



APNE AAP WOMEN WORLDWIDE –an initiative to end sex trafficking

# RED LIGHT DESPATCH

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## NUTT MAHILA MANDAL LEADERS FELICITATED BY STEINEM

By *Tinku Khanna*

Araria, Bihar: Meena and Fatima Nutt Dhunia, two anti-trafficking leaders and survivors of prostitution, were felicitated by activist and feminist, Gloria Steinem on December 14 at a public rally organized by Apne Aap Women Worldwide in partnership with the National Literacy Mission at the Araria Mahila Mahavidyalaya. Meena and Fatima are President and Vice-President of the Nutt Mahila Mandal in the Uttari Rampur red-light area of Forbesgunge.

“These women have given us the greatest gift –an example of courage – and their search for justice under the most difficult conditions. That means the rest of us can do no less. Justice is contagious and so is injustice. If we don’t follow their example we will suffer too,” said Ms Steinem in her felicitation.

Ms Steinem then proceeded to speak on “Challenges for the women’s movement in the 21st century.” She said

women needed to take control over their own bodies and decide if and when to have children and if and when to get married or have sex. Women needed to resist violence, speak out against it and stand up to it. She said children who witnessed violence began to believe that violence was a way of life and perpetuated the violence in all aspects of life as adults. Women needed to take the lead to create a violence-free world.

The cult of masculinity was cutting the life span of men. It is to prove their masculinity that they go out to wars and get killed,” she claimed. Rise in sexual exploitation is a mark of male dominance and female insecurity’. Men are introduced to eroticisation of sexual dominance from their childhood, how they would ever learn to respect women?” she asked.

“Women have come to know that they belong

*Contd. on page 7 col.1*

### *My Dream*

## I’d like to start a food business but how can I?

By *Rokeya bibi*

**Kidderpore, Kolkata:** Every day I eat my meals from one or two hotels in our area. Of course it is very tasty, but now I regularly get stomach aches. I am sure it is due to the spicy food ...so I started to think if we could cook our own food it might be good. Just imagine having the meals of our choice together. It will be such fun.

But every time I think of something good I think of something bad too. We are always squabbling and we get irritated with each other over small things. Sometimes I do not like it but I cannot control myself; so if we can do something on our own initiative, I am sure it will improve our ties with each other, our friendship. But as I said I am not sure whether we can do it.

I have talked with others about this but so far but they have not taken any interest. They listen to me but nobody says anything more after that. I feel they like the idea of starting something but do not have the confidence, so they just let it go.

I know it will be difficult to get a “customer” when I turn 40. I do not have any place to go. My daughter is too small. I do not want to put my daughter into this “profession”. I have a physically disabled child, I do not know what will happen when I will be unable to earn. I know the government is not for people like us.

That is why I believe if we can start a business through a common kitchen supplying food it will address our long term needs. How can I run a business? I do not have experience. How can I make others trust me? You are saying you will guide us, but my brothel keeper will not allow me to do anything else.

After some time if we are unable to run a successful business, who will give us shelter? The brothel owner will not tolerate us. My babu also gets angry if I cannot give time to him. At the same time I know if we could do it successfully it would help us reach into a new world.

## CHILDREN HELP TEACHER FIGHT FOR LIFE

*By: Ravi Mishra*

**Forbesganj, Bihar:** I am a teacher in the Apne Aap School in the Red Light area of Forbesganj. Many people do not think there is even a need for a school here. Before the school opened, the children in the community played on the dusty streets all the time, ran errands for their mothers's exploiters, fetched alcohol or gutka, pressed their feet, or did household chores. They were hungry and therefore quarrelsome.

When Apne Aap opened the new centre with a non formal school, health care clinic and a knitting and embroidery school, there were not many people who came to attend the classes in the beginning.

Slowly about a hundred students, many of who were dressed in dirty rags, had skin diseases, were in the habit of excusing themselves for five minutes to smoke or take gutka began to come. Sometimes parents would land up in class and call out to their children, ordering them to fetch a

bottle of alcohol and then return to class. They would tell the teacher that they would send the child back in a while.

So on some pretext or the other children would get away from school for about an hour or so every day. If I protested the parents were quick to point out that they would withdraw the child altogether. And the child would be dragged away from school. Sometimes parents would follow the child to class and thrash them because some household chore had not been completed. At other times they would come to the school drunk and say that there was no use studying since the children were going to do what their mothers and fathers did. I, along with the other teachers, was also screamed at and abused. All the teachers who taught at the school were under a lot of stress.

