



# Red Light Despatch

Volume V Issue 11

November 2012

The Princeton Against Sex Trafficking , p.4 ♀ Kolkata Dance Performance, p. 5 ♀ Survivor's Interview, p.6

## My Dream

By Mamta Tanver

**Najafgarh, Dharampura:** I faced many challenges while working in our site, Dharampura, Prem Nagar & Rawta Mod. I found that their community was very rigid; I often had to call the women many times for meetings, and sometimes they refused to attend. I worried about what I could do to make them interested.

**"My dream is to change the lives of women & girls in prostitution"**

But slowly we started activities with them, and formed Mahila Mandal, Kishori Mandal & SEGs. Our activities were to motivate them and thus they started taking interest, and our relationship with them strengthened.

The other challenge was when I used to try and discuss prostitution with them, for example how they got into it.

They felt disturbed and sometimes I had to stop the conversation. They had fears about their security. I am still working on this problem. Previously, some women have been closed to me, but now they share with me about their experiences with intergenerational prostitution. I deeply feel that through efforts of Apne Aap we will achieve our objectives.

## My Struggles and My Daughters' Hard Work

By Meena Khatun

**Bihar:** I have survived the difficulties that I have faced in my life dealing with all that I have been through is thanks to my self-confidence, determination, and obviously, the support of Apne Aap. My struggles include my getting out of the Red Light Area and settling down at a place where my past does not haunt. It was also a struggle to send my two daughters to schools but now they are going to appear for the Matriculation examination. That may seem like it is not a difficult thing but for me it wasn't easy.

My daughters are Firoza and Nazmeen who studied at Kasturba Gandhi Balika Awasiya Vidyalay till the 8<sup>th</sup> class. And after they passed out from

there, I admitted them to a nearby High School, named Bhagwati Devi Goel High School.

I am a teacher at a crèche at the Apne Aap run Basti Vikas Kendra. I teach the kids of Uttari Rampur Red Light Area who are of the age group 3-6 yrs. I need to be at work at around 8 am and get back home by 2 pm. I walk around 4 km daily to be at work, and I have to control my expenses so that I can spend on my daughter's education. My pay is meager and with that our family of three can hardly survive. But I would never compromise on their education because of that.

My daughters support me in household chores and study the rest of the time.

## Mita Group Members Open Post Office Savings Accounts in Raja Janikinath Market Post Office

By Fazul-E-Khoda Bin Mustapha

**Kolkata:** On 3rd September, 2012 Mita SWEG members opened their Post Office Savings Accounts at Raja Janikinath Market Post Office.

Members of Mita group have been residing in the Munshigunge area for ten to twenty years but most of them do not have any kind of documents to prove their identity or residence as per government norms. Because of this, they are

facing problems in opening accounts with places like the post office or the bank. In a session held by Apne Aap about their legal rights, they brought up this issue and asked about the procedure to open savings accounts. In that session the requirements to open accounts in a government post office were discussed, as well as why

(Continues on page 2)

## BPL Card Movement in Topsia and Munshigunge

*By Fazul-E-Khoda Bin Mustapha*

**Kolkata:** In the month of September 2012 the government of West Bengal advised that they would start correction and addition on BPL list within the Kolkata Municipal Corporation area and they will issue a fresh application form to the members of under privilege residents of Kolkata municipal corporation area and if they freshly apply for the BPL card then government will add their name in the BPL list after verifying the criteria and data of the respective persons as per government norms.

After heard the news it was informed by the Apne Aap team member to the community women and girls of Munshigunge and Topsia and it was suggested to apply for this B.P.L Card, as this is one of the instruments through which every under privileged person who do not exceed the BPL limit fixed by the government ( Rs- 32/ day in urban area and Rs-26/day in rural area) can get multiple benefits like subsidized food from government in very lowest price not only that they can avail medical check up from any government hospital free of cost even they can avail free/ subsidized pathology test in a government hospital. Now the west Bengal government provided supplementary vitamin added food grains to the B.P.L. Card holder families to supplement their starvation and malnutrition.

