

Preeti Monga, 40, one of the bravery award recipients, lost her eyesight when administered a wrong dose of chicken pox vaccine

Awardees overcome handicap with dollops of self-confidence

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SHE looks straight into your eyes as she tells you more about herself — about what she is doing and about how she is where she is. Forty-year-old Preeti Monga, one of the recipients of the Red and White Bravery Awards for the Social Act of Courage, lost her eyesight when she was administered a wrong dose of chicken pox vaccine early in her childhood.

It is her confidence that trained her to 'look into people's eyes' based on the di-

rection of the voice. And it is quite effective. People are unable to make out her handicap. "When I was teaching aerobics, it took one of my students almost four months to realise that I had a handicap, though she had been working out in the front row in my class," Monga laughs.

And life has been all about confidence for Monga as she nurtured her ambition to earn and prosper professionally and not merely survive. She learnt aerobics and excelled in it and appeared in Veena Merchant's Keep Fit show on Doordarshan. She worked with the National Association for the Blind and learnt to

master computers through a speech synthesiser. She moved on to take up the challenge of heading the sales and marketing (food products) wing of a marketing company and boosted the sales of Granny Pickles. She is presently working with the resource development department of Katha.

Another recipient is 29-year-old Shivani Gupta who looked forward to a bright career after she completed her graduation in Hotel Management from PUSA and started working with the front office at the Maurya Sheraton hotel in Delhi. She suffered spinal injuries in a road ac-

cident which left her handicapped.

"It took an effort to start all over again. But that was what it had to be. I simply had to get on with my life," she remembers, the pain still fresh in her memory. She began teaching computers to the blind at the National Association of the Blind. "It helped me get back my lost confidence, and I came to terms with my handicap," she said. Gupta then underwent training in Duke of Cornwall Spinal Treatment Centre, Salisbury and came back to work as a research associate in the Indian Spinal Injuries Centre.

Among the other awardees is Din

Dayal Kapil, who took early retirement from Air Force to work towards creating total literacy in his area (Sagarapur) and established as many as 100 literacy centres in the slums in his area. Or 18-year-old Deepak Kumar, who lost his life while trying to save four people trapped in a whirlpool in Garh Ganga. An only child, he had dreamt of making it to the Army. His father was here to receive the award posthumously for his son.

Among others who won the award for their bravery were Amar Singh Chauhan, who risked his life to save the lives of 11 passengers caught inside a bus which had

overturned in the Beas river near Kullu on June 22, 1998; Asha Rani Dange of Nand Nagri, for taking on robbers who came to her house posing as scrap dealers and Rajender Johar, who established a 'Family of the Disabled' to counter his own disability. The Lifetime Achievement Award was conferred on Vineet Khanna from Chandigarh, who has been working towards spreading literacy and technical education among the deprived sections in his city, despite his own handicap. He is also the founder director of the Youth Technical Training Society, based in Chandigarh.