



RED LIGHT DESPATCH

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DELHI, KOLKATA, AND FORBESGANJ (BIHAR)

My Dream To become a doctor -Jiyana Khatoon

Bihar: My name is Jiyana Khatoon. I have recently passed class VIII from KGBV, Simraha. My native village is Uttari Rampur redlight area near Forbesganj. However, currently our family members are living in a small village called Lalitgram. My life is going through difficult situation. My father wants me to prostitute myself and the other family members are not so kind either. My mother fought against him to save our lives and admitted me along with my younger sister at KGBV run by Apne Aap.

To continue my education for the past three years was tough. And I am lucky enough to have passed class VIII. After graduating from KGBV, we had to face a different kind of problem. There was not many to financially support our study. During this time, my family and I met Apne Aap team, they promised to help us to further our education. They decided to admit us into a school. After a long struggle, we successfully got admission in a Bhagwati Devi Goyal Girls High School, Forbesganj. Later, we were enrolled in Alok Bharti Coaching for an evening tuition. We'd promise them to work hard and try to succeed in life. I aspire to become a doctor and help the poor people and support my villagers and relatives to help them exit from the flesh trade. This is my dream and I wish it would come true one day.

Redlight area's women and girls participate in a stop movie making project

Payel/ as dictated to Sahana Dasgupta

Kolkata: My name is Payel, I live in Sonagachi redlight area, but originally I was from Bangladesh. Due to difficult circumstances at home, my parents got me married at a very young age. Once I arrived at my in-laws household, I realized that I was completely alone and helpless. I was trapped in a marriage that was only giving me grief, my in-laws would exploit me and my husband would rape me multiple times a week. Eventually I built up the courage and ran back to my parents home. They felt as though I had disgraced the family and assaulted me physically as well.

The one good thing that came from my marriage was that I had a young daughter named Srithi and for her I had to be strong. I eventually got a job at a shoe factory, times were

tough but I had to provide for her by doing some working. One day on the way back from work, I met a woman who told me that if I flee to India with her I can make ten times the money I make right now. Just the thought of leaving my past behind and also giving my daughter a better life was enough to convince me. When I came to India I was sold to a brothel in Sonagachi redlight area, this was the lowest point in my life I felt as though I had failed my daughter.

In 2005, I met Sahani Di, she explained to me how she worked for Apne Aap.

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Apne Aap conducts health, hygiene and menstruation workshop at a govt. run school

— Neha / as translated by Khushboo Mishra

Delhi: My name is Neha. I study in 8th standard at a Government Girls Senior Secondary School. I live in Sapera Basti, Najafgarh with my mother, 2 sisters and 2 brothers.

Last week, I attended a workshop on health, menstruation and hygiene in the school, organised by Apne Aap.

The workshop started immediately after the morning prayers. All the girls from 7th and 8th standard participated in the health workshop. The workshop was conducted by Aarti Ma'am, who have a daughter of our age.

Aarti ma'am started with basic hygiene advice, which we have to follow every morning. **She told us**

about the importance of brushing our teeth and cleaning our tongue. She told us how children sometimes skip cleaning their tongue which is not good. It leads to faulty smell from our mouth. I realised that at times, I feel lazy and miss cleaning my teeth and didn't notice the effect it was having on others and especially my health. She also talked about importance of taking bath regularly and wearing clean clothes.

(Continued on page 7)

Op-Ed— ‘Feminism Through Poetry: Bringing a Change Through Words’ published in the *She The People*

This article was published at *She The People Tv* on one of the series of *Feminism Beyond Boundaries*. This was on *Female Genital Mutilations*

How many of us really know about what Female Genital Mutilation and circumcision entails? While the Supreme Court is examining the issue, women and child development minister, Maneka Gandhi, recently released a statement saying if the Dawoodi Bohra Community, which is two million strong in India, does not ban it by itself, then the Indian government will interfere in the matter and prohibit the practice.

Additionally, a UNICEF report observed in 2016 that 200 million women living today in 30 countries—27 African countries, Indonesia, Iraqi Kurdistan and Yemen—have undergone the procedures.

During a conversation held by Apne Aap Women Worldwide last week, Alka Raza, who has authored ‘Myths of Female Genital Mutilation’ based on extensive research in Middle East and Africa, talked to Priya Goswami, co-founder of Sahiyo, a transnational organisation striving to end FGC. Alka spoke about how FGM works in African countries while Priya shed light on the Indian counterpart of the issue.

