

# The political philosophy of Islam

**T**he political philosophy of Islam is flexible. It is not based on any rigid principles. Basically, it is the real circumstances of any given situation that determine the Islamic political system. In spirit, the Islamic political philosophy is eternal but in form, it is flexible.

A study of the Quran shows that there is no such thing as a detailed political philosophy or a complete political system revealed. For example, the appointment of a *khalifah* or head of state is the most important part of any political system, but in this respect, no clear cut directions are given in the Quran. It was because of this that after the Prophet of Islam, there were four subsequent heads of the Islamic State but all four were appointed in four different ways.

The fact that the Quran or Islam does not explicitly outline a detailed political system is not due to any shortcoming or incompleteness of the religion.

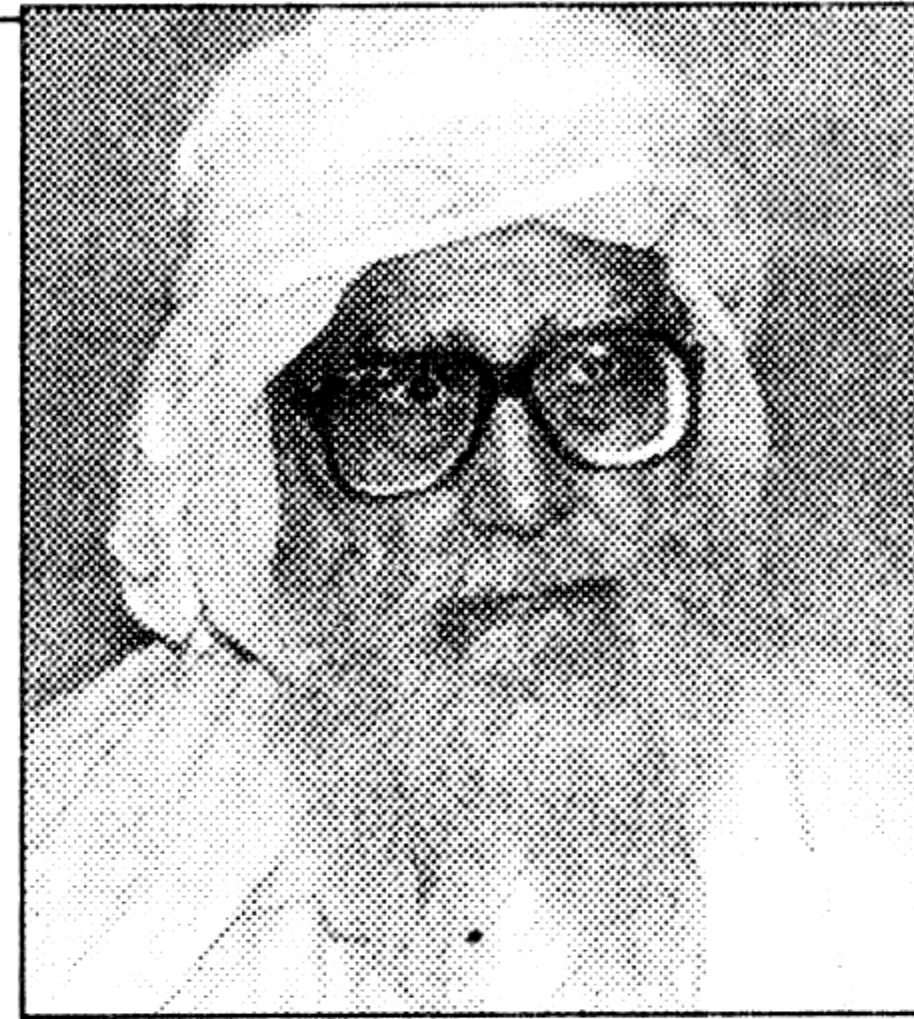
To be sure, there is no doubt that Islam is a complete ideology. The fact that Islam does not clearly outline a political system is exactly what is wanted because politics by its very nature should be flexible and malleable. Otherwise it would go against Nature and would not be sustainable.

Thus, what would be the point of detailing something that is not sustainable? Hence, it is just according to Nature that the Quran sets forth only the basic ideological principles and does not ordain a detailed political system in a practical form.

This nature of the Islamic political system can clearly be seen in the Prophet's life. The life of the Prophet of Islam as a prophet was twenty-three years long but during this period, he did not opt for any single political system.

Instead, his political behaviour would depend upon the circumstances that prevailed at the time. The entire life of the Prophet, as regards to politics, may broadly be divided into

## Horizons



*Wahiduddin Khan*

three parts. During the early period of his Prophethood, the Prophet of Islam lived in Makkah for thirteen years. During this period, the political system of Makkah was based around the *Dar-al-Nadwa*, which was a sort of tribal parliament. But the Prophet did not ever attempt to enter or seize control of this *Dar-al-Nadwa*. He completely ignored the *Dar-al-Nadwa* and immersed himself in peaceful *dawah* work.

From this behaviour of the Prophet we learn that the first principle of Islamic political philosophy is to accept the existing political *status quo* as it is and to avail the constructive opportunities in non-political fields in a peace-

---

**Islam does not clearly outline a political system because politics by its very nature should be flexible and malleable. Otherwise it would go against Nature and would not be sustainable**

ful manner. This principle is not simply *status quoism* but it is a positive *statusquoism* because it provides room to continue peaceful activity in fields other than politics.

The second principle of Islamic political philosophy can be gleaned from the period in the Prophet's life after migration to Madinah. The life of the Prophet in Madinah was for ten years. This period can be further divided into two broad parts. During the first half of the Madinah period, three communities were present in the city — the Muslims, the idolators and the Jews. In other words, at the time, Madinah was a multi-cultural society.

Due to this circumstance, the Prophet opted for a kind of common politics. He issued a charter, which is known in Islamic history as *Sahifa-al-Madinah*. In this charter, he declared that all three communities were to enjoy cultural and religious freedom.

Even the Jewish judicial system which had been running for a long time now was allowed to continue as it was, under *Kaab ibn Ashraf*, a Jew. So the first half of the Madinah period was, in present terms, much akin to a democratic system.

Modern democracy is a system of power-sharing. The Madinah period was quite similar to this.

So, according to the Prophetic precedent above, a power-sharing system under a democratic setup is also permissible under Islam if circumstances so require.

The third principle of Islamic political philosophy is a system governed completely by Islam. The Prophet adopted this third method only after Madinah had become virtually a homogeneous religious society.

The wisdom behind the above three principles of Islamic political philosophy is given in this *hadith*: "How you are, that is how your rulers will be (*Mishkat-al-Masabih*)".

In short, the well-known saying that politics is the art of the possible is very near to the spirit of Islam.