

BEAUTY, BEBO AND FRIENDS PICK A FIGHT AND OTHER STORIES



Baby

What time tomorrow? 😊

8:15 PM

Shreya

I need someone to come with me to the police again



8:16 PM

Bhavna

The morcha starts at 11 am...

8:16 PM

Anjali

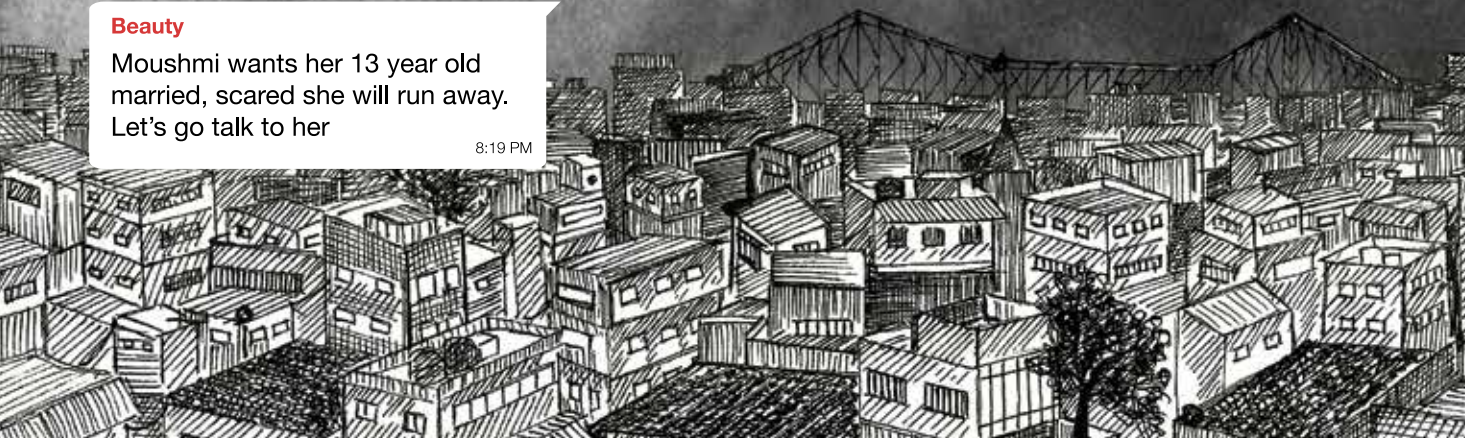
That's the same time as my Biology tuition. I'll come by noon

8:18 PM

Beauty

Moushmi wants her 13 year old married, scared she will run away. Let's go talk to her

8:19 PM



For Moti, who left suddenly, when so much was to happen.

...It's about making it a part of your life – contextualizing it.... For me, these are all a part of education....I don't give importance to benefits such as delay in marriage or then girls having fewer children. These are roles according to society for a 'good' girl/woman, so that they get privileges... this discourse is not different from the old one. It's useless. It's a part of exploitation, *aapko acha naukar basically chahiye* (you basically need a good servant). It perpetuates the same structure in a different language. The benefits of education, to my mind are to end exploitation and discrimination.

– Moti, 2015

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Foreword

JUST A GROUP OF GIRLS

When you get your head out of all the numbers and policies and films and reports and graphic books about girls, you realise that they've become less and less real, and more and more science fiction. Stories of what may, what could be. Not really about girls we know, or that not long ago, we were.

This book is a collaborative effort of girls from multiple generations: a biography of many young selves, of girls and women together looking closely at the fun and the hairyness of growing up.

It is a work of fiction, based on true facts and occurrences. Our girls are quite unmistakably of certain times and places, classes and castes. Through these multiple and complex lived experiences we hope the struggle to conform, and also transgress, to make the world our own comes through.

The graphic stories are our attempt at looking at the world through the eyes of girls: a world that has always been quite taken with the idea of girlhood, but in present times this has taken on a significance that is larger than life. It shapes global development policy, the movement of resources, obsesses over returns on investment and the representation of girls in all spheres of life. In this slim volume, we pry open the world's neatly packaged girlhood and turn it inside out, into the world from a girls'-eye perspective.

In the dark and fearful place that adolescence is painted to be, how do girls and women manage the process of growing up? What are the histories of politics and mobilization that girls inherit from the generations of women they grow up with?

These stories foreground how adolescence and girlhood are almost never stories of exemplar individuals. Nor are they silhouetted against dark gender practices, as pure victims of tradition. And they don't all begin and end with the sexualised body of the girl, and its ruinous potential. These are adult fantasies. In the everyday, girlhood is explored and negotiated and resisted and enjoyed in sharing, mirroring and fighting multiple experiences of body and mind. Moments of rupture and growth come when we are able to resist the trappings of social norms and expectations, often as part of groups and collectives that support, nurture and ground us.

As researchers, writers, feminists – we have observed and been part of women's movements and their changing forms over many generations. Collectivising – coming together in formal or informal ways around a common issue – has been an important strategy for women, to address local or global issues; or to take on the might of an oppressive structure, like patriarchy, caste, class or race. For decades and across the world, autonomously or in formations facilitated by women's groups, NGOs and even the State, women have come together and used the strength of numbers to transform personal and individual struggles and experiences into politically transformative ones.

This book grew out of a research study done in 2015, which mapped the experiences and work of seven organisations in India working with young girls and women. 150 girls, women, activists and researchers were interviewed as part of the study, and a series of regional and national consultations held afterwards. The research and consultations threw up interesting findings, all contributing to the far-from-reality-and-closer-to-science-fiction contemporary construct of the girl. We encountered the highly instrumentalist 'manufacturing' of an idea of girlhood in policy exhortations, that claimed to solve not one, but all the problems of the twenty-first century. We were surprised at the sudden noise about social transformation, which seemed to eclipse how transformative women's movements have been; and the deafening silence on the role of

women's collectives in changing girls' lives. On the contrary, the Tragic Girl protagonist-soon-to-turn-Supergirl featuring in most reports on girls seems to have little idea about the strategies that girls or women have adopted to resist or fight for what they wanted, decades before her. The Tragic Girl is isolated in her troubles—being pulled out of school, married off early, being last to get dinner, not allowed to laugh or play or talk on the phone. Getting to school unleashes her superpowers. Before you know it, she's jumped into a terribly dilapidated classroom with an equally non-functional toilet and changed her life and the world.

Unfortunately, real life has few superheroes, and even the ones we have appreciate the backing of a group and some social interaction.

For the lonely girls in the pages of the policy documents and research reports, to know of the history of girls and women who have taken a stand or come together around the same struggles they have—or even vastly different ones—would be a source of strength and dynamism. We saw this unfold, in places where women's collectives predate or exist alongside efforts with young girls. The structures and the outcomes of women's mobilization over the last thirty years bulwarked girls' own yearning for change. We saw that the explicit presence of women's collectives, as well as the more implicit learnings from the women's movement have contributed in large part to girls having taken collective action (for instance in the case of the 40-day protest in Andhra Pradesh against exploitative labour practices, or the Right to Pee campaign in Mumbai for public toilets for women, and girls' engagement with this).

This is not to say that the relationship between older women's collectives and fledgling girls' collectives is not a perfect one. Women at times find girls giddy headed or romance obsessed, and girls often find women overbearing; but both know that there's a larger battle to be fought, and they're both on the same side.

Building and sustaining collectives is not just a question of learning from history. It's hard, tedious work. The collectives that have been successful and sustained are the ones where internal work on the design, structure and systems (of the collective) have been

carefully crafted: there is leadership, there is mentoring and investment. With women's collectives, there is the fact of stability and some measure of control over location and time. With girls, the constant is change and growth and unpredictability: education, marriage, employment, children. Collectives for girls seek to be flexible and allow mobility and access to new people, places, opportunities; at the same time, they too have a scaffolding, a structure that ensures some stability and transparency, allows for new generations of girls to move in and out, to lean on.

In the end, girls deserve the chance to be something other than the frightened child bride, or the bright-eyed overachiever in school. Shock-inducing statistics generated by national and international agencies and a heightened interest in their future cannot determine their present. While change that is directed and contained in individual lives of girls may be the safer, tamer, better investment, in actuality, change is not linear or predictable in this way, nor can it be sustained over time. Collectives provide the opportunities, learnings and spaces for plural imaginings of what girls want in their lives, what they could be or do; for looking back, looking forward; for moving, or staying in the same place. These may not be (as yet) validated by numbers, but they are an undeniable strand in our intergenerational herstories.

~ Dipta Bhog and Disha Mullick

THIS IS HOW YOUR
BODY PREPARES FOR
MOTHERHOOD, HIPS
GET ROUNDED,
PELVIC WIDENS AND
BREASTS DEVELOP
AND FILL OUT.

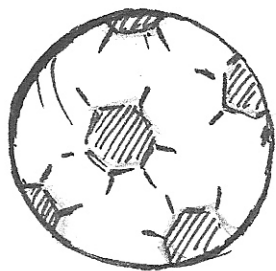
DON'T BE
DISTRACTED
BY BOYS

ADOLESCENTS CONFRONT
PROBLEMS IN MANAGING
THEIR SEX DRIVE...

ON BEING REPEATEDLY ASKED TO ENGAGE IN
SEXUAL INTERCOURSE, BE FIRM AND LEARN
HOW TO SAY NO







1 When I grow up, I want to be **URMILA MATONDKAR** (but not just that)

Illustrated by Ikroop Sandhu

Present day, small-town north India. A messy world of early marriages and smartphone romances. The presence of field workers working on issues of gender and sexuality with women, girls and the community-at-large throws wide open the playing field to challenge all ideas, of what girls can do or cannot do. How big they can dream and where their own desires are knotted up with the desires of kins and peers. This field is markedly different from what it may have been two decades earlier, where activists worked to mobilise rural women around various issues, like violence and labour rights. Multiple worldviews overlap here. The world and critical vision of the feminist activist – keen to provide the girls opportunity, the ability to question and reject oppressive gender norms, step beyond the boundaries drawn for them. There is the world of parents and community members, even male peers, for whom the girls' subversion means a destabilising of their own familiar identities and power. And then, the worlds of the girls themselves, each one of them different, each one of them negotiating boundaries and liberation in their own way. Sport becomes a key player in this drama, provoking us to think about the limits on mobility and space placed on girls, the control on their bodies as much as on their minds and will. What happens when ideas of the 'right' balance of modern and traditional, subversive and normative are challenged by what girls themselves may want?

SMITA FINDS HER FEET, AND SOME FRIENDS, IN KARALI, UTTAR PRADESH



COULD I HAVE
A GLASS OF WATER?



HERE.

WHAT IS YOUR
NAME?



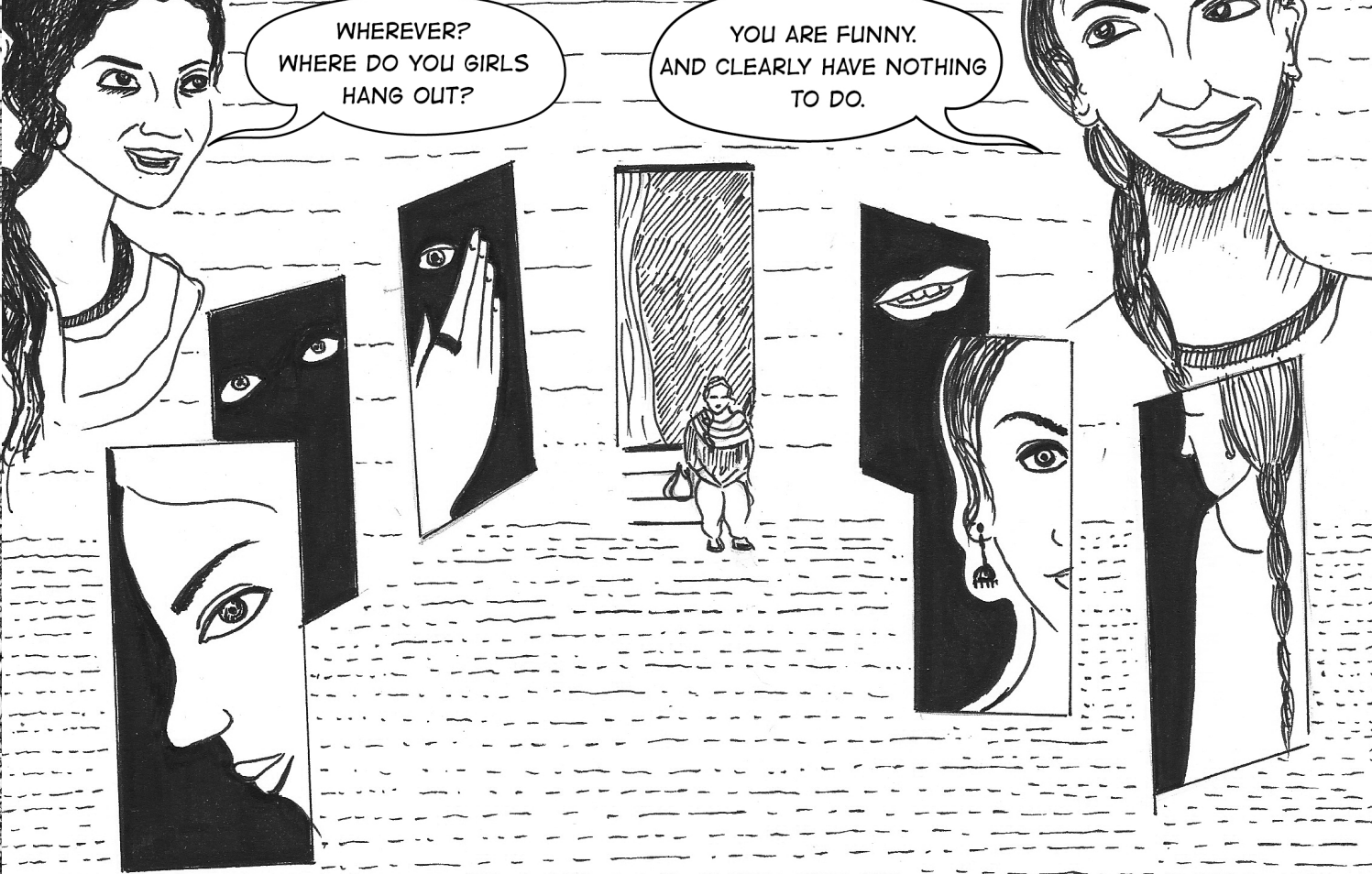
HINA

YOU SHOULD SMOKE
BEEDIS. I DON'T KNOW
WHAT THEY PUT IN
THESE.

