CHAPTER THREE

Learning to Speak Up

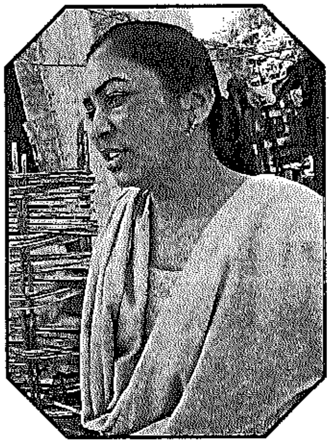
Reasonable people adapt themselves to the world.
Unreasonable people attempt to adapt the world to themselves.
All progress, therefore, depends on unreasonable people.

—GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

One of the reasons that so many women and girls are kidnapped, trafficked, raped, and otherwise abused is that they grin and bear it. Stoic docility—in particular, acceptance of any decree by a man—is drilled into girls in much of the world from the time they are babies, and so they often do as they are instructed, even when the instruction is to smile while being raped twenty times a day.

This is not to blame the victims. There are good practical as well as cultural reasons for women to accept abuse rather than fight back and risk being killed. But the reality is that as long as women and girls allow themselves to be prostituted and beaten, the abuse will continue. When more girls scream and protest, when they run away from the brothels, then the business model of trafficking will be undermined. The traffickers know that, and they tend to prey on uneducated peasant girls precisely because they are the ones most likely to obey orders and resign themselves to their fate. As Martin Luther King Jr. put it during the American civil rights struggle: "We must straighten our backs and work for our freedom. A man can't ride you unless your back is bent."

Of course, this is a delicate matter, and it's dangerous for foreign cheerleaders to urge local girls to assume undue risks. But it's also essential to help young women find their voices. Education and empowerment training can show girls that femininity does not entail docility, and can nurture assertiveness so that girls and women stand up for themselves. This is exactly what has happened in the slum of Kasturba Nagar, outside the central Indian city of Nagpur.



Usha Narayane in her slum neighborhood in India (Naka Nathaniel)

The fetid ditches of Kasturba Nagar ooze sewage, stink, and hopelessness. The inhabitants are Dalits—Untouchables. Most of them have dark complexions and signal in their clothing and bearing that they are poor. They live in shacks on winding dirt lanes, which turn to a stew of sewage and mud whenever it rains. The men of Kasturba Nagar drive rickshaws or work in menial or dirty jobs, and the women work as housemaids, or they stay home and raise the children.

In this improbable setting, a young woman named Usha Narayane shook off despair and thrived despite the odds. Usha is a self-assured woman of twenty-eight: short, with long black hair, a round face, and thick eyebrows. In a land like India that has long suffered from malnutrition, pounds can be prestigious, and Usha has just enough weight to hint at her own success. She talks nonstop.

Her father, Madhukar Narayane, is a Dalit, too, but he is also a high school graduate with a good job at the telephone company. Usha's mother, Alka, is also unusually well-educated: Although she married at age fifteen, she has a ninth-grade education and is literate. Both parents were determined that their children get a solid education as an escape route from Kasturba Nagar. So they lived frugally and saved every rupee to educate their children—and they accomplished something heroic. In a slum where no other person had ever gone to college, all five Narayane children, including Usha, graduated from university.

Usha's mother is delighted and a bit horrified at what this education has wrought in her daughter. "She's fearless," Alka said. "She doesn't get frightened by anyone." Usha graduated with a degree in hotel management and seemed destined to manage a fine hotel somewhere in India. She had already escaped Kasturba Nagar and was preparing to take a hotel job when she came back for a visit—and collided with the ambitions and self-assurance of Akku Yadav.

Akku Yadav was, in a sense, the other "success" of Kasturba Nagar. He was a higher-caste man who had turned an apprenticeship as a small-time thug into a role as a mobster and king of the slum. He ruled a gang of hoodlums who controlled Kasturba Nagar and who robbed, murdered, and tortured with impunity. The Indian authorities would have prevented a gangster from preying so ruthlessly on a middle-class neighborhood. But in slums with Dalits or low-caste residents, the authorities rarely intervene except to accept cash bribes, and so gangsters sometimes emerge in such places as absolute rulers.

