Delhi: My name is Karina. I am aged 13. When I grow up I want to become a teacher. Whenever I go to school, I normally have this urge of sitting on the teacher’s chair and children greeting saying ‘Namaste’. At times, I wonder what type of teacher I would become: the fun loving or a strict one. And I know, no matter whatever approach I have with them, I would become the type that loves all children and I would try to help them with their both problems. This, in terms of school education and if I become a teacher I would try to change the world to decrease dirt, upheld women and girls’ rights and start rallies for positive change.

I will reach my goal through my own hard work and I would not expect anything more. If someone stops me then I will just do as my heart says. I will study a lot and I will try my best to reach my goal and I will achieve it no matter what.

I will help the children in my class and help clean the dirty parts of our community. I will support and work for better roads and clean rivers. I will help girls study and convince their mothers about the importance of girls’ education. I will help in every problem of my community. Further, I will support my mother and father from my earning.

Importance of Topsia Eviction Report
—Mumtaz Begum (survivor)/ as dictated to Fazul

Kolkata: My name is Mumtaz Begum and I am the one among the many victims of forceful eviction from the roadside of Topsia, bridge area. The eviction was carried out by the government officials supported by political goons.

I am aged 32, and to date I have experienced three evictions and have been violated of my right to home. On November 7th to 13th 2012, around 383 families living under Topsia No.4 Bridge, near Park Circus Railway Station, Kolkata, were forced to evict the place without any prior official notification. Before the eviction, we were facing repeated threats and abuse from some goons. The evicted families have not been provided with any rehabilitation or adequate compensation, except a paltry amount of Rs 12,000 (twelve thousand) per household.

The 383 families have been living at that place for the last 30-40 years. Most of us have voter identity cards, ration cards, Adhar cards, etc. in the very address from which we were evicted. Being from the marginalized, illiterate, lower caste population engaged mainly as rickshaw pullers, daily wage earners, beggars, rag-pickers, with an average monthly income between Rs 1500 and Rs 2000 could not resist this government supported eviction on our own.

After the eviction, most of us were compelled to move from one settlement to other.

(Continued on page 6)

Bathnaha’s nomadic community celebrates Independence Day for the first time
— Poonam Kumari/ dictated to Kalam

Bihar: My name is Poonam Kumari. I am 16-year-old. I belong to a Banwari community, living in Bathnaha. Majority of us do not own a land, house and cannot avail the facilities provided by the government of India. We travel from one place to another. Begging is the one of the main source of livelihood we have. We survive from the money earned from it.

Not I, nor my relatives or any one from our community has ever enrolled in a formal school. We communicate in Hindi language and also in native language.

This year, we celebrated Independence Day for the first time in our lifetime. Every year during this time of the year, we used to witness tricolor flags in cars and houses. But, we could never really participate, as we were busy moving from one place to another and earning few rupees a day by begging on the streets.

For a change, we cleaned our locality today, with the help of our parents and elder members in the community. We hoisted a flag. There were many curious onlookers from outside our community. Some of them were very supportive, but also received negative comments from others.

It was raining that morning. We have collected flower, bamboo and other items which were required.

(Continued on page 7)
Apne Aap Women Worldwide is an Indian non-government organisation that was founded in 2002 with its mission to end sex-trafficking. It goes into slums and red-light districts in Delhi, Bihar and West Bengal, and enlists at risk and trafficked girls and women into its networks. Then over a period of three to five years it creates an exit strategy for trafficked persons or prevents those at risk from being trafficked by reducing their vulnerabilities through its ‘Last Girl Ten Asset Approach.’

Through house-to-house visits, Apne Aap social workers invite girls and women to an easily accessible safe space in the ‘slum’ or red light area. Here it starts running a community classroom that holds adult literacy courses as well as bridge courses for children. It also runs a soup kitchen for women and girls to get food. A lawyer provides legal support in cases of human rights violations such as domestic violence or trafficking. Social workers help girls and women fill up forms for government documents, such as birth certificates, caste certificates, voter cards, Below Poverty Line (BPL), Aadhar, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) and ration cards. Then they help the women campaign to get the cards. Once they get the cards, the women and girls are entitled to government services and subsidies. Apne Aap social workers then help them link to subsidies like food rations, low-cost healthcare, housing under the Indira Awas Yojana, low-cost loans etc. This reduces their expenses and reduces their vulnerabilities while improving their education, health, self-confidence and self-respect. At this point, there is a backlash from the traffickers who want to control the women and girls.

