

RELEASING SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM MUMBAI, DELHI,
KOLKATA AND FORBESGUNJ (BIHAR)

I had to accept even greater torture because I had a daughter.

Sarama: Kidderpore: Kolkatta

I am Sunita's mother. I would like to tell you my story, even though it may be the story of many women like me. Yet for me it is still different. I was born in a village called Tarkeshwar in the Hooghly district. My father's name was Haridev Sarkar and he was working in a goldsmith's shop. My mother Sabita Devi was a housewife. I had two brothers.

Our life was very happy. We went to school everyday. The rest of the time we spent near the riverside or in the playground. Suddenly my father lost his job. My mother had only been a housewife so she started working as a house maid in peoples' homes. All of a sudden she left us forever. It was a very difficult time for us.

One day a person came with a marriage proposal for me. I was forced to get married. I had known that my husband was a businessman. But later I realized he was nothing but a trafficker. I could not trust him. Yet what could I do? I had to look after my family. I was sincere to them. My husband tried to push me into the Red Light area. Very soon I became the mother of a girl-child. I had to accept even greater torture because I had a daughter. My husband tried his best to drive me out of the family home. At that time, a neighbour of mine asked me to come out of my house. She promised me that she would find a job for me. Unfortunately, I was sold to the Kidderpore Red Light area, without my knowledge. My twelve year old daughter was with me. I realized that it was next to impossible for me to escape from that area. But I was determined to save my daughter from this plight.

Minudi was working with "Apne App Women Worlwide". It is an organization which was running a night crèche in the Red Light area to save and protect the girl child. Minudi suggested that I should go and meet the Didi incharge of the crèche, with my request. I went to her and asked her to put one child into the night crèche. She was very nice, and told me that it would be no problem to do so. But she also told me that I should try to go as far as possible from that area. I did so.

Today I am staying very far from the Red Light area. I am working as a housemaid and living a life of dignity. My daughter Sumita goes to school. I am a proud mother now.

I wear a short dress, paint my face and stand on the road.

Sita : Kidderpore: Kolkatta

I stay in the Red Light area of Kidderpore. I lost my mother when I was a child, and was helpless as I had a cruel and dominating stepmother. She was cold and rude to me.

As I grew older my family became more unkind to me. I had studied till class 7 but my stepmother stopped me from going to school. She said they had no money to spare for my education. I used to work in the house and think about leaving home. I tried to find a separate place to for myself and often thought that if I could get married I would have a better place to stay.

I knew Ratanda. He was my elder brother's friend. I had known him since childhood.

He used to tell me quite often, that I was having a miserable time and that he could help me find a better life. I trusted Ratanda. I was sure he could find me a better place to stay. One day Ratanda told me that he would take me to a nearby village to show me a chariot race. I quickly completed my housework for the day and left with Ratanda. On the way he offered me some sweet drinks. After having the drinks I lost consciousness. Nothing made any sense to me.

Gradually I came to realize that I was somewhere else. There was a 'madam' who was the manager of that place. She told me that I had been sold to her. She said that she would provide me with shelter, food and clothes. She would also give me some training. I would now work as an "Adhya". She said that whatever I would earn from now onwards, I would have to hand over half my earnings to her.

I have started working as an "Adhya". I wear a short dress, paint my face and stand on the road. I can do nothing about it.

I shall grow up to be an eminent doctor one day

Nargis Khatoon: Uttarpara: Kolkatta

Everyone calls me Pinky. My present address is Ramkrishna Vivekananda Mission, Uttarpara centre. We used to live in the Red Light area of Kidderpore. My mother, Sonia Bibi, came to the Red Light area with me. At that time I was only two years old. We used to live in a very small room. That is where I grew up. Our home was earlier in Barasat. I lived there with my parents. I do not know what circumstances forced my mother to leave home and led her to this place.

When "Apne Aap Women Worldwide" opened their night crèche in the Kidderpore Red Light area, my mother got me admitted there. She told me that she wanted me to become a great person one day. Then she said that we would leave that area.

