



Red Light Despatch

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My Dream

Shilpa Pal

Dharampura, New Delhi: I am Shilpa and I am 15 years old. I dropped out of school when I was in class 5. My family and community don't allow girls to get more education so I didn't feel it's importance either.

A year and a half ago I joined Apne Aap centre at Dharampura, Delhi. I enrolled myself in the cutting and tailoring course and have now completed it. I took part in activities and programmes like

“I want more opportunities like these to show my talent”

gender training, LEE sessions, leadership training etc. I got a lot of information about social and personal right from Apne Aap.

I also learnt *Bhangra* (Punjabi Folk Dance) that we performed in a program in Dharampura. Since then we have performed in many places like Bal Bhavan, Gender Resource Centre (Khaira), Har Khabar News Channel etc. and received good reviews.

I participated in Delhi Haat Exhibition and put *mehandis* on women's hands. I want more opportunities like these to show my talent. Soon Income generation program will start. I hope to use this opportunity to my benefit.

(Shilpa is a Member of Kishori Mandal, Dharampura, New Delhi)

Search For Identity

Bhagbanti Devi

Khidderpore, Kolkata: I was born in a very poor family in a remote village of Bilaspore district in Uttar Pradesh. There were nine members in my family including my parents, three sisters and four brothers. At that time my father was the only earning member in our family and he worked as a daily labourer in agriculture field. We had a small piece of land where we lived. Most of the days my father was not able to arrange enough food for the family, so we had to share whatever little food we had among ourselves. Sometimes we had to sleep with empty stomachs. When I was only 15 years, my parents arranged my marriage with a much older man than me from our locality. He did not take

care of me after our marriage. My parents asked him several times to take responsibility and make arrangements for only the minimum requirements, but he blatantly refused his duty towards me. I was compelled to find a job for my livelihood as my father had become very weak due to his old age and bad health. At that time a lady from our village told me that she was going to Kolkata where she had arranged a job for herself with good earnings. So I requested her to help me also to find a job. I arrived in Kolkata with the lady and started residing in the Khidderpore Red Light area. Initially I had no knowledge about the activities of the Red Light Area

(Contd. On Pg.2)

“Khelo” Party

Dolly Mahato

Kolkata: I went to Raj Bhavan in Kolkata on March 5th. I really had a good time there. There were about 600 children present with all of them being in the age bracket of 6-14 years. Raj Bhavan is a beautiful place full of green grass, trees and a big ground. I played around and danced with the other children. I listened to songs that I liked. Later in the day, we were

distributed tiffin. I met new people there and I made friends with children that I had never known. I also met M.K. Narayan there. I also saw Padmini Narayan, the wife of M.K. Narayan. I have been to Raj Bhavan two times earlier. If I get another chance I will go there again.

(Dolly Mahato is a Member of Amontron Kishori Mandal Kolkata)

My Right; My BPL Card

Sarita Devi

Forbesgunj, Bihar: I am Sarita Devi and am 42 years old. I live in the Bagh Kohlia area in Forbesgunj, Bihar. While I am economically poor, I used to be very troubled for the reason that most of the influential and well off people from my village had got their BPL (Below Poverty Line) cards using their connections and influences. Whereas I had not got it, even though I belong to the category of people for whom this BPL card scheme was designed. I ran from pillar to post, from the *Mukhia* (Village head) to the *Sarpanch* (Head of Village governing council) but still did not get it. Five long years went by. The village election for

various positions was going to take place. A probable candidate contesting for the post of the village *Mukhia* came and asked me to vote for him. He promised that if he wins he will help me get the BPL card that I was trying so hard to acquire. The candidate won the election. I applied for the BPL card again but when the list came, I discovered that my name was not there. So I went to the *Mukhia* and told him about my problem. He washed his hands off from his promise saying that my name had been omitted from the list from the govt. office itself and that he could do nothing about it. He asked me to apply for the card again.

One day I heard from people

in the village that fresh application for the BPL card was being accepted. So I hurriedly went to Apne Aap Women Worldwide office in Forbesgunj that I knew from before and met Mr. Ravi Kumar Mishra, the helpdesk counsellor. He helped me in filling up the form and then submitted it in the local Block office for further process. Six months later some people came to my village with cameras and made an announcement that whosoever had applied for the BPL card needed to come out of their house and get their photo taken. They charged us Rs. 20 each for taking our photo. We later came to know that we had been cheated. *(Contd. to Pg.4)*

(Contd. from Pg.1 "Search...")

but after some days the landlord forced me into prostitution and I could not see a way out to escape from the Red Light Area. Within a year a male child was born and I was left with no other option to earn money to meet the basic needs of my child. Since then I live in the area and I have no identity of my own in terms of a physical identity card like a voter card, Aadhar card or the BPL card issued by the government.

