



RED LIGHT DESPATCH

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DELHI, KOLKATA, AND FORBESGANJ (BIHAR)

My Dreams

My Own Boutique

Kajal, 16 years

Delhi: My name is Kajal. I am 16 years old and a resident of Dharampura. I dropped out of school two years back because it was not being possible for me to continue with my education because of the financial conditions I come from. But I started learning stitching and tailoring at the centre in Dharampura where the didi comes and teaches me.

My dream is to grow up and become a Stitching & Tailoring teacher. I want to own a boutique one day and have employees work together. I will open a boutique here in my community itself and that day will be the happiest day in my life and I will know that yes, I have done it.

I not only want to learn these skills and master them but I also want to teach other girls. This will help them become independent. They could stitch at homes and make an earning out of it.

I will also hire some of the students whom I will teach. We all together would work hard and make an earning for our living. I also dream to fly on an airplane once. I have never been on one ever. Maybe one day when I will become rich and successful, I will travel in an airplane.

Clearing Class X is Just the First Step

Jyoti, 16 years

Forbesganj: My Name is Jyoti Khatun. I am a resident of Uttari Rampur (Red Light Area). In other words, I am the daughter of Biwi Fatma, who mainly fights for the development of those girls and women who are victims and trapped in the marsh like prostitution.

From the very beginning, I have a desire I will read more and more and by doing so, I will be an example for my community and I gradually started to take steps to reach my aim. It is very difficult to do this where I come from as most of the people I know and also most of my friends have already dropped out from school or are planning to do so very soon. And this is a little demotivating for me. But I also was very clear, that I cannot become like them I have to

make a life for myself and I knew that I will work hard for it somehow.

A few days ago when I wake up every morning and would go to school, then I only passed through the Red Light Area and at that point of time, many boys used to tease me, but I would go to school all day without being distracted. I could not let these affect me and steal from me my goal.

I am also thankful to Apne Aap Organization, because one year ago, I told Martin Bhaiya and Gargi di that I am very weak in few subjects, at that time, they arranged tuition for me and I successfully passed in the 10th Board examination.

(Continued on page 6)

Dancing My Way to Happiness

"A World Outside My Home"

Uma Das

Kolkata: I am Uma Das. I am 21 yrs old. I am from Munshiganj which is a red light area. I am learning dance from very long time here. I participated in different dance programme. Likewise I participated in a Programme named as "Flash Mob".

For this flash mob, I and seven more girls from Apne Aap did rehearsal for 4 days. On the first day, It was good to interact with the Didis (the trainers), although there was fear inside of me because they were talking in English. I was feeling shy because I can't talk in English. But the dance movements which they taught to us were very easy to catch and also dance makes me the most happy and that is something which I absolutely love. *(Continued on page 5)*

Column
Volunteer Journal
**First Impressions of
Activism in My
Motherland**

- Sameera Rizvi

Delhi: The epicenter of archaic patriarchal values head-to-head with values of modernity and empowerment. Whether true or not, this is the reputation that the great city has earned for itself around the world, especially as of the December 16th disaster, the Jyoti Singh Pandey incident. As a student who was first inspired by documentaries about confronting oppressive cultural practices in the Subcontinent, Apne Aap was perfect place for me to intern. After just beginning my internship, my first impressions thus far have shattered any romanticism about what it is to be an activist, and broken stereotypes about what interns do.

This week's field visit to Dharmapura had a much different tone than my first. There was a domestic violence case in nearby Prem Nagar, in which a young woman, who shall be here-in referred to as Zainab, had been hospitalized after being beaten by her husband. I learned that Prem Nagar is a village which has been traditionally sustained on inter-generational prostitution; a system

in which daughter-in-laws are expected to begin prostitution as soon as they bear their first child.

Zainab has not yet conceived, supposedly delaying impending duty as a woman of Prem Nagar. We arrived first to the field office to be briefed by Sunita, Field Coordinator. Zainab had contacted Sunita to seek advice and support. We had no idea about her condition but knew that her physician was not acknowledging domestic violence in her medical examinations, which was important because she wanted to file a warning with the police department to keep Karan* in line in the future.

