



RED LIGHT DESPATCH

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DELHI, KOLKATA, AND FORBESGANJ (BIHAR)

My Dream To become a dancer -Priya Shaw

Kolkata: My name is Priya Shaw. I am 9 years old. I study in 2nd standard. I have two siblings. My father is an autorickshaw driver and it is difficult for him to enrol both of us in school. I joined Apne Aap at age 2 and it is like my home and family. During one of my English classes, the class teacher asked what is my dream. I told her, “I want to be a dancer.” Dancing is a difficult profession choice. There are so many dancers struggling to earn good name and reputation. My mother desires of me to become a doctor. But, my father believes that I can choose a career in whatever I am good at. I know it’s too early to make a career decision, but I’ll try my best not to deviate from my goal. Having a goal is better than not having at all.

When I first came in association with Apne Aap, with the opportunities provided I realized I am good at dancing. My mother always taught me to take the best of everything. So I took the best of Apne Aap and that is dance for me.

I don’t know how all of a sudden I got so attracted toward it. I attended every class. There was a routine for everything including studies. I used to participate and compete in extra-curricular activities. Many times I won first prize and sometimes I don’t get any. This doesn’t discourage me. I always learn from my teachers, “failures are the true pillars of success.”

Public gathering to create a dialogue for the Last Girl

— By Roshan Ara/ as translated by Praveen Kumar

Bihar: My name is Roshan Ara. I belong to a very poor marginalised Muslim community settled in Gorhiyare Chowk, Forbesganj, Bihar. My mother’s name is Bibi Shamina and my father’s name is Md Shamim. I am 20 year old and study in 12th standard in a local higher secondary school. My father is a labourer and earns enough to provide meals for the whole family. He made sure that we are able to access education. One day I heard about Apne Aap Women Worldwide which works to uplift poor and marginalized girls and women through programmes like Mahila Mandal and Kishori Madal. I became a member of Kishori Mandal in Uttari Rampur Basti Vikash Kendra. I attend Mahila Mandal on a regular basis and participate in vari-

ous activities run by the organization. We are taught stitching, embroidery, craft, computer and other skills in the centre.

Each one of us is given an Asset card, which we are told is a 10 x10 approach system in determining what we have gained or how empowered we have become with the help of the organization.

In the Asset list, we have safe house, education, self-confidence, political power and legal empowerment too. We are explained on how we can gain each asset step by step.

Apne Aap believes that if a girl or woman gained the 10 x10 asset approach, she has become empowered.

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Interaction with Ashley Judd during open mike session

— Sunaina/ as translated by Khushboo Mishra

Delhi: My name is Sunaina. I study in 7th standard at a senior secondary government school in Najafgarh which is closer to the place where I live in Dharampura. I belong to Perna caste.

Recently Ashley Judd, Hollywood actress and activist visited our community. **Sapera Basti is a very small area; we didn’t expect a Hollywood actress to visit us in the community. It was hard for met to believe that Ashley Judd was actually in our community to meet us!**

On that day, many foreigners, including parliamentarians and activists, along with Apne Aap staff visited our community. I was informed that they came to India to attend World Congress Against Sexual Exploitation of Women and Girls. After the congress, they wanted to visit the community where Apne Aap carries out intervention work. Ashley Judd had also come to India to attend the world congress.

Khushboo Di introduced me to Ashley Judd and asked if I would like to take her around in my locality. I was very excited.

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Op-Ed— Human Rights Activist Ruchira Gupta conferred prestigious French Award



Ruchira Gupta, anti-sex-trafficking activist and founder of grassroots organisation Apne Aap Women Worldwide, was on Wednesday conferred the prestigious Chevalier de L'ordre du Merite (Knight of the National Order of Merit) award, joining the ranks of economist Amratya Sen and filmmaker Satyajit Ray.

Ruchira was awarded for her work to help prostituted women and girls by the President of Republic of France at a ceremony in New Delhi.

