

Motherhood

PAKISTAN'S FIRST PARENTING MAGAZINE



A Sneak Peek
into Supermom,
Sarwat Gilani's Life

A Mother's Guide
to Properly
Weaning Babies

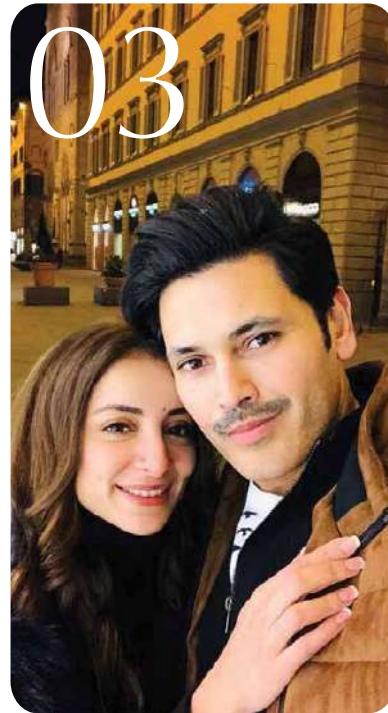
A Culturally
Interwoven Marriage
and the
Joys it Offers

***Avid novelist Taha Kehar
shares his favourite reads***

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Motherhood, Philanthropy and Career through Sarwat Gilani's eyes



Interview by: Sundus Zafar
Coordination: Saba Quddusi
Photos from: Sarwat Gilani's personal archives

Sarwat Gilani with her husband, Fahad Mirza and two sons, Rohan and Airaz

Actor, model, superstar, creative, philanthropist, daughter, wife, and above all else, mother to two beautiful young souls, Rohan and Airaz, with husband Fahad Mirza. We talk to Sarwat Gilani about work, motherhood, and life as a multi-tasking parent.

A Typical Day in Sarwat's Life

Sarwat's day starts and ends with a lot of running around and getting things done. She is always in fast motion because she has very little time and a lot to accomplish in a single day, whether that's picking her kids up from school, sitting down with them to do homework, going to her venture Arthouse to cater to other kids and their creative needs, or something else. Currently, Arthouse is the subject of her core focus, her art school for children where they get to explore their fun, creative side.

The end of the day is all for her family. "We do family time every evening. We have dinner, read together, say our duas, and then go to bed. I like keeping a set routine for the kids -

it helps me remain sane and helps them stay fresh if they have to be up for school or even if they have a day off or a playdate to get to. They are well-slept, well-fed and mentally in a positive space."

Sarwat believes that once you become a parent, you must live a very calculated life. Many things have to be added to or removed from your life for you to be a conscious parent. "Kids who are raised around confident parents who have their lives sorted, do not grow up with insecurities. They grow up with a lot of wholesomeness. And to achieve that, it is very important that as a responsible parent, you give a few things up."



Sarwat's Sparkling Career

Brightening Up Our Small and Big Screens



The first 20 or so years of Sarwat's career were spent on television, she recalls. Starring in blockbuster dramas that became the talk of the town for their captivating storylines and intriguing execution, she ruled the small screen. Before she decided to take it big. And also smaller. "After such a long time on television, I wanted to expand my audience scale and venture into different content types. Thus, you will see me more on the web or on a big screen rather than a TV screen any time soon."

A fan of making decisions as opportunities present themselves, she isn't fond of planning too far ahead of time. "I just take it how it comes to me and see if something excites my brain cells while reading a script." For television, she believes she has overcome her phase. But that is not how she feels about cinema. "I love the big screen. Cinema has an amazing impact on its audience and people really wait for a film they think they'll enjoy. If it is a global film, there's nothing like it because then your audience becomes a global audience and you are able to show your craft to people from across the world."

When asked about the highlight of her career, three names stood out to Sarwat: Churails, Joyland, and Qatil Haseenaon Ke Naam. In her own words, these three pieces of content gave her a new perspective on acting - it was refreshing to be a part of such unique narratives. On the standing ovation Joyland received at the Cannes Film Festival, Sarwat said she was overjoyed. "The standing ovation was unbelievable. It

was a dream come true for all of us representing Pakistan at the event and also back home."

Sarwat believes that actors have a role to play in shaping public perception about important matters. "Just because we are entertainers does not mean that we do not hold any responsibility." She references the shift in her career in terms of the roles she played initially to the scripts she chooses now. "I've done the damsel in distress for so many years and as an artist, it did not give me a variety to explore my ability or acting skills. The recent projects I have been a part of required me to break all bounds. There are unbelievable women all around us and we need to tell their stories. We need to focus on their struggles and their achievements rather than focusing on the 'muzloom, sisakti hui aurat.'" And Sarwat has been making it a point to do that through her own work.

Commenting on her husband's career, Sarwat mentions that Fahad is very much a part of the industry still, but we seldom see him because he is picky with his scripts. He acts when he pleases or when he gets a good role. "It's fantastic being married to another actor - it's always nice to compare notes on acting skills and character building. Apart from that, I love Fahad's passion for changing and saving lives when he is playing a surgeon in real life. He is passionate, skilled, and extremely hardworking, and that is why my love for him is so strong. Whether he's working hard on a script or preparing for the surgical operations he has to perform the next day, he gives it his all."



Being Raised in a Creative Environment: A Pattern Carried Over into Sarwat's Own Parenting Style

It is during one's younger years that one is taught right from wrong, good from bad. All wrapped up in fun, conducive activities that may very well define one's path for the rest of one's life. And a lot of love, support, and encouragement. Sarwat's upbringing wasn't so different.

Brought up in what she remembers as a relatively strict environment, she recalls that there were rules to be followed but there was no lack of fun times. In addition to there being a lot of discussion on art, music, and culture, Sarwat vividly remembers the one gift she would always get from her mother on any occasion: art supplies! A lot of her time was spent doing artwork as a child, experimenting with different materials, and letting her imagination run wild.

But that's not all! "I remember as a child, we played a lot, outside and inside. I remember getting our toys only during summer breaks but somehow, we found a way to keep ourselves busy the rest of the year too." However, things have changed, and nowadays, kids don't get the opportunity to play outside so much anymore. So while Sarwat doesn't restrict her sons from playing with toys every day, there are other things from her childhood that she has carried over into motherhood. Since she made a lot of artwork in her own childhood, it transcended into her own parenting style and became a core part of how she brings up her kids. She buys them a lot of art material, which is why they're always busy

with creating something new. "We do not need screens to entertain us," Sarwat tells us proudly, "We have a lot of creative ways of entertaining ourselves."

Another way in which Sarwat is similar to her mother is in how she maintains her children's eating habits. "There was a rule in our house growing up: whatever was on the dining table had to be eaten. There were no 'nakhras' on the dining table and that is a culture I maintain in my own house with my kids too." Many young parents today struggle with the fact that their kids are picky eaters - some of Sarwat's friends are the same. But Sarwat has been able to sustain the no-picky-eating policy in her space. "Whenever my kids say something like 'we don't like this or that,' I teach them to look around and learn from those who are less fortunate. I tell them about how there are a lot of poor kids who don't have a choice with what they get to eat, so you have to be grateful to be blessed enough to have good food on the table."

