

By MANU MOUDGIL

**S**USHIL Sehgal always wanted to be close to his wife Yogita when she underwent labour pain. So he was very excited when the gynaecologist asked him to cut the umbilical cord. "I felt so special. Though there was definitely a fear that something may go wrong but having so many doctors around was a big boost," he recalls.

Sehgal is not the first husband who was deeply involved in the birth of his child. City hospitals are increasingly making efforts to involve the whole family in the process of childbirth rather than making it a woman-exclusive affair. Private hospitals are promoting cashing this newfound male interest, and are cashing in on the baby boom.

### DADDIES GET INVOLVED

EXPECTANT fathers are being encouraged to get involved with their wives' pregnancies right from the start. They are attending antenatal classes which involve counselling sessions with a neonatologist, anaesthetist, physiotherapist, psychologist and a nutritionist to prepare the couple for the little one. This also enables men to help their wives do certain breathing and relaxation exercises during labour pains. They are given an opportunity to participate in the delivery which can include making a video, holding hand of his wife or even cutting the umbilical cord.

"Men have always felt left out when it comes to the 'becoming a father' experience. Nowadays they are trying to do as much as they can to help with the pregnancy of their wives, but becoming a father still frightens them. We are trying to get them more involved," says Dr Veena Bhat, head of obstetrics and gynaecology, Artemis Health Institute.

Rather than being scared of blood and scalpels, men are feeling blessed to be in the labour room. "It works very well from the perspective of bonding with your partner and the newborn. Also, being there is so much better than pacing up and down the corridor listening to cries from the labour room and worrying about what's going on inside. Once in, you feel reassured there are so many machines as well as doctors continuously monitoring the health of child and mother," Sehgal quips.

### CONVERTIBLES & MUSIC

SPECIALISED rooms are also on offer for expectant mothers. These rooms are converted into delivery chambers once the woman starts experiencing the labour, removing the hassle of shifting. During the delivery, soothing music is played in the background to make the delivery process easy on both mother and the child. "Birthing is a natural process and we want to keep it as simple as possible with involvement of all family members," says Dr Dinesh Kansal, senior consultant, gynaecology, B L Kapur Memorial Hospital.

Depending on the family's choice of what kind of sound they want the newborn to hear, religious music, jazz and classical music are on offer. "Some of the families wish to play *gayatri* mantra in the background considering them auspicious first words to be heard by the baby while others go for popular music," says Dr Bhat. Music companies are already offering titles specifically composed for neo-natal, prenatal and post natal stages.

Aromatherapy has also entered delivery rooms, since many families want the room to be filled with divine fragrances to celebrate the arrival of their newborn!

### CAESAREANS STILL RULE

DESPITE increasing male involvement in the birthing process, we really haven't made much progress when it comes to making healthy birthing choices. Giving birth to a baby in a natural way has been taken over by med-

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Sushil Sehgal with his wife Yogita and their newborn son



## BEWARE OF GUM DISEASES

PREGNANCY is a time to take extra care of your teeth and gums because your oral health can affect the general and dental health of your unborn child as well. A dental infection can lead to premature birth and low birth weight, putting your unborn baby at serious risk for lifelong conditions such as cerebral palsy, chronic lung disease, or even death.

In fact, pregnant women with gum disease are six times more likely to deliver their babies early than those with healthy gums.

It is common for pregnant women to develop gingivitis (an inflammation of the gums) due to hormonal changes during pregnancy. Your gums are more susceptible to irritation and may bleed more often when you floss or brush your teeth. Have at least one checkup and dental cleaning during pregnancy, preferably after the first trimester.



