



# RED LIGHT DESPATCH

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DELHI, KOLKATA, AND FORBESGANJ (BIHAR)

## My Dreams

### “To be a choreographer” Aneesa, 10 years

**Delhi:** My name is Aneesa. I belong to Perna community. I live in Sapera Basti. I am 10-year-old. I study in standard IV. I have three brothers in my family. I want to become a professional dancer when I grow up.

In our locality, there is an office of Apne Aap Women Worldwide. It is an NGO working to end sex-trafficking. In September 2014, a Bollywood Star Rani Mukerji came to the Head office. I and my two friends Aarti and Varsha performed a dance on a random Hindi song in front of ‘Rani Mukerji. She was pleased to see our performance and decided to sponsor Apne Aap for our dance classes.

Apne Aap team helped us in enrolling to *Shiamak Davar Dance Academy*. We all go to dance classes in Dwarka Sec 11. All expense including conveyance and admission fee is paid by Apne Aap.

Now, I have a dance learning Certificate. It was never in my farthest dream to get certificate in dance learning, the reason being, our family does not allowed us. I started coming to the Apne Aap centre three years ago. After being associated with the organisation, my hope of fulfilling my dream is possible. I want to become a well respected choreographer and I hope that with the help of Apne Aap I will be able to accomplish my dream. I have learnt dance for three months and will continue the class for another year. I thank Apne Aap for providing the platform.

—As dictated to Parvesh Sharma

## Arrest of Pratima Mondal from Munshiganj RLA

—Pratima/ as dictated to Fazul

**Kolkata:** My name is Pratima Mondal and I have been living in Munshiganj red light area with my husband for more than 25-years.

At the age of 13-years, a woman from my native village in Medinipore, offered me a job in Kolkata. She said, I could earn my livelihood. During that time, I did not give much thought about the consequences, as I was in need of money to support my siblings—a minor sister and two brothers.

We lost our parents at early age and being the eldest in our family, I had taken the responsibility to look after my younger sister and brothers. Hence, I didn’t have any option than to come to Kolkata with my neighbor. The lady brought me in Munshiganj red light area and forced

me into prostitution, since then I am in this area.

Earlier, I tried several times to escape from this area, but was unsuccessful due to my ‘Malkin’ and other pimps who maintain a good relation with the local police and other authorities. Also, we were not able to lodge any complaint against our ‘malkin’, traffickers and the landlord. The reason being, we were not aware of our legal rights, the procedures and outside support. Gradually, we gave up on our hope to escape from this locality. Then I came across Apne Aap, an NGO working with the prostituted women and girls to end sex-trafficking.

(Continued on page 6)

## Meena’s Opinion on Legalisation

—Meena/ as dictated to Manish Swarnkar

**Bihar:** My name is Meena and I strongly believe that prostitution can’t be termed as an occupation. I am saying this from my past experience. I was trafficked into the trade too. Most of the income generated by the girls and women in prostitutions are taken away by the pimps and the brothel owner.

Those girls and women who are forced into prostitution are unable to express their feelings freely. Because of the over looming fear from the brothel owners and also culture of shaming by the society at large. Even NGOs and police personnel can’t understand their agony. I have many things to say on why prostitution should not be legalized.

- Prostituted girls and women are stigmatized. Majority of them are not socially accepted by others. Also, not many are willing to marry those girls and women in prostitution. They are harassed on day-to-day basis.

- Prostituted women don’t have long life due to disease. Generally, when they die, the pimp will pressurize the prostitute’s daughter to get into the trade.

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**Op/Ed:**  
— Ruchira Gupta's column in The Telegraph

In *Mardaani*, Shivani Shivaji Rao, a cop, who befriends a young flower seller, ends up uncovering a whole sex-trafficking ring, when her young friend goes missing.

In *Dabang*, Chulbul Pandey, a cop who calls himself Robin Hood, recovers the money that a gang of robbers is stealing from a bank by beating them up and then keeps the money himself.

Both movies are action-packed, have special effects, chases, kicking, boxing, funny dialogues and suspense. So why did a man at a Delhi party tell me that he did not like chick flicks, when I asked him if he had seen *Mardaani*?

What makes *Mardaani* a chick flick? Is it because *Mardaani* has more dialogue than monologues, more relationships than cameos, and relies for its suspense on a story line, rather than episodic fights and dances?

