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• Health Services • Life Skills Education • Healthy School Environment



The National Life Skills, Values Education & School Wellness Program

Healthy Schools Healthy India

Education is not preparation for life...
Education is life itself

- John Dewey

Submission Guidelines

- All submissions should follow the APA 7th Edition style
 - All submissions should have an abstract summarizing the main points.
 - The submission should have a clear and informative title
 - The submission should be original and should not be in the process of consideration by any other publication at the same time.
 - The submission should have rigorous and reliable information and provide a deeper level of understanding.
 - Submissions should be engaging and accessible to non-expert readers as well.
 - Submission emails must contain an inline declaration stating that the research work is the author's original work and has not been submitted elsewhere for publication.
 - Initial acceptance of any submission does not guarantee publication. The editorial board shall do the final selection.
 - If necessary, the editors may edit the manuscript in order to maintain uniformity of presentation and to enhance readability.
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 6. Viewpoint: These should be experience-based views and opinions on debatable or controversial issues that affect the profession. The author should have sufficient, credible experience on the subject. The word limit is 3000 words.

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2. Brief Research Communication: These manuscripts should contain short reports of original studies or evaluations and service-oriented research which points towards a potential area of scientific research or unique first-time reports. The word limit is 1500 words and an abstract (structured format) of not more than 150 words.
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9. **My Voice:** In this section multiple perspectives are provided by patients, caregivers and paraprofessionals. It should encompass how it feels to face a difficult diagnosis and what this does to relationships and the quality of life. Personal narratives, if used in this section, should have relevance to general applications or policies. The word limit is 1000 words.
10. **Book/ Movie reviews:** Reviews of books or movies relevant to school mental health and wellbeing may also be submitted. The word limit is 1000 words.
11. **Announcements:** Information regarding conferences, meetings, courses, awards and other items likely to be of interest to readers should be submitted with the name and address of the person from whom additional information can be obtained (up to 100 words).

Faculty members are invited to be the guest editors of the journal on a theme relevant to school health and wellbeing.

The Manuscripts for publication in the peer-reviewed and refereed Indian Journal of School Health and Wellbeing (IJSHW) are to be submitted via e-mail to journal@expressionsindia.org along with a copy of the email to the editor.

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Message from the Editors

The act of raising a child has varied implications in different contexts and times. In an industrialized society and with the influence of modernity, child rearing is largely visualized as the responsibility of a family with nuclear set-up comprising of parents and a child or children. However, there are several variations in this modern childcare providing structure. There are families with a single parent, joint families, same sex families, children living with their grandparents etc. Whatever be the set-up, the experience of raising a child is seldom a very smooth process. There are many emotions that caregivers go through while they raise a child. It would not be incorrect to say that raising a child is akin to undertaking a long journey where the child and caretaker grow every day. Unlike the images depicted in popular media, parenting, or caring for a child can be a very emotionally exhausting process since it includes many unexpected challenges. First, the dependence of human infant places an enormous demand on the caretaker to apprehend the needs on the child and provide for these needs. Most of the time, providing for the needs of a child may mean compromising on one's own goals in life. A caretaker can experience several conflicting feeling, anxieties and frustrations in the process.

Second, the caretakers are themselves placed in a web of social relationships. They are dealing with several trials including demands of their workplace, their families, or their own desires while taking care of a child. These several demands may be at cross-purpose with one another. Third, there are several different approaches to raising a child and there is no one prescribed way. In absence of a set pattern, a parent may experience self-doubt and inadequacy while performing their role as a caretaker.

In this edition of the journal, we propose to explore the meaning of being a parent and a caregiver as it unfolds in the everyday experiences of a person. Parenting can mean different things to different people as they play a role which is shaped by their unique circumstances, their own expectations and their past experiences. We endeavor to reach the inner world of a care provider who is raising children between the age group of 1 to 7 years.

We were happy to receive papers that covered wide range of issues about parenting. The various papers in this issue bring out the complexity and wide array of issues that parents address in the process of raising a child. These issues include awareness related to sexuality, social expectations, adoption and coming to terms with the challenges of a child. The first paper in this journal brings out the world of a parent who struggled to come to terms with a child who does not conform to the socially constructed gender binaries. The second paper raises intergenerational change pertaining to involvement of fathers in the process of raising a child. The third paper is the journey of a mother who recounts that how goals of a parent keep changing as the child keep growing. The fifth paper presents the struggles of a mother to find answers related to gender and sexuality along with her son. The sixth paper includes the experiences of a mother who felt that she evolved in the process of raising her child.

The fourth and seventh paper are interviews taken with two mothers who were dealing with behavioral issues among their respective children. The eighth paper presents the inner dialogue of a father who despite his active involvement as a parent becomes aware of the close bond between a mother and daughter. He chooses to remain a silent spectator of this special bond and supports his wife whenever the need arises. The ninth paper documents the journey of a mother

who shares that even the awareness of various theoretical frameworks related to child development does not prepare one for becoming a mother. The tenth paper is a man's voice about co-parenting a sibling due to the huge age gap between them. The eleventh paper presents an educated mother's struggles to understand herself as she facilitates the identity development of her child. I am sure these eleven papers will open up a dialogue among scholar community and other about the centrality of lived experiences in understanding parenting.

Dr Vishakha Kumar

Message from the Patrons

It is a matter of great happiness to note that the latest issue of the Indian Journal of School Health & Wellbeing published by the Expressions India is being released. It is a well known fact that Research publications and Journals in particular are the most authentic sources of verified knowledge and experiences. The sharing of such knowledge and experiences not only amongst the Researchers, Scientists, Policy Planners and Implementers, but also the Activists working in the concerned area and persons having special interest in that area benefits all. It is our privilege to reiterate that the Expressions India has been doing pioneering work since long, in the field of Health Education under its banner of “Holistic Health and School Wellness Programme” to enable the school education and teachers holistic facilitation in realizing the goal of Health Education in Schools. The present publication is a momentous indicator of this initiative.

The major bottleneck in the way of achieving the objective of Health Education has been the particularistic conceptualization of its transaction process. The goal of development of holistic health and wellbeing of young learners cannot be attained by making them gather certain information and rote-learn those. It can be attained only by a transaction process focused on experiential co-scholastic methodology that ensures active participation of learners and substantially contribute to the development of life skills enabling young children to manage their lives more competently and grow as truly empowered human resource of the nation and human society at large. To facilitate this process it is very critical to encourage and empower the teachers, so that they act like facilitators and mentors.

The formal school education system need to look towards interacting and taking the support from the initiatives like the one taken by Expressions India under its National Life Skills Education & School Wellness Programme aimed at realizing the Goal of “HEALTHY SCHOOL.....HEALTHY INDIA”. It is pertinent to state that the Schools and other educational institutions that have been associated with such endeavours have strongly felt the need for such programs to be adopted by all schools including Higher Education System.

It is in this context the Journal of School Health has potential to reinforce the process of realizing the vision of Health Promoting Schools getting integrated into the education system in India. We are more than confident that the present issue of the Journal will strengthen this grand endeavour and empower all who are creatively engaged in the promotion of Health Education in Schools. With immense pleasure we would like to express our gratitude for Advisory group, Editorial Board and Members of the Executive Editorial Committee for their valuable contribution, ungrudging cooperation and keen interest and also for making available the benefits of their rich experiences and knowledge.

“If there is will, there is way, and if the will is reinforced by enlightened path-breakers, the way would lead to the destination at the earliest “.

Dr. Jitendra Nagpal, M.D., D.N.B.

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Towards Understanding the Challenges of Parenting a Transgender Child

Dr Shivani Arora

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Abstract

Parenting a gender diverse child who does not subscribe to the socially accepted gender binary and is considered anormative is not an easy task. As a child transitions into their preferred gender, it is a phase of evolution for the parent too. They go through the stages of guilt, social intimidation and denial before adjusting to the new gender reality of their child. They have to traverse through the deep, socially ingrained norms and personal limitations like lack of awareness and correct information. Renegotiating their way into affirmative parenting in order to provide unconditional acceptance to the transgender child and sustain them through their journey is a challenging task

Introduction

Growing up in a family with two male siblings, Neela, (6 years old) was always interested in playing football rather than playing with jewellery items and dolls. She preferred tool kits and racing cars over dolls and tea sets and so no one in her family found it unusual. She played only with boys and befriended boys more than girls. From very early in life, she persistently displayed a dislike for anything feminine; toys, dresses, mannerisms, gestures etc. In her mind, she was also a boy just like her two brothers and therefore used he/him as the choice of pronoun while addressing herself. When pushed by her parents, she would often reply that she was a boy who looked like a girl.

Her parents felt that Neela was going through a phase where she followed everything her brothers did. They were not worried about Neela's masculine gender expression, communicated through clothing, hairstyle and behaviour^[1] because they believed it to be temporary phase. They felt that their daughter was being a tomboy. Neela felt like a misfit in an all girls' school and begged her parents to send her to the same school as her brothers. Neela's gender dysphoria became public during a big party organized by her parents for her sixth birthday. A special cake was ordered and a beautiful dress was bought for Neela for the big day. But Neela was so angry with her parents for organizing a girl's birthday party. She was so hurt that she tore the pink dress and locked herself in a room, refusing to come out. Her parents were visibly embarrassed. She was

slapped by her father. Stricter measures followed and she was forced to appropriate feminine mannerisms. It was clear to her that her family rejected her feelings. No one understood her plight.

The above given vignette provides a preview into the life of a transgender (FtM) child who was born as a girl but identifies as a boy. The vignette highlights the gender dysphoria or the acute discomfort arising out from the incompatibility between the biologically assigned gender and the gender experienced by the child (Fisk,1974). Parenting a transgender child is a taxing process since it involves not only catering to the special needs of a child but also entails attitude reconstruction both at the levels of society and self for the parent or the caregiver.

Parenting may be defined as the process of raising children as independent, competent and healthy individuals into adulthood who are capable of positively contributing to the society. The process of parenting is a constantly evolving series of progressive behaviours with which parents prepare their children to develop life skills and become capable of managing potential challenges. It is a culturally specific phenomenon, customised according to one's socio-psychological and emotional needs, and individual parenting styles thereby making it a herculean task.

The quality of care provided by a parent has a significant impact on the physiological, socio-psychological and emotional development of a child. Even as they move into adulthood, their

childhood experiences are responsible for shaping our personalities and behaviour (Freud, 1922). Because of the enormous amount of conscientiousness invested into it, parenting without a doubt comes with a set of strong expectations and socio-cultural norms. A gender diverse child who does not subscribe to the socially accepted gender binary is considered anormative.

This unacceptability forced upon the transgender by an intolerant and unfair society ranges from discrimination and abuse to denial of fundamental human rights and exclusion. Herein comes the role of the family which can offer a support system to buffer the negative social interactions and stigmatisation faced by the gender diverse individual. There is sufficient research which indicates that strong and robust interpersonal relationships within the family help in providing support and offer a psychological buffer to help children develop into capable and healthy individuals, confident of facing potential challenges. Being firmly rooted into the family instils a sense of security and psychological well-being. (Ryan et al, 2010; McConnell et al, 2016) Healthy parental bonding is known to encourage resilience in non-binary children. On the other hand, dysfunctional family dynamics lead to development of poor self-esteem and feelings of helplessness in gender diverse children. (Olson et al 2016; Umberson & Montez, 2010)

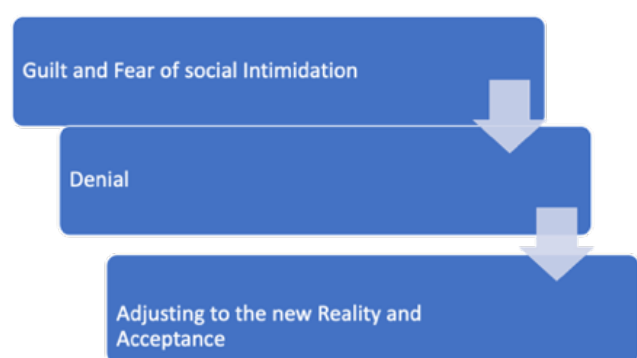
Psycho-Emotional Stages of parenting a transgender child

Embracing a child who identifies as transgender is a tough row to hoe. Ironically the child is ready and prepared to embark upon a new gender creative journey but the parents are not. Parents or caregivers undergo a profound sense of loss and grief upon losing their son or daughter as they knew it. They also experience sadness for losing an imagined but curated future for their child. They are apprehensive and fear social stigma and marginalization which their child would most likely be subjected to.

Parents are unforgiving to themselves for not being able to raise a “normal” child and are overwhelmed with this guilt. Social Intimidation

in terms of transphobic attitude of the mainstream society and the prejudice faced by the persons of transgender community adds to the fear of parents with children who identify as transgender. They are afraid of the precarious life which comes along with their gender declaration. To cope with this guilt and anxiety inducing life situation, they refuse to acknowledge the affirmed gender of their child and thus end up in denial of reality. Parents need to navigate through their felt emotions and reactions and come to terms with accepting the gender variant child. Transgender support groups and gender counselling for the parents of trans children helps them overcome their apprehensions and misconceptions. An open communication and unconditional positive regard for the child who is exploring their affirmed gender is of utmost importance. Parents who are able to provide validation to the child's gender identity act as the biggest source of support for the transgender child to live authentically. There is sufficient research to imply that children who receive warm and loving relationships at home fare better with mental health issues and experience psychological hardiness. (Aranbus, 2018; Ehrensaft, 2011; Gray et al, 2016; Norwood, 2012)

Fig 1: Psycho-Emotional Stages of parenting a transgender child (Developed by the researcher)



Advocating for Transgender children

DSM V has de-pathologized the non-conforming gender identities. Gender Dysphoria, thus can be operationally defined as a marked incongruence between one's perceived gender and gender assigned at birth.

