Kolkata: I am Reshma Khatoon, I was born and brought up in Munshiganj red light area where my mother is still being-prostituted. My mother struggled to get me a good life but the brothel keepers, the ‘madams’ and costumers often tortured her and other aunties. Whenever I saw this, I used to get scared and cry. From that time I decided to be a strong woman and realized the importance of education. Women are dragged into prostitution because they don’t have education and employment choices.

In 2004, Apne Aap started a center in my area where my mother enrolled me for basic education. Later, Apne Aap admitted me into the RKV Mission Boarding school; here the director and the staff take care of our physical and mental health, education, food etc. I learnt music, drawing, games and the teachers increase our knowledge. My dream is to complete my post graduation and return to my school as a teacher. I want to build the careers of children from communities like mine. I understand their pain and I want to show them the path of education, to help them come out from the darkness. My other dream is to buy a small home for my mother, far from the red light area and live a happy life. In the future I want to rid this world from the evil of prostitution. Thanks to the teachers in RKVM and Apne Aap team.

Bihar: My name is Ruksar Khatoon. I am also known as Nageena. It was name given to me by my trafficker. I don’t know the reason behind it. His name is Mohammed Muslim. I was trafficked from Delhi when I was around 13 or 14 years old. I was forcibly kept in the Forbesganj red light area. For the last 15-16 years, I have faced extreme violence in my life. I tried to escape several times from the brothel, but couldn’t.

In 2012, I was rescued by the police. That time, I had trouble explaining them about anything. I was in trauma and the trafficker was present with me. I was handed over to the trafficker again. Because he had proved to the police that I was his family member, an adult and that I was not being prostituted. During this period, I suffered extreme mental and physical torture.

A year ago, I was sick and my health was deteriorating. The trafficker had no concern about my health. When I refused to entertain customers, he had sent me to a local government hospital with the brothel madam. The medical report said that I was suffering from tongue cancer. However, the trafficker did not disclose this information to me, instead he gave me some pain killer. The pain was extreme. I felt that I was going to die there. Finally, I found a costumer who loves me and I told him my story. He was ready to marry me. Six months ago, I escaped and got married to him.

(Continued on page 6)

Delhi: My name is Hoorbai. I live in Dharampura, Najafgarh and have four daughters. My two daughters are married and the other two studies at Shanti Gyan International School with the sponsorship provided by Apne Aap.

My daughter Megha was married at an early age as I couldn’t foresee any opportunity for her growth. In our community not many of the girls goes to school. At that part of my time, I was very influenced by the people around and decided to marry her off, just like every other daughters in my neighbourhood are married off at early age.

Initially, my daughter was happy at her in-laws home but later situation started to turn against us. She is married off in the same caste—Perna. The problem started few months ago. Megha used to visit home quite often and stay with us along with her child. I assumed that may be the child is small, so she wants me to have some quality time with the child as I am his grandmother. Whenever her in-laws would ask her to come back home, she would give an excuse and continue to stay at my place. I tried to find out if there is any problem she was facing. She said nothing. Then, one night as I was going out to be prostituted for the night, Megha broke into tears and requested me to stay back.

(Continued on page 7)
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 in The Guardian.

Gupta, in London this week to take part in the two-day Trust Women conference, organised by the Thomson Reuters Foundation and the International Herald Tribune, is the president of Apne Aap Women Worldwide, a grassroots movement that campaigns to end sex trafficking and offer women alternatives to soliciting. It's an organisation she set up 15 years ago after exposing the involvement of girls in sex work while working as a full-time journalist. Her documentary on sex trafficking, The Selling of Innocents, won an Emmy award. "My organisation works with survivors and victims of sex trafficking. We go into red light areas and slums, and very marginalised communities and villages where girls and women [are] likely to be trafficked," she says.

