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THE ROLE OF WELFARE INSTITUTIONS IN THE EDUCATION AND UPBRINGING OF ORPHANED CHILDREN IN SWAT: AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract
This study examines the role of welfare institutions in providing education and upbringing to orphaned children in District Swat, Pakistan. Drawing on the researcher's field visits, interviews with institutional administrators, and available documentary records, the study presents a detailed case analysis of five prominent institutions: the Khpal Kor Model Foundation (1996), the Child Protection Institute Zamung Kor (2021), Parwarish School (2009), Al-Furqan Welfare Public School (2009–10), and Maskan (1968). The paper situates these institutions within the broader historical and religious context of orphan care, tracing the global origins of the orphanage as an institution and outlining the Islamic teachings that underpin the ethical treatment and sponsorship of orphans. The findings indicate that, with one exception, the emergence of these institutions is closely tied to periods of conflict and crisis, particularly the displacement and violence experienced in Swat around 2009. Across institutions, a consistent pattern emerges: the integration of religious and secular education, reliance on zakat, charitable donations, and philanthropic sponsorship for financial sustainability, deliberate inclusion of non-orphaned community children to mitigate stigma, and structured periods of home leave to preserve family bonds. The study also identifies shared institutional challenges, including shortages of teaching staff and limited residential capacity, which constrain further expansion. The research concludes that these institutions play a substantial role not only in the material welfare of orphaned children but also in their moral, religious, and academic development, producing graduates who go on to contribute to fields such as medicine, engineering, and the armed forces. The study recommends increased resources, staffing, and capacity to enable these institutions to better serve the growing population of orphaned children in the region.

Keywords: *Orphan care, welfare institutions, Swat, Islamic education, child upbringing*

Introduction

Orphan hood represents a highly sensitive and delicate phase of human life, in which a child is deprived of parental affection, guidance, and upbringing. An orphanage is defined as an institution or residence established to shelter and raise orphaned children.[i] Various terms are used for this concept across different languages and cultures, such as "welfare home," "children's village," and "*dar al-atfal*." In the global literature, an orphanage is described as a public institution established for the care and

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protection of children who have lost their parents or whose parentage is unknown,[ii] while the Faith to Action Initiative (2014) defines such institutions as residential organizations dedicated to children whose parents are unable to provide for their upbringing.[iii] Historically, prior to 1729, no formal institution existed for the care of orphans; this responsibility fell largely upon close relatives. The world's first orphanage was established in 1729 in Natchez, Mississippi, in the United States, to care for children orphaned as a result of conflict between Native American and white settler populations. Between 1830 and 1850, private charitable organizations added fifty-six such institutions across America. By contrast, the history of orphanages in the Indian subcontinent remains considerably more obscure and poorly documented; an early nineteenth-century article in the “Bombay Times” confined the definition of orphanhood to young children, rather than extending it to adolescents approaching sixteen to eighteen years of age.[iv]

Recognizing the global significance of orphaned children, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) declared in 2013 that the 15th of Ramadan would be observed annually as "Orphans' Day," regarded as the first international day instituted by Muslim nations. Pakistan currently has an estimated 4.2 to 4.3 million orphaned children, while globally, in conflict-affected countries, this figure exceeds 132 million, of whom sixty million are located in Asia. Islam places particular emphasis on the rights of orphans and on their equitable treatment.[v] The Qur'an addresses the honor and dignity of orphans, the safeguarding of their property, and the adoption of gentle conduct toward them in numerous verses, as stated in Surah al-Duha: *"As for the orphan, do not oppress him."* The Hadith likewise commends placing a compassionate hand upon an orphan's head and equates the sponsorship of an orphan with jihad. Guided by this religious and moral teaching, numerous welfare institutions have been established in District Swat that are actively engaged in the education and upbringing of orphaned children. What follows is a detailed examination of five prominent institutions in District Swat, based on the researcher's personal visits, interviews with institutional administrators, and available documentary records.

Khpal Kor Model Foundation

This institution was founded by a group of young men affiliated with the Swat Scouts Open Group, who, owing to their involvement in the Scouts movement, were already active in community service. Between 1961 and 1981, District Swat witnessed a rising trend of contract killings, and a survey conducted by the group revealed that most of the individuals involved had fallen into the wrong hands as a consequence of orphanhood. On the basis of this observation, the institution known as "Khpal Kor" was founded in 1996 with only five children, under the patronage of Haji Muhammad Ali. The institution is located in Makan Bagh, Swat, and is registered with the Social Welfare Organisation under Ordinance XLVI of 1961; the land was donated by the government.[vi] As the administration does not wish the children to be addressed using the term "orphan," a formal resolution has been passed to avoid the use of this term both internally and externally. At present, approximately 980 fully sponsored students and around 600 community fee-paying students are enrolled at the institution. Administrative affairs are overseen by three wardens, one superintendent, and one medical technician.

