



RED LIGHT DESPATCH

VOLUME VIII, ISSUE 11

NOVEMBER, 2016

DELHI, KOLKATA, MUMBAI AND FORBESGANJ (BIHAR)

My Dream To become a teacher -Icha

Delhi: My name is Icha. I am aged 8 and living in Dharam-pura, Najafgarh. I belong to the Singhi caste. Earlier, I used to stay at home, like the other children of my caste, because majority of the Singhi children still don't go to schools. Instead, they help their parents to earn money for their survival. My dream is to become a teacher. My mother died two years ago. Since then, my father takes care of me and my four sisters. I am the second youngest. My older sister goes to school, while the rest of us stay at home. This year, things changed, Apne Aap staff enrolled me in class I in a Primary School nearby. Initially, I was reluctant because I am poor, and I thought the other children at school might laugh at me. But when I attended the classes for a few days, I liked everyone. The teachers were very supportive and I was able to make new friends. Since my mom's death, getting cooked food, to eat on time, was also a dream for me. In my school, we get mid-day meals with different food items. My teacher loves everyone equally. I want to be like her when I grow up, wearing suit and sandals to school. If I am able to fulfill my dream of becoming a teacher, I will teach all children of my community and won't let them work as rag pickers, cobblers or anything else. I will teach them to stand on their own feet and earn for themselves and their families.

Mahila Mandal member adopts child of a trafficked woman

— By Roshan Khatoon/ as dictated to Mohd Kalam

Bihar: My name is Roshan Khatoon. I am 32-year-old. I have joined Apne Aap women group (self empowered group) in 2009. Later, I learnt sewing and stitching at Apne Aap centre. During this period, I met Roji Khatoon who was trafficked earlier then married with a boy living in the red-light area.

Roji has learnt sewing and stitching very well and started work with IGP based organization. Where she earned some money but that amount was not enough to fulfill her basic needs. Her husband was jobless and depending on pimping work from the red-light area. Roji's husband also forced her into prostitution.

One day Roji had shared her problems with me. Then, she requested me to help her escape from her hus-

band and provide shelter.

Earlier, I was married too. But, I was tired of regular beating and decided to quit this kind of life and never to marry again. Hence, I stayed alone. I gladly welcomed Roji to shift at my house. My neighbor protested against my decision to offer shelter to her, as she is from redlight district.

However, we requested others to be sensitive towards her need as Roji needed to escaped from the brutality of her husband and she was also pregnant. They refused to listen to me.

I had to stand for her safety.

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Sit-in-circle with the mother of Munshiganj redlight area

— Shanti Das/ as dictated to Laboni Basu

Kolkata: I am Shanti Das, aged 40 years. I had come originally from Basirhat, Kolkata. I was cheated and sold in Munshiganj by one of my nearest relative. I have spent my 20 years in Munshiganj. I am one of the active member of Apne Aap.

I would like to attend your meeting because I am able to express my feelings and observation by heart. By attending the meeting during the discussions I am able to go outside more often than usual days before. My life is nothing if not restrictions. **I am encouraged to learn new things and also educate others too.**

Even they will be able to learn something from it.

The many sit-in circle discussion

have made me realised that I, as a human being, have every right to share my views with others. And by attending such workshops on a regular basis, I have observed a boost in my level of self-confidence. **The sisters working in the organisation understands our pain and sufferings. Ruchira di has given me a new life.**

I attend such meetings twice a month in Munshiganj Centre. Earlier, I was very unhappy as I was deprived from other possible prospects in my life.

(Continued on page 7)

Op-Ed— Interview with Ruchira Gupta by the Urban Democracy Lab

Ruchira Gupta is a feminist campaigner, writer, visiting professor at New York University, adviser to the UN, and founder of Indian anti-sex trafficking organisation Apne Aap Worldwide. This interview was published in the Urban Democracy Lab.

Your organization, [Apne Aap](#), aims to end sex trafficking. What broad strategies do you feel are necessary to move in the direction of meeting this goal?

