



RED LIGHT DESPATCH

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DELHI, KOLKATA, AND FORBESGANJ (BIHAR)

My Dreams

“To Own a House One Day”
—*Gulabsah Khatoon*

Bihar: My name is Gulabsah Khatoon and popularly known as Saavan. I am 17—year-old. Recently, I started my Urdu education from *Noorani Kay-dain* Madarsa. My father and mother passed away, now I live with my brother and his wife at Red Light Area, Forbesganj (Bihar).

Recently, I joined as a member of Kishori Mandal group at Ant Kanya Centre, Rampur.

Before, my family did not allow me to step out of my house except while going to Madrasa. But, now after joining Kishori Mandal, I go out everyday and meet my friends at Rampur Centre.

I also participate in various activities at the Kishori Mandal. For instance, learnt stitching and sewing, attended craft class, tuition, RLD session, open mike session, participated in rallies and human rights campaigns.

I am happy with my life, the way it is going. I just hope it remains uncomplicated and I get a chance to grow with my friends around.

I always have this nagging fear that I might get into wrong things. My only wish and dream is to be able to save myself from all the bad things happening around and live a healthy life. I want to be able to work. Walk freely in the market and own a house one day.

Apne Aap helps Topsia women to secure a job in leather industry

—*Dipshika Khan/ as dictated to Fazul*

Kolkata: My name is Dipsikha Khan. I live besides the railway tracks near Park Circus Railway station, Kolkata, with my family members.

Along with me, there are also families of those who were evicted on 7th - 12th November 2012 from the close proximity of the bridge, by the ‘goons’ hired by the government agency, who has constructed the bridge with active support from the ruling party and the police authority.

Following the eviction, most of the people from the area were not able to find any place to live as they did not have enough money to even rent a hut made of plastic sheets. So they were forced to live under the open sky and some of us got a temporary

settlement beside the railway tracks. Majority of those evicted ones were forced to relocate to a remote of south 24 pargana districts.

We lost our jobs. Also, were unable to find an alternate employment options to lead a life with dignity. There was no opportunity at all. Almost all the doors were closed on our face, especially when we had lost our identification cards after the eviction. We were on the verge of giving up on life. Still, with some hope, we attended meeting with Apne Aap members on a regular basis.

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Najafgarh girls attending classes at Head Office

—*Afsana/ as dictated to Jasneet Kaur*

Delhi: My name is Afsana, and I live in Sapera Basti, Dharampura (Najafgarh). I am 10-year-old, and I study in standard III in Nagar Nigam Prathmik Vidyalya, Najafgarh. I live with 4 sisters and 1 brother of mine, and I am the oldest among the siblings. I take care of my younger brother and sisters, and I also clean the house every morning and evening.

I have been coming to the Apne Aap community centre since two years in a row. Recently the activities were shifted to the Head Office in Lodhi Estate. We started going there by travelling in a metro everyday.

I have taken part in various activities with the organisation. Regular teach-

ing classes are held where girls like me, who go to school, are helped with our homework and syllabus, and the ones who do not go to school are taught. Jasmine didi takes our class, alongwith Shubhra didi. I really like them both, and the way they teach.

One day we went to the Lodhi Garden for our class. We sat there in a circle, finished our homework and learnt some new words. Jasneet didi, Mamta didi and Shashi didi accompanied us.

(Continued on page 7)

Apne Aap's rescue operation telecasted in Public Broadcasting Service (PBS): What happens when the person forcing you into sexual slavery is your own mother

Special correspondent Fred de Sam Lazaro traveled to India recently to take a closer look at the issue and the often unsuccessful efforts to combat the practice.

Fred De Sam Lazaro: In India's impoverished rural state of Bihar, people struggle to live off the land. One of the few businesses that thrive is underground.

Ruchira Gupta: This is one of the epicenters in the world for human trafficking. Little girls are trafficked into prostitution. They are put on buses and trucks and taken to the big brothels of Bombay, Delhi and Calcutta, but sometimes closer by.

Fred: Ruchira Gupta and the human rights group she founded, Apne Aap, or On Our Own, is working to change the tradition of lower-caste women being channelled into the sex trade.

The group sued authorities to provide schooling for girls rescued from brothels. And it runs a shelter for the women and their daughters. But, first, Apne Aap has to work with the police to free the women.

Ruchira (through interpreter): We have to arrest the trafficker.

Fred: Sometimes, that task is not easy.

