



# Red Light Despatch

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## My Dreams

### I Yearn to Empower

#### Others

By *Munni*

**Forbesganj, Bihar:** My name is Munni and I have lived in Bihar my whole life. I don't have a home. I only have a few relatives, but none of them have ever helped me or taken care of me because they are ashamed that one of their family members is working in prostitution. I had a daughter when I was very young. I tried to give her an education so that she would not have to go into prostitution like me since every day is so hard and I am so ashamed. Even though I tried so hard to give my daughter a better life, she is now a prostitute in a different area and doesn't look after me.

Now I am told that I am 'too old' and do not get as many customers as I used to. My only other option in life is to do the domestic work at other's houses. The people I work for are aware of the situation that I am living in and have given me food and shelter. They cannot provide for me every day or for a long time. I want to get out of the Red Light Area and live a dignified life, but it is difficult to do after all this time. I do not have many other skills and this is the only life I've ever known. *(Continued on page 5)*

### I Have the Courage to Leave

By *Mamata*

**Dharampura, Delhi:** My name is Mamata and I got married when I was quite young. My husband and his mother did not treat me very well. I got sick and kept getting worse; eventually it was so bad that I felt that I could barely move. My husband and mother-in-law did not believe me, did not take my illness seriously, and continued to make me do all of the housework because my condition did not matter to them. It wouldn't have been so bad if my husband had been too busy to help, but in reality he was too lazy and would smoke and drink all day. He had always been abusive but for some reason he beat me more after I became ill. He would hurt me very badly. I realised that this was not how I wanted to be treated. One day I realised I needed to stand up for myself or else I would die, so I returned to my mother's home. She was very welcoming and treated me nicely. My husband

was shocked and came to get me. This is when I told him that I wouldn't go back with him unless he changed his behaviour and started treating me better. It surprised him that I stood up for myself.

We talked about this more and he recognised that I shouldn't be treated in this way and that I deserved better. I moved back home with him and since then he has stopped abusing me and has been much kinder towards me. His mother still doesn't like me but she also does not complain about me as much as before since she sees the change in her son. Other women that I know who left their husbands always returned to them. Their husbands' bad behaviour continues and often these women don't do anything else about it. I know that if he ever tried to beat me again or verbally abuse me I would have the strength to leave him and this time not return.

### Securing my Financial Independence

By *Anupama Das*

**Kidderpore, Kolkata:** After separating from my husband, I started living with my parents. My parents live in a rented house in Kidderpore. It was a very old house with only two rooms but it was still quite expensive for us to rent out. I have three children who all live with me. I asked my husband to help pay for their education and general expenditure but he refused to give us even a penny. I decided to consult a lawyer about this matter, but I couldn't afford his consultation charge.

At this point, I had no further options. This meant that my children and I were totally dependent on my father.

Meanwhile, I was desperately searching for a job but I could not find anything. I started teaching students, along with my youngest daughter, in the local school. There were only two children in the school and their parents could only give me 100 rupees a month. One day I met a lady who worked for a local NGO who told me that her NGO had a vacancy. *(Continued on page 7)*

## Internal Insights of Apne Aap

*By Sowmya Didugu*

**Delhi:** During my tenure at Apne Aap I learned about the different factors that cause women and girls to be inescapably forced into prostitution. However, what surprised and upset me most was the existence of intergenerational prostitution. This concept was completely foreign to me prior to interning at Apne Aap. Intergenerational prostitution in India happens when certain castes engage in a tradition of abuse; their wives and daughters are induced and assimilated into the world of prostitution to generate income for their families. This is essentially another form of sexual slavery. Often, young girls are forced to drop out of school when they reach puberty and are expected to work in the family business. I was able to see firsthand the painstaking work that Apne Aap does to educate the girls' parents on the social and economic advantages of keeping them in school with the opportunity to live respectably and sustainably. I have learned from my internship that

the education provided by Apne Aap is multi-layered; it involves the education of the men in the community, the girls themselves and the overall supply chain. The primary focus of this education is centered around the monetary and psychological benefits that ending these dehumanizing traditions and lifestyle would bring. It is a practical and convincing way to alter strongly held mindsets that tangibly shows individuals that these benefits are greater than could

### Column Volunteer Journal

ever be achieved with prostitution. This is a proven and concrete way to affect permanence in long held traditions. Sustained education and re-education of communities is necessary to maintain these lifestyle modifications. An aspect of the education that the women and girls undergo, which I found to be vital, is the livelihood program. These programs provide practical, life-affirming skills which can, beneficially, be put to imme-

diated use by the women and girls. These practical and marketable skills increase their confidence and knowledge, which enhances the belief that they have more to offer to their society, their community and their family. It affects their capability to provide for themselves and for their family. Since the maintenance of families is extremely important to these women and girls, the programs implemented by Apne Aap offer only positive returns for everyone involved.

