



# Red Light Despatch

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## My Dream

By Momal

**Najafgarh, Delhi:** I just love dancing and I want to become a dancer. It gives me energy and it makes me happy. I forget all my worries when I dance. I was only 11 years old, when I started dancing. I used to dance at my home. Instead of copying the dance steps of any song, I used to make my own dance steps.

**“I forget all the things while dancing, even myself.”**

Dancing is my passion. I forget everything, even myself while dancing. I do not even remember that I am dancing in front of somebody. Everyone in Apne Aap praised my dance and Monika *didi* helped me to get admission in Dance Institute, Art Intro. Monika *didi* supports me a lot and keeps motivating me. She is my idol.

She motivated me to work to help my family. After some time I was convinced and now I am working as maid in a house. I am happy that I am helping my family. My dream is to become a dancer. After becoming a dancer I want to go in Dance India Dance. This is my ultimate goal. With all the support I get now, I feel I can do better in my life.

## Kishori Mandal Girls Demand High School

By Tunni Kumari

**Kasturba Gandhi Kishori Mandal, Babuan, Bihar:** My name is Tunni Kumari and I am a member of Apne Aap Kasturba Gandhi Kishori Mandal, Dumarbanna, Babuan, Araria. On 29<sup>th</sup> December 2012 all the girls from Babuan, Bela and Basmatia organized a meeting and rally to demand a High School and approx 250 girls participated in the rally. All the important elected members of Bela Basmatia and Babuan *panchayats* also participated in this rally. Mr Dinanath Yadav, ex-chairman, Babuan *panchayat* addressed the rally and said that “we are with you and you will get the High School soon.” We are hopeful to con-

tinue our higher education in our locality. All the *panchayat* members addressed the rally and assured support in the movement to get a High School sanctioned from the govt. S.S.B. Commandant Mr Pratap Singh Randhavat was also present in the occasion and addressed the rally. A Sports and Dance competition was also organized by the SSB. I participated in the Dandia Dance and won a prize. It was given to me by the SSB commandant. A newspaper named “Times of India” gave me the prize. I am very proud to win the prize and I believe that if we have courage, nothing is

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## My Struggles and My Strength

By Anita Kumari

**Bihar:** My name is Anita, and I am 35 years old. I am the member of Sakhi Swayam Sahayata Samuh, the SEG run by Apne Aap in Kubertola, Forbesganj. My husband died 5 years back which broke me mentally and financially. I have four children, 3 daughters and one son. It was really difficult for me take care of my family. Somehow I managed to do domestic work and

was running my family. My husband had taken loan from the bank for a business when he was alive and after his death I came to know about it. I was already struggling to earn food for the family and I didn't know how I would pay back the loans on top of that. The bank people used to come often to my house

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## Dance Away Your Blues

*By Uma Das*

**Kolkata:** I am trying to mobilise all girls in my area of Munshiganj against sex- trafficking. And I do it through my dance. Recently, I participated in the Stop Violence Against Women programme conducted by Apne Aap in collaboration with another organization by the name of Shibiranjani. We celebrated the International Day for Elimination of Violence Against Women on 25th November, 2012. I mobilised ten girls-- Annu Rauth, Tannu Rauth, Anwary, Dolly Mahato, Sushma Jha, Radha Prasad, Rakhi Shaw, Priyanka Gupta, Rekha Gupta, and Seema-- for this programme. We all practiced together for three months before we performed at this programme.

We performed to songs like “*Boro asha kore asechhinu kachhey deke*,” “*Ful bole dhonno ami*,” and “*Jamunaboti*”. I was very excited about our first on-stage experience at the Indian Council for Cultural Relations. When we went to the I.C.C.R auditorium my team members were feeling quite tense, but I motivated them to give a good performance. Free dance movement helps me a lot. Some years ago I, too, used to feel hesitant about performing publically. But now I feel like a bird that has been set free and can fly freely. Dance is my passion and I can express myself through my dance. I want to become a trainer of dance movement therapy. Now my aim is to see a change in society as well as my team members. I want to fight against sex trafficking with the Apne Aap through dance as therapy.



