

THOSE WHO DRINK TOO MUCH BEFORE COMING HERE, MISBEHAVE

By Purnima Mondol

Ghutiari Sharif, West Bengal: I am 19 years and a half years old. I am from Bhangar, in South two Paraganas. My parents, two brothers and two sisters have a pond where we breed fish. My family knows that I work as a health worker. I didn't like studies. I used to play around. My folks wanted me to study – everyone in my house is literate.

I was married and had a child. After keeping house for three years, I returned to my parents' place, with my child, because I didn't get along with my husband. But my parents pestered me to go back to him. Leaving my child with my mother, I went to Sonarpur because I wanted to work as a domestic servant. There a girl befriended me and brought me here. The girl made me unconscious with drinks and drugs and brought me here. When I gained consciousness and the effect of the drugs wore off, I thought this was the only way I could make a living and rear my son. I could have escaped if I wanted to, but I realized I had nowhere to go. I started working the day after I came here. But for the first six or seven months, the girl who brought me here took all the money.

I had to service seven or eight clients per day. The rate is Rs 50 per ejaculation and Rs two00 if the client stays for the night. I earn a minimum of Rs 200 and maximum of Rs 500 per night. So many different kinds of men come here. Not all tell the truth about themselves. Some clients want to have kinky sex. They behave horribly if you refuse, though they don't hit you. Those who drink too much before coming here, misbehave.

I can refuse to entertain a client if I am very tired. If he is drunk, I feel scared – I tell the owner that I can't entertain him. If the client wants me to do something I am not willing to do, I tell the owner who tries and reasons with the man. If the client understands, well and good – if he doesn't I refuse to entertain him. We have to buy condoms – we get 18 condoms for Rs 5. We end up with Gonorrhoea, syphilis, marks and sores on our private parts. Once I had white discharge. You get it when your body gets heated. You should have cold drinks to cool you down. My back and limbs ache – especially before New Moon and Full Moon nights. Previously, I used to suffer from high fever from time to time. I took poison. The last time I tried to put my head on the railway tracks, but then I thought who would take care of my family if I died? I am not very hot tempered. But earlier, I used to feel angry very often. Now it has subsided. I sit quietly in my room till I cool down. I have seen a few girls here try to kill themselves. I tried to cut myself twice and saw the blood ooze. But then I thought there was little to gain from cutting myself. Sometimes – I wake up thinking of my life, my future and what lies ahead.

DID YOU KNOW?

RAPE FIGURES IN NEVADA, WHERE PROSTITUTION IS LEGAL, ARE HIGHER THAN THE NATIONAL AVERAGE

There is absolutely no evidence for the claim that if it weren't for prostitution, more women and children would be raped. This myth is offensive to men who choose not to abuse and rape women.

Does anyone really believe that men are incapable of control, and that they will inevitably rape a woman or child if they can't have sex?

In addition, this myth ignores the sexual abuse of women in prostitution. Women in prostitution are disproportionately affected by rape, sexual and physical violence. In the US FBI crime figures show no evidence that prostitution leads to a decrease in rape. In fact rape figures in Nevada, where prostitution is legal, are higher than the national average (FBI Uniform Crime Report, 2004)

I WILL STUDY AND HELP MY SISTERS

By Ruksar Nat, 17

Khawaspur, Araria, Bihar: When I was young my sisters were in prostitution. I used to go to school or stay at home most of the time. We faced many difficulties and then I was also put into prostitution finally when I was 14. My parents used to live in Jogbani and sell meat of goat and lamb. One day the railway authorities said, this is government land, please leave it.

They were evicted. People from my clan came and took my parents to live where they lived. I cannot remember who came to fetch us. When we shifted to Khawaspur, my parents did not have enough money to live, let alone buy and sell meat. Then my mother, sisters, brother all began to go to work in the fields. They used to earn Rs 10-20 at the end of a hard day's work in the field. It was impossible to run our family on so little money. We are seven siblings. My brothers or sisters were not able to study. Society never gave us money to live on, but ostracized us saying why you have put your elder daughter into prostitution.

