



# RED LIGHT DESPATCH

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DELHI, KOLKATA, AND FORBESGANJ (BIHAR)

## My Dream To become a musician -Amit

**Delhi:** My name is Amit. I am from Sapera community. I live in Dharampura. We are six siblings. I am studying in 12<sup>th</sup> standard. My father has passed away. We belong to a very poor family and the financial condition is not good. I earn my living by playing drum during marriages. I have two sisters and both of them are unhappy with their married life. Their in-laws does not treat them right. I feel sad. I often dream to become a musician by playing drums in different cities and foreign countries. I wanted to showcase the importance of entertaining people by playing drums. I have lived my life in extreme poverty and I want to become famous and rich one day. I want to help my family to come out of poverty and take them around. Apne Aap helped me telecast my talent by often inviting me to play drums in different occasions. Whenever outsiders visit our community, I played drum for them. However, my most memorable moment was when I played drum to a Punjabi song beats during the World Congress against Sexual Exploitation. People from different countries were present there; survivors, activists, parliamentarians, intellectuals etc. They all started dancing to the beats. I still remember the thought that crossed my mind during that time. I felt the happiest person on earth. It was something I always wanted- to play in front of large audience.

## Apne Aap girls selected for nursing training

*Sapna Khatoon/ as translated by Praveen Kumar*

**Bihar:** My name is Sapna Khatoon. I am a member of the Mahil Mandal run by the Apne Aap Women Worldwide in Uttari Rampur redlight district. I am married and my husband's name is M.D Jamshed. For the last three years I have been living in Rampur. I visit the centre everyday and participate in every activities the centre have organized for the women and the girls of marginalised communities.

One day, during our stitching class, we were informed by Sanju di that a Nurse training will be organized by the government at the MBIT College. We all were very excited and so were many girls who were working at Apne Aap. They had asked us to send for girls and women from Mahila Mandal and Kishori Mandal. We

couldn't wait to send over new recruits for them to receive the training. This would give the women a certified degree in nursing at the MBIT. After the initial course, the best candidate would be chosen to do a more advanced course. This motivated us all to give it our best and get to the next level of training. The fee would be Rs. 1500, but the money will be refunded once you complete the course.

When we heard about this we all very excited, but only girls above 18-years could attend the training. This was demoralizing for some girls but they cheered on their friends and family who were going to attend.

*(Continued on page 6)*

## Women empowerment meeting in Sonagachi redlight area

— *Gita / as dictated to Laboni Basu*

**Kolkata:** My name is Gita. Currently, I am 45 years old. I have been living in the Sonagachi redlight area for the past seventeen years now. I have two children, my son is twenty three and my daughter is two. I was born into a poor Brahmin family from Malda, West Bengal. Due to the poor conditions of my family I could not get an education. Instead I was married off at the age of thirteen, and at the top of that, my father had to pay a dowry of Rs.11,000.

A few years after marriage, I got pregnant at the age of fifteen, my father-in-law and husband still were not happy. My parents thought they had sent their daughter to a good house for a better life, but I was dis-

respected and treated with such inhumanity.

I never got any respect, love from anyone. Eventually my husband informed me that he's getting a second marriage and threw me out of his home. When I returned to my father's home I started searching for a job. I was uneducated, so I was looking for domestic work. I met a man who told me that he would arrange an assistant's job for me in Kolkata. For me this was a dream come true, Kolkata was a big city for me and I was so excited to leave my previous life. When I reached Kolkata with him he immediately sold me to the Sonagachi redlight district.

*(Continued on page 7)*

## Op-Ed— *“Girls as young as Five are Sold into Prostitution”, says Ruchira at a talk Stanford University*

**Ruchira Gupta, Founder of Apne Aap at a talk at Stanford University. This article was published at India-West, written by Sunita Sohrabji.**

Girls as young as five are being sold into the multi-billion dollar sex trafficking industry, said Ruchira Gupta, founder and president of Apne Aap Women Worldwide, at a talk here May 24.