Community women and girls of Munshigunge and Topsia were very much eager to apply for their B.P.L. Card, they personally collect the BPL application form from the local councillor's office and with the help of the apne aap staffs and total 82 members including their family members were filled up the BPL form and then they submit this form in the respective municipal office on 20th September 2012. And within this short period of time it was known from some community women that government authority has completed verification of their residential status, on the basis of which the BPL card will be issued to them. *(Continues on page 8)*

*(Continued from page 1 "My Struggles...")* I must say that they were never demanding and always interested in studies, which I felt really good. Maybe all this wouldn't have been possible if I was still stuck in the Red Light Area but even in this life where there is a struggle it seems to be meaningful. In March 2013, my daughters will appear in their Matriculation Examinations and they assure me that they will acquire first division. They are studying hard and Apne Aap has supported me in paying the examination fees for my daughters and now I along with everyone our organization are waiting for them to pass out with good grades.

*(Continued from page 1 "Mita Group Members...")*

it is necessary to open savings accounts in government post office or any government or government owned financial institution. In this area in the past, common people had lost their hard earned money by opening an account with a 'cheat fund' run by an unauthorized private company. The group was advised that a post office/ bank savings account is a much more secure and safe place to save their hard earned money.

The members of Mita group want to save their money in a secure place like the post office, but because they do not have any official documents such as voter cards, ration cards or any kind of identity card, which they need to open a post office savings account. It was suggested by the Apne Aap members that they must collect some documents as 'proof of residence', for example a councillor's certificate.

On 31st August 2012 they went to the councillor's office at Munshigunge and convinced her to issue a residential certificate to them as they have been residing in the area for between ten to twenty years. So the councilors issued the residential certificate after her staff had verified their residence

After that they went to the Raja Janki Nath market post office and after talking with the post master, submitted their residential certificates and then completed some official formalities to open an account. And finally they opened their savings accounts and got their savings pass books.

This is a great fight fought by the women to claim their right to open an account in a safe place like post office. Now, not only can they use this pass book as their residential proof or identity proof, but they can get interest on their deposited money on the post office. This is an important step by the community women of Mita Group towards their self-empowerment.

## Attendance Figures for Apne Aap Programs:

Attendance figures of school and livelihoods programs in: Kolkata, Bihar and Delhi

	Kolkata	Bihar	Delhi	Gender Resource Center
<b>Non Formal Education</b>				
NFE Students till date	765	350	40	93
No. of drop out students to date	255	100	30	0
No. of students Main-streamed w/ either gov/ private schools	250	250	8	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>1310</b>	<b>950</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>125</b>



Photo taken by Megan Keels

*AAWW girls in group session in Kolkata*



Photo taken by Megan Keels

*Sign posted in AAWW office in Kolkata*

	Kolkata	Bihar	Delhi	Gender Resource Center
<b>Vocational training/ Livelihood</b>				
No. of vocational trainings provided till date	10	34	2	40
No. of beneficiaries taken the training	240	34	70	390
No. of beneficiaries trained	203	16	33	105
No. of beneficiaries opted it as a main source/ alternative source of their livelihood	40	0	2	85
<b>Total</b>	<b>493</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>620</b>

## Princeton Fights Against Sex Trafficking

*By Shikha Uberoi*

**United States:** By the time you finish reading my words, and move on into the reality of your world, 152 more people will be trafficked - the U.N. estimate that around 4,000,000 people are trafficked annually. Slavery is universally thought to have been abolished well before computers and air conditioning were even conceived - but we are sorely mistaken if we believe that slavery is merely a shameful mark in the history of humanity. Slavery is a brutal gash that bleeds relentlessly and stains our human reputation.

