CHAPTER-V

INSTITUTIONALISATION AND CONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRACY
Among the Arab countries, Kuwait provides a shining example of democracy. Kuwait has experienced a remarkable political stability since its inception. The process of democracy was present right from the emergence of the state. After the independence of Kuwait in 1961, the country adopted a constitution in 1962 which provided a unique blend of hereditary rule and the parliamentary democracy. The first democratic elections were held in December 1961 for the constituent Assembly for drafting the constitution. Kuwait is regarded as one of the most developed states in the Arab world with established democratic indicators and traditions. Kuwait has a written constitution which forms the basis for the political process in the country. The National Assembly established by the Constitution of Kuwait is a democratically elected body. It has the full legislative rights and all the bills should be passed in the Assembly with the two-thirds majority. Kuwait follows the policy of separation of powers between the legislature, executive and judiciary. Judiciary is an independent body free of any interference from government or any other authority. The following chapter discusses the contribution of various institutions in consolidating the democratic process in the country which followed an incrementalist pattern in the development.

THE CONSTITUTION

The Constitution of Kuwait is a well defined and institutionalised the political system. The Constitution of Kuwait was drafted through an agreement
between the ruler and the elected representatives of the people. The drafting of the Constitution by the elected representatives of the people and the consent of the Emir is the witness to the joint contractual political theory and it created a combined responsibility and the guarantee. The Constitution was ratified by the Emir on 11 November 1962 and it came into effect on 29 January 1963, the day of the inauguration of the first National Assembly. Although the articles of the Constitution have since been suspended twice, the document nonetheless remains the basic statement of intent for the Kuwaiti political system.

The Constitution is the basis of the political system in Kuwait. The Constitution summarises the motivations, objectives and spirit on which it is based. The Constitution of Kuwait emphasizes on the values of liberty, justice, equality, equality of opportunity among all citizens to education, public jobs, social care like housing, medical or educational and the constitution guarantees the social insurance services and aid to the aged, sick and citizens with disabilities. The Constitution guarantees the freedom of speech, freedom of press, printing and publishing. The Constitution allows and guarantees the freedom to form associations on a national and peaceful basis without any coercion or violence. The Constitution provides people’s participation in all aspects of life empowering the modern parliamentary democracy.

The Constitution opens with the declaration that Kuwait is "an independent sovereign Arab State," and its people are "a part of the Arab Nation." Islam is "the religion of the state," and the sharia (Islamic law) is "a main source of legislation." The latter phrase has been the source of much debate, with Islamist opposition members pressing to have Islam made "the" source of legislation. The Constitution defines Kuwait as "a hereditary Amirate, the succession to which shall be in the descendants of the late Mubarak Al Sabah." This clause codifies what has become a practice, the semiformal alternation of power since 1915 between the lines of Mubarak's two ruling sons, Jabir and Salim. Although Emir is vested with substantial power, the Constitution also provides for political participation by the citizens. The system of government is defined in Article 6 as "democratic, under which sovereignty resides in the people, the source of all powers." Articles 79 to 122 establish the National Assembly and lay out the rules governing its formation, rights, and duties.

The individual rights of the Kuwaiti citizens are in fact well protected by the constitution that are extensive and include aspects such as personal liberty and equality before the law, freedom to hold beliefs and express opinions, and freedom of the press. The residences of citizens are inviolable, the torture and the deportation of Kuwaiti citizens are prohibited, and the accused are assumed innocent until proven guilty. The Constitution also guaranteed the freedom to form associations and trade unions. Another vital aspect of the Constitution is
the portion relating to dispensation of justice through guaranteeing the independence of the judiciary and designated the Supreme Council of the Judiciary as its highest body and guarantor of judicial independence.

