CONCLUSION
Kuwait's long experience with the parliamentary democracy can be traced back to as early as 1938 when a fourteen member National Legislative Council was established to act as a check on the ruling al- Sabah family. Though it was an experience that remained in vogue for a short period it was cherished as a historical legacy and provided an envious place to the notion of consensus and formal representation in their historical memory. The political system that we see today in Kuwait began to evolve by the end of the nineteenth century on account of an informal alliance between the al- Sabah family and the merchants. The al- Sabah family controlled the political and military affairs while the merchants were engaged themselves in the economic activities such as trade and pearl fishing. The merchants accepted the political supremacy of the ruling family in return for the protection and the security that the ruling family provided and even supported the regime financially and in turn the Emir would always consult the merchants before taking any decisions on the matters important to merchants.

In 1899, the then Emir, Mubarak al- Sabah, signed a treaty with British which essentially turned Kuwait into a British protectorate. The treaty stipulated that Britain would control Kuwait's defence and foreign policies while the Emir would continue retain control over domestic matters without any interference from Ottomans. The Emir with Britain's political and financial support began to act independently making important decisions without consulting the merchants. With the emerging indifferent attitude of the Emir,
some prominent merchants in 1918 began to press for the establishment of an elected Consultative Council to check the Emir's powers and abuses by the authorities of the Emir. Their demand for the establishment of the Consultative Council though ignored by the ruling family, the merchants throughout the 1920s persisted with their demand for the Consultative Council. In the late 1930s, Kuwait witnessed a severe economic crisis due to the economic blockade and the collapse of the pearl industry which was till then a dominant economic activity in the country. On the other hand the educated elite of Kuwait became more aware of the political developments in the region and began to demand for the political reforms in the country.

The economic crisis and the political activities in the country forced the Emir to recognise the National Consultative Council which was already elected by the merchants. The Council consisted of fourteen members from prominent Kuwaiti families and was presided over by the Crown Prince, Abdullah al-Salim al-Sabah. The Council drafted a Basic Law consisting of five articles which was approved by the Emir on 2 July 1938. It was often referred to as the first Constitution of Kuwait. This law stipulated that the nation is the source of all authority and that it should be represented by an elected assembly which is authorised to legislate on all matters of concern to the country including security, foreign policy, budget and social policy. Though this Council failed to have extended life beyond just six months it served a larger purpose of creating political awareness among the people.
With the discovery of oil, there was a spectacular rise in the flow of revenues to the state. The state revenue increased from $760,000 in 1946 to $169 million in 1953. This increase in the state revenues enabled the government to introduce many social welfare programmes and create many government jobs. With these activities, the government was able to minimise the demand of political reforms from the people and with the development of oil industry, the regime convinced the merchants to adopt a reduced political profile in exchange for extending the fruits of the flow of oil revenues that go directly to the state. Though the country's economic class became politically less active to preserve their interests under the changed circumstances, a new social group, which was in a way a product of the modernisation in the educated urban intelligentsia emerged roughly around the 1950s and began to show a keen interest on the movement for the political reforms and demanded for the establishment of the parliament.

The Emir gave his consent and ratified the Constitution on 11 November 1962 without demanding any modifications. The newly adopted Constitution established a unique blend of hereditary rule and the representative government. The Constitution of Kuwait, which is considered to be the bedrock of the political system in Kuwait, was in fact necessitated in very special circumstances when Iraq attempted to lay its claim over Kuwait. In order to avoid the imminent threat that was looming large, the members of the ruling family sought to buttress and strengthen their claim through the most
acceptable mode of explicit popular support by creating the National Assembly on the basis of the constitution. Through such occurrences one gets an impression that the ruling family resorted to the most easily amenable democratic practices and applied them as an antidote to political instability, popular unrest and the designs of other Islamic ideological groups. Therefore, democratic practices and institutions were indeed the most decisive aspects to the ruling family more than ever at times of vulnerability, which once again became so glaringly evident during the Gulf crisis.

The fourth National Assembly that was constituted after the 1975 elections was in news for all wrong reasons. The opposition groups charged the government of manipulation and large-scale malpractice to influence the results to their favour. The special feature of this Assembly was that half of the members elected were fresh entrants. During this period a number of important bills pertaining to economic affairs and foreign policy were passed. However, the 1975 National Assembly was known more due to the Emir's decision to suspend its functioning on 29 August 1976 there by denying an opportunity to serve the full term of four years. Though the Emir cited the uneasy relationship between the Assembly and cabinet as a core reason that prompted him to arrive at such an extreme decision, many unsavoury incidents preceded.
The Emir claimed that the deadlock between the Assembly and Cabinet had paralysed the government machinery from its smooth functioning and accused them for being lethargic and sitting over important legislations for too long. The Emir further blamed the attitude of opposition members for stretching political activism too far in the Assembly through unnecessary interrogation and frequent no-confidence motions against the ministers.