ARE YOU FREE?
YOU WANT TO GO
FOR A WALK?

WHERE?





WHEREVER?
WHERE DO YOU GIRLS
HANG OUT?

YOU ARE FUNNY.
AND CLEARLY HAVE NOTHING
TO DO.

HMM, WELL,
THAT'S NOT
REALLY TRUE...

DAMN RIGHT. LOOK AT ME.
ONLY A BUNDELKHANDI
DABANGG CAN DO THIS?
CAN YOU SEE THIS?
DAMN RIGHT.

ANUSH KATE
INTERTECHNOLOGY
-OGY
ATTACHED TO -
ANU MARG

ENGLISH CLASS
ONLY
AT
ANU'S IN

UP ALSO FLIES, NOT JUST
PUNJAB. IT'S ALL LIES.

UP FLIES ON SHEER
WILLPOWER.

MARI OM 3, TRADERS

VISI

THREE WEEKS LATER...

WHAT WILL I HAVE
TO DO TO GET YOU ALL
GIRLS TO COME, HINA?

I DON'T KNOW.
JUST DON'T SPOIL THINGS FOR
US. AT LEAST I'M STILL GOING
TO SCHOOL.

WHY WOULD I DO THAT?
OKAY, WHAT IF WE GET TOGETHER
TO JUST TALK? NO AGENDA. YOU
AND ALL YOUR FRIENDS.

FRIENDSHIPS ARE ONLY
FOR SCHOOL AND TALKING
IS DANGEROUS. YOU DON'T
KNOW THAT?

HAHA. MOTHER SAYS,
'STOP PARROTING
YOUR DIDI'

STOP PARROTING
YOUR MOTHER.

WE HAVE FOUGHT AND
COME, BECAUSE OF HINA.
WHAT ARE WE GOING
TO DO?

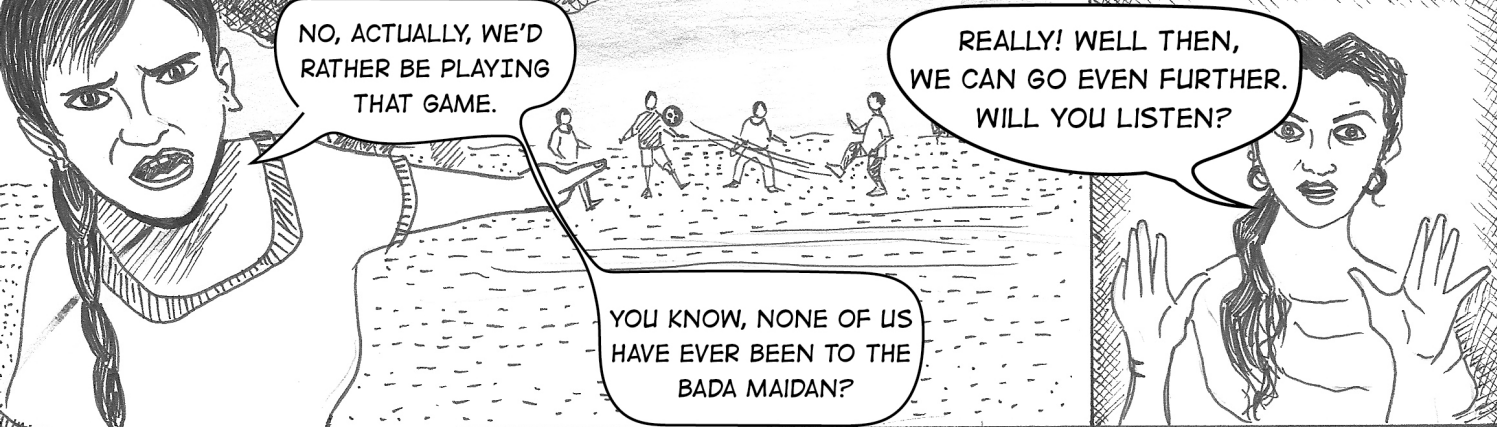
I HAVE TO BE HOME IN ONE HOUR TO MAKE
FOOD.

AND SO LATER THAT DAY...

YES, JUST SIT DOWN....WE WILL DISCUSS
SOME THINGS ABOUT MENSTRUATION AND
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH...

IS THIS WHAT
YOU'D RATHER DO?

KABADDI KABADI KABADDI KABADDI KABADDI
KABADDI K KABADDI
KABADDI KABADDI KABADDI



NO, ACTUALLY, WE'D
RATHER BE PLAYING
THAT GAME.

REALLY! WELL THEN,
WE CAN GO EVEN FURTHER.
WILL YOU LISTEN?

YOU KNOW, NONE OF US
HAVE EVER BEEN TO THE
BADA MAIDAN?

NEXT DAY, WITH THE
LOCAL FOOTBALL COACH

...SO IT WILL BE ABOUT
THRICE A WEEK. THE GIRLS JUST
WANT BASIC TRAINING -- OFFENSE AND
DEFENSE, GOALS AND PENALTIES...

SO YES, JUST FOR ONE MONTH
THREE TIMES A WEEK, IT'S TO
EMPOWER ADOLESCENT
GIRLS...

ARRE, ATLEAST
GET A COLD DRINK FOR
MADAM...BLOODY
IDIOT.

SO YOU
ARE STAYING
AT SANTOSH LODGE NO?
COMFORTABLE
ROOMS?

ARE YOU
ALONE?



महिला शौचालय

15

THAT NIGHT...

BHENCHOD, SAALA
BHENCHOD, SAAMNE
TOH AA...

YES, I KNOW
YOU DON'T TRAIN
FRESHERS, BUT THESE
ARE VERY KEEN GIRLS
-- WE WILL RAISE
FUNDS TO PAY
YOU...

JUST IMAGINE. YOU'LL SAY NO AND A 30-YEAR-OLD AMERICAN
WILL PICK THEM UP AND SEND THEM TO SPAIN. THEY'LL BE
STARS LIKE THE GIRLS FROM JHARKHAND. THEN YOU WILL
CURSE YOURSELF.

INDIAN IN
COMPUTER
SHITTED TO
VISHNU MARG

A WEEK LATER...

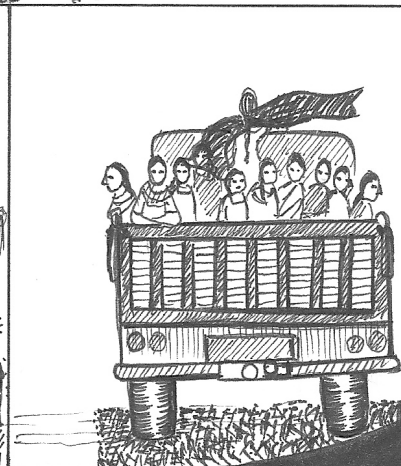
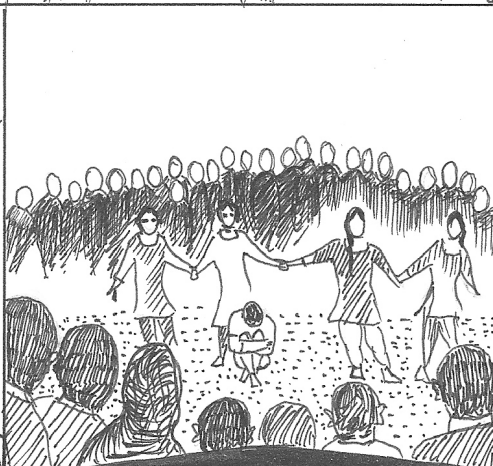
SO WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?
WE PLAY THE WAY THEY
PLAY ON TV?

BEFORE
WE START, WE NEED TO
TALK TO OTHER GIRLS
LIKE YOU

DOES
HE LOOK LIKE
SHAH RUKH KHAN?
OUR COACH?

किशोरी मंच

OVER THE NEXT FEW WEEKS, MUCH
FUN WAS HAD AT THE KISHORI MANCH



I NEVER KNEW
...THAT I COULD
FEEL LIKE THIS. WHAT'S
THE WORD?

BUDHU?
ARE YOU FEELING
FOOLISH FINALLY?

SHUSH. DON'T
KILL THE MOMENT.

IT'S BEEN FIVE DAYS SINCE I'VE BEEN HOME.
I DON'T THINK I'LL THE SAME PERSON
WHEN I GO BACK.


NO, OF COURSE NOT.
YOU HAVE NOW BECOME
KANGANA RANAUT.

IT'S A STRANGE
FEELING TO DISCOVER
YOU ARE NORMAL.
I HAVE NEVER FELT
NORMAL
BEFORE.


YOU ARE EXTRAORDINARY.

YOU ARE NOT
NORMAL.

FOOTBALL! I NEVER IMAGINED THAT'S
WHAT I WOULD BE DOING WITH
THESE GIRLS...



HALF A
FIELD IS WHAT WE
WANT.

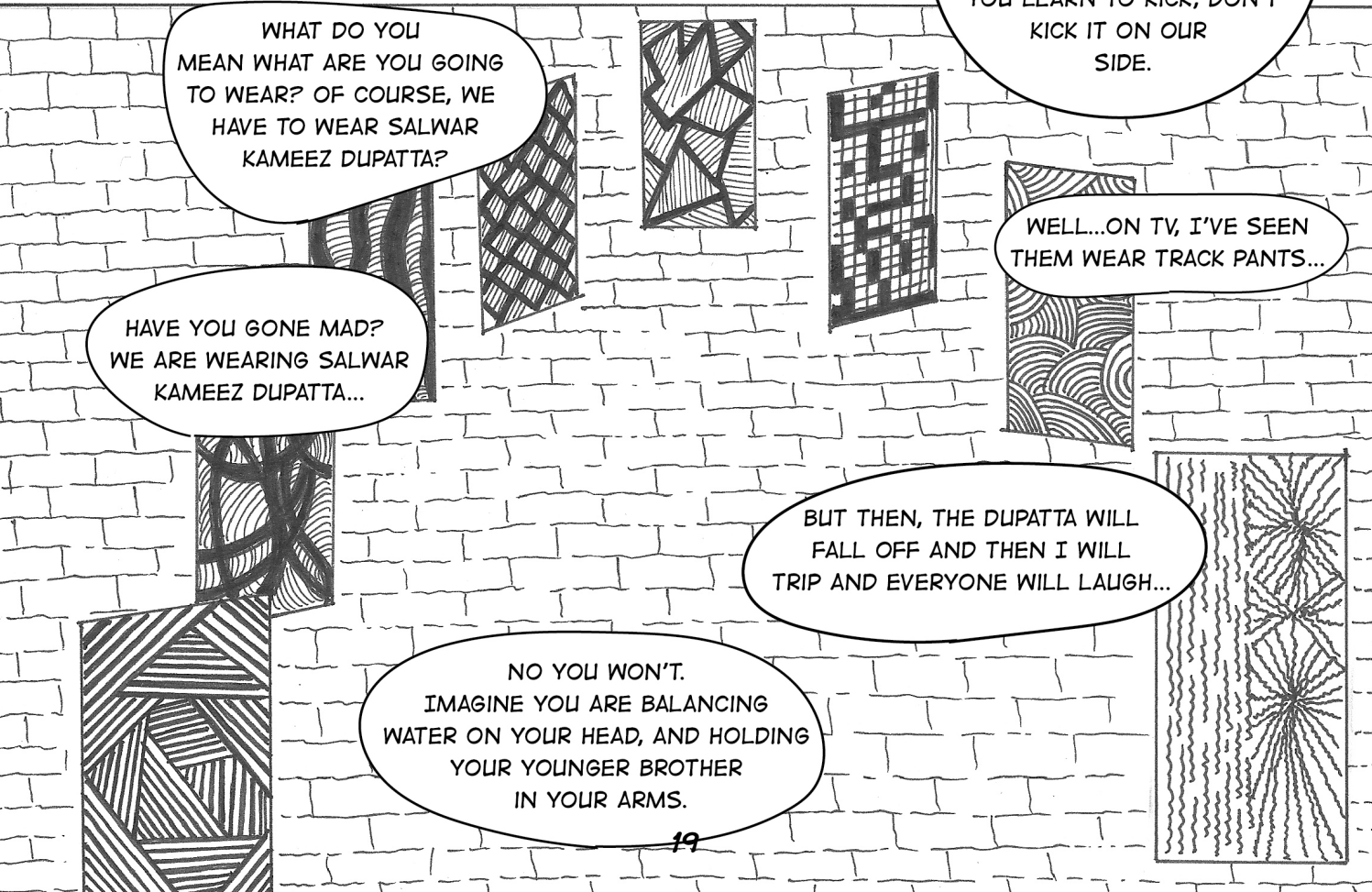


WE WON'T EVEN
PLAY WHEN YOU PLAY...
BEFORE OR AFTER...

