



RED LIGHT DESPATCH

VOLUME VIII, ISSUE 2

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DELHI, KOLKATA, MUMBAI AND FORBESGANJ (BIHAR)

My Dream “Help uplift other girls” —Aditi, aged 17

Bihar: I am Aditi and 17-year-old. As we are aware that computer is a great blessing to modern age. It has made our life easy and more convenient. It brought the world closer. I live in a small town.

In my town, there are several computer education centres. I have also started learning computer in “Apne Aap”, which is only for girls. Many girls from our community go to the centre. My computer teacher is very patient, humble and kind. To date, I have learnt many things like MS-Paint, typing and several other things. Being computer literate is always useful. It makes things easier for us. Learning computer is like a dream come true for me. There is no age limit to learn it.

With computer knowledge it becomes easier for us to find a job. These days, every well reputed organization requires a candidate with computer skills. Generally, I try to motivate other girls in our community and tell them the importance of learning basic computer skills. Now it is almost impossible for us to imagine finishing a technical work without the help of computer.

It is my passion to connect with people via internet worldwide and share our girls’s educational and social status to the world outside. I know such things don’t happen overnight. But, I believe and hope that one day the girls from my town will be self-motivated to go to work.

I got subsidized food with Apne Aap’s support

— By Sita Devi/ as dictated to SK Fazul

Kolkata: My name is Sita Devi. I and my family live in Munshiganj redlight area. I was sold at aged 15, after being lured for a job. During the initial days in the redlight area, I was tortured by the brothel keeper on a daily basis. I was compelled to take five to six customers per night.

Eventually, I got a rented accommodation with the help of a lady. After many years, I heard about Apne Aap Women Worldwide, an organisation whose goal is to empower at risks girls and women in prostitution, by different intervention including training for livelihood opportunities.

After that I heard about Apne Aap, an NGO working for the prostituted women. They provide legal awareness, livelihood options and also help

the children of redlight areas to get admissions in schools. Then I joined Apne Aap. I wanted to secure my protection from the harassment of brothel keeper by linking with an organisation. My decision was also to help other gullible girls and women who are often sold for prostitution in the redlight district.

After coming in touch with Apne Aap members, we discussed about the prevailing problems and formed a group ‘Dhobi’. I am one of its active member.

I and my daughter, participate and attends in different meeting including legal awareness sessions.

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Nukkad Natak on gender equality in male dominated community at Najafgarh

— Sunaina/ as dictated to Khushboo Mishra

Delhi: My name is Sunaina. I study in fifth standard in Nagar Nigam Prathamik Bal Balika Vidhyalaya, Najafgarh. I live in Dharampura and belongs to Perna community. My favourite subject is English and Maths. My hobbies are painting, dance and music. I also like watching drama and movies.

Few days ago, some students from different colleges in Delhi University came to our community to perform Nukkad Natak. The residents were informed three days prior to the program. I was very excited. On the day of Nukkad Natak, I had my school. I completed my homework in school itself. I didn’t want to get delay to see the performance. As soon as I fin-

ished my lunch, I heard the voice of cheering. I ran out of my house and performers were there already. They were all girls wearing yellow kurtas and black leggings. They all had beautiful coloured dupatta hanging from both sides around their neck. All girls were very pretty to look at.

Initially, the performers took about three to four rounds in the area of Perna and Saperas to make the announcement with dholak in their hands. I was following them the entire time. It was so much fun. It was the first in our community.

(Continued on page 7)

Op-Ed— Ruchira Gupta's conversation on "Facing Wrongs and Seeking Rights: The Female Perspective" published in The Express Tribune

Apne Aap Founder and activist Ruchira Gupta in conversation with Shaheen Attiqur Rehman on 'Facing Wrongs and Seeking Rights: The Female Perspective' session at 7th Karachi Literature Festival. Published in The Express Tribune.

KARACHI: She hurts, she hides, she cries. No one to listen to her unchained melody of pain, she thinks she is going insane.

Breaking the silence, the speakers of 'Facing Wrongs and Seeking Rights: The Female Perspective' session highlighted the significance of discussing 'discomforting' topics of child abuse and prostitution. The session was held on the third day of 7th Karachi Literature Festival.

The session started with the moderator, Bunyad Literacy Committee Council vice-chairperson Shaheen Attiqur Rehman, narrating an anecdote from her childhood. Rehman was sitting with a teary-eyed less privileged woman in a bus once. When Rehman inquired, the woman said that she has been diagnosed with tuberculosis, upon the knowledge her in-laws threw her out of the house so she had no option but to sell herself.

