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**Political Participation
In The Islamic Political Thought**

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Political Participation

In The Islamic Political Thought

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The " **political participation** " is a rarely- used terminology in the books of politics and law, in the present, as well as in the past. It is expected that, in the future, this term will play a significant role in the politics and law textbooks. This urged the writer to handle the subject and relate it to an old, but renewable, political thought which is based on divine outlined fundamentals that enable the thought to renewed and developed dynamically.

Someday, His Magesty King Hussein -the King of Jordan- was asked to submit his opinion on the " **political opposition** ", in the mean time of readopting the democratic option through electing the members of the House of representatives in 1989. His Magesty replied that he would prefer the use of " **participation** " rather than " **opposition** ". Because the implications of the first term include the political opposition as well as proposing better opinions within a determined legal and political rivalry among individuals and groups to gain authority and decision making position.

The handling of " **political participation** " as a new and rarely used term, and linking it to a specific thought in Islam, will sometimes, enforce

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researchers to seek the help of contemporary and widely known political terms as means to grasp the knowledge related to Islam viewpoint towards the adoption of **political participation** or **opposition**.

In order to understand the topic, we should use one of the contemporary political terms, that is the **political parties**.

To cover the subject with detail, the following points will be investigated:

- The meaning of Islam.
- Parties in the Holy Quran.
- The right of political opposition or participation in the Islamic political thought.
- Islamic viewpoint towards the multiplicity of political parties and evidences of its supporters and opposers.

I The Meaning of Islam:

The word Islam is derived from the word silm, which means peace. Further, Islam is the last religion of Allah " God " submitted to all peoples by Prophet Muhammad " peace be upon him ".

1 Inamullah Khan: Islam in the contemporary world. From "God and man in contemporary Islamic thought. Edited with introduction by Charles Malik. AUB. 1972, p. 1. Mahmmoud Shaltout: Islam is a belief and law. Cairo, 1974, p. 19.

Islam is not as some Westerns Prefer to call Muhammadaism. It includes and recognizes all religions ¹. The Holy Quran mentions " say we believe in Allah and that which has been revealed to us and which was revealed Abraham and Ismael and Isaac and Jacob the tribes, and in that which was given to Moses and Jesus, and in that which was given to the prophets from their Lord, we make no difference between any of them and unto Him we have surrendered (Muslim) ¹ .

Thus the Muslims believes in all Gods' prophets and his books as Islam is the last religion revealed by God to all the peoples. It is mentioned in the Holy Quran that " This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed my favor on you and chosen for you Islam as a religion ² .

II Parties in The Holy Quran:

The term " Party " -Alhizb- in the contemporary political thought doesnot have the same meaning as in the Holy Quran, in which the word is used to refer to all those who allied against the prophet Muhammad -infidels and Jews alike- in the battle of Alkhandaq.

The term has now become an important symbol and necessary instrument, both of which consitute a basic element of modern democratic systems and

1 Surat Al Baqarah, Ayat 136. Translated by Muhammad Ali AlKhuli: The Light of Islam. Amman, 1981, p. 19.

2 Surat Almaeidah, Ayat 3.

institutions ¹.

Therefore, a discriminating scholar should not be misled by the literal and semantic ambiguity of the term " **party** " as it no longer suggests conflicts and sedition. Rather, it has come to refer to an important instrument for performing specific tasks and achieving progress and stability as part of the practice of democracy ².

In a comparative study of the legacy and sovereignty in the past and present, and in an ideological viewpoint, scholars investigating the notion of parties and opposition in the Islamic political thought have come up with conflicting conclusions.

Invoking the right to opposition and political participation in Islam, some of them (AlFiqh) maintain that the Islamic political system provides for multi-party. Others, however, hold the view that Islam rejects the party system, whether in the form of multi-party system or a one-party system (unique party).

1 Duverger, Maurice: Institutions politiques et droit constitutionnel. Themis, 1980, p. 99.

2 Key, V. O. : Politics, parties and pressure groups. Fifth edition, Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1964, p. 199.

Wilson, James: Political organizations, Basic Books Inc., N. Y., 1973, p. 95.

III The right of participation and oppositon in the Islamic political thought:

Islamic political thought reflects the Islamic philosophic and theoretical inquiry in the nature and the role of the goverment, its relationship to the religious and temporal affairs and its relationship to social change and social revolution within the Islamic world and beyond ¹.

Regardless of place and time, opposition and freedom of expression, stem naturally from the freedom of opinion, consistent with justice and equality. Thus, a dmission of freedom of opinion or a freedom of speach entails necessarily some of the opposition and participation ².