All the girls from our clan had already been put into prostitution. My sister was put into prostitution in Khawaspur. After that my other two sisters were also put in. Slowly my family became greedy and they thought that if they could earn so much with one sister why not two more.

I used to go to school, but the villagers looked down on me. They used to say my sisters are in prostitution and my parents are bad. Sometimes in school, I would not get place to sit. The teacher would behave differently with me than with the other students. The girls, who studied with me, never invited me home and thought badly of me. The master once beat me.

Once, my mother sent one boy to call me home. I asked Masterji to give me leave to go home. He said I know why they are calling you home. We started arguing and then the Master began to beat me.

At home, I used to hear everyone talking about me- that we have to put her into prostitution also. One day at night, I asked my elder sister, "Didi will I have to be prostituted also? First you were put into prostitution, then Sitara didi, can I not be married?" Didi said, what can I do? The person who gave birth to you has to decide. We have brought you up, with great sacrifice and suffering. Sitara and I have sacrificed our lives. When we did it, it was difficult for us. Why should it be different for you?

When I used to go to school, all the village boys looked at me with a bad eye. Once, I was coming back from school, I was alone. A Mandal caste boy caught me and started hurling abuses at me. After some heated argument, I came home and told my mother. The people of the village said this girl is lying, girls from the Nat community are bad and this is how they try to attract attention.

When the first buyer came for me, I was 14 and he was 45. No girl dreams that she should be raped by a 45 year old man at age 14. I had never thought that my dreams would be torn apart like this.

He was a Muslim and was from Shyampur Pachauli village. He still comes to our area and I don't know how many young girls he has raped and violated. He gave Rs 15,000 and a gold nose ring to my parents. When I asked my mother and sisters why I was being put into prostitution, they told me that this was my duty. Then I asked the buyer to let me go, begged and pleaded, but he had already paid for me and refused to let go. He was dead drunk. I had to do what I did not want to do to look after my parents.

I could not expect help from the police. If there is any case-fighting, brawl -then women have to give their bodies to the police, Panchayat authorities and other powerful people. If we

have a fight with the buyers who come over money or when they try to force sex on us without money, then all the abuse has to be borne by the prostituted girl. No brother, mother or sister comes to share the abuse. All suffering has to be borne by the girl.

We were forced to have sex with buyers who were dead drunk and could not even stand. If we refused, then they say you have to give us sex since as you are a prostitute. If a buyer pays Rs 400 instead of Rs two00 he makes sure to get sex worth the amount of money he has paid, by asking for different kinds of sex.

I want to tell every section of society that you should feel ashamed to buy girls who are your daughters' age. Girls don't dream of being raped but these buyers tear apart the dreams of girls like us. The biggest culprits are those buyers who buy girls.

All those who promise us love actually are just hungry for our bodies. Some girls have managed to leave and get married but most girls who are young and healthy are kept in prostitution.

My brother tried to open a shop but it closed after two or three months. He is an alcoholic and spent more than he earned. He was dependant on alcohol, tobacco, gutka, there is no intoxicant that our community does not take. Girls are also dependent on drugs to forget the pain and sorrow of the torture inflicted on them by buyers.

I was also dependant on alcohol not because of choice but because of necessity. I like vegetables but many family likes meat and fish. We are listed as APL. We got some money and some grants after the floods. I was small during the riots but my family members said Muslims were attacked and the Nat and Lahiri were beaten very badly in 1992.

Many criminals have attacked us. Once, my father was kidnapped. Twice Maisoon, my sister was kidnapped. The police does nothing. If we ask members of society to help, they turn us away, saying this is your profession.

Pregnant women deliver babies at home with a midwife. No one has come here from the angnavadi centre. The women who are now no longer in prostitution don't know how to earn any money. Parents don't support the girl and the she just knocks around till she dies.

I have had one abortion, in the Forbesgunge private hospital. My mother and sister had gone with me. Now I think that my sister and mother should not be prostituted in the future. I don't have a bank account but have a LIC. I don't have land. When we find a boy for my sister, we will find a boy who stands on his own feet. Sometimes the boys' parents may

throw the boy out of the house or force the girl into prostitution. There are changes in the family. The same society that used to laughs at me now says respectfully that this girl was a prostitute earlier, but today she is a teacher. I sit with good people now, maybe I will change. I don't want to get married. I want to stand on my own feet first. Many boys will offer love and marry me and then later when they are satiated with me, they will sell me to a brothel.

