



## Confronting Privilege though Powerlessness in India: A Great Learning Experience

By Rachel Rustad | November 23, 2010

Mumbai is a lot more difficult than Rajgurunagar was. Traffic, noise, pollution, absolute and utter poverty, beggars, so many children on the street, the jam packed trains to work and back every morning and the slums we pass every day each way, the kindness of strangers when I was throwing up on the train yesterday (during peak hours no less, which means the train was PACKED!), the kind smiles of the women and children I work with every day, the amazing food, the cows and goats and stray dogs which are intermingled with the cars, buses, trains, auto rickshaws, taxis, the chaos, the crowds, the kind neighbors, the heartbreaking conditions in the brothels of the Red Light District and the amazing Prerana staff which go on twice daily community visits to check on the children and women trafficked in the flesh trade. So many emotions pull at my heart every moment.



I am so privileged to be here and to be able to learn the amazing work of Prerana. I am so privileged to be able to leave in a month and not ever have to set foot in a brothel again. This juxtaposition haunts me. There is absolutely nothing sexually appealing or enticing about Mumbai's Red Light District. It is filthy, literally, there is open sewage, and garbage everywhere! And it is unbearable to see so many children living here as well. We are working so hard to prevent second and third-generation prostitution. There is nothing okay about prostitution here. In a place where the only time a woman or child has a bed is when they're being sold for sex. Yet, there is still community, smiles, and kindness here in the midst of all of this. I am blessed to know these parts of humanity as well for the children we work with are the hope.



Culture is so central to our work as conflict resolution practitioners, as well as each context in which we are working; for example, I am working in an extreme environment within Mumbai, India, and the Red Light District of course doesn't represent the entire culture of Mumbai nor of India. I have to remember my own ethnocentricity, the influence of my feminist beliefs in this context especially, and how my global, social, political, economic, etc. positionality affects how I view every moment of every day. This can be exhausting. Sometimes I just want to yell and scream, or cry, or just give up and not come to work everyday but to stay in the nice suburban neighborhood of Goregoan (West) where the guest house I'm living at is, and just go shopping in the markets, eat yummy food, and watch Hindi movies

at the mall. But I can't do this. I have to come to Prerana every day because that is what I am here for. These thoughts lead me to wonder about the pressure and strain upon social workers and fellow CR practitioners. We must be ethical with those we work with as well as being so with ourselves. I'm not sure what this really means but I am thinking along the lines of self-care and how important this is in our field. Speaking of self-care, I just watched the most beautiful Hindi movie yesterday called Guzaarish. A must see!