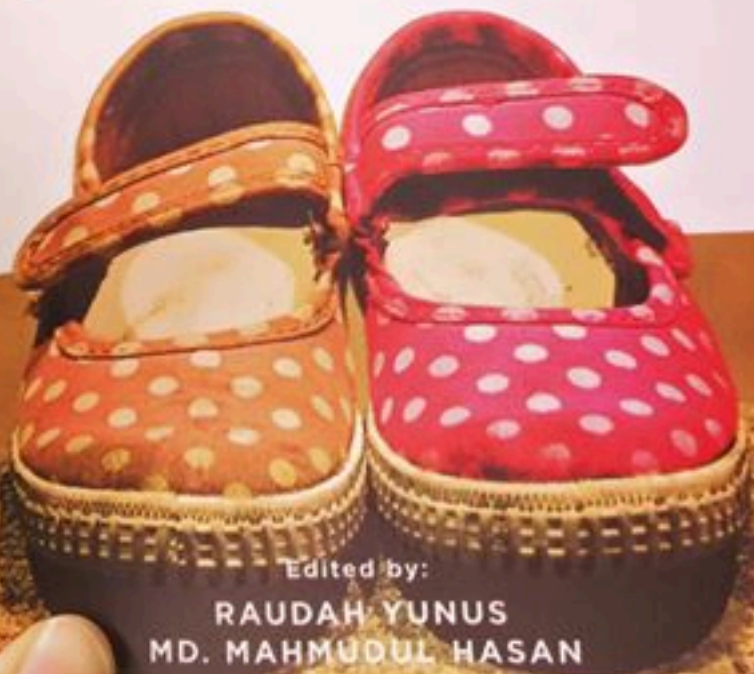




Tales  
Of  
Mothers.

THE GREATEST  
LOVE



Edited by:

RAUDAH YUNUS  
MD. MAHMUDUL HASAN

# TALES OF MOTHERS

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THE GREATEST  
LOVE

Edited by:

**Raudah Mohd Yunus**  
**Md. Mahmudul Hasan**

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*We dedicate this book to our parents.*



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## CONCLUSION



# Reaffirming and Celebrating Motherhood

*Md. Mahmudul Hasan*

*International Islamic University Malaysia*



Attitude towards motherhood, maternity and child-caring is one of the two most important issues on which mainstream feminism is believed to be wrong or ambivalent. One big reason why many women refuse to associate themselves with the dominant feminist movement is its focus on sexual liberation or a public culture of sexual license, and its pathological disinterest in motherhood. In the face of the dualistic private-public hierarchy where family life is depreciated, fractured or dysfunctional to a great extent mainly because of the absence of mothers in the house, the tsunami of unstable domestic life is affecting many societies.

The centre of human relationships is moving away from the home. The fabric of family life is under serious assault and is facing many challenges chiefly because of mothers' increasingly limited role in the domestic sphere. Restaurants and holiday destinations are being used for socializing and family recreation, while the home is becoming a thing of the past or a mere dull space to accommodate isolated individuals submerged in television, films or cyberspace. The sophisticated gadgets and other electronic devices seem to have disjointed the family unit, as all the eyes are glued to various types of screen and there is little communication between family members.

Since many mothers have transferred their family duties to the domestic helps, homes are now indoor restaurants where the latter act as waiters. Involvement of the family

members in looking after the home is decreasing, and such indifference and detachment is unhelpful in training the children to be good future householders and homemakers. All this is largely due to the fact that family is gradually losing its central value as a site of life, vitality, human well-being and fulfilment.

Mothers' sacrifice and hard work involved in performing her caring role in the domestic environment are not adequately recognized. Hence, in order to seek significance, value and meaning in life, many mothers have gone out to compete in the world of work and gain entrance into the privileged group, which in many cases leads to infringe upon the welfare of children.

Like a section of feminists, one group of tradition-modernity dichotomists emphasize woman's public sphere activity and show total disregard to her role in the home as a wife and mother. Another group promotes certain social norms and practices which limit or restrict women's participation in public life. Thus both the groups hold extreme views, and there is lack of a balanced approach regarding mothers' indoor and outdoor responsibilities. However, beyond the feminist rhetoric and the public-private binary, it cannot be denied that, children's interests in a domestic setting are of paramount importance. Family life is the primary social unit that fosters and strengthens human relations and nurtures the future generation. It is also a school that inculcates in children certain values, and



an impregnable fort that protects them from potentially harmful cultural influences.

