



Red Light Despatch

Volume 4, Issue 7

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Newsletter

Column

My Dreams

I Want to Be a Teacher, who Teaches with Love

By Hina

Kolkata: I study in Gyan Bhaskar Baalika Vidyalaya in class 8. I am 16 years old. I stay with my parents and my brother who is two years younger than me. I have been coming to the center for the last three years. I study and learn how to stitch and how to dance. I enjoy my studies a lot.

My favorite subject is English. I don't know why but I love speaking in English. I like Chaitali Didi because if I don't understand something then she explains things patiently. If anyone deliberately makes trouble, she also scolds them. Archana Ma'am is also a good teacher. I like her too. That is why I think when I grow up I would like to become a teacher and would teach my students with love, just as I have been taught by my teachers.

Our Only Concern is the Punishment of all the Buyers of the Female Body

By Soni

Forbesganj, Bihar: We were extremely happy to come back to our home after a long time for a small vacation because of Holi from KGBV, Simraha. We did not know the upcoming unwanted events that were in store for us and our family. We were studying in KGBV, Simraha run by Apne Aap Women World Wide. On March 18 2011 when we were getting out of a Rickshaw at about 3 PM in Uttari rupees from us. We also saw a famous trafficker of our neighborhood there chatting with some police wallah and telling them not to book our complaint. We then went to the Government's Referral Hospital for the treatment of my elder brother. Initially Doctor refused to treat my brother saying that it's a police case so we again went to the Police Station and requested the Bada Babu to file our case. He again refused us bluntly saying that he would send a constable to investigate the matter on his own.

We then went to the Police Station but the Police wallah said that they were busy with a murder case in "Bhagkaholia" and didn't register our complaint. They even took 200



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I Want my Sisters to have a Better Chance in Life

By Salma

Kolkata: I was 20 years old when I was brought to the brothels. I don't even remember who brought me or how I came here. But I remember some man bringing me to this place which I later came to understand is a brothel. I won't be able to recognize that man. My parents had sent me with this man saying that I was to get married to him. I understood that I was sold. The first few customers that I had to service were horrible. I remember crying a lot and going through a lot of pain. Till date I try and forget those days.

But one of my clients turned out to be a really nice man and I fell in love with him. He also wanted to marry me. He wanted to take me away from the brothel and wanted to get a registry marriage done.

After certain difficulties we were able to get all that done. Now we are living happily. We have a small child now. We have a business of rickshaws and we are doing well.

I consider myself lucky to have been able to get out of prostitution and have such a good life. I wish the same for my sisters who have not been too fortunate and have to face violence day after day. I pray for their lives and hope that like me, they too, can get out of prostitution soon.

I Will be on TV and the Whole Country Will Watch Me



By Kajal

Dharampura, Delhi: My name is Kajal. I study in the 7th standard. I like studying everything but my favorites are Hindi and English. I have two brothers and four sisters. But none of them go to school. Only I go to school. My brother works in the ATM.

One day the Times Now channel came to Dharampura and they wanted to speak to me. I faced the TV camera for the first time. They are attached a mike to my

dopatta. And there was a huge camera which was facing me. There was a lady with a mike who was asking me questions.

It felt really good and I felt important. They asked me my name, which class I study in, how old I am, my entire family history. They asked me what my family members do for a living. What subjects I like to study. They asked me about each and every member of my family. Then they asked me to talk about my participation in the kishori mandal group.

I told them what we do at the kishori mandal. I meet other girls at the Kishori mandal and we talk about various issues – how we should study, how we should not get married at an early age. We also do a lot of fun things like drawing, painting, and sometimes dancing. The didi taught us how to do all of this. They teach us how we should behave, how to speak to others respectfully. We are taught to respect elders. We are given moral lessons as well. We can tell the didi what we

want to know about and what we want to learn and the didi teaches us accordingly.