*(Continued from page 1 “Kishori Mandal...”)*

impossible for us. The aim of our life is to achieve our mission, vision and goals. We are very thankful to Apne Aap Women Worldwide who support us and encourage us and give us a safe space where we participate in several activities and our Kishori Mandal weekly meetings. I am proud that I am a member of Apne Aap Kasturba Gandhi Kishori Mandal, Dumarbanna, Babuan, Araria.

*(Continued from page 1 “My struggles....”)*

and were sending notice after notice that if I didn't pay back the money they will put me in jail and would acquire my house. I was living in a small hut which was the only property I had and if I was thrown out of that along with my family, where would I go? I was very worried and helpless.

Then the women in my community asked me to join their group. I had seen them many a time sitting in groups discussing how to save their money. I told them that I don't have money and moreover I was scared to put any money anywhere. They assured me and said that it's a very small amount that one needs to save monthly and I can also take loan from the group when I need on a very small interest. I joined the group and I started saving. I got legal support from Apne Aap for my hus-

band's loan issue and I didn't have to pay back the money. I was interested in stitching and tailoring and knew a little bit about that. Once the *bhaiya* from Apne Aap came to ask about our skills and took our details.

Then I was selected for a tailoring class at the classes run by NOMI Network. There were other women also learning and a *didi* from abroad came and was teaching us tailoring and how to make bags. They paid me money even during the training and now I am making bags and earning too. My daughter has got admitted in the computer training programme of Apne Aap.

My life, which I didn't know where it was going two years is back is now back on track. I now have an aim. I want my children to be educated which I couldn't think of earlier. I am happy that I joined the group and I feel I am safe now.



## Anti-Human Trafficking Rally

*By Tamal Mukherjee*

**Mohor Kunja, Kolkata:** On 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2012, 10 girls from Apne Aap Women Worldwide participated in a dance event organized by the American Center at Mohor Kunj with the other anti-trafficking organisations. The girls got 5 days of rehearsals with composers Tanmoy Bose and Laura Price. The ten girls had been divided into two groups of five each. One group participated in percussion and the other group in a short play. In Mohor Kunj, Apne Aap also had two stalls of products and for collection of signatures on campaigns for selling of the Cool Men T-Shirts, etc.



## Save The Girl Child Event

*By Manohar Rana*

**National Bal Bhavan, New Delhi:** Apne aap women worldwide and Gender Resource Centre, Khaira, participated in an event organized by Action India partnering with other NGOs to raise awareness against female foeticide. The the main objective of the rally was to educate people about the need for gender balance in the society. This can only be achieved by eliminating the practice of female foeticide and ensuring that girls get equal opportunities and treatment. Female foeticide is a deep rooted social evil in India and those who practice it are quite inventive. They employ high-end technologies to kill the female foetus like ultrasound . However, saving the girl child is not the sole responsibility of the government but of the society as a whole. There were many kinds of program organised for this event. Like short plays on the of theme eliminating female foeticide, poems, songs, dances, self-defence demonstrations, etc. Dharampura Apne Aap girls did two bhangra numbers. All programmes were appreciated by the people. Some people could even be seen with tears in their eyes.



## My Visit to Sonagachi

*By Megan Keels*

**Kolkata:** On Wednesday December 12, 2012, I traveled South East for 26 hours by train from Delhi to Kolkata to visit the Apne Aap Women Worldwide office and community center there. The next day we went to see the office. It is a discreet two story building at Khidderpore, near the docks, marked by an Apne Aap sign-board. Inside, large posters explain Apne Aap's goals and vision, and colorful pictures of women and girls testify to the work being done at the center. I was fascinated by everything going on with rooms designated for different activity such as the research and documentation unit, the gender resource unit and survivor advocacy unit. In each room different activities were taking place-- women making bags in the sewing room, students working on projects on the computers, a group of children being instructed in a drawing class.

I especially loved seeing the women working away on their sewing machines. The IGP (Income Generating Projects) at the ground level are something that is particularly motivating to me because I appreciate seeing tangible outcomes on small and large scales – the products being made, women's lives affected, and inequalities confronted. Through IGP programs the women are provided a skill, a job, an income and freedom from relying on someone else for their livelihood. On the ground level it has a direct impact on their lives; furthermore they are teaching their children that they are responsible, independent and intelligent women.