The team arrived at the hospital where Zainab and her close relatives were staying. Upon meeting the girl, we inquired into her health and diagnosis. This was not the first or second time she had been beaten... Zainab was an outspoken girl who would not obey the whims of her husband; it's just that this time he had gone too far, the beatings were severe enough for hospitalization. Tragically, domestic violence is otherwise an unrecognized norm in most homes and barely warrants attention. Karan* was afraid when he was contacted by Sunita, who knew him well before the incident; he did not want to be thrown in jail or prosecuted.

I noted that this is where Apne Aap's role and importance comes

into play. Most women who want to speak out do not have the support to do so, because alone they will be struck down again and again. Now add the presence of a third party equipped with education and confidence, then the perpetrator will have to stop and consider his or her actions. I know that the villagers resent outsiders who come in and try to change the *modus operandi*, meaning that it's not always safe for anyone involved in raising their voice. The Apne Aap staff has endured more than their share of sticks and stones, literally. However, sitting in that hospital room knowing that this young girl was getting the attention of her abusive husband with the help of the team I was surrounded by, was empowering for me on a personal level as a student activist.

On a sobering note, Zainab should be ready to be discharged from the hospital, having escaped debilitating physical injury. But before we left, we came to find out the root cause of Zainab's constant punishments... she will be beaten until she agrees to start prostitution.

Sameera Rizvi studied Economics and International Development at the University of Maryland, College Park. After graduating, she decided to spend a year volunteering in South Asia to pursue her interests and learn the ins-and-outs of the development field

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Op/Ed : “Fighting for the ‘Right Not to be a Prostitute’” - An interview with Ruchira Gupta

The following is an excerpt from an interview with Ruchira Gupta conducted by Kathambi Kinoti from Association for Women’s Right In Development (AWID).

AWID: You prefer to call the women you work with 'women in prostitution' rather than 'sex workers' as is more common. Why is this?

RG: Apne Aap members use the term 'women in prostitution' rather than 'sexworkers' for adults and the term 'prostituted child' instead of 'child prostitutes' or 'child sex-workers' for girls and boys. We do not believe that prostitution is a profession. It is a forced occupation.

The term 'sex-worker' is a misnomer for several reasons:

1. It sterilizes the inherently exploitative nature of prostitution and invalidates the women's traumatic experiences of subjugation, degradation and pain.
2. It also naturalizes the sexual exploitation of women and children and makes it socially acceptable.
3. The term 'sex-worker' makes it convenient for governments to ignore the structural social, economic and political policies that force women into prostitution. Very often governments, policy makers and buyers of prostituted sex argue that women choose prostitution as a work option over working in sweatshops, domestic servitude or other forms of hard or cheap labour. They forget, or choose to make invisible the fact that for women, other higher income options are limited, and prostitution and pornography remain among the more highly paid occupations

available to women. They also fail to consider that economic and social policies make other lucrative employment unavailable to women and that gender discrimination and occupational segregation funnel women into particular occupations.

4. Calling prostitution 'sex-work' categorizes it as a kind of work, yet it cannot be categorized as work because it disconnects the self from the activity. Prostitution always involves penetration of the body. Apne Aap members see their sexuality as an integral part of themselves, and feel they are selling themselves when their bodies are sold for sex.

To cope with the experience, many women in prostitution detach themselves emotionally from their bodies- effectively segmenting themselves, or entering into out of body experiences. So beside risking disease or death they suffer from the deep psychological trauma of alienation from their own bodies. There are also other differences between work and prostitution;

- a) While labour movements can and do guarantee certain minimum conditions and standards for workers, providing for energy and time needed for the worker to be a fulfilled human being, prostitution inherently cannot do so. For instance, all labour movements strive for minimum wages. In prostitution there is no guarantee of minimum wages, as the price of a woman varies with age, time of night, and location. Moreover, in brothel-based sex there is no such thing as minimum wages. For the first five years the brothel owner owns the woman or child, keeps her like a bonded slave and spends an amount to keep her in a subsistence condition.

