

## **Kumar**

I come from a small city in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, India. One day I saw an ad in the newspaper for a U.S. company that was recruiting for Army jobs in Afghanistan. They wanted people with training and experience in the food service industry. I had work experience and certifications in food services and preparation, so I thought I would apply.

I went to the offices of the U.S. company that was listed in the newspaper ad. It took me 36 hours, over two days of travel by train to get to Delhi. When I arrived, they told me they wouldn't accept my application. I would have to go through the recruiter they used in the southern state of Kerala. I then traveled by train for two and a half days to Kerala. When I arrived and attempted to give them my application, they wouldn't accept it. They referred me to a list of sub-agents they used. I called the agents on the list and spoke to them. They all quoted me a fee amount to get the job. I selected the one that charged the least. I then went to the sub-agent's office and provided him my resume and certifications. The only thing he asked me was if I had 75,000 Indian rupees (\$1,200) to pay him in order to get the job. I told him I could get the money. My mama had some gold I could use as collateral to get a loan. The money amounted to what I would make in seven months wages in my hometown and the interest rate for the loan was 30% rate. The Army job promised around \$1,200 per month, so I figured I could pay off the loan in no time at that salary. Once I committed to the fee, the agent notified the recruiting agent that I could be interviewed.

I was interviewed by the recruiter in Kerala. They informed me they would need to consult the sub-agent to confirm the payment of the fee, then they would provide me a written offer. Once I paid the sub-agent the fee, I received the offer. The written contract promised me \$4.25 per hour, twelve hours per day, six days per week. After some in-processing in India, I was sent to Dubai. While in Dubai, I was informed that the contract I signed had to be changed. I would not be a food service worker in the dining facility, I would now be a laborer, making \$2.25 per hour. I was told that I could go home, but I had already paid the commission to get the job so that money would be lost.

I went to Afghanistan as a laborer, but the base was closed after just six months and I was sent home. In the end, I didn't make any money from the work. All my earnings went to cover the payment I made to the money lender, to pay the fee to get the job. When I talked with others in my group, this was also their experience; we all made half of what we were promised and all had to pay the commission to get the job. All of our original contracts were revoked by the U.S. company, and we were made general laborers for half the pay. I was lucky, many of the men had to pay a higher commission and they used their family homes as collateral for the loan. Most paid as much as \$3,000 to get their job. They went back to India and had to tell their family they had to get out of their house and try to find a new place to live. The house no longer belonged to them. The money lenders repossessed the properties used as collateral. Some of the men never returned home, they were too ashamed of what happened and the harm caused to their families.

This was my experience working on the U.S. Army contract. I thought this was my big break, my chance to really get my family ahead. I was an employee of a U.S. company, but I was cheated by the recruiters and sub-contractors.