



Documenting Liberation through his Lens

Jalaluddin Haider is a well-known veteran photographer of Bangladesh, whose photographs bear evidence to the history and turmoil of Bangladesh's politics. Many of his shots document the momentous incidents that led to our Liberation War and independence. In this exclusive interview he talks to The Daily Star's Mishuk Ashraful Awal, a photographer himself.

MISHUK ASHRAFUL AWAL

Your photographs are witness to the momentous incidents of the history of Bangladesh, and an inspiration for many as well. Tell us about how your career in photography started.

My mother passed away when I was only four years old. I had a rough childhood and could not study for long either. I had to go to Kolkata to my maternal uncle who used to have a studio, that is where I learned the nitty gritty of photography. After coming back from Kolkata, I started doing business. I would buy things from Chawkbazar, and sell them in stores. I learnt tailoring and worked for a tailor shop. I was from Jashore, had no one in Dhaka, so I did whatever I could, to stand on my own feet. I even worked at a spectacles factory. Then I went over to Tongi, where I used to supervise at a mill. The salary was only a hundred taka. We were the ones who worked, and those from West Pakistan would just sit there, and take thousand, five hundred taka for doing nothing. I did not like that one bit, so I quit. Finally I came to Dhaka, got a job at a studio in New Market - Studio Sartaj. I would take photos there, develop them, and retouch them. Nowadays retouch is done on computers. Back then we used to retouch with pencil, we would even use lac-dye. Reproduction was done there as well. Rashid Talukder would come there sometimes. He was a darkroom man at that time, the government used to employ darkroom men from PID (Press Information Department). He knew reproduction work very well. In the evenings, he would visit all the studios and look for work. After I had been working there for sometime, a friend of mine told me one day, "Dainik Paigam is looking for someone. If you want to, you should apply." There I got the job, and that is how I became a photojournalist. That was in the year 1965. And in 2000, I retired from

the Daily Janakantha.

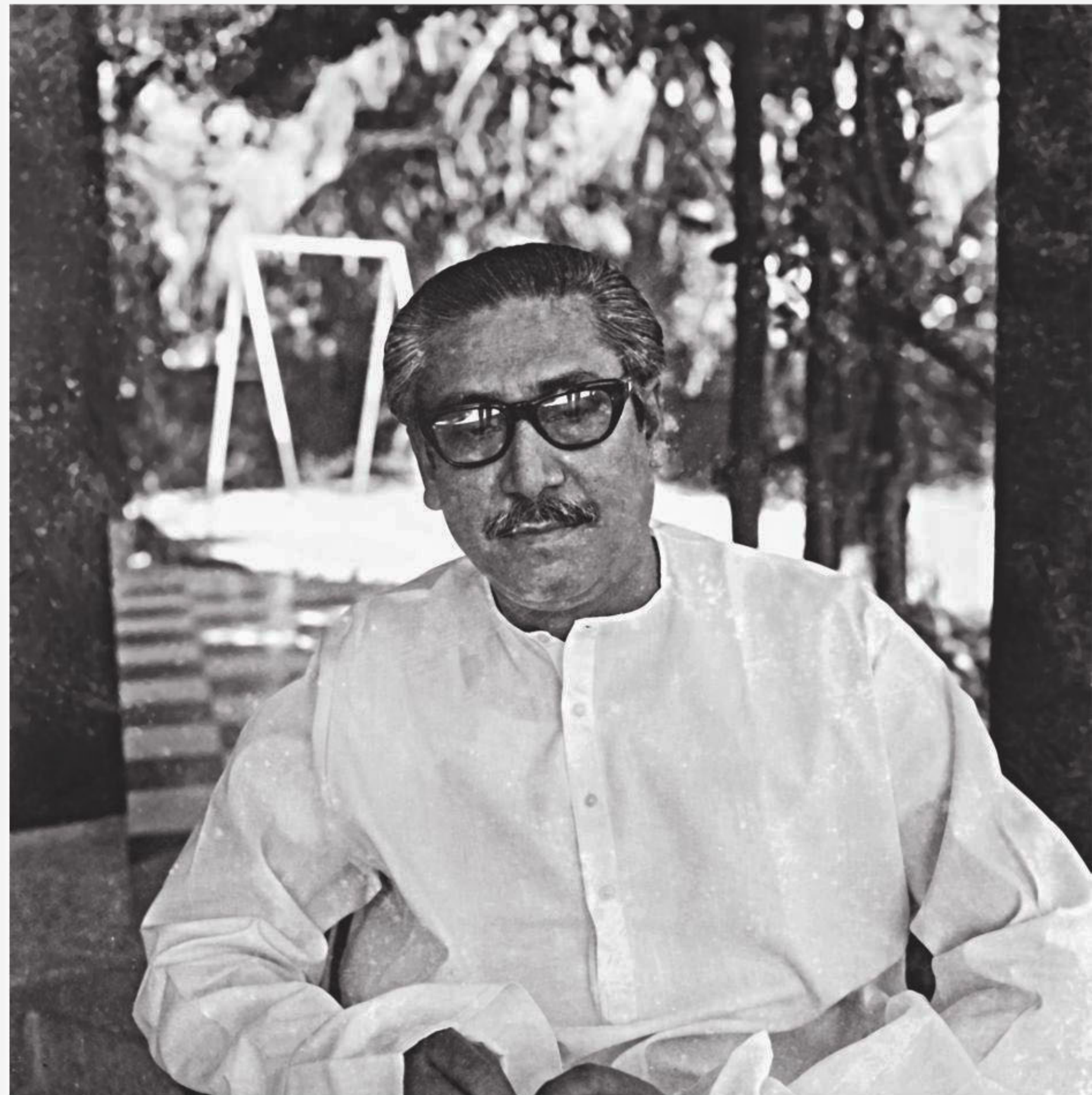
You have taken many photographs of Bangabandhu when you started working for newspapers. When did you see him for the first time face to face?

