CHAPTER-II

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON SAUDI POLITY

Any significant study of the political system of a country has to begin with a systematic and analytical study of the history of the country. In the absence of any such reading of history, it is difficult to establish the causal links that lead to a lucid understanding of the actual processes at work within a political system. In this chapter, the history of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is traced over two centuries in order to have a clear picture of the processes of political development over a considerable stretch of time. This chapter is divided into three parts corresponding to the three phases of historical development. The first phase covers the reign of Saud dynasty from Mohammad bin Saud in 1744 to Abdullah bin Saud in 1818. The second phase covers the reign of Saud dynasty from Turki bin Saud in 1824 to Abd al-Rahman bin Faisal in 1891. The third phase covers the reign of Saud dynasty from Abd al-Aziz Ibn Abd al-Rahman in 1902 to the present King Fahd. Taking all these factors into consideration, this chapter primarily provides a historical background of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, besides explaining its role in determining the course of political development.
The First House of Saud

The Arabian society, which passed through centuries of discord, was united by the bestowal of Islamic faith by the Prophet Mohammed to the Bedouins of Arabia. Gradually, the society adopted novel socio-political institutions and the new faith penetrated into the adjacent areas of Arabia. However, with the influx of primitive pre-Islamic concepts into the fold of Islam, it lost its pristine form. The state and the social structure broke down with the rise of conflicts among the Amirs. Superstitions crept into the fold of Islamic principles. Despite the Islamic abhorrence for symbols or any kind of idol worship, trees, caves, domes, tombs and mausoleums became the place of the worshippers.¹

Najdis, during this period, were practising animism, which included both belief in superstition and polytheism. It was marked that tribal religion took precedence over Islam. Stoddard says, the Najdis “practised fetishism and followed all manner of innovations and flourished on the meagre income of the credulous”.² Looking at this polytheistic social order, Abd al-Wahhab, a Shaykh from the religious family of Uyaynah of Najd wanted to restore monotheistic social order of Islam in order to ward off the corrupt practices. The Ulama remained largely dogmatic and mystical. Islamic monotheism “had become over-laid with the growth of rank superstition

and puerile mysticism”. The Holy cities were largely converted into “sink holes of inequity”. He preached among people to practise the principles of Islamic monotheism instead of venerating saints, trees and stones. Such proselytisation efforts of Abd al- Wahhab invited the wrath of the Sulayman, Amir of Uyaynah, who warned Wahhab not to subvert the religions of local tribes. Ultimately, Sulayman expelled him from Uyaynah and he fled to Dirryah which was being ruled by Amir Mohammad Ibn Saud. Ibn Saud gave him shelter. He supported his call for *tawhid* (monotheism). An alliance was forged between them in 1744 to buttress the cause of Islam by both persuasion and force. Since then, the Al-Saud clan, who gradually gained respect among the people of central Arabia, carried on reforms in the adjacent areas of Diriyyah. The Amir of Uyaynah, who expelled Wahhab from his own principality also, fell to the Arabian reformation Wahhab-Saud alliance. The Amir Mohammed Ibn Saud spread his authority over the regions of Wadi-Hanifa. With the death of Amir Mohammed, his son Abd al-Aziz Ibn Mohammad, became the Amir and exercised his influence over the region of Arabian peninsula by preaching Islamic Unitarianism. He conquered Riyadh, Buraida and al-Hasa and Kerbela in Iraq. Bahrain, Oman and Jawasima tribes in Ras-al-Khaima also

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3 Ibid.  
4 Ibid.  
became part of his territory. After continuing wars for several years against his neighbouring Amirates, Amir Mohammad stopped his military campaigns. He entered into a life of rest and worship. Amir Mohammad installed his son, Saud as his successor. He carried on the polices of his father. In order to carry out the reform programmes, he maintained close link with Abd al-Wahhab and showed exemplary military acumen in bringing neighbouring opponents to his fold.

He attacked Hijaz and reached Mecca in 1804. He reached Medina just two years after entering into Mecca. The ruler of Mecca, Sharif Ghaleb, surrendered to him and Imam Saud spread the message of Islamic monotheism throughout the Hijaz. The main aim of Amir Saud was to establish an independent Arab Moslem state in the Arab land wresting its control from the suzerainty of Ottoman Empire. Amir Saud not only issued instructions to delink the term Ottoman Sultan in the Friday sermons but also issued instructions to oust the Turks and other officials of the Ottoman Government through setting up of Arab-garrisons and re-organising the administrative structure.

Imam Saud continued his policy and conquered the regions of Arabian Peninsula. The parts of Yemen, Assir, Tihamand Najran came under his control. He expanded his authority over the shores of Arabian Gulf. He annexed Nadj, Hijaz, Assir, Hadhramaut, al-Hasa, Bahrain.

\[^{6}\text{Assah, n.1, p.5}\]
\[^{7}\text{Ibid.}\]
Basra by 1808. His authority held sway from Hauran in Syria to the Baghdad in Iraq. The mighty powers of the Saud posed a serious threat to the legitimate authority of Ottoman Empire that exercised suzerainty over the Arab or Moslem lands. The Ottoman government also felt that unless effective measures were launched against the Saudis, the government would lose its title of the “custodian of the two holy shrines”. Alarmed by such developments, the Ottoman Sultan, Muhammad II, wanted to destroy the Saudi State. But during this period, he was engaged in European wars. He could not pay attention to the problems of Arabia. But when the question arose over the sovereignty of the two Islamic holy places, the Sultan ordered Mohammed Ali, the Governor of Egypt, to liberate Hijaz from the control of the heretics. The Sultan issued instructions to march towards Hijaz and the last of it was immediately accepted when Mohammad Ali sent his son, Tousun Pasha in an expedition equipped with latest arms, foreign generals and engineers. But when Tousun advanced, he was interrupted by the Herb tribe. When he reached in Judayadh, he was confronted with a stupendous task of defeating the defenders. Tousun’s forces were completely overwhelmed and they retreated to Yanbu. Realizing the prowess of Saud’s forces, Mohammed Ali sent a contingent of five thousand forces for Tousun to carry on his military campaign against

