



RED LIGHT DESPATCH

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APRIL 2014

DELHI, KOLKATA, AND FORBESGANJ (BIHAR)

My Dreams

Gahani Devi

Forbesgunj: I am Gahani Devi, one of the group members from Mahila Kranti, an SEG group of Apne Aap. I live in the Mela ground where many DNTs reside, adjacent to the brothel of Forbesganj.

My husband is an employee with the Bank. But he spends all his money on alcohol and drugs. Whenever I have tried to say anything to him he has abused me – both physically and mentally. I came to our Rampur Centre and shared my problems with other members of my Mahila Mandal. With the help of AAWW I put my children to hostels. Apne Aap and my women friends gave me full support and courage to raise voices of protest against my husband.

Finally I decided to move court. Apne Aap provided me with necessary support in drafting the FIR, hiring advocate, paying the advocate fees. My husband is bound to give 5 thousand rupees per month.

Now, my dream is to get my daughters educated, have a small house of my own where I can live peacefully with my children. Now, I am also helping women who are in my position and trying to fight the injustices done towards them.

Trafficking Kingpin Gainul Arrested

Md. Kalam

Forbesgunj: Gainul is a big trafficker who has trapped, bought and sold vulnerable girls for prostitution since last 8 years. Earlier he was into robbery, murder and other criminal activities. The brothel gave him the space of easy money exploiting vulnerabilities of marginalized girls and their families. He used his power to dupe them with money and put their daughters into forced prostitution living off their money.

Eventually he even built his house in the red light area of Rampur. He often used to kill parents before trafficking their daughters. He became a big trafficker by gradually using his criminal networks. Apne Aap has been complaining against Gainul since the last 5 years but police was not arresting him. There have been repeated cases of trafficking and criminal activities filed against

him. He was absconding in charge of trafficking of many girls.

We got the news of Gainul's arrest and it was really a moment for celebration for all of us who have been associated with the struggle in Forbesganj over the years. In fact, last December when Meena and Fatima gave Gargi the news that Gainul re-trafficking a girl who our team had rescued one week back and officially Gainul is absconding in charge of trafficking that girl, Gargi & the team arranged police force from Thana to arrest him. But the same police had informed Gainul before they set out to arrest him so that he could escape. Gainul was not a petty criminal. He was well protected by police and political parties on both sides of the border.

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The World Outside

"My Voice Among the Crowd"

Uma Das

Kolkata: I am Uma Das. I am 21 yrs old. I am from Munshgunj which is a red light area. In my childhood I used to come to crèche run by Apne Aap. Since then I am seeing the seeing the wmen and girls produce the different jute products like; Jute fashion bags, jute envelopes, jute purse, coin pouches etc. The women and girls from red light and nearby area come to learn stitching and sewing to the centre.

I participated in one exhibition held in Lata Bajoria's (Member of trustee board) house in the month of March in 2014. I and Anwari got the scope of selling those products of IGP there. This time we went and faced the world outside of our home and Apne Aap centre.

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Column
Volunteer Journal
An eye opener

- *Tanushree Choudhuri*

When I had first visited Sonagachi it was a completely new experience for me. I've been in and around that area but had no clue that what looks like any other street in Kolkata, is actually home to so many prostitutes.

The moment I entered the place it looked like a completely different world within the city. They were prostitutes standing along the streets. The brothels are situated in and around very unhygienic area. There are grocery shops, medical store, eateries and all the necessary things which can be found in and around any residential area, but the atmosphere isn't the same.

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I enter there and I see a life which is so different from the city, yet it is in the city. You see dirt, unhappiness and a lot of negative energy all around you, but when you look at the women, they smile.. They always smile. Smile with some hope, some wish, some dream that I will help them, help them live a life which they have always dreamt about, but have been forced out of.

When I went inside the area, walking on the streets I saw the houses so compactly built and in very bad conditions. The people staying in

these areas lead a very hazardous life. They literally live their lives on the edge. A life they might have not chosen for themselves and would never choose for their children.

I was thrilled to learn that for most women from Sonagachi who are associated with Apne Aap, have gotten their children admitted in the boarding school, so as to keep them away from this dirty place and allow them to live a life which is very different from what their mothers do.

I had visited the Munshiganj field also. The field is visibly so different from the Sonagachi field. Firstly, it is most definitely not as big as Sonagachi, and the women there also look visibly older, but that doesn't make them any less oppressed.

I have been amazed to see how the children come and study in the Safe House and are provided with the Mid-Day Meals. There is just so much enthusiasm that you see in the eyes of the children. They are always waiting eagerly for their classes to start and are very obedient towards their teacher who comes to teach them there.

