



Bernard Henin Nov. 2010

An insight into
Contemporary Sexual Slavery

This is the story of Rashmi and Aarti, two members of the Indian Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Apne Aap Women Worldwide, as they visit the girls and women living in an ostracised community in India.





On this particular day Rashmi and Aarti enter a village less than one hour's drive outside the city centre of Delhi.



To many this may look like a typical undeveloped village in India.



However the urban waste indicates that this area is a slum.





Strong social practices are deeply rooted within this community as men force their wives to prostitute themselves within their own homes to support their family.



Eager to learn more we ask a mother, known to the members of Apne Aap as a prostituted woman, to tell her story while in her home..



This is Seema's place of business.
It is also her home where she
raises her children.

(Please note that her eyes have been artificially
covered to respect her privacy)



She agrees to talk to us while she waits for a customer.





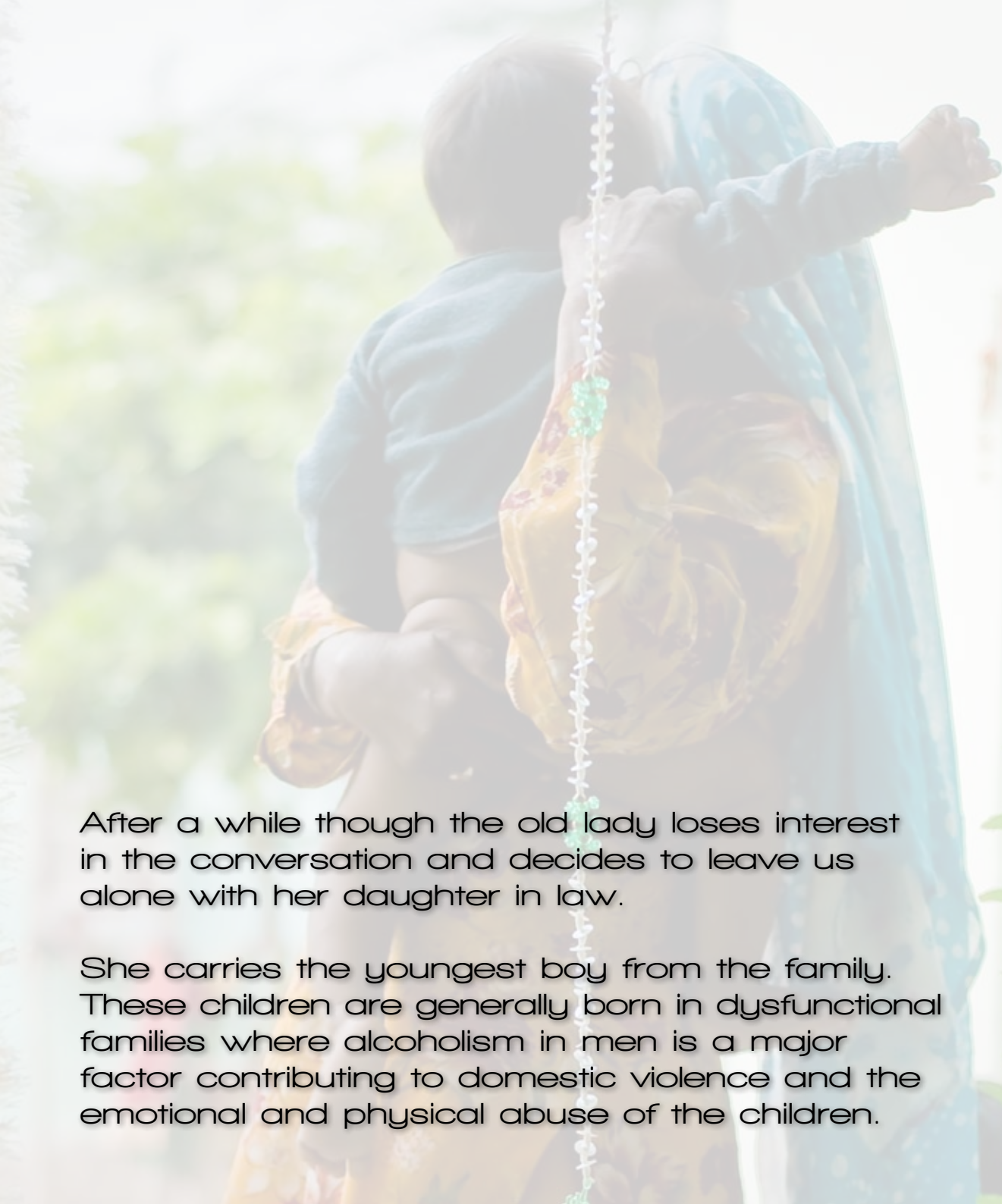
Rashmi tries to get a better understanding of Seema's life conditions. Does she have any skills? Has she looked into alternative sources of income? Would her husband accept that she earns less money through another job? Replying negatively to all these questions, Seema does not see a way out of prostitution as there are no other sources of livelihood available to women in this community.

An old woman arrives while we are speaking to Seema and listens in. It is her mother-in-law. She supports this practice as she herself was prostituted when she was young and sees this as their way of life.






By allowing us to stay and speak with Seema, the mother in law has approved of our presence in the house, thereby indicating a desire for change within the community.



After a while though the old lady loses interest in the conversation and decides to leave us alone with her daughter in law.

She carries the youngest boy from the family. These children are generally born in dysfunctional families where alcoholism in men is a major factor contributing to domestic violence and the emotional and physical abuse of the children.



A young girl in a light blue school shirt and dark pants sits on a bed, looking towards the camera. Next to her, a woman in a red top and grey pants sits cross-legged, looking down at her hands. The room has teal walls with two framed pictures: one of a man and woman embracing, and another of a landscape with a river and trees. The bed is covered with a patterned white sheet.