In 2010 my friend Rafael Grillo and I started a group at Princeton University, called P.A.S.T, Princeton Against Sex Trafficking. We knew going in that we were two simple students pitched against a dangerous, historical and global \$32 billion dollar industry. But we also knew that behind those numbers and statistics were people; people with brilliant personalities, dreams of futures yet to be manifested, and people with the right to fulfill the potential of their personhood. Seeing the human behind the stats and keeping him or her top of mind, neutralized any fear and nipped our doubts in the bud. Suddenly, we were no longer two insignificant students but members of a powerful, global team that stood for guarding the sanctity of life. One team leader is Ruchira Gupta who founded the Indian NGO Apne Aap.

After speaking at P.A.S.T.'s lecture series, I asked Ruchira if it would be possible to try something a bit out of the ordinary for both Apne Aap and Princeton University. Her immediate support and enthusiasm eventually led us to the pivotal moment we have reached today. P.A.S.T. will be selling purses, stoles, pillowcases and coin purses made by

the survivors and marginalized women Apne Aap supports. The difference between these products and other similar types of merchandise lies in the fact that the names of the women who made them are stitched into their work. A piece of their identity literally becomes a part of our lives. The gulf that keeps those "far away" sex workers distant from us,

***"...behind those numbers and statistics were people; people with brilliant personalities, dreams of futures yet to be manifested"***



*Photo of community women sewing stoles, bags, and other materials for purchase at the AAWW center in Kolkata*

we who can help but feel so helpless, has now been bridged. The intrinsic human connection between two people is etched in every product. Your connection directly impacts "Preethi" or "Anjali" because she now knows she is heard, she feels she is wanted and above all, valued. Your purchase will allow "Preethi" and "Anjali" to sustain themselves and plan their futures, and it will protect their children from being forced to live their mothers' past.

The idea of physically going to a location, domestic or foreign, to rescue victims and prevent trafficking is exciting and unconventionally glamorous. However it is not always feasible for many of us. So, P.A.S.T will bring the glamour to you. The purses, stoles and pillowcases look as if Vera Bradley herself designed them. However, they are one tenth of the cost and ten times the value.

A slim margin of chance separated me from being the girl who writes about this subject versus being the subject matter itself. Winning the "parent lottery" and being born into privilege is yet again something I had no control over, and the amount of luck I have had to be in the position I am in today has never been in my hands. But what is in my hands is my responsibility to share my luck, to spread it and foster its growth. I would like to do my bit and now I can do it feeling beautiful wearing my stole with pride.

## President Obama Calls For New Steps To Combat Human Trafficking; Will India Follow?

*By: Ruchira Gupta*

**New York:** When US President Barack Obama made a milestone commitment against sex-trafficking in New York on Sept 25, I was sitting in the audience wondering what it would take for the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to demonstrate the same commitment for the most marginalized section of girls in our country.

In the middle of a busy election campaign and meetings at the United Nations General Assembly, the President took time out to make a nearly hour-long speech on human trafficking. Perhaps the most forceful speech ever on this topic by a world leader, Obama referred to the fight against human trafficking as “one of the great human rights causes of our time,” and mapped new steps to deal with a problem he called “barbaric and evil.” The President not only noted that human trafficking is a criminal activity that involves the buying and selling of human beings, but also squarely equated it with slavery. “When a little girl is sold by her impoverished family -- girls my daughters’ age -- or runs away from home, or is lured by false promises of a better life, and then imprisoned in a brothel and tortured if she resists -- that’s slavery. It has no place in a civilized world,” he said.

The Central Bureau of Investigation in 2009 stated that there are at least three million prostituted women and girls in India of which 1.2 million are children. The National Human Rights Commission says the numbers are going up and the ages coming down. The latest reported case is of a seven-year-old girl from Darjeeling.

Yet our Prime Minister, even in his second term, is silent on the subject. So is our own female Chief Minister, who could not have failed to notice the young girls lined up in her own backyard on the Chetla bridge with their painted faces and their dead smiles.

A stricter law to punish buyers of prostituted sex and its traffickers is pending in the Indian Parliament even 60 years after Independence. This is in spite of repeated submissions by activists and victims of trafficking to law-makers. Such a law has been passed in Sweden, Norway, and Iceland and has been found to act as a deterrent to the sex industry. The delay in law only puts hundreds of more girls in harm’s way.

