

# Islam and Democracy

## Qur'an and Hadith Perspective

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Islam is the first comprehensive system of life, which pronounced the notion of group life (Jamaat) and commands the practice of ideals of Islam for the welfare of human being. Islam is regarded as fountain of basic law for the guidance of Islamic government. Islam stands for the realization of the noble ideal of human welfare both in this world and the next.

Democracy is literally derived from two Greek words: Demus meaning the people and Kratein meaning to rule. Democracy is popular sovereignty or rule by the people and is form of government distinguished from "rule by monarchy, rule by hereditary aristocracy, rule by the most educated, rule by the elders and rule by the religious and other elite."<sup>1</sup>

It is said that democracy means rule by the people, however does not reveal enough about the meaning of democracy. There are three of the principal uses of the term 'democracy, participatory democracy, representative democracy and economic democracy'.<sup>2</sup>

Participatory democracy is a form of direct democracy, which emphasizes on popular participation majority rule and political equality. Participatory democracy is possible in small communities. With the emergence over the past few centuries of political communities containing diverse ethnic, religious and racial groups, larger numbers of people, and more sophisticated economics, a different kind of democracy has developed as representative democracy.

A representative democracy or indirect democracy

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52.M. R. Grenberg, R. Anderson, and G. W. Page,  
Environmental Impact Statements, Resource Paper no. 78  
– 3 (Washington, D. C.: Association of American  
Geographers, 1978), p.2.

53.Ibid., pp. 15 – 29.

36. Relative attribute means any adjectival idea about God pertaining to some aspect of his action; Pooya, Fundamentals, p. 13.
37. Al Quraan, s, 21, vs. 101 –7.
38. Ibid., s. 68, v. 4.
39. Nahjul Balagha, Sermons, p. 286.
40. Al Quraan, s. 4, vs. 58, 80.
41. Ibid., S. 57, v. 25.
42. Nahjul Balagha, Sermons, pp. 246 – 59.
43. For an elaborate discussion see Pooya, Fundamentals, pp. 20 – 22.
44. Al Quran, s. 7, v.26; see also s. 49, v. 13, s.5, v. 2.
45. Ibid., S. 2, v. 247.
46. Ibid., s. 2, vs. 31 – 32.
47. Ibid., s. 96, vs. 1 – 5.
48. Ibid., s. 37, v. 36.
49. Ibid., s. 17, v. 85.
50. Ibid., s. 20, v. 114.
51. S. H. Nasr, The Encounter of Man and Nature (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1968), p. 97.

- 25.H. M. Mehdi Pooya, *Fundamentals of Islam* (Karachi: Pakistan Herald Press, 1972), pp. 25 – 26.
- 26.For a good discussion see Nase, *Introduction*, pp. 7 – 11.
- 27.*Al Quraan*, s.2, v. 284.
- 28.*Ibid.*, s.15, vs.19, 20.
- 29.*Ibid.*, s.55,vs.8, 9, 10.
- 30.*Ibid.*, s. 41, v.53; s.45, v.12.
- 31.For an excellent discussion on sigh see Yi Fu tuan, “Signs and Metaphors, “*Annals of the Association of Americarr Geographers* 68 (1978); 263 – 72.
- 32.Ali Tehrani, *Iqtisad-I-Islami [Islamic Economics]* (Mashhad: Khorassan Press, 1974), pp. 209 – 11.
- 33.*Nahjul Balagha, Sermons, Letters, and Sayings of Hazrat Ali*, trans. M. Askari Jaferi (Karachi: Khorasan Islamic Centre, 1960), p. 287.
- 34.*Ibid.*, p. 280.
- 35.Grace is defined as “ to give out of sheer love without expecting any return”, whereas “justice means ‘He keeps everything in its proper place and according to merit, so that the system should function as one harmonious unit representing the absolute unity of its Creator and Administrator..... Whatever He gives is out of sheer love but in accordance with the merit and appropriateness of the state of the receiver” (Pooya, *Fundamentals*, p. 113).

12. Yi Fu Tuan, "Discrepancies Between Environment Attitudes and Behaviour: Examples from Europe and Canada", *Canadian Geographer* 13 (1968): 171 – 91.
13. White, "Historical Roots", pp. 1206 – 7.
14. See for example I. A. Matley, "Review of J. Passmore's Man's Responsibility for Nature", *Geographical Review* 65 (1975): 533 – 34.
15. Black, *Dominion of Man*.
16. Simmons, *Ecology of Natural Resources*, p. 29.
17. J.W. Bennet, *The Ecological Transition: Cultural Anthropology and Human Adaptation* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1976), pp. 94 – 95.
18. White, "Historical Roots", p. 1207.
19. Nast, *Introduction*, p. 14.
20. M. Baqir Sadr, *iqtisadona* [Our Economics], Persian trans. M. Kazim Musawi, *Iqtisad-I-Ma* (Tehran: Intesharat Islami, 1971), pp. 20 – 28.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
22. Al Quraan, s. 45, vs 12, 13; s. 31, v. 20; s.14, vs. 32, and 33.
23. *Ibid.*, s.10, v.14.
24. *Ibid.*, s.2, v.30.