YOU GIRLS ARE
VERY FUNNY.

HALF THE FIELD. 4 - 5 PM.

FINE. JUST MAKE
SURE YOU DON'T TRIP ON YOUR
DUPATTAS. AND WHENEVER
YOU LEARN TO KICK, DON'T
KICK IT ON OUR
SIDE.



WHAT DO YOU
MEAN WHAT ARE YOU GOING
TO WEAR? OF COURSE, WE
HAVE TO WEAR SALWAR
KAMEEZ DUPATTA?

WELL...ON TV, I'VE SEEN
THEM WEAR TRACK PANTS...

HAVE YOU GONE MAD?
WE ARE WEARING SALWAR
KAMEEZ DUPATTA...

BUT THEN, THE DUPATTA WILL
FALL OFF AND THEN I WILL
TRIP AND EVERYONE WILL LAUGH...

NO YOU WON'T.
IMAGINE YOU ARE BALANCING
WATER ON YOUR HEAD, AND HOLDING
YOUR YOUNGER BROTHER
IN YOUR ARMS.



SOME MONTHS LATER...

YOU KNOW
HE DEFLATED
MY CYCLE TYRE SO THAT
I COULDN'T COME
HERE NO?

YA, MINE TOO.
THEY HAD ALL PLANNED
IT.

ANYWAY, I'VE THROWN
HIS CYCLE IN THE POND. SO I
MAY NEED TO COME STAY AT
YOUR HOUSE. OKAY?



MEANWHILE,
OTHER LIVES,
OTHER WORLDS

I DO WANT TO GET
MARRIED. DON'T YOU,
SHANTI?

I DO. BUT THIS IS TOO SOON, NO?

EVERYONE LOOKS AT YOU
WHEN YOU PLAY ALSO,
REKHA, DON'T THEY?

YES, BUT RED COLOUR
REALLY SUITS ME.

DIDN'T YOU SEE AT SARITA'S
WEDDING HOW EVERYONE
WAS LOOKING AT HER?

MY HUSBAND WILL BE
LIKE VARUN DHAWAN.
NATKHAT.

LET'S BE REALISTIC.
YOUR HUSBAND WILL BE A
MECHANIC. BUT WHAT WILL
YOU BE?

I DON'T REALLY
CARE AS LONG AS
HE LOVES ME.

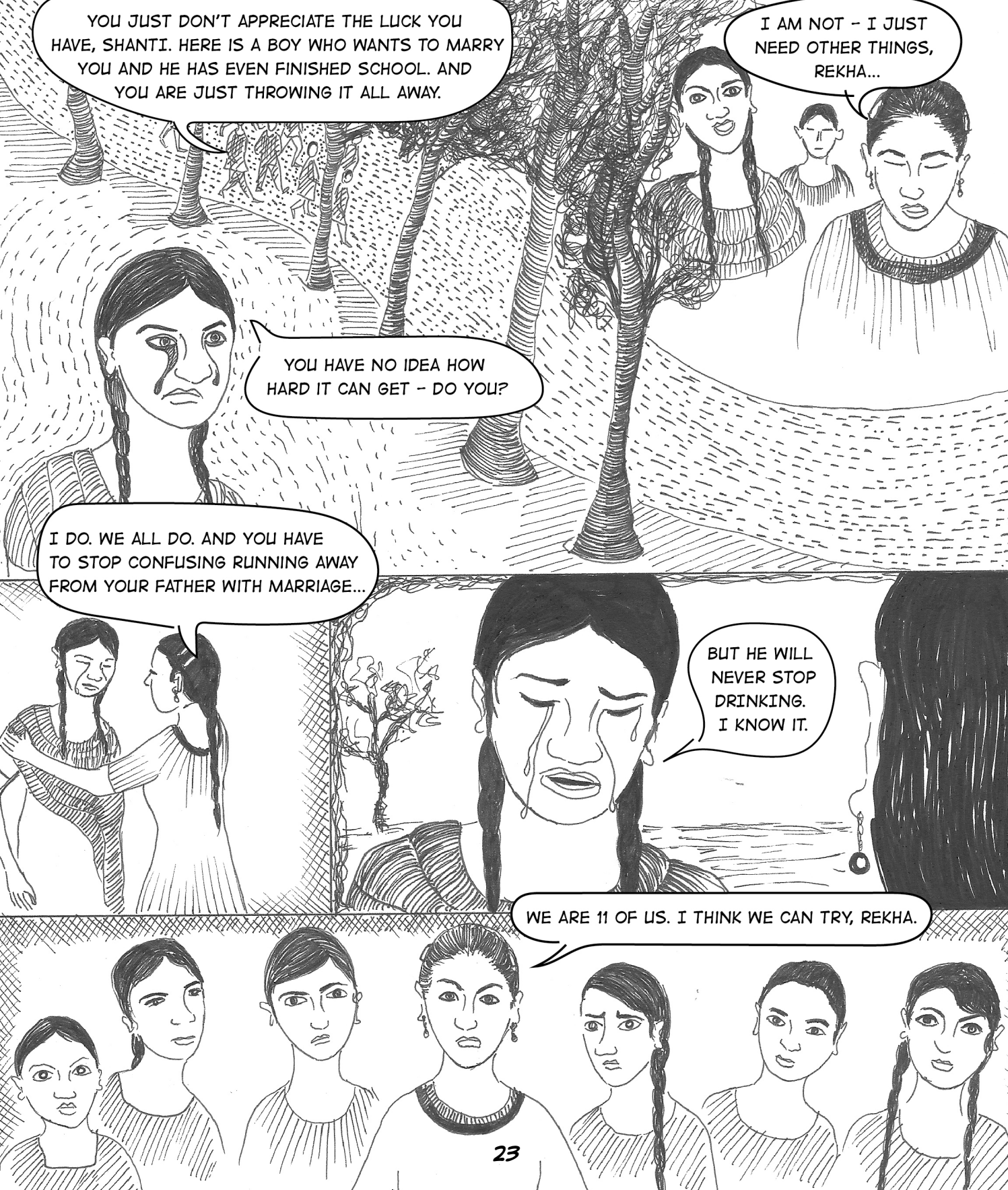
A FEW DAYS LATER,
AT SHANTI'S HOME...

I WANT
TO FINISH STUDYING,
THAT'S ALL. I WANT TO
MARRY YOU WHEN I
KNOW I AM READY.

YOU CAN TAKE AS LONG...

WILL YOU CONTINUE
PLAYING FOOTBALL?

...



YOU JUST DON'T APPRECIATE THE LUCK YOU HAVE, SHANTI. HERE IS A BOY WHO WANTS TO MARRY YOU AND HE HAS EVEN FINISHED SCHOOL. AND YOU ARE JUST THROWING IT ALL AWAY.

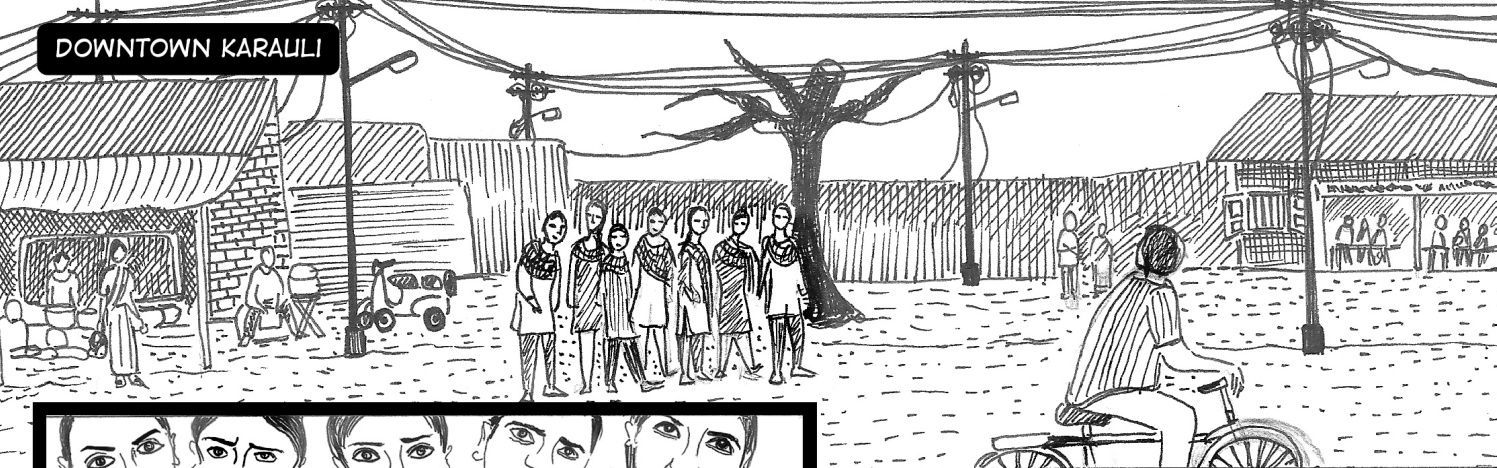
I AM NOT - I JUST NEED OTHER THINGS, REKHA...

YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW HARD IT CAN GET - DO YOU?

I DO. WE ALL DO. AND YOU HAVE TO STOP CONFUSING RUNNING AWAY FROM YOUR FATHER WITH MARRIAGE...

BUT HE WILL NEVER STOP DRINKING. I KNOW IT.

WE ARE 11 OF US. I THINK WE CAN TRY, REKHA.



ARE YOU MAD YOU HARAMZAADI,
YOU HAVE COME HERE? WHAT IS
WRONG WITH YOU? I'M GOING TO
BREAK YOUR LEGS...



NOT BEFORE WE BREAK THIS DIRTY HABIT!



SIX MONTHS LATER...

HE'S COMING TODAY, MY FATHER.
HE SAID LET ME ALSO SEE WHAT
YOU GIRLS CAN DO.

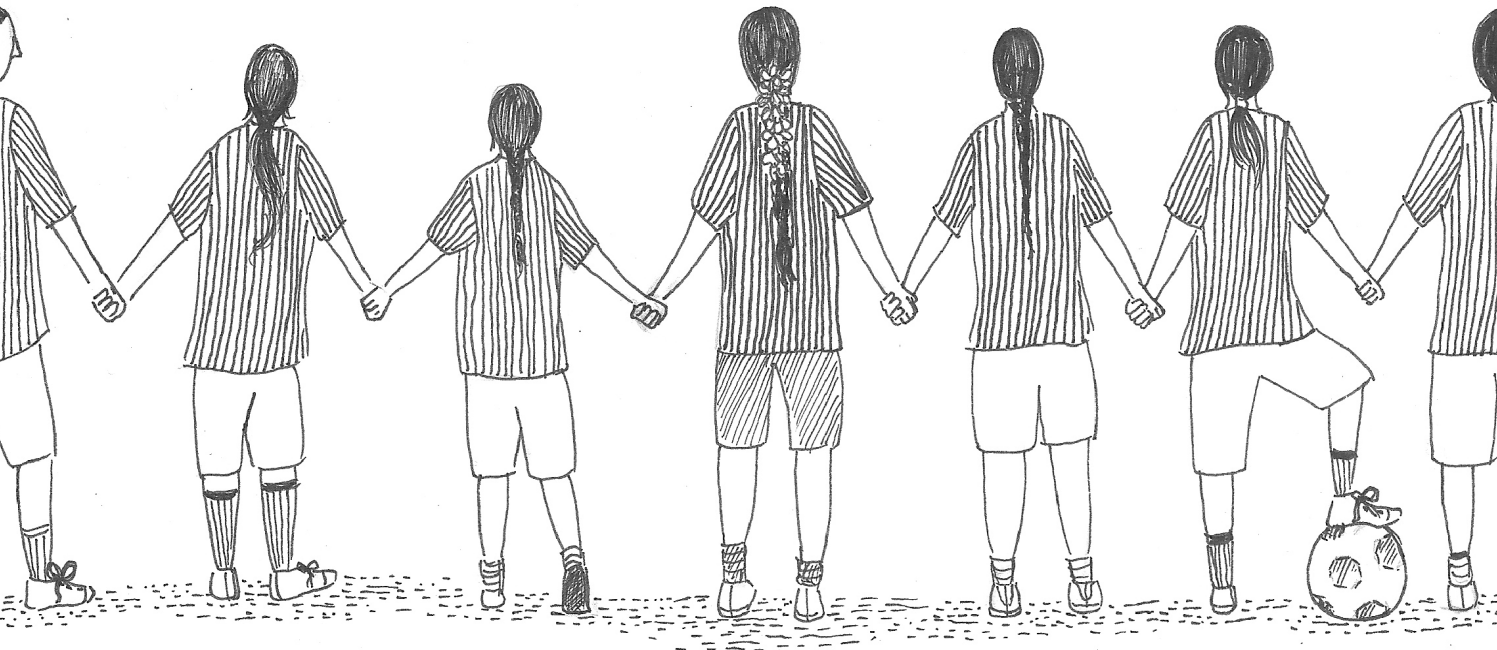
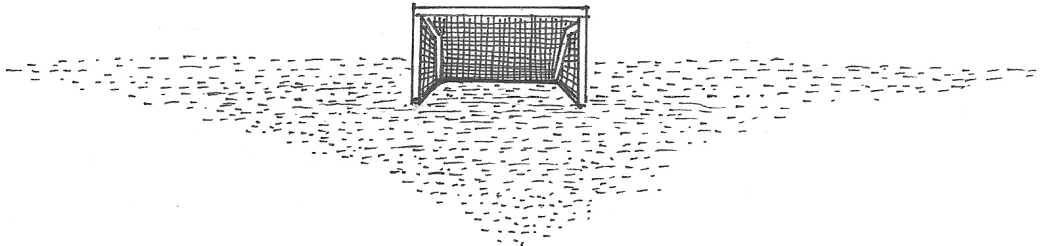
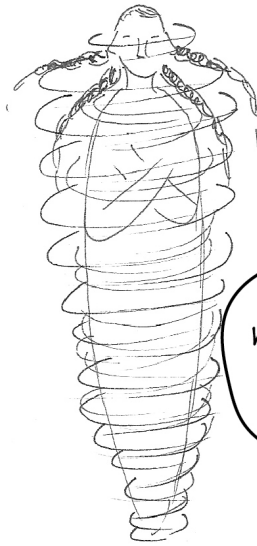
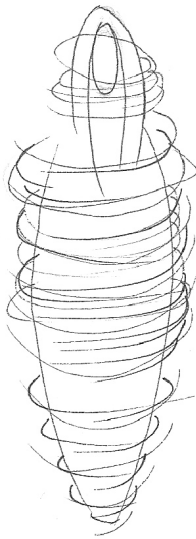
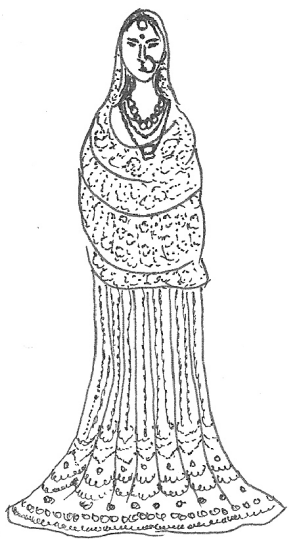
BUT YOU THINK
SHANTI WILL
COME?

