

Shiv, India

Shiv, 16, is from Madhepura village in the state of Bihar in India. He has 3 brothers – 8-, 13- and 15-years-old – and 2 sisters, 18- and 20-years-old. Both Shiv's mother and father work as agricultural laborers. His brothers and his sisters act as "supporting hands" to their mother when she works on the farms, even Shiv's 8- and 13-years-old siblings. None of them go to school as there is no school in that village, though there is one in a nearby village. The family uses the additional hands to bring in a little more money, since the family is so poor and no facility for education is available to them.



Shiv, 15, Press Conference, Children's World Congress on Child Labor, Florence, Italy, May 10-13, 2004

When he was barely seven-years-old, Shiv was lured away from home by a man who had promised him chocolate. The man took him 600 kilometers away from his home to the Varanasi district in India, where he worked in a carpet factory for five years around the clock for no pay. He was abused and beaten by his employer. "Have you ever realized that carpets are made by children like me?" Shiv asked. Since he worked for no pay and was not allowed to leave the factory, Shiv was considered to be a bonded laborer. "The work was hard," Shiv said. He worked 16 hours a day from 4:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., seven days a week with an hour for lunch at 1 p.m. He used to get up at 4:00 a.m. and go to bed at 10:00 p.m. He did not go to school.

Shiv lived, slept, and ate in the same room where he worked. He lived and worked with 18 other boys, between 7- and 16-years-old. Shiv was not given proper food. The children go no breakfast. For lunch and dinner, they received "very badly cooked" rice and lentils.

There was no time to play or have fun. Shiv was not allowed to go outside, even though it was very hot and dirty inside and there was no fan. Shiv was often sick and tired, but was never taken to the doctor. He was just given some pills and told to continue working. Often, he cut his fingers while weaving. When this happened the employer filled his cuts with the chemical from a matchstick and cauterized/burned the cuts on his fingers. He said it was very painful. If Shiv ever said "no" to work, he was subjected to verbal and physical abuse.

Shiv did not like his boss, who wanted the boys to work hard and produce more every day. "For this he used to beat us. His behavior was very bad with us. He used to ill-treat us. He always used bad language with us. If there was any small mistake, or when we did not meet the deadline for completing the carpets, we were beaten very badly," Shiv said. This happened "quite often, at the employer's whim". His boss never praised anyone.

For five years Shiv worked without any time off. He never went home or saw anyone in his family. He did not enjoy a single day of work. At that time he had no dreams.

After five years in the factory, Shiv was rescued at the age of 12 by Mr. Kailash Satyarthi and a team of activists from Bachpan Bachao Andolan (BBA) / South Asia Coalition on Child Servitude (SACCS). BBA and the local police raided the factory where Shiv was working. Shiv was brought to the Mukti Ashram (a rehabilitation center) operated by BBA activists. Now he lives and attends school in the Mukti Ashram run by BBA in Ibrahimpur, New Delhi. "Now I am getting love and education," Shiv said. The Mukti Ashram provides his education. He goes home during school vacations. Shiv has completed the fifth standard (grade) and no longer works.

Since he stopped working, Shiv's life has totally changed. When he went back to school he felt as if he had a new life. He said,

"My life has taken a completely new turn. I feel free, free from any pressure. I have learned how to speak and read well. My conduct has improved. I feel now I am getting more respect in the society and, above all, I got to know about my rights."

After spending some time at the Mukti Ashram, Shiv became a child activist. He has helped stop child labor by participating in awareness raising campaigns in villages and slums.

Shiv's parents are also very happy that he is attending school. "They (my parents) say that I (Shiv) should study and take up some good job. . . Though they are working as laborers, the next generation should not work as laborers," he said.

Shiv was very happy to be in Florence at the Children's World Congress on Child Labor, but he was also thinking of the children like him who were still working. Now he realizes that there are many boys and girls like him, who work in circuses and end up crippled for life, left on the streets, or sold as camel jockeys.

"My only ambition is that these children are liberated and have access to quality education, and people listen to them," he said. Shiv wants to study and become either a "good school teacher" or a social worker. He also wants to continue working to end child labor and to ensure the rights of all children. He is very optimistic about accomplishing his aspirations.

At a press conference during the Children's World Congress on Child Labor in Florence, Shiv demanded:

"Children should be removed from work. They should have a chance to play. *Adults* should work in place of children. They should be given normal 8-hour a day work opportunities for fair wages, and have a chance to move around, meet their families, and provide good food so that their families can have a good life. It is important to listen to

the voices of children. All children should have access to free compulsory primary education. The education should be *quality* to enable children to be productive citizens. The rich people send their children to rich schools, but for the poor children there is no quality education available. Access to quality education should be equal for both the rich and the poor. Children should be educated about their rights along with their normal course of study."