

With exclusive write-ups by psychologist **Seema Hingoranny**, pediatric consultant and oncologist, **Dr Santanu Sen** and paediatrician, **Dr. Ninad Hebbalkar**

# TUHIN A. SINHA

# DADDY

*The birth of a Father*



# Tuhin Sinha

## Daddy

### Аннотация

With gender dynamics changing the world over, parenting is a key area where this change is most perceptible. Modern dads today have no inhibitions in changing their baby's diapers, spending sleepless nights catering to their newborn or looking after the baby while the mother is at work. They often tend to be more patient and indulgent with the baby, a marked shift from the way Indian fathers used to be a few decades ago. **Daddy**, a first of its kind Indian book, provides a rare parenting insight from a father's perspective, and looks at issues, concerns and joys that every new father goes through. Combining personal narrative, with stories from new fathers and leading medical practitioners, the book brings together ideas on involved fatherhood and explores the changing relationship dynamic between a couple after the baby arrives. In more ways than one, it celebrates the spirit of new age fatherhood. PRAISE FOR 'DADDY' «Fatherhood has been the most amazing life altering experience for me..Daddy is a one of its kind book that celebrates the emotion of being a father, besides being a ready handbook for all new fathers as well as those planning to go the family way.» -VIVEK OBEROI, BOLLYWOOD ACTOR "Daddy' proves that fatherhood is an inner calling and a passion! It shows how you can find time to be a hands-on father despite all your professional commitments" -MANOJ BAJPAYEE,

**BOLLYWOOD ACTOR**"The book is an excellent combination of profound paternal emotions and some very practical guidance tips for new fathers. Loved it... you will!" -**TARUN KATIAL, CEO, RELIANCE BROADCAST NETWORK LTD.**"Tuhin's book comes with a bright ray of hope, providing beautiful and meaningful insights for fathers to raise their children in a healthy environment, which will enhance a child's life holistically." -**SEEMA HINGORRANY, PSYCHOLOGIST**

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Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.



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**TUHIN A. SINHA**

# DADDY

*The birth of a Father*





## Praise from the Participant Dads

*‘Excellent read! Absolutely unputdownable for new and expecting dads! Would have been even better had this been around when my son Archit was born!’*

**—Abhishek Srivastava**

*‘A riveting, heart-rending, responsible and flawless depiction of a father-son relationship. Strongly recommended as a must-read for parents, especially fathers.’*

**—Anant Ganesh**

*‘Fatherhood is this biggest joy and this book will make your journey through parenthood seamless and fun.’*

**—Asad Lalljee**

*‘A book that brings out the male perspective on child-birth was long needed. Daddy is a brilliant and very useful read.’*

**—Debashis Das**

*‘A must-read for all modern-day parents. Tuhin has put his heart and soul in consolidating his experiences.’*

**—Rajan Gupta**

*‘Finally, a book about, for, and by the modern, urban, Indian father—an oft-neglected demographic.’*

**—Roopak Saluja**

*‘A practical handbook with emotional connect makes it a unique read.’*

**—Roshan Kanal**

*'It's a must read for the younger generation to realise what all their dads did for them...It will help kids reconnect to their dad's with a fresher outlook.'*

**—Shobhit Jaiswal**

*'The book is a must-read for every dad-to-be, particularly in a world where nuclear families have become the norm. With no support from grannies and uncles, it becomes even more imperative that the husband equally helps his wife in nurturing the kids.'*

**—Zahid H Javali**

## About the Author

**TUHIN A. SINHA** is among the best-selling authors in India, a columnist and a screenwriter.

Tuhin is acknowledged among the most prolific Indian writers with a maverick knack to experiment with new genres. While his first book, *That Thing Called Love* (2006) was an offbeat romance, *The Captain* (2008) was a cricket thriller that explored the underbelly of modern cricket. *Of Love And Politics* (2010) was a political thriller. His fourth and fifth books *The Edge of Desire* (2012) and its sequel, *The Edge of Power* (2013) can be called socio-political thrillers with a strong feminist skew.

*Daddy* is Tuhin's sixth book and his first non-fiction narrative.

Tuhin is also a screenwriter of several popular TV shows, the most noteworthy being *Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai* on Star Plus.

Apart from his fiction novels and scripts, Tuhin is a keen political observer. His columns on Indian politics appear regularly in India's leading dailies. Tuhin has a regular blog on [ibnlive.com](http://ibnlive.com). He also appears frequently on news channels on discussions around politics and cricket.

At present, apart from working on two other books, Tuhin is a consultant with Reliance Broadcast, in-charge of new programming initiatives for their TV channel, Big Magic.