Ruchira: The police is part of our society, and if the entire society believes that a girl is of less value, a low-caste girl is of even lesser value. So unless their mind-set changes, they don't even try to enforce the law, because they think this is not a crime.

Fred: In this morning's raid, the exact location was kept secret from the police until the last moment. Still, rumors of a raid had spread, and brothels cleared out.

But Fatima Khatoon, an Apne Aap staffer who grew up and still lives in the red light district, is a key source of intelligence. She led the search to a home where she said a girl was hidden. Not long after indignant protests from the homeowners, a frightened young woman emerged.

Fred: As the young woman was led to a waiting car, Fatima Khatoon led the team to a brothel where she had been allegedly working, hoping to gather evidence against her trafficker, apparently, the man shown here talking to police and also taunting Khatoon.

A loud and physical altercation ensued, before he was put into the police paddy wagon to cool down, at Gupta's insistence.

Ruchira: He was following us to try to talk the police out of it. And then he started abusing Fatima to provoke her not to go there by calling her all kinds of name, from whore to all kinds of things, provoking her so that she would hit him, and then he could hit her back. He's trying to stop us from going to the brothel.

Here's another room which is being used as a brothel, where the girl we rescued, this is the bed where the customers are brought and these girls are put forward for the customers. And they're locked up in rooms like this with iron bars on the window, as you can see. Here's a little condom lying here.

Fred: Next, another shack-like brothel. Here, they hope to

rescue two teenage girls, one forced to prostitute herself, the other the daughter of this woman who owned the place.

Gupta says it's not uncommon for women to be involved in the business of trafficking. Many were themselves trafficked when they were young.

Ruchira, what's — what's happening right now?

Ruchira: She says those girls are in school. So, I'm saying, fine. Take us to the school. We will go and meet the girls. We will meet the — and suppose we meet the girls?

Fred: Are they arresting her?

Ruchira: The girl is suddenly found who she said was in school. So, let's go and see what's going on.

Fred: It was the 14-year-old daughter of the brothel owner. Until recently, she had been enrolled in school and even lived in the Apne Aap shelter. But she was pulled out after seventh grade, being prepared, Gupta said, to go into the sex trade, a common tradition here passed from mother to daughter.

Negotiations resumed with the chastened brothel keeper and her son, who, in another common practice, works as a pimp.

Ruchira (through interpreter): Do you want to be a pimp?

MAN (through interpreter): No, ma'am.

Ruchira (through interpreter): So why are you doing this? You're preparing a 14-year-old to prostitute herself. You have another girl in the back, Sampatia, that you have enslaved. Have you no shame? And what's the use of you crying? Sampatia cries every day when customers come and rape her.

Fred: Sampatia, the girl being prostituted, wouldn't be produced on this day, but Gupta was able to negotiate a deal for the daughter, one more year in school.

Ruchira: Sampatia has agreed that she can study until class eight.

The hope, the daughter will become stronger, more educated, and she will be able to negotiate with her mother and we will, together, make her go on and stay on in school for another two years. It's year by year that we negotiate for a child.

And even a year of not being raped, a year of not being beaten is great. It's better than a year of being raped and beaten.

Fred: For the young woman brought back to school and to live in the Apne Aap shelter, it was hard to see much beyond her immediate fears and turmoil, torn and confused by family loyalty and tradition. Counseling for her is just one of the tasks that lay ahead for the Apne Aap staff.

They will do the same for the girl rescued earlier this busy day. Her testimony will be key to building the case against her alleged trafficker. In its 12 years, the anti-trafficking group Apne Aap had managed to successfully prosecute 66 traffickers, but, more critically, Gupta says, the first four alumni of its shelter now hold tickets out of generational prostitution and poverty. They have gone on to enroll in college.

Diary of a Social Worker

Mamta/ as translated by Varun Saxena

Delhi: My name is Mamta. I live in Dharampura with my family members. I am associated with Apne Aap as a community worker. The initial few months of my work as a community mobiliser was very tough. It was extremely difficult to get into the community and win their trusts.

I have Joined Apne Aap on January 14, 2011. The programme coordinator at that time gave me the basic insight about the problems involving sex trafficking and subsequently I was selected as a community mobiliser.

Before joining Apne Aap I used to work with Mrydo, a government ngo working for the uplift of women. I had formed self-help group of about 20 women. My main objective was to get loans for the underprivileged women. At present, I work with both little girls and women of the extremely marginalised communities- Perna and Sapera. They are among the denotified tribes in India. And Perna community is still into inter-generational prostitution

When I moved to Dharampura for the first time, the surrounding was not friendly. The place is unhygienic and it emits a strong stench. It was more difficult for me on a personal level because by choice I am a vegetarian and the place is dominated by meat-eater. The scenarios were as such where the men were playing cards and drinking in the public space. Also, the women were not ready to talk to us.