The Constitution also grants its citizens a number of social rights, which form the basis for Kuwait's extensive welfare system. The state is constitutionally obligated to care for the young and to aid the old, the ill, and the disabled. It is obliged to provide public education and to attend to public health. The Constitution provides for state's involvement in the national economy to the degree that these obligations necessitated. However, Articles 16 through 19 protect private property, stating that "private property is inviolable" and reminding citizens that "inheritance is a right governed by the Islamic Sharia." Article 20 stipulates that "the national economy shall be based on social justice. It is founded on the basis of fair cooperation between public and private activities. Its aim shall be economic development, increase of productivity, and improvement of the standard of living and achievement of prosperity for citizens, all within the limits of the law." Duties of citizens include national defense, observance of public order and respect for public morals, and payment of taxes. These rights and obligations, however, apply only to Kuwaiti citizens. The remainder of the population has few political and civil rights and enjoys restricted access to the benefits of the state's welfare system.
The amendment of the Constitution is the most complicated process and some portions of the Constitution cannot be amended or revised unless the amendment concerns the title of the Emirate and it further guarantees the human rights and equality. If the Constitution has to be amended, it requires the consensus of the Emir and an absolute majority in the National Assembly and the process of the revision also requires a two-third majority in the Assembly and it should be ratified by the Emir. If the proposed amendment is turned down its not possible for the government to present it again for one year and the Constitution cannot be amended before five years after its implementation.

However, in August 1976, in reaction to the National Assembly's heightened opposition to his policies, the Emir suspended four articles of the Constitution concerned with the political and civil rights (freedom of the press and dissolution of the legislature) and the assembly itself. In 1980, however, the suspended articles of the Constitution were reinstated along with the National Assembly. There have also been attempts subsequently by the government to amend the Constitution. In 1980, the government appointed a committee for the amendment of the Constitution. The committee was provided with powers to the review and suggest changes to be made in the Constitution. The committee after studying the changes provided by the government rejected

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3 Assiri, n.1, p.76
most of the points in the draft. After this, the government sought to amend the Constitution in the parliament once the new National Assembly was elected in 1981 and presented its draft amendments in the parliament. The draft amendments were nothing but the recommendations of the committee. The nineteen constitutional amendments submitted by the government, among other things, would have allowed the Emir to declare martial law for an extended period and would have increased both the size of the legislature and the length of terms of office. The government’s request to the National Assembly for amending nineteen articles of the Constitution involved both formal and procedural changes in articles (50, 65, 66, 69, 71, 73, 80, 83, 86, 91, 93, 95, 100, 101, 104, 110, 112, 117, 180). 5

There was widespread opposition to any changes or modifications to be effected on the Constitution, and the apprehension of the opposition groups was to a extent that they vigorously campaigned against the review committee and even questioned its role in amending the Constitution. This provoked the campaign by the opposition groups and though the draft amendments were passed in the initial deliberations, but the government was pressurised later to withdraw the amendments. 6 In May 1983, these proposals were formally dropped after several months of heated debate. Nonetheless, the issue of Constitutional revisions continued as a topic of discussion in both the National Assembly and the palace.

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4 Alnajjar, n.2, p.254  
5 Ibid, p.59.  
6 Ibid.
In 1986, the Constitution was again suspended for the second time, along with the National Assembly. As with the previous suspension, popular opposition to this move emerged; indeed, the pro democracy movement of 1989-90 took its name, as the ‘Constitutional Movement’, for the demand for a return to Constitutional life. This opposition became more pronounced following the Iraqi occupation, which abrogated all Constitutional rights, and following Kuwait's return to sovereignty in 1991. In early 1992, many press restrictions were lifted. After the October 1992 election, the National Assembly exercised its Constitutional right to review all the Emir’s decrees promulgated while the assembly was in dissolution.

The Constitution of Kuwait provided the basis for the political system of the country. It provided the basis for the laws existing in the country. The Constitution helped the country to eliminate the dependence on the traditional norms and values as the strong basis for the legal system in the country. The Constitution became a platform and the driving force for the people to pursue the democratic aspirations. Though there have been many ups and downs in the parliamentary experience in Kuwait, the sanctity of the Constitution was given at most priority and somehow maintained throughout.

POLITICAL GROUPS

The political parties are not recognised in Kuwait. In the pre 1992 period, the candidates used to contest as independents, though they were
loosely connected to political groups. In the post liberation period, though the political parties were not yet recognised, there were certain organised groups that have clear political platform. There were the groups like democrats, reformists, Islamists etc.

