PREFACE

There has been a variety of estimation on democratization of the polity in Arab World. It has been often argued, with relative ease, without stepping into the Arab World’s unique historical experience and attempting to discern the meaning as well as the context of their institutions that democracy is an unviable political institution in the Arab World. There are many researches that have been unconvinced about the prospects of democracy in the Arab World and often attributed this phenomenon to Islam and the related movements. For them, the mixture of politics with religion in general and Islam in particular is antithetical to democracy.

It is certainly worthwhile to ask a simple question that had the region could have attracted this many scholarly attention but for the oil? The point is that the imperative of oil to the modern society often provided a natural temptation to overlook nuances of the pre-modern and colonial Arab world in any analysis concerning the modern Arab World and there by deprived them and their institutions an opportunity to be understood more closely and objectively. In this context the present study aims to study the political process in Kuwait not just an extension of a situation out of the compulsions of modernity but the extent to which the contemporary politics of Kuwait is a continuation of a historical process with accompanying changes.
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.

After the independence of Kuwait in 1961 the country adopted a Constitution in November 1962, which provided a unique blend of hereditary rule and a representative government. The National Assembly was established which consists of fifty elected members by secret ballot as well as non-elected Cabinet ministers as ex-officio members and the members are elected for every four years. The National Assembly must ratify treaties related to war and peace, alliances, the use of natural resources and financial obligations. The period after the Gulf crisis witnessed ample transparency between the government and the people. The public had access to information connected to the Emir’s decisions, activities and this
progress made Kuwait’s Cabinet more responsible. The National Assembly also keeps the Cabinet in check by challenging and scrutinizing the drafts of Emir.

The deliberations of the National Assembly are widely covered in the media, which itself is one of the most outstanding political achievement in the Gulf region. Several institutions of civil society had immensely contributed in keeping alive the public consciousness, sensitive towards political reforms by providing space to ventilate their opinions.

The diwaniyyas, a weekly get together of friends and families, played an important role in promoting the political reforms. On the other hand, the non governmental organizations constitute effective groups that complement the requirement of the civil society. The cooperative societies also provide the citizens the necessary practice with democratic procedures and generated an experienced pool of elected representatives. These cooperatives assumed a large political importance by serving as a forum for public debates on issues of general importance in the state.

These institutions are deemed essential to the democratic role. They express the views of their members and supporters and their role in cultural, political and social awareness cannot be underestimated. They act as an instrument towards the crystallization and mobilization of public opinion. These societies are channels of
democracy in the sense that they recruit citizens into participation and realize public diversification. Furthermore, they enhance the foundation of democracy. Thus, we can say Kuwait is the closest to the western model of democracy in an Arab and Gulf framework with local values and traditional settings in the absence of political parties. This research is intended to be a study in the evolution democracy in Kuwait. It would discern the various phases of Kuwait's parliamentary experience and elections that took place in Kuwait.

The focus of this study is to analyse the political reforms of the country and the institutional arrangements which allows people to participate in (a meaningful way) the decision-making process of the country.

The objectives of this study is to examine the specific political, social, economic and other factors which accounts for the early development of democracy in Kuwait and to analyse the role of monarchy in facilitating democracy. This study also examines the various factors which accounts for the persistent functioning of democracy in Kuwait and to examine the impact of Gulf crisis in terms of institutionalisation of democracy in Kuwait. This study also focuses on the role of women in Kuwait's politics and to find out whether the current practise of democracy will result into the constitutional monarchy.

The methodology would be historical and analytical. The primary sources
such as the reports, speeches and statements would be perused besides secondary sources that are books, periodicals and newspapers.

The present work is divided into six chapters. The first chapter is the Introduction which gives a brief account of democracy and gives a brief history of Kuwait.

The second chapter titled, Political Development of Kuwait, 1961-1981, discusses the process of democracy in Kuwait which was present right from the emergence of Kuwait as an independent state in 1961 and Kuwait is the only elected legislature in the Arab World. Kuwait adopted its constitution in November 1962, which provided a unique blend of hereditary rule and a representative government. This chapter deals with the constitution and the functioning of the National Assembly and the reasons that led to the disbandment of the National Assembly in 1976.

The third chapter titled, Political Development of Kuwait, 1981-1990, deals with the restoration of National Assembly in 1981 which was again disbanded in 1986 and the activities that took place after the National Assembly was dissolved and about the movement for democracy in 1986.
The fourth chapter is the ‘Gulf Crisis and the movement for Democracy’. The Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in 1990 sidelined the democratic movement in the country. It created the need for the national unity to free the country from Iraq. After the liberation of Kuwait, there was pressure on the Emir to reconstitute the National Assembly and show his commitment to democracy. The significance of this movement is the participation of people in large numbers especially women. This chapter deals in detail the Gulf crisis and the movement for democracy and the role played by the women in this movement.

The fifth chapter titled Institutionalisation and Consolidation of Democracy, deals with the period after 1992 which witnessed ample transparency between the government and the people. This period also witnessed consolidation of democracy in Kuwait. The public had access to information to the Emir's decisions, activities and this progress made Kuwait's cabinet more responsible. The democratic institutions such as political parties and media became powerful. Though political parties are not recognised in Kuwait, political groups were formed which actively participated in the political process. The freedom of press which was curbed in 1986 was restored along with the restoration of democracy. Media played an important role and acted as a bridge between the people and the government in communicating ideas, educating people and creating awareness about the issues etc. This chapter examines the consolidation and the institutionalization of democracy in Kuwait.
The final chapter is the Conclusion which discusses the problems and prospects of Democracy in Kuwait and how the democracy has survived despite the various obstacles in the process of democratisation in the country.