



RED LIGHT DISPATCH

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

Column
My Dream

By Khushbu

Dharampura, Najafgarh: I am Khushbu and I am 15 years old. I left school in Class VI as I was not interested in studies and girls of our community drop out of school by this age.

My father has two wives. He does not support my family. I have three sisters and one brother. My mother brought us up.

I belong to Perna community in which girls have a very dark future. After marriage our life is all lost. Girls here cannot dare to dream as we know that our dreams will never be fulfilled. I never thought that I will have a dream one day. But as I got a chance to learn tailoring at Apne Aap Centre in Dharampura, I got my dream. I can be independent and earn to live a life of dignity.

Rinki didi taught me cutting and stitching for six months, after which I took the exam for certification and passed it. I will take further training and gain greater expertise. I want to become a dress designer and open my own boutique.

I needed a sewing machine to practice but my mother could not afford one. Priyanka *didid* then gave me a sewing machine and I was very happy. I keep practicing on the machine. Thanks to this machine, I earned twenty rupees for altering my friend's dress.

I hope I will be able to achieve my dream also.

Thank you Apne Aap

Loved, Lost & Sold, I Reclaimed My Life

The Story of Ayesha

Kolkata: I was born in a small village in Jessore, Bangladesh. My father was a simple farmer. We were poor, but all of my eight brothers and sisters went to school. I was known in my village as the girl with the golden voice. Growing up, my songs were about the earth, the sky, and my village. But when I met the man I wanted to marry, my songs changed to my love for him.

He was twice my age. We would sit together for hours as he told me tales of his travels to far-away, big cities. I was impressed by everything about him – his bicycle, his radio, his clothes. When I turned 13, he told me he wanted to marry me, and that he could make me a famous singer one day. I agreed. It is very common for girls to marry early in rural India and Bangladesh. Since women are valued mostly as homemakers and mothers,

families have no incentive to keep their daughters in school. The older a girl gets, the more her family will have to pay for her dowry. Many of my friends were already married when the question was posed to me and I said 'yes'. I eloped with him.

My heart beat fast as we crossed the border in the darkness of night. I had never been to a big city like Kolkata, and so I was distracted from the reality that I was leaving my family and my school. I was terrified of being caught, but thrilled at the prospect of settling down with the man I loved.

When we arrived, he told me he wanted to keep me safe with his aunt until my parents stopped looking for us. In a few days, he would return for me. I was reluctant to see him go, but I trusted his decision. That night, in the glow of moonlight, I saw girls in

(Contd on pg 2)

A Survivor's Story

By Rokeya Begum

Kolkata: My name is Rokeya Begum. I live in Munshigunge Red Light Area, under the jurisdiction of Watgunge Police Station, Kolkata-700023.

When I was only 22, a man came to our house and told my mother that he will provide a good job for me. At that time there was no other source of income as my father had passed away a few months ago and I and my brother were too young to earn enough to fulfill the basic needs of our family. My mother had to work for our bread, usually as a maid servant. In such a situation, when this man offered a lucrative job for me, my mother got easily convinced and saw it as an opportunity. I was

compelled to accompany the person from a remote village of Khulna, Bangladesh to Kolkata, India.

At first he took me to a house and promised to provide me a good job within a week, but unfortunately within one or two days I realized that he had sold me to a brothel owner. At that time I had one son who was physically challenged, so I had to earn some money for his treatment. In this way I was forced into prostitution, and since then I am in the Munshigunge red light area.

In the meantime another female child was born and she started to grow

(Contd on pg 2)

*(Contd from pg 1 **Loved, Lost & Sold, ...**)*

short skirts and red lipstick standing in a line on the street. When a man approached one of them, she led him into her house. The next morning, I asked his aunt about these girls. In a hollow voice devoid of emotion, she told me that I had been sold to her by the man I loved, and that I would have to work off my debt by joining those girls each night.

I still remember that moment. My whole world shattered into pieces. I have been tortured and abused, and survived serious injuries inflicted by buyers and pimps, but nothing hurts as much as the pain of being deceived by the man I loved.

For a whole month, I resisted the 'aunt,' who I learned was really a brothel madam. The owner of the brothel grew impatient and raped me, as he did to all new girls. He ordered the brothel madam to beat me with a leather belt every day. I still bear these marks on my body. I was kept locked inside a room, with no food or water, for days.

