

#RELATIONSHIPS & FAMILY



50/50 marriage? More like 90/10 in disguise

Meet Runi, a 33-year-old woman living in the metropolitan of Dhaka. To many, she is a shining beacon of modern success — Runi has a thriving corporate job, a pristine Instagram feed full of #BossLady hashtags, and a dazzling smile that hides the chaos she navigates daily. However, beneath this glittering exterior lies the harrowing tale of a Bangladeshi woman juggling the world's most unreasonable expectations.

Her day starts at 6 AM because that's when the battle begins. Not the one in the boardroom but the one in the kitchen. After all, if her husband's omelettes do not have that perfect crispy edge, the in-laws will start wondering if the family bloodline is doomed.

Runi used to skip breakfast in her single days, but now, she's a one-woman breakfast factory. By 7 AM, the kitchen looks like a battlefield, the only evidence of her triumph being the stuffed lunchboxes she sends off with her family members, while she downs a double shot espresso for herself.

But wait, there's more. Financial independence is the post-feminist woman's armour, so off she goes to her 9-to-5, which is more of a 9-to-9 because Dhaka traffic eats up a third of her life.

At work, she's the queen of presentations, a master of spreadsheets, and a champion of multitasking. That is until she gets a call from home because the rice cooker is not working and she is expected to troubleshoot it over the phone — because clearly, her MBA also included a minor in household appliances.

By the time she returns home, she's not greeted with a "How was your day?" but with a list of things she forgot to do. "Did you call your mother-in-law's second cousin's son about the wedding gift, why didn't you pick up more ketchup, and the curtains need changing because chachi is coming tomorrow."

Let's not forget the pregnancy subplot, which is ever-present in her life. She could be discussing geopolitics, and someone would ask, "But when are you giving us the good news?" As if motherhood is the ultimate promotion she's been striving for. Of course, this comes with unsolicited advice from everyone, including her office peon, who once suggested that eating seven dates daily would guarantee twin boys.

Runi often pondered one of life's great injustices, as she massaged her swollen ankles after a long day: why was the pregnancy burden hers alone while the financial burden had to be 'shared equally'?

Her husband was a perfectly progressive man who championed equality in theory but when it came to the practicalities of biology, nature had handed him a permanent get-out-of-jail-free card.

While Runi dealt with morning sickness,

mood swings, and a belly that made her feel like a human watermelon, his biggest contribution was rubbing her back occasionally, and buying mango pickles when she craved them.

Yet, society had the audacity to expect her to split bills with a man who would never know the joy of waddling to the office at 8 months pregnant or crying over a detergent commercial.

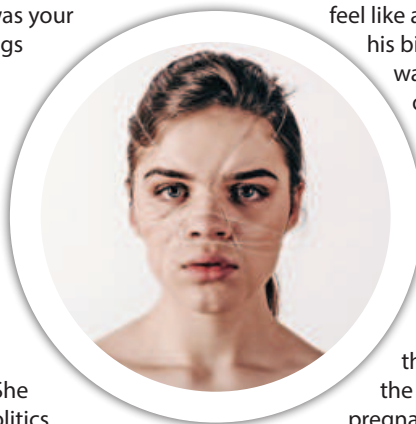
"Partnership, my foot," Runi muttered one day, glaring at her husband as he sat on the couch scrolling through his phone while she Googled "Can pelvic pain make you lose your mind?"

Runi also has her parents to think about, who she left behind when she got married. Her heart aches every time her mother sighs on the phone, subtly reminding her of how the house feels empty without her.

"But don't worry about us," her mother insists. "We are fine."

The guilt would crush a lesser mortal but Runi pushes on, wondering if teleportation is a possibility in her lifetime. Even in modern times, leaving the natal home is a woman's cross to bear and 'adjust' to the home of the man she has partnered with and pour her life force there.

And yet, amidst all this, society expects Runi to remain impeccably dressed, maintain her waistline, and throw Pinterest-perfect dinner parties. She must also take up yoga and Pilates because 'It's good for your shontan!' and watch educational videos about 'how to keep the spark alive' in her marriage.



One evening, after a particularly gruelling day, Runi collapsed on her couch. Her husband — well-meaning but oblivious — asked, "What's wrong? You're just balancing work and home. Women have been doing this for centuries."

The unassumingness of the statement played havoc on her already fraught nervous system. Women were discriminated against, always. A few decades ago, they were privy to being homebodies only, not being allowed to do anything, having nothing, and living as a second-class citizen in their own homes due to the lack of economic identity. Today, we abide by the 'Superwoman Syndrome,' where modern marriage claims to be the epitome of the Dutch phenomenon of 50-50. I struggle to find the male 50.

So, Runi just stared at him, her vision narrowing like a predator spotting its prey. "Oh, really?" she said sweetly. "Would you like to try it for a day?" Maybe then he would be able to scrub out his 50 between the cushions of the sofa of his childhood home, possibly with the help of his doting mother.

The next morning, she handed him an apron and left for work without packing his lunch. By 11 AM, he had managed to burn the eggs, flood the kitchen, and call his mother in desperation. By the time Runi returned, he was sitting in a corner, hugging the rice cooker like it was his last friend on earth. And so, Runi survived another day. She might not have the cape, but she's definitely saving the world — one omelette, spreadsheet, and guilt trip at a time. But it is time society starts asking the other half of the population what 50 they are bringing to the table.

By Noshin Nawal
Photo: Collected