





**I**t is 1994. Let us take some time out to take stock! The first generation of women's libbers has come and gone. The contemporary working woman has been empowered with high tech goods to help make life and labour a lot easier. Women the world over, have taken the lead in shaping trends that determine lifestyles. Millions of women still put dinner on the table every night, but they also get their kids to school on time, get the house clean, plan for that Saturday night dinner party, and all this after they



Illustration: Sanjay Ghosh

the top of their agenda. Supporting these lifestyles will be a revolution in the durables industry. State-of-the-art cooking systems (whatever happened to the good old gas stove?), fridges with multiple doors, user-friendly vacuum cleaners, chip-controlled automatic washing machines, multipurpose food processors, deep freezers, microwave ovens and even answering machines and home computers are right on top of the super mom's shopping list.

Each year, an increasing number of women are empowe-

are required to adopt a new practice, product or belief system, before it becomes a chain reaction that in time persuades most people to adopt the practice or product and initiate a self-sustaining process? What was the critical mass for refrigerators before most people started possessing one? Was it twenty per cent or forty per cent? What will be the critical mass for microwave ovens? For answering machines? What about home computers?

One metaphor for a critical mass is an avalanche. Tiny snow crystals move, and it looks as if nothing is happening. Millions become billions, and then there is a turning point and boom, a loud explosion. Once the critical mass is achieved, the rate of adoption of a new product or innovation becomes self-sustaining. It is an idea whose time has come. The challenge is for marketers to energise that critical mass and transform it into action.

The achievement of critical mass for lifestyle change does not happen in a vacuum. There is always some resistance working against it and slowing down its achievements. For example, how many of us really like talking to an answering machine? Some of us felt that way and got over it. Some have yet to come to terms with it. Sooner or later, the critical mass will be achieved and the answering machine will have truly arrived. The outlook is optimistic for the white goods industry because the countervailing forces are getting wea-

ker in the face of acceptance of new ideas.

**Good news about women:**

"We want liberation from labour!" Read my lips. Today's working lady is not content to come home after a 40 hour work-week and spend the precious time that she has sweating it out in the kitchen. She would rather have fun with her kids and her family. She is serious about preserving her bonds with her family and every little bit helps. Cook and freeze in advance; thaw in the microwave; chill in the fridge; balance your budget and your personal share portfolio on the home PC. Catch up with your messages on the answering machine; the list of etceteras goes on.....

Women have pushed themselves beyond the limits that men defined for them and have taken on roles that were once the domain of the male sex. Today's woman is a management consultant, a systems analyst, a doctor, an engineer, a chef, an artist, a marketing executive and a college professor. She has achieved great heights and she still is a great mother, wife and a friend. She can achieve her goals and raise the quality of her lifestyle. And she has strengthened her home front with goods that help her to devote time to attend to her career and her future. Marketeers all over the country had better awaken to the fact that the customer is no longer "king" but in reality, the "queen". And it is this queen who in the long run will prove to be their strongest ally.

## You've come a long way, lady

have put in a hard day's grueling work taking on jobs that till date were a man's forte.

**Aneeta Madhok**

They are debunking outdated stereotypes about the typical working woman who did not care about the home and the family. The woman today, has proven that she can have her cake and eat it too. She can keep her job and her family as well. And what's more, she can manage quite well, thank you very much, and bye bye Kanta bai!

The good news is that women will continue to upgrade their homes and their lifestyles and become more confident of interacting with technology. They will find it easier to rely on more complex

home goods like microwave ovens and washing machines. Despite inflation and Manmohanomics, urban working women will keep buying food processors, microwave ovens, refrigerators and the like, as well as small extravaganzas like a second T.V. set for the bedroom. Nevertheless, the disconcerting news is that they are now more cost conscious than ever before, and keep an eagle eye for good bargains where they will get more "value for money".

Marketeers have to be doubly sure that they are not selling any substandard stuff and that they deliver the highest quality for the lowest price. You can say goodbye to the days when you had them paying through their delicate noses for small differences in

quality sold as "premium". They now have a head for discounts, buy back guarantees, money back offers and sales because they are more educated and aware. The days of caveat emptor (let the buyer beware) are fast getting over and instead, it is the marketer who has to be on his toes and bend over backward to delight his customer.

About 25 per cent of the urban work force consists of women, most of whom are moonlighting as homemakers, and another 25 per cent of that same work force are their husbands. A whopping number of double income households — a massive chunk of consumers comfortable with their purchasing power and brought up with the culture of consumerism will put lifestyle issues at

red with greater confidence in their ability to buy on their own. The first generation of women with lifelong, full time careers is just entering its prime power years. These women, who came of age in the sixties, worked hard at balancing their career and family in the seventies, and in the eighties equipped themselves for the late 1990s. A second generation of young female upwardly mobiles has also been born to scan the markets for any item that may make homekeeping a little less of a drudgery. It is time for hundreds of corporations to shift gears, and re-orient their corporate objectives to these two segments of the market.

Consumer behaviourists are instructed by the notion of "critical mass". How many people