



RED LIGHT DESPATCH

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DELHI, KOLKATA, AND FORBESGANJ (BIHAR)

My Dream

To become an air hostess —Gungun

Kolkata: My name is Gungun Khatoon. I was born in Munshigunj Red Light area. I had no one to look after me and Apne Aap took me in by admitting me in a hostel and starting my basic education.

Every morning, I used to go to the Apne Aap centre where they taught me how to write and draw. Later, they enrolled me in a local school. After my school, I go to the centre and the teachers help me complete my homework. I share my lunch with all the children.

At present, I am staying in boarding house of RKVM, Jayrambati center. I study in 6th grade. The staff of the boarding house takes care of our education and food. They also teach us dance, vocal music and drawing. They send us to take part in tournaments. Now I feel much fulfilled with my life.

When I see the airplane in the sky, I dream about my future. I feel that one day I will be in the airplane as an air hostess. I am aware, in order to be an air hostess I have to complete my education. I am focused and trying my level best. I like to study. Through my education now I know more about my country and the world.

I pray that I become an air hostess in the future. I will come back to Apne Aap and help the children who will be studying then since this organization has helped me dream about my future. I pray for the success of Apne Aap and the children.

Christmas celebrations in Najafgarh

— By Dimple/ as translated by Khushboo Mishra

Delhi: My name is Dimple. I live in Dharampura with my family. I study in 8th standard at Government Girls Senior Secondary School. I usually walk to my school as it is nearby my home.

My father works as a traditional medicine practitioner and mother do stitching to earn some money. I have four elder brothers. I am the youngest among the siblings. As we are from Sapera community, my brothers carry out different caste occupations like monkey shows, play drums at the wedding, snake charming etc.

On 25th December, we celebrated Christmas in our community. This Christmas celebration was organised by Apne Aap where children from all the communities were invited from Perna, Sapera and

Singhi. Apne Aap celebrates many festivals in community with the children and teaches them something new every time.

This time Apne Aap staff came to our community along with anew visitor named Shubhra didi. They were having Santa Claus hat on their head. I liked Shubhra di's hat which had golden colour on it. All the children gathered at one house. Khushboo didi wished Merry Christmas to all and explained about the importance of Christmas and its history.

We were informed that Shubhra di had come from America, so she told us how Christmas is celebrated in New York.

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KGBV girls discover innovative language to communicate

— Samhita Barooah

Bihar: My name is Samhita Barooah. It was almost 15 days at Apne Aap Women Worldwide for me. I was trying to understand the organization, people and most importantly work assigned to me. We had just started the journey of archival work trying to make systems work so that the vision of reflections on resistance remains. While I was thinking whether I will be working for all the 30 days inside a room, in front of a computer and through the files as my job profile was of a documentarian, I was pleasantly surprised. I discovered the organization through the papers, files and occasional conversations with my old school friend Juanita and later with Kalam ji at Forbesganj office of Apne Aap Women Worldwide.

On December 9 morning, Ruchira Gupta the founder and nerve centre of this organization requested me to go to the field areas of the centres at Uttari Rampur and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) at Simraha village near Forbesganj. It was a change of schedule which we had fixed to keep track of the archival work in progress. Ruchira told me to see if I could find any new stories, documents, artifacts for the archive work from the field. I was both worried that our schedule was changed and very elated that I got a break from the documents.

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Op-Ed— An article at the Reuters about prostituted women, their rights and trafficking

Reporting by Nita Bhalla @nitabhalla at Reuters on prostituted women, their rights and trafficking.

Sex workers in India have slammed a global conference on the abolition of prostitution, saying campaigners for the end of the sex trade failed to recognize some women were prostitutes out of choice and not due to coercion, trafficking or force.

Participants at the Delhi conference - including former sex workers from South Africa, Canada, India and the United States - have been sharing stories of sexual slavery and calling for an end to prostitution by punishing clients, pimps and traffickers.

But sex workers' groups in India said there was a difference between voluntary sex work and sexual exploitation, and that not all women in the trade are victims or trafficked sex slaves.

