

Islam  
*And*  
Democracy

Muhammad Kamaruzzaman

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## **Published by**

Publicity Department  
Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh  
505, Elephant Road,  
Bara Moghbazar, Dhaka-1217  
Phone : 9331239, 9331581  
Fax : 880-2-8312997  
E-mail : jibco@gtlbd.com  
Website : [www.jamaat-e-islami.org](http://www.jamaat-e-islami.org)

## **First Edition**

April - 2005  
Baishakh - 1412  
Rabiul Awal- 1426

Price : 10.00 only (US \$ 1)

## **Printed by**

Al-Falah Printing press  
423, Bara Moghbazar, Dhaka-1217  
Phone : 9345741. 9358432

# Islam and Democracy

Democracy is a popular word among the political circle all over the world. It is derived from the Latin word 'democracia'. The literal meaning of this word democracia is 'people'. The definition of democracy was given as "the rule of the people by the people for the people". Democracy is a system in which people's participation in the running of affairs of the state has been assured. It is a participatory political system in which people rule through their representatives.

Political scientists have evolved some principles as the basis for democracy. These are political parties, elections, separation of power, independence of Judiciary, respect for human rights, freedom of speech, press and movement, the rights of minorities, the rights of ownership and properties and people's participation in the political process.

In a democratic system three wings of the government: the legislative, the executive and the Judiciary are separate and independent. Government is formed through popular elections. There are two types of government, (1) Presidential form of government (2) Parliamentary form of government. Election process varies from country to country.

Islam is a complete code of life. It has its own political economic, social and cultural system and values. Islamic political system and democracy, though different in many respects, share a set of governing values in common. According to Islamic thinkers democracy is a means or mechanism through which Islamic values and laws can be applied. For changing government Islam does not allow the use of force. It does not support a self-declared leadership. In an Islamic state the leadership must be elected by the people or approved by the people. Democracy provides opportunity for people to elect or select their leadership. Regarding the formation and changing of the government there is no difference between Islamic system and democracy. But there are two major differences between Islamic system and democracy: Sovereignty and separation of state from religion. Islam does not recognize the sovereignty of the people. According to Islam the Almighty God is the only sovereign and the people are only His vice-gerents. Islam does not accept the idea of separation of state from religion. The belief of Islam is that state is not an end in itself, but it is the stage preparatory to the hereafter, which is the lasting and final life. Islam calls people to obey and practise the rules, regulations and injunction of Islam in every sphere of life.

It is believed in Islam that the Holy Quran is not only a book of prayer. Prophet Muhammad (sm) has taught us how to perform Salat, Sawm, Hajj and pay Zakat and at the same time he has taught us how to rule a country, how to lead a war, how to make treaties and agreements with others. So in Islam religion and state are inseparable.

## The Islamic State

The term "Islamic state" has been misunderstood by many. Some think that the Islamic state is only for the Muslims. Some others think only implementation of Shariah Law is the main function of the Islamic state. But in fact Islamic state is a welfare state, a multi-religious, Multi-cultural and democratic state run by the people's representatives. Its principles are derived from the Holy Quran and Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (SM) but its administration is carried out by the representatives of the people.

The form of the Islamic government is a divine democratic government because the Muslims have been given limited popular sovereignty under the suzerainty of God. The executive power under this system of government is constituted by the general will of the Muslims who have also the right to depose it.<sup>1</sup>

The sources of law of the Islamic state are as follows; (1) The Holy Quran (2) The Sunnah (the practice and sayings of the prophet) (3) The Third source of law is the Ijma of the companions of the Prophet. (4) Ijtihad. The constitution of the state must follow the rules of the Holy Quran and Sunnah. It is a divinely ordained system of laws. The Quranic law is supreme. Sunnah occupied second position as the source of law. With the death of the prophet and the end of the revelation and his practice, Ijtihad came to constitute the third source

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1. Abul A'la Maudoodi, The Political Theory of Islam, 1939, page-22

of Islam. The first two sources of Islam illustrate the theocratic dimension while the third reflects the democratic aspect in the legislative process. This is enhanced by the fact that no particular group, clan or even party play a dominant role in the function of the Islamic state.

