

The Joy of Sacrifice

by Syed Ashraf Ali

It is not their meat nor their blood that reaches Allah; it is your piety that reaches Him.
 — The Holy Quran

SACRIFICE is nothing new on this clay of a cold star. From time immemorial people have sacrificed many a thing for many a reason. Sacrifices have been made to get rid of natural calamities like floods and cyclones and earthquakes, to evade famine, to solicit rain, to extinguish volcanic eruptions, to end tyranny, and, of course, to appease or eulogise gods and goddesses — the chequered history of mankind is indeed full of sacrifices in various forms by various nations and for various purposes. But sacrifice in seldom synonymous with joy or happiness or pleasure. When a man or a woman sacrifices something he or she normally dispenses with something, loses something valuable or precious, there is normally a direct or indirect sense of loss or even grief (whatever might be the noble or sublime purpose behind it). Seldom, very seldom indeed does a person find joy or pleasure through sacrifice. But the glorious and inimitable attempt of Prophet Ibrahim (pbuh) at slaughtering his own son, Prophet Ismail (pbuh), stands unique in the annals of history simply because both the father and the son accepted and welcomed this glorious sacrifice willingly and smilingly — there was not even the slightest shadow of grief or unhappiness — simply to obey the Divine Command of the Creator and Sustainer of the worlds. Eid-ul-Azha indeed brings us a unique happiness — a joy synonymous with sacrifice.

The priest to behead her. The priest raised the sword, but when it came down, it struck not Iphigenia but a goat. It was Diana who performed the miracle when she took pity on Iphigenia and whisked her away, making a goat appear on the altar.

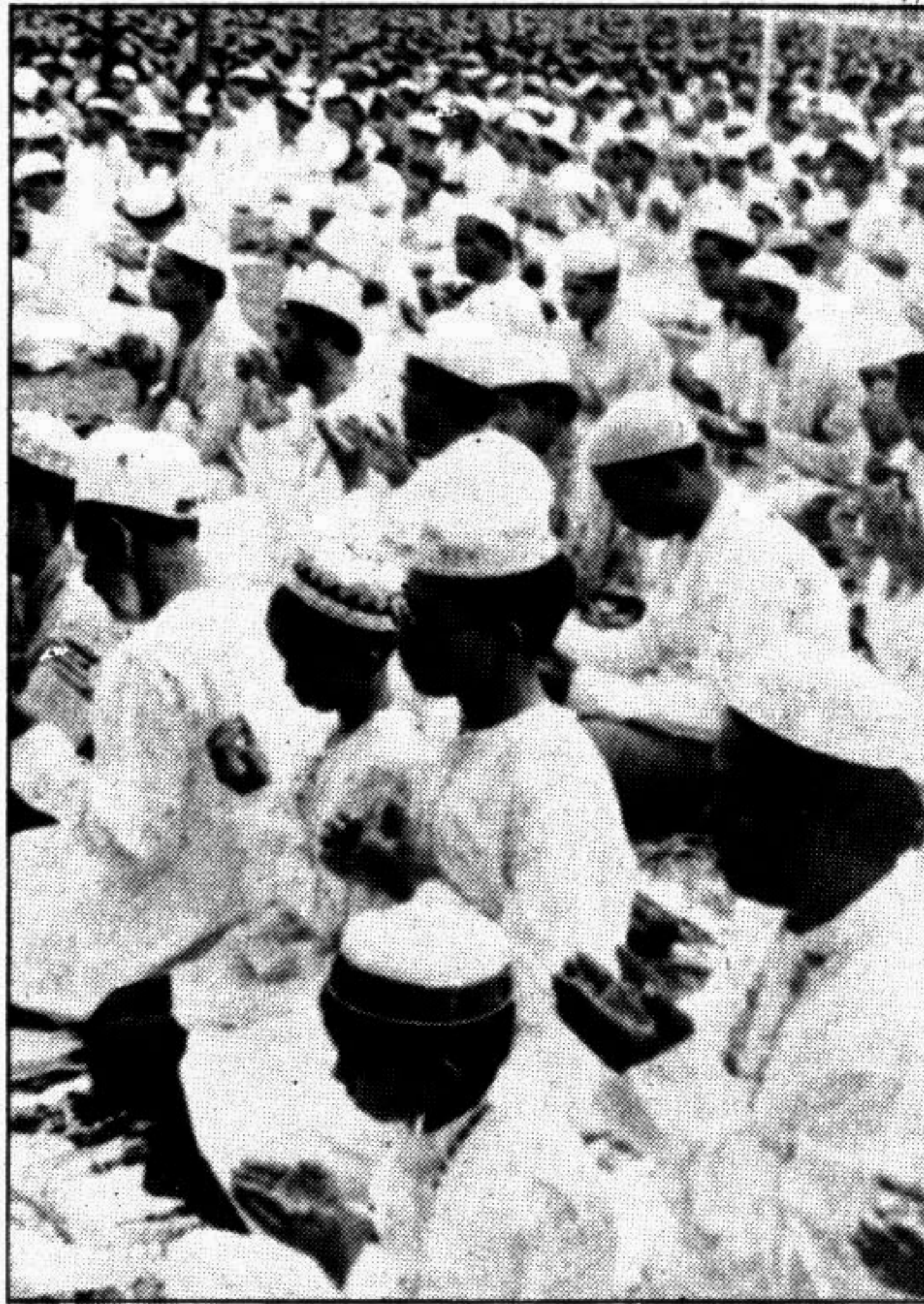
The incident no doubt has a faint similarity with what happened at Mina, but it is needless to emphasise that it will be totally unjustified and a sin to try to equate the incident at Aulis, created by Homer in the 800 BC, with the sacred, serene, unique and historic sacrifice at Mina 3800 years ago. In the case of the Prophets in Arabia there was no question of war, no issue of helplessness as in Aulis, it did not originate from the lips of a sooth-sayer, no daughter was there, no plea was necessary to bring the son to the place of sacrifice, nor was there any protest from or unwillingness on the part of the person to be sacrificed. The entire incident took place on the mutual consensus between a father and his son.

