

Identification of Islamic Socio-Political System

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Abstract

The idea of an Islamic state is as old as Islam itself. The authority of Islam also warrants the establishment of an Islamic state because the state is a necessary instrument for the implementation of divinely-ordained Islamic principles that govern all aspects of the believers' lives. The first principle of Islamic polity is the recognition of sovereignty of God. Blessed be God, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds! Although the political system works under religious laws but it should not be identified with the theocratic system as it worked in Medieval Europe. Every citizen of an Islamic state has the right to hold the political office provided he fulfils requisite qualifications. Allah says: Islamic political system is supposed to perform its function of political socialization so as to foster new political values and regime norms. This principle was fully enforced in the early Islamic state. In short, Islam is complete in its form, it has no need to become compatible its socio-political structure with Western socio-political system and Enlightenment ideas.

Keywords: *Capitalism, Democracy, Shariah, Individualism.*

Islam has introduced an ideal political system which incorporates its own set of political values, regime norms and ultimate objectives. These patterns of polity were translated into practice under the Holy Prophet and the pious *Khalifah's* in the early Islamic society. Political aspect of Islam can be apprehended only with reference to the understanding of the ideology of Islam as a whole. Islamic polity, therefore, cannot be fully identified with any other political system.

Islam does not believe in the concept of political sovereignty as protected by modern democratic ideology; Rule of Law, on the other hand, is the backbone of an Islamic political order. Supremacy of the *Shariah* is an accepted doctrine in the political structure of Islam, as the revealed law shapes the framework of socio-economic and political processes of life. An Islamic state is, in fact, the most effective instrument and a vehicle of change that can be employed for revolutionizing all aspects of life in the light of Islam.

Variations:

The concept of democracy, as understood in its western sense, claims

to champion the cause of human liberties. Islam secures fundamental freedom in much effective manner through ascribing sovereignty (Supreme Power) to Allah. Democracy is not merely a political precept, if understood from the point of view of its Western concept; it is rather a socio-economic, cultural and political precept. It has evolved its own value system, beliefs, processes and structures. But all these aspects are not nurtured in isolation from their environmental settings. No democratic system has fixed structures or static norms.

Its structures and especially institutional setup, for instance, is shaped within the socio-political conditions of a people at a particular time. The contemporary Western democratic systems have attained their present form from the Enlightenment period. Moreover, every country has developed different form of democratic system which is in line with its political, religious and cultural heritage. American democratic system differs from the British one and from that of the Scandinavian systems in respect of its institutions, structures and processes.

Variations in time and place also play an important role in shaping these structures. The British system with its symbolic values of welfare concept is to a greater extent different from the one as it flourished during the nineteenth century. During that period its objectives were inspired by that form of Liberalism which believed in Individualism and *Laissez-faire*. John L. Esposito writes:

“In the modern Western European political history, there is a long-standing tension between two different understandings of democracy, and each of these understandings represents a revolutionary opposition to the other. J. L. Talmon (who favors “Liberal democracy”) identifies these two conflicting alternatives: “Concurrently with the liberal type of democracy there emerged from the same premises in the eighteenth century a trend towards what we propose to call the totalitarian type of democracy. These two currents have side by side ever since the eighteenth century. The tension between them has constituted an important chapter in modern history. The two competing visions were one that emphasized individual rights and limitation on government (“liberal democracy”) and another that stressed the popular will and collective structures of community. This is the continuing debate in the Western political tradition and is at the heart of any discussion of democracy. The debate is long-standing, but in the 1990s it takes many new forms that go beyond the stark contrasts of the old liberal-socialist debates of the past two centuries. With the failure of what Talmon called “totalitarian democracy” of the socialist-communist left, the alternative to the liberal-libertarian vision is a new left (or “post-left”) radical democratic perspective. This “radical democracy” represents the major form of the conceptual alternative to the currently dominant “liberal democracy,” in both its neo-conservative form, which emphasizes the market economy, and its “postmodern” form, which emphasizes multicultural pluralism.