Apne Aap lawyers provide these women with legal support and training by escorting them to police stations and courts and teaching them how to file a complaint or testify in court. Social workers continue to build the Assets of the women by helping them access loans and bank accounts, and teach them how to start and run businesses or get a job. They constantly protect them with the support of the Apne Aap network and link them to a minimum of nine friends in the form of a self-empowerment group.

All these are called the Ten Assets – safe space, education, self-confidence, political bargaining skills, government identity documents (IDs), government subsidies, loans and bank accounts, legal support, vocational skills, network and nine friends. These Assets are based on the four fundamental rights to education, safe and independent housing, sustainable and dignified livelihood, and access to justice and legal protection.

Apne Aap was running one such safe space in the slum of Topsia, Kolkata, West Bengal since 2003. Its aim was to prevent the trafficking of marginalised ragpickers, ancillary leather workers, street vendors and their children via the Park Circus Station. It was running a community classroom and connecting children to mainstream schools, as well as running a soup kitchen and linking women to government IDs and subsidies.

In October 2012, Mumtaz Begum and Topsia Mahila Mandal informed AAWW about the threat of eviction. The women said they were being threatened and told to leave the slum, where they had lived for decades. They were worried for themselves, their children and families. They thought their children would be cut off from education and protection, and they would be cut off from food, legal support, families and networks as well as their jobs and livelihoods.

They all belonged to Scheduled Castes (SC) and Other Backward Classes (OBC) and many were from freed/Denotified Tribes, nomadic groups labelled as Criminal Tribes under British colonialism.

They were all Muslims. Apne Aap social workers wrote to the local government authority expressing their anxiety over the potential displacement and its impact on the women and children. It invited Dr Sayeda Hameed, then Member of Planning Commission, to come and meet the women and intervene on their behalf with the Government of West Bengal.

The women did not oppose the eviction. All they wanted was adequate compensation and alternative housing. However, between 7 and 12 November 2012, 383 families (approximately 2,000 people) were forcibly evicted for the construction of a nine-kilometre long Parama-Park Circus flyover by the Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority. Some of them were offered the paltry sum of Rs 12,000. No prior notification was given. No assessment was done of the consequences of the eviction. No alternative housing was provided. No compensation was given for loss of documents, valuables and property. No alternative jobs or livelihood were provided. No food security or medical support was ensured. Ten children went missing. One woman went missing and one woman was murdered within the next two months. There was widespread infection from diarrhoea, respiratory infection, pneumonia and skin diseases, and of course malnutrition as children and adults were sleeping in the open, cut off from drinking water, food, toilets, and shelter.

Some women suffered from sexual violence and suffer from the psycho-social trauma of physical violence, eviction and homelessness till this day. They continue to suffer a loss of dignity as they are subjected to humiliation and harassment when accessing public lavatories, or by medical staff when they ask for low-cost medicine or treatment, or government officials when they ask for restoration of documents or subsidies and even police when they ask for protection from gangsters.

The forced eviction has resulted in loss of life, liberty, legal protection, housing, education, livelihood, food, medicine for more than 2,000 people. Its impact has been an increase in debt, debt bondage, child marriage, child labour, human trafficking as well as deterioration of health.

Apne Aap Women Worldwide adapted an Eviction Impact Assessment (EIA) tool of the Housing and Land Rights Network, by incorporating its ten asset measurement from its Last Girl Asset based anti-trafficking tool and conducted a survey to assess the market value of the losses incurred by the evicted families as well as legal and human rights violation. We hope the report will lead to adequate compensation, alternative housing and legal protection for the victims, of those forcibly evicted from the slums of Topsia in November 2012 and thus prevent human trafficking in all its forms – from debt bondage to child marriage, to child labour.
Kolkata: My name is Rumki Halder. I was born in Sonagachi, said to be one of the largest redlight area in Asia. I am 26- year- old. No, I am not into prostitution. But, I am a woman and deeply feel the trauma these women are undergoing. I can feel the fear, trauma the girls and women in prostitution has to undergo every day.