Even the existing law is hardly ever used to tackle the Tsunami sized sex-industry we have flourishing in India. The administration routinely turns a

blind eye to the size of the red-light districts, the violence that the young girls are subject to therein, and sometimes actively harasses anti-trafficking activists. Recently Fatima, the 14-year old daughter of an anti-trafficking activist, was illegally detained by a local police officer, S.P. Lande, in Forbesgunge, Bihar. This was perhaps done to intimidate the mother from campaigning. No government has so far held the police officer accountable for this gross misuse of the law. No arm of the state -- be it the Child Welfare Committee, the National Committee for the Protection of Child Rights, the ministries of women and child in Patna or Delhi, or even the Home Minister who is in charge of the police, has so far spoken a word on the subject although all are aware of the case. The officer concerned has found strength in this silence and gone on to arrest another anti-trafficking activist, Md Kalam on blatantly false charges. While Kalam is now out on bail, no evidence has been presented against him in court so far. There are innumerable such cases around the country.

### President’s Column

In our patriarchal set-up, sex trafficking is one of the most invisible, unacknowledged and under-prioritized of problems. It is so perhaps because it affects more women than men, girls more than boys. Perhaps, because we accept prostitution as inevitable we believe in the myth that men are entitled to “unbridled” sexual desire. It is as if some poor girl or woman should inevitably be available to meet this need. Or is it that sexual pleasure is only a man’s prerogative, associated with domination and purchase.

Of the 20 million victims worldwide that President Obama spoke about in his speech, 3 million are in India. I saw friends and fellow-activists’ in the room who were proud of their President for taking on an issue that they had struggled for. While our Prime Minister is often found to agree with his friends in the US on matters of economy and defense, I wonder when he will have the courage to do so on behalf of the most marginalized -- the fourteen-year-old prostituted girl?

## I Cursed God for Sending Me Here

*Nisha Khatoon, a 17-year-old survivor talked to Ruchira Gupta for Channel NewsAsia—a Singapore news channel. Below is an excerpt from the interview.*

**Nisha:** I never thought that there are good people in this world, I always thought that the world is so bad and it is full of people who do bad things. I always cursed God for creating and sending me to such a place where everything is bad and ugly. But then I used to console myself by thinking that life is such in this world and we have to face life bravely.

**Ruchira:** Why did you feel that the place where you live is bad?

**Nisha:** Because the people there consume alcohol, have fights with each other, use abusive language, prostitution happens there, men who visit the place say bad things to us. And I used to feel very bad about it.

**Ruchira:** How did you feel about the people in your own house? Your brother, father, mother?

**Nisha:** They would always say that this is our profession and even if we tried to or wished to, we would never get a job outside the Red Light Area.

**Ruchira:** Did you feel scared of them?

**Nisha:** No, because they never tried to scare me. They would always stop me from hanging around with the girls and boys in the Red Light Area and would never want me to do anything that was wrong. My mom was a little strict but my father was so cheerful and liberal and soft, that I wasn't ever scared of him. But I know one thing that if my mother had lived I would never have been prostituted. (Her mother passed away four years back).

**Ruchira:** How did it all happen? How did they force you into prostitution?

**Nisha:** The people of Rampur would always be waiting for a girl to grow up so that she can be prostituted. When I was of that age they forced themselves to me; they beat my father and they also beat me up and raped me and then I was prostituted.

**Ruchira:** After you got prostituted and when men came to you, did you say something to them?

**Nisha:** Yes, I asked them if they didn't have mothers and sisters at their homes; that don't they realize the dignity of a woman and how could they do what they did with me. To that, they replied that I was born in such a place where I was bound to be doing this and that I am bound to serve them, unlike the

women in their own houses. They said that this is what we have been doing since ages and this is our future also. And they also scolded me for arguing with them after being born at a Red Light Area. They asked me why I am trying to act 'decent' when I was living in a Red Light Area.

