



Red Light Despatch

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My Dreams

I want trafficked girls to be free

By Fatima

Kidderpore, Kolkata: It is my dream to be an example to all the girls and women who are married, trafficked and who think that their lives are limited. I want to teach them something so that they have more options and can stand on their own feet. Before I joined Apne Aap, people thought I was a weak and ordinary woman. However, after I joined Apne Aap, there have been many positive changes in me. As far back as I can remember, I have seen trafficking taking place in front of me. I was married when I was nine years old. During this time I removed five girls from prostitution, out of which two were married and one had two children. I removed her children and her from the Red Light Area because in the future they would be more vulnerable to being trafficked. These girls are now studying in Nepal. After this incident, I did not receive food for five days. After facing these problems I became stronger from within.

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Sting Operation at the *Kali Mela*

By Saumya Prateek

Forbesganj, Bihar: Every year in Forbesganj a *mela* (cultural event) named “*Kali Mela*” occurs from December through January. During this *mela* a tent is put up at the huge grounds—a government property near Uttari Rampur Red Light Area. In earlier times, the *Kali Mela* was essentially a cattle fair since people used to come from far to buy cattle. Now however, the *mela* has become a fair to buy and sell girls. At the *mela*, some theatres recruit girls, forcing them to perform immoral and illicit acts to seduce the audience; they are also sent out for other illicit activities, such as prostitution. Almost 100 girls—many of which are minors or kept as bonded labour—are recruited in these theatres. A few of the girls from this theatre were interviewed and from these interviews Apne Aap was able to confirm with certainty that

the girls were forced into performing such salacious acts. Thereafter, Apne Aap conducted a sting operation at the theatre. Based on the evidence we garnered from the sting operation, Apne Aap filed a petition to the DM and SP, Araria on September 2nd this past fall against the *Mela* and the trafficking of minor girls under the pretext of the *Mela* and theatre as a home-based brothel. In response to the said petition, SP, Araria engaged in a rescue operation at 12:30 am on December 2nd in the home-based brothels of Uttari Rampur and picked up 25 girls, some of whom were prostituted and were minors, while also arresting 44 traffickers and customers. Among those 25 girls, one of the girls was Kajal, the daughter of Bibi Fatma who is a staff member of Apne Aap and has been fighting against sex trafficking and prostitution for many years. (Continued on page 3)

Empowerment through the Sit-in-Circle

By Seema Raut

Kidderpore, Kolkata: My name is Seema Raut and I am 14 years old. I live in Kidderpore with my parents. I am a member of Apne Aap and I belong to the Amotron group. We came to know from Apne Aap that 15 American activists who were working for women and girls will be visiting Kolkata and subsequently will meet with us. Apne Aap also told us that we were to meet these activists on the 7th of February. On that day members of our Amotron group assembled along with other

groups at the Apne Aap office. Apne Aap provided lunch for all of us, and then along with other girls and women, our group went to Edan Uddan around noon. Afterwards, we divided into five groups and each group was a combination of activists and group members. First, all the members of the group introduced themselves to the other members. Then the activist gave us chocolate and cards, starting the discussion with the other activists and members of Apne Aap.

(Continued on page 3)

We're Gonna Need a Bigger Boat

By Laurie Kallevig

Delhi: We're gonna need a bigger boat. That's the famous line from the movie *Jaws*—when Roy Schneider's character sees the size of the killer shark circling in the waters. And that's how I feel the more I learn about the scope of sex trafficking in India. The last six weeks I've been volunteering with Apne Aap Women Worldwide. I first learned about the organization in Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn's book *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity Worldwide*. Ruchira Gupta founded Apne Aap with 22 women who were the subject of her Emmy Award-winning documentary—*The Selling of Innocents*—that exposed the trafficking of women and girls from Nepal to India. The 22 women were prostitutes in Mumbai's Red Light Area, all victims of trafficking, and during production of the film they found strength in the circle of relationships they built with Ruchira and with each other. After filming completed, the women continued to meet and then began to advocate for themselves with “a vision of a world where no woman can be bought or sold.” This was the beginning of Apne Aap. This vision has expanded across a number of communities in India, with

