

MANOBAL A NEW BEGINNING FOUNDATION

NEWSLETTER

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The Girl Who Returned to the Darkness

In 2021, I was working with the Anti-Human Trafficking Unit on a case that had haunted us for almost two years — the search for girls who had escaped from a shelter home after being rescued from human trafficking. One afternoon, I received a call from an informant. She said, “Madam, the girl you've been looking for is in the city.”

We immediately rushed to the location, and after days of searching, we finally found the girl. But what left me speechless was learning that the informant who had provided this information was the same girl I had rescued back in 2017 — a girl who herself had once been a victim of human trafficking and forced into prostitution.

Her name was Sheela (name changed). I had rescued her from a brothel at GB Road in Delhi when she was just 16 or 17 — a minor Nepalese girl sold into prostitution. During that rescue operation, we freed 25 girls in total, all from Nepal, all victims of the same horrific trade. It was Sheela who had helped us locate the others. For her courage, she was even honored publicly. She was proud that she had helped save lives, and I was proud of her too.

After the rescue, Sheela stayed in a shelter

home in India before being repatriated to Nepal. She found a job at a rehabilitation center there and began rebuilding her life. We spoke often — mostly at 5 a.m., when she had a few minutes to herself before work. Her voice was bright, full of hope. She talked about her dreams, her new routine, her newfound independence.

But life, as I later realized, had other plans.

By 2023, our conversations had stopped. She had blocked me on her phone and social media. I didn't know why. I told myself maybe she wanted to move on — to start a new life without the shadow of her past. I wanted that for her.



A year later, while working with Project Manobal, we were conducting a Holi celebration in one of the city's red-light areas. It's part of our social well-being initiative — we organize awareness programs, mental health sessions, and festival celebrations to bring light into the darkest corners of society.

That day, amidst colors and laughter, I saw a girl in a pink saree, her face partially covered. Her eyes caught mine — eyes I could never forget. I froze again.

It was Sheela.

When I said her name aloud, she stepped back, then ran inside a small room. I followed her. When I entered, she hugged me tightly and began to cry. I couldn't stop my own tears. For a few minutes, we both just stood there — no words, only tears that carried years of pain, guilt, and helplessness.

“Didi, I Was Helpless...”

When we finally calmed down, Sheela spoke. “Didi, I was helpless. I had to come back. My family had no one to take care of them. My younger sister needs to get married. We have debts... too many responsibilities.”

Her words pierced through me. I wanted to say something — anything — but I couldn't. The only words that came out were:

“Whenever you feel I can do something for you, I'm there for you.”

After that meeting, I couldn't sleep for nights. My mind was filled with questions.

We had rescued her — but did we truly rehabilitate her?

We gave her safety — but did we give her a future?

Where did we fail? Was it the system, the family, or society?

The Hidden Truths Behind the Numbers

According to India's National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), over 6,500 cases of human trafficking were reported in 2023, with thousands of victims being women and children. Many of these victims are trafficked

from neighboring countries such as Nepal and Bangladesh. Studies suggest that nearly one in three survivors of human trafficking are re-trafficked, often due to a lack of family support, economic vulnerability, and social stigma, forcing them back into exploitation or prostitution.

Sheela's story is not unique. It reflects the painful reality that rescue is only the first step. The real battle begins afterward — in reintegration and acceptance.

In rural Nepal and India, survivors often face rejection by their own families. They are seen as “tainted,” unworthy of belonging. Without jobs, support, or acceptance, many girls are pushed back into the same darkness they fought to escape.

When Victory Feels Like Failure

As I write this, I still struggle to call Sheela's story a failure — because she wasn't one. She was brave, resilient, and hopeful. But the system failed her. Society failed her. And somewhere, I feel I did too.

Rescue operations give us moments of triumph — the kind that make headlines. But rehabilitation is where the real work lies, and where most stories quietly fall apart.

In our fight against human trafficking, we must remember: rescue is not enough — reintegration is survival.

Every Sheela we fail to support is a reminder that we must do better — not just in laws or operations, but in humanity.

Because sometimes, victories are loud, but failures whisper louder — reminding us that the journey to freedom doesn't end with rescue; it begins there.