French MP, Catherine Coutelle, Delhi Commission for Women Chair, Swati Maliwal and Hollywood actress-advocate Ashley Judd were also present at the event.

The ceremony was attended by survivors and global activists from across the globe at the end of a three day World Congress to end sex trafficking.

This report was published at Daily News and Analysis (DNA) India

Diary of a Social Worker

Praveen Kumar

Bihar: My name is Praveen Kumar and I am based out of Forbesganj, Bihar. Since many years I am with Apne Aap Women Worldwide. I have done my BA degree in History. After joining the organization, I had also done my PGDCA.

On my initial days, I visited the red light areas and interacted with the girls and women there. I observed the vulnerability of women and children living in the red light areas and how they were systematically neglected by the society at large. They seemed to have very low self-esteem and often hesitated to interact with the outsiders. Most of them were suspicious and even rude toward people who tried to help them. I don't blame them for such a behavior. They have been made to feel this way. All that they have been going through is inhumane treatment.

The orientation in Apne Aap and knowledge sharing with the senior colleagues, working in the red light areas, made me realize how these women and children need a humane touch more than anything else. I feel the need to bring them closer to us and integrate them in our society.

It can be achieved by providing them equal opportunities to leave their place of misery behind where they have been raped or tortured and faced different kinds of humanly unthinkable violence.

It helped a great deal to change my perception about social work at grass root level.

After 10 years of working with Apne Aap, it has helped me grow both spiritually and professionally. It made me understand the importance of being sensitive in this area of work. It has helped me in developing an understanding and easier interaction with the targeted group.

In May 2007, when we started Kasturba Gandhi Valika Aavashiya Vidyalaya, a program of central government run by the support of Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan in Bihar and our NGO, I got the opportunity to manage it.

We got the opportunity to use the hostel as a safe space for the girls, who are at risk to inter-generational prostitution. With much struggle, Apne Aap team members succeeded in admitting 28 out of 50 girls in the residential school from the red light Areas of Forbesganj and Khawasapur, who were at risk of inter-generational prostitution.

I was appointed as the administrator of the Kasturba Gandhi Valika Aavashiya Vidyalaya and since then I try my best to run the program successfully. With some luck, we are running the program smoothly and we have admitted more than 100 girls from red-light areas and other marginalized communities.

In 2008, during Bihar floods, we started a relief work in eight different mega camps with the support of UNICEF WASH program. The victims of the flood stayed in the camps with their family for 4-5 months with the support of 30 volunteers.

Later, when the city was back to normal people returned to their home. The volunteers continued supporting them in every possible way. We continued our work for three more years and formed 60 SEG groups for the poor and vulnerable women. We advocate about the mission of our organization to help the girls and women toward empowerment.

We work in the principle model of 10 X 10 assets. We help them to gain all the assets required to become an empowered person. Most of the women and girls receive 8- 10 assets nowadays. We are now verifying the asset holder data base of these areas.

At present, I am the Office Manager and Administrator of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Simraha, run by our organization. And I try to do my best for the betterment of girls and women of marginalized communities and those from the red light districts. After the association with Apne Aap, I know the actual meaning of social work and struggle hard for the betterment of my life too. Thanks Apne Aap and my seniors who support me to grow here and encourage me in many ways. Thanks Apne Aap and specially thanks to Apne Aap Bihar team.

On my initial days, I visited the red light areas and interacted with the girls and women there. I observed the vulnerability of women and children living in the red light areas and how they were systematically neglected by the society at large. They seemed to have very low self-esteem and often hesitated to interact with the outsiders. Most of them were suspicious and even rude toward people who tried to help them. I don't blame them for such a behavior. They have been made to feel this way. All that they have been going through is inhumane treatment.

Sonagachi Centre starts a Mime session

— *Sambhu Sarkar/ as dictated to Anish*

Kolkata: My name is Sambhu Sarkar. I study in class V. My house is located close to the Apne Aap centre in Sonagachi. I have no parents. I live with my sister. She has been taking care of me since childhood. She is my everything. We live in Sonagachi red light area.

