



Red Light Despatch

Volume V Issue 5

May 2012

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My Dream

I Want to be an Animator

By **Sonu Rajender Agarwal**

Sonu came to Dharampura, New Delhi from Mumbai. She is the daughter of a survivor from Mumbai with whom Apne Aap has worked for many years.

I am from Nalla Sopra in Mumbai. There are four people in my family: my mother, my father, my brother, and me. When I was 12 years old I went to school at Hostal Bandra CCDT Ashray. I knew about Apne Aap because my mother was working with them. I am very excited to join Apne Aap — I feel very comfortable here, and everyone on the staff has a very good nature. I am taking computer classes and NFE classes.

My dream is to do animation. I like to draw pictures and I like colours; that is why I would like to join animation. When I was in class 12, a producer came and visited my college. He was giving animation classes also. And he told us the benefits of animation, and that's why I decided to do the animation course.

I like to study. It is needed to be a strong lady and for independence. If I want to be proud of myself and respected in society I need to study

My mother is a very good mother. She is very caring.



What I Think of Hillary Clinton

By **Poonam Khatoon**

Simraha, Forbesganj, Bihar: Hillary is of a good nature as all great women are. She talks with anyone like a simple person. I like the attitude of her laughing, talking and joking. She is so sober, gentle and kind-hearted a lady that I want to meet her again. I think that when I met her, I offered friendship, because I feel better after meeting with her. I cannot express my feeling in words. I was inspired by Hillary; men generally think women are useless, but look at her. She has so many bodyguards, and most of them are men. So many men running behind her! All men must think of women as important and able to do important things. When Hillary asked me if I had ever used my karate skills to nab someone beyond my practice sessions, I said gravely, "My teacher says one must be patient and not use karate skills unnecessarily. I

will only use it when I have to. But yes, people around are certainly scared of me. I am a karate champion," I proudly announced before Hillary Clinton at the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) on Sunday afternoon. I asked her whether she would like to watch me perform, and of course she did. The US Secretary of State laughed and asked me to show some of my skills.

Poonam asked the group of journalists travelling with Hillary to move back. Everyone laughed, admiring the self-confidence of the little karate girl. And she did not disappoint.

After my arrival here I always talk to my friends and teachers about Hillary. I never feel that she is proud and arrogant. She talks like a simple person. In my hostel, I kept the name of my room as Hillary Clinton.

(Continued on page 3)

Why I Invited Hillary to Join the "Cool Men Campaign"

By **Uma Das**

Munshigunj: I'm Uma Das, a resident of a red light area. I was born and brought up in Munshigunj. I am a school drop out, not by choice but by lack of choice. My mother remained tense and worried about my future. She was afraid that her daughter might be pushed to prostitution by the local pimps. I went to school and was later admitted to a hostel with the support of Apne Aap but couldn't stay for long. I returned back to

Munshigunj and learned carpentry work at Apne Aap.

But being a girl and resident of the red light area, I saw that the customers and buyers of sex couldn't differentiate between the girls like me and the women and girls in prostitution. They took it for granted that all women and girls living there were prostitutes and easily available to satisfy their sexual urges. The children and girls were not safe.

(Continued on page 3)

Ruchira Receives Shere Bangla Award; Inspires Others

By Bibi Fatima

Forbesganj, Bihar: I felt very proud while giving the “Shere Bangla” award to my founder president Ruchira Gupta because I was awarding a sister in an anti-trafficking organization who always fights against the traffickers to end sex trafficking on a grassroots level to save the victims and survivors of sex trafficking. She is the ideal lady who always empowers the women to fight the traffickers and teaches them the lesson and gives them the voice to become bold and remove the causes of sex trafficking from their community. Before the arrival of Apne Aap, all the women of the community felt helpless, but now we are fully dependent on ourselves. I feel that today an excellent lady who stood with us and joined our movement to hear our one voice is recognized. We are inspired and keep the lesson to stay bold to continue the movement, and finally we will achieve our goals.



Above: Grassroot Community Outreach worker from Bihar giving Shere Bangla Award to Ruchira Gupta, Founder President of Apne Aap.

