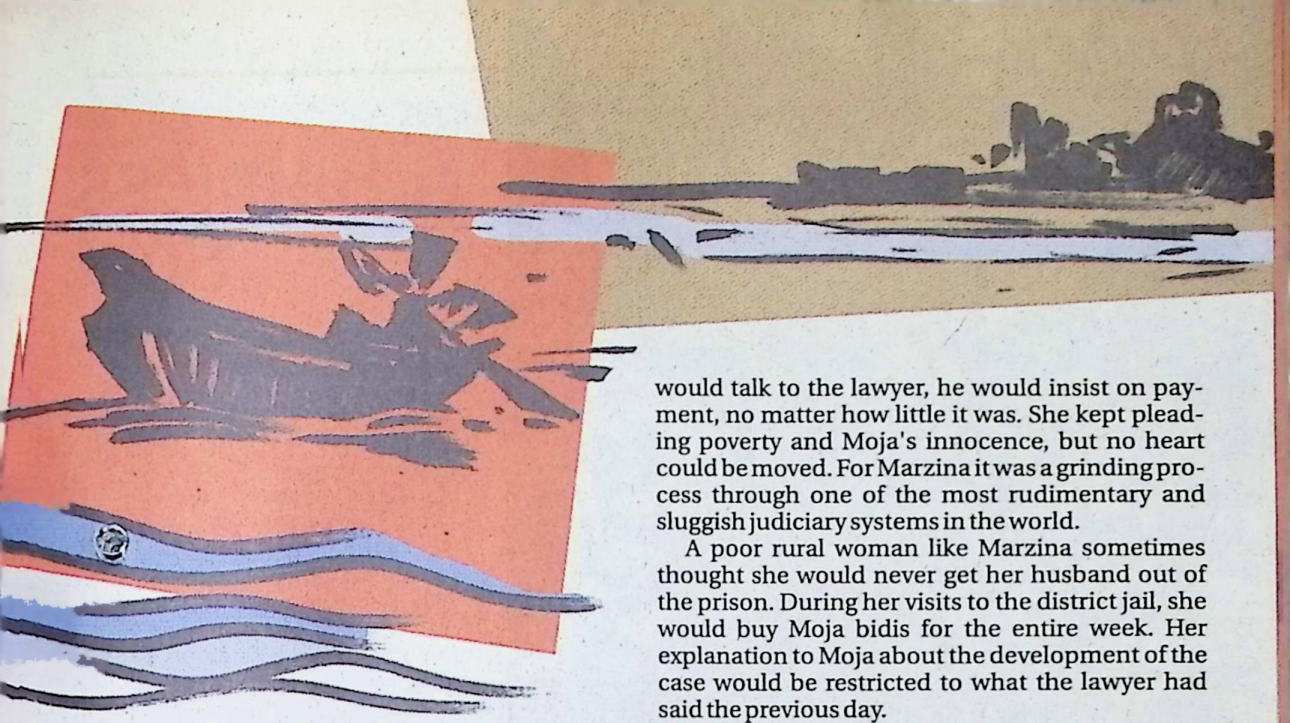


eration war we did the same every day when bodies with bullet wounds floated by, I was a little boy but I remember helping my father and others bury many, many bodies."

The SI pushed Moja on to the back of the van where the wrapped body was laid.

The police had Moja in their custody. The following day Moja was brought on a two-day remand and questioned. He cried like a child. The autopsy report of the ill fated woman showed death by strangulation. Police searched for her identity in the upstream of the Meghna as far as they could go within their jurisdiction. There was no clue. The body was buried as an unidentified woman of about 25 years of age.

Policemen were convinced about Moja's innocence but they were extremely annoyed at him. Such a murder within their jurisdiction brought discredit for every member of the police station. For them it was a blind case and offered no clue for an immediate resolve. Infuriated, policemen vowed to teach Moja a lesson. At the end of the remand they charged him with deliberately destroying murder evidence.

The gruelling path of justice had just started for the poor boatman. Moja's wife, son and daughter came to visit him at the police station and joined some policemen to scold him.

"Why would you not let it float downstream, what made you put it on our shoulder?" asked one. But Moja remained mum with tears rolling down his cheeks.

For the next six months Marzina and other family members kept shuttling between the court houses and her home. Every evening she would travel to the lawyer's chamber 10 kilometres away and beg him for Moja's bail prayer. Every time she would talk to the lawyer, he would insist on payment, no matter how little it was. She kept pleading poverty and Moja's innocence, but no heart could be moved. For Marzina it was a grinding process through one of the most rudimentary and sluggish judiciary systems in the world.

A poor rural woman like Marzina sometimes thought she would never get her husband out of the prison. During her visits to the district jail, she would buy Moja bidis for the entire week. Her explanation to Moja about the development of the case would be restricted to what the lawyer had said the previous day.

It was during the next hearing on the case that a dark looking man approached Marzina. The case could not be heard immediately as the judge was yet to arrive. Moja and others stood on the dock handcuffed and shackled inside the packed room.

"I work here," introduced the dark man. "Is Moja your husband?"

"I have a proposal, I know he is innocent." "Can you afford 20,000 taka?"

Marzina would do anything to get her husband out. She sold two goats she owned, Moza's boat and a pair of gold earrings she had safeguarded for her daughter and rushed back to see the dark man with 16,000 taka.

"I could not procure the rest, please help me with whatever I have got," she begged.

Seven months after his arrest, Moja was granted bail a month after Marzina sold her belongings. Three years later, the case was rejected by the court and Moja Majhi was finally relieved of all charges. The police never bothered to appeal against his acquittal.

But the delay in deliberation of justice took its toll on the boatman's life. By now, Moja had sold the family's only piece of land on which they lived and moved to the district town. Their son dropped out from the SSC exams and moved with them to their new abode, a thatched room in a slum. Marzina, with her long acquaintances in the court premises, managed to set up a small tea stall, where everyday she sold *paan*, cigarettes and cups of tea to people coming to seek justice.

Six months later the family moved to Dhaka and rented a room in a slum in Kamrangirchar, where Moja's son makes a living by pulling rickshaws. Marjina has set up a tea stall near the local police station. Moja and Marjina never think of returning home by the Meghna.