



RED LIGHT DESPATCH

VOLUME VI, ISSUE 11

NOVEMBER 2013

RELEASING SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM DELHI,
KOLKATA, AND FORBESGANJ (BIHAR)

My Dreams

Najmoon Khatoon

I live in Khawaspur Red Light Area and I am a home maker. I have two daughters and a son. My husband works as a laborer. I look after the children and do all my household chores. I joined Apne Aap as a member of Asha self-empowerment group.

My financial situation is very bad and my husband doesn't earn enough for a comfortable life. It is very difficult sometimes to make ends meet and we end up borrowing from our neighbors. I wanted to work but I do not know any kind of work other than doing domestic chores. I did not have any income of my own which made me very dependent on my husband and very helpless sometimes. I am always concerned about my daughter's safety, and I have always felt that because I do not have an income of my own and am not independent, I have no say in my family.

It was then that an organization called NOMI Network started working with us. It is one of Apne Aap's partners and they started training for bag-making. I joined the training five months ago. My daughter is also attending the training. I earn a stipend of Rs. 800 now during the training. Even though it is not a big amount, it makes me feel secure. I am more confident about myself and I am more happy for my daughter. I am very grateful to Apne Aap and NOMI for this opportunity.

Visit to Sonagachi

Swapna Kar

I have been living in the Sonagachi red light area for a long time. I have a daughter and she is now studying in Rama Krishna Vivekananda Mission (RKVM), Dwipa.

When I came to know that a group of people were coming here to meet us, I was very excited. I was excited because I had never met anyone from other places before. I was also excited because I heard that they were supporting us for my daughter's education. This is a big reason for me to get excited for meeting with them.

That day I was waiting for a call from Sahana di. As soon as I got the call from her I just rushed to the Apne Aap center. I was really, really excited and nervous. Three of us were there that time at the center when the group arrived. All of them asked my name and wanted to know about my daughter and her educa-

tion. I talked with them for a long time (Abhilasha ji, Sahanadi and other Apne Aap members helped us to understand their words).

They heard about my life, asked about my dreams and also shared their story. I told them that my dream was about my daughter. I dream that my daughter would have a beautiful life and that she would never be in a position like me. When we were talking they felt so much emotion while hearing our stories that some of them also cried. I was feeling so emotional at that time and it was a great feeling that they empathized with our situation. They hugged me also.

That day was the first time I shared my stories in front of them all. I was surprised that I could speak a lot to fight in the future. I want to get

(Continued on page 6)

Anisha's story

Anisha

I joined Apne Aap in April 2013 for sewing classes. Watching other kids study made me want to study too. I joined educational classes as well. I told *didi* how I wish to study and play, so she arranged for sports activities at the centre. That is how she got to know that I am really good at sports. So they got me enrolled into Government School in Palwala Khurd for sports. When I regularly started attending school for sports, I realised the importance of studying. So *didi* got me admitted into Govt Girls Senior Secondary School in 6th Standard.

With the help of Apne Aap I got various options to grow. I went to Apne Aap head office on 22nd December 2013. Chicago Care, a donor organisation were on a visit. We prepared a song to welcome them.

(Continued on page 5)

Column
Volunteer Journal

This November, Apne Aap had the privilege to welcome renowned Kathak dancer, choreographer, academic, and storyteller Maya Rao.

Through her movements and words, Dr. Rao addresses various social issues, especially those facing women. In her latest performance at ApneAap, she demands

that there be progress in the move to end violence against women.

She specifically calls for a minister who will not turn his back on her, for justice against sexual predators, and for the ability for women to safely walk the streets at all hours of the night.

Dr. Rao emphasizes the absurdity of there being only one conviction of sexual violence against women in 2012, and she then asks for the hundreds more cases that were not reported. Her words are paired with graceful body move-

ments and soothing music to make for a very impressive performance.

Kara Myers is currently interning at the Apne Aap New Delhi office. Her interests run deep in the field of gender and human rights.