One day because of all the stress of teaching, I fainted in the school. At that time there was no

other adult in the school so the frightened children took me to the hospital nearby. The doctor there saw how upset the children were and decided to start treating me even though he knew they had no money with them. For about three hours I was on the drip and the children formed a circle around me and cried as they waited for me to recover. When I finally opened my eyes I was amazed and touched by the worried faces around me.

All the stress and worry that I faced in the last few months, struggling to teach, vanished as I saw the faces of the children and realized that they really cared for me. I decided then that even if this journey to teach them was a difficult one, I would not abandon the hopes and dreams of the children.

This year, of the boys studying in the non formal school 12 boys were able to get admission in the boarding school through the Pratham Mumbai initiative. Those boys now want to rescue their sisters who are working in prostitution in Forbesganj. We have also organized the Mahila Mandal and Kishori Mandal and two women from the community have been drawn into this centre. These women also help us run a balwadi.

In January last year 25 girls from the Forbesganj and Khwaspur red-light areas have joined the Apne Aap Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya hostel and two boys and a woman are now trying to prepare for the Matric Exam in 2008. Several girls in the community are now coming forward to join the school. Our efforts have paid off.

*Editors of Red Light Despatch :*

*Editor :* Ruchira Gupta

*Asstt. Editor :* Reecha Upadhyay and  
Devina Dutt

## HOW WE HAVE ORGANIZED A WOMEN'S COLLECTIVE : TOPSIA WOMEN

*By Sraboni Sircar and Sudebi Thakurta*

### **Q: Why does A2W2 work in Topsia?**

**Mumtaz Ansari:** to ensure that children and women are not trafficked.

**Reshma Ansari:** To let people know about their rights and fight for them.

**Mumtaz:** To prevent social menace like early marriage too....

**Zareen Taslim:** To empower women

### **Q: You are about to form your own women's collective which will be run by you. How will you accept the responsibility? How do you think you have changed in the past few years?**

**Mumtaz:** I will not be afraid to take the challenge as I am confident of all our abilities.

Previously we did not have the guts to stand firmly and speak out about what we believed was right. We could not gather the courage to do something on our own. Fear and hesitation pulled us back. When we will run our organization we will give a lot of stress on education and economic empowerment. We have learnt the importance from our personal experience.

I was a rag picker. My husband is a drunkard and tortured me everyday. After joining A2W2 I feel I have changed in many ways. Now I know that trafficking is part of a system. I know the problems that can be caused by early marriages and I also know how to deal with family violence. I know how important it is to offer a proper life to my children. Earlier I would have just accepted it all as my fate.

I am also trying to bring the same awareness among other women. I will be stronger if I can other women to join my struggle. We will go to every household in our locality to call the women and girls. We will encourage all women and girls to stand on their feet and emphasise vocational training.

**Zareen:** I am confident too. Even four years back before I came to the Centre I knew nothing. By attending the

different workshops and trainings on trafficking and our rights I have got lots of confidence in my own abilities.

A lot of new avenues have opened up. We know about women empowerment. We are aware of the various ways in which we can run an organization and take responsibilities. We know that we have to go ahead no matter what happens. We will try our best to encourage and make the others, who will come to the centre, be as confident as we are. We will give them the training we got by which they can explore their potential so that they also can pass on the courage and confidence to others.

Our greatest strength is the fact that we know what we are doing and what we do is legal. Earlier we were not sure that even standing up to our husbands was legal. The education and trainings have helped us understand that nothing can be sustained if it is not legal. The honesty of our work will help us establish ourselves as a proper dignified organization and not any anti-social or illegal organization which just came up one fine morning.

**Reshma:** I do agree with both. Before I came here the different incidents of abuse and trafficking and early marriage and the like were like separate isolated incidents. I was not in a position to correlate them. I was not aware too. Now I am aware of the different things which are happening in my locality or the surrounding areas.

*Contd. on page 4 col. 1*

**I am the hand fan made up of palm trees.**

**I can be seen nowhere in winter.**

**Comes summer, and I am remembered to get the nice breeze around.**

**This fan is of such good quality that it takes away all the perspiration.**

*Poem from Topsia wall magazine Uran*

## Why are those who make us suffer not punished?

By Meena Sheikh

**Forbesgunge, Bihar:** My daughter, Naina, was born to me in a brothel in Katihar, where I was raped by many men everyday. I was about eleven or twelve when I was kidnapped and brought there. I was beaten, raped and told my children would be killed if I ran away. There were other women and girls in the brothel who were tied to the bed and beaten mercilessly also. One day I helped two of them escape. Then I heard the brothel owner wanted to kill me. I took my life in my hands and jumped from the terrace and ran away.