[We focus on] the empowerment of girls and women who are the most vulnerable to trafficking, which is women suffering from multiple oppressions or intersectionalities. In India, they are poor, female, teenagers—and low-caste. In America, they are poor, and female, and teenagers — black or Native American. So we think that by organizing women and girls in collectives — small groups known as *mandalas*, or circles — they get the strength to fight against all the injustices imposed on them. So, that is our first strategy. The second strategy is that we make sure that the women and girls and their groups have a safe space to meet in. Safe space is a very integral part of our strategy, so that they [the women and girls] have a place where they can share stories, cry, and laugh together, and know that it's not the place of exploitation. It has to be within walkable distance from wherever they are so they can go to it, and they know psychologically it exists. It does not have to be fancy; it can be a mud hut with a straw mat on the floor, but to them it has to mean that it's safe.

The other strategy is that most of the girls and women are undocumented either because they come from the poorest of poor communities and they're low caste, or black, or Native American, or migrants, or refugees—and these are the vulnerabilities that traffickers or recruiters often take advantage of. So, one of our strategies is to make sure that we teach the women political skills to campaign for these documents. Our approach is a very rights-based approach. It's a political approach, and it's based on linking to anti-poverty programs as well as addressing the demand. We see the demand of sex trafficking as the root cause for prostitution, because, on one hand, we see prostitution as an absence of choice, but based on two systems—supply and demand.

In urban areas, because there is an increased population size as compared to rural areas, it would seem that there is generally more of a demand for prostitution. Would you say this is true?

I would totally say that urban areas have more demand for prostitution for two reasons—one is that men are living in groups, and they tend to influence each other so what happens is that pimps often show up in these areas where men are living in groups to entice them to

come to the red light districts to buy girls. The other is that urban cultures are promoting a notion of masculinity which is based on domination and violence against women. It's being promoted. So, many men who are migrating to cities are feeling very dislocated from their roots, they're not able to earn enough, they see women in jobs and they feel these jobs are being taken away by the women. There's a misogyny which is being bred in urban places, and that is coming out in all kinds of ways, including buying girls for sex. So, there is definitely a bigger demand for buying sex in urban areas than in rural areas, which is not to say that there is no demand in rural areas. There is a demand in rural areas too.

How can people learn more about Apne Aap and contribute more to efforts to end sex trafficking and support *The Last Girl*? How can people engage in culture change regarding sex and masculinity?

I would like people to like us on [Facebook](#), as well as follow us on [Twitter](#) because we constantly update different campaigns and interventions that we want people to join in over there. The other is to go to our [website](#). We have some resources for people who want to learn. There is a video called *Cool Men Don't Buy Sex*. They could show that on their campuses, as well as videos about *The Last Girl*. We have a PayPal donation system set up on our website, so we seek funds urgently, all the time, and we also want people to join our latest campaign against the legalization of child labor in India through the new child labor law. The campaign is on [Change.org](#). We want people to [sign that petition](#) to the Prime Minister and Chief Justice of India, asking them to not allow the legalizing of child labor, which is what the new law in India has done. In terms of the campaign on *Cool Men Don't Buy Sex*, we are planning to create PSAs and put them out on TV channels and also to put them out on YouTube and to put it on different social media and also regular media all over the world, so if anyone wants to make a video around the theme of *Cool Men Don't Buy Sex*, or take photographs around that theme, we would welcome it. Send us an email, create the content; we will upload it and share it. We would also like, if there's a community of bloggers out there, we would like bloggers to blog about what do they think a cool man does? What do cool men do as opposed to what cool men don't do? So we would love for people to put up ten things cool men do versus ten things cool men don't do to just generate the conversation all the time. We also have videos and factsheets [on our website]. I would encourage people to organize small salons and to show our videos and share the factsheets. Conversations really help.

Diary of a Social Worker— *Monika*

Delhi: My name is Monika. I belong to Singhi caste and live in Sapera Basti of Najafgarh. In my family, we are total of five members-- my husband is a homeopathy doctor, my two sons study in 9th standard and the other in 7th standard in a government run school. My youngest daughter studies in 5th standard at nearby MCD Primary school. I too work as a toy seller. I make toys at night and in morning sell them around religious places to earn few rupee notes.

In our caste, not many are encouraged to pursue education. Instead, we start working at a very tender age. When my eldest son was born, I wanted to give him good education so that he would be capable enough taking care of himself in life. I faced challenges from our relatives and neighbours who wanted my son to continue the caste-based occupation.

I assert again, in Singhi community, children are not encouraged to go to schools. They start working from the age of 7-8 years. Generally, boys work as cobblers, rag pickers and in worse cases situations turn them into a criminal. On the hand, girls start selling toys or start picking rags. These little girls usually pick rags before they get married when they are very young. They sell the toys to save enough marriage for their marriage.

