



# RED LIGHT DESPATCH

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RELEASING SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM MUMBAI, DELHI,  
KOLKATA, AND FORBESGUNJ (BIHAR)

## THEY USED TO DROWN THE GIRLS UP TO THEIR NECKS INSIDE THE WATER TANKS TO HIDE US FROM THE POLICE

*By Minu Mondol*

**Kolkata:** My father sold me to a Mumbai brothel when I was 11 years old. My father was a drug-addict. We were 13 children altogether but now only 3 of them are alive. We were not so poor earlier and a private tutor used to teach me when we were in Lucknow at our grandparent's place. But my father was a very bad person. He has left home and came to Kolkata and started to sell newspapers and magazines on street. But as I have told you, since he was addicted to Heroin, he found it really difficult to sustain this expensive addiction. So one day, he sold me. I was in Mumbai for 5 years.

In Mumbai, I had to provide two kinds of services: a) I had to entertain clients inside the brothel and b) I had to go to the Hotels/Beer Bars to escort the rich clientele, mainly the Arabs who always preferred young girls.

Earlier I used to stay with the eunuchs who had a very novel method of hiding the minors whenever there was a police raid. They used to drown the girls up to their necks inside the water tanks.

Beating and abuse was the most normal thing for me, by the Madams, the managers or the

customers. The customers used to get angry when I used to ask them to wear condoms. But even then I could not avoid getting infected by HIV. The customers who used to visit brothel, mostly used to agree to wear condoms after a little persuasion. But, the customers in the hotels never used condoms. Most of them were very aggressive and I used to get frightened. One of them had sores over the penis and I did not agree to entertain him without condom, but he beat me up and had sex with me forcibly. Now I suppose that I got the HIV infection from him only. I have been infected by STDs several times. I could not entertain clients at that time.

Then the Mumbai Police along with other Bengali girls rescued me and we came to Liluah Home where I have been detected HIV+. The moment the staff of the Home came to know about HIV, they started treating us like animals. We were not allowed to eat, sleep with or even talk to other girls. The Home Staff used to throw our food and medicine on us. They never touched us. You know I have seen misfortune and abuse from a very close quarter, but I have never received such treatment what we got in the Liluah Home. Nobody ever has thrown food on me.

### **Did you know**

#### **THE POLICE ARREST THE GIRLS**

*By Reshma Mondol*

**Kolkata, West Bengal:** I want to tell my story so that people know about HIV and become aware of it. I was born in Murshidabad but we came to settle at Gangasagar. My father was a local shaman and he used to collect goosefeathers and sell them in the market. We were four sisters and three brothers altogether.

We were very poor. So I never had a chance to go to school. We really had nothing to eat at home. Father used to drink and whatever he earned was spent on that. So when I was 9 or 10 years old I started begging. Whatever I earned were spent on buying leaves to roll tobacco (bidi leaves).

Mother never liked the idea of my begging, especially when I reached puberty. Even I felt that begging is not a proper way to live. But I did not like to live in the house either, as there was nothing to eat and both of my parents used to beat me black and blue. Since I was the eldest among the children I had to bear the brunt of their anger and frustration.

Because I used to beg people started maligning me and my father was so angry that he sometimes even kept me chained. I used to escape at the slightest opportunity. One night while my mother went to her father's house, my father tried to kill me under the spell of alcohol. That day I finally fled home.

I used to roam around the village roads. I became violent. Once the Police of Kakdweep P.S. caught me and kept me chained inside the P.S. After my release, I fled again and this time, I was spotted by a man at Kakdweep and those were perhaps the best years of my life. He was

### **FACT IN FOCUS**

#### **THE PURCHASER OF SEX HAS MONEY**

- Since the Swedish law was passed in 2002, prostitution is dramatically reduced in incidence in Sweden, trafficking in Sweden is the lowest in Europe, and other countries are starting to adopt aspects of the Swedish model (e.g., Norway, Iceland, and South Korea). The Swedish Law punishes the purchase of sex but not the selling of sex. Civil damages put the accountability where it belongs. The one who, by using her abused situation, violates the prostituted person by forcing her to perform sex harms her and should therefore compensate her. This provides an economic opportunity to change prostituted persons' situation that the state does not have to pay for, while offering a substantial incentive to testify. Again, work along these lines is proceeding in Sweden to further effectuate its approach to ending prostitution.
- In Stockholm, social workers report encountering only 15 to 20 prostituted persons per night, whereas prior to the law they encountered up to 60. In Malmö, social workers reported encountering 200 women a year prior to the law, one year after the law there was only 130, and in 2006 only 66. In Gothenburg, data indicate street prostitution declined from 100 to 30 persons a year between 2003 and 2006.
- The National Criminal Investigation Department in Sweden has found traffickers and pimps do not regard Sweden as a good market anymore. Procurers are now forced to operate through complex indoor arrangements to satisfy customer's fears of

very kind and he took me to his home. But by that time, I started disliking being confined to any single place. So I fled again and this time I was spotted by one of our relatives who informed my parents.