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9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Iqbal. n.2. p.16.
12 Ibid.
Medina. Tousun, initially, could not enter into the city due to heavy resistance of the forces of Najd. Finally, Medina fell to the forces of Tousun. Tousun continued his military campaign and with the help of Sharif Ghaleb, the Hijazi Governor of Mecca, he entered Najd. When Mohammad Ali reached Jeddah, Sharif Ghaleb received him with warm welcome. However, Mohammad Ali arrested him and sent him as a prisoner to Egypt. He confiscated his property and appointed another Sharif as the Governor of Mecca.\(^{13}\) He took his forces towards Najd. He sent his son Ibrahim Pasha to fight with the Saudi army in Najd. With the death of Saud in 1814, Abdullah became his successor. However, he could not give befitting reply to the forces of Ibrahim Pasha and ultimately Diriyah fell to Pasha. Abdullah was taken as a captive and executed in Istanbul. The Ottoman Sultan occupied Riyadh in 1818 and kept a few garrisons in Najd.\(^{14}\)

Both triumphs and setbacks marked the historical development of the polity of Saudi Arabia from 1744 to 1818. The drive for a Saudi state started with the initiative of Amir Mohammad Ibn Saud when he reigned over the region of Wadi-Hanifa. But it materialised during the reign of Saud bin Saud when he unified the regions of Arabian Peninsula and conquered the neighbouring regions. Arabia, during his rule, reached its zenith. However, the victory of Saud invited the anger of the Ottoman

\(^{13}\) Assah, n.1, p.5.  
\(^{14}\) Ibid.
rulers and they sent Mohammad Ali, the Viceroy of Egypt, to deal with the Sauds. Saud’s successor Abdullah could not display the military acumen of his predecessor and was defeated by the mighty forces of Ibrahim Pasha. This was a temporary setback in the process of building a strong Arab state. Notwithstanding the setbacks, the process of formation of an Arab nation state was marked for the first time during this period.

The Second House of Saud

The drive for re-establishing the Saudi state gained momentum when Turki Ibn Abdullah, the second son of Muhammad Ibn Saud came out of Egyptian confinement in 1820. Abdullah re-established the “lost empire” of his grandfather. The whole coast of the Arabian Gulf acknowledged the Wahhabi rule by the time the Turki died. Turki’s son Faisal carried on the policy of his father. He dealt heavily with the rebellious chiefs of the Eastern Coast, the rulers of Bahrain. He also fought against the resurgent Shaykhs of the Qasim. He regained all the territories by 1840. He showed exemplary courage and statesmanship. During his regime, Imam Faisal established justice and restored the traditions of Najd. He unified the Arabia under a single Saudi state and looked towards al-Hasa, al-Qatif, Wadi al-Dawasir, Assir and al-Qasim. Looking at such developments, the British government sent Colonel Bailey to report the affairs of Saudi state. Bailey said in his report that the Saudi state was extended from Jauf al-

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15 Iqbal, n.2, p.22.
16 Ibid.
Amer in the north to the Empty quarter (Rub al-Khali) in the south and it was extended from Wadi al-Dawasir in the west to an indefinite point in the Persian Gulf. Bailey also stated that Faisal held his suzerainty over western part of Arabia ranging from Kuwait to Ras al-Khaima and to the lands of Arabia ranging from Kuwait to Qatif, Ras al-Khaima, Oman and Ras al-Hadd. In spite of all these developments, he could not check the internecine conflict between his two sons – Abdullah and Saud. With the death of Faisal in 1865, the Saudi state was thrown into chaos. The conflict became more open when Saud returned from exile and fought against his own brother, Abdullah. He captured Riyadh and ruled till his death in 1875. After his death, Abdullah rode to the throne. He realised that the family feud led to the loss of important territories in the north and in the east. Ottoman government also invaded the al-Hasa province during this period. Muhammad Ibn Rashid of Jabal Shammar also wanted to regain control over Najd. He established his supremacy upto the Kharj in the south. But while on the way to Hail, Abd al-Rahman, the third son of the late Imam Faisal temporarily controlled Riyadh, Abdullah Ibn Faisal died in 1889. After his death, Ibn Rashid kept eyeing on Najd. When Ibn Rashid came from Hail to capture Najd, Abd al-Rahman Ibn Faisal restored the independence of Riyadh. But when al-Qasim and other regions paid their allegiance to Abd al-Rahman, Ibn Rashid attacked Riyadh. Muhammad Ibn Rashid fought with a strong confederacy in the south, spearheaded by Zamil

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17 Huyette, n.6, p.14.
al-Sulayman before prevailing over Najd. However, the confederacy was badly defeated at the battlefield of Muleida in 1891. Rashidis occupied Najd and the last vestige of Saud dynasty came to an end. The Ottoman government offered assistance sending an envoy to Imam Abd al-Rahman. He made a condition that Abd al-Rahman would be installed as the Amir of Riyadh under the Ottoman suzerainty and he would be paid a symbolic annual tribute to the Ottoman treasury in turn for receiving the army. But Rahman rejected the offer, as he was determined to free the Arab land from the yoke of Ottoman regime and to set up an independent Arab land. He preferred to stay in the empty quarter for several months with the objective of unifying the Arab state. Rahman migrated to Qatar and he stayed there for sixty days. Rahman then moved with his family to Bahrain and finally to Kuwait where he stayed for about ten years.