Tuhin is a doting Dad who has often bunked work to steal additional time with his son. He is not a bad husband either.

# Daddy

## The Birth of a Father

### Tuhin A. Sinha



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For

Neev Tanish,

you've gifted me the most pristine experience on earth

Daddy,

whose virtues and values I carry today as a father

Ramy,

for bringing Neev into the world

Mamma,

for being the most wonderful mother

And for every passionate and evolving Dad who redefines the parent-progeny relationship with a new meaning.

## Acknowledgments

There aren't many instances in your professional life when you instinctively derive the courage to swerve away from conventional commercial considerations and do what you believe in. In that situation it is equally an arduous task to find the right person who believes in what you believe in. Thank you Amrita Verma Chowdhury for the strength of your conviction. Thank you for your indefatigable efforts and initiative in nurturing the book and making it happen in its present form. As a publisher, you have been exceptional.

Thank you, Mohini Chaudhuri for your being so patient and relentless through the editing process. This was not an easy book to edit and your contribution to the book stands out.

This book would not have happened without the sporting participation of ten young fathers who eagerly took queries, some of a personal nature, and with whose inputs I was able to bring forth more perspectives for the readers. Thank you, Abhishek Srivastava, Asad Lalljee, Anant Ganesh, Debashis Das, Rajeev Shukre, Rajan Gupta, Roopak Saluja, Roshan Kanal, Shobhit Jaiswal and Zahid H. Jawali for taking time out from your busy schedules and making the book more engaging.

I owe a debt of gratitude to renowned psychologist, Dr. Seema Hingorrany, senior paediatric consultant and oncologist, Dr. Santanu Sen and paediatrician Dr. Ninad Hebbalkar for

contributing exclusive write-ups for the readers. The book's utility for the common reader has gone up manifold with your contributions.

I am grateful to Vivek Oberoi, Manoj Bajpayee, Madhur Bhandarkar, Tarun Katial, Nandita Aggarwal and Vinita Nangia for their consistent encouragement.

I remain grateful to my mom and dad for instilling in me values that had me believe that a book of this nature was long overdue and had to be written.

I am as grateful to my wife Ramyani and son Tanish for being my reservoir of strength. You make life more liveable.

Last but not the least, as always, I remain thankful to my readers! No contemporary Indian writer has perhaps experimented as lavishly with all his books as I have. You give me the strength to believe that the bestsellers' chart is not the be all and end all. There is a beautiful world beyond it.

## The Rainbow

My heart leaps up when I behold  
A Rainbow in the sky:  
So was it when my life began;  
So is it now I am a man;  
So be it when I shall grow old,  
Or let me die!  
The Child is father of the man;  
And I wish my days to be  
Bound each to each by natural piety.  
—William Wordsworth

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## Prologue

As I dwell upon what has been the most beautiful phase of my life, I feel blessed to have enjoyed the unflinching support of several kind-hearted souls who shared my joys and sorrows through this journey. Some of these relationships were inherited; others formed, often unsuspectingly, at different stages of life. The inherited relationships constitute what we call family, while the acquired ones include my circle of friends.

They say birth, death and marriages are made in heaven. What that implies is that we were destined to be born to a certain set of parents, marry a certain man or woman, and have a certain being as our son or daughter. While we choose our friends, the people with whom we're closest to were perhaps always meant to be a part of our lives. An invisible, divine force plays a crucial role in determining these relationships.

The Hindu religion accords great reverence to our lineage. An important ritual in most of our *pujas* is to pay homage to our forefathers. The last five ancestral fathers in a family are invoked by the priest through chants and prayers and their blessings sought. I have always felt a strange kinship with those names, most of whom I have never seen or met. I don't know what they looked like; how different their lives were from the ones we lead today and yet, I know that I am in this world because of them. I owe my existence to the vast lineage to which my forefathers

and I belong. So while documenting my journey forward, I feel a strong urge to thank them for taking their generations ahead. They form the foundation of my being, my values and my beliefs.

In addition to the reverence that I have always had for my father, about whom I talk later in detail, I also greatly admire four other father figures who are worthy of emulation. Each of them belong to a different world—mythology, literature, sports and films. Their lives are a true celebration of fatherhood.

These are the stories of Nandaraj and his foster son Krishna, spiritual partners Debendranath and Rabindranath Tagore, novelist Ramesh Tendulkar and cricketing genius Sachin Tendulkar, and Aamir Khan and his surrogate son Azad Rao Khan.

