The present study, ‘A Critical Analysis of the Religio-Political Conditions of Modern Saudi Arabia’ begins with the first chapter which introduces ideological foundations of the Saudi State, which became basis of the establishment of the state, is discussed in the chapter two. The next chapter gives a historical survey of the Saudi State from the first quarter of the 19th century to the end of 20th century. The fourth and fifth chapters study the intrinsic relationship between the Religious ideology and the modern political challenges and changes; followed at the end by my own conclusions. The thesis on the whole can be introduced as follows:

It is a well known fact that the location of the two holiest Muslim shrines- the Kabah at Mecca and the Prophetic Mosque in al-Medina accounts for the privileged religious position of Saudi Arabia as it attracts lacs of the Muslim Pilgrims every year from all parts of the world. Likewise, the presence of the vast petroleum reserves in this country gives it significant economic and political clout. Further, as the largest and perhaps the richest country in the Middle East, it exerts considerable influence on the nearby oil-rich states as well as on the problems facing the Muslim world.

The Saudi state which emerged in the first half of the 18th century mainly through the fruitful efforts of the house of Saud, today ranks among the powerful countries of the Muslim world. The history of Saudi Arabia is
in fact the history of the origins and development of the so-called 'Wahhabiyya', in real terms, in all its aspects, as it was in essence a 'revival' of the purity of early Islam.

During the eighteenth century there arose in Najd a Muslim religious thinker and reformer named Shaykh Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703-92), born into a family of Hanbali scholars who followed the traditional Islamic thought of Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (d. 855) and Imam bn Taymiyah (d. 1328), and invited the Muslims to adhere to the strict dogma of *tawhid* (monotheism) and abandon all forms of deviationist ideas of 'divine associationism' (*shirk*). He found a powerful protector in Amir Muhammad Ibn Saud, the ruler of the town of Dir`iyya. Both formed a pact of mutual support in 1744 and vowed to work together to establish a state based on the doctrine of pure monotheism. The event marked the dawn of the Saudi state. Acting on the basis of the puritanical, but appealing, approach to Islam, Muhammad ibn Saud and his successors in the Saudi royal family rapidly conquered much of central Arabia, thereby establishing the first Saudi State. It was followed by second Saudi-Wahhabi state founded in 1824. Riyadh was then made its capital which ended in 1891 with the Rashidis taking over the whole of Najd. With the fall of Riyadh, the
Saudi capital, and the self-exile of `Abd al-Rahman in Kuwait, there remained no Saudi contender for the Rashidis in Najd.

A young Saudi prince, Abd al-Aziz (born about 1880), regained control of Riyadh in 1902 and thus emerged the third Saudi State which later grew to transform into the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932. Abd al-Aziz, commonly known as Ibn Sa`ud, demonstrated good judgment, leadership skills, and extraordinary courage as well as a deep personal and political commitment to Islam. By 1904, with the help of his brother Saud, Abd al-Aziz extended his power over the districts of Kharj, Aflaj, and Wadi al-Dawasir in Southern Najd and Sundayr, Qasim, and Washm in the North. All these had been extorted from the Rashidis. All Qasim as far as the boundary of Shammar, the stronghold of the Rashidis, now recognized the Sovereignty of Abd al-Aziz.

Having himself spent enough time with the Bedouins, Abd al-Aziz moulded them into a formidable martial force, their settlements were called *Hujar* and the settlers came to be known as Ikhwan (*brethren*). Abd al-Aziz made first use of the Ikhwan in 1913 against the Turks at Hofuf, the principal town of Hasa. Therefore, the Ikhwan became the main force of the Saudi state. In 1915 a treaty was concluded between the British and Abd al-
Aziz. In 1920 the Ikhwan were involved in a number of raids in Kuwait and Iraq which forced the British to intervene on behalf of Kuwait and Iraq both.

In 1924, after the abolition of the Caliphate by the Turkish Republic, a conference of 'Ulama, tribal chiefs, Ikhwan, and notables were held and decided to attack Hijaz. The fall of Hijaz ended the Sharif’s rule there. In January 1927 'Abd al-Aziz was proclaimed king of Hijaz and Najd and its dependencies with headquarters at Riyadh. The British Government in the treaty of Jeddah in 1927 recognized the Kingdom as a sovereign state and renounced the long-outdated special rights as set forth in the treaty of 1915. The final step in the creation of the modern state was taken on September 22, 1932, when it was renamed the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. 'Abd al-Aziz reached the peak of his career and the Arabia over which he was to rule for nearly three more decades was united as never before. Thus for the first time in human memory Arabia had a single ruler whom all could, and did, respect.

In 1953 King Abd al-Aziz ibn Saud passed away and was succeeded by his eldest son Saud, although he had served as his father’s deputy in Najd but during his rule Saudi state got some set back to avert such a breakdown, Faisal as Prime Minister was granted full power to administer the external and internal financial affairs of the Kingdom. One of King Saud’s greatest
successes was the development of education. In 1957 King Saud also made his mark globally and became the first Saudi monarch to visit the United States.

King Saud was succeeded by King Faisal, one of the most important rulers of Saudi Arabia whose influence transcends the actual period of his reign to which conventional history assigns a mere eleven years. The legacy of King Faisal extended for more than half a century and encompassed virtually the entire modern history of the nation. As such the history of the modern state of Saudi Arabia is essentially the history of King Faisal. Early in his reign, when faced by demands for a written constitution for the country, Faisal responded with "our constitution is the Quran."