Apne Aap self-empowerment groups and community centers that provide safe spaces for the women to gather, learn their rights, get vocational training and find a way out of prostitution. On my first day at Apne Aap, I got to go to *Gandhi Smriti* (the location where Mahatma Gandhi spent the last 144 days of his life and where he was assassinated, which is now a museum) and sit in with 15 leaders from American NGOs that are part of Novo Foundation's Initiative, “Move to End Violence”. We gathered on the lawn and listened

understands that they are playing with the dreams of girls. The clients don't realize the dreams they are spoiling. The clients don't realize that this would be a mother, a sister or someone else—they are just ruining dreams. We want to stop them.” During the conference, I sat with a number of women who were still working in brothels. We exchanged smiles and hellos, and soon got out our cell phones and started taking photos of each other and together. We joked and laughed and had a really nice time. But back to the bigger boat. Sex trafficking in India happens in so many ways. There are a number of castes that have a long-standing tradition of prostitution. In many families of these castes the women are all prostitutes and their husbands and fathers are their pimps. It's called intergenerational prostitution, and girls are brought up knowing that they will follow in their grandmother's and mother's footsteps—and be a prostitute. Then there's what I call the prince-not-so-charming method of trafficking. It works like this: a young girl is charmed over the course of a few weeks or months by a dashing young man who promises her marriage and a beautiful life together.

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to some of India's foremost female activists speak about their time with Gandhi and what he taught them. Gandhi's granddaughter, Tara Gandhi Bhattacharjee, added a bit of glam to the afternoon with her style, grace and humor. Two days later I was off to the pink city of Jaipur to attend Apne Aap's regional survivors conference. Much of the event was in Hindi, but here's the translation of what one of the survivors said: “In the community many girls are brought in and many are sold out. How do you address this? No one

(Continued on page 4)

My Experience at the Jaipur Conference

By Meena

Forbesganj, Bihar: I got an opportunity to go to Jaipur for a conference. When I went to Jaipur, I wasn't sure what the conference would be about or what would occur during my conference. I went into my room and freshened up, then went downstairs with my roommate who came along with me from Bihar to get some food since I was starving. When I got downstairs, I saw that there was a variety of foodas served on big tables. Many women from Rajasthan were also there who I supposed had questions similar to me. We were actually looking at each other and wanted to talk but were hesitant to since we didn't know how to start the conversation. Around four pm we were all told to gather in a big room down stairs. After resting for a while, I came to the conference hall where some women and some social workers from different organizations were already seated. I sat on a chair and after sometime a women from our organization came forward and addressed everyone, telling us about the special reason as to why everyone was gathered in one place. She then asked each one of us to introduce ourselves. *(Continued on page 6)*

Ruchira Honoured at Amazing Indian Awards

The Times Now News Group's Amazing Indian Awards honoured Apne Aap's Founder, Ruchira Gupta, by presenting her with the Shri Shakti Award. Arnab Goswami, Editor-in-chief of Times Now had this to say of the award ceremony: "At Times Now we believe in acting as catalysts that empower our viewers with current news. Celebrating the achievements of these worthy champions, TIMES NOW showcased the real-life journeys of these Amazing Indians". The Shri Shakti Award literally translates to "women power". It is no surprise then that Times Now chose to bestow this award upon Ruchira and Apne Aap Women Worldwide. As Ruchira accepted this award, she spoke on the importance of her organization and encouraged others

to participate in the fight to end sex trafficking. Her speech is transcribed below:

"Namaste, I received this award on behalf of all the women and girls who are members of Apne Aap Women Worldwide, the organization that I founded to fight sex trafficking—they are victims and survivors of prostitution. Apne Aap Women Worldwide, along with organizing these women and girls at the grassroots to access education, livelihood, safe, and independent housing, and legal protection, is also calling upon all men to not be part of the demand. Today we have launched a campaign called *Cool Men Don't Buy Sex*, I ask all of you in the room to be part of the campaign to be cool men. Thank you."

