

7 months on, single mom secures son's admission

TNN | Jul 1, 2018, 08:45 AM IST



KOLKATA: After seven months of running from pillar to post to get her son admitted to school, a single mother could finally secure a seat at a reputable institute for the four-year-old. Little Agnisnato was born to filmmaker Anindita Sarbadhicari through IVF and an anonymous sperm donor.

Sarbadhicari on Wednesday had a meeting with a leading school in south Kolkata. A day later, he walked into the school's foundation class, ending the long-drawn ordeal of his mother, who was left with no other option but to knock on the doors of West Bengal Commission for Protection of Child Rights chairperson Ananya Chakraborti to ensure he could attend school.

The move was lauded by educationists and activists. Educationist Pabitra Sarkar said other schools should also follow the example. "I was upset when I read about this case. It had reflected on our societal prejudices. I am glad one school has come forward. Others, too, must follow," he said.

SCHOOL INTERVIEWS

Can Ask Single Moms

- Time she can devote to child
- Name of another person to contact in case of emergency
- Her profession and family income

(Information provided by West Bengal Commission for Protection of Child Rights)

Can't Ask

- Personal questions
- Don't be judgmental about her decision of being a single mother
- Question her ability to raise a child



Anindita Sarbadhicari with her son Agnisnato

Sarbadhicari started her hunt for schools in December. In six cases, she couldn't even register online because all of them wanted the father's name and photograph. She made rounds of at least three more schools, but to no avail. Despite furnishing a birth certificate, a letter explaining the process of his birth and the hospital's discharge certificate, a school had asked for an affidavit, stating "the child has no father and that he was born through IVF". "I faced such intrusive personal questions that I almost decided to shift out of Kolkata. I was made to feel it was a crime to become a single mother through IVF. I wanted to shift out to ensure my son gets an opportunity to study in an inclusive environment," Sarbadhicari said. The repeated refusals had a psychological impact on the child. All his 35 classmates from his playschool had gone on to high schools. "He felt unwanted and didn't want to go to the playschool any more," Sarbadhicari added.

Child Rights chairperson Chakraborti was happy with Agnisnato's admission. "But we will continue our fight with other schools that discriminate against single mothers," she said.

The principal at Agnisnato's school said he had merely discharged the role of an educator. "During our assessment, we found nothing lacking in him. Questions regarding his father aren't required. So, we decided to take him in. I have personally faced problems during the admission of my daughters in Kolkata and understood the situation," he said. Agnisnato was made an exception and accommodated in the class despite there being no vacancy. "I didn't want to break his mother's heart and reject him because of lack of vacancy. Often, students take transfers to other cities and the issue will be adjusted," he added.

The next hurdle is how to explain Agnisnato's father's absence to his classmates. "When people ask my son about his father, he says my name. He is aware of the biological process of his birth," Sarbadhicari said. But other children may not have the wavelength to understand it. The principal plans to sensitise the teachers. "But, we don't want to overburden the kids with this information now."