

**ECHO SATURN—THE COURTS
TRANSCRIPT, 29M23S, 13 MARCH 2016**

ZAMAN Well eventually yes, but I didn't think I'd have to on the first day. He was very connected, which is what you're really paying for. So after banter with colleagues he takes me down some winding alleyways, we're still within the courts area remember, but it was like a bazaar, although no, I don't think legally stores were allowed there, no. No maybe there was.

ADNAN I mean there are stores there now. With one photocopier out the front ... at least when I was there.

ZAMAN I was very political back then and I wanted to get out of here. Politically it was suffocating and that affects everything. Or at least it did for most of us ... We called ourselves 'The Agitators'. Those I grew up with, fought and argued with, everyone had left or was trying to get out but you couldn't find easy ways. Not in the 80s. The west was turning rightward. As you know, I'd been fired some years before. There was nowhere to go here, except to some kind of regressive agricultural aristocracy back in the village. I couldn't do that with all those fucking villagers and mullahs everywhere.

So I was really trying to make this one opportunity happen. A postdoc. It was funded. More things were then, of course. And, yeah, I wanted to grab my chance. To do that I needed money, which I didn't have nor did my family by that point but my mother told me that I could sell this small plot of land we had swapped in Rajshahi. Well a little outside of it. And so I jumped at that and promised Mita ...

ADNAN But you couldn't leave right? You needed the money, how long had you been there then?

ZAMAN Well, we never talked about it.

ADNAN The effect it has had? Now that

ZAMAN Well it felt like months. But I don't know ... it was a week perhaps. I tried to get in touch with the lawyer but he was nowhere to be found. I called my uncle. What I learned subsequently was that they had found it. The lawyer went to my uncle. Not me! And I was just walking and sulking through the streets of Rajshahi waiting you know. Endless tea and walking the river side. That protean changing. I'd go back to the courts and spend the days there. But actually I remember now, it was the Varendra Research Museum.

ADNAN Yes, how?

ZAMAN Yes, exactly. Holes in the ceiling as light and god knows what rained down on these papers and sheafs and folders going back centuries and rotting on the metal shelving. Records of ownership and transference, of negotiations and family disasters. You know, discord and small dynasties. And a group of men smoking and drinking cha and as sedimented as the papers around them ...

ADNAN So you found the deeds I take it?

ZAMAN Well no, because there was a big political base for the left out there, and the problems with all the Universities and colleges and even the high schools, so there was a big presence from the army and the administration. At that point nearly insuperable.

ADNAN So maybe we can start with why you went to Rajshahi that winter

ZAMAN I went to the courts and it was totally carnivalesque, you know, like Rabelesian. Packed restaurants and village streets with typists and corner stores and para-legals. Hah, para-legals! Some set up on these beautiful jute mats beneath the big trees by the ponds ... it was ancient times. Writing things out carefully with blue, leaky biros. And the lawyers, in fluted English Barristers' gowns. Milling about in flocks, some tattered, some stately,

others cast this sense of power and there were deals being done everywhere, in all directions. People giving shrewd advice next to someone giving awful advice all jostling together underneath these slow turning ceiling fans. Mesmerising!

ADNAN I see, and by this point you had a lawyer?

ZAMAN Yes, I think ... actually all dictatorships, due to their tight tolerances engender these deep aesthetic worlds and there was a certain ... lyricism to that dictatorship. Zia was the last first dictator. The zeitgeist was a certain odd orderliness

ADNAN What, but how could that be? ... Your father was a strict muslim, with political roles in the muslim ...

ZAMAN The name was of Hindu extraction. It was a Hindu name, 'Bandyopadhyay'

ADNAN Wow. And what did you do there?

ZAMAN Well, initially he said that it'd take a couple of days and that I wouldn't have to pay him anything. You know, in that way that Bengali's do, with utmost sincerity, whilst you both know that the favour is concrete, repayable, and will be called upon. But I didn't care, I wanted to get the deed, sell the land, and leave post haste.

ADNAN So they found the deed, but ...

ZAMAN No, not at first, I mean, I had to, you know, embarrassed, I had to go see him again, and he gave me a name for a lawyer. Because at first, I mean I was hopeless with this kind of thing. I still am.

ADNAN And how was the conversation with your mother?

ZAMAN Yes. I know. I'd grown up with that. And it was a Brahmin name. My father's hatred of ... no, well it wasn't hatred at all really, my father was too refined, it was just a recognition of difference and that recognition was motivated by the same fears as in the lower classes of the country. But, all of this, it was a shock ...

ADNAN What do you mean?

ZAMAN Well maybe. Maybe ... (goes silent)

ADNAN Yes very.

ZAMAN They used my mother's maiden name and that name, that name was something else

ADNAN In Rajshahi. So that was it, you're uncle just didn't help from that point on ...

