



# RED LIGHT DESPATCH

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DELHI, KOLKATA, MUMBAI AND FORBESGANJ (BIHAR)

## My Dream My White Coat -Chahat, aged 5

**Delhi:** My name is Chahat. I am a resident of Dharampura and a student, studying in 1<sup>st</sup> standard. I have five members in my family – mother, father, younger brother, younger sister and I. We belong to Singhi caste.

I have a dream of becoming a doctor. Doctors treat sick people. They help nurse ill people back to health and that is why they are well respected in the society. One day, when I become a doctor I will open my own chamber and treat patients and help them get better.

I will wear the white coat that doctors wear. I love a doctor's coat and dream of having one in the future. Shall I tell you a secret? Sometimes I pretend to have severe stomach ache so that my mother takes me to the doctor. I love visiting my doctor and seeing his white coat.

When I will become doctor, I will buy a big house and a big car for my family. Currently, we live in a very small house and eat whatever my mother and father can afford. My teacher encourages me to become a doctor.

I have to work harder and study for longer hours. I am just five-year-old now, but once I grow up I want to read all the thick medical books and become a good and successful doctor.

I want to grow up very soon and wear that white coat that doctors wear

## Urgent need to re-design schooling for nomadic children

— *By Rahul Kumar/ as dictated to Naresh*

**Bihar:** My name is Rahul Kumar. I belong from Banjara community. The primary occupation of our community people is to sell herbs and beg from one village to another, and travel to different towns as well.

Since eight years, our community has been living in Bathnaha. My father name is Agamlal Banjara, and my mother is Savitri Devi. I have two brothers and three sisters.

Last year, a social worker from Apne Aap Women Worldwide, an organization located in Forbesganj, came to meet my father in Bathnaha. My father is the head of the community. Apne Aap's social worker named Kalam discussed about the education of community children and assured to support in many ways. Most of our community members are illiterate and have no means and no knowledge to

avail the service for our children. We do not have any government identity card to prove our citizenship. This, absence of documents leading to denial of school admission of our children.

Kalam Bhaiya assured us a teacher from their organization will come to the community on regular basis to teach the children. We agreed to start classes in our community. On August 9, 2015, Kalam bhaiya visited our community with another colleague of his from Apne Aap. His name is Naresh and fixed timing to teach us on daily basis. Our children started going to class that month itself. The timing was fixed from 2 pm to 5 pm.

*(Continued on page 6)*

## I learned about the concept of crime from the legal training on anti-trafficking laws

— *Uma Das/ as dictated to Sangeeta Singh*

**Kolkata:** I am Uma Das, aged 24. I am associated with Apne Aap since 2011 as youth leader. I live in a rented room in Munshiganj redlight area with my mother, elder sister and a younger brother. It has been 30 years since we are here.

I am fortunate to be able to attend training and workshops on social and political issues. On March 2, 2016, Dr PM Nair (Rtd, Chair Professor, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai), conducted a Legal Training session for Apne Aap Staff at Shastitala, Kolkata.

The training was on rescue operations and anti-trafficking.

Firstly, he introduced himself and asked about all of us and our participation in social work. The session

was attended by Tinku aunty, Rhona madam, Md Kalam, Sudipta Dasgupta, Sangeeta Singh, S K Anish, Laboni Basu, Rachna Nayak, Jasneet Kaur, Ashma Bibi and Apne Aap's other staffs.

During the session, Mr Nair shared his lifetime experience about his work in different states of India.

We were already aware about trafficking and it's remedial. But, he made it so clear for us.

*(Continued on page 7)*

## Op-Ed— Ruchira Gupta and Gloria Steinam's notes on the Indian Women's movement

*This note was published in The New York Times on January, 2014*

**MS. GUPTA :** Walking through the red-light areas of Sonagachi or lobbying in Albany for the New York State laws against human trafficking, Gloria and my life have interwoven into shared writing sessions, rallies, meetings, dinners, books, conversations, late night phone calls across continents, brainstorming and sometimes movies. With her, I have experienced how movements move and how immense the feminist movement is.

I was excited about the new wave of feminism that hit the streets after the December 2012 gang rape in Delhi. I wanted Gloria to see how the movement was really moving in India, and to share Gloria's courage and hope with my fellow protesters.

So armed with a new collection of her essays that I edited, "As if Women Matter: The Essential Gloria Steinem," I set up a road trip with Gloria from Delhi to Jaipur to Patna to Kolkata to Forbesgunge – the last being a small village on the Indo-Nepal border where poverty has created intergenerational prostitution — and finally Cochin in Kerala.