Kids are quick learners and are empathetic by nature. They pick up on generosity and kind thinking and often replicate those same behaviours in their own lives. The values that Sarwat's mother inculcated in her when she was a child stuck, and they have made their way into her own parenting style. A perfect example of how empathetic parenting creates an endless loop of raising kind, thoughtful kids.

Motherhood and Raising Kids the Right Way



To Sarwat, balance is key when it comes to parenting her kids the right way. "I feel it's very important to have a smart balance between letting the boys be themselves and showing them the right way of being." Throwing a tantrum, for example, is something that is not acceptable in the actress' house. Certain rules have been set and they are expected to be followed, much like they were during Sarwat's own childhood.

While young parents nowadays can turn to their own parents for advice on how to maneuver this beautiful journey, parenting in the digital age comes with its own set of challenges. There is competition between parents and everyone is in a race to prove a point, even if it is at the expense of their children. "I feel that just because something is in fashion or is the norm, I would never push my child to go in a direction where he doesn't feel comfortable. If it isn't his vibe, he doesn't have to do it. I always ask my kids what they want to do and we talk openly about things."

Sarwat maintains a culture of open and honest communication within the family. The family talks about everything. More than scolding or spanking them, Sarwat believes talking to her kids about what is wrong and what is right has a greater impact. And she has a great fun technique to make sure nothing gets missed. "We have a family 'circle of truth' time where we each tell a truth, something that has the potential to get someone in trouble but instead, there are no consequences. By doing this, my child knows that he can tell me the truth about anything no matter what and instead of

being punished, he'll lovingly get taught about right and wrong. This will let the boys develop a very good relationship of trust with Fahad and I."

When asked who the kids are closer to, Sarwat had a mixed response. While she identified as the "bad cop" for making the kids do their homework, take part in doing the house chores, and save money for charity, she said she also plays with them a lot to make up for it. "Fahad and I both show physical care and love a lot. We love to cuddle up in one bed. We are very close like that as a family." Sarwat feels it is very important to raise responsible children, whether they are boys or girls. Kids should, from a very young age, know and understand what values are important, to know themselves, and to understand emotional intelligence so they are less confused and more confident. "I love teaching and spending time with my kids, whether it's academics or any form of personal development skills."

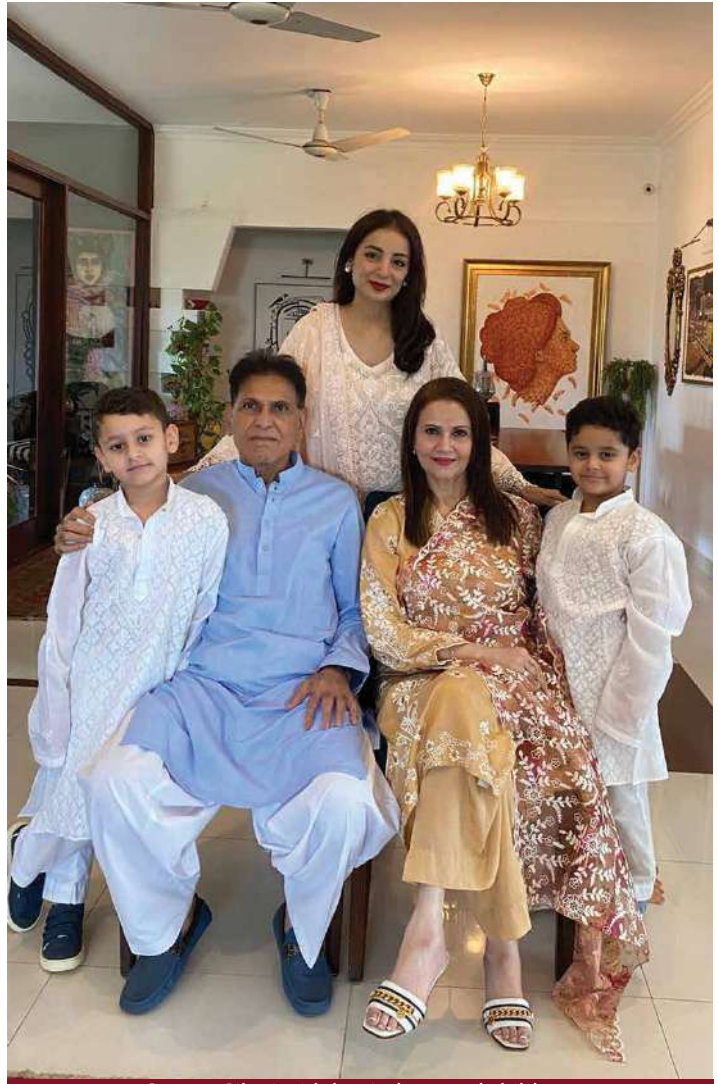
With horrifying stories related to harassment making the rounds every other day, parents are in a constant state of fear. To address this, Sarwat is of the opinion that children should be exposed to all the important conversations, all matters that need to be discussed so the children can remain safe, including safe and unsafe touch among others. In general, she believes kids should be aware of their own self, their values, etiquettes, and manners, and how to tap into their skill set themselves. "They should be given a lot of creative freedom and time for experimentation, all while being guided by their parents in the right direction."

Philanthropy - A Value Embedded Across Generations

In a country ridden with poverty and the destitute struggling to make two meals a day, it is essential for those who are more privileged to step up and take responsibility. Philanthropy takes many different shapes and forms and Sarwat has played her part by offering her support to a number of NGOs over the years, in some way, form or capacity. It is a quality that she has inherited from her brilliant mother, a woman who has always taken part in a lot of charity work and believed in spending her time responsibly. These are the values Sarwat grew up with and took with her into her adult life.

There is one cause that is very close to the superstar's heart, and it involves enabling those whose talents often get overlooked in our fast-moving world. Sarwat has been a brand ambassador for Special Olympics Pakistan for many years now, and she describes the experience as nothing short of transformative. "All the NGOs I have supported over the years do tremendous work but Special Olympics really changes lives through the power of sports. To see that happen right in front of me with so much transparency, so much honesty, and so much hard work is truly magnificent."

As soon as she came across the cause, Sarwat decided that she wanted to contribute to it. "I wanted to be a part of something so much larger than life that it was changing lives not just around us, but of families and kids who belong to underprivileged areas or marginalized societies. I felt great thinking about them and thinking for them." It was Sarwat's resolve to partake in activities that made such a great impact and she became a part of the tremendous team led by Ronak Lakhani that resulted in her being attached to the cause to this day.



Sarwat Gilani with her in-laws and children

Sarwat's Role Model in Life

When asked who she looked up to for inspiration, Sarwat said every woman who is trying to get it right is a role model for her, whether that's a single mother, a woman who doesn't have children, or one who is raising children together with a partner. "Every woman I know and beyond is trying to do her best at whatever job she has, whether that's being a housewife, a good mother, a good teacher, or a valuable contributor to whatever profession she belongs to. We are always trying to prove to the world, women in general, that we can do it. So, every woman who is trying and every woman who doesn't let circumstances or the world bring her down is my ideal."

With a message of strength and a life that reflects her thoughts, Sarwat herself is an inspiration for women across the country and beyond - a true representation of a wonder-woman acing every walk of life like a pro.



Leila Akram

Lille, France

Belongs to a multicultural family where Pakistani, French, and Algerian cultures are shared on a daily basis. The Akram family launched a Franco-Pakistani association to promote the education of Pakistani children a year ago and they continue with their philanthropy.

