



Red Light Despatch

Volume 4, Issue 8

August 2011

NEWSLETTER

Column

My Dreams

I Dream for Myself Now

By Aarti Bedia

Hasanpur, Delhi: When I was young, I would dream about my doll's wedding. I wanted my doll to get married into a good house and be happy and not face any problems in her life. When I was growing up my parents taught me how to do the chores at home. At 11, my family began to show me a dream - my marriage. They said that I would need to learn how to run a home efficiently, as when I am married I will be responsible for doing all the work. I forgot all about my dream for my doll's wedding and got involved in learning how to run a family home. I found it difficult to cope with my studies. I was concerned and anxious about my prospective marriage and then I began to have a new dream about getting a job and working outside the home. I was a little fearful. Now I only wanted to support my family—and my dream came true. Not every girl's dream comes true. I realised that perhaps if even one out of ten dreams comes true, we can be happy.

I Want my Rights Returned to Me

By Julie Thapa

Khidderpore Kolkata: I am 35 years old. When I was about 10 years old I was forced to prostitute my body. One day, while I was playing near my home, a man that I came to know as Ashfaq started talking to me. He told me that I had to go with him. Innocently I followed, only to be later tortured and raped by him. He kept me in his home, far away from my own. I didn't know where I could go, so even though I was terrified, I stayed. Ashfaq said I owed him. I became what is known as his 'keep' meaning that I lived with him and had to be allowed to be raped by him whenever he wished. He began to prostitute me to his clients and took all the money that

my body earned. During this time of living with Ashfaq, I gave birth to a boy and a girl. My children still live with me.

After some years, I don't know how many, Ashfaq moved out of the house and got married. He now lives with his wife outside of the red light area that is my home. My income goes directly to them; I have no money of my own. I did once ask Ashfaq for some money so that I could move away and get out of prostitution. He refused. I have to stay, and if I try to refuse a client, I am tortured, beaten and starved by Ashfaq.

What I want is to be able to move out of this area and set up an enterprise of my own. Recently, I have been attending classes run by Apne Aap.

(continued on page 6)

I am Proud to Have Given my Son a Future

By Rumi Das

Munshigunj, Khidderpore: I live and work as a prostitute in the Red Light District of Khidderpore. I grew up in a small village and I lived with my parents and younger siblings. I remember being very happy and free to play. I was surrounded by love. Even though we were very poor we were happy because we had each other.

When I was still young, about 11, a man came to the village. He told my parents that he could get

me work in the city, and then I could send money back to them and we wouldn't have to struggle so much. I felt proud to be able to

Column

The World Outside

contribute to my family, but I was terrified of leaving my village and everything that I knew. The man took me to Khidderpore where we came to a dirty building. He took me into one of the

(Continued on page 6)

Apne Aap's Healthcamp is a Huge Success

By Kari Fuglesten

Princeton University Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs

Washington DC: During my internship at Apne Aap headquarters in Delhi this summer, I had the privilege of working with Apne Aap's many talented staff members who dedicate their lives to ending the exploitation of women forced into prostitution in India. My colleagues at Apne Aap work hard to create innovative programs that help women gain alternative livelihoods, know their legal rights, and educate their children.

One of the projects I worked on during my time with Apne Aap was to help implement a new initiative—a health camp in the Khaira Village in Najafgadh District. At the health camp, Apne Aap sponsored free medicine and health checkups for the Harijan community, a group of people who are at risk for prostitution due to their low socio-economic status.

The health camp was a huge success, helping over 200 people receive free disease screening, anemia testing, and women's health exams. A general physician, a pediatrician and a gynecologist provided medical service at the camp, and a dispensary was set up to provide the prescribed



medications free of charge. Women who attended the camp were also told that they would be provided free follow up services at the Apne Aap centre in Hasanpur where the doctors visit once a week.

In addition, Apne Aap made sure that a legal support advocate was at the camp to provide advice and support to women who wanted to discuss legal problems such as

domestic violence or dowry issues.

