

The Situation of the Dhaka University Campus during the Liberation War of Bangladesh

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Abstract

Operation Searchlight was a brutal, planned military operation carried out by the Pakistan army on 25th March 1971. It signified the beginning of Bangladesh's Liberation War. The operation was deployed simultaneously throughout the province. Their main target was the provincial capital, Dhaka. One of their primary targeted places in Dhaka was the University of Dhaka (DU) Campus. It is estimated that around 4000 to 6000 were killed in Dhaka city during Operation Searchlight. Among them, around 300 were killed inside the DU campus. Operation Searchlight killing destroyed the academic situation of the university. During the war, the government and the DU administration tried to ensure normalcy inside the campus. On the contrary, Bengali nationalist students and teachers tried to prove that an abnormal situation prevailed inside the campus. Thus, a worse situation was created inside the campus. In that situation, most teachers were bound to join the university to save their lives and jobs. However, Bengali nationalist teachers were under surveillance and some of them received Shani and Jamdot's letters. Some teachers were rusticated, some were removed from the Syndicate, and some were arrested. The trial of some teachers and students was also organized in their absence, and ultimately, they brutally killed ten teachers of DU on 14th December 1971. In that worst situation, only 30 to 50 students attended the class. At last, on 16th December, the Pakistan Army surrendered at the Race Course ground, which is adjacent to the DU campus. This article explores the academic situation of the DU campus during the Liberation War of Bangladesh. It also focuses on the miserable conditions and the different types of punishment of Bengali nationalist teachers and students that they had to endure at that time.

Key words: Situation, Operation Searchlight, Nationalist, Normalcy, Anomalous, Explosion, Punishment, Surveillance.

Introduction

The University of Dhaka's educational situation was worse during the Liberation War of Bangladesh. Operation Searchlight was the beginning of the War. The operation was unleashed on the unaware, sleeping Bengali population of East Bengal at midnight on 25th March 1971. It was deployed simultaneously throughout the province. Their main target was the provincial capital, Dhaka. One of their prime targets in Dhaka was the University of Dhaka (DU) campus. Inside the campus, their primary target were Zahurul Haq Hall and Jagannath Hall. However, all the halls, teachers' quarters, staff quarters, Dhaka University Club, Teacher-Student Center (TSC) and

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BNCC building came under merciless attack. The purpose of the genocide was to demolish the Non-cooperation movement. It also aimed to halt Bengali nationalism at its peak and, hence, stop the emergence of Bangladesh. The Bengali people considered the operation as a war and started their nine-month-long war against the military government. During the war, the government and the DU administration tried to ensure normalcy inside the campus. On the contrary, Bengali nationalist students and teachers tried to prove that an abnormal situation prevailed inside the campus. Thus, a worse situation was created inside the campus. In that situation, most teachers were bound to join the university to save their lives and jobs. However, Bengali nationalist teachers were under surveillance. Some received threat letters from *Shani* and *Jamdot's Bahini*; some were rusticated and captivated. Even they killed ten teachers on 14th December. In that worst situation, only 30 to 50 students attended the class. At last, on 16th December, the Pakistan Army surrendered at the Race Course ground, which is adjacent to the DU campus. This article explores the academic situation of the DU campus during the Liberation War of Bangladesh. It also focuses on the miserable conditions and the different types of punishment of Bengali nationalist teachers and students that they had to endure at that time.

Operation Searchlight and the University of Dhaka Campus

The DU campus was one of the worst sufferers of the Operation Searchlight. The operation activities began from the Dhaka cantonment on 25th March night when Major-General Khadim's green telephone rang at about 11 am; on the other side, Lieutenant-General Tikka Khan said, 'Khadim, it is tonight'.¹ He passed the order to his staff for action. According to the plan, the army marched out of the cantonment instantly. Jacob said, "Troops began to move from the cantonment into the city at 2300 hours on 25 March".² On the way to the DU, they faced a roadblock at Farmgate. Overcoming the obstacle, a composite force consisting of one company each of 18 Punjab, 22 Baluch and 32 Punjab marched towards the DU campus under the command of L. Corner Taj.³ Later, Taj was awarded a promotion to Deputy Sub-administrator Martial Law (DSAML) due to his leadership in the mass killings.⁴ Taj Bahini planned to kill every student, teacher and employee inside the campus. Archer Blood said, "What was generally believed that the Army plan of attack the University was to take

¹ Siddiq Salik, *Witness to Surrender*, (University Press Limited 1997), p. 71.

² Lt Gen JFR Jacob, *Surrender at Dacca: Birth of a Nation*, (University Press Limited 2019), p. 33.

³ Rafiqul Islam, *Swadhinota Sangrame Dhaka Bishwabidyalay (Dhaka University in the Freedom Struggle)*, (Agamee Prakashani 2016), p. 153.

⁴ Hasan Hafizur Rahman (ed.), *Bangladesher Swadhinata Yuddho: Dalilpatra (History of Bangladesh War of Independence: Documents)*, Vol. 8, (Hakkani Publishers 2011), p. 354.

no prisoners and to kill all students present in the dorms.”⁵ Muazzam Hussain said he could hear the voice of the control on the radio saying, “There is no question of taking prisoner. They are shooting at you. So, wipe them off.”⁶

Pakistan Army first attacked Jagannath Hall around 12.30 am and then Zahurul Haq Hall at 1.30 am. The same night, they attacked Ruqayyah Hall and Dhaka Hall. On the morning of 26th March, they attacked Salimullah Hall, Surjansen Hall, Mohsin Hall, Jagannath Hall, Fuller Road, Nilkhat, teachers club, Sibbari, Ramna Kali Bari and TSC. They took 36 hours to complete the operation in DU. Ratan Lal Chakraborty said the total duration of the DU operation was 36 hours. It started at midnight on 25th March and ended on the morning of 27th March.⁷

It is estimated that around 4000 to 6000 were killed in Dhaka city alone during Operation Searchlight.⁸ Among them, around 300 were killed inside the DU campus, including nine teachers, many students, staff, their family members, relatives, guests, and slum dwellers. The nine teachers were Anudaypayan Bhattacharya (1945-1971), Atawor Rahman Khan Khadem (1933-1971), Muhammad Abdul Muktader (1940-1971), Govinda Chandra Dev (1907-1971), Jyotirmoy Guhathakurta (1920-1971), Abu Nasar Muhammad Muniruzzaman (1924-1971), Fazlur Rahman Khan (1939-1971), Muhammad Sadek (1939-1971) and Sharafat Ali (1943-1971).