MIXED COUPLES:

“I, a Franco-Algerian woman, am married to a Pakistani”

In this article, Leila, one of Motherhood’s readers, gives an insight into her culturally diverse marriage and the delights it offers.

According to INSEE, one in seven marriages in France is a mixed marriage. What makes the French champions in this area? In a mixed marriage, religion, education, daily life, culinary and cultural habits are constantly questioned within the couple and the families of the spouses.

My name is Leila Akram; I am of Franco-Algerian origin and I am married to Muhammad Waqas Akram who was born in Pakistan in Multan. We have two wonderful daughters; Nina, 7 years old, and Hanya, 3 years old. First, let me tell you our story.

A Meeting and Only the Language of Love to Understand Each Other

I met my husband through our mutual best friend. My best friend had told me before the day we met that Waqas looked like a Bollywood actor and was extremely serious about getting married. He was also ambitious professionally and had attended a top business school.

At the time I was working for the French government's corporate tax department. And I was just waiting for Prince Charming to complete my life. So, I agreed to meet him! We liked each other from the very first moment and ended up shyly exchanging our contact details the same day. In the evening, I sent him the very first message. I asked him to arrange a meeting, but he replied that it was not possible to meet. Frustrated, I sent a message to complain to my best friend and tell him that I would never talk to Waqas. Very quickly, Waqas contacted me again and then I understood! He did not speak French very well yet and he had not understood the meaning of my message.

I might as well tell you that we lived our first few months in a triangular relationship with Siri from Apple who was our

interpreter. I must admit that my English at the time was even worse than it is today, but my husband knew English perfectly well. Very quickly, he learned French and our relationship became even stronger. Within weeks, I had met his mother on a video call. I was surprised and shy that he introduced his mother to me in such a natural way and without even warning me beforehand of his intentions.

As for the introduction of my mother, Waqas booked one of the most exclusive restaurants in town. Throughout the meal, my mother kept asking me if I realized how much he was looking at me with love!

My mother and I are both in love with Indo-Pakistani culture; in fact, before we met Waqas, the two of us used to eat in a restaurant serving Indo-Pakistani food every Wednesday. The restaurant owner had even asked my mother if she wanted her daughter to marry his nephew. Sometime later, I found out that my husband was the nephew of this man.

After a month of our relationship, Waqas proposed to me for the first time unofficially while we were just shopping. He took me into a jewelry store, explaining that it was better to buy gold jewelry than fancy ones to match my outfit. Then, he led me to the diamond window and told me to choose a ring; if I accepted, it would mean that I would want him to propose to me.

I accepted! Who can resist?

One beautiful proposal later, we set the date for our wedding in France. We celebrated our wedding with my mother and our three witnesses. I wished to have my hands covered with henna, but in view of some conflicts, I gave up the idea of the red Pakistani dress and all other ceremonies. My husband and his family gave me, as is traditional in our religion, gifts.



Leila and Waqas Akram

Turning Our Differences into Strengths!

At the beginning of our relationship, people were quite surprised to find that we were a balanced and loving couple.

In France, the Pakistani community is very integrated professionally, but marriages are still an internal affair. Families prefer to find a Pakistani husband or wife so as not to lose their roots, religion, traditions, and culture and I respect their opinion.

How do we get our relationship accepted by our family? This is the question I get the most through my Instagram account frenchpakistanifamily. Some will insist on the fact that parents do not have to give their opinion on the future spouse of their child, even going so far as to advise them too quickly to flee and not to give any more news to the families.

From my side, I always advise people to be sincere with their partner and not to start a relationship that they know is doomed to failure and to family conflicts. I invite my subscribers to reflect on the consequences of their actions. On the other hand, when there is a possible opening to allow a mixed union, I recommend patience and respect. I invite lovers to demonstrate to their parents the seriousness and viability of the union and to introduce their parents to the cultures and traditions of the loved one before talking to their parents about marriage.

As for our relationship, our parents made us grow up with the idea of choosing our partner. My husband's late uncle always told him that later on in life, he would marry a Gori, and luckily, I was already attracted to the Indo-Pakistani culture. It is said that we attract to us what we believe in, and I was convinced that one day I would visit the most beautiful palaces of the

Maharajas. Unfortunately, the current situation has not yet allowed us to go to Pakistan and it is a great sorrow that I share as a spectator.

Marrying an expatriate will also be trying to understand the homesickness syndrome. It means finding the right words to help the other not feel the loss of their family without forgetting them. You have to juggle video calls with the whole family and understand that your partner is suffering from their absence and therefore, enjoying these reunions. It is to show your partner your love and respect for their country and people - I did this by creating a Franco-Pakistani association in France in favor of the education of Pakistani children. To marry a Pakistani is to have one's feet in Europe and one's heart in Pakistan!

A Mixed Couple on a Daily Basis - Love and Sacrifices!

The wedding ceremony and the arrival of a child are events that will bring a lot of upheaval for lovers and their families who idealized it according to their vision of the world. Dealing with this will bring frustrations and joys on both sides. Nevertheless, I note that mixed couples who encounter difficulties are often those who attach great importance to the external gaze.

I think what makes my husband and I strong is our ability to communicate. At the beginning of our relationship, we took care to discuss subjects that we did not have in common such as family joint, culture and so much more. I remember our first date at an ice cream shop. Waqas was direct and asked me if I wanted a serious relationship or not. He also asked me how



Waqas Akram with his daughters, Nina and Hanya



many children I wanted, my religion, and my level of practice. He questioned whether I wanted to work after the wedding or take care of the house and if I would agree to live in the same house as his parents one day. And finally, he asked what country I wanted to live my life in.

Don't forget, it often happens that emotions that were not anticipated collide during a debate, but respect and love must take precedence over respective convictions.

Religion

Another common point of contention is religion. Here again, open-mindedness must take precedence in a mixed couple. I am a Muslim from my father and my mother is Christian. My mother celebrates Christmas and Easter and we go to her house during events that are important to her and respect her convictions. We take pleasure in sharing meals and our daughters receive gifts. During Eid celebrations, it is my mother's turn to join us and share our moments of celebration and prayer.

I would also like to thank my mother who prepared my meals for me and woke me up to eat before dawn during Ramadan.

But be careful, you should in no case impose it on the other if they are not sensitive to it. Convert to the religion of your loved

one, only if your choice is carefully considered, personal, and not under duress. In any case, this is a question to be addressed before starting a relationship!

A mixed couple is a union rich in sharing. I think all mixed couples agree that they fall in love with their spouse for their differences. Living with a Pakistani means expecting to taste tasty and spicy dishes, to spend long evenings watching romantic films with the hero Shahrukh Khan. It is to understand the real meaning of what is the family spirit! Living with a Frenchwoman means facing a temperament in search of independence and emancipation. It is to share a thirst for discovery and adaptability. Living as a mixed couple is confusing but it is a rewarding journey.

This is why we have decided to expose ourselves on social networks, not to promote it but to answer questions and prejudices.

I do not think I hold the key to the success of a mixed couple, but I like to show that nothing is impossible and that love makes us do great things. It won't be easy to get along every day, but remember that when a couple argues, it is to settle better and it does not matter if you are of the same origin or religion, it would not change anything if you are deeply committed to your relationship. Do not listen to what people say, live without regrets! Real love only happens once! **M**





Amani A. Hashem

Beirut, Lebanon

Is a registered nurse and certified breastfeeding specialist who holds a Master's degree in Public Health. She currently works as a freelance lactation consultant. Her main focus is supporting families to make informed decisions regarding feeding their children.

