



SOAR ABOVE THE SKY

Social and Development Research and Action Group (SADRAG) is a not-for-profit organisation working since 2007.

The organisation builds Inclusive Communities through Education, Protection and Livelihood, with the vision of creating the world of Equality where all have equal opportunities for social, economic and community participation. The organisation has qualitatively transformed the life of underprivileged segment of population and has built their capacity for sustaining the change.

The Coffee Table Book, ***Soar above the Sky***, reflects the changing landscape of India where life of youth from deprived social-economic conditions, is transforming through an opportunity of Skilling and Learning. The youth have undergone a dedicated training regime, and are today, an important part of Print & Design industry. The stories shared in the book are for us to read and understand, how access to opportunity can lead to personal grit and dedication for a qualitatively transformed life

Stories of Youth Aspirations & Dreams Come Alive!



Preface

India, with a population of over 125 billion, is the second largest country in the world. Nearly half of the country's population is under 25 years of age and constitutes the youth segment which is restless and eager to learn and make a mark for themselves. The only thing they lack is, opportunity and a push in the right direction.

Today's youth is sharp enough to understand that there is intense competition out there and they must put in that bit of extra effort, in order to be able to realise their dreams. They understand that the nation requires well trained and motivated youth in its push to become a power to reckon with. The yawning gap between their existing skills and expectations of the market however, tends to discourage them and gives them the feeling of rejection. It is to fill this gap that we introduced the contemporary skill training course for youth through Market Aligned Skill Training (MAST), a program that aimed to train youth in IT enabled specialized skills and get a foothold in the competitive work environment of the industry. The selected skill imparted was, Graphics and Print Designing. It was in line with the growing demands of the industry for specialised data management, branding and Image building challenges. To give them added confidence, comprehensive capsules on Financial Literacy and Workplace Readiness were also conducted under the watchful eyes of experienced staff.

We launched MAST in 2015 in partnership with Adobe Foundation India and American India Foundation. It was a six months livelihood program for underprivileged youth living in and around Noida. With a focus on creativity, around 90 young boys and girls were trained in Graphic and Print design, and assisted in securing internships and jobs. Today, 80 percent of these youth have moved on to a sustainable career path. They are working in Print and Graphics industry at a reasonably good salary and have enabled their families defeat abject poverty and associated disappointments.

Youth reflect the essence of Learn, Grow and Prosper in life. Their stories reflect the determination and grit which conveys, "*Given an opportunity, we too can make it*". We have documented the challenges, struggles and successes of these youth through the stories of their life. These are the Stories of transformation which are compiled as a coffee table book, ***Soar Above the Sky***. The book is for all to read and reflect upon.

This coffee table book is attributed to the work of many. Special thanks to The American India Foundation and Adobe Foundation to have brought MAST in the life of underprivileged youth and facilitate them in reaching the destination of their dreams. A special Thanks to corporate volunteers team, Barclays Noida for preparing the youth for a sustainable career through dedicated learning sessions. Thanks to Industry partners for coming forward with generous hearts and resources, in mentoring the youth on the job.

Each story in the book is designed by the young achiever in its own right. We are sure that these stories would inspire the youth for achieving More in Life.

Dr Mala Bhandari

Founder Director

SADRAG

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Indebted to My Piggy Bank - Divya Kumari

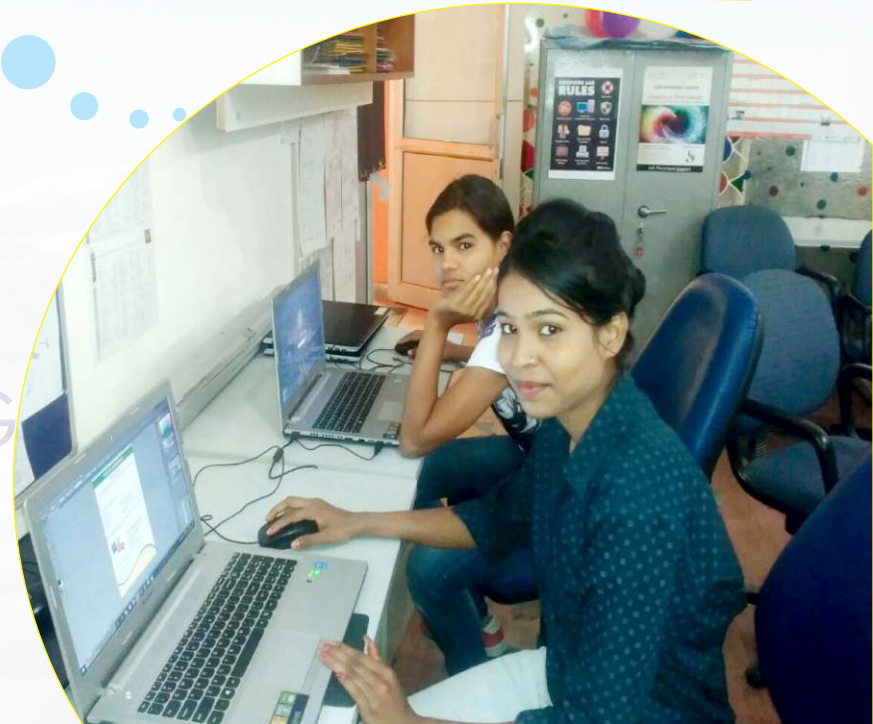
“MAST provides opportunities to young & aspiring individuals who are in search of a dignified life. I am one of the few fortunate people who had the privilege to be a part of this life- changing program facilitated by SADRAG. No doubt, the best decision of my life yet”!

...Divya Kumari

On a warm summer afternoon, I dialled a mobile number. A soft voice responded. “Sorry Ma'am, this is my office time, can you please call me after 6 pm”. I was impressed. The young 19 years old Divya came across to me in a most professional and business- like manner.

Divya is the eldest child of Dilip Singh and Mamta Devi, who years back, shuttled between Danapur, a small village near Patna in the state of Bihar and the industrial city of Noida in U.P., struggling to make a living for the family. They now live with their three children in a tiny room in village Garhi, Sector-68 at a monthly rent of 3000 INR.

Divya's family migrated to Noida when she was only six years old. Her father got a job at a paltry salary of about 7000 INR, in a small factory where he darned fabric with hand. His income was grossly insufficient to secure a stable life for his family but there was no other option.



Expenses seemed endless and soon Divya had to separate from her family and go back to her village to stay with her grandmother, maternal uncle, aunt and their child.

