



# RED LIGHT DESPATCH

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DELHI, KOLKATA, MUMBAI AND FORBESGANJ (BIHAR)

## My Dream

To become a Doctor

-Sonalı Khatoon, aged 14

**Bihar:** My name is Sonali Khatoon, and I am a student of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Aavasiya Vidyalaya (KGBV). My village is Uttri Rampur, which is also a redlight area near Forbesganj. Currently.

I was admitted in KGBV in 2007, but my father withdrew me in 2009. However, my mother worked persistently to save me from traffickers, and I was re-admitted in 2014. My life has been very difficult, and I have suffered greatly emotionally and physically because my parents have used me as an object. I want to study to be a doctor. I can help the poor, and uplift my family and village from the flesh trade. In 2007, I found out that Apne Aap started a girls hostel with KGBV. Immediately, I forced my parents to meet Apne Aap activists. In school the teachers taught me Karate, Crafts, and Computer Education skills! They also inspired us to achieve successful futures, despite our pasts.

I live here with my friends, and everyone gets along despite their religion or caste. My friends and I enjoy the hostel life and I even prefer it to my home.

We do the activities together. I am happy here and need the support of Apne Aap to complete my higher studies, and also to continue to encourage me to fulfill my dream of becoming a doctor and helping the poor.

## Apne Aap launches Clean My Community campaign

— By Bebo/ as dictated to Khushboo Mishra

**Delhi:** My name is Bebo. I study in Class II and live in Sapera Basti of Dharampura, Najafgarh. My mother sell toys in the local market. She also says, we belong to Singhi caste. My father is a cobbler. I have 3 brothers and 2 sisters. My elder brother works in a shoe showroom in Gurgaon.

I study at MCD Primary school which is a walking distance from where I live. I attend classes everyday with my friends from the community. During my free time, I like to play and do painting. My teacher at school says we should keep our surroundings clean.

The place where I live was not clean before. There are garbages almost everywhere. People threw polythene bags, their kitchen waste and other

waste in open area. Big uncles and aunties also spit and used to defecate in open. Even the children started following them. It is open drainage, all wastes get accumulated. It emanates a powerful stench. Somehow, the people got immuned to it. But I knew it is unhealthy.

Due to unhygienic situation of the community, many of my friends and other people used to remain ill. Various infections and contagious diseases were spreading: eye infection, malaria, viral, stomach ache, head ache. My friends from the same community often used take leave from schools due to ill health.

*(Continued on page 6)*

## Free Computer training for Topsia's children

— Shanaz Khatoon/ as dictated to Laboni Basu

**Kolkata:** My name is Shahnaz Khatoon. I am aged 12. Currently, I am studying in class V in at Adi Ballyang High school in my locality.

On February 2, 2016, approximately 25 children from Apne Aap Women Worldwide's Topsia center were selected to receive free computer training lessons at the Mahadevi Birla World Academy in Kolkata.

From my computer training class, I have met a friend named Shabana. She is a six-year-old girl whose mother is a domestic help and father is a rickshaw driver. Her family doesn't have a fixed income. Even my family members don't have a fixed income.

My father is a rickshaw driver and my mother sells vegetables at the local market in Topsia. I have two brothers. We all live together near the Topsia bridge. Both my brothers are working. One is aged 18 and the other is aged 20 years. They are auto rickshaw drivers in Topsia.

Most of the children selected for training classes are from very poor family and cannot afford to receive an education.

And Apne Aap is not only helping us with the classes, but also helping our mothers by providing them with free knitting lessons at the Academy.

*(Continued on page 7)*

## Op-Ed— Ruchira Gupta's article "The Jail that sparked many a story" published in the Telegraph, India

*Ruchira Gupta is a feminist campaigner, writer, visiting professor at New York University, adviser to the UN, and founder of Indian anti-sex trafficking organisation Apne Aap Worldwide. This article was published under series of articles titled Bihar Safar-nama*

I stop at Purnea to meet Girindranath Jha, a journalist, who has returned to his ailing father and begun farming. I read his blogs and Facebook posts on harvesting potatoes, the impact of the westerly wind - *pachiya* - on fruits, the joy of seeing rice saplings sprout, the significance of green fields and running rivers, all intermingled with his own fiction and research on the writings of Phaniswarnath Renu, one of the greatest modern socialist writers from Bihar.

