



# RED LIGHT DESPATCH

VOLUME VI, ISSUE 9

SEPTEMBER 2013

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

## My Dreams

By Pushpa

I completed my sixth grade after which I was pulled out of school. It was 7 years back when I had to leave my schooling. When I stopped going to the school and started being at home I was very sad. But there was a part of me that knew that this is not something strange which has happened to me. I knew that girls in our community are not allowed to go out once they start looking bigger. If a girl goes out and studies and does things of her own, she and her family are criticized and looked down. This is the reason why my parents also decided to pull me out of school. It seemed like my freedom and mobility was restricted and I was tied to something that I did not want to.

When Apne Aap started its centre near our house, I wanted to attend the classes but my parents scolded me badly and stopped me from going. But when gradually girls from my neighborhood started going and the *didi* from the centre kept convincing my mother, they allowed me to go. One of the reasons why my mother allowed me to join the centre was also because she thought that the centre is for our community's benefit.

I learned to work on computers at Apne Aap's centre and also participated in a lot of activities like the demonstration at Jantar Mantar.

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## And I became an artist too : United Art Fair

Monika

**Dharampura:** I didn't have many before).

dreams after I was pulled out from school and did not have much of an opinion about myself. I was pulled out of school before I could complete my 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Although I requested my parents to let me study they didn't allow me. I was expected to take care of my younger siblings and my mother who was sick mostly all the time and moreover had to do the household chores.

I had stopped thinking that I could even do something that would make me feel good. But recently something happened that actually gave a boost to my self-esteem and I started feeling that I can be good at something. I have been interested in painting and I had started learning applique stitching at the Centre. We were told that we can participate in an event which is an art fair (something that I had not heard of

I went with my friends to what we were told was an art studio in Gurgaon. The house was full of paintings, photographs and books. We met Mithu *didi* who told us to draw some images and we did that. She guided us and it turned out to be really good. But she said it was just a trial and we have to make other pictures. She even brought lunch for us when we were working. After this we had a few more workshops where we were asked to make a few more images of our homes and places around us. We drew images of pregnant women, angels, trees, snakes, trucks, the highway and girls being teased etc. We made those pictures and then our real work started after that. We had to stitch these images and put them in applique form. Our teacher at the centre, Seema *didi* (Continued on page 5)

## Education of Children from Sonagachi

Sudipta Dasgupta

**Sonagachi:** The internal scenario of Sonagachi was unknown to us even before Apne Aap decided to begin work there. Sahana *di*, our Program Associate started visiting Sonagachi around September 2011. It was very difficult to make an inlay and interact with the women there. However, with persistence, constant effort and hard-work for months together, we were able to interact with the women. In the beginning, the conversations were very simple- asking their names, where they were coming from etc. Gradually Sahana *di* asked the women about their children, were they staying with them or not in Sonagachi or somewhere else, if they went to school or do they study at all etc. Then a plan was created to admit the children in school for a brighter future.

When we spoke to the women about this plan, they were afraid of sending their children to Rama Krishna Vivekananda Mission (RKVM) because they were worried that it could be very expensive and high-class for them. But Sahana *di* convinced them. (Continued on page 2)

## Stories of Attachment and Fear

*Sonia Taneja*

**New Delhi:** The juvenile justice system has become a topic of much controversy in India recently. Several heinous crimes, including the three reported gang rapes in the past year involved perpetrators younger than 18 years of age. Apne Aap spoke with Child Rights Advocate Anant Kumar Asthana about the rights of juveniles in India.

Asthana argues that Indian society's neglect for children, environmental dangers, barriers to proper implementation of policies and abject conditions of institutions are some of many problems within the current system that are responsible for any juvenile's crime. He shared several cases that demonstrate the poor state of India's children today. In a recent case a 12-year-old boy in a juvenile home was bullied by his peers. When he approached his superintendent for help, he was again beaten, threatened, and encouraged to lie about his injuries in court. Fortunately, the court magistrate investigated further and arrested the superintendent. Then the superintendent made another threat – if they dared arrest him, the other children would lash out. And they did. They burned down

the home in support of their superintendent, the same man who beat them daily. Why?

