



RED LIGHT DESPATCH

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DELHI, KOLKATA, AND FORBESGANJ (BIHAR)

My Dream To Give Myself A Chance -Soma Ghosh

Kolkata: I am separated from my husband. Presently I am living in Munshigunj with my parents and siblings. In 2000, I got married to Joyonto Ghosh who is a driver. After one year of marriage, he started torturing me for dowry. Then, in 2006 I decided to leave the home to save the rest of my life. I was in search of job for a long time to support my family.

I joined Apne Aap in 2015 to work in sanitary napkin making unit. Then, I also got engaged with the other vocational trainings for women like beautician course, Usha stitching training provided by the organization.

Presently, I have completed the 3 months of Usha's certified stitching course training. I have learnt to make petticoat, A-line frock, pajama, party frock and salwaar till today. I love to learn making new dresses and also experiencing confidence build up in myself. Our teacher is excellent.

My dream is to be a professional stitching teacher of Usha Company like our teacher, Moumita and also want to complete diploma in fashion designing course in future. I want to give a chance to myself again. If I became professional teacher, would like to give cost-free training to the poor women and girls to make them self-sufficient like me.

Hoorbai Speaks About Being Attacked by Her Daughter's In-Laws

- Hoorbai Perna / as told to Khushboo Mishra

Najafgarh: My name is Hoorbai. I have four daughters, my two daughters are married and two study in a private residential hostel sponsored by Apne Aap.

My second daughter is 18 years old and is married the Perna caste-community. She has a 4 year old son and is pregnant with her second child. No families from other caste marry children from our community due to the prostitution stigma attached to us. In Perna, daughter-in-laws are prostituted since the time she delivers her first child. It is our traditional occupation and has been normalised since decades.

Having four daughters with no man in house, I used to feel scared

with the looks of the community members. I had always said that none of my daughters will accept this caste based occupation. My first daughter is married and happy at her in-laws place. When I was fixing my daughters marriage, I told their in-laws that they should never force my daughters to enter into this vicious cycle.

My second daughter was safe till the time she didn't deliver a son. Soon after her delivery, her husband started to consume alcohol. Her father-in-law is also an alcoholic person like most men in our community.

(Continued on page 6)

We Took Shelter on the Top Floor of a Hospital

- Shabnam Khatoon / translated by Praveen Kumar

Forbesganj: My name is Shabnam Khatoon and I am belonging from the red light area, Uttir Rampur Forbesganj. I am a member of Mahila Mandal run by Apne Aap Women Worldwide in our location. I am a survivor of prostitution and joined with Apne Aap now with a mission to remove the system of prostitution from our community. I with all other member of Mahila Mandal used to visit the community center located in our community and use to take part in all the activities run by Apne Aap for the betterment of the victims and survivors and at risk girls and women.

On 12th August midnight a massive flood hit in our area and we all ran away from our houses to

save our lives. That was a rainy season and the rain continued from 2 days. On the evening of 12th August when we are in community centre a big black cloud came across and covered the whole sky and become dark in the day time look like a night.

We were all filled with fear and scared about the situation. On the evening at 7 pm the heavy rain starts and continuously for whole night. and clothes to ear and wear. Our children cried for food but we have no any food to give them.

(Continued on page 7)

Op-Ed— 'How Hard Is It to Exit Prostitution?'

- Juanita Kakoty

Two days ago, Noor Bai (name changed) was attacked by her daughter's father-in-law and mother-in-law. She was beaten, her clothes were ripped, and her thin as reed seven month pregnant daughter received blows on her protruding belly. The whole of Perna Basti in Dharampura, beyond Dwarka in Delhi NCR, had gathered outside her house. But no one called the police.

In some time, Noor Bai called up Khushboo at Apne Aap Women Worldwide. She just said, help me, I am being attacked. We at Apne Aap dialled 100 and requested that the police be sent to her house immediately. It took exactly an hour for us to reach Dharampura from Anand Niketan. Outside Noor Bai's house, there was a big crowd but no sign of the police. When we contacted the police again, they said they had gone to help the victim but were sent away by the crowd with the word that it was a matter of the biradari (community) and the biradari would settle it. The police told us that this is how it always is at the Perna Basti in Dharampura.