I often go to study at the Apne Aap centre. I like drawing and reading books. I also like watching comedy movies. I have been coming to study in this center since my childhood. I am getting the opportunity to learn drawing, reading books and many other activities.

We go to attend many programmes in different places like picnics, musical programmes, workshops through Apne Aap center with teachers. The children from other NGOs also participate with us in these activities.

One day a teacher of Apne Aap shared with us a new concept of acting that is “Mime”. It was a new word for me. I heard the word for the first time and I had no idea regarding this. After attending the classes two to three times, I got interested in this activity. I understood that Mime is an art of acting where no words or sound is required. Mime means expressing the situation by action, hand gestures and emotions without saying any word. I also learnt different types of expressions and movements of hands through mime.

In this activity any person can explain about their emotions. Our teacher Anish Sir showed us the entire act step-by-step then he taught each and every movement with facial expressions. Mime helps people to bring out the emotions, which cannot be done by words otherwise. I really enjoy such activities.

**I want to be a comedian like Charlie Chaplin, to be able to make everyone laugh around me and spread happiness.
I want to be a professional mime artist,**

as I love this art form a lot. Through this I can create awareness among the masses about crucial social messages and will try to change their thinking process in a more positive direction.

I also got many chances to show my talent in this regards in various programmes held by Apne Aap.

Apne Aap works for women’s rights and to end sex trafficking. I also want to do something with and for the NGO and for the society. I will convey the message about these types of issues in society through mime and give them message for positive change.

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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 for 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

Struggle of freed/denotified tribes girls in availing education

— *Muskan Kumari/ as translated by Praveen Kumar*

Bihar: My name is Muskan Kumari, I am 13 years old. My parents are Birju Banjara and Ghutni Devi.

I live in Bathana, near the railway station on government land and am from the Banjara community. We live in temporary structures made of plastic and cloths like tents. No one in our community is literate. Our source of income is from begging or selling herbs in other villages and towns.

In August 2015, a few NGO members of Apne Aap Women Worldwide who were working in Forbesganj, came to our area and held a meeting with the elders and encouraged them about educating the children as education is important for the betterment of life. After a long session of discussion, our parents agreed and the NGO started educational classes in our community.

Naresh, our teacher, came to teach us daily. They provided us with stationary required for studying, including seats and blackboard too. At first, we started studying from the books and writing on the slate. After a period of six months, we learnt a few easy English words and many words in Hindi. However, we struggled to continue our classes as after every six months, our community migrated from one place to the other to earn. Although, our classes had to be stopped, Apne Aap contacted us and suggested us to continue the classes.

In March 2016, some of us returned to our old area and the classes were restarted. Naresh Sir told us about the girls hostel in Simraha run by Apne Aap named Kasturba Gandhi Balika Aavashiya Vidyalaya. The hostel is especially for the daughters of prostituted women,

for poor and vulnerable BPL people and nomadic girls who could not continue their education for different issues.

The organisation offered my parents to admit me in this hostel, my parents agreed but some of the people in our community did not want to enroll their daughters. They wanted their daughters to continue helping the family in begging. As of now, I have given the entrance exam to seek admission in the hostel and I am waiting for the results. My parents along with members of Apne Aap have tried to convince our community people to enroll their daughters in the hostel. **We hope that someday, these people agree to enroll their daughters in the hostel because only through education, one can better the existing circumstances.**

I guess we have to wait before our dreams come true and we all get educated. I have longed to someday enjoy life and see the world outside.

At first, we started studying from the books and writing on the slate. After a period of six months, we learnt a few easy English words and many words in Hindi. However, we struggled to continue our classes as after every six months, our community migrated from the place to the place to earn. Although, our classes had to be stopped, Apne Aap contacted us and suggested us to continue the classes.

