

SCAN

Aryan Supremacy

Move over, Cleopatra Jones, Manjeet Arya is here. All set to take on the antisocial elements of this big, bad world. As Assistant Security Officer of the Taj Mahal Hotel, New Delhi, she should find ample opportunity for this daunting task. Her qualifications for the job are impressive. She is a judoka with a Black Belt from the Kodakan School, an accredited judo coach for the National Institute of Sports (NIS), Patiala, and winner of gold medals in the below 55 kg and the open categories of the women's section of the Delhi State judo championships. She is also the first woman to join the security wing of any hotel in India.

Her initial inclination was toward medicine, but there as she puts it, "a few marks mattered". After finishing school, she took up a course in German at Jawaharlal Nehru University. It was here that she first saw a judo class, "which impressed me very much. I wanted to learn it to defend myself as my father and brothers are not always with me." Her reasons, as in this case, are never glamorous but rather pragmatic and based on a highly developed sense of self-preservation and a simple but rigid moral and ethical code.

Being of an athletic disposi-

tion ever since her schooling days, Arya took easily to judo. Within four months, she was good enough to win the gold medal at the Delhi State level. Quickly ascending the rungs of the judo ladder from White to Red to Brown Belt, she attained the topmost rungs, a Black Belt, after a one-year diploma course at NIS. She could have received this title earlier but for the fact that no high-ranking Black Belt who could confer it was available in Delhi. The Belt was finally conferred upon her by veteran Japanese coach, M. Suganami, a 5th Dan Black Belt from the Kodakan School of Judo in Japan.

By this time, she was qualified as a coach for NIS, but decided to pass up that opportunity because she felt that, with the large influence of politics in sport, she could not be sure that she would be able to guarantee her students a fair deal in selections and competitions. This may be largely motivated by the example she cited: "I made my younger brother an expert in judo and a gold medallist in his category; despite this, he got short shrift in the selections for international". She has, however, done some coaching, mainly in girls' colleges in the city.

Her greatest inspiration, she



Manjeet Arya: Women's liberator

says, has been Kiran Bedi. Arya admires, almost reveres, Bedi for her intrepidity and dedication to duty. Nevertheless, when offered the post of a Sub-Inspector in the Delhi Police, she refused because, like Bedi, she "wanted to be the first woman to do" whatever she took up. Her wish was granted when Tatas offered her a job in the security wing of their hotel, the Taj Mahal. Still, she wonders what it would have been like to have "the feeling of power and the glamour of a uniform".

The security staff at the hotels have had no difficulty in adapting to this unusual state of affairs. Initially, the ex-servicemen guards were wont to disobey her orders but her self-confi-

dence and authoritative manner prevailed, and now they call her "boss". Her colleagues fully acknowledge her capabilities, and from one of them, I heard the story of a fire which had flared in an unoccupied room of the hotel. Being on duty, Arya, braving the poisonous fumes and the flames, rushed into the room and threw the window open to disperse the smoke which was making it difficult to locate the origin of the blaze. After that, controlling the fire was just a formality.

Arya shrugs off the incident with "It was part of my duty — nothing exceptional. Judo gives one spiritual, mental and physical discipline so that one doesn't panic in the face of an emergency. The job comes first and it's my moral duty to act." This would have sounded trite but for the personal conviction with which she said it.

Arya believes that she is truly liberated, not like "those women who sit and discuss liberation across the conference table and record it all duly in their minutes". She insists that she is the equal of any man and sees to it that she is not given any special treatment with regard to duty allocation at her job. Arya has become the model for many girls: the number of girls in the security staff of large hotels is increasing. More power to them.

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