Regarding the number of deaths, Rafiqul Islam said it is estimated that 300 people were killed inside the DU campus on the 25th and 26th of March.⁹ The number 300 was also known from the discussions between 88 units and the control room of the MLA on the morning of 26th March. Dr Moazzam Hossain¹⁰ recorded the discussions. The discussions were:

Control: how many persons are wounded in the university area. It is enough if you tell me the approximate number—answer 300.

Control: wonderful. All 300 is killed or someone wounded or captured.

⁵ Archer K. Blood, *The Cruel Birth of Bangladesh: Memoirs of an American Diplomat*, (UPL 2021), p. 207.

⁶ Hasan Hafizur Rahman (ed.), Vol.8, *ibid.*, p. 354.

⁷ Ratan Lal Chakraborty, *Bangladesher Swadhinota Sangrame Dhaka Bishwabidyalay, 1947-1971 (The Liberation War of Bangladesh and Dhaka University, 1947-1971)*, Vol. 1, (The Universal Academy 2015), pp. 541-543.

⁸ Department of State, Telegram, 31 March 1971, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 79, 2002.

⁹ Rafiqul Islam, *ibid.*, p. 159.

¹⁰ Moazzam Hossain was a scientist. During Operation Searchlight, he could hear the discussion of the different army units through radio and recorded some portion of the debate. He sent his recorded copy to Calcutta through his friend during the war. *Akash Bani Kolkata* broadcasted the record in the middle of May

The answer, I only like one thing. Three hundred die.

Control: I also agree with you. That job was easy. Would not you want to know anything more?

I further said, wonderful.¹¹

Due to Operation Searchlight's mass killing, the educational situation of the DU collapsed. There was a twofold trend among DU's teachers and students in those circumstances. The first one was to stay inside Bangladesh, and the other was to cross the border, take shelter in India, and lead the war from there. This article explores the first one. Those who stayed inside the country were divided into two significant fractions. One group collaborated with the Pakistani government. They supported the government for their interest or ideological reasons and worked to implement its policy. The other group supported the war and secretly maintained good communication with the freedom fighters and the Bengali nationalist leaders.

The two groups performed opposite actions during the Liberation War. The government, university administration, and pro-Pakistani students and teachers tried to bring normalcy to the university campus. On the contrary, the nationalist students and teachers tried to create a weird situation. Therefore, both groups performed contradictory activities inside the DU campus to implement their purposes during the Liberation War.

Academic Situation of the University of Dhaka during the Liberation War of Bangladesh

The academic situation of the DU campus was worse during the Liberation War of Bangladesh because the government and the Bengali nationalist students and teachers took opposing positions inside the campus. The government initiated the restoration of normalcy inside the campus, but the Bengali nationalist teachers and students secretly discouraged students from attending class. The DU campus has been vacating since the middle of March 1971 due to the non-cooperation movement. After the Operation Searchlight massacre, the university became utterly vacant. Even the pro-Pakistani teachers left the campus due to the circumstances. The government had very sharp eyes on the DU campus because the institute had been the hub of the Bengali nationalist movement for a long time. The eyes of the Bengali people, Pakistani people, and the international media were on the activities of the DU campus from the beginning of March 1971. Secondly, as a renowned higher education institution, the DU was well-known to the world's intellectuals and politicians. So, the government was worried that if the news of the mass killing of the students and teachers were disclosed, the government would face immense international pressure. Therefore, the government and the university authority were keen to establish normalcy inside the campus.

¹¹ Hasan Hafizur Rahman (ed.), Vol. 8, *ibid.*, p. 355.

To focus on normalcy, the government opened the university on 2nd August 1971. They made compulsory regular attendance for teachers and students to ensure their presence in the class. They sent letters to the students' permanent addresses to ensure their presence in the halls. The university authorities organised conferences, arranged final examinations and obligated some teachers to attend the mass media to discuss things in favour of the government. Evidence shows that on 20th May 1971, the provincial government decided to start classes in all the universities and colleges from 2nd August. However, they summoned all the teachers to join the university from 1st June 1971.¹² Following the government notice on 21st May, the DU authorities published a circular announcing that all the teachers would have to join on 1st June, and the class would start on 2nd August.¹³ Mafizullah Kabir said everyone was asking if the classes would start on 2nd August and why the teachers were asked to join on 1st June.¹⁴ On 24th May, the government published another notice extending the teachers' joining date till 15th June. The university authority forwarded the letter to the heads of the departments for further action.¹⁵ Tikka Khan published a Military Ordinance in this regard. The ordinance said that if the teachers failed to join between the 1st and 15th of June, they would be rusticated from the job, and their trial would be organised under the military court.¹⁶ On 4th June, the Deputy Secretary of the Education Department of East Pakistan sent a letter to the Vice-Chancellor of the DU. The letter suggested that the university authorities ensure the teachers join within the prescribed time. It also requested to take all the necessary preparations for the commencement of the classes on 2nd August and that the teachers' detailed work programme be sent to the Education Department and ensure the teacher's presence during office hours.¹⁷ The registrar of DU published a notice on 15th June. The notice informed all the departments that the university authority would not allow teachers to join after 15th June. Moreover, the absent teacher's post will be considered vacant from 16th June.

