



APNE AAP WOMEN WORLDWIDE –an initiative to end sex trafficking

RED LIGHT DESPATCH

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Visit to Rajasthan

‘Hindu and Muslim Nutts are equally marginalized’

by Mohammad Kalam

Alwar (Rajasthan): When I was a child, I used to sit on my father’s lap and hear stories about Nutts. They were in Rana Pratap’s army and had to go into hiding when the Mughals defeated them. They were not agriculturists, so now being devoid of the traditional mode of livelihood, gradually they became nomads. They were warriors and had good physique. They used to put up game shows of rope walking, balancing, archery etc. However, since their women are very beautiful, the kings and the nobility started exploiting these women sexually. Some kings and *zamindars* donated land to them so that they could settle and entertain the nobility. In fact, we have been told that behind the creation of every Nutt or Bediya settlement, some king or *zamindar* is responsible. Over time, these settlements turned into red light areas and the communities have gradually been forced to take up prostitution and trafficking as the only means of livelihood. My father used to talk about it with a heavy heart and he always used to cry at the end. I have always dreamt of meeting other Nutts living in Rajasthan to find out how they are, what are they doing for their livelihood? Are they in the same condition as we are?

Tinku di used to tell me about Nutts and similar communities living in other places in India and we had decided that we would go to Rajasthan to have a first-hand exposure of Nutts there. We told Ruchira di that we wanted to go on a study trip to Rajasthan and meet members of the communities that are forced to take up prostitution and trafficking as their livelihood. We also thought of visiting other NGOs working there to share our experiences.

In November, after the ISF, Ruchira di told us to go to Rajasthan. Our first stop was to Alwar. Dr. Virendra Vidrohi of Matasya Mewat Shiksha Evam Vikas Sansthan told us that there are 42 red light pockets in Alwar of which 25 are officially recognized and 17 are unrecognized. He took us to the Tijara block, 40 Km. from Alwar.

We left the highway and took a byroad into village Kalgaon, where there is a village called Kanjar ki Dhani or the habitat of Kanjars where people from the Kanjar

(they call themselves as Nutt Kanjars sometimes) community live. There are around 30 families with around 2000 people living in the village. The place is far away from the main road and we were wondering who are the buyers and how do they get there?

When we entered the area the men were sitting under the trees, drinking and were playing cards. We introduced ourselves. They were hesitant and apprehensive initially. But after some time they became relaxed. The houses were scattered around a big field

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A Devdasi is...

by Jammva Mestri

DEVDAASI means... wearing a moti (bead)

DEVDAASI means... to be born in the Madar Community (in this community one girl child has to be devoted to god)

DEVDAASI means... devoted to God

DEVDAASI means... to earn

DEVDAASI means... *dhandha karna* (prostitution)

DEVDAASI means... exploitation of women

DEVDAASI means... *zindagi kharab hona* (ruining of life)

DEVDAASI means... worshipping Yellama (goddess)

DEVDAASI means... taking up the responsibility to look after the family

DEVDAASI means... for one month acting as a widow (a tradition of “breaking bangles” and living as a widow for one month)

DEVDAASI means... to behave like a male member in the family

DEVDAASI means... not having your own dreams

My mother

by Sangeeta (As told to Tinku)

Forbesgunge: My name is Sangeeta. I am 8-years old. I study in lower KG section of Apne Aap School. I have one younger brother and sister who come to attend the crèche everyday. I have been coming to the school regularly since August. During this time, I have learnt the Hindi alphabet, simple words in Hindi and simple sums. I like the painting class and the music class the most. I am happy that I can come to school now.

Earlier my parents, especially my mother, was very reluctant to send us to school. She used to warn us not to go near the school. I, along with a few girls from our village, used to roam around while other girls of the village used to go to school. They were our friends. We used to play together, but soon I saw that they had learnt lot of things which I could not. I used to feel bad and shy away from them. We used to play day and night and we all, our brothers and sisters, tried to spend as much time as possible outside the house. We used to run scared because my parents used to drink from morning to night and the more they got drunk the more they would beat us. They had started drinking more ever since my eldest sister who was in the “dhanda” returned from Purnea. She had gone crazy. Used to drink bottles of cough syrup through out the day. She could not stay inside the house and was found dead one night under the mango tree in front of the school land. Doctors said that she died of taking an overdose of pain killer tablets.

