



RED LIGHT DESPATCH

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DELHI, KOLKATA, AND FORBESGANJ (BIHAR)

My Dream

- Varsha

Najafgarh: My name is Varsha. I study in class IX. My school name is Shanti Gyan International School. I participate in all activities whatever there is. Last time, I participated in Netball National. I went to Chhatisgarh. I enjoyed myself very much. I am proud to have participated.

I did not win, but I am happy I took part in this activity. It was my first national competition. It was the first time I was going alone out of Delhi. It was a very nice experience for me.

There, I learnt how to play in a team. Many girls had come from other states. They all became good friends to me.

Thank you, Apne Aap for giving me this chance. You have admitted in this lovely school. This school is very good. Now, I will achieve my aim of whatever I want to become in life. I promise I will never break your trust.

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A Memorable Conference in Calcutta

- Juhi Khatoon/ as translated by Anwesha Basu

Kolkata: I was a part of the two day ‘Three-City Feminist Abolitionist International Consultations on Child Labor, Sex-Trafficking and the Last Girl’ held at the Presidency University of Calcutta. On the first day, I was looking forward to meet Ms. Catharine MacKinnon whom I lovingly call Catharine Aunty. I got the chance to meet many other influential and wonderful people over the course of the two days.

The best part of the conference for me was that I got the opportunity to speak in front of such a big audience. I was about to tell them about my journey and my childhood in Bihar. Being from the Nat community of Bihar, I never thought I would even be able to get proper education, lead a dignified life let alone attend a conference and talk on the stage. But I

have come a long way. It was slightly nerve-racking but I was proud of myself for being able to convey my story with the audience. I feel it was important that I shared my story because it is not only my story but also the story of every girl from my community. Due to the tortures inflicted on the girls of the Nat community for generations, it was assumed that a girl from the Nat Community is meant to be trafficked and meant to be pushed into the sex trade. Fatima di broke this change. Thanks to her efforts, today girls like me have stood up for our rights and have come so far.

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Apne Aap’s Three-City Conference

- Afzal Hakim

Delhi: ApneAap Women Worldwide organized its Three City Feminist Abolitionist International Consultations on Child Labour, Sex-Trafficking, SDG 5.2 and the Last Girl. This event was part of a three-city consultation on child labour and sex trafficking that Indian anti-sex trafficking organisation ApneAap Women Worldwide organised in Delhi (23 November), Kolkata (24 and 25 November) and Patna (1 December). Each consultation highlighted the vulnerabilities of marginalized girls - the ‘Last Girls’ - and advocated for India to uphold its constitutional and international obligations to them. The goal of the consultations was to create a campaign that would result in more awareness and

action for the Last Girl, who is the most vulnerable.

The Consultation in Delhi was a one-day event organised at C.D. Deshmukh Auditorium on 23rd November, 2017. It was flagged off with introductory remarks by Ruchira Gupta who is an Indian sex-trafficking abolitionist and the Founder of Apne Aap Women Worldwide. EU Delegation to India and Bhutan), Per-Anders Sunesson (Ambassador at Large for Combating Trafficking in Persons, Sweden) and many others.

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Op-Ed—Girls Don't Count

- *Samhita Barooah*

This article was first published in The Thumbprint—A Magazine from the East in December 2016.

“Why are you teaching girls computer scanning? They will move away soon once they are married. So what is the point of training or educating them?” said a visitor to Apne Aap Women Worldwide organisation at Forbesganj in Bihar while I was working on an archival work. The visitor was an educated man who was educating his own daughter in a technical institute in South India. Young girls are groomed to be married very early whether as a tradition or as a prestigious trend. So, the community at large perceives young girls as temporary citizens whose life revolves around gathering those skills which supplements their reproductive roles. The girls wanted to learn as much as they can while they are relatively free from their household chores and family restrictions. But the society watchdogs find them a waste of resources to be invested upon. Even when the country is moving towards skilling, digitising and educating the girl child to save her, there is a very regressive gravity which pulls the girls behind under the veils of protection, patriarchy and caste and class differentiation.

