



# FIGHTING FOR A FUTURE:

A STORY OF RESCUE & REHABILITATION

October 2019



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Prerana has been working in the red-light areas (RLAs) of Mumbai since 1986. Within the RLAs of Kamathipura, Vashi Turbhe and Falkland Rd., Prerana provides several critically important services like Night Care Center (NCC), Educational Support Program (ESP), to ensure the safety and well being of the children of victims of commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking on 24x7 basis.

The prostituted women living in these RLAs have little to no agency. Often they are under close control of their brothelkeeper or aadmi (a kind of pimp), with little voice of their own. Here is one such case of a prostituted mother who was forced to leave her child in the hands of her brothelkeeper, but continued to fight the odds to rescue her child.



## THE MOTHERS HISTORY

At the age of 16, Priya\* was trafficked into the RLA of Kamathipura in Mumbai from her village in West Bengal by a man belonging to her village. She continued to live in Kamathipura for four years, after which she returned to her village and stayed there for a few months. She was forced to leave her village due to constant fights as her family and neighbours from her village were aware that she was in the sex trade and lived in Kamathipura. She moved to Pune's Budhawar Peth RLA as she had heard about the same during her time in Kamathipura.

Priya lived in a brothel there. A regular customer got friendly with her, from whom Priya got pregnant. On finding that out Priya's brothelkeeper got furious and went to the extent of getting rid of that particular customer. Two months into her pregnancy, around July 2015, the Andhra Pradesh Police conducted a raid in the Budhawar Peth RLA to take action against the brothelkeepers and rescue the victims. Instead of catching Priya's brothelkeeper, the police arrested Priya and put her in prison. She was in prison for one month after which the brothelkeeper bailed her out and claimed to have spent 3.5 Lacs as her bail amount. Having to regularly present Priya at the court, the brothel keeper sent her away to Delhi. She returned to Pune's Budhawar Peth to give birth to her daughter Sanya\* who was born in January 2016 at Kamla Nehru Hospital in Pune. Priya was able to repay Rs. 1 Lac to the brothelkeeper and was attempting to pay off the rest. The brothelkeeper would physically assault Priya and would keep Sanya away from her for a long time. She couldn't take it any longer and left Budhawar Peth and moved to Kamathipura in 2017. Priya couldn't take Sanya along with her as the brothelkeeper had kept Sanya in her custody, stating that she would return Sanya once Priya has paid off the 'loan' fully.

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# THE INITIAL INTERACTION

Upon returning to Kamathipura, Priya came in contact with some Civil Society Organizations (CSO) working in the RLA. She narrated her ordeal to the CSOs hoping that one of them would help reunite her with Sanya. Priya then met the team of Mumbai Smiles, an organization that works with the underprivileged communities in Mumbai. Mumbai Smiles has been collaborating with Prerana since August 2017 and has been running a balwadi at Prerana's Falkland Rd. Center.

Mumbai Smiles had not worked on such a case before, but knowing about Prerana and its work, it approached the Prerana outreach team and shared the case and Priya's concerns. The team met Priya during an outreach visit where she shared that the brothelkeeper had kept Sanya's original Birth Certificate and Priya's Pan Card with herself and was not willing to return the same. A Mumbai Smiles representative also informed the team that they had interacted with a woman named Pooja\* who was taking care of Sanya in Budhwar Peth. Pooja was also taking care of three more children, presumably the children of the women living in the brothel Priya once lived at.

The team informed Priya that they would need to approach the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) regarding the case. They helped her understand the role of the CWC and details of the process that would be followed. Priya was also told that she would have to retell her experience to the CWC and possibly to the police officials as well. Priya agreed to all of that.

## THE RESCUE

On 6th December 2018, the social workers of Prerana approached Mumbai's CWC informing them about the case, who then further contacted the Pune CWC. They reiterated that a rescue needed to be conducted as the child was very clearly a Child in Need of Care and Protection. During this time the social workers from Prerana continued to meet with Priya and discuss the procedures that would need to be followed before and after the rescue. Priya agreed to direct the team to the brothel but was adamant that she does that from a distance to ensure that she wouldn't be recognized.