The freedom of opinion, justice and equality represents solid foundations and fundamental principles in the Islamic political system. As a result, participation or opposition is allowed to exist and to fulfil its functions.

1 Tareq H. Ismael and Jacqueline S. Ismael: Government and politics in Islam. Frances Pinter. London, 1985, p. 3 .

2 Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said " The most excellent jihad is a true word in the presence of a tyrannical ruler" Trmithi and Abu Dawud. From Muhammad Ali Alkhuli: Traditions of prophet Muhammad. Al Falah House for Publication and Distribution, Amman, p. 80.

However, opposition in Islam does not mean systematic rejection for opposition's sake, and dismissal of others' opinion, be it right or wrong. Opposition in Islam involves redressing mistakes, suggesting alternatives and joining efforts for the achievement of welfare within the general and fundamental principles of Islam.

Prophet Muhammad said " let no one among you be a timeserver; (that is) if people do well, so you will do; if they do wrong, so you will do. But be mentally prepared to do well if they commit a misdeed" ¹.

Opposition in Islam is an opposition of details, not principles. Its aim is not, as the case with the Western system, to remove the government in place in order to supersede it. Its primary concern is to help redress errors and indicate the right path. In keeping with Islamic political expressions, we might say that opposition should not break the principles of legitimacy and obedience which constitute the foundations of AlBaya'a (the agreement). Indeed, Al Fiqh ² defines Al Baya'a as " a legal bond between the ruler and all the Muslims". This of course requires the ruler to be just and impartial ³.

1 At-trmithi, vol. 4, p. 3640. Hadith number 2007.

2 Al Fiqh is variously defined by classical Muslim Jurists. For example Abu Hanifa a known Muslim jurist defined the law "science of the right and obligations of man". Dr. Seif A. Romahi: International law and diplomacy with introduction to islamic law. Data Labo Inc., Tokyo, 1980, p. 46.

3 Dr. Bahi Muhammad, "Modern Islamic Thought", 1965, p. 285.

In the Muslim society, expressing one's opinion, particularly in matters concerning the community, is every Muslim's right, or rather his duty. In this connection, the Prophet Muhammad prescribed: "if one of you sees abomination he should set it right by hand; if he cannot, then by advice, if he cannot, then by heart. It is the least he can do" ¹.

However, in order for it to be successful and constructive, opposition must be organized. Organization in its turn, must be enforced by a group of eminent Muslims who, in controlling individuals, the community and the ruler, make them answerable for their deeds. Allah (God) says: " Let there arise out of you a band of people calling for all that is good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, they are the ones to attain felicity: ². There is agreement among Fiqh "scholars" that those chosen for this challenging task should have qualities of erudition, equity and independent judgement, which would enable them to analyse the relationship between the governor and the people in all its aspects. Thus, their opposition and participation would be based on sound analysis and farsightedness ³.

1 Shih Muslim "the Book of Faith" vol. 1, p. 69.

2 Surat Al Imran. Ayat 194.

3. Dr. Abdessalam Faruq, "Islam and Political Parties", 1978, p. 144. He refers to Abderrahman Al-Kawakibi, Rifa'at at-Tahtaoui, Mohamed Abduh and Dhia Ud-Dine Erris.

IV Pro-Multi-Party System in the Islamic Political Thought:

This issue maintains that the Islamic government system, does not rule out multi-partism, on grounds that it is not inconsistent with Islamic principles and prescriptions. Advocates of this opinion invoke the following arguments:

a) The Oneness of Allah (God) and the Constitutional Principles:

The unity of God "La illaha illa Allah" is not only the basic element, but it is the corner stone in Islam. The oneness of God means, "there is no God except Allah". All other constitutional principles which organize the community are called constitutional principles.

These principles are freedom, equity and equality. They can only be preserved and consolidated in a system that not only accepts political parties, but also guarantees for them the right to exercise their activities for the well-being of the community in accordance with the principles and prescriptions of Islam.

Al Shura (consultation) and (opposition) are two sides of same coin. Their aim is to exchange views between the ruler and his subjects for the sake of the general welfare. However, in the early period of Islam, the ruler was well-versed in the juristic and political matters of his time, but the situation is different today. The ruler is in need of guidance and support, just as the opposition requires organization and leadership, and this is precisely what

political parties offer nowadays ¹.

Equity and equality are among the major principles on which the Islamic government system is based. Thanks to these two principles, people whether they are weak or powerful, rich or poor have equal opportunities to express their views. Socially and ethically, Islam emphasizes the equality of all persons before law, and the equality of all human in origin.

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), said " The one who will be dearest to Allah (God) and nearest to Him in place on the day of judgement will be a just imam (ruler or governor) and the one who will be most hateful to Allah (God) on the day of judgment and will receive the severest punishment will be tyrannical Imam".