Apne Aap, which means self-empowerment in Hindi, organises women into groups of 10 and educates them about their legal rights, offers vocational skills training, helps women access finances, and offers advice on setting up bank accounts. Just as importantly, it provides a space for women and girls to encourage each other and build up their confidence to speak to the police and in court so people who buy sex can be prosecuted. In other words, the organisation seeks to "reduce their dependency on brothels and prevent them [women] from being trafficked". Classrooms are set up so young girls can be educated.

To date, Apne Aap has worked with 15,000 women and girls, mainly in Kolkata, Bihar, Delhi and Mumbai. The organisation is hoping to expand to other regions. "By doing this what we have really done is make a dent in the sex industry by increasing choices for women and girls, because we see prostitution as an absence of choice," says Gupta.

"It's a system based on supply and demand. The supply is formed by marginalised women and girls, who have very little choice, so traffickers take advantage of their vulnerabilities. Demand is based on pimps and johns, those who take advantage of the lack of choice these girls have," she says. "On the demand side my organisation tries to get pimps into jail and tries to get people who buy sex to think differently, and about the consequences to the women and girls when they buy sex."

The organisation is petitioning to change the laws in India related to sex work and tackle social norms that allow it to go ahead. Her team visits campuses to "tell them [male students] what happens when women are bought and sold, [when their] bodies are invaded".

India has similar laws on prostitution to the UK. It's illegal to have sex with a minor (a child under the age of 18) or to live off the earnings of women selling sex or soliciting in a public place. But police tend to "pick up women and girls who are soliciting rather than the men in the brothels".

Gupta's view that women become sex workers because they have no other choice is controversial among some women's groups. Organisations like Vamp see sex workers not as victims who need saving, but as members of a profession offering greater freedoms than they previously experienced. In July, hundreds of sex workers met in Kolkata for the sex workers freedom festival to lobby for the decriminalisation of their profession.

Do they have a point? Gupta, who will be taking part in two sessions on trafficking and sex work at the Trust Women conference on Wednesday, believes the people at the Kolkata conference were not the young women who are controlled by brothel managers to "pimp themselves, sell their bodies and stand on the streets for long hours waiting for clients".

"What happens to prostituted women and girls is that as they grow older ... the brothel system does not require them any more and throws them out, or forces them to replace themselves with their daughters. These women are only in their 20s or early 30s. They're disease-ridden, [have] had many abortions and they have dependency on drugs and alcohol."

Very few sex workers become brothel managers, she says, and the few who do are "brutalised to such an extreme that they become desensitised and they think, well we have survived so we'll do what we can, never mind what happens to the other girls and women".

She adds: "I think women have a right to choose a lot of things, but sometimes they choose to be exploited because they have very few choices. No one chooses to be born poor, nobody chooses to be born low caste, and in India very often nobody chooses to be born a girl."

"A combination of these three things takes away many of our choices. So, therefore, women who say they choose to be sex workers, it's because they don't have any other choices, it's a survival strategy. And what Apne Aap and I are advocating for is that women are entitled to have many more choices, just like their brothers or their husbands or their fathers. So they have to have access to jobs, access to livelihoods and savings and education that men in their society do so that they can exercise equal choice."

Note: Apne Aap does not use the term sex worker.
**Diary of a Social Worker**

—Khushboo Mishra

**Delhi:** My name is Khushboo Mishra and I am associated with anti-sex trafficking organisation, Apne Aap Women Worldwide as it’s Programme Associate. My journey till now as a social worker has been full of amazing experiences.

Joining Apne Aap, helped me to expand my knowledge and understanding on different social and political matters. Earlier, I wasn’t aware of de-notified tribes and their deplorable, unjustified conditions. I remember my first day at community in Najafgarh, I was surprised to observed the existence of such community where prostitution is a caste-based occupation.

It was unacceptable to see how women in Perna are trapped in inter-generational prostitution on the basis of their caste. Stories of Perna in Najafgarh was difficult to fathom, especially when it has been happening in the very Capital of India, Delhi. I started reading more about the de-notified tribes.