Apne Aap Women Worldwide has been resisting against the forces of inter-generational prostitution, structural caste based patriarchy and multiple vulnerabilities of the ‘last girls’ who does not count in the so called mainstream society. The adolescent girls does not count because their goal in life is marriage for every form of social, cultural, economic and political security while the boys are trained with all possible productive skills to counter every challenge in life. Such discrimination cripples young girls at an early age and from diverse fronts limiting their choices and enslaving them to the vagaries of life. Girls at any age, count only when they are contributing to their household chores.

Gender and disability has such discriminatory realities, I had only read about it but this time gathered some empirical evidence from the field to testify the assumptions. Here also girls don't count even when they are educated, willing to study and build their own dreams and careers irrespective of their economic status, disability and gender based alienation in the name of protection and tradition. and skills for the work of her choice.

Girls count a lot in the context of intergenerational

prostitution within some of the traditional communities which is a harsh reality. They are not counted for education, recreation or reflection but more so for cheap reproductive labour which in inhuman, indecent and intolerant. Such girls are rescued from the stronghold of prostitution by Apne Aap Women Worldwide and they are given a dignified threshold to make new beginnings. Such work does come with inherent threats, intolerance and constant challenges to re-position the last girl outside the legitimacy of all forms of social protection, civic amenities and social security from the authorities of power. The battle within the community is equally grave when some of the women survivors of prostitution and men from the community stood up against their own traditions apart from the agency which was constantly critiqued for being abolitionists. It becomes a matter of choice when one endorses a particular profession. But when a 9-year-old or 12-year-old girl is sold for flesh trade by her own family members, then such practices cannot provide girls with choices over their bodies, sexuality and livelihoods. It is a situation of women's excessive human rights violation with social, cultural, familial sanctions and inadequate legal, legislative and policy specific remedies to curb such practices.

Apne Aap Women Worldwide is forging this battle since 2002 when Ruchira Gupta, a daring journalist from Mumbai made a film titled, ‘The Selling of Innocents’ and wrote extensively about this practice. Her resistance started as an individual story which collected common stories from across the world and created the collective identity of Apne Aap Women Worldwide and their constant struggle for survival, resistance and rescue of women in prostitution continues till date. The context of last girl emerged from the Gandhian talisman of the last person who is most marginalised. Apne Aap Women Worldwide works with the vision of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King II to connect the world's two largest democracies for ensuring dignity, support and survival of every woman and girl whose birth defines her doom and positions her last in the ladder of life. Such work enabled me to reflect upon my own doubts and realise the intersections of race, gender, class, caste, religion and territory. I stand in solidarity with the efforts which ensures that every last girl counts.

Diary of a Social Worker

- Anwasha Basu

Kolkata: I got the opportunity to intern with Apne Aap Women Worldwide in Kolkata. This had been a dream of mine since I was school. Having received the opportunity, I knew it would be one of most impactful periods of my life. But little did I know that I would get an opportunity to meet such extraordinary women.

At the 'Three-City Feminist Abolitionist International Consultations on Child Labor, Sex-Trafficking and the Last Girl' held at the Presidency University of Calcutta, I got the chance to witness Soni Sori and Fatima Khatoon share their story.

Soni Sori is a Adivasi school teacher, activist and political leader from Bastar, Chhatisgrah. Fatima Khatoon is an activist and political leader from the Nat community of Bihar.

Even though both of them are fighting for protecting girls and the marginalized communities, their struggles are in difficult yet different situations.

On one hand in Chhatisgarh, Soni has to struggle against the constant presence against the constant presence of the Naxalites and the Central Reserve Police Forces. Due to their presence, Bastar has become a hostile place where people live in the fear of losing their lives all the time. This makes Soni's struggle even more difficult because people are scared to protest.

On the other hand, Fatima is fighting against the entire prostitution and sex-trafficking racket that is present in Bihar. Every day she tries to change the mindset of the people there so that she can prevent girls from being sold like commodities and abused. Her struggle is against the societal construct which has made people think of women as inferior who are only meant to be used. Her fight is not any less difficult because even here the people in power and the police do not want the situation to end and for prostitution to end.

