



RED LIGHT DESPATCH

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DELHI, KOLKATA, MUMBAI AND FORBESGANJ (BIHAR)

My Dream

To become a doctor

-Mariam Ansari, aged 5

Kolkata: My name is Mariam Ansari. I am five-year-old. I live in Babu Bazar with my sweet & small family. My father is a decent tailor. My mother is a home maker. She helps my father with stitching at times.

I am a student of Malvi Bidiyaloy School. I love my mother and grandfather. With love, people call me Nahid. It means water goddess. I am loved by everyone at home and even by my teachers at school. I feel like a lucky person.

I learned basic education from Apne Aap Center. I go to Shashtitala office every morning and by afternoon I return home.

Every child has a dream. I also have a dream. I aspire to become a respected doctor in Kolkata. Earlier, my mother had a bad accident and the doctor had completed the operation successfully. Still, my mother suffers from leg pain. I feel bad for her.

I give medicine to my mother. Even my grandfather is suffering from lots of health problem; sugar and blood pressure. I want to be a good doctor. So that I can treat poor people without charging any money from them. I don't wish to see any mother in pain. I can't stop myself from crying when I see my mother's pain. I love my mother. I always pray to God to heal my mother's wound.

Every doctor should treat poor people for free of cost. I think doctor is a representative of God. He can save someone.

I would like to thank Apne Aap for supporting me. When I become a doctor, I will treat Apne Aap's community people for free of cost.

Liquor ban in Bihar brings smiles on women's face

— By Raso Devi/ as dictated to Mohd Kalam

Bihar: My name is Raso Devi, I live north of Rampur. I have faced a lot of trouble during my life. My husband is an alcoholic. He earns around Rs. 250 to Rs. 300 per day. I have five children; three daughters and two sons. My mother in-law and father in-law are suffering from chronic diseases.

My entire family lives off my husband's income. He spends most of his income on alcohol. Only Rs. 50 to Rs. 100 would be spent on food and other expenditures.

It was distressing for the whole family. Like a poison, killing us slowly. When I would ask him, that why was such a small amount of money being spent on ration, he would reply rudely and start yelling at me and my children. Some days, he would even

beat me and my children.

Now, my bad days are over, all thanks to our Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, who banned liquor in Bihar. My life has totally changed. I feel more relaxed now, as my children get food and my in-laws are getting their medicines. These days my husband gives me all the money he earns daily. He takes money from me if required. He has become kinder and sweeter to the children and other family members.

Surprisingly, he has even built good relation with the neighbors. I am saving money for my children's future. This seems like a reality all because of the alcohol banned.

(Continued on page 6)

A youth leader challenge adversity and get certificate from Seagull Publishing Course

— Uma Das/ as dictated to Sangeeta Singh

Kolkata: My name is Uma Das, I am 24-year-old. I live at Munshiganj redlight area in Kidderpore.

I joined Apna Aap Women Worldwide in the year 2004 as a student. Along with my education at Apne Aap I have learnt stitching, arts and crafts, drawing, computer, dance and many more extra - curricular activities. In 2011, I was selected as a Youth leader to work with the organization and am still working with them and have gained a lot of experience and knowledge. I have had crucial support from the organization at each and every phase of my life.

My entire life I have struggled with many things. When Tinku aunty and Ruchira aunty had suggested that I do

a Seagull publishing course. I was hesitant to join the course, but after persuasion and support from Apne Aap I decided to join. On January 6, 2016, I joined the Seagull Publishing Course at Hazra in Kolkata.

For the first two weeks the authorities of Seagull publishing course kept me under observation, as the course was to be taught in English, they wanted to test my command over the English language and my computer skills.

In the beginning of the course I was very confused and under confident.

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Op-Ed— Interview of Ruchira Gupta published in Scroll.in

Apne Aap Founder and activist Ruchira Gupta interviewed by Lisa McKean.

Let's start out with you describing your new book, *River of Flesh: The Prostituted Woman in Indian Short Fiction*, before going into the ideas behind bringing a volume like this to readers. Later in the interview we can talk about your first US launch that took place here in New York.