I told them what I wish to become when I grow up. I want to become a school teacher and I want to teach children like me. I want to earn a basic amount of money and contribute to my family income so that my family can live comfortably. For my community, I want the roads to become better because the roads are quite broken and dirty right now. I want all the children like my brother and my sister, who don't go to school, to go to school so that they change their lives and their future. I'm determined not to get married before I am 20 years old, and I have already told my family that they can't force me to get married.

I had a lot of fun facing the camera and talking to the didi from the channel. I am waiting every day to see when it will come on TV and I can see it and show my friends and family as well that I am on TV.

Apne Aap's Guerilla Street Theater Group Sprang into Action

Column

Volunteer Journal

By Kate Sturla

The square outside of **Delhi** had plenty of sights and sounds competing for the attention of passersby. Cows and dogs wandered past street vendors and cars with blaring horns. But then—*bang bang bang!*

Apne Aap's guerilla street theater group sprang into action. They descended on the square, shouting, banging drums, and dressed in eye-catching royal purple. In a moment, all eyes were on them.

Apraudi Kaun Hai—Who's the culprit?—was the question they asked and the name of their play. They acted out the story of a girl

trafficked into prostitution and asked the audience to question their own prejudices about women who are prostituted and the people who exploit them.

Surprisingly for such heavy subject matter, the play was *funny*. The actors were a high-energy bunch, and the audience laughed and clapped whenever the bumbling figures of two inept cops were onstage. The comedy got people watching, but the message hit home. The play ended with the trafficked girl's despair, and then the actors turned on the audience to ask the question

—*Apraudi kaun hai?* Who is the culprit?

Looking around at the audience, it seemed like the play was calculated to appeal to those people whose answers were most important

in this: men. People took it seriously and nodded along to the actors' assertion that prostituted women should be seen as victims, not criminals. After the play, we circulated through the crowd asking people for their reactions. Many men told us that it had changed their view of prostitution. It wasn't just men who got the message. Two tiny girls in school uniforms announced that they had learned never to accept candy from strangers. Culture doesn't change overnight, of course. But there's evidence that plays like these can have long-term effects on attitudes. At the very least, Apne Aap started the conversation.

Many Will Call Me an Adventurer

By Soumya Pratheek

“Many will call me an adventurer - and that I am, only one of a different sort: one of those who risks her skin to prove her platitudes.” (On my Bihar sojourn from all the way to Kerala)

Forbesgunge, Bihar: While boarding the flight from Delhi to Baghdogra there was a lot of confusion and a lot of unanswered questions were going through my mind like, “Why am I leaving my family behind and going to Bihar all of the way from Kerala? Can trafficking and prostitution be eradicated?” and many more. The journey from Baghdogra to Forbesganj kept on giving me the realization about the cause for which I am in Bihar as the poverty and marginalization of people was clearly visible.

After joining Apne Aap Bihar Office, Manish, the State Coordinator of Bihar, gave me a picture of the work going on there. After getting a general idea about the how we work in Bihar, I visited

Column

Diary of a Social Worker

KGBV, Simraha, a residential school which is an initiative of Apne Aap in partnership with the government to give a safe place and education for the minor girls who are rescued from the Red Light Areas. This place also serves as an intervention for those who are at risk of getting trafficked and prostituted, those from the vulnerable communities and flood affected areas and are prone to get into prostitution. We interacted with the students, sat together and introduced each other, talked to the teachers and I came to know that most of the students are talented in one way or other. Some are good in martial arts like karate, some are good in craft work, some of them can sing beautifully, some can dance well and some are very good at academics.

After returning from KGBV, I went to visit Basti Vikas Kendra which is a centre of Apne Aap func-

tioning at the Red Light Area (RLA) for the children of RLA giving them alternate schooling and after bridging the gap in their academics putting them into formal schools. The centre also conducts tailoring classes for the girls in the RLA who are the members of Kishori Mandal. One of our survivors named Meena also runs a crèche in the centre.

