

MY SISTER IS MY GODDESS

By Md Kalam

Forbesgunge, Bihar: Today I am going to talk about the story of a goddess in front of you. This goddess was born in such a community where most people are involved in commercial sexual exploitation in some way or the other.

In her family she was the eldest. She was unable to see her family about to die in utter poverty and hunger. But then....what could she possibly do other than sacrificing herself in the flesh trade? With her own flesh she fed her family and brought up her siblings. But alas!!! Despite her best efforts she could not save her three sisters from going into prostitution. She also failed to hold back her two brothers from being pimps. But even then her hope did not die. Her confidence did not reduce.

After fighting with her parents she got her sisters married one by one. All her siblings thus left her family in some way but she never did. She was always there beside her parents and her youngest brother. Her last ray of hope was her youngest brother. In order to protect him from this shadow she left the village with him for a town, where she got him into a hostel and she herself stayed at the red light area to send money to her family every month. She never used to visit the hostel out of the fear that her brother might be thrown out of the school and her dream would have remained incomplete. So she would rather send someone else to meet her brother when she wanted to do so.

During his vacations she would tell him about the violence she faced everyday and would encourage him to emancipate innumerable such girls who were caged

GOOD, BAD, CRIMINAL. I CAN'T DISTINGUISH

By Maisoon Nat, 25

Khawaspur, Bihar: We don't want to do anything that is wrong. We keep thinking that we can get out of this. I can leave but I need the police to protect me because there are many people who can torture me. I don't know who they are but they come in the night and they rape us. Once I was kidnapped, stabbed, and raped just because I refused to open my door for prostitution at midnight. I was twelve or thirteen at that time. I fainted so I don't know who the people were. The police will protect us. They have to.

I hate this work. We want some relief from the government. I want help for protection and livelihood. Maybe run a shop. My mother, father, brother, and sister are all depending on me. I don't have a pimp and prostitution occurs out of my home (father's house). My earnings are divided among the family. I don't have any savings.

All kinds of men come here: Good, bad, criminal. I can't distinguish. I just want a life of peace.

into the net of trafficking like her. She would inspire him to emancipate their community from this evil.

After a few days when she came to know that her father was ill, to look after her ailing father she came back to her village and for this she brought her brother from the hostel to the village school, being unable to pay for the expenses. It can be easily understood she had given up every little fun, each little happiness, each little enjoyment of her life just for her parents and last but not the least for her brother. After the demise of her father solely her brother became the aim of her life and she made it a point to make her brother reach that point by getting education where he could earn enough for some comfort of his sister. He was ready to feel and realize the pangs of his sister and do something to wipe off the tears that she shed. He was there to fight for the rights of all the sisters of his community and to bring back the respect that they deserved from life.

So this is the story of a sister and her brother...Well the sister is my own sister and the brother I have talked about is none other but me!!! With my sister's inspiration and Apne Aap Women Worldwide's support I have been able to be courageous enough to stand against the evils of my own community... the Nat community.

POLICEMAN HAVE SO MUCH POWER

By Quyam, 13 years

Uttari Rampur, Bihar: I study at the Apne Aap Uttari Rampur School. I love to study and want to be like Kalam sir when I grow up. I would like to become a policeman. They have so much power. They can help the people if they want to and that's what I want to do when I become a policeman. I also want a Boy's hostel, like the one our girls stay at. I think if we stay at a hostel we can study better since we can concentrate better. Why don't you open up a boy's hostel?

SHOP OWNERS ASK FOR OUR SISTERS

By Md. Sajjad, 19 years

Uttari Rampur, Bihar: I was trained in carpentry at the Apne Aap centre in Kolkata. I have learnt to design and make chairs, tables, finishing of Almirahs. I was trained by Sean Sir and Christophe Sir. I was staying and studying at the Apne Aap Kidderpore centre. Our tutors came every Saturday and Sunday evenings.

My trainers wanted me and 2 of my other friends to get our passports ready to leave to France. They wanted us to continue training in carpentry and in France we would have the opportunity to train in machine carpentry. He told us to make our passports and would take us to France for learning machine carpentry.