Weaning after Breastfeeding

In this article, Amani as a mother talks us through a few handy tips and tricks to wean babies.



Hey Mama, congratulations on breastfeeding your baby!

Your baby is probably around two years old now and is ready for weaning. You will find here a few tips that could be useful to you when you decide to wean your baby. Remember that it is always better to consult a breastfeeding professional for breastfeeding-related issues (like a breastfeeding peer counselor, a breastfeeding specialist, or a lactation consultant) if things do not work smoothly or you feel you need help.

If you and your baby still wish to breastfeed, you can continue even past 2 years according to many references, including the World Health Organization, UNICEF, Health Canada, and others. The geochemical analysis of the teeth of one species of early human ancestors (*Australopithecus africanus*) revealed that 2 million years ago, early humans were breastfed for five to six years. According to a contemporary human anthropologist and as mentioned in her book "Breastfeeding: Biocultural Perspectives", the normal age for humans to wean is between 2.5 and 7 years. So, it is okay if you feel 2 years are still not enough. I, myself, breastfed my little one for more than 3 years.

Similar to how your body takes time to establish your milk supply, which typically starts at the fourth month of pregnancy and continues all the way until giving birth to your little one, it should also take some time to stop making milk. Weaning needs to be gradual, and it should not happen over a night or so. Breastfeeding does not only provide your baby with nutrition but is also a source of connection between the two of you. Suddenly stopping this connection might harm you and your baby psychologically, so go easy. Do not consider 'Cry It Out' or the 'Cold Turkey' approach.

Since milk is considered the main nutritional source for your baby until their first birthday, your baby highly depends on breastfeeding, especially during the first 6 months of life, and continues to rely on breast milk to nourish the body day and night even after they finish the first year. Therefore, you should not consider night weaning until your baby has become 1 year old. Some babies are not even ready to wean at this age and continue to nurse day and night even after crossing their second birthday. My own baby, for example, did not night wean until he turned 30 months. Before then, we were both happy with waking up at night and breastfeeding back to sleep. In fact, I considered breastfeeding my magic touch which put him back to sleep instead of having to wake up to rock him or make him a bottle. You might want to start with night weaning and another mama wants to start with day weaning. Both are fine and there is no definitive rule; just make sure both you and your baby are ready for what you decide.

Mothers, at a certain point in their breastfeeding journeys, might be asked to wean the child due to a medical condition like pregnancy, illness, or taking a certain medication. In most cases, there is no need to wean. Pregnancy is not a contraindication for continuing breastfeeding and there are many mothers who continue to breastfeed during their whole pregnancy and tandem feed both kids after giving birth. Illnesses that are an absolute contraindication for breastfeeding are very few as per CDC (HIV while the mother is not taking treatment, Ebola Virus Disease, HTLV -1 and 2, untreated brucellosis, and active Herpes Simplex lesion on the breast where the baby puts their mouth to feed). As for medications, a huge percentage of medications are safe to be taken while

breastfeeding and you can always check with a breastfeeding professional about the compatibility of the prescribed medication with breastfeeding.

Contrary to what most formula companies advertise, your baby does not need follow-up formula milk after their first birthday. Almost all the "special nutrients" claimed to be in the grow-up formula can be taken from natural food resources, specifically from family food prepared at home.

Now that you have decided to wean your toddler, go slow. Start by skipping one breastfeeding session every few days or every week. Replace every session with something like a yummy snack, hug, dance, or any other activity to fulfill the baby's time and distract him. At night, you might hold, rock, sing, cuddle or offer some water until the next feed. If you feel your baby is not happy about it, you can forget about it that day and start tomorrow all over again. If not today, it will happen one day. It is a fact that babies wean at a certain time in their lives. As for which breastfeeding session to remove first, you know better Mama! Just note that most breastfed babies need to nurse to sleep so keep the pre-napping sessions till the end.

What if someone recommended you wear a tight bra to stop the production of new milk? The reality is that this is old-school advice and wearing a tight bra might increase your risk of getting plugged milk ducts and breast inflammation/infection. So, don't. If you get breast engorgement, which is unlikely to happen if you are weaning gradually, you may hand express some milk until you feel relieved. Do not worry that milk being expressed would still trigger milk production. This is better than having severe engorgement and getting a breast infection. Eventually, you can keep on doing this even for weeks, until your milk dries up. Cold cabbage leaves applied directly to the breasts help relieve the engorgement as well. Make sure you change them every few hours. Note that sometimes, breast milk takes months to dry up completely and you can still see drops of milk coming out after a hot shower months after weaning. This is totally normal, and nothing needs to be done about it.

Congratulations one more time on breastfeeding your little one! M



The author nursing her son Amir



Amna Baloch

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Is presently the High Commissioner of Pakistan to Malaysia. Her 30 years of diplomatic career has taken her across the globe - all the way from Denmark, to Sri Lanka and Singapore to China. Not only has she excelled as a Pakistani diplomat, but is also a sister, a mother, and a wife.

Upon several requests from parents and children alike, we are introducing a brand-new segment where experts discuss the pros and cons of their profession, making it easier to choose a career for yourself. From architects and civil servants to chartered accounts and filmmakers, we hope to have many career paths covered!

Diplomat Talks Diplomacy in the 21st Century



It is said that diplomacy is the first line of defense for a country. This adage reflects the importance of diplomacy in statecraft, national policy, and governance of a country. This brings us to the topic at hand: who are the people forming the first line of defense for Pakistan?

This query arises because the diplomats of Pakistan are more visible outside the country, as they interact with international communities in a multitude of ways to protect the national interest across international borders.

Now let's address the second query: how do you become a diplomat? The process is quite straightforward. Any national of Pakistan, after completing graduation, may take the Civil Service examination (CSS), qualify, and seek allocation to the Foreign Service of Pakistan (FSP). Once allocated to the FSP, a new journey begins, a wonderful one if you have the passion, dedication, patience, and above all love for your country.

The initial training phase starts at the Civil Services Academy (CSA), Lahore followed by a specialized training program at the Foreign Service Academy (FSA), Islamabad. These trainings prepare and nurture the future diplomats of Pakistan over a course of about 18 months. Eventually, the day arrives when the young diplomats, equipped with diplomatic knowledge and tools, enter the Ministry of Foreign Affairs gates on Constitution Avenue, Islamabad. What a day that is! Smartly attired and with thousands of dreams in your mind, the practical diplomatic life begins. Some may find it daunting, and I will let you on a secret- I was terrified. However, my fears and apprehensions began to fade with time, as my seniors became my mentors and took me under their wings, guiding and teaching me along the way. The unique camaraderie and being part of a family beyond the normal hierarchical structure is a defining feature of the FSP community, one you appreciate within the first year and continue to enjoy thereafter. Within a span of one year, I was completely at ease, navigating the work and learning the ropes. But wait! There were still two more important bridges to cross, the final passing out examination, to be conducted by the Federal Public Service Commission (FPSC), and language training spanning 1-2 years depending on the language. Learning another foreign language is an integral part of the training process and FSP officers are sent



abroad to build not only their language skills, but also to acclimatize and navigate a new culture. This is important as they learn to become part of a foreign society while retaining their individuality.

