



# RED LIGHT DESPATCH

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DELHI, KOLKATA, MUMBAI AND FORBESGANJ (BIHAR)

## My Dream

**“To become a teacher”**  
—Anjali Kumari, aged 17

**Bihar:** My name is Anjali Kumari and I am 17-year-old. I live at Kuber Tola, Uttri Rampur Panchayat, Forbesganj. I am a student of class XI at Lee Academy, Forbesganj. I am associated with Apne Aap women worldwide through computer and appliqué class. I learn the lessons and try to be better than others in my class.

My mother is also associated with NOMI network, an NGO, which was working in collaboration with Apne Aap Women Worldwide. My mother does the job of stitching and earns money to feed the entire family members. Besides the economic constraints, she continued to provide for our study with the money she earned from stitching.

I am said to be good in my studies. After the completion of college, I aspire to a teacher or a banker. I don't want to be poor any longer. I don't want my family to be in the same condition. I wish they could life at par with other privileges ones. I hope enroll my younger brother in a better school for higher education.

My family lives in a village near Forbesganj. Most of the families in my neighborhood are illiterate and from an extremely poor background. I want to help them in getting a proper education, which can be used to exit poverty. I want them to be self-empowered and live a better life. I want to thank my mother, who has supported me even when she had no money for my schooling. She has taught me never to lose patience. I hope I'll be able to fulfill my dream very soon.

Thanks to Apne Aap women worldwide, who gave me the opportunities to reach my goal in life.

## Anthology on prostitution launched by Apne Aap survivor leaders

— By Payal/ as dictated to SK Fazul

**Kolkata:** My name is Payal and I reside at Sonagachi Red Light area. I am a member of Apne Aap Women Worldwide. I visit the centre to learn some skills and also participate in different educational programme and meetings.

Once a didi from Apne Aap mentioned about Ruchira Di's book and she had said that the book is a collection of stories written by few good writers about the dark world that we live in. I learnt that it is dedicated to the last girls and women living in red light areas, who are forced to sell their body.

In January, I was pleasantly surprised to learn that the book “River of Flesh” would be inaugurated in Kolkata Town Hall. And I was bowled

over when Tinku di and Sahana di requested me and Rumki to inaugurate it. I felt deeply honored. There were prominent celebrities like Aparna Sen, Ratnottama Sengupta, Educationalist like Nayanika Mookherjee and others along with Ruchira di- the Editor of the book.

Initially, I was scared and nervous. It was for the first time in my life where I'll be standing in the same platform with the likes of the well known individuals. I only saw them in television. It was nothing less than a dream. On 17 January, 2016, the book “River of Flesh” was released and available for the people to purchase it.

*(Continued on page 6)*

## The struggle of DNT community members to secure Caste Certificate

— Virender/ as dictated to Khushboo Mishra

**Delhi:** My name is Virender. I live in Dharampura of Najafgarh. I belong to Sapera Caste, which is a denotified/freed community. I have three children; two boys and a girl. My monthly income is not enough to feed the entire family and also provide the basic needs of my children.

I am bound to make end meets and put more efforts during the peak wedding season. Our source of income depends on weddings in town. We get paid for playing drums in weddings. We term it as a ‘wedding season’. Because of the many weddings in one season; starting from the month of October to March. We wait for it eagerly.

**This is the time when our whole family is happy. We save some money for the months, which do not have any weddings so that there is no shortage of food at home.**

Earlier I did a survey on behalf of an NGO where I was paid little. I am not much educated, as I and our community people ( Sapera) never give any importance to education. **I don't want the same fate for my children. I have big dreams for them. I will struggle as much as I can, so that my children can fulfill their dreams. Now, this is my mission in life.**

## Op-Ed— ‘Feminism is one country’

### Ruchira Gupta’s interview in Telegraph India

*From the definition of feminism to the power of love marriage, Ruchira Gupta, the founder of Apne Aap Women Worldwide, touched upon a wide range of topics in conversation with Jadavpur University professor Paromita Chakravarti at An Author’s Afternoon, presented by Shree Cement and Taj Bengal, held in association with t2, Prabha Khaitan Foundation and literary agency Siyahi.*

#### **Feminism is one country**

People tell me that feminism is a ‘western concept’ or ‘western feminists think so’! That’s what I’m trying hard to cross, because I feel that we have a movement on our hands and we should not let anyone divide it. Cultures are dynamic and they cross borders and boundaries, so they affect us all, just as I was talking about the Playboy culture there.

