



RED LIGHT DESPATCH

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DELHI, KOLKATA, AND FORBESGANJ (BIHAR)

My Dream To become a banker -Anjali Kumari

Bihar: My name is Anjali Kumari and I am 13-year-old now. I live at KGBV, Simraha. My village's name is Belai Pothiya. I am a student of class VII in Middle school, Simraha. Since two years I am associated with Apne Aap. I am from a very poor family. My father and mother both are agricultural laborer and work hard to earn livelihood for our family members. My family members are not literate. I am the first person from my family who received proper education. So I study very hard to fulfill the dream of my parents. After the completion of college, I want to become a teacher or a banker. I hope I will get select in one of these. I want to take the burden off my family and support them in ways possible. I want to admit my younger brother in a better school for higher education. I want to help the villagers in getting education and better jobs. I want to support all the poor children who are not able to access quality education. I want them to be independent. So that they are financially well off. I struggle very hard and continue my study to get the job. I hope to fulfill my dream very soon. I am thankful to my mother, who never gave up on me and encouraged in the continuation of my studies. She also taught me a very important lesson: In whatever situation I am in life, never to lose my patience.

Perna women attends World Congress against Sexual Exploitation

— By Seema/ as translated by Khushboo Mishra

Delhi: My name is Seema. I live in Dharampura. My family consists of my husband, three sons and one daughter. My husband works as a part-time driver to support the family. All my children are studying in different school. My eldest son is studying in a government school and my other two sons are studying in a local private school near our community. My daughter's study is sponsored by Apne Aap and she is studying in a residential school. Earlier my daughter used to study in a government school. But when she was 9 years old, we got her engaged to a boy who belonged to our caste. We belong to the Perna caste and as per our caste system we marry our children at a young age. This practised has been prevailing since gen-

erations.

When Apne Aap learnt about this practice, the organisation tried to convince us to do away with such regressive practices but we did not pay heed to them. After many meetings, Apne Aap decided to put my daughter in a residential school. The entire community was against them. Four girls from our community were selected to be admitted into the residential school. I was very hesitant as people told me stories of how some NGOs take children away and sell them or misuse them. At first, I was very scared but Apne Aap asked the mothers of the girls to visit the school once. They promised us if we didn't like the school, they will not ask us again to enrol them.

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Picnic with activist and Hollywood actress Ashley judd

— Sapna Prasad/ as dictated to Rachna Nayak

Kolkata: My name is Sapna Prasad. I am 13-year-old. It's been many years since I have started to come to Apne Aap. The place I call home is at Munshiganj Red light area. I am a class IV student. My mother was a prostituted woman. As you know, the societies at large are not willing to accept the prostituted women and their children among them. I know that almost all the women in redlight districts are being beaten up and tortured. Prostituting oneself is not an easy decision and is absolutely not out of choice. Most of the time, as I have observed it is forced upon them by circumstances and bad luck. Since the time, I joined Apne Aap my mother has been showing me lots of

encouragement to further my education. These days my mother is attending parent-teacher meeting. Now, she is also a member of Apne Aap family.

With the organization, I get many opportunities to participate in different kinds of activities. Here I do lots of activities. I feel such a friendly surrounding in here a part from studies we are here being encouraged for education, drawing, dancing, singing and stitching.

We are given the opportunity to learn computer. I am learning a lot from the excursions. We participate in the workshop too.

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Op-Ed— An article at Vagabomb about Last Girl First: World Congress against Sexual Exploitation

Reporting of Last Girl First: World Congress against Sexual Exploitation by Stuti Bhattacharya at Vagabomb

Most of us reading this and sitting in the comfort of our privileged lives have several opinions of prostitution and trafficking. Most of us never think too deeply about it, but what we don't realise is, it stems from the problem of objectification all women face, simply because they are women. On January 30, 250 global voices gathered to address these problems, at a World Congress against the Sexual Exploitation of Women and Girls in New Delhi. Organised by Apne Aap Women Worldwide, the Coalition for Abolition of Prostitution (CAP), and Vivel, in partnership with the All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar March, this conference sought to question existing views about prostitutions, and find solutions for the growing problem of human trafficking across nations. Apart from addressing common questions about prostitution and human trafficking, they each told their stories as survivors of sexual violence, and gave statements of support.

Here are some of the highlights from the event.

