



Tales from the dungeon: Dr Yousuf Murad Baloch

This is first part of Balochistan Time's *Tales from the dungeon* series in which former victims of enforced disappearances tell their ordeal. Dr Yousuf Murad Baloch was among the first victims. He was taken away from Karachi in March 2005 along with other members of the Baloch Students Organization (BSO). He now lives in Germany.

If you are an educated Baloch and you do not plan to appear in the competitive exams, or you have failed to mould your voice into a specific obedient tone always beginning your sentences with "sir", or you do not believe in the divinity of the Pakistan army, then you are most likely to end up in a secret services-operated torture cell. Also, if in any way, you happened to have read the wrong books, you can be taken to a tour to dungeons for re-education.

The pain you are inflicted upon in these torture cells is of another level. Torture is an institutionalized science in Pakistan and your torturers follow a certain protocol to inflict maximum pain, break down your spirit and influence your thinking to fit into the official narrative.

Before I start telling my ordeal in military-operated dungeons, let me explain why I happened to be present at the place which the security forces raided and took us away.

I was the elected Press Secretary of the Baloch Students Organization (BSO), responsible for the group's press releases, press articles and publications. I directly reported to the Chairman of the organization.

The BSO, as the name suggests, is a leftist nationalist student organization in Balochistan. The literature its members are encouraged to read mostly preach anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism and independence struggles. Although the BSO perceives Pakistan as a model of Islamofascism, it has to walk a thin line when it comes to dealing with the sensitive subject of religion.

In 2005, we anticipated that the ongoing negotiations between Baloch leader Nawab Akbar Bugti and the Pakistan government were going to fail and that the army would eventually attack the outspoken leader of the Jamhoori Watan Party (JWP).

There was always a sense of readiness and preparation among the BSO leadership for mass protests in case any move was made by the army. We were preparing to mobilise the non-tribal Baloch people to stand for their rights.

In the governance system of Pakistan and the colonial mind-set, any and all voices for rights or justice are considered as a cover for insurrectionists.

The BSO was not only challenging the lies of the state narrative but also educating the masses to dismantle the dehumanizing collaboration of tribal sardars and the state forces in Balochistan.

It was the first time after a long interval of relative calm in Balochistan that the state narrative was being questioned, and the legitimacy, authority and supremacy of the paramilitary Frontier Corps (FC) and the regular army was being publically challenged in Balochistan.

It was during such a press conference in Quetta that the police made a

move to arrest Dr Imdad Baloch, the then Chairman of the BSO. We had to smuggle him out of Quetta to Karachi.

On March 17, 2005, the army tried to knock out Nawab Akbar Bugti in an aerial assault on his house in Dera Bugti, killing more than 70 people. We saw this as the beginning of military operations in Balochistan.

I contacted Dr Imdad and went to Karachi to discuss the BSO's protest campaign against the looming threat of violence against Baloch civilians. With some twist of fate I, Dr Imdad, Dr Naseem, Ali Nawaz, Akhter Nadeem, Gulam Rasool and Dr Allah Nizar — all of them either current or former BSO leaders — ended up being crammed into an apartment in Karachi owned by a relative of Dr Naseem.

On the night of March 24, I cooked biryani, not knowing this might be our last biryani for a long time. After dinner I remember trying to start a discussion with Dr Allah Nizar about the recent stock market crash as I believed it was the result of investor fear from the foreseen military operations in Balochistan. He took some time out from reading a magazine to explain that the crash was more about investor greed rather than Balochistan and how politicians used stock market crashes to rob the small investors of their money.

Being on a full stomach from the oil-rich biryani coupled with tiredness, I dozed off rather quickly.

I felt heavy boots on my neck. Both my hands were forcefully pulled behind, twisted and tied, and my eyes blindfolded with a piece of cloth, all in no time, even before I could wake up properly.

I used to be a heavy sleeper but that changed after this incidence.

By the time I woke up, I had already received plenty of kicks and punches on every part of my body. "Do you have a gun on you," asked one of my captors. "No," I replied faintly. He shouted something to his colleagues from whom one joined him to drag me down the stairs.

The speed of the operation augmented by the terrible fear seizing me had

rendered me paralyzed. I could not apprehend the noises and screams around me nor could I understand the betrayal of my body.

It was on the stairs when my bare feet-falls felt the paan juice someone had spitted on the stairway. By now I had gained my senses. I felt my heart sinking in my stomach. That dull ache in my belly persisted for days.

The person handling me checked my side pockets and took everything away. I had a mini phone book, my identification card and some money on me. I could see his disappointment when he berated me for not carrying more money. I was not certain but this behaviour confirmed my immediate presumption that our captors were from the notoriously corrupt Karachi police.

From our study circles and stories told by my grandfather I had some knowledge of enforced disappearances of Baloch activists in the 1970s. At one moment, I thought of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), the dreaded premier intelligence agency of Pakistan, but I conveniently dismissed the thought, as the fear of the ISI was too great. But you can't choose your tormentors. Not in Pakistan.

As we were dragged out of the Block H of the Nouman Avenue Apartments, the characteristic knocking noise of the pickup diesel engines could now be heard among the human noises. I was blindfolded but I could hear others being dragged along, beaten and abused all the way. One of the captors guided me to a seat in the back of a pick-up truck where I felt that someone else was sitting beforehand. When my body touched his I felt that his hands were also tied on the back. I had an instinctive sense that he was one of my friends. I did not have the strength to ask him who he was nor did I think it necessary. I also realised that my head was in a sack which had strings loosely tied to my neck.