We must at this point, understand that gender variance is not a disease. It is a deviation from

the pre-existing, heteronormative model of gender binary that the society approves. Till the time transgenders are seen through the disease framework, they will continue to suffer discrimination, abuse and stigmatization.

It is imperative that parents with gender diverse children connect with other families having similar composition. This will not only end their isolation and provide a support network but also help in educating other parents of gender non-conforming children to share their lived experiences and offer emotional scaffolds. Community Outreach programs can help to support and cater to the special needs of parents with transgender children. Online platforms, engagement with social media can be used to create a narrative and serve as avenue for providing specialized services and resources.

Conclusion

Parents of a transgender child are fearful of their child being discriminated and stigmatised by the mainstream society and hence reject the perceived gender of the child. Lack of parental and familial support adds to the distress and helplessness felt by the child.

Therefore, it is imperative that parents rise above their fears and pay attention to the needs of their child. Affirmative parenting which recognizes the expressed gender, understands the gender dysphoria experienced by the child and offers unconditional love and support to the gender diverse child is a pre-requisite to the creation of an environment where differences are celebrated and not rejected.

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<https://www.apadivisions.org/division-44/resources/advocacy/transgender-children.pdf>

Child is the Father of a Man

Mr Udayan Jain
Lawyer

Abstract

From my time as a child where my father didn't ever remember the class I was studying in to my time as a parent where I was sitting in my son's classes more than he was, is quite a generational leap and not a very smooth one at that, but a huge learning nevertheless. My child has helped me evolve as a parent and as a person that I am and that I will be. The journey as a parent is actually the destination at each step since we discover the joys, frustrations and innovations required to cope with the new age parenthood. Welcome to my journey as a new born parent.

I belong to a generation where the involvement of fathers in the child rearing was so limited that each time in a family gathering if someone asked my father about the class in which his children were studying, he had to call out to one of us to confirm. From there to becoming a father in a day and age where the level of involvement of fathers in child rearing is virtually in competition with mothers, is a great generational leap. I'm a father of a 7 year old boy and these last 7 years, as far as being a father is concerned, have been like a new life all together.

Child is the father of Man – William Wordsworth had used this expression in his famous poem 'The Rainbow', the expression became more famous than the poem itself. I have a different take on the interpretation from what Mr. Wordsworth used it for. I feel that there are so many emotions, aspirations and situations that new parents face when a child enters their life that it's like a new birth for them too. Also, parents re-live the childhood a second time along with their child. The real meaning of being a parent only dawns when one becomes one. Did that change anything for me? Well, it made me revisit every concept of life, made me a more realized soul for sure, I realized my limitations and also my limitlessness.

I've enjoyed my parenthood the maximum any parent can. I've tried being as hands on as I could be. At each step I was aware of the food that my child had to be fed, health issues he faced, medicines to be given, time he woke up at night and how much milk would have to be fed to him. I even enjoyed making milk for him whenever he woke up as a new born in the

middle of the night. Till he was one year old, he would wake up several times each night and we had to feed him, change his nappies, play with him or generally pet him back to sleep. It wasn't easy and used to be very frustrating especially after a tough day at work or if there's a tough day ahead but the love for your child and the sense of duty as a parent is more overpowering than anything else. We were told things would change when he would turn one and they did change dramatically because he started to sleep through the night very soon and so could we. But the struggles of each stage are different and more complex than the previous one, so are the frustrations and joys. I've enjoyed galloping around my apartment complex with my son on my back giggling uncontrollably, requesting the horse to go faster and for one more round. I've enjoyed playing hide and seek with him, where every time he would hide, he would call out to make things easier for me and if we were playing in a large group then too, he would let the seeker also know where we were hiding, just so the seeker knows that he is hiding. I've immensely enjoyed wrestling with him where he wins every time and sometimes, as a concession, he lets me win too. I've most thoroughly enjoyed discovering children's literature which I hadn't read when I was a child. I am amazed to see what a wonderful treasure it is and how enjoyable and profound each of those books is. Now I enjoy making pan cakes for him, read out at night to him and go out for a treat with him. I play with my child more as a friend, but that doesn't always take away the ego of being a parent, to whom the child should listen and comply. Despite the decision to not make our

child a compliant child, I used to frequently be frustrated at his dissents and challenge to my authority. I've had few emotional outbursts as a result of that, even when he was a mere toddler, where I ended up shouting at him. I regret that a lot but I realized that I was a new parent and despite the decision of bringing him up in a certain way, I was much trapped in a mould of my own upbringing, the social conditioning, societal expectations and certain image of a father.

Despite being in a joint family set up, which has its own advantages, I have realized that the struggles and joys of being a parent are very individualistic. What sort of a person you want your child to be, what sort of life, discipline and concessions you want to give your child are ultimately the decisions which rest with parents alone, especially if you wish to remain involved in the child rearing. Being a parent makes one reflect upon the person you are, the life you've had, the values you have, influences that have been upon you and whether you would like your child to grow up any differently from what you've become. These are deeper and profound issues which only a parent has to reflect upon and confront. There are influences which would prevail upon the child in Indian family set up, which you can't do much about but there are influences and pressures which you would have to withstand and shield your child from, those you have to filter and decide as parents. I credit my involvement, my enriched experiences to the discussions I've had with my wife about each aspect of parenthood. Her background in psychology and education helps us lay every aspect relating to child rearing thread bare and pick up the best we can. I may still not be perfect but I've enjoyed the experience much more than I would have had I not been so involved as a parent.

Also, as parents we tend to doubt what we are doing, get worried if rather than doing any good in bringing up the child the way we've decided to, we may be causing more damage to the child in some way. Child rearing at some level is full of experiments, these are all experiments that one does during the course of bringing up a

child. But such doubts and worries get answered through the results that we see in our child's behavior on account of such experiments. It's also good to find likeminded parents and see what they do, their struggles, growth trajectory of children of the same age group. Discussion over issues with other parents also help put doubts in the mind to rest. Inputs from our own family members and parents also help but at the end of the day one must have faith and belief in one's own decisions and go with the flow.

The biggest challenge however which no previous generation has ever faced has been on account of Covid-19 Pandemic. Since March 2002 schools have been closed and for the first time, we have all realized the importance of school as a space not just for kids but for parents as well. We have all talked about schools being temples of learning and the important role it plays in shaping a child's future but never before did we realize that school time is the time which lets kids do peer interaction, which is so important for their growth and development and also for sanity of parents since that time away at school gives us time to pursue our life tasks, for which we should eternally be grateful to schools. To keep a child of 3-7 years engaged in smaller family units with no other kids around is a task which is difficult to manage and also not very healthy for the child on account of too much adult interaction. There have been several tomes already written on the ill effects of online education on children but there hasn't been much investigation on the effects which online schooling has had on the parents. In our house the ill effect of it came to such a head that we decided to discontinue the online schooling of our son and take up home schooling instead. I was constantly not just losing my cool but I was not able to adjust to the fact that a child who is otherwise very bright was not interested in online classes at all. The effort which as parents we were putting in was immense, it was bound to take its toll. Children who would usually be in school for 5-6 hours were now with parents all the time, constantly vying for attention. Teachers who would otherwise be responsible for children now needed full time cooperation of parents in not just making kids sit in the classes but to help

them in their learning, to gather material for arts, craft and project classes, to upload images of work done in class and homework done later. Those classes which required maximum efforts for parents to gather material were the classes which were most enjoyable for kids but those took the maximum toll on all working parents. My son was not just getting disinterested in the classes but he was losing interest in every other learning process which he otherwise enjoyed, including art and craft. Several times we heard one or the other parent losing their cool during the classes and I'm sure we were also heard

losing it some of the times. Since the time we have stopped online classes, there is not just peace in the family but interest of my child in everything is back to where it was.

In these last seven years, my child has grown taller, learnt a lot of things and is picking up fast but so am I. I have lived a second childhood, have also come a long way from what I was, to what I am as a parent and as a person. Therefore, for me my son is the father of the Man that I am and that I am going to be.

Retreating Whimper of a Chihuahua Mom: The Saga of my First Seven Years as a Parent

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Teacher

Abstract

In this paper I share my experiences of the first seven years and beyond, as a parent. I have divided my paper into three segments where in the first segment I talk about the initial three years of parenting, my experiences and learning here helped me pace myself for this journey. In the second section, I talk of being a parent to a four-to-six-year-old. The last segment talks about the more recent past as well as my present time as a parent. For each segment, I highlight how my experiences with my child defined and redefined my parenting style and practices. Also, I try to emphasize that parenting is a fluid exercise with continuous goal setting, strategic withdrawal as well as role reversals that cannot be clearly put within set boundaries. Overall, I have taken a humorous stance to talk about this unique experience that is life-changing in more ways than one.

The liberty to choose is the biggest of all freedoms. Or so I believed and lived by till I became a parent. I chose to spend my twenties in academic pursuits, procrastinating marriage for the same. I chose to marry at the ripe old age of thirty-two, I chose the person I married, for various obvious and not so obvious reasons, including his genetic pool. Six months into the matrimony, I chose to go for procreation (of course, my spouse was an equal and active participant in this one). During my pregnancy, I chose to go for an elective cesarian. All these were well analyzed and thought-out choices, putting enough effort into the decision making. I had a baby, and I chose its name. That's pretty much the last time I exercised my right and liberty to choose, my free will, without any sense of self-doubt.

Birth to Three

Parenting is an overwhelming thing for sure. Right from the moment one discovers the that one is pregnant, more importantly, right from the moment the world discovers that you are expecting; it is a full-blown circus. Right from my parents to the nosy aunties of the neighborhood, for that matter, even my much-younger, never married, obviously never-pregnant cousins had advice for me! Though I had reasonable doubts about my role as a parent, but I always had a very clear concept of what I will not be as a parent, I definitely didn't want my baby to turn out like me. I have been a very demanding, problem child so my parents'

parenting style was out of question. They, most definitely, did it all wrong. I believed that I am going to go for a very democratic parenting, having my child participate in all the decisions concerning him. From early on, for nearly all things and decisions, I started looking for non-verbal cues to check if he liked or disliked something, if his 'vote' was there or not. So, if he didn't like Three Little Pigs but did seem more engaged and happier with Hansel and Gretel, then it was time to tell him about wicked stepmoms and evil witches. Well, he 'voted' for it, right? Bathing in the morning didn't seem to bring as much 'joy' as did bedtime baths, so night bathers we became as we had a 'voice vote' for that. Then, somewhere in the initial days of my journey I read a then-popular book 'Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother' by Amy Chua. It was evidently an empowering experience for me, I took notes and had a broad framework of what all I will definitely not do as a parent. Also, it was the time that the seeds of doubt in myself as a parent were sown in -maybe I am being too liberal as a parent? Maybe I was taking this democratic parenting a bit too far? Maybe that's not what Alfred Adler meant? Maybe Ms. Chua knows what she is talking about, after all Chinese kids are so gifted, well behaved, and academically brilliant? So, should I next be turning to Pavlov's dog for inspiration or Harlow's monkeys? Or maybe, I should get a Bobo doll like Bandura? Or was Freud correct about his stages all along? These and many more

were the tumultuous array of thoughts in my head. You see, my battles were all internal. By this time, I did not have anyone at home questioning me about my job as a parent, no nosy mother-in-law, no interfering husband (for reasons unknown to me, he believed in me, still does), none of the colleagues and friends questioning me about what I was doing. People around me believed that I knew what I was doing and was apparently executing this 'grand parenting plan' to a T. Whereas here I was, doubting and second guessing myself at every step.

Another significant and overwhelming feeling that took over around this time was the loss of the sense of self and ownership. In those initial years, it seemed to me that my child owned me, completely. He decided when I sleep and wake up, if and when I go out for a drive, even my bathroom breaks were at his beck and call. I couldn't and wouldn't do or think of anything that didn't include the little one. Of course, I was very lucky to have enough help to give me ample space and time (especially my child's grandparents who were totally hand-on), and it was not a diktat from above and nobody asked me to follow this line of thought, definitely not my child but there it was. I lost a sense of control and decision making, I let go, completely. My weight spiraled out of control (I am still struggling with it); it was an emotionally draining time for me. I don't know if I was depressed, post-partum but it didn't feel so, and I never consulted a doctor. I was, most certainly, very happy and grateful. I guess, I was culturally trained to be a mother like that, not consciously, but at a very subconscious, subtle level. Books, television, movies, advertisements, family, society, all have been putting up mothers on this pedestal forever and in my quest of doing it right, I think I was doing it all wrong.