I was admitted into Jyotirmayee Vidya Mandir, with the help of "Apne Aap". I liked studying and often stood first in my class. Then we heard that we would be sent to a hostel very soon. Again with the support of "Apne Aap Women Worldwide" I got admitted into Ramkrishna Vivekananda mission at their Uttarpara centre in 2009. Mataji Analprana of the school re-named me "Nargis" – the name of a beautiful flower. I started going to my new school.

In school we have to pray every morning and evening. We do all our personal work with our own hands. The teachers come in the morning and evenings to teach us. I love this place. We have a huge sky above us and plenty of open space all around to play. Mataji has told me that if I study well, then she will send me for higher studies to America.

I have begun to take my studies very seriously and truly believe that I shall grow up to be an eminent doctor one day. Then I shall devote my life in the service of treating the people of this Red Light area. I would also like to guide many mothers and help them to get out of this area and lead decent lives. My mother is no more with us. She has departed for her heavenly abode.

I wondered if anyone would talk to me as I belong to a low caste.

Meenakshi: Hasanpur Centre: Delhi (Kamyabi Kishori Mandal)

I have two brothers and one sister. I am 12 years old. I study in class 7, my younger brother is in class 5 and my elder brother studies in class 8. My eldest sister had to leave her school after class 5. My father's name is Santram and my mother is called Poonam. My father is in government service. My mother works at home. We belong to the Dalit caste.

I had always wanted to learn some handicraft. I was thinking about joining some class in my spare time. However we had no such facilities in our village. I was trying to motivate my friends to go to some nearby village where such classes were being held. I wanted to learn something useful to do along with my studies for some time.

Then one day Naina Didi came and told us about the Hasanpur centre. She told us that girls would be trained to do appliqué work at the centre. She also encouraged me to come if I wanted to learn that skill. I liked what she said. I always wanted to learn and here was an opportunity at my doorstep.

When I first came to the center I was very hesitant. I wondered if anyone would talk to me as I belong to a low caste. But as I continued coming to the centre I realized my fears were completely unfounded. The atmosphere was friendly and relaxed. As a result I enjoyed myself. The Didis at the centre told me that nature had not created the divisions of caste, creed and class among people. According to nature all human beings are the same. They are equal. We can only see harmony in nature. Social differences of higher and lower caste have only been created by human beings not by nature. So it is our responsibility to correct this mistaken thinking.

Along with learning appliqué we also learn singing and theatre. I love that. Now I come to the centre everyday. I want to study further. I want to become someone. I want to have my own identity.

Independence is very valuable to me.

Durga: Kidderpore Centre: Kolkatta

I am 15 years old. I am studying in Lajpat Vidyalaya. I come to this centre for my tutorial classes and complete my homework. Every day from 12pm - 4 pm I also come here to attend the income generation classes. I have been coming here for the last 5 years. I am learning how to make fashion bags from Anita Didi. She is a good teacher and very kind. We learnt how to make many things like, passport cases, handbags, mobile covers, computer covers, pencil cases and many such things. I like making fashion bags. Earlier I got a stipend of Rs. 250. Now we work according to the orders we receive and earn according to our expertise. I now get Rs. 500 a month.

The most important thing about this work is that it has shown me a way to become independent in future. Certainly, I don't know what may happen in future but I have found a way to go ahead.

Independence is very valuable to me. There is so much of difference between the way people at home behave with boys and girls. Boys are encouraged to go out and do things. Girls are asked to stay at home and be quiet. I get very angry with my mother. She does not allow me to go even to my friends' houses alone. I would love to be independent, go out and see new places. When I grow up I don't wish to get married. Married women lose their independence.

I like coming here because I feel free. I meet my friends. We talk, we laugh and have fun. I also enjoy learning new skills here. It can help me to live independently when I grow up. I hope it will be so.

