



RED LIGHT DESPATCH

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DELHI, KOLKATA, AND FORBESGANJ (BIHAR)

My Dream

I Want A Safe House for My Baby

- *Shabnam Khatoon / as dictated to Sara Khan*

Forbesganj: The flood that came in August destroyed everything. I have two sons and I am pregnant with my third child. We took shelter on a nearby hospital terrace. Once the water reduced, we returned home.

Everything in the house was broken. We had no food. We ate only biscuits for two days. I borrowed clothes from my aunt. I don't have enough money to repair anything in the house. The government is providing financial aid to those whose houses were destroyed in the flood but my name hasn't even appeared on this list.

I want my sons to study and do something good with their lives. In August, they didn't go to school because I couldn't pay their fees. My third baby is on its way. I want a safe house for my baby. I want clothes for my children. I want a bright future for all my children. I need to rebuild my home first.

“I want my sons to study and do something good with their lives. I want a safe house for my baby. I want a bright future for all my children.”

Hoorbai's Struggle with Her Daughter's In-Laws

- *Hoorbai Perna / as dictated to Khushboo Mishra*

Najafgarh: My name is Hoorbai. I belong to Perna community and was married at the age of 13. After few months of the birth of my youngest daughter, my husband died. He was an alcoholic.

I am uneducated and have four daughters. I was left with no other option but to continue our caste-based occupation of prostitution. I had to earn, earlier for my husband and now for my daughters.

My two daughters are in a private residential school. Apne Aap funds their education. My other two elder daughters are married. I know how

it feels when I have to entertain clients.

I sell my body every night for money. I had decided to never let any of my daughters join our caste based occupation.

Both my daughters are married in the Perna community. For two years the in-laws of my daughter, Megha, were forcing her to enter into this profession. Earlier we used to discuss the matter within the boundaries of our four walls.

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The World Outside

I Acted in a Hollywood Movie

- *Keya / as heard by Sara Khan*

Kolkata: My name is Keya. I live in Sonargachi in Kolkata. It is the biggest red-light area in Kolkata and Asia. Recently, Payal, another girl from the red-light area, and I went to Mumbai with our Apne Aap leader, Sahana Dasgupta, to shoot for a Hollywood movie. The movie is called 'Love Sonia'. It depicts a red-light area and how girls are bought and sold, and daily lives of girls like Payal and me.

I was both excited and nervous to board the flight to Mumbai. It was my first time in a flight. The world looked very small from my window. We stayed in two different fancy hotels for a month in Mumbai. Both were very grand and beautiful. While, Payal enjoyed

spending time in hotel, I wanted to explore the city. I didn't know when I'd ever get a chance like this. The director of the movie gave us a car every day. Every evening I would go somewhere new. I visited many places. But, my favourite places were Haji Ali, Juhu, Bandra and Chowpatty.

Mumbai has spoiled us. I got used to the air-conditioned rooms and the respect I received from everyone. In just a month, I feel a huge change within myself. I used to fear people and what they thought of me. But, now I realize many people sympathize with me. The one month in Mumbai has given me courage and confidence. Now, wherever I go, I feel strong. I wish

Op-Ed— On Global Human Trafficking

- Ruchira Gupta

The following was spoken by Ruchira Gupta in September 2017 in New York at the UN General Assembly on human trafficking.

My name is Ruchira Gupta and I'm from Apne Aap Women Worldwide, an organization that works against sex trafficking in India. We represent more than 20,000 girls and women who are victims of sex trafficking and prostitution. They are the poorest of the poor. They are poor, female, and low caste. On top of that, when they were trafficked into prostitution they were teenagers. Many of the girls I work with are still teenagers. I call them The Last Girls—the most vulnerable of human beings.

I applaud the leadership of the UNODC and all those who are present here today for taking the lead to create and reinforce the Global Plan of Action for Trafficking. It is much needed for the girls I work with in remote villages in India who are pimped out every day, ten times a night, just for 50 cents or 30 cents for each rape.

I am here to spotlight the needs and the vulnerability of the girls that are trafficked—The Last Girls. As Mahatma Gandhi, born 150 years ago, said that whenever we embark on any action, we must think of the most vulnerable and weakest human being we know, and the impact of our action on that person. So I ask all of you present today to think about that most vulnerable human being as that Last Girl, the 13 year old in a brothel, who has no access to food, clothing or shelter, except what that brothel keeper gives her, and definitely no access to justice. Her trafficking, her prostitution, is not a choice. It is an absence of choice. We need to invest in her basic needs, to reduce her vulnerabilities, so she can exit out of prostitution, just as South African survivor Grizelda Grootboom said today.