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Lady Sri Ram College for Women
Guest Lecture by Prof. Ruchira Gupta

The Women's Development Cell of Lady Sri Ram College for Women, Delhi University organized a lecture by Prof. Ruchira Gupta, Founder/President – Apne Aap Women Worldwide. The crucial theme that was chosen for the interactive session was 'Sex Trafficking in India and Beyond'. Most significantly, the session also gave emphasis to the recently launched Cool Men Don't Buy Sex Campaign – a prerogative of Apne Aap Women as a call to end every form of sex trafficking.

The session began with a short presentation exhibiting Prof. Ruchira Gupta's involvement in advocating against sex trafficking, which has contributed to making her a true leader, at both the national and international platform. Thereafter Prof. Gupta dealt with the session in an intense yet sensitive manner. She connected profoundly with the audience, by sharing her personal journey from being a passionate journalist to someone who gradually realized the ignorance attributed to women's voices and experiences.

Most significantly, she pointed

out the attitude of the pimps and customers who believe in buying domination through prostitution, much more than buying sex. By acknowledging prostitution as a system and a complex web of buyers, brothels, business and the bought, Prof. Gupta reflected on the sharp distinction between sexual exploitation and sex, coupled with the idea of lack of choice for the woman who persistently gets entrapped in this business. She uncovered layers of our understanding pertaining to masculinity and the prominent version of aggressive masculinity which conveniently views prostitution as a means of supporting an economically deprived and vulnerable woman receive adequate livelihood, thereby getting away from the aspect of criminality. Through the campaign, therefore, she explains the need to acquire a societal shift, believing that it is the male demand for prostitution that continues, furthers and perpetuates trafficking.

Students who attended the session were partly stunned by the experiences narrated by Prof. Gup-

ta. The Women's Development Cell of the college received tremendous appreciation from the student audience for organizing an intriguing session with Prof Gupta that left a tremendous impact of all of them. The enthusiasm and interest to know more about sex trafficking was clearly reflected by the Question and Answer forum that lasted for nearly an hour longer than the anticipated time. Students are curious to learn about the Campaign and further initiatives of Apne Aap Women Worldwide. Their eagerness exemplifies the appreciation they have expressed for the session concerned. To put it in a nutshell, we were really honored to have Prof Gupta amidst us, for taking out time and creating this powerful space in deciphering the voice of women who become victims of sex trafficking, even in the present 21st century. We salute and gain inspiration from a leader and a remarkable achiever like her.

*Women's Development Cell,
Lady Sri Ram College.*

Op/Ed : 'The Selling of Innocents' - An interview with Ruchira Gupta

The following is an excerpt from an interview with Ruchira Gupta conducted by Aditya Bhushan Dwivedi on October 12, 2013.

There are people who see problems and talk about them, then there are people who see problems and solve them. Ruchira Gupta belongs to the second group. Ruchira is the founder of Apne Aap Worldwide, an NGO which works in the field of Women Rights and also helps eradicate the practice of human sex trafficking. We caught up with Ruchira and here is what she had to say about the issue.

Your Story: What caught your attention and interested you in working against trafficking ?

Ruchira Gupta: I first became aware of the problem of trafficking when I was working as a journalist. I was traveling in the hills in Nepal and noticed a village where there were no women or girls. I thought, how can this be, and when I asked what had happened, I was told, "Don't you know, all of them have been sold in the brothels of Mumbai." I couldn't believe that modern day slavery was going on in my lifetime. This was the subject of my Emmy-winning documentary, *The Selling of Innocents*, and ultimately what motivated me to start my NGO, Apne Aap.

YS: Please take us through some of the white lies in this sector.

RG: One white lie I would definitely like to expose is that prostitution is a choice. The women who are forced into prostitution are low caste and class and from marginalized races, ethnicities, and religion. How could body invasion be a

choice? Prostitution doesn't result from choice but from the absence of choice.

YS: Do you think it would have been different for a man fighting the same struggle?

RG: That's an interesting question. I think there are many men who are powerful advocates for women and children and that their work should not be discounted. That being said, I think being a woman in India society is a unique position. From birth until the day we die, we are at risk – from sex selective abortion, female foeticide, and trafficking, to bride burning. I do think being a woman in this society gives me a unique understanding and sense of empathy.

YS: How is the situation of trafficking & prostitution different in India as compared to other countries and how strict are the laws at different places?