My father finally decided to abandon me and one day he sent me to Kolkata with one of our relatives and as pre-planned, she abandoned me at the Burdwan Railway station with Rs. 120 in my hand. A woman spotted me there and she brought me to Delhi and sold me to a Delhi brothel.

But somehow I managed to escape from there after sometime. I came to the Delhi station and with the help of the Railway Police I came to Kolkata again. But as I had nowhere to go, so I used to loiter around the platform and one day a woman came to help me. She was a vendor and I started selling vegetables with her.

After seven or eight months she took me to Kolkata on the pretext of visiting one of her uncles. She took all the little money I had earned by selling vegetables. We came to Dharamtolla and we ate in a hotel and two men and a woman also joined us. They looked very poor and simple. They took me to a Mumbai brothel. They took me to several brothels and finally sold me for Rs 25,000.

I had to entertain 10-12 customers per day. No question of using condoms. I even did not know much about it. However, once I asked for it and the customer I was entertaining at that time, retorted, "Why should I use condom? Am I not paying you? Then masturbation would have been a better method."

Most of the customers behaved more or less well with me. But once I was beaten black and blue because I did not comply with his demand

telephone interception (wiretapping), testimonies from prostituted women, police in the Baltic States, and in almost all preliminary investigations." In practice, lower demand leads to fewer women being abused in prostitution.

- After the law was passed, the judiciary had to assign a level of penalty. In this context, the Supreme Court 2001 accepted a ruling by a lower court holding that when a man makes use of a prostituted person, her so-called "consent" entails the offense is committed against the "public order," and not against her as a "person."
- As one consequence, her right to civil damages has not been recognized, and the penalty was lower than it could have been otherwise. However, none of the conditions or observations of prostitution made by the legislature, or in contemporary research, document the condition of freedom required for the "consent" on which the Supreme Court relied to be meaningful. The Parliament had, by criminalizing the purchaser – but not the prostituted person – established that purchasers are legally assumed to knowingly exploit another person's dire situation. This is not a situation to which a person can legitimately consent, as the Parliament knew. Work is ongoing in Sweden to rectify this aspect of the model in practice.
- Swedish law could be improved consistent with its intent. Until the victims are compensated and helped further, enabled to leave the sex industry, the situation will not be fully addressed. There have to be three parts to any adequate scheme: (1) decriminalize and support the prostituted people, (2) criminalize the buyers strongly, and (3) criminalize third party-profiteers.

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**Source:** National Criminal Investigation Dept. Sweden, Trafficking in Women: Situation Report no. 5. elaborated by Kajsa Wahlberg and Camilla Örndahl (Sweden: RKP KUT Report 2003:b), 34; Cf. Kommittédirektiv [dir.] 2008:44 Utvärdering av förbudet mot köp av sexuell tjänst, pp. 5-6 (Swed.). Socialstyrelsen, Prostitution in Sweden 2007 (National Board of Health and Welfare, 2008), p. 33. 2001-07-09 s. 529.

for kinky sex. We had to drink beer with the customers. Apart from drinking, I used to chew tobacco (gutkha). There were a few Bengali customers who wanted to hear my stories also.

There was one particular Bengali girl who was very kind and one day when the police came on a raid, and as usual I was being pushed in a secret chamber inside the house. She informed the police about the hideout.

I was rescued and brought to the Liluah Home. After we underwent the compulsory HIV test (at that time, whoever was rescued from Bombay, had to undergo compulsory HIV test, which is

no longer prevalent now after long negotiation by NGOs and women's organizations). Three among the five of us who were rescued during that raid, were found HIV+. The ill-treatment we received from the Liluah Home after we were found HIV+ was comparable to any previous torture. The officials never used to touch us. We were kept in an isolated place and they used to throw food and medicine at us. All the time, we were addressed in abusive language.

I was suffering from TB at that time and got treated in a hospital. Now I get food, I get love, I get care and love. I am more at peace now.

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## **VOLUNTEER BLOG**

### **INCREDIBLE PEOPLE**

*By Belle Staurowsky*

**Forbesgunge, Bihar:** Apne Aap I am sure has many fine people working for it. Two such people I had the true honour and pleasure of getting to know, seemed to me to be sparks creating real change:

**Aarti Bedi:** Aarti is a 25 year-old, raven-haired, pint-sized pixie who could easily power all of Delhi with her smile. She has an almost hypnotic voice soaked in calm, caring, and sincerity that matches her soft brown eyes.

I got to know Aarti during my 14 day stay at KGBV. She was kind enough to suffer through my attempts at Hindi, and her English was good enough that we were able to have

discussions, albeit often punctuated by "please repeat?" and "I don't understand." During our conversations, I learned that Aarti is from the Bedia community near Bhopal which practices intergenerational prostitution. As such, she has braved several challenges, but with the support and encouragement of her grandmother and a teacher, she refused to be a victim, and rejected the acceptance and practice prostitution typical in her community. Instead, Aarti enrolled herself as a private student and completed her post graduation in 2007, supporting her own education through small jobs from high school onwards. She has been working with a social rehabilitation

initiative of the Bedia Community for the past three years. She has a big vision for her community where girls have access to education and dignified living, boys critically look at gender relations in their community and the community itself can relate to the larger social world on equal terms.