Girls and women should stand on their own feet, so no one can trick them. Girls should be kept away from their families so that they are no seduced by the affection and duty to their families and put into prostitution. If we stand on her own feet, we can change our family and community. I am out of prostitution. I will study and help my sisters, change society and become a role model for my community.

EVERYBODY WAS NOT WILLING TO WEAR A CONDOM

By Radha (name changed)

Liluah home, Kolkata: I hail from Naate, a village near Lakshmikantapur. Our economic condition was very poor. We come from the potters caste. Father was permanently ill, mother used to work in a brick kiln, my elder brother used to work in a sweetshop and my elder sister used to work as a maid. There was no money to go to school. My younger brother and I were admitted to a school once, but dropped out on the very next day because the teacher treated us badly and my brother beat him up and we fled school and never returned. We brothers and sisters got along very well. We really loved each other.

One day, a close friend of mine who we know used to work outside took me out. I had no idea where we were going and thought that it's just a day's outing. But she sold me to someone who sold me to a Mumbai brothel. At that time I was barely 1two years old. I was crying heavily, when a Bengali girl, coming from Jayanagore, told me that I had been fooled like her and was sold. Now the men would come and do 'dirty work' with me. I tried to escape several times, and got caught every time. After each escape I used to be beaten up like a beast by the Nepali Madam.

Every day I had to entertain at least 10 customers. The good friend from Jayanagore always tried to protect me and she warned me not to entertain any client without condoms.

There was a general vendor who used to come every day and he used to sell condoms, two for 5 along with other sundries. I tried to persuade each customer to wear a condom, but as you know, everybody was not willing to wear it.

The madam could not care less and did not pursue it with the customers. But I was insistent on it and most of the customers used to wear it.

I hadn't heard anything about STD/AIDS at that time. I used to smoke cigarettes but did not drink. The other girl from Jayanagore was desperate to escape and one day, she informed the police. The police raided the brothel and rescued me and put me in a Mumbai Home. Later I was sent to the Liluah Home. There, after a compulsory Eliza Test, I was found HIV+.

When I came here, I was suffering from TB, Hepatitis and genital herpes, for which I used to get regular medical treatment. Now I have no serious health problem, I am very fine.

A LOOK AT THE WORLD OF NATS

By Fatima Nat

Forbesgunge, Bihar: My father was a cattle herder a Sheikh by caste (a high caste Muslim) and my mother was a weaver (a low caste Muslim). My grandmother was a Nat and my grandfather was a Sheikh. I have two maternal aunts and two maternal uncles. I am married with Md. Shoaib who is an auto driver and am his third legally wed wife. The other two are dead. I have four kids and the eldest one Jyoti was born when I was twelve. Aman the youngest one is one year old.

I have been working with this NGO Apne Aap Women Worldwide for the past two years and before this I was involved with the GOI's Literary Mission. It was such a big fraud and eyewash like all government programmes and schemes. I used to take classes for the prostitutes and otherwise. At the moment, I am preparing for my matriculation examination and look forward to see this entire red light area being clean and wiped out of this scourge. At the moment it is hell. There are seven girls in this area who are on the throes of getting into this profession.

In this area there are approximately 50-75 girls who are in this profession. In fact there are even more but the others are in Dharamganj or Delhi. Approximately 3-4 who are the real Nats. The husbands are from the Nat community and always Muslims but the wife or keep can either

be a Muslim or a Hindu. Seeing the current nature of violence, I feel it is better that they become owners or mailks themselves rather than getting beaten up mercilessly.

