

মাতৃকথা



The Journey of Twenty Years...



Few Golden moments captured fromAnnual Picnics of Atmaja 2006 to 2020



2006



Rabindra Nazrul Sandhya by Atmaja 2007



2020



Shalboni 2008



Bishnupur 2009



Chandipur 2010



Ranchi 2011



Purulia 2017



Atmaja attending parenting workshop at JU Darshan Bhavan 2009



Atmaja Ahana and Puja addressing in Pre-adoptive counseling Workshop 2021



Atmaja in pre-adoptive counseling workshop in collaboration with ISSA 2020

Down the memory Lane...

10 Years Celebration



আবার বছর কুড়ি পরে.....

নয় নয় করে একুশ পার হয়ে গেল আমাদের আত্মজা। আজ যখন পিছন ফিরে প্রথম সেদিনের কথা মনে করি যেদিন আমরা একদল বন্ধু মিশনারিজ অফ চ্যারিটিতে সিস্টার অড্রে এবং সিস্টার মার্জারি'র সাথে বসে ঠিক করি একটা সংগঠন শুরু করার যার নাম আত্মজা তখন একটা বিষয় খুব স্পষ্ট মনে আছে - আমাদের কাছে খুব পরিস্কার ছিলোনা এই সংগঠনের ভবিষ্যৎ কী হতে পারে।

তবু সেই ৫ই নভেম্বর , ২০০০ সালে যে ঘোষণাপত্রে আমরা সই করেছিলাম সেখানে সংগঠনের যে পাঁচটি মূখ্য উদ্দেশ্য নথীবদ্ধ করেছিলাম সেই পাঁচটি স্বস্তের উপরেই আজো দাঁড়িয়ে আছে আমাদের এই আত্মজা। আর এই চলার পথে আমাদের প্রধান এবং একমাত্র রসায়ন ছিল ভালোবাসা, ভালোবাসা এবং প্রচুর ভালোবাসা। তাই শুরুতে আমাদের ভাবনায় অনভিজ্ঞতা জনিত সামান্য কিছু অস্পষ্টতা থাকলেও শুধুমাত্র এই ভালোবাসার জোরেই আজো আমরা একসঙ্গে একজোট হয়ে আত্মজাকে বাঁচিয়ে রাখতে পেরেছি... এবং আজ একথা স্বীকার করতে দ্বিধা নেই যে এই মুহূর্তে দাঁড়িয়ে আমাদের মনে হচ্ছে আত্মজা'র এই চলার পথ আরো বহুদূর যাবে। যে ভাবে আমরা একটা একটা করে বছর পার হয়ে অতিক্রম করে ফেললাম দু দুটো দশক। ঠিক তেমন ভাবেই হয়ত একদিন আত্মজা আরো কয়েক দশক পরে আজকের এই দিনটির কথা স্মরণ করবে।

আমাদের এই আত্মজায় যেহেতু ব্যক্তিতর্পণ কাঙ্ক্ষিত নয় তাই আলাদা করে কারো নাম নিতে চাইনা। তবে আমাদের সমস্ত সদস্যদের ভালোবাসা এবং বেশ কিছু বন্ধু সংগঠনের সাল্লিধ্য আমাদের একটু একটু করে এগিয়ে নিয়ে এসেছে এই দীর্ঘ যাত্রাপথে। মিশনারিজ অফ চ্যারিটিকে কেন্দ্র করে যে সংগঠনের শুরু হয়েছিল ... ক্রমশ তার পরিচয় হয়েছে CRY (Child Right and You) , প্রাজক , ISSA এবং এইরকম আরো অনেক সংগঠনের সাথে। এই মুহূর্তে আমরা পশ্চিমবঙ্গ সরকারের পিপিআর্টমেন্ট অফ উইমেন অ্যান্ড চাইল্ড এর বেশ কিছু উদ্যোগেও অংশগ্রহণ করছি। শুরুতে আমরা সত্যিই ভাবিনি যে একদিন এতটা ব্যাপক এবং বিস্তৃত পরিসরে আমরা কাজ করব।

এই চলার পথে আমরা অনেক কিছু করতে পেরেছি ... যার মধ্যে একটা উল্লেখযোগ্য কাজ হল কর্মরত দম্পতিদের জন্যে দত্তক নেবার জন্যে ছুটি বা অ্যাডোপশন লিভ আদায় করা। প্রথমে এটা কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার এবং পরে রাজ্য সরকারের কর্মচারীদের ক্ষেত্রে এবং সমস্ত সংস্বাহিত কার্যকর হয়েছে। দত্তক সংক্রান্ত আইন ও এখন অনেক সহজ হয়েছে। তবে এ বিষয়ে কোন সন্দেহ নেই যে আরো অনেক কাজই এখনো আমাদের সামনে রয়েছে এবং আগামীদিনে আমাদের সংগঠনের সামনে প্রধান চ্যালেঞ্জ হল সেই সব সমস্যার দিকগুলো সঠিক ভাবে চিহ্নিত করা এবং সেই অভিমুখে সংগঠনকে এগিয়ে নিয়ে যাবার প্রয়াস নেওয়া।

প্রথমেই যে কথা বলার চেষ্টা করেছিলাম সেটা একটু স্পষ্ট করে বলি। এই দীর্ঘ পথ পার হয়ে এসে একটা কথা আমাদের মনে হচ্ছে যে সংগঠনের নেতৃত্বে নতুন মুখের খুব প্রয়োজন আজ। অনেক নতুন সদস্য যেমন এসেছেন যারা এই নেতৃত্ব দিতে পারেন ঠিক তেমন আমাদের সন্তানদের মধ্যেই সেই সম্ভাবনা বেশ ভালো ভাবেই আছে যেটা আমরা সেদিন বুঝিনি। তাই আমাদের সদস্য হবার জন্যে শুধু আইনি পথে দত্তক নেওয়া দম্পতিদের কথা বলে হয়েছিল আমাদের রুলস অ্যান্ড রেগুলেশনে। কিন্তু আজ আমাদেরই সন্তানরা যখন অনেক বড়ো হয়েছে এবং আমাদের এই কর্মকাণ্ডে সক্রিয় ভূমিকা নিচ্ছে তখন তাদের সদস্য হিসাবে গ্রহণ করতে আমাদের রুলস অ্যান্ড রেগুলেশনের বাধা রয়ে গেছে। এই বিষয়ে আমাদের খুব গুরুত্ব দিয়ে ভাবতে হবে এবং এই বাধা দূর করার প্রয়াস নিতে হবে খুব তাড়াতাড়ি। এই প্রসঙ্গে বলি আমাদের এই আত্মকথার এবারের প্রচ্ছদ শিল্পী হল পূজা দত্ত আমাদেরই

এক আত্মজা । ওর জন্যে রইলো একরাশ ভালোবাসা আর শুভেচ্ছা। এবং সেই সাথে আমাদের আরো অনেক আত্মজা যারা আমাদের সাথে একসাথে কাজ করে চলেছে তাদের জন্যেও রইলো প্রচুর ভালোবাসা।

এবার বলি আমাদের এই যাত্রাসঙ্গী যে আত্মকথা ... সেও আজ একুশ বছরের হয়ে গেল । ২০০১ সালের মার্চ মাসে প্রথম প্রকাশের দিন থেকে আমাদের মনের কথা , প্রানের কথা আরো অনেকের কাছে পৌঁছে দিতে দিতে যে আমাদের হাত ধরে নিয়ে চলেছে ঠিক সেই ভাবে ... যে ভাবে একদিন কবি বলেছিলেন ... “ এই পথে আলো স্বেলে , এ’পথেই পৃথিবীর ক্রমমুক্তি হবে”।

ভালো থাকবেন , ভালোবাসবেন , ভালোবাসা নেবেন বন্ধুরা..... **আত্মকথা’র সম্পাদক মন্ডলী**

Twenty years of Atmaja

Incidentally, little over ten years back in November 2010, when we celebrated our ten years of existence, I had written an introductory article for the souvenir, as I was the Secretary even then. After some break, I am back at the thorny helm and on the keyboard of my laptop to write this similar monologue. It is certainly a pleasure and a privilege to take up this responsibility in the celebration of twenty years of Atmaja. However, the pandemic has drawn some lines which, despite delaying this celebration, is still threatening to make us somewhat hesitant to celebrate with full liberty and unbounded joy. We are going ahead with our restricted plan through intense enthusiasm from our members and juniors alike.

At the cost of repeating, it is tempting to write about the genesis of our association and the activities of the last twenty plus years. Atmaja, the association of adoptive parents, came into existence in the year 2000 with the initiative of some of us who used to meet informally at Missionaries of Charity (MC) primarily to discuss and exchange issues related to adoption and stay in touch with our adoption agency. In the process, and encouraged by the inspiration from late Sister Audrey, who was the then in-Charge of the Adoption Office in MC, and Sister Marjorie, we felt the need to form an association which could be used as a forum to discuss various issues related to adoption including promotion of adoption as an alternative way to parenthood. Atmaja was born out of this need on 5 November 2000. The formal registration as a society under the West Bengal Societies Registration Act 1961 (Registration No. S/1L/1844 of 2000-01) took place on 24 January 2001 with 23 member families. In these past years, our membership has grown to 95 member families. The children of our senior members have now grown up to be high school or college students, and some are working, while being responsible and taking part in our regular activities. They are our pride and fruits of love. During this journey, unfortunately, we have lost several of our members; most recently, we lost our senior member, Debabrata Chatterjee, on 30 December 2021.

As outlined in our Memorandum of Association, the objectives of our association were set as: (1) to provide a network, support group and forum for adoptive parents, (2) to ensure the well-being of adopted children and to help protect their rights, (3) to assist the process of adoption by providing help to parents in the pre-adoptive stage, (4) to work towards the rationalization of laws regarding adoption to ensure the best interests of the children and parents, and (5) to promote social awareness and consciousness about adoption in the society.

In the beginning, we acted only as a support group to help each other with the various problems/issues related to bringing up our children while meeting on various occasions like picnic, cultural evening, counseling workshop, film show, short trip, visiting city spots, etc.. We soon expanded the scope of our association to (1) help the pre-adoptive parents by holding regular workshops specifically designed for the purpose, (2) spread the awareness about adoption by going to different media, (3) stress the need of disclosure to the adopted children, (4) pursue with the relevant ministries for maternity/paternity leave for

the adoptive parents at par with the biological parents, (5) modify the adoption law to facilitate the adoption process, etc. Due to our persistent effort, the central government has agreed to grant maternity leave to adoptive mothers at par with the biological mothers since 2005 and the West Bengal state has granted the same in 2011. We have also succeeded in making the adoption law more flexible and friendly through the Juvenile Justice Act 2006, with the recent amendment in 2019.

It is our constant Endeavour to help ourselves and the pre-adoptive parents as a support group which makes us unique in this city of Kolkata, while making an impact at the national/international level by getting into relevant issues and trying to initiate a change (no matter how little) for betterment of the adopted children and adoptive parents. Our sincere concern also lies with the children to be adopted and the parents willing to adopt.

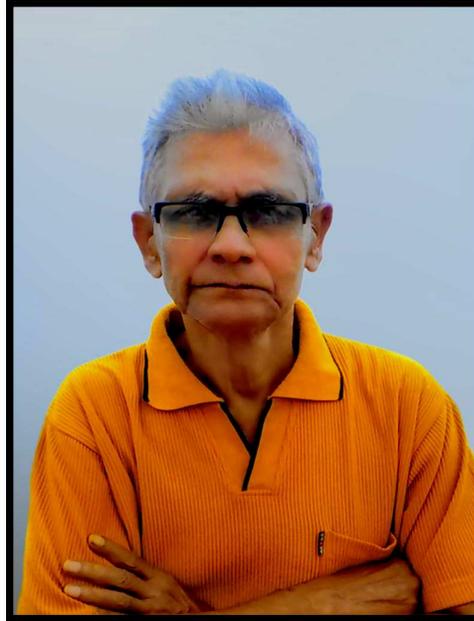
This special issue of Atmakatha is to mark the twenty years of Atmaja and to serve as a souvenir for the occasion. The editors are to be congratulated for this tremendous effort and the contributors are to be thanked to make this issue so rich and meaningful. I would also like to acknowledge encouragement, co-

operation and support received from many personalities, institutions and our sponsors. Tireless effort of our members is also to be appreciated. It is our hope that, through this celebration, we shall have the required strength and motivation to bring about a change in the society at large that will accept and appreciate adoption as a natural process.

02 April 2022
Kolkata

Anup Dewanji
Secretary, Atmaja

শোক



আমাদের আত্মজার এই দীর্ঘ যাত্রাপথে অনেক বন্ধুকেই আমরা হারিয়েছি। এইরকম একজন শ্রী দেবরত চট্টোপাধ্যায় চলে গেছেন গত ৩০শে পিসেম্বর, ২০২১ দুরারোগ্য ক্যান্সারের সাথে ছয়মাস লড়াই করার পর। আত্মজার পক্ষ থেকে রইল এই শোকতপ্ত পরিবারের জন্যে সমবেদনা এবং তাঁর আত্মজা স্বাভাবিক পাশে থাকার প্রতিশ্রুতি।

THE MASK THIEF

Tiyasa Mukherjee

Team Cuba has solved lots of dangerous cases of theft, murder or any other for the last ten years and it was successful and has received lots of awards for contribution in saving the country and lives of citizens. Team Cuba is actually a very huge team but it is divided into small groups and spread worldwide so that the whole world gets protected.