Reflecting on this experience, I continue to be amazed by how much good work was done in just a few hours. At the camp, I spoke with countless women who expressed how grateful they were to receive help for ailments that have gone untreated for months. By all accounts this health camp was outstanding—the staff was caring and capable, and the patients were satisfied.

As an intern in Apne Aap's monitoring and evaluation unit, I can say without hesitation that these health camps are well worth the effort and resources put into them. As such, I am delighted to hear that Apne Aap will continue this successful initiative by organizing more health camps across India over the next few months.

Announcements:

Cool Men Don't Buy Sex Campaign

Apne Aap will next month launch a year-long advocacy campaign called *Cool Men Don't Buy Sex*. This campaign will highlight the role that men play in fostering the sex industry. All too often, the attention is focused on the women who are the victims of trafficking, and the male demand is left unaddressed. Without men buying sex, traffickers, pimps, and brothel owners will be driven out of business. Our ultimate objective is both societal and legal change. *Cool Men Don't Buy Sex*

will enlist men and women to put pressure on the Indian Government for the enactment of the proposed section 5C of the Immoral Trafficking Prevention Act (ITPA). This amendment would shift criminalization from women and girls in prostitution to the men who buy sex and the pimps who profit from the violent exploitation of women. To pressurize the government we will submit a 10,000 signature petition to the President of India.

The campaign will raise aware-

ness of the following:

- Prostitutes are victims, not criminals;
- The actual 'bad guys' are the pimps, traffickers, and johns;
- Prostitution is not a choice. It is a lack of choice;
- Prostitution is not the world's oldest profession; pimping is the world's oldest profession;
- When men buy sex, they are funding a multibillion dollar industry that inevitably exploits women and girls

Rehabilitate the Prostitute Buyer

By Ruchira Gupta

Prostitution is neither a real choice nor inevitable for poor low-caste girls and women. Nobody chooses to be born poor, nobody chooses to be born a girl and nobody chooses to be born low-caste. Even among the valuable human beings born into such unfairness, no one wishes for an occupation that depends on multiple body invasions a day, the constant threat of violence, a shortened life expectancy, and use as an object rather than an equal human being. Prostitution for most women is about the absence of choice. On the other hand, men who create the industry of prostitution choose to pay for sex. They consciously choose to visit a brothel, and not a few of them beat, wound, maim and even kill prostituted women and girls. Not all men go to prostitutes – probably only a minority are so addicted to the drug of dominance that they buy and sell females as objects – but they are numerous enough in their pathology to create a network of brothels and trafficking.

While Justice Markandey Katju and Gyan Sudha Misra's Supreme Court order calling on the Centre and all states to prepare schemes for giving technical and vocational training to prostituted and sexually abused women should be hailed with gratitude, it still falls short of nailing the problem. Prostitution is not driven by poverty as the order says but is driven by the demand for purchased sex and by traffickers who take advantage of the over-arching poverty and inequality of women to turn a profit. Prostitution is a demand driven

industry.

All the rehabilitation schemes of the 3 million women and girls trapped in prostitution in India today will not stop the growth of the trafficking industry. While governments may set up honest job training schemes for the those who have already been prostituted in response to this order, traffickers will simply prowl around in other villages, slums and campuses seducing, tricking, forcing, kidnapping and buying other girls. The only way to turn the tide of trafficking is to deter the prostitute buyers and the traffickers who cater to them, with strong punishments ranging from long jail sentences to high fines and rehabilitation programmes that de-addict them from sex with domination and violence.

It would have been wonderful had the order also called on all states to give reports on the number of convictions of prostitute buyers and traffickers, and development of rehabilitation schemes for sex buyers. The order might have asked the Centre and the Ministry of Women and Child about why there is a nine-year delay in amending the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act of 1956, seeking stronger punishments for buyers of prostituted sex and for the pimps, transporters, recruiters, brothel owners and managers. Country after country have ratified this law and thus began to dismantle the system of prostitution.

