



# RED LIGHT DESPATCH

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DELHI, KOLKATA, MUMBAI AND FORBESGANJ (BIHAR)

## My Dream

### To get a degree certificate -Md Shoukat

**Bihar:** My name is Md Shoukat. I live in Kudhaily Basti with my mother, three brothers and a sister. When I was 13 years old, my father died in a car accident. He was a driver. My mother was helpless because there was nobody in the family to earn money. For a few days we were supported by money and food from the neighbors and relatives, but this discontinued. My mother used to do work as a maid. When I grew older, I joined a grocery shop as a servant to help our family. During this phase, I also continued my study and passed 10th class board examination with good marks. When I turned 19 years, I joined Apne Aap as an Office Assistant in Forbesganj. Now I am able to support my brother and sister's education, as I give my earnings to my mother to run the house. Now she had left her job and stays at home to look after my younger brother and sister. I also continued my study and admitted myself in 11<sup>th</sup> standard in Forbesganj College. I do my job as a responsible person, and everybody is satisfied with my work and supports me in many ways. In the future, I want to complete my BA and get a govt. job to do betterment for my family. My mother has seen bad days in the past and works really hard for our sustenance, so I wish to support her in every way possible and fill her life with happiness. I specially thanks to ApneAap NGO.

## Diwali celebration by Singhi, Sapera and Perna communities

— By *Gunnu/ as dictated to Khushboo Mishra*

**Delhi:** My name is Gunnu. I am 14-year-old and live in the Dharampura district of Najafgarh. I belong to Dher caste. In our caste, generally men sell bedsheets in and around the streets. My dad is a drug addict, so he doesn't earn. My brother works to support my entire family. My dad is always in a drunken state, irrespective of the date and time. We sent him for rehabilitation many a times but due to economic problems, we couldn't support his stay for long. Thus, he often comes out after a few days and starts to fight with all the family members, especially with my mother. Earlier when we were young, my dad used to beat my mother. Now as my siblings and I have grown up, we protect our mother. My mother has also started to

speak up against the violence towards her.

I want to work in a government office but I don't go to school. I have epilepsy. Thus, the teachers and the principal are hesitant about admitting me to their school due to my medical problems. Earlier I was enrolled in a school for a few years. But I dropped out due to economic and family problems. Now, I wish to study but my medical problem stands as an obstacle. I have studied at the community classes which Apne Aap used to organise on a regular basis.

Apne Aap staff used to teach us there. She taught us English, Math and basic etiquettes.

*(Continued on page 6)*

## Community mother from Munshiganj redlight area rejoices movie outings

— *Ayesha/ as dictated to Laboni Basu*

**Kolkata:** My name is Ayesha. I live in Munshiganj redlight area. Apne Aap gave us opportunity to go to movie screening. Some films seems so real, it just relate to issues we are facing on a daikly basis. There was a film screening programme organised for mothers from the Munshiganj community in Kolkata's London Paris Hall on October 21. The film screened was Parched-- it tells the story of four girls and their fight for their rights. Leena Yadav wrote and directed the film and Ajay Devgan produced it under his banner. Someone told me, this film was globally recognised. The meaning of Parched is 'very hot, dry due to the absence of rains', or 'very thirsty'. The title has a deeper meaning which

is justified through the plot of the film. All characters in the movie have been played well played and are very expressive.

It deals with issues of child marriage, sexual abuse and prostitution which have been portrayed in a very sensitive way. Tannishtha Chatterjee plays the role of Rani, a widow who tries to keep her son Gulab with her. Her loneliness, sacrifices, frustration, struggle, independence, and her strong protests against social barriers have been shown in the film. I am a member from the Munshiganj red light area.