Being a member of the Dhobi Self Empowerment Group (SEG), I regularly participated in different awareness session and group meeting organised at the Apne Aap centre. In one such meeting a *Dada* (community worker) from Apne Aap told us about the necessity of

government identity cards and how it is useful in getting different government entitlements and benefits especially for the aged and marginalised women like us. He also told us that the government had published a notification to submit applications for applying for the BPL card. He also suggested collecting the application form from the respective councillor's office. So I along with other members of our group collected the application form and filled it with the help of a *Dada* from Apne Aap and then submitted our application at the concerned Kolkata Municipal Corporation office with the hope of getting the BPL card.

Two and half months later we

received news that my name was in the government BPL card official list published by the Kolkata Municipal Corporation including names of other members of our group. This news made me very happy because after a long time and effort it had become possible to have my name along with my son, who is mentally challenged featured in the BPL list. Now I can make use of several government benefits like the subsidized rations from government ration shops, free medical facilities and also apply for residential units for the urban poor under the Rajiv Awaas Yojana (RAY) programme. I thank Apne Aap for helping me get this BPL card.

(Bhagbanti Devi is a member of Dhobi SEG and lives in Kolkata)

Another Perspective

Fazul

Kolkata: As India is preparing to implement the new Rape Law that was recently passed by the Indian parliament, Apne Aap Women Worldwide in Kolkata tried to do a check on what survivors of trafficking and at risk girls and women thought about it and how it will affect them. Various questions were raised and answers were sought from survivors themselves. The people participating in the discussion were members of Self Empowerment Groups (SEG) in Kolkata including Basanti Das, Mousumi Mohanti, Pratima Mondal, Ayesha Begum, Bharati Singh, Sita Devi, Sandha Devi, Piu Begum, Rabiya Begum, Asma Begum, Maya Mondal, Basanti Das and Anupam and Fazul the Apne Aap coordinators Kolkata.

The first question members of the SEG were asked was what were the solutions they had in mind to stop sex trafficking. Varied answers came from different members and while all of them were victims of the sex trade, answers came from their point of view. They said that more organisations such as Apne Aap should be present who work for victims like us and the police should be more active in stopping such a crime against humanity. When a trafficker is caught and handed over to the police then the court should give very tough punishment because once he is out, he will continue committing the crime using his friends and relatives. In fact the punishment

should be so severe that he should never be released from jail.

Many times even marriage is used as a tool to push the woman in prostitution. Numerous times even married women with children are also trafficked and pushed into prostitution. This should be stopped. The prostitute should not be punished but the trafficker should be. The law should be friendlier to the common people and specially marginalised people like us. When the prostituted woman is young, she is able to earn some money as she becomes older she has no place to go. She has no more customers and there is no shelter. They are not in demand anymore and they are tortured if they go against the establishment. There is no option left for the poor woman.

On further discussion it was asked if there was a possibility where a female can rape a male or sexually exploit him. The women were surprised at this point of view but answered saying that if any such rule is passed where a woman is convicted of rape, it will further lower the status of women in society. They had not come to know of any such incident and it was practically impossible in a country like India, so no such law should be made.

In the world where we live men have nothing to be ashamed of and need nothing to guard their modesty while women have so much to protect. If a man

wears only one piece of clothing and its removed, he will be okay but even though women wear four layers of clothing and if even one is removed it becomes an incident of shame. Today women are progressing as fast as men which becomes difficult for them to accept.

When one girl from an affluent family is gang raped, there is so much change in the establishment, so many discussions and debates. The media publicises it, rallies are taken out, TV programs are aired. Why did it not happen earlier when a rape or sexual assault was reported in a smaller town? Is it because it happened in a prominent place like Delhi?

The family of the Delhi rape case victim could present all details to everyone. Could all victims do that? The women said they were scared to report the matter, not ashamed. There are people who always keep an eye on them. Did the police and govt. officials scare them? The women revealed that some customers who came to them had some connection with the local police. When they left, the police came and took all their money saying that they had snatched it from the customer. The policemen exploit the women and charge them with a huge monthly amount. This should be immediately stopped and the guilty officials and policemen should be punished.

