



# RED LIGHT DESPATCH

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DELHI, KOLKATA, AND FORBESGANJ (BIHAR)

## My Dreams

**“To become a doctor”**  
—Sahana Khatoon

**Bihar:** My name is Sahana Khatoon. I am 15-year-old and studying at Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV), Simraha. I was born and brought up in Uttri Rampur redlight area, Forbesganj.

I was going through an extremely difficult phase of my life and my stay at home was not free from hard labour. I was forced to drop out of school, but I wanted to continue my education and become a doctor someday. This way I wanted to help the girls, who do not have access to education especially my relatives. It will also help them to exit prostitution.

When I heard about the KGBV, I forced my parents to meet Apne Aap staff and enroll me in the Girl's hostel-cum-school for studies. They admitted me to the school and here I got trained in sports, karate, craft and computers. The teachers encourage us to lead independent and dignified lives. We all live together in the hostel where the environment is devoid of any segregation on the basis of religion and caste. We are all loved by our teachers. We enjoy our hostel life so much that we forget about our homes at times. I want to prove that a girl from the red-light area too has also potential to lead society. I wish our society, and the Government accepts us like anyone else and give us more opportunity so that we can prove ourselves. I also want all parents to send their girls to schools to study so that more and more girls can prove their capabilities, lead independent lives and also be able to support their families in future.

I am thankful to Apne Aap for providing me the platform.

## The Last Girl March in the Heart of the City

—Sarla/ as translated by Sanjay Verma

**Delhi:** My Name is Sarla and I am 15-year-old. I have studied till 3<sup>rd</sup> standard and could not study any further due to financial constraints and the social setup of the place where I lived. I belong to the Sapera community in Dharampura, Najafgarh.

Our main source of income is through snake charming. A typical performance includes hypnotizing a snake by playing an instrument called the ‘Pungi’, it also includes dangerous stunts like handling the snakes or performing other seemingly dangerous acts, as well as other street performance staples, like juggling and sleight of hand.

I have been associated with Apne Aap Women World for the last 4 years.

A rally was organised by Apne Aap on the 15<sup>th</sup> of December with women and girls of Sapera and Perna community in the memory of Jyoti Singh Pandey, who was brutally raped on the same date 2 years ago. At the rally a play based on women and girl safety was performed.

The rally marched from CP to Munirka where Jyoti had boarded the bus where she was gangraped. We paid tribute to Jyoti by organizing and participating in a candle light march.

**The event named as “Last Girl March”. It stands for those who are invisible, neglected and ignored.**

*(Continued on page 6)*

## Missing of three children of Munshiganj

—Laxmi Devi/ as dictated to Aruna Singh

**Kolkata:** Three children named Dhiraj Kumar Mahato (14 years), Niraj Kumar Gupta (15 years) and Prem Kishore Shah (14 years) from Munshiganj Red Light Area has been missing since December, 2014. My son and two of his friends told me that they were going to school to write their examination, but when they did not return even at nightfall I got worried.

I came to know that one of the children called his parents and told them that they were at Burdwan Railway station and asked for their blessing so that they could succeed at the task they had left to accomplish. We tried a lot to locate those children at every possible

place but failed. We then informed the Apne Aap office about our missing children on that very day.

There Fazul da from Apne Aap women Worldwide helped us draft three missing complaint and guided the relatives and parents to register missing diary at Watgunge police station and guided them to inform it to the missing squad of CID West Bengal for speedy action.

Subsequently, the missing diary was treated as FIR as per the direction of Supreme Court.

*(Continued on page 7)*

**Op/Ed:**  
**—Ruchira Gupta's interview in Women Lead Nepal**

***Interview by Megan Foo, President of Women LEAD's Hong Kong Chapter.***

**Ruchira Gupta** is the Founder of Indian anti-sex trafficking organization, Apne Aap, which has helped more than 20,000 at-risk and prostituted girls, women and their family members in red-light areas and slums across India to save themselves. In 2009 she won the Clinton Global Citizen Award for her work to end sex trafficking, 15 years after she won an Emmy for outstanding investigative journalism for exposing sex trafficking in the documentary, *The Selling of Innocents*. Ruchira helped create the first UN Protocol to End Sex Trafficking as well as the Trafficking Fund for Survivors at the United Nations by addressing the UN General Assembly on behalf of survivors and taking a panel of survivors to speak at the UN General Assembly in New York alongside Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay.