This phase of Saudi history was also marked by ups and downs. Saudi state reached the pinnacle of success during the able leadership of Faisal Ibn Turk. However, the family conflict among the sons of Faisal became a boon for the Ibn Rashid of Hail. Contemplating the fluid situation of the Saudi state, he occupied Najd. Abd al-Rahman made strenuous efforts to revive the Saudi state, but he failed on his mission. This was a

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18 Iqbal, n.2, p. 25.
19 Assah, n.1, p. 20.
20 Ibid.
setback for the Saud dynasty in the history of political development of the Kingdom.

**Third House of Saud**

The third house of Saud began with the starting of military campaign by Abd al-Aziz al-Saud. He wanted to restore the Najd Kingdom from the control of al-Rashidis. While staying there, he knew the art of statecraft and diplomacy from his patron, Shaykh Mubarak al-Sabah, the Amir of Kuwait. Mubarak was confronted with a grave challenge during this period. The nephew of Mohammad Ibn al-Rashid, who wanted to annex Kuwait with his Amirate, threatened the independence of Kuwait.

The Ottoman government also encouraged Ibn al-Rashid to invade Kuwait, as it was deeply suspicious about the relationship between Shaykh Mubarak al-Sabah and the British government. Anticipating the evil designs of Ottoman Government, Shaykh Mubarak made an agreement with the British in 1899 whereby it became a protectorate.\(^{21}\) However, this treaty was replaced by another treaty in which the independence of Kuwait was guaranteed. Shaykh Mubarak al-Sabah made up his mind to attack the Amirate of al-Rashid in 1900 with a force of ten thousand persons. The House of Saud wanted certain modifications in the plan. On that basis, Abd al-Aziz thought of invading Riyadh and recapturing the suzerainty from Ibn al-Rashid. But his plan failed with the defeat of Shaykh Mubarak. Abd al-

\(^{21}\) Mcloughlin, n. 5, p.19.
Aziz on his way to Riyadh found strong support among the Najdis, but he
could not do anything against the mighty forces of al-Rashidis. Ibn al-
Rashid wanted to annex Kuwait with his Amirate immediately but he
refrained from doing this, as the British had already sent a battleship for its
protection. Abd al-Aziz again proceeded to Riyadh to regain the territories
from the control of Ibn al-Rashid. Shaykh Mubarak provided full support
to him with camels, money, arms and forty warriors. Abd al-Aziz’s brother
Mohammad, cousin Abdullah Ibn Jeluwi and Abd al-Aziz Ibn Musaed also
accompanied him. Abd al-Aziz stayed for several months on the borders of
empty quarters looking for the support of the Bedouins to invade Riyadh.
When he could not achieve his grand aim, his father Imam Abu al-Rahman
and Amir Mubarak al-Sabha called him to come back to Kuwait. But he
did not accept their offer and marched to Riyadh with sixty persons. He
also left twenty of them on his way to Riyadh and instructed them to go
back to Kuwait. Abd al-Aziz also left his brother Mohammad along with
twenty-three persons on the orchards covering Riyadh. After he reached
Riyadh, he was confronted with the forces of Ajilan, Ibn Saud’s lieutenant
in Riyadh. Abd al-Aziz caught Ajilan in the fortress called “al-
Musammak”, which was built by Ibn Rashid’s people.\footnote{Assah. n.1, p.22.} Ajilan’s forces
could not give befitting reply to the forces of Abd al-Aziz. Abd al- said,

\begin{quote}
I wanted to pursue Ajilan inside the fortress but my men
prevented me from doing so. At this point, Abdullah Ibn
Jeluwi, in the midst of heavy firing, rushed inside the gates of
fortress, followed by ten men. Soon, the rest of our men followed us, until there were about forty of us inside the fortress. Before us there were eighty warriors, half of whom we slew. Then four of them fell from the walls of the fortress to their death, while the rest took refuge in one of the towers of the fortress. We promised to spare their lives if they surrendered. At the same time Ibn Jeluwi was making an end of Ajilan.23

Ajilan was killed and Abd al-Aziz captured Riyadh on 12th January 1902. He re-conquered Riyadh by January 1902.24 After the liberation of Riyadh, Abd al-Aziz marched to liberate Najd. During this time, Ibn al-Rashid was planning to attack Kuwait. He did not concentrate on re-opening Riyadh. So, taking advantage of this, Abd al-Aziz repaired the fortification of Riyadh against any possible attack. Abd al-Aziz entrusted the government with Abd al-Rahman. Abd al-Aziz with the help of his brother won considerable support among the people of al-Kharj and Wadi al-Dawasir of southern Najd. By 1904, Abd al-Aziz spread his influence over central Najd and it was extended upto Djebel Shammar. In 1906, he annexed the breadbasket of Najd, Qasim from the al-Rashid within his territorial boundary.25 His objective was to recapture the territories of his forefathers and set up an independent Arab state.