# Nandaraj & Krishna

According to *Bhagavata Purana*, Krishna was born not out of a sexual union, but by a divine 'transmission' from the mind of Vasudeva to the womb of Devaki. He was born in a prison during a period of political turbulence in Mathura. King Kansa, Devaki's brother-had ascended the throne by imprisoning his father King Ugrasena. Afraid of a prophecy that predicted his death at the hands of Devaki's eighth 'garbha', Kansa locked the couple in a prison cell and killed their first six children.

Krishna narrowly escaped death when he was secretly handed over by Vasudeva to his foster parents, Yashoda and Nandaraj, immediately after his birth. Nanda was the head of a community of cow-herders who belonged to Vrindavana. What fascinates me is the sheer selflessness with which Nanda offered to adopt Krishna and in the process risked his own new-born daughter Yogamaya's life by handing her over to Vasudeva. He accepted Krishna and raised him with all the love his own father could not provide.

Scriptures do not delve deep into the motivation behind Nanda's grand gesture. But what I learnt from the story is that fatherhood is a state of mind. It means protecting a young life from imminent perils and nurturing it to realise its true worth.

# Debendranath Tagore & Rabindranath Tagore

The seeds of Rabindranath Tagore's spiritual journey were sown way before he was born. Much of his philosophical bent, which is celebrated worldwide through his poems and prose, came to him as inheritance from his father Debendranath Tagore. Debendranath belonged to an affluent family, but he believed that meditation, prayers and travel accelerated brain development better than knowledge from books. He belonged to the intelligentsia of his days which took great pride in its philosophical leanings. Santiniketan was in fact Debendranath's discovery and not Rabindranath Tagore's, as some might believe. Rabindranath further developed his father's discovery and got it its due recognition.

As I flip through the pages of Tagore's autobiography *Jiban Smriti*, it tells me that if the father connects with his son at a spiritual level, he often creates a legacy which is far greater than material inheritances.

# Ramesh Tendulkar & Sachin Tendulkar

Ramesh Tendulkar, a respected Marathi novelist, was professionally poles apart from his sportsman son Sachin Tendulkar. However, both the Tendulkars shared a common goal of excellence and hard-earned self-respect. In his book, *The Tendulkar Opus*, Sachin says, “My father understood exactly how to get the best out of me. He always encouraged me and told my mother that he had full faith in me. It was probably reverse psychology, but as I got older I felt like I could not misuse that trust. He warned me against taking short cuts and told me to just keep playing, despite the ups and downs. My parents taught me that it is important to live every day of your life with grace and honour. When it came to choosing between cricket and going to university, he said, ‘You can play cricket, I know that is your first love, so go for it.’”

It might not have been easy for an educationist to watch his son put sport over academics, which makes it admirable that he blessed Sachin with his support. Sachin’s achievements are known world over and do not need further mention. From their inspiring story I learnt that a father should be prepared to take risks for his son and back his talent, no matter how unconventional his choices may be.

# Aamir Khan-Azad Rao Khan

Superstar Aamir Khan and his wife Kiran Rao had their first baby, Azad Rao Khan, through the In vitro fertilisation surrogacy technique. This is an expensive procedure and not every couple having trouble conceiving can afford it. Some, however, have had the good fortune of experiencing parenthood through IVF surrogacy but are too embarrassed to acknowledge it.

For a public figure like Aamir to make a candid and brave admission set a new precedent of sorts. By attaching his brand value to the procedure, he managed to remove the unpleasantness associated with something that is scientific and healthy. Later, fellow superstar Shah Rukh Khan too followed in his footsteps, using IVF surrogacy for the birth of his third child.

I credit Aamir and his family for making their new-born a torch-bearer for many such deliveries in the future. His brave move has created for Azad, a path of truth, courage and progression.

While these are fathers I look up to, there are umpteen examples of dads who have failed their children. They were either found wanting in fulfilling their responsibilities or were outright indifferent to their child's upbringing. Ironically, Mahatma Gandhi, who is known as the Father of the Nation, wasn't the best parent to his son Harilal. An article published in *The Guardian* in 2007 corroborates this. "Mahatma Gandhi once confessed that

the greatest regret of his life was that there were two people he had not been able to convince. One was Mohammed Ali Jinnah and the other was his eldest son, Harilal Gandhi,” said the story.

Gandhi was only 18 when his first son was born. Six months after the birth of Harilal, he left his family in South Africa to train as a barrister in London. Harilal's early years were marked with complete neglect by his father which reflected in his various complexes and rebellious nature. He spent his life fighting against all that his father stood for and died a pitiable death a few months after his assassination. Did Gandhi get carried away in his exaggerated sense of idealism, making Harilal a victim? Well, the answer to that question will always remain a subject of conjecture.