In preparation for the reopening, the university authorities started a campaign to clean the campus. As part of the cleaning campaign, students' books, clothes, and other belongings, including furniture, were taken out in the open, and a bonfire was made of them. This was done for several days in the Iqbal Hall (Zahurul Huq Hall), S.M. Hall, and Jagannath Hall.¹⁸

¹² *The Purbodesh*, May 21, 1971.

¹³ *Daily Pakistan*, May 21, 1971.

¹⁴ Mafizullah Kabir, *Experiences of an Exile at Home: Life in Occupied Bangladesh*, (Rezina N. Kabir 1972), p. 78.

¹⁵ Ratan Lal Chakraborty, Vol. 2, *ibid.*, p. 677.

¹⁶ *Daily Pakistan*, June 3, 1971.

¹⁷ Hasan Hafizur Rahman (ed.), Vol. 7, *ibid.*, p. 476.

¹⁸ Mafizullah Kabir, *ibid.*, p. 73.

Due to the government initiative, the non-Bengali and pro-Pakistani teachers joined the university due to their ideological beliefs and personal interests, and the Bengali nationalist teachers joined to save their lives and jobs. Ratan Lal Chakraborty said that all the pro-Pakistani teachers joined the university willingly and the Bengali nationalist teachers joined under pressure. He argued that after the mass killing of 26th March, some teachers escaped to India and some to their native houses. However, those unable to go to India or escape their locality joined the university.¹⁹ Mafizullah Kabir said he communicated with some of his university colleagues; among them notable was the President of the Teachers Association. He advised him to join and argued they couldn't stay in the country without joining the office and, at the same time, go undetected.²⁰ Therefore, he joined the university.

Attendance sheets for teachers and students were not compulsory earlier, but the government made them mandatory during the war to ensure their presence. The University authorities published a notice on 31st May. The notice requested all the heads of the departments to send the names of the teachers who would be absent from 1st June.²¹ The secretariat also supplied a proforma to send the teachers' attendance reports daily.²² The authorities monitored the system precisely. Evidence shows that on 2nd June, the university authorities published a notice. The notice said many departments had stopped sending the teachers' presence sheet and suggested sending it regularly. It also mentioned that students' attendance sheets had to be routinely sent from 2nd August.²³ On 6th August 1971, the Registrar's Office sent the second reminder notice to all the heads of departments. The notice said the attendance report of the students must be sent regularly to the office by 11.00 am.²⁴ On 3rd September 1971, the Registrar's Office published the third reminder notice. The notice said,

In inviting your attention to this office letter No. C/73819 dated the 2nd June 1971 and subsequent reminders No. 2400-440 dated the 2nd August 1971 and No- 3054-95 dated 6th August 1971, on the above subject. I am to inform you that the daily report of the students' attendance from some of the departments are not being received in this office even by the noon of the following day. I am therefore, to request you to kindly send the report to this office by 10 A.M. positively on the following day in order to enable this office to forward the consolidated report to the Govt. in time.²⁵

¹⁹ Ratan Lal Chakraborty, Vol.2, *ibid.*, pp. 677-681.

²⁰ Mafizullah Kabir, *ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

²¹ Ratan Lal Chakraborty, Vol.2, *ibid.*, p. 677.

²² Mafizullah Kabir, *ibid.*, p. 78.

²³ Ratan Lal Chakraborty, Vol.2, *ibid.*, p. 653.

²⁴ Hasan Hafizur Rahman (ed.), Vol. 7, *ibid.*, p. 486.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 525.

To ensure the presence of the students in the halls, almost all the hall provosts of DU sent letters to the students' permanent addresses at the beginning of November 1971. The letter motivated the students to return to their halls to continue their studies and warned them that their residential facility would be removed if they failed to return. Mir Fakhruzzaman, Provost of Fazlul Haque Hall and Aktar Imam Provost of Ruqayyah Hall, assured that they had sent a letter to the guardians following the order of the Vice-Chancellor.²⁶

To bring normalcy inside the campus, the government and the university authorities started organizing conferences, arranging final examinations, and opening the university during Ramadan. Evidence showed that on 6th November, the Education Ministry sent a notice to all the educational institutions of East Bengal. The DU administration forwarded the letter to all the departments. The notice said that to create a peaceful environment and trust in the country, the authorities had to organise meetings and conferences at the university. In the meetings and conferences, they had to focus on the contemporary crisis of Pakistan and criticising India's rule in Pakistan.²⁷ Following the notice, DU organised many conferences during wartime. The university administration arranged BA Honours, MA Preliminary and MA Final examinations from 23rd August 1971 to prove the situation of the DU was normal. Following their example, the colleges under DU also arranged the examination in September.²⁸ However, only a few students participated in the examination. The authority also took the initiative not to stop the university during Ramadan and reduced the Eid vacation.²⁹

The authorities also obligated some teachers to attend the mass media to discuss things in favour of the government. For instance, Kabir said he was bound to appear on Television discussions to prove that he had not died in the military operation and directed him to speak clearly about the current situation, bringing out Pakistan's point of view and condemning India.³⁰ All leave except on medical grounds was cancelled, and no one was allowed to leave the station.³¹

The Bengali nationalist students and teachers very secretly opposed the activities of the authorities and performed different activities to create a weird situation inside the

²⁶ Ratan Lal Chakraborty, Vol. 2, *ibid.*, pp. 731-732.

²⁷ Letter from Zainul Abedin, Section Officer, Government of East Pakistan, Education Department to the Registrar, University of Dacca, 6 November 1971, D-Register, Bundle-17, Serial No. 436, Dhaka University Record Room.

²⁸ 'Forms, Fees Submission dates for DU Examinations', *Morning News*, August 24, 1971.

²⁹ Ratan Lal Chakraborty, Vol. 2, *ibid.*, p. 714.

