



RED LIGHT DESPATCH

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

I HAVE BEGUN WORK IN DELHI

By Naina Nat

New Delhi: I was very worried when I arrived by train to Delhi. I was not sure how I would find a place to stay. Then Arti didi told me that till you find a place, come and stay with me. I stayed with her for a month and started going to the Apne Aap office. I liked the office but I did not like the meetings and plans. I do not know how to read and write very well and everyone in the office kept talking about making plans.

Then I started going by Metro to work in the field in Najafgarh. I was scared that I had studied in school and I did not the rules of a big city. But now I am used to it and like it. I feel thrilled that I am independent and taking my own steps. But sometimes I still feel that somebody still controls me and holds me by a thread. I cannot shake of that feeling.

Every day I wonder how I will go to work alone but when it is morning, all I think about is how to get to the Centre. I have started blogging and I enjoy that so much. When I had learned blogging and videography in Kolkata, I had enjoyed it very much but when I had to write the blog in Delhi or work in the office, I did not like it at all. I felt I could not do it. I still want to learn and make a video film.

When I am in the field and working to mobilise the girls and women's groups I like it very much as I have an identity

OUR WOMEN'S GROUP HAS BEGUN TO HELP EACH OTHER

By Rajita Peran

Prem Nagar Basti, Najafgarh, Delhi: Our group of women has changed things in Prem Nagar Basti. Now, we women have begun to help each other. Recently, I had needed Rs 10,000 to deliver my baby. Earlier, I had to borrow the money from our moneylender or from other people living here. When I could not return the money, I would be beaten and abused. I never realised that they were charging me so much interest. I used to sell myself and still the loan stayed against me for years.

I have one son and one daughter. I am about 25 or 26 years old. I used to wonder if there was a way out if it. I saw that all the women in my community were stuck with the same thing. My husband could never help me. He would only get money when there was a wedding where he would fix lights. I knew that my life as a Peran woman was to look after the family by prostituting myself.

Then I heard about the Apne Aap Centre and that some women were forming a group. I was told we had to save Rs 1 a day as a member of the group. I joined. When I need the money, the group gave it to me and I returned the loan in 10 instalments over a year. By August, I was loan free. I never thought I would be loan free in my life. I now feel we can start taking decisions on other matters too. We have each other.

there. Everybody knows me at the Hasanpur centre. I am forming a children's group here. I have a lot of difficulties coming here but I forget all my problems when I start working. I am in the middle of forming a girls group here and I feel I will do it soon as I am now friends with the women and girls.

I was very excited when I had to go to the Prem Nagar Basti to meet the girls group. I had met them a year ago and they been very friendly and affectionate then. Now they don't even listen to

anything I tell them. They don't treat me with respect. I still hold meeting with them and hope they will start listening. I don't like this city. The people are very selfish here. Raj Kapoor the former coordinator at this Centre tried to stop me from meeting the girls group and distributing clothes to them. He shouted at that me and said I will not let you do it. The organization held a meeting and reprimanded him from interfering with our. I still continue to hold the meetings with the girls groups.

MY DREAM

By Sangita Nat, 11

Simrah, Forbesgunge, Araria: My oldest sister Roshni was pushed into prostitution when she was 14. She died when she turned 20 from an overdose of painkillers in December, 2006. This was revealed in the doctors post mortem. But reality was different. The truth was the Roshni wanted to marry and live happily ever after with her children and husband but the very person she wanted to live with wanted to live off her. Then she tried to establish a relationship with someone else in Rampur. But he too started living of her earnings. This is how her dreams were broken and this is how society forced her to commit suicide.

HOW MANY TIMES WILL MY DREAMS BE SHATTERED?

My other sister who is younger than Roshni, was also pushed into prostitution when she was 14 in January, 2006. She too kept searching for her dreams among the passengers who bought her daily for a few years. She married one of them. But she returned home a year later, pregnant, because society did not let her stay with him. One day her child was murdered while she was fighting with a passenger. She could not bear this and was seriously ill for many years and finally died. This is how Sujata's dreams were shattered.

I could not continue studying and like my sisters I too was pulled into prostitution. My mother was jailed. I had run away with a boy from the neighbouring village. In September another sister died. I came back to look after my two younger sisters and brother. Apne Aap organization started a movement to get us all back to school. I was taken back to school. I am very worried about my eight year old brother and my six and four year old sister. I don't want my sister to have the same destiny as me.