We made a daily visit for months, but there was no positive response from the communities. The life was as usual. The children were seen doing the home cleaning chores. It was a breaking point. Gradually, we started getting response from people. There we formed a Mahila Mandal and Kishori Mandal with both girls and women.

We used to hold meetings and discussion in a week. It was a way to bridge the trust between me and the women. **The process was slow, but the result is good. They accepted me as one of them and slowly started sharing their stories with me.**

Initially, we used to assemble at one of the beneficiaries house. Later, we opened two centres in Najafgarh and were given lessons in computer education and other skill development activities.

Working here is like readying ourselves for a battle. We face lots of problems and people throw abuses at us. Especially, after we rescued a girl of Perna community from Prem Nagar. To protest our rescue operation, the community people who believe prostitution is right, started boycotting us. We were locked from outside and once they threw stones at us.

Besides, on a regular basis we generally face harassment. Because the communities with whom we work are into inter-generational prostitution and the male gender tends to look every woman from that angle. They leered at us and sometimes pass comments by saying “ chalti hai kya?” Once even a cop stopped me thinking I am into prostitution. I told him I am working in Apne Aap as a social worker. He did not believe me and I was not carrying my identity to prove it. After, I had to phone my brother-in-law for my rescue.

Life is tough here, but working for the girls and women gives me happiness. If they succeed in life, may be they'll remember me playing a crucial role in it. That is what keeps me going.

Did You Know?

In India:

- There are 3 million women and girls in prostitution
- 1.4 million are under the age of 15
- 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

My First Day at Apne Aap

—Garima Bastola

Delhi: My name is Garima Bastola. On my first day at work, I did not know what to expect, I reached office at 9.00 am and prepared to start my day. I spent most of my time at the library reading up materials and articles to learn more about the visions and missions of Apne Aap.

I Inquired about the research work the organization had carried on and if I could read about what I would be undertaking. Looking back I feel I was trying to prepare way in advance what I was expected to do here.

What I have understood that in life things don't go as planned all the time. The most important part of my day was meeting the beautiful, mesmerising children of Najafgarh. I conducted their art class. The result of the art class was brilliant. They are excellent children. On my way back home, my mind was filled with many questions about the inequalities and unfairness in life.

It made me wonder what is so different between these children and ours? They have the same smile, same innocence, same laughter, and inquisitive eyes. They are all children. So, why is this disparity? Why are their children less privileged than ours? It somehow made me come to the conclusion that if we expect change and bring equality among all, then we need to shake the system, change policies and makes changes.

What kind of world are we living in, where we have parental control on television to protect children from watching something violent and there is another world where children are forced into prostitution. Delhi being the capital city, half of the population lacks basic necessities such as clean drinking water, safe place, education and health; the other half feels it's an effort to choose between tap water, still water or sparkling water.

If the place, where the Aap Aap's children living in Dharampura is not considered hygienic enough, safe enough for us, then it's not good enough for them too. The disparity is so wide that it frightens me the kind of world I live in.

My thoughts, my views on many things especially this world has changed. Everywhere I look, small children begging, children as young as 5-6 getting raped, children being stolen from parents and exploited. What sort of inhuman world are we living in; we have no morals, values or humanity. **Since my days in Apne Aap I have come face to face with the harsh truth of life.**

Get yourself involved!

Be a part of the campaign!

Click a selfie and share it with us on the Facebook Page 'Cool Men Don't Buy Sex' <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Cool-Men-Dont-Buy-Sex/624526271001934> with #CoolMenDontBuySex #Selfie #ApneAap.

The Cool Men Don't Buy Sex Campaign is a call to end demand for sex trafficking which highlights the role that men play in fostering the sex industry.



Apne Aap's "Cool Men Don't Buy Sex" campaign was born to draw attention to the demand side of sex trafficking - the traffickers, pimps, and purchasers of sex. Apne Aap advocates for the criminalization of these individuals – they are responsible for maintaining sexual slavery and continue to exploit women and girls every day in India.

A survivor at the National Human Rights Defenders workshop

—*Mohd Kalam*

Bihar: My name is Mohd Kalam. I am a survivor. I am a social worker. I am born to a community where girls are groomed to become a prostitute and in the same manner, even the men grow up to become pimps.