Divya missed her parents but the sad emotion of separation was overcome by a strong desire to become financially independent. While studying in a local school in Danapur, she gave private tuitions to neighbouring children thus earning money to sustain the school and meet her miscellaneous expenses.

"I was so home sick, I often told my mother, please call me home. I want to come back. When I was in Class X, my mother said, fine, come home after your final exams. I was so happy".

After completing Matriculation from Danapur, Divya returned home. She was elated to be with her parents and siblings. She was determined to study further and asked permission from her parents to let her seek admission in a Higher Secondary close to her house. In her heart however she knew that it was very difficult for her parents to afford higher education for her as they found it hard to meet even two ends meet. Nonetheless, they stood by her and she started attending school again.

One day, Divya confided in her teacher that she had decided to drop out of school in order to find work and support her family. The teacher advised her to continue the school and encouraged her to work simultaneously.

Divya applied for a job in Timex factory situated in their village. She joined the afternoon shift at a monthly salary of 6500 INR. Her job was to check proper clamping of tiny wires used for making watches. Everyday at 2 pm after school, she would go to the factory, work there and return home after the shift was over at 10 pm. Divya accepted this ordeal and worked in the factory for more than two years. Her only aim was to lessen the burden of her parents and to let her brothers continue their school.

Out of her vigour and determination, Divya completed high school and was eager to take the next step in life. It was during one of the exploratory visits to a neighbouring computer centre that she learnt about the Graphic Designing course being conducted for under privileged youth in Noida. She liked the concept and desired to know more about it.

“I was overjoyed to know about Graphic Design & Printing course at SADRAG. MAST was perfect for me since I could revive my love for sketching, drawing and painting, which was something I loved but forgot in the struggles of my life. It was a golden opportunity for me to learn, create wonders on screen and earn too”.

The next day, Divya visited the MAST media lab and was fascinated with the state of the art training aids available at the disposal of the students. Divya enrolled for the course without wasting a minute. She joined the morning shift and shuttled between the media lab and the factory. Once she was deeply committed to the course, she quit her job even though it had a negative impact, as her means of income had ceased. However she continued the course. She enjoyed being with others in the class since they all came from the same socio-economic background, full of aspirations, yet deprived and neglected. The dream of learning and earning was a thread which bound them together.



Divya, although an introvert by nature, overcame her hesitation to speak with others, a learning imbibed from the soft skills sessions held during the course. Her motto was to Excel in whatever she does. So she took a lot of interest in confidence building and personality development sessions. She often interacted with the Trainers and was never shy to talk about her weak areas. During the course, Divya's work was appreciated quite often. It took her some time to understand the nuances of computers and various softwares but the Trainer's guidance helped her tide over her teething troubles soon.

Once I began, there was no looking back for me.

For three months, everything went smoothly till she inevitably felt the crunch of money. The situation became so bad that one day Divya had no money to pay even for her travel. She had to miss her classes and stay at home. She felt helpless, watching her dreams of doing something, evaporate in front of her eyes. The Trainers at SADRAG guessed that something was amiss and visited her home to check what was wrong. The organisation offered to extend monetary assistance to help her meet her travel expenses. The gritty, self-respecting girl however refused but returned to Media Lab the very next day, composing beautiful designs on the computer screen. Divya not only completed the course but also put in extra time and effort to make up for the lost time when she was not able to attend classes.

“Thanks to SADRAG who offered me money to meet my travel expenses. It was a beautiful gesture from the organisation. But I didn't accept it. I broke my Piggy Bank which had my day to day savings. I used that money to pay for travel during the rest of the course”.

After completion of the course, Divya appeared for numerous interviews. She got an internship offer from one of the Graphics Design company based in Noida. There she interned for five months at a monthly stipend of 4000 INR. For her, it was the beginning she was looking for. Her work was appreciated and she soon got a raise of 3000 INR. Persistence and good work fetched her another raise of 2000 INR and she is presently working at a monthly salary of 10000 INR.

Divya has the heart of an artist. She loves every hour and every day of her job. Her wish to enrol for a job which helps her to reflect her talent for creativity has finally come true. As a Graphic Designer, she creates visual designs on computer using specialised software and shares her ideas and experience to attract and inspire others. At the moment, she enjoys creating layouts and production designs for brochures, magazines and online advertisements. Her work in a multi-disciplinary environment has improved her communication and social skills as well.

She is in no rush to reach the top. She wants to build a steady career through hard work and persistent effort, taking small steps, one at a time. She would gradually like to diversify her skill set to design website that would effectively communicate the creative side of her ideas.

“One day, I was asked to create graphics for Children's Day. It was one of the most challenging assignments for me. I gave my heart and soul to it. What resulted was an amazingly beautiful design which was highly appreciated for being interesting, effective and visually appealing”.

Divya was recently awarded a Certificate of Appreciation for her efficient and dedicated work by her employers. She has been encouraged by the company to learn digital marketing while at work.

Today, Divya represents a confident and a smart girl who does not succumb to the drudgery of life. The hardships faced during childhood made Divya strong and prepared her to face the struggles of life.

Divya has a dream. She wants to have a house where she can live comfortably with her family. She would want her younger brothers to study well and opt for higher studies. She is all prepared to work hard to realise this dream.

“My journey from an unskilled worker in a watch factory, to a professional has not been easy. I never dreamt that I would ever reach this point. I am indebted to SADRAG and to my Piggy Bank for changing the course of my life”.

...Teary eyed Divya



Chasing your Dreams - Harsh Saini

“I did not know, What was good for me... I was a lost youth a few years ago. Today, I am quite confident with an identity of my own”.

... Harsh

Shahdara, one of the oldest and now horribly congested locality in Delhi, is situated on the banks of river Yamuna. Born and brought up in this semi-urban locality, 21 years old Harsh lives in one of its by-lanes with his parents and a younger brother.

Harsh's parents moved to Shahdara around 30 years ago when options for livelihood dried up in Kaira Hazari, their native village in Modi Nagar, U.P. where they were literally starving. With hope of a better life, they migrated to Shahdara. Here they rented a small room and settled down to facing the realities of living in a Metro. While Harsh's mother stayed at home to manage the household, his father, a high-school graduate, searched for a job. To his misfortune, he could not get any job and was forced to learn electrical repair work. In spite of irregular income and several hardships, his parents sent both their children to school. Harsh recalls that parents were strict with the boys but admits that it helped him grow into a responsible lad.



