

CENTRE STAGE

# Rachel Priyanka

*Rachel Priyanka is an esteemed dancer, who has established herself in the hearts of the audience with her awe-inspiring 'Gaudiya' dance performances. Also a lecturer at the University of Dhaka, she talks about her struggles and glories in this week's interview with Star Showbiz.*

**Tell us something about yourself.**

I'm known as both a practitioner of the *Gaudiya* dance and as a lecturer in the field of dance in *Dhaka University*. It can be said that my only passion is dancing.

**When did you begin dancing, and did you always want to become a dancer?**

I was involved with dancing from very early on in my life, since I was around four. My passion became my profession. I was certain that I wanted to attain higher studies in dance since I was in grade nine. I was never interested in other subjects. I received a lot of support from my family regarding this choice. I went to *Rabindra Bharati University* immediately after completing my Higher Secondary examinations, with a scholarship. I completed my bachelors and masters from there.

**What are the barriers you had to overcome to pursue this career?**

I'm a stage performer. I perform on huge stages – around fifty feet wide. If I want myself to be visible there, I can't be too skinny. However, I have to be healthy, and have a nice figure. This poses to be quite difficult. Moreover, dancers have many economic and social barriers. Parents don't willingly let their children grow up to become dancers. In all the art forms, I feel that dancers have the lowest pay. It takes a lot of hard work to learn classical dance. I've been practicing *Gaudiya* dance for eleven years now, yet I feel that I need to learn more. As a dancer, the most important thing is pursuit.

**Who was your biggest inspiration?**

Definitely my mother. I had many teachers, but Professor Mahua Mukherjee was my *Guru*. He was the former Dean of Fine Arts in *Rabindra Bharati University*. He was also the head of the department. In the last two years, he has been involved with the *Tagore Chair* in *Dhaka University*. He's the one who reformed *Gaudiya* dance. I began my dancing lessons at *BAFA*. The teachers there also inspired me a lot.

**Is the education system in Kolkata different from Bangladesh?**

I can't talk about the differences as we are the first generation who pioneered the department of dance in Bangladesh. We are the first lecturers. The syllabus was created by us from the things we learned in Kolkata. We modified it to suit our country's culture and heritage. So, academically, I don't know the differences yet. However, the student-teacher relationship is quite different here. The devotion is not quite as prevalent. I've tried to establish that here, and although I've had some success, I still feel as if that can't be reached. This is due to the huge differences in our way of living. Those who have studied in Kolkata, and are teaching now, I think they all try to develop the student-teacher relationship they experienced in Kolkata.

**Do you have any special message for the readers?**

The dancers of today are lacking in setting a fixed goal. They're performing a variety of dances. I believe that this is the era of specialization. If I do ten different forms of dance, I believe I'll lose my identity. A fixed goal and hard work are what's essential, I think.

Interviewed by Joana Nomrata Mazumder  
Transcribed by Amina Hossain