After bestowing the honour, I decided to make myself like Ruchira Didi and continue our movement and fight against the traffickers. I want to become the ideal for the women of the Nat community. And I want to get recognition by the President of India as an activist who fought till the last breath to end sex trafficking.



The World Outside:

How I Felt Meeting Malini Bhattacharya and the Pat* Artists

By Naina Khatoon

I went to Triveni Auditorium, Connaught Place with Delhi State Coordinator Manohar to attend the book release. It was a book released by Malini Bhattacharya on the occasion of Ravinder Nath Tegore's anniversary. We met with Ms. Malini Bhattacharya regarding the same event. We introduced ourselves and visited the whole room to see the all pictures and other relevant materials that were made with the help of pat artists. We discussed the event with Ms. Malini and her team and tried to learn about the whole process of writing a book. They told us that they work with the Nut community and try to motivate them to show their skills of making painting and pictures without any support. They give them just the ideas by telling; only through listening skills can they make good pictures. We know that pat artists have the skill to make paintings and pictures by just assuming anybody's ideas, so Ms. Malini and her team tried to utilize their skill to show off in front of other people. That's why she wrote and published a book with the help of pat artists. She began the program by introducing herself. She explained the whole process of making the book and how around

eight to ten pat artists have to come with her in this program. After she finished her speech, we joined Mr. Sitaram. He introduced himself and applauded all the pat artists and Malini Bhattacharya for their excellent work. He called all the pat artists to come on the stage and be introduced; as they came up one by one, he told about them and their fantastic painting. Mr. Sitaram encouraged them and said he expected that they will be keeping it up in future. Today they reached Delhi and will show their talent in front of the public with the help of Ms. Malini. Now they will have to do more hard work so that they can show their identity in front of others so that it will be a good book releasing program. We saw many pictures, T-shirts, paintings, and books, and we tried to learn something new. But many times I was unable to capture all the information because they were using their mother tongue. During the program, Ruchira joined us, met with reputable people, and introduced Naina in front of the others. It was a good book releasing program where we learned about pat artists and their excellent work. They have good skill and talent for making paintings and pictures.

* an art form of rural Bengal



What I Think of Hillary Clinton *(Continued from page 1)*

After hearing the story from me, Pinky Didi told me “Choti Hillary”. I think I am the lucky girl who gets the chance to meet Hillary Clinton. Nobody knew me in Kolkata until yesterday but after meeting with Hillary, everybody calls me and wants to know about me and treats me like a superstar. Soumya Didi (Monitoring & Documentation Officer, Apne Aap, Bihar) is my assistant. I feel very happy and all the people around me also feel happy. One lady who came from America took my autograph and wanted to take my photograph but I had no more time to

meet her. Mr. Saun Bhaiya, who is from Bangalore, wanted to take my autograph at first. I told him: why do you want to take my autograph? When I become a lawyer, then I’ll give you my autograph. He told me, “You are a famous girl”. I feel very proud after hearing that. I told him that when I become a lawyer, I will come Bangalore and give you my autograph. Both Hillary and I feel the feelings of each other. I want to become a good lawyer and treat everyone like a good person. I feel faith in myself that I will become a good person.

**What I Invited Hillary to Join the “Cool Men” Campaign** *(Continued from page 1)*

Sometimes they were made buy drinks and cigarettes for the customers. So the mounting family pressure forced me into early marriage.

But my marriage couldn’t detach me from Apne Aap. I worked with the adolescent group there. I extend my full support to end sex trafficking. I know this not a one-man game but that we have to raise a movement to end this devil’s game. Through various meetings and workshops I have learned about the nexus of the systems of prostitution and trafficking. The traffickers find prey from remote villages where women and girls are vulnerable. They lure them with jobs and false marriage and sell them in various cities to madams and pimps of red light areas.

But another truth that I became recently aware of is that these people supply girls and women and run these businesses as there is demand for them. This is the reason for raising the campaign “Cool Men Don’t Buy Sex”, which calls for change in traffick-

ing laws. We campaigned to punish the perpetrators, not the traumatised victims. For these we are putting together people’s support and collecting signatures for the President of India.

