



Tales from the Dungeon: Dr Naseem Baloch

In the *Tales from the Dungeon* series of Balochistan Times, former victims of enforced disappearance recount their ordeal. Dr Naseem Baloch was forcibly disappeared twice. He was first whisked away by security forces in 2005 along with Dr Imdad Baloch, Dr Allah Nizar, Dr Yousuf Murad, Ghulam Rasool, Akhtar Nadeem and Ali Nawaz Gohar, all incumbent or former leaders of the the Baloch Students Organization (BSO). In 2010, he was ‘kidnapped’ again. He now lives in France as a political refugee.

It was March 25, 2005. Nauman Avenue Aparments, Gulistan e Jauhar, Karachi. The doorbell rang at around 3am. I woke up, opened the door and saw around 20 people in police and paramilitary uniforms. Some were in civilian clothes.

“What’s happening, sir,” I asked politely. In response, someone hit me with the butt of his AK-47 — once on my head and once on my neck, forcing me to collapse on the ground. They handcuffed my hands on my back and blindfolded me. I could hear my other friends being beaten and handcuffed.

We were thrown into a vehicle, barefoot, and driven to a secret military location.

They did not let us sleep for three nights. We were hanging, hands tied upwards. It was a huge hall with black and white tiles. A giant searchlight was looking directly into my eyes. A soldier was tasked to beat me every once in a while to stop me from drifting into sleep. He was good at his work. He had a leather-strip, which he used with his both hands on every part of my body. When it hit me, it would stick on my flesh, forcing out streams of blood.

My hands had been tied upside in such a way that if I tried to keep my feet on the ground, my

wrists would feel the pressure of my body and my wrists would bleed.

My head had been covered with a plastic bag making it difficult to breathe. The knees, wrists and back joints had been burnt with cigarette butts.

Such were the happenings of the first few days. Later, I was shifted to a tiny cell where I could only stretch my legs. The searing heat of Karachi, mosquitoes, a suffocating small cell, eyes shut with a black piece of cloth and feet chained. Sleeping was not an option anyway, but an officer would visit at any time of night. If he found one sleeping, there was a punishment – electric current on thighs.

The interrogation room was located near the main gate of our lock-ups. If someone was being interrogated, I could hear their screams. One day, I heard someone being tortured to extremes. I prayed it ended soon. The torture continued for what it seemed hours. A while later, I saw through the metal strips of my cell's door someone passing by. His eyes were blindfolded and his neck was bloodied. I figured it was Allah Nizar. Only he was tall enough to be seen from the upper part of my cell's door.

The first three days were meant for sleep deprivation and instilling fear. Then began the investigation. Sleep deprivation and fear make you talk.

During the investigation, my eyes were closed, an officer sitting in front of me asked questions and a guard stood behind me with a leather strip or a stick. I guess when the officer signaled, the guard would start beating.

They rubbed something against my feet which felt like a stick, and asked: "Do you've any idea what it is?" I didn't know. "You'll know when we'll use it." I don't know if they ever used it or not.

Toilet sessions were no less torture. You had only forty seconds, or a minute at most, to relieve yourself. A guard holding one end of the chain tied to my handcuffs waited outside the toilet. He would pull me out as the time ended. It always felt like sitting on a ticking time bomb.

But I could still pee in peace inside my cell, as I was given a bottle for the purpose. Yet, I had to make sure that I didn't confuse it with the other bottle meant for drinking water.

Interrogation sessions continued for days. There was a long list of questions they asked during the interrogations:

Who is funding the Baloch Students Organization (BSO)?

How did we finance our propaganda literature like pamphlets, posters, magazine etc?

Do you collect "jagga tax" from people? (I asked what "jagga tax" was. In return, I got a beating.)

Which is the militant wing of the Baloch National Movement (BNM)?

Why Allah Nizar was staying at the apartment where we were arrested?

Was Akhtar Nadeem related to me?

What is the passcode of this suitcase? Open it.

Which route is used to smuggle weapons?

Have you ever visited Afghanistan or Iran?

One day, they told us we were going to get a haircut. They trimmed our beard and hair, which had grown like wild grass, in a gallery just outside our lock-up area.

“The Baloch are handsome people,” the barber haughtily told the officer. It made me feel good.

The officer had once been stationed in my hometown, Mashkay, and knew many people from the area.

“We’re taking you to your country,” he said. We were about to be shifted to Quetta.

