

## **The End Of Female Infanticide: Inspecting Prophetic Reforms And Their Societal Impact From Pre-Islamic Arabia To The Present.**

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### **Abstract**

**T**his study investigates the role of prophetic reforms in the eradication of female infanticide and the transformation of societal perceptions of women from pre-Islamic Arabia to the modern era. It analyses how these reforms, particularly through the teachings of the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad, challenged deeply entrenched cultural norms and catalysed significant societal shifts in protecting the rights of women and girls. The study underscores the prohibition of infanticide under Islamic jurisprudence.

Furthermore, it draws connections between these early reforms and ongoing struggles against gender-biased practices, particularly in contemporary India, where gender discrimination and infanticide remain prevalent. By illustrating the continued relevance of Islamic principles in addressing such issues, the research highlights the influence of prophetic teachings on modern legal frameworks and grassroots movements advocating for women's and girls' rights.

Through a comprehensive review of historical and contemporary contexts, this study highlights how these teachings have long promoted justice and equality, and how they continue to address enduring gender disparities while advancing women's rights in various modern societies.

*Keywords: Female Infanticide, Islamic principles, Justice, Equality, Gender Discrimination, Empowerment, Prophetic reforms.*

### **Introduction**

#### **Background of the Study :**

Infanticide is defined as the killing of an infant, where an infant is defined as a child under the age of one year. Female infanticide is the wilful killing of newborn girls or female children shortly after birth or within the first few years of life, represents one of the darkest chapters in human history. It reflects deep-rooted gender disparities and the systemic oppression

of women, paralleling the global issue of women's marginalisation and the persistence of reductive societal attitudes. As defined by Jones (2020) "the intentional killing of infant girls within a society that places higher value on male children, often due to cultural norms, economic pressures, and perceived future liabilities associated with female offspring" (p. 45). This definition underscores the grave violation of a child's fundamental right to life, occurring in active and passive forms.

Active infanticide involves the deliberate killing of an infant through direct physical means. In various societies, common methods include suffocation, drowning, poisoning by administration of lethal substances and blunt force trauma. Pre-Islamic Arabia, for instance, witnessed the practice of burying newborn girls alive, resulting in death by suffocation or entrapment. Other forms of active infanticide include striking or hitting, leading to fatal injuries.

In contrast, passive infanticide occurs when caregivers intentionally neglect or withhold essential resources, leading to death from malnutrition, untreated illness, or hazardous living conditions. This may include the abandonment of female infants in unsafe locations or selective neglect of their health, leading to poorer nutrition, less medical attention, and emotional deprivation in societies with a preference for male offspring. The societal pressure leading to gender-selective abortion of female fetuses, along with the continued neglect of surviving female children, prevents postnatal care altogether and can be considered a form of passive infanticide. Additionally, female children may be denied necessary medical treatment due to their perceived lower value, resulting in preventable deaths from treatable conditions, as resources are often prioritised for male offspring.

In modern societies, passive infanticide has evolved into systemic or organised practices such as gender-selective abortion and discriminatory neglect, particularly prevalent in countries like India and China. (Basu & Deaton, 2014 ; Hesketh & Xing, 2006 ). The persistence of these practices remains deeply concerning, as they are still widely accepted and ingrained in the social fabric of these nations.

### **The Spread of Infanticide: Analysing Its Persistence from Ancient Civilizations to Pre-Islamic Arabia:**

From the golden age of ancient Greece to the grandeur of the Persian Empire, infanticide has been a pervasive practice across many societies. In ancient Greek and Roman civilisations, infanticide was not only prevalent but also considered a legitimate means of population control among

various social classes . A newborn was viewed as the father's property, and Roman law granted him the authority to dispose of his children as he wished. Additionally, the public authorities sometimes sanctioned such actions, with Roman texts even describing the cruel practice of smearing opium residue on an infant's breast to inflict harm. Infanticide remained legally and socially acceptable in both Greek and Roman societies until the 4th century AD .

This practice eventually reached pre-Islamic Arab society, significantly influenced by extensive trade and cultural interactions. The exchange between different civilisations, such as the Greeks, Romans, and Persians, likely facilitated the spread of these customs and beliefs. In pre-Islamic Arabia, the persistence of infanticide can be attributed to the absolute freedom within tribal societies. The lack of centralised authority and the strong emphasis on tribal independence enabled such practices to endure.