RG: Girls and women are being forced into prostitution at an earlier age than in the US. I feel very happy that we were able to change the law in India in April so that trafficking was incorporated as a criminal offense into the Indian Penal Code. Nevertheless, we have a long way to go in terms of developing victim-friendly laws that punish the traffickers, johns, and brothel owners, the buyers of sex, and not the women who are the victims. Of course, stricter laws also require stricter enforcement for them to be effective.

YS: How much faith do you have in our police and judicial system? Why/why not?

RG: I have seen police involvement with traffickers and a lack of gender sensitivity. My organization, Apne Aap, is currently working to provide police with gender-sensitivity training so that they can enforce the laws to the best of their ability.

YS: How important can be the role of our society in putting a full stop to trafficking?

RG: I think that in order to end trafficking, we have to change the hearts and minds of people. The demand side – the buyers and sellers of sex – need to realize that women are not for sale.

YS: What keeps you going and motivates you to do more for these people ?

RG: The women keep me going. I look at all they have achieved for themselves and that motivates me. Just this year, we have three girls in Bihar who have graduated and are the first in their communities to go to college. We also have a self empowerment group in Kolkata which has established a community kitchen business and a savings account. I look at all of the women have accomplished for themselves and think all that still needs to be done to allow women to live with dignity.

We wish a Ruchira a great journey ahead.

Aditya Bhushan Dwivedi has been a Workshop Consultant with the Times of India and is a Software Engineer by education. You can follow him on Google+ and Twitter at @TrollNath.

Cultural function at American Centre, Kolkata

Radha Prasad

I was very excited when I heard that we were going to celebrate Children's Day at the American Centre in West Bengal, on 14th November, 2013, with Kolkata Sanved in collaboration with Department of Women and Child Development and Directorate Social Welfare, Government of West Bengal, with the other eight organizations.

We decided to prepare for a performance. I practiced a lot for this dance program and Uma didi guided us. When I went to the American Centre's stage I was feeling quite tense and nervous, but Uma didi and my other friends motivated me to give my best performance. There I saw number of other children also participating with us.

The United States Consul General inaugurated the programme with his beautiful speech and welcomed us with a handful of gifts and Dr. Sashi Panja, Parliamentary Secre-

"...at that time, I was 'feeling like a bird that has been set free and can fly freely'".

tary, Government of West Bengal, Member of West Bengal Legislative Assembly, also gave a motivating speeche and encouraged us a lot for joining this dance program. I

got nail polish, a tooth brush and chocolates. After that I danced with my six other friends to songs like "Nach Kore Sundarii" and at that time, I was 'feeling like a bird that had been set free and can fly freely'.

I want to become a trainer of dance movement therapy. Now my aim is to see a change in the society as well as my team members. I want to fight against sex trafficking with Apne Aap through dance therapy.

Radha Prasad is actively involved in Apne Aap's dance program at the Khiddipore Centre.

Ritu's computer class

Ritu

I love studying and I am an introvert. I always feel shy when talking with others. But my younger sister is very extrovert, silly, naughty, and not very good at her studies. Sometime I teach her and my other young sister and brother.

I was very curious about computers. I used to see people using them in television and always thought that only people with lot of intelligence can use a computer. Apne Aap helped me get over that fear and myth. I started going to the center run by Apne Aap for my tuitions and ended up joining the computer classes where Monika di used to teach. When I started attending the class, my sister also started coming and we were in the same batch.

When the classes started I was very nervous and I was scared to touch the computer. But then didi gave me the confidence and made me use the keyboard and before that she explained the various parts of the computer and its function.

At first we were not allowed to use the computers and didi was teaching us in theory, which used to be very frustrating. I always wanted to start working on the computer and do something on it. We used to have verbal tests every alternate day on what we have learned and I initially did not do well in it but later on I started working hard to answer the questions and to listen to didi carefully when she was teaching the class. One of the reasons why I couldn't

answer was also the fact that I was so shy and nervous about giving wrong answers. On the other hand my sister used to come forward and answer even though she did not know the answer. But as time passed by I became more and more confident and I got comfortable with the computers and learned more about them.