**Women LEAD: You are the Founder of Apne Aap Women Worldwide, an organization dedicated to ending sex trafficking by increasing choices for at-risk women and girls. What inspired you to found Apne Aap, and what has its impact been so far?**

**Ruchira Gupta:** When I went back to the brothels to show the selling of innocents, after the Emmy, the 22 women in prostitution who had told their stories in the documentary said they wanted my help to change their lives. They had four dreams: 1. A school for their daughters to save them from the same fate as themselves 2. A job in a office, where they could work fixed hours, nobody would beat them, where there was old age pension and 3. A room of their own: where nobody could walk in when they wanted, where they could sleep as long as they liked and where their children could play safely and 4. Justice -severe punishment of those who had brokered away their dreams by selling and buying them and those who failed to protect them from being trafficked or when they tried to escape.

Our aim was to create a world in which no woman is bought or sold. We decided to hire a teacher and in a small room in the red-light area, we started preparing the children for school. When they were ready, the women went as a group of mothers to the local school principal and cried and begged till he became his prejudice and admitted them. That was the first victory for the women and the Apne Aap teacher. Emboldened, the women then wanted to do something for themselves. We realized that to access anything they needed citizenship documents, like birth certificates or passports or other government-issued IDs. We helped them fill forms and then campaign with local authorities to get the documents. The women wrote slogans, made posters, signed petitions to put pressure on authorities to give them the IDs. If that failed, they spoke to the media. That helped them get both the IDs and the linked government subsidies like low cost food rations, low-cost health care, low interest loans, slowly reducing their expenses and desperation. Of course their was pushback from the pimps and brothelkeepers as their dependency on the brothels came down. They were beaten. We helped with legal support to go file a case

in a police station or testify in court. At the same time we started linking with livelihood promotion organizations and helping women open bank accounts to save some money safely.

More than 21,000 girls, women and their family members became members of this network and reduced their risk or dependency on prostitution. The first generation of daughters of these women are in college now. Over another 1200 are in schools for the first time in their families. They have put 66 traffickers in jail.

**Women LEAD: Why does women's empowerment matter to you?**

**Ruchira Gupta:** I have always longed for equality and justice. I have joined any campaign or movement for social and political justice. I slowly began to see that sex was a kind of class or caste; that of any group, females were the largest group that were universally unequal. So I began to campaign for women's empowerment to create a world which respected the full social, political and economic equality of women.

**Women LEAD: Can you talk about one woman who has impacted your life?**

**Ruchira Gupta:** I am deeply and fundamentally impacted by Gloria Steinem. With her I have experienced how movements grow and how immense our movement is. Walking through the red-light areas of Sonagachi or lobbying in Albany with New York state Assemblymen, our lives have interwoven into shared writing sessions, rallies, meetings, dinners, books, conversations, late night phone calls across continents, brainstorming and sometimes movies.

She has taught me that there are always more than two choices, and that there is a third way of proceeding that is familiar to human experience; that small acts have a big impact and when you do something you should not worry about how big its outcome will be; that only time will show, you have to do it as if it matters. Her feminism is rooted in the deep truth of our own experiences and if we do not challenge inequality at home, we will normalize and accept inequality everywhere. If we accept that one sex can be unequal, then why not one class or one race? She has influenced me to measure my actions in its value to the least powerful.

In my own work, I have gone on to call her "The Last Girl." She is weaker than the poor man, because she female, but she is weaker than the poor man's wife because she is a teenager and on top of that she could be the "last" because she is black, low-cast, first nation or native American. I have learned from her that we have to be open to listening to identify the weakest. I have seen her listen all the time.

**Women LEAD: What advice do you have for future champions of anti-trafficking?**

**Ruchira Gupta:** Join other movements for social, political and economic justice; after all, trafficking is an outcome of multiple inequalities and all will have to be rooted out together.

## Diary of a Social Worker

*Sahana Dasgupta*

**Kolkata:** My name is Sahana Dasgupta. I had completed my education as an M.A in Bengali from Jadavpur University, Kolkata. I started my career as a research associate in Jadavpur University. Meanwhile, I got involved as a volunteer in various activities, to address the social causes in different organization. During my job tenure in Ananda Bazar Patrika, I was involved in research activities and later, I decided to work actively in the developmental sector for the betterment of at risks and vulnerable to prostitution people.