To "break me in," I was raped several times a night for nearly a month before the madam started selling me to men for money. It was typical for me to have ten to twelve buyers every night. They were usually abusive, treating me as if they owned my body. I have a deep scar on my neck from a knife blade, which I got trying to save a young girl in my house from being gang raped. It almost killed me.

Later I would learn that my story was not unique. There were hundreds of us – young girls from Bangladesh, Nepal and other parts of India, sold into brothels. To keep us isolated the brothel owners forbade us to speak to girls in other houses. They were very afraid that we would form groups or befriend one another.

I tried to leave that dungeon many times. Memories still flash in my mind of being pulled by my hair, of being dragged through the dirt streets by the brothel owner after a failed escape attempt. I cried, screamed for help, but people just stood by watching, without even a look of sympathy. Tears stream down my face as I think back to that day. If even one man had tried to save me, my life would have been changed. But all of them

stood there like mute spectators.

When people tell me that women choose this life, I can't help but laugh. Do they know how many women like me have tried to escape, but have been beaten black and blue when they are caught? To the men who buy us, we are like meat. To everybody else in society, we simply do not exist.

I had three children in my captivity – two beautiful daughters and a son. My children were my treasure, yet my love for them was often accompanied by fear of what would become of them in the red light area. As my children grew, it became hard for me to provide for them. My daughters had to drop out of school for financial reasons, while my son, who suffers from autism, needed my constant attention. The local pimps began to hint that I could make some money if I prostituted my two daughters. However, the pimps never touched them. All of the women in the brothel banded together to keep our children out of prostitution.

One day, I heard about Apne Aap, an organisation which helped women in my area leave prostitution. In 2010, I joined a self-empowerment group, where I quickly found a community of nine other women with similar stories. As I talked to women who had made new lives for themselves, I felt hopeful for the first time that I could leave prostitution. It took me some time, but I permanently exited prostitution last year.

I asked Apne Aap staff to help my daughters find dignified livelihoods, so they wouldn't be prostituted. Apne Aap worked hard to find my eldest daughter a job. They set up interviews for her, offered her professional training and helped her eventually connect with a woman entrepreneur who owned the first all-women run petrol pump in Kolkata.

Today, my daughter's salary as a station supervisor provides for all of us. Although I am happy to no longer be in prostitution, with so many years taken from me, I have little options for an alternative way to support my family. I know this will not be my daughter's fate. She is making a life for herself outside of the red light area. Because of her, I sing again.

*(Contd from pg 1 **A Survivor's ...**)*

up in this red light area. I wanted desperately my children, especially my daughter, to have a life better than one in a red light as a prostitute.

One day I heard about Apne Aap and its activities for the women and children who reside in the red light area. I came to Munshigunge Apne Aap centre and learned about different activities of Apne Aap like self-help group formation, different legal awareness sessions especially women

issue related, including sponsored child education along with other activities. Then one of community leaders Asma Begum came to my house and asked me to join in a group which was being formed to wash clothes so that they could earn money through means other than selling their body. The very next day I joined in the Dho-bi Self Empowerment Group (SEG) and started regularly participating in different group activities. At the same time my daughter was admitted to

Uttorpara Ramakrishna Mission, a residential education unit for girls with the help of Apne Aap.

Now I am trying to get an alternative livelihood source other than prostitution and I am desperately trying to get a safe place for my children as they are growing up and there is no safe place for them to live with dignity. If I get that opportunity, then I will leave this place for ever and lead a normal life along with my family members.

Feisty celebration of victory at Najafgarh

By Varsha

New Delhi: It was a hot afternoon in peak summer when I along with other women and children from Perna community celebrated with gusto our victory in getting the criminal law amended to make 'trafficking' a criminal offence.

We had been demanding such a law and we even took out a rally at Jantar Mantar on February 22 this year under the leadership of Apne Aap Women Worldwide (AAWW) founder Ruchira Gupta. The victory in achieving this was a landmark and a beacon of hope in our lives.

Thursday, May 30 was a day chosen for the celebration. An organisation, langhar.com that provides home-cooked food free to the needy, had tied up with AAWW to offer free food to the children and women of the community and also offered some of us a chance to be part of their network

and earn an additional income by cooking for them.

