

# All That Glitters Is Silver

By Ayesha M. Ali



**Z**eenat Saeed Ahmed is tall. Very tall for a Pakistani woman, 5 feet nine, and as if that isn't enough to distinguish her from us Lilliputians, she has the added distinction of being one of the few Pakistani women who only wear the graceful sari.

Better known in Karachi as the owner of Sehr Boutique, Pakistan's first ever fashion designer, she ran two branches of the boutique for twenty-five years, since the 1970's. Owner of a garment factory, she manufactured clothes for export to the UK and Europe. Her famous buyers included John Lewis, Debenhams, Miss Selfridges, Littlewoods, Hennes and Mauritz, Karstadt, Necker-mann and Quelle.

Today, yet again, Zeenat is the proud owner of "Taneez", a glittering new boutique stocked with silver handicrafts. "Taneez" is "Zeenat" spelled backwards!

A Pakistani businesswoman, she lives her life exactly as she chooses to. She believes that getting ahead in life and self-fulfilment require certain qualities, which she claims to possess, "I'm optimistic and liberal, educated and well-travelled, have a zest for life..... I also have razzmatazz." Whatever that means! She seldom lets things bring her down and if they do she pulls herself up and starts designing. "Keep your mind busy and it becomes less of a devil's playground. Then sky's the limit," says Taneez's owner.

Taneez is located on the third floor of the chic and modern Park Towers Mall, in Karachi's Clifton area. A boutique, specialising in classy,

unique, beautiful items of silver-plated ware for the home and office.

Zeenat designs all the items herself, but admits candidly that she sometimes takes valuable tips from her karigars (craftsmen) who know their mettle - pun intended. She says she can't depend solely on their concept of design, because unfortunately most of them are uneducated. They just inherited the craft, but made no attempt to diversify or use new designs or incorporate different materials in the metal.

"Their workmanship is superb and they respond very well to new ideas, but cannot create them." However, she has an excellent working relationship with them which shows in the quality of the silverware. "They've understood what I want, we have a mutual under-



Taneez offers a glittering array of silverware.

standing." You walk into Taneez and instantly but pleasantly are blinded by the opulent glitter of silver. An array of vases, bowls, candle stands, trays,





A selection of Zeenat's creative silverware. Attractive prices have caught the eye of discerning Pakistanis.

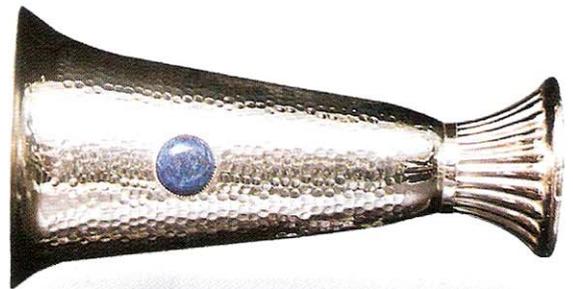
She has held many exhibitions in Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad and now plans taking her exhibition abroad. She is an old hand at foreign exhibitions, as she attended and exhibited at many textile exhibitions in Paris, New York, Dusseldorf, Kuwait, India, Toronto, Nairobi, Cologne and Frankfurt, when she ran a garment factory and was Pakistan's only fashion designer. She has organised several fashion shows within Pakistan, and others abroad.

Zeenat makes fascinating give-aways for corporate clients and has recently been asked by foreign airlines to supply them give-aways for their First Class and Business Class passengers. Many multinationals order her items as corporate gifts. When she first opened the Park Towers outlet, customers were so impressed with the décor and the ambience of the shop, they wanted to buy even the light fittings.

Taneez has something for every strata of clientele. Wedding or birthday gifts, office or household items. She has chosen just the right items to produce and market. Although Pakistan has a lot of silverware, real and plated, the indigenous designs are the same, unchanged in fifty years. Taneez, happily for us, has filled the void in the handicraft market by giving local materials; pewter, aluminium and brass a new lease of life with chic designs and new ideas. Embellished with semi-precious stones such as malachite, agate, lapis lazuli and sandstone, which add value and enhance the creative styles.

At the end of our meeting I asked Zeenat if she planned to carry on and diversify still further. "Definitely. I want to establish businesses which my grandchildren will inherit and run."

There you have it. The end is nowhere near for



Photos courtesy of Women's Own.

Zeenat Saeed Ahmed's 'zest for life'. It must go on.

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