River of Flesh is a collection of 21 stories by modern Indian writers around one common theme – prostitution. Translated from 12 languages still commonly used, they span a century and a subcontinent, reflecting India's great experiment with modernity and diversity.

When I started collecting the stories I began to realise how unique this was. Many of these writers never met, did not speak the same language, had not read each other and yet felt the same way about the status of women and prostitution systems in our society.

The writers are obviously influenced by the same value system – a value system unleashed during India's struggle for Independence from British colonialism. Along with freedom from British Rule, the writers are challenging control of caste, class and gender hierarchies in all spheres. They are trying to empathise with the most disempowered or weakest human being they know – in this case the prostituted woman. Men are writing with insight on a woman's feelings, women are writing sensitively on men's feelings.

Kamleshwar, a man, writes in *River of Flesh* of a woman in a brothel who cannot stand the smell of her customer's feet, an occupational hazard that no one who was not prostituted could imagine, let alone a man. Manto, another male writer, imagines a prostituted woman's desire to sleep.

Manisha Kulshreshtha, a woman, writes of a mother who understands her son's anger that his mother is a nude model. The female writers even understand the loss of identity of the male buyer, pimps and Johns.

In Amrita Pritam's story *Shah Di Kanjari*, the kept woman and the wife strike a bond. Kamla Das, a woman writer famous for her erotic writing, depicts a male constable who buys a doll for the prostituted child and can no longer use her sexually when he sees her playing with the doll.

Some of the stories take place before the Partition of India and date to the 1930s; other stories are post-Partition. There is a story by Saadat Hasan Manto, one of India and Pakistan's most famous modern Urdu authors. Manto wrote extensively about prostituted women in Delhi, Bombay, and Lahore. He moved to Lahore after Partition, where he died before he turned 50. His customer travels to Lahore from Kolkata after the partition. Lahore looks different, shabbier and with more poor disenfranchised people – in this case a pimp and the woman he is prostituting.

In the Hindustani story, *A Prostitute's Letter* by Krishan Chander, a woman writes to Jinnah and Nehru on behalf of two girls – one Hindu and one Muslim – who ended up

homeless after the Partition and then in her brothel in Mumbai.

The stories in *River of Flesh* explore the futility of prostitution as a system for pulling women out of poverty and inequality. They also show with great empathy that women in prostitution are not crazy. The system is crazy.

How does *River of Flesh* relate to your work as a feminist and anti-trafficking activist? What are the ideas and motivations behind publishing it?

I need more support in the fight against trafficking and prostitution. I want to tip the balance. Just like people think it's not okay to buy and own a slave, I want people to think it's not okay to buy sex. When buying sex is no longer tolerated, the demand for the purchase of sex will end, which in turn will end prostitution and the trafficking of girls and woman.

One of the challenges I still face after 20 years working as an activist to end trafficking is that people don't realise the urgency. People don't realise the immensity either in terms of numbers or in terms of the depth of exploitation.

The view of prostitution is typically from the outside. People think it's about a poor person getting money for sex; some assume that prostitution is better than a bad marriage or even believe there's such a thing as a happy hooker. They don't know anything about the woman or the reality of her daily life.

The other challenge comes from those who accept the inevitability of women's unequal choices. They feel that prostitution is one choice, among other unequal choices like bad marriage, domestic servitude, rag picking, etc. that women can choose from. They think, given the alternatives, why not choose prostitution? They say there is agency within prostitution.

It's like saying a slave had agency and would not know what to do when free. In these conditions agency is so limited and so inherently harmful. If only people would understand that it is an unethical compromise to settle for agency on behalf of the exploited while we struggle for freedom for the privileged and entitled.

I wanted to compile these stories to challenge those who claim that women choose prostitution over marriage. They say prostitution allows women to choose who they will have sex with, when they have sex, and to control their own earnings. The women in the stories I have chosen cannot sleep when they want to, cannot eat when they want to, cannot turn away disease-ridden or even brutal customers.

Prostituted women do not control their earnings. The pimps and brothel managers control both them and their money.