³⁰ Mafizullah Kabir, *ibid.*, p. 84.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 79

DU campus. For instance, some of the nationalist students secretly put up posters on the university walls. They exploded bombs inside the campus to discourage the students and teachers from attending classes and prove that an abnormal situation prevailed inside the DU campus. Evidence shows that the authorities published a circular accusing the students of being anti-state elements. The circular said,

It has also been observed that various sorts of posters dissuading the students and teachers to attend classes are pasted on the walls of the institutions by anti-state elements. This also happens with the connivance of the staff of the institution. The heads of the institutions should be directed to ensure that the institution premises are not used for striking or pasting posters of any kind. They should also be asked to take steps to issue identity cards to students with their photographs pasted therein so that these be produced in case of necessity.³²

Freedom fighter students exploded bombs inside the DU campus to create panic and break the apparent normalcy. Evidence shows that on 11th October, they exploded a bomb in front of the Arts Building. However, nobody was injured.³³ The *Morning News* wrote that “a bomb exploded in the Arts Building of the DU yesterday morning. No one was injured”.³⁴ The *Dainik Pakistan* wrote that there was an explosion within the compound of the Arts Faculty Building for the first time.³⁵ The second explosion in the Arts Building took place on 4th November. The third explosion occurred on 8th November. It was a severe one. The freedom fighters threw a grenade in the corridor leading to the Philosophy Department. Some of the teachers, students and staff were injured.³⁶ Mofizullah Kabir wrote, “Explosions on 4 and 8 November surprised everybody and embarrassed the Police personnel who came to investigate the incidents because these explosions took place even after thorough checking every day when it was not possible for an ant or a fly to smuggle itself into the building. How could then the bombs find their way in?”³⁷ The *New York Times* wrote that on 8th November, bomb explosions rocked three educational institutions in Dhaka. Six people were injured. Among them, one was critical.³⁸

Due to the explosion, university authorities and the government became concerned. They took some initiative to tackle the situation. On 9th November, Sazzad Hossain published a notice. The notice said,

³² Circular from the Deputy Secretary to the Government of East Pakistan, Education Department, 7 September 1971, No. G/10-13/71 890-Edn. D-Register, Bundle 10-A, Dhaka University Record Room.

³³ Ratan Lal Chakraborty, Vol.2, *ibid.*, p. 729.

³⁴ *Morning News*, November 5, 1971. p. 8.

³⁵ *Dainik Pakistan*, October 12, 1971.

³⁶ Mafizullah Kabir, *ibid.*, p. 118.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119.

³⁸ ‘Terrorism in Dacca’, *The New York Times*, November 9, 1971.

In view of the sense of insecurity which has been created by three successive incidents in the Art Building arrangements to check entry into the buildings have become essentially necessary. The Proctor has been asked by me to take the necessary steps in the matter and he will need the assistance of all the office assistants in this building. They will have to be spared for periods of one hour and a half each. I hope the Deans and all the Heads of Departments would kindly do the needful.³⁹

On 3rd December, the Education Department published a notice. The notice said that bomb blasts often occur in educational institutions despite the necessary security arrangements. The government took this seriously and decided that if any bomb blast occurred within the institutions in the future, the Head of the Educational Institutions would be personally responsible.⁴⁰

Some DU students, teachers and employees directly and indirectly participated in the war. Evidence showed that 113 DU students sacrificed their lives for the liberation of Bangladesh.⁴¹

Some of the DU employees arranged the accommodation for the *Mukti Bahini*, directed them in the right ways, and provided them with moral and economic support.⁴² Due to the government's and nationalist students' and teachers' contrary activities, fewer students were present in the DU during the war and the university was almost vacant. The quiet condition of the university was known from Kabir's narration. He said,

If for any reason I sat in the office beyond noon, I found the whole Ramna area deserted, and I could hardly get a transport for my return. On many occasions, I walked down from the University Building at Nilkhet to the Medical College, finding no rickshaw or auto-rickshaw on the way; buses were few and far between and carried alien elements. By 1 O'clock, the roads quickly emptied all over, and one would notice streams of rickshaws, cars and pedestrians moving fast and racing with one another to reach their destinations as quickly as possible. People in the university area got panicky every now and then, and renewed army actions in the area served only to affect adversely the much-publicised normalcy.⁴³

Kabir also provided the scenario of his department. He said that after reopening the DU on 2nd August, he could not get one student until 24th August. On 7th September, the number rose to three, the maximum attendance during the period of occupation being

³⁹ Letter from Sajjad Husain, Vice-Chancellor, Dhaka University to all the Deans and Heads of the Departments in the Arts Building, 9th November 1971, D-Register, Bundle-61, Dhaka University Record Room.

⁴⁰ Letter from Mr. Zainul Abedin, Section Officer, Education Department, Government of East Pakistan to the Vice-Chancellor, Dacca University, 3rd December, 1971, Ref. No. 110-13/71/1340 (8) edn., D-Register, Bundle-61, Dhaka University Record Room.

⁴¹ Ratan Lal Chakraborty, Vol.2, *ibid.*, p. 969.

⁴² Annual Report: 1970-71, University of Dacca, p. 27.

