

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

The Political Changes in Oman from 1970:
Transition Towards Democracy

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By

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to study the political changes in Oman from 1970 with the focus on the transition towards democracy. The core issue is the change from the policy of the previous sultan, who banned the participation of the nation and oppressed it. This led the country to civil war, isolation and the end of the regime. The current sultan, who launched a coup against his father in 1970, adopted various changes in areas such as the economy, politics and infrastructure, and allowed the people to run the country. The important changes were the process of democratisation in Oman, which is discussed in the context both of democratic theory, and change in the South. The thesis will offer an overview of democratic political theory, an account of political change in the South in general, and in the Middle East region in particular. The focus on Oman will seek to answer three questions: when did the process of democratisation begin; why was it begun, and how has it been managed? The core of the argument will look at the creation of formal institutions of democracy, such as the *Majlis Ash-Shura* (Consultative Council), and the State Council, and informal institutions, such as the media, the Chamber of Commerce, the Businessmen's Council, *Sablat Alarab* (the Arab Council Web Site), and the role of leading individuals in the democratic debate. These changes led the current sultan to receive internal and external legitimacy. Omani citizens are now aware of the development in other parts of the world and they will force the current sultan to add further changes. He should respond positively in order to remain in power.

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Table of Contents

	Pages
Abstract	2
Acknowledgment	3
Chapter 1: Introduction	12
1.1 Defining the Problem	12
1.2 Existing Knowledge on the Subject	17
1.3 Our Departure	27
1.4 The Aim of the Thesis	29
1.5 The Importance of the Study	29
1.6 Methods and Sources	30
1.7 Organization of the Study	31
Chapter 2: Democracy and Democratization	36
2.1 Introduction	36
2.2 Defining Democracy	37
2.3 Democracy	38
2.3.1 Democracy in Ancient Greece	38
2.3.2 The West	40
2.3.3 The Development of Democracy	42
2.3.4 Democracy in the South	47
2.4 Democratization	53
2.5 Democracy and its Critics	56
2.6 The British Experience	60

2.6.1	The Role of the Head of the State	61
2.6.2	The Role of the Ministers	61
2.6.3	The Role of the Parliament (the House of Lords and the House of Commons)	62
2.7	Conclusion	63
Chapter 3: The Political Context in the Middle East		
	and its Implications for the Sultanate of Oman	65
3.1	Introduction	65
3.2	Social and Cultural Context	66
3.2.1	History	66
3.2.2	Arabic Language	67
3.2.3	Islam	68
3.2.4	Islam and Democracy	72
3.2.5	Tribes	80
3.2.6	Democracy in the Middle East	82
3.2.7	Social and Economic Contexts	85
3.3	Political Changes in the Middle East	86
3.3.1	Colonial Period	86
3.3.2	Decolonization	87
3.4	Political Regime types in the Middle East	93
3.4.1	The Middle East Monarchy	93
3.4.1.1	Jordan	95
3.4.1.2	Yemen	96
3.4.1.3	Bahrain	97
3.4.1.4	Kuwait	100
3.4.1.5	Islamic Revolution in Iran	101

3.5	Conclusion	104
Chapter 4: Introducing Oman: History and Society		108
4.1	Introduction: Oman's backwardness	110
4.2	Geographical Location	108
4.3	Demography and Social Structure of Oman	112
4.4	History of the Sultanate: The Establishment of the Elected State	116
4.4.1	Sa'id ibn Taymur (1932- 1970)	125
4.4.1.2	The Nature of Sa'id's Regime	128
4.4.1.3	The Challenges to Sa'id's Regime	128
4.4.1.4	The Dhofar Rebellion	131
4.4.2	The coup of 23 July 1970	135
4.5	Society	138
4.6	Conclusion	147
Chapter 5: The Interaction of Economic and Political Development		148
5.1	Introduction	149
5.2	Oman before 1970	150
5.3	The National Income Since the 1970s	151
5.3.1	The Main Income	151
5.3.2	Diversification of Income	153
5.3.3	Fisheries and Agriculture	157
5.3.4	Tourism	160
5.3.5	Privatization Policy	161
5.3.6	External Investment	164
5.3.7	Vision of 2020	167
5.3.8	World Trade Organization	169

5.4 State- Building	170
5.5 Education	175
5.6 Social Affairs	180
5.7 Health	182
5.8 Media and Development	186
5.9 Crime, Law and Order	188
5.10 State and Labour	189
5.11 Other Services	190
5.12 Conclusion	191
Chapter 6: Oman: Progress Towards Democracy	193
6.1 Introduction	193
6.2 The Establishment of Ibadhiah	193
6.3 Oman’s Administrated Structure	197
6.4 The Government Structure	199
6.5 Formal Democracy in Oman	201
6.5.1 Structure and Operation of Parliament	204
6.5.2 Majlis Al-Shura (consultative Council)	210
6.5.2.1 Session and Duties of the Council	210
6.5.2.2 Membership Criteria	226
6.5.2.3 Criticism of Mujlis Ash-Shura	228
6.5.3 Majlis Al-Dawlah (state Council)	231
6.5.3.1 Membership Criteria	231
6.5.3.2 Duties of the Council	232
6.5.3.3 Criticism of the State Council	233

6.6	Informal Democracy in Oman	234
6.6.1	The Media	236
6.6.2	Arabic Website (Sablal Alarab)	237
6.6.3	Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry	238
6.6.4	Businessmen Council	239
6.6.5	Democratization and External Actors	240
6.7	Conclusion	241
	Chapter 7: Oman's Foreign Policy Searches for Legitimacy	244
7.1	Introduction	244
7.2	About Oman	245
7.3	The Effect of Location on Omani Foreign Policy	248
7.4	The Important Players in Oman's Foreign Policy	251
7.5	Maintaining Arab and Islamic Identity	253
7.6	Relationship with other Countries and the Regional and International Organizations	255
7.6.1	Regional and International Organizations	255
7.6.1.1	Membership of the United Nations	255
7.6.1.2	Gulf Co-operation Council	256
7.6.1.3	The Arab League	262
7.6.1.4	Damascus Declaration	265
7.6.1.5	Organisation of the Islamic Conference	265
7.7	Economic and other Aspects of Co-operation between Oman World Organizations	266
7.8	Relationship with Arab Countries	267
7.9	Relations with Iran	268
7.10	International Relations	272

7.11 Dealing with International Crises	274
7.11.1 Development of Palestinian Problem and its impacts on Oman (society and the state)	274
7.11.2 The Omani Position towards the Water Question in the Middle East	280
7.11.3 The Omani Position toward the War between Iran and Iraq	283
7.11.4 The Second Gulf War	286
7.11.5 Iraq in Crisis with the United Nations	289
7.12 Conclusion	290
Chapter 8: Conclusion, Democratisation in Oman	293
References	312
Appendices	337

List of Tables and Diagrams

4.1 Population of Oman in Regions, 2000	113
4.2 Population of Oman by Sex and Age, 2000	115
5.1 Oman's GDP by Economic Activity	154
5.2 Profile of Oil Production in Oman, 1998-2000	156
5.3 Agricultural Productions in Oman, 1999-2000	158
5.4 Fish Production In Oman, 1997-2001	158
5.5 Estimated Production in Agriculture and Fisheries	159
5.6 Estimated Number of Animals	159
5.7 Imports and Exports	164
5.8 Value of Recorded Merchandise Imports (the top ten)	165
5.9 Value of Recorded Merchandise (the top ten)	165
5.10 GDP at Market Price	166
5.11 Estimated Production of Crude Oil, Gas, Copper, Gold and Silver	167
5.12 Government Employees	172
5.13 Private Sector Employments	173
5.14 Civil Service Employees in Ministries and Government Organisations by Educational Level	174
5.15 Skilled Labour	175
5.16 Educational Profile of Students in Oman, 1970-99	178
5.17 Government Education Institutions	180
5.18 Women's Associations and Membership in Oman No. of Recipients of Social Welfare by Governorate region	181

5.19 Health and Medical Care	183
5.20 Patients Attending Ministry of Health Hospitals and Health Centres	185
5.21 Health Educational Institutions and Student Enrolment in Oman	186
5.22 Crime Statistics for 1996 and 2000	188
6.1 The Turn Out of Voters in Muscat	220
6.2 The Turn Out of Voters in Batinah	221
6.3 The Turn Out of Voters in Musandam	222
6.4 The Turn Out of Voters in Al Dakhliyah	223
6.5 The Turn Out of Voters in Al Dhirah	224
6.6 The Turn Out of Voters in Sharqiyah	224
6.7 The Turn Out of Voters in Wusta	225
6.8 The Turn Out of Voters in Dhofar	225

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“Democracy is often touted as diminishing the likelihood of war, protecting human freedom, and facilitating economic growth. It might be going too far to say democracy is all things to all people, but it is fair to say that there is a strong propensity to associate democracy with a wide array of activities and outcomes that people value.”¹

1.1 Defining the Problem

The Sultanate of Oman is a small Arab country in the Arabian Peninsula with a population of some 2.3 million which is about one-third of the population of Switzerland². Though founded as a tribal dynasty some centuries back, Oman remained very backward in social, economic and political development up to the 1970s. Long known for inter-tribal warfare often complicated by religious animosities, the country remained in obscurity except for the series of foreign invasions due mostly to the very strategic position of the country. In the hot politics of the Middle East, Oman has never been a big player like Iran, Iraq or Israel. Oman also hardly figured in the vast anti-colonial liberation struggles of many non-western countries against colonial rule. When

¹ Shapiro I., and Gordon, H., **Democracy's Value**, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p.1.

² <http://www.yahooligans.com/reference/factbook/sz/popula.html>. [1-12-2002].

the Islamic revolution gripped Iran, and its effects spilled over to the Middle East, and the Muslim world, Oman was hardly shaken. On the face of it, Oman would simply pass unnoticed as a typical South country suffering from the lack of education, malnutrition, poverty of the masses, diseases, and an authoritarian monarchy as a curse upon the people. Oman thus apparently seems an unlikely case for serious academic and political scientific attention.

And yet, Oman deserves serious academic and scientific attention for the following reasons. First, from the early 1970s, Oman began to change in a big way, so much that, in about three decades' time, it is no longer a typical country of the 'South', and an insignificant minor player in Middle Eastern politics. In fact, the political and constitutional changes that took shape in the early 1970s were the culmination of a series of mass rebellions (most notably the Dhofar rebellion in 1964-75) against the old regime, and the consequent political disorder that visited the country. The most interesting aspect of the changes in Oman is that while the country, backed by the sudden discovery of oil wealth, has grown at a rapid speed, this growth, socially and economically speaking, has not upset the political order. That is, Oman has experienced economic growth in the midst of political order and stability. This is all the more remarkable given the change-over from the old Sultan to his son Sultan Qaboos in a palace coup in 1970. In short, Oman's case of political changes goes against the thesis of Huntington (1968)³ that economic growth brings about political disorder and instability. In Oman's case, that did not happen. The interesting feature of the Oman's case is that

3 Huntington, S., **Political Order in Changing Society**, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968.

the new Sultan himself has introduced a lot of constitutional and political changes in order to adapt to a changing world.

Second, the political changes, including the change-over from the old regime to the new one, were necessary for the very survival of the monarchy itself. The Dhofar rebellion since the mid-1960s was giving enough signals to the old regime. If the previous Sultan had remained in power, Oman would have collapsed. The take-over by the present Sultan averted serious damage to the sovereignty of the state, as the new leader learned carefully from the mistakes of the previous one. Therefore, the case of Oman is a pointer to the students of political Science that timely political changes, undertaken at whatever cost, may be necessary to ensure the sovereignty and identity of the state. Third, compared to other Muslim countries in the world, and particularly in the Middle East, Oman's prospects for democracy are greater because of the predominance of the Ibadhi tradition of Islam in Oman. This Ibadhi tradition is more hospitable to democracy, based, as it is, on principles which are proto-democratic.

Fourth, Oman's strategic location at the Straits of Hormuz in the Arabian Peninsula calls for serious attention since about 75% world oil passes through this area. It is for this reason that Oman has been caught in the web of international and regional rivalries, and was a victim of imperial domination. That Oman today plays a greater role as peace broker in the Middle East is also mostly due to this.

Fifth, Oman may be small in size and population, but not in importance, because the new Sultan has taken the country out of its age-old isolation, and got it engaged in many

bilateral, multilateral and international relations and associations, which have served as a basis for its internal legitimacy, even as a monarchy.

Finally, what Oman has achieved has mostly been due to the leadership of the Sultan Qaboos, whose ascent to the throne coincided with the breakthrough of income from oil. Beyond doubt, oil strengthens the present regime. Without oil, the country would certainly face difficulties and barriers toward stability. As a result of this important income, Qaboos was able to build a strong army and to fulfil his promises to his citizens especially in the following areas. Firstly, during the last thirty three years Oman, has seen remarkable development in different sectors. Secondly, the new sultan absorbed former opponents into his regime and involved all Omanis in the government and building of the state, by a process of consultation through formal and informal institutions. This means the sultan's success can be attributed to two strategies, development and consultation.

The accession of Sultan Qaboos marked a watershed in the history of Oman and the pace of change during the last thirty years has been simply overwhelming. First, reconciling the developments in the economic field with the social, political and cultural aspirations of the people has been a major concern of the government. Second, with oil products serving as a beneficial resource to kick start the economy's path toward development, attempts have been made to diversify Oman's activities in order to ensure the security of the Sultanate in the post oil era. Third, more significantly, the government has also moved cautiously toward institutionalizing a more representative form of government without endangering the supreme authority of Sultan Qaboos. On assuming charge of

ruling Oman on and from 23 July 1970, Sultan Qaboos resolved to rejuvenate Omani society, as well as to pursue the policy of 'infitah' (openness), a task which was very daunting in view of the largely fragmented country. Achieving unity and modernization in conditions of political instability and social disorder was difficult indeed.

Despite the fact that Oman has a long history, its modern history began only after 1970, a period during which most countries of the world saw remarkable development. But the rapid development in Oman has strengthened the legitimacy of the recent government. Sultan Qaboos faced external interference in support of his opponents but, through external help, Oman was able to end the internal war.

It should be remembered that the demands of the people grow according to their progress. People now are more educated, and influenced by Western culture which is based on the principles of democracy and human rights. Furthermore, Omanis are aware of progress in other countries, through sophisticated communications media such as the Internet and the satellite T.V. Thus it can be expected that they will pressure the government for further democracy.

The Middle East is undergoing dramatic changes. No one can isolate Oman and the Omani nation from the Middle East, because Oman still shares with the nations of the region a number of features and values, such as the Arabic language, Islam, geography, history, tribal structure and so on. This means any discussion about Oman should be in the context of discussion of the Middle East. The changes that occurred in Oman were linked to the wide changes in the Middle East as a whole.

1.2 Existing Knowledge on the Subject

Although historians have written about the existence of Oman, and its various traditions including Ibadhism and the Imamate, it was since the coup in 1970 and the rise of a new regime under Sultan Qaboos that Oman began to receive serious academic attention. In particular there is no study of the transition towards democracy in Oman during this period.

John Townsend's "Oman, Making of a Modern State" (1977)⁴ was in a sense the pioneer as an analysis of the post-1970 period. He not only discussed the coup of 1970 but also the various factors leading to the coup. He discussed also the regime of Sa'id ibn Taymur and his methods of rule. The internal and external challenges to the rule of Sultan Qaboos have also been paid some attention, together with the action undertaken to meet such challenges. The civil war in the Dhofar region has been dealt with by the author as an important factor. Townsend has also discussed the development of Ministerial Government in Oman.

J. E. Peterson's "Oman in the Twentieth Century: Political Foundations of an Emerging State" (1978)⁵ was the next major step that provided a detailed account of the history of Oman, its people and culture, the growth of the ruling dynasty, the coup of 1970 and the nature of new administration. The most appealing aspect of the book is its detailed

4 Townsend, J., **Oman Making of a Modern State**, London, Croom Helm Ltd, 1977.

5 Peterson, J., **Oman in the Twentieth Century: Political Foundations of an Emerging State**, London, Croom Helm Ltd, 1978.

discussion of the external influences on the evolving politics in Oman. Noting the situation of Oman before 1970, Peterson rightly wrote:

“The twentieth century has largely been a time of isolation of Oman. Suffering from fragmentation and economic stagnation, the country’s contacts with the outside world have been few and far between, consisting in the main of occasional steamer calls at Matrah and radio broadcasts monitored on the few sets available locally”. (p.136)

Peterson has also pointed out that:

“since Oman’s involvement in the outside world, its problems have also increased. Oman’s relations with its ideological opponents in the Arab world were not easy. For example, although Oman became “liberalised substantially, it was still plagued by rebels backed by Arab regimes whose ideological stance remained far to the left of the Sultanates”. (p.154)

also Peterson argued that:

“the gradual evolution of opposition to the Sultanate along the ideological spectrum from religious xenophobia to radical Marxism-Leninism gave notice to the Sultanate that change was absolutely necessary”. (p.154)

John C. Wilkinson’s “The Imamate Tradition of Oman” (1987)⁶ was a very interesting study of Oman’s social history and culture centring around the country’s Imamate tradition. The various issues dealt with in the book are the geographical structures and regional identities of various regions of the country, the complex tribal structures and

6. Wilkinson, J. , **The Imamate Tradition of Oman**, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987.

systems of property rights, clan patterns, and more importantly, the tribal state tradition, the Ibadhi renaissance, and the end of the Imamate. According to Wilkinson, the Imamate was always a more or less dynastic institution, “the religious legitimisation of a clan or family to hold a tribal state together”(p.9). Although, the book ends when Qaboos overthrew his father in 1970 in a coup, this is an indispensable reading for understanding Oman’s journey into the modern world after 1970.

Wendell Phillips’ “Oman, A History” (1967)⁷, was a historical account of Oman which, however, provided a lot of background information to the evolving politics in the state since the late 1960s. For instance, he discussed the Al-Busaid dynasty and their relations with East Africa. Then he discussed the troubles over Buraimi, the disputes between the sultans and the Imams and, finally, the civil war in the Green Mountains between supporters of the Imam and the Sultan. Although published before the new regime took over, this is an important book for understanding post-1970 Oman.

Morris, J., “Sultan in Oman”⁸ is an interesting account of the oil disputes between Oman and Saudi Arabia and the role that the country’s elites played at that time to defend the country. The elites’ role was ably analysed against the backdrop of Oman’s tradition of Imams and tribes.

7 Phillips, W., **Oman, A History**, London, Longmans, Green and Co Ltd, 1967.

8 Morris, J., **Sultan in Oman**, London, Faber and Faber, 1957.

Carol J. Riphpenburg's "Oman, Political Development in a Changing World" (1998)⁹ is a very serious academic account of the political development in Oman in the context of the country's history, culture, civil society, economic development and foreign policy. The author has, to begin with, highlighted the special role of Oman's geography in the development of its politics and economics in the sense that its strategic geographic location has allowed it to develop quite separately from the rest of the peninsula. Like other authors on Oman before, he also point out the problem of the isolation of Oman. After a short and synoptic history of Oman under the rule of various empires, Riphpenburg shows how, very rapidly after assuming power. Sultan Qaboos brought his country into the twentieth century, despite limited oil revenues by Gulf standards. The basic observation of the author is worth-mentioning here:

"Oman has made tremendous strides toward modernization in a remarkably short time. Today, it encounters the challenge of privatizing and diversifying the economy in the face of declining oil revenues, reducing the country's reliance on expatriate labour, and responding to the demands of a new generation unfamiliar with the austerity of former generations. Raised to adulthood in an oil-rich state, these Omanis have been able to take for granted the entitlements oil has provided. Consequently, the major political issue confronting the new regime is how to deal with the politics of rising expectations in a climate of diminishing resources". (p 2)

⁹ Riphpenburg, C., *Oman Political Development in a Changing World*, London, Praeger, 1998.

Joseph A. Kechichian's "Oman and the World" (1995)¹⁰ focuses on the foreign policy aspects of the new regime, although the interconnections between the domestic and the foreign environments are also pointed out. This book explores in detail how Oman has come out of its time-honoured isolation, and got involved in so many bilateral, multilateral and international organisations and associations. It also discusses the growing assertions of Omani leadership in both regional and international peace-making. Kechichian has identified the sources of Oman's independent foreign policy in an interdependent world, and pointed out the strategic role of the same in resolving many regional disputes. This has served to enhance the country's prestige outside and added to the domestic legitimacy of the ruler. The most fascinating aspect of the foreign policy of Oman is that although its foreign policy was articulated in classic Cold War terms, Sultan Qaboos adapted it to the changing Middle Eastern and international environment of the 1980s. The reason why this was possible, according to the author, was that the country's foreign policy was guided by an awareness of the country's capabilities¹¹.

Hamoud Al-Harassi, in his Master's Dissertation, "The Sultanate of Oman's Foreign Policy: Analysis and Explanation of Oman's Independent Approach Since 1970" (1994)¹² provides an overview of Omani foreign policy in the setting of the Arab World. He examines the principles of Oman's foreign policy, its role in the region and studies the causes for Oman's more independent policy compared with other Arab countries. He

10 Kechichian, J., **Oman and the World**, USA, Santa Monica, CA, Rand 1995.

11 Ibid. p1.

12 Al-Harassi, H., **The Sultanate of Oman's Foreign Policy Analysis And Explanation of Oman's Independent Approach Since 1970**, Unpublished MA Dissertation, University of Salford, 1994.

also provides historical background about Oman; the role of foreign powers in the country, the Omani empire in East Africa and, briefly, about the present ruling family.

Abdullah Omar Aideed's, "Omani Foreign Policy in The Post-Cold War Era" (1996)¹³ examines the transformation from a backward- looking nation into a modern dynamic state. He describes the recent Sultan as pragmatic. His analysis is in four parts. These are

- A- The projection of conventional Omani foreign policy.
- B- The Imamate, the rise of Sultan Qaboos ibn Sa'id and the consolidation of Omani foreign policy.
- C- Implementation of Omani foreign policy.
- D- Future challenges confronting Omani foreign policy.

Patricia Risso's "Oman & Muscat" (1986)¹⁴ gives a general background about the Ibadhi sect. She said the Ibadhi considered themselves to be the original inhabitants and thus the authentic independent continuity of Islam. Unlike Sunni who recognise themselves as orthodox, she argued that Ibadhi recognise themselves as 'Motazilah' which means 'liberal'. However, Risso confuses Ibadhi and Motazilah. Motazilah is another sect in Islam. They separated themselves from the Shias and Sunni but they were not Ibadhi. The Motazilah accept that every point relating to Islam is subject to discussion. Risso gave an overview of Oman before 1970, but most of her discussion was about Sa'id ibn Taymur. She discussed about the Omani regions such as Sharqiah and Dahira.

13 Aideed, A., **Omani Foreign Policy in The Post-Cold War Era** Unpublished Master Dissertation, University of Westminster, 1996.

14 Risso, P., **Oman & Muscat**, London, Croom Helm, 1986.

Clements' "Oman, the Reborn Land" (1980)¹⁵ covers social background, the reign of Sa'id ibn Taymur, the development in Oman during the current Sultan, the Dhofar war, education and youth, and the future of Oman.

The local literature is dominated by two authors, Al-Salmi¹⁶ and Ibn Ruzaiq¹⁷. At the same time, some English writers who visited or worked in Oman during the period of Sa'id ibn Taymur provide important information. For example, Fred Halliday, in his book, "Arabia Without Sultans"¹⁸ provided a very good analysis of the personality of Sultan Sa'id ibn Taymur, which is an important source for this thesis.

"The Omani culture of election", *Bi'ah*, was discussed in a book written by Hussein Gubbash (1997)¹⁹ who presented a very clear and mature debate about the electoral system in the past in Oman.

William R. Polk's "The Arab World Today" (1991)²⁰ offers an overview of the political changes in the Arab World especially the period since the occupation of Palestine, the

15 Clements, F., **Oman, the Reborn Land**, London and New York, Longman, 1980.

16 Al-Salmi, A., **Tuhfat Al-Aian Beserat Ahl Oman**, (The Omani History), Oman, Muktabt A-Imam Noor Al-Deen Al-Salmi, 2000.

17 Ibn Ruzaiq, H., **Al-Futh Al-Mumubeen fy Seeret Al-Sadah Al-Buaideen** (The History of Al-Busaid dynasty), Ministry of the National Heritage, Amoon Lil-Tagleed Wal-Tibah, Egypt, 1984.

18 Halliday, F., **Arabia Without Sultans**, London, Penguin Books, 1974.

19 Gabbash., H, **Oman Al-Democratiah Ali-Slamiah; Taqaleed Al-Imamah Wal-Tareekh Al-Siasy Al-Hadeeth, (1500- 1970)**, (Oman Islamic Democracy, The Traditional of Imams and the Modern Political History, 1500 – 1970), Beirut Dar Al-Gadeed, 1997.

mandates policy toward Jordan, the relation between Arabia and Egypt, Libya, Sudan and the problem in Palestine. This background gives clear view of the arab world.

Michael Field's "Inside the Arab World" (1994)²¹ is not specifically about Oman, but, as the title itself suggests, about the profound changes taking place inside the Arab world Oman included. The book discusses the most common issues affecting the Arab world: Islam and democracy, regional conflicts, corruption, the impact of the structural reform of the global agencies, the vexed issue of peace in the Middle East, and the relationship of the Arab world and the west. The most compelling picture in the Arab world, according to the author, has been the issue of change. As he said:

“In the last ten years there has been a growing feeling in the Arab world that there must be change. The realisation by the people of the failures of their governments has led to an intellectual ferment, within the region and outside of it”. (p.173)

In fact, the above observation applies equally to the case of Oman which understood rather early that social, economic and political changes were a must if the country was to survive as a sovereign unit. The old Sultan Sa'id thought that by completely isolating Oman from the rest of the world he could manage not to change. How wrong he was! The new Sultan Qaboos well understood the spirit of the times, and the fact that Oman

20 Polk, W., **The Arab World Today**, Washington, Harvard University Press, 1991.

21 Field., M., **Inside The Arab World**, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1994.

could no longer resist the changes that the Arab world was already experiencing. The great merit of the book, then, is that it provides the right context, as above, within which to locate the case study of changing Oman.

Yezid Saygh and Avi Shlaim's (eds) "The Cold War and the Middle East" (1997)²² contains a host of papers dealing with the Cold War and its impact on the politics in the Middle East. The Cold War was the dominant international conflict in world politics for about half a century from the late 1940s to the late 1980s. Fred Halliday, an authority on the subject defined the Cold War, in his chapter in the book, as:

"...a competition between two rival social and national systems, each of which sought to represent itself as the solution to the problems of the world and each of which believed it could prevail over the other, in the long-term competition". (p.6)

Since the Cold War was a global conflict. The Middle East was also affected by it, and the patterns of conflicts inside the Middle East were deeply affected by its dynamics. The great merit of the book is that it locates the political changes in the Middle East against the backdrop of the Cold War, and its aftermath. If the Cold War affected the patterns of conflicts in the Middle East, the end of the Cold War now defines the contours of the shifts that are taking place in many countries in the region including Oman. With the decline of the Socialist model of development, the countries are now

22 Saygh, Y., and Shlaim A., (eds) *The Cold War and the Middle East*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997.

freely taking to the free-market and liberalised economy. The book also posits the issue of democracy in the Middle East in the right perspective:

“That the USSR did not promote democracy in the Middle East is hardly surprising. America’s failure to promote democracy and pluralism or even basic human rights in the Middle East is much more difficult to reconcile with her official ideology. Some American leaders extol Israel as a shining example of democracy in a sea of authoritarianism, but no American President, with the exception of Jimmy Carter, actually tried to promote democracy and human rights in the rest of the region”. (p.291).

To understand the experience of democracy from wider perspective, the researcher has devoted part of this study to the concept of democracy and its arrival in the world. There has been wide discussion in this field, but particularly useful were “Models of Democracy” by Held (2000)²³, “Democracy” by Dunn (1993)²⁴, “Defining and Measuring Democracy” by Beetham (1994)²⁵ and “Democracy in the Third World” by Pinkney in (1993)²⁶. These and other books paved the way of better understanding and evaluation of the features of democracy that began to appear in Oman from 1981. David Potter, David Goldblatt, Margaret Kiloh and Paul Lewis’ “Democratisation” (1997)²⁷ does an excellent survey of the democratic developments in the Middle East along with other areas of the world.

23 Held, D., **Models of Democracy**, Oxford, Polity Press, Second Edition, 2000.

24 Dunn, J., **Democracy**, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995.

25 Beetham, D., **Defining and Measuring Democracy**, London, Sage Publications Ltd, 1994.

26 Pinkney, R. **Democracy in the Third World**, Buckingham, Open University Press, 1993.

27 Goldblatt, D., Kiloh, M., Lewis, P., **Democratisation**, Cambridge Polity Press, 1997.

Simon Bromley in his chapter on 'Middle East Exceptionalism-myth or reality' has discussed the problem of democracy in the Middle East in terms of a set of factors. First, he identifies a set of countries which are revolutionary nationalist, modernizing and authoritarian (e.g., Egypt, Iraq and Syria) which are different in social structure and historical patterns of development, yet share common obstacles to democratization. Second, there are some small states (such as Jordan and Lebanon) which do not have significant landed classes and access to oil, and in which the state plays a limited role. These countries thus allow more scope for pluralism in the political sphere. Third, there are some purely 'rentier states' (Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States) which are not based on agrarian development, but have access to oil wealth, and which have developed mostly on the basis of that wealth (rather than through strong movements by socio-economic forces). These states have a limited social basis, and have very little space for the emergence of forms of independent political representation. In such countries, the ruling tribes have been turned into monarchies and authoritarian monarchical rule remains the norm.

The third point above may not be entirely true at least for the case of Oman because the Omani rule today is not a case of hard authoritarianism as it was before 1970. However, one would agree with the overall conclusion that the Middle East has witnessed limited democratisation, and there are few, if any, liberal democracies in the region.

1.3 Our Departure

Most of the studies surveyed above have dealt with various aspects of the changes that have taken in Oman since 1970 but the single most important issue of, on the one hand, political change and its interaction with social and economic development, and, on the other hand, legitimacy for the monarchy, has remained neglected. This study seeks to rectify the neglect and to fill in the gap in knowledge. The component parts of the argument are as follows.

First, the notion of political change, as we use it in this study, is one of incremental political change, especially since the enthronement of Sultan Qaboos. Although the new Sultan came to power through a bloodless coup, this was not a revolutionary change. To begin with, the political structure of the country remained the same. However, the change-over from the old Sultan to his son was a major political event given the circumstances surrounding it. The set of political changes introduced by the new Sultan had a piecemeal character, but were most effective. Thus, for the new regime, 'political change' has served as an effective survival strategy. This study seeks to unravel the politics of political change in Oman, something nobody has done before.

Second, the interaction between political changes and socio-economic development is very important, and the new regime has seen to it that the political change is not delinked from social and economic changes. The basic idea is that the people need a share of the oil wealth and at the same time want to see changes in the old method of ruling. A combination of the two has made for the best strategy for the new ruler.

1.4 The Aim of the Thesis

In the light of the above basic argument of mine, this thesis seeks, concretely, to analyse and to assess the political changes in Oman between 1970 to the current time. The aims of this thesis are thus:

- To discuss the strategy of abuse and repression which was practised during the period of Sa'id ibn Taymur.
- To explore the main changes introduced by the new regime.
- To evaluate to what extent has democracy been achieved so far.
- To examine if the development helped the current regime to receive internal legitimacy.
- To explore whether the changes in the Middle East compelled Oman to change.
- To explain and analyse the main changes in the Omani foreign affairs.
- To explore the prospective changes that Oman needs in order to be able to remain stable in the future.

1.5 The Importance of the Study

This study looks at Oman from a perspective not used before. Its focuses on democratisation and its effects on policy, as well as the Omanis' relation to the changing Middle East. It attempts to provide suggestions as to what route Oman should take in the future, in order to strengthen the legitimacy of the present regime to maintain social and political stability

1.6 Methods and Sources

In writing this thesis, the researcher has followed a number of methods of collecting data. The most important source of data is of course the official sources which include various reports of the various departments of the government especially those dealing with social and economic development, health and medical care. The researcher has also used the sources of the Arab League, and the other diplomatic sources facilitated by the diplomatic position of the researcher. As a Diplomat himself the researcher has taken part in various high level conferences of the Arab League (1993), and the Damascus Declaration (1995), the Tehran Conference on the Relations Between Iran and the Other Gulf States, (1996), and the Conference in Oman on Confidence Building Measures among the Gulf States (1999). The researcher as a Diplomat was the second most important organiser (entrusted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Oman) to organise the Omani Ambassadors' Conference in Oman in 2000. Additionally, the researcher was also given the responsibility to look after Arab Affairs, and afterwards European Affairs by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Oman. All these activities helped the researcher to gain first hand knowledge about many aspects of the country's domestic and foreign policy. The other major source consulted in writing this thesis are the books written by foreign scholars and Omani researchers, both of which have been found to be helpful. Articles in journals and on the internet, written on Oman, have also been used for writing this thesis.

On the empirical side, the researcher has interviewed a host of high level government officials, diplomats, and high level officials of the private sectors to ascertain their views on various aspects of the political changes taking place in Oman. The interviews were

open-ended so that they could express their views freely and frankly. The many visits made from Britain to Oman in the last couple years by the researcher have enabled him to conduct the interviews, as well as to collect more materials for the thesis.

The other source of information for this research has been Omani newspapers, both printed and electronic. The researcher has also consulted some dissertations available for the purpose.

1.7 Organization of the Study

The basic argument of the thesis has been developed in terms of the following chapters. This first chapter introduces the problem of the study in the appropriate intellectual, social and cultural context, which includes the definition of the study, existing knowledge on the subject and the limitations of the same, my departure from the existing knowledge, my argument, sources and methods.

The second chapter is titled “Democracy and Democratisation”. It is shown here that democracy has become a dominant political feature of the late 20th century. In some countries in the South, development has accompanied democratization. In this global journey toward democracy, the unique experience of Oman has been highlighted. Oman has experienced social and economic change without the major social and political disorder that Huntington (1968)²⁸ would have us believe is inevitable. At the same time Oman has been introducing a modicum of constitutional and political changes that may be taken, on a liberal estimate, to be moves toward democracy.

28 Huntington, S., op.cit. 1968.

The democratisation process did not just begin at the end of the Cold War. In some cases, states in the South—such as in Uganda and Lebanon- had democratic institutions but then experienced civil war, and the decline of democracy. It is also the case that during the Cold War, both the USA and the USSR intervened in states in the South, supporting dictators or communist parties. At the end of the Cold War, also, there is an argument that some states in the South felt they were forced to democratise, or lose western investment, yet for democracy to be genuine, people must want it. One of the more difficult areas in the South has been with regimes that only introduced democracy in order to stay in power, using fixed elections to do this. In these circumstances, people have no faith in democracy and it becomes harder to make it work.

The third chapter is concerned with “Political Changes in The Middle East and their Implications for the Sultanate of Oman”. Political change in Oman will be located in the context of political changes in the Middle East as well as the Third World. The Middle East also has begun to move toward a kind of democracy, but not in the same way as the rest of the third world. The Arab Israeli conflict, with the Monarchies in the Middle East and the Iranian Revolution all will be briefly considered in this chapter. It will be argued in this chapter that the Omani regime of Qaboos has not been impervious to political changes in the region and the world, and he has articulated a political strategy of survival on the basis of a modicum of political changes without which Oman perhaps might have disintegrated and been divided.

The fourth chapter, “Introducing Oman: History and Society”, deals with Oman’s history, culture and society in order to locate the study in the right context. It explains the history of the Sultanate of Oman and the social background to the political changes in the country, notably Oman’s backwardness, geographical location, demography and social structure. This shows also the linkages between society and the political changes in Oman taking place after 1970 on the basis of the argument that the political changes were not simply imposed from above without any social support. In fact, Oman has had a different historical experience from other Arab states, having once been a powerful empire in the Indian Ocean. It has also had different relations with Iran, Pakistan and India, both in the past and in recent years, from those of other Arab states.

Chapter five is about “The Interaction of Economic and Political Development”. Most writers neglect to discuss the economic effect of political change in Oman. Domestically, citizens concentrate on infrastructure, development and the prosperity. For example, the priorities for the Omani citizens are hospitals, roads, and subsidies for agriculture and fisheries. The election of a representative in the Legislative Council is of secondary interest and people keep silent if the government meets most of their demands. The internal development strategy gives the regime internal legitimacy. Chapter Five will also give an overview of the situation in Oman before 1970, and at the present time. Oman has seen various changes and improvement in areas such as the social sphere, economy, national income, employment, health, education, fisheries, and agriculture. However, modernization has brought with it an increase in crime.

The sixth chapter “Oman: Progress towards Democracy” focuses on the difference between the Omani experience and that of the rest of the Middle East. Oman is influenced by the Ibadhi tradition, of elections and accountability. This chapter seeks to answer three questions: when did the process of democratisation begin; why was it begun, and how has it been managed? The core of the thesis will look at the creation of formal institutions of democracy, such as the *Mujlis Ash-Shura* (Consultative Council), and the State Council, and informal institutions, such as the media, the Chamber of Commerce, and the role of leading individuals in democratic debate.

Chapter seven is entitled “Foreign Policy and Searches for Legitimacy”. The survival of any regime mostly depends on external and internal legitimacy. Sultan Qaboos has succeeded in enhancing his international legitimacy. Oman has established relations with other countries and organizations. Mostly, rulers use external legitimacy to assist the internal legitimacy. This chapter contains an analysis and explanation of Oman’s foreign policy before 1970, the objective of the subsequent change, how relations with foreign countries are maintained, who makes policy, what are the basic policies of the country and the changes in foreign policy in the 1970s, 80s and 90s. Oman now plays an important role in solving the problems in the Middle East; it is one of the founders of the Indian Ocean Association and it was in 1990 a temporary member of the Security Council. The basic argument in this chapter is how widespread involvement of Oman in its external relations has served well as a basis of domestic legitimacy for the political changes introduced in the country, and the renewed support for the monarchy in this time of democratic change world over.

Chapter Eight, "Conclusion" first summarises the findings of the thesis, and then attempts to evaluate their implications for further political development in Oman and the prospects of such changes in the country's move toward a still more open and democratic regime.

CHAPTER TWO

DEMOCRACY AND DEMOCRATISATION

“The principles and practices of democracy continue to spread even more widely, and it is hard to imagine that there is a corner of the globe into which they will not eventually penetrate”²⁹

2.1 Introduction

The process of democratisation, which began in the South after the end of the Cold War, seems to have been based on the assumption that ‘West is best’. That is, the Western European tradition of democracy is the only model of democracy that exists and it should be exported to the whole world. There are many benefits of European democracy, but not everything in this tradition – such as elections and accountability- are unique to Europe, for they can be found in other cultures.

The chapter will give a definition of democracy, then the experience of democracy in the West and in the world, and the processes of democratisation will be discussed. Also, there will be a critical consideration of the values of democracy. The aim of such an overview and analysis is to give a clear account of the concept of democracy from a theoretical and practical point of view.

²⁹ Shapiro, I and Macedo, S. “Introduction” to “Designing Democratic Institutions”, *Nomos*, XLII, 2000, p.1.

2.2 Defining Democracy

The word democracy is familiar to most of the people in the world. But the concept is misunderstood. Since the time of the Greeks, the meaning of democracy has changed greatly. Etymologically, democracy means rule of the people. Abraham Lincoln, the former American President defined democracy in the 19th century as a system of government of the people by the people and for the people³⁰. Philosophers and political thinkers before and after Lincoln have not agreed on the exact meaning of democracy.

There are certain criteria that must be satisfied if a political system can be defined as democratic. These are: 1) the people have significant influence on the government through political institutions: 2) there is no serious discrimination in access to social and political rights: 3) there is a certain element of freedom of speech and access to the media; and: 4) the government has a good record of human rights. A state can move down the democratic route quickly or slowly. In fact democracy is not static; all democratic countries have developed in their own way.

The world has seen a dramatic movement toward democratisation since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Now, more than seventy percent of the population of the world have elected Parliaments³¹. Democracy seems to have gained an almost universal victory³².

30 Yoroovsky, I, Introduction to the basic elements of Democracy,
<http://usinfo.state.gov/Arabic/democracy/democracy1.htm> [17-2-2003].

31 Norton, P., in Norton P., and Ahmmmed N., "Making Sense of Diversity", **The Journal of Legislative Studies**, 4 (4) 1998 P. 183.

32 Blaug, R., and Schwarzmantel, J., **Democracy : A Reader**, Edinburgh University Press, 2000, p. 1.

Almost every regime now claims that it practises some sort of democratic system. Such countries use the term for gaining prestige, to create an appearance of legitimacy for their subjects and for external observers – in other words to keep themselves in power³³. But the fact is that democracy is not a tool, as countries claim. It is a universal value. Some analysts have set up a number of conditions to judge whether this or that regime is practising real democracy. According to Kedouri these involve: free and fair elections, in which all the people participate, inclusive suffrage, the right to run for office, freedom of speech and freedom of information³⁴. Three further conditions, in his view, are development of social institutions, insurance regarding human needs and developmental training in democracy³⁵.

2.3 Democracy

2.3.1 Democracy in Ancient Greece

European democracy as a political concept originated in ancient Greece in the fifth century BC. In Greek, the word *demokratos* is a combination of two words: *demos*, which means people and *kratos*, which means rule³⁶. Thus, democracy means the rule of a country by the people.

The general claim of Greek democracy was that it gave equality to all in making decisions which affected all. Decision-making was in the hands of the people, who made their own laws, and debated decisions before voting on them. For example, it was the

33 Held, D., *Models of Democracy*, Oxford, Polity Press, Second Edition, 2000, p. 3.

34 Kedouri, E., *Democracy and Arab Political Culture*, London: Frank Cass, 1994.

35 Ibid.

36 Dahl, R., *On Democracy*, Yale University, 1998, p. 11.

right of a democratic citizen to take part in decisions on such issues as war and peace. However, the meaning of the word 'democracy' may be ambiguous and involves broad scope for debate³⁷. It creates a dilemma in a number of aspects, such as the exact identity of the people and the nature of their rule. The word people should in theory, mean all the people, but in reality, there were many people in ancient Greece who were excluded, because they did not have full rights as citizens. These included women, slaves, and people who were not of Greek origin. Perhaps only around ten percent of the total population were given the opportunity to express their opinions, while the other ninety percent were ignored. These ten percent ruled, although in theory state and society were supposed to be one and there were no subjects as such³⁸.

A summary of democracy in Greece is provided by Held (2000). He points out that its citizens had direct participation in legislative and judicial functions. The assembly of its citizens had sovereign power, which included all the common affairs of the city. There were multiple methods of selection of candidates for public office: "directly, by election, not rational discussion". Ordinary citizens and public officials were not differentiated in terms of special privileges. With the exception of positions connected to war, the same office could not be held more than twice by the same individual, and terms of office were short. Finally, payment was received for public service³⁹.

37 Dunn, J., **Democracy**, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993 p. 19.

38 Held, D., **Democracy and the Global Order**, Cambridge, Polity press, 1995, P.6.

39 Held, op. cit. 2000, p. 17.

From the study of Greece, it emerges that the aim of democracy is to foster three main values: justice, sharing of power and solving problems through dialogue, not violence. The establishment of peace allowed science and the arts to flourish, as is testified by the proliferation of new inventions. Sward argues that the phenomenon of democracy continues to be valid, as it is the basis for political equality, popular control, inclusiveness, freedom, constitutional rule and competition⁴⁰. In real life, there are imbalances in nature, in power struggles and in economic terms (the haves and the have-nots). Democratic government should aim to treat citizens equally, and push forward important political issues such as self-determination. In Athens, the power of some clans or tribes was dissipated if the majority asked for change. Peasant peoples were given a voice, and the freedom to elect their candidates through competitive methods. This early form of democracy can be relevant to a country like Oman moving in a democratic direction.

2.3.2 The West

Between the collapse of Greek civilisation and the modern world, little or no attention was given to democracy as a political ideal. It did not play a major role in the Roman Empire, or in Europe, in the period of Christian rule that was dominated by monarchy, and a close relation between the Church and the State. Up until 1760, no significant regime in the world had a democratic system⁴¹.

40 Betham, D.,(eds.) **Defining and Measuring Democracy**, London, Sage Publications Ltd, 1994., p.8.

41 Goldblatt, D., **Democracy in the Long Nineteenth Century; 1760 – 1919**, in Potter, Goldblatt, D., Kiloh, M., Lewis,P., **Democratisation**. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997, P.46.

A new period of democracy began to occur with the development of the European economy, and its growing dominance around the globe. New wealthy classes emerged to rival traditional hierarchies⁴².

In the case of Britain, after the political upheavals of the Eighteenth Century, the monarchy lost power, and Parliament became sovereign, but decisions were still the privilege of a wealthy elite. Only slowly was the electoral franchise extended. Not until 1918 did all men over 21 have the vote, and not until 1929 was the vote extended to all women of the same age. Only from that time may Great Britain be said to have had universal liberal democracy⁴³.

The French revolution began in 1789 with the slogan “Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity”. This revolution, which led to violence and terror, resulted from the monarchy being unable to cope with the requirements and expenses of modern government. The French established equality of social groups, bringing into existence a single popular nation⁴⁴.

The democratic element in the French revolution of the eighteenth century created great fear among the European monarchies, as did the revolution in America. In the latter, a constitution was established in 1789, thirteen years after independence had been declared from the rule of Great Britain. The focal point of the constitution was

42 Bronner, S., *Twentieth Century Political Theory: A Reader*, London, Routledge, 1997, pp. 2-3.

43 Ibid, pp. 50-51.

44 Ibid, pp.51-52.

Democracy, but in the beginning, as in Britain, the franchise was limited⁴⁵. The American civil war which lasted five years (1861- 65) led to the end of slavery in the South and “curtailed the development of an explicitly anti-democratic coalition of Northern and Southern elites⁴⁶”. The most difficult problem in the USA was integration of black African people in the political agenda. A triumph was achieved for the African American and minority groups of women through the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Right Act of 1965. The latter Act meant that America had finally become a liberal democracy⁴⁷.

2.3.3 The Development of Democracy:

Generally speaking, monarchies in different parts of the world were reluctant to relinquish any of their powers to the populace. But in the 19th and 20th centuries, social and economic changes resulted in a considerable amount of conflict, with the dominant social orders challenged by rival ideologies, such as Communism and Fascism. In the 20th century in particular, democracy emerged as the most efficient and fair system of government, even though there are still debates about the nature of democracy, and even though there is no perfect democratic government in the world⁴⁸.

In general it can be said that the development of democracy in the 20th and 21st centuries has paralleled the development of the modern state. Only from the 1970s did democratic regimes start to gain ground in the world, although even in 1975, around sixty eight

45 Ibid, pp.48-50.

46 Ibid , p. 50.

47 Goldblatt, D., op.cit. 1997, pp. 48-50.

percent of countries remained authoritarian. This figure dropped to around twenty-six percent by the end of 1995⁴⁹. The remainder mostly have some features of democracy. The transformation spread from Southern Europe in the 70s, to South America and Asia in the 80s (with the sole exception of India which has been a democracy since 1950) then to Sub-Saharan Africa. Eastern Europe, including Russia was transformed in the late 80s and at the beginning of the 90s⁵⁰.

It should be noted that the concept of democracy does not relate to a tribe or other small units. It is only associated with nation states⁵¹, and issues of democracy concern the quality of government, the amount of freedom people should have in the state, and how much political participation should be allowed.

Mostly, it is only in a democratic state that people can openly criticise the government. Every means is used, but the media are the most important. People use the media to express their ideas⁵², and find enough space to do so there. People in industrial and developed countries tend to have better opportunities to pursue their causes than in poor countries. The reason is that opposition groups can reach the media more easily and attack the ruling party.

49 Potter, D., Framework for Analyses in Potter, D., Goloblat, D., Kiloh, M., Lewis, P., **Democratisation**, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997, p.9.

50 Ibid, p. 10.

51 Anthony, M., **The Transformation of Democracy**, Cambridge, Polity press with the Open University, 1997, p.5.

52 Budge, L., Introduction, in Budge and McKay Ceds, **Developing Democracy, Comparative Research**, London, Sage, 1994, p.2.

States with Communist systems have claimed to be democratic, but for the most part, it is under a capitalist economy that democracy has become most developed. However, democracy is also about informal processes, and hence greater attention should be paid to the way democratising states allow freedom in the informal sector.

The democratic system became an important feature after the First World War. In that time, the Ottoman Empire, Germany, and the Austri - Hungarian Empire collapsed. The American president Woodrow Wilson was keen to establish a safe democracy, not only in his state but also in the entire world. His country's view of democracy included the right of active participation, national self-determination and a parliamentary government with a constitution⁵³.

However, the reality was different. Most of the governments in the inter-war period were military or authoritarian. For example, Mussolini took power in Italy in 1922, Salazar in Portugal in 1929, King Alexander in Yugoslavia in 1929, Hitler in Germany in 1933 and Franco in Spain in 1939⁵⁴. Instead of stability being achieved, the world entered the Second World War.

The consequences of the Second World War reorganised the map of the World. The world divided into two main systems, the Eastern bloc, led by the Soviet Union and Western countries (the United States of America, the Western European countries and

53 Kegley, C., and Wittkopf, E., **World Politics: Trend and Transformation**, Thomson Wadsworth, United, USA, 2004, p. 198.

54 Bessel, R., *The Crisis of Modern Democracy, 1919- 45*, in Potter, Goloblat, D., Kiloh, M., Lewis,P., **Democratisation**, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1997, p.71.

their allies). The Cold War was a difficult era because every other part of the world was subject to intervention, either by the Soviet Union or the United States of America. This led to tensions, because the independence of nations was compromised. A dramatic change occurred in the late 1980s and 1990s as a result of the revolution in Eastern and Central Europe and the former Soviet Union.

The actual change started from the beginning of the 1980s with Poland and then Hungary shifting from communism towards a democratic regime⁵⁵. The cornerstone of the change was Gorbachev's reform, coupled with the Tiananmen Square incident in China in 1989, which affected levels of trust in communist ideology. Finally, the unification of Germany was a great triumph for democracy.

The end of the Cold War was a triumph for liberal democratic ideology with its universal suffrage and free market economy.

“From Latin America to Eastern Europe, from the Soviet Union to the Middle East and Asia, strong governments have been falling over the last two decades. And they have not given way in all cases to stable liberal democracies. Liberal democracy remains the only coherent political aspiration that spans different regions and cultures around the globe”⁵⁶.

Power is distributed in democracies, through formal institutions, such as elected bodies at local and national level and maybe also at the state or at regional level (as in Germany

55 Held, D., *op.cit.*, 2000, p.276.

56 Giddies, A., *op.cit.*1994, p106.

or the USA). Liberal democracy is associated with a pluralist system and is characterised by multiple political parties competing for votes in free and fair elections. Once elected, representatives are accountable to the electorate. Elected bodies can also, force public and private institutions - for example, in the military or in commerce - to account for their actions in public. Accountability is one way in which the public can maintain a bureaucracy free of corruption.

A liberal democracy will usually protect the rights of private institutions that are part of civil society to be free from government interference. It will also guarantee its citizens the right of freedom of assembly, freedom of movement and freedom of speech within the law.

Another feature of liberal democracy is its respect for minorities and human rights generally. Liberal democracies usually practise free market capitalism in their economies. This means that the greater proportion of wealth in society is owned by private individuals. The role of the state is to provide a stable currency, a legal system in which people can live in peace, and defence of the realm. It also means engaging in international diplomacy to promote and develop international trade⁵⁷.

Liberal Democracy involves two features: liberty which means a free market and the regulation of the state and democracy which means the rule of majority. These two may, on the face of it, be incompatible. But they are found to be co-existing in the capitalist

⁵⁷ Deegan, H., **Third Worlds: The Politics of the Middle East and Africa**, London, Routledge, 1996.

states. Capitalism requires state intervention to be kept to the minimum, while democracy is supposed to protect all people.

2.3.4 Democracy in the South⁵⁸

Democracy in the South became common as the Cold War came to an end, and military regimes, or other forms of dictatorship, were no longer supported by either the West or the East.

Throughout the Cold War, states in the South had been vulnerable to the competition for influence between the USA and the USSR. It meant that repressive regimes were supported by the USA, for example in Latin America, Africa and the Middle East, even though the USA as a democracy claimed to support democratic values.

At the end of the Cold War, states with repressive regimes were no longer able to claim that dictatorship was necessary to prevent the spread of communism. Also, because many of these states were poor, it was believed that democracy would remove corruption in government, and would lead to economic liberalisation and the promotion of free markets and a private sector economy. People would be free to make their own decisions; they would not be dominated by government, but participate in its selection

⁵⁸ Since the end of the cold war the division of the world in to three worlds has been replaced by a split between North and South. The latter includes the continents of Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

and decision-making. A higher economic standard of living was the intention of the structural adjustment programmes of the IMF and the World Bank⁵⁹.

The end of the Cold War has seen an increase in democratically elected governments. In Africa, 25 out of 41 states have a government chosen by competitive elections⁶⁰, while governments have also been elected in Asia and Latin America. In mainland China, however, the democratic movement has failed to make any impact.

But the transition to democracy has not been easy, and in some states, continuing economic and social problems have resulted in domestic unrest, as has been the case in the Sudan, Jordan, Venezuela and Tunisia. In other states where governments are elected, such as Egypt, the elections do not appear to be free and fair. The same party is always elected, and domestic unrest continues⁶¹. In the case of Egypt, and other states in the South, the end of the Cold War and the transition to democracy has not had any effect on long standing disputes based on religious, regional, or class differences. These usually exist where people believe they have been excluded from the political process. Dictators who obtain the support of a minority claim that they have a democratic regime; they identify those people who support them and marginalise the others⁶².