While many societies are politically and economically subordinated, if the institution of family and domestic life is not well-maintained, there may not be anything which people can claim as their own. Thus the site of home has become a moral and cultural battleground and a space of resistance where mothers are the chief warriors. If they are distracted from their role of nurturing it, family members may feel a vacuum despite all material successes. A strong family home is the last bastion and fortified zone that can be used to protect its inhabitants from many evils. And mothers are the key players to sustain it and keep the family bond strong and tied up, as they play a great role in maintaining positive family relationships.

Unfortunately, many a mother nowadays relegates the important task of parenting to domestic helps or to the employees of childcare centres, all on the plea of earning money for the family. While in many cases, it may be necessary for both the parents to work, in many others mothers go out to work neglecting the important responsibility of looking after their children only to earn extra money, to afford to eat out in restaurants as a family or to make holidays on a regular basis. While all these pastimes may not be unacceptable, these and other modes of family entertainment must not be a priority and should not be a reason for mothers to compromise motherhood, especially

when there is no necessity for extra money and competition in employment.

In many urban settings, children's interests are trampled down in the absence of mothers from home, which has a severe impact on children's upbringing and behavior. Both the parents seem to compete with each other for playing the role of father. Given the fact that the role of father in regards to looking after the children is not as strenuous as that of mother, it seems that both the parents opt for the easy task of fatherhood at the expense of the interest of their wards.

Employment rates of mothers are rising and they are going out to work and climbing the hierarchy of promotion as well as the corporate ladder and becoming economically influential. However, if mothers' successes in the world of work means failure in rearing the children in the family in the best possible manner, all should have a good reason to be worried about the wellbeing of the future generation. Given the higher status of motherhood, bartering away the role of mother for professional success is not a profitable strategy because the former is priceless. If mother's career outside the house perils the right upbringing of the children, the consequences can be disastrous. Even if one child is emotionally imbalanced or socially derailed because of the lack of adequate motherhood in the house, the disillusionment caused may eventually eclipse the career success of the mother.



As mentioned earlier, some career mothers are completely drawn to work and complacently relegate the responsibility of motherhood to domestic maids. While the possibility of abuse of the children by the maids can be minimized by various techniques and preventive measures, no one can deny the fact that children brought up by mothers would generally be better than those looked after by maids or the workers of childcares.

While for a wide range of good reasons many mothers may need to work and earn money, the best for such mothers is to accept the double career of working and homemaking. That is to say, after coming back home from work, they are required to give quality time to their children in the house. They should not be taken by the entertainment frenzy and should not focus on maximizing the pleasures in public life which they may afford because of extra income.

Spending time with the children *in the house* is extremely important, as they also need to learn the art of running and maintaining a home. When parents spend time with their children in the house, the latter find role models and learn through practical examples on how to behave and organize and manage a household.

Failing to give the needed attention to children as they grow, motherhood may appear anomalous and remain shrouded with ambiguities. What I submit here is that, mothers must strike a balance between familial roles and

their self-realisation through participation in public life. However, if doing justice to children is not possible, one may choose to postpone or opt out of motherhood. This is because there is no resignation from motherhood and mothers cannot cease to give attention to their children. While children are obligated to do justice to mothers, the former are also entitled to receive the needed care and support from the latter especially during infancy.

Mothers may not afford to run such a great risk as neglecting the interests of children in any circumstances. In the hierarchy of work pursuits, looking after the children should remain mothers' first priority. For the sake of children, society and state, mothers have been rendering this important service since the beginning of human life. Recent developments in lifestyle patterns should not distract and dissuade them from continuing to nurse and care for their children at least for an expected period of time.

There is no denying the fact that this is an arduous task, but at the same time it is equally indispensable. This volume contains stories of mothers who have gone through trials and tribulations while looking after their children but have not failed the test of motherhood. It is in this spirit that, in these lines I celebrate mothers and reaffirm their unique characteristics and strengths and the unparalleled social status that comes with motherhood.

While reading and editing the life writing of these

respectable mothers, I was gripped by their extraordinary struggles and experiences as well as by their enthusiasm and optimism regarding the overall wellbeing of their children. Their narratives – even if not replicas of experiences of average parents – shape self-definitions and inform the reader about collective interests of mothers. Their passion and devotion is contagious and is, perhaps, the number-one driving force for performing their motherly duties with such tenacity.

