

## “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 wellbeing 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.”