

TANYA TAZEEN KARIM - 2010



Architect and Co-founder of Tanya Karim NR Khan & Associates

Seventeen years ago, she started it with a small investment that could only buy her a computer, some stationery items such as tracing paper, drafting pens, and some books on architecture.

Today, architect Tanya Tazeen Karim is among a few women entrepreneurs who earned fame both at home and abroad by designing buildings.

Tanya formed a partnership with a classmate, Nurur Rahman Khan, after

graduating from Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) in 1990. Three years later, their firm, Tanya Karim NR Khan & Associates, was officially registered.

"We started with minimal capital. We could not rent office space. We had used a small bedroom in my apartment as our first office for the time being."

Her major breakthrough came in 1993 when Tanya and her team worked on the interiors of the Beximco Pharmaceuticals headquarters in Dhaka.

Since then, she has never looked back. The orders started flowing in from multinational banks and other companies.

The firm's next breakthrough came when it designed a residential building owned by Annisul Huq, a leading businessman.

Her work also involves interiors, landscaping, master planning, and graphic designing. All are part of an effort to make Tanya Karim NR Khan & Associates a one-stop service centre.

Tanya also had to fight other issues. "Initially, I had to overcome gender bias to come this far. Everyone around me

thought that I knew nothing."

"When one saw that my technical knowledge is sound and I am capable of delivering what clients ask for and giving decisions on the site, the situation changed and respect grew."

Tanya rates herself as a successful entrepreneur. "As a business entrepreneur, in terms of money, we will not say we are very much up in the ladder. But in terms of quality of services, I think we have advanced a lot."

"We have been able to earn the respect of society and business clients. We have played a key role in changing interiors and office interior designing. I think we are a pioneer in quite a few aspects," Tanya said.

Tanya and her team have done some international works. "We designed the Bhutan Telecom building and a mosque in India. We have also worked in Malaysia, China, and Thailand."

"We had to compete to win such projects. We are proud of our team and works."

"Our vision is to become a global design house that will be internationally recognised," she said.

She said the scope for architects and interior designers has expanded. "After the 90s, the trend began to change, as people travelled more and came to know the importance of a good design. The knowledge base of the clients has gone up." According to Tanya, maintaining a balance between one's career and family life is important. She thanks her sons and husband for helping her through everything.

Tanya said architecture is one of the few areas that allow women to shine. "I think professions such as architecture and interior designing suit women the most in a sense that you can design from home as well."

Fifty-seven people work for her firm

on a regular payroll, with another 150 people on contract. Tanya said trust and respect are important for a long-lasting partnership.

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"I have been able to maintain a balance due to their understanding."

"My husband, parents, and in-laws have helped me a lot. For a woman, this type of support is crucial," said the mother of four.

She said teaching is helping her to relate to the younger generation. She considers teaching a way to give back to the society. "It is my social responsibility."

KANIZ ALMAS KHAN - 2009



Managing Director of Persona Hair and Beauty

Unlike many of her contemporaries, Kaniz Almas Khan showed the courage to venture into the beauty business in the late 1990s. She was determined to be the best in the field.

"When I planned to start my career, I thought of something different and big. That's how I came to the beauty industry," she said.

Kaniz opened beauty salon Glamour in a 2,000 square feet room at her residence in Kalabagan in 1990, with nine workers and an initial investment of Tk 2 lakh, she borrowed from Micro Industries Development Assistance and Services (MIDAS).

It did not take long for the salon to teem with clients. "From the first day, we tried to provide the clients with the best quality skin and hair care services, and also bridal makeover. Soon the number of clients went up as there were only a handful of quality salons in the city at that time," she said.

The major breakthrough in her career came in 1991 when world-famous brand Unilever made her the "brand ambassador" for Sunsilk.

This brought her countrywide recognition as an expert in hair care and inspired many small entrepreneurs to get involved in this business.

"In 1998, Glamour was turned into Persona Hair and Beauty Ltd, a 3,400 square feet salon on Road 27 in Dhanmondi, with 200 workers. Its area was further expanded to 11,000 square feet in 2002," said Kaniz, narrating the story behind Persona.

Over a span of 19 years, she has established a brand in the beauty industry, running two separate companies - Persona Hair and Beauty Ltd and Persona Beauty Care Ltd.

And the brand, Persona, has now grown into one of the most profitable beauty service providing ventures in Bangladesh with an annual turnover of Tk 14.64 crore and average daily sales of Tk 5.25 lakh.

The company employs 1,400 people, of whom 1,200 are service providers and 200 are corporate executives. And of the total workforce, 99 percent are women.

Later, Kaniz initiated several ventures,

including spas, gyms, a studio, and a lifestyle magazine.

The company introduced Persona Health, Spring Spa, Adams' for men, and Persona Institute of Beauty and Lifestyle. The beautician said the industry suffers from a lack of training institutes on beauty services.

"The people, who are eager to work in the industry, lack training and skills. We opened an institute in Dhaka. One or two other institutes were launched recently, but their number is still very small, compared to the demand," she said.

Persona Hair and Beauty Ltd also runs an independent studio and monthly publication "Canvas."

Business is not always easy for Kaniz, as frequent power cuts often hamper services.

Kaniz feels the absence of an association to protect the industry's interests.

In 2004, she introduced the "Best Worker Award" at all her salons, where a meritorious and hard-working employee is awarded every month.

Simultaneously, she is involved in social work like providing training and

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financial support to female victims of domestic violence and acid attacks. She often employs them.