Nat community in Bihar shocked me again where family is forcing their own girl to prostitute. As a girl, when I tried to imagine the situation of women in prostitution, I cannot control my tears, fears, anxiety, anger, hatred and shame. And they are living it every day, the trauma which would just lead to one thing: destruction of their own being.

The time I approached Apne Aap, I was certain that I wanted to work in at grassroot level. They offered me to work as a teacher with the children initially, which I accepted immediately. I knew this would give me an opportunity to travel to community on a regular basis.

For me it was an effort to understand the life of people in community from a closer perspective. Giving two hours for one side travel, I started taking classes in community. While teaching to children, I learnt how even the small ones are aware what their mothers and grandmothers did for earning.

Some of the little girls from the said community have sub-consciously accepted that they’ll follow their mother’s footstep, once they are married with children. It was imbied deeply in their mind.

**When I was a 13-year-old girl, I use to count the number of years it would take for me to join college. But in this community, the same aged girl receives gifts like beautiful saree and bangles, as she is aware its her time to get married. Child marriage is a crime, still it exist, not only in this community but across the country.**

When I was a 13-year-old girl, I use to count the number of years it would take for me to join college. But in this community, the same aged girl receives gifts like beautiful saree and bangles, as she is aware its her time to get married. Child marriage is a crime, still it exist, not only in this community but across the country.
Apne Aap girl felicitated for winning documentary film making award

— Saleena Khatoon/ as dictated to Praveen Kumar

Bihar: My name is Saleena Khatoon and I am 11-year-old. I am a student of class VI in Kasturba Gandhi Balika Avashiya Vidyalaya, Simraha run by Apne Aap as a shelter and protection home against sex trafficking. My mother’s name is Fatima Khatoon and she is an activist, associated with an anti-sex trafficking NGO named Apne Aap Women Worldwide. She is fighting to end sex trafficking in Indo-Nepal border in Forbesganj. I am in class VI, enrolled in KGBV, Simraha run by Apne Aap as a shelter and protection home for at-risk to prostitution girls and the marginalized communities.

I live in a red light area in Forbesganj with my mother, three elder sisters and two younger brothers. I have completed my previous education in Apne Aap community center school from creche class to class five.

In June 2014, when I studied in Apne aap community centre school, a person named Aseem Asha who visited our community center with his assistants and introduced himself as a documentary film maker. Aseem Ji along with Apne Aap was looking to make short films with the girls of Kishori Mandal. I was also a member of Kishori Mandal in Apne Aap.

After the selection process, I was chosen for the film making with five other girls of Kishori Mandal named Isha Parween, Khushboo Kumari, Shahjadi Khatoon, Jyoti Khatoon and Kajal Khatoon. Among them, two are my sisters. The idea was to teach girls on how to take videos and make short films out of it. The workshop conducted by Aseem Asha Foundation and Apne Aap was very helpful. All of us made six short films based on what we observe in our neighbourhood.

I see women get beaten up by their men in our community. It can be seen everywhere in our locality and that too on a regular basis. It’s impossible to unsee the domestic violence happening around. Hence, I decided the title of the film as “Gaya Jamana Pitne Ka”.

I wanted to convey a message that “Ab Bahut ho chukka, Ab auretein majboor aur abla nahi hai. Hum mardon ke kandha se kandh mila kar kaam kar rahi hai. Unhe apna adhikaar pata hai aur ab unhe koi pit nahi sakta. Pitne walon ki ab khair nahi hai (It’s enough. Women are no longer weak. We are working shoulder to shoulder with men. They are aware of their legal rights and men are not allow to hit women. Otherwise they are punished”).

It took around six weeks for the completion of the short film making project with Aseem Asha Foundation. They had been extremely helpful all this while.

The short films were finally screened in French Embassy, Kolkata. And of all the good movies, my short film was selected for 1st prize. When I got the news, I was filled with joy. Other selected participants were handed over Rs 1000 as a consolation prize by Apne Aap Women Worldwide.