### **Historical context of Female Infanticide in Pre-Islamic Arabia**

In pre-Islamic Arabian society, the tragic practice of *wad al-banaat* (the burial of female infants alive) was motivated by the belief that female children were burdensome and brought social dishonour. This era, known as *Jahiliyyah* (the age of ignorance), was marked by rigid tribal structures and harsh environmental conditions that shaped societal norms, including strict gender roles. Sons were valued as essential contributors to labour, warriors, protection, and heirs, while daughters were regarded as liabilities, requiring dowries and contributing little to the tribe's economic or military strength.

Historical narrations from Abd Allah ibn Abbas describe how fathers, to avoid the perceived dishonour of having daughters, would dig graves even before their wives gave birth. If the baby was a girl, she would be cast into the grave, while a boy would be spared. Ibn Abbas also reported that some fathers allowed their daughters to live temporarily, dressing them in wool or hair garments and assigning them tasks such as tending livestock in the desert. Once the daughters reached a certain age, the father would deceive them by pretending to take them to visit relatives, only to lead them to a pit where he would bury them alive (Ibn Kathir, 2003; Al-Tabari, 1987). Hisham ibn al-Kalbi's *Kitāb al-Asnam* (The Book of Idols) further elaborates on the idolatrous rituals and societal norms that devalued women's lives (Ibn al-Kalbī, 1952). In *Asbab-al-Nuzul*, Al-Wahidi explains the relevance of verses in Surah Al-Nahl (16:58-59), which recount the shame fathers felt upon the birth of a daughter. These customs are also discussed in *Sahih Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim*, where Prophet Muhammad (peace

be upon him) condemned and actively worked to abolish such acts, emphasising the protection and dignity of women (Bukhari, 1997; Muslim, 2007) .

The justification for wad was deeply intertwined with tribal honour and economic pressures (Al-Sa'dawi, 1980) . Female infanticide was not only seen as a means of managing population growth but also as a response to the economic and social challenges of raising daughters. In some tribes, this practice became institutionalised to maintain social and fiscal stability (as cited in Khan, 1996) .

## **HISTORICAL RECORDS AND EVIDENCE:**

### **Poetry and Oral History :**

In pre-Islamic Arabia, poetry and oral traditions played a crucial role in shaping and reflecting societal values. Poetry was not only an art form but also a medium for preserving historical events, social practices, and moral reflections . Many pre-Islamic poets lamented and criticised the tragic practice of wa'd al-banaat, highlighting the emotional and ethical consequences of such actions. These poetic expressions helped preserve oral traditions and contributed to shaping the moral discourse surrounding female infanticide in Arabian society.

Several notable pre-Islamic poets criticized these practices. Imru al-Qais, a prominent poet of the period, poignantly addressed the issue of female infanticide in his elegies, mourning the loss of daughters and criticising the practice as a profound injustice . His poetry, characterised by themes of loss and shame, subtly conveys the societal preference for male offspring over females, as discussed by Bauer (2000) . Similarly, Antarah ibn Shaddad, renowned for his valour and poetic prowess, used his poetry to condemn the killing of female infants, intertwining his critique with themes of justice and morality (Beeston, 1995).

Another significant poet was Al-Khansa' (Tammam bint 'Amr), whose poetry articulated a deep emotional and ethical conflict regarding female infanticide. As a prominent female poet, she leveraged her work to challenge societal norms and express her outrage over the practice (Mernissi, 1991) . Al-Shanfara, known for his work *Lāmiyyāt 'al-Arab*, often reflected the harsh realities of desert life and tribal culture, including the rejection of unjust customs like female infanticide (Lyons, 1995) . Lastly, Zuhayr ibn Abi Sulma, in his famous *Mu'allaqat*, indirectly criticises the violent and unjust treatment of women and children, advocating for more humane values (Stetkevych, 1993) . His reflective and moralistic

poetry addressed various societal issues, including the wrongful killing of daughters, highlighting the ethical shortcomings of his contemporaries (Ibn Hisham, 1955).

Oral histories and tribal legends also provide insight into the normalisation of female infanticide. These narratives, while not always explicitly condemning the practice, illustrate the extent to which it was embedded in cultural traditions (Al-Sa'dawi, 1980; Duri, 1987). For example, oral traditions from Bedouin tribes in the form of stories and sayings often express relief or approval when a daughter is not born, highlighting the cultural bias towards sons. This recounts practices and offers a glimpse into the cultural acceptance of such customs (Schacht, 1958).