The success of Apne Aap correlates strongly with the education of communities, the effectiveness of programs offered, the dignified livelihood earned by families, and the preservation of those families. I found that Apne Aap is effective in achieving its organizational goals given the difficult and trying nature of endemic prostitution.

## Travelling the Distance for my Mother

*By Rosni*

**Forbesganj, Bihar:** My name is Rosni and I am a student at KGBV. Bobbi didi encouraged me to talk about bravery, so that is what I will tell you about. Before I came to live at the hostel I lived at home with my mother, father, and brother. At home, my father fought with my mother all the time; he yelled at her, called her bad names, and threatened her. One day my mother decided that she did not want to put up with him anymore and left my brother and me alone in the house. I tried to be brave and take care of him by myself but I was very scared and I missed my mother very much. We kept asking our father where she had gone and when she was returning home, but he wouldn't tell us. I asked our grandmother to take us to my mother but she refused. My brother and I did not want to give up so we travelled to the residences of our other family members, who all lived many kilometres away. An uncle told me in secret where my mother was. I took some money from him without telling him what it was for and then my brother and I took a train to go find our mother. I was very nervous since I had never before travelled on a train without my parents. People, especially the men, kept staring at me. I was very worried that something bad would happen because my friends had told me many stories about men touching them on trains. We arrived to where my mother was staying without any problems on the way. She was very happy to see us, but worried that we had come alone all this way. I tried to convince her to come back home and take care of us but she did not want to. I understood why. Yet, after many attempts to convince her, she finally agreed to come back home. Whenever I see my father now, I tell him that he must treat my mother better because she deserves better. After losing her once, my father's behaviour improved and I'm hoping the change is permanent.

# Speech on Sex Trafficking

*By Ruchira Gupta*

Hello everyone,

First of all, I would like to start by thanking all of you for supporting our cause. What you are doing is part of a global movement which we are hoping to go and go until we see a change.

Why should this issue be taken up? There are three million women and girls being prostituted in India right now. The average age of entry into prostitution is nine to thirteen years old. Every girl who is locked up in a brothel is locked up for five years at a very minimum. On average, the girl is raped by ten customers every night.

When the girl is bought by a procurer from the village, he pays something like three thousand rupees to five thousand rupees to her parents. When he takes her to the brothels, he sells her to the pimp for seven thousand rupees to ten thousand rupees and the customer pays 200 to 300 rupees every time he rapes her. The girl gets nothing for the first five years when she is kept in the brothel. She is normally kept locked up in a small room and trotted out when customers are available. She is forced to have a couple of children in the first two years so that the brothel manager can use her affection for her children to control her. The brothel manager normally tells her that now that she has a child and has been raped, she will be of no value to her family. Along with that, the brothel manager makes sure that the girl becomes dependent on drugs and alcohol within the first two or three years. Between the dependency on the drugs and alcohol, the repeated rapes and beatings, and the fact that she has to have a couple of children in the first two

or three years, the girl is completely imprisoned psychologically and physically.

When the brothel manager says, "Okay, you have a little more freedom—you can get half of what you earned and can go out and stand on the streets," the girl doesn't really know where to go. In those five years she tries to eke out an existence, keeping half of what she earns. She gets deeper and deeper into debt even though she has started earning because the brothel manager makes her pay for all expenses, including medical expenses. The pimp and the brothel manager keep account of all of this; the girls have completely lost count of their expenses in the last five years since they've been in the brothel (that is, if they had ever learned to count). So the girls go by whatever figure the brothel manager tells them.

By this time the girl, who has become a woman in the brothel, also picks up many diseases. She suffers from malnutrition and drug and alcohol dependency. On top of that, she has to face violence when she is alone with a client. Many of the clients and customers who come to the brothels come not only to buy sex, but also to buy domination.

Then as the women grow older their looks begin to change. They begin to look like cardboard creatures, because they have been so used and abused; they have skin diseases, hollow eyes and their hands shake. If they can't earn, the brothel manager doesn't let them eat. He threatens to kick them out of the brothel and then tells them that the only way they can stay in the brothel is if they put their daughters into prostitution. That's when these women begin to approach organizations like Apne Aap. We

start a community classroom to prepare their daughters for school. When they begin to see a change in their daughters, they begin to think that a change is possible for themselves. This is when we start organizing them—first as a mothers group, then as a women's group, then as a self-empowerment group.