SHE LOOKED SO BEAUTIFUL.
I DON'T THINK THERE IS
ANYTHING MORE BEAUTIFUL
THAN A BRIDE...

OH SHUT UP BOTH
OF YOU....THERE IS
SOMETHING MORE
BEAUTIFUL... THE
BRIDEGROOM'S
GHODI.
THAT'S WHAT
YOU SOUND
LIKE JUST NOW...

YOU CAME?

WHAT DID YOU EXPECT!
DON'T WE HAVE A
MATCH TO PLAY?



HAIR INSPECTION

ADD 2 DROPS TO
ENSURE LEAST
INVESTMENT
REQUIREMENT

ASSEMBLY SECTION

REPRODUCTIVE
UNITS

FLAMMABLE
MATERIAL

CAUTION

PACKAGING

FRAGILE
HANDLE
WITH CARE

OBEDIENT

LOW
MAINTENANCE

THE MANUFACTURE OF GIRLS

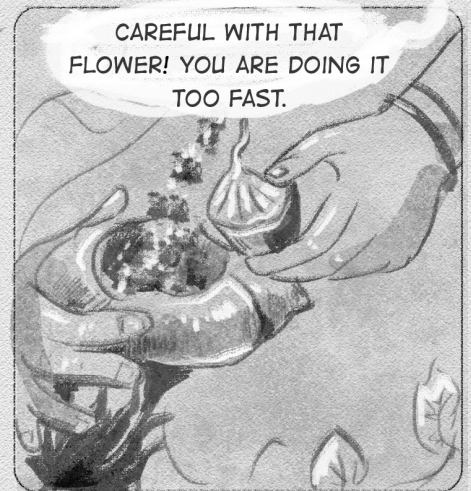




2 The true history of **THE GULAB CHELI SANGHA**

Illustrated by Samita Chatterjee

It is the mid-Nineties, in rural Telangana , erstwhile Andhra Pradesh. It is a harsh existence, especially for Dalit families: life and livelihood unfold tinged with sweat, the scent of endosulfins and modern-day contractors. Many women and their families have worked for decades as contract labour on the cotton fields here. Yet, even in oppressive circumstances, change finds its way. Some Dalit women had formed a collective – a women's sangha – across many villages. They met, talked and raised issues ranging from sexual violence to education and labour rights. This collective becomes the background, and in fact an important character in the lives of a new generation of young women. The drama in the lives of these young women unfolds in the midst of friendships and dreams – creating new stories in parallel and also strikingly differently from the generation before them.



YOU HAVE TO GO
HOME CHELLELU.
DON'T WORRY. I'LL
SPEAK TO YOUR
MOTHER. SHE WILL
NOT MAKE YOU
MESSAGE NAANA'S
LEGS

I'D RATHER BE
HERE.
I DON'T WANT
TO TOUCH
NAANA'S LEGS.

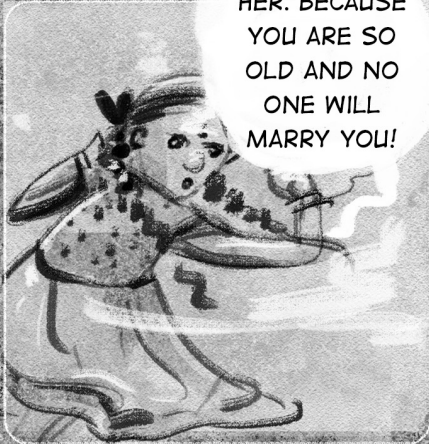


I KNOW.
I'LL SPEAK
TO YOUR
MOTHER

YOU ARE
SCARED OF
HER. BECAUSE
YOU ARE SO
OLD AND NO
ONE WILL
MARRY YOU!

LEAVE
ME
ALONE!

NO, YOU WON'T





A LOCAL MYTH: IF A GIRL WHO HAD STARTED MENSTRUATING WAS TO POLLINATE THE COTTON PLANTS, ALL OF THE CROPS WOULD DIE THAT SEASON. CONTRACTORS INSISTED THAT THE GIRLS WORKING IN THE FIELDS SHOULD BE *YOUNG ENOUGH *. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE ROOT OF THIS BELIEF WAS BECAUSE COTTON PLANTS WERE SMALL, THE SMALL AND TENDER HANDS OF LITTLE GIRLS MADE THEM BETTER WORKERS AS WELL AS CHEAP LABOUR

WHY DO I
FEEL LIKE THIS
EVERYDAY?
AM I DYING

DON'T BE SILLY.
YOU ARE NOT
DYING. YOU ARE 8
YEARS OLD. IT
GETS A BIT BETTER
AS YOU GROW
OLDER.

DO YOU EVEN
REMEMBER
WHEN YOU
WERE 8?"

DON'T BE
SMART WITH
ME!

WE ARE TAKING
THE LONG WAY.
LET'S AVOID
THEM

I CAN'T WALK.
I'M SERIOUS.
YOU'LL HAVE TO
CARRY ME,
AKKA

OKAY, LET'S
TAKE A BREAK.
.. HMM....

LET'S GO TO
THE MAHILA
SANGHA
MEETING,
LAKSHMI AKKA
WILL BE THERE

I THOUGHT
THEY THREW
YOU OUT
LAST TIME

YA, BUT THIS
TIME YOU
ARE THERE
WITH ME.

WE'RE
COMING
TOO!

THE DAUGHTER
HAS RUN AWAY,
BUT HE'S
BEATING HER...

BUT SHE
NEEDS TO SAY
IT'S ENOUGH.

SHE WOULD,
IF SHE
WASN'T SO
ASHAMED.

ARE YOU
GIRLS OKAY?
DID SOMETHING
HAPPEN?"

SHE'S NOT
FEELING WELL.
WE'VE BEEN AT
THE COTTON
FIELDS FOR
12 HOURS!

NO. WE
HAVEN'T
BEEN PAID IN
2 WEEKS.

YA, YOUR SON
BOUGHT THIS
DRESS FOR ME.
ANY PROBLEM?

WASN'T IT PAY
DAY TODAY?
DID YOU GIRLS
GET PAID?

OKAY, BECAUSE
THAT ONE IS ALL
DRESSED UP..

THE CHEEK!



BACK DOWN.
AND LEAVE
HER ALONE

IF YOU ARE FEELING
BETTER YOU SHOULD
BE ON YOUR WAY. WE
HAVE TO FINISH
OUR DISCUSSION

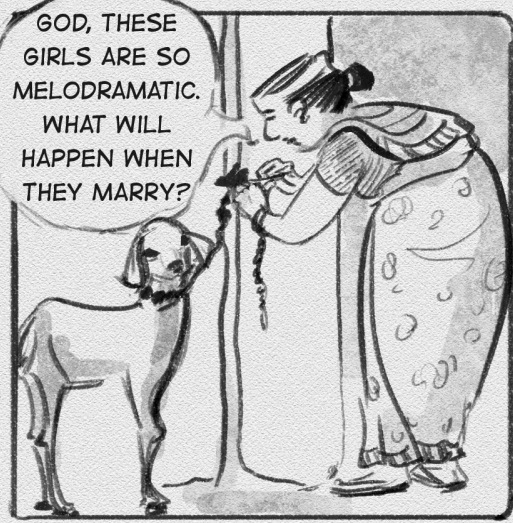
WE WOULD
LIKE TO
STAY IF YOU
DON'T MIND



WE ALSO WANT TO
TELL YOU THINGS,
IF YOU'D LIKE TO
HEAR THEM



I'M
BLEEDING
TO MY
ANKLES...



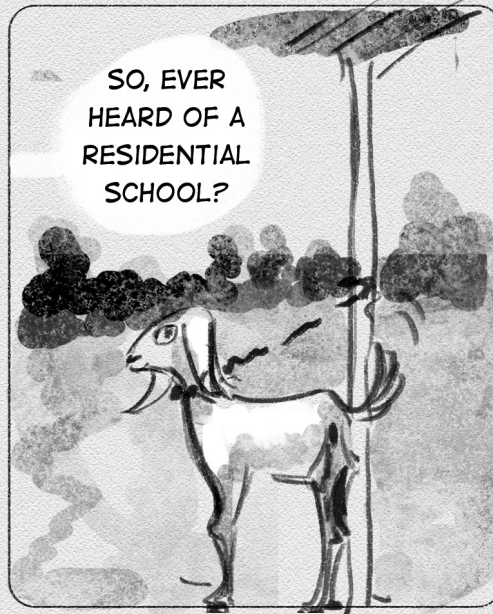
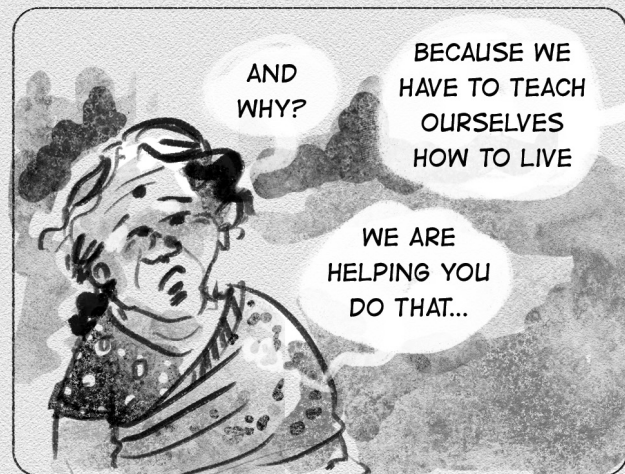
GOD, THESE
GIRLS ARE SO
MELODRAMATIC.
WHAT WILL
HAPPEN WHEN
THEY MARRY?



MARRY, MARRY- THAT'S ALL
YOU CAN THINK ABOUT. WE
HAVE OTHER THINGS TO
SAY TOO.



ACTUALLY,
WE HAVE
AN IDEA





THE WOMEN'S EDUCATION CENTRE WAS AN EIGHT-MONTH RESIDENTIAL EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTION FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS FROM MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES. HERE THEY LEARNT TO READ AND WRITE AND LEARN ABOUT THE WORLD AND THEIR RIGHTS.

8 MONTHS LATER, AFTER RETURNING FROM THE RESIDENTIAL LEARNING CENTRE...

IT'S TOO MUCH!
WORK IN THE FIELD
AND THEN COOK!

AFTER COMING BACK
FROM THE CENTRE, I
ALSO DON'T WANT TO
SLOG ALL DAY

HE'S TAKING
US FOR THE
WEEKLY FILMS
TOMORROW.

WHAT A FRAUD!

YA! JUST CALCULATE! FOR
12 HOURS IT WILL BE ONE
AND A HALF TIMES MORE
THAN THE DAILY WAGE.
NOT 70 RUPEES BUT 105
RUPEES

WHY ARE WE
WORKING FOR 12
HOURS THEN?