In Asthana's words, "He will beat them also, but he will give them love as well." As much as the boys feared their superintendent, they were attached to him. He had been

### Column **Volunteer Journal**

so rarely kind that the few times he offered a small degree of leniency, he seemed greatly compassionate. Swedish psychiatrist and criminologist Nils Bejerot assigned the term 'Stockholm Syndrome' to the psychological condition common to hostage cases in which individuals held captive develop positive feelings towards their captors – a situation similar to the institutionalized boys, but also highly prevalent in trafficked women.

The suffering endured by trafficked women – violence, persistent abuse and malnutrition to name a few – results in their altered mental state. Instead of viewing their kidnappers as the source of their trauma, trafficked women may be-

gin to view them as their source of sustained life. They believe that without them, they would die.

Prostituted women who develop Stockholm syndrome are often so tormented that they no longer express any desire to escape the cause of their trauma and return home. Just as the boys defended their captor, the superintendent, prostituted women may reject outside help and choose to remain with their abusive kidnappers.

Not only does this sustain the dangerous environment in which they exist, but it also establishes barriers for activists attempting to dismantle trafficking practices.

This is only one of many examples of the value that mental health care has for prostituted women, children in poor circumstances, and the community at large – while physical health is vital, mental health services work to undo extreme psychological damage that results from traumatic life circumstances.

*Sonia is currently interning at Apne Aap's New Delhi office. She is a graduate from the University of Yale and, is researching on health issues of women in prostitution.*

*(Continued from page 1)*

After that she met the Maharaja of RKVM and convinced him for the admission of the children. After this, a list of eligible children was made and they were sent to the RKVM for admission test. The selected children were admitted to the decided center of RKVM according to the mission's instruction.

The mothers of these children provided the primary requirements for admission. Apne Aap arranged for bedding, uniforms, trunk etc. Apne Aap supports the fee for the studies.

In September 12 more children

were admitted to RKVM. The boys were sent to Joyrambati center and the girls were sent to Deepa center in Hooghly district. Currently, 24 children from Sonagachi are studying in different centers of RKVM.

The mothers of these children usually visit RKVM on Sundays to meet their children on a weekly basis. Apne Aap's staff visits each center of RKVM twice a month to get feedback of and from the children and the teachers. They give their feedback to us about health, education etc. After seeing a positive feedback, recently more women are opening to the idea of sending their

children for studies. We are likely to have more admissions in the next session.

*Sudipta works with Apne Aap as a Project Officer in Kolkata. She enjoys working with the children of the red light area the most.*

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## Op/Ed : 'Our Very Presence In Public Places Angers Men'

### Ruchira Gupta

As long as I can remember I have always longed for equality, an addiction I owe to my Gandhian socialist father and courageous mother. My home was like a salon, with politicians, writers, journalist, poets, academics and artists, all converging, to talk about how they would create a fairer and more just India.

In my quest for equality, I decided to be a journalist and expose all that was unfair in the world. I had the privilege of working with successive progressive male newspaper editors. I was given the dangerous assignment of covering the ULFA armed struggles in the north-east. Blindfolded, I hopped onto a scooter with them to meet their leader and scooped a story on how they lived and what they wanted just before Rajeev Gandhi as Prime Minister signed an accord with them.

On another occasion, I went into the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya as it was being demolished to see "what was really going on." And in Mumbai, where the 23 year old photojournalist was raped, I went into a brothel with a camera in the red-light district of Kamatipura.

On the first occasion, the ULFA was hospitable and kind, simply sharing a few songs and pamphlets and sending me on my way, but on both the other occasions I was physically attacked. In the brothel a knife was pulled out on me by a customer or a pimp, who said he would not let me film and it was the women in prostitution, who surrounded me and protected me by saying that, "We want to tell our story. You have to kill us first." The pimp thinking it was more dangerous to kill 23 women than letting one woman make a film, slinked away and I went to win an Emmy for out-

standing investigative journalism for field producing the documentary, *The Selling of Innocents*. I also went on to found an anti-trafficking organization, Apne Aap Women Worldwide, which has supported more than 15,000 girls and women to access schools and livelihoods.