Or is it that the only song in *Mardaani* is of freed women marching out of captivity rather than a misogynistic and voyeuristic “item” number to the words *Munni badnam hui*. Or is the sad truth just that the main character in *Mardaani* is a female cop and the main character in *Dabangg* is a male cop.

Does this mean that men are uninterested in or uncomfortable with female characters in lead roles as movers and shakers? And since men have more purchasing power, will they continue to make a difference in the box office success of movies?

**I'm not challenging the choice men make; I'm just questioning their discomfort. After all, if they think back to their school days, most authority figures in their lives were women-mothers and teachers.** Does their discomfort stem from this? Do they feel infantilised when confronted with strong women? So do they feel a greater sense of power when they see men in action oriented macho roles and feel disempowered when they see women in a similar role?

It is indeed sad that while whoever has power takes over the noun — and the norm — while the less powerful require an adjective. Thus, we read that there are “movies” and then there are “chick flicks or chick lit”.

So think about it: What will it take for movies like *Mardaani* to succeed? Will it require for men to get more comfortable with strong women or women to gain more purchasing power?

Indeed, as long as men are taken seriously when they save the female half of the world — and women aren't taken seriously when saving themselves, much less men

— the stories and narratives will always be more about power than talent.

Bias punishes everyone. What if as the opposite of “chick flick” or ‘chick lit’ as an adjective — “prick flick or prick lit” would guide our choices? Would it help us eliminate movies and writings, with mind-numbing and senseless violence or with caricatured men masculinised because they are bossy or dominant?

The simple label “prick flick” could lead us easily and quickly to filter through the thicket of televised, downloaded and theatrical releases to such so called attractions as all the movies and TV serials that glorify men as breadwinners and hunter-gatherers. From movies with Jeetendra, Dhamendra and Shatrughan Sinha, actors who conveyed heroism by watching women straighten their tie and send them to office to movies with Salman Khan, Sunny Deol, Akshay Kumar, actors who convey masculinity by watching women do item numbers.

All the movies and TV serials that glorify *sindoor*-wearing women protected by a male head of the family. These feature sadistic humourless husbands as ordinary male adults who haplessly are supposed to make all decisions, plus cleverly plotted humiliations of powerful women for the well-educated misogynist.

All the movies that glorify wars against Pakistan, and the war on terrorism. Watching Sunny Deol go and get a bride against all odds from Pakistan or a Hrithik Roshan shot in the torso and fall into a swamp in Kashmir is not much fun to watch — but they justify our country's purchase of more fighter planes and surveillance systems. Without frequent exposure to our enemies, how are we to believe that our defence budgets are justified?

All the movies that insist female human beings are the only animals on earth that seek out and even enjoy their own pain. From glamorised versions of stunted infantile brides submitting to dominating controlling families and husbands to such complex plots as the sublimation of Meena Kumari in *Pakeezah*.

As you can see, one simple label could guide you through diversity, and help other viewers to practice avoidance.

In our own self-interest as both women and men: why not look for labels to guide us to movies we do like, unbiased by sex or gender. It might open new frontiers and create more choices and if you really think about it, the man in the Delhi party might like to watch a chick flick after all.

## Diary of a Social Worker

—*Sudipta Dasgupta Majumder*

**Kolkata:** My name is Sudipta Dasgupta Majumder. I am working with Apne Aap Women Worldwide since 2012. This organization is effective on providing education to women and girls, who are into prostitution, so as to mainstream them and link them to dignified means of livelihood.

Currently, I am working in Sonagachi field centre as a project officer. **Every day is a challenge for me.**

Here, I mobilize the women of the red light community by generating awareness on the benefits of education for their children; motivating the mothers to admit their children into schools for their healthy growth and development; enrolling the drop-out students of Sonagachi red light area in the non-formal educational support and to re-admit them in the local school here.

**Sonagachi is the largest red light area in Asia, where I meet women everyday, who entered into the trade due to exploitation and absence of choice. We work to provide them other opportunity to live life with dignity.**

On November 21, 2014 I participated in a discussion whether Legalization of Prostitution is the 'way' with the community members of Sonagachi red light area. This is an unforgettable experience in my life. That day I heard many heart wrenching stories which the community's women encountered. Like Jaya masi (aunty), who is our community member and also very soft spoken person, shared about how she ended up here. She narrated that when she came to Kolkata, she was just 12-year-old, in search of her mother, who was working as a help in Central Avenue.