RS. 105 X 6 DAYS
IS RS. 630/-

HE PAYS US
360/-

AT THE NEXT MAHILA SANGHA MEETING

THESE 'GULAB CHELI SANGHA'
GIRLS HAVE REFUSED TO
WORK MORE THAN 8 HOURS

WE STAND FOR
OUR RIGHTS, WE
SHOULD STAND
FOR THEIRS TOO

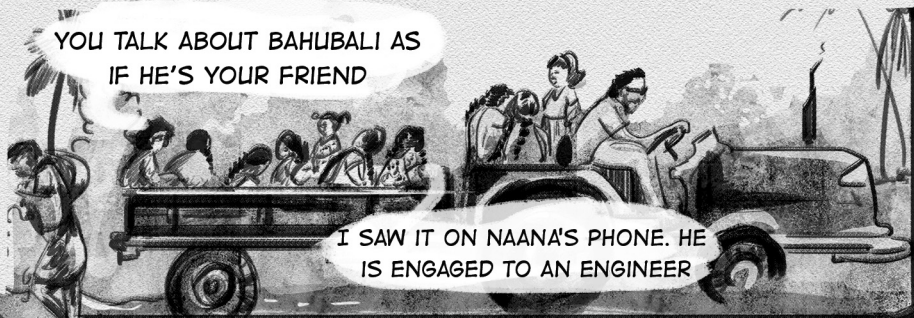
BUT WE HAVE
ALREADY BEEN
PAID, IF THEY
DONT WORK WE
WILL HAVE TO

THE WEEKLY FILM TRIP



I'VE HEARD
PRABHAS IS
ENGAGED

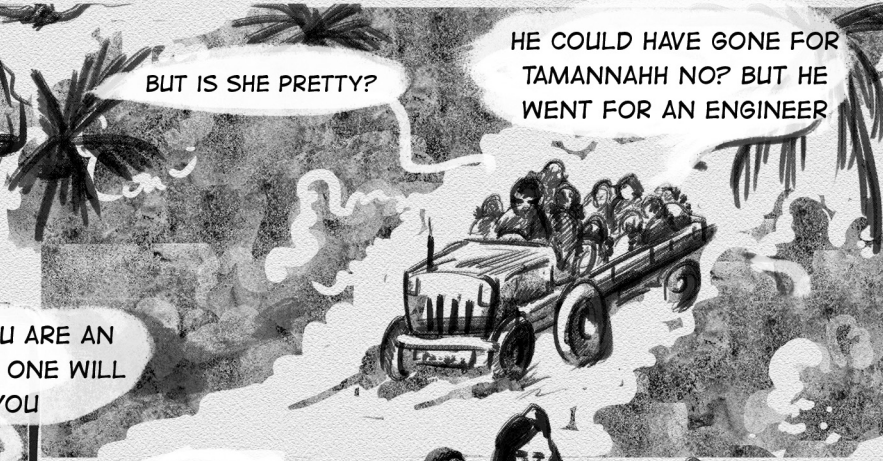
YOU TALK ABOUT BAHUBALI AS
IF HE'S YOUR FRIEND



I SAW IT ON NAANA'S PHONE. HE
IS ENGAGED TO AN ENGINEER

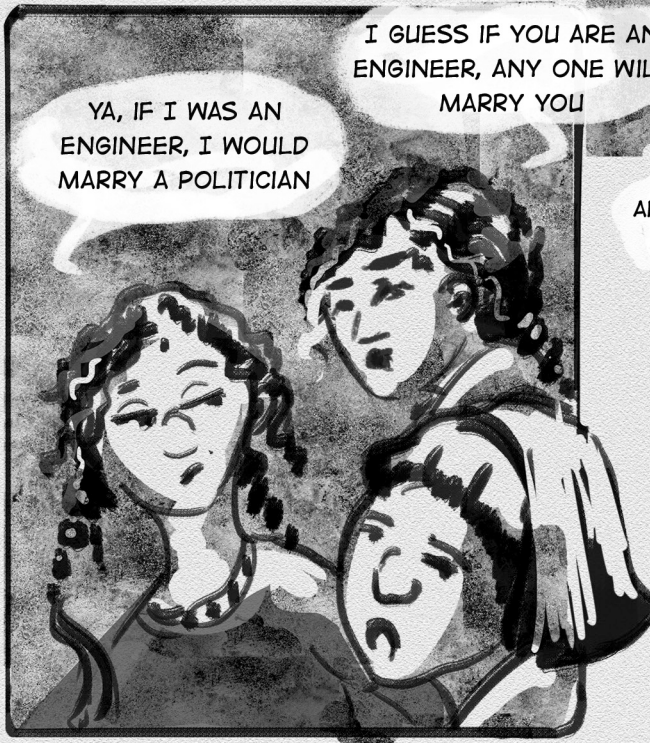
BUT IS SHE PRETTY?

HE COULD HAVE GONE FOR
TAMANNAHH NO? BUT HE
WENT FOR AN ENGINEER



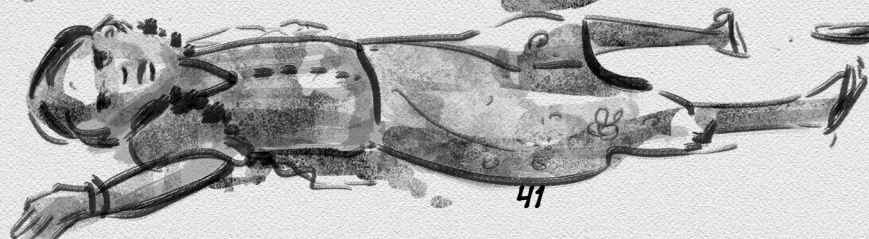
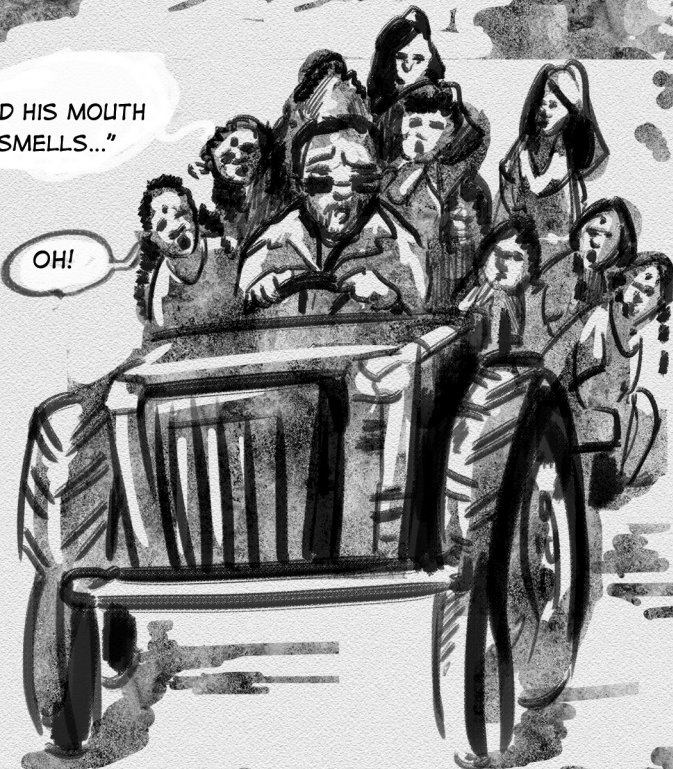
I GUESS IF YOU ARE AN
ENGINEER, ANY ONE WILL
MARRY YOU

YA, IF I WAS AN
ENGINEER, I WOULD
MARRY A POLITICIAN



AND HIS MOUTH
SMELLS..."

OH!

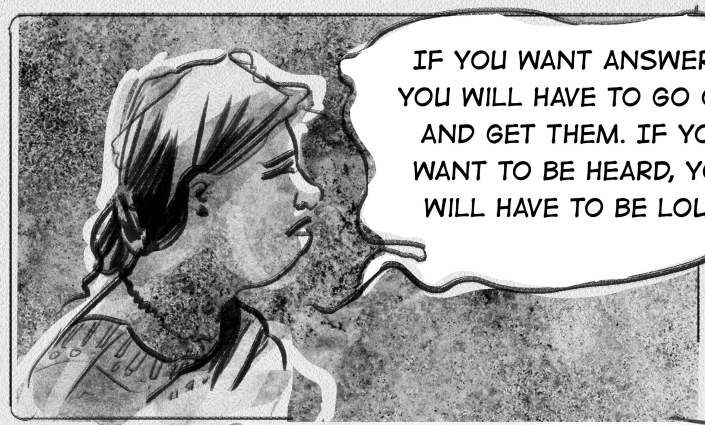




WHAT DID SHE DO
WRONG? WHY DID
SHE DIE? SHOULD
WE NOT ASK
THESE
QUESTIONS?



WE WANT ANSWERS!



IF YOU WANT ANSWERS,
YOU WILL HAVE TO GO OUT
AND GET THEM. IF YOU
WANT TO BE HEARD, YOU
WILL HAVE TO BE LOUD



WE CAN BE LOUD!



AND IF YOU SAY YOU ARE DIFFERENT FROM
US, YOU WILL HAVE TO SHOW US HOW

THE GULAB CHELI SANGHA, ALONG WITH THE MAHILA SANGHA, TRAVELLED ACROSS MANY VILLAGES, ENACTING THE STORY OF THE LITTLE GIRL WHO LOST HER LIFE WORKING IN THE COTTON FIELDS. THIS CAMPAIGN WENT ON FOR 40 DAYS.



WE HAVE NEVER
FORCED YOU TO
WORK. YOU CAME
TO US...!

CHILDHOOD
IS OUR
RIGHT

YES, WE
KNOW, BUT WE
ARE NOT HERE
TO...

LET THEM!
STUDY. LET
THEM GROW!

WE
LIKE
TO STUDY!

BUT YOU HAVE
RUINED OUR
REPUTATION ALL
THE WAY FROM
THIS RIVER TO
THAT VALLEY.

I THINK YOU
HAVEN'T HEARD
A SINGLE THING
WE HAVE SAID.

OK, NOW, PAY
ATTENTION!

TWO
THINGS!

WE WILL NOT
WORK A SINGLE
MINUTE AFTER
THE EIGHTH
HOUR

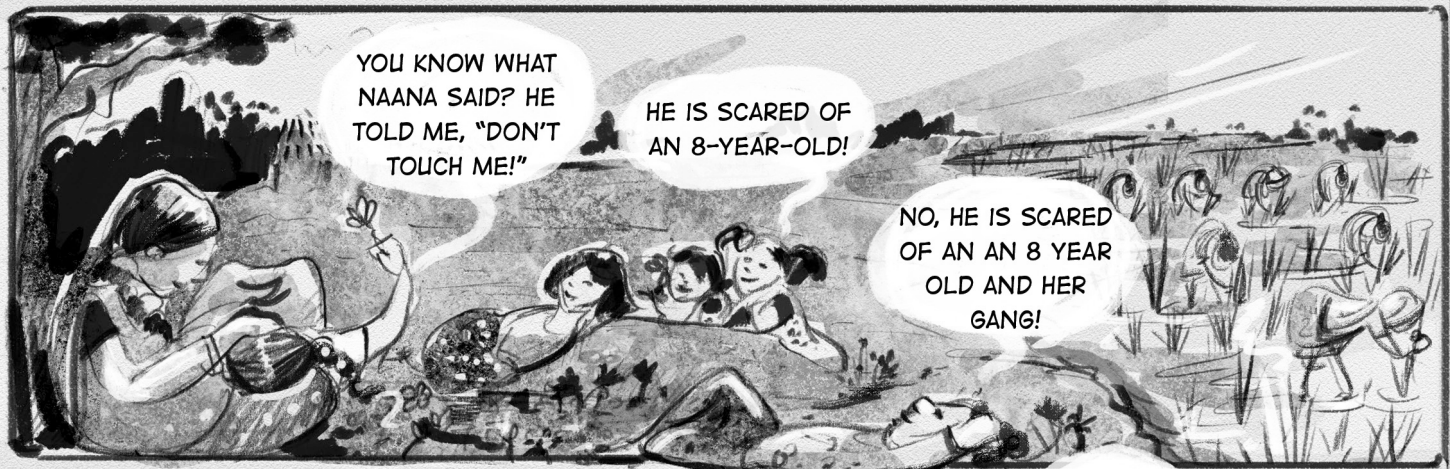
8 HOURS ONLY

ABOVE 14 ONLY!

AND NOBODY
BELOW 14 WILL
WORK FOR YOU.
BOY OR GIRL.

SWEAR ON
KONDAMMA!

OKAY OKAY!
WE SWEAR ON
KONDAMMA. PEACE
BE UPON HER.



YOU KNOW WHAT
NAANA SAID? HE
TOLD ME, "DON'T
TOUCH ME!"

HE IS SCARED OF
AN 8-YEAR-OLD!

NO, HE IS SCARED
OF AN 8 YEAR
OLD AND HER
GANG!



HAVE YOU TOLD
YOUR MOTHER?"



I HAVE. I JOIN THE
RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL NEXT
MONTH. CLASS VI. AMMA
SAID SHE WILL STITCH A
NEW SUIT FOR ME



WILL THERE
BE BOYS? IF
YES, I'M
COMING



SO, INSTEAD OF
MARRYING A
POLITICIAN,
I'VE DECIDED TO
BECOME A POLITICIAN
MYSELF. LESS WORK.

