

THE LAST RIFF

Excerpts from an archived interview of Ayub Bachchu

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On October 18, Bangladesh lost one of its musical giants, the king of rock, Ayub Bachchu. His sudden demise left everyone reeling in shock, followed by an outpouring of tribute and love on social media, newspapers and TV channels. Much has already been written by his friends and followers about AB, the rock legend, and Bachchu bhai, the ever-so gracious Chittagonian. So we revisit, instead, the maestro on his own terms, in his own words, in an interview with Star Weekend (then the Star), published in November, 2012.

When you meet Ayub Bachchu off stage, it is easy enough to forget that he is a legendary rockstar. The signs are there, of course—in his all-black attire, the exclusive guitars that he fiddles with from time to time and the constant influx of different types of people hoping for an audience with the king of rock.

But beyond the obvious attention he commands wherever he goes—by virtue of who he is—there is very little about him that strikes as unusual. He is warm, humble and gracious, with a remarkable ability to make everyone around him feel welcome.

Even amidst the hectic launch of LRB's new album, *Juddho*, AB is the ever-affable host. "Have you been given your tea? Some snacks?" he asks us. "Will someone please make sure there are some sandwiches here?"

Bachchu admits that his fame, and the incredible love he has received from his countrymen, has humbled him over the years. "Every person deserves respect, no matter what their profession or background," he says, "I really believe that whole-heartedly and try to reflect that in my actions."

Ayub Bachchu is decidedly different—calmer, wiser and more responsible—from the young avid guitarist who left his familial home in Chittagong to pursue a career in music. "Thirty years ago, I didn't understand anything beyond myself and my guitar. I used to think that my guitar was my life, my career, my food, my air, my family, my friend ... it was my everything," he says.

"But now I know that life is much more complicated. Every day, there are new challenges, new complications, new responsibilities. My two children are growing up and I have to think of their well-being," he states. "I have played the guitar for a long time but I often wonder what lies in my future?"

After an illustrious career in Bangladesh's music industry—an industry which he unarguably helped define—spanning almost three [now four] decades, AB finds himself wondering if it has all been worth it.

The son of Haji Mohammad Ishuque Chowdhury and Late Nurjahan Parvin, he grew up in the port city of Chittagong, in a joint family, surrounded by cousins, aunts and uncles. His family was like a big ship, he says, and he enjoyed the sharing and caring that was an inevitable outcome of being part of a joint family.

"I was, surprisingly, a good student, but my father wanted me to be even better, so he would change schools all the time when I was really young," he shares. "So back then, I made a lot of friends in different schools all over the city. I finally ended up in Muslim High School, where I was quite happy." As an adolescent boy, not unlike others his age, he would fly kites, play football with his classmates and dream of being a professional cricketer. "It seems amusing now, but I was really into cricket once," he says with a chuckle.

He started to dabble in music when he was in Class VIII. "We used to listen to cassettes back in those days. I would listen to one song thousands of times, rewinding and fast forwarding religiously, to accurately reproduce the music with my guitar," he says. "No one goes through that much trouble anymore—they can just download the songs and the tabs from the internet; now it's like a free-hand exercise." For Bachchu, however,

