

IT was 30th January 1995. Jewel Aich had granted me a talk-session at 2:30 pm sharp. I was extremely excited as one can easily presume. Seeing this ambidextrous virtuoso, either on the silver screen or on stage, is itself a big achievement, but getting the opportunity to talk with him, more specifically, to interview him, felt like getting two yets from Tibet in one day. I was thinking on how to talk with him and forgot what questions to ask. Fortunately, two of my most intimate friends were present to provide mental support. When we left Jewel Aich's home that day, all of us were simply enthralled. Yes we had really talked with the world's most artistic illusionist. It had not been a dream, not a dream at all, simply pure magic.

The following narrative compiles the crux of the talk we had.

Daily Star (DS): Was your becoming a magician accidental or was it pre-planned?

Jewel Aich (JA): My becoming a magician or an illusionist, which ever suits you, was quite accidental.

DS: Why?

JA: It was after our glorious independence war that I set out to take illusion as a permanent profession. The Pakistani hockey team and Bangladesh



Jewel cuts his lovely wife Bipasha into two with an extremely dangerous electric saw. An unbelievable experience.

Illusion is the Ultimate Art

The two words "Jewel" and "Aich" are enough to take one on a "magical mystery tour", perhaps more magical than that of the Beatles, to the world of illusion, a place, where "nothing is impossible".

An Interview with Jewel Aich by Asrarul Islam Chowdhury

played against each other. Pakistan scored seventeen goals against us. Can you imagine, seventeen! This really made me sad. Even some time before we managed to defeat them, one of the strongest armies in the world. And look now, we were transformed to smithereens. I at once made up my mind that I would one day become an illusionist and through my illusion, brighten the prestige and honour of Bangladesh.

DS: From when are you practising the art of illusion? Did you learn on your own or through an institution? Who was your mentor?

JA: I am practising illusion from my childhood. I used to practice on my own. No, I did not have a mentor, in the way the term is traditionally used. The answer to the above question actually ignited my passion to illusion. However, if you want me to mention a mentor, then I would like to name Charlie Chaplin. If you watch a

Chaplin cinema, you will notice that he delivers more than just plain entertainment to his audience. Each one of his movies has a special message. Behind all the laughter and glamour, one finds sorrow, hypocrisy of the society, but above all, humanism. I also wanted to entertain, to make people forget their sorrows and pains for a while. However, what actually did enhance my attention and devotion to the art of illusion from my childhood were my visits to the local circus at Shirajganj. There I used to watch an illusionist by the name of Abdur Rashid. I used to get excited and at the same time, ask myself, what is the secret behind his tricks? This was what prompted me to grow interested and infatuation to the art.

DS: Why did you chose illusion as a form of art?

JA: Illusion is the ultimate art.

DS: Aren't you exaggerating by being a little bit egotistic?

JA: No. Although apparently it may seem I am a narcissist, but you will soon agree with me. Let me cite a simple example. Let us take a movie. A movie is the combination of many types of individuals and talents. The actor acts; the director directs; the play writer writes the script; the lyricist writes songs and so on. An illusionist has to combine the above talents all together. To be a good actor; you have to be a good actor; you have to write what you will do on stage; you have to know good psychology; you have to plan your special effects and lighting, etc., all by yourself. Moreover, the difference between an author and an illusionist is that, although both have ample scope for imagination, the illusionist has to transform this imagination into reality before his audience. That is where the real credit of the illusionist lies and that is why I think illusion is the ultimate art.

DS: Today you are one of the most prominent illusionists in

artists. He/she also has to be diligent and honest to his/her commitments. If so, then at the end of the day you will see that illusionist has plucked some luck and become "enlightened". Otherwise not.

DS: Are you enlightened then?

JA: (smiling) May be. May be not. That is for others to judge. Not I myself.

DS: What are your ideas for the development of illusion in Bangladesh? Do you want to set up an academy like many artists do?

