

Those days of 71

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out of their noses and mouths, their fingers broke; but they didn't die. If someone fainted, they would splash water on his face, give him a break — revive him just enough so that he would be ready for more pain.

In the meantime, one by one, they would be called to another room — a Colonel was sitting there — Colonel Hejaji. One by one, he would ask them innumerable questions. After taking Sharif into the room, he made him first sit on a chair, asked what he did, how many children he had, how many people were at home, how old Rumi was, what he studied — these kind of things. Sharif answered all these questions, and added that Hafiz had just come from Chittagong, and that he had no inkling of what was going on in Dhaka. Besides, his uncle was the DC of Dhaka.

Then Colonel Hejaji asked when Rumi had left for the Liberation War, where he had received training. Sharif answered that he had no knowledge of any of this. The conversation thus far had been quite civil, but now Hejaji said vehemently, "You don't know what kind of vile boys your son mingles with, does vile things with?" Sharif said, "My son is now grown up, he studies in the university, who he hangs out with, what he does — is it possible for me to keep track of him?" Mockingly, Hejaji asserted, "Then it appears you are an unfit father. You have not been able to fulfil your responsibility of guiding your son on the honest path." Sharif, now furious, exclaimed, "Can you say with certainty who your son is hanging out with, where he is going?"

After bringing Sharif back to the room, they took Hafiz. The stub of the plane ticket from Chittagong was still in Hafiz's pocket; by showing it, he could prove that he really had come to Dhaka that very day. Then, one by one, they took Jami and Masum. As one went in, the rest would continue to be beaten. When he returned, he, too, would be beaten. This continued till the morning.

Then the sepoy took them to another room, where a great surprise was awaiting them. It was a small room, about six foot by eight foot. A horde of people sat along the walls, on the floor. Sharif and the lot were astonished to find Bodi and Chullu among them. They didn't know anyone else, but they soon made acquaintances with everyone. Just as the Pak soldiers left the room and locked the door from



Leon Golub, *Interrogation*.

outside, everyone started whispering and introducing themselves. Altaf Mahmud, his four brothers-in-law Nuhel, Khonu, Deenu and Leenu Billah, artist Alvi, Sharif's engineer friend's two brother-in-laws, Rosul and Nasser, Azad, Jewel, Dhaka TV musician Hafiz, Morning News reporter Bashar, owner of Neon Sign Samad and many more. Altaf Mahmud's shirt was drenched in blood near his chest; there was still blood smeared on his face; his eyes and lips were swollen. Both bones between Bashar's left wrist and elbow were broken; only a handkerchief was somehow wound around the broken bones, hanging feebly. And in that condition, his hands were tied at the back. There was blood on Hafiz's nose and face; the beating was so brutal that an eye had melted out of its socket and was now hanging over his cheeks. The military had wrung and broken Jewel's fingers, which were already injured a month ago, as if they were jute.

A while later, there was the sound of the door opening, and everyone fell silent. Talking was prohibited. If the Pak soldiers heard anyone speaking, they would beat them. They brought in Rumi and some other boys. Someone said in Urdu, "Sepoyji, I'm very thirsty. Please give me some water." In reply, the Sepoy swivelled his belt and rope and hit indiscriminately, then closed the door again. An outraged voice exclaimed, "Executioners! Executioners! They won't even give us water? More beating if you ask for water?"

After a few minutes, as someone sitting by the wall shifted his position, another cried, "Oh! You can see a tap there!" Everyone was shocked: there was a tap on the wall; its presence had been shrouded by the swarm of bodies pressed against each other. Everyone drank some water from the tap. A boy took some water in the cup of his hands and helped Bashar drink.

Whispered conversations resumed.

Information was exchanged about when and how everyone had been caught. Bodi was caught on August 29 around 12 noon. That day, he had attended a meeting with Rumi and others in the house on Road no. 28. Afterwards, Rumi went to Chullu's house to listen to music. Bodi went to his close friend Farid's house for a chat. The military picked him up from that house. Samad was picked up around 4 in the afternoon. The military went to Azad's house at midnight. They also apprehended Jewel, Bashar, Azad, his cousin's husband and two other guests. [Only Kazi had escaped.] Apparently he had suddenly jumped on the Captain in an attempt to snatch the Sten from his hands. It was so sudden and unexpected that the military, taken aback, began to shoot at random. In the commotion, Kazi escaped.

Alam's house was quite close to Azad's big house in Maghbazar, in Dilu Road. The army went there around two in the morning. From there they picked up Alam's uncle Abdur Razzak and his son Mizanur Rahman. Around 1.30 am, Kazi had arrived at their house, almost naked. He said, "The Army just conducted a raid on Azad's house. In the scuffle, I managed to escape somehow. Give me a *lungi*, and a Sten. The Army will inevitably come to this house. I will stop them." Alam's mother gave him a *lungi* and said, "Son, you must leave at once. We will take care of ourselves." As soon as Kazi left, Alam's mother and four sisters helped his father climb over the low boundary wall to the other side. Just then, the army surrounded the house. There was a small hidden concrete chamber beneath the floor of Alam's kitchen where arms were stored. Upon arrival, the first thing the army asked was: where is the kitchen? Everyone knew then and there that the army had already found out about the arms and ammunition dump. The Pak soldiers went

to the kitchen, removed the firewood and dug out the arms and ammunition, smashing the concrete slabs with crowbars. Since the only men in the house were Alam's uncle and his cousin, the army picked up both of them. The poor souls had come to Dhaka from Khulna only a few days ago. Even though they didn't know or do a thing, they were being beaten to death. They could not begin to comprehend why they were being beaten at random.

The military had arrived at Shahadat's house in Hathkhola at three in the morning. Since they couldn't find any freedom fighters there, they seized one of Shahadat's brothers-in-law, Belayat Chowdhury. The poor man worked at P.I.L. He had come home from Karachi on leave and never gone back. He was at the village, but as fate would have it, he had come to Dhaka only 10-12 days ago. The poor man was not involved in anything at all, but thanks to his freedom fighter in-laws, he was now being subjected to torture.

At Chullu's house, the military arrived around 12/12.30 am. Chullu's brother M. Sadek was a high up government official. Chullu was apprehended from his government residence, No. 1 Tenament House, Elephant Road.

The army went to Altaf Mahmud's residence around five in the morning. Their house was in Outer Circular Road, opposite the Rajarbagh Police Line. They had rented the house next to Sharif's friend, Mannan's residence. That house belonged to Mannan's elder brother, Baki. A few days ago, Samad of Neon Sign had brought a huge trunk filled with ammunitions and explosives to be stored at Altaf Mahmud's. It was buried in the courtyard behind Mannan's house. Once they arrived, the first thing the army did was whack Altaf Mahmud on the chest with such tremendous force that blood

They had seen how Shapan's father was hung from a fan and beaten senseless with a thick stick, with a stiff coiled rope, how they had revived his consciousness by spraying water on his face only to resume their torture.

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