



# Red Light Despatch

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## My Dreams

*By Afra Khettry\**

### I Will Become a Police Officer and Catch Criminals who Exploit Women

**Uttarpara, Kolkata:** I am Afra Khettry, I'm 8 years old and am in 3rd standard at Rama Vivekananda Mission School. I live in the school's hostel with my sister, Kajol. My mother is a prostitute working in the Munshiganj Red Light Area. I used to share a shabby room with my mother and brother in the Red Light Area. My mother worked until late at night so my brother and I had to stay away from our so-called home. We used to wander the streets, staring at the crowds of men. Within a few days my brother was sent away to another village by my mother while I stayed. My mother knew he couldn't grow up in that environment.

My mother came to know about Apne Aap Women Worldwide who provided shelter for children at night while their mothers were working. So in the morning I went to the crèche and in the evening was dropped by my mother at Apne Aap's Munshiganj centre. Due to my age my mother didn't want me to stay in the Red Light Area for much longer. (*Continued on page 5*)

## Everyday in the Red Light Area is a Sad Day for Me

*By Piu Begum*

**Kolkata:** One of the realities of life in a Red Light Area is seclusion. You are brought into the Red Light Area (RLA) as a child and for years kept locked inside a room with only the *Malkin* to talk to. It's only after about ten years or more that you can start going out and talking to the other women. This interaction is limited because the women living in one house or one block do not talk to the women living nearby. Life is so harsh here that eventually you get so bitter, living a life without hope.

Every morning I get up with a heavy heart knowing that I have to live another day. Had it not been for my daughters I would have lost my will to live. No woman, and I repeat, no woman comes here out of choice. Once we are here, we somehow manage to pass our time. Ever since I joined the group of Apne Aap, however, I have started

to interact with women from other houses. Initially I found it hard to talk but as group exercises began and we started sitting for training sessions and saving money, we slowly started coming together and I felt more comfortable.

A couple of days ago we were sitting in a circle and telling our stories of courage. Members from other groups were also there. I was talking about my life, the challenges and struggles I have faced. Every time I talked about it, I felt as though I was going through each horrible experience all over again. I couldn't contain my feelings and started crying. Two women from another group, who I did not even know, came to sit with me. They held me tightly and slowly calmed me. For the first time I felt the importance of being part of a group. One of them told me that she too had experiences of sexual abuse and also been beaten. (*Continued on page 5*)

## Now I have the Freedom to Dream about my Children's Future

*By Bibi Julie*

**Forbesgunj, Bihar:** My name is Bibi Julie and I am 38 years old. I have been living in the Red Light Area of Forbesgunj for many years and it is my home now. I cannot recall the age I was forced into prostitution as I have been here for so long. I didn't like it here but time kept passing by in the Red Light Area. Before I could even realize what was happening to me, I became the mother of two children. I love them very much and I

do not care about their father. I am actually scared that if somebody claims to be their father they could sell my children as most children in the area are sold when they are old enough. My children don't need a father; I think I am enough for them. I used to give all my earnings to the brothel owner every day and she gave me food and clothes in return. There were many girls who tried to rise against the brothel owner and escape. (*Continued on page 7*)

# In the Village, Microcredit is Very Different in Practice and in Theory

*By Charmaine Jelbert*

**Cambridge University, United Kingdom:** *An estimated 2.7 billion people in the world have no access to formal financial services. As a result, poor people have to rely on informal financial services that are generally more costly and less reliable than formal savings and loan accounts, insurance, and payments services. Access to formal financial services allows progress for families and for the economy as a whole... Improving access to finance has a positive impact..[a]t the household level it creates a positive impact on households' welfare by helping families to build assets, manage risks, and smooth consumption.*

This is an example of the theory that I have read about during my studies, especially as a PhD student who has studied political science and gender studies. My research focuses on human trafficking prevention, so how is it possible to reduce human trafficking by exploring both direct and indirect prevention strategies. The example of micro-finance above is an example of indirect human trafficking prevention. How? Well, the

scheme provides women with access to credit without putting them into a cycle of debt bondage. These finances mean that they can access education, medicines, food, and in a very real sense reduce their vulnerability to being trafficked because they remove the danger of poverty.