German leader Adolf Hitler too had a tempestuous relationship with his father Alois through his growing up years. It is widely believed that Hitler was so terrified of his abusive father that it led to a persecution complex. Sadly, Hitler's flawed personality resulted in consequences and casualties that impacted an entire generation.

So I guess it's safe to say that a dysfunctional father-son relationship can almost never produce healthy or positive personalities. This is where a spiritual connect between the father and son becomes all the more important. A positive father can help his child explore facets of his personality that he would have never imagined existed in him. An aloof one, on the other hand, can end up fuelling unhealthy complexes that inhibit growth and

progress.

## Section A



## BECOMING DAD

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### Why I wrote this book

Once while travelling in a cab with my son Tanish, I observed that our driver kept peeking at us in the rear view mirror. He then began humming a lullaby in a local dialect of Uttar Pradesh to himself. The pain and emotion in his voice was palpable. He later confided that he was missing his son who he had left behind in Allahabad while he worked here in Mumbai. Every year he would take a month off from work to visit his family in Allahabad. That was all the time he could eke out to be with his son. Every time he went home, he saw his son had grown considerably from the last time they met. It saddened him that he had missed out on some of the most magical moments of his early life.

This incident got me thinking about the sacrifices fathers often have to make for their family. The watchmen in my Mumbai apartment had a similar story to tell. They too meet their family only once every year. The agony of being separated from your child is hard to deal with no matter what your economic or social status. Be it a soldier manning our country's borders or an IT professional who has to spend months abroad on work, their suffering is the same. Often you read about successful actors and

cricketers rueing about their nomadic lifestyle that denies them the simple pleasures of watching their kids grow. When I think of that cab driver or my watchman, I feel extremely fortunate that as a writer I had the chance to closely witness Tanish's evolution.

Caring for a baby has always been considered the mother's domain. In fact, all books on child-birth or raising a baby have been written from the mother's perspective. Hence, they do a great job in defining her duties but often leave out the dad's role. When I heard I was about to become a father, I found very little literature to guide me through this journey. In today's era where traditional gender roles stand re-defined, a man is as involved in bringing a baby into the world.

Fatherhood, like almost everything else in today's world, is complex and layered. For the older generations, the role of a dad primarily involved looking into the financial needs of the family. Dads of that generation often kept themselves detached from their kids, sometimes deliberately. There were occasional indulgences in the form of bedtime stories. But for the most part they believed that their task was to discipline the kids. Mothers, on the other hand, were affectionate and indulgent, making up for the father's aloofness. Today, we see a role reversal of sorts, which is not unrelated to the larger change in gender equations. Interestingly, I now find that most dads tend to be more indulgent while it's the mothers who are in the policing mode.

The physical labour of carrying a baby and breastfeeding aside, there is virtually no department that a modern father is not

involved in. He witnesses his baby enter the world and at times he cuts the umbilical cord. He also wakes up at night to put his crying baby to sleep and changes diapers. He's there when the baby needs vaccination shots and keeps a check on medicinal needs. It might surprise you but a dad also feels a lump in his throat when he has to step out to work every day, leaving his baby behind for a good 10-12 hours. A modern dad takes a keen interest in his kid's education, doing a thorough research on the right school and curriculum. And on weekends, he becomes his kid's best friend, indulging him with a movie and ice-cream!

The thought of writing this book first came to mind when we were still trying to conceive. Strange as it may sound, I believe I forged a spiritual connect with my son even before we knew of his arrival. As a writer and a creative person, I had a vivid imagination of my life with my to-be child. Two years on, I've been lucky to have had the good fortune of enjoying fatherhood as extensively as I hoped to.

Being an ambitious and career-driven man, I was unaware of my propensity to love a baby. Today, I'm certain that no amount of professional success can substitute the simple joys of fatherhood. In fact, I've devoted so much of my time to Tanish that at one point I felt like his mother. The flip side was that he'd want my attention all the time. If I stepped out without him, he'd throw a tantrum. At times I'd end up yelling at him, but then at the very next moment I'd realise that his behaviour was a sign of his trust in me. I had become his best friend.

As much as I relished the importance, I also knew that this excessive dependence on me was not good for him. It was limiting his social outreach and behavioural growth. I then took up a consultant's position with a TV channel that kept me away from home four days in the week, while my wife Ramyani started spending more time with him.