*(Continued on page 7)*

**Op-Ed— Ruchira Gupta's article "Nature's bounty, Poverty Paradox" published in The Telegraph**

*Ruchira Gupta is a feminist campaigner, writer, visiting professor at New York University, adviser to the UN, and founder of Indian anti-sex trafficking organisation Apne Aap Worldwide. This article was published in The Telegraph, as part of Bihar Safar-nama.*

We enter a world of trees dripping with mangoes in Muzaffarpur. Lychee season is over and we are in the middle of the mango season in Bihar.

Muzaffarpur is known as the Lychee Kingdom. Two varieties are famous, China and Shahi, available from May to June. Its cultivation covers a farm area of about 8,000 hectares with a production of about 75,000 tonnes of lychee every year.

**Kranti Prakash, a local farmer, believes that the lychee is a gift from China in exchange for the gift of Buddhism from Bihar. "That is why one of our main lychee varieties is called China."**

He grows lychee, rice, mustard, bananas, squash and three varieties of mangoes - Malda, Bambaia and Langda - on his land. He also has four kathal trees.

The whole district is lush. Rice-fields, sugar-cane fields, banana groves, guava trees, grass for thatching and making ropes, and vegetables. Bihar has become the largest producer of vegetables - potatoes, onions, eggplants, and cauliflower. It is also the third largest producer of pineapple.

All Bihar's rice varieties - Katika, Jagar, Satthi (ready in 60 days), Sonachur, Hathia Jhulan, Jaswa, Kasaunjih, Bakol, Tulsimanjari, Badshabhog, Laldhari, Darmi, Jagar, Kessore, Selha, Kamod, Katani, Ladaura, Mircha - are grown by farmers in the district in spite of the pressure of the markets. Mill owners tend to buy only two varieties and government agencies as well as loan companies keep pushing the high yielding variety.

"We have edible soil, that is the best variety of soil. It comes from Nepal in the Budi Gandak river every year," says Kranti Prakash.

When I see this abundance and prosperity, I cannot understand why Bihar is poor and why so many Biharis are malnourished. Kranti explains: because of lack of amenities for the cultivator.

"If we keep promoting the high-yielding variety seeds, we will lose our diversity," says Kranti. He adds that he keeps back a sack of Sonachur every year to re-grow.

"If the market has its way, this will disappear."

He is also apprehensive of the micro-credit companies

driving the market of the high-yielding variety seed, chemical fertilisers, and irrigation systems catering to corporate farming.

"We have a top-down approach to farming. For example a dam has been made near my village. This will lead to malaria for all and my own village is going to go under water," he said. I feel sad. I love the diversity of Bihar. I can get a variety of vegetables here that we cannot find in a US supermarket. Fruits are still flavourful because they are not genetically modified.

The variety of rice is a part of my life as is the variety of mangoes. I eat different rice for chuda and different rice for a pilaf. I hardly touch the ubiquitous Basmati.

I have been tasting different mangoes since I started the Safar-nama. Bambaia came first, then the Dasheri, Kishen Bhog and Zardalu and now my all-time favourite, Langda. I will be gone by the time Fazli, Neelum and Chausa are available in full force. It won't matter that I won't be here for the Bathua in late September, I will get the pickle made from it.

**It would be a pity if Basmati is the only rice left in the world, Shahi the only lychee and Alphonso the only mango. It would also be a pity if corporate farming destroyed the small landholdings with their rice-fields, vegetable patches and banana groves, a way of life that is the backbone of the country that I know.**

**When I see this abundance and prosperity, I cannot understand why Bihar is poor and why so many Biharis are malnourished. Kranti explains: because of lack of amenities for the cultivator.**

**Diary of a Social Worker**

—S K Anish

**Kolkata:** My name is SK Anish and I have been working with Apne Aap since the year 2014. Firstly, I would like to share my background, my mother Kumkum Chetry used to work with Apne Aap Women Worldwide as a teacher cum field worker. My father SK Sahid still works with Apne Aap. Ever since I was a child I took inspiration from my parents because of their social work. Even from an early age, I used to think of becoming a social worker when I grow up. I thought that when I become a social worker, I would dedicate my life towards the wellbeing of the people around me.