WOMAN

By Aarti

I am the earth, the sky, the sea and
its waves
I am the village and the city, the
antidote and the poison
If you are calm, I am calm, if you are
ruffled so am I,
I am the earth...
I am alive in your breath, in the
solace of your experience,
In the air, in the dew, in the breeze,
I am the wound and the balm, the
friend and the lover.
I am the earth...
I am the solution, I am the future,
I am the intervention, the good, the
moment,
I am the lotus of flowers, I am the
song of a poem,
I am the daughter and the mother,
I am the cloud dripping with
tenderness,
I am the colour Red, I am the
question,
I am the Earth,
In every question in this world, in
every idea of man,
In every web of troubles, I am human
in every instance.
Without me you will always be
confused, Never at peace.
Let me be born,
I want to be born.
Let me be born,
I want to be born.
I am the earth.

WE OVERCAME OUR FEAR

By Alka Peran

Prem Nagar, Najafgarh, Delhi: Our group, Asha Ki Kiran, decided we would oppose the spurt in sex-trafficking to Delhi for the Commonwealth Games. We decided we would educate common people about sex-trafficking and sex-traffickers. We scripted a play called "Who is the Culprit?" When we rehearsed the play we felt very shy and even ashamed to discuss such subjects in front of everyone. But we decided to overcome our shyness and tell people about the violence done to us. We also learned what we can do when something happens to us. All those who acted in the play are members of our Kishori Mandal, Girls Group.

Many people were coming to our city from other cities and countries for the Commonwealth Games. We decided to perform the play at the New Delhi Railway Station. When we saw the crowd, we were a little afraid. We were also scared that our drama would get spoilt. But when started performing, a lot of people came to see our play. They spoke to us after the play and said it was wrong to buy and sell girls. We then felt that had we felt too shy to perform, this important information would never have reached so many people. We also got rid of our fear. And now we have scripted another play just like this.

The other play is called: "Freedom from Domestic Violence." In this play we show the violence against women in their homes. This happens in every home but no one talks about it-nether the perpetrator or the one who tolerates it. They all believed that a good girl or a good woman should keep quiet -that is her destiny and her culture.

When I first came to the centre, I saw some girls playing and some girls studying. I too wanted to come and play and study with the other girls. I began to come with Alka as soon as the centre opened and read the many books which were there. Many people would come from other countries to meet our Kishori Mandal and we

would talk to them and learn about their country. I like coming here because I can talk to my girl friends, play with them and study and paint. I love drawing. When I first came I used to be very shy, but now I talk openly and fearlessly. I love acting in the plays also.

I first came to centre with Kanchan. She told me we could play, study and learn sowing there. So I started coming from that day. I enrolled my name for the Kishori Mandal because I too want to go out of the house, to a place where I can play and talk to my friends.

The best thing I like about our activities is our play: Who is the Culprit? I could tell everyone what happens to girls like us. I like studying and sowing too. I also loved going to the zoo. I like going out of Prem Nagar but the only reason we go out of Prem Nagar is to go to hospital. This time we went out just for fun.

I am the secretary of the group and I like to sit with the group and talk, draw or play. Otherwise we are always working at home and never get to play or talk to each other.

DIARY

I REALIZED HOW A PROSTITUTED WOMAN FEELS

By Chaitali Paul

Kolkata: When Apne Aap's Kidderpore program has started, we have been doing a survey from door to door of the children and the women. One day, while I was standing on the doorway of a woman's house and talking to her, a buyer came and looked at me and then asked me how much money I charge! I was aghast!

The women who were around me started yelling at the buyer and drove him away and later apologized to me. But that day was an eye opener for me. So long, I have thought that this is their profession. But with my reactions and feelings at the buyer's gesture, I for the first time, could connect to the women who are prostituted. I realized how they would have felt when a buyer haggles for her price. I realized how much pain she must have felt when she is treated as a commodity.

THE WORLD OUTSIDE

WHEN I WENT TO GB ROAD

By Kanchan Peran

Delhi: When I went to GB Road, I saw some girls with makeup looking out of the windows and calling men. I was standing in front of the police station. I wonder why the police was not helping the girls and pulling them out of there. I saw many men walk up the stairs and I wondered if they did not feel ashamed or why the police just stood silently watching. The shops below were selling machine parts. And above the shops women's body parts were being sold. I went to a man and asked him, why he was going up the stairs. He pushed me aside and said I was too young to know. But he was about to have sex with a girl my age. I was too young to know but not to young to be exploited?