Although a diplomat he was also a man of action. As king he is credited with rescuing the country's finances and implementing a policy of modernization and reform, while his main foreign policy were pan-Islamism, anti-Communism, and anti-Zionism.

Promptly upon assuming power, Faisal issued on November 6, 1962, a ten point program of reform which covered a wide range of measures designed to improve the administration, the economy, the judicial system and the educational system in the Kingdom as well as to introduce a
machinery of popular representation in the form of a consultative council. The leadership of King Faisal is viewed as a continuum in which the period of his premiership with full power and the subsequent period as king. The aim of which was to modernize the country in administration and technical section while adhering to the traditional principles in the religious, cultural, and social sectors. He was assassinated by his nephew on March 25, 1975 and was succeeded by King Khalid.

In April 1976, Khalid made state visits to all the Gulf States which probably laid the foundation for the establishment of the *Gulf Cooperation Council* (GCC). Khalid’s achievements in domestic and foreign policies were not inconsiderable. King Khalid oversaw the implementation of the second five-year development plan (1975-1979) and the creation of the third five-year development plan (1980-1984). Saudi Arabia began to diversify its economic base and edged towards the completion of its infrastructure. In 1981, Khalid convened a historic summit of Arab nations.

Khalid died on June 13, 1982, and Fahd ascended the throne. He adopted the title “*Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques*” in 1986, replacing “*His Majesty*” to signify an Islamic rather than secular authority. On March 03, 1992 (27/08/1412 H) he announced the establishment of four new systems.
1. The Basic Government System.
2. The Al Sh'ura Council System
3. The Provincial System
4. The Council of Ministers System.

On August 2, 2005, Saudi King Fahd bin Abdul Aziz was laid to rest.

As Saudi Arabia is the heartland of Islam, it is committed to preserving the Islamic tradition in all areas of government and society. It is a leader in the pursuit of worldwide Islamic solidarity. It hosts the Muslim World League the Organization of the Islamic Conference, institutions dedicated to preserving Islamic interests. Saudi Arabia, flush with oil revenue, and increasingly the most influential player among Arab countries, has long resisted changing its ultra traditional ways. Since the 1950s, when oil revenues became abundant, Saudi rulers have sought to reap the economic benefits derived from oil resources while trying to minimize the political and social impact of change.

With the establishment of the state and the advent of oil wealth and mass education, Wahhabi ‘ulama became one group among several others capable of articulating religious ideas and interpretations. Their engagement with modernity centered on formulating opinions on whether certain aspects
of modernity were permissible or prohibited. They developed religious rulings regarding technological aspects of modernity (cars, aeroplanes, radio, television, cassettes, faxes and the internet), and its economic challenges (banking, insurance and other new economic innovations).

The introduction of the satellite dish and the Internet in the 1990s ensures a deepening of connections between Saudis and the outside world. Wahhabi ulama have used these and other communications technologies to proselytize. The innovations of modernity, together with communication technology, have allowed both the consolidation and contestation of official Saudi discourse. Official ‘Wahhabiyya’ has shown greater flexibility and pragmatism. Islam continues to occupy the central position in Saudi Arabia as it not only guides the lives of people but also the policies and functions of the government.

Saudi Arabia's unique role in the Arab and Islamic worlds, its possession of the world's largest reserves of oil, and its strategic location make its friendship important to the United States. The United States and Saudi Arabia share a common concern about regional security, oil exports and imports, and sustainable development. Close consultations between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia have developed on international, economic, and development issues. The advent of ARAMCO in the 1930's marked the
beginning of professional public relations in Saudi Arabia and increased embracing of Western techniques and innovations. *ARAMCO* established a research department to study the Saudi people, their language, and their history, and the nation’s social conditions.

Islam and politics in Saudi Arabia are closely intertwined and mutually interdependent. Saudi Arabia was built with the support and approval of the ulama, thus their historical relationship gives them direct access to the monarchy. The ulama operate as part and parcel of the state apparatus in Saudi Arabia, contributing to stability of the country, support to the rulers, and encourage change and development. The ulama hold a variety of positions in Saudi institutions they are judges (*qadis*), lawyers (*muhama*), and prayer leaders (*imams*) although only a few of them wield real power.

The ulama in fact, exercise their sway in subtle and silent ways. While their input varies depending on the domestic circumstances and the strength of the Saud family, the king can never completely ignore them but must take their views into consideration in every choice he makes. Since the 1970s, it has been commonplace to speculate about the legitimacy and longevity of Al- Saud rule. True, the kingdom has endured a prolonged stretch of unrest since 1990. In the 1990s, however, the Saudi/Wahhabi-revivalist alliance unraveled its fragility because of Riyadh’s decision to solicit United States
military intervention against Iraq. The same issue divided the kingdom's religious camp between traditional Wahhabis loyal to the monarchy and recruits to the revivalist outlook. The 'ulama's support for the regime is not unconditional. They remain controversial, provocative and confrontational. The sahwa have consistently agitated against the regime's close relationship with the United States as well as what they perceive to be aggression against religious beliefs and rituals in the Kingdom. From this vantage point the religious field in Saudi Arabia appears to be in flux, its horizons hazy and the destiny of the eighteenth-century call from Najd uncertain.