This journey's goals are meeting old and new feminists, speaking at rallies, organizing with students, sitting in circles with women and girls trapped in prostitution, sharing ideas with writers, poets, journalists and thought leaders at the Jaipur Literary Festival and the Kolkata Literary Meet and going on a girl-led journey inside a red-light district. Follow our travels here on India Ink and see how big a family the global feminist movement has become.

### **MS. STEINEM, FROM NEW DELHI**

**Jan. 11, Saturday:** The airport is calm and glamorous, but the roads on the way to Ruchira's apartment are chaos. There are bicycle rickshaws, ancient black-and-yellow taxis darting about like bumble bees, buses overstuffed with passengers and trucks covered with folk art that could be in a museum. Even the occasional cow munches at the edge of traffic.

All this I remember from the two years I lived here as a student more than four decades ago, yet every visit since then, there have been more luxury cars, sleek motorcycles and giant billboards advertising everything from the newest computers to the tallest apartment buildings.

**Jan. 13, Monday:** In the airy, simple offices of Apne Aap, I sit cross-legged in a circle with 10 teenage girls. They are the daughters of families who belong to a tribe that was nomadic for centuries, and resisted all British efforts to turn them into wage slaves. When their traditional life outlawed, the men became petty thieves, and their wives and daughters were prostituted. In the terms of the British, they became "criminal tribes."

That label was removed with Independence, but they still had no other way to survive. Even many Indians of goodwill had come to believe they were incapable of change. Now, Apne Aap has set out to prove this untrue, one girl and one family at a time, by providing schools, respect, encouragement.

**Jan. 15, Wednesday:** At our formal book launch at the India International Center, I'm suddenly aware that my 22-year-old self once came to there. The auditorium is overflowing with old and young feminists, plus the curious.

On stage, Devaki Jain, the Gandhian feminist economist who is my oldest friend in the world, calls me "truthful and courageous, transparent, brave and daring." My younger and uncertain self wouldn't be able to imagine or believe this. Then Ela Bhatt, founder of S.E.W.A., the Self Employed Women's Association, which is the largest women's union in the world, gives a rare and historic speech about her feminist journey and life's philosophy. She should have received a Nobel Prize decades ago.

**Jan. 16, Thursday:** In Connaught Place, we as students once escaped to sophisticated and forbidden coffee shops. Now, its curved promenade of shops is old-fashioned next to luxurious hotels and modern office buildings.

But inside a two-story store in that arcade, the women of S.E.W.A. sell beautiful clothes and weavings of their own making. Upstairs today, there are 30 of so S.E.W.A. women who have gathered to meet with us — Ruchira, me, Devaki and several women from Apne Aap — for the first time. We are welcomed with tea, homemade sweets and a song about their movement.

I wonder if the S.E.W.A. women will understand these activists who have been rendered less respectable by being prostituted.

I can feel surprise — and then understanding. I realize that these two groups can organize together. Later, Ruchira tells me she realized this at the same time.

At the end of our meeting, the S.E.W.A. women sing one last song. It is "We Shall Overcome" — in Gujarati.

In organizing, I've always used a tree as a symbol of the fact that lasting change grows from the bottom. After today, I will say this is a banyan tree whose branches dip down in dry weather, take root, grow up again and create a forest from one trunk. Globally, we have to become a banyan tree.

## Diary of a Social Worker

—*Taw Nana*

**Delhi:** My name is Taw Nana. It has almost been two years of association with Apne Aap Women Worldwide. Initially, I was hired as a media associate. But, with time and circumstances, I started looking after activities related to advocacy and program too.

Never in my life, had I thought of becoming a social worker or working as an activist with a feminist organisation. I, however, during my reporting days at The Asian Age, a national daily newspaper realized, I wanted to do something more than being a mere spectator. There, I was merely reporting about people and incidents. But, I wanted to get involved. Deeper. Make connections with people, people different from me and many others, who are less fortunate than us.

I decided to shift my career to development sector. I had done my researched and later with some luck, I came across Apne Aap. I started reading more about it. Later, when I heard that there was an opening for media person. I applied immediately.

Here I am today, as an associate editor of Red Light Despatch, a monthly newsletter, organizing talks, rallies, identifying problems in the community, collecting and documenting their stories, counseling parents and children if need be, facilitating media interaction with the community members, mobilizing, running campaigns, meeting with different stakeholders etc.

