

The writer (L) with his grandfather.

riated a Punjabi classmate with whom I had never got along well. He brought out the history textbook we studied in class, turned to the page containing Mohammad Ali Jinnah's photograph, and dared me to tear it up if 'you have the guts'. Well, at that point, I did have the guts. I tore out the picture, and then tore it into bits and flung them on the ground. It was a scandal and soon I was called to the principal's office. A Dutch missionary, the principal was angry that a 'perfectly good boy' like me had committed such a nefarious act. How in heaven did I insult the 'father of the nation'? That was his question. I still remember the sudden courage that shaped my response: 'Father, I did not insult the Father of the Nation. Our Father of the Nation is Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.' He gave me a quizzical, I would say a quite sympathetic look. "I understand, son," said he. "Don't do it again." I had made my point.

Over the next few days, I was always getting into arguments with my friends about Bangladesh. And like every other Bengali, I wondered where Bangabandhu was or what the army had done to him. And then, on an April morning, at a newspaper stand to get my copy of Herald magazine, I saw Bangabandhu's picture on the front pages of all the newspapers there. Looking somber, he was on a sofa at Karachi airport, flanked by two policemen. The heart nearly cracked in me. Something told me he would not get out of prison alive. Where the junta had taken him from Karachi was a thought that assailed me all the way home. I showed the picture of a captive Bangabandhu to my family. My parents were terribly upset. Father decided he had to take us home to Bangladesh one way or the other.

The rest, as they say and as we know, is history.

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