At around 5pm in the evening I walked along with Manish and Fatima(a girl who had been married at the age of nine to a guy from the Nut community, and she has been fighting against prostitution since then and has now joined Apne aap for the cause) through the stretch in Red Light Area. We could see girls with heavy make up and dark lipstick standing in front of their “own” house waiting for the customers, old ladies sitting in front of most of the houses who also look after their small businesses like tea stalls, petty shops which also sell alcohol secretly .

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Is it Really so Difficult to Get a BPL Card?

By Asma Begum

Khidderpore, Kolkata: I am Asma Begum. I have been struggling for many months to get a BPL (Below Poverty Card) card. I really want a BPL card because it will help me get ration in a much cheaper rate; like rice in 2/-/ kg, which is less than half price compared to a regular ration card. Also I will apply for widow pension if I get BPL card. Both of these will help to make my life better.

Along with the other women in my community, I have been taking various efforts to get a BPL card. From local people I got to know that if we

get BPL card we will get a lot of facilities and this little income will help us run our families.

One year back I went to talk to a counselor, Faizan Khan as that time they were distributing forms through which I can apply for a BPL card.

Counselor was dismissed due to some political reason and the whole process got delayed.

Then again after a few months, along with another 15 women from my area, I went to Bilcis Begum, a new counselor. We have given a letter also with the help of Apne Aap Women World-

wide to the counsellor so that they should take action. For the last one year, we went four times at least in a group to petition for the card. Every time they said it will come, and when it will come we will inform you and there is no need to come here again and again. But still other people and I, go and ask them again and again so that they don't forget us. Till now we are expecting that we will get the card and I will apply for my widow pension and will get grocery at a cheaper rate. Buying basic rations is going to continue to be very difficult till that happens.

I can Differentiate Between Women and Housewives

By Kalpana Basnet

Forbesgunge, Bihar: My name is Kalpana Basnet. I am working with Apne Aap Women World Wide since 2009 as Kishori Mandal mentor and recently got a promotion as Centre In-charge of Basti Vikas Kendra, Uttari Rampur which is a centre of Apne Aap functioning at the Red Light Area (RLA) for the children of RLA giving them alternate schooling and after bridging the gap in their academics putting them into formal schools. The centre also conducts tailoring classes for the girls in the RLA who are the members of Kishori Mandal. One of our survivors named Meena also runs a crèche in the centre.

In the first week of June I underwent a two day in-house training program conducted by Mr. Ra-

jnikant Prasad from BASIX Consultancy, Delhi and senior member of Apne Aap, Bihar team. Theme of the training program was based on upcoming baseline survey that is going to be held on coming 4 days for previously selected 6 models of self help groups and 2 Kishori Mandals. In the orientation of training program we got to learn abbreviations like WIP, WAR, RLA and Vulnerable. The vision, Mission and Goal and the importance of Base Line Survey of Apne Aap from the State Coordinator and Monitoring & Documentation Officer of Apne Aap, Bihar.

When I joined this training program I had no idea whatsoever about Self-Help Groups or Base Line Survey. In fact I had never heard about anything like a base line survey so it was a completely new

experience for me along with eight other fellow participants. Mr Rajnikant showed us 3-4 different formats and asked us to soak it first, after going through the various questionnaires we got to know how we would ask these questions to women and Kishoris. Some of the questions were really embarrassing like the use of Condoms or contraceptive pills but thanks to Soumya Di's clarification we started tackling these questions well. The biggest learning of this training program is that from now onwards I have started believing in my own abilities and can differentiate between working women and housewives. I also learnt a lot from this training program, especially that "Women Empowerment" can only be done by the enhancement of the capacities of each and every individual woman.