The admission procedure requires the concerned individual to obtain an information form from the institution, which is verified through a survey team; following

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shortlisting and interviews, the most deserving child is granted admission, with efforts made to enroll the child at the nursery level. Notably, the institution enrolls not only orphaned children but also children from stable community households, so that orphaned children do not develop feelings of inferiority. Daily routines begin with prayer Qur'anic instruction, exercise, and regular inspection of room cleanliness. Instruction follows the standard curriculum, and students who fail to achieve 80 percent results are directed toward technical fields to enable future self-sufficiency. Annual exhibitions, recreational and educational excursions, and cleanliness campaigns also form part of the curriculum, and children are sent home for three days each month. Financially, the institution relies largely on sponsorships from philanthropists abroad and on government support, with a regular annual audit and published annual report. Graduates of the institution have gone on to serve in fields including engineering, the army, the air force, and medicine, and some now volunteer their services to the institution. The institution's principal limitation is restricted residential capacity, which does not accommodate more than one hundred children.[vii]

Child Protection Institute for State Children (Zamung Kor, Swat)

This institution was established under the Child Protection Act of 2010 and first opened in Peshawar in 2016. Its founder, Muhammad Farman, serves as Assistant Director and Social Welfare Organiser and has been associated with the institution since 2016. In 2021, the institution was established in the Kanju Township area of District Swat, following which separate campuses for girls were opened in Abbottabad, Dera Ismail Khan, and Peshawar. This is a fully government-run institution, with staff receiving salaries from the state. It currently enrolls approximately 100 to 104 children, generally between the ages of four and eight.[viii] A distinguishing feature of this institution is that it admits not only orphaned children in the strict sense but also children whose parents cannot be traced, children raised by drug-addicted parents, children found abandoned on the streets, or children placed under institutional care by court order due to divorce or separation disputes between parents. Upon admission, a psychologist conducts a fifteen-day psychological assessment of the child. The educational system follows the curriculum of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government, with a separate teacher assigned to each subject. The daily routine proceeds as follows: assembly and Qur'anic recitation classes at eight in the morning, academic activities until one in the afternoon, followed by return to the hostel, the noon prayer, lunch, rest, madrasa classes at four in the afternoon, the afternoon prayer, recreational activities, study time, and, following dinner, the night prayer and further study. Religious instruction includes jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Hadith, and Qur'anic issues, while the choice between memorization (*hifz*) and simple recitation (*nazira*) of the Qur'an is left to the child. Children are taken on monthly recreational excursions to provide a sense of domestic environment, and every two months they are sent home for a week in the company of a guardian; financially disadvantaged families also receive travel assistance ranging from fifty thousand to one hundred thousand rupees. Formal receipts are issued upon receiving zakat and charitable donations to ensure transparency for donors. Two wardens remain continuously present with the children for supervision, while two female staff members are responsible for their clothing and food. The institution's principal shortcoming is limited capacity and a shortage of beds.

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Parwarish School

Following the crisis that struck Swat in 2009, an estimated seven to ten thousand children were orphaned, prompting the founding of Parwarish School in November 2009. A team of volunteers identified orphaned children, and forty children were admitted in the first year alone. As the registration of non-governmental organizations was restricted at that time, the institution was registered with the Social Welfare Organisation under the 12 March provision of Ordinance XLVI of 1961. The institution's founder and current director is Naimullah, and it is located opposite Swat City Centre (Qambar). At present, approximately 375 to 400 students, from nursery through seventh grade, are enrolled, and the institution has consistently achieved notable positions in board examination results. Admission requires a written test for the child, an assessment of financial status, and the father's death certificate.

The daily routine begins with exercise, breakfast, and school attendance, extending through various sporting activities until the afternoon prayer, with recreational and educational excursions also conducted to Swat's mountainous tourist sites. The academic curriculum is based on the "Afaq Sun Series," while religious instruction includes basic Qur'anic reading (*qaida*), recitation (*nazira*), jurisprudence, Hadith, and Qur'anic issues. A monthly "Sports Day" is observed, and food is provided in accordance with principles of hygiene. Children are sent home for three days each month. The institution's mission is to protect children from social ills while producing active citizens through quality education, with efforts made to advance students to university level; the first graduating cohort completed their studies in 2020 and is currently enrolled in universities. The institution hopes that graduates, upon securing employment, will reimburse their educational expenses so that other deserving children may benefit. The institution's finances depend largely on charitable donations (*sadaqat*), zakat, and other forms of philanthropy.[ix]