But I recently realised how theory looks different in practice when I was in India and had the privilege to accompany Anindita Roy from Apne Aap to Bado Sarai, a village

outside of Delhi. We drove out there to meet a community mobiliser who was employed by Apne Aap to co-ordinate and organise meetings with the women in the village.

One of the initial logistical difficulties in implementing such a scheme is identifying which village is vulnerable to trafficking because of the high levels of poverty. A further difficulty in the actual implementation of the theory is that it takes time to build trust with the women in the village and set up the structures and proce-

dures. This requires individuals dedicated to achieving this and as such Apne Aap have hired community mobilisers to empower these women and enable them to take control of their own lives. Organising the meetings is one way to begin the process of empowerment.

Sitting in the heat of an Indian autumn, waiting for people to arrive so the meeting can begin was another element not mentioned in the theory. The women would arrive from their various work places, which for some were the fields, and seat themselves around the vacated vet's office. Seated in a circle they would have roll call, but throughout this process women and children would be arriving and others leaving to go back to work or collect children. Once roll call was completed the money had to be collected, which was a sum of Rs100 a month. Each member had to pay; otherwise they would not be allowed to borrow money from the group for the next three months. The group proceeded to discuss the rate of interest and decided it should be decreased from Rs2 to Rs2 per Rs100 borrowed.

*(Continued page 7)*

*Column*  
**Volunteer Journal**

## Mahatma Gandhi is Alive in Our Hearts

*By Kiran Kumarj*

**Forbesgunj, Bihar:** My name is Kiran Kumari and I study in 7<sup>th</sup> standard. Each year we celebrate Gandhi Jayanti in school on the 2<sup>nd</sup> October. Gandhi Jayanti is celebrated to keep Gandhiji's memory alive in our hearts and remind his ideals to the nation. On this day we acknowledge and appreciate his contribution to the freedom struggle and nation building initiatives. He gave us the message of love, brotherhood and non-violence. On this day we listen to his words and teachings on the radio and the television. A lot of people do not know much about his teachings and ideals. Acknowledging the man on his birthday is the best way to honour the man and his ideals. We can solve great challenges in our lives by following the example and teachings of the Father of Our Nation, Gandhiji.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> October we wake up early in the morning and organise a prayer service in honour of him. We pray for him. According to their knowledge, all the girls make a presentation on Gandhiji's contribution to the freedom struggle movement in India. The best presentation is appreciated and awarded. *(Continue page 4)*

## Campaigning Against the Prostitution System Through Legal and Social Change in India

*By Ruchira Gupta*

Kumkum Chetty, survivor and Community Mobiliser, Apne Aap Women Worldwide on the 9<sup>th</sup> of October gave a testimony to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Human Resource Development on the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Amendment Bill, 2006. She wanted a desperate change in the law.

Kumkum Chetty's appeal is filed away and the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Amendment Bill, 2006 has been dropped by Parliament altogether. In the interim years, India has witnessed an alarming rise in the sex trafficking of women and girls with some estimates claiming that the sex-industry has expanded by seventeen times.

On May 13, 2009, three years after Kumkum Chetty's brave appeal in Parliament, the Home Secretary of India admitted in a seminar organized by the Central Bureau of Investigation that there were 3 million prostituted females in India of which 1.2 million were girls. Around the same time, the National Human Rights Commission of India released the appalling statistic that the average age of recruitment into prostitution of an Indian female was between nine and twelve years. This means, that 1.2 million girls are raped every night, as per the Indian law, which defines sex with a minor (anyone below 18) as statutory rape. Each girl is forced by the brothel system to submit to ten to fifteen customers a day. Simple multiplication reveals that India ignores, at the very least, 12 million rapes a night.