Harsh studied in a government school near his house. He was a calm and soft spoken child. Though quite young at that time, he was aware of the poor financial condition of the family. He wished to contribute but his parents insisted that he should focus on his studies instead. Although he continued his studies yet he was troubled by the feeling that he couldn't contribute financially to his family. While in school, Harsh was in the good books of his teachers who loved him for his polite and well mannered behavior. They encouraged him to be creative and supported him to engage in expressing his creativity with words and symbols. His creativity became an outlet for him to reflect his emotions and feelings.

After completing Higher Secondary, Harsh approached his teacher to help him explore employment opportunities. The teacher knew that Harsh's strength was Art and creativity was his flair. He encouraged him to explore learning avenues in the field of art and creativity.

“When I completed my Class 12 examinations, I met Mr. Ashok Tiwari, my teacher in school. He inspired me to learn Graphic Designing at SADRAG. I followed his advice and was one of the early students to enrol for the course. At SADRAG, I saw an opportunity that could change my life and I was not wrong”.

On the suggestion of his teacher, Harsh visited MAST lab the next day. He took a tour of the lab and enjoyed its ambience. He did well in the mandatory entrance test in which he attracted the admiration of all the trainers. Harsh was immediately enrolled in the course. During the course, Harsh was a very diligent and a promising student and regular in his assignments. He loved the learning environment of the lab. The Trainers proved to be very supportive and guided him at every step. By the end of the course, Harsh had considerably improved his creative skills and was motivated to make a career out of it. He wanted to stand up on his own and SADRAG gave him the launch pad.

Harsh was particularly appreciative of soft skills sessions which groomed his communication and networking skills which are essential to be successful in a professional environment. The financial literacy sessions instilled in him a lesson to judiciously manage his money and save it for a secured future.

Harsh completed MAST course and was groomed for an internship. He joined a Noida based company as an intern. As time passed, he was absorbed there against a regular appointment at a monthly salary of 8000 INR.

working and his yearning to gain work proficiency grew with every passing day. He decided to take one step ahead and enrolled for a course in Social Media Marketing. His training in Graphic Designing coupled with the Social Media course, opened a plethora of opportunities before him. He bravely chose the option of working on his own.

Harsh planned to venture into a startup in partnership. He proposed the idea to one of his friends who agreed to join him. Thus emerged a company in the designated S.V. Designers. The team is engaged in designing and printing work. Harsh has started off on a small scale, yet is confident that as time passes, the company's reputation to deliver orders on schedule will help them grow rapidly.

***“I believe that we should do, what we are comfortable with!
I enjoy graphic designing and have therefore, put my heart and soul into it.
If we are honest in our work, then success can't stay away for long”!***

Harsh was aware that the road to success would be challenging. Being made of the stiff competition in his chosen field, he has worked hard to build his capacity and knowledge to be able to do well. Presently, he has joined a multi-media course in animation. He and his friend are working to build and expand their company, quite confident in the belief that they would be able to meet all challenges.

True to his nature, Harsh is steadily working towards changing his adversity into success and good fortune for self and his family. His dream is to be a successful young entrepreneur in his own right and is working hard to realize his dream.



Girl on a Mission - Pinki

Pinki, at the age of 23, is like any next-door girl who nurtured many aspirations but did not know how to go about it. Settled in Noida for the last several years, Pinki stays with her parents and two brothers. Being the second child, Pinki grew up under the love and care of her elder brother and a strong sibling rivalry with the younger one.

Pinki's father unfortunately did not have a steady job and it was very challenging for him to manage day to day household expenses. He learnt driving an auto-rickshaw and began plying it in the Noida-Delhi corridor. While he was majorly responsible for earning money, Pinki's mother had the responsibility of taking care of the children and home.

Pinki's brother somehow managed to study till high school and joined training for IT enabled course in Website Designing. Soon after the completion of training, he joined a private firm as a Web Designer. Pinki had seen him struggle to build his career brick by brick.

Pinki's parents had always wanted their children to be independent and have the capacity to fend for themselves. Pinki knew that she had to complete her school and take up a job that would pay her enough to be financially independent. After completing high school, she opted for a correspondence course in Accounting at Delhi University



“I liked to play with numbers and was inclined towards Accounting. Side by side, I kept looking for available job options. The big question was, What kind of job and Where to find it? Thank God I came to know of SADRAG and decided to join it”!

During those days of struggle and the prospect of facing an uncertain future, Pinki met one of her friends and told her that she was desperately looking for a job. She saw a ray of hope when her friend told her about SADRAG and the training being imparted there. Her mind was intuitively made up and soon she was one of the selected young minds that learnt to put all the bad times behind and face the world on their own.

“Joining the Graphic Designing course at SADRAG was the best decision of my life. I am very grateful to my brother to have encouraged me for joining it and to my parents for supporting me”.

The first day in the Media Lab was full of surprises for Pinki. She was overawed as she was confronted by an impressive array of electronic equipment like laptops, projectors and a screen with neat rows of tables and chairs where boys and girls were sitting busy at work. She felt hesitant at first as she did not even know the basics of computer technology. She shared her apprehension with the Trainer who assured her that she too could learn computers like others.

As the course progressed, Pinki got more and more involved into learning the essence of designing. She felt more confident of her interests and about her self. She fell in love with designing to the extent that all her free time was spent innovating new designs and patterns using different software. Her work improved as the course progressed and she received appreciation from all in the class. The sessions on soft skills and financial literacy taught her how to move ahead confident and secured with her head held high.

By the end of the course, Pinki was a young and confident woman. She appeared for interviews in several companies. She showcased her work in a portfolio that she carried with pride each time she appeared for an interview.

Pinki did a few months internship and then got the job in a graphic design company at a monthly salary of 10000 INR. Her family celebrated Pinki's success with pride and tears of happiness in their eyes.

Pinki's life changed after she joined her first job. It was a new environment with new rules and a new kind of role for her. Initially, Pinki was scared but gradually, her work encompassed her and she started enjoying it.

“In office, whenever I landed in trouble, I recalled my learning acquired during the course. It helped me solve problems”.

Pinki fondly remembers the day she received her first salary. She bought sweets and they had a mini celebration at home. Her parents were happy to see their little daughter happy. They never wanted Pinki to be deprived of any opportunities and wanted her to succeed like her brother.

It has been an year since Pinki has been working in Micra Systems Private Limited, Noida. She has chalked out a plan to enrich her career with advanced courses in graphics. She would like to become a Web Designer like her brother.