On the second occasion inside the mosque, my attackers sexually assaulted and then tried to kill me. Someone dragged me to a trench outside and pulled my shirt off. But a passer-by jumped in and fought off the attackers. Later, when I testified in court against the attackers, their lawyers asked me questions that inferred I was to blame for the attack. "Did I smoke, what kind of clothes was I wearing, did I believe in God? Why did I go to cover the demolition?"

But none of these deterred me. I considered myself fearless, following the story and reporting on news in the "same" way that my male colleagues would. My desire to prove myself, was perhaps a reaction to all the slights I had heard in the newsroom--that women could not deal with tough assignments, would get tired or scared, were too much of a responsibility and should be sent home early, were always having babies and had to take maternity leave and so should not be given key posts etc.

These slights often translated into a glass ceiling-with mostly men occupying decision making posts. I was ambitious and wanted to be editor, not for the money or the fame, but to take decisions, which would shape the news and in turn my society and country.

When the 23 year old photojournalist was attacked, I heard and read comments that female journalists should not be given dangerous assignments. But it is not due

to the nature of our assignments that our clothes are ripped off, or we are sexually assaulted, it is because our very presence in public places angers men, who would love to push us back into the home.

In any case, homes are often the most dangerous places for females from the time they are conceived till the time they die--from foeticide, to incest, child marriage, dowry deaths, domestic violence, maternal mortality and marital rape.

The sexual violence is an outcome of misogyny and can only be stopped by uprooting the deep-seated patriarchy that it is embedded in. This can only be done if more women are in public spaces and more men in private spaces, more men who will take care of child rearing and more women who will be breadwinners. When even in the very newspapers we work in, politics is no longer defined as what happens to men and culture to women. When gender inequalities are reported on with as much vigour as caste, religious and class inequalities.

For example, as a reporter I noticed that famine and farmer suicides are routinely reported, but no investigation is done on the fact that more girls would go to bed hungry on a daily basis, than boys. If I researched murder, I would find that a man's murder was taken more seriously than dowry deaths and honour-killings by the judicial system. In caste conflict, women were the special targets of abuse: rape had become a weapon of war.

No amount of violence is going to force women back into the home. In fact more freedom is the answer, not less.

## **Hajri System: Continuing atrocities on De-notified Tribes**

**Asmita Satyarthi**

Imagine a situation where you have to wake up twice in one night and report yourself at the local police station. Failure to do so results in you being beaten up mercilessly and put in jail and no one ever believes your futile protests of innocence. You are forced to sell your land and all your belongings in order to afford bail. Or a situation where you struggle and toil endlessly against all odds only to be told that all of it was in vain- the circumstances of your birth ensure that you will forever be kept in a deep, dark pit of hopeless and helpless despair.

These are not imaginary situations. These are every day realities in the lives of men, women and children of our country's so called De-notified communities. Right at the onset of my journey with Apne Aap during the ICSSR survey training in Kota, I got a chance to meet the brave men and women and hear their inspirational stories as they continue to fight centuries old social stigmas today.

I listened with rapt attention, which

converted into seething anger as I heard about the blatant de-humanization and social exclusion these people have had to face all their lives. When Kishan Kumar became the first person to complete a BA degree, his parents were very

*Column*

**Diary of a Social Worker**

proud. But after countless rejections at job interviews where he was labeled a 'thief' and a 'criminal' on the basis of his last name, this pride soon turned to despair.

I was shocked to learn that the systemic social stigma and social exclusion follows these people right from birth- in schools, inside their villages and outside. They also suffer extreme police apathy and exploitation. But worst of it all is the continued practice of the *Hajri* system, the archaic practice whereby members of certain 'notified' or 'criminal' communities had to regularly appear in front of the law en-

forcement authorities before it was banned in 1952.

As I learnt from my senior colleague that the Rajasthan government has no existing population records for most of these communities, I felt a deep sense of importance and of urgency in my work. Their stories need to be told. These stigmatized and often landless men, women and children deserve an acknowledgment of their gruesome reality and at the very least, a proof of their existence. All of us must collectively take action to ensure that members of the De-notified communities are able to break the shackles of their birth and are able to claim their rightful place in society. Here's hoping for real change, real soon.