Prostitution is not sex work

The most common argument for prostitution is that it is supposed to be empowering, because women have the right to be sexual beings. However, the panel at this forum was quick to dispel this grossly inaccurate myth. The foremost argument for this was made by Rachel Moran, who authored a book about her experience as a former prostitute in Ireland. She clarified that prostitution is never a matter of choice, saying, "Prostitution exists everywhere on this earth because of the male demand for it, and women's position in prostitution is simply a response to dire circumstances," adding that prostitution was the male exploitation of female bodies, and that there was nothing empowering about such exploitation.

An impassioned argument against prostitution was also made by Jackie Lynne, an indigenous Canadian woman who spoke poignantly about her experience growing up as a prostitute's daughter, saying that it broke her mother's heart when she heard Jackie was also sitting at the same bar to pick up clients her mother first sat at, ready to sell herself.

Addressing the problems of the 'last girl'

Be it in the hinterlands of Bihar, or in a white-majority country like Ireland, prostitution always affects the most oppressed girl the worst. Young women who are from poorer families and socially marginalised groups are the worst affected and most voiceless people. These women are sold into prostitution because they neither

have the money, nor the social position to seek a better life. The main cause of this Congress was to address the needs of this 'last girl.' Ruchira Gupta, founder of Apne Aap, explained that most prostitutes in India suffered for the same reason.

"All the women and girls are not just poor and female, but often low-caste, but very often from de-notified, 'criminal' tribes."

The hurdles against combating prostitution

A member of the French National Assembly, Catherine Coutelle summed up the problems one faces when trying to combat prostitution without hurting the helpless prostitute. She alleged that several elitist arguments mistakenly romanticised prostitution. "The first battle is the opinion of the general public. False ideas around prostitution, that it is the oldest profession, and is about choice, and those who do so, wish to do so. These meetings are important because they give the floor to actual survivors."

The sexual exploitation of women is institutionalised. The story of Fatima Khatoon proves that prostitution is not only not a matter of choice, but a manner of entrapment or subjugation of oppressed girls and women. Belonging to the Nat community which was cruelly certified as a "criminal" community by the British, Fatima's prostitution was the consequence of a generational tradition of prostitution. At the conference, she revealed that the reason behind this, apart from caste, was a tradition of 'upper' caste men treating the bodies of 'lower' caste women like objects. She added that this tradition continued, and would continue unless there are radical changes: "If there is no demand, something cannot be sold. We demand that the government sternly punish the buyers, pimps, and brothel keepers so that they never dare to buy women again."

Tribal rights activist Soni Sori, who was attacked by state forces recently, reiterated Fatima's point about how government officials did not help matters, saying, "There might be laws. But they are ineffective. Rapes still happen. My question is, why don't these apply to politicians and the police? Today, four years have passed and my case is still pending without justice. So many girls who are as young as 15 are put in jail for nearly a decade. Women who are victims are put in jail without any investigation on the government's part, and ruin women's lives. How can we come to an understanding with a state which does this?"

Diary of a Social Worker— *Deepmala/ as translated by Khushboo Mishra*

Delhi: My name is Deepmala. I live in Dharampura with my two children- a girl and a boy. I am married but have been staying at my mother's house.

My son is three- year- old and daughter is 11 months old. I and my elder sister are married in the same family and live under the same roof. My in-laws were not happy with me and my sister; our husbands also supported my in-laws, not us. After a long fight, my sister and I were asked to move out of our in-laws house. Thus, I stay with my mother.

I have three brothers and three sisters. My father died long time ago. My mother stays at home. I belong to Sapera caste, where livelihood is earned through snake charming, monkey shows and by playing drums at the weddings. After my father's death, my brothers earning were sufficient enough to just feed the family members. We did not give much thought to other important basic needs.

When my father died, my siblings were all very young, with no working experience. My mother was extremely worried. It was obvious. There were eleven mouths to feed and not one to earn. However, my brothers shouldered the responsibility. Earlier, they used to play drums in the community out of joy, but they took this as a profession. In fact, enhanced their skills too. They did not get the chance to go to schools though. I hope life was not that tough on us.

But, I am thankful for certain things. I believe I am more privileged than others in our community. Despite, being born to Sapera caste, my father had sent me to school till 10th standard. However, after sometime, even I was married off early like everyone else in our community. I didn't want to get married. I wanted to study and do something in life so that I wouldn't have to spread my hands in front of anyone. Also, it's been sometime, since my husband and in-laws paid a visit at my mother's house and seen my 11-month old daughter's face. It pains. I believe I have to live with it.

Apne Aap started its work seven years ago in Dharampura. That time, Apne Aap staff would come and ask us to come for meetings and programmes. They used to tell us stories of many women, their challenges and how they overcame it. We would listen and ignore. Honestly, people used to hide once they see Apne Aap

staff coming to community. Slowly, we started to understand that whatever they do, it's for our benefit.