I went to the police to rescue my children, but they told me to go back to the brothel. Finally, last year when my organization Apne Aap helped me file a complaint at the police station, I was able to rescue my daughter, Naina. She was about twelve and I found out that she too had be prostituted by the brothel owners. She had bruises, she was doped and she walked with a limp.

She told me that first she been raped by a very old man and when she recounts her experience she as well as I live through the hell. The same things happened to me when I was her age.

I hate the people who brought me and pushed me into this as much as I hate the men who were my 'passengers' (clients). Why can't the government, the police and society not put an end to all this? Every woman wants to live happily. Why do you have to suffer like this if you are a woman? Why are those who make us suffer not punished?

*Contd. from page 3*

We were initially afraid of going to the field which we have overcome. Now we know that we have been able to build a trust by which we can go ahead. We know we can convince people by intervening in disputes in the community. Another very important thing is now we know our area and its streets and its people and the houses. We were living in a limited physical and social area. Now our confidence has increased even more.

**Zareen:** Yes...people in our area now know why we are doing this... We know we can prove our credibility.

**Q: What do you think is the most important thing you have learnt that will help you in running the collective?**

**All:** We have known how to take care of a centre, how to maintain it, how to take responsibilities and how to be a leader.

**Q: When you will take charge of the centre what are the things you want which are not there right now?**

**All:** We want more kids to be enrolled and want to increase the magnitude of the soup kitchen. We should be able to feed more people.

**Q: What are the qualities you seek in those who will lead the organization?**

**Zareen:** The leader must have the capability to make friends easily, be an understanding person and be educationally qualified.

**Reshma:** The leader must be one who knows how to speak and what to speak, and must have good behaviour.

**Mumtaz:** The leader must be good in keeping accounts, and be a good administrator. The leader should be good in expressing views and must be a visionary.

**Q: How will you manage to fund your organization?**

**Mumtaz:** A2W2 will fund us.

**Zareen:** No, at a time when we will not get funds from A2W2 we need to make contacts to get funds and keep our organization running. But for that we are yet to learn a lot. We need more training, more education, and more computer proficiency. We ourselves will have to be strong to strengthen others. There is a long way to go. But we will try and keep on trying to uplift ourselves. We also need to learn how to write proposals for fund raising.

**Q: Do you think you need male members in order to run your organization?**

**Mumtaz:** No. I think we are sufficient.

**Zareen:** I do not agree though. We need male members too to strengthen ourselves. They are also part of the community and the world. We should include them in our work.

Mumtaz, Reshma and Zareen are members of the Apne Aap Topsia Mahila Mandal. They are office-bearers of the new women's collective that the Mahila Mandal has helped organize.

## *Punish those who profit from our misery*

*By Fatima Nutt Dhunia*

**Araria, Bihar:** I think all the people for whom the lives of young girls are sacrificed, must be punished. Anyone connected to the business that profits must be punished. If police starts getting the clients arrested, the others would stop coming. It will force the community to find for alternative livelihood options.

No girl wants to join prostitution of her own will. If it was the case, girls would not be forced into it. They would not need to be beaten mercilessly. They have to put on make up and pretend to be happy.

Just imagine how she must have felt when a person who buys her, beats her up, abuses her? She stops thinking. Ask yourself how would you feel yourself if the same thing happens to you? The people who come

and rape the girls go back to their society and nothing happens to them.

I am married into Nutt family. It was a form of trafficking. I ran away twice. I was only seven or eight. Now I am 25 or so. I have decided not to accept it. I am still beaten.

When I walk down the roads of Forbesgunge, people stare at me and whisper that there goes the prostitute. I feel bad. If I can feel so bad how does the girl who stands there day in and day out feel like? Everybody in this world wants to lead a dignified life. I am sure the woman who stands there throughout the day can't sleep at night. She feels so miserable and cooped up.