Team Cuba of Kolkata branch consists of three girls with experiences of six to ten years. Once they got a case which changed their lives completely or may be the equation with each other. They got a case which created lots of raucous in the whole world. The case got a name "THE MASK THIEF" by people. As they faced the thief, they had not seen the real face and they had not even known whether the thief was a boy or a girl. He or she wore different kinds of mask which covered his or her whole face like ghost, vampire, cartoons and many more. People who are facing the issue are in complete dilemma as they also don't know the exact solution for the problem. For the last ten months, the case went to many other agencies without success. It went to one of the most famous Dolphin Agency which solved many important and "tough-nut-to-crack" cases, but they also failed to solve this case which was quite shocking! So, finally, the case came to the Kolkata branch of Team Cuba, which has a team of three girls, Rashi, Olivia, and Nisha.

Olivia, a tough and rough person, is responsible but somewhere she was truly kind, which many people failed to understand and made a perception in their minds that she was a heartless person, except her partner and friend Nisha who was working with her for the last ten years. Nisha is complete opposite of her friend, soft-hearted, honest, responsible and people-friendly. Rashi is something totally different; she is honest, dedicated, responsible, soft-hearted but easily gets fooled by others which creates lots of problems for her.

Before starting to solve the case, Rashi got injured as the team was already solving a case and, towards the end, while catching the culprit, Rashi got badly injured. So, she could not join the new case and, as a result, got a nice bashing from Olivia. Rashi didn't mind as she was able to understand the situation and agreed on working with the injuries. Though Nisha tried to handle the situation differently, Rashi denied and moved forward with the case.

Then, suddenly one day, Rashi got bashing from Olivia as they failed to catch the thief and every plan of them was becoming flop including the plans given by Rashi. Suddenly, out of anger, Olivia blurted out some bitter past related to the team which shook her completely. She could not control her emotions and ran away; but Nisha consoled her, though Rashi was having so many questions regarding the accident that had happened six years ago. Why she gave in to the words of the goons and could not save Sonia madam? Sonia, another mate whose nature was similar to them, but she couldn't see any tears or sad faces that was her weakness.

Later Nisha helped her to get back to work. Meanwhile Rashi got a new friend named Neha, who does nothing to survive in life, depends on parents' money, but she is honest and grounded. Rashi sometimes goes out to meet Neha leaving the critical case behind! One day, the three girls disguised themselves differently and roamed around a lot in crowded place to catch the thief, but failed as someone pushed Rashi and snatched away a chain from her neck. The chain was the last memory of her dead mother. As it is lost, Rashi completely broke down with emotions as well as with injuries, which again halted the case and, as a result, Olivia's anger rose again. But this time it was at a different level and Rashi even got the offer for leaving the job.

One certain night, few girls dressed up beautifully roaming near a lake/swimming pool with safety measures like guns and other materials as they had a solid plan to put the thief behind bars, the girls are

none other than the three girls of Team Cuba including Rashi. In between, Olivia warned her so that they can solve the case by that moment, otherwise the situation would be worst for Rashi. Then they spread out to different ways to catch the thief. Some sound of splashing water was heard when Rashi was going to hide. She took the risk to look at the splashing water as her sixth sense was telling her to look at that place. Rashi warned before jumping and, after going under the water, she tried her best despite having problem. After lots of struggle, as Rashi succeeded and came out with the thief, she was completely shattered after seeing the face of the thief. It was the face of Rashi's new friend Neha who was completely behind all this.

As the reason for Neha's wrong-doings came out after interrogation, it turned out that she fed poor children; also she liked to live a lavish life. Something else was also waiting for everyone. Suddenly Rashi revealed something which shocked everyone. Neha, who was thief but pretended to be Rashi's friend, tried to kill her by suffocating with the help of a pillow. But Rashi acted as a dead person and, when Neha went away, Rashi was shocked as she saw the face with the help of little light, the face was her friend Neha's. Then she connected the dots and solved the case but only catching up was left. So they all came up with a plan.

Not leaving a single place for searching, day and night, the team got to know about the thief visiting the places and the rest is history. The team got orders to shoot the thief, but Rashi didn't do anything like that; instead she put her inside the prison to give her a chance to improve her life as somehow she was still attached to her. When everything got over, Rashi was all alone and sad, then suddenly Olivia sat beside her and slowly thanked her for returning back to the team and helping out with the case even after facing a lots of difficult times; before that, she gave her locket back.

Then they both went to some 'flashbacks', where secretly Olivia and Rashi met each other and spoke for returning back to the case as Olivia believed that she still have some faith in Rashi and her process of solving the case. When they came back to reality, Rashi said something which softened Olivia further. Rashi stated that "Ma'am, honestly speaking, but I really don't know how to say, I was really very hurt, not because of me not getting insights into the case, because I was losing my friends Nisha and you; to deal with criticism, it is a common thing; you know my parents always gave me hopes to stand up, they always motivated me no matter what, they always taught me to be fearless and to deal with every situation calmly because we get nothing by anger". All the while, Rashi was smiling as if she was really feeling proud, but somewhere she was disheartened. Rashi continued "Ma'am, you know, my parents always told me to give my best, to try my best; and another thing they always told me that if you are falling down, try to get up on your own until and unless you lose the last ray of hope".

Hearing so, Olivia gave a warm hug to Rashi as if she was always there for her and Rashi reciprocated because she felt so inside her heart. Someone was watching all this from far, having happy tears in both the eyes and the person was none other than Nisha. She was feeling very happy as she always wanted to mend both of their relationships. She went out to them and shared a beautiful and warm hug.



MANDALA ART
by Anhiti

THE PANDEMIC'S MANY GIFTS TO INDIA

Riddhi Naskar

For the past two years our world has been facing an unprecedented crisis, and its presence for our country is perhaps best proved by a simple look at the statistics of our nation's economic condition. But apart from such data sheets, there are other facets to this pandemic's effect on us, which might be less visible on the surface but are far more potent a danger in their nature - not least because those effects threaten to snowball into something far greater than their present hidden selves in the very near future of the youths of our great nation of overpopulation and class inequality.

India has 90% of her population under the poverty line. Nor do we have claim to 100% literacy, much less access to enough information and resources necessary for pursuing one's education remotely as this pandemic has forced us to do. As a result the already existing class inequality in our country has become shamelessly apparent as the students of urban and rural areas found access to their rights of education to be handled quite differently. For those in an urban area, neither access to the electronic devices necessary for a remote class, nor the previous knowledge of the said electronics to handle them successfully have any lack. But on the other extreme there are the students of a weaker economic standing, usually in the rural areas, where not only having access to the devices necessary for such classes are far too costly for them to afford easily, or indeed at all, but even being successfully able to use them is an uphill battle because that may and do well fall into a knowledge blind spot caused by their poverty. The child of a van driver cannot be and should not be expected to have the same kind of familiarity with the online systems, nor enough money to afford a constant internet service like the child of government service worker. And then there is the fact that even the teachers on the other end of such classes are equipped very differently – a teacher in South Kolkata may know and handle their online classes with ease, but to expect the same from a teacher in some marginal schools of Sundarbans just based on a few training programs is not only farcical but also proves an entrenched cruelty that amuses itself by heightening class inequality in an already unequal world. And one might even venture to claim that this is intentional cruelty towards retaining a world of class inequality, because as we all know, knowledge and education are the only vehicles that can help an individual to move across classes, can allow them to go past the binding of the poverty they are born into and let them find a better standing. To allow such unequal treatment in that very same education system is the easiest and crudest way of ensuring poor people does not have access to education, and eventually to jobs that could better their lives. It also holds a misogynistic approach in particular, because women education is the first to suffer from poverty – a multitude of girl students in rural areas have been forced into child marriages during quarantine and has no way of returning to education in near future. Have the schools been continuing normally these students would have had access to mid-day meals and their families would not have been as burdened by presence of an extra mouth. But in the quarantine, most of their families, with low income and low education, could not afford that extra meal and ended up marrying them off – for boys, this same phenomenon has appeared through a growth of child laborers, usually in farming or other works, where similarly, the families have been unable to bear the expenses of that extra meal that was previously covered by the mid-day meal system and have instead chosen to send the children to work. Because after all, ethics, morality, and legalities can only be respected and followed when the stomachs are full. Before a hungry mouth everything else fall short. These instances of child marriages and child labourers are not the family's cruelty, but primarily and ultimately a failure and cruel negligence of our esteemed governing body.

India is a third world country. India is a developing country. And expecting her to function the same way like the first world countries has always been a fool's dream, though the heads standing at the top of our nation seem to have done just that. And so where the primary concern in the first world countries for their youths are around the self-care and mental wellbeing, our great nation has seen a record high in suicide attempts in youths during these pandemic years, along with a steady increase in mental health issues like depression, anxiety, stress that are par the course in a nation without proper awareness about mental health, much less any infrastructure to protect that mental health. Mental wellbeing cannot and does not exist in a vacuum. The stress of a world of pandemic, of grief and mourning, of having a life of functional imprisonment is further exacerbated by the innumerable lacks suffered by the populace of a third world country. One instance has been discussed previously – inequality in education. Another example is the lack of proper provision of safety nets (e.g., food safety) for those hit the hardest by lockdown. Due to the enormous scale of

the problem the government schemes remain vastly inadequate. As a result of the lockdown, there is increased possibility of malnutrition among the poor people and who live in a remote or rural areas. The Food Corporation of India recently allotted 12.96 lakh metric tonnes of food grains under the *Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojna* (PMGKAY) as an initiative of Government of India in its fight against the COVID19. Efficacy of this scheme and adequacy of food distribution remains to be seen.

Many nations across the globe are fighting to return to a pre-covid era. Yet, there is a common strand of discourse that reminds us that rather than a 'return to normal' what we should be attempting is to find a 'new normal'. But the response on that note cannot be by strangling down the marginalized classes, nor by ignoring the problems of our governing body, our economic structure, the many failings of our nation that this pandemic has brought to the fore, highlighted in blood. Nor can these issues be answered while refusing to face the horrors these failures have already brought, and on that note, let this article end on a sombre point as we remember one of the greatest horrors such a failure had brought, where over 16 migrant workers were killed – not by covid-19, but by this failing system of our grand nation, killed under the wheels of a train because they were given no chance to return to their home by the government who was supposed to protect them, and could only follow the long train-lines in hopes of returning to a familiar place. Our nation has always held many failings, not least because we remain in a shroud of the past glory where to acknowledge the failings themselves seems to weaken our 'national pride', but the pandemic years have proved like never before, on how many corpses India's façade of grandness stands.

But let us say Jai Hind for the upcoming Acche Din anyway, because even if that 90% who are under poverty line dies, at least the upper 10% claiming the majority of India's economic resource will live, right?

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—

“ A Tale of Two Cities “ ... Charles Dickens

'আত্মজয়'-র সাফল্য বাসনায়



বাউল মন প্রকাশন

৩৪, সেন্ট্রাল রোড (রামঠাকুর সরণি)

যাদবপুর, কলকাতা - ৭০০ ০৩২

প্রকাশক : শর্মিষ্ঠা রায়

নিয়মিত বিভাগ - পাখীদের কথা

প্রভাত কুমার চট্টোপাধ্যায়

হলদে গাল রামগাঙরা (The Black-lored It)

রামগাঙরার সাথে হলদে গাল রামগাঙরার স্বভাবে অনেকটাই মিল আছে। তবে দেখতে তেমন সাদৃশ্য নেই বললেই চলে। আকারে অনেকটা চড়াইয়ের মতো। কালো আর হলুদ রঙের পাখিটা। মাথায় তোকোণা ঝুঁটি আছে। পালকে নানা রঙের বাহার, পাতার ফাঁকে দৃষ্টি রেখে এদেরকে চিনে নেওয়া যায়। বিশেষ করে বনাঞ্চল এই পাখিদের খুব প্রিয় জায়গা।

এই ছোট পাখিটার মাথায় যে কালো ঝুঁটি, সেটা অজানা কারণে প্রায়শই খাড়া হয়ে ওঠে। এটা একটা বিশেষ লক্ষণ এই পাখিটার। হলদে গাল রামগাঙরার মধ্যে স্ত্রী-পুরুষদের দেখতে প্রায় একই রকম। এই পাখিদের নামকরণ করা হয়েছে এদের হলুদ গাল দেখে। আর একটা লক্ষণীয় বিষয় হল যে এদের চোখের পিছনদিক থেকে ঘাড় পর্যন্ত হলুদ মোটা ছোপ - গালের দু'দিকেই। আবার তলপেটের দু'ধারের পালকের রঙ হলুদ। খুতনি থেকে গলা বেয়ে বুকের মাঝখান দিয়ে একটা কালো ডোরা - অনেকটা রামগাঙরার মতোই। এদের যদি চুপচাপ বসে থাকতে দেখি, তাহলে ডানার পালকের নকশা চোখে পড়ে। কালো ডানার ওপর সাদা-সাদা চিহ্ন, দেখলে মনে হয় যেন আধখানা বাঁকা চাঁদ। এদের ঠোঁট শালিকের মতোই ছোট। তবে এই ঠোঁট দিয়ে ওরা বেশ আরাম করে ফুলের বা পাতার কুঁড়ি খুঁটে খুঁটে খায়।