Apne Aap organised various programmes and activities for women and girls in community, including exposure trips. They also helped community people receive their government Ids like Caste Certificate, Birth Certificate, Voter Card, Aadhar Card, Ration Card, Labour Card etc. I feel proud to be associated with Apne Aap.

Recently, Apne Aap had enrolled me for 12th standard through distance mode. I never thought that I will get the opportunity to study again. In these 7 years, I gained enough confidence. When my marriage broke off, I had lost all hopes, but it's my association with Apne Aap that had pulled me up again. I feel glad when people who earlier used to ignore me, now listen to my advice carefully. Apne Aap had made me a leader in true sense.

I, try to advocate people in our community to send their daughters to school, do not support child marriage, and standing for social causes. It doesn't matter the number of people in our community. It is small effort on my part to contribute for the society.

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Ceramic workshop with the girls and women of Dharampura

— *Manshi/ as translated by Khushboo Mishra*

Delhi: My name is Manshi. I belong to Saperas caste and live in Dharampura with my husband, in-laws and three children. Some days ago Apne Aap had organized a ceramic workshop in the community.

Anu Nagaraj, ceramic artist from New York had visited our community to teach us how to make ceramic art pieces. Initially, we were little hesitant to work with clay which would dirty our hands, that too in winter. However, we decided to try it once. It was exciting and brought back my childhood memories when I used to play with clay at the potters house close to my home.

On the first day, Anu showed us all the tools necessary to make ceramic art pieces. She explained us on how and where to use these tools while making the art pieces. What surprised me was that there was no potter's wheel; we were expected to make all the items with our hands. I was confused. I doubted if it was even possible.

During my childhood days, I, too used to make small pieces of pots with my hand. On those pieces, one could easily notice the cracks, result of which, it would break in just few days. The first day, I, along with other women and girls of the community learnt how to knead the clay and the amount of water we should add in order to give the exact moisture. If we pour more water than needed, it will just increase the workload and then we would have to wait for it get dried.

With 8-10 days of practice, we finally were able to produce good and quality ceramic pieces. I really enjoyed the two week long workshop. When Anu visited the community to meet us, she didn't know Hindi and we don't English. For 2-3 days, Khushboo from Apne Aap came to assist with the language barrier. Anu taught us every step with utmost patience. She became friendly with everyone quickly, especially the little children who used to come to the workshop only to get clay and

would make their own little dinner set to play. Sneha also showed Anu the snake which all saperas keep in their respective houses.

On the last day, when all art pieces were made, Anu took it to the clay company. She told she would fire and glaze them, which will beautify it further.

Apne Aap had organised the World Congress Against Sexual Exploitation of Women and Girls at India International Centre in Delhi. The ceramic art pieces were put on exhibition at the world congress, which attracted many national and international people. Sneha had attended the world congress and seen the exhibition. She told us that ceramic pieces were looking very beautiful. After the world congress, Anu and Khushboo brought the Ceramic items to the community. I was glad to know that majority of the items were sold off.

During the Ceramic workshop, I used to finish my house chores early and used to rush to attend all the ceramic sessions. My children also accompanied me in the ceramic workshop. I felt happy to attend this workshop and see the fruit of my hard work .

It was exciting and brought back my childhood memories when I used to play with clay at the potters house close to my home.

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

Republic Day celebration at Apne Aap centre

— *Rukhsana Khatoon/ as translated by Praveen Kumar*

Bihar: My name is Rukhsana Khatoon. I am from Forbesganj redlight and also the member of Kishori Mandal run by Apne Aap Women Worldwide in the Ant Kanya Kendra Utri Rampur. I am a regular student and member of Apne Aap Kishori Mandal.

I used to visit the centre on a regular basis. They often organize different events and I feel fortunate to participate in some of it. I feel like it helps us a lot. In terms of healthy thinking process, being more active in social work and also such activities helps the girls in taking better decision of their future. .

I am with Apne Aap since September 2016 and it is my first chance to celebrate Republic Day in the centre with other girls. It was my first time experiencing a flag hosting ceremony in Apne Aap centre. I have never seen such celebrations in the place where I live. When it comes to celebration, it is just marriage ceremonies I have attended to.

In Apne Aap centre, the importance of Republic Day was explained to us. It was said that this day has to be observed with much joy and great pride for our nation. On this day, Jan 26, 1950, Constitution of India finally came into effect. I heard Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar, who was a law minister during that time, had drafted the Indian Constitution.