In 2005, she started training 25 acid victims from the Acid Survivors Foundation and 23 of them now work for Persona.

In 2008, the company joined hands with Development Assistance for Background Society, a non-profit organisation, and provided scholarships to 10 students from Dhaka University.

She also extends her efforts to other social responsibilities, such as creating awareness on cancer and regular tax payments.

Kaniz is the spokesperson for the "Cervical Cancer Campaign" initiated by GlaxoSmithKline and the National Board of Revenue.

"I work hard to ensure high quality service for my clients. It helped me pursue my dream to be the best in this industry," she said.

"Success comes when you are true to your dream. That's why Persona is successful today," said Kaniz, with a smile.

SABRINA ISLAM - 2008



Chief Executive Officer of Reflections

Sitting at her Gulshan showroom of Reflections that was literally crammed with decorative glasses, kitchen cabinets, bathroom panels, and ceilings to amaze the visitors instantly, Sabrina says: "Unavailability of decorative art glasses in the local market prompted me to get involved in such a business."

"I hit upon the idea of working with decorative art glasses when we were preparing to build our house in Gulshan in 1997. We planned the house do-ups with etched and stained glasses that were not available in the local market then," said Sabrina Islam, who emerged as the Outstanding Woman in Business for 2008 as part of the Bangladesh Business Awards jointly given away by *The Daily Star* and DHL Express.

Deeply devoted and loyal to art and creativity, Sabrina launched Reflections as a small enterprise in 1998 with two workers in a small 400 square feet studio at Eskaton.

"Initially I started producing etched glasses and sandblasted glasses. Luckily, I got an order for doing interior decoration of a house in Gulshan and they liked it very much," says Sabrina.

"Within a short time, I started getting orders from individuals, restaurants and corporate houses," she says.

"In 2000 we shifted to a 2,200-sft studio at the current Gulshan address to widen our production ranges from sandblasted, engraved, and coloured glasses to stained glasses."

In 2002 Reflections signed an agreement with Stained Glass Overlay (SGO) in a bid to expand further into a full-service studio specialising a wide array of designer glass products.

SGO is an international franchise company based in California and one of the world's biggest players in the customised decorative and architectural art glass sector.

Sabrina opened Reflection's second showroom in Chattogram in 2005.

"This was an important landmark in the company's evolution, and

a significant milestone in the development of the decorative glass sector of the country," she says.

"2008 was another important year for the company, as we launched our interior designing section and also started franchising decorative products of wood-iron composite and durable life-film products in the same year," she adds.

She set up a bigger plant in Mirpur, which is likely to be the main factory of the company.

Now Reflections produces seven types of glasses - stained glass overlay, traditional stained glass, sandblasted glass, engraved glass, coloured glass, etched glass, and bevelled glass.

The company is undoubtedly the country's leading crafted art glass producer, designer, and supplier as it holds nearly 40 percent of the total market share. The company has 24 employees with an annual turnover of over Tk 50 lakh.

Sabrina's journey as a working woman started 24 years ago. She signed up as a voluntary worker

Her journey as a working woman started 24 years ago. She signed up as a voluntary worker at Karika, the oldest handicraft organisation in the country, in 1975 when she was a student of LLB at Dhaka University. "Joining Karika was the stepping stone of my career. After being a regularised staff in 1976, I started to manage the company's marketing, sales, and inventory, altogether."

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"Joining Karika was the stepping stone of my career. After being a regularised staff in 1976, I started to manage the company's marketing, sales, and inventory, altogether," she says.

"That time I got intensively involved with handicrafts and the designers of the country. Since then, the desire to explore the crafts and designs started growing in me."

In 1977 she was awarded a one-year scholarship for a diploma programme on small business management from Ford Foundation at Washington DC. The scholarship was given under the programme of the foundation's Decade of Women that aimed to empower women.

"During the scholarship

programme, I found business more interesting compared to practising law. So, after returning from the US, I decided to start my own venture," says Sabrina. "Then I did my MBA from the Institute of Business Administration at Dhaka University."

She worked at Karika until 1980, the year she got married and decided to join her husband's venture. Her husband was setting up a garment factory, Concord, in 1981.

She joined Concord to oversee the company's sales and marketing activities and soon it started exporting garment items to the US and Europe.

In 1985, she launched Rainbow Children's Boutique to sell children's garments, school uniforms, including shirts, sweaters and ties, and other personal care products. Those were a hit among the urban working women and famous kindergartens in Dhaka.

In 1998, Sabrina floated Reflections with an initial investment of Tk 2.5 lakh.

She took part in some training programmes on sandblasting and traditional stained glass making in the US, Thailand, and India.

She also often sends her staff abroad, mainly to India, and Thailand, to help them gain expertise and strengthen knowledge in glass art.

Now she plans to expand the reach of Reflections and start exporting her designer glasses initially to the neighbouring countries.

However, her efforts were not left unnoticed. She received the FBCCI Standard Chartered Bank Outstanding Woman of the Year award in 2006. She also clinched the Most Outstanding Business Woman Award in 2008 in Doha from the 3rd Business Forum of the Islamic Countries.

However, her business often faces setback on power shortage and unavailability of raw materials in the local market that affect production badly.

"Outage is the main problem that holds back the local industries' faster growth. I can't afford a big generator to overcome the losses I incurred due to electricity shortage," she says.

She suggests the government develop local expertise for producing raw materials like different colours and bonding materials for decorative art glass that will make the industry more cost-effective.

She also calls upon the government to ensure a better law and order situation in the country to attract more women to entrepreneurship.