Sting Operation at the Kali Mela *(Continued from page 1)*

Police kept the 25 girls in the police station the whole night and handed them over to CWC the next morning, after which the CWC sent the girls for an age and sexual exploitation determination test. Out of the 25 girls, six were left by CWC chairperson Rita Ghosh simply because they looked over 18 when in fact many of the girls were forced into prostitution and only three of them were above 18. Many were regular school-going girls. These girls are now kept in a shelter home in Purnea and although many efforts are being made to release the innocent girls, CWC is not cooperating. There have been rumors that the girls are not kept well in the shelter home and Apne Aap staff were refused a meeting with the girls when they arrived at the shelter home. The men who were arrested have also been left on bail. The raid should have been better coordinated and the police should have involved Apne Aap staff. The CWC chairperson should have also acted in a more responsible way and should still do so in order to save the remaining girls and try and get back those that were released. Apne Aap is willing to help rehabilitate them and help them receive government aid and enrollment at the Apne Aap monitored residential school, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya.

Empowerment through the Sit-in-Circle *(Continued from page 1)*

Our team translated the conversations of the American activists. All the group members spoke on the themes of Apne Aap, then one of the activists asked me how we became associated with Apne Aap. I said that when I was only six or seven years old, some of my friends were admitted in different programmes of Apne Aap such as computer training, D.M.T, stitching, drawing and other product making. Girls like me were inspired by the abilities of these girls and asked our mothers to admit us into the program. Another activist asked me how did we stop gender discrimination. We all told her our views about gender discrimination. I told her that the first place to stop this discrimination was in our own houses. Then Sabana (Uma) told her story about her admittance in school with Apne Aap's help. She explained that first she was admitted in a night shelter run by Apne Aap, then the residential hostel with Apne Aap's help and then finally was admitted to Apne Aap's D.M.T. classes and computer training. She also spoke about her public speaking in governmental and nonprofit organizations. We requested to the activist to help us close the Red Light Area in Kidderpore because us girls were facing difficulties there. During the conversation I asked the activist what was the position of the women and girls in America. Did these girls face torture from pimps, clients or from other persons and how did you work to protect those women and girls from torture? They briefly told us how they protected the women and girls from gender discrimination and torture in America. The activists asked us how to protect women from violence and how to close a Red Light Area. Then Sabana (Uma) told them that they could approach local political leaders, administration and law makers who can play a big role in stopping a Red Light Area in our locality. Sabana further said that if the activists provide education, food and shelter, the women could leave this area and profession. They assured us that they would indeed return to close the Red Light Area and arrange alternative livelihoods. In our sit-in-circle, my friends and I voiced our views and opinions to the American activists. We freely discussed our everyday problems living in the Red light Area and how to solve them.

Interacting with American Activists in the Sit-in-Circle

By Asma Begum

Kidderpore, Kolkata: My name is Asma Begum and I am 55 years of age. I live in Kolkata with my family members. I am a member of Apne Aap and I belong to the Dhobi group. We

came to know from the Apne Aap office that fifteen American social activists who were working for women and girls will visit Kolkata and would like to meet with us. On February 7th, members of our Dhobi group assembled along with other groups at the Apne Aap office. After eating lunch, all the women and girls went to Eden Uddan. We separated into groups

of the women and activists and Apne Aap staff members. We had Sita Devi, Boby Begum, Salma Begum, Maya Mondalin in our group along with other members of Apne Aap, namely Sraboni didi, and other American activists. In the beginning all the members of our group introduced themselves to the other members. Then the American social activists gave us chocolate and wristbands and initiated a discussion. Sabana didi translated the conversations of the American activists so that we too could understand. All the group members started to speak about

“The American activists asked in what way could they help women secure financial stability, saying that women cannot be free in a complete sense unless they secure financial stability. Bharati Singh told them that approaching change makers would help stop gender and economic discrimination.”

the benefits of forming a self-help group. One activist asked us all how we came to be associated with Apne Aap. I told her that I joined when Apne Aap started an office in Kidderpore and became deeply involved in many different activities at Apne Aap.

These activities inspired other women to do the same. It was in this way we created the Dhobi group. One of the American activists then asked me how we benefitted from the creation of the group. We told her about our positive experiences of sharing and communicating within the group.

The American activists asked in what way could they help

women secure financial stability, saying that women cannot be free in a complete sense unless they secure financial stability. Bharati Singh told them that approaching change makers would help stop gender and economic discrimination. Salma Begum spoke about how to obtain a B.P.L. card and a voter card, also requesting the American activists to arrange for education, food and residence, which could help the women leave the Red Light Area. They assured us they would try their best to make this happen.