Since 2003, I am associated with Apne Aap Women Worldwide. I work for the extremely marginalized women, stigmatized as “prostitutes” by the society, and have been effective with the survivors of the prostitution and the children of the prostituted women in Munshiganj and Sonagachi red light areas, Kolkata.

Initially, my role was to mobilize the activities in Topsia and Munshiganj. Those were the days when we had to face frequent problems from the pimps and the brothel owners. We were prevented from visiting the area. The pimps warned and threatened us to not visit the area. But this did not deter me and my zeal to help the women.

Eventually, our relentless efforts of approaching people were fruitful, as we develop a healthy relationship with the women and the landlord. Sonagachi is the largest red light area in Asia and I believe that creating a space for ourselves here is a commendable achievement.

For the last twelve years, I am working at Apne Aap with survivors of trafficking and prostitution. I work on forming women’s groups in their own communities and to ensure admission of the children of women in

prostitution in different residential schools within Kolkata and beyond.

Even after so many years in the profession, I, strongly feel that there is lot more to do for the women and the children. I am always considering different ways on how to approach more women and community, to understand their problems and difficulties in life and would be keen to show them how they can overcome with the hindrances.

**We all should know our constitutional rights, and so the women in prostitution. Accordingly, they can claim their rights from the society and government. They have to overcome all the barriers and will establish a place for themselves in the society. Their children will get proper education and job opportunities too. This would affirm their citizenship in the country.**

**Even after so many years in the profession, I, strongly feel that there is lot more to do for the women and the children. I am always considering different ways on how to approach more women and community, to understand their problems and difficulties in life and would be keen to show them how they can overcome with the hindrances.**

### Did You Know?

#### **In India:**

- There are 3 million women and girls in prostitution
- 1.4 million are under the age of 15
- 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

## Inauguration of a Sanitary Napkin Project

—Uma / as translated to Sudipta Dasgupta

**Kolkata:** I am Uma. I am a resident of Munshiganj Red light area. Here I am staying with my mother and brother for the last 21 years. I have been involved with the Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) for the last two years and recently I passed this course. I work with Apne Aap women worldwide as a youth mobilizer.

**I wish I could be another Ruchira Ma'am, have an organisation like Apne Aap women worldwide and work for the women and children of the Red Light areas.**

On 17<sup>th</sup> December, 2014 our sanitary Napkin unit was inaugurated by the members of the French Embassy. Basically we are 12 girls who are involved with this project. Rudolphe Monet the French diplomat inaugurated this Unit. We(I and my team) performed a welcome dance on the song "Desh Rangila". We were appreciated for our efforts and told that this unit would help us have our own business.

After a long wait we received our sanitary napkin machine on the 11<sup>th</sup> of December, 2014. Me and 6 other girls got trained to make sanitary napkins by Mr. Kannar from the Jayshree Industries. The experience was very thrilling for me. On being asked how I would go about doing this work by the French

diplomat, I replied to him saying that we intended to work with Women in Prostitution (WIP) and with Women at Risk (WIP); to work towards alternative livelihood options by increasing their choices of livelihood; to work with the objective of reducing the dependency of women and girls on prostitution from vulnerable areas and families. **It is an endeavor to prevent girls from getting into prostitution to earn a livelihood.**

I and my team were appreciated a lot by the members of the French Embassy and I thank Apne Aap team for all their support.

**It is an endeavor to prevent girls from getting into prostitution to earn a livelihood.**

**Get yourself involved!**

**Be a part of the campaign!**

Click a selfie and share it with us on the Facebook Page 'Cool Men Don't Buy Sex' <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Cool-Men-Dont-Buy-Sex/624526271001934> with #CoolMenDontBuySex #Selfie #ApneAap.

The Cool Men Don't Buy Sex Campaign is a call to end demand for sex trafficking which highlights the role that men play in fostering the sex industry.



Apne Aap's "Cool Men Don't Buy Sex" campaign was born to draw attention to the demand side of sex trafficking - the traffickers, pimps, and purchasers of sex. Apne Aap advocates for the criminalization of these individuals – they are responsible for maintaining sexual slavery and continue to exploit women and girls every day in India.