The holy Quran testifies: "He (Ibrahim) said, O my son! I see in vision that I offer thee in sacrifice. Now see what is thy view?" The son, whose very character was to be Halim, which means ready to suffer and forbear, replied without any humming or hawing, "O my father! Do as thou art commanded. Thou wilt find me, if Allah so Wills, one practising Patience and Constancy". One must not forget that the Sacrifice was demanded of both the father and the son. It was indeed a great trial for both of them. By way of the trial the father had the command, conveyed to him in a vision. To make sure that it was not a idle dream, and if it was a real order, to make sure that his son consented, Hazrat Ibrahim (pbuh) consulted Hazrat Ismail (pbuh) who not only readily consented but also offered to stand true to his promise if his self-sacrifice was really required.

The father sought a solitary corner for the Supreme Sacrifice and took his son towards the hills in Mina. On the way to the hills Satan stealthily whispered to Ismail (pbuh) that he was being taken by his father to be slaughtered. But the evil attempt at tempting the dedicated son into refusing to be sacrificed failed miserably and the boy stood steadfast in his obedience to Allah. Thrice did Satan speak to Ismail in the same manner at

three different spots but he received the same rebuff every time (this is why pilgrims during Haj cast pebbles at the three Pillars in Mina symbolising Satan — an incident which has again been equated without any rhyme or reason with the rite in honour of the fertilizing god Quzah at Muzdalifa). Just before the sacrifice, Ismail (AS) requested his father to blind-fold himself lest he might not be able to go through the ordeal. Ibrahim did so and brought down his knife. The holy Quran vividly narrates the incident: "So when they had both submitted their wills (to Allah) and he had laid him prostrate on his forehead (for sacrifice). We called out to him: O Ibrahim! Thou has already fulfilled the vision". And the angel Jibrail with a ram in his arms stopped Ibrahim (AS) and replaced the son Ismail (AS) by the ram. Both the father and the son stood the test and deserved the Divine Blessing. Naturally, therefore, Allah in His infinite mercy, declared in the holy Quran: "Thus indeed do we