### **Archaeological Evidence:**

It provides tangible proof of widespread female infanticide in pre-Islamic Arabia, complementing historical and literary sources. Excavations at various sites have revealed infant remains buried in a manner consistent with historical accounts of infanticide. For instance, the discovery of infant skeletons buried in shallow graves or haphazardly aligns with descriptions of infanticide practices. Objects from this period, such as burial items and inscriptions, shed further light on societal attitudes toward female infants. Graves indicating hasty or improper burials often reflect broader cultural norms of the time. The presence of infant remains in such contexts underscores the harsh realities faced by female children in pre-Islamic Arabia.

### **Notable Tribes and Regions Practicing Infanticide :**

Several tribes and regions in pre-Islamic Arabia were notably involved in the practice of female infanticide according to Ibn Ishaq's records (as cited in Watt, 1953, pg. 45). The motivations varied depending on the specific circumstances and societal norms of each tribe .

**The Quraysh Tribe:** A dominant tribe in pre-Islamic Mecca and the tribe of Prophet Muhammad, driven by economic and social pressures of their era. Historical accounts suggest that the practice was part of the broader societal norms of the time (Al-Mubarakpuri, 1996 ). The Quraysh's involvement highlights the widespread nature of the practice across different tribal societies.

**The Banu Tamim Tribe:** Another tribe where female infanticide was practised. Economic pressures and social expectations contributed to the acceptance of this practice among them (Al-Sa'dawi, 1980; Schacht, 1958).

The Banu Hashim Tribe Initially engaging in pre-Islamic practices, later became known for their eventual rejection of female infanticide. This change was influenced by the teachings of Prophet Muhammad, who condemned infanticide and advocated for the protection and respect of female children. The Banu Hashim's shift from practising to opposing infanticide demonstrates the transformative impact of Prophetic reforms on established societal norms (Al-Hibri, 1997). Historical accounts in Ibn Ishaq's *Sirat Rasul Allah* also document the shift within the Banu Hashim, reflecting their movement away from practices such as infanticide, influenced by the Qur'anic revelations and the Prophet's teachings.

**The Banu Asad Tribe:** Like other tribes in pre-Islamic Arabia, engaged in female infanticide primarily due to economic constraints and social pressures. The practice was a reflection of the broader societal norms that devalued female children in favour of male heirs who could contribute more directly to the tribe's survival and prosperity .

**The Banu Aws and Banu Khazraj Tribes:** Two significant tribes in the city of Yathrib (later Medina), practised female infanticide for similar reasons. The adverse living conditions and frequent conflicts resulted in a rampant preference for male offspring due to their perceived higher value in defence and resource management roles. Female infanticide was a means of alleviating perceived economic burdens .

### **Religious Beliefs and Practices Related to Infanticide:**

#### **Pagan Rituals and Superstitions Around Family and Offspring**

In pre-Islamic Arabian society, various pagan rituals and superstitions were central to family life, particularly concerning offspring. Female infants, in particular, were often seen as omens of misfortune leading to the practice of infanticide. These beliefs were rooted in ancient tribal customs, where sacrifices, including the killing of children, were thought to appease gods or prevent calamities (Beeston, 1995) (Guillaume, 1955).

#### **Influence of Fatalistic Beliefs on the Decision to Kill Female Infants:**

Fatalistic beliefs also played a significant role in perpetuating infanticide. Many in pre-Islamic Arabia believed that fate, or qadar, dictated their lives, leaving them powerless to change their circumstances. This worldview contributed to the rationale for killing female infants, as families often viewed daughters as a liability that could not be overcome (Guillaume, 1955). Such beliefs were embedded in the cultural psyche, and the decision to commit infanticide was frequently justified by these fatalistic notions .

However, with the advent of Islam, these fatalistic perspectives were directly challenged. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasised human agency and the intrinsic value of all beings, regardless of gender, marking a significant departure from pre-Islamic norms .

### **Women's Status in Pre-Islamic Arabia :**

#### **Role and Treatment of Women:**

While societal structures generally imposed significant restrictions on women's public and political roles, women still managed to exert influence and contribute to their communities in various ways.

**Social Status and Rights :** Before the advent of Islam in Arabian society, women often occupied an inferior status compared to men. The rights and social roles of women were significantly affected by tribal customs and economic conditions. In many instances, women were perceived more as possessions rather than independent individuals with inherent rights.

