

Portrait of Shahin PRAVEEN



There are times when I really need to know someone just because of what is coming out of the person. This is exactly what happened in Shahin's case. After being nominated by her colleagues for the **"Portrait of the month,"** it took me just a glance, not more, I assure you, for me to feel compelled to dig thoroughly and find out who she actually is. And guess what, I was not actually wrong! Someone whose motto is: **"Be the best version of yourself, wherever you go"** cannot go unnoticed. I have seen so many other mottos put right under the signatures of some colleagues. I confess I don't understand some of them because they are too complicated. This one is quite clear. Anyway, I asked her what lies behind. Her response was straight: **"It is about education, she said. There are people who are so well educated, well-read... but who misbehave, out of contempt for others or out of lack of respect for the poor and those battered by life. The best version of oneself is the one people cannot cheat with or change, it means remaining steadfast and respectful towards fellow human beings, animals and nature in**

general." Wow, I was expecting a dialogue, but this looks like philosophizing! My philosophy course cannot go thus far, Shahin; let us now come down to the terra firma. I do understand that for Indians, everything involves meditation, levitation and elevation, but nevertheless, would you please be lenient towards me, a native of the Sahel region!!!

Well, now that we have set foot on the terra firma, tell me when and how did you join MONUSCO and what your job consists in. **"I joined the UN Mission in DRC as a United Nations Volunteer on 2nd March 2016 and COE (Contingent Owned Equipment) Data Base Assistant, based in Goma. My responsibility is to manage and update the comprehensive documentary and electronic files/records on day-to-day activities relating to units and their inspections to the e-COE data bases. I am also the COE technical focal point to the United Nations headquarters in New York regarding anything the e-COE data base and support INEED Applications for reporting any queries or challenges faced by the COE teams in sectors/region."** You are getting familiar with me now, let me ask my usual question: the United Nations: your choice or a happy coincidence? **"It was my happy choice as it gave me the opportunity to work in a multicultural environment and an opportunity to serve in a good cause."** Nothing else to add, Your Honor!!!

While explaining to me how she got to the United Nations, she told me she has a bachelor degree in Technology from the University Sri Ramaswamy Memorial University, India in 2012 and she later on got her Master degree in Business Administration (with a specialization in Human Resource) from Symbiosis University, India in 2014. ***“My experience in college not only prepared me for my career but it also prepared me for life outside of my career. I gained skills that cannot be taught. Through interactions with fellow students, professors, internship supervisors and co-workers as well as other college staff, I earned a “degree” in people and social skills that I did not even signed up for. After completing my degree, I got selected in Wipro Technologies through my campus placement in college as a project engineer and my first posting is in Bangalore, India. After my marriage, I travelled to Delhi and started working as a data base administrator in Soft Center Technologies. Based on the experience gained throughout my professional career and after a lot of efforts, I was selected by MONUSCO in February 2016.”*** Well, that is a fully developed mind in a head full of facts. So, what can we infer from this; there are people to whom God gave lavishly, he gave them without limitations; that's it...

Personally, I am a great admirer of UN Volunteers. In most cases, they have the same workload as regular staff on the payroll but do not get subsidies up to their commitment; yet, we have never heard them complain about that. That is what dedication means, I believe. Shahin, like other volunteers, deserve our full admiration. In this regard, this is what her supervisor Mohammed Osana has to share with us about her: ***“I have known her for about two years now; I have been working closely with Shahin and interacting with her on a daily basis. She continues to amaze me with all the hard work and dedication. Shahin’s professionalism is built on a foundation of multiple competencies. Firstly, her extraordinary technical skills to comprehend the business process of the clients and translate that into product features as widely reflected; secondly, Shahin’s client orientation skills are not limited to meeting the client expectations but she believes in going beyond the client’s expectations; thirdly, her elevated work ethic has resulted in the timely implementation of work with meeting 100% deadlines. Shahin has good interpersonal skills and spends significant energy communicating with clients and periodically with me to make sure that all of us are on the same frequency. Shahin does not fill the mold of the typical IT professional. Instead she uses her friendly demeanor and knowledge to liaise with people of varied cultural backgrounds.”***

It is true that the multicultural environment in which we serve is not quite easy. Shahin has however makes it a gain and believes it is an opportunity to know the different cultures she would have never known had she not joined the UN. She tries as much as possible to understand people from different backgrounds, refraining to judge them when they display a conduct, a habit or attitude dictated by their culture. She avoids biased judgments when dealing with them and has this to share with us as one of her success stories: ***“I have an excellent professional relationship with my co-workers, which gelled quite nicely with the working***



environment. People assist one another. We work as a team to solve problems and learn new skills to attain our team objectives. I made some good friends for life, who today can vouch for me on a professional basis."