One day, I was removed from my cell, but not to be taken for torture. They took me to a comparatively distant place, and put me into a vehicle. My eyes were shut and hands chained. But I figured from random whispers and purposeful clearing of throats that Ghulam Rasool, Dr Yousuf and Akhtar Nadeem were also there. The soldiers had warned us from whispering. Every word was punished with prolonged beating sessions. Keeping that in mind, we all fell silent out of fear. The vehicle started moving.

Someone tuned in to a radio channel. The DJ was saying it was a Karachi FM channel and so and so. Then he said it was International Mother’s Day.

I remembered my mother. Suddenly, I was overwhelmed by the fear that my mother was dead by then. I had been missing for two months and nobody knew about my whereabouts.

Once, I was jailed for a minor dispute involving my BSO activities at the Bolan Medical College. My mother sent my cousin from Mashkay, saying: “He’s my only son. I’ll die if he remained in jail.”

Therefore, in that vehicle on Mother’s Day, I feared my mother must have died. (She’s still worried about me, but thankfully she’s still alive.)

“You guys don’t have a brother so take good care of yourself,” Dr Allah Nizar used to joke about some of us. While crossing a road, he would tell us jokingly to be on the safer side. I, Dr Shams, Ghulam Rasool, Ata ur Rahman and Dr Imdad belonged to this club – being the only son of our mothers.

After 45 days of torture and interrogation in Karachi, we were flown to Quetta on a small plane. At a certain place in the Quetta Cantonment, we were made to walk blindfolded almost all day. I found out later that they were short of cells and did not know where to put us. Finally, they had to sort out a place around the weaponry area for me and Dr Yousuf.

The same torture techniques were used and the same questions asked in Quetta. A total of two months passed in similar conditions.

One day, we were taken to a hospital, most probably the CMH, in Quetta. Our blindfolds were removed during medical check-up with a doctor. After asking some questions, the doctor gave me a bottle to deposit my urine sample. In the toilet, I saw myself in the mirror after a very long time. It was a different person.

On the return to the cell, a guard told me those who were taken to hospital for medical tests were either released soon or detained forever. It was a confusing message.

An interrogator in Quetta had previously warned me that I had lied to them on several occasions and it meant I had to rot there forever. But that did not happen.

One day, we were flown to another city, where we were handed over to the police. They removed everyone's blindfolds and handcuffs, except mine. My handcuffs refused to be unlocked despite all their efforts. I was, finally, given to police custody with the handcuffs still hanging on from one of my hands.

In the police vehicle, I saw the signboard of the Agriculture College Dera Ghazi Khan. "We're in Dera Ghazi Khan," I announced to my friends.

We were shifted to the Sakhi Sarwar police station. I could see the road from inside the police station. Decorated trucks, which looked so familiar, passed by. One of it must be coming from Mashkay, my hometown, I thought. *If only I could pass on a message to my family.*

We were still in captivity, but we were already celebrating our freedom. I took a shower, almost after 20 days, and kept staring at the road. I saw a policeman bringing a mechanic from across the road.

"The one with the handcuffs should come forward," the policeman called out. I moved forward and stretched my handcuffed hand out of the window. The mechanic broke it open with a sharp tool, as I gasped in fear of losing my hand.

In the night, the police conducted a photo session with us. It meant for the next day's newspapers, which said we had been arrested for trying to bomb the airport in Dera Ghazi Khan.

On May 25, we were released on bail in a framed case of burglary. We had been accused of stealing a TV set and a CD player from a house.

On the same day five years later, I was going to go missing once again. But more on that later.

My father, Dr Imdad's late father Mr Noor Jan, Ghulam Rasool's cousin Dr Iqbal, Hammal Haider and Dr Yousuf's cousin Maqbool Shambay Zai had come to Dera Ghazi Khan to receive us.

In June, I, Dr Imdad, Dr Yousuf and Ghulam Rasool went to the Sindh High Court to record our

witness accounts, as Dr Allah Nizar, Akhtar Nadeem and Ali Nawaz Gauhar were still missing.

The court heard us through our lawyer Hafeez Lakho. Dr Imdad also spoke in front of the court.

After the hearing, human rights activist Salim Akhtar took us to a psychiatrist, who prescribed us some medicines. I remember one tablet: Tofranil. I used it for a long time and it helped me leave behind the painful memories of the night of March 25 and the torture I went through in its aftermath. A year later, I got tired of using the medicines and quit them.

One day in 2007, I became very restless. I bought some Tofranil but they did not help.

I wasn't liking any place. I had left my favourite place in Quetta - the hostel of Bolan Medical College- and was staying at my uncle's. Yet, the flashbacks kept coming.

