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FILED UNDER: *BONDED LABOUR*

She is strong. She is brave. She is free.

THAIAMMA'S STORY

For the first time in nearly nine months, I felt my baby move.

My husband and I worked in a tree cutting unit in Vellore for four years. We were forced to work all day to repay an advance we had taken. It was about ₹1,000. Although I was pregnant, I was forced to carry and transport heavy logs otherwise the owner hurled insults at me. We did not even have a simple hut. We were made to sleep under the open sky which became even more difficult when it rained.

The owner did not let me go to a hospital. The one time he gave me permission, he said I had to go alone. I really wanted my husband to be by my side. I was worried about my baby. I never felt my baby move and I was afraid that my child wouldn't survive our harsh conditions. I felt so hopeless and alone.

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unit. We were released from bondage that day!

I immediately went to a hospital. The doctors gave me six units of blood. It was only then that I felt my baby move for the first time. One month later, my son was born. I am so happy my son was born in freedom. It was a dream come true. I never thought I'd give birth in a hospital.

Today, my husband and I have built a small hut for our family where we live happily in freedom. Now when we look at the light inside our hut, we recall the nights we slept in darkness with no shelter. We never thought this day would come.

Now that we are free, I am no longer afraid. I will continue to speak up for my family and for others whose freedom has been taken away. I want to tell other mothers to never give up. Keep fighting for your family. Keep fighting for your freedom.

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