Her colleague Bikas Sen has this to say about her: ***"I knew Shahin since she joined the COE, on 28 February 2016. I was very impressed with the quality of work knowledge that she had. She started assisting us for the COE Inspections that we do for contingents and assist the COE Team with her technical skills; basically she works on database and is always ready to assist her colleagues. Some of our colleagues named her "Fast and Furious" in a positive way, a person full of energy. I am very happy to have her as my colleague,"*** she concluded. Aqueel Khan, another colleague who shares the same culture with Shahin has this to say about her: ***"Enthusiasm, passion and skilled would be my first impressions of Shahin. She is knowledgeable IT professional and a master of her craft. As I know, she is very organized and truly cares about the integrity of the organization. She always thinks outside of the box. Anything she put her hands on ends up successful and she is of great value in the eyes of her clients, colleagues, friends and families."***

I am amazed by her cultural background. In fact I have always been impressed by Indians. They can best be portrayed as people who are ...Zen. Nothing can disturb or upset them; they are friendly and courteous, often smiling and easy-going; if I did not have a job with MONUSCO, I would have travelled to India to visit Maharaja de Jaipur palace. Please, Shahin, tell me something about your India that will keep me dreaming. ***"I was born and brought up in India, which is often labeled as an amalgamation of several cultures, spans across the Indian sub-continent and have been influenced by a history that is several millenniums old. I am personally amazed to see how the Indians may seem surprising. They are both conservative and modern. Our rites and customs have endured the disruptions and upheavals we have gone through and people have developed a resilience that is reminiscent of the Congolese people's resilience."***

By the way, since you have raised it, what is your reading of the overall situation in DRC?

"First of all I would like to say that DRC is a beautiful and rich country with lots of human and natural resources. Let me congratulate the Congolese people who, in spite of the ordeals facing the country continue to work for peace. I hope DRC will definitely achieve peace and prosperity in a near future through transparent elections." Do you think UN is doing a great job or little in DRC? ***"I believe UN is doing a great job through its peacekeeping Mission in collaboration with the different Agencies in DRC to slightly improve the lives of the Congolese people."***

You must be aware that UN has set the issue of the gender balance high on its agenda. What is your interpretation of this requirement in your daily activities? ***"Whether it is men or women, both genders are equally contributing for the development and advancement of our society. As a simple example of my married life, my partner and I both work and we have incorporated different rules knowing our capabilities without any ego factor for either of us. As we totally believe on the saying that Men and women are the two wheels of the bi-cycle as without one the other is useless. As an example, regarding our life as a couple, my partner and myself, both of us, work and have incorporated the different rules of gender factoring in our different or differing capacities."*** Shahin, as you realize, is married and I presume happily married. She also told me that from her wedlock was born a girl who will soon turn 4. This is what she had to say about her husband and daughter: ***"I want to express the gratitude I feel to be able to do this work, and the gratitude I feel to my family. I have a husband and one daughter. I couldn't do anything without their support and the joy I get from being around them."***

She loves cooking occasionally for her family and friends some Indian foods, especially the Indian foods, one would guess so but what she likes the most is ***"going to the restaurant to taste delicious foods."*** You are right, everyone to their own business! Our colleague also dedicates her time to visiting orphanages during the weekends to provide assistance to the needy. As a hobby, she loves practicing some sports such as cardio activities. Whenever she has time, Shahin says ***"I love to travel the world with my family to see and learn the different culture and lifestyle of the people around the world."*** What memories will you keep about DRC? ***"I completed almost 2 years in DRC, which is very memorable and fruitful in terms of my***

professional and personal lives, I would always remember the good relations I built in my working environment and outside as well as all my adventurous experience that I had when climbing the Nyiragongo Volcano. Anyway, this place has got all in terms of its culture, the resources, the jungle, the mountains, the gorillas....In short, I have so many recollections..."



You are right Shahin, but I would be disappointed if you don't say anything about the DRC's music!!! You must be aware that it would be difficult for everyone to live in the DRC and not to be captivated by its music, it is an institution, it can be enjoyed everywhere, the Congolese Rumba... *«Since I came to Goma, I came across one of the most successful musical festival Amaani which stands for peace and is organized by volunteers from the Foyer Culturel de Goma in conjunction with local and international organizations. The cultural event mainly focused on promoting peace, reconciliation and bringing change in DRC helped me to meet with artists - musicians and to see the Rumba for myself. Yes, it is a beautiful, very captivating music that can hold the audience spellbound when listening and watching people perform the dance. I do like it.»*

My last question, dear colleague would be on your dreams about the DRC (Do you have any?) *“Yes, of course, I dream for peace and prosperity for DRC actually a full-fledged country with tourism and investments from all over the world, which would lead to development and the well-being of the Congolese people.”* It is also our dream and I am persuaded that all the Congolese people do share this dream.

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