JA: Illusion is an expensive art. Being an illusionist in a country like Bangladesh is not an easy job. We have to work out ideas for new tricks. We have to employ both funds and our intellect in research and development (R&D). Then we have to practice repeatedly so we do not make mistakes on stage. Sometimes, we have to abandon tricks just before a show, due to lack of practice, or inadequacy of tools. For de-

"Jewel's magic brings tears in my eyes".
 — Pandit Ravi Shankar

veloping the art of illusion in Bangladesh, I hope to set up an academy in the future. However, unlike most artists, I want people who will come here, to take art not for the sake of art itself, but for the sake of life. I want a pupil to enjoy every moment, to believe in his/her self. Like I said, illusion is the amalgamation of most arts. If you fail to get peace of mind here, all your efforts will go in vain.

DS: Which illusion do you consider the most dangerous?

JA: On stage or overall?

"Mr Jewel Aich is much ahead of his time. He is a 21st century magician".
 — Hong Kong Standard

an artist also needs luck?

JA: I consider luck to be a little bit different than most other people. To me luck is pluck. Everybody has luck. It is in the ether. It is only the enlightened who manages to pluck his/her luck.

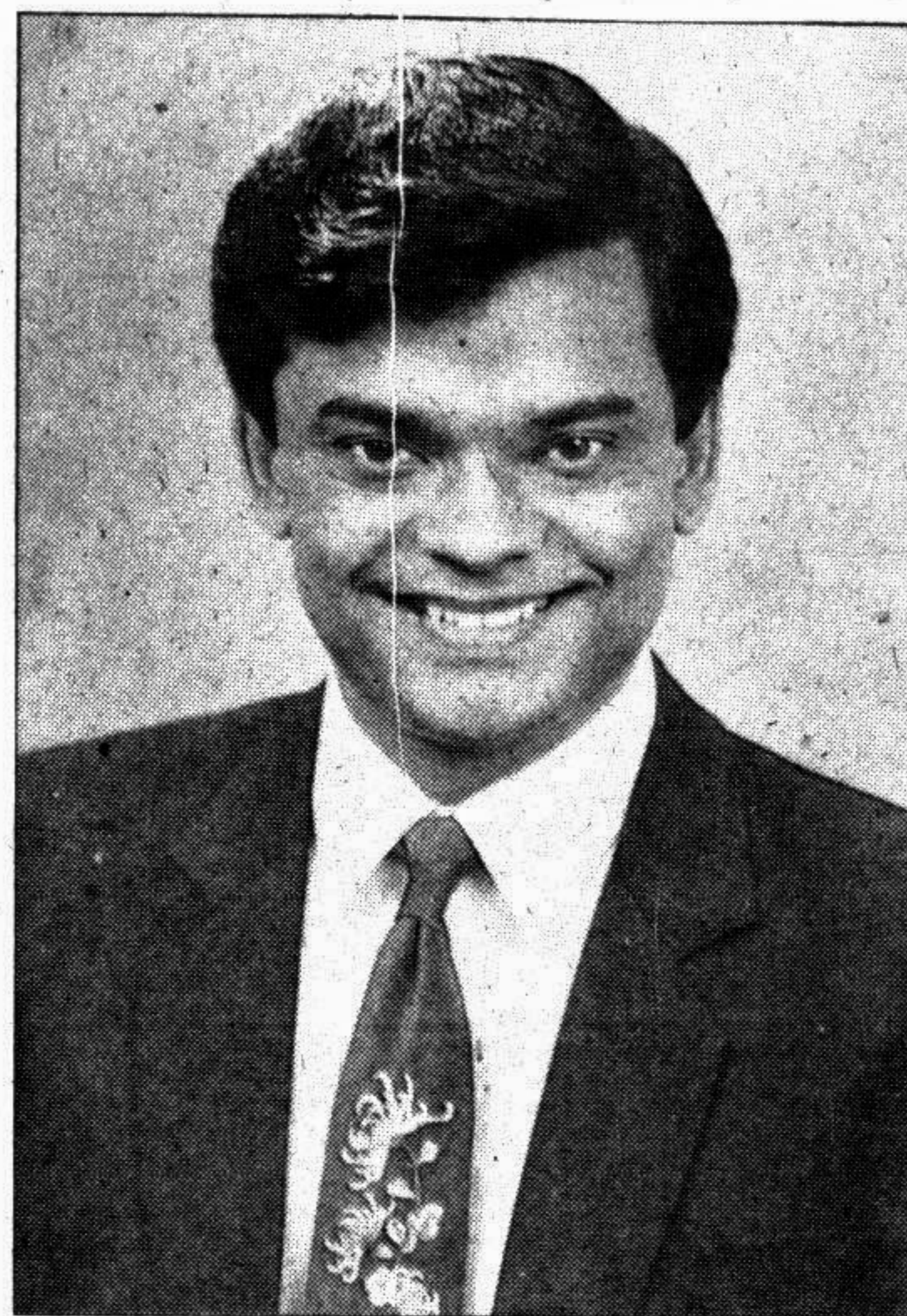
DS: Do you then believe in the old Hollywood saying that, "Talent? Forget it. It takes guts to be a star"?