We understand that strong support will be our base for the movement to end sex trafficking; I had an opportunity when Hillary Clinton arrived in our city, and I bagged an opportunity to meet her. I had heard that she is US Secretary of State, a great social activist and wife of former US President Clinton. As per my understanding, she is a powerful woman who can amplify our voices to policy level.

So when I got the opportunity to meet her at ICCR on 6th May 2012, I invited her to join the campaign. I requested her to ensure that red light areas are closed down all over the world. I requested her to campaign for punishment of those involved in the sex trade and child marriage. I gave her a wristband with the message “Cool Men Don’t Buy Sex”. Ms. Clinton immediately wore it on her wrist and asked the entire team to wear it. She was also gifted two black T-shirts which read, “Together we can end sex trade”.



— Poem —

I am a Butterfly

By Karina

I am a butterfly, I am a butterfly, I am not to be married off
 One day came a little prince, but he looked like a mouse
 I am a butterfly, I am a butterfly, I am not to be married off
 One day came a tall prince, but he looked like a pole
 I am a butterfly, I am a butterfly, I am not to be married off
 One day came a fat prince, but he looked like a buffalo
 I am a butterfly, I am a butterfly, I am not to be married off
 One day came a thin prince, but he looked like a leaf
 I am a butterfly, I am a butterfly, I am not to be married off
 One day came a small prince, but he looked like an ant
 I will crush him but I will not be married off



Sonar Bangla Launches Catering Business

By Tinku Khanna

Munshigonj: *The group Sonar Bangla first began with ten women from Munshigonj red light area who shared the objective of attaining a sustainable and dignified livelihood. Together, they formed a group in search of this alternative livelihood.*

The first hurdle to our mission was our illiteracy; so, we decided to focus on our skills. We came together in several meetings to identify our skills. After a lot of discussion we came up with the conclusion that all of us cooked food at home, so we were willing to try our luck with a catering business.

In the first round of inspection we found that there was no good canteen in and around the area, though lots of offices exist. So we had an opportunity to supply lunch to those offices. We were confident that if people get a clean and tasty lunch, they would definitely come back to our canteen again.

The women's group opened a bank account with the United Bank of India, Kidderpore, for a fair accounting track and to create savings.

In January 2012 Sonar Bangla cooked lunch for a day-long open mike workshop facilitated by Apne Aap. The session was led by Bobbi Ausubel and Zoe Samath of "That Takes Ovaries". It was a five-day

workshop and we cooked lunch for all of the participants. We have enjoyed cooking and eating together. Besides the fun and enjoyment, the event brought the group closer and they also received a practical training on how to keep accounts and earn profits. We save all of the profits to their bank account.

Next, from 9th to 12th May during Apne Aap's internal workshop in Kolkata, Sonar Bangla took the responsibility to cook and supply lunch for the workshop's participants. We did the job in a fantastic way and the participants were very happy to get delicious food for all four days. We made a very good profit and they all were very happy. The group decided to use that money as a capital to start our canteen activities.

On the basis of that group decision we started to supply lunch to the Apne Aap employees in the Kolkata office from 30th May. Through the canteen, our group wants to see ourselves become a renowned food supplier and make people hungry for our food. Their next challenge is to expand the business in order to actually make their venture sustainable. For this we have already started looking for a larger clientele.



Girls Shine at Bhangra Dance Competition

By Manohar Rana

An event was organized by Har Khabar Media Private Ltd & Global Film and Music on 17th June at Shiksha Bharti Public School in Dwarka, Delhi. Apne Aap sent a total of ten participants to the competition – eight for a bhangra group performance, and two for individual dances.

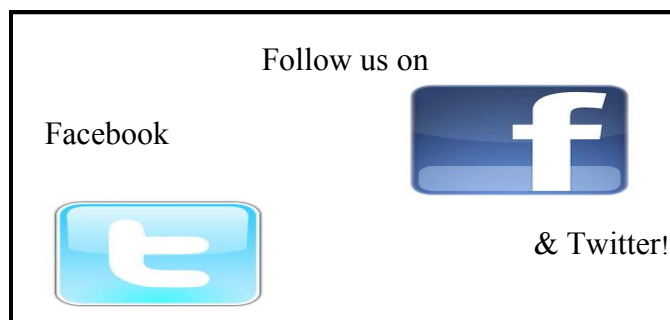
As the participants reached the program venue, they found that there were many more individuals and group performers present with their parents. Our participants were worried and hesitant to see all the other participants because it was their first time to perform outside. However, our supporting staff motivated and encouraged them to be normal and take control over their emotions before performing. Sure enough, they got their confidence back and were ready to perform in front of the audience.