Recently, I was humbled and felt privileged to be invited as a panel speaker in the National Human Rights Defenders one-day workshop. It was definitely a respectable platform for me to share my story in front of the rights activist from across the country.

There were about 300 people, who had participated in the one-day workshop. This includes, Judges, National Human Rights Commission officers, State chairperson of SHRD, and other human rights defenders, respectively.

Here, I shared stories with regard to the vulnerability faced by our girls, who have no choice but to live in a home-based brothels, where the community still practice inter-generational prostitution. The girls are pushed into the trade by her mother, father, brother and relatives. **She is not safe at her own house.**

Under such situations, we are bound to feel helpless. The questions are always in my mind: who are going to protect these girls and women? Because, for certain society it becomes difficult to accept that this practice in itself is a violation of someone's right to live life with dignity. The girls born and brought up in this locality are considered among the last in the strata of society. For the very reason that most of the time their

voices are thwarted and they do not have the means to exercise their right to government subsidies. These girls do not have access to formal education and livelihood opportunities.

Some activists are advocating for legalizing of prostitution in India. If that is the case, what will be the future of these caste and communities who are still into inter-generational prostitution? At present, there are about 15 denotified tribes in India. During the British, there were certain tribes, which were declared as criminal tribes, but after gaining Independence, these tribes were denotified. The stigma, however remained and they are still branded as a prostitute family.

In front of the large gathering, I said in a stern voice that this has to stop. Later, I also talked about my illegal arrest and how I was falsely framed by the police force. Following my speech, many other human rights activist, shared their heartwrenching stories. Almost, 150 Human Rights Defenders claimed to have false charges against them. We have requested the NHRC to resolve the false charges against us.

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contact@apneaap.org**



The World Outside

“I am no longer into prostitution ”

— Keya/ as translated by Hindol

Kolkata: I am Sabina Bibi, but known as Keya in Sonagachi redlight area (Kolkata) where I have been living for the past eight years of my life.

In the month of February, I along with Uma got a chance to visit Delhi, to attend an event organized by Apne Aap. It was a great opportunity for us.

When coming out from the place where I have been living since so long, I observe that there were quite a many people who understand our problem, emphasised with us and lend a helping hand to support our cause, our fight. It gave me hope and also boosted my self-confidence many folds.

I live in redlight are, but it was never my choice. I was going through a violent marriage. But, one day I was thrown out of my in-laws house, along with younger son S K Raj. That was eight years ago.

I was homeless for some days. I made Sealdah railway station my temporary shelter. One day, when I was crying, a woman approached me and after listening to my story, she lured me by offering a job. She brought me to Sonagachi redlight area. She left me in a room there and promised to come back the next morning.

But, it never happened. She never came back. And my life took a whole new turn. It was turned upside down.

I didn't even get time to realize that I was trapped into prostitution. Soon I was forced to entertain customers and my hope of ever exiting prostitution was lost.

My life stopped there--Mental and physical torture, sexual violations, abuse. It was a story of every night. It was my life before I came in touch with Apne Aap and started working at Sonagachi centre in 2012, as a teacher in a non-formal school.

Apne Aap supported me and other girls, who are in similar situations by admitting our children in a school like Ram Krishna Vivekananda Mission and by bearing their education costs.

After joining Apne Aap, I again realized that a big world is outside of Sonagachi, that I always wished to see it for myself. I support Apne Aap's movement against sex trafficking and exploitation of vulnerable girls and women. **I am now working as a teacher in Apne Aap's Sonagachi center and cherishing the experience. I, however, wish to exit from this place as soon as possible.**

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As Apne Aap was working with us against the eviction and also helping to link us with the government subsidies, by creating identification card for us.

Last month, Fazul da from Apne Aap told that Ruchira di had arranged a working space for us in a local leather production factory. Initially four of us were allowed to avail this job opportunity. If our work satisfies them then the factory owner will create more space for others, who were jobless like us. We were glad to grab this opportunity. On the said day, we went to the location, along with three women from Topsis area, led by Mumtaz.

Initially Mumtaz introduced us to the supervisor of that factory, Rinku Dey. We had an introduction round; she had asked our names and then showed us the production unit where we were to work. Later, we met other co-workers of the same unit and started the work. We were divided in to two groups-- polishing unit and the other two in finishing unit. Initially, we were not comfortable but then our other colleagues extended warm welcome towards us. My first day was memorable. By the end of the day, the supervisor asked about my experience at work and assured us that we will be able to

learn the technicalities within few days if we are committed to learn. The next day, we reached our work place at 9:30 am.

