Rethinking Strategies for Reducing Maternal Mortality in India
By Dr Janaki Ananthakrishnan

Abstract
Maternal Mortality is a sensitive indicator of the success of the reproductive health policy of any country. Following the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994, there has been a paradigm shift in the manner in which developing countries are formulating/implementing their reproductive health policies. The focus is now on client-friendly services, as opposed to the erstwhile family–planning/target driven approach. Safe Motherhood, too, is high on national agendas, having received a boost when, in 1998, the WHO declared World Health Day as Safe Motherhood Day. India’s performance on this front has been less than satisfactory, forty years of the Maternal and Child health program notwithstanding. Currently, the maternal mortality ratio is over 500/100,000 live births. Against the background of the worldwide decline of maternal deaths over the decades, this paper seeks to examine the success stories in the Asian neighborhood, with respect to maternal mortality reduction. What was the winning formula, and how was it implemented? Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Thailand have been chosen for comparison for two reasons. Firstly, their income per capita is comparable with India; and secondly, their stage of development overall is on par. This paper will analyze the best practices in obstetric care--both routine and emergency--followed by these countries with a review of the evidence regarding their efficacy. Strategies have been sought to be applied to India which can ensure safe and accessible obstetric facilities for both rural and urban women.