My parents started drinking even more after her death. By that time Geeta, my other sister had joined the “dhanda” and she picked up the habit of drinking too. Life became so difficult for the three of us. Kalam sir and Ravi sir used to come to our house often and try and persuade our parents to send us to school. My mother would say “yes” in front of them but would not allow us to go once they were gone. She was apprehensive that they would take us away from her. Some people used to scare us about the school. But I found those of my friends who studied there were very happy. I envied them. How they ate together, played carom or badminton during the recess and practice physical drills every morning. I also envied them their dance classes.

Everybody at Apne Aap—Kalam sir, Veena didi, Meena didi and Fatima didi—started scolding our mother for neglecting us by not sending us to school. But mother was adamant. She would not send us to school at any cost. One day my younger brother met with an

The world outside

‘The Basic difference is Dignity’

by Asma (as told to Sudebi Thakurta)

Kolkata: My favorite color is black. I cannot really say why I like it. But I like it. I have only female friends and no male friend. My friends are mainly the ones at Apne Aap. But besides that I do not have other associates. I do not have any dream as such, but I just wish to have a house of my own.

Even in my dreams I only see the day when I realized that I had been sold into prostitution. I cannot get rid of that dream. I was around 12 years old at that time. One of my neighbors took me to Kolkata promising me a good job and sold me to a landlady in the Bowbazar area. I did not understand anything at that age. In the first six months, I saw girls dressing up and standing. After six months, a local girl brought in two men with her, one for herself and one for me. I cannot

forget that day. I just cannot.

I really do not like talking about my past and brooding. It has been 25-26 years since I was sold into the red light area. I do not feel like talking and remembering those terrible moments.

If you know the difference between heaven and hell you would realize the difference between the two worlds—inside the red-light area and outside. The basic difference between the two is in dignity. A woman’s dignity is constantly shattered inside the red light area. Maybe people outside look down upon women in prostitution, but they have honour and integrity. I would prefer talking about the lovely pretty world outside. I have my respect in this centre. Now I feel proud that I go into the red light area to work for a different cause. And not as a prostitute.

accident. He was hit by a speeding motorcycle while playing on the street. Amina didi, Meena didi and other people rushed in and Veena didi took him to the hospital. Every body started scolding my mother and told her that if my brother had been in school, he would not have had the accident. She cried a lot. And she took a vow in front of everybody that she would send us all to school. From next morning, we also started going to the school like the other children.

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LEARNING ABOUT MY RIGHTS

by Mumtaz (as told to Sraboni Sircar)

Kolkata: 'If your husband beats you then you should go to the local police station. But in most cases we observe that you don't do that because you think that beating you is your husband's right. But no, it is your right to stay in a violence free world,' we remember Justice Samaresh Bannerjee of the Calcutta High Court saying, when he inaugurated our legal cell in Topsia on 6th December 2006.

But how can we believe him, when from our childhood we see that the boys are treated like gold rings. We were taught to believe that the lion's share of the family's belongings is for them. Everyday from morning to night we observed that our mother worked hard but ate the least. When we faced any crisis at home our mother went to the shop or to our relative's house for credit. My father or brothers

never went. If mom said that there was nothing in the house they used filthy language and abused her. Sometime she took a job, but her health would not allow her to work continuously. She was pregnant often.

My father insists on drinking liquor every night. We always felt afraid when our father came at night because he invariably hit our mom, as a matter of right. Even then our mother would say that my father and brother were the key members of the family. We must obey them and keep them happy and give them the lion's share of the food. When our brothers grew up they also started to use filthy language against our mother and us. Sometimes they hit us and controlled our movements.

When the inauguration of the Apne Aap legal cell took place we

were very excited because we feel that our community women need this type of legal awareness for their safety—who to go to, how to get there and what to say in the police station. We need help. We are not educated and we don't know what rights women have or what rights men have.

