



# RED LIGHT DESPATCH

VOLUME VIII, ISSUE 11

NOVEMBER, 2015

DELHI, KOLKATA, MUMBAI AND FORBESGANJ (BIHAR)

## My Dream

**“To become a farmer  
-Salma, aged 27**

**Bihar:** I am Salma. I am 27 years old. My dream is to be a farmer with my own plot of land.

I want to grow rice, banana trees, wheat and maize. My farm will have a pond with red, brown, yellow and black fishes. It would be beautiful to see fishes of all colour in one place.

There will be a blue sky above it. Birds will come and sit near the pond, blue kingfishers, white egrets, long tailed swallows. I will lie down on the back of a buffalo and look at the blue skies go by.

Also, I wish life would be fair enough. The sun and the moon will be in the sky at the same time. I will see the rays of the sun through the raindrops when they fall. My friends will come and sing songs with me. We will help each other to harvest the crop.

## KGBV girls selected as a Karate Trainer

**— By Sonali Khatoon/ as assisted by Shruti Kumari and Praveen**

**Bihar:** My Name is Sonali Khatoon and I am a student of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV), Simraha. I belong to Nat community and reside at a Red Light Area in Forbesganj. My Mother’s name is Meena Khatoon and father’s name is Md Allaudin. I got admitted to KGBV in 2014 in class VI, when I was 12 years old.

I am a student in class VII now. I live here with my other friends and continue to study and work hard at it. This is a girls’ hostel and supported by Sarv Siksha Abhiyan, Araria. There are 100 girls belonging to different caste and communities studying in class VI, VII and VIII here and getting free hostel facilities.

There are two teachers, Ms Noorani Khatoon and Ms Shruti Priya who teaches us all subjects with a lot of attention. Our warden is Ms Chanda Kumari who takes care of us. We also learn Karate for self defense from Mukesh Sir who comes here from Apne Aap Women World Wide, Forbesganj. We enjoy learning, playing and doing other physical activities assigned to us.

One day a person named Mr Momin Akhtar came to our hostel and met with our warden and submitted a letter issued by Sarv Siksha Abhiyan to start 15 days Karate training for us.

*(Continued on page 6)*

## Sonagachi redlight area children gets gender training

**—Shambhu Halder/ as translated by Sudipta**

**Kolkata:** I am Shambhu. I am 11-years-old. I stay with my elder sister and her family in Sonagachi red-light area.

I don’t have a mother, my neighbors keep telling me that my mother left us and ran away with someone else.

At present I am a student of class 3 at Oriental School. I visit Apne Aap centre, located in Sonagachi, everyday. Keya didi is one of our teachers and she teaches us Bengali and Maths, while Sudipta di teaches us English.

One day Sudipta di called upon us and told us to sit forming a circle, and started a play session with us, the session consisted of 12 boys and

girls. We enjoyed a lot.

After the session she asked us a strange question, she asked us who does all the work at our home. On informing her that it’s the young girls, she told us that this was the reason why the girls are always late to school while the boys are on time.

She also told us how this was one of the many reasons behind girls drop out of school. My observations said Sudipta di was correct. I have seen how mothers in our area always get their sons admitted to schools while ignoring their daughter’s admission.

*(Continued on page 7)*

## Op-Ed— Ruchira Gupta's article in Outlook India Magazine

### “Gender Bender In Bihar”

**Ruchira Gupta is a writer, feminist campaigner, professor at New York University and founder of anti-sex-trafficking organization Apne Aap Women Worldwide ([www.apneaap.org](http://www.apneaap.org)) Twitter: @ruchiragupta**

For 20-year-old Nageena, a college student in Patna, life is about possibilities. She dreams of becoming an engineer.

For the first ten years of her life, she ran ragged on the dirt path of a red-light district in Forbesganj, Bihar. Her home, a mud hut had no doors, no roof, no toilet, no drinking water and no electricity. She could not read right or write, used to feel hungry all the time, was scared to go to the local school.

Her mother, Savita, could not get the police to rescue her other daughter from a brothel in the neighbouring district of Katihar. Savita would tremble with fear when a trafficker passed by. She was invisible to government authorities.

Today, Nageena is a graduate of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's famous pink boarding schools. She is also a beneficiary of the free bicycle, school uniforms, text books and college incentives that the JD(U) government ensured for marginalised girls since it came to power 10 years ago.