After I completed six months of the course, I was very disappointed that I had to leave the class. However, I also felt that now I feel confident to do more and go for an advanced course.

Ritu is in the 7th grade. Of her five school-going siblings, she is the eldest girl.

Sitting in circles

Annu Routt

I am a 14 year-old girl. I study in Lajpat Balika Vidhayalay in class XI. Here I would like to share with all of you my experiences in Sit in Circle Event at Eden Gardens. I came to know from the staff that 24 women's rights activists from the United States of America were going to visit New Delhi and Kolkata from November 14- 21 in collaboration with the anti-sex-trafficking organization, Apne Aap Women Worldwide. They came to understand and learn the grassroots movement that uses a Gandhian perspective and to build solidarity for the global cause for ending violence against women.

The leaders came from leading NGO's like NOVO Foundation, Asian and Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence, Caring Across Generations, Miami Workers Center and Movement Strategy Center

among others and are part of the 'Move to End Violence' (MEV) program. MEV is a 10-year old program of the NOVO Foundation designed to strengthen leaders, organizations, and ultimately works to end violence against girls and women in the United States. The group also planned to interact with a girls group from Apne Aap Women World Wide.

I am a group member of Amontran Kishori Mandal and I was there at Eden Garden with my friends, Apne Aap's staff and the visiting team. It was a great experience with them. At first we sat in a circle and introduced ourselves. We were divided into groups and each group had 4 girls. They wanted to know how we develop our group and what we are doing in our group? We all shared our experiences of our group and

after that we all were playing three games and I realized that the visiting team members might not be living in India, but somehow they have a little girl in their soul. Andrea Lee shared their work and how to develop day by day their work. She also told us to interact with the school regarding our group.

This Sit in Circle Event is a platform where we can share our sorrow, happiness, joy and love with the others and this is also a knowledge sharing platform. I learned that language is not a tool for understanding others, but a true feeling is a way to know the others.

Maybe we are not living in the same country but the situations of girls are the same. It was a great moment and I will never ever forget this experience.

(continued from page 1: 'Anisha's Story')

Abhilashaji told us her story; how she struggled herself to study in spite of no importance of education in her locality and yet she studied and is so successful today. I was truly inspired by her story. I wish to study further and become successful.

A lot of people had come from

"With the help of Apne Aap I got various options to grow"

Chicago Care. I was impressed at

how people from foreign countries were interested to know about us and our lives. It was very nice to see them and to know that they even cared to help us.

Anisha is 15 years old. She lives in Prem Nagar with her family and has been with Apne Aap since

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Vijeta's story

Vijeta

My name is Vijeta. I belong to a middle class family. I am the first girl from my community to be a graduate. That is why my parents and I are proud of myself. But I do not wish to be the last girl from my community to have studied. I wish that more and more girls will come forward and study further. I hold a Bachelor's in Arts, and courses in J.B.T, First-Aid and Conductor training. I aspire to become a teacher and open an NGO one day to not only help society but also to create awareness and change mindsets of the people. With change in the status of women and girls in the society, I wish to bring a change in the society.

In my community, parents do not pay much attention to education of their children. Young boys still get to go to school and study, but girls are kept far away from schools. There are very few girls who study beyond 5th standard. By the time they reach 10th standard, they are married with their dreams shattered. When I told my parents I wished to study further than standard 5, my father got me admitted to

Najafgarh School and supported me to study as much as I wished to. My school started at 7:30 for which I used to get up at 5:30 in the morning. To return back home from school, I had to wait for 2 hours for the bus to arrive, sometimes I even had to walk back home. The bus service at this hour was not good.

I completed my 12th standard in the same school. After a few months, I started teaching young kids at the Angadwadi centre of my village. I completed my B.A. from Delhi University alongside J.B.T, First-Aid and Conductor Training. Once I was done with J.B.T, I prepared for C.TET all by myself. I did not have the kind of money required for coaching classes or to pay any sort of bribe. I cleared the exam with my own effort and hard work.

Now I am waiting for my dream to come true to become a teacher. People still have not stopped taunting; a lot of people used to say things like, "What will you gain after studying so much?", "Even after studying so much, you have not yet

got a job" and, "you have studied enough, when will you get married?"