When Noor Bai saw us, she seemed relieved and her daughter's in-laws withdrew from the scene. We asked her to come with us and file an FIR at the police station. But all those gathered would just not let her leave with us. They blocked her way and used all means to deter her from taking this step - they used threat, plea, emotional blackmailing and what not. Someone even said that her daughter's father-in-law would be nominated as the pradhan (chief) of the caste panchayat this year and so she ought to be careful.

Noor Bai is from the Perna community, where one finds the practice of inter-generational prostitution. She has built a small two room house for herself, where she lives without any extended family member unlike the rest of the households in the Basti. Last year, she had won a significant case at the Panchayat with Apne Aap's help. Two of her daughters are married and two are in a private residential school in Najafgarh, with the support of Apne Aap. One of the married daughters, Radha (name changed), came home last August crying that her husband and in-laws were forcing her into prostitution. Noor Bai supported Neha and told her in-laws that she shouldn't be prostituted without her will. This caused quite a furore in the neighbourhood. A Panchayat was called by Radha's in-laws and after a gruelling six or seven hour session, the Panchayat finally gave the verdict in favour of Noor Bai and Radha. This decision of course was influenced by the presence of Apne

Aap members, and Noor bai's long association with Apne Aap.

Since then, Radha has been repeatedly asked by her in-laws to either get into prostitution or pay them INR 2.5 lakh that they spent on her wedding. She has been harrassed about this and so she often came and lived with her mother. That day, when the incident took place, her husband took off with the little money she had saved over the months with her mother's support. Apparently, he went to enrol himself in an akhada (a place where boys train in body-building and wrestling) with that money so he could kick his alcohol addiction. He didn't think it appropriate to consult her before taking the money. The husband's father, later when he spoke to us and tried to reason with us about why there should be no police case, told us with a lot of entitlement that his son but had the right to use his wife's money for improving himself.

Noor Bai, who lives off prostitution, has faced tremendous reprovals for keeping her daughters off prostitution. Radha became a mother at the age of 14 and is now pregnant with her second child. Her in-laws have a problem feeding her and her child since she does not earn.

We have been conducting intervention programmes at Dharampura for about five years now. And we have seen how the Pernas and Saperas (traditionally snake charmers, who now play drums at weddings, or engage in seasonal migration to earn money) would not allow their girls and women to move out of the Basti (neighbourhood) for work. They would tell us, get our girls and women work here in the Basti, they will not go out. And amongst the Pernas, what is allowed though is going out for prostitution, not for anything else, not even education.

Diary of a Social Worker

Adopting Schools for a Better Tomorrow - Khushboo Mishra

Najafgarh: My name is Khushboo Mishra and I lead Apne Aap's field intervention programmes at Delhi office. My journey with Apne Aap at the field level has been full of ups and downs. I still remember the day when I reached to Apne Aap and during the interview I was asked if I would like to work in office or at field and I am glad that I chose field that day.

We have adopted two schools, one is Primary level and other is Senior level. In both the schools, we work to educate and empower the girls, especially from the marginalised and vulnerable communities. The most reason for the adoption of these particular schools are their location. These two schools are the nearest to the area where our three DNT communities (Perna, Sapera and Singhi) have set up their temporary settlements.

The three caste communities were known as Criminals under the British Administration. With time, though they started to be called as De-notified but their status is still the same. They still carry the social stigma and are still not provided with the livelihood opportunities. For these communities, schools are nothing than just wasting eight crucial hours which they could use to earn money elsewhere. Hence, these communities are completely uneducated.

Being aware of the caste realities of these communities, we initially decided to adopt a primary level school at a distance of 15 minutes from the community. We enrolled 13 children in this school from July 2016 till Dec 2016 and organised various programmes such as open mic, art & craft classes, self defence etc. We made all efforts to make the schools attractive for the children, so that it becomes easy to keep them in school. This helped us to reduce the problem of absenteeism, drop outs etc. It is pleasure to bring in the notice that we have been granted the permission to work again in the primary school from the Municipal Corporation of Delhi. This will be our second year with this school.