Apne Aap is starting 146 such groups; we've reached out to more than 10,000 women over the years. But there are a million women and girls still out there. Also, the average daily number of times a girl or woman in a brothel has to provide sex to a customer is ten. So if you multiply three million into ten that means thirty million rapes are being committed in our country, every night, with impunity.

This impunity happens for two reasons: One reason is that these girls are from poor families. The second reason is that many of them are low caste. They are segregated even inside the villages and towns that they are picked up from. They don't have access to education, legal protection, job training, or land. So when a trafficker comes into the village preying for girls, he goes into such areas. He takes advantage of the fact that they are these girls and the family already considers them low value.

What happens to them is invisible and what happens to them has been normalized. But what we have to remember is that nobody chooses to be born poor, nobody chooses to be born a girl, and nobody chooses to be born low caste. *(continued on page 7)*

# Diary of a Social Worker

By *Abraar Karan*

**Dharampura, Delhi:** In my past international experiences, I've encountered numerous cultural practices that have been curious and fascinating—from using chickens to ward off evil energy in India to eating fried grasshoppers as delicacies in Uganda to entertaining the wisdom of magical *sobadores* in Nicaragua. However, for the first time, I have come across a “cultural” practice which I am particularly at odds with.

Around India, there are castes which traditionally engage in familial, intergenerational prostitution. Starting from around age 13, girls are married and subsequently prostituted by their husbands and parents. Earnings can be as high as \$100 USD per hour, more than what many professionals in America will make in the same amount of time. For an uneducated villager whose only other job option is cheap manual labour, the money is a tempting draw. Unfortunately, the earnings go directly in the hands of the husbands who don't work at all, instead playing cards and drinking throughout the day. From a purely economic standpoint, there seems to be very little incentive to change the status quo, particularly from the perspective of the men.

I'm currently working in Dharampura teaching traditional *bhangra* dance to a group of young girls while conducting anthropological field research with their families to try and understand a cultural practice that may have originally developed out of poverty and desperation but now continues without necessity. From a young age, girls know that this is what they are “supposed” to do. Their mothers and sisters do it while their fathers support them, which eventually makes it their “culture”. Thus, there is very little room for a girl to object. Although I am still unaware of all of the physical and psychological pressure that is put on girls to do this, it is interesting that the only cause for divorce in the community is if a girl decides to stop prostituting. A few NGOs, including Apne Aap, are attempting to provide alternatives for the girls, but with slow and limited success. Many girls enjoy attending the centre for daily activities such as sewing, dancing, computer classes, and basic English lessons. However, when they return to their homes they witness their mothers getting ready for the night's work. They know exactly where she is going and why. And not surprisingly,

this overrides any encouragement for an alternative future for the younger generations.

After having visited some houses where these women stay, I know that desperation is not the driver of this work for them—many have televisions, air conditioning, properly furnished houses, and other relative luxuries. Some staff workers have commented that greed is a major reason this continues, but I am interested in the sociological underpinnings of this work as it seems unusual that men would want their wives to do this and that women would

want their children to. I have been fighting with the idea that my own “Western” biases have influenced me to see this practice as exploita-

tive, when the people engaging in it may not see it as such. Perhaps I have a poor understanding of a different community's traditions, but I ask, whose tradition is this? Is it an individual girl's tradition? What about culture—who made the culture? To whose advantage and disadvantage is it? I feel as though many practices are conveniently played off as “cultural,” thus assigning some sort of reason for why they exist when our intuition tells us otherwise. In objecting to this practice, I may seem like a culturally insensitive Westerner with a lack of understanding.

But I do understand a few things. I understand that these girls are forced out of school after grade six, do not have the option to pursue an alternate job because their families will not support them, and have to accept a dangerous and socially stigmatizing lifestyle. I also understand that there is a convenience factor for their husbands and

fathers to claim that this is their culture, but it sounds like a cheap excuse to me. The actual choice to prostitute oneself for money is not my issue—that should be a personal decision. However, the complex social and cultural infrastructure which biases this decision so that the girls are no longer the agents of consent is what is problematic.

