

Understanding the Deep Stirrings and Wellspring within Her

On Byron's Birthday

(Anniversary 22 January)

by Arifa Ghani Bonhi

Spirited one, thy name is immortal:
To thy memory do I dedicate
A humble poem unworthy of all
That thou didst write and that thou didst create.
Fame came to thee as thou didst deserve it,
And thy works shall live as long as the sun —
All that thou built up to greatness from bit:
"Child Harold's Pilgrimage," "Beppo," "Don Juan."
True love, true feelings, thou wert not given;
Shunned and in exile didst thou spend thy life;
Yet the flame in thy heart didst enliven
The false-faced drawing room of thy "dear" wife!
Thou wast a man, the bravest of the brave,
And the best poet English language could crave.

"I went to Indira Gandhi on 13 and 15 October. I arrived with a tape recorder; now she was not talking to me alone, but to history. I was to be her ambassador, representing her to the unknown future.
If Jayakar saw herself not only as Indira Gandhi's biographer but also as an emissary representing her to an unknown future, she has discharged her duties with finesse. This biography will certainly not be the last word on Indira Gandhi. However, it is an important one which attempts to present the complex personality of one of

the major actresses on the political stage of free India.
The book traces the life of Indira Gandhi against the backdrop of the history of the Kashmiri brahmins; their diaspora into the plains of India and their resilience for survival; later the family's role in the freedom movement and their many sacrifices. It was inevitable that Indira, who from her earliest childhood days steeped in the big and small events of the national struggle, should identify herself with India's destiny and take what she believed was her natural place as her father's heir. Her