## **The Islamic Government**

The Islamic Government is a kind of Republic. It is founded on the same basis of any other republic in terms of modern political systems and institutions. The qualifying term 'Islamic' stands for the ideological basis for the state. It is a fact that the Islamic state is an ideological state but at the same time it is a moderate democratic state. The Islamic state has all the factors of a democratic state. Islam does not accept the idea of using force for the implementation of its rules and injunctions.

It considers democracy as the most appropriate mechanism through which the Islamic rule can be applied. Islamic thinkers in the contemporary world view democracy as a means to achieve an end. So it is clear that Islam does not negate democracy. Democracy and Islam can function together, can work simultaneously. The difference between liberal democracy and Islamic government lies in the fact that the former emphasizes its adherence to the worldly constitution and the fulfilment of the people's wishes and aspirations whereas the later promises its people to

comply with the Shariah. The first caliph Abu Bakr Siddique stated in his speech at oath taking ceremony "If I obey God and His Prophet, obey me, if I neglect the laws of God and Sunnah of His messenger, I have no more right for your obedience.<sup>2</sup> He took the responsibility as the caliph or ruler after the approval through *Bayat* by the people. The people reflected their opinion through Bayat. It was a kind of election or process through which the institution of caliphate functioned. So the Islamic government is a constitutional one. During the last two hundred years modern election system, nation state and party system had developed for the functioning of democracy. Presently major Islamic parties all over the world have been participating in the electoral process in different Muslim countries. Muslims are contributing to democratic political process even in many of the Non-Muslim countries. It is a significant development in many Muslim countries where democracy is functioning that the Islamic parties have emerged as principal players in the mainstream politics.

## **Parliament and the concept of Shoora:**

In liberal democracy parliament is the key institution for legislation or making any Law. Parliament is the center place for politics and the rise and fall of the government depend on the parliament. Shoora system

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2. Khalid M. Khalid, *Khulfa'al-Rasul*, 1974, Page-120



in Islam is a legislative process whereby the executive authority is obliged to accept the decisions of the legislative authority. But unfortunately the concept of Shoora has been misinterpreted as 'consultation'. According to Islam it is a divine order since the Almighty God orders His Messenger not to make decisions except through Shoora. "Shoora, therefore, is an integral process in the function of the Islamic state. It is the legal collective way through which the representative of the people could enact or legislate laws or decisions related to its national interests. It is considered as the backbone of Islamic political system. Shoora is defined as the process through which decisions concerning the state's public affairs are made. Such decisions are binding on the executive authority since Shoora is a divine order." <sup>3</sup>

Islamic scholars in the contemporary world call for the institutionalisation of Shoora through the adoption of representative councils or Parliaments. The elected parliament can function as the Shoora for an Islamic state. Scopes of legislation is the only difference between the liberal democracy and Islamic political system. In the liberal democracy scope is wide under the constitution but in the Islamic political system the scope for legislation is limited to the guiding rule which should neither forbid good nor call for evil.<sup>4</sup>

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3. Fahmi Huwadi, Al-Islam Waal Dimuqratiah (Islam and Democracy), Al-

4. Hassan Al-Alkim, Power sharing Islam? P-79

## **Political Parties:**

In democracy role of political parties is significantly important. The idea of political parties is a recent political development. Democratic countries may have multi-party system or two dominant parties like those of the UK and the USA.

Contemporary Islamic leadership has accepted the idea of political parties. But there is a debate among the Muslim scholars on the role of political parties. The Muslim society is a pluralist one that grants every member equal civil and political rights regardless of his or her racial, religious or social background. Many of the Islamic movements and parties are working in the multi-party system in a number of countries. This multi-party system enables every group of people regardless of their political orientations to associate themselves with a political party, whose platform is not necessarily based on the Shariah. Tolerance of people of other religious beliefs encourages more tolerance among Muslims with different political orientations. This idea has come to be accepted by most contemporary Islamic political parties and movements. This point of view is increasingly acquiring prominence in contemporary Muslim political thinking. The only condition laid down for the non-Islamic parties is to adhere to the state's constitution and this does not negate the idea of a

multi-party system. In many countries the Islamic leadership has developed a kind of political accommodation. It may be noted that politics of accommodation has become a reality in many Muslim countries. The experiences in Turkey, Bangladesh, Yemen and Malaysia should be taken into consideration. Even some of the Islamic parties are working as coalition partners of non-Islamic, secular or nationalist parties.