Her mother, Savita, has government ID cards, accesses subsidised rations, has bought her own plot of land and built her house. She has electricity and a hand pump in her courtyard for water. She sometimes talks about fighting elections.

Both mother and daughter cast their vote in this election. Both voted for the Grand Alliance of JD(U), RJD and Congress(I).

They voted for a government and a Chief Minister, who had helped them from destitution to social and economic stability.

Savita remembered how the Chief Minister had personally visited the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya boarding school her daughter and her friends studied in, in a public show of support to girls from the red-light area.

Nageena remembered how the education ministry in Patna had sent down a team to mobilise the local police to protect the girls from the traffickers besieging their hostel. She saw how the administration responded to her mother's Mahila Mandal's petitions for BPL cards, voter ID cards and later to getting subsidised food, health care and even land. She saw how life changed. Her mother was able to open a bank account. They were able to wear proper clothes, go to school, eat something, study in the evening. They had water and toilets at home. They did not feel scared of traffickers anymore. Her mother was no longer invisible. She had

a political and social identity and their family had some economic and social stability.

She saw the red-light area become a non-red light area as woman after woman got govt IDs and subsidies and girls got educated, traffickers got arrested. She saw other women from the neighboring panchayats get more power, more girls passing out from her school get jobs, better health care. She too began to have dreams. That she would be an engineer. Her friends felt for the first time in generations that they too could get out of their cycle of poverty-become doctors, lawyers, nurses, teachers, politicians. After all, other women in Bihar were achieving all this.

Nageena and Savita are just two of the 60.57 % of women who have voted in Bihar.

The emphasis on girls education and women's safety has paved the way for a great social change in Bihar.

Two out of every three women have voted in Bihar.

They have turned out in such large numbers to hold on to their newly found social, political and economic independence. To keep the public spaces now available to them through the 50 % reservation in government jobs and women-only seats for Mahila Mukhiyas in village councils.

These newly-educated women in the public space were alarmed by the implications of the BJP's national annual budget presented 8 month ago.

The Modi government had phased out shelter homes for single women, one stop crisis centres, hostels for working women, cut the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya boarding school budget by 9.5 percent, reduced allocations to the ICDS and Midday Meal Schemes and to the gender budget for school education by 8.3 percent. To add insult to injury he spent Rs 100 crore on an international branding exercise called Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Abhiyan with no money spent on actually educating the girl child. These were the very schemes that helped them out of destitution and deprivation.

The budgetary allocations in absolute terms has decreased by almost 49.3 percent to the Ministry of Women and Child Development.

In addition the increase in indirect taxes led to a sharp price increase in their daily consumables like daal creating more difficulty for working women. One of the most popular slogans doing the rounds in the last two phases was *Har Har Modi se Arhar Modi* (Arhar is a daal, which is a staple diet for all Biharis with rice).

The last straw on the camel's bank for poor, marginalised mothers was when they heard that the BJP Cabinet had approved a Bill to legalise child labour and his National Commission for Women wanted to legalise pimping and brothel keeping. *(Continued on page 3)*

## Diary of a Social Worker

—Jasneet Kaur

**Delhi:** My name is Jasneet Kaur, and I have been a part of the Apne Aap team for almost one and a half year now. Being the Advocacy Associate in the organization, I handle campaigns, networking and activities at the policy level. I also manage the programs Apne Aap runs with the community trapped in inter-generational prostitution, and those at risk in Najafgarh, Delhi.

**Life of the girls and the women from the community is full of everyday rebellions against the patriarchal society.**

But the rebellion is not only limited to them. Every woman, including me needs to fight everyday for basic rights and freedoms. Our fights are on different levels though. Ignoring raised eyebrows in the family and the society, I recently bought a motorcycle. I had to respond to questions like “Isn’t it for men?” “Can you ride alone?” I have to tolerate the surprised looks of men (and women) every time I ride it.

In November, I took the motorcycle for a long ride, and rode from Delhi to Goa. My favourite part of the ride was the early morning route through small towns, cities and villages across Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra.