Generally, January is one of the coldest months especially in Forbesganj. During the Republic Day, it was extremely cold. My hands and feet felt numb, but I got out of bed and reached centre at 7.30 am. I was very excited to celebrate the Day with our friends and other children, who are the students of regular and bridge

courses.

The teachers, staff members of Apne Aap, our parents and other respective member of our locality were present in the occasion. It was so exciting to be part of the celebration. We had done the decoration of our centre in mini tri colour flags and flowers.

The National flag is tied to a pole with some flowers into it. The flag was hoisted by Sanju Di and Fatima Di and we sang the national anthem, flowers filled the air. It was such beautiful picture. There was a certain kind of pride in it. We also sang other patriotic songs. We were distributed sweets.

It is the first time for me to celebration such important day in the centre. I am filled with pride when I gave the salute to our national flag.

I thank Apne Aap to include me in this celebration

The National flag is tied to a pole with some flowers into it. The flag was hoisted by Sanju Di and Fatima Di and we sang the national anthem, flowers filled the air. It was such beautiful picture. There was a certain kind of pride in it. We also sang other patriotic songs. We were distributed sweets.

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

—Pooja Ladha

Bihar: My name is Pooja Ladha. I live in Forbesganj. I am assisting in archiving the stories and struggles of the girls and women of Apne Aap. I am based out of Bihar. For me, AAWW and its objectives came into limelight, when I saw Fatima Di at the hotseat of Kaun Banega Crorepati (KBC).

Since then, I was always keen to learn more about Apne Aap. I started watching the interviews and documentaries of Ruchira Di. And, recently, I contacted Ruchira Di and later was invited for part time office work. I always wondered about the work culture at an NGO, and to my surprise, the people were extremely polite and cooperative. Disregarding the western culture of “Sir/Mam”, addressing our colleagues as “Di” was something I needed time to put in habit. Even while entering in the office, one can say the Gandhi ideology lies within the Campus.

While busy in archiving at office, I was getting to know about the struggle of people trapped in prostitution. I used to see the interviews of marginalized women, went through the videos and my first ever encounter was listening to Fatima Di. Eventually I came to know about Meena Di and others—“**THE EVER SMILING LADIES**” for me who are powerful and gracious on their words and work.

Also, surveying about the success figures of KGBV in educating and in fact graduating the females was a matter of pride and applauds. The goal of KGBV of building social capital of literate and empowered girls

through a well rounded learning experience within the ambit and facility was gradually being achieved. While filling the asset card for women, I was overwhelmed watching the young girls and women, who at the cultivating age was brought or still struggling of this trafficking business. **Each and every smiling faces had lots to say and experience. Many had been through training of vocational skills, karate, computer skills, health education, and financial literacy (bank accounts and how to finance money). Along with learning the basic laws, girls learn how to file a First Amendment Report, case diary, and a missing person’s report.**

This is especially useful to know their rights, in case they are trafficked or lured into trafficking, they can know their rights. KGBV fosters girls empowerment through self-confidence activities.

And eventually I was introduced to the Nat Community which resides mainly in the red light areas of Forbesganj and are forced to practice intergenerational prostitution due to poverty, illiteracy and lack of livelihood choices. With them one can understand the value of Education and literacy, the awareness of ones Constitutional right and motivating them to choose and fight for those. And if by practising so in AAWW, it additionally helps a few hundred of India’s girls who in most likelihood have been saved from a social reality that treats them as commodities, then that should be reason enough to extend and expand initiatives.

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We visited the school and met the principal and teachers. We were given a tour of the school; we saw the classrooms, hostel rooms, dining hall, playground etc. We were quite happy and satisfied after seeing the facilities provided. Now, I am happy that my daughter is under the guidance of Apne Aap and she is safe.

Recently, I had an opportunity to attend ‘The second World Congress against sexual exploitation of women and girls’, organised by Apne Aap at India International centre, New Delhi.

The event had many speakers and participants from all around the world. I was surprised to see the amount of people who had come to attend the conference, the auditorium was full and people around the globe gathered for a common cause.

On reaching upon IIC, I had mixed emotions. I was nervous as well as. Later, Apne Aap staff asked us to help volunteer on the registration desk and collect information of the people present.

We were seated in the middle of the last benches. The session commenced by Ruchira didi as the first speaker

but we couldn’t understand her as she spoke in English. One speaker from Bihar, Fatima Khatoon spoke in hindi and we were relieved as we understood her.