Approximately 20 minutes in our detour to the unknown, the vehicle stopped for a short interval. I heard the opening of gates as if we were passing through a military check post. Within another minute or two, the vehicles came to a complete halt. One of the captors took hold of my hand and walked me through what I judged a gate. Then he guided me through what seemed to be four downward stairs and then through some corridors.

We were in some kind of a basement.

I was made to sit on the ground. After a few minutes which I believe was when they had brought all the others, a person with an authoritative voice asked us our names. About five minutes later another person asked our names again.

Two guards grabbed me by my both arms and guided me through a corridor. I heard the opening of a lock and a metal door. My hands were still tied with a cloth on the back. They pushed me into the cell and locked it on my back. I heard one of them yelling at me to sit down.

After sitting for some time I assumed that no one was attending me. Having lost the strength to sit any longer I slowly laid myself on the ground, which had a stinky and moist smell. There was an odour of urine in the air as though we were near some toilet. I lied down motionless for hours on the stinky floor. At some point I stealthily rubbed my face against the ground to loosen the blindfolds. The cloth slipped a little and I could see that the colour of the bag on my head was black.

It is difficult to accurately judge time in a dungeon. I heard a very distant and feeble call for prayer, certainly coming from a nearby mosque. Although not being an adherent Muslim I recognized the morning azaan (prayer call) as it is different from other azaans.

I was awake but thoughts were not in my control, in an inexplicable state. A feeling of defeat and cynicism ran through my head like a dream.

I remembered my grandmother. I was twelve years old when she died from malaria. She passed away at the Panjgur Civil Hospital awaiting treatment. I was young but I knew that the lack of doctors was the reason for her loss. It was the trauma of her helpless demise that had convinced me to become a doctor. *And look, I thought, how I got myself into this mess. Instead of attending my medical classes I am here, tied and blindfolded.*

I was with these incoherent thoughts that I suddenly heard the door of my cell open once again. It broke the sequence of thoughts which in fact were

not in any sequence. One of the guards came in. My blindfolds were removed, hands untied from the back and were instead handcuffed on the front with a Made-in-USA-inscribed handcuff. This was the first time I was seeing the faces of my captors. The feet were chained with locally-made fetters and a large Chinese lock above my ankles. The weight of the lock caused me constant pain in the ankle.

I was asked if I wanted to drink tea and bread. I declined. I had forgotten what hunger was. They hooded my face with the black cloth bag and left, locking the cell behind.

After what it felt like hours, I heard the opening of the door once again. Two people grabbed me by my hands and guided me to another room through what I believe was a corridor. Just before entering the room they told me that I had stairs ahead to climb. My fourth step fell on flat ground and I felt being inside a room. Here they removed the black bag from my head, unlocked the handcuffs and made me sit on a seat.

In front of me was a table and on the other side of the table sat four people in civilian clothes. A guard stood behind me. Our mobile phones, books, magazines, telephone diaries, ID cards etc were scattered on the table. I was asked to identify my things. I did identify my ID card and the Nokia mobile phone.

I was pleasantly surprised that my telephone directory was not there. I supposed it had been kept along with the money by the soldier who searched my pockets at the time of my apprehension, and like the money he had not handed it over to his seniors. I was in a way relieved that the poor army soldier had taken my phone book as the "spoils of war", for I did not have to answer questions about my contacts. In another stroke of luck, someone had stepped on my mobile phone and broke it at the time of our arrest. They tried to switch it on in front of me thinking I might have broken it myself. In any case, the damaged mobile phone spared me extra questions.

One of them had thick eyebrows and an elongated nose dropping to cover the middle of his thick moustache. He was tall with a stretched-down face and seemed to be in his mid-fifties. Even in his silence he appeared to be

overshadowing others.

The one who was half bald and slightly fat introduced himself as Jameel and that he was a Pashtun from Quetta and had come especially for us. He had a fairer skin than the other three and asked me for tea and biscuit which I declined.

Noticing my dry mouth, he said, "You are thirsty. Drink this glass of water." I realized he was right. The kicks and punches had left me dehydrated. I took a few sips from the glass on the table.

The other three kept silence and let Jameel do the interrogation. While the thick moustached man observed me, the other two wrote something on the notebooks they were carrying.

"Do you know where you are?" Jameel asked.

"In Karachi police custody, sir," I replied as naively as I could.

Giving me a mocking look, he said, "Don't fool yourself. Your asshole would be filled with petrol by now if we were the police."

I could not say a word.

He continued. "Look, boy. We are the ISI. That is the difference between the police and the ISI. They fill your asshole with spices because they do not know anything about you and we stuff your shithole because we know everything about you."

Then, suddenly changing to a more stern tone, he asked why I had lied to them the other day when they asked me about my name.

I had not given them any pseudonym. Believing they had gotten it wrong, I told them my name again.

"And what is your father's name?"

"Murad." I replied.

He shouted at me to stand up. As soon as I stood up, I received a forceful beating at my buttocks. The guard standing behind had used his studded wide leather belt which they call *Chetter* in Urdu. The pain was excruciating. It was far superior than the beatstick of our schoolteachers.

“I am telling the truth, sir,” I cried out like an obedient student being punished for no reason.

He asked me my father’s name again. I was completely clueless. That was the name by which everybody knew my father.