"Women in South Asia live in a state of permanent exile," said Apne Aap Worldwide founder and social activist Ruchira Gupta while addressing the predominantly female audience. She has also won an Emmy for investigative journalism on a documentary on sex trafficking, 'The Selling of Innocents'.

Dome of silence

"We don't talk about incest. Incest is a reality, whether you like it or not. We don't talk about issues that the decadent society does not approve of. We don't want to talk about child abuse. Women who are raped are condemned in the society. We have to break this silence. We have to be the voice of the voiceless."

Rehman raised topics that the society chooses to ignore. Gupta and Saeed highlighted the power of raising collective voice.

Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation launched an AIDS campaign in India, said Gupta. However, the distribution strategy was actually protecting the male buyers and not the female 'sex workers'. So, we raised our voices against the policy of the campaign, and it was changed, she added. "There is power in amplifying voices."

On the other hand, Saeed shared her experience of filing a complaint of sexual harassment at her former

place of employment. "Three years I put up with it but, once I started talking to other women, I realised we all had a similar experience." Eleven of us, then ultimately filed the complaint, she claimed.

Getting the legislation on sexual harassment passed was another endeavour for Saeed. "Initially, the government did not want to sit us because we were using the word 'sexual', so we rephrased it as 'code of conduct for gender justice.'" We should learn to strategise to bring people on board, she added.

Innocence for sale

Gupta shared how she did not write on women's issues earlier in her career. "I thought I will be trivialised at the workplace. So there was a big red-light district in my hometown (Kolkata) but I continued to ignore it. My education taught me not to empathise [with those who are marginalised]", she added.

"Once, I was walking through the hills of Nepal and I came across many villages that did not have any girls from the age of 15 to 45. I asked the men, where the women were? And they told me, Bombay." It was that moment of realisation that flesh trade happens in my country so I began investigating it, she explained.

"Women were being raped, physically tortured and all in plain sight." Gupta then made a documentary and launched an NGO to eradicate sex trafficking.

On her research on traditional system of prostitution, Lok Virsa head and author of Taboo! The Hidden Culture of a Red Light Area Fouzia Saeed said that her journey started because of her love for dancing. "I noticed that whenever people are dancing, someone always remarks, 'why have you opened up a brothel here?'"

During the research, I came across the many biases surrounding the field. These women were named after swear words, yet the men who visited them remain anonymous, pointed out Saeed.

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Diary of a Social Worker

—Noorani Khatoon/ as translated to Praveen Kumar

Bihar: My name is Noorani Khatoon and I am employed as a teacher in KGBV, Simraha (Bihar) supported by Apne Aap Women Worldwide. Since two years I have been appointed as a language teacher here. It is a residential hostel and act as a safe house for girls from redlight areas and for those belonging to an extremely marginalised communities.

We have close to hundred girls in this hostel. Most of them are from class VI, VII and VIII. The admission for girls in the hostel starts from class VI and they are allowed to stay till they complete standard VIII. I was appointed by Sarv Siksha Abhiyan, Araria on September, 2014. Beside me, there are two other teaching staffs, Mrs Chanda Kumari (warden) and Ms Shruti Priya (Science Teacher).

This is my first job. I am from a minority community. My father is a small-time businessman and my mother is a home-maker. I have a brother and a sister, who are still studying in colleges. I did my graduation from Forbesganj, Bihar. **The feeling was overwhelming when I was selected as a teacher in KGBV. It was a beginning for me to share the financial burden of my family. My father was overjoyed too. We are not rich enough to provide education to all the girl members of the family. It was a lot of struggle for my father to support my education.**

I came to know more about the work of Apne Aap, after joining as a warden at KGBV. It was not an eye opening issues to me. I have been brought up in the neighborhood. I was familiar of the deep rooted problem from before. **But, being here, looking after the girls and understanding them on a deeper level, it gave me entirely new perspectives on seeing life. On communicating more with them, I understood that almost of them have either been a victim or is habituated to violence at their home. Some of them have their houses at the red light areas of Forbesganj block, and they certainly have altogether new experiences to share.**

Initially, I was confused and did not know how to work with these girls. It was an ordinary thing for them to use abusive language against other hostel mates, on a regular basis. I started by giving time on understanding and training them on basic etiquette. For instance, we use to sit in a group, try to understand each other and conduct simple activities to build the friendship bond among them.

Every day is a learning process.

We, teachers are respected by the girls. Hence, it is not an issue for us to create guidelines, which is followed by them dutifully. The girls, however, after a point of time start the process of knowing each other. This, self initiation by the girls, help in maintaining discipline without much effort.