**Kuwait Democratic Forum (KDF):** Kuwait Democratic Forum was formed in March 1991, immediately after the liberation of Kuwait. Many of the members of Kuwait Democratic Forum were active members of Graduates Society and the Istiqlal Club, a liberal pan-Arab club that had emerged in 1960s and 1970s. The Istiqlal club was banned in 1986.\(^7\) The Kuwait Democratic Forum comprised of well experienced leaders such as Ahmad al-Khatib, Abdullah al-Nibari and Jassim al-Qattami. The groups support to the secularist ideological positions, their long standing support to the Palestine cause and the remarks of the candidates regarding the dialogue with Saddam Hussein during the Operation Desert Storm eroded the support of the voters for this group.\(^8\) These in a way indicate that a radical outlook at times may not be received well among the Kuwaitis. Despite the presence of the famous leaders like Ahmad al-Khatib, the party was unable to devise new policies and in the 1992 elections it won only two seats both of which went to the veteran leaders, Ahmad al-Khatib and Abdallah al-Nibari.

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\(^7\) Shafeeq Ghabra, “Kuwait: Elections and Issues of Democratisation in a Middle Eastern state”, *Digest of Middle East Studies*, vol.2, no.1, winter 1993. p.8

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The Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM): The Islamic Constitutional Movement was formed in 1991, a Sunni Islamist group in which the Muslim Brotherhood was prominent along with the members of the al-Islah al- Ijtama‘i, an Islamic association. The Islamic Constitutional Movement is a highly organised group, maintains good relations with the government and sought to reform the system from within. Its leaders were quite popular and many held high positions in the bureaucracy and the public sector. But the group lost some of its popularity during Iraq’s occupation because of the support given to Saddam Hussein during the Gulf crisis by the Muslim brotherhood and the departure of many leaders from Kuwait during the Iraq’s occupation. But this group performed well during the elections of 1992 by winning three out of five seats it contested.

The Islamic Popular Alliance (IPA): The Islamic Popular Alliance is a Sunni Islamist group popularly known as al- salafin. It is one of the older organisation which contested the 1981 and 1985 elections. The Islamic Popular Alliance is a part of the wahabi movement and are generally more conservative than the Islamic Constitutional Movement in its position on social issues. This group’s emphasises on the implementation of sharia and amending the Article 2 of the constitution to make the sharia as the sole source of all legislation. The group became very popular during the Iraq’s occupation. Many of the leaders chose to stay in the country and played an important role in the resistance movement.

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Some of its leaders suffered detention at the hands of the Iraqi occupiers.\textsuperscript{10} They had been active in the distribution of food and other vital supplies to the people.

\textbf{The Islamic National Alliance (INA):} The Islamic National Alliance is an Islamist group and many of its members are from al-Jamiyyah al-Thaqafiyyah, an organisation incorporating several factions among the Shias. This political group is quiet progressive on social issues and many of its members advocated for the expansion of the political rights to women. The group also opposed using sharia law to govern the country.\textsuperscript{11} During the time of occupation, the Shias went out of their way to prove their loyalty to the country as they were constantly accused of disloyalty to the country in the preoccupation period.

\textbf{The Constitutional Bloc (CB):} The Constitutional Bloc comprised of Kuwait's old merchant's families and it was backed by the Kuwaiti chamber of commerce. This group is the close ally of the government on many issues and their leaders controlled the boards of major corporations in banking, insurance and industry.\textsuperscript{12} This group was chaired by the head of the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce, Abdul Aziz al-saqr. The Constitutional Bloc only one seat and won the election. Jasim al-saqr, a veteran politician won the seat on behalf of

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{10} Crystal and Shayaji, n.8, p.117.
\textsuperscript{12} Crystal and Shayaji, n.8, p.118.
\end{footnotesize}
the Constitutional Bloc and he became the chairman of the foreign affairs committee.

The Parliamentarians Group: This group comprises of the members of the 1985 Assembly who came together following the dissolution of the Assembly in 1986. This group was formed in 1986 and was headed by Ahmad al- sadoun, speaker of the dissolved Assembly. It was a heterogeneous group consisting of secular and religious members. They demanded the reconvening of the National Assembly and they led the pro-democratic movement prior to the Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait.

Besides, the political groups mentioned above, Bedouins play an important role in the electoral politics in Kuwait. They are not associated to any group and contest the elections independently. They are considered loyal to the government and supported the bills sponsored by the government. Their representation had invariably remained high in all the elections in Kuwait.

