



PHOTO: STAR

## Ilias Kanchan on career, regrets and current projects

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

National Award winning actor Ilias Kanchan has achieved a lot during his career, being one of the most successful leads of his time.

He has also successfully forayed into production, and has worked tirelessly as the head of "Nirapad Sharok Chai", making roads safer for everyone with his efforts.

This Eid, the actor has starred in the much talked about "Moronottom", a web film produced by Bongo, which was also televised by four channels.

We talk to the eminent actor for his thoughts on the industry, future plans and more.

**"Moronottom" was your first web film. What was your reaction when you first saw it?**

I have been a rebellious voice all my life, so I was exceptionally happy when I saw "Moronottom" myself.

The film, which tells the story of a girl who undergoes harassment and commits suicide, is a touching tale by Sanjoy Samadder.

It was telecast on four channels at once, so I must say that it was a record for me, and I am proud of "Moronottom".

**How was your experience working on the film?**

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, I have not gone out much, unless it was an emergency. However, I took four days to shoot for this film. I must say, Sanjoy Samadder is an excellent director and handled it very well. I have done more than a hundred small-screen projects, but outside of films, I have rarely seen such a great production team.

Everyone on the unit was careful, wore a mask and followed the safety protocols. I had a great experience shooting in Pubail, Shahid Minar and

Old Dhaka for this project.

**What was your most memorable memory from the shoot?**

When I was shooting at a very old residence in Old Dhaka, and later realised that it was the home of the publisher of "Begum Potrika". It was a great moment for me, as I had the chance to speak to him when we received the "Nagar Padak" from former mayor, Sadeque Hossain Khoka back in the day. Since he is not with us anymore, I reminisced him during that time.

**You recently worked with long-time colleague Rozina for a new film. Tell us about that.**

Rozina and I go way back, we did many films together. She recently directed a film named "Fire Dekha", which is based on our great Liberation War. It is a government granted film, and more importantly, I took up the offer because I am very fond of the subject.

I'd like to say that there are unfortunately no institutes in the country where you can formally learn direction. Greats like Amzad Hossain and Subhash Dutta learned from others. My belief is that Rozina, having acted in more than 300 films in her career, will do well in direction.

**Do you have any regrets in your career?**

My only regret is that I have not been able to continue my "Nirapad Sharok Chai" movement because of this pandemic. We usually go around schools, and give motivational training to drivers as well.

However, I am very grateful for the career that I have had. I was able to star in "Beder Meye Jochona", one of the country's most commercially successful films. I have been able to help people with "Nirapad Sharok Chai", after I started to appear less in films. The Almighty has given me a very respectable life, and I cherish it very much.

MADIHA ATHAR KHAN

For the last two years in a row, I had taken much joy in correctly predicting the Oscar winners for best actor. Both Rami Malek ("Bohemian Rhapsody") and Joaquin Phoenix ("Joker") transcended the barriers of storytelling on their own to give memorable performances in their respective films. 2020 was not the same for movies, or otherwise. As cinema theatres remained shut around the world contributing to the sense of grief and the loss of normalcy that were universally experienced, many anticipated an underwhelming year for new films.

Yet, despite the unprecedented circumstances or perhaps because of them, poignant stories were told, boundaries of creativity were pushed, and most importantly, smaller movies (those with less Hollywood fanfare) received the limelight. Sir Anthony Hopkins delivered a gripping performance in one such movie, called "The Father" and deservedly, was awarded the Oscar.

"The Father" tells the story of an old man (also named Anthony), as his mind unravels due to age and dementia. Olivia Colman as his daughter Anne, deftly depicts the intricacies involved in the face of difficult decisions.

A few weeks back, I read a 2019 article in *The New Yorker*, titled "Why We Can't Tell the Truth About Aging". I understood that when much of classic literature was penned, the average life expectancy of man couldn't have been more than fifty. For the first time in history, we have an aging population. The stories of the elderly not only deserve to be told, but there is a wide audience for them which comprises the old and the young, who wish to know more about what old age can look like, and that picture is not always pretty.

