



RED LIGHT DESPATCH

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DELHI, KOLKATA, AND FORBESGANJ (BIHAR)

My Dreams “To end prostitution” Shilpa, 16 years

Delhi: My name is Shilpa. I am 16-year-old. I am from a Perna community and I live in Dharampura. I have been associated with Apne Aap since 2011. I joined as a Kishori Mandal member and later enrolled in Apne Aap’s cutting and tailoring class for six months and in the meantime also learnt *Bhangda* dance. I was married off early in Prem Nagar to start a family and bear a child. It was difficult for me to take responsibilities at the early age and I felt suffocating in that place. Hence, I requested my husband to shift to my maternal home in Dharampura. So that I can join Apne Aap Centre and enrol in the cutting and tailoring classes to fulfil my dream, as economically and socially independent person. Later, I joined the income generation program, so to strengthen my financial condition. Also, I am against the inter-generational prostitution in our community (Perna). The day I received my first stipend from Apne Aap, I was overwhelmed and it made me more determine to fight against exploitation against girls and women. My means never ends here and I have to walk a long way ahead. Eventually, I hope each and every girl from my community should come out of this hell, where no women and girls will be branded as a ‘prostitute’, which really hampers the dignity of women in society.

“It is like a dream come true moment” —Fatima

Bihar: This is how I felt in the hot seat of KBC in front of the superstar Amitabh Bachchan. For a moment my life came to a standstill, and, I couldn’t believe that it was happening in reality! And, being a girl from “Nat community”; a girl who is born to be sold, was sitting in front of thousands of spectators and to whose support none other than the renowned bollywood actress Rani Mukherji was there. The greatest moment of the event was when both the superstars gave me a standing ovation and heaved praises for my efforts in the battle against human trafficking. The audience too joined in to cheer me. For me, it was really a moment of wonder. I got obsessed with my earlier struggles when, at a tender age of nine, I was sold off to a man living in the red light area of Forbesganj, Bihar, in the name of marriage. At that time it was

my inner courage which helped me at every step, and, helped escape a lot of girls captured in the trap of prostitution. In return, I was inflicted with severe corporal punishment, and, confined within the four walls without food or water for numerous days. However, these incidents only firmed my further resolve to fight tooth and nail against eradicating trafficking completely on the face of the earth. This apart, if for four days of torturous ordeal, I could help save the lives of four girls, I was even ready to undergo many such ordeals.

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The World Outside “Meeting Amitabh ji in Mumbai” Mohd Kalam, 33 years

Bihar: One evening I had received a call from Tinku di intimidating about Mr Bhaskar from Big Synergy Media Pvt. Ltd. She informed me that he is interested in documenting Apne Aap’s struggle against anti-sex trafficking for a television programme, “Zindagi Zindabad”. I gave our consent to her. After a week, we spoke to Mr Bhaskar over the Skype. He told us about the impending video shoot and a possible Delhi visit. To our discomfort, however, after a month, we received a call from him again, saying the show was postponed. But, one day, out of nowhere, Fatima, our activist leader, said that Mr. Bhaskar is willing to take our story for other programme. At that time, Fatima did not had much information about the programme, so I

called up Mr. Bhaskar to inquire about it. He confided in me that Fatima’s survival and leadership story was selected for the Kaun Banega Crorepati (KBC) 2014. I was thrilled, but he requested me not to reveal it to anyone as the selection was yet to confirm. In July 14, Mr Bhaskar visited our Bihar office and approached us to document Fatima’s story and Apne Aap works, in context of how it help and empower the girls and women in general. The shooting was done after we got the approval from Tinku di, Ruchira di.

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Op/Ed : World Day against Trafficking in Persons - Ruchira Gupta's interview in *The Diplomat*

Anuradha Sharma is an independent journalist based in Kolkata. She writes on politics and culture in South Asia. She was a journalist fellow at Reuters Institute for Study of Journalism, University of Oxford, 2013.

The first **World Day against Trafficking in Persons** was observed on July 30. The World Day was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly to end modern-day slavery, which has in its grasp an estimated 2.5 million people, most of them women and children. *The Diplomat* speaks with Ruchira Gupta, the Indian abolitionist, women's rights activist, and award-winning journalist and documentary filmmaker.

Gupta has provided policy support to the Government of India on countering trafficking. She has worked with UNICEF and UNIFEM in Thailand, Nepal, Iran, US, Kosovo, Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, Philippines and South Africa. She teaches a course on modern-day slavery in Zanzibar, Tanzania and is adjunct associate professor at the Centre of Global Affairs, New York University, where she teaches graduate courses on human trafficking and movement building. She is the founding president of Apne Aap Worldwide, an organization working in countering human trafficking and helping women in prostitution.