Fatima spoke about her belonging to the Nat community in Bihar. She further explained the regressive practice of her community of forcing young girls into prostitution. Fatima spoke about her background in detail and told us her story of courage on how she courageously fought for herself and her daughter against her community. Fatima also fought elections, to which she says, “I knew I will not win because no man will vote for me”, “They call me terrorist”, “They (men) extend their hands to touch us but not to protect us”.

I felt happy after listening to Fatima Khatoon’s story. It encouraged me to fight against the inter-generational prostitution which is rooted in my community as well. On the way back home, the words of Fatima Khatoon echoed in my ears. Though, I have not been able to refuse the caste based practices but words of Fatima Khatoon instilled courage in me to save my daughter from this. I envision a bright future for all my children. Moreover, I promised to myself to never let any of my children enter this caste based practices.

The World Outside

— *Jyoti Khatoon/as translated by Praveen Kumar*

Bihar: My name is Jyoti Khatoon. I am pursuing my graduation from Shri Arvinda College, Patna. I belong to the Nat community where parents put their daughters in inter-generational prostitution. My mother, Fatima Khatoon is associated with Apne Aap as a community leader in Forbesganj. I started my education at Apne Aap community centre in Uttri Rampur (located in the middle of our community).

After completing primary school, I was admitted in the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Aavarshiya Vidyalay, Simraha run by Apne Aap. I gave my 10th board exams from a local school in Forbesganj and completed my high school education from a school in Patna. Currently I am staying at Mother Teresa Girls Hostel, Patna.

In January 2017, I was told that Apne Aap is organizing a 'World Congress' against sexual exploitation in New Delhi. I was filled with joy and wanted to participate in the congress. I requested the organization for the same and participated in it.

On 28th January, I, along with my mother reached New Delhi after completing a journey of 2 days by train. On the same day, we visited Lodhi Garden and Sarojini Nagar Market.

On 29th January, the inauguration for the world congress took place in India International Centre at 6pm. I along with a few other members of the organization, helped pack the bags for the speakers in the congress. My mother was too one of the speakers. People from all walks of life participated; some were feminists, victims,

survivors of sex trafficking, political leaders, government officials and students.

The most important part of the program was the speeches as they narrated courageous stories of women who fought the racket of sex trafficking. The stories told by the survivors brought tears to the audience.

The leaders, activist and politicians present were from all over the world and spoke about measures to end sex trafficking and improving the status-quo of prostituted women.

The congress continued for 3 days with many speakers from all over the world who spoke about ways of protecting 'the last girl'.

The conference was an enriching experience for me. I realized that, I want to become a youth leader and fight inter-generational prostitution taking place in the Nat community.

I thank Apne Aap for giving me this opportunity to attend the conference as learnt so much from the speakers. I learnt that growth is constant and needs to be directed towards changing ones situation than just accepting it.

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The best outing I experienced was with Ashley Judd. Like usual, it was just a regular picnic outing with family members and teachers. We were overwhelmed when we learnt about her joining us for the picnic. I did not know much of her background. We were told she is an activist-actress. I was just glad to meet her.

People around were very attracted to her. They were crowding her and wanted to talk. For many, she was a foreigner and also beautiful. I also felt she was such a beauty. Even before being formally introduced, she caught my eyes from distance. Later, our teacher introduced her to us saying, "She is Ashley Judd, a versatile actress of Hollywood". Her English and even Hindi accent was really different from the way we talk. She started introducing herself with a 'namaste'.

Ashley di was very pretty in Indian attire. She was wearing a saree. She was friendly. She sounded so curious to know about our way of living, culture, food and likes and dislikes. She was just an extraordinary being happy with her own way. Even I got a chance to talk with her.

She asked my name, class, everything about me.

This was a memorable picnic for us. We started with games likes passing the ball spoon, race and ended with jogging. At the end, everyone looked so content and even our teacher were playing with us.

No rules or restrictions. It was a fun filled day. Our mothers were also playing. Someday I would like to become like her. She is my inspiration and a role model now. I had a great time with her. I really want to thank Apne Aap for giving me this opportunity to study in this organization .

With the organization, I get many opportunities to participate in different kinds of activities. Here I do lots of activities. I feel such a friendly surrounding in here .a part from studies we are here being encouraged for education, drawing, dancing, singing and stitching.

Poems

Chandni

I, Chandni (moonlight) live in the city,
I Play on the streets,
Mother says you are like moonlight,
Then why no one plays with me,
No one comes to me,
Why is this happening with me,
I will also read, I will also write,
I will make my country and my mother proud
of me,
I am proud to be a daughter!

Name– Sapna Prasad

Area: Kolkata

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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