As I communicate about trafficking and prostitution, I keep looking for ways to get under the skin of people to make them empathise. I'm an avid reader. The closest I came to understanding the prostituted woman before I began working in red light districts was through stories. They sparked an insight into a far-removed life. So I thought a collection of stories by writers that we know and respect would be a way to help people imagine and empathise with the absence of choices in the lives of these women.

Diary of a Social Worker

—Praveen Kumar

Bihar: My name is Praveen Kumar. I am an employee of Apne Aap Women Worldwide India trust, Forbesganj Bihar Centre. I have completed my Bachelor of Arts degree in History and later my post graduation, while working with Apne Aap. I am located here since February 2006.

After I joined Apne Aap, I started visiting the redlight areas and interacted with the girls and women there. I observed the vulnerability of women and children living in and periphery of the redlight areas and how they were systematically neglected by the society at large. I also noticed they have an extremely low self-esteem and hesitation while interacting with the outsiders.

Most of them were apprehensive, suspicious and even rude towards people who try to help them. I do not blame them for such a behaviour. They have been made to feel this way. All that they have been put through is inhumane.

The orientation in Apne Aap and knowledge sharing with the senior colleagues, working in the red light areas, made me realize how these women and children need a humane touch. I felt the need to bring them closer to us and integrate them in the mainstream society.

All this is possible by providing them equal opportunities, so they could leave their place of misery behind where they have been raped or tortured and face different kinds of humanly unthinkable violence. It helped a great deal to change my perception about social work at grass root level.

After 10 years of working with Apne Aap, it helped me grow both spiritually and professionally. It made me more sensitive towards situations in general and especially in this area of work. It helps in developing an understanding and makes it easier to reach out to the targeted communities.

In May 2007, when we started Kasturba Gandhi Valika Aavashiya Vidyalaya (KGBV), a program of central government run by the support of Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan in Bihar and our NGO have got the opportunity to run it by the district administration Araria in Forbesganj block. We got the opportunity and are using the hostel as a safe space for the girls who are at risk to be pushed into inter-generational prostitution.

With continuous effort, Apne Aap Bihar team succeeded in admitting 28 out of 50 vulnerable girls from the red light areas of Forbesganj and Khawaspur to KGBV residential school, who were at risk of being

prostituted, as part of their practiced tradition. This residential school is used as a safe space.

I have got the opportunity and appointed as an administrator of the Kasturba Gandhi Valika Aavashiya Vidyalaya and I try my best to run the program successfully and luckily we are doing great now with 100 girls in hostel from red-light areas and other marginalized communities.

In 2008, during Bihar flood, we started a relief work in 8 different mega camps by the support of Unicef wash program when the victims of flood stayed with their family for 4-5 months with the support of 30 volunteers. Later after the flood, the people returned back to their home and our volunteers returned with them and extended support in many ways.

We continued our work there for 3 years and formed 60 SEG group for the poor and vulnerable women and trained them in different ways, as a mission of our organization to empower women and girls. Basically, we work in the principle of 10 X 10 assets and try our best to make sure the girls accomplish all of it. We believe that if a woman received all the 10 assets she is empowered. Currently, from this area, most of the girls and women received 8- 10 assets. We are now verifying the asset holder data base of these areas. Two years ago we concluded our program there.

Now I am the office Manager and Administrator of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya, Simraha, run by our organization. I try my best to do justice for the girls from the redlight areas. After the association with Apne Aap, I know the actual meaning of social work and struggle hard for the betterment of my life too. Thanks Apne Aap Team and my seniors who support me to grow here and encourage me in many ways.

With continuous effort, Apne Aap Bihar team succeeded in admitting 28 out of 50 vulnerable girls from the red light areas of Forbesganj and Khawaspur to KGBV residential school, who were at risk of being prostituted, as part of their practiced tradition. This residential school is used as a safe space.

My First Day at Apne Aap

—*Laboni Basu*

Kolkata: I am Laboni Basu. I joined Apne Aap in Feb, 2016. My professional background is from a corporate sector. Besides social work, I also work as a guest faculty in different management colleges in Kolkata. My area of teaching is HR and marketing management. Coming from an altogether different background, now associating with a welfare organisation is helping me to discover myself more.