We have had workshops after the inauguration and we learnt that a judge is the person who gives justice and that the police will listen to him. We have learnt that 'right' means that the victim will get justice and that the perpetrator will be arrested and that we can fight against violence. We have learnt that a legal cell means somebody will talk with the victim, assist her in the police station, write her case, help her get justice, intervene on her behalf and give her protection.

We went to Parliament...

by Tarun Kumar, 13 (as told to Priyanka Mukherjee)

New Delhi: We are Harijan children living in Delhi in a migrant workers colony. Though we live in Delhi, we had never seen the sites of Delhi. We go to school but are not taught science. They say no science teachers are available for our neighborhood school. We are not taught any of the fine arts-music, dancing or painting. We have now formed a youth group and we are learning science, computers and puppetry at the Apne Aap centre.

Our youth group wants to learn more- we want to be part of the mainstream. We don't need to be marginalized anymore. We live in Delhi, we should be part of what Delhi means to India. Last fortnight, sixty members of our group got a glimpse of what Delhi means to India. We went to Parliament.

We went to the Parliament museum, we got to know of our historical struggle, which started in 1885 and ended with us winning our independence in 1947.

We also had a discussion on our present ministers, like Lalu Yadav, who is our Rail Minister and Renuka Choudhary, the tourism minister. We were also

introduced to the works and ideals of great people like Mahatama Gandhiji, Sardar Vallabbhai Patel etc. We got a lot of information on their lives and work and the role they played in the independence struggle.

We also learnt that the Lok Sabha could be dissolved any time, while the Rajya Sabha is a permanent body. There are 545 seats in the Lok Sabha, as opposed to 245 seats in the Rajya Sabha. Further 2 seats of the 245 are reserved. We also saw the sand brought from moon in the parliament museum. We learnt about kings of earlier times and medicine men. We learnt about the barter system, where people exchanged food and clothes and animals. We saw a beautiful museum at the parliament.

On the same day we went to the Nehru Planetarium -we learnt about stars and the solar system. We learnt about new technologies and new planets in the solar system. We learnt about new research and findings. I now want to learn science even more. Maybe, when I grow up, I will be a scientist or a politician.

Women from red-light area run free kitchen for friends

by Shashavva and Padma (as told to Swati Sonavane)

Mumbai: Shanti (name changed) is a 40-year-old woman living with HIV/AIDS from the 1st lane of Kamatipura in Mumbai's red-light district. She has no family. She has no home. She begs on the street. She was thrown out of the brothel when she turned positive and was getting old.

She goes for a bath to the Bombay Central State Transport Bus Depot. She goes for breakfast to the Gaurabai hospital, for lunch to an NGO and for dinner to our center.

We prepare dinner for about 45-50 women like her everyday. We ourselves are from this area. In 2001, HIV and AIDS entered our lanes. Women fell sick, and many were pushed into the streets. They had not eaten for days, let alone digest the medicines, which were being handed out. We knew many of the women—they were our friends, sisters and colleagues. I, and some of the other women from here decided to do something. We put in our own money, collected funds from the area's public

servants, social workers and even Gharwalis (brothel madams) and started a free kitchen for our sisters. We called it the Asha Mahila Sansthan Nutrition Programme.

Initially, we felt that our programme would collapse due to lack of funds. We approached NGOs, societies and foundations for help—we were given space by the municipality and we were given utensils and initial support by a welfare society.

We then created a committee with a President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer along with some trustees. We opened our own bank account. We divided our work among sub-committees—one to buy ration and one to supervise the programme. We set up a shift system for cooking, serving food and cleaning. Four persons are responsible for the entire week—two to cook food and the other two to serve food. The shift changes every eight days.

We serve rice, dal, one vegetable, roti and some fruits. It

costs approx- Rs.30 per plate. Every Friday we give the women egg curry as well. Prostituted and exploited women, affected by HIV/AIDS, T.B. and old age, come for the dinner. For many, this is the only meal they get in the day. Our free kitchen opens at 6.00 pm every day.