Both these women have lived horrific live that a privileged person like me could not have imagined of. I was not the only young individual who was awestruck and inspired. Juhi Khatoon was another. She is a young member of Apne Aap and a trafficking survivor from Bihar. She spoke to Soni Sori and Fatima Khatoon and thanked them for inspiring thousands of girls like her. I then got the chance to listen to Juhi's journey. Her endeavor and ever-smiling attitude taught me so much. Even though we are of the same age, she is someone I look up to today and I consider myself lucky that I can call her my friend now.

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I Received a Business Loan

- Naina Khatoon / translated by Praveen Kumar

Forbesganj: My name is Naina Khatoon and I am living in the Red Light area Uttri Rampur Forbesganj, I am a member of Mahila Mandal run by Apne Aap Women Worldwide in the Uttri Rampur center. In the tailoring classes run by Apne Aap in the center, I learn tailoring and try to collect some money to buy a sewing machine and do the tailoring job in our locality but unfortunately I don't succeed in my mission. I used to visit the Mahila Mandal classes, meetings and other activities on regular basis in the Apne Aap center.

One day I hear a message from Fatima Di who is the spokesperson of Apne Aap and our community leader that government wants to distribute loans through State Bank of India, Forbesganj branch for the women of Red Light Area to do some small business to improve their status. I told Fatima Di that I want some amount as loan to start the tailoring shop. She agrees with me and asks to visit the bank with her for proper inquiry about the loan and documentation work. We meet the Bank Manager and he told the brief process to us and asks to prepare the required documents. I visited many offices in the process to prepare the required documents. After a hard struggle of 15 days finally received all the documents for apply for a loan. Next day, I visited the bank and fulfill the apply form for the loan of Rs.- 50,000.00 and submitted it to the concern officer. After two or three days, the concern officer visited our place and do the enquiry job as per the rules and confirm me that he will sanctioned the loan from his side and asked to meet the Bank Manager after three days. After three days we visited the bank and meet the branch manager. He congregates me and asked that your loan is sanctioned for Rs.- 50,000.00. I filled with glad because my dreams came true. Four other women from our community also received the loan from that bank also.

On the afternoon of 15th November, a loan mela was organized in our Apne Aap centre for distribution the cheques of loan. Some officers of bank with manager, DM, DDC, SDO, BDO of our area and some other bank staff came to our center. A small program was organized

there. The cheques for the loan amount distributed by the DM to us. We are very happy to received the loan and thankful to Apne Aap for the support. We are very proud to be a member of Apne Aap Women Worldwide.

“I told Fatima Di that I want some amount as loan to start the tailoring shop. She agrees with me and asks to visit the bank with her for proper inquiry about the loan and documentation work. We meet the Bank Manager and he told the brief process to us and asks to prepare the required documents. I visited many offices in the process to prepare the required documents. After a hard struggle of 15 days finally received all the documents for apply for a loan. Next day, I visited the bank and fulfill the apply form for the loan of Rs.- 50,000.00 and submitted it to the concern officer. After two or three days, the concern officer visited our place and do the enquiry job as per the rules and confirm me that he will sanctioned the loan from his side and asked to meet the Bank Manager after three days. After three days we visited the bank and meet the branch manager. He congregates me and asked that your loan is sanctioned for Rs.- 50,000.00. I filled with glad because my dreams came true. Four other women from our community also received the loan from that bank also.”

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

I Was Moved on Hearing Soni Sori Speak

- *Baby Haldar / as translated by Anwesha Basu*

Kolkata: On 25th November, 2017, it was a little after 2 pm. The audience was engrossed into listening to a social worker from Bangladesh who was delivering her lecture on the dais when suddenly a woman walks into the conference. She was dressed in a white and blue colored salwar suit and a shawl, with her hair clipped at the back. She seemed to be around forty years old.

Seeing her enter the room, quite a few people stood up to show respect while those who could not recognize her were whispering. Our Ruchira Di smiled and made place for her to sit right next to her. Those who did not know her wondered whether she was Soni Sori for whom everyone eagerly awaited.

It was necessary to announce her name on the dais as her work and her fearless eyes speak for her.