“The community calls the clitoris -‘haraam ki boti’- because they think that it will give women more sexual urges. It is believed that just like a penis gets an erection, a clit gets an erection as well, so it needs to be slit so it does not drive a woman insane with sexuality,” explains Priya Goswami

THE HISTORY OF FGM AND MYTH BREAKING

Raza said that the practice emerged in the Nile valley about 6000 years ago. Her research work concluded that it was not Christianity, Islam or any other religion that gave birth to FGM. “I started getting more historical references for my book and I found that historians have discovered women from 5 century BC with circumcision. An Italian historian had clearly written in his travelogue, while travelling to West Africa or Black Africa, that a circumcised woman or a slave would always bring better price in the slavery market because that meant that she is a virgin,” said Raza about how she started researching for her book and unravelling the mystery surrounding FGM.

FGC IN INDIA AND HOW IT WORKS HERE

Priya, who shot a documentary titled “A Pinch of Skin” on the issue a few years back, articulated, “Imagine being a seven-year-old girl and your mother or grandmother takes you for an ice cream. Then they push you into a room where your female guardian practically makes you believe that it is all okay that your underwear is pulled down and then your clitoris is taken out.”

“Apart from the enormous pain, there is also a sense of betrayal at a very young age from your female elders that they lied to you,” added Priya.

In India, FGC happens at the age of seven specifically because the community wants you to remember that at this age when it happens, you are not young enough to die of the pain and old enough to remember the practice, so it is passed on from you to your children. “The community calls the clitoris -‘haraam ki boti’- because they think that it will give women more sexual urges. It is believed that just like a penis gets an erection, a clit gets an erection as well so it needs to be slit so it does not drive a woman insane with sexuality,” informed Priya.

She said that when Alka talks about the time two decades back when she was researching for the book, no one knew or talked about FGM/C. Even two decades later when she made the documentary, nothing much had changed. The silence was unreal.

“Nobody knew about it, nobody confessed and nobody wanted to open up. And everybody kept reverberating that it does not happen in India. It has been a ground zero for us to start from,” she recalled about the time when she started studying the subject for her documentary.

Her film is based on hands, feet, body gestures and suggestive visuals because that is the extent of secrecy in the community about the issue. “This is such a private matter that they did not risk revealing their identities in the fear of social boycott. This practice does not just work on the level of suppressing a girl and violating her body, it also works as social control. The idea behind FGC is to get the girl married, keep her sexuality in check. Nobody actually checks, trip down panties and search for it but there is this giant fear created in the mind that if you don’t get your daughter mutilated, you will be ostracised and she won’t get married.”

The people propagating ideas of mythical excessive sexuality in women are none other than your own mothers, aunts and grandmothers and not men who have undergone circumcision themselves.

Diary of a Social Worker

Monika

Delhi: My name is Monika. I belong to Singhi caste and live in Sopera Basti of Najafgarh. In my family, we are total of five members-- my husband is a traditional medicine practitioner, my two sons study in 9th standard and the other in 7th standard in a government run school. My youngest daughter studies in 5th standard at nearby MCD primary school. I too work as a toy seller. I make toys at night and in morning sell them around religious places to earn few rupee notes.

In our caste, not many are encouraged to pursue education. Instead, we start working at a very tender age. When my eldest son was born, I wanted to give him good education so that he would be capable enough to take care of himself. I faced challenges from our relatives and neighbours who wanted my son to continue in the caste-based occupation.

I assert again, in Singhi community, children are not encouraged to go to schools. They start working from the age of 7-8 years. Generally, boys work as cobblers, rag pickers and in worse cases situations turn them into criminal. On the hand, girls start selling toys or start picking rags. These little girls usually pick rags before they get married when they are very young. They sell the toys to save enough money for their marriage.

My daughter is in 5th standard, in a MCD Primary school. I have already started getting marriage proposals for her. I consulted Apne Aap staff in this matter. Khushboo di advised me not to get my daughter married off until and unless she completes her education and is financially independent.

My daughter is very intelligent. In school, all teachers and principal appreciates her and encourage her to study more. It was my dream to do something well in life but I never got the chance. I was married off early and never got the chance to enter the gates of school. I want my daughter to fulfill her dreams and my dream too. I am determined to give the best education to my daughter and not get her married till the time she doesn't stand on her own feet.

