



APNE AAP WOMEN WORLDWIDE –an initiative to end sex trafficking

RED LIGHT DESPATCH

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'Upper-caste gangs force us to stay in prostitution'

Nutts Speak out to Member, Denotified Tribe Commission

By Maisoon Nutt

Khawaspur, Araria, Bihar: When I shut the door of my hut at night, last January, and went to sleep, upper-caste criminals came and broke down the door, beat me and kidnapped me and said I could not give up prostitution and that this was my destiny.

Twenty two people raped me, burnt me with cigarette butts and finally stabbed me. I was severely abused and beaten as I refused to cater to their whims late at night. We have to cater to criminals and other powerful people day and night—provide them with free sex and alcohol. The criminals abducted me in front of people from the 'society', but none came to my rescue. My community and my family had to go to negotiate with these men. They let me go when we agreed to be available for them, whenever they wanted. Nobody came to protect us. The police station was two hours away.

Later, the same people from the 'society'

said that my people, the Nutts, encourage criminals and began to abuse and shun us. We are victims of violence from both sides. What do we do? Upper caste gangs force us to stay in prostitution and the society does not support us to get out of it.

Even after this incident, no one came to talk to us, no police, no politician, no leader, no officer, no one. Even now, I am prostituted at gun point. I want peace. I wish this fate on no other girl in my community.

Now I am trying again. The Apne Aap Mahila Mandal has once again given us the self-confidence to end this daily horror. They brought Dr Meena Radhakrishna, Director (Research) of the National Commission for De-notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, and the District Magistrate, Mr. U.K. Rai. Ruchira didi was also there. They actually sat in our hut and heard our

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My Dream

I want to be a nurse, in a clean white uniform

By Zeenat Khatun

Kamatipura, Mumbai: All I can think of every day is that I want to be a nurse, in a clean white uniform, busy at work in a hospital all day long and live in a decent neighbourhood just like all of you. I know how difficult it will be. I will have to be coached properly. I want to prepare for my class ten exams. I can read and write Marathi quite well and a little English.

The last time I was in a classroom was in my village all those years ago. Once you reach Nagpur it is further from there. We were so desperately poor, we would eat one meal a day every other day. So we were all short tempered and ready to fight each other all the time.

One day I had a fight with my stepmother and decided to leave. I was only thirteen. I know this temper of mine is not good. I took a train to Bombay without a ticket and reached VT station. I sat on a bench for a whole day crying when an old man approached me and said he could help me get a job and brought me to Kamatipura. It was a large house with many small rooms and I saw women wearing shiny clothes and putting on makeup.

I got a strange feeling but it was too late. I did not cooperate for a very long time and for months I was beaten up as they tried to sell me off from one brothel owner to another. After more than 10 years I was desperate to quit. I could never get used to it.

By then the woman who ran our brothel had become old and decided to return to her native village and so I was told that I was on my own. Suddenly I was free. Now I am no longer in the profession and I cannot tell you how good I feel about it.

'I realize my advice is important'

Organizing our women's collective

By Savitri Bairwa and Manju Hanswalia

Subhash Camp, Delhi: The Apne Aap Mahila Mandal (Women's group) transformed into our own community-based organization, Apne Aap Ekta Mahila Sanstha, Dakshinpuri, New Delhi, in September, 2007. We started with 10 members and now we have 25 women members. We are two of the founding members of our community-based organization. After we became members, we realized even our advice has some importance.

When we heard about Apne Aap, four years ago and went to visit it, we saw many women and girls making jewellery, doing embroidery, doing mehendi and stitching. We started learning embroidery here, and then we formed a group. Here all of us women came and shared each other's sorrow and happiness. Slowly we became friends.

After marriage, many of us found that our husbands increasingly drink alcohol and fight and beat us. We cannot even do anything for our children. Some of us had to start working in other homes as domestic workers and are abused and sexually exploited as well. That becomes very

shameful. We spoke about this at the Apne Aap centre and decided that our group should do something. We decided to develop work associated with employment and income. So that our time is used productively and nobody can force, trick, tempt or lure and exploit us. We want this work to increase so that poor girls can get more help and our husbands cannot beat us or starve us.

Our organization is for those women whose parents marry them off early. This group is of those girls and women who because they don't have any jobs will do anything for daily wages. And sometimes it happens that even other women misuse the women who live so precariously. And sometimes you feel so ashamed that you can't even tell anybody about it and you want to commit suicide but then you realize there is no other choice but to step out of the house. And our organization can give them help. Poor women and children need this kind of help.