Arabic stands for variously, Sallallaho Alayhe Wa Alehi Wa Sallam or Sallallah Alayhe-Wa-Salam ("May God send upon him and his descendants greetings and peace"); and latter stands for both singular and plural and means Alaih-is-Salam ("Peace be upon him [them]"), and is used for all other prophets as apostles and Shiite Imams.

6. S.H. Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctorines* [Cambridge: Havard University Press, Belknap Press, 1964], pp. 3 – 5.
7. Mikesell, "Geography", p.17.
8. Simmons, *Ecology of Natural Resources* pp. 358 – 60; see J. Black, *The Dominion of Man* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University press, 1970); K. E. Boulding, "Environment and Economics" in W. W. Murdoch, ed., *Environment* (Stanford, Conn.: Sinauer, 1971), pp. 359 – 67; A. Toynbee, "The Religious background of the present Environmental Studies 3 (1972): 141-46; J.G. Bruhn, "The Ecological Crisis and World Ethics", *Internatinal Journal of Environmental Studies* 3 (1972): 43 – 47; see also R.J. Bennet and R.J. Chorley, *Environmental System, Philosophy, Analysis and Control* (London: Methem, 1978), pp. 14 – 21.
9. Simmons, *Ecology of Natural Resources*, p. 369
10. Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis", *Science* 155 (1967): 1205, 1206 – 7.
11. Toynbee, "Religious Backgroud."

2. Robert Kates, "Improving Societal Management of Technological Hazard" (Paper presented at the Workshop of the International Geographical Union Working Group on Environmental Perception, Ibadan, Nigeria, 1978), pp. 1.1a.
3. For details refer to the works like M.T. Farver and J.P. Milton, eds. *The Careless Technology: Ecology and International Development* (New York: Doubleday, 1972) R.F. Dasman et al., *Ecological Principles for Economic Development* (London: John Wiley and Sons, 1973) and I.H. Zaidi, "Land Use Hazards in an Arid Environment: The Case of Lower Indus Region," "Ecological Guidelines for the use of Natural Resources in the Middle East and South West Asia (Morges, Switzerland: International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, 1976), pp.38 – 59.
4. See for example C.O. Sauer, "The agency of Man on earth", in *Man's Role in Changing the Face of the Earth*, ed. W.L. Thomas, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956) pp. 49 – 60; M. W. Mikesell, "Geography as the study of Environment: An assessment of Some Old and New Commitments", in *Perspectives on Environment*, ed. I.R. Manners and M.W. Mikesell, Association of American Geographers, Commission on College Geography Publication no. 13 (Washington, D.C., 1974), pp. 1 – 23.
5. For an English translation of Al Qur'an refer to M. Pickhtal, *The Meaning of Glorious Koran* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1930); see also S.V. M. Ahmad Ali, *Al Qur'an: Translation and Notes* (Karachi: Sterling, 1964), s. (surah/chapter) 3, vs. (verses) 19,84 S.A. and A.S. are benedictory formulas; the former is used specifically for Prophet Muhammad (S.A.), and in

that their actions are causing on the quality of the environment. Such people are disregarding the ethical spirit behind their right to subdue nature and benefit from natural resources. Indeed, the state processes in an Islamic state have to be subordinated to divine leadership, a kind of leadership which in the present circumstances can be possessed by a religious scholar or a council of such scholars well reputed in taqwa, for it is taqwa and knowledge which guarantee justice.

In particular, the findings of this paper can be of value to the Muslim world, where governments are embarking on various kinds of developmental programs. These programs need to be prepared and executed in such a way that the environment quality of the areas involved is enriched rather than injured. As faithful adherents of Islam, they must work in accordance with the principles enunciated here, setting aside the idea of maximization of benefits without any regard for the maintenance of environmental balance. Our approach should be optimization of resources, and the alteration and modification of resources, and the alternation and modification of environmental features need to be properly managed in accordance with Islamic principles.

## References

1. Peter Haggett, *Geography: A Modern Synthesis*, 2d ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), p.72; I.G. Simmons, *The Ecology of Natural Resources* (London: Edward Arnold), pp.217-23.



comprehensive review prior to construction or implementation.”<sup>52</sup> This law, however, has its own weaknesses particularly from the standpoint of its application in a political system characterized by pressure groups.<sup>53</sup>

## **Summary and Conclusions:**

It can be asserted here that the ecological crisis faced by many developed and less-developed nations is in effect a moral crisis, and that it can be effectively dealt with by an Islamic ethics of decision-action processes. Unlike the materialist interpretation of development, the Islamic worldview considers man, because of his theomorphic makeup, as ecologically dominant, but as an instrument of God’s will to whom everything belongs. Man’s freedom to convert resources and adjust spaces is controlled by justice, taqwa, and knowledge, including both theoretical and practical knowledge, which he is enjoined to observe, lest he become the sufferer. It is these variables, the guiding principles to the Islamic approach to environmental ethics, which provide the perceptual and behavior framework that helps us maintain the ecological equilibrium.

Man is constantly reminded by God that this world is only a temporary abode for him, and that he must work here on this Earth in such a way as to be rewarded in the next world – his permanent place of residence. The caliph of the Islamic State is duty-bound to oversee human actions vis-à-vis the environment. He has the right to enforce laws and punish those whose actions are found to be blindly following the path of the maximization of benefits as well as those who ignore the ill effects