# Maya – 'I control my money'

## Maya, when she first came to Swaasthya

*"I knew so little about my body, and almost nothing about sex and reproduction.."*

**Year joined Swaasthya:** 2001
**Age then**: 18 years
**Education then** : 10th class Left school because of problems at home; had to look after the household front and my sisters and brother.
**Family background**: mother was a vegetable vendor; papa was a *mistry* (mason), but used to keep unwell most of the time, so hardly went to work. I had one elder sister, five younger sisters, and one younger brother.
**How I joined Swaasthya**: the *didis* came home and used to advice us on issues and asked us to come for meetings. So I went.
**Programmes I attended**: weekly meetings, SBM, and other special programmes they had from time to time.
**Attended Programmes till:** 2002
**Stopped because:** I got married and went away.

## Choosing contraceptionAreas of Influence

I knew spacing was a decision I had to take early on, so I told my husband to use condoms. But he used to get irritation with it. Then I began using Mala D (contraceptive tablet), but it used to cause excessive bleeding. So we consulted a doctor, and he told us to use 'Choice' (another brand of contraceptive tablets). This suits us both and we are happy with our choice. From where I come, very few couples would have gone to the doctor to discuss such an issue. It is just that I learnt about all these things, and know how important they are in a sexual relationship. And I was able to discuss all this with my husband and put my point of view across – that's another thing I picked up there.

## Period Cleanliness

Something that was really useful for me was what they told me about the menstrual cycle. My mother was traditional in her way of thinking and told us to use cloth. So we used cloth. It used to get really dirty with repeated use. I had to hang out mine after washing it. So there was this stained dirty cloth out to dry. Everybody would get to know that I have my period. When I was using it, the cloth would feel either too wet, or dry and hard, and I used to feel repulsed. I could never fix it properly… it would not soak up properly, and my clothes would often get stained, embarrassing me so often.

Once when I had my period, I had to go the market. I was using a synthetic cloth. I was finding it difficult to walk, and the cloth was irritating me a lot, causing much itching. At one point it sort of slipped and almost came off. I abandoned my market trip and somehow made it back home. It was traumatizing. I had joined up Swaasthya recently then, and I asked the *didi* there what I should do about this problem. She told me never to use any synthetic cloth; to use only coloured, (and not white, because they are difficult to clean) soft, cotton cloth. And they taught me to how to keep the cloth in place with safety pins. And that's what I did till I got married. Made my life so much easier. Now I use sanitary napkins…they told us about those too. I dispose of it in a dustbin, wrapped up in paper. Before I got to know all this, each period was an ordeal. But now I don't even know it and my period has gone. I passed on all that I learnt to all my sisters, and *bhabhi* (sister-in-law) also. They all benefited from it. Even my mother learnt to keep clean during menstruation from me.

## Saving

They used tell us how to save money. We used have a group of about ten. We used to deposit hundred rupees each month. But because members were irregular, the group eventually broke up. At that time I used to earn working in a beauty parlour. We had a large family, papa hardly earned any money, and we were always hard up. All those meetings on the importance of steadily saving money made a huge impression on me. I learnt to save money. I put away a little every month, and managed to save up quite a bit.

When I got married, I stopped working. But I get money on festivals and occasions from relatives and my parents. I save it all up. Right now I have close to Rs 10, 000, which is a tidy sum considering that I neither earn nor get spending money from my husband. I don't spend on eating and drinking. I don't indulge in any extravagance.

Recently, papa was very ill and he needed an eye operation, and I was able to give my mother Rs. 5,000 only because I got into this habit of saving since the time I learnt the importance of it. When festivals come up, my mother can't afford to buy too many things. I am able to contribute, and she gets a new saree and clothes for my siblings at home. I save up but don't tell my husband, otherwise he takes it all and puts it in the bank in his account. Every woman should have some money of her own to spend as the need arises.

### Maya Now

*"I'll never stop saving. It has seen me through some very patchy phases of my life."*

**Age now**: 25 years
**Family now:** two children, mother in law, father in law, and 22 other members of my husband's joint family.
**What now**: housewife
**Future**: I want to re-start my painting work

***On the Swaasthya Experience***

**What part/programme had least impact**: everything was very useful
**Rates the programmes on a 1-10 scale:** 9