Before I could answer, Mr Jameel said, “Your father’s name is Mohammed Murad.”

I remembered he was correct. It was me who had forgotten that my father’s official name is Mohammed Murad. But what difference did it make if you do not add *Mohammed*. For Jameel it made a difference and he explained why.

“Look, boy. You know what your problem is? You people take Islamic names and then feel embarrassed to use them. Do you consider yourself a Muslim when you do not know your father’s Islamic name but remember his un-Islamic name?”

He waited for my reply.

“Yes, sir. I am a Muslim,” that was all I could say.

As if he had anticipated my answer, he asked promptly, “If you are a Muslim recite *dua e qonoot*.”

I could only recall a word or two of *dua e qonoot* as I had never memorized it.

I was hit again with the *Chetter* on my upper back and bums. I wished I had memorized *dua e qonoot*.

“What is your position in the BSO?” He continued his interrogation.

"I am just a member," I lied unwittingly, hoping that I would escape some torture and questions by presenting myself as an ordinary member of the BSO.

Jameel ordered me back to my cell. In the cell, I was provided with a diaphanous white shirt and a similar pyjama. The shirt had a yellow luminous X stitched on the back. The pyjama hanged by a thin rubber band on my waist. My Made-in-USA handcuffs were replaced with Pakistani handcuffs and the hands were tied on the front. The black hood on my head was also taken away. The fetters remained with a constant heaviness on my legs.

The cell was around four feet wide and six feet long. The door was of black metal with bar openings about approximately at a height from which anyone standing outside the cell could easily look into. The light from a bulb hanging from the ceiling of the corridor illuminated my cell round the clock. Just inches above the foot of the door there was an additional horizontal opening, approximately four inches in width and one foot long. An oscillating fan with its ever humming noise was mounted on the wall just opposite the door opening.

There was no way one could tell what time it was. When they slipped flat bread and some *daal* in a plate from the lower hole of the door that I could tell its purpose and also the time. I still could not convince myself to eat. I knew by now that there were other prisoners in the nearby cells but I could not hear any of my friends' voice.

When the guards had apparently left the corridor and I heard some prisoners speaking among themselves I gathered some strength and yelled out in Balochi to check if any of my friends were there. Akhter and Ghulam Rasool replied back confirming that they were in the nearby cells. Before we could initiate a conversation, a guard gave me a hard truncheon blow on the face through the upper bar opening of the door. Either the guards walked with great caution or they wore shoes which muffled sound. Either way it was difficult to know beforehand that they were coming until they tapped on the metal door with their truncheon.

The other prisoners were hardened al Qaeda members. Due to their

devotion to Islam they enjoyed respect in the eyes of the guards and apparently had the privilege to exchange a few words among themselves during the day. I felt all prisoners should be treated equal; discrimination hurts, even if you are already in a cruel place like a dungeon.

The sudden realization that I had not urinated since I had been held gave rise to an urgent urge to urinate. When I timidly asked the guard, he pointed to an empty two-litre Pepsi bottle at the corner of the cell and said, "Urinate there".

The beatings from the guards did not look so frequent, just occasional slaps on the neck, or a sporadic pulling of hair, a light kick on the legs, or, on some occasions, a twisting of ear. The guards did those things to me more out of a habit than necessity. It was their way, as I believed, to relieve themselves of their daily pressure.

Somehow, in an unexplainable way, the victim acquires these habits from their tormentors. I know this because, after being released, I used to have this urge of occasional abusive outbursts, pulling someone's hair, or slapping them. Such is the complexity of the relation between the tormentor and the tormented.

I was in complete solitude; always in a dream like state. Facts, time and dates were all blurry with a distorted mood of helplessness and compliance. Most of the day passed in a trance like state, daydreaming.

I had learnt that to visit the toilet more frequently one should start praying. This allowed five or four visits to the toilet every day. You might get a glimpse of one of your friends peeping from the bar openings while walking through the corridor, though you are not allowed to turn and look.

By now I had confirmed that Akhter Nadeem, Ghulam Rasool and Naseem were in the same dungeon. I had not seen Imdad, Allah Nizar and Ali Nawaz Gohar. The cells were painted grey black. There were every type of graffiti on the walls. Previous victims had also carved out their names on the walls. After every three meals and the isha prayers I would carve a vertical line on the wall to keep track of the days.



Dr Yousuf Baloch, left.

At nights a guard would come once or twice and tapped the door with his truncheon. He was accompanied by an officer. We were obliged to wake up from the sleep, stand up facing the wall and raise our hands. If you took time to execute this task, the guards would open the door and start hitting you with the truncheon. I learnt this the hard way when one night I had thoughtlessly decided not to heed and kept sleeping.

It was also required that I do not look back and see the accompanying officer. The guards would always warn that a glimpse of the officer would block all our chances of getting out of there alive. I believe the job of the officer was to ensure no prisoner died of torture. He would occasionally ask questions about my health. There was complete silence otherwise.

For days I would not be spoken to. At times, despite the fear of torture, I longed to be interrogated. I longed to be spoken to by the guards despite knowing that the Punjabi language could not be spoken without verbal slurs. And these slurs were coarser in the dungeon.

Holding ones urge to defecate until the guards had the courtesy to take you to the toilet was gruelling. Going to the toilet was similarly punishing too. It was a squat toilet. The door was only two feet high so that the guards could pull the chain when required; one end of the chain was locked into the handcuffs and the other was in the guard's hands. The guards would count to forty five and pull the chain.