Yet, India has failed to develop a legal framework that will stem human trafficking and its main outcome in the country—

Prostitution. It continues to depend on an old outmoded law, Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956, (ITPA) based on laws and policies developed by the British under colonialism where prostitution systems were actually established to make native women sexually available for clerks and soldiers in the service of the British empire.

The law, ITPA, therefore, has very light sentences against customers who buy sex, rape girls, stub cigarette butts out on them or shove bottles up their vagina. Customers can only be punished if the girl/woman can prove that she is a minor (below 18 years of age). In India, sex with a minor is statutory rape. Conditioned, controlled, subjugated and traumatized, the girl ends up saying, in court case after case, what the brothel managers have coached her to say- that she is an adult. Age tests based on examining bone density are of course inconclusive and very often extremely traumatic for the girl.

Even if customers, brothel managers, pimps, transporters and recruiters are violent, the police do not book them on lighter charges of assault or abuse. The common refrain by the police on the evidence of violence is that the customers are entitled to do what they want because they are paying for it.

The law, ITPA, however, does have clauses punishing the girls and women. It punishes women for soliciting in a public place. It is based on earlier laws, designed by British colonial bureaucrats, to ensure the invisibility of prostitution, by keeping women off the streets, in order to satisfy the morality of a Victorian England. This section of the law is most used by the Indian police. Under

the law, currently more women are arrested than men, even though the women are forced to stand for long hours outside the brothels by the pimps and managers to attract customers. The current law, ITPA, therefore, ends up protecting the sex-industry—the pimp and the buyer, while re-victimizing the victim, putting her through the criminal justice system for soliciting.

Prostitution is neither a real choice nor inevitable for poor, coloured, minority, and 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 or a person of colour. 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.

The women of Apne Aap are spearheading a campaign to have ITPA amended. This survivor-led campaign is seeking to penalize buyers and traffickers. If the numbers of convictions against buyers and traffickers go up, the cost of human trafficking will become untenable. Increased convictions will also restore a sense of justice to the survivors of prostitution. *(Continued on page 7)*

# The Women Wanted to Learn How to Sign Their Own Name

By Chaitali Das Paul

**Munshiganj, Kolkata:** In June, 2011, I went to the 9/5 Munshiganj area to form a group. On the first day I sat down with the women who were residents of that house. There were nearly 15 women who were present, most of whom had come to work from Murshidabad.

We all sat in a circle and I told the women that I wanted to form a small group with them which would provide educational, economic and survival support to its members. The first thing women said after was, 'We want to learn to read and write'. Then I asked them, 'Why do you want to learn to read and write? What good would it do to learn to read and write?' They replied that, 'We never went to school and never learned to read and write. We do not even know how to sign against our own name. When we go to the bank, we have to use our thumb imprint as our signature. When we have to catch a bus, we have to ask people to find out what number bus it is. Since we cannot read anything, sometimes we get misled by people.

On hearing this, I said, 'In that case, if you want to learn to read and write you must come for literacy lessons regularly and on time. I will teach you'. They were very pleased to hear this. They asked me to teach them to write their own names before anything else. They also asked me to provide them with pencils, erasers, and notebooks. I told them that I will come twice a week to give them literacy lessons and I will provide those items. We began meeting for lessons on Mondays and Wednesdays from 2:30 to 4:00pm.

There were 15 women present on the first day and I wrote down the name of each person in her own notebook in Bengali as most of them were Bengali speakers. They asked me to write down their name in English as well, saying that they wanted to practise writing it at home. The class was conducted in this way and they learned to write their own name within one month. Within a month 5 women managed to learn to write their own name well and if they were given any homework, they'd do it. The others also try hard, even though they cannot write as well as these 5 women.

My Adult Literacy classes run in this format and

## **Mahatma Gandhi is Alive in Our Hearts** *(Continued from page 2)*

The butcheries in our area remain closed on this day in honour of Gandhiji's principle of non-violence. There are many activities organised in our school. The school shows movies on Gandhiji for our knowledge. These features inspire us to follow the path of truth and non-violence. His ideals have left a deep impact on our minds, hearts and souls.

