

Accused # 17

“DON'T be afraid. We will live,” the grievously wounded man tried to assure his companion. They were on an ambulance, headed towards Combined Medical Hospital (CMH). That fateful morning, they were shot by the guards, who had also beaten them mercilessly with bayonets. Later that night, he passed away.

On 15 February, 1969 Sergeant Zahurul Haque lay dying. He was among the 35 accused, of sedation -- to overthrow the then in power East Pakistan government. Accused number 1 was Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Accused number 17 was Sergeant Zahurul Haque.

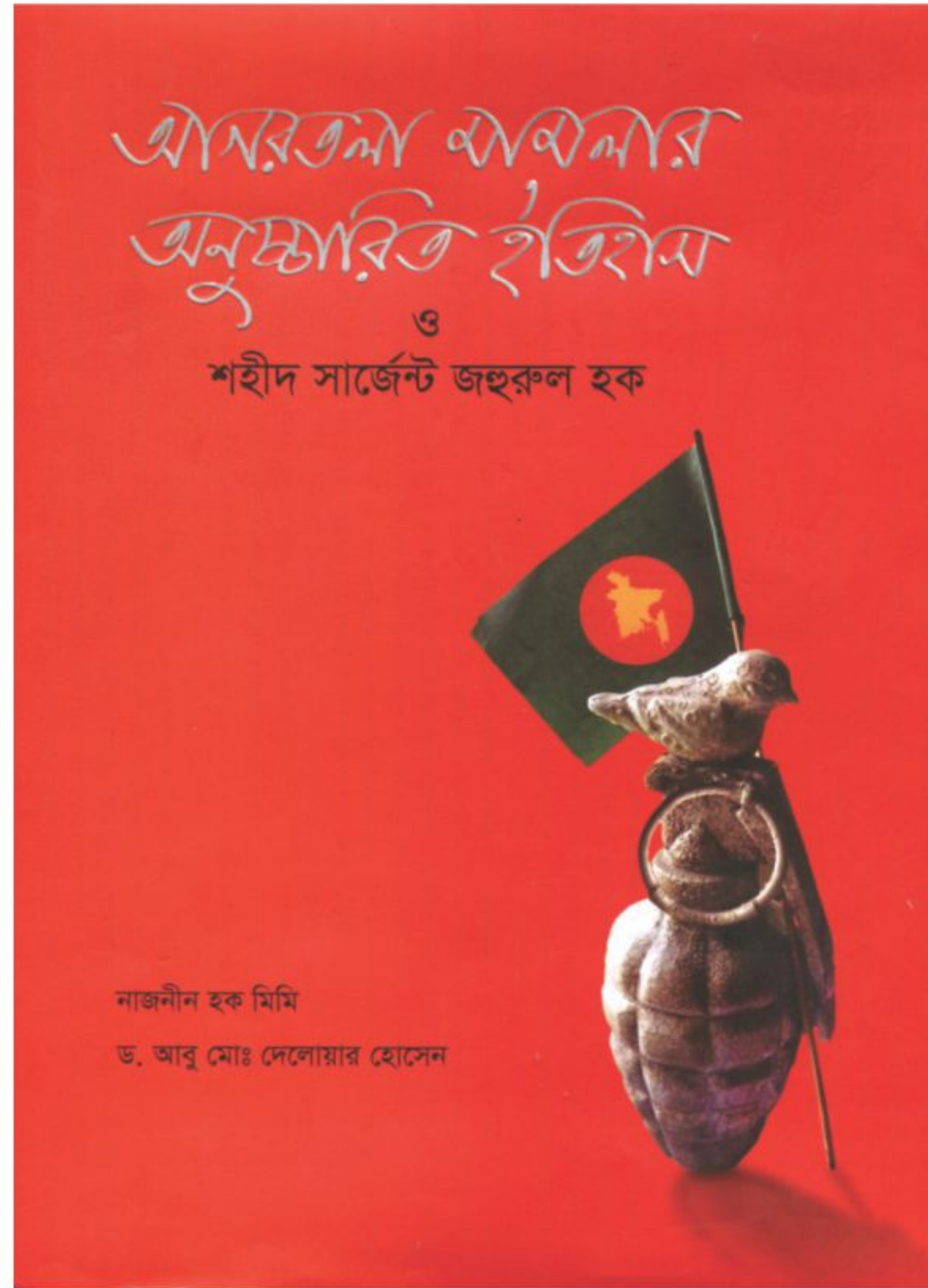
The infamous trial, State Vs Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Others, better known as the Agartala Conspiracy Case, resulted in immense public outcry. The mass uprising demanded the freeing of Sheikh Mujib and the co-accused.

Then one morning, Sergeant Zahurul Haque and Flight Sergeant Fazlul Haq (another accused) were shot. The former did not live to see the next morning.

His death added fuel to the fire. And eventually, the infuriated people of East Pakistan had brought the trial to a forced end, freeing all of those accused, including Sheikh Mujib. They were released on 22 February, and on the following day, the leader was titled Bangabandhu. But Sergeant Zahurul Haque was not to return anymore.

One book on the Agartala Case, which has a focus on him, is called 'Agartala Mamlar Onucharito Etihash O Shaheed Sergeant Zahurul Haque' (Untold History of Agartala Case & Shaheed Sergeant Zahurul Haque). This book, which was released in February 2015, has been published by Journeyman Books and is written by Nazneen Haque Mimi and Dr. Abu Md. Delwar Hossain.

Delwar Hossain is a veteran academician at Dhaka University, teaching history. He is also the provost of Shaheed Sergeant Zahurul Haque Hall. Meanwhile, Nazneen Haque Mimi is an interior consultant at Journeyman. But her ties run deep: she happens to be the niece of the beloved martyr.



The book cover, designed by Tarik Sujat, is a simplistic yet symbolic one. Most of it is red, mirroring martyrdom. The cover portrays a grenade, on which a pigeon is sitting, along with a flag of the country. The grenade is symbolic of the one by which Zahurul used to train others. The pigeon symbolises peace.

As you open the book, the fine quality of the paper and the robust binding show that the publisher has spared no

expense.

Moreover, the book reads well because of its format and use of simple everyday words: it is written in a question-and-answer format.

Mimi and Hossain interviewed 9 of those accused of the Agartala conspiracy and a witness. These interviews give a detailed account of their role in the conspiracy and in the trial and their memories of the martyred sergeant. They also sketch biographies of their personal and professional lives.

The authors even interviewed the surgeon who operated on Zahurul and Fazlul at CMH, giving the readers a rare glimpse on the last hours of the sergeant's life and a medical analysis of his condition.

Furthermore, there are interviews of family members of the accused. It is an untold history of the agonies with which they spent their lives at that time.

And, as the name suggests, the book takes a special interest in Zahurul Haque. Hence, there are interviews of the martyr's family members and different essays and articles written in reminiscence of him, in addition to pictures and letters.

The last section deals with interviews of eminent politicians, lawmakers, journalists and literary personalities regarding the case.

The book is a comprehensive study of the case and the sergeant, and it would be a useful read for researchers and those interested in the case and/or Sergeant Zahurul Haque.

Sergeant Zahurul Haque had told one of his co-accused while they were on their way to the hospital that they would survive, they would live. Unfortunately, that was not to be the case. But when thought figuratively, he was not wrong, because Sergeant Zahurul Haque continues to live in our hearts till today.

By M H Haider



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