Four to Six

The first three years of me as a parent had definitely set in a sense of deep-seated doubt about my style of parenting. At every step my offspring set out to challenge, question, and cancel me. My four-year-old was proving to be my arch nemesis. At so many levels, he was

turning into a mini-me and I wasn't too pleased about it. Around this time, we moved continents and it was the best thing that happened to my parenting and me. I put my child in a Montessori play group where he thrived. Our lives there exposed both of us to a culture of novel experiences, way different from what we had been used to. All three of us, my child, my partner, and I were ready and receptive for this welcome change. Every day, I could literally feel that a change of place as well as our efforts towards deliberately putting ourselves out there were doing us plenty good. Our everyday experiences were redefining our relationship as a parent and child. There was a sense of freedom that accompanied my parenting skills now. I felt that while in India, I had set up a model of parenting for myself, governed by my personal experiences as well as my limited interaction with other mothers, which I was finding harder and harder to stand by. In US, I was exposed to so many different kinds of parents, a huge variety of parenting styles and some of which my old self would have been left scandalized by the 'utter disastrous things passing off for parenting'. To be fair, I realized an essential fact that parenting is not what my books will teach me, it is definitely not the list of dos, don'ts and 'never will I ever' that I had prepared in my head, rather parenting is what works practically for each family. I didn't feel the need any more to fake it till I make it to the list of 'best-possible parents', a list which, again, existed in my head only. 'To each one his own' became my mantra. What works for my neighbor, or my cousin, most definitely doesn't work for me, but that doesn't make either of them a bad parent. Over the years, I became less judgmental and more forgiving towards myself. This has been an emancipating experience and has brought about an ease of being myself even while being a parent. If I messed up today, well, life happens, and tomorrow is another day.

Seven and Beyond

Soon after his seventh birthday, my much larger bundle of joy told me that 'Death Metal' is his favorite genre of rock music. This was a watershed moment for me in more ways than

one. First, we don't listen to rock music at our home (my partner does, sometimes, and always using headphones, still, it's his fault!); secondly, I didn't know that he knew the meaning of the word 'genre' (he knew, I checked and quizzed him). Lastly and most importantly, we hadn't yet discussed existential questions regarding life and death. It was this moment that dawned the reality our family dynamics to me. Whatever I knew, whatever I rigorously trained for, whatever I believed in, was futile. It wasn't about me anymore. For a person who consciously decided to embark on this journey of parenthood, I was full of ideas and theories regarding what kind of parent I will raise myself to be. Oh no, I never thought I was raising a child, the child simply reflects all that I am as a parent. Right? That's how it works? 'No Mam, it doesn't'- my little, pink, squeamish bundle told me, early on and has been repeating it day in and day out.

Now, we, my child and I, have made a paradigm shift from democratic parenting to enlightened leadership, with him providing the quintessential leadership. He directs this parent child equation and I hope and pray he does this well. This is an ever-changing dynamic, parenting is fluid, with enough flexibility and sometimes it entails a struggle for power and authority. Honestly, I am not sure if I can define our relationship in words anymore. The only thing I am certain about now is that I love him and as he charts the course of his destiny, I fervently hope that I prove to be a parent who loved her child well. That's the only expectation I have from myself-to love my child well and to love him enough.

Glimpses of the Inner World of a Toddler

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Abstract

This paper is a recollection of the moments in which we, as parents, could glimpse the rich inner world of our toddler son Advait. We reflect on his engagement with animals, birds, nature, music, dance, language, and food. We also share an account of his autonomy, self-assurance, metacognition, and ‘fear of missing out. Though we don’t position ourselves as academics, psychologists, and educators in this writing, our parenting experiences note that perhaps we give children very little credit for their intellectual, emotional, and kinaesthetic capabilities in our theories and practice. Therefore, possibly there is a need to expand and even radically re-envision our theories of child development to account for these rich inner lives of children.

We are privileged parents to a two-year-old bright and curious toddler. We call him Advait. In this paper, we write about the moments where we could get a glimpse into the rich inner life of Advait as parents. This spontaneous urge to write about his inner life comes from his ongoing excitement about animals. We often take Advait to gardens where he enjoys looking at birds, squirrels, dogs, peacocks, trees, flowers, fountains, and ponds. He usually pays attention to what other people, particularly children, are doing. But, it is animals and birds that capture his attention the most. His excitement and happiness in these moments fill us with joy as parents. Therefore, as we write this narration, we position ourselves more as delighted and wonderstruck parents and not as scholars, researchers, and educators who primarily examine children’s experiences through theories and concepts.

Even as a few months old baby confined at home during the pandemic, Advait would look intently at the pigeons, crows, and dogs. As soon as we started stepping out with him when he was about 5-6 months old, he took a fancy for squirrels, eagles, sparrows, and parrots. Being out on sunny winter mornings in gardens, he enjoyed tracing the flights of birds, their chirping and singing. He keenly observed the colourful flowers in the parks and started tracing the movement of squirrels on the trees and in the grass. As soon as he turned a year old and could walk, he started chasing butterflies and running after pigeons and squirrels. In these moments, he

is so immersed in the experience that he does not care about mosquitoes or uneven ground, of which he is otherwise acutely aware. It is this absorption in-the-moment that captures our attention. He is also fascinated that many animals and birds in the park drink water from the same pond and eat from the same bowl. He has not yet seen animals killing or eating each other.

Dogs have a special place in Advait’s life. He calls them ‘dodo’. He started playing with a puppy named Sky when he was about two months old, and Sky was a few weeks old. His very first plush toy was a puppy he identified as Dodo. Later, he played with many more full-grown dogs at relatives’ homes and parks. He shares a level of comfort with dogs to the extent that he finds the presence of dogs comforting in an otherwise unfamiliar home. He thinks of dogs as his friends and often orders them around with great confidence. Once he saw two dogs fighting in Sunder Nursery, a pet-friendly park in Delhi. He immediately started arbitrating the tussle by ordering both the dogs to shut up and sit down. However, soon he understood that the dogs were in no mood to stop, and he retreated to the safety of his pram. As he started getting older, he realised that not all dogs are equally friendly, and therefore, he proceeds with caution now. But, we have observed that Advait’s response does not stem from fear. Instead, he navigates the unfamiliar with caution without losing his curiosity and sense of wonder. His love for dogs and other animals and birds became evident on a

trip we took to a lakeside resort in the foothills of the Himalayas when he was about a year and four months old. There were many dogs in the Resort, and he loved spending time around these dogs to the point where he exclusively wanted to stay outdoors. He paid particular attention to the different kinds of chirping and tried locating the birds on trees. In addition, he would be on a constant lookout for cows and dogs on the roads during our travels.

He has recently been fascinated with peacocks, and a nearby park, where peacocks are in abundance, is his favourite place for an outing. Before he saw peacocks in real, he was vaguely familiar with peacocks through a book with many colourful drawings of peacocks. He had his first glimpse of a peacock when he was about one and a half years old. He spotted a peacock in the bushes on his outing to Sunder Nursery. On his next visit to the same place a few days later, he could see peacocks moving around at leisure. He was thrilled, to say the least. He remembered the encounter for many days and continued recounting the experience to everyone at home. He would especially look out for peacocks on all subsequent visits and be disappointed if he did not spot them. Suddenly, the dogs and squirrels became less fascinating for Advait. Perhaps, it was due to the novelty and beauty of peacocks. His interest was further piqued when we discovered another park where peacocks and peahens are abundant. They are spotted easily, running around, sometimes dancing, or perched on trees. Ever hopeful, Advait enjoys running behind these peacocks and peahens as they fly or run away each time. Maybe running toward these creatures gives him some sense of agency and excitement. He often collects the fallen feathers of peahens with the hope of finding a fallen feather of a peacock one of these days. His perseverance in these moments amazes us as parents.

Music, and songs too, capture Advait's imagination in a big way. Initially, we would sing lullabies and songs to him on the swing at home. This was his favourite place to fall asleep. Then, as he grew about a year old and started picking up words and tunes, he began humming

with us. Gradually, he started singing with us and by himself. As he is about two years old now, he remembers and identifies many lullabies, songs, and rhymes we sing to and with him in English and Hindi. Now, for a couple of months at least, he demands the particular piece he would like to be sung or played at a given moment. Then, he readily joins us in singing that song to him. Interestingly, he often corrects himself, his grandparents, and us on the specific tune, pronunciation of words and even the lyrics of the songs that he likes. Moreover, he sometimes stops and corrects us when we, by chance or intentionally, replace a word with another. We wonder if this is a demonstration of his metacognitive abilities.

Advait is big on dancing too. For him, mostly, it is an expression of his happiness and excitement. While he would move to the tunes of music as a baby, he danced for the first time with others when he was about eight months old. On the occasion of a party, we organised to celebrate his birth. He keenly observed what others were doing around him and then started grooving to the tempo of the music. He also has some favourite songs that he likes dancing too. In the last month, he sometimes spontaneously breaks out into a specific sequence of steps with great enthusiasm, and we all, including Advait, identify it as 'victory dance'. The act of naming something seems vital to Advait as perhaps that concretises the experience as something special in his imagination and experience.

Likewise, concerning food, he remembers the names of the dishes, fruits, or vegetables he likes. Croissant and pizza are two such dishes that he finds particularly fascinating. These are the dishes he likes naming when someone asks him about what he ate, even when he has not eaten either. Maybe he remembers and reminisces on the times when he ate these dishes with us on an outing. Maybe remembering these times give him joy. It is incredible for us also to see him assert his autonomy and choice while we feed him every day. He precisely states the items he would like to eat from his plate. He is particular about every bite he eats and wants the precise combination he has specified. He keenly

investigates the content of every spoon to make sure it is as per his specification before eating it. He swings and sways whenever he enjoys a particular food and says ‘achha!’ to convey his delight. Likewise, he had begun to express his distaste and dislike for food items by spitting them out and stating that ‘it is not achha’. His sense of like and dislike and pleasure and displeasure is not just limited to food. A couple of months back, he touched the garment’s fabric, felt its texture and noted that it was “bahut achha”. These instances make us think that probably we don’t pay enough attention to this pure sensual pleasure of eating, touching or drinking something. Advait, on the other hand, is closely engaging the world through his senses and seems to be immersed in the delight these experiences bring.

Another such sensual experience for Advait is playing with water. These days, he finds different ways to be in the water—turning on the taps, having a bath multiple times a day, watering plants on the terrace in the evening or drinking water from every bottle at home. He likes getting his clothes wet, and perhaps, he also enjoys the touch and feel of water. He would spend a lot of time playing in his bathtub, trying to catch water in his hands. Even before he turned a year old, we discovered his fascination with water bodies. As a baby, he liked dipping his feet in the pond. He is usually delighted around a water body where he can spot ducks, swans, and birds. He is especially interested in fountains and gets sad at the sight of a non-functional fountain. The first trip we took with Advait was to a lakeside resort, and he had a great time. We plan to repeat the visit soon, as he is a little older now, and he may be able to enjoy it in many more ways now.

Another interesting phenomenon that we have witnessed with Advait is his tendency to stay in the mid of action and excitement. We observed this for the first time when he was barely six months old. During Diwali celebrations at home, when the extended family and friends would stay back till late, Advait would not sleep despite being exhausted. He would cry when we tried putting him to bed. He wanted to be with

everyone even when he was dozing off, and in fact, he would find ways to stay awake until everyone had gone off to sleep. The same tendency continues, as the only way to put him to bed is first to assure him that everyone at home has gone off to sleep. The closest possible explanation for this to our mind is Advait having something like a ‘fear of missing out’ (FOMO) on the excitement, play and stimulation that life has to offer in any given moment. Naturally, he is fond of celebrations and family get-togethers and likes recounting these events later in the form of stories. These recounting and narrations have taken the shape of learning moments for us. He has learnt many new words and expressions based on such experiences through the stories we tell him. The story of his visit to the zoo and the peacock park seems to be his favourite by far.

We marvel at his excitement for every visit we make outside the house. He participates in getting his diaper bag ready, wishes to dress up as soon as possible, and even chooses the car he wants to go out in these days. He is riveted to the scenes of the world outside from the very moment he sits in the car. He keeps on naming the things he sees, and sometimes, he just starts humming songs to himself. It is fascinating for us as parents to see the world through his eyes in such moments. He takes nothing for granted, lives in the moment, and takes every experience to broaden his imagination. These are the moments when we, as adults, realise that we have so much to learn and re-learn. He becomes our inspiration.

One may wonder if these parents’ recollections have a meaning beyond their personal life. One may even think if there is an academic relevance to these musings. In conclusion, we would like to opine that as academics, psychologists and educators, we give children very little credit for their intellectual, emotional, and kinesthetic capabilities in our theories and practice. If we were to put aside our preconceived notions, we would notice that they have much richer and more complex inner lives than we reckon. Their engagement with the world is far more sophisticated, intense, and agentic than we currently believe. In fact, in our view, we need to

expand and even radically re-envision our theories of child development to account for these rich inner lives of children.

Interviews

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To understand the challenges of parenting holistically I conducted interviews with two mothers raising an eight-year girl and a seven-year-old boy respectively. These were done with two mothers who were facing a challenge pertaining to the understanding of a normal child. None of these two children were diagnosed with any specific psychological or behavioral problem yet their behavior was seen as problematic in their own context. The first interview is with a mother who decided to adopt a child when she could not conceive at the age of thirty-nine. Her life underwent a drastic change after this decision since she had to leave her job and become a stay-at-home mother. Despite best efforts, her daughter does not trust her and exhibits violent behavior. The second interview is with a mother who decided to have a child in her late thirties. She too had to leave her well-paying job to raise her child. Now her son is facing issues in adjusting to the school environment and the mother feels that the teachers do not have the patience to deal with him. The teachers find it difficult to facilitate development of self-regulation of behavior in him when others in their class seem to have mastered it by now. The difference between the teachers' and the mother's perception of the concern is what makes parenting a challenge for Ms. Sumi.