I borrowed the motorbike of a friend, Qaisar Rakhshani (not his real name), but did not know where to go. I was just riding around. A bicycle was not giving me way, so I hit it on the side. It fell down along with its rider. I felt pleased. Such violent actions made me feel good.

I knew those medicines were no longer helpful and that I needed new ones. Still, I was hiding my condition, trying to look normal. But how could I look normal! I called a friend, Farhad, who was staying at the hostel, to take me to Dr Ghulam Rasool (a famous psychiatrist in Quetta). He laughed, saying "Have you gone crazy".

"No. But I need help," I replied.

I drove to the hostel on the borrowed motorbike. He was waiting for me at the hostel's main black gate. When I neared him, I suddenly thought that Dr Ghulam Rasool had treated Hasan Khan and he had been healed; so, I'll be healed too, but before getting healed let's hit the hostel's gate. And I did just that. I felt I was not myself. But, in retrospect, I think I did some of those crazy things knowingly just to feel good.

We went to Dr Ghulam Rasool's clinic, and told him my story. He said I had post-traumatic stress disorder. He was right. I dreaded military boots, the colour of military uniform and vehicles that looked like those used by the army. He prescribed me Paroxetine and sleeping pills. "It's good that you came, otherwise this disorder would have worsened," he said, asking me to visit him once in every month.

I kept using those medicines. I felt some relief for around three months. The stress had subsidized and I could sleep peacefully. But the feeling of fear was still there. Some people's voice or the opening and closing of doors and windows would freak me out. The noise of keys bunched together in a keychain was a torture. In the torture cell, every time the guy with the keys came, someone would be taken for torture. Hearing the sound of the keys, every prisoner would think it was his turn. The thrashing happened once a day, but the fear was worse. The soldier would visit the cells every once in a while, not necessarily to take out a prisoner for beating on every visit. I believe it was just another means of mental torture.

I was visiting Dr Ghulam Rasool every month and he advised me to keep using the medicines. The Paroxetine was adding to my weight and my paranoia was not going away. So the Dr replaced it with Sertraline 50mg after a year. It was 2008. In 2009, he prescribed me Sertraline 100mg.

I was still a medical student and couldn't afford the extra expenses of the medicines from my pocket money. I did not want to inform my family about my mental disorder, as it would have worried them. Dr Ghulam Rasool was kind enough to give me sample medicines that he received from pharmaceutical companies.

In the month of February the same year, I completed my house job. I passed the service commission exams for the post of a medical officer. In February 2010, I got admission in MCPS (Psychiatry) and I was posted at the the Bolan Medical College Hospital. I had chosen psychiatry to know more of my illness, to treat my condition.

February, March and April passed in study and training. Then came May 25.

I carried my medicines in my purse, as I needed them almost all the time. Panic attacks came without warning. That day I was short of them.

After completing my day's duty and training at the psychiatry ward, I went to the laboratory at around 1:30pm to donate blood for my aunt who was admitted at the hospital for a surgery. I donated blood, attended my aunt and set out for home along with my cousins Ilyas and Yasin.

I stopped by the pharmacy in front of the Bolan Medical College (BMC) to buy my medicines. I was still inside the pharmacy when I heard screeching of brakes. Five or six Frontier Corps (FC) vehicles were parked outside. Two FC personnel entered the pharmacy and asked me to show them my official identity card. "It's him," said a soldier with an Islamic beard before I took out my identity card.

They led me outside to my car. "You're wanted by the Customs authorities for faking your car's papers," one said. I knew what was happening. I was being abducted for the second time.

They threw me into the back of a desert camo patterned vehicle and put a blindfold on my eyes. They had already taken hold of my mobile phone.

"He's our property now," one soldier remarked.

The vehicle gathered speed. They drove for around 20 minutes and then changed the vehicle. After another five minutes, I was offloaded and escorted to what I thought to an open space. It certainly didn't feel like a room. I was made to wait there for quite some time.

I was getting thirsty because of the heat, but asking for water was like asking for a beating. I remained silent. *I am not here to party anyway, I thought. Torture is guaranteed, so why not take the beating after getting hydrated.*

"I need water," I said without knowing anyone was nearby to listen. Someone kicked me from the

back.

“Bring water for this son of a doctor,” he said haughtily. I received water just the same.

One could never be certain about time at a place like that, but it was around after the maghrib prayers (sunset) that they shifted me to a room. They tied my hands to the ceiling and I could stand only on my toes. I felt that someone else was being tied in the same way beside me.

Two soldier entered the cell after a while. “Remove their shalwars (pants),” one ordered. He was instantly obeyed. “*Cheter*,” he ordered again. The other soldier used his *cheter* on me with all his force. From the cries and screams, I realized my cousin, Ilyas, was also being tied up and beaten.