“The numbers of trafficked girls are going up, while their ages are coming down. This is the most urgent human rights crisis of our time,” stated Gupta, noting the youngest girl she had met in the course of her work in Mumbai brothels was seven years old, and had not yet begun to menstruate.

“Sex trafficking is a demand-driven industry,” said Gupta.

The U.S. State Department noted in its annual “Trafficking in Persons” report for 2016 that millions of women and children are victims of sex trafficking in India. Traffickers increasingly use websites, mobile applications, and online money transfers to facilitate prostitution, and children continue to be subjected to sex trafficking in religious pilgrimage centers and tourist destinations, noted the State Department.

Section 370 of the Indian Penal Code prohibits trafficking of any sort, penalizing the persecutor with a sentence ranging from seven years to life in prison. However, noted the State Department, Section 370 does not define the prostitution of children under the age of 18 as human trafficking. Several other statutes, however, do criminalize the prostitution of children. In an earlier report, the State Department recommended shifting penalties from the prostitutes to their pimps and brothel owners, a recommendation Gupta supports.

The community activist spoke at Stanford University’s Cecil Green Library, in the Bender Room, which will soon house the papers and other archival material of Apne Aap.

Girls as young as three and five are being sold over the Internet, said Gupta, a former journalist who won an Emmy award in 1996 for her documentary, “The Selling of Innocents.” Gupta received the Clinton Global Citizen Award in 2009. In January, the women’s rights activist was awarded France’s highest civilian distinction, Chevalier de l’Ordre National du Mérite.

“Customers want girls on who they can inflict violence along with the rape,” said Gupta, detailing the atrocities inflicted on young girls in brothels, who are bought by their ‘johns’ for as little as 40 cents per encounter.

The men have told her that they like girls who look childlike, innocent and fresh. Men also like to sleep with virgins to avoid sexually-transmitted diseases; many believe they can cure themselves of an STD by

sleeping with a virgin, she said.

Others said they come to brothels to practice having sex before their marriage, noted Gupta.

The availability of pornography has played a huge role in promoting children as objects of pleasure for men, said Gupta, noting that the typical narrative of such films involves pain and violence for the woman. Pornography also promotes a “no means yes,” mindset, she said, noting that a teenaged boy’s first experience with sex might likely be watching pornography.

“Once sold, the girls are taken across the border – border guards are often complicit in the scheme – and handed over to lodge-keepers who beat and starve them until their will is completely subjugated, said Gupta. They are then taken to auctions throughout India and sold to pimps. Girls are valued for their fairness, plumpness, docility, and exotic looks.

In the brothels, the girls are repeatedly raped by eight to 10 men a day, and are often subjected to multiple abortions, said Gupta. The first daughter borne by the young sex worker is often kept as hostage by the brothel madam as a means to keep the girl working.

Girls cannot negotiate for protected sex, and many suffer from STDs, tuberculosis, jaundice, and other illnesses.

Gupta founded Apne Aap with 23 former sex workers who protected her – when she was trying to film in a Mumbai brothel – from a man who held a knife to her and threatened to slit her throat. The women crowded around Gupta and told the man that if he wanted to kill Gupta, he would have to kill them all as well.

The organization – which now has more than 20,000 members and has managed to put 66 traffickers in prison – aims to fulfill four goals identified by the former sex workers who founded the organization, including formal education, a dignified livelihood, safe and independent housing, and legal protection.

The organization has taken children out of red light districts and put them into formal schools or community learning centers. Apne Aap also helps girls and women train for employment, and supports entrepreneurship, a monetary savings scheme, and vocational training.

Apne Aap also helps women avail of “below poverty line” housing provided by the Indian government. The organization has also established legal aid centers to help women understand their rights, and has spoken out against sex trafficking throughout the world.

Gupta said she is aiming to bring the Apne Aap model to the U.S., where sex trafficking is widely prevalent. “The culture of sexual exploitation is becoming normal. The victim is increasingly the girl next door,” she said.