Interview I: Mothering a Different Child

Mothering a child can mean different things to different people. When I became a mother, I started observing other mothers around me. Were other parents as overwhelmed as I was? How do they handle their problems? Sometimes conversations with others helped allay my fear and at other points it made me more anxious. In the process of raising my son, I came across a young child around my house who appeared different from others. I judged her as different because she looked different from her parents, and I found that she was unable to stay still.

Subsequently, I got to know that she was facing issues in school because of her inability to focus and her sudden violent eruptions in class. I found that her mother was very quiet as if trying hard to hold back her emotions. I often wondered how the mother would be dealing with this child. In this paper, I have documented the journey of Reena*, through an interview, as a mother of a child who was labelled as different, right from the beginning. In her own words, 'Every day is a new challenge. Somedays I feel I won't be able to deal with it any longer. But then something gives me hope and I carry on. I just don't want people to see Kiara as different. I just want her to be like everyone else around her.'

Q. Tell me about your journey as a mother

I was working as a systems administrator. My work used to be late nights and I hardly had any holidays. I usually came back home from work late at nights. I was 38 years of age and wanted to adopt a child, we tried to get a child within family, but no one supported us. We then went through CARA and after some wait, we were given a 15 days old girl child for adoption, we named her Kiara. We have no idea about her whereabouts and her lineage. We just knew that she was found on a railway track and then she was taken to an orphanage. She looked very frail and very dark. Not that her skin color was an issue, but she was extremely malnourished. Kiara had septicemia when we got her, and she was admitted to a hospital after we adopted her. After she was treated and cared for in hospital for over 15 days and she became alright we got her home. She was so light in weight that I carried her in my lap till last year, she is now over 8 years in age. I made her wear the same clothes for 5 years so you can understand that she was such a weak child. Now she has started gaining height.

Till Kiara was one year old everything was very smooth. She would eat her food easily on time and she used to stay with my parents and my in-

laws. She never demanded that she should be only with me. She was very comfortable. But as she grew one year old then the problem started. She was so hyper and so destructive. She would pick up a glass and throw it. I could never sleep on a Sunday afternoon after she was one year. Once I got into the bed and slept. She picked up a one-liter bottle and spilled all the water on me. My head and my ear were full of water and the bed became wet. Her violence aggravated and she would hit anyone. Whenever we took her to a mall she would be attracted to young children. Then suddenly she would hit them, and they would start crying. I used to feel very bad. I stopped socializing. We stopped taking her out because if we took her anywhere, we had to remain vigilant. When she was two and a half years old, there was a family wedding. I kept her in my lap for three days so as to avoid an untoward incident. She would pull people's hair and hit them. People's gestures changed when they saw such things. It was very embarrassing and disturbing experience. I can't put it in words. I lost my confidence. It seemed as if someone had taken away the ground from under my feet.

We admitted her to a private school. Everyday some or the other parents called to complain, and teachers used to call me to complain about Kiara. I was asked to apologize every day to some or the other parent. It was a nightmare. Kiara would randomly hit anyone in class and despite explaining her to refrain from using her hands she did not stop hitting other children. She had difficulty in reading and writing. And her teachers reported this to me regularly. Kiara was not just violent outside home but even my hands used to be blue all the time because she would hit me and bite me. One she hit me very hard on my face and I still have the scar. We took her to a hospital, but they could not diagnose anything. They said she does not need any therapy. Finally, after one year the school asked us to withdraw Kiara's name from the school. I was totally shattered not knowing what to do.

Q. Then did you change her school?

Everyone around me started telling me that Kiara needs help, but I did not accept that. I wanted to prove that my child is normal. I used

to leave her with her maternal grandmother when I went for work. One day while playing Kiara did something which shook me completely. I was lying on my stomach, and she was on my back playing peacefully. Suddenly she took out her plastic hairband and plunged one end of the hairband inside my ear. I had excruciating pain and I saw blood dripping down my ears. I rushed to the hospital leaving Kiara with my mother. Fortunately, the doctor told me that the wound had not reached the tympanum and I would be fine in few days. We came back home, and Kiara was just laughing. She showed no sign of fear or remorse for what she had done, not even when she saw blood dripping down my ears. I wondered whether she even realized how much pain she had caused me.

After the school asked her to withdraw, I started looking for a day-care where I could leave my child. My parents were not able to cope. I found a day care but I was not sure that she will adjust. It was a Jain family, and they needed money, so they accepted to keep her. Luckily, Kiara was fine in their house. The lady told me that Kiara would chant *bhaktambar* with them. I had never heard of *bhaktambar stotram* but I was happy that finally my child was settled somewhere. But this lasted just for five months. Suddenly one day the lady managing the day care told me that she would not be able to keep Kiara. She told me that the previous day she got into an argument with her husband and Kiara reacted in a very violent manner when she was not given attention. The lady's husband asked her to not keep Kiara with her anymore. Hell broke loose for me then. After this episode Kiara developed a repulsion towards men. She never warmed up to any male member in the house. Even with my husband, she maintains a distance. Like when we are in bed, she does not let her father touch her. She says only she can touch Papa, but Papa can't touch her. She had dislike for men earlier too but after the day care experience it became even more noticeable. Till now I wonder what happened there that made her dislike men so much. Kiara has trust issues. I can sense that she does not even trust me completely. After this day-care episode I had to leave my job and now,

I work from home. So, my life has changed completely.

Then someone suggested a progressive school to me and I took Kiara there. When the director of the school was interacting with Kiara, Kiara spat on her face. I was surprised that the director did not say a word. They admitted her. Ever since that day, Kiara has been in this school. She has a special educator who shadows her in the class, she also goes for bridge classes which are individual classes and there is a counselor to map her progress. There are some changes in her behavior, and I see that she is now aligning herself with the school. It is not that things are smooth. Even now she has anger issues. Recently we had one such episode. I had kept a bottle of extra virgin coconut oil on the table. I and Kiara got into an argument, and she spilled the entire bottle of oil on my head. So, we keep having such incidents.

Qs. How did you manage her during the pandemic?

Actually, pandemic turned out to be a better experience. She attended school throughout. Sometimes she was the only child in the school. Her special educator worked very hard. She paid attention during online classes too. I find it tough to follow what the school is doing. I rely completely on the school. See we learnt through conventional methods, so I am unable to work with *ganit mala* and other mathematics material which this progressive school uses. They made her repeat a class and I was fine with it. Kiara likes to study, and she likes her school. She never told me that she does not want to attend classes. She takes time to understand English and Mathematics. She is struggling in these two areas, and I find that now the school is going at a fast pace. She is finding it tough to keep pace with the school. I don't know how it will be in future.

When I adopted Kiara, I had lots of dreams that I will teach her in a certain way and I will introduce her to music. All those dreams now seem meaningless now. I just want her to grow up normally. I don't want her to be seen as a different child. And I want her to behave well and not hit others. Now, even she asks me,

'Mumma how can I control my behavior. Please tell me some trick.' What trick can I teach my child!!.

Qs. Did you ever consider taking her to a counselor outside school as well?

No, I did not take her. After my initial experience, I found that she is more sorted at school and is aligning herself with it. Kiara has trust issues. Now I don't want to disturb the balance that she has found. The counselor has not diagnosed anything specific. Sometimes she says Kiara has few characteristics of ADHD and sometimes she says that Kiara has one characteristic of ADD. Nothing is clear. Taking her to another counselor may disrupt her newfound sense of balance. I think she must repose her trust in me first. Kiara has some other issues as well. One of them is that she has difficulty in bladder control and as a result she has accidents in class. This can be embarrassing, and I wonder how she will make friends if such accidents continue. Sometimes she soils her clothes too. I want her behavior to change first, and she should start taking care of herself. I just hope that she starts to manage herself.

Qs. Have you found out who is she comfortable with?

She is unusually comfortable with domestic helps. She likes them and behaves normally with them. Probably she feels a certain sense of belonging with them. Kiara displays some behaviors which are contradictory to one another. Like she wants to say hello to everyone and then she becomes very shy. She cannot sit still for a minute and would change several channels in few minutes. But she can sit and study for long durations. She is very warm and loving and yet she can be aggressive and violent. She uses lots of abusive words and no one in our home uses such words. It leaves me very confused at times.

Qs. How have you changed as a person after you became a mother?

(laughs) I am very upset with God with what he has done to me. I was a very spiritual person and would meditate regularly. I even taught meditation. Even now I do it but I feel drained -

emotionally and spiritually. I wonder why I had to go through this. I was a topper in my class and did very well in studies. I had dreams for my child too. Probably we (I and Kiara) had some karmic baggage to resolve. Let's see how things will shape up now that schools have reopened.

Interview II: Complex Choices, Self-Doubt and Decision Making in Parenting

The decision to become a parent in today's time is not a simple decision. In nuclear families, with more education and less support, we feel nervous and apprehensive about having a child. To raise a child is a full-time work and the challenge lies in who will give up their professional aspiration to accomplish this task. While my son started to go to school, the first parent that I became friends with, was a mother who decided to give up her plush job to raise her son. I found her in school most of the time since her son took time in adjusting to school, just like my son did. I found Sumi a very amicable person who would sometimes get very anxious. We both had quiet moments where we would silently comfort one another. I decided to interview her to know what complex decision making is involved in raising a child. She faced major challenges in making people understand the child's perspective. People often labelled her son as hyper and stubborn. And she had a tough time making people understand that they are not able to see things from the child's perspective. So, here's is her perspective of raising her son:

Sumi, what does it mean to be a parent?

Being a parent is like being custodians of a bird's egg. You have to provide the right atmosphere for it to hatch so that it can one day fly away - and feed, fend, soar independently. Our job is to raise children to become independent adults.

You are Master's in Computer Science and Information technology. You had a very well-paid job. Why did you give up your job to raise your child?

Yes, I started working in 2004 and I had to leave my job in 2014 when I decided to have a child. My son was born premature and underweight. He was born with a congenital problem. The cap

of his oesophagus was pushed back, and he had a strider. He was born with that, and he had to be given artificial respiration. He had a slight murmur in his heart but when he turned one that fear was also removed. The tests indicated that he did not have a hole in his heart. Due to this problem, he had a lot of acidity and reflux. He had a very difficult six months period and so did I. I was getting calls from office, and then I looked at my child. I wondered can I put this child in hands of someone who does not relate to his problem? I decided that I will continue to take care of my child. When he turned one and half year, we started looking for a day care. But I did not find anything very satisfactory. I realised that I would get a job again. I trust my calibre. But for now, I must invest time with my child. I am not judging parents who decide to leave their children in a day care. It is perfectly fine. I was not ready to do that. Now during pandemic, I have got many offers which include positions to head an organisation. These offers are equivalent to what I would have got if I had not left my job. Now looking back, I feel happy for my decision. Currently, I am working as a product manager in artificial intelligence domain.

How do you think cultural beliefs and practices influence your parenting decisions?

In the early years - 0-3 years, I would say, the influence was more. I was constantly told by people around me that this is how we did things, in our times this was done, by this time this should have happened etc. As a parent our choices have a direct effect on our children and that has given me the courage to align myself with what and how best can I provide for the child even if it means moving away from said cultural beliefs. One such example was the tradition of getting the head shaved of the child, popularly called as the *Mundan* ceremony. In our family head shaving can be done only after 4 years, but for my child, I had to get it done earlier. He had long hair and his hair would irritate him. Everyone in my family told me that this ceremony can be done only when the second child is born. I and my husband were clear that we did not want another child. I was 35 years of

age when I had my first child and even then, we had to undergo chromosomal testing to be on the safer side. I was admitted in hospital one week before the due date since the foetal heartbeat was weak. This whole experience had shaken us, and we were sure of not having another child.

What challenges did you face in the process?

The biggest challenge one faces while even deviating from said cultural social practices is adjusting to not pleasing everyone all the time. As the saying goes - "You can't please all the people all the time" so is true in parenting. You end up coming out as choosing sides. Being called - overprotective, pampering, helicopter mom even. Parenting is not for the soft hearted. The biggest challenge is self-doubt, and standing up to what you believe in, hoping that everything resolves with time and is worth the effort.

I have self-doubt when people constantly judge my child. People say that he is not behaving in a certain way, he is hyper, he has too much energy and he is not behaving in an expected way. People also say that before the pandemic he was different and now there are changes. There was an instance, when he was standing at a place in the playground, and everyone was asking him to move from that point. I asked him later, why he was standing there. He told me that I was standing there so that I could see you and I could not see you from the point where I was asked to stand. There was no effort to understand the child. Such remarks shake you from inside and make you wonder whether what you do is right. I have realised that one needs to conserve one's energy and not be rattled by all this. This is where you have to go to the depths of your heart and you hold on to that one small ray of hope that I will remain steadfast no matter what the challenge is. I know my son. I must give him time and give him the best.