I've been privileged to witness the library project. The library which has been donated by Apeejay Group. I feel amazed to see the zeal in the children to study to become big, to achieve the zenith. They are knowledge hungry. Though they don't get the luxury which we have been blessed with yet we keep cribbing about the petty things in life.

Its good to see organizations and agencies being sensitive to issues of this sort and willing to come forward to help organizations working with trafficking. The library was a great initiative on their part to open a world of education and wisdom for the children who come and visit

our centre. This will help the children to explore the world around them, which they otherwise might not have been able to without access to the library, here at Apne Aap.

It brought tears in my eyes when I saw that how much a small piece of cake can give them happiness. It was not a piece of cake that they desired, it were just these small things which would bring them so much happiness.

Many people of my age or even elder to me know the spelling of gratitude use it plenty of times but don't know its true meaning because we have got things in life without struggling for it. Many times our wish has been fulfilled even before asking for it. But these children may not know the spelling, might not even use this word but they are grateful in the true sense.

Unless we really come and see the way in which these women and children are oppressed.. One has to really see it to believe it. Living in the conditions that they do, its difficult to believe that they are happy, but they live with this hope and faith that something better is awaiting them, which they are waiting and aspiring for.

Its been a beautiful learning and self development experience for me. I will never forget, not because of the place, but because of the people I met and the bonds I made as those will always remain very special in my heart, one that I will cherish always, for many more years to come.

Tanushree Choudhuri, is a graduate from Loreto College Kolkata and pursuing her Master's in development communication. She believes that working grassroots is the way to being productive and successful

Op/Ed : Curie Review- "Trafficking Laws in India"- A Struggle for Change - An interview with Ruchira Gupta

The following is an excerpt from an interview with Ruchira Gupta conducted by Jillian Dunham.

Jillian Dunham: You consulted with governments all over the world, and you were instrumental in changing India's law. Before your work, trafficking was not considered a penal offense in India. Did that come about after the UN protocol?

Ruchira Gupta: The UN Protocol came into force in 25 December 2003. The new anti-trafficking law in India, Section 370 of the Indian Penal Code, came into force on April 3, 2013. It took us ten years! Until then India did have an anti-trafficking law, called the Immoral Traffic in Person Act 1956, which was based on the old colonial British law which basically gave licenses to brothel owners to provide disease-free prostituted women to British soldiers and clerks. The new law is based on the UN protocol.

When the UN protocol happened, we started lobbying, lobbying, lobbying with our own governments, saying sign and ratify the protocol, which happened three years ago in India. And then from that we started lobbying again. Dalit women's groups to joined hands with us. Communities that were suffering from inter-generational prostitution were organizing with us across India.

Apne Aap grew from 22 women to 3,000, to 7,000, to 15,000. We would ask survivors what kind of law they wanted and then we would draw up the law based on what they said. We would get women to show up at Parliament and speak to MPs. In India, people needed to understand the reality of

these girls and women.

Things began to change. Funnily enough, the final resistance came from public health foundations and public health activists to changing the law in India.

JD: Because of HIV?

RG: Exactly. About fifteen years ago, the World Health Organization said that India was going to become the epicenter for AIDS in the world, because we had such a growing population. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation hired a former McKinsey consultant to design the program for HIV/AIDS in India and put hundreds of millions of dollars behind it.

The consultant said the maximum number of sexual transactions were among heterosexuals in red light districts. So they designed condom distribution programs where pimps and brothel managers were hired as peer educators to distribute condoms. As a result, we had a massive condom distribution program in India that gave more power to the pimps and brothel managers.

JD: Was their argument that if you prosecute the johns or the pimps then you make it harder for them to do all of this outreach?

RG: They said, don't prosecute them because they will go underground. And if you criminalize the buyer, you're depriving the women of a livelihood. Who will they sell their bodies to? They did this all in the name of agency. Because we cannot change poverty, they said, in India it is endemic, so let's just talk about reducing the harm.

That entrenched the pimps and brothel managers, it made them legitimate. If an NGO like mine

would go to the police station and say a pimp is holding this 17 year-old in a brothel and she needs help, they would say, "She's alright, because the pimp works for such-and-such organization."

When survivor came to testify in front of Parliament to change the law, their people would also come. They had a battery of lawyers all saying how it would impact negatively on AIDS and also on the women. They did it in the name of the women. It was really hard to make visible the issue.

JD: Was there a moment when momentum began to shift in your favor to change the law?