FRIENDSHIPS IN TOPSIA

By Sahana Dasgupta

Topsia, Kolkata: Jahanara and her mother used to sell vegetables in the streets of Topsia every evening. Every morning at the wake of dawn they used to board the first train to Canning and buy vegetables from the Community Centre. Jahanara and her mother never failed to attend a single women's meeting and they used to attend weekly clinic. At times they used to do outreach work for us voluntarily.

Jahanara was married at a very early age and her husband has abandoned her when she was just in her teens. Jahanara was very fond of kids and whenever she used to come to our Topsisia centre, she used to spend some time with the kids in crèche and help the teachers. At that time we were in search of a helper in crèche. Jahanara's mother requested us to induct her as the helper. Jahanara started coming to the centre. After a few weeks, Jahanara came with a woman who lives in the shanty next to her. Her husband was an alcoholic and was on the verge of dying. She had ten children. Jahanara said to us, "Didi, give her my job. She needs it more than me." Ambia was employed in Jahanara's place.

About a month later, Jahanara's mother rushed to us and informed that she was run over by the train and her leg was amputated. The moment the news has been received, Sraboni, Mumtaz and many others from Topsisia rushed to the spot and Apne Aap trustees decided to bear the cost of her treatment as Jahanara was our member and staff. All the members of the Topsisia community centre took responsibility of attending her in the hospital. They did it by shifts and turns for next two weeks till Jahanara recovered.

I recalled a story from Sraboni about Mumtaz in this connection: At that time, Apne aap has adopted a policy of providing nutritious food to its staff members, especially those who work at the grassroots level. As a part of it, a glass of milk and one egg were given to each staff every day. We made it a point that the member will have to eat it then and there and she can't take it home to feed anyone else. One evening, Zarin told Sraboni that Mumtaz does not eat it but takes it home. Sraboni caught Mumtaz with a glass of milk and an egg in the evening when she was leaving the centre. Sraboni asked her if she does not know that it is imperative for the staff members to eat the food at the centre and not take them home. Mumtaz told Sraboni that Mumtaz was taking her quota to give Jahanara who was lying in the hospital bed. Mumtaz told that the food given in the hospital is bad and Jahanara needs it for replenishment.

LINKAGES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TRAFFICKING, MIGRATION, AND SMUGGLING

Trafficking, migration, and smuggling are distinct, but interconnected issues for trafficking in persons is for purposes of exploitation and may be with or without the consent of the victim or survivor, whereas migration may occur with the willing consent of a migrant through legal or illegal channels but is not for the purposes of exploitation. Smuggling is more directly concerned with the manner in which a person enters a country illegally with the involvement of third parties and addresses people who have given their consent to be smuggled.

DID YOU KNOW?

VIOLENCE AND RISKS BEFORE AND DURING TRAFFICKING

- Violence before trafficking: 60% of women reported being physically and/or sexually abused before they were trafficked.
- Violence while trafficked: 95% of women reported physical and/or sexual violence while in the trafficking situation.
- Injuries while trafficked: 58% of women reported injuries.
- Restrictions while trafficked: 77% of women reported that they were "never" free to do as they wished or go where they wanted. A further 10% reported that they were "seldom" free.
- Time in the trafficking situation: 89% of women were in the trafficking situation for more than one month and 20% for over one year.
- Recruitment: Nearly one in five women reported that a relative knew their trafficker.

Source: STOLEN SMILES, Written by Cathy Zimmerman, Mazeda Hossain, Kate Yun, Brenda Roche, Linda Morison, and Charlotte Watts

MOST OF THE TIME I USED TO REMAIN DRUNK

By Neelam Chetty

Kidderpore, Kolkata: We used to live in Assam. My father was a subsistence farmer there and we found it really hard to make both ends meet. Therefore we came down to Shillong where my father used to supply coal to households and shops. We were three sisters and a brother. We had good relationship among ourselves. There I met a Nepalese man who used to supply coal like my father. We fell in love and got married. We went to Bhutan and got settled down. His elder brother and his wife lived with us.

