



RED LIGHT DESPATCH

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DELHI, KOLKATA, AND FORBESGANJ (BIHAR)

My Dreams “To Free my Mother” -Soni Khatun, aged 16

Bihar: My father passed away when I was nine-year-old. After some years, my mother left me and my brother alone, to live with another man in the same district. My mother was happy in the initial few months; later life became tough and blurry for her, as she lives as a slave with this man. Even to meet her own child, she has to take that man’s permission.

It disheartens me to see her in this condition. I want to help her exit from this situation. I want to live with my mother and brother as a happy family.

I feel very lonely when I have to share something. All the girls share their problems with their mother but my mother is not with me. I want to talk to my mother over the phone but the man creates problems and does not allow us to talk. I want to meet my mother and stay with her but it seems impossible.

I see my future filled with darkness with no ray of hope to improve this situation. My younger brother’s situation is worsening. He is not admitted to any school. He is seven-year-old and needs to start his education right away but there is no one to guide or help him.

Every human being has the right to live freely, and so does my mother. I hope Apne Aap will support me to help my mother give her the life she deserves.

Redlight area girls pay for education by selling sanitary napkins

—Uma Das

Kolkata: I live in the Kidderpore red-light area. I have been a member of Apne Aap since I was little. We used to have a girls group, Kishori Mandal. During our group discussion, there was one issue, which was a matter of concern to all. “If only we had a job, and earn a little income, it would be so good.”

We were contemplating to start a small scale business. But, with our limited skills, we were short of options. Then, Ruchira aunty suggested producing sanitary pads and selling it in the market, largely our locality. It was a great opportunity for us. Accordingly, we had ordered for a machine from Jayashree Industries. The ITC Ladies Group gave the money. Someone from the industry visited us and trained us with this regard.

Then we inaugurated our sanitary pad-making unit. Initially, it was a challenge for us to sell any pads at all. I used to counsel the girls in the group to muster patience, as the business was just in its initial days. “Slowly our production will increase and we will get orders,” I began telling it to the girls. Earlier we were four girls making the pads.

We would go into the red light area and visit girls in their homes. We started mobilizing other girls to join us in making the pads. For instance, encourage other girls to work, so that they can choose a better life for themselves. The time they spend sitting around at home, can be use to make sanitary napkins.

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“We want to take a train to the whole world”

— Sunaina, Sneha and Gunnu/ as dictated to Tinku Khanna

Delhi: We are girls from the Dharam-pura, Najafgarh on the outskirts of Delhi. We are also from different communities: Perna, Singhi and Samera.

Our families domesticate goats, dogs, horses and snakes. These are the means and source to earn livelihood. We make and sell medicines made out of snake venom. We take out wedding processions, perform at weddings and rent out our horse for the groom to ride on.

Our elders say that earlier we use to travel from one place to another and thus, we fell in the category of nomads. Now we live near the highway, near the Border Security Force Camp. None of our elders have been to

school.

Everyday, we commute by Metro to the Apne Aap office in Lodi Estate, for different activities. This includes, studying, doing our homework, art classes etc. The metro has taken us out of our little community for the first time. We love the metro. It has Air Condition.

However, the windows are closed and cannot travel beyond Delhi. We heard that trains can take us anywhere—even to Mumbai where movies are made. We wanted to ride in a train and travel to far away places.

(Continued on page 7)

Apne Aap's letter to UN Women

Dear Dr. Mlambo-Ngcuka,

Subject: UN Women recent note on “sex work, sexual exploitation and trafficking”

We the undersigned- victims and survivors of prostitution, women's groups representing marginalized communities of caste, class and ethnicity, and anti-trafficking organizations representing those trapped in bonded labour and other forms of servitude, would like UN Women to circulate a new note on sex trafficking and prostitution recognizing the realities of our lives.

1. We do not want to be called ‘sex workers’ but prostituted women and children, as we can never accept our exploitation as ‘work’. We think that the attempts in UN documents to call us “sex workers” legitimizes violence against women, especially women of discriminated caste, poor men and women, and women and men from minority groups, who are the majority of the prostituted.

