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Paternity leave: The new-age hands-on fathers

— By Vikas Gupta | Dec 11, 2016 02:26 am

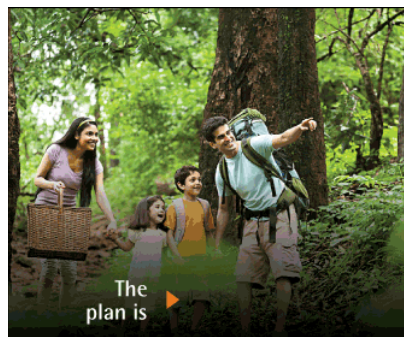
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An increasing number of men are taking paternity leave, in order to spend time with their newborn. Vikas Gupta speaks about this new trend

"The guys who fear becoming fathers don't understand that fathering is not something perfect men do, but something that perfects the man. The end product of child-raising is not the child but the parent" – Frank Pittman, Author

When Soham (aged 27) and Kia (aged 26), both recently married, applied for the same position, Soham inherited some extra points just because he was a man.



The hard reality of Indian patriarchal society is that, companies and people still consider women's job as secondary and thus feel that their stay would be temporary until they get pregnant, subconsciously

considering the financial cost of maternity leave. According to world economic forum, Indian ranks 108 out of 148 countries with only 0.35 female to male ratio in labour force participation. Thus, Menaka Gandhi nudging union labour ministry to increase maternity leave from current 12 weeks to 26 weeks, can do more harm than good to this gender gapped society.

The Indian government has done little to recognize that the baby is a shared responsibility. According to Vikram Shroff, Head of HR Law (Employment & Labour) at Nishith Desai Associates, "Government employees in India are entitled to 15 days of paternity leave. Private sector employers in India are not legally required to provide paternity leave to their employees".

Often this becomes counter-productive as males cite work to avoid getting involved in what are considered as motherly chores. On the contrary, it is highly recommended that a paternity leave, (fathers leave) will bring about better work life balance, thereby encouraging more women to participate in the workforce, especially in the nuclear families and make our society more gender-equitable. This concept of paternity leave is highly successful in many developed countries of Europe which also rank highest in the gender gap index.

Country	Period	Pay during Paternity
Norway	45 weeks	
Sweden	8 weeks	80% pay
Italy	13 weeks	
Canada	35 weeks	55% pay

International private companies are taking giant strides in accepting and promoting this long awaited concept:

Company	Paternity Period
Netflix	Full year
Spotify	24 weeks
Facebook	17 weeks
Pinterest	16 weeks
Google	12 weeks
Microsoft	12 weeks
Bank of America	12 weeks
Linked in	12 weeks
Twitter	10 weeks

According to Fatherly.com – A parenting resource for men

Many Indian companies are still oblivious to the emotional quotient to attract and retain talent. The top offerings in India still come from the subsidiaries of multi-national companies.

Indian Companies	Period
Facebook India	16 weeks
Google India	4 weeks
Star India	4 weeks
Adobe India	10 days
Flipkart	10 days
Airtel	1 week

In the rat race for work many fathers end up overlooking smaller things that cannot be undone later. Dr Anjali Chhabria, Consultant Psychiatrist, explains the importance of fathers being around during this life changing event, "Many mothers go through post-partum depression or anxiety. It is as common as 8 in 10 women experiencing some levels of depression and for many women it goes unaddressed until things get out of control, either adversely affecting the child or the mother herself. A father's motivation and kind support can be of great help to the new anxious mother. She needs equal love and care for it to amplify to the child too."

When asked if this helps the father child relationship at later stages, she added "When the father holds the baby and plays, the child responds to him, and may even probably recognise his voices from the womb. This creates a sense of security right from the beginning.

A new born is rapidly learning how to socialise and by the time they are toddlers they have developed the concept of immediate relationships and the small things that the child will begin to recognise about his/her father will last throughout the relationship in his/her life. Also, the child will have scattered memories and experiences to remember from childhood that expresses their bond with the father."

First time parent Anurag Agarwal, a textile businessmen who managed his work 8 weeks over the phone says it is not only the emotional support that is required, sometimes such decisions are economic as well, "Since this was our first child, we decided to do everything by ourselves and not take help of any maid.

Being around definitely reduces the frustration of a mother who is recovering from delivery and at the same time managing the new role. Paternity leave is more important for working professional as many of them cannot afford to have a maid."

India has to start taking baby steps in the right direction to have a balanced holistic society rather than only become economic power with a zombie-like workforce. Even though leaves have been stated by companies HR policies, reality seems far from what is portrayed, Kunal Das (name changed), who works for a private firm in Ambernath stated "I believe motherhood is not restricted only to mothers.

I live in a joint family and know that there many people to look after my wife and baby. But still I decided to take paternity leave when my daughter was born on August 9, 2016. I applied for a 15 day leave in advance; and even though my organisation was cooperative I had to cut it short to 10 days as I was working on an important project. But I manage to take leaves in October."

Bring about a real change would require a major shift in attitudes rather than company policies. With Bollywood celebrities, Shahid Kapoor and Saif Ali Khan leading the way, and, taking paternity leaves from their respective shoots, it's only about time that we embrace the same with grace.

(With inputs from Sonali Pimputkar)