Beyond the jargon of essentialist or constructivist feminist theories, it may not be incorrect to say that, only mothers can give such unstinted attention to children. This explains the significance Islam gives to women and why in the religion mothers have the highest social status. As the following Qur'anic verse and Prophetic narratives suggest:

*And We have instructed human being to be kind to his parents. In pain did his mother bear him, and in pain did she give him birth; and her bearing him and his utter dependence on her took thirty months. And so, when he attains to full maturity and reaches forty years, he [a righteous child] prays: "O my Sustainer! Inspire me so that I may forever be grateful for those blessings of Yours with which You has graced me and my parents, and that I may do what is right [in a manner] that will meet with Your goodly acceptance; and grant me righteousness in my offspring [as well]. Verily, to You have I turned in repentance: for, verily, I am of those who have surrendered themselves to You!" (Qur'an 46: 15)*



*Do good to and serve your mother, then your mother, then your mother, then your father, then the near relatives and then those who come after them. (Hadith qtd. in Bukhari)*

*Paradise lies at the feet of mothers. (Hadith qtd. in Nasa'i)* ■

It is widely understood that, according to Islamic teachings, in filial relations mothers are entitled to three quarters of the good treatment of children and fathers, one quarter. As the Prophet unambiguously states, one possible way for children to enter paradise in life hereafter is through looking after their mothers well in this world.

Every mother is in a continuous struggle to give the best to her child. Motherhood is a uniquely female experience and with the birth of each child, a mother enters a critical life event. Despite the negative attitude to motherhood from some quarters, a mother embraces this identity with love and compassion and with the readiness to work hard for the betterment of her children. Since men cannot become mothers, this laudable status is reserved for women. As, focusing on the importance of maternal duties and reaffirming the dignity of mothers, Mother Teresa (1910 - 1997) is reported to have said: "Love begins at home. If a woman fulfills her role in the home, if there is peace in her surroundings, there will be peace in the world. There is a part of a woman that no man can take—the power of producing, the power of love."

Apparently, given the high status of mothers in Islam, it may seem that God is biased to women in giving such great significance to them. However, the stories contained in this volume amply suggest that there are good reasons why mothers are held in such high esteem in the religion. Mothers' pre- and post-natal struggles and efforts for the sake of children beggar description.

The confessions of the mothers in this book make one fact very clear, that is, what comes after pregnancy and after successfully giving birth to a child can be more strenuous and complex and requires rigorous exertion. What is more, at the absence of the father, the mother has to carry a double burden. In other words, mothers' routine duties to children do not end with the delivery of their children. What comes afterwards is sometimes more crucial than merely conceiving and delivering a child.

Mothers bear the principal responsibility of preparing the children for living a decent life in this world. Mothers teach their children such things which the latter may not learn from other human beings or from formal educational institutions. At every stage of physical and mental development, a child requires some distinctive attention and special types of training inside the domestic setting. When a particular phase is over, it cannot be brought back. Therefore, if a child does not receive some specific training at a certain stage of their development, some deficiencies may remain palpable and it may not be possible to make



up for such losses which may affect them for the rest of their life. This tells us how important it is for mothers to be constantly vigilant and to give continuous company to their children, especially in infancy and during the formative period of their life.

Needless to say, the vast majority of mothers have maintained the seriousness and vigilance that is required for the smooth, healthy and balanced growth of children. God has bestowed on women incredible patience and unfailing love as well as the willingness and ability to undergo hardship and sacrifice for the sake of their families. Importantly, He has also made them biologically capable of the great feats of endurance that is considered necessary to bear and bring up their children.

For their devotion to children, mothers are entitled to the best treatment from the former, and in life hereafter they will receive immense rewards for performing their motherly duties with utmost sincerity. It goes without saying that the more difficulty a mother faces while looking after her children, the stronger and greater the filial bond is. In other words, motherly love and compassion is reciprocated by an intense attachment of mothers and children to each other.

What a mother gives her children right from the beginning of their life journey cannot be measured in monetary terms. Nor can it be bought by any currencies. If a mother simply gives money to her children and fails to

give motherly care and the needed training and guidance, she can be honoured as a benefactor but will be at fault for depriving her children of their rights; hence, her motherhood will be in crisis.