We decide to start by visiting the Purnea Jail. My father had been a political prisoner there as a 25-year-old in 1957 with the Maharaja of Vizianagram Vijay Gajapati Raju, Loknath Joshi, Kalikaprasad Singh, Sarju Mishra and about 95 other socialist leaders. They were all part of a pan-Indian movement to remove English from official use. My father used to describe the room where 65 prisoners were jailed with one open toilet between them, the mess, the courtyard where they did yoga, the tree that had thousands of bats hanging from it...

As we drove to the jail we stopped at the Indubhushan library, started by the father of Satinath Bhaduri, a socialist writer who wrote the great novels *Jagori* and *Dhorai Charit Manas* about India's freedom struggle against the British. Professor Partha Chatterjee, whose writing and teaching have helped to decolonise the humanities, was informed by the subaltern characters in *Dhorai Charit Manas* in writing *The Politics of the Governed*.

Bhaduri was born in Purnea and went to jail in Bhagalpur, Giri reminiscences, and Renu was born in a village in Araria and went to jail in Purnea. Bhaduri was Renu's guru. Both were influenced by the Indian National Congress and later the Congress Socialist Party.

The characters in *Jagori* and *Dhorai Charit Manas* describe the jail in Purnea as does Renu.

We reach the jail and meet the kind-hearted jailor, who does not let us inside the actual prison, but we are allowed to peep in from the outside and visit the room with an open toilet that my father occupied. It is disused. The jail is clean, there is a garden and the prisoners are allowed to pursue cultural activities.

Indians have done better than the British in the treatment of prisoners. Bihar has gone one step ahead. National Crime Records Bureau data reveal that Chhattisgarh and the Union territories are arresting increasing

number of people, whereas the numbers of those arrested in Bihar are going down. I had read recently that Sweden has closed down its prisons because they do not have anyone to arrest. They have chosen to use the funds to invest in people instead. Perhaps, the socialist government in Bihar is going to follow its socialist partner's path.

Purnea was the first district to be created by the British in 1771, one of the worst exploited and thus the worst hit by the Bengal Famine. Timber contracts to those in service of the British Raj ended up turning this area, once called *Puran Aranya* (Total Forest), into a swamp, that generated one of the cruellest cholera outbreaks in human history. As a result, Purnea became the centre of resistance and intellectual ferment. Its young men and women were delegates to the Indian National Congress, attended rallies, spun the *charka*, went to jail, wrote pamphlets and books. Purnea became a literary centre. Today it is one of the big education centres of north Bihar.

The disused rooms in the jail could easily be turned into a museum on the role that Purnea played in India's independence struggle. It would be a striking way to remind the next generation of their hard won independence.

Over lunch at Sanjha Chullah it is evident that Giri will carry on the legacy of Purnea's literati. Like Renu his writings are both reportage and fiction. His newest book, *Ishq me Maatisona*, has been published by Rajkamal.

I then go to Gulabh Bagh, one of the most notorious red-light areas in north Bihar, situated near the largest grain depot in eastern India and on a highway. Truckers used to routinely buy little girls here and the traffickers would provide a constant supply of poor, low caste children from nearby villages. To my pleasant surprise, I heard from a young girl, Roshanara, on her way back from school, that a female police officer, Kim Sharma, has arrested many of the kingpins and things were much better here. Roshanara adds, "One more push and investment in the girls and women here could make this a non-red light area."

I leave, thinking that perhaps, we are too hasty in saying nothing has been achieved in 60 years. We have forgotten what once was. The legacy of zamindari and the Raj are vanishing. Two days ago, women won more than half the seats in the Purnea municipality.

## Diary of a Social Worker

—Noorani Khatoon

**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 extremely vulnerable 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 staff, 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 the first time. I have been brought up in the neighborhood. I was familiar of the deep rooted problem of inter-generational prostitution from before. **But, being here, looking after the girls and understanding them on a deeper level, gave me entirely new perspectives on seeing life. On communicating more with them, I understood that almost all of them have either been a victim or were exposed 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 a normal 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 used to sit in a group, try to understand each other and conduct simple activities to build the friendship bond among them.

Every day was 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, started the process of knowing each other. This, self initiation by the girls, helped in maintaining discipline without much effort.

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

I, wholeheartedly appreciate the commitment by Apne Aap Women Worldwide in uplift of 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 novel work. Thank you Apne Aap team for helping the children of next generation.