There is an elaborate ritual performed before a girl is pushed in the throes of prostitution. If the girl is from the Nat community itself, then she is asked to present herself in the presence of the community members and a ceremony is performed which is called MISSI MEHNDI whereby the ladies from the community apply tamarind paste on the girl's body and the vermilion mark is put in the mid parting of her hair. It is symbolic of the fact that the girl is married. This ceremony is being abolished now as it creates lot of confusion between a real married lady from the outside world and non-Nats or Hindus and a girl who is at the cusp of entering prostitution. Another ritual called MATKOR is performed which is in sync with the Hindu marriage ritual where four bamboo poles are erected to create a canopy and the ritual is performed. The girl is also given jewellery and other items of make-up.

A Nat man can only marry from the Nat community but keep a lady from a non-Nat or a Hindu famiy. The Hindus are normally from a low caste like Dusadh and Chamar. Nats from Nepal are not into prostitution and therefore they

don't accept water from those Nats whose family is into prostitution.

The Nats owe their origin since Britishers came here. They are basically god-fearing people so much so that even kids from Uttari Rampur (A rival area / locality of Uttari Rampur) can threaten the Nats living in this red light area. They are very scared of the law and police and give the police officials as well as the sarpanch and mukhiya a regular cut so that they are not harmed in any way.

We have a Nat Panchayat. The eldest member in the family as well as the elder/sarpanch usually a male is called a SARGYAN. A female member is made a Sargyan only in a case where there isn't a male elder in the family or is either mentally or physically not fit. If in case, members do not listen to this Sargyan's orders, then a token amount of Re.1 is given to the community Sargyan and is called SAHUL. The family is then socially ostracized from the Nat community. If the person wants to be included again as a Sargyan, then a panchayat is called and the said person is levied a fine after which he has to throw a feast.

There was a girl and was into this trade only for 6 months and a BJP leader fell in love with her and now she is happily married to this man and stays in Delhi. Her new name is Shikha Jain.

Shaoib before getting married to me used to have a keep who was earning for him. He used to gamble, drink, and make merry and all other vices one can possibly think of. In fact when I got married to him and was pregnant with Kajal, I was beaten up since I knew the trade secrets. I was not even allowed to sit outside.

Things however began to change after 2004 and it was because of me. Shaoib's mother herself kept 6 girls. I helped four escape when I came here as a married girl. Now, only two are left, Afsana and Rukhsar, and their mothers. I was

myself twelve when I got married. This is also the age for a girl to be pushed into this trade. Those girls who are in this profession aren't allowed to marry and attend any function elsewhere in the community. They are not even allowed to touch the marriageable items like pots, kalas, madwa etc.

A mother who wants her daughter to enter this trade would drill into her daughter's mind that she was good looking and beautiful and that she would fetch millions. It is basically the mothers who are responsible for pushing their daughters in this inferno.

Usually a good looking girl would earn between Rs 2,000-Rs 15,000 a day. The customers have to pay more if they want to have drinks. It could be Rs 1000-1500. If the girl is not that good looking then she might end up with Rs 300 to 400 per day. A customer then would be paying Rs 20-30 only.

In order to look plump, beautiful and fleshy, the girls eat medicines. From inside, these prostituted girls are very sad. They have to show that they are happy from outside in order to attract customers. In order to bear the torment and face all the torture from the hands of the customers as well the guardians, they take drugs, alcohol and do gambling.

If the girl has a kid already then she would not allow the kid to be near her since it would reduce the price. The customers or 'passengers' as they are called prefer a raw and fresh girl who has not had any issue.

If the girl is the earning member of the family, then she becomes the owner/master of the house in many senses as she is the bread winner for all the other members. She at times threatens the family members and in this sense has the negotiating power. But then this is only restricted to those girls who are from the Nat community like ones own daughter, sister and

wife. If the girl is a non-Nat then she doesn't have any rights so much so that she can't even take food from the kitchen with her own hands. In this case then, it is her guardian who owns her takes the decision. But speaking in a general sense, it is the woman who takes the decision since the men and husbands are mostly idle, drunkards and drug addicts

The clients are Politicians, Marwari businessmen, bus drivers, police, sarpanch, etc. The customers are from all the castes and religion. But if it is a Hindu, then he has to be from the low caste. The clientele is usually Muslim.