Nirmala B Walter
*Founder and Social Worker
Manobal A New Beginning
Foundation*

ABHAS

Prevention through Awareness program



Awareness Session Held in Over 20 Government Schools in Delhi



Awareness Sessions Conducted in 35+ Government Schools in Rural Areas of Seoni, MP



School Awareness Programs with YouthLight in Purnia, Bihar



Awareness Programs in Schools with Aasha Care Trust of Pune, MH

World Day Against Trafficking in Persons



Nizamuddin railway station Delhi



Shradhanand Marg, Kamla Market Police Station Delhi



Jabalpur railway station MP



Medical Collage Seoni, MP

Rescue, rehabilitation and repatriation



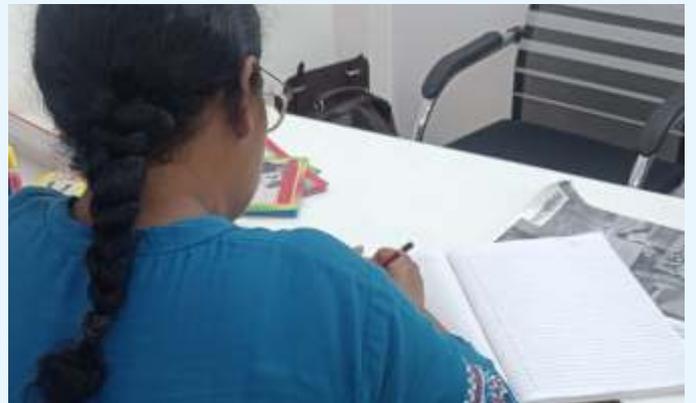
Successful repatriation in Nepal



After the rescue, she was successfully restored



After the rescue, she was successfully restored in West Bengal



Victim rehabilitation through education and livelihood



Manobal Internship Program



The Manobal Internship Program was successfully completed with students from JIMS College, focusing on the practical applications of forensic psychology, law enforcement, mental health, and human rights. The program's diverse sessions helped students gain valuable knowledge and skills for their future careers.



Social well-being program in brothel



Students from JIMS College conducted mental health counseling sessions and engaging activities to promote well-being as part of the Manobal Internship Program.



Through mental health sessions at the brothel, we aimed to bring comfort, healing, and hope—helping the women overcome emotional pain and find their way back to society with dignity.



Celebrating the Dussehra festival with the sex worker community. During the celebration, we organized a fashion show where all participants joyfully walked the ramp and received gifts. It was a beautiful moment filled with happiness, dignity, and a sense of togetherness.

Manobal tuition center



Organized mental health sessions at tuition centers to help students learn how to care for their mental well-being while focusing on their studies.



A counseling session at the tuition center provided a safe space for students to share their concerns and explore solutions together.



During a moral values session, students learned that time is precious and using it wisely is the key to success.



Conducted hygiene sessions at tuition centers to educate students on maintaining physical health and distributed hygiene kits, including soap, toothbrush, and toothpaste.



Celebrating Independence Day



Girls birthday celebration at the centre



Celebrating International Girl Child Day



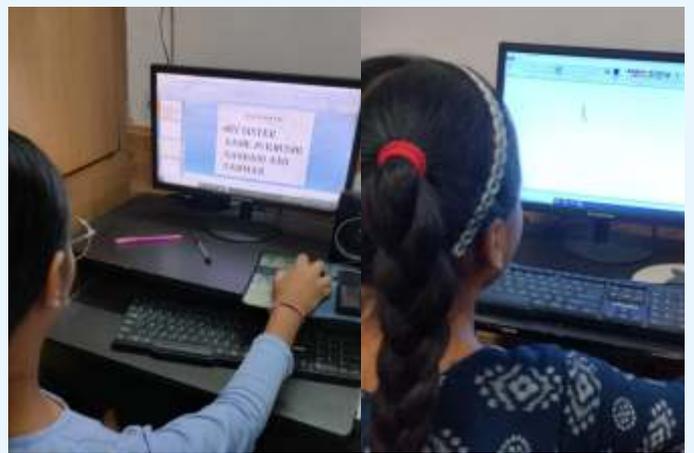
A mental health session was conducted for the parents of students to discuss the importance of mental health.



Happy to learn English in a creative way.



On October 2nd, Mahatma Gandhi's birthday was celebrated through Shramdaan by cleaning the tuition center.



Digital literacy



Under the 'Nikshay Poshan Yojana', Manobal provide nutritional support to 8 children affected by tuberculosis at Lakhnadon, MP.





The social worker who has rescued over 200 trafficked women

Social worker Nirmala Walter raids the brothels of Delhi's red light district to rescue trafficked women and girls. It's sometimes dangerous, often confronting work that brings her face to face with the realities of the sex trade in India. Nirmala's approach to what she does is unique: she never gives up looking for individual trafficking victims, no matter the odds, or how long it takes. To date, she's rescued more than 200.

Nirmala's interview was translated by her son Arhaan Walter, and the English voice over was provided by Ruchika Jain.

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