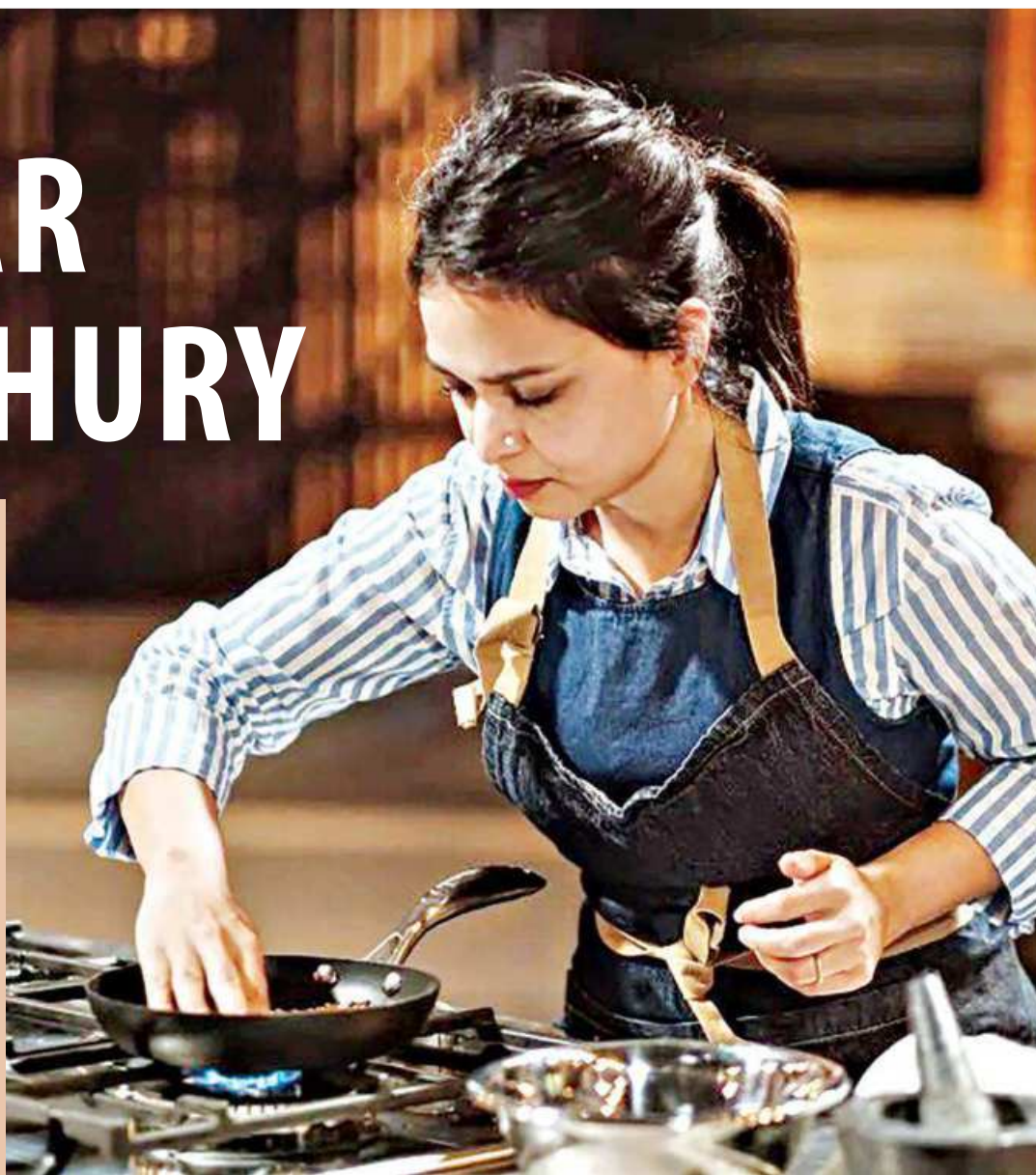


In conversation with KISHWAR CHOWDHURY

ELITA KARIM

Kishwar Chowdhury lit up the culinary world with her representation of Bangladeshi cuisine in globally recognised television programme, *MasterChef Australia*. Having secured a place among the top 10 of the competition as of writing this article, she is a strong contender for the title. The talented cook takes some time off from the rigorous



Former home cook Kishwar Chowdhury is now a strong contender for the title of "MasterChef Australia".