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

—Moulika Mehta

Delhi: My name is Moulika Mehta. I am doing my Political Science (Hons) from Jesus and Mary College, Delhi University. My college professor, Ms. Tanuja Sachdeva informed us about a World Congress Against Sexual Exploitation being organized by Apne Aap Women Worldwide which was going to take place in India International Centre. Initially, I thought it would be like any other talk I have attended during my academic years.

Being a student of governance and political science, I have been interested in the field of human rights and have been an avid reader on issues relating to it. But little did I know that this congress was not like any other session, it changed my opinion on complex issues such as prostitution, sex trafficking at the global level, and atrocities faced by lower caste women.

Back then, I believed that prostitution should be legalized and sex as work is justified as there are women who would want to work as a 'sex worker'. But Apne Aap started the congress by declaration of their stand on prostitution by refusing the term 'sex worker' as they believed that no one would willingly enter such a profession as no one would be willing to sell their bodies. Seated in the audience, I quite did not understand why the organization did not evaluate the pros of legalization of prostitution.

However, as the conference proceeded, there were speakers from different parts of the world, from different walks of life and different academia. One session was with survivors, women who had been trafficked and forced into prostitution. Survivors from all around the globe were sharing their horrific stories and their strug-

gles against the oppressive system of sex trafficking. **I could not help but cry, in that moment I thanked God for giving me a safe, sound and protected environment. I was exposed to the grassroot realities and circumstances that one faces, with little or no alternatives or opportunities to turn to.** Even though prostituted women run away or struggle their way out of the unfortunate circumstances, they do not have an alternative to earn a living for themselves and survive, and because of this they go back into prostitution. It's like a vicious cycle!

On my way home, there were reoccurring thoughts about the conditions that burden the 'the last girl.' As a human, I felt awful of being oblivious to issues pertaining to prostitution. Moreover, there are enormous loopholes in our justice and police system. The police who are appointed to protect against such crime, turns out to be the perpetrator of the crime itself. Women constantly live in fear.

As Mahatma Gandhi said, "You must be the change you want to see in the world."

My prerogative now is to help and impact those around me, especially women. Therefore, I decided to seek an internship with Apne Aap, so that I could vehemently work toward helping and empowering women.

In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well."

As I write this, I would like to urge the readers to open their eyes outside their fancy metropolitan lifestyle and become aware of the actualities of the world.

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I have gained some assets like membership of Apne Aap, safe space, confidence building through writings in Red Light Despatch and open mic sessions, participation in rallies and getting ration card and linkages to government facilities that help receive stipend for poor student: Posak Yojana, Bicycle Yojana, etc. in High School. We have also received bank accounts, different livelihood trainings, legal trainings etc.

On 15th February, Apne Aap organized a rally for the uplift of the Last Girl. A bus was arranged for us to participate in the rally. The members of Kishori Mandals were ready to participate in the rally. In total, we were 65 participants. After half an hour travel by bus, we reached the venue in district headquarters Araria. The rally was organized in the town hall and approximately 600 people had gathered to witness it.

Many government officials, including District Magistrate had attended it. People from neighbouring district had also joined us. In the gathering we had, Ashley Judd, Hollywood actress and activist as the chief guest. The program started at 12 noon and ended at 2.30 pm. We learned many things from the speakers in the gathering.

The main idea behind the rally and gathering was to create a dialogue for the last girl. Many dignitaries gave their suggestion on how to uplift the last girl and the victims of sex trafficking.

Ms Ruchira Gupta, Founder President, Apne Aap Women Worldwide was also present in the stage and promised to continue the struggle and to improve the life of these girls and women. Tinku di and other team members of Apne Aap were also present in this rally and took an oath to continue the struggle.

The World Outside

— Rumki Haldar/as dictated to Rachna Nayak

Kolkata: My name is Rumki Haldar. I live at Sonagachi. I have been associated with Apne Aap Women Worldwide since 2012. I am truly inspired by the work of Apne Aap and its staff. Initially, the Apne Aap staff approached us and wanted to admit our children in RKVM. I didn't want to miss this wonderful opportunity and enrolled my daughter Maushmi Halder in RKVM.