"We are against anyone who does not recognize us as human beings who can take our own decisions," said Kiran Deshmukh, a sex worker from Veshya Anyay Mukti Parishad, a collective of sex workers from India's western state of Maharashtra.

"Making us victims with no agency is a violation of our human right to work in sex work. By 'abolishing' us they are not helping us - they are ignoring our need to work and earn a living with dignity."

Sex work is illegal in most countries across the world, yet it exists everywhere. There are an estimated 40 million sex workers globally, according to French charity Fondation Scelles.

Abolitionists say most have been lured, duped or forced into sexual slavery by pimps and traffickers, largely due to poverty, a lack of opportunities and having a traditionally marginalized status in society.

Once forced to work in brothels, on street corners, in massage parlors, strip clubs or private homes, it is difficult for sex workers to leave, activists say.

For many it is the threat of physical abuse from their pimp that keeps them in prostitution, but some stay of their own accord, ostracized by their families with nowhere to go.

"WE ARE NOT COMMODITIES"

Groups from the National Network of Sex Workers in India said abolitionists were being moralistic and judgmental. They said legalizing the trade would regulate the industry and ensure there was no exploitation of women and girls.

"The violence of a judgmental attitude has contributed untold misery on sex workers encouraging lumpen elements to justify the violence meted out to sex workers,"

said a statement from the group, signed by over 2,000 sex workers, sex workers' children and 20 groups representing their rights.

However, several speakers at the conference said the vast majority of sex workers were exploited.

"So what if there are women out there who are doing this out of their own free will?" said Rachel Moran, an Irish prostitution survivor and founder of the charity SPACE International.

"There are 40 million women and girls on this earth that are prostituted and if you have a tiny sprinkling of those who say they have chosen it fully and voluntarily, that doesn't negate the experience of the vast majority."

Hollywood actress Ashley Judd, attending the conference as a strong advocate for prostitution to be abolished, said women and girls were being bought and sold like commodities and that action had to be taken to end the global sex trade.

"We need to put on the onus and shame where it belongs - which is on the perpetrator, the aggressor and the person who thinks that women and girl's bodies are purchasable," Judd said.

"We are not commodities, we are human beings and we are entitled to bodily integrity, sexual dignity and the right to be free from all forms of body invasion."

The three-day World Congress on the Elimination of the Sexual Exploitation of Women and Girls - which brings together 250 charities and activists, as well as academics, trade unions and lawyers from across 30 countries - ends on Tuesday.

(Reporting by Nita Bhalla @nitabhalla, Editing by Katie Nguyen. Please credit the Thomson Reuters Foundation, the charitable arm of Thomson Reuters, that covers humanitarian news, women's rights, trafficking, property rights, climate change and resilience.

Diary of a Social Worker

— Sanju Kumari

Bihar: My name is Sanju Kumari. I am the centre in-charge of *Ant Kanya Kendra Uttri* Rampur run by Apne Aap Women Worldwide. I am a part of it since February 2012. Apne Aap fights to end the sex traf-ficking. My area of work is located in the redlight districts. Many people are afraid to go in such an area as they feel it isn't safe for women, moreover people try to advice me not to work there.

People have a bad image of the red light are because of the work done there. However I think differently about it. **I believe that my job is great as it helps girls who are exploited, traf-ficked and forced into prostitution. It helps them by uplifting and inte-grating them with the main stream society. These women have bleak opportunities in their lives however my work can change that and pro-vide them with new avenues.**

Women in the redlight district have given me immense respect and this makes me proud.

The job I have been allotted is to teach children in the district by holding regular classes for them. This will help bridge the educational gap between these kids and main stream. This will help these children seek admis-sions in government schools. I also visit their houses to hold classes and maintain their regularity in studies. I teach stitching to the adolescent girls and women of this area. Through this, these women learn a new skills, which they can apply it to earn some livelihood or grow as an individual. Moreover, I have observed that they are happy and it gives them more confidence to take decisions in their life.