There are only two kinds of people in this area who have money; one who 'owns' a girl and the other who is a shopkeeper/ businessman. People don't lack money. They have their own bank accounts. They spend their money in gambling, drinking, food which necessarily has to be non-vegetarian.

We have KHANTA; a ceremony to find out the truth. A 'khanti' which is an iron rod with one of its flattened and also made sharp in order to dig a hole or bore in the earth is made hot and kept on two and a half leaf in the palm of both the accused and the accuser and then made to walk 40 steps. At every step, there is a candle burning and the accused is blind folded and he picks up the candle at the 40th step and the blindfold is removed. The person is given grains to rub on his/her palm for a few seconds and if it doesn't cause any wounds, then the accusation made against him/her is declared to be false.

The Nat men are even settling down with Hindus. That is why you will find that on death, both the religious rituals are observed depending upon the religion of the person. One is not forced to eat beef if he is a Hindu. The Nat observe all the fasts and religious festivals with equal fervor as any other non-Nat Muslim person.

There are no (regular) health check-ups for HIV / AIDS detection. If a government doctor comes, then all the girls rush inside their respective houses.

This profession can be curbed if the buyer is punished. If the demand side is completely cut off maybe by using threat to the customers or by creating a movement in the area which is anti-prostitution, then this problem can be tackled in a big way. There has to be a fear in the minds of those who enjoy this kind of physical bonding. Moreover, the parents or guardians of these girls should be punished along with the hospital staff who sell abandoned girl children (for Rs.50-100) from the hospital.

There should be more SHG's in this area since women's organizations are necessary and essential. It is also necessary to revive the dead or dormant dreams and ambitions. There is an urgent need for residential/ board schools be made for boys. We need to impart a good/moral education to these kids. Apne Aap is conducting sewing and tailoring classes, incense stick making classes. Talks are on for getting the marketing done for all these. In fact, the NGO is trying to talk to banks for providing soft term loans to people from this community in order to start a business venture.

Nowadays, the girls are duped into marriage and later sold in these areas through pimps. In fact the boys perform the marriage rituals and later sell off their wives. Many of the girls come from Bangladesh, Nepal and Kolkata. Most of the cases of girls are trafficked through false promises of love and a marriage later on. The trafficker doesn't do anything except the buying and selling of girls.

The trafficker gets Rs.10,000-12,000 but the main money is earned by the middlemen. These middlemen sometimes keep the girl for a time period in which they teach them proper manners and etiquettes and later on sell them to

another middleman. The village mukhiya Ashfaq is the main culprit in this area. He has himself kept three girls who end up earning Rs.10, 000 a month

Sometimes, the girl is kept chained and locked outside. If at all a girl is caught escaping from the house, then the punishments and the torment that she has to undergo is simply unbearable. She is beaten to pulp and on any part of the body that the guardian feels like. But, if the girl has finally managed to run away and is found loitering on one of the main streets which is removed from this red light area then she cannot be touched by the middleman, pimps or the guardians.

If the girl goes to study outside, then she is treated very badly and is still taken to be a prostitute, thief, and therefore forced to sit back at home. The MOHALLA as the red light area is called in the local parlance is a stretch where people who don't have anything to do with this profession. There is an US versus THEM feeling between the outsiders who are non-Nats and insiders who are Nats themselves. The high caste Hindu men and women always look down upon those who are prostitutes in this area. On most occasions, the threat is so huge by the middlemen that she is unable to speak in front of the SP or other police officials. In fact I would say that the police is also into trafficking.

Violence is a part of everyday life. The girls are beaten up brutally and there is a use of iron knuckles, blades. Houses of the prostitutes get burnt down.

They sell bhang, marijuana, pills, and alcohol both beer and whiskey. But what the clients demand here is the local drinks which comes in a small polythene bag and is cheap. Drugs and pills like FORTVIN, ESPASPREXI-1, VELLIUMDEM,

COREX, PHENSYDRYL. In fact all the houses have a backyard where alcohol is stocked in order to serve it to the customers.

Earlier on, guardians used to sit with the girl and take money from the customers. After the client left, she was physically frisked and even her extra money (tip) was taken away by the parents. Now, the girls are in a better position with respect to the negotiation and the price of the service being offered. Today, they fix their own price and keep the tip. But, they have to part with the main income.