Before going to start, the girls practiced in a separate room for some time. Then, they were instructed to come to the common hall. The program host interviewed all of the participants, and one by one each individual responded about the routine they were

about to perform. The host asked some questions to one of our little participants and she replied very confidently. Finally, the audience sat down to watch the program. Our team was the sixth act.

When our participants performed, the entire audience clapped loudly along with the bhangra and really enjoyed the whole performance. All of them appreciated our team's group performance. The judge of the program was out of control upon seeing the program and she joined our team to dance. Our participants were so happy to be performing with her and they danced with confidence.

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The Dharampura Bhangra Team

By Abraar Karan

My time researching intergenerational prostitution (IGP) near New Delhi, India is coming to what I might think of as both an ending and beginning. Recently, my students and I culminated our regular dance classes with a performance for their community. Present were some of the women engaged in IGP as well as staff members of various local NGOs and visitors from America and elsewhere. I had been teaching the girls bhangra, a traditional Indian folk dance which is historically performed only by males (females typically dance giddah). However, partly to reinforce an ideology which I believe in and partly because I'm utterly incapable of dancing giddah, my students learned bhangra with the conviction that men and women are both capable of equal accomplishment and participation in all aspects of life.

And bhangra they did. Back in January, none of these girls knew a single step of bhangra and many of them shied away initially, stuck with the idea that only boys could and should be bhangra dancers. Aside from this initial mental inertia, we faced many logistical challenges. Working in a rural village, many days there was no electricity (meaning no music and no fans) and we had to fight through extreme temperatures (100+ degrees of Delhi's summer heat) while I would count out the beats for them to practice to. It wasn't all fun, but they did not falter, instead showing endurance and steadfastness toward a goal. During the week prior to the show, each girl sewed her own dress and on the day of the performance, excitement rather than nervousness was the mood backstage. At the end of the dance, I presented each student with a different award that captured the strength which they showed during our times of adversity throughout the training.

In my experience, most efforts at working with sensitive populations seem to focus only on the issue (such as only focusing on prostitution when working with prostituted women), inadvertently ignoring the complexity of the individual. By engaging in an activity that was mutually enjoyable, I was able to do more good than harm for my students. While I did not end sex trafficking, I did help gradually gain the trust of the community and this will now hopefully open the path for some of my local NGO partners to work more effectively. More importantly, I've made life-long friends and unforgettable memo-

ries.

My research was based in the grounded theory approach and can be best classified under medical anthropology. My question was to what extent culture, family, and psychology influenced these women to choose lives as sex workers, and once understanding this, in what ways alternative opportunities could be presented to improve aspects of life, particularly healthcare. If I had more time, I might have been able to more fully understand whether women truly are equal participants in the creation of a "culture" where sex is the commodity which runs a household and where men control finances while alcoholism controls them. Nonetheless, I am currently in the process of decoding through hours of interviews and field notes and will be publishing a longer research piece in the future which begins to address this question.

Column:

Volunteer
Journal

To the outside observer, the place where I work might seem entirely bleak and unfortunate, but the last several months have shown me how much deeper and more colorful the community

is than just the hardships they currently face. There is love between children and parents, as proven by the proud faces of several mothers who came to watch their children perform. Also, the girls are admirably responsible beyond their age - I regularly see my 12 and 13-year-old students walking alone to the market after class to pick up groceries for the house, and most of them are busy doing chores for several hours into the evening when I make home visits. At the center, the girls are often happily chattering away in their intriguing dialectical mix of Hindi, Rajasthani, and Haryanvi, and most of them won't leave the center until glimpsing at least part of their favorite Hindi film song on YouTube. They are the children of a very interesting and historic community whose origins are shrouded in mystery and struggle, and whose future is hopefully going to improve and progress alongside society.