Jaya masi did not know anything regarding Central Avenue. Her neighbors helped her to come to Kolkata, and later found a job as a help. But local goons and

pimps tried to exploit her, but she was trying to save herself from them. Her nights spent in Sonagachi were with sheer fear. One day, the house owner, where she was working as a help asked her to leave. They had expressed their fear of being disturbed from the pimps and goons, as she was a teenager by that time.

She couldn't live in that house anymore. Jaya Masi felt very lonely and helpless. . She was clueless about finding a place to stay and search her mother in the area. During that time she met a lady who assured her of giving a job. Jaya masi trusted her and did not suspect that she was being trapped. She was 15 years then.

**She broke down while sharing her story--her journey from trying to find her mother and ending up in Sonagachi red light area, where she was forced into prostitution, beaten up and tortured, was heart-wrenching.** Now she has become very old. She is working as a maid servant in Durga Charan Street's house.

**After listening to her story, I was depressed, and it is heart breaking to witness so many cases of the same nature. Prostitution is nothing but exploitation. I am determined to show them new path, which will help them coming out of prostitution and live a healthy life.**

### 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

## My First Day at Apne Aap

—Arpita/ as translated by Pankhuri Sehgal

**New Delhi:** My experience of Apne Aap was a bit surprising as I joined the organisation thinking that over the years things have changed. I am a Front Desk Executive here and I have been told that the required training will be given to me and there is no reason for me to be afraid. I was excited, but to my surprise there was a lot of work assigned to me. It took me a while to understand my roles and responsibilities and in no time I realised that it was not going to be easy. My work here will be challenging and demanding.

I also got to know that the field in Delhi which was created by me after so much effort is no more the way it used to be and all the teenage girls have now been married off and some even have children. This reminded me of the different and difficult nature of our work. It is rather depressing and discouraging at times when you work hard and believe that your hard work will reap the benefits and you feel so close to your goal, but in a fraction of second you are again standing from where you had started.

However, the good thing was that after all the hurdles and disappointments still the name and goodwill of Apne Aap was being recognized everywhere and people were noticing our good work and somehow that's in itself was a big change. The Dharampura centre has been shifted, they have a new office now which is far

too big than the previous one with marble floored rooms providing ample safe space for the women and girls of the community. I was delighted to have known all these positive changes and was filled with a sense of achievement both for the organisation and that I'll be again resuming my work here.

Initially, I was feeling hesitant because the whole staff was new to me and I didn't know anyone but everyone was utterly sweet and helpful. I also felt bad since I knew nothing about anyone but everyone knew about me. Hence, I wasn't left with the opportunity to introduce myself. Moreover, in that moment I realised that I already have an identity and my story will always be told by Apne Aap even after me.

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### **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.

**Landlord's threat to evict Babli Singh in Sonagachi RLA**

—*Babli Singh/ as translated by Fazul*

**Kolkata:** My name is Babli Singh. I live in Sonagachi Red Light Area under jurisdiction of Bourtolla Police Station, Kolkata.

When I was only 16-year-old, a person came to our house and told my mother that he would provide a good job for me. At that time there was no other source of income as my father had passed away a few months ago.

**I, and my brother were too young to earn money to fulfill basic needs for our family. My mother worked as a maid for our daily bread. My mother was easily convinced with the lucrative job opportunity and agreed to send me with the person from a remote village to Kolkata.**

Later, I came to know that it was Sonagachi - a red-light area. The person kept me in a home and promised a good job within a week. Soon I realized that I was sold to a brothel owner. But it was too late by then. There was no way to escape from the house and thus, I was forced into prostitution.

Earlier my landlady/brothel owner extorted all my money claiming she provided me food and a room to stay. She continued extorting all my earning for around ten years. Then I realized about my rights and started giving her money only as a room rent and electricity charges as a tenant. I came to know about my rights by the members of ApneAap. They also told about some documents which could be documentary evidence to prove my legal status as tenant in that building.

There were also some documents and letters to prove

my present status. Since, then my landlady has been trying to evict me and some other women who resides in the same building.

Initially our landlady threatened us several times and also used anti-social aliments against us. But we stood together against this illegal eviction. We have lodged a complaint in local police station and initiated a civil suit before the court to establish our right.

