



Samina Husain Prema and Mohima Shwagota



Mohima Shwagota

## Reflecting upon life through MANIPURI DANCE

ASHLEY SHOPTORSHI SAMADDA

Acclaimed Manipuri dancer Samina Husain Prema came across her student, Mohima Shwagota, nearly a decade ago. At the time, Prema had just started conducting dance lessons. Over the years, the two have grown together in their pursuit of classical Manipuri dance. In a candid chat with *The Daily Star*, Prema and her protégé Shwagota speak about their bond, and more.

"Shwagota was in kindergarten when she first came to my dance class," mentions Prema. "At the time, I had a small batch of five to six students, who are still very special to me. Shwagota has always been there for me in tough times."

Prema further adds that her students' sincerity and dedication inspired her to establish Bhabna, a school of Manipuri dance.

"My dance guru Prema is a perfectionist. Her dedication always makes me want to work twice as hard, even during the long and tiring rehearsal hours," adds Shwagota, a student of Viharunisa Noon School & College. "Over time, I realised that she truly prepared my physicality for Manipuri dance, when others started praising my performances. Her strictness actually inspires me to be better."

Prema and Shwagota have performed on numerous occasions together. The dance dramas, "Bhanu Shingher Podaboli" and "Shakuntala" are two



Samina Husain Prema

of their favourite collaborations. More recently, they collaborated at the Mujib Shotoborsho programme. Shwagota also assists Prema with dance classes at Bhabna.

Over the years, the duo has grown to find comfort in each other's presence. "Usually, after I have finished choreographing a routine, I

ask Shwagota to work with my dance steps and help me perfect them on stage. Shwagota always goes with the natural demands of a song. I enjoy our compatibility," shares Prema.

On the other hand, Shwagota shares that Prema always shows faith in her students, and never hesitates to put in the extra effort to help them.

"When my students appeared for the exam conducted by Paschim Banga Rajya Sangeet Academy, they were highly appreciated by the visiting classical gurus, alongside my guru Smt Kalavati Devi. Based on their knowledge of classical Manipuri dance, my students presented themselves as graceful dancers. I was very proud as their guru that day," says Prema.

Speaking of her growth, Shwagota shares that under Prema's guidance, she overcame any form of jealousy or pettiness. "At Bhabna, we always work on each other's weaknesses and take on roles that contribute to the betterment of the routine that we are performing. There are no ego classes when we perform on stage as a troupe," she says.

Prema has dealt with her own struggles while pursuing professional training in dance. "I have tried to give my students the tutelage that I missed when I was a student myself," she shares. "Dance has not only given me grace and poise, but has also taught me to maintain a good work-life balance, and empowered me to help aspiring artists. Today, when I see Shwagota managing her academics and passion for dancing, I feel proud."

An introvert at heart, Shwagota shares that dancing brings her a sense of comfort and confidence. "I feel like a completely different person on the stage. Dancing makes me feel complete, and makes me forget about my anxieties," she concludes.

PHOTO: SHEKH MEHEDI MORSHED

## BUBLY on her upcoming ventures

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Shabnom Bubly started her career as a television news presenter, making her silver screen debut with "Bossgiri" in 2016. The actor has recently started shooting for multiple projects, including "Leader: Amie Bangladesh" where she will share the screen with Shakib Khan. In a candid chat with *The Daily Star*, the star speaks about her upcoming projects and more.

**Tell us a bit about your upcoming film "Leader: Amie Bangladesh".**

The film is directed by Topu Khan, and I will once again be seen opposite Shakib Khan. We have been working together for such a long time and the last release we had was "Bir". The story of this film is amazing and we are trying to wrap it up around Eid al-Adha. Times are tough and we are trying our best. The production will hit the theatres after the Covid-19 situation is under control.

**What are your other upcoming projects?**

I recently finished shooting for "Chokh". The film, directed by Jewel, casts Ziaul Roshan in lead alongside me. The audience will get to explore a new side of me through this film.