2. Body invasion is inherent to prostitution and cannot be legislated away. If we accept prostitution as work, the UN needs to hold consultations with all Member States and civil society representatives as it will be in contravention of UN standards defining what is accepted labour and livelihood. The nature of work should not be different for one class or caste of human beings just because they are socially and economically weaker. This would be in violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

3. We want you to recognize that the majority of prostitution is an outcome of trafficking, as defined in the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, where the “abuse of a position of vulnerability” is recognized as a method of trafficking. It is our vulnerabilities that are taken advantage of to seduce, trick, coerce or force us into prostitution. These vulnerabilities are based on our caste (De-notified Tribes, Dalits, OBCs), class (families from where women and girls are mostly trafficked earn less than INR 25 per day), sex

(majority of those who are prostituted are women and girls), and ethnicity (Hill Tribes). We are denied access to education, land, livelihood, capital and often to justice. Traffickers take advantage of this by offering us food, a bed, some cash, jobs, marriage, housing. Local and legal authorities that take pay-offs or free services from us often abet them.

4. We want you to recognize that our survival strategies are not a choice but an absence of choice.

5. By legitimizing prostitution as a form of ‘work’, delinking prostitution from trafficking, we feel that UN Women has let down marginalized girls and women, without even a proper consultation. It seems, that UN Women's policies are controlled by AIDS management agencies, who want to protect male clients/Johns from disease, rather than women and girls from repeated rape by male clients.

6. We ask that UN Women advocate with other UN agencies, as the agency charged with representing the voices of women, to recognize that commercial rape is the same as non-commercial rape and to remove all demands advocating for decriminalizing pimping and brothel-keeping. We want an end to impunity for all those who take advantage of our vulnerabilities to sexually exploit us. We want them to be held accountable and we want laws that penalize and punish them. By calling for the decriminalization of pimping, UN agencies are effectively helping the sex-industry and impeding our access to justice.

We want UN Women to stand by agreed upon international conventions and protocols, including:

1. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)
2. Convention for the Suppression of Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, 1949
3. Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery, 1956
4. Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979
5. Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, 2000

To retreat from these protocols would be illegal and unethical.

We therefore ask UN Women to circulate a revised note calling for more gender sensitive language in all UN documents, recognizing and promoting the rights of girls and women from lower caste, minorities and other marginalized groups. In particular:

1. **We request that UN Women changes the word ‘sex worker’ in all documents to ‘victims and survivors of prostitution’ or ‘prostituted women and children’.**
2. **We request that UN Women acknowledges that the majority of prostitution is an outcome of trafficking and calls upon all states and UN agencies to reduce the vulnerabilities of women and girls that make them easy prey for traffickers.**

Signed by citizens of countries including India, Nepal and Bangladesh.

Diary of a Social Worker

—By *Jayasri Mitra*

Kolkata: My name is Jayasri Mitra. I work in Apne Aap as a project officer. My active life started when I completed my Phd at Calcutta University and joined the reputed cultural organization “PADATIK”. Since my school, college, university days I believed that theatre, music, dance, and poetry were soft instruments to reach out to people.

In times of great humanitarian crises fuelled by war, cruelty, trafficking, social injustice and poverty, culture is the best way to spread the message of love and purity as well as to touch the mind of the masses and develop a sense of healthy life.

It was, while watching a performance by a group of young dancers—all direct or indirectly victims of sex trafficking and children of prostituted women, that I started thinking about people in a new way. These children learnt the idiom of dance from their teacher—the celebrated dancer, Dipanwita Roy. She also gave us evidence of their tremendous joy of living.

This was my first encounter with the organization “Apne Aap Women Worldwide” under whose aegis the children thrived, and with the founder Prof. Ruchira Gupta. She earned my admiration for having worked relentlessly against trafficking through out the world. I was greatly impressed to see the four centres in Kolkata—Sastitala (main centre), Munshigunj, Hastings and Sonagachi.

My responsibility is to assist the girls from the marginalized community to get admission in schools.