One had to defecate and wash himself while the guard was looking, all in 45 counts. Most of the guards were cooperative though. They would count slowly if there was no officer around. But, again, an occasional pull before washing was always expected. In normal life this would be maddening, but in a torture cell one is even robbed of his anger. One would look with

pleading eyes to the guard to count a bit slower.

One day, probably the evening of the fifth day of my detention, two guards entered my cell. They ordered me to stand and face the wall. My hands were handcuffed on the back and the black cloth bag was put on my head. The bag alone would freeze my entrails.

After being blindfolded, I was walked to the interrogation room, staggering all the while. Inside the interrogation room, a new voice sarcastically welcomed me. I could also hear Jameel say, "Sir, this guest is from my province. I hope you entertain him well".

In a coercing tone, the interrogator started his pre-torture lecture. There was always a lecture at the beginning and one at the end of the interrogation.

"Look boy," said he, "it has been days that you are rotting here. It does not bother us at all if you linger here for another few years. It all depends on you. If you cooperate and tell us the truth, you might suffer less and might not rot here."

Then he read out a list of things that I had done in the last previous years, mostly about BSO lectures, seminars and protests, including the one in which I had worn a black armband. These details were enough to convince me that they had been watching me and they knew details of my political activities.

He continued his condemning lecture. "Since you have already diminished your chances by lying to us about your role in the BSO, you are a good candidate to be eliminated. You should know we know everything. You know how we eliminated Hameed Baloch*? He was hanged and he became a hero but that was a mistake. Things have changed now. We will not hang you. We will let you rot here."

The talks were meant to inflict maximum degradation and submission before being flooded with questions ranging from politics to prostitution. I was made to step on a stool and stand on it. Being blindfolded, it was difficult to maintain my balance. There was a time frame to answer each

question. The answers were always required to be instantaneous. If the interrogator felt that you are taking too much time or you are thinking, you would be either pricked with a needle on any part of your body or hit with a single blow of *chetter* or a slap on the face. You could never guess what sort of hitting you will get on the next question. If you fell from the stool you would be laid on the floor, feet raised, and beaten until your feet tore with pain. After being hit ruthlessly at the soles, it would be more difficult to keep the balance on the stool with swollen feet.

The interrogation went on for hours, sometimes repeating the exact questions numerous times. Every time a question was repeated my previous answer would be presented to me in a twisted form to prove me a liar. If I tried to argue that I had not said such a thing I would be beaten with the *chetter*, or the truncheon until I accepted I had indeed said that.

This combined procedure of twisting my answers and torture rendered me so confused and terrified that at the end I did not know what I had actually said. At some point into the interrogation I felt that it did not matter what I said; I would always be proven, with reason, to have lied and then beaten. My calves felt like bursting out with blood after being swollen due to the hours-long stand.

At times I was told that my friends had already confessed to several acts of crime and they had also testified against me. Then they would ask me to speak about my friends' crimes. I could have reasoned why I was being asked to testify about their crimes if they had already confessed, but I knew better than this. I had learnt that reasoning would lead to further beatings. The best bet was to avoid reasoning and give them an impression that you were in complete compliance and submission. Submission and compliance gratified their latent "army superiority complex".

At the end of the day's interrogation, my handcuffed hands were tied to the fetters of my feet at the back and I was laid face down so that my shoulders and knees both were raised. Two people took turns to hit my feet soles with a stick, and my knees, legs and arms with the *chetter* until I lost consciousness.

During the interrogation sessions, the most frequent questions were:

From where does the BSO get its money?

What plans do you have for protests against the Pakistan military?

Why are you against the military?

What is the relation between the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and the BSO?

What is the relation between the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF) and the BLA?

Have you ever met Nawab Akbar Bugti or Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri?

How are the BSO members trained?

Do you extort money from businessmen, or others? Why do people donate to you?

Who are leading the BLA and the BLF?

Have you ever visited any foreign country?

Do you know anyone who has carried out bomb blasts or is a guerrilla?

What does the BSO want and how are you going to get it?

Who are the BSO leaders in Karachi? They also asked about certain BSO members from Karachi.

Why does the BLF use *Balochistan* in its name and not *Baloch* like the BLA? To this, I obviously did not have any answer.

I had regained consciousness by the time I was brought back to my cell. Every part of my body was in writhing pain. I had bruises all over my body and I had started passing blood-red urine. The bottle filled with this urine was a reminder of the torture. Whenever I tried to stand a searing pain ran from the soles to the backbone. Time and dates were once again blurred

as I had stopped praying and eating. I was drained, exhausted and in a vague state of mind until I fell asleep.

They had arrested some new Islamic militants and Akhter Nadeem was shifted to my cell because of shortage of space. I had not known Akhter Nadeem well before being arrested. I only knew that he was a former BSO member and a contractor in Gwadar. Yet, it was delightful to talk to someone after such a long period of complete silence and solitude.

My bruises were getting better.

(To be continued.)

*Hameed Baloch was a member of the BSO who was sentenced to death by a military court. He was executed in 1981.

This is the the second and final part of Dr Yousuf Murad's tale. The first part can be read here. The *tales from the dungeon* is a project initiated by Balochistan Times in which former victims of enforced disappearances recount their ordeals.

My bruises were getting better and I no longer passed red urine. Akhter remained in my cell probably for two days. There was finally someone I could talk to without the fear of being tortured for what I say.