The main reason why India has not amended its inadequate law could be that the majority of the trafficked are girls and women, and we place less value on females in our society.

Or it could be the opposition mounted by the AIDS establishment, backed by the big sex-pharma industry nexus who resist dismantling of the brothel system saying, "in that case where will we distribute the condoms?" In fact they keep pimps and brothel owners on salaries for easy access to brothels and get the government to make bulk purchase of condoms from various manufacturers.

With pimps drawing salaries and condom manufacturers making profits, there is little incentive to dismantle the sex industry. This establishment has been actively lobbying with Health Ministry and NACO officials against amending and strengthening the law that will punish buyers and pimps.

These profit-seeking misogynists are at least as great a danger to women and girls as any customers of prostitution, and have the added advantage of pretence of good purpose plus profits to distribute, legally and otherwise.

The two-judge bench of Katju and Misra have taken a vital step toward a more gender sensitive policy on sex-trafficking and prostitution. They have quoted Charles Dickens in their order but unless they and the government go further to attack the very roots of the problem, which is the demand for purchased sex and ensure accountability for raping women, we will create the Dickensian nightmare of innumerable shelters and homes for women providing vocational training while brothels will continue to outnumber the shelters.

Nobody Asks us Women About our Health

By Rina

Hasanpur, Delhi: This month, Apne Aap: Women Worldwide brought medical services to more than 150 women and girls in my village. We are all very poor and we all really needed this medical service. My Village is called Harijan Basti in Hasanpur. I can see every day that there are so many women who are suffering from everyday health problems like cough, cold, fever, body ache, weakness. These are very curable diseases but these women including me suffer for days and days with these problems. In this health camp we were told about anemia which I came to understand is another very big problem for women and girls who live in my village. Anemia happens when the blood in the body becomes very little and results in many side effects. I kept noticing that many most of the women and

girls after getting their blood tested was informed that they have anemia. They were then given tablets to become better but they were also told how to eat the right things so that even when the medicines stop the Anemia does not come back. I think the main reason by all these young girls are getting Anemia is because they are not eating good food. But how will they eat good food when they have so little money? They cannot buy the good food.

Even to go and visit the doctor we I am ill or my children are ill I cannot do it. The closest Government hospital is so far away we have no way of going there. The doctors who are here are very expensive. We cannot pay them money so often we just don't go to the doctor. I cannot believe that here the doctors are there for free and they are giving the medicines also.

Many times I don't even realise

that there is something wrong with me. I am feeling tired and sleepy all the time but I think that it is just because I am not sleeping well. But after coming here the doctors explained to me that this tiredness is because of Anemia. I don't have a lot of blood in my body. I never thought that this could be a problem. When we think of medical problems we think about aches and fever and all. I found out that Anemia is not just a small disease and definitely I should not ignore it. I am very worried for my daughters. I hope they are not very ill. They are very young right now but I want to try my best to make sure that from a very early age, their health does not get bad and that they grow up healthy. As their mother in the years that they are living with me this is what I can try and do for them. After they get married, who will look after them and their health?

(Continued on page 6)

I am Waiting for the Government to Help Women Like Me

By Pooja Kumari

Forbesgunj, Bihar: I am 20 years old. I am from a poor family and I was brought up in Kolkata. Three years ago a man I didn't know promised me a professional job. He said that if I come with him I will be able to work and earn money to give myself and my family a better life.

I believed him but I was reluctant to leave my family so the man forced me to go to Forbesgunj with him. This man is a pimp. He tortured me and raped me. Now I am kept in his brothel

and forced to make money for him by selling my body for his customers. Every day I am repeatedly raped, not only by the customers, but also by the brothel owners. I don't earn any money for myself or my family. I have not seen anyone I know since I left my village.