I have daughter. She is 12 years old. She is staying in Ram Krishna Vivekananda Mission in Barasat, West Bengal. This is a residential school. She studies in class V. Her schooling and stay is sponsored by Apne Aap. I joined Apne Aap Women Worldwide in 2013.

I do the cleaning work in Sonagachi Centre. I requested Hindol Da for the job. Later, I saw the work Apne Aap was doing for the marginalised children. I want my child to be an educated person. So, I approached them for help in admitting my girl child in school. They helped me and now my child is in one of the best school.

Apart from cleaning, I also work with Khiddirepore Income Genaration Programme unit. I am learning a lot from here. I deal with many girls and women alongside Sudipta Di. We talk to people. As I live in the redlight area, I learnt how to gain more information from them with regard to dealing with difficult matters, which I and other women have to face on a daily basis.

Earlier, my mother was into prostitution. Now she is old, aged 52 and no longer relates to prostitution. She works as a domestic help in Sonagachi area. For me, my mother is the noblest woman. She faced many difficulties in her life. But, she protected me like a lotus in dirty water. I am supremely proud of my mother and her fight to protect me from getting into prostitution.

Another reason I joined Apne Aap is because I want to do something for exploited girls and women living in red light areas and fight against trafficking.

I wholeheartedly participated in many programme of Apne Aap, like Candle light march, One Billion Rising. Also, a silent protest march to demand justice for Sathi Das. She was visiting our centre and was showing her willingness to exit prostitution. However, it wasn’t taken well by one her client. He slitted her throat for refusing to have sex. Her room was at the 2nd floor of the same building where our office is located.

She used to come to the centre every day in the afternoon, used to sit here and talk with us for hours some days. She was a jovial and fun loving person. She was good in organising activities.

Also, I visited Presidency College for listening Ruchira Di's Speech. I feel privilege to get many exposure from Apne Aap. Even my daughter attended One Billion Rising. She is a good dancer. She inspires me to dance.

I also met Barbara Davidson. We are told she is a well known international photographer and has won many awards.

I love that moment when the children come to our Centre and greet to me. My daughter is in hostel and do not live with me. But, even these children are like my child. I love each one of them and I am glad to be associated with Apne Aap.

But, she protected me like a lotus in dirty water. I am supremely proud of my mother and her fight to protect me from getting into prostitution.

Did You Know?

In India:
• There are 2.3 million women and girls in prostitution
• A quarter of 2.3 million are under the age of 18
• There are 1,000 red-light areas

Globally:
• About 58 % of all cases of trafficking detected globally are purpose of sexual exploitation
• About 75 % of all trafficking victims detected globally are women and girls
• About 20.9 million adults and children are bought and sold for commercial exploitation
• About 1 in 10 men in the world have bought commercial sex
Bihar: My name is Renu Kumari. I am from Banjara community. My father’s name is Moti Banjara and mother is Shanti. I am sixteen-year-old now. We live near Bathnaha Railway station since more than 20 years. I live in a locality where the houses where the houses are made of tarpaulin sheets and old clothes. Rainy days are bad for us, extremely sunny is not good either.

Education has never been a priority in my life. I am aged 16. I have never been to schools. In fact, not one from my community has ever enrolled themselves in schools. We live for the day. Earn enough to feed ourselves. I have been told about the right to education program initiated by the government. I heard under this program, every child should be enrolled into schools for free or otherwise. I don’t see it happening here. There is not enough effort by the government to achieve the target. However sad it may sound, the truth remains, there is no visible link between us and our rights. Our community is left behind. Again.

A total of 50 families live in this area. We collect ayurvedic herbs from the jungle and sell them in the local market and in Nepal as herbal medicine. The place where we live is almost in the Indo-Nepal border. Some days when we get nothing to sell in the market, we beg on the street. It is to fulfill the basic needs of our family—for instance, food.

We have been living here since 20 years, but we do not have any documents to prove our identification as a citizen of India. We don’t have ID cards, BPL cards and other documents which could help us to get the government subsidies.