We must be careful not to let any vested interest allow us to redefine her exploitation as a livelihood choice. People may try and tell us that anything which is chosen is not exploitation. But that takes us away from the context of the choice, or the grim realities that force millions of women and girls to make the choice to survive. They are still exploited. We need to understand that any work which is physically or mentally harmful is exploitation.

Let us not let any semantics take us away from our understanding of exploitation. Exploitation is exploitation, if it is harmful—chosen or not. Very often, some affiliated agencies of the UN, have been

debating, that if it an economic activity is chosen, it is not exploitation, and therefore we should call it sex work. But if it is physically and mentally harmful, it is exploitation. Work is worship, noble and dignified. A renaming of exploitation as work will normalize exploitation and reverse the gains of labor struggles for dignified and sustainable livelihoods.

And therefore, I ask us all to emphasize Target 5.2 in the Agenda 2030 of the Sustainable Development Goals, which recognizes the sexual exploitation and prostitution and sexual violence done to women and girls all over the world as a major global crisis and asks all countries to combat it.

I understand that partnerships are essential to combat the sexual violence—partnerships across UNICEF, UNHCR, UNAIDS, and other UN agencies—but the most important partnership is to look at best practices that already exist as solutions to combat sex trafficking. Therefore I point to the Nordic model which has been created by Sweden, followed by Norway, and now adopted by France and Ireland, as a way to go forward. In this model, women and girls who are victims of trafficking are decriminalized, and those who buy and sell them are criminalized.

I ask that we remember to address the demand for human trafficking as the best way of preventing trafficking because it acts as a deterrent, as all the evaluations of the Nordic model have shown.

I also ask and appeal to member states and the UN to talk to my country, India, where there are two laws which are very, very problematic and will have a very dangerous impact on The Last Girl. One was passed in September last year. That law has legalized child labor in my country in many sectors like family-based enterprises and audio-visual entertainment. It has also removed the ILO-IPEC list of hazardous industries that children should never be employed in. The second law in the works is trying to delink trafficking from sexual exploitation. Both laws together will make 80 % of victims of human trafficking for sexual and labour exploitation invisible. It will create data that will show a decrease in human trafficking in India, but it will increase the numbers of child labourers and prostituted children. Trafficking is for both sexual and labor exploitation and we need to combat both as we implement the Global Plan of Action to combat trafficking.

Diary of a Social Worker

The Kolkata Retreat Made us Family

- *Anahita Mir*

Kolkata: The team of Apne Aap Women Worldwide came together on the 1st of September 2017 for a three day retreat in Kolkata. The retreat was hosted by Apne Aap's team in Kolkata. The event was a significant one because it aimed at bringing together the family and charting the course ahead for the organisation. Apne Aap's founder, Ms. Ruchira Gupta was also present at the retreat.

On the first day there was an ice breaking session was held. The teams introduced themselves to the gathering. After the ice breaking session, all the states presented their work as well as working strategies to rest of the states through multimedia and oral presentations. There was an exchange of ideas between teams. While Bihar and Kolkata teams learned about the school adoption programme of Delhi, the Delhi team got ideas for adopting a KGVB in their community.

The second day began by a visit to the income generating programme unit where the outstation team got a chance to meet the women and girls working at the centre. It's the place where jute products like bags, pouches and wallets are manufactured. For the rest of the day the teams were hosted by Ms. Lata Bajoria, one of the trustees of Apne Aap, at her residence. The session was held by Ms. Ruchira Gupta who introduced the mission, vision and goal of the organisation to the new-joined members. She also gave the teams a detailed description of the different conventions and protocols of United Nations pertaining to human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Ms. Ruchira Gupta talked about different laws of the Indian penal code which can be used in different situations confronted by the people who work to prevent anti trafficking.

For hours, we all sat in a huge circle like one big family, and discussed Indian laws on sex trade, trafficking and rape. How many laws do we have that can be considered when one discusses trafficking? How many laws protect the vulnerable?

The rains allowed us a brief run around Lata Masi's garden. As her pet peacocks walked around, a team bonded on swings and with her pet dogs. It was there, perhaps, that the retreat truly came into form.

On the third day, the team gave media presenta-

tions on different media coverage of Apne Aap which was followed by a discussion between the teams. The three days were enlightening in a lot of ways. It allowed the members of all the states to meet and interact with each other. There was an exchange of ideas and interests which are necessary for growth and development of the organisation as a whole.