PUPUL JAYAKAR

Indira Gandhi A Biography

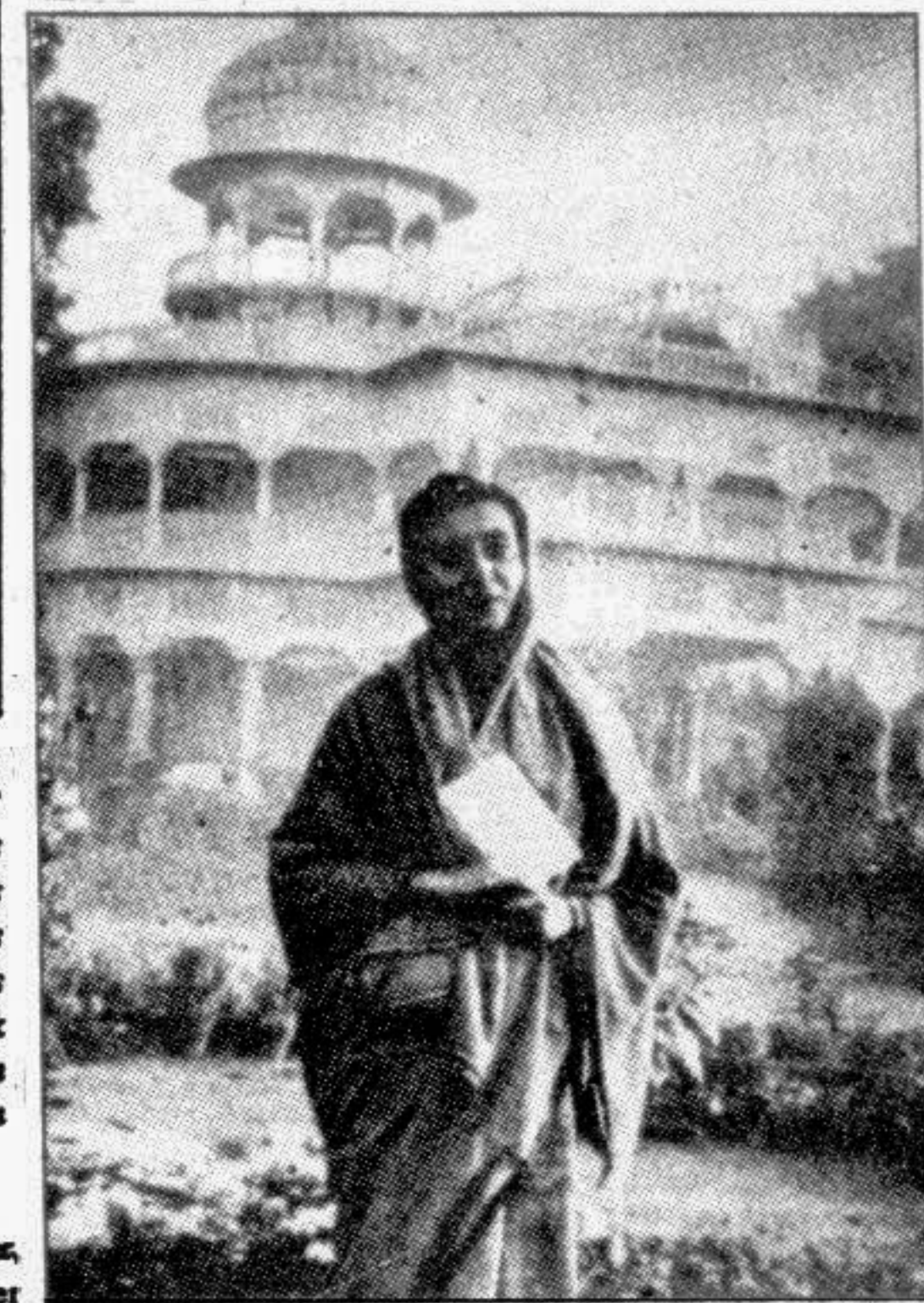
VIKING

How vast and interesting and how beautiful is our country. How different is the climate, the scenery, how very different the people and their customs in each part. Yet so few of us have the time or the means to break through the narrow walls of daily routine that enclose our lives, to get to know this immense space of land that is India, to enjoy her loveliness and to make friends with our fellow country-men who speak a tongue and think thoughts that are not our own. How I wish I were with you as you spread the magic message of freedom from one distant corner to another.

— Indira Nehru (aged twenty) in a letter, written from Oxford, to her father Jawaharlal Nehru on 4 February 1938

BOOK REVIEW

INDIRA GANDHI: A BIOGRAPHY
by Pupul Jayakar
Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1992
Reviewed by Prava Rai



In front of her old family home, 1955

strategist in organising the party and the election campaigns. Many would vouch otherwise.
However, the book also reaffirms the extraordinary courage and grit that Indira Gandhi possessed, qualities not easily rivalled. During the Sino-Indian war, she travelled to Assam, an area which had been all but given up for lost. She went there, all her protective instincts alert, to comfort and give courage to the Assamese people when even the district officials had deserted their posts.
She visited all frontier areas during the Indo-Pak war giving moral support to the fighting men as the Prime Minister of the country. She reached her heights in her involvement in the freedom struggle of Bangladesh. During the language riots in the seventies, the massacre at Belchi and Nellie, she showed extraordinary physical fortitude and courage.
Indira Gandhi's personality was a complex one. She imbibed her father's rational and scientific approach to life, but she also harboured equally strong superstitious streaks in her, especially when she was told of the dark forces that were released by her enemies to destroy Sanjay, who had become, over the years, indispensable to her.

In secret she performed rites to counter these forces and visited places of religious pilgrimage. There also seemed to be an aspect in her character which echoed the longings of pilgrims that flock every year to the banks of the Sangam in Allahabad. She went whenever she was in deep anguish, to holy men. She was drawn to J. Krishnamurti and met him, and conferred with him when she felt troubled. "She saw herself as Sisyphus constantly toiling", she wrote to J. Krishnamurti in July, 1992.