PHOTO COURTESY: MASTERCHEF AUSTRALIA

When did you decide to apply for *MasterChef Australia*?

I applied for *MasterChef Australia* during lockdown last year. My son was on my back until I handed in my application, and the rest is history!

You have very strong roots here in Bangladesh. In fact, your family is quite well known and well respected in Melbourne amongst the Bangladeshi diaspora. What do you think of the reactions that you are getting from your friends and family in Bangladesh and Australia?

My father is from Bangladesh, and was a freedom fighter. He moved to Australia about 50 years ago as a student and met my mother, who is from Kolkata. I was born and brought up here in Australia. I moved to Dhaka and lived there for five years for work. My in-laws are based in Dhaka and I used to travel there four to five times a year pre-Covid. Therefore, living and working in Bangladesh played a role in shaping me. What do I think of the reactions? Pretty overwhelming.

It is common knowledge that you have always liked cooking. However, when did you actually begin to cook like a professional in your kitchen?

I just cook. I always had a knack to put flavours and combinations together, being inspired by the ingredients that were available to me. I drew inspiration from my travels, places I have eaten in, and just listened to my heart. If I could not buy some food, I would learn to make it. From fresh pasta and crystal dumplings to smoked duck and crab curry -- I spent a lot of time in my home in Dhaka making dishes I would regularly eat in Melbourne and when I wanted a good *deshi* meal, I would go to my in-laws. My mother and father in law really spoiled me. They would buy the best *Elish* (with the roe) and save the biggest pieces for me. They still do.

What was the most challenging dish that

you had to prepare in the *MasterChef* kitchen till now? In addition, which one was the easiest?

I cannot tell you because they haven't aired that particular segment yet, you'll have to keep watching!

Tell us about one dish that you would like to prepare for the judges, if given the opportunity and unlimited resources.

Something that I can eat on repeat forever is my *haleem*, but given unlimited time and resources, I would make my smoked pastrami. It takes 10 days to brine and for the tendons to break down in the beef, before being cold smoked for at least 16 hours. It is a slow, and very worthwhile labour of love.

It is great to see that you are not only presenting fine dining from the Bengali kitchen, but also spicy snacks from the streets of our universities and workplaces! What kind of street foods of Dhaka (or elsewhere) did you grow up eating and do you plan to present most of them at the *MasterChef* Kitchen?

Melbourne did not have a huge street food scene -- It did, however, have some fast food, food trucks, and food festivals. I looked forward to canteen food like sausage rolls, lamingtons, and ovaltinies. But when I would visit Dhaka during winter holidays, I loved all the snack food from Town Hall and *Puran Dhaka*. There were these little orange containers with dried ginger and little toy lanterns filled with colourful candied fennel. At my grandparents' house, I loved *laal shak* (red spinach), green mangoes, fresh steamed peas, *phuchka*, *khattakhat*, and naan. To be honest, I do not have any plans to cook or not cook anything in the *MasterChef* kitchen. I am a versatile cook with affinity for all different cuisines, like any metropolitan person. When I do cook Bengali food though, I get a sense of pride. I think that shows.

Follow Kishwar on her Instagram handle [kishwar_chowdhury](#) and on her Facebook page [Kishwar Chowdhury](#) to get a sneak peak of her journey behind the scenes!

Shamol Mawla talks 'Mohanagar'

SHABABA IQBAL

Hoichoi's eight-episode crime thriller series, "*Mohanagar*", was released recently. Written and directed by Ashfaque Nipun, it is the streaming platform's first Bangladeshi original of 2021, after the success of "*Taqdeer*", starring Chanchal Chowdhury, last year.

"*Mohanagar*" depicts the events of a fateful night in a police station in Dhaka, where paths of criminals, an eminent industrialist, the general public, and members of the press, intertwine in the aftermath of a road accident, for a period of seven hours. The series, produced by Shopnoghri Productions, features Mosharraf Karim as O C Harun, Zakia Bari Mamo as Shabana Huda, Shamol Mawla as Afnan Chowdhury, Mostafizur Noor Imran as Moloy Kumar, and Khairul Basar as Abir Hasan, among others.

Shamol Mawla spoke to *The Daily Star*, about taking on this project.

