

ON TOP

## Simply sumptuous

*Furthering her mother's legacy is no easy feat in a city teeming with food outlets. SAVIA RAJAGOPAL meets the innovative ASHA ZAVERI who has carved a unique identity for the highest-selling thali joint, 'Swati Snacks'*

**Swati Snacks that was established by your mother started out as a chaat and ice-cream joint. How did that happen?** My mother started Swati Snacks in 1964. She was the first one in Mumbai to sell home-made icecream. She used to make delicious chaat items at home and that's how she got the idea to open a restaurant. She started out with seven or eight chaat items. She used to prepare everything at home and then bring them to Swati in the afternoon. The outlet would open at 4 pm and close at 10 pm.

**Did you always intend to take over Swati Snacks?** I took over Swati Snacks in 1979 and I've been running it for the last 26 years. I never planned on taking it over but it so happened that there was no one else in the family who wanted to continue with it after my mother passed away. I had no formal course or training. Whatever business strategies I've learnt have been from experience. I wanted to continue my mother's legacy in serving traditional cuisine. **Swati Snacks has a formidable reputation in a city that is teeming with snack and food outlets. What do you attribute to its success?** Constant innovation is the key. I create my own recipes and themes for food. I like to bring elements from different regions and add my own style to it. Now I experiment with international cuisine like Lebanese and Mexican and have created my own fare.

This kind of food is not served anywhere else and I maintain very high standards. That is very important. My customers teach me a lot everyday and I am constantly learning from their feedback and comments. **Traditional Gujarati cuisine is your forte. In a cosmopolitan city like Mumbai where you have customers from all communities and regions, what do you think make them repeat visitors?**

The quality and the taste of the food here. That's why people keep coming back for more. I create my own recipes and train my chefs personally. I feel a lot of responsibility towards my customers as they come here with the intent of eating good food in exchange of their hard earned money.

**How do you manage to maintain the standards of the restaurant?** My experience over the years has helped a lot and has taught me that personal supervision is the best way to maintain quality and standards. I have a staff of 80 people who are very dedicated and I share a wonderful rapport with them. My husband has fully supported me. Also, we decided not to have children so that I could focus completely on work. 'Swati' is like my child.

**Do you think women face more obstacles in mainstream business?** It used to be difficult earlier for women to start up their own businesses but that has changed now. Women no longer have to face difficulties as such. Yes, there are obstacles in business but that apply to both men and women. To be successful... "There has to be total dedication and never give up on what you really want. Always be prepared for hard work."