This same afternoon we got invited to sit in on a large circle session with about 20 of the girls. One of our primary tasks during the visit was to videotape two to three minute segments of the girls' stories and experiences with Apne Aap. The girls range in age from about 8-17 years old. This informal open mike session was set up on the open roof top of the Apne Aap community center. It was great to be outside on a sunny warm Kolkata afternoon.

We took off our shoes and squeezed in between the girls on the large rug spread out over the floor where they were all sitting cross legged in a neat circle. They told us about their experience with Apne Aap, what had brought

them there, some encouraging moments that made them stand up for themselves, and other stories that brought tears to their faces. It was very moving to sit in their presence and be a part of what they had to share.

Afterwards they sang songs and asked us a lot of questions like what our favorite foods were, if we had siblings, and what we wanted to be when we grew up. Most touchingly, one of the girls wanted us to see her computer class; she was really proud of a PowerPoint presentation that she had been working on over the week and wanted to show it to us. It was a wonderful experience to share her joy in her accomplishment. I loved seeing all of the work in progress at the AAWW center, and especially spending time with the girls.

### Volunteer Journal

#### **Witnessing Modern Day Slavery: A Walk through Sonagachi**

On Sunday December 16, 2012, I was given the unique opportunity to visit Sonagachi, the largest Red Light District in Kolkata and one of the largest in Asia. It is an area made up of several hundred tall, multi-story brothels and approximately 10,000 prostituted women and girls.

It was a warm afternoon and there were people scurrying about all around us. At first, from the street view I couldn't tell that we had actually arrived, I thought that it looked relatively unremarkable. Then we entered into the narrow streets that made me feel like I was in a life sized maze. Clustered together, the towering structures and confined spaces of the narrow lanes gave me an immediate feeling of claustrophobia as we walked into the Red Light District.

Everyone stared at us. Why wouldn't they? A curious group of people, with two white women, obviously not there to do anything but look around. We were looking at them and they were looking at us. It felt weird and uncomfortable. Besides the two or three children who were playing badminton in the street that said hello to us and smiled as we passed, I felt unwelcome the entire time. *(Continued on page 5)*

*(Continued from pg.4 "My Visit to...")*

Sonagachi was busy; bikes passing, people shopping, men and women carrying heavy loads on their heads, and a constant reverberation of noises from traffic, people, and movement. There are more than just brothels here; facing the streets are stores, homes, businesses and shops. People live, work, and carry out ordinary lives in Sonagachi, too. Some of the girls we saw were dressed in average clothing, weren't wearing any make-up, and may have been out living everyday lives.

But it wasn't long before I saw what we had come to witness, a group of prostituted girls that couldn't have been older than fifteen or sixteen. They were standing outside a doorway, waiting. Waiting for purchase. They were dressed up, wearing their colorful saris, had make-up on their faces, and their skin was fair, as that is a highly demanded quality. All these efforts are an attempt to make the girls look healthy and happy to be there, however, the girls were not well.

You could easily tell by their faces and from their sunken eyes that they were tired, ill and sick with disease and trauma. As we continued walking we saw more groups of girls, clustered at doorways. I was told that there are approximately 25 prostituted women and girls living in each brothel, and on any given day the girls may be forced to have sex with as many as 30 men. The girls do not receive monetary compensation for these services. The money goes directly to the pimps or the brothel owners/managers. Once the girls have been "working" for the brothel for 5 years, the owners allow them to keep half of their wages, at which time the owners charge them extremely inflated rates for rent, food, medications and other basic necessities. At this point they shift into a debt bondage. The brothel manager charges highly exaggerated rates for these supplies which the women can't keep up with and become entrapped in a cycle of owing the manager more than they will ever be able to make.

They didn't look happy, but I am sure that if I were a male customer approaching

them for sex, they would be forced to appear excited to see me or risk being beaten by the brothel owner who was undoubtedly close by monitoring their every move.

At one point, one of the Apne Aap Women Worldwide staff told us to walk faster to keep up with each other so as to not get separated from our group. It was impossible though not to look at the girls, just standing there waiting. Waiting for the next person to dehumanize her, to rape her, to take away more of her childhood. That's all she is, a teenage girl disguised as an adult to fulfill the desire of someone who's buying the domination of another human being. The fear and terror of living in this hell is immeasurable. It is not a life they have chosen or would choose for their children, but are often forced into both situations unwillingly.