But the real reasons, however, were quite different from the ones cited by the Emir. One reason was that the opposition (leftists & Arab nationalists) in the Assembly attempted to acquire the right to scrutinise and oversee the performance and expenditure of the ruling family. The Emir construed this as a violation of the previous understanding which restrains the Assembly from directly criticising the ruling family. Moreover, the ruling family was extremely disturbed by the civil war in Lebanon and anticipated that it can be replicated in Kuwait. The ruling family's fear was not without any basis. The Kuwaiti students often protested not only in solidarity with the Palestinians but also the regional opposition groups in Bahrain, Oman and elsewhere in the Gulf. The Kuwaiti government was worried that it may affect relations with the other states in the region. The statements levelled against the Saudi government in the Kuwaiti National Assembly made Saudi Arabia to pressurise the ruling family to restrain the dissenting elements. All these reasons made the Emir increasingly insecure who dissolved the legislature and declared the Constitution null and void.
The dissolution of the legislature was accompanied by a series of severe measures that stifled the freedom of expression and imposed restrictions on the press. Any attempt to undermine the rules imposed by the government was met with awarding punishments. The educated intellectual and professional elite who dared to speak against the government was the worst affected section during this period. The teachers' association board was replaced, the student union journal was banned and the government dissolved the boards of writers, lawyers and Journalists association and suspended some news papers editors. It can be said that the National Assembly was dissolved largely due to the Emir's insecurity when the Assembly attempted over ambitiously to bring the financial aspects of the ruling family under its purview.

The dissolution of the National Assembly in 1976 was so typical a situation peculiar to Kuwait. The whole crisis arose out of the National Assembly's eagerness to ensure transparency in the dealings of the ruling family. In this context, it is an imperative to discern in unequivocal terms what exactly constituted the dealings of the ruling family that it was so offended to set a negative precedence by banning the Assembly. The ruling family controls vast possessions of wealth by owing all available major economic resources such as the oil industry and land that makes the government to influence the livelihood of many citizens. In reality all powers would ultimately emanates from those who control these resources no matter whatever be the level of imbalance it creates with other institutions in Kuwait. Therefore, any attempt to
check or embarrass this arrangement would be considered as a transgression. This, added with the absence of political parties in reality continued to weaken the democratic political culture. However, the period that followed the 1976 dissolution of the National Assembly was indeed not very heart rendering particularly in the context of the developments in Iran where Ayatollah Khomeini demonstrated how the political articulation of a religious ideology could successfully mobilise people around for political transformation against tyranny.

The tremors caused by the Islamic revolution in Iran and the subsequent conflict between Iran and Iraq war were not only felt but also firmly influenced the domestic affairs of Kuwait. The Iranian revolution in particular posed an immense threat to Kuwait, as the Emir thought that it may possibly trigger a wave of Islamic fundamentalism in the country. On the other hand, the prolonged conflict between Iran and Iraq created a grave concern to Kuwait on account of its geographical proximity to the war zone. Internally, Kuwait was also faced with political crisis that arose out of the dissolution of the National Assembly in 1976. Both the external as well as the internal factors were so complicated in nature and essence that required a cautious handling of the affairs of Kuwait from the ruling family, however, whose foremost concern was the stability and security of the country.
The political developments in Kuwait from 1981-1990 point towards inconsistency on the part of the ruling family to take firm decisions that would have ensured political stability. Similar to the pre 1981 period, the domestic and foreign policies of Kuwait were increasingly determined and shaped by the volatile nature of politics in the region. The Iranian revolution posed a great threat to the ruling family through the revival of Islamic fundamentalism at a time when Kuwait was negotiating its own political problems. Kuwait also encountered a delicate situation in 1980 when Iraq invaded Iran and resumed a military conflict that continued up to 1988. The prolonged period of the conflict was of great concern to Kuwait on account of its geographical proximity. Kuwait suffered a lot to ensure the stability of its socio-political, economic and security structures during the crisis. Further, the economic lifeline too experienced a blow as a result of a downward trend in oil prices and the collapse of the financial market. The economic adversity coupled with the unpredictable nature of the region's politics, in a way, forced the otherwise non-political influential merchants to involve and play a greater role by demanding political reforms.