My daughter is in 5th standard, in a MCD Primary school. I have already started getting marriage proposals for her. I consulted with Apne Aap staff in this matter. Khushboo di advised me not to get my daughter married off until and unless she completes and is financially independent.

My daughter is very intelligent. In school, all teachers and principal appreciates her and encourage her to study more. It was my dream to do something well in life but I never got the chance. I was married off early and never got the chance to enter the gates of school. **I want my daughter to fulfil her dreams and my dream too. I am determined to give the best education to my daughter and not get her**

married till the time she don't stand on her own feet.

Apne Aap has been working with our community members since seven years and recently they adopted MCD Primary school where my daughter is enrolled. My daughter tells me often about various activities, workshops, trainings etc which is organised in school by Apne Aap staff.

In October, my daughter was enrolled for Robotics training with the help of Apne Aap. Initially, I didn't want to send my daughter. I have never sent her far from our community. But a sister from Apne Aap convinced me that there are more children who participating from other community to attend these training sessions and it is a great opportunity for my daughter to enhance her skills. Thus, I sent my daughter. After the first day of training, **When my daughter came back she was so happy that I can't express. She didn't sleep that night and shared each and every detail of that training with me.**

I am glad to be associated with Apne Aap who helps our children to fulfil their dreams and shares all important information related to new government schemes, hygiene and others with us.

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Prostituted women and nomadic tribes hit by demonetisation

— *Meena Khatoon/ as dictated to Mohd Kalam*

Bihar: My name is Meena Khatoon and I am 38-year-old. I have been living at Forbesganj red-light area since 25 years. I am still in prostitution. The sudden announcement of demonetization has greatly affected me and many of my friends.

It has practically increased the level of exploitation in our world. We live at red-light area where we are branded as a sex service provider. So, we don't have access to other kind of job opportunities. I have to survive. Apart from many other basic things, we need food to eat and take care of our health. It's very rare that you can find women and girls from redlight area having a bank account.

Most of the women in prostitution do not have access to their own earning. Their income is managed by brothel madams, pimps and her so-called husband or parents. Often, it is shown to the prostituted women that her earnings are used to buy her food, taking care of her health, dress, make-up, alcohol, gutkha and paying heavy amount to local police, goons etc. Finally, whatever is saved are taken by the husband/lover and parents.

This leaves us with nothing but only our body. After demonetization we are facing lots of problems. First, we can't live here without paying to brothel owners, pimps, local goons, and corrupt police officials. Which categorically means, I have to earn money to stay here. I have to entertain clients and the clients knowing our situation, takes advantage of our vulnerability by either negotiating or paying meager amount for sex.

There are many who even gave old currency. But, we had no option then to accept it. Later, the same amount was handed over to pimps and others to get it exchange for the new notes a half the rate.

The clients pay very less and we don't have the

bargaining power. Some women have even compromise their safety by succumbing to clients' demand of having sex without using condoms. We are in the situation where we left to entertain more clients for our survival.

Thus, this industry is still flourishing. It needs the involvement of trafficker, pimps and others in sex trade and they need money. These days there are many under-age teenage girls, owing to the clients demand in this trade. The customer always demands for young girls.

There are many other girls living in the vicinity of the redlight areas, but are not in prostitution. I fear for these girls. They are at high risk of being forced into prostitution.

Outsiders are aware of our conditions and also know that there are girls who are victims of repeated rape, but there is no action against the culprits. There is barely any police raids in this district, may be once or twice a year. There is no guarantee that the girls living in the periphery are safe anymore.

On top of that, demonetization happens, which has affected our life severely. It has increased the number of trafficking and rape of the women and girls. Now, women like us are even less in demand because of the young girls, who are forced in prostitution in lower rate. It deeply saddens me how sometimes aged women are forced to sleep with shop owners of tea, medicine, general store, betel etc for their daily needs. We are perpetually harassed and exploited.

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

Children's Day celebration at redlight district

— *Vijay Halder/ as dictated to Rachna Nayak*

Kolkata: My name is Vijay Halder and I am ten years old. My mother came from Bangladesh and her name is Baby Haldaris. I am living a wonderful life with her. In 2012, she admitted me in Apne Aap day care center, where they taught me how to read, how to write and many other interesting educative things, like drawing, painting, dancing, music and even primary computer education. Also with their help, I got admission in Oriental School, where I study now. I became really confident due to the proper guidance of Apne Aap's aunty. In Apne Aap's center we celebrated Children's Day in 14th of November. I have actively participated in that program. That day, Baby aunty told us the story about Nehru ji and his contribution towards the nation. According to Nehru ji, children are the future of our nation, and we have to work hard for our country; we have to be very responsible for our parents and society too. We also have to be conscious about our duties and responsibilities.