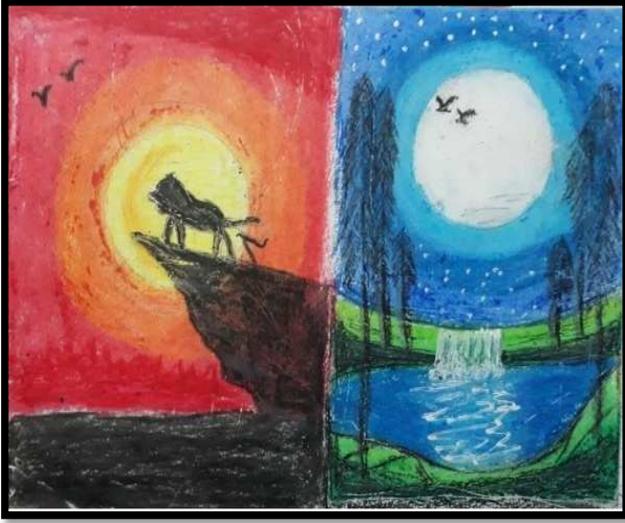
স্বভাবে এরা অনেকটা রামগাঙরার মতোই - সদা চঞ্চল। চুপচাপ বসে থাকতে পারে না। দল বেঁধে খাবারের সন্ধানে বেরিয়ে পড়ে - গাছে-গাছে, পাতায়-পাতায় বিচরণ করে। আর সেই সময় খুব মিষ্টি সুরে চি-চি করে ডাকতে থাকে। তবে খাবার পাক বা না পাক, তাতে কিছু আসে যায় না। সারাদিন ধরে ওদের খোঁজাখুঁজি চলে।

এরা বসন্তকাল থেকে শরৎকাল অবধি বাসা বানায়। বাসা তৈরী করে ডালের ফোকরে। শেওলা, শুকনো ঘাস পাতা, পশুর লোম, এমন হরেক রকম জিনিস দিয়ে বেশ নরম করে ভেতরটা তৈরী করে।

হলদে গাল রামগাঙরার পছন্দের খাবার হল পোকাকার ডিম, তবে ফুল-ফলের কুঁড়ি পেলে একদম ছাড়ে না। এই পোকাকথেকো পাখিটা পক্ষীপ্রেমীদের খুবই প্রিয়।



ছবিটি ইন্টারনেট থেকে সংগৃহীত



স্বয়ম্ভু পাত্র



শুচিস্মিতা শিকদার



অস্থিতি

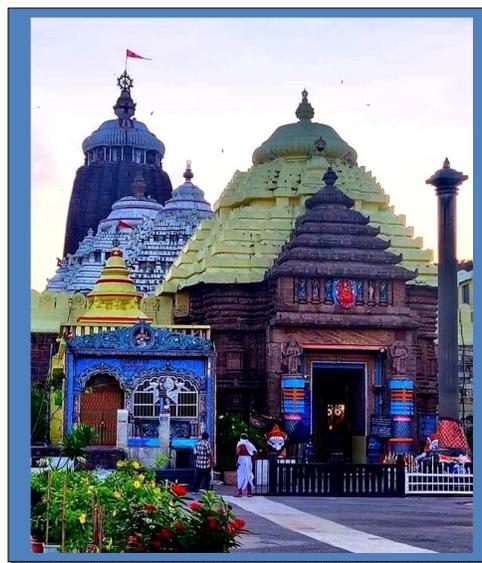


পূজা দত্ত

হাতে নিয়ে তুলি পাত্রে নিয়ে রঙ ... রঙে রেখায় আমাদের আনন্দ এবং আনন্দজ'রা...

এই বিশেষ সংখ্যার প্রচ্ছদ ংকেছে আমাদেরই এক আনন্দজা পূজা দত্ত। পূজার জন্যে রইল আনন্দকথার পক্ষ থেকে শুভেচ্ছা ও ভালোবাসা।

Clicks from Puri , December 2021 by Ahana Basu



THE TRUE VALUE OF A MOMENT
IS NEVER KNOWN UNTIL IT
BECOMES A MEMORY...

Our Journey

Kaustuv Bhattacharjee

Since adopting our son Kaushik in the year 2009, I always had a desire to pen down my experience of those few months and our journey till date. As I am not a person to habitually express my thoughts in written form, I could not do this until recently, when our very close friend Anupda asked me to share my experience of adopting Kaushik.

To begin with, I can recollect, the decision of adoption was a process of discussion between my wife Arpita and I. Internet was still in nascent state those days, smart phones were yet to enter our life; thus the knowledge and information was more based on experience of other adopting parents. We had been fortunate to get in touch with one such adoptive parents and we met them at their house to understand the process, both emotionally and legally. This fruitful discussion actually motivated us for adoption and we thought of moving ahead. We expressed our thoughts to our parents, brothers and my best friend Pradip. They listened to our desire and encouraged us on this. We thought of approaching Missionaries of Charity, one of the most renowned agencies for adoption. We went to visit the adoption centre of Missionaries of Charity. However, the first visit was a bit disappointing. The queries from the Sister over there were more to examine genuineness of our desire. After long years, both my wife and I are now quite convinced that this is indeed a correct approach from a responsible agency to judge the prospective parents about their willingness of adoption. The visit was followed by further visits from our end with the social worker for discussion sessions. Then there was home study. This is a mini milestone in our journey of adoption. A social worker had come to our house to meet our family members. She had spoken with several members in length to understand the family support. As the family members from both sides and our close friends had been encouraging and supportive enough, the home study had been a success.

We had been visiting the agency periodically for some more paper works, and finally the day came when Sister Rosella, in-charge of the mother house, announced that they had a baby boy for us, and they would like us to visit to get the first glimpse of our son. This day had been a red-letter day in our life. I still remember we visited the agency and had been waiting upstairs when Sister Rosella entered the room with the baby. It is very difficult to express the emotional flow we had gone through in those moments. I still remember I took him in my lap and immediately experienced something new, the accomplishment of parenthood. Both my wife and I were like, well, 'how long do we need to wait to get him back at our home?'. The paper work and procedural delay seemed to be causing hindrance between a son and the parents. Nevertheless, we could control our emotions till we got our son. The next few days were like long waiting period for us. Our son had to go for medical checkup and some pathological tests as per the standard process. Thankfully all went well.

The day of 3rd June, 2009, will always be remembered by us for the entire life. Early morning, we visited Mother House along with our close family members. The rituals and prayers were performed in a serene ambience before we were gifted our son, the most precious gift we have received in our life. We returned home with plenty of joy. Many of our friends and family members visited us in next few days to see our son. We had his Annaprasan the following month and a dinner programme with family and friends.

What is the role of gene for the progress of a child? This question may arise among many of us. Well, gene is indeed deterministic for the appearance of a person, but the completeness of an individual is much more than mere appearance. We all know and agree that environment plays a crucial role for the overall development of a child. Care by parents and other family members, nurturing to become a responsible, honest individual, sensitivity towards society, people and animal, etc., are the key ingredients for the overall grooming of a child. At the end of the day, an individual is always remembered for her/his behaviour and work. So, it is always important for all parents to give proper guidance to their children for their upbringing.

As our son enters the teen age bracket, we are very much concerned about his studies like other parents. At the same time, we also know that, apart from formal education which is very much necessary, we want our son to become a responsible, sensitive, honest, caring, humble human being who can contribute in a positive manner towards the society. We are very much certain that, with the type of good people we are associated with; our journey will definitely be a successful one.



Arpita Bhattacharjee, my wife, and I adopted our son Kaushik in 2009 from Missionaries of Charity. During our periodic visit to Missionaries of Charity with our son, we came to know about Atmaja. We were interested to become the part of an association of adoptive parents. We got in touch with Anup Dewanji from Atmaja and started our journey with this wonderful organization.

যতদূর মুছে নিতে জানে
দীর্ঘ চরাচর
তার চেয়ে আর কোনো দীর্ঘতর যবনিকা নেই।
কেননা পড়ন্ত ফুল, চিতার রূপালি ছাই, ধাবমান শেষ ট্রাম
সকলেই চেয়েছে আশ্রয়
সেকথা বলিনি? তবে কী ভাবে তাকাল এতদিন
জলের কিনারে নিচু জবা?
শূন্যতাই জানো শুধু? শূন্যের ভিতরে এত ঢেউ আছে
সেকথা জানো না?

শঙ্খ ঘোষ

A story about intention and conviction

Digangana is Co-Founder of “Pragna” a Bangalore Based organization very actively working towards the cause of increasing awareness on different aspects of adoption at online platforms.

Today I will talk about a couple, whose adoption journey officially started in December 2017, when they registered at the CARA website. Unofficially their journey started on a cold Kolkata afternoon, 12 years back, when a 20 something couple sat on the stairs of The City Centre mall, discussing their impending marriage and promising to each other to bring home their heart child when the time is right.

Twelve years down the line, the couple has a 5-year-old biological son and has welcomed their heart child. A long-cherished dream has come true.

The couple is us, and today I wanted to write about a very important aspect of our adoption journey, ‘the intention’.

By now we know that in India, and across the globe, parents or individuals adopt for various reasons. Some adopt because they do not want to populate the earth further and would rather provide a loving home to a baby who does not have a home, some adopt because they cannot conceive biologically, and some adopt because they think the least they can do is it to provide a family to a child who does not have one. The reason can be varied, but what is important is to have the ‘right intention’.

When we adopt, we take the responsibility of a life. It is therefore important that we are absolutely certain of the intention of the situation. Consider the intention as a seed. Only if the seed is sown right, will the plant grow properly.

My husband and I, we took the decision to adopt because we believe that every child deserves a home. This was the seed of our intention. A seed we carefully nurtured for 12 years before it sprouted its tiny head and became a sapling. Finally, 11 months back, we opened our hearts to welcome our baby girl home. From the moment she came into our lives, we have experienced nothing but joy (along with sleepless nights, of course).

Digangana Mukherjee

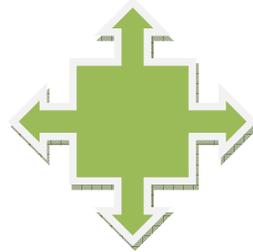
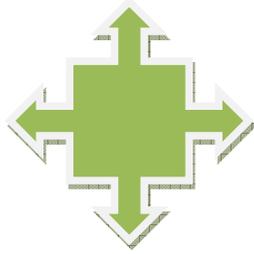
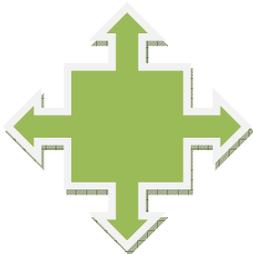
The journey has not been easy. The 10 years before registering at CARA and the two and half years long wait after registration were fraught with challenges. Doubts had crept in and belief had faltered, but we supported each other because of the strong intention.

Unfortunately, adoption till date is not a normal way of life. This results in prospective adoptive parents and even adoptive parents to face many hurdles. If the parents are committed to their decision, it becomes much easier to handle these situations. One such common issue at hand is to convince the grandparents or immediate family members. Everyone I have spoken to has a different experience while ‘breaking the news’ to the family. Sometimes the acceptance comes easily, sometimes it becomes difficult. Once again if the prospective parents are sure of their intention to adopt, it becomes fairly easier for them to convince the family.



My husband, Kunal, and I brought our baby girl, Upolobdhi, home in July 2020. Our son, Ikkhon, is 5 years old now and every day we are learning a little about parenthood and a lot about unconditional love. Our heartfelt gratitude to Atmaja for the noble work they are doing and for giving us the opportunity to share our story.

This is our story. Thank you for listening.



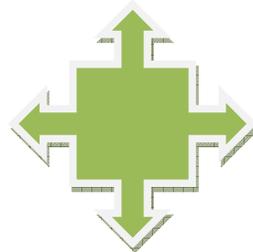
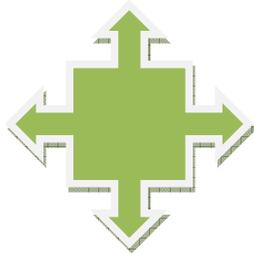
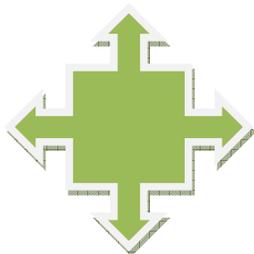
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The Beauty of Adopting an Older Child

Sahana Rishu Kumar

Adoption is one of the most beautiful things that can happen in anyone's life. The joy of raising a life not born from you is much more extraordinary. It isn't new that when it comes to adopting, most of the couples or singles prefer an infant or a toddler. The reasons are obvious that they want to experience every stage of child's growing up years. In the race to adopt an infant, the wait list is longer than the equator measured around simultaneously leaving the little hearts of older children empty and their future uncertain. However, there are a few countable numbers who decide to raise an older child. The definition of an older child for ease is considered as six years and above. This may sound difficult and forbidding to adopt an older child who definitely brings with them a baggage of their past, but it is not impossible to win their heart with love, affection, care and counseling.