Abd al-Aziz wanted to create Saudi Arabia as an independent state. During his time, Bedouins followed nomadic life. Abd al-Aziz thought that

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23 Ibid., p. 23.
25 Iqbal, n.2, p. 42.
his aim of unifying the kingdom could not be completed without the permanent settlement of Bedouins. So, he unveiled socio-economic programme to settle the Bedouins. The programme called for acquiring new habits that were different from the habitual life of pillage and robbery. It also induced Islamic teachings in them with the spirit of sacrifice in Holy war. They were also persuaded to leave the migratory life of the desert to enter into agrarian settlements. The spirit of migration was also related to Prophet’s migration (hejira) from his original home in Mecca to Medina, so that the Bedouins would soon follow and imitate it. The main aim of Abd al-Aziz was to break the tribal bonds creating broader society based on religion. With the help of Mutawia (volunteers), he wanted to create new ideas among the people and called them to work for the improvement of agricultural trade and crafts to raise their standard of living. The agricultural settlements were under the military regime and each settlement was divided into three groups that included all adult males, children and women. Abd al-Aziz established more than one hundred and twenty two settlements, which were headed by a sub-tribe. The members of these settlements were known as Ikhwan who wore white headband in place of traditional agal. The total number of persons in these settlements was 76,500. Ikhwan constituted the core of Abd al-Aziz’s army and with the help of it, he further expanded his territory.26 St. John H. Philby, who reached Riyadh in 1917 heading the British mission, wrote a report on the

operation of the Najd Mission. The report indicated that the Ikhwan movement was characterised by Arabism, Islam and nomadism. The report said,

In setting to work at the task of consolidation, by which he was confronted, Abd al-Aziz cannot have failed to be impressed by two models from the history of Central Arabia. Muhammad Ibn Rashid had owed his strength to the peculiar characteristics, which made the Shammar what they have been and are – a Badawin tribe based on a Badawin city – while his own great ancestor, Saud Ibn Saud had carried his conquering arms to the farthest corners of Arabia by reason of the judicious combination of religion and policy to which he owed his power.

Ibn Saud followed neither the one model nor the other in its entirety he set to work to combine the two and the result was the Akhwan movement, whose essential characteristics are as follows:

(i) “It was restricted to the Badawin, who though nominally for the most part, adherents of the Hanbali, or as they came to be called, the Wahhabi doctrines were in practice divided into their allegiance between those doctrines and the codes of unwritten customary law, by which their lives were regulated; the townfolk of Najd, among whom the tyranny of public opinion in matters of religion is strong and well organized, are tacitly assumed to be devout Wahhabis and, therefore, required no special attention....
(ii) ...Suitable sites were, as discovered, made available for the foundation of permanent settlements, and a number of villages have sprung up, during the last five or six years....

"To sum up, it can be said that the object of Ibn Saud in fostering the Ikhwan movement has been to increase his military service over a great number of his subjects, to minimize the weakness inherent in a Badawin state and a Badawin army and to economize his resources by substituting the hope of eternal reward for more mercenary considerations."

However, the Ikhwan did not consider themselves as a separate sect in Islam. They believed that before the religious teachings given to them by the Wahhabi teachers, they were Muslims. The beliefs of Ikhwan were based on five principles like Sunnis and Shiites. No secret ritual, code, sign or other trappings of a closed society was permitted. The use of pork liquor and smoking was banned. They were maintaining a rigid orthodox life. They believed in forced conversions.

Notwithstanding the forceful behaviour of Ikhwan, they constituted the primary source of inspiration for Abd al-Aziz military campaign against the neighbouring states. The predecessors of Abd al-Aziz largely failed to unify Saudi Arabia as a state because of the lack of his strong military.

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28 Ibid.
force. The real military campaign of Abd al-Aziz only started with the march of Ikhwan. With the help of Ikhwan, Abd al-Aziz could give a formidable challenge to his opponents.

During the outbreak of First World War, Hijaz was an Ottoman province. It maintained relative autonomy under the leadership of Sharif of Mecca in comparison to other provinces of Ottoman Empire. When the Saudis invaded it in the first part of the nineteenth century, the Sublime Porte took direct control of Hijaz. But Husayan Ibn Ali, one of the ashrafs of Hijaz, wanted to regain the status of Sharif in 1908. During this period, the young Turks overthrew the Ottoman Sultan. Realizing the troubles of Sublime Porte, Sharif Husayan supported the stand of Ottoman Sultan. The Ulama and notables of Hijaz proclaimed Sharif Husayan as the king of Arabs on 29 October 1916. Even he fought with Abd al-Aziz for the cause of Ottomans. He also provided all the support to the al-Rashid to attack the territories retained by Abd al-Aziz.

During this period, the changing international situation had also strong effect upon the internal politics of the Kingdom. The British sent Sir Percy Cox replacing Captain Shakespeare in the Arab Gulf region. The purpose of sending Cox was to persuade Abd al-Aziz to fight in favour of allies against the Ottomans. After series of discussions, the first treaty was signed between Saudi State and the British. The British recognized the suzerainty of Amir Abd al-Aziz Ibn Saud over Najd, Al Hasa, Qatif, Jubail
and its dependencies under article one of the treaty.\textsuperscript{29} Article 2 of the treaty stipulated that in the event of any aggression by external power against al-Saudi’s territories or by his successors, the British government would render aid to Abd al-Aziz. Under Article 3 of the treaty, it was stipulated that Abd al-Aziz would restrain from entering into any correspondence, agreement or treaty with any foreign government or power. He also acknowledged that he would inform the British government if his territory were encroached by any foreign government. He also stated that he would not surrender, sell or pledge any part of his territory to any foreign power or foreign company without the consent of the British government.\textsuperscript{30} He also stated that he would follow the British advice in all matters, which were important to both of them. Abd al-Aziz also promised not to invade Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the Coast of Oman and the Shaykhdom under British control. This treaty largely strengthened the position of Abd al-Aziz vis-à-vis the neighbouring Emirates. He emerged as a strong force in the Arab politics during the First World War period.