I feel proud to say that I am financially independent and also the only earning member in my family. My husband is very ill and there are two unmarried daughters in my family. Now, I can earn up to five thousands rupees from a dignified means. **I and other women from Topsis wanted to express our heartfelt gratitude to Ruchira di and Apne Aap for giving us this job opportunity. Also, for always being a support to our struggle.**

We lost our jobs. Also, were unable to find an alternate employment options to lead a life with dignity. There was no opportunity at all. Almost all the doors were closed on our face, especially when we had lost our identification cards after the eviction.

Applique artwork at Forbesganj

—*Seema Kumari / as translated by Bhawana*

Bihar: My name is Seema Kumari. On the second week of February, I moved to Forbesganj, Bihar to teach appliqué stitching, as livelihood opportunities for the girls and women living in red light area.

Earlier, I was posted in Delhi centre and my first visit to Forbesganj was last year in the month of December. The first thing I did before starting the appliqué workshop was to mobilize the community locals of Rampur. With the able support of Fatima Khatoun, I met the women group from Rampur community. I gave the women an introduction on *'what is an applique?'*, and, displayed some samples of the appliqué work. In the end, it drew an enthusiastic group of 23 women to learn about novel appliqué techniques, who registered their names to attend the workshop, which started on December 26, 2014.

First, the women were taught stitching on a 6 by 6 piece of cloth. The participants learnt to make a cut out of a tree and leaves. In this, the participants learnt to do loose stitching of the cut outs, and, finally to stitch the seams. Later, from February 12, 2015, I have started taking regular sessions in appliqué workshop.

I am aged 25, and developing a connection with my students has always been important to me, and, I have developed strong connection with the participants. My students are the vulnerable girls and women, who reside in redlight area or in the same district. **I feel privileged to pass on the skills taught by mother, to the people in need, who can use it as an opportunities to earn their livelihood.**

Now-a-days, women participants come early and start practicing the work. Right now there are 23 women participating in the appliqué workshop. So far these partici-

pants have been taught to make *handkerchief, card, tree, hut, flower, leaves, patterns of dolls and birds.*

Nothing is more striking than hand appliqué done on a dark background. However, successful transparencies depend on value (the lightness or darkness of color) and intensity (the brightness or dullness). Shot cottons – fabrics that have different-colored warp and weft threads – have a shimmering quality that enhances the illusion of see-through color.



It has always been a great way to really spend some time with people who enjoy my work and want to learn more through my sharing of designs and techniques, and materials.

Over the years I have held many and various workshops although not on a regular basis. The response has been wonderful and I reconnected with students from previous classes and had new students as well. Everyone was enthusiastic and came prepared to learn and create.

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After we were done, we walked around the garden and saw the grand monuments. I also saw ducks in a pond. I loved the visit to the garden.

Another day we had an art workshop by Mahula Ghosh. She gave us different topics to draw and colour. We were also given training about computers, and I learnt the various parts of a computer.

I really like coming to Apne Aap Head office and getting involved in different activities there. We meet so many people from different countries, who come to visit Apne Aap. I like coming out of my house, my basti for few hours in a day, traveling in the metro and meeting new people.

Everyone carries their lunch with them, but I don't feel hungry after school, so I just drink the coffee we get in

the office. I don't feel like missing the class even for one day. Once I got hurt on my head while playing with my sister, and I had the bandage on, but I still attended the class.

I, however, wish there were more to learn in the Head Office. For instance, I want to learn singing and dancing too. Also, I am told that my drawing is good in comparison to other peer mates. I wish to get a chance to enhance my talent further.

Poems

“I Want to Live”

I want to become a puzzle flit,
Want to become cloud to touch the sky,
Want to be a girl and still live,
And never want to cry.
I want to create a new style of life and live it,
Do not endure Violence,
Fight against it,
We want to live,
We want to live,
We have to win,
With smile on our face!

Name-Jyoti Kumari Shaw
Age- 12 years
Class-VI, Munshiganj (Kolkata)

“FRIENDSHIP”

Friendship is a blessing of God to man,
Never be scared of anything if you have friend,
Do not let down friends ever!
Only Lucky people get the holy hand of friendship,
Show the miracle of friendship to all,
And always be together!

Name- Ruby Gupta
Age- 13 years
Class- VII, Lajpat Balika Vidhalaya, Munshiganj
(Kolkata)



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Organizing communities to end sex trafficking—every woman free, every child in school