I feel nothing is impossible if one tries to do it. I have always wanted to learn how to use the computer, it was like my dream for me. Computer based knowledge is very important in today's world and it would have helped me submit my work reports. However my dream finally came true! The first time I sat in front of the computer was when documents were scanned for Apne Aap. I was very happy to sit in front of the com-puter and Ms. Shamita Barooah taught me how to scan and save documents. I was filled with joy on being able to use the computer.

I finally got what I longed for!

Similarly, I believe, the situation and status-quo of the

women in the red light district can be changed. It is no longer only a dream, as organizations such as Apne Aap are taking initiatives. I am an active and responsi-ble member of Apne Aap network. Now I do all types of works on behalf of our organization. I am a proud member of the organization whose mission is to uplift the 'Last Girl'.

It feels good that I am both teacher and guardian of the girls who come to learn different kinds of activities in our centre.

As a result of my job, I have become a fearless and confident lady. I am not afraid to talk to any police of-ficer or government official with regard to my work. I, many a times met the district Magistrate to solve prob-lems relating to the women in red light area of Forbes-ganj and Khawaspur, Bihar.

I am very happy to be a part of this organization and its mission to uplift the Last girl. Thank You Apne Aap for providing me this platform.

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A prostituted woman attends women's rights programme

— *Shanti Devi/ as dictated to Laboni*

Kolkata: I am Shanti Devi. I am 40-year-old. I am living at Munshiganj from the past 18 years. Since childhood I had a dream that one day I will be someone's wife and he would love me from his heart and soul. I will build my small world with love, care and affection and I will be the queen of my world consisting of my husband and my children. My in-laws would love and respect me.

I never imagined the kind of a disastrous life I would have. I got married to a man who was way older than me. He was an alcoholic and an abuser. He sold me in Munshiganj redlight area. My life was completely turned upside down. I entered into a world of 'evil' darkness. I was raped; I was tortured by my brothel keeper, clients, even by my community people. I started hating myself, as an individual and a woman.

I always used wish for my death. I had lost confidence in myself and others. My life became like a garbage for me, as with time I started considering myself as a dustbin when customers used my body for their satisfaction. The pain of not having command over my own body is unrealistic for many. I was not even respected as a human. My life and the situations I was in had showed me the worst parts of the society.

I came across an organization named Apne Aap Women Worldwide in the year 2005. The women of this organization not only gave me respect but also gave my life a new meaning. I started my new journey with them. I felt safe, secure, warm and respected with their support. Ruchira di is like a God to me. She is an ideal devotional existence for all women.

I participated in Apne Aap' Shastitala office center for women's rights celebration. The program was organized for Women's Right. There were 45 women who

participated from Munshiganj and Sonagachi Center. It was a celebration in respect to womanhood. Needless to mention, women are part of the society and play a great role in every aspects. Apne Aap organized the various activities such as games like musical circle. This kept us active and I believe that such games help improve physical and mental health. The event was concluded by the guest speaker giving a small talk on women's life in general. It was followed by a dance performance by the children. I felt very honored and respected. It was one of the most memorable days in my life.

My journey with Apne Aap has taught me to fight against injustice and exploitation against women and girls. Previously, I used to feel that I am not a part of the society; it had no place for me. Because I am from the red-light area, and the word 'respect', 'dignity' and 'human rights' or 'women's rights' has no connection with our world. But I am very thankful to this wonderful organization where I found myself. Being born as a woman is not a crime and whenever need be we should fight for our rights.

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Did You Know?

In India:

- There are 2.3 million women and girls in prostitution
- A quarter of 2.3 million are under the age of 18
- There are 1,000 red-light areas

Globally:

- About 58 % of all cases of trafficking detected globally are purpose of sexual exploitation
- About 75 % of all trafficking victims detected globally are women and girls
- About 20.9 million adults and children are bought and sold for commercial exploitation
- About 1 in 10 men in the world have bought commercial sex

Self-defense training in MCD Primary school

— *Balma/ as translated by Khushboo Mishra*

Delhi: My name is Balma. I am 14-year-old and live in Dharampura. I study in 4th standard at MCD Primary School, nearby where I live.

My father died a few years ago and I had to drop off from school as my mother and brothers were moving to Nangloi to earn a living. I used to help my mother with the household chores so that she could go out for work. But when I came to Dharampura, Apne Aap helped me in getting enrolled to primary school again.