59 Robinson, M., Strengthening Civil Society in Africa: The role of Foreign Political Aid, *IDS Bulletin*, 26, (2, April, 1995).

60 Pinkney, R. *op.cit.*, 1993.

61 *Ibid.*

62 Douglas, L., *Radical Democracy*, Ithaca; Cornell University Press, 1996, pp15-16.

The replacement of military authority by democratic rule could cause instability for a country. The country might experience violence. For example, in October 1998, most experts thought that President Abd-Urrahman Wahid would bring political and economic reform to Indonesia. But instead of that, the country sank into a political and economic crisis, causing the stock market to slump. Furthermore, religious and separatist problems have displaced a million people and killed thousands of the population, threatening the nation's fragile unity. Wahid was accused of two corruption scandals, and religious violence between Christians and Muslims erupted, as well as ethnic struggles with migrant communities⁶³.

One of the dominant claims in the democratisation process is that the existence of democracy is more likely to prevent war from taking place. The democratic peace theory has argued that there are no serious examples of democracies waging war on each other. However, states in the South are still vulnerable to external intervention during the process of democratisation. Such intervention may be threatening in nature, perhaps in states which are the targets of religious or political opposition movements, whose intervention is designed to cause problems for what is seen as an illegitimate regime. Afghanistan in recent years has been a state in which external powers intervened for their own interests, causing chaos inside the country. The Taliban was supported by some countries, while the Hikmatyars were supported by others. But foreign intervention sometimes helps countries to achieve development, as in the cases of South Korea and Taiwan. American support for the survival of both in the face of potential communist

63 BBC Analysis: **Indonesia's problems**, [29-5- 2001].

take-over allowed both economic development and eventual democratisation. Without enough wealth Taiwan and South Korea would not have gone towards democracy. Through massive military and economic support they achieved stable development. As a result, a democratic system succeeded in these two countries through external intervention.

Nearly all African countries share one feature: they were colonies, with the exception of Liberia. At one time or another Britain, Portugal, Belgium, Spain, Holland and Germany occupied and ruled over African countries. In order to share the land, these empires imposed boundaries on the continent which created cultural and linguistic difference within the new states when impence came⁶⁴. These new states also faced economic struggles, and did not have a good chance to develop as real democracies. Elites mostly controlled the state. For example, the previous president of Zaire was recognised as the wealthiest president in the world, but most of the population were desperately poor⁶⁵. Wiseman, providing statistics about the situation in some African countries, reported in the year 1997 that in a number of African countries the GNP per person was less than \$100. In Mozambique and Angola, infant mortality was around thirty percent. Also, in Central Africa, only 10% of the population had access to clean water. In addition, females have fewer privileges than males in African countries. Furthermore, those countries which are rich in natural resources, such as Sierra Leone, have bad administration, and those which lack natural resources, such as Lesotho, see their

64 Wiseman, J., *The Rise and Fall of Democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa*, in Potter, Goloblat, D., Kiloh, M., Lewis, P., *Democratisation*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1997, pp.273-274.

65 Ibid, p. 274

indigenous labours emigrate to other states.⁶⁶ In addition to cultural and economic problems, African countries have ideological and class problems. They have been vulnerable to interference by both Marxists and capitalists. The rulers of these countries face competition from outside, which may lead to weakness. Greed often takes priority over the country's interests. Political order or development become secondary⁶⁷.

Globalisation tends to maintain elites in power in the South, owing to their privileged position in both politics and the economy. The result is that elections may be used to reinforce their status, rather than create a genuine democracy reflecting the interests of the people as a whole. Kenya is an example of a state where elections are held but its record of fulfilling the wishes of the people is not good⁶⁸. Indonesia during the Suharto period was another example. It may be the case that apparent democratisation in the South is 'rewarded' by the North in the form of foreign aid or investment opportunities.

Some countries in the South often suffered from border disputes after independence. This was a good excuse for the rulers to empower the military and delay the practice of real democracy. For example, after independence in the 19th century, most countries in Latin America were taken up with border disputes⁶⁹. Although in the 1970s South American countries celebrated one hundred years of independence. Up to that time, with the exceptions of Costa Rica and Venezuela, all of them were under military regimes.

66 Ibid, p.275.

67 Ibid, pp.275-276.

68 Chabal. P., "A Few Considerations on Democracy", *International Affairs*, 74 (2) April, 1998, pp. 289-303.

69 Potter, op .cit. pp.174 -194.

The change to democracy started in the late 1970s and by the 1990s, democratic systems had become the norm in these countries⁷⁰.

Asian countries grasped independence only after the Second World War, and their experience was totally different from South America's. These countries had differing types of culture, religions and languages. Also, some Asian countries were communist, and this situation delayed the chance to practise democracy. Those practising real democracy were few, for example India, Japan, and South Korea.

India is recognised as the largest democratic country in the world. It was one of the earliest countries in the South to adopt the system. After independence from Great Britain in 1947, India announced itself in 1950 to be a sovereign democratic republic. The most important element of democracy in India is that it has a free press and basic citizen's rights. These are written in the constitution and protected by the courts⁷¹. However, India is criticised for not having social equality. For example, there are a few people who are very rich, while the majority are poor. Furthermore, only a minority is educated, and its corruption is infamous. On the other hand, real reform can be found in the style of life in India, which means the future of this country might progress. For example, since the 1990s, the country has begun privatisation projects. This step was important for the government. Nowadays average development in India is over 6% per year. Furthermore, the green revolution in Punjab province has brought wealth for this

70 Cammack, P., Democracy and Dictatorship in Latin America, 1930- 80 in Potter, Goldblatt, D., Kiloh, M., Lewis, P., **Democratisation** Cambridge, Polity Press, 1997, pp.152-173.

71 Rundall, V., Why Have the Political trajectories of India and China Been Different? in Potter, Goldblatt, D., Kiloh, M., Lewis, P., **Democratisation.**, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997, pp.195-216.

region. Regional groups are now less demanding of independence. The BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) cannot win a majority of votes. It needs an alliance with other parties. People in the South, for example, do not vote for this party. This means the BJP must listen to other voices. Indians have emphasised the enhancement of the political sphere other than the economic situation. An accountable and honest government is a precondition for greater prosperity and social equality. Democratic participation in India is relatively high. More than 60% of the Indian population participate in elections. In comparison, less than fifty percent of the population of the UK who had the right to vote participated in the last general election⁷².

2.4 Democratisation

For Potter, democratisation "refers to political changes moving in a democratic direction"⁷³. There are countries which have experienced fast movement and others which are slow. Movement inside one country is variable across a number of aspects, such as from low accountability to high, from low competitiveness in elections to high, and from low protection of civil and political rights to high protection of civil and political rights⁷⁴. Any movement, because of a complexity of factors, is bound to involve risks. There are, therefore, opposing views regarding the wisdom of moving quickly. There are those who are worried about countries which have started to move quickly towards democracy. They believe that difficult times will be faced in the future. The experience of some countries, such as the former Soviet Union, African countries and

72 John F. "Hindu Nationalist Party Expected to Make big Gain in India Election", New York Times, <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/bjp.htm> [6-12-2003].

73 Potter., op.cit. 1997, p3.

74 Ibid, pp. 3-10.

some countries in the Middle East, demonstrate that the democratic process is difficult to achieve⁷⁵. Other writers and politicians insist that all systems in the world should switch rapidly to democracy, believing that it will solve all problems and bring peace to the entire world. As regards the type of change, there are various options and outcomes, liberal democracy, partial democracy, or a more controlled type of regime. These outcomes might be dependent on either the will of the voting population or on the strength of the incumbent government. Whatever the case, the examples given above may be characterised as follows. Liberal democracy involves accountability, free and fair competition, civil and political rights and association autonomy⁷⁶. Examples of liberal democratic countries are Western European countries and the United States of America. A partial democracy might involve limited accountability of government to its citizens through elections, unfree and unfair competitive elections, rights to freedom of expression curtailed and associational autonomy (ie: civil society) more or less compromised⁷⁷. Israel, for example, expelled some of the Palestinian population and bans them from establishing their own country, and India has had its problems with Punjab, Assam and Kashmir.

There are extreme cases of authoritarian governments who claim to be democracies, but are not accountable through elections, who allow no competition in elections, who place restrictions on individuals' civil and political rights, and where autonomous associations

75 Burnell and Calvert, *op.cit.* 1999.

76 Potter, *op.cit.* 1997, pp. 3-10.

77 *Ibid*, pp. 4-5.

and organisations critical of the state are virtually non-existent, Salvador, North Korea, Cuba, China and Iraq during the previous regime are examples⁷⁸ .

Historically, the demand for democracy came as a result of bourgeois revolutions, for example in France, Britain and in the United States. The process often starts with revolution or a conflict between the ruling group and those who ask for change. So a country might enter into a civil war or a major confrontation might occur with the head of state, forcing him or her to step down and give way to a democratic regime. This is what happened in Serbia in the year 2000.

The revolutions that have taken place world over may be of many types and forms: bourgeois democratic (France in 1789), or an authoritarian type of bourgeois revolution, (e.g, Germany in the late 1870s under Bismarck and Japan in the nineteenth century), or a peasant revolution from below (e.g., China in 1949)⁷⁹. As in the latter case, not all revolutions lead to democracy. The aim of revolution is to change the distribution of power, possibly in a democratic direction.

Since 1998, the world has witnessed remarkable developments in democratic processes. For example, constitutions have changed to enhance existing democratic systems and reforms have taken place in the judiciaries, in civil liberties, in development in the media, with the introduction of referenda and multiple parties, with more competitive

78 Ibid, p.7.

79 Goldblatt, D., op. cit. 1997, P.19.

elections, debates in parliament, and with politicians subject to greater accountability⁸⁰. This means that democratisation as a process is expanding and developing for the better in some countries, and especially in the West.

2.5 Democracy and its Critics

Democracy has not been without its critics. The argument that people should be allowed to take part in decision making has not been popular among many armed forces in developing states, while in emergencies or crises, it is rare for a President or a Prime Minister to delay making a decision in order to consult the people. Also, even in the mature democracies of Western Europe, the theory and practice of democracy is always being discussed, to see how it can adapt to the social and economic changes that are always taking place⁸¹.

Democracy can be criticised as suffering from the following weaknesses. To begin with, democracy is an unsettled process, in the sense that it is always subject to change. Moreover, even in Western democracies, there is a debate on how democracy can cope with change⁸². Secondly, there are varieties of democracy in the world. In some states the head of state is an elected president, while in other democracies, the head of state may be an unelected monarch without power, which is in the hands of an elected prime minister.

80 Kedouri, E., op.cit, 1994.

81 Hirst, P., and Khilnani, S, **Reinventing Democracy**, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996, p.1.

82 Ibid p.1.

Thirdly, the aim of democracy is to achieve stability through justice, but democratic countries rely on the capitalist system, with the result that there are individuals in some countries who own millions, while other individuals are homeless. This might create instability. It also indicates the failure of democracy to provide social justice, as the elite fights to maintain power against the lesser classes. In most countries, stability comes from a sound economy, whether democratic or not⁸³. For example, on the one hand the UAE is ruled by an unelected leadership but it practises economic stability. On the other hand, Nigeria has an elected government but it faces instability. In Western countries social programmes have been developed to enhance the life of have-nots. For example, there have been social programmes for more than 100 years in the UK. This means such programmes come together with democracy. They increase the beneficiaries of the system and mean that the democratisation process is being undertaken to benefit the whole population and not just an elite⁸⁴.

Unless issues of inequality are addressed, states in the South can experience many problems as they try to create a democracy. It is not always clear if becoming a democracy will solve problems, such as conflicts among ethnic and/or religious groups, or economic problems such as high unemployment. Finally, writers such as Rosenau argue that people are only free at the time when they choose their representatives⁸⁵.

83 Shapiro, I. and Hacker-Cordon, C. **Democracy's Value**, Cambridge: University Press, 1999, p.1.

84 Discussion with Grove, E., the Supervisor, [21- 5- 2003].

85 cited in Bentam, op.cit.1995.

A comparison of the processes of democratisation in the developed world and the South is a useful analytical tool. Democratisation in the North coincided with social and economic change, whereas in the South, democratisation has succeeded years of authoritarian rule. In the North, democracy is based on a consensus of interests that people support. The formal institutions of democracy in the North have changed and developed to meet people's expectations. However, in the South, democracy has arrived in states where there are diverse interests. These may be regional, ethnic or tribal, each with a particular political representation. Dissatisfaction is a feature when no political party is large enough to form a government. The end result, as Kohli (1993) writes, is that too much democracy too soon can produce instability and a return to authoritarian rule. Algeria is an example.

A further problem of formal democracy is that democratisation in the South often produces elections which give political power to an elite who practise authoritarian rule. This stands in contrast to Qader's (1993) belief, that genuine democratisation entails a shift in the basis of state power, from a dominant elite who have an interest in the preservation of the state, to popular forces for whom the national state must serve both as a focus for their own identities, and as a source of basic material needs. Democratisation may represent a crisis of the state⁸⁶. Other critics of democratisation in the South have argued that formal institutions such as political parties and parliaments

86 Qadir, S et al, "Sustainable Democracy: Formalism vs Substance", *Third World Quarterly*, 14 (3).1993, 415- 438.

are tools used by elite to keep the public 'quiescent and out of the decision-making process'⁸⁷.

The arguments that consider informal democratic processes say that democratisation in the South will not succeed if it does not focus on issues such as human rights and the distribution of wealth⁸⁸. In other words, this approach to democratisation involves the progressive redistribution of assets, and equal access to services such as education. The opportunity to cast a vote in regular general elections does not transform the lives of people unless it is accompanied by such a redistribution of resources. The problem with this approach is that it assumes that either elements of formal democracy - for example individual politicians or parties - may campaign on these issues, or such demands will come from the people themselves. The reality is that in many states in the South there are problems of poor economic resources, poor education and transport facilities. By themselves, people are too weak and disorganised to force change in these areas. However, external actors such as non-governmental organisations may try to persuade new democracies to take up human rights issues and the re-distribution of wealth⁸⁹.

Democracy is a western concept exported to Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe. Democracy represents the best of Western culture, customs and tradition. This creates struggles within those non Western countries which adopt a democratic system.

87 Gills, B. and Rocamora, J., "Low intensity democracy", *Third World Quarterly*, 13 (3), 1992, pp. 501-523.

88 Ibid. pp. 501-523.

89 Ayooob, M., 'Defining Security: A Subaltern Realist Perspective', in Keith Krause and Michael, *Critical Security Studies; Concept and Cases*, UK, UCL Press, 1997, pp.121-146.

Problems appear in various areas, such as economy, culture, ideology, ethnicity, politics, social activities, the legitimacy of governments and sophisticated institutions.

2.6 The British Experience

A study of the British Parliament may shed light on the strengths and the weaknesses in Omani democratic development. Over several centuries, an authoritarian and hereditary system developed into one that is widely regarded as one of the most mature democracies in the world.

At the beginning, in 1254, there was only the House of Lords in England. Since then, the House of Commons has established itself and indeed become dominant. While Parliament used to respond to the demands of the king, the Prime Minister now has the key role in Parliament⁹⁰. Until the Seventeenth Century the monarchy was the dominant executive power and Parliament was under its grip, its role being to advise the monarch and provide it with resources. In England after 1603, King James and King Charles tried to rule without Parliament, which eventually led to civil war. The forces of Parliament executed the monarch, but just over ten years later the monarchy was restored. In 1688-89, in the Glorious Revolution (a peaceful revolution), the independent power of the monarchy was permanently curbed, paving the way for the rise of constitutional monarchy and eventually democracy in England⁹¹. Voting for Parliament was far from universal. The voting franchise varied from place to place. In the beginning of the 19th century, the franchise was standardised, although still related to control of a significant amount of property. In 1867, the number of people eligible to vote was increased and in 1884,

90 Norton, P., **Does Parliament Matter?** New York, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993, p.13.

91 Ibid. p.16.

every male householder was given the right to vote, but the number remained quite limited⁹².

The prime minister is not formally elected. The people elect his party and his party chooses him. The royal prerogative powers such as the decision to go to war are exercised by the government without necessarily consulting Parliament (although this is becoming more customary). If a party has a majority in the House of Commons, then it can notionally exercise absolute power (although constitutional custom, in effect, limits it).

2.6.1 The Role of the Head of the State

The monarch was originally the head of both the state and the government. Now, the Prime Minister leads the government, as head of the majority party. The prime minister is not directly elected by the people but is defined by being able to count on a majority in the House of Commons to carry on the government's business. The largest opposing party is officially recognised as the 'loyal opposition'.

2.6.2 The Role of the Ministers

Formally, ministers act under the crown but they do not need the permission of the monarch on issues such as declaring war; it is the prime minister and cabinet who makes such declarations. For example, the prime minister ordered the task force to re take the Falkland Islands from Argentina in 1992. The Gulf War of 1991, was also launched on a decision from the cabinet. Thus, it was the people's representatives who decided, not the monarch.

⁹² Ibid. p17.

Ministers are members of Parliament. The senior ministers form the cabinet, which is collectively responsible for major decisions. Although the cabinet is composed of the queen's ministers, she has no role in their choices or actions. The queen only enters the Parliament once a year, when she delivers a speech written by the government. She meets ministers when they are appointed and leave. She also holds weekly meetings with the Prime Minister in which he briefs her about what is happening. She can advise and warn, but no more, and there is no compulsion to take the advice or warning.

2.6.3 The Role of the Parliament (the House of Lords and the House of Commons):

The House of Commons consists of 659 elected members representing various districts around the country. Those support or oppose the government's business, take part in debates, ask questions of ministers, and sometimes sponsor their own private member's legislation.

In the past, members of the House of Lords inherited the position from their fathers. From 1958, members could be created through what are called life peerages. In 1998 there were 700 members. People are appointed on the basis of experience, for example leading academics. Some of them have a party affiliation. They are appointed in recognition of their achievement⁹³. The House of Lords is in transition. Hereditary peers are disappearing. There is debate between supporters of an all-nominated house and one with some election. This raises constitutional issues as the House of Commons is superior, *because* it is elected. In 1911 the House of Lords lost its right to veto legislation and now it can delay decisions for a maximum of one year.

93 Norton, lecturer at Hull University and Lords in House of Lords Interview [1-8-2002].

It can be said that the British system used to be monarchical, autocratic and authoritarian, but it has evolved into a democratic system. The power of the monarch and aristocrats has been reduced. Britain thus represents a good case study as a country which inherited a non democratic system and evolved into a system in which everyone has one vote and both the monarch and aristocrats have lost their power.

2.7 Conclusion

Democracy and democratisation emerged at the end of the 20th century as the dominant forces in the world. The end of the Cold War was seen as the end of communism as a theory and in practice, leaving only liberal democracy as the future for the world. But the fact is that the democratisation in the South has not followed naturally, even when dictators or military governments lost the support of either the USSR or the USA. And, although the USA and Europe have sometimes tried to link economic aid to democratisation, the real experience of democracy has been mixed.

In general there has been a development of the concept of democracy, in different parts of the world in terms of theoretical and practical aspects. Every country has different experiences. Furthermore, sometimes there is an internal demand for democracy, as happened in most European countries; sometimes there was an external interference, as happened in Japan and a number of Eastern European and Asian countries, or combined internal and external pressure as in South Africa. But the more stable movement derives from internal demands.

The survival of democracy in both developed and developing countries depends on issues such as economic and political circumstances. Rapid democratisation might create a struggle in the developing countries. In Europe, where the countries are already established their constitutions are mature and wealth and development are achieved, democracy moves into a comfort zone. However, in the South, which endures ethnic conflict, international interference and economic problems while states are still being built, rapid democracy makes for more violence and instability. Therefore, from previous experience, dictators have a greater chance of success in the South. Democracy may bring sacrifices and new problems. Instead of political triumph, economic disaster might ensue. Debates amongst people with different interests might not reach a solution. The important values of democracy are not grasped.

Despite the fact that there is no unique type of democracy, the experience of states in different parts of the world shows that democracy is an evolving process. At the level of formal democracy, there has been a growth in political parties, and elections have taken place across Africa and Asia. But informal democratic institutions are often weak, and many states in the South continue to face problems of the division between rich and poor and religious or ethnic or tribal differences.

The Middle East is one region that has not experienced widespread democracy, but some states have begun to democratise, either along lines familiar from the European tradition, or in their own way, as is the case in Oman. The Middle East is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE:

**THE POLITICAL CONTEXT IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND
ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SULTANATE OF OMAN**

“We regard ourselves as Members of the Third World, proud of our membership of our Arab brotherhood of Nations”.⁹⁴

3.1 Introduction

The political changes that have taken place in Oman since the late 1960s and the early 1970s should be understood in the appropriate context of the Middle East, of which Oman is a part, to which it has responded historically, and with which it interacts immediately. The constitutional changes in Oman came late and the country was already undergoing the impact of political change in the shape of various rebellions and secessionist movements. Thus, Oman could not remain immune to the forces of Arab nationalism and socialism, of which the Dhofar rebellion in the late 1960s was a part. The winds of change in the neighbouring states in the Middle East could not be resisted by the state in Oman.

This chapter thus has three-fold objectives. First, it provides a broad outline of the social and cultural context of the Middle East, and the location of Oman within that context.

⁹⁴ Qaboos, S., *The Royal Speeches of H. M. Sultan Qaboos ibn Said 1970 – 1995*, Ministry of Information, Oman Newspaper House, 1995, pp.84-85.

Second, it discusses the political changes, both revolutionary and regime stabilising, that the Middle East, as a whole, has undergone recently. Third it introduces, in broad outline, the political regimes in the region. This chapter is based on the assumption that the various political changes introduced in the region were actually the survival strategies of the rulers in the face of various dislocating challenges in the region and the world.

3.2 Social and Cultural Context

The Middle East is composed of mostly the Arab states, plus Turkey, Iran and Israel. Although there are a number of similarities in the Middle East, inside this area there are also contradictions, which make the experience of this area unique. In the following section there will be an overview of the main similarities and dissimilarities in the Middle East, such as history, language, religion, tribal structure and other fundamental facts.

3.2.1 History

During the 20th century and into the 21st, the Middle East has remained unstable⁹⁵. The first generation of the last century fought for independence from various Empires to establish one Arab State in the Middle East. At the beginning many Arabs supported Britain against Turkey (The Ottoman Empire 1552-1918) in order to end its occupation,

95 Bulqazeez, A., *fy Alnahdah alarabiah awamil Awkhfaq alhkargiah waldakhliah*, (The Arabic resonance; the tools which led to the failure of internal and external issues), in Shoon Arabiah, the Arab League press, December 2000, No 104 pp. 28-47.

but then they themselves were placed under new empires. Britain and France shared the Arab lands⁹⁶.

After the departure of colonial rule, this area faced bilateral disputes over borders, for example, Saudi Arabia and Yemen, and the UAE and Iran⁹⁷. Furthermore, the Arab-Israeli conflict affected the stability in the Middle East. During the Cold War years the division between the two blocs led the area to further division. Other destabilising factors have been the Iran-Iraq rivalry and Iraqi ambitions against Kuwait, as well as the internal problems inside states such as Bahrain and Sudan, the civil war in Lebanon, the events of 11th September, 2001 and the war on Iraq⁹⁸.

3.2.2 Arabic language

The essential feature which links the inhabitants of the Middle East is the Arabic language. There are twenty two Arabic speaking countries. All of the Arab states are members of the Arab league. With the exception of Somalia and Djibouti, all Arabic people communicate in Arabic.

In addition to language, religion, and a common way of thinking unite the Arabs. Certainly, not every Arab is Muslim, but the Arab region is the centre of the Islamic world⁹⁹. An Arab citizen from Morocco and an Arab citizen from Oman can learn the

96 Polk, W., op.cit. 1991.

97 Sick, C., and Lawrence, **The Persian Gulf At The Millennium Essay in Politics, Economy, Security, Religion**, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1997, pp.231-248.

98 Polk, W., op.cit. 1991.

99 Field, M, op.cit , 1994, p.8.

same lessons in the same institution or watch the same Arabic historical programme on TV. Both of them might say to themselves, “Ah, that invention, those buildings, that victory, that civilisation, were the works of my ancestors”¹⁰⁰.

3.2.3 Islam

Islam represents the identity of the people in the Middle East. The majority of the people in the Middle East are Muslim, but there are some minorities, such as Christians, Jews, and even Hindus¹⁰¹. Islam is used by the politicians as a strong means to achieve their interests. Among Muslim society there are three main sects. These are Sunni, Shias and Khwarage. The division between them dates back to the beginning of the Islamic State. Ali was the central figure at the origin of the Shia-Sunni split, which occurred in the decades immediately following the death of the Prophet.

In Chapter 4 of the thesis, we will discuss the birth of the Ibadhi sect, which belongs to the Khwarage. This sect has had strong influence in Oman and some areas in North Africa such as Tunisia and Algeria. In Oman, the sect has defined Omani society and policy since the seventh century. In contrast, the Sunnis and the Shias are influential in other parts of the Middle East. The major crisis for the Islamic faith occurred after the death of Ali. While the Sunni considered that Ali was the fourth Khalifah in the Islamic world, following on from Abu Bakr (632-634), Umar (634-644) and Othman (644-656), the Shias believed that Ali was the only true successor of Prophet Mohammed¹⁰².

100 *ibid*, op.cit , p.8

101 Hindus can be found in the Gulf States as Oman and Bahrain for example.

102 Amin, H., The Origins of the Sunni/Shia split in Islam, <http://www.islamfortoday.com/shia.htm>.

Historically, Ali succeeded Othman who was murdered. However, he was opposed by a number of Muslims such as Aisha, the wife of the Prophet and daughter of Abu Bakr. They asked him to punish those who killed Othman. The main enemy was Mu'awiya, the governor of Damascus and cousin of Othman. A civil war ensued, which ended with the assassination of Ali and Mu'awiya's self proclamation of himself as the Khalifah¹⁰³. The differences between the Shias and Sunni started from that time.

From 750 until 1258, the Shias were privileged in the Islamic world because they received governmental support from the Abbasid family, until the time that Baghdad was defeated by the Mongols in 1258. When the Turks (Ottomans) came to power, they fought the Shias to reduce their influence¹⁰⁴.

In recent times, a Shia dominated state exists only in Iran. The other parts of the Islamic world are represented by Sunni governments, and Shias are marginalised. However, there are some countries in the Middle East, such as Lebanon, Oman and Kuwait, where Shias are well integrated into society through representative systems.

During the period of Saddam Hussein, both Shias and Sunni in Iraq faced repression from the government because of their beliefs. The situation there currently is vague. The relations between the two sects will depend on the new government. Gulf States with minority Shia populations were apprehensive of the spread of the Islamic Revolution from Iran. It should be noted that before the Iranian Revolution, there was little

103 Ibid.

104 Ibid.

discrimination against Shias in the Gulf. Indeed, Bahrain has recently introduced positive measures safeguarding the interests of Shias, despite being a Sunni majority state. A fundamental problem, however, is that Shias do not respect Sunni governments. They believe that the Imam, who is destined to arrive, should rule the Islamic world¹⁰⁵.

Nevertheless, Shias generally have supported Arab governments since the Second World War. For example, Hisb-Allah fights Israel in South Lebanon, and most Shias in Kuwait refused to support Iran in the first Gulf War.

Generally speaking, the cause of the differences between Muslims did not arrive from the interpretation of Islamic legislation; it was from disputes over *Sahabah* - those who met Prophet Mohammed then started to run the Islamic states- and the views of famous scholars such as Alshafi, Abuhanifah and Malik. The problem is that Muslims believe these people are laws in themselves, and none of the groups want to negotiate about their ideas. Anyone will criticise any idea that comes from the sect he regards as hostile¹⁰⁶. Unlike other sects, the good point in the Ibhadi is that people are considered as tools to convey truth and knowledge. In the Ibadhi sect one mostly meets respect for *sahabah* and scholars, but there is wide criticism of their ideas¹⁰⁷.

In the current circumstances, the US is poised against the Iranian state, the only Shia state in the world. Hence, by default, Sunnis in the Middle East are favoured by the US

105 Abu-Murshed, W., Burnamag Al-Hiah Al-Arabiah (Arab life program), Aljazeera.net [11-2-2002].

106 Al-Nahi, H Conflicts Between sects and its Effect on the Prosperity of the Arabic and Islamic civilisation “ The crisis over Islamic sects” Conference Amman, 11-14-2-1998.

107 Al-Harthy, S., scholar of Ibadhi history, Interview [30-5-2003].

vis-à-vis Shias. This creates problems for the Shia sect, putting them under further pressure. The American policy is not a result of any particular aversion toward the Shia community, but because of their enmity against the Islamic Revolution in Iran, which is supported by the Shias.

The difference between the Shias and the Sunnis is a continued source of tension in the states of the Middle East. These tensions might be a cause of future conflict and are a threat to the regional peace and stability. However, democracy sustains and nurtures itself from discussion, debate and differing opinions. On a positive note, the experience of these differences might lead to an enhanced understanding of diverse points of view and might go on to strengthen the democratic institutions and processes in the Middle East.

Whereas internal difference dominated Islamic history in the middle ages, the modern age led to a redefinition of Islam vis-à-vis others, especially the west. During the 20th century, most of the Middle East was under external influence, especially French and British. The opposition to colonial rule was framed under the ideology of nationalism and not under the ideology of Islam.

Hence, the renewed emphasis on Islamic ideology in the second half of the 20th century could be placed in a broader context of decolonisation, identity crisis, and demands for social and political changes. This overemphasis on Islamic ideology might turn out to be a midwife for modernity in the Middle East. In the long term, we might be able to evaluate the benign effects and rather the inevitability of Islamisation in 20th century in

the Middle East. Much, however, depends on the ability of the elites to recognise this fact, and to make sincere efforts at reconciling modernity with the region's balance of social, cultural, political and economic features.

3.2.4 Islam and Democracy

Some argue that Islam and democracy cannot work with each other¹⁰⁸. Holders of this view argue that even if Muslims participate in elections, their aim is to gain power and then use it in an authoritarian way¹⁰⁹. Some describe Islam as 'a new enemy of the West' after the collapse of the Soviet Union¹¹⁰. Moreover, some argue that political Islam is an attack on modern society and an attempt to return to what is traditional¹¹¹.

However, it can be understood from the Quran, that Islam is in favour of peace and consultation, and that it encourages the people to hold their governments to account¹¹². Al-Shura in Islam means consultation with other people to obtain their opinion. It can include every aspect of life, such as social issues, business, work, politics, government and even defence¹¹³.

Critics of Islamic politics usually say that it is not democratic, but it can be argued that in the Islamic system of belief, there are elements of democracy. The Quran recognises

108 Huntington, S "The Clash of Civilisations" *Foreign Affairs*, 1993

109 Salame, G, "Islam and the West", *Foreign Policy*, Vol. 90, p22-27. (1993).

110 Ibid.

111 Ibid.

112 Holy Quran, verse Ash-Shura No38

113 Al-Ansari, A., op.cit, p.49

Muslims as one community, and requires them to have a consultation processes (Shura)¹¹⁴.

“Whatever you are given (here) is (but) a convenience of his life: but that which is with God is better and more lasting: (it is) for those who believe and put their trust in their Lord; (36). Those who avoid the greater crimes and shameful deeds, and when they are angry even then forgive (37). Those who hearken to their Lord, and establish regular prayer; who (conduct) their affairs by mutual consultation who spent out of what we bestow on them for sustenance(38)¹¹⁵

This consultation process can cover a wide range of issues and not just political ones.

The Quran says on another occasion

“ It is part of the mercy of God that thou deal gently with them. Wert thou severe or harsh - hearted, they would have broken away from about thee: so pass over (their faults), and ask for (God’s) forgiveness for them, and consult them in affairs (of moment). Then, when thou hast taken a decision put thou trust in God. For God loves those who put their trust (in Him)¹¹⁶

These verses stress that the leader should consult his citizens and not taking personal decision.

114 Ibid.

115 Cited from Al-Rawahy, A., **The Concept of Al-Shura in Oman, The Journey Continues** , paper provided to the Anglo - Omani Society, London, 27- 4- 1995 . p2 Ayat 36 -38 Surat Al-Shura.

116 Ibid. Ayat 159 Surat Al-Imran.

The confusion that surrounds this debate is due to the ignorance of people in the West regarding Islamic principles. The media do not always present the truth about the beliefs and practices of Islam, but look at politics in an Islamic state and draw their conclusions from that. Islam has developed into a civilisation that has, within it, some variations. So it is not possible to look at how Islam is practised in one country, for example, Egypt and then say this is true of all Islam. This is an important point because the Ibadhi Muslims of Oman, since the 2nd century after the Hibirah (the Prophet Muhammad's move from Mecca to Medina: ie eighth Century AD), have a view of Shura, which has enabled the country to develop formal democratic institutions. Islam and democracy are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Rather, a way can be found to reconcile Islamic principles and politics in a modern state.

When Prophet Mohammed took power in Medina in 622, he announced the establishment of an Islamic constitution. This provided protection to the individuals and communities and set out rules for relations with other groups. The protection of freedom and rights were the core principles. Then he built the first mosque. The Prophet consulted the local people on several issues such as the economy, social activities and politics. People had the right of freedom of speech.

Ali, the fourth khalifah in Islam, asked Prophet Mohammed what Muslims should do if they faced a problem and there was no discussion about it in the holy Quran or from the prophet. The Prophet answered that people should gather and consult among themselves.

He added there should be a unanimous opinion.¹¹⁷ One witness, *Sahaby* said, ‘I have not seen anyone consult with his people as Prophet Mohammed did’ The Prophet said on another occasion that the concept of Al-Shura (consultation) was a mercy to the people¹¹⁸.

The Majlis (common room) of the Prophet included poor people who used to be slaves, plus the elites, without any discrimination. When the Muslims refused to delay the pilgrimage to Mecca until a better time. The Prophet felt that the Muslims could not face the power of the people in Mecca. His wife Um Salamah told him to start the practical steps to end the pilgrimage, then the Muslims would follow him. When he did that, all the Muslims imitated him. This example, gives a clue that consultation in Islam includes women. In times of war, the prophet consulted his soldiers about the best way to achieve victory against the enemy. The battles of Badr, Ahud, Al-Khandaq, Hudibiah, Al-Taif and the treatment of the prisoners of Hwazen,¹¹⁹ were all decided by consultation in this way.

The next four Khalifahs who took power in the Islamic state came through election. This point was discussed in chapter six of the thesis. In his first speech, Abu-Baker said, ‘If I run the community well, please give me your support. Otherwise, you have the right to abandon me’. In this point he mentioned the importance of consultation, and admitted

117 Radwan, A., p20-21, see also Al-Ansary, A., *Al-Shura in its effects on Democracy Critical Study*, Beirut, 1980 , p. 65.

118 Al-Rawahy, op.cit, p2.

119 Al-Ansari, op.cit pp.71-75.

that people should choose the leader and depose him¹²⁰. Omar also consulted the people on various matters. For example, he met the people in the mosque and delivered regular speeches. Then he received the comments of the people. He established a consultative Council which included mature people and then he established another Council for discussing the daily progress with his governors¹²¹. The problem started when Mu'awiya came to the power. He changed the system of the rule to inheritance instead of election (*biah*). He announced that his son Yazeed would be his successor. Most people in the Islamic world rejected this step. However, the Khalifah used his power to thwart any attempt to replace him¹²². Some argue that this step created corruption, abuse of human rights, use of force, discrimination and the appropriation of the nations by the ruling family¹²³. The main demand of the opponents during the Amu'awiy period was to return back to the system of Al-Shura. In their period, consultation was confined to the arts, knowledge and general sociology¹²⁴. During that time, the revolution of the Ibadhi people started in secret in Basra and this paved the way for the announcement of the elected Ibadhi state in Oman. (See chapter 6).

From the verses of the Holy Quran, the practice of Prophet Mohammed and the other main figures in Islam, such as Abu-Baker, Omar, Othman and Ali, is possible to the aims of Al-Shura in Islam. Firstly, it helps the leaders and the people to arrive at the best view. When people enter debates, the leader will be able to take the best opinion. This

120 Al-Ansari, A. op.cit. p.79.

121 Ibid pp.88- 95.

122 Atwan, H., **Al-Shura in Amoy period**, Mountain press , 1990 pp.51-56.

123 Ibid pp.83-89.

124 Al-Ansary, A., **Al-Shura and its effect on Democracy**, Critical study, Buirut, p.67.

will reduce the risk of mistakes. Secondly, it protects the rights of the people. Through consultation, people will be able to express their opinion in speeches and open debates, no matter who originated the idea. The important point was who would be able to provide the most useful suggestion. Thirdly, it brings the people together, to work as one group. Through dialogue and the exchange of opinion, people will feel they are united. Fourthly, it guarantees equality between the people. No one alone has the rights to force others accept his idea. All people have the same rights in the state. Fifthly, it trains people to develop their reasoning to provide mature views. This will promote citizens' ability to develop the country and to defend it from foreign interference.

Nevertheless, some extremist Muslims also refuse democracy, because they argue that religion does not influence the politics of "godless" democratic countries.¹²⁵ For an Islamist, religion cannot be limited strictly to the realm of personal faith and private life: Islam has things to say about society and what it sees as the just political order that have strong implications for contemporary politics. Unlike Christianity, Islam was concerned with politics and governance from the start: the Muslim rule that developed in the lifetime of the Prophet required attention to principles of community life, justice, administration, relations with non-Muslims, defence and foreign policy. A vision of what constitutes good governance, law and a just society were among the principal new ideas¹²⁶. The Prophet came not to protect the status quo, but to reform and change.

125 Khan., "Islam and Democracy: The Struggle Continues" by CSID Board Member http://www.islam-democracy.org/khan_art_islam-and-democracy.shtml [3 March, 2002].

126 <http://www.observer.co.uk/worldview/story/0,11581,845725,00.html> [27,5,2003].

Women, for instance, were given legal status (where they had none before) and concrete legal protection within society.

Osamah ibn Laden made sense to a number of Muslims when he started to remind the world about the right of Palestinians and the innocent Iraqi people who suffered from the sanctions imposed by the United States of America and the West. There was a widespread frustration among within the Arab world on American policy on these issue. But this does not reflect the ideology of Islam toward democracy. It only reflects the failure of American democracy to deal with other countries in a democratic fashion.

The democratic experience of India suggests that a Muslim community can meaningfully participate in the affairs of state. The constitution provides the basic right to all religions to follow, disseminate and preach their beliefs¹²⁷. In terms of demographic structure, the Muslims are a sizeable population in India. There are approximately one hundred million Muslims in India and they are recognised in all democratic institutions¹²⁸. So no single party can compromise on the right of minority. Two of India's former presidents were Muslims, and even the senior leadership of the ultra right BJP includes Muslims, for example, Sikander Bakht, the former External Affairs Minister and President of BJP. Indeed, the head of India's nuclear and missile programme who became the president of India Dr Abul Kalam Azad, who commands the respect and admiration of his fellow countrymen, is also a Muslim¹²⁹. However,

127 <http://alfa.nic.in/const/preamble.html> the Constitution of India [13-5-2003].

128 www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/indian-subcontinent/india/culture.htm [27-5-2003].

129 www.iniancongress.org/HTM/history/presidents/maulanan_abul_kalam_azad.htm [24,5,2003].

incidents like the destruction of Babri Mosque by fundamentalists and riots in certain cities raise doubts about the ability of the democratic state to accommodate the aspirations of minorities in India¹³⁰.

There was a remarkable transition in the Middle East toward the features of democracy especially in the 1970s and 1980s. Oman was one of these countries. Islam in itself is not an ideology that abuses, ignores or coerces other societies. Islam calls for honesty, promotes non-interference in the beliefs of others, justice, for leaders to be held to account and for the election of leaders. Unlike Christianity, however, Islam insists on establishing strong armed forces in the Muslim countries. Islam says that through power, countries achieve peace by defeating enemies. Some westerners link what has happened in history with some aggressive leader. They think that Islamic philosophy is pro-war. The fact is that it is not allowed to kill anyone in Islam, as to do so is like killing all human beings on the earth¹³¹. Even in war, it is prohibited to kill children, women and innocent people. Samuel Huntington was mistaken when he criticised Islam, saying that Islam took the place of democracy in the Islamic world¹³². The problem is that since Islamic parties in the Islamic countries have more chance to win in elections, the recent leaders in the Middle East have found that democracy threatens their power, so consequently, these authoritarian leaders started adverse propaganda against their opposition.

¹³⁰ www.shashitharoor.com/articles/hindu/hostages.html [20,5,2003].

¹³¹ Holy Quran, Amaidah, No. 32 P.113 .

¹³² Abootalebi, A., <http://www.biu.ac.il/SOC/besa/meria/journal/1999/issue1/jv3n1a2.html> Meria Journal Vol,3 N1, 1993[5,2,2003].

The anti-democratic reputation of Islamist regimes should not be over estimated. Through the Islamic revolution, Iran is becoming a democratic country. Furthermore, Sudan, when it changed to Islamic ideology, started to practise democracy. Islamic movements have acquired a good reputation in the Islamic countries. They have paid attention to building institutions, and provided health, education and social services for the people. For example, during the earthquake in Egypt in 1992, the media covered the generous help that was provided by the Islamists, but the Egyptian government worked very slowly.

The fact is that the practices of democracy are of two- fold, from inside as well as outside. Firstly, those who had privileges and were afraid of losing their power created obstacles in the path of change. Secondly, Islamic ideology is strongly criticised by many people in the West. They do not accept an Islamic democracy, not because Islam is bad, but because popular opinion if allowed to be expressed through democracy, will be hostile toward Israel, which is backed by the West. No Muslim will compromise with Israel on the status of Jerusalem.

3.2.5 Tribes

Most arabs are composed of different tribes. Members of a tribe trace their descent to one father through the male line. For security reasons, most people marry within their tribes. But sometimes, tribe members can marry people from other tribes to achieve alliance or political interests¹³³. The role of the tribe covers most of the requirements of the people such as politics, economy, defence, society and ideology. The leader of the

133 Al-Nahi, H., Tribes and Political activities, Iraqi Tribes **Conference**, December 10-12 2002, London UK.

tribe is called the Sheikh. Muslims continue the practice, which predates Islam, of electing the Sheikh who represents them in terms of debates, conflicts and economic interests. Besides the Sheikh, there are a number of consultants who are known for their maturity and knowledge of the interests of the tribe. There are a number of Councils which were known very well in Arabic history, such as the Common Council (*majalis Al-Mala*). Members of these Councils took the internal decisions of the tribe. Also, in Mecca there was an Assembly house (*Dar Al-Nidwah*). Furthermore, there was the Alliance Association (Hilf Al-Fodool), the aim of which was to discuss how the people of Mecca could best achieve justice among the people¹³⁴. People in Oman, for example, elect an important person, one who is wise, rich or the oldest one in the family to be a leader of the tribe. Then he will be the strongest person in the tribe and can exert authority over others. If he is weak, however, others might end his role and replace him with another Sheikh. The position is usually inherited by the old Sheikh's son, unless he does not want to be Sheikh or he is not mature enough. Then the people in the tribe will elect a new leader, but usually a relative of the previous Sheikh. Inside tribes there might be an alliance to achieve further security and serve economic interests. We can cite, for instance, the recent case in Oman relating to the division between the *Hinawi* and the *Ghaferi* groups. Inside every group a number of tribes are allied. In both North Yemen and the interior of Oman there existed long-standing confederations; yet even there, membership of such groups varies. Most conflicts were between sub-sections and did not involve all the members of the confederation at any one time.

134 Rushwan, A., the Omani experience in Al-Shura, Al-Shurgah, Dar al-khaleeg, 1999 p.19-21.

“Inter tribal feuding was a dominant feature of the area and one which prevented emergence of larger political units of economic co-operation”¹³⁵.

When the former imperial rulers left the area, a number of Sheikhs became leaders of the new emerging states such as the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar. Others became very rich as a result of the previous privilege or the wealth that they inherited. In Oman, for example, a number of Sheikhs such as those of the Al-Harthy, Al-Khalily and Al-Hin’ay tribes became influential because they inherited land, which has become increasingly valuable.

3.2.6 Democracy in the Middle East

Paradoxically, a casual glance at the political history of the Middle East shows the co-existence of various brands of authoritarian regimes and debate about the forms and utility of democracy. Perhaps the heavy burden of authoritarian regimes has encouraged calls for democracy in the region. Compared to many non-Arab third world countries, the question of democracy in the Middle East has assumed some special importance, not simply because of the survival of tribal, religious and community-based societies in the region (many post-colonial societies of Asia are not different from the Arabs in this respect), but because of the sudden oil-wealth of the nations in the region. Michael L. Ross has argued that oil impedes the development of democracy in the Middle East.¹³⁶

Elie Kedouri expressed pessimism about the prospect of democracy in the region:

135 Halliday, F., op.cit. 1974, pp.38-39.

136 Ross, M. L. “Does Oil Hinder Democracy?”, *World Politics*, 53 (3), April 2001, pp. 325-62.

“The notion of popular sovereignty as the foundation of governmental legitimacy, the idea of representation, or elections, of popular suffrage, of political institutions being regulated by laws laid down by a parliamentary assembly, of these laws being guarded and upheld by an independent judiciary, the ideas of the security of the state, of society being composed of a multitude of self-activating groups and associations---all of these are profoundly alien to the Muslim political tradition”.¹³⁷

Kedouri’s view was perhaps extreme and Euro-centric. Historically, the progress of democracy’s march in the West was not smooth, and it had to wage centuries of struggle against hierarchy, religious superstitions, various traditional prejudices and feudalism. Also in many post-colonial countries, ridden with old traditions, customs, social divisions and prejudices, democracy has been sustained, and itself become a modernizing force.

The practical world of political changes in the Middle East, at least for the last few decades, does not suggest too pessimistic a scenario. As has been aptly summed up by Michael Field:

“The whole logic of the governments’ reforms [in the Middle East], of course, is practical. The Arab heads of state have not been reading the work of the great political thinkers and been converted to the principle of democracy. They are reforming because they have to. Yet in the minds of all of them to different degrees there is also an acceptance that moves

137 Kedouri, E., 1994, op.cit. pp. 5-6.

towards democracy are in keeping with the spirit of the times, that they are right and that they are unavoidable. Their pragmatism is blended with a genuine but cautious interest in managing the evolution of a new form of government for their countries”.¹³⁸

The Arab world has not been averse to democracy. Many countries in the Arab world have been experimenting with different brands of democracy. But the cornerstone of their moves towards democracy has been what Field has reported on the basis of intimate knowledge of the Arab world of politics:

“The idea that democratic change in the Arab world should come slowly is the cornerstone of the policies of all reforming governments at present.”¹³⁹

Since most of the countries in the Middle East are Islamic, and Islam has a great influence on life and culture of the people, a significant hindrance to the spread of democracy in the Middle East has come from Islam. Hence, the democracy debates in the Middle East have also reflected the relationship between Islam and democracy, two apparently opposed world-views and paradigms. Mark Tessler (2002) however found in his work in Egypt in 1992 that religious orientations had a bearing on male and female attitudes in only about 25% of his respondents. This demonstrates that there should

138 Field, M. *Inside the Arab World*, Cambridge, Mass : Harvard University Press, 1994, p. 272. For further details, see “Steps Towards Democracy”, and “Society and Democracy” pp. 271-312.

139 Ibid., P. 312.

not over estimate¹⁴⁰. This demonstrates one should not over-estimate the influence of Islam in preventing democratisation in the Middle East.

The above suggests that democracy in the Middle East, including Oman, is not just a matter of some institutional practices indulged in by the rulers, but also a matter of serious theoretical discussion. It is an axiom in political science that every political practice is informed by theory. So, the question of democracy in Oman should be handled at the level of both theory and practice. The theoretical discussion of democracy is important for properly locating practices of democracy. A theoretical discussion of democracy also helps in assessment of democratic practice.

3.2.7 Social and Economic Context

The other feature of the Middle East is that most of these countries are developing countries. They were under colonialism when most of the people were illiterate, received low income and suffered from diseases. The development of any society needs good income and a market to absorb the income. Absence of these prerequisites delayed the development in the Arab world¹⁴¹. But things have of late been changing. With oil reserves and partial democratisation involving some degree of resource distribution which started thirty years ago, most of the countries in the region are showing signs of

140 For details, see Tessler, M. "Islam and Democracy in the Middle East: Impact of Religious Orientations On Attitudes toward Democracy in Four Arab Countries", *Comparative Politics*, 34 (3), April 2002., pp. 337-55.

141 Al-Qaisy, F., *Majlis Al-Wihadah Alarabiah*, (The Arab United Council) *Arabic Affairs*, Cairo, the Arab League press, March 2001, pp. 113- 128.

social reforms¹⁴². The total external debt of the Arab states was around 144 billion dollars in the year 2000. This amount was a decrease from around 159 billion dollars in the year 1995. Nevertheless, some countries such as Oman, Tunis and Lebanon experienced an increase in total debt¹⁴³.

3.3 Political Changes in the Middle East

In this section we will provide an overview of the political changes in the Middle East. The area suffered deeply from western colonialism. When the colonial masters left, and decolonization began, new problems evolved. The new emerging states faced internal, bilateral and external problems.

3.3.1 Colonial Period

The Middle East passed through different periods in the 20th century. At the beginning of the century and into the 1950s, imperialism dominated the region. First the Ottoman Empire, and then the British and French Empires came and went, leaving behind a succession of independent states¹⁴⁴. During the nineteenth century, the Arab Middle East was under immense colonial influence. While the peripheral areas, like North Africa and Arabia, were under direct occupation, rival powers fought to control the central Arab regions, which were oppressed by the Ottoman Empire. The First World War helped to clarify the relations between imperial powers. The Ottoman Empire was destroyed, the Russian revolution took place, Germany was stripped of its imperial influence, and Italy,

142 www.aljazeera.net/in-depth/arabic_depts/2002/4/4-30-1.htm p.2.

143 Ibid.

144 Hourani., A., **The Ottoman Background of the Modern Middle East**, University of Essex, Longman Group, Ltd, 1969,, p1- 18.

though victorious, was too weak to win any additional influence immediately. Only Britain and France remained to divide the conquered lands between them. The USA, though it did not gain any territory, succeeded in getting access to the oil resources of the region¹⁴⁵.

3.3.2 Decolonization

The Second World War led to the decolonization of the Middle East. Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Libya were born under the rule of the classes that cooperated with the West. The various forms of imperialism accentuated the differences within the Middle East that were rooted in the history of the region.¹⁴⁶ In many of these states, such as Jordan, Egypt, Syria and Iraq, the formal institutions of democracy were established, such as political parties and representative parliaments. In all cases, however, these states became authoritarian.

Elsewhere in the region, notably in the Arabian Peninsula, modern states were built by the leading Sheikhs of the local tribes, who often established their rule with the assistance of British political, financial and military support. This was the case in Kuwait, Bahrain, and what is known today as the United Arab Emirates¹⁴⁷. Three exceptions to this were Hejaz and Nejd (in what is now Saudi Arabia), Yemen, and Oman.

145 Halliday F., *op.cit.*

146 *Ibid*, pp.19-21.

147 Zhalan, Z, **The Making of the Modern Gulf States**, London, Heinemann, 1989.

At the time of the Great Arab Revolt (1914), Britain was allied to the Hashemite rulers of Mecca and Medina¹⁴⁸. In the years that followed the end of the War, however, the Nejd ruler, Abdulaziz ibn Saud, became a powerful military and political figure, and in 1925 occupied the Holy Places, eventually creating the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932¹⁴⁹. The British, who did not get involved in any activities that concerned the Holy Places of Islam, were only concerned that whoever ruled in western Arabia should not be hostile to the British Empire.

In Yemen, British interests were concentrated in Aden, which was used as a supply port for commercial and military traffic going to India. Relations with the Zaydi Imam were relatively good, but Yemen was already established as a centralized state at this time. In Oman, also, the existence of a centralized state did not raise the questions of authority or state-building that existed elsewhere in the region¹⁵⁰.

From the 1920s onwards, the British and the French imperial possessions in the Middle East began to change. Liberalisation in Egypt took the form of the British conceding independence in the 1920s, even though they continued to have influence over policy makers. In Iraq, the League of Nations Mandate was ended in 1932 and it became an

148 Nutting, A., **The Arabs; A Narrative History From Mohammed to the Present**, New York, American Library, 1965, pp.266-276.

149 Golschmidt, A., **Concise History of the Middle East**, Boulder, Co, Westview Press, 1999, p.209.

150 Dunbabin, J., **The Post- Imperial Age: The Great Powers And The Wider World**, New York, Longman, 1994, p.366.

independent Kingdom under King Faisal¹⁵¹. However, here also, the British continued to hold office in the Iraqi government. During the Second World War, supporters of Germany in the region, notably in Iran and Iraq fought the British, while the liberation of France in 1944 led to independence for Syria and Lebanon. Jordan became an independent Kingdom in 1946, while Palestine suffered a completely different fate, losing much of its Arab identity when the State of Israel was declared in 1948, causing four wars that have played a major role in delaying democratisation in the region¹⁵².

In the period referred to above, the newly independent states in the Middle East were close to the European empires, and many of the rulers had been landowners, merchants, and military officers under Ottoman rule. They owed their position of wealth and authority to their co-operation with the west, and thus became the target of the attacks by Arab Nationalists in the 1950s¹⁵³.

151 Haji, S., **The Making of Iraq, 1900- 1963; Capital, Power and Ideology**, New York, State University of New York 1997, p32.