On the last few months, a person named Md Kalam from Apne Aap Women Worldwide organization visited our place with some people—locals and foreigners alike. Initially, we thought of him as an outsider. Later, he introduced himself and told about his family background and also communicated with us in our language. We believe him and were able to connect with him. We spoke our heart out and conveyed the everyday tragedy that we are living. He assured to help us. He said that illiteracy is the root of all the problems. A well educated person is always aware of his and others’ rights.

He took forward our story to other members of the organizations and support us by linking our community with government related schemes.

During the initial month, he returned with two other people named Naresh Sir and Meena didi. They started with a baseline survey of all the family members residing in the area. By the mid of August, we were involved in education program with the organizer’s support. Essential items like slate, pencil, mats, etc were provided to us. We are continuing with our studies now.

Apne Aap is taking initiative to talk with the government officials in order to provide us with official documentation. They are also meeting the principal of a nearby government school to admit around 15 children from our community. We are hoping to get enrolled in the school. This will be the staircase to achieve our dreams. I deeply appreciate Apne Aap’s effort in supporting us.

Brief Note on Feminism Beyond Boundaries

Apne Aap Women Worldwide organised it’s monthly series ‘Feminism Beyond Boundaries’ in collaboration with Oxford Bookstore on August 20, 2015. The speaker, Prof Ishita Mukhopadhyay deliberated a talk on the question of prostitution in India. She is associated with the Department of Economics, University of Calcutta and is the Director, Women’s Studies Research Centre, University of Calcutta. She has been a gender researcher for more than fifteen years, specialising in issues on gender and development; and supervises research and research projects on counter trafficking programmes.

In her talk, Prof Mukhopadhyay provided a broad spectrum of the issues concerned with prostitution, especially in South Asia, where she charted out how demand is created and sustained for, what she called, this ‘industry.’ Her focus was on why those who create demand have to be criminalised and prosecuted than those who are ‘supplied’ for this demand or prostituted. She also pointed out that campaigns against sex trafficking address only those who are vulnerable; and that it is not meant for the adult, educated woman who does not come from a marginalised community or section of society and ‘chooses’ to be in prostitution. This is because, for the most part, the women who find themselves in prostitution did not ‘choose’ it, nor can they ‘choose’ to leave it.

The talk elicited much response from the audience who wanted to know if the provision for ‘sex-work’ to be regarded as legal work would be beneficial for those involved in it. The question and answer round drew forth arguments like if sex-work is legalised, then what about clauses like protection of women against sexual harassment at work places? Besides it was pointed out how field studies have shown that pimps and brothel owners stand to benefit more from such legalisation than the prostituted women and girls, whose condition doesn’t improve much with or without benefits.
Delhi: My name is Mamta. I am working as a community mobiliser with Apne Aap since four years. I have participated in many activities organised by the organisation. On August 3, a short film ‘Meena’ was screened at the India International Centre, New Delhi. It was to honour the United Nations World Day against Trafficking in Persons.

The movie has been directed by Lucy Liu and The Sibs, and is about a woman trafficked into prostitution, who rescues her daughter from the same fate. It is a real life story where Apne Aap played a crucial role in the rescue.

I was really touched by the essence of the movie. It brought me to tears in seeing the relentless fight of a mother to rescue her daughter from the brothel. I believe such films with strong social should be screened on a larger scale, to sensitise people, who learn to look at prostitution not as work but as exploitation and abuse.

I am 37-year-old, lives in Najafgarh, within the National Capital territory of Delhi. Most of our community activities are executed from here.

I have been working with a few communities in Najafgarh. Amongst which Perna Community is still into inter-generational prostitution. While watching the movie Meena, a thought crossed my mind that how easy is to change a person’s mindset by just showing them a movie. It should be in their language. I am not saying that change will come immediately, but eventually it will.

In the last two years, a lot of change is observed in the Perna community. Mothers now want to put their girls in hostels. And I want from my heart that these girls live away from their community residences. This change has come about because we have been working with them since 2011. We conducted a lot of meetings with them initially and this was done in an effort to bring mind-set changes. With time, the women started trusting us and told us that if we helped them, they would like to keep their daughters away from the kind of lives they have lived.

