

Smt. Rehmat Sultan Fazelbhoy

Recipient of Jamnalal Bajaj Award for Uplift and Welfare of Women and Children-2001

Educational Qualification : B.A. (Hons), B. Ed., Diploma,
College of Teachers of the Blind, UK

Smt. Fazelbhoy's rejection by a prospective employer in UK because of her visual handicap (she has only 15% of normal vision due to albinism) inspired her with a desire to teach blind children for which she obtained a Teacher Training Diploma through the Royal National Institute for the Blind in London. She was the first lady student from India to do so.

On her return to India, she conducted a very successful experiment in "Integrated Education" i.e. teaching blind children at regular schools along with sighted children. This experiment starting with three blind children in the New Activities School in Mumbai where Mrs. Dolat Doongaji, Founder Principal encouraged her has now become an All India Policy, officially recognised and supported by the Central and State Governments. Today, over 15,000 children are being educated each year in India through this programme in 17 different States of India both in the rural and urban areas, including over 5000 villages.

One of her greatest satisfactions was when Rajendra Singh from the very first batch of three blind students became the FIRST MULTIPLE HANDICAPPED STUDENT (he is deaf - blind) to obtain his Ph.D. from Bombay University.

In 1958, Rehmat introduced for the first time in India a Braille Reading Competition for blind children in schools for the blind in the States of Maharashtra and Gujarat. These have now been extended to all States.

In 1962 she was the Co-Founder with Mrs. Fatima Ismail, Founder President of the first day school in Mumbai for crippled children run by the Society for the Education of the Crippled. This has reached out to disabled children in villages in and around Talegaon in Pune District of Maharashtra. Both medical help and educational guidance were provided. Rehmat is also the founder editor of the magazine "BLIND WELFARE" the only professional magazine in English to be published at that time by National Association for the Blind NAB.

In 1985, Rehmat as Founder-Secretary along with Mr. A. H. Tobaccowala, Founder President, helped to establish the multiple Sclerosis Society of India, the only organisation in the country working for the rehabilitation and care of persons suffering from Multiple Sclerosis (MS), an incurable disease of the central nervous system. The society with 8 chapters has been able to generate public awareness of this disease not only in India but in neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

In 1989 Rehmat and her team organised the International MS Conference held in October in New Delhi at the request of the International Federation of Multiple Sclerosis Societies (IFMSS). Twenty two countries were represented at this conference which was held for the first time in a developing country. From every aspect, public education, medical information and research, international exchange of ideas on rehabilitation and patient care, on fund-raising and administration - the conference was an outstanding success. At this Conference, Smt. Rehmat Fazelbhoy presented an audio-visual review of the work in India and also a paper on the reactions of children where a parent (father or mother) had Multiple Sclerosis. The International Federation of Multiple Sclerosis, London awarded her a Certificate of appreciation.

Fund raising has been her forte. She played an outstanding role in conducting unique fund raising events such as the Car Rally for the Blind in 1985, a case of the blind leading sighted, the Gandhi Book: Give-A-Gift, Get-A-Gift project and Match Box Competition.

Rehmat has adopted as her life's Mottos:

"Success lies in the effort, not in the attainment;
Full effort is full victory" - Gandhiji

"We make a living by what we get;
We make a life by what we give" - Churchill