**This is one incident in our locality but it may be an example to fight against landlord/ brothel owners who extort all our money which the women earn by selling their flesh without their wishes.**

**Later, I came to know that it was Sonagachi - a red-light area. The person kept me in a home and promised a good job within a week. Soon I realized that I was sold to a brothel owner. But it was too late by then. There was no way to escape from the house and thus, I was forced into prostitution.**

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## The World Outside

### *“Experience of participating in a marathon race”*

— Muskan/ as translated by Jasneet

**New Delhi:** My name is Muskan and I am 13-year-old. I belong to the Perna caste. I live in the Sapera Basti in Dharampura, Najafgarh. I study in VII standard. I have a brother and a sister. My father works as a band master. I have been coming to Apne Aap’s community centre since four years. There are a variety of programs that are held at Apne Aap, one of which I will share my experience about.

On 23 November 2014, I got a chance to participate in the Airtel Delhi Half Marathon. It started from Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, New Delhi. There were many categories of the run, but we participated in the 6 km run called ‘the Great Delhi Run’. We went there with 18 girls and four Apne Aap staff. We took a bus from Najafgarh and reached JLN Stadium at 9 am. All arrangements (including travel, running gear and registration fees) were done by Apne Aap.

There was great rush at the marathon, a lot of men, women and children participated. Everybody present there was supporting some cause, some campaign or their company or organization. Everyone wore colorful clothes. We were supporting ‘Cool men Don’t Buy Sex’ campaign at the marathon. We held banners and placards of our organization in our hand. With these thoughts, we ran six kms and finished the Great Delhi Run with great enthusiasm.

Bollywood superstar Bipasha Basu, the Brand Amba-

sador of Airtel Delhi Half Marathon was present there to cheer all the participants. Other celebrities like Vinod Mehra, Gautam Gambhir were also present.

After completing the six kms distance, refreshment was provided to us by the organizers. We were so hungry after the run, that we finished the refreshments in a split second. After everyone finished the refreshments, we got back home.

It was the first time in life that I got to participate in a marathon. It was really a unforgettable experience for all of us. I want to participate in the Marathon next year also.

**I like to come to Apne Aap Community Centre because I get chance to participate in different interesting activities.**

**It was the first time in life that I got to participate in a marathon. It was really an unforgettable experience for all of us. I want to participate in the Marathon next year also.**

### *Continued from page 1*

I started visiting Apne Aap centre and also participated in different activities on a routine basis.

Now, I am a member of Sonar Bangla Self- Empowerment Group (SEG), from where I am able to earn money in a dignified manner. I also run snacks -cum-pan shop in front of my house as an alternative source of income other than prostitution, as I am deliberating on the idea of exiting prostitution.

One evening, police personnel came to our shop and demanded money, as it is an unwritten practice of extorting arbitrary fines from the brothel owners, land lords and from the shop owners to secure them from any criminal allegation or cases. On that day, I deliberately denied to pay a penny to those police officials, as we’ve learned from Apne Aap that extorting arbitrary fines is an offence by the police personnel and any unauthorized organizations.

One evening, a raid was conducted by the local police alleging that they had credible information about illegal bottling and selling of country liquor from our shop.

Hence, they seized some empty cold drink bottles from my shop’s storage and later alleged that the bottles were used to sell country liquors.

They arrested me and sent to the Watgunge police lock up. Meanwhile, our other community women informed Apne Aap members and they initiated a talk with the Officer-In-Charge of the concerned police station and convinced them that it is a false allegation and there was no substantial proof to register any case under NDPS Act or any other sections of law. Finally the Officer-In-Charge ordered the sub-ordinate police officials to release me on a personal bond..

It is a daily experience for us on how police officials harass girls and women residing in Munshiganj red light area and other similar places across the country.

**If the residents, however, are made aware of their rights and legal formalities, police would not be able to harass any one on false charges.**

## Women Volunteers in Polio Drive

—*Bhawna Joshi*

**Bihar:** Countering the difficulties to convince people to take polio doses as there is some resistance, especially, in minority communities - mainly stemming from false rumors about the polio vaccine – to convince communities reluctant to take repeated doses as they feel their child was fully protected, through community involvement in the polio program, India has managed to eradicate polio everywhere.