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Eid Mubarak

Significance of Eid-ul-Azha

by Md Shafiuddin

EID-UL-AZHA occupies a unique position in the Islamic calendar. Literally, the word 'Eid' means that which 'returns' or a recurring happiness and 'Azha' means 'sacrifice'. Eid-ul-Azha, being the festival of sacrifice which occurs on the tenth day of the month of Jil-Hajj of the lunar calendar is obviously an important occasion for the Muslims. On this day, Muslims from every walk of life gather in a vast congregation, and fall prostrate before their Maker, offering gratitude to Him that He has enabled them to perform their duty or to make a sacrifice. The spiritual significance of this festival is thus brought out of the divine service which is the chief feature of the day. The act of sacrificing an animal is symbolic to a total surrender to the will of Allah. Allah says in the Holy Quran "It is not their meat nor their blood that reaches Allah; it is your piety that reaches Him: (He has thus made them subject to you, that you may glorify Allah for His guidance to you: And proclaim the good news to all who do right).

The verse throws a floodlight on the essence and real object and purpose of sacrifice. It teaches the supreme lesson that it is not the outward act of sacrifice which pleases Allah

but the spirit underlying it and the motive behind it. Allah demands and accepts total sacrifice of all that is near and dear to us — our material possessions, the ideals that are dear to us, honour and life itself. In reality Allah wants no offering from us in form of flesh and blood of animals but demands the offering of our hearts.

We know the background of this offering. Hazrat Ibrahim (Ah) obeyed the directives of Allah without any reservation and stood firm in the test before Him. As Allah commanded him through three successive dreams to make sacrifice of his dearest son Hazrat Ismail (Ah) in the name of Allah, he decided to do the job forthwith with the consent of his favourite son, who very gladly agreed to submit himself to the will of Allah. This was a test of Hazrat Ibrahim (Ah)'s love and devotion for Allah. The sacrifice of his son was not the real intention of Allah. But what was more unique and, in fact, matchless in the history of Islam, is the unique love of the little boy Ismail (Ah) for Allah. When Ibrahim (Ah) said his little son Ismail (Ah) that he was the dearest thing to him and that Allah wanted something dearest from him to be sacrificed, the

little boy, without a second thought, offered himself for sacrifice. The demonstration of love, the test of sincerity and unconditional surrender was overwhelming for the father and the son. Allah says in the Holy Quran: So when they had both submitted their wills (to Allah), and he had laid him prostrate on his forehead (for sacrifice) Hazrat Ibrahim (Ah) then moved the knife across Ismail (Ah)'s neck. At that moment Hazrat Jibril (Ah) replaced Hazrat Ismail (Ah) with a ram whereupon Allah says: "We called out to him, O Ibrahim. Thou hast indeed fulfilled the vision. Thus indeed do we reward those who do right for this was obviously a trial and we ransomed him with a momentous sacrifice: And we left (this blessing) for him among generations (to come) in later times."

The celebration of Eid-ul-Azha emphasises a universal order based on Islamic way of life and a sound spiritual basis. The Muslims all over the world observe the occasion with festive mood, put on special dress and thank Allah through their prayer in the open. Eid is a great equaliser. It is a day when every individual sheds his social trappings and embraces one another in the spirit of brotherhood. The gathering at Eid congregation removes the sense of inequality among the rich and the poor. There is no distinction between the low and the high. All are treated on equal footing.

Eid-ul-Azha furnishes an occasion for the exercise of charity. On the occasion, the sacrifice of an animal not only makes the poor people enjoy the festival with good feast of meat but funds can also be considered strengthened by the skins of the sacrificed animals. So if the spirit of social gathering of Eid-ul-Azha could be maintained and Muslims allow the world could reciprocate fraternal feelings among themselves and maintain the spirit of sacrifice for the cause of the poor and the needy, they would have real blessings of life here and hereafter.

In Bangladesh, Eid-ul-Azha is observed every year with high gaiety and jubilation. Improved diets are served to the inmates of hospitals, jails and destitute homes. Special prayers are offered in different mosques for continued peace, solidarity and prosperity of Muslim world and specially for the progress and prosperity of the country. People also visit the graveyards and offer 'fateha' for the departed souls of their near and dear ones. Besides, in the rural areas cultural function, football match, boat race etc. are organised as regular features of attraction of the day. Special dishes are usually prepared in almost every house to enjoy the day.

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DEAR Reader, in your opinion, what is a Miracle? Can you give an example of a miracle? The New Oxford Dictionary defines a miracle as an "Even due to supernatural agency". It is likely that you would enlist an event or happening as a miracle. Let me share with you a miracle we often overlook; a miracle which can be declared as the "Miracle of Life".