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### *Submissions on behalf of Ruchira Gupta, Executive Director of Apne Aap Women Worldwide to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Human Resource Development on the proposed amendments to The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act of 1956*

17/11/2006

Dear Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

As requested by the Honourable Chairman during my submission of oral evidence regarding specific recommendations on the proposed amendments to the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act of 1956, we are submitting the following:

- We welcome the inclusion of Section 5 A, B and C.

Only the punishment of buyers of prostituted sex and sex-entrepreneurs will be a deterrent against trafficking of human beings in India.

Additionally, in order to remove penalties from pimps and procurers, India would have to exit or rescind its ratification of the 1949 Convention in 1953.

- We want the words “victims of trafficking” deleted from sub-section 5(c)

The UN protocol does not de-link prostitution from trafficking. It sees prostitution as the outcome of the process of trafficking and therefore assumes that all prostituted women and children are victims of trafficking.

It is impossible for a prostituted person-woman or child-to prove at what point they are trafficked either in court or in a brothel. The experience of trafficking and prostitution is so traumatic that most women and girls are unable to give a coherent account of their experience, besides which the loss of education deprives them of the ability to understand the Indian law.

- We welcome the doing away for Section 8 of the present Act.

The stated purpose of ITPA is not to punish the prostituted but the traffickers.

## ISTAND UP TO MY HUSBAND

By Mumtaz

**Topsia, Kolkata:** We are desperately poor. My husband takes alcohol regularly. He is a rickshaw-puller and never gives money to us. I go rag picking from 2.30 a.m. to 5.30 a.m. to keep my children going. I was regularly beaten by my husband as were the other women of my area. I think we all think that it is our destiny.

It was in the middle of 2004. Some *didi* came to our shanty and told us to send our kids to their school. I did not know who they were. At first we refused but after four months we started to send our children there. I have six children and five were admitted in A2W2 schools.

Previously I came to this centre as a mother of my children. Then I started to attend the women's group

meetings. I came to know how to protect myself from abuse and violence and survive with dignity.

I stand up to my husband now. The first time I did so he was shocked and left the room. Now when he drinks, he tries to stay outside the room or comes home only to sleep. I can do all this because I know that the organization is behind me and now I have the inner power to protect myself from any kind of abuse and violence. I also help my fellow women friends who are facing violence from their husband.

Now my husband often says 'these *didis* have given you a lot of courage.' I laugh on my own and agree that yes, I do have the power to protect myself from violence.

### Even on Holidays

By: Sonia Khatoon

**Kidderpore, Kolkata:** I work during the night and could not take care of my daughter Pinky. She used to sleep in the same room where I entertained my clients. She is still very young, and does not know about my work at night. But I could not keep going on like this. I had to find a way to keep her safe.

I did not have any other options, until I found out about the Apne Aap centre.

I have admitted my daughter at the Apne Aap night crèche and the Jyotirmoyee day school. I think my daughter is safe here during the night instead of with me, in the red light area.

Since attending the Apne Aap centre, Pinky has been doing excellent in her studies, and the school environment is very pleasant.

Even during the holidays, she is able to stay at the centre. The Apne Aap staff also let her stay at the centre from 10 am to 5:30 on Sundays and on holidays.

I know my daughter Pinky is safe when she goes to the Apne Aap centre.

### *I am inside the room*

By Sandhya Parbat, 11

Looking outside the tiny window of my room,

I see the world as a light of bliss and think ...

Is there any scene which is more beautiful than this? Anywhere in this world?

There are meadows all around bedecked with the golden paddy grains

...looking ravishing.

There are the trees inundated by the lovely tunes of the birds.

There are beautiful lovely friends around.

The birds are all flying high in the sky spreading their wigs...

And I?

I am sitting inside the room.

## THE LALA'S DEBT NEVER ENDED

By Arti Sahu

**Hanuman Tekri, Bhiwandi:** I was born and brought up in the red light area as my mother was a Gharwalli. My mother was poor and was forced into prostitution when she was a child. I have seen the life of women very closely and am affected by it.

My house is in the red light area. I too have habit of using vulgar language whenever I get angry or frustrated. I have seen so many women quarrelling and even trying to kill one another. I have seen women running for shelter during a police raid and being tortured by them for a bribe. I have seen women stay hungry for that particular day when they didn't get any customer.

As a small child I used to run errands for them and get tips in return. But as I started growing up I realized how very difficult it was for such women to survive. I used to request my mother to give them some food. Sometimes she did and sometimes he did not. It depended on her earnings. Until the women did not earn and give my mother she could not feed them or herself. Her total earning depended on the women whom she kept in the brothel house.

