



The Rural Changemaker OUT-OF-THE-BOX!

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The Rural Changemakers e.V.
www.rural-changemakers.com
hello@rural-changemakers.com

I'm THAT Girl!

*A conversation
between Rijul Kataria
and Asha Gond.*



➔ <https://soundcloud.com/janwaar-castle/i-am-that-girl-mp3>

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I'm THAT Girl!

A conversation between Rijul Kataria and Asha Gond.

Hello Asha!
Hi bhaiya (Brother).

How are you?
I am good, how are you?

I am also good. So, your life has just changed after the song, huh!?
Yeah... the song... after the song (giggles), lots of people have commented and I've heard positive comments, so it feels good. There are some girls who have commented and messaged me personally. It feels good to hear what they have to say and I am happy that people are happy with my rap, and that girls are getting inspired.

So you dream of being a rap artist?
Yeah... I dream of being a rapper.

And why is that? (laughing)
Because I feel that through rap, I can say things that I can't say otherwise.

Hmmm, so you feel easier expressing yourself through music?
Yes, I find it easier to express myself through music, and a lot of people like listening to rap songs as well.



Asha with her parents, Dharamraj and Kamla Gond

So how did you respond when you heard the song yourself?
When I heard the song, I really enjoyed it.

Were you nervous before the song came out?
I was nervous before the recording. I didn't know if I would be able to sing or not? In the beginning, when I started, I kept stopping and losing my beat, even though I had learnt the lyrics. But after two or three times, I got into a flow. I gained some confidence...

And how long did you take to put this all together?
When I wrote my first draft, I had to go back into the past and think about all that I had done (laughing)...

So you've put all your life's work into it?
Yeah (laughing), I have!!!

And when you are going to give an examination, are you more nervous then or were you more nervous about the song?

It's been a long time since I gave an examination, but when I used to go, I used to be a little nervous. I did not know what questions would come. Similarly, I was nervous here. How will I sing? What If I forget my beat? All these questions came to my mind.

Have you ever felt this nervous while skateboarding? Say, when you're going to perform an 'Ollie'?

Yes, I have. One feels nervous initially. But once you get into a mood, then things become easy. You hesitate at first, but you take a few rounds of the skatepark and ease yourself into it, you feel comfortable.

So was it the same with the song about the rhythm?

Yeah, so once you get into a flow and rhythm, it becomes easier.

So, what's easier? Skateboarding or Rapping?

Easier...? Both are the same (laughing).

*What did you have to work harder on?
(Laughing)*
It took me much longer to learn skateboarding.

And have people around you heard the song? Have your parents heard it?
My brother has heard it.

What did he say?
Right now, he hasn't said anything. No comments from him.

Why??
I don't know why that happens. Whenever he is in the village, we don't end up talking often, even though we're living in the same house. We talk a lot on the phone when he's not around. So I haven't even asked him yet, but I will.

But do tell us later when you hear from them. We'd like to know about what your parents and people around you think.
Yeah, as I said, my friends are surprised and are congratulating me. They are wondering how and where I got this talent from!

So you were hiding this pair of aces?
Yeah, even they never thought I could rap. And there's a friend of mine who has heard the song and is now on his laptop, constantly listening to new beats and sending me links from YouTube. He is very excited!

So it's great!? You're receiving lots of positive feedback and encouragement?
Yes!

So when you hear all this, do you get more nervous about the rising expectations or is this something you take in your stride, peacefully?

When people praise me or like my friend is doing, constantly sending me beats, I get more excited. I am encouraged to rap more. If they feel that I can rap, I feel like I can do better now.

So what are the things you'd like to rap about? Tell me something about that.
Firstly, about the girls and issues around gender discrimination. Girls are not considered equal to boys, they aren't given their due. And girls are powerful. They can take a stand. But a lot of times, say even parents start putting them down by saying little things, which can just demoralise some-one. They then start living according to their parent's wishes.

Ohhh, and has that happened with you as well?

This could have happened to me...

Ohh, this could have?
But I didn't let that happen (smiles)

So tell me something about that (smiles along)?

Take skateboarding for example. When I wanted to skate, my parents used to



Asha at the British Museum in London.

refuse. Not initially, but as time passed they wanted to place restrictions on me. That's because the villagers used to come and say things like 'your girl hangs around with the boys... skateboards with them'. They used to say things like 'girls should not be doing that, keep her at home, teach her how to cook and prepare for marriage'. So I

faced challenges in the beginning but I refused to listen to them. I used to reply asking if they have seen me do anything wrong? I used to challenge them. I told them to not trust what others are saying, but to trust me instead. Once I started going out of the village, that's when they started trusting that I won't do anything wrong.

And did you receive support from others around you? Like you said that you called out your parents by keeping your stance. Did people back you then?

Not when I was at home. It used to be just my mother, father and me at home and my elder brother doesn't stay with us. But sometimes I used to appeal to my mother and ask her to request dad to not pay heed to what others have to say.