A Woman's Song

Arti Bedia: Hasanpur Centre: Delhi

*The world has not learnt to value women;
It has not acknowledged our courage.
The world was born from our womb;
But it has snatched me away from myself.
No one has understood my pain.
The world made me into a silent stranger.
Nature gave me so much beauty, yet
Sons mean everything. Daughters can be thrown away.
Daughters too have their dreams. And a voice.
Daughters too have their songs and music
They wish to dance in this world
They wish to light a lamp within themselves
They wish to break their silence and come right in front
So that the sun will come rolling around in my lane
And the moon will make a lot of noise in my backyard.
And I? I will shine like a star in this world.*

I will never allow myself to become a victim of domestic violence.

Vijeta: Hasanpur Centre: Delhi (Kamyabi Kishori Mandal)

I study in class 8. I am 13 years old. I learnt about the centre after it opened in my village. I came here with my friends once and then started coming everyday. We formed our own group of girls. I also learnt theatre here. I was at first very hesitant. I had not taken part in a play before. I felt really strange. But when we performed before everyone it seemed easy and I enjoyed myself. When we were writing and practicing that play based upon domestic violence, I felt that it happens everywhere and everyday around us.

The play was about a young married couple. The parents of the husband are planning to get their son remarried to another girl. They beat their daughter-in-law and make her do all the housework. She is a non-literate and can do nothing but cry. Her in-laws insult her by piling all kinds of verbal and physical abuse upon her. They also want to get their son remarried. I felt so bad for the girl. All parents should encourage their daughters to study so that if such a fate befalls her she can take a strong stand. The Didis at our centre also explained the facts about domestic violence and how we can prevent it. I have decided that I would like to study further. I will never allow myself to become a victim of domestic violence.

Through the eyes of a visitor
Swatantrata and Sonagachi
Meenakshi — Kolkata

*Swatantrata (freedom) is a beautiful word
Swa means our desire to be happy forever
Tantra means a system that fulfils that desire
Ta means the essence of that desire*

Swatantrata is a beautiful word...

*Sometimes words fly very high,
Far above. Like birds in the sky.
Losing all touch with their meanings.
Losing all sight of the earth below.*

*Words like wishes, yearn to come true.
Yet they need meaning in order to be true.
And meanings need systems, to make it so.
So swatantrata must be allowed to come true.*

*The long lines of stark bodies, waiting.
Standing along the lanes of Sonagachi
With expectant eyes. Seeking mutual respect—
A desire far beyond their display of flesh.*

*Can the flight of human consciousness
Acknowledge its creation, when
They see the human despair of Sonagachi,
As another distortion of their imagination?*

*Today the women of Sonagachi
Demand that same swatantrata/freedom
Not just the beautiful word
But it's real meaning - in their lives.*

*Swatantrata (freedom) is a beautiful word
Swa means our desire to be happy forever
Tantra means a system that fulfils that desire
Ta means the essence of that desire*

Swatantrata is a beautiful word...

Freedom :

*Arti Bedia: Hasanpur
Centre: Delhi*

*Freedom
From work,
From bondage,
From rules.
From our brothers.*

*Freedom
To go to school,
To be free of
Bad habits
And wrong company,*

**Freedom is not feeling
ashamed of ourselves**

**Komal: Hasanpur:
Najafgarh: Delhi:
(Kamyabi Kishori Mandal)**

One day I was sitting and thinking... I wish I could become a bird..flying high in the sky. I would have an aim and I would sing my own song away from the rituals of this world..That is what freedom means to me.

Freedom is to take deep breaths. Going where we wish to. Expressing our thoughts without restriction. We should not be burdened with house work. Freedom is to live like our brothers do. Go out and do as we please. Freedom means to be able to laugh openly, to talk, to get married or not get married, make friendships, get into relationships of our choice..... Freedom is getting rid of the discrimination between boys and girls which happens at home. Freedom is getting out of the rules that imprison us which have been created by society. Freedom is not feeling ashamed of ourselves.