TREAT ME
NICELY.
YOU'LL NEED
ME, GIRLS!



WE'LL ALL NEED EACH OTHER

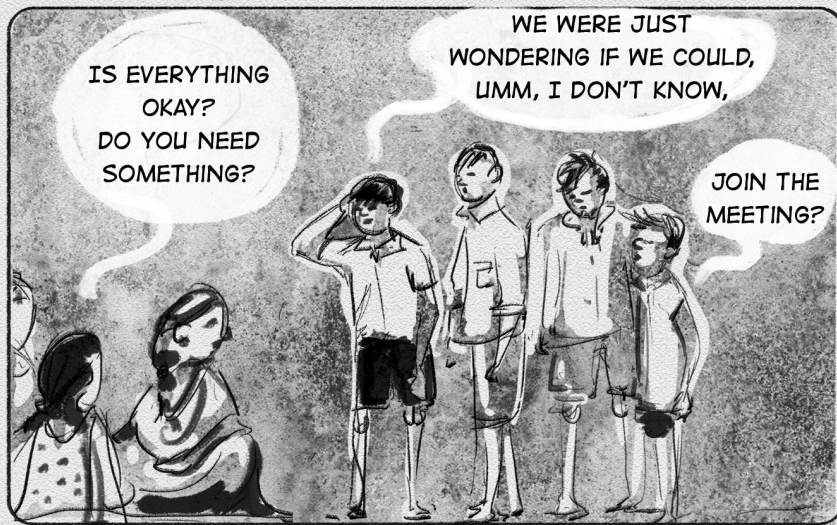


I THINK IT'S BRAVE
OF SHAILA TO NOT
RUN AWAY. I THINK IT
TAKES MORE
COURAGE TO FACE
THE COMMUNITY

BUT WHAT'S THE
POINT IF THE BOY IS
NOT BRAVE? WHAT IF
HE ABANDONS HER?

IS HE THE
LAST BOY ON
EARTH?

DON'T TALK
LIKE THOSE
OLD PEOPLE



IS EVERYTHING
OKAY?
DO YOU NEED
SOMETHING?

WE WERE JUST
WONDERING IF WE COULD,
UMM, I DON'T KNOW,

JOIN THE
MEETING?



FEELING FRISKY,
ARE WE?



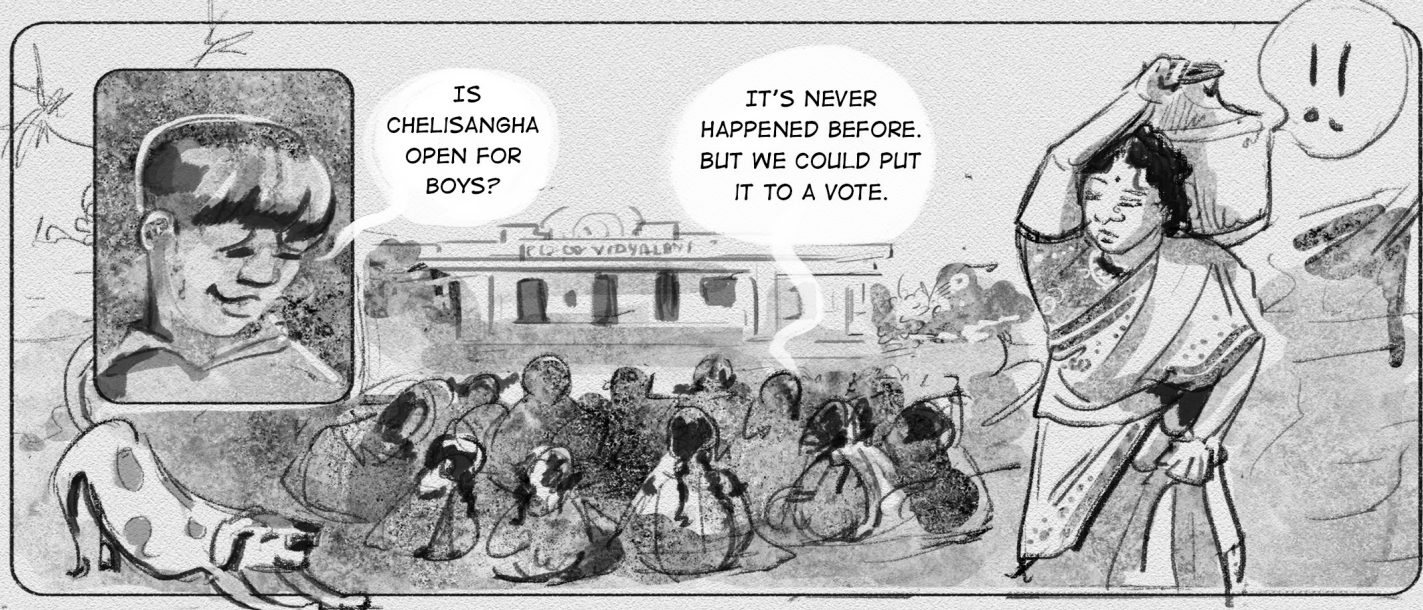
NO, NO!

IT'S JUST THAT WE
CAME AND WATCHED
ALL YOUR STREET
THEATRE SHOWS.
AND THEN WE CAME
FOR THE OFFICIALS'
MEETING

AND IT WAS
AMAZING! WHAT
YOU GIRLS DID...
AND IT'S HELPED
US TOO!

THE CONTRACTOR
DOESN'T MAKE US
WORK BEYOND 8
HOURS NOW...

YOU ARE WELCOME.
BUT NOW WHAT DO
YOU WANT?



IS
CHELISINGHA
OPEN FOR
BOYS?

IT'S NEVER
HAPPENED BEFORE.
BUT WE COULD PUT
IT TO A VOTE.



ALL WHO WANT BOYS IN, RAISE YOUR HANDS



BAS!
ONLY THIS
WAS LEFT



I TOLD YOU
WE WERE
DIFFERENT
NO?

AINS OCCUR WHEN A 6 HUNDRED MILLION UNPRODUCTIVE POPULATION OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS PLAYS PRODUCTIVE ROLES. INDIA CAN ADD CLOSE TO \$100 BILLION TO GDP IF ADOLESCENT GIRLS STAY IN SCHOOL AND DELAY MARRIAGE AND PRE



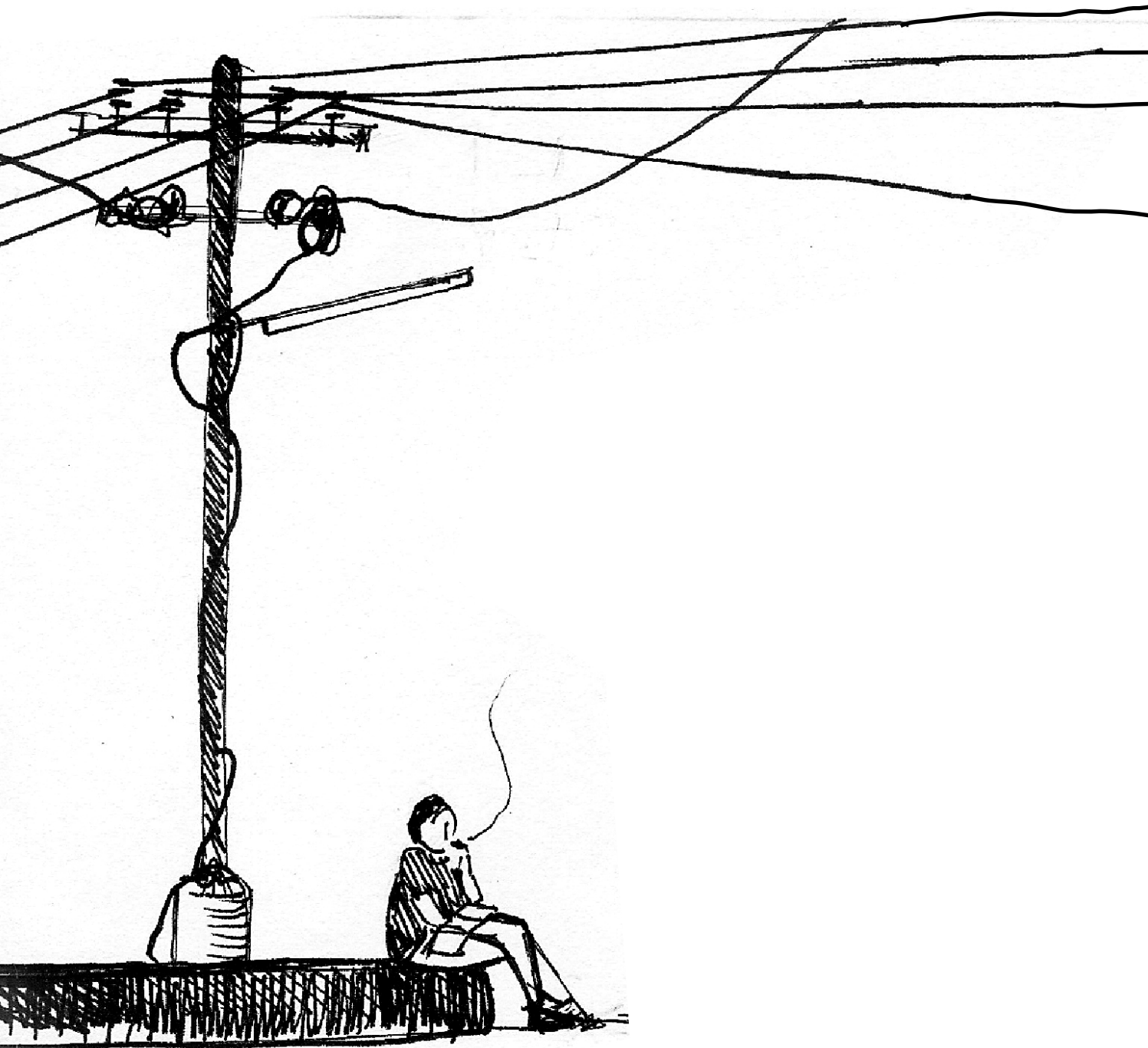
IS THAT A
BIRD OR
PLANE?

NO ITS'S
SUPER GIRL

WE HAVE A PROBLEM ON OUR HANDS

GNANCY. IN HAITI, 5 PERCENT OF THOSE BETWEEN AGES 15 TO 19 WERE INFECTED BY STIS/AIDS, IN 2003; 55 PERCENT OF YOUNG WOMEN AND 95 PERCENT OF YOUNG MEN... IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA THE RATE IS 44 PERCENT. ECONOMIC







3 **BEAUTY, BEBO AND FRIENDS PICK A FIGHT**

Illustrated by Ikroop Sandhu

We are deep inside the streets of a city in the east, where a group of sex workers works hard and long. The perfect setting for a volume of Adventure Stories for Girls, don't you think? Young girls navigate the streets with familiarity, bravado and also foreboding. They forge friendships, they laugh, they read books that anchor them, they fight, they dream of new places. All alongside the mundanity of life in school: the taunts, the humiliation in the playground, the deprecation regardless of their personalities and potential. Their everyday lives are a tableau across which the shadows of their mothers' work plays: sometimes strengthening them, sometimes making the road to growing up incredibly tedious to walk. In the midst of this, there is a place where many generations of women of the area collect to talk, learn and mobilise against multiple injustices. A tall house, a character in a dark story; not to turn it from dark to light, but to say that every experience of growing up has its moments and spaces of luminescence.



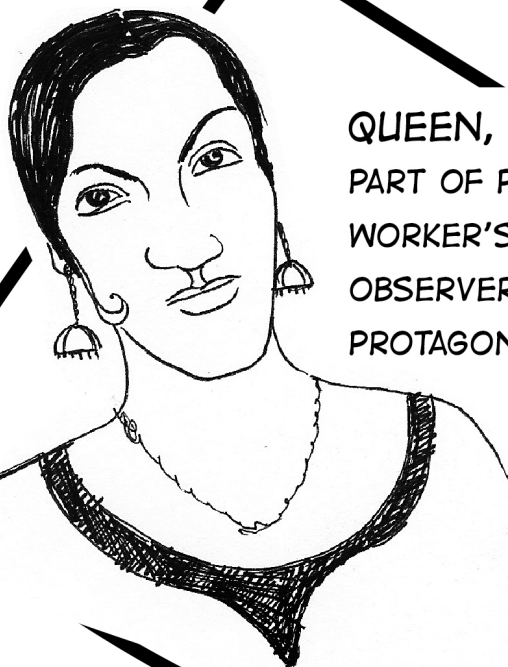
BABY, 14,
WANTS TO BE A STUDENT...



BEBO, 15,
HAS GIVEN UP ON BEING A STUDENT...



BEAUTY, 12,
WANTS TO REMAIN IN A
SCHOOL LONG ENOUGH
TO FEEL LIKE A STUDENT...



QUEEN, 35,
PART OF PALLAV CENTRE, A SEX
WORKER'S ORGANISATION, A KEEN
OBSERVER OF OUR THREE
PROTAGONISTS.

BABY, BEAUTY AND BEBO ARE ALL DAUGHTERS OF SEX WORKERS IN KOLKATA.

MEET BABY ON THE STREET...



