

The Concept of Political System in Islam: A Review

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Abstract

The political system is the most inclusive system of behavior in a society for the authoritative allocation of values.¹ In the present time of globalization, Islam is now being considered a potential political system. Muslims are majority in more than sixty countries across the world. Muslims reside everywhere in the world, from east to west and from north to south. Many Muslims want to lead their life according to the rules and regulations of Islam. Every Muslim is more or less influenced by the socio-economic and political views of Islam. In the contemporary world, democracy and socialism are two popular political systems. Islam has its own principles to form an independent political system. Upon the principles of Islam, the Prophet had established a state in Medina where he ensured equality and justice for all regardless of religion, caste, creed, and tribes. In the state of Medina Christians and Jews enjoyed the same facilities as the Muslims did. Muslims had to provide kharaj and the non-Muslims had to provide jizya to the government for enjoying citizen rights and security. In an Islamic political system, people from all classes could enjoy equal and proper opportunity. There is nothing beyond Islam in the matter of earth and haven. This paper is an attempt to study features of Islamic political system. It attempts to study Islamic political system as an academic phenomenon as it is now being studied across the world.

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¹ David Easton, *A Framework for Political Analysis*, N.J, Prentice hall Inc., Englewood cliffs, 1965, p. 56.

Introduction

Western people -- either democrat or socialist -- consider Islam as political challenge to the western civilization. There are some ingredients in Islam which the Islamists consider better than democracy and socialism. Islam may replace both democracy and socialism. Islam has provided the rules and regulations for every sector of life, from individual cleanliness, rules of trade to the structures and politics of the society. Islam must not be disconnected from social, political and economic life, where the primary act of faith is to try to execute Allah's will in both private and public life. Muslims as well as the world around them need to be in total submission to Allah and His will. Furthermore, the Muslims know that this idea of His rule must be established on earth in order to create an egalitarian society. According to many Muslims, the concept of religion and state is inseparable whatever the form of government a Muslim society chooses to have. All its constituents must be in direct concordance to the precepts of religion. In reality, Islam is basically a religion of tolerance, justice, fair play and universal brotherhood. Islam gave the world certain valuable principles that are as applicable today as they were fourteen centuries ago. Islam teaches its followers to show respect for other religions and Prophets of other religions such as Christianity and Judaism.² There is no doubt that an Islamic political system would be bound by the laws, principles and spirit of Qur'an and Sunnah. Moreover, violation or going directly against any sacred teaching of Islam could not be tolerated in an Islamic political system. The political system of Islam has been based upon three principles: *Tawhid* (Oneness of Allah) *Risalat* (Prophethood) and *Khilafat* (Caliphate). It is difficult to comprehend the various aspects of the Islamic polity without fully

² G.W Choudhury, *Islam and the Contemporary World*, Dhaka, Academic publishers, 1991, p. 42.

understanding these three principles. *Tawhid* means that Allah and Allah alone is the Creator, Sustainer and Master of this universe and of all that exist in it -- organic or inorganic.

The medium through which we receive the law of Allah is known as *Risalat*. The Prophet Mohammad, in accordance with the intention of divine book, set up for us a model of the system of life in Islam by practically implementing the law and providing necessary details where required. The combination of these two elements according to Islamic terminology is called the *Shariah*. It is the *Khilafat* on earth which encompasses the range of activities of human being in this universe; man becomes ready to implement Allah's teaching as communicated through the message of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This is exactly what Islam means when it says that man is the *Khalifah* of Allah on the earth. The state that is established in accordance with this political theory will have to fulfill the purpose and intent of Allah by working within the limits prescribed by Him and in conformity with his instruction and injunction. This paper is an attempt to study features of Islamic political system. It attempts to study Islamic political system as an academic phenomenon as it is now being studied across the world as an important academic subject.