Pinki is very proud of the fact that her salary contribution has eased out her parents' burden. Her younger brother studies in high school and she is committed to support his college education.

Pinki has every intention to give her best to her profession. She has tasted success and in the real sense, is unstoppable.



Recovering from the Depths of Despair - *Prakash*



Prakash, at the age of 20, reflects a kind of youthful energy that cannot be missed. You call out his name and a smiling face appears from nowhere.

Prakash's family belongs to Nepal. When Prakash was just seven years old, the family migrated to Noida due to a domestic dispute. The family was faced with an unprecedented inter-generational dispute that could not be settled within the periphery of their native village. Therefore, one day, Prakash's father left home in rage, crossed the border and entered India. He finally found his way to Noida, the industrial jewel of U.P. state.

The intimidating city of Noida was not the city of his dreams but it provided him shelter. He struggled to find work. But nothing substantial. Eventually, he got an opportunity to ply a cycle rickshaw on the roads of Noida.

He grabbed it and started earning money. Bit by bit, he saved some money and went back to his native place in Nepal to patch up with his father and to get married. The family was back to Noida where he picked the threads of life once again.

With the passage of time, the family grew in size and along with it, the basic needs. While his father's resources remained meager, the struggle for basic existence grew.

Prakash's mother was forced to work on daily wages which helped meet the household expenses on food. However, despite their impoverished conditions, there was love and care for each other. The home had a comfortable environment and the children were sent to school.

When Prakash was in class five, he saw a computer in his school lab. The small machine fascinated him and he desired to work on it. He grabbed any opportunity to be at the computer. Limited access to computer in school made him sad. The fascination for computers got him interested in other electronic gadgets like mobile phones.

“I loved to explore mobile phones and their functioning. I became a self made mobile expert. Our neighbors often approached me to fix their mobile phones. Some would even come for the repair of the T.V. remote. Soon I became popular in the locality as a magic boy who could repair any electronic gadget”.

When Prakash completed his high school, he thought of working in the IT sector. However, money constraints at home did not permit him to do so. The round the clock struggle of his parents made him put aside his ambition and he started looking for a job.

“I feel for my father. My main aim in life is to keep him happy. I want to take all the burden off his shoulders. I want to work and run the family”.

Just when Prakash was looking for a job, luck knocked at his door. His friend introduced him to the Graphic Design course being conducted by SADRAG. Prakash sensed an opportunity and he visited the Media Lab the very next morning. He realized that the MAST course was completely aligned with the area of his interest. He was good at drawing and sketching and the promise of placement was something he could not refuse.

“The biggest challenge before me was that I had to work on the laptop. I had only heard of a laptop but had never seen it. I was very nervous in the beginning because laptops are very expensive. However, I learnt to handle it and today, I am very comfortable working on it”.

Prakash was very diligent at work. He regularly attended the classes and took part in every activity. He took every possible opportunity to create, showcase and improve upon his work with inputs from others. He liked the talks given by professional Graphics Designers who regularly visited the lab. He drew a lot of inspiration from their personal life stories.

In the class, Prakash generally remained aloof. He would never start a conversation on his own. At times, he was bullied by others, a price he paid for being quiet. Gradually, he overcame his inhibitions and he is now a fluent speaker.

“Initially I was shy to speak in front of others. I was afraid that others would laugh at me. At times, I used to stammer and it made me more nervous. I followed the personality development sessions very seriously and one fine day, I stood up in the class and raised a question to my own surprise. That was my moment of liberation, a moment I will never forget”.



After completion of the course, Prakash appeared for interviews in several companies. He faced three interviews before he was offered a job. For Prakash, these interviews were a good learning experience. He was nervous and hesitant initially, but the fourth time when he appeared for the interview, he was quite comfortable speaking before the panel. He bagged a job with the company at a monthly salary of 7000 INR.

With his first salary, Prakash got a suit for his father and a sari for his mother. It was a beautiful surprise for his parents. They accepted the gifts with tears of happiness and pride in their eyes.

"The smile on my parents face was priceless. I am proud that I could bring a beautiful smile on their face . My father's life so full of struggles, has been an inspiration for me. He has taught me that nothing in life comes easy. One has to work hard to succeed".

At work, Prakash receives a lot of appreciation for his creativity and the beautiful designs that he brings to the table. He has learnt client handling on the job. Usually, when the sales team is unable to explain a design idea , Prakash, the goto man, called to explain it to the clients.

Prakash doesn't want to stop here. He wants to learn more through advanced training. He has enrolled himself for a Diploma course in Computer Applications through Distance Learning.

"Then I am skilled at UI (User Interface) and now want to learn UX (User Experience) skills. I want to be a master in programming languages. There is so much to do. At my end. I explore various website to assimilate knowledge and gain proficiency at work".

Prakash would like to be a man with a visible face. His fight for an identity has earned him the badge of a Graphic Designer. He is now striving to add more badges to his name and create a distinct identity for himself.

Against all Odds - Priyanka

From a small village in the hilly state of Uttarakhand, to the concrete jungle in Delhi, the journey for Priyanka and her family was that of desperation and struggle against poverty.

Theirs was a happy family with parents and four siblings, living together in Gadarpur, their native village in Rudrapur district. Then tragedy struck and Piyanka's mother was left to fend for the family all by herself. Not being able to find any support, she decided to head to Delhi and boarded a bus for the national capital. Priyanka's mother somehow managed to take a room on rent. Trying to pick up the lost threads of her life, she took up a helper's job in a school. Her priority was to meet the urgent needs of her growing children and giving them the comfort of what she called, their new home.

The children started going to a government school. Priyanka was sent to Chandra Arya Vidya Mandir, a residential school in Delhi which had a free hostel facility. Despite many girls around, Priyanka felt lonely and vulnerable in the hostel. She disliked hostel rules for children where they had to wash their clothes, clean their room and also help in the kitchen. Above all, Priyanka hated washing her clothes.

“I would often sit in a corner and cry. I wanted to talk but had nobody to talk to or share my feelings with”.

Gradually, Priyanka got accustomed to her being alone. A pen and a notebook became her best friends. She penned down her feelings in little poems, each reflecting the turmoil going on inside her. She read her poems to escape her loneliness.

Priyanka's daily routine was very tiring and she used to be exhausted by the end of the day. Every night, she missed her mother. She recalls how her mother's agony which began with marriage continued unabated.

She wondered how her mother fought against all odds but still brought them up with a smile on her face. At difficult times, she could feel her mother's strength in her and she promised to herself that come what may, she would never give up in life.