**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 of inter-generational prostitution.**

## *My First Day at Apne Aap*

—*Luisa Fernanda Mejia*

**Delhi:** My name is Luisa Fernanda Mejia. I am 22-year-old. I work in Government and International Relationships of the Externado University of Columbia. Earlier, I had been associated with different associations. I have worked in different non-profit organization in Columbia and has been working as an intern with Apne Aap Women Worldwide since a month.

My mother always says that the new places I visit are an opportunity for me to grow up, because of the experience. But also because I could meet many new people who, with time, become an inspiration in my life. This was my first thought when I arrived at Apne Aap. There, I met Juanita a wonderful woman with a special energy. She has found the equilibrium between her family and her work. A woman, who have many things to teach. I also met Nana, a very professional woman and Khushboo, an amazing woman with a passion for her work. This first impression of all the Apne Aap staff was confirmed with my days over there. Now, I believe I need more time to learn from them.

I must say that when I was planning my trip to India, my initial thought was to get associated with an organization that worked in providing education to children.

So, my next question was why I chose it over other organisations? **After being to the field centre, and getting acquainted with Apne Aap's work I realised that today's girls are the women of the future, and we need to start building better opportunities for them, in terms of education, empowerment, healthcare etc.**

After few hours of reading about the works of the organization and learning it first hand from Apne Aap activists: Juanita, Nana, Khushboo, I started reading about

the history of a powerful woman Ruchira Gupta. A wonderful woman, who has founded the organisation and have the capability of being an inspiration to the entire world.

The first day I couldn't meet her. But, when I got the opportunity to finally meet her, I was in awe of the message that she had to deliver to the world. I cannot describe her in words. I realised that her message has to reach other parts of the world.

**On the first day, I learnt their policies, ideologies and concept. And somehow this has become part of my personal and professional life, "the last girl".**

An ideology, that was practised by the person I admire the most, Mahatma Gandhi. After going through the organisation's concept, I am certain it has to be applied in different context, related to projects, policies, and connecting with other countries. While, mentioning about it, I remember my country Columbia and how the girls and women of this country can benefit out of it.

My days at Apne Aap were full of learning new things, gathering new knowledge, a fresh view of India society, of Indian women.

Since coming in touch with Apne Aap staff and work, I am absolutely sure that this experience would change my life and in near future it will change the life of other people with whom I will work. So for these important lessons, I thank all the activists working in Apne Aap and other organisations to uphold girls and women's rights.

## 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

## *Children learnt the harmful effects of drugs abuse*

— *Tannu/ as dictated to Anya Prasad*

**Delhi:** My name is Tannu and I am a 14-year-old girl residing in Najafgarh. I currently am enrolled in Class 7 at the Senior Secondary MCD School in Dharam-pura. My main subjects are English, Maths, Sanskrit, and Hindi.

I live in Sapera Basti, with my two sisters, Jyoti and Gunnu, my brother Ajay, my parents, and my pet dog, Moti. Although we are all around the same age, we do not fight with each other a lot. When I am not in school, I like to spend my time watching movies, but only Bollywood. My current favorite movie is ‘Sanamrei’ because I love romantic comedies.

Last week of June, Apne Aap activists had organized an anti-drug day in our community. I wasn’t able to go. But, my friend attended it. She had narrated about the importance of the date and why we shouldn’t indulge in drugs and alcohol. It doesn’t only harm the person is taking, but the entire family members.

**The participants were made to perform an act where few students were covered with black, emphasizing dark life ahead and other group with pink, to show bright life. It was in relation to drug abuse. Later, they showed documentary movies made by Apne Aap’s girls, Kya Sahi Kya Galat and Mein Fir Padhna Chahti Hoon.**

Even without attending the event, I know the harmful effects of alcohol. In my village, alcohol is a severe issue. **Many people drink, including my father. I am strongly against alcohol because I have seen its dangerous effects on my father. He does not act like himself when he drinks. I do not recognize his be-**

**havior, and it scares me.**

**When he drinks he becomes very ill, and I know that if he continues to drink as much as he does now, he will die.** I have voiced these concerns to my father, telling him that I am such a small girl right now, and he cannot leave my life yet.

**I have told him that if he dies nobody will be able to arrange my marriage, watch me grow, or teach me, and I love him so much. My father has listened carefully and cautiously to what I have told him because now he only drinks once a week! I can’t believe that he actually listened to me! I am much younger than him.** The fact that he listened to me show me how much he loves me, and how much he is willing to change his behavior. I am very proud of his improvement, and I know that he is changing his life for the better, and I am glad I could help him.