**I had seen how my mother dedicated her time and effort for the well being of women in vulnerable situations. During my childhood, I observed how my mother used to teach children who were born into brothels. She used to admit them into schools and later on, she would visit all the brothels to know more about their problems.**

From that time I used to think that when I grow up, I would do the same work for those who are vulnerable, I would raise my voice against this inhuman crime of prostitution. In 2014, I finally received an opportunity to work with Apne Aap. I joined the organisation as a drawing teacher. I felt very proud that I could take care of the children while they learned from me. I found myself feeling honored when I got to teach the children how to draw because I could feel their pain. Many of the children come from Red-light areas like Munshiganj. Now, I see my entire world in them.

Apne Aap always stands up for those who are helpless and protests against the ones who exploit the rights of women. Apne Aap has raised voice against the inhuman crime prostitution, during my childhood I had seen how women of Munshiganj were tortured by pimps and customers. I wanted to stop this crime against women and girls and now I can shape the dreams I have had since a long time through this wonderful organization.

When I counsel little children my heart fills up with love and happiness, I pray to god and ask for them to be blessed. I always wish for the well being of Apne Aap too because it is the kind of organization which works on behalf of invisibles girls and women. The most marginalized sections in India.

**As a male, my responsibility lies not only towards my own family, instead I think that it is also my duty to empower women and our society. I am a human being after all.**

Apne Aap has given me a wonderful opportunity to work for the cause. Through the time I have been working with Apne Aap, I have come to realize the deeper meaning of life. I am a teacher and my biggest responsibility is towards the society.

I attended the mother's meeting program in Munshiganj with my colleagues from Apne Aap. During the program, the mothers shared their problems, their sorrows and sufferings. We have been continuously trying to lessen their problems. Overall, I think I am going through a sensitive phase in my life and in a responsible manner. I would like to convey my respect towards my organization and Ruchira di. They have given me such a wonderful opportunity to find a new meaning in my life.

**When I counsel little children my heart fills up with love and happiness, I pray to god and ask for them to be blessed. I always wish for the well being of Apne Aap too because it is the kind of organization which works on behalf of invisibles girls and women. The most marginalized sections in India.**

## *Kishori Mandal girls attends meeting on cross border trafficking issues with Special Security Bureau*

— *Alia Khatoon/ as dictated to Mohd Kalam*

**Bihar:** My name is Alia Khatoon and I am 14-year-old. I study in 12<sup>th</sup> grade in the Arts stream. I have started learning how to sew and operate computers at the Apne Aap Women Worldwide training centre. Earlier, I had no idea about AAWW but now I feel that it is helping me in shaping my future and many other girls. I had heard that girls are trafficked from Nepal and Bihar too, but I am glad

Recently I got the chance to participate in a discussion on trafficking with Mr. Mukesh Kumar Gautam, he is the Assistant Commandant of the Special Security Bureau (SSB).

During our interaction, I talked to him about my dream. I told him how I want to be independent, even financially. **Achieving this will help me take better decisions about what I want in life. Other girls also described to him how they learnt computers, sewing etc. at the AAWW centre. They will go ahead and teach more girls; through these skills they can then reduce their vulnerabilities. This will also help many girls in becoming more independent.** Apne Aap team members explained how they want every woman and girl to be free from exploitation. Mr. Mukesh Kumar said that SSB wants to understand the kind of trafficking which happens through the Indo-Nepal border. He also said that they have huge manpower which will help in meticulous intervention to handle the trafficking cases.

Tinku di discussed how AAWW focuses on marginal communities who are the most vulnerable to trafficking. She requested Mr. Gautam to provide a safe space for de-notified communities where AAWW can setup a

library and conduct other activities. She suggested how the SSB soldiers can also teach some skills in these communities, tutor them etc. Such gestures will increase the trust between the army and the civilians. This approach will help in their integration into the mainstream society.