I chose to learn Russian at the National Institute of Modern Languages in Islamabad (now a university). Now, you may question my choice. It was inspired by the rise of the new Central Asian States during the nineties. I felt that a new vista had opened and I wanted to develop an insight into a



At the United Nations General Assembly 2019, New York with Foreign Secretary Tehmina Janjua & Permanent Representative Maleeha Lodhi



With her husband and daughters

region that had had a deep cultural and historical impact on our part of the world. Central Asia with its natural resources and its geostrategic location was destined to play an important role in international politics and economic developments in the future. That, however, remained an unrealized dream as I was diverted to other regions on account of exigencies. Despite never being posted to a Russian-speaking country, learning a new language was not only a personal achievement but also helped in opening up doors in the most unexpected places while encountering native speakers.

It is important to know that Foreign Service officers are required to spend a large part of their career abroad, serving in Embassies, consulates, and Pakistan Representative Missions to multilateral organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and many more. However, diplomacy in the 21st century has evolved to include traditional and non-traditional elements. It is no longer limited to political dialogue, rather it has brought into its ambit economic diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, scientific diplomacy, public diplomacy, and many others, that were earlier not considered a part of its domain. Factors like globalization and emerging technologies have majorly contributed to this shift.

Therefore, Foreign Service provides a great opportunity for lifelong learning in terms of knowledge as well as skills. It helps to develop constructive and innovative thinking, as the work of a diplomat requires a proactive approach to tackle work. Attention to detail and resourcefulness are qualities that often come in handy when dealing with challenging tasks. The onset of Covid-19 is a recent example when it created a situation that no one had predicted, a totally unforeseen challenge with hardly any reaction time. The Pakistan embassies across the world rose to the challenge and provided unprecedented support and service to our people, ensuring their well-being and safe repatriation to the country. Domestically, the role of the Foreign Office is often overlooked, yet it is the critical bridge between all external actors and the Government of Pakistan. These unsung heroes are responsible for garnering consensus among different facets of the government, on important issues to protect the core interests of Pakistan in the international arena.

A very exciting aspect associated with a diplomatic career is traveling. It would not be an overstatement to say that

diplomats are global nomads. The career entails traveling across continents and countries, roughly after every three years, with an intermittent two-year assignment at the Foreign Office in Islamabad. It is certainly an exciting and diverse lifestyle involving traveling, cultures, people, and languages, all leading to an appreciation of how the global community interacts despite different political beliefs and views resulting in unparalleled personal enrichment and evolution. Learning to adapt to the unfamiliar when you arrive in a foreign country and then readjusting to the familiar upon return to Pakistan is a roller coaster ride of troughs and peaks. This factor highlights how this career transcends beyond a mere job to a lifestyle involving the whole family.

Looking back at my career, even I am amazed, that I have visited almost 40 countries, experienced diverse cultures, and cuisines, made friends across continents, and interacted with international leaders who have shaped the world that we live in today. I have sat in the royal courts, and covered meetings with Presidents, Foreign Ministers and many dignitaries in Pakistan and abroad.

I would conclude by saying that a diplomat's career is wholesome, fulfilling and eclectic by all standards. If a person is searching for a career that is challenging yet rewarding and brings an opportunity to lead around the world, then the Foreign Service of Pakistan is the right choice. **M**





Taha Kehar

Karachi, Pakistan

Is a novelist, journalist and literary critic. Kehar is the author of two novels, *Typically Tanya* and *Of Rift and Rivalry*. He is the co-editor of *The Stained-Glass Window: Stories of the Pandemic from Pakistan*. His third novel, *No Funeral for Nazia*, will be published in 2023 by the UK-based Neem Tree Press.

Taha Kehar Talks His Favourite Unforgettable Books

Books have a life of their own in the reader's mind. Many readers even witness a rebirth when they rediscover them. In the spirit of this declaration, here is a list of books that have stayed with me for years.

Invisible Ties by Nadya AR

With intimacy and rare insight, Nadya AR's second novel *Invisible Ties* explores a woman's journey to escape her traumatic past. When the calm rhythm of Noor's life in Karachi is disrupted by tragedy, she reluctantly agrees to marry a stranger and settle in Singapore. But the memory of an unresolved past casts a shadow on an even bleaker present. This novel offers a glimpse into Noor's courageous struggle to obtain closure and make choices that will help her break away from the shackles of history. 'Invisible Ties' primarily depicts the protagonist's personal voyage towards fulfilment. The narrator's lens does not just focus on the unpredictability of Noor's mind but also shifts toward the sights, sounds, and flavours that surround her. The non-linear narrative adds an aura of mystery and suspense. At first, some readers may find themselves working on a particularly complex puzzle as they juggle shifting timelines. But once the puzzle has been completed, the novel offers a finished portrait that stands out.

A delightfully original book, *Invisible Ties* ventures into unfamiliar territory and plums the depths of crucial debates on the psychology of violence, the terrors of hidden trauma, and the struggle involved in letting go.

Mothering a Muslim by Nazia Erum

Is there an evolving consensus on how to tackle the rampant bullying of Muslim children at schools across India? Nazia Erum investigates this and many other questions in *Mothering a Muslim*. The book offers detailed accounts of those who have been bullied in the classroom and playground because of subliminal and seemingly entrenched religious prejudices.

The narrative is driven by crisp reportage that helps build a holistic discourse on the issue. There are moments where the author

struggles to provide context. However, this doesn't make it difficult to get through the book.

Death at the Darbar by Arjun Gaiind

Arjun Gaiind's *Death at the Darbar* paints a telling portrait of India during the Raj and offers a shrewd commentary on British imperialism. A strangled courtesan is discovered in the king emperor's personal chambers before the coronation of George V and with the help of Maharaja Sikander Singh of Rajpur, a veritable *desi* Poirot is enlisted to solve the case. With the tenacity of a sleuthhound, the Maharaja sniffs his way through India's native aristocracy in search of the nautch girl's murderer.

The Poison of Love by K R Meera

Fearless in its focus on infidelity, *The Poison of Love*, which is a translation of Malayalam writer K R Meera's *Meerasadhu*, takes readers on a personal journey into the dark underbelly of a marriage. Troubled by her philandering husband, Tulsi embarks on an anguished search for redemption in the company of widows in Vrindavan. But when her husband returns a few years later to rekindle their bond, past wounds become the poison that obliterates her present. This is a moving account of how love can break us in small but permanent ways.

Magic Within by Manal Shakir

Hobbling under the weight of strained relationships and an emptiness that threatens to obliterate them, the characters in Manal Shakir's *Magic Within* find solace in the recurring dream of a circus. When they fall asleep every night, Adnan and Shara enjoy a secret rendezvous that draws them closer. When they wake up, the world is governed by unshakeable bonds that keep their imagined infidelity under check.

As they negotiate the porous boundaries between illusion and

reality, Adnan and Shara discover that some things can only be dreamt about while others are best left in a world without fantasy.

A quick, compelling read, *Magic Within* stays with you like a shadow or even an unforgettable dream. The only missing link in the story is the rather warped sense of place throughout the novel. The unnamed city is neither a locale nor a character in the book. As a result, the characters struggle to establish a connection with their troubled world.