But I have never bothered myself with such taunts and continue to work for society. I want people to be aware and independent, and I cannot do this alone, this is the reason I joined "Apne Aap".

I had heard about Apne Aap for a long time and even helped Apne Aap with their activities. This organisation not only works towards awareness but also helps in making women and girls get education and become self-dependent. I appreciated this work and hence joined Apne Aap.

What I could not do alone, now I want to do it with Apne Aap. I wish all girls get educated and become aware of their rights, and get training in skills which help them become independent. I wish girls, who are less educated, are helped in attaining jobs so that other girls learn from them. Education is important for both, boys and girls.

(continued from page 1) **Visit to Sonogachi**

out from this area with the support of Apne Aap and I believe that not only me, but my other friends also coming to this place from this red light area. Without any fear of the pimp, I was able to share and open up. Sahana Di and the Apne Aap team support me a lot for this.

At last I want say that this is a memorable day of my life and I will cherish this day all through my life. I also want to say that today's conversation with that group made me proud and I realize that I am not alone. There are many people with me who are supporting me in this fight against prostitution.

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Diary of a Social Worker

Communications Team

On our journey to learn about ending violence on women we travelled to Shantiniketan in West Bengal. It is a hub of social, political and cultural activity. A two-hour train ride through rural farmlands brought us to the Bolpur railway station from Kolkata.

Shantiniketan was made famous by Rabindranath Tagore, the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. He used his prize money to establish a university that would value the expertise of traditional knowledge and wisdom. His philosophy was grounded strongly in non-violence and experimentation, and the openness of the institution attracted people who both sought to teach and to learn.

We opened our stay at Shantiniketan with one of Tagore's famous poems,

Where The Mind Is Without Fear:

*Where the mind is without
fear and the head is held
high*

Where knowledge is free

*Where the world has not
been broken up into frag-
ments*

By narrow domestic walls

*Where words come out
from the depth of truth*

*Where tireless striving
stretches its arms towards
perfection*

Where the clear stream of

*reason has not lost its way
Into the dreary desert sand
of dead habit*

*Where the mind is led for-
ward by thee*

*Into ever-widening thought
and action*

*Into that heaven of free-
dom, my Father, let my
country awake.*

The vision that Tagore communicates in this poem resonated with the concept of the Move to End Violence (MEV) group. When we were visiting Anu Kapoor and her Kolkata-based organization SWAYAM, which works to end all forms of violence against girls and women, we talked about "violence-free zones." There was commiseration about the struggle to actually achieve a zone truly free of violence, a term that was part of SWAYAM's work and had also been used in one cohort member's California-based work. To all of us – this picture painted above of a mind without fear could have been defining violence-free zones.

During the afternoon, we met with Dr. Amrit Sen, a professor of English and Tagore studies. He gave us a walking tour of the museum and school campus, sharing the importance of the open-air classrooms, which our group was able to use later in the afternoon for a critical conversation amongst ourselves.

That evening, we were invited to the Mitali Homestay, a family home that is now used as a guest house and meeting place. There, we met with intellectuals, academics, and activists from Shantiniketan area, including Prof. Asha Mukherjee, Prof. Aparajita Mukherjee, Manisha Banerjee, Ayesha Khatun, and Swagata Nandi. Prior to dinner, we were able to introduce ourselves to each other and learn a bit about their organization and their work with women and children in the rural and remote parts of the area. Then, over a delicious meal, we had the chance to engage in lively discussion and deep arguments regarding movement building and the various challenges that one faces while working with the last girl.

**“this picture painted
above of a mind
without fear could
have been defining
violence-free zones.”**

The following day, we spent a leisurely morning in Shantiniketan, before catching our train back to Kolkata. After a day of experiencing the power and unique environment that was established and inspired by Rabindranath Tagore, it was a powerful space to strive to be in authentic relationships and partnerships with each other .

Poems

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Red Light Despatch

Editor: Ruchira Gupta
Editorial team: Tatum Street, Kara Myers, Parul
Publisher: Apne Aap Women Worldwide
RNI Number: DELMUL/2008/27727
Printer: Rana Printers, New Delhi

Organizing communities to end sex trafficking—every woman free, every child in school