Concept of Sovereignty in Islam

In Islamic political system, sovereignty belongs to only Allah. The explicit commands of Allah, as laid down in the Qur'an, cannot be changed and must be adhered to by all. Moreover, the principle of oneness/*Tawhid* further asserts that the sovereignty of Allah is fulfilled by the vice-regency of a single person in each age, called the Imam/leader. "Of all the divine attributes mentioned in the Qur'an, those which are frequently brought to view for the imitation of man are the attributes of *Rububiat* (Providence), *Adl* (Justice) and *Rahmat* (Graciousness or Mercy). The first attribute postulates that Allah is the Allah of no particular section of

mankind or of any particular group of people. He is the Allah of all mankind and of everything else in the universe, both visible to man and invisible, and is the nourisher, sustainer and developer of every one of them.³ According to Islamic law Allah is the source of all power and laws. It is Allah who knows what is good and what is bad for His servants. Human beings cannot change His law. His order is unchangeable by any parliament or any government which claims it to be Islamic. In Islamic political system, Allah is the sole sovereign of human affairs. The worship of the one true Allah may be established in every village, city and house hold; that skepticism and all infidelity may be banished for ever from the world; that is Asia Europe, Africa and America may be united in a vast federation of humanity.⁴

In the traditional democratic system, sovereignty belongs to the people and that is exercised by parliament which is supposed to represent the people. But, in Islamic political system, sovereignty belongs absolutely to Allah and Allah is the only legislator, though there are some options to legislate under *Majlish Al Shura* in a prescribed form guided by *Shariah*. Allah is the sole owner of all power and authority but men are the representatives of Allah in the world and carry out all the duties on behalf of Allah and in the name of Allah in this universe. Allah is the first and last and ever sustainable in the world and also in the heaven but man has to die and has a very limited and uncertain life. According to Islam, Allah has created this universe and mankind to demonstrate his Excellency. Some people think that Prophets are equivalent to Allah; Allah is incomparable to any one of His creatures. But the Prophets are the representatives and messengers of Allah to the

³ Syed Abdul Latif, *Bases of Islamic Culture*, Delhi, Idarahi-1, Adabiyat-1, 1977, p. 08.

⁴ M. Ahsan Ullah, *History of the Muslim World*, New Delhi, Deep and Deep Publications, 1996, p. 12.

mankind in this globe. "The British parliament together with the king is the sovereign constitutional and legislative authority according to principles and practices of British constitution and there is distinction between constitutional law and ordinary laws.⁵ But, in Islam, *Khalifa* or members of *Shura* are not sovereign to legislate any law subjugating the laws of *Shariah*.

The representative of Allah and the *Khalifas* of Islam like Hazrat Abu Bakar (R) Hazrat Umar (R) Hazrat Usman (R) and Hazrat Ali (R) never claimed themselves as sovereign except Allah. So, in the concept of Islamic political system all power and authority comes from Allah and man is his representative in this world. The Islamic political system makes the ruler and the government responsible firstly to Allah and then to the people. The ruler and the ruled are both the *Khalifas* and representatives of Allah and the ruler shall have to work for the welfare of the people according to Qur'an and Sunnah.

Khilafah of Mankind: Vice-regency of man

Khilafah refers to those human beings who should implement the will of Allah on earth as His deputy or agent. Human beings will carry out the will of Allah (SWT) on His behalf as a trust (Amanah). *Khilafah* is a trust. The agency for running the affairs of the state will be established in accordance with the will of individuals, their opinion will be decisive in the formation of the government, which will be run with their advice and in accordance with their wishes, whoever gains their confidence will carry out the duties of the caliphate on their behalf, and when he loses his confidence he will have to relinquish his office. In this respect, the political system in Islam is as perfect a democracy as

⁵ Abdul Bari Sarker, *Concept of Islamic Statecraft*, Dhaka, Islamic foundation, 1987, p. 51.

ever can be.⁶ The *Khalifah* must adhere strictly to the dictates of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and administer the affairs of the state in consultation with the people. No decision will ever be taken on any important matter without the advice of the people.⁷

Man is vice-regent, the agent representative of Allah (SWT) on earth. Allah is the sovereign and man is His representative, man should do as Allah commands him to do. But he has a choice to either obey or disobey Allah and he will be judged on the Day of Judgment on the basis of the choice he makes. "The period of the Prophet (PBUH) and his rightly guided successors in Medinah is regarded as the base of the Islamic edifice in history. The achievement of that period was extraordinary on all forms, in all fields. Muslims in every age looked to them for inspiration and norms.⁸ *Khilafah* is not theocracy of the kind that once existed in Europe. The very basis of government in Islam is morality defined by Allah and the ruler has to be the embodiment of such men as Prophets to do justice. This is exactly what Islam means when it says that man is *Khalifah* (Representative) of Allah on the earth. The state, that is established in accordance with this political theory will have to fulfill the purpose and intent of Allah by working on Allah's earth within the limits prescribed by Him and in conformity with his instructions and injunctions. It is this *Khilafah* on earth which encompasses the range of activities of the human being, exploration of its resources and energies, fulfillment of Allah's purpose of making full use of its resources and developing life on it. In brief, this task requires the implementation of Allah's will which is in harmony with the divine law governing the whole universe.