For fifteen years, Akku Yadav had terrorized Kasturba Nagar while shrewdly building a small business empire. One of his specialties was the threat of rape to terrorize anyone who might stand up to him. Murder left inconvenient piles of bodies, requiring bribes to keep the police at bay, while rape is so stigmatizing that the victims could usually be counted on to stay silent. Sexual humiliation was thus an effective and low-risk strategy to intimidate challengers and to control the community.

According to neighbors in the slum, Akku Yadav once raped a woman right after her wedding. Another time he stripped a man naked and burned him with cigarettes, then forced him to dance in front of his sixteen-year-old daughter. They say he took one woman, Asho Bhagat, and tortured her in front of her daughter and several neighbors by cutting off her breasts. Then he sliced her into pieces on the street. One of the neighbors, Avinash Tiwari, was horrified by Asho's killing and planned to go to the police, so Akku Yadav butchered him as well.

Akku Yadav continued his assaults. He and his men gang-raped a woman named Kalma just ten days after she gave birth, and she was so mortified that she doused herself with kerosene and burned herself to death. The gang pulled another woman out of her house when she was seven months pregnant, stripped her naked, and raped her on the road in public view. The more barbaric the behavior, the more the population was cowed into acquiescence.

Twenty-five families moved away from Kasturba Nagar, but most Dalits had no choice. They adjusted by pulling their daughters out of school and keeping them locked up inside their homes where no one could see them. Vegetable vendors steered clear of Kasturba Nagar, so housewives had to trek to distant markets to buy food. And as long as Akku Yadav targeted only the Dalits, the police didn't interfere.

"The police were very class conscious," Usha noted. "So if you were lighter-skinned, then they thought you were higher class and they might help. But they would swoop down on anyone darker-skinned or unshaven. Often, people went to the police to complain, and then the police arrested them," Usha said. One woman went to the police to report that she had been gang-raped by Akku Yadav and his thugs; the police responded by gang-raping her themselves.

Usha's family was the only one that Akku Yadav didn't torment. He gave the Narayanes a wide berth, wary that their education might give them power to complain effectively. In developing countries, tormenting the illiterate is usually risk-free; preying on the educated is more perilous. But finally, when Usha was back for her visit, the two families met head-on.

Akku Yadav had just raped a thirteen-year-old girl. He was feeling cocky. He and his men went to the next-door neighbor of the Narayanes, Ratna Dungiri, to demand money. The thugs smashed her furniture and threatened to kill her family. When Usha arrived afterward, she told Ratna to go to the police. Ratna wouldn't, so Usha herself went to the police and filed a complaint. The police informed Akku Yadav of Usha's action, and he was enraged. So he and forty of his thugs showed up at the Narayane house and surrounded it. Akku Yadav carried a bottle of acid and shouted through the door for Usha to back down. *You withdraw the complaint and I won't harm you,* he said.

Usha barricaded the door and shouted back that she would never give in. Then she frantically telephoned the police. They said that they would come, but they never did. Meanwhile, Akku Yadav was pounding on the door.

I'll throw acid on your face, and you won't be in a position to file any more complaints, he roared. *If we ever meet you, you don't know what we'll do to you. Gang rape is nothing. You can't imagine what we'll do to you.*

Usha shouted back insults, and Akku Yadav replied with vivid descriptions of how he would rape her, burn her with acid, slaughter her. He and his men tried to batter the door down. So Usha turned on the cylinder of gas the family used for cooking and grabbed a match.

If you break into the house, I'll light the match and blow us all up, she shouted wildly. The thugs could smell the gas, and they hesitated. *Back off, or you'll get blown up,* Usha shouted again. The attackers stepped back.

