



RED LIGHT DESPATCH

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KOLKATA, AND FORBESGANJ (BIHAR)

My Dreams

By Basanti

I am member of a self-empowerment group, Sonar Bangla (Prosperous Bengal). We the ten women, survivors of sex-trafficking living in Munshiganj red light area in Kolkata formed this group in the year 2009 in search of an alternative and dignified livelihood. Through our group meetings and discussions in the group, we have decided that we would start a canteen where we can sell cooked food for the people working in the offices near Kidderpore area. My dream is to turn this group initiative into a successful group business.

I was in prostitution for a long time. After joining to Sonar Bangla, I have felt that I got some friends with whom I can share my sorrow and happiness. I was never good at cooking, but after joining this group and working together I developed my skill of cooking. I learnt some new recipes also. When I come to this group for meeting or when I sit with them and cook I enjoy that time. During I wish to continue this group activity and want to turn this initiative in a successful group business like – food center or restaurant.

I belong to a poor family and parents live in a village. I want to help them financially in leading a peaceful life. This food business has a good market and we all together can run this properly.

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An Inspiring Minister Karina

Dharampura: I got ready and told with each other and so I realised it is the people in my community that the security for the Minister who was there is a minister coming to our centre today. Everyone was asking me if it was Sonia Gandhi or Man Mohan Singh or Sheila Dixit. I couldn't remember the name of the minister but I told them that it's a minister from a foreign country. I could see the face of people changing. They were expecting someone who they know and were disappointed to hear that it is not anyone of them. But I was excited because I had prepared a song which Soumya di taught me and I was all practicing it again and again to do well.

When I reached the centre, I was astonished to see a lot of police and security standing outside the centre. For a moment I felt scared and wondered what happened but then I could hear Priyanka di, Monika di and Soumya di standing and chatting

With the name which Mumta di told me about the Minister I thought it would be a man. I was very surprised to see a young woman stepping out of the car and then she was welcomed by the elder girls from our community with *teeka* and garland. The Minister's name was Najat and she was very pleasant and friendly with us. She also signed our board which we have put up to start a campaign against the issues of our girls in the community.

She saw the short films that were made by the girls of our community recently. She praised us for narrating our stories so bravely through those films. It was our way of talking and expressing what we see around us everyday in our community.

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My Association with Kishori Mandal

Sanjana Khatun

Forbesganj: I feel very much at peace being part of the *Kishori Mandal*. I love going to the center, talking to my friends and discussing different kind of things with them. I would never have been able to know so many things, meet so many people if I was not part of the *Kishori Mandal*. It is a very different place from the community where I live in.

I always saw that girls of small ages are married in my community; they drop out from schools and they use very bad language at times. I always felt bad at all these, seldom went out and remained within my house, not speaking to anybody. I did not have many friends. But being a part of the *Kishori Mandal* I made many-many friends.

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What I like best are the discussions that we have on child marriage, domestic violence and other forms of violence on women.

I like the way I am part of the *Kishori Mandal* protesting against all these. Being part of this group, I have learnt to stand up and fight for the rights of those who are being tortured.

It is only after joining *Kishori Mandal* that I have realized that I have so much strength within myself, strength that is equal to any other

person. I can raise my voice in protest against things that are wrong; I can fight for my rights along with my friends. I have realized the strength that is there in me and try to work towards using those strengths. I have been able to do all these only after being part of this group.

I am thankful to Apne Aap for helping me to realize my collective power, potential and also for generating so much awareness within me on different issues that kept disturbing me since my childhood. I

had so many questions and finally I have a safe space where I can voice these with others like me. It give me confidence and makes me feel very happy that here I got a place to talk to so many people and clear so many doubts that keep coming to mind.

Sanjana Khatun is 10 years old. She has been associated with the Kishori Mandal at Uttari Rampur for the past one and a half years.

Jamila Bua faces camera to speak out

Compiled by Raju

Forbesganj: I live in the red light area of Uttari Rampur in Forbesganj with my sister and her daughter, Ishrat. I was a prostitute but I decided to leave it after sometime. My husband was a small shopkeeper who passed away fifteen years ago. Now that I am very old I face many difficulties in leading my life, especially economically. Apne Aap's staff members have helped me in setting up a tea-stall and with Ishrat and me working for NOMI network at Apne Aap, things have definitely improved. It is still difficult as my sister is HIV+ and remains unwell most of the time. Ishrat has three children. Her husband has abandoned her and he does not pay a penny or any attention to his family.

On 28th & 29th October 2013, Nita Bhalla of Thompson Reuters came to Forbesganj for a film shoot. I was initially very hesitant but also very fascinated by the interview that I was supposed to give. I spoke about my life, my pains, and my struggles that previously remained in silence within myself- it was giving voice to what I had never spoken up

before.