I have observed that the children despite their poor economical background have excelled both academically, sports and extracurricular activities. The students participates in activities including karate, gender training, appliqué classes and sorts.

I, wholeheartedly appreciate the commitment by Apne Aap Women Worldwide in uplifting the last of the last girl from the most marginalised communities. I feel proud to be associated with the organisation and be part of such noble work. Thank you Apne Aap team for helping the children of next generation.

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Delhi University students performs a 'nukkad natak' on gender equality in Najafgarh

—Sunaina/ as dictated to Khushboo Mishra

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Initially, the performers took about three to four rounds in the area of Perna and Saperas to make the announcement with dholak in their hands. I was following them the entire time. It was so much fun. It was the first time in our community.

Then, they started to perform Nukkad Natak. The crowd started pouring in. We had struggle to get a place to keep our feet. Everybody was engrossed in watching the play. **We were all smiles. Some scenes were intense. For a while I forgot it is just a play. I got goosebumps. I felt like crying, laughing and shouting he slogans with them. I could not believe that a street play could be so effective.**

The street play was based on gender equality. It was mindboggling. I really liked some of the lines and I remember it clearly. The participants while talking

among themselves were also saying lines like, "ask for the permission before touching any other person", "Learn and grow so that you can take your own decision", and on how difficult it is to be a girl. For instance, during the play, the characters said "being a girl, I always have to ask for permission from my father or brother".

During the entire play, I have noticed that they were repeating this same line over and again "chal rehne de". When I questioned a girl from the University about it's importance. She told that, generally we ignore everything saying leave it, it does not matter to us. They said, although we live in a patriarchal society, if we want we can break all the barriers. It was such a serious matter. But they have portrayed in such a humorous manner. They sang several songs. They danced with us. We all enjoyed a lot. I wish that they come again soon.

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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

The World Outside

— *Rachna Nayak*

Kolkata: My name is Rachna Nayak. I am associated with Apne Aap Women Worldwide. Our team members have visited various schools (Modern High School, St Xavier's College, Maha Devi Birla Girls School and Apeejay school) for "Talk to Me" program initiated by Apne Aap.

The first step we took was to assemble in the school auditorium and introduce each of us, our organisation's work. We told them about how our organisation works with marginalised girls and women at different redlight areas. Further, we gave details about our work by mentioning the enrolment of children of the prostituted women. We told them why children's residential schooling was most important. It is in order to break the cycle and educate the children of prostituted women, so that they are not pushed into prostitution directly or indirectly.

We make earnest efforts to make these children comfortable at our center. **We try to make them believe that they are in safe places, where they could grow to become bright and highly intellectual individuals by learning and gaining enormous knowledge provided at Apne Aap center. Here, we broaden the meaning of knowledge by including not only studies but also dance, drawing, computers, spoken English, tuitions and other vocational trainings.** We also informed them about mid-day meal facility. After providing all the necessary details, we requested school to assist our children in all possible avenues.

After "Talk to Me" program, Apeejay School visited our center and donated color pencils, books, copies and many stationary products for children. In a similar manner, other schools where we held the programs donated various items including stationary and food items. At the conclusion of the event, all participating schools accepted our approach and confirmed to contribute in whatsoever way they can to brighten the future of the children in need.

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**Write to us for any queries or comments at contact@apneaap.org
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Marginalised girls from Najafgarh performing at Shanti Gyan School's annual function

—Hoorbai/ as dictated to Khushboo Mishra

Delhi: My name is Hoorbai. I belong to Perna community. I have been living in Dharampura, Najafgarh after my marriage. Though my husband passed away I still live here. I am a single parent, looking after the well being of my daughters.

Last year (2015), Apne Aap admitted four girls in Shanti Gyan International School from our community – Varsha, Aarti, Anisha and prachi. From those girls, two are my daughter: Varsha and Aarti.

Recently, the school celebrated annual day. I, along with other members from our community attended the function. We were accompanied by Apne Aap team members.

It was thrilling to see our girls performing on stage. They had performed dance on different songs like Jhansi ki Rani, Holi. It was such a pleasant surprise for us. I never imagine my daughter could perform so well, that too on such a big platform in front of large audience.

Which mother will not feel proud? Why should I restrain my emotions? I was very proud seeing my girls on the stage. **Earlier, girls from our community were looked down upon in the hostel, as we belong from an economically backward class.**

However, with time and their enthusiastic efforts in school, the girls have gained confidence and are respected by other hostel mates and the

teachers.

When people appreciate our girls, we cannot be happier.