Diary of a Social Worker*Khushboo Mishra*

**Delhi:** My name is Khushboo. It's been one and a half year since I am working with Apne Aap but it still feels like yesterday.

On my first field visit at Najafgarh, there were few things that made me stop and look closer into this community. Thus, I chose to do field work. I was not sure about being selected for field work as I have studied Japanese and economics and had no degree in social work but luckily for me a week later I was informed that I have been selected for the field work.

I had a mixed feeling, being nervous but excited too. I had to be very careful in dealing with the children in this community as they were not as privileged as many others. After I got to know them I realised that they were extremely talented and weren't at all different from any other privileged ones.

Unfortunately, their daily hardships have made them mentally very strong. It is not something they choose, but given an opportunity the sky will be their limit.

I would like to share a few experiences from my first field visit. When I reached to the community, the first thing I noticed was a group of 5-6 men sitting in a group in one corner of the road playing cards. Apne Aap field mobiliser Shashibala ji took me to a house belonging to a family from the Perna community. In this family two real sisters were married to the same man and were living under the same roof. The next thing I noticed was the bad condition of the lanes, open drainage system and huge piles of garbage. The streets were filthy. The unused plots were used as urinals. I couldn't believe that I was at the outskirts of Delhi, seeing this side of the world.

Even today, one can see these groups of men playing cards in the same place. **I launched a Cleanliness Campaign two weeks later in the community, where children from Perna, Sapera and Singhi participated along with their mothers. On the same day, I filed a complaint at MCD office about the filthy condition in which the community member lives. From the next day onwards, the workers from MCD started coming regularly to clean their residential area which they never did before. The**

**women were extremely happy that day.**

A month later, I organised an open mike session on International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, as drug usage is high in this community. Even small children from the community are into drugs.

After summer vacations of 2016, I started to work on MCD Primary School adoption project where I organised art and craft classes, open mike sessions, games, self-defence trainings etc, including activities on World Population Day and International Day of Girl Child.

This year we adopted Government Girls Senior Secondary School in February. On our first visit to the senior school, I met children from Primary School who have now been shifted to Senior School in 6<sup>th</sup> standard. I felt so happy to see all my previous students in this school.

I did a survey and research in the community two months before as part of the Government Girls Senior School adoption project. This gave me chance to understand their problems, lifestyle, and relations and work more closely.

No matter how difficult their lives are, they never forget to smile.

**Apne Aap field mobiliser Shashibala ji took me to a house belonging to a family from the Perna community. In this family two real sisters were married to the same man and were living under the same roof. The next thing I noticed was the bad condition of the lanes, open drainage system and huge piles of garbage. The streets were filthy. The unused plots were used as urinals. I couldn't believe that I was at the outskirts of Delhi, seeing this side of the world.**

## Women of de-notified tribes linked to govt. Schemes

— *Jugni Khatoon/ as dictated to Praveen Kumar*

**Bihar:** My Name is Jugni Khatoon. My family and I live in a red light district in Forbesganj, India. When I was aged 13, I was sold into a life of prostitution by my parents. Recently, I turned 20 and looking back I am so fortunate that I have left that life behind. I am now a member of the Mahila Mandal, which is run by the Apne Aap Women Worldwide. **One of our mission as a member of Mahila Mandal is to help girls like me to grow emotionally and financially. It also boost their confidence just like it did to mine. We teach them embroidery and stitching so that they can have a fresh start.**

There are many events that is organised by Apne Aap, we look forward to such activities. There is so much to learn and meeting new people all the time helps us grow too.

One day we heard the news that a Jan Sunwai program will be organized in our center. The attended would included DM Araria, Retired Chief Justice of the Patna high courts, V.N Sinha and Ex DGP Mr. P.M Nair. The reason behind this event was so that the women and children who were forced into prostitution and also trafficked especially those from the poor community, could interact with local officials and ask them for funding to help them improve their lives. When we heard this news a bunch of us were nervous on how to present our demands, luckily Sanju Di guided us and helped us create the petition. Also the founders of Apne Aap. Ruchira di and Tinku di were present at this event .

