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## Shahnaz Husain

FOUNDER, MANAGING  
DIRECTOR & CHAIRPERSON  
THE SHAHNAZ HUSAIN  
GROUP

# Shahnaz Husain

THE ARCHITECT OF  
INDIA'S AYURVEDIC  
EMPIRE

*How one woman challenged the chemical status quo to build a global institution rooted in ancient science and modern resilience.*

Shweta Singh | The CEO Magazine

**S**ome leaders build companies; a rare few build institutions that redefine industries and endure across generations. Shahnaz Husain stands firmly among the latter. At a time when women-led enterprises were uncommon and Ayurveda remained outside mainstream commercial imagination, she transformed an ancient knowledge system into a global beauty movement. By taking Indian herbal science to international markets, Shahnaz did not just build a brand; she made Ayurveda commercially credible, globally recognised, and central to the modern conversation around beauty and wellness.

In the 1970s, when global beauty was dominated by Western cosmetic science and India had limited examples of women building businesses at scale, Shahnaz chose a radically different path. Trained in international cosmetology across some of the world's leading institutions, she stepped away from chemical formulations at a time when they represented the industry standard and turned instead to Ayurveda. It was a contrarian move, one that demanded not just conviction but the ability to build belief where no market yet existed. That belief would later become the foundation of an enterprise that carried Indian herbal beauty onto the global stage.

What followed was the start of a journey that would gradually grow into one of India's most recognised global beauty enterprises.

### The Making of a Visionary

Shahnaz's early years played a defining role in shaping both her outlook and ambitions. Educated at St. Mary's, Allahabad, and raised in a family of prestigious legal luminaries, she grew up in an environment rooted in discipline and purpose. Yet she chose to follow a path very different from what was expected, one that would eventually lead her to the world of beauty and wellness.

Her training took her to some of the most respected institutions in international cosmetology, including Helena Rubinstein, Schwarzkopf, Christine Valmy, Lancôme, and Lean of Copenhagen. While these experiences exposed Shahnaz to the prevailing science of beauty, they also led her to question the long-term effects of chemical treatments. This realisation pushed her to explore herbal alternatives, gradually drawing her toward Ayurveda.

A strong source of motivation in Shahnaz's life has been the influence of her father, Chief Justice Nasir Ullah Beg, whom she describes as her constant inspiration and the reason she continues to move forward with conviction. Under his guidance, Shahnaz learned lessons that became her source of strength, wisdom, and resilience, helping her forge ahead without giving up, even in the face of challenges. She credits him with shaping her belief that life must be lived with purpose and that serving humanity at large should remain central to one's work and choices.

*"I owe my strength to my father. He taught me early in life that humanity at large should be the purpose of a human life. That belief continues to guide me in every step of my journey,"* she reflects.

### Shahnaz Husain Group: Reimagining Beauty

For decades, the beauty industry has been shaped by shifting ideals, product innovation, and the constant pursuit of perfection. For Shahnaz, however, the foundation of her journey lay in challenging this very premise. In a space dominated by chemical formulations and the pursuit of cosmetic perfection, she chose to establish her brand on the ancient principles of Ayurveda, reconfirming the traditional understanding of beauty as something that begins from within. In doing so, she worked to change how people perceived beauty, shifting their thought process and influencing the choices they made. Her approach centred on holistic, wellness-driven solutions using pure botanical extracts that addressed the root cause of concerns, restoring natural beauty and supporting skin and hair health.

This philosophy gradually took shape as the Shahnaz Husain Group, a structured enterprise built around herbal research and application. Their herbal product line was developed through extensive R&D and scientific research on Ayurvedic texts, designed to address individual concerns such as alopecia, hair fall, acne, pigmentation, dandruff, blemishes, and even minimising the effects of ageing with visible results. The process involved harnessing the goodness of nature and amalgamating Ayurvedic principles with a scientific approach, without the use of sulphates and other harmful ingredients.

The formulations brought together essential oils, precious herbs, floral extracts, vitamins, and natural substances, along with elements such as diamonds, pearls, and precious metals like gold. Over time, this approach aligned closely with the growing demand for holistic lifestyles and wellness-led choices, allowing her work to remain relevant to evolving consumer expectations. At its core remained a philosophy of 'care and cure', focused on addressing root causes and creating a positive, long-term impact on skin, hair, and overall well-being.

### The "Care and Cure" Model

In an increasingly crowded beauty market, differentiation is often shaped by clarity of purpose and consistency in approach. For Shahnaz, this distinction has come from building her work on the foundation of Ayurveda. At a time when the industry was largely dominated by chemical formulations, the principal formation of her product line differed from what was commonly available. Rooted in pure herbal ingredients, it has been tested over time through decades of work



solutions rather than focusing only on the problem. Her approach has remained strongly solution-driven, allowing her to detach from immediate setbacks and look for possibilities beyond them. She has consistently believed in finding a way forward, often seeking out-of-the-box responses to complex situations and approaching difficulties with resilience and clarity.

**"I HAVE ALWAYS BELIEVED IN BEING SOLUTION-ORIENTED. THE MOMENT I SEE A WALL, I FOCUS ON BREAKING IT RATHER THAN GIVING UP, AND THAT BELIEF CONTINUES TO GUIDE THE WAY I MOVE FORWARD AND SET AN EXAMPLE TO OTHERS AS WELL." - SHAHNAZ.**

### Redefining the Consumer Conscience

In an evolving business landscape where women leaders continue to navigate changing expectations, rapid technological shifts, and increasingly competitive markets, leadership has required both adaptability and conviction. For Shahnaz, her leadership philosophy has been guided by self-belief, which continues to propel her forward in a competitive industry where standing out demands determination and a distinctive approach.