*Historically this radical tradition has been articulated in terms of a utopian critique of the developing industrial society that combined the capitalist economic system with liberal democracy and was the core of the radical revolutionary tradition of Western European societies. In this form, it was a violent revolutionary opposition, rather than the "constitutional opposition" envisioned in most presentations of democratic theory."*¹

In spite of these differences, however, there are certain values, attitudes and modes of behaviour that can be labeled as democratic. The peculiar values system of democracy has its bearing on the structures that ensure participation of individuals in public and especially in political life. It implies that the main objective of every democratic system is the protection of liberties. The Western model of democracy, in has developed a participant culture fore the attainment of this objective.

Real Objectives:

The concept of democracy in respect of its present meanings, was inspired by French and American revolutions, when such slogans as Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, were developed as its symbolic values. It was with reference to this background that the Western civilization developed the means and processes through which these targets could be attained. The concept of popular sovereignty was motivated by that ideal, i.e., the protection of fundamental rights.

Islamic version:

A profound study of the teachings of Islam along with its application in the pristine period reveals that the true democratic values and structures were initiated by the Muslims. Muslim civilization introduced the concept of fundamental rights and provided their prerequisites at such a period of backwardness. Exploitation in all of its forms was eliminated in the early Islamic society. Maximum sanctity was attached to human personality and new codes prescribed for the participation of individuals in public life. Abul Kalam Azad says:

*"Islam differs with the Christian view of their belief in the original sin of Adam (due to which) the entire race of Adam or Mankind had become an object of Divine displeasure and that consequently Christ had to atone fore this original sin through his own crucifixion and effect the redemption of man."*²

Islam, on the other hand, believes in the goodness of human nature.

God says:

*"So set thy purpose (O Muhammad) for religion as a man by nature upright – the nature (framed) of God, in which He hath created man...."*³

Supremacy:

Islam eradicates all sources of evil and collectivize individual behaviour on constructive side. In this context a moderate path is adopted in between Individualism and Collectivism which incorporates the true spirit of democracy. Thus Islamic version of a participant system stands superior to all

of its other forms. The origin of this system is generally traced back to Greek period where only a limited population, in fact, was bestowed with the rights of citizenship, hence eligible for political participation. It is to be noted that nine tenth of the total population in Greek city states, consisted of *Metics* (foreigners) and that of slaves, who were deprived of citizenship.⁴

Whereas, modern Western democratic systems were developed in the Capitalist societies, as a result, all the evils of a Capitalistic system are inherent in the Western democracies. The wealthy aristocratic classes have practically assumed the role of political elites in these societies. In the so called pattern of free economy the laws of state, in fact, represent the aspirations and serve the interest of the dominant class that owns the means of production. Moreover, most of the contemporary democratic systems, especially that of the third world, are handicapped by the absence of democratic values, viz., and democracy as a complete code of conduct has not been implemented. As a result, even the political aspect of democracy is devoid of its true spirit due to the absence of pre condition of this system.

As a matter of fact, democracy can work successfully and attain its real objectives under such a system as has full potentials to regulate all aspects of life and thereby to bring it into a coherent whole. Islam as a workable ideology can revolutionize human behaviour towards a superior cause. As a blessing of Islam the barbarian and warring people of Africa became the most moderate and cultured people of the world, and rose to the rank of torchbearer of the world civilization. The Holy Prophet inculcated new moral values in human thinking and thereby evolved an ideal life style. New norms of behaviour were prescribed which deviated from the old trodden path. Discrimination on the basis of cast, creed, colour and language was overshadowed by the only criterion of supremacy, viz., and piousness of character. It is laid down in Quran:

“Lo! The most righteous among you in the sight of God is the most pious among you.”⁵

This principle was infused in the political values and theory qualitative principle became the keystone to the political arch. In fact, the mission of the Holy Prophet was “to complete the excellent virtues and to perfect good action.”⁶ It is to be noted that the democratic ideals of Islam were fully implemented in the state of Madina in the early period.