**I think that I am actually quite an inspirational person.** When I grow up, I would like to become a school teacher and spend my time inspiring and teaching people, just like how I did with my father. Also, I would like to educate the people of Najafgarh on the dangers of drugs. I have seen how it can deteriorate peoples’ health, and my community must be aware of this before it is too late.

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[contact@apneaap.org](mailto:contact@apneaap.org)**



## *Girls living in redlight areas attends Live Music Concert*

—*Tannu Kumari Rout/ as dictated to Rachna Nayak*

**Kolkata:** My name is Tannu Kumari Rout. I live in Khidderpore, Kolkata. I have been associated with Apne Aap Women Worldwide since the time I started my formal education. I was aged five then.

Apne Aap has played a vital role in getting me admitted to school and it has assisted me in continuing my education without any hindrance.

I learned dancing, stitching, computer skills and spoken English courses, besides the regular classes. I was among the participants in most of the workshops that were conducted in the centres.

There are many activities, but one of the most recent and interesting activities was organised by Siddha, a music organization that performed in Apne Aap centre. They already had performed three times for the children.

There are many activities and events to choose from. The girls really enjoyed this activity because whichever musician comes from the Siddha organization plays and sings the songs of the children's wishes and because they also do new performance for them each day.

**I enjoyed watching their performances,**

**because the songs they sing are new, fun, and different every time. Last time, they sung my two of my favorite songs, one in Bengali, and one in English. The other children and I had so much fun, that we want this band to come every two months!**

Outside school and the Apne Aap Centre, I and ten to twelve other girls are part of a group called 'Aamantran Group,' in which we meet once a week and we could not freely discuss problems with our parents. We also talk about issues other girls face and brainstorm ways to solve those issues. Sometimes, we even go on field trips to places like the Victoria Memorial monument.

We have so many new things to learn from Apne Aap.

Now, as I continue my promising story, I would like to give thanks to Apne Aap Women Worldwide for ensuring that I have a story, one in which I am educated, successful, and can stand on my own.

### *Continued from page 1*

Last month, even I was away from school for quite a long time, as I was suffering from jaundice.

I was confused what should we do to improve the hygiene condition of our community. **To keep the area clean, everybody needed to take equal and responsible measures but nobody was ready to take initiative. People used to blame each other for this mess. Blame game was the only constant things we could notice in a regular basis. In the morning too, people used to fight over garbage thrown at their front doors instead of greeting each other for cheerful day.**

Since few days, eye infection and stomach ache was escalating rapidly. My sister also got malaria. Seeing all the condition, I decided to talk to Khushboo didi from Apne Aap who takes classes in our community. I gathered all my friends and explained complete situation to her and Shashi di. Next day, they surveyed the area and met many people. Immediate action was required.

On June 6 2016, Apne Aap activists came to community and gathered all children of different community. Perna and Sapera who used to avoid us came together with us. Many mothers too came forward from all caste communities. An air of enthusiasm and hope filled everyone. We ran to our respective homes and brought

brooms. Surprisingly, even our community shopkeepers and boys who used to neglect us extended their support. They provided brooms from their houses and shops as well. 'Clean My Community' campaign was a step towards clean and hygiene Sapera Basti. We together cleaned every lane. It was delight to know that now less diseases will spread in community. We all took a pledge with broom in hand that we will keep our community and homes clean.

Following the cleanliness drive, we all washed our hands with soap and water. Many took bath as well. Later, Apne Aap activists went to MCD office and filed a complaint about piled up garbage and unhygienic condition of Sapera Basti. On 7<sup>th</sup> June, when I woke up I heard some noise in community. Out of curiosity, I started searching the source. I was pleasantly surprised to see MCD workers and garbage van cleaning the community. They came next day and day after again. They took care of all cleaning needed in our community. Since the day 'Clean My Community' campaign was launched, MCD worker visit regularly to Sapera Basti to clean the roads and remove garbage pile.

I am glad to report that my community looks better than before. It's more hygienic than earlier and now less children fall ill. Also, there are fewer quarrels in mornings. I feel glad to be a part of 'Clean My Community'.

## The World Outside

— *Juhi Khatoon/ as dictated to Khushboo Mishra and Laboni Basu*

**Kolkata:** My name is Juhi. I am 20-year-old and currently studying at St. Xaviers College, Kolkata.

This June I got the chance to travel to the United States for the second time. When I went last time, I thought it will be my first and last experience to travel to another country, so I was very delighted with this second chance to go abroad.

