

WOMAN BEATS MENTAL ILLNESS TO WIN BABY BACK FROM FOSTERAGE

After influential foster parent, a Bollywood director, snatched boy from rescue home, Child Welfare Committee rules that child be returned to biological mother, as doctors certify her fit

VINOD KUMAR MENON
 vinodm@mid-day.com

DEEMED fit by doctors after she overcame mental illness, the biological mother of the baby, the centre of a custody battle, said on Wednesday that she is thrilled. "Mujhe mera bachcha mil gaya, main bahut khush hun," she said after the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) ordered the foster parents to hand over the baby to her on Monday. "Mera babu abhi so raha hai, I will not let him get separated from me," she said. She has returned with her father from Dongri to the Shradha Rehabilitation Centre in Borivli, where she was treated and has been staying for the past year. » P08

'I am witness to the mother's transformation in the past year, from being a psychiatric patient to being fit today. I have been accompanying her and this is a miracle' Farzana Ansari, social worker



The woman with her father after they got her son back, (inset) mid-day's Dec 5 report

'A win for the rights of the mentally ill'

Experts hail the order to give baby back to biological mother; rehab centre which helped her get well to continue providing support

Continued from Page 1

MID-DAY had highlighted the case of the woman, who hails from Bihar, in a December 5 report. She overcame mental illness under Ramon Mag-saysay Award-winner Dr Bharat Vatwani's care, only to find out that the influential Bollywood director who has been fostering the baby won't let go of the child.

"I will take care of my daughter and grandchild hereafter. We are thankful to each and everyone who helped us in getting our child back. All this was possible because of Dr Vatwani, who not only saved my daughter by treating her free of cost but also provided her shelter for so long," said the woman's father.

Farzana Ansari, the social worker who had been with the woman since her admission at the rehabilitation centre last year, said, "I am witness to the mother's transformation in the past year, from being a psychiatric patient to being physically and mentally fit today. I have been accompanying her and this is a miracle. After she had recovered, she kept asking for her baby and was missing him. I am satisfied that she has finally been united with her child forever." Ansari has assured the family that she'd stay in touch.

Dr Vatwani, founder, Shradha Rehabilitation Foundation, said, "This is the power and victory of truth. I want people to spread the message that the mentally ill have rights. They have more emotional needs than a common man, and no one can deprive them of the same."

"You cannot walk over the human rights and dignity of the mentally ill, nor extinguish their desire to love and be loved," Dr Vatwani said.

"We will continue to take care of the mother and child for some time and after getting the child medically evaluated, we will send them home. We will provide the mother with the required medicines. Our responsibility towards them is neverending," Dr Vatwani said.

'Victory of the mentally ill'

Dr Sanjay Kumavat, senior consulting psychiatrist and former deputy director, Mental Health, Maharashtra, said, "It is the victory of the rights of people

"This is the power and victory of truth. I want people to spread the message that the mentally ill have rights. They have more emotional needs than a common man, and no one can deprive them of the same"

Dr Bharat Vatwani, founder, Shradha Rehabilitation Foundation



Experts in mental health and child rights emphasised that people, especially the marginalised, should be helped to take care of their children. REPRESENTATION PIC

'The foster parents were emotional and they requested to allow them to meet the child at least for the next few days, which the CWC has agreed to'

Milind Bidwai, chairman, Child Welfare Committee

with mental illness and of alert mental health professionals. This will set a precedent."

Nishit Kumar, founder and managing director, Centre for Social and Behaviour Change Communication, said, "I am happy that the child has been finally restored to the mother after BYL Nair hospital certified her fit. Her trauma at being separated from her child will reduce. Hopefully, the Social Justice department will link her to a livelihood opportunity so that she can be independent and raise her child with normal development."

Nishit added, "Sickness, infections and wounds are commonplace among all marginalised children and can be no grounds for separating a child from a poor and sick mother. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-5 state fact sheet recently reported that 35.2 per cent of Maharashtra's children under the age of five years are stunted, 68.9 per cent of six-month-old to 59-month-old infants are anaemic and only eight per cent of breastfeeding children from six to 23 months receive an adequate diet. This does not mean we should separate these children from their mothers. The solution is to ensure that the State's schemes reach mothers like her and her child can grow up and be a productive citizen."

CWC speaks

Milind Bidwai, chairman, Child Welfare Committee (CWC), Mumbai City-1, said, "The four-member CWC committee unanimously decided and



Social worker Farzana Ansari had been with the woman since she was brought to the rehabilitation centre

passed its order in the larger interest of the child, after taking into consideration all the points, including the psychiatric evaluation report by the Department of Psychiatry, Nair hospital, handed over to the CWC by Borivli railway police on Monday."

Bidwai added, "We have also roped in the CWC, District Child Protection Unit and Childline members from Bihar, who will monitor and support the family. Shradha Rehabilitation Foundation would also inform us about the mother's wellbeing."

When inquired about the foster parents, Bidwai said, "The foster parents were emotional and they requested to allow them to meet the child at least for the next few days, which the CWC has agreed to. Also, 12 cheques of ₹6,000 each given by a donor have been handed over to the maternal grandfather."

Bidwai added, "The foster parents took good care of the child. In coming days, we are roping in more NGOs and the state government will conduct awareness about foster parenting in the larger interest of children requiring care and protection."