I and my friends welcomed the idea and participated enthusiastically. Manish ji explained what all the change in the law meant for us and how we could use it to prevent being subjected to trafficking, exploitation or selling ourselves.

The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 came into force after it received Presidential assent on April 2, 2013. The law was amended after the protests in the 2012 Delhi gang rape case, protests in which we had also raised our voice and demanded the changes in law.

The changed law, new portions have been introduced which deal with trafficking of person for exploitation. Anyone who recruits, transports, keeps or receives or transfers a person by using threats, or force, or fraud, or even money

for exploitation including prostitution, will be punished and have to go to jail for at least 7 years. He can also be jailed for life, depending on the number or category of persons trafficked.

After this, I and other girls came to the fore one by one. Some girls sang a song written by themselves. We also performed dances we had learnt and practised ourselves and also displayed some basic martial art skills we had learnt from Maria *didi* at the AAWW centre.

We also persuaded the boy and girl who had come from Langar.com to in turn perform 'salsa' for us as we cheered them on.

It was a true victory celebration to mark a milestone towards a decent, normal life free from fear of ending up in a life of bondage which had been the bane of our lot in the community earlier.

An experience to be remembered

By Shradha Newatia

Kolkata: I had gone to "Apne Aap" at Munshiganj, Kolkata, to teach a group of 15 young girls who belong to the age group 11 - 17 years old.

I was there to train them how to make hair clasps and coasters using different materials at a very nominal cost. It was a wonderful experience which I have ever come across. I was blessed to teach them. I taught them on three days, with two-weeks gaps, on April 18, May 2 and May 16, 2013 for two hours each day.

I simply enjoyed all the interactive sessions with them. I was very happy to see how important education was in their lives. The children were highly

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interested in learning new things. I was very happy with their performance, and showed my appreciation by giving them chocolates on the last day.

My main target was to tell them about the importance of education and creativity in their lives and how to use these in future to climb the stairs of success. There is a hope to see them in the top-most position in future. I am thankful to "Apne Aap Women Worldwide, who had worked so hard to bring hope to the women and children of

the red light area by helping them learn new things to earn their livelihood and prepare for a better life.

Salma's struggle to enroll in Aadhaar card (UID)

By Salma

Najafgarh, Delhi: I am Salma and am now 17 years old. I learn tailoring at the Apne Aap centre in Najafgarh. I used to be a very shy girl till just about a year ago. I used to smile constantly and kept biting my lips. I could never answer if asked anything. I only smiled back.

I am happy to learn cutting and stitching course as it would help me in future by providing me a means to earn money for decent living. I am also listed for enrolment in Open Schooling. With the help of Apne Aap, I have taken part in gender training, meditation & recreational session, Kishori mandal meetings, open mike, painting mud figures, dance movement therapy session.

All this gave me some confidence and I have learnt to communicate in the last one year. In the last meeting of KALI kishori mandal, of which I am a member, I even shared my thoughts about the practice of intergenerational prostitution in Perna community and also shared my personal problems.

At my age, however, I am still

not very clear about many things and do not feel unsure of many things, but people at Apne Aap have been very understanding. About six months back, I thought of going to a hostel. But later on, I changed my mind. Normally by this age, the girls in Perna community get married.

When people at Apne Aap centre told me what is the importance of ID and need of getting registered in the ration card also, I visited ration card office and applied. My registration there is in process.

But I could not as her parents want her to marry in nearby places like Dharampura, Prem Nagar and they wanted more dowry. Because of this, people of the community, including women and girls, sometimes pass satirical comments at me which disturb my mind.

But now I have started giving

them reply boldly. Now I want a job and have asked Apne Aap if they can help me in getting a job. I want to continue to do some job and earn even after marriage also.

I have also tried to get enrolled for Aadhaar card and get an identity card. My registration form was filled by Apne Aap people but it could not be processed as Salma is not having any identity proof and age proof, which is required for Aadhaar enrollment. I did not even have a ration card. When people at Apne Aap centre told me what is the importance of ID and need of getting registered in the ration card also, I visited ration card office and applied. My registration there is in process.