“My mother never went to school. She worked on Sundays and holidays to earn some extra money for us. How can I forget all this”.

In school, Priyanka's teacher knew about her family's economic condition. When Priyanka completed higher secondary, she introduced her to Graphic and Print Design course being conducted by SADRAG. She enrolled for the course immediately and simultaneously, enrolled for Graduation through correspondence at Delhi University. Priyanka liked experimenting with creative designs doing the course. Her passion for writing had got a new medium of expression. Her life was no more black and white. She could draw her thoughts on computer and even give them colour. The colourful graphics before her eyes gave her a new perspective of life. Priyanka was friendly with everyone in the class and never hesitated to discuss issues related to their curriculum. She knew that her work had to be the best because it would get her a good job and she would be able to share the family's burden with her mother.



“I learnt about life at a very young age. I believe that achieving success in life is not something one gets by fluke or luck but it requires a combination of skills, time and hard work”.

For Priyanka, the financial literacy module taught in the class was very useful in planning financial security for her own family. She learnt about money management, savings and investment and was determined to make sure that her family would never again face a financial crisis. She also focused on English speaking and professional communication skills that are important for career building.

“The Graphic and Print Designing course has enriched my mind. I am confident to say that I can do better than my friends. I dream of creating meaningful, innovative and eye catching designs”.

While walking on the road, Priyanka would often stop to look at roadside hoardings and assess them for their appeal and message delivery. She thought, one day my work will find a prominent place up there.

After the completion of Graphic and Print Designing course, Priyanka interned with Om Book International, a print and publishing company. It was a good learning opportunity for her that paved the way for a regular employment.



“Besides designing, I am very fond of reading Hindi literature. Among my favorites are writings by Munshi Premchand and Mahadevi Verma. I relate their stories to my own life. I draw a lot of inspiration from their stories and they give me immense confidence to face life”.

Priyanka's story of life transits from an eagerness to learn, to finding her own identity. She feels that an individual's identity helps in reinforcing one's dreams and aspirations. Therefore all her efforts are focused on reaching professional, social and economical success.

“I want to be the number one Graphic Designer in the country. At the same time, I don't want to give up my love for reading and writing. I would like to develop a blog and pen all my feelings on issues that concern me. I believe in positivity and therefore, wish to write books on subjects like Living Life Positively and Motivation”.

Priyanka is working towards realizing her dreams through sheer hard work and perseverance. She has come this far against all odds and is confident that she can achieve the moon.

The Girl who refused to give up - Priyanka Chauhan

Priyanka, at 21, looks very young for her age. Settled in Noida with her parents, younger brother and a sister, Priyanka's childhood was spent in the semi-urban environment of village Sadarpur in Noida. Her early years were different from the children who lived in residential colonies near their village. If there was joy and laughter on the other side, the uncertainty and deprivation was evident on her side. Her father is an electrician but has never had a steady and a regular job. An unsteady source of income and five mouths to feed, was a challenge for him. Priyanka understood that if her family was to see better days, she would have to stand up and do something.

The children were sent to a neighborhood government school. Since they spent a lot of time together, Priyanka developed a close affinity with her younger siblings. She showered love and care on them, unmindful of her own requirements. In a way, she graduated from childhood straight to adulthood, where others mattered more than her own self.

The year 2016 was a year of dreams, aspirations and expectations for Priyanka. This was when she had to decide the next course of action after passing out of school. She had always dreamt to studying law in a regular college. However family resources did not permit it. You see, others in the family wanted to study too! One day Priyanka's younger sister announced that she wanted to do a course in Nursing. There was a hefty fee to be paid. Then, there was her younger brother who was still in school. Their father, with his paltry income could not bear these expenses. Though he never asked any of them to compromise on studies yet his inability to bear the expenses for all was evident. Not wanting to destroy the younger ones dreams, Priyanka willingly gave up her own ambition to study in college.



“I felt that it was futile to spend money on an expensive course. It was better to work and earn for the family. This was in the interest of all. At the time, nothing else occupied my mind”.

While Priyanka's sister went ahead to pursue the course in Nursing, Priyanka looked for other options. She searched for a course that required minimal investment and would give her job security. In the meantime, Priyanka enrolled for graduation through a correspondence course from Delhi University. One day, her friend told her about the Graphic Design course offered at SADRAG. The course details captured Priyanka's attention and she enrolled for it.

“Graphic Design was a new subject for me. All I knew was that I wanted a job and this course could get me one”.

Priyanka admits that on the first day when she entered the Media Lab she felt nervous and completely under confident. She had very little knowledge and interest in the field of computers and designing. She felt that she would not be able to go through the course. However, her perception changed after she had a long conversation with the Trainer. She diligently attended all the classes and spent a lot of time practicing on her own. The Media Lab became her second home. She would reach in the morning, attend the classes, have lunch and then attend the classes again with the evening batch. She was never bored of attending the same lectures twice in a day. Such was her zeal to learn and learn well.

“Joining SADRAG was the best decision of my life. Graphic Designing has put me on the road to success and fulfillment”.

As the course progressed, Priyanka became comfortable handling the computer. She enjoyed working on the lap top. Not just the designing skills, she improved her communication and social skills as well which helped her become more confident. She wanted to build a career that would change her life.

At last, hard work, patience and regularity fetched rich dividends. Priyanka completed the course and was sent for an interview at Acceleration Engineering & Softwares Pvt. Ltd. Noida. The Interview panel appreciated her portfolio and she was instantly offered a job. On 19 April 2016, Priyanka joined the company as a Graphic Designer. She was a bit tense the first day but soon learnt to work in a professional environment.

At work, Priyanka is doing well. Her designs are so good that they are posted directly on the company's website. Beginning her career at a humble 4000 INR, her salary has now grown to 14000 INR per month within a short span of time.

“Thanks to SADRAG, today I am on my own feet and am capable of supporting others. My salary is a big support to my family and we are all very happy”.

From an impoverished childhood to a bright future, Priyanka has lit up the dark road of her life with her own efforts and has also helped others to grow. Priyanka wishes to continue her journey towards excellence in the profession that accidentally came in her life but has now become the source of joy and satisfaction for her. Priyanka is the girl who refused to give up!

In search for Dignity and Respect - Ritu Kanojiya

“I never thought that one day I would be a Graphic Designer! I have seen a lot in life. Thanks to my mentors who taught me to face every situation with courage and never feel inferior to anyone”.

