

AMANA FONTANELLA-KHAN

PINK SARI REVOLUTION

A BBC
RADIO 4
Book of the
Week

A TALE OF WOMEN
AND POWER in the
BADLANDS OF INDIA

'Powerful, engrossing.' **Sonia Faleiro**

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A TALE of WOMEN
AND POWER *in the*
BADLANDS of INDIA

AMANA FONTANELLA-KHAN



A ONEWORLD BOOK

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Advance Praise for
PINK SARI REVOLUTION

'With her usual deep reporting, humane storytelling, clarity of explanation and wry humour, Amana Fontanella-Khan brings to life a group of women who have overcome origins and odds most of us cannot even imagine to create a movement that might very well change India – and the West's image of what it means to be a woman in the so-called Third World.'

Hanna Rosin, author of *The End of Men: And the Rise of Women*

'Corruption was a fact of life in Uttar Pradesh, and females were too often the victims of the social, political and economic inequalities that defined this Indian "Wild West". But as Fontanella-Khan shows in this lively account, they were not without hope, nor were they without a champion ... As delightful as it is intelligent and important.'

Kirkus Reviews

'This beautifully rendered book is a call to women everywhere to take the world into your hands, to rise and resist.'

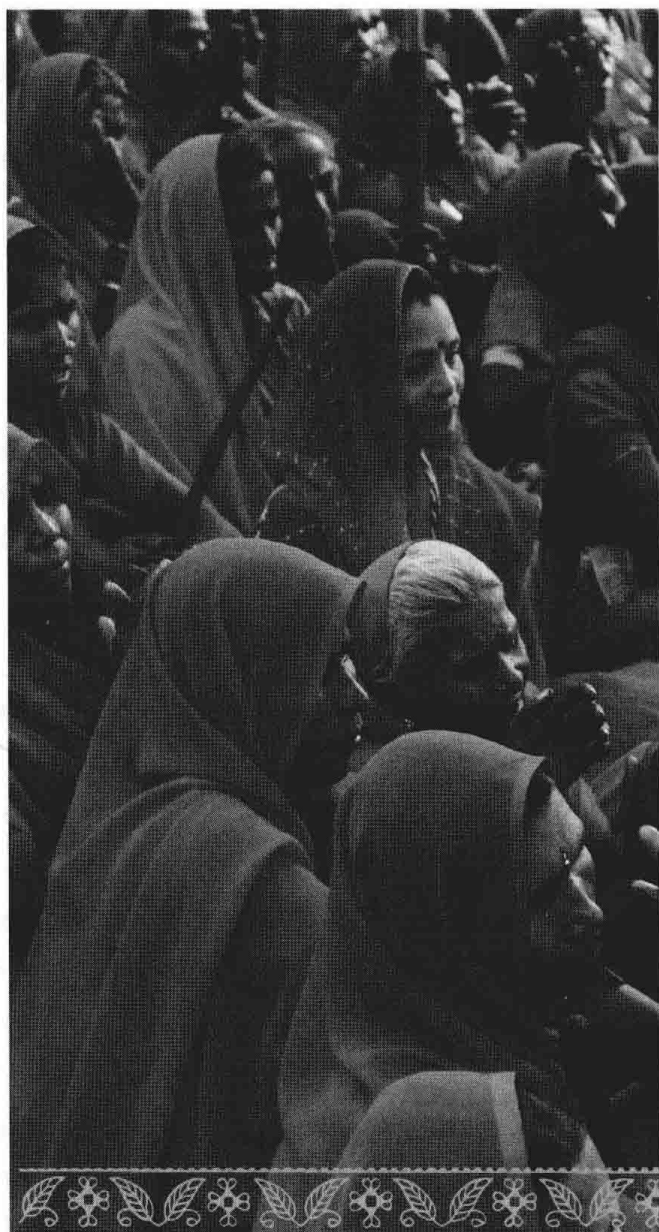
Eve Ensler, author of *The Vagina Monologues* and *In the Body of the World*

'A powerful, engrossing portrait of one woman's fight for female empowerment in India. Sampat Pal's extraordinary courage will inspire you, delight you and fill you with hope.'

