

## Carpet of Dreams

### Ravi's Story

This is a true story. My name is Ravi. I think I am between 12 and 13 years old. When I was younger, a man came to my village. He was looking for boys to work for him, to make handmade carpets. He approached my parents, telling them that I would earn a good salary. I did not want to leave my home and, at first, my parents agreed with me. But this man wouldn't take no for an answer and, in the end, my parents gave in to his demands. The man gave them \$10 to take me away. But he had lied. I earned nothing.

I still remember the train journey to this man's home. Throughout the entire journey he refused to feed me. It was only when we finally arrived at our destination that he gave me just a small amount to eat. The next day I woke up and again, I was given nothing to eat. Then the man took me to the place where the looms and machinery were kept. That was the very first time I saw a loom.

From my very first day I was forced to work. I was made to sit at the loom and the man made a little mark on the loom itself. He gave me clear instructions that up to that mark I had to weave a carpet. If I couldn't finish it during the day, I had to work under candlelight to reach that particular mark. I was forced to work very long hours, so I was never able to get enough sleep, and because I was always exhausted I would make mistakes. Things were so bad that I would cut my fingers with the sharp tools we used. When this happened I'd go to my boss's wife and ask for some cream to put on my finger. But she never gave me anything. Instead, she would pour something like petrol over my fingers and light a match. It was so painful, but I was still forced to go back to the loom and continue weaving. Often, because the wound was open, blood would start running down my fingers. When it became so bad that I could not possibly weave anymore, I would stop. And the minute I did stop, the loom owner would hit me hard.

I didn't get any money, but I got a bed. We all slept and worked in one room, and we were forced to work there for 12 hours a day. Once a day we were allowed to use the bathroom, but even the number of bathroom breaks were controlled. We were given very little food, usually just a little rice. In the evening, after we'd finished working, we would ask for a little bit of money so we could go to the market and have fun. The loom owner would always refuse. At the most he would give us a rupee, [\$US00.02 or 2 cents] or he would say, 'Don't worry, we will go tomorrow.' But he always lied. Once, my father came to visit me. He asked the loom owner to let me go, but my boss refused saying, 'He can't leave until the carpet is completed - he's the only one who knows the pattern.' My father left. So that was it. That was the only time I spoke to my father.

I would think, 'There has to be something better.' I would think of running away. But the thought of running away would always be followed by the question, 'What if I get

caught?' If I did get caught, I'd be beaten violently. And the loom owner would tell us, 'If and when the police come, run away, run away because they are going to be mean to you.' So I never tried to escape.

Finally, I was rescued in a raid operation carried out by the police. I was terrified. I thought I was going to get beaten up again and they were going to throw me away. The police officers were very clever because they had parked their vehicle about three kilometers away from the loom and made their way unseen. We were surprised because they crept up on us slowly. We didn't have any chance to run away.

Luckily, I was taken to a place where children are looked after. I love it here. I have friends, I am happy and I go to school. Now I'm trying to learn how to be an electrician. I like the electricity idea. I like the fact that the teacher gives us notes and lessons, which we have to memorize. He asks me questions in class and when I'm able to answer, it feels good. When I go back home, I'm sure I will continue my education. My dream is to teach my brothers, my sisters and everyone in my village.

I would like to tell the children who are working right now on looms to stop and to do what they want to do. If I got the chance to talk to the world, I would relate my life story. I would tell them that I was working on the loom. I would tell them about my rescue. I would tell them about my life experiences. And now I know for a fact that every child is entitled to study. I know that no child should be subjected to any torture from anyone. I know that you should not be made to work for anybody else just for food.

There are hundreds of thousands of children trapped in India's handmade carpet industry. The children, usually boys, are forced to work for no pay, for 10-18 hours a day, seven days a week. They are beaten, tortured, abused, starved and usually have to sleep in the loom shed.

It is possible that the carpets Ravi was forced to weave are now on the floors of homes and offices in Europe, Australia or the USA. People who walk across these handmade carpets probably have no idea that child slavery is under their feet. The question is, would they have bought that carpet if they'd known that child labour is in the supply chain? Fortunately today there are better options. See: [www.goodweave.org](http://www.goodweave.org)

This story has been adapted with permission from Anti-Slavery Usable Past (ASUP). To read Ravi's original narrative visit <http://antislavery.ac.uk/items/show/116>