She tells *The Diplomat* about trafficking and rape in India and the story of her own journey.

India is one of the major contributors to global human trafficking. It is a signatory to the UN Protocol on trafficking in persons. From your experience of being closely connected its policymaking, do you think India is doing enough to end trafficking?

Not enough, but it is doing something. On April 3 last year, it passed Section 370 of the Indian Penal Code, criminalizing the entire process of trafficking for sexual exploitation. What it did not do is criminalize the process of trafficking for labor exploitation. India is the epicenter of bonded labor in the world. More people are slaves through debt-bondage in India than anywhere in the world. Also, there are more prostituted children in India than anywhere else. Sometimes labor and sexual exploitation are interconnected. A person may be trafficked for labor and then may be sexually exploited as well. It is very important for India to have strict laws against trafficking for labor exploitation. India has to make bigger legal changes.

Also, while the law has changed, there are no budget allocations to provide legal, health, housing or capacity-building services to victims and survivors of prostitution. And on prevention, there is absolutely no policy at all. A holistic approach that links different departments, such as women and child, social welfare, education, police, is needed. Schemes need to be linked. The government must also identify those who are most likely to be trafficked and map them. I hear that the new government is apparently is setting targets for its ministries; I would love some of the targets to be around trafficking and prostitution.

Your organization, Apne Aap Worldwide, has been working in the field of intergenerational prostitution, especially among the de-notified tribes. What are your observations?

De-notified tribes were categorized as criminal tribes in British India. We have just finished a study for the Indian Council for Social Science Research on the status of education among the de-notified tribes in six states of India. During the course of the study, we found that there is a very high prevalence of inter-generational prostitution among them.

It is extremely difficult to map these communities and find out the extent of inter-generational prostitution in them because there is no data available. The government could not give us any data as to how many such tribes exist, what their numbers are and where they live and what's happening among the girls. We had to literally go in and dig out information ourselves through word of mouth from one tribe to another. If its own citizens are invisible to the government of India, how are they going to create policies for them?

To ask you what every Indian is most asked these days, why are so many rapes happening in India in recent times?

Rapes have been going on, but they are now being reported more because of the success of the women's movement. We have made it a mainstream issue.

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**Op/Ed : World Day against Trafficking in Persons
- Ruchira Gupta's interview in *The Diplomat***

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We marched on the streets, we have taken on water cannons, we have written about it, blogged about it, put it on social media (especially, in the aftermath of the 2012 Delhi rape case). We have not only forced a change in the law, but we have also forced mainstream media to report on these issues. We have relentlessly made sure that media covers rape and now rape has become a “mainstream issue.” The media just cannot afford to ignore it. Earlier, the tendency was to hide, which is not the case anymore. Women have broken their silence. Now they don't see it as their shame and guilt and are more open to reporting and talking about their rapes. So, it is not that more rapes are happening, but that more outrage is being expressed. The next good thing to emerge from this movement is that this outrage and public pressure will lead to better enforcement of laws and more convictions. Now, no police officer will be able to get away easily by not registering a complaint or investigating a rape case. And that will then lead to the number of rapes going down. It will take time, but the process has begun.

So, it is much better now than in the 1990s when you had spoken against the molestation you faced while on duty as a journalist? What was your experience, how did you deal with it?

Of course, it is much better now. (In 1992,) I had gone to cover the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. I went inside the mosque because as a journalist I had to be as close as possible to the source of news. I was wearing a pair of jeans, a loose shirt and had tied a hanky on my head. The Hindu *kar sevaks* (volunteers, who brought the mosque down) thought I was a Muslim and tried to strangle me to death, all the while molesting me. I was pulled outside and was about to be thrown into a trench when a *kar sevak*, whom I had interviewed earlier, recognized me and intervened. When I spoke up against this incident publicly, a whole section of society tried to make the shame mine. They tried to say I was doing it for publicity and that I was a liar. They asked me if I had scratch marks in my body. They asked me all sorts of questions: did I believe in god, did I smoke cig-

arettes, did I have male friends. So, first they tried to make me hide it, then they tried to trivialize me, blame me, and when, nothing would make me stop, they tried to marginalize me.

This experience had a deep impact in your life and work, resulting in your Emmy award-winning documentary film, *The Selling of Innocents*, in 1996.