ZAMAN No but it was kind of a deep disjunct for me. Confronting the Real, the Lacanian Real I guess. Everything that propped up my identity, including yes, my cosmopolitan desires for myself and for

the country too and the politics, it was all just a mess.

ADNAN Dr. Mazarul Alam? You worked for him earlier on right?

ZAMAN Well, my uncle put me in touch with someone. I presume he wanted to keep tenuous control over the situation and perhaps my mother called and berated him. She was the oldest in their family. And so after three days of wandering the courts I finally had a meeting with the lawyer, he had an office external to the Courts but he met me in one of those teeming, tabled halls where all the lawyers sit and gossip and petitioners are wandering about and waiting and all that. I imagine he assumed it'd a straightforward thing and that perhaps with the right amount of money we could just resolve it soon enough. He wasn't going to string me along because of my uncle, or I think that's what he initially thought ...

ADNAN It hasn't changed, not even a coat of paint! Papers everywhere, lights buzzing you know

ZAMAN Yes, I've always loved it. It, I mean it's rundown as all hell. But that's it's charm I guess. Anyway, actually, I was lucky to get a room that night, there was some examination on at the university and they

put me in this awful room on the second floor.

ADNAN Wow. I mean, I'm just trying to think through the implications ...

ZAMAN Well maybe, but that's what we do. ... When I went to Rajshahi I tried to stay with my uncle. I did for a couple of days but it was terrible. He kept on telling me not to sell, why was I selling, did I know what that meant. And it was remarkable, because he was very angry. And generally he's not an angry person. I tried to tell him about the situation back in Dhaka. How bad it was for me and that Mita was relying on me, that I'd given her my word but he wouldn't hear any of it. And then the third night ... I mean he was shouting at me in front of his family and he said something that felt really strange: that I shouldn't uncover is, or what should stay hidden. In Bangla it was inconclusive. Anyway. I had no idea what he meant and I started to feel that perhaps he had a financial interest that he wasn't disclosing. Anyway, I couldn't stay there after that. I had to leave ...

ADNAN So it seemed ... yeah so you were kind of desperate when you went there?

ZAMAN No. No we didn't. The clerks looked, just using a small flashlight, the overhead lights had stopped working. But we

couldn't find it. It's not where it should've been. And I think then, the lawyer's demeanour changed, he knew that this was going to be a problem. So we left, and he said he'd get back to me. I didn't ask him when ...

ADNAN In Bangladesh? After you left?

ZAMAN It was even smaller then but the works were still miraculous. Inscriptions, sculptures, objects that shouldn't have existed, should have been buried underneath the shifting wet mud, but ... it was magnificent and I spent a lot of time there. Befriended the guards. Oh I'd forgotten about all that! But ... yes so finally I got to meet the lawyer in person and he explained to me the problem. And, well I couldn't believe it

ADNAN Swapped during partition?

ZAMAN Yes, it was very bittersweet, to use a cliché. It was conflictual, the affective implications if you like. I understood instantly that this must be the enigma that the family had tried to keep hidden. Perhaps it was my father most of all ... and that my mother, she wanted me to know but as was her way, she couldn't tell me, she wanted me to discover it and I wanted to speak to her urgently. But we didn't have a telephone then in our house in Dhaka.

And I didn't want to write. I just, I just went away, in a stupor.

ADNAN Ah! And how did that feel?

ZAMAN Oh, 30 or 31 I think. So I was late. Very late for back then. Anyway, that first day the chief registrar or archivist, he wasn't in and they sent us with a deputy something or other and we walked into the warrens of these archives and I still remember the rows of shelving and the aged grayness of everything in there, sepulchral shelves and he looked and looked but couldn't find it. There was paper strewn all over the place, at the end of a dark row these rats scampered ahead of us. I'm sure I wasn't impressed, I'd spent enough time in enough old archives, but now ...

ADNAN Yes, really amazing

ZAMAN Really it's hard for me to tell now. Some weeks, maybe a month. No it couldn't have been a month. It was still Jyôishthô. But I went back to the hotel and just slept. For days I remember. I couldn't raise myself. My uncle came to the hotel to try to cajole me to his house but I used all my energy to resist. There was something in his eyes in how he looked at me. I couldn't believe it. I don't think I saw him again after that. ... No, he died only a

couple years later and I was already in Europe so ...

ADNAN What?!

ZAMAN No, what I found out later wasn't ... I don't know whether there was something like that but it was only later that I found out what he meant by his rambling. But, he was an imposing man. A family of land holder going back some time both there and Behrampur. Before we all immigrated over the border ...

ADNAN They weren't smoking.

ZAMAN Yes they found the deed but the name on the deed, my mother's name, it wasn't my mother's name

ADNAN What did you do first?