These were some of the political groups that were predominant in 1990s in Kuwait. The names of these groups sometimes change from elections to elections especially when a particular group is banned by the government. The members reorganise themselves under a new name. According to Mary
Ann Tetreault, "the 1992 elections revealed institutionalisation of the dominant political trends embodied as public political blocs."\textsuperscript{13}

THE JUDICIARY

Kuwait’s judicial system, though based on the Egyptian model, was an amalgam of Islamic law, English common law and the Ottoman civil code. According to the Constitution, the judiciary is an independent power in administering justice and the judges shall not be subjected to any authority. The chapter V of the Constitution deals with the judiciary, its general principles and systems, kinds of courts and the relationship between the judiciary and other branches of the government. Islamic Jurisprudence is the main source of legislation in Kuwait. The article 2 of the Constitution states, “the religion of the state is Islam and the Islamic legislature is the principle source of legislation”.\textsuperscript{14} The judiciary looks into different disputes whether criminal, civil or commercial and judiciary is a principle law enforcer to protect and to repel any unlawful encroachment on the public rights. The different courts were established to investigate commercial, administrative, penal and personal cases. Personal and the family matters such as divorce and inheritance are governed by separate family courts operating under religious laws.

The structure of legal system is comprised of the Court of Cassation, Court of Appeal, Court of First Instances and the Court of partial first instances.

\textsuperscript{13} Tetreault, n.11, p.115
\textsuperscript{14} Assiri, n.1, p.110
or Small claims tribunal. The constitution also stipulated the establishment of a Constitutional Court.

The Court of Cassation is the supreme court of the country and is entrusted with the task of reviewing and examining court rulings of lower jurisdiction in civil, commercial, penal, personal, administrative and labour matters. The basic function of the court is to work towards the unification of interpretation and application of the law.

The Court of Appeal has appellate jurisdiction to settle appeals made to judgements rendered by Courts of First instance. There are many chambers of appeal organised and classified by the board of advisers granting each chamber the authority to examine a certain type of disputes such as civil, commercial, administrative, criminal, labour or family cases. It settles the disputes related to he rent, the Court of Appeal reviews only the legal merits acting as the court of Cassation. The Court of First Instances hears and determines all disputes examined for the first time covering civil, commercial, administrative, labour and rent disputes.

The Court of partial first instances is considered to be the first degree courts and is similar to the Court of First instances. This court examines all the disputes within the limits stated in the law including the claims not exceeding

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15 Ibid, p.115
16 Ibid, p.117
KD5000.\textsuperscript{17} This court is established in every district in Kuwait by the order of the Ministry of Justice.

The Constitutional Court is established according to the chapter V of the Constitution. It explains the constitutional articles upon a request by the National Assembly or government and decides upon the disputes relating to the constitutionality of laws, law decrees and regulations and in the contest concerning the election of the members of the parliament and the validity of their membership.\textsuperscript{18} If the Constitutional Court decides that a law or a law decree or legislation is unconstitutional it shall be considered null and void.

The Constitution of Kuwait preserves the independence of judiciary free of any interference from government or any other authority. No other agencies have any rule over the judiciary and they have no right to dictate the court anything related to the cases reviewed by the court. The judicial system preserves the rights of the individual and offers legal avenues which guarantees to defend the rights of the citizens. Thus the independent judiciary play a very important role in preserving the rights of the citizens and consolidating the democracy in Kuwait.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, pp.117-118
\textsuperscript{18} The Constitutional System in the State of Kuwait (State of Kuwait: National Assembly), p.13
DIWANIYYAS

The *diwaniyas* are the institutionalised weekly gatherings of family and friends. This is the traditional meeting area adjacent to a Kuwaiti house. There are thousands of *diwaniyas* that are considered as social institutions, but, however their political role far exceeds the social functions for which the institution is formed.\(^{19}\) After the independence of Kuwait, the *diwaniyas* played an important role of a melting pot during the elections and all the important political meetings and discussions are held that significantly influenced the public opinion on various issues.

