



BUILDING BLOCKS OF TOMORROW

SPECIAL
SUPPLEMENT

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any one kind of marriage - love or arranged. Marriages also turn sour for a wide range of reasons; some are more serious than others.

Shegufa Tasnim, 30, had been in a toxic relationship for seven-and-a-half years until she escaped from it with her daughter, who is now 22 months old. They now live in Dhaka at Tasnim's parents' residence.

Tasnim moved to London in 2010 following her marriage to the man chosen by her family, only to find out that her husband was a compulsive gambler, who at one time went as far as attempting a car accident with Tasnim in the passenger seat. Tasnim was eight months pregnant at the time.

"His addiction to gambling was so excessive that he attempted a car accident with me and our unborn child, so he could file an automobile insurance claim for personal injury," said Tasnim.

"I was also not allowed to leave home alone at any time, not even to toss the household garbage in the dumpster downstairs. Enrolling in a postgraduate program or finding a job was therefore out of the question," she said. "Although he was a British passport holder, he also never let me apply for British citizenship," she added.

Asked how supportive her family has been so far, Tasnim said, "My brothers consider me a burden. Our society still believes that a woman needs a husband and a child needs a father. But they miss the point that being with one parent is healthier for a child than to be with two parents who are unhappy together."

Tasnim, who is now working towards an MBA degree at a private university in Dhaka, says that she dreams of raising her daughter to be a confident and independent person, not just a girl or woman.

"If I have to be her father, then she has to be my son, too," Tasnim said.

She thinks that as an educated woman, she does not want or need to depend on a man to provide for her child.

But Tasnim laments over the fact that many schools in Dhaka often show reluctance towards admitting children of

single parents. "This unfair attitude and system should change, because it is not only frustrating for single parents but their children as well, who grow up thinking that they are not accepted in the society they live in."

OUR SINGLE FATHERS

When we talk about single parents, we tend to think of single mothers only. But the reality is, there are single fathers, too. Single fathers carry out the same responsibilities that single mothers do - from preparing meals, feeding, bathing to putting their children to sleep and helping them with their schoolwork.

Shihab Haider, who is in his mid-30s, is a single parent to a six-and-a-half-

peaceful life and home. He stays in touch with his ex-in-laws and has a cordial relationship with them. Haider's son also visits his maternal relatives regularly. For the well-being of his son and to spend more time with him, Haider has also reduced the number of his official out-of-country trips.

When asked how our society looks at single fathers, Haider said, "Our society still cannot accept that a father can be the primary caregiver of a child. The general idea is that after the divorce, the guy will remarry soon and therefore cannot look after a child."

Haider says that he also faces unpleasant situations at the immigriga-

for increased engagement of fathers in raising children.

Although Shihab Haider and Anisa Rahman belong to two different generations, they both believe that young people today do not try hard enough to save their marriages.

"Divorce is now taken as a convenient option because we know that we can always get divorced and start everything anew," he said. "But it is often cruel to the children of such couples."

Whether we marry the person we love or one chosen by our family, we all envisage for ourselves a happy family where love and peace will abound. But what we envision does not always come



"Even the teachers at my son's school used to call up my ex-wife to discuss anything about my child. That particular situation has now changed, though," he added.

year-old boy. It was a love at first sight for Haider and his ex-wife, but that love did not last long after their marriage; the dreams perished sooner than they thought.

"The decision to get divorced was my ex-wife's. She thought we differed too much in our opinions and our philosophies about life and living," Haider said. "She also thought that that it would be better for our son to be with me. We did not have to go through much struggle deciding on the custodianship."

Haider calls his three-year journey as a single father a beautiful one. From day one, he has tried to give his child a

tion counters of our airports when he travels alone with his child. "People just cannot accept the idea that a child can be alone with his or her father," he said.

"Even the teachers at my son's school used to call up my ex-wife to discuss anything about my child. That particular situation has now changed, though," he added.

Haider agrees that single fathers are rare in Bangladesh but he thinks that there will come a time when a large number of fathers will be taking care of their children without help from their partners. Haider cites the growing rate of failed marriages as one of the reasons

true. However, our pain and heartache from a failed marriage should not destroy us, but make us stronger, if not for ourselves, then for our children. Single parents, every one of them, are fighters in their own right.

Some of the names of individuals interviewed for this article have been changed to protect their privacy.

Wara Karim is a US-based writer for The Daily Star. She can be contacted at warakarim1@gmail.com

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A. P. J. Abdul Kalam



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