Soon after that we about the floods (the Kosi Floods 2008) in the district we hail from-Araria. We did not have a choice but to return home. Our parents had advised us not to try and find work in our locality. We still tried, but in vain. All the carpenters in our locality are from the Barhai caste and won't allow us to become their apprentices. When we tried to work elsewhere the shop owners would always jeeringly ask us if our sisters could visit them for free!

We are bogged down by these conditions and don't see any opportunity for us here. We want to return to Kolkata again and start working under Christophe Sir.

FACTS IN FOCUS**80% TO 90% PROSTITUTION IS PIMP-CONTROLLED**

Women in prostitution are battered women. Prostitution, like battering, is a form of domestic violence. Giobbe (1993) compared pimps and batterers and found similarities in their use of enforced social isolation, minimization and denial, threats, intimidation, verbal and sexual abuse, attitude of ownership, and extreme physical violence to control women. The techniques of physical violence used by pimps are often the same as those used by torturers. Gray (1973, cited in Weisberg, 1985) reported that one teenager was beaten with a 6-foot bullwhip and another was tied to a car and forced to run behind it. It has been reasonably estimated that prostitution is 80% to 90% pimp-controlled (Giobbe & Gamache, 1990; Hunter, 1994).

Source: Prostitution: A Critical Review Of The Medical And Social Sciences Literature, Melissa Farley and Vanessa Kelly

APNE AAP IN ACTION**APPLICATION TO ARARIA CWC FOR CUSTODY OF GIRLS IN DANGER**

To

The Chairperson and Members

Dtd: June 21st, 2010

CWC, Araria

Application for Custody under(iii) clause 1 of section 32 of Juvenile Justice Act (Care And Protection Of Children) 2006 of Vulnerable Students at K.G.B.V from Red Light Area.

Madams/Sirs

We Apne Aap Women Worldwide (A2W2) India Trust is an national anti trafficking organization to prevent sex trafficking by building the capacity of girls, women and children in red –light areas and slums to get access to education, livelihoods other than prostitution, and safe housing by organizing themselves in small co-operatives. Apne Aap Women Worldwide **Registered under** Bombay Public Trust Act bearing No.E20422-Mumbai; having its national office at D-56 Anand Niketan, New Delhi 110021; having Bihar office at Jagdish Mills, Forbesganj, Araria.

We request for the custody of adolescent girls who are studying at Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya managed by the NGO “Apne Aap” in vacation period from June 2010 to June 2010

The facts grounds for the above request are following:

1. That the girls are from the red-light area and their parents are involved in prostitution.
2. That the girls for whose custody this application is made are aged between 12-17 years.
3. That there is eminent chance of trafficking of some girls in prostitution in various places in India
4. That a copy of detailed information of the vulnerable girls is attached as annexure-1
5. That the details of tour for the aforesaid girls as attached as annexure-2

Grounds:

1. Because clause 2 of section 30 of Juvenile Justice Act (Care And Protection Of Children) 2000
2. Because sub-clause (iii) clause 1 of section 32 of Juvenile Justice Act (Care and Protection of Children) 2000
3. Because clause 1 of section 31 where the powers of the committee conferred under Juvenile Justice Act (Care and Protection of Children) 2000
4. Because clause 2 of section 31 where the committee has overriding effect under Juvenile Justice Act (Care and Protection of Children) 2000

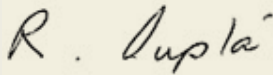
That the hon'ble committee has power, under Juvenile Justice Act (Care And Protection Of Children) 2000, to pass order(s) for the welfare of children.

Prayer

It is therefore, most respectfully prayed before the Hon'ble committee to pass an order to hand over the custody of these vulnerable children to the NGO "APNE AAP" managing the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya at Simraha, Forbesganj, where these girls are studying.

Thanking you,

Yours truly



Ruchira Gupta

President Founder
Apne Aap Women Worldwide

DIARY

By Subir Rana

Forbesgunge, Bihar: The red-light area here is called Lantern Bazaar because after the sun sets, the girls sit outside their huts with lanterns at an angle, so that the light hits their face sideways and the prospective client can get a better look at the girl. I visited this "Lantern Bazaar" to interview Guddi on discrimination faced by Nat women.

