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**KOLKATA IS TALKING ABOUT**

## 'THIS CITY OF HEART GAVE ME THE COURAGE TO BEGIN AGAIN'

Anindya Saha

**MINU BUDHIA**

at Carring Minds

Chandrima Pal

**M**inu Budhia's journey as a special parent is not just about overcoming grief and setbacks, but transforming that emotion into action – one that brought conversations around mental health into the spotlight, challenging stigma and ensuring that those who need help no longer remain in the shadows. Today, as a psychotherapist, author, and founder of Carring Minds International, Minu's work has touched countless lives and reshaped how Kolkata approaches mental health in its urban landscape, with both awareness and dignity.

**Could you recall that moment when you decided to actively step in and create change – not only for your younger daughter Prachi, but for others as well?**

There was a time when I was on the verge of committing suicide. Somehow I took a step back as I realised God had different plans for me in this city. I started afresh with Prachi, my family. I had taken Prachi all over the world for her treatments, for her assessments but I struggled to accept her reality. But then I reminded myself of my dreams. As a woman I always wanted to make a difference. And I channeled that self. My rebirth happened. **You often speak of your small-town origins. How did that influence your work and world view?**

I am indeed a small-town girl from Tinsukia, where I grew up learning to value our own resources. We lived in a large joint family and were taught to be content wherever we were. So

when I came to Kolkata, I fell in love with the city from day one. It became my world.

I started my journey again as a student. I believed that without knowledge, there is nothing. I pursued courses from the US, London, and Kolkata, and became a mental health professional. Kolkata was very kind to me. I began at Manovikas Kendra, where Namitadi (Namita Sharma, the founder) gave me my first opportunity. Later, at JD Birla College, I saw how little awareness there was around mental health.

As I worked, I noticed how fragmented men-

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**CHANGEMAKERS**

tal health services were. That's when the idea took shape – to create one integrated, dignified space under one roof. But when I tried to set up the clinic at a building on Ballygunge Circular Road, neighbours objected, saying they did not want 'pagal' people coming in, and even got a stay order. I refused to back down. I adapted. With my team already hired, I started Carring Minds from home, with a table and a few chairs.

**How did things expand from that dining table setup to where you are today?**

In the beginning, we had just three or four patients a day. Sanjay (husband, Sanjay Budhia) and I would often joke about it. But I didn't give up. I started conducting awareness workshops in schools and corporates, mostly complimentary. I knew if I charged, they wouldn't call me. I also built networks with doctors.

Slowly, people started coming in. In the second year, I started academia – teaching and training counselors. I tied up with CU and JU. In the third year, I opened a school. In the fourth year, the café. Every year, I built something new.

It took four years for things to fall into place. Today, we offer both clinical and non-clinical services, including occupational therapy, psychometric testing, focus on training and development, aware-

**I am not an industrialist's wife with a hobby**

People often ask me why I call Kolkata 'imperfectly perfect'. The truth is, my journey here was anything but easy. Setting up the centre came with intense challenges, and for years, I was still searching for my old self. As a special parent, I was going through my own stages of grief and struggling to come to terms with it.

But people misunderstood me. Some assumed, because of the way I look, I was just an industrialist's wife doing this as a hobby. They didn't see the purpose that was driving me. The fact that I was here to stay and to change lives. Today, that perception has changed. People recognise my work and speak with respect. And that, for me, is deeply fulfilling.

**Kolkata is a city of heart; a city of soul. I am able to run my organisation because of people. I am blessed with a team that works with heart and purpose**



Minu Budhia with her younger daughter Prachi