JA: Yes, you do need guts, but guts and no talent will not take you too far. Like I said, the illusionist has to combine the talent of many types of

gold or silver smith. Their nimble fingers and quick eyesight were indispensable to the success of the work. The master craftsman prepared the materials and formed the frames of the designs. Only the purest silver could be em-

DS: Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones once said, an artist has to be nervous to

"Jewel Aich is truly the father of modern magic".
 — Iqbal Hossain (Dilshah)



perform on stage, otherwise he is not functioning properly. Do you agree?

JA: Certainly. Because you have to perform in front of many people and cannot afford the luxury to make a mistake. For the second part of the previous question, I think chopping a human body, my beloved wife to be precise, is the most dangerous illusion on stage. We don't always perform this magic.

DS: Do you have anything to say to the readers of The Daily Star in particular and the people of Bangladesh as a whole?

JA: When I was a child, I always used to think, if I could ever survive long. My physical condition was never good. I managed to reach where I am today through diligence and honesty. I do not know if I have managed to "pluck my luck", but I have tried my best. I have always tried to place myself as a leader in life and not as a victim. This is also, in one way, the secret behind my success, if I have attained any. I hope that the readers of your esteemed daily and the people of Bangladesh also do the same as I did. But above all, I love people and am a humanist. We could solve a lot of our problems if we placed ourselves in the place of a distressed person. Like the saying goes, to share a sorrow is half a sorrow. We cannot solve everybody's problems, that is true, but we can try, can't we? I love my people. I love Bangladesh. Come, let us try to share the sorrow of our people. Remember, "you have to 'pay-in-full', otherwise your life will be 'painful'!"

Swan Song: To those who say "what is in a name?" all I can say like the poet once said, "foolish is the only thing that makes us. Brazilians forget their hardship and poverty". Jewel Aich is truly one person who has the rare and congenial genius to take his people to the land of his heavenly magic and make them forget, at least for some time, their poverty, hunger and misery. Yes, Jewel Aich is the "Jewel in the Red and Green", the colours of our national flag, an authentic flag-holder in the truest sense.