The last few decades, women empowerment has been discussed as a vital issue all over the world including India. Many national and international countries have pointed out in their reports that gender equality issue should be given utmost priority. In all this discussion, we learnt that how trafficking cases of girls and women are increasing every passing year. Human trafficking is the second largest business only next to trafficking of arms and ammunitions. It is saddening how it affects women's decision making and their very existence.

One of the main reasons of this factor is economic situation, non-availability of jobs, how poverty has made the women more vulnerable. Traffickers trapped vulnerable women by luring them with opportunities and drag them into crime networks through fake love and false promises for suitable working conditions and fair pay packages. Later, the victims find themselves in dark world, where they have to live like a dead soul. **Apne Aap is trying to empower and enlighten them to get back their hope and live life on its own term.**

Apne Aap is working for a noble cause. There is a poem of Rabindranath Tagore, where we can find “nari keapon bhaggo joy koribarkanonahidibeadhikar, hebidhata,(Oh God! Why not give women a chance to discover their own rights and existence).

I have noticed how ApneAap is continuously try-

ing to work for those women who have lost their hope due to living in inhumane conditions for such a long time. Apne Aap helps women to discover their existence with gratitude, faith and honour.

Every day, I am participating in various activities organised by Apne Aap, which makes me feel great as a woman and as a human being in general. I joined Apne-Aap as a programme officer. I visit Sonagachi red-light area where, I teaches students from the community, I visited St. Xavier for the admission of girls from Bihar, I met with film crew of “Love Sonia”. It was a wonderful experience.

In Apne Aap, everyday is like a new day for me. We organise work shop, we celebrate birthdays, and other achievements together. For instance, we celebrated when France passed a new law, which makes it an offence to pay for sex and shifts the punishment from prostitutes to clients. This campaign is a revolutionary movement, as the activists who hope it will help to fight against sex trafficking in a more organised way.

I also look after a very interesting work, to update the assets holder data base, in an organised manner and record the achievements of the beneficiaries. I meet several primary beneficiaries of ApneAap and noticed how the organisation has devoted their time and attention for the rights and livelihood for the most marginalised ones.

It is a wonderful opportunity to be working with an organisation like Apne Aap. I feel proud to be associated with it's humane work.

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

Students participates in a workshop on menstrual hygiene and practices

— *Balma/ as dictated to Khushboo Mishra*

Delhi: My name is Balma. I am 14-year- old and I live in Sapera Basti of Dharampura, Najafgarh. My family's financial condition is not good. We struggle on a daily basis, only to avail us with some food. The main reason being, we don't have fixed monthly income.

We battle everyday to survive extreme poverty and hunger. Whatever we earn today is by entertaining people through snake and monkey shows. Also, some days and some seasons we go from place to place to earn a living. At one point, life threw me at such a spot that I had to drop out from school, because of financial restraints and poor health condition of my late father. I was going through a dark phase in my life.

After the death of my father, I was staying back at home with my mother in Dharampura. I used to do house chores. I had no hope of going back to school. Then Shashibala di and Mamta di met me and after detailed talk, I was encouraged to continue my study. They got me admitted into 3rd standard of primary school. I felt thrilled. I also used to visit Head office at IIC where I learnt many useful things. I came to know that the world is so much bigger than outside my Sapera Basti.

Recently, I attended a workshop on menstrual hygiene and practices in my school organised by Apne Aap. This session was taken by Nur madam and Jennifer di.

They came from America. Nur madam was so beautiful and cheerful. She taught us many things about health and hygiene. We all were taught how to use pads instead of clothes during menstruation. Most of us were unaware about it.

There were few students who were not getting periods yet, even they learnt many beneficial things from this session. We also learnt how to use pads, how often should we change it, why is it beneficial than the cloth, how not to get infected in those days. It was a very informative session. I liked it alot. I get pads from my school itself and now I use it with confidence. From this session, I learnt the importance of cleanliness during menstruation for my body.

I learn many new things since I have re-joined the school. I feel very happy and safe. I have promised Shashi didi that I will study hard and become a successful person one day.

It was a very informative session. I liked it alot. I get pads from my school itself and now I use it with confidence. From this session, I learnt the importance of cleanliness during menstruation for my body.

