



# Living through Brushstrokes

NAZIBA BASHER

Anika Mariam Ahmed grew up in a family of academics- architects and doctors. And even though they appreciated art with utmost enthusiasm, they didn't see a career in the subject and left it to be nurtured as a hobby or passion. However, Anika was determined to turn this passion of hers into a career and she wouldn't take no for an answer, for she knew she was destined to paint.

"I used to paint since I was a child. But I never looked at it as a potential career until I had joined BRAC to study Architecture. After a year, I grew apart from the subject knowing that my heart solely lies in painting. I knew that my parents gave academics more priority than the arts, so I enrolled myself into Charukola to study painting in secrecy, and also rejoined BRAC to study English Literature- to keep my parents unsuspecting," says Anika. 6 months into her course at Charukola, her parents had found out that she was studying painting without their knowledge or consent. There was a lot of tension at home after that incident and it lasted a while. "I even had to get a job to pay for my paint and other utensils because my parents refused to buy them for me."

After her family finally came to



PHOTO: COURTESY

terms with her studying Painting and Literature both, Anika started a new venture- Orange Theory. "I remember never finding the kind of clothes I would want to wear in any store. So I had decided to make my own clothes by painting things, that I found interesting, on them. My sister and a close

friend, Rajon, inspired me to make this bigger and sell my creations, and eventually, Orange Theory happened," says Anika. Starting out as an online clothing store, Orange Theory now focuses on very unique, hand-made jewellery such as a peter-pan themed necklace or hairpins with

large golden butterflies about to take flight. "I always wanted to work with the colour golden. I always thought good golden jewellery was hard to find. And I saw this as the perfect opportunity for me to create some really good pieces with my own artwork."

Like every great artist, Anika makes sure that a hint of herself is present in her work. "I base all my work on things that I like," says Anika. Starting from her fascination with Johnny Depp and Audrey Hepburn to The Beatles and Rabindranath Tagore, Anika's jewellery has made a place in the hearts of people with a similar taste. Her jewellery can start from sophisticated and elegant, portraying the paintings of Van Gogh, or just downright funky and colourful, urging an inner zest for life.

Anika is currently planning on going abroad to pursue a Master's Degree in painting from an art institute. She says, "It's not like our end of the globe has anything less to offer. One can find art anywhere, if one looks close enough. But I really just want to be a little far from home. I want to be on my own for a while. I believe that will help me understand myself better, which will ultimately help me reveal my true potential as an artist."

