



Red Light Despatch

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My Dream

By Kajal

Najafgarh, Dharampura: My name is Kajal. I live in Dharampura with my parents. Since joining Apne Aap in 2011, I got a new way of life. I have participated in many programmes like dance, computer classes, tailoring, open mike sessions, gender training etc. But I like cutting and tailoring the most. Before joining Apne Aap I had some training in stitching that I perfected here.

Now I want to do something in my life so that I can support my

“The greatest dream I have in life is to own a boutique.”

family and overcome hardships and live with dignity and respect in society. The greatest dream in my life is to own a boutique.

Initially my parents had problems regarding my joining any organisation. They did not like my going out to study. But when the girls around me joined the organisation, then my parents allowed me. Today my parents thoughts have totally changed. Now I am capable of making my own clothes and also help my mother. I have completed my cutting and tailoring course. I now want to participate in Income Generation Programme (IGP). My mother also wants the same thing. I also want to help my parents in their income. Hopefully my parents will be very happy with my work. My happiness is in my parent’s happiness.

The Missing Children of Topsia

By Mumtaj

Kolkata: On the 10th of November 2012, we were evicted from the bridge number 4 area in Topsia by hired musclemen of the government agency which is constructing the bridge with active support from the ruling political party and the police. After being evicted, most of the people from the area were not able to find any place to live as they did not have enough money to rent even a shack made of plastic sheets. So they started living under the open sky and some of us were living beside the railway tracks. Since then many children, especially girls, continuously kept on going missing from the area that became a regular incidence. Some of the girl victims were thrown into the local ponds after

Right now I am living besides the railway tracks near Park Circus Railway station with my husband and my son (as my other two daughters were shifted to my relative’s house for their safety) along with other evicted families from the Bridge number 4 area. Even before we were evicted from Bridge number 4 area, we used to hear about incidents of children missing. We have even rescued a couple of girls who were taken to perform in *Nautankis* in Bihar. We learned from Apne Aap that it is trafficking. Most of the children who went missing came from very poor families whose parents were rescued after... *(Contd. to Pg.2)...*

“Hum Mukhtara” Inspired Me

By Uma Das

Kolkata: I’m Uma Das, a student of dance movement therapy and part of the training of the trainer programme at Apne Aap. I try to mobilize girls against sex- trafficking through dance. I got an opportunity to see “Hum Mukhtara”, a play directed by Usha Ganguly at Rabindrasadan theatre in January. Seema, Annu, Tannu, Dolly, Priyanka and Priyanka Gupta, my youth group members, came along. This drama tells the story of Mukhtar

Pakistan. I felt very sad to see the violence against Mukhtar Mai. But she chose to fight against the violence. I could relate to her because I was born and raised in Munshigunj, a red-light area. Now I want to fight against sex trafficking with Apne Aap. What we learnt from this drama is that we have to stand up against this kind of violence. I want to see a change in my society and make girls aware of sex trafficking.

My First Dignified Earning

By Basanti Das

Kolkata: I am member of Sonar Bangla (Prosperous Bengal) Group a SEG. We, seven women survivors of sex-trafficking living in Munshiganj Red Light Area in Kolkata formed this group in the year 2009 in search of an alternative and dignified livelihood. Through our group meetings and discussions in the group, we have decided that we will start a canteen where we can sell cooked food for the people working in the offices near Kidderpore area.

As we get old, it becomes tougher for us to do hard work with concentration and learn new skills. But we all love to cook which is a good option. We think it will be successful because there is no good canteen in or around the area where lots of people come to work in the offices.

I was in the prostitution for a long time. After joining to Sonar Bangla SEG, I have felt that I got

some friends with whom I can share my sorrow and happiness. I was never good at cooking, but after joining this group and working together I developed my skill of cooking. I learnt some new recipes also. I am so happy with these. When I come to this group for meeting or when we all sit together and cook for any order of food, I just enjoy that time. During the cooking we all divide our work among us. Being in a group many times we face conflict in making decisions among us, but through proper discussion and suggestions from our group secretary, we overcome those.