We provide free medical assistance to the women as well. That compels us to provide them good diets too. The programme is running very well, the only problem is we don't have enough money as more and more women want to eat dinner and we feel that once a week our women must get to eat non-vegetarian food, which we are unable to provide at present.

Some of the women who came to our free kitchen have recovered and have even found jobs in some NGOs. Some have been able to put their children into boarding schools. They have got a new lease of life.

Through this entire journey we have gained a lot of confidence in ourselves. In a difficult situation we stick together as a team.

The Park Circus Station

by Ritu (as told to Sraboni Sircar)

Kolkata(Topsia): The Park Circus station is full of people. Congested like anything. The station looks like a big fair. One day, from this Park Circus station I started on my honeymoon and ended up in a brothel in Mumbai. I was 14 then.

I come from a very poor family of 16 people. I used to work as a maid in Sealdah. I would go there with my friends in the morning and after finishing work return home in the evening. One day on my way to work a young, handsome boy proposed to me. Our meeting point was Park Circus station. He put me on a train and said we would get married in Mumbai and took me straight to a brothel. I was kept in captivity there for two years.

Now I am back in Kolkata after being rescued by the police. But I shiver, when I pass the Park Circus station. I feel uncomfortable and unsafe. The place is very untidy with lots of unused things. Some notorious

people from our community have a regular den in the Park Circus station, eve teasing, drinking and taking powder (drugs). I avoid that station after 6 p.m. The place is always full of strangers who look suspicious and cruel.

Park Circus station is one of the most important junction points of three main train lines- Canning, Diamond Harbour and Laksmikantapur. It is also a handover point for traffickers of girls sold into prostitution. Both sides of the Park Circus railway track have shanties where sometimes the traffickers keep the girls for final handover. Most of the shanties' residents are migrants who have arrived in Kolkata by trains that run along this track. Everyday more than 5000 people use the Park Circus station. Park Circus and the adjoining area are vast and from here easily one can go to Howrah or Sealdah or to the city.

My Journey to Delhi and Back

by Quresha Biwi (As told to Tinku Khanna)

Forbesganj: I have been to Delhi earlier. So initially when I was told to go to Delhi to attend the meeting at ISF, I was not interested at all. I have seen Lal Qila, Qutub Minar, Jantar Mantar, everything. So what's new there to see? We were told us that the meeting is very significant as there will be people from all over the world. All over the world! On top of it, my brother Kalam is going to address a meeting! I thought that if by participating in the meeting I can share with such a big crowd the plights of being born as Nutt, I must not miss the opportunity.

A meeting was called in the community. Many women were scared and said no. Finally it was decided that Fatima, Amina and I will go from Apne Aap Forbesganj Mahila Mandal while Fatima's mother will go on behalf of the Nutts in Nepal. Some of the men and women from the community started teasing us, "Look, there go the leaders!" We have got so used to being outside the society, that we are afraid of any close contacts outside the community. Therefore, some were very apprehensive about what are we going to talk about. So many heated discussions and debates went on in the mohallah, that at one point I got irritated and told Kalam "Leave me out!" Even Amna Bhabhi got frustrated. Only Fatima

from among us said that she would go alone even if we back out. What an irony! Fatima herself could not go finally as she fell ill.

Then there was this reservation problem. We could not get any reservation to Delhi. Finally Kalam got the Tatkal tickets for us. First we had to go to Katihar by the chhoti line (narrow gauge) train. After that from Katihar, we had to take another train to Delhi. The train's departure time was 1:30 am. It was a winter night; we had had to start very early to catch the train at Katihar. Though we have got our tickets reserved, when we reached there another group with the same reservation was there. We were very worried. How could we travel for two nights without sleeping? Then the ticket checker came and told us that we had been upgraded automatically to the air conditioned (AC) compartment. For the first time in our lives we had boarded an AC train! The compartment was so bright and clean! I wondered why don't they keep the ordinary trains so clean. The people pay for the seats in those as well. Anyway, since it was an AC, there were no vendors. So we missed half the fun. And at the end of the day, we got very bored!