"This is a depressing time. Has the world come to a dead end? More and more people are realising what is wrong and what can be done. Yet we drift in the opposite direction. A handful of people have the power to affect the lives of all other millions who inhabit this earth. The few are wrapped up in themselves and what they consider their immediate interests in terms of place and time, and the many are willing to be pushed along in the illusion that they are free and guiding their own lives. The world needs your spirit of compassion and direction to look within themselves and the courage to act accordingly."

In world forums, Indira Gandhi as the Chairperson of the Non-Alignment Movement and host for the meeting of the Commonwealth countries generated much goodwill for India. It was evident that she was held in special affection by women and men in the remotest parts of India and it was they who eventually voted her back into power.
The combined forces of the opposition were unable to hold their ground against the mighty affection that she inspired in the hearts of the people in India.

The book closes with an epilogue on the tragic story of Indira Gandhi and her sons at the banks of the sacred river where their ashes were immersed.

Alliance Francaise premises.
The show will require a budget of at least Taka 3.5 lakh. It will be sponsored by the Alliance Francaise and different, multi-national companies.

"I am specially thankful to artists Kaidas Karmakar and Badal Roy for making my stay in Dhaka convenient," says Partha who plans to return to Paris after the completion of his mission to introduce the trend of mimodrama here.

"I can already sense the new wave of culture in Dhaka — the people have become more interested in plays and other cultural activities — that's good for the development of mime art," says Partha.

Ekatturer Jatre/Voyagers 71 Band Show '94

by Akku Chowdhury

erators as well as today's younger crowd. The focus of Ekatturer Jatre is to disseminate accurate information regarding the '71 Liberation War and raise an awareness and pride in all ages and social spheres of life.

Ekatturer Jatre welcomes anyone having an interest to contact them to receive further information regarding publications which tell an accurate history of the Liberation War.

The Mukti Juddho concert in pictures:



Asaduzzaman Nur and Bipasha Hayat performing a one-act play.



Shakila Zafar singing a solo item



'Renaissance' playing songs popular during the war of liberation.

— Photos: Shamsul Haque

SATURDAY January 15th. Shilpakala Academy Auditorium was venue for a flash from the past, with a "today" sound. That sound was a rousing choice of songs from the period during and immediately after the 1971 Liberation War.

Individual performers included Asaduzzaman Noor, Bipasha Hayat, Roksana Anwar, Shakeela Jafar, Tapon Chowdhury, Abdul Jabbar, Rothindronath Roy.

Renaissance band performed a premier concept of some ten songs which were responsible for inspiring all free thinking Bangladeshis during the period of conflict. Renaissance had adapted the music to a modern "pop rock" sound for this purpose. This new style of rendering the songs of Mukti Juddho is inspired as a reflection of Bangladesh being a youthful nation in touch with today's youth. Samar Das, original composer of music of several of the songs, was present. He offered his excitement, joy and praise to the event. His delight was further offered in his rousing performance of "Purbo Digante" to the pleasure of the attending crowd.

Ekatturer Jatre is pleased to have been a catalyst for the presentation of a new form of Mukti Juddho patriotic songs. They are confident that the public will be enthusiastic and receptive to this new style as well. As the president of the organization architect/poet Rabiul Hossain told that it is usually said that Band Music is considered as alien culture, "which we do not accept. We would like to show that through this form great things can be achieved."

Prior to the songs, the audience were spectators to a lovely skit — one act play adaptation from Humayun Ahmed's original play 'Shonno Bilash' performed by Asaduzzaman Noor and Bipasha Hayat.

To try to express the feeling of the audience and performers would be lengthy as each individual performance was a special pleasure to witness. Many, if not all of these performers, had experiences from the period leading up to the birth of Bangladesh. As a result, they each shared and gave from the heart their talents.

The attending crowd included many "young" men who were the actual gun toting lib-

initial desire to build a home and raise a family was soon swept aside as events propelled her towards a more public life.