That night I saw Guddi drunk and wobbling her head sideways in an effort to tell her clients that she was drunk and they could have a good time with her for the price they paid. With hesitation

and inhibition and after a lot of prodding and nudging by Shoab (Fatima's husband) to talk to Guddi, I went up to her and said I wanted to speak with her, if she didn't have any problems. She raised her head and looked deep into my eyes, threw a mischievous smile and said, "Would you like to marry me?" I was thrown for a toss. But regaining my calm, I replied "Yes, why not? You are young and I am young, then what's the problem? This 'acting out' was pretty difficult for me but I managed it well, I suppose. She shot back with a gleaming smile. Since it was

already getting dark and there were lot of mosquitoes around, I thought it would be a better idea to come tomorrow. She readily agreed. I bought her a pudiya from a paan shop nearby and handed it to her along with Rs.10. We bid goodbye and I left.

It was a nice sunny morning and Guddi was sleeping sideways making her arm as an aperture to hold her drooping head sideways. She was in a black skirt and a bright red top. I went up to her and asked, "How are you"? She replied, "I am alright." And then there was a pause. I asked her if we could talk and she sat and offered me a seat beside her.

I queried if we could chat there or at some other place to which she rose up and took me inside. As I went in I witnessed rows of room one after the other with a similar structure. The rooms were thatched and the ground was mud swept. The rooms were so transparent that what was happening in one could be seen and heard in the adjoining one.

With a lot of hesitation as to what was going to happen next, I entered Guddi's room. It was dark, soggy and there was a strange stench coming from the undergarments which were hung on the clothesline inside the room. These clothes were in tatters and breathing their last. After a brief silence, I asked if we could have drinks to which she gleefully replied in the affirmative. I took this sign as moving a step nearer to my subject that is Guddi. This was probably the only way I was able to broach a very sensitive issue which was buried long ago inside her heart. Guddi was still swaying a bit from one side to the other since she was still not awake from her yesterday's 'spirited' hangover. She informed me that I could have beer, whiskey and rum. I told her to fetch a bottle of whiskey and gave her an Rs.100 note. After a while she came back with a whiskey bottle "No.1" along

with a glass and a small pouch of salted chips. I insisted that I would have it only after she got a glass for herself to which she agreed after the formal dilly-dallying tactics. The water tumbler from which we were supposed to take water was de-shaped, corroded, and had dark interiors. I was shrieking in silence to this horrifying scene. I thought to myself, "How can I possibly drink water from a tumbler which was as dark as tar and possibly carrying germs of various shades and influence?"

But then, I had promised myself that no matter what, I have to live up to my discipline which follows a famous dictum and that is the 'emic view'. Mr. Malinowski was ringing loud and clear in my mind...live, behave and act like your subject...in one word place yourself in the shoes of your subject. This was Mr. Malinowski harping on his practical approach to studying one's subjects.

I told her to sit on the bed which was felt soggy for some time. I could smell semen and urine, cigarettes, and pudiya in the room. As soon as we settled in a bit, she told me to prepare a peg. I followed what all she had to say and while I started having small dregs, she did the 'bottoms up' show. She was sitting almost on the edge of the bed and I asked her if she could make herself more comfortable. She complied with my request but not before asking me to make another peg for both of us. Since by this time, I was also through, I started making a fresh peg for both of us.

It was at this moment that I asked her "You know what, as soon as I saw you for the first time, I thought that you were Nepali. And then immediately I pounced upon another question. I said, "O.K Guddi, tell me something...why do you do this"? What compels you to getting yourself abused by strangers every moment for a small amount?

**"I WAS SHRIEKING IN
SILENCE AT THIS
HORRIFYING SCENE"**

To this she immediately took down the second peg as if she was gulping down water and looked at me from the corner of her eyes and gave me a mischievous grin. In a husky tone and as if loaded in her throat full of some ancient guilt, she replied, "No one does it out of any liking. One is compelled to do so."

