

## Caring for Orphans in Islam and Challenges Faced: A study based on the Eravur Orphanage

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**Abstract:** Islam places significant emphasis on the welfare of orphans. Children who experience the unexpected loss of a parent often undergo psychological trauma, with their future prospects becoming uncertain. These children frequently encounter difficulties in meeting even their basic needs. Consequently, Islam exhorts its followers to provide care for orphans, enabling them to experience a life comparable to that of other children. However, the extent of concern within the Muslim community for orphans remains unclear. This study aims to investigate whether Islamic guidelines on orphan care are being implemented, specifically examining whether orphaned children are entrusted to their next of kin or reside in orphanages with rights equivalent to those of other children. To achieve the objectives of this study, an orphanage in the Eravur area of Batticaloa District was examined. Interviews were conducted with children residing in the orphanage and the institution's administrators. The research identified challenges faced by orphaned children and difficulties in managing orphanage institutions. This study analyses these issues and proposes potential solutions.

**Keywords:** *Caring of Orphans, Islam, Orphanage, Muslim Community, Eravur.*

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## Introduction

The Arabic term "yatīm" denotes an individual who has lost their father (Alwani, n.d.; Hayes & Sijpesteijn, 2024). While this term encompasses all fatherless children, both young and old, it ceases to apply once a boy reaches puberty and becomes capable of fulfilling his own needs. The Prophet (PBUH) explicitly stated that one is no longer considered an orphan after attaining puberty (Hawa, Sayeed (1985) Al-Asaas fi al-Tafseer, Beirut : Dar al-salaam).

The Qur'an addresses the care of orphans in approximately 23 instances (Ali, 2023). The majority of these verses advise on the necessity of caring for orphans, providing for their needs, and ensuring their full social and economic rights (Siyana et al., 2023). Some verses strongly caution against insulting or neglecting orphans and misappropriating their property. The term 'orphan' refers to children who have not reached puberty following the death of their father (Atobrah, 2004). No distinction is made between impoverished and affluent orphans; all children who have lost their fathers, regardless of their financial status, are classified as orphans (Ghazni 1982).

Children who have lost their fathers often face numerous challenges, both psychological and financial (Ntuli et al., 2020; Yosef et al., 2023). Consequently, Islam urges its adherents to alleviate the suffering of such children. Islam promises substantial rewards for those who care for orphans (Krafess, 2005). However, there appears to be limited concern for orphans within

contemporary society. As a result, even institutions dedicated to orphan care encounter numerous challenges (Theophil, 2022). This study examines the challenges faced by orphanages and orphans, and presents solutions from an Islamic perspective.

## Methodology

Both qualitative and quantitative data are analysed to achieve the purpose of this study. The opinions of the Qur'an, Sunnah and Imams were reviewed as secondary data. Additionally, 20 students and two administrators of the orphanage were interviewed. The primary data obtained through the interview has also been analysed.

## Findings and Discussion

This section covers the importance of caring for orphans in Islam and their economic, social and psychological care. Accordingly, we will discuss them in detail under separate headings.

### Virtues of caring for orphans

The Arabic term for the care of orphans is "Kafālat al-'Aydam" (Ali, 2023). The Arabic term *Kafālah* encompasses multiple profound meanings (embrace, love, caring, spending) (Ali, 2023). The Prophet (PBUH) has also utilised this term. All the Hadiths that are said to be in the Hadith of the Hadith of Paradise (Kafa (k) Latul Yadeem (Kafa (k) Latul Yadeem. The

community competed with each other to take care of Allah and Maryam (a.s.). Ultimately, Zakariyya (a.s) assumed responsibility for Maryam (a.s.). The Qur'anic verse (Al-Imran: 44) also employs the word 'Yaqb' which originated from the word 'Kafa' (Alwani, n.d.). This verse also records the historical fact and its significance that an orphan attempted to assume responsibility (Alwani, n.d.; Hayes & Sijpesteijn, 2024).

Islam places significant emphasis on orphans. Consequently, Islam revolutionised the social structure by appointing Muhammad (PBUH) as a Prophet who was born as an orphan in the Jahiliyya community where orphans were neglected (Ali, 2023). The infidels of Mecca derided him as an orphan under the care of Abu Talib. However, the Prophet (PBUH) overcame the injustices towards orphans through Islamic propagation and protected their rights and property (Alwani, n.d.). The Jahiliyya infidels persecuted the orphans. The Qur'an states, "Have you seen him who denies the judgement? Such is he who drives away the orphans" (Alma'oon: 1-2) and admonishes, "You do not honour the orphan."

