

HABIB-THE MAN WHO BUILT AN EMPIRE

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THE CUTTING EDGE

Gabriel Bá, Daytripper's language of hair was heard by a young man from India in the 1970s and he became a master of the art of dealing with it. **Habib Ahmed** is a hair stylist who has held his shears with honour for five decades. The man who gave the **Habibs** brand its name, **Habib Ahmed** is an affable and soft-spoken person, who single-handedly spearheaded fashion hairstyling in India and took 'styling' to a new horizon, refining, redefining and revolutionising the concept and standards of creativity and dexterity in hair care in India. He has been honoured with the prestigious 'Indian International Gold Award, 1995' and the 'Pride of Country Award, 1999' for his outstanding excellence, meritorious individual achievements and distinguished service to the nation. Also, he is a life member of the World Federation of Supreme Hairdressing since 1968 and has been on the panel of judges at numerous international beauty pageants and hair shows.

In him, 'Modern Hairstyling' and 'Habib's Hair Styles' have found an able ally. He hastaken this fragile, hair-thin industry across the country to a luxurious growth, basking in the warmth of glorious snippets carefully scissored away. Those getting a hair cut from this legend feel on cloud nine and boast truckloads.

In keeping with the tradition of service with a difference, for the last three decades, **HABIBS** have carved a niche for themselves in the field of professional and creative hairstyling in India and overseas.

Having introduced the idea of 'styling', Habibs have integrated hairstyling, beauty and personality grooming in India. Today, this is a brand whose concept of hairstyling is a perfect amalgam of Indian and Western hairstyling based on the Geometrical System. Their potential skills, aesthetic sensitivity and solid expertise help them to understand the clients' requirement better and do wonders with hair. Habibs spells professionalism and client satisfaction from all over the world.

Their breathtaking achievements prove their excellence on all kinds of hair so you can be modest when you say you're in tune with the times by getting your hair cut at Habibs.

Habib Ahmed, founder of the 'Habibs' group of saloon chains and academies, was born on 2 October 1940 in the small town of Jalalabad, near Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh. It was a settlement of Afghans from the middle ages. He has six sisters and three brothers. Habib's father Nazir Ahmed was barber to the Viceroys of British India in its last years, Lord Linlithgow and Lord Mountbatten. He had joined the services of the British government in India around 1936 at the then Viceroy House. After India became independent, Nazir continued working for the Presidents who occupied the palace that came to be called the Rashtrapati Bhavan. His first President was Rajendra Prasad.

Habib went to England to study hair designing. He did not know how to react to this decision that came out of the blue from his father, and to this he could not say 'No'. He went to the UK in the '70s and his first love, football, grew distant. He studied and trained in London for several years at what is popularly known as the Morris School and returned to India with a new definition for the barber's profession,

transforming the conservative image of a *nai* under the tree privy to deep dark confessions and parlour king.

Once upon a time, the Morris School where Habib Ahmed and his sons trained, was one of, if not the first school of British hairdressing, set up by Adele Morris and her husband Alfred Morris. It was a time when the word 'hairdressing' really encompassed all that took place. The emphasis was on the use of waves and curls. Rows of hood hair dryers lined the saloon and there are photographs of the 1950s with rows of women under them 'when the sweet smell of setting lotions wafted in the air'. They tended their client by shampooing, setting the hair in rollers and placing them under the dryer for 20 mins. The dry hair was then dressed into style. By the 1970s Morris had become a name in styling and training.

After training in the UK, from 1971 to 1981 Habib worked with the Oberoi Group of Hotels in New Delhi, after which the vague thought of opening his own saloon became strong. Habib had the chance of training with famous European brand names Alexander, Mario and Bruno and now, what they had done in entrepreneurship was what Habib wanted to emulate in India. His name, his own styling outfit, his exclusive saloon under his ownership. In 1983, the first Habibs Hair & Beauty Saloon was set up in the Lodi Hotel. Within the next two years, Habib also set up a teaching institute for styling, Habib Sons Academy, which too operated from the same Lodi Hotel premises. Now, the House of Habibs is a well-known name in the hairdressing industry, with brand saloons in New Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Udaipur, Jaipur, Hyderabad, Mangalore, Cochin, Goa, Bangladesh, Nepal, London and New York.

Habib Ahmed took over a traditional craft from his father Nazir and has been instrumental in revolutionising hairstyling in India. Habib's three sons—Jawed, Parvez and Amjad—are brand ambassadors in their own right and continuing the family business and are frequently on the move across India and abroad providing training to the hairstylists.

Habib Ahmed says that he is able to value the importance of his family, which include four grandchildren, and after all the effort that he has put in, he is glad that he can 'finally discuss hair styling not merely with his sons, but with his daughters-in-law as well, which is a dream come true.' He discloses, 'While the children don't want to break away, I have suggested that we branch out differently on point of professional techniques.' That is the way to go he feels in modern times since the times have changed.