Slowly over the years our Mahila Mandal grew stronger and one day we thought why not register our own community based organization. The group

was then registered in September 2007 under the name of Apne Aap Ekta Mahila Sanstha. Before the Ekta Sanstha was formed, the staff organized rallies and in response to the rallies women from the community approached Apne Aap and enrolled as members. The Ekta Sanstha decided to set up

a Self Help Group with a bank account and a small business. Members were then trained in various skills.

An election of the governing body was held in 2007, whereby the President and Vice President were chosen to

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I can do anything

By Namita Das

Kidderpore, Kolkata: I used to think I could never use a computer. It was a strange machine, which was completely unknown to me. But once I started using it, I started to figure out what it did. Soon after, I could also do a few things on it on my own. The more I learnt the more I believed I could do anything.

As I started to learn more things on the computer, I noticed that my interest towards my school work also increased considerably. I want to study English, so I can be better at using the computer. This is the reason why I love computers.

In today's world, I can get a job if I know computers. That is why I want to study hard and be a teacher when I grow up. I want to teach a lot of children about what I know. I am sure that if I want I can learn a lot. Learning computers has given me this confidence.

I hope that this new world of learning and doing better in school becomes a reality for all children who come from the world that I come from. I am thirteen and from the red-light area. I am now part of the Kishori Mandal which is learning computers, going to school and learning about our rights. Earlier, I used to hate my mother for giving birth to me. Now I believe that I can save my mother from this violent life.

Break free of fear: Gloria Steinem

Interview by Juhi Nutt, 13

Forbesgunge, Bihar:

Q: Why have you come here?

A: I came to meet you. You are my future. I may not be around when you grow up, but you will carry the seeds of kindness and compassion and my spirit will be with you.

Q: How do we find our future?

A: I will share a secret with you. I came to India as a student fifty years ago to avoid getting married. I was engaged to a man who was very nice, but he was not for me. He was fond of hunting etc and I was not. I ran away to India with no idea about what to do.

My story has a happy ending. We never got married. I am very happy and so was he till the day he died. We remained friends all our lives because we did not get married. In fact his wife asked me to speak at his funeral. The moral of the story is that if you listen to your heart and bravely follow it you will be happy. I am happy because I did not get married.

Q: What if we want to get married?

A: Then you should, but it must be with the right person. Don't get married for the sake of getting married. Marriage is not an end goal and simply getting married may not give you the security or happiness that you are looking for. Bravely following your heart in all things will make you more content.

Even if you get married don't believe that you belong to your husbands and don't let the man in your lives understand that the sign of masculinity is dominance over women. Remember, women can be strong and men can be beautiful.

Q: How can we be strong?

A: By breaking free of fear. Find the courage to speak out. Honour your friends with the truth. Make friends with other girls and boys. When I ran away to India to escape my engagement I was pregnant and I had an abortion. I was not able to speak about my own abortion for many years till I met a group of women who were sharing their stories on how they had faced and dealt with abortion, and that is when I found the courage to

speak out. I learnt that women can get strength from each other. I had seen the power of organizing at the grassroots as a 22-year old woman when I travelled through the villages of India with Gandhians. I used both these learnings to organize women and men for social justice for the last forty years.

Q: Is that what our mothers are doing?

A: Your mothers have given us the greatest gift –an example of courage –and their search for justice under the most difficult conditions. That means the rest of us can do no less. Justice is contagious and so is injustice. If we don't follow their example, we will suffer too. See how they are organizing against all odds. They are fighting for your future and for their own future too. The Mahila Mandal is giving strength to the Kishori Mandal. Their self-help group will pave the path for you.

Q: What have you learned from this visit?

A: That the most effective weapon against trafficking is neither legalization nor criminalization but a third way—decriminalising the women and children and prosecuting the pimps and traffickers and educating the customers. It is alarming how many underage girls are in Sonagachi in Kolkata. This struck me as most unusual for a place that has organised “sex workers” fighting for their right.

Talking to your mothers and aunts has taught me so much. The enslavement of certain women for sexual exploitation because they belong to certain castes or marginalized groups does not stigmatize them but stigmatizes all of us who let it exist.

Your mothers and aunts have given us an opportunity to redeem ourselves. As some women are sexually exploited others will be sexually restricted.

The victory of this visit is meeting all of you. You are the change. You re-affirm that change is possible and that organizing in small groups where everyone has a voice is beautiful.

You are like a butterfly. The flap of your wings will change the climate for even the girls of Sonagacchi's red-light area in Kolkata.