152 Amin, S., **The Arab Nation, Nationalism and Class Struggles**, London, Billing Sons Ltd, 1978, p. 47

153 The following declarations made by the Dhofar Liberation Front in 9 June 1965 show the strong links between Omani opponents and the Arabic nationalism in that time. "The government of the stooge Sa'id ibn Taymur has enlisted the services of an army of Shu'ubi mercenaries to frustrate the goals of Arab Liberalisation in this country; but the DLF will be like blazing fire against it in every part of the country. This same spiteful Su'ubi (foreign, non-Arab- ed.) army has managed to obstruct the aims of the revolution in Oman; however, the Free Will which derives its strength from the will of God is bound to overcome. We vow to God that we shall teach this army a lesson it will never forget- the same lesson taught to the imperialist armies in Egypt, Algeria, Iraq and Yemen". " Arab fighting masses! The Dhofar Liberation Front - presently leading the struggle in Dhofar against imperialism and its agents- firmly believes in the unity of the Arab nation and in the unity of the struggle of all Arabs from the Ocean to the Gulf. This belief necessarily derives us to seek militant unity with other Arab revolutionary organisations in the Gulf and in South Yemen. That is why the DLF calls upon such organisations to support it in its just struggle and provide it with all the moral and material help they can afford until it achieve its aim and

Arab nationalists took the view that the separation of the Arab world into separate states by the Europeans had been a mistake. They believed that Arabs could be unified because of their common language, and cultural similarities. The role of Islam was a problem, because while the nationalists recognized the importance of religion, they were often in competition with Islamic groups –such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt- and were not interested in creating a religious state. They believed that the state should take a stronger role in creating a more just and equal society, and that it should develop a more independent foreign policy. With regard to the last point, Gamal Abdul Nasser was a key player in the creation of the non-aligned Movement, even though in the late 1950s, he began to develop close relations with the USSR¹⁵⁴.

The two decades after 1950 marked a significant change in the Middle East. It transformed itself from the role of marginal importance in the world economy to one of strategic importance. The oil reserves made the Middle East a region of key importance in the world capitalist economy. The rise of an anti-imperialist movement was another main phenomenon of this period. Though the rulers of the Middle East tried to locate themselves within this new global capitalist order, the anti-imperialist movement sought to destroy capitalism altogether.¹⁵⁵

defeats its enemies, the enemies of Arab Nationalism” Cited from **Conference Declarations of the Front, Document of the National Struggle in Oman and the Arabian Gulf**, (X.709/19058. London, British Library, 1974) pp.7-9.

154 Dunbabin, J., *op.cit*, 1994, p. 277.

155 Halliday, F., *op.cit*. p.18.

The formal instruments of democracy that had been created by the West were not seen as the best instruments of change. In the 1950s, the nationalists, in order to break the links with the West, and the British, began a period of revolution in the Middle East, particularly in Egypt in 1953, and Iraq in 1958¹⁵⁶. Unsuccessful attempts were also made to overthrow the monarchy in Jordan in the 1950s¹⁵⁷.

In terms of democratisation, the problem with the period of Arab nationalism was that it led to the creation of strong, authoritarian regimes that did not believe in pluralism. So, even though Gamal Abdul Nasser created a political party, the Arab National Union, his aim was to use this party to bring together all Egyptians under one organisation. In fact, in the period from 1958 to 1962, Nasser joined with Syria to form the United Arab Republic, on the ground that the shared interests of the Arab people would create one Arab nation. In fact, problems existed between the leadership in Egypt and Syria, and the experiment ended in 1962. But while formal democratic elements in Egypt existed, in practice, the state became completely dominated by the figure of Nasser, who was also influential across the Arab world¹⁵⁸.

After the defeat of the Arab armies in the war with Israel in 1967, and the death of Nasser, Arab nationalism lost its dominance. Anwar As-Sadat, Nasser's successor, terminated Egypt's relations with the USSR, and developed close relations with the

156 Dunbabin, J., 1994, p. 273.

157 Ibid. p. 300.

158 Ibid.

West, and the USA in particular¹⁵⁹. Arab nationalism was still a powerful force in Syria and Iraq, but these states did not have much influence in the region at the time.

Elsewhere in the region, the experience was quite different. The changes and the revolutions that happened in the area between Egypt and Iraq hardly affected the Arabian Peninsula, other than the threat to Kuwait in 1961 and the nationalist revolution in Yemen which began in 1962. The monarchies that were established did not come under threat. Indeed, because of the social and economic developments that began to take place as the oil industry was started, the existing regimes were able to strengthen themselves.

In Oman, the story was slightly different. Although there was oil and the European and the American companies wanted to develop the industry there, the monarch, Sa'id ibn Taymur, was opposed to long-term capital investment and the social and economic changes this would bring. As Oman, geographically, looks out over the Indian Ocean more than into the peninsula (because of the 'Empty Quarter' or Rub al-Khali), it was not the focus of interest of politically by other Arab states, other than its immediate neighbours. For much of the 20th century, Oman was isolated and poor, while the central authority of the Al-Bu Sa'id dynasty under Sa'id ibn Taymur was weak¹⁶⁰. In that time Britain for economic reasons backed the Sultan with who it had a long standing relationship against the Imam of the inertia who though might be subject to external influence. This was in some way attempting set back for a democracy in the country as it

159 Fraser, *The Arab- Israeli Conflict*, London, Macmillan Press Ltd, 1995, pp.95-96

160 Zahlan., *op.cit.* 1989.

destroyed the pro to democratic feature of the ideational system In recent years, however, Oman has developed closer ties to its neighbours and other Arab states.

3.4 Political Regime Types in the Middle East

After decolonization, nationalism became the main feature in the Middle East. People strove for political and economic reforms. However, in 1967 nationalism failed to achieve the demands of the nation, and then people turned toward a new ideology. The Islamic movement became the new hope for the people. The middle classes were not happy because they realized the governments were not able to govern. Governments tried to involve the elites in their system, but the middle classes were ignored, so they supported the Islamic movements. Examples can be seen in a number of countries in the Middle East such as Algeria, Iran, Egypt and Yemen:

3.4.1 The Middle East Monarchies

The period of Arab nationalism in the Middle East saw many states break their connections to the West, and become authoritarian states. Democracy was very weak, or formal democracy was used to create one party, so that elections were only for that party. Also, the nationalists often intervened in the monarchies of the region, hoping to unify the whole Arab world under one republic. In fact, most of the monarchies survived this period, and have been more stable. The monarchies of Arabia have been stable because of the use of oil wealth in development.

The monarchies have been built on traditional forms of legitimacy, in which an existing hierarchy of family, clan, and tribal loyalties shape the political life of the state. With the

exception of Jordan and Morocco, the Middle Eastern monarchies have become oil-rich states. In the cases of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, these developments began in the 1930s: the other Gulf kingdoms developed their petroleum industries at a later date¹⁶¹.

In the monarchies, power is concentrated at the top of the state, among the ruling family. These states have been described as 'Rentier states', referring to a relationship with the purchasers of petroleum in which the state acquires the greater part of its revenue from oil profits. These profits are then used, other than for personal purposes, to modernise the state in terms of its physical and social infrastructure. This means the population is provided with a wide variety of services and benefits without having to pay direct taxes, while the government is relieved of the tensions that exist between government and taxpayers and any political demands that might be made on the basis of 'no taxation without representation'. In the Gulf kingdoms, civil society has not really developed, and this is one reason why democracy has not become a part of the political culture¹⁶².

However, there are cases where democracy is, or is becoming a part of, the political culture, such as Jordan and Yemen.

3.4.1.1 Jordan

Although it was an authoritarian system, the Ottoman Empire began to introduce political reforms, including elections to regional assemblies, in the late 19th and early

161 Al-Busaid, B., *The Under Secretary of Foreign Affairs Interview* [15,12,2002].

162 Korany, *op.cit.* 1994, pp. 511-513.

20th centuries¹⁶³. During the period of the British Mandate (1921-1946), political parties were allowed, and a legislative Council regularly elected. However, the Council had little practical power and no authority. Nevertheless, the late Ottoman and British legacy has been to introduce the idea of democratic elections into Jordan's political culture¹⁶⁴. Between 1948 and 1967, when Jerusalem and the West Bank were under Jordanian sovereignty, a single parliament was created to represent both areas. When Israel occupied the West Bank in 1967, King Hussein suspended the parliament. A return to democracy began in 1988, when King Hussein cut Jordan's constitutional relationship with the West Bank. Following riots in the summer of 1989, King Hussein reintroduced elections, and reconvened parliament, which has been elected every four years since then. To some degree also, the media have been liberalised, though attempts to interfere with the freedom of journalists has been widely criticised.

With regard to the formal democratisation, political parties in Jordan must be legally registered. They must represent the citizens of Jordan, and not receive funding from sources outside the country. There is a strong Islamic representation in parliament, but in recent elections the lack of unity between the Islamic parties, and the nationalist parties, weakened the authority of parliament¹⁶⁵. This has maintained King Hussein's and his son King Abdullah's decisive role in decision making.

3.4.1.2 Yemen

163 Abu Jaber, K., 'The Legislature of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan: A State in Political Development' *The Muslim World*, 59, (1969) pp. 220-250.

164 Ibid.

165 Dunn, J., *Democracy*, op.cit., 1995.

In 1962, a nationalist revolution in the Yemen overthrew the rule of the Zaydi Imam. In the civil war which followed, nationalist revolutionaries received military support from Egypt, while supporters of the Imam received support from Saudi Arabia and Jordan. The civil war led to the division in Yemen between the North, which was associated with Saudi Arabia and the USA, and the South, which grew closer to the USSR¹⁶⁶.

In May 1990, the North and the South unified, declaring their intention to become a democratic state by 1993¹⁶⁷. However, following unification, Yemen suffered from the diplomatic position that it took during the Gulf War of 1990-1991. Almost a million migrant workers were expelled from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. The collective leadership that had ruled since 1990 broke down in April 1994. Conflict took place between the two leaders of the North and South in which the winner was Ali Abdullah Saleh, the president of the North. The former leader of the South, Al-Bid, went into exile to Oman.

Despite the fact that in Yemen the government is elected, and has one of the largest circulations of newspapers and great press freedom in the region, in practical terms, elections have kept the northern elites in power. According to the 1996 formal Yemeni statement, the numbers of the population of Yemen are around 16, 500,000. Around 4, 500,000 participate in the voting in the year 1997¹⁶⁸.

166 Dunbabin, J., op.cit, 1994, pp360- 361.

167 Dunn, J., op.cit, 1995.

168 Gabash, op.cit. 2001.

3.4.1.4 Bahrain

Bahraini people come from three ethnic groups: the ruling family (Al- Khaifah) who are of the Sunni sect, their allied tribes, Hawalah, who are sunni as well, and the Shia who represent the majority of the population¹⁶⁹.

Bahrain has a deep experience in democracy in its modern political life compared to other Gulf States. This factor enlightens and encourages other Gulf countries to imitate Bahrain especially in terms of cultural and social issues. The beginning of the twentieth century brought to Bahraini people the foundations of the moderate Bahraini culture. The state strengthened its own political identity, and established modern education in 1919. At that time, Bahrain was the only state in the Gulf that possessed a school. This school was called Ahidayah. Abdalwhab Alzebani established the first political reform movement in 1923¹⁷⁰. This reform movement concentrated on two major points: firstly, the establishment of the As-Shura Council, secondly, achieving national sovereignty by decreasing the involvement of Great Britain in the internal issues of Bahrain. Unfortunately, this movement was restricted to a small group which involved businessmen and educated people of the sunni sect. It failed to realise its aim toward the establishment of social unity and national participation. But in general, as Gabash has said, it was an important experience in terms of the history and politics of Bahrain. The British Empire forced the prince of Bahrain to abdicate in 1923 because he supported the

169 Al- Hosni, T., **The Paramilitary Experience in The Arab Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) States: A Step Towards Democracy; Facts Ambitions** Unpublished ph.D Thesis, The University of Hull, op.cit, 2000, p.29.

170 Gabbash, H., op.cit, , 2001.

movement. Furthermore, the founder of this movement was exiled to India, where he died¹⁷¹.

However, this movement was the stimulus for the demand of democracy in Bahrain. A number of educated people and labourers in oil fields started to establish similar movements. These came under the influence of Nasser, the president of Egypt. His movement affected most Arab countries, reinforcing nationalistic sentiments. Nasser's idea was to unite the Arab world under one state and to free the Arabs from colonial occupation¹⁷².

The other significant movement within Bahrain was the establishment of a national association organisation in 1945. Although similar to the first movement, it was more mature, because it covered most of the demands of the social and political forces. This association, founded by Abd-Alazeez As-Shmlan, Abd-Alrahman Al-Baker and Al-Elawat, was supported by both Sunnis and Shias. This gave credibility and strength to the movement. In 1954, this association made efforts to establish a foundation for a democratic country, but it was banned by Britain¹⁷³.

Following British withdrawal, Around 27,000 people went to vote to elect a National Assembly in 1973. The people of Bahrain elected thirty members for the first National Assembly. However, in the year 1975, the Prince of Bahrain suspended the National

171 Ibid.

172 Ibid.

173 Ibid.

Assembly. The second attempt to revive the representative process was made in 1993 when the members of the As-Shura Council were appointed by the Prince¹⁷⁴.

Bahrain resumed the work of the constitution only in 2002. The prince of Bahrain established a Parliament including a Legislative Council, members of which are appointed by him, and the Congress Council, elected by the people. Around 98% of the Bahraini people supported this step by voting in the election. In the election, the Islamic party captured most of the seats; out of 24 seats, the Religious Committee gained 20 seats, and the Shia Committee won only 4 seats. This is because the National Assembly partly refused to participate in the election because with the limited powers of Congress. In the Legislative Council the Prince appointed forty members six of whom were women, and one of the six was Christian¹⁷⁵.

3.4.1.4 Kuwait

The first attempt toward democracy in Kuwait was in 1921 through the establishment of the Shura Council. This Council was established as a result of the pressure of Kuwaiti merchants, at a time when oil in Kuwait had not yet been discovered. After six months,

174 Al-Hosni, T., op.cit. 2000, PP.114-115.

175 United Nations Development Programme, <http://www.undp-pogar.org/arabic/countries/bahrain/elections.html> [2-2-2003].

the government banned this Council. During the 1930s, there was another attempt to establish a wider institution which included merchants and politicians¹⁷⁶.

After giving independence from British mandate in 1961, Kuwait established a governmental interim Council. The first priority of this government was to issue a Constitution¹⁷⁷. The Constitution provided for the establishment of the elected Parliament, which included 50 members working together with the government. The role of this Council is similar to the role of other democratic Parliaments in democratic countries. At the beginning, this Council faced pressure from above. The government was reluctant to give the nation political rights, and dissolved the Parliament several times. Currently, this Council is very active. Members use their influence to the utmost extent; for example, they have withdrawn confidence from a number of ministers and criticised them openly¹⁷⁸. These discussions are published in the media. In terms of foreign affairs, the National Council includes a political affairs committee. It coordinates and communicates with the ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kuwait. The Foreign Affairs committee provides regular reports to the Council explaining the latest Kuwaiti position towards developments in international politics. Furthermore, the National Council also plays an international role. For instance, it participates in the regular Parliament Conference of non-aligned countries, the Islamic Summit and the Arab Association Parliament.

176 The Kuwaiti Parliament, *Masirat Al-Hiah Al-Dimocratiah in Kuwait* (the progress of Democratized Life in Kuwait), Kuwait, the General Secretary of the Parliament, Information Sector, 2001.

177 Al-Rahamah, H., Kuwaiti Diplomat in Morocco *Interview* [15- 5- 2003].

178 Ibid.

The constitution guarantees the role of women, but the conservative traditions of the Kuwaiti people have hindered the participation of women in the political sphere. In 1999, the prince of Kuwait issued a decree allowing women complete political rights in elections, but this step was banned by the National Council, which is composed of men. Only one vote supported the prince's proposal. Currently, efforts are being made to involve women in the Parliament. It is expected that they will be members in the Council very soon¹⁷⁹. Finally, the position of the prime minister has been separated from the position of the crown prince. The separation between these duties will help to make the government more accountable. There are no political parties in Kuwait, but there are groups with tribal or religious affiliations and independents.

3.4.1.5 Islamic Revolution in Iran

During the last two decades Iran has seen significant movement towards democracy. Any revolution, at the beginning, takes a fundamental path. Later it starts to stabilise, and perhaps its ideological fervour becomes diluted. The Islamic revolution in Iran shocked all liberal states. America, for example, attempted to squeeze Iran and change its policy by means of information propaganda and sanctions. The evidence shows, however, that the Islamic Revolution is itself ending in response to internal demands.

The Islamic revolution can be classified into three periods: firstly, the period of revolutionary Islam, which lasted from 1979 to 1988, secondly, the reconstruction

179 Al-Rahamah, H., Kuwaiti Diplomat in Morocco, *Interview* [15, 5, 2003]

period from 1988 to 1997, and thirdly, the republic or searching for a more open society, which began with the election of President Khatami in 1997¹⁸⁰.

During 1979 to 1981, there were three presidents in Iran. In the beginning Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini appointed Mehdi Bazargan to establish a transitional regime in Iran. But he resigned in the same year after students attacked the American Embassy in November 1979. Then the Iranian people elected Abu-Alhassan Sadr to the presidency; but Khomeini soon forced him to resign. The next president was Mohammed Ali Rejaee, who was assassinated¹⁸¹

After 1981, those who followed Khomeini's line controlled the Iranian political system. This group found strong support from the population, they declared their opponents to be "anti-revolutionary" and "clients of imperialism". Since the end of the war with Iraq, Iran, from 1989, has undergone major economic changes throughout the country. Also, with respect to foreign policy, the elites adopted a more pragmatic line, especially with Europe and the Gulf Arab monarchies. The efforts to secure foreign investment and the creation of better relationship with other countries has increased the demand for further opening up of society and enhanced dialogue¹⁸².

180 Aras, B., Transformation of The Iranian Political System: Toward a New Model?
<http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2001/issue3/jv5n3a2.html> 5, (1) [3-9- 2001]

181 *ibid.*

182 *Ibid.*

On 23 May 1997, Khatami was elected as the president, and at the same time the conservatives faced struggles with the new generation. Iran under Khatami's rule showed respect for pluralism and a more open dialogue with the West. Without denouncing religion as anti freedom, he emphasised that those institutions that suppress freedom of ideas and speech are destined to be doomed. He attempted to institute constitutional amendments and introduced institutionalised freedom in the public sphere.

Following the elections of 1999, a *de facto* bi-party political system emerged in Iran. Executive and legislative offices, along with the presidency, remained under the control of the reformists, while the economy, intelligence, the military and the judiciary remained under the hegemony of the conservatives.

In contrast with other countries in the Middle East, Iran became an attractive example of democracy with the election of Khatami. Once democratic elections were known as the source of political authority, then the focus of attention shifted to jostling amongst the various political parties. Political parties have moved towards being seen as the most suitable institutions for absorbing and representing the highly politicised demands of people in Islamic countries. The rearguard action of the conservative Guardians Council in banning pro-reform candidates in the February 2004 Iranian elections could be seen as a sign of the growing legitimacy of the pro-democratic institutions. The Guardians faced the power of a pro-reform majority¹⁸³. Although democratic systems in Islamic countries still leave a great deal to be desired in terms of freedom and contribution, from Algeria

183 <http://news.bbc.co.uk> [26-2-2004].

to Indonesia there is a widespread attempt to maintain and improve multiparty political systems¹⁸⁴.

3.5 Conclusion

The hope that more states in the South would become democracies has not been fulfilled in the Middle East in general. Authoritarian leaders continue to dominate the region, but there are states that are experimenting with democracy, such as Jordan and Yemen. Ironically, the states which are economically less prosperous have adopted democracy, whereas the rest of the prosperous states are under authoritarian regimes. The legitimacy of the regime, is seriously threatened if the population suffers hardship. In such circumstances, democracy provides a way of venting peoples' pent-up feelings and frustrations. Certainly, autocratic or monarchical regimes cannot provide this outlet to the aspirations of an economically disadvantaged population; hence, they are unable to survive in poorer countries. The difficulties of democracy in the region are due to the history of imperialism, which created separate Arab states, and the wars with Israel, which meant that the military were very powerful in the region. As Korany has said, many states have introduced democracy not from below, but from the top down, so that there is a lack of informal democracy or civil society. In the oil rich monarchies, the power of the state to provide services without taxes has given the ruling family great authority, and reduced the demand for democracy.

The Middle East is one region that has not experienced widespread democracy, but, as we have seen above, democracy, or democratic change is an important agenda of most

184 <http://www.fas.org/man/dod-101/ops/war/iran-iraq.htm>.

of the rulers of the region, and people talk about democracy a lot.¹⁸⁵ There are interesting aspects about the popular attitude to democracy in the Arab world. Although most people want democracy in the Middle East, “Arabs do not trust their societies with democracy”.¹⁸⁶ It is widely believed that the tribal structures in the Middle East are inhospitable to democracy. Field has encountered such popular reactions from the Saudis:

“When one asks Saudis what would happen if democracy were introduced to their country, almost everyone of them replies that it would immediately recreate tribalism, that nobody would vote for anyone except a member of his own tribe, or somebody from his own town, and that the different parts of society would soon be at each other’s throats”.¹⁸⁷

One of the great challenges to democratisation in the Middle East will, of course, be Islam. Any democratisation project in the region must grapple with the force of Islam. Islam, as derived from the Quran, advocates firm rule based on consensus, and considers that a good form of government. In traditional Arabian society, a tribe or a town accepts as its leader a person, normally from a well-established family. The leader is chosen by consensus and then in government he consults advisers who reflect the views of the different sections of society¹⁸⁸.

185 Field op.cit.1994, p. 313.

186 Ibid, p. 311.

187 Ibid, p. 312.

188 Wiktorowicz, Q., in an interesting article “Civil Society as Social Control: State Power in Jordan”, *Comparative Politics*, 33 (1), October 2000, pp. 43-62 has identified an interesting hurdle to democracy

Finally, it is not always the rulers in the Middle East, but the people who have been the true democratisers. People of the Middle East have risen in revolt for major social and political changes in their countries. As Halliday has pointed out with reference to Arabia:

“While the local ruling classes developed their own autonomy, the anti-imperialist movement in the peninsula was transformed into a powerful section of the movement and was able to develop the anti-imperialist struggle to a level never before achieved in the region”¹⁸⁹.

Thus, Arab nationalism in its various guises has remained a very powerful force for democracy and social justice in the region. In the discussion of democracy in the Middle East, such popular pressures from below must not be lost sight of. Such nationalism as has developed in various times since the post-Second World War period (Nasserism in the 1950s and 1960s being a prime example) is Western in spirit and Arabic in form. The content of democracy or popular rule that such nationalism has demanded is profoundly significant for the region’s democratisation.

In Oman, as part of this Arab world, the democratisation process, as the chapter that follows will shortly show, is naturally subject to the main challenges that the Middle East, as a whole, has been facing. But what makes the story of Oman interesting, is how,

in the Middle East. He shows how civil society far from becoming a help to democracy has acted as the state’s arm of control over its citizens.

¹⁸⁹ Halliday, F. *op.cit.* 1979, p. 17.

under the current Sultan, political order and political changes have been combined together, which contains an important lesson for other Arab countries to learn.

CHAPTER FOUR

INTRODUCING OMAN: HISTORY AND SOCIETY

“I observed with mounting concern and intense indignation my father’s inability to govern.”¹⁹⁰

4.1 Introduction: Oman’s Backwardness

Prior to 1970, Oman as a country was very backward. In 1970, the infant mortality rate was 75 percent. There were only three small primary schools, one hospital, no press, and a literacy rate of only 5 percent.¹⁹¹ The life in the villages was miserable: “In the villages of Oman there is often not a single healthy inhabitant in sight”.¹⁹² An expert visiting the country in 1958 was shocked to say “In twenty years’ experience of most of the countries of the Middle East he had never seen a people so poverty stricken or so debilitated with disease capable of treatment and cure”¹⁹³ Fred Halliday said, “Trachoma, venereal disease and malnutrition were widespread”.¹⁹⁴

190 Statement by Sultan Qaboos Ibn Sa’id: Broadcast to the People of Oman---27 July 1970. For details, see Kechichian, *op.cit.* 1995, p. 277.

191 Halliday, F., *op.cit.* pp. 274-75; According to his Majesty Sultan Qaboos “ We had no hospital to care for our people, we had no schools to prepare our young to take their place in the world, we had no government structure with which to organise and develop the resources of our country, many of our gifted sons and daughters had left in despair to make life for themselves in other lands” The Royal Speeches of H. M. Sultan Qaboos ibn Said 1970 – 1995, Muscat, Ministry of Information, Oman Newspaper House, 1995, p. 81.

192 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 275 from a visitor’s account.

193 *Ibid.*

194 *Ibid.*

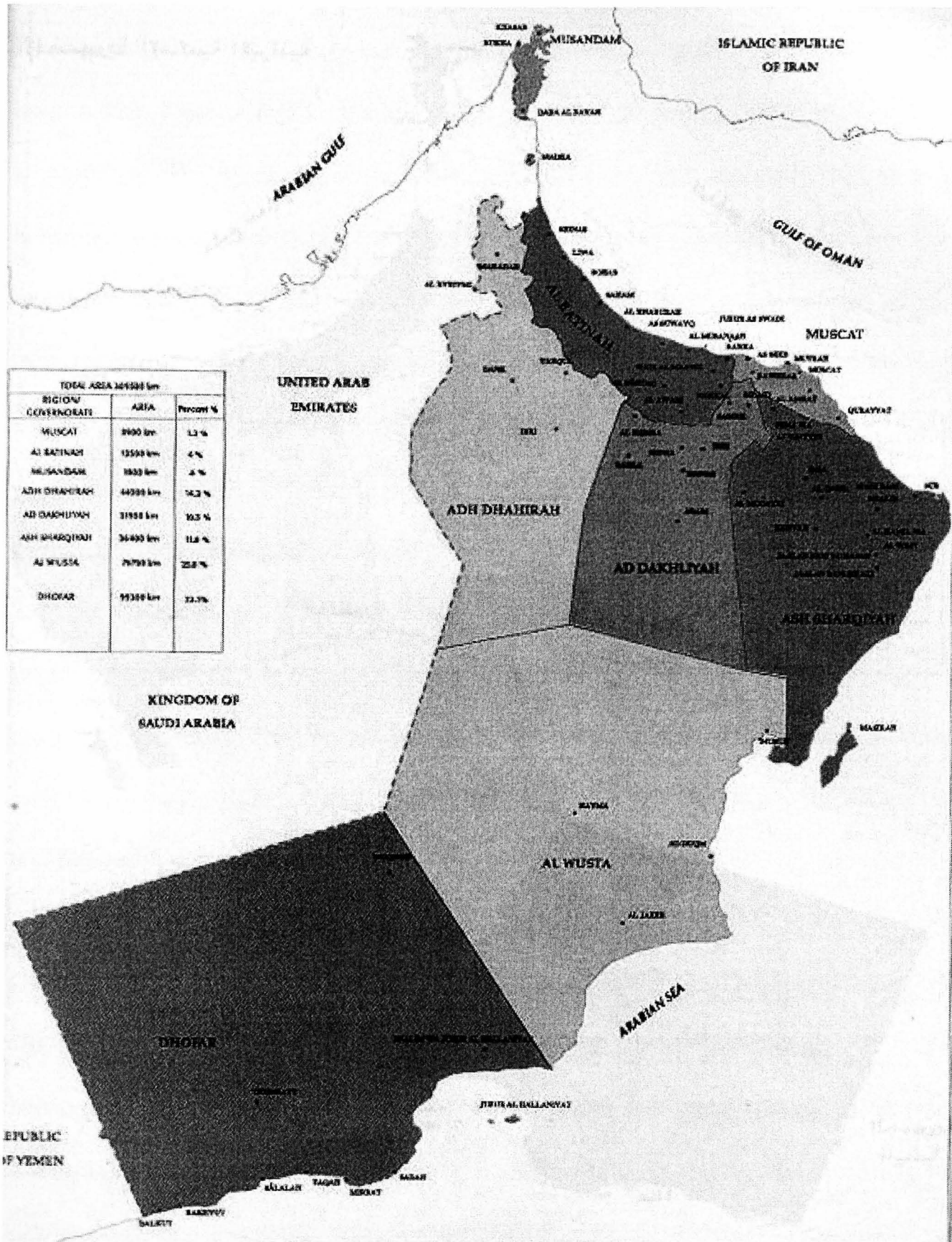
Even in the middle of the twentieth century, Oman was living in the middle ages. Sa'id ibn Taymur, from whom the current Sultan seized power in 1970, was opposed to any development. On one occasion he told his British adviser on development "This is why you lost India, because you educated the people"¹⁹⁵. He was so angered at the prospect of development that just before his ouster in 1970 he decided to close down the three existing primary schools in the country because they had become a 'centre of communism'¹⁹⁶.

Given the above, the political changes introduced, and various development activities undertaken in Oman since 1970 are far-reaching in their consequences, and need to be appropriately situated in the country's recent history and society. This chapter seeks to provide an overview of Oman's history and society as a back-drop to the political changes since the early 1970s.

195 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 276.

196 *Ibid.* For further details on the savageries of his rule, see pp. 276-97.

4.2 Geographical Location



Source : <http://www.omanet.com/geography.htm>

The Sultanate of Oman is an Islamic country located on the south-eastern rim of the Arabian Peninsula, bordered by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. Archaeological evidence suggests that human communities have lived in the area for at least 5,000 years. Copper, frankincense, farming and fishing were the sources of employment. The country is situated beside the most strategic waterways in the Middle East. Out of some 4,000 miles of the Arabian Peninsula coastline, about one-fourth belong to Oman, the country which commands the entrance to the Gulf and faces the sea to the north, east and south. Oman occupies some 120,000 square miles, an area, which exceeds Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates together.

Oman occupies a strategic location overlooking the Straits of Hormuz, through which a high percentage of world oil is currently carried by ships. The country's geographical location has had an important influence in shaping state boundaries and subsequently creating international links by air, sea and land. Oman has encouraged internal industrial sectors and built important ports, such as the port of Salalah, with the specific aim of creating links with North America, Europe, Asia and Africa¹⁹⁷.

Geographically, historically and politically, Oman remained outside the main currents of Arab history. Its major contacts were maritime and, as these withered the country became a "secluded, remote, and isolated corner" of the Arabian Peninsula.¹⁹⁸ For quite a long time, Oman's economy, linked as it was to the Gulf and the Indian Ocean, had little cultural or commercial exchange with Europe and the Americas, even with the rest

¹⁹⁷ Internal Industrial sectors, Oman Daily, 1997.

¹⁹⁸ Rippenburg, C., op.cit. 1998, p. 1.

of Arabia. One cause of the country's insularity from the rest of the Arab world was the formidable Hajar Mountains which, standing as a ridge between the coast and the desert, have at the same time differentiated the two.¹⁹⁹

Geographically rather diverse, Oman lies on the Tropic of Cancer which makes it very hot in summer. It is composed of Eight distinct physical regions: the Muscat, Batinah Coast, the Alshurkiah, Inner Oman, Aldhahirah, Central Oman, Dhofar, and the Musandam, each of which maintains a distinct cultural identity.²⁰⁰

4.3 Demography and Social Structure of Oman

Demographically, Oman is small. Its population is estimated to be just two and a half million, three-fourths of whom are Omani nationals, and the rest expatriates. The population is unevenly distributed across the regions. The coastal and the metropolitan Muscat regions contains the largest population. Oman's people are a diverse ethnic and religious mix and bear the imprint of a history of maritime trade, tribal migrations, and contacts with the outside world. The majority of Arab tribes are diverse, a significant number being Ibadhi. Some communities in Oman trace their origins to before the Arab migrations. The ethnic composition of Oman's minorities is also mixed and not always easy to determine.

199 Ibid.

200 More details see Rippenburg, C., op. cit. pp. 2-8.

Table 4.1. Population of Oman in Regions, 2000.

Estimated (mid – Year) Total population by Governirate/ region					
2000					
Governorate Region	Total	Expa.	Expa.	Omani	Omani
		%	(000) Number	%	(000) Number
Muscat	661	47	295	21	366
Al-Batinah	667	17	108	31	559
Musandam	34	1	7	2	27
Adh-Dahirah	215	9	54	9	161
Ad- Dakhiliyah	273	6	36	13	237
Ash -Sharqiah	273	6	36	13	237
Al -Wusta	20	1	4	1	16
Dhofar	225	12	74	8	151
Sultanate	2,402	100	624	100	1,778

Source: **Oman: Facts & Figures, 2000**, Information and Publication Centre, p.1.

Most Omanis belong to the Ibadhi sect of Islam, which has largely shaped Omani culture. The Ibadhis are one of the Muslim world's few remaining *Kharighite* sects. The Sunnis form the largest non-Ibadhi group (around 25%) comprising a variety of ethnic groups such as the Baluchis. The vast majority of the people in Dhofar are Sunni. The Shia sect represents the third largest religious group in Batinah where the Liwatiyas are predominant. There are sizeable sections of the Indian Hindu community on the coast. Other religious communities are smaller in number, but they have freedom of worship.

The dependent population below the age of 19 is quite significant, amounting to around 57% of the total Omani population. This implies that in future the challenge of creating employment and opportunities for this fast growing population will be immense.

Women still constitute a small minority of the workforce, since Oman is a conservative Muslim society and this makes the dependent population even larger. The rate of population growth is high at around 3.43% during 2001. Life expectancy has increased considerably because of economic development from 49.3 years in 1970 to 72.5 in 1999.²⁰¹

201 The National Economic Ministry, Sultanate of Oman, 2001, p.6.

Table 4. 2. Population of Oman by Sex and Age, 2000

Estimated (mid year) Omani National population by Age Group and sex						
2000			1999			(000) Age group
Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	
249	122	127	247	121	126	4-0
262	129	133	264	130	134	9-5
258	127	131	254	125	129	10-14
238	117	122	234	114	120	15-19
204	100	105	194	95	99	20-24
136	66	70	121	58	63	25-29
87	42	45	83	40	43	30-34
71	36	35	69	36	34	35-39
60	32	29	58	30	28	40-44
50	26	24	48	25	24	45-49
42	21	21	41	20	21	50-54
36	17	18	35	17	18	55-59
29	14	15	28	13	15	60-64
22	10	12	28	10	11	65-69
15	7	8	15	7	8	70-74
19	10	9	18	10	9	75+
1,778	874	904	1,729	851	879	Total

Source: Oman: Facts & Figures 2000, Information and Publication Center, p.1.

The latest census which was held in 2003 showed an increase in the Omani population, to 2,331,391, of whom 1,779,318 are Omani and the rest, which represent 23.7 % are foreigners. The people are concentrated in two areas, Muscat and Batinah, which together have around 55% of the total population. However the population of Musandam and Al-Wusta is 2% only of the total. There are 312,708 inhabitants in Al-Sharkiah, 265,083 in Al-Dhakhliyah, 214,331 in Dhofar and 204,250 in Al-Dhairah.

Most of the foreigners are in the capital of Oman. They represent 45% of the total population of Muscat. Again, there are fewer foreigners in Al-Wusta and Musandam; they represent only 2.5 % of the total inhabitants of this area²⁰².

4.4 History of the Sultanate: The Establishment of the Elected State

The Islamic era in Oman is thought to have begun as early as 630 A. D, when a ruling family, the Al-Julanda, received a letter from the Prophet Muhammad. The Al-Julanda converted to Islam shortly afterwards.

As a result of the clear conception of the role of the Imam and how he should deal with his nation and other countries, Oman existed as a quasi state as early as 1253 years ago.

This phenomenon was rarely seen in other places in the Middle East. As Aideed said:

“The Sultanate of Oman was originally called the Imamate of Oman. This was because the country was ruled between 751 and 1792 by Imams of the Ibadhi sect of Islam, elected directly by the people”²⁰³.

According to Joseph A. Kechichian:

“The sultanate of Oman was governed between 751 and 1792 AD by elected *Imams* of the Ibadhi sect of Islam”²⁰⁴.

The first *Imam* in Oman was Al-Gulanda ibn Musood in 751²⁰⁵. Omani people, who had studied in *Basra*, on returning to Oman, tried the same methods that they had learnt

202 Ministry of Economy, Oman www.Oman Census.net. [10 - 2- 2004].

203 Aideed, A., op.cit. 1996.

204 Kechichian, J., op.cit. 1995, p . 3.

205 Al-Wasmi., op.cit. 1993, p.70.

in the Islamic state by electing Al-Gulanda. The other Omani people supported the idea, and supported the new *Imam*. Many Omani delegations came to congratulate him and give him full support²⁰⁶. Al-Gulanda was considered a good ruler because he always asked specialists for their opinion. In 793, Mohammed ibn aby-Affan came to power and proclaimed himself as the new leader²⁰⁷.

In 796, Al-Warth ibn Kab was elected²⁰⁸. Most of the Omanis were satisfied with him. In his period, Esa ibn Gafar was sent by Haroon Al-Rasheed, one of the Abbasid leaders, to try to occupy Oman. Esa was executed on the judgement of the Omani court²⁰⁹. Al-Warth remained in power for around twelve years. In this period, the capital of Oman was changed from Sohar to Nizw²¹⁰. In 808, when Al-Warth died, the Omani people arranged a meeting to elect a new leader. They agreed to elect Gassan ibn Abullah in same year²¹¹. He successfully defended Oman from external enemies and he also paid attention to building a strong navy. Oman fought and defeated ships from East Asia, as a result of which attacks on Omani ships were ended.²¹² Gassan died in 823. Then, Abd-Almalik ibn Humaid came to power through election in 824. He defended Oman from foreign agents who came from Yemen with the aim of destabilising Oman. He remained in power for around eighteen years²¹³. The Omanis

206 Al-Harthy, A., op.cit, S, 1973, op.cit. pp.10 -50.

207 Al-Wasmi, K, op.cit. 1993, p.72.

208 Al-Salmi., A, op.cit. 2000, p.112.

209 Ibid. p.116.

210 Ibid. p.118.

211 ibid. p .120.

212 Ibid. p.121.

213 Ibid. pp. 132- 134.

then elected Mohana ibn Jafar in 841. He was very strong leader, who built a number of ships, reportedly as many as three hundred. He also owned nine thousand camels, and maintained around ten thousand soldiers. He remained in power for around ten years²¹⁴.

This first period represented a test of Oman's viability as an independent and quasi democratic state. Although it faced opposition from neighbouring countries, through the means of elections which received massive support from the nation, it succeeded in defeating external enemies. The period of success lasted for around one hundred and thirty six years. Later, Oman faced internal and external problems²¹⁵. New powerful leaders in Oman such as Mohammed ibn Zaidah and Rashed controlled Oman without elections²¹⁶. The Omani people were not happy about this, so they acted to remove these people, and arranged a meeting to change the situation.

The Omani people succeeded in electing Al-Sult as imam in 851, but when Al-Sult became an old man, Musa ibn Musa (scholar) announced a new leader. A number of intellectuals and leaders agreed with him to select Rashed ibn Al-Nader. However, the intellectuals faced a dilemma whether to support the existing leader or the new leader²¹⁷. There were three schools of thought:

- 1- Musa ibn Musa should be supported because he was a very important philosopher in the country. He had the right to remove the bad leader.

214 Ibid. p.148- 1150.

215 Al-Wasmi., K,op.cit. 1993, p. 73.

216 Al-Salmi, A, op.cit. p.105.

217 Al-Harthy., S, op.cit 1973, p.255.

- 2- Musa was acting wrongly when he announced his decision to change a leader who had been elected unanimously. This was a crime.
- 3- Not clear about the situation. Those of this position gave wide legitimacy for the position of Al-Sult. They were prepared to show him mercy, even though he was weak and he could not run the country, because they did not want civil war²¹⁸.

This issue divided the Omanis into two groups, the Nizwani and Rustaqi. The Nizwani took a middle stance; they did not claim any party was in the wrong. In contrast, the Rustaqi did not support Musa. They believed that Musa had declared war against an elected president. This meant Musa was a criminal who had acted against the stability of the state. They called for war. This division lasted for around 739 years.

In the period from Al-Sult ibn Malik to Nasser ibn Morshid (885- 1624) Oman was not stable and most of the leaders came to power through militant means which left the people dissatisfied²¹⁹. During this period, there were around thirty *Imams* and some of them were kings who represented their tribes, not the nation. The most famous ones were from the Nabhani tribe. Some of them succeeded in controlling parts of Oman; others controlled the whole country²²⁰.

Despite their shortcomings, these Imams founded a united system of state governance.

The Omani state covered the area from Bahrain to Yemen to Oman it self, and the

218 Omar., F, op.cit. 1985, pp.13 – 27.

219 Al-Salmi, A, Nizwa Magazine, V.30, April 2002.

220 Ali-zkwai, S., Kashf Algumah, op.cit. pp 735- 753.

debate between the Rustaqi and Nizwani schools represented an advanced dialogue on the legitimacy of the president²²¹. The medieval history of Oman was also marked by a series of foreign invasions, divisions by domestic rivalries with competing *Imams*, and periods of rule by *maliks* (kings).

In 1508, the Portuguese occupied Oman with the aim of securing the road to India²²². This attack led to the destruction of Omani power and a number of important Omani cities. A number of Omanis were tortured. For example, the soldiers cut off the noses and ears of the local people. This atrocity infuriated the Omanis and pushed them to reunite. In order to achieve internal unity and the independence from external enemies, the Omani people elected Nasser ibn Morshid in 1624²²³. The Alyarobah family thus came to power and tackled the Rustaqi-Nizwani dilemma. Nasir launched war against his local opponents, then he fought the Portuguese. He succeeded in liberating some Omani areas such as Gulfar and Sohar. He continued to fight them throughout his period of rule, but died in 1649 without completing his mission²²⁴.

Then Sultan ibn Saif came to power in 1649 and he expelled the Portuguese the following year²²⁵. Furthermore, he occupied some Portuguese colonies such as

221 Gabash., H, op.cit. 1997, p.45- 46

222 Al-Salman, M., *Al-Gazw Albortogalee lil-Ganoob Al-Araby Wal-Khaleeg, 1507- 1525*, (the Portuguese Occupation of the Southern Arabic states and the Gulf States, Zayd Centre for Heritage and History, 2000, p. 189.

223 Omar., F, op.cit. 1985, p.35.

224 Al-Siabi op. cit. pp. 2001, pp.177 -229.

225 Al-Wasmi, op.cit. 1993, p 77, For details, see Rippenburg, op. cit., pp. 19-55. and see Gabash, op.cit. p.110-111.

Zanzibar (now part of Tanzania) and Guarder (now part of Pakistan). His action was a response to the request that he received from the local people of these places and a strategy to secure the country from further attack. He also pursued them in India, and gained much wealth from the attack. With that money he built the famous Nizwa fort in Oman, and built a number of *Falajs*²²⁶. He was so popular with the people that he could walk in the streets without bodyguards, and talked to people freely and openly. He remained in power for around forty years²²⁷.

Then Bil-larab ibn Sultan came to power in 1680- 1692²²⁸. He built a famous castle called Gebreen castle, in which he opened a school, providing education for many Omani students²²⁹, who studied various subjects. Bil-Larab reigned for around thirteen years. But before the end of his life, in 1692²³⁰ Saif ibn Sultan asked to replace him. Bil-larab died before any conflict occurred between him and his brother. A number of people asked Saif to recognise his attempt to take power as illegal, but then he was elected by the people, as eventually they were convinced he was the person best fitted to the serve the state. He attacked the Portuguese in East Africa in places such as Mombasa and occupied that area. His strategy was to achieve stability for the Omani road to Mecca, the holy place for Muslims. He paid attention to the development of the economy. For example, he built seventeen *Falajs* and a number of new farms. He

226 Falaj is a system in which a number of wells are dug and linked together through canals in the depth of the earth. The falaj might cover a distance of seven kilos or more. This system is unique. It provides a small community with few resources, with sufficient water for their various needs.

227 Al-Salmi , op.cit., pp. 49 – 51.

228 Gabbash, op.cit. 1997, p.113.

229 Al-Salmi., A, op.cit. 2000, pp.81- 102.

230 Gabbash, op.cit. 1997, p. 115.

owned 24 warships, such as the *Al-Mulk*. He died in Rustak city, after a reign of 19 years²³¹.

Sultan ibn Saif, in 1692²³² was elected by Omani people, but scholars imposed a condition that he should consult them on all major decisions. He was recognised as better than his father because he received more support from the Omani people. Before the election, Omanis arranged three review meetings and agreed to elect him. He fought the external enemy on land and at sea. He occupied Bahrain, Alqasam, Hurmoos, and built Alhazem castle. The country was very wealthy in his time because he paid special attention to agriculture and amassed wealth in the course of his battles against the external enemy. He died in 1711²³³. He was the last strong leader in Alyorobah family, which remained in power for one hundred years. This period laid the basis of Oman's latter days of glory.

A new leader emerged in Oman after the Persian invasion. He was Ahmed ibn Sa'id, the founder of Sultan Qaboos's family. He fought the Persians from 1738²³⁴ until he succeeded in expelling them in the year 1741. The Omani people viewed him as a national hero, and they elected him as Imam²³⁵.

231 Al-Salmi, A, op.cit. 2000, pp. 105- 108.

232 Gabbash, op.cit. 1997, p.116.

233 Al- Salmi, op.cit. 2000, pp. 117- 121.

234 Darweesh., M, **Sultanate of Oman in 18th and 19th Century**, Egypt, Dar Al-Shorook, 1982, p.40

235 Gabash., H., op.cit.1997, pp.128- 130.

For the next century, the Albu-sa'id dynasty had to engage itself in a struggle for survival in Oman and also in Muscat, effectively divided in 1785. Power was distributed between the sons of the *Imam* Sa'id ibn Ahmed. This meant that:

“sovereign power was now divided, the *Imamate* was falling into desuetude, and the most vigorous member of the ruling family, the sultan, was concerned almost wholly with maritime and commercial enterprises. Not unnaturally, a growing estrangement between the Al-Busa'id and the inland tribes developed, becoming more marked in succeeding generations”²³⁶.

The Alsa'ud, the leaders of Najd (recognized now as Saudi Arabia) wished to unite all the Arabian Peninsula under their rule. They found that the division in Oman offered them an opportunity to attack Oman. But Oman was then ruled by Sa'id ibn Sultan, who put an end to the Najdi aggression and succeeded also in uniting the country. But after his death, the division erupted again and the ruling family divided Zanzibar and Oman in 1862²³⁷. This weakened the Omani Sultan who lost power and support .

By the middle of the 19th century, Oman's power diminished in the wake of the control gained by the Europeans in the Indian Ocean trade, and internal problems escalated foreign influence especially the British. The country continued to face more and more

236 Kechian, J., op.cit.1995, P.30.

237 Gabash, op.cit. 1997, p. 201.

political turmoil, which ended with the re-establishment of an independent *imamate*.²³⁸

Between 1868- 1873 Imam Azzan Ibn Qais combined both posts but the split re-emerged and the problem came to a head with the death of Sultan Faisal ibn Turki in 1913 when the tribes of interior refused to recognise Taimur ibn Faisal. They elected Salim Al-Kharose as imam²³⁹. The election of Al-Kharose:

“raised the standard of revolt against the sultan in an alliance that combined both Hinawi and Ghafiri tribes. A month later Nizwa was occupied, the Al Bu Sa'id wali expelled, and the town made the seat of the *imamate* as in times past. The new Hinawi- Ghafiri coalition was probably the most powerful ever created against an Albu-Sa'id ruler”²⁴⁰.

Taimur, assisted by the British defended himself from attack by the Imam's supporters and in 1920 the Treaty of Al-Sib created an uneasy balance between Sultan and Imam. The Sultan recognised the Imam as a religious leader with some power in the interior, but he still claimed sovereignty over all Oman as well as Muscat²⁴¹.

Thus, for over three centuries Oman had faced external influence and internal problems. Between the 17th to 19th centuries, it was an imperial power that fought against the growing European colonial influence in the Gulf. It first contested against Portugal, and later the British for influence in the Gulf and the Indian Ocean and on the

238 Kechician ,op.cit. 1995, p.31.

239 Ibid p.32.

240 Riphhenburg, op.cit. 1995, p.44.

241 Ibid, 28- 29 and see Geran, R., op.cit. 1967.

coasts of India and East Africa. Oman's maritime power in the Arabian waters for over two centuries from the expulsion of the Portuguese from Muscat in the middle of the 17th century to the assertion of British supremacy, in the 19th century was considerable. Nevertheless it could not resist the 19th century expansion of British maritime and imperial power.

4.4.1 Sa'id ibn Taymur (1932-1970)²⁴²:

242 The historical periods of various dynasties of Oman up to Sa'id ibn Taymur have been adequately documented in various books. The most important books on: Oman's political history are, **Oman Islamic Democracy The traditional of Imamate and the Modern Political History**, Gabbash, H., (1500 – 1970), Lebanon, Dar Al-Gadeed, 1997; **Oman and the World, The Emergence of an Independent Foreign Policy**, Kechichian, J., Rand, 1995; **The Political System in the Sultanate of Oman**, Dahdooh, S., Ph.D. Thesis, the University of Baghdad, 1999; **Oman Since 1856: Disruptive Modernization in a Traditional Arab Society**, Robert Grean Landen, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1967; **Oman between Independence and Occupation a study about the Omani Modern History and its Regional and International Relations**, Al-Wasmi, K., Kuwait, Alsharu Al-Araby, 1993; **Tuhfat Al-Aian Beserat Ahl Oman**, Al-Salmi, A, Muscat, Muktabt Noor Aldeen Al-Salmi Oman, 2000. **Dilemma of the Religion and Politics in the First Period of Islam**, Giat, H., Beirut, Dar Altalyah, 2000; **The History of the Gulf States in the Middle Ages**, Omar, F., Iraq, Dar Al-Arabia, 1985; **Al-Futah Al-Mobeen fee Seerat Al-Sadah Albu-Saideen**, Ibn Ruzaiq, H., Egypt, Ministry of heritage, Amoon lltagleed waltibah, 1984; **The History of the Gulf**, Wilson, A., Translated into Arabic by Amine, M., London, Dar Al-Hikmah, 2001; **Oman During History**, Al-Siabe, S, Oman, Ministry of National Heritage and Culture al-Sharqiakah press, 2001; **Kashf Al-Gumah**, Ali-zkwai, S., written by hand 1407 the writer of the book was In 11th century, Oman, Almudarib Al-harthy, S., library, pp 735- 753; **Sultanate of Oman in 18th and 19th Century**, Darweesh , M, Egypt, Dar al-Ashorook, 1982; **The Local Conflict in Oman between 1913- 197**, Abdulraham Mohammed Shahdaad, Qatar, Dar Alawzy, 1989; **Alkashf wa-Albian**, Al-Azdy, M., Tunes, Sil-Silat a-lderasat Aleslamiah, 1984; **British Policy in the Gulf 1853- 1914**, Alabid, F., Kuwait, Dar Alsalasel 1984; **The Arabian Gulf Study for The UAE History**, Qasim, G., Egypt, Dar Al-Fiker Al-Araby, 1973; **Britain and Gulf, between 1795 – 1880**, Kelley, J., Oman, Ministry of Culture and Heritage of Oman Esa Al-baby, Egypt, 1979; Morris, C., **Oman: A Report**, London, Morris International Associates Ltd, 1991; **Muscat and Oman**, Skeet I, and Faber, London, 1974; **H. Mayes- Bartlett The Pirates of Trucial Oman**, London, Macdonald, 1966.

For a number of reasons, the period of rule of Sa'id ibn Taymur (1932-70)²⁴³ was the most significant for the purposes of this study, since it provided the immediate backdrop to the political changes since 1970. The seventh hereditary ruler of the family, which had ruled Oman since the 1740s²⁴⁴, he was educated in India at a school for princes conducted by the Anglo-Indian government. He spoke three foreign languages (English, Urdu, and Hindi,) in addition to Arabic. He had received recognition as heir-apparent during his father's reign, a practice which, in essence, established the principle of primogeniture as the basis for choosing the sultan.²⁴⁵

His first objective was to eliminate the debts he had inherited, keenly aware as he was of the humiliation that both his father and grandfather had experienced from the British as a result of the financial condition of the country.²⁴⁶ He managed this and avoided further financial obligation by maintaining an economic strategy of rigid austerity.

“The Sultan learnt two other lessons; the first was that if you are in debt to someone, then that person has a very strong hold upon you and can force you to do things that you would not otherwise dream of doing. In Oman's case the same one was with British government. The other lesson he learnt

243 Risso, P., **Oman and Muscat An Early Modern History**, London, Croom HELM , 1986, p. 163

244 The full name of the sultan was Sa'id ibn Taymur ibn Faisal ibn Turki ibn Said ibn Sultan ibn Ahmed ibn Said, Cited from Rosso, op.cit. P., 1986

245 Rippenburg, C., op.cit. 1998, op. cit.

246 Ibid , pp. 40-47.

was that if you wanted to ensure that something was done as you wanted;
you should do it your self²⁴⁷

Despite the fact that Sultan Sa'id continued to depend on a number of British and other foreign advisors, a characteristic of his rule, in addition to the autonomy gained through economic solvency, was his emphasis on restoring his power over the whole sultanate. He exercised his authority in the government by actively supervising the decision-making process.²⁴⁸

Sa'id ibn Taymur was an extraordinary character, an arch-reactionary of great personal charm. He was opposed to any sort of change and attempted to isolate Oman from the modern world. Under his rule, a country which only a century earlier had engaged in empire building became a medieval anachronism. He personally issued all visas. He forbade travel inland by residents of the coast and vice versa. He opposed education, which he saw as a threat to his power. Most Omanis were not allowed to leave the country; and the few who managed to get out were rarely allowed to return. After 1958, Sultan Sa'id established his residence at Al-Hisn near Salalah, in Dhofar, where he remained permanently except for periodic visits to London. Only a handful of officials had a radio link to his palace. Retirement to the south helped assure his security from

247 Risso, P., 1986, op .cit. p. 165.

248 Landen, R, **Oman Since 1956: Disruptive Modernisation in a traditional Arab Society**,
Princeton: Princeton University Press 1967, p. 408.

assassination and removed the obligation to meet frequently with tribal Sheikhs and distribute subsidies, which might deplete the treasury.²⁴⁹

4.4.1.2 The Nature of Sa'id's Regime

During the period of Sultan Sa'id ibn Taymur, Oman became even more isolated. Although the Sultanate enjoyed friendly relations with Great Britain Sa'id opposed any type of modernization. There was no attempt by the Sultan to allow the modernization of social services, such as health and education, while the transport system was basic, and the economy shut off from external influences. The country was described as a state of prohibition. For example, it was not allowed to wear sun glasses or buy books: women were not allowed to travel abroad²⁵⁰.