It was painful to have that credibility challenged, my character questioned. But in the end it made me stronger. Later, when I went inside the red light districts, I could empathize with the girls I interviewed because they were also made to believe that the shame and guilt were theirs. My truth connected with theirs and they agreed to be in the documentary and spoke about things that were not exposed before in any other documentary. The film brought me the Emmy award for investigative journalism (in 1997), but my bigger joy is in the fact that it had a huge impact in the anti-trafficking movement across the world. The documentary was shown in the U.S. Senate. Later, U.S. Senator Sam Brownback wrote to me saying that the film and my testimony at the Senate led to the passage of the first U.S. law against trafficking, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act.

How did Apne Aap happen? What does it do?

I began to build friends and allies wherever my film was screened. Through them I was able to create a coalition which became part of a worldwide movement against trafficking. The movement has had an impact in about 110 countries which then changed their laws to address trafficking based on the UN Protocol. In the meantime, the 22 girls and women who I interviewed in the film told me that they wanted to change their lives. It was with them that in 2002 I started Apne Aap (meaning “on one's own”) from a red light district in Mumbai. We hired a teacher and started a community classroom where the women would drop their children.

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Op/Ed : World Day against Trafficking in Persons - Ruchira Gupta's interview in *The Diplomat*

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Then we moved the children into boarding schools, which were removed from the brothels (so that children could study in a free, healthy atmosphere). The women then organized themselves to fight for their rights, such as getting government documents (voter cards, ration cards, caste certificates, below poverty line cards) which are very important to avail of any government scheme and subsidies. Slowly the dependency on brothels came down. But that riled the pimps and brothel managers. It was then that we trained the women on rights and the process of seeking police help.

Based on the success of Mumbai, from where we have eased out, we now have centers in Delhi, Kolkata and Forbesganj (Gupta's hometown) in Bihar state, touching the lives of 21,000 girls. We work to empower women in prostitution by making them aware of their rights, imparting them with vocational and income generating skills, getting their children educated and connecting them to media and political representatives to give them a voice and social visibility. Women are organized in groups that

gives them a collective bargaining power. Of the 21,072 girls we have been able to rehabilitate, 20 per cent were victims of trafficking. We were able to help 13,000 women get government IDs and subsidies.

How do you think the observation of World Day against Trafficking in Persons will take the campaign against modern-day slavery forward?

The World Day against trafficking marks the success of the anti-trafficking movement in a way to show that we have recognized it as a problem, we have changed laws in countries, and we have a UN Protocol against trafficking, which was passed in 2002. Going forward I feel, it may even mark the end of trafficking in the world, where we say, "Oh, trafficking is history. It used to happen in such and such century or in such and such decade," just like we say about slavery.

Diary of a Social Worker —Bhawna

Bihar: As a three months old in Apne Aap Women Worldwide, I feel greatly satisfied and relieved that I chose the right path in my career move. But I am also deeply honored with the approach of the organization; that it allows its employees to grow out from their shell.

I was really trying hard to put into praxis my learning of Master's degree in development field, few days ago from now. And, I thought deeply about it. Asking questions to myself, such as how my theoretical knowledge, which I gained during my master degree relates to any such issues in real? Again, I was at fault!! I was not trying to get the essence of the readings from the grassroots work approach which my organization does!

But then suddenly, from nowhere, it dawned upon me the reading named "The promise of Sociology" by C. Wright Mills. An interesting and informative article indeed! What Mills is trying to say is justified by Apne Aap Women Worldwide. **There are two types of sociological problems – troubles and issues. The troubles are of the individuals, whereas, the issue belongs to the entire society.** However, an individual cannot understand his/her troubles without looking into the history of life. And, in a nutshell, an individual's troubles can influence the society; when it is experienced by many.

From what I mentioned above, I am not pretending to be a sociologist. What I am trying to put across in my writing is that Apne Aap is engaged at both the levels – individual as well as societal – when dealing with human trafficking. And, that is what makes its achievements even wonderful and laudable!

At an individual level, with a girl or woman, the organization makes an individual's troubles its own and tries to empower her by unknowingly making her go through 'sociological imagination'; helping her find an intricate connection between her 'present state and the precedent events that shaped it, in order to control one's life in a better way.

And, at a societal level, the organization is brewing a vision of a world where no girl or woman could be bought or sold. 'The Promise' made to the twenty-two founding women who have since passed away from hunger, suicide and AIDS-related complications, but, Apne Aap's work continues.

Educative Exposure Trip to Science City — Tamal Mukherjee

Kolkata: On August 19, 2014, total of 40 children from Apne Aap's went for an educative exposure trip to 'Science city' Kolkata, West Bengal. Science city at Kolkata is a place where one can learn about scientific theories and science practical. Science city is the largest science centre in the Indian subcontinent under National Council of Science Museums (NCSM), Ministry of Culture, Government of India, is at the crossing of Eastern Metropolitan bypass and JBS Halder avenue, Kolkata.