My Dreams: I'll Always be a Role Model for these Girls *(Continued from page 1)*

That's when I decided that when this kind of exploitation takes place, I will be the one who comes forward and fights to end it. I was only 12 years old back then. After this I have continued to work in the field. You can call this coincidence or destiny, but I received a chance to work with Apne Aap Women Worldwide, which works on behalf of these women and children. After joining this organization I have continued to work for the cause with complete enthusiasm and energy.

We're Gonna Need a Bigger Boat *(Continued from page 2)*

She runs off with him to begin said beautiful life only to find herself in a strange city, locked up in a brothel, and told she was sold and must work off her sale price with her body. This happens every day in India. These are just a few of the forms of sex trafficking going on in India and the problem seems overwhelming, like a really, really big shark. But we stay in the boat until we get a bigger boat. We join other boats. We create awareness, we advocate for change, and we reach out a hand to those who have been pulled under.

Customers Threatened Me with Genital Mutilation

By Dhanwati

Prem Nagar: My name is Dhanwati and I am 40 years old. I was born in Rewadi, Haryana and I belong to the agricultural labour family of the Perna community. I was married when I was only 16 years old. My husband used to abuse alcohol and show cruelty towards me and beat me every day so I divorced him through our *Panchayat* (local self-government). I was pressured by my parents to once again marry someone. By this time I had six children and my new husband was unemployed so I struggled trying to provide for my family. I was pushed into prostitution to support my entire family. Everyday I used to go to different Red Light Areas and work as a prostitute. I was forced to deal with all types of customers. Not every customer was kind to me. Many were bad men who said that would threaten me with genital mutilation if I did not obey their commands. Even dealing with such bad customers,

my daily earnings were only 500 INR so it was still difficult for my family to survive on such a small amount of money. The house is only two rooms but houses my husband and me, our two sons and their wives—who are also prostituted women—and our three unmarried daughters. I provide all the money and my husband remains unemployed, yet I have no right over my own house; it is entirely my husband's decision as to whether I have a right to the house. My husband also argues with me about our money issues. Even though I am 40 years old I must work as a prostitute to provide for my family and my husband will not work to help provide for our family. This is very frustrating and pains me a lot. I attended Apne Aap's legal clinic in Prem Nagar and shared my story with the staff. I hope to take the lessons I learned during the clinic about my rights as a woman and better my situation.

Did You Know: Government Initiatives to Tackle Trafficking

Recognizing that the current response to the growing incidence of human trafficking in India has “not been very effective”, the Indian Government's Ministry of Home Affairs implemented a new project entitled, “Strengthening the law enforcement response in India against trafficking in persons through training and capacity building” with the assistance of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime¹. This project involves the initial education of trainers who will then pass on their knowledge to police officers throughout India. More than 10,000 police officers have been trained to specifically recognize and handle cases involving human trafficking². Secondly, and the most important component of this government scheme, is the establishment of hundreds of Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs) that will handle the criminal aspects of trafficking to tackle the problem on the ground through a combination of well-trained police efforts and nonprofit assistance. The Ministry of Home Affairs recognized that police awareness of this issue was low and thus concluded that police officers must undertake courses that provide information and data on the current status of human trafficking in India and sensitization of the police officers to this issue¹.

In Delhi, AHTUs have been formed in each of the Delhi Police's 11 districts. The police officers are concentrating on cases involving missing children and investigating their whereabouts and linkages to trafficking³. Police sensitivity and training, awareness about the issue and task forces set up to penalize criminals and protect children from trafficking are all necessary steps in eliminating the crisis of human trafficking in India. It is laudatory that the Indian government has identified the occurrence of human trafficking in the country and has taken bold and hard-line measures to rid the country of trafficking—a crime that the Ministry of Home Affairs believes “gravely violates basic human rights”¹.