While multinational corporations are working across borders and boundaries, grass-roots movements are not able to, because they are so caught up with the struggle to survive. So, it becomes very important for us to exchange information and practices and have joint struggles.

The work that I do, for example, anti-sex trafficking, if there are good laws to punish men who buy sex in Sweden and Norway, they will travel to countries like Thailand to buy 13-year-old girls. So, we have to have the best laws in Thailand too.

But there are some things very local in women’s movements. For example, in America, their biggest issue is abortion. They have to take on the pro-choice people and the pro-life people. In India, we don’t have to struggle for it. It is legal and for Rs 300 we can get a very safe abortion. The struggle here is the right over property or inheritance, food security... basic fundamental rights. How much food does a girl get versus how much food does her brother get? When does she get the food? Same thing with a wife and a husband.

#### **Who is a feminist?**

Suddenly, there’s a comeback in feminism in the States, and also in India. But yes, till the December 16 bus rape, people didn’t want to call themselves a feminist. They thought that being a feminist was being completely desexualised. I remember girls telling me that ‘if we were feminists, we wouldn’t have boyfriends!’ They thought feminism meant cutting off all access to sex and flirtation. That has changed. Now, a boy comes and tells me that he’s a feminist.

I was standing at Delhi airport when Bharat Ram, one of the boys who was boarding the same flight, came to me and said, ‘Are you Ruchira Gupta? I wanted to tell

you that I’m a feminist.’ I said, great, and asked him why. He said, ‘Because feminism is for men. If we are feminists, then we will have a more equal society, where we can participate equally with women and that’ll be much more fun, so we’ll have sex with collaboration rather than sex with domination. Participation is more fun.’

People are beginning to understand that feminism is not only about being pro-women, it is really about understanding the feminine in all of us and supporting that.... When we say that we are not feminists, we are actually cutting off empathy with something inside ourselves because all of us have femininity and masculinity and so many other things in between, which are gender fluid.

#### **The power of love marriage**

Love marriage is a sign of rebellion; you are choosing your own man rather than letting your parents choose him. So you rebel against your parents, but you don’t rebel against patriarchy, because you are still choosing a man. What about all the women who are choosing to live alone? That’s even more interesting to me, because I find more and more single women in beautiful homes and lovely careers, now even producing their own babies through all the science and technology available to them.

On the question of love, these girls who choose to marry outside caste, outside religion and then have to face issues like honour killing... that too is a rebellion against set patriarchy. They are choosing husbands because that’s the only thing they know as a way of rebellion. But soon that will change... the single woman’s movement is growing and I think men will also appreciate it, because they too are being put into the prism of stereotypes.

In India, the biggest gain has been legal. We have great laws and they keep changing all the time. For example, we got the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act after the rape of Jyoti Singh Pandey, as I’d like to call her.

It’s a huge gain that we have managed to create laws around inheritance, domestic violence, rape, and redefined rape.... Because women participated in India’s Freedom Struggle, so constitutionally some things were a given for us. We had voting rights and equal rights in the Constitution. So we are much more self-confident than women in many other countries.

Personally, I find Indian women to be more self-confident than American women.

#### **Challenges ahead**

## Diary of a Social Worker

—*Shashibala/ as translated by Khushboo Mishra*

**Delhi:** My name is Shashibala. I stay in Dharampura colony of Najafgarh with my entire family. I have three grown up children and my husband works for a private company in Gurgaon . I studied up to 12<sup>th</sup> standard, and then went for a teacher training course which attracted me more.

Since early days of my life, I was clear in mind that I want to work in an area where I could contribute to society on a larger scale. After the completion of my teacher training, I got the opportunity to teach the students of nursery class. I was a teacher for some years. Then worked with G.R.C Hasampur as a community mobilizer for four years .Later, On 3<sup>RD</sup> Dec 2010 I joined Apne Aap Women Worldwide as a community mobiliser.

When I started to work with Apne Aap in community, I faced numerous challenges. Earlier, I worked on many government schemes (Pension, Ladli, Health Insurance) which were very beneficial for people. But as I was new to this community in Najafgarh, people didn't listen to me. They would hide away, shut their doors, and pretend to not hear anything said. This disheartened me. I was not going to give up easily.

Next day and the next day, I approached till I was successful in creating a bond between us; till they trusted me enough to listen to me. Eventually, I started telling them about various activities done by our organisation.

