



# RED LIGHT DESPATCH

VOLUME VI, ISSUE 7

JULY 2013

RELEASING SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM DELHI,  
KOLKATA, AND FORBESGANJ (BIHAR)

*Column*

## **My Dreams**

*By Rina Saha*

**Kolkata:** I am Rina Saha. I am 27 years old and have been living in Sonagachi for the last five years. I want to tell my story to you all.

My name was Rina Bhattacharyya. I was born in Katoa in a lower middle class family. We were nine brothers and sisters. My father was a labourer and poor but still wanted us to get educated. Our parents really cared for us and got us admitted to school. We really enjoyed those days.

But when I was a student in class 3 my father fell sick. Our schooling stopped as nobody could fund our education. When I was 11 years old my father arranged my marriage. I came to Bhirbhum. My husband was a nice person and a carpenter. We had two children and were very happy.

But then my husband got cancer. I didn't have money to pay for his treatment and five years back we lost him.

Due to the hardships I tried to get a job. A person arranged for a job and brought me to Kolkata. But he had tricked me and sold me to Sonagachi.

I lost confidence and trust in myself when I accepted prostitution. I had no hope of my children's education and a better life for me. In 2011 I met a team from Apne Aap. They helped me admit my children in

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## **Felicitation Ceremony of Nat Girls**

*By Najmin Khatun*

**Forbesganj:** An event was organised to felicitate the girls who had passed their matriculation exam from the Bihar Board this year. Juhi, Sonam, Madhumala, Resham, Lata, Poonam and I were awarded. Along with us our mothers were also felicitated in order to recognize their relentless struggle to let us continue our education despite all the obstacles. I am very thankful to my mother for this.

The atmosphere was very festive. We received gifts from the Superintendent of Police (SP), Araria and Abhilasha di ( Director of Apne Aap ) gave gifts to our mothers. I felt very proud while receiving a gift from the hands of the SP.

I had to study in limited resources as there was always a problem of money. My mother tried to fulfill all my requirements as best as she could. I was supported by Apne Aap

Women Worldwide since my days at KGBV and feel lucky that my mother and I are involved with this organisation. Despite all her hardships and struggle to get me here, my mother has always encouraged me.

I want to become an engineer. My mother does not have the money to pay for the tuition fees of engineering colleges. I am extremely grateful to Apne Aap that they are supporting and sending me to Patna for higher studies. I will try to make the best of this opportunity.

I felt very proud to see myself in the newspapers and am very happy that my friends could also achieve the feat with me.

I would like to thank Apne Aap who supported us since the beginning and I am happy that I could make my happy and proud of my achievement.

## **Rally Against Sexual Harassment**

*By Garima Sharma*

**Forbesganj:** Lewd comments, cat-calls and whistles form a part of the everyday lives of girls in Forbesganj. During a session of the Kishori Mandals, some girls described their daily encounters with men who harass them on their way to school, market, the center at Basti Vikas Kendra (BVK) and elsewhere. The girls were infuriated by the street harassment and tired of having their freedom curtailed for fear of such harassment and rape.

Inspired by protests that shook the nation post the gang-rape in December, the girls decided to curb

violence against women. One of them suggested, 'Didi, hum aando-lan karenge' (Didi, we should protest). So began our preparation for the rally. Tuesday was specifically chosen as this day, the young boys routinely gather near the Kaali (Goddess) temple to harass girls. The girls conceptualized the rally as a medium to express their anger, raise awareness about the importance of collective action and encourage families to focus on stopping boys and men engaged in harassment. Everyone including the

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## Art Therapy Workshops

*By Megha Jhunjunwala*

**Kolkata:** Therapy can be used to enhance lives in different ways. Art therapy is one such tool. Having volunteered a couple of years ago at Apne Aap (Kolkata) as a communicative English teacher, I always yearned to go back.

This summer I formulated an art therapy program to enhance the lives of these lively children whose selves were at risk. Even though I'm a trained chef, I studied Art & Design in College and have always found the creative arts to be very helpful in self-expression and healing. Having been a part of various art therapy sessions myself, I have seen my life transformed at a very subconscious level. All I wanted to do was share a little bit of the magic with the children at Apne Aap. My only goal for these sessions are self acceptance. The concept of human trafficking enrages me. Having been abused as a child, I know how the experience has changed the way I've looked at myself and my life and my inter personal relationships with people all around me even after coming from the 'privileged' strata of society. What I talk about is a spec of dust compare to what these children have seen and experienced. The baggage is immensely heavy. All I want to do is lighten it in anyway to live a fuller, happier life.