Allah reminded the Prophet (sallallaahu 'alayhi wasallam) that he was also an orphan, stating, "Did he not consider you an orphan? Do not rebuke the orphan." Consequently, the Prophet (sallallaahu 'alayhi wasallam) took care of orphans. The Prophet (PBUH) encouraged others to care for orphans and attend to their needs. Even when distributing ganimat and sadaqa, orphans were prioritised.

### Types of orphans

Agla has categorised modern orphans as Normal orphans and legal orphanage: Normal orphanas in the sence This category encompasses all male and female children who have died or have not reached puberty.

Legal orphanage: This category includes children who lack guardianship and protection. Their parents are presumed deceased. Because such children (Aqla, 1989) are in a disadvantaged condition without care, protection, and affection. These children may experience a deficit in the nurturing and attention that normal orphans in society receive (Theophil, 2022). Consequently, there is a greater necessity to provide care for them compared to normal orphans. Such children fall into the following categories:

- Children of long-term incarcerated individuals.
- Children of persons who have emigrated for employment and have no contact with their spouse and children.
- Children of individuals whose status (alive or deceased) is unknown.
- Neglected and homeless street children.
- Children of parents separated due to divorce.
- Children of widowed parents.
- Children of disabled parents: It is challenging for individuals with disabilities to care for their children when they are unable to care for themselves.
- The Qur'an emphasises the care of young children who have been deliberately abandoned by their parents or mothers (whose identities are unknown). "But if you do not know their parents, then they are your brothers in religion." (Al-Ahzab:).

Upon examination of the Qur'anic and Sunnah guidelines regarding orphans, it is evident that they focus on three aspects:

- Economic care
- Social care
- Psychological care.

Al-Shingeedi (1408 r. 564) asserts that all these verses prohibit harm to the life and property of orphans and provide guidance on ways to enrich their lives.

### Financial maintenance

The issue faced by children who are orphaned due to the loss of their father is economic in nature. Specifically, it becomes a significant burden for them to obtain basic necessities such as food and clothing. Islam provides various guidelines to address this issue. *"Whoever provides sustenance to an orphan until he is sufficient, Allah will make Paradise a permanent abode for him. Even if he committed an unforgivable transgression!"* The Prophet (PBUH) stated. (Tirmidhi)

Moreover, the Prophet (PBUH) used to send assistance to orphans. Even in the distribution of resources, the orphan children of those who were martyred in the battle of Badr were given a significant role. Narrated um al-Haram, the daughter of Zubair (r.a). "When I and my sister Fatimah, the daughter of Prophet Muhammad, approached the Prophet (sallallaahu 'alayhi wasallam) and informed him about his difficulties and requested him to allocate some of the resources, they said, 'The orphans of Badr have precedence over you.'" (Abu Dawood)

Numerous verses of the Qur'an (Nisa: 8, Al-Anbal: 41, Al-Hashr: 7) declare that orphans are among those who are eligible to receive resources. The people inquire of thee, O Prophet, about those to whom they should allocate resources. Answer them by stating, "Whatever ye spend in charity should be for parents, relatives, orphans, the needy, and travellers." (Quran 2:215).

Furthermore, when a Muslim offers aid to a family-related orphan, they are rewarded twice the normal value of the act. The wife of Abdullah ibn Mas'ud (God be pleased with him), namely Zainab, inquired of the Prophet (PBUH) if assisting the widow of the deceased man and the deceased man's children would also earn them a double reward. The Prophet (peace upon him) confirmed that they also would have a double reward due to the merits of preserving familial relationships and the practice of giving alms. (Nasa'i) The value of almsgiving being a means of preserving kinship relationships is thus supported by the reference to the Quranic command to "Help the orphan who is among your relatives." (Al-Mughni, 1984).

Concurrently, in the case of a father bequeathing assets to his heirs upon his death, the introductory passages of Surah An-Niza provide specific instructions on managing the assets of orphans to prevent their depletion or misuse (Saujan et al., 2022). Furthermore, the passages state: "And give the orphans their properties, and do not substitute the bad for the good. And do not consume their wealth along with your own, for that is indeed a great sin." (4:2) The Quran emphasises that upon the orphans' attainment of majority, their assets must be returned to them intact, without diminishment or substitution with inferior quality assets. It also cautions against commingling their assets with personal assets, as this constitutes a grave transgression. This serves as a reminder of the necessity to preserve and manage the assets of orphans appropriately until they reach the age of responsibility to do so independently.

