

TUC

Recording Women's voices

Working at Ford: The Asian Women's Story

Abbreviated version

Prabavathy Selvaraju

After marriage I went to Singapore, then my husband was retired in 1968, then come this country so 1980, so, yes, 1981 I joined the other factory, then 1983 I joined Ford Motor Company.

Swatanter Mayor

I came to this country in 1965 - only one year married at that time, I was, and I came; first of all I don't like this country because my whole family in India – I am alone here, only my husband here; that's why I miss so much my family. After that I had just over there after one year I got daughter, after two year I got another daughter and I got two children; they born here, both of them born here.

Saros Kavia

I came to London in 1974 in May and my brother was here. He came here in 1971, my elder brother. I am second eldest in the family.

Laurentia Wallace

I came to England 1961 and I didn't like it from the time I land and I cry for a whole year. Anyway, I got married in 1963 and I did many job when I arrive. Every 5 minutes, you 18 you don't want to stay in one job, you know? And I couldn't speak English properly because we speak in Hindu, between Hindu and – my father was – they are from India; these days would call it India because it was Calcutta; and my mother is Creole, like French, from Martinique, so we speak a mixed language (*laughs*).

Bhana Gohil

I came to England in '73 and I wasn't married – I had just turned seventeen then. We had a big family so obviously I had to look for a job and the very next day I think I started working.

Sushila Pithia

I come in this country in 1968, 26 February, and my father come in this country 1966.

Papla Chadha

I come from Kenya, actually; I was in Kenya in 1964. It was very cold, you know, and I didn't like it and we had to go to bath after one week to have a bath, you know, outside; the same thing, you know, it was not really very easy – all the heaters we had to use, the oil heaters and I'd got my daughter, 3 years old; I have to leave her to the baby-sitter, take her in the snow and then my husband has to work in the Post Office – he start with the Post Office.

Swatanter was the first in this group to get a job at Ford's Dagenham plant.

Swatanter Mayor

Then I so scared because I don't know big machine – I never did that. I don't know how to – but I can manage; and only three or four Indian people/Indian girls working over there and they helped me: "Do this one, like this one, like this one," and after that it was OK and after two months I decided to come here and start work and we don't wear saris, suit, only trouser or skirt. There were four or five Indian ladies working over there - after that they came, oh so many, fifty or sixty Indian ladies came after me. We are the first one.

(Ford Dagenham engine plant – 2007)

Prabavathy Selvaraju

When I came to this country, somebody said, "Without machining experience you can't get any job. Then I learned somewhere two years some other place, machinist, so slowly I catch up speed also after Dammie Patel and me and working together somebody told me Ford Motor Company vacancy there – we can apply for that. And my husband said, "Oh, you can't get the job – it only is experienced people only get the job. I feel inside I want to go there and get the job. So after I went to interview I write the mathematics and English everything – they are fine. After they gave me the same thing, two cushion, my hand all shaking because I'm so nervous (*laughter*) in front of one lady sit down; I watching her and how she doing the job so after I can do it myself – I did! Then the Ford lady is very nice lady: "Don't be scared – I'm not standing near to you, I'm going far away," so she far away gone then I done the job – pass! After, the same lady send me medical test – pass!

Laurentia Wallace

When my husband was already working in 1965 and I think in the late 70s I told him I saw the advert on the ?Ford Man? paper, I think, or some paper; anyway he wouldn't let me, because he knows – he works on the assembly in BT where there is lot of men and you know what men is like; he knows, he works there; so he didn't want me to work there and I did find the job myself so without his help! And it was mostly women anyway where we worked in the Ford machinists and it wasn't so hard.

Saros Kavia

We used to do our own cutting over there as well. When we had free time we used to cut our dresses and we'd all get together and it was really fun and

?

We miss that!

Saros Kavia

Yes, anybody retired we used to have 1 hour break. We have music, we used to dance and lovely food and

Papla Chadha

and everybody liked our food, yes, plus they liked our language and the food, and they like us there, you know (*laughter*) It was interesting!

Yes, the first day when I go to Ford it was nice, I work there. I like the people there – they was very nice and what happened, first day I didn't have any problem, and second day, you know, we had a problem with the language, you know, we had a big problem because we'd got only four or five Indians there. When we get together we start – that lady sitting there, she was with me – and when we start talking Indian you know ?.....? everybody start's saying, "You can't, you are not allowed to talk – English here, you speak only English here, not Indian, not Indian," and we cannot help it – when we see Indian we talk Indian. And there was a big argument and the union was on our side, you know, the union was very good because they have supported us all through all of the years and that's why we settled in the Ford.

Prabavathy Selvaraju

Yes, really they help a lot, they really help a lot.

Swatanter Mayor

Very strong union there.

Saros Kavia

It was in 1994 when machinist went and, well, most of the ladies they retired; it was about over 300 ladies who were working as machinists and then only about 15-20 of us left and because I wasn't that age to retire so I just end up in engine plant. First we were doing permanent day's job – they did have permanent day's job there but now in the past three years even that department closed down as well so I'm on light machining now. It's very hard for me to do shift

3 Shift System
Rotates weekly
6.30 am – 2.30 pm
2.30 pm – 10.30 pm
10.30 pm – 6.30 am

work because I've never done it, I mean I've been at Ford's about 28 years now – I'd never done that shift work.

Sushila Pithia

My first children start from the nursery after playgroup – they'd gone bigger school. Elder one study in Cambridge seven years. Younger one didn't study but he got a nice job.

Papla Chadha

My children is not like us at all, because they have gone to university with the English and they are just like English, only they are Indian men, we say. Otherwise they have changed a lot and they want us to change like the English, you know, so they are very different from us and my daughter especially, you know, she's a dentist, she's married to an English man. She is quite English, you know, and her children, one son, one daughter, they just, er, they are English but they like Indian food; they are very good people, we enjoy with them – it's nice, you like it but they are different, you know.

Prabavathy Selvaraju

I am all right in this country.

Swatanter Mayor

I'm all right, now.

Prabavathy Selvaraju

Getting old, it's all right.

Swatanter Mayor

It's all right.

Saros Kavia

Yes, because before when we come here we didn't have no friends at all, even next-door neighbours, they – everybody was so busy doing their own things and we hardly know who was living even next door, so, oh yes, now that's really interesting.

Prabavathy Selvaraju

Because back home, we don't know, you know we lean in doorways. Staying indoors back home, so now that they are going to work, they explain themselves to outside people everything but in this country they have to learn a lot of things – more knowledge also – experience also. They get more. I'm happy; my children's also happy. My husband also happy.

The TUC wishes to thank:

- *Prabavathy Selvaraju, Sushila Pithia, Swatanter Mayor, Bhana Gohil, Saros Kavia, Papla Chadha, Laurentia Wallace, Sushila Lamani, Damyanti Patel and Urmlia Kavia*
- *Siobhan Quaine, The Ford Motor Company, Dagenham*
- *Saravanaa Bhavan, Restaurant*

for their co-operation and assistance.

A TUC production with the support of the Wainwright Trust.

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