**Ruchira:** So what did you reply?

**Nisha:** I said that it's not necessary that if I am born here, I can't talk and argue or that I have to do wrong things. And it's not necessary that everyone here is involved in prostitution. There could be one good person for every 10 bad people. And I requested them not to do anything with me as I was a child. They tried to manipulate me by saying that this profession will make my father rich and we would have a good life. But I said that I don't need such a life. When my father resisted they took him outside the house and beat him up. And they raped me.

**Ruchira:** Did you ever feel that you would be rescued from there?

**Nisha:** Once I ran away from my house and hid in a jungle nearby. I didn't come out from the place till they were gone. When I went back home my father was also crying as he felt helpless that he couldn't protect his daughter.

**Ruchira:** So did you ever feel that you could get out from there and how did you feel when you were rescued?

**Nisha:** I felt good but also bad at the same time because I was rescued after I was prostituted and after all the bad things did happen to me. They should have prevented me from being prostituted and should have saved my life from being ruined.

**Ruchira:** So now do you feel that your life has been ruined?

**Nisha:** No, now I feel that my life is perfect.

**Ruchira:** So don't you feel now that nobody's life can get ruined, that everyone can start a new life and can make it better?

**Nisha:** Yes

**Ruchira:** How did you feel when you came to school and met other girls?

**Nisha:** I used to be very short tempered and didn't like the place. The girls used to fight with me and I

*(Continues on p 7)*

(Continued from p. 6 "Nisha's Interview ...")

always felt that this is how it is and it's because we are from a bad place and that's why these girls don't talk to me and don't interact with me. But gradually when I started living there, we became friends and we all started living together and it was all fine then.

**Ruchira:** How did it all changed? How did you manage to change the attitude of other girls towards you? How did you gain the strength to do that? Do you remember how the transition period was?

**Nisha:** There were some girls who used to provoke me to fight because they wanted me to leave the hostel. And I used to get influenced by them and even the teachers used to scold me for fighting and then I would fight with the teachers also. I would cry and wanted to go back home.

But then the girls in the class changed, new girls came and they interacted with me and became friends with me and everything changed. I started concentrating on studies.

**Ruchira:** What do you want to do after studies?

**Nisha:** I want to become a social worker.

**Ruchira:** What do you want to do after becoming a social worker?

**Nisha:** I want to start a school for girls in the Red Light Area and give education. The parents will also change their attitude when they see that someone is thinking about them. I want to change the system there.

**Ruchira:** What if the girls don't want to go to school and they want to be at home?

**Nisha:** I will convince them that if they live in the Red Light Area their life would never get better and they are at risk. I would also ask them to stay at the hostel and see how it is and how the world outside the Red Light Area is and then they would realize why they have to be in schools.

**Ruchira:** Which song do you sing at the hostel in the mornings? Could you sing that?

**Nisha:** The Song – "The voice of my heart says that confidence stays where there is courage...Should not give pain to others nor should take pain from others...Should not keep a relationship with lies and follow the path of truth..."

**Ruchira:** What do you see as a difference between school and home in the Red Light Area now?

**Nisha:** At hostel, I have friends, I interact with them, play with them, study, learn computer, karate and everything is so well managed. But at home, in the Red Light Area I see girls being beaten up, prostituted, alcoholic people, and people fighting with each other, using abusive languages.

**Ruchira:** What is your father saying now?

**Nisha:** My father says that he will educate me and make me a doctor and sometime he says he wants me to be a police officer. But then I say that I will be a social worker.

**Ruchira:** What did you do at the court and the police station after you were rescued?

**Nisha:** I was asked in the court why my father couldn't protect me from being prostituted and I said that my father was sick and was weak and he was beaten up. And if he would have gone to file a case he knew that

they won't file a case because the policemen never file a case from the people of the Red Light Area. They would ask for money and my father didn't have money.

**Ruchira:** What is your dream about other girls who are your friends?

**Nisha:** I want them to study and have a good life.

**Ruchira:** What is your dream about Uttari Rampur Red Light Area?

**Nisha:** All the things I mentioned were especially for Uttari Rampur (Where Nisha is born). I want that the girls there shouldn't be prostituted and they do some other business and lead a dignified life.