On 28th September 2016, an award distribution ceremony was organized by Apne Aap in Forbesganj office and retired Col. K.K. Dangwal, at present Director, MBIT, Forbesganj was the chief guest of the event.

Also, as a guest was Mr. Vidya Sagar Gupta, father of the founder of Apne Aap.

I am delighted to get acknowledged for the short film. It will motivate me throughout my life. Thanks Apne Aap Bihar team for giving me the exposure and playing an important role in shaping my future.

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
Kolkata: My name is Baby Halder. I am from Halisahar, West Bengal. I am a writer. I have four books in my name including ‘Alo Adhari’. In this book I have written about my life struggle. Currently, I am associated with Apne Aap.

I joined Apne Aap in October, 2016. Earlier, I used to work in an ngo based out of Mumbai named ‘Stree Mukti Sangathan’. I joined Apne Aap’s Sonagachi Centre as a teacher.

Before joining Apne Aap, I had vague idea of the hidden truth of dark life of the girls and women in prostitution. It makes me feel very emotional. Apne Aap office in Sonagachi centre is located in the midst of brothels. Every day I notice so many women standing outside the brothels and waiting for their customers. I have also came across girls who are just fifteen to eighteen years old. Personally I had face many problem in my life, but no where near to experiencing something of this nature.

Here, the girls and women are forced to sell their body to earn a living. Many of the girls are either trafficked or sold here. With time, some of the girls learn to accept this as their fate.

As the days are passing, I am trying to gather information about them with the help from my other colleagues. It is a painful life. Apne Aap is helping is an anti-sex trafficking organisation. It is working to empower the girls and women in prostitution to fight for their legal and political rights. Apne Aap is trying to link the women with the mainstream. In past, the organisation helped women to escape from prostitution and giving them livelihood training. Some of them are associated with Apne Aap now. Those who are no longer in this profession are living a happy and dignified life.

I am planning to learn more from Apne Aap and would love to dedicate my time and effort for the girls and women in distress. Let us see, how I, along with the support of other co-workers can help in establishing a life different and good for the girls and women in redlight areas.

I believe that a country like India, one of the largest democracy are facing problems like trafficking and forced prostitution because of prevalence of extreme poverty. It is equally hard for me to believe that many families are dependent on their girl’s income through prostitution. My eyes are filled with tears as I observe girls in the lanes and by-lanes for their next customers. I pray to god ‘Oh god please help them to come out from this dark world.’

According to UNICEF, each year one million children enter into sex trade, many of them are brought from Nepal and Bangladesh in the name of job opportunities and marriages. I have seen in Sonagachi how girls and women are struggling each and every day for their bread and butter. I am considering myself extremely lucky to work with this genuine and sincere organisation like Apne Aap.

I thank Apne Aap and Ruchira di for giving me the opportunity.

Join our campaign to #QuitChildLabour. Sign the petition to revoke laws that enable #intergenerational prostitution http://ow.ly/z2zH303xsS1

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Write to us for any queries or comments at contact@apneaap.org
contact@apneaap.org
Apne Aap organised bookmark making workshop

—Manisha/ as translated by Khushboo Mishra

Delhi: My name is Manisha. I am 11-year-old and study in 5th standard at MCD Primary School. I live in Dharampura, Najafgarh. I have one younger brother. My father works as a daily labour at construction site and my mother works as domestic help in houses in the locality.

My dream is to become a teacher. I like English. Once I grow, I will teach this language to students. I like to participate in activities organised in our school. I learnt many things in open mike sessions, art and craft workshops, games, painting etc. All these activities are organised by Apne Aap activists. We, as students feel glad when they come to our school. We eagerly wait for the next activities.

Recently, they organised a bookmark making workshop at school for 5th standard girls. We didn’t know what bookmark is and never used it. It was new. We were naturally excited to learn on how to make bookmark. I dream of becoming English teacher and I’ll be reading as many books as possible.