We are doing this catering activity and cooking from January 2012. We also participated in an exhibition in Kolkata where we sold our cooked food. We are very happy that the people loved our food. During the exhibition there was a time when I really felt that I should be with the group for the

help to the others members but I was forced by my *malkin* to sit for customers at the doors. But as soon as she left I just rushed to my group. It's a very difficult for me to express my feelings when I got the money after all this hard work. The money that I earned was without any exploitation earned and with dignity. We are constantly gaining confidence. With the money that we earned as a group apart from sharing it among ourselves, we also deposited in our group bank account. We have enjoyed our cooking and it has helped our group to bond strongly.

Sometimes we have problems about getting a good customer base. To solve this issue we are now making our menu list and we are planning to distribute that after printing it. We are also getting support from Apne Aap and hope we find enough customers to keep ourselves going.

(Contd. from Pg.1 "The Missing...") were rag pickers or rickshaw pullers or even beggars. When they went to their work, their children were left by themselves and some of them went missing from their families. We have informed this matter several times to the local police administration but the police authority did not take any action. They were not even willing to register a complaint of missing children and there were no investigations following these incidents of missing children.

Even after these heinous incidents of violence, rape and

disappearing children the police did not take any action to stop it. They did not make any arrest linked with these trafficking incidents. So there was a wrong message from the police administration to the local people which resulted in more than seven incidents of mob violence including lynching in which three persons were killed and five persons were seriously injured. The mob even burned some police vehicles when they came to rescue the alleged accused. Some poor, hapless women became the major target for the mob.

But after this, we have started

awareness sessions within the community people through home visits and personal communication with the people, especially with local women of the area, where we talk to them about how to stop trafficking and identify the traffickers and report to police. The police have also become more responsive to the cases of missing children after several demonstrations by the community. As long as so many children are left out on the streets, such incidences will happen frequently. So, we need proper shelter and schooling of the children to stop trafficking of children.

Encountering The Last Girl

By Teresa Cantero

Kolkata: From January 5th until January 15th, a group of 14 students from New York University (NYU) crossed half the world to see firsthand the reality of sex trafficking in India. The class, *Movement around Sex Trafficking in India*, was organized by the Masters of Science in Global Affairs (MSGA) of NYU and Ruchira Gupta, Apne Aap founder and leader. Last October, the Masters students met in New York City for a few sessions with professor Gupta. Most of them had taken a class about human trafficking and people smuggling; all were willing to learn in the field. Once in India, the tour led to a series of

sessions around the movement in sex trafficking and Indian efforts towards it. Combined with the classes, visits and meetings with victims and experts made the class a great and touching experience for life. From Delhi to Kolkata, the graduates saw what they had read and studied for months. The pages of the books and articles opened up as reality.

Gandhi said that he based his policy making on the 'last person'. If his decisions were not

going to affect the poorest person, the last one from the lowest caste, the forgotten and untouchable, he would not take them. I am one of the students who, for ten days, have learned who is the last person in society, a human being who cannot take a decision because of gender, race, caste and or place of birth. The last person is a girl between 13 to 19 years old, and she might live in Kolkata. She has been trafficked or is at risk of being trafficked. She might end up in a red light district, have her organs removed or work to pay back a small family debt in a brick kiln.

We first met the last girl in Delhi. ...(Contd. on Pg. 4)

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A Visit to Remember

By Louise Cousyn

Kolkata, December 2012: We were welcomed by a light breeze as we got off the train after the two day journey from Delhi. The air was full of dust and Bengali street food smell. We drove among old black and yellow taxis, loud blaring horns occasionally punctuated by the comparatively gentle bell of the tramway.

Kidderpore was our destination, a new-sounding name for an unknown place. After 30 minutes of driving through narrow streets, we arrived at Apne Aap's office. As soon as we passed the front gate, I remember being startled by the peaceful, quiet atmosphere that contrasted with the buzzing city. Hanging on the light-yellow painted walls were the girls' drawings and explanation of what

sex trafficking or prostitution means. Simple words for a simple fact: thousands of girls are turned into slaves each day and, on the pretext that it bears a name, it is okay for the society to turn a blind eye. But how on earth can it be okay to abduct a child, crush her dreams, destroy her life and keep her trapped in a man-made hell?