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Determined To Receive an Education

By Kajal

Dharampur, Delhi: My name is Kajal. I live in Dharampur with my family. Many of my friends and cousins go to school and tell me stories about how much they enjoy school. They share books with me and tell me everything they are learning in school and how much they love their teachers and friends at school. I really want to go to school too. While they are at school I have to help my mom around the house. I asked my family if I could also go to school but my parents said that we are too poor. We could not afford the school fees and I would need to help around the house so I could not go to school. I decided that I would pay for my school fees and not my family. I decided that the little money I received

from my parents I would save up and from this money I would be able to attend school. For the next few months I saved up all my money. I did not buy any candy or sweets or small toys. It was very hard because I could not enjoy these small things for a long time even though I saw many of my friends always buying sweets and toys. But I knew that if I bought these things I could not go to school, so I continued to save my money. At the end of a couple months I counted all my money and I realized I had enough money to go to school now. I told my family and they agreed that now I could go with my friends to school. The next day I attended school with my friends and now I go to school every day. I was very happy that I saved up money because I really enjoy school and have learned many new things.

My Persistence Stopped Underage Drinking

By Rakhi

Dharampur, Delhi: My name is Rakhi and I live in the village of Dharampur. Very often I see men use and abuse alcohol. I also see how many of the boys are influenced by the men around them. These boys always see how their fathers, uncles and male community members behave and act and try to copy them. One day I saw two boys from my village laughing and it seemed they were up to no good. I wanted to find out what wrong thing they were doing so I went by myself to see what trouble they were up to. What I saw shocked me. These very young boys who were slightly younger than me were drinking alcohol. I asked them what they were doing and they at first tried hiding the alcohol but I told them I already had seen it. I asked them where they got it and they said they nicked it from some of the older boys in the village.

"These boys always see how their fathers, uncles and male community members behave and act and try to copy them."

I told them that they need to stop drinking alcohol and stealing from the older boys. They laughed and told me that I cannot stop them and who am I to stop them. I once again told them they had to stop, as it is not good for young boys to drink. They did not listen to me. A few days later I caught them drinking alcohol again and I told them again that they must stop. They were very annoyed with me but still did not stop. The next couple days this type of thing went on and every time I would tell them to please stop stealing and drinking the alcohol. After the fourth time I told them that it is not good for them to do this they told me they would stop. They agreed that it may not be good for them and they did not want to get into trouble. Now I never see them drink anymore. I am very glad that I persisted and continued to scold them every time I saw them drinking.

My Experience at the Jaipur Conference *(Continued from page 2)*

Once the introductions started it didn't take me long to understand that a lot of women had been oppressed and exploited like me. The next day in Sabha Bhavan there was a meeting where everyone spoke about their work and the various difficulties they faced during work. Their difficulties were very similar to the difficulties we had faced. The only difference being that we faced and overcame these difficulties for quite sometime now and these people were struggling with them. Some experts then spoke about the major activities used in the fight against trafficking. If girls are educated it will be difficult to trap them into prostitution by giving them fake promises of jobs. If they are given employment and the chance to live dignified lives, this will help break the cycle of prostitution. When women are provided with legal help and advice they will be able to fight against exploitation and fight for their rights. If these three factors are given importance I believe that we will be able to fight against trafficking. After the meeting some women came up to me and told me that they aimed to work just like me.

Interview: The Benefits of Attending Apne Aap's Health Clinic

Dharampur, Delhi: *Sudha describes her experiences attending Apne Aap's free health clinic, the OPD.*

Q: Please tell us about yourself.

A: My name is Sudha and I am 20 years old and live in Dharampur. I am married to a man named Heera and have been educated only till the fifth standard.

Q: When did you attend the OPD?

A: I attended the OPD in January.

Q: What health problem did you have and did you feel that the OPD was helpful?

A: I had lower abdominal pain but I believe the OPD session was very helpful.

Q: Have you learnt any lessons in maintaining your health?

A: Yes. I have actually been to many of Apne Aap's

health sessions. I received information about the importance of nutrition. Also I once attended a very informative session about personal health and hygiene that was conducted by a community mobiliser.

Q: Do you feel the OPD benefits many females in the community?

A: I think that the OPD is very helpful for the community. The centre is near to community, so community members can easily participate in Apne Aap's activities. The doctor treats us with much patience. I think Allopathy and Homeopathy solutions will be beneficial to the community members.

Q: Why do you think Apne Aap has started the OPD in the community?

A: Apne Aap is providing many services to our community because they know we are in need of these services, especially services such as the free health clinics.

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