When we had started to work in the primary school, we observed that only 60- 70% of girls enrol in the Senior Secondary School for their education, i.e, majority of the girls drop after fifth grade and do not reach to the sixth grade. Keeping these circumstances in mind, we approached to the few parents and decided to adopt the Government Girls Senior Secondary School. It took me six months to receive the permission to work in this school.

There were times when I felt like giving up due to the regular visits to the government office to know the status of my application and every time they would say "Madam ji agle hafte pata kar lena (Madam, Please check next week)". But the smiles of these young girls used to fill me with an immense energy and encouraged me to procure the permission, no matter how much time it takes. Finally, I was able to receive the permission letter on 25th April 2017 and was extremely happy. Currently, we are working with both the schools and are in the process of adopting more such schools so that each child could receive the education, which is their fundamental right.

"The three caste communities were known as Criminals under the British Administration. With time, though they started to be called as De-notified but their status is still the same. They still carry the social stigma and are still not provided with the livelihood opportunities. For these communities, schools are nothing than just wasting eight crucial hours which they could use to earn money elsewhere. Hence, these communities are completely uneducated."

Freedom is Being Independent

— *Sunaina Perna / as told to Khushboo Mishra*

Najafgarh: My name is Sunaina. I study in 7th grade at a Government Girls Senior Secondary School which is 20 minutes walk away from my community. I have been lucky enough that I am still able to go to school. Generally, in our Perna community, girls are married at a very young age. For the girls like us, going to school and getting education is a real freedom.

In Perna community, girls are married at a very young age and as soon as they reach puberty, they are sent to their husband's place. In a maximum period of two years, she will deliver her first child and would be forced into prostitution in the name of tradition.

I, along with my sister and brother feel very lucky that we still are able to go to school. Many times people from our community ask my mother to not send me to school, otherwise I would face problem finding a groom. My mother practice prostitution but she do not want me and my sister to enter into this profession.

My sister wants to be a teacher. She shares that freedom is when she goes out from the community. She likes to travel various places and meet new people. She feels like a bird flying high in the sky when she moves out from the community, even if it is few hours.

My friend in neighbourhood shares that she would get freedom when she will be able to work and earn. She wants to work in office. She likes to shop. She dreams of buying different designer dresses and makeup when she will start to earn. For her, freedom will be the office environment.

My other friend in next lane shares that she wish to see all historical monuments in Delhi. She has seen Qutub Minar in the pictures. She once shared that

she wish to go on top of the Qutub Minar and want to shout all of her friends name from there.

In Perna, girls are not allowed to express themselves freely. She is taught how to behave properly from much early age. Perna women and girls are the bread earners but are not allowed to spend money on themselves. Under the wings of Apne Aap, I have seen many independent women, I wish to be like them one day. Being an educated independent girl, earning my own money, that will be my real freedom.

“In a Perna community, girls are married at a very young age and as soon as they reach puberty, they are sent to their husband's place. In a maximum period of two years, she will deliver her first child and would be forced into prostitution in the name of tradition.”

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

Celebrating Independence Day Amidst Floods

— *Sunita Soren/ as heard by Praveen Kumar*

Forbesganj: My name is Sunita Soren and I am a student of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya, Simraha Forbesganj run by Apne Aap Women Worldwide. I am a student of class VII and living in the school's hostel with my other 99 classmates. There are three classes VI, VII and VII. This is a girl's hostel and we stay here full time for three years. We all are admitted in the concern middle school and use to go to school on daily basis for our study. This hostel is like our homes. We only use to go our homes on the occasion of festivals when there is a holiday in the school and hostel too. We celebrate all the festivals in our hostel with our classmates and teachers here.

On 13th August midnight a massive flood touched our area and the land filled with floods water. Our hostel campus also filled with approx 2 ft water but thank god that the water not interred in our rooms. When we awake in the morning we were surprised to see the situation. Our warden and teachers also filled with fear and they call Praveen sir and share the detail information to him about the situation ask him to do necessary steps for our safety. After one and hour Praveen sir came here and as per his guidelines, we all are shifter in the second floor of the middle school building. All the necessary arrangements were completed to fight for the situation. Many people from outside came here for shelter also. We all gave them shelter and provided food for 3 days also.