In this regard, "The Father" fits perfectly into the current cultural landscape, which is hyper fixated on how to stay young and look young for as long as possible. Growing old however, is inevitable: skin will wrinkle, hair will grey and fall out, energy will be low, and some will lose their minds.

## MOVIE REVIEW

# The Father: A gripping tale about the reality of old age

Director Florian Zeller intentionally scripted the movie entirely from the perspective of Anthony. As a result, the audience at any given moment in the film only knows what he knows, and sees what he sees. Anthony is highly speculative, fearful, and arrogant. At times, the movie can seem like a mystery-thriller in which one is compelled to question whether a mean trick is being played on this old and vulnerable man.

In a 2021 interview with BBC, Zeller says, "I wanted *The Father* to be a bit more than a story, but like an experience, as if you [the viewer] were the one losing your bearings."

The movie is shot almost entirely inside an apartment, which we initially know as Anthony's own. Throughout the film, bits and pieces of the apartment change, furniture is switched around, and a painting disappears. The set is used as a device to convey a change in timeline. Ultimately, I wondered if the events of the movie were simply a recurrence of what Anthony goes through on a given day.

Hopkins astoundingly depicts the reality of how dehumanising old age can be — the image of a man in his 80s whimpering for his mother as though he was a young kid will certainly stay with the audience. Hopkins portrays strength and fierceness when he is stubborn and helplessness when he is weak. The dichotomy of his performance is not only haunting, but also leaves the viewers with much to ponder about their own relationship with aging, and elderly parents and grandparents.

"The Father" brings to light the unfathomable difficulty of being in the position of someone responsible for an elderly person — there are not one but two characters in helpless positions. Anne struggles with the weight of her decision to live out her life on her own terms and what it means for her father's life.

The movie illustrates a simple but harsh reality of old age: one's way out of a life of complete dependence and into a better place is death.



A snippet from "The Father".

## A candid chat with Digghi

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

National Award-winning actor Prarthana Fardin Digghi started off her career as a child artiste. She made her comeback on the silver screen with "Tungipapar Miabhai", last year. She has also been in talks for her role in the upcoming Shyam Benegal directorial Bangladesh-India joint venture "Bangabandhu". In a candid chat with *The Daily Star*, the actor talks about her upcoming ventures, future plan, and more.

**How was your experience of working in "Bangabandhu", the biopic of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman?**

This project has been one of the greatest opportunities one, as an actor, could hope for. I am playing the role of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's wife Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib, while she was aged between 13 and 15 in the film's timeline. I had to travel to India to shoot for this production in two lots. The shooting of my part is done and the director has much appreciated my performance. "Bangabandhu" is a historic film and being a part of such a larger-than-life character feels

like a blessing.

**Before you started shooting, you had a meeting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Any incident in particular that you cherish about the meeting?**

This was yet another epic moment for me in my career. When I told the honourable Prime Minister that I was to play the character of her mother, she shared many unknown sides of

Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib, which has really helped me absorb the role.

**How did you prepare for this project?**

I had to undergo tremendous formulation, both mental and physical, for this role. It started with intense research and conceptualisation as I wanted to perfect her projection from books to the screen.

**Your film "Tungipapar Miabhai" was released a while ago. How was your experience with it?**

Coincidentally, I played the same character in that film. It got a positive response from both the audience and critics. Sadly, the number of audiences allowed in the theatres was limited in the pandemic. However, I am still hopeful about the impact it would leave on the audience in the longer run.

