

MAITI

“My goal is to make Nepal wholly free from the slave trade in girls,” says Anuradha Koirala, the founder of Maiti Nepal.

Nepal is one of the world’s poorest countries. Many children here are forced to work in carpet factories, farming or as household servants. Girls face the additional threat of being cheated and sold as slaves to brothels in India.

Several thousand girls are sold every year, the youngest only eight years old.

The girls are locked up for several years in brothels. Often they are not released until they’ve become too ill to work. Many girls have by then been infected with HIV.

Worse for girls

“Many blame poverty, but the main reason is that girls are treated worse than boys in Nepal,” says Anuradha Koirala. She founded Maiti in 1993, which since then has been able to save thousands of girls from having their lives destroyed in brothels.

Daughters are supposed to be married off and move to

their husbands’ homes, so why should we educate them? That’s how many parents think. The boys are supposed to look after their families and are therefore seen as more valuable. And when a daughter marries, the family has to pay a dowry.

Girl-traffickers exploit the poor villagers’ situation. They say they have a good job for the daughter in town. Sometimes the man asks to marry the daughter.

Prevention and rescue

At Maiti’s various centres in the countryside, thousands of girls have learned all about the trade in girls. They have also been able to learn to read and write, sew clothing and make jewellery. If they can support themselves there is less of a risk that their parents will send them away to work. The girls at the centres travel to villages and sing and put on plays about the slave trade in girls. And when they return home to their villages they pass on their knowledge to their girlfriends.

Maiti provides protection and care at its centre in the capital Kathmandu. There is also a children’s home and a school, Teresa Academy.

Maiti saves thousands of girls every year at the border. It cooperates with the police at the border posts in India. Maiti trains girls, who have previously been sold, to become border guards. They know how trafficking works and what to look out for.

At one of the border posts Maiti has opened a hospital for women and children infected with HIV and AIDS.

“My dream is to establish a village for children with AIDS,” says Anuradha Koirala. “And I would like to see the girls who were sold, laugh and become children again!”



WHY IS MAITI A NOMINEE?

Maiti Nepal has been nominated as WCPRC Decade Child Rights Hero 2009 for its fight against the slave trade in girls from Nepal, who are sold to brothels in India, a practice known as trafficking. Maiti prevents poor girls from being lured to brothels by educating and informing them. Maiti takes care of and supports girls who have been held in brothels in India, and has a special hospital for girls who have been infected with HIV. Some of these girls have become Maiti border guards, who stop girl-traffickers when they try to bring girls to India. Maiti works with Rescue Center in Mumbai in India, whose employees risk their lives to free girls locked up in brothels.



Anuradha Koirala, founder of Maiti.



Poonam

watches the border

Poonam watches the border between Nepal and India. She scrutinises every vehicle that crosses the border. Poonam herself was sold to a brothel in India when she was only 14, so she knows just what to look for. Suddenly, border guard Poonam catches sight of something that attracts her attention. Is the girl she caught sight of one of the thousands of poor Nepalese girls who are lured to India every year to be sold to brothels?

It is ten o'clock on a Saturday morning at a border station between Nepal and India. Poonam covers her nose and mouth with her white scarf. The air is humid, dusty and full of exhaust fumes.

“Stop! Stop! Where are you going?”

Poonam stops an approaching bicycle taxi. In the passenger seat sits an older man with a young girl by his side. The man becomes irritated.

“Who are you? What right do you have to stop me?” he asks.

Poonam has no uniform and looks like an ordinary girl, dressed in a white pat-

terned sari and sandals. This is intentional. No one should be able to tell that she is a border guard. Poonam takes out her ID card where it says she works for Maiti Nepal. She explains:

“We work to stop girls from being smuggled into India, so I would like to ask you some questions.” It turns out that the girl is his niece and they are going to visit relatives in India. The man shows papers to prove who they are and Poonam lets them go.

Saving many girls

“We check all the girls who cross the border. Even when they travel with women. You



Maiti's border guards don't wear uniform, so that no one knows they are guards.

can easily recognise girls from the villages by their clothing and by how they speak. We ask for their ID, and where they are going.”

The young border guards always work in pairs. Maiti has a small house where people are taken for questioning.

“If we're not sure about somebody we try to contact their relatives. And we question the man and the girl separately. We only allow them to travel on if their answers match.”

Poonam has saved several girls on their way to being smuggled to India.

“We take the men to the police and the girl must



You there...Stop!

Poonam asks what the man and girl are going to do in India.





Poonam has done her washing. She doesn't want to show her face so that people in Nepal find out what she has been through.

come with us to the Maiti Centre. Then we locate her family and send her home.”

Lured to India

Poonam was sold to a brothel in India when she was 14.

“My father died when I was five. I was forced to leave school in the ninth grade, because our family is poor. My best friend and I began to work as waitresses at a restaurant in the capital, Kathmandu.”

Eventually, Poonam became good friends with a boy who came to the restaurant every day.

“It felt as if Rudra was my brother. I really trusted him. One day he asked my friend and I if we wanted to visit a temple the next day. It was located up on a mountain far from Kathmandu, and you could make wishes up there. I said no, but my friend convinced me to go. We had to stay the night at an inn.