**Property and Inheritance:** In many tribes, women's rights to inherit property were restricted, and they had limited opportunities to possess land or substantial assets in their own right. The legal subordination of women reflected the societal preference for male authority (Gibb 1953). Inheritance laws frequently disadvantaged women, with daughters receiving a fraction of the inheritance compared to sons. This practice stemmed from a broader societal belief that sons were the primary economic providers and heirs (Ibn Hisham, 1955).

**Marriage and Family:** Marriages were typically arranged for strategic, economic, or political reasons, with women having limited say in these decisions. Marital transactions, including dowries and alliances, were crucial for consolidating power and wealth within tribes (Mernissi, 1991). Women were often married off to strengthen tribal alliances or settle disputes, reflecting their role as pawns in broader social and economic negotiations.

**Public Life:** The participation of women in public life was typically limited, with prevailing social norms reinforcing a distinct separation between the public and private spheres. As a result, women were predominantly confined to domestic roles. While some women were engaged in social and religious activities, their participation in political and military affairs was limited (Schacht, 1958).

**Economic Contributions:** Despite the restrictive social norms, women in

pre-Islamic Arabia contributed significantly to the economy, particularly in agricultural and pastoral communities. They were involved in various economic activities, including:

**Agriculture and Craftsmanship:** Women played a vital role in domestic and agricultural production, including planting, harvesting, and managing livestock. These contributions were essential for the sustenance and economic stability of their families (Beeston, 1995). Additionally, many women engaged in craftsmanship, such as weaving and pottery, which were essential to the domestic economy (Al-Sa’dawi, 1980).

**Trade:** In certain urban centres like Mecca, women participated in trade and commerce. Prominent women, such as Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, demonstrated considerable business acumen and played a crucial role in the economic life of their communities. Her marriage to Muhammad was based on mutual respect and affection, highlighting her significant role and influence in pre-Islamic society (Mernissi, 1991). Her support was instrumental in the early years of Islam and reflected the potential of women to exert influence and contribute to societal change.

**Contribution in defence as Supportive roles:** They managed resources, cared for the wounded, and maintained morale. These supportive roles were critical for the effective functioning of tribal defence mechanisms (Beeston, 1995)

## **PROPHETIC REFORMS AGAINST FEMALE INFANTICIDE:**

### **Islamic Teachings and Revelation:**

With the advent of Islam in 610 A.D., a profound transformation swept through the moral landscape of pre-Islamic Arabia, especially regarding the practice of female infanticide. Islamic teachings, through both the Qur’an and Hadith literature, condemned this barbaric act, introducing a new ethical framework that emphasised the sanctity and equal value of all human life.

### **Qur’anic Verses Addressing Female Infanticide:**

The Qur’an addresses the issue of female infanticide across several verses. Surah Al-An’am (6:140) states: “Surely lost are those who slay their children foolishly without knowledge.” This verse condemns the act of killing children out of ignorance or misguided beliefs. Additionally, in Surah Al-Isra (17:31), the Qur’an explicitly rejects the justification of infanticide due to economic hardship: “Kill not your children for fear of want: We shall provide sustenance for them as well as for you. Verily, the killing of them is a great sin.” This verse underscores that God’s provision is sufficient and condemns the act of killing children based on

financial concerns.

Furthermore, Surah Al-An'am (6:151) reinforces this message: "And do not kill your children for fear of poverty. We provide for you and for them." This verse reiterates the prohibition of killing children due to fears of economic difficulty, affirming that both parents and children will be provided for by God.

In addition to these, Surah Al-Takwir (81:8-9) poses a rhetorical question to criticize the practice of female infanticide: "And when the girl [who was] buried alive is asked, for what sin she was killed?" This verse questions the unjustifiable reasons behind such actions and highlights the severe moral injustice of burying female infants alive.

Surah An-Nahl (16:58-59) also addresses the emotional and societal disgrace associated with the birth of daughters: "And when one of them is given the news of the birth of a female, his face becomes dark and he is filled with inward grief. He hides himself from the people because of the bad news he has received. Should he keep it with dishonour or bury it in the ground? Verily, evil is their decision." This passage depicts the shame and distress related to the birth of daughters, condemning the practice of infanticide driven by societal dishonour.