No woman chooses to be in this profession, like me they are forced into it by their circumstances or by people around them. The majority of us are physically forced into it, we are trafficked and sold. I was enticed and brought to Forbesgunj under

false pretences. I have always felt helpless under the power of this network of men.

The only way that I can see a future for myself and others like me is if I am saved by the government. If they offered a chance for rehabilitation then I would come out of this hell and live a life of dignity. I believe that the government should allow the women of India the chance to train in some alternative livelihood and that can give us help with housing. I dream that the government will enable girls like me to come out into an accepting

Did You Know...?

India, the Law & Prostitution

India signed the UN convention for the 'Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others' in 1950

In India, at least 20,000 girls a year are forced into prostitution

On the 20th July, 2011, the Indian Supreme Court ruled that in accordance with the statement that every person has "a right to live with dignity", all prostituted women will have access to participate in a survey conducted by all Indian states to identify prostitutes who are willing to be rehabilitated. This means that steps are being taken to give prostituted women a chance for an alternative life; a life they have more autonomy over.

In 1956 the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act (ITPA) came into effect in India. However, Apne Aap are working to lobby for a change in this law as it currently punishes the prostituted woman, and doesn't go far enough to punish the buyer of sex / brothel owner / pimp. A person caught buying in a brothel buying sex can be let off with a sentence of 3 months or a mere fine of Rs 20,000, hardly enough to deter a client from going to brothel to buy sex from a victim of sex trafficking

However, as yet, the state has not given out any more directives after announcing this initiative for rehabilitation of prostituted women

It took 4 years, but in 2004 India signed the UN convention for the 'Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography'

It is LEGAL to be a prostitute in India but trafficking is ILLEGAL

The UN ranks the subcontinent of India as 'tier 2', meaning that the government of India DO NOT fully comply with the Trafficking Victims Protection Act's (TVPA) minimum standards.

Join our mailing list at:
www.apneaap.org

Follow us on
Facebook and Twitter!



I Want my Rights Returned to Me

Poetry Corner

Meri Maa

By Khushboo
Dharampura, Delhi

*Meri Maa Jaisi Maa paana dur-
labh hai sansaar mein
Hogi nahi kahi aisi Maa chahey
dekho laakh hazaar mein
Main dhannya hua Maa tujhko
paakar
Tujhe paana punah chahoon
main sansaar main aakar
Anek dukh sahar bhi humey
tune paala hai
Jaise dono netro ko palko ne
sambhala hai
Ehsaas kabhi na honey diya
humey tune abhav ka
Har peeda ko door kiya hai tune
mere ghav ka
Ankhon mein hai tera sapna
humein bada banana ka
Khona nahi vishwaas hai ma tune
apne seenay ka
Tuhi ek jeevan ka sahara hai Maa
Jaise nadi main nao ka kinara hai
Maa
Jan manas ki seva karna tune
humein sikhaya hai Maa
Bal buddhi vivek ka path tune
humein padaya hai Maa
Kabhi maine chaaha nahi
ankhon main tere aansoon lana
Galti se agar aa gayey ho to
kshama mujhe kardenaa Maa*

(My Mother: This poem is about the girls' mother and how grateful she is for having a mother who cares about her so much. Her mother has sacrificed a lot to keep her away from any harm or trouble. Her mother has borne a lot of difficulty to give her a life where the girl never loses faith in herself.)

(Continued from page 1)

The classes have been helping me to learn about equality and my rights. People look at me with disgust and treat me as below them. I am never invited to social occasions or marriages. I am separate from society. I want to be able to participate and for people to see me as a good woman. I want them to see the real me. I want my rights to be returned to me.