Representatives from Apne Aap Women Worldwide took part in the UNICEF polio drive. Below is the excerpt from the interview of the some women who participated in the social cause:

**Bhawana:** What was the feeling on being a part of the polio vaccination drive and what were your experiences that you drew during this period?

**Poonam Devi:** I have two kids of my own. But, for me I make no difference in other children and love them equally. This is behind my motivation and I ensured that I checked every child that I came across. If the child's finger was without ink mark, it meant that the child has not been vaccinated and it was my duty and responsibility to give polio drops to that child.

**Gunja Devi:** It was a great sense of relief to vaccinate children by giving polio drops. I feel that we need to accept the small opportunity if it comes in our way in order to take the full responsibility in a bigger role.

**Sarita Devi:** I really enjoyed being a part of the drive. If I chanced upon a child who has not been given polio drops, I ensured to do the needful.

**Bindu Devi:** I had never imagined that I will get a chance to get associated with a public health organization. Giving polio drops to a child gave me immense

satisfaction.

**Rita Devi:** I was overjoyed to be selected as a volunteer for a social cause.

**Bhawana:** What were the challenges that you faced as a volunteer and how did you handle the situation?

**Poonam Devi:** Sometimes parents were averse to get their child suffering from fever being vaccinated. But I used to convince them that no adverse reaction will happen to their child.

**Gunja Devi:** Vehicles used to drive past quickly. To stop them, I used to blow a whistle, which a scout boy assigned the duty at the same time was carrying. The whistle made the vehicle stop and then I did the job of checking, and, if found carrying a child, I ensured the immunization work is done properly.

**Bindu Devi:** Sometimes parents used to refuse to get their child immunized, but my colleagues and I requested the parents to make the child have polio vaccine.

**Renu Devi:** I recall the last day even now. There was a small child of 18 days. The parents of the child refused to get their child immunized saying, "*We will give our child polio drops when it turns six months older*". It was then that I counseled them that a child should be given polio drops immediately after its birth. The parents readily agreed and thus I succeeded in immunizing the child by giving polio drops.

**During the polio drive, I made sure, I spent at least 10 minutes at every point and it was great to see all work as a team. The spirit was applauding.**

### *Continued from page 1*

- Prostituted women cannot be in the trade for long, as she grows older, her demand would decrease. During such time, they do not have much choice to save their daughter.
- Most of them take alcohol and drugs to ease their level of pain. They have to attend many clients a day, which they cannot refuse.
- Money will go to the traffickers, brothel managers and pimps. Hence, they barely have access to their own earning.
- Those girls and women in prostitution are extremely vulnerable to violence, which affects them in every possible manner—mentally and physically.
- **Their children are always vulnerable and at risk to prostitution. They are not exposed to normal surrounding for healthy mental and physical growth.**

- Legalization will promote trafficking of the lower caste/poor families/abandoned child into prostitution. Illiterate women and girls are at higher risk level. Who will care for their right?
- **It will increase the number of buyers, which would in turn increase the demand for girls.**
- Many unfortunate women and girls are trapped into prostitution. Even mentally challenged ones are not spared by the pimps and brothel owners.
- How will you identify trafficked ones, and help minor girls involved in prostitution? Police never initiate the rescue. They are also buyers. How will we end sex-trafficking and punish the culprits?
- **No woman would want their daughter to get into prostitution.** So, why do educated groups would think the poor and marginalized communities have left with only one of option earning their livelihood, prostitution.

## Poems

### Books

What worlds of wonder are our books!  
As one opens them and looks,  
New ideas and people rise,  
In our fancies and our eyes.  
The room we sit in,  
And we find over selves at play,  
With someone who before the end,  
May become our close friend.  
Or we sail along the page,  
To some other land or age,  
Here's our body in the chairs,  
But our mind is out there.

Name: Akshita Raj

Age: 9 years

From: Kishori Mandal, Forbesganj (Bihar)

### Our India

Punjab for fighting.  
Bengal for writing.  
Nagaland for beauty.  
Rajasthan for history.  
Maharashtra for victory.  
Mysore for silk.  
Haryana for milk.  
Himachal for apple.  
Tamil Nadu for temple.  
Madhya Pradesh for tribals  
Jharkhand for minerals.  
Other states for unity.  
India for integrity.

Name: Akshita Raj

Age: 9 years

From: Kishori Mandal, Forbesganj (Bihar)



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## Red Light Despatch

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