And she do not have any age proof also. She do not know her real age. For age proof, I visited my primary school so that I can get school leaving certificate and that would be my age proof with which I can try for the Aadhaar sankhya. I could never gain the awareness and confidence to do all this without help from Apne Aap.

INTERVIEW

Education opens up a new world for Jahan Ara

By Manish Swarnkar (Translated by Gargi Banerjee)

Jahan Ara's mother, Sachda Begum, spoke to Apne Aap about how education has helped her daughter. Jahan Ara has passed out of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalyay (KGBV) in March 2013. They stay at Rampur.

Tell us about your family

I have two daughters and a son. I am a housewife and have studied till Class VIII. My husband, Parvez Alam passed away when Jahan Ara was very young. My husband was a farmer and also owned a paan shop in the locality.

Your daughter Jahan Ara has passed out of KGBV. What motivated you to send her there and how do you feel about this?

Jahan Ara is my eldest daughter. My younger daughter, Gulsan Ara is studying in Class VI and son Adil Raja is in Class I. After my husband's death I am staying with my

husband's family and there are many difficulties and problems in having to depend on them for everything. I want my children to somehow grow up fast.

Before I came to know of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalyaya (KGBV), my daughter was studying here at a local school in Class IV. I was very relieved to send her to KGBV as it would give her the opportunity to get proper guidance in her studies. Back home, she was irregular at school, did not take interest in school or studies and there was hardly anyone to guide her. At KGBV, they guided her for 6-7 months with her studies at the hostel and admitted her to Class V. She has completed Class VIII

(Contd on pg 7)

Op/Ed

Call for Multilateral Support for a More Comprehensive Law on Trafficking

New Delhi: It was a significant milestone in the long struggle of Apne Aap Women Worldwide and other civil society organizations when the Criminal Law was amended to incorporate a definition of trafficking and make it a criminal offence punishable with imprisonment up to life term. However, further steps are still required to tackle trafficking.

To address the substantial increase in human trafficking, leaders from across the globe gathered in New York to attend the UN Special Session on Human Trafficking in May. Apne Aap, a member of Consultative Committee on Trafficking, actively participated in the discussion on “The Global Plan of Action: Relevant legal instruments and effective partnerships to protect and assist victims of human trafficking”.

Putting forward the stand of AAWW, Abhilasha Kumari explained that we work with the poorest, most marginalized and most victimized women. We focus on prevention and try to get young girls out of red light areas and brothels, try to link them with universal education

and, in that way, we try to prevent more and more girls going into early marriages and fake marriages and entering prostitution. We also provide alternative livelihood strategies and programs. Awareness of legal rights and legal assistance is a critical element in the support we try to provide. We facilitate and enable women in prostitution to articulate their legal needs and advocate legal

It is important that international multilateral agencies bring pressure on the Indian government to implement both in spirit and in action the United Nations Protocol which envisages a comprehensive law against trafficking.

policy changes to meet these needs.

It is in this context that we have increasingly realized the importance of a proper legal framework to give victims of trafficking access to justice. The Criminal Amendment Bill has been passed, but the Government of India is now dragging its feet with regard to a more comprehensive law on trafficking which not only criminalizes the trafficker and decriminalizes the victim, but also integrates rehabilitation as an integral part of the law.

We have been able to push the definition of trafficking into the

Criminal Amendment Bill, which has just been passed in India. However, Abhilasha Kumari said, there are gaps in the law – a need for more comprehensive law to replace the archaic immoral traffic prevention act (ITPA).

It is important that international multilateral agencies bring pressure on the Indian government to implement both in spirit and in action the United Nations Protocol which envisages a comprehensive law against trafficking.

Such collaboration or partnership is a must for dealing with the problem. For us, partnership is not a choice; it is a necessity, because of the scale of work that has to be done. We run programs, but all the time we feel the necessity of scaling up operations so that we can help more women and give them the type of social and economic security, and the skills to counter the trafficking networks that they encounter.

We look at partnerships as an essential feature for any organization which seeks to bring about social change. This partnership consists not only with government, but other international partners, other NGOs and, of course, the UN agencies.