I learnt to think

By Gulshan Jehan

Topsia, Kolkata: I started coming to the Kishori Mandal at the Topsia centre from 2006 January. I hail from a very orthodox Muslim family. I read up to class VIII and dropped out. So when I came to know that I would have to learn all these things too I was worried and wondering if I did the right thing by coming here. Some things I found very confusing in the beginning...for example in our family, dance is strictly prohibited. I was always very disturbed previously. In our family and community it is common to see violence and hear a lot of abusive language.

I came here to learn stitching. It was only after coming here that I came to know that we should also concentrate on education, computer, dance therapy, yoga, other training (now I know that is called life skill and leadership training) along with the stitching I had come to learn in the first place.

But now I think if I had not come here I would have missed the golden period of my life. Now I am studying, learning computer, doing dance therapy, yoga and leadership training and even giving training to the others.

After coming here we used to go through yoga and meditation. It helps me feel stable in my mind. Yoga gives me patience. After doing meditation I feel cool and my mind fills up with joy and happiness. It also helps me to concentrate and gives us inner power. After doing meditation I am able to think very deeply. It removes pain from our bodies and also helps us to freshen up and reduce extra fat from the body. We used to do this first thing when we entered the center. So right from the morning we had a strong and fresh mind to think or to do any things. It is very essential in everybody's life to have concentration and inner power.

My favourite colours are red and green

By Rinki Sawaria

Subhash Camp, Delhi: Recently, Fatima, a young designer came to teach us how to make artificial jewellery.

I learnt how to make earrings, bracelets, necklaces in different designs and colours. My favourite colours are red and green. I only have a few bangles and earrings of my own. I made a bracelet with my favourite colours. Fatima and Neelam didi showed us how to match colours, place the beads in sequence and how to knot the thread, and then they made samples, step by step and we followed. Then they checked the pieces we made and made corrections if necessary. Once we were taught colour schemes, we could mix and match beads ourselves, but we always showed didi and asked for her guidance.

So far we have made and sold many items and earned some profit too from it. For the Diwali festival we had

put up our jewellery items, crochet designs, art work and bags for sale. Till date we have had three big sales, the UNODC Conference in Delhi, the Korean Festival and the Delhi Diwali sale at the Indonesian Embassy .

When the Hollywood actress Ashley Judd wore our bracelet with pink and green glass beads decorated with small silver balls we were thrilled. We are very grateful to Fatima didi for teaching us. We feel good when our products are liked and sold.

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Devina Dutt

We were evicted and then our home was burnt, we want peace

By Shaukat Nutt

Khawspur, Araria: I was born into the Nutt community. I was born in a place called Jogabani. My father was a butcher and thus he used to sustain his family. In the year 1988, we lost our homestead as some people said that the land didn't belong to us and they evicted us from Jogabani. Our home was very close to the Nepal border. We became homeless.

The relatives who used to stay at Khawspur came to my father and consoled him and told him why lament over this? They said come to Khawspur and all of us will stay together. We were quite young at that time. We shifted to Khawspur, built a new house and started living there.

My father was out of job and soon both of my parents started working as agricultural labourers. They used to earn hardly around forty or fifty rupees. It was a family of eight children, my parents and grandparents, altogether a family of twelve. It was very difficult to sustain.

Then during the riots of 1992 our house in Khawspur was also burnt. We were shattered. We had

nothing to eat. We didn't get any relief from the government.

After that, my sisters and my family got into this mess (prostitution). We saw all our sisters getting into this mess one by one in front of our own eyes. Then the village heads told us that if we do not stop prostitution in the Muhalla by nine, they would fine us Rs. 10,000. We agreed.

After a couple of days, some people came and knocked at the door. We told them that the village heads have asked us to close the door by nine. After that, once when my father was going for namaaz, they just abducted him. We cried and yelled but no one came to our rescue. In the morning some people told us to register a case against the abductors and others forbade us to do so and said that we can't prove anything against them. Then we sent someone to the kidnapers and were informed that we had to pay a ransom to get my father freed. We had no option but to pay and get him freed.

We want to be free of this. We want peace.

My unknown daughter

By Kumkum Kshetry

Kidderpore, Kolkata: It has been ten years since I saw my daughter. I am from the red light area and when I had my child my husband said we should not bring her up in this area. All I remember of her is the little girl who used to run to me and hug me with her little hands.

Instead of keeping her here in the red light area, we decided to send her to stay with my brother-in-law in Delhi. On returning from Delhi, my brother-in-law told me that he had put my child in a Madrasa where she will be taken care of and it will be a safe place for her. He gave me the address of the Madrasa but living in the red light district, I moved around a lot and I have since lost the address for the Madrasa.