I like the fact that you raised your voice and that you want to be the voice of other people through music. So, do you see girls or even boys around you who want to work with you against this injustice? Say if I ask, who all are ready to support you in this endeavour?

If I take my village, there are girls who would stand, rise up and support me whenever something happens. They tend to agree with me when I talk about injustice. And boys.... I can't say much about that... Yeah maybe there are some boys, maybe...

None of your friends?

There are some friends in the village... There was Karan for instance who wanted to do a lot for the girls and for himself. But he too ultimately married under family pressure. Even now when he meets us, he encourages us to keep on doing what we're doing and likes the fact that we're living on our own terms. He laments about his circumstances.



Asha in Janwaar, 2018

(Laughing) Asha you have said something very important here. You are uncertain whether there are boys who support you in this movement of sorts, but if you were to say something to the boys about their behaviour around women in their lives, what would that be? What advice would you give to the boys about respecting their mothers, wives, and sisters?

I would tell them that whoever is in their family, wives, mothers... whoever, I would just advise the boys to let the girls dream. Just like you want to achieve something in life and be happy, so do the girls. Don't stop them, don't put them down, but instead, help them achieve their goals.

That's good advice which I think everyone must follow. Good! But another category that I'd like to talk, specifically in relation to Janwaar, is the that of an Adivasi.

What does it mean to be an Adivasi in Janwaar?

To be an Adivasi in Janwaar means that you follow the rules set by the other castes. You have to stay within boundaries, which defines your job or your name. If you try and do things beyond the caste rules, they start downgrading you and spread rumours about you, demoralise you so that your progress stops.

And in this journey of yours, have you also raised a voice against this system of discrimination?

Yes but in a way that I completely ignored them. There were times when I felt terrible when they spread rumours about me. It broke me inside. But I gathered myself. I had support from Ulrike and she helped me a lot.

And against caste discrimination, are there boys and girls who are raising their voice against it?

Yes, there are a few children and even some parents who are raising their voice by ignoring what members of the higher caste are saying and standing up for their rights.

So do you think that things are changing?

Yes I think things are changing. They have certainly changed a lot in front of my eyes.

And where do you see yourself in this fight? Would you like to lead this fight or would you want to leave this place and let others fight this battle?

No, I can never think about leaving this place. I want to stay here and if not more, then at least raise awareness in the area so that people can stand up for their rights.

And you've mentioned this in your rap as well?

Yes!



Asha at the lakeside in Janwaar, 2019

Tell me something more about yourself. You've travelled a lot!? You've mentioned in the song as well about going to London, China... so where all have you been?
 Outside India, I've been only been to London, UK and Nanjing, China.

And within India?

In India... Benaras for a day for a TV commercial shoot; ProtoVillage close to Bangalore... Vishakhapatnam... Orissa... And Jaipur, Rajasthan side... and yes of course Delhi and Noida ...

So tell me, did you dream of travelling so much? And has any other dream of yours been fulfilled by travelling?

When I was a young girl, I didn't know if my dreams would turn into reality. I used to dream, but I never spoke about it. I never told anyone about them...

Were you hesitant in expressing yourself earlier?

Yeah, a lot!!

And now (laughing)?

No, not at all (laughing). So even though I never spoke about my dreams, I never let them die. I kept my dreams alive and as time passed, my dreams started turning into reality.

So skateboarding helped you travel the world and fulfil your dreams? Even those dreams that you never shared with anyone!?

Yes!

That's amazing. So tell me, Asha, in how have these travel experiences changed you? How have they changed your perspective on life?

I used to be scared. I had never stepped out of my village, so there was a fear of the unknown. Once I started going out, that fear completely went away and I started understanding that people are the same around the world, even though we are from different places. I learnt that people are sweet and that I can talk to them. I gained confidence that I can travel alone and even take a group of girls with me.

Wow, that's amazing. That confidence is what I would like to talk about. Tell me about your work in Villa Janwaar?

In Villa Janwaar I currently work with children in the morning and I also take computer training classes for the girls. I guide them, help them operate the systems and I am making plans to start a forum for girls on the weekends. It will be at a time when the girls are free. We intend to meet up and share with each other our problems and even solutions.

So this is an attempt to create a safe space where people can fearlessly express themselves?

Yes.

So is this a facet of the confidence you've received after travelling the world?

Yes, indeed!

Do you see another Asha in any of these students? Do you see hope? What do you see in these students that gives you hope?

Yes, there are two girls I'd like to talk about, Poorti and Shanti. I have seen a lot of changes in Poorti. She has gained so much confidence now. There is a hunger in her to learn. So when I look at her, I see a bright future for her and I think that she's someone who will also empower and inspire other girls around her. Whenever she comes to the Villa as well, she never comes alone. She always gets other girls with her. Shanti is someone who always says the right things. She thinks about other girls and even questions the actions of her own family members if she thinks they are not right. I think Shanti is the kind of person who will raise her voice.

I see a chain in what you're saying. You said that you faced hindrances earlier but you kept your efforts alive. Now you're creating spaces where other girls can express themselves without fear. I like this a lot. So tell me about the chain in your life. What has been your mother's impact on you?