In these Qur'anic passages, Islam condemns the act of female infanticide and upholds the fundamental values and respect for all human beings. This starkly contrasts with the norms of pre-Islamic society and introduces a transformative ethical approach rooted in kindness, justice, and divine support.

### **Hadith Literature Addressing Female Infanticide:**

The Hadith literature, which records the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), provides valuable insights into his stance against female infanticide and his promotion of the dignity and value of daughters. One notable Hadith reported in Sunan Abu Dawood states: "He who has three daughters, or three sisters, or two daughters, or two sisters, and he supports them and fears Allah regarding them, they will be a shield for him from the Fire". This narration underscores the spiritual merit and divine reward associated with the proper care and support of daughters, challenging any notion that they are a burden.

Another Hadith recorded in Sahih Bukhari emphasises the virtue of supporting daughters: "Anyone who supports two daughters until they grow up will come on the Day of Judgment with me like this". Here, the Proph-

et raised his fingers to indicate his closeness to those who uphold this virtuous act, reflecting the high value placed on supporting and caring for daughters (Ibn Hajar, 1997) .

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also advocated for equitable treatment of daughters, as evidenced by the Hadith: “The best of you is those who are best to their families, and I am the best of you to my family” . This Hadith illustrates the importance of treating family members, including daughters, with kindness and respect, reinforcing the values of justice and equity (Ibn Majah, 2007).

Additionally, another Hadith explicitly condemns the practice of female infanticide: “Whoever has a daughter and he does not bury her alive, nor does he scorn her, nor does he prefer his son to her, Allah will enter him into Paradise” . This Hadith links the condemnation of female infanticide with the promise of divine reward, further emphasizing the value and importance of daughters in Islam.

The Hadith literature collectively reinforces the Qur’anic condemnation of female infanticide by presenting a comprehensive ethical stance that promotes the dignity and respect of all individuals, especially daughters. Islamic teachings, conveyed through both the Qur’an and Hadith, aimed to eradicate the practice of female infanticide and transform societal attitudes towards daughters.

## **PROPHETIC DECREES AND ACTIONS:**

### **Public Condemnations of Female Infanticide:**

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) publicly condemned the widespread practice of female infanticide. These public condemnations were not just moral proclamations but strategic efforts to change deep-seated societal behaviours. By addressing the issue openly, the Prophet aimed to shift public consciousness and instil the idea that all life is sacred. This direct challenge to patriarchal customs was a foundational step in reforming the treatment of women and children in society.

### **Implementation of Legal Penalties:**

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) took decisive legal action against female infanticide as part of a broader framework to protect the rights of the vulnerable. By imposing strict penalties for those involved in infanticide, he established a legal precedent that underscored the importance of valuing all lives . The penalties included severe fines and, in some cases, corporal punishment, aimed at deterring the practice and emphasizing its gravity . Additionally, perpetrators were required to provide restitution or

compensation to the victim's family, addressing the loss and demonstrating the seriousness of the crime (as cited by Watt, 1956). These reforms ensured that infanticide was no longer tolerated, reflecting the Prophet's unwavering commitment to justice and the sanctity of life.

### **Societal Mechanisms for Change:**

**Education and Awareness Campaigns :** Through sermons, public discussions, and the dissemination of Islamic teachings, the Prophet and his companions sought to educate the masses about the rights of women and the prohibition of infanticide. These campaigns were instrumental in reshaping social norms, emphasising the equality and dignity of all individuals, regardless of gender. By fostering a culture of learning, these efforts laid the groundwork for long-term societal change.

**Community Engagement and Support Systems:** In the early Islamic state of Medina, the establishment of community support systems was essential in addressing female infanticide. Central to this effort was the Charter of Medina , which laid the foundation for social cohesion and mutual support among diverse groups, including the Ansar (the Helpers) and the Muhajirun (the Emigrants) (Ibn Ishaq, 1955) . This charter fostered a sense of brotherhood and solidarity and outlined mechanisms for collective welfare .

Local mosques and community centres emerged as crucial resources, providing material and emotional support to families facing the pressures of raising daughters. This emphasis on communal responsibility fostered widespread support for protecting and nurturing female children. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) ensured that these reforms were deeply integrated into community-driven initiatives rather than being mere top-down directives. By embedding these principles in daily practices, the Prophet reinforced his vision of a just and compassionate society, making the eradication of female infanticide a grassroots effort that resonated with the broader populace.