Another instance that I remember is that once my child very clearly articulated and asked for a quiet time in school. He was questioned in the set-up of school that why he wants a quiet time. What is it that you have done that you need a quiet time? Now here again there is

preconceived notion that if this much work is done then output should be this. The teachers felt that he has just come to school. But no, he was sitting in the bus for last 80 minutes and then he has reached school. When you change lens of your glasses you see the correct image. Sometimes we must be fearless and point out where the mistake is. A child is seen as a problem to be solved. Ask him why he wants a quiet time and let him answer. Not everyone is well-versed with psychology so they should abstain from labelling. We live in our heart and there is an inner being. We must stay calm because your child needs it. Have faith in your values and your child. We must stay steadfast. This is what I tell myself over and over again.

Can you elaborate further on self-doubt?

I think parenting in the modern, urban, nuclear families is nothing, but self-doubt served on a platter. There is so much noise - so much material, so many options, even when enrolling in a play school is something people can shame you about. So, there's this incident that happened, my child loves to interact but would decide with whom he wants to interact. There was a lady who would stop and say hello, for whatever reasons, my son wouldn't reach out to her. I never insisted or forced. He was about 2 years then. When one day, my child refused to say hello to her, she immediately retorted - You should try schools in Delhi, since they don't have an interview process. In Noida you will never get it as your child doesn't speak. I wasn't worried about the admission, but I started doubting myself - am I really so late? Why would I send a child to school at such a small age? In the end, I waited - I wanted to send my child where he can be close to nature and be grounded to reality. Or even before this, night-time schedules and breastfeeding can put a whole lot of doubt in you. I breast-fed my child for four years since my child demanded that.

What do you do in case of doubt?

When in doubt, trust your gut! Own what you must do - with what you have and that's it. We are a complex function of what we experienced - and always have the right to correct our ways. So, deciding what is best then and ignoring the

noise of doubt is what I do. At least we can try doing this most of the times.

Do you experience emotional outburst due to overwhelming demands of parenting?

When and how?

It is a given that parenting will overwhelm you. It is so demanding. Emotional Outbursts too happen - mostly when there is too much on the plate - work, home, child, etc. or when I am unwell. In what forms they happen? It depends on my situation - sometimes, it can be tears, sometimes a raised voice, sometimes being too snappy.

How do you cope with emotional challenges?

Breathe, take a break, listen to music - Play with the child, to just cuddle up for stories, take some alone time – even if it is a long bath. Anything and everything. For more serious ones, even when the decision has been taken, the best way to talk to a friend and ask them to just hear you. Having someone to just listen to you without judging you is sometimes more than enough.

Let's Talk it Out: Anecdotes of an Askable Parent to Break Gender and Sexual Myths

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Abstract

This article is about a mother's journey with her growing son to find answers to the toughest questions. Yes, tough questions that were related to gender and sexuality. They are still there but perhaps growing age and experiences have opened up more sources to explore. Being an askable parent probably prompts him to ask his questions outright. In this article, such experiences have been discussed which parents must have faced at one time or another. These are not difficult questions; we make them so. By ignoring simple queries, we make them taboo. And the child starts hiding such things. There can be no better and reliable source than parents to get answers to their queries. We have to be askable parents to give sound understanding to our children especially about matters related to sexuality.

Each age brings its own kind of queries and seeks answers to them. No questions are wrong and should not be rejected but sometimes the way of answering somehow isn't appropriate and carries 'wrongness' in it. Such responses may put the children in more dilemma than ever before. And this is largely reflected in the answers to questions related to gender and sexuality. Most of the parents get nervous after hearing these questions. They tend to forget that children's questions are based on their experiences. As a result, they keep on making adult speculations on those questions which put barrier on any kind of dialogue between the children and parents. Further, the children find themselves in a state of confusion which impacts their overall growth and development.

Not getting answers to questions encourages doubts that this cannot be asked to the parents, and the questions asked probably wrong and should not have been asked. And in this way, we not only kill the curiosity of the children, but we deprive them of a proper understanding. At the same time, it has to be accepted that most of the parents feel that they cannot talk easily with their children on some topics. Children instinctively ask these questions to their parents because they consider them the most reliable source. So why can't we give age-appropriate answers with same credibility? That is why our discomfort on many issues makes them turn to other mediums to find their answers.

In present times, the world of internet has become an elusive world. Immense knowledge and information come to the fore with a single click. What is right or wrong you have to sort it yourself. At this young age, children are not able to connect with internet independently, so mainly their own peers and siblings become their biggest resource for information, whatever that information may be. And along with this, Television has become one of the biggest medium in present times to get any information.

Like other parents I too had questions regarding the upbringing of my child. I was also skeptical about what kind of questions my child will have. Will I be able to answer those questions? Will he come to me with his curiosities? Such questions used to occur in my mind. Though they still occur. I have been fortunate in this regard as my child has established an effective communication with me. My being a teacher and perhaps his being an only child in a nuclear family can be considered as the reasons behind this. I could be wrong to believe that. Sharing our daily routine with each other, whether it is sitting together or through phone, we have always encouraged communication and interaction between us. And sometimes we have adopted written communication in the form of writing letters and lengthy messages to each other, when we felt that verbal mode is not workable at that moment. Expression is important, no matter which method is adopted for that.

Since I teach a course on Gender, I felt that I was able to orient him in the appropriate direction about it. Rather I believed that it helped me in orienting him as a gender conscious being. Probably I wouldn't have realized this if he didn't bring up some stereotypical queries and questions. He was able to bring up all his stereotypical observations to me due to open communication we had about our daily worldly experiences and interacting about the same. I would like to present this through some observations.

At the age of 6, he furiously asked me why don't I put his father's surname with my name? Whereas mothers of all the children in his class have done so. When I discussed a little more, then he said this is what happens. Then he insisted that I should also do it. He seemed quite upset. He further revealed that he finds it very awkward when even the teachers ask again and again to confirm my name. All this is happening because of my surname, he concluded. It was difficult to talk to a 6 years old child to talk about a stereotypical tradition that has been going on for centuries. But it can't be avoided at all. It wasn't just a matter of my child's displeasure; it was a matter of narrow mindedness and a stereotypical ideology which was being instilled in this generation as well and reinforced by the women teaching staff by protecting and promoting through their gestures and questions. This may have been a contemptuous situation for the child and may continue to be so, but I felt necessary to discuss this issue. Necessary, also because he could have been a messenger for the class and may be even for the school. It became a great teachable moment for me where I was able to tell him about identity, individuality, choice and decision making. To explain that every individual has an identity which should be respected. Took a long time on this, because he wasn't seeing similar examples in the neighbourhood and in the family. Examples were found and discussed in detail. I don't know how much he was able to understand but it became a topic of discussion during the lunch break in the class. It turned out to be a long battle for him, for taking a defence for his mother. This probably became his own

battle with growing age. Later, I also came to know such discussions where woman's higher education was linked with her existence and identity and how education gives her power to think and act. Discussions like, job and earning might have helped to take such decisions, was it a sign of change? If you look closely, then not on a large scale as it was happening then in my son's group. But if a gender related issue remains a point of discussion amongst children for so long, so it's definitely a mark of change. It is necessary to keep questioning to ensure your first step towards the change. My child now has an independent thinking on this which is an indicator of change.

I would like to talk about a few more anecdotes related to school situations when he was around 7 years. One day he came from school very sad. He remained upset but didn't say anything all day. On asking, he said that he would break friendship with the girl he liked most in the class. When I asked why do you like her? He responded that because she is very fair. On probing, he added that fair people look beautiful. On further asking, what happened now? He said that I saw from outside the washroom that she washed her face and there was a big scar above her lip, then she applied some cream to cover it. I was not aware of that. She told me that she is applying a medicine. And she told me not to tell anyone in class especially not to boys, if they come to know then they will make fun. Now she doesn't look beautiful to me. Later, she went to a boarding school but is still a good friend. This gave an opportunity to talk about the social dimension of gender and how it is depriving and dividing everyone in some way or the other.

The girls of the class like to talk to him. I thought that he might be popular so could this be the reason behind it. But talking to him for girls was like talking to someone from their own group because he was a low built and soft-spoken boy. When other boys got to know this, they made fun of him and teased him. Some boys asked him why he talks to a girl who is taller than him. He should talk to a girl shorter to him. And she'd look great with the other tall guy in the class.

There were many doubts and dilemmas related to skin colour, height, body, looks and a patient listening was required for that. Children do not disclose such things readily. And if they do not share, then they do more harm to themselves. These were not just questions; they were myths that needed to be broken.

Fair is norm and fair is beautiful, this is the cultural construction of beauty we have. Wolf (1991) in *The Beauty Myth* emphasized the societal desire where “physical appearance, bodies, face, hair, clothes-matter so much... something important is indeed at stake that has to do with the relationship between female liberation and female beauty (9). Beauty of the body is incomplete without defining the skin colour. The desire of white skin is perpetuated not only by the society but also the media which is flooded with the fair and lovely campaigns. May be the colonial past of the country is still trapped under the beauty definition of white skin empire or the ancient religious scriptures which describe the beauty of the goddesses and fairies(apsara) with milky complexion manifested as pious, pure and symbol of peace. From our own indigenous folklores to fairy tales, all the construction of femininity are with the fair skin. On the contrary wicked characters possess dark skin. The description of beautiful woman will not be complete without describing her body, features and colour (Gupta,2019:310).

These children are part of this heterosexual society which gives power to patriarchy to define heteronormativity. Children have constructed the notion of woman's beauty as per the set norms of femininity. Tall boys are not only considered macho but also presented sexually desirable. Children at this young age think about heterosexual romantic relationships where the compatibility of physicality plays crucial role in match making.

Children are developing their own construct about ideal femininity and masculinity by observing and imitating. These stereotypical experiences will further become part of gender schematic processing. Chodorow in (Seidman,2010:20) states that perspective is important because she assumes that ‘sexuality

emerges during individual's development. The family plays a crucial role in the making of the sexual life. She insists that our gender identity shapes our sexuality in profound ways, as boys and girls experience different parent child dynamics, they will have somewhat different sexual values and orientation'. Parents' discomfort to talk about such issues is because they are afraid that ‘too less is too much’, what to discuss and how much to discuss but most importantly how to discuss.

Parents have their own ideological constructs about gender and sexuality and nothing else they want to add to that. Such rigidity of thought stops the child from confiding in their parents and talk about the experiences which are new in their lives. It always turns into a value laden discussion which could not help child to come out from his/her dilemma. Parenting practices (re)produce heteronormativity as children taught themselves to see the world through a heteronormative lens (Martin,2009:190-91) and it strengthens its hold as a universally accepted truth and reality.

Mary Douglas (1966) in her classic work ‘Purity and Danger’ (in Seidman,2010:53) argues that cultures try to impose order and meaning on a chaotic, meaningless world through classify somethings as ‘dirty’, ‘polluted’, ‘dangerous’, or ‘taboo’ while other things are labelled as ‘clean’, ‘pure’, and ‘safe’. Mary further explains how purity /pollution dualism invoke by culture to draw symbolic boundaries around groups. The moral criteria and boundaries constructed by the community decide the inclusion or exclusion of people ... (54). These boundaries conveniently marginalise the peripheral groups with their non-normative sexual preference and push them out from the morality circle. Bullying in school by the classmates for certain behaviours and choices are the reflection of these binaries and boundaries created by the society. School as an institution itself is heterosexual and divides everyone into these categories. If we parents are not attending the queries of our little ones then we are hindering their reflective thinking. Moll (2009) makes it clear, ‘Modesty, austerity, and clean living on the part of parents will counter

balance much negligence in direct guidance or protection'. We need to value their experiences. Researches proved that children feel most comfortable with their parents to get any information. We all must have had such

experiences with children. It is very important to encourage them to share with us for their sound emotional and all round well- being.

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“In Motherhood Lies My Growth.....”A Glimpse Into the Inner World of A Caregiver

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Abstract

Motherhood is a unique experience. As mothers, everyone has their journey. Through this reflective narrative, I put forward the case for mothers' mental well-being by bringing forth the internal and external turmoil faced by me. In Indian society, major emphases are on the woman's body during and after pregnancy, and the emotional aspect gets neglected. Childbirth can be a traumatic experience, yet women go through this unprepared. To hold space for their emotions, I suggest that mothers should access therapy. At times children mirror what remains unhealed in us. Therapy again is stigmatized in Indian society. This article put forth the claim that inner work is the answer. Motherhood for me is an act of service towards myself, my family, and humanity in the larger context.

Motherhood is a unique experience, in a “to each on her own” kind of way. Yet, as mothers, we are united by a “universal will” of care and well-being of our little ones. The decision to be a mother is personal. I felt a strong desire to be one—fuelled by societal pressure, age, and hormonal issues. Women, most of the time, are placed in difficult situations. The child is love and responsibility at the same time. It was a bumpy ride for me from day one, though it turned out to be a blessing in disguise.

When I was pregnant, I lived this dream life in my head—thinking I would be that perfect mom with a perfectly dressed baby in all matched-up little outfits and motherhood would come naturally to me; it would be ‘easy.’ I thought that one has to love their child; how hard can that be? I did not anticipate the taxing bit—physically, emotionally, and mentally. The superstitions and taboos in Indian society around pregnancy and childbirth add to this. For instance, one does not buy a cot before the child's arrival. My friend told me in her household; one buys nothing beforehand. This lack of preparation can make moms anxious. Nowadays, mothers feel a need to be prepared for the baby—from pregnancy yoga to baby massage, there is so much to learn. This is great, but I don't see any talk about a mothers' mental health—the missing thread. I feel through visits to the gynaecologists; the hospitals can provide facilities for mental well-being. Childbirth can be traumatic, yet women go through it without any mental preparation to endure the physical

pain, be it normal or through c-section. All the post-pregnancy talk is centred around the body, the massages, and mothers' food intake. I had to ensure that I didn't get ill because my newborn depended on me for nourishment and attachment. In our society, the physical is emphasized and the mental neglected.