...Ritu

Ritu's parents migrated to Noida when she was very young. With no work or income, those were days of hunger and scarcity for the family. Ritu's father was frustrated and was desperate to do anything to bring home food for the children.

One day, a friend told Ritu's father that there was a requirement of an Ironwallah in a residential colony. He grabbed the opportunity and thus began a meagre source of income for the family. However, despite working the whole day, he could not make sufficient money to cater for the family of eight. The children suffered the most as they could not even dream of going to school. It disturbed Ritu's mother as she had suffered enough because of being uneducated and did not want her children to face a similar life. So she started looking for work. With no skill, the only viable option for her was to work as a domestic help in the neighbourhood colony. To her credit, she took up the challenge and does not regret doing so.



Ritu's mother took up part-time cleaning, washing and mopping work in a couple of houses. With the money thus earned, she paid the school fee of all the children and they started attending regular school. She pushed herself to take up more and more work to earn for the rising expenses.

“I started going with my mother to work in a nearby colony. We left home at six in the morning, went home to home doing cleaning and washing. While I would leave at 8 am for school, my mother continued her work till afternoon. She would return to work at four in the evening. This ordeal continued 7 days a week”.

Years passed. Ritu and her mother followed the same routine day after day with only a faint hope of good days ahead. Ritu hated washing dirty dishes. Working in others' homes took away her smile and laughter. All she wanted was to get away from this ugly routine. In the middle of all this, Ritu passed her Higher Secondary examination.

One day, when Ritu was mopping floor in somebody's home, the employer asked her mother as to what did Ritu want to do after school? Ritu's mother told her that she didn't want Ritu to wash dirty dishes anymore. Good fortune struck and the house lady got Ritu connected with SADRAG to attend the Graphic Design Course. The next day, taking some time off, Ritu visited the Media Lab. Her eyes popped out seeing so many computers there. The fact that all of it could be accessible to her, made her happy. She was enrolled for the course and a new phase of life began for her.

Everyday, Ritu would get up early morning, go for work and then rush to the lab. Coming to lab was so sacrosanct to her that she would reach the class much before time. Once she reached the lab, she would be in no hurry to return home. She would keep practising different software, glued to the computer.

“Our trainer was very supportive. He always encouraged me to learn. I loved working in the lab. It had a very comfortable environment with youth like me working together and sharing the same dream which was to get their family out of poverty”.

After Ritu completed the course, she did not rush for a job. She waited to turn 18 in a few months. She kept practicing in lab till the time she was sent for her first interview.

“I was very shy and was afraid to speak before others. During my first interview, my voice was shaking. I looked blank. However my portfolio spoke for me and I got the job. I often wondered, how would I work in an office setting. On my first day at job, I entered the room. Gazing eyes weighed me down and I was nervous”.

Having worked for a few months, Ritu today is far more confident. Besides improving her designing skills, she has learnt client dealing, voice modulation, time management and most of all, has acquired a dressing sense to match the professional work environment. She is very conscious about dressing up appropriately for work, it adds to her self confidence.

Ritu is happy because she is respected for her work. She is no more the same Ritu who tagged along her mother and washed dirty dishes. Though she feels good about herself yet the picture of her mother, washing dishes for others constantly haunts her. She would like her to rest a while. She would not want her siblings to be trapped in poverty as she was in her childhood.

“I recently took my brothers and sisters for an outing. We visited a shopping mall and later went to the zoo. I felt a sense of achievement and realised that such little things bring great joy to the family”.

Ritu's life changed because an opportunity came her way. An opportunity to learn, grow and get engaged in productive work. It is this opportunity which brought Ritu out of neglect and desolation and introduced her to the world of dignity and respect. Ritu would like to make the most out of this opportunity. She banks on her training in karate, martial art to wriggle out of difficult situations. She owes her success to self discipline, which she imbibed during the days of scarcity and deprivation in her childhood.

“When I was a child, I saw other children playing in the park. I often thought, Why did I have to undergo such drudgery? Why couldn't I laugh like them? I will make sure that my brothers and sisters don't suffer the same misery. We deserve to live with respect and dignity and I will make it happen”.

Ritu has brought about a generational change in her family. She has lit the light of hope and has opened an avenue of stability for her family. Her dream is to save enough money so that the family can live in a decent house. She has worked hard towards earning Dignity and Respect and dreams of bigger things ahead.



Ambition leads to Success - Sandeep

“Ambition pushes us towards success. Winning is about doggedly striving for something and that is important for great results. Often when there is a zeal to create and innovate, it motivates us to grow, often in unexpected ways”.

...Sandeep

Sandeep is a young promising boy who loves the city of Noida for its diversity; people, culture and social life. Sandeep is 22 years old. He has two brothers and one sister.

Sandeep belongs to Tetraian, a tiny village in District Aurangabad in the state of Bihar. They migrated from their native place in the year 2000 where they had no access to work, income and growth. They came to Noida and settled in village Chaukhandi which is at the periphery of Noida and Ghaziabad. Their hope was that this industrial city would have a lot of options for them.

The family looked for decent opportunities of work. Seeing a lot of road-side eateries that cater to industrial workers, Sandeep's father came up with a business idea and set up a small noodles making machine at home. This machine makes noodles with refined flour and packs it in varying sizes. These packets are supplied to road side eateries for the preparation of all time favourite, Chow Mein.



The size of the business is small but it is sufficient to cater for the basic needs of the family. Children studied till Higher Secondary in a government school but scarcity of resources did not permit them to pursue higher education.

While Sandeep's elder brother joined his father in business, Sandeep's little mind wandered off towards seeking other options. As the small family business had very limited scope of growth, so Sandeep made up his mind not to join it full time.

“The idea of all three male members of the family joining the same home business did not appeal to me. I found it too restricted in scope. I wanted to get out and explore something different. I told my father that I did not want to join the home business”.

When Sandeep was in Class X, he had a friend who dropped out of school and opened a small photography shop. When Sandeep met him, he saw a camera, for the first time, a little machine, used for clicking pictures. He liked it a lot and offered to assist his friend at the shop. This was the beginning of his fascination with technology. He learnt the art of photography.

After completing higher secondary, it was obvious to Sandeep that he had to look for a job. However a surprise awaited him. He had secured 62% marks in the annual examination. In appreciation, his father bought him a Toshiba laptop for 29000 INR. He knew that his son loved machines, so thought of gifting him one. It was like a dream come true for Sandeep who spent a lot of time exploring and learning new things on the computer, by trial and error.