I had finished shooting for the film "Casino" prior to the coronavirus pandemic. I will be seen with Nirab Hossain in this Saikat Nasir directorial venture. The release was postponed due to the pandemic but I am hopeful that the audience will watch this production in theatre once the situation becomes better.

**What are your upcoming plans? What kind of characters attracts you the most?**

I don't intend to sign up for numerous projects, I would rather do a few that marks a milestone in my career. An actor has the opportunity to make the audience feel emotions on screen and respecting this privilege has always been my utmost priority. As an actor, I look to take up challenging roles and indulge myself in deep research before I face the camera.

**What lesson has this pandemic left behind for you as an actor?**

This pandemic has left behind a lot of lessons for people from all walks of life. We have lost many legends and living in a constant death threat. Living with dignity and honesty is what counts the most, that's what I have learned over the past months.



PHOTO: STAR

## Painting during a pandemic

JAHANARA TARIQ

After more than a year into the coronavirus pandemic, we are still largely confined to the four walls of our homes. But for painters, by and large, this has always been the case. They have to negotiate with their mediums from their rooms or studios. Keeping this in mind, we caught up with distinguished artists from Bangladesh to know more about their journey with art during these trying times.

Eminent artist Kanak Chapa Chakma considers herself lucky to not have to face any personal loss, when so many people near and



Mohammad Eunus

dear to her have lost people they love. "I still remember the initial days of the pandemic when I would stay at home, hungrily observing the suddenly empty world from my terrace," she says. Even though the artist finished a few paintings in the first wave of the pandemic, quite a lot of them were developed much earlier. She fed street dogs and cats frequently, and donated paintings to organisations that sold them and distributed the money to artists and film production crew members who lost their livelihoods due to the coronavirus crisis.

Acclaimed artist Professor Jamal Uddin Ahmed is known for capturing the inner pains and joys

of life in his paintings. "Staying indoors does not physically make much of a difference to us. As artists, our work requires us to stay cooped up for long hours, observing colours," says the Ekushey Padak-winning artist. In the past, he hired models for his paintings, but due to the movement restrictions now, he had to minimise the practice and paint figures based on his own psyche.

He was among one hundred artists who participated in Art Against Corona, organised by Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy. He made a painting of a mother and her two children, separated by a huge block of glass in a hospital; both of them trying to touch the other without succeeding. Ahmed donated fifteen paintings to different organisations to support struggling artists.

Professor Mohammad Eunus says that he really lost the colours in his life when the pandemic began. The loss of lives weighed so heavily in his mind that he couldn't bring himself to add bright colours to his drawings. Instead, he resorted to black and white sketches on small



Farida Zaman



Jamal Uddin Ahmed

canvases.

He was finally able to paint in colours when he was invited to a virtual workshop, the first of its kind in Bangladesh, in June 2020. It made him realise that in order to get away from these trying times, he needed to paint large pictures in vibrant colours, some of which were about the coronavirus pandemic. It paved the way for him to meditate on the nature of

painting that he didn't consider otherwise in the past. "I truly got to understand the concept of art therapy during the pandemic. It nourishes your soul and feeds your optimism towards life. Every individual should dip their toes in art to battle with the rising turbulence in life," he asserts.

In conversation with Ekushey Padak-winning artist Farida Zaman, we got a taste of her meditative and contemplative nature. She spent almost a year and a half in Thailand, well into the pandemic. Even during her stay there, she was free from the noise of the city and had access to a quiet and nourishing atmosphere as well as all kinds of art materials. Yet, she missed drawing from the comfort of her studio. She had a lot of plans on what she would do after her return, but they had to be put aside for the time being. She is continuing to write, and hopes to start painting again soon.

The author is a postgrad student of English Literature and a freelance journalist. Email: jahanaratariq@outlook.com.



Kanak Chapa Chakma