*(Fazul is a Project Officer (Legal)
at Apne Aap Centre in Bihar)*

Why I'll Miss Them

Pinki Kumari

Kolkata: My name is Pinki and I am a teacher at the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidhyalaya (KGBV), Simraha, Bihar, in a school run by Apne Aap Women Worldwide. I want to share my experience of four and a half years with students of class 8 at studying at KGBV. Their names are as follows: Jahan Ara, Farida Khan, Soni Khan, Nisha Khan, Nagma Saheen, Roshni Khan, Kiran Kumari, Minu Kumari, Khushboo Khan, Khushboo Kumari, Baby Kumari, Amrita, Guddi Kumari, Bharti Kumari and Ruhi Khan.

When I first started working at KGBV, I had no idea about the kind of difficulties that I was going to face. Most girls of communities living in the area around Apne Aap, study here. Due to the environment that these girls came from, they always used bad words including curses when talking. Quarrelling

and fighting amongst themselves was their way of life. Sometimes we too got involved in their fights and became victims of their abuses. Due to all these reasons, I had the least interest to stay back and continue teaching.

DIARY OF A SOCIAL WORKER

At the time when I began teaching the girls, they were younger and had no understanding of what they said and did. Maybe that is why they used to fought so much. But as time passed by, the girls started becoming more and more tolerant. I also made a conscious decision to make myself mentally stronger.

There were difficulties that we came across, but we fought

together to overcome those problems. We became friends. The girls did not consider me as their teacher but as their friend. With time, we formed a strong bond amongst us and we forget that we had come from different places. We had become one big family. The girls did not hide anything from us. They used to discuss each and every problem with us, even the mistakes that they had committed. The girls had understood that all teachers at the KGBV were their elder sisters and should be respected. All guests visiting the center received a big welcome. They answered every question with clarity to any visiting govt. officer. They had discovered good things about themselves.

Soon they will be appearing for their class 8 final exams and move ahead in life. They will always be remembered in my heart while I am still alive.

(Contd. from Pg.2 "My Right...")

However, six months later my name finally appeared in the BPL list published by the government office. We then went to collect the card from the local village representative who had collected the BPL cards on our behalf. When I asked for my card he said that even though my name was in the list, I had to pay Rs.100 to get it. I told him that I will ask my husband if I needed to pay Rs.100. Instead I went to Apne Aap office and met Ravi Ji, the help desk counsellor who helped me fill the form. He advised us to not pay any money to anyone.

After sometime, during one of our self-empowerment group meetings we heard that many of the villagers had got their BPL cards. I came to know that my card was also there, although I could not get it. There were other members in the group also who had not got their cards. We then decided in the group meeting that we will protest in front of the village head and will not let him leave his house until we get the card. The next morning we began our protest in front of the village head's house and raised our voice in singularity so people could hear our voices. At first the

village head threatened us with dire consequences even amounting to throwing us in jail if we did not stop our protest. Later he gave in and distributed all our cards. The following morning I went to a nearby government subsidised ration shop and bought food at subsidised rates for me and my family. I felt privileged to own the BPL card because I know how difficult it is to get one. I thank the entire Apne Aap Women Worldwide team in helping me get the BPL card which was rightfully mine. I can now live a better life.

Women Asserting Their Basic Rights

By Manish K. Jha

Babuan, Bihar: The following is a brief case study of Apne Aap Women Worldwide work in Babuan Village of Narpatganj Block that depicts how the Apne Aap, organizing women and girls in smaller groups to dismantle Sex Trafficking at high risk Indo-Nepal Border, where trafficking of women and girls are a big concern, has initiated processes through organizing poor and marginalized women for the assertion of their basic rights. This is just one among the several such success stories emerging in many places through various Govt. Schemes with strategic operationalisation of Apne Aap vision mission and goal.

The Government of India has a scheme for the economically poorest people called Below Poverty Line (BPL). This scheme is exclusively meant for the poorest sections of the population and government provides many subsidies and other benefits under social security and many other government schemes to the people in the BPL list. In Babuan village prior to the initiation of the A2W2 process, the BPL list included the upper caste, economically well-off and the elite and influential sections of the village, completely ignoring the real poorest and marginalized sections.