## The Balancing Act

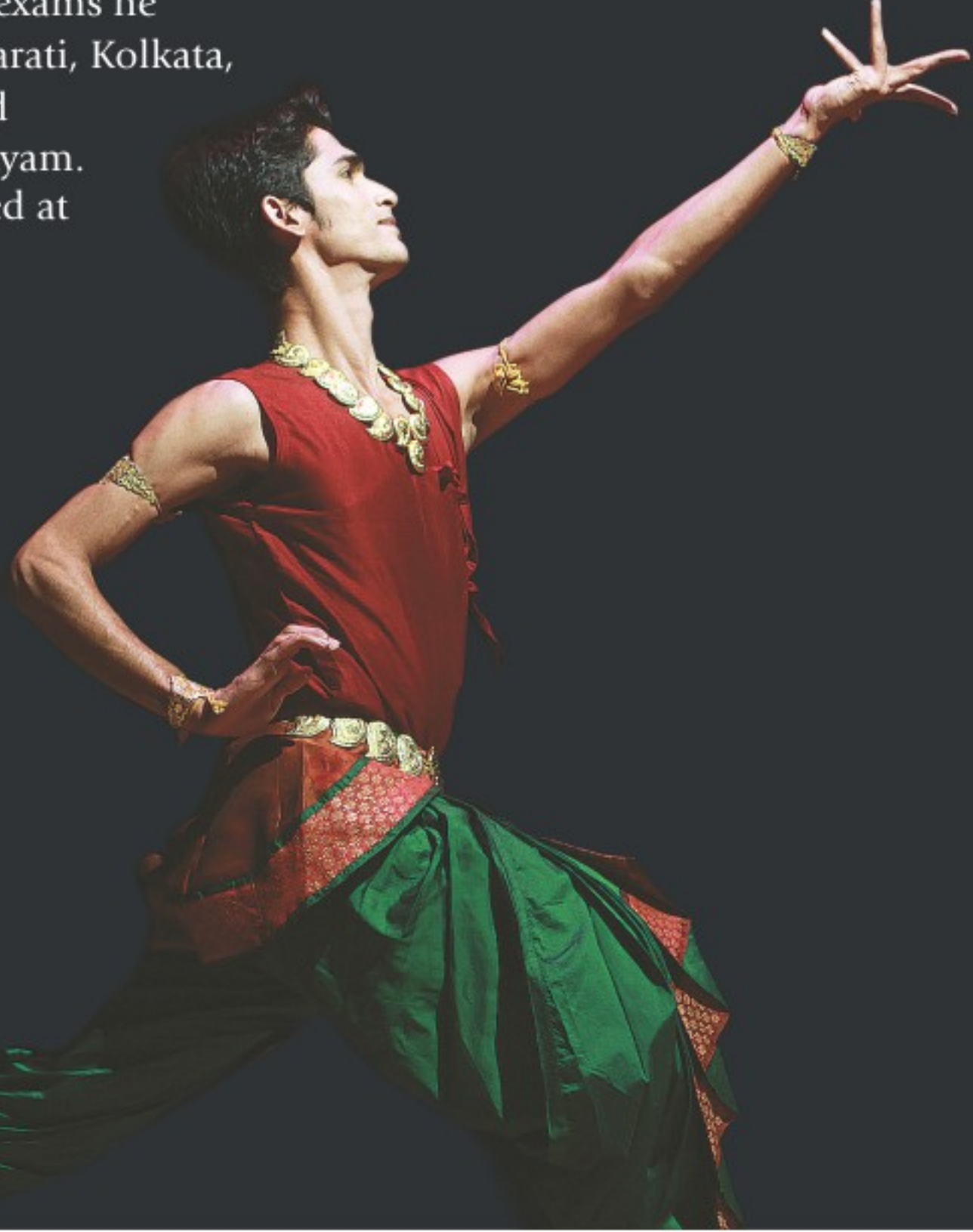
APURBA JAHANGIR

Amit Chowdhury has not only proved to be a prominent Bharatanatyam dancer, but also proved that it always pays off when you stay true to your passion. Over the years he has directed and performed a host of productions including Tagore's famous 'Mayar Khela,' 'Tasher Desh,' 'Fireflies,' and many more. Amit also performed at various festivals including the 'Uday Shankar Festival' and 'Kalki Kalakar Festival'.

Born and brought up in Chittagong, Amit's voyage towards the world of dancing began at a very early age. "I began dance lessons because of my mother," he says. "However, very soon, I realised that dance is something I cannot live without." He learned the basic of folk and other genres of dancing at the Chittagong Shilpakala Academy and after completing his HSC exams he went to Rabindra Bharati, Kolkata, for his Bachelor's and Master's in Bharatnatyam. Amit has performed at

various festivals but he states that his most remarkable show was at the Kalki Kalakar Festival where he received the Srinagarmani Award. "I think that an artiste can never be fully satisfied with his own work," he says. "Once an artiste is satisfied, he or she would become stagnant! I don't think I was ever entirely satisfied with any of my performances but after receiving the award I was at least certain that I was on the right path."

Currently, Amit is working as a lecturer of Dance at Shanto Mariam University and a guest lecturer in the Department of Theatre and Performance Studies in Dhaka University. He has also been working extensively with Shadhona- a centre of advancement in South Asian culture. According to Amit, there should be more academic institutions in our country to practice these art forms so that many more can pursue them professionally.



PHOTOS: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

## GOT PAAN?

ANIKA HOSSAIN

The tradition of eating a well made paan after a heavy meal has been a part of our culture for centuries. Although many of the customs associated with paan have now waned, they are still served at weddings and a small crowd of people can always be found around the local paanwallah (seller). One such popular joint is in Gulshan Avenue in the form of Mohammad Shamim's Paan Shop. For thirty years, Mohammad Shamim has been running his business which has been handed down in his family for three generations.

Shamim's paan shop is everything a traditional paan shop should be- complete with ornate jars to hold his colourful spices and leaves. "What we do here is done with a lot of love," says Shamim. "It's not just what we put inside the paan that makes it special, in my shop if you just have the paan leaf by itself you will like it." What makes Shamim's shop unique is that he travels to India at least twice a month to buy his ingredients. "I am originally from Uttar Pradesh, but my forefathers moved here long ago."

Shamim carries more ingredients than the average paan seller. "I have the Indian Magai leaf, the Indian Meetha leaf (sweet) and the Bangladeshi sachi leaf and mishti leaf from Maheshkhali," says Shamim. "As for spices I have gulcan, rasili kimam, tabac, (the silver/golden foil like substance),

we have ones made from real gold and silver, from Kolkata."

Each time he goes to India, one of his sons accompanies him to learn the business. "Aside from myself, I have five other paan artists in my home- my four sons and my wife." Shamim has several very popular paans on his menu, "The VIP paan is one of these," he explains. "This has saffron and kosturi flavours in it. The Suleimani paan is also very popular- I put in

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cherry paste (from Bhutan), Pakistani gulcan as well as the Indian gulcan which is made from rose petals and is very good for the heart," he explains. "Then I put in a honey jelly, peppermint, coconut, date paste, sauf dana, mirch masala (from Hyderabad, which itself has 16 spices blended in it), benarasi masala, taal misri, chaman bahaar, ru-afzah and lastly I put tabac."

Shamim's shop is open from 7pm till 1am every night. During

winter, he gets orders for at least two or three weddings a week. "We wear special outfits when we serve at weddings complete with turbans so we look more elegant," he says. Shamim has a knack for what his customers like, he carries chocolates for children and cough and indigestion remedies for the adults, all free of charge. "If I make my customers happy, they come back," he smiles.

Although Shamim never learned to read or write, he wants to educate



his sons alongside teaching them the business. "I want them to run an even more successful business than I do and education is the key to that," opines Shamim. Although he is very content with his small but profitable enterprise, Shamim says he will not mind working for the bigger companies that supply paan. "I am well respected in the business because of my skills, and if the Almighty wishes, I will do even better in the future," he says.