There are two-three NGOs working in the area at Najafgarh, but no one is working in the area of abolishing prostitution among the communities where women and girls are prostituted or are at-risk of being prostituted. I think what Apne Aap Women worldwide is doing is very important for the women and girls.

And I want from my heart that these girls live away from their community residences. This change has come about because we have been working with them since 2011. We conducted a lot of meetings with them initially and this was done in an effort to bring

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Najafgarh girls visit to Natural History Museum

— Sneha, Nishita and Karina/ as dictated to Anjali (Delhi)

Delhi: In August, we were taken on a trip to Natural History Museum with Mamta didi and Anjali Didi. First we watched a movie about the Bishnoi community in Rajasthan. We liked the way this community treated animals and we strongly feel that everyone should love animals. This community also makes medicines especially for the animals that are part of their community. We saw that even though they did not have a lot of money they still helped animals. They gave food to the animals as well. We saw that even celebrities such as Salman Khan have acted in a cruel manner towards animals and killed endangered deers.

After the movie, we went to a part of the museum that focused on the ecosystem. We learned that animals are connected to the environment and they depend on the earth for it so in turn all of us are connected. We are all connected to the environment and nature. We saw the water cycle in action and how the rain filters through our land, evaporates and becomes rain again. We even saw a life size portrayal of scavengers such as vultures and how essential they are to the food cycle and environment.

In another part of the museum we learned about conservation. There was a special exhibit on the Ganga and how it has been polluted by our actions. It is becoming very dirty and with all our human waste. We should stop doing this and put everything in the garbage bin. Further, factory waste is going straight into the river and it is further getting polluted. People think that by taking a shower in ganga they will become more pure but it actually makes us dirtier! We also went to the museum classroom where we got to learn about all that happens inside the human body. We got to literally hold a life-size heart model, bones, organs and ears!

All in all we had a great time and at the end we even got to take a picture with a life-size dinosaur!

This community also makes medicines especially for the animals that are part of their community. We saw that even though they did not have a lot of money they still helped animals. They gave food to the animals as well.

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This includes places like Park circus rail bridge, Diamond Harbour, Kalikapur etc. The chosen area was slightly far from where we were settled and later evicted. We were displaced—lost our identification proofs, source of earnings and no savings. Some fortunate families who were able to put up a tent near Topsia bridge, were unable to access basic facilities like drinking water, washroom, electricity. To make the matter worse, threat from political party cadre or from Railway Protection Force.

The situation forced us to marry off our minor girl children, especially consider their safety when we did not even had a shelter over our head. Also, most of the children quit from school.

Later, we decided to fight back. We knocked at the doors of many government body and authority to consider our rehabilitation, but were met with suspicion, hostility, non-cooperation and non-recognition of our issues.

Surprisingly, we found that the government do not have any actual data or tool to measure the loss caused due to eviction neither they had any intention to build it too. It was difficult to get any government statistics including our occupation, income, caste community, house hold status, family members, to measures the losses due to eviction.

In the year 2013, Apne Aap started gathering information by surveying over 200 families among the 383 evicted ones, to measure the losses, so that we can submit it to appropriate forum including government sector for proper rehabilitation and adequate compensation. We continued our survey, even after facing many hurdles. It was difficult to reach the remote areas to fill the questionnaire.

Finally, on August 17, 2015, the Topsia Eviction Impact Assessment report was published at Rotary Sadan in presence of Ruchira Didi, Miloon Kothari, Shivani Chaudhury from Housing and land rights network and Malini Bhattacharya. Housing and Land Rights Organisation has asked in developing the tools of survey. The survey by Apne Aap will be a helpful tool for us to claim our rights in the court of law.

We did not receive anything from the government yet. But during our journey, with Apne Aap’s help we got government ID’s and subsidies which will help us to fight for our rights. Thanks to Ruchira Didi and Tinku didi along with Apne Aap team for their relentless support to date.
Delhi: It was on my first day at Apne Aap that I realised, in all of my thirty six years, how poverty, illiteracy and the lack of choices have imprisoned a few communities in our country in the throes of inter-generational prostitution. I was amazed I had not heard of them all through my Master’s and MPhil courses in Sociology at the university. Reading up ‘The Town of Love’ by Anne Ostby, talking to Ruchira Gupta and Tinku Khanna drilled home the point how it is important not to regard prostitution as ‘sex-work’ because nobody would like to go through violations of the body, in exchange of a pay or without, out of free will. My initiation into the philosophy of Apne Aap nudged me into a realm where I had not given much thought before – that it is the pimps, traffickers, brothel keepers who should be regarded as the criminals, not the ones who have been prostituted, because it is the ‘ones who prostitute’ who have all the choices and the ‘ones who are prostituted’ none.