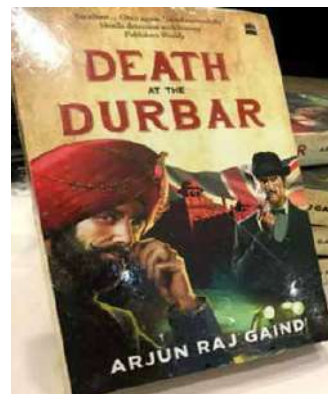
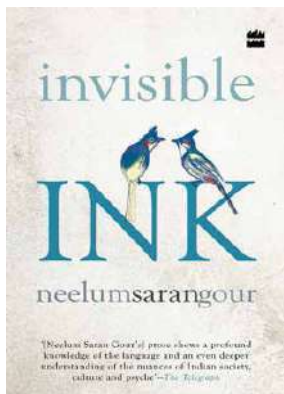
Two by Gulzar

Two is lyricist Gulzar's debut novel in English that revives a long-forgotten motif in South Asian literature: the story of how one nation was divided into two. The novel moves deftly between the

dark days that preceded Partition and the vague optimism that ensued in the lives of those who cultivated a home in a new country.

While *Two* doesn't deviate from the common reminiscences of the 1947 unrest, it appears to be steered by authentic accounts and distressing memories. The novel is devoid of any cunning devices that sugar-coat the realities of the displaced population or exaggerate them for dramatic effect. The focus remains on how the search for home has persisted over time and morphed into a challenge for survival.

At times, the book becomes a recurring meditation on the loss of humanity and the pitfalls of communal strife. Even so, it reminds us that history doesn't breed optimism without choosing a victor.



This novel also explores how far we have come since the cataclysmic events of Partition and opens old wounds to see if they have healed.

The Sense of an Ending by Julian Barnes

The Sense of an Ending offers devastating meditation on self-deception and suppressed memories. The novel leads us into the mind of an unreliable narrator. Tony Webster's efforts to peel back the layers of the past and reclaim his own personal history add an aura of mystery that pushes the narrative to its stunning denouement. His recollections are often convoluted and produce questions that don't receive tangible answers. Nevertheless, the novel benefits from these omissions and comes away with a good story.

Erotic Stories for Punjabi Widows By Balli Kaur Jaswal

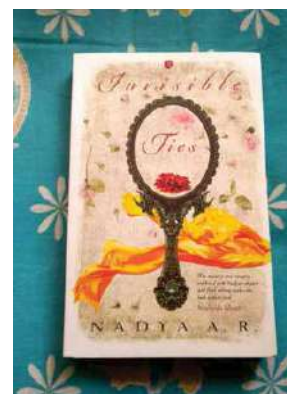
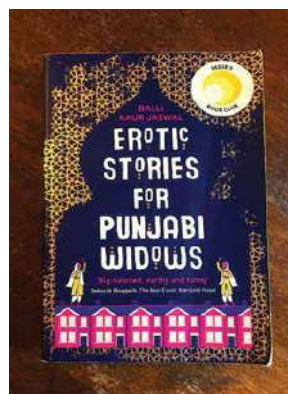
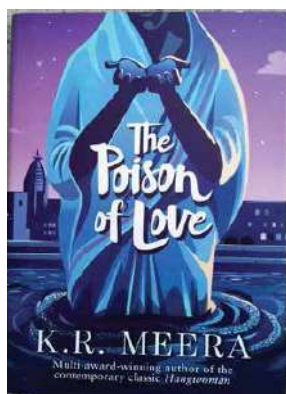
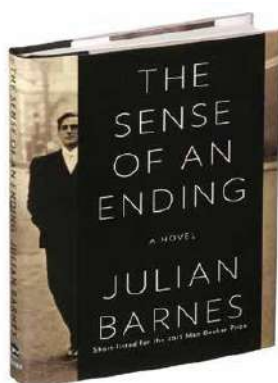
Balli Kaur Jaswal's *Erotic Stories for Punjabi Widows* opens a vista onto the terror and solace of a few Sikh widows in Southall as they audaciously explore hidden intimacies and unspoken desires. Jaswal smartly catches the complex terrain of traditions that keep

women in check and the familiar warzones that chastise them for being human. With its subtle and significant meditations on patriarchy, racism, violence against women, and the deep aura of mystery surrounding our needs, this is a story about how we dare to dream of a better world while narrowly averting a collision with reality.

Invisible Ink by Neelum Saran Gour

Some memories and secrets are always written in invisible ink, shielded from the unsparing gaze of bigots who do not understand the power of nuance. But when friends conceal their versions of history, we can only expect pain and chaos. Neelum Saran Gour's *Invisible Ink* explores how friendships evolve as secrets grow and memories claw their way back into our lives.

Amina and Rekha's strained friendship carries the seeds of other unresolved conflicts from the past. The unspoken plight of an elusive feminist poet, the scandal stoked by Rekha's affair with a Muslim and the rifts between both friends over the value of a shared legacy propel this narrative toward its promising end. This is the story of how a world changed and what its people did to survive the aftershocks. **M**



Muhammad Zeeshan Rub
Karachi, Pakistan

Is a medical physiologist and educationist who works as a subject specialist, freelance writer, blogger, and health speaker. He is the author of many reference books for Cambridge and local boards. He loves reading, writing, traveling, and counseling.



HUSHE

One of the Most Beautiful Villages in Pakistan

In this article, Zeeshan journeys us through a kaleidoscope of northern places like Kanday only to end up in the more beautiful Hushe Village.

Man collecting woods to burn fire for cooking



Mountainous rocks, lush green ground and red-brick houses

A variety of places in Pakistan lure visitors from around the globe to tour the country enriched with cultural, historical, traditional, and exotic foods, sceneries, and locations. Only a few countries in the world offer deep seas, floating rivers, falling waters, great deserts, lush green valleys, mountains, glaciers, and all kinds of weather. Fortunately, all of the aforementioned features are present in Pakistan.

Location

In the northern region of Pakistan, there is a beautiful village called Hushe in the district of Gilgit Baltistan. It starts from River Shyok and extends up to the Masherbrum, the world's 22nd and Pakistan's 9th tallest mountain. This mountain is also called K-1. It is at a height of 23,453 ft from surface water. Because of rigorous, uphill, and hard routes, villages in Gilgit Baltistan, including Macholillo, Thalish, Marzicon and Kanday are not visible on the globe. Hushe, at 10,800 ft is one of those miraculous villages. It is almost life-threatening to reach Hushe, but once one reaches there, they strive to visit again and again. Climbers and trekkers come to reach Skardu all the way from Baltoro Glacier, Concordia and K2 via Gondogoro Pass, descending into Hushe village.

Trip to Hushe

During summer break, my friend and I decided to visit Hushe village. The distance from Skardu to Khaplo is around 102 km, after which mountainous jeeps are required to reach Hushe. It was an amazing experience with difficult mountains and rounded routes that made

the distance thousands of kilometers. I must mention, these routes were fatigue-causing, however, I enjoyed the natural beauty; all from water falling from the mountains into the rivers to irregular routes. On one side of the deep abyss of water, we found a green fertile mountainous valley, while on the other side, the river was flowing in full swing. It seemed like a cup of tea or coffee was immersed in the water. The ground was occupied by fluttering green head crops, colorful flowers, and patchy land with some underdeveloped houses. As you enter the valley you experience the shrinkage of the mountains, till the tall mountain walls turn into triangular-shaped pillars which you doubt as the pillars of Hushe Valley. At this point, one will find the mysterious and magical appearance of Hushe in the grey and brown-colored pointed rocks that touch the skies, the melodious sounds of birds, and floating river water.