In an age marked by the government intervention in different activities and domains, one may wonder what prompts people to express their opinion and be certain it will reach those to the ruler. Needless to say that it is those popular and political institutions which bring people together and grant them equal opportunities to express their views, with the certainty of it being effective ².

1 Dr. Al-Kutb Mohamed Tobalia, "Islam and Human Rights", Cairo, 1976, p. 249.

2 Dr. Hamed Rabii, "The Science of Political Theory ", p. 211.

It is known that, Islam has recognized the freedom of speech and urged Muslims to exercise this right. The Prophet Muhammad underlined its importance when he said "the greatest Jihad is a word of truth uttered before a despotic ruler" ¹. In this respect, political parties may function as the vehicle through which public opinion is conveyed to the persons in charge to remind them of their duties if they are oblivious of them. Or to show them the right way if they go astray. This would contribute greatly to the achievement of security and stability.

b) Islam Is A Universal Religion:

Islamic principles are primarily concerned with organizing Muslims. They have, nevertheless, provided for the security of non-Muslims. The good treatment of religious and political communities within the Islamic State has received much emphasis. Minorities, whether political or religious, are thus granted the right to express their opinion and exercise political and intellectual activities through their own institutions, provided that they observe the general system set up by Islam, while determining their objectives and choosing their means ².

1 "Sunan Abi Daud," vol. 4, p. 514, At-Termadi: Hadith number 2175.

Muhammad Ali Alkhalili: Traditions & Prophet Muhammad (op. cit), p. 80.

2 Suleiman Al-Tammawi, "Umar Ibnu Al-Khattab and the Foundations of Politics and Administration", 1976, p. 384.

Seif A. Romahi: International Law and Diplomatic practice (op. cit), p. 47.

c) Political Parties Fulfil Numerous Functions:

One of the political parties' most important functions is to nominate candidates for the different political and administrative offices, and the judiciary in some states. This upholds the principles that the individual should not indulge in self-judgment. Allah Alimghty said: "Justify not yourselves" ¹.

The ruler's legitimacy is derived from the Baya'a of Muslims (The agreement) or "election", to use modern terms. Yet, this Baya'a would not be accomplished unless the parties have nominated the person, made him known to all Muslims and ascertain that he does satisfy the conditions of Al Imamah (leadership), if he is to be elected for presidency, or other conditions if he is to hold a judiciary or an administrative office.

d) Difference of Opinion is Acharacter of Human Being:

Allah "God" said: "if the Lord had so willed, he could have made mankind one people, but they will not cease to dispute" ². The Prophet Muhammad says: "The Jews split into seventy one groups, the Christians into seventy-two, my Ummah (people) will split into seventy-three groups" ³. The case being so, the

1 Surat An-Najm, Ayat 32.

2 Surat Hud, Ayat 118.

3 Al-tarmadi, Chapter "the Division of the Ummah", Hadith Number 2778.

Abu Daoud, vol. 5, p. 4.

Islamic Ummah "people" should have settled their divergences and organize them so as to take advantage of it.

It is unquestionable that the collective effort is more rewarding than the individual one, and the Ummah would gain much if parties and groups worked for the achievement of public welfare within the principles of Shari'a " Islamic Law ".

The allegation that any controversy generates rancor and hate and as such, leads to disunity and anarchy lacks foundation. In many instances, disagreement helped uncover the truth and make out errors, thus becoming a factor of reconstruction and not a tool for destruction.

In support of this, Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal used to say about Shafei (who was also a master in matters of religion and jurisprudence) "I have for forty years invoked God's blessing upon Shafei in my prayers", while Shafei used to say about Imam Malik " as far as Ulama are concerned, Malik is the best of all. No one can be his match ".

V Arguments Against Multi-Party System In Islamic Political Thought:

Adversaries of multi-party system maintain that this system goes against the spirit of Islam, its precepts and principles, basing their stand on the following:

a) Opinion Should Be Expressed On An Individual Basis:

Abu Al-A'la Al Mawdudi wrote about parties saying: "these are the outcomes of your considering yourself a mere nation, forgetting that you are a universal party whose primary aim is to make its principles prevail in the world and rule over it. As long as you do not develop a clear conception of the nation party, you will not succeed anywhere" ¹.

The above statement results in the belief that applying the term of party to Islamic community instead of a national group means that such a party becomes an integral part of any nation just as is the case within a multi-party state. Hence the call of Abu Al-Ala Mawdudi advocating party-system in the Islamic political context.

Al Mawdudi did not in fact use the term "party" in its current implications. He used the term to mean the Islamic Ummah which represents the party of God as opposed to Eastern and Western sects.