Education is very important. With time, our girls have brought many positive changes in their outlook. They are encouraged to study and be successful. I want to see Aarti as doctor and Varsha as Lawyer. **I always teach my daughters to study hard so that they do not lag behind. I have many dreams for my daughters. I got married at an early age. I did the same to my two elder daughters due to lack of education and financial support.**

Now, I want my other two daughters to study and fulfil their dreams. I will not get them married till the time they complete their studies and start earning for themselves. Later, they will take decisions for their marriage.

Annual Day function was a big day for all of us. I have never attended one in my entire life. As a mother, being there, seeing how good my girls were doing in the world outside. I got emotional. Although, I don't make enough money, I will let my girls study and move forward in life. I will allow them to take their decisions in life. I am delighted that school and Apne Aap support our community girls to move ahead in life.

Continued from page 1

During one such legal sessions, Fazul da informed us about National Food Security Act and how people can be benefitted through this act. He said that government will distribute cards and application forms from local camps as the act have been enacted from 27th January, 2016 throughout West Bengal, along with state government's food schemes namely Rajya Khadya Suraksha Yojana (from 1st February 2016).

He asked us to collect application forms from the local camps and gave a brief information about the importance of the cards and who can avail it. We, being from one of the most marginalised groups, met all the criteria to avail the service.

In 2013, we submitted to get rice in subsidized rate through BPL card. Now it is even better, we are getting the same benefit from NFSA scheme.

Through this scheme, we are getting rice and wheat at the rate of Rs 2/ kg. **It is still difficult for us to believe that we can access government facilities. Generally, most of the women**

residing in redlight areas were excluded from all kinds of government schemes. It is worst when the government officials do not feel the need to give us explanation on why we are not treated at par with other people. We feel awfully insignificant.

It is a different case this time, three members in my family got the NFSA card and we are able to collect ration in a subsidized rate from local shops.

My daughter also applied for her card, however, she did not receive it yet. Nevertheless, she got necessary assistance from Apne Aap; Fazul da gave her a blank form to fill the NFSA Card and my daughter finally submitted it again.

For me this is a great step towards my empowerment, by reducing dependency on prostitution. I am thankful to Apne Aap for generating awareness about different new government schemes and helping us to link with those schemes.

My First Day at Apne Aap

— *Sibaji Barik*

Kolkata: I am Sibaji Barik. I am from Odisha. I am residing in Kolkata and doing a course on Cost and Management Accountant. I was in a confused state when I decided to join Apne Aap in February 2016. I had no previous experience working in development sector.

I heard about the work of the organisation by Sudhanshu Kumar Jha. Earlier, my interest was more into perpetually growing population of India. It used to amaze me how it seems to never stop. Many people are homeless, they are dying due to starvation. Still, we see child being brought into this world and thrown out on the streets to feed for themselves. It makes my heart bleed to see the situation everyday.

And, when I was informed that one of organisation's work is to empower girls and women in modern day slavery, a different picture came in my mind. Whenever someone utter the word "slavery" or human trafficking people relate it with some unfortunate and tragic incident of the pasts. For most, it only existed in history.

They were wrong. Human trafficking and sex trafficking still exists and it is one of the most profitable business globally only second to arms and drugs smuggling. Without saying, we know it is downright violations of many rights including right to live life with dignity. It is a form of modern day slavery. Trafficking in person refers to the illegal trade or sale of human being for sexual purpose or forced to labor. It was a reason enough for me to join Apne Aap. To work for a cause of grave importance in present days.

The first person I met on my first day at work was Salama aunty. I also observed beautiful drawings hanging on the walls at Hasting office. The drawings were made by girls. Later, I met Tinku Khanna, Director of Apne Aap, and then Sudhanshu Kumar Jha who gave me brief introduction about the organisation and my roles and responsibilities here.

As a finance person, I wanted to start with tally entry, but Sudhanshu made me read the organisation's structure, the number of field centres, and what are statutory laws applicable by the organisation. In the late evening, I met few important members of the organization.

That day, when I returned to my hostel after work, it made me realised that an non-governmental organisation regardless of it's size and reach can always change many lives positively. This makes me smile. I am contended.

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Poems

Childhood

Beautiful as cherry blossom
Purest as lotus flower
Brightest as sun and moon
Let my childhood be
As joyful as the face of sunflower

Name– Neha

Class: VI

Area: Delhi

Tree

I am a tree,
Home to many.
I have roots,
Hidden from the view.
I am grounded,
under deep soil.
Isn't it the reason,
That we grow so beautifully?

Name– Suhana

Class: IV

Area: Delhi



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Red Light Despatch

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