



Auroville

P A P E R S

NEWSLETTER N° 03

THE LADIES OF AUROVILLE PAPERS



THEY ARE TWENTY-FIVE OR THIRTY YEARS-OLD. They wake up at 5 am, make sure there is water for everybody's bath, prepare their family's breakfast, cook and pack lunch for their husbands, their children and themselves, clean their house, see to it that children are ready in time for school and that nothing has been forgotten in their schoolbags. Then they sit on their pink, violet or red scooter and off they go. After driving almost an hour through the intense and chaotic traffic of the south Indian roads, they finally reach Auroville Papers.

THEIR DAY HAS JUST STARTED. Here they are, fresh flowers in their hair and fresh

smiles on their faces. Dressed elegantly with a blouse always matching their sarees in the most impeccable way. Like proud little princesses with not a care in the world. They are ready to start "working" and nothing else exists now for them. When I say "ready", it is an understatement: in fact they are hungry for work and their plates are never full enough.

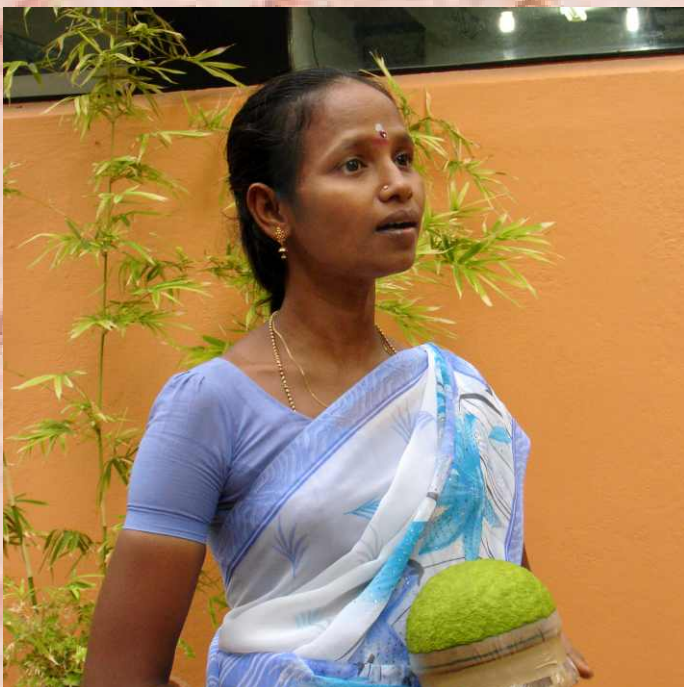
WHEN YOU ASK THEM if they like to work, their eyes shine: Oh, yes! They love working. When you ask them whether their job is not difficult, they look at you slightly pained: Not at all! *Nothing* is difficult. When you ask





them if it is not too hard to manage their family life plus a job, they proudly reply that women can adapt very well and very fast. "When I start from my house, says one lady, I immediately begin thinking of Auroville Papers. When I leave the office in the evening, I switch off and I think of the dinner."

I AM SPEAKING HERE about the women who have the most important responsibilities in Auroville Papers and Auroville Press. Deepa is our accountant. Vasanthi organizes the work at the Press and fixes the prices of all items made by Auroville Papers. Selvi manages the production and participates in the creation and design of new products. Jaya juggles her time between the management of Auroville Press Publishers, DTP work for the Press and the ordering of books for our bookshop. Shakila supervises the fabrication of our hand-made paper. Shivagami and Ambikha have also their own specific tasks.



THEY ALL HANDLE THESE MULTIPLE JOBS with grace and deftness. While we, aurovilian "executives", are likely to be worried or tense or irritated under pressure, their energy is stable and calm. "They give me inspiration", says Luisa, "they give me strength." Yes, they are fearless. Not only that: in fact they welcome new challenges. Or rather, they want new challenges.



AND THIS IS ALSO WHY THEY LIKE TO WORK HERE; this is a place where they are constantly confronted with new situations and are always forced to learn something new: "Auroville is a place for learning," says a lady. "I feel that here I can talk frankly with the executives," remarks another one, "They are like friends. I give them suggestions and I know I will be listened to. So I am not afraid presenting my ideas, and in this way I have the space to be creative and make progress." A lady who worked with other companies before joining Auroville Papers draws a comparison with the kind of management she had known previously: "Here we are given respect. In other places, executives never talk to people 'below' them. They treat them like dirt. Also elsewhere men resent it if a woman is given a post higher than theirs. For them a woman has to remain subordinate and her main job is to serve them."

INDIAN WOMEN are reputed to be shy. And this is true in a way. But when their task demands it, they overcome their shyness in the most

amazing way. Take Deepa, who has to present our accounts for audit in front of six forbidding gentlemen. She does it with great poise and is proud of this achievement. Take Shivagami who had never worked anywhere before joining our team and who now, like Chithra, spends her days welcoming visitors and foreign guests in our bookshop. Take Shakila in the handmade paper unit, whose team is composed mainly of men.

I HAVE ALSO NOTICED SOMETHING NEW and this is so interesting in the context of Auroville: some of these ladies lately have started functioning a little differently. They seem to rely more and more on intuition. For instance, they can sense it when we are troubled about something and they spontaneously without saying a word manage to let us know that we can count on their support. Another example: don't ask Vasanthi to make an estimate for you if you never had the intention of giving us the work in the first place. She will read your mind, and in spite of your reminders, you will never get the estimate... As for Selvi, she is now able to guess with great accuracy whether a particular client will like a particular product, and she knows it before the client himself.



I FIND IT REMARKABLE that while discussing with them in preparation for this article, in the course of our conversations they all mentioned the fact that what they want most is to be able to learn and progress. It is this deep thirst for learning which is the most striking and touching element in their aspirations.

THESE LADIES HAVE GROWN tremendously from the shy young girls who entered our company ten or fifteen years ago for helping in book-binding to the efficient organizers they have become. But this should be a continuous process and for us it is certainly a great responsibility. This is an invitation to make our little corner of Auroville the place of "unending education" that Mother wanted. In order for them to grow, we all have to grow. Our company also has to grow in many different ways.

THIS IS OUR CHALLENGE. With your good wishes and your collaboration, it may be possible. And remember: when you give us orders, you make these ladies happy.



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