Breastfeeding, for instance, takes time to master. I remember crying at 4 am in the hospital with my baby in my arms because she wouldn't latch. I questioned my worth as a mother and said to God, “What sort of mother am I, who cannot breastfeed her baby?”. These are the times when mothers need help and assistance. Breastfeeding is a journey. To some, it comes easily; for others, it takes time, and for some, it does not happen. There is no talk about how one should be kind to oneself. Motherhood takes time to figure out and does not happen overnight.

The newborn stage to six months I cruised through. This phase was about “trying to figure this out.” Sleepless nights, understanding the non-verbal cues, and continuous breastfeeding was my day. From six months to one year was the time to marvel at my tiny human. The determination to sit, crawl, walk, and eat with little hands—just curious about life. I immersed myself in the care of my child and neglected my well-being. The need to ‘master’ it all was the constant thought process. Then came the toddler phase. I could not understand the tantrums and the sudden outbursts. This would anger me, and I had to calm myself in a separate room, which

took a considerable effort. I decided to learn about toddler behavior and how to manage such situations. I bought some books and signed up for a course but the lack of time to devote to these learnings stressed me further. It was as if nothing was working for me. The internal turmoil within me was brewing up.

The external turmoil manifested in the form of Instagram. I joined this space when my daughter was around 1.5 years old. I was blown away by the information on this platform for mothers and parents. In the ‘perfect’ world of ‘mommy bloggers,’ I got trapped into thinking that I was not good enough. Moms on social media were doing so much, and some even home-schooling their kids, and here I was, who could not make one decent *chappati*. Intuitively, I felt this world to be fake. I inquired and asked questions around. After some basic research and getting to know some mothers on these platforms, I realized that the good was shown, and the mess wasn’t. There are strategies to increase your followers by “Follow for Follow.” People have opened every corner of their homes and personal life on social media. One sees kids on a potty chair in their bathroom and their mom reading them a book and someone capturing this. The intimate time of the day is for anyone to view on a public platform. There is no talk about child rights—how much is too much? The anxiety in me was growing as now I would compare my life, my day, to a “random someone” having a public profile about whom I did not know anything. Further, through ads and sponsored links on social media, one can see that “parenting has become a business.” The marketing strategy is to tap on parents’ anxieties and—sell. I, too, got sucked into this, especially the training courses. Right-Brain, Prodigy Baby, Reading Programs, and the list goes on. Further, the suggestions on social media for books and toys are never-ending. How much can one buy? These businesses are marketed in a way one feels inadequate and unequipped.

This external and internal turmoil created a recipe of disaster for my mental wellbeing. My toddler’s behaviors and actions started triggering me. The books and toys that I had collected

could not solve it. The parenting information informed me that tantrums are healthy and age appropriate. Then Covid hit, and my world came crashing down. Now, with no house help, I was struggling. I had so much stuff in the house, and it stared at me to be cleaned, dusted, and organized. The responsibility to cook, clean, and sanitize came all on me. I was anxious every morning. I realized my body felt heavy, and I had to drag myself out of bed. I had to find the answer to the spiraling thoughts. I started reading about self-help. I changed my followings on Instagram from mommy bloggers to self-help pages. Everyone suggested doing some inner work, but what was this inner work, and what did it entail? I had only known about chanting and meditation. Eventually, I came across Gabor Mate’s “Wisdom of Trauma” movie. The lightbulb moment of my life. The film is about addiction and childhood trauma. This was new information. I realized the solutions to the problems in my adult life lay in my childhood.

I decided to open up about my struggles to a close friend. She suggested I consult her therapist and schedule an appointment. Since then, everything has changed. When I entered this world of learning and information, I came to know the tricks the mind plays and how the body stores trauma. Healing is the path for me now. I prioritize my family and me. At the same time, therapy is stigmatized and considered taboo in Indian society and unaffordable for many. I saw it as a personal investment. I came to realize I must have suffered from postpartum depression, which my gynaecologist and people around me had overlooked earlier. No one even mentions postpartum depression in Indian social circumstances. The support Indian households have in general with the affordable services makes postpartum depression an “invisible-paradox.” In the Indian context, mental well-being is the neglected aspect of the pregnancy and the post-pregnancy journey.

Seeking help is brave. Either one can be at war with oneself or stand with oneself. After being a mother, it is better to stand with oneself. I stood up and decided for myself. One must be patient and kind. The relationship with one’s child will

change when one seeks within. What matters is the mental well-being of the caregiver. Mental health helps build a strong foundation for the family we all wish to create—enriching and full of love. There are all kinds of beautiful families to cherish. One can create their little world with their loved ones with peace. A curious quest to one's inner world is the start. I came face to face with my fears, these external and the inner turmoils of my life. Platforms on social media can be used to reach out and make quality information available. Motherhood has been a self-reflective journey for me, and in it lies my growth. To be a mother is an act of service,

specifically towards me, my child, my family, and in a larger context—towards humanity. We need an open and honest dialogue around mental health and motherhood. This article is my attempt.

The quote by late American comedian Gilda Radner honestly describes motherhood-

“[Motherhood is] the biggest gamble in the world. It is the glorious life force. It's huge and scary—it's an act of infinite optimism.”

मां-बेटी के नायकत्व में निखरता पिता

डा० ऋषभ कुमार मिश्रा

महात्मा गांधी अंतरराष्ट्रीय हिंदी विश्वविद्यालय के शिक्षा विभाग में सहायक प्रोफेसर

सारांश

इस लेख में एक मध्यम वर्गीय नौकरी पेशा युवा की दृष्टि से उसके पिता होने के अर्थ को प्रस्तुत किया गया है। यह लेख बताता है कि कैसे पिता-पुत्री के बीच रिश्ते को दोनों मिलकर रच रहे हैं? कैसे पिता का विकासात्मक संदर्भ, सांस्कृतिक विश्वदृष्टि और अकादमिक प्रशिक्षण जन्य प्रगतिशीलता उसके पितृत्व में प्रकट होती है?

रिश्तों के बारे में बातें करना और लिखना, खासकर तब, जब आप खुद उनमें से किसी एक की भूमिका में हो, एक कठिन कार्य है। ऐसा करते हुए हम अपने संबंधों की रूमानी दुनिया के आकर्षण में पाठक को बांधना चाहते हैं। फलतः ऐसी अभिव्यक्ति निजी अनुभवों का आख्यान बनकर रह जाती है। इस लेख में इस प्रवृत्ति से खुद को सुरक्षित रखने का प्रयास करते हुए मैं एक मध्यमवर्गीय, उच्च शिक्षित, और परिवार से दूर रहकर पिता की भूमिका निभाने वाले युवा के रूप में अपने अनुभवों को मननपूर्ण ढंग से लिख रहा हूँ।

अक्सर हमारी स्मृतियों में पिता की छवि एक ऐसे पुरुष की होती है जो परिवार के आर्थिक-सामाजिक-सांस्कृतिक दायित्वों का प्रतिनिधि होता है। इस छवि में वह अपने बच्चों और परिवार के सदस्यों के लिए एक नायक की तरह होता है जो सभी के अरमानों और अपेक्षाओं को पूर्ण कर रहा होता है। नगरीय मध्यमवर्गीय परिवार जहां माता और पिता दोनों उच्च वेतन वाली नौकरी कर रहे हैं और दोनों मिलकर परिवार के दायित्वों का निर्वहन कर रहे हैं, वहां पिता की ऐसी 'सख्त' छवि थोड़ा उदार हुई है। नए जमाने के पढ़े-लिखे युवा इस नई छवि को पसंद भी कर रहे हैं। वे परिवार और बच्चों के लिए बाहरी दुनिया से संबंध जोड़ने वाली भूमिका के साथ उनके आंतरिक दुनिया का भी हिस्सा बनना चाहते हैं। वे बच्चों की मां के साथ-साथ उनकी जिम्मेदारी उठाने के लिए आगे आ रहे हैं। अपने संदर्भ में भी मैं यही देखता हूँ। जब से मैं पिता बना हूँ तब से मेरे विचार-प्रक्रिया में मां, पिता, भाई और पत्नी के ऊपर मेरी बेटी आ गई है। किसी भी आम मध्यमवर्गीय कस्बाई युवा की भांति मैं उसकी जरूरतों को पूरा करने के लिए तैयार रहना चाहता हूँ तो उसकी मां की तरह उसे समनुभूतिपूर्ण 'केयर' भी प्रदान करना चाहता हूँ। समय के साथ-साथ मैंने देखा है कि एक पुरुष के लिए यह कहना जितना सरल है, हकीकत में उसे उतारना उतना कठिन है।

शुरुआत के दो-तीन वर्षों में मैंने देखा है कि कितना भी प्रयत्न क्यों न करूं मेरी बेटी के लिए उसकी मां पहली और आखिरी प्राथमिकता होती थी। परिवार से दूर रहने और केवल अवकाश के दौरान परिवार के साथ समय बिताना इसका सबसे बड़ा कारण था। मैं कम समय में उसकी मां के जैसा घनिष्ठ रिश्ता नहीं बना सकता था। हां यह जरूर है कि पिता की भूमिका में उसके साथ अपनी उपस्थिति को हमेशा बनाए रखता था। पिछले दो वर्षों में जब मेरी बेटी बड़ी हुई तो इस प्रवृत्ति में बदलाव हुआ है। उसने अब मां और पिता दोनों की भूमिकाओं के लिए अलग-अलग दायरे बना लिए हैं। कौन सा खेल किसके साथ खेलना है? कौन सी बात किससे करनी है? किससे, कैसे निगोशिएट करना है? इसकी समझ उसके व्यवहार में दिखती है। इस तरह से परिवार में पालक की भूमिका और पिता की भूमिका में मेरी पहचान को मुझसे ज्यादा मेरी बेटी तय कर रही है। हालांकि यह कोई प्रतियोगिता नहीं है, बल्कि पारस्परिकता का संबंध है। इस पारस्परिकता में बेटी के 'अबोध' होने का घटक कमजोर है, उसकी कर्ता और अर्थनिर्माता की भूमिका महत्वपूर्ण है। इन भूमिकाओं में वह मेरे लिए जो 'स्पेश' पैदा करती है, वह अनूठा है, वही हम दोनों के लिए नितांत निजी है। इस निजता में ही जीवन के रंग हैं। इस रिश्ते को जब मैं अपनी बेटी की निगाह से देखता हूँ तो मेरा उसके साथ होना उसे एक सुरक्षित आजादी देता है। वह मेरे साथ पार्क में देर तक साइकिल चला सकती है। वह अधिक शारीरिक ऊर्जा और भागमभाग वाले खेल, खेल सकती है। वह अपनी काल्पनिक दुनिया के पात्रों को साकार करने के लिए मुझे खेल में रोल दे सकती है। मेरी और उसकी अंतःक्रियाओं में वह पापा के पीछे चलने वाली और हां कहने वाली बेटी नहीं है। वह पापा के साथ और पापा के साथ तर्क करने वाली बेटी है। उदाहरण के लिए हाल में ही हम साथ-साथ दुकान गए। वहां उसने कुछ

खिलौने देखे। उसने पिचकारी ली। जबकि उसके पास एक दिन पहले ही एक नई पिचकारी आई थी। इसके बाद एक खिलौने को लेने से इसलिए मना कर दिया। उसने अपने इस फैसले का क्रमबद्ध तरीके से कारण बताया जिसका निष्कर्ष था कि उसके पास अपेक्षित खिलौने से मिलता-जुलता एक खिलौना पहले से ही था। ऐसे ही वह खेल के दौरान छोटे-छोटे निर्देश देती है, उसका पालन करवाती है। उसके साथ अंग्रेजी की किताब पढ़ते हुए भारतीय शैली में उच्चारण करने पर वह ठीक करवाती है। वह अपनी अध्यापिका को बताती है कि मेरे पापा आए हुए हैं। ये घटनाएं हमारे रिश्ते की गहराई को बताती हैं। वह छोटी-छोटी बातों को याद रखती है और समय-समय पर उसका उद्धरण देती है। जैसे- पापा के साथ मैंने पेड़ पर बैठा उल्लू देखा था, पापा ने गोभी की सब्जी बनाई थी, पापा ने खिलौना भेजा था आदि। परिवार के बीच ही मैंने बेटी के लिए मां और पिता की तत्परता में भिन्नता को भी रेखांकित कर पाता हूं। कई बार मैं समय निकालकर बीच में लैपटॉप पर काम करने बैठ जाता है। मेरी इस आदत पर न तो बेटी और न ही उसकी मां टोकती है लेकिन उसकी मां के लिए ऐसा कर पाना दुविधापूर्ण होता है। जब ऐसा करना होता है तब मैं और बेटी दोनों पार्क में टहलने या साइकिल चलाने के लिए जाते हैं। ऐसे ही जब कला और शिल्प से जुड़ी गतिविधियां करनी होती है तो मैं अपनी क्षमताओं और दक्षताओं से पार जाकर उसमें योगदान करना चाहता हूं, लेकिन मेरे कार्य में वह पूर्णता नहीं आ पाती है। मैंने यह भी पाया है कि मां-बेटी के संबंध में एक अपना विशेष संप्रेषण कोड भी तैयार हुआ है, जिसे वे दोनों समझ पाते हैं। मुझे उसे समझने में अतिरिक्त ऊर्जा लगानी पड़ती है।

