too good. None can tell what will come of the Mujib-Yahya-meetings. Yesterday, Bhutto arrived with 12 advisors."

"They're very scared, it seems. I read in the papers they descended from the plane under very strict military guard. They're staying at Hotel Intercon under very strict security."

Sharif (Jahanara Imam's husband) said, "Bhutto met with Yahya for 2 hours as soon as he arrived. But the day Yahya arrived, he didn't look for Mujib the whole day. The next day, he waited till 2:30 in the afternoon to talk to Mujib."

Ekram bhai said: "There seems to be a conspiracy afoot." The bell rang. Kasem opened the door to Murtaza bhai and Mustafa bhai. We didn't even exchange greetings, the first question on everyone's lips was, "What do you think is happening in the country?"

Sharif said: "Yahya and Mujib are in meeting, while every class of men in the country — doctors, engineers, CSPs, EPCS — every profession is meeting under its own banner, bringing out protest marches. In Joydebpur, the military opened fire on the public. In Tongi and Narayanganj the people are reacting. In Mirpur, Chittagong, Parbatipur and Syedpur, Bangladeshis and Biharis are caught in bloody fights — the army is encouraging and supporting the Biharis."

Mustafa bhai asked, "Do you think there is going to be any trouble tomorrow?" Sharif said, "No. I don't think so. But the people are angry at the Joydebpur incident. The situation in Mirpur is tense also. Bangladeshis are excited. The day before yesterday, the Students League brought out a parade. At the end of the parade, about 500 young men and women marched out in the streets. And two thousand people stood on the streets to cheer them on. Tomorrow the Jai Bangla group will march in Paltan Maidan."

Murtaza bhai said, "Bhabi, they printed a picture of the Bangladesh flag in the papers today. Have you seen it?" I said, "Why shouldn't I see it? In fact, I bought a whole bunch of flags."

"Why so many?" I laughed: "To give away to those who might not get any at the last minute." "Really? Let's see one." I brought some Bangladeshi flags down. They each took one in hand, and stared at it with awe. I said, "You can each take one. Tomorrow you will fly them."

Subhan quit his job and left us today. He says he doesn't want to cook anymore. He wants to fight for our freedom. That's well and good. But who will cook for us now?"

23rd March, Tuesday, 1971

Today is Protest Day. Early in the morning, all of us climbed up on the roof and flew beside the black flag the new Bangladeshi flag on its own bamboo post. There was a strange feeling in my heart. A feeling made up of happiness, excitement, hope, fear, and dread.

We roamed the entire city in our car. From every home fluttered the bright new red, green and yellow flag. Then we visited many people. Moazzem bhai said: "Even Shaikh saheb flew the Independent Bangladesh flag today from his house."

Mrs Khaleque asked, "Did you see the Parade in Paltan Maidan?" "No," I said. "We just drove around to see the new flags. Even the office buildings flew the Bangladesh flag. Even the Intercontinental, in spite of its military guard."

Moazzem bhai said, "Even the foreign embassies flew the new flag! How wonderful it looked. But the best part was Shaheb Minar. I saw some daring posters by Kamrul Hassan. They were pasted on the stairs of the Minar. Each poster had a man's face, with the caption: 'Finish these men.' The face looked exactly like President Yahya."

The television doesn't seem to end. On other days, it's over by 9:30 pm. But today the TV is like a huge celebration which goes on and on. Two wonderful programmes on Sukanta's poems. Poetry recitations along with Nozesh Ali's photographs, and a programme called 'Deshalal' (match-sticks), in which Sukanta's Deshalal is recited as countless match-sticks burst out in flame on the screen, one by one. In the end, the whole TV screen is filled with burning match-sticks. Then a play by Abdullah Al Mamun: 'Abar Ashibo Fire' (we shall return).

At 9 minutes past midnight, the announcer spoke: "It is 9 minutes past midnight in Bangladesh. Today is 24th March, Wednesday. Our programme will end here." After this the Pakistani flag flew to the tunes of Pak Sar Zameen. At least the mystery was solved. The brave Bangladeshis had not let the Pakistani flag fly on our TV on 23rd March, Protest Day.

Compiled and translated by Gemini Wahhaj

A Painter with Dreams and Daring

by Fayza Huq

THIRTY-two year old Kanak Champa Chakma, one of the leading young artists of Bangladesh, sitting in the dining room of her Azimpur house, patiently waiting for the birth of her child on the 23rd of this month, says, when asked her views on the status of Bangladeshi women "Is marriage important for a woman? This differs from person to person. The social hang up that an unmarried woman in the house is a matter for concern for parents and elders is something that should be removed, but this cannot be done immediately due to circumstances."

"A woman cannot move around in society as freely as a man. Relatives and neighbours will question her coming and going in the house. If she is seen with a man more than once this becomes the gossip of the day. She must always have a father, husband or elder brother. In Singapore, Bangkok and Malaysia, in comparison, women are more progressive. In Turkey and Jordan too I have known women to travel overseas alone to participate in seminars, as I gather from visiting artists during the Bimales held at Dhaka."