Apne Aap has been working with our community members since seven years and recently they adopted the MCD primary school where my daughter is enrolled. My daughter tells me often about various activities, workshops, trainings etc, which is organised in the school by Apne Aap staff.

In October, my daughter was enrolled for Robotics training with the help of Apne Aap. Initially, I didn't want to send my daughter. I have never sent her far from our community. But a sister from Apne Aap convinced me that there are more children who participating from other communities to attend these training

sessions and it is a great opportunity for my daughter to enhance her skills. Thus, I sent my daughter. After the first day of training, when my daughter came back she was so happy that I can't express. She didn't sleep that night and shared each and every detail of that training with me.

I am glad to be associated with Apne Aap who helps our children to fulfill their dreams and shares all important information related to new government schemes, hygiene and others with us.

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Motivational speech by visually impaired adults

— *Khushi/ as translated by Khushboo Mishra*

Delhi: My name is Khushi. I live with my family in Sopera Basti, Najafgarh. I study in 8th standard in a Government Girls Senior Secondary School.

I am associated with Apne Aap since February 2016 when the evening tuition classes started in our community. Since then, I used to attend all the programmes organised by Apne Aap in our community and even in my school.

Few days ago, before our summer vacation started, Apne Aap members came to my school for the open mike session. With them, there were two visually challenged persons whom we haven't met before. We all are from classes 6th, 7th and 8th were sitting in the school auditorium waiting for the open mike session to start. I, along with my other friends was constantly looking at visually impaired people. I didn't say anything that time but felt very emotional to see them.

We all were curious to know about the event. Both the guests, a visually challenged persons were sitting on chairs, with smile on their face. Then, Khushboo di introduced us to both. One was Brahmanand bhaiya working in a reputed government bank at Noida and the other was Ashwin Bhaiya from Delhi University. Ashwin bhaiya study literature and play guitar.

Brahmanand bhaiya started interacting with us. He told us about all the struggles that he had to endure during his school and college life and also job. He told us the challenges were more during their school days. **Brahmanand bhaiya never wanted to study in a special school, instead wanted to study with other 'normal' children. He told us how schools rejected to give him admission because they didn't have any technique to teach him at par with other kids.**

But he was resilience enough by not giving up. He studied in a school with children who were visually active. Brahmanand Bhaiya talked to us on many topics such as family support, importance of education, general knowledge questions. **He asked us to never lose hope and to never give up. Challenges are a part of life. We should face them, not run away from them. They make us strong, to live and progress in life.**

After completing graduation, Brahmanand bhaiya cleared entrance exam to study law in Delhi University and cracked written and interview to get government job in a bank. Coming from small village of Assam with no vision, it was an achievement and inspiration for others. He told us to always move forward in life, no matter how hard the challenges are. I felt so motivated after listening to all this. I decided that I will try harder to achieve my dreams in life. I will never give up in life.

Then, Ashwin Bhaiya shared his share of problems with us. He told us he is partially blind. But, he too, had to face many problems. He started to play guitar since school days. **As it was time for our summer breaks, Ashwin Bhaiya sang a song dedicated friendships all around. We, joined him for other songs too.**

I felt very encouraged after the open mike session. It filled me with new energy of hope and strength. I shared the details with my mother after reaching home. She was happy to see me with new energy, hope and dreams.

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

Nat community girls get admission in Girls High School in Forbesganj

— *Sonali Khatoon/ as translated by Praveen Kumar*

Bihar: My name is Sonali Khatoon. I am a student of Class IX in Bhagwati Devi Goyal Girls High School, situated in Forbesganj.

I just graduated in 2017 from Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Simraha. This is a girls' school and hostel that is run by Apne Aap Women Worldwide. My life has already changed a lot. All thanks to Apne Aap, but I want to continue my education and for that I needed their help again. Near my village there is a school called Bhagwati Devi Goyals Girls High School, the application process is hard and involves a lot of obstacles which I need assistance to get past. My parents are very supportive of my ambitions, that is why they encouraged me and my sister to get admission together at the high school.

When I approached the Apne Aap community for help to take the next step in higher education, without any hesitation they jumped at the opportunity to help my family. Praveen Sir and Sanju ji helped me to gather all the necessary paperwork from my family and school, which include school transcripts, bank statements and my school marks.