I have travelled the world and explored various avenues, but spending just a little over a couple of months with the girls at the Apne Aap centre in Kolkata, my life has changed. Changed in a way, I know I will never be the same again. The maturity and grace with which the children communicate their lives and thoughts during the sessions has been truly inspirational.

Through these sessions we are trying to conquer many issues they are facing on a daily basis. For ex-

ample, some of them are treated differently, even in school by their classmates, because their mother's are victims of prostitution. Art is used as an expressive tool to accept and love oneself. To understand that we are no different than others, and it's not our fault that we



were born in a challenging socio-economic situation in our orthodox country has not given our mothers choices to live a different life. Most of their mothers have been trafficked into this trade at very tender ages. We talk about fears and how we can combat them. Sometimes it's not easy to talk about our deepest darkest thoughts or experiences. Art therapy is a way of letting go and building confidence. One of the

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most satisfying parts of these therapy sessions is watching these children be themselves.

This is not an art class. This is not about drawing beautiful or technically correct flowers and sceneries. Initially the children were stuck on figurative drawing, because that's what they thought was 'beautiful' and 'accepted' or 'impressive'. Slowly, we moved away from what others think is

beautiful and drawing what they wanted to draw. Even if its purely a splash of red paint on a large white canvas. The children are thoroughly enjoying these classes. Encouraging them to use their body movement to paint and draw is something they enjoy most. The adolescent girls especially have become a part of my life, and we share stories when we meet. I feel honoured and overwhelmed to be welcomed by the children into their families and lives.

Initiating this project, I have got the esteemed opportunity to take a little peek at their lives and in some cases even their personal space. I appreciate how strong their core values in life are. There is so much of their lives they share with me through Art that is used as a tool for therapy. Most of them desire very basic things, which are human necessities. Many of them expressed freedom and free will in their own unique ways through art. I love how these girls have inbred in them such sense of community. We are working on breaking free through those old thoughts which our worlds are chained with, of looking good to the world, but not satisfying our inner selves, our souls. It's important these beautiful yet vulnerable children find their voices. Art therapy is just one way for them to speak out loud with confidence.

I realised how much society forcefully puts us in boxes and dictates terms of what to do, so much so, that we are forgetting to explore our greatest potentials and merely existing in mundane grounds. We look forward to the children expressing themselves more freely, with no limit. And what I am learning from them, well, one of the most important lessons one needs to survive in the world: To be fearless!

Op/Ed**Ruchira Gupta: Crooked Cops Keep Traffickers in Business**

Excerpts from an interview with Prof Ruchira Gupta . It was featured in the Gulf News in July 2013.

In 1996, at the age of 32, Ruchira Gupta began her fight against trafficking of young girls in Mumbai.

And two years ago, when she was diagnosed with breast cancer, she not only maintained her grip on the issue close to her heart, but also fought a battle for her own survival.

'I gain strength from the young girls and women we save from the brothels in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Bihar. What has kept me going is their call for justice. These women want the traffickers and pimps to be punished for taking away their childhood and destroying their lives,' she says.

Her crusade has resulted in the Parliament passing a law in April under Section 370 of the Indian Penal Code, which now criminalises the entire process of trafficking. This means stringent punishment for recruiters, agents, pimps, brothel managers and clients.

**While making the documentary on brothels, what made you decide to quit journalism?**

I could not just walk away after seeing the suffering of women, even though prior to that I had covered war, famine and hunger. I had never seen a deliberate exploitation of one human being by another. The women were humiliated and abused and had all kinds of diseases including jaundice, tuberculosis and sexually transmitted diseases. There was a woman called Surekha, who had been pulled out of her house by traffickers when she was merely 12 years old. She told me that no one had tried to protect her or raised their voice. And no one even cared to find out why she had suddenly stopped going to school and where she disappeared. So, all that needed to change, especially

for women from the poor and low castes.

**India is being termed as the 'land of the missing children'. Do you think all these young girls who go missing are forced into prostitution?**

The Central Bureau of Investigation prepared a report five years ago, which claimed that three million

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girls were forced into prostitution. Sadly, the numbers have been increasing and the age of the girls, as reported by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), is coming down. Now it is between 9 years to 13 years. And yes, the large number of girls who go missing end up in brothels. Some are duped, knowingly or unknowingly. The poor and uneducated family members do not know who to approach and the police refuse to register their complaints.