## **Election**

Election is one of the main characteristics of democracy. Modern election system is also a recent development in political process. Emperors, monarchs, kings and rulers were not elected. But immediate after the death of Prophet Muhammad (SM) Muslims developed the caliphate as an institution to run the affairs of the state.

In those days most of the rulers were self-declared or self-imposed or dynastic rulers. All the caliphs of Khulafa-e-rashideen took Bayat (oath of alliance) from the people which were one kind of voting or approval by the people for the legitimacy of rulers. Emperors, kings, monarchs were self-appointed but the caliphs were elected by the people. Scholars like Ibne Khaldun, Ibne Taymiya, Al-Ghazali, Al-Mawardi, Al-Maududi, Hasanul Banna and others agreed on the principle that the President (Imam) or caliph must be chosen by the people. Leaders of Islamic movement in the twentieth

century have emphasized the importance of elections in the political process of the Islamic state. Hasanul Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood movement of Egypt, called for a freely elected parliament in the 1940's. Islamic scholars emphasize the necessity of a freely elected body with whom there must be regular consultation regarding the running of the government. It can be noted here that though Hasanul Banna was in favour of a non-partisan parliamentary election but Ikhawanul Muslimoon in Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Kuwait are participating in the elections under the political parties. Abul A'la Mawdudi and his Jamaat-e-Islami movement strongly advocates elections and the Jamaat have been participating in elections regularly in Bangladesh and Pakistan. Islamic movement in Turkey participated in the election under Salamat Party, Rifah Party, Virtue Party and very recently Justice and Development Party. In Yemen Leader of the Ikhwan Sheikh Abdul Majid Al-Zindani formed an alliance with the traditional Ulama in the name of Al-Islah Party and regularly participating in elections and representing in the parliament. Islamic parties in Malaysia, Indonesia, Morocco, Algeria, Jordan, Bahrain, Nigeria, Sudan also accepted elections and actively involve in electoral process. Election is mandatory in Islamic political system. Islam recommends that the change of government must be through election and constitutional process. No system is 100% perfect. There are faults in the election system also. But even

then this is the only acceptable alternative for changing and forming government or choosing rulers. So Islam and democracy have the common approach regarding elections.

## **Professional groups and civil society**

The role of professional groups and civil society has become important all over the world, especially in the running of the affairs of the state. In the present day contexts only political parties can not run a country. The professional groups like teachers, lawyers, doctors, engineers, associations, trade unions, chamber unions, women associations, business syndicates, journalists, unions, students' and youth forums are actively involve in political process. During the Prophet's time we could find some example of such groups. It is recorded in the history that one woman came to the prophet and asked him to allocate part of his time for teaching the women and the prophet accepted this proposal. A woman opposed Omar bin Khattab's (R) decision to place a limit on the dowry of women. Hazrat Omar (R) acknowledged the woman's point of view and retreated from his position. These two examples illustrate the role of women in those days, though they were politically un-organized, in the decision making process.

In the contemporary world professional interest groups are very much active and can play an important role in the decision making process. Islamic political process has no objection regarding these professionals or

interest groups, rather it has encouraged to consult with them for better solution. Al-Maududi argues that there should be no law enacted concerning women without prior consultation with the women's forum.

## Justice

Justice is the main agenda before the leadership of the Islamic state. The leadership must ensure Justice for the people of the state. The state must provide the citizens with the rights of food, shelter, clothes, education, medical services and security of life and property. In the eye of Islam leaders are defined as servants of the people that they would have to ensure the above facilities and services for the citizens. On the other hand Islamic political system grants every citizen the right to engage in the running of state's affairs, to express his beliefs, thoughts, and opinions by all peaceful means under his disposal and to stand against oppression. "Citizens of the Islamic state must enjoy freedom of speech, freedom of criticism, freedom of practice and limited economic freedom. <sup>5</sup>

Based on the principles of popular vice-gerency and public involvement the decision making process in the Islamic state, the idea of referendum or plebiscite to promote mass participation in managing the state's affairs becomes an accepted method of decision-making, as long as such an act does not forbid the

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5. S. Hawa, Al-Islam, Beirut, Darul Kutub Al-Alniah, Page-192

Halal (permissible) nor promote the Haram (Forbidden).