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Participation of a Perna woman in a Meri Kahani Ankhon ki Zubani Project

—Seema/ as dictated to Khushboo Dasgupta

Delhi: My name is Seema. I am 32-year-old. I belong to Perna caste and live in Dharampura. I am married to Anuj and have four children; three sons and a daughter.

With the help of Apne Aap Women Worldwide, an organisation working towards ending sex-trafficking, my daughter Anisha is enrolled in Shanti Gyan International School. It is a boarding school. Now she is in her 5th standard.

Apne Aap has been working in Dharampura since many years. I have attended many open mike sessions, Mahila Mandal meetings with them. Shashibala and Mamta used to keep approaching us and inform about new government schemes and how to link to government Ids.

Few days back, Shashibala ji was accompanied by a lady. I became furious that I have to give interview and later I was informed that she is artist Vibha. She came to teach us the art of expression. I along with many other females of community attended various sessions provided by Vibha Madam. We use to cut pictures from magazines, paste it on sheets or use to make frames from those pieces of pictures.

I was able to express my thoughts, feelings, dreams, everything through the sessions. I got the opportunity to share what I deeply feel. My thoughts. My anguish. And after daily sessions, we all ladies would sit and talk about what they have made and how it helped

them. We would express our pleasure to each other and appreciate this workshop. I wish Vibha ji soon visit our community again to teach and share more art work.

Earlier, on initial days, I used to go to Apne Aap centre in community and I observed that they teach computer, tailoring, appliqué work, videography etc. I saw a chance for my daughter. I immediately talked to Shashibala ji to help my daughter achieve her dreams. I never got the opportunity to fulfil my own dreams but I wanted daughter's dream to come true, I decided. I wanted to give her dream a chance.

With the help of Apne Aap, my daughter learnt dance in Shyamak Davar Dance Academy and now is studying in a residential school with three other girls from our community.

I was able to express my thoughts, feelings, dreams, everything through the sessions. I got the opportunity to share what I deeply feel. My thoughts. My anguish.

Continued from page 1

My husband even contributes his time to help with children's homework and went to their school as well. He sleeps well at night.

Earlier, villagers used to pass comments on by saying, "Sharabi ki biwi aur Beti ka kya hoga" ("What will happen to the wife and children of the drunkard?"). **Now, they don't anymore. It's like a dream come true that my family is living in peace and has a plan for the future too. My husband even buys clothes for me and my children. I can't explain the joy that these changes have brought into my life.**

Earlier, with all the problems, I started suffering from stress. My children did not get good education and a friendly environment to grow in. They would always be scared and unhappy when my husband would return home at night. My eldest daughter also faced a lot of harassment from the villagers and neighbors. I am always worried about my daughter's marriage but due to the lack of money, as nobody was willing to marry my daughter.

Life has been a very painful experience for me. My husband doesn't bother about what people say about our family, if anybody would come into my house and suggest some way which would reduce my family's problems; my husband would disrespect them and throw them out of the house. Most of the neighbors treated us like an outcaste people. **I felt as though I was living in hell. Sometimes I even considered leaving the situation and taking my children away from my husband, but I have no skills or means to sustain myself. How could I have earned and taken care of my children?**

But, due to liquor banned in our state, life has shown me a happier side too. It has given me so much happiness. I still remember the fear I had for my children's future. Yesterday, my husband said "Chalo ab kahin ghumane chalet hain" (Come lets go out somewhere?). **I am so happy, this is the first time after our marriage that my husband has said something like this to me. I would really like to thank our CM.**

The World Outside

— *Payal Khatoon/ as dictated to Sahana Dasgupta*

Kolkata: I am Reena Khatoon. My nick name is Payal. I live in Sonagachi redlight area, Kolkata. There, I got in touch with Apne Aap, an organisation working toward ending sex-trafficking and empowering last of the last girls.

Some days when I feel down or directionless, Apne Aap staff members helped me during those days. I receive advice by didi and dada working there. I participate along with the staffs to different activities on gender issues. This helped me to ask myself about my life and gave me the liberty to think on how I ought to change my life positively. The life which I never chose, but which was forced upon me to live.