It was common knowledge in Balochistan that Gwadar was being taken over by the Pakistani establishment for military and economic reasons. Gwadar was the pivotal and emotional core and the rallying point of our politics. We saw it as a means of further subjugation and exploitation. I lamented with Akhter over failing to fulfil my parent's dream of being a doctor and my dream of visiting Gwadar before my death.

Akhter consoled me. "Well, your death as a martyr might make them prouder than you being a doctor. And for the fact that you have not seen Gwadar I will depict Gwadar for you." Whatever time we had together we spent it by talking about every aspect and shade of Gwadar.

I did not have Akhter's company for long as they shifted me to another cell. I was all alone again, daydreaming about freedom and, at other

instants, contemplating about committing suicide. No object present in the cell could be used to commit suicide — not the plastic bottle nor the elastic rubber band in our pyjamas. I tried smashing my head against the wall but the guard would intervene within seconds. It only gave me head pain and additional thrashing by the guard with his truncheon. It was impractical, I knew. Yet, I kept trying it like so many other idiocies one can only try in a torture cell. Sometimes I would count all the visible spots on the walls and ceiling and then recount them to compare with the previous counting.

After some days, I was shifted to another cell which, fortunately, was near the toilet and the corridor had another cell's door facing my door directly. Inside was a suspected al Qaeda member. He taught me a technique: using recitation of the Quran to talk. He would recite the Quran in a loud voice and in between verses insert some Urdu words so that I may join all the Urdu words to form a coherent sentence. This technique would be our primary source of conversation throughout the detention. The guards had no objection to such recitations.

Also, the guards had grown laxer and some would occasionally talk to us when their superintendent was not around.

I requested for a copy of the Quran and was provided with a Bareilvi translation with pleasure. I learned from the guards that the American investigators, who visited this facility at times, prohibited any other translation of the Quran to be given to the prisoners. The guards were not pleased with this and considered it as a meddling in their religion.

The suspected al Qaeda member was released after a few days and Naseem was brought in his place. We both would recite the Quran and sometimes speak complete sentences in Balochi in a recital manner and the guards would not notice.

Most prisoners came from al Qaeda and other Islamic militant groups. They enjoyed especial moral authority over the guards and the officers. Unlike us, they were not always beaten into silence. Except for a Sindhi guard, all others favoured the Islamist prisoners over us.

The Islamic militants would receive a fruit once a day. They would also be taken into the sun thrice a week. They would shout back angrily at the guards when they were not given enough time in the toilet, always getting away without being beaten. They would also be allowed more frequent showers. Some of them were in good terms with the guards and at times were smuggled cigarettes at a hiding place in the toilet. Often, officers discovered the cigarettes during regular night searches. They would confiscate any more than three cigarette sticks.

The Sindhi guard would occasionally talk desultorily with us in absence of his superiors. He would passionately narrate the love story of Sassi and Punno and tell us how the Baloch and Sindhis were historically interrelated and both oppressed by the dominant Punjabis. He would complain that there was discrimination even in the army. He would allow me to talk to Naseem in the opposite cell for a few minutes.

The Sindhi guard once told me I and he both were prisoners. "I am also tortured when I beat you," he said. It was, I guess, his way of consoling me. Yet, the beatings did not hurt any less. On another occasion, he indicated to me in very subtle words that there were widespread protests going on for our release. This did help me receive the beatings with a braver face.

A Punjabi guard, who was in his late sixties and had a shaven moustache and white beard, suffered from constant head and neck pain. Upon discovering that we were medical students, he asked us about a cure for his pain. We advised him to get his eyesight tested which he did. After a few days, he showed us his new eyeglasses and claimed his headache had been healed. That led to his opening up to me, and he kind of half-heartedly regretted for his harsh dealings with us during the first few weeks. At first, I thought it might be a trick to extract information. But, in front of his superiors, he would hit me, trying to demonstrate to them that he was doing his job professionally. Once the officers were gone he would apologize again. "It's my job. I don't want to do that," he would say.

He had only a few months left to his retirement. He would often boast about his days in the army. He claimed he was a former SSG commando and that he, in his youth, could run eighty kilometres with a 20 kilo

backpack. He said he was always the first choice to guard important political prisoners. "Like you people."

He said he had guarded Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Nawaz Shareef, adding that Bhutto was very brave just like the many Baloch prisoners he had seen. "He would never cry for mercy." According to him, he was there during his last night at the jail when one particular army officer asked Bhutto to sign a paper which he refused. The officer kicked him to death. Then they had to hang Bhutto's body the next day.

He also claimed that when Nawaz Shareef was arrested he got a diarrhoea which could not be cured by any medicine. The diarrhoea was so severe that he could not eat anything except for *espahgol* (Ispaghula Husk). He asked his family members to bring bags full of money to be distributed among guards as *kherat* (offering) to God for his sins.

There was another fat Punjabi *sobedar* who seemed to be a sadist. He derived pleasure by pulling our hair every time he saw us. He knew every person from Mashkay, the hometown of Allah Nizar, Naseem and Akhtar Nadeem. He had served there for quite some time. We used to refer to him as "Mashkay wala" meaning someone from Mashkay.