Kanday

Beautiful and eye-catching sceneries will grab your attention. But wait, you are not at your destination yet. Kanday is the second to last village in the valley of Hushe. From this village, tourists and mountaineers start their journeys to K-6 and K-7. The village I highlighted here, Kanday, is important because at this point we were made to change the jeeps. We came to know through the inhabitants that a few years back, because of land sliding, the only bridge which connects Kanday to the road of Hushe was damaged and destroyed. That time, somehow, jeep owners managed to get their jeeps to the other end. So, if you want to visit Hushe village, you have to stop at this point, and get some rest, tea, and refreshments in a

hotel. The hotels and restrooms are simple here but the atmosphere is soothing. If you look out of the hotel through windows, you will see heart-catching views. There are a lot of posters and banners which introduce you to the valley, with details, maps and a description of various localities. When you cross the bridge using wooden planks, you will get to the other end of the river. Walking distance from here, one will find the jeep points again. These jeeps charge up to Rs 1500 for dropping off at the market of Hushe village.

Hushe

Finally reaching our destination after a beautiful journey, we found Hushe surrounded by the fast-rushing Hushe River. It is on the slopes of some 6,000 meter tall mountains. The tourist sites of this locality support the beautiful natural scenery. The sky-touching mountains, lush green grounds, and colorful plants caught our glance. This environment did not allow us to sit even for a minute. As we visited in the month of July, the weather was outstanding, with a cold breeze and snowy evenings which is why we had to dress appropriately in leather jackets and gloves. The sensation among the snow, rivers and mountains made us walk for hours. We found children running and playing in the streets, older people

laying down, and women working in the fields beside their men. Vibrant flowers, soft and wet grass, and melted snow were especially mind-blowing. We captured a number of photographs to upload the visuals on our social media forums, especially during the sunset and sunrise.

Life At Hushe

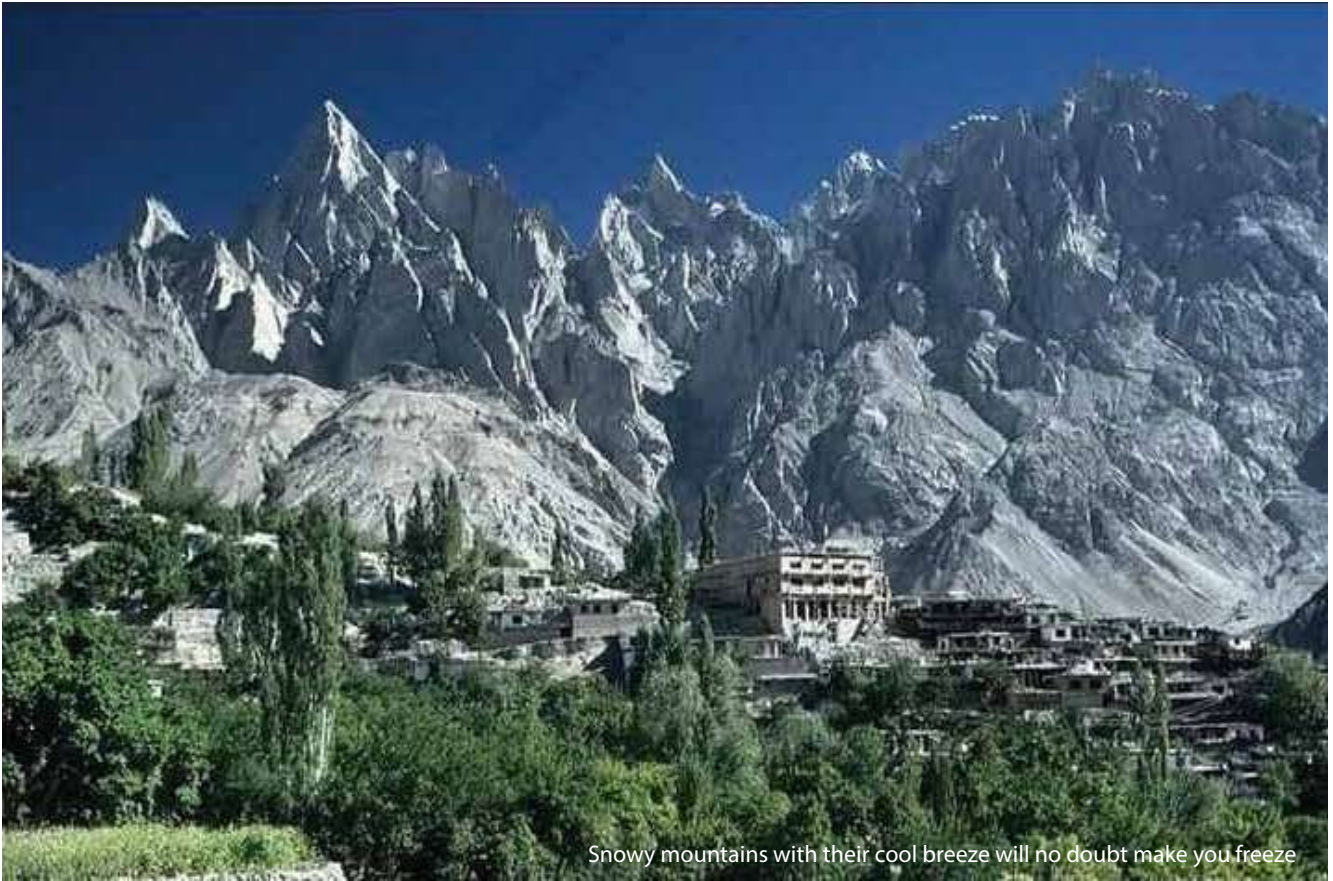
It needs to be mentioned, the people of this village are very down-to-earth; pets and domestic animals, including sheep, goats, cows, and yaks are very precious to them. They lack the basic necessities of life and their youth is illiterate and lacking skills. Each year, two crops are prepared which are not even sufficient to feed the entire population. Due to the harsh weather, the land is not suitable for fertilization and agriculture, nor do the people have the right tools and equipment to do so.

The two guesthouses in the Hushe are 'Hussain Guesthouse' and 'Refugio'. Refugio is a Spanish-run hotel whereas 'Hussain Guesthouse' is local. We decided to spend the night at Hussain Guesthouse. The manager provided us with a room with a double bed and an attached bathroom.