**But didn't the home ministry advise all state police to immediately register First Information Reports on all complaints?**

That is better said than done. In Bihar, a young boy, whose three sisters were forced into prostitution, helped us do a sting operation on the traffickers. But when the CD was given to the police officer, he in turn, arrested the boy on fabricated charges. That's because the officer was [working] in collusion with the traffickers and we did not know it.

While the boy was let off only after five years, the officer is now ADC to Bihar governor! We have complained to the NHRC, which issued a notice to the Bihar Director General of Police for justice to the boy, but six months have passed and there has been no response. So, unless we have police reforms, the system won't change.

**How will the new Section 370 of the Indian Penal Code help in preventing trafficking of girls?**

It is a very powerful tool in the hands of the activists, the police, the judiciary, the victims, the survivors of prostitution and most important the mothers who want to protect and prevent their daughters from this trap. They can inform the activists or other authorities and help in getting the traffickers to be caught red-handed.

**But how do you know if these women are at all aware of the new law?**

I admit it is too early to see the effects. And here, not only the NGOs, but also the government and various agencies, including the ministry of women and child development, government's television channels, school teachers, panchayats and village heads have to join hands in creating massive awareness campaigns. This is our next step. But the government should also take responsibility of its citizens.

**What similarities do you find in the subject of prostitution in India and abroad?**

Whether in the East or the West, all prostitution is forced. Some women are coerced into it, while others get into it out of compulsion [circumstances]. It is based on the absence of choices and is a survival strategy.

## **Building Courage and Confidence**

*By Priyanka Singh*

**Dharampura, New Delhi:** I started working in Dharampura almost a year and a half ago with the *Perna* community. The people of this community are from Rajasthan and migrated years back to Dharampura. As a close-knit and fairly guarded group they are very strict about following their customs and norms. They have their own set of rules and see to it that these customs are unquestionably followed generation after generations.

One such practice of the *Pernas* is that of following inter-generational prostitution where the daughter –in-laws of the family is prostituted for family's income. Child marriage and polygamy are very real and common practices here. The girls are married off at a very young age. Right after the birth of the first child these girls are prostituted by their in-laws. The first pregnancy brings a combination of happiness and fear for the girls— on one hand they are ready to give birth to a new life and on the other, they are well aware that their lives would change forever as now they would enter into prostitution. Resistance to this practice has resulted in violent acts of physical abuse. Along with lot of other caste-based discriminations within the community, the girls and boys are not provided and education. There is no impor-

tance to education even for the boys. They do not do anything for a living and often serve as pimps who take their wives to various places for prostitution.

I was astonished to see that a lot of rules that are followed by other communities, even though illegal,

*Column*

**Diary of a Social Worker**

are not practiced by the *Perna* community. One such practice is that of the dowry system. However, there is a stark reason why it does not exist here. The girl's family takes a bride-price from the groom's family and so in a sense the girls are sold out to the groom and his family to be an income generating entity for them.

After Apne Aap's interventions in the Dharampura, girls started coming to the centre and began opening up about their family's situation and how they felt about it. They are part of various programmes such as stitching and tailoring, art and painting, computer classes and lots of other sessions on legal, gender and rights awareness including life skill sessions.

A very important session is that of Open Mikes where the girls learn the importance of public speaking.

Once during this Session one of the girl, Gita (name changed) was sharing her story and she said '*Didi – Jo hamari jaat me hota hai na, vo hame bilkul pasand nahi hai, hamare yahan sabhi auraten kam (prostitution) par jati hain. Aadmi kuch bhi nahi karte hain* '

(I don't like what happens in our community. Women in our community works and the men don't do anything).

I come across many such issues where women are considered a commodity to serve the family. And if she does not follow the rules, she and her family are cut off and secluded from their community which brings several issues especially of the social stigma of living with others who see them as morally incorrect. It is this fear that makes the women understand and accept that they are exploited and they lose the courage and confidence to fight. We are focussing more and more on building their confidence and courage. The education and livelihood skills will stay with them forever and will go much further to make them capable to understand and tackle the issue in a much broader perspective. This will help them to not only challenge the system but also fight for their rights rather than living in a exploitative environment for them and their children.

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## **Stakeholders' Meet on Criminal Law Amendment Act, 2013**

*By Tinku Khanna*

**Forbesgunj, Bihar** : A major thrust of Apne Aap since its inception has been to lobby with the Government for changes in law that can help the victims of sex-trafficking to put an end to their enslavement. The new Criminal Law Amendment Act, 2013 is a very significant achievement. The law has made provisions for stricter punishments for the traffickers and for the repeated offenders the punishment is extended to imprisonment for life. But perhaps the most significant achievement is that it has made the consent of the victims irrelevant. This means, the millions of women who were trapped in prostitution and whose enslavement was so far considered as 'choice', henceforth will be legally treated as victims of sexual exploitation.