⁶ G.W. Choudhury, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

⁷ Abdul Rashid Moten, *Political Science: an Islamic Perspective*, London, Macmillan Press, 1996, p. 92.

⁸ Abdul Rashid Moten, *ibid.*, p. 93.

Legislation by Shura

Islam teaches us to run a government, to make legislation and decision by the process of *Shura* which means taking decision by consultation and participation. This is an important part of the Islamic political system. There is no scope for despotism in Islam. The Qur'an and Sunnah will be the basis of legislation in Islam."The parliament or *Majlish-e-Shura*, the Consultative body, shall comprise one house, known as the Islamic state assembly or house of the people in which subject to the provision of the *Shariah* and the *Sunnah* on such matter of which guidance shall be available from the guidance council on Islamic affairs and the authority assigned to the constitutional and guardianship council, shall be vested in the legislative authority.⁹

The Qur'an commands the Muslims to make their decision after consultation, either on a public matter or a private one. The practice of the Prophet Muhammad (Sunnah) has reinforced this disposition. For, in spite of the exceptional quality of his being guided by the divine revelations, the prophet always consulted his *Sahabas* (Companions) and the representatives of the tribes of adherents, before making decisions. The first Caliphs were no less ardent in their defense of consultative institutions. Moreover, legislation in an Islamic state will be restricted within the limits prescribed by the law of the *Shariah*. As for the commandments which are liable to two or more interpretations, the duty of ascertaining the real intent of the *Shariah*, will depend on people possessing a specialized knowledge of the *Shariah* law. A vast area will still be available for legislation or questions not covered by any specific injunctions of the *Shariah* and the advisory council or legislature will be free to legislate on these matters.

⁹ S. B Choudhury, *The Profile of an Islamic State*, Dhaka, Islamic foundation, 1984, p .45.

"Islam approves the majority rule, but prevents the hostile majority to tyrannize over the minority -- whether political, religious, or economic.¹⁰ Consultation is obligatory at all levels of the Islamic government. "In order to run state affairs, the *Khalifah* used to consult with the *Shura* (legislative body) during the period of *Khulafa-e-Rashedin* and the *Sahabis* (Companions of Prophet Muhammad) were the members of that consultative body.¹¹ The Prophet repeatedly commanded the Muslims to engage into consultation.

The Judiciary

In Islam, the judiciary is not placed under the control of the executive. It derives its authority directly from *Shariah* and is answerable only to Allah. The judges, no doubt, can be appointed by the government but once a judge has occupied the bench he will have to administer justice according to the law of Allah in an impartial manner. The organs and functions of the government will also be within his legal jurisdiction. So much so that even the highest executive authority of the government can be made to appear in a court of law as a plaintiff or defendant like any other citizen of the state. Rulers and the ruled are subject to the same law and there can be no discrimination on the basis of position, power or privilege. Islam stands for equality and scrupulously sticks to this principle in social, economic and political realms alike."With a view to performing responsibilities of the judiciary, a high judicial council shall be formed to be the highest judicial authority, taking care of appropriate justice's organizations, civil and criminal in the context of the *Shariah* and *Sunnah*. It shall recruit competent and righteous judges. It shall concern itself with their appointment,

¹⁰ Abdul Bari Sarker, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

¹¹ Mofizullal Kabir, *Islam O Khilafat* (Islam and Khilafah) Dhaka, Abdul Kadir Khan, July 1974, p. 152.

promotion, dismissal, assignment of post and transfer and other administrative measures.¹²

The high judicial council shall be composed of the following posts:

1. The Chief Justice or president of Supreme Court, to be appointed by the Amir of the state. He shall be an expert in Islamic and other laws.
2. The attorney general or the prosecutor general to be appointed by the Amir on the advice of the Minister of justice (Expert in Islamic and other laws)
3. Three judges versed in Islamic principles, jurisprudence and other laws, are to be elected by the judicial bar of the country. The constitutional and guardianship council will arrange the election and communicate the result to the chief justice for necessary action.