Apne Aap also suggested that in the beginning different NGOs, the police and the PRI can hold monthly meetings to get a better idea about the challenges and understand local issues, trafficking rings etc. Mr. Gautam agreed to these suggestions and told us that he wants to work on it at the earliest. Apne Aap's 10 asset model was explained to everyone by Mr Praveen Kumar; the model reduces vulnerabilities of being trafficked and brings down the dependency of women and girls on the red-light areas they live in. This tool is very effective in reducing trafficking; it brings transformation in red-light areas so that women and girls are not shifted to other places.

**I listened to the entire discussion and it served as an eye opener for me. Now I understand why traffickers target adolescents from poor and lower caste families. It is also very important for me to see the kind of interests the SSB shows because it monitors the Nepal and Bhutan border.**

Also, it reports most of the smuggling cases and monitors trafficking victims. Humans are more important than objects, which is why I will help the most vulnerable girls in our locality.

### 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

## My First Day at Apne Aap

— Heena Khatun/ as translated by Sahana Dasgupta

**Kolkata:** My name is Heena Khatoon and I am 16-year-old. I live with my mother in Munshiganj. I have studied up to class 7<sup>th</sup> and I was studying till 2013. My mother is a member of the women's meeting group of Apne Aap.

Before joining Apne Aap I was not doing anything. My mother brought me to the center to meet all the teachers and *didis* who work there. After knowing about the ups and downs of my life they counseled me motivated me to continue my studies again.

I joined Apne Aap as a student. I have started learning spoken English and Computers from Sangeeta *didi* so that I can become stronger in these two subjects. I am learning a lot of things here and preparing myself to get admitted to Class 8<sup>th</sup> in the local school.

Last year, my mother had got me married to a minor boy in Chhattisgarh, as she was compelled to do this because of some local circumstances. I had to leave my studies. **She wanted me to be safe but it was too early to marry. Somehow I returned back to my city, Kolkata. I managed to get back to my mother's house and since then I have stayed here. When I was married and living in Chattisgarh, I used to miss my mother, my friends and school days that had been left behind. After I returned home, no one wanted to accept me like before.**

I was getting depressed day by day and had no aim to

start my studies again. But after meeting with the *didis* from Apne Aap, I have realized that it is the most important thing in my life and that I should not leave it the way I had left it earlier. The *didis* at Apne Aap want me to continue my studying, so that I can stand up for myself in the future, even so that I can support my mother in her old days.

I started coming to AAWW center every day. **Here I feel safe, confident and happy in the company of all the teachers and students. I learn something new every day. I love the spoken English classes and in the upcoming days I plan on joining the stitching and beautician classes too.** Sometimes *didis* also give me the opportunity to teach the crèche children, I like teaching them the most. They provide me fresh mid-day meals everyday like all the other children and never let me feel like I am different from them.

I am engaged in different activities here such as drawing, crafts, dancing etc. Recently we celebrated children's day. I will get admitted to a school in January 2017. I am forgetting bad memories from the previous year as each day passes and I feel happy and confident about future. I heartily convey my thanks to Apne Apne for the sudden and positive change in my life.

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)



## Apne Aap girls takes inspiration from Dr. Kalam's life

—Suhana/ as translated by Gazal Shekhawat

**Delhi:** My name is Suhana and I am 10-year-old. I live in Dharampura in Najafgarh and I belong to Perna community. There are six members at our home, my parents and my two brothers and one sister. For the past five-six years, *bhaiyas* and *didis* from Apne Aap have been regularly visiting us and helping the community.

I go to the MCD Primary School in Roshanpura to study. I am in fifth standard in section B. I am very fond of the *didis* and *bhaiyas* from Apne Aap, especially Khushboo Didi and Shashi didi. They take good care of us and always make sure that we have fun. They do so even when my mother may not like it.

On 14<sup>th</sup> of October, we were very happy to see Apne Aap team members who had come to our school. It was a surprise! We got to know that the *didis* and *bhaiyas* were there to celebrate the birthday of Dr APJ Abdul Kalam. Earlier I didn't know a lot about Dr. Kalam but thanks to the happy celebration we had; now I do.

