

Those days of 71

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

instantly gushed out of his nose and mouth. Then they made him and Samad dig out the trunk from the courtyard. The army had brought Samad with them to the house. They made Altaf's brother-in-law place the trunk in the car. Alvi was in their house at the time. The Pak soldiers were searching for him bellowing in Urdu, "Where is Alvi?" But fate was on Alvi's side; Altaf Mahmud had managed to tell Alvi in those few seconds, "Your name is Abul Barak. You're my nephew; you've come from the village." Thus, as he pretended to be Abul Barak, his life was spared. Nevertheless, he was picked up by the Pak soldiers along with the rest.

Mannan's two brothers-in-law and their mother used to rent the second floor of their house. Since the two houses were adjoining, and the trunk had been salvaged from Mannan's courtyard, the Pak soldiers also apprehended Rasul and Nasser. Lucky for Mannan, he was in Chittagong at the time and was thus spared. An income tax officer who lived on the second floor of Altaf's house, his son and nephew were also picked up.

After Rumi was brought to the small room, he told Sharif, "Baba, even before they caught me, they already knew about our action in Road 18 and 5 on the 25th, who was in the car, who had shot when, how many we killed, they knew everything. So it is irrelevant whether or not we admit anything. But the four of you must not admit to anything. You don't know anything at all, that's what you will repeat to them. They might question you one at a time but all of you must say the same thing. You never had a clue of my whereabouts. Make sure there is no incongruity."

Altaf Mahmud said the same thing to his four brothers-in-law, Alvi, Rasul and Naser, "You, too, will say the same thing, that you don't know anything. I am the

only one who has done anything. I'll confess what I have to."

Time passed. At intervals, the Pak soldiers would enter the room, randomly beat up people, curse them, and then leave. Then they [the prisoners] would whisper amongst each other. After some time passed, Pak soldiers took away Rumi, Bodi and Chullu. A little later, they removed Altaf Ahmed and all others with him. Then they took Sharif and the lot. Meanwhile, no one knew that, at 9 in the morning, Hafiz had been released. No one had any sense of time or place. Who was being taken where, when – no one can say with certainty anymore. The only thing that occupied their minds was the continuous torture they were subjected to. 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. The Pak soldiers were especially angry at him as his son, Shapan, had escaped right through their fingers. His other son Dalim was already fighting in the war.

The army, who had gone to Ulfat's house in search of the guerrilla, had picked up his father Azizus Samad when they did not find him there. I know him by name. His wife Sadeka Samad is a headmistress of Anondomoyi Girls' School. I have known Sadeka *apa* for a long time. Ulfat has played a role in some of the daring actions in Dhaka. They couldn't find the son, so they got the father and tortured him inhumanely.

That evening, I had spoken to Shubedar Gul and Jami on the phone. Jami now revealed, "After getting your call, Gul took some money from us and bought us all *kabab* and *rotis*."

Around 11 at night, they took everyone, meaning all those caught between the midnight of 29th and 30th morning – except Rumi – to Ramna Station on jeeps. After entering their names, they placed

everyone in a room. When they arrived at the station, it was very quiet. After they entered the room, they saw prisoners passed out on the floor, sleeping. But once the Pak soldiers locked them up and left, an incredible scene took place. The ones who had seemed to be fast asleep now sat up all at once, and made a fuss over them, asking about their health and condition and taking care of them. Who had broken what, who was bleeding, where was the pain – they were putting bandages on some, massaging some, giving Novalin to others. Those who smoked were given cigarettes. Then some rice and curry arrived -- two mouthfuls of rice and a little vegetable curry. Even *paan* was arranged for those who wanted to chew on the beetle leaf. These prisoners too were patriotic Bangalees who had been captured by the military. They too had lived through the MP Hostel experience. They told the newcomers, "They will take you to MP Hostel again in the morning tomorrow. They'll torture you some more. Let us teach you a trick. Pretend to faint after one or two lashes, close your eyes, and hold your breath. Then they would pour water over you and let you be. This way you'll get thrashed a little less."

The next day, they heard the sound of an approaching car at 7 am. Again, a big bus. All the windows of the bus were shut once everyone boarded. Again, MP Hostel. After a while, they were taken to another house at the back. Apparently everyone had to give statements now. In that house, another infernal episode commenced.

