

Islam and democracy

Family



ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY The present paper aims to explore the relationship between Islam and democracy. Being the second largest religious community, its followers live in all parts of the globe, whereas it enjoys the status of state religion in over fifty six sovereign states of the world. It is therefore exploration of the political system of this faith has always been the matter of great interest for the analysts, historians and readers alike. Though no religious faith follows specific political system, yet faiths provide the individuals with an outline for leading the individual and collective life in an orderly and organized manner; the same is applied to the Islamic system of government. The Paper Democracy serves as the most popular political system of the contemporary era, which has won tremendous acceptance and approval by an overwhelming majority of the sovereign states at large. It looks for the forming of government through direct and indirect elections, where every citizen who has reached the age of majority, contains the right to cast his vote in favor of the candidate or party of his choice in order to elect him as member of the parliament or president of the country in case of direct elections. Democracy is a form of government characterized by regular elections, universal suffrage, freedom of conscience and the universal right to stand for office or to form political associations." (Giddens, 1994: 112) Hence, democratic government system allows every man, woman and elderly to use his right for the formation of populous government at state level. However, the concept of democracy in Islam is quite different from that applied and observed by the western societies. Islam is one of the three Abrahamic religions, which provides complete code of leading a systematic group life. Its Holy Scripture, the Qur'an, provides the blueprint of social and political activities, and the sacred life of the Holy Prophet

Muhammad (peace be upon him) is regarded as the role model for the entire community for imitation and inspiration. The Prophet guided the humanity as mentor, spiritual leader, ruler, commander, community member and conciliator for the amicable solution of gravest issues and disputes even. The initial decade of the advent of Islam was extremely unfavorable one for the community, as every type of cruelty, torture and brutality was inflicted upon the Prophet, his noble family and dedicated companions. However, after his migration to Medina after thirteen years of the advent of Islam, the Prophet laid the foundation stone of first Islam state by 622 A. D., where the principles of political establishment were set up in the light of the holy revelation from Almighty God. Though Qur'anic verses are the final source for the Muslim community in respect of spiritual and worldly pursuits, and provides commandments regarding political structure of the state, yet Islam vehemently supports the people's opinion regarding some important issues, and looks for finding solution of political issues through consensus. Hence, the concept of shura and majlis (i. e. parliament) certainly prevails among the basic principles of Islam. It is therefore, the war plans and social problems used to be discussed in the mosques, the then center of political and cultural activities during the initial years of Islam. However, Islam does not present the same scenario of consensus as it is observed by the western societies, where the men, women, young people, prisoners, offenders, criminals and everyone reaching the age of majority casts his vote and gives his opinion in favor of or against a group or political party. On the contrary, Islam allows only the knowledgeable, wise, pious and rational male members of society to express their views regarding the political and cultural issues. It is therefore, the Holy Prophet used to seek counsel of Ali bin Abu Talib,

Hamza, Salmaan the Persian, Ammar bin Yasir, Abdullah bin Abbas and such other intellectual, committed, dedicated, pious and highly sensible companions in strategic, cultural, political, economic and social affairs. The same tradition continued till the end of the righteous caliphate by 661 A. D., which was replaced by the condemnable monarchy in Islamic political system. The monarchical system remained in vogue till the end of WWI in most parts of the Muslim world. However, the shameful defeat of the Ottoman Empire, first at the hands of the four tiny Balkan states in 1912, and then the decisive defeat of Turkey at the hands of the Allies in 1918, introduced western democratic system in many Muslim states. Somehow, few Middle East Muslim states still observe monarchical, oligarchy and dictatorial governments; Saudi Arabia is the most notorious one in this regards, which has named the country after a defamed Saud family, which has changed the very teachings of Islam by practicing every type of cruelty, racism and despotism, in the sacred name of religion. “ The relationship between Islam and democracy in the contemporary world is complex. The Muslim world is not ideologically monolithic. It presents a broad spectrum of perspectives ranging from the extremes of those who deny a connection between Islam and democracy to those who argue that Islam requires a democratic system.” (Esposito & Voll, 1966) Somehow, a large proportion of the enlightened Muslim subjects oppose the western democratic system, as it is not fair to allow the immature people, criminals, the corrupt elite, offenders and fanatics to elect the representative of their own choice, as the offenders and fanatics would certainly elect their like-minded people, which may pave the way towards destruction and turmoil, as it is being observed in Afghanistan and Pakistan in the name of religion and democracy. “ The

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educated stratum in Pakistan still keeps itself away from the electoral procedure by taking the plea that since his opinion is regarded as equal to that of an illiterate, an offender, a criminal and an immature teenager, he should not participate in the entire election process. Consequently, the immature teens and illiterates are in a position to decide regarding the very fate of the country.” (Zaidi, 2010) Consequently, the educated and sensible people abhor western democracy, and strive for the implementation of controlled democracy through the pious and technical hands. Islam strives for the traditional democratic system, where the selection of the members of parliament could be in the hands of the pious and wise individuals containing the in-depth knowledge of the Holy Qur’an, the life, noble sayings and traditions of the Holy Prophet, and the gifted intellect to make judgment between right and wrong on the basis of the available information regarding the fast changing world scenario. To conclude, it becomes crystal clear that no Muslim country of the contemporary era observes the true spirit of Islamic democracy at the national and local scale. On the contrary, western democratic system, oligarchy, monarchy and dictatorship are in vogue in the so called Muslim states, which are busy in exploiting their masses on the one hand, and their western patrons and masters on the other in the name of religion and reforms respectively. Otherwise, Islamic traditions stand for the selection of rulers and parliamentarians through the votes of the specific stratum of society, conditions of which have described above.

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