I gave birth to two children who died subsequently. There is one specific incident I still recollect with a heavy heart. Once, my first child was very ill. I asked my husband to stay back home. He didn't listen to me and went out. Within a couple of hours the baby died untreated as I was new to the place and could not arrange for any doctor. By that time, our relationship was getting bitter and we started fighting. My brother-in-law's wife despised our marriage because I was from a different ethnic community and she insisted on getting him married to a girl from their own community. He had great faith in his sister-in-law and our relationship worsened. After sometime when we found that

our going was getting pretty tough, we came down to India.

I got a job as a helper in a construction farm. I used to earn Rs 900 a month and Rs 200 as overtime. I used to buy our monthly ration from whatever I used to earn. I always tried to help his sister-in-law because she had three children to support and they were very poor. But she was so unkind to me! Since I used to work extra time and got back home quite late in the evening, she started maligning me. My husband also started abusing me, though it was me who kept him alive. Once while we were quarrelling, I told my husband that I would leave him forever. He said to me, "You have nowhere to go. You have to live with me however I treat you."

I got a job at a local restaurant, where I used to make momos. Once my employer has asked me to go to a movie and gave me Rs 200 for that purpose. He was a very decent man and never misbehaved with me. There were some men in the neighborhood, who were my husband's acquaintance, who knew about our deteriorating relationship and knowing it they tried to take advantage of my helplessness. There was one particular guy who always used to tease me. When he saw me going to the movie, he followed

me and somehow got a seat next to me. When he tried to molest me in the darkness of the hall, I slapped him and everybody around started swearing at him. He fled but threatened me that he would teach me a lesson.

The following day, when I was returning home from work, he along with some other men gagged me and abducted me. Later I found myself in the room of a hotel at Siliguri. Lots of prostitutes were there in that hotel and when I asked for help, none came to rescue me. That man kept persuading me to marry him. Now I really had nowhere to go. Our 'society' would not accept a runaway girl. So I agreed to his proposal even though unwillingly.

I have been brought to Calcutta in the name of getting married to his sister's house and I was actually sold to Sonagachhi. When I realized it, I raised hell. That time, a police raid was going on, so I was pushed to a secret chamber and the very next day, I was resold again to a brothel at Delhi. By the time I reached Delhi I have resigned to fate. I worked there for three consecutive years without any day off except the days of menstruation.

We insisted on having sex with condoms but the customers refused to wear them and you

know the Madams. They never bothered about our health. So they used to force us to have sex without condoms.

Sometimes the condoms used to get torn off. I got infected by STDs several times and got them treated by a lady doctor.

Most of the time I used to remain drunk as that was the only way to ease out my pain. I even tried smack once or twice.

FACTS IN FOCUS

DRAMATIC DECREASE OF TRAFFICKING INTO SWEDEN SINCE THAT COUNTRY CRIMINALISED THE BUYING OF SEXUAL SERVICES

Decriminalisation promotes sex trafficking, child and all forms of prostitution as it gives a green light to pimps and traffickers making it easier for them to operate. On the other hand it is reported that there has been a dramatic decrease of trafficking into Sweden since that country criminalised the buying of sexual services. Jonas Trolle, an inspector with the Stockholm police unit dedicated to combating prostitution:

“We have significantly less prostitution than our neighbouring countries, even if we take into account the fact that some of it happens underground ... We only have between 105 and 130 women — both on the Internet and on the street— active (in prostitution) in Stockholm today. In Oslo, it’s 5,000.”

Another relevant aspect of the ban is the reduction of the number of foreign women now being trafficked into Sweden for sex. The Swedish government estimates that in the last few years only 200 to 400 women and girls have been annually trafficked into Sweden for prostitution, while in neighbouring Finland the number is 15,000 to 17,000. ‘

Source: Swedish Prostitution Ban An Apparent Enormous Success’, Thaddeus M. Baklinski, 2007 and Feminist coalition against prostitution www.fcab.btik.com

VOLUNTEER BLOG

By Belle Staurowsky

The Road Home – Change of Plans

On September 7th, Tuesday morning, I started my journey home. It had rained the night before, and so the temperature had cooled and sleep came for a few hours. Heaven. I woke early to pack the last of my bits and to fit in one last visit to KGBV – the girls had apparently been asking for me. It wasn’t to be, though, as my driver showed up late. In hindsight, definitely for the better.

I was accompanied on my three-hour journey to the airport by Praveen, an Apne Aap staff

person, and his wife who needed to see a doctor in Baghdogra. With the same driver I had had for my arrival in this land, we set off for my departure from it.