According to *The Sealed Nectar* by Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri (1996) and *In the Footsteps of the Prophet: Lessons from the Life of Muhammad* by Tariq Ramadan (2007), the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) reforms included the abolition of female infanticide, significant advances in social justice, and the establishment of charity and welfare systems through zakat and sadaqah(charity). These reforms addressed economic pressures, improved the status and rights of women, prohibited usury, and promoted ethical business practices. Legal reforms ensured fairness in criminal and family matters, and the Charter of Medina promoted social cohesion and support among diverse groups.

## **INITIAL RESISTANCE AND CHALLENGES:**

**Opposition from Tribal Leaders and Traditionalists:** The Prophet's reforms encountered strong opposition from tribal leaders and traditionalists, who considered female infanticide essential for preserving family honour and economic security. These leaders viewed the Prophet's message as a threat to their authority and the prevailing social structure. Their resistance stemmed from concerns about losing influence over societal customs. This opposition underscores the persistence of patriarchal norms and the difficulties in driving social reform (Watt, 1956).

**Strategies Employed to Overcome Resistance:** To address the opposition, the Prophet utilized a blend of diplomatic efforts, persuasive communication, and religious instruction. He worked to garner the support of tribal leaders by highlighting the ethical and societal advantages of his reforms. Additionally, he formed alliances with those who shared his vision for a more equitable society. While legal enforcement was occasionally required to ensure adherence, the primary strategy focused on gradual persuasion and active community participation, ensuring long-term acceptance and sustainability (Ibn Kathir, 2000; Watt, 1956).

## **IMMEDIATE SOCIETAL IMPACT OF PROPHETIC REFORMS:**

### **Demographic Changes:**

#### **a) Reduction in Female Infant Mortality Rates:**

Through legal measures and moral teachings, the perceptions regarding females transitioned from being considered liabilities to being recognised as valuable and integral members of society (Khan, 2006). This shift contributed to a marked decrease in female infant mortality rates, leading to more balanced gender ratios and fostering a cultural transformation that valued women's roles within the community (Mernissi, 1991).

#### **b) Shift in Population Gender Ratios:**

As the practice of female infanticide declined, the previously skewed male-to-female population ratios began to normalise. This demographic change had significant implications for the social fabric of early Islamic communities, promoting greater gender diversity and contributing to more stable and inclusive community structures (Ramadan, 2007). The improved gender balance facilitated more equitable social interactions and integration.

#### **c) Enhanced Status of Women in Society:**

This transformation laid the groundwork for subsequent advancements in

women's rights, including improvements in education, legal protections, and increased public participation (Mernissi, 1991). The enhanced status of women marked a crucial development in the evolution of societal norms and gender equality (Siddiqi, 2001).

### **Changes in Family Dynamics and Inheritance Laws:**

The Prophet's reforms introduced notable changes to inheritance laws, granting women the right to inherit property—an unprecedented shift from pre-Islamic customs (Siddiqi, 2001). These changes empowered women economically, resulting in a fairer distribution of wealth within families. The reformed inheritance laws contributed to a more balanced social structure and enhanced the stability of family units by ensuring equitable resource allocation (Mernissi, 1991).

### **CONTINUITY IN THE POST-ISLAMIC WORLD:**

The early Islamic caliphates made notable achievements in implementing legislation to secure women's rights and champion social justice. According to Hallaq (2009), "Under the Rashidun Caliphs, particularly during the rule of Umar ibn al-Khattab (r. 634–644 CE), several legislative measures were introduced to promote justice and equity. Umar's reign was noted for his progressive stance on women's rights, including implementing reforms that curtailed practices such as female infanticide and enhancing the social and legal status of women". These reforms included the establishment of welfare systems and legal protections that advanced the status of women, addressing issues like female infanticide.

The Umayyad Caliphate continued this trajectory but their implementation was inconsistent across regions. While they were focused more on administrative consolidation and territorial expansion, some reforms related to social justice persisted. For instance, during the Umayyad period, Caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (r. 685–705 CE) implemented administrative reforms that indirectly affected social policies and notable gains in women's rights were scarce (Lapidus, 2002).

According to Gutas (2001), "The Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258 CE) was pivotal in promoting educational reforms and elevating women's roles in intellectual and public spheres. Caliphs like Harun al-Rashid (r. 786–809 CE) and Al-Mamun (r. 813–833 CE), were instrumental in establishing institutions that not only advanced learning but also facilitated the active participation of women in scholarly pursuits." This era saw women participating more actively in the public sphere, with several female scholars and poets gaining prominence.

