



Superchef tales from Comilla and Feni

After uncovering some culinary gems in Sylhet, Rupchanda- The Daily Star Superchef 2016 moved on to Comilla and Feni, where they were met with some striking individuals, who are capable of changing the culinary face of Bangladesh with their magic hands. They shared their stories, their lives, their inspirations, and most importantly, passionately portrayed their love for the art of cooking.

Masum Ahmed used to be in a completely different profession, but something as simple as 'passing by Radisson hotel' used to nudge his insides. The butterflies in his stomach would whisper tales of flavours and spices inside of him. He wanted to cook. That's all he wanted to do.

"After I realised that I have a certain passion for food and cooking, I enrolled myself into a cooking institute, after which I got a job at a restaurant," he said. After three months, Masum became somewhat of a pastry chef at his job.

"I actually applied for this competition in 2014 once. But in the middle of the competition, a family member had passed away, for which I had to go back home, and thus, couldn't take part in the competition any further. I'm very excited to be back here!"

Masum believes in pure innovation. "I want to promote the food of my country, but with a twist. I want to respect the dishes of my country, but also put my own two cents in there and make each dish my own."

Another popular contestant from Comilla was Mamun Chowdhury. With the help of his boss, the Australian High Commissioner and his boss' wife, who was a contestant of Masterchef Australia, Masum learned to win hearts over with the use of flavours.

"I learned everything from my boss and his wife. I loved cooking from before that though. Because I am from a poor family, I used to depend on my cooking skills to earn money. I worked here and there but my current boss and his wife are amazing people. "Seeing my interest and passion, they not only taught me everything there is to know about the culinary arts, but also encouraged me to take part in this competition."

Mamun, for a very long time, had his eyes on Rupchanda-The Daily Star Superchef competition, but failed to apply because of time-management. His boss insisted he go on leave for this competition, and gave him all the confidence and inspiration he needed. "The competition is very tough. In the audition round, I noticed everyone I was competing against and it was terrifying because they were all excellent. But without confidence, you cannot go too far. I thank my boss and his wife for instilling that very confidence in me."

In Feni, though the number of participants in the audition round wasn't very overwhelming, the selected winners and their food certainly were. There, we came across Rokshana Shirin, a hardworking woman with a background in English from Dhaka University.

"Ever since I understood what cooking was, I've been interested in it. I grew up in a household where women weren't forced to cook. Instead, we were always told to focus on our education and career. But cooking, as an art, is very appealing to me. Ever since I could, I've been experimenting with food and my father is my biggest fan."

Rokshana's main goal, when it comes to cooking, is making something different. "The most exciting part of cooking is making different things, creating differ-

ent flavours. My husband and I both love experimenting with food, and we travel a lot and try different cuisines. I try to apply whatever I learn into my cooking."

Taking inspiration from the previous seasons of Rupchanda-The Daily Star Superchef and Masterchef, Rokshana is now preparing herself to go further ahead in the competition.

There was another contestant who got a wild card, which means, she was selected to be in waiting and will have to cook another round. But she gets confidence in her name- Umme Kulsum.

"I am the namesake of last year's champion, and that in itself helps me dream bigger." Giggly Umme Kulsum says she was very baffled with being a part of a competition. "I've never competed for anything before. But just being a part of this has given me a lot of confidence. I was very shocked and baffled on the day of the audition. Which is why, I think, I remained in waiting. But now, with the inspiration I took from there, I know I can do much better."

Kulsum now times herself every time she cooks. "I have a lot of confidence in my cooking. What I don't have confidence in is myself. So now, to train myself better, I time myself in the kitchen. I give myself 30-45 minutes to cook everything I need to."

This bunch from Comilla and Feni ooze determination and will-power. They aren't just here for the sake of competition; they all have their eyes set on the Superchef crown. Who will be our next Superchef? Will it be one of these talented individuals? We'll just have to wait and watch!

By Naziba Basher
Photo: Md. Kawsar



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