One day, after lunch, my door clanged open and some guards came. I was blindfolded, hooded and walked into the interrogation chamber. This time the interrogating voices were different but the questions were all the same. The interrogation was similar in technique but a sense of desperation and frustration prevailed in their voices. I could say that their notion of covertly killing us was all in ruins ever since the protests had started. They did not want to create martyrs and heroes. All the while they were torturing me I could not figure what they wanted me to confess. It was as if they knew I was hiding something in my heart and mind but they did not know what precisely it was. "*Aur batao* (tell us more)," they would yell in frustration.

In between the questions, they ordered beating, often discrediting my answers by claiming that either I had said something else in the previous interrogations or my colleague had said something contradictory. I heard one of them yelling "*es ko jehaz bana dou* (make him into an aeroplane)".

My head was then bent against the wall towards the floor and told to stretch my hands like aeroplane wings. I felt blood rushing to my head with some light pain at the beginning, but gradually the pain started to flow through my leg and arm muscles as a guard kept pushing my buttocks until my back felt like splitting. The beatings on the buttocks continued in intervals. I screamed in pain. I was told it was the last day of my life and they will give me maximum pain before killing me.

By now, I was certain that even if I did not leave the dungeon alive I would die as a celebrated martyr of the Baloch cause. After days of disillusion, I had once again started to believe in the nobility of my convictions. The knowledge that people were protesting for us boosted my morale. I was ever more ready to die as death was the only escape to torture.

At one moment I heard myself screaming and begging to be killed, and right at that instance Jameel, who had been silent most of the time, intervened in a concerned voice. He told me that he can not only help me get rid of the pain but also save my life. And then without saying anything else he ordered the guards to stop the torture.

I was made to stand and handcuffed. Jameel told me they were aware of my preparations for the ISSB test (a test for the selection of applicants for officer commissions in Pakistan's armed forces) before getting admission in the Bolan Medical College. "Why didn't you take the test?" he asked me. I answered that in my view I could serve my nation better as a doctor. It goes without saying all my sentence began with *sir*. Often, they ended with it too. "Will you work for the army now, if you get a chance," he asked. "I cannot do it, sir," I responded without thinking.

It was one reckless moment when my tongue had inadvertently slipped causing an unintended insult to the Pakistan army. To them it looked I had always known they would offer me such a deal and I had, in my subconscious, decided to reject it. To me, confessing to the crimes I had not committed under torture was not a betrayal of my beliefs but agreeing to work with the same people who humiliated and dehumanized a whole nation to the lowest extent was a betrayal to my very honour and integrity. Nobody would trust you to act brave in a torture cell. But, unwittingly, you do, and you pay for it.

I thought I will get an instant beating. But Jameel first wanted to know why I was not willing to work for them. To repair the damage my tongue had caused, I tried to be as diplomatic and apologetic this time as I could. "Sir, I want to work as a doctor and serve the people of our country," I said.

"Look, boy. The way you answered without thinking shows you believe to be on the right path and consider us as exploiters. But I tell you that you are wrong. You never learn. So be ready, we are sending you to *Jahannam* (hell)." Then he yelled: "Kill him."

My hands were tied with my legs on the back and the soles of my feet were beaten with a stick. I, convinced they were beating me to death, continuously read aloud *the Shahada*. The guards took turn with the *chetter* and stick until I lost consciousness.

When I came back to senses I was in my cell. I was alive; my urine was once again red with blood. The pain in muscles was so intense and stinging that I had to lie down for days. When I was able to stand and see through the bars of the cell door, I saw Naseem in the opposite cell. The Sindhi guard was on duty and that meant we could talk for a few minutes. Naseem inquired me about the interrogation.

I had grown a beard by now and my lice-infested hair had not been combed for weeks and they were scattered all over my face. Naseem tried to console me by telling me my facial looks resembled that of Hameed Baloch. I remembered, with mixed feelings, the interrogator's words that it had been a mistake to publicly hang Hameed and make him a martyr. At that time the Baloch had not many martyrs. Hameed's face was an image of reverential envy for me and for most of the Baloch youth. I asked the "Mashkay wala" guard to shave my hair as we had a lice problem. The head shave saved me from lice, frequent pullings of hair and thoughts of Hameed.

In a few days, the pain subsided. My cell was again changed and I was put with Naseem. It was a delight to be with someone again. We both lay on the floor and talked for most of the day. We did not have the energy to get up. When the pain and soreness got unbearable we would press each other's legs and arms to help with the pain. We both were awaiting death

but amidst all the fear of death and pain we often talked of life. We visualized a free Balochistan where no one would have to suffer what we were suffering. This hope which rises in the darkness of dungeons and resonates in society is the revenge that one can return to his torturers.

An al Qaeda member of Kashmiri origin had been brought in my previous cell. He told us that he was the son of a former diplomat and had lived in many European countries. His name was Adeel and his code name was Shakir. He had been captured three years ago for facilitating the bombing of French engineers in Karachi. According to him, he was taken to a US-operated safe house in Karachi and interrogated by the FBI. All his co-accused except one named Sabir had been shifted to either Bagram in Afghanistan or Guantanamo. The US had asked for his extradition to Guantanamo but refused as his family had close contacts with General Pervaiz Musharraf and the ISI. He was treated like a family member, allowed to go in the sun every day. A daily phone call was facilitated to his family. Despite all his powerful connections he had to languish in the dungeon for years.

He told us he had seen the outside of the dungeon as he was not blindfolded when taken outside. As per his saying, it was located just behind the CMH hospital Malir, Karachi. He boasted that certain ISI bosses were involved in his case and that he would be released as soon as American interest in him dwindled.