On further probing, she replied that her parents had passed away at an early age and after her elder brother got married, he left for some other place with his newlywed wife. Now in this situation, she was alone in this place and had nothing else to look forward to except entering this murky world. Immediately she had tears in her eyes which rolled down her cheeks. I was quick to respond to this difficult situation and wiped her tears away.

She shifted towards me and kept her head on my lap. I was a bit tense with this reaction of hers and to some extent blamed myself for this situational crisis. Now there was just that last peg left for both of us. She was indeed finding another kind of solace in my lap and tells me, "You know what; I have not eaten for the past three days. I have only been having daru". I felt so sorry for this lady who had a 5 year old girl child whom she put in the care of others when soliciting customers or else performing the act.

Guddi as if in a great rush took out a small chit from under her pillow and directed me to dial a number. I dialed this number a couple of times but it did not connect. Guddi now sang couplets from a shayari which spoke of false promises, deceit and hollow words.

Without asking her, I was making the last peg now but this time around, I was making hers a wee bit stronger. She drank it as soon as I made it and was complaining that it was very hard. She spat again and opened a pudiya in her mouth which was reeking of alcohol and betel nuts. Now, she posed a question which threw me out

of my sanity couch. She asked, "Will you marry me? I have fallen in love with you".

I was lost for a reply but surprisingly I said "Why not. What is wrong with you or me". You are young and so am I". To this she shot back immediately with a shine in her eyes. "But you will have to adopt my daughter." I replied, "Yes, why not. I don't have any hassles in accepting your daughter but then you will have to leave this profession". To this there was no reply from her side. She kept mum.

It must have been 25 minutes by now and she wanted to relax. Guddi took the dirty pillow and was posing as if she was in trance. All of a sudden, there were some banging on the door and I could sense that it was the hurly-burly lady who used to sell tea just opposite Guddi's house. It was later that I found out that Guddi used to give a part of her earning to this "local guardian". Although Guddi used to practice her occupation independently, still she needed a person who could take care of any untoward incident. The banging grew harder and with it a volley of abuses hurled at Guddi since it was time that I left.

The madams have a great fear that their girls or 'mangtins', who stay for a longer time with the clients may elope or fall in love. They are especially scared if the client is a Kajwa i.e a non-Nutt male. The abuses were intolerable and seconds later a little girl who must not have been more than 7-8 years also joined in the much sullied cacophony. Guddi signaled me to keep mum but after a while she asked me to give Rs.50. I did so which she slipped outside the door.

While all this was going on, I was feeling a bit scared now as things had hopped from being not so smooth to dangerous. By this time, I had decided that I should leave the place. In a desperate attempt, I dialed Tinku's number and asked her to bail me out of this situation. But

unfortunately, Tinku was busy in one of her meetings with the Mahila Mandal and a bank manager for sanctioning loans to the Nats for small business ventures. She however said that she was sending Meena to help me out.

The situation was getting tense as there was repeated banging on the door for the second time after a gap of 10 minutes. This time around, there was another prostituted lady who was working for the lady selling tea opposite Guddi's house. The pompous lady tried to make all efforts to watch me through the small gap in the thatched door. We both saw each other. She saw me holding the glass and spoke to another person who was standing with her. She said, "The boy is not 'doing' anything". For the guardians, not doing anything smells of a lurking danger. Guddi signaled me to part with another

Rs.50 this time. I did so but not before I showed her my wallet and told her that I didn't have anymore and that I was peeved at this treatment.

Meena came and shouted my name but as I was going to open the door Guddi pulled me to her and said, "You can touch me wherever you feel like". Her word fell on me like a hard shell knocking me off my senses. It was at this juncture that I said, "Guddi, I had come here to talk to you as a friend but am pained to get this low and abusive treatment. I don't think I will come back." She didn't say anything or rather didn't have anything in her stock of words to pacify me and hold me back. I opened the door and Meena was there; my guardian angel.