What freedom means to me:

Students of KGBV: Forbesgunj: Bihar:

- I want to be free to attend school everyday: *Khushbu*
- Freedom means when there is nothing and nobody to stop me from what I wish to do: *Sonam*
- Freedom is to do what I wish to do every day of the week: *Kavita*
- Freedom is being free to do whatever we want on Saturday and Sunday: *Kaajal, Baby, Khushbu Khatoon, Amrita, Nagma, Karishma, Sangeeta, Juhi, Julie, Poonam, Kavita*
- Freedom means to be free on one day in a week perhaps Sunday: *Nikhat, Shabnam, Kalpana, Khushbunara, Guddi, Rita, Rajila*
- I want to be as free as a bird: *Baby, Jahanara*
- I want to be free not to do the cleaning chores if I do not want to do them, some day : *Soni*
- I want to be free to play everyday: *Sakina*
- I want to be as free as a person with magical powers like a fairy: *Rukhsana*
- I want to be free to go anywhere I please: *Poonam Khatoon*

We need freedom from Superstitions

Priyanka: Hasanpur: Delhi (Kamyabi Kishori Mandal)

I feel girls should not be put under any kind of pressure. They should go out and see the world. Times have changed. Earlier girls had child marriages. There were many unfair practices like *sati*. Now it's not happening. I want to be free and live my life as I choose to. We need freedom from superstitions.

I want freedom to become a policewoman:

Pooja: Kidderpore Centre: Kolkata

I am 14 years old. I study in class 10 in Lajpat Balika Vidyalaya. I have been coming to this centre since I was very young. I have learnt a lot of things here. I know how to stitch clothes on a sewing machine. I am learning computers and Spoken English. I love both these subjects very much. They can help us to go ahead in future.

I think freedom for me stands for living in a way so we can take advantage of the opportunities we get in life. If we have an aim in our life then nothing should obstruct it. I want to become a policewoman wearing a white uniform. For that I have to study hard. I feel bad when parents do not allow their daughters to study. They are coming in the way of their daughters' freedom. In such cases the daughters should struggle and persuade their parents till they agree.

Education is important to get respect.

Leelavati: Hasanpur Centre: Delhi

I am a resident of Hasanpur. I was very young when my husband died. I had three sons. I looked after them all by myself. Today all my sons have government jobs, are married and have children. Now I look after my grandchildren and help with some chores at home.

"Apne Aap" has recently opened a centre in Hasanpur. I had gone for their inauguration and liked everything they said, during the function. They told us about a lot of schemes for women and I liked hearing about it. I also learnt about the "Domestic Violence Act". I think this good because it can prevent a lot of violence which happens behind closed doors of what we call "home".

As I come for these meetings I am learning about "Apne Aap's work also. Near our village there is another village called Revlakhanpur where there are many people from the Perna tribe. One day I was going to the army hospital and passed this village on my way. I was told that the women of this village are not 'good'. I also learnt that they get cheated by middlemen who take Rs. 2000 from customers and give only Rs. 1000 to the women and pocket the other half of the money. I felt it was unfair.

I think that all the women should sit together and begin to think about the future of their children. The lives of these women have almost been ruined. But if they are determined, they can do something so that it does not happen with their next generation. They should educate their children so they do not have to depend on this disrespectful way of earning money. Their children will then be respected in society. Education is important to get respect. I know this.

I do not believe in any caste discrimination. I am very happy that the centre of "Apne Aap" has started in Hasanpur. This is good for elderly people who stay here. We will also know a lot of government schemes for women if we come here. I have heard that "Apne Aap" is working in Premnagar Basti close by. I would also like to go and help, by having discussions with the women there. I hope this happens.

From a social workers' diary

Educating children from Red Light area has been a big step towards changing society

Sahana Dasgupta: Topsia, Kolkatta

I was working with Sanlap till I joined Apne Aap in 2003. Before I started my work in the Topsia centre I saw the boys taking lessons in carpentry from Sean and Christoff. Earlier these boys used to earn money by selling illicit liquor. So when they earned Rs. 1000 from their carpentry work, it was a new experience for them. For the first time in their life they were enjoying the pleasures of earning money from the labour of their own hands.