On the second day the famous national festival, our independence day was to be celebrated. We all

filled with sadness to how we celebrated the festival. Next day at 8 pm, Praveen sir came here and suggests us to do the preparation for hosting the national flag on the top floor of the building. We all do the necessary arrangement in his guidelines. We prepared rangolies, map our country, hang the pictures of the freedom fighters and decorated the place beautifully. Jalebi the national sweet arranged for us and guests also. At 9 am the national flag hosted by the chief guest, and the national anthem was taken by us too. A short speech delivered by some guests and from our side also. After this Jalebi distributed among all of us. We all are happy now because we get worried how we celebrated our national festival in the floody situation. But thanks to Praveen sir who gave the idea of this type and we all enjoyed the festival.

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The World Outside

Getting an Aadhar Card

—Munni Devi / as told to Praveen Kumar

Forbesganj: My name is Munni Devi. My husband's name is Shree Manoj Ray. I live in Kali Me-la Rod, Ward No.- 07 in Forbesganj. I am now a member of Apne Aap Self Empowerment Group. In the first meeting by Apne Aap, a card called Asset card distributed among us by Madhu Di and Meena Di and asked us to give the information related it to fill it. We hear about the information sheet there is a column about Government ID's and about Aadhar card also. When we asked about the importance of Aadhar card Madhu di told me about its importance and we were surprised to hear because we have no any Aadhar card right now. When we all five women- I with Jaimala Devi, Rani Devi, Pramila Devi and Rinku Devi told that we have no Aadhar card and we want to prepare it so please help us. They agreed to help us there is a big problem that we have not any residence proof and date of Birth proof also. When we reached the Aadhar enrolment center with Madhu and Meena Di, they refused to fill out forms and need the residence and date of birth proof. We all become sad to hear it but Meena di told that they will find any way for it. They call Praveen Sir and ask him to support us for preparation the Aadhar card. He call us in the office and prepare a letter to the Ward Councilor for the approval of our residence and date of birth too.

Praveen sir also prepared a detail information sheet regarding the information's needed for aadhar enrolment and requested the ward counselor to approved it from his side and support us to get our Aadhar card. Next day morning, we reached to the ward counselor's residence for the approval. He read the letter given by Praveen Sir carefully and gave us the approval. We filled with glad and reached to the enrolment center half kilometer far away from there. We saw the approved latter to the in charge and finally he enrolled us for Aadhar card. After a week we get there Aadhar card on online basis and take the printouts. Now we have the Aadhad card by the help of Apne Aap team members and we are happy not to get the amount of flood relief through the Aadhar card. Thanks Apne Aap for this support. We all promise that we all became a lifetime member of Apne Aap network now.

(Continued from page 1)

The situation was getting out of control with the passage of each night. My daughter's husband and in-laws started to force her for the prostitution. Days and months passed, situation was becoming out of control. My daughter started to live at my place (her in-laws live in the next lane in the same area).

Last year, when her in-laws realized that she will not accept our traditional occupation of prostitution, they called a Panchayat. The Panchayat went on for a long time from morning till evening. Our Panchayat is male dominated and we were opposing our traditional occupation which was the first time in the Perna community. My all four daughters were home and we were scared, thinking what if the Panchayat decision goes against us. The Panchayat members favoured us and said that nobody can force my daughter to carry out this caste based tradition if she don't want to. They also fined her in-laws with Rs 1100/-. The matter has been sorted out. My daughter went back to her husband's place and after few months she conceived again.

Being pregnant, she was not taken care of by her husband and in-laws, instead was mentally harassed for being a burden on them. She started to live again at my home. Few days back, her husband and in-laws came to my home, all drunk and broke their alcohol bottles inside my one room house. I started to question and they slapped me. I was furious. Her husband went back and in-laws stayed. They torn off my clothes and beaten me all blue and black. I started to bleed. My daughter was also kicked on her womb despite being seven months pregnant. I had called Apne Aap when all this had started, they came and talked about the incident briefly. Few hours later I filed a Preventive FIR in the nearest police station.