DMSS Come and Pollute the Mahila Mandal Gathering

By Sitadevi

Munshigunj, Kolkata: Apne Aap asked me to form another women group in our Munshigunj. Forming women's groups called Mahila Mandal which helps us solve our personal problems as a group with a lot more support and help. I have been trying to do this for the last two months, but I am not getting any good results. There are many reasons which make the formation of these groups very difficult in the red light area of Kolkata. These women are very scared about the "madam" or the brothel owner finding out about them joining Mahila Mandal's and then torturing them. They often feel that Mahila Mandal's can't help them because they need some other means of livelihood before

they can agree to get out the red light area. It is also very difficult for them to make time to come for Mahila Mandal gatherings.

Sometimes I go and talk with the women and try to tell them about the benefits of making groups, but most of the time representatives from DMSC (Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee) come and pollute the environment. The DMSC want to legalize prostitution and they don't want us to take the women out of the red light areas.

Our local women don't have enough and specific time to form a group. All the members don't have the same free time so all of them cannot come for a meeting at the same time. As their earnings are dependant on clients, whenever they get calls they just leave the

place without any delay. This prevents discipline in the group. Also, most of the women send their children to tuition, so sometimes they are busy dropping and picking up their daughters and sons from tuition.

Another important agitation in the community is the closure of the night shelter. Even now at least 30-32 women are quite angry about this. Due to this, whenever we call them for making groups they simply refuse to come with me.

What can I do? I am trying my best, but I don't know if I will find any positive result. I m hoping I will get more help and support to form Mahila Mandal's. I am just trying to help the women. I really want to help the women.

Change Doesn't Happen Overnight but it's not Impossible

By Fatima

Forbesgunj, Bihar: In the six years I have been with Apne Aap, I have become strong.

I have been able to change my husband a lot and that is my personal achievement. He had married thrice before. He was known to beat his other three wives in a way that people would not even beat their cows and buffaloes. He gambled cards, and drank like a fish.

I wanted to change him. I wanted to change him, so that he can improve his life and in turn improve my life. He does not gamble or drink anymore. He has even agreed to carry stones and earn some money. He feels that as his wife, I have helped him bring respect back to his life and also the community has started respecting him. He respects me and listens to me. I am also now free to go wherever I wish to go.

This change did not happen overnight. There were times when I have had to stay without food for five days. My mother-in-law did not want her son to pick up stones for a living. She was happier when he was doing nothing rather than do a lowly job. My husband also did not want to do that. My mother-in-law kept four girls in the house, as she used to earn a lot of money by pushing them into prostitution. She decided that that was enough to earn money for the family. But I wanted everyone in the house to do respectful jobs.

My husband did not know how to do any other kind of work. What else could he be? I had an uncle who supervised the work of lifting stones. I asked him for help, and he gave my husband a job. Then I got another job for my husband. A lot of things changed in the house. I

started reading out the *namaz* to my mother-in-law along with my husband. There were other girls in the house who were doing *dhandra*. She asked them to keep *roza*. She asked me to teach other women to read and write too and also write their names. I would press my mother-in-law's feet in the evening. My mother-in-law loved me so much that my other sisters-in-law grew jealous. I would save money and did not spend it on useless things.

Soon, my mother-in-law, the same woman who had been so cruel to me, changed so much that she left 2 *khathas* of land and had a toilet constructed for the girls who had stayed with her and earned money for the house. She said that these girls had spent all the years of their youth earning money for her and her family, so she must give them something before she dies or otherwise she would think that she has sinned.

This is my personal victory. When I got married into this house everyone used to say that I had been married into the worst house, where everyone was very scared to even enter. Everybody was scared to say anything to my husband. He was known to have a horrible temper. Today they are all amazed to see the change in my husband. Now people say that if he could change, then there is hope yet for many others. I could have fought and left the house long ago. I remember I was thinking of doing so once, but my aunt told me to consider that if my second husband turned out to be even worse than this one, where would I go? I agreed. What would have been the use?