Few minutes later the girls from the neighbourhood started coming for their computer class, sewing class, informal gathering and other activities that would have remained a faraway dream in other circumstances. The room we were sitting in filled up with curious glances and giggles.

We all went to the rooftop, as the purpose of our visit was to shoot some videos of the girls'

stories and experiences, before and after joining Apne Aap. Some of them, shy and quiet, would look at their feet as we were sitting in circle wondering who would speak first; while others would impressed me with their self-confidence. There were 12 year-olds who showed more common sense than most of the women I had met till now; be it in India or elsewhere.

There I truly understood the importance and the scope of these sessions where the girls would just come here and talk without fear of being judged or turned away. This place is theirs, they can laugh, play, learn, cry. It sounds so obvious, but we tend to forget that for some people, to feel and express these feelings is a luxury.

Hope in an Unexpected Place

By Lindsey Swedick

Kolkata: Hope was the last thing I expected to find in the small, dark room, where I sat on the bed of a woman who was exactly my age. I watched rats and mice run across the floor, the shelves, the headboard, while she spoke of life in Sonagachi. It had been seven years since she was sold there as a 15 year-old girl. For 2,555 days she had lived and worked and mothered a child in this room. "I usually have 20-30 clients a day," she said. When I realized this meant that her body had been purchased by over 60,000 men, I marveled at her strength, and wondered how she survived each day.

As she talked to us, she searched for a hidden key among some boxes on her shelf. I wondered what her prized possession was; what she kept secret and hidden and safe in the locked storage unit propped

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against the wall. "I want to show you something," she said, smiling. With eager anticipation, I watched her open the unit, and pull out a small piece of paper with check marks and red ink. It was her

son's report card. As she pointed to each check mark, her joy and pride was evident. She spoke so quickly that my translator didn't have time to tell me what she was saying. But it didn't matter. I understood that that piece of paper gave her hope in a seemingly hopeless place.

Just a few days before, she had received news that Apne Aap was successful, after years of attempts, to get her son and other children from the red light area into a hostel. It would be a safe place for him to continue in school. And this mother knew he would have a better life

...(Contd. to Pg. 5)

(Contd. from Pg.3 "Encounter...") She was in the back of the eyes of Ravi Kant, the president of Shakti Vahini and a consultant for UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime). She followed us in our notes in a 17 hours train to Kolkata, where she was traveling with the people who she called 'mom' and 'dad', but were not her real parents. Once in Kolkata, the last girl showed up through passionate lectures with experts like Anchita Ghatak, from Parichiti, or doctor Ratnabali Chatterjee, who engaged in a vivid conversation about prostitution and forced prostitution, the terminology and pros and cons of legalizing it. The last girl, after that, sat with us at Eden Gardens, among other survivors of sex trafficking and told us about the empowerment programs they join, their dreams, the chance they are taking to

improve their lives and the ones of their families. The last girl waved her hand when we crossed Sonagachi, the red light district. She told us she was over 18. She lied to us. We told her about how good was to go to college. She asked about the softness of our skin. We told her that the key was being happy. Her fate created a wound in us that night. The last girl was also in a lecture from Biju Mathew, from IJM (International Justice Mission) and his 'mission impossible' rescues that kept our faith awake. She lives, as well, in the shelter All Bengal Women's Union and learns skills for her future, where she creates her own opportunity. The last girl is reflected in the work of Ruchira Gupta and Apne Aap and was transmitted to us through a trip that let us admire the Taj Mahal and the Victoria Memorial, but kept us focused on not only what

has been done to fight sex trafficking in India, but most important, what must be done. She needs the law to be changed and the punishment for clients and traffickers to be stricter. She needs a police reform so she is able to trust in the police without thinking that is corrupt and will. The last girl needs the system to protect her, not to look down at her.

The United Nations stated that India is the worst place in the world to be born a girl. India needs to stay awake. The biggest lesson we learned during our time in India is that the last girl needs no pity from the outsider. She needs the student, the researcher, the father, the society, to know that she did not choose to be the last girl. When there is a lack of choices, decisions are not been taken. The society decided for the last girl, and is its duty to let her live through the change.