Children of these red light areas were getting an opportunity to lead a decent life by attending educational classes at Apne Aap centres and then being admitted to nearby schools. Many students have been settled in different Ram Krishna Mission’s residential institutions

like Barasat, Uttarpara, Jairambati, Dipa and Barrackpore.

Girls also receive dance and Computer training. It is lovely to watch the bright young souls enjoying their dance and drawing classes.

Apne Aap also has a very meaningful division of sanitary napkin production. Girls and young women earn from the proceeds of sale.

While they are thus occupied, their mothers make supplementary incomes by making jute bags, petticoats etc. Their day is livened up by a happy lunch served by the kitchen for the children and youngsters from all the divisions.

Their acceptance into mainstream society should be our objective always. The joy I derived from looking after all these divisions is that I become a part of their lives. What better reward can one expect in this complicated world?

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Did You Know?

In India:

- There are 2.3 million women and girls in prostitution
- A quarter of 2.3 million are under the age of 18
- There are 1,000 red-light areas

Globally:

- About 58 % of all cases of trafficking detected globally are purpose of sexual exploitation
- About 75 % of all trafficking victims detected globally are women and girls
- About 20.9 million adults and children are bought and sold for commercial exploitation
- About 1 in 10 men in the world have bought commercial sex

My First Day at Apne Aap

— Prachi

New Delhi: My name is Prachi. The first day at the organization- was a day well spent.

Before joining the organization, I had heard a lot about it and its initiatives that is why, the expectations and the excitement to come here and help with the cause were both very high.

Apne Aap, an anti-sex trafficking organisation has reached out to many in need and helped them out and has been recognized for its effort.

So, when I heard my friend interning with the organization and that the position was open, I didn't hesitate to contact Apne Aap myself.

On my first day, I was extremely excited and a bit nervous. I was greeted by the receptionist with a warm smile as I took in the area which was artfully styled reflecting the cause Apne Aap promotes.

I was informed about the daily activities in the office and what assistance I could provide, given my fashion and design related background. **I saw some of the craft-work that the women and the children who are supported by Apne Aap had made. The products varied from, scarfs, quilts, jute bags, etc. I could see the effort and time that they all put in to make these products.**

Finally, I was assigned to help out the girls coming to the head office, with their holiday home work and other activities, which includes teaching English.

All of them were of very different nature from each other. Yet the will to learn and achieve something was equally strong. Before, proceeding with studies we all

had an introduction round to know each other better.

One of them was in class 5th and was studying in a boarding school, which the support apne aap provided, while the other two girls studied in government schools and were in class 4th. Sunaina and Kareena, who study in government school, were very curious and thrilled when they came to know that I would be teaching them English. I helped out Aneesha completing her holiday homework.

As the hour went on with soft giggles and smiles, I taught them the basics of English and guided Aneesha when she needed help. They actively participated in every little game I played with them in order to help them understand English better. Finally, after more than an hour of study, we had a brief recreational jam session, where the girls laughed and danced from one hit number to another.

Being there, watching them be so happy and carefree, and knowing the girl liked me, was an absolute delight. Over the past few hours, the girls and I bonded pretty fast.

They were curious to know about me and had expressed their likeness for me, pretty straight. **Sometimes, even small thing can cause a whirlwind of emotions and make you feel proud and happy, knowing that the girls really liked me gave me that feeling.**

That was how my day ended, with a feeling of self-accomplishment and satisfaction. And I left for the day, wondering how I can contribute keeping in mind, the best interest of the girls.

Apne Aap's Activities in June

Kolkata:

- 1) Legal Awareness session on Trafficking.
- 2) Kushal Bhanduri (Chairman Cum Managing Director) and R.C.Saboo (Consultant) from National Jute Manufactures Corporation Ltd , Government of India visited Apne Aap Center.
- 3) Rosemaria Etille and Isha Mathore from German Consulate visited apne aap centre and interacted with the women and girls.
- 4) Legal session on domestic violence.
- 5) Community awareness session on dowry and it's prevention.
- 6) Exposure cum learning tour to Deepika Mission NGO, Barasat.
- 7) Participated in an exhibition at Lion's International Club, Salt Lake.