The *diwaniyas* as an institution of socialisation maintains and consolidates the identities of the extended family, social class and Kuwait society.\(^{20}\) It is the place for an individual to express his grievances if any and establish personal contacts with the officials concerned to solve the grievances. The election campaigns of the candidates are usually launched from the *diwaniyas* and it has been said that no candidate in the electoral fray could imagine a victory in the election without meeting the major *diwaniyas* and seeking their support. These are called the campaign *diwaniyas* and are the protected spaces for ideas and the public expressions. A large number of people usually attend these *diwaniyas*. In the *diwaniyas*, usually after the formal speech the candidates were posed with from the audience, which were

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\(^{19}\) Alnajjar, n.2, p.257  
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answered by them in return.\textsuperscript{21} The \textit{diwaniyas} also enjoy a predominant status on account of its freedom to discuss and debate any issue, however contentious the issue might be, and are usually exempted from any kind of governmental interference into its space as they are considered to be the extension of the household. Therefore, the immunity ascribed to this exclusive partially public space in diwaniyas was often utilised to take on the government when ever it perceived that Kuwait's open society or its public institutions are under threat.

For instance, when the National Assembly was dissolved by the Emir in 1986, the \textit{diwaniyas} played a very significant role in shaping the pro democratic movement launched by the opposition for the immediate restoration of democracy in Kuwait. The opposition in fact spearheaded the pro democracy movement from the \textit{diwaniyas}. The \textit{diwaniyas} social context has made it free from any sort governmental interference since it is considered to be the part of the home that has every right to ponder over aspects it deemed necessary, which is protected by the law.\textsuperscript{22} Following the dissolution of the Assembly in 1986, the opposition members continued to meet regularly with the speaker of the dissolved Assembly, Ahmad al- Sadoun's house to discuss the future course of action. In July 1989, this group of parliamentarians began to broaden their base by recruiting thirteen non parliamentarians, who were selected to represent various social groups in Kuwait including women.\textsuperscript{23} This group submitted a memorandum to Emir for the restoration of democracy and

\textsuperscript{21} Tetreault, n.11, p. 103
\textsuperscript{22} Alnajjar, n.2, p.257
\textsuperscript{23} Tetreault, n.11, p.69
reconvene the National Assembly. When their petition was rejected, this group of forty five began meeting regularly, which came to be famously known as the Monday *diwanniyas* to discuss their future agenda. These Monday *diwanniyas* became the main centres of the political activity as the political meetings or gatherings were banned along with censorship on the print media made it extremely difficult for the opposition leaders to express their views. These Monday *diwanniyas* were held on successive Monday nights to bring to the Knowledge of the people attending them of what was going on in Kuwait.\(^{24}\) The government however reacted to these *diwanniyas* rather sharply by sending the riot police who stormed the place and closed down some of the *diwanniyas*. In January 1990, when the special *diwanniya* was in progress, the Kuwait National Guards along with the riot police stormed the area and detained six Kuwaitis. The correspondents of the Reuters and *Le Monde* were also among others who were detained by the police. Following these incidents, the group of forty five suspended the special *diwanniyas* in January 1990. Though these *diwanniyas* were closed, the movement has already achieved in large measure its goal and created a political awareness among the people of Kuwait. In the subsequent elections that followed the *diwanniyas* continued to play a central role in influencing the political process in the country.

According to Ash Narain Roy, “the *diwanniyas* are the heartbeat of Kuwait democracy and democracy finds its true expressions in this traditional

\(^{24}\) Ibid, p. 70
institution which is an informal gathering of relatives or friends who share a common interest and discusses the whole gamut of issues from politics to sports to literature."\textsuperscript{25} The diwanniyas are the representative institution of the people who express their opinion freely. The diwanniyas played an important role in the democratic movements in Kuwait and also helped to organised the underground resistance to Iraq’s invasion.

**MEDIA**

Media played a very important role in the democracy movements in Kuwait. It created awareness among the people about the democratic principles in Kuwait. The media had been privately owned and has gained more freedom and independence from the government. There are state owned institutions like Ministry of Information and Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) which publishes a wide range of historical and cultural works to educate the people of Kuwait on the importance of its specifically Kuwaiti identity.\textsuperscript{26}

The Ministry of Information supervises the official media. It follows an open and flexible policy, both domestically and abroad and is based on mutual cooperation and respect for and non- interference in the affairs of other countries.\textsuperscript{27} The ministry of Information has set up Kuwaiti International Media centres in abroad. Their main aim is to promote Kuwait’s media objectives in

\textsuperscript{26} Crystal, n.20, p.70
\textsuperscript{27} http://www.moinfo.gov-kw/, 2 May 2005
the host countries and to provide media institutions and decision making authorities with information about different aspects of life in Kuwait.