There were many students in our class. Hence, we were divided into three groups. It was unique learning, we were given ice cream sticks and were asked to paint and decorate it.

I started to paint ice cream stick with yellow colour using paintbrush. Later, we were asked to use fingers instead of paintbrush. I was resistant, like my other friends, as it would make our hands dirty. But then slowly everyone started to use fingers to colour. It was nice to see their hands filled with colours. I too kept paintbrush on the table and started to paint ice-cream stick with my fingers. I painted my stick with yellow, green and pink colour. Once, It was dried up, the stick was decorated with coloured tapes, ribbons, stars, dots and other items. I also made a lotus and put it on top of my bookmark. It was heart-warming to observe that my classmates and Apne Aap team appreciated my bookmark and encouraged me to make few more.

I feel that just like other creative activities, bookmark making workshop also increases my ability to develop ideas. I also realised the importance of colours in my life, which on other times, I would have underestimated it’s importance. I have participated in many open mike sessions. Once I shared about my dream on open mike session. I always look forward to learning new in these sessions and workshops.

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I have started working as a vegetable seller and I went to Patna to get treatment for my tongue cancer. The doctor has confirmed that my tongue has to be removed because of the cancer. I tried to solve the treatment costs through my own income but I failed because the surgery needs two lakh rupees. Then I went to my trafficker, Mohammed Muslim and demanded money for my treatment. He refused to give me any money. I requested him to give me some money because I was forced to give all my earnings to him. No one was helping me and I felt helpless.

Finally, I approached Apne Aap Women Worldwide. I met the AAWW staff and explained them about my circumstances. They suggested that I should file an FIR against the trafficker; I went to the police station with AAWW staff members. I reported my complaint to the police but they did not take any action against the traffickers. Then the Aap staff contacted the District Magistrate and updated him about what had happened in the local police station. The District Magistrate instructed the local police and then they registered an FIR. The police was not taking interest in arresting the trafficker.

The local goons and village level politicians were creating tremendous pressure so that I would compromise.

The trafficker had also threatened me to withdraw my case. I was afraid that I would be harmed. Then, I contacted AAWW staff again and told them about what was going on. They suggested that I should not lose hope and told me that they were with me. They also told me that the trafficker would not harm me and that he had understood that no one would help him, that he was going to go to jail. This is why he was doing all these things. Finally the police has arrested the trafficker and sent him to jail, despite all the pressure that had come from the local leaders who wanted to protect the trafficker.

I can’t express in words how happy I am to see the trafficker in jail. Now, I feel safe and free but my illness is creating more and more problems for me to survive. I don’t have money to get quality treatment and then I met the AAWW staff. They gave me Rs 30,000 and not just money; they have also travelled with me three times to Patna for the treatment. They also applied to the district health department for my surgery. The district health department has sanctioned Rs 40,000 for my treatment. I will get the cheque from the district health department very soon. Now I have hope that I will get my surgery done. I don’t know how many days I will live, but I am happy that my trafficker got jailed and justice was finally served.
The World Outside
— Pinki Kumari/ as translated by Praveen Kumar

Bihar: My name is Pinki Kumari. I am 22-year-old. I am a disabled person. Since the time I was aged 3 or 4 years, my mobility has been restricted due to paralysis. I live in Kuber Tola, Forbesganj with our parents. My father is a barber and my mother is a home maker. My mother Sunita Devi is also a member of SEG named Kiran run by Apne Aap Women Worldwide since 2011. It was not an easy task to complete my studies. I studied in a nearby government school and passed class 10th with good marks. I have a dream to study further. I had a tricycle as my tool to move from one place to another. This, doesn’t replace what my family had done for me. They had been my pillar and still continues to be. My family members used to carry me around to school, college and other public spaces.

I got admitted in class 11th and in the same time joined as a Data Entry Operator in Apne Aap Women Worldwide, an anti-sex trafficking organization. I am earning enough to support my education. It is a part-time job. Also, I’ll keep looking for better opportunities. I struggle every day to make my life better.