For the next five years, she may keep half of what she earns and later she is allowed to keep all that she earns but her earning capacity diminishes.

- b) All labour movements aspire to certain minimum working conditions. In prostitution, all women face violence that cannot be legislated away as they are ultimately alone with the buyer of prostituted sex. In both brothel-based and non-brothel based prostitution, women are commonly forced to speed up the process of earning more money by servicing an increasing number of buyers, sometimes up to 20 a day. They are also forced to provide all kinds of services and high-risk activities like sex without a condom as most often they have no negotiating power. They are kept locked up in brothels and have no access to medical care or education. Their children lay on the floor while they service their buyers. They live in small rooms with barred windows end up suffering from insomnia, trauma, cigarette burns, jaundice, tuberculosis, cigarette burns, HIV/AIDS and trauma. They often undergo several abortions. While some of these conditions can be regulated in brothel-based prostitution, they cannot be regulated in street-based prostitution at all.

- c) The third five years (ages 25-30): After ten years of physical abuse, malnutrition and drug and alcohol dependency, the earning capacity of the women diminishes. At this time, they want to leave prostitution, but do not have the life-skills or the physical health to do so. They have no choice.

Diary of a Social Worker *Sudipta Dasgupta Majumdar*

Kolkata: “Prostitution is not a choice but an absence of choice based on gender, class, caste, ethnic and race inequalities that the sex industry exploits.”

Nine years ago when I started my journey as a working women that time I never ever imagine that the story behind Sex Trafficking. In Cinema I just saw the vulnerability but I can not touch the real ground of Sex Trafficking.

But I get a chance to serve my service in this tough and challenging field through Apne Aap women world wide, where I can understand what is Prostitution, Inter- generational Prostitution, what is the definition of Women in Prostitution, Women At risk. I learned here that how to face challenges and how to solve this.

At present I am working in a Sonagachi Red light area as a project officer. Here we have a center. Few women visited our center interact with us and share there real life story with us. They believe us and now they all are my friend. Here I just share one real life stories which are very touching.

Here I met with a girl who is now 19 years old, she passed Madhaymik exam. Her father sold her only for 500 rupees. She is very intelligent student, she wants to be higher study, her father said that he took her for a higher school Admission.

She believed her father, but the result is that she is now a prostituted Women.

She said that I don't believe any body, My father who is given me birth if that person sold me then every one can sold me for any thing. I love to hate my self. But I do not try to subside, I want to live my life, and enjoyed the pain. Somebody who is enjoying Pain, which is enough to saying what, is called Absence of choice.

Every time when I entered the Sonagachi Field I just look at the women's Eyes, where you can get

**“A Safe Space where
the Women Realize
Their Freedom...”**

easily Very Starkly Make-up with a sweet smile, but when you started talking with her, that time you can get only the reality of violence. You have to smile. Because the last thing I want to make these women feel, is that I pity them because pity is in fact one of the lat emotions I feel for them. I, in fact admire their tenacity, their strength and their want to do anything to make ends meet for their children, so that their children don't have to face the life, the women had to.

You have to sell your body, just because you have not any other option to get out from this area, Maximum Women thinks that society did not Allow them, Did not recognize them, so that the only way to live life is regular basis Stand in the road

with a sweet and attracting smile.

Sonagachi is the largest red light area in South Asia, and our center is very new to in this area, but still this center is like a safe space for them, where they can realize the real meaning of freedom, here they chit chat with us, and also other women. And it is a little foot step to end Sex trafficking.

One has to really be there to see and understand the predicament of these women as well as the life that these women are leading. I sometimes reflects on these interactions that I have had with the women and fail to understand whether to feel privileged for the life that I am leading or whether to feel bad that I have so much and they don't. But at the end of the day, I do feel satisfied, that I was at least able to extend some help to them, with my limited knowledge and resources and for this inner satisfaction, I wish to thank Apne Aap.

'I Still Cannot Believe We Made a Movie'

Dolly Mahato, 17 years

Kolkata: My name is Dolly Mahato and I study in class XI. I generally come to the Apne Aap centre in Khidderpore to learn stitching, computer, dance, and also take part in the various events that happen here.