After a few days, we visited the school with Apne Aap staff, unfortunately it was closed for the summer vacation. The good news was that the admission office was still open for a few hours during the week. The following day at 9:00 am, the three of us went to the admission office and filled out all the paperwork. Thanks to Apne Aap staff, the process went smoothly. We attached all the documents and also three passport size photo. The headmaster of the school was very welcoming, and he gave my sister and me a tour of the school

and all its facilities.

Apne Aap provided all the financial support, they paid a total of one thousand eight hundred rupees for the registration fee, school fee and the school dress. Just walking around the school campus I had butterflies in my stomach, I would never have thought that I would get to attend an establishment like this.

With all the support and help from Apne Aap we were able to fill out all the required paperwork that same day, and first day of classes will be June 19th for both of us have also enrolled in an after school coaching program called Alok Bharti here in Forbesganj, this will help us improve our grades. Apne Aap took care of all the expenses including the school bag and stationary and guided us every step of the process. **My family is so excited for my sister and myself, we can definitely see ourselves elevating our family's standard of living in the future.**

I just wanted to thank Praveen Sir and Sanju Ji, and most of Apne Aap community for giving my family hope and helping me take the next step in fulfilling my dreams. I wish them all nothing but happiness and good luck in their future endeavours.

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



The World Outside

—*Madhumala Kumari/ as dictated to Praveen Kumar*

Bihar: My name is Madhumala Kumari and I am a student at Forbesganj College. I am from a very poor scheduled caste living in small village near Forbesganj. I have always wanted to study and continue my education but financially it would have taken a toll on my parents.

With the support from Apne Aap, I applied to the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) at the age of ten and continued to study there till the 8th grade. After I finished studying at KGBV, I started going to the local High school and finished the 10th grade with flying colours. I was honored by the SP of the area with Rs-10,000 in a ceremony organized by the Apne Aap community. After completing class 10, I got admission in Forbesganj College in science faculty for class 11 and 12 and passed the final examination with phenomenal marks. I don't know if any of this would have been possible if the staff from Apne Aap did not support me financially and emotionally.

In 2015, one day Praveen sir called me and said that I have to prepare my passport and that I will go to the United States of America for a summer study abroad program. He asked me to bring all the documents that are needed to apply for a passport. The very next day we both went to the passport office and with his assistance I submitted all the documents. Within a few

hours we got an interview date with the main office in Patna. I visited the main office with my parents and the interview went really well. A month went by and I waited by checking the post and my passport had finally arrived. After a few months I went to Kolkata for the visa interview, unfortunately I didn't get the visa.

I knew that this was not the time to be sad or get depressed, I continued working hard and again applied for the 2017 summer program. This time luck and hard work was on my side: I received the visa. I will leave for the United States Of America in June. And, I am certain that the next 3 months will be the most important and exciting moments in my life. I will be participating in a program that was organized by President Lincoln from June 26th-30th to, The goal for this summit to find new ways to abolish slavery.

Looking back at the last few years, a scared and lonely girl from Forbesganj College has gotten an opportunity to go to New York City and make her family proud. Without Apne Aap community in my life I know for a fact that this dream of mine would never have become a reality. Thank You!

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and how the organisation is running this program that allows children who are living in the red light districts to get a proper education and live in a hostel called RKVM. However hard this choice was for me, I knew that this could have been the best decision for my upbringing of my daughter, Srithi. At the time Srithi was four years old, with the help of Sahani Di and Apne Aap I got her admitted to RKVM. Within a few weeks of moving into the hostel I realized that Srithi was already more committed to her education and overall her nature looked healthier and happier.

I could never have imagined that my daughter would be able to take classes in singing, dancing and drawing. Even her social life has improved, she has made many new friend who kept her company in the hostel. Srithi has found a new home in RKVM, I do miss her a lot but I know that someday when my life is better track, we can live together.

Apne Aap gave me an opportunity to learn about filmmaking and also act in it. The film was directed by Aseem Asha, as part of a filmmaking project. I shared my story in front of the camera. Initially, it was difficult to express. But it's important to do that as I get the confidence to do the right thing I expressed my life story. **Also, one of the reasons I wanted to share my side of the story is because women like me are barely able to come out with confidence and fight back. This experience was wonderful and very special to me. I felt like the camera was recording not just my story, but my confidence, my strength and the story of many others who are going through similar situation like me.**

Lastly, I would like to thank Ruchira Di, I just want to tell her to keep moving forward, because of her helping hand I can see a bright future for myself and my daughter.