We create paintings of Bapu and write essays in a bid to understand him better and get more acquainted with his personality. Through these initiatives in my school, we girls try to follow the teachings and ideals of Gandhiji in our lives. This is our way to keep Bapu's message and beliefs alive.

around 8-10 women are taking the lessons. I did, however, face some obstacles in trying to conduct these classes. Some of these obstacles were:

- Going to 9/5 at 2:30pm to conduct the lesson and not finding anyone present, as the women decide to take a nap around this time. I have to personally go to each of their rooms to wake them up and ask them to attend the lesson. When woken up, the women tend to get very irritated.
- Sometimes they claim to be ill in order to avoid coming for lessons, and during lessons, some women claim that they have clients to attend to and they leave. I have found that some of the women claiming to have clients to attend to, in fact, have no clients at the time.
- I have to sit in a small space near a drain or in one of the women's rooms to conduct the lesson.

I confronted them saying, 'When I come to teach you at 2:30pm, I find that some of you are going to sleep and those who are already asleep get annoyed when I wake you up. If I come at 2pm in the afternoon will it be convenient for you?' They agreed that 2pm was good for them. I said, 'Fine, from now on I will come at that time but I request you all not to fall asleep'. They assured me that if I come at 2 o'clock, I can conduct the classes on time and as per plan, and that the women are very eager to learn to read and write.

However, the women too have some hurdles which make it difficult for them to come for literacy lessons. Some women have to stay up all night in order to attend to customers. These women cannot remain in lessons for too long because after working all night and waking up late, they have cooking and other housework which need to be done. Some women wake up late in the mornings while others catch up on lost sleep in the afternoon. If they have not had enough sleep, they cannot stand outside and attract clients. In spite of all these hurdles, the women are willing to learn to read and write and I too am eager to teach them. Sometimes more women turn up and sometimes less, either way I will continue with these lessons to ensure that they have the opportunity to learn.

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## They Asked me to Visit Their Country

By Kareena

**Hasanpur, Delhi:** We were told that some foreigners would be coming to the Apne Aap Hasanpur office. They were coming only to meet all of us. I was talking about it with my friends for many days. We even decided what we were going to wear. We wanted to wear out best dresses for the visitors. Didi had told us that a van would be coming to pick us up. I was ready one hour before the van even came. My friends and I were all ready and we were very excited.

In my community, we all like to draw and paint. We were carrying all our drawings to share with the visitors who were coming. We were really looking forward to showing them what we had done on our painting classes and wanted to know what they would feel about it. Didi had told us that we would be doing some drawing and painting over there and we would be given paints and paper for that. I was very excited about it. I love drawing.

We reached the Hasanpur office. The visitors came after some time. They were all foreigners. They were all smiling a lot. They came and shook hands with all of us. They even asked us our names. I was feeling a little shy but then when they asked me my name, I told them very loudly and they smiled and said "Hello Kareena". There was a very handsome man, I asked him in English, "What is your name?" he was surprised that I could speak English. He answered me, "Very Good. My name is Ralph".

To another foreigner I asked, "Who is your favourite actor?" she said 'Aamir Khan'. I would have been happier if she had said Salman Khan but I was happy that she knew Bollywood actors.

The foreigners who came loved kids. They were so happy to meet us. They were going everywhere with

us. I felt really good that I could speak to them a little in English. I felt very proud that they said that I spoke good English. They even told me they wanted me to come and visit their country. I was so happy that a foreigner was asking me to come to a far away place to meet them. It really was a very happy moment for me.

They were taking lots of photographs. All of my friends and I sat down together and we started our drawing session. We kept looking at each other's drawings because we all wanted to do our best. We all wanted to show the visitors that our drawing was the best.