After entering into negotiation with Abd al-Aziz, the British government came to an agreement with the Sharif Hussein of Mecca. He agreed to declare Arab revolt in the Ottoman province. He expected that the British would provide help to Sharif Hussein to set up an independent Arab state consisting of Arabian Peninsula, Syria and Iraq in response to the

\textsuperscript{29} Assah, n.1, pp.33-34.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
offer of Sharif Hussein. However, the text of the treaty entered into between British government and Abd al-Aziz in 1915 was not revealed to Sharif Hussein. The agreement entered into between Sharif Hussein and the British government was also not revealed to Abd al-Aziz. When they came to know the text of the agreements, they found that the promises made in the agreement were similar in nature. So it was not simultaneously possible for both Sharif Hussein and Abd al-Aziz to set up an independent Arab state.31

The year 1924 saw the downfall of Husayan when he proclaimed himself as caliph or rightful leader of Islamic community. Abd al-Aziz did not accept his authority and challenged his position. It also angered the Ikhwan. Ikhwan attacked Taif in September 1924 and nobody came to the rescue of Husayan. His forces could not counter the Ikhwan. The war created horror and it led to massacre of a number of people in Taif. So, the people of Hijaz forced Husayan to abdicate in favour of his son Ali and he was proclaimed as the King of Hijaz in 1924. But Ali, poor in statesmanship and proper diplomacy, could not match with Abd al-Aziz. Ultimately, Hijaz fell to Abd al-Aziz by the end of 1925 and he was proclaimed as the king of Hijaz.32

31 Huyette, n.6, pp.19-20.
After Abd al-Aziz's annexation of Hijaz, he was confronted with a new challenge. In the past, his style of statesmanship only catered to the needs of Najd people. Consequent to his annexation of Hijaz, he had to change his priorities to accommodate the requirements of Hijazi population. The Ikhwan did not enable king Abd al-Aziz to achieve this and he was forced to contain the considerable pressure of its fanatical elements that demanded purification of Hijazis. Meanwhile, Abd al-Aziz managed to rule Hijaz proclaiming a Royal Decree in 1928. The American Vice-Consul in Aden Clayson W. Aldridge commented that “Ibn Saud, in spite of his severe religious tenets, appears to have surprisingly progressive ideas and an eager desire to secure for the Hijaz the advantages offered by Western civilization”.33

After occupying Hijaz, Abd al-Aziz unified it with Najd. He changed his title to the king of Hijaz, Najd and its dependencies on 28 January 1927. Abd al-Aziz demanded for the formal recognition by the British through a separate treaty. Ultimately, British accepted him by entering into a new treaty in May 1927. The treaty recognized the 'complete and absolute independence of the dominions of His Majesty, the King of Hijaz and its Dependencies'.34 The title marked a new era in the direction of the ultimate unification of the kingdom. During this period, the

33 Al-Rashid, Documents, Letter No.38 from Clayson W. Aldridge, American Vice-Consul in charge, Aden, to the Secretary, in Huyette, n.6, p.20.
34 Ibid., p.21.
\textit{Ikhwan} posed challenge to the regime of King Abd al-Aziz. The creation of \textit{Ikhwan} had been an important factor in the consolidation of the Saudi Kingdom, but its utility was no more there when it defied the authority of the king. So Abd al-Aziz strove to reach a peace settlement inviting the leaders of the \textit{Ikhwan} to the Great Assembly of Najd in November 1928. He hoped that he could persuade them to accept his authority. But Ikhwan entailed that Abd al-Aziz betrayed their cause. Ultimately, in the battle of Sibila in 1929-30, king destroyed them.\footnote{Helen Lackner, \textit{A House Built on Sand: The Political Economy of Saudi Arabia}, (London: Ithaca Press, 1978), p.27.} The defeat was a watershed in the Saudi history. Towards 1932, \textit{Ikhwan} no longer threatened the stability of the King. When there was no threat from any quarter, the King realized that time had come to consolidate his groups and to bring the newly acquired territories into a single administrative unit. This turning point reached in the kingdom in 1932 when the king “issued the Royal Decree 2716” renaming the kingdom of the Hijaz, Najd and its Dependencies to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.\footnote{Helen Lackner, \textit{A House Built on Sand: The Political Economy of Saudi Arabia}, (London: Ithaca Press, 1978), p.27.}

The reign of the king Saud was marked by the zenith of success. Staying in exile, he started his military campaign against the formidable adversaries like al-Rashids. He not only recaptured Najd, but liberated other provinces as well. It was due to his astute leadership and dynamic statesmanship that Saudi Arabia could emerge as a unified kingdom in 1932.
After the unification of the kingdom, King Abd al-Aziz sought to consolidate his authority and make the polity more dynamic, by bringing about exhaustive political reforms. *Majlis*, during his time, served as an informal body to listen to the grievances of the people. He also issued another Royal Decree on 9th October 1953 for the setting up of the Council of Ministers in place of the old institutions of the system. The political institutions evolved during his regime show the initial breakthrough so far as the process of political development is concerned.