I am suffering from paralysis and every day is a struggle for me to do the most basic body movement. I get frustrated sometimes. But, my family always supports and encourages me to go outside and meet more people. Without them, I would have been spending my entire life in some corner of a house.

I understand my physical limitation, but I want to live, work and be recognized as other “normal” human beings.

I have scored really well and completed my BA in Psychology in September 2016. Now, I want to study B. Ed. However, my father earns very less and becomes difficult to run the family with his earnings. There are six members in my family: father, mother and three younger brothers. I am planning to apply for an education loan to complete the course and do something better in my life. Apne Aap staff members also encourage and support me from time to time.

I specially thank to my mother, who has been there in my life like a shadow. Never giving up on me. And, thanks Apne Aap team Bihar.

Continued from page 1

I have never seen my daughter so much in pain. It was heartbreaking to know that her in-laws along with the support of her husband were forcing her to start prostituting herself and make money out of it. I could have never imagined such a life for any of my daughters. We didn’t sleep that night, just talking and calming each other.

Next day, her in-laws had called a Panchayat (a local trial) because my daughter refused to accept the prevalence of caste based occupation prevalent in our society, prostitution. She was ready to do any meagre job but not prostitute herself. I and my other daughters became pillar to support each other. Early morning, I made call to Shashi ji, explaining her the entire situation. I couldn’t hold back my tears. In few minutes, I started receiving calls from everyone at Apne Aap. They ensured safety of Megha and my other daughters.

I was glad with the entire team of Apne Aap. They were waiting nearby Sapera Basti in case of any problem. The constant touch over the phone with the staff during the Panchayat had given a sense of security for me and my daughter.

The elder members started gathering since early morning and continued till 5 pm in evening. The in-laws were adamant for Megha to accept prostitution like others in our community. Discussion went on for hours. In those few hours, the male elders of my community were to decide the future of my daughter. I was a child bride then and now a widow; I had to be prostituted as there was no options open before for me. But my daughter had me and her sisters. I couldn’t let her do anything just because of the societal pressure. Emotions; anger and anxiety, all had their own place. It was difficult for me to describe what I was feeling. I just knew one thing; I have to save my daughter.

Finally, at the end of the negotiations, Panchayat took their decision. “If Megha do not want to continue our caste based occupation, she would not be forced. Also, her husband and in-laws need to pay Rs 1100/- as a fine for harassing Megha and her mother”, said by one elder member at the conclusion of Panchayat session. We were glad. I hugged Megha tightly and kissed her forehead. Now, Megha lives at her in-laws home, enjoying her motherhood. She is not forced for anything. I am happy as my daughter’s future is secured.
Poems

Monkey uncle

Monkey uncle, you are very clever
The feats you perform are stellar
Sometimes you climb the roofs of houses
Sometimes you sit on the tree’s branches
Taking away people’s clothes
Where you go, you do not disclose
In children’s hands when you see food
You always decide to loot
But when you wander weakly, with unease
Facing the cold in the trees
Why don’t you then, make for yourself
A tiny home of your own?

Name— Pooja Kumari
Class: VI
Area: Simraha, Bihar

Bear Kaludas

After scorching heat when
When his mind and body felt upset
To have a picnic on the riverbank
Bear Kaludas outset!
But while going crazy by himself
To the river when he got close
His foot stepped in the puddle
And he slipped, with a lot of force
Fate had made him helpless
Such was his wretched fall
He couldn’t balance and started rolling
Round and round like a football
The thermos, the hookah, all broke down
And he fell in the middle of the river
His pajama loosened from his waist
Near his shoulder, his shirt did tear
But as soon as he fell in the water
In his hands, a fish was stuck
And with a lot of joy he said-
Turns out I have a good luck!

Name— Nandini Kumar
Class— VIII
Area: Rampur, Bihar

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