



Victim, Oil on Canvas, Aminul Islam

A tale of torture, rape and dehumanisation

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THE town hall building of Rangpur town was constructed in 1913 by the British as a government office building, which later on became a place for cultural activities. It was the place of meetings, seminars, dramas, cultural programmes, etc. It stood as a proud heritage with a distinct cultural identity of the people of the area.

In 1971, the Pakistan Army and their collaborators stopped all cultural activities in the building like they did everywhere else and took possession of the building to set up a military camp. They started conducting nefarious activities in the building and destroyed its sanctity. Many people who were arrested by the Pakistan Army and their collaborators were brought here and brutally tortured and killed. Out of fear, people of Rangpur avoided coming near the building. A number of torture

cells were set up in the rooms of the building where the local people were brought and tortured in the name of interrogation. Also, this was the place where a large number of women kidnapped by the Pakistan Army and their collaborators were tortured. The auditorium where people once used to sit and enjoy cultural events was used for keeping these women imprisoned. The chairs of the auditorium were removed; flat wooden planks were placed on the walls with hooks with which the women were tied so that they could not escape.

It is opined by the people of Rangpur that the most brutal killings and torture were conducted in this town hall. Adjacent to the building there was a big well, where a large number of people were thrown after being killed. It is unfortunate that later the well was filled up and no mark was kept. Among the many women who were brought to this town hall building was Mansura Begum, the wife of Freedom

Fighter Mostafa Mia. Young and beautiful, Mansura, with light green eyes, was the youngest of the three children of her parents who lived in Tapodhan village under Rangpur Sadar. She was married to Mostafa Mia, son of Abdul Khaleq, residing in the same village in 1969. Mostafa was a small trader in the village. In March 1971, when the Liberation War started, she was four months pregnant.

Mostafa Mia decided to join the Liberation War. He advised his father and Mansura to keep his plan of joining the Liberation War as secret. In early April, he met Dr Abdus Samad of Shaptibari village and accompanied him to the Mukti Bahini training camp located at Sitai area of India. But the collaborators of the Pakistan Army came to know that Mostafa Mia had joined the Liberation War and reported this to the army camp located at Rangpur town hall. They also informed that Mostafa Mia had returned to the village after receiving training from India for

conducting operations against them. On the morning of 14 June, Pakistani soldiers accompanied by the collaborators, surrounded Mostafa Mia's house and forcibly entered the house in search of him. As he was not found, the soldiers started beating and kicking his father, Abdul Khaleq, mercilessly with rifles and boots. At one stage of the brutal torture, Khaleq lost his consciousness but the soldiers continued beating him. Mansura Begum saw the incident while hiding behind a small bush near the house. She could not anymore bear her dear father-in-law being beaten to death. She broke the cover and rushed to the old man, grabbed his bleeding body and begged the military not to kill him. The beautiful Mansura attracted the attention of the notorious soldiers. They picked up injured Khaleq on their truck and also pulled and dragged Mansura onto the truck. Mansura tried to resist but the soldiers did not let her loose.