Political ideals of Islam can be better explained and apprehended with reference to the infra-structure of the polity portrayed in the teachings of Islam.

Modern Socio-Economic Patterns and Islam:

The smooth functioning of political democracy is dependent on a participant political culture that secures and guarantees supportive cultural norm, values, and belief system. This has been an irony, in most cases, of the third world, that Western democratic structures were introduced in the absence of a democratic political culture. As a result, these systems failed to

foster requisite cultural norms. Undoubtedly, the modern developed political culture that nourishes the secular political values.

A profound study of the Islamic teachings reveals that Islam has presented not only such cultural norms rather given equal consideration to the development of favourable environmental settings and socialization process. Highlights of the social aspects of democracy viz., civic virtues, are given below.

Tolerance: A Spirit of Islam

Islam lays greater emphasis on tolerance in its programme of social interaction. According to the verse of Holy text:

“There is no compulsion in matters of faith.”⁷

The attitude of the Prophet (peace be upon him) was the best manifestation of this principle. He allowed for instance, a delegation of the Christians of *Najran* to celebrate their prayer in his Church. God says:

“God loveth not the utterance of harsh speech save by one who hath been wronged. God is ever hearer, knower.”⁸

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) not only tolerated many pre-Islamic Arab customs, but also announced as a matter of policy:

“The virtues of the days of ignorance will be acted upon.”⁹

In his appraisal of the ethical values of Islam, Muhammad Asad writes:

“We believe and the recent developments of the West reaffirm this belief, that ethics of Islam, its concept of social and personal morality of justice, of liberty, are infinitely higher, infinitely more perfect than corresponding concept and ideas within Western civilization.”¹⁰

Self Conceitedness:

Islam expects from every faithful to participate fully in public affairs. To equip the individuals with pre requisites of a participant culture, Islam lays stress on the acquisition of knowledge and character building. The civic virtues fostered in an ideal Islamic society help to eradicate self conceitedness and indecency. Such virtues are fostered as can facilitate the development of mental and moral capacities of the citizens. Even the rituals of Islam are helpful in the nourishment of fraternal feelings. There is no place for *“Rahbaniat”* in Islam. In fact, in every scheme among at the moral and material uplift of the society, Islam harnesses individual’s efforts and coordinate them with socio-economic and political processes of life.

Vigilance:

People generally show a back of interest in public affairs at the cost of their own. Moreover, indolence stands a hurdle in the development of a healthy civic life. The observance of rituals and of other religious customs activates the individual initiatives and help in the eradication of indolence and lethargy. It has been made obligatory on the Muslims to work for the common good and eradicate evil. God says:

“Those who, if we give them power in the land, establish worship and pay the poor due and enjoin kindness and forbid wrong: with God rests

the end (and decision) of (all) affairs.”¹¹

The Holy Prophet is reported to have said:

“The best of Jihad is to speak up for truth in the face of a government that deviates from the right path”.¹²

He further said:

“If any one of you see anything evil, he should set it right by his hand; if he is unable to do so, then by his tongue, and if he is unable to do even that, then within his heart, but this is the weakest of faith.”¹³

Civic virtues of Islam can be helpful in shaping an environment where the rights are better safeguarded as the people themselves stand up for their protection.

Harmony Between Rights and Obligations:

Islam has synthesized rights and obligations through a balanced approach to life which encompasses both spiritual and temporal aspects. Protection to individual's rights is given priority over *“Huqooq-al-Allah”*. The most effective sanction behind the enforcement of the scheme of rights is inspired by fear of God. It is worth noting that observance of rights and fulfillment of one's obligations, from Islamic stand point, is considered as sacred as the performance of rituals (*Ibadat*).