**Women’s Participation in the Public Sphere:** As noted by Gutas (2001), “Fatima al-Fihri (circa 800–880 CE) made a profound impact on education and gender equality by founding the University of Al-Qayrawan in Fez, Morocco, in 859 CE. As a wealthy woman from Qayrawan, she used her inheritance to establish this influential institution, which became a leading centre for learning. Her initiative not only promoted intellectual growth but also confronted traditional gender roles, setting the stage for future generations of women to gain access to education and engage actively in public life. Fatima’s legacy underscores the early Islamic commitment to inclusive education and serves as a testament to women’s capacity for leadership and societal contribution.”

During the Abbasid era, social programs also played a crucial role in promoting women’s participation in public life. The introduction of legal reforms, such as the protection of women’s property rights and the regulation of marriage practices, aimed to create a more equitable society. These initiatives laid the groundwork for future advancements in women’s rights within the Islamic world.

### **Global Influence of Islamic Teachings on Infanticide:**

#### **Spread of Islamic Reforms Against Infanticide to Non-Arab Regions:**

As the Islamic empire expanded into regions such as Persia, North Africa, and the Indian subcontinent, the prohibition of female infanticide became part of local legal and social systems. The spread of these practices played a key role in integrating Islamic values related to preserving women and children into various cultural traditions.

### **How Prophetic Reform Influences the Global Anti-Infanticide Movements:**

By establishing a clear moral and legal stance against infanticide, these teachings laid the groundwork for later ethical and legal frameworks aimed at protecting children’s rights. Islamic principles, emphasising the value of life and the prohibition of infanticide, influenced the development of legal systems in regions where Islam spread. This influence is evident in modern international conventions, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which reflects these principles by safeguarding children from violence and discrimination (UNICEF, 2019). Organisations like UNICEF draw on universal ethical standards, including those rooted in Islamic traditions, to advocate against harmful practices such as infanticide, highlighting the lasting impact of prophetic reforms on global child protection efforts.

## **Causes of Female Infanticide: Connections to India and the Jahiliyah Period:**

This practice has deep-rooted causes that are influenced by a blend of cultural, economic, and societal factors. This issue, originating from the Jahiliyah period, persists in contemporary regions of India such as Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, and Gujarat. During the Jahiliyah period, female infanticide was driven by economic burdens associated with raising daughters, as well as by cultural norms that devalued women. In contemporary India, similar socio-economic pressures and traditional beliefs persist. Economic constraints and dowry demand lead many families to prefer male children, viewing daughters as financial liabilities rather than assets. This preference reflects a historical legacy of gender discrimination, where patriarchal norms justified the devaluation of female offspring.

Additionally, the lack of education and awareness about gender equality in historical and modern contexts contributes to the persistence of this practice. Insufficient access to education and resources in Rajasthan perpetuates the undervaluation of girls, maintaining the cycle of female infanticide. By understanding the historical and cultural continuity between the Jahiliyah period and contemporary practices, efforts can be better directed towards ending female infanticide and fostering a more equitable society.

## **THE ROLE OF PROPHETIC REFORMS IN ERADICATING FEMALE INFANTICIDE IN INDIA:**

Islamic teachings played a significant role in addressing and reducing female infanticide in India, including in regions like Rajasthan, where the practice was once prevalent. The principles established by Prophet Muhammad have influenced various aspects of social and legal reforms aimed at combating this harmful practice.

### **By Community Advocacy and Education By Religious Leadership and Reforms:**

In India, leaders of the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) have actively worked to educate communities about the ethical and religious imperatives against female infanticide, advocating for the protection of female children and challenging traditional practices (Khan, 2015). Their efforts have been instrumental in shifting societal attitudes and reinforcing the moral and legal arguments against infanticide within the Muslim community, thereby contributing to broader efforts to combat gender-based violence (Ahmed, 2018).

**By Legal and Policy Influence:** The principles of child protection emphasised in Islamic jurisprudence align with the objectives of Indian laws and policies aimed at preventing infanticide and promoting gender equality. For instance, the Indian government's initiatives to combat female infanticide and the implementation of the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act, which regulates the use of diagnostic techniques to prevent sex-selective abortions, reflect a commitment to protecting the rights of children and addressing gender discrimination .