They shall be elected for 5 years without any provision of re-election. The high judicial council shall make its own laws and rules and regulations for appointment, promotion etc. The salaries of the judges shall be given from the budget which shall be presented by the Amir to the assembly.¹³ Islam arose in a society whose only notion of law was established custom and traditions sanctioned by public opinion. To this, Islam added the concept of positive law as divine ordinance through revelation and with the substitution of Prophet's sayings (Hadith). All these together combined into a sacred law, the *Shariah*.¹⁴ Islamic political system ensures equality for all citizens before the law. It does not

¹² S. B. Choudhury, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 53-54.

¹⁴ Harris.J Proctor (ed.), *Islam and International Relation*, London, Frederick A. Praeger Inc., 1965, p. 08.

recognize any discrimination among the citizens as all of them are considered the *Khalifas* of Allah, on the basis of language, color, territory, sex or descent. Islam recognizes the preference of one over the other only on the basis of *Taqwa* (Piety or fear of Allah). One who fears Allah is the noblest in Islam.

The Executive

Islam emerged under a political organization, and its earliest differences of opinion were expressed on political issues. Its identification with the political leadership was even further emphasized by the accepted obligation to extend the political rule of Islam to the utmost limits and by the actual conflicts that it waged with the outer world.¹⁵ The responsibility of the government in an Islamic state is entrusted with the Amir (leader or chief) who may be similar to the President or the Prime Minister in the conventional democratic state. The basic qualifications for the election of an Amir are that he should command the *Ablul Hal Wal Aqd* (the constitutional body). They are recruited from among the scholars (of Islam), leaders, and notables who effectively have the duty to carry out this task of appointing the ruler. In this, they do not act on their own personal preference, but on behalf of the whole nation being, as they are, its representatives.

The Amir can retain office only so long as he observes Shariah laws. Being himself the primary example of it both in his dealings and conduct, honoring his commitments and being true to his trust, he should conform to the conditions originally stipulated upon his office and will have to vacate his office when he loses this confidence. But, as long as he retains such confidence he will have the authority to govern and exercise the powers of the Government, of course, in consultation with the *Shura* (the Advisory Council) and within the limits set by *Shariah*. Every

¹⁵ *ibid*, p. 6.

citizen will have the right to criticize the Amir should he deviate from the straight path, fail to honor the trust laid in him, transgress and impose tyranny over people, change his conduct for the worst, freeze the implementation of Allah's penal code, or flouts Allah's regulations in any way. If he fails to live up to one of the conditions stipulated for his eligibility to the office, the nation has the right to overrule his judgment either by correcting him or by deposing him.

The Amir shall be a person of good name, pious and trustworthy believing in the tenets of Islam, as enshrined in the holy Qur'an and the Sunnah and practices of Prophet Mohammad. The Amir shall be elected on the basis of adult franchise of male and female by direct election. Franchise will be made eligible for naturalized citizens of the state as well as domiciled and other kind of citizens. In the election, separate arrangement for voting by male and female shall be made under separate male and female staff.

Qualifications for becoming an Amir are as follows.

1. Not less than 40 years of age and not more than 63 years of age.
2. Should not have been removed from the office of the Amir under the Constitution.
3. Shall not be qualified for the election as a member of Islamic state assembly or parliament, *Majlish-e-Shura*.
4. Should not have been convicted for any criminal offences. He shall not be an invalid or bankrupt person, declared by a competent authority.¹⁶

¹⁶ S. B Choudhury, *op.cit.*, p. 38.

The Islamic principles of morality must be observed at all cost and in all walks of life. Hence it lays down an unalterable policy for the state to base its politics on justice, truth and honesty. It is not prepared, under any circumstances whatsoever, to tolerate fraud, falsehood and injustice for the sake of any political, administrative or national expediency. Whether it be the mutual relations of the rulers and ruled within the state, or the relations between the states, precedence must always be given to truth, honesty and justice over material consideration. It imposes similar obligations on the state as well as on the individual to fulfill all contracts and standards for carrying out duties along with the rights and not to forget the rights of others when expecting them to fulfill their obligations. It is the moral obligation of the administration to use power and authority for the establishment of justice and not for the perpetuation of injustice; to look upon duty as a sacred obligation and to fulfill it scrupulously; and to regard power as a trust from Allah and use it with the belief that one has to render an account of one's actions to him in the hereafter.

