

and Preeti Singh are heroines who have turned their disabilities into triumph

# She opened their eyes to a welltuned, healthy body



**D**ressed in pink leotards, foot-tapping music in the background, Preeti leads the group through an aerobics routine. There is something puzzling about the instructor. The session ends, and it hits you: she can't see. Preeti is the only blind aerobics instructor in the country.

When she was 25 in 1987, she heard Veena Merchant conducting an aerobics class on television, and went to her training. At the end of three weeks, she was doing aerobics regularly and Merchant returned to the United States. Preeti was on her own.

On her first day as instructor, several students tried to "teach" her her job; perhaps out of mistaken sympathy. The head of the institute heard the commotion in the aerobics room and intervened, saying that students who had a problem with Preeti as teacher should come right out and say so. Nobody said a word. She has had no problems since. In March 1988 she began her own aerobics classes. "I have become more confident, patient and disciplined than I was," she says.

Exercise helps us deal with stress, says Preeti. "Time and money are spent on doctors and medicines. We have forgotten *prevention*. Most people shirk exercise with the excuse of being busy. But of the 10,080 minutes in a week, you

need only 90 minutes for aerobics to keep hypertension, strokes and heart attacks at bay. Think of it: If you give your body just 90 minutes a week, it will reward you in health, so that your body can feel and good and perform at its peak."

Preeti also markets pickles for a firm. She started by selling pickles to almost anyone she bumped into at the National Association for the Blind. After a month, she acquired the rights over the marketing operation. Her ability to type and use the computer helped.

She has worked as a training manager for eight months, apart from counselling at the National Association for the Blind. To supplement her income, on which she supports her two children, she began teaching English at the National Association for the Blind.

Preeti is self sufficient: she can cook, clean and do household chores. She acknowledges she would not have been able to achieve such independence without the support of her parents. She loves chatting, listening to old Hindi semi-classical songs, gathering data, swimming and eating exotic foods. She has travelled alone through Germany. Aerobics instructor, writer, disabled rights activist, marketing manager, she has many roles to play.

Helen Keller, whom she heard about when she was eight years old, is her inspiration. "Keller was blind, deaf and dumb. My own handicap appears very small before all of hers."

○ Ekta Sahney  
India Feature Service