To familiarize you with the logic behind this declaration, permit me to place before you an analogy. The complete analogy will be built up piece by piece by posing various hypothetical situations. To understand the logic, each hypothetical situation must be given due weight and consideration. You may be familiar with childrens building bricks called Lego. The bricks are called Lego after the name of the company which makes them. The range of bricks are such that entire townships can be made from Lego. Indeed, many individuals do create model towns which include buildings, people and cars among others things.

First Piece of the Analogy
 Imagine that you are one such enthusiastic Lego builder and that you have created a model town. You have pieced together, brick by brick, Lego people buildings roads, trees

Miracle of Life

by Yousuf Mahubul Islam

and cars. After putting together the model town, you have a problem; the people you have pieced together are, of course, immobile, they cannot move on their own. You have to lift them and place them at different locations. You want to give these people mobility in their legs so that they can move on their own. This could consist of a complex set of muscles which respond to stimuli. They also need to be taught how to stimulate the muscles into moving. Once they can move, they need vision, so that they can see where they are going. They need to be given intelligence, so that they can respond appropriately to different kinds of objects in their path, e.g. when faced with stationary objects such as buildings as compared to when faced with oncoming objects such as cars.

On top of all this, the people will need energy to enable them to move. You could provide them with food which would be converted to energy. Each person will then need a "digestive system" so that the food could be converted to energy. You also need to ensure a continuous supply of appropriate food i.e. you need to create a system of continuous multiplication of food; through propagation and/or procreation.

Is any of this possible? Can you create this self-sustaining physical ability for the Lego people? Can scientists, of this "technological age", create this ability? Is it possible, that this ability, may come about by itself, while you stare at the model town for millions of years, randomly? If anyone or any being were able to create this ability you would consider it a miracle. Consider, then the ability of self-sustaining movement we, as human beings, have. Notice the way a child learns to balance when he or she is starting to walk. We can walk, run, stop, turn, ride a bike, control the pedals of a car, climb; to name just a few things we can do with this ability. All this involves a myriad of muscles in our legs and a complex set of stimuli which move the muscles. As we cannot ourselves create

Second Piece of the Analogy

Let us assume that by means of a miracle performed by a supernatural agency, the self-sustaining ability to move has been provided to the Lego people. Putting ourselves in the shoes of a Lego person the following questions arise:
 — when and why should a Lego person move?
 — where should the Lego person move to?
 Should the movement be random or should there be a purpose behind each movement? Having a purpose would answer the three when, why and where questions. Random movement is meaningless, and cannot sustain interest for very long.
 Let us assume that being a master builder you would like each movement to have a purpose. This could be a simple

purpose like having to work to provide oneself with food. This food is needed to provide energy for movement. The work for getting food could consist of two forms:

- to grow vegetables and/or fruit for food or
- to raise and/or kill animals for food.

To decide which of the above the person should do, the person needs a "making-up-his-mind" process or a free will to choose among the options provided/created. These options cannot suddenly appear by themselves. Not only do energy giving vegetables and/or fruit and edible animals need to be created, a multiplication/procreation process has to be created.

You may find that simply existing for the purpose of moving is an insufficient doctrine. It would be monotonous exercise. You, the master builder, do not want the Lego persons life to be monotonous. In an attempt to inject colour into the Lego persons life, you may want to provide him a companion or mate to relieve him of his loneliness. He would then need a means of communicating with his mate. You would need to create a mechanism of love so that each is attracted to the other in order that they may become companions. You

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WHEN THERE'S FESTIVITY THERE'S ALSO FASHION

Blending Tradition with Contemporary Styles

by Aasha Mehreen Amin

THE secret to success in the fashion business is creating something that is new and yet retains that mysterious, ingredient that stayed on from generation to generation. In the sub-continent, it is the shalwar-kameez that has gone through all sorts of changes, some styles disappearing as soon as they were created, others surviving for a longer time. In the 90s, the shalwar kameez has achieved its unique look but with something very familiar from the past — tradition. More and more astute designers have come to the conclusion that it is the