According to Islam, the ruler, the ruled, the head of state and the people are equal. The head of the state has to face the judiciary like an ordinary citizen.¹⁷ Umar (R), the *Khalifah* of Islam, stated that the Prophet once addressed us: "shall I tell you which of your administration are good people and which are not good? The good administrators are those whom you love and who love you and for whose well being you pray, and who pray for your well being. The administrators who are not good are those who are not pleased with you, and whom you curse and who curse you. (Tirmizia).¹⁸ The holy Qur'an clearly states that the aim and

¹⁷ A. N. M Abdur Rahman (ed.), *Islami Rashtro Beboztha* (Political System of Islam), Dhaka, *Islamic Foundation*, November 2004, p. 169.

¹⁸ Syed Abdul Latif, *op. cit.*, p.196.

purpose of this state is the establishment, maintenance, and development of those virtues, with which the creator of this universe wishes the human life to be adorned and the prevention and eradication of those evils the presence of which in human life is utterly abhorrent to Allah.

Human Rights

Although an Islamic state may be set up in any portion of the earth, Islam does not seek to restrict human rights or privileges to the geographical limits within its own state. Islam has laid down some universal fundamental rights for humanity as a whole which are to be observed and respected under all circumstances whether such a person is resident within the territory of the Islamic state or outside it, and whether he is at peace with the state or at war."One of the fundamental postulates of Islamic concept of life is : individual enterprise and responsibility with framework of limited free will of men; and this has laid the foundation of Islamic democratic society- a society in which the excess of individual license (as opposed to liberty) are precluded. That is why not merely fullest development but most perfect development of individual selves will be presumed in an Islamic democracy.¹⁹ Human blood is sacred in any case and can not be spilled without justification. It's not permissible to oppress women; children, and people, sick persons or the wounded. Women's honor and chastity are worthy of respect under all circumstances. The hungry must be fed, the naked clothed and the wounded treated medically irrespective of whether they belong to the Islamic community or not; even if they are from amongst its enemies. The west has studied Islam for centuries through its scholars, libraries and now sophisticated technology -- but in the main it has failed to

¹⁹ Raihan Sharif, *Islamic Social Framework*, Dhaka, Islamic Foundation, November 1980, p.54

understand both Muslims and their societies. Muslims, who rarely study the West, believe that though the western scholars understand its words and deeds they do it with a hostile attitude. The double misconception is reproduced through the prism of philosophic and historical opposition to Islam. It is the canker lying at the heart of the Muslim endeavour.²⁰ The rights of citizenship in Islamic state are not confined to persons born within the limits of state but are granted to every Muslim irrespective of his place of birth. In Islam, liberty and human rights are nearer to each other. Harold J. Laski told about liberty and equality: "by liberty I mean the eager maintenance of that atmosphere in which men have the opportunity to be their best selves; liberty, therefore, is a product of rights. A state built upon the conditions essential to the full development of our faculties will confer freedom upon its citizens."²¹

A Muslim ipso facto becomes the citizen of an Islamic state as soon as he sets his foot on its territory with the intent to live there in and thus enjoys equal rights of citizenship along with those who acquire its citizenship by birth right. "Islam is a religious way of life which contains diverse elements, all bound together in a certain unity of outlook by the common belief in God and his Prophet who had received a revelation -- the final revelation -- in the form of the Qur'an, the precious book."²² "Said the Prophet: Allah has fixed a certain portion of the wealth of every rich man such as shall suffice the needs of the poor. If, nevertheless, people are found hungry and naked and indigent, the situation is due to the negligence and miserliness of the rich and God will take account of

²⁰ Akbar S. Ahmed, *Post Modernism and Islam*, Delhi, "India penguin books", 1993, p. 37.

²¹ Harold J. Laski, *A Grammar of Politics*, London, *George Allen and Unwin*, December 1967, p. 142.