Also, I received legal assistance by Apne Aap which helped me to know about my Rights. Apne Aap admitted my child in RKVM. I am forever glad to the organisation that I cannot express in words.

I am going to tell one of the biggest experiences that Apne Aap provided me: One day, suddenly we came to know that a Bollywood star, Mrunal Thakur was coming to visit Apne Aap Sonagachi Centre and we were invited to meet them. In fact, we met Mrunal and Riya, they visited our brothel and spent the whole day with us. Within a span of few hours we became friends.

A month later we came to tell Apne Aap that I and Keya would have to travel to Mumbai and also play a part in the film "Love Soniya". Hence, we had to be there for one month.

It was a new and existing experience for me and Keya. Apne Aap arranged a trip to Bombay by flight. Both of

us were very excited and started discussing about our then impending journey and what would be the experience like. We started our journey from Sobhabajar with Sahana Di at about 1.30pm. We reached airport and started waiting for boarding. The time of departure was 4pm, but due to some problem, we had to wait four hours. At about 8pm we finally could board the plane.

There were so many thoughts coming in my mind. For instance, how can we fly so high? The aircraft took off. However, we could not see anything from the window as it was dark outside. Nevertheless, I was extremely happy; how could I not be, if I was going to Mumbai by plane? We reached Bombay by 11pm.

We are thankful to Tabrej Noorani and the team, who took care of us in Mumbai. Also, Apne App and Ruchira Di who gave us this chance.

I participate along with the staffs to different activities on gender issues. This helped me to ask myself about my life and gave me the liberty to think on how I ought to change my life positively. The life which I never chose, but which was forced upon me to live.

Continued from page 1

How was I suppose to complete the course when there were others in the class whose computer skills and English was much better than mine? It was the first time in my life that I had to learn something at the same level with graduate English medium school students.

After completion of two weeks of classes, the authorities were satisfied with my performance and believed that I would be able to cope up with the classes and understand the instructions. They allowed me to continue for a three month course. This course was related to the editing of text and graphics, font formatting and book cover page designing.

I had to choose any two modules and I chose Book Cover Page Designing and Editing. **I selected cover page designing, because it included picture graphics, objects with various multimedia and**

Photoshop editing software which I found very interestingly.

Initially, I had some problems in understanding what the teacher was saying but with the help of the assistant teacher I was able to overcome all the difficulties. Sitting in front of an Apple computer everyday for my classes, made me feel very happy.

After overcoming some hurdles and working hard I completed my course successfully (on 31st March, 2016) and got the prize and the certificate with a specialization in Design by Naveen Kishore, Managing Trustee of the Seagull Foundation of Arts.

Overall it was a great and learning experience for me and now I have the skill and knowledge to get a good and stable job to provide for me and my family. I am very happy to have done this course and would like to thank Apne App Women Worldwide for all their love and support.

Poems

Even we want to achieve something

Even we want to achieve something
Achieve something good in our lifetime
Even though achieving that seems to be a
farfetched goal
Even though it might be too difficult to achieve
Even we want to.....
Whatever has been taken from us taken has been
taken
Why can't we move forward in our life?
Even we want to.....
We wish to make our parents proud
We want to fly high up in the sky
Even we want to.....
In our lifetime.....
Even I have the zeal to move forward in life
And I will move forward in life
Even we want to.....
In our lifetime.....

Name– Jiyana Khatoun
Class: VIII
Area: Bihar

Love for a mother

Sometimes I feel sleepy mother,
Just studying, and If you were there mother
Than I would have asked you to make me a cup
of tea
I am tired of eating *rotis* of my hostel
If you were there mother, I could have asked you
to make me some *parathas*
The forced happiness that I portray
Would have been converted into an actual smile
if you were there mother
I have come a long way away from home
Mother if I hadn't cared about your dreams
I would have returned home a long time ago
I am thirsty to receive the ocean of your love
The love of motherhood in your *anchal*
There is no love or pity here
Just the talk of studying
I persuade my heart to
Stay away from my loved ones and live to fight
for my dreams, mother
Mother give me strength so that I don't fall weak

Name– Nisha Kumari
Class: VIII
Area: Bihar



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