However, the law as legislation only does not guarantee justice to the victims unless the stakeholders in the Criminal Justice system implement it. In light of this, we organized a panel discussion with the members of the legal fraternity of Araria on the New Criminal Law Amendment Act, 2013 on July 7th, 2013. The focus was to engage the audience in a deep and fruitful discussion of the legal standing anti-trafficking affairs as well as the future trajectory that the movement ought to take in order to continue to be effective and in pursuit of justice.

The objective of the discussion were:

a. To discuss the salient features of the CLAA, 2013 with special reference to combat human trafficking.

b. To discuss the local trafficking issues and how this law be made effective to combat the situation on ground.

The event was attended by the

Chief Judicial Magistrate of Araria, Shri Komal Ram, ACJM, Md. Has-muddin Ansari and Judicial Magistrate 1<sup>st</sup> Class, Shri Sanjay Singh. Adv. Anjana Mishra from Patna High Court and Adv. Sk. Fazul from Apne Aap and Shri Deo Narayan Sen, Convener of Legal Cell, Araria and the Public Prosecutor, Shri Maheswar Prasad Sharma were also present among the panellists. A number of lawyers from the Bar Association, Araria and media persons also attended the event. In her welcome address, Dr. Abhilasha Kumari, Director, Apne Aap said 'An understanding of the law is inevitable if we are to ensure justice to the women who are trafficked to and from Araria'.

Shri Komal Ram in his inaugural address, in cognizance of the difficulty of Apne Aap's efforts at combating trafficking and raising awareness, lauded the organization's zeal and perseverance.

Shri Sanjay Singh highlighted the importance of anti-trafficking interventions especially in districts like Araria or Kishanganj that have a porous border and weak socio-economic circumstances that render persons (especially women and girls) vulnerable to trafficking like poverty, absence of alternate source of income or employment, and ignorance of the fate that befalls a person lured away with the false promise of a job. He has also mentioned that in recent times, the trafficking of girls for the purpose of marriage has emerged as a significant contributor to trafficking in the area. He stressed that every woman and girl who is trafficked is a 'victim' and thus rejecting any notion of 'choice'. He states that no woman can really choose to be trafficked. Thus, prevention of trafficking, and increasing awareness of measures

that counter its effects is imperative. This was the major focus of the event. Adv. Anjana Mishra explained the need for the Criminal Amendment Bill. Stating that the new law is a massive improvement on previous provisions. It introduced a comprehensive definition of trafficking, laid down penalties for traffickers, and also provides penalties aimed at ensuring accountability among public servants, such as police officers. As part of the final section, public servants are liable to be penalized with a fine and/or jail time if found to be abetting an act of trafficking.

The present audience recognized that punitive provisions are far from the end-all of the anti-trafficking struggle. Shri Ashok Jha, Member, Bar Association, Araria made an appeal to the people present to create an anti-trafficking cell within the Bar Association that will keep a track on the trafficking cases and will help the Public Prosecutor (PP) towards preparing grounds for conviction of the trafficker. Shri L.N. Yadav, former PP, Araria stated that to further the anti-trafficking struggle, a collective and community action from the civil society (including NGOs) is also required. The CJM, Shri Komal Ram pledged support along with his colleagues of the district by conducting speedy trials of trafficking case recommended by Apne Aap. In his capacity as the Convener of the Legal Assistance Cell of the district, he invited Apne Aap to organize awareness generation camps on anti-trafficking laws.

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## Demanding Justice: Documentary Making in Najafgarh

By Tamara Gates

**New Delhi:** 35 girls participated in a weeklong videography project led by Aseem Asha Usman, a video editing professional to make 12 documentaries.

Usman wants to screen the videos in the community to 'learn the importance of girls and the issues faced by them.' He believes videography is the best medium to document the gender discrimination and hence it is important to

teach these at-risk girls the usage of media tools that are formally restricted to men. Skilled in script writing and recording, they can raise awareness about child abuse, domestic violence, lack of education, health needs and also document their dreams for the future.

The content is hard-hitting, focusing on rape and domestic abuse, health issues- namely the lack of access to sanitary napkins- and women's lack of autonomy within the community. Many see this project as a chance to speak out. 12 year old Alisha (name changed) says, 'Now it is my dream to make such films again, so I can bring the problems around me to light.'