"In this context, I believe the tribal women of Bangladesh are more independent than their counterparts in Dhaka. They collect vegetable and fruit from the hills, they make handicrafts which they sell in the markets and have income of their own. This is so especially as regards to handloom; they make their ads from cotton, colour them with natural colours and end up making garments, sheets, blankets for home consumption and for commercial purposes."

Being married to an outgoing and liberal minded artist-cum-photographer Kalid Mahmud Mithu, has been a great boon for Kanak Champa in her career. "I feel meeting someone like Mithu, who encourages me as an artist, has been a great help in my participation in the national and international field. My husband does

not want me to be in the kitchen or spend my time in doing routine daily shopping or household chores. He wants me to be a full-time artist. I have progressed as much as I have due to his inspirations. He is both a mental support and a guide." Kanak Champa says when asked to explain how she combines her role as a house-maker and a career woman "I do supervise the housework but I don't have to



do any dusting, cleaning or cooking." Does she feel that her field is a competitive one, "Real and professional artists always have a competitive drive. They want to excel and not lag behind the others. Some girls in Bangladesh are good as students; they might even do well for a few years as career women; but having gotten married they devote all their time to in-laws and get no encouragement from the family. This applies to most women who qualify from the fine arts section. This also goes for many of our Bangladeshi women who have graduated in other subjects. When a woman works she is bound to gather more experience, and this eventually helps her develop a personality, and she is perhaps a better mother and help-mate after her job experience."

Comparing the status of women artists with that in the west, Kanak Champa, who has travelled extensively for a young woman painter comments, "In Europe and USA women artists get the same importance as men. Today, in Bangladesh, women too have won considerable recognition. Ten years ago the situation was different — women were meant to be decorative objects and wives only. However they still have social barriers to

sumers are mostly women, they can best understand the psychology of women. As illustrators of magazines and newspapers, they are sincere and do not waste time, with excuses such as a ten minutes break for a cigarette. As art teachers too, they make a great contribution to society."

When she does oils, acrylics and collages, the artist concentrates on tribal life and this she projects with woman as the subject, seen in harmony with her environment and with her male counterpart. "The tribal woman deserves to be played up, she looks after the house and earns a living as well."

Discussing why she opened her gallery "Tone" she explained, "when my husband Mithu and I opened the centre there were not many professional art galleries. We wanted to promote artists financially and also wished to provide space for newcomers to help them come into the limelight. We also planned to educate them through workshops. In addition we plan to publish books on art which will be both for local and foreign consumption. People overseas should know that Bangladesh is just not a land of floods and cyclones."

How will she plan out her work once these is the baby to look after? The artist replies with calm and confidence, "when the baby comes I must devote six months to the child but later I will take up my regular work. I will oversee my household but won't get involved. I must paint, study and meditate."

Kanak who has been painting professionally since '78, has had eight solo exhibitions including one at Pennsylvania and two in Bhutan. She has participated in 65 joint ventures in places like USA, UK, Germany, Netherlands and India.

She writes in her spare time and her short stories and poems have been printed in Rangamati newspapers. She also takes great delight in tapestry, weaving traditional motifs with modern designs.

Fulena a Success Story

by Md Enamul Huq

IT WAS NOT in my knowledge that to milk a cow can be a hobby and that there is an authority inherent in it too. Recently I experienced it from a village adjacent to Mymen-singh Agricultural University.

Fulena Begum of this village is thirty years old. Hers is a five-member small family of husband-wife, two sons and a daughter. The only possession of the family is a three-katha homestead with a hut. Only two years ago there was no other earning member except husband Kuddus Ali. The family was run by the daily labour income of only 30-50/- Taka and that also for only half of the year, no better than passing the day by hand to mouth or half-starved. None of the children has gone to the school although the world-famous agricultural university stands near their house — where many from home and abroad come to study and research.

About two years ago Fulena Begum met a worker from a development organisation, Association for Social Advancement (ASA). The worker listened to her tale of sorrow with sympathy. Then the worker made her to dream of an improved standard of life by advising her to form a group and accumulate savings through it to raise a fund of capital, then to participate in development education and training to create awareness and self-employment with loan from the fund.

But Fulena could not take the words in confidence on the first day so she bade the worker good-bye, by saying, "Let me think."

That might Fulena consulted the matter with her husband and he encouraged her to go on. Then she intimated her consent to form a group through that worker to the ASA unit office. And Saikat Bhumihin (Mahila Samiti (landless women's group) was formed with 20 poor female members under the leadership of Fulena.

The group continued well with its weekly meetings, weekly savings of 5/- Taka per head, one hour of study in each weekly meeting and sharing of each other's sorrow and joy in the unity.

Now, Fulena is owner of two

cows and three calves. The present market value of these animals is about Tk 17,000-18,000/-. She also has saved Tk 950/-. Now, she dreams of having a tin-shed house; keeping land in mortgage; up bringing of the children. She also dreams of taking part in local arbitrations.

The loan amount of Tk 7000/- only has brought wealth in her family, endowed her with confidence and ensured three-times meals for the family members. The children now go to school. She is no more an illiterate and fool. She can sign, read and keep accounts of her milk sale. Now she gives counsel to her husband.