4.4.1.3 Challenges to Sa'id's Regime

From the early 1950s, Sultan Sa'id began to face political challenges to the regime. The famous Buraimi episode was an obvious example of the incapacity of the Sultan to deal effectively with encroaching powers. This had its origins in the combination of oil prospecting and the revival of Saudi activity.²⁵¹ The Iraq Petroleum Company, received right to survey for oil for Oman from Sultan Sa'id in 1937 and 1939. The company found oil in the Dhahirah in the winter of 1938-1939 but then suspended the operations

249 Mahamdi, Oman in Helen Cmetz (ed), **The Persian State: Country Studies**, Washington, DC Fedral Research Division, Library of Congress 1994, p. 301. Also see Rawlings, J., **The History of the Royal Air Force**, Feltham, Temple Press Airspace, 1984. pp. 252-254.

250 Gabbash, op .cit. 1997, p.339.

251 Kelly, J., **Arabia, the Gulf and the West: A critical View of the Arabs and their Oil Policy**, New York: Basic Books, Inc, 1980, p. 112.

for the duration of Second World War. After the war, it took up prospecting on the Trucial Coast. In the winter of 1947-1948 it expanded its survey to the city of Buraimi. But Al-Khalili the Imam declared that he would accept no oil prospecting in the area²⁵². Meanwhile, Suleiman ibn Himyar, another powerful local figure, began reaching out to the Saudis, negotiating a personal deal with an oil company. In October 1952, the Saudis began to encroach on the imam's western frontier as Ibn Sa'ud encouraged by Aramco (the Arabian-American Oil Company), occupied the city of Buraimi. Sultan Sa'id, recognizing immediately the intention to destroy the territorial integrity of Muscat, found common cause with Imam Al-Khalili and mobilized an army of 8,000 tribesmen at Sohar, within striking distance of Buraimi. Before he could mount his attack, however, the sultan was dissuaded by the British, responding to pressure from the United States at Saudi request, from proceeding with the attack. Subsequently, Sultan Taymur suffered a loss of reputation among his people; and the Saudis, who continued to lay claim to the area, were left at Buraimi. By then the situation within Oman was changing²⁵³. When Imam Al-Khalili died in 1954, Ghalib ibn Ali from the Hinawi tribe won election as his successor. In the highly volatile content of oil prospecting, the British and Sultan Sa'id became convinced that the new ruler was receiving Saudi assistance. At this time, the British were sinking test wells at Fahud in country between that occupied by the imam and the vague Rub al-Khali border of Saudi Arabia. In September 1954, Sultan Sa'id's forces occupied Ibri, cutting the imam off from Buraimi and in 1955 the British cabinet decided to order British

252 Gabbash, H., *op.cit.* 1997, p. 312.

253 Townsend., **Oman: The Making of a Modern State**, London: Croom Helm, 1977, P. 60.

Forces to occupy Nizwa the capital of the imamate²⁵⁴. The Imam sought to outflank Sa'id politically by applying to the Arab League for recognition as ruler of an independent state but, with military help from Britain in December 1955, Sa'id occupied the imamate's dual capitals of Nizwa and Rustaq. The rebels were defeated and the Sultan then annexed the interior. The Arab League supported Ghalib's membership application, because of anti-British sentiment, but was in no position to offer assistance²⁵⁵. The British, in contrast, were able to assist Sa'id in unifying his country in return for securing oil concessions for British companies. Imam Ghalib was allowed to go into exile in his home village but his brother, Talib, and another rebel leader Salih Al-Harthy, escaped to Cairo, where they received the support from President Nasser²⁵⁶.

In May 1957, Talib returned to continue the struggle with supplies provided by Saudi Arabia, and subsidies from the Arab League. This secessionist movement, the Oman Revolutionary Movement (ORM), attempted to restore Ghalib and easily Sa'id's troops from Nizwa and Bahla. A strong propaganda effort based in Cairo succeeded in getting the "Oman Question" on the United Nations Assembly agenda. The British intervened on behalf of the sultan, forcing the ORM rebels to take refuge on the Jabal al-Akhdar (Green Mountain). Great Britain, under increasing criticism in the United Nations, agreed to help the sultan only if he promised to reform his old kingdom. A limestone massif, with a large plateau of 6,000 feet and peaks rising nearly twice as high, the

254 Gabbash, H., op .cit. 1997, p314.

255 Lee, D., **Flight from the Middle East. A History of the Royal Air Force in the Arabian Peninsula and Adjacent Territories 1945- 1972**, London, Her Majesty Stationery Office, pp. 134- 136

256 Gabbash, H., op cit. 1997, pp.315- 316

Jabal al-Akhdar was an ideal refuge for the imam's guerrillas. By 1959, however, the Imam and his brother were forced to surrender. The British had re-established the sultan's authority. Treaty of Al-Sib was officially abrogated and the office of imam abolished²⁵⁷.

4.4.1.4 The Dhofar Rebellion

The most powerful challenge that the Sultanate in Oman ever faced came from the Dhofar region, in the shape of Marxist Nationalist Rebellions²⁵⁸. The Dhofar region lies in the south of Oman and has been historically very distinct. It is a very beautiful and green land. Comprising about one third of the total area of Oman, Dhofar blends with central Oman to the North East and with Yemen to the West. The province has three distinctive regions: the Salalah plain, the mountain region and a plateau beyond the mountains bordering on the desert.

In the latter part of his rule the Sultan turned his back upon his country and his people. Salalah in Dhofar was to him what Zanzibar had been to the earlier Sa'id (1806-1856²⁵⁹). He disappeared most of his time from the late 1950s onward. He rarely visited Muscat; and he never again visited the interior after his trip through Oman at the end of 1955. With the discovery of oil, great pressure had been put on Sa'id by the citizens to develop his country and spread the wealth of the oil among his people. A development organization had been established in the government structure in 1958.

257 Allen, H., *Sayyids, Shets and Sultans: Politics and Trade in Masqat Under the Al-Bu Said, 1785-1914*, Seattle: University of Washington, 1978, pp. 59-60. see also Gabbash, pp. 317- 325

258 See Halliday, F., (1974), *op. cit.*, chapter 10, pp. 304-60 for a detailed account of the rebellion.

259 Guabsah, H., 1997.

However, Sultan Sa'id had thought enough about development in the context of Oman in the last years of his reign to know that he did not want it to happen.

An Omani presence in Dhofar had existed from 1880, when Turki ibn Sa'id sent soldiers and a regional governor to Salalah. Prior to 1970, however, the area had been only loosely tied to Oman. Sultan Sa'id tended to regard Dhofar as his personal property and to treat its people very bad. When problems arose in the mid- 1960s, they came from this area of factionalised and rival tribes. The local economy was stagnant, not helped by severe drought in the late 1950s, driving many Dhofaris to seek work in neighbouring Gulf states. A UN report put the situation thus:

“He was cruel and imposed much arbitrary restriction on the people. They could not travel outside; they were not permitted to build houses; food could only be bought in one walled market where the quantity that could be bought was fixed; and they were not allowed to import or export goods. Furthermore, there was no work in Dhofar, no schools, no hospitals, no economic life, no company came, people from outside the country were given jobs, although local people had wished to work. However, the young people of Dhofar had held secret meetings about these matters and although they had no education, some of them had travelled and they all knew their rights”²⁶⁰.

260 UN Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Oman 1965, p.164.

In 14 August 1964, Dhofari rebels who had trained in Iraq and were opposed to Sa'id blew up an oil exploration vehicle and shot at Omani military installations within Dhofar itself²⁶¹. Sa'id's security forces captured approximately 60 insurgents in coastal villages and compelled the remainder to seek refuge in the mountains²⁶². To separate the other rebels from their supplies, the sultan surrounded Salalah with barbed wire and denied access to all outsiders. This move further disturbed the Dhofari tribespeople, who relied on the markets of Salalah to sell their produce and purchase supplies²⁶³.

In 1965, the rebels had established the Dhofar Liberation Front (DLF) controlled at first by tribally oriented separatists. In April 1966, DLF agents penetrated the Sultan's guard and attempted to assassinate him. Sa'id, in reprisal for the uprising and the attempt on his life, forbade all Dhofaris to go abroad to work. Deprived of one of their chief means of supporting their families, many tribes people left for the *jabal* (mountains) to join the rebels. Marxist radicals dominated the DLF by 1968, transforming a semi-nationalist struggle against the Albu-Sa'id leader into a leftist revolution. Unable to make many gains, these radicals sought to change the movement from a poorly organized tribal revolt against specific grievances into an international socialist, Arab nationalist, ideological struggle against imperialist forces throughout the Gulf region. They, thus, renamed themselves the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG). The augmenting current of Arab

261 Townsend, J., **Oman: The Making of a Modern State**, Biddles Ltd, Guildford, Great Britain, 1977, p.96.

262 Kechichian, J., op .cit. 1995, P.162

263 Allen op.cit., 1978

nationalism reached Oman at about the same time that oil exports began. Consequently, the sultan's style of government began to appear more and more anachronistic. PFLOAG received ideological and material support from the USSR, China, and Iraq. For example, Russia provided some weapons to the Omani guerrillas and trained them in weapons and Marxist ideology²⁶⁴. Furthermore, PFLOAG was provided a base and headquarters over the border in South Yemen, which had become independent under a Marxist government in 1967. Although PFLOAG did not attract much popular support from among the region's Jibali tribes people, by 1970 its guerrillas occupied Dhofar's mountains and much of the coast²⁶⁵. In the middle of all the turmoil, oil had been discovered at Fahud in 1964, with exports beginning in 1967. While Sa'id did proceed with a few development projects, progress was far too slow for the people of Dhofar or Oman.

In June 1970, shows of revolutionary activity similar to that in Dhofar surfaced in central Oman. With the aid of the Iraqis, a new group emerged, the National Democratic Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf (NDFLOAG), composed of foreign-educated Omanis of varied ideological stances and some locals who simply opposed the sultan. The new organization intended to operate in Oman along the same lines as PFLOAG in Dhofar. With fewer than a hundred supporters, NDFLOAG staged mortar attacks on Nizwa and Izki. A new group, the Arab Action Party, was formed in Musandam. Exasperation was mounting in London over Sa'id's refusal to spend oil revenue to alleviate the living conditions of his people and his

264 Kechichian, J., *op.cit.* 1995, pp.162-163.

265 Kelly, P., *op.cit.* pp. 1979, 136-138.

inability to deal with the insurgency, which threatened to spread from Dhofar to Oman in general. Sa'id would have to be deposed, preferably before the date fixed for Britain's removal from the Gulf, in 1971, and with enough time for his successor to strengthen his rule²⁶⁶.

4.4.2 The Coup of 23 July 1970

The revolution in the north and the rebellions in the South ended any more hope for Sa'id to run the country. Qaboos reached a conclusion that his father should be replaced²⁶⁷. On Thursday 23 July, 1970, Qaboos with small number of supporters from the political elite launched a sudden attack on Sa'id ibn Taymur and removed him from power²⁶⁸. After a brief exchange of shooting in which Buraik (the governor of Dhofar) was shot in the stomach and the sultan in the foot, the sultan was detained. On Sunday 26, July, the new Sultan Qaboos informed his citizens of the overthrow in his first national radio broadcast²⁶⁹.

The old sultan was exiled to London, where he died in 1972. The new sultan had been born in November 1940²⁷⁰ to Sa'id's wife from the Maashani tribe in Dhofar. His early years were spent in Salalah, but he was isolated in the royal palace until the late 1950s when he was sent to public school in England, followed by training at the Royal

266 Allen, op.cit. 1978, p. 71.

267 Peterson, J., **Oman in the Twentieth Century: Political Foundation of an Emerging State**, London, Croom Helm Ltd, 1978,. P. 202.

268 Miller, J., "Creating Modern Oman" **Foreign Affairs**, New York, vol 76 (3).

269 Ibid., p. 72.

270 http://www.omanet.com/sultan_qaboos.htm [2-1-2002].

Military Academy at Sandhurst²⁷¹. Before returning to Oman, he served a tour of duty with British units in West Germany, trained in municipal administration in England, and went on a world visit. On his return to Salalah in 1965²⁷², the future sultan was held under house arrest in for six years²⁷³, reportedly to study Islamic law²⁷⁴, and was refused all visitors except for a few reliable Omanis and expatriates whose loyalty to the sultan could not be doubted. Qaboos international and progressive views were incompatible with his father's repressive conservatism and isolationism. He was worried that Oman would go the way of Marxist South Yemen and that Sa'id's policies were damaging to the country's development. The British agreed and British officials disaffected Omanis conspired with Qaboos to overthrow the regime.

From 1970 to 1975, Sultan Qaboos concentrated on restoring control over the Dhofar region. He used both economic and military means, convinced that poor economic conditions had contributed in promoting the Dhofar rebellion. He offered a general amnesty to all opponents, especially those in Dhofar. He began an ambitious, socio-economic campaign among the Jibali, building wells, roads, and schools, all aimed at winning the Dhofaris' political support. Between 1971 and 1975, Dhofar, with its population of around 50,000, received almost one-fourth of the country's growth money.

271 http://i-cias.com/e.o/qaboos_ibn_said.htm [7-1-2002].

272 Ibid.

273 Townsend, J., op .cit. 1977, p.78.

274 Peterson, J., op.cit. 1978, p.201.

Divisions between the rebels helped the sultan. Traditional Dhofaris disliked the Marxists, who had taken over the radical leadership with foreign support. They broke with the movement; and when Qaboos gained power, many agreed to support him against the rebellion. Surrendering rebels were retrained by the British Special Air Service and organized into a special unit, the *firqat*. By 1975, around 2,000 rebels had surrendered and been retrained and incorporated into the force, as pledged under the terms of the amnesty declared shortly after the 1970 coup²⁷⁵

The government succeeded in cutting supply lines and secured positions in the Jabal. Royal Omani Air Force Strike-master ground support aircraft flew missions from the RAF bases at Salalah and the island of Masirah. Sultan Qaboos also solicited the assistance of neighbouring states, worried about the growth of left-wing movements in the region. By 1973, the Shah of Iran, acting in his self-perceived role as guardian of the Gulf following the departure of the British and facing the opposition of a communist party in his own country, dispatched ground forces and air units to Dhofar to aid the sultan. Oman received economic aid from Abu Dhabi, Saudi Arabia, Britain, Jordan and Egypt. In addition, the UAE and Jordan provided troops for guard duty in the north, releasing Omani units for service in Dhofar. In 1973-1974, with the arrival of Jordanian engineers and Iranian paratroopers, government forces attacked the guerrillas in the mountains. By 1975, the sultan had succeeded in suppressing militarily the Marxist-inspired rebellion; and he could turn to development issues and

275 Mohamedi, op.cit. 1994, pp. 304-305.

the establishment of modern governmental and administrative institutions²⁷⁶. The rebellion finally ended when Oman and South Yemen decided to establish diplomatic relations in 1982. From that time the Aden government stopped its help to the rebels.

From the above account of the recent political history of Oman and the various challenges to the Sultanate, it can be concluded that the various democratically oriented political changes after 1970 were the responses of a political regime in crisis, as an attempt to survive, with the backing of oil resources, in a fast changing world. The distinctive aspect of the political changes in Oman was that the process of change was fairly peaceful and the regime under the new Sultan managed to hold itself together.

4.5 Society

Oman is a country with a complex social structure. The majority of the population are Arab Muslims of the Ibadhi sect, although there are minority Sunni and Shi'a communities. The principal form of social organisation is the tribe. There are minority sections of Omani society such as Baluchi, Hindu, and some Christians, whose origins lie in the imperial past when immigrants from the Indian sub-continent, or east Africa, were either settled in the country, or imported as slaves. Slavery in Oman only ended in 1964. The majority of the minority communities have lived in Oman for generations, and have Omani citizenship.²⁷⁷ The last three decades in Oman have been characterised by modernisation. This has affected society in a number of ways. First, the provision of

276 Kelly, J., *op.cit.* 1979, pp.142-150.

277 Allen, *op.cit.* 1978.

a strong and centralised leadership under Sultan Qaboos has reduced the local power of the tribal Sheikhs. The development of a state apparatus has enabled people to by-pass the Sheikh when seeking, for example, jobs, passports, or licenses for various things, such as cars. Land ownership is now based on legal documents registered with a government agency. Tribal Sheikhs maintain traditional roles but these are being increasingly reduced in modern Oman. In the past, the tribes provided the security, a job and everything that a person needed, but the state has replaced the tribe in this role. Consequently, loyalty has been transferred to the government. This helped the government to impose its authority on the citizens. Today, the central government has superimposed its authority over the traditional patterns of authority and power structures like the tribes that were historically accustomed to autonomous existence²⁷⁸. Sheikhs have lost their privileges, with jobs in the modern society going to those who possessed better skills and knowledge. This has created conflicts between the new elite and the Sheikhs. Also, as a result of the massive development in Oman, a trade community has started to have strong influence in the society. Traders are influential in places such as the Chamber of Trade and Industry, which was established in 1974. Some of them occupy important positions in the government and play an important role in the policy formulation in Oman.²⁷⁹ In the past, everything was in the hands of the Sheikhs, but today all persons with sufficient wealth can educate their children, so they might change the balance in the structure of the society in the future. Some claim that the government supports the Sheikhs financially, but this is a strategy of the government to command the support of the Sheikhs while creating a new elite. This

278 Rippenburg, op.cit. 1998, p. 115.

279 Dahdooh, S., op.cit. 1999, p. 161.

might help the government to achieve more stability and decrease the power of the Sheikhs.

Revolution has to be forced on people where as an evolution or modernisation can be made to seem to be in the people's best interest leading to their support for the process. The stability that Oman obtains from its strong social and religious foundation gives a stability in which peaceful gradual political change can flourish.

Modernisation has also effected change in the way that people live. In particular, information technology in the form of the telephone (including mobile phones), fax, e-mail, radio, television, cinema, and household goods such as refrigerators, washing machines and motor cars have transformed the day-to-day activities of the greater part of the population.

More important has been the creation of state schools and public health services. These services are free, though some facilities in hospitals –such as a private room– have to be paid for.

Modernisation in the form of transport, other than the motor car has been important. Long distance travel, and the traditional forms of transport used in desert areas, such as the camel, have been replaced by the truck. This enables greater quantities to be transported more efficiently over long distances, but has not meant that the symbolic value of the camel has been lost to the more nomadic tribes of the interior.

In Oman, a number of cultural associations have grown up over the years. However, while these may become elements of a civil society, at the moment, they have all been funded by the state and may be in some way supervised by the state. For example, in sport, there are football clubs in every *Wilayat*. Other popular sports privately organised are table tennis, volleyball, handball, and athletics. Cultural clubs exist whose interests are the arts, such as poetry and music. Science clubs also exist.

Modernisation has also changed the way that people work in Oman. Traditional jobs in Oman before 1970 were in the agricultural and fishing sectors of the economy. Building, and crafts, such as stone masonry, gold and silversmithing and carpet weaving were all common trades. Since 1970, and the development of a state apparatus, a large number of office-based, white collar jobs were created, as were other jobs in institutions such as banks and private companies.

Industrial production in Oman has grown, mostly staffed by immigrant labour from India. The proportion of the labour force in Omani industry that is from abroad is significant²⁸⁰. Industrial jobs in food production, textiles, and oil-related products, are thought of as low-paid and unattractive, relative to other jobs that are available. Thus, for Omanis themselves, desirable jobs in a modern society are office or white collar jobs in either the government or the private sector. However, increasing unemployment amongst a growing population suggests that more and more Omanis will work in the industrial sector, and that there will be a reduction in the numbers of immigrant workers in the country.

280 Riphenburg., op.cit., 1998, p. 141.

During the 1970s and 80s, unemployment was very low and jobs were easily available. Most Omanis entered into white collar jobs because of the abundance of opportunities and the fact that the lowly paid worker's jobs were taken up by foreigners. However, since the 1990s the situation has changed drastically. Unemployment has risen and the availability of white collar jobs has also declined.

“Today the situation has changed. Young Omani graduates are beginning to take over jobs previously held by expatriates. The Sultan has frequently stressed the importance of reducing Oman's dependence on a foreign work-force and has reminded the youth of Oman that they must gain the necessary academic qualifications to equip themselves with necessary knowledge to work effectively in serving their country.”²⁸¹

This means that more and more Omanis are now being forced to accept the jobs that are less remunerative and were previously done by foreigners. In fact, it is the strategy of the government to replace foreign workers with Omanis to tackle the problem of growing unemployment. As a result, the number of Omani labourers in industries increased from 16% in 1993 to 28% in 1997²⁸². Since there is a considerable difference between the earnings of white collar workers and labourers jobs, this has widened the income gap among Omani people. In the long term, this might affect social harmony and be a source of concern because of frustrations that inequality brings to society. The

281 Morris, op cit. 1991, p 4.

282 Omani Diplomatic institute, op.cit. 2000

problem of unemployment has to be solved carefully if these dangers to Oman's path of progress and development are to be avoided.

The process of democratisation that has been taking place since the 1980s, has also given a degree of public access to decision making. In addition, the citizens themselves, whose opinions in previous years would not have been aired in public, now take part in discussion programmes on radio and television, and can write to the press²⁸³.

A form of social welfare exists in Oman. In some cases, the government pays subsidies to traditional jobs such as fishing, agriculture and handicrafts. Families who have been affected by natural disasters, such as floods or fire, are entitled to a monthly income. Charitable foundations also exist that are targeted at the poor, women and children²⁸⁴.

The lifestyle of people has changed. Individualism has started to influence the new generation. In the past the person used to live with his family sharing the income and the food. Now, in order to find a job he has to go elsewhere. Most educated people have started to leave their home towns to go to Muscat, where they relish the free environment, especially the modern life.

Emigrants have also returned to Oman. Before 1970, a huge number of Omanis went abroad to search for better jobs, a better standard of life and freedom. They went to the

283 White Book, Oman op.cit. 1996.

284 Oman Information Book, op.cit. 1997.

Gulf states, Egypt, East Africa, India and other parts of the world. The fundamental changes in Oman have encouraged Omanis to come back and the knowledge and experience they have brought with them gave them the opportunity to participate in the development of a modern country. Also they have participated in designing the features of the Omani social policy.

In addition there was an internal migration. People from rural areas migrated to cities, where there were better chances of jobs, better chances of education for their children and higher incomes. This led them to decrease their loyalty to the traditional style of life, such as their interest in growing animals and agriculture. Before 1970, around 90% of Omani people depended for their income on agriculture which in 1967 constituted around 34.6% of the total income.²⁸⁵ Today, Omanis prefer to work in industrial, trade, and service sectors. This migration increased their level of awareness and enhanced their knowledge by bringing them in contact with experts. Despite the fact that the government pays attention to developing urban areas, this migration adversely affects the infrastructure there. People leave their gardens and their animals in villages, and today the immigrants take care of them.

Also there have been cultural changes. At the beginning of the 1970s the government provided opportunities for the development of cultural activities, by establishing educational and information institutes. Clubs, schools, youth centres, and training centres spread throughout Oman. In addition, the government became 'liberal'. People

285 Dahdooh, S., op.cit., 1999, p.254

were free in their beliefs, so they could drink alcohol, smoke and shave their beards, women could go unveiled if they wished, and so on.

Women now have the freedom to work, own property, and join men in their activities. They have started to be effective elements in the society. Women's participation in the government has increased. For example, Sheikha A'aisha bint Khalfan Al-Siyaby the President of the Public Authority for Craft Industries, Dr Rawiah Al-Busaidi the minister of Higher Education and Under Secretaries in the Education, Social Welfare and Development ministries are women. Also, a number of women are members of the State Council and the Consultative Council. But a number of families are still conservative and much needs to be done in the field of gender justice.

The position of children in the society has also improved greatly. They enjoy good health and rich nutrition now, as compared to thirty years back. The vaccination and immunisation campaigns have been a great success, decreasing the chances of fatal diseases and physical disabilities. There are community parks in residential areas where children can go and play along with their families. For example, the municipal body in Muscat organised a new year festival for children which was sponsored by many companies. The children learnt about the heritage of the country and were entertained with their families. Children have the opportunity to watch interesting programmes on TV, which was banned before 1970.

The nature of cuisine has also undergone a significant change. Today one can find restaurants serving dishes from various countries like Mexican, Chinese, Indian,

Turkish etc. The food habits within the household have also been influenced by Indian, East African and European tastes.

In the past, relations between father and son were a traditional. For example, if the father was a fisherman, the son would continue the same work. But as a result of the change in the society and the better standard of education, the new generation have found themselves taking different professions, and have started to think differently on various issues of life, compared to the previous generation.

As a result of the job opportunities that have been created since the 70s, experts and workers came to Oman from abroad and the number of tourists increased every year. These people brought with them new habits unusual for the Omani society. This affected the society at cultural and social levels. The number of criminals and drug-takers has increased during recent years. These phenomena were absent in Oman earlier. As a reaction against these trends, various fundamentalist elements and organisations entered Omani society. For example, during the summer of 1994, the government arrested hundreds of members of the international organisation of Muslim Brotherhood who were planning to overthrow the current regime and replace it with a more fundamentalist Islamic regime.²⁸⁶

286 Rippenburg, *op.cit.*, 1999, pp. 106-107.

4.6 Conclusion

The location of Oman at the far corner of the Arabian Peninsula has had a profound effect on Omani history, its people and the current situation. Historically, Oman remained outside the main currents of Arab history and its relations with Asian countries were far stronger than those with Arab countries. In present times, this is reflected in the considerable number of South Asian economic immigrants in Oman. The history of Oman shows that it has passed through many phases. From being an Indian Ocean empire between the 17th and 19th centuries, it was reduced to being a relatively poor state until the 20th century. On the social front, change is slowly creeping in through education and contact with external societies by the new generation. The government has tried to reconcile the traditional authority structure with the demands of the centralised authority of the state. So far it has been successful in this balancing act.

We will see in the next chapter that significant progress has been made in the health and education sectors in order to enhance the human resources at the disposal of the nation. In the international arena, the government has acted responsibly and in cooperation with various governments and organisations, and has fully participated in international organisations like United Nations, WTO etc. The policy of the government has been to keep itself open to influences and ideas without compromising its sovereign interests.

Social and economic developments in Oman have lifted the country from poverty and backwardness to a modernizing society competing with developing Arab neighbours.

This has in turn added to the legitimacy of Sultan Qaboos. But he has also sought to broaden the legitimacy basis of his rule, internally and externally.

Democratisation in Oman has not been an exact copy of western European or American democracy. It has some formal elements that can be found in the West, but most important is the way that it has incorporated Islamic traditions into the consultation process. Also, in Ibadi Islam, there are requirements that leading figures be elected. This means that people in Oman recognise democratisation as their own, and not as something imposed or imported by foreigners. Oman offers a different experience from the other states in the region. It is one of the oldest states in the region, it is oil rich, and it has begun to experiment with democracy. The specification of democracy in Oman will be examined in chapter six but because of the key importance of the Omani setting the next chapter will examine the interaction between political and socio-economic change in the country.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE INTERACTION OF ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

“The comprehensive development that is taking place throughout the length and breadth of our land has been achieved through hard work and honest endeavour and its success has been due to the sound planning and support afforded by the government”²⁸⁷

5.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to examine the interaction between political and socio-economic changes in Oman because in practice, they have been closely interlinked. The current Sultan has seen to it that his model of political changes is not de-linked from social and economic changes.

The political changes that have been introduced in Oman since the 1970s are immensely important for the subjects of Oman. Oman is not yet a democratic country, but the changes have democratic significance. Politically, the situation in the country is much better than in the pre-1970 period. It will take perhaps many decades before the full import of the political changes will be understood. But what is more important is the set of social and economic effects for which those political changes have been

287 Qaboos , S., *The Royal speeches of H.M Sultan Qaboos ibn Said 1970 – 1995*, Oman News House, 1995 p. 277.

responsible. The political rationale of rulers in introducing change is, of course, their need for survival in world of change. Political rulers, especially in a monarchy, buy time by introducing political changes. The history of the West is full of examples of how political rulers have introduced changes in the face of serious challenges to their authority. It is true that not all of them survived. Eventually, monarchies in the West have given way to popular rule. In the Middle East, by contrast, with the backing of the sudden oil revenues, the political rulers are more equipped to survive in the rapidly changing world than, perhaps, their western counterparts. Nevertheless, the people tend to judge the efficacy of such political changes in terms of social and economic goods delivered. In Oman, the political changes that have taken place may not be revolutionary, but the social and economic changes that have followed have been overwhelming. Such social and economic effects have prepared further grounds for political legitimacy to the Sultanate. The existing writings on Oman's politics have neglected this aspect of the political changes in Oman. This chapter seeks to rectify this neglect by providing an overall descriptive account of various changes that have followed the political changes in Oman since the 1970s.

5.2 Oman before 1970

Oman before the 1970s was a stagnant country. Despite some oil revenues, its infrastructure was almost absent due to the complete lack of any development. The country was extremely backward in health, education, housing, and communications. The country faced a full- scale local war in Dhofar, and all the consequent dislocations. The people of various regions of the country suffered from various hardships due to lack any development, and redistribution of the oil resources. There was almost total

illiteracy, malnutrition, diseases and so on. Oman before 1970 was a classic case of a poor underdeveloped country. The country at that time was heavily dependent upon agriculture, which was not developed, despite being the main source of income for the country. The main source of state revenues was the heavy taxes imposed on crop-growers and cattle farmers. The taxes were exorbitant because the country was isolated and did not have external trade relations to diversify its resources. However, with the political changes, and within the space of three decades, Oman has made remarkable progress and development in various fields: oil production, gas exploration, industrialization, international trade and commerce, service and tertiary sectors, agriculture and fisheries.

5.3 The National Income Since the 1970s

“It has long been our intention that our economy should be so diversified that our dependence on one resource - oil - is reduced. To do this, we must exploit our country’s other natural resources and our industrial potential to the full” Qaboos ibn Sa’id, 10th National Day, 1980²⁸⁸

5.3.1 The Main Income

Oil in Oman was known before the new era began in 1970. In fact, the first oil concession was granted in 1925. Initially, oil companies did not look favourably on Oman’s resources. It was only when superior deposits of oil were discovered in Yabil and Natih in the central province in 1962 that oil companies took a keen interest, and

288 Ibid. pp.82-83.

the first oil from these sources was exported in 1967. However, owing to Sultan Sa'id ibn Taymur's reluctance, the Dhofar war, and the lack of a physical infrastructure, it was not until 1975 that practical measures on a substantial level were taken to develop the oil industry²⁸⁹.

The development of the oil industry took place with the implementation of a strategy devised by Sultan Qaboos in 1974. The First Five-Year Plan, launched in 1976, targeted the physical infrastructure, that is, transport and communications, and laid the foundations for long term improvements in the provision of health and education. The plan was based on the revenues from oil, which increased substantially as development coincided with the oil boom of the 1970s-1980s²⁹⁰.

An additional feature of the oil industry has been Oman's refining potential. The first refinery was opened in 1982, and is used mostly for domestic supplies. Other developments have included investment in the petrochemical industry, and the provision of oil refining facilities in other countries, such as India²⁹¹. The government announced in 2003 the establishment of a new refinery in Sohar city, expected to be operational from the year 2005²⁹².

289 **Oman Information Book**, Muscat , Ministry of Information, 1997.

290 Ibid.

291 <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs.oman.html> [1-8-2002].

292 www.Oman News Agency [5-1-2003].

5.3.2 Diversification of Income

Non-oil resources of importance in Oman are gas, fish, processed copper, and textiles. Gas was first discovered and developed in the period between 1989 and 1991, also in the central province. There are considerable reserves and a large amount of capital has been invested in the industry. Natural gas is used in Oman for electricity supplies and to power water desalination plants. It is also an export resource, with contracts signed to supply India, South Korea and other Asian and European countries. Investment in the project totals about one billion dollars and it is expected to cover around ten percent of the total income of the government²⁹³.

The Omani strategy focused from the beginning on the necessity to adopt harmonious policies for development to ensure diversification of the national economy and its balanced growth. The recent economic plan shifted Oman from a backward economy to a modern and diversified one that had the potential for self-development and the ability to adapt to regional and international changes. The following table shows the contribution of oil and non-oil sectors to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Oman during 1998-2000. Whereas the contribution of the non-oil sector remained almost stagnant, the contribution of the oil sector more than doubled from 1998 to 2000.

293 www. Oman news Agency, [13-11-2001].

Table 5.1. Oman's GDP by Economic Activity

Gross Domestic Product by Kind of Economic Activity at Current Prices			
Mn Ro	2000 (2)	1999 (1)	1998
A- Petroleum Activities	3,731.4	2,365.8	1,672.6
Extraction of Crude Petroleum & incidental services to Oil & Gas extraction	3,631.5	2,299.2	1,609.7
Extraction of natural Gas	99.9	66.6	62.9
B- Non Petroleum Activities	4,041.2	3,751.2	3,859.7
Mining & Quarrying	18.1	15.8	15.8
Manufacturing	397.8	253.9	251.3
Construction	116.3	140.0	202.0
Electricity and Water Supply	78.0	71.4	67.9
Public Administration & Defence	699.8	682.7	671.3
Other Activities	2,731.3	2,587.5	2,651.5
Total Activities (A+B)	7,772.6	6,117.0	5,532.3
Less Financial International Indirectly Measured	212.2	197.0	178.2
Plus Custom Duties	42.5	80.3	61.7
G.D.P At Market Price	7,602.9	6,000.3	5,415.9

Source: **Oman: Facts & Figures 2000**, Information and Publication Centre,

The most important economic achievement since 1970 was the huge jump in the GDP which rose from RO. 104,7 million in 1970 to around RO. 7603 million, according to initial estimates for the year 2000. A growth rate of 5.9% in GDP was achieved during the first half of the year 2001 and the non-oil sectors achieved growth of 9.9%.²⁹⁴ In addition, per capita income rose from RO. 1,596 to around RO. 3,200 during the same period. The social indicators also witnessed a huge development in terms of big increases in the production and distribution of electricity and water and the expansion

²⁹⁴ Mucki, A., **Review of the Omani Economy**, Muscat, Oman News Agency, 18, 11, 2001.

in education and health services, which positioned the Sultanate among the developed nations²⁹⁵.

Another economic achievement was the diversification of the economic base as the non-oil sectors' contribution to GDP rose from 31% in 1970 to around 52% in 2000. The continued growth in the private sector's role in boosting economic development and the comprehensive renaissance witnessed by the Sultanate was another economic landmark of this era.²⁹⁶

Oil production still remains the main pillar of economy with 350 Million (Mn). Barrels (BBL) produced per annum. Of this, 327 Mn. BBL is exported every year, bringing huge revenues²⁹⁷. Oman remains heavily dependent on oil revenues, which account for roughly 80% of country's export earnings²⁹⁸. The number of producing wells is around 2,525 and five crude oil companies are involved in the exploration and production of oil in Oman. To top it all, the annual average price (US \$ BBL) of oil has more than doubled since 1998 from 11,92 to 26,71.²⁹⁹

295 **Oman: Facts & Figures 2000**, Information and Publication Centre Ministry of National Economy. P.3

296 Mucki, A., op.cit.

297 **Oman: Facts & Figures 2000**, op.cit. 2000. p1.

298 www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/oman.html [1-8-2002].

299 **Oman: Facts & Figures 2000**, op.cit, p.1.

Table 5.2. Profile of Oil Production in Oman, 1998-2000

Oil			
	2000	1999	1998
Crude Oil Production:			
Daily Average (000BBL)	955	904	899
Annual (Mn. BBL)	350	330	328
Production Wells (no)	2,525	2,470	2,377
Exports (Mn BBL)	327	309	301
Average Daily export (000 BBL)	895	846	825
Crude Oil Prod.. Companies	5	5	5
Annual Average Price (uss BBL)	26,71	17,35	11,92

Source: **Oman: Facts & Figures 2000**, Information and Publication Centre, 11

Oman has also concentrated on the production of natural gas. In 2000, 547,219 Million Standard Cubic Feet (MNSCF) of natural gas was produced compared to 367,123 MNSCF in 1998. Chief minerals produced include Marble, Limestone, Gypsum, Salt, Chromate, Iron and Building Materials³⁰⁰.

A number of strategic projects were implemented, which were important for economic diversification and helped boost the national income and hard currency earnings. These projects included the Liquid Natural Gas Company plant in the Wilayt of Sur, the Salalah Container Terminal Expansion and Sohar Port.

³⁰⁰ Oman: Facts & Figures 2000, op.cit., p11.

5.3.3 Fisheries and Agriculture

Sultan Qaboos has emphasised the importance of the fisheries and agriculture sector and said

“This sector will be given all necessary support to enable it to become an important national income project, with the widest possible opportunities for participation by all Omanis. As encouragement of agriculture, as a vital factor in our national economy, we intended to declare next year as the Year of Agriculture. This signifies the importance we attach to all efforts in the field, by both government and the private sector. In this we include the essential factor of marketing, which will also provide support for our farmers”.³⁰¹

As it can be seen from Tables 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5 a total area of around 173,400 Faddan (acre) is under cultivation with maximum utilisation in fruit production.³⁰² This is a significant improvement from the figure of 63,000 Feddan used for agriculture till 1993. Shortage of irrigation water was the key reason behind this underutilisation of land resources³⁰³. Fisheries are another source of foreign income with around 29% of fish produced being exported every year. Domestic animals include cows, camels, sheep and goats³⁰⁴.

301 Qaboos, S., op.cit p. 166.

302 Oman: Facts and Figures op.cit. p. 11.

303 Dahdooh, S., 1999, pp.254-256.

304 Ibid.

Table 5.3. Agricultural Production in Oman, 1999-2000

Estimated Cultivated Area and production by Crops				
	2000		1999	
	Production	Area	Production	Area
Vegetable	151.7	15.7	166.9	17.1
Fruit	345.0	100.3	347.8	100.1
Field Crops	23.8	14.8	24.5	15.1
Crops	692.2	42.5	747.4	42.4
Total	-	173.4	-	174.7
- Area in (000) Feddan – Production in (000) Ton				

Source: **Oman: Facts & Figures 2000**, Information and Publication Centre, Page 10

Table 5.4. Fish Production In Oman, 1997-2001

Fisheries				
Ton	2000(1)	1999	1998	1997
Traditional Fishing	108,019	96,663	88,556	84,444
Commercial Fishing	12,402	12,145	17608	34,549
Fish Landed	120,421	108,808	106,164	118,993
Fish Export				
Quantity	34,905	29,889	45,640	55,920
Value 000 RO	18,610	13,980	19,128	25,948
% of Exports to Production	29.0	27.5	43.0	47.0

Source: **Oman: Facts & Figures 2000**, Information and Publication Centre, Page 10

Table 5.5. Estimated Production in Agriculture and Fisheries

	2000	1995	1990	1985	1980
1- Agriculture Sector					
a- Estimates of Cultivated land (000 Fadden)	173	172	–	–	–
b- Estimates of Agriculture Production (000 Fadden)	1,213	1,121	–	–	–
2- Fish Sector					
a- Fish Landed (000 ton)	120	140	119	95	–
b- Commercial Fishing	12	31	19	13	–
c- Traditional Fishing	108	109	100	82	–
3- Export of Fish					
a- Quantity (000 ton)	35	59	34	19	8
b- Value (000) R.O	18,610	23,612	17,280	8,764	2,007

Source: Ministry of National Economy, **Statistics Year Book**, Information and Publication Centre, 2000 pp. 138-139

Since the 1980s when the development programmes in the country were really launched, the country's agricultural and fisheries production has shown manifold increase. As Table 5.5 above shows, overall, production in both the sectors has registered a nine-fold increase in R.O values.

Table 5.6. Estimated Number of Animals

Animals (000)	2000	1999	1998	1997	1996	1995
Cows	298,9	285,0	270,2	258,1	246,0	234,5
Camels	118,9	117,0	115,1	110,8	107,6	104,5
Sheep	343,9	327,0	310,9	295,9	280,9	266,7
Total	978,5	959,0	939,9	922,4	905,3	888,6

Source: Ministry of National Economy, **Statistics Year Book**, Information and Publication Centre, 2000, p.147

Better health care and governmental support have meant that the cattle population of the country has witnessed growth (Table 5.6). During 1996-2000, the numbers of all the three major animals (cows, camels, and sheep) have grown.

5.3.4 Tourism

The government paid this sector attention from the beginning of the 1990s. The Sultanate has all the potential for a prosperous tourism industry not only in terms of natural, cultural and heritage resources but also in terms of the level of security and stability it enjoys. In addition to that, basic infrastructure and other services related to tourism including accommodation, transport, entry and residence procedures are all present in the Sultanate and create conditions conducive for the growth of tourism.³⁰⁵

Since the Sultanate is a secure destination for tourists and abounds in rich and diverse tourist sites, the plan to enhance tourism movement will depend on the availability of utilities and services in addition to promotion and marketing programmes. The roles of the government and the private sector are integrated in this respect and the government will continue to provide all facilities including infrastructure and institutional requirements in addition to promotional campaigns.³⁰⁶ The plan now is to assist private companies operating in the sector which should, on their part, make their own marketing programmes to attract tourists from around the world. For example, the government supported the private sector, in the year 2000, in establishing an annual Film Festival to attract famous artists and media to come to the Sultanate. This step

305 Al-Busaid, B., Under Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, **interview** [10- 4- 2001].

306 Ibid.

attracted people who work in films to visit Oman and encouraged film producing companies to use Omani facilities³⁰⁷.

To improve the level of tourism activities in Oman, the government and the private sector have established a number of modern hotels, keeping pace with globalizing economic changes around the world. Indeed, a major indicator of the change in Oman is the increase in hotel industries, both nationally owned and internationally owned. From the 1980s, Oman has seen the establishment of major hotels, representing major international chains, notably Intercontinental, Sheraton, Holiday Inn and Novotel.

5.3.5 Privatisation policy

Oman is keen to privatise companies in sectors such as electricity, water and communications. The foreign private sector's contributions reflect the success of the privatisation policy, as well as the success of economic diversification and the interaction between the Sultanate's economic policies and new developments in the international field. These developments include liberalisation, economic freedom and a gradual reduction in the economic role of the public sector, particularly in the productive fields, as well as a greater role for private-sector consumer and capital spending in boosting economic development. This policy will give opportunities to local businessmen and external investors to invest their capital in Oman³⁰⁸.

307 Al-Zadjali , K., the president of the Omani Film Society, **Interview** [21-8-2002]

308 Mucki op.cit.

From the beginning, privatisation aimed to strengthen the development process and economic diversification, reduce the government's role in the productive and service sectors and expand the role of the private sector by giving it the opportunity to finance, implement and manage service projects. Privatisation had several advantages. It helped promote economic freedom, made the private sector more productive, provided services and attracted domestic and foreign investment for industrial and commercial enterprises which had previously been the preserve of the public sector. This in turn helped promote greater economic diversification³⁰⁹.

The result was more and better goods and services, more training opportunities for nationals, enhanced productivity and greater efficiency. Privatisation also played a vital role in developing the capital market and, as a result, the financial system. It also helped reduce the burden on the state budget by reducing expenditure on subsidising products and services and by increasing state revenues by selling off the state's shares in various industrial and commercial enterprises³¹⁰.

The Minister of Economy in Oman said:

“Transfers of ownership and attempts to expand and modernise may demand that a company or establishment be restructured, and this can lead to surplus labour – particularly unskilled labour – becoming unemployed until it can be absorbed elsewhere. The government has taken several steps

309 Ibid.

310 Al-Manthary, F., “Towards Excellence in the Private Sector”, *Al-Markazi*, vol, 24, issue 3, 1999, PP.20-22.

to minimise the negative effects of privatisation on the work force. These include retraining people who have been made redundant so that they can find employment elsewhere. In addition, various other economic reforms will stimulate economic activity and create new job opportunities”³¹¹.

The government expects privatised establishments to create greater job opportunities in the long term. This is because they will become well-organized and more dynamic and will develop a greater need for trained manpower³¹².

An important role in economic planning is played by the census. It is well known that the Sultanate’s development programmes are based on the five-year- plan system. These plans need accurate statistics and other data, so the census provides information which is essential for the preparation of the development plans. In addition, development projects and social services programmes are based on the results obtained from the census.

The new census, which took place in the year 2003, will enable the government to identify its achievements, as well as future needs. Moreover, the census data will provide useful statistical information for specialist surveys and field studies.

Oman is also affected by the policies of the GCC, of which it is part. The GCC countries announced the creation of the customs union similar to the European Union.

311 Mucki op.cit.

312 Al-Lamki, S., “Barriers to Omanisation in the Private Sector: the Perceptions of Omani Graduates”
The International Journal of Human Resources Management, vol 9:2 April 1998

They agreed also on a single Gulf currency by the end of 2010, linked to the US dollar³¹³. These two measures reflect the trend towards greater Gulf integration, with the year 2010 marking the start of practical steps to create a unified Gulf.

The Muscat Security Market was established in 1989 but by the late 90s was affected seriously as a result of the recession in the world economy. The Security Market began to recover its health after the latest steps taken by the government to support it and the measures introduced by the Capital Market Authority (CMA) on procedures and conditions for listing on the market. The Capital Market Authority will continue to introduce reforms when necessary. The government sees its role as to focus on creating a suitable environment and climate for investment and encouraging domestic and foreign investors³¹⁴.

5.3.6 External investments

The following tables show Omani imports and exports of goods:

Table 5.7. Imports and Exports

Item (Mn R.O)	2000	1995	1990	1985	1980
Merchandise Imports	1,972.80	1,683.60	1,075.90	1,161.90	678.00
Merchandise Exports	4,352.00	2,345.90	2,116.40	1,778.10	1,294.50
Total Trade Exchange	6,324.80	4,029.50	3,192.30	2,940.00	1,972.50
Trade Balance	2,379.20	662.30	1,040.5	616.20	616.50

Source: Ministry of National Economy, **Statistics Year Book**, Information and Publication Centre, 2000, pp.228-229

313 Al-Busaid, B., Under Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Muscat, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, interview [10- 4- 2001].

314 Ibid.

Table 5.8. Value of Recorded Merchandise Imports (the top ten)

Country	2000	1999	1998
	(000) R.O	(000) R.O	(000) R.O
UAE	570,891	505,314	550,766
Japan	350,869	273,697	343,780
UK	112,776	122,894	159,001
USA	103,981	115,318	153,522
Germany	72,66	70,760	107,150
Korea (south)	66,781	37,909	41,310
India	63,269	62,004	63,689
Australia	56,292	48,480	46,290
Saudi Arabia	52,942	61,167	64,652
Netherlands	45,016	57,720	47,256

Source: Ministry of National Economy, **Statistics Year Book**, Information and Publication Centre, 2000, p.263

Table 5.9. Value of Recorded Merchandise (the top ten)

Country	2000	1999	1998
	(000) R.O	(000) R.O	(000) R.O
UAE	299,133	276,104	286,884
Saudi Arabia	62,609	44,738	38,865
Iran	58,453	46,159	61,652
Yemen	58,410	35,021	52,456
USA	41,137	33,235	33,393
UK	28,289	33,235	33,393
Tanzania	21,983	29,696	24,290
Singapore	13,828	9,720	9,706
Zambia	11,594	16,133	9,339
Kuwait	11,589	8,330	7,382

Source: Ministry of National Economy, **Statistics Year Book**, Information and Publication Centre, 2000, pp.273-279.

Table 5.10. GDP at Market Price

Item	2000	1995	1990	1985	1980
	Mn R.O	Mn R.O	Mn R.O	Mn R.O	Mn R.O
Total Petroleum Activities	3,719.9	2,020.00	2,144.40	1,780.70	1,322.70
Total Non-petroleum Activities	4,069.00	3,368.50	2,407.00	1,832.30	878.20
GNI per Capita (R.O)	3,053	2,426	2,708	2,474	1,979
Gross National Disposable	6,786.80	4,594.20	4,086.00	3,191.60	1,973

Source: Ministry of National Economy, **Statistics Year Book**, Information and Publication Centre, 2000, pp.328-329

As Tables 5.7-10 above show, the country's exports and imports have grown by seven hundred percent manifold in the last two decades. That is what the Sultan wanted when he emphasised the need for diversification of the sources of revenues for the country. International trades have diversified, and Oman has increasingly involved itself in trading with many nations. The country's trade balance has also been retained. Oman's international trading partners are not simply confined to its neighbours in the developing countries, but include many advanced western countries such as USA and the UK. All these are signs of a fast growing economy.

The Gross National Product (GNP) has seen remarkable improvement. In 1970 it was estimated at 105 million Omani Rials, but in 1985 the amount was estimated 3454 billion Omani Rials ³¹⁵.

315 Al-Harassi, H, **The Sultanate of Oman's Foreign Policy: Analysis and Explanation of Oman's Independent Approach Since 1970** University of Salford, 1994, p. 65.

Table 11. Estimated Production of Crude Oil, Gas, Copper, Gold and Silver

	2000	1995	1990	1985	1980
Production of Oil Daily (000) BBL	955	852	685	498	283
Annual (Mn.BBl	350	313	250	182	104
Average Daily Exp (000BBL)	895	785	21	27	37
Production Gas (MNSCF)	547,219	242,266	186,880	141,985	92,964
Sales Copper Cathode (Ton)	24,400	1,100	12,400	14,014	-
Gold	1,029	1,578	54	59	-
Silver	4,594	4,490	3,000	-	905,3

Source: Ministry of National Economy, **Statistics Year Book**, Information and Publication Centre, 2000, pp.166-167

The table above shows that although the country's oil production has increased over the last two decades, the other sources of the country's revenues such as gas have registered significant growth. For example, in 1980 Oman produced, 283.000 BBL, which was increased to 955.00 BBL in 2000. In the year 2003 the production dropped sharply as a result of technical problems, but production is expected to return to its former level by the year 2004³¹⁶.

5.3.7 "Vision of 2020"

In 1995 Oman held an international conference, to which numerous experts from different parts of the world were invited. Members of the government, and the Omani Parliament and businessmen also participated³¹⁷.

316 Oman News Agency [5-1-2003].

317 Al-Lamki, S., op.cit 1998.

The aim of the conference was to establish a clear vision of how Oman could handle the challenges of globalisation and establish an economy based on international competitiveness and productivity. The government, private sector and citizens would translate these directives into plans, which would enable the Sultanate to enjoy its prominent economic and financial position by reliance on the private sector. Both the government and the private sector identified the following aims:

1. Develop and upgrade Omani Human Resources in order to cope with technological progress and attain international competitiveness.
2. Develop a private sector capable of optimum use of human and natural resources in an efficient and economically sound way, in close collaboration with the government.
3. Utilize the geo- strategic location of the sultanate, optimize the use of its natural resources and promote economic diversification
4. Distribute the fruits of development among all regions and all citizens.
5. Preserve, safeguard and develop the achievements accomplished in the past twenty-five years³¹⁸.

Oman is taking the recommendations of the conference seriously. Most of the current projects in areas such as the education, health and business are based on the advice received from this conference.

318 http://www.moneoman.gov.om/ministry/vision2020/2020_vision_con.htm [1-8-1002].

5.3.8 World Trade Organisation

In October 2000 the Sultanate of Oman became the 139th member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO)³¹⁹. It was expected that WTO would produce numerous advantages but at the same time create major difficulties. The national industries would face considerable external competition. For this reason, the Sultanate fixed the general customs general duty ceiling for manufactured products at 15%, with some exceptions above or below that level in a number of areas. Various tariff categories would become effective in a period of 3 to 10 years from the date the Sultanate attained WTO membership³²⁰.

Since those ceilings were higher than or equal to the tariff ceiling currently employed in most cases and there was a grace period of up to 10 years in some cases, Omani industry had enough time to prepare for competition with imported goods and for entry into international markets³²¹.

The private sector needs to improve external competitiveness by raising the quality of its products and capacity for production and marketing as well as focusing more attention on research and development. The government has already taken significant steps to amend the legal framework to meet the WTO requirements, encourage local and foreign investment, improve productivity and efficiency, reduce production cost and realise competitiveness, while observing international standards and specifications.

319 Flifal, J., *Sultanate of Oman and its involvement in the World Trade Organisation*, Muscat, Ministry of Trade and Industry 2001, p.3.

320 Mucki, op.cit.

321 Ibid.

5.4 State-Building

“At the same time, we call upon every citizen to participate in this drive for comprehensive development. More than ever before, it is essential that the private sector should take serious and progressive steps to make as much as possible of the qualified Omani working force. Naturally this will greatly help in developing the capabilities of our national skills”³²².

The above speech suggests that Sultan Qaboos has always emphasized the overriding need for the total development of the country in a more progressive direction. However, the development of the country needs efficient government officials, and hence the need for state-building.

One of the major areas of the effects of the political changes in Oman has been the growth in the state itself, to be precise, the government. Governmental activities required governmental apparatus, the bureaucracy. Thus, the governmental structure has also developed in the wake of multifarious developmental activities. Before 1970 the number of workers in the government was 4,900 around 93 percent of whom were Omanis ³²³. As Table 5.12 below shows, there has since 1980 been a persistent growth (almost three-fold) in various sectors of state employment. The most spectacular development has taken place in the civil service, which is strategically very important for the social and economic development of the country.