²² Erwin I. J Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam*, London, Cambridge University press, 1968, p. 2.

the defaulting rich on the Day of Judgment. Perfection of living in Islam lies in the payment of what is due to the poor.²³ In an Islamic state, every Muslim is to be regarded as eligible and fit for all positions of the highest responsibilities without any discrimination on the basis of race, color, or class. "Addressing a gathering during his last hajj, said the Prophet: O people! Your God is but one, and the father of each one of you is but one. The Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, the fair colored over the colored, or the black colored over the fair colored, except by the righteousness he displays in life (Ahmad Musnad).²⁴ Islam has also laid down certain rights for the non-Muslims who may be living within the boundaries of an Islamic state and these rights must form part of the Islamic Constitution. According to the terminology such non-Muslims are *Dhimme* (the Covenant) implying that the Islamic state has entered into a covenant with them and guaranteed their protection.

Islam and Democracy

Muslims today are debating the relationship between Islam and democratic institutions in their societies. While most Muslims wish for greater political participations, the rule of law, governmental accountability, freedom, and human rights, there are many different ways to achieve these goals. To some, Islam has its own mechanism, which is prelude to democratic institutions. Still others contend that Islam is fully capable of accommodating and supporting democratic institutions. Engaging in a process of reform, they argue for the compatibility of democracy, by using traditional Islamic concepts like consultation (*Shura*) between the ruler and the ruled, community consensus (*Ijma*), public interest (*Masalah*), and scripture-based opinion (*Ijtihad*) and (*Kiyas*) use of

²³ Syed Abdul Latif, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

²⁴ Syed Abdul Latif, *ibid.*, p.179-180.

judgment. This mechanism can be used to support forms of government with systems of checks and balances among the executive, legislature and judiciary. However, authoritarian rulers suppress democratic institutions. "Muslim Jurists and political thinkers, likewise, upheld the view that whoever is entrusted with the task of governing the affairs of the *Ummah* should discharge his duties in consultation with *Ahl al-Shura*.²⁵ The *Khalifah* is also answerable to the *Shura* for all his actions.²⁶ In general, one can see that Islam is a religion which not only governs the private religious life of an individual, but also mandates and regulates all aspects of public life.

There is no doubt that Islam promotes egalitarianism, social and human rights, but the reality is that the method of rulership and its selection in Islam is different from the conventional way of selecting rulers in Western-type democracies. In Islam, sovereignty belongs to Allah alone and a divinely appointed Imam runs the *Ummah* on earth. There is no requirement for popular sovereignty in Islam. Again, the unalterable character of the Quranic laws is a guarantee for the right of the individual; for no member of majority can deprive him of his Quranic rights.²⁷ Islam approves the majority rule, but prevents the hostile majority to tyrannize over the minority whether political, religious, or economic, etc.²⁸ "Islam does not absolve individual from the responsibility of his own act, because he is considered to be a rational being."²⁹ So it has given as much emphasis to the collective aspect of the society as to every particular individual.³⁰ "Throughout the Islamic history, the ruling system was referred to as *Khilafah*, which means "representation".

²⁵ Abdul Rashid Moten *op. cit.*, p. 121.

²⁶ Abdul Rashid Moten, *ibid.*, p.121.

²⁷ Abdul Bari Sarker, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

Man, according to Islam, is the representative of Allah on earth, his vice-gerent; that is to say, by virtue of the powers delegated to him by Allah and within the limits prescribed, he is required to exercise divine authority.³¹

Some western researchers support the Islamists' claim that parliamentary democracy and representative elections are not only compatible with Islam, but also Islam actually encourages democracy. Among the best known advocates of such idea is John L. Esposito, founding Director of the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim Christianity Understanding (ACMCU) at Georgetown University and the author or editor of numerous books about Islam and Islamic movements. Esposito and his various co-authors have built their arguments upon tendentious assumptions and platitudes such as "democracy has many and varied meanings. Every culture will mold an independent model of democratic government and there can develop a religious democracy."³²

He argues that "Islamic movements have internalized the democratic discourse through the concepts of *Shura* (Consultation), *Ijma* (Consensus) and *Ijtihad* (Independent interpretive judgment) and concludes that democracy already exists in the Muslim world, whether the word democracy is used or not."³³ A vast literature has developed arguing that Islam has all the ingredients of modern state and society. Many Muslim intellectuals seek to prove that Islam enshrines democratic values. Although Islam means "submission", there is no contradiction to the freedoms inherent in democracy. Islam and democracy are not only compatible but their association is inevitable in a Muslim society

³¹ G.W. Choudhury, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

³² <http://www.meforum.org/1680/Can-There-Be-An-Islamic-Democracy>, Date, 2/11/2010.