There are also 4-5 young agents (and not really professionals) in this area who roam around in the night and are on the lookout for prospective clients (basically new comers to the area or from outside) and who are rich can shell out money. These guys then take a cut (Rs.200-300) from the customers for doing the extra bit that is making available a girl late at night since by 9-10 in the nights, these mud-shutters go down.

Few of the girls own coloured television (like Chandani) which they can possibly afford to watch only late at night and that too if one is working as an independent prostitute. But those who are owned by the matrons and guardians are in an even worse situation since they can be forced to work till late at night and at very odd hours. Both the trafficked girl as well as the one from the Nat community ends up as not going for any kind of recreation since it becomes a long tiring day for them.

They prefer to sleep since they have to be prepared for another long hard day. The small kids as well as young brothers ask for a small amount to either buy something like PUDIYA (betel nut masala with some additives) or else watch a movie.

VOLUNTEER BLOG

By Belle Staurowsky

Araria, Bihar: Yesterday was my second visit to Babuan. Armed with two litres of water, a package of cookies, and a Kit Kat, I felt pretty good as Dheeraj and I set out at 7:30 am. The morning was sleepy, life stirring slowly to life as we passed by field and village, the sun climbing higher from the horizon. All was going so well...until we hit the Indian Border Patrol. Last week when we went, we blew right past this remote outpost without a problem. Yesterday, however, we were past their main gate by about 100 feet when we heard shouts. Some little girls in front of us herding goats said in Hindi to Dheeraj, "They are calling to you to stop." Oy.

So we turned around and drove back and were 'greeted' by three guards. They wanted to see my passport (which I luckily had on me this week), and after the guardsmen had had a chance to see it, they motioned for us to wait. Shortly, an older gentleman in civilian clothes marched down the path to the gate. He proceeded to ask Dheeraj all the questions that the guardsmen had asked; Dheeraj answered the same. Not that I understood all that was going on – everything was in Hindi. And then yet another gentleman came, this time in full military uniform, and English words such as "authority" and "qualification" emerged. At length, we were finally allowed to proceed, but the delay was due to the fact that we did not have authority of the provisional government in Babuan on our person to qualify our going back and forth from Forbesgunge to Babuan. Easily solved, apparently. Just 20 minutes down the road, Dheeraj veered off the road suddenly into the front yard of

a house. And wasn't I pleased to see that the provisional head in this area is a woman...

We arrived at the teacher Ritu's house at about 9:30, and almost immediately, the Karate Girls started to converge. During tea, I asked when we would go to the school to start class. "Not possible," Dheeraj replied, offering no explanation and no alternative. "Kahan (where) karate class?" I questioned suspiciously. Not meeting my eyes, his response came, "Here." 'Here' was a side yard sandwiched between the cattle corral and the guest meeting/private karate class room, an unshaded dirt area complete with mud, ruts, cow dung, and whatever else. Oh, joy.

**GIRLS ARE VERY
 TALENTED, VERY
 PHYSICALLY STRONG.**

But whatever trepidation I felt initially soon disappeared as I grabbed a stick and scratched the outline of a ladder in the dirt. Ladder drills, one of my favourite things at the dojo in the States, were in order to warm the girls up. Literally get them hopping.

And hopping they did. These girls are very talented, very physically strong (pound for pound they put me to shame), but light on their feet? Not exactly. But we persisted, and they laughed, and coached each other on. And, yes, there were the men again. This time one of them said in English, "Come on you bird brain. You have such a weak mind." Well, this put me in a bit of pickle. Did I want to walk over to him and slap him? Did I want to yell out, "Get off your fat butt and you try to do this"? Yes. But was that possible under the circumstances? No. But will that guy be there my next and last class? What do you think?

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Publisher	:	Ruchira Gupta (Apne Aap Women Worldwide)
Address :	:	D-56 Anand Niketan, New Delhi 110 021 India
Phone	:	011-24110056
RNI Number	:	DELMUL/2008/27727
Printer	:	Impress Printers, New Delhi