Principle of Responsibility:

In Islam, the principle of responsibility is underlying tenet of the governmental system. The enforcement of the way of life as envisaged by Islam is not the duty of the government alone, the individuals, groups, and the social institutions all are made responsible to this effect.

Acquisition of Knowledge:

In order to nurture a participant political culture, Islam makes it an obligation on all Muslims to acquire knowledge. Imparting of knowledge is not confined merely within the educational institutions; it rather engulfs the whole range of socialization process. The Holy Prophet attached much importance to this aspect and asked the captives of the battle of *“Badr”* to teach reading and writing to the Muslim children in lieu of the payment of ransom.¹⁴ He declared that the acquisition of knowledge is obligatory on all Muslims. He is reported to have said:

“Learn the compulsory doctrines and the Quran, and teach the people, for the verily I am a mortal.”¹⁵

The civic virtues of Islam pave the way for the reinforcement of a just moral and ethical order in which people are held together by lands of love, sympathy and brotherhood. In such a society evils are eradicated effectively through new institutional devices and through other legal sanctions.

Economic Uplift:

Islam has introduced a realistic and balanced pattern of economy which has full capabilities to make fair distribution of wealth in the society. Islamic polity is supposed to be a welfare state, in which provision of basic wants of life to all the citizens, has been declared as an important responsibility of the government. It is to be noted that the views regarding the

welfare functions of the state, were initiated at a time when these were quite unknown to that stage of human civilization. In pursuance of its welfare objectives, an Islamic regime is under obligation to provide mental and material conditions necessary for the development of capacities in all according to their natural disposition.

New economic values and institutional practices were initiated by the Holy Prophet in the state of Madina. He harnessed and coordinated individual's efforts along with social and legal action in the enforcement of the principles of economic justice. All efforts were made to uproot the very sources of corruption and other economic evils; and for the reinforcement of new economic laws. God says:

*"They who hoard up gold and silver spend it not in the way of God; announce unto them a most grievous penalty."*¹⁶

Quran says about usury:

*"That they took usury, though they were forbidden; and that they devoured men's substance wrongfully; we have prepared for these of them who disbelieve a painful doom."*¹⁷

The new economic values created a network of rights and obligations based on fairly and justice. A citizen was remained and conscious of his economic duties towards his family members, towards his neighbours, to his fellow citizens and ultimately to the government. To stabilize the economic system, payment of Zakat and Usher was made compulsory on the well off sections. Similarly, all economic ills such as hoarding, black-marketing and usury etc., were declared illegal.

In order to stabilize the new economic order, fundamental changes were brought about in the socio-cultural patterns of life. All possible means were adopted to discourage such trends as luxurious way of life and love of wealth. Similarly was the cardinal virtue held in esteem in the early Islamic society. The new pattern of economy enforced in that society was based on a mixed mode of production, as private ownership and collective ownership, both were accommodated.

In the structure of *Shariah*, the whole scheme aiming at the economic uplift has been coordinated with an ethical programme. The role of an Islamic state in this welfare framework is that of an arbiter and of planner, and not that of a monopolist as suggested by socialists. Equality of opportunity and not in gains is the underlying principle of Islamic economic system, a principle which is in line with natural precept of justice and fairplay.

The Political Framework of Islam:

The political framework as prescribed by Islam is an internal part of a comprehensive scheme in which each and every aspect of life is channelised between all the socio-economic and political processes of life. The political structure is also characterized with new codes of political behaviour, institutional setup and regime norms.

The Islamic State:

The idea of an Islamic state is as old as Islam itself. Muslims' widespread and forceful attempts to establish an Islamic state have been explained by communal needs, Islamic universalism, explicit Quranic instructions and the prophet's tradition.