Giving a statement meant an army officer would hear the statements of the prisoners one by one, interrogate him, hear his answers and note them down in a piece of paper. The torture conducted upon the prisoners during the 'statements' exceeded by far the torture they had been subjected to in the previous two or three days. The officer asked the prisoner a question, and

if the answer was in the negative, began to kick him, beat him with a stick, smack him with a rifle. If one answered in the negative continuously, then the officer lost his patience and took a break. During that break, the soldiers would hang the prisoner from the ceiling and beat him ceaselessly with a coiled rope. Some would be made to lie on their back with their hands and feet tied together such that their bodies took the shape of a boat. They would suffocate, but couldn't scream. If a prisoner was particularly stubborn, they would switch on the fan at high speed with his feet tied to the fan. His hanging head would spin and spin with the fan till there was blood in his nose-mouth-eyes and he lost all consciousness.

It was way past noon while statements were being extracted through this hellish process. Around 1.30, Sharif and the other three were brought to the Colonel's room in MP Hostel. The Colonel said, you can go home now. Sharif asked about Rumi. Colonel replied, "Rumi will be released tomorrow. We haven't finished taking his statement."

Translated by Sushmita S Preetha.

Jahanara Imam, a writer and political activist, was born on May 3, 1929. She is widely remembered for her efforts to bring those accused of committing war crimes in the Bangladesh Liberation War to trial. She was also known as Shaheed Janani or Mother of the Martyr.

In her professional career, she worked as the of Head Mistress of Siddheswari Girls' School. She was also the first editor of the monthly women's magazine called Khawateen. In 1971, her elder son Shafi Imam Rumi joined the Mukti Bahini. He was picked up by the Pakistani army on August 29, never to be seen again. During the war, she wrote a diary on her feelings about the struggle, which later became one of the most important publications about the War of Liberation. In 1986 this diary was published under the title Ekatturer Dinguli. Her other literary works include Anya Jiban (1985), Jiban Mrityu (1988), etc.

Jahanara Imam received several awards for her contribution in Bangla Literature. She won Bangla Academy Award in 1991. She also received Independence Award and Rokeya Award posthumously.

Sushmita S Preetha is a journalist and researcher.

BANGLADESH I Stay Away from Me

FAIZ AHMED FAIZ

How can I embellish this carnival of slaughter? How decorate this massacre?
Whose attention could my lamenting blood attract?
There's almost no blood in my rawboned body
And what's left isn't enough to burn as oil in the lamp?
Not enough to fill a wineglass.
It can feed no fire,
Extinguish no thirst.
There's a poverty of blood in my ravaged body—a terrible poison now runs in it.
If you pierce my veins, each drop will foam as venom at the cobra's fangs.
Each drop is the anguished longing of ages' the burning seal of a rage hushed up for years.
Beware of me. My body is a river of poison.
Stay away from me. My body is a parched log in the desert.
If you burn it, you won't see the cypress or the jasmine, but my bones blossoming like thorns in the cactus.
If you throw it in the forests, instead of morning perfumes, you'll scatter the dust of my seared soul.
So stay away from me. Because I'm thirsting for blood.

BANGLADESH II

This is how my sorrow became visible: its dust, piling up for years in my heart, finally reached my eyes, the bitterness now so clear that I had to listen when my friends told me to wash my eyes with blood.

Everything at once was tangled in blood—each face, each idol, red everywhere.
Blood swept over the sun, washing away its gold.

The moon erupted with blood, its silver extinguished.
The sky promised a morning of blood, and the night wept only blood.

The trees hardened into crimson pillars.
All flowers filled their eyes with blood.
And every glance was an arrow, each pierced image blood.
This blood—a river crying out for martyrs—flows on its longing.
And in sorrow, in rage, in love.

Let it flow. Should it be dammed up, there will only be hatred cloaked in colors of death.
Don't let this happen, my friends, bring all my tears back instead, a flood to fill my dust-filled eyes, to wash this blood forever from my eyes.

Translated from Urdu by Agha Shahed Ali.

Born on February 13, 1911, poet, journalist and writer Faiz Ahmed was a defiant voice against tyranny, oppression and imperialism. Since the foundation of Pakistan, he maintained a critical position against the discriminatory role of Punjabi-dominated Pakistan state, especially in its treatment of East Pakistan. He was one of the few conscientious Pakistanis of note to vehemently oppose the military crackdown on the unarmed Bangalee population. In the context of this tragedy, Faiz published his famous poems Hazar Karo Merey Tan Sey and Bangladesh II in 1971.

He was conferred the Friends of Liberation War Honour in 2013 by the Bangladesh government for his contribution to the country's cause of liberation.

Agha Shahed Ali was a noted Kashmiri poet.

This translation first appeared in The Rebel's Silhouette: Selected Poems in 1995.