In past two years, I got the chance to visit the field operation centres in Bihar and Kolkata. It gave me a whole new perspective of seeing life. When in Kolkata, I used to frequently visit different redlight areas; Sonagachi and Munshiganj. What I saw in movies, read in papers about the miserable living conditions of prostituted girls and women was nowhere near to seeing them in person. It broke my heart. **I observed how they are struggling with life's injustice, everyday. It made me realized, no matter the circumstances, I will never take life for guaranteed. Some people are living in worse conditions, devoid of any choice. They couldn't even mourn freely for their friend's death.**

**I try to imagine myself in their position and I flinched even with the thought.**

And then in Forbesganj (Bihar), which is located some kilometers away from Nepal border, misery was no less than what I observed in Delhi and Kolkata. In Bihar, the place where our field programme office is located, was also known for its home based brothels. Here, it was surprising to see how a girl from Nat community was not safe at her own house. As it is, the girls are pushed into prostitution at an early age. This, all in the name of tradition. Yes, an inter-generation prostitution which prevails among this community in Bihar. Their daughters are pushed into prostitution. And in Delhi, among Perna community, the daughter-in-law is prostituted after she gives birth to her first child. These communities are categorized under de-notified tribes.

That said, I genuinely respect the work Apne Aap team is doing in this area. Enrolling close to 800 hundreds children in residential schools (Kolkata, Bihar and Delhi), providing livelihood opportunities, safe house, linking to government schemes, legal awareness trainings, workshops, school adoption programme, open mike sessions, and most important getting govt IDs etc.

**In my two years, I have noticed children with no dreams to wanting to become a teacher, doctor, singer, actor etc. Their confidence boosted many folds.**

Also, I admit, before joining Apne Aap, I wasn't aware of such practices. It was surprising for me. I have been brought up to believe that family is everything. They are always there to protect us against the world. It was hard to imagine something of such unjustified practices.

**And, mentioning all of it, I feel immensely proud to be associated with an organization, which noticed and is working on what many people have neglected: a better life and opportunity for the last of the last girls. Be it the daughter of the prostituted women or the women themselves.**

We cannot close our eyes to injustices happening against girls and women in the name of tradition. It's been going on since generations. Also, I cannot challenge someone's belief, but I can definitely point out the wrong doings.

And I take inspiration from these women. No matter, how harsh life is for them. They continue to battle it and live. I, however, pray that no girl or women to ever fall in such situation of despondency and hopelessness. I pray a better life for them. Freedom; as free as I and you.

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## *Apne Aap celebrates International Women's Day*

—Team Apne Aap

**Kolkata:** I am Rachna Nayak from Kolkata. I am associated with Apne Aap. Our organization is an anti-sex trafficking organisation. We believe that every woman has her own pride and has the right to live with dignity. On March 8, 2016, we celebrated International women's day at Shastitala center.

Twenty women and children attended the program. This year the theme was Pledge for Parity. Like every year we celebrated the achievements of several women across the world.

The first International women's day was celebrated on 1911 in Europe. More than one million women and men campaigned for Women's right to Education, right to work, right to vote, right to equality and end in discrimination.

**Despite great improvement in the lives of Women in general throughout the world we still find gender disparity in several parts of the globe. Women are still victims of violence and face discrimination in everyday life.**

Worldwide, women continue to contribute socially, economically, culturally and politically but still they face so much of discrimination so at this year's celebration all of us, men and women, decided to pledge for gender parity.

**We at Apne Aap encourage women to stand up for themselves, we motivate them and guide them to not be exploited but to have ambitions and also help them toward the achievement of those ambitions through education and skill training.**

During the program we spread awareness amongst women and children and later we also had a very active

question and answer session. Anjali Paswan was one of the most active participants in the Q & A session. She shared how women in her community face violence every day.

The crowd was very happy after the celebrations and loved the fact that 8<sup>th</sup> of March is dedicated to women.



Delhi team held open mike session on theme of child marriage at the primary school in Najafgarh

### 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

## Apne Aap centre screened “Stanley ka Dabba” film for the redlight children

— *Anjali Paswan/ as dictated to Sudipta*

**Kolkata:** I am Anjali Pashwan, aged 13. I stay with my family in Munshiganj, which is a redlight area. Originally, I hail from Bihar. Currently, I am studying in class VII at Lajpath Balika Bidyalay. I go to Apne Aap’s centre very often.

Apne Aap screened film “Stanley ka Dabba” in the Centre on March 21, 2016. I loved this movie. I became so emotional while watching the movie. I always knew that mother is the most important person for many people across the globe. And, this movie only asserted the fact. Those children without mother in their life are like an orphan. They do not get much needed love and affection.