Over the years, her Ayurveda formulations and the way they provide complete solutions for skin and hair concerns have influenced how people perceive beauty and shaped their understanding of a healthier lifestyle. She has long believed that Ayurveda offers answers that connect beauty with overall well-being, something she has been advocating and practising for decades, long before the wellness movement became widely recognised.

Shahnaz's focus remains on wellness-driven products that align with the holistic lifestyles people are increasingly choosing today. With formulations based on botanical extracts and designed to support skin and hair health, the work continues to hold relevance in an evolving and dynamic market.

and experience. With fifty years of excellence and strict adherence to formulation guidelines, the brand has built a consumer base that chooses it for its purity, efficacy, and authenticity, with no compromise on quality.

Driven by the core principle of 'care and cure', the brand is centred on providing individual, tailor-made solutions for specific concerns. This extends into premium care signature salons offering healing therapies focused on the mind, body, and rejuvenation. Positioned as a wellness-driven enterprise, it works on deeper human layers rather than surface appearance alone, appealing to consumers who seek herbal treatments that benefit health while enhancing and restoring natural beauty without the use of harsh chemicals.

### A Solution-First Leader

Leadership, particularly for women, often comes with its own set of professional, structural, and cultural challenges. For Shahnaz, however, these challenges have remained a constant part of her journey, professionally as well as culturally, but they have never defined her direction. The early foundation laid by her father continued to shape her outlook, guiding her to lead with a mindset of growth, learning, and seeking



### A Culture of Collective Growth

Building a strong organisation begins with people and the environment in which they are encouraged to grow. Shahnaz's approach to talent acquisition and leadership development has been shaped by observation, awareness, and the ability to recognise individuals for their unique strengths. She has consistently focused on bringing in people who have something distinctive to offer, be it intellect, skill, or the ability to contribute meaningfully to the environment they work in. At the heart of this approach is the belief that everyone should have the space to share ideas, showcase their abilities, and contribute their perspectives, recognising that each individual brings a different way of thinking and working towards a common goal.

*"I highly appreciate individuals who are driven to achieve and are able to see the common goal towards which we are working," she explains.*

Over the years, she has worked to create a space where skilled, educated, and talented women feel encouraged

and supported, with teamwork and mutual appreciation forming an important part of the culture. Shahnaz believes that women often bring an intuitive understanding and sensitivity that helps in sensing shifts, understanding nuances of the beauty industry, and anticipating emerging trends. This perspective has shaped the Shahnaz Husain Group as a place where ideas and insights are openly shared and where contributions are recognised and valued.

The emphasis has remained on inclusivity and encouragement, ensuring that those who perform and surpass expectations are acknowledged and supported. By creating an open forum and collaborative environment, she has focused on building a team that grows together, aligned with the larger vision and direction of the organisation.

### A Legacy of 'Firsts'

In a journey that has spanned decades, success often takes on meanings that go beyond scale or recognition. For Shahnaz, it has always been shaped by consistency



in vision, purpose, and the ability to keep moving forward. She has never chased time but has allowed hard work, passion, and determination to guide her path.

Over the years, several milestones have marked this journey. Representing India at the Festival of India in London in 1980 became an early moment of global recognition. Shahnaz went on to become the first woman in 109 years to receive the World's Greatest Entrepreneur Award from New York-based Success magazine. Her business model was later adopted as a case study for brand creation by Harvard Business School in 'Emerging Markets', and she has represented India and its ancient herbal system through guest lectures at Harvard, MIT, and Oxford, sharing insights on building a brand through word-of-mouth and authenticity rather than traditional marketing.

The global presence of her brand today spans over 100 countries, with products sold at prestigious international stores such as Harrods and Selfridges in London, Bloomingdale's in New York, and Galeries Lafayette in Paris. At the same time, her work has remained focused on innovation and impact. She developed the 'Chemoline' range to help alleviate the side effects of chemotherapy and radiation and also formulated an Ayurvedic cream, 'Shaspace', for NASA to address skin concerns during space travel.

Through these milestones, her journey continues to influence young entrepreneurs, reflecting a consistent focus on growth, innovation, and the belief that enterprise can also serve a larger human purpose.

### The Journey Continues

In an evolving business environment, growth is increasingly shaped by how closely organisations stay connected to their consumers. For the years ahead, Shahnaz sees expansion as a key priority, reaching out to potential consumers, increasing online presence, and building stronger connections to better understand what people truly want. She believes that establishing meaningful communication has become essential, especially as social media continues to influence the way people think and make choices. With new skincare trends emerging online every day and consumers following them with great enthusiasm, staying engaged and responsive remains central to the direction she envisions.

Shahnaz also views the future as an opportunity to lead by example. Having built an Ayurveda-based enterprise at a time when women stepping into business was far from common, she continues to see her journey as proof that conviction, passion, and vision can help overcome barriers and create new paths.

*"I always say—believe in yourself and your own abilities. Keep learning. Do you dream of being successful? Don't stop. It is important to dream and then to have the faith and courage to take the first step towards realising those dreams. An entrepreneur needs a vision in order to make dreams a reality. The focus should always be on achieving your dreams, having a practical plan to execute them and fiercely chasing your goal without giving up. When you truly have the will to achieve something, your drive and determination are what become the foundation on which you build your legacy." — Shahnaz Husain. ■*