The retreat helped us to forge a team. After that, we have been at ease over phone calls and other correspondence because team members never seem too far away when we need them.

The Difficulties of Rescue

— *Shinjini Chowdhury*

Jogbani: A phone call in September informed us that a young girl had been rescued from trafficking in Jogbani area, Bihar. Rabeya Begum was 22 years old, and had 18-month-old Muskan in her lap. They were in the Shashastra Seema Bal camp at Batnagar. Across the mud hut where they waited for us, Lakshman Das was sitting on the floor. Rabeya had run away from her abusive husband after a particularly infuriating fight and was crying at Varanasi railway station, Uttar Pradesh, when Lakshman met her. He offered food and clothes for Muskan. Rabeya was thankful at first, but grew suspicious when Lakshman did not leave her side. He offered to find her a job. On the train, she overheard him conversing on the phone. “He was speaking in his tongue. He said something about 17,000 rupees,” she said. By the time, Lakshman brought her the roundabout way to Bihar, Rabeya managed to attract attention to herself and the SSB captured them bought.

While Muskan played without a worry, Rabeya narrated her tale. In the time that we reached the Railway Police Station, Jogbani, Muskan had fallen asleep. Rabeya’s brother, Shirajuddin, had arrived. He looked mutinous and tempted to deal a blow at Lakshman at the slightest chance he got.

Jogbani Railway Police was yet another sorry state of affairs. A room full of people, NGO workers included, started scolding Rabeya for trusting a stranger. “It is not the man’s fault alone,” they said. “She trusted him and came with him!” Once again, we were confronted with basic human instincts of trust and need for affection, and, not knowing what to do with these, we laid blame.

Indeed. Who was at fault? A woman who had left home in anger and had foolishly trusted a stranger

to ferry her to safety? A man who earns a living by trafficking women? Police and NGO personnel who were grappling with questions of right and wrong? A system that sees black and white divisions of ‘to do’ and ‘to avoid’, while overlooking issues of neglect, abuse, emotional suppression and rebellious need, a deplorable job market, and an increasing void of human rights?

At her tears and at a dissenting voice about that, the police and the workers remembered to offer her water to drink and a chair to sit in. Lakshman, still, sat in one corner on the floor. Our society teaches us to be moralistic – to decide who is right and wrong, who gets the chair and who the floor. Criminals, poor people, and members of the lower caste are clubbed into one category that always gets the corner to sit in and the dirty cup to drink from. My observations have told me this that unless we can manage an intervention at the level of thought, trafficking will continue as will all other evils in our world.

Rabeya, Muskan and Shirajuddin were not allowed to go home finally that day. They were transferred to the Katihar Police, where they awaited release.

“It is not the man’s fault alone,” they said. “She trusted him and came with him!” Once again, we were confronted with basic human instincts of trust and need for affection, and, not knowing what to do with these, we laid blame. Indeed. Who was at fault?”

Did You Know?

In India:

- There are 2.3 million women and girls in prostitution
- A quarter of 2.3 million are under the age of 18
- There are 1,000 red-light areas

Globally:

- About 58 % of all cases of trafficking detected globally are purpose of sexual exploitation
- About 75 % of all trafficking victims detected globally are women and girls
- About 20.9 million adults and children are bought and sold for commercial exploitation
- About 1 in 10 men in the world have bought commercial sex

National Conference on Child and Adolescent Labour by the Ministry of Labour, Delhi

- Anahita Mir

Delhi: On 26th September 2017, Ministry of Labour and Employment organised National Conference on Child and Adolescent Labour. The main aim of the conference was the launch of 'PENCIL' portal that is an acronym for Platform for Enforcement for No Child Labour and Standard operating procedure for enforcement of the Child Labour and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 (SOP). Home Minister Mr. Rajnath Singh and Minister for Labour and Employment Mr Santosh Gangwar were the chief guests. Mr Kailash Satyarthi was the Guest of Honour at the event. The conference audience was majorly comprised of state ministers and bureaucrats with very less NGOs present.

PENCIL is an online complaint portal which is to be used to for reporting and monitoring child and adolescent labour. The portal has an easy-to-use interface. It also has a feature to track one's complaint status. The rescued children get a unique index card and are rehabilitated according to their age specific requirements. After two years of rehabilitation, the child is to be mainstreamed and tracked for a year after mainstreaming. The status of the child is to be updated for online access.