The beatings were recurring, at intervals of every ten, twenty, or, thirty minutes. During a longer interval, I rubbed my blindfolds aside with my arms. I saw a wall with familiar black and white tiles. A giant searchlight was shooting streams of light into my eyes.

“Water,” I begged. In return, I received four strikes of the *cheter* along with a bottle of water, handed by a soldier.

“Toilet,” I asked again.

“Tomorrow. Boss isn’t around,” the soldier replied. I knew from my experience in 2005 that it was going to take long.

Hours passed. The guard’s shift changed. Another few hours passed.

“Was it you who wanted to go to toilet,” a soldier touched my shoulders. “Yes,” I said. He untied my hands and led me outside. In the toilet, my blindfolds were removed. One was allowed to relieve himself with eyes open. Such small gestures of kindness make you feel grateful to your captors.

A stinging burning sensation ran across my backbone as if I was lying down on a pile of burning coals. My shirt was bloodied. Almost all joints of my body had swelled up.

I was brought back to the black-and-white-tiled hall, to be tied and beaten. Day after day. In retrospect, I am left with four strong impressions of those days: beatings, heat, water and toilet.

Ilyas was getting the same treatment. He screamed, and then I screamed.

Days passed. Hours passed. I was semi-unconscious. Everything was blurry. Sleep deprivation and beatings had taken me to an unexplainable state of mind. I felt the pain all the same. There was no escape from the pain.

They untied me one night and took me to another room. I was asked to sit on a chair.

“Just look straight at the laptop. We will kill you if you looked around,” someone warned while removing my blindfolds.

Another soldier was sitting beside me. "Do I look familiar," he asked. I looked. He was the same bearded soldier who had identified me at the pharmacy. "No," I replied.

He showed me photos from the laptop. Around 40 photos of all kind, including that of Indian actress Karina Kapoor. "Who's she," he asked.

"Karina," I replied.

"What's she wearing around her neck," he asked again.

I could not think straight because of days of sleep deprivation and torture, so I somehow failed to answer the question. I paid heavily for that: electric shock.

I soon found out I was going to get an electric shock no matter if I answered the questions or not. An electric shock on every photo. For 40 photos.

It was a blue machine being operated by the bearded soldier. "It's at 100 right now," he said as he pressed one of its buttons. "It can go up to 450 if you don't cooperate."

He took pleasure in applying electric shocks on every part of my body. Until I lost consciousness. I do not remember what happened next. In the morning, I was taken to the toilet where I saw blood all over my shirt and pants.

The same treatment continued every night for around a week. Every question was followed by one or another form of torture, or all of them simultaneously. *Cheter* beatings. Electric shocks. Cuts with a sharp blade. Cigarette burns.

I screamed and heard my cousin scream.

"Leave him be. He'll die," I heard my cousin's torturers say.

Being tortured is a horrendous experience, but what is more horrendous is to witness your loved ones being tortured.

After around seven days, I was presented, blindfolded, before an officer. "I'm a psychiatrist. I've come from Islamabad for you. We'll just talk. No torture," he said.

He was true to his words. He asked me questions for three days, for three hours a day, without beatings. Most questions were the ones they had asked me already.

One day, he ordered a soldier to open my eyes. He himself stood behind me so that I could not see him. He asked me to draw sketches of trees, maps, addresses.

I was a post-graduate psychiatry student and knew he was trying to extract information from the depths of mind. He also asked me questions as I drew.

"Where are his pants? He's a doctor, for God's sake," he scolded a soldier. "Bring his pants," he

ordered in a show of kindness.

“They’ve no heart,” he turned to me. “They shouldn’t have tortured you. But I’m not like them. No torture anymore. I’ll assign you a different room. Not the one used for beatings.”

I knew the drill. Torture and kindness. Stick and carrot. It was all scripted. Yet, I wanted to ask him a favour. “My medicines are in my purse. If I could get them.”

“No problem. Tell me when you need more,” he said, laughing.

I was not given my medicines, but I was shifted to a new room, with a high ceiling. A small light modestly brightened the room. The presence of a thin, dirty mattress showed that I could catch a wink after days of sleep deprivation. I sat down. But my buttocks and back were too sore for any contact. I had to sleep on my stomach for two days.

The upper thigh of my right leg was burning the most. It felt dry, thick and scaly when I touched it. I found out on the next visit to the toilet that the whole upper thigh skin had been burnt. It was the favourite place for the bearded soldier to apply the electric shocks.