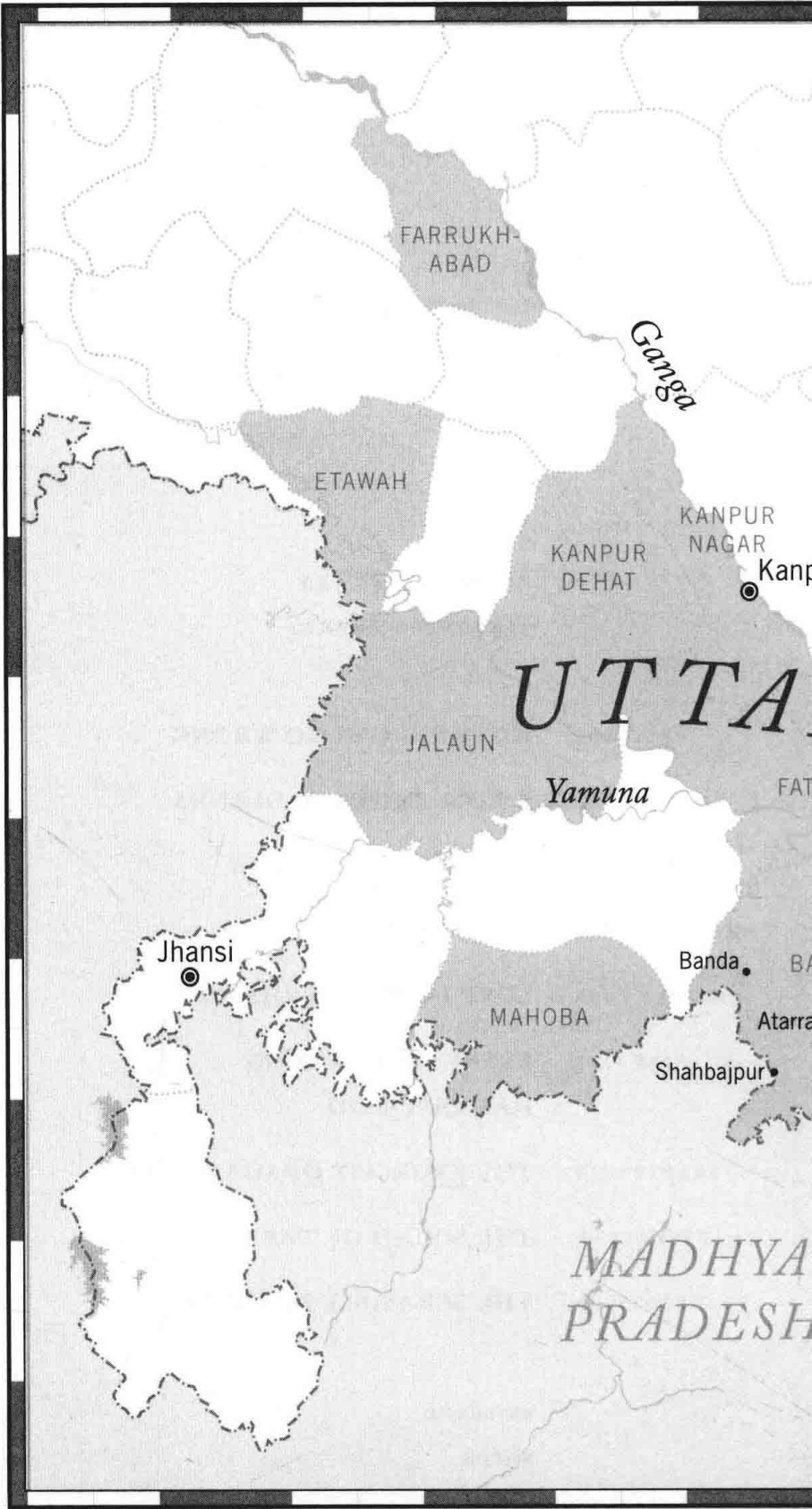
Sonia Faleiro, author of *Beautiful Thing*

'A maze of political intrigue, personal melodrama and feminist activism unfolds in this account of the Pink Gang ... Fontanella-Khan brings a novelist's pacing to a timely page-turner that is essentially political.'

Publishers Weekly



For my parents and James, naturally



FARRUKH-
ABAD

Ganga

ETAWAH

KANPUR
DEHAT

KANPUR
NAGAR

Kanp

UTTAR

JALAUN

Yamuna

FAT

Jhansi

Banda

BA

MAHOBA

Atarra

Shahbajpur

**MADHYA
PRADESH**



now

PRATAPGARH
KAUSHAMBI
ALLAHABAD
AKOOT
RADESH

Allahabad

Varanasi

Legend

- Rivers
- National boundaries
- State boundaries
- District boundaries
- DIST. Districts with local Pink Gang commanders

100 200 km

100 200 mi

AUTHOR'S NOTE AND
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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THIS BOOK IS, FIRST AND FOREMOST, ABOUT SAMPAT PAL AND her extraordinary group of women. However, a great part of it also deals with the case involving Purushottam Naresh Dwivedi and Sheelu Nishad.