When the day finally arrived, I had butterflies in my stomach. I was nervous, wondering whether they would listen to our demand or not? Whether they would get the time to understand our problem. However, when we all

presented our petitions and the officers promised to fulfill them. And on the first meeting, the DM instructed the SDO to prepare a ration card for us at the earliest possible. This was so prompt. We brought all the necessary documents that are required for filling the form. They also organized a camp the following day and invited us all. There were more than ten women who had submitted the form instantly. After completing the mandatory paperwork, we received Ration cards. We were overwhelmed. They also helped us prepare our Bank accounts, Residential Certificates, Aadhar cards and photographs. Thanks to them the ration cards will arrive in a few weeks.

Apne Aap really helped us by organizing a Jan Sunvai program. Women like me needed a helping hand and they reached out to us. Thanks to them we got the documents we need to succeed in our personal lives.

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### Did You Know?

#### **In India:**

- There are 2.3 million women and girls in prostitution
- A quarter of 2.3 million are under the age of 18
- 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

## Counseling session on good manners

— *Annuradha Rajak/ as dictated to Rachna Nayak*

**Kolkata:** My name is Annuradha rajak. I, along with my family members live at Khidderpore, Kolkata. I was born in Bihar. Shortly after my birth, my parents moved to Kolkata. I recently turned 9 years and I have a younger siblings. I am the eldest and we are total of four family members. We are from a very poor family, my father works as a daily labourer and my mother stays at home with us.

My father earns Rs 4,500 per month. After paying all the bills and providing us with food, we don't have any money left with us and especially not for a private school. I am among the lucky ones, who, although don't have enough to eat on normal days, is able to access education.

My parents send me to the local Government school, called Shanti Niketan Vidyalaya. The basic benefits of this school are great, and the amenities are phenomenal. But, the problem remains the same, the quality of the education in general is poor, as there are too many students in one class. There is not enough attention for one student. And I cannot afford any private tuition to help us.

**My mother noticed that a lot of local children go to some place to study. She found out that an organisation called Ape Aap run a local community center, which provides kids with the help they required to succeed at school. My mother decided her children should also join this after school program.**

The following week I started going out to the Apne Aap community center. I observed that apart from helping us with our studies we also learnt other skills, such as computer science, singing, dancing and drawing. I also started to attend counseling sessions that they provided every Tuesday for children who are going through a tough time at home. **They taught us how to maintain clean hygiene, and they informed us all about child labour and how it has adversely affected our country and culture. They taught us about manners, how to behave when you are in a public place and to respect our parents and teachers.**

They explained to us the basic manners and on how to be a good person and to earn everyone's respect instead of being malicious and not a good person. A person, who is honest stands out in the crowd. A person with unique personality attracts everyone around us.

While studying in the NGO, I realized that we need to help people especially the member of our society and through education try to elevate our family's status. While studying at the NGO, I slowly realized small improvements within myself, I said "please" and "thank you" more often. I started to knock the door before entering someone's room. Small things like this is how Apne Aap really touched my life, and gave me a helping hand in my education. Thank you Apne Aap!

Join our campaign to [#QuitChildLabour](#). Sign the petition to revoke laws that enable [#intergenerational](#) prostitution <http://ow.ly/z2zH303xsS1>

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[contact@apneaap.org](mailto:contact@apneaap.org)



## The World Outside

—Atul/ as dictated to Khushboo Mishra

**Delhi:** My name is Atul. I am aged 13. I belong to Singhi caste, living in Dharampura, Najafgarh, at the outskirts of Delhi. In our community, most of the men work as cobblers and ear cleaners, whereas women work as toy-sellers and rag pickers. Most of the children from our community are yet to enroll in schools. Instead, they accompany their parents on their work. Once they reach the age of nine or ten years, sadly, most of them start to start earning by going to work alone. Our daily earning ranges from Rs 20-Rs 100/day.

