

Those days of 71

Here we present an excerpt from Jahanara Imam's seminal autobiography, Ekatturer Dinguli. This diary entry was made three days after the military picked up her husband, Sharif, eldest son, Jami, and youngest son, Rumi, a freedom fighter, from their residence at Dhanmondi. Although Sharif and Jami returned to tell the horrific tales of their detention, her youngest son, Rumi, did not.

JAHANARA IMAM

September 1, Wednesday, 1971

SHARIF, Jami and Masum tell an unbelievable, inhumane story of barbarity and cruelty. Sharif doesn't speak much usually; he gave a summary of their two-day, two-night imprisonment in his characteristic manner. I had to extract the detailed descriptions from Jami and Masum.

That night, the soldiers made Rumi and Jami walk to the main road from the house. The road was lined with quite a lot of jeeps and lorries. The military police, that had surrounded our house, now came out of our lane and that of Mr. Kashem, and gathered on the main road. Captain Kaiyyum then made the five of them stand in a line on the side of the road. A jeep from the Kampala Hotel Building on the opposite end moved forward and stopped in front of them, its headlights on them. Captain Kaiyyum mumbled something or the other to someone sitting inside the jeep. Then coming back towards Sharif, he

grasped Rumi's arm and said, 'You come with me.' He made Rumi sit in the jeep, and asked Jami, Masum and Hafiz to follow them in Sharif's car. Some military men also squeezed into the car. The jeep with Rumi and Captain Kaiyyum went first, followed by Sharif's car, and finally the rest of the lorries and jeeps. Eventually they stopped in front of the MP Hostel. There, the five were made to stand in a line once again. Once again, the headlights were focused on their faces. An army officer, standing in a corner of the balcony, enquired, "Who is Rumi?" After identifying Rumi, he asked them to stand on the balcony to one side. In those few seconds, pressed against each other, Rumi whispered, "None of you admit to anything. You don't know anything. I haven't told you anything."

After a little while, some sepoy took Rumi inside. Some other sepoy took Sharif and the rest to a medium-sized room. There was a sofa set there, but they were made to sit on the floor.

Then began the infernal. Every few minutes, Pak soldiers would come and

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interrogate Sharif, Jami, Masum and Hafiz. "Where have you kept the arms?" "Where did you do your training?" "How many soldiers have you killed?" Answers to these were naturally in the negative, and with that would commence the beating. And such beating it was! Blows to the chest, kicks in the stomach, sudden smacks with

the rod from the back – eyes would strain to come out of their sockets – pokes on the back and chest with rifle butts; smacks on the face, head, back – every inch of the body with canes, sticks, and belts; make them lie facedown on the floor, and then stomp on them with boots, squashing their elbows, wrists and knee joints. It was the same thing in the other rooms; the cries and moans of imprisoned Bangalees, the mirth and mockery of the Pak soldiers would reach their ears. It was as if the prisoners were their toys, and they were having a grand celebration having found so many playthings. One group would come and after abusing them physically and verbally, leave. A few minutes of respite, till another group would resume this pernicious play.

The Pak soldiers were very careful about one thing – they would make sure to not beat a prisoner so much that he would die. They would beat him just enough so that the prisoner would feel unbearable pain, so that blood could gush

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Fadia Affash, *Interrogation*.