The girls that are currently in my dance class are all in their early teens. Some of them are part of this specific caste while others are not. It is possible that those in the caste could have a similar fate to the ones who I have spoken about, although hopefully through our interventions they will not. In working with these girls, it is easy for me to forget those who don't come to the community centre where we work. They are the quiet ones who silently stare at me from closed windows as I walk through the village on home visits. (Continued on page 6)

*Column*

Diary of a Social Worker

*“the complex social and cultural infrastructure which biases this decision so that the girls are no longer the agents of consent is what is problematic.”*

## Did You Know—The Largest Brothel Areas in India

1. **Sonagachi, Kolkata:** This area has hundreds of brothels, many of which are multi-storied. There is an estimated 10,000 sex workers here. Kolkata has become a hub for trafficked women from countries like Nepal, Bangladesh and Burma. Sometimes these women are transported from Kolkata into the brothels of Mumbai. Although there are many NGOs working in the area to distribute condoms and information about diseases, many of the women cannot or will not use condoms because if prostitutes insist on this, the client will simply go next door to one of the other thousands of women in prostitution.
2. **G.B. Road, New Delhi:** G.B. Road dates back to the Mughal era, when there were five Red Light Areas in Delhi. When the British took control of India, Garstin Bastion, a British collector, combined the areas into one and he named it after himself. There are an estimated 4,500 women in prostitution working here. During the day G.B. Road is a large hardware market, but by evening it is one of the largest brothel areas in India.
3. **Budhwar Peth, Pune:** There are at least 5,000 women in prostitution in Budhwar Peth. The brothel area is situated within an electronics market so you can also find many hawkers selling everything from jewellery to food here. In 2003 about 54% of the women in the area were HIV positive. There is good news however. NGOs and other organizations focusing on decreasing HIV and AIDS in Budhwar Peth have successfully decreased that percentage to about 20% (2008)<sup>1</sup>.
4. **Kamathipura, Mumbai:** Kamathipura is named after the *Kamathis*, or workers from Andhra who came to the city in 1795 and settled here. This area is one of Asia's oldest Red Light Areas. During the late 1800s, the area became a place that British troops would visit for "comfort" or to show visitors a good time. When the British left, Indian natives took over the brothel area and it became a hotspot for trafficked women from Nepal. The police began to crackdown on brothels in the late 1900s when the AIDS statistics began to rise so the number of women in prostitution in Kamathipura dwindled from 50,000 (1992) to 1600 (2009)<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>Lucile Scott. "Taking care of business," POZ: Health, Life & HIV. May 2008.

<sup>2</sup>Clara Lewis. "Red light district swaps sin for skyscrapers," The Times of India. November 28, 2009.

## I Remained a Prostitute for my Mother's Sake

*By Basanti*

**Kidderpore, Kolkata:** My name is Basanti. My parents tried to marry me off when I was still very young even though I told them that I did not want to get married. Instead, I wanted to work and use my earnings to look after my parents. A girl offered to bring me to Kolkata and help me find a job. I trusted this woman completely. She was kind and talkative with my family and me, so they trusted her too. We all agreed that I would go with her and send most of my earnings back home to my family.

After bringing me to the city she sold me. The person who bought me was a brothel owner. He warned me that if I tried to leave the brothel I would have

nowhere to go and would be hurt. I lost all contact with my parents. One day someone informed me that my father had come to the city and was waiting to see me. At first I refused to believe it, but then I saw that he really was there. I spoke with him and gave him all of my earnings. I learned that my mother was very ill so I decided to stay in prostitution to help support her. I did not want to since I had been thinking of ways to use my money to escape the city but I felt obliged to help my mother. I continued making money, which I sent home to help my parents. The money was used to pay for my mother's treatment, but despite my best efforts, I could not save her life.

**My Dreams** (Continued from page 1)

Even after all these hardships I am not ready to leave my dream of having my own place to live outside the Red Light Area. I have joined a Self Empowerment Group through Apne Aap and I believe this will help me live a better life and allow me to help other girls get out of prostitution. Apne Aap has given me the opportunity to do this and achieve my dreams.

