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Pics by T. A. Hafeez

Woman power

IN HIS message to the nation on January 1, 2001, the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, declaring 2001 to be Women's Empowerment Year, said: "In the coming days, let us actively promote women's access to quality education, credit, health care, employment and social security."

The Stella Maris Alumnae Association, in its own humble way, has started off the year keeping in mind the objectives of the Prime Minister's message. "Celebrating Women's Empowerment" was the theme of the sale and exhibition organised by the association on the college campus on January 24. A number of alumnae who have their own businesses, set up stalls displaying products manufactured by them.

There was a wide variety on display, from garments – salwar kameez sets and saris, to leather wallets, bags, knapsacks, keychains, candles, pickles, terracotta items, jute bags, herbal products, dried flowers, computerised horoscope casting and ready-mix powders. There were also stalls on academic counselling for the

GRE, GMAT and TOEFL exams, as well counselling on studying abroad.

Some of the alumnae work as volunteers in homes for the mentally challenged – they set up a stall for cards, coasters, wall hangings, et al, made by the children of the homes.

The stall holders were fairly happy with the response – for some, it was a good source of publicity, if nothing else – being a college event, they had not expected much in the way of sales, students being proverbially

hard up for money!

The purpose of the exhibition was to ensure that students be aware of the options available after graduation and to highlight successful businesses that alumnae have started. The college itself regularly invites alumnae and people from different fields who speak on their own careers and provide the students with information on various career options available to them. Perhaps another way in which the college and the alumni association could work together would be to start some counselling or organise programmes on entrepreneurship itself. Starting a business is not easy under any circumstance, but with the increasing availability of loans for women, and the benefits that are being provided for women entrepreneurs, it would be helpful if some guidance were given on the practical aspects of starting a business. Given the tremendous reach that the alumni association has, and the number of successful members it has, this should not be too difficult a proposition.

The Stella Maris Alumnae Association, like most alumni associations, works towards maintaining a comprehensive database of members around the world, raising funds for the college, and ensuring continuity between present and past students.

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