The version of events I recount is based on countless interviews, newspaper articles and press statements related to the case. That said, it is just one version among many. Dwivedi staunchly denies any wrongdoing, and there is much ambiguity about the exact nature of the relationship between Sheelu Nishad and Rajju Patel.

Much of the dialogue in this book comes from the best recollections of participants, whom I almost always quote in verbatim. Unfortunately, it was not always possible to interview both participants in any given dialogue. In those cases, I relied on their interlocuter's account of what they said and added a keyword note to attribute the quote. In those instances in which I was able to obtain transcripts of conversations, I detailed sources in the notes section.

I spent two years (August 2010–August 2012) research-

ing this book, while I still lived in India. One year into my travels to Bundelkhand, I lived with Sampat at her family house in Badausa (in August 2011 and December 2011). I have many happy memories from that time. In those days, we all bathed at the same water hand-pump and I learned by observing others how one washes more or less fully dressed. I spent many evenings with Sampat's daughters and nieces during which we cooked together, cracked jokes, and sang songs around the wood-fire after the power had gone out. Sampat's little nephews were drawn to the accoutrements I had brought with me. They liked to get tangled in my mosquito net, wear my rubber flip-flops, and were fans of my camping torch (all three of those items are still with them today). I spent much time chatting to Sampat's father-in-law, who loved to eat jalebis first thing in the morning, washed down with a glass of hot chai. Then, of course, there was Sampat, who is one of the most fascinating people I have ever met. Sometimes it felt like she was the one interviewing me. She wanted to know everything from whether there were also rainbows in my country to whether I had a love marriage. It was an experience I will always treasure. Mindful of the great trust with which Sampat and her family received me into their lives, I always made a distinction between what was 'on record' (my Dictaphone was blinking red in those moments) and what was not. The primary purpose of my staying with Sampat was not so much to gather concrete anecdotes and quotes that would find their way into the text but, rather, to gain a deeper understanding of Sampat's life – a knowledge that I hoped would inform my interviews and my eventual telling of her story.

Sampat and Jai Prakash Shivare (Babuji) also stayed at my

home in New Delhi for a week (June 2012). Sampat's time in Delhi gave me a glimpse into her growing political clout, reflected in her numerous engagements with party officials when in the capital. Apart from hard work, those days were also filled with good times and, of course, invaluable interviews, for which I am grateful to Sampat.

There is no doubt that, after spending much time with the Pink Gang, I have become sympathetic to Sampat and her women. I also have made financial donations to the Pink Gang, which I hoped would go towards strengthening an organisation that I believed was doing a tremendous job and was in need of financial support. Despite being close to the gang, however, I am very aware of the shortcomings of the organisation and the challenges it faces. I have not hesitated in discussing these frankly in the book. I remain in touch with Sampat and Babuji, who update me on how their work with the gang is progressing.

During my field trips to Bundelkhand, I also spent much time in Shahbajpur visiting Sheelu, who allowed me to use her full name in the book, as well as Santoo and Achchhe. They patiently answered all of my many questions and gave me the access I needed to tell this story. Sheelu and I still speak regularly on the phone too. Ever resilient, Sheelu is moving on with her life with incredible speed.

Here, a note about language should be made too. Over the course of my time in India, I learned enough Hindi to converse on my own with people. Hindi was the language in which all interviews were conducted, except a few with Babuji, whose English is very good. I had several talented interpreters with me during most of my interviews, who are named in the acknowledgements below. Towards the end

of my research, however, I was able to go to Bundelkhand and conduct interviews on my own. These interviews, like almost all others, were taped and later translated and transcribed by Cuttingedge Translation Agency, a professional company specialising in that service, for the sake of accuracy.

THERE ARE MANY people without whom this book would never have been possible. First and foremost, I wish to thank Sampat Pal, who gave me so much of herself, and Babuji, for the same reason. I am grateful to everyone I interviewed in Bundelkhand, who shared their life with me and gave me their precious time. I especially want to thank Sheelu Nishad, Achchhe Lal Nishad, Santoo Nishad, Lakhan Upadhyay, Bola Dwivedi, Dr. Khanna, Jai Karan Bhai, Geeta Singh, Deepak Singh, Munni Lal Pal, Munna Pal, Beenu Pal, Nisha Pal, Champa Pal, Prabha Pal, Tirath Pal, Mahima Pal, Seema Pal (Guru-ji), Mitu Devi, and Hemlata Patel. A special thank-you to Amit Tripathi at Hindustan, for providing me with valuable information and his time. Also, I am immensely indebted to Arun Dixit at Sahara Samey TV's Banda bureau for the footage he so generously made available to me.