New Delhi:

1. Visit to the National Rail Museum
2. Discussion on amendments to Child Labour Act

Apne Aap Comic Super hero, Priya in New York

— Alison Adams

New York: Apne Aap's Indian female comic super-hero, Priya, a rape survivor

who tackles the problem of sexual violence in India and around the world, was presented to New York City in an augmented reality exhibition at City Lore Gallery. The exhibition will conclude in October end in New York.

The experience was first of its kind. The entire gallery was turned into a walk-in comic book where audiences can unlock special animation, videos, real-life stories, and bring other interactive elements to life via a mobile visual discovery platform and mobile app.

The opening reception was part of PEN World Voices Festival. Also, a large colorful augmented reality mural from the comic book was on display at the Tribeca Film Festival.

The comic, designed by Dan Goldman and conceived by Ram Devinini is partnering with Apne Aap Women Worldwide to educate youth in and out of schools about rape and sexual violence.

Apne Aap has already distributed Priya's Shakti and initiated conversations on sexual violence with boys and girls using Priya as a role model in four schools in Kolkata and Delhi.

"The impact of Priya has been to de-stigmatize a rape survivor and show her as a strong female. It has also

been possible to talk to 12 year old boys and girls about rape because of the comic. We would love to take it to every school in every district of India," " said Apne Aap Founder Ruchira Gupta

"Stories like Priya's are in the news often these days, not just in India but in all nations and online," said artist Dan Goldman. With *Priya's Shakti* came the chance to put a symbolic face to this issue and enlighten all genders about sexual violence, and there's no format better suited to this than the instantly accessible medium of comics.

The comic book is free worldwide in every digital format and downloadable on the project's website and at ComiXology and BitTorrent. **The printed comics will be available at the comic book convention in Hindi and English, but eventually will be translated into other languages.** Apne Aap has launched Priya's Shakti as part of its Last Girl March.

'The Last Girl' is a poor, female, a teenage and low caste, who is raped for prostitution, when she goes to school or boards the school or go to a job or a movie. She is invisible and not included in any government or international laws and policies.

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An education trip to Jharkhand

— By *Soni Kumari/ as dictated to Praveen Kumar*

Bihar: My name is Soni Kumari and I am 13-year-old. I am from the village Lahsanganj, Halhalia Panchayat near Forbesganj. I stay in Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya, Simraha, which is supported by Apne Aap Women Worldwide since 2012.

I stay at the hostel and right now, I am studying in class VIII in the Middle School, Simraha. My father's name is Kripanand Pashwan and my mother's name is Guddi Devi. I, with my all classmates, went on an educational tour to Deoghar, Jharkhand with our teacher Noorani Khatoon, cook Bibi Sabira and peon Sanjay Ray. It was organized by Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan, Araria (Bihar). A bus was arranged by the school administration for the trip.

We all started our journey at 7 am in the morning for Deoghar. First we reached Purnea and had a light breakfast. After about half an hour, we started our journey and reached Bhagalpur at about 11.30 am. There we saw the holy river Ganga and crossed the river through the famous Vikram Shila Setu. We saw many dolphins in the river. Our teacher told us that dolphin are on the verge of extinction and the Government has banned hunting of dolphins, announcing all the areas in and around river Ganga as a dolphin protected area. After crossing Bhagalpur, we reached Sultanganj.

There we took a dip in the holy river Ganga. It was rejuvenating. We again started our journey for Deoghar. The children enjoyed and played games like antakshari, songs and jokes during the journey.

We reached Deoghar at 5pm in the evening. I was very tired after the long journey and then we went to the Hotel to stay for the night. There were five rooms booked for us by the school authorities. We took our dinner and slept off early.

It was a day full of learning and enjoyment. Next day, we visited the famous Lord Shiva temple. We saw many Statues of Gods and Goddess there. There was a river called Shiv Ganga where we saw colourful fishes

We visited many temples that day. Such as, Nawlakha Mandir, Nandan Pahar, Tapovan, Satsang Bhawan, Amansinghai.