Here are some of the most common concerns and preparation guide for those who are willing to adopt an older child.

What to expect– India is country with rich culture that varies every 100 kilometer. Having said this, we all are living in a society that sets standards for people according to their age, gender, strata and likewise. The first thing that an adoptive parent must do is to lock their expectations in a closet before bringing home their child. Every individual is different, no two people can be exactly same in terms of behavior or thought process. The children come from different backgrounds, some might have spent their life since birth in shelters, some might have been rescued, and some might have ended up in shelter due to non-supporting families or probably lost their family. Their backgrounds affect their behavior and ability to gel with a new family. All this affects the way they catch up with the “so called standards” of the society. Hence the parents must be ready to unlearn and re-learn along with the child.

How to prepare – Preparation is a quintessential part of the procedure of adoption. It isn't enough to have an intent to adopt. Understanding how and what sort of challenges one might come across while adopting an older child is very important. Reading of books related to adoption of older kids, talking to support groups and connecting with people who have adopted before or are in the process will prove useful. If need be, consulting an adoption counselor is even more beneficial as it will open insights to parenting that one might have not considered before. There are a few Face book Groups that are already existing to help and build a community of prospective and adoptive parents to discuss and seek support in this subject.

Bonding the bond- Children take their own pace to settle down in a new environment. The post adoption anxiety is true for parents as well as children. Hence it becomes a must to understand the needs of the child. Knowing their likes, dislikes, attitude towards general life, and dependency on others, everything matters. In the shelters they might be hooked to a routine and are self-reliant. When they enter a homely environment, the routine might not be the same. Hence bonding with the child takes time. A chit chat over breakfast, helping them do their tasks or taking help in small family activities like setting up table, watching a cartoon together or de-cluttering shelves, etc., might be of help. In brief spending quality time is very important.

These are just the tip of the iceberg of adopting an older child. A thorough understanding requires experience and counselling from experts, who can guide and support in a happy adoption. Rome wasn't built in a day, similarly no strong relationship can be formed in minutes. Although it may take time, but it's indeed so heart-warming and meaningful to adopt an older child and see them thrive through parents' love and see their personality evolve. How much ever resilient children may be, they may take time, but they do bond with the family and learn new things.

Sahana is Co-Founder of “Pragnaa” a Bangalore Based organization very actively working towards the cause of increasing awareness on different aspects of adoption at online platforms.

If you have an apple and I have an apple and we exchange apples then you and I will still each have one apple. But if you have an idea and I have an idea and we exchange these ideas, then each of us will have two ideas....

George Bernard Shaw

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A WELL WISHER

Book Excerpt: (Upcoming Novel to be published from Hay House)

My Name is Cinnamon : Vikash Joshi

From Monday to Friday, Meena Bai owned the house. On Saturday and Sunday, Maa took it back. A barrage of loud instructions on Saturday morning showed that the weekly handover was in full swing.

Maa taking an interest in the house again meant everyone had to jump around and make themselves useful. Maa dusted, Baba did the laundry and Cinnamon folded and refolded the clothes in the cupboard. Meenabai used the mop vigorously till the house looked ready for a house warming ceremony. Long-forgotten corners were rediscovered. The whole house looked fresh and shiny. On Saturday afternoons, Maa tended to her Bonsai plants. A bansuri artist came home to teach Baba the flute; the strains of ‘Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Dha Ni Sa’ could be heard faintly. Cinnamon went off for football coaching and art classes.

And Sunday was also special for another reason: Maa cooking for a change. In particular, it was the Sunday lunch that was the highlight of the week. Sometimes it was Kosha mangsho Bengali style. Other times, Tambda and pandhrarassa. Pork vindaloo or her special finger licking good chingrimalai curry.

But her favourite (and Cinnamon’s and Meenabai’s) was the kosha mangsho or dark, rich mutton curry Bengali style, with potatoes. It was dangerously yumilicious.

That Sunday too, it was the Kosha Mangsho for Maa, Cinnamon and Manik.

Manik, a friend of Cinnamon, had also dropped in for lunch. Manik was a year older than Cinnamon and they went to the same drawing class. He lived nearby.

For Baba, there was shenga in black masala, slices of crisp begun bhaja, and hot yellow varan, with masalebhat. Cinnamon placed everything on the table, taking care that Baba’s plate was well away from the mutton and fish.

“Meena Bai didn’t come *again* today?” asked Baba, frowning.

“Her mamebhau is not well, apparently,” murmured Maa.

“*Again?* Boss, last week her ajoba had some issue. Before that her husband had a life-threatening ailment and before that, her brother. Now her mamebhau is sick. At this rate, every man in her family will be in hospital. It seems only men in her family fall sick, and that too only on weekends and public holidays.”

“Rishi, we all *need* one or two days off a week. Please let it be. Look, your veg delicacies are there,” Maa said, pointing to them with one finger. “We lucky carnivores get to eat all this tasty stuff.”

“Mrs. Ghoshal, I am quite happy with my ghasphus. Your stinky fish and fragrant goat meat don’t tempt me.”

After such a sumptuous lunch, the only thing possible was to eat something sweet. Baba gave everyone his favourite sandwich ice creams as dessert. The crunch of the hard chocolate, the soft melting vanilla inside. Bliss, I tell you.

Baba and Maa retired to their room, after the lunch and Cinnamon and Manik went to the flat’s balcony.

Cinnamon sat on the parapet, his sturdy legs dangling, while Manik sat on a chair in front.

In the balcony, Cinnamon said, “Maa made me put up clothes on the line a few days ago. It’s so bad that she sometimes makes me cut vegetables. But putting up clothes, that too...banyan and *underwear*?”

Seeing that he had got Manik’s attention, Cinnamon continued, now more animatedly. “So, what happened that day, Manik Da, was that I forgot to clip the underwear properly. It was a very windy day. You know how it is. Bed sheets or saris don’t fly away easily...but some clothes...”

Seeing his friend giggling, he screwed up his nose but didn’t stop speaking. “I had gone to sleep after putting them on the line. When I woke up, I saw some clothes had been blown off by the wind. They had fallen in the drain behind the apartment building. It was so embarrassing to go and pick them up in front of everyone.”

“C’mon, Cinnamon, it was just your underwear. It’s not something major,” Manik snapped.

“No, no! Hear me out first. This wasn’t the end of my misery. Two very small, white VIP Frenchie underwear and one very big, red-and-black checked boxer, with some Batman images on it, were lying in the drain. Luckily, they were all dry. I knew the small ones were mine and assumed the other one was Baba’s. So, I brought them home and clipped ‘his’ boxers on the line. Next morning, Baba had to pack clothes for his trip to Ahmedabad so he started taking the clothes off the line. I was in my room. That is when I heard him shouting very loudly.”

Cinnamon mimicked Baba’s nasal, high-pitched tone when he was very amused or very angry about something and said, “Where the hell did these new Batman boxers come from? I never wear such funny Batman boxers! *Who* brought this *here*?”

Laughing hard now and wiping a tear, he added, “I could hear both of them laughing so much. I thought Baba and Maa would die laughing. Maa asked me later whether I had picked it up by mistake, and did I know whose it was, but I kept denying it. It was way too embarrassing.”

Manik couldn’t control his laughter either.

“Stop laughing Manik Da! I really felt terrible.”

Looking at him more seriously, he asked Cinnamon, “Arey Champion, did you ever find out who it belongs to?”

“I think it belongs to Pranay Bhaiya, our neighbour in A-30, that chubby guy who is always talking on his hands-free. You know him, right?”

Manik nodded his head. “But how do you know it was his?” he jeered.

“Well, a few days later, he came to give us his house key in the evening, since he was going out. He told Baba that there was a thief on the prowl in the society, and that he would definitely speak about it at the next society meeting. He shouted that we need armed guards, biometric scanning, anti-terrorist software, hi-tech CCTVs and all and what not. Then he said the thief had come to his flat but luckily had only managed to steal a pair of old boxers. Next time, he said, it could be something more valuable.”

“What did Rishikesh Kaka say?”

“What he always says. The way things are going these days, you can never tell what will happen and when. So please be careful.”

“So. Where is it now? Don’t tell me you just kept them!”

“I don’t see those boxers anymore, and bhaiyya hasn’t said anything, so I suppose he is wearing it now. Anyway, it was just a pair of old boxers, not the Kohinoor diamond or something. Chhodo, leave that. Why do you think my parents make me do so many chores?”

“Do you really want to know why your parents ask you to do so many chores?” Manik asked, looking off into the distance.

Cinnamon nodded.

Manik started speaking...

Vikas Prakash Joshi is a writer based in Pune, India. He holds degrees from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, and Asian College of Journalism, Chennai. He has worked in major newspapers and NGOs. He has done stories from diverse parts of India, Gujarat to Odisha and from Punjab to Karnataka. From the time he can remember, narrating and hearing stories has always fascinated him. Writing, public speaking, travelling, cooking and learning new languages are his passions. He believes all of us and everything is a story; what matters is how effectively and honestly we tell these stories, to ourselves and to the world at large. His first novel “My Name is Cinnamon” is in the final stage to be published from Hay House .



স্কেচ শিল্পী - অনুশা বসু চৌধুরী

“...নিশ্বাস ছেড়ে বেকার বললে, “কাজ করব তার সময় নেই।”
মেয়েটি ওর কথা কিছুই বুঝতে পারলে না। বললে, “আমার হাত থেকে কিছু কাজ নিতে চাও?”
বেকার বললে, “তোমার হাত থেকেই কাজ নেব বলে দাঁড়িয়ে আছি।”

“কী কাজ দেব?”
“তুমি যে ঘড়া কাঁখে করে জল তুলে নিয়ে যাও তারি একটি যদি আমাকে দিতে পার।”
“ঘড়া নিয়ে কী হবে? জল তুলবে?”
“না, আমি তার গায়ে চিত্র করব।”
মেয়েটি বিরক্ত হয়ে বললে, “আমার সময় নেই, আমি চলুমা।”

কিন্তু বেকার লোকের সঙ্গে কাজের লোক পারবে কেন? রোজ ওদের উৎসতলায় দেখা হয়, আর রোজ সেই একই কথা, “তোমার কাঁথের একটি ঘড়া দাও, তাতে চিত্র করব।” হার মানতে হল, ঘড়া দিলে।

সেইটিকে ঘিরে ঘিরে বেকার আঁকতে লাগল, কত রঙের পাক, কত রেখার ঘের। আঁকা শেষ হলে মেয়েটি ঘড়া তুলে ধরে ঘুরিয়ে ঘুরিয়ে দেখলে। ভুরু বাঁকিয়ে জিজ্ঞাসা করলে, “এর মানে?”
বেকার লোকটি বললে, - এর কোনো মানে নেই”।

“ভুল স্বর্গ” - রবীন্দ্রনাথ ঠাকুর

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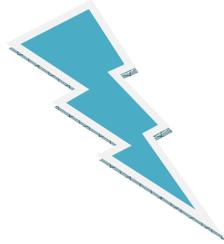
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A Well Wisher



CARA, Leave the Kids Alone!

Nilanjana Gupta

(This article was published in *The Tribune* soon after the Missionaries of Charity withdrew from the adoption process in 2015. More than 7 years later, the situation has not changed.)

Nineteen years ago I carefully carried home a tiny, frail little bundle from the Missionaries of Charity—my daughter. In a few days, she is going to turn twenty. Beautiful, with a sunny smile that can melt the heart of the sternest teacher or conquer the severest critic, she has brought joy to our family and continues to do so. She is close to her elder brother—our biological child—with whom she shares the typical highs and lows of teenage life. Interestingly, people who do not know that she is adopted often comment on how she resembles her mother—me.

Thus, it was with a sense of sadness that I read in the newspapers that the Missionaries of Charities is withdrawing from the process of adoption. If any one person's name is associated with adoption in India, it is that of Mother Teresa who began the practice many many years ago. While there are some negative stories that circulate around the process of adoption and about the Missionaries of Charity, our own experience was very positive and nowhere during the process were we asked to pay anything other than the court and legal fees. Nor was religion ever an issue.

Some time after the adoption, the Missionaries of Charity contacted us and a few other parents and requested us to help them in the process of preparing parents for adoption. We readily agreed as we too had felt the need to talk to someone who could answer the questions we had—both about the legal issues and the emotional and social aspects. We had sought out a friend who had adopted a couple of years before and they guided us through the process. Our voluntary work with Missionaries of Charity forged a close relationship with the nuns who worked in this wing of the organization and enriched our understanding of various situations as well. Eventually, we created Atmaja an organization that has been working as a support network for adoptive families for the last fifteen years.

Newspaper reports suggest that there are two main reasons for the decision taken by the Missionaries of Charity—one is that the new Guidelines issued by CARA give equal right to single parents to adopt and the other is that now prospective parents will be given the particulars and photographs of six children from which they may choose the child they want.