322 Qaboos, S., Op. cit, p. 161.

323 Hassn, M., *The Progress of the Omani Administration Law*, (Golden Press, Sultanate of Oman, 1990), p414.

Around RO. 2 million was allocated to building a national fund for support and development of small projects. The private sector was expected to carry out the role of on-job training for nationals, with state support³²⁴. This called for the enlargement of both government and investment expenditure in order to achieve growth in the social services and to complete the mega projects. The same was also necessary to start new projects and to support the private sector efforts to develop tourism and continue supporting soft loans offered by the government in the health, education, industry and tourism fields.

The Sultanate is one of the highest spenders on education; a fact recognised by the World Bank. These successes have reflected positively on the policy of Omanisation. The number of Omani employees in the private sector and registered with the Public Authority for Social Insurance more than doubled at the end of the Five-Year Plan from 25,000 workers in 1995 to 56,000 workers as at the end of 2000 and 59,000 workers in August 2001³²⁵.

324 Oman news Agency, [17-11-2001].

325 Ministry of Manpower, Oman, **Report**, 2001.

Table 5.12. Government Employees

	2000	1995	1990	1985	1980
Total government employees (000)	110	111	84	69	40
1-Civil Service	84,662	86,202	68,120	54,962	34,652
a-Omani	63,934	59,728	44,024	33,772	21,625
b-expatriates	20,728	26,474	24,096	21,190	13,027
2-Diwan of Royal Court	18,280	17,004	12,384	11,686	4,188
a-Omani	12,243	10,848	6,420	5,424	1,820
b-expatriates	6,037	6,156	5,964	6,262	2,368
3-Public Corporations	7,556	7,323	3,807	2,462	1,500
a-Omani	5,602	5,176	3,039	1,682	1,105
b-expatriates	1,954	2,147	768	780	395

Source: Ministry of National Economy, **Statistics Year Book**, Information and Publication Centre, 2000, pp. 88-89.

Meanwhile, employment in the private sector has also kept pace. For expertise and knowledge, Oman has always employed foreign workers who constitute a significant element of the work force in the country. This foreign element in the workforce was unavoidable when the country itself did not have the adequate infrastructural facilities to create its own technical skills. However, with development, this dependence on foreign workers has been reduced and the country's educated manpower is now searching for adequate employment.

Necessary arrangements for the growth of the private sector and enhancing its contribution to the national economy were made, including institutional and legal frameworks, improvement of the investment environment and opening up the economy to embrace globalisation. This resulted in a very tangible contribution from the private

businesses to economic activities. Private investments as a percentage of the total investment increased considerably from 28% at the end of the eighties to more than 40% at the end of Fifth Five-Year Plan. The plan is that private sector investment will reach 54% of the total investment projected in the Sixth Five-Year Plan, thereby exceeding for the first time government investments³²⁶.

Table 5.13. Private Sector Employment

Total Omanis Working in the Private Sector

Year	2000	1999
Number or Workers	55,671	50,660

Source: Ministry of National Economy, **Statistics Year Book**, Information and Publication Centre, 2000, p.114

As it can be seen from Table 5.13, despite the growth in educated and skilled Omanis, the country still depends on foreign workers. Therefore, the government is yet to stop the recruitment of foreign workers, but it has been stipulated that companies have to employ Omanis as well. The statistics show that in 1998, there were 470,000 foreign workers but in 1997 there were 500,000. Thus, decrease has not been great. Currently, the country is facing some unemployment around 30,000 Omanis search for jobs every year³²⁷.

326 Ministry of Manpower, op.cit , 2001.

327 Al-Hosni, A., Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, **The Ambassador Conference**, November 2000, Sultanate of Oman, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Table 5.14. Civil Service Employees in Ministries and Government Organisations by Educational Level

Educational level	1996						1997					
	Omani	%	Non-Omani	%	Total	%	Omani	%	Non-Omani	%	Total	%
Illiterate	9,526	18.0	1,855	7.3	11,381	14.5	8,434	15.5	1,649	6.6	10,083	12.7
Can read and write	5,510	10.4	1,223	4.8	6,733	8.6	5,440	10.0	1,090	4.4	6,530	8.2
Primary	4,197	7.9	504	2.0	4,701	6.0	3,988	7.4	470	1.9	4,458	5.6
Preparatory	4,859	9.2	307	1.2	5,166	6.6	5,150	9.5	296	1.2	5,446	6.9
Secondary	7,938	15.0	1,539	6.1	9,477	12.1	8,825	16.3	1,000	4.0	9,825	12.4
Diploma	14,403	27.2	5,065	20.1	19,468	24.9	15,042	27.7	5,436	21.8	20,478	25.9
Bachelor Degree	6,038	11.4	12,195	48.3	18,233	23.3	6,633	12.2	12,372	49.6	19,005	24.4
Bachelor Graduate Diploma	303	0.6	1,133	4.5	1,436	1.8	441	0.8	970	3.9	1,411	1.8
Master's Degree	229	0.4	889	3.5	1,118	1.4	247	0.5	985	3.9	1,232	1.6
Ph.D.	35	0.1	529	2.1	564	0.7	42	0.1	685	2.7	727	0.9
Total	53,038	100.0	25,239	100.0	78,277	100.0	54,242	100.0	24,953	100.0	79,195	100.0

Source: Al- Hashmi, S., **The Urgent Need for an Expansion of Higher Education in the Sultanate of Oman**, Unpublished Dissertation, University of Hull, 1999.p.93

It can be seen from Table 5.14 that the number of Omanis in government, educated to below secondary school level, is higher than that of non Omanis.

Table 5.15. Skilled Labour

Occupation	1993			2020	
	Total	Omanis	Non-Omanis	Required	Available
Specialist	62,600	19,300	43,300	153,200	127,700
Technicians	33,000	15,600	17,400	91,100	86,700
Skilled Labour	157,500	110,300	47,200	453,600	295,200
Semi-skilled	111,000	9,100	101,900	246,400	174,900
Other Semi Skilled	303,000	84,100	218,900	344,300	103,300
Total	667,100	238,400	428,700	1,288,600	787,800

Source: Al- Hasshmi, S., **The Urgent Need of an Expansion for Higher Education in the Sultanate of Oman**, M.E.D Dissertation , University of Hull, 1999, p.96

5.5 Education

“The human being, as we have always said, is the power of the instrument and the ultimate aim of national development. Thus, we exert every effort to provide him with these essential qualities so that we can all, together, build our nation. You are aware that there are countries in this world which do not possess rich natural resources, but nevertheless have cared for their people and directed them in the right direction, developed their skills and provided them with technological experience in order to face their domestic and international evolution. Therefore, their innate abilities have been realised and their inventions have been eagerly sought throughout the

world. By this means they have taken their place in the forefront of the developed countries”³²⁸.

As the above quotation from Sultan Qaboos strongly suggest the advancement of education is constitutionally guaranteed in Oman and there is state support for it as part of the overall development of the country. Article 13 of Oman’s Basic law (The White Book: The Basic Law of the Land) says: “Education is a fundamental element for the progress of society which the state fosters and endeavours to make available to all.” It also states: “Education aims to raise and develop the general cultural standard, promote scientific thought, kindle the spirit of inquiry, meet the needs of the economic and social plans, and create a generation strong in body and moral fibre, proud of its nation, country and heritage, and committed to safeguarding their achievement.” According to the same Article, the Omani state “provides public education, combats illiteracy and encourages the establishment of private schools and institutes under state supervision and in accordance with the provisions of law”³²⁹.

Enlargement of literacy is a major indicator of development. Around 1970 there were only three primary schools in the whole country, and the last Sultan closed them down for the fear of communist rebellion. Two of them were in the capital (Muscat and Mutrah) and the other one in the South, in Salah. Girls were forbidden to go to school

328 Sultan Qaboos ibn Said quoted in Al-Hasshmi , S., **The Urgent Need for an Expansion for Higher Education in the Sultanate of Oman**, Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement of the Degree of Master of Education, University of Hull, 1999, p.116.

329 Royal Decree No. 101/96, issued on 6 Nov 1996.

and there were no schools in other parts of Oman³³⁰. Some rich families sent their children to study abroad in countries such as Egypt, the Gulf states and European countries.

Since the 1970s, the country has made remarkable progress in the sphere of literacy. Statistically, illiteracy among the older generation was reduced to 41% and among the younger generation to merely 4.5% for male and 21% for females in 2000. In 2000, as much as 86% of the children of both sexes within the age-group of 6-11 were attending primary schools, a figure which compares very favourably with most developing countries. As the detailed data in the Information and Publication Centre of the Sultanate show clearly, number of students in basic and primary education have increased by leaps and bounds since 1993, from 290,199 in 1993 to 301,281 in 1998. What is most remarkable is that fact that the girl students have not lagged behind boys. In 2000, for instance, 48.4% of students in these two categories were girls. In secondary education, girls outnumber the boys. In 2000, for example, of 54,192 students in the secondary sector, as many as 51.7% were girls³³¹.

Up to 1998, Oman had only one University, called Sultan Qaboos University, which admitted 2,887 Omani students.³³² There are a number of private and governmental Colleges that aim to cater to the higher education needs of the Omani people. Since

330 Dahdooh, S., *The Political System in the Sultanate of Oman*, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, the University of Baghdad, 1999.

331 Information and Publication Centre of the Sultanate, pp. 506-14.

332 Statistical Bulletin, *The Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf*, (2000, vol. 10), p. 76.

there is an acute shortage of University education facilities in Oman, the Government sends most of the students for higher education abroad³³³. The figures show that in 1999 there were around 23 000 students studying abroad, 48% of them being girls.³³⁴ Table 5.16 shows that there were no girls attending school before 1970. The number of students going to school rose dramatically by 630 percent, from 1970 to 1999. There were only 900 students in 1970, whereas in 1999 there were around 566,000 students studying in schools. The number of schools rose from 3 to 1103 between 1970 to 1999. The number of girls attending school rose from zero to 48% of the total student population between 1970 and 1999. Almost 100% of children attend primary schools in Oman today, 97% attend intermediate schooling, and 68% attend secondary schools.³³⁵ Thus, Oman has made commendable progress in the field of education within the last 30 years.

Table. 5.16 Educational Profile of Students in Oman, 1970-99

	1970	1999	Average increases year
The total number of male students (by thousands) **	0.9	96.6	24.9
The number of girls (%)	zero	48	-
The number of teachers (in thousands	0.3	27	16.8
The number of students in primary schools (%)		99.8	
The number of students in	-	966	
The Number of students in secondary schools	-	68.3	
The number of university students		23090	
The number of girls%	0	48	
The Share of individual from general expenditure	25 ***	126	7.0

Source: Ministry of National Economy, **Statistics Year Book**, (Information and Publication Centre, 2000) p.512

333 Al-Lamki "Higher Education in the Sultanate of Oman: the Challenge of access, Equity and Privatization" **Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management**, vol 24 (1) 2002)

334 Ministry of Economic Affairs, Sultanate of Oman, 2001.

335 Ibid. 2001, pp. 6-7.

The spread of schools under the care and control of the government has taken place in such a way that the country's regions have adequate representation. During 2000-01, for instance, Dhofar had 15% of all government schools while Muscat, the country's capital, had 13%. Dhofar's 15% share of all government schools today contrasts rather sharply with only three primary schools in the whole country before 1970. The main reason why armed rebellion took place in Dhofar was its regional deprivation and complete lack of any development. With adequate governmental attention since the 1970s, Dhofar is a competing region in the country's developmental map³³⁶.

The most remarkable development in the field of education in Oman since the 1980s has been the establishment of the Sultan Qaboos University in 1986 which enrolled in 2000 some 6000 students, two-thirds of whom were women. Very few countries in the Arab world could boast of such an achievement.

In addition there are five technical and industrial colleges which include 4500 students, of which 60% are male and 40% female. Also, there are 4 centres which take those who could not finish their education at school. There are around 170 training institutes scattered in the capital and the outside³³⁷.

As it can be seen from Table no 5.17 there is remarkable increase in the number of schools, institutions, classes and students

336 For further details, see Information and Publication Centre, op. cit., p.519.

337 Al-Hosni, A., op.cit. 1999.

Table 5.17. Government Education Institutions

Type of Education	01/00	98/97	95/94
School and institutions	1,014	980	960
Classes	17,388	55,937	14,739
Students	571,517	526,991	479,545
Teaching Staff	30,874	26,817	24,278
Teachers	27,620	24,229	21,883
Technicians	199	78	—
Administrators	3,055	2,510	2,395

Source: Ministry of National Economy, **Statistics Year Book**, (Information and Publication Centre, 2000) p.513

5.6 Social Affairs

“We believe that the time has come when the poverty and distress that afflicts so many millions of the people of this world must be the subject of concerned actions by all nations³³⁸”

Sultan Qaboos has made it his resolve to take Oman out of its poverty and underdevelopment for which the country was known for much of the earlier centuries. The social security system of the country is yet to develop fully, but a good beginning has been made. The government pays an allowance for those families who cannot work. There were around 43, 800 cases in 1999 who benefited from this system and received around 23 million Omani Rials. There are also some social services, for example, for Women’s Community. Now there are around 25 such communities in Oman and the government plan to open a new community in every *Welayat*. Also there

338 Qaboos, S., op.cit. 1995. p. 78.

are 12 centres for charities. Lastly there are some institutions for the care of those who are sick or do not have families³³⁹.

Various women's associations have been active and play an important role in the voluntary sector. In 1999, there were 25 associations with a membership of 3,991 women who, in co-operation with the relevant ministry, have been carrying out social work within the community³⁴⁰.

The number of women's associations has increased to 27, although the membership surprisingly dropped to some extent. (Table 5.18)

Table 5.18. Women's Associations and Membership in Oman

No. of Recipients of Social Welfare by Governorate region

Region	2000		1999		1998	
Muscat	2,143.0	4,297	2,157.8	4,120	2,083.4	4,151
Al – Batinah	7,360.5	13,963	7,229.9	12,963	6,804.8	13,173
Musandam	583.3	1,072	592.1	1,040	573.9	1,049
Adh-Dhahirah	2,360.6	4,431	2,292.6	4,094	2,179.7	4,149
Ad-Dakhilyah	2,748.5	5,598	2,853.7	5,477	2,846.6	5,587
Ash-Sharqiah	5,175.5	10,299	5,185.9	9,673	4,922.1	9,848
Al-Wusta	450.7	886	437.1	820	408.4	833
Dhofar	2,433.6	5,486	2,647.7	5,587	2,887.5	6,043
Total	23,255.7	46,032	23,396.8	43,774	22,706	44,833

Source: Ministry of National Economy, **Statistic Year Book**, Information and Publication Centre, 2000, p. 605

339 Al-Hosni, A., *op.cit*

340 *Ibid.*

There are good reasons for the government to support those who have finished their study and are unemployed. If they do not find jobs or assistance from the government, they might threaten the stability of the country.

5.7 Health

“The new Royal Hospital, which we shall be opening soon and the teaching hospital of the Sultan Qaboos University which is nearing completion, are on earnest of our deep interest in the health service. These two projects will play a significant role in ensuring a highly advanced standard of medical care for our people, and in meeting their increasing needs. Equal attention, is being paid to improving the standards of our hospital and medical services through the country”³⁴¹.

Oman has made considerable progress in the health services area since the 1970s. The number of hospitals rose from only 2 in 1970 to 54 in 1999. Over the same period, the number of health clinics rose from 19 to 162. The number of doctors rose from a mere 13 to 3143 in 1999, and nurses increased from 77 in 1971 to 7525 in the same period. The number of hospital beds rose from 12 to 5069. The report published by World Health Organization in 2000 said that Oman is one of the best countries in the world for the quality of its health system, and number eight in per capita health facilities.³⁴²

³⁴¹ Qaboos. S., op.cit. 1995,p167.

³⁴² Ministry of Health, report of the ministry, Oman, , 2001.

Public health has been a top agenda for the new Sultanate. Over the years, budgetary allocation for health has increased. In 1999, health and education together received priority and accounted for around 40% of current expenditure. In 2000, health received a 7% increase (at RO 127 million). In 1970, the average life expectancy in Oman was under 50 years, but today it is 70 years. In 1970, there was only one small hospital in Muscat whereas today there are now 47, 13 of which are referral hospitals. The total bed capacity has increased to 4443. There are, in addition, 116 primary health centres of which 57 have maternity beds and 7 are extended health centres.

Table 5.19. Health and Medical Care

Item	2000	1995	1990	1985	1980
Hospitals	55	53	52	43	31
Hosp. Beds	5,190	4,564.	3,873.	3,040.	2,111.
Health Centres	118.00	120.	94.	79.	55.
Doctors	3,258	2,477	1,441	958	289
Pharmacist	495.	356.	247.	193.	9
Birth rates per (000) pop.	32.6	34.00	44.70	48.00	50.00
Infant mortality rate per (000) live births	16.7	20.00	29.00	45.00	64.00
Crude Death Rate per (000) pop.	3.7	6.10	7.60	9.90	13.30
Life expectancy at birth	73.4	67.40	66.50	61.60	57.50

Source: Ministry of National Economy, **Statistics Year Book**, Information and Publication Centre, 2000, pp.452-453

As Tables 5.19-21 show clearly, the public health care in the country has witnessed an all-round development. First, life expectancy at birth in 1980 was 57.5 years, which has increased to 73.4 years in 2000. Second, the infant mortality rate, which in 1980 was

abysmal at 64 per 1000, has decreased to only 16.7 in 2000. Third, numbers of hospitals, health centres, doctors, and pharmacies have all greatly increased.

Table 5.20 in particular shows that the numbers of patients attending both in-patient and out-patient departments have increased too.

Table 5.20. Patients Attending Ministry of Health Hospitals and Health Centres

In Patients	Out – Patients	Year
12,430	120,380	1972
23,140	145,110	1973
28,800	183,330	1974
56,119	1,376,580	1975
64,900	1,982,000	1976
77,700	2,449,300	1977
86,431	2,564,317	1978
92,462	2,777,400	1979
108,208	3,123,354	1980
125,608	3,525,854	1981
134,999	3,328,434	1982
142,722	3,616,137	1983
155,546	4,071,611	1984
150,798	4,589,863	1985
151,868	4,821,734	1986
166,611	5,296,5965	1987
177,470	5,435,136	1988
177,338	5,591,425	1989
183,375	5,837,768	1990
189,482	9,963,458	1991
202,850	10,433,166	1992
225,600	11,550,147	1993
220,368	11,998,776	1994
220,846	12,233,202	1995
217,070	12,469,906	1996
214,634	12,255,522	1997
215,477	9,171,461	1998
222,485	9,797,432	1999
225,868	9,906,200	2000

Source: Ministry of National Economy, **Statistics Year Book**, Information and Publication Centre, 2000, p. 472

Table 5.21. Health Educational Institutions and Student Enrolment in Oman

Year	Nursing		Institution of Health Science		Oman Institution of Public Health		Oman Assistant Pharmacy Institute	
	Students Enrolled	Graduates	Enrolled	Graduates	Enrolled	Graduates	Enrolled	Graduates
1990	78	8	41	-	-	-	-	-
1992	255	59	59	41	35	-	38	-
1994	308	193	60	47	63	62	32	33
1996	403	331	76	64	31	67	34	33
1998	458	305	64	61	-	-	54	35

Source: Al- Hasshmi , S., **The Urgent Need for an Expansion for Higher Education in the Sultanate of Oman**, M.E.D Dissertation, University of Hull, 1999.

5.8 Media and Development

“Every Omani is required today – more than at any time before- to roll up his sleeves and give his devoted efforts to carrying out his duties seriously and consistently³⁴³,”

Article 29 of the Basic law of Oman recognises the “freedom of opinion and expression, whether spoken or written or in other forms within the limits of the law”.

Article 31 of the Basic law states: “Freedom of the press, printing and publication is guaranteed in accordance with the conditions and circumstances defined by the law.”

Encouraged by the basic law more congenial atmosphere, there has been a good growth of the various newspapers and magazines in Oman over the last few years.

343 Qaboos, S., op.cit. 1995, p.228.

Before 1970, the media hardly existed in Oman. People depended on personal communication. They tried to own radios, but this medium was not welcomed by the regime, because political opponents used it as a tool to attack the Sultan. Some countries such as Iraq and Egypt gave space in their media to talk about Omani's problems and support the opponents of the regime.

The first breakthrough in the media was after 1970. Soon afterward, various media came to be established. For example, a radio station was introduced in 1970, which circulated various programmes from *Bite alfalag* in Muscat. Then the first newspaper, *Alwatan* was launched in 1971. TV was launched in 1974.

At the beginning, the media concentrated on development and on influencing the people so that they would appreciate and support the Omani policy in various sectors such as economics, politics and social plans. This strategy continues to the present. The Omani media so far are formal media that come from the government to the citizens.

Nowadays, the government invites public opinion to participate in the media, but on condition that they should not attack the policy of the government. At the same time it seems that the important target recently is to spread the voice of Oman in the entire region and the Arab world as a whole.

The Omani media are not multi-channel. There are branches to feed the main channel. For example, there are eight locations for TV in the *Welayat* but all feed the main station in Muscat. This reflects the government desire to unite opinion instead of

creating further differences. Officials are afraid communicated media might be used by opponents to launch an oppositional ideology against the regime. For example, conservative and religious people will refuse any openness to Western culture.

5.9 Crime, Law and Order

Table 5.22. Crime Statistics for 1996 and 2000

	1996	2000
Drugs	83	252
Thefts	1024	4479
Forgery	67	71
Homicide	18	8
Rape	97	18
Fraud	67	43
Prostitution	73	1
Other crimes	52	219

Sources: adopted from Royal Oman Police 1996 Annual Criminal Statistics report, Sultanate of Oman, Al-Nahadah Press, Sultanate of Oman, 1996); Comparative Statistics of the Royal Oman Police Activities, between 1999- 2000, International Press Sultanate of Oman, 2000.

There has been an increase of crime as a result of the rapid changes in social and economic life, for example, the influx of foreign workers who brought new habits to society; Unemployment; migration from rural areas to urban areas; and the failure of the religious institutions (Mosques) and the education institutions (schools) to reach the people. But compared to the size of the population, the rates of law-breaking and drug

abuse are not alarming. In the past, the life was lived according to traditional customs, and controlled by the religious institutions. The level of crime may be higher than reported as sometimes families do not admit their problem because it might affect the reputation of the family.

5.10 State and Labour

“When it rains, it begins in small drops and then it pours. It is the same with material benefit. What you should be doing is to enlighten your children on these matters so that they can feel responsibility towards themselves and towards serving their country³⁴⁴”.

One of the major areas for judging the effectiveness of a political regime is the way the country's workforce is protected and socially insured by the government. This is also a measure of the development of a country. In Oman, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training is responsible for the national workforce employed in the private sector, as well as foreign labour employed by private companies. The government issued the Social Insurance law in 1992, and the Public Authority for Social Insurance has since registered some 4000 companies and establishments. By the end of 1999, some 50660 Omanis were registered. Under this registration, Omani workers and their families are provided for in cases of sickness, injury, disability or death. On retirement, a worker gets a pension from the authority.

344 Qaboos, S., op.cit. (1995) p. 300.

One major aspect of the Sultanate's labour policy is that no Omani should remain unemployed for want of a job, as long as he or she is capable of working. Another related policy is to bring Omani women into the workforce wherever suitable employment can be found.

As part of the modernisation and Omanisation drive of the new Sultanate, the highest priority has been given to recruit more and more Omanis for jobs they traditionally were less inclined to do. As a result, young men and women can be found to be working in retail business at check-outs, and as shop-assistants.

The government gives special importance to Omanisation and the development and training of national cadres at all levels. Huge amounts were allocated for educational training programmes for Omani citizens in the Sixth Five-Year Plan. In addition to that, several official and private bodies were set up and encouraged to support the private sector projects, for example, the Oman Development Bank, and the Youth Projects Development Fund.

5.11 Other Services

Oman has also made considerable progress in the social welfare sector. The annual grants for social security have increased from 0.2 R.O. Million in 1973 to 23.4 R.O. Million in 1999 with a corresponding rise in the number of social security cases from 131 to 43,774. The total value of Housing Bank loans has risen to 350 R.O. million in 1999 from zero in 1975. Today around 86% of people in Oman own houses. Oman has also spent around 1,631 R.O. Million on the transport sector during 1971-2000. As a

result, asphalt roads have increased from 10 km to 8,138 km and graded roads from 3620 to 25,344 km during 1973-1999. The number of vehicles owned per thousand populations has grown at the rate of 9.6%³⁴⁵. A drain on the economy is the government's spending of around 16% of the GDP for defence expenditure³⁴⁶. The figures show that around 25% of the total income in Oman during the period from 1970 to 1975, during the Dhofar civil war, went for defence expenditure, around \$1.8 billion. This money could have been better utilised for developmental purposes, but the exigencies of the situation demanded this unwanted expenditure. In contrast, even though there is no crisis like the one that prevailed during 1970-75 today, the government still continues to spend heavily on defence related equipments. For example, the Omani government placed orders for fighter planes from US and Great Britain in the year 2001-02. This appears all the more striking with the fact that inflation in Oman today is at a phenomenal high. One justification for this increased defence spending is the concerns of the government after the terrorist events of 11th September 2001 and its consequences.

5.12 Conclusion

Since the early 1970s, and the beginning of the reign of Sultan Qaboos, fundamental economic changes have transformed Oman into a major regional and an important international power. Although the economy even today is heavily reliant on oil and

345 Ministry of National Economy, **Thirty Years of Development Process, 1971-2000**, p.32-45.

346 Al-Busaid, K., **The GCC Security and the Arab Order: Relation in Question**, Unpublished M.A Dissertation United States International University, 1995, p36.

related resources, efforts are being made to diversify into other sectors of the economy to ensure a long-term future for the country.

Like the political changes, the socio-economic changes in Oman over the last three decades have been overwhelming. It has taken many more decades for many a western country to achieve the level of development that Oman has achieved quickly within a short space of time. Many third world countries decolonized for longer periods than Oman have yet to reach the level of development that Oman has recorded. Omani society and its people have been exposed to the global development and information and telecommunications revolutions. Therefore, the forces released in the wake of the development of Oman themselves will be the basis for further political changes towards more democracy. So far the social and economic changes in Oman have been the offshoots of the political changes, and they have worked hand-in-glove. If, however, the regime fails to cope with the rapidly changing society, the situation might change. Such is the paradox of political reform.

CHAPTER SIX

OMAN: PROGRESS TOWARDS DEMOCRACY

“We are following with great interest the Council’s activities which take into account our deep-rooted Omani traditions and which call for sincere work and co-operation in the interest of the country and the people”³⁴⁷

6.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to answer three questions: when did the process of democratisation in Oman begin; why was it begun; and how has it been managed? The core of the study will look at the creation of formal institutions of democracy, such as the Mujlis Ash-Shura (Consultative Council), and the Mujlis Aldawlah (State Council), and informal institutions, such as the media, the Chamber of Commerce, Businessmen’s Council, *Sablat Alarab* (Arab Council Web site), and the role of leading individuals in democratic debate. But before that the chapter will provide a cultural overview of the experience of the Omani people in relation to *Al- Biah* – the election of the *Imam* (president).

6.2 The Establishment of Ibadiah

Democracy is not a new feature for the Omani culture. Mosques and some other places such as *sablah* (common rooms) were points at which people met and elected their leaders. These represented an elective dimension in the earlier period.

³⁴⁷ Qaboos., S , op.cit., 1995, p.147.

The formal ideology of Oman is Islam. Omani people belong to the Ibadhi sect. Ibadhis believe the Imam should be elected by the citizens through *Biah*. Their belief is based on the experience of the election of the Imam after the death of the prophet Mohammed. The first khalifa in Islam was Abu Baker who ruled from 632 to 634. His name was proposed by the important figures such as Omar and Abu-Obaidah. The majority of Muslims approved of his leadership. This gave him legitimacy as a ruler. In his first speech, he asked people to be loyal to him if he remained fair; otherwise they were free to reject him. Then Abu Baker asked the Muslim community to elect Omar to be his successor and he found approval. When Abu Baker died, Omar became khalifa with the approval of other Muslims. The agreement was written by Othman in 644³⁴⁸. When Omar was on his deathbed, he selected six people of ability to succeed him. In the year 656 the Muslims accepted Othman as president³⁴⁹. A number of people who gave Othman their support started asking him to stop a number of malpractices such as favouritism and discrimination towards his favourites. People accused him, for example of giving his family priority in appointment to important positions. These practices eventually led to Othman's assassination³⁵⁰. After the death of Othman, the Muslims arranged a meeting and they agreed unanimously to elect Ali. It was made

348 Giat., H, **Dilemma of Religion and Politics in the First Period of Islam**, Dar Al-Talyah Beirut, 2000, p.55.

349 Omar, F, **Tareekh Al-Khaleeg Al-araby fy Al-Usoor Al-Wasta, The History of the Gulf States in the Middle ages**, Iraq, Dar Al-Arabia, 1985, p.99.

350 Al-Azydy, M., **Al-Kushf Wa-Albian, (Description and Explanation)**, Tunis, Silsilat alderasat Aleslamiah, Tunis University, 1984, pp.37- 39.

clear to Ali that he should not give any chance to those who might be corrupt, otherwise the people would withdraw their support³⁵¹.

These were the ways of electing the khalifa in that time. It was believed that Muslims had the right to elect a fair and able leader for this important position. Based on these fundamental experiences, Ibadhi people do not believe in hereditary rule³⁵². An Imam should be mature; if he is not very intellectual he should rely on specialist advice, he should have a good background, be a good listener, and have an open mind to the advice of other people.

The Ibadhi sect which is so influential in Oman was started in Basra, by a group of people who were not happy about the political situation. They insisted that the khalifah should be elected by the people. At that time, the Islamic world was in a dilemma. People were divided between Ali and Muawiah. Ali was the person who had come to power through elections, but he was opposed by his Governor, Muawiah, in what is now called Damascus (*Sham*). In order to avoid the conflict, both sides agreed to appoint delegations to find a solution. These two delegations were given full authority to decide what was best for the Islamic people. Both of them agreed to replace Ali with a new leader, but they did not agree to appoint Muawiah. This created a new conflict in the Islamic world. Some of Ali's supporters asked for a new election in which the

351 Ibid. p.58.

352 Al-Wasmi., K., **Oman Byn Al-Isticlal Wal-Ihtilal: Drasah fy Al-Tareehk Al-Omani Al-Hadeeth Wal-Alakat Al-Eqlimiah Wal-Dwaliah** (Oman between Independence and Occupation, a study of Omani Modern History and its regional and international relations), Kuwait, Alsharu Alaraby, 1993, p.74

leadership issue would be settled by the Muslim people themselves. Ali said that he had entered into negotiations to stop bloodshed but that he did not intend to lose power. This infuriated his supporters and a small group of them chose to part ways from Ali, insisting on electing a new President for the Muslim people. This group, of around 10,000 people, known as Al-khwareg³⁵³, which means a group which left the government³⁵⁴, elected Abdullah Al-Rasbi to be the Imam.³⁵⁵ Ali attacked them and most of them died. The few who survived separated into two groups. One of them was the Ibadhi sect. The Ibadhi attached importance to education and they established a school in a secret cave. They succeeded in producing influential followers. One group went to Oman and came to power through peaceful means. From that time, Imams in Oman have come to power only through elective means³⁵⁶.

The Imam (the president), in the view of the Ibadhi sect, should have certain attributes such as broad knowledge, especially about Islam. However, his tribal or racial origins

³⁵³ Originally, the word Al-Khwareg had positive contributions and meant the people who left their wealth and prosperity to follow God. However, later on, Al-Azariqah and Al-Suffariah practised fundamentalist behaviours and announced a war against all groups who did belong to them. They reached a point where they have considered themselves entitled to kill any person who did not belong to them. The Ibadhi people rejected this behaviour and joined together under Abdullah ibn Ibadh, the strongest man in his tribe, who protected them strongly. The meaning of Al-khwareg has changed to indicate those people who left the government and created instability in society.

³⁵⁴ Al-Harthy, S, *Alu-Quod Alfidiah fy Alosool Alibadiah*, (Silver Chains in the Omani Ibadhi History), Beirut, Dar Al-yakadah, Lebanon, 1973, pp.10-50.

³⁵⁵ Gubash, H., *op.cit.* 1997, p53

³⁵⁶ Al-Harthy A., *op.cit.* 1973, pp.10-50.

are unimportant. The law should rely on the Islamic *shariah* court³⁵⁷. If the President fails to rule through *Shariah* and he turns out to be corrupt, it is the duty of the Islamic community to replace him with some other leader, even if it involves a civil war. This struggle to establish good rule is known as *Jihad*.

The normal way of electing the Imam is called *aldohoor*, meaning the normal selection of the khalifah. This process may be interrupted in periods when Muslims do not have freedom of action. In this case, the practice of *alcotman* prevails, a method derived from the incidents that happened to Prophet Mohammed. He disappeared in the house of Al-arqam ibn Abe-alarqam before he announced the first Islamic state. When he ruled, he changed the strategy and announced his ideology. The Ibadhi movement began the practice of *alcotman* after the death of Al-Julanda in 793 it lasted for around forty years, in the modern history after the death of Azan ibn Qais in 1881, until 1913³⁵⁸.

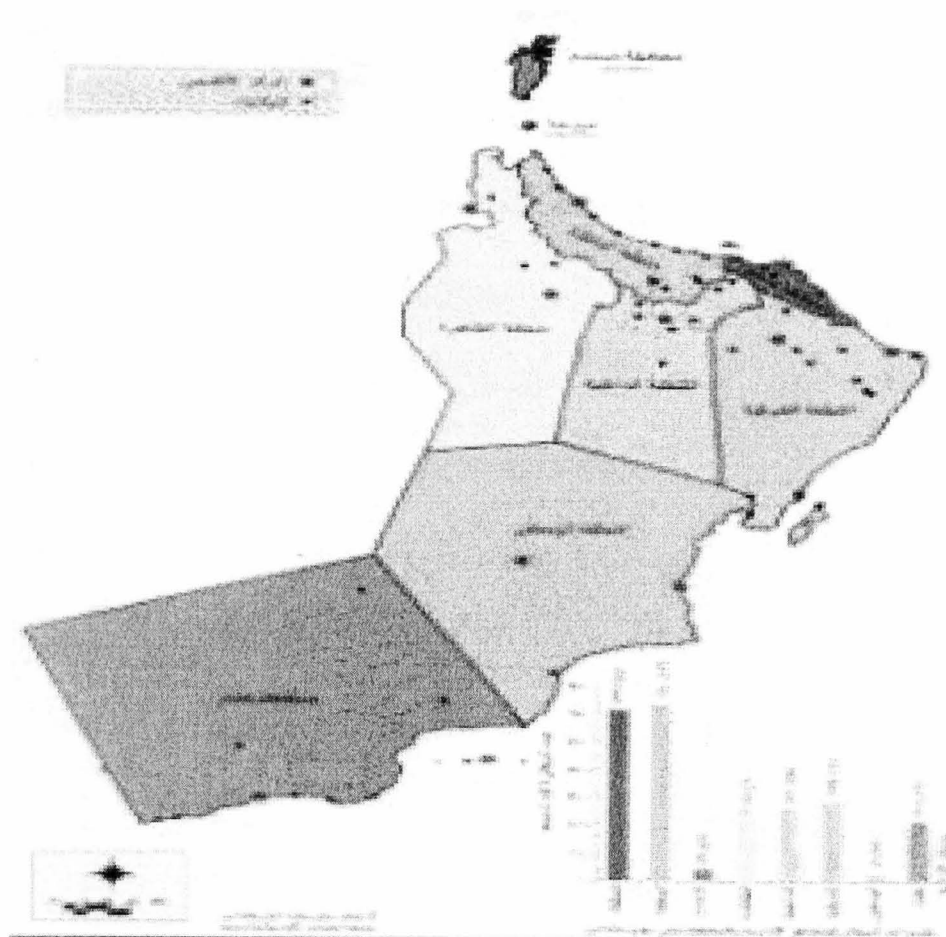
6.3 Oman's Administrative Structure

The Sultanate of Oman is divided, for administrative purposes, into provinces and areas, each of which includes a number of *Wilayts*³⁵⁹.

357 Al-Abdalkareem, A., **Political Economy and Political Development in the Arabian Peninsula: The Case Study of the Sultanate of Oman**, Unpublished Dissertation, University of South California, 1997.p, 85.

358 see Gabbash., op.cit, 1997, p.68.

359 A *Wilayt* is an area which includes a number of cities and villages. Every *Wilayt* involves branches of ministries, clinics or hospital, and court. The *Waly* is the person who deals with issues with regard to the tribes and any local problems.



Source: <http://www.shura.om/start.html> [12-6-2003]

In geographical terms, a province and an area may be large or small. Provincial status is conferred for strategic or political reasons, or by the level of population found within it. For example, one of the main provinces is Muscat, the capital of Oman, which also has within it five *Wilayts*. Dhofar, a large province in the south of Oman bordering the Yemen, has five *Wilayts*, but has a smaller population than some of the areas. Musandam, located in a strategic position on the border with the United Arab Emirates [UAE], has fewer *Wilayts* of the areas. Batnah is the most important, owing to its agricultural base and its large population. In geographical terms, two areas, Sharkia and Dakliah, are larger than Musandam province. The area known as Wusta is the oil and

gas rich part of Oman, but has a small population. Dahrah also has mineral resources³⁶⁰.

6.4 The Government Structure

The conflict between the citizens and the previous sultans, especially Sa'id ibn Taymur, led the country to lose internal and external power but the current sultan restored the Omani tradition of participation in the regime. When Sultan Qaboos came to power, a new era in Omani history started. The present Sultan evolved a new method of ruling, based on a strategy of combining the experience of the past with the adoption of the tools of moderate values.

Now, Oman is a monarchy with the Sultan as the ultimate source of sovereignty and legitimacy. Key bodies of the government organisation are the Sultan, the Cabinet, the Defence Council, the Financial Affairs and Energy Resources Council, the Supreme Committees and Specialised Councils, the Higher Committee for Conferences, the Civil Service Council, the Supreme Committee for Town Planning, the Higher Education Council, the Economic Co-ordination Council, Sultan Qaboos University

360 Muscat governorate includes: Muscat, Mutrah, Bausher, Seeb, Alamerat and Quriyat. Dhofar includes: Slalah, Thamrait, Takah, Morbat, Sadah, Rakhyoot, Dhalkoot, Mukshan, Alhalanit islands. Musandam includes: Khasab, Bokha, Daba, Albiah and Madha. Batinah: Sohar, Alrustak, Shonas, Saham, Liwa, Alkhabarah, Alswaiq, Nakhal, Wadi Almuawil, Alawabee, Almuosonah and Barka. Aldhirah: Alborainmi, Ebri, Mohadah, Yankul and Dhank. Aldakhliyah: Nizwa, Samail, Bahla, Adam, Alhamra, Manah, Ezki and Bibid. Sharqiyah: Sur, Ibra, Bidiah, Alqabil, Almodaibi, Doma waltaeen, Alkamil Walwafee, Jaalan bany boaly, Jaalan bany bohasan, Wadi bany Khalid and Mosirah Isalnd. Wusta: Mahoot, Aldoqm, Algazir, and Hima.

Council, the Tender Board, and The State Financial Audit³⁶¹. The ultimate authority lies with the Sultan and his remains the last word in matters of governance. He appoints the Ministers and nominates members to various Councils, and he is the Minister of Defence, Financial Affairs and Foreign Affairs. The Cabinet includes 29 members and meets regularly, presided over by His Majesty and in his absence by the Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers. The Defence Council includes eight members and discusses issues related to the safety, security, well-being and defence of the sultanate. The Financial Affairs Council is responsible for drawing up the state's fiscal policy and financial and monetary regulations. It also prepares the annual General State Budget, studies financial allocations for development projects, and examines domestic and foreign investment and investment funding and other savings, investment, fiscal and monetary matters³⁶².

Oman has moved towards a modern, secular, independent judicial system. From 1974, civil law started to take its place beside *Shariah* law. Ten years later the government established the Trade Dispute Association to cover business's problems. Then, in 1996 Sultan Qaboos announced the basic law³⁶³. This gave Omani people the freedom of religion, equality before the law, a free of speech, freedom press, the right to a fair trial. Citizens gained the right to call the regime to account through formal and informal institutions³⁶⁴. In 1999, a royal decree gave more details about the new Omani Judicial

361 Oman 2000, **Ministry of Information**, Muscat, 2000, pp. 28-31.

362 Oman 200- 2003 **Ministry of Information**, Muscat, 2002, pp.33- 45.

363 Trowers and Hamblins., "Consultation Firm, Oman Recent Development Further Development of Oman's Legal Systems", **Arab Law Quarterly**, vol 15 issue 1 (2001). PP. 112-114.

364 <http://www.sgsa.com/aboman/political/political1.htm> [10-8-2002].

system. The Supreme Judicial Council ensures and maintains the independence of the judiciary and monitors its development³⁶⁵. It can be said that Omani law is now really independent and follows the progress in the judicial systems in modern states such as the UK.

6.5 Formal Democracy in Oman

The 1970s in Oman was a decade in which the new Sultan Qaboos ibn Sa'id al-Sa'id, put an end to internal rebellion, and began the process of uniting the country. With western investment, the petroleum industry was developed, so that by the end of the decade, economic and social change had begun to take place, with a modern transport and communications infrastructure, and the provision of housing, health and education services for the people. The goal of democracy was in the mind of Sultan Qaboos. At the beginning of his rule, he received a warm welcome from public opinion. A few days after the coup, he left the region of Dhofar to go to Muscat (the capital of Oman) where he received Omani people who came from different groups. They congratulated him and pledged their loyalty to him as the rightful ruler of Oman. Most of the previous regime's opponents, who were abroad, decided to return. This step represented a type of election (*biah*) of the new leader, and reminded the Omani people of the previous practice. In August 1970, Qaboos promised his nation in a public speech to democratise the country and involve his subjects in running it, without discrimination. He said:

365 Ibid.

“ the process of educating and training our people should start as soon as possible, in order for the Omani people to rule the country as Omani nationals in the long run³⁶⁶”

On the first national day, he confirmed that he would lead Oman to become a democratic state when he said:

“our plan inside, is to build our country and provide a good living and affluent life for our people. This is an objective that cannot be achieved, without people participating in sharing responsibilities and the mission of construction. Our doors are open for all people, in order to reach this objective and we will work hard to establish a fair democratic ruling in our country. This while catering to our Arabic Omani reality and according to tradition and customs of our society, takes into consideration Islamic rules which enlighten our path³⁶⁷”

This gave an indication that the sultan was serious about changing Oman in its type of rule. The opponents started to be loyal to the government and worked hard to build the state.

Despite the fact that Sultan Qaboos succeeded in achieving a number of steps toward democracy during the first period, 1970-1980, the focus of his efforts was on achieving internal unity. The Dhofar civil war which lasted six years and the opponents who remained outside represented examples of threats to the unity of the country Training

366 Al-Rawahy , A., **Islamic Concept of Al-Shura and the Omani Model**, lecture in Virginia, Washington 12th - 15 September 2000, p. 28.

367 Ibid.

toward democracy was one means to achieve stability. The ability of the Omani people to run the country was tested by limited reforms. For example, the Sultan brought figures from important tribes into the cabinet. Two years into his rule Sultan Qaboos gave assurance in speech that the policy of the sultanate was to establish cooperation among the nation³⁶⁸. In 1972 the Sultan established a Higher Council for Economic Planning and Development. This Council included a number of experts from Arab countries and Omani citizens but was abandoned because some of the experts left the sultanate³⁶⁹. In 1973, the Sultan established the National Council for Defence, to coincide with the resignation of the British experts. This step was an indication that Omani citizens were able to take mature decisions on defence issues. In 1974, Sultan Qaboos established the Natural Gas Council. He was the chief of this council and the rest of the members were foreigners. Later on, a number of Omani people from the private sector were appointed to this council. In the same period, the government established the Financial Council³⁷⁰. All these councils were under the supervision of the sultan. Despite the fact that the sultanate was unable to give wide trust to the citizens who belonged to different groups, there was a degree of training towards democracy through the Council and the wider membership of the cabinet.

In July 1979, the Sultan established the first democratic institution in Omani history. This was the Council of Agriculture, Fisheries and Industry. It was composed of twelve members. Three of them were the chiefs of the Chamber of Trade and Industry, the

368 Ibid. p.31.

369 Al-Mawafy., A, **Oman Bina Aldwalah Alhadeethah**, (Oman: the Building of a modern state), Cairo, Trade Press, 2002 p.256.

370 Ibid. pp. 2560 258.

undersecretary of Agriculture and Fisheries and the undersecretary of Petroleum. The rest were appointed by the sultan from the chamber of Trade and Industry. It was a condition of membership that the nine members should not work in the government and were well known for their experience in their respective areas. Seventy five percent of the members did not belong to the government. The term of membership of the council was four years. The chief of the council was nominated by the sultan from the members. All ministries were asked to give support to this council. The aim of this council was to study the regulations and the law regarding these three areas, to study policies and projects related to these sectors, to study the projects of the private sector, to search for the best methods to increase productivity in these sectors and put forward suggestions, and to study complaints regarding these areas. The members held monthly meetings. Recommendations, which had to be passed by a majority of those present, were forwarded to the Sultan. Every minister in the government with responsibilities in these areas was to meet the members during the latest three months of the year and inform them about the plans of the government. This council improved the three sectors in which it was involved; fisheries, agriculture and the industry. Furthermore, this project affected a wide number of citizens, since most of the Omani people depend for their income on agriculture and the fisheries. The council also coincided with the first Omani plan (1976- 80)³⁷¹.

6.5.1 Structure and Operation of the Parliament

In the early 1980s, quite differently from other Arab monarchies, Oman began to introduce forms of democratic consultation in politics. The democratisation process

371 *ibid.* pp.258- 260

was built on formal institutions. In 1981 a *Al-Mujlis Alestishari* (Consultative Council) was set up in Muscat. It consisted of 45 men appointed by the Sultan. This number was later expanded to 55 members. In his speech in 1983, Sultan Qaboos ibn Sa'id declared that,

“We have taken steps to open more new channels of co-ordination between the Council and the government, as a clear indication of our desire to provide more and wider opportunities for the participation of citizens in the affairs of the council and in involving them in the decisions given by the Council³⁷².

The aim of the establishment of this council was to provide a place for participation in economic and social policy, but the council was prohibited from making regulations on these issues. On the other hand, the Sultan has the right to put any subject to the council, and allows discussion on subjects wider than economic and social issues.³⁷³. Initially, decisions had to be approved by 70 percent of the members. The importance of this council was that, for the first time, Omani citizens were consulted on the formulation of the development plans. Council members were appointed from different governmental, geographical and economic sectors³⁷⁴. The council held three sessions every year, in January, May and September to study the issues raised to them from the general secretariat. Meetings had to be attended by 70% of the members, in secret. The members had the right to call any person in the government to answer their questions.

372 Ash-Shura Council, op.cit.

373 Al-Mowafy, op.cit. 2002. p266.

374 Dahdooh., S, op.cit. 1999, pp.79 –81.

The right of the freedom of members was guaranteed. No one could stop any member when he spoke, with the exception of the chief of the council who could only later on delete some of speech in the final record. The chief of the council had the duty of raising recommendations with the Sultan. The vote was taken through the raising of hands during the meeting³⁷⁵.

Governmental representatives were at the level of under-secretaries from ministries such as Interior, Education, Youth, Health, Trade and Industry, Agriculture and Fisheries, Social Affairs, Municipalities, Communications and Housing. These representatives were links between the ministries and the Council.³⁷⁶ 19 members of the council were from the public sector, 36 of them from the nation, 11 members from the private sector and 25 members from the regions. The members had to be thirty years or older. Membership was for two years, but tenure could be renewed by the government. At the beginning there was only one vice president, but in 1983 there were two. The Council included firstly: the chief of the Council who was responsible to ensure that the work and process of the council were not contrary to its internal regulations. He could invite the committees of the council to discuss any issue and supervised the general secretary of the council³⁷⁷. He held a similar position to that of a government minister³⁷⁸. Second was the executive office; the focal point of the Council. It planned for the activities of the council and organised the meetings of the

375 Al-Mowafy, op.cit. 2002. p266.

376 Al-Mashikhy, , H, *Al-Maglis Al-Istishary li-Dawlah* , (Consultative Council) Unpublished MA Dissertation, University of Cidy Mohammed, Science College for Law and Economy,1988, pp. 6- 11.

377 *Consultative Council (1981- 1991) Oman, Newspaper, 1991.* pp.44-45. see also Al-Mowafy op.cit. 270 - 271

378 Al-Mowafy, A. op.cit pp. 270-271.

committees, coordinated between them and organised the regular work of the council. It sent details of the important issues to be studied and then received the committees' reports. It held weekly meeting. The meetings were not valid unless five members attended the meetings plus the chief of the office or his assistant. The meetings were not reported. During its work this office asked a number of ministers to attend meetings with the Council committees³⁷⁹. Third were these committees of the Council; there were six permanent committees, covering such topics as economy, legal system and education. Temporary committees were established as necessary and disbanded when the aim was achieved. Every committee included nine members from the private and public sectors. The committees held weekly meetings. They had the right to ask the chief of the council to invite people from different ministries in the government for questioning. Meetings of the committees were not public. The quorum was 70 % of the members. The fourth dimension of the Council was the General Secretariat which included the general secretary and his assistants and staff. This supervised administration and financial issues³⁸⁰.

This Council raised around 59 studies to the government, 10 of them in the areas of fisheries and agriculture³⁸¹. In these areas the members suggested for example that the government should provide support to fisheries, search for the best method to find a suitable market for lemons, and investigate the best climate for livestock breeding. 18

379 Consultative Council (1981- 1991) the press of Oman news Paper , 1991. pp.45-47. see also Al-Mowafy op.cit. 271 - 272.

380 Consultative Council (1981- 1991) the press of Oman news Paper , 1991. pp47-48. see also Al-Mowafy op.cit. pp.272 - 273.

381 Ibid, p.277.

of them were about economic, social and trade development. In this area, the council suggested, for example, supporting internal investment, increasing internal capital to support the Omani banks, and the first trade legislation. Five studies were on education policy and training matters. The Sultan asked the Council to study the best method for the programme of Omanisation, the possibility of increasing the weekly holiday from one day to two days, and how to encourage Omani people to run businesses³⁸².

That system continued for ten years. In 1991, the consultative process was changed and a new Mujlis Ash-Shura (Consultative Council) was created, whose members were, for the first time, elected by the people.

In 1996, the Sultan in his Royal Decree enlarged the role of the constitution. This new development in Omani political life was the most important step of legislation. The aim was to give strength for political and social stability and ensure the rights and freedom of the people³⁸³. The decree said the Mujlis Oman (Omani Council) shall consist of the Ash-Shura Council and the State Council. It added:

“The Law shall specify the powers of each of these Councils, the length of their terms, the frequency of their sessions, and their rules of procedure. It shall also specify the number of members of each Council, the conditions

382 Consultative Council (1981- 1991) the press of Oman news Paper , 1991. pp51- 78

383 <http://www.sgsa.com/aboman/political/political1.htm> [10-8-2002]

which they must fulfil, the method of their selection and appointment, the reasons for their dismissal, and other regulatory provisions”³⁸⁴.

These two Councils represent the instruments of formal democracy in Oman. These councils have different forms of representation. The members of the Consultative Council are elected by people from different *Wilayts*, whereas members of the State Council are nominated by the Sultan by royal decree. Members of the State Council should be aged over forty years, but the qualification for the Consultative council is thirty years³⁸⁵. The Presidents of both Councils are invited to an annual meeting held by cabinet ministers, which authorise the Sultanate’s plans for the year ahead. Both councils have a general secretary and deputies. In order to cooperate with the government, both councils in the Parliament meet with the cabinet twice a year³⁸⁶.

These meetings discuss important issues regarding development through an open and positive exchange of opinion. When they meet together in a combined session, they are called the Mujlis Oman (Oman Council)³⁸⁷. Ministries and other governmental institutions are required to provide any data or information that is asked for by the two councils. The chiefs of both Councils send yearly reports to the Sultan about their duties during the year³⁸⁸.

384 http://www.uni-wuerzburg.de/law/mu00000_.html [27-6-2002].

385 <http://www.shura.om/start.html> [1-10- 200].

386 Sultanate of Oman **Ash -Shura Council: 1991-1997**, Al-Sharkiah Print, 1997; Royal Decree No 91, 94,95,96,97/1991; Royal Decree 74/94.

387 Ministry of Information, *op.cit*, 1997.

388 Document of the Ash-Shura Council.*Op.cit.*, p 30-31.

Every three years, the Sultan meets with the members of both councils. He also has the right to hold emergency meetings. All members should attend such meetings unless they have a strong reason for not doing so. Resolutions are passed by majority vote. The chief of the Council does not vote, except when votes are equally divided, when he has a casting vote³⁸⁹. Members are not allowed to be members in both Councils, or to have a job in the government and to be member in any Council at the same time, unless they have an academic position. It is not allowed to be a member for more than two terms³⁹⁰. In the year 2003, the Sultan decided to enlarge the term of both councils to four years instead of three years³⁹¹.

6.5.2 Mujlis Ash-Shura (Consultative Council)

6.5.2.1 Sessions and Duties of the Council

The Council holds four meetings a year, lasting at least one week; on some occasions for longer. Elites from the *Wilayts* elect three members and the government selects one of them. Candidates who have a good reputation among the people and a good level of culture and knowledge have a better chance of being selected³⁹². During the first period, around 177 competitors entered the election, of whom 59 became members in the council. This number is equal to the number of *Wilyats* in the Sultanate³⁹³. In the first

389 Royal Decree No 86/97.

390 Al-Hashmi, S., **Comparison study between some Arabic Parliaments and Some European Parliaments**, Unpublished paper, presented to the State Council, Sultanate of Oman, April 2000, p.40

391 www.omannews.com [20-10-2003].