ZAMAN Yes, I didn't know much about it. I was eleven when we moved to Dhaka. Anyway I was courting Mita. Incessantly and annoyingly. It wasn't working: It made her far less sure of being with me. She's always been very wise in instituting double movements, counterpoints. Moving towards and away at the same time. I was hanging on by a thread. And her father was sick

ADNAN And so how long did it take?

ZAMAN Well, I needed the money. Needed it badly. Mita encouraged me to stay, told me I was

over-reacting and she was probably right as always. But I was debilitated ... The lawyer set a date for a perfunctory hearing. And I signed the papers to do that. Yes in the end I couldn't, I just couldn't stay there, or go through this process of the mutation, then selling the land, which was so, so foundational now, I realise, a marker for something really larger than I was. And so one night. I remember, one night, I had some pain killers to stop the headaches and I just haphazardly gathered my things and left. That night there was a train back to Dhaka from Rajshahi Central station. There were three stations then. Anyway I spoke to the lawyer through the telephone later, from Dhaka. and he said that the court date had been voided, that one had to appear personally to mutate the deed. I knew that of course. And I said that I'd come back again and he asked me when? ... I said I didn't know.

ADNAN And how did the meeting go? The first meeting I mean?

ZAMAN Drank cups of tea in the hindu stalls mostly. They made the best cha, in those breakable cups, you don't see that any more. I'd watch the typists typing at prodigious speed on these ancient typewriters that seemed like it was one cast iron piece you know? And this feeling

of a clerical world, it was confusing yet also deeply attractive. I got stuck there after all, so ...

ADNAN Ah, yea so, well ... Is that important? I'm not sure if I can tell you clearly, right now ... and maybe it takes us off track?

ZAMAN I was both heartbroken that I didn't know and just rendered mute. I remember being unable to speak. I asked what would be next, and he said that it was not so complicated, that we'd have to petition the court, as this was during the partition period and fell outside the normal junctures of cases with parameters such as these. It was an exception but that it wouldn't be too complicated but it would be a further wait

ADNAN So then what did you do?

ZAMAN Yes, I think it was understood, by both of us what had happened and what it meant. The kind of sacrifice she had made and continued to. I hadn't realised but there was this other side of her family ... And then you know I did the humiliating thing, although it wasn't humiliating at the time because that man was so kind, Mita's father, may he rest in peace. He married us off. In his quiet, indirect way he just made us marry and then he gave me the money to leave and I did. I left first as you know and then Mita and our baby son

followed us. And, I think everything was deeply unresolved and ever since that strange journey to Rajshahi, everything came loose in my life and it all remains unresolved. I've hidden it all but all of me, just ... it's all echos ...

ADNAN And so you felt ...

ZAMAN Yes but I mean, I look back now and I think I engineered a certain urgency and it was to my detriment. I was bored and anxious, and I was scared and I shan't have been. Some part of me regrets that I missed out on so much back here ... on so much of what happened

ADNAN I guess it's hard to split the two apart

ZAMAN Yes, okay, and all of the accoutrements of a court, we passed them. You know people with beautiful handwriting, scribes I guess, rewriting documents. There were photocopiers then but not many. And we ducked under a row of palm trees onto open space and then walked to one of those old dilapidated court buildings. The archives ...

ADNAN And wait, so your mother was happy for you to sell the plot? And she didn't hint at anything about what it was ... ?

ZAMAN No. She didn't tell me anything. She was happy for me to do it. The land was unused, a holdover. It wasn't so much

land. Just enough for the tickets and to make up the difference for my fellowship, well they called it a scholarship then, even for postgraduate positions. And she wanted me to leave. After all the turmoil I was involved with, with the left, the 'socialists,' she, she hated all of that and wanted me to get away from it. And she wanted me married of course!

ADNAN So what was it?

ZAMAN Yes working on Goff's ideas around the face etc. but also Quenue and Levi-Strauss. Well, everything around masks and faces in the colonial administrative. Spivak hadn't written anything then we knew anything about, Fanon and Said of course ...

ADNAN Strange! But I guess it's one of the last time you were in Bangladesh in the 80s right?

ZAMAN It was actually one of the more repressed places. So, people always look for a coded way to express themselves in that environment. But I think juridicial processes are deeply performative in any case right? I had done my thesis on colonial administrative relationships so I was primed, and so, receptive to it.

ADNAN Because of the money?

ZAMAN That would be an understatement. It was like some kind of dream state

ADNAN I get it! Wow, and did you find out later? I mean, whether he had a financial interest in the land?

ZAMAN to regret perhaps I'd need to believe that I had a choice ...

ADNAN A nightmare ...