**Ruchira:** What should happen to the pimps and traffickers?

**Nisha:** They should go to the jail.

**Ruchira:** What about the customers?

**Nisha:** They should be banned there, the girls should say no and they would obviously stop coming there.

**Ruchira:** Do you want to give any message to other girls around the world?

**Nisha:** My name is Nisha Khatoon, I want every girl in this world to live happily and a girl should be smart enough not to get into any kind of trap and decide if they need to go with someone or not. And one decision of theirs can change their life whether it is a good one or bad, so take good decision. Never do anything wrong and be strong.

***"I always cursed God for creating and sending me to such a place where everything is bad and ugly. But then I used to console myself by thinking that life is such in this world and we have to face life bravely."***

(Continued from p. 2 "BPL Card...")

If the community women will get this card then it will be a very great achievement for them as the community women actively participate and interact with the government officials. Obtaining this BPL card will be very helpful to getting their rights to live with dignity as guaranteed by our constitution.

*Photo of Mita Group Members opening their post office savings accounts*



## Banishing Violence Against Women with Dance

*By Anupam Das*

**Kolkata:** Celebrating the International Day for Elimination of Violence against women on Sunday the 25<sup>th</sup> of November 2012, at ICCR, Kolkata; our girls had a nice time and enjoyed to their fullest by performing on three songs in the auditorium in front of a crowd of 70-80 spectators. They also participated in a live painting program on stage, planned as a part of the event.

The event was joint collaboration between Apne Aap and Shibarajani (a dance group set up by the Odishi Dancer Dipanwita Roy). The Chief Guest for the event was the Honorable Minister for Women & Social Welfare Smt. Sabitri Mitra. The chairperson for the event was Smt. Sunanda Mukherjee, Chairperson; State Commission for Women, West Bengal. Artists like Ms. Dipali Bhattacharya, Ishami Bonick and Swapna drew a live painting in front of the crowd, in the tune of Rabindra Sangeet. Our girls of the DMT group also participated in the live painting and tried their hands at stroking the brush.

Tamal on behalf of Apne Aap gave a welcoming speech and shared how Apne Aap came into being and has been relentlessly



*Apne Aap girls in a dance performance formation at ICCR in Kolkata*

fighting against sex-trafficking since the year 2002. *mentally challenge the culture of discrimination that allows violence to continue.*

*This year's message from the desk of the UN's Secretary-General Ban K-Moon says, "Millions of women and girls around the world are assaulted, beaten, raped, mutilated and even murdered in what constitutes appalling violations of their human rights. [...] We must funda-*

*make good on their pledges to end all forms of violence against women and girls in all parts of the world, and I urge all people to support this important goal."*



## Did You Know?

*Rape: The victims, the perpetrators, and how often these crimes get reported*

- 1 in 3 women will experience rape or attempted rape in their lifetime
- 46% of rapes are committed by a friend or acquaintance
- 20% of rapes are committed by an intimate partner
- 30% of rapes are committed by a stranger
- Only 20-28% of rapes are reported, compared to 60% of robberies
- Among the men arrested, only 1/2 are convicted
- And among these, only 2/3 serve jail time

Sources: US Department of Justice, 2000; Magid et. al 2004; LeVay and Valente 2006



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.

**Join our mailing list at:**  
[www.apneaap.org](http://www.apneaap.org)



### Red Light Despatch

Gate 3/4, Second Floor,  
India International Centre Campus  
40, Max Mueller Road, Lodhi Estate  
New Delhi - 110003  
Phone:  
+91 11 24619968  
E-mail/Web:  
contact@apneaap.org  
www.apneaap.org

<b>Editors:</b>	<b>Ruchira Gupta</b>
<b>Editorial team:</b>	<b>Megan Keels, S. Kalidas</b>
<b>Publisher:</b>	<b>Apne Aap Women Worldwide</b>
<b>RNI Number</b>	<b>DELMUL/2008/27727</b>