392 Oman news paper, [17-2- 1991].

393 Al-Mowafy, A., op.cit. p. 287

four years of the Council (1991-1994), it achieved many things. Among these were the sessions it held in public with ministers, at which their plans for Oman's development, and other future prospects were discussed. Members of the Council were also free to open discussion on any matter suggested by the people. These discussions were broadcast live on television to enable the general public to observe the proceedings. They were also reported on and analysed in the press. As the Sultan put it:

“The role being played by your council is acquiring growing significance at the present stage and that makes it necessary for the council, more than at any time before, to participate in shouldering the burdens and responsibilities of the new stage to achieve the progress and growth we cherish for Oman”³⁹⁴

In the second period (1994-1997) of its life, the Majlis was expanded in terms of representation. The number of members was increased to 80, compared to 59 in the first period. In addition, membership was expanded to include businessmen and intellectuals. The number of voters was increased to be between 100-300. Every constituency elected a committee from the members to supervise the process of the election and announce the winner³⁹⁵. The basic reason for this was that *Wilayts* with a

394 Qaboos., S, op.cit, 1995, p.207.

395 The author was a member in the committee in my wilayts (Al-Qabil) during this period. It gave practical experience of the election at that time. Each candidate had a representative among the persons responsible for counting the votes, so that those people could observe each other and ensure that every candidate was treated fairly. The names of the candidates were written on a board in the meeting launch. There was a box where people put their vote. But the problem was that, each candidates knew who

population of more than 30,000 gained an extra two members to represent them in the Council. Another innovation in the second period was the appearance of women in the council. Two women were elected. This visible progress has been remarked upon nationally and throughout the Arab peninsula. The Council is seen as acting in partnership with the government in developing the country's economic and social potential³⁹⁶.

In the third period (1997-2000) the number of members was expanded to eighty-seven, in line with the projected increase in the population. Another feature of change in the Council is the higher proportion of younger representatives being elected to serve. This, it is hoped, will give the Council the opportunity to cope with new innovations taking place, nationally and globally. During this period, the members issued a number of studies to the government on varied issues such education, security market, social affairs and external investment³⁹⁷. There is no universal suffrage. Rather, the law allows for one person in 35 of the population to vote. The number of voters was 51,000, representing between 100-625 from every Wilayt. In this stage the door was opened to more types of voters. In practice, voters are selected. The process of selection varies. In some cases, a voter is selected by members of a family. In other cases, the voter will have been selected by people living in a village. In the case of women who have become voters, it may be that they have been nominated by their supporters. Unlike the previous election, where only women from Muscat were supported him and who did not, because voters wrote their names on the paper. This created embarrassment among the voters.

396 The construction of Al-Shura Council. Op.cit. p15

397 <http://www.shura.om/start.html> [1-10- 200]

eligible, in this period, women were allowed to enter the election from any *Wilayts* in the Sultanate. In 1997, two women were elected to the Ash-Shura Council³⁹⁸. The number of women who entered the competition was 27. While the competition between women in the previous election was confined to the capital, during this period it was expanded to include all women in Oman³⁹⁹. Typically, the *Waly* of a Wilayt grants the authority to vote, and nominations are made through him. The number of candidates were 800. 82 of them won in the election⁴⁰⁰.

The government announced in the year 2002 a new step in the system of elections, by which every person aged 21 years and above has the right to vote⁴⁰¹. This was an important step for the following reasons. After the end of the Omani civil war, the government was busy with building the state in different aspects, political, social, cultural, economic, and infrastructural. When the government succeeded in achieving a sufficient level of development, it then started to train people in democracy. Because Oman comprises various ethnicities and tribes, the government decided to test the feasibility of democracy, to see whether it worked or not. It gave the citizens, firstly, a Council which includes leaders of various ethnic and tribal groups. The results were favourable towards advancing this experience. It was found that people responded positively towards democracy. Then the government gave the right to the people to elect their candidates. Initially, from two or three winning candidates, the government chose one, but then the government decided to normalise the experience and stopped

398 Dahdooh, S, op.cit. 1999, p 157.

399 Sultanate of Oman, **The structure of Ash-Shura Council, (1997- 2000)** p.25

400 Al-Mowafy, A., op.cit. p318.

401 Oman News Agency [1-12-2002].

interfering in the electoral system. The person who wins takes his/her position as a member of Parliament.

It can be found that from the beginning, there was no discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, religion or gender. The values of democracy are taught in schools through direct or indirect means. For example, Students practise the means of democracy through elections to run such social activities as health facilities, libraries, shops and radio stations. Every person who desires to be a leader of one of these activities can enter the election. Furthermore, these people contact others and express their desired aims. This process continues from primary to secondary school. Then in Sultan Qaboos University, there are associations, in which people enter a competition to take part. The university represents an advanced level of thinking. These students are preparing themselves to play an important role in the state after graduation. At time of graduation, students will be 21 years old. That is why the government decided to take people who have reached this age. The training in democracy among students is very important, especially since young people constitute the majority of the population. This allowed the franchise to be safely expanded to involve all Omani citizens, giving them the chance for their views to be represented in the Parliament. The members thus elected are more educated and have better awareness of the current Omani demands, so they can develop the role of the Parliament. Also, this brought the Omani experience into line with the international trend in democratic election systems whereby every person (male or female) aged 21 years and above has the right to vote for his or her candidate. In addition, the direct connection of the population with the parliament helped to switch the loyalty of the citizen from tribes and elites to the state.

The duties of Council members are concerned, primarily, with representing the interests of their constituents, and reviewing government policy. Members can receive visits from citizens who live in their *Wilayt*, and pass on to the relevant government office their concerns or questions, and expect a response from that government department.

Members are allowed to raise policy issues for consideration by the government. The Council has committees that specialise in particular areas such as health, education, transport and employment. From these committees, proposals can be made and forwarded to the government. For example, Council members concerned about rising unemployment have put forward proposals to deal with the problem. In turn, members of the Council have the right to look at government policy papers before they have become law. Amendments and suggested changes can be discussed and sent back to the government.

During a Council session, a Minister from the government can be held accountable for the performance of his department or his department's policy. For example, the Ministers of Information, Electricity, Transport, Energy, and Education have all been questioned by the Council. Sometimes the sessions have been confrontational, as when a controversy arose with the Minister in charge of the National Economy, who was also Deputy Chairman of the Financial Affairs and Energy Resources Council. The Minister proposed to charge secondary school students 30% of their fees. A female member of the Council raised an objection to the proposal, and was supported by other members of the Council, causing the government to withdraw its proposal. When interviewed by

newspapers based in the Gulf, Shura Council member Tibah Al-Muali was highly critical of some Ministers in the Omani government. Such public criticism led to the Minister of Information retiring from the government.

In the fourth period (2000-2003) it can be seen that the Council encouraged the government to help the Omani social and sports clubs to combine. The government took up this suggestion and that is why, from the year 2002, it can be found that a number of clubs have started to unite. Also, the Council suggested that the government pay subsidies to the private schools and the government adopted this idea. Other suggestions of the Council include measures to curb over-fishing in Omani waters, and suggestions as to how the government can provide work, education or training for secondary school graduates⁴⁰².

In addition to routine matters of government policy, members of the Council also review the long-term development plans proposed for Oman. Development proposals can come from committee reports produced by members, through criticism of development proposals, or through schemes as they have been put into practice. There are a number of committees in the Council. These are the Legal Committee, Economic Committee, Health and Social Committee, Education and Cultural Committee, Development of Local Society, and the Environment and Awareness Committee. Every

402 Al-Hashmi, S. *The Omani Experience in the Consultation*, Muscat, State Council, September 2000, p.60

committee elects its own chairman and deputy. The chairman of the committee declares the times of the meetings⁴⁰³.

Matters of foreign affairs are not usually discussed in the Consultative Council. As in the past, when the US Senate debated foreign policy rather than the House of Representatives, so in Oman, foreign affairs are limited to the State Council.

The Minister of Interior publishes at each election the names of the committee members who will be responsible for the supervision of the polling stations. They usually include the *Waly*, *Vice-waly*, judge, a high ranking police officer, and four senior staff from each *wilayt*. Their duty is to supervise the election, receive the complaints of citizens, prepare reports about the conduct of elections and establish three-sub committees, for organisation, voting process and counting the votes. The role of the organisation committee is to prepare the polling stations, check the identity of the voters to ensure security and show them the polling boxes, and report on conduct of the election. The role of the vote committee is to check that the voting boxes are empty before the polling starts, provide cards for the voters, supervise the boxes during the vote and close the boxes with red stickers. The vote counting committee is responsible for the opening the boxes, checking the papers, accounting the votes and preparing a file for this purpose⁴⁰⁴.

403 **Documents of the Ash-Shura Council**, 1998 to 2000 ,Golden Press, Oman, 1998, pp.48-51

404 Al- Hashmi, S., In the Omani Election, [www. Alwatan.com](http://www.Alwatan.com) [10-6-2003]

In the 2000 election, the actual number of voters was 114,567. The total number of candidates was 540. The government had already forced 114 aspirants to withdraw because they did not meet the eligibility criteria (see the next section). Two candidates, both women, withdrew. The number of members elected was 83, of whom four were women. The people in Muscat showed less interest in the elections than others; only 46% of those eligible to vote participated in the election. In contrast, around 98% of eligible voters in Al-Wusta participated in the election. Overall, the participation ratio was around 65%. 40% of the members of *Al-Shura* Council participated in the new election, and 23 of them won. Also, there were 60 members who entered the Council for the first time. Most of them were young and 80% of them had a degree. The average age of the members was between 40 to 55, in contrast to the previous election, when it was between 57 to 65 years⁴⁰⁵.

The number of voters has increased in the year 2003 to 175,000, representing 25% of people aged 21 years and above and three times the number of voters in the previous election.. The participation of women trebled compared to the previous election, from 10% to 30% of the voters⁴⁰⁶. The number of the candidate decreased to reach 721. 163 men and 8 women withdrew. The final number were 540 519 of them were men and 21 women. 114 became excluded⁴⁰⁷.

405 Ibid

406 Al-Hashmi, S., [www. Alwatan.com](http://www.Alwatan.com) [27-5-2003]

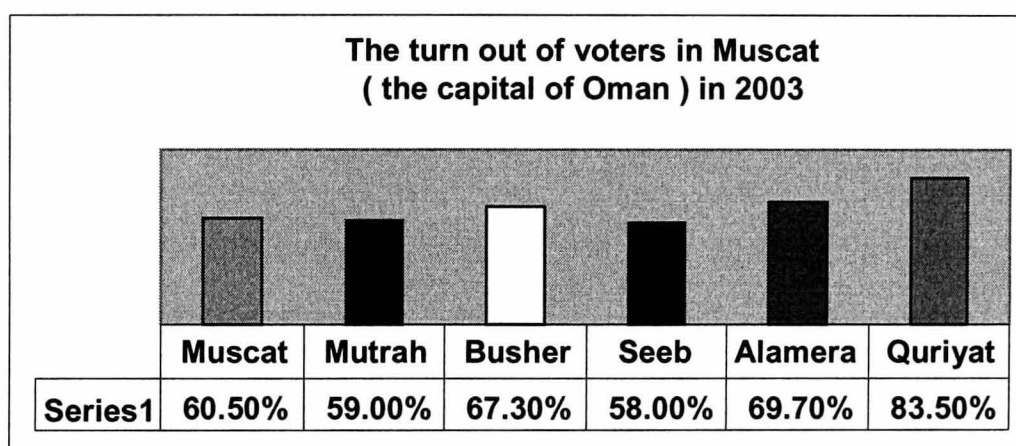
407 Al-Mowafy, A., *op.cit*, pp 326- 327

The Ministry of Interior succeeded, for the first time, in computerising the data of the election. There was a net-work linked with a main control room. At the same time, the media covered the developments in both the constituencies and in the control room and held interviews with the voters, experts, and those who organised the election. The use of the computer enabled the ministry to announce the winners on the same day. The Ministry of Information presented various programmes on the TV and the radio and published several articles in newspapers and magazines to encourage people to respond positively to the election. Through these tools, the government sent messages to the nation, such as advising them to choose fit representatives and to take advantage of their rights. A TV programme, for example, covered the events of the elections, replacing other programmes with the exception of the News bulletins. The process of voting was also quick. In some areas, such as the South of Oman, it took around five to ten minutes. Furthermore, the government gave people a holiday on this occasion. These steps would give people a good impression and encourage them to attend polling stations in the future. Polling boxes were also opened for Omani people who lived abroad in a few states such as Qatar, Egypt and Jordan (a list which the government plans to expand). Journalists from abroad covered the events. There were correspondents from many channels and newspapers. The atmosphere of the election also showed signs of greater democratic maturity. Previously, candidates had simply made verbal attacks on each other. Now there was a greater emphasis on policy. The legitimacy of the opponent was accepted. The number of members elected was 83 of whom 50 entered the Council for the first time⁴⁰⁸.

408 Al-Qutaby, A., www.omannews.com [14- 11-2003]

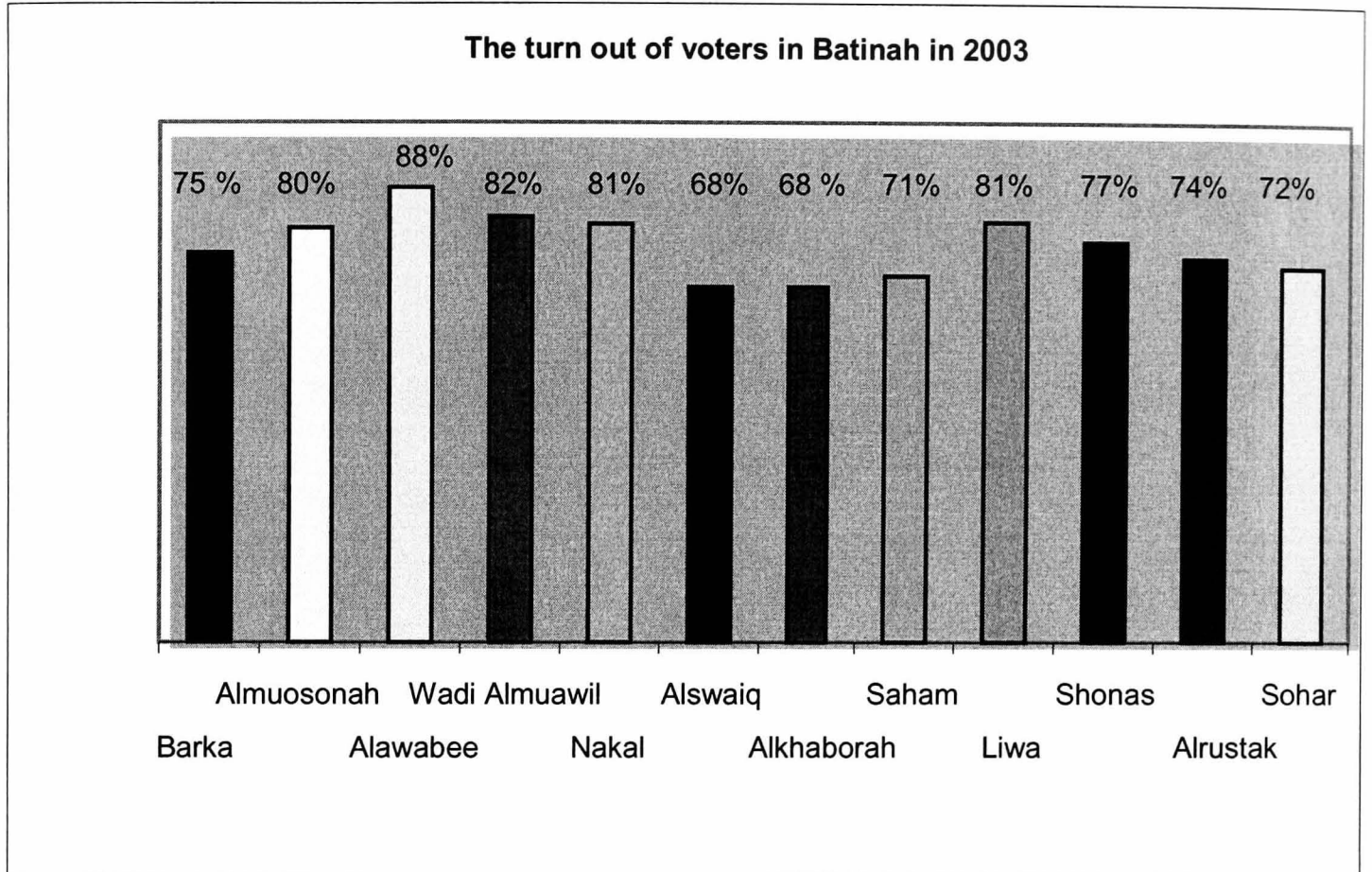
The following diagrams show the percentage of voters who participated in the latest election:

Diagram 6.1



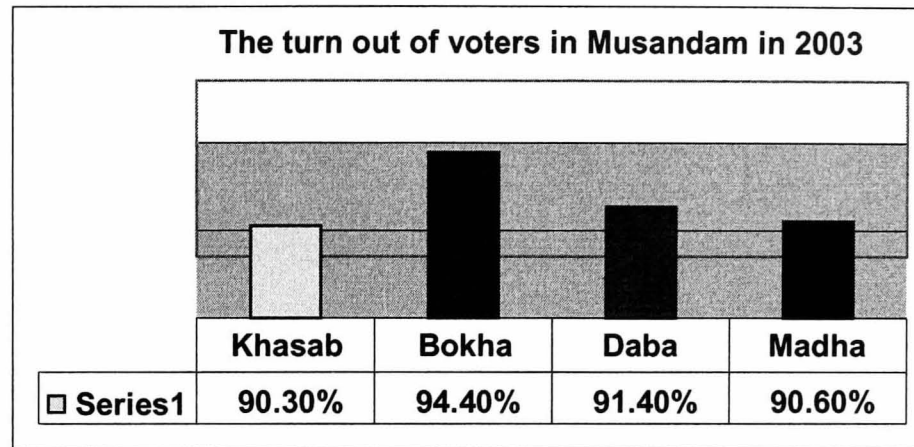
It can be seen that this diagram represent the election in the capital of Oman. With the exception of the Wilayat of Quriyat there is less interest in the capital of Muscat to participate in the election. This is a universal trend in the modern cities in different part of the world. It seems that the percentage of voters is in the 60%. But in general it represent a good response from the people.

Diagram 6.2



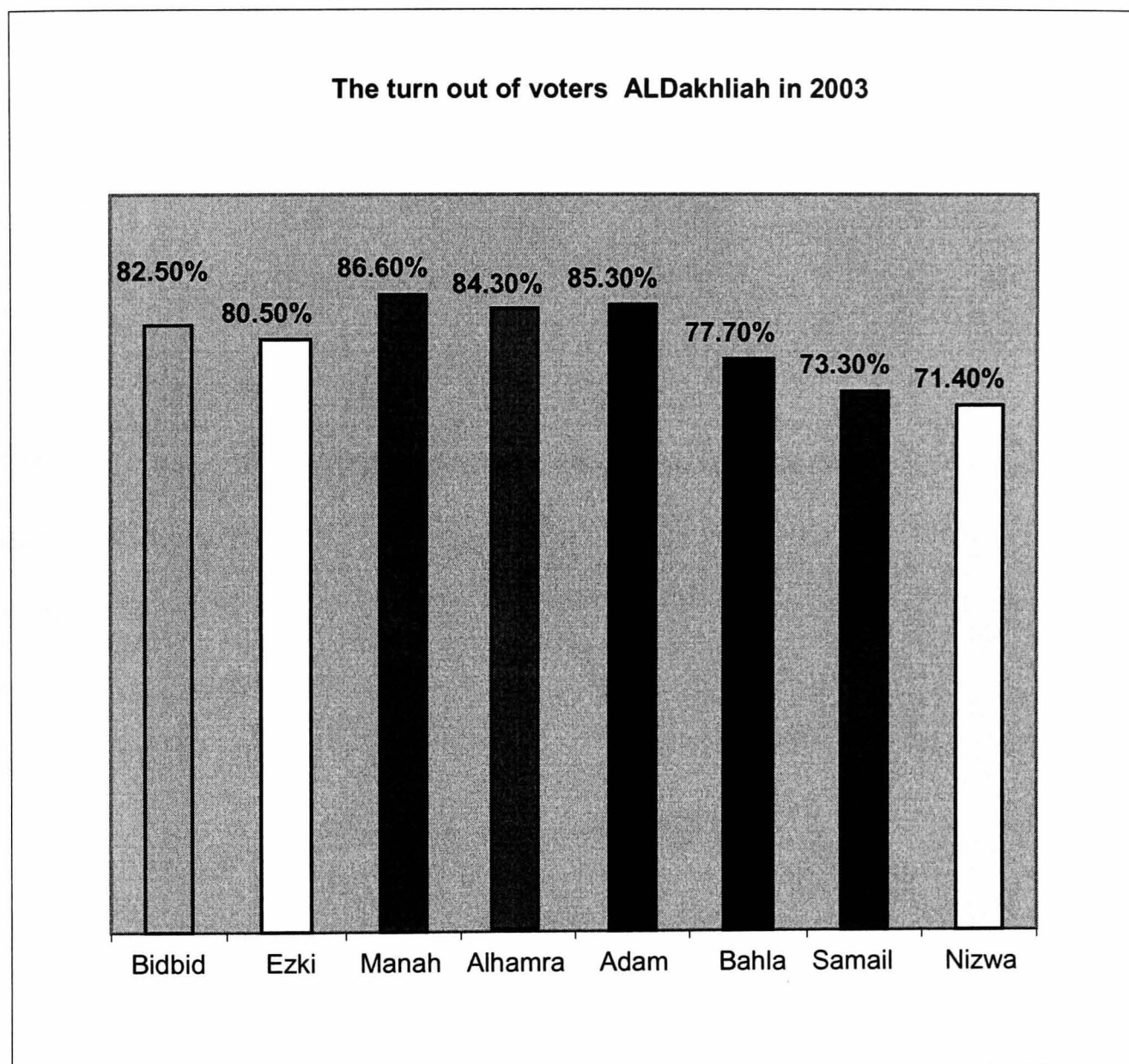
Al- Batinah region includes the largest population compared to other regions in Oman. The turn out is exceptional. It represents around 70% of all potential voters.

Diagram 6.3



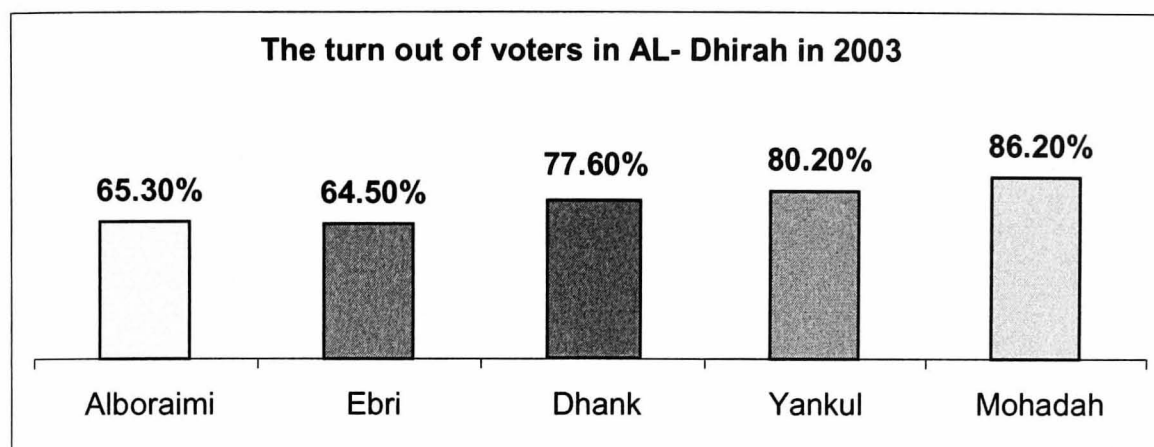
Musandam includes less number so people knew each other. Through family campaign the candidate can reach to the people easier. That is why most of the region the respond was more than 90%.

Diagram 6.4



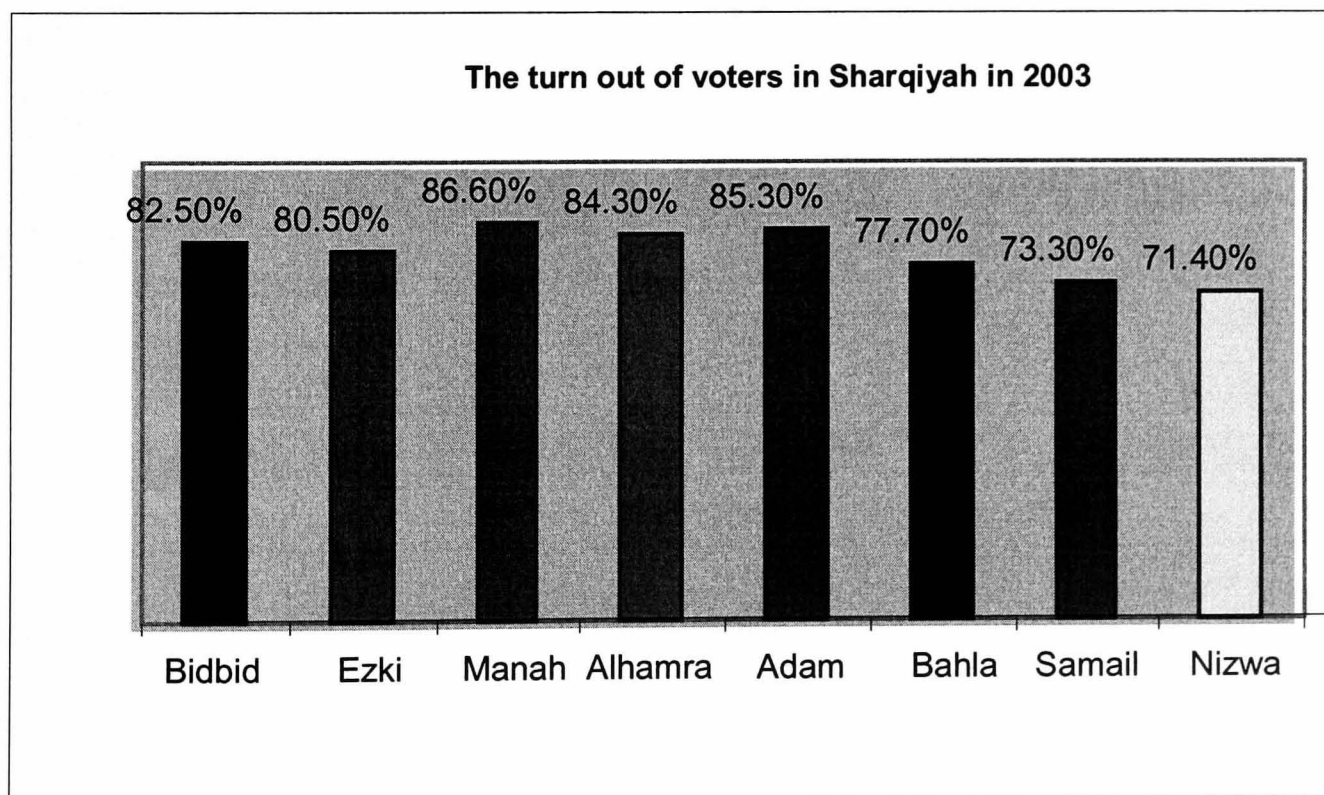
The people of Al-Dakhliyah react positively to the election. In five wilayats out of eight, more than 80% of the eligible population participated.

Diagram 6.5



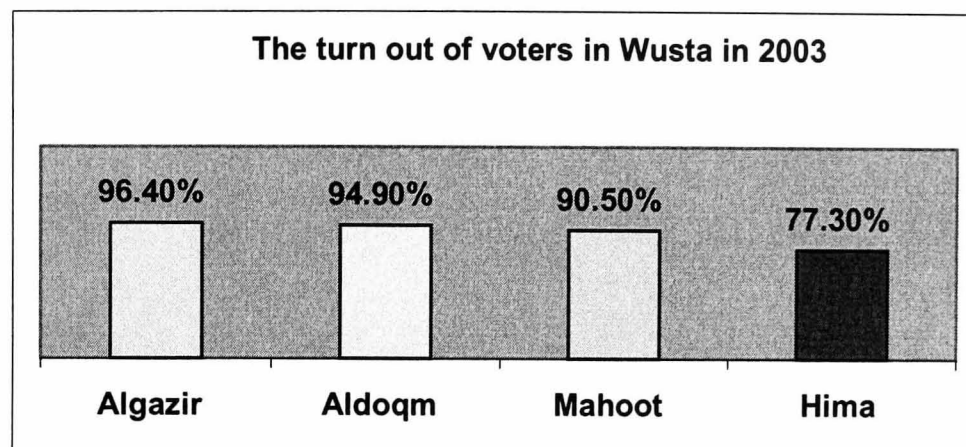
The turn out in Al-Dhirah region represents around 70%. However, this number is quite high, considering that a number of them work in the capital of Oman and others work in the UAE, since this area is located on the border with the UAE. Therefore, some of them might not be able to attend the election.

Diagram 6.6



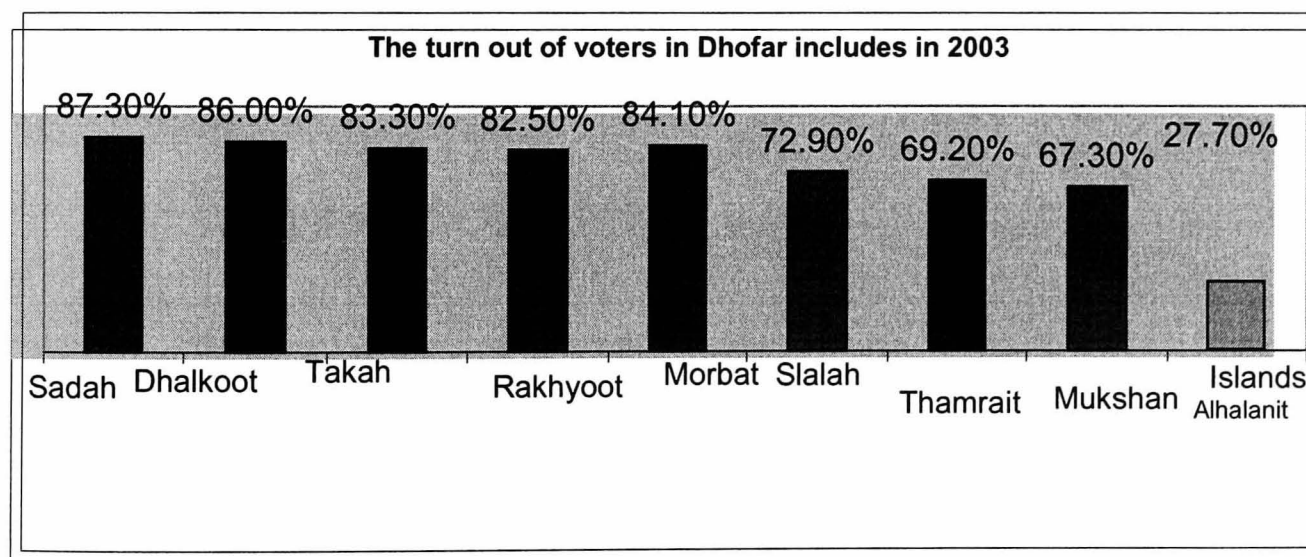
The table indicates that there was a good response to the election here. In 5 wilayats out of 8, the voters numbered more than 80%.

Diagram 6.7



The story of Musandam was repeated in the Al-Wusta region. People knew each other and could launch a successful campaign.

Diagram 6.8



As in Al-Dhakhliyah, the people of Dhofar responded positively to the election. In five wilayats out of nine, more than 80% of the eligible population participated.

These diagrams represent the latest example of the percentage of voters who participate in the election. It might be said the majority participated in the election. However, in places such as Alhalnit Island only around 28 percent of those who have the right to vote participated.

Although the Mujlis Ash-Shura still does not fully meet democratic aspirations, it represents the basis for further democracy in Oman. People have started to elect their representatives who practise the role of parliament through their debates with government ministers.

6.5.2.2. Membership Criteria

In order for someone to become a candidate for the Consultative Council elections, and thus, a Council member, a number of criteria need to be met. To begin with, candidates must be Omani by birth and family origin. The aim of this requirement is to maintain a purely Omani identity, and Omani culture, in the state's institutions⁴⁰⁹. This means that descendants of immigrants from the Indian sub-continent are not eligible to register as candidates, even though their families may have lived in Oman for more than a generation, and even though they hold Omani citizenship. This preservation of Omani identity has some similarity to the situation in Jordan, where special rights of representation are given to Christians and the Bedouin, who have guaranteed seats in Parliament.

409 The construction of Al-Shura Council, op.cit. p. 75.

In order to register as a candidate, a person must be more than thirty years old. This requirement is based on the argument that someone of this age will, through their educational background, and their experience of life, approach their responsibilities with greater maturity. Another requirement for candidates is that they possess a favourable reputation in their *Wilayt*. Representation is taken seriously, and is also taken to be a reflection on the people who elected the candidate⁴¹⁰. The view is that if a candidate performs well in the Council, this will reflect well on the place and the people he or she represents. Thus, it can be said that the responsibilities taken by a candidate and an elected member of the Council require them to be wise, well-educated, and experienced. However, these are subjective criteria.

By contrast, the conditions which bar people from standing in an election are clear and objective. A person may not put themselves forward as a candidate if they have been declared financially bankrupt, or have debts that have not been cleared. Also, people diagnosed as suffering from mental sickness are not allowed to become candidates. Serving members of the armed forces are also not eligible for election. Anyone from the military, who wishes to become a member of the Council, must resign or retire from the forces and then wait for a further two years before becoming eligible to stand. Conviction of the crimes of fraud or deception bars a person from becoming a candidate. Thus, many of the restrictions on candidates that are found in Oman, can also be found as regulations covering candidates in other democracies in the world,

410 Ibid. pp. 75-76.

such as the UK. Council members have freedom of the speech but within the limits of the Omani law ⁴¹¹.

6.5.2.3. Criticism of Mujlis Ash-Shura

The activities of the general assembly, the reports of the committees, and the studies which prepared in the Mujlis Ash-Shura are classified as secret. This fact was asserted in the principles of the Council⁴¹².

The Council does not have public media, such as Hansard. It depends on public media such as Oman and Al-Watan newspapers, the Omani TV and Omani radio. This affects the capability of the Council to publish important messages since, when these media are busy covering other important issues, they will not be able to give enough attention to the Council⁴¹³.

The Council conveys suggestions to the government about new rules, but, the government does not mention the advice of the Council, even if it acts on their suggestions. Thus, people are not aware of the Council's activities. This affects the level of trust of the nation towards the Council.⁴¹⁴

A number of members depend on the salary which they receive from the government during their membership. This creates two difficulties: firstly, they cannot criticise the

411 <http://www.shura.om/start.html> [1-5-2003]

412 Al-Harthy, S., from www.alwatan.in in Omania.net.com [12-6-2003].

413 Ibid.

414 Ibid.

role of the government as, ideally, they should be able to, and secondly, they feel when they leave the council they need to search about a new job. This fact decreases the number of people who desire to be members in the Council and reduces the quality of debate⁴¹⁵.

Members of the electorate sometimes do not vote and, if they vote, they do not care about the capability of the candidate; what is important to them is friendship or the tribe. This decreases the quality of the Council membership⁴¹⁶. Women are still not competitive with men because Omani society is controlled by men. Consequently few women enter the election⁴¹⁷.

The Sultan stressed the importance of cooperation between the members of Ash-Shura Council and the government. The nation depends on the dialogue between these bodies and analysts watch carefully the development of this relationship. Some members in the Council at the beginning were aggressive and attacked ministers personally, not their plans. This affected the level of the trust between the government and the Council. Also, some members did not care to discuss the plans and the programmes of the ministers, but were only concerned with local demands and small projects which could be solved through personal visits to the office of the ministers. The members used this strategy to win support from their local voters in the future. They did not treat the ministers as they should be treated. Furthermore, there is a tendency to make

415 Ibid.

416 Al-Hamhami, S., the membership in *Ash-Shura* Council www.alwatan.com [7 and 11-6-2003].

417 Abd- Al-Khaliq, T., Shura and Women www.alwatan.com [4-6-2003].

unsupported assertions, unsupported by figures and facts, causing the debate to be weak. Besides, some ministers who had long experience of dealing with the media, used this ability to stifle debate from the members. Some of them accused the members of disloyalty and had difficulty accepting criticism. Members cannot reply to what ministers say⁴¹⁸.

A number of well educated people do not vote. During the last election, around 5,000 people refused to vote, because they believe that the Ash-Shura Council is not a real Parliament. Members cannot use the media to express their plans. Also, the law bans those who are still in government position from being members. The only way they can participate is to take a holiday without salary. During 2003 the government started to organise a campaign to make people more aware of the elections and the importance of choosing high quality members for the Council. In the past, every person could vote for two candidates, but now the voter can vote only for one person. Some argue, however, that this will increase the chance that people will vote according to tribal affiliation rather than choosing the best person. Another concern with the present system is that the voter has to give his/her name on the voting paper. This constrains a voter's freedom to vote according to conscience⁴¹⁹.

418 Al-Harthy, S., the Meeting with the Ministers in Ash-Shura Council, www.alwatan.com [15-5-2003]

419 Al-Hashmi, S op.cit.

6.5.3 State Council: (Majlis A'Dawlah)

6.5.3.1. Membership Criteria

The second important council in Oman is the Majlis A'Dawlah (State Council), established in 1997. The members of this Council are appointed by the Sultan. To become a nominated member of the Council, a candidate would normally have considerable public experience. The aim is to bring together a group of people who have already served the state for many years, and who can use their wisdom and experience to enrich the political debate. Thus, members of the State Council have served the Government, for example, as Ministers of State, or as professional civil servants, in the case of retired under-secretaries. Retired ambassadors are eligible for nomination, and this is also true of officers in the armed forces who have either resigned from the service or who have retired⁴²⁰. In the year 1997 the number of members was 41 and in 2000 the number reached 48, five of whom were women. In the year 2003, the number of members in the council increased to 55, six of whom are women. For the third time, the chief of the council remained in position⁴²¹. A new leader of the council was appointed on March 2004 after the death of the previous one.

Outside the areas of government and the military, nominations can be made from public figures whose reputation is based on, for example, commerce. Leading businessmen and merchants can be nominated. Intellectuals and scholars have been chosen, as have people known for their wisdom. Sheikhs are also people whose

420 <http://www.shura.om/start.html> [1-10- 200].

421 www.Omannewsagency.com [19-10-2003].

authority gives them enough social status to be eligible for nomination⁴²². The Council holds four meetings every year, in January, February, May and October. The chief of the Council has the right to call emergency meetings⁴²³.

6.5.3.2. Duties of the Council

Members of the State Council have six important duties to fulfil. The first is to take responsibility for the preparation of studies on a wide range of issues aimed at stimulating the country's development. A more precise focus provides members with a second duty. This is to draw up recommendations and suggestions aimed at creating more effective enterprises in the production and service sectors⁴²⁴.

Because members of the State Council have had experience in government, and in management, they are also responsible for evaluating the efficiency of administrative plans in various sectors. Again, the experience of members of the State Council gives them the authority to review and evaluate projects passing between Ministers and the Consultative Council before they are forwarded to the cabinet for implementation. Members of the Council may also study and provide expert opinions on the issues forwarded to the council from the Sultan, or Cabinet ministers relating to public development projects⁴²⁵

422 Ibid.

423 Ibid.

424 Documents of the Ash-Shura Council, 1998 to 2000 ,Golden Press, Oman, pp.31-37.

425 Ibid.

This Council was able to prepare a number of studies in areas such as modernity and its negative social effects. It was set up in 2003 and discussed the problem of begging, the large sums of money paid to the bride on marriage, the effects of divorce, the effects of alcohol and drugs and dangers to the Omani identity posed by the imitation of undesirable behaviours from other parts of the world. The latter study did not discuss solutions to the problems but it did provide suggestions⁴²⁶.

As was noted above, it is not usual for members of the Consultative Council to discuss foreign policy issues. In the State Council, the eminence of its members, some of whom may have been in the armed forces or the government, gives them the authority to discuss foreign policy.

6.5.3.3. Criticism of the State Council

The State Council is still in its early stages. Both the Ash-shura Council and the State Council will be the cornerstone to help the evolution of the government to a constitutional government. Through their criticism they will help the government to correct its mistakes. For example, the State Council has conducted a number of studies in areas such as law, tourism, economy and population. Members have paid visits to other countries in order to learn from their experience and so develop their work⁴²⁷. Also the number of members has increased step by step and the number of women has reached five.

426 State Council, **Modernity changes and the negative social effects on Omani society**, Social Committee in the State Council 2002.

427 Al-Muskary , S., Member of the State Council, **Interview** [15-9-2002].

The aim of the establishment of the State Council is to achieve a balance between the Ash-shura Council and the government. The members of the State Council have good experience in government. However, the Members of the State Council feel their work is undermined by other authorities. For example, Sultan Qaboos asked the Council to study the reasons for the collapse of Muscat Security Market⁴²⁸. The Council established a committee to study this case, but the Minister of Commerce and others complained that the Council was investigating and claimed that it did not have the right to do so. Even when the report was prepared by the Council, it did not reach the Sultan⁴²⁹.

The role of the Council is to criticise the government and explain its mistakes. Despite the fact that a number of laws allow the members to express their ideas, the members are not willing to criticise the government frankly, because sometimes they have their own interest or they do not want to create conflict with the government. Another problem is that the members do not have own data to support their criticism of the government. They depend on the formal statistics provided by the government⁴³⁰.

6.6 Informal Democracy in Oman

In addition to the formal institutions of government, one of the outstanding features of Ibadhi culture, is that at the political level, people elected to authority are supposed to

428 Ibid.

429 Ibid.

430 Ibid.

be accountable to the people who elect them. Before the democratisation process in Oman began, the Ibadhi system of election and accountability was limited to Islamic scholars (*Ulema*), who had the right to elect their Imam, and who were accountable to the Islamic community as a whole⁴³¹.

Because the concepts of election and accountability have existed in the religious sphere, it has been relatively easy to extend them into the political sphere. Moreover, by creating a political system which incorporates a variety of political opinions, Oman has not suffered from the violence of Islamic opposition to the state found elsewhere in the Middle East.

In addition, accountability is enhanced by the visits which Sultan Qaboos makes to selected areas of the country⁴³². These visits which started from 1976, take place during a one-month period each year. The Sultan takes with him members of his government and they conduct face to face consultations with anyone wanting to make representations to him on any subject⁴³³. These visits not only bring the Sultan close to the people but they can also result in action being taken on a range of issues. Sometimes Sultan Qaboos organises surprise visits to observe projects, visit specific areas or military camps and to talk to people in public⁴³⁴. The purpose of his visits in general is to hear from people about the real needs for further development, to learn about problems, to expand development in every area in the country, to highlight to

431 Al-Harthy., S, op.cit. 1973, pp.15-25.

432 Oman 2002-2003, op.cit, p.30.

433 Ash-Shura Council, op.cit. 1998.

434 Oman newspaper, 8- 3- 1990.

citizens the importance of development to correct misunderstandings, and to assure them of the importance of keeping the Omani and Islamic identity⁴³⁵.

Another feature of democratisation is the development in gender issues. Women have equal rights according to Omani law and many reach top positions and participate in democratic councils. These developments are in line with current world trends⁴³⁶.

6.6.1 The Media

The media play an important role in democracies. They can act as a means by which people make their views known to the government. In Oman, the media also see themselves having a role in the development of the country. The media may also carry out an investigation on a subject of interest to the public, independently of government. In Oman there are a number of programmes on TV or Radio which are open to people who want to complain about some aspect of government business, and to offer alternative suggestions. In addition, satellite TV has opened up a wide range of Arabic-language stations broadcasting from the region, and other channels, such as CNN. Sometimes an official from a government institution will be in attendance on an Omani programme to answer questions. Also, in every Omani newspaper (the press started only in 1970) there is at least one page on which people can voice their opinion on an issue to the relevant Ministry, and expect an official reply⁴³⁷.

435 Al-Rawahy, A., op.cit p.6.

436 Al-Alawi, op.cit,1997.

437 Dahdooh, S, op.cit., 1999, p.144

6.6.2 Arabic Web site (*Sablat Alarab*)

This is a web site forum, which criticises the role of the government very frankly. It was established in November 1999, and the numbers of the visitors up to 2nd August 2002 was over 40 million⁴³⁸. The number increased in November 2003, to reach more than one hundred million⁴³⁹. This indicates that democracy in Oman finds fertile soil in opinion, as a result of the cultural background of the Omani people. The forum discusses topics of interest, things such as politics, economics, social issues, religion, and sport and publishes poems about Oman and other related countries⁴⁴⁰. The most interesting section is the political and economic section.

The opinions which are discussed in *Al-Sablah* are very important because they stimulate public opinion. The government faces very severe attacks from people⁴⁴¹. People in positions of authority are very sensitive to public opinion and are deterred from using their authority to practise any type of corruption, for fear of being attacked strongly the next day. For example, when the Minister of the Civil Service secured a job in his ministry for a member of his family, he was openly criticised by more than one hundred and fifty people⁴⁴². It can be said the reason why the ministers of Information and Education were replaced was because their policies were not supported by public opinion. Some believe that the Sultan himself follows what people say in this web site and uses it as a tool for political change in Oman.

438 www.omania.net [3-8-2002]

439 www.omania.net [13-8-2003]

440 www.omania.net [3-8-2002]

441 Al-Harthy, A., Founder of the Website *Interview* [10-4-2002]

442 *Ibid.*

6.6.3 Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry

This chamber was established in 1973 with the aim of providing the nation as a whole with important statistics, information and advice on economic and commercial issues. It conveys the proposals of the private sector to the decision makers in the government, through its membership being on various boards of directors of government authorities and in high level committees⁴⁴³.

At the beginning, the members of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry were eight in number. Four of them were elected and the others were selected by the government. In 1985, the government feared that some members were not “mature enough” and others were loyal to the former Communist Party which had been abolished in 1975, so it decided to select the president of the Chamber through Royal Decrees⁴⁴⁴.

In order to expand the democratic experience inside the Chamber, at the end of the 80s, Sheikh Yaqoub Al-Harthy, the chief of the Chamber at that time, decided to change the strategy of the Chamber. His plan was that, firstly, the members should represent geographic regions, and secondly, the chief of the Chamber should be appointed by the Sultan, not through any minister from the government. This latest suggestion was a response to the advice provided to the government that the chief of the Chamber should be appointed by the Minister of Trade and Industry. The government did not accept his idea, so Al-Harthy decided to resign, because he thought that the role of this institute

443 <http://www.omanchamber.org/>) [11-8-2002]

444 Al-Harthy, ex Chief of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Chief of Businessmen’s Council **Interview** [20-4-2003].

should be to criticise the government, not to please it. He believed that because Sheikh Salim Al-Khalele was appointed by the government, he would support the government policy of opening a trade co-operation office with Israel. Shiekh Al-Harthy refused to establish any type of cooperation with Israel, because he believed his stance represented the position of Omani businessmen. His claim was that the Omani Chamber was part of the Arabian Association Chamber and he could not establish communication as long as the occupation of Palestine continued. He added that the Omanis should await the fruits of the negotiation. He also refused to accept the idea that Iraq should be expelled from the Arabian Chamber - an association belonging to the Arab League- , as suggested by the general secretary of the Gulf Co-operation Council. His idea was that Iraq was part of the Arab League and separation from any association meant separation from the Arab League. Any step concerning expulsion to the withdrawal from any association of the Arab League should be discussed in the general assembly of the Arab League, not within the affiliated association itself⁴⁴⁵ .

6.6.4 Businessmen's Council

The Businessmen's Council was established in 1999, with sixteen members. The role of the council is to link the government and the private sector in all things related to the economy and the development of the country. It can give advice on issues such as investment, manpower, and the involvement of Omanis in economic activities⁴⁴⁶ .

445 Ibid.

446 Oman 2000, **Ministry of Information**, Sultanate of Oman, 2000, p. 32.

The government again selected Shaikh Yaqoub Al-Harthy as president of this Council. He believes that there are two weaknesses in the Council. Firstly; the government pays insufficient attention to its resources. This led Sheikh Yaqoub himself to pay the salary of the secretary, provide a meeting place and pay for the expenses of the Council. Secondly, the government selects all the members. He argues that they should be elected, since businessmen are better able to judge who is capable of working in this Council than the government⁴⁴⁷.

The Council has made a number of suggestions, such as the establishment of a college, to teach students about tourism activities. The government accepted the idea and established such an institution. Also, the Council suggested establishing the Sultan Qaboos Investment Fund. This Fund was intended to receive one Billion Omani rials over five years. A number of specialised people were to work in this Fund and use it for strategic plans with the aim of decreasing dependence on oil as a main source of income. However, the government refused to act on this suggestion⁴⁴⁸.

6.7.5 Democratisation and external actors

The influence of external actors such as the IMF and World Bank was felt most strongly in economic decision making in 1995. An international conference called “Oman 2020” was convened. The conference brought together Omani representatives and foreign advisers to plan an economic strategy for Oman over 25 years. One of the

447 Al-Harthy, ex Chief of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Chief of Businessmen’s Council **Interview** [20-4-2003].

448 Ibid.

proposals that has been acted on has been the privatisation of state utilities, such as electricity and water⁴⁴⁹.

One of the aims of the privatisation process was to encourage people with capital who were investing overseas to invest in Oman. From this point of view, privatisation can be said to benefit the Omani economy. In terms of the democratisation process, it is not clear that the decisions made by external actors necessarily obstruct the development of democracy. If by informal democracy we refer to people at all levels of society being involved in decision making, then it can be said that this aspect of democracy is still in the process of being developed in Oman. However, effective members of the Consultative Council would normally make the effort to visit the people they represent, to discuss issues with them.

6.7 Conclusion

It is true that in Oman, the inspiration for political reform has come from the top of society, from the Sultan himself. In Oman, the democratisation process began in 1981, when there was no crisis. Other examples in the world show that such weak processes can break down, but this has not been the case in Oman, where the democratic process has expanded since 1981, to include women, and younger members of society.

Although some may argue that Oman is not a democracy, the point is that Oman has begun a process of democratisation at its own speed. Oman has not gone too fast in changing its political system, and this may be why it is more stable. This means that

449 Oman 2002- 2003, op.cit. p.95.

Oman is in a democratic transition, in which it can learn from the past and make reforms to the system as it develops.

In the context of the Middle East, the democratisation in Oman is part of the same process that has begun in Jordan and Yemen, but it has its own character. Some liberalisation has also taken place in Qatar in recent years. Why is Oman's experience of democratisation different from that in Jordan and Yemen? In the first place, recent democratisation in Jordan and Yemen was begun in a period of economic crisis. Also, democratisation in Jordan was one way that King Hussein maintained the loyalty of his subjects, after he broke his connections to the occupied territories.

However, in Oman, there have not been economic or political crises behind reform. Rather, the major changes that have modernised Oman in such a short time, have led to a need for public discussion on what development is taking place. In other states in the South, rapid modernisation has led to great instability, but not in Oman. In the early period of modernisation, there was not a growing division between the very rich and very poor. The benefits of modernisation were spread across society. In recent years, a gap has begun to show between the very rich and others, and this might create tensions in the future. But, as Oman develops its democratic institutions, and maintains levels of investment providing employment, such problems can be openly discussed and addressed within the political system.

Democratisation in Oman has not been an exact copy of western European or American democracy. It has some formal elements that can be found in the West, but

most important is the way that it has incorporated Islamic traditions into the consultation process. Also, in Ibadhi Islam, there are requirements that leading figures be elected. Furthermore, rule in Oman is not oppressive. There are no torture camps. Through education, Qaboos encourages political changes towards proto- democracy based on traditional *Shura*, and there is an element of freedom of speech. This means that people in Oman recognise democratisation as their own, and not as something imposed or imported by foreigners,

The previous Sultan failed to continue in office because he ignored the voice of the nation. He oppressed the population and refused to transform his country to a modern state. His strategies of survival, as we have seen, threatened the throne. The present Sultan seems to have learned from the previous one. He has found that the best strategy to survive is to consult the nation, involve them in its institutions, build a modern state and enhance the relation with other countries. The next chapter therefore will provide an overview of the Omani Foreign Policy.

CHAPTER SEVEN

OMAN'S FOREIGN POLICY: SEARCHES FOR LEGITIMACY

“As part of the world, we must respond to events around us positively and clearly. We must exert all our efforts to actively and objectively promote peace and cooperation regionally and internationally”. (Qaboos, 17th National Day)⁴⁵⁰

7.1 Introduction

The foreign policy of a country is the extension of its domestic policy and hence a reflection of the same. Foreign policy is the state playing its role in world politics. It includes various issues such as trade, commerce, culture and ideology. Students of international relations and politics are aware of the various factors in the making of foreign policy. However, in a politically changing country such as Oman, foreign policy acquires an additional meaning: it is directly linked to the issue of the political legitimacy of the rulers who seek to gather international support for the policies pursued at home. The political changes that have taken place in Oman for the last three decades or so are very challenging for the ruling family. In a world which is experiencing a so-called third wave of democratization, these changes may not loom large, and their limited nature may invite contrary assessments from home and abroad. In such a world, the survival of the monarchy is indeed fraught with considerable difficulties. As C. J. Rippenburg has pointed out:

⁴⁵⁰ Qaboos., S op.cit, 1995, p. 167

“The concentration of foreign policy is on the regime’s dynastic interests. Decisions are made in terms of their impact on the future of the ruling family. Omani diplomacy remains highly personal”.⁴⁵¹

This may be true but as the personal interest of the monarchy is democratisation, foreign policy can play a role both in enhancing the broader political legitimacy of the regime and in strengthen the process of democratisation.