All of us looked forward to it and waited excitedly in our classes. First, Apne Aap staff helped us understand more about Dr. Kalam. We learnt and recited new poems in Hindi. We were taught about his wisdom and his life. I was very happy to know that Dr. Kalam was

very fond of children. Later on, *didis* from Apne Aap also distributed toffees and sweets amongst the children! We clicked many photographs with each other and with the Apne Aap team members.

I learned many important things about our former President. I believe that Dr. APJ Kalam was a very good person, he protected us and served our nation. His message is inspirational, he always believed that we should cooperate with each other and that we should not create tensions or fight amongst ourselves. The different children from Perna, Sapera and Singhi communities who go to my school learned about these useful morals when we celebrated Dr Kalam's birthday.

Later on, I saw how my friends and classmates from school were also very thankful upon knowing more about this great man and honouring him. **When I grow up, I want to work hard and study to become a doctor. I will help my community by treating my patients for free. It is because of the inspirational message that Dr Kalam's life teaches us that I am motivated to treat the poor and serve my people.**

### *Continued from page 1*

I learnt many things there. I also participate in all the community activities and livelihood trainings organised by Apne Aap.

Recently, Apne Aap celebrated Diwali in the community. It was great fun. We had all been informed in advance about the Diwali celebration in the community. When I woke up in the morning that day, I was very enthusiastic about the celebration. I washed all my clothes and put them in the sun to dry. I did all household chores, from cleaning to helping with the preparation of food. When it was only an hour left before the Apne Aap team arrived, I went to take a bath. On special occasions I take a long bath, so I washed my body and hair well, and dressed in my best attire. I wore capris and a pink top with a loose bun. I like western dresses but I only wear them on special days. Otherwise, I wear Indian clothes at home. I was ready and I joined the other children and women from the community at Balma's place. Five minutes later, Apne Aap team reached our community. They brought eatables, flowers, *diyas*, rangoli colours etc with them.

Rangoli is the most important part of Diwali. We needed an open space to make it. So we moved to Virender *bhaiya's* house. He has a big open space in front of his house, making it the best place to make

rangoli. Children from all castes in the community were present; Perna, Sapera, Singhi, everyone joined.

**All children were divided into two groups irrespective of their castes. Children from both groups sat in a circle on the ground. Both groups were given colours, flowers and *diyas*. All of us started making rangoli. For many children, it was first time they were making rangolis.** Everyone was very glad. We completed our rangolis and decorated them with flowers and *diyas*. It was looking so beautiful. Our community women too helped us a little and were constantly supporting us with their warmth and presence.

Once the rangolis were made, we received eatables. Everyone enjoyed their share. Many children took two shares for themselves. When the celebration was over, everyone hugged each other and wished a prosperous and safe Diwali. **Generally, people from Perna, Sapera and Singhi communities do not talk to each other. In this Diwali celebration, there was no trace of casteism. Everyone was treated equally and they behaved as equals.** It was great a Diwali. I, along with all the others from the community liked it and enjoyed it fully.

## The World Outside

— *Kusum Kumari/ as dictated to Rachna Nayak*

**Kolkata:** My name is Kusum Kumari Shaw and I live in Kidderpore. I belong to a very poor family, my father is a daily wage labourer and mother is house wife. There are eight members in my family. I have been associated with Apne Aap Women Worldwide since the age of ten; I have been studying here from that age.

I first started going to Apne Aap centre only for the purpose of tuitions. Apne Aap has played a very important role for the purpose of my studies. Apart from studying here, I also learn dancing, stitching, computer skills and attend classes for spoken English. Whenever a workshop is conducted, I participate each time, attending many such workshops has helped me in learning a lot of new things.