For me it was an entirely new experience, I was not comfortable at first. I repeatedly spoke to Apne Aap's staff- Tinku di and Raju, as I was not able to decide how and what should I say and where to begin from. I could not imagine that someone would be interested in my life and the troubles that I have faced.

Talking to them, I realized that it was my responsibility and a chance to speak out. I am a part of *Mahila Mandal* for a long time now. And I have seen and faced all the sufferings that many women in my surrounding go through. I understood that there was a need to reach out to other women like us through this interview.

It was all not very pleasant speaking of the years that I have always wanted to erase from my life, keeping them in silence. But I also wanted to set an example for community member as well as who are suffering from similar pain for being

forced into prostitution.

And I am finally happy at giving the interview. I have been told that this interview will be shown across places in the world and I am hopeful that it will provide courage and inspiration for women to fight back wherever they are. They should not think it as their destiny and must try finding a way out from any kind of violence. I feel that I have also contributed to the fight that many women like me are still fighting.

I would love to see the film once it is made and love to see how my voice reaches across the world.

Jamila Khatun, 50, fondly called Jamila Bua by the Apne Aap Bihar team has been a part of Mahila Mandal for long years.

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Op/Ed : Gloria's Feminity

Gloria Steinem tells Ruchira Gupta about Women and Violence

Ruchira Gupta: How much is non-violence a component of the feminist movement?

Gloria Steinem :Non-violence has not been enunciated by the women's movement because it's assumed. Not because women are better or different human beings or intrinsically less violent than men but because we haven't been raised with our masculinity to prove, we haven't been encouraged to be violent towards others. Indeed, we haven't even been encouraged to defend ourselves. We could use some more encouragement towards, I wouldn't call it 'violence' exactly, but 'forceful self-defence.'

How do you define 'non-violence'?

I've never tried to define it. But I would say that 'non-violence' also includes non-humiliation, not depriving an individual of the basics of life, and using non-violent language. Language shapes not only our alternatives, our interactions with each other, but also our idea of what is possible. It has to do with the way we communicate with each other. Therefore I would say that a form of non-violence that, though not as urgent as stopping people from being killed, is still a means by which to stop people from being killed.

It is to listen as much as we speak and speak as much as we listen and to try to keep that in balance. To override someone constantly with speech and thus disallowing them to have a voice is a less obvious but still a basic form of violence. So in general I think that the groups who have been marginalised or discriminated against — whether it's a racial group, or women, or children,

or a lower caste group, or whoever it is — have to learn to speak as much as we listen.

What is structural violence for women?

It's a system that normalises violence and criminalises opposition to it. So (Sigmund) Freud was a system of violence against women. Because he declared as abnormal the only kind of orgasm that women have which is clitoral and declared normal a basically non-existent form of orgasm, which is vaginal. There aren't that many nerve endings there. No one would ever give birth if there were so many nerve endings there. So he pathologised something normal. That's a system of violence. We saw that replicated until systems of feminist and family therapy came into being.

Marriage can be a system of violence against women if it legitimates violence and pathologises any sexual activity before marriage or punishes that activity and if it enforces standards of behaviour for women that it doesn't enforce for men.

Certainly child-rearing has systematised violence. Just to put the theory out there flatly, children are little animals that have to be tamed. They have to be beaten as wives have to be beaten. All of that assumes the normalcy of violence that is not at all in self-defence, which makes it a system of violence. Anything that normalises injustice and punishes those who object to injustice is certainly a system of violence.

To talk more about prostitution, how do you see it as violence against women?

It's the economic or physically forced entry into a body. Body invasion is right up there in the category of serious violence. To be in a physical fight is probably less traumatic than it is to have to smile and have your body invaded while you're unable to fight back; to be used as an object; to be humiliated; and to have to pretend to enjoy it in order to get paid. It is a rape of your body, your emotions, your sense of self, and it's so intimate. There's nothing that could be any more intimate.

If we think of violence as violation, should the violator be treated violently?

No. I can't think of an instance where violence towards the violator would be justified. If you repeat the violence, you have chosen means that do not represent the end. You might imprison that person, or fine that person, or socially censure that person but for a stated reason.

There are two kinds of violence that are much-talked-about these days — one is terrorism and the other is state-sponsored violence. What role can women play in stopping these forms of violence?

