

SILENT BEAUTIES

Real beauty knows no barriers, discovered MEENU, at the Silent Beauty Contest organised by the Delhi Foundation of Deaf Women



Happy winners — (from left) Anju Thapiyal, Suchint Sahadev, Raman Nanda and Kajal Dhawan

It was a beauty contest like any other. Smart, confident young women walked the stage vying for a crown. As each of them walked towards the audience, first in western and then in Indian outfits, the absence of rhythmic music suddenly struck you. Yet the beautiful women walked as if to an inner Beethovenian rhythm. The music was totally their own.

The Delhi Foundation of Deaf Women has been conducting beauty contests for the last couple of years, in an effort to bring young girls handicapped by hearing or speech loss, into the mainstream of society. Explains the president, Renee Kurien (through a process of writing and sign language). "Many people ask me why we waste money and time on something like this, when we need funds for their welfare. But I think it's equally important for these young women to have an opportunity to stand up tall in front of the world and gain self confidence. As you can see they are not any poorer for their misfortune and are at par with normal woman of their age. So why should they not have a platform to express themselves? Why not? The women with their smiling countenances, confident gaits and prompt intelligent answers to the judges' queries only vindicated Renee's efforts.

The women vied for the titles of Silent Queen (18 to 24 years) and Silent Princess (14 to 17 years). The contest included a Western outfit round, an Indian outfit round and a question-answer round. The judges for the contests were R. S. Hooda of Air India,

Femina Miss India - Asia Pacific, Divya Chauhan; social worker Marianne D'Souza, and Tarun Thakral, General Manager, Le Meridien. When questioned as to how her handicap affected her, one of the contestants answered, "In no way whatsoever." Yet another, on being asked about her future plans, replied, "I would like to marry a deaf man and have normal children." Each one showed an inclination to help others and to move undaunted towards her destiny. The girls are all working towards being self reliant, in such diverse fields as computer education, sports, fine arts and fashion designing. And though only a few could win titles, they were all no less winners of the epithet 'beautiful'.

Suchint Sahadev, an ace swimmer with three silver medals to her credit and a computer course and a Shahnaz Hussain beauty course under her belt,

was crowned the Silent Queen. Anju Thapiyal, a fax operator with the Gas Authority of India, and a participant at the International Cultural Programme in Vienna, was the first runner up. Kajal Dhawan, a textile designer, a bronze medalist in swimming and a district badminton champion, shared the third position with Raman Nanda, a fashion designer and beautician.

Mamta Nagpal, a sports enthusiast, was sashed Silent Princess, followed by Rashi Dhawan. The second runner-up title was once again shared by Ridhima Kapoor and Rajni Bala, a fashion designer and a beautician respectively. As each of them received their sashes and crowns amongst great cheer and applause, you could see a tear trickle down many a contestant's cheek — of happiness and disappointment. And you walked away a trifle richer for your experience of having witnessed beauty with a totally different dimension.



Silent Princess Mamta Nagpal (third from left) receives a gift from Renee Nagpal, President of the Delhi Foundation of Deaf Women