I have asked my husband and my brother-in-law to tell me where my daughter is, and that I want to see her. But they have never let me. It has been ten years and now finally my brother-in-law has agreed to take me to see her in August. I hope wherever she is, she is safe. I am very eager to see my daughter but I am also very afraid to find out where she has ended up.

'This note cannot be fake'

How we got our photographs taken

By Jameela Nutt

Forbesgunge, Araria, Bihar: All of us had to meet at 3.00 at the Apne Aap Basti Vikas Kendra to get our photographs taken for the ID cards of our Mahila Mandal. I decided to reach by 1.00 myself so that we would not be late. Five of the other Mahila Mandal members also decided to reach early. We were all very excited. At last we would have our own identity card. Some were scared. Meena said maybe somebody will shoot us or throw a bomb at our house for daring to form a women's group. We all laughed. I said it cannot happen. I watch TV and all over India women are forming groups now.

Fatima was to reach at three and take us to the photo shop. She got late coming from the Apne Aap office. She said she was late and had not even eaten. We were all in such a hurry to leave to get our photos taken we did not let her have lunch, but we did let her wash her face and comb her hair for the photo session.

We got into four rickshaws and left. Half-way to the shop we realised, that in our hurry some of the women had been left behind. Meena said lets forget them, they can go later. I said no if we have to form a group we must all do things together. Roshan rushed back and told her mother to put the other ladies in a rickshaw and send them to the photo studio.

Two of the rickshawwallahs tried to charge us double taking advantage of our excitement. We gave them the money without asking. We were in such a rush. When we realised this, one of our members went back to the rickshawallah and demanded the money back. Rattled by her self-confidence, the rickshawwallah apologised and gave the money back.

Meena was the first one to get her photo taken. She put on a very serious expression. After that the others began to get their pictures taken. We all

combed our hair, put on some make up and adjusted our clothes. Meena started to tease us, she called one of us Aishwarya Rai, somebody else Divya Bharti. We were all giggling and laughing so much that the photographer could not take the picture. He said if we sat still for one second only then he would be able to take our picture. It took him one hour to get all the photos taken.

We paid the photographer with a 500

rupee note. He thought the note was a fake. We told him the note could never be fake—it was money that belonged to our women's group. It had to be genuine.

On our way home from the photo shop I thought our group should start a canteen. Roshan wants us to start a carpentry shop. Maybe we will do both. I had to rush home. In my eagerness I had locked up the house and I had both the keys with me.

Poem by Gulzar

Prostitute

Trampled in the midst of a lush field
lies

The corpse of a *pagdandi*

Writhing in pain as the footsteps come and go
Rapidly

Glancing at the young crops surrounding her
She sighs

If my womb had not been trampled by these
wayfarers

My sons might have grown up

And my daughter too ready for marriage
by now

We were heard in Assam

Uma Das, Ruby Das and Sony Khatoon

Kidderpore, Kolkata: On 26th January we went to Assam to attend a UNICEF meeting where we would be the key speakers in a consultation meeting and the issues would relate to us, the children. When we started from Kolkata by Kanchanjangha Express we were feeling as if we were on top of the world. We had never travelled by AC train before. We had only seen that in television. This was our first trip to anywhere outside Kolkata.

It was raining outside. After we crossed the Dakshineswar temple, we went up to our berths for a nap. We were already feeling very sleepy as we had started at three in the morning. But soon our happiness turned into a nightmare when a couple of men started drinking in the next compartment. We were feeling very scared as we know what people can do when they are drunk. We were thinking is there no place in the world where we can be safe. But then Surama aunty and Tinku aunty fought with them and called the TTE and they were thrown outside the compartment, which made us feel happy and safe again. But misfortune never comes alone. After crossing Malda, we learnt that the train will not go up to Assam because of a bomb threat. We were very scared. Juhi even fell ill from fear. Surama aunty told us not to worry. There will be other children like us who are going to attend the same meeting. Many people told Surama aunty and Tinku aunty not to go to Assam as it would be very risky. But they told us that we would reach Jalpaiguri and then decide what to do. We reached New Jalpaiguri in the evening and got off the train. Finally we got into another train and reached Guwahati in the morning. We went

to NIPCCD guest house. We had been allotted one double bed room per two persons. But we have decided we four girls will stay in one room. The place was outside the main city and was near a hill. We were a little nervous initially but soon we found out that the place is very safe and secure. Next day, when the meeting started all of us were asked to introduce ourselves. We were also told to talk about our expectations from the workshop. We were happy to be heard in this meeting.