Al Mawdudi adds "Members of the Islamic State Council (Majlis ashshoura) cannot split into groups or parties. Each of them must truly express his own opinion, because Islam does not allow the members of Islamic State Council to adhere to parties and defend their points of view, be they right or wrong".

¹ Al-Mawdudi, "The Islamic Government". Dar Al-mukhter, 1980, p. 250.

b) Parties Are Sources of Disputes And Divisions:

Dr. Mustapha Kamal Wasfi says in this connection "the most noticeable effect accruing from blending democracy with Islam is the foundation of parties. This is certainly a disrespect for Islam since everything that leads to division against our religion". Allah "God" said: " As for those who divide their religion and break up into sects, thou hast no part in them in the least" ¹. Furthermore, in fulfilling their functions, parties tend to encourage the individual's dependence on the state in running public sectors, thus giving the administration prerogatives that contrast with those stressed in the Shari'a ².

c) Allah "God" Rejects Parties in the Quran:

Proponents of political parties rely quranic verses which call for unity and warn against division and partisanship. According to them, political parties are instruments of division and disputes and not an element of stability and reconstruction. Allah said:

"And fall into no disputes, lest ye lose heart and your
power depart" ³.

1 Surat Al-An'am. Ayat 159.

2 Mustapha Kamal Wasfi, "The Classification of the Islamic Orders", Wahba Library, tome I, 1977, p. 118.

3 Surat Al Anfal. Ayat 46.

"And hold fast, all together, by the Rope which god stretches out for you, and be not divided among yourselves".¹

"And be not ye among those who join gods with God, those who split up their religion, and become (mere) sects"².

"As for those who divide their religion and break up into sects, thou hast no part in them in the least"³.

Conclusion:

In this presentation of political participation and the positions of AlFiqh "jurisprudence" of partisanship in the Islamic political thought with both sides asserting that oppositon is a right guaranted by the Islamic political system, we would like to underline the following:

- a) Political Participatin is one issue of the whole and perfect religion and law. As Islam is flexible in the matters of state and life issues, it presents many options to the Muslims within its frame work consituted by the Holy Quran and Sunnah.

1 Surat Al Omran, Ayat 103.

2 Surat Arroum, Ayat 31, 32.

3 Surat Al An'am, Ayat 159.

- b) Islam has come with general principles and precepts the most important of which are freedom of opinion, equity and equality in order to guarantee all of the individuals rights as well as those of rulers, and help to keep a balance between freedom and power.
- c) The controversy over the legitimacy of political parties under Islamic regime, is a controversy over one aspect, among many, of the Islamic system as a whole. Thus any opinion in this context would be defective, unless it takes into consideration all of the principles upon which the glorious sharia rests.
- d) Considering the fact that the general context may be determinant in avoiding unfounded judgements while discussing any issue, time should also be taken into account, especially as regards matters pertaining to power, the way it is exercised and its relationship to other institutions, whether they are constitutional, such as representative bodies, or organizational like political parties.
- e) The absence of political parties in the early period of Islam was a result of absence of divergences over the philosophy of ruling.

The death of the Prophet Muhammad ended this period of unanimity and an era of opinion began. Such situation encouraged the freedom of speech and taught people to be tolerant and accept opposing views. As a result,

the Islamic political thought witnessed the emergence of theories which gained the admiration of politicians and protagonists of modern democracy alike.

- f) To use modern words, the party system as such is a mean not an end in itself. It is a mean of establishing democracy by allowing people to participate in government so as to prevent the ruler from becoming despotic, and to make those at the helm accept the directives of the public opinion and respect them.

Our attitude in favour of the foundation of parties under an Islamic government system does not stem from the need to see social classes represented. It is rather an expression of the desire to see these parties lay down programmes within the aimed principles of Islam at securing a decent living and a better future for all, and at fostering a unity that could only be reinforced and consolidated in such a democratic system.

The parties representing the majority in Parliament are endowed with absolute power by virtue of which they can issue laws and abrogate them. However, the majority in Islam must abide by the precepts of Sharia, which are the precepts of a religion to which every citizen in the Ummah is committed.

Our recognition of majority as a legislative source is conditioned by the fact that this general system established by the Holy Quran and the Prophet's

Tradition (Sunnah).

The principles in islam must remain intact. The branches could change and move without going beyond the limits of the principles or deviation from them. Individuals have indeed the right to enjoy the freedom of opinion and opposition through political organizations. Yet, they remain bound by the general system whose bases have been laid by the Holy Quran as the words of God and the Sunnah which represents the words of the Prophet Muhammad and his deeds.

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