This specific passage serves as a rebuke to the Jahiliyyah people who engaged in the unethical practice of exchanging the robust livestock of orphans with weaker and unhealthy animals through deceptive means. Moreover, the Jahiliyyah people treated the properties of orphans as their personal assets to exploit at will. Allah strongly condemns this form of exploitation, stating that to plunder the properties of orphans is a serious sin (Ibn Kathir, p. 272). The passage strongly censures this reprehensible practice and underscores the imperative to respect and preserve the properties and rights of orphans (Aqila, 1989).

It is imperative to note that the optimal solution mandates that guardians reinvest the assets of orphans into various ventures or enterprises with the objective of maximising profits and augmenting the assets of the orphans. Upon attaining maturity, all accumulated assets must revert to the orphans without deceit or misappropriation (Abu al-'Ala, Vol. 8, p. 356). The following Quranic directive reinforces this practice: "And approach not the wealth of the orphan except by way of best conduct until he comes of age." (Al-An'am: 152). This serves as a reminder to Muslims to refrain from committing this grave transgression at all costs, particularly when presented with opportunities. It is essential to avoid circumstances that may lead to the misappropriation of orphans' assets.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) provided guidance to Abu Dharr (may Allah be pleased with him) with the following counsel: "O Abu Dharr, I perceive that you are weak, and I desire for you the very thing that I desire for myself. Refrain from assuming guardianship of two persons, nor undertake the affairs that fall to the lot of an orphan." (Muslim) This serves as a caution against assuming roles or responsibilities that may lead to the mismanagement of affairs or their inefficient administration, particularly if the individual in question may lack the capacity or resources to execute them equitably.

Concurrently, the Holy Book offers a clear elucidation regarding the permissibility of a wealthy guardian utilising the assets of orphans. It states: "And if the guardian is rich, let him abstain (from taking anything of the orphan's property), and if he is poor, let him take a reasonable (amount) (for his needs)." (An-Nisa: 6) This specific passage in the Book of Allah affirms that if a guardian is financially secure, they are obligated to refrain from appropriating any of the orphan's assets. However, if the guardian is in a state of financial need, they are entitled to a reasonable amount for their necessities, in addition to the expenses incurred in managing the orphan's assets. The purpose of this provision is to promote equity and justice while safeguarding the rights of orphans (Saujan et al., 2019).

This matter is further elucidated by a particular Hadith, which states: "Once a man inquired of the Prophet (PBUH), 'O Messenger of Allah! I possess no personal assets, while I have a ward to care for. Am I authorised to utilise the ward's assets?' The Prophet (peace be upon him) responded, 'Utilise the assets of the ward provided that you do not do so extravagantly or parsimoniously.'" (Ibn Kathir, p. 274).

This Hadith reinforces the principle that a guardian with legitimate needs and no alternative means of support may utilise the ward's assets, while avoiding potential misuse or extravagance. The guidance imparted by the Prophet (PBUH) emphasises the importance of maintaining equilibrium between fulfilling personal

needs and protecting the ward's rights and properties, thereby ensuring the consistent application of justice and fairness.

The prudent management of orphans' assets is a matter of paramount importance. Any negligence in this regard can have severe consequences according to Islamic teachings. The Quran explicitly warns against such misconduct: "Verily the eaters of the assets of the orphans wrongfully eat fire into their stomachs, and they are going to burn into a blazing Hell." (An-Nisa: 10) This serves as a stern admonition that the mishandling of orphans' assets is considered a grave transgression, and those who engage in such behaviour will face severe punishment in the afterlife. It underscores the necessity of managing orphans' financial assets with integrity, ethical conduct, and utmost diligence to ensure their rights are fully protected.

Moreover, the misappropriation of orphans' properties is classified among the seven major transgressions that can lead to an individual's spiritual downfall. The aforementioned Hadith emphasises that the mother is deemed the most suitable guardian for children who have lost their father. This is attributed to the mother's unique capacity to ensure that her children are not neglected, marginalised in society, or left to confront life's challenges unaided. She possesses the distinctive ability to nurture them, safeguard them from harm, and guide them towards success. In the absence of the mother, this responsibility devolves upon close relatives. In the absence of relatives, this duty should be assumed by benevolent individuals or social institutions. This principle is eloquently illustrated by the Prophet (PBUH), who stated, "Whoever cares for an orphan, whether they are related or not, will be with me in Paradise like this," and he held his two fingers in close proximity. (Muslim) This declaration serves as a powerful impetus for individuals to assume responsibility for the care and protection of orphans, ensuring their well-being and integration into society.

