

INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE MISSION

Nyaya Pathrika

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credible India



IJM

Children of bonded labour survivors seize the opportunity to run and play on Graduation Day in November 2016.



This is only a representative photo of a brick kiln.

CONVICTION SHOWS THAT BONDED LABOUR WILL NOT BE TOLERATED

On 28th November 2016, two families were given justice nearly 10 years after they were released from a rice mill in Tamil Nadu. The Judicial Magistrate of Sriperumbudur sentenced the rice mill owner to six months imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 10,000 for having held eight individuals as bonded labourers in his rice mill. He was convicted under the Bonded Labour Act (1976) as well as relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code.

Speaking on the significance of the conviction, Richard Ebenezer from IJM said, “Punishment for bonded labour crimes are important because they tell the community that the government will not tolerate this crime. It sends a message that the trial is not an empty formality. It also encourages the vulnerable community by assuring them that the law is on their side.”

Prabhu Kandaswamy, advocate on this case, appreciates the dedicated work of Assistant Public Prosecutor, District Munsif cum Judicial Magistrate Court, Sriperumbudur. “Despite immense setbacks and challenges throughout

the trial, he continued to work diligently to secure justice for the survivors,” notes Prabhu. “Not only did he thoroughly understand the Bonded Labour Act, but he also treated the victims well and encouraged them to testify in court.”

Today, the survivors are doing well. Mari, one of the survivors, has a steady job at a company that manufactures cardboard boxes. He and his wife, Valliamma, built their house in a land provided by the government and are living contentedly.



Arul and Pachayamma share their story to raise awareness on bonded labour system at the 'End Bonded Labour' awareness programme.

AWARENESS PROGRAMME ON BONDED LABOUR REACHES OVER 3500 PEOPLE IN TAMIL NADU

In November 2016, the 'End Bonded Labour' awareness programme traversed 13 districts across Tamil Nadu sensitising over 3500 people on the issue of bonded labour. Each event featured theatrical performance of experienced puppeteers, who artfully communicated the issue of bonded labour to be understood by community members of various ages and backgrounds. Displaying support, a total of over 60 government officials were present for the programmes at different districts.

Speaking on the importance of creating awareness on the issue, Hephzibah Sunder of IJM said, "In past years, we have observed positive responses from the vulnerable community to awareness programmes. We have noticed that the rates of bonded labour are higher in certain districts of Tamil Nadu, hence the awareness programmes were focussed in those 13 districts".

Arul and Pachayamma, bonded labour survivors and community leaders, publicly shared their story of bondage and freedom to audiences of the 13 districts in hopes of educating vulnerable communities on the issue of bonded labour, and inspiring others to seek assistance and intervention if necessary.

"People need to approach the government and have confidence in them, because unless they do, the government won't know that they need help," Arul and Pachayamma said while addressing the crowd at Kanchipuram.

The campaign sought to sensitise vulnerable community groups to bonded labour, and provide information on accessing government assistance should they hear of or be involved in a case of bonded labour.



Survivors of bonded labour marked the completion of their aftercare programme for rehabilitation with IJM in November 2016 by coming together and celebrating their freedom. Around 150 survivors gathered for the closing ceremony and spent their time playing games, sharing their stories and summing up all that they had learnt during the two years.