Moreover, it was a period when Kuwait felt the heat directly and hardly left any stone unturned towards ensuring its security. From Kuwait's point of view the act of assisting, though clandestinely, Iraq in its war efforts against Iran because Kuwait knew well that the defeat of Iraq at a time when the passion for political Islam had already been heightened enough to engulf the
region would eventually spell danger for Kuwait. Similarly, Kuwait was always at the lead in advocating the policy of not permitting United States to have a firm footing in the region. But politics of the region was so unpredictably volatile that Kuwait had to enlist the support of United States to counter Iran tanker warfare that severely affected its trade. Thus, Kuwait being a small state had to negotiate often to find appropriate avenues that eventually become a part to its strategies for survival. Kuwaiti’s open society and political institutions came in quite handy to ensure political stability at a time when Khomeini’s clerical networks sought to export the Iranian revolution to other Islamic states. The Kuwaiti government could tackle this delicate situation and shape public opinion against violent acts of terrorism successfully only through its political institutions.

The second blow to the National Assembly came in 1986 when it was disbanded for the second time. The political instability that was set in motion with the dissolution of Kuwait’s National Assembly following the resignation of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet by the Emir in 1986 lingered inconclusive for a long time. Thus the period from 1986 to 1990 witnessed an active movement for political reforms spear-headed by the educated professionals, administrative and the business elites. Unlike the religious fundamentalists and the left lenient groups the rudiments of Kuwaiti elite’s politics was devoid of any ideological content. However, the absence of the ideological substance hardly dissuaded the Kuwaiti elites to oppose
vociferously and mobilise public opinion against the al-Sabah family’s attempt to subvert the National Assembly and conduct the affairs of the state independently.

One interesting aspect that worth noticing in both the cases of dissolution in 1976 and 1986 was the pressing similarity of the over active modern western educated intelligentsia and professional elites attempting to engage in acts that are considered as transgression into the affairs of the ruling family. In a way, the Emir could perhaps be not considered in the usual sense as the constitutional monarch as he enjoys far greater powers and the sole authority who decides the extent and depth of an act whether it is right or a transgression committed in the name of civil and political rights. Thus, an open minded Emir could possibly interpret things more liberally and in case of the contrary all strict provisions would be invoked to ensure his will. There being no strict guidelines for the Emir to assist him in assessing acts of political institutions including the National Assembly it is in fact his over all perception, attitude or bias that would eventually decide the outcome.

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990 occurred at a time when Kuwait was at the midst of a severe political crisis. The Iraqi occupation of Kuwait happened at a time when the al-Sabah regime was actively negotiating with the Kuwaiti elites and the other political groups the ways of restoring democracy and preparing fresh plans to improve the economy. The Iraqi
occupation of Kuwait brought to the public sphere several crucial issues such as the al-Sabah family’s commitment to defend the nation, which were hitherto construed and often eschewed as these issues would place the royal family in an preposterously uncomfortable situation. The invasion had a different set of political implications to which the ruling family adjusted itself and responded to the demands of the political groups in a changed scenario. In the post occupation period the political groups, particularly the liberal political elites criticised in unequivocal terms the conduct of the affairs of the state of Kuwait by the al-Sabah family.

The demand for political reforms after Iraqi aggression was no longer confined to a few political parties but began to expand and discover more popular support. The tragedy that fell on the unsuspecting people of Kuwait through Iraq’s violent aggression transformed forever their political aspirations and induced them to become conscious of the imperative of a political space to voice their opinion in the manner in which the affairs of the state are conducted. From the global point of view, the coalition of countries that was finalised under the United Nations to rescue Kuwait in general, and the United States in particular did not like to project a view that they were up to task of rescuing a monarch in the Arab region, to which Kuwait responded quite admirably by assuring democratic reforms thereby putting to rest the apprehensions of the United States and those opposition groups in Kuwait. Thus, one can reasonably surmise that international variables too, in a given
situation, particularly in an adversarial context, influence and condition political reforms as evident from the instant case.

Kuwait is a country, which is regarded as one of the most developed among the West Asian countries, with established democratic indicators and traditions to its credit. Kuwait with its remarkable history, independent political system and stable political institutions enjoys a unique position in the Gulf region with an incredible historical heritage. It possesses the oldest permanent and written Constitution in the region. It has varied experience in public elections—twelve in all, ten for the National Assembly and one each for the Constituent Assembly and the National Assembly. On the other hand, Kuwait went through the experiment of political participation before independence, an element that eased the country’s adjustment to the new model that emerged after independence. Kuwait has a written constitution which forms the basis for the political process in the country. The constitution of Kuwait is considered to the bedrock of the Kuwaiti political system. If at all one has point out a single most aspect that some how sustained Kuwait in a limited way towards democratisation in a region that does not disposed of favourably to democracy is nothing but the 1962 constitution of Kuwait.