Things were settling down. We would be occasionally brought to the interrogation room and be interrogated with supplementary questions to the already asked questions. The beatings were now reserved only when we gave pat answers or seemed to be not cooperating. In the course of interrogation, they would boast how the army had built roads in Balochistan and how a Baloch General Abdul Qadir had been promoted by Musharraf on various occasions. They would also claim to be wanting to change our destiny for the better. The interrogations now seemed to be more of brainwashing sessions and I had to mostly keep on saying *yes sir*. There was a feeling in the air that the interrogations were winding up.

Ali Nawaz Gohar was brought in the cell next to us while Ghulam Rasool was in the other cell next to him. We would mostly talk in the Quranic

recital manner. One night Ghulam Rasool had a severe stomach pain. He was vomiting and groaning with pain. A doctor was brought and it was revealed that he had gastric ulcer. His breakfast was changed to milk and sliced bread instead of tea and *paratha*.

One day, after breakfast, we were given our own clothes to wear. We were blindfolded, hands tied on the back and walked out of the dungeon. It was after forty five days that we were feeling the sun, just for a few seconds before we were thrown into the back of a pickup truck, one on another. In the Quranic recital manner, someone asked who else was in the pickup. Each of us made a noise to inform the others of their presence. Akhter Nadeem, Naseem, Gulam Rasool and I were in the same vehicle, while Ali Nawaz, Allah Nizar and Imdad were not with us.

We were driven to an airfield about three minutes from the dungeon. A man, who introduced himself as a Sindhi captain in the army, spoke to us before putting us on the waiting plane to Quetta which he referred to as "your city". He was supposedly not being allowed to talk to us about what is going on, but defying the rules, he was doing us a favour.

He explained in mixed Urdu and Sindhi that the ISI had a marking system, marking suspects as white, grey or black. Those marked as white are eventually released, while those marked as black are detained indefinitely. Those marked as grey, like us, had not committed any crime or terror activity but since their politics was damaging to Pakistan they must get a clean chit from a Joint Investigation Team for being released.

He further warned us that any divergence from our previous statements to the ISI would not only lead to indefinite detention and severe torture but the ISI would get involved again. We understood that he was implying any additional confession from our side with the JIT would prove ISI incompetent. They saw their reputation being at stake in case other intelligence agencies extracted any information from us that we did not give to the ISI. They had brought the Sindhi man to convey us this message considering our sympathetic relation with Sindhis.

We were made to sit and wait in the vehicle, with the FM radio broadcasting melodious Urdu songs. The songs stopped unexpectedly and

a coarse voice announced that it was 10 o'clock and the date is May 8, 2005. The voice reminded the listeners that it was Mother's Day. My thoughts diverted from my situation to my mother. I recalled her pale white old face. I wondered would she ever be able to see me alive, or, in some other thoughts, would she be able to receive my body. I felt I had failed to fulfil my responsibilities as a son, and when the world was honouring mothers, I was a source of grief and misery to mine.

My thoughts were interrupted when I heard a voice coming from the wireless set of one of our guards. We were then walked to the plane. We were not blindfolded but a black hood was put on our head which was removed once the plane was in the air. Our hands were handcuffed with the seats. The plane had only a few seats and the rest of the area was empty. Unlike the commercial planes that I had travelled, its ceiling was higher. From the conversations of the guards, I figured it was a Pakistani Air Force C130. The people accompanying us were also in air force uniforms.

We were flown to the Samungali air base in Quetta. Before leading us out of the plane, the hoods were placed again on our head. I had managed to bite multiple miniature holes on the black hood while we were waiting for the plane; at times when the holes were at level with my eyes, I could see outside.

There was a strange feeling being back to our own city. I was put in the back seat of a Hilux double door pick-up and two men sat on both my sides. From the tiny holes, I could see that the Hilux was being driven through the Samungali road. It took a turn near the Serena Hotel Quetta. Just before entering the new dungeon, I saw the Quetta Garrison Golf Club. I knew this area quite well as I had visited the FG school multiple times to get my younger brother admitted.

It is said that the notorious Kulli camp is located about ten minutes' drive from the golf club, and it was after about the same time from the golf club that our vehicle stopped. Kulli camp was built during the British era and has served as a place of torture since then.

In the new dungeon, there was no light directly in front of our cells, which

were old and cold. One army wool blanket was provided to me which was not warm enough at nights. Our hands were chained to a big nail in the ground and eyes blindfolded. They would remove the handcuffs and blindfolds only during the meals. We were ordered to face the wall while eating.

We were now in the custody of Military Intelligence.

After three days, I was taken to an interrogation room. The questions were the same. I tried to stick with my previous answers knowing that any deviation could lead to death. They used the previous interrogation tricks. One particular question of concern to them was why the BLF and BLA lacked a written constitution. I too wondered why. I knew the BSO had a written constitution which I mentioned to them.

In Quetta, I was subjected to only one intensive interrogation session at the end of which I was told that they would throw me into some dark cell to die my own death.

Unlike Karachi, the guards here always wore military uniform. One guard with a gun guarded our cell at nights like a statue.

I and Naseem were in the same cell. The food was mostly flat bread with *daal*, and a cup of tea in the morning.

About a week after my last interrogation I and Naseem were bundled into a Toyota Hilux pick-up. We were driven and then walked into a building where we could hear many different voices. Voices of children playing, women and men talking. The handcuffs were put on one of my hands and a long chain was attached to it. The other end of the chain was held by a guard who used it to walk me along.

