

A Mother is What You Do, Until 'High-Quality Childcare' Does the Real Mothering

I was listening to a debate on the radio discussing the topic of high quality childcare for children in society. The debate was centred around how childcare must become more affordable, perhaps subsidised like other European countries, and of better quality across the UK, to help women. Or more specifically, to help women go back to work. Whilst listening, lots of things were going through my mind. And I thought I would share a few of them:

- 1) The stay-at-home mother is rarely if ever, glorified or valued in society or in the media. She is not aided through Government support of any kind. And the fact that the Government and media dominant discussion is always about how to make childcare better and more easily accessible, takes the option of staying at home to bring up your children, away from the table before women have even had a chance to decide.
- 2) The idea was discussed that sending young children to nurseries/ day care centres is good for their stimulation, learning and overall outcomes. There is an assumption that if a professional can get a child to learn their abc's especially early, this is the marker of development of a child. I'm not saying reading is not important, but this cannot compensate for the fact that the child is still detached from their main carers, their parents, and the effect this has on the child's overall outcomes. Because in the real world, children do not just develop in the areas of reading and writing - Their emotional, social development as well as development of character and values, all form the 'education' of a child. And to deny that is to deny children their real education. This is just not considered or discussed enough at all, in the public domain.
- 3) Another comment made was how women only really need to commit to being at home with children for a very 'short time' of their lives, up to three years, and so should not take their foot out of their career door. Such a comment reflects a mindset that has not appreciated the role a mother can and should have in a child's life, at all. The fact that the mother forms the backbone of the child's moral and emotional support, and her dominant presence in the child's life can shape that child through to adulthood, is totally undermined. The eruption of after-school clubs across the country, reflect this mentality where after school children must be bussed on mass to another 'school' where they are supposed to play and do activities for another few hours till their parents can pick them up (after work of course). I particularly remember a girl in my school who attended one such club, who actually told me that despite how fun the club was she was just jealous her mum was not at the school gate and everyone else's mums were.

A society which is driven by its economic output and GDP will naturally lean towards whatever will get its' maximum workforce back to work and therefore discussions in a Capitalist society will always be around getting women back into work. However such a

lack of importance on motherhood has effectively wiped out the integral and important societal role that a mother plays. Being a mother is not just about changing nappies and biding time until you can get them into a school to be really 'educated'; but is about nurturing and shaping the next generation in the palm of your hand through a deep, loving and secure relationship. Such a massive task requires focus, dedication, attention and time. Islam places the role of the mother with such value and weight, that women embrace it with honour and pursue it with dedication. The beautiful duaa of the Quran:

((وَقُلْ رَبِّ ارْحَمْهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيْتَنِي صَغِيرًا))

“My Lord! Bestow on them [parents] your mercy as they cherished me in childhood”
[TMQ 17:24]

Illustrates how Muslim parents view their responsibility – They not only fulfil their obligation, but cherish it. Mothers of the great scholars in Islam are examples of such cherishing such as the mother of Imam Shafii who as a single mother shaped his education, even migrating to another place in order to do this – And look at who Imam Shafii became, SubhanAllah! But if the Capitalist societies continue to have their way, most women won't have the pleasure of experiencing the breadth and depth of the role of motherhood. Simply because it is being taken away by 'high-quality childcare.'

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