

Kumari's Story

It was in the wee hours of one morning, I first felt the pain. It started with a cramp in my stomach and slowly spread all over, till the time the pain became unbearable. From that moment onwards, till I reached the delivery room at our Primary Health Centre (PHC), was something I will never forget. I was cold and it felt like I was slowly suffocating to death. Through all this pain, I kept reminding myself that the worst was yet to come. I had heard that the PHC was not one of the best places to deliver a baby. Yet thinking of nothing else, we had rushed to the same PHC. (*We had heard that we would get Rs.1400 from the Government there*)

It was not very difficult to identify the nurse that day; incidentally she was in a *white saree*! I had never seen her earlier in a white saree, least of all a clean one. As I entered the labour room, I was shocked to find it clean! Very clean! *I had visited the PHC 6 months before and it was smelling worse than a cow shed*. The labour table even had a *rubber sheet* on it today! As I was laid out on the table, I could see the nurse *washing her hands and putting on a pair of gloves*. I still can't make up my mind, whether it was due to how the labour room looked or due to the nurse's white saree or her calm preparations for my childbirth, that I suddenly felt very safe. *I couldn't help but wonder what had wrought the magic here?*



It was well past 10 am when my little angel finally arrived. After I recovered, I was given my baby and an attending *Mamata* assisted me in breastfeeding the baby. All this while, there was a quiet demure lady standing in a corner, smiling at me. The smile was so reassuring and it told me: *You and your baby are perfectly alright*'. I smiled back. Then I recognised her as Seema Didi, from an organization called CARE. I had seen her earlier when I had come for my ANC. That time I had seen her talking sense into a few men who were loitering around the labour room. *Earlier the OPD and Labour Room were next to each other*. One could hear the women scream in labour even from the OPD. This time I found

the labour room in a more private area and curtains were put up. (*Guess you don't like your private parts on display when you are giving birth!*) And to tell you the truth, those screams from the labour room had actually scared the hell out of me and I dreaded coming here.



A few weeks later, I accompanied my sister-in-law for her delivery in the same hospital. Suddenly, there was a huge commotion in the labour room for a baby, just born, was not breathing. I remember Seema di instructing the nurse to immediately put the baby in some machine in the '*Child Corner*' (*That day I came to know there was something special in our PHC for new born babies*), and also use something to make him breathe again. Shortly, I could make out that the baby had survived. It was such a happy moment for all of us there. I could not help but admire the nurse's calm and efficient handling of the situation. *Where did she learn all this?*

Later, when I met Seema di in the ward, she asked me *how I was doing*. She explained to me the '*WHY and HOW*' to breastfeed my child (*only my milk*) till the age of 6 months. She, also advised me on how to avoid getting pregnant immediately, and *told me 'WHAT' those were*.

Money is what seems to drive families like mine to the hospitals, but I guess with such wonderful changes happening, our motives are also changing! When I look back, everyone in the hospital, from the highest to the lowest staff, was involved in making my pregnancy the best experience of my life. But I wonder who do I link all this to? Seema di's smile?