Kuwait started its first radio transmission on 12 May 1951. From that time onwards, radio played an important role in informing people about the various political trends in the international arena. It played a very significant role in educating people about the democratic principles. During the occupation, radio Kuwait continued to broadcast from Saudi Arabia and it kept people in Kuwait informed about the efforts taken by the Kuwaiti regime to free the country from the Iraqi occupation. After the liberation of Kuwait, Radio Kuwait restarted its transmission from Kuwait. Today Radio Kuwait, under the auspices of Ministry of Information uses state-of-the-art broadcasting technology and covers a wide range of subjects such as Arabic music, news, discussions and current and social affairs.28

Television, though started in 1957, but the real steps towards television transmission were taken in November 1961, when Kuwait TV was transferred to the state and it became the part of the Ministry of Information. Kuwait has four state run television channels and the channels which are telecast from abroad. The state television offers a variety of programmes like drama, cartoons, cultural, scientific, religious, Arabic programmes, local series, western series news and political programmes.

28 http://www.kuwait-info.org/media/radio.htm, 2 May 2005
The Press plays a very important role in influencing the political decision making process. It plays an outstanding role in influencing the public opinion and participating in building modern Kuwait. The press is not restricted to the officially licensed newspapers; it extends to a wide range of high quality magazines published by organisations, establishment, companies, banks, syndicates, federations and corporations. The press strives to reflect the wide range of opinions in the society. The successful and popular papers are normally those that do not appear to be loyal to the government. The parliamentary proceedings are covered fully in the press. There are seven major daily newspapers in Kuwait- Al Rai Al- Aam, Al- Seyassah, Al- Qabas, Al-Watan and Al- Anba in Arabic and Arab times and Kuwait times in English. The press is independent of any governmental interference.

But, when the National Assembly was dissolved in 1976 and 1986, the press was placed under censorship. In 1976, the Press law was amended to allow the Ministry of Information to close any newspaper by an administrative order, though this Press law was repealed after the restoration of democracy. In 1986, a pre censorship law was introduced, but these restrictions were lifted by the government in 1991 and today press enjoys the absolute freedom and plays an important role in shaping the public opinion.

29 http://www.kuwait-info.org/media/printmedia.htm, 2 May 2005
30 Alnajjar, n.2, p.255
VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS

The formation of voluntary associations was permitted by the government in 1963. Several small associations and groups which were formed before the independence of Kuwait were also reactivated. These groups which were formed before the independence had been banned along with the sports club because of their outspoken criticism of the government in 1959. Anyhow after the independence when the formation of new associations was permitted government asked the associations to distinguish themselves from the previous associations which were banned and to choose the new names. Many of the old associations renamed themselves. For example, the Cultural Nationalist Club which was at the forefront of intellectual life and the nationalist movement renamed itself as Independence Club. The Guidance Society which was formed by the Muslim Brotherhood before independence renamed itself as Social Reform Society, the Teacher’s Club became the Society of Kuwaiti teachers and the merchants established Chamber of Commerce to promote their interests. These associations were influenced tremendously by the social and economic changes in the society and they became the platform to express the opinion of the people and the debates within the parliament were deliberated in these associations.

The voluntary associations were formed by the various sections of the society. The Labour unions, the associations of teachers, students unions,

32 Ibid
women's associations etc were formed during this period. Many of these associations began to play a more active role in the society and many of these groups had developed a sense of national pride and an awareness of the importance of transforming a traditional society into a modern society. Many of these associations' vision was based on an awareness of the unity of the Arabic language and the cultural symmetry of the Arab people. For example, the National Union of Kuaiti students sponsored lectures and seminars that covered a wide range of topics and discussed the political issues in the society. During the Iraqi occupation many of the associations were formed inside Kuwait as well as among the exiles. Some exiles formed the associations to publicise the plight of the people staying in Kuwait at the time of occupation. The Citizens for a Free Kuwait, a Washington based group, Free Kuwait Association, a London based group and another London based group, Free Kuwait campaign which provided an opportunity for grassroots activism and provided an expression of the strong desire of Kuwaiti exiles to participate directly in the efforts to liberate the country.