In December, we had self-defense training at the school. We keep on having self-defense trainings in our school which Apne Aap organises. In this training, all 4th and 5th class girls participated. They were three people who had come to train us.

When all the girls reached the school ground, we were asked to stand at one arm's length. One of the three people started giving us information and how we should protect ourselves. They gave us examples by creating imaginary scenes, suppose we are travelling in a metro and my family members were able to board the metro train except me. In such situations, I should not cry, instead I should reach out to the nearest customer care for help. They told us to remember our parent's phone number and house address and more.

After providing us with some information, they started to teach us hand-techniques. The trainers asked all the girls to move the wrists clockwise and anti-clockwise.

We did it for 10 times each. **Then they showed us practically if someone tries to stop us by pulling our hair, how we prevent it. We learnt how and where to punch in**

different situations to protect us. Once the techniques were done, they told us that in some situations, we may not be able to fight back as we are small. During that time, we should throw stones at the wrong doers and should run away to seek for help or should hide somewhere safely.

While wrapping up the session, we were also informed about good touch and bad touch. I attend all the sessions of self-defense training in the school. I learn many things here which otherwise would not be possible.

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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



My First Day at Apne Aap

—Kumkum Mishra

Kolkata: My name is Kumkum Mishra. I am 14-year-old. I study in Class IX. My school name is Lajpat Hindi High school. I belong to a very poor family. My father is a security guard and my mother is a home-maker. I have four siblings. I am the eldest among all. It's difficult for my father to take care of a family of seven members.

Apart from my father, I am the only one who earns. He barely receives 6000 per month as his salary. He somehow manages to provide us food and shelter. But, it's not possible for my father to provide quality education for all of us.

I am admitted in a government school. I was never given a facility of private tuitions. My parents cannot afford to spend so much money on a private tuition.

When I was studying in class VIII, the syllabus was tough and I desperately needed tuition. It was just a miracle which brought me in touch with Apne Aap. My school friend Karina Jha. She has informed me about this organization. She said that the organization provide tuition. This really helped me for educational growth and in many different aspects.

Apart from tuition, I also get the opportunity of learning dance, music, and drawing and also mime. And the best part is, we learn all these skills for free. I am continuing my studies without much pressure.

Since the day I joined Apne Aap, my mother has been

showing lots of encouragement in continuing my education. **Now even my mother is joining for the parent-teacher meeting. She is also the member of mother's group. Apne Aap is like my new family. Here I get the opportunities to participate in lots of activities. I feel such a friendly surrounding around me. I am learning a lot.**

There are other children along with me whom the sisters take out for excursions. We participate in workshops as well. Apne Aap organizes a picnic for children's and mother too. I simply love it. Our teachers and mothers also joined us while playing games. No rules, no restriction only fun.

It is like a competition, some gets prize and others get chocolates. Our teachers were much happier than us. They were just so happy.

We even get food during the outings. We were provided breakfast, lunch and snacks in between.

Apne Aap provides fresh meal to the redlight children everyday. I received many prize and learnt Indian classical dance and performed in Uttam Munch. Apne Aap is helping me build my personality. I am glad to be a part of it. Thanks to Apne Aap for saving my life and giving me quality education.

Continued from page 1

In the community, we all wished merry Christmas to each other and played different games. For instance, mirror the mirror, give name and jump etc. **I liked the mirror the mirror game where two children would stand in front of each other and act like mirror.**

They both had to do some action and mirror one another. If one child's hand is up, then other child's hand should also be up. If a child is shaking his head and leg simultaneously, then other should do the same. There was barely anyone who could copy each other like the mirror.

And the next game, we played was 'take the name and jump'. In this game, it has two rounds, in the first, children stood in a circle and had to take the name of the person next to her/him and jump. Then, in second round, they had to do some action like clap, smile, dance, jump and later to stand still. The person standing next to you will remember it and is suppose to repeat this action in the other round.