At times I've wondered if my deep emotional connect with my son makes me an exception. What goes through the mind of men juggling high pressure corporate jobs? Were they as elated about fatherhood as I was when we found out we were expecting? In the course of writing this book, I chatted with a cross-section of dads across different cities and professions to answer all my questions. I was quite amazed to find that even the relatively taciturn ones were more than forthcoming when they started talking about their child. From an obsessive mid-40s dad who would mail a new picture of his daughter to close friends every day, to one in his late 20s trying hard to squeeze in more time for his son and then to an adoptive father whose eyes light up at the very mention of his daughter, this book chronicles the life of a new-age Indian dad.

But none of this would be possible without the contribution of the new-age mom. So a big shout out to them for allowing us to experience pleasures which our preceding generations did not. This book is as much a tribute to the modern mother as it is to the modern father.

## Chapter 2

### I Want to Become a

### Dad...But Am I Ready?

### My first paternal pangs

Being a father is undoubtedly the toughest job you'll ever have. It is also a daunting experience. Once you know that your wife is expecting, it is natural for every guy to ask themselves, 'Am I ready?' I guess I'm a bit of an exception to this rule because I've wanted to be a father for as long as I can remember.

On a cold wintry morning of November 1982, at around 6-6.30 AM, my dad kick-started his Bajaj Super scooter with me standing in front and my heavily-pregnant mom seated behind. We drove straight to Telco Maternity Hospital, some 5 km away from our home in Jamshedpur. Three hours later, my younger brother Tanmay was born.

The image of my baby brother curled up near my mom and our journey home two days later in an auto rickshaw will forever stay with me. I was barely six years old at the time, but Tanmay's arrival made me feel like a grown-up overnight. I've often heard that when the age gap between siblings is more than four years, it's common to spot an early maternal/paternal instinct in the older child. The theory held true in my case. At his slightest discomfort, I would swoop into action by gently

swinging Tanmay in my arms. I taught him how to play cricket quite early and when the other kids in the locality were busy, we'd bat and ball by ourselves for hours together.

When Tanmay got admission in Loyola School, where I was already studying, I took my responsibilities more seriously. Since his classes finished before mine, I would request my teachers to excuse me 10 minutes earlier so that I could escort him to the right school bus. This continued for an entire year. I must have been excessively fond of kids because by the time Tanmay was two, I began pestering my parents for another sibling. Like I said, the idea of fatherhood has excited me for as long as I can remember.

## When to be a father

As I look around, I find that every man has his own way of knowing when he's ready for fatherhood. There are also extreme cases of couples not wanting children at all. I know of at least three such couples and they have all stuck to their decision. But Rajan Gupta, an Indore-based engineer with roots in a small town in north Bihar, was adamant on having a child immediately after marriage. His wife Sonal, who didn't have any work commitments, was on board with the idea. Their gynaecologist advised Sonal to gain some more weight before getting pregnant. The couple went the extra mile to make that happen and nine months into their marriage, they were expecting. Rajan became a dad at 28. Interestingly, his father is a mere 22 years older than him. So he became a grand-father at just 50.

Asad Lalljee, a CEO of a corporate cultural initiative who has spent 14 years in the United States, has a different story to tell. He doesn't believe in living by the book. Even major decisions like marriage or having a baby weren't planned much ahead. By 43, Asad was ready to be a father. By then he realised it had become a "now or never" situation. "It's funny how in your 20s and maybe early 30s you keep finding ways to avoid pregnancy. And then in your late 30s and beyond you desperately find ways to get pregnant," he told me. He recalls how a colleague once ran out of a crucial meeting because his wife had "begun to ovulate".

Asad became a dad at 44.

Roopak Saluja, media entrepreneur and angel investor, became a father at 34. His wife, actress Tara Sharma, hosted a television show on parenting called *The Tara Sharma Show* on Colors and now on Star World that Roopak co-produced. “Both Tara and I were passionate about the idea of having kids to the point that we’d planned things to quite a degree even before we were married. “A month before our first anniversary, Tara was pregnant,” he says. The couple have two sons, Zen and Kai.

Rajeev Shukre (name changed), a senior executive in a telecom firm, adopted a three month old girl at 39. Today Rajeev says he never imagined he could love somebody as much as he loves his daughter. His wife Maya and he are still undecided on the perfect age to tell her about the adoption. “We’ve tried becoming friends with more parents who have adopted kids so that whenever she gets to know, she’d have a sort of support group of her own,” he says.

