

# Motherhood: a choice, not an obligation

The year 2021 is ringing with change but women claiming bodily autonomy is not one we are prepared for yet. The liberal (read: atypical) belief of “your body, your choice” is one shrouded with controversy, shame and guilt where only one school of thought is given attention.

To have or not to have children is a life-changing decision that is often taken for many women; their ‘consent’ to motherhood is mostly seen as an assured constant unimaginable to ever change. But aspiring to motherhood is a personal choice and there are two wings, rather than just one, that must be acknowledged with the same respect.

If raising children is what you yearn for, you should be celebrated and supported for your choice to bring life into the world. Motherhood is a beautiful experience, one that has no substitutes. There’s nothing quite like feeling a growing foetus move and breathe inside of you and having its tiny heartbeats pull at your emotional strings.

Usaila Alam, a teacher philosophising over life and English and a successful mother bringing up two teenage daughters, loves every opportunity and challenge raising her children allow. Her view is transparent, “I love my daughters and



everything about being a mother. I love disciplining them, instilling my values into them and having free-spirited conversations with them. I feel blessed to have daughters and I can positively say they understand me better than anyone else in the world.”

But make no mistake, motherhood is anything but a lionised bed of roses. Morning sickness, physical distress, eating and sleeping disorders, not to mention the financial cost and tumultuous alterations a child, small enough to fit in a tiny bassinet, brings with it. What we often forget is that it’s not just the pregnancy that a mother has to endure. It’s the permanency of raising the children you bear and parenting that is a discussion suffering from little to no limelight.

“Your children are your responsibility. They did not ask to be born; in fact, they had no say in the matter! It was you who decided to do so. This is why it is your job to take care of them as well as you can and raise them into able human beings,” Alam shares.

And so the enunciation of the argument, thus far, falls onto the word “choice.” You are more than welcome to sincerely *choose* to be a mother. However, if you are of the second wing of taking a childless life, no one should be entitled to have a say in the

matter. Other than you, of course.

The world should applaud you and minstrels should write songs of your opinion and bravado. If you find yourself shocked at this notion, perhaps, it is time to remind you yet again that motherhood is a conscious decision; one that must be taken with respect to individual ideologies and perspectives. Bangladeshi women who have happily decided to be child-free exist and one such brazen example is Kohinur



Khyum Tithila, a journalist working at Dhaka Tribune.

“I’m an independent, heterosexual woman and I have no desire to have a child. I proactively made this choice not out of apathy or ignorance, but because I want to live my life to the fullest; I want to explore every opportunity I’m granted without having my hands tied. And even though I love to celebrate my femininity, I identify that motherhood is not its only branch,” Khyum feels. “I simply cannot picture myself mothering a child in any phase of my life,” she states.

And a brazen statement to make. Khyum deserves a show of respect simply for voicing an outlook deemed unconventional in our society. But maybe it’s an outlook that more women should accept and adopt.

Parenting is a big ask. It demands enthusiasm, training and patience – qualities not everyone is inbred with nor are prepared to develop. A young child left to the whims of neglect and mercy of chance is one who grows up with scars and trauma that take years, if even that, to reverse.

In our society, broken marriages are often seen as perfect rooms to throw a baby in, unrealistically hoping that an infant will somehow act as an aiding tool to overcome cases of abuse, abandonment, mistreatment and miscommunication. It’s important we recognise that this argument is about as good as saying that bullet wounds can be patched with a grenade timed to blow up your whole life, taking your marriage down with you.

To sum up, having a child that you do not want is the greatest injustice you can inflict upon humanity. And, perhaps, the most extreme tragedy that exists in the world is when women vying for motherhood find it impossible to conceive, while others who do not have the maternal gene are ironically blessed with a baby.

But if things were as simple as adding two and two, life wouldn’t be such a puzzle. For a woman to admit out loud that you wish to be child-free invites prying friends, disappointed, even hostile parents and in-laws and a shocked society. The ideology may very well be deemed as the biggest blasphemy of a brown society and before you know it, you’ll find yourself at the receiving end of offensive and futile bargaining mechanisms that tell you your biological clock is ticking away, every woman comes with a maternal instinct and maybe even that you’re failing at the sole purpose of your life – to sire an heir.

To understand these regressive

comments, and eventually negate them, sociologist and professor, Obydullah Al Marjuk believes that the gradual development of society had a major role to play in shaping the perceptions we seek to debunk today.

“Society was formed to recognise women as a powerful being gifted with the ability to prevent human extinction. Women do this simply by having children. Through the passage of time, helped with a myriad of other factors like women choosing to stay home and misguided definitions of masculinity and feminism, women found themselves with the image of being primary caregivers,” recalls Marjuk.

“Society has not helped this notion much with their over-adulation of parents, particularly mothers, who are put on a pedestal and given a free get-out-of-jail card for everything simply because they are mothers,” he further explains.

Indeed, quoting scriptures and Victorian beliefs of having more and more babies to increase likelihoods of eventually birthing a son are all guilt-trips and emotional manipulations to coerce women into accepting motherhood.

With global population exceeding 7.79 billion, it’s more than safe to assume humans are nowhere near the brink of dying out. Having established that, let’s allow half of our kind to wilfully make decisions regarding their own bodies. After all, women hold the sole proprietorship of their own selves and not having a child is equally as acceptable as having a child. In either case, it has never been and will never be your business anyway!

**By Ramisa Haque**  
**Photo: Mère Maternity Wear**