My First Day at Apne Aap

— Arjun Unnikrishnan

Kolkata: My name is Arjun Unnikrishnan on 5th June 2017, I joined Kolkata office of **Apne Aap Women Worldwide (AAWW)**. After getting a very warm welcome from Ms Laboni and the staff members I completed all the necessary paperwork and formalities. AAWW provided all the intern with lunch as we went over all information and what is expected from us over the next few weeks.

The Apne Aap staff members were nice enough to provide all the new interns a tour of the facility. **While walking around I noticed a children's class in session, I courteously asked the teacher if I could observe the children for a few minutes. The children were exposed to many different languages and studied a variety of different subjects. Whatever little time I spent with the children, I learnt that they were a very enthusiastic bunch of kids and I had no doubt that they had a bright future ahead of them.**

Apne Aap provides basic education and soft skill trainings for the children from the regions of the red light areas. It aims to dismantle the system of prostitution by increasing opportunities for the weakest and marginalised girls and women from red light areas and caste-communities suffering from inter-generational prostitution. One of the main goals of the organization is to help the girls and women access education, citizenship documents, government subsidies, livelihood skills, health care, legal protection, and increase their social circle. Apne Aap strongly believes that sexual trafficking cannot be eradicated but can be contained through policy and social awareness.

Apne Aap Women Worldwide is involved in anti-

trafficking work through addressing the demand for trafficking for commercial and sexual exploitation. It effectively addresses the root causes that act as the pull, push and facilitating factors that give birth to and perpetuate grave human rights violations. Human rights of victims of trafficking should be at the centre of all efforts to protect, assist and provide redress to the victims of trafficking. **The organization applies the formula of bringing awareness using the advocacy methods at all levels including government machineries. It ensures broad based participation of civil society, media and survivors in strategizing empowerment of vulnerable groups.**

Later in the afternoon we were assigned the task of archiving some documents related to the Topsis Eviction Case. A set of documents related to the case that are vital for the official and legal purposes were to be segregated. Arithri, another intern in the office gave me a copy of, **Confronting the Demand for Sex Trafficking**, a handbook published by AAWW, which would help me in understanding the policy and legislation aspect of the issue.

The cause Apne Aap stands for is noble and their job is commendable! By way of reading books and articles related to human trafficking for sexual exploitation and interacting with the staff members about the lives of prostituted girls and women and the responsibility undertaken by Apne Aap to empower the girls. I am genuinely impressed with their modus operandi too. I look forward to contribute my best towards this organisation all through my internship period and after. I am sure that I will work for this cause either individually or being a part of Apne Aap family in the future.

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After morning hygiene, she talked about menstruation which is often considered as a taboo and we do not talk about it much in public. **Menstruation is never openly discussed. Even in schools we do not talk about it openly with our teachers or friends. I feel shy to talk about it to my mother as well. Aarti ma'am took out a large size pad from her bag and showed it us. I, and all other girls felt shy and started giggling. She taught us how to use the pads correctly. I learnt that pads are also called as sanitary napkins and can be made with ease.**

When I first had my periods, my mother gave me cotton cloth to use. I kept using clothes for many months. Then, later I started receiving pads from school. Arti ma'am talked about the benefits of using pads. Now, I encourage my sister and other girls of my community to use pads.

Arti ma'am also shared information related to vitamins, minerals and other important nutrients in our food. She told us how important it is to include these nutrients in our food for healthy growth of our body and mind.

I am always grateful to learn such important lessons. This will help in changing our daily habits positively.

Poems

Papa

Papa is strong and tall
And when I hear his foot step in the hall
I hide behind the curtain - I know what he'll
say!
'Where is my little Miss Mousie today?'
Then I come prancing out just like a mouse
And he takes me and hugs me all over the
house
I give him six kisses, or seven, or ten
And tell him I'm going to marry him.

Name– Ruby Kumari
Area: KGBV, Simraha, Bihar

The Park

The Park is great and green
And full of many things unseen
Swings that come swinging and might knock
off your head
Germs in the fountain that might kill you
instantly
And many children who like to throw sand
at you
And sometimes there's even a musical band!

Name– Anita Kumari
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