After the drawing session we stood with all our drawings to show them off. I drew a tree with a girl plucking fruit from the tree. They looked very happy. They went from drawing to drawing and told each one of us that we had done a very good job. They took pictures of each one of us with our drawing. When it was my turn I was feeling a little nervous. I felt so important, as so many foreigners were taking a photograph of me.

There were tricycles at the centre. I liked riding the tricycles. The visitors took photographs of me riding a tricycle. We were given bananas and bread to eat. I liked the skit and the big centre with the beautiful *rangolis*.

On the way to the centre I saw the fields. I had never seen such fields before. Most of all I liked the motion of the car. It was a very fun day. I also loved the dance that we saw over there. Overall it was a very new experience for me to meet and talk to so many foreigners. I was feeling a little sad when we were leaving because the day had come to an end. I wish many more events like this are organized where we can come and have fun and meet many new visitors.

### Everyday in the RLA is a Sad Day for Me *(Continued from page 1):*

She told me that she hated her husband beating her on the pretext of the dowry that he had demanded and which her family could never pay. Before joining the group, she dealt with the beatings, but now she spoke up instead.

I realized that there are so many more women living in Red Light Areas who have never shared their lives and ordeals with others. Had they been connected to other women, as we are now, they would have the support to speak out against the *Malkin*, the goons and other people who exploit them.

**My Dreams** *(Continued from page 1)* : She began searching for hostels and boarding schools for me but the rates were more than we could afford. She was knocking at every door for help.

Meanwhile Apne Aap told us they knew an organisation who arranged sponsorship for children like me. Sahana di came to my mother with an offer of admission to Rama Krishna Vivekananda Mission School where I could stay with Kajol. I enjoy going to school and my favourite subjects are Bengali and English. Before coming to school I wanted to be a teacher like Chaitali Aunty from Apne Aap. But now I want to be a police officer because I want to catch criminals and put them in jail. All I know is that bad people, who harm others, should not be kept free.

## Did You Know

### 15 Facts on the Economics of Prostitution

1. Human trafficking attracts annual profits of between roughly \$5 billion and \$7 billion USD (Gunnell, 2004).
2. This trading is the third-biggest illegal trade after drug smuggling and gun-running. Due to this large income it is hardly surprising that, like other forms of smuggling, it operates with near-impunity (Gunnell, 2004).
3. Mumbai generates at least \$400 million per year in revenue from the estimated 100,000 women/girls serving an average of 6 customers per day; Mumbai is also a centre for pedophiles (Joffres et al, 2008)
4. Trafficking for CSE has proven to be a low risk and highly lucrative business (Joffres et al, 2008)
5. These girls (many are under age 18) are most often from lower castes (usually untouchables) and financially vulnerable groups (Simkhada, 2008).
6. Traffickers frequently take women from the impoverished country of Nepal to bring to brothels in New Delhi, Mumbai, and other big Indian cities. The brokers offer financially desperate parents as little as 200 Nepal rs. (\$4 USD) for their little girls (Joffres et al, 2008).
7. The brokers turn around and make a huge profit on the young girls. These brokers sell the young girls to brothels for between 15,999-40,000 (\$450-\$1300 USD) (Joffres et al, 2008 and Simkhada, 2008).
8. After the brokers sell a girl to the brothel, she is told by the owners that she is in debt and must work in prostitution to repay the brothel owners what it cost to buy her (Simkhada, 2008).
9. Within the Dommuri community it is the eldest daughter's responsibility to support the family financially by prostituting herself (Dondona et al, 2006).
10. The Dummuri girls typically start having sex for money when they have their first menses. The cost for the first sex with one of these girls is 3000-8000rs (\$69-\$184 USD). After that the price they can ask for each service typically declines (Dandona et al, 2006).
11. How much a girl can earn for each service she renders is determined by her age (the younger the better; many of the johns have sex with children), looks, skills, and what kind of sexual act she is forced to perform (Simkhada, 2008).
12. In Delhi the majority of girls are kept in slave-like conditions. The brothel owners take victims' earnings until repayment of the price at which they were bought, which takes 4–8 years (Joffres et al, 2008).
13. In Goa most women are debt-bonded and released from that after 2–3 years. After that time, they can begin receiving only 20% of their income (Joffres et al, 2008)
14. It is ultimately the Johns who have power over the girls. For the right amount of money, they can have almost anything and can even take girls out of the brothels for weeks at a time and then return them when they please (Simkhada, 2008).
15. A constant risk with sex work is pregnancy. If these girls become pregnant, they almost never receive any financial support from the father of the child. They then have to support their child or children alone on their merger earnings (Pardeshi and Bhattacharya, 2006).