King Ibn Saud died on 9th November 1953 and was succeeded by his son Saud Ibn Abd al-Aziz. Faisal Ibn Abd al-Aziz, another son of the late king, became the crown prince. The regime of the King Saud was marked by severe crisis both on the internal and external front In order to strengthen the government, the royal family conferred on crown prince Faisal full powers over internal, external and financial matters. Saud installed several of his sons on the important positions. It created unnecessary trouble among the members of the royal family. He unnecessarily spent the money on conspicuous consumption. This further deepened the economic crisis. On the other hand, due to the rise of Nasserism in Egypt, the Nasserite elements became active in Saudi Arabia. All the Arab monarchies including Saudi Arabia were dubbed as “corrupt, decadent and servile institutions under western hegemony.” During this period, Prince Talal formed an

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36 Ibid.  
17 Huyette, n.6, p. 65.
organization of young princes championing the cause of constitutional
democracy and liberal reforms. Looking at such developments, Prince
Talal Ibn Abd al-Aziz with the help of some discontented young princes,
stripped off important powers from the King Saud. Faisal was installed as
the Prime Minister of the Kingdom and he was entrusted with lot of powers.
When Faisal could not fulfill his promises, the young princes led by Prince
Talal again brought back the King Saud into his former position.
Discussions went on within the royal family for constituting a General
Assembly, an open government and ushering a democratic way of life in the
kingdom. After the assumption of power by King Saud, Mecca Radio
announced on 25 December 1960 that the king was going to grant a
constitution to the people of Saudi Arabia. But on 29th December 1960,
the Mecca Radio denied the whole episode. The King re-established his
position strongly and did not accept the views of Talal, Tariki and other
young princes. But he made efforts to improve the financial conditions of
the Kingdom. He cut down the lavishness of his own entourage.

However, the King Saud's initiative for monetary stability in
economy could not last for long. During this period, Prince Talal who held
the finance ministry also did not see eye to eye with the King Saud, as the
King did not bring any reform package. Prince Talal resigned from the
Office and after a few months, King Saud fell seriously ill. The Aramco
doctors told him to go abroad for the treatment. Faisal again came to power

but he could not bring any reform package. During this period, Prince Talal who already resigned from the Ministry of Finance has gone to Europe. He was in Geneva in August 1962, when President Nasser celebrated the tenth anniversary of the Egyptian revolution through launching the first Arab rocket missile. Talal congratulated Nasser and this was immediately broadcast on Cairo Radio. Talal’s open acclamation of President Nasser created strong resentment among the Royal Family. His brothers dubbed him as a ‘trouble-maker’.39 His passport was revoked when he reached Beirut on 15 August 1962.40 He convened an urgent press conference and launching a scathing attack upon the Royal Family. Talal said, “In our country, there is no law that upholds the freedom and rights of the citizens….If a person like myself is treated with such harshness, what must be the position of the ordinary man?”41 Talal appealed for the establishment of ‘a constitutional democracy’ within a monarchial framework. He also invoked the Quran which “forbids homes being entered let alone occupied without their owner’s permission”.42 He declared himself as a ‘Fabian socialist’ and then he flew to Cairo where President Nasser welcomed him. He also called for the formation of state-sponsored industries, distribution of land to the poor and the establishment

40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
of cooperative farms. He rejected the title 'Prince' and made severe attacks upon the Saudi government over Cairo Radio.

King Saud returned to the Kingdom in 1962. He demanded for the full restoration of power. During this period, on 26th September 1962, the revolutionaries in Sana’a ousted the Royal Family and proclaimed Yemen as a republic. The Egyptian army also carried the revolution across the border into the Saudi Kingdom. It was also reported that the field guns appeared outside the gates of Nasriyah Palace and three Saudi aircrews defected to Egypt. King Saud met with his uncles and brothers to discuss on the Egyptian threat along the Saudi border. It was decided among the members of the Royal Family that Faisal would head the emergency War Cabinet.43 Faisal again became the Prime Minister and acquired enormous authority. He introduced a ten-point reform programme.

Faisal’s ten-point programme was based on the following principles:

1. A basic constitutional law would be drawn up from the Koran, the traditions of the Prophet and acts of the orthodox caliphs;
2. The local government would be reorganised and a Ministry of Justice would be formed;
3. Recreations like television, a home-based entertainment, would be permitted (public cinemas remained taboo); expanded state welfare facilities were promised along with the development of roads, water resources and industrial projects – and, in as casual as it was possible in the circumstances, slavery was abolished at once; ‘It is known that the Moslem Shariah urges the manumission of slaves. It is also

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43 Ibid., p. 344.
known that slavery in modern times lacks many of the stipulations imposed by Islam for the justification of slavery....Now the government finds the time opportune for the total abolition of slavery.44

Faisal brought all those reforms to bring stability. But Saud was very rigid on restoring his kingly powers. Saud's sons told Faisal to return full powers to their father. They called King Saud as the Imam of the Muslims. But Faisal was not motivated by their appeal. The Saud-Faisal conflict again cropped up. The senior members of the Royal Family convened a meeting of the Princes and Ulama. The Ulama issued fatwa (ruling) on 29th March 1964:

"May God be praised and bless His follower:
In view of the current conflicts between His Majesty King Saud and his brother, His Royal Highness Prince Faisal...
In view of the fact that these divergencies have become more serious recently and they have threatened to cause disorder and chaos in the country, with disastrous results which only God Almighty could foresee....
And in view of the fact it is essential to find ways and means of permanently solving these unending divergences and disputes...the undersigned have decided the following in the general interest.

