

INTERVIEW

Aspirations and towering responsibilities

Some time ago, the Bangladeshi news portals were shaken up by amazing news even amidst the severe global crisis. Two young ladies of Bangladesh made it to the Forbes' 30 under 30 Asia class of 2020 list. Everybody knows their names by now, but here, we tell you their stories.



AMAL FOUNDATION & ESRAT

Esrat Karim Eve, founder of the Amal Foundation, used to be a meek youngster back in the day. She claims to have been an introvert with social anxiety.

"I only discovered my full potential after joining Dhaka University and staying away from my parents. Before that, I remember not being able to fill a glass of water from the jar. I had to be helped," claimed the Forbes acknowledged social worker.

During the interview, Karim also shed light on the name 'Amal' — an Arabic term meaning 'hope' and was the base of the establishment initiated by her.

"Amal Foundation works in four sectors, namely education, health, emergency response, and women's empowerment. We work in remote riverine islands of the north, with displaced communities and numerous slums of the capital, dealing with everyday issues like sexual harassment to providing mental health support," disclosed Karim.

This journey was not easy at all. Being shy, she did not know how to express her feelings, but here she is now, helping so many people through an organisation she initiated from scratch.

So, how did it all come into being?

After D.U., Karim went on to study abroad for her master's degree and there, she acquired a huge amount of mentorship and courage from her teachers.

"The best thing I ever did to build on my aspirations was an internship at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and this very opportunity showed me the light at the end of the tunnel! I knew what I wanted to

do with my life... I just knew," said Karim.

After that, it was a long road for her since she decided to return to Bangladesh and contribute to the welfare of the country — one that she was particularly fond of.

"The road wasn't easy at all! I returned in 2014, with little clue as to how to begin work with the foundation. With no support system back here, I struggled with depression. Then, things worked out slowly, as a few junior friends began to help me with my objective and I started working on small projects. And since those preliminary days, I never had to look back again" Karim said.

Inquired about her recent stint with Forbes Magazine, Esrat Karim shied a little, but was clear-cut in portraying that the accomplishment was a team effort rather than her own.

"Forbes recognised me because of Amal Foundation, but this social organisation would have been nowhere without the hard work of the members, beneficiaries and even my family's support," recalled Karim.

She added that success or recognition is never easy; and that it only comes after a whole lot of hard work.

JHAKANAKA & RABA KHAN

Another name that pops up while discussing the 30 under 30 Asia class of 2020 list with Forbes Magazine is Raba Khan, the famous female satire artist of Dhaka.

We spoke to Raba Khan about her recent recognition and the unprecedented

backlash she received; and she surely had a lot on her mind.

"Back in 2014, there was a boom in online based YouTubers, my favourite being Lilly Singh. Getting inspired by her satires, I wanted to do something similar in Bangladesh. My antics began with a tripod, a camera and my brothers' video editing skills," reminisced Khan.

From then, till now, Khan has taken part in myriad videos, mostly socially relevant satires. She boasts about her fans being able to relate to the content because they deal with topics ranging from body shaming to modern relationships.

"Dealing with negative attitude in a positive light is what I do best. My methods may be light and funny, but they actually bear a subtle hint to the prevalent cynicism and how it's time we changed and became

When we wanted to know what Raba Khan stood for, she promptly replied, "Raba Khan is a brand, she is also a hard-working individual who has been able to set precedence to the satire world of Bangladesh, that women can also be funny and equally successful."

There's a whole lot of misinformation doing the rounds recently that Raba Khan only managed to be on the cover of Forbes because of her PR agency.

"I'd just like to tell them that I am my own PR, and completely self-made. While you have the chance to criticise as much as you want, I won't pay any heed to it, if it's not constructive. Tell me how I can better myself, I will listen, and try to become something bigger and better," said the superbly confident lady.

To end on an optimistic note, both



better human beings," she added.

Khan's online contents are famously termed as the Jhakanaka Project, which she claims has been influenced by her childhood friends, who used to call her by that name since she was always a bit 'blingy with an over-the-top sense of style.'

"I was borderline tacky – I will admit that," said Khan unabashedly.

The Jhakanaka Project inspired her to ultimately initiate the JKNK merchandise and fashion line.

"I always wanted to have my own fashion line. It's very simple actually; I do my own styling and when people like it, I suggest where and how to get it. If they still want my help on this, then I suggest that they place an order at JKNK and then we make it for them," said the trendsetting satire artist.

Karim and Khan suggested that young Bangladeshis trying to make a difference in the world apply for international and global recognition in order to boost self-esteem and make our country renowned in the worldwide arena.

While recognitions may help to strengthen one's ground, it is also the process to make aspirations bigger and responsibilities higher. Today, Bangladeshis expect more from these two talented individuals and others who were acknowledged before them.

It is for them and future personalities that we expect a prosperous tomorrow.

By Mehrin Mubdi Chowdhury
Photo Courtesy: Esrat Karim Eve and Raba Khan