

A good job, caring colleagues – she’s living the dream

Agnisha Mahalingam, a transperson, works with the Metro

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Regulars at the Meenambakkam Metro station might have noticed a tall woman walking around the premises, checking on maintenance and attending to passengers – all with a smile.

The woman is Agnisha Mahalingam, 25. She clearly is very happy with her job. It is way better than the job she first held.

Four years ago, Ms. Agnisha was sidelined in her first job, at a corporate, when she decided to come out as a transperson. Three years on, in 2019, she landed a job with the Metro, as an operator. Today, she has been promoted for her outstanding work, and now works as a station service manager. “I was moved and thrilled beyond words. It was quite surreal to see that they had recognised my work,” she said.

Born into a traditional family in 1993 in Tirunelveli, Ms. Agnisha was a rather quiet child. “I always felt like a woman, but I realised the seriousness of it with age. I began reading about the lives of transgender persons and the battles they fought. So I was clear about one thing, even while transitioning into a woman, education is crucial, otherwise, I may have to face abuse and struggle for a livelihood, like many others,” she said.

After being prodded into pursuing mechanical engi-



Agnisha Mahalingam landed a job with the Metro in 2019, and works as a station service manager. ■ B. VELANKANNI RAJ

neering, Ms. Agnisha graduated, and finally came out to the family for the first time in 2016. “My parents were aghast and my mother wept endlessly. But I was determined, and showed them videos and news articles of transpersons who had emerged successful,” she recalled. Fortunately, they were convinced in a week’s time, and encouraged her to move ahead.

It was the beginning of a new chapter, when Ms. Agnisha shifted to Chennai and sought help from NGOs like Thozhi and Sahodaran, and eventually found a job.

Respect at work

Even as she recounted her past, three of her colleagues, one after the other, interrupted every five minutes, to check if she had eaten, and whether they should wait to eat together.

“I love this job so much, not because of what I do alone, but owing to how

warmly my colleagues treat me. They respect me and not once have I felt sidelined here. I’m deeply grateful to BVG India and Chennai Metro for hiring me,” Ms. Agnisha added.

That’s not all – once, a woman passenger had entered the station and her child ran in, lost control and was about to ram the ticketing gate. Ms. Agnisha rushed and lifted the child, much to the relief of the mother. “I will never forget what she told me then. She said she had always been scared of transpersons for some reason. This incident had changed her opinion and outlook,” she said.

With a good salary, an understanding family and a great bunch of friends, Ms. Agnisha’s ambitions have grown. “This is like living a dream; I feel welcome here. I want to help more transpersons find work and lead a decent life,” Ms. Agnisha said.