

Sultana's Dreams

ELITA KARIM

A popular name in the world of academia, or at least in Dhaka, Razia Sultana Khan, is a professor of English and also a published writer. Born in the old part of Dhaka in the 1950s, Sultana had had the opportunity to explore many parts of Bangladesh and also the world. "My father was a carrier diplomat. My mother was a home maker and being the wife of a diplomat she was kept pretty busy not just looking after us but with her social duties," she says.

Head of the Department of English at Independent University, Bangladesh from 2008 to 2011, Sultana was also known for organising conferences: one on Mark Twain and another on Tennessee Williams. "I also initiated a monthly Teacher Development Workshop series, and the IUB Book Club which is open not just to IUB students and teachers but also to outsiders," she says. In addition to semi-

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nars and workshops, Sultana also started a literary journal, CHAOS, of which she is the Editor. "He we publish some of the best writing being done by writers of English in Bangladesh, be they Creative or Critical," she adds.

Razia Sultana Khan has a PhD in Creative Writing from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln (UNL). "I had always 'dreamt' of doing my PhD but had to put it on hold because I had a young family and aging parents," she says. "By the time my children were older my father had passed away. So before my deferred dream, 'festered or dried up like a raisin in the sun,' (curtsey of Langston Hughes: 'Dream Deferred') I went off to do my PhD. The other more basic reason is that you cannot really succeed in academia without a doctorate. I won't say it

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"I was at Dhaka University in the mid seventies and to quote a famous writer, 'It was the best of times. It was the worst of times,'" she says. "It was the best of times because in your early 20s the whole world is a delightful place. We had returned to what was now Bangladesh. I was blessed in having some wonderful teachers: Sirajul Islam Chowdhury (SIC), Soraiya Khan, Razia Khan Amin, KMN Munim, Imtiaz Habib, Iniri Hussain, Fakrul Islam and Niaz Zaman. I will be every grateful to them for moulding me into the person I am today."

According to Sultana, the English curriculum has changed a lot at educational institutions, and that too for the

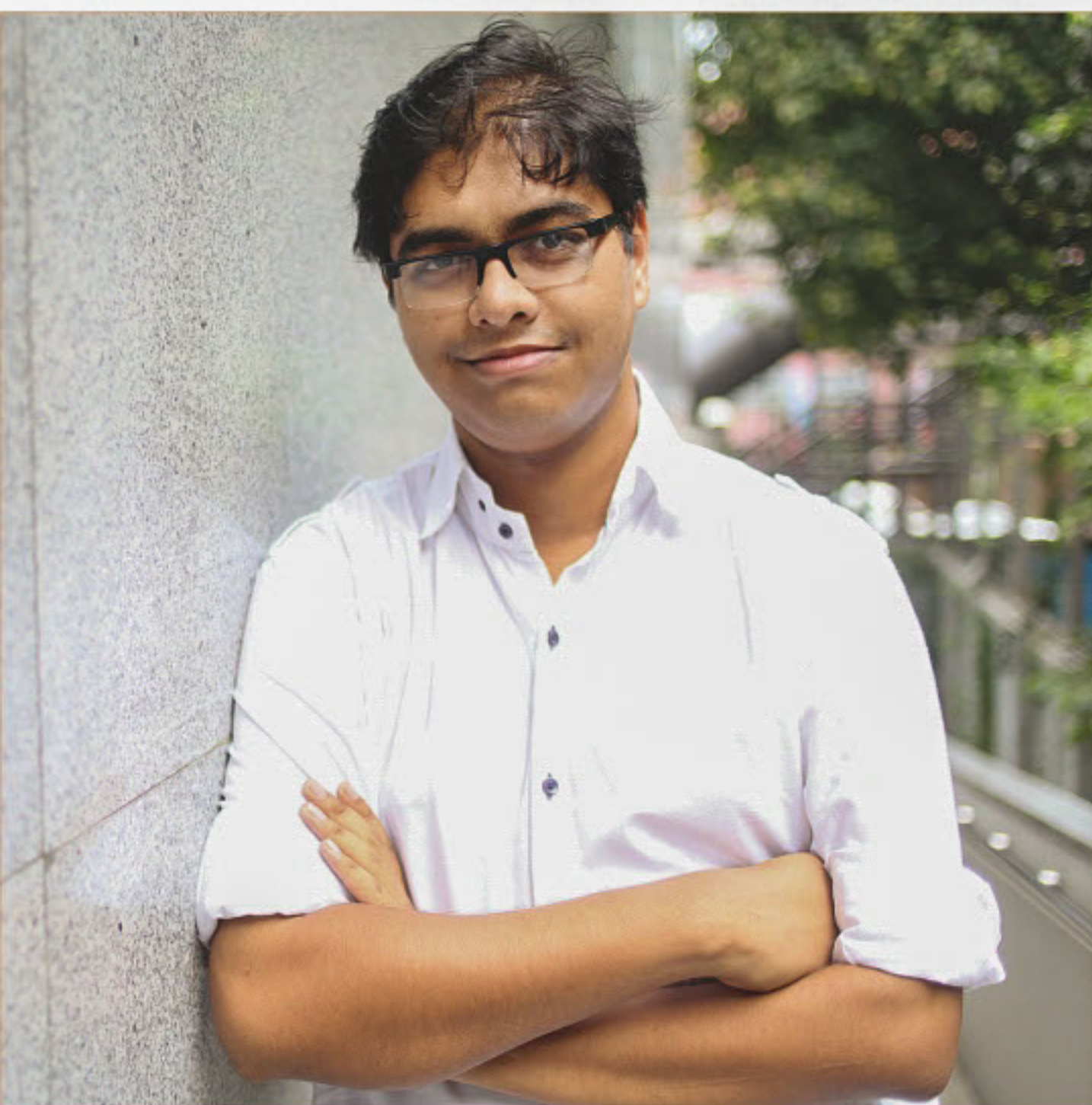
better. "Applied Linguistics and ELT have gained popularity," she says. "Previously a degree in English basically meant English Literature. The courses here mainly comprised of the canons: Shakespeare, Milton, Blake, Bacon and so on. Now the literature syllabus includes, not just the received canons but also those approaching it. The English degree now offers, in addition to English Literature and Comparative literature, a whole slew of Language and Language Teaching courses."