### Open Forum for Change

*by Jyoti*

**Forbesgunj, Bihar:** When Apne Aap came to our community for the first time, we were curious about who they were and what they did. Apne Aap shared and discussed their mission and vision in great detail with my community members. We had very deep discussions about what Apne Aap stood for and its ideals. The women of my community agreed with the belief system of Apne Aap and firmly stand behind every initiative undertaken by the organization. Before we only concerned ourselves with the domestic sphere and let the men take a call on social issues. But things have changed considerably. The women in my community discuss the implications of various social issues amongst each other and with the men in the community. We have intense discussions with the men on things of social importance. Apne Aap has given us the confidence to speak our minds.

The concept of an open forum is quite popular in our community. We talk freely with all members, discussing our hidden feelings, emotions and things that affect us. This platform has helped us to know each other in a better way and the opportunity to help each other. Things have undergone considerable change since the open forum came into existence. Today, women not only talk about issues that affect their children but they are also keen to discuss the challenges that they face in their own lives. Rather than being self-effacing, the women in my community are assertive and confident after Apne Aap's intervention. The forum has given us a collective space and voice through which we have come to redefine the way we solve problems and navigate through the challenges that confront us every day.

## Now I Have the Freedom to Dream about my Children's Future

*(Continued from page 1)*

But they would be found and treated even worse than before. I saw the fate of rebels in brothels and their hardships killed my courage to run away.

One day the brothel owner became ill and suddenly died. Her relatives came and took away all her belongings and property. I ran away from the brothel that day.

Now I send my children to school every day. After moving out of the brothel, I got out of prostitution but my income kept drying up. Although I was unable to earn enough and felt tempted to return to prostitution I reminded myself of all the violence inflicted on me by customers and became determined to live a more respectful and violence-free life. I started to work as a house maid; I cleaned and cooked in neighbouring houses to earn a living. This way I am able to make ends meet.

I accompany my children to school and am glad that I don't have to wear short clothes in order to attract customers. I have the freedom to wear what I like. It feels good to know that I can wear warm, full clothes during winter unlike the other unfortunate women who still have to wear revealing clothes to attract customers.

We do not own a house yet and live in rented accommodation but I have sent a request to the district officer for land allotment and I will request the Bihar government to assist in building a house for us. I want to give my children a place where they are safe and secure to pursue their dreams.

Regardless of my reduced income as a house-maid, I can take care of my children and live a peaceful, satisfying life. Today I can proudly say that I earn my livelihood with dignity. I am no longer forced to earn for the brothel owners, pimps or corrupt policemen. I am free to spend my earnings as per the needs and wants

## In the Village, Microcredit is Very Different in Practice and in Theory

*(continued from page 2)*

This resulted in a further discussion about those who had already taken out a loan before the decreased rate and what rate of interest they should pay. After discussing the economic intricacies they discussed how the money should be divided. This involved establishing whose need was more desperate. The women would reveal their needs and their desperation. Something you would never find in a coffee shop in England.

The starkest difference between theory and practice is that theory doesn't give you a sense of what it means by microcredit being a tool for socioeconomic development. For these women it meant that they could now afford medicines for their children, or some could buy a new flourmill to turn their wheat into flour so they could sell this and earn some profit. For one woman it meant she could pay off the interest from the other loans, which were extortion and might have kept her in a cycle of debt payment. All of this could happen without having to become destitute. As a researcher I felt so privileged being able to see the impact this scheme was having in these women's lives through incremental differences and a sustainable system.