## It's written in the stars

It was an incident in 2009 that propelled me towards fatherhood. Ramyani and I had been dating for a few years but weren't sure of our future plans. I wasn't commitment phobic but the alarming number of marriages crumbling around me had made me cynical about the institution. Even as the confusion persisted, I decided to have our horoscopes matched. I must clarify here that I don't blindly follow astrology. Yet, if I find merit in some prediction, I wouldn't dismiss it prematurely. I consulted a young astrologer for whom this was more a passion than profession. I was relieved to hear that our horoscopes were well-matched, but with it came some bad news as well. He predicted that Ramyani and I would have trouble conceiving. I might not be the biggest fan of astrology, but I'd be lying if I said this didn't upset me. I sought a second opinion, only to hear those crushing words yet again.

I've noticed that when I'm pushed into a corner, I usually come out stronger and more determined. In keeping with that trait, I wanted to have a baby quickly to get the better of my astrological fate. Roughly a year into our marriage, we started trying. It took a year before we got the good news. Eight months later, Tanish came into our life. In hindsight, I had put undue pressure on Ramyani without realising I was being unfair to her. She believed that if something was destined for her, she'd get it against all

odds. And being a mother was one of them.

## The clock is ticking...

At times I envy people who fall in love early and get married in their mid or late 20s. Such couples get a larger window to make the best out of their married lives before planning a baby. My brother Tanmay, a corporate lawyer with one of the world's largest venture capital funds, got married when he was 27. Both he and his wife are the same age. "We wanted to spend the first few years slogging it out in our careers and travelling around the world. It was only after three-and-half years of marriage that we gave a serious thought to having a baby," he says. Tanmay and his wife Lopa are expecting their first baby in December 2014.

If you settle down post 30, women are in constant fear of that fast-ticking fertility clock. That could leave them no choice but to have a child soon after marriage. That apart, nobody likes to be an old mom or dad. The other advantage of having your first child early is that it buys you more time to plan a second one. Given that both Ramyani and I were on the wrong side of 30 when we got married, we didn't want to wait for too long before we started trying. My good friend Abhishek Srivastava, an associate professor at IIT Indore, got married at 35 and became a father before his first anniversary.

## THINGS TO REMEMBER

Before you decide to get into parenthood, it is becoming increasingly important to consider a few factors.

### *Start counting your pennies*

Having a baby is expensive, so make sure your finances are in place before moving ahead. If you're used to living on a double income, keep in mind that your wife is entitled to a paid maternity leave for only 3 months. After that you're on your own. A freelancer friend panicked when his wife had to suddenly quit her job in her third month due to a medical complication. Burdened with mounting costs, he took on more work than he could handle. It came as no surprise when he messed up most of it. Ultimately, with just a month to go for the baby's arrival he had to take up a full-time job.

Your expenses start going up way before the child is born. It helps to be aware of the additional costs incurred during pregnancy months. Doctor's consultation, medical tests, ultrasounds, maternity wear, etc will cost you at least Rs 15,000 (there is no upper limit). At the time of delivery, a decent hospital in a metro city charges upwards of Rs 50,000 for a normal delivery and upwards of Rs 80,000 for a C-section (again, there is no upper limit). Immediately after the baby's birth, you will be required to spend on formula milk, diapers, the paediatrician's fees and immunization.

In recent years, medical insurance policies have begun to cover pregnancy expenses up to a specified limit, subject to terms and conditions. If you plan your pregnancy well in advance, you can avail of this. It also helps if you can get all pending loans and debts out of the way before the baby arrives.

### *Professional Considerations*

Having a child impacts the mother's career greatly, so it makes matters easier if she is professionally well-settled. If she's been with the same company for long, she can demand perks like a work-from-home option, flexible hours and an extended maternity leave.

During the pregnancy months and even after the baby's arrival, the distance from the mother's workplace to home assumes crucial importance. We lucked out in this regard. Around the time we were trying to conceive, Ramyani found a job where her office was a mere 300 metres from home. This was a huge blessing. It not only afforded her the luxury of working till 10 days before her expected due date but also meant she could take a shorter maternity break.

### *Happy parents make happy babies*

A couple should be emotionally in sync and have a deep understanding of each other's temperaments before becoming parents. This is especially crucial if you've had an arranged marriage or a brief courtship period. In this case you might want to take more time to get to know each other before jumping into anything. For those in a troubled marriage, it's best to hold off

on baby plans till you sort out differences. You can't raise a child if you're not on the same page with your partner. I know of cases where couples have had kids to save the marriage. This is not a wise option. Chances are that it will backfire, and that too on the unsuspecting child.