(i) His Majesty King Saud will remain the sovereign of the country, with all the respect and reverence due to his position.

44 Ibid., pp.344-45.
(ii) His Royal Highness Prince Faisal, Heir to the Throne and Prime Minister, shall discharge all the internal and external affairs of the state, both during the presence and in the absence of the King, and without referring to him.\textsuperscript{45}

This religious decision was an important landmark in the process of political development in Saudi Arabia. The Saud-Faisal feud came to an end with it. However, the reign of King Saud was still subject to severe criticism. During his kingship, he almost created a dynasty within a Saudi dynasty by installing several of his sons in important portfolios of the government. Besides this, he lavishly spent the money from the state exchequer. He was confronted with severe challenges both at the domestic and the external front. The movement of the democratic princes led by Prince Talal along with the external threat posed by the Nasserite radicals along the border made his condition highly unstable. In spite of this, he did not bring any political reforms which could have ushered an era of constitutional democracy. This shows that the process of political development was highly retarded during his reign as the King of Saudi Arabia.

King Saud left the throne in May 1964 in favour of his brother, Crown Prince Faisal. He was quite dynamic compared to his predecessor. He brought about socio-economic reforms by blending the principles of modernity with traditional norms. He viewed that the Shariah was so wide

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., pp. 353-354.
that it would encompass science and technology, ideas of social justice and human development. The communication system was modernised. The educational system was revamped with the introduction of science and technology. Women's education was also introduced. The Saudi renaissance movement (al-Nahda al-Sa'udiyyah) formed by Faisal's wife, Iffat, also offered free education in Riyadh in order to eradicate illiteracy among women. It was realised that the influence of the Ulama in the decision making process was reduced considerably. He did not bring in any reform for a democratic government, but in order to make the polity responsive, he addressed himself to the grievances of the people. However, his reign was not free from any trouble. During the June War of 1967, King Faisal did not cut off supply of oil to USA. Widespread demonstrations were marked in the Kingdom opposing this royal move, which have been reported thus:

[in Dhahran] 'the demonstrators attacked the American Consulate, took down the American flag, tore it up and burned it. Afterwards they marched to the airport and military installations where they destroyed the American's clubs, cars and recreation centres. They also attacked the American military barracks which were symbols of the country' foreign domination. Finally they were stopped by police who prevented them from entering the military airport. Before being forced to leave, the demonstrators set fire to more cars and both occupied and damaged the local Aramco headquarters.47

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46 Ibid., p. 364.
These mass demonstrations were followed by a new wave of terror and arrest campaigns encompassing the entire country which victimised workers, soldiers and other progressive elements. The traitor Fahd ben Abd al-Aziz who was Minister of the Interior and the Second Vice-Premier of the Council of Ministers, went to the American consulate and to Aramco’s president Thomas Barket to apologise for the workers’ action. He also began supervision of the interrogation and torture of people who had been arrested as suspects for participation in the demonstration. He was aided by the King’s henchmen such as the Eastern Province’s Governor, Abdul Mohsin ben Jiluwi, and the Director of Investigation.48

Besides such movements, the regime of King Faisal was also marked by abortive coups. The first coup attempt was made by the Air Force Officers in June 1969. However, the matter was reported to the King before the coup could take place. The officers were arrested and put on trial. The second coup took place in 1969 and it was organised by the bourgeois reformers from Hijaz. The leaders of the coup were retired Generals; Ali Zen Abdine Abdullah Aysi and other top brass of military corps.49 While the King survived these two coup attempts, finally his nephew Prince Faisal bin Musaed Abd al-Aziz assassinated him, in 1975.50

The discussion marked that Saudi Arabia stepped into the frontiers of modernity during the reign of King Faisal. However, his economic reforms were not accompanied by any reforms in the political front. So, King Faisal’s regime cannot be termed as the beginning of an era of renaissance.

48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
After King Faisal's assassination, Crown Prince Khalid ascended the throne. During his regime, traditional Islamic laws continued to remain in force. Even though he liberalised laws for recreational facilities, he did not bring about any significant political reforms for establishing a constitutional democracy in Saudi Arabia. His regime was also not free from troubles. The religious radicals led by Juhaman ibn Seif al-Oteibi, a Sunni Muslim extremist, captured the Mecca Mosque in 1979. He declared himself as the Mahdi in the first day of Islamic year, 1400 AH. In a separate incident during this period, the Shiaites of al-Hasa region organised many demonstrations and called on the people of Saudi Arabia to overthrow the monarch. Their basic objectives were outlined in one of the pamphlets circulated at that time.

At the time when the Muslim Ummah is turning to real Islam as the only hope for progress, freedom and complete independence, the Ummah faces a dangerous enemy represented by ruling regimes of the so called Islamic states. The Saudi family is one of these regimes. Their regime is the most dangerous enemy of Islam because they use the cover of religion to legitimise their otherwise un-Islamic rule. Ask Yourselves: does Islam allow a Royal family to have luxurious palaces and share in commercial firms.51

We demand an immediate end to the wave of indiscriminate arrests in Qatif and al-Hasa (both are Shi'i regions) and the release of all political prisoners especially those arrested in the Eastern province while practicing religious rites of Ashoora; we deplore the dictatorship of al-Saud and demand that an Islamic constitution be introduced to secure democracy and progress for people. Our Muslim people in

the Arabian Peninsula are one people, regardless of sect, condemning the regimes sectarian policy of inciting Sunnis against Shi’is. We demand a cut-down in the rate of oil production. We demand social justice to end mass poverty. We demand the abolition of all treaties signed with the United States.\(^{52}\)

The radical religious and orthodox groups wanted to achieve a society based on Islamic order. They accused the Royal Family of religious and moral bankruptcy and pleaded for the resurrection of seventh century Islamic government. The members of the movement held the existing culture unsatisfactory and un-Islamic and strove to bring about a change in the cultural system which could ensure smooth operation of a pure and unadulterated Islamic system of governance.