Al-Furqan Welfare Public School for Orphans

This institution was established to assist children orphaned and rendered homeless during the turbulent circumstances of 2009–2010. Initially, volunteers from the organization conducted surveys to collect data on affected families. The institution's founder is Sardar Khan, and it is registered under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Charity Commission Act of 2019. The institution is located in Charbagh, Swat, and operates as a non-governmental organization (NGO). According to recent figures, approximately 200 to 400 orphaned children receive free education from kindergarten (K.G.) through matriculation (SSC). The daily routine begins with morning exercise, prayer, and Qur'anic recitation, and alongside religious instruction, a secular curriculum is also taught. Recreational and training excursions are periodically arranged for the students' personal development. The institution's most notable shortcoming is a shortage of teachers, and its remediation is expected to further improve the quality of education and upbringing provided.[x]

Maskan (Saidu Sharif, Swat)

The history of this institution traces back to 1968, when, at the initiative of Naseema Begum (daughter of Aurangzeb), a member of the family of the Wali of Swat, the institution was established to care for girls subjected to forced domestic labor. Volunteers removed such girls from various households and settled them in the former Dar-ul-Uloom building, which was subsequently named "Maskan." The institution was registered on 10 September 1968 with the Directorate General of

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Social Welfare, Government of Pakistan, Lahore, under registration number DSW/794. Its current patronage rests with Miangul Aurangzeb, of the family of the former Wali of Swat. The institution began with only four girls and now educates approximately sixty orphaned girls. A distinguishing feature of this institution is that the admission of men is prohibited, and formal written permission is required for any unavoidable necessity.

Admission of a girl requires that one or both of her parents have died and that a close guardian relative be available. The institution's curriculum follows that of government schools, and two female wardens, both graduates, supervise the girls. Zakat and charitable donations are received either in cash or directly through a bank account, and the institution's finances are largely sustained by the former ruling family, with partial government support. Graduates of the institution are enrolled in prestigious universities, and the institution continues to provide them with financial support. Alongside academic instruction, handicrafts and other vocational skills are also taught to ensure the girls' economic self-sufficiency. A shortage of teachers likewise remains a fundamental challenge for this institution.[xi]

Number of Orphaned Children Residing in Selected Orphanages in Swat District

Various organizations around the world provide care, education, and other forms of support to orphaned children. Similarly, several institutions in Swat District are engaged in the care and welfare of orphans through different programs and arrangements. However, some of these institutions are specifically established for orphaned children, where they receive education, accommodation, and other essential services.

For the purpose of this study, I visited five major orphanages in Swat District and met with their respective directors. Interviews were conducted with the directors to gather information about the role and functioning of these institutions in supporting orphaned children in Swat. One of the most significant aspects explored during these visits was the number of orphaned children currently residing and receiving education in these institutions. In addition, information regarding the services provided by the orphanages and other relevant aspects of their operations was also collected. The details of the information obtained through these visits and interviews are presented below

Khpal Kor Foundation			
Location	**Number of Children**	**Patron**	**Year of Establishment**
The institution is located in Makan Bagh [xii] . Swat	Initially, five children were enrolled in the institution. At present, approximately 980 children are receiving education and residential support, while around 600 additional students are enrolled through the	Haji Muhammad Ali serves as the patron of the institution.	The institution was established in 1996

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	community-fee .program		

	Child Protection Institute for State Children		
Location	**Number of Children**	**Patron**	**Year of Establishment**
The institution is located in Kanju [xiii].Township, Swat	The institution was established in Swat in 2021 and currently provides education and care to approximately 100–104 children.	The institution is headed by Muhammad Farman, who serves as the .Assistant Director	The Child Protection Institute for State Children was established in 2021.

	Parwarish School		
Location	**Number of Children**	**Patron**	**Year of Establishment**
The institution is located opposite Swat City Center in Qambar, Swat. [xiv]	Initially, 40 children were enrolled in the institution. At present, the institution has approximately 400 children enrolled.	Naeemullah serves as the Director and head of the institution.	The institution was established in 2009.

	Al-Furqan Welfare Public School for Orphans		
Location	**Number of Children**	**Patron**	**Year of Establishment**

The institution was established in 2010.	Approximately 400 students are currently enrolled in the institution.	Sardar Khan serves as the patron of the institution.	The institution is located in Charbagh, Swat. [xv]

Maskan

Location	Number of Children	Patron	Year of Establishment
The institution is located in Saidu Sharif, Swat. [xvi]	The institution initially started with four girls. At present, approximately 60 girls are receiving .education there	The institution is patronized by the former ruler of Swat, Miangul Aurangzeb.	The institution was established in 1968.

