

Blind woman who defies handicap

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Yanger Thakkar

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AT SIX she lost her sight. She was thrown out of school and refused a bank account. Her marriage is broken, but, not her zest for life that keeps her going.

Meet Preeti Singh. At 30, she has mastered computers, attained *visharad* in playing sitar, done an aerobics instructor's course, is a marketing manager with a non-durable consumer products firm and a counsellor for the visually impaired and physically disabled.

Tall, fair, attractive and vivacious. Her sharp features and reflexes conceal her blindness and not until she introduces herself does a person realise that she is sightless.

And she gives no chance for one to feel sorry. "My dream is to reach out to the masses with the message, 'Give us disabled people a chance, we too can be an asset to the society. Don't unnecessarily compel us to be a burden...'"

The National Association of Blind couldn't have got a person more apt than Preeti for counselling others as unfortunate as her.

The lady is a computer trainer too. After having undergone training at the association's centre, she trains others on how to handle computers with a voice synthesiser.

The device, developed by a team of scientists at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, gives a sound for each letter enabling a blind person to check the spelling of every word when a particular key is pressed.

She was confidently dabbling with her personal computer when the managing director of Granny's, a fast growing non-durable consumer products firm, spotted

and offered her the post of the marketing manager.

"He was impressed with her confidence and competence," says a spokesperson of the National Association for the Blind.

Although recognition has come rather late for Preeti, she finds it difficult to forget that she was thrown out of the Loreto Convent in Class VIII because "they thought that my visual impairment was a nuisance to my classmates."

Later, she went on to complete her matriculation from the Indira Gandhi National Open University.

Her qualifications include a Sangeet Visharad (degree) from the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya in instrumental music and an instructor's course in aerobics.

Her tryst with marriage was traumatic. Her husband, whom she describes as "an alcoholic" not only tried to siphon her money but also physically abused her.

"Then I decided enough was enough and walked out of it (marriage)."

"I am a mother of two beautiful children and living with my parents as I am single now," says Preeti.

The marketing manager leaves it all behind as she assumes the role of a business executive but is unlikely to sever ties with the association she has been connected with for so long.

"My passion is to work towards helping disabled persons to step out and do something worthwhile, and to become social and economically independent," she emphasises.

Her message to others is: 'Don't unnecessarily compel us to be a burden. All that is needed to help us along is little love, understanding, and encouragement.' Says she, "I keep looking for ways and means of doing this." PTI