My First Day at Apne Aap

— *Priyanka Voruganti*

Delhi: My name is Priyanka Voruganti, I'm 15 years old, and this summer I interned with Apne Aap. It was my first time in India since my childhood, and so I had no idea what to expect. Before arriving in Delhi, I prepared myself to be confronted with either a hot, humid place full of loud voices, unfamiliar sounds and daunting people or a second home- a place where I felt I immediately belonged. It was the latter; As soon as I stepped off of the plane, I knew I would love my newfound abode. However, there was another confrontation to be had. I would be going to Najafgarh for the very first time and meeting the very same women and girls at risk of prostitution that I spoke about passionately and felt for deeply my whole life. I act in various feminist plays, one of which is called A Day In The Life, a production that gives voices to girls that have been sex trafficked and tells their stories. I had acted and played the role of girls who have been in this terrible situation for as long as I could remember but never even came close to being face-to-face with the victims themselves. So, going to the community that Apne Aap works with and helps was a big moment for me. When Khushboo, Apne Aap's field officer, my mother, and I arrived at Najafgarh we were greeted by a herd of small children. The thing I remember the most about these precious children were their smiles, so bright and so full of life. Some hugged Khushboo, glad to be reunited with the woman who visits them so often, and others gravitated towards me- the new arri-

val. Everyone was so kind, and I was so excited to begin my work at the community. We gathered outside a woman's home and she was very quick to find a bench for my mother and me and get a fan running. Then, it was time to begin the workshop. For a month, I taught kids in the community and the local government school how to act and how to channel a desire for a better, more equal world into a work of art- a skit! That very first day, I asked the group of kids sitting in front of me what they wanted to do when they grew up. Quickly, they all shot up their hands and delivered the same response, one after one- "An actor!" I laughed and responded, "That's what you're all going to be today! Actors!" We talked about the components of a scene, how to build a character, and what we would like to make a play about. Finally, we played some drama games and just as soon as it had begun, the day had come to an end and it was time for me to leave. I said goodbye to all the lovely children- Prachi, Prince, and more, and promised we would have another workshop soon. I was so lucky to have the opportunity to work with Apne Aap and teach drama to the children at the Najafgarh. community. It was an unforgettable experience, and I hope to return to India soon.

(Continued from page 1)

We have taken shelter in the top floor of the govt. hospital near about our community. We stayed there for three days, one day fully without taking any food. On the morning of 14th August some food packets were distributed among us by the hospital administration and we gave the food to our children to eat who were hungry from last 36 hours. After the mid day of 16th August, the flood water goes down and we went to see the situation our houses but when we reach there, we were filled with sorrow to see our houses broken badly by the flood. We are homeless now and no any way or shelter to stay for us. After a few days we returned to our place and arrange some plastic sheets, hanged them and build a temporary shelter for us. Apne Aap tem members provided us food and clothes and they also promise to rebuild our homes. We are very sad because our houses and not rebuild by Apne Aap now and the winter season came across. We all are requesting Apne aap to please

rebuild our houses as earliest possible and gave us a shelter. Thanks Apne Aap and I hope we will get our new houses soon.

"We stayed there for three days, one day fully without taking any food. On the morning of 14th August some food packets were distributed among us by the hospital administration and we gave the food to our children to eat who were hungry from last 36 hours."

Poems

Open a Book

Open a book
And you will find,
People and places of every kind;
Open a book
And you can be,
Anything you want to be,
Open a book
And you can share,
Wondrous words you find in there
Open a book
And I will too,
You read too me,
And I'll read to you.

Selected by: Kajal Kumari
Area: Simraha, Bihar

The Little Plant

In the heart of a seed
Buried deep so deep
A tiny plant
Lay fast asleep.
“Wake” said the sunshine.
“And creep to the light”.
“Wake” said the voice.
Of the raindrops bright.
The little plant heard
And it rose to see,
What a wonderful,
Outside world might be.

Selected by: Varsha Kumari
Area: Simraha, Bihar



Second Floor, D-56
Anand Niketan, New Delhi

Phone:
+91 11 24119968

E-mail/Web:
contact@apneap.org
www.apneap.org

Red Light Despatch

Editor: Ruchira Gupta

Editorial team: Shinjini Chowdhury, Sara Khan,
Anahita Mir, Praveen Kumar, Tinku
Khanna

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