Conclusion

The foregoing study demonstrates that numerous welfare institutions are operating effectively in District Swat for the care, education, and upbringing of orphaned children, prominent among them being the Khpal Kor Model Foundation (1996), the Child Protection Institute Zamung Kor (2021), Parwarish School (2009), Al-Furqan Welfare Public School (2009–10), and Maskan (1968). The following conclusions may be drawn from this research:

First, with the exception of the 1968 case, the founding of most institutions is a direct outcome of the natural and human crises of 2009 (conflict and displacement), indicating that the emergence of charitable institutions at the social level is frequently a response occurring in the aftermath of tragedy. Second, all institutions offer a combination of religious and secular education, incorporating congregational prayer, Qur'anic recitation and memorization, jurisprudence and Hadith, alongside instruction in the official curriculum, reflecting these institutions' deep attachment to Islamic social values. Third, financially, these institutions depend on zakat, charitable donations, sponsorships from abroad, and partial government support, with the Child Protection Institute being the sole institution operating entirely under government

administration. Fourth, most institutions enroll other community children alongside orphans to shield them from feelings of orphanhood, and a system of periodic home visits is maintained throughout the year to preserve family ties. Fifth, all institutions face common challenges related to shortages of staff, teachers, and residential capacity, which continue to impede their expansion.

On the whole, it may be concluded that these welfare institutions in District Swat play a significant role not only in the physical and financial support of orphaned children but also in their moral, religious, and educational upbringing, and it is for this reason that graduates of these institutions are serving as productive members of society in medicine, engineering, the armed forces, and other walks of life. Nevertheless, with increased resources, greater numbers of teachers, and expanded residential capacity, these institutions could provide even better services for the welfare of orphaned children in the future.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed for the improvement and sustainability of welfare institutions engaged in the education and upbringing of orphaned children in District Swat:

1. Expansion of Residential Capacity: Given that limited residential capacity was identified as a common constraint across nearly all institutions studied, concerned authorities and philanthropic donors should prioritize funding for the construction of additional hostels and dormitories to accommodate a greater number of deserving orphaned children.

2. Recruitment of Qualified Teaching Staff: Since a shortage of teachers emerged as a shared challenge, particularly at Al-Furqan Welfare Public School and Maskan, institutions should be supported in recruiting and retaining qualified, subject-specialist teachers, with competitive compensation to reduce staff turnover.

3. Standardization of Registration and Regulatory Oversight: Given that these institutions are registered under varying legal frameworks (the 1961 Ordinance, the Child Protection Act 2010, and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Charity Commission Act 2019), a unified regulatory and monitoring mechanism should be established to ensure consistent standards of care, transparency, and accountability across all orphan welfare institutions in the district.

4. Institutionalization of Psychological Support Services: Following the model of the Child Protection Institute, which conducts a structured psychological assessment upon admission, other institutions should be encouraged to incorporate trained counselors and ongoing mental health support, given the emotional trauma commonly associated with orphanhood, displacement, and loss.

5. Diversification of Funding Sources: As most institutions depend heavily on zakat, charitable donations, and foreign sponsorship, efforts should be made to diversify funding through government grants, endowment funds, and partnerships with local and international NGOs, thereby reducing dependency on any single funding stream.

6. Strengthening of Vocational and Technical Training: Building on the practice observed at the Khpal Kor Model Foundation, other institutions should expand vocational and technical training programs for students unable to meet academic thresholds, ensuring that all graduates, regardless of academic performance, are equipped for self-sufficient livelihoods.

7. Preservation of Family and Community Ties: The practice of periodic home visits and the inclusion of non-orphaned community children should be adopted more widely, as these measures appear effective in mitigating the psychological and social stigma associated with orphanhood.

8. Establishment of Alumni Support Networks: Institutions such as Parwarish School and Maskan, which maintain relationships with graduates pursuing higher education, should formalize alumni networks to facilitate financial reciprocity, mentorship, and continued institutional support, as envisioned in Parwarish School's model of graduates repaying educational costs.

9. Gender-Sensitive Institutional Policies: Institutions catering exclusively to girls, such as Maskan, should receive targeted support to expand capacity and staffing, given the particular protective and cultural sensitivities involved in the care of orphaned girls.

10. Further Research and Data Collection: Given the scarcity of comprehensive, up-to-date data on orphan welfare institutions in Swat and the broader region, future research should undertake a wider survey across additional districts to assess the scalability of effective practices identified in this study and to inform evidence-based policymaking.

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[x] This information was obtained through an interview with Sardar Khan, Director of the institution (personal communication, November 4, 2024).

[xi] This information was obtained through an interview with Usman Ghani, the institution’s supervisor (U. Ghani, personal communication, 2024)

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[xii] The information presented in this table was obtained through an interview with the institution's representative
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