After an eventful day, we left for our hostel in the early afternoon and reached the next day. It was a memorable journey. I am really thankful to Apne Aap and the school administration for this unforgettable trip.

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Eventually, the girls started coming. I trained them. Now we get orders from ITC. And fortunately, we have managed to deliver. Also, we received an order from Siliguri to make 1,500 pieces. It was delivered dutifully. We give Lata masi (aunty) 40 packets every month.

We love this business. The demand for our products is increasing every passing days. Our girls are getting work. They are receiving stipend amount from it. **And this stipend is used by the girls to pay for their education. Isn't it good to empower oneself?**

We are 13 girls running this business. We are happy that our unit has more producers. All are committed with their work. They are thrilled to receive the stipend every month. Most girls want the production to increase. We want orders to keep coming in. Simultaneously, our earning will also increase.

During our visit to the red light areas to sell condoms we send out a message to the girls that we are in the business of making and selling sanitary napkins. Every girl needs pads. There is nothing to be ashamed of or to hide about it. Girls do get menstruation, monthly. It is part of our biological and physical changes. Most of the

girls use dirty cloth during their Periods. **Lots of hygiene problem arises out of it. Some of the women and girls say they cannot afford the pads. We have an advantage in this, as our unit produces good quality pads at low cost.** You can come and see it at our Centre. We sell three pads for ten rupees. Are we not able to spend Rs 30 for our health?

A doctor charges more when we get infection. There is no shame in having periods. All the girls in the group order pads from our unit. Also, we are planning to put up stalls in low-income and slum schools. We intend to spread awareness about the use of sanitary napkins. **We are working hard, earning, studying from our income and using the pads.** These pads are our stepping stone to a better future.

Every girl needs pads. There is nothing to be ashamed of or to hide about it. Girls do get menstruation, monthly. It is part of our biological and physical changes. Most of the girls use dirty clothes during their Periods.

The World Outside

—By Mamta

New Delhi:

Girls from Dharampura were taken for a educational trip to The National Railway Museum in Delhi.



"There were so many old trains, we took a ride on one of them, we all really enjoyed it.. It was a very big museum, I liked the red train best .. there was steam coming out of the engine.. there were many engines of diff colours and sizes.." said Sunaina, one of the beneficiaries from Dharampura.

Continued from page 1

Mamta and Shashibala didi works with Apne Aap. They are from our locality. Both didi took us to the Railway Museum last Friday. **We finally rode a real train that took us through jungles and caves created for this ride.** There were waters that were dancing with music. Shashi di told us that it is called Musical Fountain.

Real smoke came from the engine. We stopped at small stations. It was such fun to sit by the window and look outside and feel the air on our face. In metro, there are many people in a single coach. But in this train, we had one seat for each of us.

We saw what railway tracks look like. We saw what a railway engine looks like. We saw real trains from all over the world. We saw where they keep the coal.

The Museum had two sections; indoors and outdoors.

The Indoor section had photographs of old railway engines and buggies and the outdoors section had real railway engines. And we rode one!

We saw old carriages and also photographs of carriages from all over the world. We were very thrilled to see the train that goes through the jungles of Africa. We saw photos of trains all over India. We saw how trains run, how coal is burnt and the fuel releases the stem to push the engine that pulls the coach.

We have learnt a lot of things that day. **We have understood how rail has helped people travel faster and how it has helped people from one place to connect to people from another place in a very short time. It has opened up the world before them. We want to sit on a train and travel the whole world. We want to be free.**

Poems

My dream will never die

I want to fly in the sky
Though I have no wings,
I want to go to school
Though nobody gives supports me.
My brother goes to school
I go to work;
Feeling restless.
I struggle to overcome my condition
My dream will never die

Name– Radha Prasad
Area: Kolkata

Sun and Moon

Who will show me way
In dark night
If there is no sunshine
In the day
Who will fill our thirst?
If there is no clean water
If there are no green trees
How will we find our green
World to survive?

Name– Amisha Gupta
Area: Kolkata



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