News and Events

Reactivation of Dhobi Group's Bank Account

Delhi: Ashma Begam, secretary, Dhobi Group, said that she and her group members were happy to announce that they were able to reactivate their group's bank account. The year 2009 was the last time they deposited any money in their account. Since



then, due to various reasons their group became stagnant. But in 2012 they again started their

group activities and earned a good sum of money from Diya (earthen lamp) project which they deposited in their bank account and reactivated it.

She and her group members were happy for help and support from Apne Aap. "I will take the responsibility to keep the bank pass book updated", says Ashma.

NY Students Visit AAWW

Kolkata: Piu Begam, member of the Sonar Bangla Mahila Mandal shared her life story with NYU students who came for a visit to Kolkata's infamous red light area. She discussed problems faced by women in India and USA. She even invited the students to her home in Munshiganj.

She enjoyed the interactive sessions with them as she got the chance to share her story with the people from another country. Later, the students took photos together for which she requested them to give her those photos as she wanted to keep those as a memory.

Dolly Mahato a member of the Amontran Kishori Mandal said she was happy to get a chance to interact with the NYU students. She also said that the students group was excited to know that in Kishori Mondals, the girls got to know about child laws and other laws related to women issues.

National Girl Child Day

New Delhi: Anwari Khatoun a member of Krishna Kishori Mandal participated in the art and hand craft event on National Girl



Child day Celebration day on January 24, 2013. She was thrilled while taking part in the event where she made drawings and learnt paper craft.

Previously she did not know that there was such a day which was dedicated to the girl child. She was to know that this day was celebrated for people and young girls in general for increased awareness towards crime of violence against women and girls.

"Hum Mukhtara"

Drama by Usha Ganguly

Kolkata: About 31 women and girls went to see a play called "Hum Mukhtara" by Usha Ganguly, a reknowned theatre personality at Rabindra Sadan theatre in Kolkata. Seema Rout, a member of Amontran Kishori Mandal said that this was her first time watching a drama related to violence against women. She specifically liked the performances by the artists and the story of Mukhtar Mai who fought for justice against her rapists. Even when the entire world was against her and there was little help, she showed courage determination to stand up against all odds and fight for her right. The character of Mukhtar Mai inspired her and taught her that if you believed in yourself you can face any challenge in life. It was good learning experience for her.

(Contd. from Pg.5 "Hope in...")
and a bright future.

There are so many things I wish I could change about this young mother's life. That I could do something, anything that will

make a difference in her life. Upbeat and optimistic about life, when I hugged her goodbye, I felt so thankful and reassured for the Apne Aap Women Worldwide staff in Kolkata, who work so hard

to bring hope to the mothers of Sonagachi by offering their children a better life. Thanks to them, even in the most dark and hopeless places there is hope to rebuild life.

What Verma Committee Report Means For Us

By Ruchira Gupta

New Delhi: Thanks to the Justice Verma Committee recommendations set up after the 16th December rape in Delhi, India is on the brink of a paradigm shift in its legal framework to deal with human trafficking. Through the current Criminal Law (Amendment) Ordinance, 2013 and the proposed changes to the Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill and the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act, 1956, India has finally broadened the definition of trafficking to include all forms of enslavement -from servitude to prostitution. These amendments will bring India on par with the UN Protocol to End Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.

The trafficking definition legally explains exploitation, the exploiter and the exploited for the first time in India's Independent history. Exploitation is defined as forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude, the forced removal of organs and prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation. The exploiter is clearly defined as the recruiter, transferor, transporter, harbourer or receiver of a person for the purpose of exploitation. The exploited is defined as the forced or bonded labourer, slave, person in domestic or other kinds of servitude and the prostituted woman or child.

By making the consent of victims to their own exploitation irrelevant, the definition frees millions of prostituted females-whose survival strategies are written-off as choices, from culpability. So far the police and judiciary were often powerless to hold traffickers and end-users accountable, because women and girls were unable to explain that

they were seduced, coerced, tricked or forced to submit to their own exploitation, because they or their children were hungry or most of their decisions were taken away from them.