Before "*Mohanagar*", the prominent actor worked with Ashfaque Nipun on "*Koshitoneer*", a Hoichoi film.

"I built a good rapport with Nipun during the making of '*Koshitoneer*'. He is the captain of our ship, and I trusted him completely. I believe he had faith in my work too," shares Mawla.

The actor was really drawn towards Afnan Chowdhury, his character in "*Mohanagar*". "I hope audiences will have a great time watching my character with O C Harun, played by Mosharraf Karim, on screen," he adds.

Mawla further elaborated on his overall experience of shooting for "*Mohanagar*". "I get slapped at one point on the show. Filming that scene is a memory that stands out," he shares. "Even though we had to follow safety guidelines, and there were certain restrictions due to the ongoing pandemic, I felt really comfortable on the sets." The actor especially enjoyed the night shoots.

Mawla is also known for his roles in recent crime thriller web shows like "*Money Honey*" (2019), and "*Contract*" (2021). However, when asked if he is particularly drawn to crime thriller stories, the actor insisted that he has never given it much thought. "I am not seeking out projects that belong to the crime thriller genre, or any other genre for that matter. I am, however, always looking for interesting roles to play," he says.

Furthermore, Mawla shared that "*Mohanagar*" has an exciting story. "As artists, we are consistently trying to get better with each project. Everyone in '*Mohanagar*' has done their best. Now, it is up to the audiences to decide whether we have met their expectations or not," he concludes.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

competition for an exclusive interview with *The Daily Star*, where she talks about her roots, motivations, and dreams.



The powerful Manipuri dance duo

RASHEEK TABASSUM MONDIRA

Celebrated dancer and choreographer Tamanna Rahman started her journey with Manipuri dance from early childhood. Under the tutelage of Guru Kalavati Devi, Padmashri Darshana Jhaveri, and Guru Bipin Singh in India among others, Tamanna went on to become one of the leading Manipuri dancers in Bangladesh. She founded the institute, *Nrityam*, in 1998 and was appointed as a lecturer of the Department of Dance at Dhaka University in 2015. Known for her grace and modesty, she has been teaching and inspiring generations of dancers for years.



PHOTO: COURTESY

In a candid chat with *The Daily Star*, Tamanna, along with her student Manomi Tanjana Orthy, share their views on dance, and more.

"Orthy is a dedicated dancer," shares Tamanna. "She has an education in dance, and she took it up as her profession as well. She is willing to face challenges and make sacrifices for her craft."

When Orthy was in the sixth grade, she began learning Manipuri dance from Tamanna.

Now, she is an established dancer and teacher herself. Orthy currently teaches at *Nrityam*, Bangladesh Shishu Academy, Shopno Bikash Kala Kendra Academy, and Excel Academy. She graduated from Rabindra Bharati University, after completing both her bachelor's and master's in Manipuri dance.

"I can depend on Orthy for any production, choreography, music editing, or technological aspect," expresses Tamanna. "At the same time, she is building her career bit by bit, and she is involved with me in various productions and compositions."

"I've been observing Tamanna Di since my childhood days. She was my inspiration to pursue dance as a full-time career," shares



Manomi Tanjana Orthy



Tamanna Rahman

Orthy. "She even allowed me to conduct classes when I was a student, she taught me how to teach others and it has been a valuable life lesson. After I came back from Rabindra Bharati University, she eagerly learned the newest forms of dance from me. As a student, that is an indescribable feeling and it gives me a sense of achievement."

"When we were students, we had a lot of free time, we could dedicate a large amount of time to our dance lessons," she adds. "Unfortunately, the young generation of students now don't have the time and energy to do so. They are too involved with academic activities, even outside of school. It is getting harder for them to dive deep into the methods of any art form."

Additionally, Tamanna said that there is a lack of knowledge of literature, patience, and hard work among students nowadays. Yet, she believes that the young generation of dancers has the capability to carry the torch forward, rising above complex challenges and negativity to become true artists. Tamanna is consistently inspired by her young students, as a teacher.

Moreover, Orthy shared that the young generation can use technology to their benefit, for learning and spreading knowledge on classical dance forms. "More people are now getting the chance to study various forms of dance, which is helping them to strengthen their roots. They will pass on their learnings to their students, which gives me hope for a bright future," she concludes.