In December 2018, two social workers of Prerana and Priya presented the case to the Pune CWC. Priya shared her ordeal with the CWC who immediately passed an Order to the Social Service Branch (SSB) of Pune Police asking them to locate and produce the child before the CWC.

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At around 2:30 pm the social workers of Prerana, Priya and the SSB team went into the Budhawar Peth RLA to conduct the rescue. When the team reached the area, Priya directed the team to the brothel and the team went in. On the way up the stairs of the brothel a woman passed by the team. The team was later informed by Priya that she was the brothel keeper who in all the commotion managed to flee. The team later found out that Priya called Pooja and told her that she (Priya) had contacted an NGO and would rescue her daughter. This is how the brothel keeper was able to flee.

The rescue team entered the brothel and searched the place with no sign of the Sanya, but the team did find a copy of Priya's pan card. After leaving the brothel the rescue team went to Pooja, the caretaker's home. The team noticed that the house was locked and Pooja had moved into another house and presumably taken the child with her. The rescue team returned to the brothel and took two women to the Shukrawar Peth Police Chowki, where they were questioned. During this time the social workers from Prerana attempted to contact Pooja. After many rejections she answered the phone and told the social workers that a man would be coming to the Chowki and talk to them. Accordingly one man walked into the Chowki and quickly began shouting at Priya. The social workers from Prerana instantly intervened and asked the man who he was. He claimed to be working with an organization that works with HIV+ women in Budhawar Peth. He supported the brothelkeeper and Pooja saying that they were taking care of Sanya while Priya left her and run away. After much argument between the social workers from Prerana and the man, he agreed to call Pooja directing her to get Sanya to the police station. Eventually, an hour and a half later Pooja brought Sanya. As it was 6:30 pm and as the SSB's Order stated that the child had to be presented to the CWC before the next step was taken, the police kept Sanya in temporary care at a Child Care Institution (CCI) in Pune itself. During this time the team was also able to procure a photocopy of Priya's PAN card from the locker in the brothel. On the 12th of December 2018, the case was presented to the CWC. The CWC passed the Order to restore the child to her mother along with directing Prerana to conduct regular follow-ups and submit periodic reports. The Order also stated that Sanya would avail Prerana's Night Care services and spend time with her mother during the day. The case was then transferred to the Mumbai CWC and the social workers from Prerana were asked to present the case to the Mumbai CWC on a day in 3rd week of December 2018, to share an update about the child and the mother.