THERE SHE IS!

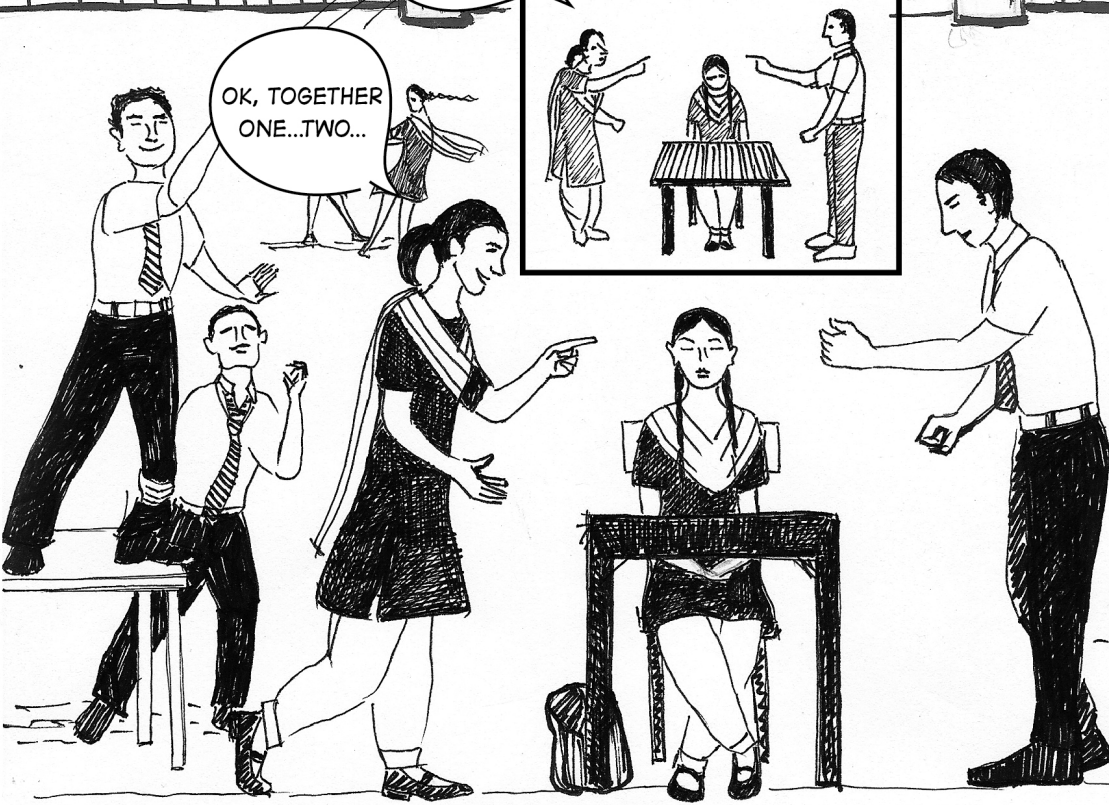
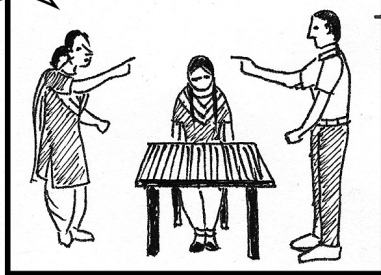
WHERE'D SHE GO?

BLIND BASTARDS

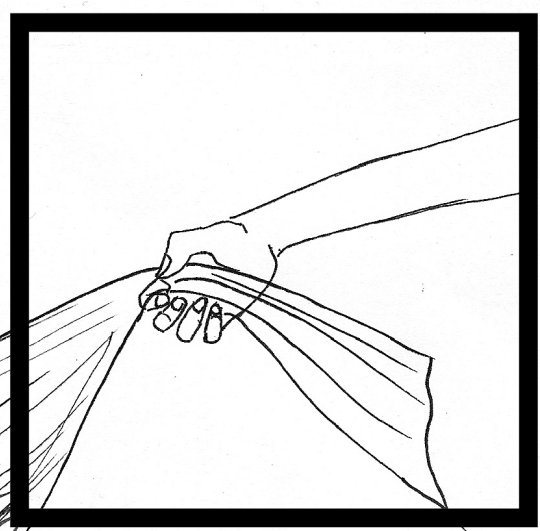
YOU FIRST

NO,
YOU FIRST

OK, TOGETHER
ONE...TWO...



THREE!!!
....HAHAHAHA




BEBO AT THE CHAI SHOP...

WHY DON'T YOU COME IN AND STUDY...?

YOU KNOW, YOU SHOULD GO SOMEWHERE INDOORS TO STUDY. EVERYONE WILL JUST ASSUME...

YOU KNOW,
YOU SHOULD GO
SOMEWHERE INDOORS TO
STUDY. EVERYONE WILL
JUST ASSUME...

YOUR PROBLEM?



LOOK AT YOU,
ALREADY SOUNDING LIKE

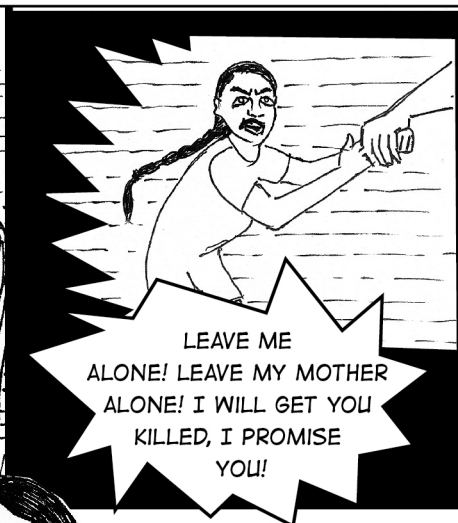
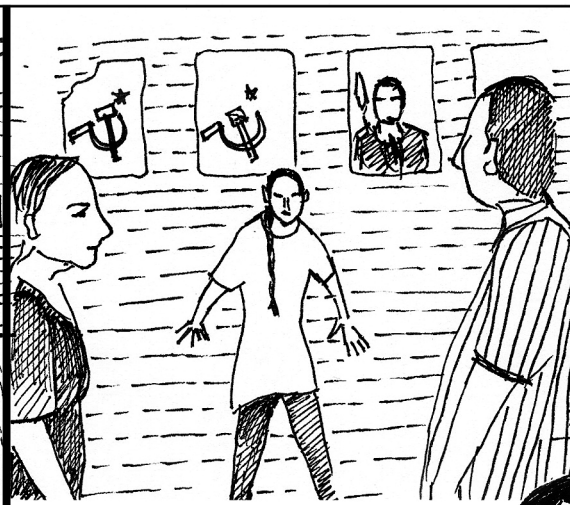
AND QUEEN, WATCHES FROM A TALL
AND BUSY BUILDING IN THE CITY...



QUEEN DIDI, YOU SHOULD
JUST GO TO THEM NOW NO? WHAT
ARE YOU WAITING FOR?



BABY ONE AFTERNOON...



LEAVE ME
ALONE! LEAVE MY MOTHER
ALONE! I WILL GET YOU
KILLED, I PROMISE
YOU!

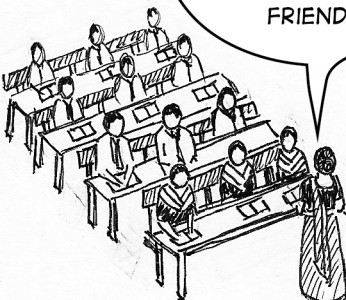


HE KEEPS SAYING
HE'S HER HUSBAND, BUT
HE'S NOT MY MOTHER'S
HUSBAND


HE'S A PIMP.
HOW DO WE GET AWAY
FROM HIM?

I'M SO SCARED...


SSH. THEY'VE GONE...
YOU ARE SAFE




BEAUTY, YOU HAVE
TO STOP COMPLAINING.
HOW WILL YOU MAKE
FRIENDS?




I DIDN'T COMPLAIN...
I ASKED YOU IF I COULD
GO TO THE MEDICAL ROOM DURING
FREE PERIODS, THAT'S ALL...




THE THING IS...
YOU JUST DON'T WANT TO
WORK HARD AT ANYTHING. YOU DON'T
REALIZE WHAT IT TAKES TO
MAKE IT IN THE
REAL WORLD



MA'AM,
I HAVE PASSED
IN MATHS...



SEE THAT?
THAT ATTITUDE
IS WHAT WILL HOLD YOU BACK.
AND YOU WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO
RESCUE YOUR MOTHER FROM THAT...
THAT...PIECE OF HELL...



SO, WHERE
WILL YOU GO?



THE NEXT
SCHOOL



WITHIN THE
CAPITALIST SYSTEM ALL METHODS
FOR RAISING THE SOCIAL PRODUCTIVENESS
OF LABOUR ARE BROUGHT ABOUT AT
THE COST OF THE INDIVIDUAL
LABOURER;

THEY
MUTILATE THE LABOURER
INTO A FRAGMENT OF A MAN,
DEGRADE HIM TO THE LEVEL OF AN
APPENDAGE OF A MACHINE,

ALL MEANS
FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF
PRODUCTION TRANSFORM THEMSELVES
INTO MEANS OF DOMINATION OVER,
AND EXPLOITATION OF THE
PRODUCERS;

DESTROY
EVERY REMNANT OF CHARM IN HIS
WORK AND TURN IT INTO A HATED TOIL;
THEY ESTRANGE FROM HIM THE
INTELLECTUAL POTENTIALITIES OF
THE LABOUR PROCESS...

HOW LONG
WILL YOU STAY OUT
HERE?

AS LONG AS MY
MOTHER NEEDS TO WORK.
I DON'T DISTURB HER
DURING OFFICE
HOURS.

CAN I TAKE YOU TO
A PLACE WHERE I LIKE
TO HANG OUT? YOU
MIGHT LIKE IT.

IS
THIS ROOM
OKAY?



BABY,
WE'RE GOING
TO THE NEXT
FLOOR

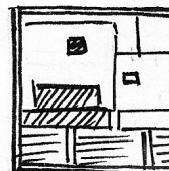
HAHAHAHA



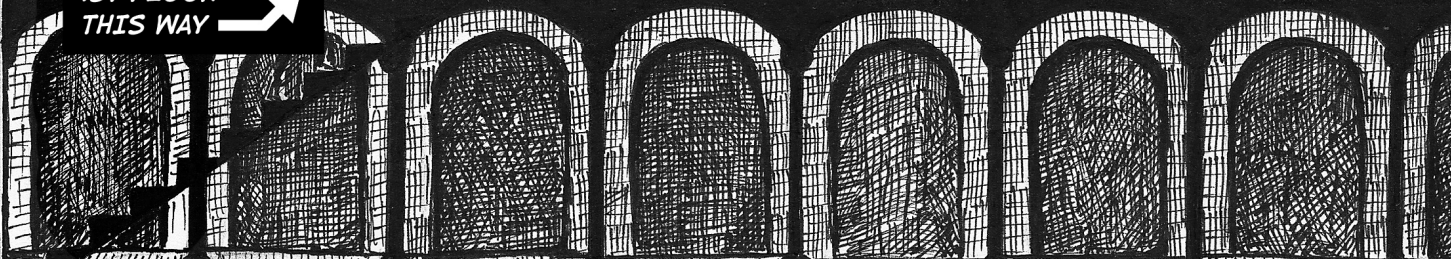
STOP GIGGLING. IT LOOKS
LIKE SOMETHING YOU BLOW
UP, BUT ITS CALLED
A 'CONDOM...'

DID
THE BOYS TRY
SOMETHING WITH
YOU, BEAUTY?

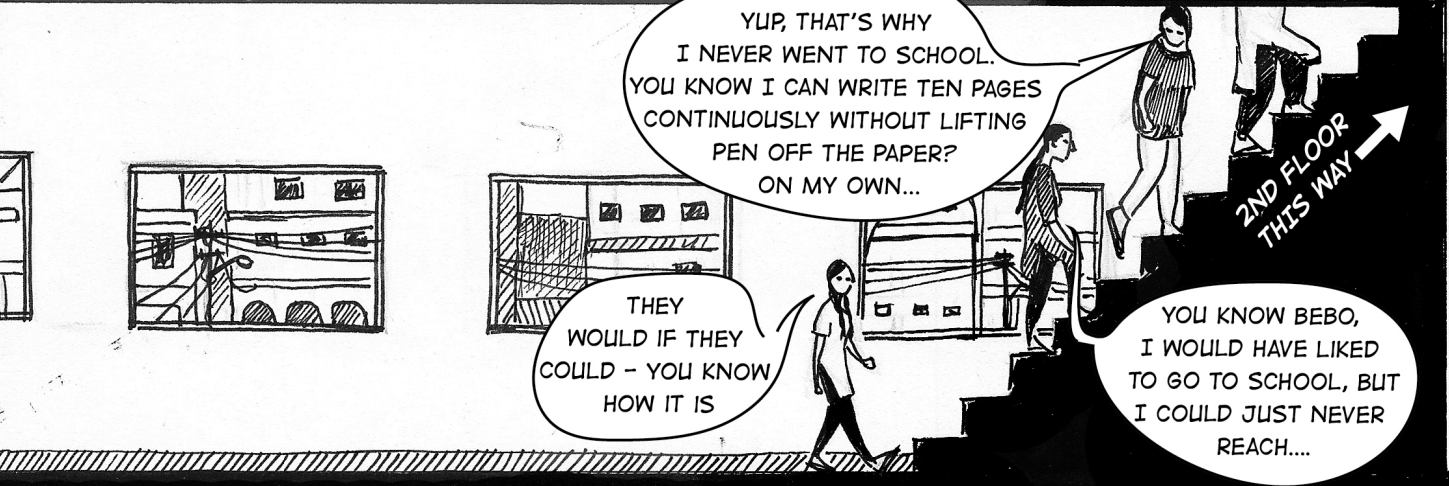
MY OLD SCHOOL
DESPERATELY
NEEDS THIS
SESSION



1ST FLOOR
THIS WAY



CENTRE




SOME WEEKS LATER, AND
IT FEELS LIKE HOME

I NEED YOU TO POINT
OUT TO A BODY PART AND SEE WHICH ONE
YOU ASSOCIATE WITH --FEAR, PRIDE,
PLEASURE, SHAME



THIS ONE IS FEAR





YOU HAVE THIS SPACE, FOR NOW
AND FOREVER. IT'S YOURS. IT'S A SPACE TO
FIND YOURSELVES, HOWEVER YOU WANT TO.
YOU WILL SEE THAT THIS PLACE ONLY
HAS GIRLS YOUR AGE. IT'S NOT FOR YOUR
MOTHERS. IT'S FOR YOU.



