



## Appu's Story

### GENERATIONAL BONDAGE COMES TO AN END

Appu was born and raised in the Sakunthala Ammal Rice Mill, Chengalpattu Revenue Division, TN, where he worked tirelessly to pay his father's debt of Rs. 5000. His is a compelling case of generational labour, where children are held in debt bondage because of a loan their parents took decades earlier.

"From the time I remember," said Appu, "my father was at the rice mill. I remember being there all my life." He remembers his father training him as a child; he remembers carrying sacks of rice all day, instead of going to school and studying like other children.

Even after his father passed away, Appu was forced to pay off his debt, which had 'increased' to Rs 19000 because of loans that he had taken to conduct his marriage and pay for food and medical expenses. In fact, for the long hours of labour that he had put in over the years, Appu had earned that amount many times over.

Appu attempted to seek employment elsewhere only to be forbidden by the owner to leave the mill. Meanwhile, abuse was a frequent occurrence. "He beat my brother. I don't know why. I was scared of the owner. Even if he didn't pay, I was scared to ask as I was afraid he would hit me."

Working 18 hours a day for Rs. 20 - 25 a day made it impossible for him to ever break free from the rice mill and its owner. The owner would only compensate him if he worked night and day. If he worked only mornings, he was paid nothing at all. It was not unusual to sleep for only one and a half hours.

Everything changed on 10th June 2015, when RDO Paneerselvam along with his team entered the rice mill. After establishing that this was a case of bonded labour, he ordered the victims to be evacuated. Appu was rescued along with four other families. By the end of the inquiry, 17 bonded labourers were issued the initial rehabilitation money, their Release Certificates, as well as Ration Cards and Community Certificates.

Since the labourers had been working in the facility for generations, they did not have a home or a village to return to. The government stepped in to arrange land for the six families to begin their lives in freedom while students from the Social Work department of Madras Christian College (MCC) helped the survivors build their homes.

Thanks to the government, and the community, all of the survivors, including Appu, have been given new lives and hope for the future. Now that they are free, survivors like Appu can move forward to become an example of courage and strength. His rescue proves that generational bondage can be broken. From now on, his family's legacy will not be one of bondage, but one of freedom and restoration.