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# PROGRESS + FOLLOW UP

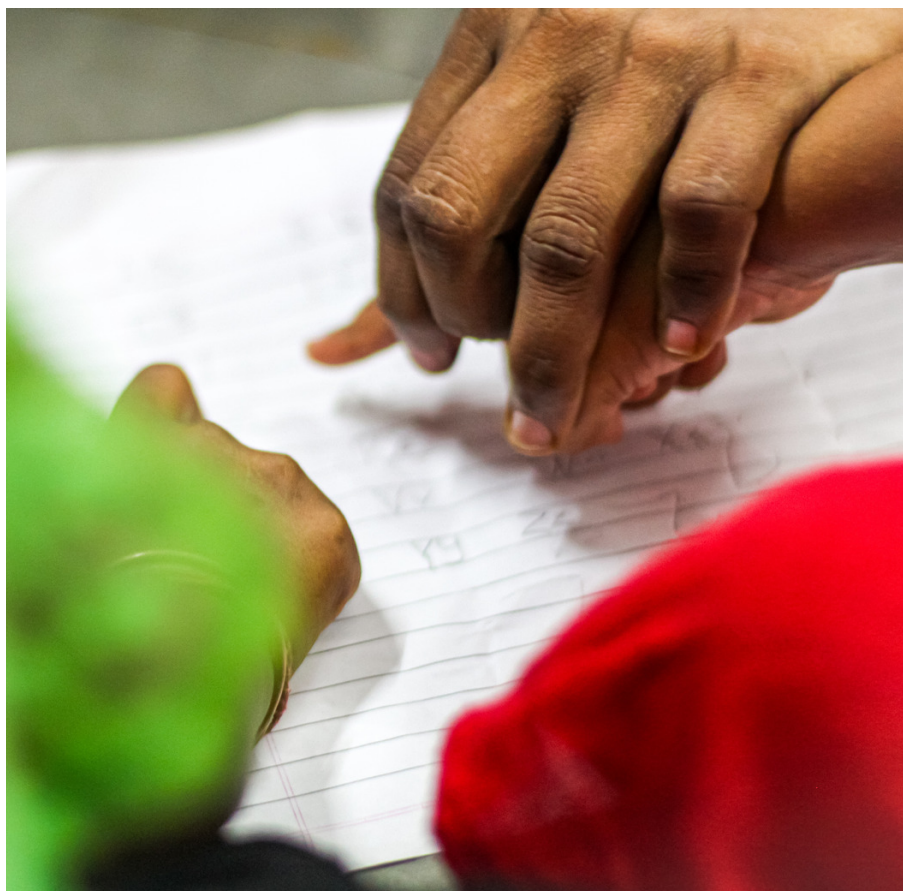


Sanya began availing services at Prerana's Kamathipura NCC and was regular at the center. While engaging with her, the NCC staff noticed that she hadn't attained key developmental milestones generally seen in a three-year-old child. She wouldn't speak to anyone and had to be toilet trained. For this, she was taken to Nair Hospital and the social workers consulted the speech therapist. After assessing the situation, the therapist told the social worker that until she can process what she hears, she wouldn't be able to form a reply. The therapist also suggested consulting an Ear and Throat specialist.

As per the CWC Order, Priya and Sanya were to visit the CWC monthly to discuss and review Sanya's care plan. In the second week of January 2019, the social workers attempted to get in touch with Priya through their daily community outreach. The Team found out that Priya had moved to the Vashi-Turbhe RLA, leaving Sanya at the NCC. After a few days, the Team tracked down Priya and informed her about the visit to the CWC. They also inquired about her move as they had to inform the CWC about Sanya. Priya assured the Team that she would come to meet Sanya as soon as she could and would be there for the meeting with the CWC. Priya came to the CWC for a follow-up visit, but as the CWC was unavailable the meet was postponed. The social worker from Prerana discussed her absence, she shared that she wasn't able to get customers at Kamathipura, due to which she moved to the Vashi-Turbhe RLA as her pimp wanted her to make

money. They asked if she would like to shift and enroll Sanya into Prerana's Vashi Turbhe center. She said she would think about it but never got back to the team. In the first week of February, Priya moved back to Kamathipura as she found it hard to get customers in Vashi-Turbhe and wasn't able to earn much. In a few days, Sanya and Priya were to meet with the CWC for the follow-up visit, but on the day, Priya couldn't visit the CWC as she was unwell. The CWC rescheduled the meeting as they were very keen on Priya's presence so that they could follow up with her as well.

Sanya was unable to recognize Priya as her mother and wouldn't readily go to her, Priya in her anxiety would try to be harsh with Sanya to get her to respond with "love" towards her. Noticing this, the social workers counseled Priya about her behavior towards Sanya.



They suggested that she spend more time with Sanya, this will help the child recognize her and identify that she is her mother. They would also encourage Sanya to call Priya 'maa' and help her understand that Priya is indeed her mother.

In the second week of June 2019, Priya approached the Prerana team stating her inability to care for Sanya after the NCC hours and was worried for her safety as she was living in a brothel. She shared that she would like to enroll Sanya into a CCI, also mentioning that her brothelkeeper wasn't willing to let Priya stay on if she kept bringing Sanya to the brothel. The Team discussed the procedures that would need to be followed and Priya agreed. On the 27th of June, two social workers from Prerana, Priya and Sanya visited the CWC and the case was presented. On the same day itself, Sanya was enrolled into Asha Sadan, a CCI in the city.

Priya continues to live in a brothel on Kamathipura's 11th lane. She regularly visits Sanya at Asha Sadan. Sanya is adjusting well to her new environment. She has also been growing closer to her mother. The Team continues to regularly follow up with both Priya and Sanya.

\*The names in this document have been changed to protect the identity of the individuals mentioned.