Women's associations were established to discuss the basic issues of women in the society. Women's associations were first formed in 1963-Women's Cultural and Social Society (WCSS) and Arab Women's Development Society (AWDS). Women's Cultural and Social Society was a group of wealthy women, who gather for social events and indulged in charity

33 Ibid, pp.202-203
34 Tetreault, n.11, p.84

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work and Arab Women’s Development Society comprised mostly of the middle class women and its goals were to modernise Kuwaiti society and raise the status of women primarily through promoting women’s education.\textsuperscript{35} It expanded the feminist struggle demanding not only the political rights but also restrictions on patriarchal authority within the family. But this attempt met with the fierce resistance from Kuwaiti men and the government.\textsuperscript{36}

During the 1970s there was an increase in the employment of women in the government sector due to the policy of government to increase the employment opportunities for women. The Arab Women’s Development Society argued for the voting rights for women and to abolish polygamy. The Arab Women’s Development Society attracted more attention when it called the conferences in 1974 and 1975 to examine the situation of Kuwaiti working women and these public forums allowed the middle class women to put forward their grievances.\textsuperscript{37} The Arab Women’s Development Society also attracted the merchant class women to the association which created a rift with Women’s Cultural and Social Society. The government having been outraged with the demand for the abolition of polygamy and for the political rights closed down the Arab Women’s Development Society alleging it for financial irregularities. The Women’s Cultural and Social Society continued to work on

\textsuperscript{35}Mary Ann Tetreault, “Kuwait: Sex, violence and the politics of Economic Restructuring” in Eleanor Abdella Doumato and Marsha Pripestein Posusney’s (eds) Women and Globalisation in the Arab Middle East: Gender, Economy and Society, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003), pp.223-224


\textsuperscript{37}Tetreault, n.35, p.224.
the women's reforms but did not work directly or indirectly with the group of middle class women seeking to restore full citizenship rights to women married to foreign nationals. After disbanding the Arab Women's Development Society government encouraged the formation of many religiously oriented women's groups shifting the character of women's public discourse from demands of autonomy to the advocacy of values. However in 1990s various women's organisations were formed demanding the political rights for women and they participated actively in the reconstruction of Kuwait in the post liberation period. Their efforts ultimately resulted in granting the full political rights to women on May 2005.

The cooperative societies also provided a platform for expressing the public opinion. The cooperative societies were elected and it provided an insight to the democratic procedures to the people. Though they were primarily retail networks, they began to assume a larger political importance, providing a forum for public debate on issues of general importance. Each cooperative society served a specific residential area, supplying basic commodities at subsidized rates and they also dealt with local social and community issues as concerns on garbage collection, schooling for children and serves as a platform for expressing community grievances. During the Iraqi occupation, these cooperative societies played an important role in providing the basic needs for

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38 Ibid, pp. 224-225
39 Tetreault and Mughni, n.36, p.40
40 Crystal and Shayaji, n.11, p.112.
the people and supplying the relief material and played a significant role in organising resistance movements against the Iraqi occupation.

The voluntary associations played a significant role in creating political awareness among the people. In the post independence era, these associations were influenced by the grassroots' movements of Arab nationalists. The labour unions, associations of teachers and students, the literary club and Independence club called for the Arab unity, total independence from foreign rule and supported the Palestine movement. These associations brought about a significant stage in the development of political thought in Kuwait.

WOMEN'S POLITICAL RIGHTS

Women's suffrage has been an extensively debated issue in Kuwait. After the independence of Kuwait, women's organisations established in 1963 had been demanding the political rights for women. In 1971, a conference was held on women's issues in Kuwait. Following this, a bill was submitted to the National Assembly granting full political rights to women but the bill got the support of only twelve members out of sixty members in the Assembly. Women's suffrage continued to dominate the political debates in Kuwait. Several bills were introduced in the Assembly in 1981, 1986, 1992 and 1996 for the granting of political rights to women. But all the bills were defeated in the Assembly.