Listen to her narrate her story, I was moved. "I have been tortured", she said. Yes, it is true that those who protest against injustice and brutally suppressed. She continued to say, "When I was in police custody, saying that I was tortured is an understatement. Days went by without any food. I was given electric shocks, one after the other. They stripped me naked, they sexually assaulted me, and they inserted stones into my private parts. They did everything they could to break me but here I am, still alive, still fighting for the girls of not only Bastar but for every girl who is denied her rights."

After listening to her, I realized that the girls of Bastar face unimaginable hardships on a daily basis. They are never safe. Even when they go to collect wood in the forest, they are often kidnapped and raped. Young girls who live in the hostels are lured out and raped. The list is endless. Soni is fighting against these injustices. She is fighting to make the world a little better. Is her fight,

her struggle a crime? Is she tortured so much because she is trying to help others?

Soni's family members were also tortured to prevent Soni from protesting against the injustices. Her daily livelihood has become a fight to live another day and a fight to save as many other lives as possible.

All I would like to convey to Soni Sori is that she has inspired thousands and because of her many more brave Soni Soris have been born. She should continue her work as many depend on her. She is definitely not alone in her struggle as the entire Apne Aap family is with her. I believe that she should write about her struggles.

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contact@apneaap.org**



The World Outside

A Book-reading for Children's Day - Rani Khatoon

Kolkata: I am Rani. I come from an impoverished background. I never knew who my real biological mother was. The woman who took me in when I was an infant is the mother I know. She brought me to the Apne Aap Women Worldwide center. She wanted to give me a better future. Apne Aap is the family I have. This is where I received my education, learnt dance, art and stitching. My association with Apne Aap Women Worldwide gave me the opportunity to attend several events that have contributed in my holistic development over the years in one way or the other.

On 14th of November, 2017, I got another such opportunity. 14th November is our first Prime Minister's birth day. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru loved children and was referred to as Chacha Nehru by all the kids. Hence, every year this day is commemorated as Children's Day.

Apne Aap Women Worldwide had organized a book reading session with Ruchira Gupta and Nandana Sen. I could not have thought of a better way to celebrate this day. Participating in Nandana di's interactive book reading of her new book "Ekhhuni Na" (Not Yet) was a lot of fun. Seeing her enthusiasm, I was even more excited. After that Ruchira di's read excerpts from Chacha Nehru's book, 'Letters From A Father To His Daughter.' I learnt that as the name suggests this book was a compilation of all the letters Chacha Nehru wrote to Indira Gandhi, his daughter from prison. They were not mere letters but each letter had a valuable life lesson in it. One thought and learning that stuck with me from that book

reading was that even an ordinary person like me can make a great change if we are determined to the cause.

I am grateful that I got the opportunity to attend such a wonderful event which inspired me to be a better person and work harder. I am delighted when we were given these books as Children's Day gifts. I started reading them on the same day and quickly finished them also.

"One thought and learning that stuck with me from that book reading was that even an ordinary person like me can make a great change if we are determined to the cause."

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Finally, it was time to meet Catharine Aunty in the evening. She had come to deliver a speech. The last time I met her was in 2009, when she had visited Bihar. I was quite young then. I was nervous whether she would be able to recognize me. I had got a gift for her. On meeting her, it was great to see that she was as excited as I was to meet if not more and she did remember me. She also said that she was very proud of the progress I had made. She is someone I look up to and hearing her appreciate me was indeed a good feeling.

The second day at the conference was another special day indeed. I was eagerly waiting to listen to Soni Sori's speech and to meet her again. I had met her earlier this year in January when she had visited Delhi to deliver a speech. Every time she talks about her journey, it becomes really difficult to listen without tearing up. She has faced several obstacles in her life to say the least and continues to tread a dangerous path for the betterment of others.

Seeing her is awe inspiring. Her efforts are commendable. The sole reason behind all her speeches and all her visits across the country is not for her own glory but to generate awareness about the condition of women in Bastar, Chhatisgarh. I completely support her fight and will do my best from my end to create awareness.

This conference was definitely one of the most memorable experiences of my life and I hope I can share my learning with others.

"I was eagerly waiting to listen to Soni Sori's speech and to meet her again. I had met her earlier this year in January when she had visited Delhi to deliver a speech. Every time she talks about her journey, it becomes really difficult to listen without tearing up."