NO CONDITIONS. BUT YOU'LL
HAVE TO WORK TOGETHER TO
FIND YOUR WAY.

A FEW DAYS LATER, THERE'S NEWS OF A NEW GIRL IN THE AREA. THIS TIME QUEEN HAS HER OWN RAT PACK



THESE GIRLS ARE FROM A YOUTH GROUP --- AND BELA IS THEIR FRIEND. YOU KNOW THAT THE SEX WORKERS UNION IS AGAINST THE TRAFFICKING OF MINORS. NO ONE WHO DOESN'T WANT TO BE HERE SHOULD BE HERE. THERE WILL BE A COURT CASE. YOU WILL BE SUMMONED UNDER THE ANTI-TRAFFICKING LAW. NOW MOVE!

BELA?

I HAVE COME TO TAKE YOU AWAY FROM HERE..

SHE'S A GREATER MAN THAN YOU'LL EVER HOPE TO BE.

OR WOMAN

AND YOU, HIJRA! YOU WILL TELL ME WHAT TO DO?

CAN'T YOU HEAR WHAT SHE SAID? GET OUT OF OUR WAY



AND CLASS,
WE WOULD LIKE TO
WELCOME BEAUTY. SHE IS A
BRAVE GIRL, WHO HAS COME ALL THE
WAY FROM THE FILTH OF
CHANDIPUR TO OUR SCHOOL TO
MAKE SOMETHING
OF HER LIFE.

I'M SURE WITH
JESUS' HELP, WE CAN
KEEP HER AWAY FROM
HER MOTHER'S
LIFE...



MA'AM, COULD
YOU PLEASE NOT CALL
MY HOME FILTHY
AGAIN?



ARE YOU
GOING BACK TO SCHOOL
TOMORROW?

LATER AT NIGHT,
AT HOME



I AM.



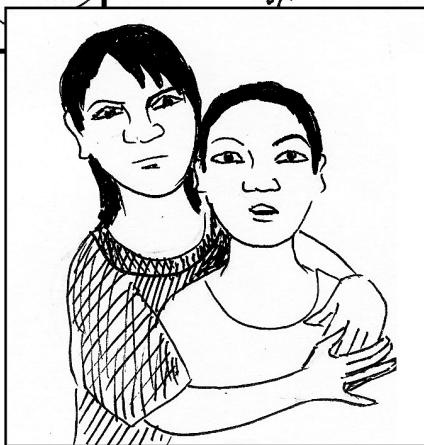
WATCH BABY WALK THE STREETS



YOU ARE
GROWING UP
FAST.

GASP

DO YOU
WANT TO GROW EVEN
FASTER?



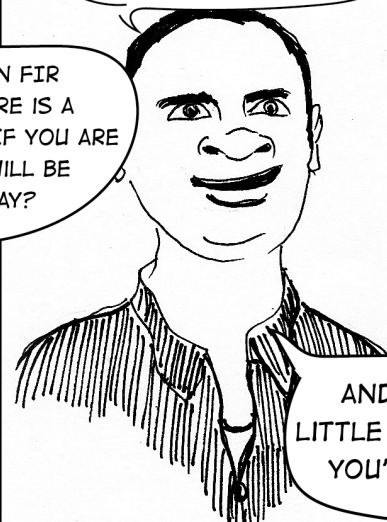
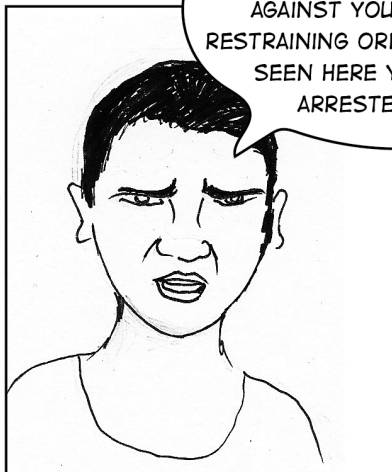
AND YOU WILL REPORT
ME? WHO TOLD YOU WHAT THAT
WAS, LITTLE GIRL?



TELL THEM
WHERE YOUR MOTHER
IS BABY

SHE'S NOT
GOING TO BE BLACKMAILED
BY YOU ANYMORE

SHE HAS FILED AN FIR
AGAINST YOU. THERE IS A
RESTRAINING ORDER. IF YOU ARE
SEEN HERE YOU WILL BE
ARRESTED, OKAY?



AND WHAT IS THIS
LITTLE MONKEY BRIGADE
YOU'VE COLLECTED?

I DON'T THINK YOU
ACTUALLY KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE
TO BE SURROUNDED
BY MONKEYS.





ACTION STORIES ARE THE BEST TO RE-TELL...

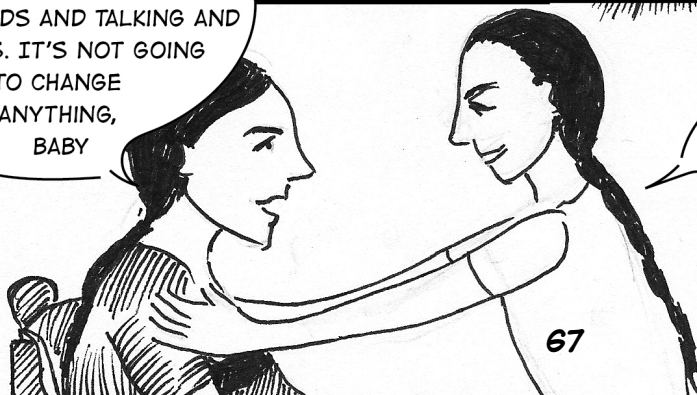


...AND THEN,
THEY LITERALLY VANISHED.
I COULDN'T BELIEVE
MY EYES!

YOU ARE FEELING
BRAVE BECAUSE OF THESE
NEW FRIENDS AND TALKING AND
HOBBIES. IT'S NOT GOING
TO CHANGE
ANYTHING,
BABY

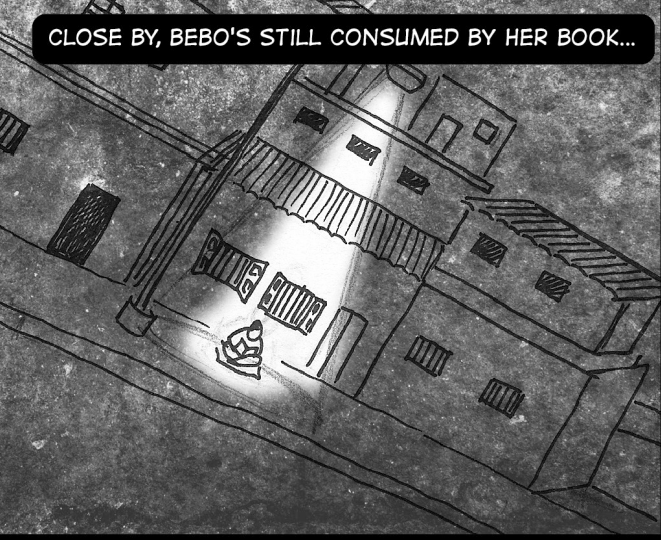
YOU HAVE TO GET OUT
OF HERE, BABY. ALL THIS
BRAVADO WON'T GET YOU FAR

NO MA,
NO MORE RUNNING



THAT'S NOT TRUE.
SOMETHING IS CHANGING. I CAN FEEL
IT IN MY STOMACH. IT'S TAKEN THAT BALL
OF SCAREDNESS AWAY

CLOSE BY, BEBO'S STILL CONSUMED BY HER BOOK...



BEBO! YOU WILL SPOIL
YOUR EYES! COME
AND EAT.



I CAN'T GET
USED TO PROPER
LIGHTS

YES

I HAD AN IDEA -- WOULD
YOU LIKE TO RETIRE IN
THE NEXT FIVE
YEARS?

SOMETHING CAME
UP IN DISCUSSION
TODAY AND...

SO, HOW WAS
YOUR DAY?



OKAY, SO YOU NEED
TO GET INTO THE STOCK MARKET. I
MET A GIRL AT THE PALLAV CENTRE
TODAY WHO IS A WHIZ -- HER
MOTHER HAS ALREADY BOUGHT
A LITTLE ROOM FLAT IN
NEW TOWN...



AND SO, WE LEAVE BEBO, BEAUTY AND BABY, AND LIFE GOES ON...





Baby

What time tomorrow? 😊

8:15 PM

Bhavna

The morcha starts at 11 am...

8:16 PM

Shreya

I need someone to come with me to the police again



8:16 PM

Anjali

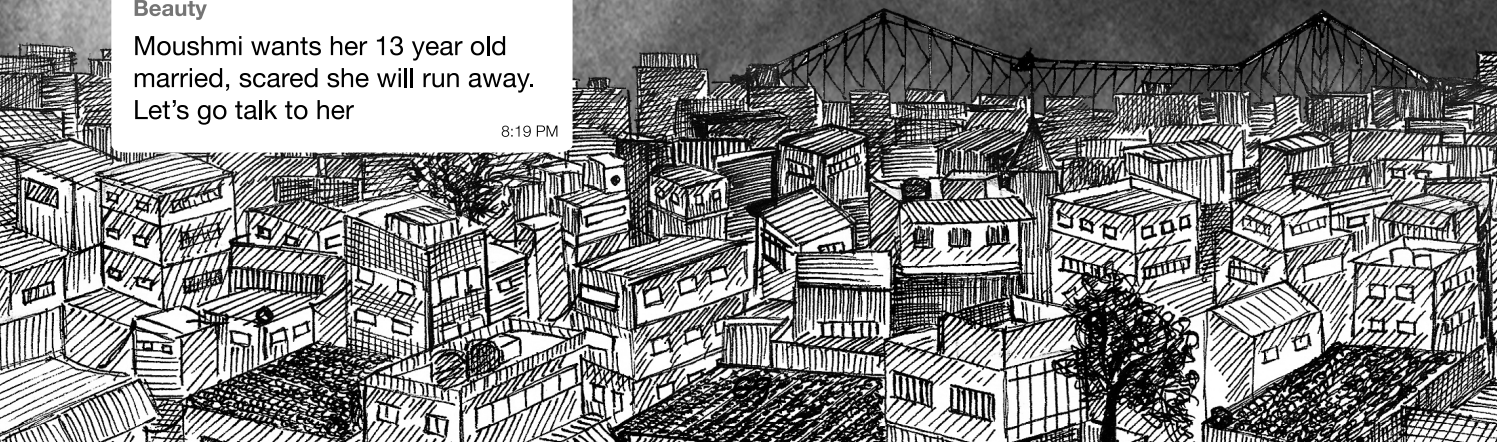
That's the same time as my Biology tuition. I'll come by noon

8:18 PM

Beauty

Moushmi wants her 13 year old married, scared she will run away. Let's go talk to her

8:19 PM



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book would not have been possible without the generosity of the seven organizations that were part of our study on collectivizing girls. We are also grateful to all the organizations and individuals who participated in the regional consultations.

We would also like to thank:

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Esha Sidhu, the manga enthusiast, who picked out all the inconsistencies and jerky bits.

LIST OF ORGANISATIONS

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What's your favourite memory of girlhood? Or the one that haunts you still? The endless gossip after and before school, the infatuations that made the world go out of focus, the after-tingle of the slap when you were home late? That smear of blood and pain, that exhilaration beating that boy who teased or touched you? The feeling of being utterly alone, or being fit into a shape that didn't seem quite right?

These graphic stories are of very different girls from different places, negotiating the world as young farmers, housekeepers, babysitters, fieldworkers, labourers, sex workers, but also just as young girls. The stories explore how girlhood can be the scariest and most alienating experience in the world, in almost every context: and what may be possible when girls don't fight the big bad world and its many tentacles on their own, but as a collective.

Recently, policies, projects and narratives about adolescent girls have taken the world by storm - all claiming to crack open their 'hidden potential'. But if we put our ears to the wind that blows past a group of girls sitting under a tree outside school, will we hear something we never knew?



SADBHAVANA
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