

SHARMILA BANAJERJEE AND SUDESHNA SWAYAMPURABHA

Star Showbiz looks into the life of the famous mother-daughter dancer duo: Manipuri dancer and instructor Sharmila Banerjee and her daughter Sudeshna Swayamprabha. Sharmila is the lead Manipuri instructor at Chhayanaut Sangeet Vidyayatan, while also running her own dance school named Nritya Nandan. Sudeshna completed her Graduate and Post-Graduate Degrees in Anthropology from the University of Dhaka and is currently pursuing her second Masters in Manipuri Dance at Rabindra Bharati.



FAVOURITES:

Colour
Sharmila- Purple
Sudeshna- Pink

Food
Sharmila- Spicy food
Sudeshna- Same. Anything spicy

Music
Sharmila- No specific genre as we have to listen to a lot of music to accumulate dancing
Sudeshna- Same as mom. We have to work with so many songs that I personally do not get enough time for music as recreation

Singer
Sharmila- Since we have to work with a lot of music, settling on one favourite singer is tough
Sudeshna- It keeps changing

Movie
Sharmila- Uttam Suchitra duos and any Big B movies
Sudeshna- Romantic Comedy and Biographies

Actor
Sharmila- Amitabh Bacchan
Sudeshna- Too many

Dancer
Sharmila- Birju Maharaj, Nila Samsun, Uday Sankar, Amala Sankar, Sanjukta Panigrahi and of course Srimati Kalavati Devi and her daughter Bimbawati Devi
Sudeshna- My mother of course and all the names she has mentioned. I have seen their performance while growing up. I will also mention Santosh Nair and his student Tushar Kalya from the newer ones.
Rabindra or Nazrul

Sharmila- Both
Sudeshna- Both
What made you choose dancing over any other career?
Sharmila: Luckily, I belong to a family where music and dancing was our second language. From when I can remember, my family would arrange cultural functions like Nazrul Jayanti and Rabindra Jayanti at home. My cousins and I participate in the shows. This was back in Chittagong. I would say 1971 has given us independence and 1971 has given me dance. I was a part of "Mukti Sangrami Shilpi Shongstha" as a singer. I first joined dance school in 1971 in Kolkata under Amala Sankar and decided to choose dancing as my language of expression. I finished my Undergraduate from The University of Dhaka by the will of my father. Later, I won a scholarship in dancing at Shanti Niketon in 1978. I never really had to face any obstacle before or after marriage. *It is obvious that your mother inspired you to start dancing but did you ever want to recite with your father (Bhaskar Bandyopadhyay)?*
Sudeshna: I basically chose dancing by myself. Of course, my mother gave me support and I was with her all the time. I would go to rehearsals and dance classes from since I can remember, so I was never really attracted to recitation. Although my mother would always encourage me to sit with my father and improve my pronunciation, and maybe recite a few lines (which I eventually did). I never thought of talking recitation as seriously as I took dance. *Share with us your experience of your*

debut movie "Moner Manush".
Sudeshna: Dance had the upper hand in this too. Goutom Kaku (Director Goutom Ghosh) saw my performance on stage and immediately decided to cast me and approached my mother. Although we refused initially, obviously without knowing the script, but after being aware of how good the script was and that I had to act opposite to Prosenjit Chatterjee (one of the most renowned actor from Kolkata) there was no way we could refuse this. I do not really have stage fright but given the first shoot of the entire movie was mine and we were called in at 3 in the morning where we rehearsed and got prepared for the shoot at 6 with a plain cotton saree wrapped around me in freezing cold weather of Santi Niketon, I was shivering both out of cold and nervousness. But after the first shoot everything went smoother than I expected. I got to work with an amazing bunch of co-artists. *Tell us something that you love about your daughter Sudeshna and dancer Sudeshna.*
Sharmila: I hope Sudeshna will agree to me on this. I never give her any privilege when it comes to dancing. I always treat her as a student like I would treat any other. But at home I am as strict as any mother, making sure she is practicing and concentrating. We are more like friends. *Tell us a good side about Sharmila ma'am as a teacher and a mother.*
Sudeshna: There is really not much of a difference between her as a mother and a teacher. We are always sharing ideas even at home, maybe discussing new steps or

choreographing. Since we both share the same interest there is basically no difference. We are like friends at home and a teacher-student relationship at class. *What are your future plans?*
Sharmila: My plan is to go slow with my school Nritya Nandan, but I wish to turn it into a studio theatre. Other than that I have started arranging workshops since the past two years. I brought Smt Kalavati Devi and 65 students from different dance schools to attend these workshops. I wish to bring development in the dance industry of our country. In 2016 I invited Chadra Shekhar Guruji and introduced a residential workshop in Bangladesh for the first time. It was arranged at Savar and lasted three days. I want to continue doing what I do and give my best to bring any necessary changes in dance.
Sudeshna: Before my admission in Dhaka University we went to a conference by World Dance Alliance in Delhi where I met many anthropologists from various parts of the world. There were many of them who had never danced physically or had any practical experience but were writing papers on it, which was absolutely beautiful. That is what inspired me. I realized that I had many scopes to research on dance through anthropology. So basically, my plan is to flourish in this sub-discipline called Dance Anthropology, which is very established and famous in Europe and America. I am going to work on dance scholarly so it can bring a change, as it is very new to our county.

By Rownak Nowrin Haque