Well, I don't mean 'all women' because I would never say there's such a thing as masculine and feminine, but culturally women have been raised without the idea that we have to prove our masculinity. And that makes us very valuable as peace negotiators and as people who are maybe 80 percent or more of every peace movement. So yes, women have a definite role to play. In original cultures you couldn't

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Story of discrimination from the field

Ravi Mishra

Forbesganj: Anari Devi from Patraha is a very poor woman and very vulnerable to prostitution. She works as a labour along with her husband. She has to work to get food twice a day. If she does not work, she will not be able to provide food for herself and her family. She earns and lives on a daily basis. She is part of the Shanti SEG that has been formed in 2008. She has been a member of the group since the beginning.

She came to know of a vacancy in a school in her area. They were looking for a woman to cook food for mid-day meal at a local school. Anari Devi applied for the post. But she was refused. She told us that ,” they were all from the upper caste and they said that their children will

not have food cooked by someone like her who belongs to the lower caste.” Anari Devi belongs to the *Chamar* caste (untouchable). So the people from the school were looking for people from an upper caste. The vacancy was however reserved

Column

Diary of a Social Worker

for the Schedule Caste/ScheduleTribe community. But the school principal had to appoint a person from the upper caste under the pressure of parents of the students.

Anari Devi put up a fight against this. She confronted the principal and the parents. But they were not

prepared to listen to her. She shared the incident with her self-help group members and staff of Apne Aap. The group discussed the issue and decided to take it up collectively and is going to raise their voice. They have decided to take up the issue and collectively fight for Anari Devi’s justice. The group believes that this issue needs to be taken up and talked about in our society. There are many Anari Devis in our country and they might not even have a group of friends to help her.

Ravi travels to the filed areas in and around Forbesganj to work with the self empowerment groups.

Open Mike Session – An incident where I stood up for myself

Arti

Dharampura: There are very strict divisions in the area where we stay. Our community members stay together in the community. Our ancestors were snake charmers and for many of the people it still remains as a profession. I am 25 years old and I have a four year old daughter. I was married off when I was 20 with a guy who was my second cousin. I knew him since childhood. After my daughter was born, my husband and his family started harassing me a lot because I gave birth to a girl. I could not do much because I was not educated and neither was I capable of raising my voice. My mother’s family was very poor and I knew I could not go back. But one day my husband asked me and my daughter to leave the house. I didn’t know what to do and

I even thought about ending my life but I thought about my child and I came back to my parents’ place. My mother allowed me to stay with her and started negotiating with my husband’s family. After a few months I heard that my husband had married another girl and was living with her. My family still continued to negotiate with them to keep me also with them in the family. I was very angry and I told my mother that I will not go back as he has disrespected me. By then I had started attending classes at the Apne Aap centre and I had a sense of understanding about my rights and the exploitation which I went through. I protested against my going back and I also told my mother that I want to get married again and I deserve to be with someone. My

mother was against me getting married again. But I fought with my mother on it and just a month ago I got married to a man from our community who works in the band and sings and plays for weddings and other ceremonies. He accepted me with my daughter and I am happy now. I feel bold now and I know I will not be the same girl who got married at 20. I know my self esteem and I am proud to be what I am. I learned stitching and tailoring at Apne Aap centre and they also taught basic classes to read and write. I feel confident; I am planning on starting my own tailoring shop and earn some money so that I am independent.

Arti lives in the Sapera basti in Dharampura.

Muskan's Rescue

Team Kolkata

Munshiganj: Muskan's mother, a prostitute, abandoned her at the age of two. Hasina Begum, who is also a prostitute from the red light area of Munshigunge, adopted that girl as she was keen to at that time. When Muskan was 6 years old, Hasina admitted her to Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission with the help of Apne Aap as at that time she had no other option to keep her safely from the land lady or brothel owner.

Initially Muskan performed very well in at RKVM school. She was one of the best students in her class. After 4 years when Muskan was in class four, she returned to her adopted mother for *puja* vacations. After the vacation when Apne Aap members went to Hasina's house to send her back to the hostel it was revealed that Hasina along with Muskan left Munshigunge area with

an old man. Since then no one was able to trace Hasina and her adopted daughter Muskan Khatoon.

After long interactions with community's women and from different sources it was possible to trace Hasina from one remote village of South 24 Parganas. Besides the rail track, this was Hasina's residence. It was revealed from Hasina that her adopted daughter Muskan was detained and abused. That person who was nearly 72 years of old sexually abused Muskan. When Hasina started to resist that unnatural activity with her daughter, she was forced to leave the house where she was living.