The economically well-off and influential people in the village used their immediate and maximum access to information

about different government policies and programs to register their names in the BPL list, either through influencing, putting pressure or bribing, and had been ad infinitum extracting benefits from this scheme. Meanwhile the poorest and marginalized sections were deliberately deprived of information about schemes by the local level government officials and even the local elected representatives to the Panchayati Raj institutions. The prevalence of large scale illiteracy and ignorance among the poorest and marginalized sections, whose priority had been to arrange two square meals a day to feed their families, meant they had no information about the BPL scheme, its provisions and the people of the village who had been availing the benefits.

Once the Participatory method of Apne Aap Women Worldwide came in place in Bordering village of Indo-Nepal border in shapes of Social Map, Resource Map and well being analysis, the poorest and marginalized section came to know about the villagers who were economically well off, belonged to upper caste and elite sections, being credited with maximum resources under their control.

A comprehensive discussions started among Apne Aap self help groups. Apne Aap facilitator, while discussing various government schemes meant exclusively for the poorest sections of the population, also

discussed the BPL scheme. And from there they (Group members) came to know how they had been kept deprived of access to the government scheme meant for them while the well off sections in the village had been taking benefits from that particular scheme.

Then, it became the major issue for the Apne Aap Work and SEG members of Narpatganj Block. They were continuously discussing their deprivation and the process of their alienation that had been strategically devised by a racket encompassing the local level Government officials, local elected peoples' representatives and the elite and economically well off sections of the village so as to cater to their vested interests smoothly and effectively.

The discussions in the group was followed by a plan to assert their right to get enlisted under BPL. The group members first brought the matter to the *Gram Panchyat* (Village Council). The *Gram Panchyat* was taking a long time to act, so they planned a different strategy.

They went to the Block Headquarters of Narpatganj, Araria district and participated in a Local rally to pressurize the administration on the BPL identification issue. They met the Block Development Officer (BDO) to pledge their demand for the rectification of the BPL list. *(Contd. on Pg.7)*

Low-caste Women on the Brink of Betrayal

By Ruchira Gupta

“If rape is done for profit, it is not rape. If rape is done to poor and low-caste women it is not rape but “sex-work”.

This is the message that millions of victims and survivors of prostitution will hear if their experience of violence is invalidated by our politicians and policy makers, who want to remove prostitution as an explicit form of exploitation in the Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill. Prostitution was clearly defined as exploitation in the 3rd February 18, 2013 Presidential Criminal Law (Amendment) Ordinance but now there is a move by some in the law ministry to retreat from it. They use the excuse that defining prostitution as exploitation will deprive the prostituted girls of a livelihood. In reality it is not the livelihood of the prostituted girls that will be affected but of those who buy and sell them. The money made by the traffickers is what drives the industry. They hunt for poor and low caste-girls to trap into prostitution.

In fact, most of the prostituted girls are kept in debt bondage by the sex-industry. They are often told that their families took some money from them and that they are working off the debt. Pulled out of school and subjected to serial rape, these girls lose count and don't even know how much the debt is, or when it is repaid.

The women in the industry known as “flying sex-workers” who rent a room in a brothel

district, and come daily, to earn cash get deeper and deeper into debt. The lion's share of their earnings goes to others-landlords who charge exorbitant rent, pimps who take chunks of their earnings, doctors or quacks who rip them off to deal with all the violence and diseases they pick up, the police who extort money for them, money-lenders who charge them steep interests, musclemen who take protection money, bootleggers who give

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

them alcohol and other substances to deal with the repeated body invasion, transporters who bring them and recruiters who introduced them to the sex-industry.

Another question often asked of me is: Will the women freed from prostitution starve? The reality is that the unfreed women in the prostitution system, both starve and die, by the time they reach their forties. The brothel system chews up and throws out women by the time they reach their twenties.

Prostitution is an occupation in which you earn less with experience as you grow older. The trajectory of a prostituted female is from debt bondage to begging to early death. For a few years in between she is allowed to keep some of what she earns.

But these earnings are used up to pay for the bed she uses, the clothes, the food, the makeup, her medical bills, her children's schooling, and even drugs and alcohol which is used to block the experience of repeated body invasion, repayment of debt to the money-lender, and protection money to the pimp.

Brothel managers begin to put pressure on prostituted women to replace themselves with their daughters. Many succumb to it. Every single prostituted woman I have met wants to save her daughter from the same fate as herself. And they think someday society will stand by them, and create laws to protect them and their daughters, and hold accountable all those who rape, buy and sell her.