41 Ghabra, n.31, p.203
During Iraq's occupation of Kuwait, women enacted a very prominent role in the distribution of the relief measures to other occupied Kuwaitis. Men were largely forced to hide to avoid arrest by Iraqi forces. The Kuwaiti women staged street protests and smuggled food items, provided vital information and necessary weapons to resistance fighters. Following the liberation of Kuwait, women in general expected that they be granted with political rights. In 1992 elections, women's political rights became the main campaign issue. The liberals and democrats supported the women's suffrage whereas the Islamists were against the granting of political rights based on the religious grounds.

In 1994, the Women's Issues Network (WIN), a coordinating committee for twenty two non-governmental organisations launched a Blue ribbon campaign in support of the women's suffrage. The campaign was aimed to raise the public awareness about the exclusion of women in Kuwait from political participation.

On 4 May 1999, Emir dissolved the Assembly and before the elections were held in July, Emir issued sixty decrees dealing with the women's suffrage, economic liberalisation and nationality. This decree provided the women the right to vote and to contest the election. But these decrees of Emir required the approval of the new parliament and if it is approved, women can register to vote and contest for the next elections. But these decrees were condemned by

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all the opposition members as an encroachment on the constitutional authority of the parliament. Even the liberals and democrats were against the decrees though they support the women’s rights and they condemned the decrees and termed it unconstitutional. Meanwhile, Islamists alleged that the move was foreign inspired to denigrate Islam and secularise Kuwaiti society and accused the government of caving in to the foreign influence.\textsuperscript{44} In November 1999, Emir’s decree on women’s suffrage came up for voting in Assembly but it was defeated by forty one to twenty one. A similar bill as introduced within a week in the Assembly by the supporters of the women’s suffrage, but even this bill was defeated narrowly, thirty two to thirty and two abstentions. On 28 October 2000, a public demonstration was held in front of the Assembly by the Women’s Issues Network demanding for the amendment of the Election law to give women the right to vote.

Kuwaiti women continued with their demand for the political rights. Their struggle for women’s suffrage ultimately resulted in a historic vote on 16 May 2005. The Kuwaiti parliament approved the bill granting women the right to vote and contest for the elections. Parliament amended Kuwait’s election law with thirty five votes in favour, twenty votes against and one abstention giving full political rights to women. This facilitates women to participate in the 2007 elections and contest for the elections. This bill increases the number of registered voters from 1,39,000 to 3,39,000. Women’s organisations in the

\textsuperscript{44} Tetreault, n.11, pp.235-236.
region welcomed the vote as historic and according to Hoda Badran, chairperson of the Cairo based Alliance for Arab women, “the amendment is of fundamental importance as it ends gender discrimination in Kuwait and bestows a basic human right. It also symbolises the sweeping changes that the region is experiencing.”45 And in June Dr. Masouma al-Mubarak, took oath as the first woman cabinet minister amid the protests from Islamists. She was appointed as the Minister of Planning and Administrative Development46

To sum up, the various institutions discussed above contributed for the development of democracy in Kuwait. The Constitution declares Kuwait as the democratic country and it forms the base for the political development in the country. The National Assembly expresses the public opinion of the people through its representatives.

The institutions like diwanniyas and voluntary associations acted as the platform for the people to express their opinion on the various issues in the society. The diwanniyas played a very significant role in the election campaign of the candidates. No candidate can ignore the diwanniya and usually they start their election campaign by visiting the diwanniyas and seeking the support for their candidature. The large number of people attends these diwanniyas and usually the diwanniyas are free from the interference of the government as they are considered as the extension of the family. The diwanniyas also played an

45 The Hindu, 18 May 2005.
46 The Hindu, 21 June 2005
important role in the pro democratic movements. The voluntary associations contributed in the development of political thought in the country and played a significant role in creating a political awareness among the people.

The denial of the political rights to women was considered as the biggest drawback for the democratic process of the country. After the prolonged struggle of women for the political rights, women were ultimately granted the political rights to vote and contest in the elections. The media, political groups, independent judiciary and cooperative societies contributed to the development of democratisation process in the country. These various institutions contributed in the consolidation of democracy in Kuwait.