Shortly after a young schoolgirl called Lalita joins Seema on the bed.



Being a child, she is in a playful mood and her presence provides some freshness to the harsh reality that exists here.







We decide to leave the house and head out to the community centre to meet the unmarried girls living in this village.



The community centre sponsored by the Apne Aap Women Worldwide lies on the edge of the village.



Apne Aap members use this centre to build a rapport with the village children and give them a safe space to express themselves.



Rashmi provides some encouragement while the children look at a world map.



Aarti works with the children to create a play depicting domestic violence. She hopes that by providing the opportunity to creatively express this topic, the children will be able to express their thoughts, feelings and concerns present within their daily lives.

Developing this level of engagement and trust requires patience and experience.



Through the preparation of the play the girls were able to engage in a discussion about domestic violence, a topic that may never have been discussed openly before.



All the girls from the village know that once they are married they have no other option than prostitution as the men do not work in their community. From the birth they are socially conditioned to accept this practice as normal.

The next slides are portraits of the girls living here. My aim was to show them under a positive light.





Rupa will be married within the next six months with a man from the community.

The average marriage age for these girls is 17 years old.







Rashmi embraces Priti who will also be married soon. It is important for the NGO staff to get as close as possible to these girls before they become the 'property' of a husband.





Apne Aap Worldwide expects that it will take at least 3 years to create enough critical mass to initiate change within this community.

Hopefully by the time change arrives, these girls will not will not have reached the critical age.



Unfortunately, Rupa will not have this chance...



There are 3 million prostituted women in India today...
almost half of them are girls.

The average age of entry into prostitution in India is 9 to 13 years old.

Worldwide, around 30 million children have been trafficked in the
last 20 years.

Rashmi, Apne Aap member, has many years of experience in assisting women in deprived communities. She enjoys working for the empowerment of those marginalized within society and strongly believes in facilitating the attainment of equality of women worldwide through any means necessary.





Aarti, Apne Aap member, is a charming young lady with a lively personality. She likes training adolescent girls and women on issues such as gender based discrimination and domestic violence.





For more information on Apne Aap please go to www.apneaap.org

Or contact Apne Aap directly by email:

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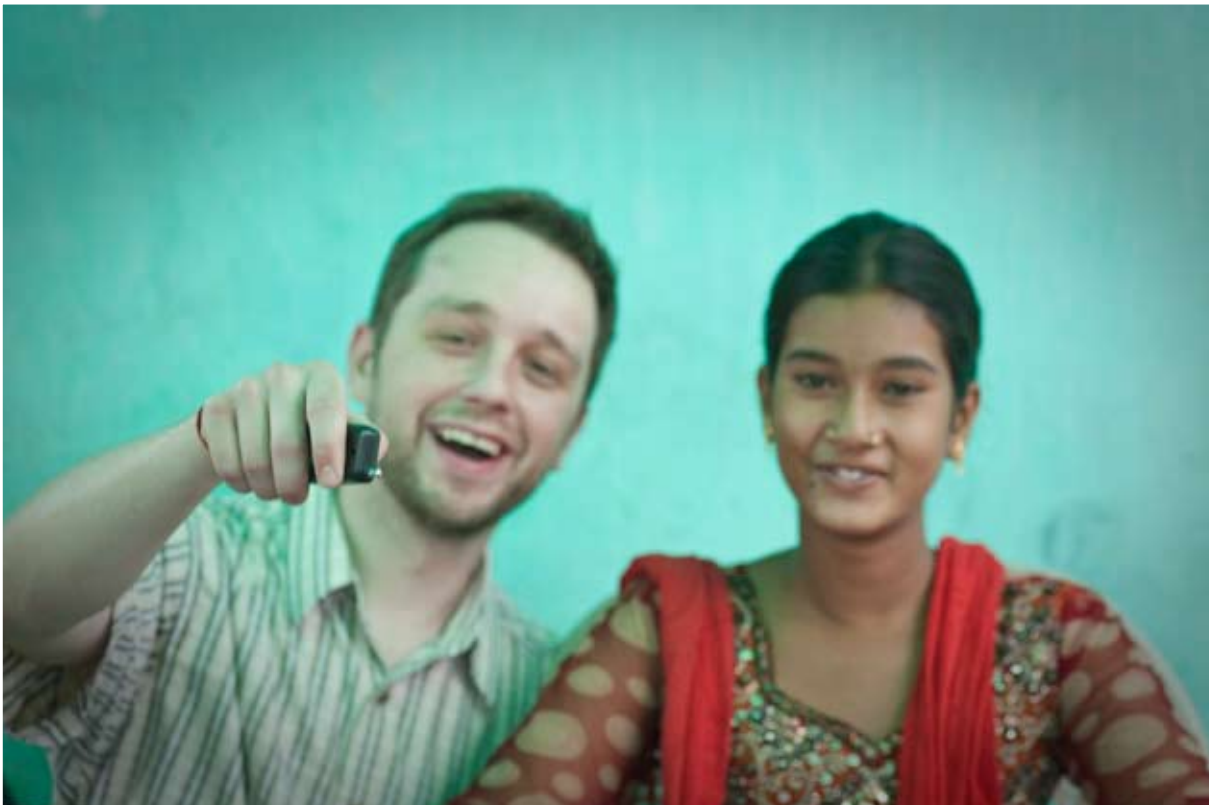
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To donate, please visit :

www.Apneaap.org/get-involved/donate

* Please note that the names given to the women and girls living in this community are fictitious.

bernard henin
photography



It is easy to create images of misery and despair within the impoverished communities around the world.

Instead, my vision as a photographer is to provide images of humanity that reflect dignity and hope. This is what these people really need.

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