## Section B



## WHAT A DAD NEEDS TO DO DURING PREGNANCY

## Chapter 3

### You're Expecting! What Next?

### Deciding the doctor and hospital

Once your wife's pregnancy is confirmed, the very first call that the expecting couple has to take is picking the right doctor and hospital. Many couples tend to delay this decision. Often the absence of complications in the initial weeks makes them take things easy. But this is where you need to be vigilant. A potentially life-threatening condition known as tube pregnancy or ectopic pregnancy, wherein a fertilized egg settles and grows in the fallopian tube instead of the inner lining of the uterus can sometimes show no symptoms. Often it creeps up on you only during an ultrasound. Therefore the first ultrasound should not be delayed beyond 5-6 weeks.

Ideally you should check in with a doctor the moment you know there is a baby on the way. I also suggest you register yourself on [www.babycenter.in](http://www.babycenter.in) from the word go. The weekly mailers provide you the most comprehensive and up-to-date information on the progress of your wife's pregnancy. These mailers continue well after your baby is born.

Before zeroing in on a doctor and hospital, speak to your friends who have already been through this process. It is safer to opt for a doctor that comes highly recommended by friends or

people whose opinion you trust. It could be that the hospital they suggest doesn't suit your budget or that the doctor's chamber is far off. In that case, keep a second and third option handy.

When it comes to deciding on the hospital for the delivery, every couple has their own priorities. Some prefer smaller, more economical hospitals that have all the facilities in place but may not be counted among the most reputed brands. Others may feel safer to go for a more well-known brand, even if it is a little out of the way. One of my screenwriter friends in Mumbai, Shobhit Jaiswal, had his wife check into Kokilaben Hospital in Mumbai, one the biggest in the city, the moment he realised there would be complications leading up to the birth. The hospital was nearly 12 kms away from where they lived but the reassurance of a reliable brand made them feel more secure.

From my personal experience, I would suggest factoring in a well-equipped Neo Natal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) unit while making your decision. I ended up paying a heavy price for overlooking this seemingly small thing. But more on that in a later chapter.

## Make your home baby-friendly

If you live in a metro city, chances are that you're not entirely happy with your living situation. You may find your flat too cramped or the area too noisy and yet you're not in a tearing rush to look for a better place. It happens when you lead a hectic life and shifting homes is an ordeal you can do without. When a baby comes into the picture, you'll be in no mood for a compromise. Naturally, you'll want what is best for your child—a place that is safe, peaceful and has enough room for your baby to move about freely.

Ramyani and I shifted to a new place two months prior to Tanish's birth. We wanted a bigger house for him to crawl around and explore. We also wanted my parents and Ramyani's mom to spend more time with us, which meant getting a larger space. We gave the flat we owned on rent and shifted to a bigger rental accommodation. It seemed like an unusual solution at the time, but another friend whose wife got pregnant a few months after Ramyani did the same after seeing how much it helped us. Shobhit also sold his flat and shifted into one that was tailor-made for babies. The flat was small in size but it made up for that with an adjoining balcony which was as big as the rest of the house. "We wanted a private playground for the baby where he could crawl around freely. Mumbai apartments simply don't provide that," he reasoned.

In India, there are families that look beyond size and safety while choosing a new address; superstition also plays a part. If you feel that a particular house has brought you bad luck, you might want to shift to one that has a more positive energy. Like I said before, I have an ambivalent attitude to such matters. A couple in my building changed homes soon after the wife started expecting. The husband later told me, “My wife had had two sudden miscarriages even when everything seemed alright. Somehow we were convinced that our flat was jinxed. When my wife conceived this time, we consulted a spiritual guru who asked us to shift out of the house. And it worked.”

Moving houses is an expensive proposition and could add to your already mounting costs. The next best option would be to make your current house as child-friendly as possible. A few days before her due date, when Ramyani returned from work, she insisted we visit a mall. She picked up an assortment of soft toys, art paper and oil paints. By the next morning she had created a colourful baby corner in the room. There were miniature bears, dogs, monkeys and penguins on the bed-stand and paintings of animated mushrooms, butterflies and fish on the walls. I wondered if Ramyani’s efforts were futile. Wouldn’t the baby be too small to appreciate art! Also, I wasn’t too thrilled to see her exerting herself in that precarious state. But the joy and excitement on Ramyani’s face made it worth it.

## Scans and more...

Your first introduction with your baby, even before the birth, will be through ultrasounds. I would eagerly await these sessions. With every passing scan you can see your child evolve from a foetus to a full-grown baby. Asad too echoes my sentiments. Like me, he was obsessed with ultrasounds! “The first sonography was the most moving and we looked forward to seeing our baby each month and then every 2 weeks. There were some weeks we didn’t need a sonography/doplar, but we would joke about dropping by for one anyway,” he says.