## Women Group makes Madhubani Painting at the Railway Station

—*Renu Devi / as dictated to Praveen Kumar*

**Bihar:** My name is Renu Devi and I am 32-year-old living in Kuber Tola, Forbesganj, with my husband and four children--two sons and two daughters. I have been residing at Kiran SEG, Kuber Tola, Forbesganj since April 2010 run by Apne Aap Women Worldwide.

I am also a member of Madhubani Painting Group of women trained by a volunteer from Italy.

On August 2012, we undertook our first painting job at the Forbesganj railway station with the support of Jill Pillai, an Intern with Apne Aap and our trainer. It was a joint effort by our trainer and Apne Aap Women Worldwide.

**We had made a lot of handicraft ornaments out of Madhubani Painting and earned some money by selling them with the support of Apne Aap.**

This was the second time that we were given a contract to paint the walls of the railway station by Apne Aap Women Worldwide and even received an honorarium Rs.250 per day per person.

A person named Mr. Naushad Alam met us from the railway's side. He is the contractor of railway, who was assigned to do the Madhubani painting works. We were a group of seven members, Asha Devi, Rita Devi, Janki Devi, Sunita Devi, Poonam Devi, Renu Devi and Tetri Devi.

We started the work from 26<sup>th</sup> December 2014 and were assigned to complete within a span of seven days.

**At first we were a bit skeptical and hesitant but gradually things fell into place and with courage**

**we accomplished the task.** Even though we faced difficulties in the process we finally finished our work and were appreciated for our efforts by all. It was one of the happiest days of our lives the day we received our money from Mr Naushad.

**To realize our own potential, executing it and being appreciated for it by people brings immense satisfaction to our self-confidence.**

I, generally visit the Forbesganj railway station to see our artwork on the walls. I find my identity on it. This was the fruits of our hard labour and courage.

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## The World Outside

“Dance away my sorrows”

— Dolly Mahato/ as translated by Hindol

**Kolkata:** My name is Dolly Mahato. I am 16-year-old. I am studying in standard XI and a resident of Munshiganj red light area. I live with my parents. I have been associated with Apne Aap since my childhood and also represented the anti-sex trafficking organization in various events.

On the December 18, 2014, during the visit of Eve Ensler in Kolkata, the NGO “Kolkata Sanved” organized a cultural event at Swabhumi. Me and seven of my friends from Apne Aap participated and performed at the event.

On that day, we started from Munshiganj red light area at 9 am to reach Swabhumi. Many other NGOs from Kolkata had also participated in the programme the same day. I was thrilled. Initially, we were rehearsing the dance item, but the moment Mr. Tanmoy Bose, a renowned musician, began playing the drums, we all started to dance at our own will.

We continued to do so for 30 long minutes, a part of dance movement therapy. The objective of this therapy is to allow the participant to dance freely without any hesitation and in the process help them vent out all their sorrows and stress without fear. The programme was organised to celebrate One Billion Rising Event for the year 2014.

After the programme at Swabhumi, we went to St. Xaviers College with all the other participants, where the next part of the event was planned. At Xaviers College their students performed several dance routines which

I thoroughly enjoyed.

**We all danced together once again at the College and even had the pleasure of feminist activist Eve Ensler joining us. After the event we all returned home.**

I’ll cherish this day forever as this was the first time I had been to Swabhumi, St.Xaviers College, participated in a dance therapy session and met Eve Ensler—the founder member of One Billion Rising Campaign.

**The objective of this therapy is to allow the participant to dance freely without any hesitation and in the process help them vent out all their sorrows and stress without fear.**

### *Continued from page 1*

Our march hopes to make every such girl, every last one of them, visible to the nation.

**I was very impressed with the mascot of the march who happens to be Priya, an animated character who is a rape survivor and flies around the world on a tiger and fights against sexual violence.**

We girls want our rights and want to be treated as equals. We are no different than men.

I am learning stitching work out here and have recently moved to Apne Aap’s head office. Apne Aap is an organisation which has joined hands with rights-based movements where girls and women are made aware of their legal rights.

I am glad to understand how Apne Aap has joined hands with groups spreading awareness about right to food, right to sustainable and dignified livelihood, right to land and housing, and right to education. Apne Aap also actively participates in movements against marginalization of the scheduled castes, the

scheduled tribes, the denotified tribes, women and girls.