My First Day at Apne Aap

- Prabartana Das

Kolkata: My acute interest to work for vulnerable section of the society made me join Apne Aap Women Worldwide (AAWW) on October 2017 as an intern. The name of the organization itself suggests empowerment of women and AAWW have successfully gratified it's duty.

I remember the first day I entered AAWW, I was petrified as both the place and its people were new to me. I had no past work experience, so I was not sure if I would fit into the work given to me. As soon as I entered AAWW, all my myths were gone. My senior colleagues were supportive and they made me understand each work that I was suppose to do. The children were treat to my soul. They greeted me with a smile on their face every time they saw me and it made me feel special. I did not feel that I was away from my home.

My work was to archive the documents and I thoroughly enjoyed doing so, not because of the fact that it was my first day at work but because it gave me a overall view on how the Organization works, it's motives and how AAWW resolve different issues. There were several case studies and analysis of different stalwarts which enlightened my approach. At the end on the day, I was introduced to Sahana Ma'am. She enriched my knowledge with her work of several years in the field. I had few ideas about human trafficking and brothels which I surfed through Google and I wanted to know more. Sahana Ma'am have successfully served my cravings which Google could have never done so. I admired how the women in the office had zeal in them to work

for those women and children who were severely exploited .

If somebody asks me 'What is so special about Apne Aap Women Worldwide?' I would not hesitate but say that AAWW have changed my way of looking at the people around. I feel that I have grown up in a society which had infused in my mind the concept of 'What is good' and 'What is bad'. AAWW have inculcated the idea in me that it's too early to judge anyone as women don't sell their body by choice but due to 'absence of choice' when they are sold by the one whom they have trusted in life.

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This was followed by panel discussions on many themes like – “Vulnerabilities of women and children in India to Child Labour and Sex-Trafficking”, “Indian Laws against Child Labour and Sexual Exploitation”, “India’s International Legal Obligations and Sexual Exploitation – UN Protocols and Conventions”, “National and International Best Practices”, “The way forward – The Nordic Model”, etc. A plethora of ideas were exchanged by an expert panel consisting of – Roma Deabrata (Founder, STOP), Sunita Rani (Convenor, National Domestic Workers Union), Hasina Kharbhii (Founder, Impulse NGO Network), P. Joseph Victor Raj (National Convenor, Campaign Against Child Labour), Swati Maliwal (Chairperson, Delhi Commission for Women), Ellina Samantroy (Fellow, V.V. Giri National Labour Institute), Frederike Tschampa (Head of Political Affairs, EU Delegation to India and Bhutan), Per-Anders Sunesson (Ambassador at Large for Combating Trafficking in Persons, Sweden) and many others.

Some significant highlights were made like Sunita Rani said, “Domestic workers in various cities of India come from the state of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, west Bengal, Orissa and most of them are generally trafficked by thugs”. She further recommended that the government

should provide livelihood at their doorsteps not only in the form of salary but other rights as well.

“Rehabilitation should be done according to the will of the victims and that one of the major difficulties is to give them a sense of belongingness and to give them a real dignity” said Roma Deabrata. She recommended that the survivors and victims should be treated with dignity and this was further reiterated by Junu Lama, a rehabilitated worker who studies in class 8th and works as an independent fashion designer.

Catharine MacKinnon’s public lecture on ‘Sex trafficking and last girl’ became capstone to the international consultation when she said “it is crucial to criminalize buyers and sellers but not the women engaged in the prostitution. These women should be provided training so as to create more opportunities and possibilities as no one chooses to be the Last Girl”. Her words served as an allegorical picture to the anti sex-trafficking movement globally.

Poems

My Dear Mother

My mother loves me very much.
My mother ties my hair
And takes me to school on time.
My mother looks happy.
And she plays with me.
She suffers a lot for me.

Name: Amisha Kumari

Class: VII

Age: 14

Area: Khidderpore, Kolkata

Daughter

She is not a burden.
She is a pearl of the ocean.
Wherever she goes, she plants seeds of joy.
She is not less than a son.
If your son is the lamp of the house,
Your daughter is wealth.
Your son is the light of the lamp,
Your daughter is happiness.

Name: Kareena Jha

Class: VII

Age: 13

Area: Khidderpore, Kolkata



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