Meanwhile, word of the confrontation had rushed around the neighborhood. The Dalits were deeply proud of Usha's schooling and success, and the thought that Akku Yadav would destroy her was agonizing. The neighbors gathered at a distance, not knowing quite what to do. But when they saw Usha fighting back and hurling abuse at Akku Yadav, finally forcing his gang to retreat, they found courage. Soon there were a hundred angry Dalits on the street, and they began picking up sticks and stones.

"People realized that if he could do this to Usha, there was just no hope," one neighbor explained. Stones began to fly toward Akku Yadav's men, who saw the crowd's ugly mood and fled. The mood in the slum became giddy. For the first time, the people had won a confrontation. The Dalits marched through the slum, celebrating. Then they went down the street to Akku Yadav's house and burned it to the ground.

Akku Yadav went to the police, who arrested him for his own protection. Apparently the police officers planned to keep him in custody until the mood cooled and then to let him go. A bail hearing for Akku Yadav was scheduled, and rumors spread that the police were planning to release him as part of a corrupt bargain. The bail hearing was to take place miles away in the center of Nagpur. Hundreds of women marched there from Kasturba Nagar and filed into the high-ceilinged grand courtroom with its marble floor and faded British grandeur. The Dalit women were uneasy there in their sandals and faded saris, but they took seats near the front. Akku Yadav strutted in, confident and unrepentant, sensing that the women were disoriented in the grand setting of the courtroom. Spotting one woman he had raped, he mocked her as a prostitute and shouted that he would rape her again. She rushed forward and hit him on the head with a slipper.

"This time, either I will kill you, or you will kill me," she shrieked. At that, the dam burst, apparently by prearrangement. All the women from Kasturba Nagar pressed forward and surrounded Akku Yadav, screaming and shouting. Some pulled chili powder from under their clothes and threw it in the faces of Akku Yadav and the two police officers guarding him. The police, blinded and overwhelmed, fled at once. Then the women pulled out knives from their clothing and began stabbing Akku Yadav.

"Forgive me," he shouted, in terror now. "Forgive me! I won't do it again." The women passed their knives around and kept stabbing him. Each woman had agreed to stab him at least once. Then, in a macabre retaliation for his having cut off Asho Bhagat's breasts, the women hacked off Akku Yadav's penis. By the end, he was mincemeat. When we visited, the courtroom walls were still stained with his blood.

The bloodied women marched triumphantly back to Kasturba Nagar to tell their husbands and fathers that they had destroyed the monster. The slum erupted in celebration. Families put on music and danced in the streets. They dug into their savings to buy lamb and sweets, and they handed out fruit to their friends. Throughout Kasturba Nagar, the festivities resembled a giant wedding.

It was clear that the attack on Akku Yadav had been carefully planned, and Usha was the obvious leader. So even though Usha could conveniently prove that she was not in the courtroom that day, the police arrested her. However, the killing had focused public attention on the plight of Kasturba Nagar, and there was an outcry. A retired high court judge, Bhau Vahane, publicly sided with the women, saying: "In the circumstances they underwent, they were left with no alternative but to finish Akku. The women repeatedly pleaded with the police for their security. But the police failed to protect them."

Then the hundreds of women in the slum decided among themselves that if they all claimed responsibility, no one person would be culpable for the murder. They reasoned that if several hundred women each had stabbed Akku Yadav once, then no single stab wound would have been the fatal one. Across Kasturba Nagar, there was a single refrain among the women: *We all killed him. Arrest us all!*

"We all take responsibility for what happened," said Rajashri Rangdale, a shy young mother. Jija More, a prim housewife of forty-five, added: "I'm proud of what we did. . . . If anybody has to be punished, we'll all be punished." With considerable satisfaction, Jija asserted: "We women have become fearless. We were protecting the men."

The police, grim and frustrated, released Usha after two weeks, but only on the condition that she stay in the area. Her career as a hotel manager is probably over, and she is sure that members of Akku Yadav's gang will seek revenge by raping her or throwing acid on her face. "I don't care about that," she says dismissively, with a confident toss of her head. "I'm not worried about them." She began a new life as a community organizer, using her management skills to bring the Dalits together to make pickles, clothing, and other products to sell in the markets. She wants the Dalits to start businesses to raise their incomes, so that they can afford more education.