RG: December 16 was the famous rape case. Jyoti Singh was a medical student taking a bus home after watching a movie when she was brutally raped and assaulted. That had a huge impact on the consciousness of India. All of the students were out in the streets, women and men marching and being pelted by the police. We joined in with the protests. More than 200 women from Apne Aap brought placards saying, "Prostitution is commercial rape" Or, "Our bodies are not for sale."

Now the challenge is two things: one is to make police officers who have to do the investigations aware of this law. And the other to delete sections of the old law, the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act, that penalize women for soliciting in a public place. Unless we can change the law, women are not going to come forward to testify, so it's really important that we remove that section. We are planning to launch a campaign on deleting that section and increasing budget allocations to help women get housing, education

Diary of a Social Worker *Sk Fazul*

Kolkata: As per statistics crime in India 2012 published by National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. Total 38172 incidents were recorded as crimes in India against children and most of the cases governments' records like NCRB do not reflect the figure of actual offences occurred in India.

Even I don't have any idea about the reason of increasing figure of offences on women and children but when I joined to Apne Aap as a Social Worker and I get the opportunity to talk directly with most vulnerable population about the issue of trafficking, offences against women and children and related issues. This hard reality came to my knowledge when I participated to rescue one 11 years girl namely Muskan Khatoon and it is one of my remarkable memory till today.

Muskan khatoon, an eleven years old girl who was rescued by Apne Aap as per order of CWC Kolkata. Muskan was abandoned at the age of only two years by her prostituted mother. Hasina Begum who is a prostituted woman from red light area of Munshigunge, adopted that girl as she had no issue at that time.

When Muskan was only 6 years of age, Hasina admitted her in Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission with the help of Apne Aap as at that time she had no other option to keep safe that girl from the land lady or brothel owner.

Initially the girl Muskan khatoon performed very well in her RKVM school. She was one of the best students in her class. Unfortunately after 4 years when Muskan was in class four she returned to her

adopted mother on puja vacation and after puja vacation when Apne Aap members went to Hasina's house to send her back to hostel, it was revealed that Hasina along with Muskan left Munshigunge area with an old man, since then we could not trace Hasina and her adopted daughter Muskan khatoon.

After long interaction with the community women and from different sources it was possible to trace Hasina from one remote village of

The Journey of Muskaan Khatoon

south 24 parganas, namely Purbo kankhuli under Santoshpore police station where Hasina resided besides rail track of Santoshpore Station. It was revealed from Hasina that her adopted daughter Muskan was detained and abused by one person namely Salim Sk.

Even Muskan was sexually abused by that person who was nearly 72 years old. Hasina started to resist that unnatural activity with her daughter. Then she was forced to leave the house where she was residing with the man along with Muskan.

Apne Aap approached to Kolkata CWC and prayed to rescue that girl from the custody of Sk Salim who was sexually abused that girl and detained forcefully. After considering the complaint lodged by Hasina before CWC, passed an order to rescue the girl from the custody of Sk. Salim and for this reason CWC di-

rected the O.C. of Santoshpore police station to rescue the girl and produced the girl before CWC. As per direction, Muskan was rescued from the remote village of Santoshpore and produced before the court.

After production she was sent to a home for counseling and medical treatment. After that she was produced before the CWC again and as per prayer of Apne Aap CWC was pleased to pass an order to admit that girl RKVM, subsequently she was admitted in the RKVM with the assistance of Apne Aap but in the year 2014 RKVM complain that she violates the rules and regulations of the institution so they suggested to admit her in another residential school without informing CWC as per law.

So we immediately informed to Kolkata CWC and as per order of CWC she was admitted to Hope Kolkata Foundation where Muskan can get all kinds of mental, physical, physiological development and she is very happy now.

This experience helps me a lot to learn about the journey and fight of a girl who abandoned by her parents in her early age and there are many girls like Muskan are being abandoned everyday by her parents, guardians or relatives or they were tortured or exploited although there are so many provisions in the law to stop it.

Fire in Topsia

Mumtaz Begum

Kolkata: On 29th April'2014, a massive fire was broke out at Topsia, near 4 no. bridge of Park Circus & it's adjacent rail line areas where I stay with many other people in their huts. In that area, most of us started to stay after being evicted from the Topsia slum last year & for which Apne Aap is fighting with the Government to get the support for us.

The people from Apne Aap many times come to visit this area & we also used to go to Apne Aap office at Kidderpore for different meetings & also in search of legal advice & support from Apne Aap.