*Asmita works as documentation associate at Apne Aap. She travelled to Kota in Rajasthan to learn and document the marginalization and discrimination on the de-notified tribes on India.*

## **Death Penalty or Institutionalize a Juvenile? A case of Worse or Worst Scenario**

**Shwetta Khattar**

**New Delhi :** With the December 16<sup>th</sup> gang-rape incident's verdict out, the masses seems satisfied with the death penalty. The Court affirmed it as the rarest of the rare case. One of the convict who was 17 years old at the time of incident (18 years old now) has been sent to a correctional institution for juveniles. How well can an institution reform him is a question that perhaps, need to be addressed.

Ananth Kumar Asthana, Delhi High Court Advocate and Child Rights

Activist, feels that a child is what his environment makes him. The child is driven by peer pressure and it is required on the part of the society to work on the core issues. With most of the children facing drug addiction problems, and no correctional homes available until 2010, it is an issue to be worked upon even now.

The institutions are very rudimentary in India where older boys often beat up the young ones and push them to escape. With low infra-

structure and untrained staff available in the Correctional Homes , how is the reformatory process expected to take place?

Asthana continues to feel that the law is correct in its place however, it is the implementation of these laws that prove to be faulty. The perception of the public is highly influenced by media. "With the harm already been done, why spoil another child's life?"-is the philosophy followed by him.

*(Continued on page 7)*

## **NOMI network sewing classes**

*Jamila Khatun- Dictated to Raju*

**Uttari Rampur:** I live in the Red Light Area of Uttari Rampur with my only sister and her daughter. I am 50 years old. I was a prostitute but later I left it. I am old now and find it very difficult to earn a living. My husband was a small shopkeeper who passed away fifteen years ago. My sister is HIV+. My sister's daughter, Ishrat is the only earning member of our family. Ishrat has 3 children herself and her husband has abandoned her. He does not contribute towards feeding his children.

I am a part of Mahila Mandal for a long time. Ishrat is also a part of our group, Mahila Jagran. At different times, I have taken loans from the group to run the family, as there was not enough money to feed so many people. There was a time when I would go to houses of differ-

ent people in the community to get whatever food I could for the family. Five months ago when my house was absolutely broken, it was Apne Aap's members that contributed money from their own pocket to reconstruct my house. We are living in that house now. All these situations prompted Apne Aap to include Ishrat in Nomi Network's program. But the amount that Ishrat is earning now is also insufficient to run the family.

And, so once again members of Nomi Network & Apne Aap have come to help me by contributing money from their own pocket. They are opening a tea stall for me in front of my house to create a new livelihood option from which I can make some earning for my family. And I am also very touched that my

group members in Nomi Network also contributed money towards my tea stall. I am looking forward to making a sustainable income for my family, so that we can have food for everyone in the house. I feel a bit more secured for myself and my family now.

I am thankful to Apne Aap, Nomi Network and all members of my group for their support.

*Jamila Khatun, fondly called Jamila Bua by the Apne Aap Bihar team has been a part of Mahila Mandal. She was the first President of the first Self Empowerment Group in the Red Light Area of Uttari Rampur. She is also a part of Nomi Network now.*

*(Continued from page 1)*

guided us and worked with us to make this happen. We worked all day throughout for a month to compete the work.

I was very excited when I saw the work progressing and the images actually building up. The images that we drew in bits and pieces on paper were put together to show the life of the community where I live and the life that exists here. We had to work on deadlines and that was very stressful. But at the end it turned out to be a beautiful and we made it in the form of a tent.

It was exhibited at the Pragati Maidan and we were called there as artists. We all had a blue card which said 'artist'. It was a moment of pride because our work was there in the middle of lot of other paintings and crafts that were beautiful and our work was looking good. Many artists came and spoke to us. They asked about our work and they appreciated it. One of the artists actually took us and showed her art piece and explained about it. I was feeling shy when she asked what I thought of her art piece because I never thought I could actually give

an opinion to other famous artist who have already exhibited lot of such work in a lot of places.

When I came back home and told my parents and siblings about the experience they didn't say anything but I could feel the pride and peace in their eyes. It was a moment of fulfillment.