Asha and chores.

My mother has supported me a lot. My grandfather was constantly talking about my marriage when I was growing up. They wanted me to marry early so that my brother can get married too. My mother convinced other people on my behalf. She used to question the other members of my family, but very politely. She didn't want conflicts to escalate. When I was in school, she

used to request other family members to let me continue my education. She always counted each step of my progress and kept that in front of my family members. When I completed my ninth standard, she told my grandfather that look 'Asha has reached here, why don't we let her give the 10th boards?' So, she extended time...

Right, so she used to handle complex issues with simplicity? She negotiated so that you could do what you wanted and it also didn't upset the other elders?
Yes!

So how do you apply what you've learnt from your mother in your everyday life and struggles? Do you recall any particular incident with regard to girls' participation in Villa Janwaar?

I don't know if I applied exactly what I learnt from my mother, but yes, I do try. I always make sure that family members of girls who are coming to Villa Janwaar don't feel bad about anything. They shouldn't be irked off, or shouldn't think that girls are wasting their time over here. Parents should feel that their girls are learning something, and I want to also keep the parents happy so that they keep sending their daughters.

I am always intrigued to know more about your inspiring journey. How old are you right now, Asha?

21...

And all these changes that you have spoken about, how long has it been since this journey began for you?

I was 16 when I started skateboarding...

So 5 to 6 years if we count this 21st year, but I am not here to talk about mathematics. I want to ask you simply: What's next? Where do you see yourself in the next 5 to 10 years? What do you see yourself doing?

I see myself as part of a collective. And I see all of us having a blast!



Asha in her "zone", the skatepark.

Meaning? Something big? (Laughing)

Yes (laughing)

Okay, I leave that with you to ponder what is a 'blast' and the time that it might take to reach that. But a personal question, what is it that you fear? There are a lot of dreams, miles to go, so is there something that scares you? And if yes, how do you think you will resolve that?

For now, I can't think of anything that scares me. I trust myself a lot. I believe that whenever I am faced with any challenge, I can face it confidently.

Wow, that's brave! I loved listening to all what you have said. And I hope that your next song can just flow with all these inspiring ideas. I hope you write many songs and fulfil your dream of becoming a rapper.

A: Okay Bhaiya, thank you.

R: Thank you so much for your time, Asha. We will keep these conversations alive and I hope to connect with you in the future. I am also happy talking to you right now because I know that your words will travel and might inspire someone else.

A: Thank you, Bhaiya



I'm THAT Girl!

🔗 <https://soundcloud.com/janwaar-castle/i-am-that-girl-mp3>

The story begins when I was a child
Born in Janwaar, into the wild,
As a girl, Adivasi, there was always a line
And If I stepped over, there would be a fine.

But my eyes saw the future and I could dream,
As I climb the hill and loudly scream,
That this is my time and I want to rise,
I will claim what's mine, earn this prize.

I am that girl who wants to roar,
Up in the sky, as I soar,
The words are mine but I speak for you,
And without fear, I will say what's true.

I went to school, but I wanted to play
I wanted to learn, but in my own way
So hard I worked, in everything I did,
I wanted to do, what I couldn't as a kid.

This skatepark is my zone, I fly on four wheels,
I came on TV, newspapers, and film reels,
Flew to London, China, to show what I can do,
Representing India, me, and you.

I am that girl who wants to roar,
Up in the sky, as I soar,
The words are mine but I speak for you,
And without fear, I will say what's true.

Today I feel proud, for what I have done,
But I also know I am not the only one,
My parents, neighbours, everyone around,
This is my Janwaar, my very own ground.

But you see me as a woman, and call my name
Harass, Embarrass, play this horrible game.
You see me rise, and pull me down,
But you are scared, hiding, and I will not frown.

I am that girl who wants to roar,
Up in the sky, as I soar,
The words are mine but I speak for you,
And without fear, I will say what's true.

My family support me, they set me free,
I live my life and I don't need to marry,
My terms are mine and so is my time,
I won't wait to take what's mine.

I thank all those who support me today,
For without their help I wouldn't know my way,
My parents, my idols, and all my guides,
Thanks for the wings, for now I can glide.

I am that girl who wants to roar,
Up in the sky, as I soar,
The words are mine but I speak for you,
And without fear, I will say what's true.

A long road ahead, but I have just begun
If I rest right now, there will be only one.
And all that work I did on myself,
Will be sitting there alone, by itself.

I want to rap, tell you my story,
And I don't want fame, or name, or glory.
What I want to do is be a voice,
For all those girls who (don't have a choice) *2

My voice alone will not win this fight,
We need to come together to win this, right?
I invite the boys to write their song,
Join me in this chorus and sing along...

I am that girl who wants to roar,
Up in the sky, as I soar,
The words are mine but I speak for you,
And without fear, I will say what's true.

Words: Rijul Kataria
Music: Subhadra Kamath
Vocals: Asha Gond