**I did not visualise the difficulties I was about to encounter. This area is divided among communities of Perna, Sapera and Sindhi. Caste system was at such a level where even little children didn't talk to each other. People were not at all supportive in initial stages. I was like a burden to them, someone who would come every day.**

With the passage of time, people realised that I knock at their door regularly for their own benefit only. My aim was only to help them to progress and grow. With Apne Aap, I managed to get Labour Card, Voter ID Card and Ration Card of many localities. I still remember my first few days in community, I was much

scared, occupied with thinking how would I manage if the people in community won't listen to me. Determination to get victorious made me more strong everyday and I decided that I will work in this community to make this section of society to stand on their own feet.

Recently, I was working on Caste Certificates which will enable them to get increased facilities from government. Lack of documents was a new obstacle this time. Somehow, I managed to get caste certificates done for 27 residents here and others are in progress. With Apne Aap, we got four students admitted to hostel (Shanti Gyan International School). Sending the girl child to hostel was a serious issue. Parents were adamant not to send their children anywhere. Rumours of society were also responsible.

**Parents feared that their children will be taken away for wrong purposes. With the exertion of tremendous efforts, we convinced parents and had put four students in hostel. Seeing this, now many more parents are willing to put their children into hostel.**

Willingness to do is the medium to get achievement. Men, particularly, in this community do not want to work. They consume alcohol, bidis and gamble as a mission to fulfil in their life, unconcerned of every other aspect. Despite other future challenges which are yet to come as a social worker, I feel glad that I got a wonderful platform where I can contribute my part for the betterment of society.

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*(Continued from page 2)*

India's problem has been that we have not been able to deal with the social issues to manage the laws. So, one group of women who are educated, who are not working-class, have been able to make strides along with working-class women. The middle class and the lower-middle class are the ones caught between the freedoms that the upper classes and working classes enjoy. I think that is changing, which is very interesting, specifically since the December 16 rape.

A film like Masaan couldn't have been made before December 16, where the movie opens with this woman watching some erotica on the computer and she is the one who has rented a room.... It was such a true movie about the new Indian woman who is middle class, lives in small towns. Her aspirations aren't shoes or clothes, her aspiration is independence. The moment when women began to march on the streets and speak up, and the government responded and changed the laws, it gave such a boost to the Indian women's movement.

*A prostituted woman from Sonagachi meeting a survivor from Ireland*

—*Babli Singh/ as dictated to Sudipta Dasgupta*

**Kolkata:** My name is Babli Singh. I have been staying in Sonagachi past 20 years. I and my entire family members have shifted from Agra. I have been associated with Apne Aap for a long time. I stand with the organisation's cause and ideology. Whenever I had difficult in legal, the team stood with me and helps in fighting my case.

Sonagachi is the largest Red Light Area in Asia, where Apne Aap started work since 2014. Here the organization generates awareness campaigns among community people regarding their rights. **In the centre, located in the middle of Sonagachi, prostituted women's children come for education; women come for legal support, adult literacy, livelihood options like sewing, stitching and dance classes. It has been a shelter of hope for many during the time of need.**

The centre acts as a safe space to the prostituted women. Many women in prostitution come to live temporarily in Sonagachi with their children. Sometimes, they leave their children behind alone and runaway from here. Generally, Saturday and Sundays are busy day for the Women in prostitution. We earn much more than week days.

On Sunday, Sudipta Di informed me that Rachel Moran, a prostitution survivor from a foreign country would come to have a chat with us. She was accompanied by Rachna, Fazul Sir, and Tinku di.

She came and interacted with me and asked many questions. For instance, how difficult is life for us? Do girls come here for their own need or they are traf-

ficked or they are voluntarily willing to get into this trade as a livelihood option? I replied that many of them came here for their own livelihood reasons, and also there are few organisations which helped them in getting their name registered.

If police gets hold of any of them then they can show the card for the immediate release.

After the conversation with Rachel, I felt a tinge of pride by seeing someone of our likes leading her life so respectfully.

**I admire her determination to exit prostitution. Not many can do that. We can only dream to. Even if we exit we will continue to be outcaste and anonymous.**

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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

— *Shahjadi Khatun/ as dictated to Mohd. Kalam*

**Bihar:** My name is Shahjadi Khatun. I was born in Forbesganj red-light area. My mother passed away six years ago. **I am still unsure about my birth history. My community people says, I am adopted. I don't want to trust them. I believe what my mother said to be true and I am her daughter. I am in prostitution since aged 16.**

When mother was alive, she had bought an acre of land from the money that I had earned by selling my body. After her death, I had been staying with my cousin sister, along with my baby. One day I had received information that my uncle had sold my land to someone from outside the community.