“The laptop was the ultimate gift from my father. I knew that he must have spent a big chunk of his savings to buy it for me. The laptop raised my quest for working with machines and I planned to turn my interest and hobby into serious work”.

Sandeep was keen to join a full time course in IT but could never afford the high fees. One day he came to know about the Graphic design course in SADRAG and decided to give it a try. Sandeep appeared for the exam and was selected for the course. Designing fascinated him. He quickly followed the basics of design patterns and image making. He diligently practised the integration of various software and art of designing.

“I consider designing an overall umbrella that puts together all art forms into a business card, a sign, a logo, or an advertisement, into a visual system”.

Sandeep completed the course with flying colours. He was sent for interviews in different companies. He bagged an internship with a Noida based enterprise. It paid him little but provided him a very rich experience in art work. He got an opportunity for diversified learning through Web Design and Digital Imaging.

During the course at SADRAG, Sandeep had learnt the difference between a job and a career. He wanted a career for himself and was prepared to accept all kinds of challenges for it. He worked persistently towards his goal and it paid off. Sandeep's work has fetched him several laurels. His company has awarded a Certificate of Appreciation for an innovative concept that he had brought through his designs.

Today, Sandeep has become a Team leader in his company. He is heading a team of six designers whom he guides and mentors for good work and performance. He is earning a monthly salary of 15000 INR for his efforts.

“With my first salary. I went straight to the market and bought a sari for my mother for 2500 INR and a pyjama-kurta for 1000 INR for my father. I want to give them a better life ahead”.

Sandeep is a happy man today, doing something that he loves and also, because his work provides him ample scope for future growth. At the same time, he feels good that he is able to contribute to the happiness of his family. A few months back, Sandeep's brother was married off. The marriage ceremony took place in their native village in Bihar. It was Sandeep who used his personal savings to meet a major chunk of the expenses.

Sandeep has plans for his younger siblings. His sister is studying in school. He plans to get her private tuitions so that she gets good marks and can attend a better school with hostel facility. Sandeep's younger brother is studying in college. He wants to him to become a Graphic Designer like himself.

“I would never leave my parents. Whatever happens, my parents would always live with me”.

Through hard work and dedication, Sandeep has surely turned his ambition into a success story.



Search for Independence - Sofia Aziz

23 years old Sofia was born and brought up in a happy family environment where her parents had a liberal perspective of life. Though the parents had never been to school themselves, yet they always encouraged their three daughters to study and become economically independent. They always advised them to dream big, work hard and make the best of life.

Sofia's father had a small roadside eatery which fetched him a decent income every month. He spent a major chunk of his income for the education of his daughters. Sofia's sister studied till college and teches in a private school. Sofia too, joined college and completed her Graduation. Both the sisters have been taking tuitions in their spare time to earn some extra income.

“Despite being from a Muslim family, dogmatic cultural traditions were never binding on us. Our parents trusted us. We studied in a regular school and that has today, opened up many options before us”

...Sofia

Sofia's family did not know that their happiness was short lived. In the year 2017, the family's eatery, the only source of income, closed down. Sofia's father had no other source of income and it was hard for the family to survive. In the absence of anything concrete, he purchased an e-rickshaw with his meager savings and began plying on the roads of East Delhi.



Sofia was devastated. She gave up her dream to study further and started teaching in a small private school. She was paid a small amount but worked over time to earn some extra money for the family. She remained tense and was shattered by the sudden change in the family's fortunes. One day, she spoke to her aunt, who was associated with SADRAG at that time.

She introduced Sofia to the MAST program and asked her to pay a visit to get first hand information. Sophia had no background knowledge of Computers or Designing. She however was quick to understand that MAST promised to give her a chance to break free.

Sophia could not afford to give up her teaching job, even though it paid very less. Her family could not pay even for her travel expenses during the course. Being sensitive to her plight, SADRAG allowed her to adjust the timings of her training and thus started a fascinating journey for a young girl, who wanted to become financially secure. Graphic Designing proved to be quite a challenge for Sofia. Initially, she faltered many a time. There were occasions when she was disheartened but a strong desire to succeed dissuaded her from quitting the course. She tried very hard to learn the art of designing. Each time she designed on paper, she revised it several times. She would not stop till she was satisfied with the results. Her persistence paid off and Sofia's work improved considerably to become the talk of the class. Others in the class consulted her for new and creative ideas. Sofia felt special and enjoyed their attention.

Sofia missed soft skill classes because they were asked to practise inter-personal communication with each other. Too shy to talk, Sofia didn't like it. It was only after her work was recognised and others approached her for ideas that she started communicating. Gradually she got over her hesitation and began to understand that the skills being imparted in soft skill sessions, in fact would be her friend in later years.

Sofia completed the course and began searching for a job. After nearly three months, Sofia got a job. She cried the day her job was confirmed. Her parents hugged her with joy. They went around telling everyone that their daughter had got a job in a big company. For Sofia, it was like good old times were back for the family.

Sophia faced several challenges at work. She was initially given editing work, while she longed for an opportunity in designing. Sofia was beginning to get discourage and demotivated but then the work environment changed and things turned around. life.

She not only got design assignments but was also tasked to introduce new design ideas and present them. Sofia's creative skills blossomed with the passage of time and with it, returned her smile.

Today, Sofia continues to work as a Graphic Designer. She feels good to have an identity of her own. She feels proud to be able to contribute a part of her income to her family and is determined to give them a new lease of

“I owe my success to my parents who supported me through out. It is they who encouraged me to study and become economically independent. SADRAG was a turning point in my life. It gave me an option and helped me get over the most challenging phase of my life”.

Sofia is confident that her good work would receive due recognition in the Industry. For her, search for independence has just begun!



With Stars in his eyes - Sujeet

Sujeet, at eighteen, is a young and promising boy. A native of district Madhubani in Bihar, Sujeet espouses a strong determination and dedication towards his professional career.

In native Bihar, Sujeet lived in a joint family which comprised his parents, two sisters and paternal uncles. His family toiled hard on their meagre piece of land to make ends meet but they could never make enough to meet all their requirements. In desperation, they looked for other means of livelihood. The only choice before them was to migrate to an industrial city where the male members of the family could get some work.

One day, they finally took the plunge, undertook a long train journey and arrived in Noida. Sujeet was just three years old then and quite oblivious to the reasons for their move. The parents, with no formal education had very limited options. They explored every possible opportunity but nothing seemed to be working for them. The need for money was growing and so was their desperation.