## **Minority rights or rights of the non-Muslim**

Equality between Muslims and non-Muslims constitute one of the main features of the Islamic state. Islam emphasizes the unity among human beings by tracing them all to Adam. Islam emphasizes equal civil and political rights for all the nationals of the Islamic state regardless of their religious beliefs. The non-Muslims enjoy not only the right to worship but the freedom of movement to preach their faith.

The subjects of the Islamic state enjoy the right to private secrecy. The Quran says, "You who believe, enter not houses other than your own, until you have asked permission and saluted those in them". (Al Quran S xxiv: V-27). Islam has not differentiated between Muslims and non-Muslims. The prophet said, "he who hurts a non-Muslim, I am his opponent and whoever's opponent I am, I will litigate against him on the last day." It is on record in history the way non-Muslims used to be treated under Islamic rule. Omar Ibne-Khattab, recommended his successor to treat non-Muslims well. He said, "trust whoever follows me with the good care of the non-Muslims, he must fulfil their commitments, defend them and not over-burden them. He incorporated the non-Muslims into the states welfare programme. He instructed the secretary of Baitulmal (treasury) to review the Jiziah

policy (tax imposed on non-Muslims) and to abrogate the Jiziah imposed on old people, children, orphans and unsupported women and to give them social security benefits. Ali Ibne Abi Talib, the fourth caliph, enacted a law equalising the non-Muslims with Muslims in terms of blood and money.

Democracy is an inseparable ingredient of Islamic political system. So both are compatible to each other and mutually reinforcing, Islamic political ideals do not involve complete rule by the religious hierarchy, though theocratic elements are there. It involves a great deal of political participation and shares with democracy in many features of the democratic process. Based on Shariah Islamic political system has given emphasis on ethics, morality, human dignity and honesty.

Since peace and justice are at the heart of Islam, the Muslims can play a significant role for achieving peace and justice in the world.