While my fellowship is nearing its end, my time with the community is only just beginning. Intergenerational prostitution is an interesting topic that encompasses several schedule tribes and groups spread across India, including Bedias, Nats, Devadasis, Kanjars, and Pernas, the last of which is the group with whom I've been working.

(Continued on next page)

The Dharampura Bhangra Team *(Continued from previous page)*

Apne Aap currently works in the outskirts of Delhi, one of several areas where this practice is occurring, and they are looking to expand their network with interested individuals who may help in creating alternative livelihoods for the women. Some might (and do) argue that perhaps women do this of their own will. My research suggests that many don't and some might, but regardless, they all suffer a variety of physical abuses from violent clients and most are controlled by their husbands fiscally and emotionally. Moreover, almost all are subject to domestic violence.

Whether you take the "right to be a sex worker" approach or the approach that attempts to empower women and provide them with alternative choices, I would suggest looking more into the on-the-ground

realities if this topic interests you. I will be expanding my work in the near future and will be looking for collaborators. Again, entering a field such as anti-sex trafficking should not have with it a single metric of success, such as whether sex trafficking was ended or not. People are far more complex and diverse than just their adversities and it's time we paid more attention to connecting with the person before the issue. Providing my students who have difficult household circumstances with an outlet such as bhangra dance is in itself extremely rewarding and very important from a simple "happiness" perspective for them. In the end, I think all people are quite frankly looking for happiness.

See Abraar's full blog and contact information at swasthyamundial.com



(Courtesy Karan/ swasthyamundial.com)

Girls in Dharampura performing the traditional "jugni" step.

Bhangra Dance Competition *(Continued from page 4)*

Due to an excellent performance, the audience requested them to perform again. When the bhagada performance finally ended, the judge expressed her feelings by saying one line in Punjabi: "Tussi Khub Changa Kitta." After that, Manisha*, another Apne Aap participant, performed her dance to a Hindi song, while Momal performed to a Rajasthani song.

The judges and audience highly appreciated the performances of all of our girls. Our participants were extremely happy to get appreciation and respect for their skills and performance. The program

was an excellent experience and encouraged all our participants; afterwards, they felt like a group of birds that wanted to fly in the sky without any hesitation. The competition was a wonderful platform where they got a chance to express their talents and show their skills in front of a large audience. We hope that they will do even better in coming performances and get good responses from many more agencies.

The competition's judges said that they are planning to hold a program on 24th July for an NGO, and they will invite back those participants who performed well. Hopefully they will call us!



Interview with Gloria Steinem at the Women's Rally

By Ritu and Neha

Forbesgunge, Bihar:

Q: *How can we change the red light area?*

Gloria Steinem: A red light area changes each time a woman's heart and body and mind are freed. It changes collectively as more and more women free themselves. Eventually it will change when we help men and boys understand this is limiting them and keeping them from real authentic relations.

Q: *When a man sells his daughter, he does it because he is poor and has no income. If she stops selling his daughter what will you do to provide him a livelihood?*

GS: There are many alternatives. He has no right to sell his daughter. He does not own his daughter. No one does. He has the right to sell himself but he cannot sell his daughter. No human being owns another human being.

“The organization is
in your hearts.”

Q: *Will you stand by us only as long as this organization remains?*

GS: The organization is about people. The organization is in your hearts. The organization will remain as long as it remains alive in your heart. An organization is not a person. We are people.

Q: *We are also inspired by you and want your friendship to continue.*

GS: I am so proud and inspired by you. Your lives are the change. You are the experts on closing the red light area because you are there and you know. Personal is political. You are making political progress.



The *Red Light Despatch* is a monthly newsletter published exclusively by Apne Aap Women Worldwide. It compiles articles, testimonials, speeches and interviews by women participating in Apne Aap's Self-Empowerment Groups (SEGs) and other initiatives, as well as by staff members, volunteers, and media figures. The central objective of the RLD is to offer a space for the unique voices of our girls and women. The particular writing style has been implemented to best preserve the original tone of the speakers.

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