Starting my day early morning, I would come across children on their way to school, outside schools, waiting for the bus etc. I could not help but observe the young girls throughout my journey: some wearing salwar kameez to school, some wearing skirts and shirts; some walking to school, while some taking the bus. Some walked alone with meek expressions, while some walked in a group with their friends and siblings laughing and chatting their way through. **Despite all the differences, I could spot a similarity – the dreams in their eyes. It reminded me of the**

**dreams in my eyes as a young girl.**

**This journey has inspired me to start a blog in the coming months, posting stories and pictures of girls going to school, documenting their challenges covering the long distance to school every single day.** I plan to travel extensively and cover stories of girls throughout the country.

At Apne Aap, my dream is to see every girl in school. We managed to enroll four girls from the Perna community in Najafgarh in an English medium residential school in 2015. In a period of six months, one could notice the positive changes in their personalities and their conducts.

In 2016, I aim to enrol more girls in the boarding schools and prevent them from getting married at a young age and later trafficked. Godspeed!

**But the rebellion is not only limited to them. Every woman, including me needs to fight everyday for basic rights and freedoms. Our fights are on different levels though.**

*(Continued from page 2)*

They wondered how they would protect their children from those who wanted to exploit them and how would they educate their daughters if schools shut down, mid-day meals were not available. They were relieved to see that that state of Bihar kept the mid-day meals, boarding, schools, cycles, uniforms and reservations going against all odds.

They, therefore, refused to be drawn into the BJP’s attempts to fuel religious and caste hatred over beef, cow-dung, pork, toilets, tantriks, and urine. They voted for harmony and peace, and for economic and social incentives for the poor and marginalised. The overall turnout of women voters in this Assembly elections was 60.57 per cent, whereas that for men was 53.41 per cent. Women understood that a government that allo-

cates big money to weaponry, smart cities, superhighways, international public relations contracts but peanuts to increasing literacy and lowering infant mortality values them less as citizens.

Tax money is being spent on Modi’s international tours, fancy suits, grandiose meetings with Facebook and Google, while government aided schools are being closed, child labour is being legalised to address shortage of wages, pimping and brothel keeping are being legitimised to address the lack of sustainable and dignified work for women, formerly self-sufficient groups are being pushed out by land acquisition for mines, factories, multi-national agro-businesses and a non-cash economy for women’s productive or reproductive work is becoming justified in the name of “Hindu” values. **Bihar has shown that women are not buying it.**

## Nomadic tribes submits applications for voter I-card

—*Agam Lal/ as dictated to Mohd Kalam*

**Bihar:** My name is Agam Lal. I am from the Banwaria community. I just know how to sign my name in Hindi. I was born in Bihar. I want to share the perils that our community faces. Nomadic communities struggle a lot. They don't have access on land, home, health services or education. Their women are also not safe. We do not have any papers or documents to prove our Indian citizenship and as such we have no voting rights and aren't a part of the census. Apne Aap has started working with us from August 2015.

My community stays at Bathnaha, near the railway station since 2010. **It is extremely unfortunate that we don't have any identity card issued either by the Bihar government or the Central government. We have tried many times but the administration like the village head, gram sevak, and especially Block Level Officer are least bothered.**

No importance is given to us. We have even spent money to get our voter id card, as we face police harassment, but to no avail. We have finally undertaken a new approach to get our voters I- cards. **Apne Aap had helped us fill up the application for voter card. Total of 94 people filled up their information and among them, 39 of these people (men and women) from our community visited the Block Office for their voter card, the first time in their lives.**

The Block Development Officer wasn't present at his office at that time and the staff started enquiring whether we had gathered there to beg or to put up some kind of performance? Even though we felt insulted we

informed them about our desire to see the BDO of Forbesganj. After three hours, the BDO came back to his office. Seeing all of us the BDO initially got apprehensive and worried but, on being told that we had come to apply for voter card he seemed to calm down.

Although he was offended and told us to visit in smaller groups of 2 to 3 in future, he advised us to go see the Panchayat which would in turn help us. He told us that we had to produce some kind of residency proof like AADHAR card or voter card belonging to any of our kins.

On informing them that we had none he told us to go see the BLO. With the help of Apne Aap and the media we finally brought our plight to everyone's notice and we have successfully applied for our voter card. We thank Apne Aap for helping us and also making people aware of our struggles and problems.

**We do not have any papers or documents to prove our Indian citizenship and as such we have no voting rights and aren't a part of the census. Apne Aap has started working with us**

### 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

## Visit of Council General of France

—*Radha Prasad/ as assisted by S K Anesh*

**Kolkata:** I am Radha Prasad. I live in Kolkata, Munshiganj. I started coming to Apne Aap centre since I was little. The organisation has always been with me whenever I needed it. It supported for my education. Apart from this, I actively participate in extracurricular activities including drawing, stitching and dancing.