The book, as a testimony of a close friend and observer, sheds interesting light and opens up possibilities of understanding the deep stirring and the wellspring within Indira Gandhi. Jayakar describes her relationship to Indira Gandhi as that of a friend who is yet not of her world, therefore, she is in an advantageous position to be a confidante without being considered partisan or a threat.

Over the long years Indira Gandhi confided in Jayakar her thoughts and recollections of childhood and other events and matters that moved her. What she was not told, the author observed.

The earliest memories and experiences that were to remain with Indira Gandhi were of the world as absorbed "through her pores" as her grandmother, Swaroop Rani, took her to bathe at the confluence of the sacred rivers at dawn every year during the solar equinox.

"She absorbed the intensity of colours, strong and muted; the resonance of the chants and people's voices; the myths and their re-enactment; the swift movements of birds and the lazy walk of the bulls. She saw the face of the peasant, gaunt and shrunken with ancient eyes, but with strength and dignity that is part of the sharing and belonging ... It is along these river banks that Indira came alive to the antiquity of the earth and the mystery of the seasons.

She learned to observe nature's play; to see the colours of the earth change; the waters transformed by sun, cloud and rain; new shoots appear in the trees; and to identify the cry of the birds. For many decades these intimations of her childhood were to remain as a dor-

mant seed within her."

The family's involvement in political life made a very uncertain home for a growing child. Sometimes, the house would be spilling over with people and at other times it would be silent and empty as the older members of the family were either away for political work or in jails. In addition to this Indira's life was overcast with the shadow of her mother's illness and her own resentment and anguish at the cruelty of her aunts towards her, and her father's neglect.

For many years she suffered deeply on behalf of her mother. Some of the wounds inflicted almost casually by her aunt never quite healed. As a gawky adolescent she overheard her aunt comment about her ugliness and stupidity. Indira retreated and was shy about expressing herself freely.

Indira Gandhi's entry into post-independence Congress politics was almost imperceptible as she fulfilled her duty as her father's hostess, walking always two steps behind him. It was also a time when she met most of the world leaders and her apprenticeship in the art of politics took place. In 1959 she

was elected to be the President of the Congress Party. Later, she engineered the breakup of Congress until it became what is now the Congress (I), the "I" standing for Indira.

It will not be possible to ignore the role of Indira Gandhi in initiating a brand of politics which has not always served the country she loved and identified with so well. The author skims over the more unpalatable aspects of this part of her life. It is possible that Indira Gandhi, during the dark months of the Emergency, was missing informed or kept in ignorance about the terrible things that were happening in the country. But it is difficult to believe that she did not realise the full import of suspension of all civil liberties and freedom of speech for the Indian people.

For the first time after independence, the people of India experienced the terror of a rule without any freedom. Jaykar claims that it was only after her defeat in 1977 elections that the full horror of those dark months were revealed to Indira Gandhi. The role of Sanjay Gandhi is too portrayed in a positive light and he is described as a masterful



Indira Gandhi, J. Krishnamurti and Pupul Jayakar, Rishi Valley, December 1980.

Introducing Mimodrama in Bangladesh

by Sharier Khan

OVER the thousands of years of civilisation, man has changed his outfit and way of life. Life has reached a speed once unimaginable. But, has the man essentially changed? And does his heart beat like it did thousands of years ago?

Internationally renowned mime artist Partha Pratim Majumder says, a man has not essentially changed. His heart still beats like it did thousands of years ago because he is essentially controlled by his

inhibitions and emotions. His outward appearance may change but his basic instincts will always remain the same. This is also the theme of the "Bad Dream" (or "Vlod" in French). "Bad Dream" will be the first ever mimodrama or silent drama to be staged in the country on February 7, 8 and 9.

Partha of Palna has already made an international reputation in the field of mime art.

After living a long 12 years in Paris and reaching the top of fame in his field — he has come to Bangladesh to organise the first ever mimodrama.