पिता की भूमिका में मेरे फैसलों, भूमिकाओं और दायित्वों पर सबसे अधिक प्रभाव मेरे खुद के निजी अनुभवों और विकासात्मक संदर्भों का है। मेरा कस्बाई और धार्मिक झुकाव वाला मन महानगरीय जीवन के बीच बेटी को बड़ा होता देखकर उत्साहित और चिंतित होता है। मैं अपने बचपन के अनुभवों से सतत उसकी तुलना करता रहता हूं। मेरी कोशिश होती है उसे उन सांस्कृतिक और आर्थिक अवरोधों से मुक्त रखूं जिनका एक बच्चे के रूप में मैंने प्रत्यक्षण किया था। मैं कस्बाई जीवन के 'मीठे' अनुभवों को कहानी के माध्यम से साझा करता रहता हूं। देशज त्योहारों, पकवानों और शब्दों की जानकारी देना मेरी और उसकी रोजमर्रा की बातचीत का हिस्सा है। उसे कहानी और गप्प के माध्यम से

गांवों से परिचित कराता हूं। यह अभ्यास प्रवासी परिवार द्वारा वर्तमान पीढ़ी को उसके परिवार की सांस्कृतिक जड़ों से जोड़ने का प्रयत्न है। मैं दिल्ली महानगर में रहकर भी इसे अपना 'घर' नहीं माना पाया हूं। इसी कारण अपनी बेटी को उसके परिवार के इतिहास से जोड़ता हूं। इसी तरह मैं वर्धा की खादी, उसके कपड़ों, खिलौने, खेतों और कुटीर उद्योगों की खाद्य सामग्री आदि द्वारा भी उसे कस्बाई भारतीय जीवन से परिचित कराता रहता हूं।

मेरी इस कस्बाई अस्मिता बोध के साथ अकादमिक परिसर जन्य प्रगतिशीलता भी पिता-पुत्री के संबंध को विशिष्ट बनाती है। बेटी के साथ खेल, पढ़ाई और अन्य अंतःक्रियाओं का अंत इस तथ्य पर बल देने से होता है कि ज्ञान ताकत है। इसे मैं नई वैश्विक-आर्थिक व्यवस्था के बीच सुरक्षित भविष्य के लिए अभिभावक द्वारा बच्चे तक संप्रेषित किए जाने वाले संदेश के रूप में देखता हूं। ऐसे अनेक संदेश मैं उसे रोजमर्रा की अंतःक्रियाओं के दौरान देता हूं। यह सोद्देश्य प्रयास होता है जिसमें उसकी वर्तमान और भावी भूमिकाओं को अधिक प्रभावी बनाने का लक्ष्य होता है। इस दिशा में मुझे कुछ सकारात्मक बदलाव भी दिख रहे हैं। मेरी बेटी असहमतियों को व्यक्त करने में संकोच नहीं करती है। हम दोनों को पता है कि जब वह असहमति व्यक्त करती है तो एक पल के लिए मेरे मन में भारतीय पिता जगता है लेकिन अगले ही पल बालविकास के सारे सिद्धांत विशेष रूप से सोचने और करने की आजादी और कर्तृत्व बोध कौंध जाते हैं और मैं उसकी असहमतियों को स्थान देने लगता हूं। इसी भाव से प्रेरित होकर मैं उससे बात करने के दौरान ऐसी सशक्त महिलाओं की छवि प्रस्तुत करता हूं जो सफल हैं जो कहीं से भी 'मजबूर' नहीं है। वह जब भी मेरे साथ सख्त व्यवहार करती है तो मुझे खुशी होती है कि वह ऐसा ही सख्त व्यवहार किसी भी अन्य पुरुष के साथ कर सकती है। मैं उसे सोद्देश्यपूर्ण तरीके से औरतों के बेचारी होने की छवि से दूर रखता हूं। उदाहरण के लिए किसी भी ऐसे मिथकीय पात्र जो महिलाओं के उत्पीड़न का प्रतिनिधि हो, उसे नहीं प्रस्तुति करता हूं। उसके कपड़ों, खिलौने, हाव-भाव और व्यवहार के अन्य क्षेत्रों को रुढ़ियों और पूर्वग्रहों से मुक्त रखने का प्रयत्न करता हूं। विश्वविद्यालय का अध्यापक होने और शिक्षा के विमर्शों से परिचित होने के कारण सचेत रहता हूं कि शिक्षा बोझ न बने। लेकिन 'अच्छे प्रदर्शन' की इच्छा कई बार इस पर भारी पड़ जाती है।

मेरे सारे सपनों और फैसलों के केंद्र में उसका भविष्य है। एक तरह से कहूं तो अब मैं केवल एक अच्छा पिता बनना चाहता हूं। जब-जब मैं इस सवाल पर विचार करता हूं तब-तब मेरे पिता, मेरे ससुर और मेरे पुरुष-अध्यापक विशेष की छवियां और उनकी भूमिकाएं मेरी निगाहों में घूमने लगती हैं। मैं अपनी माता, विश्वविद्यालय की दो शिक्षिकाओं की भूमिकाओं को भी ध्यान में रखकर फैसला लेता हूं। मैं सोचता हूं कि इस स्थिति में ये लोग क्या करते? वे जो करते, क्या वह मेरे और मेरी बेटी के लिए भी उचित होगा? एक तरह से पिता की भूमिका संबंधित मेरे नज़रिए का विकास और उसका क्रियान्वयन एक सामाजिक जाल के बीच हो रहा है। मेरे अभिभावक एवं अभिभावक के जैसे अन्य महत्वपूर्ण सदस्य (मेरे अध्यापक) इसके स्रोत हैं। मेरी पत्नी यानि कि बेटी की मां भी मेरे पिता की भूमिका को प्रभावित करती है। हम दोनों के बीच होने वाली बातचीत का सर्वाधिक हिस्सा हमारी बेटी पर केंद्रित होता है। मुझे खुशी होती है जब मेरी पत्नी कई बार मेरे परंपरागत विचारों पर प्रश्न खड़ा करती है और हम मिलकर वर्तमान परिस्थितियों और वर्तमान संदर्भों में सोचते हैं। चूंकि मैं अपनी नौकरी के कारण परिवार से दूर रहता हूं तो मुझे यह कहने में संकोच नहीं कि मेरी पत्नी ही मेरी बेटी के लिए मां और पिता दोनों की भूमिका निभाती है। परिवार,

नौकरी और बेटी के लिए उसके समर्पण को सिद्धांत में बांधकर उसकी भूमिका को मैं छोटा नहीं कर सकता। मेरी बेटी के लिए 'पितृत्व' के अभाव की पूर्ति उसके मां के 'मातृत्व' में है। मुझे यह कहने में जरा सा भी संकोच नहीं कि मेरी पत्नी अपनी मां की भूमिका के लिए अपने कैरियर के अवसरों से समझौता करने में जरा भी संकोच नहीं करती है। ऐसे कई मौकों पर मैं उसके जैसा साहस नहीं दिखा पाता हूं। मेरा यह मनन मेरी पत्नी और उसके परिवार के द्वारा मेरी बेटी के लालन-पालन की वास्तविकताओं के सामने कुछ भी नहीं है। इसमें आप कुछ सिद्धांत और कुछ लच्छेदार शब्दावलियों को रेखांकित कर सकते हैं लेकिन इस कहानी का वास्तविक 'नायक' (नायिका नहीं) मेरी पत्नी और मेरी बेटी है जो मेरी अनुपस्थिति में भी परिवार नाम की इकाई को जीवत और गतिशील बनाए हुए हैं। आने वाले समय में, मैं उनके साथ मिलकर उनकी दुनिया और अपनी दुनिया की साझेदारी करना चाहता हूं। मैं खुद को नायक सिद्ध करने के स्थान पर मां और बेटी को अपनी दुनिया का 'नायक' बनाना चाहता हूं।

Parenting: A Journey of Exploring Oneself

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Abstract

The event of becoming a parent is one of the most exciting experiences of a person's life, embarking on a period that will require a lifetime of commitment. It is a period of new experiences that bring with it hopes and expectations about what it will be like to raise a child. But the question that arises is whether one is prepared for the journey or not. It is only when one becomes a parent does one realise that parenthood is a path of journey – not just discovering meaning and role as a parent, but also discovering oneself.

“What it's like to be a parent: It's one of the hardest things you'll ever do, but in exchange, it teaches you the meaning of unconditional love.”

-Nicholas Sparks

Becoming a parent is considered to be one of the most exciting events in a person's life, embarking a period of that requires lifelong commitment. It is considered a period of new adventure that brings in hopes, expectations about what life is and will be like to raise a child. Several educational degrees give one an expertise in the related discipline and prepare one for the professional world. However, there is no degree that prepares individuals to become a parent. It is only when you become a parent you get to know what parenting is.

Parenthood was a new step in my life after marriage, like a landmark that marks the passage of time. Being a parent was exhausting and exciting as well, with seeing so many firsts in my life. I had never held a small baby, realising I created another living being, developmental milestones being achieved by the child-everything around me was new. Parenting has been an overwhelming experience for me. Having my grounding in Child development discipline, I had formed notions about children and parenting as grounded in theories and supported by research. I also had my own notions of being a parent and what parenting should entail.

I lived with my in-laws (husband's parents) and my own parents resided nearby. When I became a parent, I realized my child was not brought up by her parents, rather my child was brought up

by everyone. Both sets of grandparents belonged to different cultures and their own notions of child rearing contradicted each other and the notions that I had. At every step it was not an individual's decision but a collective one. There have been many times when what I was sure of a decision, was refuted as not being favourable for the child and vice versa. I was also working at that time, so the guilt that I had of not being able to be with my child every time, which was further enhanced by the significant others in my life. It was constantly reiterated that as a parent you are on a path that's filled with surprises and can feel like you're on a winding road full of emotions that range from joy and satisfaction to anxiety and frustration. Parenting is an experience that requires many adjustments. A parent learns to adjust, understand and fulfil the role of being a parent, plus meet their child's changing needs as they grow, develop and change. I was constantly reminded of being a working mother who is absent for the child during working hours, not conforming to the cultural notions and customs of child rearing. I also couldn't measure up to her father who was way more playful, pampering, loving and held engaging conversations with a small child who barely move. I made sure that she was cared for, safe and met all her needs in the best possible way. All this made me strive for perfection even more that I had desired or dreamt of. But as a working mother, health changes that happened due to pregnancy and delivery, my own frustrations arising from the contradictions of my desires and dreams with the reality that prevailed around me.

With each passing day and each passing year, I felt as if I was losing myself. I started to feel guilty, that I was not good enough, that I was not loving her enough. This feeling of guilt would overpower me especially once she used to sleep and after my day's struggle, I would look at her peacefully tucked away. I am a person who is very calm and patient. Yet I got angry very easily when I was with my child and with her actions. When she made the kiddish mess, I couldn't keep my cool. I realised that I have started to raise my voice to make my point to her. Everyone around me told me that by 6 months child rearing will be better, then by 1 year, then by 3 years. The period was ever expanding. With each passing day, I felt the love of her towards me was being replaced by feeling of dislike. I read a quote by Bette Davis, "If you have never been hated by your child, you have never been a parent."

I realized that parenting is a journey as I went along with my child. I become aware that motherhood can be difficult, challenging, and overwhelming. We are all prone to feeling exhausted, frustrated, stressed, or even

suffocated at times. There are many aspects involved in parenting, and one wears many hats simultaneously; being the family chef, the driver, the entertainer, the family caretaker, the coach, and the confidant. There are times when society is harsh and you will be judged even if you are right.

The journey of being a parent is one of self-realization, acknowledging that it is a long-term commitment, one that involves discovering what being a parent means. A journey to see how one evolves as a person, learn self-control, resilience, and courage one has. I know my child has a significant role in my life. I believe my child is a significant influence in my life. She has taught me lessons that I would not otherwise have learned. She taught me the power of saying no. I learned that if I was unhappy, then I could not advance any further. She taught me to be optimistic. Through her, I discovered myself and motherhood. She led me to be me.

Negotiating Challenges of Being A Parent

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Abstract

Like other social constructs, the notions of family and familial relationships are replete with stereotypes and ideals. While the archetype of parenting has undergone a change over a period of time, in India it continues to remain rooted in traditional ideals of collectivism and togetherness. Developing close family bonds, providing for the child, and caregiving in terms of resources and love, are not options, but compulsions. Parents in contemporary urban Indian set up are struggling with maintaining these traditional notions while also trying to redefine them. Their own sense of parenting is influenced by the ideals created by society at large, their peers, and print and electronic media. Constraints posed by a collectivist culture are juxtaposed with letting the child fly solo. Parents live with trepidation of stifling their child with love and becoming overly detached. In this paper, the author explores his personal experiences of parenting over the last few years and especially during the past two years (2020-2021) when children spent exceeding amounts of time at home given the constraints imposed by corona virus led pandemic. The time was marked by strengthening family bonds on the one hand and making ends meet on the other. The uniqueness of the family set up of the author also provides for careful thought and reflection on negotiating challenges of parenting.