After a few days of joining *Dainik Paigam*, I got an assignment. I was supposed to take Sheikh Shaheb's photograph, for print purposes. I headed over to road number 32, his home. That was the first time I saw him face to face, and that was the first picture I had taken of him. A few days back I posted that photo on Facebook, Bangabandhu was sitting on a chair. At first, he sat a bit sideways, resting his face on one hand. I put my hand on him to straighten him up, and said, "Not that way, this way" - using my studio experience. I did not know back then that he was going to be the father of the nation! He said to me, "You have to give me the photograph. Everyone takes photos, but I don't get any copy from anyone." I said I would, but depressingly I could not. Ever since then when he saw me, he would often ask, "Why, I never got that photo from you?" Even though I said I would, I never really got around to it. Now I feel bad about that. Even Sheikh Hasina asked me once, "Did you give him the photo?" I let her know I never did.

A photographer has to do all sorts of jobs while working for a newspaper, has to take different sorts of photographs. Which of these did you prefer most?

I always preferred taking feature photographs, I would love to go from one village to another taking my camera. Such as those schools under bare trees, no roof, no nothing. I have taken many pictures like that. I had fun taking photos like these. There was no fun in taking protest photos. Protest photos and feature photos are completely different subjects. But due to the unrest all around, there was less opportunity to take feature photos, so I had to take protest photos mostly.

I started working for the newspaper



Jalaluddin's first photograph of Bangabandhu.

PHOTO: JALALUDDIN HAIDER

in '65, and the movements had started a few days after that. The pictures of the movements were important then- the 1968 protests, then the mass uprising in 1969, shoot outs. I was at all the spots in Dhaka City, such as the New Market area, Dhaka University, Gulistan, in front of GPO. I remember the boy who was killed in front of GPO. The street kid giving slogans, Rashid Talukder took that photograph, it became quite famous. I was there as well.

Everyday there were meetings and protests -in front of Baitul Mukarram, Paltan field, in front of Shaheed Minar. Meetings were being held almost daily, torch-lit protests were happening. I am talking about years 1968, 1969. Dhaka city was on fire! There were shooting, people were dying. Once gunfire broke out in Tongi, a man was shot dead, his absentee funeral was held there as well.

Were you working at the *Dainik Paigam* at the time of the Liberation War in 1971?

No, I did not have a job at that time. I worked in *Paigam*, then I worked in the *Daily Observer* for a few days. There was the *Dainik Azad*, I have worked in different newspapers. I never could survive in one place, my luck was bad that way. Sometimes I would work by myself without being associated with any newspaper, I would get paid if any of those photos got printed, and the negatives would stay with me. I used to

be a stringer at the *Pakistan Times* as well, my salary there was seventy five taka. When I worked as a staff, the newspaper had the right to keep my negatives if they wanted. But if I worked independently or as a stringer, then the negatives would always remain with me. That is how I managed to keep so many photos. Many would take photographs at that time, but never realised their importance. Even I never realised how important these pictures would become today.

Once ABM Musa, the news editor of the *Daily Observer*, bought a photograph from me personally, and sent it abroad. The one where Bhutto was leaving with the arms guarded protocol. He bought one print with ten taka. That photo was very rare, no one else had taken it. It was in Hotel Continental. I was sitting next to the elevator at the downstairs waiting for him. The moment he got out, I clicked. That one click! The flash used to have bulb system back then, the bulb would burst in one click, the flash would not work after that. If you miss that one shot, you miss your desired photograph. It is a matter of luck as well. But if you have the experience, luck can be in your favour.

I have taken photos of many leaders. During the time of independence, when the presidents and leaders of various countries that were recognising Bangladesh started arriving,



First hoisting of Bangladesh flag on March 2, 1971.

PHOTO: JALALUDDIN HAIDER

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