During the plane ride to the United States, I felt both nervous and excited. When I reached, I came out to the arrival place and I could see a couple holding an Apne Aap board with my name written on it. **My biggest fear was the feeling of not being able to interact with them or even enjoy this trip because they were English speaking people, and I only know Hindi and can speak basic English.**

**Surprisingly I found that my homestay family was also nervous about it and they proposed me the idea of having my own translator. Thanks to their care, love and attention I could understand them better.**

I arrived at home and it was awesome. They had such a beautiful and clean house. Once there, I met Shalini and Suchain from Malaysia both of them so nice. We immediately became friends. I used to play with them and also with my host and their grand-daughter. We used to play all games like cricket, football and basketball, and my host showed me his Tree House which was immensely quiet and alluring.

**In U.S, I went to attend a program titled ‘ Student Opposing Slavery’ in President Lincoln Cottage. The anti-slavery exchange was for seven days.** In this training I met people from many countries. I, Shalini and Suchain made friends from all over the world. After

the training sessions we visited the White House and Martin Luther King Gardens as well.

Once, my homestay parents took the three of us to dinner at a restaurant, an English one. The food was so different from ours. Once we ordered lobsters in a restaurant. They liked it, but I didn’t like the taste much. Instead, So they ordered some vegetable for me.

In the United States everyone use to wear western clothes like jeans, top, shorts and skirts. I always wore Indian attire there, and they appreciated it. They liked my Indian dresses. On the same day, aunty took me to her sister’s place where she cooked pulses and rice, my favourite food. I was touched at heart by his generous gesture. I’m so thankful to all of them for the love showed to me.

As the date of returning to India was getting closer, I was feeling so emotional. I wanted to preserve all the memories. So, I cooked food for all at home and clicked pictures as much as I can of my entire trip.

On my scheduled day, aunty prepared breakfast. My uncle took me and others to an Indian restaurant, where they served delectable south Indian food.

**The time to say goodbye to the United States, uncle, aunty and friends came. I had mixed emotions; happiness and sadness engulfed me. I was happy as I was returning to my home land and sad for leaving behind so many beautiful people. Obviously, I was bringing all the memories with me.** When I was seated in the aircraft, I was flooded by all the memories in the US. This was one of the most beautiful experiences in my life.

### *Continued from page 1*

We are incredibly grateful to receive these computer training lessons, and I even aspire to become a computer teacher one day. ***Ak Din Boro Hoye Amino Computer Sekhabo Didi*** (One day I will also teach other people how to use computers).

**I was so excited for these computer lessons, as I love learning new skills and activities. All my friends in the class are learning basic computer programs, such as how to make Power Point presentations, and how to use Excel.**

Also, our teachers are very passionate about teaching these children and making sure we truly master the basics of computer programming. If there is any difficulties in understanding, the teachers diligently work to resolve them. I am confident that they know we have a genuine desire and passion to learn.

I believe that with these computer lessons, Apne Aap has successfully organized a initiative to empower chil-

dren. The organization is giving us the skills that will be forever useful.

**The organization has worked in so many sectors to help the girls living in and around the redlight areas. And as young as I am, I cannot forget the contribution they had done for people living in Topsisia. When we were evicted by goons overnight. The didi (s) and dada (s) from Apne Aap stood by us. All the time.**

I believe that life is a journey full of lessons, hardships, heartaches, joy, celebration, and special moments that define everyone’s purpose in life, and Apne Aap is providing children with these exact lessons and moments that will help us to understand their worth.

The organization also believes that the people that we meet serve to enrich our lives by lightening our inner souls.

I am proud to feel connected with Apne Aap

## Poems

### Eid is here

With happiness and hope,  
Dad, please buy dress for me in Red,  
Green and in some other bright colours,  
My sandals are also torn and,  
I am not going to listen to any excuses,  
Buy me a new sandal and toys and clothes,  
Eid is here !

**Name**– Khusbhu Khatoon  
**Age**: 10 years  
**Area**: Bihar

### If I would have been a kite

What a colorful and beautiful kite  
It flies all over the villages, across the river,  
forest  
If I would have been a kite  
I would have chosen to go outside my  
village  
Would have birds as my company  
I'll play with them  
And would have disappeared somewhere in  
the far horizon,  
If I would have been a kite.

**Name**–  
**Class**: III  
**Area**: Kolkata



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## Red Light Despatch

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