This chapter aims to examine the changes in Omani foreign policy after 1970 from the point of view of the internal make-up of the country, and in the light of its political history and the content of world events. Further, it describes Oman’s involvement with world organizations such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Arab League and the United Nations, and the relations with specific states such as Iran and the United Kingdom. Finally, it discusses the subject of regional and international crises, in which Oman plays a part, along with other nations, as a mediator.

7.2 About Oman

Before 1970, Oman was an isolated state⁴⁵². Sultan Sa’id refused to enter into any type of diplomatic relations with other foreign states. His relations were limited to Great Britain and India. During this period, Oman did not participate in any regional or

451 Riphenburg, C. J op.cit, 1998 ,p.185.

452 Al-Hammami, H., **Education for the 21 Century: General Education Reform in the Sultanate of Oman: Motives, Nature and Strategies of Implementation**, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis: the University of Birmingham, 1999 p. 92

international organizations. The Sultan followed the events in the world from his radio in his isolated residence. Although he appointed his uncle Shihab as the minister of foreign affairs, in reality he did not rely on him. He was the man who ran the ministry. In 1948 he appointed Woods Ballard, who was a British expert, to be the Minister of Foreign Affairs. In 1953 he replaced him with Neil Inez, also an expert from Britain.

When the present Sultan took over power, he adopted an opposite strategy. Qaboos opened the country to the world. For example, Oman began to establish diplomatic missions in various countries; engaged itself in various bilateral and multinational relations; got involved in regional and international organisations; acted as a mediator in problems concerning the Gulf States, and the Arab World; and made great efforts to find ways to a better future for the people of the Middle East.

In order to blunt the edge of enmity, Oman showed magnanimity towards its past enemies. AS early as the 1970s, it succeeded in establishing diplomatic relations with Iraq, Kuwait, the USSR and South Yemen. This step helped to reduce the circle of the State's enemies. Oman understood exactly the geopolitical situation of the region. This understanding reinforced its relations with the West and the main powers in the region such as Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

Oman has tried to use regional developments to enhance national security. The establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council is a prime example. The establishment of this body helped greatly in ending the complex border disputes between Oman and

its neighbours. Oman, for the first time in its history, established political and legislative agreements which were recognized by the international community⁴⁵³.

Oman declared that its international relations should be based on: “mutual respect” and “common interests”, “non-interference in internal affairs” and “compliance with international and regional charters and treaties”⁴⁵⁴. It sought to enhance relations with the Arab states, establish good relations with other countries in the world, provide assistance with African problems and support the Southern African freedom struggle⁴⁵⁵.

In the 70s of the last century, Oman tried to focus on regional politics and adopted policies which avoided any clashes which would create further enemies. At that time, Oman faced a number of problems such as border disputes, the desire to obtain recognition from regional and international organisations, and economic problems. After the ending of these problems, Oman started to embark on unique policies⁴⁵⁶.

Historically, Oman had a deep interest in the Indian Ocean. When Omani merchants wanted to go abroad, they would invariably go to India. The sea links between the two nations were very ancient. Nevertheless, from 1970, Oman started to be closer to the

453 Al-Mowafy, A., columnist in Oman news, *Interview*, [20- 9- 2002].

454 http://www.omant.com/Msi_for.htm [1-6-1998].

455 Humoody, H, *Al-Fiker Al-Siasy Al-Omani* (The Omani Political beliefs, 1992) p.386. Oman has a special historical linkage with Africa.

456 Al-Mowafy, A., columnist in Oman news, *Interview*, [20- 9- 2002].

Arab World. For example, Oman allied itself with the Gulf States, made remarkable progress in mutual trade, and established excellent relations with Egypt and Jordan. Oman's relations with other Arab countries improved greatly. In the past, the Arab world caused problems for Oman as emigrants from Oman created security problems to the country, but now the situation has changed⁴⁵⁷.

In 1996, the *Basic Law of the Sultanate of Oman* published by a Royal Decree defined basic Omani principles. Foreign policy was to "strengthen Oman's international position and its role in establishing the foundations of peace, security, justice and co-operation between different States and peoples"⁴⁵⁸.

7.3 The Effect of Location on Omani Foreign Policy

Oman overlooks the Straits of Hormuz, through which a high percentage of world oil is currently carried by ships. It also overlooks the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. Geographical location has had an important influence in shaping the state boundaries and subsequently creating international links by air, sea and land⁴⁵⁹. This fact gave Oman international interests, especially in relation to the main powers. For example, the European countries obtain around 70 percent of their oil requirements through Hormuz and the United States of America obtains around fifty percent⁴⁶⁰. On 4th June 1980, Oman signed an agreement with the United States called the United States-Omani Facilities Agreement. The aim of this agreement was:

457 Ibid.

458 http://www.uni-wuezburg.de/law/mu00000_.html [27-6-2002].

459 Miraan, T., op.cit. 1996.

460 Al-Harassi, op.cit, 1994, p62 .

“To enhance the capability of Oman to safeguard its security and territorial integrity and to promote peace and stability”.

At the same time Oman paid attention to the regional powers, especially Iran⁴⁶¹. Its location compelled Oman to be an active player in the international community.

The location gave the opportunity to Oman to encourage internal industrial sectors and to build important ports in the region, such as the port of Salalah, with the specific aim of creating links with North America, Europe and Asia and also India and Africa⁴⁶².

Oman inherited many unsettled borders with a number of states. This is a very sensitive issue. Many political and legal problems between countries are related to border disputes. Therefore, Oman under the current leadership decided to settle the border disputes with the neighboring countries to avoid any further problems. Oman was concerned that this type of dispute might be used as a card by any party that wished to create problems for Oman⁴⁶³. For this reason, Oman started to end its differences with Saudi Arabia in May 1991, with Yemen in October 1992, and with the United Arab Emirates in 1993. Also, with respect to the maritime boundaries, Oman ended its disputes with Iran in 1975⁴⁶⁴ and Pakistan in June 2000. Oman now does not have any

461 Al-Mowafy, A., columnist in Oman news, **Interview**, [20-9-2002].

462 Oman Daily, [27-12-1997].

463 Al-Harthy, A., The Chief of the Arabian Department, **Interview**, [20- 9-2002].

464 Oman News Agency, [1-21-2000].

border disputes with any country⁴⁶⁵. This is a remarkable achievement indeed, when compared with the half-a-century old border disputes of India and Pakistan, and India and China.

Historically speaking, the Sultanate during the last thirty years went back to the Omani foreign policy which had been applied in the 19th century. At that time, Oman kept good relations with the major powers in the world such as the USA, Great Britain, Holland and France.

Oman concentrates on peace efforts and international legitimacy as basic principles for the regime at the present time. From this understanding, Oman seeks to become an active member of the international community, and it participates in any efforts directly regarding the region. It has strengthened its relations with the Arab League and the Committee of the 77, and involved itself with issues to which the United Nations gives major importance, such as the environment, climate and nuclear weapons. It is party to a number of weapons agreements. It has also been a non-permanent member of the Security Council and has paid attention to the problems of the African continent. It has mediated in a number of problems in the Gulf States and the Arab world.

Unlike other Gulf States, Oman remained neutral during the Iraq-Iran conflict. Furthermore, along with the other Gulf States, Oman took a position under the

465 Al-Harthy, A., the Chief of the Arabian Department, *Interview* [20- 9- 2002]. see also Al-Harassi, *op.cit* ,1994 , pp. 91-92.

umbrella of the UN against Iraq during the 1990-91 crises. Oman may be said to have acted responsibly in both situations.

7.4 The Important Players in Oman's Foreign Policy

The foreign policy of a state is shaped or influenced by factors from within (the domestic environment) and from without (the external environment). The domestic environment includes the major institutions of the country. Foreign policy may be affected by the interactions among these institutions, and the interactions of these institutions with the state⁴⁶⁶. Also included in the domestic environment are factors such as the physical environment, population, the economy, the role of the military, and type of government⁴⁶⁷. Relations and interactions with other states and their institutions provide the external environment. External policies and internal policies may follow similar patterns⁴⁶⁸.

Decision-making in Oman is a process controlled by the head of state, Sultan Qaboos, in conjunction with his Ministers. As regards foreign affairs, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, his two advisers -the General Secretary and the Secretary for Foreign Affairs- ambassadors in the ministry and in the missions and their staff, share responsibility. Their roles include collecting information and conducting analysis on strategic matters, organising consultations and agreements on world events, developing relations between Oman and other countries, sending representatives to Embassies abroad,

466 Brown, C., **Understanding International Relations**, London, Macmillan Press Ltd, 1997.

467 Miraan, T., The Lectures of Course no 16 untitled, **The Omani Diplomatic Institute**, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Oman Press, 1996.

468 Brown, op.cit, 1997.

liaising on Oman's behalf with other ministries or institutions internationally and, finally, communicating and negotiating on behalf of the Sultanate on issues relating to treaties and agreements. In order to achieve better cooperation, the ministry decided in the year 2000 to gather the Omani ambassadors who represent the Sultanate in the missions and give them an opportunity to meet with the ministers of the government and their under secretaries. The aim of this meeting was to discuss various areas which would help to develop the role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and to be aware of the latest developments which occurred in Oman. As for matters of Defence, the Sultan is also the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces while the Defence Council is responsible for maintaining security⁴⁶⁹.

As we saw in chapter six, public opinion has an important role to play in decision-making processes concerning domestic and foreign policies. Opportunities are made available to the public to make representations to the Ash-Shura and to the Al-Dwalah Council and Sablat Alarab website. The opinions of the commercial sector are transmitted through the Chamber of Trade and Industry and Businessmen's Council, which raises their proposals before the appropriate Ministry. A number of decisions have been influenced as a result of the latter efforts of the latter institutions.⁴⁷⁰

During the 70s and the 80s, the work in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs relied on men. However, the situation changed in the 90s. The ministry started to open the door for women to participate in this field. Now, the number of women is increasing year by

469 Royal Decree, 1996.

470 Al-Alawi, Y., *Omani speech to the United Nations*, 1997.

year. Furthermore, women have reached high positions such as ambassador. For example, the current Omani ambassador in Holland is a woman.

The role of women in the past was as wives of diplomats who organised social events for the diplomats. Now, women work alongside men in the ministry, enjoy the same level of education, the same level of opportunity in the training in the Omani diplomatic institute, and the same level of trust from the ministry. As a result, women can negotiate with other foreign delegations for the Omani interests in different issues such as politics, economics and bilateral and multilateral issues.

7.5 Maintaining Arab and Islamic Identity

From ancient times, Oman has played an important role in the pan-Arab world. Also, in common with many neighbouring Arab states throughout the Middle East and North Africa, and in common with some non-Arabic states, such as Turkey and others throughout the world, the Omani people have adopted the mantle of Islam. This dual Arab/Islamic identity has been defended. An example, as we have seen in Chapter Four, was the famous battle against the Portuguese in the 17th century. The racial and religious make-up of the people is an influential factor, therefore, not only in the shaping of domestic affairs, but also in the shaping of international relations with other similar countries.

Oman is an essential part of the Arab World. However, it differs from most Arab states in one important way. Oman does not adopt the full Arab strategy and desires to be

more open to and interactive with foreign countries. To illustrate that, Oman has trade relations with Israel, whereas most Arab countries, such as Syria, still do not accept any kind of relations with Israel. Oman also is a founder of the Indian Ocean Association, of which all other Arab countries are not yet members.

The movement in every state in its contacts with other states depends on its historical heritage. Oman used to have contact with Arab and non-Arab countries. At that time, as we have seen in the previous chapter, most of the Arab countries were under the control of foreign Empires and there was no Arab system. On the other hand, Oman was a quasi-independent state, and it dealt with other authorities on an equal footing. Therefore, in modern political life, Oman took the initiative to establish the Indian Ocean Association. The aim of this step is to establish economic cooperation. The countries involved have a growing population and this step will open the door for closer economic cooperation⁴⁷¹.

Oman also has a traditional relationship with India. The relationship has ancient origins in the voyages of Omani merchants, for whom India was an important meeting point and strong post for their further trade to other parts of the world. Other countries, too, recognised India as an important market for trade for example, in spices. Oman now insists on improving relations with India because it is a neighbouring country, which is important in terms of mineral resources, and has the second largest population in the world after China. India, too, is keen to improve relations. Oman takes an impartial position in the problems between Pakistan and India and has tried to help both sides to

471 Al-Harthy, A., the Chief of the Arabian Department, *Interview* [20- 9- 2002].

find a solution in the border disputes over Jammu & Kashmir. There are various cultural, economic, trade and even social links with India⁴⁷².

7.6 Relationships with other countries and Regional and International Organisations

According to Frankel (1984), the foreign policy of a country may be judged according to the range of its relations with other countries. As far as Oman is concerned, it may be said that the country has taken a position of strength with regard to other countries, both in terms of building peaceful links of friendship and economic co-operation, and in terms of acting firmly and responsibly in time of conflict and crises among its neighbours.

7.6.1 Regional and International Organisations

7.6.1.1 Membership of the United Nations

Membership of international organisations is a very important aspect of the contemporary world⁴⁷³, and Oman is a full participant in many world associations. For example, it joined the United Nations in 1971. The involvement in the United Nations opened the door to the world. Firstly, the Omani civil war was discussed in the United Nations. This gave international recognition to the Omani authorities and thus strengthened their position in the internal conflict. Secondly, the United Nations was an important forum for effective political communications with countries such as the former Soviet Union and Israel. Relations with Israel led to the creation of the trade

472 Al-Tubi, H, the chief of Asian department, *Interview* [20-9-2002].

473 Light, op.cit. 1994.

office in both countries after the Madrid Accord. Thirdly, the UN helped to expose Oman and its culture, its role, and activities to the world. Finally, it represented an important umbrella in the international community, to stop any foreign aggression⁴⁷⁴.

Oman has gained international respect for responsible actions and contributions in recent events. Its status was confirmed when it was elected to the United Nations Security Council in January, 1994. 176 countries participated in the vote⁴⁷⁵. As a responsible member of the UN and other organizations, Oman demands aid for refugees and proposes strategies to protect the environment particularly the local desert environment⁴⁷⁶. As regards peace issues, Oman declared before the United Nations (Conference 51)⁴⁷⁷ in favour of an agreement on weapons proliferation. Oman in principle would like to lend weight to such international agreements⁴⁷⁸. Oman's involvement in organizations such as the UN has encouraged stability and rapid growth within the country.

7.6.1.2 Gulf Co-operation Council

In order to exert political and economic influence, states need to create alliances. A major benefit of Oman is involvement with other groups has been greater recognition. Oman was the first country in the Gulf which called in 1975 for a committee involving

474 Al-Mowafy, A., columnist in Oman news, *Interview*, [20- 9- 2002].

475 Miran, T., op.cit, 1996.

476 Al-Alwai, A., op.cit, 1997

477 This speech was delivered by Yousif Al-alwai, the Omani Minister of Foreign Affairs, on behalf of Sultan Qaboos the in the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1996.

478 Ibid.

the Gulf States, Iran and Iraq. These countries agreed to hold a meeting of foreign ministers in Oman to discuss how they could cooperate to establish better security and stability in the area. Such a move was a pioneering initiative. Although the meeting failed to achieve much, as a result of this step, the voice of Oman started to gain respect in the international community⁴⁷⁹.

In the second stage, Oman and five other small countries in the South East of the Arabian Peninsula felt the need to secure their sovereignty against external and internal threats⁴⁸⁰. Firstly, the Islamic Revolution in Iran had announced that it was desirous of expanding its own experience to other parts of the Muslim world. Secondly, the war which erupted between Iraq and Iran affected the stability in the region. Thirdly, the price of oil fluctuated, so that these countries needed to consult to protect their citizens from harmful effects. They felt that collective economic projects might help to diversify the income of these states, and that collective security would preserve their territorial integrity⁴⁸¹.

The principles of good neighbourliness and respect for international law and traditions were clearly defined by Sultan Qaboos, in the celebration of the national Omani Day. He stated that Omani policy had the aim of

479 Al-Harthy, A., the Chief of the Arabian Department **Interview** [20- 9- 2002].

480 Cooperation Council For The Arab States , (Riyadh, Secretariat General, 1991) p.3.

481 Lonney, R., "The Gulf Cooperation Council's cautious Approach to Economic Integration", **Jornal of Economic Cooperation**, vol. 24, 2003.

“strengthening the co-operation between the Gulf states, fortifying relations with other Arab countries, as well as supporting issues of importance in the Arab world, enhancing Islamic co-operation, supporting just causes, exploring all avenues for increased co-operation with the European Union and other international bodies, following a policy of non-alignment, and the establishment of cordial relations with all friendly countries”.

On 25th May 1981, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar established the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC). The GCC excludes Iran and Iraq, because they do not have similar regimes. The aim of the GCC was to strengthen co-operation in areas such as economy, finance, trade, customs, tourism, legislation and administration, as well as fostering scientific and technical progress in industry, mining, agriculture, water and animal resources, establishing scientific research centres, setting up joint ventures, and encouraging cooperation of the private sector⁴⁸².

The Council has achieved remarkable co-operation in various areas, but the most important are in politics, security and the economy. In terms of politics, these countries were able to consult, discuss and unite their position on political events. Members hold regular summit-level and ministerial-level meetings, for example, in the Arab League, and, during conferences and meetings which are held at the international level, the members of the GCC meet to unify their position.

482 <http://www.gcc-sg.org/Foundations.html> [1-3-2003].

The leaders or ministers of foreign affairs issue statements to represent the position of the GCC toward any regional or international issue. During the last two decades, the members were able to act collectively on a number of issues, such as the problem between Iraq and Iran, the UAE and Iran, and the disputes between the Arab states and Israel.

In terms of security, the Members believe that any aggression against one country means aggression against all. Most of these countries feel that they are not secure because they are oil-wealthy, with small populations and weak armies. At the same time, they are close to Iraq and Iran, both of which have ambitions to dominate the area. This fact forced the countries to co-operate. In order to achieve practical self defence, Sultan Qaboos suggested creating one army for the six members. The countries are still discussing this suggestion. He also suggested the establishment of a strong force which would include one hundred thousand soldiers, drawn from all the members. Every country at the same time would enhance its relations with the main powers in the world such as the USA and UK, and the main powers in the region such as Egypt. This step would help achieve not only stability in the GCC but also world stability, and would decrease expenses on weapons⁴⁸³. Another example of the co-operation between these countries is that the members created the peninsula shield force in 1982⁴⁸⁴. This force participated during the war against Iraq in the second Gulf War and is ready to prevent any threat facing the GCC states.

483 Al-Harassi, H., op.cit, 1994, p.55.

484 <http://www.gcc-sg.org/cooperation.html> [1-2-2004].

In economic terms, the GCC desires to achieve economic integration. In 1983, for example, the members discussed areas such as a free trade zone, according to which goods from member nations are exempted from customs tariffs. Some argue that the Council was established as a result of external problems, rather than internal demand and pressure⁴⁸⁵. The external threats to these states such as the Islamic Revolution in Iran did lead these countries to co-operate, but later this union encouraged further co-operation, and improved internal integration.

This cooperation does not mean that these countries act as one in all economic, security and political affairs. There are issues in which every country takes its own decisions. Oman, for example, because it looks over the Strait of Hormuz, takes an especially international approach. Most of the world's oil passes through this Strait. This resource is important not only for the GCC but also to the international community. Moreover, although most states in the GCC depend on oil, Oman has less income from that source, so it needs to diversify its income. That is why Oman decided to establish an alliance with other countries which overlooked the Indian Ocean. Another difference is that Oman, compared with other Gulf states, has taken greater steps in the democratic process.

Saudi Arabia is a very influential country in the GCC council, but the other party which balances it is Oman. The reason is that Oman is the second largest country in the Gulf States and it is the oldest country which has political and civil life in the Gulf

485 Al-Busaid, K., op.cit., 1995, p. 52.

States. Other places in the Gulf were founded on the tribal system. Oman is the only country which has a wider political and diplomatic history. The Saudis understand this point and take it into account when making any suggestion.⁴⁸⁶ Also, Oman can join with two or more states to create a balance.

In order to develop a level of consultation in the region, the GCC states established in 1998 a consultative association under the Secretariat General. Oman offered to host the headquarters of this association and the GCC states accepted this proposal in 2003. Oman's aim in this step was to strengthen the role of the consultative association. A number of suggestions along these lines have been made to the council of ministers of the GCC, notably, that the association should be separated from the Secretariat General of the GCC and become independent⁴⁸⁷. Up to now, unlike the European experience with consultative institutions the GCC consultative association has had only limited authority.

The establishment of the GCC enhanced consultation among all Arabs. The GCC states provide mature opinions to the Arab states, because they are more settled in terms of wealth compared to the other Arab states. The GCC countries mostly consult before they talk to other Arab countries. This collective alliance strengthens Oman's position at the regional and international levels. On the political side, Oman has a respected voice in the GCC. This has secured the area from two important wars. From the economic point of view, the situation is advantageous: the GCC has reached a number

486 Al-Mowafy, A., columnist in Oman news, **Interview**, [20- 9- 2002].

487 Al-Muskary, Member of the Consultative Association of the GCC states, **Interview** [4- 12- 2003].

of economic agreements on matters such as economic relations and mutual trade. It includes a number of mechanisms. Secondly, the members have agreed to unify customs duties for the GCC states from the year 2003. This will help to improve the liberalisation of trade between these countries. Thirdly, a study is underway with a view to unifying the currency from 2010⁴⁸⁸. This step will bring benefits for the member states. Finally, there is also a desire to depend on internal workers from the GCC instead of foreigners.

7.6.1.3 The Arab League

The Arab League was established in 1945⁴⁸⁹ to achieve political, economic, cultural, and social programmes. The Arab League plays an essential role as a link between the populations of its members. The latter prefer to call it the “House of the Arabs”, and it is involved in settling Arab problems. For example, it helped to solve the 1958 Lebanese civil war. It has helped shape school curricula, and preserve manuscripts and the Arab cultural heritage. Furthermore, the Arab League has launched literacy campaigns, and reproduced intellectual works, and translated modern technical terminology for the use of member states. Other areas in which the League has been active are fighting crime and drug abuse, labour, cultural exchanges, youth and sports programmes, the role of women in Arab societies and child welfare activities. The

488 Al-Harthy, A., the Chief of the Arabian Department, [20- 9- 2002].

489 Tahri, S., On this Volume, in *Biat Alarab (The House of Arab)*, **The Arab League** Cairo, The Arab League, Marsh, 1995, p. 6.

members established a joint defence council, an economic council, and a permanent military command.⁴⁹⁰ Oman has benefited from most of the League's programmes.

The Arab League represents an essential political forum where the Arab states meet and discuss their problems. Politically, it involves a group of states linked now as one unit to achieve political and economic interests in international politics. This strengthens Oman's political and economic position. Oman plays a role in terms of organising the work inside the Arab League, for example, Arab summits. Whereas meetings in the past were held on an adhoc basis, meetings now are held regularly⁴⁹¹.

Oman's a tribal culture, Omanis believe that human strength lies first at in the level of family, then in the tribe, then the state, and finally, the international community. The power of the state is increased according to its circle of the friends in the world. From this perspective, Oman has a great interest in promoting its relations with the Arab League and creating a place for itself in development efforts in the region⁴⁹². Oman, with other Arab states, is pursuing economic cooperation in the context of the Arab League, with the ultimate aim of establishing an Arab common market⁴⁹³. It is also hoped to establish an Arab free trade zone by the year 2007, but this step requires improvement in the market system of the market inside state. The economies of Arab countries close to the Soviet Union used to be centrally controlled. This created barriers for economic cooperation especially between individuals. A free trade zone

490 <http://www.arabji.com/ArabGovt/ArabLeague.htm> [27- 8- 2002].

491 Al-Harthy, A., the Chief of the Arabian Department, **Interview** [20- 9- 2002].

492 Ibid.

493 Ibid

would remove state interference in the economy and encourage states to switch economic activities from the public to the private sector⁴⁹⁴.

Involvement in the Arab League is very important to Oman. For example, during the internal war in Oman, there was a movement to split Oman into two states. The Imamate sought become a member of the Arab League and to establish a separate state, but the success of the Omani government in joining the Arab League limited any such attempt to weaken the state. Oman at the beginning faced opposition from Saudi Arabia and Yemen, but then these countries agreed to accept Oman. This involvement was an important step toward creating a united political state in Oman⁴⁹⁵.

Oman thus started to present itself as a united state for all political purposes. This meant that the opponents represented an illegal movement and the state had the right to stop them. In the next step, Oman started to play a role in some committees inside the Arab League, such as the legal and administrative committees. Then, Oman started to feel that it should involve itself in Arab problems. This would help Oman to strengthen its position among the Gulf States and other Arab countries. That is why it ended all its differences with Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and started to be active with other Arab states. And that is why, up to the present, Oman is very serious about fulfilling its commitments to the Arab League. Oman does not house any of the associations or organisations of the Arab League. However, there are some other Arab

494 Ibid.

495 Al-Mowafy, A., columnist in Oman news, **Interview**, [20- 9- 2002].

countries which also do not house them⁴⁹⁶. Oman is active in other ways, for example, it tried to mediate between the Arab countries which supported Iraq in its invasion in Kuwait, such as Jordan, Yemen and the Palestinian authority. In 1994, Oman played host to the king of Jordan, the President of Yemen and the Chief of the Palestinian authority⁴⁹⁷.

7.6.1.4 Damascus Declaration

Oman is also a member of the Damascus Declaration, which was established in 1991. It includes the GCC plus Egypt and Syria. It was established after the occupation of Kuwait by Iraq. The declaration was to enhance economic and defence co-operation between the members. However, the GCC did not desire to strengthen this new alliance as they felt that it might not be welcomed by Iran⁴⁹⁸. For this reason the activities on this Declaration are currently suspended.

7.6.1.5 Organisation of the Islamic Conference

This was established in 1969 after the burning of al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. In total, fifty- five states are members in this conference. All of them are Islamic countries. They aimed to:

496 Ibid.

497 Al-Harassi, op.cit, 1994, p. 90

498 Ibid. p.55

"Consult together with a view to promoting close cooperation and mutual assistance in the economic, scientific, cultural and spiritual fields, inspired by the teachings of Islam"⁴⁹⁹.

Members gather regularly at heads of government and foreign minister level to discuss the position of the members from Islamic perspective. The area of discussion has been enlarged to include any development in the world politics.

7.7 Economic and other aspects of co-operation between Oman and World Organisations

Foreign policy analysis has evolved in the present time to embrace economic considerations, and not only diplomacy and the use of force⁵⁰⁰. Oman is aware of the need to develop potential in the national and international sectors. Consequently, it has made significant contributions, such as organising an international conference to prepare for the year 2020, signing a number of agreements with Asian countries to co-operate in gas production, and participating in the World Trade Organisation. One important group in which Oman is involved is the Indian Ocean Association (IOA), which includes 29 countries in the region with a membership covering 31% of the world's population. Among its many objectives, the IOA aims to benefit the welfare and development of nations, improve living standards, draw up a special programme for economic co-operation, investment, trade, science and technology, and lastly

499 <http://www.arab.de/arabinfo/oic.htm> [27,8,2002].

500 Light, op.cit 1994.

implement anti-terrorist measures. Most of the objectives of the IOA are along similar lines to other world groupings such as the European Union (EU) and Asia- Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), which have become powerful associations in the international economy.

7.8 Relationship with Arab Countries

Because Oman is economically independent, it can afford to make its own decisions. Sometimes these are made in solidarity with the Arab League. But at other times Oman has made its own decisions. An example of solidarity was the Gulf War in 1991. Because it was opposed to Iraq's violation of the Charter of the Arab League it joined the military alliance to defeat the Iraqi armed forces.

The efforts of the present government have succeeded in reducing the differences with other countries. For example, Saudi Arabia refused at the beginning to recognise the state of Oman. In 1972, Sultan Qaboos visited Saudi Arabia. This historic event changed the Saudi position. The two countries agreed to establish diplomatic relations and exchange diplomatic missions at ambassador level. However, the two countries remained at odds because Saudi Arabia gave shelter to some Omani religious opponents when the disputes over the borders were still not settled. At the end of the 1970s and the beginning of 1980s, especially after the announcement of the Gulf Co-operation Council, new relations started to be established between these two countries. Representatives of both countries started to meet and cooperate on various issues, providing opportunities to settle most of the problems. In 1990, both sides signed a border agreement. After the events of 11th September, Saudis started to come under

severe attack from some politicians in the United States, who accused Saudi Arabia of being behind the incidents of 11th September and claimed that the regime could do nothing to control religious fanatics. In the light of this development, no doubt the Saudis will need to strengthen their relations with the other Arab states, including Oman⁵⁰¹.

7.9 Relations with Iran

The Omani policy regard to Iran came from the fact that any revolution, at the beginning, takes an extreme path. Later it starts to stabilise, and perhaps its ideological fervour becomes diluted. The Islamic revolution in Iran shocked all liberal states. America, for example, attempted to squeeze Iran and change its policy by means of information propaganda and sanctions. The evidence shows, however, that the Islamic Revolution is itself ending in response to internal demands.

Oman also has good relations with Iran. The diplomatic relationship was started in 1972, but the root of this relationship runs deep in history. Relations have been harmonious at some times and conflictual at others. Iran, for example, tried on various occasions to occupy Oman or interfere in its internal issues; Oman has also occupied Iranian lands. However, most of the time, the two countries cooperate and benefit from each other, especially in trade and cultural matters.

⁵⁰¹ Al-Harthy, A., the Chief of the Arabian Department, **Interview** [20- 9- 2002].

Iran supported Oman in its war against the rebels in Dhofar between 1964 and 1975⁵⁰². At that time, Oman failed to receive Arab support to stop this aggression. Other Arab states justified their lack of support by claiming that while countries strove for independence, Oman opened its gate for imperialism. Only the Shah of Iran sent troops and equipment to stand by the Omani troops⁵⁰³. This support was instrumental in the Omani victory. The relations between the two leaders were very strong. Sultan Qaboos visited Iran in 1971 to attend the Iranian celebration on the occasion of the 2500-year anniversary of the Persian Empire and in 1975 Qaboos visited Iran again⁵⁰⁴. This visit was an occasion to thank Iran for its help against the rebels.

At the beginning of the Islamic revolution in Iran, there were a number of Iranian troops in Oman. Both countries reached an agreement to let these troops fly back home. In the early stages of the revolution, relations between the two states were uncomfortable. The new regime in Iran could not trust any regime which had built good relations with the Shah. Oman was one of these countries. But Oman stressed that the relationship with Iran was strategic and it should be naturalised. It maintained contact with Iran at various levels. Oman thought this strategy would help to improve relations with Iran, and restore relations to the level enjoyed before the revolution⁵⁰⁵.

Therefore, Oman was the first country in the Gulf States to send a delegation to Iran to congratulate the new regime. This mission was at the level of the Under-secretary of

502 Kechichian, J., op.cit 1995, p.99.

503 Al-Harthy, A., the Chief of the Arabian Department *Interview* [20- 9- 2002].

504 Kechichian, J., op.cit.1995, p.99.

505 Miller, J., op.cit. 1997.

Foreign Affairs, who was the second most important figure in this ministry. Step by step, Omani efforts helped to improve relations with Iran. To illustrate, during the Gulf War between Iraq and Iran, which lasted eight years, Oman remained close to Iran. This strengthened the Omani position with Iran. Iran saw Oman in that period as a means of enhancing its relations with other parts of the world. This gave Oman an opportunity to play an important role to restore relations with Iran, as one of the most important countries in the area. Oman believed that stability in Iran would bring stability for the entire region⁵⁰⁶.

Iran's relations with the Gulf States have improved. Only the Islands problem remains, but the Omani position is very clear⁵⁰⁷. The GCC states believe that these Islands are part of the United Arab Emirates. Despite the Iranian efforts to find support from the GCC, it understands the Omani position with the UAE, and Iran's political leaders do not blame Oman for its position⁵⁰⁸.

506 Al-Harthy, A., op.cit, 15, 9, 2002.

507 In 30 November 1971 Iran occupied three Islands. These are Abu Mosa, Tanab Alsogra and Tanab Alkubra. Britain and America supported Iran's occupation of these islands. At that time, Britain had left the area and Iran was the best ally which might protect the sea route from any the threat from the Soviet Union. The UAE refused this occupation for many reasons. Firstly, historically, the islands are part of the UAE. Secondly, they are located on the route which conveys most of the oil to the world. Thirdly, from these islands, the coast of Saudi Arabia is visible. In 1992, Iran announced the full occupation of these islands and it forced the Arabs to leave. Cited from <http://www.albayan.co.ae/albayan/2001/12/11/mhl/41.htm> [20- 10- 2002].

508 Rippenburg, C., op.cit, 1998, p.182.

At the level of bilateral relations, there are a number of mechanisms which link the two countries. There is a desire on both sides to establish a strategy to enlarge the level of cooperation. For example, there are three committees. These are:

1. The Common Committee at the level of the ministries. The aim is to study how to promote and enlarge the economic, investment and trade relations between both countries.
2. The Mechanism of Political Cooperation at the level of foreign affairs ministers. The committee meets regularly in the capitals of both countries.
3. The Army Friendship Committee. The aim of this committee is to exchange opinion. Iran is desirous of selling Iranian weapons to Oman⁵⁰⁹.

Iran invests in Oman through 12 companies, with a total capital of 1,356, 000 Omani rials. Furthermore, there are a number of branches of banks and insurance companies such as Mily Bank, the Iranian Export Bank and the Iranian Insurance Company. Iran accounts for around 8.9% of all total Omani exports and around 4% of all Omani imports⁵¹⁰.

So it can be said that the Islamic revolution in Iran did not harm the relations between the two countries. Both countries look over the straits of Hormuz. Both of them cooperate to protect the area from conflicts. Both countries are aware that there are some differences on some regional and international problems, but each country respects the position of the other. Therefore, these differences have not led to further

⁵⁰⁹ Al-Harthy, A., the Chief of the Arabian Department Interview [20- 9- 2002].

⁵¹⁰ Ibid.

disputes. Both countries trust each other and have created bilateral committees to consult on various issues such as political, trade and economic subjects. Both countries exchange formal visits at civilian and military levels.

In contrast with other countries in the Middle East, Iran became an attractive example of democracy with the election of Khatami. Once democratic elections were known as the source of political authority, then the focus of attention shifted to jostling amongst the various political parties. Political parties have moved towards being seen as the most suitable institutions for absorbing and representing the highly politicised demands of people in Islamic countries. The recent multiparty election in Iran is a landmark example in this regard. Although democratic systems in Islamic countries still leave a great deal to be desired in terms of freedom and contribution, from Algeria to Indonesia there is a widespread attempt to maintain and improve multiparty political systems⁵¹¹.

7.10 International Relations

Historically speaking, Oman has had strategic relations with the UK. Oman's relationship with the United Kingdom is unique. In the past, Britain supported the Omani Sultans, and during the civil war Britain supported Oman with troops, equipment and expertise. In the present time, relations with Britain have expanded to include aspects such as politics, culture, technology, and education. Also, Oman has received military and political training programmes. There are media links with the establishment of a BBC station in Msaera Island, subsequently shifted to the village of

511 <http://www.fas.org/man/dod-101/ops/war/iran-iraq.htm>.

Asilah. The British Council in Oman plays an important role in developing the relations between the two countries⁵¹². Britain provides help to Oman with weaponry. Britain has also provided subsidies to Oman, but it has stopped doing so now, because it believes that Oman has reached a stage at which it can be self-reliant, but Britain is willing to send experts in different fields. There is a committee which was established in 1976 called the Omani Britain Committee based in Oman and there is also the British Omani Committee based in Britain. Both of them arrange lectures discussing how the two countries can enhance and improve their bilateral relationship. There are a number of missions from both sides exchanging visits⁵¹³. Britain takes Oman's advice on issues regarding the Middle East. British and American firms have subsequently developed the oil and other industries. In the late 1990s the Foreign Secretary in the United Kingdom described the relationship as "excellent", and stated that the British government would work tirelessly to further the partnership. Oman obtains technical help from the United Kingdom particularly in regard to the forward-looking 2020 programme⁵¹⁴. Oman has enjoyed good relations with both the Conservative and Labour parties⁵¹⁵.

In addition to Britain, Oman has had a long standing relationship with the USA. Oman was the first Arab country to establish diplomatic relations with the United States in

512 Al-Harthy, S., the Desk Officer of London, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sultanate of Oman
Interview [20-9-2002].

513 Ibid

514 Gulf News, op.cit. [2-5-1997].

515 Al-Alawi, Y., op.cit, 1997.

1840⁵¹⁶. That was before Oman's period of isolation, which continued until the reign of Sultan Qaboos. Today, Oman is an important country as a consequence of its strategic position over-looking the straits of Hormuz and the Indian Ocean. The US military has been able to use facilities there since the second Gulf War⁵¹⁷. In 2003 President Bush praised Oman for the democratic steps that it had taken; citing it as an example of the political for democratisation among Islamic countries, a major focus of his post Iraq foreign policy⁵¹⁸.

7.11 Dealing with international Crises

A country's relations with other countries and membership of international organisations are important features of peace-time policy-making and long-term co-operation. Equally important, or perhaps much more important, is a country's ability to act responsibly in times of international crisis. The following sections describe in more detail Oman's role in recent events.

7.11.1 Development of the Palestinian Problem and its Impact on Oman

The creation of the State of Israel in 1948 has been a determining factor in the development of the Middle East. At that time, all Arab states were weak because they were newly independent or they were still under occupation. Only TransJordan was able to defend a significant portion of Arab Palestine, the West Bank or Ariha. The Arabs fought with Israel in 1948, 1956 and 1967 to liberate Palestine, but they lost

516 Al- Kalbany, [http://www.oman.com/Msi for htm](http://www.oman.com/Msi%20for%20htm) [1-5-1998].

517 Miraan, T., op.cit, 1996

518 [http:// Japan.usembassy.gov](http://Japan.usembassy.gov) [26-2-2004]

these wars, and as a result, more Arab land came under Israeli occupation. At that time, cities such as Baghdad, Cairo and Khartoum were disrupted by demonstrations. Oman failed to react due to the following reasons. Firstly, it was isolated by the previous Sultan. Secondly, the state faced internal conflicts as a result of religious and tribal conflicts. Thirdly, the media was backward; Omani people did not get access to the media since there was no electricity. Fourthly, the economy was weak; thus, Oman could not afford to provide financial support or hospitality. Finally, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation and its remaining Arab supporters were on the left of Arab political opinion, supporting the opposition movement within Oman.

But then, the Sultanate of Oman changed. When Sultan Qaboos came to power, Oman became a strong champion of peace in the Middle East. Oman actively supported the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, when most other Arab countries objected to it and imposed sanctions against Egypt. In addition, Oman has participated in all multilateral negotiations between the Arabs and Israel.

After the end of the Cold War in 1991, the world changed dramatically. Firstly, America became the strongest country in the world; secondly, bilateral differences between Arab states appeared because Iraq occupied Kuwait; thirdly, Iraq became weak when America forced Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait and fourthly, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) also became weak because Saudi Arabia and Kuwait stopped their financial support to Yasser Arafat, who supported Saddam Hussein against Kuwait. In this climate, the Arab countries accepted the mediation offered by the United States of America to end the conflict in the Middle East. Oman and the

other Arab states started to believe that they could not defeat Israel in a war because of Israel's military superiority and lack of support from Egypt. Israel also was weary of continued wars with Arabs. However, the United Nations resolutions such as 242 were never implemented by Israel and were not enforced upon it by the UN Security Council⁵¹⁹.

Therefore Oman among the other Arab states agreed to negotiate a peace treaty with Israel, only on condition that Israel should withdraw from all the Arab land which it occupied in the year 1967. This suggestion received public support from the Omani public opinion, the muslim world and the international community. The Israeli side was not however, prepared to withdraw from the land which was occupied in 1967. Nevertheless, Oman felt that despite the failure of the Oslo and Madrid conferences in achieving any agreement, they were useful in that it reopened the doors for bilateral negotiations between Israel on the one hand, and Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and the Palestinians on the other⁵²⁰.

A new meeting was held, in 1992 between Palestinian and Israeli delegations. The Palestinian delegation proposed a new suggestion. The Palestinian side would accept self-rule and elect a Palestinian Legislative Council, but the agreement should be based on the UN resolution 242, which entails the right of self-determination of the people

⁵¹⁹ Said, E **Culture and Imperialism**, London, Chatto and Windus Ltd, 1993.

⁵²⁰ Walad Abah, A., *Mustakbal Al-Taswiah Al-Shurk Awsatia min Al-Mundoorin Al-Arabi Wal Israeli (the Future of Settlement of the Middle East; from the Arab and Israeli Perspective)* The Omani Diplomatic institute , Muscat, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Course no 20 in the Omani diplomatic institute, Oman press, 2000, P. 99.

and establishment of an independent state⁵²¹. Israel again rejected the suggestion. Rabin, the Prime Minister of Israel during that time, suggested that there should be two steps. Firstly, there should be a transitional phase that would last for five years. During this stage, the Palestinian people should have administrative government linked with Jordan and Israel. After three years, the two sides would start fresh negotiations for the permanent agreement based on the UN resolution 242. This project was rejected by the Palestinian side⁵²². Oman welcomed the agreement which was signed on 13 September 1993, between Israel and the Palestinians in the White House in Washington. This agreement included details about the aim of the negotiations, the relationship between the two sides, the mechanism for solving problems, the prospects of an election inside Palestine, the withdrawal of Israel from the Gaza Strip and *Ariha*, the co-operation between two sides and the economic and development programmes. The agreement gave formal recognition to the PLO in parts of Palestine, and paved way for further negotiations between the two sides⁵²³. In 1995 Oman opened trade offices in Tel Aviv and Israel opened a similar office in Muscat.

Oman believes that there is a broad international consensus that the Palestinian people should have an independent state of their own⁵²⁴. Despite the opposition of powerful fundamentalist elements in Israel, who are able to exploit Israel democracy to block the path to a settlement, it is likely that Israel will be forced to accept a peaceful solution that includes the creation of an independent Palestinian state.

⁵²¹ Walad Abah, A., op.cit. p.101.

⁵²² Dunbabin, J., op.cit, 1994, pp.337-339.

⁵²³ Ibid, op.cit. p.101. P. 100.

⁵²⁴ Al-Busaid, B., The Under Secretary of Foreign Affairs, **Interview** [15-9- 2002].

Modern Omani relations with Egypt started after the Camp David pact and Baghdad Summit. There was an awareness by the Omani leadership of the necessity of good relations with Egypt, the most powerful Arab state in the region. Its pro-Western stance since the 1970s also made the two countries natural associates⁵²⁵.

Although Oman faced internal crises during the 70s and was preoccupied in internal development in the 80s, it paid attention to the situation of Palestine, and made contact with the Palestinian Liberation Organisation. Oman recognised the state of Palestine directly after its announcement in 1988. Since 1987, Oman has supported the Palestinian *Intifadah*. Oman opened a mission in the Gaza strip in 1997 and Palestine opened an embassy in the same year. Yasser Arafat made four visits to Oman up to 2000⁵²⁶.

The peace process with Israel was approved by the Arab states and the Gulf Cooperation states. This was seen as the only the way to bring back the occupied lands from Israel after the Camp David Accord. The same strategy was pursued in 1991 with reference to the Madrid Pact, Oman was one of those countries which agreed to enter into the Peace Conference⁵²⁷. But Oman believes that the Arab states should deal with Israel on the same level and no state should go further in the negotiations with Israel unless the other parties achieve the same progress. This means these countries should

525 Al-Mowafy, A., columnist in Oman news, **Interview**, [20- 9- 2002].

526 Al-Harthy, A., the Chief of the Arabian Department **Interview** [20- 9- 2002].

527 Miller, J., op.cit 1997.

take a united stance. But one should take into account the circumstances in every state. The Omani position is to support peace in the Middle East on the basis of a partition of Palestine on the pre- 1967 borders.

After the Oslo pact, the establishment of the Palestinian Authority with free elections and the foundation of the administration authority, a number of countries from the Arab world started to negotiate with Israel. This was a step to encourage Israel to go forward. Oman felt that this step would help the Palestinians, Lebanon and Syria to obtain the return of their lands. Oman during that period received Rabin in 1994 and Shimon Peres in 1996⁵²⁸ But when the peace process was destroyed and it appeared that there was no hope of negotiation so long as the Israeli right remained in power, Oman declared therefore that it would close the Israeli trade office and would stop any formal negotiation with Israel⁵²⁹.

On an informal level, unlike before, Omani citizens are organising demonstrations supporting Palestinian people and expressing their anger against Israel; also they send subsidies to the Palestinian people. Furthermore, the Palestinians are authorized to visit Oman and work. It is important therefore that the Omani government reflects the popular views in its policies.

7.11.3 The Omani position Towards the Water Question in the Middle East

528 Al-Mowafy, op.cit. p.127.

529 Ibid.

The Middle Eastern countries share a common problem, shortage of water or disputes over rivers. The inhabitants of the Middle East represent 5% of the total world's population, but the region contains only 0.9% of global water resources. The number of states which are water-scarce in the Middle East and North Africa had increased from three in 1955 (Bahrain, Jordan and Kuwait) to eleven by 1990⁵³⁰. Those included in the list are Algeria, Israel and the Occupied Territories, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Seven other states might also face this problem by 2025. These are Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Libya, Morocco, Oman and Syria. At the same time the population is estimated to reach 423 million by the turn of the century (and double that, 25 years thereafter), creating further difficulties for the region⁵³¹. The water in many places is polluted⁵³². There is a significant expansion in the agricultural and industrial fields. The usage of water per person in the Middle East is the lowest in the world, representing only around 3% of Asian and 15% of African levels. Countries such as Oman depend on desalinated water⁵³³. Since these countries already expend huge sums on water for domestic use, it will be difficult to use it also for agriculture purposes.

In Oman among other countries in the Middle East, it is being increasingly recognized that many of the current and prospective conflicts result from the lack of natural

530 Berman, I., and Michael, P., *The New Politics of the Middle East*

<http://www.iasps.org.il/strategic/water.htm>. [3-2-2003].

John Pike, <http://www.fas.org/man/dod-101/ops/war/iran-iraq.htm> [21-12-1999].

531 Ibid.

532 Ibid.

533 Ibid.

resources and their inequitable distribution. Environmental degradation, climate change and water scarcity are the issues that underline most of these conflicts. The patterns of conflict and political instability are visible at the local, regional, and interstate level. In the Middle East, environmental degradation, lack of water resources, growing population and territorial disputes are intricately linked to each other and create serious challenges for regional stability. Furthermore, Middle Eastern leaders, both past and present, have stated that water is the factor most likely to lead to war. The link between environmental degradation, water scarcity and violent conflict is a serious threat. Even the most peaceful neighbours could go to war over water disputes. For the sake of the region, it is crucial that water scarcity and environmental degradation be dealt with in a manner that will ensure that essential water demands are met sustainably⁵³⁴. In the Middle East there are three main rivers, the Tigris-Euphrates, Nile and Jordan River systems. These rivers create conflict between the states in the Middle East, for example, disputes between Turkey and Syria over the water of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers; in the Jordan River Basin between Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Jordan; among Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia over the Nile River. Some claim that the Iran-Iraq War flamed from disputes over water claims and availability. But sometimes rivers help states to enhance co-operation with other states. For example, Jordan and Israel signed a bilateral agreement in 1994⁵³⁵.

534 Charrier, B, and Dinar, S., Water, conflict resolution and environmental sustainability in the Middle East, <http://ag.arizona.edu/OALS/ALN/aln44/charrier.html> [3, February 2002].

535 Berman, I., and Michael, P., op.cit.

Oman encouraged the other states of the Middle East to enter dialogue and cooperative work. In 1994, Oman hosted the meeting of the Multi-party committee responsible for investigating about the best method of find water in the region, in order to end the disputes. It also agreed to host the Research Centre for Water Desalination, in which Israel is a participant⁵³⁶. The founders of this centre were the Sultanate of Oman, the State of Israel, the United States of America, Japan and the Republic of Korea. The European Commission was invited as a founding member of the council⁵³⁷. The members believe that one of the serious problems in the Middle East is the scarcity of water, which could be a source of instability in the future. Because Oman is one of the countries which faces the challenge of scarce water resources, it played an important role to encourage the Middle East peace process. Hence, the members decided to choose the Sultanate of Oman to establish the centre. The aim was to achieve two main objects. These were firstly, to support the peace process in the Middle East and secondly to create communication between technical experts from developed and developing countries. Water shortage is a common problem in the area and represents a threat to the stability in the region. If the people get access to drinking water at a low price, the Middle East will be more stable. The Omani idea received unanimous support from the members who attended the working group. Every founder agreed to pay three Million dallers. The Centre provided a number of studies in this field, but it has recently faced a critical time, as it is not able to pay its expenses. The members stopped paying their commitment as they are awaiting developments in the peace process. Furthermore, a number of Arab countries forced their experts to end their

536 http://www.omanet.com/msi_for.htm [1- 6- 1998].

537 <http://www.medrc.org.om> [2-6-1999]

involvement with this centre. Up to now there is no final decision whether to close the Centre or to continue. The members hold two meetings every year, but at the level of administration and experts in European countries, not in Oman⁵³⁸.

7.11.3 The Omani Position Towards the War Between Iran and Iraq

Oman felt the War which erupted between Iran-Iraq in 1980, changed many things in the Middle East⁵³⁹. Firstly, the Gulf States spent huge sums of money to support Iraq against Iran. Secondly, the war destroyed the power of two of the most important countries in the Islamic world, which had provided a balance to the power with Israel. Thirdly, the United States of America was afraid that the peaceful flow of oil to America was in danger. Fourthly, the Islamic revolution in Iran encouraged individual fundamentalist groups in the Middle East, those such as in Egypt and Algeria, to fight to establish Islamic states. Finally, the trust between Iran and other Gulf states was breached.

Iran is an important country for the all Gulf States including Oman. All these states depend on oil. For example, the efforts of Iran in the world markets strengthen the oil price, and the power of Iran decreases the aggression of Israel. So, the states of the region need to take practical steps to end their differences and achieve co-operation. No doubt there are widespread differences between these countries, but there is further space for co-operation. For example, the relations between the United Arab Emirates

538 Al-Musolhi, K, coordinator of the Middle East Desalination Research Centre *Interview*, [Muscat, 28, 9, 2003].

539 Amin, S., *Political and Strategic Issues in the Gulf*, Royston Ltd. 1984.p.54.

and Iran are unique. Despite the fact that Iran occupied a number of the Emirates islands, the trade relationship between two countries is not affected by the political disputes. Such steps can promote peace and create better chances of co-operation for the Middle East. For example, Iran is rich in water and labour resources, while the Gulf countries face shortage of water and labour. Also, Iran needs to re export goods from the Gulf. Furthermore, any further link with Iran means internal stability. In every country in the Gulf, including Oman, there is a significant Shia minority. In terms of ideology, Shias support Iran. When these Shias feel there is harmony between Iran and other Gulf States, they will be loyal to their respective states. Secondly, the main tenet of American strategy is that there is no permanent friendship in American policy but there are permanent interests. This suggests that if American interests are better rewarded by favouring the Muslim world, democratic or not, then the US will align with the latter.

Even today, the key security considerations in the Middle East are Iran-Iraq relations, potential threats to oil rich weaker Gulf states from Iraq or Iran, and the threat of an arms race that could lead to a war threatening the world's access to oil resources. After the second Gulf War, Iraq was devastated economically and weakened militarily, making it difficult to pose any threat to its neighbours, let alone assume regional leadership. With Iraq's defeat, Iran emerged more powerful and is the strongest regional actor. Though it suffered huge losses during the Iran-Iraq war, its might is increasing.⁵⁴⁰

540 Riphenburg C., op.cit. 1998.. p.203-204.

The Omani vision toward Iraq was that, firstly, there would be a day when the war between Iraq and Iran would end. Secondly, both sides would be losers, because of the heavy casualties, suffered on both sides. Therefore, Oman refused to get involved in this war. It remained impartial. Oman's neutral position protected the Gulf States, a number of which almost entered the war on the side of Iraq⁵⁴¹. The clarification of the Gulf position through the Omani side persuaded Iran to not escalate the war. After the end of the war, Oman's role was very important. Oman was instrumental in persuading both sides to adhere to the UN Resolution 598 which called for a cease fire and withdrawal to recognised boundaries⁵⁴². The Omani position led both sides to respect Oman. This also reflected public opinion in Oman. The government gained further trust from the nation. Oman's formal position protected Oman's permanent interests and, unlike other states in the Gulf which provided financial support to Iraq, Oman saved the resources for internal use. Omani magazines and newspapers published during that period reflect public support for the regime in its policy stance.

7.11.4 The Second Gulf War

One of the most significant developments in the recent history of the Middle East during the ruling of Sultan Qaboos was the second Gulf War, which was a result of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. This incident seriously undermined the Pan-Arab solidarity and altered the nationalistic perception of the Middle East from an Arab identity to identities developed along state loyalties.

541 Ibid.

542 [gopher://gopher.undp.org/00/undocs/scd/scouncil/s87/5](http://gopher.undp.org/00/undocs/scd/scouncil/s87/5) [20,10,2002].

Iraq invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990 claiming that Kuwait was part of Iraqi territory⁵⁴³. After the occupation, Saddam Hussein announced that Kuwait would be known as Iraq's 19th province. Iraq argued that Kuwait had been under Ottoman rule and that Iraq was the Ottomans successor in the region and thus had the right to rule Kuwait after the Ottomans. The second argument was that the borders between the two had never been agreed upon. Iraq also objected to overproduction of oil in Kuwait. Further, Iraq also accused Kuwait of illegally pumping oil from Iraq's North Rumaila oil field⁵⁴⁴.