*Monica is 16 year old and was taken out of school in 9<sup>th</sup> standard. She has been associated with the Dharampura centre for almost two years now.*

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## Lot to learn from nukkad natak- Discrimination on various Grounds

*Team Kolkata*

**Kolkata:** Collaboration between students of the Globsyn Business School along with Young Indians group began with Apne Aap Women Worldwide to work on various themes such as women empowerment, education and youth affairs, environment and employability, health and culture among others. Recently, they came conducted a drawing competition on Human Rights. They also distributed T-shirts as puja gifts to the participants.

After the competition, nukkad natak were held for Apne Aap's children. The plays were scripted and acted by the Business school students themselves. One depicted the bad impact of discrimination in its all forms in society. The second one was on how a boy neglecting his studies had to repent in future for his failures. The last one was on a child getting addicted to bad habits

like stealing, getting in wrong company and ultimately neglected his father's treatment that cost him his father's life. The play on discrimination based on religion was very thought-provoking as it showed how irrespective of belonging from different religions we are still human beings with everything common like feelings, ideas, aspirations and dreams.

We also learnt that we all should be taking our education very seriously because that is then that the foundation of our lives takes shape and it is based on this time that our future is deigned. The main character in the story used to avoid his studies during childhood and even during his college days. He is not able to make ends meet. One day he meets one of his friends who was a hard-working student and realizes that if he had seriously taken his

studies then his life would have been different.

The last story was very heart-rending. It was about a boy who due to peer pressure and bad company gets addicted to stealing. Every time he steals anything his mother praises him for the deed. He took it as a talent. When his father was ill and had to be admitted to a hospital his mother had to sell all her jewelry. When the boy learnt about this he stole all the money from and went off with his friends on a trip. On returning from his trip he found that his father was dead. He started repenting after this great loss. The bottom line of the story was that whenever a child commits a mistake, it is the duty of their parents to correct him or her at the first instant rather than repenting for the rest of their life.

*(continued from page 1)*

I enjoyed my time when I spend it at the centre. I feel that I can be myself when I am there. I am married now as every girl in our community gets married off at a very early age. I want to learn a beautician's course and start a parlour of my own. I don't like the locality where I live right now. I want to settle down somewhere outside the locality and live with the income I have from the parlour.

*'Mein maangne nahi jaana chahthi'.*

I don't want to sell my body and earn money.

*('maangane jaana' is the terminology used by the people in Perna for going out for prostitution)*

*(continued from page 1)*

guided us and worked with us to make this happen. We worked all day throughout for a month to compete the work.

I was very excited when I saw the work progressing and the images actually building up. The images that we drew in bits and pieces on paper were put together to show the life of the community where I live and the life that exists here. We had to work on deadlines and that was very stressful. But at the end it turned out to be a beautiful and we made it in the form of a tent.

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*Monica is 16 year old and was taken out of school in 9<sup>th</sup> standard. She has been associated with the Dharampura centre for almost two years now.*

## Team Retreat

*Advaita Marathe*

Apne Aap Women Worldwide is a leading voice in the struggle for ensuring justice to the most marginalised group within the women's group – women in prostitution and women and girls at risk of being trafficked for prostitution, the last girl. It aspires to build a movement where the survivors become advocates for social change. Apne Aap's work is unique in the sense that it addresses both practical and strategic gender needs of these groups of women and girls, building their capacities to lead empowered and dignified lives.

Over the last ten years, AAWW has undertaken various interventions to rehabilitate women already within the system and prevent more women and girls from getting into the system. In this journey, there have been some successes as well as obstacles and challenges ranging from the personal to the systemic and has accumulated a wealth of understanding and insights which will contribute to the building a body of knowledge around the issue.

Apne Aap is poised to become a centre of excellence and a thought leader in the global struggle to end sex trafficking and prostitution. It is important to lay a strong foundation for this centre of excellence and consolidate our work, learnings' and insights and build a strong team. To

build a common understanding and to brainstorm on the future journey,

### Column

## Did You Know?

a three day Apne Aap programme team review and retreat was organized from 10-12 September at Bodhgaya.