Despite all this, why the English departments at universities are getting smaller by the semester, one may wonder. "There is a misconception that the market for English graduates is limited," she says. "The belief is that the only option open to them is teaching, and the question often bluntly floated

is 'How much can an English teacher earn anyway?' It is given the same consideration that studying Art or Theatre or even Sports was given a few decades ago. And look at what cricket players are earning now. My opinion is that with an undergrad degree under your belt the world really is your oyster. A degree in English gives you the skill and confidence to make a success of whichever area you wish to major in."

As a teacher of language, Sultana believes that the best teachers should be teaching at school level. If young people at Elementary and Secondary School are given a strong and solid foundation, the task at the tertiary level becomes so much simpler and more fruitful. "University teachers would then be able to build on those basic skills and offer students a much more comprehensive as well as extensive and varied education," she says. "Unfortunately our students at university level are still battling with language proficiency and basic academic skills (e.g. reading texts, listening to lectures and making notes)."

Some of Sultana's stories have been published in anthologies like The Best New American Voices, published by Harvest Books, USA, The Rainbow Feast: New Asian Short Stories published by Marshall Cavendish, and in a collection of short stories published by the Daily Star. "I have a collection of short stories, Palki and other Tales of Seduction, published by Ankur a couple of years back. Sadly my publisher for whatever incomprehensible reason has not made my book available anywhere," she says. "I am working on this however and hopefully it will be available at Omni, BookWeb, Friends and a few other major book stores within a month or so."



TBBD: Satisfying Your Travel Needs

NAZIBA BASHER

Kashef Rahman studied in Udayan School and moved on to Notre Dame, for college. After completing his HSC, he enrolled into North South University to study Economics. After completing his Bachelor's, Kashef joined Grameen Phone and worked there for 1 year. He then shifted to Banglalink and ended up working there for seven and half years.

"I was always into travelling. As a matter of fact, everyone in my office sort of knew me as the 'traveller,' and they would always come to me to help them with their tours and packages," says Kashef. While being flooded with questions about touring, Kashef planned on opening a travel blog where he could answer everyone's questions and help them with planning their trips.

"At one point, the requests kept pouring in so much that I planned on opening up a service. I opened at Facebook page in the name of TBBD (Travel Booking Bangladesh) where I would give people the best trip advice that I could, and link them with packages, for a small service charge for myself," continues Kashef. There was no fixed cost to his services, but the fact that this venture was very profitable was unquestionable.

"I thought of this being an excellent business but I still wasn't sure whether I was just getting lucky. So I kept TBBD on a low profile for a while and started



concentrating on my job at Banglalink more, a trial and error process," says Kashef. Shortly after, Kashef left his position at Banglalink, and set up a new office in Banani for TBBD. He made a trade license, got two hotline numbers, made a Google Doc with a format and turned this into full-fledged business.

"I hired an accountant, some runners, travel consultants and we are now working with an 11-man team, which we are hoping to increase soon, as we get bigger," says Kashef.

According to Kashef, getting the trade license or setting up his office was not really the difficult part. "I had the most difficulty when it came to striking up a deal with the Civil Aviation. There are a

lot of taxes to pay and lots of procedures and expenditures I had to go through."

TBBD now offers outbound packages for people to travel all over the world. They are, right now, very strong with travellers going to Nepal, Bhutan and recently, the Maldives. "We try and make our clients' trips as enjoyable as possible within reasonable prices," says Kashef. The packages can also be customised according to the customers' needs. "Right now, we are working on developing a website where people can also make inbound deals and people from across the world can come and visit Bangladesh. There will be packages, vouchers and hotels that you can pay for with your local debit or credit cards and the rest will be up to us!"