The SOP has been drafted as a 'working tool on law enforcement for practitioners and specialists of governmental, non-governmental and civil society organisations at different stages of intervention.' The SOP sets forth the exceptions under which a child can work. It states a child can 'help' in the family enterprise provided the enterprise doesn't

deal in hazardous occupation listed in Part A or Part B of the schedule of the Child Labour and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986. "Help" is defined as 'aid or assist family only in such a manner that is not incidental to any occupation, work, profession, manufacture or business, or for any payment or benefit to the child or any person having control over the child, and which is detrimental to the growth, education and overall development of the child.' Child can work continuously for not more than 3 hours without a break and cannot work between 7pm and 8am. The SOP doesn't define any procedure to check the working hours of child in family enterprises. Also working timings prescribed mean that the child either work before going to school or after coming from school up till midnight. It's also ambiguous about the number of times a day can a child help for three hours in a family enterprise.

Advocating Against Child Labour

- by Sara Khan

- The Child Labour Prohibition Amendment Act of 2016 has allowed child labour in family-owned enterprises. Children are allowed to work in the audio-visual entertainment industry. The list of 83 hazardous has now been reduced to ONLY 3.
- These issues can be tackled through legal action, budgetary exercises and a movement to change attitudes towards and perceptions of child labour.
- A discourse on child labour is necessary. Child labour is only one aspect under the umbrella of child protection.

A Child Labour Act Consultation meeting was held in early September amongst representatives from Apne Aap and various other stakeholders working in the areas of child rights, women's rights and sex trafficking. The meeting included eminent lawyers, activists, professors and academicians. This was a preliminary meeting and a first meeting of its kind. The Child Labour Consultation group has decided to meet regularly to chalk out short term and long term plans and delegate tasks to each group member, to be more effective in the future.



My Husband Could Not Pimp Me

— by *Megha Perna / as told to Khushboo Mishra*

Najafgarh: My name is Megha. I turned 18 this year. I have a son who is 4 years old. He lives with my in-laws. Currently, I am seven months pregnant with my second child.

I belong to Perna community where in-generational prostitution takes place. Here, every bride is forced into prostitution after giving birth to a first child. I was no different. At the age of 14, my son was born and soon after, my in-laws started to force me for prostitution.

My mother has been a strong woman. She made it clear every time that none of her daughters will ever join this caste-based occupation. She wants us to live a free and dignified life.

I live with my mother. Last year, the Panchayat had taken place at my mother's house because my mother supported me and refused to let her daughter join this caste-based occupation. My in-laws had

harassed us for long time and finally a Panchayat was called. Our Panchayats are male dominated. It was the first time that the Panchayat had taken its decision in favour of a family who was going against their traditional occupation. The Panchayat said to my in-laws that I can't be forced into prostitution. They also fined my in-laws for harassing me and my family. My in-laws accepted me in their house and I conceived again after few months.

I used to spend most of my time at my mother's house.

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Megha used to spend most of her time at my home. But last year, the situation went out of our control. Megha's in-laws didn't let her enter the house at night. I received the news and immediately reached her in-laws' house where they were shouting at Megha and asking her to go earn money and then enter the house. They told me that I am keeping my daughters away from our caste-based occupation, for which I would have to pay price. They didn't let Megha enter the house.

After two days, a Panchayat meeting was called. In Perna community, only the Panchayat takes all decisions, which is a patriarchal system. No one has ever denied our caste-based occupation. I was scared, thinking what if the decision goes against us and the Panchayat forces Megha to take up this tradition, my daughter too would be trapped in this inter-generational prostitution.

That night seemed long. In the morning, I immediately called Khushboo didi from Apne Aap and explained the entire situation which I was hiding since long. While all the Panchayat members and our community started gathering at my home, Apne Aap team reached Najafgarh. They waited at a distance of 1 km from the community, to help me and my daughter in case the Panchayat gives its judgement against us. The Panchayat continued 8 in the morning till 5 in the evening. The decision was given in our favour and Megha's in-laws were fined Rs 1100/- for harassing us.

This year, in August again, my daughter's in-laws came to my house and started abusing us. Megha is seven months pregnant and lives with me during day time. I arrange for her food and other nutrients. Her in-laws beat us, tore our clothes off, broke alcohol bottles in our home and abused us badly in front of the entire community. Nobody said even a single word in our favour. I called Khushboo didi again and started crying, explaining everything. Apne Aap staff reached my home in an hour. Meanwhile, they had called police and asked them to reach the community. The police came and went back to the station as no one outside the community is allowed to interfere in our community matters. A long discussion took place between the community and Apne Aap after I shared every detail of what happened with us. After 4 hours, I went to police station and filed a Preventive FIR with the support of Apne Aap.

