

"Goshta Eka Ranichi" (literally in Marathi: The story of a Queen)

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This is a heart-rending tale of Rani 's life. Despite being sold at the age of seven, the 33-year old India-born Rani still stands tall today. Now living in the U.S., Rani is a strong voice against the gigantic human trafficking racket. She was in Mumbai for participating in an international conference on ``Next steps to path-breaking strategies to combat trafficking''.

This is the story of Rani. A real story, of course with the protagonist's name changed. This Rani is a 33-year old owner of a U.S.-based construction company, besides being a mother of four small children. She campaigns against trafficking, very vociferously. As part of her vow to take on the worldwide human trafficking racket, she travels around the globe as an activist of a non-governmental organization. She is particularly concerned about the trafficking practices in India, due to her abuse many years ago. A history that she has not yet forgotten, a dreadful period of the kind that she would not want anyone to experience.

Rani's life took a cruel turn at the young age of seven. She was living in a village in South India with her illiterate, unemployed mother and four siblings. The family could barely make ends meet due to the sudden illness of the patriarch. Then one day a respectable woman called on Rani's mother and offered help . " I would like to look after your younger daughter (Rani). I will take care of education as well . Since we live in the same village, you will be able to see you daughter grow well . Trust me ,'' were her reassuring words to Rani's mother. Rani was given to the women. As the time went by Rani's mother noticed that daughter wasn't around whenever she (Rani's mother) visited Rani's adopted home. When asked Rani's new parent claimed she was shifted out of the village for her to attend another school. Rani's mother did not dare to ask for further for explanations. Most villagers also asked her to trust the women. But the mother smelled a rat, and feared that something worse had happened. As days passed, her hope of meeting Rani dimmed . There was no way to reach her child.

The little Rani was indeed living a horrible life. She had been sold, beaten up and threatened. She could barely understand all that was happening to her. She didn't know the language in which she could ask for help. Her South Indian dialect was of no use in the place where she found herself away from her home. The entire year that she lived there seemed like a veritable hell . She was ill, physically and mentally. But her physical deterioration came to her rescue. she was soon thrown out to the streets of India. After due formalities, the eight year-old Rani was adopted by an American woman. Rani just remembers that she was put on a plane and that she flew for very long hours. As she landed at the airport, her new 'mother' had come to receive her. She began living life anew-in a protected environment. She started going to school with other American children of her age.

Rani was now an American citizen, speaking English in an American accent, living an American lifestyle. But this smooth life was

disrupted after the death of her adoptive mother. Rani became an orphan again at the age of 16. But by this time she had developed into an independent woman, studying in a Community college and working in a state government office. At the age of 20, she got married to an American civil engineer of Chinese origin. But she never forgot her past, and made it her life-long mission to fight human trafficking.

Rani's life took another dramatic turn, again for better. In 1999, when she came to Mumbai as a tourist, she tried to trace her roots and tried to find her file. She did succeed in getting the address of her orphanage which could possibly lead her to her mother. And then the unbelievable happened.... One day, she heard a knock on her hotel room's door, and when she opened the door, she found a woman looking at her intensely. Despite years of separation, both instantly recognized each other. Rani could no longer speak her mother tongue. And yet, the mother and -daughter embraced each other, shedding tears of joy. They spoke the language of love which had remained intact despite 21 years of separation. Rani's elder sister also came to meet her the next day and she, being English-educated, served as an effective interpreter in the dialogue between Rani and her mother.

Despite her mother's insistence, Rani could not stay for long time in Mumbai. She had to return to her home and the family in America. Of course, this time Rani did not leave with a dejected heart. She promised to keep in touch with her mother, and that she did through e-mails and phones. In 2001, when Rani was to give birth to her third child, she called her mother to the U.S. to take care of herself. Rani's mother proudly flew to America. She was probably the first woman in her village to fly across the ocean. She was with Rani for two moths, a very happy and nostalgic period for both of them. Both of them tried to make up for the lost years of their lives. Rani's children also enjoyed their grandma's presence, who not only introduced them to Indian cuisine but also the `mother' tongue.

Rani is currently in India for the international conference on human trafficking, and that gives her another chance to meet her mother. She will soon visit her native village and stay there for a week. Of course, she will have to return to the U.S. for an important assignment. Rani was among 300 invitees for a world wide summit, on human trafficking--an honor she had earned through her battle against trafficking. She was instrumental in formulating a law against trafficking in the Washington state where she resides. The New Jersey state is also likely to implement a similar law.

Rani considers herself fortunate, as she underwent abuse for only a year. She got the opportunity to break away from the hellish above her circumstances and fight against trafficking. Therefore, she finds herself responsible to the 2-4 million young girls who are sold and exploited across borders as part of the human trafficking racket worldwide. Of these 2-4 million, a sizeable number hail from Asian countries, including India. And Rani feels accountable to all of them. She does not wish to forget her past. ``I will not let the traffickers operate in peace. I will fight against such inhuman acts till the end of my life,' ' declares Rani, a vociferous activist of Shared Hope International.

True to her name, Rani is indeed living like a queen, confident and inspiring!.