Many of the Apne Aap workers frequent our community. I like listening to them. One of the didi told me of various govt. schemes at state and central level. It feels good to know that we can benefit out of the schemes. However, despite all the efforts, my friends and many other members of my community are yet to benefit anything out of it. Even if someone gets admission, we are not able to sustain it for long and drops out in middle of academic year. We have mouths to feed. At times, the condition is so bad that we don't even get two meals a day. And the elders believe that going to school is a waste of time and effort. The children and the adults have to earn together otherwise how would we feed everyone in the family. **However, I really want to go to school and become someone important who has authority over many people and can do justice for the society. I believe Police Officers are powerful and**

**would like to see myself as one of them in future. I study in class VI at a govt. run school in Dharampura. Before leaving for school, I get up at dawn and work for few hours to earn some money.** And, some days I give my hand in the household chores, so that my mother would be able to sell toys on the streets. Many people will be surprise to know that bathing is a luxury for me. I take bath twice a week without soap and once in 15 days with soap. **I don't want others to sympathise with me, but understand the situation I and most in my community members are facing against. We are still invisible to the outside world.**

This does not stop me from participating in the community development program organized by Apne Aap. I feel different there, as if I belong; I am one of them. And my goals are clearer. I never want to give up on that.

In one such program, I was asked to draw about 'My Dream', as it was the theme of the Art Class. However, I took the initiative to draw 'Clean India'. The feeling of using the white paper sheet and draw on it from colour pencils feels so strange to my hand. I feel different. And it makes me wonder, how long can I continue this? Will there come a time when I have to drop out from school and sell toys on the streets on a full time, just like my mother, and my aunts, uncles, and my friends.

### *Continued from page 1*

Apne Aap staff came had selected eleven girls who were going to attend the training in the following days. The people working at Mahila Mandal like Sanju Di and Praveen sir helped the girls who in getting all the documents like Aadhar card, Ration card, school certificate, residential proof and three passport size photos. After collecting the necessary forms and documents in hand, the girls were accompanied by Apne Aap staff to MBIT College.

At the campus, we were introduced to Col. Kiran Dnagwal who was the director of the institute and Mr. Amit Kumar Das who was the Chairman. They were very warm and welcoming and took out time to show us around the college campus. Eventually, we went ahead and submitted the required documents and went up to pay the fees of Rs.1500. **To our surprise, it was rejected. The Director invited Apne Aap staff in his office and told her that they will not accept any money from any of the girls. I could not believe the generosity of the college's Chairman had shown towards the girls and women. Because, most of them come from a very poor background and to get that**

**much amount of money was extremely difficult by their guardians. The girls were clearly beaming with joy.** They felt blessed by the authorities. The chairman asked all the girls to join training on June 7th from 10am-3pm. It was five days a week starting from Monday through Friday. We could not wait for that day to arrive. The feeling was .like our child is going to the school for the first time.

Out of excitement, on June 7th all the girls reached MBIT way before time. When we walked in, the girls knew that this was the beginning of something very special that will change their lives forever. The whole course of the program was a magical few weeks for us. We wanted to thank MBIT and all its staff and Bihar's Government.

**And, I don't how to thank the Apne Aap Bihar team. In fact, words are not enough to describe the emotions and the dreams the staff have help in bringing out among these girls. The work they do gives women like us a fighting chance with the threats that we face in life. Training programs like these will help us get dignified jobs to support our families.**

## My First Day at Apne Aap

— *Siddharth Thomas*

**Delhi:** My name is Siddharth Thomas. I was born in New Delhi, India. I am currently pursuing my post-graduate degree in architecture from The Catholic University of America in Washington D.C. My life has taken many different directions for the last few years. When I was aged 12 my parents told me that we would be moving to the United States permanently. Initially, I was nervous, I didn't not know how everyone would treat me or even accept me in their lives or culture.