An hour and a half later, after passing through livestock auctions that choked the road more than the usual traffic would, we hit the West Bengal border, and shortly after that, our first warning. There was a small pile of rocks in the middle of an intersection, a droopy red flag stuck in the top of it. We stopped, and Praveen

and the driver got out and walked over to a man who explained that the road was closed; apparently, there was something going on past this point where there were barricades and people were being pulled from their stopped cars and trucks and beaten. "What?" my mind screamed as I heard this. "This surely can't be happening." After a few minutes of discussion, Praveen, the driver, and I agreed we would continue on, but at the first sign of real trouble, we would have to bail.

We continued down the road for another half an hour and were stopped again. This time, instead of a single gentleman giving the information, there was a group of about six guys. Praveen and the driver again got out of the car and headed over to the group to discuss our situation. After 5 minutes, and looking like nothing was being solved, I got out of the car and started walking toward the group. I was three paces away when our driver turned and intercepted me, led me back to the car, shortly thereafter joined by Praveen.

"They have warned us, but we're going to continue," Praveen said. Mind you, at this point, I was seeing on the road motorbikes and bicycles – all other traffic such as trucks, buses, and jeeps, anything that could transport people and goods had disappeared. But I was also seeing kids playing by the side of the road, people casually going about their harvesting work, storekeepers lazily manning their roadside stalls. No fear, no panic. In other words, no indication that anything dangerous was afoot. But still, what do I know? I am a foreigner here, with three people, and the only thing on my mind is "I HAVE to make it to the airport."

Another half an hour down the road, another warning. This time, it is looking serious: trucks and buses line the road here. Again the scenario plays out: Praveen and the driver go to talk to the group of men, around 20 men. Five minutes goes by. Peering through the back window towards this grouping, I can see that things are

going badly. This is serious, and it looks like the end of the road...for the car. I scan the area, and half a dozen motorbikes are visible. It would be uncomfortable, but I could make this last leg of the journey on the back of a motorbike if I had to. But before that, I would make an appeal...

I exit the car, and march across the road, right into the crowd of men, Praveen in a heated exchange with one of them. I look at Praveen, and I say in a loud voice, "Tell them that the U. S. State Department has my itinerary. They know when I am supposed to arrive in America. If I do not arrive in the United States when my itinerary says I am going to arrive, they will come looking for me. There is going to be a problem." Praveen gets the gist of this, and hurriedly translates. I am not taking my eyes off of Praveen, not looking at any of the men that now surround me. But as I stand there, Praveen listens to the reply, and I can see on his face, they will not let us go. I now have 50 minutes before my flight leaves.

"Praveen Ji," I say, "I understand that they will not let a car go, but what about a motorbike?" Seemingly, Praveen switches tactics, and starts to ask the crowd if anyone would be willing to take me. There is, miraculously, a taker.

I hurry across the empty intersection back to the car with the driver. He opens the trunk, and I take out my 50 pound backpack and smaller 15 pound pack. The larger pack sits on my hips yet towers over my head by a good foot; to put it on requires me to perch it on a table, or in this case the back of the car, bend my knees and slide my arms through the straps, and then stand up and walk forward. Having done this, I am uncertain of how this is going to fair on the back of a motorbike, but I push any doubts I have aside. I am singular in focus: get to the airport.

I am standing next to the motorbike, its engine running, just about to strap the 15 pound pack around my front, when a man in military attire walks up to me from the direction of the group I

interrupted earlier. He motions me back to the car. "I'm not getting in that car unless it is going to the airport," I warn, my words wasted as it becomes clear this man does not speak English. Again he motions me away from the motorbike and toward the car. Praveen appears, and he says to get into the car, reassuring me it is okay, helping me take my backpack off and place it back in the trunk from which it came only two minutes ago. "Get in the car," Praveen says, and I look at him doubtful, but he motions, and I'm in, and the driver settles in his seat as well. Some final words are exchanged between Praveen and the military guy, and then we are off...in the direction of the airport. I have 30 minutes to make my plane.

Praveen turns to me from the front seat and tells me that the military guy told him he is letting me get to the airport 'in the interest of keeping good relations between India and the United States.' He smiles, his eyes twinkling with amusement and I think relief. My little grandstanding worked. At this point, I don't know what to think as we drive past mile after mile of tea fields, the mighty Himalaya stretching inky blue across the distant horizon. Will we be stopped again? What guarantee do we have?