After that with the request of Hasina Begum, Apne Aap approached Kolkata Child Welfare Committee (CWC) and pleaded to rescue Muskaan from the custody of that man who was sexually abusing her

and had detained her forcefully. After considering the complaint lodged by Hasina before CWC, they passed an order to rescue Muskaan. As per direction, Muskan was rescued from the remote village of Santoshpore and produced before the court with the help of police. After this she was sent to a home for counseling and medical treatment. After that she was produced before the CWC again and as pleaded by Apne Aap, the CWC was pleased to pass an order to admit that girl to RKVM, so that she has access to all kinds of mental, physical, physiological development and she is very happy now.

Community and outreach members of the Kolkata field office have been very active in rescue missions and lookout for missing girls who are at risk or trafficked.

(continued from page 3)

go to war unless the Four mothers said so. They voted and especially because the women had to make the food supplies and so on. If they didn't do it, there was no war. As far as I know, it was the female elders who decided when to go to war.

I can't ever understand why women let the power go?

They didn't. They fought. The whole

Amazon culture was a backlash culture. The backlash against the patriarchal cultures went on for centuries.

Do you think transcending gender is a way of overcoming violence?

It supposes that there is the power to transcend gender. There may be individual ways to escape the system by living as the other gender but there's not a collective. I think we can strive for a double con-

sciousness. We can strive to be as free from gender as possible by making parallels. For instance, 'If I were a man, how would I respond?' We can try to free our minds from gender as much as possible. At the same time we recognise that's the way the world is organised.

Gloria Steinem is the pioneer of the feminist revolution. Ruchira Gupta is the founder president of Apne Aap Women Worldwide

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Feminism in South Asia: a talk by Fahmida Riaz

Apne Aap's Blog

New Delhi: This month Apne Aap hosted a talk by the eminent Pakistani poet and activist –Fahmida Riaz. The session was a conversation between the renowned Pakistani Urdu writer and progressive feminist and Ruchira Gupta revolving around 'feminism in Pakistan and South Asia. Fahmida Riaz is one of the most powerful feminist voices in South Asia and has actively participated in social and political activities during her academic life and career. A leading Urdu writer and poet, she also serves as head of the Urdu Dictionary Board of Pakistan.

Sharing her views on men and women, society, traditions and culture in Pakistan, Riaz talked about the struggle for women's rights within Pakistan as well as her en-

counters with successive suppressive regimes. The interactive session was organized to reach out to students, academicians and lovers of poetry to understand the rise of feminism and the feminist movement in Pakistan and how it advocated for equal political, economic and social privileges for women.

Elucidating about the dynamics of feminism in Pakistan Fahmida Riaz shared, "It was really nice to be among young women and men and it was a great experience. At this point the feminism in India is very closely linked to Pakistan , the greatest hurdle in Pakistan is to commute safely and for this we need better laws and jurisdiction."

Participating in the discussion,

Ruchira Gupta, said "Terrace talk is an initiative to start a dialogue among young people , on issues relating to sex trafficking and also to know the root cause of sex trafficking , which can be inequality among rich and poor , men and women , upper caste and lower caste and through these talks we are trying to bring these issues amongst the masses , the youth ."

Fahmida who is also the director of WADA (Women and Development Association), an NGO for the development of women's education and awareness, was supportive of Apne Aap's mission to end human slavery and sex trafficking in India and applauded their continuing efforts.

*(continued from page 1) **My Dreams***

I also discussed with my group members about my dream they all also agreed with me. This small cooking activity showed me a path to grow in life with dignity. Though we are cooking food now also but that is not

regular. I think if we all start to invest our time to build a food center we can do this and we have already started planning about this. To achieve this as a group we started to do group saving in bank account to build our business starting cost.

*(continued from page 1) **An Inspiring Minister***

She also went around the classrooms and talked to the other girls. I went upstairs as my programme was going to take place there. When the minister came up she came to the tailoring centre and was very happy to see the girls. She sat with us at the sewing machines and asked us to show how it worked. We were very excited to see her interact with us from so close and so freely. There we so many photographers and reports around us. They kept taking so many photos when she was talking to us.

The girls had written thanks for her for donating the tables and chairs for the centre. Then she came and sat with the rest of us and Soumya di called my name along with Varsha's to sing the song we had been practicing. We started singing 'Tu zinda hai tho zindagi ki jeet par yakeen kar..' and Beenita di, Ruchira di and Soumya di also sang with us. Ruhira di was translating the song for the minister as we sang together. Then Rita talked

about the Jantar Mantar rally we went for and how we helped to change the law after the huge rape case and protests last year. Also the Minister asked us what our dreams were and we all told her one by one. I said that I want to be a reporter. After Momal's dance performance the minister also joined her. I was so happy to see her dancing with Momal and I felt that if a person so powerful like her could interact with us like this, she must be really great. Deep down I felt that I wanted to be like her.