As Hushe is now becoming a tourist point, people here have started to do odd jobs like being potters, guides, trackers, mountaineers on expeditions, etc. Besides the



Refugio; Spanish-run hotel for tourists



Snowy mountains with their cool breeze will no doubt make you freeze

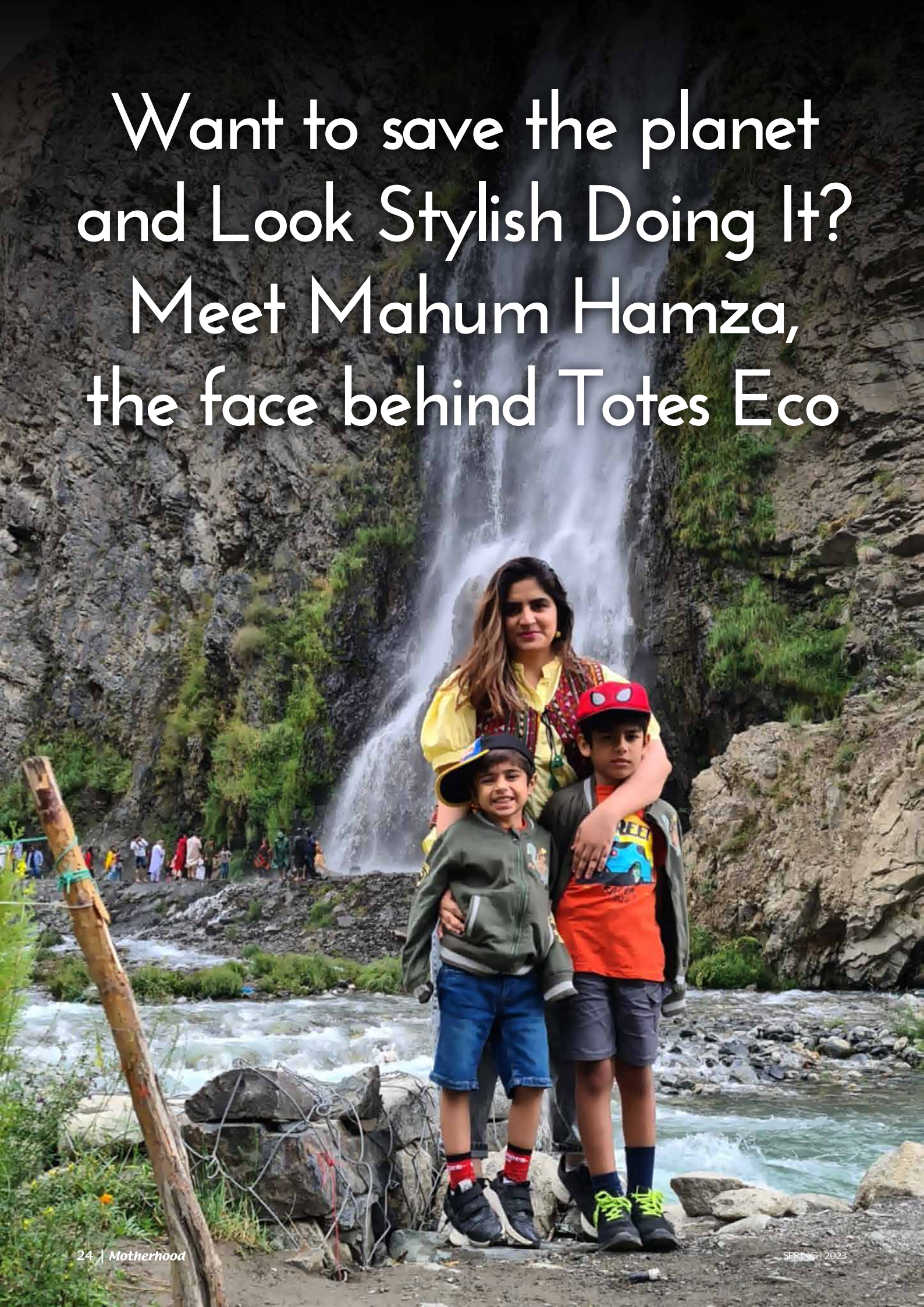
poverty, people here are very simple and social. They obey the rules and regulations affixed by their elders and do social work. They share a fixed amount of their income for the development of their area. They have even started a school where more than 300 children are getting an education. Only a few literates are responsible for teaching them education and health. They also provide

necessities for tourists. But indeed, these services are not sufficient for the entire village.

The journey as well as the destination definitely amazes the seekers; no one wants to leave that magical world, but when they do, they go with a deeply fulfilled heart, bursting with beautiful and undefined sceneries. M



Want to save the planet and Look Stylish Doing It? Meet Mahum Hamza, the face behind Totes Eco



When it comes to saving our planet, every little decision we make in a day can add up to make a big impact, and that also includes gifts. Totes Eco specializes in sustainable giveaways and corporate promotional gifts. What started as a thesis project by Mahum Hamza is now a full fledge business helping companies and event planners promote sustainable gifts. Whether a birthday goody bag or a corporate gift, these items are meant to be used and cherished rather than gathering dust in a closet or rotting in a landfill. By choosing promotional products with sustainability and utility in mind, Totes Eco offers a range of products that are produced ethically with zero-plastic packaging.

How did you come up with the idea to start this venture?

Plastic bags always made me cringe. I always made sure to carry my own fabric tote when I went out for shopping or grocery. And then when my son started school, we were invited to birthday parties and play dates almost every month. While the goody bags made kids really happy, they made me really uncomfortable. The amount of single-use plastic in the goody bags made me wonder what can be done to avoid so much waste. This is when I started brainstorming and Totes Eco came into being. We started with sustainable and eco-friendly totes and now have a variety of options you can choose from.

Which city are you based in?

Karachi

How many people are involved in your business?

I have 3 team members. Printer/designer, logistics head, and social media manager.

What was the journey like to start an online business?

Honestly, it only took me a week to get it started. A dear friend was arranging a commercial play date and I asked her if I could sponsor the goody bags and launch my brand with her play date. She was kind enough to trust me with just an idea in my head and no sample in hand. This play date helped me reach my target audience and I started receiving orders from organizations like Goread.pk, WWF, and various private events. While our most popular totes are #colorme totes, we have worked with many brands to make their classy and sustainable shopping bags.

What were the initial challenges you faced while establishing your venture?

While the business grabbed attention and found genuine clients very quickly, we soon realized only a handful of people understand the actual concept and are aware of the consequences of plastic waste. Despite the vast scale of the problem, the general public and other important stakeholders have not been adequately engaged and educated on how they can become part of the solution. This is when we decided we will spread awareness through our social media platforms and



by collaboration with influencers and FB community leaders. It's a long journey but slowly and gradually we are making a difference and more and more people are joining our mission.

How did your family and friends react to the news of starting this online business?

My family and friends were really happy and excited. They have supported me since day 1. I have also made many new and genuine friends because of this start-up.

What does a regular workday look like for you?

My day starts with a cup of black coffee, some positive thoughts, and reminding myself I can do it! After sending my kids to school, I go to the gym, come home, have breakfast and try to get all the house chores done quickly so I can start checking my emails and get updates from my manager. Then I start packing and dispatching orders.

After picking up kids from school, it's all about them. We catch up, hang out, study, go for extracurriculars, etc. After their bedtime, I start working again. This is when I finalize orders, send

invoices, confirm payment and send the game plan to my team for the next day. On weekends I take off!

What obstacles (if any) are you currently facing within your business?

Plastic bags are obviously cheaper. Most of the time people are not willing to pay a little extra for a sustainable option to save our planet.

How has social media helped in promoting your business?

Social media has been a game-changer for us! It has been really easy to reach the target audience and build a community of like-minded people, who have further helped us to reach more people. So far, it has all been word of mouth and organic reach.

Where do you see your brand in the next 5-10 years?

We plan to expand our business and add two more categories i.e. sustainable fashion and sustainable toys. **M**