Any way we reached Delhi. We were put up at

the Delhi Apne Aap centre at Subhash camp. The walls of the room had been painted so brightly by the children! We simply loved it. Asma, Janaki, Tinku and two young girls from Kolkata, Tamanna and Rina were already there and there was the wonderful, warm team of Delhi, Neelam, Prabha, Arati.

The first day, we took a conducted sight seeing tour around the city. The next day we went to ISF ground. My, My! The exhibition ground itself only is as big as our Forbesganj, and people dressed in traditional costumes started coming in a stream dancing, singing and cheering loudly. There were so many events going on simultaneously. It was very difficult to make out anything distinctly. But everything together made it so lively! I was walking along the ground and one group from Jharkhand was dancing and suddenly they pulled us all in.

I have heard that they are adivasis (indigenous tribes)! I was wondering, how free and fearless these women are! They are dancing with such ease. In our "society", you are always looked down upon if you sing and dance and how they torture women in our "society"! I felt ashamed at the double standard of our "society"!

Apne Aap had a stall. Everyday, we had our duties by turn. Then there

was Apne Aap's meeting where Kalam spoke besides many others. I was crying secretly. My brother Kalam addressed such large audience! So many dignitaries were listening to his speech. All of this had been possible only because he joined Apne Aap. I liked the speech of the woman from the Badi community the most. I was so happy that so many people were thinking of and addressing our problems! Something would definitely happen. Things are going to change for us.

Then there was the beautiful puppet show by the children from the Delhi centre. The show was about police raids and how the madams go scot-free! The show was rightly named "Aparadhi Kaun?" (Who are the criminals?) The show became so popular that the children had to repeat the performance three times that day! I have seen so many dances by so many groups, so many plays and heard so many songs! They all were so different from what I have heard or seen so far! I felt sad leaving and at the same time felt very happy! Had I not come, I would have missed such great fun! I would have never imagined that such a life existed outside our Forbesganj. *Main kuain ki mendhak hi rah jati* (I would have remained a frog in the well).

Ask the Doctor - *Dr Rakesh Agarwal answers*

Q: What is HIV and AIDS?

A: HIV is a virus which can infect and survive only in human beings. This virus gradually breaks down the immune system of the body or the body's ability to fight against infections leading to a condition called AIDS. AIDS is the condition where an HIV infected person's body resistance or immunity is totally destroyed and the individual becomes easily infected with different infections like diarrhea, fever, cough, chest infections, skin diseases, tuberculosis etc.

This virus is transmitted from one person to another through body fluids particularly blood, semen, vaginal secretions and breast milk. There are only four methods of transmission of this virus.

1. By having unprotected sexual intercourse which might be either vaginal, oral or anal with an infected individual. This is the commonest route of transmission. 80-85% of the infections around the world take place through this route.
2. Through infected blood and blood products or tissue transplants. This is the most dangerous method because the chances of infection are very high.
3. Through the reuse of contaminated needles and syringes or any other skin piercing instruments used for tattooing, vaccination etc.
4. Infected pregnant women can pass HIV to their babies during pregnancy or delivery as well as through breast feeding. There is 30-35% chance of the infection being passed from an infected mother to a child. 5% chance during uncomplicated pregnancy, 15-20% chance during delivery, 10-15% chance through breast milk.

The percentage of infection through different routes in India:

Sexual route	85%
Mother to Child is	5%
IDUs	5%
Blood transfusion	3-4%
Health Care needle stick	0.01%

My dreams

‘Tolerating injustice is itself an injustice’

*by Anwar, 14, carpentry student from
Forbesgunge (as told to Sahana Dasgupta)*

Kolkata: After learning my craft, I feel that I will not go into business, but will teach. I would like to uplift the Nutt community and open the doors of life for them. My wish is to make use of my knowledge.

I would like to stand on my feet, get established and take care of my family. The very first thing that I want to do for them is to shift them from the red-light area to a place with a nice environment. I want them to know how beautiful the world can be. And I also want them to have the courage to admit that the place they are in is not healthy. I would like to change the environment of the people around me. I do not want anybody to be in an unhealthy environment.

I earnestly feel that tolerating injustice is in itself an injustice.