Now Usha is struggling to make ends meet, but she is the galvanic new boss of Kasturba Nagar, the heroine of the slum. When we went to visit her, our taxi driver had trouble finding her home. He stopped periodically in Kasturba Nagar to ask for directions, but each person the driver asked insisted that there was no such person—or else directed the vehicle away from the neighborhood. Finally, we called Usha to report our difficulties, and she came out onto the main street to flag us down and show us the way, explaining that each of the people who had misdirected us had sent a child running over to her, warning her that a stranger was looking for her. "They're trying to protect me," Usha explained, laughing. "The whole community is looking out for me."

The saga of Kasturba Nagar is unsettling, with no easy moral. After years of watching women quietly accept abuse, it is cathartic to see someone like Usha lead a countercharge—even if we're uncomfortable with the bloody denouement and cannot condone murder.

"Empowerment" is a cliché in the aid community, but it is truly what is needed. The first step toward greater justice is to transform that culture of female docility and subservience, so that women themselves become more assertive and demanding. As we said earlier, that is, of course, easy for outsiders like us to say: We're not the ones who run horrible risks for speaking up. But when a woman does stand up, it's imperative that outsiders champion her; we also must nurture institutions to protect such people. Sometimes we may even need to provide asylum for those whose lives are in danger. More broadly, the single most important way to encourage women and girls to stand up for their rights is education, and we can do far more to promote universal education in poor countries.

Ultimately, women like those in Kasturba Nagar need to join the human rights revolution themselves. They constitute part of the answer to the problem: There will be less trafficking and less rape if more women stop turning the other cheek and begin slapping back.

The New Abolitionists

Zach Hunter was twelve years old and living with his family in Atlanta when he heard in school that forms of slavery still exist in the world today. He was flabbergasted and began reading up on the subject. The more he read, the more horrified he was, and although he was only a seventh grader he thought he could raise money to fight forced labor. So he formed a group called Loose Change to Loosen Chains, nicknamed LC2LC, a student-run campaign against modern slavery. In his first year, he raised $8,500. Since then, his campaign has ballooned.

Zach, now in high school, travels around the country constantly, speaking to school and church groups about human trafficking. His MySpace page describes his occupation as "abolitionist/student," and his hero is William Wilberforce. In 2007, Zach presented to the White House a petition with 100,000 signatures seeking more action on trafficking. He also published a book for teenagers, *Be the Change: Your Guide to Ending Slavery and Changing the World*, and he is nurturing other LC2LC chapters in schools and churches across the country.

Zach is part of an exploding movement of "social entrepreneurs" who offer new approaches to supporting women in the developing world. Aid workers function in the context of an aid bureaucracy, while social entrepreneurs create their own context by starting a new organization, company, or movement to address a social problem in a creative way. Social entrepreneurs tend not to have the traditional liberal suspicion of capitalism, and many charge for services and use a business model to achieve sustainability.

"Social entrepreneurs are not content just to give a fish or to teach how to fish," says Bill Drayton, a former management consultant and government official who popularized the idea of social entrepreneurship. "They will not rest until they have revolutionized the fishing industry." Drayton is the founder of Ashoka, an organization that supports and trains social entrepreneurs around the world. They are called Ashoka Fellows, and there are now more than two thousand of them—many involved in women's rights campaigns. Drayton's brief history of the rise of social entrepreneurs goes like this:

> The agricultural revolution produced only a small surplus, so only a small elite could move into the towns to create culture and conscious history. This pattern persisted ever since: Only a few have held the monopoly on initiative because they alone have had the social tools. That is one reason that per capita income in the West remained flat from the fall of the Roman Empire until about 1700. By 1700, however, a new, more open architecture was beginning to develop in northern Europe: entrepreneurial/competitive business facilitated by more tolerant, open politics. . . . One result: the West broke out from 1,200 years of stagnation and soon soared past anything the world had seen before. Average per capita income rose 20 percent in the 1700s, 200 percent in the 1800s, and 740 percent in the last century. . . . However, until about 1980, this transformation bypassed the social half of the world's operations. . . . It was only about 1980 that the ice began to crack and the social arena as a whole made the structural leap to this new entrepreneurial competitive architecture. However, once the ice broke, catch-up change came in a rush. And it did so pretty much all across the world, the chief exceptions being areas where governments were afraid. Because it has the advantage of not having to be the pioneer, but rather of following business, this second great transformation has been able steadily to compound productivity growth at a very fast rate. In this respect, it resembles successful developing countries like Thailand. Ashoka's best estimate is that the citizen sector is halving the gap between its productivity level and that of business every ten to twelve years.

Think how much more effective a women's rights movement could be if backed by an army of social entrepreneurs. The United Nations and the aid bureaucracies have undertaken a relentless search for technical solutions—including improved vaccines and new processes for boring wells—and those are important. But progress also depends on political and cultural remedies, and, frankly, on charisma. Often the key is a person with a knack for leadership: Martin Luther King Jr. in the United States, Mahatma Gandhi in India, and William Wilberforce in Britain. It's important to invest in these emerging leaders as well as in processes, and aid organizations have largely missed the boat that Drayton launched with Ashoka.

"It does seem to be a major blind spot in development and government efforts," notes David Bornstein, who wrote an excellent book about social entrepreneurs called *How to Change the World.* The big donors, whether government aid groups or large philanthropic organizations, want to make systematic interventions that are scalable, and there are good reasons for that. But as a result they miss opportunities to bring about social change by failing to set up networks to identify and support individual leaders who can make a difference in the trenches. Donors typically aren't set up to make small, targeted grants at the community level—but such grants can become an important tool to achieve change. A few groups have operated as venture capital providers to support small-scale programs abroad, and in fact that is precisely what Ashoka does with its support of Ashoka Fellows. Likewise, the Global Fund for Women, run by a former graduate school classmate of Sheryl's, Kavita Ramdas, since 1987 has supported more than 3,800 women's organizations in 167 countries. The International Women's Health Coalition, based in New York, is best known for advocacy, but it also awards grants to small organizations around the globe that support women.

Zach is a brilliant social entrepreneur. So are Ruchira Gupta and Usha Narayane. While women worldwide have generally not risen far in the ranks of political leaders, they often dominate the ranks of social entrepreneurs. Even in countries where men monopolize political power, women have formed their own influential organizations and have enjoyed considerable success in bringing about change. In particular, many women have risen as social entrepreneurs to provide leadership in the new abolitionist movement against sex traffickers. One of these is Sunitha Krishnan, an Ashoka Fellow from India who is legendary among those fighting trafficking. We had heard so much about her that when we finally met it was a surprise to see how tiny she is. And her diminutive stature, at four and a half feet tall, is accentuated by a congenital cleft foot that causes her to limp.

When Sunitha was a middle-class child in kindergarten, she took a slate and went to teach a group of poor children what she had learned in school that day. She was so moved by that experience that she decided to become a social worker. She studied social work in college and graduate school in India; her focus was on literacy. Then, one day, she was with a group of fellow students trying to organize poor people in a village, and a gang of men resented the interference.

"They didn't like it, and they decided to teach us a lesson," Sunitha

recalls. She was telling us her story in her small, bare office in the shelter she runs in the city of Hyderabad, nearly one thousand miles southwest of the village in Bihar where Ruchira Gupta is fighting to keep Meena alive. Sunitha speaks in polished, upper-class Indian English, sounding more like a university professor than an activist. She is detached and analytical, but still quietly furious when she explains what happened next: The gang of men opposed to her efforts raped her. Sunitha didn't go to the police. "I recognized the futility of it," she says. But Sunitha found herself blamed and her family stigmatized. "The rape per se didn't impact me so much," she says. "What affected me more was the way society treated me, the way people looked at me. Nobody questioned why those guys did it. They questioned why I went there, why my parents gave me freedom. And I realized that what happened to me was a one-time thing. But for many people it was a daily thing."