In the studio, Aashi (name changed), 17, told us of her dream of becoming a dancer while Maanika (name changed), 9, inspired by the politicians who don't do anything for the community, wants to be a TV reporter so that she can broadcast the change her community needs.

Usman was a brilliant mentor, coaching the more self-conscious girls about vocal pace and

tone, offering plenty of constructive criticism for them to work with. It was an excellent confidence-boosting session; the girls looked delighted when their voice recordings were played back to them. Once satisfied with the clips, it was time to get out of the studio and get hands-on with a camera to finish filming- monsoon rains had forced an early wrap the previous day - followed, of course, by a large clan of excited children who all wanted in on the action.

Divided into three groups- one narrator, one camera-woman, one assistant, the girls filmed each other in their homes. This allowed them to use advanced technical equipment and also allowed the groups to control their own narratives. So the girls themselves decided how they would appear in front of the camera.

'Films can operate from micro to macro level to bring about positive change,' Usman says. And for the girls of Najafgarh, he is confident that these videography workshops are an important step, and a 'unique way of guiding them out of darkness.'

*(continued from page 1)*

Rama Krishna Vivekananda Mission School (RKVM) in Barrackpore and assured us of a respectful life. I am grateful to Apne Aap for admitting my child to RKVM. Someday, when my son will become someone respectable in the society, I will be a very proud mother. I too now have begun to dream of a new life. We are planning to attend classes for educational and vocational training. Now we receive proper training under the guidance of Apne Aap Women Worldwide and will have respectable jobs and families. This is our dream and hopefully we will be successful.

*(Continued from page 1)*

parents of the girls were convinced of the protest march.

On the day of the rally about 50 girls and staff members began their journey from the BVK at Rampur and reached the District Superintendent of Police's (DSP) office. The girls handed over a deputation to the DSP and urged him to increase the number of patrol officers on routes used by traffickers. Assured of the cooperation by the DSP the girls moved to the temple at Kali Mandir Chowk, the harassment prone area.

Throughout the procession the girls repeated slogans, including '*mahilaon ko samman do*' (respect women), '*ladkiyon ko chhedna band karo*' (stop harassing girls), and '*seetiyaan bajaane se tum hero nahi, zero ho*' (whistling does not render you hero but zero). Additionally, the protesters were periodically talking to the parents, who came out of their houses to view the march, to refrain from telling their daughters to stay at

home and instead teaching their sons to respect women. In effect, the message focused on the differential treatment of the parents (and society) to girls and boys, daughters and sons. A microphone accompanied the procession and two girls took turns making the audience aware of the march's purpose as well as leading the other girls in slogans.

At the close of the march, a tired yet merry audience of girls listened to the older ones narrating their experience to the DSP. 23<sup>rd</sup> of July will remain an important day for both the girls as well as the organization- for the girls, it signifies their first collective protest march—the first time that they publicly opposed the inequality that they experience at the hands of society. For the organization, it signifies success in terms of ensuring that 10 years of empowerment aids in enabling the girls and women, who it seeks to help, in becoming self-advocates for their rights.

## The Criminal Amendment Bill, 2013 : Myth vs Facts

The Justice Verma Committee (JVC) report was a landmark statement, applauded by all citizens, welcomed by all Political Parties. This document addresses several myths about the new Criminal Law Amendment Bill 2013.

### **Myth- 1**

The Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill is against men.

#### **Fact**

- The Bill is against criminals and sexual crimes like rape, molestation, stalking etc.
- It recognises that men also must be protected against sexual crimes such as rape.

### **Myth -2**

Lowering the age for consensual sex to 16 will encourage child marriage, prostitution and trafficking.

#### **Fact**

- This will prevent criminalization of young boys and girls.
- This will protect the right to sex-

ual autonomy and agency.

- The age for marriage should be retained at 18 as it entails long term

### Column

## **Did You Know?**

responsibilities.

- Rape and prostitution are always by definition without consent and irrelevant to age.

The bill has special provisions to deal with trafficking.

### **Myth -3**

The offences of Voyeurism and Stalking will trap innocent men.

#### **Fact**

- The offence of Voyeurism will protect the dignity of women.
- It will punish only that person who watches a women in any private act where her body parts are exposed.
- The offence of stalking will protect women from being sexually or physically assaulted and killed.

- It will punish any man who repeatedly follows a woman either physically or by other means causing her distress.

