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## MUSLIM WOMEN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

On 24<sup>th</sup> May SEWA a Mumbai Based Social and welfare organization, launched its ladies wing at the Islam Gymkhana. During the function, I met many Muslim women from all walks of life –education, medicine, dentistry, administration, law, media Finance, Social Work, Civil Defense, eager to work for the welfare of Muslim Women and also for other underprivileged sections of society. I was quite moved by the enthusiasm with which they offered their services – one of the women was literally appealing to one of the NGO President that she would like to take sessions for youth for spreading awareness on drug abuse which is a big problem among the youth across social strata –from Slums to middle class localities and of course where there is enough money .It seemed that it was not confined to boys only, but even girls were taking recourse to it, in the form of certain pain killers mixed with aerated drinks to cause a high, or consuming cough syrup with codeine to have a soporific effect on the senses. The problem is so rampant that many NGO's have started having sessions for youth who may be just children in the age group of 12 and 13, together with their parents. It seems that lack of attention and communication at home as well as unchecked freedom is leading to undue exposure to unsocial elements.



Figure 1 Mrs. Fatima Anees President Ishteraq on dais during a programme of the Society

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One of the Social and Political Activist who was awarded for her work in this field as well as for an anti tobacco and gender sensitization campaigns, Rubina Firoz, is the general secretary of Ishteraq Education Society ,the Founder President of which is her mother , Fatima Anees , ex Principal of Anjuman Khairul Islam and ex-Deputy Mayor of Sholapur. Though the Head office is located at Mira Road, the NGO organizes anti drug, anti tobacco and gender sensitization camps all over the city and suburbs and in the adjoining district of Thana. In Mira Road they conduct English and Marathi speaking classes at very nominal fees for house wives. The NGO also helps in the education of needy children by distributing free notebooks at the commencement of the school year.

Rubina, a smart and articulate lady with a Masters in History and a Diploma in Advertising and Public Relations is politically very active and intends to stand for the Municipal elections. She has a vision for empowering women through their socio economic development.

Asma Rehmani who introduced herself as an educationist, is a pleasant soft spoken young woman. She was awarded for her services in the field of education. She has an NGO, The Scholars Education Trust in Masjid Bunder which is committed in providing quality education to children from lower income communities. Accordingly the Trust has adopted a Municipal primary school where she has improved the quality of teaching by providing better facilities in teaching English and other subject. She hopes to extend the adoption scheme to more schools in due course on the same pattern as AKANKSHA and many NGO's . In this adoption scheme, the NGO or Voluntary organization provides infrastructural support such as maintenance and upkeep of building , Extra Curricular support i.e. provision of library and setting up computer classes and enhancing their learning experience by coaching in English, Science and Mathematics.



Figure 2 Shehrbano Guller with Ghazala Azad at a function

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Sheherbano Guller , Vice President of the Ladies Wing of World Memon Foundation who has been a social activist for many years and is associated with many Voluntary organization besides being convener of Ladies Committee of the Kolsa Mohalla Halai Memon Jamat also received an award for her social work. The Kolsa Memon Jamaat is conducting every summer,since 1906, a girls Personality Development class which grooms girls to be Honhaar Beti or promising daughters .But the syllabus which has lectures as well as practical exercises as well as visits to the Banks and Police station is clearly geared to make young women, confident and competent daughters and later wives ,who are capable in taking care of the house as well as in negotiating their way in a fast developing world .

Sheherbano is also instrumental in leveraging the services of the various organizations to facilitate girls and women to enable them to take advantage of various Government schemes for minorities and women.

“Most of the people are not aware of the various schemes under the Ministry of Women and Child Development and Ministry of Minority Affairs .Moreover they are also not conversant with the required forms and certificates required to avail the scholarships and various grants and loans given by government. I try to spread awareness and facilitate the applicants in filling the forms correctly so that they can avail of the benefits given by the government.”

I thought that this service was really crucial if the government schemes are to benefit the target group and wanted further details of the schemes and beneficiaries– this could be very useful for other Voluntary organizations working in this field .She promised to give it after Ramzan.