One of the most overwhelming emotions that I had as we walked through the streets of Sonagachi was guilt. I felt guilty that I could leave this place and these girls couldn't. I was essentially a tourist here. For these girls that is not an option. They are trapped in a life size maze of forced prostitution and they have to relive it every single day.

As we passed through the last of the multi-level structures to exit back onto the main street, I felt a little relieved. The staff from AAWW asked us why we wanted to come here. We told them that it's one thing to read about, study, and attempt to form solutions to forced prostitution, but actually visiting a place like this is incomparable. However, you don't have to come all the way to India to find sex trafficking; it occurs almost everywhere in the world. It is going on in my home town of Wilmington, NC in the United States of America and more than likely is happening in your hometown too.

Slavery today is an economic endeavor, driven by profit rather than simple hatred, and while slavery is illegal in every country, there are very few economic controls on such trade. Economic sanctions have been successful in attacking drug and weapons cartels, but haven't been widely used in fighting human trafficking. If governments and people make slavery unprofitable, it will stop.

***"The fear and terror of living in this hell is immeasurable."***

## **Movement Building to End Sex Trafficking**

*By Jane Eyre Mathew*

The School of Women's Studies (SWS), Jadavpur University organised a one-day workshop on 11th December 2012 in collaboration with Apne Aap Women Worldwide, a grassroots organisation working to end trafficking. The agenda for this workshop was to chalk out ways and means of advocacy and communication for dismantling sex trafficking and to develop strategies for movement building around sex trafficking and sex work.

Ruchira Gupta, Founder President of Apne Aap Women Worldwide, spoke on key issues related to sex trafficking in India. Her emphasis was on the Gandhian principle of *Antyodaya* meaning upliftment of the last woman.

Ms. Gupta highlighted the dynamics within trafficking and the ways in which pimps traffic girls from rural areas to city brothels and red-light areas. She said, "The girl's aspiration is killed in the first instance, when she is born in a poor and low caste family." Traffickers take advantage of these helpless and poor families with daughters to feed. Girls within the age-group of 13-19 are the most disempowered and vulnerable.

Poverty is the main cause of entry into prostitution. Young girls and women are 'powerless' and 'silent' in Indian families dominated by the male members. In rural areas, this patriarchal domination is considered 'natural' and 'necessary', causing them to succumb to such discrimination and give in to the demands of the male members.

Elaborating on ways women and girls are pulled into the sex trade, Ms. Gupta said that its usually done by someone they know. The typical procurer is a 'friend' or a relative—who has secured the trust of the girl. Deceit, sale by the family, abduction, seduction and even romance are major tools used in trafficking. Women and girls belonging to poor families and those living in rural areas usually get drawn towards the allure of a steady and high paying job.

A promise of marriage is another ploy used by paramours causing the girl to run away from her family and consequently getting sold off to some brothel owner. Poor families burdened by daughters are glad to see them depart to the city. Thus, poverty and desperation often lead families to sell their children into slavery.

To end sex trafficking certain steps need to be taken like communication with trafficked women's family, organising awareness camps about the trade among the vulnerable women and the general public. Educating girls is just one among many ways of creating awareness and equipping them to fight for their rights. Linking trafficked women to government schemes is another strong way of empowering these women. Marginalised communities need to be supported and alternative livelihood options addressed for them to sustain their families.

The next main focus was on "How to build a movement which reaches out to the 'last girl'?" Ms. Gupta suggested a two way action plan. Firstly, by visiting the red-light areas and speaking to the affected women directly about their needs and concerns. Secondly, by going to villages prone to sex trafficking and speaking to families on ways sex trafficking takes place and the consequences of the act.

Trafficking has two aspects which need to be dealt with, namely, development and protection. To develop the concept of trafficking and related issues, there should be a large scale research focussing on the source, transit and destination. As of now there is a no reliable document related to trafficking either with the government or NGOs working on the issue. Hence the proportion and magnitude of this problem can not be easily estimated. This calls for a concerted effort on the part of the government and NGOs who will help document various facets of trafficking and in the long run pave way for advocating an end to trafficking. There are also communities in the northern part of India where women and girls enter prostitution due to tradition. These women need to be made aware of their rights and choices in life. The reality of traditional prostitution has to be seriously addressed so that the future generation is educated, rehabilitated and protected from this practice.

