



## Survivor Stories

### Passing on the Gift of Freedom: Munnu's Story

Imagine being denied the right to govern your own life. Imagine being beaten, stripped of your dignity, deprived food, water, shelter, money, and education. That's the reality of modern-day slavery. A man named Munnu, a slavery survivor in Northern India, decided to take action to bring slaves into freedom.

#### Meet Munnu

Munnu was enslaved at a brick kiln in the Indian village of Bahari. Brave residents who had managed to break free with the support of a Free the Slaves front-line partner organization, MSEMVS, eventually helped to free Munnu, too. But even as a survivor, Munnu remained hopeless, anxious, distraught, and depressed. His family was still enslaved—the slaveholder had taken his 10-year-old son to his house, and Munnu had lost contact.

#### The Courage to Act

The people of Bahari wouldn't allow Munnu's loved ones to remain in slavery. The local community vigilance committee decided to help reunite him with his family. They told Munnu, "All of them will be rescued, as we were rescued, and now we're free." The message gave Munnu courage. He decided to act. With help from MSEMVS, he contacted local authorities, who pressed police and the Labor Department to organize a raid. In all, Munnu's family was rescued—alongside 22 other men, women, and children.

#### Munnu Rebuilds His Life

Local anti-slavery activists kept up the pressure after Munnu's family was freed. And it worked. The government provided compensation to all the rescued laborers. Four members of Munnu's family, including his 10-year-old son, received the equivalent of \$400 dollars each. Now Munnu is in good spirits. He has control over his life. He and his family bought a small plot of land. They have their own decent home, thanks to a



housing grant provided in their compensation. He started his own small business, and proudly rides his own bicycle rickshaw. "It was my dream to own one," he says. Munnu's wife has also regained her life in freedom. Now she knows her rights and has bargaining power with local landowners. "I refuse to work without wages," she says. "I do not even accept low wages."

## Munnu Strikes Again

After their rescue, Munnu and his family could have settled into a quiet, peaceful life. But Munnu decided to act—again. Just as the people of Bahari decided to help him, Munnu decided not to tolerate others being enslaved. He decided to pass on his gift of freedom. Munnu was busy running his small business when he discovered another case of rural Indian villagers trapped in slavery. They were 25 families from Titrahi.



## The Titrahi Survivors

The Titrahi families had been trapped in slavery for a decade before they met Munnu. For the first five years, they worked at a brick kiln. When it closed, the slaveholder transferred them to his farm. "If we raised our voice, we were beaten," one villager says. "If we got sick, we were beaten for not working." The Titrahi slaves had been forcefully taken from their homes. They were given the equivalent of \$1 for 10 days of work. One woman's husband died because he could not afford to buy medicine. They were held as captives: humiliated, afraid, and powerless. "When we went to relieve ourselves, [the slaveholder] would come up behind and hit us on the head," one man recalls. "We couldn't even go to get a drink," another man says. "We didn't drink as much as we sweated. They would give thousands of abuses if we went for a drink."

When he found out about the enslaved Titrahi families, Munnu alerted an MSEMVS fieldworker. His action set justice in motion. MSEMVS and an attorney secretly met with the families to devise a plan to free them. Quickly, authorities were contacted, and the families were rescued. For the Titrahi survivors, slavery is now behind them. They are free, thanks to Munnu.

## A Chain Reaction of Freedom

Today the Titrahi families still work on farms, but now they earn four or five times as much as they did as slaves. They are free to come and go. They can send their children to school. They are learning new skills, to help them earn money without risking enslavement at local farms or factories. They are creating a self-help savings group to pay for emergencies, instead of being forced into debt bondage by borrowing from corrupt moneylenders. Once, the families of Titrahi had no hope. Now they are establishing fulfilling lives in society, living in freedom and with all the opportunities it brings. Munnu's story proves that one person can help the next—creating a chain reaction of freedom. "We are free now," the survivors say. "Now nobody can suppress us."