I was blindfolded all the time. Blindfolds were removed only once for two minutes during the toilet visits.

Most questions asked during interrogations were the same I had been asked in 2005. However, this time I was asked more about the Baloch National Movement (BNM), a Baloch political party I had joined after my tenure in the Baloch Students Organization (BSO).

Other questions included:

Q. Who was your informer in the raid on the police weaponry in Awaran?

A. I don’t know.

Q. Your car was used in the attack. How come you don’t know?

A. This incident took place on Eid’s eve. My car was parked at my house that night.

Q. When did you buy the car?

A. It’s been two months.

Q. You changed the old car so that it couldn’t be identified, right?

A. No, sir.

Q. When did you see Allah Nazar last time?

A. In 2006, at the Jail Ward of the Civil Hospital.

Q. How's Akhtar Nadeem related to you?

A. My grandfather and his father are cousins.

Q. Akhtar Nadeem's brother, Asif Nadeem, was injured in a blast. You treated him and two other injured. You also gave 1, 00,000 to one of them for treatment in the city. Who was he? Why did you treat them? Why did you give them money?

A. I don't know. I haven't treated anyone injured in a blast. I don't know who they were.

Q. Awaran Bank's money were being transported from Khuzdar. They were robbed around Jhao. Were you the informer?

A. No, sir.

Q. Was your car used in the robbery?

A. No.

Q. Bodies of three FC personnel have been found in Greshag. They had been kidnapped from Basima. Give us the details.

A. I don't know, sir.

There was a beating session reserved after every question. It did not matter what answer you gave. You always received a beating. For example, they asked me if I knew how to operate a certain gun (whose name I don't remember). I expressed my ignorance. I was beaten all the same. If you admitted to committing a crime, you'd be beaten. If you didn't, you'd be beaten more.

In retrospect, I can think of a number of sarcastic answers I should have given to them for the absurdity of their questions. I could have said *yes, all the dead in Mashkay's graveyard are victims of my killing spree* or *why aren't you asking about my role in Abraham Lincoln's murder*. But, under torture, you keep answering every stupid question with all your honesty.

They shifted me to another dungeon. The door of my new cell was of metal strips, so I could hear my neighbours. The old prisoners knew when to talk. I came to know from these conversations that Altaf Bugti and Sami Mengal (both of them are still missing) were in my neighbouring cells.

Sami Mengal was a defiant and stubborn prisoner. He often shouted abuses at the guards and never obeyed them. "What's this Kalashnikov doing on your shoulder, coward," he dared the guards. "Why don't you just kill me with it?" Some days he would refuse to eat in protest.

He told me the dungeon was close to Askari Park. On certain days, I heard the rumbling sound of a passing train. I figured it was the Chaman-bound train which passed through the Askari Park area once or twice a week.

Sami Mengal also told me that my cell was lucky. "I've seen many prisoners released from this cell.

Hai Kamal, an old Bugti, two mullahs from Machh," he said.

The toilet was just across my cell. The bathroom was a little away. One day I was allowed to take a bath. My blindfolds had been removed for the bath and there was no guard around, so I sneaked a glance outside. I saw a young man sitting in his cell, blindfolded. I happened to know him.

"Ilyas," I called out.

"I'm fine, doctor. Don't talk," he replied.

In the middle of the night of July 9 and 10, they shifted me to a different cell. They removed my handcuffs, blindfolds and fetters. "You're getting released today," a guard informed me in broken Balochi. I asked him about Ilyas. He said he did not know anything about him. On my refusal to be released without Ilyas, he phoned someone and said I was asking about my cousin.

"His case officer is on leave," he informed me after the call. "He'll come after a week, and your cousin will be released then."

I insisted we should be released together.

"You don't have a choice," he said.

They blindfolded me again and put me in a car. After 10 minutes of drive, the driver gave me some money and my identity card. "Stay at a hotel. Don't tell anyone. I'll bring your cousin and car in two days," he said.

"Alright," I replied.

"Which hotel will you be staying?"

"Qasar Gulnaz, Saleem Complex."

"Now you're going to stay at VIP hotels, huh?"

"Yes."

He dropped me at Science College Chowk in Quetta and warned me not to look back. I feared I might be killed and dumped like others. But I was spared. They drove away.

The office of daily Intekhab was nearby. I went straight into the newspaper's office. Some staff members recognized me, and took me to my home.

My parents and the aunt whom I had donated blood were there. My aunt passed out on seeing me. I stood there confused, trying to recall my medical knowledge about giving first aid to an unconscious person.

Courtesy: [Balochistan Times](#)