In the Science Park, the children were educated about the plants and animals. Different varieties of plants and animals were explained in the Earth Exploration Hall. It is a two storied building that displayed the details of the southern hemisphere in the ground floor and northern hemisphere in the first floor. A huge Earth globe is located at the centre of the hall surrounded by multi-media presentations on all major global issues. The exposition is divided into 12 equal longitudinal segments for each hemisphere and all important features of each segment such as physical geography, land and people, flora and fauna and other dynamic natural phenomena on Earth have been highlighted around the central globe with the help of modern technology. Interactive multimedia presentations have been used for information retrieval and visitor engagement, as they got the practical information about the Earth and in addition to this there were illustrative pictures of flora and fauna to increase their knowledge.

The children were seated in the picnic garden which was shaded and they were able to play freely. Later, the children were given food packets that included samosa, biscuits, cupcakes and chips provided by the interns. **The**

40 children both from Munshigunj and Sonagachi actively participated in the educative exposure trip: Earth Exploration Hall, Space Odyssey, and Dynamotion Hall, Maritime Centre as well as the outdoor exposure enjoyed by all the children.

It was an exciting journey to the world of science for the Apne Aap's children, in the Dynamotion Hall. The aqua mobile, a plethora of exhibits on physical science and the energy ball exhibit complement the building of unique architecture. Here, one can create music while walking on the floor piano, make soap bubbles float in air, manoeuvre the floating ball, make a large dish float in air or observe a well of infinite depth. A virtual harp, which creates music, a working tornado, principles of flight and many more exciting exhibits would stimulate the intrinsic and extrinsic faculty of visitors and keep them engrossed in the process of discovery.

There was a huge aquarium which the children loved as they could see various types and colors of fishes. There was also the 'mirror magic' that had various types of mirrors that fascinated the children. The 'Children Play Corner' was very huge and children were running and playing around.

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My First Day In Apne Aap:

—Ruby Khatun

Kolkata: I, Ruby Khatoon, joined Apne Aap on the 9th of August, 2014. I was given a tour of the office and visited all the departments. I got to meet the other workers of the organisation.

I grew up in the red light area of Munshigunj and feel lucky to join this organization as it works for the empowerment of ‘women in prostitution’. We help these hapless victims to lead an independent and free life by opening up to them, different avenues of alternative livelihood.

I found my true calling at Apne Aap and today I am Me because of Apne Aap Women Worldwide. They have taught me and several others like me to lead a dignified life with respect.

We give them the opportunity to choose their own livelihood. Apne Aap Women Worldwide educates them and their children. Besides basic education they are also given vocational and computer training which helps them to look after themselves in the long run. It provides them with financial and social independence. Apne Aap also makes them legally aware of their rights. This helps them not to get exploited any further under any circumstance. Most of the women who have been helped by our organisation are now self-employed.

They are not only looking after themselves but are also contributing to their families. **I believe that Apne Aap will continue to enlighten these victims for days to come and this is why I**

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“God helps those who help themselves.” Something like that, too, happened with me. In the year 2005 I got associated with Apne Aap Women Worldwide, an NGO working against sex trafficking, with the help of Tinku di. And, since then, I have never looked back, as I have been supported well by Ruchira di from time to time. Whatever I am today, I owe it deeply to Ruchira di and Tinku di.

In the end, I would like pay my heartfelt and sincere gratitude to Kalamji, the person who has worked closely with the community on the issue of human trafficking, and, without whose gracious support I wouldn’t have reached the platform of KBC; starting from my initial days of the struggles. This is just the beginning of my journey.

want to be a part of this organisation and their endeavours.

I grew up with my family members in the red light area of Munshigunj and studied at Apne Aap ‘Byasti Bikash Kendra’, Munshigunj. I was well guided by my teachers at the Kendra and eventually I was admitted to a nearby school in Khidderpore by one of my teachers from there. I learned how to sew, draw and operate a computer. I also took carpentry lessons at the Kendra.

I used to work at a tea godown in Munshigunj. Everyday I used to see people from Apne Aap visit our locality, talk to the women folk, the children, visit their homes, organise Mahila Mandals, take them on field trips, help them get their voters identity card and ration cards.

This made me feel very good about the organisation and I told *Shana Didi* from Apne Aap that I was encouraged to do the same for my community and my people and that I wanted to join the organisation. She helped me through this and now I am also a part of this noble cause. I found my true calling at Apne Aap and today I am Me because of Apne Aap Women Worldwide. They have taught me and several others like me to lead a dignified life with respect.

“God helps those who help themselves.”

