

My Father, Jitendra Lal Dutta

MIHIRLAL DATTA

THE 14th of October, 1971. It was 4:25AM in the morning, in the last few weeks of the Liberation War. The calls to morning prayer were about to begin. Lying in bed I heard someone knocking on the main door of our home in Barisal. Father came out of the inner room to the drawing room with sleep still in his eyes, and opened the door. I was lying half asleep in the adjacent room, exhausted and freshly released from the (Jessore) cantonment. Someone was interrogating father, I heard.

: Where is your son Timir Datta...Muktijoddha (freedom fighter)....
: We have not heard from him.
: Where is your other son Samir Datta?
: I have no news of him either, hence the sorrow in my household...

Again he asked: Where is your eldest, Mihir Datta?

By then I opened the door and made my way into the drawing room, and asked them: Why? I am him.

They said: Come with us.

There were four armed and bloodthirsty razakars, led by some Ruhul Amin of Mehendiganj. Each had a 303 rifle on their shoulders.

I asked where were we to go. He said:

the Bridge No. 3.

Ruhulthen said, "Get ready, we have orders to shoot you."

I had never come to this side of the town before, never thought of this, and never faced such danger.

They pushed father to the base of the bridge. He pleaded gently, holding his hands together: "Please let us go, we have our identification papers." But Ruhul Amin took him to the bank of the canal, turned him around, and shot him in the back. My father's bleeding and lifeless body fell into waters of the deep and wide canal. The other three razakars were still guarding me on top of the bridge. Ruhul now approached us, and started a to curse his associates, and held his rifle on me. Although lost for words, I tried to plead humbly: "Don't kill me, my family will be ruined..." While pleading I suddenly jumped and sturdily grabbed the razakar leader around his waist. He started to hit and punch me like a mad man, but I grabbed him and pulled him off his feet. The man hit my neck with his rifle while held like that, and I screamed, but did not let go of his waist. Ruhul was cursing his associates out of desperation. But everytime they trained their rifles on me, I moved Ruhul in front of them. If I died, I was going to take him with me. Suddenly a

with us. But we could not stay there long because of the greed-fuelled conspiracy of some people. They set fire to both our buildings, which were housing some 10 families at that time, to rob the valuables of refugees. At about 8pm one night, in the second week of May, a band of robbers attacked our home again, and looted money and other valuable from all that were there. My mother received life threatening injuries. At that time my father and I, along with my three sisters and wife were hiding at another house. After the incident, father set out with us again, this time to the Christian majority area of Padri Shibpur. On the way there, at Bakhorkathi, we were set on by robbers again. Father was hit on the head. My second brother Samir was also barely saved from the clutches of death.

The next day, our enemies from the village pretending to be our friends, took us back to our own home. But this was also a planned conspiracy against us. On the first of June, they brought police to our home and arrested us. Along with father and I, and my third brother Subir Datta and Panu, a total of 11 people were arrested and sent to Jhalokati jail on the same day. Our family was well-reputed not just in the village, but also in the entire union and nearby areas. On the news of our arrest, many simple and

tral jail. I was released on the 4th of September. Thereafter I joined my parents at our Barisal home on the 5th of September.

I was arrested five times between 1962 and 1971 because is was a journalist. Every time, father would take me to the jail with a smile. "If one of my sons is lost, I still have four more to serve my country. I want souls dedicated to the country, to its people. I only faced a few batons with Congress leaders at the Gorer Math in Kolkata during the anti-British movement, but couldn't do much for the country. I will repay my country's debt with my



Jitendra Lal Dutta

sons."His favourite song was by Dhananjay Bhattacharya, "Matiteyi jonmo, mati tai roktey misheche..."

My father Jitendra Lal Dutta was born in 1907, the third of four brothers. He was brutally murdered at the age of 64, in the pre-dawn hours of October 15th, 1971.

My third brother Sudhir Datta was also martyred in 1971. The blood of the martyrs did go back to the soil, as we never found either of their bodies. But memories are truly indestructible.

Jitendra Lal Dutta was a practicing lawyer in Alipur from 1941-43. During the bomb raids of the Second World War, he, like all other East Bengali citizens, came back to his native Barisal, and joined the local Bar Council. For a while he also worked at the Manpasha High School as an assistant teacher. During the establishment the Union Board system in the British era, Jitendra Lal was elected as the Chairman of the first Union Board of Siddhikathi.

In 1947, he bought the Zamindari of Dharendra Sen in an auction.

Jitendralal was also a philanthropist, dedicatedly working for the people of his area. He repaired the road from Fulhar village to Birat, and also many of the roads in Boalia, Manpasha, Kushongol and Pulihaat. He also gained the love of the local people by repairing many canals.

He also helped many people secure good jobs, and established a primary school in his own village. The school is currently called the "Shaheed Jitendra Smrity Shorkari Prathamik Bidyalay."

Jitendra Lal was married to Shobha Rani, and had five sons and three daughters.

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West Pakistani army used to kill people on this bridge at WAPDA in Barisal city during the Liberation War in 1971.

PHOTO: STAR

Our camp.

By then my teary-eyed mother had joined us in the room. She pled with those razakars for us, but her cries fell on deaf ears.

Father was wearing a lungi, and a striped mustard khadi Panjabi. I had a white dhuti wrapped around like a lungi, with a white long-cloth Panjabi. They proceeded to take us away. Mother came to father crying, and asked him: What will happen tomorrow?

He took out a 6 anna coin from his pocket and gave it to her. We got to the lane, then the main road. The azaan was just being called. We travelled through Ishwar Basu Road, Alekanda - Bot-tala road, and then on to the third bridge on the C&B Road. The razakar leader Ruhul, with the rifle on his shoulder, walked some fifteen paces ahead, behind my father. Behind them, I was being escorted by the other three. After walking for a while; we stopped about 1.4 krosh (4.5kms) from our home, upon reaching the designated killing field under

young razakar pulled my legs from behind me, and I lost my footing. Right then, another razakar shoved his rifle above my navel, and shot point blank. I fell. It felt like a flash of fire just went through my body. They dragged me like a dead dog and threw me into the canal. They shot a couple of more times into the water, but missed me, and I lived.

I swam in the half light of dawn and came out on the other bank of the canal. They came looking for me, but by then I had hid in the nearby jungle, still bleeding from my wound.

Father had been horrified by the news of the horrific massacre of Dhaka on 25th March, carried to us by foreign radio channels. In the first week of April, we, as in my father, mother, sister and newly-wedded wife moved to our ancestral village of Nalchiti in Barisal. We took some valuables like utensils, money, and jewellery

peaceful pious Muslims of our village organised the recitation of the entire Quran, praying for our liberty (I donated quite a few copies of the Quran to them after the Liberation War).

For the next nine days, father refused to even drink water or to even freshen up at the holding cells in the Jhalokati police station.

Ten days later, police sent us three to Barisal. First to the detective branch, and later to the army camp in the WAPDA Colony. On the third day, father was given his identification papers and released (probably 12th June, 1971).

Upon returning home, father found it to be occupied by a junior lawyer friendly with the occupation forces. With the help of a magistrate (Mr. MS Uddin) and a police inspector, he somehow succeeded in taking our house back. I was arrested by the army on the 1st of July, and sent to Jessore cantonment, and later to the cen-