⁴³ Mafizullah Kabir, *ibid.*, p. 72.

seven.⁴⁴ Evidence shows that the total number of students at DU in the 1970-1971 session was 6,409.⁴⁵ Among them, only 30 to 50 students were present in the class. The newspaper *Janmabhumi* wrote that only 30-40 students were participating in class.⁴⁶ *Banglar Bani* wrote that only 47-48 students were participating in class.⁴⁷ The low number of students also became evident from the proctor's annual report. The report said that when the classes resumed on 2nd August, only a handful of students, around 1% of the total roll strength, turned up on the campus. Classes were held with only one or two students and, more often than not, were abandoned for want of attendance.⁴⁸ Among the 30 to 50 students, some attend the class to avoid government harassment, and others do so for ideological reasons or to spy on their teachers. The annual report of the English Department of DU stated,

Not many students attended classes. A few came because their guardians feared harassment by the Military rulers in case their wards failed to contribute to the so-called restoration of normalcy. It is, however, not unlikely that a handful came because they believed in Pakistan and that the odd one or two had accepted the job of spying on their teachers.⁴⁹

Kabir said most students came to the university to watch the situation, and they told some of the teachers about their intentions. But a few of them were spies. From the very beginning, they came to please the military authorities.⁵⁰

The government accused the teachers and staff of a low presence. Blaming them, a circular from the Education Department said that it has come to the government's notice that apart from the circulation of baseless rumours by anti-state elements, some teachers are directly or indirectly discouraging students from attending classes. In some instances, the conduct of the educational institution staff is a significant factor in low attendance. The heads of institutions should ensure that all the staff under them perform their duties properly and loyally. They should also see that the teachers positively encourage the students to attend classes and create confidence in them. They should also explain to them that the rumourmongers are not their friends and that they should attend classes in their own interest.⁵¹ Kabir said the military authorities had

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁴⁵ Annual Report: 1970-71, University of Dacca, p. 107

⁴⁶ *The Janmabhumi*, September 13, 1971.

⁴⁷ *The Daily Banglar Bani*, September 14, 1971.

⁴⁸ Annual Report for the Session 1971-72, Office of the Proctor. D-Register, File No. 3141, Dhaka University Record Room.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Mafizullah Kabir, *ibid.*, p. 81.

⁵¹ Circular from the Deputy Secretary to the Government of East Pakistan, Education Department, 7 September, 1971, No. G/10-13/71 890-Edn. D-Register, Bundle 10-A, Dhaka University Record Room.

specific information that some teachers discouraged students from attending classes.⁵² Therefore, the government and the university administration punished the Bengali nationalist teachers and students differently.

Different Punishments Against the Bengali Nationalist Teachers and Students

During the Liberation War, the Bengali nationalist teachers who joined the university faced different punishments from the authorities. Some of them were under surveillance and received Shani and Jamdot's letters. Some teachers were rusticated, some were removed from the Syndicate, and some were arrested. The trial of some teachers and students was also organized in their absence, and ultimately, they brutally killed ten teachers of DU on 14th December 1971.

Bengali nationalist teachers who joined the university were under the surveillance of government intelligence agencies, their pro-Pakistani colleagues and student spies and were harassed and tortured in different ways. Most Bengali nationalist teachers tried staying in their rooms, avoiding the department office, classroom, teacher's lounge, and public places during office hours because there were so few students that they could conduct the class in their rooms. Moreover, they could avoid surveillance of pro-Pakistani teachers and spies. However, when the Pakistan army entered the campus, they took shelter in the teacher's lounge for their safety.⁵³

On 10th August, the government sent a notice to all public, private, and autonomous institutions to send the details of their employees and their family members to the government.⁵⁴ Following the notice, all the DU chairpersons sent the details of their teachers, staff, and family members to the government.⁵⁵ Kabir said that one day in the second week of August, they were required to provide residential addresses by 12 noon. Although this aroused great suspicion in their minds, and they were apprehensive of trouble, they could not but comply.⁵⁶ So, it was easy for the government to monitor the activities of the teachers. Accordingly, the teachers who were suspected of engaging in the Liberation War or *Mukti Bahini* received threatening letters from the *Jamdot Bahini* or *Shani Bahini*. The sample of the *Jamdot Bahini* letter was:

You Mr. Agent,

Due to your malicious machinations to fulfil the dream of *Akhand Hindusthan*, thousands of innocent people have been butchered by you the agents of '*Bharat Mata*', with the help of Indian armed infiltrators. You cannot conceal your seditious misdeeds, the penalty of

⁵² Mafizullah Kabir, *ibid.*, p. 82.

⁵³ Ratan Lal Chakraborty, Vol. 2, *ibid.*, p. 710.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 654.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Mafizullah Kabir, *ibid.*, p. 83.

which is death and death alone. Correct your ways or else you will be eaten up by dogs and vultures. Mind, you are under constant watch. JamdudBahini.⁵⁷

The sample of the Shani Bahini letter:

Annihilation of Devils

Devils,

You are one of those main leg-licking dogs of the Hindu Brahmins and the agents of Indian Indrabad who are hopelessly trying to destroy the greater Pakistan state, the homeland the Muslims. Nothing of your attitude, movement and activities is unknown to us. Be off without late and refrain from licking the legs of India, otherwise you will find no outlet to escape. On receiving this letter be ready to be completely annihilated. Shani.⁵⁸

Following the surveillance on 1st September 1971, General Tikka Khan, Chancellor of DU, warned some DU teachers not to indulge in anti-state activities in the future. Those who were warned included Dr Munir Chowdhury and Dr Nilima Ibrahim, teachers of the Bengali Department, and Dr Serajul Islam Chowdhury, teacher of the English Department.⁵⁹

Under the government's surveillance, the Pakistan army arrested nine teachers of the DU from 13th August to 17th November 1971. The allegation against them was that they gave statements against the government, attended the procession, incited the students and assisted the freedom fighters and Liberation War.⁶⁰ The list of the arrested teachers included:

Table 1: List of Teachers Arrested by the Government during the Liberation War

Sl.	Name of teacher	Department	Date of arrest	Date of release
1	AMM Shahidullah	Mathematics	13 August 1971	30 September 1971
2	Dr. M Abul Khair	History	13 August 1971	30 September 1971
3	Rafiqul Islam	Bengali	13 August 1971	30 September 1971
4	Saduddin	Social Science	13 August 1971	30 September 1971
5	Ahsanul Haq	English	31 August 1971	2 November 1971
6	Dr.Rashidul Hasan	English	20 September 1971	2 November 1971
7	Wadudur Rahman	History	17 November 1971	They were arrested but not held in the jail.
8	Dr.Ghyasuddin Ahmed	History	17 November 1971	
9	Zahurul Haque	Philosophy	17 November 1971	

Source: Ratan Lal Chakraborty, *Bangladesher Swadhinota Sangrame Dhaka Bishwabidyalay*, Vol. 2, p. 688.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁵⁸ Ratan Lal Chakraborty, Vol. 2, *ibid.*, pp. 665-66.