## Inspiring Acts of Courage

“I would go to the bank to open an account, but every time they would ask me to come back later and wouldn’t allow me to open the account. One day I was very angry and frustrated and spoke out. I said that I would not leave the bank without getting my new account. They finally gave it to me.” **Shashi**

“I am a widow and I lead a bold life because I take care of my four girls all alone. I am struggling every day to give them a good life so that they grow up to lead comfortable lives and they get enough education. I have sent my boys and girls to school although that is not the tradition in our community. My children were harassed on their way to school. Though, I am happy they went since there are few who are as educated as my children in our community.” **Neelam**

“My brother used to stop me from riding a scooter and attending my tuition classes as this was not something that ‘girls’ should do. I fought with my brother and stood up against him and continued to attend my tuition classes.” **Monika**, computer teacher at Dharampura

“My family didn’t have enough money for me to go to school but I really wanted to go. I saved up all of my pocket money; I never bought candy or anything and eventually I saved enough to pay for school tuition fees. Now I go to school regularly.” **Kajal**

“Once I was going to the block office in Forbesganj and a man commented to me saying that I was from the Red Light Area. I scolded him and slapped him. Then people gathered around the guy and scolded him.” **Chunni**

“One of my friends took poisonous medicine in an attempt to commit suicide. After she took the medicine her health was in poor condition, so I told the teachers and got her help. The girl got well again and she is doing better now.” **Farida**, student at KGBV

“A 14-year old girl was being forced into marriage at Babuan. We informed Apne Aap staff about this and we all went to the girl’s parents and stopped the marriage from happening.” **Ritu**

“I have been fighting to get possession of my house. All of my husband’s property is in his two son’s names but I am refusing to leave because this is my home.” **Chandri**

“There was a fire at my home one night. My parents were gone and just my brother and I were at home. My brother was not waking up and I could not get to him. I road my bike down the road to get help. Luckily we saved my brother.” **Chandri**

“I used to be beaten by my husband every day. One day I dared to protest. Now he encourages me to do social work and he said, ‘I knew you weren’t that type of lady. If you go to the Red Light Area you’ll definitely put another 10 women on the right path.’” **Mumtaz**

“Once, while I was in a public toilet, a boy began pulling on my *dupatta*. Angry, I removed my slipper and hit him with it. This scared him and he left.” **Asma Khatun**

“I was married off at a young age because my parents were very poor. My husband was very abusive towards me. I had three sons who I had to look after and provide for, as well as another woman’s child. For this reason I had to become a prostitute.” **Mithu**

### **Diary of a Social Worker** *Diary of a Social Worker (Continued from page 4)*

They are the girls who have already been married off, who are sent late at night to dangerous streets in the city, and, who, while still children, had to abandon childhood. They remind me of the impact that this type of work has on people. The confidence with which my students laugh at my broken Hindi, the energy and life that they bring to the centre and to every class—it saddens me to think that they could ever lose this. And so I wonder whether sometimes accepting our “Western biases” is actually a good thing. It has made me start to realise that “culture” may be an excuse that institutionalizes exploitation and hurts innocent people for the benefit of others.

**To learn more about Abraar’s work please visit:**

<http://swasthyamundial.com/>

### **Securing My Financial Independence** *(Continued from Page 1)*

I went in for an interview and was selected. It was the first time I had heard of Apne Aap Women Worldwide. I had part-time work teaching their students, who were not going to schools. I received a monthly remuneration of 1,700 rupees. Though it was a very little amount for my entire family's expenses, I was very happy to think, that at least now, I could help my father a little.

My children grew up and our daily expenses increased. My father retired from his job so it was very hard for me to run the household and I became depressed. The result of my husband's appeal for divorce and subsequently my need to hire a notary for my defence was only further expenditure.

One day, didi in our office told me to join their computer course. She said that if I completed the six-month course successfully, I would be able to get a good job. Many girls like me got jobs through this course. It was a new opportunity for me that I decided pursue. My only request to Apne Aap was to consider paying my course fees, as I was unable to pay the fees at that time. Thankfully they did. Within four months I got a job, even before I completed my course. This was my new beginning.

I joined a security company working as a security guard. I received phone calls and provided different services for patients who were admitted to the hospital. I used to work different shifts—day and night. It was a hard job but I would have done anything for that monthly salary. I am happy now since I no longer depend on my father. I can now look after my parents as well as my children.

### **Speech on Sex Trafficking** *(Continued from page 3)*

Thirty million rapes are being committed every night...thirty million! If this number represented how many people were killed or massacred, there would be a war or global uproar about it. The girls are prostituted because of the absence of choice, but the perpetrators—the Johns, the clients—have the choice. But their choice is considered inevitable; “men will be men”. This is an insult to most men. Thinking that men have an unbridled sexual desire that they cannot control is not true. But since we are not standing up and saying that it is not true, those that are making a profit, or the buyers, who say men will be men, have the louder voice. Prostitution is a system that is formed from supply and demand. Vulnerable, at-risk girls and women who have no choice are on the supply side, but on the demand side is the business, composed of a whole chain of people who definitely have a range of choices.