I was so impressed by her passion, her spirit (brighter than her smile), her dedication, her commitment, and her sense of humor. She had such love in her voice as she talked about working with the girls at KGBV. Her empathy and compassion with these young trauma victims makes her a powerful beacon for positive change in their lives. I will always

remember the sound of her voice tugging me awake in the mornings as she gently prodded the KGBV girls awake with a cheerful “Good morning” in English. But for those who resisted, a small bowl of cold water awaited...

**Mohammed Kalam:** Kalam is absolutely committed to ending the practice of intergenerational prostitution, and he works tirelessly to do so. With a boyish face and charming grin, it is hard to imagine that he has suffered hardship by virtue of being born into the marginalized Nutt Community. The Nutt Community has been in existence for hundreds of years, subsisting on dance, song, and snake charming (yes, really) performances to earn a living. But during the time of British rule, the community was criminalized, and its people became undocumented and therefore nonexistent to the government. As such, they could not own land, hold reputable jobs, or attend school. With such restrictions, this ultimately led to prostitution as a means of family income. With the help of his sisters and father, Kalam went to law school, and now fights on behalf of his community to successfully end societal and civil injustice. His

efforts focus on educating women and girls about their civil rights, on creating self-sustaining youth programs that develop leadership, on basic health and vocational issues.

Kalam’s efforts have had a substantial impact. For example, one community that Kalam started working with seven years ago had at that time 23 families that practiced intergenerational prostitution. Today that figure has been reduced to three, and Kalam predicts that by next year the number will be zero. How cool and wonderful is that?

Kalam was particularly supportive of my karate teaching, and we even had impromptu self defense classes around the Forbesgunge offices on several occasions. I’ll never forget the look of surprise on his face when I showed him how to avoid a knife attack and turn the knife on the attacker. Priceless.

Aarti and Kalam were really inspiring to me, so knowledgeable and helpful for me to understand the predatory dynamics of the ‘at risk’ environments for girls in Bihar which led me to develop a self defense policy and a short educational piece for girls about how to keep safe. I wish them much continued success

in their fascinating and life changing endeavors.

**The Road Home:** The Road Home – this phrase has so many different meanings to me now. I have wondered time after time since I set foot back in the U.S. on September 8th what I would write on the blog. It is not because there are too little words to say, but too many.

For example, my actual leaving India was very emotional – that is, until the road was closed to the airport. But I’m getting ahead of myself.

My final day in Forbesgunge was punctuated with a wonderful meal prepared by Kalam and his beautiful wife.

Mutton stew, with green beans, rice, a salad of tomatoes, cucumbers, lemon, apples and bananas. There are no words to say how honored and touched I was to be in their beautiful home eating a meal that was made just for me. I will never forget it.

Pulling away from Kalam’s house and heading back to the office, once again on the back of Dheeraj’s motorbike, there was a shift inside me. It started to sink in that my adventure was winding down now, and

that my 'going home' was beginning.

Back in my room after dinner, I began packing. I forced myself to be very practical about it. Staring at my Indian kurtas, I swept away the images that I had of washing those kurtas in the blue buckets at KGBV, of the reaction the girls and the

cooks had when I first wore one (they were so pleased and approving), of the kurtas drying next to dupattas and pants around the girls hostel.

When I grabbed my karate gi, I forced myself to just consider how it would fit into my backpack, instead of remembering all the girls I had

taught and coached in that gi, their beautiful faces, their determination, their laughter and smiles shining brighter than the sun.

My Road Home continues. I'll post more about the scary trip to the airport, and some results of my efforts, tomorrow

### **FACTS IN FOCUS**

#### **PROSTITUTION IS HARMFUL IN AND OF ITSELF: LEGALISATION DOESN'T REMOVE THAT HARM —**

#### **IT SIMPLY MAKES THE HARM LEGAL**

A study of prostitution in five different countries found that 62% of those involved in prostitution reported being raped and 73% had experienced physical violence. The same study found that 92% of those people wanted to leave prostitution immediately if they could.

Prostitution is legalised in Amsterdam, yet this has not stopped male clients raping and abusing women in prostitution. CCTV, police patrols and importantly, a sympathetic response from police when women in prostitution report rape or violence should be the norm.

It is not necessary to legalise the sex industry in order to extend such basic rights and services to women in prostitution. Public safety measures and adequate police responses to crime should be provided to all women, irrespective of economic activity.

The parents of Marnie Frey, a young woman involved in prostitution in Canada who was murdered by Robert Pickton — a man who brutally murdered numerous other women involved in prostitution— have this to say on the legalisation of prostitution — *“To think the best we can do for these women is giving them a safe place to sell their bodies is a joke. There is no such thing as a “clean safe place “to be abused in. For a man to think he can buy a woman’s body is insane, and should show us the attitudes that women have to fight against in society. Marnie did not choose prostitution; her addictions did, and any man who bought her body for their sexual pleasure should go to jail for exploiting her desperation.”*Lynn & Rick Frey, 2008

Source: feminist coalition against prostitution ([www.fcap.btik.com](http://www.fcap.btik.com))

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