The right of single parents to adopt is not new. The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act of 1956 categorically states that “Any male Hindu who is of sound mind and is not a minor has the capacity to take a son or a daughter in adoption, Provided that, if he has a wife living, he shall not adopt except with the consent of his wife...” Similarly, “Any female Hindu (a) who is of sound mind, (b) who is not a minor, and (c) who is not married, or if married, whose marriage has been dissolved or whose husband is dead or has completely and finally renounced the world or has ceased to be a Hindu or has been declared by a court of competent jurisdiction to be of unsound mind, has the capacity to take a son or daughter in adoption.” These provisions go back to earlier Hindu customs which purport that the last funeral rites of a Hindu can only be

performed by a son. The Act of 1956 carries the imprint of this belief in the injunction that a Hindu male cannot adopt a male child if he already has one son. Similarly, the single woman may adopt because the ‘natural’ maternal instincts of the woman should be fulfilled even if she is not married for some reason. Thus, while today we may view the right to adopt of single parents as a ‘modern’ phenomenon, it actually existed as part and parcel of traditional Hindu beliefs though based on completely different logic.

However, the right to adopt was not given to Muslims, Christians, Jains or any other 'non-Hindu' groups. This exclusion was removed in the Juvenile Justice Act of 2000; now any Indian citizen can adopt under the provisions of this Act, including single men and women.

It is true that the Missionaries of Charities has certain notions of what constituted a good family for the adopted child and in their view family played a very big role. In the preliminary interviews they would try to gauge the relationship between the couple and the integration of the couple within their larger family. As I was a working mother with a one year old son, they asked me who would look after the children. They were pleased when I said that we lived with my in-laws who were very active and keen to have another child in the family. In their framework of values, ideal parenting could only be provided by a family in which both father and mother were present to create the cocoon of love and care required by a child and so they would pass over or discourage single parents from adopting. Usually such individuals would go onto another more progressive agency and complete the process there.

The second cause of discomfort to the Missionaries of Charity stems from the kind of attitude that seems to be reflected in CARA's newly issued Guidelines. At a meeting organised by CARA, the Minister in Charge Maneka Gandhi reportedly took the adoption agencies to task, accusing them of "idleness, unconcern, deliberately lying" and threatened to cancel the licences of those agencies which did not increase the abysmal rate of adoption. While it is true that many organisations are not only idle but also corrupt and ask for huge 'donations' when desperate parents come to them, the methods detailed in the Guidelines seem to suggest technological and administrative solutions to what are actually deeper social problems in Indian society.

In a country where the number of fertility clinics is at least a hundred if not a thousand times more than the number of adoption agencies, the desperation of couples to have their 'own child' is very high. In a society where sex, skin colour, caste and religion play such important roles, the idea of taking into one's family an abandoned child who is almost sure to be female with dark skin tone, abandoned by a lower-class and lower-caste mother or maybe even a Muslim mother is just not acceptable. Most couples in India choose adoption reluctantly after undergoing fertility treatment for several years. For them, adoption is always a second-best option and so the process of adoption, which ought to be joyous one, becomes a public admission of failure.

Many who do adopt do not inform their friends, family or even their child. Adoption all too often is seen as a shameful secret that must remain hidden. There are many stories of the child coming to learn that she was adopted after the death of her parents when she was looking through the legal papers of her parents. Popular culture in India too celebrates the bond of blood over everything else and reinforces these stereotypes. Thus, couples take the illegal route with the active connivance of maternity homes—both private and government—to recreate the illusion of a biological birth. People change houses, jobs and friends in order to keep the fact of adoption hidden.

The website of the Central Adoption Resource Agency which is under the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India shows that the number of adoptions in India is abysmally low: In 2010 5693 children were adopted in India and the number has gone down to 3988 in 2014-2015. Yet homes and orphanages are full of children. Though the state-wise statistics are not given, it is a well-known fact that more than half of these figures come from two states—West Bengal and Maharashtra—and there are many states where the figures are close to zero.

CARA must recognize and address the social dimensions to the issue of adoption as well as the procedural bottlenecks if the rate of legal adoptions is to rise. Part of the dynamics that all good adoption agencies try to assess is whether the child will get a home which is warm, caring and accepting. If the parents go for adoption with a negative emotion, obviously the child will sense that and deep psychological fissures will result in unhappiness for all concerned. Most children are naughty and get into scrapes, but if the parents always wonder if this is because she is adopted, then things are likely to go seriously wrong. One aspect of this acceptance is the willingness to accept the child that is offered to them rather than looking at the photographs of six children and then choosing "the best". In the case of biological parenthood, the law

allows for no such choice and bans sex determination tests; what was the need to offer a selection of children to adoptive parents? The nuns of Missionaries of Charity have always maintained that even infants respond to 'rejection' by parents and they were always distrustful of parents who wished to visit the nursery and choose 'the best' child.

In many of our government policies, we see a reflection of a belief that technology can solve all our problems. Unfortunately, this is not true. CARA should focus on creating more awareness about legal adoption. One of the problems that we see in states like West Bengal is that the rules for declaring a child 'free for adoption' are so complicated and long-drawn out that abandoned children fail to even enter the long chain of bureaucratic processing now required. Local police and administrators are all too often clueless about how to proceed if a child is abandoned in their area. Neither do they have the funds to follow the processes laid out in the law. These issues need to be simplified. Nursing homes and hospitals should be monitored so that the selling of unwanted girl children is eliminated. Often the maternity homes will charge large sums of money as they guarantee two things—that the child of from a 'good family' and that the paperwork will be done in such a way that there will be no trace of 'adoption' in future.

On the one hand, there are thousands of couples going for fertility treatments and surrogacy; on the other, thousands of children need a home. CARA needs to take a deeper look at the malaise that exists in our culture and simultaneously facilitate the work of those who have so successfully championed adoption for so many years. That would be a true benefit for us all.

(Nilanjana Gupta, Professor of English, Jadavpur University & founder Chairperson of Atmaja- The Association of Adoptive Parents)

“Men fear thought as they fear nothing else on earth -- more than ruin, more even than death. Thought is subversive and revolutionary, destructive and terrible, thought is merciless to privilege, established institutions, and comfortable habits; thought is anarchic and lawless, indifferent to authority, careless of the well-tried wisdom of the ages. Thought looks into the pit of hell and is not afraid ... Thought is great and swift and free, the light of the world, and the chief glory of man.” ... **Bertrand Russel**

AWARENESS AND ACCEPTANCE

Geetha Roy

When Anup da approached me for a write up for the upcoming issue of Atmakatha, I didn't really know what to write, as this topic is so close to my heart that I have so much to say.

In my 15 plus years of experience in the field of Special Education working with children with special needs, I have learnt so much from the children and the parents, which is unparalleled to any knowledge I have gained from text books and different courses, seminars, workshops etc. In short, I have experienced life!!

The pandemic has shown us what we are capable of and not capable. How much health and life skills are important vis-a-vis wealth. And we have lived and understood the word **challenge** better now than earlier.

The lockdown was terrible for us to put it mildly. Many of us fell ill physically, emotionally and mentally. Not being able to be with our near and dear ones in times of need, and not having our near and dear ones at such trying time, was killing during this pandemic. **But**, let me tell you, our children with special needs and their families live this life day in and day out.

Social distancing was a phrase we were all exposed to by the pandemic. But, for our children and their families, this is a way of life!! It was not a new thing for them. They are anyway socially distanced. The parents especially go through unimaginable hardships. They cannot mix freely in the society due to fear and a sense of inadequacy inflicted on them by others. The fear of rejection of their beloved child, who for no fault has been born with a difficulty!! Families disown them, leave alone society. The parents, especially the mothers are blamed for giving birth to such a child!! Here too the blame game plays dirty. They are alienated from family, relatives and friends while dealing with a child with challenges.

The parents need the support of the family and society, to first help them with acceptance. Once the acceptance happens, they run from pillar to post in search of Doctors, Psychologists, Psychiatrists, Therapists, Care-givers who will help them with the child. In our country, unfortunately, all these professionals do not work as a team to give a child-centric program to the parents to follow, which is extremely crucial to the progress of the child in helping him/her to realize his fullest potential.

We often talk about awareness programs. Awareness is present. Thanks to the social media, now-a-days, people are aware of most of the disorders or the names of the disorder at least. The **need of the hour is ACCEPTANCE.**

And a **disorder cannot be cured, it can only be managed.** We can give medicines for certain co morbidities accompanying a disorder, but the disorder itself cannot be treated. So what can we do?

- Educate self
- Show **empathy** not **sympathy**
- No remarks likes "Oh your child has I am so sorry to hear this!"
- No prying questions to the parents or family of the child in a social or public gathering

- No staring at the child
- No blame on parenting
- **Just offer help.** If you come across anyone struggling with a special needs child in public place just go ahead and ask if there is anything you can do to help in that situation.
- If there is a special child in your neighborhood, please invite them over a cup of tea. Ask what the child likes to eat. Keep that ready. It is so disheartening to see our special needs children do not get invited to birthday celebrations. Is it their fault that they are born the way they are!? The parents are scared to take their children for fear of rejection and so they shut themselves in a cocoon.
- Among all the different disorders, children with Autism and Learning Difficulties have to face lot of social ostracisation because of their inability to conform to certain social norms and they do not have any physical manifestation of the disorder. They look like you and me.
- Last but not the least, let us **not call them abnormal!!!!** Please let us not label the children like MR (mentally retarded), Autistic, blind, dumb, deaf and so on. Because their inability to perform certain functions likes others, does not define them. Not all of us can do everything. Some can sing, some can dance, some can cook but not sing and the list is never ending. So, does it define who we are? NO.
We all have some inability or the other so let's not call them abnormal. We prefer to say **differently able.**

I would like to close my pen here with just one thought. I am a better human being after working with these children. I have learnt how to love unconditionally and selflessly, from my children. I have learnt to appreciate and celebrate the effort taken than the achievement!

A remarkable consequence of this new reality is that the universe looks to all observers in every galaxy as though it expands around them. It's the ultimate illusion of self importance, where nature fools not only sentient human beings on Earth, but all life-forms that have ever lived in all of space and time..... What are the lessons to be learned from this journey of the mind? That humans are emotionally fragile, perennially gullible, hopelessly ignorant masters of an insignificantly small speck in the cosmos....

Death by Black Hole , Neil De Grease Tyson

দওক সন্তান

সুপ্রিয় সরকার

“If you have the heart for adoption
Don't let fear stand in the way”

“Little souls find their way to you,
Whether they are from your womb or someone else's”

দীর্ঘদিন State Adoption Resource Agency (SARA) তে কাজ করার সুবাদে এই দওক সম্পর্কিত বহু ঘটনার সন্মুখীন হতে হয়েছে। একটি ছোট শিশু যখন সুন্দর পরিবার খুঁজে পায় আর সেই পরিবারে যখন আনন্দের বান আসে তখন মনে হয় এই কাজটার চেয়ে মহান আর কিছু হয় না। কিন্তু মূদ্রার উল্টো দিকে যখন এই দওক প্রক্রিয়া ব্যাহত হয়, মিলন সম্পূর্ণ হয় না। তখন মনটা বিষাদপূর্ণ হয়ে যায়। এই কাজটা করতে গিয়ে নানা সময় যে সব ঘটনা আমি দেখেছি তার কয়েকটি আমি উপস্থাপিত করার চেষ্টা করছি। অবশ্যই স্থান কালপাত্র উহ্য রেখে। প্রতিটি Episode আমাকে ভাবিয়েছে, কখনো আনন্দ দিয়েছে, কখনো দুঃখ। আমার অভিজ্ঞতার কথা আমি বলছি এবং প্রতিটি ঘটনার সাথে আমাদের যে দায়িত্ব পালন করা উচিত সে সম্পর্কেও আমার মতামত দেবার চেষ্টা করছি।

প্রথম ঘটনা : ঘটনাটি প্রায় পাঁচ বছর আগেকার। তখন সদ্য দওক গ্রহণ করার জন্য অনলাইন প্রক্রিয়া শুরু হয়েছে। আমি একদিন অফিসে কাজ করছি আমার মোবাইলে একটা ফোন এল। একজন ভদ্রমহিলা হাউ হাউ করে কাঁদছেন, কথা বলতে পারছেন না। নিজেকে কোনরকমে সামলে উনি বললেন যে আমার সাথে উনি এখুনি দেখা করতে চান। আমি জিজ্ঞাসা করলাম –“ কি সমস্যা ? ফোনে বলা যাবে না ? ” কিন্তু উনি বলতে চাইলেন না এবং একমাত্র আমার সাথে দেখা করেই উনি বলবেন। আমি ওনাকে পরদিন আমার অফিসে আসতে বললাম। পরদিন উনি এলেন বাবাকে নিয়ে। পুরো ঘটনাটি নিচে বর্ণিত হল।

