



A train waits in Rajshahi station in the 1930s.

PHOTO: CHRIS WALKER COLLECTION, THE RESTORATION AND ARCHIVING TRUST

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return to Ishwardi. There, I took shelter in comrade Shahabuddin's house in the loco-shed. One day, police arrived there and arrested me. Delwar was arrested the same day. It was September 21.

I sometimes recall the events of that day. My wrist and Delwar's were locked by the same handcuff. We were kept at the Ishwardi platform. The SP was inquiring about my name. Every time he asked me about my name, I said "Akbar". He was annoyed. "You're lying. We know that you're Jasim Mandol," he said. "We know that you led the chicken feed movement." I replied, "You're making a mistake. My name is Akbar. I am not Jasim Mandol." The SP began to search inside my pockets. Nothing was found. There was, however, a letter written by Dwijen Da which I took out secretly and began to chew. The SP was shocked to find out about it and scrambled to take it out of my mouth. But I swallowed the letter. Outraged by the perceived betrayal, he punched me in the

face.

I remember I had a wristwatch with me then. It was given to me as a parting gift by Barrister Latif when I left Kolkata for Pakistan. It was my favourite watch which the police constables present there seized from me. I had a close relationship with Barrister Latif. There was another person whom I was also very close to, who visited us here at regular intervals. It was the seasoned writer-poet Golam Kuddus of West Bengal. He had written a novel about my wife. It was also named after her, "Mari-om". Anyway, the station's platform was swarming with people by then. Everyone was watching us, in silence. I recognised some of them. They were involved with our movement. There was anxiety written all over their faces. I could see that some of them were fuming with rage, as if they would snatch us away from police at the first opportunity. After a while, we were escorted away from the crowd and into the prison van, and sent to the Pabna Jail.

By then, I had some idea about the inside of a jail—albeit a British jail. While

living in Kolkata, I had been imprisoned several times for short durations and I had first-hand knowledge of how erratic and inedible prison meals could be. So, I was relatively unfazed. At night I was put in a cell with some convicts. That very night, Delwar, my associate in the movement, was separated from me—and never again had I seen him afterwards and never will, either. Later, I heard that he was sent to the Rajshahi Central Jail. His dresses were taken off and replaced by the black-and-white stripes of the prison cell.

Translated by Badiuzzaman Bay.

*This is an excerpt from the autobiography, Jiboner Relgari (Train of Life) by veteran labour leader Jasim Uddin Mandal (1924 – 2017). He was closely involved with the movements of railway workers since British period. He was also the president of Bangladesh Rail Sramik Union and Trade Union Centre (TUC). This excerpt provides a first-hand account of the railway workers' strike in 1949, famously known as Khud Andolon.*

## 1947

East Pakistan Trade Union Federation (EPTUF) is formed with Dr AM Malik as the president and Faiz Ahmad as secretary. It is set up on the basis of a resolution adopted by AITUC General Council on September 5, 1947 in Mumbai. It further declares that "Partition of India into two states will not affect the class unity and solidarity of the workers who, under the banner of AITUC, have forged abiding bonds between sections and communities in the common struggle against capitalism." EPTUF was the most representative organization of the workers belonging to industrial and commercial establishments in the then East Bengal.

## 1948

Railway workers protest in Lalmonirhat.