⁵⁹ Hasan Hafizur Rahman (ed.), Vol.7, *ibid.*, p. 502.

⁶⁰ Ratan Lal Chakraborty, Vol. 2, *ibid.*, p. 694.

The arrested teachers were taken to the old MP Hostel (Head office of the Martial Law Administrator) first for primary interrogation. Then, they were taken to the Dhaka Cantonment, but the authorities did not accept the professors there. Then, they were taken to a house at Shere Bangla Nagar. The house was a jail for particular persons, and this is where the Pakistan army interrogated and tortured the teachers.⁶¹ During the interrogation, they tried to find out about their earlier nationalist activities, their explanation of Bengali nationalism, what was necessary for Pakistan's unity, and their perception of the national hero of Pakistan.⁶² Later, most of them were sent to Dhaka Central Jail. Finally, all of them were released by 2nd November. Among them, three were killed on 14th December.

General Tikka Khan (1915-2002), Chancellor of DU, rusticated six DU teachers on 1st September 1971 and warned them. They were Dr. Anamul Haque (1902-82), Dr. Muhammad Moniruzzaman, Dr. Nilima Ibrahim, and Dr. Munir Chowdhury (1925-1971), teachers of the Bengali department; Dr. Abu Mohamed Habibullah (1911-1984), teacher of Islamic History and Culture; and Dr. Sirajul Islam Chowdhury, teacher of English.⁶³

The university syndicate meeting suspended three nationalist DU teachers from the syndicate and appointed three pro-Pakistani members to increase government control. The suspended teachers were Dr. Muhammad Enamul Haq, Dr. Muhammad Quadrat-i-Khuda, and Dr. Mamtaz Uddin Ahmed. Justice Muhammad Asir, Mohamad Osman Gani, and Jalal Uddin Ahmed were the three new members.⁶⁴

The DU administration took the initiative to donate to the government's war fund. On 6th November, the registrar of the DU published a notice proposing that all teachers and staff donate 1 percent of their salary to the Governor's War Fund. It also suggested they fill out a form and deposit the money by 15th December. Due to the circumstances, the authority did not have time to implement it.⁶⁵

During the Liberation War, 32 teachers did not join the DU. Evidence shows that within the time limit (1st to 15th June 1971), 52 teachers did not join the university. The

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 689.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 694.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 671.

⁶⁴ Extract from the Minutes of the Syndicate Meeting held on Wednesday, the 10th November 1971 at 9.00 am. In the Vice-Chancellor's House, University Campus, Ramna, Dacca.

⁶⁵ Ratan Lal Chakraborty, Vol. 2, *ibid.*, p.738.

first syndicate meeting of Syed Sajjad Hussain temporarily suspended all 52 teachers.⁶⁶ The government appointed Sajjad Hussain as the Vice-Chancellor of DU on 19th July 1971, and the syndicate meeting was held on 5th August. His second syndicate meeting was held on 30th September. The meeting allowed ten teachers to join after the ultimatum.⁶⁷ Nine teachers of DU were killed on 26th March, and one Sadat Ali was killed on 26th April by the Pakistan army. Eventually, 32 teachers did not join the university. They went to India and worked for the Liberation War. The DU administration sent a suspension notice to the suspended teacher's address. The contents of the notice came to be known from Anudwaipayan Bhattacharjee's letter. On 4th September, the university authorities sent a notice to his address. The notice declared that all the DU teachers were asked to join the university from 1st to 15th June 1971. The Governor and Martial Law Administrator, Zone 'B', had ordered all officers to join their duties by the afternoon of 15th June 1971. The university authorities also issued a notification to all its employees to join the university by 15th June. Therefore, the said Anudwaipayan Bhattacharjee was hereby informed that in pursuance of the said order of the Governor and Martial Law Administrator, Zone 'B' and the Syndicate resolution thereon dated 5th August 1971, he had been placed under suspension with effect from the forenoon of 16th June 1971.⁶⁸ Mr. Anudwaipayan Bhattacharjee's father received the suspension letter. Like him, the authorities sent the same notice to other suspended teachers.

Martial law administrators organized the trial of absent teachers under martial law. Evidence shows that at the beginning of September 1971, Tikka Khan ordered five prominent teachers of DU to be present at the Sub Martial Law Administrator office located at MP Hostel of 6th Sector on the morning of 8th September. The notice said that their trial would start under the Military Ordinance if they failed to attend. They were Muzaffar Ahmed, Abdur Razzak, Sarwar Murshid, Mazharul Islam and Abu Zafar Shamsuddin.⁶⁹ They did not respond to the government order. Therefore, they were punished with 14 years of rigorous imprisonment. *The Kalantar* wrote that the special military court of Dhaka gave 14 years of rigorous imprisonment of four teachers in their absence.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Extract from the Minutes of the Syndicate held on 5th August 1971, Dhaka University Record Room.

⁶⁷ Extract from the Minutes of the Syndicate held on 30th September 1971, Dhaka University Record Room.

⁶⁸ Personal File of Anudwaipayan, Nathi (File) no. 9, DU Record Room.

⁶⁹ *Daily Pakistan*, September 2, 1971.

⁷⁰ *The Kalantar*, November 14, 1971.