VOLUNTEER BLOG

By Belle Staurowsky

Chicago, USA: In the beginning, there was inspiration, who ever stood up to their tormentor, and are trying and this inspiration came initially from my reading of to fight injustice without any resources to speak of and Nicholas Kristof's NYT column about Assiya Rafiq. Her at great personal risk, and I found myself thinking, harrowing story, her determination, her courage, and "What phenomenal people. What can I do to help? her will to stand up against overwhelming odds educated me to the fact that ordinary people who find themselves in extraordinary circumstances often end up doing the extraordinary themselves (to read about Assiya, see below).

I find it interesting that almost a year ago to the day, I found myself getting ready to host a grilled cheese fundraising dinner (suggested by my most excellent friend, Sandy) to raise money for Assiya. That little endeavor brought in over \$600.

And then I read "Half the Sky," and read Ruchira Gupta's story and the founding of Apne Aap. And I started thinking of the all the young ladies in the world

And then I saw this on Oprah's website [http://www.oprah.com/oprahshow/How-to-Help-End-Sexual-Slavery:](http://www.oprah.com/oprahshow/How-to-Help-End-Sexual-Slavery)

Young girls, in India, learning how to kick butt – how cool is that? I saw this picture, and knew this was something I could do. And now, six months later, it is soon to be a reality. I am getting psyched.

So that is where this whole trip idea came from.

My departure date is nine days away. I spent yesterday

trying to find the right shoes to deal with heat, humidity, and rain. Found them online – hope they get delivered on time. I also got a video

**IN THE BEGINNING:
"WHAT CAN I DO TO
HELP?"**

cam/still camera that will allow me to start posting photos and video to this blog, so stay tuned.

I have to go now to keep in shape for this trip. Have been trying to get my cardio strong – can't find the elevation for Forbesgunge. If it is high altitude, I'm screwed; p. Higher elevations will really tax me for a bit; I know this from Pakistan and Mexico – but nothing that 3 days of acclimating can't take care of. It'll all be good.

I had been assured last week that I would have my Indian visa in hand by yesterday. Today's call revealed that it will be sent out today, or maybe Monday. I asked the very nice lady at Travisa if I should start biting my nails yet, and she assured me no...not yet.

UPDATE: Oh Happy Day!!!! FedEx just delivered my visa and passport...relief.

I took the name for my project from the buddhist deity, Tara or तारा (sanskrit), who is the mother of liberation. There are different colors for Tara. In her green form, she is known as the Buddha of Enlightened Activity. This is what I aspire to, that through my activity (enlightened or not), others may be empowered, liberated. That is the dream that has set me on my journey of one thousand miles. Actually, I don't know how far it is to India from my little place here in Oakwood Hills, Illinois, but my guess is it is probably over a thousand miles. Dream big or stay home, and I have chosen to dream big.

I leave August 3rd to head to Forbesgunge, Bihar, in a remote north-eastern corner of India. Bihar is

one of, if not THE, poorest area in India. People there earn just 50 cents a day. Crime is rampant. And Forbesgunge is on a trafficking route that transports kidnapped girls and young women from Nepal to cities such as Mumbai for sex work. An organization was started in the 1990s by Ruchira Gupta called Apne Aap (www.apneaap.org) whose mission it is to rescue victims of human trafficking and rehabilitate them. It is at their centre that I will be spending roughly a month, teaching self defence and karate.

The thought of this journey for me at this moment is stressful. I am trying to get my shots, my anti-malarial pills, get my visa and passport back from processing, get a list of things that will prepare me for the monsoons which will be going on during my stay, decide how best to teach a group of 50 young ladies who may or may not speak English, decide how best to teach on mud floors, decide how best to teach in 90 degree un-air-conditioned spaces, decide how best to deal with creepy crawly things at night when I'm sleeping in an un-air-conditioned room with temperatures in the 80s, decide how best to protect my personal safety in an area where a murder happens every two hours, and plan for roads to be out and travel generally delayed because of rain, rain, and more rain. It's a good thing I like a challenge.

And when I start thinking like this, I like to remind myself of the young ladies I will be encountering, remind myself that while for me, my living conditions there might be poor but temporary, but for them, it is an everyday occurrence. And then some. And now I am back to sanity.

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