I questioned my uncle and his supposed ownership of the land. His answer broke my heart, but I couldn't give up on the piece of land that was purchase from my earning. He said, I was illegally adopted by mother. It confused me momentarily. But I refuse to believe him. I approach the person who had purchased the land from my uncle, but they asked me not to come near their house premises. Which was mine till my uncle sold it without my knowledge.

None stood by my side. Finally I had approached Apne Aap and it's member helped me. My situation was well understood by them. I met lawyers, went to court rooms, bank officers and block officers. All the statements supported my uncle. Because in Muslim Property Laws, my uncle is the sole kin who could either keep or sell that land.

Apne Aap team, however, did not give up and continued the fight with different strategies. They had negotiated with my uncle and made him realized the consequences he could face if the case is taken up by organization. Later, he was asked to pay half the total amount of the payment he received after selling the plot.

I got total of 1.5 lakhs, which is huge amount for me. Now this deposited in my bank account with the help of Apne Aap. I could not thank more to each of them.

When no stood by me. They stood and their principle to help the last girls stood by me. I am glad to have known them.

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## Inauguration of Apne Apne's data entry centre

—Preeti Kumari / as dictated to Amit Kumar

**Bihar:** My name is **Preeti Kumari**. I am a pass out of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidhyalay girl's school. It is supported by Apne Aap Women Worldwide. At present I am studying in B.Com first year.

This year I am attending computer training classes conducted by Apne Aap Women Worldwide. Data entry was inaugurated by SDO in Apne Aap's institution. The SDO was the Chief Guest. Besides the Chief Guest Mr. Col. Ajit Dutta, Ruchira Didi and many other respectable persons of the town were present there.

During the event, the Chief Guest said something which I agreed with completely. He said how the Data entry centre can be benefitted by the last girls in the community. Many girls from the economically poor background will be able to develop some skills which can be utilized in their chosen career.

There were many attendees and I could see how impressed they were with Ruchira di's work. Her contribution and effort to uplift the last girls and bring them at par among others. She has been working hard to support the poor and helpless girls and provide employment to them.

**What's best is that Ruchira di teaches a person how to stand on their own feet and be independent. It is one of the reasons why she got the data entry centre inaugurated here. It'll help in engaging the girls from poor background.**

Many people will not even understand the emotion we have attached with it. For others, who have plenty of opportunities, it is just a data entry centre. For me, and people in my community area, it is a blessing in disguise. It is to be more empowered and better skilled.

**In this region we do not have many opportunities coming our way. We do not have the means to develop our skills. With the new development introduced by Apne Aap, I along with many other students in our locality could engineer our dreams. I feel proud and privileged.**

May God bless our Data entry centre with bright and successful future.

**Many people will not even understand the emotion we have attached with it. For others, who have plenty of opportunities, it is just a data entry centre. For me, and people in my community area, it is a blessing in disguise. It is to be more empowered and better skilled.**

### *Continued from page 1*

On that day, I reached the venue with one of my friends and member of Apne Aap, Rumki. We were assisted by Tinku di and Sahana di. The stage was beautifully decorated. Ruchira di and others were already present there. Someone from the organizing committee asked our name and on replying was escorted on the seats reserved for us.

Later, Ruchira didi introduced me along with Aparna Sen and other distinguished guests and we clicked some photographs with them.

When the programme started, the moderator introduced Ruchira Didi, Aparna sen and others before the audience. Then the moderator invited me and Rumki to come on stage and inaugurate the book 'River of Flesh' officially. We unwrapped the book cover.

I was asked to say something about my journey and the book. I shared my story, on how we are fighting nearly every day to survive in the red-light areas, how the fate of girls and women like us are decided by the other (brothel owner/ trafficker / malkin). **I am very happy to secure my daughter's future by**

**providing the most important tool to success in life—education. She is studying in a prestigious residential school Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission. Apne Aap sponsors her education and many other children from the red light areas.**

Also, during my talk, **I requested those people present there to at least think about women and girl like us who resides in red-light areas and sought for their empathy and do what is needed to be done.** So, that even we can lead a dignified life like other "normal" people.

Later Aparna Sen read one story from the book and Ruchira didi talked about her book and what inspired her on bringing out this book.

The programme went smoothly and it was my first experience to be with the celebrities. I felt like a star too. For once in my life.