Another interesting point is the contribution of various institutions in consolidating the democratic process in the country which followed an incrementalist pattern, which perceptible in the table below. The simple point
that is intended here without neglecting or recognising various other factors that could have influenced these figures is that there is significant improvement in the total numbers of the voters as well as the voter turnout, which unmistakably drives a point that it was on a progressive mode at least in terms of popular participation.

Table 6.1 Voting Data, Kuwait (1963-2000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of registered voters</td>
<td>42,005</td>
<td>56,848</td>
<td>81,440</td>
<td>107,169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter turnout</td>
<td>37,689</td>
<td>48,368</td>
<td>67,724</td>
<td>89,387</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Among the institutions the diwanniyas and voluntary associations acted a catalyst as well 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 important role in the pro democratic movements after the dissolution of the National Assembly in 1986. The strength and the
respect commanded by the *diwaniyyas* only point towards their important place in the traditional set up. 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 a variety of ways and kept the issues alive towards consolidation of democracy in Kuwait.

Democracy in the Arab world has undeniably received, in the recent years, adequate attention it ought to have for critical enquiry by the scholars. The early 1990s, which were marked by a perceptible global tendency in facilitating a gradual drift towards the democratisation of political institutions, brought about many noteworthy changes in the nature of politics and the method of its practice across the globe from Latin America to Africa and Asia, and the Arab world was hardly an exception to this phenomenon. There have been various opinions on democratizing the polity in the Arab World. It has
been argued quite often that democracy is unsustainable in the Arab World on account of the Islamic factor and the notion of the rentier state.

In a rentier state, revenue is derived from external rather than domestic sources, it accrues directly to the state and as a consequence to this process, the state becomes distanced from society. There is no requirement to tax citizens and without taxation there is unlikely to be representation. The citizens of the State are not engaged in productive activity and therefore have no need to form trade unions or political parties or indeed any organization charged with an economic imperative. Their needs are met by the State's distribution of goods and services that is the allocation of oil wealth in the form of welfares. In other words, an unwritten social contract exists between the ruler and the subject. The ruler buys off any political demands by offering welfare networking.

Many researchers have also been skeptical about the prospects of democracy in the Arab region due to the rise of Islamic movements. For them, the mixture of politics with religion in general and Islam in particular is antithetical to democracy. Islamic movements have sprang up mostly out of specific domestic circumstances such as economic failure, corruption, and ban on political participation, human right abuses and the persistence of authoritarian rule. Authoritarian regimes have generally done little for the material well being of the people and in return faced the general discontent of the people. Islamic groups have the ability to articulate popular discontent in
reference to Islam. So, Islam has been found to be an effective platform to make political demands. The primary concern of these groups was to end the dictatorial rule, consolidation of democratic institutions and political participation of the people. In contrast to the popular belief among the scholars that the growth of Islamic groups will curb the development of democracy, majority of the mainstream Islamic groups seeking the change in the societies advocated the use of democratic and electoral means and non-violence and encouraged the people to participate in the electoral process. The high level of participation of people in the national elections is evident in the third world countries when compared to the developed countries which suffer from strikingly low level of participation in national elections.

Further more, the Islamists themselves constitute a very broad category with conflicting views on many issues. The radical elements among them had invariably argued that Islam and democracy are incompatible on the premise that democracy is basically western, hence should be imposed. On the other hand, the moderate Islamists particularly the Shia’s in Kuwait not only supported women’s right to political rights but also recognised elements in democracy that are harmoniously compatible with Islam.

Thus, the argument that Islam as such is antithetical to participatory representation and democracy is untenable if one sincerely has to take into account the diversity with in itself. Similarly, the argument that Islam is alien
to any institutional mechanism that promotes freedom to ponder over issues with the objective of exploring best solutions amenable to the majority, is also placed on weak premise if one has to account for the imperative of diwanniyas in Kuwait that dates back to the pre-modern period. What is essentially required is the dispassionate study of traditional institutions and their history in the context of continuity and change and link them current developments.

At a time when democracy is being used as a political weapon in the backdrop of the spread of neo-liberalism through the world over, the best answer to such 'democratisation' is a non-teleological process that is more humanizing and less dependent on global systems for its support and sustenance. In that sense, Kuwait truly represents a democratic society with all its sensitivities to openness and should be permitted to script its own course rather than following an artificial induced path.