This year I took part in a Video Workshop which took place here from 17th June onwards for 4 days. Everyday we had to give in time between 9.30 a.m. to 6.30 p.m.

On the 1st day we met Aseem Asha Sir and his assistant Mushtaq. We were then shown 15 true story movies from Delhi which was made from Delhi and these were shown to us so that we can understand what kind of movies we are expected to make.

We were then divided into 8 groups and we were asked to name the groups after famous women fighters and were then asked to write our own scripts. I was chosen as the leader for my group.

The next day I learnt how to record our voice, for which we needed a quiet environment. With a microphone we recorded our beautiful voices on the computer which took almost the entire day.

The third day we learnt how to do a photo shoot and we clicked pictures from the camera in different locations. We went to places far from our houses, near the lake and river. We also took videos near a waste disposal place. We were also provided with lunch in the centre during the entire workshop.

In the evening Aseem sir took all the video footage, scripts and recordings so that a complete and wholesome movie could be made.

These 4 days of the monsoons were extremely well spent by us and one that all of us who attended this workshop are really going to cherish throughout our lives.

This was the first time we had learnt how to make a video and I am sure that it is going to be something which will be extremely helpful for us in the future.

I still cannot believe we made a movie, just like the kinds we see on television in our homes. I am really excited to see what the final movie looks like and how all our efforts have finally paid. I felt very happy to be a part of this workshop.

(continued from page 1: 'The World Outside')

We performed the dance on 22nd of June, in six different places- Park Street, Princep Ghat, Victoria Memorial, Quest Mall, Forum, and New Market. We felt very good that there were different media to cover our performance. Lots of people were watching our dance and re-

ceiving the messages through that. As our dance was nice; we had performed the same dance thrice in a same place. Luckily there was no rain on that day and many people could see our program. We were happy that our performance was completed nicely. Before that I did not know "what does the word Flash Mob mean?" After doing the

programme I got some idea but still it was not clear. Then I asked the meaning to didi in the office; then it became clear to me. I want to thank Lina aunty.

It a good experience for me and the other girls also and enjoyed. I, myself want to organize such program with the children. And I want to lead the whole thing by myself.

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My First Day in Apne Aap *Pankhuri Sehgal*

Delhi: Eagerly waiting for my joining day to come, I finally woke up to the day when I'll be going to start my journey in Apne Aap Women Worldwide. I was very enthusiastic and optimistic, and at the same time proud that I'll be working for a cause, I always wanted to work for.

Considering myself a feminist in the first place made me feel more comfortable with my new colleagues and staff, since I easily got assimilated in my new environment amongst people who were different from one another, but at the same time similar in their battle to end sex trafficking.

After few ice-breaking sessions with my fellow colleagues, I was given an induction session from my mentors and that's where I felt and believed that I have come to the right place. I realised how the ground reality is so different from what we perceive from the different means and modes of communication we have in our lives today.

I remember how I wanted to bombard Swati Di with my questions and the doubts which were rising every moment as I dwelt more into the issue, and how Apne Aap has been working extensively since many years to put an end to this menace of flesh trade.

Understanding my curiosity Swati Di

'It's Just the Beginning and there is a Long Way to Go...'

patiently elaborated on certain things until, I figured out that faint smile on her face that it's just the beginning and there is a long way to go.

She then asked me to watch the documentary, "Selling of inno-

cents". I was asked to sit in the library which at once drew my attention. It was a mini world in itself; a storehouse of knowledge, a collection of books and movies very precisely selected by the founder of Apne Aap, whom we all refer to as Ruchira Di.

I watched some of the documentaries and read some articles. Although, it wasn't that it was the first time I was reading or watching something on this issue that I was so passionate about but yes, it did made me feel differently that very day.

Amidst the warm, compassionate and pleasing atmosphere of Di's and Dada's in Apne Aap which will never make one feel an outsider, I also realised the sheer amount of commitment the organisation upheld for the cause and I too, was happily ready to pull up my sleeves to be a part of their struggle.