**What are your upcoming ventures? Are you shooting during this lockdown?**

I am not shooting currently and spend most of my time at home. I am working on a web film "Shesh Chithi" where I will share the screen with Yash Rohan, among others. The project, directed by Sumon Dhar, is jointly written by Bobby Rahman and Sumon Dhar.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

## Carrying the legacy of Gaudiya Nritya across borders



Mahua Mukherjee

ASHLEY SHOFTORSHI SAMADDAR

Noted Gaudiya dancer Rachel Priyanka Perris developed a keen interest in dance from an early age. She met Mahua Mukherjee in 2004 at a 15-day dance workshop, where she was performing with the popular dance troupe Nrityanchal. The workshop changed her life forever, compelling her to choose Gaudiya Nritya professionally. In a candid chat with *The Daily Star*, Gaudiya Nritya exponent Mahua Mukherjee and her protégé Rachel Priyanka Perris share their experiences, and more.

Rachel clearly remembers the first time that she came across her dance guru Mahua Mukherjee. "Almost 200 dancers from all over the world attended the workshop to get a glimpse at Gaudiya Nritya. It was my first proper workshop," she says. After planning and working her way up for a couple of years, Rachel finally decided to visit Mahua Mukherjee in 2006. "I didn't even try for any other university, I had to get the ICCR scholarship," she adds. Rachel chose Bharatanatyam as her subject, since there was no major graduation course in Gaudiya Nritya at that time.

Mahua Mukherjee was introduced to dancing by her grandparents when she started living with them in Chhattisgarh from the age of five. "The first aspect that won over my mind was the tribal folk dance of Chhattisgarh. After coming across performances of maestros like Birju Maharaj and Lila Samson, I started inclining towards classical dance,"

she mentions.

At the tender age of three, she met her first dance teacher, 'Shapan Master' who came from Raipur, four stations away from Chhattisgarh to teach a batch of girls once a week, as many could not afford to pay for his classes. Within a couple of years, Mahua started performing at various festivals, including Rabindra Jayanti and Nazrul Jayanti. "I used to go to

glimpses of dancers in literature. She later went on to restore the long-lost dance form Gaudiya Nritya over the next 20 years, with her resources. Her research involved examining old sculptures in museums, temples, and other archaeological sites.

When asked about their events and work together, the Guru-Shishya duo said that they have lost count of the number of times they



Rachel Priyanka Perris

Bhatapara three times every year to pair up with the tribal girls and dance on their routines," she reminisces.

During her eleventh grade, Mahua Mukherjee grew keen on exploring the origin of classical dance. She started gathering pieces of evidence in this regard, treasuring anything she could find in textbooks to discover

performed together. "During my time in Kolkata, we performed at numerous shows, especially between 2010 and 2014 until my training was complete and I came back home," shares Rachel. "With long train journeys, and almost no time to rest, we flew from sets to stages spreading the magic of Gaudiya Nritya," adds

Mahua. Later, duo was reunited when Mahua Mukherjee returned to Dhaka as the Rabindra chair for Dhaka University.

Both of them also addressed characteristics that they admire the most about each other. "I used to scold Rachel for her over fascination with make-up, but her tenacious heart for classical dancing won my respect," smiles Mahua. "Her determination to keep on learning and improving year after year, even after attaining fame showcases her love towards dance."

Rachel expressed her adoration for Mahua, not just as a dancer, but also for being an amazing teacher. "Mahua aunty knows how to forge an artiste from a simple girl," she shares. "She taught me how dance is like a bird, with two wings, one bearing the burden of theoretic knowledge and the other holding on to the beauty of perfect execution."

"Be it her classes, her household duties, her dance rehearsals or performances, Mahua aunty manages it all within just 24 hours seamlessly. I wish I could multitask like her," Rachel further adds.

The duo also shared that dance should be a discipline to learn, not only a source of entertainment.

"If the standards for a singer, instrumentalist and dancer are at similar levels, dancers are counted at the tail of the hierarchy, due to popularity," says Mahua Mukherjee.

Rachel supported her point. "We need to get out of these attitudes to uplift dancing at a national level," she concludes.