### **Myth -4**

The anti-trafficking clause punishes women prostitutes and their children

#### **Fact**

- It punishes pimps, recruiters, harbourers, brothel keepers, owners and customers who are involved in human trafficking.

### **Myth -5**

By confronting trafficking and those involved in it, the livelihood of prostitutes and their children will fall in danger.

#### **Fact**

- Only the livelihood of those who are involved in human trafficking will be demolished.
- Women prostitutes and children will be able to come out of the trap of trafficking.

Source: [www.kafila.org](http://www.kafila.org)

## Theatre Workshops

*By Radhika Chopra*

**Kolkata:** When I first met the girls from Apne Aap for our workshop on I expected an agenda to prompt me. I was prepared to propel each day's activities further and make room for mishaps.

However, the lack of inhibitions these young adults entertain is absolutely amazing: they greeted me wholly eager and amorphous- ready to take fresh form.

These creative minds are willing to trace fresh patterns and motifs during each class; they are unafraid to insist on pursuing their favourite activities. The natural leaders among them stand at the centre to maintain discipline when focus is blurred; they are proactive enough to orchestrate group activities when the younger girls need guidance and endlessly bold to tear into new challenges every day.

We spend a portion of each class on energy raising and imagination building exercises. The girls enjoy dancing and one of their favourite creativity exercises is step choreography. The rules are fairly simple: each person creates a step making maximum use of their body and the next person repeats and adds another step. Variations are made by associating a sound with each step or using a prop such as a *dupatta* to make a movement.

After they are warmed up, they excitedly take on the challenge to discuss and perform improvisational scenes, urging me to give them stimulating topics far beyond their years.

It is exhilarating to discuss ideas with these fertile minds. A few weeks ago, an intensely passionate discussion brought to light a provok-

ing thought that each one of these fifteen girls resonates with: "Education can eradicate poverty." Currently we are in the process of conceiving and directing a street play that embodies the above belief.

I was anxious albeit delighted to be plunging into two and a half months of unadulterated theatre with this group of 13 to 17 year olds. At an age where they are especially exacting and unforgiving, and only a few years younger than myself, I was afraid that they would not welcome my experiences.

However, the courage with which these girls wholeheartedly embrace, the life force that they personify and the sincerity with which they learn has made this the most gratifying experience in my twenty years.

## From the Lanes of Sonagachi

By Tamara Gates

**Kolkata:** Sonagachi accommodates an estimated 15,000 prostitutes. It is one of Asia's most famous and largest red light areas. Apne Aap's Program Associate and community mobiliser Sahana Dasgupta travels to Sonagachi every day to meet the women living and working there. This way she tries to learn about their daily routines, the vast network of organized crime and to assess where Apne Aap Women Worldwide can offer help. I followed her one afternoon to understand the notorious district, its women, their lives and the risks involved in the middle of all this.

### **Do brothel owners get suspicious of you?**

Yes, sometimes. But I try to prevent this by sticking to everyday topics when I am inside the brothel. This is so then I can build their trust. I ask them as to what did they cook for lunch that day or what time they got up. Then I might be able to ask them about how many customers

they get each day and whether they are using condoms. Things get nasty only if the pimps suspect me to drive women away from Sonagachi.

### **What is the average age of a prostitute in Sonagachi?**

The average age ranges from 14 to 38 because after that it is very difficult to find clients. Some get desperate and lower their rates drastically. Sometimes even to Rs 20. When faced with rent charges of around Rs 150 per day—bills, food and luxuries such as phones, the situation of prostitutes gets very distressful. There are also other daily necessities. Very few of them are able to save at all. They have not got into the habit of it yet. Apne Aap is attempting to work on this. We are teaching them the urgency of saving and aim to open a bank account for each woman.

### **What is the situation regarding healthcare in Sonagachi?**

Apne Aap had a medical camp and also ran a health campaign back in Kidderpore. But we still need to do something permanent to make women aware of diseases and STI's and methods to avoid them. I think that the children of these women are the key to social change. They can change the patterns of society. They dream of a different world. Some of the children aspire to become doctors so that they can treat the women here and remove their mothers from the brothels.

### **What kind of support does Apne Aap extend for these children?**

I tell the women to enroll their children at the Rama Krishna Vivekananda Mission, which provides general education and vocational training. More than 500 children have been enrolled so far and more mothers are coming forward for their children to be enrolled as well. This is a very positive response and will help build their lives.



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*Organizing communities to end sex trafficking—every woman free, every child in school*