Abstracts on Reel

APURBA JAHANGIR

Syed Tanver Ahamad is known as the only abstract film maker of our country till now. His short film 'Suspension to me' has been shown in 54 national and international festivals including American Online Film Awards, Madrid Skate Film Festival, The Hollywood Festival of new cinema, La Plata International and more. Tanver has proved that if you take up a challenge such as abstract film making to heart, you will succeed.

From an early age Tanver was fascinated by cinemas. "My interest in this field began when I first watched Satyajit Ray's 'Pather Panchali' in my school days. The way he described the story with adequate details such as the train scene and the old lady dying is astonishing. After watching the film many times, I began to think about working in this profession," says the film maker.

Tanver never thought of choosing abstract as his genre until one day, he saw something that changed his perspective completely. "I was passing by Shahbagh when I saw two kids who couldn't talk but they were interacting with each other by facial and hand expressions. When I saw, this I thought if they can interact in sign language then why can't I do the same with my film without using dialogues and other mainstream communication?" says Tanver.

Back then, Tanver didn't have the necessary equipment to shoot his films so he shot his first film 'WOE' with his mobile phone. On this he says, "WOE was my first step towards abstract film making. The film was about climate change. Though it wasn't as popular as my second film, I learned a lot from it."

Through thick and thin, Tanver has received phenomenal response about his films from both home and abroad.

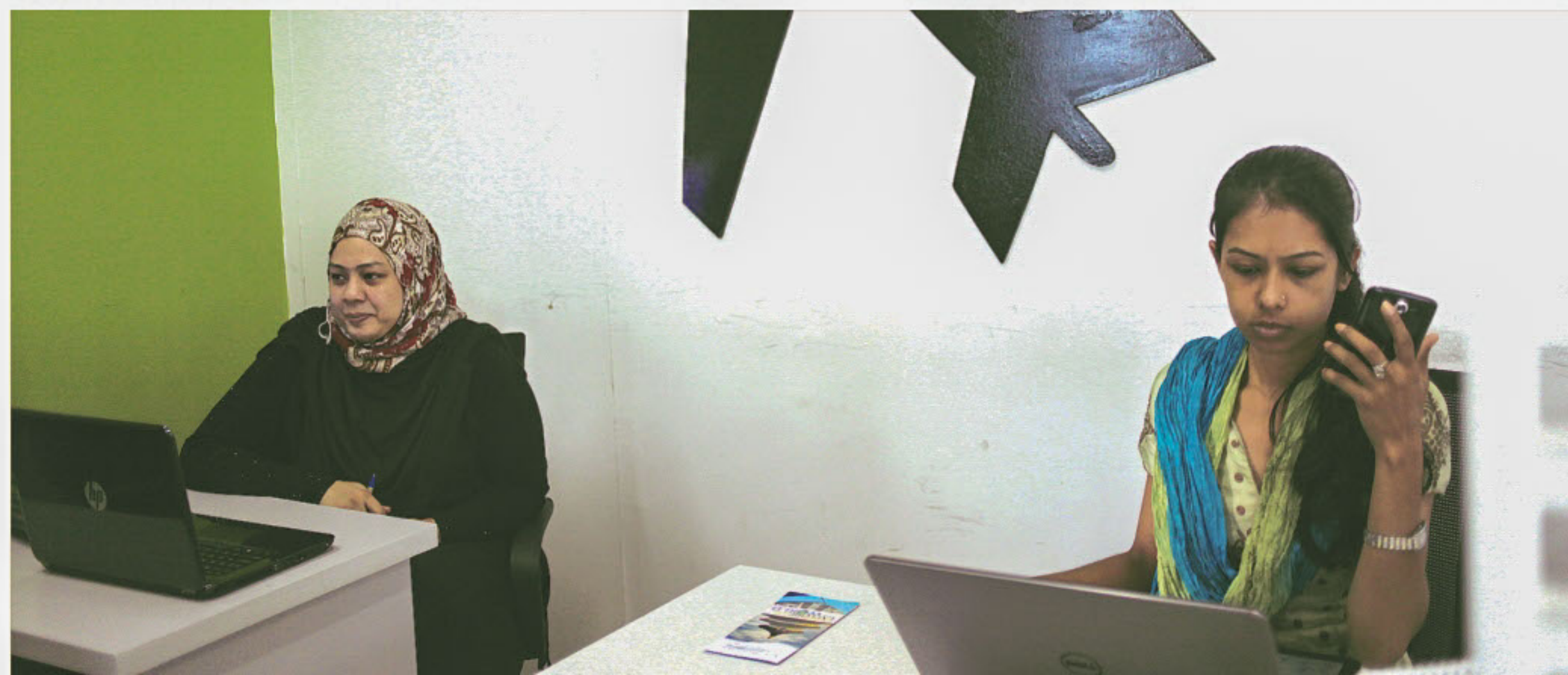


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