Communication strategy needs to be developed from the grassroots level to the centers of governance. The problem of sex trafficking must be brought within the ambit of the five year plan. The affected women who have returned to the community can be identified and employed as ASHA workers for creating awareness in their communities.



## My First Experience of a RED LIGHT AREA

*By Manish K. Jha*

I first joined Apne Aap Women Worldwide, Bihar, in March 2011 after working on a similar project at Bharatpur, Rajasthan, under Plan India. This organisation caters for the needs of the children of *Bedias*, *Kanjars* and *Saperas* and helps them move into mainstream society. These communities are involved in inter-generational prostitution. The situation in Bihar was different from what I had experienced in Bharatpur. There I was working with a Hindu community who were very affluent and were able to send their children, including their daughters to school, without much discrimination. In Bihar I came across a Muslim *Nat* community who belong to Other Backward Castes (OBC) in the state list of reservation. In Rajasthan the *Nat* Community are considered as scheduled castes or scheduled tribes. As a result of their OBC categorization in Bihar, the *Nat* Community experience extensive marginalization and dehumanization, especially of their adolescent girls. This was the biggest shock and the largest challenge of my 11 years of Development Sector life.

Uttari Rampur at Forbesganj is the single largest organized red-light area of Araria. The red-light area and its surroundings is a community of mixed groups, made up of prostituted women, perpetrators of prostitution and those who are vulnerable or at high risk of being prostituted. It is the existence of the red-light area as well as the assortment of the nature of individuals and families inhabiting the area that lends itself to various negative impacts on different members of the *Nat* community.

A significant part of this *Nat* community is comprised of adolescent girls. This group suffers disproportionately precisely because they are adolescent, female and reside in such close proximity to the red-light area. These girls have either not attended school or have been made to leave school. Most of these girls are illiterate and unskilled. They spend less time as children and more time as adults performing household duties and attending to the needs of the family. One serious consequence of being embedded in an environment of prostitution is that

these girls are often faced with situations that make them very vulnerable to being prostituted themselves. This vulnerability arises from various factors that are specific to this group. There are those factors which are the result of family and community situations, as well as those arising from the environment of the prostitution market.

The adolescent girls are not allowed equal opportunities during this crucial development stage in comparison to other children. Not being able to go to school and not having had any opportunity of learning or utilizing their skills means that these girls do not have the benefit of any productive time to themselves. This is aggravated by their proximity to the red-light area. In addition to this, the girls are at an age when they are unable to fully comprehend the costs of prostitution and are drawn towards the visible monetary benefits of the trade. This makes them extremely susceptible to the proposition of supporting the family through prostitution.

The high risk girls with low self-esteem are subjected to constant sharing of responsibilities and cannot realize the full impact of their own victimization by their families, even when they have been pushed into the trade by their parents. They are unable to protest against any physical or sexual abuse or violation of their rights regardless of whether it is from their own family members or members of the prostitution market. Most of these girls are found to be in helpless situations by virtue of the opportunities they have been denied during their upbringing in this area.

There is a great need to build strengths in these individual adolescent girls so as to protect them from their vulnerability to prostitution and prevent them from being introduced into the prostitution market. There is an equally great need to work with the family and the community towards eradication of prostitution and to change attitudes towards women in general. Kishori Mandal and Mahila Mandal programmes of Apne Aap Women Worldwide are conducting successful interventions at both the family and the community level.

## Did You Know?

### Gender Inequality in India

- The male literacy rate is 75.85%, yet the female literacy rate is only 54.6%
- Infant mortality is 6.7% for boys and 7.8% for girls
- Rural women are paid 60% of what rural men are paid, and urban women 80% of what urban men are paid.
- 40% of women are assaulted by their partners.
- Less than 50% of women are involved in decisions related to their own health care.
- Every 26 minutes, a woman is molested.
- Every 43 minutes, a woman is kidnapped.
- Every 93 minutes, a woman is killed,
- Every 102 minutes, a dowry death occurs

From: "Gandhimati Ekta" *Women in India: Facts and Figures. Madurai.*



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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