

Shirin Rehemtullah

Shirin Rehemtullah is the Head of the Department of Social Welfare of the Southern Zone, W. Pakistan. This petite and energetic young lady recalled how many years ago a friend took her to visit one of the refugee colonies where Shirin immediately decided to give up some of her time to do some organised effort to better their lot.

Soon after she heard of a U.N. Training Course and of sheer curiosity decided to attend it. She felt she would like to know what was the right way to go about social work. She never thought of it as a profession but as something you did in your spare time.

When the U.N. Advisor first mentioned the idea of Shirin taking this up as a career Shirin exclaimed, 'What! Take money for the work! A lot more persuasion Shirin decided to it out and has been in service ever since. Now she is one of the top social workers.

Talking of the development of social service in Pakistan, Shirin gave me examples from her own tenure of office. She said where there were three social workers before, there are three to four hundred trained social workers in Pakistan today. She said in the earlier days, APWA was probably the only body that was doing something, now welfare work has been taken up professionally and is in the administrative structure in the Government programme.

The University of Karachi has a three-year course where one

can qualify for this work. There was a time, Shirin said, 'when we had the hard job of convincing people of the need to help, thus instilling and stimulating community spirit.' 'Today people are conscious of this need and come forward to do service, but we still need many more people for the job.'

Shirin said that on each of their projects they have in charge one man and one woman but there are places like homes for destitute women etc. which require the services of more women. She feels that for women social welfare is the right job, 'for it plucks at your heart strings', she added. She herself enjoys this job immensely and wishes more women would try it.

Shirin started work in 1953 in the Medical Social Field in an administrative capacity. She left for the United States, after nine years at her job, where she attained her Master's degree



in Social Welfare from Columbia University in New York.

On her way back from the States she visited Japan to serve that country's Welfare Programmes and policies. Shirin feels that we in Pakistan have the advantage of observing and learning from the mistakes made by the Western countries and countries like Japan which have point blank accepted Western theories, together with their drawbacks.

She feels we should evolve a policy keeping in view our own culture and values which distinctly differ from those of the West. Shirin herself believes in laying great stress on the family structure. This, Shirin explained, does not mean a joint family system but keeping in touch, providing for dependents and aged parents as has been our custom for centuries.

The old must never become strangers to their own families. Where this necessitates the living together of the mother and the wife of a man, they must learn to live in peace and co-existence allowing for personal liberty.

I told Shirin that there were happy examples of this provided that the older woman or the mother-in-law was naturally good-natured and understood the need for co-operation and give and take. Though Shirin agreed, she felt that the burden of setting the pace and initiate means and ways to allow both the people to exercise their own wills and safeguard their ego rests on the younger, educated woman of the family.

Though she has no personal experience of this, and she wonders what kind of a mother-in-law she herself will be (I am sure time will prove her to be the right kind) she does not have to worry as her two children are a son and daughter of five and three.

Shirin says that maintaining our family structure will prove the saving grace of our social problems.

MRS HABEEB.