Son Jawed describes his father's success and motivation level, which he observed the most among his brothers, enthusiastically, 'What I really admire about my father is the fact that he is a genuine human being. He also has a wonderful ability to mould himself perfectly to the various roles life demands of him. So, while he is the attentive consultant with his clients, he is the adoring grandfather with my children and affectionate father-in-law to my wife.' Hair styling is not just about geometrical proportion but is also about an individual's personality. Habib adopted the science of understanding and styling hair and not merely cutting or using styling products. Thus, Habib's today is a symbol of a science-based styling and not a product-based one.

In this biography, Habib Ahmed shares with us the subtleties and nuances of hair texture, cosmetology and hair cutting he has treasured in the time span of more than fifty years.

There are strange rules of love. One who is in love, the one who understands love or who has learnt the lesson of love—that guy never gets off. He is riding a tiger and he will continue to ride it until the tiger falls dead. And hair is a tiger that grows in profusion and is not likely to ever fall dead; so the hair business will always flourish. Habib senior has a gold mine in his hand, a mine that never gets exhausted. As a business proposition, there could not have been a better product. And when Habib started his independent business in 1982, the timing was propitious. The country was India. He was among his own people. He knew their pulse. The numbers were always there and there could be nothing better than beginning work among his own people. The ‘styling’ concept was new in India and its place under the sun was yet to come. Good times ahead was the only way to go.

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BRAND HABIB

Today Habib Ahmed stands tall as an achiever, a teacher, an entrepreneur.

The turning point came on a normal day in 1980, when least expected and the professional and householder, Habib Ahmed was doing his regular stuff at the Oberoi’s saloon where he was master hairdresser

and stylist. The client who walked in and wanted a hair cut from Habib was one MrSulemaan of Lodhi Hotel. During the accompanying chit chat on the barber's chair, he made a proposition to Habib. A business in partnership, with an independent Habib saloon in Lodhi Hotel premises.

Habib had never thought in this way, and Habib Ahmed gave serious thought to the proposition. He discussed the idea with Rajan Nanda and Anil Nanda (friends). He told them that he had a keen desire to start his own saloon but that he did not have finances. He told his friends that he had a financier at last; someone was offering a 'partnership'. After listening to Habib, Anil Nanda said that he should not take the decision in a hurry. That Habib should wait for some more time and then start his own independent business. 'If you have one chair, it should be your own.' Habib took this wise advice positively and started working to give shape to his dream.

He really worked hard to manage the finances. He managed to get Rs 84,000 on credit basis from his close relative, Zameen, on some profit percentage basis, with payback in a year's time. Simultaneously, he was also in touch with Sulemaan of Lodhi Hotel, negotiating for place in the premise.

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Habib, however, had to keep his plans a secret as he was still an employee at Oberois. The struggle for a place went on for sometime as there was no shop place available at Lodi at that time. Finally, Sulemaan offered Habib one of the hotel's 'discount' rooms. Habib converted that into a saloon. Only after getting a place in Lodhi hotel, Habib was relaxed. His contract with the Oberois was coming to end, and his boss was anxious that Habib sign another contract of three years with the Oberois. Finally the day came when Habib decided that he did not want to sign another contract; it was his last day at the Oberoi. He was confident that he could take all his high profile clients to his own saloon, but the situation was very stressful as he had to settle all his credit in a year's time.

Time passed and his hard work paid and he was able to settle the entire credit in six months' time. Nevertheless, it was a tedious task to pull in the high-end clients like Gayatri Devi as Lodhi hotel then was a 3-star property. Habib, however, managed to get his elite clientele to his own saloon at Lodi. Habib Ahmed's son Parvez has an anecdote to tell when anyone asks him how Brand Habib was built. 'As a child, I watched my father cut people's hair. He would always whisper, just for my ears, "*Aayebudhiya, jayeguriya*" (in comes a hag, out goes a babe). I was absolutely fascinated. I always wanted to be an artiste like Dad. Even today, when I accomplish a good cut, I remember Dad's whispered words.' Sons.

Sons, who were better educated and experts in their own right, form the bedrock of the empire that Habib Ahmed has built. Habibs.

Habib's youngest son Amjad says that, 'My father never gets off, because he knows what he is doing. He is in love with his work and art. He is still in love and passionate about cutting hair and he is still active as a stylist. That shows his commitment.'

The eldest of Habib Ahmed's sons, Jawed, himself a Bollywood success story, explains 'Brand Habib' in these words: If an Indian doctor can be famous and be recognised by developed countries, if a scientist can be honoured by big advanced nations, then why not an Indian hair dresser? I think my father feels a close relationship with hair, he talks to them, he tries to understand them. So, here we are. Habibs.Habib and Sons.

Recalling the early days, Jawed says, 'I saw my father on a cycle, going to the President's House, I saw my father on motorcycle, when he opened his first saloon in 1982 in Lodi Hotel. My father is a man with simple thoughts—that we have to move forward.'

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