Money makes sense, enhances dignity in the society. When you earn money, every one in the family respects you. This way the cycle of power gives you the turn. We all know that women are weak, oppressed and powerless. But if we cannot make them self-reliant by integrating them with production process and self-employment, then their development will be only one-sided. In this regard "ASA" has developed a new model by lending about Tk 170 crore among three lakh families and which has enabled many women to take part in the family decision-making. It is not to be denied that ownership of wealth is power."

Rendered in English by Onirvan Shahu



The Pill may Be the Cause of Rare Disease

Women who have taken oral contraceptives are much more likely to contract a rare type of cervical cancer, American researchers reported on Friday.

Family planning experts said they were worried the findings could frighten women using oral contraceptives, and stressed that the form of cancer concerned was very rare.

The study by Dr Giske Ursin, of the University of Southern California's School of Medicine, found that women who took the pill for more than 12 years were four-and-a-half times more likely to develop adenocarcinoma of the cervix, or neck of the womb, than women who had not taken oral contraceptives.

"One... finding was that women who had been on the pill for only 1-6 months had a three-fold risk," the study, published in the *Lancet Medical Journal*, said.

The study said the risk then appeared to decrease to one and a half times in the group of women who had been taking the pill for seven to 24 months and then increased again for women with 12 years' use.

Ursin's research was based on the study of women born after 1935 identified from the Los Angeles County cancer surveillance programme as having adenocarcinoma of the cervix, a rare cancer of the gland tissue and cell-lining inside the neck of the womb.

between 1977 and 1991. The latest did not say how many women this involved.

Ursin said the new study may go some way to explaining why the incidence of this type of cancer more than doubled in the United States between the early 1970s and the mid-1980s.

The study said researchers did not yet know why oral contraceptives may affect the cervix but Ursin and her colleagues suggested that estrogen and progesterone, the hormones contained in older versions of the pill, may trigger unchecked growth of cancerous cells.

Frances Perrow, a spokeswoman for Marie Stopes

International, a London-based family planning organisation, said the findings were based on the old-style, heavy-does pill.

"Women in the study group would have started on the very high dose which would bear no resemblance to the contraceptive pills today," she said.

"Our medical people here are very dubious about it all," Perrow said, adding that adenocarcinoma was exceptionally rare.

"It's so rare that all of our doctors here have only seen one case in ten years," she said. "We are very concerned that women should not stop taking their pills."

— Reuters

Female Hormones Led to Striking Drop in Women's Risk of Heart Disease

DALLAS.

Giving female hormones to women after menopause led to a dramatic drop in their risk of heart disease, with few harmful side effects, according to a study released Thursday.

The findings led scientists to conclude that all post-menopausal women should at least consider using estrogen, which at one time — when it was given in much larger doses — was linked to a number of health risks.

The number of post-menopausal women is growing in the United States as the population ages. By 2000, 38 per cent of American women will be 45 or over. By 2015, that will increase to 45 per cent.

The women in the study showed improvements in a variety of heart disease risk factors, including a significant boost in levels of so-called good cholesterol, which protects against heart disease.

That effect alone was enough to cut their risk of heart disease by up to 25 per cent, depending upon the specific hormone treatment used.

But the drugs had many other beneficial effects, so they probably reduced heart-disease risks even more, said another of the study's authors, Dr Elizabeth Barrett-Connor of the University of California at San Diego.

"All of the treatments were remarkably effective," she said Thursday at the annual meeting of the American Heart Association, where the findings were reported.

"Given the fact that coronary heart disease is the number one killer of American women, the importance of this landmark study should not be underestimated," said Dr Claude Lenfant of the National Institutes of Health, which funded the \$120 million study.

Heart disease killed 237,000 American women in 1990, according to the latest heart association figures.

The abnormalities did not occur when estrogen was given with a form of progesterone, another female hormone, the researchers said.

Barrett-Connor said that more women should be taking estrogen to reduce their risk of heart disease, in addition to using it to treat the hot flashes and other unpleasant symptoms of menopause.

"There are, unfortunately, women who would benefit from estrogens and are very frightened of them," she said.

The concern dates from the 1970s, when high doses of hormones used in birth control pills were linked to a risk of strokes and high blood pressure.

The study found no evidence of either risk.

Fifteen per cent to 30 per cent of post-menopausal American women are now getting hormone treatments, Bush said.

Women have a lower risk of heart disease than men, but their risk climbs sharply after menopause, when their natural levels of estrogen fall. Yet heart disease is still widely thought of as a men's disease. Bush said.

"Every woman can tell you one in nine women get breast cancer. They can't tell you six in nine get heart disease," Bush said.

The hormone treatments had no effect on blood pressure, and did not lead to any excess weight gain. Concerns about both of those things have kept some women from taking the drugs.

The results were best with estrogen alone. The researchers recommended that for women who have had hysterectomies. Lacking uteruses, they are not at risk for endometrial cancer.

A second treatment using estrogen in combination with a new form of progesterone called micronized progesterone was almost as beneficial as estrogen alone, without causing the pre-cancerous changes in the uterus.

Combinations using standard forms of progesterone were somewhat less effective, the researchers said. — UNB News

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