One of the most repeated words that prostituted women use is *Dhoka*. They feel betrayed by family members who let them go, pimps and agents who sell and buy them, clients who rape them and a society which does not stand by them.

A country which is working hard to end impunity for rape by appointing commissions and amending laws, only protects females from the upper castes and upper classes? Is the rape of poor women from low-castes to be ignored, especially if it is rape for profit? Are we not even willing to consider their rape exploitation? Will the millions of prostituted women in our country once again experience *Dhoka*?

News and Events

French Consul General and Ministers Visit Kolkata

Kolkata: The Consul General of France Mr. Fabrice Etienne made a visit to center in Kolkata along with some French Senators on the 6th of March 2013 to meet with the members of our group of social workers and discuss trafficking issues.

The visit was officially meant to strengthen Indo-French cultural and economic exchange. Two of the Senators looked after the finance, one Senator looked after the social welfare and was also a Minister, while another Senator looked

after women's issues and was a Minister too. Just a week before, the Consul General did a recce and told us that they will visit us in the evening after their meeting with the Governor and the Chief Secretary, West Bengal.

The team arrived around 7 in the evening and was warmly received by our children and women singing the Apne Aap song. They visited each program and spoke to the women and children present. They also had a long discussion with the entire team about our work and our

approach. Taj Muhamad was also there and he spoke about the legal issues around trafficking. The Minister of Women's Rights was particularly interested to learn about our way of working. They gave us a bronze medallion of Mother France as a gift. Earlier in the morning, a messenger had come with a donation of ten thousand rupees and had expressed interest to work with us on the issue of human sex trafficking. We are quite hopeful to hearing from some of them soon in future.

Celebrating International Womens Day

Kolkata: 8th March is celebrated as International Women's Day. There was a rally organized on the occasion and I was very happy to be a part of it. Every year this rally is celebrated on a particular theme. This year it was celebrated to denounce violence against Women across the world.

This day we honour women who have fought against all violence perpetrated towards them. When I was walking in the rally, I was feeling very proud of myself. We want people to know about this day and its importance. We want them to make aware that all women have rights to equality and that they need to be encouraged to live in honour and dignity. We used slogans to send out our message. I feel very fortunate to have been a part of this rally and glad that I could do my part in fighting violence against women.

(Contd. from Pg.5 "Women...)

The BDO directed the local Community Development Officer to look into the matter. Days passed by and the complaint was put in one of the files among hundreds of others wrapped in red coloured cloths resting on desolated racks of the office.

One day all the group members of the village went to the Block Office and insisted the Block Development Officer to rectify the BPL list. While the officer tried to ignore their demand, the people protested and warned that they would not leave the block office if the things were not sorted out on the same day.

The people were losing their patience because they had sacrificed their day's wage and the BDO was in total ignorance. This raged the demonstrating villagers and in retaliation they locked the BDO and all other officials in their office. The villagers sat on *Dharna*, or sit-in,

blocking the front main entrance to the Block Office and stopping anyone coming in or leaving. The administration had to finally intervene.

The message reached the higher authorities who issued instructions for taking immediate action. The Block administrators had to get the BPL list rectified. The names of the well-off families were deleted from the list and the real poor families were incorporated. BPL cards were issued on the same day also.

This has become a pathfinder for many other Self Empowerment Groups in the District. Actions have been incessantly initiated by the Mahila Mandals taking on issues with the local administration not only in case of BPL scheme but also for so many other issues that have been identified through the unique Apne Aap based process.

(Manish is the State Coordinator of Apne Aap Centre, Bihar)

Did You Know?

- Human trafficking includes both sex trafficking and labor trafficking and is the second largest – and fastest growing – criminal industry in the world. In 2008, traffickers made \$31 billion buying and selling humans.
- The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that there are at least 12.3 million adults and children in forced labor, bonded labor, and commercial sexual servitude at any given time.
- Around 35,000 children were reported missing in India in 2011, most of them girls.
- An estimated 30,000 victims of sex trafficking die each year from abuse, disease, torture, and neglect. Eighty percent of those under 24, and some are as young as six years old.
- The National Crime Records Bureau recorded 3,517 incidents of human trafficking within India in 2011 while 3,422 incidents were recorded in the previous year.
- HIV prevalence among women trafficked from Nepal and prostituted in India is 38 percent. The rate of HIV infection exceeded 60 percent among girls prostituted prior to 15 years of age.

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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