ভদ্রমহিলা একজন শিক্ষিকা। Single Parent হিসাবে দওক নেবার জন্য আবেদন করেছিলেন। একটি ফুটফুটে শিশুকে উনি Reserve করেন। াজারি পরীক্ষার প্রতিবেদন (MER) উনি দেখেছিলেন এবং একটি সুস্থ স্বাভাবিক শিশুকে উনি Pre-adoption Foster Care এ বাড়িতে নিয়ে আসেন। আনন্দে ভরে ওঠে ভদ্রমহিলার অন্তঃকরণ। ভালবাসায় ভরিয়ে দেন শিশুটিকে। কিছুদিন বাদে উনি শিশুটির মধ্যে কিছু অস্বাভাবিকতা লক্ষ্য করলেন। বেড়ে ওঠার স্বাভাবিক লক্ষণগুলো দেখা যাচ্ছে না। ওনার সন্দেহ হল। উনি কলকাতার একজন নামকরা শিশু বিশেষজ্ঞকে ওনার সন্তানকে পরীক্ষার জন্য নিয়ে গেলেন। াজারাবাবু পরীক্ষা নিরীক্ষার পরে জানালেন শিশুটির Profound Cerebral Palsy রয়েছে এবং যা curable নয়। ভদ্রমহিলা আকাশ থেকে পড়লেন। এই কদিনে বাচ্চাটির সাথে আত্মিক যোগসূত্র তৈরি হয়ে গেছে। কিন্তু উনি একজন Single Parent হয়ে কিভাবে এই শিশুটিকে প্রতিপালন করবেন। ওনার বাবা-মার বয়স হয়েছে। কাঁদতে কাঁদতে উনি অনুরোধ করলেন যাতে উনি শিশুটিকে আবার ফেরত দিতে পারেন দওক প্রদানকারী সংস্থার কাছে। সবদিক বিবেচনা করে সেই শিশুটিকে আবার SAA তে রাখার বন্দোবস্ত করা হয়।

ভাবার বিষয় : দওক যারা নেবেন তারা খুব ভাল করে নিয়মবিধি যা আছে সে সম্পর্কে অবহিত হবেন। Adoption Regulation 2017 তে Schedule IV এ একটি শিশুর কি কি Medical Test করা দরকার তার বিধান আছে। সুতরাং

পাতারী পরীক্ষার প্রতিবেদন (MER) ভাল করে দেখতে হবে যে সমস্ত পরীক্ষার Report গুলি আছে কিনা, পাশাপাশি SAA গুলিকে অত্যন্ত গুরুত্ব দিয়ে MER তৈরি করতে হবে। সংশ্লিষ্ট Medical Officer বার বার check করবেন সেই Report।

তারপরই পোর্টালে আপলোড করা দরকার। MER ই নির্ধারণ করে বাচ্চাটি সুস্থ ও স্বাভাবিক না কি বিশেষ চাহিদা সম্পন্ন। সেই Report দেখেই একজন PAP শিশুটিকে Reserve করেন। উপরোক্ত ক্ষেত্রে নিশ্চই Medical Report এ কোথাও ভুল ছিল যার জন্য এই পরিস্থিতির উদ্ভব হয়।

দ্বিতীয় ঘটনা : একজন অবিবাহিত ও নাবালিকা একটি সন্তানের জন্ম দেন। যার সাথে সম্পর্কের খাতিরে এই অবস্থা সৃষ্টি হয় তার সাথে মহিলা আইনি ঝামেলায় জড়িয়ে যান। তিনি তার সন্তানকে নিয়ে নিকটবর্তী Police Station এ যান ও সন্তানকে দিয়ে দেবার চেষ্টা করেন। থানা থেকে চাইল্ড লাইনকে খবর দেওয়া হয়। শিশুটিকে চাইল্ড লাইনের হাতে তুলে দেওয়া হয়। তারপর শিশুটিকে শিশু কল্যাণ সমিতি মারফত পরিত্যক্ত ঘোষণা করা হয় এবং এক SAA তে শিশুটিকে রাখা হয়। পরবর্তী কালে আইন মোতাবেক শিশু কল্যাণ সমিতি শিশুটিকে দত্তক নেবার জন্য আইনত বৈধ শংসাপত্র দেন ও শিশুটি একটি পরিবারে অনলাইন প্রক্রিয়ার মাধ্যমে Reserve হয় ও পরবর্তীকালে সন্মানীয় জেলা জজের নির্দেশ মোতাবেক ফাইন্যাল অ্যাপ্রশন অর্টার বের হয় ও দত্তক প্রক্রিয়া সম্পূর্ণ হয়।

অন্যদিকে সেই মহিলা সাবালিকা হয়েছেন। যার সাথে সম্পর্কের খাতিরে সন্তান এসেছিল তাঁকে বিয়ে করেছেন। এখন আদা জল খেয়ে নেমেছেন তার দিয়ে দেওয়া সন্তানকে খুঁজে বের করার জন্য। যখন জানতে পারলেন সেই শিশু একটি পরিবারে চলে গেছে ও তার নতুন বাবা-মার কাছে বড় হচ্ছে, এমতাবস্থায়, শিশুকে ফেরত পাবার জন্য কলকাতা High Court এ Petition file করেন। Final hearing এর দিন মহামান্য আদালতে হাজির হয়েছেন Adoptive Parents আর Biological Parents। শিশুটি রয়েছে Adoptive মায়ের কোলে শুনানি শুরু হল। সমস্ত দিক বিচার করে ও সমস্ত নথি দেখার পর মহামান্য আদালত Adoptive Parent এর পক্ষে রায় দিলেন। শিশুটি তার Adoptive Parent এর কাছে খুব ভাল আছে।

এখানে বলার বিষয় যে সমস্ত আইনি প্রক্রিয়া মেনে যদি দত্তক নেওয়া হয় তা সম্পূর্ণ বৈধ। সব চেয়ে বড় কথা সন্মানীয় জেলা জজ যখন অ্যাপ্রশন অর্টার বের করেন জুভলাইল জাস্টিস অ্যাক্ট ও অ্যাপ্রশন রেগুলেশন মোতাবেক সেই আদেশ নামা পরিবর্তন করা যায় না। সুতরাং আইন মেনে চললে কোন ভয় নেই।

তৃতীয় ঘটনা : আমি একবার একটি Child Care Institution এ গিয়েছিলাম পরিদর্শন করতে। সেটি মেয়েদের একটি হোম। সবার সাথে কথা বললাম। একটি মেয়েকে দেখলাম বয়স দশ এর আশেপাশে। বেশ সপ্রতিভ, বুদ্ধিদীপ্ত চোখ, খুব মিষ্টি, শুনলাম মেয়েটি SAA CCI Linkage এর মাধ্যমে পোর্টালে আছে। যাই হোক আমি কলকাতায় ফিরে গেলাম। মাস খানেক বাদে খবর পেলাম মেয়েটিকে PAP Reserve করেছে। শুনে ভীষণ আনন্দ হল। সুন্দর মেয়েটা একটা পরিবার পেলে। খুব নিশ্চিত হলাম। বেশ কয়েক মাস বাদে খবর পেলাম মেয়েটির পরিবারে Adjustment Problem হচ্ছে। বাবা-মা মেয়েটিকে ফেরত দিতে চাইছেন। আমি অবাক হলাম। এত ভদ্র মিষ্টি মেয়েটিকে নিয়ে কি সমস্যা হল যার জন্য তারা মেয়েটিকে হোমে ফিরিয়ে দিতে চাইছেন। আমরা যথাবিহিত যা করার যেমন Counselling ইত্যাদি করার চেষ্টা করলাম। কিন্তু পরিশেষে মেয়েটিকে আবার সেই হোমে রাখার ব্যবস্থা করতে হল।

সতর্কীকরণ : একে DISRUPTION বলে। একটি বড় ছেলে বা মেয়ে দত্তক দিতে গেলে এইরূপ সমস্যায় সন্মুখীন হতে হয়। এখানে শিশুটির কোন দোষ নেই। সব দায় আমাদের। এই ধরণের বড় বাচ্চাদের ক্ষেত্রে বারবার Counselling করা দরকার SAA, DCPU ও CCI এর পক্ষ থেকে। শিশুটির দত্তক সন্তান হবার ইচ্ছা আছে কিনা বারবার যাচাই করতে হবে। যে PAP শিশুটিকে Reserve করেছে তাদের বার বার Counselling দরকার। বাচ্চাটির সাথে Interaction এর ব্যবস্থা করতে হবে ভাবী পিতা-মাতার সাথে। আরো একটা বিষয় জরুরী - গৃহ সমীক্ষা প্রতিবেদন (HSR)।

অ্যাডাপশন এজেন্সির Social Worker যারা HSR করেন তাদের অত্যন্ত সাবধান এবং যত্নবান হতে হবে। অনেক PAP তাদের Biological সন্তান মারা যাবার পর দত্তক নিতে আসেন। তারা দত্তক সন্তানের মাধ্যমে প্রয়াত সন্তানের তুলনা করেন। অধিকাংশ ক্ষেত্রেই মোহভঙ্গ হয়। দত্তক সন্তানকে তারা ফেরত দিতে চান। Adjustment problem, Disruption, এখানে HSR এর ভূমিকা অত্যন্ত গুরুত্বপূর্ণ। কোন Adoption recommend করার আগে বারবার সমগ্র বিষয়টি যাচাই করা দরকার। PAP এর সম্পর্কে অত্যন্ত ভাল করে দেখা দরকার। না হলে DISRUPTION হবে।

চতুর্থ ঘটনা : এটি একটি Inter Country Adoption এক বিদেশী দম্পতি একটি জেলার শিশুকে Reserve করেছেন। আইনি প্রক্রিয়া প্রায় সম্পূর্ণ। অতিমারীর সময় সন্মানীয় জেলা জজের আদালতে Adoption Petition দাখিল করা হয়েছে। কিন্তু শুনানীর দিন স্থির হচ্ছে না অতিমারীর কারণে। দম্পতি আর স্থির থাকতে পারছেন না। বারবার অনুরোধ করছেন আইনি প্রক্রিয়া সম্পূর্ণ করার জন্য। যাতে তারা শিশুটিকে নিয়ে যেতে পারেন। অবশেষে ইউরোপের সুদূর এক দেশ থেকে সেই দম্পতি এসে পৌঁছলেন পশ্চিমবাংলার সেই জেলায় যেখানে শিশুটি SAA তে আছে। দম্পতি CARAর মাধ্যমে আমাদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করলেন। মাননীয় জেলা আদালতে যোগাযোগ করলেন। ঐ জেলার শহরে একটি হোটেলে তারা অবস্থান করতে লাগলেন। বেশ কিছুদিন তারা রইলেন সেই শহরে। আর যতদিন রইলেন প্রতিদিন সকালে সেই Adoption Agency তে যেতেন। ওখানকার সব শিশুর সাথে দূর থেকে দেখা করতেন। ভালবাসার ঠালি নিয়ে সারাদিন শিশুদের সাথে সময় কাটাতেন। পরিশেষে সবার চেষ্টায় দত্তক প্রক্রিয়া সম্পূর্ণ হল। Final Adoption Order হয়ে গেল আদালত থেকে। সাথে সাথে সেই Agency তে গিয়ে শিশুটিকে কোলে তুলে আদরে ভরিয়ে দিলেন। দম্পতি আমায় কৃতজ্ঞতা জানিয়ে ছিলেন ফোনে। ভাষা কোন বাধা হয়ে দাঁড়ায় নি। দুজনেরই চোখে জল ভালবাসার ধন নিজের কাছে পেতে এই আকুলতা আমায় স্পর্শ করে গেল।

এইরকম আরো নানা অভিজ্ঞতার সন্মুখীন হয়েছি। এই অল্প পরিসরে বলার উপায় নেই। এই কাজ অন্য অনেক কাজের থেকে আলাদা। সংবেদনশীল আর মননশীলতা থাকলে এই কাজের মাধ্যমে ঈশ্বরের কাছে পৌঁছানো যায়।

(লেখক পশ্চিমবঙ্গ সরকারের ডিরেক্টরেট অফ চাইল্ড রাইটস অ্যান্ড ট্রাফিকিং এর স্ট্রাটজিক্যাল ডিরেক্টর এবং স্টেট অ্যাডাপশন রিসোর্স এজেন্সির প্রোগ্রাম ম্যানেজার)



Children of Atmaja engaged in creative activities during one outing program

BONDING

Soumeta Medhora

The word itself conjures an image in our minds; a bonding between a little child with her parents. However, in the course of this article I wish to deviate from the normal and dwell on different levels of bonding in the perspective of adoption.

At the outset, what do we understand by the word itself? It is the establishment of a relationship or link with someone based on shared feelings, interests, or the action of joining things securely by means of adhesive, heat, or pressure or by chemical bonds.

For us, professionals working in the field of adoption, the first instance of bonding is the break. The break in the bond between a biological family and a child who comes into our care. The older the child the more traumatic the situation. We have to help the child regain the trust with their fellow beings when a person closest to them is suddenly absent. The emotional impact on the child is immense. While no social worker will denounce the biological family, but we will use all the tools in our hand to help the little one cope. To help rebuild trust, to help cope with loss and in turn and with time help the child to dream about a future. Thus, we cope with providing care, protection and emotional stability to a child. In turn, we, the social workers, are rewarded at almost every step with a smile or a hug or a little sharing; bearing in mind that this will eventually break as the child either goes to an adoptive family or to another home. The child does not understand temporary care; she lives for the present and expects the situation to last forever.

