



Monalisa *Smiles*

COVER STORY

Enchanting and talented, Monalisa has won the heart of the audience with her delightful performances and charming smile. Monalisa has received numerous prestigious awards for her accomplishments as an actor and a model including the 'Miss Photogenic 2000 Bangladesh', 'Channel i Performance Award' and 'Meril Prothom Alo Awards 2002' among others. Monalisa later took a sabbatical from the showbiz industry. She has recently returned to Dhaka and in an interview with Rafi Hossain, Monalisa opened up about her break from showbiz, her current projects and her aspirations for the future.

Rafi Hossain: Monalisa, thank you for coming, we are so glad to have you with us. People have been saying that they can't find you anywhere. Is it true?

Monalisa: I can be found; in fact, here I am now! (Laughs) I think people are saying this because I don't do too many dramas these days. I am quite selective about the roles I accept. I just don't find the proper chemistry with everyone, so it's hard to do a lot of dramas.

Rafi: You are currently residing in America, right?

Monalisa: Yes, I have to live in America as I have a job there. The vacations I get from my job are the ones I spend in Bangladesh. So, whenever I am in talks for a drama, I share my schedule with the directors, and then I speak with them on the phone. And since I know most directors, and I also keep in touch with my colleagues, I usually don't have a problem planning the schedule. This time, I mainly came to Bangladesh to spend time with my family. We plan a lot, but most of the plans never unfold, as shooting takes up a lot of time. Whenever I come, I stay for around 3 months.

Rafi: So, you come to Dhaka for 3 months every year?

Monalisa: Not every year, I came to Dhaka this time after two years.

Rafi: You told me that you are in touch with people you have already worked with, but what about the ones you have never worked with? How do you stay in touch with them?

Monalisa: The thing is, after I come to Dhaka, I let everyone know that I'm back. This time, I've worked with quite a lot of people I have never worked with before. For me, the most important thing when selecting a drama is the story and who is directing it. These factors help me decide which projects I should accept.

Rafi: Now, you have been in the industry for quite a long time, and you must have seen a lot of change in the industry. What is your take on the current scenario of our showbiz industry?

Monalisa: Usually we can finish a good drama in two to three days. But now, the directors rush and are forced to finish in one. This hampers the quality of the work. And the budget is low, and this affects the quality as well. A lot of the dramas being produced these days aren't good and people do not watch them. They switch to programs that are more entertaining.



Most people in the industry aren't committed, and professionalism is low. Unless we fix these issues, our industry will not grow.

Rafi: Why did you decide to go abroad?

Monalisa: It was mainly because of a personal issue. I had to go abroad for issues involving my divorce, and I had to stay there for some time. Luckily, I liked it there, and because of that, I decided to stay. And I am really enjoying my stay in America.

Rafi: But don't you miss the lights and camera there?

Monalisa: I do miss acting a lot. But starting anything new is interesting. I work as a beauty adviser there; I used to be a senior makeup artist at MAC before. Due to working in the media for a long time, I knew about makeup well. It has been 5 years since I started working in the beauty industry. I started with MAC, then I was the assistant manager of KIKO, an Italian makeup brand, and now I am working as a beauty adviser in Sephora.

Rafi: Since you have been working in the American beauty industry for some time, what

do you think is missing in the industry here? **Monalisa:** What is missing here is the proper training. What I do is teach the new makeup artists in USA. I train them and certify that they are prepared to work in the makeup industry. We have to study, give exams to be able to certify others. But, people here do not have to go through any such process.

Rafi: Do the beauticians here know about your expertise in makeup?

Monalisa: To be honest, I was planning on working with some beauty consultants this time, but due to my shooting engagements, I couldn't find the time. But, it is in my plan to help develop the makeup artists here and do something for the country.

Rafi: How do you deal with rumors and gossip?

Monalisa: I just laugh them away. (Laughs) The thing is, there will be gossip and rumors about you. You can't dwell on it too much. When I first started in the showbiz industry, I felt like many newspapers did not support me. After I went to America, they joked about the fact that

I worked in the makeup industry. They could not fathom just how big of a deal a beauty expert is. It's not their fault though, as they don't know enough about it.

Rafi: What's your take on relationships?

Monalisa: Right now, I am very focused on my career. However, if I meet someone I am compatible with, I might settle down with them. But, as of now I have a lot of plans and am focused on my career. There is no room for relationships.

Rafi: Many veteran actors have come forward with complaints that they are not receiving enough work. How do you see this?

Monalisa: This is all due to the agencies that run the industry. They decide who is going to be cast. I don't understand the concept of this agency, but this is how it works. They don't value an artist. And if an artist does not get the respect they deserve, why should they stay here? Showbiz industries in other countries value their artists. They are also far more organized than us. They have a disciplined system where everyone is recognized.

Rafi: Any specific director you want to work with, but haven't received the opportunity yet?

Monalisa: Among the new directors, I really want to work with Adnan, he is an amazing director. Among the older directors, I would love to work with Mezba Uddin Sumon, Zakaria Shoukhin and a couple of others.

Rafi: Why do we not see you in films?

Monalisa: I have received a lot of movie offers, but I didn't like any of them. However, in the future, if I find a good role, I might accept it. For me a good script is very important. I got an offer for *Monpura*, but back then my focus was working in commercials and dramas, so I didn't do accept it.

Rafi: Now that you're a beauty expert, can you name five of the most fashionable male and female stars of Bangladesh?

Monalisa: For me it's Sadia Islam Mou, and Nobel bhai. I really like Nusrat Fariha, and Bidya Sinha Mim as well. Shabnam Fariha is fashionable too. I like Siam and Emon too. Most of the new actors are great too. I really like Apurba and Nisho as well.

Rafi: Message for your fans?

Monalisa: All the work I do is for my fans, I give my best for them. Please pray for me so that I can accomplish all my future plans.

By Ridwan Intisaar Mahbub