### **Sociological care**

Children who have been orphaned due to the loss of their fathers are frequently left without adequate care and affection, a phenomenon commonly observed in society. Consequently, Islam advocates for the transformation of such detrimental practices and emphasises the importance of caring for orphans. Within Muslim households, those that provide the most exemplary care for orphans are considered the most virtuous, while those that mistreat orphans are regarded as the least commendable. The Prophet (peace be upon him) stated, "I and the caretaker of an orphan will be in Paradise like this," joining his two fingers together (Ibn Majah).

Moreover, the Prophet (peace be upon him) declared, "A woman who, following the loss of her husband, endures hardships and refrains from remarrying for the sake of her children, and is worn out by the intensity of her struggles, will be with me in Paradise like this," joining his two fingers together. An alternative narration suggests that if a woman of beauty and honour restrains herself from remarrying for the sake of her children, she will attain a similarly elevated status.

### **Psychological care**

Among the critical needs of orphaned children, psychological requirements are of paramount importance (Ali, 2023). Even when basic necessities such as sustenance, clothing,

and shelter are provided, if their psychological needs remain unmet, these orphans may experience mental distress (Yosef et al., 2023). Therefore, the Prophet (PBUH) encouraged caring for and nurturing orphans with affection and compassion, as they require emotional support. He stated, "Whoever takes responsibility for an orphan and spends on them (to the best of their ability), fulfilling all their needs, that orphan will act as a shield for them on the Day of Judgment, protecting them from Hellfire." He further asserted, "Whoever strokes the head of an orphan (in affection), for every hair they touch, a good deed will be recorded for them."

The aforementioned exhortations of the Prophet (PBUH) provide a means to alleviate the psychological longings and concerns of orphans through affectionate physical contact and nurturing care.

### Analysis on Eravur Orphanage

The Eravur Orphanage was established in 2002. However, due to some criticism on using the terms 'orphan' and 'orphanage', the Committee decided to change its name as 'Eravur Child Care Home'. Later, the Committee allowed and accepted the unsupported or abandoned children to stay at this Home. In this orphanage, there are a total of 55 students, comprising 37 boys and 21 girls. Among them, the majority are students enrolled in grades 6 to 10. Additionally, it is noteworthy that 23% of the children are studying in the fifth grade. Furthermore, it is significant to note that there are very few boys in higher grades, and there are no girls at all in higher grades.

To ensure the continuity of education and learning activities for these orphaned children, they have been enrolled in the nearby Makkan Makkar School. However, facilities for evening study sessions are limited. Additionally, the absence of appointed teachers to supervise or guide them during evening study hours, leisure time, or while completing their homework has been identified as a significant deficiency.

Furthermore, the inadequate accommodation facilities for these orphaned children have presented a major challenge. However, it is noteworthy that the Islamic Relief Organization (IRO) has addressed this long-standing need by providing two dormitories along with the necessary beds and mattresses.

Similarly, meeting their nutritional requirements remains a significant challenge, as the orphanage relies heavily on public donations. While some affluent individuals and donors occasionally provide meals, and a few benefactors have assumed responsibility for sponsoring meals for one day each year, the administration faces considerable difficulties in securing funds for meals on other days.

Moreover, this study revealed that these children are significantly affected psychologically, which is a critical issue that requires urgent attention. Specifically, when these children attend the nearby school, other students often treat them differentially, identifying them as orphans, which profoundly affects them emotionally. This situation highlights a lack of awareness among school students regarding the importance of compassion and care for orphans. Therefore, teachers and orphanage administrators must collaborate to address this challenge.

Concurrently, the continuous residence in the dormitory has been identified as a factor causing mental stress for these children. To address this, it would be beneficial to invite psychological

support experts to the orphanage to conduct counselling and motivational activities. Additionally, providing enhanced recreational and sports facilities could also serve as a solution to their psychological challenges.

### Conclusion

Society generally perceives orphans as children who suffer due to the loss of their father. However, this study confirms that Islam offers a broader perspective on orphanhood. Furthermore, the neglect of orphans today is largely attributable to the lack of public awareness regarding Islamic teachings on their care and rights. While some philanthropists have taken the initiative to establish orphanages and shelters, sustaining these institutions effectively requires continuous public support and financial assistance.

Therefore, it is crucial to raise awareness among the public about the virtues of caring for orphans and the Islamic guidelines related to it. Only then can these orphaned children live with dignity, equality, and without hardship. This, ultimately, aligns with the true essence of Islam's solution.

### Recommendations

- Opportunities should be created for these children to interact equitably with others in school without being identified as orphans.
- Adequate sports equipment and recreational facilities should be provided.
- Appropriate psychological counselling should be offered to address their mental health issues.
- The significance and virtues of caring for orphans, as emphasised in Islam, should be widely promoted among the public. This will encourage affluent individuals to voluntarily extend their support.

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