The Supreme Court's order for rehabilitation could be a fantastic opportunity for women like me; it may finally free us from

I am Proud to Have Given my Son a Future

(Continued from page 1)

small dark rooms and raped me. He told me that I was his property now and that I couldn't leave otherwise my family would get nothing. I had to stay in that brothel for years, working as a prostitute. The only dream I had was to have a family of my own, and then I could be happy like I was in my childhood. After what seemed like eternity, a woman in the Red Light District community fell sick and asked if I would care for her son. I did as she asked and after her passing I became the mother of that child. He was called Raja. Raja became my own flesh and blood and I put everything I

this life. However, I have doubts about whether the order will change anything. I feel that our life has been set up like this for too long and that it won't change as we are a part of society for whom no one will speak for or support. Apne Aap is an exception and so I believe in Apne Aap more than the Government.

Nobody Asks us Women About our Health

(Continuation from
page 4)

As I am growing older I am realising

how important it is to take care of health. I have to take care of my family, but if I don't have good health then how will I take care of anything else. We women have to do so much work and so few people ask us whether we are unwell or not. They don't care. They think that we can continue to work and nothing will happen to us. I really hope that this kind of health camp keeps happening again because women like me really need it.

had into caring for him. More than anything I wanted him to have an education but my poverty stopped me from being able to send him to school.

In time Apne Aap Women Worldwide started working in Munshigunj. They provided basic literacy classes for children living in the red light district and I enrolled Raja immediately. At the age of 14 Raja completed class 11 and he started looking for work. He was polite and confident and soon got offered a job. The Didi's from Apne Aap tried to encourage him to stay in school but he wanted to work. Without Apne Aap I don't think Raja would have managed to find a job, and so I am very grateful to Apne Aap for giving my son this chance of independence and happiness.

*Name has been changed

I am Very Excited about the future of my Self Empowerment Group

By Sunita Devi

Forbesgunj, Bihar: I am the president of a self empowerment group (SEG) named “Kiran”, which is functioning at Kubertola, Forbesganj. As a part of this group, I have taken place in many activities in the past and like to be very involved in anything that we do in a group. When I found out about the legal camp, I was very excited. I had never been part of a legal camp before and I was very happy that I had a chance to attend one. This session was very important for me more so because I am a member of an SEG. I had imagined that the legal session would help give us new ideas for our own empowerment which we could really use being part of an SEG. And it did so. I am a house wife and I have no idea about the activities hap-

pening outside my surroundings or any social issues and legal issues. I had no idea about even my rights which were discussed during the session. I was quite amazed to know that there are so many things that I am allowed to demand for myself and for my family and children. I had never thought of all this before.

Today I know about my fundamental rights and constitutional entitlements. I have always felt so inferior as I am a house wife and have no knowledge about anything and maybe because of this the male community dominates us. Because I work in the house and don't do any other kind of work I felt that I am not capable of doing anything. I have come to know about many of the rights which are applicable for everyone

in society. I feel so confident and I will apply these things for my personal life, as will the women in my group. Together we will raise our voices against the atrocities happening against the women in the community. We have rights and we don't need to live under the force of men and others in society who think that we are inferior. The government is giving us rights and we should all know about them. That is true empowerment. This legal session really helped understand all this and also now I feel confident because I know that there are people who are ready to help me in my effort to empowerment. I am very excited for the future of my SEG now. We can do so much more.

It is Possible to Change Life Through Education?

By Resham Khatoon

Forbesgunj Bihar: Sometimes when I think of the olden days I feel sorry for the woman of that time. She was not modern or literate like the women today. She had to suffer all kinds of injustices quietly. She considered that it was against her *dharma* to raise her voice. She would tolerate all kinds of abuse heaped upon her and thought that it was her destiny. Men felt that women ought to be in *purdah* and it was an insult to men if they went out of the

house. Men feared if women went out of the house they would not listen to them anymore. It was their duty to stay in the house and only look after their home and children.

If she ever got out of her house she would get a scolding and even a beating, but she would quietly accept all of this even when it was not her fault. Strangely, the more she tolerated injustices the more people would think and say unpleasant things about her and do unpleasant things to her. Yet these people

only insult women and even sell her for money.