Mortality rates are high in Red Light Areas due to violence, murder, starvation, and diseases. These women usually die by the time they are 45 or 50 years old. This is why Apne Aap has launched its campaign called “Cool Men Don't Buy Sex.” We believe that the new India does not stand for buying girls. This is the message that we want the young people of India to take forward. Today, we have a huge challenge in front of us, but you are part of the movement. At times you may not realize it when you are studying and working late into the night, but you are part of it.

## **I Had to Accept Prostitution to Save my Son**

*By Chanda Das*

**Sonagachi, Kolkata:** I was in Barasat, where I got my education in a local school. I was from a poor family but luckily my parents could afford to send me to school. They wanted to send me to school and have a respectable life so that I could earn money and not be poor anymore. I could even take care of my parents if I was able to study and finish school and get a job. One day while I was going to school I met my friend's brother. We kept meeting on my way to and from school every day. Many days I even used to bunk school to spend time with him. We fell in love and decided to get married. My parents were not happy with this. They wanted me to study and not get married. They did not trust this man and I wish I had listened to them. I ran away with him and we got married. I wish I had not trusted him because

in just six months time, he left me and ran away for, what I assume was another woman. He left me pregnant. He used to tell me that he had no money so I sold all my jewellery and gave him all the money. He said he would start earning very soon but his statements were all lies. I wish I had not trusted him but it's too late to think about that now. He never loved me or my son because he left us. When my husband left me I was helplessly trying to get a job. My son and I were a burden for my family. I tried to get a job in my locality but did not find a suitable one. One lady directly told me if I am interested she can take me to Sonagachi to introduce me to some people who could help me find a job. I was very naïve. I did not know what Sonagachi was. I did not know that it was the biggest Red Light Area in India.

*(Continued on page 8)*



## Why I Help Girls like Me

**Forbesganj, Bihar:** *Fatima speaks of her journey working with Apne Aap and gaining confidence and conviction in her cause along the way*

**Q:** What changed you from the shy girl who lacked confidence to the woman who could address public rallies?

**Fatima:** When I came to Forbesganj after marriage at the age of nine, I was unaware of what was happening in my in-law's house or in the neighbouring houses. I used to play with the girls around me and only later did I realize that they were all victims of prostitution. My in-law's used to beat me and starve me for days at a time because I supported the girls. Even though I used to fight with them about these girls I was fearful since my husband's whole family was in this business together and I was alone. Moreover the clients that visited the house were influential and I always worried that my husband's family might do whatever they wanted with me—even kill me with the support of these influential clients. I used to think of going back to my mother's house but they said I couldn't come back since I was married. My grandmother told me that since I could not return home, the only way out of my situation was to fight, so I began to confront the family. After joining Apne Aap, Ruchira didi and Tinku didi motivated me and I removed all the fear from my mind. I can address any public meeting, can fight against injustice, and can stand up for the rights of women like me.

**Q:** What moved you to challenge the kerosene dealer?

**Fatima:** Some of the women from the Red Light Area were also with me when I challenged the kerosene dealer, but all the men who came with us ran back, fearing that those people would later harm them. I led the fight with the kerosene dealer, though men and women from the nearby area also came to support us. The women who used to hate the women of Red Light Area are now friends with us, visit our houses, and even invite us for weddings in their homes. The kerosene dealer also came to our area to apologize. After this incident my brother-in-law, who had always been negative towards me for supporting the women in prostitution, came to me and told me that the whole family was proud of me. Such a statement from him made me feel strong and I also felt a sense of achievement for all the struggles I faced.

**Q:** How did you feel when you travelled to Delhi by yourself to speak to the media?

**Fatima:** I had spoken to the local media before but I did not expect the national and international media that were in Delhi. When I travelled to and spoke in Delhi, I wasn't too nervous or excited. But when I returned to Forbesganj and recalled the whole chapter, I felt blessed. I know that I can now speak in front of anyone and I feel like a powerful woman.

### **I Had to Accept Prostitution to Save my Son** *(Continued from page 7)*

When the prospect of the job came up I decided to go there because I was so desperate to get a job. I accepted knowing that if I could earn something then I could stay with my family. Once I got to Sonagachi, I was faced with the heart-wrenching decision to accept prostitution or let my son die of hunger. I had no choice. Who can just stand by and let their child die. I had to save my son and give him a future. This is why I am still in prostitution. I am waiting for my son to complete his education and hoping he will get a job. Then only will I be able to give up prostitution. I still remain hopeful.

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### Red Light Despatch

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