We also had a group called 'Aamantar' here. There were 10-12 girls in the group. We would get together at least once in a week and hold meetings regarding our problems. There are many problems which we cannot freely discuss with our parents, yet in our *Aamantar* group, we get a chance to discuss our problems openly. Apart from holding discussions about our personal problems, we also discussed the problems faced by others, especially girls. Later we tried to find different solutions. Sometimes we also decided to go out for different visits, for example we went for a visit to the Victoria Memorial.

At the Apne Aap centre we are always taught some or the other new thing. On October 21, a program was held from ten thirty to eleven thirty in the morning at the South City International School, Kolkata. The program organisers arranged for a bus for the children so that they could be transported to the venue. We were happy to witness different performers, such as renowned pianist Jennifer Heemstra, singer Charlie Coins and Indian rap singer Sandeep Beyash. Jennifer Heemstra played the piano and sang songs in English. She was accompanied by Charlie Coins. Rapper Sandeep Beyash along with Charlie Coins also sang an English song. Later all of them also sang Hindi songs. My friends and I enjoyed a lot in the program and we also danced.

**Whenever we visit the South City International School for a concert, they sing in Hindi as well as English. I really enjoy all of their programs. Most of the children want a musical event to be held once in every two months.**

Now, at the end of my write-up I would like to thank Apne Aap Women Worldwide which is like a family to me and without its help I couldn't have been successful today.

### *Continued from page 1*

I especially liked Rani's bold step when she let her daughter-in-law go with her boyfriend (who could respect and care for her better than Rani's own son). After the movie screening I told other others that "all women should refresh their mind like Rani". We need such strong women in our society.

The other actress Radika Apte, plays the role of Rani's friend, Lajjo, a physically abused woman. Lajjo's husband regularly tortures her for a child, even though he is the one who is impotent. I strongly spoke against such violence. **We should not tolerate men's torture and domination any more. If we are not going to raise our voice against this type of crime, we will always have to face beatings from men. It is necessary to protest against this kind of offence.**

Another important character is Bijli, a dancer who also earns through prostitution; she is played by Suvreen Chawla. The film shows her pain after being raped continuously and how she cracked under sexual violence by men. For me, the world is a cruel place to live. Here, nobody understands the pain and suffering of women, men always see women as nothing but objects for fulfilling sexual desires. Women have to make themselves

strong, fight for their rights and help other women in rescuing themselves from the darkness.

After the screening, I and other community mothers from Munshiganj discussed about the film. We gave our opinions. Asma di, a member of Apne Aap also shared her views with us, she said that liked the film and highly enjoyed it.

I, personally found the film to be wonderful. I was overjoyed when the three women in the film free themselves from all barriers and run away to discover their lives in a new way. I was clapping and cheering for them. Thank you to the Vedic Yatra Parivar who sponsored the film screening program.

**For me, the world is a cruel place to live. Here, nobody understands the pain and suffering of women, men always see women as nothing but objects for fulfilling sexual desires. Women have to make themselves strong, fight for their rights and help other women in rescuing themselves from the darkness.**



## Poems

### Save the daughter, educate the daughter

She says, with her arms open,  
'I want your love and your protection'  
Why are daughters unseen, ignored  
All throughout this entire globe?  
Think! Without us...  
How will you settle your homes and the uni-  
verse?  
From her birth to her adolescence  
A sword hangs above a daughter, I can sense  
By now, my pain and my prayer  
Shouldn't they have made the world more  
equal and fair?

**Name**– Afsana  
**Age**: 11 years  
**Area**: Delhi

### Cleanliness Mission

We will lead the cleanliness mission  
And ensure India is in a clean condition  
We will not let any dirt  
Pollute this heaven like mother earth  
We will clear all the trash repeatedly  
And all should clean this country  
Modi took a step  
To fulfill what Gandhi dreamt  
We will not back down anyhow  
Look! India will be clean now  
We must all work for cleanliness at the earli-  
est  
We should all take this pledge.

**Name**– Suhana  
**Age**– 10 years  
**Area**: Delhi



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## Red Light Despatch

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