I am a person, who believes in social cause and also willing to devote my time working for the society in whatever little way possible. So this vacation, I decided to work in an NGO as a volunteer. I approached Ruchira ma'am and within 5 days of talking to her I was on a flight to New Delhi, India. June 19th 2017. I started working at the Delhi office. Like any new kid who is nervous at his or her first day of school, I walked to the third floor of the Delhi office with butterflies in my stomach. Juanita ma'am welcomed me to the Apne Aap. We went over the mission of the organization, and I read up on some books and brochures. I was assigned to work under Nana, in the media department. She immediately gave me a few first person interviews to edit and finalize. When we all sat to eat lunch, all these strangers welcomed me as though I had been working with them for years. This was the end of the the first day was so satisfying that I was really excited about the upcoming weeks.

Over the next few days I was assigned to complete two very different tasks, I started with editing a few stories on how the Apne Aap foundation had affected their lives. One story that really touched was about a woman whose life had been such a struggle until the foundation

stepped in and helped her. Her name was Payel, and lives in Sonagachi redlight area. At a very young age she was married off against her wishes. And later, circumstances pushed her into prostitution. Her daughter was her only hope. I realised, how the organisation's work had changed a person's life. They had admitted her daughter in a residential school and Payel started attending more sessions related to women and legal rights. After the first few days of editing interviews, I started compiling cases about people who were employing under age children to work for them. **I always knew that child labour was a problem in India, but I never imagined that the number behind it would be this bad. This news was very surprising for me as an Indian adult who thought that his country was making progress. However, it makes me wonder now, why there is so much disparity between the rich and poor? Why justice still eludes the poverty stricken population?**

I have spent the last 11 years of my life living as an American. Whenever I come to Delhi I think of how chilled it is and how my family pampers me. Sitting in the US, I converse with many Indian-American's who complain about how corrupt our country is, how people don't care about the poor and less fortunate. **I just thought to myself that I can become like one of these pompous Americanised Indian's or I can be proactive and help my country in whatever little way I can. Also, coming from a family that is predominantly Women this opportunity was a great chance to give back to all the Women that have affected my life.**

### *Continued from page 1*

I was in shock because I never would have never imagine that this kind of horrific incident would happen with me. Out of so many people, it was me. **However, spending a few days in the brothel, I realised I am not the only one who is out of luck. There were so many like me who were trapped and suffering. And life was equally horrible for them. There is no God in brothels. Also, seeing them unhappy isn't a solace. Like many others, the brothel didn't treat me well at all, I received cruel treatment from the owners, customers and the pimps.** My life was in a dark hole, I thought that this was the end of it. I see many people dying around me, they kill themselves because they can't tolerate the torture anymore. However, I knew that no matter how difficult the situation is, I had to be strong and live for my young son. After ten years of existing as a mere sex slave, a customer came along who showed me love and compassion. I left the brothel and

married him. A few years later I gave birth to a daughter. Finally my life has taken a different turn. I am now on the happy side of my life.

**One day when I was walking around Sonagachi, I spotted the Apne Aap office. I walked in and started conversing with Sahani di, Labona di and Baby di. I sat for hours and shared my feelings and story with them. Over time they inspired me to go back and get my education. I joined a writing workshop and I felt like my childhood had been returned to me. Ruchira Di is my role model, she fights for people who don't have strength to fight back.**

Her actions inspire me to do greater things. As a victim of social injustice and as a mother I want to thank the Apne Aap foundation.

## Poems

### God

God is very great and strong  
He listens to us all day long  
And teaches us to do what's right  
But nobody knows what He does at night.

**Name– Roshan Ara**  
**Area: Uttari Rampur, Bihar**

### Bad boys and good boys

Bad boys like to pull your hair  
And make you trip upon the stair;  
They also make a lot of noise  
And smash up other people's toys.

Good boys, I think, are hard to find  
The gentle, meek, and quiet kind,  
Who try to fix things when they break?  
And take you rowing on the lake.

**Name– Nisha Kumari**  
**Area: Uttari Rampur, Bihar**



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## Red Light Despatch

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