

THE HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

SHE'S BLIND

AND SHE

TEACHES

—HERVINA HERR

AEROBICS

"I CAN'T BE SECOND BEST"

Priti Brown is a talented, beautiful and vivacious aerobics instructor. That she is blind, is just incidental, for she sees herself as a complete, fulfilled person.

She is a tall, slender 32 but looks much younger. She plays the sitar, she dances, she is a qualified aerobics instructor and a proud mother of two. She is also blind. But that is incidental. Priti Brown, unlike most of us, is living life to the fullest.

Priti is from Chandigarh. She was six-and-a-half years old when the teachers started getting annoyed as she wouldn't copy her work from the blackboard. As in any other family, she says, "someone would say, beta please fetch that pair of shoes from inside." She would go through the whole house and return quite puzzled as she couldn't find them. Some aunt would impatiently say "this child is so careless, she has buttons instead of eyes."

An endless round of doctors followed, much to the annoyance of the impatient Priti. "When that whole lot crowded over me I had to resist a strong urge to push one of them over," she

fumes. The diagnosis: Priti's optic nerves were partially paralysed and she could lose her sight completely any time. "All that I was worried about was having to wear glasses," she laughs.

She studied up to class eight in Loreto Convent, Delhi, and was asked by the school authorities to leave. She did her high school privately after that. She is at present doing her graduation from the Open University (IGNOU).

In 1985, Veena Merchant's popular programme 'Keep Fit' was telecast on Morning TV. Priti found that she had a suppleness of movement and enjoyed doing the workout. She met Merchant who was initially reluctant to take her on even as a student. Priti's determination wore Veena down.

After a couple of months Merchant had to go to America and the chief instructor was also going out of town. A replacement was badly needed. Priti offered to handle it. Disbelief, shock and amazement greeted this proposal. The chief instructor, however, decided to give her a try and asked her to prove herself. Over the next few days not only did she prove the point but also had the entire class dancing to her tune — literally!

"It's others who feel I have a problem. I have never felt that way. I've been out dancing and jumping. Most other handicapped people have something missing. It is not created by them but by their environment," says Priti.

She strongly feels that the blind should not be segregated. "After coming out of those special schools it is not only difficult for them to adjust to society, it is equally, if not more difficult, for society to adjust to them. All the blind associations are going to hate me for saying this but I have never studied in a blind school. And I'm reasonably adjusted, don't you agree?"

She attributes this confidence, to take on life headlong, to her family. Priti's parents and brother were and continue to be, her source of strength. "I was never treated differently. Nothing extra for me, no allowances, no embarrassment on my account. After all, it is the parents' outlook which reaches out to society. If they treat the child normally, so will the world."

She has been counselling parents of blind children at the National Association for the Blind. She wants to take this counselling a step further with Project Vishwas. The idea behind the project — very dear to her — is preparing the society to accept handicapped people. "Society as the individual wishes to leave it at 'help'. Instead, there should be interaction."

She has the will to succeed — "I cannot be second best at anything. I have to, at least, be perfect."

SUN LAFF

Jim happened to bump into his friend Gary at the tennis club.

"So," Jim said, "how's it working out with that shrink I recommended?"

"Great," Gary said, "I mean, when I started, I was the most arrogant, self-impressed egomaniac on God's green earth. Now," he shrugged, "you couldn't ask to meet a more terrific guy than me."

Animal Crackers

