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Howrah craftsman in London contest

Jewellery maker makes national cut

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Prasenjit Dari

A countrywide hunt for a young jewellery craftsman to represent India in a global contest in London later this year has netted a diamond from Domjur in Howrah.

In a family of traditional jewellery craftsman, Prasenjit Dari was the reluctant one. The 21-year-old says he took up his father and brother's trade only because he was "kind of expected to follow suit". He still gripes about feeling cold in an air-conditioned studio.

What Prasenjit has no problem doing is translating what he sees in his mind's eye into exquisite gold and silver jewellery. His raw talent last week earned him a ticket to London to compete in the jewellery-making segment of the World Skills Competition this October.

“We were looking at someone below 22 years of age with the potential to be a big name. Prasenjit seems to fit the bill,” Pankaj Parekh, the convener (east) of the Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council, told **Metro**.

Prasenjit’s journey to recognition had started around three months ago when the National Skill Development Corporation contacted the council to search for a candidate to send to the global competition. In the weeks that followed, 11 talented jewellery workers were selected from across the country for a test to pick the one who could best represent what Indian craftsmanship stood for.

“There were some challenges in drawing up a shortlist. For one, most of our skilled *karigars* are above the age limit for the competition. Also, for the competition, one would need to be an expert in every segment of jewellery-making — forming, stone-setting and polishing. Such all-round skills are rare,” Parekh said.

On May 25, Prasenjit and 10 other craftsmen gathered at the council’s Mumbai studio for the two-day national competition. Lest he feel overawed, his guru Noor Hussain Khan had accompanied him to Mumbai. “It was nice to have my mentor around. He is a master craftsman from Domjur from whom I have learnt jewellery making and in whose shop I have been working,” Prasenjit said.

The competition was tough but the Class X dropout gave it his all. “I was given a design and told to create it in silver,” Prasenjit recalled. “There were spaces in the design for stones, although I didn’t have to do the setting. I was satisfied with how the piece turned out.”

But did he think his work would be adjudged the best? “I knew my work was good. Winning is a great feeling. Everyone in my family have been very encouraging since,” Prasenjit said.

According to those who selected him, the real test for Prasenjit begins now. “His strongpoint is forming. In the next few months, he will receive training in working with scales, polishing and stone-setting at the Indian Institute of Gem and Jewellery in Mumbai and at institutes in Indore and Surat. He will also be given personality development training in Bangalore and taught a bit of English so that he is comfortable in London,” Parekh said.

Although India has been participating in the World Skills Competition for several years, this is the first time that an Indian is in the jewellery competition, featuring representatives of about 50 countries.