"I have this dream to introduce a trend of mimodrama in Bangladesh. I have given the international audience many things — I want to give the motherland what I know best," he said in an interview with The Daily Star few days ago. According to Partha, mime exists all over Asia in the forms of dances, theatres and even shadow theatre. But the art of mime in the shape of mimodrama has flourished in the West.

His apprenticeship in mime began at a very early stage. At nine, Partha was sent to Jagesh Dutta in Calcutta. Dutta, better known as the "Indian master of silent art", became his first teacher.

After attending music college, Partha became a singer in Bangladesh in the mid-seventies and he pioneered the art of mime simultaneously. He used to play hilarious acts on the BTV from 1975 to 1980.

Many can still recall his acts of bus passenger or a football fan broadcast through the BTV.

Partha drew the attention of the French Embassy in Dhaka at that time and an unprecedented scholarship was arranged for him to study Corporal Mime in Paris under Etienne Decroux, the founder of modern mime.

From there, he got a place in the school of Marcel Marceau — the doyen of the art

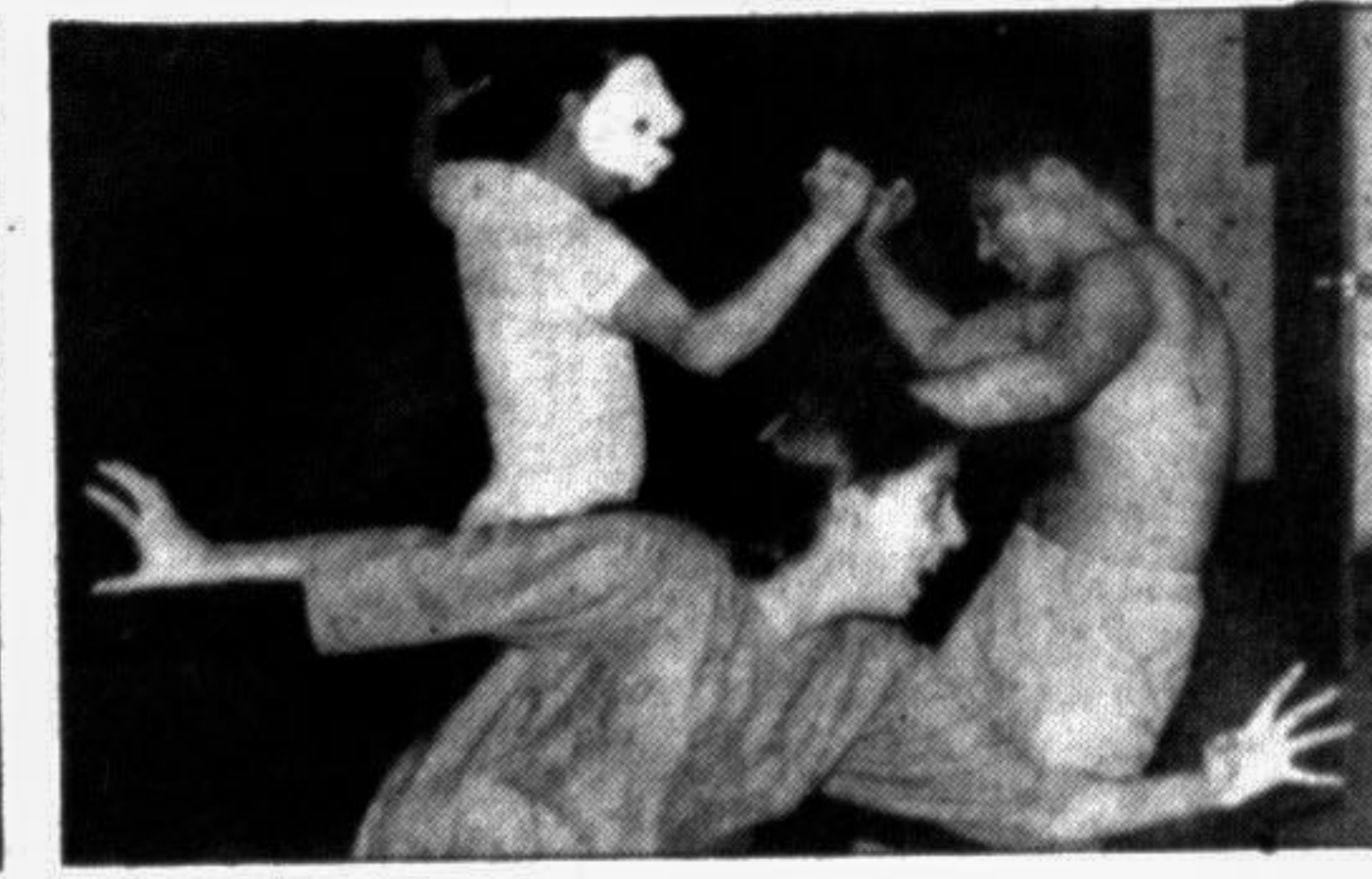
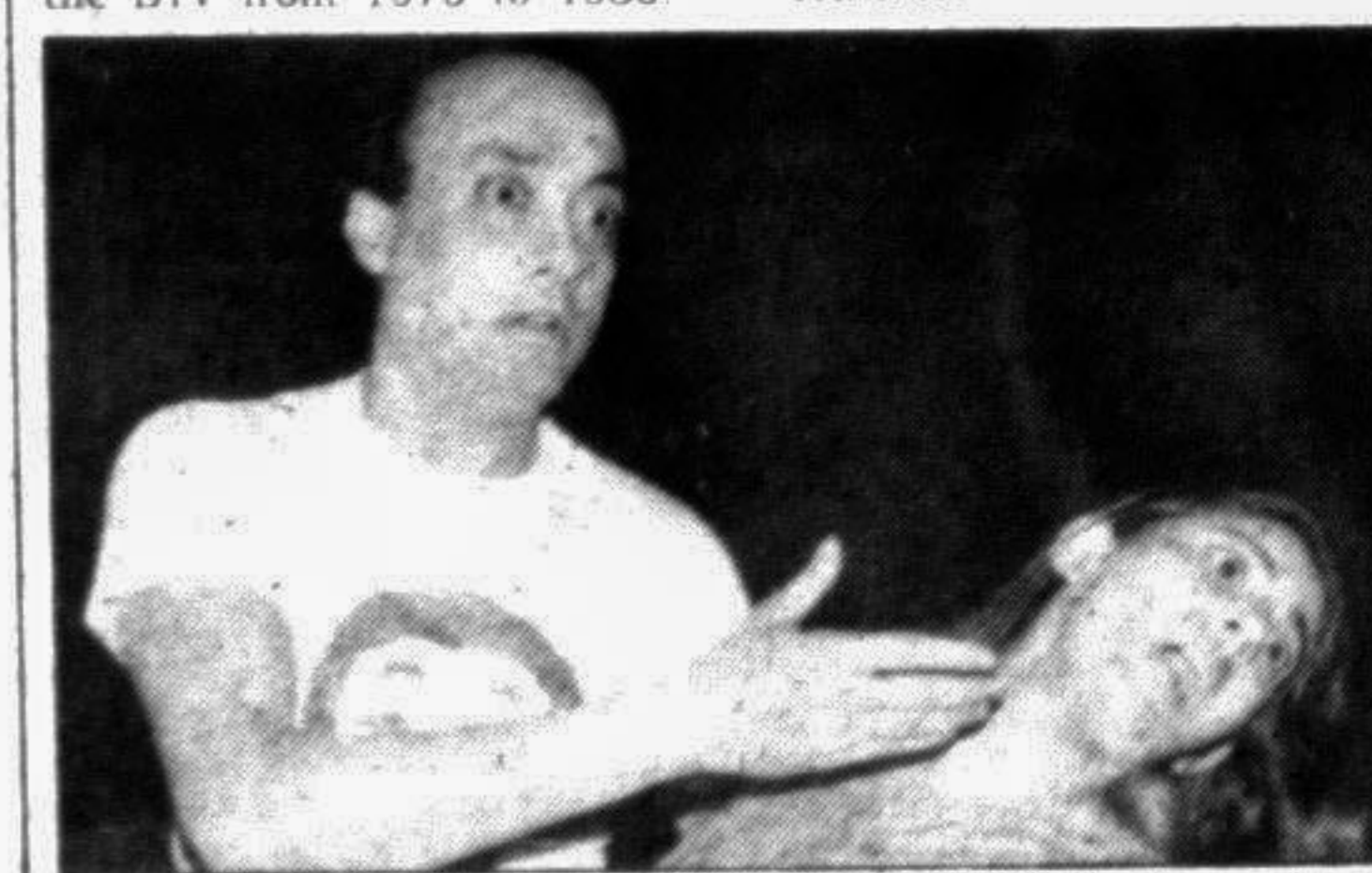
of mime. From day one, his relationship with Marceau was one of a father and a son.