There is a need constantly to pressure governments to show their commitment to the UN protocol against trafficking. Apne Aap is committed to support the UN protocol and bring pressure from the

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Poetry Corner

आज की लड़किया

हम वो नहीं,
जो खिल के मुरझा जाये
हम वो नहीं,
हो आगे बढ़कर
पीछे हट जाए !
हम वो हैं, जो अपनी
पहचान खुद बनाए !
रोज नई आशा, नई उमंग
लेकर बढ़ते हैं आगे,
पूरा करते हैं, उसे
जो ठान लेते हैं हम
यही हैं, आज की लड़कियों
की पहचान
और हमारी शान !

सीमा

काँटों में मुस्कुराना सीखो

काँटों में मुस्कुराना सीखो
काँटों पर खिल जाना सीखो
धागों की सुंदर कलियों को
जीवन में महकाना सीखो
बेला की सुंदर सुगंध की
खिड़की, पताका फहराना
सीखो
रजनीगंधा से रात महकती
जीवन बगिया को गमकाना
सीखो

साधना कुमारी

Stitching Life Together

By Supei Liu

Forbesgunj: After receiving Ruchira's invitation to start Nomi Network's livelihood program, I made the journey from the United States to a little town in Bihar, located in the eastern part of India. After two hours on a domestic flight, 18 hours on an international flight, then 15 hours on a crowded, local train, I finally stepped into a region that even many local Indians consider to be dangerous and backward.

Bihar is never the first choice for one to launch a program because it lacks basic infrastructure and resources. But after more than one year of living in this community, I was given the privilege of working with a group of

courageous women whom I have come to love and respect.

Last July, Nomi started its training program with 21 women. For the first two months, the women travelled to our training centre, received small

travel allowances, and examined me in great detail. Who could blame them for this, after years of being mistreated, being disappointed and being told they were worthless. We pressed on, however. Everyday we would meet in a hut and the women would start each class with positive words about themselves and each other. Then the women focused on learning basic skills in measuring, stitching and writing: skills that would equip them to make Nomi products.

During the class we would also discuss life skills, such as time management, personal hygiene and personal finance. We take these tools for granted, but some of these women did not even know how to write their own names.

Slowly, things changed. The wom-

en's smiles became more genuine and a sense of community emerged. I am seeing newfound confidence emerge as they experience opportunities they never had. Geeta, the oldest participant, started coming to the centre by herself and mentored another trainee on how to travel the five kilometre journey to the training centre. Samtolya and Rato walked into the bank to open their first saving accounts and demanded to be treated equally as men. Anita signed her name on a government document for the first time instead of merely putting her thumb

impression. Renu learned how to trust again after being abandoned by her husband to

raise two children.

Today, these women continue to come to our training centre daily. Many show up an hour before classes to practice their sewing skills. They take pride in their daily work and some of them have be-

come our trainers and are teaching more women. Yet, most importantly, they are forming new friendships and standing up and supporting each other when the other is in need. Sampo, one of my most compassionate leaders, gave part of her earning to another woman. Only eight months ago, she thought her life was meaningless.

As I watch these women transform, I know there is still much work to be done. I will eventually leave Bihar, but Nomi's work will not be finished. We must continue our work not only to help the women, but also to reshape the community and the way they perceive these women. Women deserve a community that values them and wants to provide them with opportunities.

Column Diary of a Social Worker

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Girls from Apne Aap to be inducted in educational programme of Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission

After persistent efforts, we at Apne Aap have achieved success in getting children from red light area accepted for admission in a school, a basic, initial step towards a normal life that was beyond their reach. Three girls whose mothers had fallen victim to prostitution – two sisters Shana and Sabrin Khatoon and Sujata Ghosh are going to be admitted in RamKrishna Vivekananda Mission school, taking them out of a life of humiliation, deprivation and exploitation. In their childhood, they had no distinct feeling of growing up in and around brothels. It was just another place with known names and known faces. They could never experience the awe, curiosity or strangeness that outsiders interested in Sonagachi felt. The social and personal relationships with the other children of the neighborhoods led to an understanding of the area. They came across different incidents in their life in their day to day activities while living in the red light areas. Specially the girl child at the time of growing up in the red light area stays in fear when they see the other women or the girl child to be abused by different people in their daily life.