“There were three boys with us – Rudra, Fiste and Bikash. The next day, Bikash said he had a shop in India that he needed to buy goods for. We refused to go with them, but they forced us and we went to a town in India.”

The girls were taken further on by train and taxi. Rudra said that they were

going to visit his sister. Now Poonam started to worry. She wanted to go home – people must be wondering where she was. But Rudra, who had been so nice to her in Nepal, now showed a whole other side to his nature in India.

Sold as a slave

“They took us to a house and Rudra dragged us into a small room. It was very hot in there and I asked if we could go out, but he said no. We asked them to take us back to Kathmandu and they promised we would return home soon. But when we tried to leave the room they stopped us.”

When Poonam tried to open a window to get a little air she saw some girls wearing lipstick who were standing in the street.

“I tried to leave, but Rudra hit me in the head with a belt and I started to bleed. My clothes were covered in blood and through the haze I saw the boys take money from a wallet, saying they had sold us. We said that had they asked us we could have given them money. We begged them to take us back to Nepal, but they just laughed at us and said we would never be able to raise enough money.”

When Poonam regained

consciousness, the woman who owned the brothel appeared and said that they had to start work immediately. Then Poonam and her friend were separated.

“I was taken to another house. When I refused to work, the brothel owner hit me.

“I told my first customer that I had never done this before and begged him to help me escape. He said that on Saturdays a lot of people came to the brothel and that he would help me then. He didn't touch me.”

But the brothel owner heard them talking and moved Poonam to another brothel. And she was beaten again.

Death threats and rescue

Life at the brothel was like being in prison. The girls lived in small crowded rooms and were never allowed out.

“There were 30 of us at the brothel, mostly from Nepal, but they didn't let us become friends with each other. Some girls talked about escaping and made plans, but somebody always told on them and then they were beaten. The brothel owner threatened us and said she would bury us under the house if we did anything stupid. I was





Girls at the Maiti Border Centre watch TV.

scared, but the thing that kept me going was that I planned to escape from the very beginning. I made an impression of the door key in soap which I gave to customers and asked them to have copies made.

Finally, after five months, Poonam was rescued. It was Maiti in Mumbai (Bombay) that had received information that there were children in the brothel and contacted the police. Twenty-one girls were saved that time. Poonam came home to Nepal and was allowed to live at Maiti's Centre in Kathmandu.

"I was so happy!"

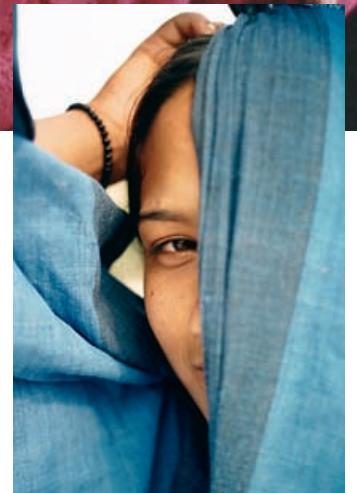
Poonam's revenge


Poonam had her revenge when she managed to have

Rudra put in jail. The other girls who were saved with Poonam, had also been sold by him. Together they could give the police information that led to Rudra's arrest.

"When I think about my time in the brothel I just want to cry. It's like a nightmare. If I had known more

about the slave trade in girls I wouldn't have been so easily deceived. So, I want to stay at Maiti and try to prevent other girls from experiencing the terrible things that happened to me." 🌐





Learn Nepalese

Ke gare ko? – Hello... How are things?
Khelney ho? – Do you want to play?
Timro naam ke ho? – What's your name?
Mero naam – My name is
Timi kasto chao? – How are you?
Ma sanchai chu – I'm fine
Malai timi maan parcha – I like you
Saathi – Friend



Saved at the border

Anjali, 12, is the youngest girl at the Maiti Centre. She was saved at the border when she was on her way to a circus in India:

"A man came to our house and asked my mother if she would sell me to a circus in India. Mother said no, but I went on about it because I thought it sounded like fun. There were several of us who were friends and wanted to go together. The man said that there wouldn't be any hard work and that I only needed to learn to walk on a rope. We would be given a lot of time to watch TV.

"When we were about to cross the border a girl from Maiti came up to us and asked the man where we were going. He said he was going to give us food in India. But the girl then asked me

and I said I was going to work in a circus. She saw that the man was lying and we were told to go with her. Afterwards I was scared because I had been tricked."

Children from poor families in Nepal are often tricked by being told they will earn a lot of money, that the job is easy and that they will be able to go to school. In reality they receive no salary at all and are forced to work every day of the entire year. Now Anjali is living at Maiti's Centre to learn about the slave trade in young girls so that she can spread this information to her friends in her home village.

Greatest risk for poor girls

Dilmaya learns about the slave trade in girls at Maiti's centre. Then she and the girls at Maiti's travel to the villages to sing and act in order to warn other girls. Dilmaya made plastic flowers to sell during Dashai, the major Hindu festival for Durga, who is goddess of the sea and represents feminine force. The festival is celebrated because when the rainy season is over and the harvest has been gathered in, god has triumphed over evil.



Durga