At present, my daughter is still studying in RKVM and is doing great. She can speak in English, learnt singing, dancing, computer and embroidery. Last year, Maushmi did very well in her exam too. I feel glad that my daughter is improving day by day and her confidence level is increasing too. Later, I was offered by Apne Aap to work in the Sonagachi centre. Now I work as a field mobiliser here. I clean the room and look after the children from red light area coming to the centre.

All the staff members here are very close to each other. We share each other's joy and sorrow. We live like a big family here. Every day is like a new day for me. I get the opportunity to learn so many things from the environment, activities and everything around.

It gives me strength and also boosts my confidence. Now, I can also support my child and my mother.

Additionally, I have got so many opportunities to attend workshops and seminars on different social issues. Somewhere this has helped me in thinking or approaching situations in my life differently. It has helped me to gain more knowledge and experience.

In February, I along with others, also got the chance to attend the international seminar titled 'Last Girl First: World Congress against Sexual Exploitation' in New

Delhi. The event started on Jan 27 and went till Feb first week.

From Kolkata to Delhi and vice versa, we travelled via train. We had a great time. We shared our food and bed. We talked to each other throughout the night. In Delhi, we were given accommodation at a guest house in Lodi colony. The facilities were better than home with attached bathroom, hot and cold water, AC and warm bed.

I enjoyed the environment and many of our colleagues from Bihar had also joined us. We had long discussions about nothing specific. We talked about everything and anything. We shared our experiences.

On 29th morning, we prepared to attend the seminar in IIC. There were so many people from across the globe. I was moved to receive such a warm welcome from Apne Aap staff in Delhi. I was happy and proud to be associated with all the staff of Apne Aap. The hall was jam packed with people. Many speakers, which include survivors and victims of forced prostitution, shared their experience and enlightened others about the pain they had to endure.

I was so taken by the seminar. We are all from the same human race, why should a girl or a women suffer just because of her gender? It pained me to know such disparity exist not only in India, but even in the most developed countries. After we returned to our room, we sat in a circle and were deep in our discussions about the event. **The seminar was for three days and we met so many people during that time. This will remain one beautiful memory for a very long time.**

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I held Ashley's hand and took her around to show the place, introduce to people living in our community. I first took Ashley to my house and introduced to everyone. My friends in community asked how I know her and asked me if they can come along with Ashley and me.

After taking a walk in the community, I took Ashley to the terrace where other women and girls from Perna and Sapera were sitting. Everyone was happy to see Ashley Judd with them. In just few minutes, we were joined by other visitors from World Congress on the terrace.

Hoorbai shared her Panchayat incident, in which she fought on behalf of her daughter. Then, Ashley started an open mic session where she shared how she visited

Bihar and Kolkata centres of Apne Aap. Ashley also met four of our community girls in residential school in Najafgarh. Ashley talked to us about the importance of education and safety for the girls. She asked all the girls to study hard so that we can be independent. Ashley also asked if we feel safe in our communities and how we should share all details of our lives with closed ones. Ashley told we should be close to our mothers and if there is anything making us feel unprotected and fearful we should immediately reach out to our elders.

Sapera caste girls had also put henna on Ashley's hand. Ashley was looking very beautiful with colours on her palm.

Once the open mic session was over, I accompanied Ashley Judd to her car. Ashley promised me she will come again to meet me. I felt very happy. My community friends also started to respect me more.

Poems

But, I am a daughter

I also breathe
I am a human
Not a solid rock
My heart is soft
And innocent is my look
With emotions I live
I am not a son
But I am a daughter
I am made of you
And hungry just for your love

Name– Vinita
Class-- V
Area: Delhi

Daughter

Daughter says spreading her hand
I want love and care
Why daughter is ignored
World don't respect her
Think without us
Will you be able to make your home
From womb to youth
Sword is on my neck
Let my pain be heard now
Let it get cured.

Name– Priyanka
Class-- IV
Area: Delhi



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