Nehru ji believed, children are blessed by God and conquer our hearts with their beautiful eyes, innocence and smiles. Children's Day is celebrated every year to pay tribute to the children all over the world, as they are considered the building blocks of the strong nation.

Although children are very small, they have the capability to change the nation in a positive way. They are the responsible citizens of tomorrow as the development of the country lies in their hands. Children's Day celebration also reminds us about their rights of which they are getting benefits or not. Children are leaders of tomorrow, so they need to get respect, special care and

protection from their parents, teachers and other members of the family.

I live in a place where almost every day I see many boys and girls suffering from various obstacles towards life. They have to face violence, ignorance, not getting opportunity of education, frustration, and are also treated very badly by their closest relatives. I would like to be a teacher and educate my society in my own way. I'm very much inspired by Nehru ji and his activities. I am living in dark here, one day I will end this by my own effort of education and kindness. I'm really thankful to Apne Aap, that always shows me a path of education, love and help.

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Join our campaign to [#QuitChildLabour](#). Sign the petition to revoke laws that enable [#intergenerational](#) prostitution <http://ow.ly/z2zH303xsS1>

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Write to us for any queries or comments at contact@apneaap.org
contact@apneaap.org



My First Day at Apne Aap

—Gazal Shekhawat

Delhi: My name is Gazal Shekhawat. When I was in 10th grade, I once made a list of things I wished to do in this lifetime. I had no idea or prediction on how to achieve them. Yet, a point that I had written down on a simple piece of paper was ‘Meet Ruchira Gupta’. Then I scratched it to write ‘Work in a way that empowers the marginalised in red light areas’. I did so because after reading about Apne Aap and Ruchira di’s work for years, I felt that meeting the woman I’ve looked up to growing up should only be the beginning.

Now I am 20-year-old, studying journalism at Symbiosis Centre for Media and Communication, Pune. And what I once thought to be a far-fetched dream is a reality. I started my internship at Apne Aap’s Delhi office in November this year and since then I’ve only been enlightened and inspired.

From my very first day itself I was introduced to some of very kind people. Mamta di, Manish bhaiya and Sanjay bhaiya made me feel welcome as a new comer at the office and took great care of me. I also got the opportunity to work with Juanita di, who is encouraging and charismatic, Nana di and Khushboo di, who have truly treated me as a younger sister I’ve shared laughs and honest conversations with them and Livia, a Brazilian volunteer who has been open to all experiences our country has to offer.

During my internship, I’ve edited many articles for the

red light despatch and writing for it only makes me feel honoured to share the pages with the brave young girls who set example for all humans around. **I also visited Najafgarh and what felt like the cruellest occurrence was how girls have been made to marry at the same age I was, when I was in studying in 10th grade. Every human deserves to experience this world without others claiming ownership over her or him.**

I’ve also known Tinku Di, who has been a motherly figure throughout, I cannot emphasise enough on the kindness the people behind Apne Aap, not just because they work for an NGO but also in all other parts of their lives, they are people who reach out. Finally, I’ve been able to meet Ruchira di, and on hearing her talk about the Last Girl, I am only convinced that in my life and in the eyes of the society, she must come first, she must be freed from all oppression or else all our claims as humans of being an evolved species remain pointless.

So from now on, each time I feel scared of the struggles ahead of me, or brought down because of my gender, I’ll simply hear voices of the last girls in the Redlight Despatch monthly newsletter, for they give me and so many others immense courage.

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Finally, the neighbours left us with a warning saying if we tried to disturb the harmony of the colony then they will give a police complaint. Later, Roji gave birth to a baby girl.

Sadly, in just some months after the delivery, she secretly got married to a boy from Uttar Pradesh. She ran away with that boy without taking her child. We tried to find her, but couldn’t. It was a tragedy. There were people from the redlight, who was trying to take the girl child claiming the legal guardian of the girl was her father. On our part, knowing what they are planning to with the girl, we said that Roji already got separated from her husband. **Also, the child was not safe growing up in a redlight area. Finally, we took Apne Aap’s support to protect the new born child.**

Currently, the child is living with me. I am very worried for Roji. I am not sure whether she is coming back or not. I feel like she is in great danger. I can’t even help her. I don’t know what is going to happen to me in

future, but I am going to protect this child.