The proposed amendments have a much stricter and surer punishment for traffickers and end-users, including life imprisonment for repeat offenders, or traffickers of more than one person and higher penalties for first time offenders. It also has proposed life imprisonment for "the remainder of that person's natural life" for public servants such as police officers, who are involved in any way in the

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

exploitation. This strict rule will prevent public officials and police covering up the crime who take pay-offs, buy sex or even anonymously own brothels.

In Sweden and Norway, similar laws have made the purchase of sex illegal while removing all culpability from women for selling sex, recognizing their gender inequality. In both countries the demand for purchased sex and trafficking has come down.

Justice Verma's recommendations establish zero tolerance for violence against women by ending male impunity on all forms of rape and sexual exploitation, whether commercial or non-commercial. In a great act of social justice, the recommendations make unacceptable the rape of poor, low-caste and marginalized women, even for commercial reimbursement, by

recognizing that it is a violation of her bodily integrity. Prostituted women and children are seen as victims of male violence who do not risk legal penalties. Instead, they have a right to assistance to escape prostitution.

The definition proposed by the Verma Committee hold accountable the pimps, traffickers, and prostitution buyers, who, knowingly exploit the vulnerability of the females caused by high rates of poverty, unemployment, discriminatory labour practices, gender inequalities and violence against women and children.

These recommendations pave the way for our country to create a contemporary, democratic society where women and girls can live lives free of male violence. It addresses both the urgency of the crisis in India, where 17 women are raped officially every day, and hopefully sets the stage for legislation that will recognize that any society that claims to defend principles of legal, political, economic and social equality for women and girls must reject the idea that women and children, mostly girls, are commodities that can be bought, sold and sexually exploited by men. To do otherwise is to allow that a separate class of female human beings, especially women and girls who are economically and caste wise marginalized, is excluded from measures being set in place for women's security, as well as from the universal protection of human dignity enshrined in our Constitution and the body of international human rights instruments developed during the past 60 years.

Poems of Strength and Courage

कविता बाबुल बिटिया

बाबुल तुम बगिया की तरुवर ,
हम तरुवर की चिड़िया रे ,
दाना चुगते उड़ जायेंगे हम ,
पिया मिलन की घड़िया रे ।
उड़ जाये तो लौट न आये ,
ज्यों मोती की लड़ियाँ रे ।

बाबुल ,
बचपन के भोलेपन पर जब
छिटके रंग जवानी के,
प्यास प्रति की जागी तो ,
मीन बने हम पानी के ।
जनम - जनम के प्यासे नैना,
चाहे नहीं कुंवारे रहना
बाबुल ढूँढे फिरे तुम हमको,
हम ढूँढे बावरिया रे ।
उड़ जाये तो लौट न आये ,
ज्यों मोती की लड़ियाँ रे ।

खुशबू कुमारी
किशोरी मंडल (कल्पना चावला)

कविता

हिंद देश के निवासी, सभी जन एक हैं ,
रंग रूप वेष - भाषा चाहे अनेक हैं ,
कोयल की कूक प्यारी, पपीहे की टेर
प्यारी, गा रही तराना बुलबुल ,
राग मगर एक है ।

धर्म है अनेक जिनका सार नहीं है,
पंथ हैं निराले ,सबकी मंजिल तो एक है

किरण कुमारी
किशोरी मंडल (सरोजिनी नायडू)

कविता

मैं बेटी हूँ कोई वास्तु नहीं,
जो मोल तुम मेरी लगाओ,
मैं भी इस जहाँ का हिस्सा हूँ
यूँ कब तक हमें तड़पाओगे

तन को तुम हासिल कर लो
मन पर न हावी हो पाओगे
जो आज हमें तुम नष्ट करो
कल फिर दुनिया में कैसे आओगे

जब बेटी ही नहीं रहेगी दुनियाँ में
कब फिर दुनियाँ में तुम कैसे आओगे
उस वक्त तुम बहुत पछताओगे
बेटी हूँ मैं कोई वास्तु नहीं,
जो तुम मेरा मोल लगाओगे

ईशा प्रवीन
किशोरी मंडल (कल्पना चावला)