Sunitha talking with children in her shelter in India (Nicholas D. Kristof)

That was when Sunitha decided to switch her career focus from literacy to sex trafficking. She traveled around the country talking to as many prostitutes as possible, trying to understand the world of commercial sex. She settled in Hyderabad, shortly before the police launched a crackdown there on one red-light district—perhaps the brothel owners hadn't paid enough bribes and needed a nudge. The crackdown was a catastrophe. Overnight the brothels in that area were closed, with no provision for the girls working there; the prostitutes were so stigmatized that there was no place they could go and no way for them to earn money.

"Many of the women started committing suicide," Sunitha remembers. "I was helping cremate dead bodies. Death was binding people together. I went back to the women and said, 'Tell me exactly what you want us to do.' And they said, 'Don't do anything for us, do something for our children.' "

Sunitha worked closely with a Catholic missionary, Brother Joe Vetticatil. He has died, but a picture of him hangs in her office, and his faith left a powerful impression on her. "I'm a staunch Hindu," she says, "though the way of Christ inspires me." Sunitha and Brother Joe started a school in a former brothel. At first, out of five thousand children of prostitutes who were eligible to attend, just five enrolled. But the school grew, and soon Sunitha started shelters as well, for the children and also for girls and women who were rescued from the brothels. She called her organization Prajwala, which means an eternal flame (www.prajwalaindia.org).

Although one red-light district had been closed, there were others in Hyderabad, and Sunitha began to organize rescues from those brothels. She prowled the foulest, most sordid neighborhoods of the city, fearlessly talking to prostitutes and trying to galvanize them to work together and inform on the pimps. She confronted pimps and brothel owners and gathered evidence that she took to the police, browbeating them to mount raids. All this infuriated the brothel owners, who couldn't understand why a sparrow-sized woman—*a girl!*—was standing up to them and making business so unprofitable. The brothel owners organized and began to fight back. Thugs attacked Sunitha and those working with her; she says her right eardrum was ruptured, leaving her deaf in that ear, and one arm was broken.

Sunitha's first employee was Akbar, a former pimp who had developed a conscience. He worked valiantly to help girls who were imprisoned in the red-light district. But the brothel owners retaliated by stabbing Akbar to death. When Sunitha had to tell his family that he had been killed, she acknowledged that she had to be more cautious.

"We realized over time that it was not sustainable," she says of her early approach. "I realized that if I'm going to be here for a long time, I have to be accountable to my team, to their families. I can't expect everyone to be a mad person like me."

Prajwala increasingly began to work with the government and aid groups to provide rehabilitation, counseling, and other services. Sunitha trained the former prostitutes not only to make crafts or bind books—the kind of thing that other rescue organizations do—but also to be welders or carpenters. So far, Prajwala has rehabilitated some fifteen hundred young women by moving them through six to eight months of job training that will help them start new careers. The rehabilitation centers are a curious sight in India: They are alive with the sounds of hammering and shouts, with young women pounding nails, lugging steel bars, and operating machinery. Prajwala also helps some women return to their families, or get married, or live on their own. So far, Sunitha says, 85 percent of the women have been able to stay out of prostitution, while 15 percent have returned.

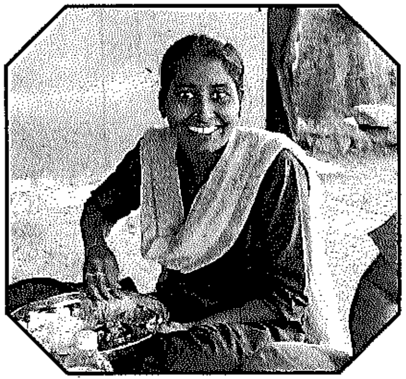
Sunitha herself plays down the success. "There's more prostitution now than when we started," she confided grimly at one point. "I'd say we failed. We rescue ten people and twenty come into the brothels." But that is far too bleak an evaluation.

