When my father passed away at 45, my mother, who was then only 34, was consoled by friends and relatives that she ‘had’ to be brave for my sake. At the same time my father’s friend lost his wife, and I heard most people commiserate with the gentleman, and in doing so, the constant refrain was ‘how will you cope?’ While the sentiment expressed to the gentleman did not impact me then, I realise how different the condoling was for the two individuals. My mother was urged to take life in her stride, and for the gentleman, it was about concern for his well-being.

Several women who I have met are often, and without overt expression, asked to absorb shock with greater resilience than men. Women are assumed to have the ability to cope better than men. Yet, nowadays, women seem to be deeply affected too, owing to multiple pressures.

As fellow-travellers, men like us, I reckon, may also shoulder the yoke with them. Many women do not ask for help, particularly psychological help. Some of them have told me that this is because they have learnt to believe that they are ‘stronger emotionally’ and asking for help is in some ways ‘revealing their vulnerability’. The assumption is similar to saying ‘grown men should not cry’.

Both these assumptions, a friend and confidant, an elderly gentleman, tells me, are ‘myths’. It may help if men can perhaps, especially in a society like ours where women saddle multiple roles and responsibilities, truly offer to walk alongside women in whatever they do. This will lessen the pain that they may be absorbing, and in doing so, genuinely demonstrate equality and concern for mutual well-being.

As a friend told me, “Man is half-woman, as woman is half-man and only together they can make music that we can truly call ‘symphony’.”

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