An appeal to powerloom workers

by Arati Sahu, 13

Bhiwandi: I live in the Bhiwandi red-light area of Hanuman Tegri right in the heart of the power-loom industry. I can hear the looms working all the time. Sometimes the noise is so great, I feel as if I have gone deaf. The cotton from the looms blows in the air and sometimes we feel we cannot breath. Even when the electricity goes off, the looms go on, they switch on the generator.

Because I am a girl, and because I live in the red-light area, I have never been inside the workshops, even though they are at our doorstep. I don't think of myself as a powerloom worker, because girls cannot be powerloom workers. To be a powerloom worker is very hard, you have to continuously sit in one place. I have never seen a girl powerloom worker. Only men.

Only in the night they come to our community and when they look at me I feel ashamed of being a girl. If I were a powerloom worker I would try to tell other co-workers not to visit the red light area.

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in the centre. Each house had a courtyard in the front where women are baking chapattis. The children were playing. We learnt that most children go to school. The girls go to school till puberty. After puberty they gradually drop out. They are then prepared to be ushered into prostitution. We asked the women how the buyers get to know about the place when it is so remote. The women replied that their men folk go to the marketplaces or the dhabas where the truckers and other prospective buyers meet, contact them and bring them. It is quite a well-known place, so there are always local people creating local demand. As we were talking we saw young men coming on bikes. I discussed many issues with the village leaders and we all agreed that the government should make provisions and special reservations for the Nutt/ Kanjar/ Bediya children, who are miles away from the mainstream society.

Next day we first visited a village inhabited by the Bediya community in Alwar, called Allahpur. The Bediyas there are mainly snake charmers by profession. They are stigmatized to such an extent that they are not allowed to drink water from the village well or to use the common hand pump for water. They have to climb a mountain, so to speak, everyday to fetch water. They are very, very poor. No child goes to school nor is any medical facility available to them. We saw men gambling and drinking in the daytime. The women were busy in tending goats, collecting fuel and fetching water. We were told that an organization called Muktheadhara, run by Mr. Ratan Katyayani works among them. Basically this organisation is trying to negotiate between the villagers and the government to let the former live in that particular place and not be uprooted again. The outreach worker told us from MMSVS accompanying us that the young girls were recruited by the Nutt women living in the village for Mumbai's dance bars.

However, visiting the Nutt village just across the road was a very different experience. From the appearance the village looked very wealthy compared to the Bediya village in Allahpur. That day, there was a family function in the house of the most influential family in the village. The men and women were drunk. The men avoided us but we persuaded some women to talk to us. We were shocked at their candor. The women told us that they were engaged in prostitution for generations. They had all returned from the Mumbai dance bars as they were old now and the younger ones were in Mumbai still. I was shocked. They were so unlike the Nutt women in Bihar. They never even tried to hide that they had been prostituted and did not have any feeling of shame or guilt. I liked such candor.

From Alwar, we went to Bharatpur to meet Dr. Prem Singh Kuntal. He works among Bediyas. His

interventions are mostly in the field of HIV/AIDS. He took us to the Malla village, where Bediyas live. The prostitution racket here flourishes around the famous Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary, which attracts a lot of tourists. There we also found girls who couldn't have been over 18.

One major difference I found between the Nutts in Bihar and the Nutts/ Kanjars/ Bediyas/ bawariyas in Rajasthan is that in Bihar they all are Muslims while in Rajasthan they are Hindus. But other than religion, the Nutts in both places are equally marginalized; the children are equally deprived of education, nutrition and health. The women are in prostitution and are equally victims of violence. I promised to myself that I would work tirelessly to fight against the nexus of marginalization of communities, poverty and prostitution, be it in Bihar or in Rajasthan.

Apne Aap wishes all its readers a peaceful 2007-one with more opportunities and justice. The last year has been wracked by war, deaths and displacement. The downward spiral of poverty has marginalized women further. The defence budget has been increased and the budget to the department of women and child has been cut.

However, on New Year's eve the Prime Minister's message has said "it is incumbent on the state to take care of the weak and vulnerable for those who cannot bear the shocks of market economy". We hope this message is included in his Cabinet's policy planning at all levels. Any country, which leaves behind its women and children, not only leaves behind half its population but also harms its own future. We don't leave the world for our children, we borrow it from them.