It was clarified that Apne Aap's role is to facilitate the process of empowerment and build capacities of the women and girls to seek justice for them. To do this effectively, the team felt that we must add further rigor to our work and develop survivor leadership so that survivors become advocates for their rights and are able to envision and design sustainable livelihood alternatives. This would help prevent the entry of those at risk and reduce dependency on brothel system for those who are in prostitution. Certain important areas for future action were identified based on the insights gained from the field:

It is important that we work towards formulation of a survival policy to ensure that the survivors are able to lead dignified lives

Apne Aap also needs to envision and strengthen the livelihoods programme for ensuring dignified, sustainable

livelihood options are available to women.

Critical to this approach is to facilitate linkages and convergence with existing options in the society, accessed by women and girls themselves

It is also important that we organize campaigns for awareness amongst various stakeholders like youth, civil society organisations, law-makers etc on sex trafficking and decrease the demand for purchased sex.

The team also felt that there is a need to strengthen our work with the administration machinery for enhanced support to the cause of ending sex trafficking. The need for networking with and organizing trainings and advocacy with police, local judiciary, officials responsible for implementation of government schemes and programs came up as an important area of future action.

After such intensive brainstorming, the team was motivated and reaffirmed its commitment to work towards ending sex trafficking in India.

*Advaita works with Apne Aap as a Program Consultant. Her interests revolve around gender rights and equality.*

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The institution as per the law is a place where the juvenile is given a safe and sound environment with counselors, highly skilled staff and medical assistance around who work on the core issues of the child, reform him, teach him civil values and release him.

In reality, the environment in these institutions is very poor and

opposite as per the law. It is unsafe and traumatic. First of all, there is a clear shortage in the number of such institutions. Children are often sent to jails due to this reason. The others, who still make it to these places are subjected to this environment. They have to adjust to the managements behavior and face peer pressure from the other boys. In what some believe to be solution in this situation is that the juveniles should be treated like adults and

under adult laws. However, this can also be an issue. Clearly, there is a requirement for an in-depth study and debate on this topic to formulate new policies. What is not on the paper is happening in reality.

*Shwetta is an intern with Apne Aap. Her interests run deep in the field of gender and human rights.*

## Open Mike Session at Dharampura

*Team Dharampura*

**Dharampura:** Open Mike Sessions have been a very significant part of Apne Aap's activities. These are held every month at the field offices and other centres and are participated with much enthusiasm and excitement. In an effort to build a movement from the grassroots and build leaders for tomorrow from within the communities— these sessions prove to be very effective and useful. Various topics— from recent news to political opinions to personal experiences— a wide range of topics are the point of talk, discussion and debate during these sessions. Not only do these sessions bring out interesting experiences from the individual speakers, the entire experience also provides support and confidence to these young girls.

A session was held on with the Awaz Kishori Mandal. The members of this group are from the Perna community. The theme of the session was 'my dreams'. Seven girls participated in the session and

spoke about their dreams.

Momal said, "I want to participate in the reality show 'Dance India Dance' and want to be known as a dancing superstar".

Kajal, who is learning tailoring at Apne Aap's centre said, "I want to be a tailoring teacher and would like to teach the girls from my community to stitch and sew so that they can have a skill to lead their life other than selling their body".

At the same time, Pooja does not dream of anything specifically according to her. She says, "I have never dreamt about my life as it scares me to have one and not achieve it. I think I want to have a job and earn money and be independent, but I don't know how to reach there."

Rita, a survivor leader who is the most educated in the Perna community of Dharampura says, "I fought and managed to complete my matriculation but I have been stopped from continuing my studies. My dream is to continue my

education and to be a teacher. I know the value of education and I know a lot of girls and boys in my community who struggle to go to school. I want to teach them and help them access education, which will indeed change their life".

Pushpa, who undertook computer classes at Apne Aap and also participated in a lot of activities like the demonstration at Jantar Mantar said "I enjoy my time when I spend it at the centre. I feel that I am being myself when I am here. I am married now as every girl in our community is, at a very early age. I want to learn beautician course and start a parlour of my own. I don't like the locality where I live right now. I want to settle down somewhere outside the locality and live with the income I have from the parlour."

At the concluding session, the girls wished each other to get their dreams fulfilled, shouted out slogans before winding up the session.



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## Red Light Despatch

**Editor:** Ruchira Gupta

**Editorial team:** Parul

**Publisher:** Apne Aap Women Worldwide

**RNI Number:** DELMUL/2008/27727

**Printer:** Khurana Printers New Delhi

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