ZAMAN Yes maybe not, maybe I made that up. Because yes, there are these hidden rules and hierarchies, observed in near religious totality. No ... no smoking then. But chai and biscuits and small little cups. We asked about the lot, I had the reference copies that my mother had given me.

ADNAN But ... it became a bit of an ordeal

ZAMAN Yes, in real life, whilst I was away. Diasporic fantasies are always regressive you know? Stifled and retrograde. What actually is happening at the place left behind, that's a very different thing. I realised that once I'd gotten back. But I'm romanticising ... many friends built great careers, lives, perhaps I didn't commit enough. But yes, we're talking about Rajshahi not after ...

ADNAN Hotel Rajmahal? I've stayed there, it has a very strange feeling ...

ZAMAN Well ... It's hard even now for me to recall it all clearly. And I find that I can only tell the story linearly, otherwise it just seems untrue, even now. What, nearly forty years later? In any case, I left his house angry and hurt that he was betraying me, it felt like to me that he was betraying me you see, and I went to stay at the hotel.

ADNAN But was that really the case out in Rajshahi though? That was outside the purview of central control right?

ZAMAN Yes, but there seemed to be a kind of mystery to solve, I don't know, like something being kept from me but, initially he, the lawyer, <<<Mr. K. D. F Akramullah>>>, I still remember his name ... not particularly old. Had this giant eel-like head but with long frizzy hair, quite a sight! He sat in a window spot in the big hall upstairs near the balconies with tree fronds falling through the window. Rows and rows of lawyers on rows and rows of old desks. Each with a wooden hand painted name plate on their desk.

ADNAN But ... was it negative? Because surely you didn't have the same prejudices

ZAMAN No, it didn't have the aggression of a nightmare, the urgency. I remember that period being defined by a viscous lethargy. Limbs and words moving slowly

through space. But paradoxically there was also great merriment there. Like a theatre, a big play with great big players. I was just an extra. Chosen out of the crowd to play a small bit, relay my tragedy and leave. But I wasn't going to do that so easily.

ZAMAN Well no, what makes you say that?

ADNAN Wait, so when you've told me something about this before, what really got me was you said ... something about 'shame'. That you were ashamed?

ZAMAN I haven't been unduly unhappy. I've been fascinated all the while. Seeing the way life courses along. ... The one regret is my son. I wish I'd spent more time with him. I can't get back or replace all the time I lost. I used to tell myself that I could. That my work ... that it was the alternative, something holding time back. But it doesn't. ... I chose my work over my son. ... regret isn't the right word

ADNAN So you left it with him?

ZAMAN No ... not me ... I wasn't and have never been ashamed. I did the right thing. It was him. He said that there was only shame to be uncovered there. And not in some kind of Hiedeggerian sense. Although now that I think of it ... it was perhaps Hiedeggerian in its trauma and shock. ... So, I knew then that I had to do this myself and I was

really desperate at that point, because you know, you don't want to wander into an administrative system in Bangladesh without guidance or some 'pull' and without my uncle to help me, as I'd expected he would, I knew it was going to be a lot tougher. The fact that it became Kafkaesque ... a kind of foreclosed, formative moment, I couldn't have known ...

ADNAN It's just that, you say you had had it and wanted to get out so ...

ZAMAN No ... it's likely that you think that I've had a sad life. Right? With tragedies in three continents, huh?

ADNAN So, you contacted a lawyer on your own?

ZAMAN The operative concept was try, because I had no clue. I was shaken by how my uncle had acted and what he said but I didn't really have the luxury of time. I was already late contacting the university and that postgrad position ... that was going to expire if I couldn't give them which semester I could begin? I'd already missed a couple and I could see that the advisor, a Professor Michel Buitan—he really helped me later actually, really, I worshipped him—he said, 'look, are you coming? Because we have to fill this place this year and ...' it was a very very stressful time. For everyone, not just me. The politics of Dhaka, of the country, the

military, it was untenable, the situation was untenable for me. So I just went out there, to the law courts, not really knowing what I was doing.

ADNAN No that isn't what I was thinking

ZAMAN Yes. Well, I won't remember everything because it was ... it ended up being very emotional. ... But I'm curious as to why you're so interested in that trip?

ADNAN Oh? Why not?

ZAMAN Yes, I guess it might. Are you familiar with Braudel's idea of the long duration? I've been thinking on it recently. It's utterly narcissistic but my life hasn't felt like a life, a life in real time I mean. It's been one of the *longue durée*. Yet ... I look back and things have happened: events of a certain boundary and so size and of shape. But it never felt felt like that. Of course, I guess it doesn't for others too. Each thing has only ever been some other thing. But yes, sorry, why I went? Well, Bakhtin said: 'the seeing eye saturates the landscape with time.' Gorgeous, isn't it?

ADNAN And how old were you then?