So instead I worked on our relationships and turned my husband and my mother-in-law around just

by changing my behaviour. I won their hearts with a lot of patience and my own efforts. I feel the same way about this place. I can leave this Red Light Area too and live peacefully somewhere, but it would be better if, with patience, I could turn this area into a non-red light area. That will be my victory.

I joined the *crèche* and used to bring the children to the *crèche*, from every house. Then after four years I made the *mahila mandals* all by myself. Here there were promises that after about six months, each *mandal* would get Rs. 25,000. That did not happen. I made two self-help groups (SHG) on my own in Bhatiyari Panchayat, and they are still going on. There are many women who have left the *dhandra* and started a canteen. There is no shame in selling tea in a *dhaba*.

Why wait till the girls have been pushed into prostitution? I think it is better to get the girls married off before they can be pushed into the *dhandra*. We need to save the girls from the beginning.

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Survivor's Conference Kolkata -20th May

Kolkata: A Survivors Conference was held in Kolkata on the 20th of May with the main objective of addressing the needs of the survivors from the Red light Areas of Kidderpore in Kolkata. This conference aimed at noting and recording the changes that the survivors have brought about for themselves and their children so that it can be formulated and sent to the Government so as to bring to the notice of the Government the condition of these survivors and women in prostitution and to put pressure on the Government to improve their condition. This was also a session where survivors were given a platform to share their experiences and their views.



“Most of the women in the Red Light Area don’t know that they can avail these services. So who will tell them about these? It is the responsibility of the Government to do that and they are not doing it.” – Taj Muhammed, Director, Directorate of Persecution, West Bengal;

We are not asking the Government for any miracles. We just want a few things. We want to move away from the Red Light Area, so we need a safe shelter to move away to, we want our children to be educated so that they never have to enter this business and we want the Government to help us learn some kind of work so that we can earn some money and sustain ourselves.” – Ayesha, Survivor



The first thing we have to do now is to get ourselves a BLP (Below Poverty Line) card. I will make sure I get all my sisters together and make them apply for a BPL card. We have to claim our benefits from the Government. We can't continue to live like this.” – Salma, Survivor; 20th May 2011

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My Power is My Experience

Minu shares her experience with a Community Mobilizer

Kidderpore, Kolkata: Community Mobilizer: First tell me, in the past when you were in prostitution, were you afraid of anything?

Minu: I was afraid of being tortured. I was afraid to think what would be happen to me when I become old. I did not have a permanent shelter nor did I have much savings to spend the rest of my life.

Community Mobilizer: When did you overcome this fear?

Minu: Apne Aap gave me a scope of employment. They gave me a job. Then I did not need to prostitute myself. I left prostitution. My husband is also getting a chance to work in Apne Aap. It makes us financially stronger. Now I have a home. I can spend my life in a respectable way. Now I'm not afraid of anything.

Community Mobilizer: Can you remember any specific dialogue with Ruchira or a particular action of Apne Aap that helped you to overcome your fear?

Minu: Any specific dialogue or action.... I can't remember. But after joining Apne Aap, I was made to undergo several different meetings & trainings. Specially, the training regarding legal matter has made me more knowledgeable.

Community Mobilizer: So the legal training helped you to overcome your fear?

Minu: The training gave me a lot of information that made me confident enough to overcome my fear.

Community Mobilizer: How do you feel now?

Minu: I feel more confident and much stronger now. Now, I tell the other women how these trainings

will also help them. I always share my experiences with them.

Community Mobilizer: So now do you feel confident to perform other acts of courage? Like for instance, going and getting voter ID cards? Or facing any drunk neighbors/ or disturbing pimps?

Minu: Yes I do. With the guidance of my didis (senior staffs of Apne Aap) are showing me the way, I can do anything. Because I believe, just like Apne Aap has helped me earn money in a dignified way, similarly they will surely the other women do the same.

Community Mobilizer: So now do you feel more powerful?

Minu: Yes, of course.

Community Mobilizer: What does power mean to you?

