

Introducing Rupchanda-The Daily Star Super Chef 2017: Aysha Siddiky Pinky

Aysha Siddiky Pinky has been dubbed as the traveller. Her journey so far has taken her from Bangladesh to Botswana to America to South Africa. Each new location would mean new culinary compositions to learn and each new dish would teach her something new about flavours. But Pink's foray into the culinary world all began with a sole cup of tea. A fierce competitor in a precocious package, Pinky announced herself to the competition with a preparation of 360 cheese in the early qualification rounds. That's when we were given the first hint of what was about to come. We sat down with Pinky to learn more of her jour-



ney in the Super Chef kitchen. Talkative, cheerful and bubbly, Pinky leaves an everlasting impression on anyone she comes in contact with. That is perhaps the first thing you take away from meeting her. The second thing is just how much she loves food and cooking. If anyone deserved to be Rupchanda-The Daily Star Super Chef 2017, this was the one. It was undoubted and with five badges to show, Pinky's victory was almost a forgone conclusion.

During the Grand Finale, the participants were tasked with preparing four dishes. Perhaps the biggest moment of her life so far, we asked her what she made. She said there was a mixed salad, a pasta-pased shrimp dish, duck as the main course and



perhaps a pie as the dessert. She stresses on the word "perhaps" and asks us to check again. "I don't want to say anything I am not sure of. I don't want to be later said to be wrong," she says, partially nervous, partially full of laughter. It was this mixed disposition that really won her over. She remembers that during her most memorable moment of Rupchanda-The Daily Star Super Chef 2017, she had been bursting into laughter only because she was so nervous. "It was the T20 challenge. We stood in the back-stage and saw them bringing cricket bats into the kitchen. It made us all very nervous and while everyone panicked, I just laughed. I was nervous too and that was what I did," she said. Laughter seemed to become her defense mechanism for the moment. Her laughter surprised her fellow competitors who teased her saying that of course she would laugh because she had nothing to be worried about.

The challenge though is the one Pinky remembers most only because of its difficulty. The challenge involved the participants being split into teams of two. The first person would go make a dish and the other would not see. Mid-way the other person would be brought in and would have to finish making the dish without being told what it was. Then, for the last ten minutes, the two would cook together. Such a challenge really inspired the participants to dig deeper and work harder than ever before. "Every year the quality of the programming goes up. This year was no different. The tasks were made all the more harder and thus the competition as a whole became enhanced because of this," Pinky said.

We asked her then what it really took to become a Super Chef. "Focus," she said, without any hesitation. It was what got her the crown and it was the one quality she valued the most. "When I was in the top 20, I knew there was no looking back. I had to do remain focused. You must immerse

yourself in the competition and not worry about what is going on around you or what people are saying," she said. She also informed that pre-planning was a waste. It just augmented the levels of worry. "Pre-planning won't help you much. In the kitchen, you have to think and work instantly. You have to trust your first instinct," she added.

As for the competition, Pinky thinks of it as one of the greatest platforms of its kind in the country. "Everyone benefits from it. It is a great place to showcase your skill. There is no other such platform. Cooking is an art and here it is valued; here, you are taught that even when serving a samosa, the presentation is important," she said. But what



about the judges, we asked. Was that important to them? "Of all the judges, Tareq Anam was the hardest to please. It takes 3-4 episodes to really gauge the judge's preference but his is a difficult one to understand. But even then, that is a challenge. We

Bangladeshis may for instance like sweets, but just because we like sweet donuts doesn't mean we like macarons too," she explained. She also added that Chef Daniel's briefings really helped the participants a lot.

Finally, we asked what the future holds for our Super Chef. "I want to learn more. I want to get degrees and diplomas in the culinary art. I want to explore more because the competition taught me to do so. In the long run, I want to participate in international competitions but for now I want to have my own travel cooking show," she said. And we couldn't help but think she would indeed have a stellar travel cooking show, one that would really connect with the audience. With that, we wished 2017's Super Chef all the best and

did not forget to tell her what a true pleasure it was knowing her and having met her. Our lives were perhaps a little brighter just for that.

By Osama Rahman
Photo: Prabir Das