age old traditional designs with a touch of their exclusive modern style that not only attracts the fashion conscious woman but makes her want to wear them again and again. Runa Doja, an up and coming fashion designer has done just that blending of traditional designs with her own special imprint to create clothes that can be described in one word as classic. Her boutique 'Mearee' has been named to reflect this quality, the name, being a colloquial version of 'alame near' which in Persian means, traditional standard or classic. Her collection includes clothes that are simple, in

design but have that delicate elegance that flatters the female physique. Mostly 'tradition oriented' Mearee's wide range of shalwar kameez, gharanas, lahengas and shararas are made in traditional styles from various parts of the subcontinent such as Sindh, South India, Rajasthan, Beluchistan and so on. With this exotic flavour Runa adds her own knack for style to create clothes that have familiar patterns but are still very different from anything else you would find in Dhaka. A lahenga, a three piece

outfit including a blouse, skirt and dupatta (scarf), for example, will be completely transformed by Runa just by replacing the usual heavy satin of the traditional lahenga, with light French chiffon. Simply ornate and in soothing colours, they can be worn to cocktail parties or casual dinners. Similarly, a sharara, also a three piece with bell-bottoms instead of the skirt, made of white cotton with white embroidery on it for a more casual look. Runa has done similar things with Shalwar Kameez adopting traditional Sindh patterns but using luminous handloom cottons than the usual heavy 'ajrak' material so characteristic of Sindh styles. Mearee also has its collection of ornate outfits with classic karchup and zardari work.

For the most part, however, Runa likes to work with simple styles and light airy material, mostly cotton. A range of shalwar kameez maybe in pastel green, mauve or pink voile with delicate embroidery on the fashionably long kurta and heavier work on the matching dupatta. Small coloured or white pearl buttons or beads may be added to enhance that 'fairy tale', cool effect. "Taken piece by piece," says Runa, "my clothes are extremely simple, but it is the total effect when the outfit is worn, that makes the difference.

Essentially, Runa's clothes are subtle, feminine and comfortable. Delicate crochet work on the sleeves or a hint of lace here and there serve to enhance this. Runa has also experimented with tie-dye fabrics creating embroidered

shararas in striking mauves, greens and oranges. Her styles are all very fluid, easy to move in and very fashionable. They are also conservative and well suited for the subcontinental milieu. "I never make anything that is revealing like low cut necklines or backless blouses, all my clothes are very decent", comments the designer. In fact, although many of Mearee's clothes are made of thin, see-through material, they almost always 'come with their own cotton slips.

Runa admits that she often takes ideas from magazines on embroidery and cuts, although she always tries to add her own imagination and natural flair for fashion to produce something exclusive. Being a person who loves challenges, Runa constantly looks for new things. Most of the fabrics she uses include natural fibres that are available locally. Recently she is taking orders for sarees with heavy embroidery and lace work.