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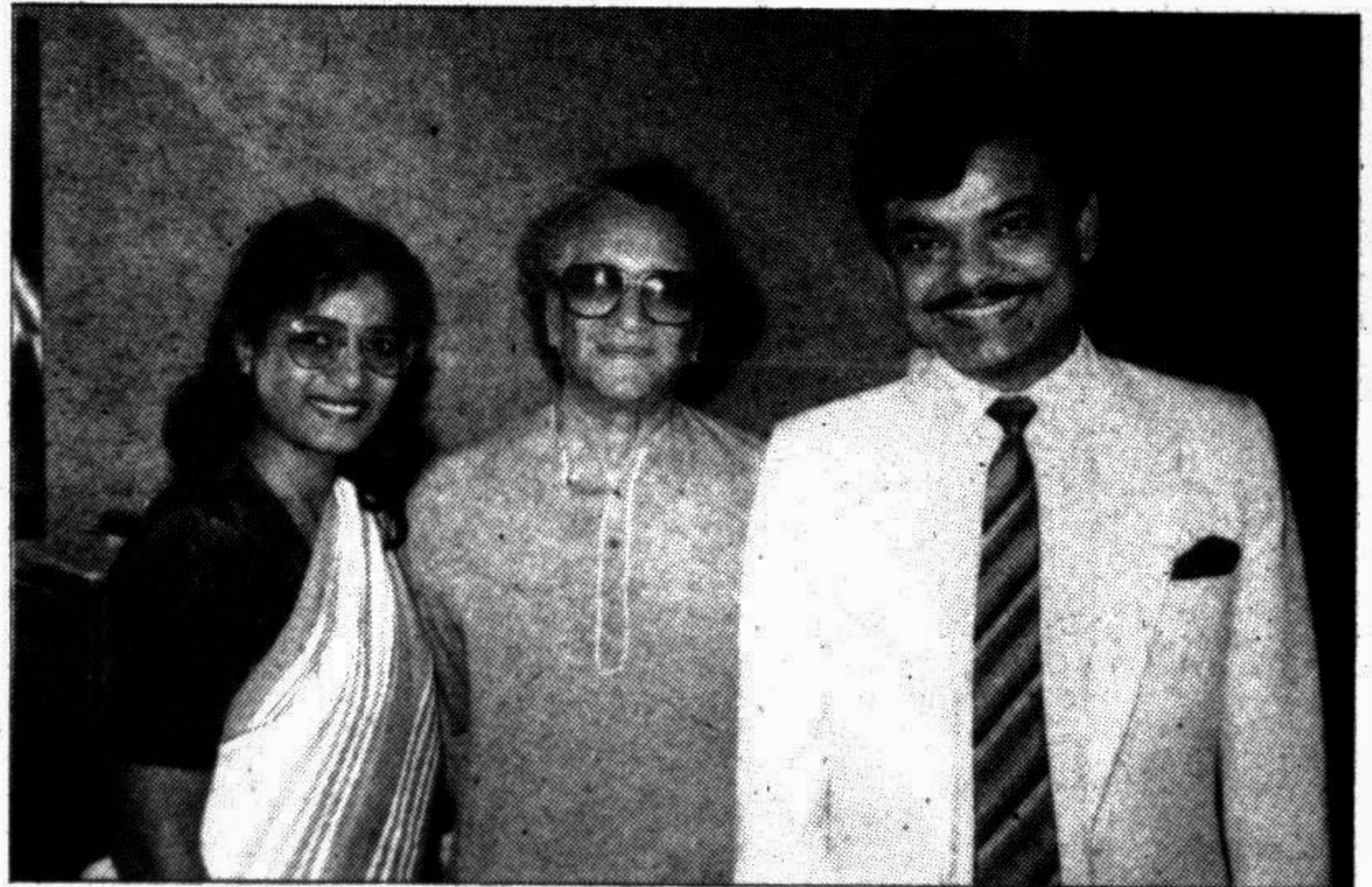
PROFILE

Name	Jewel Aich
Father	The Late B. K. Aich
Mother	The Late Saraju Aich
Wife	Bipasha Aich
Children	None
Date of Birth	April 10
Place of Birth	Pirojepur
School	Pirojepur Govt School
College	Pirojepur College
University	Dhaka

FAVOURITES

Favourite colour	Brown for painting and blue for clothes
Favourite book/novel	"Bhabaghure Shastra" (Rahul Sankrityayan) and "Nothing is Impossible" (WR Gresham) and "Citizen Kane" and "Pather Panchali"
Favourite movie	Orson Welles, Nasiruddin Shah, Shabana Azmi, Humayun Faridi and Subarna Mostafa
Favourite actor	Dhaka
Favourite pastime	Reading, listening music and playing the flute
Favourite city	Dhaka
Favourite food	Vegetables and fish
Favourite drink	Coconut water
Favourite personality	Vidyasagar
Future occupation	Teaching
Motto in life	To help the helpless

How would you like to spend the wildest day of your life?
 I don't want to make any plans to do that, just take things as they come.