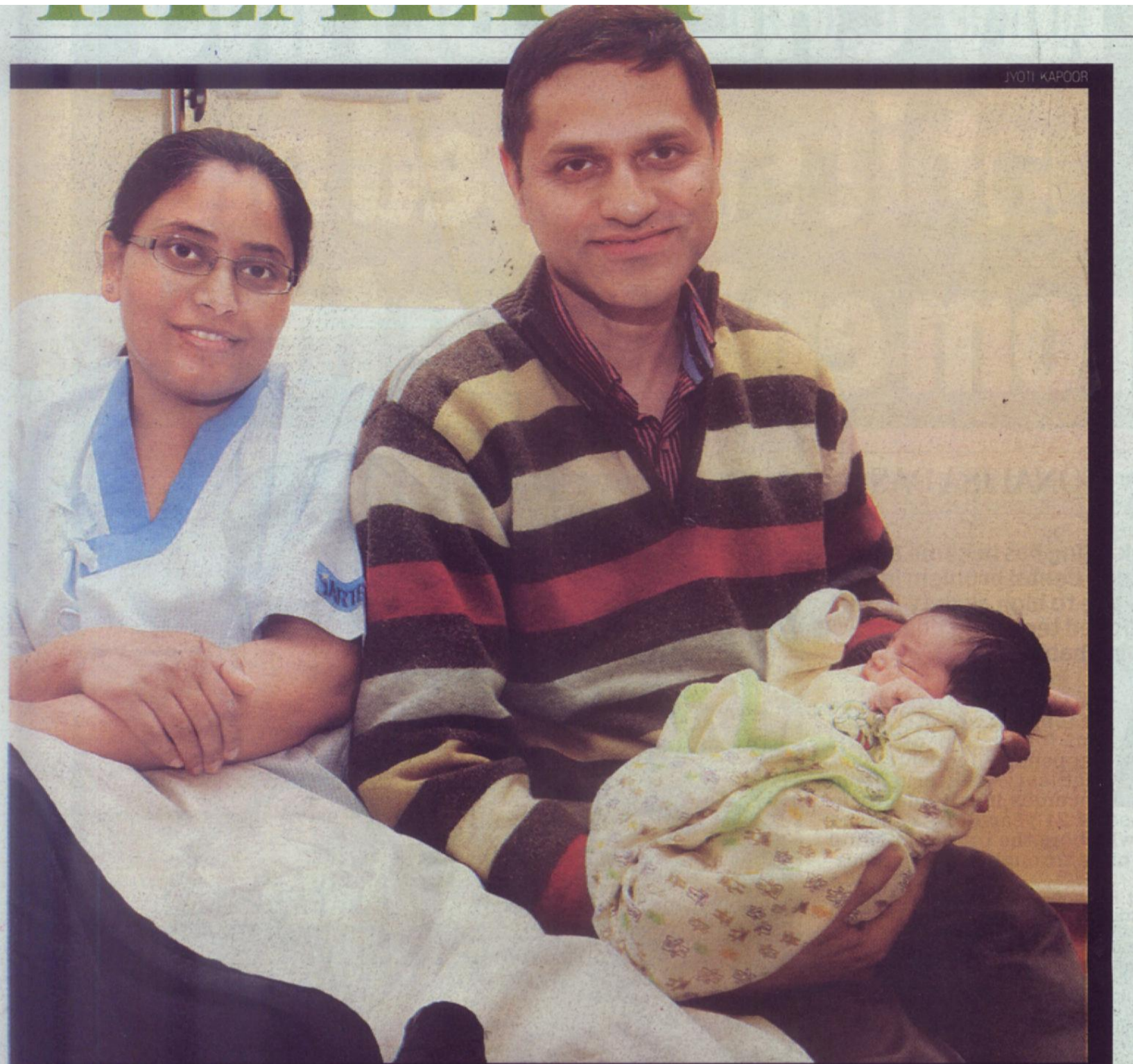
sarean sections — many of them unnecessary — are at an all time high in the country.

Nearly one in five babies is born this way, says a recent survey on maternal and perinatal health by the World Health Organization (WHO). This is bad news for both mother and child. According to a study in the *Lancet*, females who undergo C-section without requiring it are 10 times more likely to be admitted to ICU (and die too) than those who give a natural vaginal birth.

Infants born this way also face many risks: they may require

go through labour are born more alert and are better able to breathe. Going full-term gives a baby's lungs time to mature and improves a baby's ability to suck and swallow.

The reasons for C-sections are multiple: Wrong position of the foetus, lack of amniotic fluid around it, not enough oxygen in the sac, high blood pressure, diabetes and heart problems in the mother besides previous C-section delivery are some. Late marriage and motherhood has also increased the risk of complications. While these are valid rea-



# A FAMILY AFFAIR

More Indian fathers are moving away from the corridors of hospitals into delivery rooms

ily, and for financial gains. More and more women are going the Victoria Beckham way whose desire for caesarean over natural birthing led to coinage of the term "too push to push".

## CONVENIENCE RULES

THE craze for particular birth dates continues to fuel the craze for C-sections among Indians. Couples want the child to be born on a specific date and at particular time as advised by an astrologer.

While we try to accommodate a day or two if C-section is already recommended due to medical reasons, but can't adjust more than that," says Dr Anuradha Kapoor, senior consultant, gynaecology, Max Healthcare.

A C-section delivery costs at least ₹20,000 more than a normal one and hence is a good source of income for corporate hospitals and nursing homes. Several private hospitals in Madhya Pradesh were found to be performing caesarean deliveries on one out of two women in

"Besides the money, gynaecologists also avoid taking risks and are getting increasingly intolerant to the unpredictability of labour. So, if there is a 28-year-old woman, they often choose to do a C-section rather than a normal delivery even if there are no complications indicated," says Dr P K Goswamy, senior technical advisor, MAMTA Health Institute for Mother and Child. A woman can spend between 12 and 18 hours in natural labour during which a doctor could have looked after several patients and hence