³³ <http://www.meforum.org>, *ibid.*

wherein one without the other is imperfect. The will of the majority shapes the ideal Islamic state.

"The implications of the Islamic political activism are not limited only to any particular country, nor are they confined to the traditional Islamic Arab heartland. The Islamist activities and Islamic movements are widespread across the Muslim world. The impact of the Islamists activities is also wide-ranging and not just limited to domestic politics of the relevant Muslim countries. Their impact has reached far beyond the borders of these Muslim countries including the United States.³⁴ Islam in politics has been asserted in many countries in the Muslim world through democratic elections. Islamist parties have gained varying degrees of political successes in different Muslim countries of the world. For Muslims, the presence of the *Shariah* as a source of legislation does not conflict with drafting a Constitution that would allow freedom of speech. The democratic ideal of a "government by the people" is compatible with notion of an Islamic democracy."

In the early Islamic *Khilafah*, the head of state, the *Khalifah*, had a position based on the notion of a successor to Muhammad's political authority, who, according to the *Sunnis*, were ideally elected by the people or their representatives.³⁵ Democratic religious pluralism also existed in classical Islamic law, as the religious laws and courts of other religions, including Christianity Judaism and Hinduism, were usually accommodated within the Islamic framework, as seen in the early caliphate, Al-Andalus, Islamic India, and Ottoman millet system.³⁶ Many people

³⁴ Bhuian Md. Monoar Kabir, "*Politics and Development of The Jamat-e-Islami Bangladesh*", New Delhi, South Asian Publishers, 2006, p. 1.

³⁵ *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, London, Islamic Foundation, 2004, Vol. 1, pp. 116-123.

³⁶ Judge Weeramantry, Christopher G, *Justice without Frontiers*, Brill Publishers, Oxford, 1997, pp. 138.

argue that the concept of liberal and democratic participation were already present in the mediaeval Islamic world. The modern Islamic philosopher, Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) also viewed the early Islamic caliphate as being compatible with democracy. He welcomed the formation of popularly elected legislative assemblies in the Muslim world as a return to the original purity of Islam.³⁷ The accusation that Islam is anti-modern, anti-progressive, anti-democracy is not novel.³⁸ John L. Esposito and John O. Voll have argued in their book, *Islam and Democracy*, that Islam and Democracy are compatible with each other.³⁹

In order to understand the concept of democracy in Islam, one should have the knowledge of the Qur'an, the Hadith and the Sunnah. Prophet Muhammad himself set a tradition by not appointing his successor during his lifetime and left it to the people to decide their leader. The first four caliphs - Abu Bakar, Umar, Usman, and Ali, known as *Khulafah-e- Rashida* (The Enlightened Caliphs), were the choice of the people. The Umayyad King Umar Bin Abdul Aziz, commonly known as the fifth Caliph, also qualifies to be enlisted among the enlightened caliphs because he refused publicly to accept the kingship on the basis of his nomination by his father. He accepted the kingship only when the people elected him.

³⁷ Bantekoe, Marietta Tigranovna Stepaniants, *Justice and Democracy*, Hawaii, University of Hawaii Press, 1997, p. 253.

³⁸ Jeff Hayness, *Religion in Third World Politics*, Philadelphia, Open University Press, 1993, p. 67.

³⁹ John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1996, <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=24265604>

Conclusion

There is no perfect or single version of Islamic political system in the world today. There are many Muslim countries. A political system based on Islam is the model of Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) state in Medina while a Muslim state is one which has a majority Muslim population and some Islamic features. To sum up, Islam seeks to establish a world community, with complete equality among people and without distinction on the basis of race, class, color, creed or country, allowing no compulsion in religious belief, as every individual being personally responsible to Allah. To Islam, government signifies a trust, a service, in which the functionaries are the servants of the people. According to Islam, it is the duty of every individual to make a constant effort to spread goodness and prevent evil and Allah judges us according to our acts and intentions.

People, all over the world, acknowledge Islam as a potential political system. Islam is not only applicable to the Muslim world but also to other societies. Now, the whole world is under economic recession and western capitalist systems are also under tremendous pressure of financial meltdown, and Communism has also collapsed in the early 1990s. So, in this critical juncture of world history and the era of globalization as many think, Islam being a universal religio-political system may offer an alternative political system.