

# 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

## AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

2018 | Day 11



It was a Tuesday afternoon. I was accompanying 14-year-old Aahana\* from the court in Malad back to the Child Care Institution (CCI) – she had been rescued from the sex trade and was placed at the CCI for rehabilitation.

Aahana, usually a cheerful and talkative girl, looked glum! So I asked if she was okay.

**AAHANA** *Didi, can I ask you a question?*

Please do!

**SOCIAL  
WORKER**

**AAHANA** *Didi, do you think I'm a bad person?*

Not at all. Why would you think something like this?

**SOCIAL  
WORKER**

**AAHANA** This girl at the Home thinks that I am a horrible person because I accused my mother for putting me into the sex trade. *Didi*, when I saw *Maa* in the court today, she looked pale and old. For a moment, I thought that maybe I did not do the right thing by telling the truth to the police. Because of this my siblings are living in another Home. I haven't seen them for four years now. Sometimes, I think what if I had not taken this step? Would we all be together?

I asked Aahana if I could hold her hand and gathered courage to look into her eyes.

Aahana, you are a brave and a strong girl. What you did four years ago was to protect yourself from the trauma that you were made to go through. Don't you think you also protected your siblings from having to go through the same ordeal? Does seeking justice for yourself make you a bad person?

**SOCIAL  
WORKER**

\*Name changed to protect identity

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Aahana was a victim of commercial sexual exploitation since she was 14 years old. Her mother decided to hand her over to a neighbor, who would bring clients to Aahana, keeping a share of the money made and handing over the rest to her mother. Aahana endured this violence for a year and a half before she could gather the courage and approach someone to help her get away from this brutality. Even after that, it was a long journey for her to convince herself that she'd done the right thing.

I assured Aahana that she would be accompanied to the court, if need be to the police station whenever required and that she would not be alone in this entire journey.

It made me realize that in such cases, when the family, especially the parents, inflicts abuse on a child's life, it is so inherently ingrained in the child that it becomes a part of her identity/personality. The abuse is normalized through her acceptance, the basis of which is lack of informed care. There cannot be a fight for justice until realization of injustice seeps in. Aahana did not realize at that time, but she was made to feel guilty for wanting a life devoid of violence and abuse for her and her siblings. It was important to make her understand that this guilt was a result of the violence she underwent before her rescue, which was carried over to her post rescue phase. The biggest challenge with Aahana was to make her conscious of the violence she was facing in the form of unjustified guilt, and empower her with the right to choose her way out of it.

***"I freed a thousand slaves. I could have freed a thousand more if only they knew they were slaves."***

\*Name changed to protect identity



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