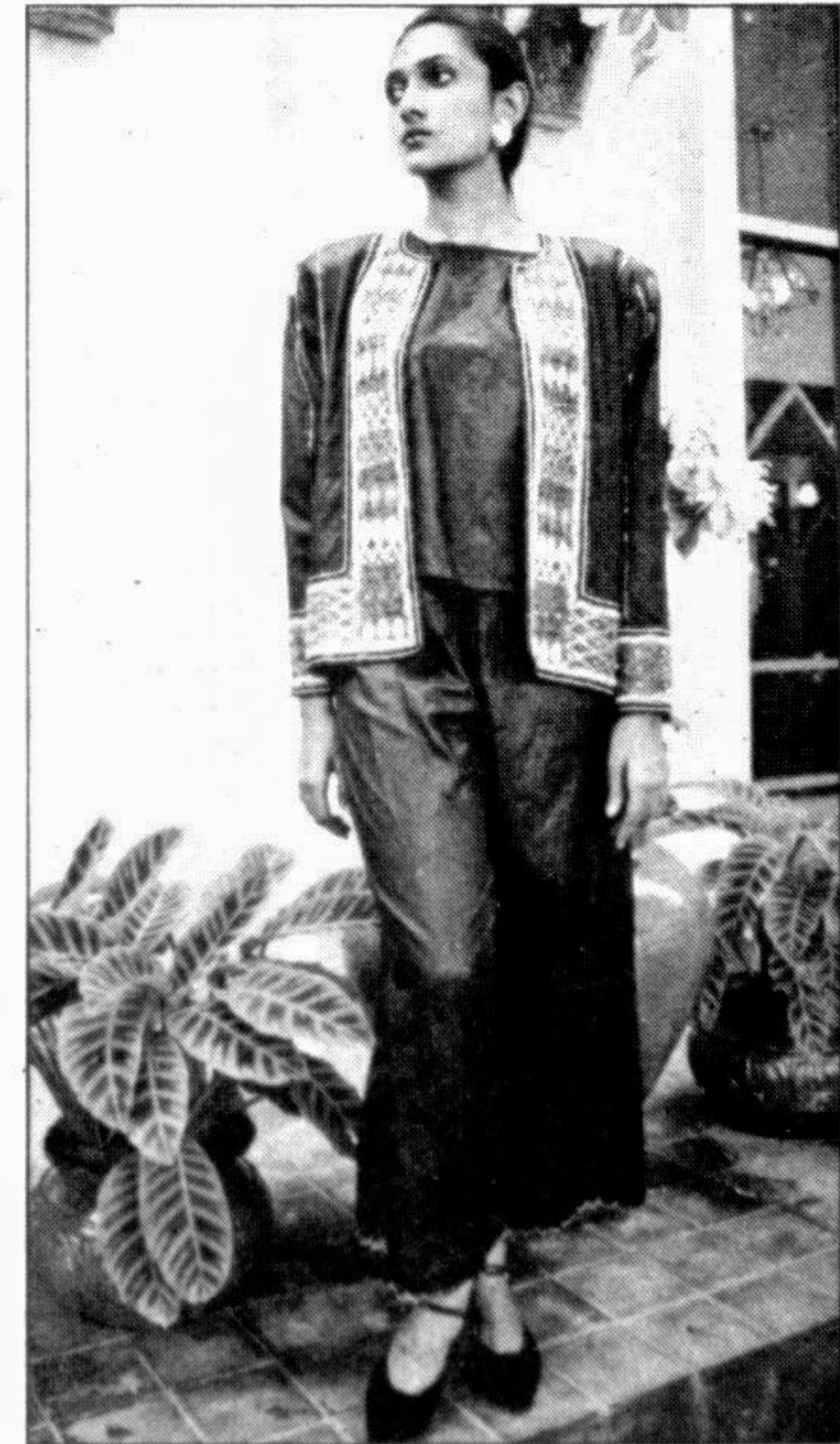
Apart from her intuition for good styles, Runa also adjusts to the climate and physiology of the people of the particular region she is catering to. "Bengali women for example," explains Runa, "are much smaller built than say Pakistani women and so their clothes should suit their personality and physique." She gives the example of kulots which although the rage in other countries, never really caught on in Bangladesh since they are not suited for small, petite women. But for taller, big torsoes physiques.

her partner Dr Chaman Rahim, has held fashion shows in Jeddah where her clothes are very popular with the subcontinentals there. So much so that she regularly exports some of her clothes to Saudi Arabia.

Runa began to take designing clothes seriously only a few years ago with a bank loan and a garage for the shop. She also got a lot of inspiration and encouragement from her mentor Anjum Durrani, a well known Pakistani designer. Two years since its inception, Mearee is now an exclusive boutique in Eskaton, with a small office and work area for Runa's workers.

Being a somewhat low profile person, Runa has been quite shy about advertising. "My clothes are their own advertisement. I'd rather have my customers recommend Mearee to their friends so that they come and see for themselves instead of me persuading them." As far as sales go, this word of mouth method has worked quite well, bringing in new customers every day. Most of Mearee's clientele are from the upper crust of society who can afford the high prices of its clothes ranging from 1500 to 5000 Takas. During Eid, however, when Mearee gives sale reductions, people from middle income groups come in to buy something special for the occasion.

Runa explains that prices have to be kept high because the quality of the work on the clothes require highly skilled labour that is expensive in this country compared to neighbouring countries like India and Pakistan. Runa maintains a large number of workers who



are divided into groups handling specific jobs separately, such as tailoring, hand embroidery (which is done exclusively by women workers) crochet work, machine embroidery, weaving and so on. Every piece of clothing is personally

supervised by Runa who gives her own colour combination and designs and makes sure that the finishing is just right. Being a perfectionist, Runa is rather conservative about expansion. "I want to increase

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