Minu: My power is my experience. Now I know how to communicate with others, where to go if sud-

(Our Only Concern is to Punish the Buyers of the Female Body)
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At this point of time we felt that since Ruchira Di is in town and she is like an angel for all the underprivileged children like us, we should go to meet her and narrate our horrible story.

Ruchira Di consoled us and gave the assurance of protection and proper filing of the case so that the accused went behind bars so that the girls of Uttari Rampur live in a free world.

Ruchira Di took us to meet Superintendent of Police Ms. Garima Malick, Araria and narrate our story. The SP has convinced us that she will instruct the Dy. SP, Forbeasganj Mr. Sharma to look into this matter urgently and punish the culprit Police walah with immediate effect.

At this point of time we felt much empowered because of

Ruchira Di's presence and assurance where as initially when had gone to the Police station with our own and didn't get any response we felt awkward and helpless.

After filing the case we felt protected blessed and empowered and had a sense of pride and contentment of our achievement. Our only concern is the punishment of all the buyers of the female body.

I feel braver now after this horrific experience. . In life, I want to become a school teacher so that I can teach all the underprivileged children of the society and eradicate all the social evils. My mother, Farida wants to become a Police Officer so that she can catch hold of all the criminals who

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Famita told us that they are the "madams" (brothel owners) of the brothel, and may also be the p (ctd page 3) mothers or sisters of the girls as they all are from Nut com-

munity practicing Intergenerational Prostitution. There were many men also sitting in front of the shops who were the pimps who do the trafficking of girls and put into prostitution.

While walking through the stretch many of the eyes were fixed on us. Some of the eyes were suspicious, some had anger in them but I could only see the eyes which were looking at me with hope. I could only see the children who were wandering in the verandah of the house and the stretches and the future that these children would have to live if no one helped them.

In the evening while I was sitting at Ruchira di's house, I started rewinding all the activities of the day and I got the answers for all the questions and confusions in my mind. That was a moment of relief, a moment of contentment and happiness for me and also the beginning of a new chapter in my life as a Social Worker.

I will Never Become a Prostitute and I will Never Marry Again

By Shazia Khatoon

Munshigunj, Kolkata: I live in the red light area of Khiddirpore, called Munshigunj in Kolkata. Apart from me, my mom has another girl and a boy. My mother said to me that Murshidabad is our native place. But from last 20 years my mom has stayed in this area only. She is a prostitute. I have never been to Murshidabad. I have never been outside the red light area.

I have an elder sister. As my mom doesn't like her profession at all and she does not want her daughters to come in this profession. When my sister was grown-up, mom took an very actively involved in her life and arranged her marriage with a suitable groom. Mom admitted me to the crèche of Apne Aap. When I qualified from class VI, teachers of the Apne Aap center admitted me to Ramkrishna Mission. They said it was good, and if I was able to pass from the Mission, I would get a job. But I don't like this

place at all. I hate those missionaries. They are very serious people and don't understand any kind of fun in life. . As I was continuously being forced, I refused to eat a single grain from there. They released me from the mission. I went back to my home.

While I stayed at Munshigunge with my mom, I fell in love with a guy. Very often he used to

“My mother says Murshibad is our native place... I have never been there. I have never been outside the red light area”

come near my home, and he said to me that he loves me more than anyone else in the world. I believed

him. One day, I ran away with this guy, and as he promised to me, both of us got married at the Kallighat temple.

After my marriage I stayed with him in my in-laws house. The first time I met with them, they were very kind to me. But after some days they started torturing me. They used to force me to do all the household duties and they did not even give me proper food. They said, go back to your home and get some money for us. We want it.

My husband also demanded the same. He started to beat me everyday. I was afraid. I know my mother did not have much money to give. One day I ran away from my in-laws house & came back to my mother's home. Now I am 14 and I live with my mom with a lot of love & peace. I did not want to be married anymore. I will not become

(Author's name has been changed to protect her privacy).



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