Marceau is a certificate to Partha describes him as a man of poetic nature and recommends Partha as an authority of mime art in which he had blended both the cultures of the East and the West.

In Bangladesh, he is still recalled for the funny acts. His made-up face of a clown can still trigger a spontaneous audience.



Partha Pratim Majumder with the doyen of mime Marcel Marceau



Scenes from the workshop on mimodrama.

A Tale of Two Presidents

Continued from page 9
of the rise of his standing in popular esteem, he has been quietly making his position more ambiguous. In fact towards the end of 1993 he initiated a few political moves which amounted to a veiled but clearly discernable statement to the whole political class to the effect that he was prepared to challenge Chirac and supplant him as the presidential candidate of the RPR.

For the moment Balladur has a comfortable lead but 16 months is a long time in politics and there are many potential pitfalls ahead. Chirac is a tough, street-smart politician and he will not easily allow the prize of the presidency to slip from his grasp. Now that he has been openly threatened he is no doubt carefully analysing his options and trying to marshal his supporters to form a solid bloc behind him. Balladur's weakness is precisely that he does not control the party machinery which is officially loyal to Chirac.

All things considered it seems that Balladur has made his move a bit too soon. One curious possible explanation for this revolves around the role

that could yet be played by Mitterrand, the joker in the pack. Mitterrand has been diagnosed as having prostate cancer. It is not beyond the realm of possibility that he has a tacit understanding with Balladur to stand down on health grounds within the next six months. If that were to happen and presidential elections were held in Autumn 1994 there would be no way to stop Balladur from sweeping into office based on his present momentum. In this sense, if it is in Mitterrand's power to designate his successor, it goes without saying that he will do everything to ensure that he is not succeeded by Chirac!

So, behind the outward courtesies and polite handshakes, powerful men in France are sharpening their political knives in preparation for the ultimate contest for the presidency. Such is the appeal of the throne that Balladur and Chirac have gone from being partners to fierce, though as yet undeclared, rivals. The suspense is entire, as no-one can tell at present who will win out in the end. The only certainty is that the final Act will be rich in human and political drama.

The Winter Tale

by Faruquddin Ahmed

Wintry winds blow but winter is still slow
To come and harass the ones with little to put on
It's good for those who have lots of cloths
Those who enjoy and entertain with "Pitha" and "Payes"

But not so for the little Tokais who roam around
And continuously shiver as if with high fever
Those who wait anxiously for the morning sun
And go back home with pale faces at sunset

To them the winter is no pleasure but pain
They pine for it to be over so they are not to suffer.

What is joy for some is no fun for others
Maybe its even a bitter bite with untold pangs.