Here in the red light area, for these children, access to mainstream

education, health and protection services is blocked due to stigma. In their homes they are often abused or forced to leave or move out in social spaces outside their communities. They witness their mothers being beaten, humiliated by the clients, pimps, brothel owner. As the children grow older, adolescents' girls are subjected to sexual abuse, harassment and pressure to enter prostitution. Boys are introduced to alcohol and substance abuse early in their lives. As a result of

Announcement

crowding and congested conditions, there is a lack of space for sleep, rest, study, or to cook and eat healthy food. Due to lack of child care, for single mothers, the children roamed in the streets. They often get sick from the unsanitary conditions. Girl child on the other are increasingly vulnerable to abuse around the age of puberty, at this time mothers begin to think of sending their daughters to elsewhere, often by arranging for them to be married at a young age. As the mothers work throughout the whole day and are often unable to provide a suitable safe place for their

children to do homework. As it is seen that many mothers are illiterate and therefore have their own limitations in supporting and understanding the demands of their children's schooling. Some boys become involved in sex trade either directly or indirectly as a pimps or trafficking agents or more directly by working with some political parties or with the local clubs in selling drugs.

The greatest challenge in admitting them in schools was that the schools initially were hesitating to admit them on coming to know about their background. But after several requests we could make this happen. They would get an opportunity to grow up away from red light areas and separated from a situation of being exploited as sex objects in future. Hostel life in RamKrishna Vivekananda Mission would help them to create a new life for themselves and enjoy being a girl. Getting admitted to schools would enable them to grow up in new environment where they could play, express their feelings, study, interact with friends and reveal their potentials rather than getting groomed to entertain customers as seen in brothels.

(Contd from pg 4 Education opens up a new ...)

this year. I also felt that sending her to hostel would help her cope with her studies, gain interest and cultivate values, which is otherwise difficult in our locality as people here are not much bothered about education of girls. I always felt that having an opportunity to get education will help my daughters lead a good life.

What was the reaction of others in your community to your decision?

There was a mixed response that I received from my community when Jahan Ara went to study at the hostel. I listened to lots of things from our neighbours. There were a great many people who told me that it is not good to send daughters to a distant place to study. But there were a few who supported me saying that it was a wise decision as my husband had passed away.

And I am happy that I sent her there, as she has developed deep interest in her studies. There is also a drastic change in her attitude, she has now become so regular with everything, I am impressed. We feel inspired to follow a routine as she does.

What plans do you and Jahan Ara have about her future?

Jahan Ara wants to be a lawyer when she grows up. She has been admitted to the Zilla School at Forbesganj in Class IX and she is doing well in her studies. Her uncle has also agreed to provide financial support for the extra tuition that she might need. I would be interested to send her to a hostel yet again if I get the opportunity from Apne Aap. And I know that my daughter will also be greatly excited, as she keeps talking of her experience and friends at KGBV.

Did You Know?

Here are ten things you may not know about men who buy sex:

- On average, men reported were 21 years of age when they first bought sex.
- 25% of the sex buyers had traveled to another state and while there used women in prostitution.
- 41% of the sex buyers knowingly used a woman in prostitution who was controlled by a pimp.
- 66% of the sex buyers observed that a majority of women are lured, tricked or trafficked into prostitution.
- 74% of the sex buyers reported that they learned about sex from pornography.
- Sex buyers were more than 7x's more likely than non-sex buyers to acknowledge that they would rape a woman if they could get away with it and if no one knew about it.
- Sex buyers are far more likely than non-sex buyers to commit felonies, misdemeanors, crimes related to violence against women, substance abuse-related crimes, assaults, crimes with weapons, and crimes against authority.
- 89% of sex buyers said they would be deterred from buying sex if their name were to be added to a sex offender registry.
- 90% of sex buyers said they would be deterred from buying sex if a \$1,000-\$2,000 penalty were imposed.
- 100% of sex buyers said they would be deterred from buying sex if a one month jail term were imposed.

From a study, "Comparing Sex Buyers with Men Who Don't Buy Sex," by Melissa Farley, PHD, Founding Director of the Prostitution Research and Education (<http://iwantrest.com/2013/04/30/ten-things-you-might-not-know-about-men-who-buy-sex/>)



Gate 3/4, Second Floor,
India International Centre Campus
40, Max Mueller Road, Lodhi Estate
New Delhi - 110003
Phone:
+91 11 24619968

E-mail/Web:
contact@apneaap.org
www.apneaap.org

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