At Present I am studying in class VI at Bankim Ghose Memorial Girl's High School.

We have many events and activities happening over here. One day Ruchira aunty brought a visitor to our centre, a French Counsel General. All of us sat together. He talked to us at in Bengali. He asked us many questions. **He asked me about my future plan and I told him that I want to be a good teacher and want to serve the community**. We were mooned to see his simplicity. We sang Apne Aap's song for him.

He enjoyed listening to our song and he also sang a French song for us. Lastly, I drew a greeting card for him. This act of simplicity has pleased him so much. It was a drawing. It feels really good to meet a person, who is so humble with a simple thinking. I have nothing to say, but Thank You for everything.

**He enjoyed listening to our song and he also sang a French song for**



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



## My First Day in Apne Aap

—Amit Kumar Sah

**Bihar:** I am Amit Kumar. Even before joining Apne Aap, I was aware of the work, which the organisation is committed to. Many people in my community appreciate its contribution and the effort it has put to eradicate many wrong things happening in the society.

Also, Apne Aap has done a lot to promote education among the girls of marginalised communities, including the children of women in prostitution. Whenever I read or someone talks about the organisation, **I always had a dream to contribute my service to society by doing something good. Apne Aap gave me opportunity by hiring me as a Computer Teacher.**

To my surprise, one day I saw an advertisement in local website, for the post of Computer teacher. I was elated to see a vacancy post. It was like someone above was listening to my thoughts. I prayed and thank God for everything. I applied immediately.

Initially, I had a telephonic interview and it was followed by face-to-face interview. And in some days, I was informed about my selection.

Now getting back to my first day in Apne Aap. When I entered the office, I was glad to find the office atmosphere very warm. All my colleagues were busy with

their work, but took out time to introduce themselves.

In the office campus, I observed that on one side, the girls and women were having stitching, embroidery and designing class. While on the other side, some girls were narrating about the problems they face and to seek solution or counseling for it. It pleased me to see everything in so much discipline and organised manner.

I was both excited and nervous. I quietly sat in a corner, waiting to take my first Computer class for Apne Aap's children. After some time, the students arrived. I began my class. I noticed that all the girls were very dedicated. They were listening to me intently. They were too curious to know more and more. Many raised their voice to ask questions, which I replied as clearly as possible.

All were eager to learn. I couldn't have been more happy.

**I feel so fortunate to teach the children and help in changing their lives for good. I wish Apne Aap a bright future and looking forward to grow with the organisation.**

### *Continued from page 1*

As per the discussion with warden and teachers, he started the training from November 23, 2015 to December 8, 2015. Total of 50 girls from the hostel were given Karate training. **After completing the training program he selected six girls as a Karate trainer, one for Middle School, Simraha, two for Kasturba Gandhi Vidyalaya, Simraha and three for the different middle schools in the periphery of 4 KM of our hostel and asked us to go there and conduct the Karate training program for 100 days for 50 girls.**

A meeting with our parents was conducted for getting them on board by the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya administration and a written consent was taken from the parents. The list of selected girls are as below:

1. Sonali Khatoon- Middle School, Simraha
2. Jiyana Khatoon- Kasturba Gandhi Vidyalaya, Simraha
3. Nikhat Parween- Kasturba Gandhi Vidyalaya, Simraha
4. Urmila Kumari- Middle School, Haldiya
5. Manisha Kumari- Middle School, Bara
6. Soni Kumari- Middle School, Kurba Lakshmipur

All the girls who were selected as Karate trainer are to start the training program from 15<sup>th</sup> December. **The Sarv Siksha Abhiyan promised to distribute bicycles among the girls who go outside to train. Sarv Siksha Abhiyan will also give the girls Rs- 1000 for their Karate costume and Rs- 5500 as stipend and Rs – 300 for a bicycle.**

The bank account details of the selected girls have been submitted to the Sarv Siksha Abhiyan by the Kasturba Vidyalaya administration to deposit the amount. **We are now waiting for the amount and when we receive it, we will each buy a bicycle to go outside and train other girls.**

We are thankful to our warden, teachers and accountant sir who supported us and helped us become trainers. We are also thankful to Apne Aap Women Worldwide team specially Mukesh Sir who taught us Karate on a regular basis and special thanks to Praveen Sir who guided us as an administrator of Kasturba Gandhi Vidyalaya.

