

# Ms Muscles vs Miss Curves

Who is a suitable role model — the woman who won the Miss World crown or the one who brought us the only medal in the Sydney Olympics? JAYANT BHANDARI wonders

SHE HAS arrived. Been met by scores of hero-worshippers. Escorted by the young and strong... Commitments will be made to serve the poor and encourage the youth. The media will again highlight it lest they be seen as being 'uncool' or ill-informed. She is our new icon. And everyone knows she is not Karnam Malleshwari, but Miss World! The meetings with VIPs and media hype will influence young women, who will see her as a role model.

That's the irony. Of the kind of persons who are our role models. The problem is not with the beauty pageants but with the excessive importance being given to them. And the hype around what was essentially a non-event, a show that is now socially acceptable for the voyeuristic pleasure of the hypocrite.

The protagonists will say how some of us, the cynics, can never encourage anyone. They will tell jokes about how the frogs being exported from India didn't have to be packed as no one let anyone else escape. And how she, the new Miss World, our girl from a small town has given us pride. She has done the impossible. The world now knows what being an Indian means. We have shown time and time again that we have both beauty and brains.

All true, except that this has become a cliché as much as that Mother Teresa was the most important person who ever lived, or is alive as claimed by the latest winner. Let's see what such pageants are for. Yes for flesh, certainly not for brains — unless the ability to speak some gibberish in English with a seemingly correct accent is our yardstick for intelligence and knowledge.

Malleshwari challenges us to make a long-term commitment to stretch our limits. Too much for us. Malleshwari challenges us to devote a lifetime to a chosen profession.



Priyanka Chopra: excessively glorified?

But in the beginning of the new millennium, there is little patience to make heroes of people who ask for such a commitment, offset against the promiscuous lifestyle we have been made to find glamour in. A mentality of gambling and cheating — the Harshad Mehta syndrome — is revered.

There is not necessarily a problem with this if it didn't become an obsession, the only way to live, and the only profession to the exclusion of other much more important ones. The problem is with the whole sequence of events that precede and follow the pageants, that glorify them to such an extent that they



Karnam Malleshwari: major achievement

leave most women thinking of them as the only thing to crave for in life. The girls will now still go around wearing suffocating clothes that hide even a fraction of skin, but will now bare their bodies at the 'right' occasion, and no thought will be given to the paradox.

Many more very young women will end up in beauty parlours (and even at the cosmetic surgeons) instead of libraries, anorexic instead of eating healthy, improving the superficial rather than the soul. This is the motivation that over-glorification of the pageants gives, and it does so by exploiting

and heightening self-contempt. A couple of girls, for sure, will win the pageants but will leave millions wayward, blind to reason, misguided and shattered.

Over-glorification of the pageants, if it carries on, will leave us with a new caste system of the beautiful and the ugly. It will no more be 'beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder' but 'beauty lies in the eyes of the Miss World and Miss Universe organisations'. The ugly will hate themselves and will do the 'menial' jobs — all in the non-beauty industry, that is. The beautiful will live a scary life of aging, ever trying to meet the standards set by the more beautiful coming in. As Anita Roddick of The Body Shop will say, there are only eight women with a perfect figure, and they are the super-models. But how many of us can take such a balanced view of life?

It's about accepting the reality of what the pageants actually are, to avoid their corrupting influence. Firstly, the exposure that the pageants get should come down to bring them to the level they rightly belong to. They are about flesh (and yes, nothing is wrong with it), money, glamour and the good old attention. Let's all enjoy ogling and why not, it's fun, but let's not be hypocritical about it. Secondly, it's not about the poor: this is not even worth an explanation. Thirdly, the competitiveness of the pageants is more about luck than even the flesh.

Acceptance of the reality will save millions from living shattered dreams. It's good for the women who win, they make a lot of money, so do winners of 'Kaun Banega Crorepati'. And like the latter, pageants are not a career: only two make it in the world every year with all the 'ifs and buts'. The protagonist and the cynics, all will then enjoy the beaut without leaving victims on the way.

The fifth season