I, along with my mother, am ‘co-parenting’ my younger sister. My sister is a student of primary school. She is younger to me by close to twenty-five years. Although she is aware of our relationship as siblings, the interaction patterns between us are not as well defined as that between siblings or between a parent and a child. Our relationship has led me to challenge the archetypical notions of family relationships. I have assumed the role of a primary caregiver along with my mother. While most of my friends continue to identify my role as a closer approximation to that of a parent than an older brother, I would wish to revisit these categorizations. Role definition of parents and siblings is often culturally contextualized.

Parenting is an extremely enriching experience, at least that’s how it is perceived by middle class family values. The idea of family which originated in western Europe along with the development of industrial society, was imported in some sense by the colony. And has influenced how we understand family and parenting today. What it means to be a parent is entirely subjective as it depends on social and cultural values. How we understand parenting is thus influenced by our cultural upbringing, our education and the society at large. What it means

to be a parent or a sibling often varies within urban and rural contexts, social class backgrounds, and culture.

My role as a caregiver assumes significance because of the extraordinary age gap between my sister and me. This changes not just how I engage with her in comparison to a sibling closer to her in age, but also the relationships of all the family members engaged in caregiving or parenting her. In a ‘normal’ family, conflicts between parents involve adults who are of the same generation. First time parents, struggling to make sense of their own roles are likely to be more open to listening to each other, sharing opinions and perspectives, and learning together in their new found roles as parents. However, in my family, the primary caregivers are of different generations. While my mother looks at parenting based on her prior experiences, for me, this experience is that of a first time parent. The hierarchy between my mother and me, as parent and child, overlaps with the relationship that each of us shares with my sister. This further complicates situations and leads to conflicts and disagreements. In situations of conflict, the differences in opinion are more pronounced and addressing the issue involves greater complexity, as my mother’s notions about learning,

discipline, punishment, space for finding one's unique identity, self-expression, and freedom, are at a different point on the spectrum of parenting, from mine.

Parenting is not something that we are taught actively in schools or homes. We tend to imbibe a lot of what parenting is from our own experiences of being parented. Growing up, we intuitively pick up characteristics, qualities, behaviours and habits, along with notions of what is right and wrong parenting, from our parents. In times of illness, for instance, we rely on the same indigenous remedies that were passed on to us from our parents. We sing the same lullaby that our parents and grandparents sang to us, we narrate the same stories and create family traditions as we grow up and become parents. Much of family history is passed on to prospective generations through these methods of oral narration. In doing so, we tend to become similar to the kind of parent that we had. The stories passed on across generations are enriched with narratives that we gather from books, movies, and internet, that widen the content of engagement between parent and child. The traditional folklore and mythological stories are supplemented by stories of Disney princesses and superheroes. My sister's everyday life is replete with access to stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata along with knowledge of religious rituals and demigods from her engagement with our mother. These provide her important cultural rootedness. While my engagement with her revolves around living a good life, finding passion, living authentically, developing empathy, and becoming a more compassionate human being. This is not restricted to discussions on religious thought or indigenous culture.

In contrast to the ethno-theories of parenting, is the nagging realization that we want to become a different version of our parents. We want to tread our own paths, overcome what we think were mistakes that our parents made in raising us. The new parent is thus in a state of constant turmoil and learning and growing with the child. I see a sharp contrast between how my parents visualized their roles as parents and how me and my friends see our roles as parents. I grew up with parents who cared but did not make the

same effort at constant, active engagement with their children as I do with my sister. This idea of parenting that requires an active effort of engaging with the child, of providing stimuli at the appropriate developmental stage, and being available all the time, is often drawn from print and electronic media, much of which is replete with images of parenting drawn from the western world. The parents of the yesteryears were not plagued by the same anxieties of being an insufficient, unavailable parent, as we are. The earlier generation was not as occupied with being the 'perfect' parent as the young parents of contemporary times. The notion of an 'ideal' parent places pressure on us to meet the 'standards' of parenting and constantly working towards meeting them. The efforts made are never enough. The insecurities of being a less than perfect parent and what it might do to our child are building a generation of overanxious, overthinking parents. These standards did not exist a few decades ago. We were raised with parents who made efforts in the best way that they could, without external, exacting standards being thrust upon them.

Another dimension that I wish to highlight in this paper is the ups and downs this relationship went through during the last two years. Parenting is a huge responsibility, at least that is how it is perceived by middle class parents residing in the towns and cities of India. Since last two years, parents have had additional responsibilities of being a teacher, a peer, a classmate, and many more. As if parenting was not enough! Parenting a young child is a challenging task especially for those who have full time employment and in the case of first child. The two years of COVID'19 and frequent lockdowns had a huge impact on the world economy as also on the family economy. Without referring to statistics, it can be positively argued that a number of people lost their jobs and those with children of school going age were faced with numerous challenges, as sometimes even paying the school fee with our reduced salaries was extremely straining.

With great difficulty, I had managed to change the school of my sister in the same academic year in which COVID happened. Thus, my sister

did not manage to make many friends in the new school. COVID and lockdowns had a strong impact on people's lives. Besides the loss of employment and reduction in salaries, it took a huge toll on the mental health of the population. The mundane, meaningless, routine activities like travelling to work, seeing familiar faces at work in the same bus/ metro, have the potential to have a therapeutic effect. All of this was lost when we were forced to sit down at home and when the home was converted into a place of work. Work in many senses operated as an intruder in the residential space. Since my sister was very young when the lockdown started, I had to request my employer to assign me work from afternoon onwards so that I could facilitate her classes in the morning. The parents at home had to deal with anxieties of both parents as well as of completing tasks of children including excessive homework and written work assigned by teachers. With children at home for the entire day, it was the parents' task to find ways of engaging them in physical, mental and playful activities. This further added to the mental strain for parents as they themselves did not get a break from this continual engagement with children. This was a welcome change in one way, as it provided extended periods of time for communication and active connectedness with children. The comfort level in conversation and an understanding of each other's needs has enhanced. This may be due to her growing up in the two years or due to the shared space and time that lockdown during COVID provided. Yet, there was no space for personal engagement and no respite from the exhausting task of engaging with children. This was exacerbated by the increase in workload of home chores in the absence of domestic helpers. Parents were thus under a constant pressure to perform well as an employee, a home maker, and a parent. All of this was coupled with the general anxiety of a world that was marked by news of sickness, lack of resources, loss of wealth and lives.

It is important to acknowledge the fact that parents too are individuals with physical, emotional, and social needs. They play several roles, in their everyday life, often doing so simultaneously. Being an individual, a man, a

woman, a lover, a partner, a child, a parent, an employee -each of these carries with it a set of responsibilities and demands. Being a parent means juggling these roles along with all other responsibilities. Without appropriate platforms for learning to be and coping with being a parent, this responsibility is becoming increasingly tough for young parents.

Motherhood: Some Reflections

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Abstract

The idea of motherhood is socially constructed. The media images create unrealistic expectations for a woman and project an image of a superwoman. The first part of the paper deconstructs the myth of a superwoman projected by television commercials. The second part of the paper charts the journey of a woman who chooses to be a professional and a mother, a choice seen as natural for men but highly problematic for a woman. It enters the home life of an educated mother who struggles to understand herself as she facilitates the identity development of her child.

Motherhood as a construct has always been an area of interest for not only researchers and academicians but for the common people as well. Popular ideas of motherhood are often shaped by prevalent social and cultural standards around it. The preparation of a girl for the motherhood starts from an early age and is shaped by many socio-cultural practices. The primary socialisation within the family and community reinforce that the girls take up the roles of nurturance and care in their natal homes (which can continue after their marriage as well). It includes familiarity and training with the household chores, expectation of girls being resourceful and responsible with the home economics. She is expected to be considerate and accommodating of needs of the family members. Most parents aspire for good education for their daughters while simultaneously expressing inhibitions about their professional choices. Those professions are encouraged for perusal which enable women to balance their work and home, thus, ensuring their viability of being responsible mothers in coming times. There is a widely accepted understanding within the masses that the child rearing predominantly lies with the role of being a mother. Such a mindset often discourages women to take up and continue with those professions which require sustained commitment and time investment. Women are also met with a certain 'judgemental gaze' on their decision and time of being (or choosing not to be) a mother.

Certain ideas of motherhood are further strengthened (and seldom contested) by the depictions and representations in the popular

social media and mass media. Some of the imageries as presented are- a mother with eight hands (fictional) effortlessly managing household chores with a smile, a working mother balancing the family life with grace, a hardworking mother who takes pride in taking care of her loved ones and sacrificing her comforts for the same. It's a common image on screen to see a stressed and concerned mother always fretting about the health and well-being of her family members and so on. These depictions present to us a very convincing and idealized construct of the motherhood. These are the imageries that young women grow up with and are asked to follow. One often fails to question deep seated patriarchal norms and unfair societal expectations forming such a notion of 'motherhood'. It is often presented as socially desirable and glorified phase of a woman's life.

Growing up with the above cited ways in which 'motherhood' is understood in the everyday, my education often made me ponder and question it repeatedly. Some of the questions that I grapple with are – Is there choice and agency of a woman in defining motherhood? Why is motherhood so glorified and celebrated, as compared to fatherhood or parenthood in general? Can the responsibility of child rearing be shared by fathers and other family members? Why women are put in a position wherein they have to choose between their career aspirations and being a mother? and finally, what are the kind of support systems that can be provided to the mothers?

These questions often translated and unfolded in my own journey of motherhood. As a working woman and a research scholar, being a first-time mother was very challenging. My excitement of being a mother was equally matched with overbearing sense of responsibility towards the newly born, especially in a situation where my spouse was not residing together and was working in a different city. I would not only grapple with the rapid physical changes taking place in the body, I would also experience various mental stressors, anxieties and exhaustions at different times. Following are some of the insights from my own motherhood journey:

Child Rearing- Expectations, Realities and Possibilities

There is a very popular saying that ‘it takes a village to raise a child’. I experienced it when my family members would actively assume the role (s) of primary care takers of my child in my absence (many times during my presence as well). My father would lovingly and voluntarily take care of his grandson- bathing, feeding, reading him stories, taking him for long walks and tending to him when he is unwell. It was very humbling and empowering to see my father take up a non-traditional role of child rearing, as a retired banker. My mother also had a very encouraging and supportive role in my journey of motherhood. Being a working professional herself, she would always share the importance of cherishing the experience of being a mother but also acknowledging the need to visualize oneself with more than that. She always laid stress on the financial independence and professional aspirations of women to experience life holistically. I learnt to organize and plan my time meticulously. I have learnt to not overburden myself with the unrealistic standards of being a ‘working mother’ who is able to manage each aspect perfectly. I can now find my own pace, daily rhythm, and realistic expectations in work-life front. To this day, this idea of a wholesome life has stayed with me and has helped me grow and mature at a pace which is not necessarily defined by socially acceptable standards. It now feels okay to feel overwhelmed

at times and seek help, support and assistance from friends and family. This realization has also humanized and individualized the experience of motherhood for me.

Life at Home- Understanding Parent Child Relation

Parents, as a general tendency, would often spend immensely on pedagogizing the home space by buying expensive toys, books, games and other ‘educative experiences’. It becomes a matter of pride and gratification for the parents to be able to provide plethora of educative experiences from an early age of the child. The underlying expectation is that every conversation or engagement with the child should culminate in some form of learning and self-improvement of the child. In this pursuit, there is a possibility that one may ignore or not acknowledge enough the child and her inclinations, interests at an early age. With excessive pedagogizing of the home space, the focus of parenting shifts from understanding and developing parent-child relation and mainly focus on the academic achievement of the child.

As an educator and a parent, it was a tremendous learning opportunity for me to observe my child grow and engage with his immediate (physical and social) environment. I eventually realized that a child does not necessarily require exuberantly priced battery-operated toys and educative materials which may catch their attention momentarily but later on are of not much use. Such toys may produce dramatics of light, sound and movement but are not able to provide a scope of sustained engagement or exploration to the child leading to lack of interest in them in due course of time.

I would, instead, observe my child play repeatedly with things used in daily chores of home such as exploring different sizes and sounds of utensils, playing with water buckets and mugs in summer and estimating how much water can fit in different sized buckets. His favorite play items include washing and dried clothes. He spends time by folding and stacking washed clothes and organising them on basis of colours. We make different games on the spot using color, shape and type of cloth as

categories. These were some of the ways through which he would participate in the everyday tasks and interact with family members through it. I understood that one does not have to always wait and plan out exclusive time slots to interact with the child, it can be an ongoing process infused with the daily rhythm and life at home. Participating in daily chores gives children a sense of routine and structure and help inculcate certain habits in a more natural way than impositions. Along with the ongoing engagement throughout the day, I would also try to find some exclusive time where I would just narrate stories to my child. I would give my uninterrupted attention to him during this time and both of us looked forward to it everyday.

My journey of motherhood has led me to the path of discovery and learning about myself and my child. It has also made me see and experience motherhood beyond the normalised or patronising notions of motherhood. There have been several moments of breakdown when I felt overwhelmed with emotions. I have learnt to accept that I am a humanized mother and not an unrealistic superwoman who has all the answers. I have grown as a mother and so has my professional aspirations. I am not trying to balance both, I have learnt to juggle both and in the midst of chaos and confusion I have found a sense of order.

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