

Asian Circle Partners with Tongues On Fire to Celebrate International Women's Day at SOAS

Brunei Gallery, SOAS, University Of London, March 2014

Title: 'Promoting Violence Free Lives for Women'
Presented by Santosh Bhanot, Chair Asian Circle

This year's International Women's Day theme is 'Inspiring Change' and it was for Inspiring change for women that last November **Asian Circle was borne** – launching at the Houses of Parliament amongst huge buzz and interest. We took inspiration from Annie Lennox's 'Circle' which in partnership with Oxfam is helping to make huge positive changes for women in Africa and other countries – improving poverty, maternal health, essential services and women's rights.

Asian Circle is a network of passionate, highly energised women from a broad spectrum of backgrounds with one thing in common – wanting to **CHANGE** the plight of women in S. Asia through **building awareness and fund raising**.

Spring last year – I visited programs being run by Oxfam India - and some of the photos you see in our Exhibition '**She rises: Inspiring Change**' come from similar programs in Education, Building Livelihoods - and Violence.

The women's stories I heard around violence were traumatic and emotionally moving - they came in the form of beatings, rape, sexual assault – they hit deep; and I still choke-up thinking about them.

- **About one-third of women experience violence**
- **Of these women, two-thirds of these women actually believe violence is justified**

Why the violence? No hot meal on the table, Refusal of sex on demand, Dowry....
(Oxfam India, Baseline Survey, 2010)

I'd like to share a video which typifies the sort of violence women experience in S. Asia. It's the story of a young Bangladeshi woman named *Beauty*.

Beauty's story – Beauty a victim of domestic violence and abuse is today able to stand on her own two feet:

(Video: Courtesy Of Oxfam containing details of work they are supporting)



BeautysStory_Circle2_PowerPoint_Lg.wmv



Credit Raj D Bakrania - PR Mediapix

Last summer - we had our first Asian Circle meeting: twenty of us sat around a table to review the types of programs we could support. There was a resounding unanimous decision – it has to be '**violence against women**'.

Asian Circle is now actively working with Oxfam, India to finalise details of a program in Chhattisgarh - one of the newest states in East India. We will be supporting 'Adivasi Women' who are part of the indigenous tribal population stemming back some 10,000 years. These women are poverty stricken, their current literacy rate stands at barely 60% and the patriarchal system is dominant.

The Program Includes

- BUILDING Support Centres in Police Stations providing Shelter, Legal and Counselling Services
- Influencing males- elders, men, youth to change INSTILLED attitudes and behaviours towards women through discussion and education.
- Working to implement the Domestic Violence Act which only came into force in 2005 by engaging with the

Chhattisgarh Government for example by helping to establish women's networks to engage on issues directly with them.



Credit : Ros Goodway Oxfam India

Our aim is to raise £100,000 to help implement the program over the next 2 years in 2 districts.... Today is our first fund raising event and we are pleased to be partnering with Tongues On Fire and SOAS.

We need your help

- **Ladies join the Asian Circle** - bring YOUR ENERGY/ PASSION/TALENTS to help fund raise
- **Students** – take us for your charity partner
- **We need Sponsors** - Individuals, Academic Institutes, Businesses –**let's talk!**

Please join us

I'd like to thank you for your donations today.....There is still an opportunity to donate if you haven't done so - see someone with an Asian Circle or Oxfam badge

To end with a quote from Gloria Steinem an American Journalist and Activist

"The story of women's struggle for equality belongs to no single feminist, nor to any one organization, but to the collective efforts of all who care about human rights"

WE CAN ALL BECOME CATALYSTS TO INSPIRE CHANGE!!

Thank You

**Santosh Bhanot
Chair Asian Circle
10 March 2014**



Asian Circle Committee



Anjna Reheja, Mala Rastogi, Saz Vora, Mandeep Nandra, Pallavi Popli, Santosh Bhanot, Pam Sharma, Claudia Codsí (Oxfam), Kalyani Gandhi –Rhodes (Oxfam), Neishaa Gharat
Credit Raj D Bakrania - PR Mediapix

Bhaji On The Beach: Q&A Panel



Santosh Bhanot, Professor Michael Hutt, Shan Khan, Radha Bedi, Pushpinder Chowdhry, Gurinder Chadha, Shaheen Khan, Tanveer Ghani
Credit Raj D Bakrania - PR Mediapix

Shaheen Khan & Gurinder Chadha with Asian Circle



Kalyani Ghanti Shaheen Khan, Gurinder Chada, Santosh Bhanot, Saz Vora, Pallavi Popli
Credit Raj D Bakrania - PR Mediapix