Lastly we thank Ruchira Di and Tinku Di who are our role models and taught us to fight for our rights.

## The World Outside

— *Sunaina/ as dictated to Juanita Kakoty*

**Delhi:** I am Sunaina (Sneha), aged 13 years and I study in the 7<sup>th</sup> class at Government Girls' Senior Secondary School. My father's name is Joni Nath and my mother's name is Jagwanti. I have two brothers and one sister. I am the eldest among my siblings. My parents, like the rest of our Sopera community people, earn by putting up shows of monkeys they have trained and by playing drums at weddings.

In November, Apne Aap Women Worldwide selected me and a friend of mine from our community, Balma, to the Oz Haat Mela in the Australian Embassy. I went there for the first time in my life. I had a very good time there. I saw different kinds of stalls which I have never before seen in my life. I just loved being there!

**There were such nice people around that I want to be like them when I grow up. I met Santa Claus who gave me toffees. Santa Claus did not discriminate against me and the other children who were there with their parents.** It felt so nice! I saw magic shows too. There was also a huge Mickey Mouse bouncy where kids were playing. Never knew that something like that existed!

My parents go out of Delhi two-three times in a year to earn some money. And they go for about a month or two at a stretch. I have often accompanied them. We put up tents by the roadside and live in them then. But I

don't want such a life. It is tough. I want to be successful so that all those who know me would encourage their girls and boys to live better lives.

I am forever thankful to Apne Aap for making many of my dreams come true. It has showed me so many things which I never thought existed before. Apne Aap also got me admitted at Shiamak Dawar's dance academy at Janakpuri, where I learnt dance for three months.

The dreams that I had are slowly turning in to reality. I am grateful to Apne Aap for being in my life, for teaching me to live with dignity.

**My parents go out of Delhi two-three times in a year to earn some money. And they go for about a month or two at a stretch. I have often accompanied them. We put up tents by the roadside and live in them then. But I don't want such a life. It is tough.**

### *Continued from page 1*

In my knowledge, many places in India do not welcome the birth of girl child. In fact, many are killed even before they are born. However, the case is different here in Sonagachi.

Here, the birth of a girl is celebrated but not that of a boy. Apparently it is believed that they will bring in money for the family in future.

Even though I am too young to understand the meaning. Being born and living in Sonagachi, seeing the bad things around me, made me realized that the way they bring money is not a good way.

**Girls and women are not safe here. They are beaten up. They are forced to do things.**

Once on asking my elder sister, why our aunt went out every day with unknown persons, she got very angry and hit me a lot.

However, the question remained unanswered to date. Here boys are safer than girls. **My aunt has a girl child and she always stops her from going anywhere, but I am never stopped- something I**

**have failed to understand. I feel sad for her.**

During the class, I learnt that my sister and I are both equal. We were taught that she also has the right as I have. She also has the right to study like me and that she has the same capabilities as I do. We should respect every women in general. At home our sisters, mothers and other female members of our family.

I believe there is a lot a policemen can do. Hence, in future I aspire to become a policeman and punish those who wrong our sisters and mothers.

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## Poems

### I am like a Candle

I am like a candle;  
I engulf myself to flame, so to spread  
brightness.  
I am a girl;  
Candle burn to give light to others,  
But inside me I am carrying so much  
darkness  
I am a Candle.

**Name**– Kumkum Kumari Shah  
**Age:** 13 years  
**Area:** Kolkata

### Pen

I have got three rupees with me  
I bought a pen out of this money,  
Pen is my life,  
Because a pen can express many things,  
A pen can be utilized to express without any  
noise  
And education changes the society,  
I can change my society.  
Pen is my life.

**Name**– Pallobi Halder  
**Age:** 13 years  
**Area:** Kolkata



Gate 3/4, Second Floor,  
India International Centre  
Campus, 40, Max Muller Road,  
Lodhi Estate, New Delhi

Phone:  
+91 11 24619968

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

## Red Light Despatch

**Editor:** Ruchira Gupta  
**Editorial team:** Taw Nana  
**Publisher:** Apne Aap Women Worldwide  
**RNI Number:** DELMUL/2008/27727  
**Printer:** India Enterprises, New Delhi

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