One warm and sunny day in Hyderabad, Sunitha's brisk efficiency evaporates as she leaves her office. The stern ferocity that she displays toward government officials melts and is replaced by tenderness as children at her school gather round, laughing and shouting. She greets them by name and asks them about their schoolwork.

A simple lunch of dal and chapati is served on battered tin plates to everyone in the compound. While nibbling on her chapati, Sunitha catches up with one of her volunteers, Abbas Be, a young woman with black hair, light chocolate skin, and white teeth. Abbas had been taken to Delhi as a young teenager to work as a maid, but instead she found herself sold to a brothel and beaten with a cricket bat to induce obedience. Three days later, Abbas and all seventy girls in the brothel were made to gather round and watch as the pimps made an example of another teenage girl, who had fought customers and tried to lead the other girls into a rebellion. The troublesome girl was stripped naked, hog-tied, humiliated and mocked, beaten savagely, and then stabbed in the stomach until she bled to death in front of Abbas and the others.

After Abbas was eventually freed in a brothel raid, Sunitha encouraged her to come to Prajwala to learn a vocational skill. Today, Abbas is learning to be a bookbinder and also counsels other girls about how to avoid being trafficked. Sunitha arranged for Abbas to be tested for HIV; she tested positive, so Sunitha is trying to find her an HIV-positive man to marry.

Sunitha and Abbas both want all brothels closed down, not just regulated, and Sunitha's voice carries growing weight in the region. A



Abbas now works in this shelter and is trying to find a man who is HIV positive, as she is, to marry. (Nicholas D. Kristof)

dozen years ago, it would have been absurd to think that a young female social worker, small in stature and with a club foot, could have any impact on the mobs that run the brothels in Hyderabad. Aid groups were too sensible to tackle the problem. Yet Sunitha brazenly marched into the red-light districts and started her own organization, in a way emblematic of social entrepreneurs. They can be difficult, seemingly unreasonable people, but these very qualities are sometimes precisely what allow them to succeed.

On her own, Sunitha would have lacked the resources to wage her campaigns against the brothels, but American donors have supported her and multiplied her impact. Catholic Relief Services in particular has been a stalwart supporter of Sunitha and the Prajwala programs. The networks and introductions that Bill Drayton made for her, as an Ashoka Fellow, also magnified her voice. It's a prototype of the kind of alliance between first world and third that the abolitionist movement needs.

CHAPTER FOUR

Rule by Rape

The mechanism of violence is what destroys women, controls women, diminishes women and keeps women in their so-called place.

— EVE ENSLER, *A Memory, a Monologue, a Rant, and a Prayer*

Rape has become endemic in South Africa, so a medical technician named Sonette Ehlers developed a product that immediately grabbed national attention there. Ehlers had never forgotten a rape victim telling her forlornly: "If only I had teeth down there." Some time afterward, a man came into the hospital where Ehlers works in excruciating pain because his penis was stuck in his pants zipper. Ehlers merged those images and came up with a product she called Rapex. It resembles a tube, with barbs inside. The woman inserts it like a tampon, with an applicator, and any man who tries to rape the woman impales himself on the barbs and must go to an emergency room to have the Rapex removed. When critics complained that it was a medieval punishment, Ehlers responded tersely: "A medieval device for a medieval deed."

The Rapex is a reflection of the gender-based violence that is ubiquitous in much of the developing world, inflicting far more casualties than any war. Surveys suggest that about one third of all women worldwide face beatings in the home. Women aged fifteen through forty-four are more likely to be maimed or die from male violence than from cancer, malaria, traffic accidents, and war combined. A major study by the World Health Organization found that in most countries, between 30 percent and 60 percent of women had experienced physical or sexual violence by a husband or boyfriend. "Violence against women by an intimate partner is a major contributor to the ill health of women," said the former director-general of WHO, Lee Jong-wook.

Rape is so stigmatizing that many women do not report it, and thus