

Commentary

Musings of a Working Mother

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We are traditionally conditioned to recognize moms as either working, homemaking or even not working. But are women ever freed from work? Needless to remind us, child-rearing is full-time job in itself. Especially in India, where budding dads are preoccupied bread-winners, unskilled nurturers or just too busy to look into baby chores. Recent years however, have witnessed a welcome change in the trend, with the concept of paternity leave and kangaroo-care with dads being encouraged. Moms though, have undoubtedly been a baby's primary source of love, care, comfort, feeds and naps. Is that why mothers are expected by default to be superwomen?

This particular excerpt focuses on how working moms in today's era balance their jobs with optimal childcare. Despite her belief that motherhood is the most important of all professions, and perhaps the only one that truly matters, every educated woman who was once a working professional, needs to keep that side of her alive and going. Motherhood enhances her identity, once confined to that of a businesswoman, engineer, doctor, or even a soldier in the defence force. She might rest in the luxury of the first few months of maternity leave, but eventually she must step back to her workplace, where she is much needed. This workplace need not necessarily be outside her home; common households still refer to the kitchen as a woman's eternal workplace. Ideally, the shift happens after her infant's weaning begins. And when the time for her to resume work does ensue, how does a mother attain the subtle balance of providing her best without compromising on her little one's nutrition?

Over past few decades, women have come up with pragmatic strategies to strike this necessary balance. The use of breast pumps has become rampant, if not the hand expression of breastmilk. We now have refined methods to preserve expressed milk at home or with milk banks, so the precious feeds are not lost. The down side of this resource is seen in the rising use of feeding bottles and of course, lesser minutes of cuddling in mommy's arms. The currently recommended standard for breastfeeding practices is that of on-demand feeding, which requires a mother to be available around the child almost 24*7. In such circumstances, it is difficult for mothers to be completely present at home, and at work simultaneously.

She has to prioritize one role over the other or let go of some inherent perks either side. She decides to pump breastmilk before leaving for work, on her way back home, and sometimes even in between, if the engorgement hurts. It is not an easy task to say the least. Besides its tediousness, it can physically get quite hurtful or let 'mom guilt' seep in emotionally. Some workplaces might be exceptionally understanding and provide facilities for baby-care, wherein moms could carry their infants to workplaces and step in for nursing as and when required. Sounds promising, at the cost of probable half-heartedness and distraction for a nervous mother.

The alternative is to outsource help from nannies or child care homes. But entrusting her baby's caregiving in the hands of another, would take much courage on the part of a mother, and some time to build it. In India, having grandparents to step in for this role is a boon to many

working moms. With growing nuclear family settings, today's women increasingly face the ordeal of picking between the desired day-night job of being mommy on one hand, and a dynamic working woman on another, without letting their baby down.

There is no right answer to this dilemma and one can only laud the moms who manage to fight their difficult emotions every day, dress up in their gear, adorn their wide smiles and not fail to ensure the safety and nutrition of their young ones, even in their absence. Yet, all moms would agree that no matter how stimulating a work environment or incentives, it is faint when compared to the deep fulfilment entailed in breastfeeding, the most natural of mammalian traits. It is the incomparable sense of satisfaction in feeding one's baby, that holds the potential to uplift all the woes of an exhausted mother at the end of a long day. Inevitably, she will never cease to provide for her baby in unfathomable ways, whether she chooses to be a successful entrepreneur mom, or not. How can we forget, that educated or illiterate, resourceful or meager, with one child or many, inside home or outside, awake or asleep, healthy or sick, and with help or alone, moms are always working!