When I started working in the Topsia centre there were many shanties along the railway line in front of the centre. People who lived there were very poor. I had to do a survey of that area. The people were busy and unwilling to talk to me. So I asked a volunteer who had a camera to take their photos. This sounded exciting to the people and they readily agreed. I asked the photographer to take a little long to adjust the camera. While this was being done I would go and ask questions and I got the answers. This was repeated with different groups. In this way I completed my survey.

I also remember how I enticed the children to study at our Apne Aap centre. I took each child turn by turn. Bathed them and put oil in their hair. Give them food like bread and sometimes even rasagullas. In this way I built rapport with them and slowly they started coming..It took 6 months to do this. After that, within 2 weeks, we had 90 children. Now mothers come on their own with their children for admission to our centre. At present we have more than 200 children.

I also remember how I helped in getting some of our children admitted into Ramkrishna Vivekananda Mission. Swami Nityananda Maharaj, who headed the institution, refused to give admission to our children at first, because they were from a red light area. I went to see him many times to persuade him otherwise. Then one day I told him; "You are one of the pillars of our society. There is a beautiful light above this pillar which illuminates everything around it. Light does not discriminate where it falls, like the light of the sun. It does not differentiate whether it is falling on good or bad things. It merely illuminates and the surrounding darkness gets dispelled. It is your job to bring light into the dark lives of these children. It is your duty." I spoke firmly from my heart. He changed his mind after that day. Now our children are going to that school. It made a lot of difference to the mothers too. They are full of hope regarding the future of their children now.

We may not succeed in changing the lives of the mothers. But helping their children get good education is a great success. This is one big achievement of "Apne Aap". Educating children from Red Light area has been a big step towards changing society.

DO YOU KNOW?

There are 2 to 3 million prostitutes in India: That estimate comes from Moni Nag, *Sex of India: Diversity in prostitution and Ways of life* (Mumbai: Allied Publishers, 2006). It is generally in accord with other estimates. A 2004 journal article asserted that India has 3.5 million commercial sex workers, a quarter of them seventeen or younger: Amit Chattopadhyaya and Rosemary G. McKaig, "Social Development of Commercial Sex Workers in India: An Essential Step in HIV/AIDS Prevention," *AIDS Patient Care and STDs* 18, no. 3 (2004):162.

A 2008 study of India brothels: Kamalesh Sarkar, Baishali Bal, Rita Mukherjee, Sekher Chakraborty, Suman Saha, Arundhuti Ghosh, and Scott Parsons, "Sex – trafficking, Violence, Negotiating skill and HIV Infection in Brothel – based Sex Workers of Eastern India, Adjoining Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh," *Journal of Health, Population and Nutrition* 26, no. 2 (June 2008): 223-31. These self – reported estimates of the proportion of prostitutes in India who entered brothels voluntarily may be high, because of the prostitutes' fear of punishment from pimps for telling the truth.

China has more prostitutes: In the early 1990s, a common estimate for the number of prostitutes in China was 1 million, and that had increased to 3 million by about 2000. A scholar, Zhou Jinghao, who has written about the history of prostitution, has estimated that there are 20 million prostitutes in China. Another, Zhong Wei, offers that of 10 million.

27 million modern slaves: The figure of 27 million slaves appears, for example, in the opening line of *Not for Sale*, a commendable call to arms against trafficking by David Batstone (New York: Harper Collins, 2007).

Women aged fifteen though forty-four: The calculation that more women die or are maimed from male violence than from the other causes comes from Marie Vlachova and Lea Biason, eds., *Women in an Insecure World: Violence Against Women, Facts, Figures and Analysis* (Geneva: Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2005)

(Source: *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*: Nicholas D. Krist and Sheryl Wudunn: Alfred A. Knopf: New York: 2009)

To combat opposition while rescuing girls requires legal support.

Sarfraz: Asst. Professor of National University of Judicial Sciences: Kolkata

I have been associated with "Apne Aap" since 2008. I also execute training programs for police officers. I took classes for police officers of Bihar and formed legal cells in Bhagalpur, Katihar and Araria districts. The focus was to provide support to the victims of trafficking and raising awareness of police officers so as to prevent trafficking. Each of these legal cells has 7-9 members including local journalists, lawyers and public prosecutors.