**By Collaborative Efforts with NGOs:** International and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in India, such as Pragti and AVANI Women & Child Rights, have integrated Islamic principles into their campaigns against female infanticide. By incorporating Islamic ethical principles into their strategies, these organisations have significantly improved their outreach and effectiveness in combating female infanticide and gender-based violence. Prophetic reforms emphasise the value of every human life and the moral imperative to protect children, which has guided these NGOs in their efforts to combat gender-based violence and promote the rights of girls.

Pragti has advocated for a collaborative approach between the government and NGOs to address the critical issue of female infanticide. The organisation emphasises the need for extensive efforts to save the girl child, reflecting the prophetic teachings that stress the sanctity of life and the duty to support and protect vulnerable individuals . Similarly, AVANI Women & Child Rights incorporates, to eliminate gender-based violence through community engagement and educational programs.

These NGOs are part of a broader network working on systemic issues affecting female children in India. The alarming statistics on female foeticide and gender discrimination underscore the significance of such efforts. According to the Population Research Institute (PRI), approximately 15.8 million girls went missing in India due to prenatal sex selection between 1990 and 2018, with 550,000 in 2018 alone (PRI, 2018). The 2011 census revealed that only 65.46% of females were literate compared to 82.14% of males, highlighting ongoing educational disparities and gender bias (Census of India, 2011).

Local NGOs play a pivotal role in addressing these issues. For instance, the Ishita Sharma Foundation (MukkaMaar) trains girls from underprivileged backgrounds in self-defence, empowering them with skills and self-

worth (Ishita Sharma Foundation ). This training is crucial because the fear of sexual assault often limits women from exploring their full potential. The K.C. Mahindra Education Trust's Project Nanhi Kali supports the education of underprivileged girls, promoting literacy and higher learning (K.C. Mahindra Education Trust) . The Milaan Foundation works to empower girls from marginalised communities, while the Vishvodayaa Trust focuses on improving educational conditions for girls. Additionally, Ibtada in Rajasthan supports women's and girls' empowerment through self-help groups and rights advocacy.

## **FINDINGS:**

**Transformation of Societal Perceptions: Societal Shifts:** The introduction of Islamic teachings led to significant changes in societal attitudes towards women and girls. The prohibition of infanticide and the promotion of women's rights were revolutionary for the time and laid the foundation for ongoing reforms in gender equality. First in Islamic Persia (now Iran), legal reforms and social education played a key role. In North Africa during the 7th-8th centuries, Islamic teachings integrated into local laws decreased infanticide rates. Lastly, In the Indian Subcontinent (8th-13th centuries), the introduction of Sharia laws prohibiting infanticide marked a major shift in regional practices, highlighting the impact of Islamic legal and social reforms on reducing this practice.

**Contemporary Relevance: Modern India:** Despite historical reforms, gender discrimination and female infanticide persist in contemporary India. However, the principles derived from prophetic teachings continue to influence modern legal frameworks and grassroots movements aimed at combating these issues.

**Influence on Modern Legal and Social Frameworks: Legal Frameworks:** Islamic principles have been incorporated into contemporary legal systems in various regions, contributing to the fight against gender-based violence and discrimination. The relevance of prophetic teachings is evident in ongoing efforts to improve women's rights globally.

**Role of Islamic Scholars and Movements: The Muslim Women's Network:** Plays a crucial role in advocating for women's rights and gender justice through legal reforms and community support. Their efforts have been significant in advancing women's rights and addressing gender-based violence.

**Islamic Relief Worldwide:** Provides education and support for victims of

gender-based violence, contributing to global humanitarian efforts. Their work highlights the application of Islamic principles in addressing contemporary issues related to gender justice and support for vulnerable populations.

Key Finding of data: The Population Research Institute data underscores the severe impact of prenatal sex selection and highlights the critical need for continued advocacy and intervention.

## CONCLUSION:

This study highlights the profound impact of prophetic reforms in addressing female infanticide and reshaping societal views on women from pre-Islamic Arabia to the modern era. By prohibiting infanticide and advocating for women's rights, these early reforms set a crucial precedent for justice and equality. The continued relevance of these teachings is evident in contemporary struggles against gender discrimination, particularly in India, where they inform modern legal frameworks and grassroots efforts. This analysis underscores the lasting influence of prophetic principles in advancing women's rights and addressing gender disparities across societies.

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