“Race, Sex and Nation: Making sense of violence against the ‘other’”

— transcribed by Sameera Rizvi (intern)

A talk on Linking race, sex and nation to make sense of the North Eastern experience by Dr. A. BimolAkoi-jam, political psychologist and social analyst who teaches at JNU, New Delhi

Many Indians believe race to be a discredited concept, many refuse to acknowledge that it is an issue in this country. **The recently released Bollywood flick *Mary Kom*, in which actress Priyanka Chopra is cast as a female boxer from Manipur is an example of how Indians are not paying attention to reflecting reality. The apathy of mainstream Indian society to see Mary Kom casted as who she was, a North Eastern woman, denies the harsh reality that this group of people face living the paradigm of being Indians by birth and citizenship yet being seen and framed as ‘the other’.**

Nationalism shares an intimate relationship with race, as nationalism in India is structured to accommodate a narrowly construed concept of who is seen and treated as Indian. The link between race and nation can be explained from the very etymology of the word “nation”, which comes from the Latin word “natio” or to be born. Society is fascinated with social status as predicated by birth, resulting in a social hierarchy of pure-blood, mixed blood and ‘the other’. In a similar sense, Jawaharlal Nehru’s book *Discovery of India* discusses how Indian culture is more than just the Hindu religion, and how more than 5,000 years of history has resulted in the absorption of many different elements and peoples. This being the case, he fails to mention the necessity of Hindus to adapt to this culture. Instead, he speaks of how Christians and Moslems have adapted themselves to the Indian way of life and “Indianized” themselves, whereas the Hindu was Indian to begin with.

In the case of North Easterners, racial classification demonstrates a sharp national divide. **While the North-east is politically and geographically part of India, the diaspora is culturally and racially grouped into South**

East Asia. Most certainly due in part to physical biological attributes and cultural traces of the Orient, the region is generally recognized to mark the beginning of South East Asia. This divide results in harmful perspectives towards inhabitants of the Northeast; a people who are marked as the “other” and are therefore vulnerable to the violence that can be observed today. From absence of representation in Indian culture (i.e. Bollywood) to military violence against civilians, there is a clear distinction of North Easterners as not being authentic Indians. In fact, any manifestation of Indian characteristics in this region are attributed to “imprints” Indians have left there, further demonstrating the seclusion faced by this part of India from the rest of the nation.

Sexuality and gender then comes into the equation to complete a nuanced snapshot of the North Eastern experience. Sexuality is played out in the politicized identity of the North Eastern people, implicated in the perspectives of men towards women belonging to a minority ethnic group. As in the colonial era, when colonized women were appropriated as sexual property, there is an automatic sexualization that occurs with female as the ‘other’. **Since moral and cultural superiority belongs to the dominant group, ‘the other’ women (North Eastern women in this case), are seen outside the boundaries of ethics. Their exoticism or “foreignness” is sexualized and they become objects which can be quickly forgotten as sisters, mothers and wives.**

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Fatima talked about her struggle and how she received absolute support from Apne Aap. Now she is an activist leader. Also, this entire event made me realized that there is possibility of Fatima participating in KBC.

In August first week, Fatima said that Mr. Bhaskar had sent her air tickets for Mumbai. The excitement was overwhelming. We left for Mumbai soon after that. First day, after reaching Mumbai, we took a rest by staying in a hotel. Second day, Sony channel had sent a car for us. We reached studio where costume and makeup team were waiting for us.

Later, we went to the KBC studio where many audiences, lights, camera, superstars Amitabh Bachchan and Rani Mukerji were present.

I was speechless. I became emotional and the fact that I and Fatima was there among the people whom we had seen in television all these years. I was in a paradise, far-away from all the problems which I deal with every day.

The sweetest moment was when my favorite actor Amitabh ji called my name, Mohamad Kalam, I was moved beyond my imagination. He asked about me and the work of Apne Aap. And at the end of the game show, Fatima and I stood on the studio, beside Amitabh Bachchan and Rani Mukerji to take photographs. **It is still a dream; being there, knowing that they knows about me and my work. It was a moment I shall cherish for the rest of my life.**

Poems

Lamp of knowledge

I have lighted the lamp of knowledge
To avoid the darkness of illiteracy
So to make each and every life glitter
And make the world sparkle
With the only weapon 'education'
I have claimed my rights.

— Sneha
Age : 12 years ,
Sapera community

A daughter

She who spread fragrance on the courtyard
She who makes simple home feels like heaven
She who bonds every relationship with love
She is a daughter.
She plays the role of a mother, a sister
Also the role of a wife and
Be forever present in all ups and downs of life,
She is a daughter.

—Dimpal,
Age : 12 years,
Sapera community



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