I have decided that I will keep her and educate her. She has even started calling me ‘Mama’. I can’t express the happiness in words. **I feel content and play with Mehar, my child and I never keep her alone at my home. While I go out for my duty then I keep her with me. I have a dream to make Mehar a strong and independent woman.** There are some people in the community and my relatives have told me that I am doing a wrong thing by adopting her. **Their reason: her mother was a prostitute. I told them that the child will get higher education and become an independent woman.**

I have opened an account in post office for Maher. I was thrilled to have found Mehar name in passbook. I deposit Rs 500/monthly in Mehar’s account. I am also thinking, when she turns 10 years then I will enroll her in Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya.

The World Outside

— *Chandra Das/as dictated to Sahana Dasgupta*

Kolkata: My name is Chandra Das, daughter of Sumita Das. I used to live in Sonagachi with my mother. When I was six-year-old, a member from Apne Aap Women Worldwide approach my mother asking her to admit me in a boarding school. Currently, I got the chance to get admitted in RKVM boarding school.

During my initial days in the residential school, I used to miss my mother a lot. But my warden and others around helped us to slowly forget about our difficult life in the redlight district. Our morning in the hostel starts with a prayer and then timings for study. We finish our breakfast by 9: 30 am and leave for the school.

In evening, we come back to the hostel and change into our casual dress and have some food. **Later, we have a break of sometime in which we are allowed to play with our friends. I like this period. I feel free with no restrictions and get time to express ourselves. I often wish they extend this time from one hour to two hours.** In the evening, we sit around for prayers.

Later, the teachers help us to complete our homework. After the evening study time, we take our dinner and then watch some educative channels before going to bed

I like my life in hostel. Each one of us has a separate

bed for themselves, study table and wardrobe to keep our clothes. **When we fall sick, the hostel warden call the doctor for our check up, we get treated and get the medicine on time. I barely get such care and protection when at home.** I feel very proud to be part of Apne Aap family, who helps children like us to get a quality education.

Now, I dream for a better life. I will be a doctor in future and I will serve the community where my mother's stays. I will become independent and stand on my own feet. I will rent a house in some good locality and will take my mother away from here. We can stay happily in the new house.

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I also get information regarding how to open Aadhar Card, bank accounts and to get other relevant documents from this progressive meeting. **I received primary and referral medical supportive information and help from**

Apne Aap.

Some days, the organisation takes initiative of showing us some educational and meaningful movies in this center and this will be followed by a discussion.

The programme offers a platform where I can express and give my analytical views and opinion on varied subjects.

There are always some new concepts to discuss about. This time it was based on resource mobilisation, which gives me satisfaction. It never fails to make me think deeper and deeper. The outcomes of the sit-in circle always leave me with a very positive note.

I thank Apne Aap staff, Ruchira di and the other mothers from the bot-

tom of my heart. It is not easy to talk about your pain and struggle so openly. But, when surrounded by them I feel like I am not alone and there is someone listening to me.

Many of the mothers were able to admit their children in school because of Apne Aap's assistance.

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Poems

The Baby's Dance

Dance, little baby, dance up high,
Never mind baby, mother is by;
Crow and caper, caper and crow,
There little baby, there you go:
Up to the ceiling, down to the ground,
Backwards and forwards, round and round.
Then dance, little baby, and mother shall sing,
With the merry gay coral, ding, ding, a-ding,

Name– Preeti Kumari

Class: VII

Area: KGBV, Simraha

Twinkle twinkle little star

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are!
Up above the world so high,
Like a diamond in the sky.
In the dark blue sky you keep,
And often through my curtains peep,
For you never shut your eye,
Till the sun is in the sky.
As your bright and tiny spark,
Lights the traveler in the dark-
Though I know not what you are,
Twinkle, twinkle, little star.

Name– Ritu Kumari

Class– VIII

Area: KGBV, Simraha



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Red Light Despatch

Editor: Ruchira Gupta

Editorial team: Taw Nana

Publisher: Apne Aap Women Worldwide

RNI Number: DELMUL/2008/27727

Printer: India Enterprises, New Delhi