Ramyani’s first ultrasound was in her seventh week. My research told me that this is when you can hear the baby’s heartbeat. Unfortunately while Tanish’s growth was on track, the heartbeat I longed to hear couldn’t yet be deciphered. A week later when we went for another ultrasound, we were both quite nervous. I hadn’t been able to get much work done in anticipation of this moment. And then there it was—a vibrant, robust heartbeat. It sounded a bit like a young horse breathing rapidly but at that time it felt like music to my ears.

Five weeks later came the all-important nuchal translucency scan. This is also the scan after which most people break the news to the world. A nuchal scan helps identify higher risks of chromosomal defects, including Down’s Syndrome in a foetus.

<sup>1</sup>This scan is carried out at 11–13.6 weeks of pregnancy and

assesses the thickness of the soft tissues at the nape of neck. From the information I got off the Web, I learnt that the nuchal thickness ought to measure less than 2.2 mm. Hence, I was fixated on this figure throughout the scan.

As the doctor took us through the different body parts of the foetus, I stopped and asked, “Hold on, will you first please tell me the nuchal thickness?” The doctor looked back in surprise. He wondered how I was aware of such technicalities. “1.2 mm,” he answered quietly. “Oh, great! You can proceed with what you were saying,” I replied in relief. Ramyani stifled her laughter as the bemused doctor continued the scan.

The other crucial hurdle is the mid-semester scan. As the name suggests, this is done mid-way, around the 20<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy. If your radiologist is not in a tearing rush to move on to the next patient, this one can go on for a good half hour. I assure you by the end of it you would count it among your most beautiful experiences ever. I was told that if the expectant mother consumes something sweet just before the ultrasound, the baby’s movements are more pronounced. We couldn’t wait to test this theory. The logic behind it is simple—sugar increases the glucose levels in the blood, leading to increased activity of the baby. In this scan, each body part is focused upon in turns. For the first time we got a clear look at the shape of the baby’s head, the limbs and heart.

The baby held both his hands together, as if greeting us with a Namaste. On our way out I told Ramyani, “I think I

noticed something.” “What?” she asked unsuspectingly. “That it’s probably going to be a boy,” I said.

## Stem cell banking

A few weeks before Tanish's birth, Ramyani and I signed up for stem cell banking. There are several private or personal banks in the country that store stem cells extracted from the amniotic fluid of the child. This can later be accessed by the person whose stem cells have been banked or his/her immediate relatives in case of a medical emergency. The concept of stem cell banking has been active for many years in India but the parents I spoke to were all sceptical about the credibility of the companies. Since it is originally a western concept, I guess they were doubtful if the services in India could match international standards.

I was very keen that we go in for it while Ramyani was not. I looked at it as medical insurance for the baby. 'Why cut corners when it comes to shielding your baby from potential health risks,' I thought? Our doctor said we should opt for it if money was not an issue. The rates ranged between Rs 70,000-1,00,000 at that time. We chose an offer by Cordlife India. Asad opted for a brand called Life Cell. "They were prompt and almost professional. It was only after Aishwarya Rai Bachchan decided to be a spokesperson for it and their full page ad in *The Times of India* did the service get a tad bit slow. I guess they were overwhelmed with calls!" he says.

The exorbitant rates of stem cell banking could pose as a deterrent for those considering it. My friend in Bangalore, Zahid

H Javali, decided against it because he felt it was too large an investment on something that may or may not be worth it. “The practice isn’t as standardised and widespread as it is in the western countries. The proper care and upkeep of stem cells is a concern. Not too many people are qualified and committed to the cause of medical hygiene,” reasons Zahid, who runs his own custom publishing firm. His concerns seem to be valid, but then again, there are parents who did not go in for stem cell banking for the same reasons, and regret it now. In such cases, Zahid says parents can make things right by opting for dental stem cell banking which can be done while the child still has milk teeth.

## THINGS TO REMEMBER

Once you know your wife is expecting, finalizing the right gynaecologist and hospital should be your top priority.

Information never hurts! Get yourself enrolled to [www.babycenter.in](http://www.babycenter.in) for weekly updates on the development of the baby and advancement of your wife's pregnancy.

Have your wife take the blood tests and ultrasounds on time. Some of the early ones can be discomfoting for the new mother, especially if it is a vaginal ultrasound. Give her the moral support and encouragement she needs to see her through this phase.

The right time to clean up and re-design your home or to shift to a new one is before the baby is born. Dust particles are best avoided once the baby is born.

Accompany your wife to the ultrasounds. They are the closest interface that you can have with your baby before he is born, so make the most of it.

Go in for stem cell banking, unless you can't afford it. Treat it as a form of medical insurance. The good thing is that it might be useful for your blood relatives as well.

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