Then we move on the most misunderstood role of the social worker and the prospective adoptive parents. Are we interrogators, are we policemen are we interviewers or detectives? The answer that we need to stress on is that we are neither, we are simply social workers. We are workers who will help a family prepare for the arrival of the adoptive child; we are helpers who will prepare a child for going to a family. The law expects the social workers to submit a report which will present the prospective parents to the law. A document which will define the kind of people they are and the kind of parents they are likely to be and the kind of the home they are likely to provide for their child. They will discuss with parents-to-be their greatest fears in the proposed adoption and the fanciest dreams that the parents may have for the child. To come to these conclusions we don various hats to help get this information. This interaction, not interview, will initiate a bond with the Social Worker and the family not defined by time. This bond lasts forever. Sometimes I find it strange that prospective adoptive parents do not remember the name of the person conducting the home study. It just tells me that either the social worker never developed the rapport with the to-be parents or on the other hand the parents-to-be did not share their heart with them. This is a serious lack of communication and I can only conclude that one or both have not done their job well. If a Social Worker has lived up to their role then the parents-to-be would not have forgotten the name of the person with whom they have shared such details of their life. In spite of the time sensitive nature of the report, a minimum of four interactions is required. This brings me to the next question very frequently asked – Why is so much information required? The answer to that question is two pronged. It helps create and prepare a very comprehensive report. Secondly, and to my mind, more importantly, the process is a step towards self analysis, realization and retrospection. However, in all of this, we must remember that we are professionals working in the field of human emotions and feelings and however mechanical we may become in our work it must be a feeling of a labour of fulfillment which will guide us in the work.

The next phase is the most beautiful phase of parental bonding with the children. At the outset, let us first remember that the child is learning to leave behind a place of trust and care in the childrens home. We have helped them develop this trust and we now encourage the child to welcome a new atmosphere. The child does not dare to think of tomorrow; all she knows is that she is being removed from today which has developed in a warm and comfortable home with many peers.

With babies, we can expect the bonding to occur rather quickly and spontaneously. This is because the care and dependence of the baby to her parents is complete and total. With older adoptive children, the bonding may take longer as there is a lot that needs to develop. The child need to deal with memories of their own that may or may not be kind. The initial stages are that of quiet observation on both sides with neither side forcing themselves on the other. Love, dependence and trust will need to be slowly introduced. This should be able to let both sides being comfortable in each other's presence before accepting each other as family. In all of this, what is important to remember is that bonding is a continuous process. It is not a level to be achieved and then forgotten. Like any relationship, this bonding has to be nurtured and that will help it to grow.

Last but not the least is the almost absent but vital bond between adoptive families. Early on in the adoption process, parents-to-be talk of the feeling of being left out, of being singled out and their inability to share with other people their feeling of helplessness and making people understand what they are going through. They need to understand that it is vital to reach out to other families who have adopted children; to share with them what they have gone through. This will help them go through the waiting period with hope and deal with their insecurities. Post adoption, the aspects of sharing the adoption with the child and to cope with various challenges that any situation will throw can be addressed as a group. This should give them a sense of belonging to a support group of people who will help with any issues that they may have or simply share some good moments together in case there are no issues. As their children grow older, the children of the group may develop a bond and help each other understand the adoption.

To put it in a nutshell, every aspect of the adoption journey is about different aspects of love and different aspects of bonding. Thus, we end this piece with our definition of the second part of the meaning; bonding is the action of joining people securely by means of love, understanding the legal bond of adoption.

(Soumeta Medhora , Secretary and Chief Functionary ,The Indian Society for Sponsorship and Adoption ,Kolkata. In addition to her overall responsibility in respect to process of adoption , sponsorship , reporting , accounting and administration of Homes she also represents ISSA at the State level and central level workshops on adoption, appears on television interviews in print media regarding the work of the society. As Member of Legal Sub Committee, Central Adoption Resource Authority, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India she is also engaged in the preparation of training tools for legal professionals in the Juvenile Justice Act as well as developing modules for the legal completion of adoption under the JJ system. As Joint Secretary (voluntary) of the Nature Environment and Wildlife Society worked with the full team to organise monthly medical camps at Sunderbans. Organised an International level workshop on 'Elephant Conservation' in Kolkata attended by experts from the field and inaugurated by the then Chief Minister of the State. Worked at Assistant Editor of the environment magazine, 'Environ' and responsible for layout, editing and proof reading of the entire magazine.)



Author addressing in a workshop of the pre-adoptive parents

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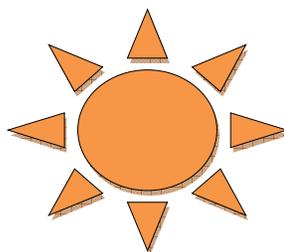
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RAJNANDINI CHATTERJEE

Joys of Adoption and the Importance of Counselling

Nilima Mehta

Somewhere a Child awaits a Family
Somewhere a Family awaits a Child
Adoption brings them together.....

Counselling is an integral part of the process of Adoption. Adoption involves a gamut of emotions ranging from intense hurt and grief to immense joy and fulfilment. In a sense, Adoption is both a “Beginning” and an “Ending” - it is the beginning of a lifelong relationship for adoptive parents and their child, at the same time, for the birth parents it is an ending of their parental ties with their biological child. Counselling in adoption leads to more successful and enriching parent-child relationship.

Pre Adoption Counselling

Parenthood is an important stage in the life cycle of a family. Parenting involves nurturing care and contribution to the growth of another human being. It is much more than procreation and the biological process of birth. A common reason that leads couples in India to consider adoption is their involuntary childlessness - a condition that gives rise to a complex of emotions for the two individuals involved. These emotions have their roots in the fundamental human need and desire for parenthood. Other motivations to adopt could be a desire to give a home to a child who needs one, wanting a child of the other sex, advanced age and the possibility of genetic problems in one’s biological child.

Adoption is seen as a triad - formed by the child, the adoptive parents, and the birth parents - whose three corners are connected by organisations such as specialised adoption agencies and children’s homes, to form a complete circle.

The process of adoption involves “Pre-Adoption Counselling” and the preparation of the “Home Study Report”.

The purpose of the Home Study Report is to provide the couple with an opportunity, as prospective adoptive parents, to think through the decision to adopt and to have all their apprehensions and doubts clarified, so that they feel confident of their decision. It is also an assessment of their capacity and emotional readiness to parent a child who is not related to them biologically.

Through individual and joint interviews, and a home visit, the agency is assuring itself that the couple will provide a caring and nurturing home for the adopted child.

Preparing the Home Study Report and pre adoption counselling involves in-depth discussion on the following issues:

1. Social and family background of both parents
2. Current marital and family relationships
3. Attitude and motivation for adoption
4. Attitude towards infertility and childlessness
5. Concerns related to the child’s social background

6. Views on sharing the fact of adoption with the family and the child
7. Parenting experience and anticipated plans after the child's arrival
8. Financial stability
9. General, physical and mental health
10. Views and recommendations of friends and relatives about the prospective adoptive parents

The adoptive couples that come to adoption agencies in India often come with a lot of anxieties, apprehensions and sometimes misconceptions about the process of adoption.

They have doubts and queries in many areas and the first and most important task is to put the couple at ease and reassure them about the concern and availability of the Social Worker. To dispel doubts and establish a positive rapport with the prospective adoptive parents becomes the primary task of the Social Worker. A humane and compassionate attitude helps to reassure and convince the couple that they are in the right place. This itself alleviates their doubts and proves to be the motivating factor in engaging in the adoptive process.

When the couples are involved in the adoption process, they are also engaged in a reflective discussion about their own situation. This helps them to clarify their doubts and mitigate their anxieties. This phase can be compared to the nine months gestation period that is provided by nature for the biological birth of the child.

Some of major areas for counselling for Adoptive parents before placement centre around the following issue:

- Emotional readiness and acceptance of Adoption, as an alternative way of achieving parenthood.
- Coping with childlessness and infertility issues without any residual sense of guilt, blame, inadequacy or deprivation.
- Stability of the Marital Relationship.
- Issues of "Bonding and Attachment" with a child who is not biologically related.
- Concerns about the child's social background.
- Heredity and Environment Issues.
- Process of selecting the child.
- Confidentiality in the adoption process.
- Acceptance of the child by family, friends and neighbours.
- Requests for "Secret" adoption.
- Anxieties about sharing the fact of adoption with the child in future.

Post-Adoption Counselling

Post-Adoption Counselling focuses on the following issues:

- Coping with Parenthood and Change of Roles.
- Feelings of Bonding and Attachment.
- Acceptance of the child by relatives and friends.
- Sharing the fact of adoption with the child - Why, When, How.
- Disciplining issues in Adoption.
- Issues related to the Child's Schooling and Academic performance.
- Child's need to search for "Roots" - Social, Emotional and Legal Issues.
- Disruption in Adoption placement.

Coping with Parenthood and Change of Roles

Once the initial “high” of adoption is over, the reality of parenthood begins to sink in. Many adoptive parents choose to adopt at a later stage and hence have had many years of freedom as a “couple”. This shift in role from being a couple to being parents is a difficult one. The man may continue his life as usual, busy with his career and profession and often it is the woman who feels that she has to cope with the restrictions accompanying motherhood. There are mixed feelings of joy and depression, which are very common and natural. Talking about this with the social worker helps adoptive parents cope better with their own emotions. In my experience, there are also moments of panic when the couple question their decision and feel “should we return the child?” “Are we ready for this?” “Do we really want to go ahead with the legal adoption?” Counselling helps to allay the fear of adoptive parents to recognise that this is more likely a passing phase and that eventually they would settle down to experience the joys of Adoptive parenthood.

Acceptance of the Child by Relatives and Friends

In India, the extended family, relations, friends, neighbours play a very crucial role in the lives of adoptive parents. Even though Adoption is a very personal decision, attitudes and responses of relatives affect the adoptive parents. If there is any doubt or restraint expressed by relatives, adoptive parents feel very touchy and sensitive about it. They expect that there should be total acceptance of the child and feel disappointed if a family member passes any hurtful remark. Post-placement counselling helps parents accept the fact that any decision that is “different” from the social norm and practice evokes mixed reactions and the social worker helps them to cope with this situation.

Feelings of Bonding and Attachment

The Pre-adoption fear of “can we love an adopted child who is not born to us, as much as our own natural born child?” is allayed the moment the child comes home. Many parents share the feeling of immediate and total bonding with the adopted child. After a few days they even comment “We need to be reminded that she is our adopted child!” However, there are also situations where it takes time for the process of bonding to occur. This is very normal and natural. Adoptive parents need reassurance about this because sometimes they may experience immense fear and guilt for not feeling totally “in love” with the adopted child. Post-Adoption counselling is very important in situations like this.

Sharing the fact of Adoption with the Child: Why, When and How?

This is a very sensitive area and most parents wish they did not have to face this. The most obvious reason why adoptive parents need to share the fact of adoption is that the child is likely to find out about it at some stage from an outsider, which would create a trauma for the child. Moreover, happiness and security in a relationship cannot be built on an untruth or the fear of “being found out”. Of course, the appropriateness of time, situation and the manner in which to talk about the adoption varies from family to family.

Parents are able to talk about adoption openly only when they themselves are comfortable, positive and have a sense of pride in their adoption decision. Inhibitions, fears and apprehensions usually come when the adoptive parents have some doubts about their own adoptive status. Counselling helps the adoptive parents as to how to share the fact of Adoption with the child.

Just “what” parents say is not as important as “How” they say it. Parents could use the child’s Baby Book, Photo Album, or the Life Book to share how they became a family. All that a little child needs to know is that being adopted means being loved, being wanted and being part of a family for life. The story of

adoption unfolds as the child's understanding develops. It is not a "one time" situation, but an ongoing and lifelong process. Counselling helps parents cope with this in a positive manner.

There are two schools of thought regarding this, one that recommends "early" sharing and one that believes in "late" sharing. The first school of thought believes that if a child grows up with the word adoption right from the start he is familiar and comfortable with the situation of adoption and hence has no fear and doubts. The latter school believes that the child has to be older and only after his cognitive development has occurred can he emotionally accept the fact of adoption.

The experience of most adoption agencies and adoptive parents has shown that "early sharing" and "openness" after taking into consideration the developmental level of the individual child, has positive results.

Of course, most adoptive parents wish that they did not have to go through this process because they feel so close to the children that it is hard to acknowledge that these children were not born to them. However in the best interest of the child and all concerned, "Sharing the fact of adoption" is an integral part of counselling.

Disciplining and the Adopted Child

Parenting is parenting – and yet parenting through adoption seems to bring in another dimension to the issue of disciplining the adopted child. Overindulgence and overprotection are two phenomena's that may be common in adoptive parenting. Some parents have shared that in a attempt to "give the best" to their child, there is an unconscious desire to "make up for" or "atone" for the fact that they are not biological parents. There is an underlying fear of "what will people say" or "what will the child feel" if one is strict in disciplining the adopted child. Counselling helps the parents to focus on the fact that they are "like" all parents and that just because their child became a part of their family through the process of adoption and not birth, does not make the issue of disciplining any different. "Best interest of the child" is the guiding factor in all parenting issues.