Thanks to Apne Aap I finally know what my rights are. After I got to know about my legal rights I have gone around educating the girls of my community about it.

**These days they too stand up for themselves. They too have a voice of their own now. Apne Aap has not only made me aware but it has also increased my confidence manifolds. Now I feel empowered and independent.**

**We girls want our rights and want to be treated as equals. We are no different than men.**

## My First Day at Apne Aap

—Mairun Khatun/ as dictated to Sanju Kumari

**Bihar:** My name is Mairun Khatun. I am 35-year-old. I was forced into prostitution at the age of 14 years by my parents. For 20 years I was in prostitution, a month ago I had joined Apne Aap Mahila Mandal group. I mobilizes the women in our community to lead a life with dignity.

After joining the team of Apne Aap group, I found my confidence has grown manifolds. Now, I have friends who support me during times of need. In our area people are scared of police raid. Recently, police has conducted raid and rescued a girl in the red light area. The officials tried to drag me in the police vehicle. I protested and told them that I am not longer in prostitution. I have join Apne Aap group and started the respected livelihood training.

I have two children, a son and a daughter. My daughter will appear for Class 10<sup>th</sup> board exam, with help of Apne Aap. I wanted to save my daughter from prostitution and make her life better. She is very good in studies. I pray to God to give good result. It'll help her to get opportunity to study at Patna.

I am willing to stop exploitation of girls and women in our locality, as it is still prevalent here. I am deeply concerned for my son's future, as he is not good in studies too. **Most of the boys in our locality do not respect their parents. They consume alcohol and indulge in gambling. I want to make my son a responsible person.**

I want him to understand hard labour. I do not enjoy my life freely. I have the constant fear of my children's future. I am attending the meeting and workshop of Apne Aap on a regular basis.

**I believe one day; I have a job and safe house, where I will sleep without fear from criminals and traffickers. My daughter will be able to walk at night without a buyer's remark. My son will protect his daughter. He will never live off prostitution's earning. When, women and girls from red-light area will apply for government schemes, they would understand the vulnerability. If people know how to respect women and girls, they will not come here to buy sex. My daughter will have a respectable job and she would not hesitate to tell anyone that she was brought up in a red-light area. I want her not feel ashamed of the fact that I was into prostitution.**

### *Continued from page 1*

After that Fazul da again met all of us and advised to release the picture of our missing children on Doordarshan, Akashvani and missing child website for speedy action and he also helped us prepare the necessary documents.

**We would visit the police station everyday for updates and were informed that they kept changing their location. Every day we did go to police station and the missing squad of CID for the updates that if there is any information about our children. From there we came to know that they were moving from one place to another.**

Finally, the police tracked them with the help of the cell phone tower which one of the children used to call his parents before leaving and they were recovered, one from Bihar and the other two from Delhi, and brought back to Kolkata.

We got back our children after ten days. It is a great

relief to know that Apne Aap is always there help us during such kind of emergency.

We thank Apne Aap for their initiative to help locate and bring back our children.

Finally, the police tracked them with the help of the cell phone tower which one of the children used to call his parents before leaving and they were recovered, one from Bihar and the other two from Delhi, and brought back to Kolkata.

## Poems

### Mummy's princess, daddy's doll

I am my mummy's princess and daddy's doll.  
Grandfather's little angel  
That's not all !  
Oh! Lovely nightingale, grandmother calls  
So much love I feel for them;  
It gives me the strength to cross any wall.  
A friend is what I have found in you  
A bond that is so true  
My sister, that is you.

**Name:** Sneha

**Age:** 11 years

**Location:** Najafgarh, New Delhi

### My Motherland

My motherland India, you are full of love  
Your land can harvest gold  
We need not feel, we will lose  
The Sun shines first, the birds chirps  
This is the beauty of my land.  
I am mesmerised at the intense beauty  
It knows no boundaries.  
Sweetness in my ears  
The lush green grass that touches my soul  
My beautiful India, your beauty has no boundaries.

**Name:** Sneha

**Age:** 11 years

**Location:** Najafgarh, New Delhi



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## Red Light Despatch

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*Organizing communities to end sex trafficking—every woman free, every child in school*