जब मैंने उसे जाना

By Monika

बिखरे उलझे थे बाल
फटी और मैली थी सलवार
आंखे थी उसकी लाल
लगता था हुई थी उसकी किसी से तकरार
चहरे पर था घाव, गहरा शायद हुआ था उस
पर वार
मन था उदास उसका मनो करता नहीं था
कोई उससे प्यार
आई वो पास मेरे और लगी कहने
मैं भी कम्प्यूटर सीखना चाहती हूँ
मैं भी चित्रों में रंग भरना चाहती हूँ
मैंने भी किया वही जो करता हर कोई
थमा दी कॉपी उसके हाथ में
मैं भी उसे सिखाती गयी
और वो हर दिन अपनी जिन्दगी के मैले
पन्नों पर लिखी,
अपनी कहानी मुझे सुनाती गयी
बाप जुआरी माँ शराबी भाई था चोर
पाप उसके साथ हुआ था घोर
नन्ही निशा देखती है कि
उसकी माँ(बबली) हर रोज

बापू से मार है खाती
घर छोड़ वह(माँ) भाग जाना चाहती
मगर कुछ नहीं वह कर पाती
बात नहीं है यह सिर्फ अभी की
निशा थी जब माँ के पेट में
तब भी थी वो(माँ) मार खाती
बबली पिटती जाती और रोती जाती
सब को लगता मार लगी सिर्फ बबली को
मगर कोई नहीं जानता कि
न सिर्फ बबली बल्कि निशा
भी थी पिटी जाती
बबली तो रोटी चिल्लाती मगर निशा तो
उतना भी न कर पाती
जैसा कि थी वो माँ के पेट में
चोट थी लगी सर पर भारी और हुई उसे
दिमाग की बीमारी
तभी से खो दी उसने सारी समझदारी
एक दिन आयी और लगी कहने दीदी होली है
आने वाली
मैं भी खेलूंगी होली बड़ा मजा आयेगा
कौन समझाए उस नादान को कि

बाबुल के घर यह उसकी आखरी है होली
आयगी होली और निशा चली जायगी
शादी का अर्थ जानने से पहले ही उसकी शादी
हो जाएगी
कंप्यूटर में जो उसने चित्र बनाया था
उसके पूरा होने से पहले ही पूरी हो जाएगी
महंदी उसकी
और आगे जो होगा और होता जायेगा
उसे लिखने से भी कापती है कलम मेरी
रह रह कर कहता है मन मेरा मुझे निशा को
है बचाना
वो कहते हैं कि....
क्यों तुझे उसे ही है बचाना?
मगर मैं कहती हूँ कि
मुझे उसे ही नहीं है बचाना
मुझे उसे भी है बचाना
बबली को न बचाया किसी ने मगर मुझे
निशा को बचाने से है बचाना
कल परसों में जा रही है वो
कोई तो उसे रोक लो रोक लो बस रोक लो
इस लौ को बुझने से रोक लो!!

Did You Know?

Sex trafficking is a growing global enterprise driven by deception, coercion and force. Traffickers transport or detain their victims for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation.

THE FACTS

1. After drug dealing, human trafficking (both sex trafficking and trafficking for forced labor) is tied with the illegal arms industry as the second largest criminal industry in the world today, and it is the fastest growing. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)
2. Worldwide, there are nearly two million children in the commercial sex trade. (UNICEF)
3. There are an estimated 600,000 to 800,000 children, women and men trafficked across international borders annually. (U.S. Department of State)
4. Approximately 80 percent of human trafficking victims are women and girls, and up to 50 percent are minors. (U.S. Department of State)
5. The total market value of illicit human trafficking is estimated to be in excess of \$32 billion (U.N.)
6. Sex trafficking is an engine of the global AIDS epidemic.

Source : International Justice Mission
www.ijm.org/sites/default/files/Factsheet-Sex-Trafficking.pdf

The *Red Light Despatch* is a monthly newsletter published exclusively by Apne Aap Women Worldwide. It compiles articles, testimonials, speeches and interviews by women participating in Apne Aap's Self-Empowerment Groups (SEGs) and other initiatives, as well as by staff members, volunteers, and media figures. The central objective of the RLD is to offer a space for the unique voices of our girls and women. The particular writing style has been implemented to best preserve the original tone of the speakers.

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