The very first day, I also got to meet a few children from freed/de-notified tribes, who comes at the Apne Aap centre from Najafgarh. These children are from the most marginalised sections in India, and a few of them are from a community where inter-generational prostitution is still practiced. These children travel a long distance daily to come to the Apne Aap office at the India International Centre in Lodhi Road. I see the same excitement and enthusiasm in them today as I saw when I first noticed it on my first day. They love the change of atmosphere, the exposure to a world where they would never have access otherwise, and they talk and laugh a lot with the staff in office. I was overwhelmed with how everybody in office connected so warmly with them, made them feel special, safe and secured.

These children come here every day for about two and a half hours for tuitions, workshops on storytelling, craft, photography, poster-making, film-making, etc. On my first day, they were working with a consultant on making some sketches and preparing some skit. And what they did, brought me shivers. One little girl had drawn a scene where some men were eve-teasing by the roadside. Another had drawn a man physically abusing a woman. I was stunned. At their age, I could have never drawn something like that. I mean even today if I sketch or draw, it is always some scenery or flower or a family portrait or a nice flower. I have never ever drawn boys teasing girls and men being violent to women even as an adult! Suddenly I felt a pain for these girls.

In the afternoon, I went to the library for a while where these girls were rehearsing for their play under the supervision of a senior theatre artist. The girls were given the freedom to think of the theme and come up with the script, with inputs from the theatre artist.

The girls chose themes like a male teacher molesting a girl child, and had characters like drunk fathers and helpless and abused mothers.

The quality of the play was so good that had I not known where these girls are coming from, I would have said, such maturity! After all this was serious stuff, not child’s play! But that day, my eyes were almost moist.

Continued from page 1

The children bathed and dressed up for the celebration. We purchased sweets. Kalam bhaiya, Naresh bhaiya and Meena di came to our place.

There, we celebrated 69th Independence Day of India for the first time. We were thrilled. We sang Vande Mataram, which was taught by Naresh bhaiya. Some of my friends practiced really well for this. The elder members of our community and Kalam bhaiya gave a speech on Independence Day. We were told that being an Indian, we must observe this day. But, we don’t have much knowledge about the freedom struggle. We always move from one place to another. I go blank when people ask me about the Independence struggle story.

After the flag hoisting, there were some media personnel who had interviewed us. They asked questions like how this celebration has motivated us. We informed them that Apne Aap had approached and supported us to access education and other link us to other government facilities. Also, there were some children of our community who got the chance to visit other schools and celebrate it with them.

Our community people noticed that children from outside attended the celebration wearing clean clothes and were accompanied by their parents.

These days many children from our community are going to Naresh bhaiya and Meena di’s class. We believe that we are no different from other children. We are as normal as others, with hopes and dreams alike. We should be given equal opportunities and a chance to prove our potentials by getting proper education.

Even our parents are not very keen on living the same kind of life in future too. Our success will motivate them to support us in our endeavour for a better life.
**Titli**

Subah Savere aati titali  
Phul Phul par Jati Titli  
Rang Birange Pankh Sajaye  
Sabke maan kobhati Titli

**Maa**

Maa tu kitni aachi hai,  
Mera sab kuch karti Hai  
Bhukh mujje jab lakti hai,  
Khana mujje khilati hai  
Jab main gandha hota hu,  
Roj mujje nah lati hai,  
Jab main rone lagta hu,  
Chup tu mujhe karati hain  
Maa mere dosto mein sabse,  
Pahele tu he aati hai

**Name**— Kaushal Sarkar  
**Age:** 12 years  
**Area:** Mumbai

**Name**— Sojib Hussain  
**Age:** 10 years  
**Area:** Mumbai