

of his house and enjoyed the sunshine.

My friend Akkel Ali had cancelled three engagements on the basis of the lines on his palm. When finally all the lines, all the stars and all the triangles appeared in the correct order, he got married. But by then he was well past forty.

If I argued with him about the validity of palmistry he would tell me that it was a 3000 year old art, and an accurate scientific tool. He would go on saying how planets influenced human lives and how nerves in the hands and feet caused a brain-hand connection and because of this connection, lines of energy formed in the hands. That there was a detailed "Map of life" in the hands according to which everything happened in life, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.

Akkel Ali travelled far and wide to meet palmists of repute and in the process spent a fortune. After seeing a programme on Zee TV a couple of years back he went to Bombay to meet Bejan Daruwalla, the big name in palmistry in India. He followed Daruwalla's instructions more religiously than he followed his own religion. From India he had gone to Sri Lanka to buy "genuine" stones to wear on his fingers. When I met him on his return I was shocked to see ten rings on all ten fingers. "What are those for?" I asked Akkel. "Dost, each stone has a unique and mysterious property of its own. One is for good health, one to keep my head cool, one for prosperity in business, one to keep my enemies at bay, one to keep my wife submissive...and so on. "If all those stones do everything for you, then what do you do?" I asked my friend sheepishly. I expected an outburst. It came instantly. "Are you being sarcastic? Don't you believe in the power of these stones? It's scientific! Do you mean to say all those people who wear them on their fingers know less than you? How much do you know? You should go and study books on palmistry and stones before passing any comment." He stormed out of my house.

Ten years later I saw an unshaved Akkel Ali, in tattered trousers and shirt, sitting in front of a roadside palmist in some part of old Dhaka. I came to learn from him that he had turned into a pauper as he had failed in business. His wife had left him for his madness. He survived by selling off his expensive stones and thousands of books on palmistry. He needed financial help. I took him to my house. ■

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