Jewel and Bipasha with Pandit Ravi Shankar

A Craft of Delicacy : Filigree with a Reference to Dhaka Tradition

by Syed Amirul Islam

FILIGREE is a very charming, intricate but exquisitely beautiful craft in metal, especially made of gold and silver. It is a process of decorating gold and silver works by the application of wire made of these metals. It may be called a branch of jewellery but actually occupies a distinct place for its own merit.

The commonest form of filigree work consists of wires soldered in patterns on a background. The wires may be arranged singly in twists or in plaits and they may be plain or beaded. From the nature of the material the most popular patterns are circles, spirals and straight lines. Such patterns, as in the past, could not easily be made freehand, were probably made with jigs i.e. blocks of woods studded with pins round which the wire was bent and thus any pattern could be exactly repeated. Usually the wires themselves created a satisfactory pattern but sometimes the effect was heightened by the addition of enamel. A rarer and technically more difficult variety of filigree consists of open work patterns without a background.

The origin of filigree technique had long traditions in Mesopotamia, Syria and Asia Minor. The Royal Tombs at Ur of about 2500 BC produced filigree work of an advanced kind. In the treasures of Troy II of about 2200 BC and in

jewellery from Byblos of about 2000 BC are found filigree works. It is first found in the Aegean world shortly after 2000 BC where they occur on jewellery from Minoan tombs in the Messara. After its first appearance about 1800 BC filigree again is found in Crete in the 17th century and perhaps lasts into 16th BC. Phoenician jewellery of the 16th century BC (from Aliseda and Tharros) shows filigree of different varieties. Shortly after 800 BC filigree was practised in Greece and from about 700 BC in Etruria. The source was probably Syria. Open work pattern as of filigree was very popular in Etruria in the 7th-6th centuries BC.

Thus was the beginning of filigree, but the time of its importation to India is yet to be searched out, though it is known that the Chinese also developed filigree to an excellent workmanship. Its intricacy and minuteness unsurpassed elsewhere. Works of Cuttack in India nearly approaches Chinese delicacy but not its detail. Actually among the most important centres of Indian sub-continent, Cuttack in Orissa, Karimnagar in Andhra Pradesh and Dhaka in Bengal were once renowned for their filigree works. In the Imperial Institute Hand-Book to the Indian Art Metal Work

Exhibition of 1892 it is stated that although the filigrarian articles are of exquisite manufacture and are made in India, they are in form obviously suggested by European originals. George Birdwood likewise observes: "The silver filigrarian work in which the people of Cuttack in Orissa have attained such surprising skill and delicacy is identical in character with that of Arabia, Malta, Genoa, Norway Sweden and Denmark, and with the filigrarian work of ancient Greece, Byzantium and Etruria, and was probably carried into the west by the Phoenicians and Arabs and into Scandinavia by the Normans and in the course also of the mediaeval trade between Turkistan and Russia". According to the Imperial Encyclopaedia of India (1907 edition) Cuttack had for many years been famous for it. It had also attained great excellence in other places like Trichinopoly, Dhaka, Rangoon and Jhansi. In Jhansi peculiarly flat form, spirally assorted, was met with.

