

## The Company of Women

Richa Gupta, Saturday 25 August 2007

Be Happy” scribbled the vivacious vamp and original item girl, Helen, as she signed copies of the newly release coffee table book, *Women in Indian Cinema* (Harper Vintage, collector’s item, not for sale). While Waheeda Rehman dazzled in an elegant black sari and ivory-coloured pearls, while Zeenat Aman and Sharmila Tagore looked suitably gorgeous. Tagore, who wrote the foreword of the book, made no bones about her disillusionment with Bollywood. “There has been a change, but it’s limited only to the appearance. As far as the roles go, women still remain secondary and decorative,” she said. So, did she ever put her foot down? “I remember I was asked to play the mother of a pampered boy in a film. There was a scene where the father was trying to discipline him after he heard his son went to buy a gun. But instead of supporting him, the mother had to simply whimper and stop him from doing so. I refused to do that movie.”

Aman, on the other hand was in a mood to celebrate. “I’m celebrating three things— being an Indian, a woman and a part of the film industry,” she said. But ask her if she shared Tagore’s views and she was quick to nod her head, “The industry continues to be male dominated. Most of the directors and producers are men and male lead actors still get paid more.” Even while the starlets rued and the feminists wondered what the celebration was for, Renuka Choudhry, Minister of State, Women and Child Development, had her share of fun as she went on a male

bashing spree. With Choudhry and the Bollywood brigade hogging the limelight, **the authors Mukul Deva and Bhagwanti Singh seemed content to remain lost in the crowd.** Bollywood may have its biases, but women in cinema played no second fiddle here.

The glittering event had French luxury watchmaker, Breguet as one of its sponsors. Little wonder then that the launch party didn't stop with the celluloid queens. Models Joey Mathews and Sapna Kumar strutted around in designer Gauri and Nainika ensembles, wearing spectacular jewels worth about Rs 25 crore from their Marie Antoinette range. Bollywood may have its biases, but women in cinema played no second fiddle here.