



Women at work

From meal makers to deal makers, bread bakers to bread earners, women in India are taking giant strides at the work place



Padmini Natarajan

Sivashankari, celebrated author and voice for women, says, "Women have entered even sheltered areas that were taboo like army, politics etc. A woman can be a pilot, an auto driver, ply a lorry or bus today. I am happy that women have discarded their inhibitions about outdated codes of behaviour that used to dictate that a 'good' woman cannot do certain things". She reiterates that today's woman has now discarded this specious yardstick of goodness, venturing into every sphere of enterprise.

Asya Ollis has been in the culinary field, mostly in NYC. She has worked for Indian cookbook author Maya Kaimal. "Recently I started a meal delivery service, where I cook southern Indian vegetarian cuisine for private clients, and in the long term, hope to open a cafe in the US showcasing South Indian cuisine." She was in South India recently absorbing the foods, sights and smells of the region

that would help her in this endeavour.

Women today are also investing their time and talents into traditional forms of art and culture. Vishaka Hari is an exponent of a unique art form, the Kathakaalakshepam, a storytelling concert interwoven with music. She is a Chartered Accountant who has taken to this field. "My time is entirely spent with *sangeetham*, *ithihasam* and *puranams*," she says. "I have no time for any other interests as I study these works and read the many books that Anna (Krishna Premi, her father-in-law) has written on our scriptures and traditional literature. What he has written is an ocean and he expresses thoughts on so many issues from politics to Dharma, value systems to karma". This she weaves into her house full performances.

Children, their needs and the issues that impact their lives should be the focus every day in India says Vidya Shankar. Through her experiences as an adoptive parent and her interaction

with other parents who have welcomed a child into their lives by choice and through her work with Juvenile Welfare Board and Juvenile Justice Board, Vidya has been able to zone in on the importance of education in a child's life. Her organization, Relief Foundation is involved in school reform processes for underprivileged children. The Cascade Montessori Resource Centre is another brainchild and offers the Alternate Education Project. Progressive, forward thinking families who have had a pre-primary Montessori experience are invited to associate with this initiative and home educate their children. Parents of younger children willing to stay on with the child in the centre or come in for separate sessions and learn about how to help their child at home are also welcomed. Older children are taught through co-operative learning methods. Experiential learning materials for all subjects are also provided. She dreams big but she gives a concrete reality to her dreams.