The highlight was assisting Apne Aap in making the two training manuals about demand for sex trafficking. One for police officers and the second one was for prosecutors. The whole experience was great. Thanks to "Apne Aap" and this work I would never have gone to a remote place like Khwaspur in Bihar.

I have seen some changes since then. - The number of trainings has increased. Thanks to the trainings, one Red Light area in Katihar has completely closed with the help of 100 police officers and the district authority. - Women in prostitution go to the police and are given a hearing. Women are demanding a lot of changes from the police, the legal and the economic systems.

"Apne Aap" should be congratulated for their effort, power and courage. They have done great work in bringing awareness and empowerment among these women through literacy. One of their good projects is the KGBV in Forbesgunj. Many such projects in similar places are needed. Rehabilitation of these women is a big challenge. To combat opposition while rescuing girls requires legal support. Equipped with resources, knowledge, PIL and infra-structural support; a lot can be done. "Apne Aap" has all that. They can start their own legal resource centre. They can develop their capacity to provide immediate support when needed.

Volunteers Column

Morgan Metcalf: Volunteer/Intern 2010

Chicago to Delhi, a 15-hour plane ride that I will never forget. Indian families and couples filled the plane. They were going home. Everything about where I was headed was the antithesis of home: unfamiliar in every way. A language I didn't speak... zero familiar faces in a crowd.... So I was on that plane, chasing the sun and feeling very far from everyone around me. Little did I know that it wouldn't take long at all for me to find my home in India.

Coming in for our landing in Bihar the sight was overwhelming in its foreign, unfamiliar simplicity, nearly archaic at first glance. I had the distinct feeling that I was in their world now, every element was out of my control and our worlds were very separate.

But then I made the decision to live at the KGBV (Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya) with the girls that Apne Aap works to keep safe from the dangers of trafficking. The girls and teachers immediately welcomed me as their sister. Instantly I was part of a family, and our worlds were no longer so far separated.

I taught English for two hours each day, but living with the girls allowed me to extend that relationship beyond teacher and students. The girls and I taught each other games and songs, we took dance therapy classes together, we ate

on the floor together, we prayed together, we tied up our mosquito nets together each night, we became the best of friends.

The living conditions were austere compared with what I enjoy in the United States, but those girls taught me about what is really important in life. We can live without most of our material possessions, but we will always need family and sisterhood and friendship. We need to care for others and be cared for. I could never have learned or accomplished all that I did during my internship if I hadn't spent so much time at KGBV (Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya) with the girls. They were the reason I went to Bihar not really knowing what to expect, and they welcomed me after that leap of faith and changed my life for the better.

The greatest aspect of my internship with Apne Aap was the opportunity to set my own goals, create my own schedule, and avoid being spoon-fed by my international internship experience. Apne Aap allowed me to tailor my internship to my own qualifications and goals.

The beauty of humanitarian work should be that no matter what our expertise or interests in life, we should always be able to find a way to help those in need, and Apne Aap allowed for that. Whether your expertise is found in karate, teaching, music, dance, painting psychology, etc., the organization sees and values the need for volunteers with diverse

backgrounds. And the girls benefit greatly from that diversity in education and experience.

Three months went by quickly. I was all too soon huddled with my family of 50 girls, saying goodbyes. I came home with a new perspective on my life and what I want to do with it. This experience with Apne Aap gave me the chance to gain firsthand knowledge of one of the direst situations facing women today. I read about sex trafficking and human rights abuses in classrooms all through my college career, but traveling to the region, living with the girls, talking with them, essentially putting individual faces with the issue changed my perspective forever.

I am now able to avoid the overwhelming feeling that comes with looking at the whole of these human rights abuses. Once I had those individual faces, names and personalities associated with the issue, it was no longer about the whole, big, daunting problem. It is now about helping these girls and others like them that I grew to love so much, and that motivates me more than any statistic.

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