While exploring around, they happened to see an Ironwallah stationed in a big residential colony. They spoke to him and gathered that he ironed clothes for the residents and earned money on daily basis. The idea appealed to them. They immediately purchased an iron and negotiated for a space in another colony. They set up a table and began collecting clothes for ironing. Over time, the family settled down and a meager but steady income started coming home. The children were sent to a government school in pursuit of education.

“My parents had never been to school. They knew that education is the only route to success in life. They always said, Study, if you desire a life of dignity and respect”.



As the children grew up, so did their needs and it became increasingly difficult to make ends meet. Sujeet could sense the family's desperation and being the elder child, he felt obliged to shoulder greater responsibility. He decided that he would quit regular studies after school and would take up a job.

The day, the higher secondary school results were announced, Sujeet was out job hunting. He knocked at many doors but questions were raised on his skill and capacity to work. A series of rejections made him very disillusioned with himself.

“One day, I visited a potential employer. The guard at the office gate asked the purpose of my visit. When I told him that I was looking for a job, he asked me, What do you know? Do you have any skill? I was dumbstruck. I returned without meeting the Manager. I saw my future as an Ironwallah like my father and felt miserable”.

Days passed but Sujeet did not give up. He remembered that in school, he had done a course in computer literacy. It had interested him a lot. So he thought of doing some IT related course. Now the big question was, where could he find a course, that gave him a qualification at an affordable price. He could see that most of the commercially available IT courses had a very high fee structure.

Little did Sujeet know that an opportunity was waiting for him. One day, Sujeet met his friend in the market. The friend told him, I know the place where you can be skilled at no cost. The next morning at 9 a.m., they both reached the Media Lab at SADRAG.

They waited for it to open at 9.30. Sujeet was so overwhelmed by the place that he immediately enrolled for the Graphic Design Course offered there. He thought it as a God sent opportunity to learn, qualify as a professional and earn. At the time of enrolment, Sujeet was counselled to simultaneously pursue his higher studies. He immediately enrolled in a graduation course through correspondence.

“On the first day in class, I learnt that creative designing is when you think of an idea and express it on paper. It appealed to me and I said to myself, Yes, this is what I would like to do in life”.

During the course, Sujeet's innovation in designing brought him many laurels. Each time, he created something new, he felt good about himself. He always said, creativity is when you make something different. His designs were fresh and innovative. The designing classes gave depth to his creative concepts, on the other hand, the soft skills sessions became more and more challenging for him. The sessions on English speaking and writing were very difficult for him. He was frustrated to see others speaking comfortably in English. He concentrated hard on these sessions and with sheer grit and dedication, started showing visible signs of improvement with his communication skills.

After completing the Graphic Designing course, Sujeet appeared for an interview at Beryl India, a Noida based company. The panel asked him to create a few designs which he did to their complete satisfaction. He was immediately appointed as a Digital Marketer at the monthly salary of 10000 INR. Sujeet was elated. He told his parents about the offer and there was celebration and joy at home.

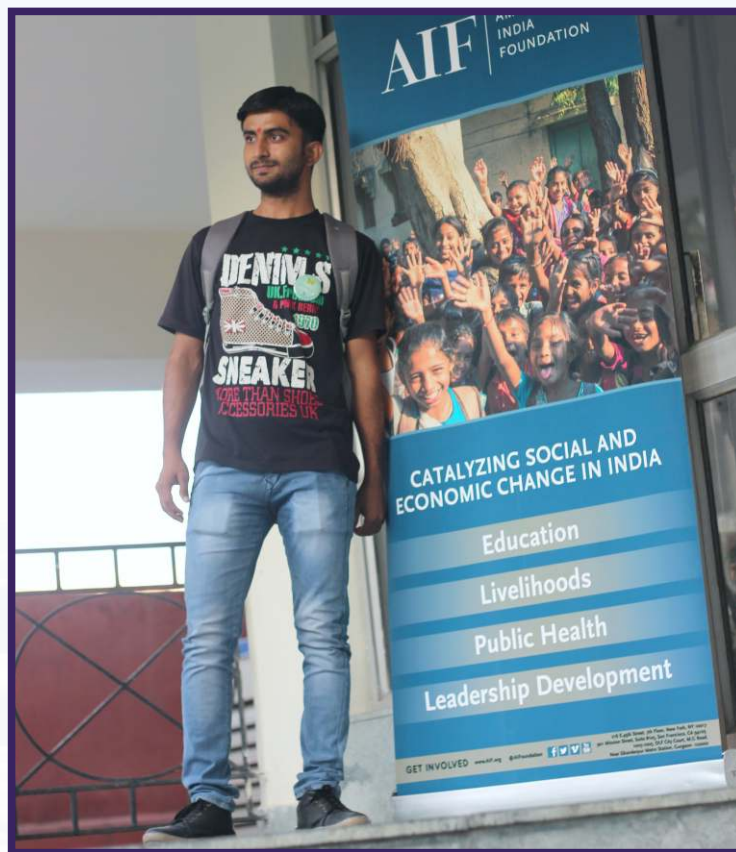
“I thanked SADRAG from the bottom of my heart when I was offered my first job”.

Today, Sujeet is doing fairly well and is very happy. He has maintained regularity at work. His confidence has grown with his learning and so has his yearning to reach the top.

Besides the job, he teaches neighborhood children to earn extra money. He wants his brother to study well and he has promised him his full support. He is waiting for the day when his parents would not have to iron clothes. Sujeet has learnt the lesson of life the hard way. He understands the value of hard work and sincerity. He finds life comparatively promising, now that he knows what lies ahead if he continues to be serious towards his work.

“Follow your path diligently and you will change the destiny of your life. Destiny is not something that is given to us. It is something that we create with our efforts”.

SADARG is proud to see yet another of its wards with Stars in his Eyes and an undiminished urge to excel in his chosen field.



कल हम छोटे बच्चे थे,
आज हम एक युवा हैं।

न तो हम डरते हैं,
न तो हम घबराते हैं।

रोके हमें कोई नहीं,
टोके हमें कोई नहीं।

वक्त के साथ जायँगे
हर दिल में जगह बनाएंगे।

आज के हम युवा हैं
आगे बढ़ते जाएंगे।
हम आगे बढ़ते जाएंगे ॥

---- सदरग

*This book has been designed by Ms Ankita Kashyap, a young and aspiring Graphic Designer who was trained under MAST: The Youth Livelihood & Leadership programme.
The book cover has been designed by Mr Parmit Dabas who is a leading Graphic Designer.*