With the emergence of an Islamic community (*ummah*) and its expansion beyond ethno-national boundaries, the need for an Islamic state which governs on the basis of Islamic principles arises. As Manzooruddin Ahmed observes:

"Once the moral and psychological foundations of the ummah are laid on the basis of a primordial covenant [sic], the next stage in the development of the ummah leads to the emergence of organized authority".¹⁸

The authority of Islam also warrants the establishment of an Islamic state because the state is a necessary instrument for the implementation of divinely-ordained Islamic principles that govern all aspects of the believers' lives. According to Maududi, the realization of the objectives of the *Shariah* is simply impossible without the agency of the state and the power it commands. In his view:

"The reforms which Islam wants to bring about cannot be carried out merely by sermons. Political power is essential for their achievement....struggle for obtaining control over the organs of the state when motivated by the urge to establish the din [religion] and the Islamic Shariah and to enforce the Islamic injunctions, is not only permissible but is positively desirable and as such obligatory."¹⁹

Ideally, an Islamic state provides a framework for the life of the individual believer and the community as a whole by playing an essential role in the perpetuation of Islamic law and in the maintenance of social order.

The Islamic state is distinct from other type of states by its unique theoretical foundations and structural as well as functional features. A state is not Islamic simply because it is inhabited predominantly or even entirely by Muslims, but rather, it is Islamic by virtue of a conscious application of the sociopolitical tenets of Islam to the life of the nation. Therefore, Western labels of democracy, authoritarianism, socialism, etc., are not proper means of identification if applied to the Islamic state. The Islamic state, as an ideological state, "has a social orientation peculiar to itself, different in many respects from that of the modern west, and can be successfully interpreted only within its own context and in its own terminology."²⁰

Sovereignty of God:

The first principle of Islamic polity is the recognition of sovereignty of God. It is written in the Holy Quran:

"Your Guardian-Lord is God, Who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and is firmly established on the throne (of authority): He draweth the night as a veil o'er the day, each seeking the other in rapid succession: He created the sun, the moon, and the stars, (all) governed by laws under His command. Is it not His to create and to govern? Blessed

be God, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds!"²¹

There is no place for accommodating concept of popular or political sovereignty in Islamic political theory as the concept, viz., absoluteness, exclusiveness, all comprehensiveness, indivisibility etc. no one, neither the Prophet, nor the whole of humanity can claim to have any say in the will of God. According to Quran:

"I but follow what is revealed to me from the Lord: this is nothing but lights from your Lord, and guidance, and Mercy, for any who have Faith."²²

Sovereignty in an Islamic state, from legal point of view, belongs to *Shariah*, viz., Quran and *Sunnah*. Thus by upholding absolute concept of sovereignty, an Islamic state affords better protection to human liberties because "Rule of Law" is its direct implication. The Western concept of sovereignty suffered a set back and got confused due to the development of such false precepts as political sovereignty, legal and titular sovereignty etc.

Participant System:

To rule of over the people has been declared as a responsibility in Islam, and is not to be taken as a privilege. This principle is clearly manifested in the concept of "*Khilafat*". To quote a Quranic verse:

"God has promised, to those among you who believe and work righteous deeds, that He will, of a surely, grant them in land, inheritance (of power), as He granted it to those before them; that He will establish in authority their religion – the one which He has chosen for them."²³

There is no place for any hereditary rights to rule in Islamic thought. *Khilafat* is, in fact, a popular vicegerency. No individual or any group thereof, nor any religious class can claim absolute right to rule in this theocratic structure. Although the political system works under religious laws but it should not be identified with the theocratic system as it worked in Medieval Europe. Muhammad Iqbal has portrayed the spirit of this system in the following words:

"The state, from the Islamic standpoint, is an endeavour to transform these ideal principles (Equality, Liberty, and Fraternity) into space-time forces, an aspiration to realize them in a definite human organization. It is in this sense alone that the state in Islam is a theocracy, not in the sense that it is headed over by a representative of God on earth who can screen his despotic will behind his supposed infallibility."²⁴

The rulers of an Islamic state are, in the other hand, accountable to God, that means they have to perform their duties within the limits prescribed by *Shariah*, while, on the hand, they are accountable to the people. Every citizen of an Islamic state has the right to hold the political office provided he fulfils requisite qualifications. It has been declared obligatory on the executive authority to carry on its functions through consultation. God says:

"Their affairs are conducted by mutual consultation."²⁵

God says in another *Surah* of the Quran:

"And when thou art resolved, then put thy trust in God. Lo! God Loveth

*those who put their trust (in Him)."*²⁶

The Holy Prophet himself used to consult his close companions on all important matters. Later the pious *Khalifahs* established a body known as *Al-Shura*, to assist them in statecraft. This consultative body was also representative in character as the persons from important tribes, and from the most ideologically committed talented persons was made its members.

The system of representation of that period, however, should not be understood in respect of its modern form.

Political Values:

Islamic political system is supposed to perform its function of political socialization so as to foster new political values and regime norms. Principle of accountability and that of responsibility is the most important operational value.²⁷ During the period of the pious Caliphs even a common man could criticize the highest person in authority and the Caliphs set exemplary free discussion by saying:

*"Differences of opinion among the learned within any community are God's Grace."*²⁸

Moreover, obedience to the ruler was not unconditional. The Holy Prophet is reported to have said:

*"No obedience is due in sinful matters; behold, obedience is due only in the way of righteousness."*²⁹

Nevertheless, clear cut codes specifying grounds of political obligations are laid down. To quote a verse from the Holy Quran:

*"Obey God; obey the Prophet and these who are in authority among you."*³⁰

Thus every caution is taken to curb the disruptive tendencies in the society.

Rule of Law:

The laws of *Shariah* stand supreme in the entire socio-economic and political processes in an Islamic polity. It implies that no body is above the law and that there is equality before law. In Islamic precept of justice there is no place for such concept as "King can do no wrong". Moreover, *Shariah* is the source of constitutional law as well as that of the fundamental rights. Laws of *Shariah* are not restricted to the regulation of legal framework only; they shape the entire patterns of life as well.³¹ The precept of "Rule of Law" also implies that there is equality in opportunity, viz., laws provide equal opportunities to all alike so that they can develop their capabilities according to their natural disposition. This principle was fully enforced in the early Islamic state.

As regards equality before law, the Holy Prophet laid too much emphasis on this injunction. Once upon a time the Holy Prophet working in his judicial capacity ordered the cutting of hands of a person, who was found guilty of theft. The companions took it too severe. The Holy Prophet rejected their appeal and warned them in these words:

*"Had she been Fatimah, I would have certainly cut off her hand."*³²

He further said:

*"The previous generations had been destroyed as the criminals coming from higher class were cherished."*³³

Fundamental Rights:

Islam introduced the concept of fundamental Rights, as already pointed out, when this was practically unknown to the contemporary civilization. It was for the first time in human history that maximum sanctity was attached to human personality and his rights better secured. Even the slaves, who were given inhuman treatment in the pre-Islamic society, were bestowed with rights. Islam did not abolish slavery with a stroke of pen; but introduced such devices by virtue of which this institution would die its natural death. The Holy Prophet once said:

*"He who sets free a Muslim slave, shall be freed from the fire of hell."*³⁴

A part of the *Zakat* was especially set aside for helping these slaves who were working for purchasing their freedom, viz., "*Mukatibat*." The Holy Prophet said:

*"If a slave with limbs cut off be put in command of you to guide you by the Book of God, hearken and obey."*³⁵

Later the slaves rose to the rank of rulers in different Muslim dynasties.

Women were also given respectable status in the Islamic society and their rights fully secured.³⁶ They were given the right to own property which is important aspect of Muslim law of inheritance. It is the basic duty of an Islamic state to make them judicable. It is worth pointing it out that the concept of fundamental rights is not static, it is rather dynamic one.

In short, Islam is complete in its form, it has no need to become compatible its socio-political structure with Western socio-political system and Enlightenment ideas. God has said:

*"This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion."*³⁷



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