After this massive fire we came to know that many of us had lost our all belongings including voter card, Aadhar card, school certificate, Birth certificates, Ration card etc and other documents in that fire. People

from Apne Aap came here and talked with the us regarding the incident and also collected the details of the documents that we have lost in the fire, so that, they can start the procedure of getting the duplicate copy of those important documents.

Apne aap office also provided us Rs 5000/- twice for arranging foods for the affected families. I cooked the food for these people & served to them as my room some how got saved from the fire but my relatives have lost their homes.

In words of a woman "Some days before we have submitted a charter of demand to the different political leaders before the election for development of our area. We expected that the government people would help us in some way with our

shelter."

"Presently to stay in these small rooms we are paying high rents. But this fire destroyed all our rooms & documents. Don't know what to do now."

Another woman said, "After a long time with the support & help from Apne Aap I have got my RSBY (Health Card) card. That would help me & my family to get the treatment at lower cost. But all the cards I have lost for this fire. Even my children also lost their books & dress of the school.

(continued from page 1: 'The World Outside')

We together displayed those products and sold all the products we brought there. While selling those products, we interacted with the different visitors shared our experiences from the beginning at the centre and also told about the work and objectives of AAWW during the

conversation. It gave me a sense of great pride to be among those people, who were listening to me with so much interest.

We felt very happy at that time. People were coming and buying the products and also received donation from them. Then we invited them to visit the Apne Aap centre. The good

thing was that the visitors came to our centre on the very next day and again they bought the products of IGP in the centre. We again met them in our centre.

I felt very happy participating in this type of activity in the centre as well as outside of the centre. I am happy that Apne Aap gave me the scope of meeting those people outside and sharing my experiences.

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Raid in Forbesgunj ***Fatima Khatoon***

Forbesgunj: When I received the call from my daughter at 5 pm, she was very afraid and told me that police is conducting a raid in the community. Immediately, I went to my house with my colleague and saw that the police had already pulled out many girls and women, including few men and boys out of their houses. My first step was to identify those girls who are school going women who are not in prostitution requesting the police officers not to arrest them. But by then, few more girls, who were not into prostitution, were already send to Forbesganj police station.

This raid was totally different from the raid conducted by Shivdip Lande and his police force (former S.P., Araria District) in 2012. During that raid we had submitted petitions to the District Magistrate and Superintendent of Police, Araria District against the Mela that is organized every year, fostering trafficking during that period of time. The administration decided on the raid, without any information to us and we were taken by surprise.

Compared to that, this raid was different in the sense that when we reached there the police took us into confidence and asked assistance from us. When I reached the RLA, I spoke to the police officials. They asked me about the whereabouts of Gainul and his house. (Gainul is one of the biggest criminal and trafficker of the area). I gave them the location to his house. Mean while, I requested police officials to release the girls and women.

I and my colleague led the police force identifying men who are traffickers and pimps and getting the police to arrest them. Had I not been present during the raid in the community, many girls, women and boys who were in no way associated in prostitution, though they stayed in the RLA, would have been arrested. I also fought with the media people as they were trying take pictures of girls and women.

I feel very happy that I could get few of the traffickers arrested, traffickers who had sold and forced several girls into prostitution. And as an aftermath of this raid, traffick-

ers like Gainul and Muslim got arrested. They are the biggest traffickers and criminals of the area.

Growing up in the area, I remember seeing a woman who Muslim had trafficked into prostitution in his house. I always saw her suffering from diseases and died without treatment. I somewhere still feel that Muslim is responsible for her death, taking money out of her income from prostitution and never leaving enough money to her that she could even do her treatment.

After assisting the police in the raid and in identifying traffickers who were arrested, I got threat calls from traffickers and community member. But I am never afraid of all these as I see them as a part of my struggle against trafficking and prostitution.

It remains one of the greatest day in my life that I could at least get a few men arrested who I have hated for seeing them traffic women and girls as being part of the red light area since my childhood.

(continued from page 1) **Trafficking Kingpin Gainul Arrested**

Gainul's arrest came as an after-effect of our long struggle to bust the trafficking network in Forbesganj. It took great courage on part of Meena, Fatima and Kalam to live inside the community and continuously challenge the traffickers. It also came as a result of the PIL we have filed in 2012 after the arrest of Kalam against the Bihar Govt. It was a very difficult task as there has been organized effort to destabilize us on behalf of the traffickers and police in connivance with them after the sting operation in the Mela and subsequent challenge thrown to the then corrupt police officials who helped traffickers. They arrested Kalam, treated with him in the most undignified way, tried to

snatch away KGBV from us. Everybody warned us not

to engage further with the Govt. in a fight and create more hostility. But the PIL found out to be a very effective way to revamp anti-trafficking activities in the state. Gainul's last arrest came as the final outcome of the supplementary affidavit our lawyer Anjana Mishra had filed to our PIL asking the State to arrest Gainul.

