



#MOTHER'S DAY TRIBUTE

Motherhood beyond the buzzword

In today's world of changing family dynamics and family structures, buzzwords promise teamwork, balance, and a shared purpose. Yet, somehow, in the mad rush between breakfasts and bedtime stories, many mothers find themselves mentally ticking off lists that are too small to make it into the "important" conversations, yet substantial enough to weigh them down.

Here's where the popular concepts fail, and reality begins.

When co-parenting is not equal

Take Arsila Mehnaz, for example. She has a high-flying career in finance in a leading multinational firm and is a single mother, co-parenting her eight-year-old son with her ex-husband.

"My son was only 9 months old when the family split," she says. "In our part of the world, children usually stay with their mother. For me, that was true from the start. There was a custody battle, but my husband and I pulled out of it in the last minute."

In Bangladesh, the courts move slowly, and the law can be stacked against mothers, so the couple negotiated a joint arrangement outside the courtroom before things got ugly and then sealed it legally.

Over the years, Arsila Mehnaz has come to realise that coparenting is a half-truth.

"I work long hours in a demanding job, yet I am the one who gets him to school, manages ECAs, soothes him when he's upset, plays bad cop when needed, and plans life around him," Mehnaz says.

His week with his father, on the flipside, is the rosy break. A few hours of fun, away from the routine, the rules, and the worries.

She adds, "My ex-husband has all the freedom in the world: to work as he wishes, to socialise when he feels like it. If I so much as decide to meet my friends, I have to plan out my entire day a certain way to accommodate my son into the plan."



Arsila Mehnaz, however, is blessed in many ways. While her in-laws remain largely absent from the support scene, her parents have become the village she needed to keep her afloat in the hardest months. Without them, she doubts if she could have kept working. Financially, therefore, Arsila is fortunate to manage without asking for support.

"That would be a whole new court case, and I do not feel like going into that situation as I am self-sufficient," she says.

Mehnaz also realises that many women are not, and with unreliable law enforcement, things can be very tough for the financially dependent mothers out there.

"My son never got the conventional family life, but he did start missing it when he went to school," shares Mehnaz. "To the best of our abilities, both his father and I try to make it to his PTMs and school shows. Until he was six, we did all his birthdays together, too."

There are, of course, times when her ex-husband cannot make it, and Mehnaz makes a conscious effort to put her son's well-being and honouring his respect for his father over using his absence as leverage.

Learning to mother alone

In a similar boat is entrepreneur and soft-skill trainer Tahmina Shaily.

"My son was one when my husband, an expert mountaineer, disappeared from

end of the sea, and learning to swim is the only way to survive.

"A woman can give birth to a child, but she does not instantly become a "mother". It takes a woman just as much time to learn the ropes of being a mother as it takes for the baby to learn the ropes of life," she adds.

It also takes a village, but in Shaily's case, that village was painfully small. Her in-laws had been largely absent from their lives, even when her husband was alive.

"After the incident, however, our lives unfolded like a tasteless movie. All the property that belonged to my husband was seized from us. This inheritance was my right, my son's right, but unfortunately, my in-laws cut all contact with us."

Choosing to remain positive for her son, Shaily remembers asking her therapist,

"I am not even fully a mother yet, how do I also become his father?" The therapist's response became Tahmina Shaily's guiding light: "Be your son's friend. He will keep coming back to you at each step of life."

Her son is now thirteen, and they have come to terms with life with all its highs and lows.

"We have found our symmetry," shares Shaily. "When I am at work, he stays with my mother or brother, just down the street. And I keep work flexible during exam season."

Her son accompanies her on work trips internationally or even locally, when he does not have school, or when he can bring his homework along.



Mount Everest on his way back down, without a trace," says Shaily.

Tahmina Shaily recalls that it was an extremely traumatic time in her life. "I did not know how to mourn it. I was going to therapists and counsellors because I had no idea how to navigate life with a 12-month-old baby, as a single mother."

Shaily likens that time to a situation where two people are thrown into the deep