

Facing life with courage

By Our Staff Reporter

NEW DELHI, MAY 26. Deepak Kumar of Uttam Nagar had gone to Garh Ganga for a holy dip along with his parents on the occasion of Somvati Amavasva on May 25 last year when he noticed four girls trapped in a whirlpool.

Son of a retired Army officer, Deepak Kumar could not stop himself from jumping into the river to rescue the girls, though he could not swim. He managed to reach the girls with great difficulty and pushed them out of the whirlpool. Unfortunately, he got trapped in it and, despite his best efforts, could not save himself.

A year after his death, Deepak Kumar was chosen for the Gold Medal in the 'Physical Bravery' of the 8th Red and White Bravery Awards for Delhi. The award was received here today by his father.

Under the same category, Mrs Asha Rani Dange was presented the Silver Medal for displaying courage in chasing away two armed men who tried to snatch money from her. The incident took place on November 19, 1998 when the men threatened her with knives, to take away the money. Displaying commendable courage, Asha Rani fought with the two men though she was badly attacked with knives. It was her courage that forced the robbers to flee.

The Bronze Medal went to Amar Singh Chauhan, who rescued 11 passengers when their bus fell into the Beas near Kullu on June 22, 1998. Amar Singh of Sagarpur happened to be near the accident site and rushed to the spot on hearing about the mishap. He got down into the bus, broke the glass windows with his bare hands and helped to take the injured passengers to safety.

Under the Social Act of Courage category, the Gold Medal went to Rajender Johar, a champion of the physically disabled. Mr. Johar became disabled 13 years ago after an accident. This, however, did not deter his ambition to make his contribution to society. He established an institute, "Family of Disabled" and contributed in making the physically disabled self-reliant by initiating



Winners of the Red and White Bravery Awards (from left) Ms. Shivani Gupta, Mr. Din Dayal Kapil, Mr. Balbir Singh and Ms. Asha Rani Dange, in New Delhi on Wednesday.

activities such as printing and selling of greeting cards they made. He also works with them, arranging exhibitions of the paintings made by them and finding them suitable employment.

Mrs Preeti Monga lost her eye sight in childhood but she did not bow down to destiny. She went ahead to complete her studies, became a qualified musician and eventually found satisfaction in the field of aerobics, which she has made her profession. She has also actively been involved with the National Association of the Blind, working towards helping others become self-reliant, organising workshops and awareness programmes for the uplift of blind and other handicapped people.

She has been awarded the Silver Medal for her work. "Reaching here has not been easy for me. There were encouraged as well as disappointments on the way. Schools and colleges are not equipped to cater for the needs of the disabled. But for my family and friends, I would have been one of the many who live aimlessly," she said, talking to *The Hindu* before receiving the award.

After watching Veena Merchant on her "Keep Fit Show" on television, Mrs Monga met her and persuaded her for over three hours to train her in aerobics. "I told Ms Merchant that I would help her

train me and so here I am today," she said. The story of Ms Shivani Gupta is no different. She started a promising career in hotel industry, when she was rendered handicapped in a road accident.

A graduate in Hotel Management, she did not accept defeat and faced the realities of life with determination. Instead of leading a helpless life, she took up the responsibility of teaching computers to blind people by joining the National Association of the Blind. She took training from Duke of Carnival Spinal Treatment Centre, Salisbury, and kindled a new ray of life in the lives of patients suffering from spinal injuries. Today, she works as a research associate in the Indian Spinal Injuries Centre.

"I think awards give a lot of encouragement and a word of encouragement or recognition gives an impetus to work even more," she said. Initially it was difficult for 29-year-old Shivani to come to terms with life when she lost her job after the accident. "I think there is a need to create awareness about handicapped in the country.

The least that can be done is to provide economic and medical rehabilitation. Economic not by way of giving stipend but creating opportunities for them to sustain and medical, making treatment

cheaper and readily available." And, incentives such as awards help in creating an awareness.

A retired Indian Air Force officer, Mr. Din Dayal Kapil, received the Bronze Medal in this category. He took the role of master tutor, taught in many civilians and established more than 100 literacy centres in the slums of Nasirpur.

He not only inspired young girls working as maids to join school but also contributed significantly to create awareness against the social evils such as child marriage prevalent among the backward classes. Mr. Kapil believes that it is not a matter of possessing resources or having time to fight social evils, one needs a firm determination and true devotion.

The Lifetime Award for Social Service went to Mr Vineet Khanna, a physically disabled person, who runs the Youth Technical Training Society, with centres in Haryana, Punjab, Chandigarh and Himachal Pradesh. Establishing an institution engaged in imparting technical education to the youth from backward social groups and opening avenues for them to be self-reliant. He runs 13 schools for the underprivileged children and works ardently for liberating women of backward communities through his projects.