**I was so involved in the movie. Somewhere I started imagining myself as Stanley. And when Stanley cried in movie, I cried in real life. I feel lucky to have a mother. She loves me so much.**

I respect all the teachers in my school. They are very good. There are times when they give us punishment for being naughty, and there are times when they are affectionate towards the students. In whatever way, one thing has been constant; my teacher always encourages us to grow emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

I also find feel lucky to have wonderful friends around. They are a gem. Always willing to help. Some days when I miss classes due to circumstances, my friends help me to catch up with others by providing the notes from previous classes.

I have been associated with Apne Aap since so long. I attend workshops, participate in events. I am quite

knowledgeable in compare to my other classmates.

**I believe, Apne Aap has a great role to play in it. The organisation is almost like my mother. I can roam around freely over here.** All dada and didi working in Apne Aap knows me. They give me gifts too.

I wanted to dedicate a line for my mother: “*Maa is duniya me aaya hu mein tere sahara, tum hi ho sabse payare*”.

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



## The World Outside

—*Saima Khatoon/ as dictated to Sahana Dasgupta*

**Kolkata:** I am Saima Khatoon. I am aged 18 years and a school drop. I couldn't continue my education because of financial problem. Once, someone told me that an NGO named Apne Aap is working in red light areas of Kolkata.

**They are taking care of children's education, and teaching tailoring to the prostituted girls and women. My mother work as a help in different houses. Hence, my dream of continuing education came to a halt.**

But, there was some hope left. When I heard about Apne Aap's work, I wanted to get linked with the activities. I want to become someone in future. I did not want to miss the chance to learn tailoring. This would help me earn some money, which would be of great help to my family.

My mother gave me the permission to approach Apne Aap for it.

I came to Apne Aap center and spoke to aunty. I started my training in tailoring department. In between, we received a very good order from Rosanna. Rosanna Sami is a woman, who sell our handicraft items in the USA. We get better making charge out of this order.

I was taught by Lila Aunty how to make bangles. We started preparing bangles under the guidance of Lila di.

During this time, I had many problems in my family. My mother had taken illness. We had to admit her in hospital. We could not afford to pay my sister's education fee. Many days I could not come to my work place. Still, I did not stop coming to Apne Aap centre. It is a pleasure to be with everyone and have lunch together.

End of the month, I got Rs 2000 on my hand. I was so happy after receiving this money. Other women those who were working with me had earned Rs 12000 to Rs 14000. I was proud to see happiness beaming on their face.

**I went to my home and gave the money to my mother and requested her to pay for my sister's education fees. My mother agreed and paid the fees.**

It has made me more confident and I believe it also increased my emotional strength. Now, I advice other girls in redlight area to come to Apne Aap and take the opportunity of learning skills and be able to stand on their own feet.

### *Continued from page 1*

Total of 23 children from Banjara community used to attend the class. It was an open air classroom, held under a tree. Initially, it was difficult for us in class. We didn't know where to start. However, after a practice of few days, we started enjoying the lessons. We started the class with reading and writing. The next we learnt was counting numbers. After attending classes for five months only, we became familiar with the alphabets, reading, writing and even counting.

However, in January 2016, we, the students had to go to Nepal with our parents. It is our chance to earn some money. We go there to collect herbs from the foothill of Himalayas. Usually, we do not have enough food to eat. Surviving become a task. During this time, many unexpected things happened in Nepal. Circumstances made difficult for us to return to Bathnaha. There were extended strikes in Nepal. Finally, on March end we managed to reach Bathnaha.

It was a gap of three months. But, Kalam bhैया and Naresh bhैया were in touch with us. They were keen to start at the earliest possible. It was difficult for us to remember all the lessons that we have learnt so far. We were willing too.

**I, however come to realized that no matter how willing we are, it is difficult for our community to continue education at a stretch. When season come we have to move to different places for begging and hunting. This is our source of income. We feed our family members from it. There are too many hurdles for us to continue studying without a gap, mainly, because of our poor background and also nomadic nature.**

No matter how long the struggle and gap was, we didn't give up. In April, we continue with our classes at the same place, under a tree. I am thankful to Naresh bhैया and Kalam for showing so much love and affection towards the well being of our clan. Thank you Apne Aap for extending your unending support in regard to uplift our community.

## My First Day at Apne Aap

— *Krishna Chouhan*

**Delhi:** My name is Krishna Chouhan. I am 23-year-old. I have completed my bachelor's degree in 2015. Now, I'm doing my master in Political Science from Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). We are six members in family including my parents. Both my father and mother are working.

