

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE



2018 | Day 5

IT CAN STILL BE A WONDERFUL LIFE!

I was on my weekly visit to a Children's Home where victims of commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking are placed. It was an especially difficult day as Janvhi*, a 16-year-old child living in the Home had attempted suicide in the Home the previous day and was recuperating in the hospital. It was then that Sonia*, Janvhi's closest friend at the Home recognized me and requested a few minutes.

"*Didi, did you hear that Janvhi consumed phenyl last evening?*" the usually chirpy Sonia asked me. "Yes, Sonia, I know. Are you okay? I know you and Janvhi were quite close" I asked her. Sonia hurriedly replied, "Please don't say we were close. It is what all the other girls also snigger and whisper. Janvhi and I were just friends, there was nothing else." Sensing some reluctance on her part about their relationship, I just asked her, "Sonia, why do you think Janvhi chose to take this step?"

Without missing a beat, Sonia replied, "It's simple. Janvhi was upset because she heard that she wasn't being transferred to a Home of her choice. She did not like it here after Superintendent Madam gave her a lecture and asked her to stay away from me." She continued, "It has happened before, you know. Children here have attempted to kill themselves and then they got what they wanted. Now there are already talks of Janvhi being shifted to another Home. It is for the best, she will now go away and other girls will stop talking about my friendship with her."

I looked at Sonia, and I wanted to tell her that she should not let herself get affected by these rumors, I wanted her to promise me that she would never do something like this. To tell her that no matter what other girls say, she will not use her life to strike a bargain. But in the end, all I could tell her was, "Sonia, you are kind, you are smart, and you are important. You matter, and don't let anyone make you feel any different." Sonia looked like she did not know how to react and all she uttered was "*Didi, at times, you say the most absurd things!*" And then slowly she could not stop grinning.

Initially, I shuddered at Sonia's nonchalance regarding Janvhi's attempt on her own life and how she perceived the suicide attempt as means towards an end. Sonia justified Janvhi's action as the last resort and was vocal that Janvhi's transfer will end the stigma other girls associated to their friendship. These children, who have already seen so much violence in their life, are not well-equipped to deal with setbacks due to lack of informed care. It made me realize how countless children like Sonia and Janvhi do not value their life because they haven't been taught to attach value to their life. This lack of respect and importance in a child for her own life and life choices is violence in a subtle yet treacherous form. It is important to make these children understand the importance of their life, personality and identity without being affected by the thought of what people will say.

Sonia, a child who was trafficked at a tender age needed the realization that she should focus on creating the best version of her life, someone has to do it, someone has to tell her that life is beautiful! It is important to make these children understand the importance of their life, personality and identity without being affected by the thought of what people will say.

*Name changed to protect identity



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