As my mind wrestles with a myriad of conflicting emotions, sadness at leaving, relief at leaving, and the car makes its way, we are at the airport before I know it. Again, I am struggling with the backpacks, with good byes, with last minute photos. And then I am stumbling toward the terminal, which seems eerily empty.

One step into the terminal and I see a makeshift bunker constructed out of brick and covered by a blue tarp. Two machine guns are positioned on top, pointed at me. Well, not really at me, but at the doors I just rushed through. Soldiers and policemen are lingering in terminal's hall, smoking or drinking tea. I hurry to the terminal door where a soldier is standing and asks for my

ticket. After rummaging around, I am relieved to find it and hand it over. He glances at the piece of paper, then looks back to me: "Cancelled." "What?" I ask, incredulous. "Cancelled," he repeats. "All flights to Kolkata have been cancelled." Oy.

I admit that this is a bit of departure from the purpose of this blog, but the challenges I had in physically getting home seemed to be more than anything I faced in the previous five weeks of being in one of the remotest, untouched areas of India. It was almost a metaphor – things simple, straightforward, uncomplicated out in the countryside; but as soon as I get closer to urbanization, complications abound.

The last post had me stranded at Baghdogra airport, close to Darjeeling and the foothills of the Himalaya. There I was, aghast at the news that, after all my trouble to get to the airport, my flight was cancelled. If you haven't gathered by now, I'll tell you straight out: when I have a goal, I'm not easily dissuaded. And my goal was to get home.

My options were slim: with my ride gone, no cell phone, no cash (I had been spending my rupees so that I wouldn't have any leftover), no

way of getting cash (the same political movement that had shut the road and the flights had also closed the banks), no bus transport,

no train transport, no car transport, and no clue about how I would stay the night or two needed for the political scourge to end, I knew had to get out of Baghdogra. Can I tell you how thankful I was to find there was one, and only one, flight leaving from Baghdogra? The last flight into or out of Baghdogra. It was flying to Delhi, not Kolkata where I was supposed to be connecting, but I would sort that out later. Priority: get out of Baghdogra and to a location that had cash machines, phones, and a greater preponderance of people who speak English. After an hour and a half of negotiating with the

"Just when I thought it was going to be smooth sailing, of course things got tricky"

airlines, mission accomplished. One step closer to home.

I arrived in Delhi at 4:30 pm, and, after a several hours spent hunting for terminals and ticketing agents, after sorting out change of flights, and getting cash, after drinking my first cup of real coffee and eating (OMG) a real donut(!!!), departed Delhi at 2 am bound for the US of A connecting through Frankfurt. Woo and hoo. I was giddy with relief and latte and food. Civilization. Bathrooms with toilet paper. Air conditioning. Electricity. It was all too much, and I walked around with a silly grin on my face as if I had just won the lottery. In a way, I did. I was going home, when just a half day earlier it seemed a distant possibility.

It has taken me more time than I thought to post my thoughts 'post trip.' I am not sure why, but there it is.

So, in the context that this was my first endeavor to help in the empowerment of women and girls, what did I learn?

That one person really can make a difference. I had been warned not to get my hopes up, not to expect too much to happen. And so when I arrived and started, I didn't have a huge expectation. What I did have was a drive to do something, anything that would help the girls and help the people helping the girls. I have to tell you, honestly, I think I made a difference. Seeing Rinku, aka 'Silent One', going from not being able to say a word to tossing out a

respectable 'kee-eye!', that was one difference. Seeing girls second-naturedly striking me to throat even as I put my hands on their shoulders or around their neck, that was another difference. Seeing girls who had never done a punch in their lives throwing out punches and kicks, another difference. Hearing the girls not only 'kee-eye' but count in Japanese no less, amazing.

I also learned that girls are girls despite differences in geography, culture, religion, and economic circumstances. They want to be pretty. They want to be liked. They want to be noticed. They want to be special. And they are special; we girls are special.

I learned that even though there are substantial and deep-rooted impediments to their empowerment, that the spark exists in every girl I met to become something greater than she imagined.

I learned that karate and self defense are indeed very good tools to use for empowerment, but cognitive skills are an important piece in permanently overcoming cultural, societal, and familial barriers to empowerment. If a girl does not think she is worth anything, she will not fight for her own life no matter how many physical survival techniques she has learned or mastered.

I now find myself wondering at how to continue my work.

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