

Growing up with a single mom

RUBAMA AMREEN

Divorce – a word heavy with implications, stigmas, and media coverage. Many children don't encounter it before their teenage years, many may not have a relationship as intimate as I do with it. My parents separated three days after my fourth birthday, which honestly makes the sacred date much easier to remember. Yet, even at that tender age, I knew my mother had made the right choice. Infidelity and negligence aren't things anybody should ever have to deal with.

So just like that, I was the child of a single mom. A tragic case, according to many, except I never saw it as one. Blessed as I was, I never faced any backlash, never had to hear the term "broken family" be used to offend me. I don't know what would have happened if I was bullied for my situation, but thanks to my mother, I never found out. Suffice to say, before I had reached the meagre age of ten, anybody who knew me was well-informed of my past by my big mouth and the headstrong attitude my mother had instilled in me.

Obviously, life without a paternal parental figure had its drawbacks. Questions about where my father was were more infuriating than anything. Whenever I



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said I did not have one, they would look concerned and ask what happened to him. How tempted I would be to reply, "Other than being a terrible human, he was perfectly fine." After all, how do I defend a man who has not bothered to see me in a literal decade? No matter how open-minded people like to perceive

themselves to be, they fail to hide their scrutiny as soon as I utter the words, "They're separated." Relatives, teachers, even strangers do not hesitate to judge us.

Another thing I've noticed is that, at my age, most kids struggle to have an honest relationship with either of their parents. I fail to empathise, however much they rant

to me. Contrary to all social assumptions, trust is rarely an issue when it comes to the dynamic between my mother and I. I grew up in a secure but not possessive environment, maybe one I would not have received if my mother had deliberated in making the ultimate decision.

Despite all that, my family was whole in every aspect that actually mattered. Confidence, attention, and love – there was no shortage of any in our house. My mom held a job all throughout my childhood, yet she always found time to listen to my nonsensical musings and made sure I never lacked anything. Raising a child by oneself is not easy. The endless diligence and patience required are not qualities a vast majority of humans possess.

I won't deny that my parents' separation affected my life enormously. I remember the months filled with anguish that followed, my mother's caring arms cradling me to sleep, and best of all, the smile that lit her face when she won custody of me years later. Our story may not be one the people on the other side enjoy, but it is certainly one we rejoiced in.

Rubama Amreen spends her time bawling over fictional characters. Send help at rubama.arahman@gmail.com

Is the big, fat Bangladeshi wedding a financial burden?

MASHIYAT NAYEEM

As this year's wedding season nears its end, I had some time to look back and reflect on the culture surrounding weddings today.

Every wedding season seems to be more extravagant than the last. The days of drawing *alpona* in the yard has long been replaced with grand stages and themed decor that put Bollywood set designs to shame. Merrymaking takes a different form with choreographed dance routines, concerts with professional singers, and carnival style activities. As such, weddings are now more festive than some of the holidays we celebrate.

While there is nothing inherently wrong with hosting a series of grand events if one has the means to do so, the issue lies with the standardisation of it. In the age of social media, the need to match up to the standards set by one's social circle is further perpetuated. Couples are under more pressure than ever to host an extravagant wedding that will be remem-

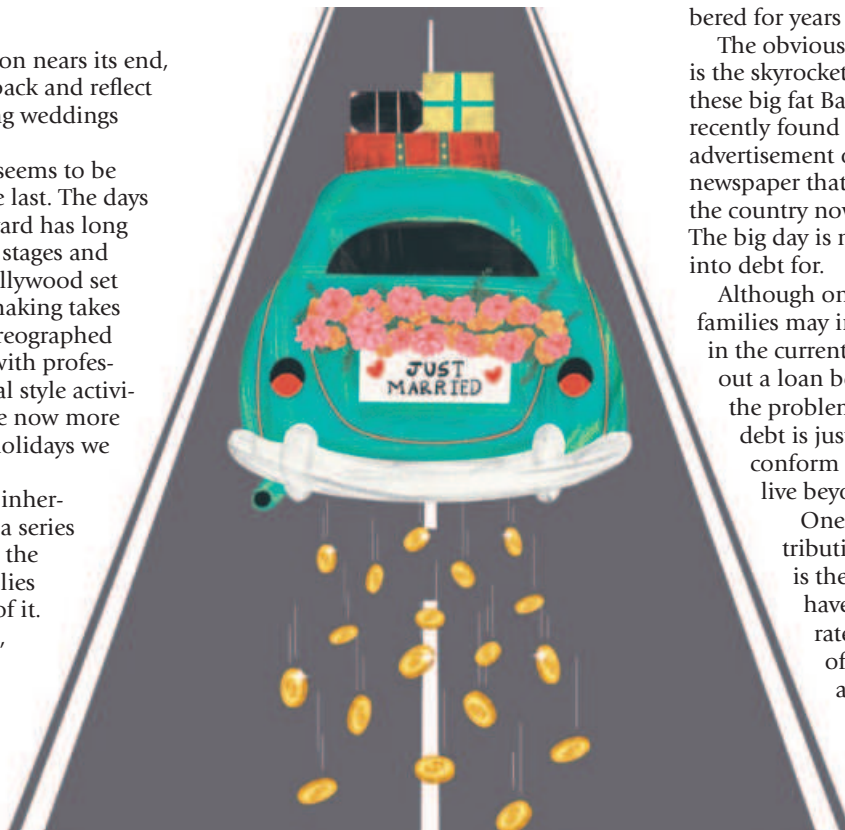


ILLUSTRATION: **SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM**

bered for years to come.

The obvious consequence of this trend is the skyrocketing expenditure behind these big fat Bangladeshi weddings. I recently found out from a rather splashy advertisement on the front page of a newspaper that many reputed banks in the country now offer "marriage loans". The big day is now somehow worth going into debt for.

Although one may argue that many families may inevitably need to borrow in the current economic climate or take out a loan because of personal reasons, the problem occurs when going into debt is justified by the necessity to conform to social expectations and live beyond one's means.

One of the biggest factors contributing to the cost of weddings is the venue. Wedding venues have now become more elaborate and luxurious, with many offering outdoor spaces, and breath-taking views.

Bigger venues lead to luxury event management, photographers, and other wedding vendors, driving the cost up. Designer outfits with

heavy customisation are all the rage right now, especially from high end boutiques in neighbouring countries, and these often cost a fortune.

Add in outfits for the bride or groom's entourage, props and party favours, and the expenses quickly climb up. A sizeable portion of the costs also come from succumbing to the cultural pressure of inviting everyone you have known in your life as to not offend anyone. While there is no going around that — especially when you come from subcultures like Sylhet, Chattogram or Old Dhaka. However, opting for smaller, more intimate events with close friends and family is the key, which even offers the opportunity to have them tastefully done within budget.

Weddings are a once-in-a-lifetime event for the majority of people in our region and it is natural to hope for a day we will look back on fondly for the rest of our lives. But it is important to remember that ultimately it is the life you build with your spouse that matters and not the wedding itself. Breaking the bank is not the secret ingredient to a happy marriage.

Mashiyat Nayeem firmly believes that all great ideas come from shower thoughts. Tell her things to think about at mashiyat.nayeem@gmail.com