(continued from page 1) **Clearing Class X is Just the First Step**

Now, I want to study further in Patna and become something, I want to make my community as well as my parents and my family proud and I want to take forward the work of my mother. My mother is not much literate and that is why she involving herself in such work which is very dangerous, but when education is required in some work, my mother become quiet and that time, I saw her to sit depressed. I know that my mother has really struggled and worked hard to get me to where I am right now. Nothing would make me happier than seeing a beautiful smile on my mother's face and knowing that I am the reason behind this.

By study, I wish to fulfill her dreams and make my community proud so that they can say proudly that

Jyoti is the daughter of our community. The very same community where I have grown up, where the education of a girl is so difficult to happen and I want to set an example and show everyone, that educating girl is not bad, is not tough and that it can happen and that it has happened. I want to show to my community that I, Jyoti Khatoon will grow up and become a Collector and that educating me was not my mother's bad idea, but in fact this idea will be useful for the other girl fights also who are stopped from going to school. They will now be able to fight in their houses when they are stopped from going to the schools.

I want to thank Apne Aap for pushing me towards my goals and helping me in each step to meet my goal. Now I have cleared class X and hope to clear many more horizons in the future.

“The Solution to Challenging Rape Can Be Answered in two Words: Challenging Patriarchy”

Namitha Bhandare, Women’s Rights Activist and Gender Columnist , MINT

- as transcribed by Sameera Rizvi (Intern)

Delhi: “You cannot challenge rape unless you’re ready to challenge patriarchy”

The root of the rape issue. Patriarchy can be described as a social conditioning which promotes notions of power, dominance and entitlement to men, who in turn demand subservience from women. What we must do now is instead of expecting others to take on the burden each one of us must begin to question our assumptions about gender and adopt a **zero-tolerance** attitude against harmful societal norms.

“We’re not just talking about rape; we’re talking about all forms of oppression. We have to stop telling our daughters to adjust, and allowing husbands a slap”. The legal framework in India is in place, but it will only work if we change our mindsets. “Today a guy who stalks will become tomorrow’s acid attacks... the guy who gropes today

will become tomorrow’s rapist. Where are you going to begin tackling this problem?”

Here is how rape is being challenged today and what must happen in order to conquer rape:

1. **Breaking the silence after rape:** Increased media coverage on rape has encouraged reporting violence because women now have a channel to be heard. The media has empowered women by shifting the shame from the victim to the perpetrator, and in order to challenge rape it is important for us to stand by victims rather than shaming them. There is a new courage among Indian women to stand up and protest; this is a positive change in Indian society.
2. **Change in the definition of and consciousness rape:** Largely due to the mass protests following the Jyoti Singh Pandey case last December, the legal terms describing rape and assault have

been changed to accommodate a wider range of violence (marital rape, use of objects, recognition of Dalit rapes). Furthermore, use of the word rape has become normalized. Rather than couching it in euphemisms as we have before, we are acknowledging the severity and reality of rape.

3. **Educating our children:** How we bring up our daughters to speak up and our sons to believe they are less entitled, is really up to us. The process of social change is long and difficult, which is why each one of us has to be responsible and take accountability otherwise we are all complicit in our culture.
4. **A challenge to the women’s movement:** Be in it for the long-term. When an NGO takes up a case on behalf of a woman, they must stick around to see the case to its conclusion.
5. **The media’s role:** Media messaging and journalism can create or break stereotypes about

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Poems

The Jungle's Peacock

The Koel makes the ku ku noise,
The peacock calls ki ki,
The birds do chi chi chi,
When its dawn in the jungle.

The Skylark makes a piu piu
sound,
The parrot sings te te,
Everyone together makes these
sounds,
When its dawn in the jungle

- Nitu Kumari

Pitcher

My pitcher is round in shape,
Sitting on a wooden table,
The water in it is very cold,
Which is filled daily by my grand mother.

My grandmother had bought it,
And decorated it with many flowers,
The pitcher smiled slowly,
And it made the entire room smell nice.

- Neetu



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