PHOTO SERIES

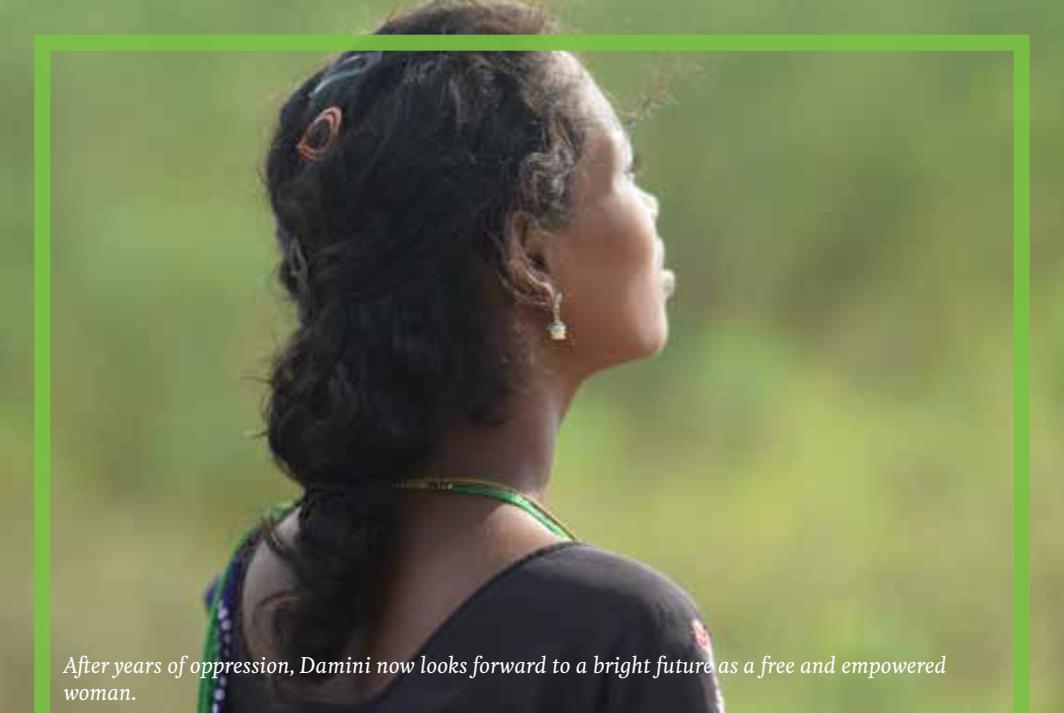
GRADUATION DAY FOR SURVIVORS OF BONDED LABOUR



Moorthi was once a malnourished victim of bonded labour, working to pay off the loans his long-forgotten family had taken. His mother had committed suicide and his father abandoned him. Soon after he was released, he enrolled for a carpentry course. Today, Moorthi sits a confident man, celebrating his accomplishments with poise—the most significant of all being his new job as a trainer in the school where he learnt carpentry.

Children of bonded labour survivors were denied freedom and stripped of their childhood when they were in bondage. Not often did they get a chance to experience life and the many joys it brought. During their rehabilitation programme, they were taught about the importance of education. Even as the children gear up to live a fruitful life, they excitedly make their own little lions depicting the fearless souls present in each of them.





After years of oppression, Damini now looks forward to a bright future as a free and empowered woman.

SURVIVOR SPOTLIGHT

Damini is a bonded labour survivor who was rescued in August 2016 from a tree cutting unit. On the day of rescue, she was in her last trimester with her second child. Damini speaks to Nyaya Pathrika about her experience as a bonded labourer and what freedom means to her.*

What happened at the tree cutting unit?

It was very difficult. We were forced to work all day. Even though I was weak and pregnant, the owner forced me to work and carry heavy logs, refusing to make any exceptions. If my husband said or did anything to help me, he would shout at him. He did not let us leave the village or provide any form of shelter. Every night, sky was the only roof over our heads. It used to be hard especially when it rained.

What happened on the day of rescue?

My life came back to me! For the first time, there was hope. I relived that moment over and over in my head for several days later. That was the day I knew that I will be alive to give birth to my child.

Your baby was born in freedom. How do you feel about that?

After receiving six units of blood, for the first time in nearly nine months, I felt my baby move. It felt like the baby leaped in joy. I'm so happy that he was born in freedom. The minute I saw him, I said, "I never thought I'll give birth to you in a hospital."

How would you describe the difference between life in bondage and life in freedom?

Bonded labour is a system where I was made to feel like it was wrong for me to eat my own food when I wanted to. I lost all freedom. The owner directed my every move. Now, I am free! I am very happy with my family. Sometimes we just lie down and look at the light inside our hut and recall the nights we slept in darkness with no shelter. We never thought this day would come.

**Name changed to protect the survivor's identity.*



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