## Campaigning Against the Prostitution System Through Legal and Social Change in India

*( continued from page 3)*

The campaign was first articulated by an Apne Aap self-empowerment group in Mumbai in December 2004, who said the only way to dismantle the system of prostitution was to go after the buyers.

In April, for the first time ever, 15 survivor organizations joined Apne Aap survivors in Jaipur to draft the survivor's anti-trafficking law. In state conference after state conference victims and survivors drafted their own version of the law, which they mailed to the President of India. Bihar survivors decided to hold a rally with women who were marginalized but not trafficked and share stories, experi-

ences and their campaign for a change in the ITPA law.

In Oct 2011, students from Symbiosis decided to launch a 'Cool Men Don't Buy sex' band drive and signature campaign for a petition to the President of India asking for a change in law. The petition is to be submitted on 26<sup>th</sup> Jan with 10,000 signatures. The campaign is already moving from campus to campus in India.

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## Interview

Noor Begum in an interview about her experience with Apne Aap

**Q:** I'm going to ask you some questions. Actually, we want to share your experience. Your answer may be helpful in empowering other women. Please give honest answers. First tell me, are you afraid of anything?

**Noor:** I'm afraid to think that people may hate me because I am in prostitution. Tomorrow my children may not care for me because I am a prostitute.

**Q:** After interacting with the Apne App Women Worldwide team, did you feel any difference? Did you feel that this organization may help you to overcome your stressed situation?

**Noor:** Maybe. When I attend different training sessions and meetings organized by this office, I feel some difference. The trainers give us a lot of information. They tell us how to face a stressed situations, how to call the police, how to call other people for help.

**Q:** How is this information helping you?

**Noor:** It makes me knowledgeable. Now at least I have the information with which I can manage any fearful situation. It helps me to be confident.

**Q:** So do you feel more powerful now?

**Noor:** Yes, I do. Now I know a team is always with me ; a team which will help me to survive and a group of people who do not hate me because I'm a prostitute.

**Q:** What does power mean to you?

**Noor:** Power means to know a lot (knowledge). Power means to be with other people (unity).

**Q:** 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 neighbours or disturbing pimps?

**Noor:** Yes, I can do things like this now. If the didis (senior office staffs) can show me how to do any work, I can do anything.

## Confidence Captured by a Camera

by Shabana Khatoon

**Forbesgunj Bihar:** My name is Shabana Khatoon and I'm in 8<sup>th</sup> Standard in Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya. A few months back, Sowmya didi came to our school with a foreign girl. We welcomed them to our school and my schoolmates greeted them one by one. The foreign girl told us her name is Larissa. She then came to our hostel room and I saw her take out a gadget from her bag and fiddling with it.

Our didi told us that Larissa didi was here to make a video of the girls who are doing very well in their respective activities at school. When didi told me that I was one of the girls who would feature in the video, I was very happy and thrilled. However, I felt extremely nervous facing the camera and unsure as to how I'd answer to Larissa's questions. I motivated myself to give it a shot and kept telling myself to give it a try. My nervousness increased even more when they called me in front of the camera. I was literally shaking all over with hesitation.

When I started it felt as if the words were choking my throat but as I continued I could sense that my tension was reducing considerably. Later as Larissa didi kept asking questions and I was able to answer with complete confidence and in full flow. I gave her a comprehensive peek into my day to day activities like karate, craft, dance etc.

I took Larissa didi to my inspiration room where I showed her many paintings made by my schoolmates and I. Larissa didi was very impressed by our paintings and she appreciated them. She applauded our efforts and encouraged us to get better with time. It was a very motivating experience for us.

I am indeed very happy that we have visitors like Sowmya didi and Larissa didi in our school who keenly observe our progress and encourage us to do better in life. Thank you very much, Larissa and Sowmya didi.



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## Red Light Despatch

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