This was in the past. Today a woman has realized that she allowed herself to become weak and allowed her dreams to be shattered. Today, the woman has been able to make herself literate and educated and now refuses to suffer silently. She is changing all the misconceptions about herself in society. With the help of education she has empowered herself. It has been possible to change her life through education.

Interview

I Will Pray That Other Girls Get Out of Prostitution

Survivor of prostitution from Kolkata, talks to journalist Anna Gonzales from the Spanish newspaper 'El Mundo' about her life of struggle and pain in a Red Light Area.

Anna: What can you recall about your life in Bangladesh?

Sita Devi: I cannot remember much as it was so long ago. I remember that I used to live with my parents, 3 brothers and 1 sister. My siblings and I never went to school – I didn't even know where the local school was! My parents worked in the fields – we were very poor. I was around 12 years old when my parents forced me to get married. I did not have any say over my marriage. I don't even remember the name of my husband. My husband was an agricultural labourer. I did not have any idea of my husband's age. We were from the same village.

My husband tortured me a lot. He beat me because I could not bring any money with me to the marriage as I belonged to poor family. He then refused to accept me as a wife and threw me out of the house. I was too proud to go back home. I started working as a domestic servant in a house that my Aunt had told me about. I needed the money and I did not want to go back to my parent's house.

A: What was the domestic work that you were doing like?

SD: It was long and exhausting. I was paid very little. One day, the master of the house tried to seduce me and when I refused, he attempted to rape me. I turned to his wife for help but she did not believe me and I was asked to leave.

A: What did you do next?

SD: I went to my cousin Mala for help. I knew her quite well and considered her a confidante. I don't know how old she was but she was much older than me. She had a family but she was working as a maid-servant a few houses away from where I was working. She told me about West Bengal and then said that she would take me there to see the very famous Kalighat temple. I had never travelled outside my village before. It was a long journey and I remember being scared but I trusted my cousin and I thought she is taking care of me so I consoled myself. I had only heard the name of Kolkata. I knew nothing else about the place

A: What happened after you reached Kolkata?

SD: I was enthusiastic about the temple visit. Since my cousin had told me about the temple I had been eager to visit it. It was amazing. After finishing my Puja at temple, I was very tired so my cousin took me to a place to rest. I fell asleep and when I woke up, she was gone. I knew no one and I had no idea where I was. There was this lady staring at me. She told me that I had been sold to her brothel. The woman took me to her brothel and I was immediately raped by clients. I was only 12 years old. Because I was so young the other women and clients doted on me. They loved me for my beauty. I have now lived here for 40 years. As I grew older the men and other women started to hate me because I was not beautiful any more. 7 years ago

I managed to escape from the

brothel without them noticing – they did not care to notice anymore.

A: Where do you live now? And what do you do?

SD: I am now staying with my Babu and with my 1 son. My 2 daughters are married and live away from the red light area. I work as a maidservant in Kolkata. I have purposely kept my daughters away so that they can stay far away from the life that I had to lead and are never dragged into prostitution.

A: What do you look forward to now?

SD: I want to see my children well established in life. I want the best for my children and to do whatever I can for them.

A: Did you meet girls like yourself who had come from Bangladesh and had been sold?

SD: I met with a few of the Bangladeshi girls who were brought and sold here but I never wanted to know their stories. It hurt me too much to hear it. I left prostitution seven years ago so I don't know too much about what is going on right now. I think young girls keep coming from all over the place. Demand is high for young girls.

A: If you were to meet the girl who sold you, what would you say to her?

SD: I won't say anything I guess but I will try and pray that she gets saved from prostitution and try and make a situation that she will be able to do some other kind of work.



D-56 Anand Niketan

New Delhi - 110021

Phone:

+91 11 24110056

+91 11 46015940

E-mail/Web:

contact@apneaap.org

www.apneaap.org

Red Light Despatch

Editor:

Ruchira Gupta

Editorial team:

Anindita Roy, Gerry Dallas

Publisher:

Apne Aap Women Worldwide