Some of the student leaders and ordinary students also faced government punishment. For instance, on 4th May 1971, Tikka Khan, in a statement, called four student leaders of the DU to surrender to the military by 10th May. Otherwise, their trial would be organized under military law in their absence. They were ASM Abdur Rab, Abdul KuddusMakhon, Nur-e-Alam Siddiki and Shahjahan Siraj.⁷¹

Some students were arrested upon returning to the DU campus on 2nd August 1971. Most notable were Zillur Murshid Mithu, Homayon Ahmed and Rina Khanom. Zillur Murshid Mithu was a history student at DU. He was a resident of Surya Sen Hall. On 26th March, he was inside the hall and miraculously survived. On 28th March, he left the campus and went to his sister's house at Dhanmondi, then to his native house at Goalgram in Faridpur. After opening the university, he came to the campus several times. On 11th August, the government arrested him from his relative's house on an arms collection and preservation charge. Then, he was sent to the central jail. The government released him on 16th November. However, he was kidnapped by some people dressed in black on 5th December and did not return.⁷² Humayun Ahmed was an MA student in chemistry in 1971. Pakistan army killed his father, Fayzur Rahman Ahmed, on 5 May. Then he went to Barisal, his native place with his mother, sister and brother, and then to Mohon Ganj Mymensing. He had difficulty staying in an unknown place during the war. Therefore, he came back to Mohsin Hall in July. Pakistan army arrested him on 17th November. After interrogation, he was released.⁷³ Rina Khanom was a philosophy student at DU. She was a resident at Ruqayyah Hall. She left the hall before 26th March and took shelter in her sister's house at Malibagh. On 11th September, the Pakistan army arrested her from her sister's house. After interrogation, she, too, was released.⁷⁴

At the beginning of December 1971, when India directly declared war against Pakistan, the Liberation War of Bangladesh entered its penultimate stage. In response, the government proclaimed an emergency and suspended all classes from 6th December. Suspending class, the DU administration published two notices. The first notice was, "In view of the present emergency, University classes have been suspended until further orders. They will be resumed as soon as practicable. No one should, therefore,

⁷¹ *Morning News*, May 4, 1971.

⁷² Ratan Lal Chakraborty, *71 Ar Shahid Jibon: Itihas Bibhag ('71's Martyr Life: History Department)*, (Collan Prokasan 1997), pp. 121-131.

⁷³ Ratan Lal Chakraborty, *Bangladesher Swadhinota Sangrame Dhaka Bishwabidyalay*, Vol. 2, *ibid.*, p. 704.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 705-06.

leave the station without permission. Teachers are requested to remain in touch with the Heads daily.”⁷⁵

The second notice was, “In view of the emergency created by Indian aggression against Pakistan, University classes will remain suspended until further orders. All offices, however, will function normally.”⁷⁶ DU was re-opened on 8th February 1972.

A brutal mass killing of intellectuals took place in Bangladesh on 14th December 1971, only two days before the surrender of West Pakistani troops. It was a planned operation and an extreme pinpoint of the intellectual killing in Bangladesh during the Liberation War. On 14th December, they killed 10 teachers of the DU.⁷⁷

The killers raided the residence of the targeted teachers on the 14th of December morning and abducted them at gunpoint. They were blindfolded and carried to the torture cell on a bus.⁷⁸ None of the abducted teachers returned. So, it was difficult to fathom how they were exactly killed. However, it is assumed from a survivor’s narrative, Delwar Hussain. He was the chief accountant of the Greenland Mercantile Company of Dhaka. He said that on the morning of December 14, several *razakars* pulled him out of his house. After placing a blindfold around his eyes, they drove him by bus to camp on the outskirts of Dhaka. He was forced into a room. A little later, the cloth around his eyes slackened and he discovered that he was in a room with a score or so of other prisoners. Some of them had been tortured. Toenails had been ripped off and toes amputated. After an hour, they were interrogated. The prisoners identified themselves as doctors, lawyers, professors and journalists. They were forced into a bus and driven out to marshlands on the outskirts of Dhaka. The *razakars* led their victims to a big tree where about another 130 prisoners were huddled. Several prisoners asked the *razakars* why they were killing fellow Bengalis. One of them told us to shut up and gave an order: finish the bastards off. Mr. Hussain said they started to shoot prisoners with rifles, and others were simply stabbed to death. He managed to slip the rope off his wrists and dashed to the river. By a miracle, he escaped.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ D-Register, Bundle No. 17, File no. 377, Smark no. 14567-C, dated 6.12.197, Dhaka University Record Room.

⁷⁶ D-Register, Bundle No. 17, File no. 377, Smarak no. 14569-C, Dated 6-12-1971, Dhaka University Record Room.

⁷⁷ Ratan Lal Chakraborty, *Bangladesher Swadhinota Sangrame Dhaka Bishwabidyalay*, Vol. 1, *ibid.*, p. 612.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 613.

⁷⁹ ‘Witness Describes Massacre Before Dacca Fell’, *The London Times*, December 30, 1971.

Table 2 : List of ten teachers Killed on 14th December 1971

Sl.	Name	Department	Place of their arrest
1.	Dr.Anwar Pasha	Bengali	30 Isha Khan Road
2.	Dr. M Abul Khair	History	35 Fular Road
3.	Dr.Ghyasuddin Ahmed	History	Mohsin Hall
4.	Dr. Faizul Mahi	Education Research	35 Fular Road
5.	Munier Chowdhury	Bengali	House at Hitirpul
6.	Dr.Mofazzal Haider Chaudhury	Bengali	68/1 Indira Road
7.	Dr.Mohammad Mortaza	Doctor	14/A Fular Road
8.	Dr.Rashidul Hasan	English	30 Isha Khan Road
9.	Dr. Santosh Chandra Bhattacharyya	History	31 Isha Khan Road
10.	Dr. Sirajul Haque Khan	Education and Research	16 Fular Road

Source: Chakraborty, *Bangladesher Swadhinota Sangrame Dhaka Bishwabidyalay*, p. 612.