The reign of King Khalid witnessed many troubles. The challenges posed by the religious radicals to the Saudi throne entailed that King Khalid would introduce political reforms in the Kingdom. However, he remained firm in his attitude and did not introduce any changes in the process of political development.

After the death of King Khalid, Crown Prince Fahd was installed as the King of Saudi Arabia in 1982. After taking over power, he continued in the same old style of his predecessor and did not introduce any political changes. During the Gulf crisis, the Saudi Kingdom sought the help of American troops for its protection. The Kingdom eased some of its rigid laws in order to accommodate the requirements of American troops.

\(^{52}\) Ibid.
western journalists and others. It created an atmosphere of openness (lnfitah). The increased presence of westerners created an illusion among the Saudis that the Kingdom would go for political reforms. However, during this period, when some Saudi women drove cars, the government viewed it seriously by arresting them and impounding their passports. They were also thrown out of jobs. Notwithstanding all this, the cry for political reforms did not die down.

Even in the post-Gulf War period, the Ulama (religious scholars) posed challenges to the political system of Saudi Arabia. To put the Saudi political system in a proper order, they unveiled a memorandum for Islamic reform. The memorandum was signed by fifty-two members of the religious establishment. It was also signed by the head of the Ulama, Shaykh Abd al-Aziz bin Baz, judges, preachers and university professors. This Islamic opposition movement is mainly led by two clerics from Najd, Shaykh Safar al-Hawali, and Shaykh Salman al-Audh. They are often called as “neo-fundamentalist” or “non-conformist” Ulama. The memorandum demands among other things:

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55 Ibid.
Creation of a *Shura* or a Consultative Assembly (Parliament), empowered to debate and decide on all domestic and foreign affairs, with its members chosen from among the most competent possible of candidates;

Islamisation of all social, economic, administrative and educational systems of the nation;

Fundamental reform of the army, through the creation of a modern, strong and independent Islamic army on the pattern of the prophet's armies as well as the diversification of modern arms procurement sources;

Introduction of comprehensive social justice based on Islamic laws guaranteeing equality for all the citizens without any exception or exclusion;

Punishment of all corrupt elements, whoever they are, whatever they are, without any exception or rank;

Equitable distribution of wealth among all members of the nation;

Total reform of the press, the creation of a strong Islamic media and of propaganda tools to be used in the service of the Islam worldwide; and closure of the 'corrupt' media.  

Besides this, other Islamic opposition groups operated in exile. They posed stiff challenge to the Royal Family. The Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights (CDLR)\(^{57}\) and the Committee for Advice and Reform (CAR)\(^{58}\) represented the ideology of Islamic opposition groups. CDLR

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\(^{57}\) CDLR was set up in Riyadh in May 1993 by Muhammad al-Masari. Masari left Riyadh with his supporters and set up the headquarter of CDLR in London in April 1994.

\(^{58}\) CAR was set up in April 1994 by Bin Laden. At present it is operating in exile in London.
distributed weekly communiqués and leaflets. It sent two hundred faxes per day to the Kingdom and received complaints, grievances and other information about the affairs of the Kingdom via the fax from its supporters. It used the electronic communication channels to make a popular dent in the Kingdom. It also sent press messages on every Tuesday regarding human rights violation and corruption in the Royal Family. The CAR demanded the termination of all aspects of the rule of Jahiliyyah (ignorance), its replacement by God’s Shariah, the establishment of true justice; the reform of all the state’s institutions and its purification from corruption and the regaining of the Umma’s general rights.\(^5^9\) In contrast to the CAR, the demands of CDLR were more liberal in nature. Their demands included franchise for women, judicial reforms, representative assemblies, multi-party system and the freedom of the press. Due to severe challenges posed by the religious radicals, King Fahd only brought incremental transformation in the politics of Saudi Arabia without introducing any participatory system.

The reign of King Fahd can be termed as moderate era in the history of Saudi politics as King Fahd brought certain incremental changes. But the reform measures introduced by King Fahd cannot usher in an era of participatory-democracy.

The study of the reigns of Saudi dynasty was discussed in this chapter. King Abd al-Aziz’s leadership was marked by success and it was

\(^{5^9}\) al-Rasheed, n. 54, pp. 17-19.
due this that Saudi Arabia could emerge as a unified kingdom in 1932. But he could not bring in a participatory-democratic government. He introduced some minimal changes which were not sufficient from the functional point of view of a political system. The reign of King Saudi was marked by severe crisis both on the domestic and external front. He created 'a dynasty within a dynasty' by assigning his sons several important portfolios in the government, which ultimately led to the family feud. During the reign of King Faisal Saudi Arabia entered into the frontiers of modernity. However, King Faisal did not bring in any political reforms to establish a participatory-democracy. His successor King Khalid remained firm in his attitude and did not bring in any changes in the process of political development. The present King Fahd brought in some minimal changes in the post-Gulf War period. Still this was a marked improvement over the previous reigns. The study of the historical developments of Saudi politics shows that Saudi Kings have only brought in rudimentary changes in order to stabilise their regime while sweeping changes were taking place elsewhere.