It was the CMH hospital Quetta and we were seated in a waiting room filled with people. Everyone behaved as if the scene of two young men in handcuffs being dragged around was something usual and normal. They were probably family members of army officers and had come for a doctor's visit. I yearned to see a Baloch who could deliver a message to my family that we were alive.

The guard took me to a toilet to collect my urine as the doctor needed it for some tests. The toilet had a mirror; it was the first time since being arrested that I was seeing my face. My skin had grown pale white, cheekbones protruding from the thick beard that I had grown on my skeleton-like face. My eyes seemed to be bewildered at my own sight. The doctor carefully observed me for any sign of torture and bruises. All the bruises had healed except the black spots on my ankle bones caused by the fetters.

The next morning we were hooded once again and taken by an airplane to an airbase which I later confirmed was in Multan, as I saw a signboard through a tiny hole in my hood. We were put in a cell and given lunch. Knowing that we were again in the hands of the ISI, fear and uncertainty gripped me. I could not eat the *daal* and *roti*.

Soon I was put in the back seat of a pickup and driven for hours. The roads were under construction at some places and the vehicles had to travel slowly. At about late afternoon the pickup stopped. I was dragged from the back seat and was thrown like a bag on the back of another pickup truck. I fell on two other people. Before I could balance myself and sit properly someone else was flung over me. From the voices, I figured that Imdad, Naseem and Ghulam Rasool were with me in the same truck.

Someone removed our handcuffs but not the hoods. They had lost the key to Naseem's handcuffs. Our new captors, the police, were in a panic, shouting and abusing each other in Seraiki, cursing the handcuffs for causing them this trouble. They argued among themselves against leaving the handcuffs on as it would confirm that we had been previously arrested.

Among us Imdad could understand Seraiki better than the others. I asked him what the problem was and about what the captors were talking. He, in a confident oratorical tone, said, "Comrades, they are going to do what they threatened us in the torture cells. We might have been weak under torture but this is our last moment. They are going to kill us in a fake encounter and since they have lost the keys, they do not want to leave the handcuffs as proof. We have time until they find the key. Let us be brave and for God's sake do not shout and cry. Do not run if they ask you to. We will show them how a Baloch embraces death."

A policeman removed the hoods. It was the first time that we were without the fetters, handcuffs and the hood, except for Naseem. ISI personnel waited in a brand new Toyota Hilux with tinted windows to receive their handcuffs. We tried to be calm and talk to each other and it surprised us to see that the policemen did not get violent. They just asked not to talk, but we kept talking. We were under the impression that the ISI had handed us to the police to be killed in a fake encounter. There were not too many guards around and it was near the Dera Ghazi Khan airport. We were then driven to the Sakhi Sarwar police station.

As we reached the police station, I noticed a Prado jeep with a VIP number plate 5555 following us to the station. The jeep's windows were tinted dark. We were all put in the lock-up. Another prisoner named Ashraf was already there. The local landlord had asked the Station House Officer (SHO) to lock him up for a day, but the old SHO had been transferred and the new SHO joined his new post on the day we were handed over to them. In all this hustle and bustle, Ashraf had been forgotten.

Dera Ghazi Khan, though in Punjab, is a Baloch district, but most of its population could not speak Balochi except the Buzdar and Mazari tribes. The SHO was also an ethnic Baloch and could not speak Balochi. He bought us good food and soft drinks which surprised Ashraf. The SHO told us that he was especially transferred to the Sakhi Sarwar police station for our case as he was a trusted man of our previous captors.

Later that evening, when they succeeded to unlock Naseem's handcuffs, we were taken to the police headquarters where we were photographed. We were driven back to the Sakhi Sarwar police station.

At night, a journalist from the BBC visited us. He was aware of our case. We confirmed to him that we were the same people who had been forcibly disappeared by the ISI from Karachi.

The next day, in the evening, we were presented before a judge at his house. We did not know what the Judge and the SHO discussed but I believe everything was part of a script given to them by the ISI.

We were shifted to another police station as journalists had come to know

about our whereabouts.

As expected, we were once again presented to a judge one morning where we learned that we were suspects in a robbery case.

We were officially ordered to be released. Our family members had come to receive us, but the ISI was reluctant to hand us to them. ISI personnel drove us to Rakhni where they photographed us with our family members. After giving us a final warning, which was not substantially different from the previous ones, we were put in a local van. The van driver was told not to stop until we reached Loralai. We had already arranged with our family members that they will hire another van and follow us. About a few kilometres we asked our van driver to stop and drop us on the road. Within minutes our family members arrived as they had been speeding up to catch us. When we reached Loralai, I was given slippers to wear.

Our families had filed a Habeas Corpus petition at the Sindh High Court through lawyer Hafeez Lakho, implicating ISI in our abduction. We went to Karachi, this time to seek justice. We presented ourselves to the court as witnesses and gave detailed account of our enforced disappearance. One of the judges asked what we wanted now that we were out. We requested that our captors be brought to justice. Not pleased, he shook his head in disapproval. "But why do you want to create further problems for both of us?" he asked.

My problems never ended though. Once tortured is forever tortured. The torture and solitary confinement have an everlasting effect on both the human body and mind. It is intergenerational; it can be witnessed in the quietness of my children. They know from experience that any loud voice can trigger irrational behaviour in their father.

Courtesy: Balochistan Times