Generally twisted silver wire is the material for filigree work. The articles have, the trellis-like appearance of jali which endows those with exquisite charm. The process of doing a filigrarian work of silver in Cuttack, as reported by T N Mukharji in his book Art-

Manufactures of India is as follows: This is first purified by melting sixteen parts of silver with one part of lead. It is then cast into bars or sticks by being run into moulds. The next process is to beat the silver into plates which are then drawn into wire. Patterns are then formed by taking the wire one by one, and carefully arranging them on a sheet of mica, on which they are fastened by a peculiar cement. Thus held the different parts are then united by soldering. The last process is that of clearing and finishing which gives the Cuttack work a delicate snowy appearance. In Cuttack, most filigrarian patterns are built up around flowers while in Karimnagar creepers and leaves predominate.

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As is evident from the above discussion, Dhaka was once upon a time very much noted for filigree crafts. Thomas Holbein Headley, the renowned writer of the book Indian Jewellery remarks, "Nowhere in India is this art practised with greater success than in Dhaka. The idea of manufacture of these items came probably from Orissa. The people worked in their own homes and on their own account. A large portion of the work was used to be accomplished by children, often not more than 8 to 10 years of age — the sons or pupils of the

Young Bangladeshis in North America : Four Issues

Tahmina Zaman and Khashruzzaman Choudhury write from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

Issue 1

YOUNG Bangladeshis in North America live in Bangladesh culture at home but as soon as they step out they face Western culture. How much of our own culture should we teach our youths, and how much of it can they really practice in their lives?

Explanation: Right from their births in this country, and especially since the time they go to school, our youths face two different, very often conflicting, cultures. At home, they enjoy Bangladeshi food, dress and music, but outside they come across strikingly different cultural elements, pizzas and hamburgers, pop and rock music, etc. Faced with a conflict of choice between these two cultures, our youths always cannot decide what to do. As time spent outside home increases, so does the scope for this conflict. Moreover, the Bangladeshi environment at home is often penetrated by Western TV, radio and video programmes. The situation gets worse if parents are totally indifferent to this entire conflict issue.

Solution: We believe our

youths cannot, and should not, be completely insulated from Western culture. But we should somehow ensure that our youths learn the basics and virtues of our own culture, so that they don't get detached from their roots. This can only be done by parents beginning right when children are very young. This is a very very serious assignment or job, and it should be treated that way. It is no less important than our own employment or vocation, and we should be at least as serious as we are with our work or job for livelihood. Efforts by families must be supported by community efforts. It is not enough to have adult associations and meetings, we must have youth associations and their meetings.

Issue 2

For Bangladeshi youths in North America, the mother tongue is not really Bengali, but probably both Bengali and English, or simply English. Therefore, how much of Bengali should we teach our children and youths, and how?

Explanation: Majority of us are interested in teaching

Bengali to our children, so that they can speak, read and write Bengali. However, for our youths, the main language of communication, especially outside home, is English and not Bengali. Some families even encourage and practice communications in English at home also. Thus asking our children to learn Bengali is to ask them to learn an additional and different language. It is not enough to eulogize it as our mother tongue alone, it is also necessary to forcefully state the reasons for which our youths should really learn Bengali. Of course, there are many valid and forceful arguments. The desire and effort to learn Bengali is likely to diminish with age. Only we adults read the Bengali weeklies and magazines; our children hardly read them! When we'll be gone, who is going to read and patronize these papers? Have we really pondered over this question seriously?

Solution: We believe teaching and learning Bengali must start at very young age. As our children grow, we as parents must convince them with reasons as to why they should learn and practice Bengali. We

must create and nourish an environment for this at home, individually, and outside, collectively. Individual families alone cannot ensure this; the community must also get involved. Families and the community should continually explore and experiment with ideas. It is a continuous process, not a oneshot affair. If either the family or the community or both continue to be indifferent to the issue, our youths will not learn and practice Bengali, neither at home nor outside.

Issue 3

How much of religious education should our youths be given and how may they be encouraged, if desirable, to practice religion in life?

Explanation: It is a very controversial issue. The influence of religion varies amongst communities, and even amongst individuals in the same community. It is not easy to follow meticulously all the teachings and injunctions of religion, especially in this not so conducive environment. How much of religion we

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