## My First Day in Apne Aap

— *Khushboo Mishra*

**Delhi:** My name is Khushboo Mishra . My first day in Apne Aap was full of activities and meeting many new people with culture and practices different from mine. I was anxious.

I went to meet the children at Najafgarh. I was accompanied by Jasneet di. Apne Aap has been able to intervene and work with the community people in Dharampura for years. The organisation work with the communities, who are labelled as de-notified tribes in India. In some communities, the traditional practise of inter-generational prostitution still prevails.

A lot was going in my mind that day. I was confused, nervous. I was visually trying to imagine the community. How It would be to work with them? What kind of life style they have? Finally when we reached, it was quite different from what I was imagining. The community members were exceptionally friendly. Most of the children were lively and adorable. I was introduced to Shashi di, a community mobiliser, who has been working with the community since a long time. She has a caring personality and also introduced me to the community people.

Many were thanking Shashi Di for the helping them in admitting their girls to hostel. There were others, who were interested to know about caste certificate. During my visit, I also met a family where two biological sisters are married to the same man, and what's more, they are happily living together. There were many old age men in the corner of street playing cards. Strangely, I still see them every day at the same place, doing the same thing: playing cards.

I spent sometime in the community and met people, knowing their lifestyles. I have been observing and learning about them. **Now I can notice caste discrimination that prevails between Perna and Saperas community members. Although, children were happy and playing together, one could notice how deeply they were divide among themselves. Caste system is deeply rooted in their society. The children living in that community, especially of different caste does not talk or sit with each other, voluntarily. Unless told. Friendship between them is almost like a dream.** I was surrounded by children on the first day. All were excited that to know that they are getting a teacher in their community. I was equally happy and excited for I know I can definitely make some difference. I, however was slightly concerned about my safely. I was reassured by the team.

I am told that these days, even the parents are slowly changing their mindset and are happy to send their children to school, be it boy or girl. The community is very nice. I am confident to work here.

When I took the first class with these students, I realised many don't even know how to read counting. When I asked them to show me where is nose, they were blank and looked at each other. A child studying in 5<sup>th</sup> standard couldn't tell me the seven days in a week, I was lost. I didn't know how or where to start. But now with help of Shashi Di, I strategise every class so that it can be broadly effective. I am glad to inform that kids are learning on a good pace. They catch words soon and are enthusiastic about learning new thing every day.

### *Continued from page 1*

Just few weeks ago, I realised that Apne Aap helped me a lot. Earlier, when I use to see Mamta Madam and Shashibala Madam coming in community, I tried to escape from that place or didn't pay heed to them. They would come and say "Virender Ji, Aap apne ghar ka maahol aur community dono ko badal sakte ho". I thought they say this to everyone, completely ignoring their words.

Then, one day both Mamta madam and Shashibala madam approached me to give 10 minutes to give 10 minutes. In those 10 minutes, they told me about Caste Certificates. Firstly, I didn't understand it's importance and it's relation with us. I inquired for more details. They told me about the facilities that I will get through this Certificate. I immediately requested Mamta madam to make my Certificate. I applied for Certificate. Form was Online. When I went to collect my Caste Certificate, I was not able to get it. I lost my

phone which carried my ID and Password for this. After few days, I saw Shashibala madam coming to community, quickly I went to her and informed her about the problem. I thought that I will not get Caste Certificate but Shashibala madam went to office and produced my Certificate.

Now, I have my Caste Certificate. I can get all facilities provided to us by government. I am Thankful to Apne Aap who helped me from starting till end to get my Certificate.

**I am bound to make end meets and put more efforts during the peak wedding season. Our source of income depends on weddings in town. We get paid for playing drums in weddings.**

## Poems

### I am a girl

I am the cheerful Sun of happiness  
I am the soothing rain of monsoon  
I am the first ray of a new day  
I am the seed of a new life  
Yes.... I am a girl  
And I am a complete Universe in Me.

**Name– Sunaina**

**Class: V**

**Area: Delhi**

### I want to fly

Spreading my wings  
I want to fly  
Breaking the barriers  
I want to fly  
Listening to my heart  
Want to fly a little more  
Being fearless and undefeated  
I wish to cover all sky with my wings

**Name– Gunnu**

**Class: III**

**Area: Delhi**



Second Floor, D-56  
Anand Niketan, New Delhi

Phone:  
+91 11 24119968

E-mail/Web:  
contact@apneap.org  
www.apneap.org

## Red Light Despatch

**Editor:** Ruchira Gupta

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