This book was born out of an article I wrote for *Slate* in 2010. The enthusiasm of Hanna Rosin, the editor of *Slate's* Double X blog, and her deft editing are largely to thank for the subsequent attention it attracted. I am greatly indebted to Hanna for her expert touch and that she took a chance with me. Were it not for her, it is very likely that this book would never have been written.

I also want to thank the following people for their friend-

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Patil, Rohan Patki, Basharat Peer, Dan Pimlott, Snigdha Poonam, Dino Prevete, Manju Rajan, Prasad Ramamurthy, Eric Randolph, Anjali Raval, Stéphane Reissfelder, Andrea Rodrigues, Rosy, Kevin Conroy Scott, David Shaftel, Naina Shah, Mihir Sharma, Varun Sood, Mehul Srivastava, Margherita Stancati, Flora Stubbs, Aishwarya Subramanyam, Priya Tanna, Hannah Thistlethwaite, Ben Thompson, Heather Timmons, Héloïse Toffaloni, Colin Walker, Aarti Wig, and Marco Zolli.

When I was out on the field I relied on the help of numerous talented interpreters:

I am deeply indebted to the talented Suresh Panjabi, whose knowledge of Bundelkhand and rapport with Sampat made him invaluable to me. Suresh and I spent countless hours together on the road, visiting small, remote mud villages. We regularly skipped lunch and returned home after dark – not ideal in an area known for banditry. Still, Suresh never complained. He had my back and was fully invested in the project, knowing that any success in this endeavour would be his, too. His contributions to this book have been immense, and I am grateful to him for all of his excellent work.

Unnati Tripathi, a gifted interpreter and researcher, was also a blessing. She was particularly good at conveying the nuances of people's speech and was a fountain of insightful observations. Unnati also made numerous astute suggestions about chapters she read and had a thorough, rigorous approach to work that I admired and benefited from greatly. I am also grateful to her for throwing herself into the project so quickly after we met, which was unfortunately only in the latter stages of research, and for her remarkable ability to hit the ground running.

Sanghmitra Ghosh, an incredibly talented interpreter and translator, came to my rescue in the final months of my research. Mita turned around audiotapes with incredible speed and efficiency when I went out to Bundelkhand on my own to conduct interviews. Although we never met in person, which I still regret, I always knew I could rely on her, even when the workload was immense. I do not know what I would have done without her.

Towards the end of my reporting, Seema Gurnani, my 'translator in residence', went through hours and hours of audiotapes and video footage from Sahara Samey TV, churning out translations for demanding deadlines. Seema, now a good friend, was indispensable to me, and I am so grateful that she stepped into my life when she did.

Of course, all of this tremendous activity, which drew in so many people, would have been in vain had I not found an editor who believed this story needed to be told. Alane Salierno Mason at W. W. Norton had a compelling vision for the book, and thanks to her it evolved far beyond what I ever expected. I want to thank Alane for her patience, wisdom, and that she granted me the time I needed to complete my writing and research. I am also grateful to Denise Scarfi, an incredibly talented assistant editor at W. W. Norton, who brought sparkle to the manuscript. Also Jessica Purcell, publicity manager at W. W. Norton, for making sure people noticed the fruits of our labour.

There are two superb literary agents who deserve to be thanked. First, Leslie Kaufman, who spotted my story in *Slate* and saw the potential in it. Leslie worked with me in the early months of the proposal before leaving her literary agency for another calling – the medical profession. I remain

ever-grateful to her for planting this seed and wish her all the best for her new career. After Leslie's departure I had the good fortune of meeting Sophie Lambert at Conville & Walsh. Sophie is everything an author could want from an agent, and I owe more to her than I can say here. I am particularly grateful for her superb edits of early drafts and her endless ideas and feedback. Her responsiveness over the phone and email kept me sane in what can be a daunting process. At Tibor Jones, my gratitude goes to James Pusey, for his fabulous work on foreign rights, Sophie Hignett, and Kevin Conroy Scott.

Of course, I would not be writing these words right now if it weren't for my exceptional parents, Khalid and Marian Khan. Apart from their love, they placed in my hands one of the greatest gifts of all: a stellar education, without which I would not have been able to embark on this project. As time goes by, my appreciation for their gifts and sacrifices deepens; I hope they are proud of what I chose to do with the opportunities they gave me. My brother and sister, Zahra and Karim, inspired me throughout the time in which I wrote the book. Seeing them pursue their dreams, armed with talents and self-belief, gave me the courage to pursue my own.

And finally, how do I thank my loving husband, James Fontanella-Khan, for all he has done and continues to do? I search for adequate words, but find only one that echoes into time: Anëssuau.

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