My elder is also working. However, my sister elder to me couldn't continue with her study and is now married. We are from economically poor background. **It was not easy for me to continue my education with no support except my mother. She has been there with me throughout the hardship. I can never thank her enough for standing for my right to study and continue it to higher level. She is so caring towards everyone in our family.**

I have joined Apne Aap as an intern. It is an anti-sex trafficking organization. I take bus to go to office daily. The ticket fare is Rs 5. It takes around 20 minutes to reach Apne Aap.

On my first day at Apne Aap, I met Juanita Kakoty. She gave me a book named 'Town of Love' to read. It was a story based on prostituted women. For instance, how is their life different from ours? What are the difficulties the women in prostitution are facing on a regular basis? How their rights are violated? Also, in this book it is about an inter-generational prostitution. The story is in a place called Forbesganj. The name of the main character is Tammana. She too faces similar kind of problem. She care for people around her. Tammana tries to help other women, but she couldn't.

While reading the book, it gave me a picture of what this organization is work for. In the book, the women are forced to sell their body for a meager amount: rs 50, 5s 100. It tore my heart to read it. The way it's described that women are eagerly standing on the door, wearing revealing clothes and inviting people. Their room wall was painted and tiny. Everything was to attract custom-

### *Continued from page 1*

From the discourse, which he gave that day, what I understood and liked most is about a law where if someone is trying to kill another person, in order to protect that person at that moment, the second or the third person can take a step against the first person and will not be considered an 'accused' in it. Because, the third person prevented the crime from happening. It can also be called as self-defence.

This concept of crime and the way he explained to us were very educational. **We were so engrossed in the session. I wanted the session to stretch little longer. It was almost two hour session. It was inspiring to learn from his experience and lifelong knowledge.**

We learnt about his challenges and difficulties he faced during his tenure of serving as Nodal Officer on anti-human trafficking and the Principal Researcher on the

ers.

The book has more characters: Fauzia. She worked in a pan stall. Many women don't know the person responsible for making them pregnant. Some deliver their baby and some dies while they are still in womb. Because of the constant body invasion, even while pregnancy.

**In this book, the family pushes the girl in prostitution. Sometime their husband, their father, their brother. They also prostitute themselves for living, as their husbands depend on their earning. The husband gets drunk and hit at their wives.**

After reading the book, it made me realize that some of the problem are universal. But, some are forced on them by society. I have been to Dharampura from office. I have observed the similar kind of tradition. Over there also women are pushed into prostitution in the name of marriage. That is after they get married and deliver their first child, they too are forced to prostitute themselves. It is disheartening to know that such inhumane, cruelty upon women is still accepted as normal.

I like the people in Apne Aap office. None of them discriminate to others. **We share each others meals during lunch hour. I feel lucky to be interning with an organization that works for women and child rights in such area.** For the most marginalized population. I am willing to learn more and to contribute what is expected from me.

Action Research on Trafficking in Women and Children. Also, other his achievements while working in civil defence.

His discourse would be very helpful in future to deal with similar kind of situation. Finally, after the conclusion of the training, we had took a group photograph with him. It is wonderful memory for me.

Overall, it was a learning cum motivational legal session by Dr. Nair sir. He also suggested that we take his teaching to schools and colleges and encourage them to start clubs on anti-trafficking and make people aware peoples of crimes.

Only together we can prevent trafficking of a person for sexual or other purposes.

## Poems

### Why this life?

Why this life that makes us cry?  
Made to experience being a daughter by and by?  
Have we sinned because we are female?  
A father and mother have birthed us as wail.  
We are told a girl does not speak or defy,  
Why have we been given a life that makes us cry?  
Why does the world treat us as the least?  
We are human not beasts.  
Why this life?  
Who is ours, who do we talk to,  
why this strife?  
A daughter is somebody else's wealth, says Ma  
as she suffers abuse from the in-law.  
A son is respected, a daughter not  
Why this life?  
is a daughter only somebody's wife/

**Name**– Jinnat Khatun  
**Class**: VIII  
**Area**: Bihar

### I am a Girl

I am a small loving heartbeat  
A lifeless valued commodity  
I am not  
Let me enter the world  
I am a girl,  
a curse  
I am not  
A well planned child am I  
An unknown quantity  
I am not  
Dont push me away,  
Just perpetuate your genes  
I will not.  
I will be your support  
A burden be  
I will not.

**Name**– Lali Kumari  
**Class**: VII  
**Area**: Bihar



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