When there was no income the women took loans from the Lala at 10% interest. Sometimes they couldn't pay the loan back and they took more loans from the Lala.

They could not pay during the entire life. Their earnings dropped as they grew older.

And if they wanted to get out of prostitution they were not able to come out because of the Lala's debt. Some alternative should be provided by society and the government of India for women in prostitution. We need to build a platform for victims to get dignified employment.

Seeing the suffering and trauma faced by women in the prostitution, people should realise it is a serious crime against womankind. It is the lack of government support which leads to the downfall of victims.

*Contd. from page 1*

to their husbands and men have come to understand that the sign of masculinity is dominance over women,' she said. Citing examples of different cultures across the world, she emphasized how men are brought up to be violent and aggressive.

She added that women had to insist on more democratic families. Only when democratic values were inculcated in families, would women and men be able to understand and run a democratic society and

country. She gave the example of pre-war Germany, where the male head of household were considered the only decision maker. This eventually led to households wanting to replicate a similar structure at the national level and they ended up voting in a fascist like Adolf Hitler to power. She ended by saying women must learn to respect themselves and believe they have the power to bring about this change. "Scientists now say that the flutter of butterfly wings can change the

climate thousands of miles away. All of you in the rally today must believe that you are one giant butterfly and if you flutter your wings, change will happen."

The rally was attended by students, academics, businessmen, panchayat members, local authorities and women, children and men from red-light areas and the Nutt community.

Ms Steinem has visited Bihar after a span of fifty years to express solidarity with the marginalized Nutt women, men and children

of Forbesgunge who have taken the bold and historic step of organizing against their own sex-trafficking under the banner of ApneAap Women Worldwide. She met and heard women of the Nutt community in their homes in the Uttari Ranpur village of Forbesgunge, spoke to members of the Self-Help group, visited the Nutt VikashKendra, and the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya where Nutt mothers have enrolled their daughters to break the cycle of inter-generational prostitution.

## Women needed to take control over their own bodies : *Steinem*

By *Mohammad Kalam*

**Araria, Bihar:** Ms Steinem proceeded to speak on “Challenges for the women’s movement in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” She said women needed to take control over their own bodies and decide if and when to have children and if and when to get married or have sex.

Women needed to resist violence, speak out against it and stand up to it. She said children who witnessed violence began to believe that violence was a way of life and perpetuated the violence in all aspects of life as adults. Women needed to take the lead to create a violence-free world.

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male dominance and female insecurity’. Men are introduced to eroticisation of sexual dominance from their childhood, how they would ever learn to respect women?” she asked.

“Women have come to know that they belong to their husbands and men have come to understand that the sign of masculinity is dominance over women,’ she said. Citing examples of different cultures across the world, she emphasized how men are brought up to be violent and aggressive.

She added that women had to insist on more democratic families. Only when democratic values were inculcated in families, would women and men be able to understand and run a democratic society and country. She gave the

example of pre-war Germany, where the male head of household were considered the only decision maker. This eventually led to households wanting to replicate a similar structure at the national level and they ended up voting in a fascist like Adolf Hitler to power. She ended by saying women must learn to respect themselves and believe they have the power to bring about this change. “Scientists now say that the flutter of butterfly wings can change the climate thousands of miles away. All of you in the rally today must believe that you are one giant butterfly and if you flutter your wings, change will happen.”

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## KOREAN SISTERS CELEBRATE PASSAGE OF ANTI-TRAFFICKING LAW

**Seoul, 2 November:** Sisters from the Hansori (United Voice) - network of women’s NGOs in South Korea-celebrated their 20th Anniversary by hosting an International Conference from 11-13 October, 2006 on Building International Alliance against Sex Trafficking and Finding Solutions in Seoul. Speakers from India, Philippines and South Korea discussed Discourse around Sex trafficking and Re-definition and making solutions sustainable for survivors. Strategies on addressing the demand for prostituted sex were also discussed as Korea is one of the first four countries in the world to criminalize demand.



**A2W2 Main Office:**  
D56, Anand Niketan,  
New Delhi - 110021

**Phone :**

Delhi: +91-11-24110056  
Kolkata: +91-33-32511503  
Mumbai: +91-22-32015637  
Forbesgunj: +91-6455-222215

Email : [contact@apneap.org](mailto:contact@apneap.org)

Web : [www.apneap.org](http://www.apneap.org)