It was painful to leave our home unattended under lock and key. My mother was in tears. As we were crossing the Buriganga by boat, my mother, who had high blood pressure and diabetes, fell very ill. We broke the journey at Jinjira and took shelter in the veranda of a two-storied building crowded by refugees like us. It was evening and like others we lined up for food from a gruel kitchen. The landlord was very kind. We were held up in Jinjira for two days, as my mother's health was not permitting us to take journey towards Faridpur.

On April 3, at dawn we were awakened by the loud bursts of four mortal shells in quick succession falling in our area. Panicked, we ran helter skelter. Instinctively, I held my eldest son Tinku in my arms and my wife held my younger son Rinku on one arm and a bag she was carrying on another arm and ran towards the opposite direction of the shellfire. There was no time to think of other members of our family. No sooner had we run half a quarter of a mile than we heard shooting from the south. I changed direction and started to run towards the east but after I covered some distance we found people were running towards the west as bullets were coming from the east. In utter desperation we took to running towards the west. I noticed my wife was lagging behind. I asked her to throw away the heavy bag. She reluctantly threw the bag containing her ornaments, a few saris, my JS Icon camera, her undergrad certificates and our wedding photo album etc. On our way to the west we found a mosque and went to take shelter there but it was full to the brim. Behind the mosque there was a large graveyard and people were hiding in graves. I hesitated for a few seconds. In the grave there might be snakes and poisonous insects. I was between the devil and the deep sea.



The writer with his wife and other family members.

But snakes and insects were no more dangerous than the Pakistan army.

After half an hour, when the shooting stopped, people were rising from the graves. They asked me to come out of the grave. In front of the mosque a big crowd was discussing the indiscriminate killing, arson and arrest of young people. An elderly person pointed out that my wife was covered in mud and cow dung and thought I was a student. He took us to his hut and gave a sari for my wife and a *lungi* and a cap for me to wear and sent for a boat to take us to Kamrangirchar and Noabganj. I was stunned by his concern for our safety. Much later I looked for him in Jinjira but without success. In the afternoon we arrived home at Elephant Road. I thought about my parents, brothers and sisters and overcome with anxiety and exhaustion, I fainted.

Next morning the entire family miraculously returned home safe. Momen Bhai narrated how, with our sick mother, they could not run about but took shelter in a mosque nearby and when the army searched for young men in the mosque, Momen Bhai, Hasnat and Rashid sat down hiding behind the standing rows of women. Abba said that after the army left, he searched for us in the heap of dead bodies killed by the army. He heard that more than three thousand innocent civilians were killed and many injured in the army mayhem. The wife and son of Hamidullah, the then governor of State Bank perished in that military campaign. This wanton killing was ranked genocide, an extermination campaign inspired by racial hatred against Bengalis and could only be compared with that of the My Lai massacre in Vietnam, Srebrenica in Bosnia, Gaza, Cambodia and Rawanda.

Hasnat, at the end of April, went to join his job as ADC in Patuakhali at the insistence of chief secretary Shafiul Azam. My father prayed and recited from the Holy Quran the whole day for his safety. A few days later, Rashid disappeared to join the freedom fighters. He was later joined by my other younger brother DR Mobin from London to work as founder doctor in Melaghar hospital in Agartala border under the command of Khaled Mosharraf.

But my life was not the same again after our return from Jinjira. My wife suddenly became silent, distant and completely lost. She never recovered her memory which, I suspect, she might have lost because of the shock she suffered of the nerve wrecking and devastating attack in Jinjira or at the loss of her precious possessions in the bag she threw away or from her shattered dream about her little household left in Islamabad, decorated with care with personal effects and gadgets imported from West Germany. Doctors at home and abroad said she suffered the irreversible trauma of the shock of the Pakistani army violence. Innumerable medical treatments could not cure her. I know she is one of the many unknown victims of the war. I am carrying the scar for last 38 years hoping she might recover one day to be able to understand and appreciate the sights, sounds, smell and beauty of life, to be able to love herself, and me and her children all over again.

Abdul Hannan is a former Press Counsellor, Bangladesh UN Mission in New York.