For centuries, society did not recognize the important role mothers have played in rearing and bringing up the future generation. Women received very little against the contribution they made to society. Honour, respect, recognition, authority and power - all have been associated with the male sphere of activity like farming and earning. Despite making great contributions to the sustenance and nourishment of the family, for too long women have been neglected, severely restricted and deliberately excluded from privileges readily available to men. They were denied the right to education, to own property, to vote, to choose their own spouses, and so on and so forth. They have been marginalized in many spheres of human life, abused and discriminated against unjustly in terms of access to economic, social and political resources.

Such accumulated grievances of women made awareness of the systematic inequalities which eventually facilitated the emergence of feminist movements especially in the western hemisphere. While the feminist movement has made great strides in ameliorating women's condition and challenged the preconceived notions about their inferiority, in the question of motherhood it seems to have made grave mistakes. Or, to say the least, with regard to motherhood,

most feminists have remained ambivalent.

Instead of fighting for women's rights and recognition for their hard work and efforts in the domestic sphere, many feminists created a negative impression about motherhood to such an extent that some extremists among them even regard motherhood as a hated calling. For many others, motherhood ends with giving birth to a baby and they refuse to carry out the important task of parenting. Again, many others have opted for not being mothers at all, as motherhood is not considered a glamorous thing and creates hurdles in 'enjoying' life.

Here I want to share the story of a British colleague of mine. During my stay in the UK, I taught at mainstream primary and junior schools as a supply teacher, which provided me with a wealth of experience. While working for one particular primary school, I met this wonderful colleague who lived in the same area where I did. Since I did not drive at that time, he generously offered to take me in his car to our workplace. On our way to the school, we spoke about various issues. One day I asked him about his parents, where they lived and how often he visited them. He told me that he visited his foster parents more often than he did his biological parents. I became more curious and he readily told me about how he came to have two sets of parents.

After his birth at a hospital, his biological parents thought that they had made a blunder by becoming parents,



as they needed to 'enjoy' life more and a child in the house might be an impediment. They decided not to take him home and left him in the hospital. Eventually, his foster parents stepped in and adopted him as their son. When his real parents failed him, he was completely dependent on his foster parents for his upbringing and all other needs associated with parenthood, and he spent his childhood and adolescence in their company.

They were the only parents whom he knew for a long time. Then at a mature age, a dramatic thing happened. While pursuing a master's programme, he met a woman much older than him. She was studying the same course and thus they were classmates. While chatting with this woman, he came to know that this was his biological mother. It took so long for the mother and the son to be reunited!

I asked my colleague a blunt question: 'Which set of parents you feel more attached to?' It did not seem to be a difficult question for him. He readily said, 'Foster parents, of course'. Although he now maintained regular communication with his biological parents, I could see a sense of resentment against them deep in his heart. They neglected him when he needed them the most. They abandoned him to enjoy their life and completely disregarded his needs and interests, and thus deprived him of the loving touch of biological parents. His life story is so telling in relation to parent-child contact and attachment.

I know a successful British academic who teaches at a prominent university in England. After giving birth to her son, she candidly told me that if it were needed she would have quit her job to look after him. However, she did not have to do that, as both she and her husband had flexible working hours.

These two stories of British parents reaffirm the well-established fact that children's need for continuous care from mothers cannot be overlooked, and they forbid any overgeneralized statements about a particular socio-cultural group. Motherhood does not have any geographical meaning or connotation. It is deterritorialized and ahistorical in character. Mothers of all places and times share the same fears and worries about their children and have the same urge and spur to look after their interests.

In the above discussion, I have not touched on father's role and responsibility and on my mother's unmatched patience and forbearance and all that she did for me and for my siblings. The first topic is not relevant here, and the reason to avoid the second issue is that I dread to tread a journey through the world of my mother, as subconsciously I am still in a state of denial of her death and continuously yearn to be reunited with her.

Kuala Lumpur, 27 February 2015



# Mother

[muht<sup>h</sup>-er] **-noun**

1. Someone who will love you unconditionally, till her last breath.

*Tales of Mothers: The Greatest Love* is a compilation of eight real-life stories of the ups and downs of motherhood. Rest assured that these eight mothers' journeys of love, hope and fear will inspire other mothers and will give new insight to curious readers.

*"This is a masterpiece of celebration of motherhood."*

***Qaisra Shahraz, author of The Holy Woman***

*"I laughed, cried and smiled while reading this book. It's a real spirit booster!"*

***Adlil Rajiah, parenting blogger***



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