There were other games. I sang few songs and Neeraj, Ritika, Deepa and Priyanka danced on those songs. It was a lively celebration. In the community, we does not play games together or celebrate Christmas and New Year or any other festival as whole. There is a lack of unity. But this year, we celebrated all festivals together in the community. The other castes were also invited by Apne Aap to celebrate the festivals collectively in the community. We also had samosas. Next day, I again went to my friend's house for Christmas celebration. It was a beautiful year.

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The World Outside

— Heena Khatoon/as translated by Sangeeta Singh

Kolkata: I am Heena Khatoon in Khidderpore. My mother is a prostituted woman. I am 16- year-old. My mother forced me to marry at the age of 13 as she wanted me to stay outside the Red Light area. I have studied till 7th grade. I have been through a hard time in my life and now I am living with my mother. I am very happy to have joined Apne Aap to learn computer, dance, and art and spoken English.

On the 9th of December 2016, we were given the opportunity to be a part of a live music program which was held at South City International School.

This program had renowned artist like pianist *Jeniffer Hemstra*. We were a group of 62 people including children and women beneficiaries from the Topsia and Munshiganj redlight area.

I can't express my feelings in words. How beautiful music can be. It is something which doesn't need any language. Any person from any part of the world can feel it. I personally was mesmerized and it left a lasting impression in my mind and on the audience. It was a first time in my life I saw a live stage performance.

It was also exciting to see so many students from different schools in Kolkata being invited for the event. We felt at par with the other children.

Apne Aap's trustee *Lata Bajoria* was also present during the event. The event drew to an end with the singing of the National Anthem by all present there.

It is always heartwarming to have this memories captured forever. So, we, all of us from Apne Aap family had a photo session with the pianist *Jeniffer Hemstra*. She was very nice to us.

I wish to participate in more and more such events. It gives us the exposure of the world outside. We are able to communicate, learn something new every time. My world is not limited to Khidderpore and Kolkata. I would like to thank sisters from Apne Aap for making me realized it.

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Continued from page 1

The moment I stepped into the KGBV school, smiling faces of confident girls beamed at me. I requested the staff members to help me find some documents and any work of the girls. They showed me their activity room with all the resources like computers and books. I took some pictures and wanted the girls to hold some of their own products. They posed for the pictures.

When I asked them to share some of their art works one of the girls got a hand drawn picture of a girl in modern attire with high heels and a smart pose. We started a discussion when I probed and all the girls participated. Some said girls can dress like that as they wish but some were firm on the belief that they cannot dress in short dresses because they will be in trouble. For their own sake they said that they can never dress in such clothes. Then I moved on to the topic of knowing different languages amongst the girls more so because we were trying to document their skills and handicrafts. **They said they knew Hindi, Thethi, Santhali and some more local dialects which they could speak. Then one of the girls promptly shared that she knows another new language which all the girls in the hostel can un-**

derstand and some of them can speak as well. I requested them to share something in that language, they shared and then I realized that the girls were actually innovating language for communication by adding some key words like 'spa' to every Hindi word that they were speaking but with speed and precision. I requested them to share a conversation in that new language and also translate the same conversation in Hindi for recording. They took some time to prepare and then they spoke. I was thrilled to find new vibes of how such communication between the girls could always help them to understand concepts of learning, build confidence, strengthen their own solidarity and even alarm them from risks when they move outside the guarded safe spaces created by the agencies and state authorities. I was happy that the girls deconstructed my perspective of the fact that the girls should learn the official and global languages to find better avenues but they can design novelty within their own contextual realities. It was an experience to cherish for a very long time. Thank you Apne Aap Women Worldwide and Ruchira specially for inspiring change.

Poems

My tooth fell out

A tooth fell out and left a space
So big my tongue could touch my face
And every time I smile, I show
A space where something used to grow
I miss my tooth as you can guess
But then, I have to brush one less

Name– Nisha Kumari
Area: KGBV, Simraha

The Apple

Up in the apple tree.
High of the ground,
I seen an apple
So big and round.
I climb up the tree
And hold on tight,
I pick that apple,
And took a big bite!
m- m- m- m- good!

Name– Nitu Kumari
Area: KGBV, Simraha



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