A special branch of police discovered the decomposed body of the intellectuals under the leadership of N.M Khan, D.I.G, Abdus Samad Talukdar, SP of the Intelligence and Special Branch of Dhaka and Major Kondu of the alliance force on 4th January 1972.⁸⁰ Most of the rotten bodies were found scattered in ditches, plains and inside the heaps of bricks in the marshy land at Mirpur and Rayerbazar. The dead bodies, eyes covered, and hands tied on the back, were found bruised all over, with bullet shots to the chest, head or back and bayonet injuries all over the bodies.⁸¹ It was almost impossible to identify the bodies because their faces had decomposed. However, their family members or relatives identified them through their belongings. Omar Hayat identified his brother-in-law, Dr. Mohammad Mortaza, by his lungi, shirt and the sari with which his eyes were blindfolded. Anamul Haque Khan identified his father, Dr. Sirajul Haque Khan, through his shirt, pants and belt. Anamul Haque Khan identified Dr Santosh Chandra Bhattacharyya, by his grey hair and dress. Abdul Awal identified the body of his brother Dr Faizul Mahi. Among ten teachers, the bodies of three were not found. The Namaz e Janaza of the deceased was held at DU Central Mosque on 6 January. Then, they were buried beside the DU Mosque. The body of Santosh Chandra Bhattacharyya was cremated at the Shampur crematorium.⁸²

There is no clear indication of who exactly killed the Bengali intellectuals. However, the most accepted opinion in Bangladesh is that Al-Badar militants (local collaborators

⁸⁰ Ratan Lal Chakraborty, *Bangladesher Swadhinota Sangrame Dhaka Bishwabidyalay*, Vol. 1, *ibid.*, pp. 614-615.

⁸¹ *Banglapedia*, accessed at https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/Killing_of_Intellectuals, on 22 March, 2021.

⁸² *Daily Ittefaq*, January 6, 1972.

of the Pakistan Army) killed them with direct assistance from the Pakistan government. The evidence supporting this claim may be found in two diaries. One was the diary of Rao Farman Ali, and the other was the diary of Ashrafuzzaman Khan. Rao Farman Ali left a diary at the Governor House, and the Bengali intellectuals' list was discovered in its pages. Most of them were executed on 14th December. Therefore, it is assumed that Rao Farman Ali chalked out the blueprint of crippling the intelligentsia on 14th December. Some of the military officers who assisted him were Lt. General Ameer Abdullah Khan Niazi, Brigadier Bashir, Lt Colonel Hejazi, Major Zahur, Major Aslam, Captain Nasir and Captain Qayyum. However, the mission of killing the university teachers was executed by a young group of Al-Badar militants.⁸³ Their leader was Ashrafuzzaman Khan, commander of the Al-Badar force in Dhaka.

The diary of Ashrafuzzaman Khan was discovered in his house (no. 350) at Nakhal Para after the Liberation War. His diary mentioned the names of 20 people. There were names of eight DU teachers who were killed on 14th December.⁸⁴ Both the diaries bear evidence that it was a planned killing and that the killers were from Al-Badar. Some of the family members of the *Shahid* also identified Ashrafuzzaman as the killer. Al-Badar Bahini worked against the Liberation War from the beginning of its formation. Some of the Al-Badar leaders followed the activities of the murdered teachers for a long time. They were also accused of sending threatening letters to the teachers named *Jamdut and Shani*.

Al-Badar militants killed the Bengali intellectuals because they were the voice of East Bengal. From the beginning of the creation of Pakistan, they focused on the disparity between the two Pakistan and the government's exploitation. They planted the idea of Bengali nationalism in the heart of Bengalis through intellectual, political and cultural activities. They also played a crucial role in the nationalist movement of Bangladesh and the Liberation War. The killing aimed to eliminate the intellectuals, thereby forcing the Bengali nation into intellectual bankruptcy and depriving the newly emerging Bangladesh of education, culture, ideology, and leadership.

Conclusion

The above discussion shows that during the nine-month-long Liberation War of Bangladesh, the DU campus was closed for five months and opened only from 2nd August to 6th December 1971. At that time, the government and the university administration tried to establish normalcy on the campus and took different initiatives to ensure the presence of teachers and students. Due to government initiatives, most

⁸³ *Banglapedia*, accessed at https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/Killing_of_Intellectuals, on 22 March, 2021.

⁸⁴ Ratan Lal Chakraborty, *Bangladesher Swadhinota Sangrame Dhaka Bishwabidyalay*, Vol.1, *ibid.*, pp. 616-617.

teachers joined the university to save their lives and jobs. However, they could ensure the presence of only 30 to 50 students, where the total number of students in 1970-71 secession was 6,409. Therefore, it is very logical to say that the University of Dhaka's academic situation was worse during the Liberation War of Bangladesh. Mofizullah Kabir correctly said, "During the morning hours, offices opened, and some employees came. But offices for whom? No student ever came to the area of the Campus. The University functions for students. But now the University was opened without students."⁸⁵

The DU teachers and students were divided into two groups. One group supported the Pakistani government and implemented its policies, and the other was the Bengali nationalists. The Bengali nationalist teachers and students worked very secretly for the liberation of Bangladesh. Therefore, they had to endure different punishments. The Pakistan government killed 20 teachers, arrested 9 teachers, rusticated six teachers, and suspended three teachers from the DU syndicate. The special military court gave four teachers 14 years of rigorous imprisonment in their absence. Some students were arrested upon returning to the DU campus. Some student leader's trials were organised under military law in their absence and 113 students of DU sacrificed their life to liberate Bangladesh. However, the government could not stop the emergence of Bangladesh. Bangladesh became independent on 16th December 1971, and the Bengali nationalist teachers and students were honoured, and the pro-Pakistani teachers came under trial in the independent Bangladesh.

⁸⁵ Mafizullah Kabir, *ibid.*, pp. 71-72.