Now, I have shifted to Bahardurgarh. I sold my house at Dharampura. This month again, the Panchayat met about this matter. This time I had a little faith because of last year's judgement. In our community, the family who breaks the marriage has to give money to the other family. I wanted my daughter to get separated, but I would be required to pay Rs 2.5 lacs as compensation to her in-laws, which is a huge amount for me. I couldn't afford this. I said how Megha's in-laws had behaved with us in Dharampura. After listening to both the parties, the Panchayat agreed for my daughter's divorce. They asked me to only pay Rs 50,000 and nothing else.

My First Day at Apne Aap

— Sara Khan

Kolkata: “I have never seen a flood like this”, Meena didi tells me on my first visit to our Forbesganj community center in Bihar. The massive flood that hit Bihar on the 14th of August claimed the lives of more than 500 people and displaced more than 8.5 lakh individuals.

On my first day at Apne Aap, in Calcutta, I spent the entire day working on an urgent Flood Relief Appeal Letters and created info graphs to raise funds for the women whose houses and possessions were completely wrecked in the floods. I was given pictures of women with their children standing in front of their completely uprooted houses. Most pictures portrayed rubble and complete destruction. I was writing stories about women I had never met and whom I only knew by their photographs laying in front of me.

My first visit to Forbesganj gave me the opportunity to talk to the women I had only seen in pictures and understand the urgency of the aid and help required. Bihar’s team began their work by supplying rice, puffed rice (muri) and flattened rice (chura) to the women and their family. After receiving a few donations, they started giving them clothes, biscuits and cake. Clothes were coming in from our Kolkata and Delhi offices as well. The team divided the distribution of clothes into two phases, so that they have more time to build a relationship with these women and children. The second batch of clothes were distributed right before Diwali so that children may have clean clothes to wear for their festival. Through

these relief efforts, the team has been able to garner the trust of many women and girls who were not associated us with previously.

Due to the floods, most women and girls had stopped coming to center for their meetings. Many girls had moved to their relatives houses during the flood and were yet to return while, others had fallen seriously ill due to the rain, flood, stagnating water and mosquitoes. Other girls and women couldn’t reach the center due to the massive amounts of water accumulated around their house.

In the beginning of October, women and girls finally started coming to the center regularly. They had to wade through knee high levels of water to get to the center. They said that they came to center despite the water because they saw the community center as a safe space for them and their friends.

Devastation is widespread. Many women have begun rebuilding their houses. “Most women are still trying to gather themselves”, Meena says. Meena says that her house is in tatters as well.

The women I met are living with their relatives or on rent. They are surviving by borrowing clothes & food for children. They say they can’t go on like this for very long. The determination and perseverance our Bihar team and all the women have shown during this difficult time has been admirable.

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Tension started to arise soon as my husband too became an alcoholic like my father-in-law and he needed money to drink. As I didn’t join our caste-based occupation, I became a burden for them. I was not earning anything the way our Perna women do.

Last month, the situation got worse. My father-in-law was drunk and he came to mother’s house where he abused us, beat us, tore off my mother’s clothes and broke his empty alcohol bottles in our single-room house.

With the support of Apne Aap, my mother filed a Preventive FIR at the nearest police station and we shifted to Bahadurgarh. This time again a Panchayat was called for my case. We told them every detail about how my in-laws and husband dealt with me and how they insulted us in front of entire community but none of Perna community members

came forward to help us; instead they tried to suppress us. The Panchayat listened to us and allowed me a divorce. Earlier we were supposed to pay Rs 2.5 lacs to my in-laws as a compensation for severing the marriage. But due to the harassment that they inflicted on us, we now were asked to pay Rs 50000. I am very happy about this divorce. I will resume my studies and will earn from a dignified source of livelihood, not letting the efforts of my mother go waste. I look forward to a bright future.

Poems

Books

What worlds of wonder are our books!
As one opens them and looks,
New ideas and people rise,
In our fancies and our eyes.
The room we sit in,
And we find over selves at play,
With someone who before the end,
May become our close friend.
Or we sail along the page,
To some other land or age,
Here's our body in the chairs,
But our mind is out there.

Name: Akshita Raj

Age: 9 years

From: Kishori Mandal, Forbesganj (Bihar)

Our India

Punjab for fighting.
Bengal for writing.
Nagaland for beauty.
Rajasthan for history.
Maharashtra for victory.
Mysore for silk.
Haryana for milk.
Himachal for apple.
Tamil Nadu for temple.
Madhya Pradesh for tribals
Jharkhand for minerals.
Other states for unity.
India for integrity.

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Age: 9 years

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