We told the people in the meeting about our lives, how in our own houses the uncles and neighbors abuse us. In the red light areas, the Babus (clients) of our mothers abuse the young boys by asking them to buy alcohol, cigarettes for them and the young girls by sexually molesting them. The children, where we live, usually drop out of school. The young girls usually become domestic help and many end up in prostitution. We asked the people in the meeting that they should talk to us before making decisions about our lives. These are the things we want:

- We do not want any red light area to exist in the world.
- We do not want anybody pointing at us and saying that there go the children from the red light area. It hurts us.
- We do not want anyone to be addicted to drugs or any other substance in this world.
- The women who are already in prostitution must have a chance to get out of it and do something else.

Nutts testify to National Commission for De-notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes
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story. That was in December. I wonder if anything will change.

We were terrified that the criminals would beat us after talking so openly about it. They did come back and murdered our neighbour. My brother is scared to step out of the

house. But with the help of the Apne Aap Mahila Mandal we are holding on with determination. We believe that things will change now.

That day the District Magistrate responded favourably and said we would get BPL cards (Below Poverty Line cards that allow owners to get subsidised food). He called the village Mukhiya

(village head) and told him that our names must be listed. And this month we find that our names have been listed for BPL cards. First the Mukhiya kept our names out but when Apne Aap heard, they reminded the authorities and lo and behold we have the cards.

Dr Meena Radhakrishnan also promised to take our

plight to the government in Delhi. We are waiting to see if the Delhi government takes note of our marginalization.

Four others members of our community who have also been forced to stay in prostitution testified and pleaded that something should be done to protect them and end their life of stigma and exploitation.

Our work has begun

by Raj Kapoor

Prem Nagar basti, Najafgarh, Delhi: I am from the Peran community and have grown up in Najafgarh on the border of Delhi. I am the first graduate from my community. Our community was nomadic and are originally from Jammu. Slowly all the nomadic routes disappeared and my great-grandfathers settled here. We were goatherds. My father still keeps goats. But many in our community were not able to keep their goats.

We are surrounded by big farms and tall buildings. A highway came up near our settlement. Nobody had been to

school, we did not know how to survive without our goats. Some truck-drivers began to take away our women and slowly our hamlet became a Prem Nagar basti—a red light area. The girls are beaten and tortured, they are taken away in taxis to the highway. We are so illiterate, we have so little food. Then the truck drivers began to ask for alcohol and bootleggers began to come. I hate to see what is happening to my brothers and sisters in the community. I am a graduate, I wanted to change things. So many projects came but no one wanted to change our destiny. They only wanted to distribute condoms.

Then one day, last year the Apne Aap people came. They were different. They first wanted a meeting with the women, then with the girls. After many meetings and discussions, they asked me to join them and on 9th March, we inaugurated the Mahila Mandal (Women's group) for Najafgarh region.

The Mahila Mandal will run the children's forum and the girls group. They will also start a self-help group. We have already started training on various social and health issues of the community and how to run a children's crèche and play school. Then we will provide supplementary education

and bridge courses. The change has begun. We are creating more options.

The Mahila Mandal consists of 10 members and contributes Rs100 every month for the sustenance of the group. The children's crèche is also already running.

Najafgarh is located near the Delhi and Haryana boundary where many of the women from the Prerna community are forced to enter the world of prostitution because of poverty and lack of other ways of surviving. Many women and girls are forced to work as prostitutes to truckers, soldiers of the Border Security Forces (BSF camp) and men from the surrounding areas. So setting up of such programmes here will be good for the whole of the community.

Organizing our women's collective

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head and facilitate the group and further prepare them to form a CBO under the guidance of the staff. The group has taken part in many activities and interacted with renowned persons. They were then trained in decision making processes, access to other agencies, managing of financial assets and managing their own projects.

The Ekta Sanstha now consists of a Governing Body of seven members and a General Body consisting of 18 members. Trainings for the Ekta Sanstha have been conducted and is still an ongoing process, whereby members of the staff as well as resource persons train the women on running the Ekta Sanstha, roles and

responsibilities of the Governing Body, information about various schemes and prospective projects they could avail of in the future. Apne Aap Women Worldwide is now a donor of the CBO as well as a mother NGO and will donate money to our account and we will pay the staff.

Our advice to our group is that we should keep a meeting of all the teachers and there should be a suggestion box so that all the members can put their suggestions into the box. The box should be opened in front of all the members, so that if the organization has any weakness it can be shared with everyone publicly.



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