

# Historical Context of Early Marriages

## A Comparative Study between Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s Time and Western Societies

### *Introduction*

In modern times, some critics question the marriage of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to Aisha (RA), often labeling it through a modern psychological lens as “child marriage.” However, such judgments overlook the vast historical and cultural differences between the 7th century and the modern era. This document aims to provide a historically grounded comparison between the marriage practices in Prophet Muhammad's time and those of Medieval Europe and early America.

### **1. Misconceptions about Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)**

The Prophet's marriage to Aisha (RA) was not an act of exploitation or immorality, as sometimes alleged. It was a socially accepted and customary practice within Arabian society at that time. Girls were considered eligible for marriage after reaching physical maturity (puberty), which was consistent with the norms of virtually all ancient civilizations. There is no evidence, either from Islamic or non-Islamic sources, that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) ever engaged in any immoral or abusive behavior.

### **2. Marriage Norms in 7th-Century Arabia**

In 7th-century Arabia, as in other ancient societies, chronological age was less important than physical and social maturity. The environment, lifestyle, and climate caused girls to reach puberty at an earlier age than in colder climates. Once maturity was reached, marriage was viewed as a way to ensure protection, stability, and family lineage.

### **3. Early Marriage Traditions in Medieval Europe**

In Medieval Europe, early marriage was also a common and legally accepted practice: - According to Canon Law (Gratian's Decretum, c.1140), the legal minimum marriage age was 12 for girls and 14 for boys. - The Catholic Encyclopedia (1910) confirms this standard: “According to the Canon Law, the minimum age for marriage was twelve for girls and fourteen for boys.” - King Richard II of England married Isabella of Valois in 1396 when she was only six years old, though the marriage was consummated later. - Margaret Beaufort, the mother of King Henry VII, was married at age 12 and gave birth at 13. These examples demonstrate that early marriages were socially acceptable and legal within European Christian culture.

### **4. Early Marriage in Colonial and 19th-Century America**

Historical records from the United States also show similar norms: - In the 18th and 19th centuries, most U.S. states set the legal age of marriage for girls at 10 to 12 years old. - According to “The Journal of Social History” (2002), “In the late 19th century, most U.S. states set the age of consent between 10 and 12 years old.” - The Cornell Law School archives and NBER historical reports confirm that these laws persisted until reforms in the early 20th century. Thus, Western societies practiced early marriage for centuries before age reforms were introduced.

## **5. Comparative Analysis**

Comparing these societies reveals that early marriage was a global norm. It cannot be morally or logically isolated to one person or culture. Prophet Muhammad's marriage to Aisha (RA) was fully aligned with the standards of his time — socially, morally, and legally. The Western critique often reflects a modern double standard, judging ancient events through 21st-century moral frameworks.

## **6. Conclusion**

Historical evidence clearly shows that early marriage was a universal phenomenon across civilizations — including the very societies that now criticize Islam. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was known for his compassion, justice, and protection of women's rights, standing in stark contrast to the exploitation and injustice common in other societies of his era. Therefore, labeling him with modern psychological terms such as "pedophile" is not only historically inaccurate but intellectually dishonest.

## **References**

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