*Ruchira Gupta,
Executive Director, Apne Aap*

Rescuing girls from prostitution is cheaper than making atomic bombs:

Shirin Ebadi

(Nobel laureate and Human Rights lawyer)

Interviewed by 12-year-old Tamanna (Secretary, Apne Aap Youth Group, Kidderpore red-light area) and 13-year-old Afsaneh (Secretary, Apne aap youth group, Topsia)

(as transcribed by Sudebi Thakurta)

Tamanna: How can we fight against human trafficking?

Shirin Ebadi: Women and children should be aware that trafficking is an injustice against them. You all have to create opportunities for yourself in this patriarchal society. I want all of you to believe that you can do better for yourselves. This belief will take you forward.

Afsaneh: But how?

Shirin Ebadi: Education is a must. You must study and also learn skills, so that you can earn for yourself. Do not depend on any one. I wish that next time I come here all of you present today should have good jobs or are doing well in school. You must make something of yourselves.

Tamanna: We will. But how will you help us? What will you do against human trafficking?

Shirin Ebadi: We have to make sure that there are places all over the world where all women and children feel safe and secure even at night. I will campaign for this.

Our only hope is public opinion, whether nationally or internationally. As a Nobel Peace Prize winner, my name is quite well known. I go on trips repeatedly to create public opinion. But, I go only to places that are independent of governments. For example, I am here in India on the invitation of your NGO, Apne Aap Women Worldwide, which works

with women who live in red light districts with their children.

I'm a human rights activist and I work only with people. Neither the Iranian government nor the Indian [government] can limit or repress small organizations like yours. On your behalf I will say wherever I can that though governments complain about not having money or resources to end sexual trafficking of women, that's only an excuse. The cost of making an atom bomb should be set against the cost of rescuing and rehabilitating girls and women trapped in prostitution.

The task for human rights defenders worldwide is not an easy one in that they hold governments accountable for transgressions and violations of human rights. You have to be prepared for strong and negative reactions when you speak up for your rights. There is a famous Persian expression that says, "You cannot enter the sea without getting wet."

Afsaneh: Is their trafficking in your country? Are there other women and girls like us?

Shirin Ebadi: Prostitution is illegal in Iran but it still exists to a large extent. When the law enforcement authorities find out about any person being trafficked, the women are punished. But the problem starts when

women have no access to money or any other opportunities. They are vulnerable to traffickers and buyers. The malady of human trafficking cannot be stopped without killing it from the root. And the root in this case is poverty and patriarchy. Once poverty and patriarchy is eradicated we can be sure that no woman will approve of selling her body.

Tamanna: What is patriarchy?

Shirin Ebadi: A society that does not accept equality between human beings. A culture, which denies the equality between men and women. It is a culture where women are sacrificed by society—unfortunately, they are the sacrifices of a flawed society. Wherever we observe the inequality of human beings, democracy is undermined and so are the rights of women.

Do you know a blood disease called hemophilia in which our blood does not clot after a wound and the afflicted person bleeds to death? Women are immune from hemophilia but are carriers of the gene and pass the illness on to their sons. Patriarchal culture is reinforced this way and in truth, women are responsible for tainting men, whom they should educate to struggle against patriarchy. That is what you can do when you become a mother.

Tamanna: How did you start working on children's rights?

Shirin Ebadi: Adults have to take care of children's rights as children cannot always do so. I was once a lawyer for a mother who lost custody of her daughter after her husband divorced here. The father and the stepmother beat the daughter so much that she died. I fought the case in court and for a change in law so that mothers could get custody of their daughters till the age of ten. I managed to get the law changed in Iran.

Afsaneh: Was it difficult?

Shirin Ebadi: Yes, it was difficult, but I believe in justice. I will always stand up for justice. I will never give up.

Tamanna: Can you repeat your name slowly for us?

Shirin Ebadi: Shirin Ebadi:

Tamanna: Muslim?

Shirin Ebadi: Yes

Tamanna: Oh, vow

Shirin Ebadi: (smiles)



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