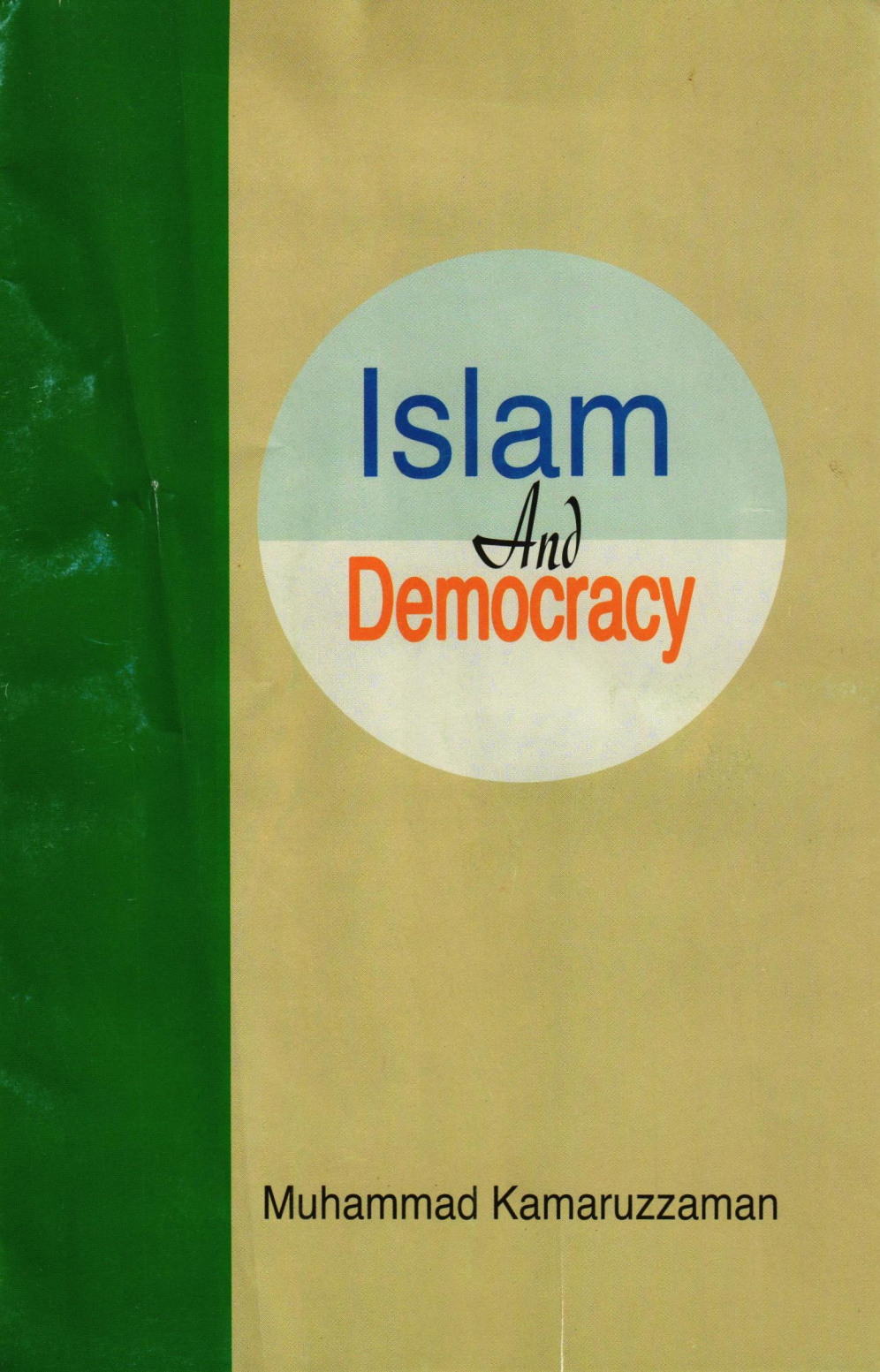
Muhammad Kamaruzzaman was born on 4th July, 1952 in a respectable Muslim family of Sherpur district. After graduation he attained his degree of Master of Arts in Mass Communication and Journalism from the University of Dhaka in 1975. Muhammad Kamaruzzaman is a career journalist. While in college he worked as a stringer of a national daily. In 1980 he was the Executive Editor of Bangla monthly 'Dhaka Digest'. For a decade (1983-1993) he worked as the Executive Editor of the Daily Sangram, Dhaka. Currently (from 1981 till date) he is the Editor of the Weekly Sonar Bangla, Dhaka a widely circulated and esteemed weekly of the country. He is actively associated with different journalist bodies. He is a member of the National Press Club, Dhaka. He was an elected member of the Central Executive Committee, Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists for the term of 1985-86. He was a member of the Dhaka Union of Journalists. He is also Vice-Chairman, Institute of Research and Development, Dhaka and a member, Executive Committee, Bangladesh Islamic Centre, Dhaka.

Muhammad Kamaruzzaman is at present senior Assistant Secretary General Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh. He is also Secretary of Foreign Affairs and member of 'Central Political Committee', Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh. He played a vital role as the member, Jamaat-e-Islami Political and Liaison Committee in the movement of restoration of democracy in Bangladesh during 1984-90 and the movement for Caretaker Government during 1993-95. Mr. Kamaruzzaman worked hard to form the Four-Party Alliance that constitutes the present government in Bangladesh.

Mohammad Kamaruzzaman is an author of a number of books in Bangla including 'Naton Biplober Padodhani O Ekbingsha Satabdi' (Emergence of a new revolution in the 21st Century), 'Ganatantrik Sthitishilata O Samanupatik Nirbachan' (Democratic Stability and Proportional Election System). His columns and articles on domestic political issues and international affairs are thought-provoking, analytical and suggestive in nature.

He is a widely travelled man. For attending international conferences, seminars and workshop he visited 32 countries of the world including USA, Canada, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Japan, Australia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Turkey, Pakistan, India, Nepal etc.

He is married to Mrs. Nurun Nahar and blessed with five sons and one daughter.



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