

## 'When You Win The Birth Lottery!'

By [DEVINA MEHRA](#) | 13 May 2025

**'I always knew that the only thing that mattered to her was genuinely our health, happiness and welfare.'**

**'We never heard the '*Log kya kahenge?*' narrative.'**

**Devina Mehra** -- inarguably one of India's leading stockmarket investors -- reflects on the remarkable life and values of her 90+ mother, whose love, strength and unflinching spirit shaped her worldview.



Devina Mehra and her mother

To the party game question 'What is your one wish for the next *janam*?' (next birth), my answer has always been the same: 'To have the same mother.'

It has been an incredible advantage to have had the mother (actually the parents) I have had.

### A Woman Ahead of Her Time

How to encapsulate my wonderful mother in some 500 words?

For a woman of her generation, she has been one with incredible achievements. When she got married in the mid-1950s, she had finished her BA and BEd, making

her already 'too educated'. After her wedding, she joined MA Economics at Lucknow University -- as an aside, she was quite the feted beauty of the campus!

Then started research but took a break when my brothers were born. When my brothers were two, she did MEd and then started working as an academic -- all well before I was born.

## No Gendered Expectations at Home

You take everything for granted when growing up, and it is only in hindsight I realise how different my parents were, and hence my upbringing was way different from the norm. For starters, there was absolutely no difference in expectations in terms of education, career, etc, between me and my brothers.

My mother was even told by her colleagues: 'You talk more about your daughter than your sons' -- mainly because it is unusual in the Indian context to give equal importance to girls.

## Encouraging Independent Thinking

While we followed her guidelines to the letter on things like hygiene and safety (and these have been practically at Covid levels from the beginning), she did not ever stop us from having and expressing opinions that were different from what was generally accepted, or even what her own opinions were.

For example, I had declared in school itself that I would not go in for an arranged marriage and I wouldn't change my name after marriage or have *kanyadaan* (the ritual of giving away the bride) in the wedding ceremony.

## Truth As A Way of Life



On a family outing about a decade ago.

For the same reason, one never thought of lying -- in fact, lying to Mummy was absolutely unthinkable in our book. Kids start lying out of fear. If you are not scared, there is no need to lie and hide things.

Of course, not everyone approved of this honesty and truth policy!

I remember a relative telling my mother, '*Banaa de banaa de bacchon ko satyavadi Harishchandra -- kya karenge duniya mein??*' [Go ahead, turn your children into truth-telling Harishchandra (*legendary king known for unwavering truthfulness, sacrificing everything -- kingdom, family, dignity -- to uphold his word*), -- what will they do in the real world?]' and my mother's reply was, '*Kya kahun bacchon ko? Kya jhooth bolane ko kahun?*' [What should I tell the children? Should I ask them to lie?]' I think it all worked out in the end.

Speaking the truth is just so much less hassle, at least in the long-term.

## **Compassion Over Conformity**

I guess I always knew that the only thing that mattered to her was genuinely our health, happiness and welfare. We never heard the '*Log kya kahenge?*' (What will people say?) narrative.

And she would always say in wonder when watching someone slap a kid, '*Apne bachche ko maarne ka dil kaise kiya?*' (How could someone bring themselves to hit their own child?)'

Even when one of my brothers was hit by a teacher in school, my mother marched to the school immediately and made the teacher and the principal apologise. This was in the 1970s, when corporal punishment was very much the norm.

Which is probably why I was never a rebellious teenager. In fact, my mother would often later say, 'How can people talk about having a difficult time with teenagers? I never had any trouble with you... we remained friends throughout.'

## **Devotion Without Martyrdom**

Being a mother, her simple philosophy has been: Nothing is too much trouble where children are concerned -- something I saw in action when she looked after my special needs daughter for years. She even prepared all her food herself and washed the utensils to ensure the child's safety and health would not be compromised.

## **A Culinary Genius and Time Strategist**

Along with being a working professional, my mother has been at a gourmet level on the cooking front, making everything from date and nut cookies and pineapple pastries to *chaat* and *rasmalai* to dozens of jams -- all from scratch... this from the 70s.

And every roti had to be hot off the *tava* -- the reason why I couldn't have cold meals.

Yet, without the management jargon, she knew how to prioritise her time.

Cooking she considered worthwhile work. But while we had all kinds of exotic baked goodies, icing was always white, chocolate or custard -- not even permitted food colours were permitted.

On the other hand, I never ever saw her sweeping or swabbing (*jhaadu katka*), even if the help did not show up... or do other stuff like ironing that could be outsourced.

## Independent Spirit, Unshaken Faith



A proud mother reads a magazine with her daughter on the cover.

She was a fab mother but was no martyr to the cause of children. She also found time for herself, reading dozens of books a year -- something she continues today at the age of 90+.

Plus, she had faith in her upbringing. Thus, when I came to Bombay to join work at 21, I was sharing company accommodation with men for the next 5 years -- something that scandalised some of her acquaintances. My parents never even visited for the first 3 years. My word that the arrangement was fine was good enough for them.

Ideal roots and wings parenting!

She has been the wind beneath my wings.

She's special, and not just in the fond eyes of her children.

Over the last 15 years, every doctor or surgeon who has dealt with her has at some point told her kids, 'I hope you realise how lucky you are to have a mother like her.' And I have always said, 'I know. I have always known.' Lucked out totally in the birth lottery!

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**Devina Mehra is chairperson, managing director and founder of First Global, an Indian and global asset management company, and author of *Money, Myths and Mantras: The Ultimate Investment Guide*. Her X handle is @devinamehra**