

THE MARVELLOUS LIVES OF CHILD ACTORS

Pursuing passion and thriving through art

MD. NAYEEM HAIDER

It wouldn't be a stretch to say that for most of us, the exciting world of pop culture occupies an imperishable position in our lives. But all of that is mostly common. What may truly be out of the ordinary are the experiences of those who grow up on the other side of the screen. The young people who, with aspirations simmering in their hearts, strive to one day be stars in their own right.

"I started my acting career at the age of eight," says Shadman Sharar Zayan, 17, who performs in stage plays at Shishu Academy Theatre and has appeared in multiple commercials, movies, and series. He vividly describes the time that led up to that momentous turning point in his life.

"I was attending drama classes at the Shishu Academy when two people came in to observe us. They took some pictures and videos of our performance. At the time, I had no idea who they were, but later, our teacher told us that they had come to scout for new artists for TV ads. I, along with three others, were then called to the office of Goodluck Ballpen, where we had to demonstrate our acting ability," he says. "I didn't hear back from them for many days. My parents and I thought that perhaps it had gone in vain. It wasn't until my father left for Cox's Bazar to attend a programme that the call came, telling him that I had been selected. Even now I can feel the pride I felt then in completing my first commercial and being the lead."

Elsewhere, Otithi Israt, 15, having played diverse roles in various television dramas and web series such as *August 14*, *Vanga Putul*, and *The Broker*, in addition to having over 50 commercials under her belt, recalls the first time she had acted. "I was very excited but not nervous in the least," says Israt confidently. "In fact, I didn't even feel scared of the camera."

This composure, according to her, stems from the depth of passion she had for acting. She then spoke in detail about her own acting process. She says, "I don't think it's even possible to act unless you've completely immersed yourself in the role. This is true for every role, but it is especially true for my web series roles." This is because her roles on television were mostly of child characters whose personalities range from shy and quiet to witty and boisterous. Her web series work, however, involved more serious roles.

"For example, in *Vanga Putul*, there is a scene where the character I played has seizures. The director, Shihab Shaheen uncle, told me to practise having seizures every day until the day the scene would be shot. While practising this, I made sure to go through a good number of videos online to make sure the seizures were realistic. To portray the trauma of my character, I observed and took inspiration from similar characters in other movies and series," she added.

The children who work in this profession, pursue their passion and thrive through their art. But in order to hone their talent, they must also go through a great deal of hard work. But for a young soul to truly realise their potential, they need to be surrounded by people who can appreciate and help them grow and mature as artists.

BotTala, a theatre organisation that aims to promote and nourish the artistic traditions of Bangladesh, offers workshop productions to children who wish to



PHOTOS: ORCHID CHAKMA



learn the art of theatre. Humayun Azam Rewaz, the Communication Director at BotTala, talks about the dedication these young performers show towards the craft, and how even after the political turmoil of the July Revolution, almost everyone in the batch had returned enthusiastically to perform.

Rewaz says, "Initially, it is of course impossible to tell where the child's talents lie. But rather than imposing any rigid structure, we create a playful environment and let children from diverse backgrounds engage together and bond. We try our best to discover their talents and let them flourish. Throughout the workshop sessions, we observe them and pinpoint their skills and the areas they excel in. We then incorporate those in the play."

Yet, no matter how dedicated a young actor or actress is, at the end of the day, they are still students who must balance work and education. On this matter, Abantika Rahman, 14, who has acted in several commercials, speaks of her experience. "Sometimes, due to school or exams, I have to turn down offers of work. Other times, I've had to balance both by attending shoots and exams on the same day. This one time, I completed my shooting by morning and then went to take exams. I didn't get any rest or sleep on that particular day, but taking the exam was something I had to do. I love my work, and I want to continue with it to perfect it, but my studies always come first," she says.

The schools themselves make considerations to help these young actors balance the two aspects of their lives. Takbir Chowdhury, 8, who has appeared in five dramas and in over sixty commercials, attests to the support his teachers and classmates have shown him, "My friends at school often tell me that they've seen me on TV, and they repeat my lines to me. I find it very fun."

Irfan Murshid Khan, 16, who appeared in over 80 commercials, 50 dramas, and two movies, *Poramon 2* and *Chironjeeb Mujib*, also spoke about the joy of being appreciated whilst talking about the effect his acting career has had on his personal life.

"I don't think I've experienced anything negative because of my acting. On the contrary, the positives have been very wholesome. When I am visiting a restaurant and the waiter comes along to take my order, they often recognise me from one of my roles. That is a very good feeling," he says.

"My biggest fans are my family members," Khan says, humorously describing the adoration he receives when attending family gatherings, "They ask for my autograph even though I can't sign properly yet. I even forget to give the dates sometimes, and they have to remind me!"

These young actors speak with passion and exude a certain charisma when speaking of their big dreams. Takbir Chowdhury proudly says that he wishes to be an actor like the famous Shakib Khan when he grows up. For Abantika Rahman, the charisma and skill of Chanchal Chowdhury are what she aims to acquire. Otithi Israt, who idolises the celebrated actresses, Mehazabien Chowdhury and Tasnia Farin, aspires to qualify as a doctor someday alongside her acting journey.