While Kuwait claimed that the Prime Minister of Iraq, Nuri Sa'id, had recognised Kuwait through his letter to the British High Commissioner for Iraq, Sir Francis Humphrys, on July 21, 1932 the Iraqi side claimed that this letter did not represent a formal recognition and that the letter was signed because Iraq was under a League of Nations mandate, with Britain controlling its foreign affairs: the letter was not therefore binding on the independent Iraqi State⁵⁴⁵.

The occupation of Kuwait in 1990 coincided with new developments in the world politics. For the first time during the 20th century, the most of the countries plus Oman were unanimously in favour of using force to stop the aggression from one state against the other. Even Russia, the close ally of Iraq, supported this step. A total of 56 Security Council resolutions concerning the situation between Iraq and Kuwait was passed in

543 <http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/history/A0838511.html>).

544 Ibid.

545 Al-Nahi, H., History background about The Identity of Kuwait and its effects toward the future of Iraq Alqudes Alarabi, London dates 13, 14, 15, 16, October 1996.

the period up to January 2001⁵⁴⁶. A coalition against Iraq was formed by 32 nations including the United States, Britain, Egypt, France, Syria and Saudi Arabia. On 28 February, 1991, Iraq lost the war against the US and its allies⁵⁴⁷.

The implications of the Gulf War went beyond the liberation of Kuwait. The international community also focused on the dangers of the weapons of mass destruction that were owned by Iraq and posed a threat to world peace. It also led to a growing concern for the rights of groups who were abused by Saddam, such as the Kurds in the North, Shias in the South, and other opponents of Saddam's regime. This event set a precedent for UN involvement in the protection of the rights of its people within sovereign states.

After thirteen years of the sanctions which were designed to pressurize Iraq into giving up its weapons of mass destruction, the world found that the innocent Iraqis were the real victims of those sanctions⁵⁴⁸. The regime remained in power, but the Iraqi people suffered from poverty, health problems and the lack of educational facilities. The occupation of Iraq in third Gulf war led to the end of the sanctions which imposed by the United Nations. But many problems in Iraq need solutions.

546 <http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/committees/IraqKuwait/IraqResolutionsEng.htm>. [1-10-2002].

547 Al-Busaid, B., The Under Secretary of the Foreign Affairs Interview [15-12-2002].

548 http://www.janes.com/regional_news/africa_middle_east/sentinel/gulf/iraq.shtml. [12-3-2003]

Oman feels that the three Gulf Wars have not solved the problems in the Gulf States⁵⁴⁹ Although Hussein has been defeated the country is highly unstable with a political vacuum, its future is uncertain and. The area needs practical steps to build trust between the countries in the region.

Oman was the first state from the GCC that expressed its opposition to the occupation of Kuwait. When, under the umbrella of the United Nations, Kuwait was liberated from Iraqi aggression, Oman was on the side of both the coalition and the UN. This is because Kuwait is a member of the GCC and any aggression on any member states means aggression against all states in the Council. But Oman did not end its diplomatic relations with Iraq, as Oman on principle wishes to maintain political relations with all countries. Oman faced pressure to end relations but refused to agree. It believed that such relations should remain to pave the way for negotiations which would be useful in future⁵⁵⁰. Such behaviour may appear to be over-optimistic, but actually was based on a realistic understanding of the regional situation, and its implications for peace in the Middle East. A high ranking foreign ministry official of Oman explained this in an interview on 08 February 1994:

“We may not pursue a certain policy which may have negative repercussions in the future. We did condemn the occupation, and we spare no efforts in supporting Kuwait. In the meantime, we have not overlooked Iraq as a people and as a state. In consideration of the fact that we have to

549 Lawrence Potter, *op.cit.* p. 231.

550 Al-Harthy, A., the Chief of the Arabian Department **Interview** [20- 9- 2002].

deal with Iraq and co-exist together, it is only wise to keep open all channels of communications with it”.⁵⁵¹

Again, government gained the support of public opinion. People admired the role of the government in maintaining relations with the Iraqi nation, for the benefit of the future.

7.11.5 Iraq in Crisis with the United Nations

Iraq supported the rebellions in Dhofar between 1970 and 1975, but this fact did not bar Oman from establishing diplomatic relations with Iraq in 1976⁵⁵². During the 1990s, Oman followed with special attention the crises between Iraq and the United Nations. It was happy to further co-operation between the two sides, but it thought that Iraq should respond in a positive way towards the international community. It should in particular take action as regards certain specific issues, such as the release of Kuwaiti prisoners, the return of stolen Kuwaiti possessions, compensation for damaged property (machinery, etc) and the verified removal of weapons of mass destruction.

The efforts made by the United Nations and Iraq failed to end the problem between the international community and Iraq. America, with the alliance of Britain, decided in late 2003 to wage war against Saddam. Oman did its best to avert the war, which it thought would create instability in the region. Saddam was ultimately captured and his rule ended. Now Oman asks the United States to search for the best solution to create stability in Iraq and give further authority to

⁵⁵¹ Quoted in Al-Harasssi, H., *op.cit.* (1994), p.49.

⁵⁵² Riphenburg., C, *op.cit.* (1998) p.208.

the United Nations as a step to allow to the Iraqi people to rule themselves, but without leaving the country in a chaos⁵⁵³.

7.12 Conclusion

Most of the literature on foreign policy derives from the European or American experience, rather than that of a developing country like Oman. Discussion of foreign policy with reference to Oman is restricted to a few authors such as Miraan and Joseph Kechichian. An analysis of Omani foreign policy suggests that decision making is concentrated in an elite group including the Sultan and his close advisers, although businessmen, the military, and public opinion are also consulted.

Foreign policy decisions reflect Oman's changing position over the past three decades, from one of isolation to involvement. The specific security structure of the Gulf and Oman's strategic position in the region allow Oman to pursue a more independent foreign policy than other Gulf neighbours. At the same time, interestingly, Oman has stood somewhat apart from other Gulf states. It has followed a more consistent and less nervous path both in terms of regional relations and in its dealing with the west. Almost immediately at the start of the current regime, Oman began diplomatic relations with Egypt and nowadays plays a valuable role in regional, Arabic, Islamic, and international issues.

553 Al-Busaid, B. The Under Secretary of Foreign Affairs, [7-1-2004]

At the economic level of Omani foreign policy, Oman hopes to achieve long-term objectives through membership of other organisations such as the Indian Ocean Association. Many of the countries involved are still growing and developing. Oman is favourably positioned to help create links between these countries, which ultimately will strengthen Oman's hand in terms of negotiations with other countries.

Finally, Oman's foreign policy successes have to be seen in the context of state-building. In the wake of the pursuance of the foreign policy, the Sultan defined most of Oman's borders, adopted pragmatic policies, and entered into alliances without neglecting its regional responsibilities. In short, Oman forged a role for itself, replacing a fledgling state with a secure one. It was thanks to Oman's consistent foreign policy, as we have described above, that the 'Idea of Oman' as a key regional power has been well understood. Nothing illustrates better the links between foreign policy and domestic legitimacy than the following observation:

“There was a realisation that the country must survive and forge a stable life for its citizens, an awareness that the government ought to regain full control over its destiny, and a desire to adopt independent measures as soon as possible to restore its standing on the Arabian Peninsula”.⁵⁵⁴

Oman, historically, has suffered greatly due to the lack of unity as a nation, caused, among other reasons, by inter-tribal warfare, religious conflicts, undefined borders and repeated foreign invasions. Today's Oman, under the leadership of Sultan Qaboos, has successfully put all those historical troubles to rest, and has emerged as a united nation

⁵⁵⁴ Kechichian op.cit., 1995, p. 257.

with high regional and international prestige. To the West, Oman is the main balancer in the Arabian Peninsula, which is a major achievement for Oman as a nation. In achieving this, the independent foreign policy of the country which is mature, realistic and consistent, has been the main instrument.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION: DEMOCRATISATION IN OMAN

This thesis has studied the political changes in Oman from 1970 with the focus on the transition towards democracy. The argument of the thesis is that the approach of the previous Sultan, Said ibn Taymur, who oppressed people and banned development, failed. Sultan Qaboos launched a coup against his father on 23 July 1970, then adopted a very different style of rule and succeeded in ending the internal civil war and the external threats to Oman. If Said ibn Taymur had remained in power using his strategy, Oman might have collapsed. Sultan Qaboos practised a successful policy. He united the citizens under a single government, encouraged them to run a modern state without discrimination and used foreign aid to achieve stability. At the same time, he developed a successful form of state government. Unlike some kingdoms in the Arab world such as Saudi Arabia, where members of the royal family make decisions independently from each other, power in Oman has seen concentration in the hands of Sultan Qaboos. Also, he transferred the loyalty of the citizens from their tribes to the state. Thus, Oman differs from Yemen, where political decisions are tribally based. Furthermore, the existing development occurred due to the wisdom and personal character of Sultan Qaboos, whose charisma is reflected in the trust and the loyalty of the citizens. Therefore, decisions made by the government generally find the support of the nation.

In addition, under his rule, Oman has seen massive development in areas such as education, health, economy, income, infrastructure and other services. This has

enhanced the internal support for the Sultan. Moreover, Sultan Qaboos endorsed a number of steps toward democracy. Omani citizens can now criticise the role of the government and participate in decision making. Finally, in terms of foreign policy, Oman is now well-known as a mature state. This reality has brought Oman the respect of the international community and improved the standing of Oman among the citizens. This is important because, as identified in Chapter 2, democracy is a value rather than a tool. There are criteria of democracy such as; free elections, the right to run for office, freedom of speech, freedom of information, development of social institutions and insurance regarding human needs. Democracy requires training and social development. These features define democracy and the foregoing discussion explains Oman's significant progress in all these aspects.

The second chapter demonstrated the popularity of democracy as a form of government has been growing across the world after the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, states in the South face difficulties in terms of the formal and informal practices of state and society, as a result of their economic, political and social problems. It is important to remember that democracy is not a system that can be created quickly. It requires time to allow people to understand and learn about the new style of government. This is particularly true of Oman, which for decades suffered from authoritarian rule. Western style democracies have developed in one part of the world, but it is inappropriate to assume that other models of representation and participation cannot work equally well in other parts of the world. There is no rule that says the states of the South must follow the Western style of democracy in all its aspects in order to become authentic democracies themselves. All states contain various cultures;

democracy should reflect the progress and the development of the country in its own way. This is not to say that governments can ignore the basic principles of democracy, such as the accountability of the government to the people, the holding of free elections and respect for human rights, but there is more than one way of creating an elected, accountable institution that satisfies a people's demand for democratic representation. The states of the South should be free to find a way of developing their own democratic institutions. If there is one expectation that everyone should have, North or South, it is that the human rights of the citizen be respected, whether they are the majority of the population, or minorities. But it should be stressed that when Westerns encourage democracy in the South, often it is to guarantee security for themselves. Generally, although the trend in international relations is toward greater democracy, it is a difficult process in the South where politicians are forever searching for ways of establishing their legitimacy.

The Middle East, which was considered in chapter three, is one region that has not experienced widespread democracy, but it was shown that democracy, or democratic change, is an important agenda item of most of the rulers of the region, and people talk about democracy seriously. There are interesting aspects of the popular attitude to democracy in the Arab world. The particular difficulties for the Middle East are 1) low growth rates in the economy, 2) slow social progress, 3) authoritarianism and fundamentalism. If there is a difference between Oman and other Middle Eastern countries, it is due to its historical legacy, quite different from that of other Arab states, and its culture. Also, in Oman the IMF and the World Bank have tended to have had a beneficial influence on economic growth. In practice, the role played by the monarchy

is considerable in the development of Oman, compared to other monarchies. Furthermore, the Omani monarchy is not an absolute monarchy, because by long tradition it is involved in the practice of Shura. This means that the monarchy in Oman is uniquely well placed to play a leading role in the development and extension of Omani Shura practices into political institutions with a democratic character. The speed of social change in Oman has taken the older generation by surprise, while the younger generation has not known anything else. The generation that lived under the authoritarian regime of Said ibn Taymur became used to his authoritarian style of rule. The relative liberalisation that has taken place under Sultan Qaboos has meant that, for example, women have entered public and political life (as members of the Councils) in a way that the previous generation did not know. Finally, whereas before, there was no public discussion of government policy or other public issues, these are now a part of daily life through the media. For some of the older generation, these changes have taken place very quickly, and they have found it difficult to adjust to modern life.

Islam can work with democracy; given the right circumstances and lack of external interference, Muslim societies can adopt democracy. India's case is an example, which could be repeated in other countries as well. The exact form and structures of democracy will vary, depending on the unique circumstances of the countries concerned, but elements of democracy have always existed in Muslim societies, and they can be successfully revived with imagination and a strong sense of purpose.

Oman as a united political, economic and social quasi-state has existed for more than a thousand years without losing its Islamic, Arab identity. As shown in chapter four,

Oman benefits from its deep and rich history as a semi-democratic system. Oman has been an Ibadhi state for more than one thousand and three hundred years. The culture of this sect depends on the election (*biah*) of the imam and his accountability. The first political split in Oman allowed the Portuguese to occupy Oman and the second internal conflict led to Persian occupation. But, when an external enemy tried to occupy Oman, the population united to repel the foreign enemy by adopting the *biah* system.

The Revolution in Iran was a significant milestone in the history of the Middle East. It signalled a renewed sense of independence and resistance in the foreign policy orientation of the Middle East states, which were greatly under the influence of former colonial powers and the USA. The neighbouring countries in the Middle East have no reasons to be afraid of Iran, for two reasons: firstly, Iran has now embarked upon a path of reforms, and secondly, the trade ties with rest of the states in the Middle East are significant enough to avoid any unnecessary conflict. In the short term, the Iranian revolution created a division between the Arab countries and Iran. However, over time, it is being recognised by the Iranian leadership that animosity with the rest of the Arab countries is futile and steps have been taken to enhance co-operation and create a peaceful environment. The Iranian revolution also created instability for other Middle Eastern countries with significant Shia minorities. The revolution emboldened the Shia minorities within these countries, whose loyalty to the new Islamic regime in Iran came in conflict with their loyalty to their respective national governments. Shia in Iraq, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia are a few of the examples of this resurgent Shia identity conflicting with the national interests. However, Oman was able to achieve a balance

among the various ethnic and religious groups. This avoided a clash between the government and Shias, in contrast to what happened in other countries.

The fundamentalist leaders in Israel, such as Netanyahu and Sharon, will lose popular support among the new Israeli generation. The role of fundamentalists in Palestine will decrease if the Palestinian people feel that the Israelis are willing to live in peace with Palestinians. The main interests of America in the Middle East are to guarantee a cheap supply of oil to the world markets, achieve peace between Israel and Arabs, protect the friends of America in the area and protect the sea routes in the area. These factors will compel the US to lead both sides toward a peaceful solution. So far, however, one of the important points in the Middle East is the absence of political progress and diplomatic contacts between the Arab states and Israel. Israel has improved its nuclear weapons capability and the countries in the area are trying to own these weapons in order to create a deterrent against Israel. These circumstances will lead Oman and other countries in the Middle East for better practice of democracy.

Oman over-looks some of the main shipping channels in the world and is located at the end of the Arabian Peninsula as a link between the West and the East. Therefore, Oman has remained an important player in the world. The stability of Oman means the stability of the world. Its strategic location attracted foreign powers to occupy Oman, but the desire to survive encouraged Oman to develop its defence capability and expand Omani territory to other parts of the region. Oman was known in the 19th century as an imperial state as a result of its expansion to East Africa and East Asia. The Al-Yarobah dynasty strengthened the Omani state. For example, they ended the

occupation of the Portuguese in 1650, and then they defeated them in East Africa and East Asia, so that those regions became a part of the Omani empire. They built many important castles and falajs which remain till now, representing the glory of their period in Oman.

Under the Al-Yarobah dynasty (1624-1741), and the first century of the Albu-Sa'id (1741-) dynasty, the Omani navy challenged the Portuguese, Dutch, British, and French, while extending its authority to the coast of Iran, the Gulf and East Africa. But then Oman lost its power. Internal problems and external interference led to division among the Omanis. The problem remained until the current Sultan came to power. He learned from history to avoid the mistakes that had been made by the previous leaders.

Oman has seen the “interaction of economic and political development”, as seen in chapter five. It is important to recognise the link between the domestic and external environments. Looking inwards, the state has seen rapid expansion as a result of oil revenue. This has enabled the country to modernize its hospitals, build roads, and generally develop the infrastructure. The policy makers in Oman are eager to enhance the level of education. That is why they listen to the advice given by the people. There are particular programmes on Omani television and radio in which specialists discuss freely issues related to the social infrastructure and provide suggestions for further reforms. Also, there are articles published from time to time in newspapers and magazines that criticize the ministries. Furthermore, several writers have strongly attacked the government. These pressures prompted the development of further facilities in the country. The Omani government wishes the media to support the efforts

that it has made to achieve development and to spread awareness among the citizens in different sectors. Any new idea that helps Oman in its struggle to emerge from a backward era is welcomed.

For such a small country, demographically speaking, there is considerable oil wealth to enjoy. Further substantial discoveries of oil and minerals have recently been made in Oman, and this wealth is a key factor in helping to achieve social and economic development and progress. At the same time, Oman, along with other oil-producing nations in the Gulf, is aware of its role as a key element in the world economy and thus oil is highly influential in determining both internal and foreign policies. The Omani government is sensibly seeking to diversify sources of income, and encourages and supports non-oil industries.

“Steps toward Democracy in Oman”, was the title of chapter six. Democratisation in Oman is part of the same process that has begun in Jordan, Yemen and Kuwait, but it has its own character. Some liberalisation has also taken place in Qatar in recent years. Why is Oman’s experience of democratisation different from that in Jordan Yemen and Kuwait? In the first place, recent democratisation in Jordan and Yemen was begun in a period of economic crisis. Also, democratisation in Jordan was one way that King Hussein maintained the loyalty of his subjects, after he broke his connections to the occupied territories. In Kuwait women failed to reach Parliament. However, in Oman, there have not been economic or political crises behind reform. Rather, the major changes that have modernised Oman in such a short time have led to a need for public

discussion on what development is taking place. In other states in the South, rapid modernisation has led to great instability, but not in Oman. In the early period of modernisation, there was no growing division between the very rich and very poor. The benefits of modernisation were spread across society. In recent years, a gap has begun to appear between the rich and poor. This feature might create tensions in the future. But, as Oman develops toward democratic institutions, and maintains a level of investment, such problems can be openly discussed with the aim of finding solutions.

The process of democratisation in Oman indicates that it is possible for political reforms to take place at the same time as economic and social change, and for the reforms to improve the access that people have to decision makers. In their turn, members of the government are conscious of the fact that they may have to appear on television to explain a policy in front of an audience, and have their decisions reported on and debated in the Consultative Council and the State Council. A wider representation of society, particularly women, is taking place in formal and informal democratic institutions, so that one can say that democracy is growing all the time, and that this is a process that will not suddenly be stopped. Oman, indeed, offers an example of how the traditional monarchies might consider opening up their political systems to democratisation. In Oman, the Ibadhi traditions of elected representation may have made the process easier, but in Islam generally, the concept of consultation or Shura is undeniably a democratic feature of political debate. In the end, each state must try to find the system that suits it best. In Oman, a process has begun that, with its special Omani features, could develop into a democracy as mature and representative as any found in Western Europe or North America.

There are similarities in the Constitutional development of Oman. Oman has a long tradition of choosing its leaders. In Britain, Charles I stood in the way of constitutional development, but Sultan Qaboos has been facilitating the process by the introduction of proto-democratic institutions in Oman. In England it took over 500 years to move from personal rule to democracy. In the case of Oman, particularly given the pace of political changes that have been taking place, it might take a shorter time to establish democracy. One major cultural factor that has promoted rather than hindered the 'democratic process' in Oman is its Ibadhi tradition of Islam which prescribed that the religious leader (Imam) should be elected. This is perhaps akin to the role of Protestantism in the spread of democracy in Britain.

During the 70s, 80s and the beginning of the 90s, the Law in Oman was not complete. From 1996 onwards this field has seen dramatic development. Theoretically, we can say that the foundation of Law in Oman has been set, but practically it needs time to be adopted precisely. In order to ensure solid democracy in Oman, there should be an effective Law to prevent elites using democracy as a tool of control. Islamic law does not hinder democracy. Indeed, Islam might play an essential role in strengthening it. For example, Islam provides rules which protect the rights of people, society and state. It also organises the relations between people and suggests solutions for those who face disputes. The principles of religion can thus be used as the basis for social and legal relationships in a democratic setting, as the principles of Christianity do in Western countries. A good sign of the development of law in Oman is that the loyalty of people has shifted from tribes to the state. This switch would not have happened if there were

no effective law to protect the rights of individuals. Loyalty now involves all people whatever their tribe or ethnic group.

In terms of Omani foreign policy – chapter seven-, from 1970 to 1975, Oman worked to end its isolation from the Arab states and the other states in the world. Oman, during that time, succeeded in obtaining foreign recognition and internal support to end the civil war in the South, achieved internal consolidation and attracted skilled labour to Oman to build up the economic infrastructure. Then, from 1975 until now, Oman moved to play a regional and international role. Its policy is one of enhancing global and regional peace and prosperity and as such it, has developed good relations with other countries, giving special attention to the GCC states. For example, it supports the Middle East peace process; the Omani position has not changed from the Camp David pact and the Oslo agreement to the present time. Most Arab states, with the exception of Oman and two other Arab countries have boycotted Egypt then changed their policy towards Egypt. Secondly, while most Arab states ended their relations with Iran during the Iran-Iraq war, only Oman kept good relations with Iran; now, most Arab states have resumed their relations with that country. Thirdly, during the Iraqi aggression against Kuwait, most Arab states ended their relations with Iraq; however, Oman did not do so, because it believes in contacts, not isolation. This shows that Oman has mature political principles and there is no place for emotion, in its policies. Omani foreign policy has helped the growth of popular trust in the democratic political system.

Oman has managed to maintain its independent position, and to play the role of a balancer in the Middle Eastern conflicts without taking any openly definite side with the super powers. Oman does not interfere in the affairs of others and it takes strong steps to avoid external interference from others, for example, Saudi attempts to occupy Abu-Raime and the attempts by the Islamic Revolution in Iran to switch the loyalty of a number of Omani Shias. During that time, a number of Arab states tried to destabilise Oman. Therefore, Oman took strong measures to protect itself. Nevertheless, in terms of security, Oman did not interfere in the affairs of others, in contrast to what has been done by other countries in the Arab world, such as Iraq, Syria and Egypt during Nasser's regime. It concentrates on local purposes to achieve internal security. Its political maturity led Oman to receive remarkable respect in terms of external legitimacy and this further increased the regime's internal legitimacy, which became stronger as a result.

Oman is part of the Gulf Cooperation Council, but since the establishment of this Council, these states have failed promote a democratic council similar to the one in the European Union, even though the situation in the Gulf is more favorable for such a move than in Europe. Unlike Europe these countries share the same language, history, culture, and style of leadership. But the fact is that there is no dynamic cooperation in the Gulf, similar to that in Europe. In Europe, for example, there is an elected Parliament, a single currency, united political decision making and a strong economy. In contrast, every single state in the Gulf has its own policy and its own alliances.

Oman has been able to end the border disputes with its neighbours through a pragmatic policy, is a member in most of regional and international organizations, has enhanced its relations with most countries in the world, signed agreements with allies and plays an important role in the region. All these efforts gave Oman further stability and contribute to the development and prosperity of the nation and the state. In such circumstances, democracy might find better conditions to flourish.

The tribal system and the family system create a situation where people know the capability of individuals and vote for them accordingly. The danger is that tribal alliances may divide the council into sectional warring factions.

Recommendations:

The changes that have taken place so far will lead to further changes. People now have access to communications and a number of them have lived in different Western countries. In order to achieve stability, the government should study carefully their demands and respond positively, otherwise the ruling party will face a new crisis. Omani citizens belong to a historical culture which emphasises elections and the accountability of the leaders.

The Omani constitution, which was issued in 1996, provides for a prime minister, but from that time, this position has remained vacant. The importance of the prime minister comes from the fact that urgent matters occur in government which need a quick solution. The prime minister would be accountable to the Sultan and the nation. Therefore, the work of the government would be more efficient. Also, it is vital that the

government be responsible to parliament rather than merely to the Sultan. This would give the royal family further legitimacy inside and outside Oman, as criticism will be focused on the government instead of the monarchy.

Further freedom of speech and development of the media will help to expose the weaknesses of the government, will avoid corruption and will open the door for the political competition. The state, at present, is strong, so the authorities should listen even to severe criticism. Oil will not be the main resource for ever. In the future, the government will not be able to continue to afford to provide free services in areas such as education, health and other facilities. In order to keep the support of the nation, the government should allow further democratic evolution. This will keep the support of the nation for the royal family.

Hence, we have seen the pattern of issues that might engulf the region in the near future. The peace and prosperity of the Middle East depend not only on the successful resolution of current conflicts, but also on the ability of the leaders to anticipate and pre-empt conflicts that are looming large on the horizon. It is time to concentrate and resolve these issues peacefully to ensure a better future for the region. I believe that further democratisation in Oman and the Middle East in general will help by creating a more open space for discussion. Oman should participate in most conferences and meetings related to the peace process in the Middle East.

As a result of the lack of democracy in the Middle East, these countries pay large sums of money for security purposes. If these countries enhanced their experience of

democracy, they would be able to end their problems with the neighbouring states through dialogue instead of war. Then, the money currently expended on weapons could be used for development. The Middle East can learn from the experience of Iraq, which brought instability for the region and for the Iraqi people.

Tribes could form the basis for the elections in the Middle East. Through tribes, people can establish various parties. Citizens would offer their votes for those who understand their demands and needs. Tribes might protect the rights of individuals. Women in some countries such as Oman need further protection for their rights. For example, to begin with, they should be guaranteed a certain number of seats in the Parliament. The reason for this suggestion is that society in the Middle East is controlled by men and, even in elections, women mostly do not vote for women, because they are controlled by men. It should be remembered that democracy is not only a matter of election. Human rights should be respected and equal chances for all people should be guaranteed.

The American example of democracy is not the sole model to be imposed on others. American experience in technology, economy, education, industry, culture and tradition cannot be found in other parts of the world. Americans have their understanding and citizens of other states have theirs. After its triumphs in Afghanistan and Iraq, America seems set on changing the Middle East; its goal is to create a new form of ruling system in the area. I doubt that America will succeed in achieving this aim. It should not interfere in the sovereignty of others by forcing them to switch to

American-style democracy. Such action is likely both to sow the seeds for fundamentalist to attacks on America and create instability through the Muslim World.

The Indian experience and Indian experiment of democracy suggest that Islam is not incompatible with democracy. Rather, cultural and historical factors play a very important role. India's experience as a secular state is unique in its own way. Western secularism functions within communities that are more or less religiously uniform, whereas, in India, the size of minority communities is considerable, making it all the more complex for a secular framework with people from other religious communities. Pluralism in India is the ground on which a democratic state is structured.

Rapid democratisation in a country such as Oman might bring instability. Oman is composed of various tribes, different branches of Islam, haves and have-not, elites and those who used to be slaves, and populations of North and South. The eruption of differences between all these branches might bring instability. Democracy is a process which needs time until people learn how to deal with it.

The Parliament represents the first step towards democracy, but not democracy itself. To enhance the role of the Parliament in Oman, it might be good idea for the Consultative Council to elect the chairs of the council. Also, it could issue weekly publications and use the Internet for communications with the Omani people. An information strategy like those in the UAE and Kuwait is also desirable as a source of independent opinion. Oman might benefit from the experience of mature democracies

such as those in Europe. The time allocated for questions and meetings with ministers could be increased.

Candidates for the positions of ministers and under secretaries in the government might be referred Oman Council, which includes the State Council and Ash-Shura Council, for their comments. Their advice is not compulsory but it would help to review the curriculum vitae of the candidate. The aim of this step is to expand the level of consultation and to appoint the best candidate To ensure the independence of both councils, the chiefs of these Councils should be elected by the members, not imposed by the government. Attendance at meetings for questioning government representatives at the Ash-Shura Council should be limited to the relevant committee, rather than including all members of the Council. Questioners should sit on the same physical level as the members.

Oman could establish a new Council made up of well-educated and distinguished Omanis. The aim of this Council would be to study ways of enhancing democratic institutions in Oman, make suggestions for reforms based on earlier experience and evaluate progress. They should be independent, not receiving subsidies from the public or private sector. Their suggestions could be forwarded to the minister of Interior, then to the Sultan.

Oman should further develop its economy. It must continue to diversify its income in areas such as the industrial sector and build commercial links with the rest of the

world. Membership of international organizations is highly important for the maintenance of standards in all aspects, from the economy to health and the environment. It may be hoped that the recent rise to a position of stability and influence in international affairs may continue under the current regime, which has inspired a sense of peace, progress and confidence among its people. Education will continue to be the top priority, as part of the wider issue of human resources development. Oman cannot indefinitely remain dependent on expatriate labour. Furthermore, as the skill level of the Omani workforce rises, so its social and political culture will develop and benefit compared to other countries in the region. That said, looking at the development figures, for example, as given by the UNDP in the annual World Development Report, Oman's progress compares favourably.

Oman should decrease expenditure on weapons. Development, evolution and modernisation are more important for citizens than weapons. Security can be achieved through alliances with strong powers. Past experience shows that the Arab countries failed to protect themselves from neighbouring threats if they did not link with international powers. The help received from alliances would protect the area, so that the money which might otherwise be used for security could be transferred to other uses for the prosperity of the nation.

Oman should work hard to achieve real success in the vision of 2020. This means Oman will achieve balance between revenues and expenditure, decrease inflation, improve the economy, diversify its income, enhance privatisation, further develop education and encourage internal and external development.

Oman should depend on the local workers. Currently, foreigners represent around 25% of the total population. At the same time, the number of unemployed is increasing. If the government works hard with new programme, which aims to place Omanis in positions currently filled by expatriates, this will enhance the stability of Oman.

Oman is well on the way to becoming a democratic country. It has capitalised on its own traditions to develop a distinctly Omani version of democracy. Although far from perfect, the current situation in Oman provides a firm foundation to the further developments set out above. The writer hopes that he has explained how the solidity of the foundations that have already been laid may offer lessons in how democracy may develop strong roots in a superficially hostile environment.

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APPENDIX

Adopted on: 6 Nov 1996

Adopted by: Royal Decree No. 101/96, issued on 6 Nov 1996 by Qaboos Ibn Said

[Preamble]

On the Issue of the Basic Law of the State We, Qaboos ibn Said, Sultan of Oman, In confirmation of the principles which have guided State policy in various fields during the past period, and in asserting our determination to continue efforts to create a better future characterised by further achievements which will bring benefits to the Country and its Citizens. And in our determination to strengthen Oman's international position and its role in establishing the foundations of peace, security, justice and co-operation between different States and Peoples.

And in accordance with the exigencies of the public interest, have decreed the following:

The issue of the Basic Law of the State in accordance with the attached form of words. This Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and shall come into force with effect from its date of issue.

Part One The State and the System of Government

Article 1 [Sovereignty]

The Sultanate of Oman is an independent, Arab, Islamic, fully sovereign state with Muscat as its capital.

Article 2 [Religion]

The religion of the State is Islam and the Islamic Shariah is the basis of legislation.

Article 3 [Language]

Arabic is the official language of the State.

Article 4 [Symbols]

The law shall determine the State's Flag, its Emblem, its decorations and medals and its National Anthem.

Article 5 [Form of Government]

The system of government is an hereditary Sultanate in which succession passes to a male descendant of *Sayyid Turki ibn Said ibn Sultan*. It is a condition that the male who is chosen to rule should be an adult Muslim of sound mind and a legitimate son of Omani Muslim parents.

Article 6 [Succession]

- (1) Within three days of the position of Sultan becoming vacant, the Ruling Family Council shall determine upon who will succeed to the Throne.
- (2) If the Ruling Family Council does not agree upon a successor, the Defence Council shall confirm the appointment of the person designated by the Sultan in his letter to the Family Council.

Article 7 [Oath of the Sultan]

Before exercising his powers the Sultan shall swear the following oath at a joint session of the Oman and Defence Councils:

"I swear by Almighty God to respect the Basic Law of the State and the Laws, to fully protect the interests and freedoms of the citizens, and to preserve the independence of the country and its territorial integrity."

Article 8 [Continuous Government]

The Government shall continue to conduct its business as usual until the Sultan is chosen and begins to exercise his powers.

Article 9 [Substantive State Principles]

Rule in the Sultanate shall be based on justice, Shura Consultation, and equality. Citizens shall have the right to take part in public affairs - in accordance with this Basic Law and the conditions and circumstances defined in the Law.

Part Two Principles Guiding State Policy

Article 10 [Political Principles]

The political principles are:

- Preserving the State's independence and sovereignty, protecting its security and stability, and defending it against all forms of aggression.
- Reinforcing co-operation and reaffirming ties of friendship with all States and peoples on a basis of mutual respect, common interest, non-interference in internal affairs, compliance with international and regional charters and treaties, and the generally recognised principles of international law, in a manner conducive to the promotion of peace and security between States and Peoples.
- Laying suitable foundations for the establishment of the pillars of genuine Shura Consultation, based on the national heritage, its values and its Islamic Shariah, and on pride in its history, while

incorporating such contemporary manifestations as are appropriate.

- Establishing a sound administrative system that guarantees justice, tranquillity and equality for citizens, ensures respect for public order and safeguards the higher interests of the country.

Article 11 [Economic Principles]

(1) The economic principles are:

- The basis of the national economy is justice and the principles of a free economy. Its chief pillar is constructive, fruitful co-operation between public and private activity. Its aim is to achieve economic and social development that will lead to increased production and a higher standard of living for citizens, in accordance with the State's general plan and within the limits of the Law.
 - Freedom of economic activity is guaranteed within the limits of the Law and the public interest, in a manner that will ensure the well-being of the national economy.
 - The State encourages saving and oversees the regulation of credit.
 - All natural resources are the property of the State, which safeguards them and ensures that they are properly utilised while taking into account the requirements of State security and the interests of the national economy. No concession may be granted, nor may any of the country's public resources be exploited, except in accordance with the Law and for a limited period of time, and in such a manner as to preserve national interests.
 - Public property is inviolable. The State shall protect it, and citizens and all other persons shall preserve it.
 - Private property is protected. No-one shall be prevented from disposing of his property within the limits of the Law. Nor shall anyone's property be expropriated, except for the public benefit in those cases defined by the Law and in the manner stipulated by the Law, and on condition that the person whose property is expropriated receives just compensation for it.
 - Inheritance is a right governed by the Shariah of Islam.
 - Confiscation of property is prohibited and the penalty of specific confiscation shall only be imposed by judicial order in circumstances defined by the Law.
 - The basis of taxes and public dues shall be justice and the development of the national economy.
 - The institution, adjustment and cancellation of public taxes shall be by virtue of the Law. No one may be exempted from payment of all or part of such taxes except in circumstances defined in the Law.
- (2) No tax, fee or other entitlement of any kind may be applied retrospectively.

Article 12 [Social Principles]

The social principles are:

- Justice, equality and equality of opportunity between Omanis are the pillars of society, guaranteed by the State.

- Co-operation, compassion, strong ties between citizens, and the reinforcement of national unity are a duty. The State shall prevent anything that could lead to division, discord, or the disruption of national unity.
- The family is the basis of society, and the Law regulates the means of protecting it, safeguarding its legal structure, reinforcing its ties and values, providing care for its members, and creating suitable conditions for the development of their aptitudes and capabilities.
- The State guarantees assistance for the citizen and his family in cases of emergency, sickness, incapacity and old age in accordance with the social security system. It also encourages society to share the burdens of dealing with the effects of public disasters and calamities.
- The State cares for public health and for the prevention and treatment of diseases and epidemics. It endeavours to provide health care for every citizen and to encourage the establishment of private hospitals, clinics and other medical institutions under State supervision and in accordance with the rules laid down by Law. It also works to conserve and protect the environment and prevent pollution.
- The State enacts laws to protect the employee and the employer, and regulates relations between them. Every citizen has the right to engage in the work of his choice within the limits of the Law. It is not permitted to impose any compulsory work on anyone except in accordance with the Law and for the performance of public service, and for a fair wage.
- Public employment is a national service entrusted to those who carry it out. The State employees while performing their work shall seek to serve the public interest and society. Citizens are considered equal in taking up public employment according to the provisions of the Law.

Article 13 [Cultural Principles]

The cultural principles are:

- Education is a fundamental element for the progress of society which the State fosters and endeavours to make available to all.
- Education aims to raise and develop general cultural standards, promote scientific thought, kindle the spirit of enquiry, meet the needs of the economic and social plans, and create a generation strong in body and moral fibre, proud of its nation, country and heritage, and committed to safeguarding their achievements.
- The State provides public education, combats illiteracy and encourages the establishment of private schools and institutes under State supervision and in accordance with the provisions of the Law.
- The State fosters and conserves the national heritage, and encourages and promotes the sciences, literature, and scientific research.

Article 14 [Security Principles]

The security principles are:

- The State's goal is peace, and safeguarding the country's security is a duty entrusted to every citizen.
- The Defence Council studies matters concerning the maintenance of the Sultanate's security and its

defence.

- It is the State alone that establishes the Armed Forces, public security organisations and any other forces. They are all the property of the nation and their task is to protect the State, safeguard the safety of its territories and ensure security and tranquillity for its citizens. No institution or group may set up military or paramilitary organisations. The Law regulates military services, general or partial mobilisation and the rights, duties and disciplinary rules of the Armed Forces, the public security organisations and any other forces the State decides to establish.

Part Three Public Rights and Duties

Article 15 [Citizenship]

Nationality is regulated by the Law. It may not be forfeited or withdrawn except within the limits of the Law.

Article 16 [Deportation, Right of Entry]

It is not permitted to deport or exile citizens, or prevent them from returning to the Sultanate.

Article 17 [Citizen Equality, No Discrimination]

All citizens are equal before the Law, and they are equal in public rights and duties. There shall be no discrimination between them on the grounds of gender, origin, colour, language, religion, sect, domicile or social status.

Article 18 [Personal Freedom]

Personal freedom is guaranteed in accordance with the Law. No person may be arrested, searched, detained or imprisoned, or have his residence or movement curtailed, except in accordance with the provisions of the Law.

Article 19 [Imprisonment]

Detention or imprisonment is not permitted, except in the places designated for that purpose in the prison laws, which provide for health care and social welfare.

Article 20 [Personal Integrity]

No person shall be subjected to physical or psychological torture, enticement or humiliating treatment, and the Law lays down the punishment for anyone who is guilty of such actions. No statement shall be valid if it is established that it has been obtained as a result of torture, enticement or humiliating treatment, or threats of such measures.

Article 21 [Criminal Punishments]

There shall be no crime and no punishment except in accordance with the criteria of a Law, and there shall be no punishment except for actions cognisable in Law. Punishment is personal not transferable.

Article 22 [Presumption of Innocence, Due Process, Personal Integrity]

An accused person is innocent until proven guilty in a legal trial which ensures him the essential guarantee to exercise his right of defence according to the Law. It is prohibited to harm the accused either bodily or mentally.

Article 23 [Right to Counsel]

The accused has the right to appoint a person who has the ability to defend him during the trial. The Law defines the circumstances which require the presence of a lawyer on behalf of the accused and guarantees those without the financial capacity, the means to resort to justice and the defence of their rights.

Article 24 [Arrest]

Anyone who is arrested shall be notified of the causes of his arrest immediately and he shall have the right to contact whoever he sees fit, to inform them of what has taken place or seek their assistance, in the manner regulated by the Law. He must be informed promptly of the charges against him, and he and his representative shall have the right to appeal before the judicial authorities against the measure which has restricted his personal freedom. The Law regulates his right of appeal in a manner which ensures that a judgement will be issued on it within a specified period, failing which he must be released.

Article 25 [Right to Litigation]

The right to litigation is sacrosanct and guaranteed to all people. The Law defines the procedures and circumstances required for exercising this right and the State guarantees, as far as possible, that the judicial authorities will reconcile the litigants and settle cases promptly.

Article 26 [Personal Integrity Against Experiments]

It is not permitted to perform any medical or scientific experiment on any person without his freely given consent.

Article 27 [Home]

Dwellings are inviolable and it is not permitted to enter them without the permission of the owner or legal occupant, except in the circumstances specified by the Law and in the manner stipulated therein.

Article 28 [Religion]

The freedom to practise religious rites in accordance with recognised customs is guaranteed provided that it does not disrupt public order or conflict with accepted standards of behaviour.

Article 29 [Expression]

Freedom of opinion and expression, whether spoken, written or in other forms, is guaranteed within the limits of the Law.

Article 30 [Communication]

Freedom of postal, telegraphic, telephonic and other forms of communication is sacrosanct and their confidentiality is guaranteed. Hence, it is not permitted to monitor or inspect them, reveal their contents, or delay or confiscate them except in circumstances defined by the Law and in accordance with the procedures laid down therein.

Article 31 [Press]

Freedom of the press, printing and publication is guaranteed in accordance with the conditions and circumstances defined by the Law. It is prohibited to print or publish material that leads to public discord, violates the security of the State or abuses a person's dignity and his rights.

Article 32 [Assembly]

Citizens have the right of assembly within the limits of the Law.

Article 33 [Association]

The freedom to form associations on a national basis for legitimate objectives and in a proper manner, in a way that does not conflict with the stipulations and aims of this Basic Law, is guaranteed under the conditions and in the circumstances defined by the Law. It is forbidden to establish associations whose activities are inimical to social order, or are secret, or of a military nature. It is not permitted to force anyone to join any association.

Article 34 [Petition, Public Affairs]

Citizens have the right to address the public authorities on personal matters or on matters related to public affairs, in the manner and on the conditions laid down by the Law.

Article 35 [Rights of Foreigners]

Every foreigner who is legally resident in the Sultanate shall have the right to protection of his person and his property in accordance with the Law. Foreigners shall have regard for society's values and respect its traditions and customs.

Article 36 [Asylum]

Extradition of political refugees is prohibited. Extradition of criminals is subject to the provisions of international laws and agreements.

Article 37 [Territorial Integrity, Military Duty]

Defence of the homeland is a sacred duty, and rendering service in the Armed Forces is an honour for citizens regulated by the Law.

Article 38 [National Unity, Duty of Citizens]

Preserving national unity and safeguarding State secrets is a duty incumbent upon every citizen.

Article 39 [Taxes]

Payment of taxes and public dues is a duty in accordance with the Law.

Article 40 [Observance of the Law]

Respect for the Basic Law of the State and the laws and ordinances issued by the public authorities, as well as observance of public order and public morals, is a duty incumbent upon all residents of the Sultanate.

Part Four The Head of State

[Section 1 The Sultan]

Article 41 [Head of State, Commander-In-Chief]

The Sultan is the Head of State and the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. His person is inviolable and must be respected and his orders must be obeyed. The Sultan is the symbol of national unity as well as its guardian and defender.

Article 42 [Functions]

The Sultan discharges the following functions:

- preserving the country's independence and territorial integrity and assuring its internal and external security, maintaining the rights and freedoms of its citizens, guaranteeing the rule of law, and guiding the general policy of the State.
- taking prompt measures to counter any threat to the safety of the State or its territorial integrity, the security and interests of its people, or the smooth running of its institutions.
- representing the State both internally and externally in all international relations.
- presiding over the Council of Ministers or appointing a person to serve in that position.
- presiding over the Specialised Councils or appointing chairmen for them.
- appointing and dismissing Deputy Prime Ministers, Ministers and those of their rank.
- appointing and dismissing Under-Secretaries, General Secretaries and those of their rank.
- appointing and dismissing senior judges.
- declaring a state of emergency, general mobilisation, or war, and making peace in accordance with the provisions of the Law.

- issuing and ratifying laws.
- signing international treaties and agreements in accordance with the provisions of the Law (or authorising a signatory to sign them) and issuing decrees ratifying them.
- appointing and dismissing political representatives to other States and international organisations according to the limits and circumstances laid down by the Law. Accepting accreditation of representatives of States and international organisations.
- waiving or commuting punishments
- conferring honours, decorations and military ranks.

Article 43 [Assisting Function of Council of Ministers]

The Sultan shall be assisted in drafting and implementing the general policy of the State by a Council of Ministers and Specialised Councils.

[Section 2] The Council of Ministers

Article 44 [Functions]

The Council of Ministers is the body entrusted with implementing general State policies. In particular it shall:

- submit recommendations to the Sultan on economic, political and social, as well as executive and administrative matters of concern to the Government, and propose draft laws and decrees.
- foster the welfare of citizens and ensure the provision of health and other essential services in order to improve the quality of their life socially and culturally as well as economically.
- formulate aims and general policies for economic, social, and administrative development and propose methods of implementing these policies which will make the best use of financial, economic and human resources.
- discuss developmental plans prepared by the relevant departments, submit them to the Sultan for approval, and follow up their implementation.
- discuss proposals by Ministries in their fields of executive jurisdiction and make appropriate recommendations and decisions in this regard.
- oversee the smooth running of the State's administrative apparatus, follow up its performance of its duties , and co-ordinate the activities of its different departments.
- monitor the implementation of all laws, decrees, ordinances and decisions, as well as treaties and agreements and court judgements, in a manner that will ensure that they are complied with.
- discharge any other competencies vested in it by the Sultan or conferred upon it by the provisions of the Law.

Article 45 [Chairmanship of Sessions]

The Head of the Council of Ministers shall preside over the Council's sessions and has the right to entrust the chairmanship of sessions, which he does not attend, to one of the Deputy Prime Ministers. If the Prime Minister and his Deputies are absent, the Sultan will authorise whoever he sees fit to chair the sessions.

Article 46 [Quorum, Secrecy, Majority]

Meetings of the Council shall be quorate with the attendance of a majority of its members. Its deliberations are secret and its decisions are issued with the approval of a majority of those present.

Article 47 [Standing Orders, General Secretariat]

The Council of Ministers shall draw up Standing Orders including its Rules of Procedure. The Council shall have a General Secretariat which will be provided with a sufficient number of staff to assist it in carrying out its work.

[Section 3] The Prime Minister, His Deputies and Ministers

Article 48 [Appointment]

If the Sultan appoints a Prime Minister, his competencies and powers shall be specified in the Decree appointing him.

Article 49 [Qualifications]

It is a prerequisite that whoever is appointed as Prime Minister, his Deputy, or a Minister:

- a) Shall be originally of Omani nationality in accordance with the Law;
- b) Shall be aged not less than 30 years of the Gregorian calendar.

Article 50 [Oath of Ministers]

Before assuming their powers the Prime Minister, his Deputies, and Ministers shall swear the following oath in the presence of the Sultan:

"I swear by Almighty God that I shall be faithful to my Sultan and my Country, that I shall respect the Basic Law of the State and its implementing regulations; that I shall uphold at all times the integrity of the State and the security of its territories, and shall work to promote fully its interests and the interests of its citizens, and that I shall discharge my duties truly and honestly."

Article 51 [Ministries]

Deputy Prime Ministers and Ministers shall supervise the affairs of their Ministries and Organisations, and implement the general policy of the Government therein, as well as drawing up future guidelines for their Ministries and Organisations and following up their implementation.

Article 52 [Responsibility]

Members of the Council of Ministers are politically collectively responsible before the Sultan for carrying out the general policies of the State, and each is individually responsible before the Sultan for the discharge of his duties and the exercise of his powers.

Article 53 [Economic Incompatibility]

Members of the Council of Ministers shall not combine their Ministerial position with the chairmanship or membership of the Board of any joint stock company. Nor may the Government departments of which they are in charge have dealings with any company or organisation in which they have an interest, whether direct or indirect. They should be guided in all their actions by considerations of national interest and public welfare and should not exploit their official positions in any way for their own benefit or for the benefit of those with whom they have special relations.

Article 54 [Remuneration]

The emoluments of Deputy Prime Ministers and Ministers, during their term of office and after their retirement, shall be determined in accordance with the directives of the Sultan.

Article 55 [Ministers]

The provisions of Articles 49, 50, 51, 52, 53 and 54 shall apply to all those with the rank of Minister.

[Section 4] Specialised Councils

Article 56 [Establishment]

The Specialised Councils shall be established, their powers defined and their members appointed in accordance with Royal Decrees.

[Section 5] Financial Affairs

Article 57 [Financial Laws]

The Law specifies the provisions concerning the following matters and the bodies responsible for them:

- collection of taxes, revenues and other public monies, and measures for their disbursement.
- maintenance and administration of State property, the conditions of its disposal, and the limits within which a part of this property may be assigned.
- the general State budget and the final account
- the autonomous and supplementary budgets and their final accounts
- control of State finances
- loans extended by or obtained by the State
- currency and banking , standards, weights and measures
- salaries, pensions, indemnities, subsidies and gratuities charged to the State Treasury.

Part Five The Oman Council

Article 58 [Composition]

(1) The Oman Council shall consist of:

- The Shura Council
- The Council of State

(2) The Law shall specify the powers of each of these Councils, the length of their terms, the frequency of their sessions, and their rules of procedure. It shall also specify the number of members of each Council, the conditions which they must fulfil, the method of their selection and appointment, the reasons for their dismissal, and other regulatory provisions.

Part Six The Judiciary

Article 59 [Rule of Law, Impartiality]

The sovereignty of the Law is the basis of governance in the State. Rights and freedoms are guaranteed by the dignity of the judiciary and the probity and impartiality of the judges.

Article 60 [Independence of the Courts]

Judicial power is independent and vested in the Courts of Law, of whatever type or status, which issue judgements in accordance with the Law.

Article 61 [Independence of Judges]

There is no power over the judges in their rulings except the Law. Judges can only be dismissed in cases specified by the Law. No party may interfere in a law suit or in matters of justice; such interference shall be a crime punishable by law. The Law shall specify the conditions to be fulfilled for those administering justice, the conditions and procedures for the appointment of judges, their transfer and promotion, the security offered to them, the cases in which they are not liable for dismissal, and other relevant provisions.

Article 62 [Organization, Military Courts, Martial Law]

The Law shall regulate the Law Courts of whatever type or status and shall specify their functions and competencies. The jurisdiction of Military Courts shall be restricted to military crimes committed by members of the Armed Forces and the security forces and shall only extend to others in the case of martial law and then within the limits laid down by the Law.

Article 63 [Publicity]

Court hearings are public except when the Law Court decides to hold the case in camera in the interests

of public order or public morals. In all cases pronouncement of finding and sentence shall be in open session.

Article 64 [Public Prosecution, Attorney General]

The public prosecution shall conduct legal proceedings on behalf of the community, shall oversee matters of judicial prosecution and shall be vigilant in the application of the penal code, the pursuit of the guilty and the execution of court judgements. The Law shall regulate the public prosecution and its competencies and shall specify the conditions and security applicable to those who discharge its functions. In exceptional cases, Public Security departments may be legally empowered to conduct proceedings in cases involving misdemeanours, in accordance with the conditions laid down by the Law.

Article 65 [Legal Profession]

The legal profession shall be regulated by the Law.

Article 66 [Higher Council]

The judiciary shall have a Higher Council, which shall oversee the smooth running of the Law Courts and auxiliary bodies. The Law shall specify the powers of this Council with regard to the functions of the judges and the public prosecutor.

Article 67 [Administrative Courts]

The Law shall adjudicate in administrative disputes through a Special Administrative Causes Court or Department, whose organisation and mode of procedure shall be specified in Law.

Article 68 [Jurisdiction Disputes]

The Law shall adjudicate in disputes over jurisdiction between judicial departments and in cases of conflict of judgements.

Article 69 [Ministerial Opinions]

The Law shall define the competencies of the department which expresses legal opinions to Ministries and other Government departments and formulates and revises draft laws, regulations and decisions. The Law shall also specify the mode of representation of the State and other public bodies and organisations before the Departments of Justice.

Article 70 [Judicial Review]

The Law shall stipulate the judicial department concerned with settling disputes arising from the incompatibility of laws and regulations with the Basic Law of the State and ensuring that the latter's provisions are not contravened, and shall define that department's powers and procedures.

Article 71 [Judgements]

Judgements shall be issued and executed in the name of His Majesty the Sultan. Failure or delay in executing these judgements on the part of the concerned public officials shall be a crime punishable by law. In such a case the judgement beneficiary has the right to bring a criminal action directly to the court concerned.

Part Seven General Provisions**Article 72 [Treaties]**

The application of this Basic Law shall not infringe the treaties and agreements concluded between the Sultanate of Oman and other States and international bodies and organisations.

Article 73 [Martial Law]

None of the provisions of this Basic Law shall be suspended except in the case of martial law and within the limits laid down by the Law.

Article 74 [Publication]

Laws shall be published in the Official Gazette within two weeks of the day of their issuance. Laws will come into force from their date of publication unless they stipulate another date.

Article 75 [Retroactive Law]

Provisions of laws shall only apply from the date of their coming into force; whatever happens before that date is of no consequence, unless the text specifies otherwise. Excluded from this exception are penal laws and laws concerning taxes and financial dues.

Article 76 [Ratification]

Treaties and agreements shall not have the force of law until they have been ratified. In no case may a treaty or an agreement contain secret conditions which contradict its declared conditions.

Article 77 [Old Laws]

Everything stipulated by laws, regulations, decrees, directives and decisions in force on the date of this Basic Law becoming effective shall remain in force, provided that they do not conflict with any of its provisions.

Article 78 [Required Laws]

Laws which are not yet in existence but are necessitated by this Basic Law shall be promulgated by the competent departments within two years of its coming into force.

Article 79 [Supremacy of the Constitution]

Laws and procedures which have the force of law must conform to the provisions of the Basic Law of the State.

Article 80 [Executive Bound By Law]

No body in the State may issue rules, regulations, decisions or instructions which contravene the provisions of laws and decrees in force, or international treaties and agreements which constitute part of the law of the country.

Article 81 [Amendments]

This Basic Law can only be amended in the same manner in which it was promulgated.