It was a great opportunity for me to see and meet a powerful women who is also very young and at the same time. I was excited about the fact that I could perform in front of her. She has inspired many of us with her short visit but very good interaction. We all were happy that we met her.

Kareena is 11 yrs old and from the Perna community. She has been with Apne Aap for about a year and half and takes very actively part in most of the activities.

Earning through Paper Bag Making

Aruna Singh

Different groups from Munshigunj red light area are trying to come out of prostitution through different livelihood activities. One of the activities they are engaged in is paper bag making. The women of two self-empowerment groups 'Dosti' and 'Dipabali' were formed from Munshigunj and adjacent areas. They are earning a part of their livelihoods by making paper bags.

These groups come together at Apne Aap's Munshigunj community centre for making the paper bags. There are different organizations and well-wishers who give orders for these paper bags. Some of them sometimes provide the raw materials also. They use newspaper, thread, gum, card board and other material for making the final product. Single and multi colour bags are also available. There are many different kind of bags made as per the requirement of the orders that the group members receive. Very soon they will also start making paper bags on which they will make space for the community centre's small children to draw on. This would be used as decoration to make the bags

Column **Did You Know?**

more attractive.

The group members also buy the raw materials from the group's fund. There are different steps for making the bags and different members specialize in different steps. These are divided among the group members. They sell the bags to different organizations and also send them to the head office of Apne Aap according to the demand. The amount of sale is shared among the members according to the contribution to the work. These bags are also used to carry the products made under the income generation program at Apne Aap for the buyers.

The group members are hoping that if there are more orders in future they can earn more. They are looking to devise a sustainable plan for generating income through this so that it can aid them to come fully out of prostitution.

पहाड़

पहाड़ से बहते झरने को देखो

नदियां भी लहराती हैं

पेड़ पर बैठ चिड़िया

भी चैंकाती हैं

देश की सुंदरता को देख

मन मोहित हो जाता है

रंग-बिरंग तितली देख

मन करता मैं भी उड़ जाऊँ

फूल-फूल पर बैठ

मैं भी मैहकाऊँ

-अनवारी खातून

"Shyamali was rescued" *Ashma Begum*

Kolkata :Recently, one evening our outreach worker, Ashma Bibi rescued a 16 year old girl named Shyamali from Nitya Ghosh Street, Munshigunj. A stranger, about 30 years old was seen with the girl, roaming for an hour around late evening in the area. Ashma di was silently watching the scene and suspected the man through his movements. She became sure of her suspicions when she approached him as he stood near a shop. Suddenly the man became frightened and ran away from there. Few people stand-

ing there also tried to chase him but failed to catch the man. Ashma di then called the girl and gave some water and food as she was very hungry. Then Ashma di took the necessary information from the girl.

The girl told her that her name is Shyamali and she lives in Diamond Harbor area. The man was interacting with her for few days and proposed to take her out. So the man took the girl to Munshigunj with a wrong motive to sell her off. But finally with the help of Ashma di the

girl was saved and sent back to her home. Ashma di helped Shyamali to go to her home and bought a ticket and boarded her to a bus for Diamond Harbor and came back to her own house at 11pm. This way an innocent girl was rescued and saved by our staff member.

Ashma Begum is a survivor or prostitution herself. She works with Apne Aap to rescue others- children and women in and around the areas of Munshiganj and Khiddipore.

Poems

प्यारा देश

हमारा देश है कितना प्यारा
देखने से लगता है न्यारा
सब ही रहते मिल-जुलकर
कभी ना करते भेद-भाव
मिल-जुलकर कदम है उठाते
देश को भी आगे बढ़ते
सच्चाई के पथ पर है चलते
कभी भी ना कोशिश से हारते
यह है देश के सिपाही
हर वक्त सुरक्षा करते हमारी
हमारा देश है कितना प्यारा
देखने से लगता है न्यारा

-राधा प्रसाद

उम्र - 10 वर्ष, कक्षा - छठी
कबितीर्था विद्यालय

जीवन

रातों में चमकते हैं तारे
दिन में चमकते हैं सूरज।
दोनों मिलकर बनाते हैं लोगों का जीवन
दोनों बिखर जाए तो टूट जाएगा जीवन।

जिसने सूरज चाँद बनाया
हम मिलकर उसके गुण गाए।
जिसने फूलों को महकाया
उसने हमारा जीवन बनवाया।
भगवान वह हैं जो करते हैं रक्षा
विद्या वह है जो देती है शिक्षा।

-विक्रम रौउत

उम्र - 13 वर्ष
कक्षा - सातवीं
स्कूल - श्री शान्ति निकेतन



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