Issues related to the Child's Schooling and Academic Performance

As with all children, adopted children may also show a wide range of problems related to behaviour and academic achievement. The adoptees who are referred for counselling in this area have had problems like Attention Deficit Disorders, Learning Difficulties, Dyslexia, Aggressive Behaviour, Bed Wetting, Thumb Sucking, Nail Biting, Truancy, Lying and Stealing. Adoptive parents get very anxious when faced with such problems in their children. There is an unconscious tendency to attribute these problems to the "adoption" situation and hold the child's background and genes responsible for all this. A child is a product of both heredity and environment and hence it is important to help the parents to reflect upon their own parenting and create an awareness about factors that could have contributed to their child's problems. Instead of experiencing guilt and shame, parents are helped to cope with the situation and handle the problems in a positive manner through the intervention of counselling and child guidance clinic. Sensitisation programs in schools also help to create a positive climate for acceptance of the adopted child and prevents "labelling" of adoptees.

Adoptee's Need to Search for his "Identity" and "Roots" – Social Emotional and Legal Implications

In the Indian socio-cultural context, this issue takes on a unique dimension since adoption is still a new concept. The Right of the Adoptee to search for his roots and identity is diametrically opposite to the Birth Mother's Right to Secrecy and Confidentiality of her identity. The "Search" has serious repercussions on the emotional well being of all the three integral corners of the adoption triad, i.e. the Adoptee, the Birth Parent and the Adoptive Parents.

Counselling in this area helps the adoptee to cope with his adoptive status. There are some adoptees who are quite comfortable with this knowledge and there are some who feel a sense of “Incompletion” like the oft quoted “missing link” or the “missing piece of the jigsaw” situation. The issue that often lurks in the mind of

the adopted child is “why was I given up? Did my parents not love me and want me?” Counselling the adopted child and the adoptive parents on this issue helps to resolve many unarticulated problems. The whole question of “who is a parent?” is reflected upon and children feel comfortable with the fact that parenting is far more than the biological process of birth.

Experience has shown that there is no co-relation between children who have a need to “Search” for the biological “Roots” and their level of adjustment or security in their adoptive homes. Therefore the belief that children who are happy and well adjusted do not have a need to search and vice versa is not necessarily true. Adoptees have a right to know about their roots after they are 18 years and the CARA Guidelines have clearly laid down the process. It is important to take into consideration the socio-cultural realities and the emotional and legal implications for all the three integral corners of the Adoption Triad – Adoptee, Adoptive Parents and Birth Parents.

Disruptions in Adoption Placements

In depth Pre-Adoption and Post-Adoption counselling is very crucial to the success of an adoption placement. However, there could be situations that result in the disruption of an adoption and this needs to be handled with a lot of care and sensitivity keeping in mind the “Best Interest of the Child”. Disruptions could occur due to poor marital stability, inability of the adoptive parents to adjust to the new parental roles, inability of the child and adoptive parents to adjust to each other due to the child’s early traumatic experience and establish a “bond”, or some other crisis situation. An adoption disruption should not be considered as a “failure” in adoption but as a situation that needs empathetic counselling by social workers of the agency, so that it leaves no trauma on the child or the adoptive parents.

Conclusion

Counselling in adoption contributes significantly in creating a positive bond between Adoptive Parents and Adopted Children. Adoption is akin to grafting. When one grafts, one unites parts from two plants to form a single plant. One cuts a part from the original plant, binds this to the second one and eventually, a new enriched plant grows. Similarly Adoption involves a wound, a separation from the original relationship of birth, subsequent bonding, assimilation and integration in a new relationship. Through a process of healing, bonding and nurturing a loving lifelong relationship is created between adoptive parents and adopted children. Adoption is truly a beautiful way of building families. It meets reciprocal needs of both parents and children, and fulfils the Right of every Child to be brought up in a nurturing family environment.

[Dr. Nilima Mehta , Professor & National Consultant ,Child Protection & Adoption , Consultant Psychotherapist. E-mail - nilimamehta@gmail.com]



Challenges Facing Parents of Adopted Adolescents

Nina P. Nayak , M.S.W.
Child Rights Advocate

The teenage years, parents are often told is when parenting skills are tested to the hilt. Anxiety overtakes many of us as our children approach this “dreadful” age as they tend to turn from that loving, dependent child to a rather secretive one. They are known to lean more on peers for company than on the parents and generally exhibit degree of rebelliousness! Whatever one may hear about the teenage years or might have experienced themselves, it a signal to all parents to engage in a little more conscious parenting.

Adolescence is not just a period of great physical change but also a time when children are developing a sense of the “self” . It a period when they grapple to define themselves as unique individuals and experiment with ways to assert independence (out of the ordinary haircuts, flashing clothing etc.). It is also now that they develop independent thinking skills, often times quite contrary to that of their parents.

Adoptive parents need to understand that the struggle to develop a sense of identity, can get complicated if they have never been open about the adoption and have fallen for the myth that adoption is the same as biological parenting. Often parents suddenly wake up in the midst of the mid or late adolescence in crisis situations and move to accept the fact that there are some unique issues in adoption, which need to be addressed appropriately. Most often they seek help, often times a little too late.

Abstract thinking:

Right from the time a child is born and begins to gather messages about herself, a sense of self develops. Around eleven years of age the child is able to think in abstract terms especially about herself and the world around her. As she enters adolescence, if she is adopted, this new ability to understand more about her past, her often unique status, makes her see new possibilities and deeper issues, all which may make her feel quite confused and disturbed. Abstract thinking could also give adolescents the ability to fantasize and realize that their adoptive parents could have adopted another child, perhaps someone with different interests or with another temperament.

Personal identity and information on birth givers

Personal identity is made up of physical characteristics, sexual self-image, intellectual abilities, talents, beliefs, personality, temperament, interests and relationships with family and peers. It can involve membership in the extended family, which includes uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents, ancestors’ etc, and in the social circle of the adoptive family.

One of the most compelling questions adopted children have at adolescence is whether they look like anyone else (“ I am short and do not look like either my dad or mom”). This is particularly important during early puberty when adolescents are feeling awkward about their bodies and the changes taking place in those bodies. They may mentally evaluate how they are alike and different from them. They can be curious for information about their physical make up such as how tall their birth relatives are and at what age they

stopped growing. This interest is specially more so when the adolescent is among the shortest in the class or one who physically developed before her peers. At this time, they may express a desire to meet the birth givers as a way to feel more comfortable about themselves rather than a desire to build a new relationship.

If no information is available on birth givers, parents can help by letting them know quite frankly that they understand their need for information. A genuine effort needs to be made in consultation with the teenagers to get the information and sharing whatever is available by putting the birth givers in a positive light. This will give teenagers the message that their parents are sensitive to their needs and this gives them a vital sense of control.

Sexual values and development

Social interaction between teenagers of the opposite sex is something taken for granted these days. For most parents, brought up in another era, this can bring shivers down their spine! These activities were taboo during their adolescence and uncharted territory. Parents often ban such interactions leading most often to clandestine meetings. Adoptive parents can get particularly anxious at this time and need to talk with them without being critical of their child's birth parents (child may have been born out of wedlock) or conveying the wrong message. In keeping with the changing times, parents could set limits and give teenagers information about their changing bodies while telling them about responsible sexual activity and the risks of sexual activity.

Other identity issues:

Differences in personality, interests or abilities can be cause for conflicts and much frustration for both the child and family. For example a family that tends to pursue artistic interests may not be willing to rearrange its evenings to accommodate after school sports. Outgoing parents may not be sensitive to a child who is shy and introverted or a slow learner might stand out as a sore thumb in a family of high achievers. Parental expectations and the pressure put on the child to meet with the same could cause teenagers to wonder if they really fit into their families and if unhappy, it could lead to rebellion or withdrawal.

Belonging to a clan

While adoptive parents would have done their best to integrate the child into their lives because they made the active decision to make them a part of the family, other relatives did not. Therefore, the adopted child may wonder if they are truly a part of the extended family, past and future generations. If parents have encouraged close relationships between their children and other relatives then that their children are more than part of their immediate families. The child can have his own heritage but he is made to feel that he is very much a part of theirs too.

Accepting Adolescents for who they are

Unlike younger children, adolescents no longer blurt out everything on their minds. Like adults they are able to hide those thoughts and feelings that are most troubling. Negative or painful feelings related to adoption which can be difficult to express are often thought through or fantasized about....."what if I had not been adopted, maybe I would have no problems". Others may focus on other typical adolescent problems, relationships, etc. Issues related to adoption can be difficult to express as they might feel that their parents might not understand or be sensitive to their feelings. Whether adolescents recognize adoption as an issue or not, adoption definitely makes adolescence more complicated.

Parents need to be somewhat objective and talk about "some adopted adolescents" who wanted to know this or that or how "some adopted adolescent's" concern was resolved. They need to get the message across that someone made an adoption plan for the adolescent bringing child and parent/s together as a family, a

union cherished by the parent/s. Even if the child does not talk or behaves in ways that indicate otherwise, gentle confrontation may be needed to get him to express his feelings.

Parents must initiate discussion that will enable teenagers to ask questions, express feelings and formulate a plan for resolving their issues of concern. One way to do this is by dropping “pebbles” every now and then. Pebbles are one liners that raise an issue which is then allowed to ripple until the child is ready to pick it up. A pebble might be a comment on a genetic issue. “You have a lot of talent. You must have got it from your birth mother”. Parents must make their children feel that is normal to be curious and that they may talk to you about these feelings. At this crucial time, by creating an open atmosphere, giving them permission to talk about how they feel about themselves can be extremely reassuring and can have a greater affect than a planned informative talk.

Support groups

Through out the parenting years, adoptive parents are bound to have questions. Where do you go to talk about your concerns? Whom do you ask? In many cases relatives, friends or neighbours or will not be able to relate to these issues as they are not adoptive parents.

Often for want of information on adoption issues, adoptive families find parenting situations more difficult than they anticipated or were prepared to handle. For these parents, support groups of other adoptive parents who have been there can be invaluable. Support groups empower families to cope and survive difficult times and teach them new coping techniques. Support groups particularly offer adolescents the opportunity to meet and interact with other children like themselves.

Parental issues - adoptive parents own life changes and challenges

With teenagers at home, it also a time when parents are involved in mid life experiences, disillusionment, changing roles etc. Adolescents while curious and eager to know or be helpful do not benefit from being privy to every manner of adult disillusionment. So parents must avoid leaning on their teenagers during their time of crisis as adolescents have enough personal struggles which they need to resolve.

Adolescence in perspective

Though adopted teenagers may have an extra load to cope with during adolescents, it does not mean that they will all have serious psychological problems. Collusions which are bound to occur (related to your role as a parent and not to you personally) need to be seen as opportunities to relate to each other in a different and more mature ways. Accept your children as separate individuals with unique abilities and interests. Encourage them to experiment, make their own mistakes as long as they are not dangerous. In the end, one must constantly give a positive attitude about themselves and their adoption, and it is then most likely that the child will come away with the same feelings. Only then can an adopted adolescent emerge from adolescence as a competent and complete young adult.

Several studies done in the west indicate early adolescence i.e. 11 to 14 years as the most problematic time for adoptees and that though they have their share of emotional, behavioral and academic problems, they still function well except if they are growing up in dysfunctional families or have shown signs of emotional problems for years prior to adolescence. Otherwise, the prognosis for healthy psychological development for adopted teenagers is good.

Parenthood is a lifelong task and parental responsibility does not end at adolescence... adulthood and independence looms ahead and there will be many other issues cropping up.... an interest in searching for their birth givers, a need maybe to build a relationship with them, anxiety to know more about their them

when the young adults are themselves going to become parents, questions from grandchildren and so on and so forth...issues which can sometimes tear the insides but which parents need to continue to calmly address in an honest, open, affectionate and caring manner.

Hearty congratulations to Atmaja for completing 2 decades of service to the adoption community. Thank you for the invitation. As much as I would like to participate in the event, I have now limited my travel plans given my age and other commitments. Wishing the program all success.

Nina Nayak



(Atmaja Team on Bishnupur Tour)

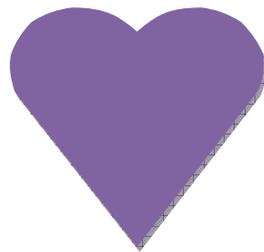
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“স্বপ্ন দেখি সে-পথের,
অস্ফাচল উত্তীর্ণ হয়ে আগামী কালের পানে-
স্বপ্ন যেখানে নির্ভীক,
বৃদ্ধের চোখে শিশুর বিস্ময়,
পৃথিবীতে উদাম দূরন্ত শান্তি”



A Journey of Twenty Years and beyond....

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The Association of Adoptive Parents, West Bengal

- To provide a network and forum of Adoptive Parents
- To protect the right of Adoptive Children and support them
- To assist and guide the parents in the pre-adoptive stage
- Towards rationalization and implementation of Adoption Laws
- To promote social awareness and consciousness about adoption in the society