It took us many years to see a trafficker like Gainul behind the bars. But we are indeed very happy and proud of our achievement. Whether he will finally get due punishment is a matter of rigorous legal follow up. But at least to the community and the trafficked girls the message that Gainul and traffickers like him are not invincible is phenomenal.

CEO of Thomson Reuters Foundation discusses Legal Issues

Alexandra Mochnac

CEO of the Thomson Reuters Foundation, Founder of TrustLaw and Trust Women, Monique Villa, was welcomed by Apne Aap staff on the 8th of April, in order to partake in an informal conversation on Apne Aap's various legal dilemmas. Girls, aging from 10 to 16, from the Dharampura centre in Delhi, joined the discussion in order to communicate some of their concerns as part of the Perna community, a De-notified tribe.

The discussion between Monique, her colleague Serena Grant (co-head of Legal for Thomson Reuters) and the girls was largely concerned with issues of identification. They expressed surprise upon finding out that these girls, as well as their parents, make up a fringe group of society that has neither a political voice nor legitimisation from the state. Most of these 'citizens' hold caste certificates, which would grant them subsidisations and access to many governmental programs, as well as schooling. One of the girls, no more than 15 years old, already understood the stigma's her tribe held in society; claiming that government officials avoided their area at all costs.

The point was made:

“This community is criminalised by others and with nonexistent police cooperation, the girls carry on living in patriarchal bubbles unable to escape from the confines of their homes.”

Sadly this community is not small, in Delhi alone it makes up approximately 50,000 people. There are, as of now, over 300 of these tribes spread across the country. With these approximate statistics in mind, Serena moved to lobby the lawyers she knew in India, who could work on this systemic issue.

“For a group of people in the 21st century to be ostracised from their society because of a cultural heritage imposed on them by the British and blocked from developing as a community with very few formal job opportunities, is a crisis supported by a severe lack of political will.”

A small section of the Perna community, which Apne Aap works with, is located within a few small streets, at the center of an indifferent neighbourhood. They have learnt to function within the confines of this area by outsourcing their main income supply, their women, to the highways that lead to this capital's modern city center.

They have worked hard to retain a strong foothold within the vicinity, most likely through paying off the few officials they have relations with, and have managed, aided by an apathetic state, to withdraw from the rule of law. Apne Aap is working hard to give these future generations a chance, largely concentrating on preventing their entry into the industry. Some of their

young girls manage to run from their laborious daily chores, caring for the family households, to spend a few hours enjoying some recreational activities within one of our two centers, situated a few kilometres away from one another.

For any real progression to occur within the dynamics of these communities, the state needs to understand the demographic of this population, in society. Only then can they realise the programs needed to help sustain these people. Some claim that it is too hard; that it is an entrenched cultural identity; that it is transposed from generation to generation. Spend a day at one of these centers trying to understand these sensitive and innocent children. What we need, what is important right now, are lawyers, government officials and researchers willing to take on this task; the task of providing an identity, which these individuals can relate to in society.

Alexandra Mochnac is interning with Apne Aap. She is conducting a research profiling traffickers in our Kolkata centers, in order to find parallels between red light areas, and their institutional hierarchies, within Erving Goffman's analyses of 'total institutions'. Her academic background is one focused on international politics and policy-making. Having studied at King's College in London, she is preparing for a Master's in Gender inequalities and Policy for a future career in policy-making on gender related issues. In order to develop such a career, she intends to expand her knowledge-base by working with social movements and grassroots initiatives.

Poems

Voting is Our Right

I want to fly like a bird,
I want to flow like the river,
I want to touch the sky,
I want to gain respect,
A girl is not a toy, hope the world understand that.

49% votes are for the girls, to help
solve the world issues,
Life is like a small boat,
We need to sail and achieve everything,
that everyone in us suppresses.

- **Sangeeta Sharm**
Age : 13 years

I Want to Live

I have started living with demanding my rights,
What will you get taking these away from me?
Don't think that a drop of water is small,
It's these drops which can flood the home of you
and me.

The one who you call backward,
Is the one who does so much work for you,
Live yourself and let me live,
Let me remain good coz i I want to live too.

- **Pooja Shaw**
Age : 15 years



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